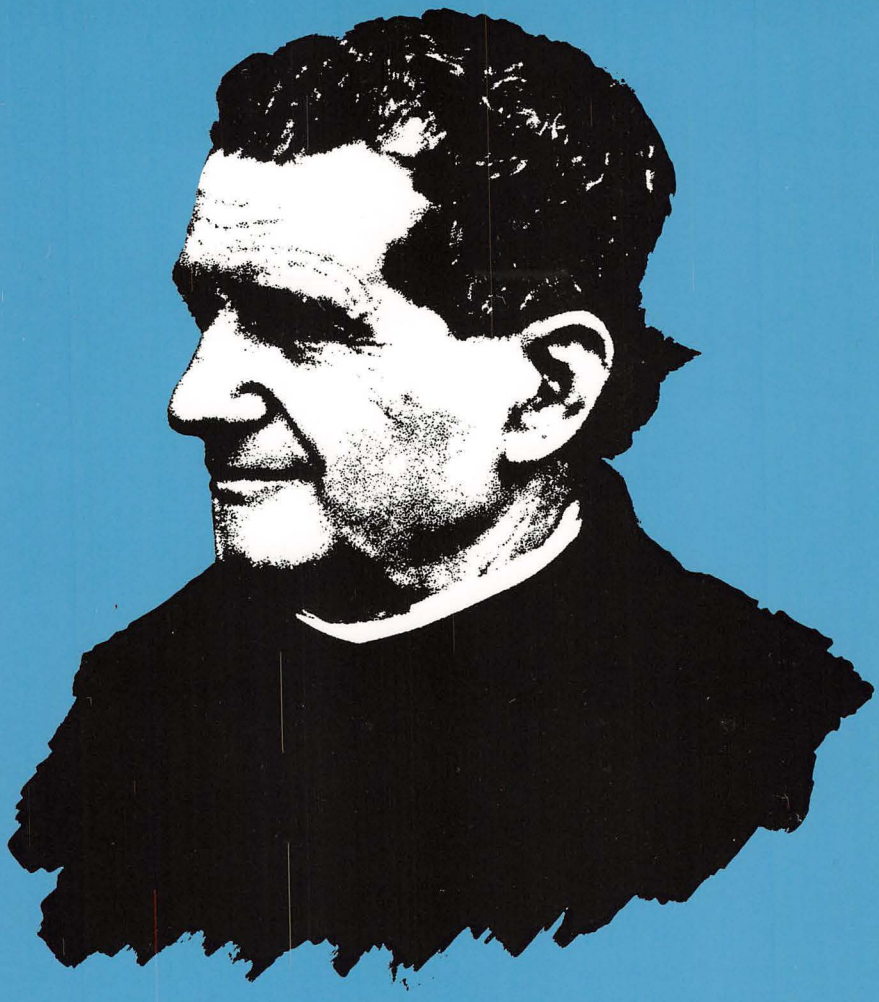


VOLUME IX - 1868-1870

THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

of Saint John Bosco



Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne

FATHER GIOVANNI BATTISTA LEMOYNE (1839-1916) was the first and great chronicler of the life of St. John Bosco and of the first decades of the Salesian Congregation.

From their first, providential meeting in 1864, Father Lemoyne esteemed Don Bosco as a person of outstanding character and holiness. He not only strove to understand and acquire his spirit, but also took upon himself the task of committing to writing anything of significance that Don Bosco did or said. Information concerning earlier events he painstakingly gathered from eyewitnesses and other sources.

In 1883 he came to the Mother House as editor of the **Salesian Bulletin** and Secretary of the Superior Chapter. The five years that followed he spent in cordial intimacy with Don Bosco and heard from the Saint himself the story of the arduous road he had to climb in his youth to arrive at the priesthood, and of the wonderful manner in which Providence guided the Salesian work.

After Don Bosco's death in 1888, he was formally charged with the compilation of available materials for the life of the Saint. Forty-five large volumes of galley proofs bear witness to his dedicated research and provide the material for the nineteen volumes of the **Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco,** the first nine of which he authored. Noteworthy among his other works are the **Life of Don Bosco** in two volumes and the **Life of Mamma Margaret,** Don Bosco's mother. He died in Turin on September 14, 1916 at the age of 77.

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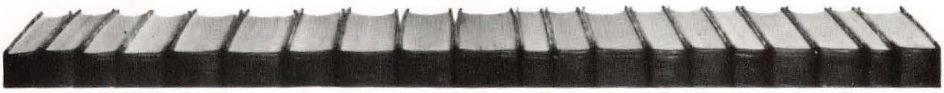
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THE

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

OF

SAINT JOHN BOSCO

The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco

by

REV. GIOVANNI BATTISTA LEMOYNE, S.D.B.

AN AMERICAN EDITION
TRANSLATED
FROM THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN

REV. DIEGO BORGATELLO, S.D.B.
Editor-in-chief

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TO

THE LATE, LAMENTED, AND HIGHLY ESTEEMED

VERY REVEREND FELIX J. PENNA, S.D.B.

(1904—1962)

TO WHOSE

WISDOM, FORESIGHT, AND NOBLE SALESIAN HEART

THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

OF

THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

OF

SAINT JOHN BOSCO

IS

A LASTING MONUMENT

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Is Respectfully Dedicated

TO THE

MOST REV. EUGENE MÉDERLET, S.D.B.

(1867-1934)

Archbishop of Madras (India),

Dynamic Salesian Pioneer,

Remarkable Religious Leader,

Enthusiastic Lover of the Poor.

Editor's Preface to the First Nine Volumes

SAINT John Bosco, the central figure of this vastly extensive biography, was a towering person in the affairs of both Church and State during the critical 19th century in Italy. He was the founder of two very active religious congregations during a time when orders were being suppressed; he was a trusted and key liaison between the Papacy and the emerging Italian nation of the Risorgimento; above all, in troubled times, he was the saintly Christian educator who successfully wedded modern pedagogy to Christ's law and Christ's love for the poor young, and thereby deserved the proud title of *Apostle of youth.*

He is known familiarly throughout the world simply as Don Bosco.[1] His now famous system of education, which he called the *Preventive System,* was based on reason, religion and kindness, and indicated by its descriptive name that, also in education, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. He always sought to place pupils in the moral impossibility of committing sin, the moral disorder from which all evils flow.

To ensure the continuation of his educational mission in behalf of youth he founded two worldwide religious congregations, the Society of St. Francis de Sales (Salesian Society) and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians (Salesian Sisters), which today number more than 40,000 members conducting 2,800 educational institutions throughout the world.

To help in the difficult art of educating the young, Don Bosco planned to expound his method of education in a book, but, absorbed as he was in the task of firmly establishing his two religious congregations and in unceasing other labors, he had to content himself with a simple outline of his ideas in a golden little treatise entitled *The Preventive System in the Education of Youth.*

[1] *Don* is an abbreviation of the Latin *dominus,* master. It is used in Italy as a title for priests: it stands for *Father.*

Fortunately, *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco* are ample compensation for a book which, if written, might have given us only theories. These memoirs, a monumental work in nineteen volumes, until recently reserved exclusively to Salesians and published only in the original Italian, are now available, unabridged, in this American edition not only to his spiritual children, devotees and admirers, but also to all who are interested in education.

In these volumes Don Bosco is shown in action: not *theorizing* but *educating.* What he said and did in countless circumstances was faithfully recorded by several of his spiritual sons, chief among them Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne. From the day he first met Don Bosco in 1864 to his own death in 1916, Father Lemoyne spent his life recording words and deeds of Don Bosco, gathering documents, interviewing witnesses, and arranging raw material for the present nineteen volumes of the life of Don Bosco, eight of which he himself authored besides readying another volume for the press before his death.

In the compilation of *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco,* Father Lemoyne's primary sources were the *Memorie dell'Oratorio dal 1835 al 1855* (Memoirs of the Oratory from 1835 to 1855) written by Don Bosco himself, the diaries and chronicles of various Salesians who daily recorded what Don Bosco said or did, numerous letters of the Saint, the *Cinque lustri di Storia dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* (The History of the First Twenty-Five Years of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales) written by Father John Bonetti, S.D.B., and personally checked by Don Bosco, the proceedings of the diocesan process of beatification and other unimpeachable contemporary documents and testimonies. Above all, Father Lemoyne, intelligent, conscientious, and well-informed, not only used reliable sources, but was himself an eye-witness. He recorded what he personally saw and heard from Don Bosco. This enabled him to write a true history even though not according to modern critical methods.[2] He concerned himself

[2] True history in the sense that what he narrates is substantially true, though his method of presentation, his chronology, and his treatment of sources could stand improvement. The episodes and incidents he reports did not necessarily take place *exactly* as described.

principally with presenting chronologically his vast selected material, and therefore his narrative is somewhat fragmentary and may lack scientific method. It is nevertheless true history, even Volume I which deals mainly with Don Bosco's youth and the training he received from Mamma Margaret, his mother.[3] When gifted writers and scholars of the future will produce a critical biography of Don Bosco, *The Biographical Memoirs* will still not be surpassed because Father Lemoyne lived at Don Bosco's side, wrote what he saw and heard, and eminently succeeded in giving us a living portrait of Don Bosco.

In editing the translation of *The Biographical Memoirs,* accuracy and readability were the goals we set. This was not easy, and occasionally, as regards the latter, we may have fallen short of the mark. Nineteenth-century Italian does not readily lend itself to an agile version that strives to be an accurate translation and not a paraphrase.

We have departed from the original in only one minor point: the lengthy titles or series of subtitles in each chapter. Father Lemoyne's method of chronological sequence in his narration necessarily made the content of each chapter fragmentary. As it was not possible, under these circumstances, to give them a meaningful title and the volumes were not indexed, Father Lemoyne prefaced each chapter with many subtitles. In some volumes such subtitles fill a whole page. Since we have indexed each volume and subtitles become unnecessary, we selected in each chapter the most outstanding episode and gave it a title. Finally, although we did not aim at publishing a critical edition, we researched and—in most cases—were able to enrich the text by adding in brackets first names, dates, and scriptural sources, as well as numerous, helpful footnotes.

May the reading of these *Memoirs* portraying the life of a man whom Pope Pius XI called "a giant of sanctity" inspire his

[3] Cf. Francis Desramaut, S.D.B., *Les Memorie I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Étude, d'un ouvrage fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint Jean Bosco,* Lyon, 1962, pp. 411ff.

spiritual children, to whom this work is primarily directed, and all men and women of good will to walk their own path of life in a spirit of service to God and man.

Fr. Diego Borgatello, S.D.B.
Editor-in-chief

New Rochelle, N.Y.
June 5, 1965

124th Anniversary of Don Bosco's Ordination

NOTE

As with Volumes VI, VII and VIII—and continuing through Volume X—we will omit material from the original text that is of little interest to American readers and of no direct consequence to these biographical memoirs. Such omissions will always be pointed out in the footnotes, except when they concern *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings] in which case dots will be used.

Fr. Diego Borgatello, S.D.B.
Editor-in-chief

New Rochelle, N.Y.
September 24, 1974

Acknowledgments

For the publication of *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco* we owe a debt of gratitude to the Reverends August Bosio, S.D.B. and John J. Malloy, S.D.B., Provincials emeriti of the Salesians in the eastern United States and sponsors of this project, and to the Very Reverend Salvatore Isgro, S.D.B., their successor in office.

As regards this volume, we wish to express special thanks to Rev. Paul Aronica, S.D.B., Province Director of Education, New Rochelle, N.Y., for his editorial assistance. We are also grateful to those who have helped in one way or another, in particular Mr. Joseph Isola of the Paulist Press in New York City. We also wish to acknowledge our indebtedness to the Ufficio Stampa of the Salesian Generalate, Rome, for its *Dizionario Biografico dei Salesiani,* a valuable source of many footnotes in this volume.

Fr. Diego Borgatello, S.D.B.
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Contents

	DEDICATION	v-vii
	EDITOR'S PREFACE	ix
	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xiii
	SALESIAN GLOSSARY	xix
1	A Zealous, Talented Salesian	1
2	A Dream: Predictions for 1868	5
3	Tips to Priests	14
4	An Extraordinary Challenge	19
5	Fulfillment of Predictions	30
6	Annual Conference of St. Francis de Sales, 1868	35
7	Noteworthy Details	41
8	Unending Vexations	46
9	Steps Toward Approval of the Salesian Society	53
10	Fulfillment of Predictions (*Continued*)	57
11	Gleanings from Oratory Life	63
12	A Dream: A Raging Torrent and Wild Beasts	67
13	Steps Toward Approval of the Salesian Society (*Continued*)	73
14	A Dream: A Mysterious Vine	75
15	A Dream: To Hell and Back!	85
16	Love for the Church	101
17	The Church of Mary, Help of Christians	108

18	Fulfillment of Predictions (*Continued*)	115
19	The Church of Mary, Help of Christians (*Continued*)	118
20	Consecration of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians	125
21	Consecration Festivities	130
22	Consecration Festivities (*Continued*)	134
23	Consecration Festivities (*Continued*)	137
24	Noteworthy Details (*Continued*)	141
25	Special Charisms	147
26	Special Charisms (*Continued*)	153
27	Spiritual Retreat for Salesians, 1868	158
28	Spiritual Retreat for Salesians, 1868 (*Continued*)	162
29	Steps Toward Approval of the Salesian Society (*Continued*)	170
30	Priestly Chastity	178
31	Fatherly Talks	183
32	Steps Toward Approval of the Salesian Society (*Continued*)	192
33	Apostolate of the Press	194
34	Special Charisms (*Continued*)	198
35	Year's End, 1868	205
36	Fulfillment of Predictions (*Continued*)	214
37	Don Bosco's Third Journey to Rome	217
38	Don Bosco in Florence	221
39	Don Bosco in Rome	225
40	Don Bosco in Rome (*Continued*)	233
41	Don Bosco in Rome (*Continued*)	241
42	Don Bosco in Rome (*Continued*)	247
43	Don Bosco in Rome (*Continued*)	252
44	Don Bosco's Return to Turin	255

45 Family Briefings 265
46 Noteworthy Details (*Continued*) 272
47 A Dream: Deadly Nooses 278
48 The Daughters of Mary Immaculate 285
49 Noteworthy Details (*Continued*) 295
50 Fulfillment of Predictions (*Continued*) 299
51 Special Charisms (*Continued*) 302
52 Unexpected Harassment 310
53 Admirable Tact 312
54 A Keen Disappointment 319
55 A Providential Delay 324
56 A Heartfelt Loss 330
57 Fair and Just 339
58 Oratory Family Life 347
59 Unending Vexations (*Continued*) 354
60 The Superior Chapter, 1869 365
61 Vatican Council I 370
62 Vatican Council I (*Continued*) 379
63 Vatican Council I (*Continued*) 389
64 Vatican Council I (*Continued*) 398
65 Annual Conference of St. Francis de Sales, 1870 403
66 Manifold Activities 412
67 Manifold Activities (*Continued*) 416
68 Feast of Mary, Help of Christians, 1870 420
69 Manifold Activities (*Continued*) 424
70 Manifold Activities (*Continued*) 430
71 Manifold Activities (*Continued*) 436

72 Manifold Activities (*Continued*) 442
73 Christian Education 446
74 Year's End, 1870 454
75 Apostolic Zeal 458
APPENDICES 465
INDEX 475

SALESIAN GLOSSARY

(For the General Reading Public)

ARTISANS: trade school students.

ASSISTANCE: Salesian method of supervision of boys and students, friendly and informal in manner, stressing the prevention of disorders rather than the punishment of offenders.

ASSISTANT: a Salesian engaged in supervising boys.

CLERIC: a member of the Salesian Society training for the priesthood.

COADJUTOR: a lay member of the Salesian Society.

COMPANION OF YOUTH, THE: a prayer book composed by St. John Bosco for the use of boys, originally entitled *Il Giovane Provveduto.*

COOPERATOR: one who contributes in any manner to the development of Salesian work.

EXERCISE FOR A HAPPY DEATH: a monthly practice of piety that promotes spiritual recollection and fervor by meditation on one's eventual death. It stresses the reception of the sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion as if for the last time.

FESTIVE ORATORY: a Salesian work which offers boys and young men organized recreational, educational, and religious activities, mostly on Sundays and festive days.

The Festive Oratory was St. John Bosco's first work and, for a good many years, his only one. He called it "oratory," that is, a place of prayer, because its primary purpose was to teach boys to go to church and pray. "Its objectives were the practice of religion and virtue, the boys' moral education, and, consequently, the salvation of their souls; recreation, entertainment, singing, and schooling, which followed in due time, were only the means." (*The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco,* Vol. II, p. 71. *See also* Vol. III, pp. 67f)

GOOD NIGHT: a short talk immediately after night prayers, given by the Director or someone in his stead. It consists of advice, exhortations, or occasional remarks.

ORATORY: *see* Festive Oratory, Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

ORATORY, THE: abbreviated form of "The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales." (*See below*)

ORATORY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, THE: the *first* festive oratory and the *first* boarding school for boys founded by St. John Bosco in a district of Turin known as Valdocco; the motherhouse of the Salesian Congregation.

On a rainy night of May 1847 a hungry youngster, drenched from head to foot, knocked at Don Bosco's door. Don Bosco's mother fed him and prepared a place for him to sleep. (*See The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco,* Vol. III, pp. 141ff) Thus, side by side with the festive oratory there began a hospice that eventually grew into a large boarding school and became the motherhouse of the Salesian Congregation.

PREVENTIVE SYSTEM: the Salesian method of education and discipline, based on reason and religion. It stresses vigilance, guidance, and sympathetic understanding in the training of the young.

VALDOCCO: a district of Turin.

The name is probably a contraction of the Latin *vallis occisorum,* the valley of the slain—i.e., some soldiers of the Theban Legion who were martyred under Emperor Maximian. The Salesian motherhouse stands on the site of their martyrdom. (*See The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco,* Vol. II, pp. 233ff, 268)

THE
BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS
OF
SAINT JOHN BOSCO

CHAPTER 1

A Zealous, Talented Salesian

AT the close of 1867, or very early in 1868, Don Bosco completed a book on which he had been working on and off for the past three years. Ever willing to collaborate in projects extolling the Blessed Virgin Mary, he had already written or would soon write on Our Lady's apparitions, shrines, and favors at La Salette,[1] Lourdes,[2] and Spoleto,[3] but he was now forwarding a brief history of a Marian shrine at Ponzone in the Acqui diocese to the pastor, Father Joseph Poggio, who had asked him to undertake this task.[4] We found a copy of this manuscript among the papers of Father John Bonetti,[5] to whom Don Bosco would entrust his writings—even before the latter's ordination—for editing or, sometimes, completion. This partnership lasted till Don Bosco's death. In these matters Father Bonetti was Don Bosco's indefatigable right-hand man. A brilliant writer in his own right, he was so painstaking in his editing that many pages of his manuscripts are almost illegible. He left a great number of sermons. Seemingly, he never mounted the pulpit without first writing his sermons out completely or at least in detailed outline with great richness and profundity of doctrine.

[1] *See* Vol. II, pp. 448-53. [Editor]

[2] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 42ff. [Editor]

[3] *See* Vol. VII, p. 105. [Editor]

[4] We are omitting a description of this shrine and Father Poggio's letter to Don Bosco about some editing of his. [Editor]

[5] John Bonetti (1838-1891) entered the Oratory as a student in 1855. In 1859, along with other young men, he banded with Don Bosco to form the Salesian Society. At their first meeting he was elected to its Superior Chapter. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) In 1864 he was ordained a priest. A prolific writer, he authored numerous hagiographical, ascetical, apologetic, and Salesian publications, chief among them *The History of the First Twenty-Five Years of the Oratory*—one of the sources of these *Biographical Memoirs.* (*See* p. x) In 1866 he was elected Spiritual Director of the whole Salesian Congregation. He died in that post at the age of fifty-three, fulfilling Don Bosco's prophecy that Father Bonetti would be the first member of the Superior Chapter to follow him to the grave. [Editor]

When, as we have already said,[6] Don Bosco lost several notebooks of his universal church history, he asked Father Bonetti to fill in this gap.[7] The latter began working on this project in 1862 and kept at it for many years. All that has reached us is the first epoch in two hand-written volumes of 1,261 pages replete with quotations from biblical and patristic sources, as well as ecclesiastical and lay authors. Don Bosco himself added many marginal notes in his own hand. Father Bonetti's manifold occupations, however, finally ended a task which, as we shall see later,[8] Pius IX himself wished to see done, particularly in support of papal infallibility. To please Father Victor Alasonatti, Father Bonetti also authored an unpublished biography of Blessed Cherubim Testa[9] and later a *Life of the Virgin Mary* and a *Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ.* In due course we shall speak of other writings of his published in *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings].

Father Bonetti's vast culture was matched by a deep spirit of piety instilled into him by Don Bosco ever since his entrance into the Oratory in 1855. Sayings and maxims which he jotted on his notebook covers were taken directly from Don Bosco's talks and writings. On his high school notebooks we read: "Frequent recourse to Mary"; "Strict avoidance of idleness"; "Mary is your Mother." In these notebooks he jotted down the etymology and meaning of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew words which Don Bosco used in 1857 in his sermons or in public and private talks to his boys. On the covers of his philosophy notebooks he wrote: "*Sedes Sapientiae, ora pro me* [Seat of Wisdom, pray for me]"; "*Da mihi animas, caetera tolle* [Give me souls, away with the rest]"; "One must detach one's heart entirely from earthly things if he wishes to enjoy full spiritual freedom"; "Detachment from friends and relatives draws one nearer to God and His angels." On several pages he wrote: "Dominic Savio[10] was my schoolmate and friend. Therefore, *Si ille, cur non ego?* If he achieved [sanctity], why can't I?"

[6] *See* Vol. V, p. 382. [Editor]
[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 382f. [Editor]
[8] *See* p. 392. [Editor]
[9] *See* Vol. VIII, p. 110. [Editor]
[10] For detailed information about Dominic Savio consult the Indexes of Volumes V through VIII. [Editor]

He also loved to invoke Michael Magone,[11] another saintly boy quite dear to him and a former pupil of his. He treasured this lad's school papers which now are preserved in our archives. Lastly, on his theology notebooks we find these inscriptions: "Long live Mary, long live Don Bosco." "*Diabolus te semper occupatum inveniat*" [Let the devil always find you busy—St. Jerome]. "*Dulcedo multiplicat amicos et mitigat inimicos*" [A sweet word multiplies friends and appeases enemies—Sir. 6, 5]. Inside an envelope addressed in Don Bosco's hand to "The Cleric Bonetti," we found a collection of nosegays on strips of paper [which we shall list in the Appendix].[12]

Father Bonetti also left a record of the following two suggestions Don Bosco gave him: "Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Virgin Mary will strongly help you and all those in whom you will inculcate it"; "Let Mary be your heavenly protectress now and forever. Into Her hands I commend your soul."

On another paper we read: "On November 27, 1863, as I was leaving for Mirabello,[13] Don Bosco said to me, 'You asked me to put you to the test. This is it! Now we'll find out what the Lord specifically wants of you. I have looked after you and will continue to do so. As long as the Lord shall grant me life, I'll do my utmost to make you happy, both spiritually and temporally. Keep smiling. When bothered spiritually or physically, write to me and I'll clear away your troubles. Your ecclesiastical patrimony is being settled now, and I'll keep you informed. Do your best to help Father Rua. God bless you.'"

Generously reciprocating these sentiments and determined to keep his resolutions, Father Bonetti [shortly before his ordination] wrote thus to Don Bosco:

Mirabello, April 25, 1864

1. I will do my best to achieve an intimate union with Jesus and Mary through frequent spiritual Communions and fervent invocations.

2. I am determined to hold even my least action and prayer in high regard. I will strive to do everything well by reminding myself that thus I

[11] *See* the Indexes of Volumes V and VI. [Editor]
[12] *See* Appendix 1. [Editor]
[13] *See* Vol. VIII, p. 128. [Editor]

shall add a lovely rose or precious gem to my heavenly crown. O Mary, be my Mother!

We shall remark here that most of his confreres were likewise pious, hard-working, and self-sacrificing. We singled him out because only recently did we come across these notes of his along with other records of the years already covered in these memoirs. We also wished to make his relationship to Don Bosco better known.

Toward the end of 1867, the members of the Salesian Society—many of whom we shall later mention—numbered nearly a hundred. Fourteen were priests, forty-eight were theology students, twenty-three were philosophy students, and three were coadjutors. Some of the theologians had made their vows or intended to do so; others belonged to other dioceses to which they wanted to return. These too Don Bosco housed, fed, and educated at his own expense. Among the philosophers, twelve had not yet donned the cassock because Don Bosco was thinking of opening a lyceum for them elsewhere.

A bit of advice that Don Bosco gave all is contained in this letter:

Turin, December 30, 1863

My dear Bonetti:

I am enclosing a few papers from Canon Gliemone.[14] I was glad to hear from you.

Have courage; concentrate your efforts on preserving unity of will among the superiors, so that all may strive for one thing alone—saving many souls, including their own. May God bless you.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

[14] Father Joseph Gliemone had often helped Don Bosco in the early years of the Oratory. *See* Volume III, p. 297. [Editor]

CHAPTER 2

A Dream: Predictions for 1868

AS we now reach the end of 1867, we have recorded Don Bosco's surprising, incessant activities as well as his dreams manifesting the state of conscience of many persons and his predictions of particularly important events and their fulfillment. He was convinced of the truth of his own words, and his conviction was shared by all men of good will—that vast majority unencumbered by prejudices or unswayed by passion. Don Bosco's dreams did immeasurable spiritual good to his pupils, but they also kept them mentally occupied and free from unwholesome thoughts—a most valuable benefit indeed. The rumor that Don Bosco would soon relate one of his dreams always created a stir at the Oratory, and his boys could hardly wait.

It is indeed natural for people to wish for a glimpse of the future, especially in critical times. The history of mankind makes this abundantly clear, and no one should be surprised. Of all people, those who endlessly consult mediums and spiritualists should be the last to deride good Christians who limit their curiosity to heeding the advice of devout souls they believe to be particularly dear to God and favored with special insights by Him. This is not to deny that, possibly, even easily, these good people may err in judgment. Hence prudence teaches us to avoid two pitfalls: first, absolute disbelief in any prophecy, save those authentically found in the Bible, excluding all commentaries; second, total credulity in all prophecies which people, including upright, God-fearing souls, accept as such.

St. Paul too warns us against these extremes in exhorting us not to despise prophecies but to put them to the test: "Do not despise prophecies, but test all things." [1 Thess. 5, 20-21] One

who scorns prophecies is as wrong as one who accepts them hastily. St. Paul's words confirm that even non-biblical prophecies may be genuine. Furthermore, it is a fact that the gift of prophecy, like other charisms, has always flowered within the Church and been recognized as such by her. Consequently, just as no Catholic may demand of others an absolute belief in predictions which are humanly sound and authoritative, so likewise we cannot impose absolute disbelief in predictions which are judged to be improbable and fantastic. Where the Church has not pronounced herself, one is entirely free to accept or reject private revelations. In such cases, sound judgment and good common sense, rather than faith, are needed. We shall now resume our narrative.

On December 31, 1867, Don Bosco gathered all the boys in the church for night prayers, after which he addressed them from the pulpit as follows:

At the close of the year, friends exchange gifts and parents like to give their children presents. I go along with this custom too. Tonight, my dear boys, I want to give you a memento that may serve you as a norm of conduct for the new year.

For some days now I have been thinking of some gift to give you, but until last night, no matter how much I racked my brains, I could think of nothing worthwhile. Even last night, after going to bed, I kept wondering what to tell you for the new year, and for the life of me I couldn't think of a thing. After a long while spent in worrying about it, I finally fell into a twilight sleep, that middle state in which one can still hear and even reply if addressed. In such a state, then, I began to dream, though I wasn't really dreaming. I seemed to be in my own room. As I stepped toward the balcony, I found myself in front of a beautiful, walled garden filled with countless gorgeous roses. On the gate was a number—68—in very large letters.

A doorman ushered me into the garden, where I saw you playing, shouting, and running merrily about. Many of you crowded about me, talking of many things. Afterward, we took a walk and came to a spot along the wall where many boys stood singing and praying with a few priests and clerics. On drawing closer, I found that I did not really know them; in fact, most of them were strangers to me. They were chanting the *Miserere* and other prayers for the dead.

"What are you doing here?" I asked. "Why the *Miserere?* Has anybody died?"

"Don't you know? they replied. "We are praying for a boy who died on such a day and hour."

"What boy?"

"Don't you know?" they repeated.

"No," I answered.

"Maybe he wasn't told," they remarked among themselves. "Well, so-and-so died," they finally informed me.

"He did?"

"Yes, but he died a good, enviable death. He received the Last Sacraments fervently and edifyingly, fully resigned to God's will. We are praying for him as we lay him to rest, though we hope he is now in heaven and praying for us. In fact, we are sure he is in heaven."

"So he really died a holy death! God's will be done! Let us imitate his virtues and pray that the Lord will grant us also the same blessing." With these words I left the boys. After some time—a rather lengthy period—we came to a verdant meadow. All the while I kept saying to myself: *Strange! I went to bed and now I am in a garden with a crowd of youngsters*. Then I noticed a large group of boys kneeling in a circle around something I could not see. I drew closer. A coffin was lying on the ground and the boys were reciting prayers for the dead and chanting the *Miserere*.

"Whom are you praying for?" I asked.

"Another lad died," they replied. "He too died a holy death after devoutly receiving the Last Sacraments. Now we are about to bury him. He was ill only eight days, but his parents were able to see him."

When I learned the boy's name, I was deeply grieved. "How sorry I am!" I exclaimed. "He was so close to me and yet I could not bid him farewell. The same thing happened with that other boy. Is everybody dying now? Two deaths—one yesterday, and one more today. I can't believe it!"

"Why not?" they countered. "You may think it is a short while, but over three months have passed since the first one died."

On hearing this, I thought: *Am I dreaming?* I did not think I was dreaming, but what I heard confused me. We resumed our walk, and after another fairly long while, I again heard the *Miserere* being chanted. We stopped and saw another large group of boys approaching us.

"Who are they and where are they going?" I asked those closest to me. I was told they were coming from nearby. Hastening to meet them halfway, I saw that tears were streaming from their eyes.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Oh, if you only knew!"

"Knew what?"

"A boy has died."

"For heaven's sake, another death? Who is it now?"

"It's so-and-so!"

"He died?"

"Yes, but...."

"But what? Wasn't his a holy death?"

"Far from it!"

"Didn't he receive the Last Sacraments?"

"At first he refused; then he agreed, but only half-heartedly, showing little compunction. He edified no one. In fact, we are very concerned for his eternal salvation. Too bad that an Oratory boy should have died so!"

"If he received the Last Sacraments," I said, trying to comfort them, "we can hope that he is safe. We should not despair of God's great mercy." I could see, though, that I had failed to raise their spirits.

Deeply disturbed, I sadly wondered about the time of their deaths when a stranger suddenly materialized from nowhere and came toward me.

"Look," he said, "there they are, all three!"

"Who are you?" I countered. "We have never met before."

"First listen to me," he replied, "and then I'll tell you who I am. Do you want to know the meaning of what you have seen?"

"Yes!"

"Well, then, the number you saw on the gate stands for the year 1868 during which those three boys will die. As you have seen, the first two are well prepared. Your task will be to prepare the third lad also!"

Wondering whether those three dear sons of mine were really to die in 1868, I asked, "How do you know?"

"Wait and see," was the reply. His poise and amiability convinced me that he was a friend.

"Am I dreaming perhaps?" I asked as I walked by his side and pondered his words. "No, it can't be! I am wide awake. I can see, hear, and understand."

"You are right," he replied. "You are not dreaming."

"In that case," I went on, "do me a favor. You told me the future. Now tell me something of the present, something that can serve me as a New Year's *strenna*[1] for my boys."

"Very well! Tell your boys that the first two lads who died were ready

[1] A New Year's gift customary in Italy. From the very beginning of the Oratory (*see* Vol. III, p. 433), Don Bosco had started the custom of giving a "spiritual" *strenna* or gift to his boys and co-workers on the last day of the year. It took the form of a motto or slogan to be practiced throughout the year then about to dawn. This custom is still kept by Don Bosco's successors. [Editor]

because they regularly received Communion with the proper dispositions. That's why they also received edifyingly at their death. The third boy seldom went to Communion when he was healthy and strong, and so, when death came, he had little desire for it. Tell your boys that if they wish to die a holy death, they must go to Holy Communion often and be properly prepared, first of all with a good confession. This, now, is the *strenna* [for 1868]: 'The devout and frequent reception of Holy Communion is the most effective guarantee of a holy death and eternal salvation.' Now come with me and be alert!"

I followed him down a path to a large clearing crowded with boys. I stopped to observe them. I knew them all. Seemingly there was nothing different about them to attract my attention, but on closer observation I saw something amazing and horrifying. Many lads had two little horns protruding from their foreheads. The little horns varied in length; some were broken, others were intact. Some boys had scars where horns had grown. Others, it seemed, had not been able to prevent their broken horns from growing again, even bigger than before. To make matters worse, still other boys went after their companions butting them with all their might. Some lads had a single, exceptionally large horn in the center of the forehead. These were the most feared. There were others, however, whose calm, smooth foreheads had never been disfigured. At this very moment I could tell you what each one of you was doing in that garden.

Along with my guide, I left that group, and after some time we reached the top of a hill, from which I could see a vast expanse of land where countless soldiers were struggling in a furious battle. The merciless blood-bath went on for a long time. From my position I could clearly see each soldier as he fell to the ground mortally wounded.

"Why the slaughter?" I asked my guide.

"There will be a frightful war in 1868," he replied, "and much blood will be shed."

"Will it happen in our land? Are those our soldiers?"

"Look at their uniforms and you'll know."

I noticed then that the soldiers belonged to various nations, though I also saw Italian contingents.

"Italy, too, will be in this war," my guide remarked.

We turned away from that carnage and after a short walk came to another section of the garden where a multitude of people kept running about, screaming, "Let us out of here or we'll all die!" In fact, many of them, though they looked strong and healthy, would suddenly collapse and die.

"What are you fleeing from?" I asked them.

"Cholera!" was the answer. "Many have died already. We shall too, if we don't flee."

"I can't believe it," I told my guide. "Is death everywhere?"

"A terrible cholera will break out in 1868!" he exclaimed.

"We are in the dead of winter," I objected. "Are people dying of cholera now?"

"Yes. Reggio Calabria already has a daily toll of fifty."

We resumed our passage and came upon a countless multitude of people who were pale, dejected, emaciated, and exhausted, with their clothes in tatters.

"What has happened to them? What does this mean?" I asked in utter astonishment at their misery.

"A fearful famine will come in 1868," he answered. "These people are starving."

"What!" I exclaimed. "Has hunger reduced them to this state?"

"Yes indeed."

I watched them hunting for food and finding none, searching for water and having nothing to quench their thirst. In total dismay I said to my guide: "Are all plagues then to fall on our unfortunate land this year? Is there no way to prevent these scourges?"

"Yes, there is a way. People must resolve to sin no more and to stop blaspheming. Rather, they should revere Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and invoke the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom they have so shamefully forsaken."

"Will this famine be material or spiritual?"

"Both. People will starve physically because there will be no food, and spiritually because they will refuse the means of grace."

"Will my boys also have to suffer these evils or die of cholera?"

"It depends," my guide replied, after studying me from head to toe. "If all your boys will avoid sin and be devoted to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin, they shall be spared. These devotions are two all-powerful safeguards. Without them, nothing can be obtained. If your boys neglect them, they too shall perish. Remember, even if only one of them were to commit mortal sin, it will suffice to draw God's wrath and cholera upon the Oratory!"

"Will my boys perhaps have to suffer hunger too?"

"Yes, they shall."

"I was hoping that famine would touch me only, since it is my duty to provide for them. If there is no food in the house, what fault is it of theirs?"

"Both you and your boys will go hungry. Likewise, their families and benefactors will have to struggle to pay tuition and meet their other necessities. Many will be totally unable to pay. Without funds the Oratory will no longer be able to provide for the boys' needs, and so they too shall suffer."

"Will they also feel the lack of spiritual nourishment?"

"Yes, a few because they will refuse it, others because they will be deprived of it."

As we conversed, we kept walking through the garden. Suddenly dark clouds covered the sky and a violent gale arose. I looked about and saw at a great distance that the boys had started to flee. I went after them hoping to overtake them and seek safety with them, but soon I lost sight of them. Thunder and lightening followed in swift succession. It seemed as though we might be incinerated at any moment. Then came a heavy downpour the like of which I have never seen. I kept roaming through the garden, looking for my boys and for shelter, but found neither. The whole place was deserted. I made for the exit, but in my haste I drew farther and farther away from it. Finally a terrible hailstorm broke out. Never had I seen hailstones that huge. Some struck me on the head with such force that I woke up, only to find that I was more tired than when I had fallen asleep.

Well, as I say, I saw these things in a dream. I am not trying to make you believe they were real, but since we can learn something from them, let us take advantage of the opportunity. Let us consider as fantasy what does not apply to us, but let us hold as genuine what may benefit us, and all the more so since similar things I have told you in the past have come true. These too could come true. Let us profit by them; let us keep ourselves prepared for death; let us pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary and shun sin.

Now this is the *strenna* I give you: "Frequent and devout confession and Communion are powerful means of saving one's soul." Good night!

Don Bosco narrated this dream on two consecutive nights. The above account, written and signed by Stephen Bourlot, an Oratory student of theology, is dated January 29, 1868. It bears this postscript: "I have reported Don Bosco's dream just as I believe I heard it and in the same sequence, without, however, using all his exact words because I do not remember them very well. But I know for certain that the substance is here. This should suffice."[2]

[2] We are omitting at this point a digression about Father Bourlot's apostolic work in Buenos Aires among Italian immigrants. [Editor]

Bourlot, a serious, intelligent youth, had entered the Oratory only a short time before with the intention of joining the Salesian Society. Feeling somewhat skeptical about Don Bosco's dreams about which his older companions kept telling him, he kept a watchful eye out for these three predicted deaths and their circumstances.

Together with Joachim Berto[3] and Joseph Bologna[4] he decided to keep a written record of events as they occurred, all three of them signing the document every time a prediction was fulfilled. They were astonished to see how wondrously and precisely Don Bosco's predictions came true.

Regrettably, their reports—except the one concerning the first boy's death—were lost when they were carelessly moved elsewhere with other written records. Fortunately, when Father Bourlot returned from [South] America for a short spell, he furnished us with additional details of the dream and of the deaths of the other two boys. On October 12, 1889, he signed the following statement: "I can testify, under oath, that the three deaths predicted by Don Bosco did take place. Father [Joachim] Berto and Father [Joseph] Bologna can confirm this." He added that, though he could not recall the surnames of the second and third boys, he was still certain that the surname of one of them—a blacksmith apprentice—began with "B" and that this lad died in the hospital after making his last confession to Don Bosco.

We shall further comment upon Father Bourlot's statement by matching it with other material from these memoirs, Father Rua's notes on the matter, and the Oratory obituary, and as we continue our narrative of the events of 1868, we shall present our conclusions. We must add that the prediction of these three deaths

[3] Father Joachim Berto (1847-1914) entered the Oratory in 1862, joined the Salesian Society in 1865, and was ordained a priest in 1871. While Berto was still a clerical student, Don Bosco made him his secretary—a post he retained for the next twenty years. During this time he accompanied Don Bosco on his most important trips to Rome and Florence. While carrying out his secretarial duties, Father Berto also carefully recorded and documented important details concerning Don Bosco and the Salesian Society. He also authored several devotional and ascetical pamphlets. He died at the Oratory on February 21, 1914. [Editor]

[4] Father Joseph Bologna (1847-1907) entered the Oratory in 1863, joined the Salesian Society in 1868, and was ordained a priest in 1872. In 1878 Don Bosco sent him to Marseilles to open the St. Leo Festive Oratory, which he directed until 1892, when he was appointed provincial of the houses in southern France. In 1898 he was named provincial of northern France and Belgium. He died at the Oratory on January 4, 1907. [Editor]

did not exclude the possibility that others too might be called to eternity that same year. Augustine Parigi[5] assured us that a few days later Don Bosco revealed that six other boys would die. When one of his hearers became frightened that he might be one of them, Don Bosco dispelled his fear by saying, "Don't worry. The Lord does not want you yet." Indeed so it happened.

Thus nine boys were destined to die among the eight hundred or more residents of the Oratory. Why then did the dream allude only to three deaths which were to occur within the space of almost a year? [Perhaps] the other six deaths, at in-between intervals under unknown circumstances, were to act as an alarm clock to alert the Oratory residents to the memory of that dream and to their own state of conscience.

The fulfillment of the prediction of the three deaths suffices to confirm the veracity of the prediction of the three scourges. Occasionally, the prophets of Israel predicted events which were to occur centuries later, and they proved the veracity of their first prediction by prophesying some other imminent, unforeseen event. We shall return to this matter later.

[5] Augustine Parigi entered the Oratory in 1867 at the age of eleven. That year Don Bosco predicted to him that he would live to see Father Joseph Cottolengo declared "Blessed." His prediction came true. *See* Vol. VIII, p. 253. [Editor]

CHAPTER 3

Tips to Priests

AT the beginning of January, Don Bosco wrote to Octavius Bosco, son of Count Bosco of Ruffino:

Turin, January 3, 1868

Dear Octavius,

This unrelenting snowfall prevents me from enjoying your company at dinner tonight, and so I shall have to content myself with wishing you a safe trip. I'll remember you in a special manner at Mass tomorrow.

The best of everything to you, your mother, and your sister Julie. I recommend myself to the prayers of all of you.

Affectionately yours,
Fr. John Bosco

The almost total absence of callers caused by the bad weather—which also kept him at home—afforded Don Bosco many peaceful hours which he spent in private discussions with his pupils, giving them details of his dream, explanations, and advice. The priests and clerics were particularly delighted by the opportunity of talking with him because they always benefited by it. One evening, when asked how a priest, especially if newly ordained, could handle an unexpected request for a sermon at some solemn feast with no time for preparation, he answered, "It's best to be ready for such eventualities. I suggest you start working on a few sermons which in necessity can serve for feasts of Our Lady. For instance, prepare a sermon along these lines: 1. The Madonna is the Mother of God. 2. She is also our Mother. This topic will do quite well for any Marian celebration. Do the same for feasts of saints by choosing a virtue, such as charity, obedience, prayer, purity and the like, as a main theme. With

slight changes such a sermon can fit any saint, whom you will portray as a model of one virtue or another."

Others sought his advice for effective preaching.

"Besides researching and developing a topic," he replied, "one should take the liturgical season into account. The Church asks us to celebrate feasts at appointed times, and a preacher must act accordingly. For example, during Advent one should choose such topics as may prompt his hearers to receive the Child Jesus lovingly into their hearts. During Lent, sermons should aim at leading sinners to penance by reminding them that Jesus gave His life for them on the cross. During Pentecost, one may speak of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the founding of the Church, the miracles of the Apostles, the victory of martyrs, the glories of the papacy, and so on. Furthermore, one must also take into account the age, social condition, and education of his audience.

"When talking to children, a priest must go down to their level. As St. Paul told the Corinthians, he must feed them milk, not bread. To reach this audience, a priest should try to teach through examples, incidents, and similes. Only then will he get his message across. Let his textbook be the catechism; he will also find that suitable for all sorts of people.

"As regards his listeners' social condition, a priest must certainly not tell the poor what pertains to the rich, nor servants and dependents what should be pointed out to their masters. Besides being bound by general precepts, each social class has its own specific obligations, but the honey of charity should always temper the bitterness of reproof. Never offend people through irony or invective. In small towns especially, never say anything which may be interpreted as an allusion to any individual. Avoid also anything smacking of politics. Corroborate your statements with scriptural quotations, especially from the Gospels, so that no one will take it amiss if certain truths are unpleasant to swallow. For example, when talking to the wealthy about their obligation to give alms, the parable of the rich man will free you of the necessity of inveighing against hardness of heart.

"As regards the audience's level of education, the priest must

aim at making himself understood; therefore, if his congregation is uneducated, he must adapt himself to their way of speaking and thinking, to their world of fields, factory, workshop, and so on, as did Our Lord when preaching to the farmers, shepherds, and fishermen of Galilee. If instead an audience is well educated, a more elevated style is called for, always with due regard to the character of sacred eloquence. A sermon's excellence should rest on its clarity of expression, concepts, and chain of reasoning. The sacred orator should not be guided by worldly standards but by God's Spirit.

"Furthermore, he should not digress into polemics. It is unwise to raise doctrinal objections in the pulpit for the purpose of rebutting them, because some listeners, bent on arguing, may unwittingly side with the opposition and sit in judgment. This stance at times defeats our purpose. One must also bear in mind that rebuttals are not often understood or may be misinterpreted and that certain people more easily absorb error than truth. These controversies are better left to scholars who know where, when, and how to conduct such discussions when they preach in larger towns and cities to an audience trained to follow long, subtle reasoning.

"Should there be heretics in a town where one is preaching, the priest must take care not to arouse their hostility. Let his words always be kind and charitable. Let him refute errors and sophisms simply by a solid proof of the truths they deny. By forestalling objections, he will take the wind out of their sails. Let him explain the true meaning of the scriptural passages they have falsified and then base his theme on them. Invectives never bring about conversion because self-love rebels. This was the system adopted and recommended by St. Francis de Sales, who used to say that Protestants flocked to him and liked his sermons because he did not rave and rant like their own ministers."

Early in the month, the January issue of *Letture Cattoliche, Historical Incidents about the Popes, from St. Peter to Pius IX*, came off the press....

The Pope! This was the theme which Don Bosco wished to de-

velop incessantly so as to keep the supremacy and glory of Christ's Vicar ever uppermost in the minds of the faithful. For this reason, although treating of many matters in his letters, he often recommended subscribing to *Letture Cattoliche.* [1]

At this time he was also busy replying to the many people, including his Mirabello and Lanzo pupils, who had sent him holiday greetings. To Lanzo he wrote as follows:

Turin, January 8, 1868

Dear Father Lemoyne:

I have received your letter as well as those of the boys, individual and collective. They heartened me exceedingly. I must admit that I was repeatedly moved by their affection and good will. Unfortunately I lack time to reply to each individually, but I hope I can do so personally before long. Meanwhile please tell them these three things in my name:

1. I thank you all for the good will and affection you have shown me beyond my merit. I shall try to reciprocate by praying for you in my daily Masses as if you were present with me.

2. This year I insist that charity reign in your house. Everyone—superior and subject alike—should strive to bear annoyances patiently and give good advice whenever it is opportune. This is the secret for spending a happy year.

3. Let all promote frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament as an effective means—rather, as the only means—of averting the many calamities, public and private, which threaten us this year.

At an opportune time explain these points and comment on them.

This year we must obviate bad literature and promote good reading. I would indeed be very pleased if all your pupils subscribed to *Letture Cattoliche.* Let all the confreres and boys try to promote this publication among their friends and acquaintances. I am enclosing pertinent fliers. I would like you and Father Sala to enclose them in more important letters.

Tu vigila, in omnibus labora, opus fac evangelistae, ministerium tuum

[1] We omit four letters of his addressed respectively to Father Raphael Cianetti, Father Salvator Bertini, Chevalier Frederick Oreglia, and Mother Magdalene Galeffi. The first two are mostly congratulatory while also promoting *Letture Cattoliche*; the third is mostly business, and the last deals with contributions for an altar in the new Church of Mary, Help of Christians. [Editor]

imple. Argue, obsecra, increpa in omni patientia et doctrina et in perdifficilibus rebus dic constanter: Omnia possum in Eo qui me confortat [Be vigilant, labor in all things, do the work of an evangelist. Reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine and when faced with very difficult problems keep saying to yourself, "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me"].

May God bless you and your efforts, your staff, and all the boys. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

CHAPTER 4

An Extraordinary Challenge

DON Bosco's letter delighted the Salesian pupils at Lanzo and spurred them on to firm resolves, but the pupils at Mirabello were far more deeply moved by another letter of his which they eagerly awaited for a special reason. Toward the end of November [1868] their director, Father John Bonetti, had written to Don Bosco in these terms:

[Mirabello, November 29, 1868]

Dear Don Bosco:

A strange thought flashed into my mind as we started the Immaculate Conception novena. Let me tell you about it. It dawned on me that we call the Madonna "Mother" whereas, as far as angels are concerned, She is "Queen." We are therefore Her children, rather than subjects and servants. In fact, the words "Behold your son... behold your Mother" were addressed to us, not to the angels. Undoubtedly a child's love should be more ardent than a subject's, no matter how devoted. Our love for Mary, therefore, should not be inferior to that of the angels. True, at present they can outdo us in their love for Her, but that is because of their beatific state. Still, we—Her children—have more rights, wider claims, and stronger obligations than they to love and venerate Her, especially because of Her countless favors. Therefore, although at first glance it seemed presumptuous, I suggested that our pupils challenge the angels in their celebration of the novena and feast of the Immaculate Conception, urging them to do their very utmost to surpass the heavenly spirits in fervently loving our most tender Mother. Rebutting the objection that angels are not subject to passions or temptations and therefore can easily beat us, I proved that passions and temptations could be an asset for us if we controlled them with the unfailing help of Jesus and Mary. In judging this contest, God would certainly consider our greater efforts.

Right or wrong, I did make the suggestion, and the boys accepted it.

The novena began today with warm fervor, and a goodly number of boys seem ready to win or die. I need all the prudence of a general to temper and channel their enthusiasm. But now I find myself in a fine predicament. The boys asked me who would referee this contest. Overconfidently perhaps, I replied that I left it to the Madonna to let us know the outcome in some way or other. I fear that I have been too daring; that's why I am appealing for aid. How? With one of your usual dreams. During this novena I will pray to Our Lady to send you one.

Hopefully in such a dream or in some other way, you might see the Mirabello boys, all or in part, as winners of this contest or as at least deserving of a caress from the Blessed Virgin as a token of Her satisfaction. To top it off, you would do us a great favor if, at the novena's end or on the feast day itself, you would tell us in Mary's name the results of the contest we hope to win.

Dear Don Bosco, for heaven's sake, do not leave me in the lurch, but come to my aid promptly.

The sick boy whom I recommended to you quickly recovered. Another (Stella by name), the nephew of Canon Manfredi of Voghera, has just taken a turn for the worse. I recommend him to your prayers.

All the others are well. Not counting the boys we are expecting, we now have exactly a hundred and forty-five, ten less than last year. Pray for us.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bonetti

Don Bosco must have smiled at this letter, but since it gave him a chance to heighten his pupils' filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin, we must assume that, after a fervent prayer to Her, he felt sure it would be heard. Nevertheless, postponing a reply, he let the feast of the Immaculate Conception go by and asked Father Bonetti to send him a list of all the pupils, the staff, and the members of the Provera family. He asked him to write each name on a separate line so that he could then add a motto, a suggestion, or a word of praise or rebuke in Our Lady's name. We must note that he had met some of the new pupils only once and that those who arrived after his November visit [1] were completely unknown to him. Father Bonetti hastened to send the list on sheets of paper written only on one side. Something quite similar had taken place

[1] *See* Vol. VIII, p. 421. [Editor]

in 1862 when Don Bosco gave the New Year's *strenna* to the Oratory boys.[2] Once more Don Bosco filled the pages in his own handwriting and returned them to Mirabello with the following letter:

Turin, January 7, 1868

My dear Father Bonetti:

Before challenging the angels, I thought it best to delay somewhat Our Lady's reply to the Mirabello boys. I could not mail it sooner because the dictation was rather long. You will find some very severe reprimands, but no one should take them amiss. Anyone who has objections should take them up with Our Lady Herself. However, one thing is certain. No one will be able to say: "This *strenna* is not for me."

Nasi, Chicco, Cerruti, Belmonte, and a few others sent me really delightful letters. I am keeping them on my desk for a quick reply.

The messages after the names are very concise, but the blame is yours! In sending me the boys' list, why didn't you leave more space between the names? Help the boys with my handwriting and let each keep his own message. On my next visit to Mirabello, I shall give each lad a more detailed explanation of what I now simply point out.

May God shower abundant blessings on the Mirabello boys and Salesians! I give no *strenna* because I do not want to intermingle the sacred with the profane. Let all of you pray for

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Please promote *Letture Cattoliche* whenever you see fit. Enclose fliers in your letters.

Father Bonetti received the messages and copied them in a notebook, using only initials to indicate the names. He then cut the original names and messages into strips and gave each to the proper lad. The first messages seemed to be addressed to the confreres:

Speak often and charitably to those in your charge.

If you wish to fly high, start from below. *Humilitas totius aedificii spiritualis fundamentum* [Humility is the foundation of the whole spiritual edifice].

[2] *See* Vol. VII, pp. 2-9. [Editor]

Always strive to practice what you preach.

Quaere primum regnum Dei [Seek first the kingdom of God]. *Sursum corda* [Let us lift up our hearts].

In patientia felicitas et salus tua [Patience will bring you happiness and salvation].

Cave ne ponas manum ad aratrum et respicias retro [Beware lest you set your hand to the plough and then turn back]. Borne patiently, this life's small crosses will become heavenly crowns of glory.

Multis modis vocat nos Deus ad Se [God calls us to Him in various ways]. *In patientia tua possidebis animam tuam* [By your patience you will win your soul].

Placentia superiori, placent et Deo tuo. Perge! [What pleases your superior will also please God. Go ahead!]

Ama nesciri [Love to be unknown].

Non multa, sed quae Deo, non tibi, placent agenda sunt [What matters is not doing many things but doing things which please God, not yourself].

Homines vident quae parent, Deus autem intuetur cor [Men see the exterior, but God beholds the heart].

Nondum coepisti; et quae coepisti Dei non sunt [You have not even started yet, and what you started is not of God].

An pergis? Quid vis? Pete, ora, et operare [Are you going forward? What do you want to do? Seek God's help, pray and get busy].

Consecrate your health to God, and you shall be healthy.

Excita somnolentos et teipsum si calumniatus fueris [Shake up the lazy ones and yourself, if you have been spoken ill of].

Meditation and Communion will be your salvation.

Si vinum bonum, opera bona, feceris, laetificabis cor Dei et hominum [If you make good wine and perform good deeds as well, you will delight both God and men].

If you must account to God for your words and thoughts, how will you fare with your actions?

Si cum bonis bonus eris, cum perversis perverteris [If you are good [only] with the good, you will be bad with the bad].

Satage ut per bona opera vocationem certiorem facias [Strive by good works to make your calling sure].

Why do you not keep your promises? What has happened to your resolutions? If you will be faithful to meditation and spiritual reading, you will overcome your laziness and the vice I told you of.

Get started! God is not pleased with you.

Qui dicit bene et male agit, erunt ei mala in interitu [He will fare badly in the end whose words are good and whose deeds are evil].

Charity and humility are wings to lift you up to God.

It is not enough to begin; one must persevere, even at the cost of sacrifice.

Let Jesus Christ be your friend. Shun bad companions.

Those who give bad advice and those who accept it both run a grave risk.

God dislikes your indolence. Why are you so careless in your meditation and spiritual reading?

Your bad advice calls God's wrath upon you. Mend your ways while you can.

Open your heart entirely to your director and make fervent, frequent Communions.

Keep going if you want to win. Don Bosco will tell you the rest.

If you do not retrace your steps, you are on the way to perdition.

Stop your nonsense. Act as a shining light to others.

You are guided by evil counselors. Listen to your confessor.

You had better be humble or you'll lose the loveliest of virtues.

One who gives or takes evil counsel becomes the devil's servant and slave.

Let past misfortunes be a lesson to you for the future.

Inchoantibus proemium promittitur, perseverantibus datur [A reward is promised to those who start, but is given only to those who persevere].

A great reward awaits you. Never mind fatigue.

Frequent Communion and meditation will be your good fortune.

Your arrogance and waste of time will be two thorns in your side at the time of death.

Go with good companions and follow your confessor's advice.

Avoid vanity and laziness. Visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Make good use of your time; go often to Communion; be obedient.

Take heart; do good; never mind others.

If you want the reward, keep going to Communion often.

He who indulges in foul conversation is an agent of Satan. Mend your ways.

Have frequent recourse to Mary and keep going.

Associate with good companions, go to Communion often, and take heart.

Why think of home so much? Why not think a little more of your soul?

Carry out the resolutions you make at confession.

Be faithful to your meditation and spiritual reading; they are indispensable to you. Go to Communion often.

God expects something more from you. Give Him your heart. Go to Communion often.

You still have time, but woe to you if you delay. Shun idleness.

Love your soul more than your body. Courage! You are still in time.

The world deceives you. Listen to God who has a great reward in store for you.

Your coldness and indifference put you in grave danger of perdition.

Beware of bad counselors. Make friends with your director and your teacher.

Take courage; go often to Communion; avoid idleness.

Mary is calling you. Listen to Her and never mind others.

Be more humble; make your meditation better.

Seek good counselors, lest you be in great danger.

Cleanse your soul often and practice your confessor's advice.

Do not mask the poison in your heart. Look for better companions.

Have greater trust in your superiors and follow their advice.

Avoid idleness and meditate better.

Cut out the clowning; be more devout and diligent.

You are [still] in time. Do what is right and never mind others.

Your brothers expect good example and advice from you.

Meditation, spiritual reading, and frequent Communion will be your fortune, if you do them well.

If you do not rid yourself of the vice you know, you will prepare an unhappy future for yourself.

Trust your superiors; follow your confessor's advice.

The world pays poorly. Associate with good companions and go to Communion often.

Why don't you make up for the past? Why persist in doing evil? Ask Mary's help.

The world is fooling you. God alone will truly reward you. Call upon him.

Let your superior's advice be your norm of conduct.

Thoroughly cleanse your soul and then shun evil.

Be a good companion by your good example, and go often to Communion.

God is not pleased with you. You must change radically.

Obedience and diligence will unfailingly lead you to heaven.

Pay no heed to fatigue, but think of the reward that God gives to those who serve Him.

Meekness and obedience are absolutely necessary.

Go with good companions and avoid bad ones.

You are not doing evil but that is not enough. God wishes you to do good.

Open your heart to your superiors, and they will tell you how to mend your ways.

He who clings to his own way pays with his own coin. Be more obedient.

Practice the resolutions you make at confession.

Your hot temper and bad example cause us worry. Amend your ways.

Why worry about so many things, but so little about your soul?

You give bad advice and are much too concerned about your body. Amend your ways.

Do you know where fights and squabbles belong? Be patient and obedient.

At the point of death the slothful will cry over the time they have wasted.

A certain bad habit of yours will spell disaster for you unless you amend your ways.

Be more sincere; occupy your time better, and avoid....

Communion and meditation will make you happy.

You are not doing enough for your soul, nor are you sufficiently diligent.

Be more faithful to the promises you make to God.

Are laziness and fickleness your friends?

Keep busy, give good example, and God will help you.

God wants you to be more diligent in your duties.

Go with good companions and don't be idle. Have courage!

Think less about home. Pay more attention to your soul and to your studies.

Never mind others; do what is right; associate with good companions.

Avoid idleness; be more recollected in church.

Avoid foolish companions; be more diligent.

Perform your duties, but pay more attention to spiritual matters.

Be more charitable with your companions; resist the bad habit you have.

Mary wants you to be more diligent in your duties.

Be more devout in church and more diligent in your school work.

Be more attentive at meditation and spiritual reading.

Respect your superiors and control your temper.

Mary wishes you to be devout and obedient.

Mend your ways or you'll end up badly. You still have time.

The time you waste leads you into sin. If you go on like this, where will you end up?

Your laziness is displeasing to God; start being more diligent.

We can fool the world, but not God. Be sincere.

Be more attentive in school and more devoted to Mary.

You are too light-minded; be more diligent; have recourse to Mary.

Lying lips bring death to the soul.

Forget the past and turn over a new leaf.

Follow your superiors' advice and suggestions.

Be kind to your companions, respectful to your superiors, and more devout in church.

You made a good start, but keep it up. Be obedient and devout.

Resolve to associate with good companions.

Receive the sacraments often. Pay attention to the spiritual reading.

Open your heart fully to your director and do what he tells you.

Piety and diligence in school work will make you happy.

Spend your time better; be more devout in church.

If you speak in times of silence, you'll harm yourself spiritually and physically.

Your negligence displeases God: make better use of your time.

Recollection in church will draw many blessings upon you.

Listen to your superiors and you will not go wrong.

Spiritual reading and obedience will keep you on the right path.

Why do you misbehave in church? Be more recollected.

Your levity is displeasing to God. When are you going to mend your ways?

Your tomfoolery and carelessness do your soul great harm.

If you do not put an end to your negligence and fighting, you'll have no heavenly reward.

Strive to be a little more obedient and everything will go well.

What reward can a lazy and negligent boy expect?

Be more devout; be more charitable toward your companions.

If you wish to make headway, be charitable to your companions and respectful to your superiors.

Attention in the classroom and devotion in church will make you pleasing to God.

Learn from the ant and meditate on the Seventh Commandment.

It is not enough to begin; one must do one's best to persevere.

Stop lying; your negligence is displeasing to God.

Do you wish to become good? Be recollected in church and attentive in school.

You are hurting your soul with your negligence and chatter.

Obedience is a must for you. Pray to Mary.

Do you want to be sure of following the right path? Be obedient.

Stop being lazy, lest you fare badly spiritually and physically.

The devil wants to make you lazy. Do not listen to him.

Associate with good companions, avoid bad ones, and you will do well.

You are heading for ruin unless you change radically.

Your confessor's and your teacher's advice will be your fortune.

Do you want to be good? Be recollected in church and attentive in school.

If you do not begin now, you will jeopardize your future.

If you are devoted to Mary, you will fare well spiritually and physically.

Ask your director for his advice and follow it.

You have made a start. Well and good! Now keep going.

Seemingly the next messages were for the school's workers:

Give great importance to religious matters.

Bear up with others and they will bear up with you. Be more devout.

Now you can, but don't want to; a time will come when you will want to, but will be unable.

He who is more concerned about the body than the soul will fall into the devil's snares.

Receive the sacraments more often and you will surely be on the right path to heaven.

The Gospel tells us that God condemned the lazy servant. Have courage!

If you do not like to be spoken ill of, do not speak ill of others.

Being respectful and obedient will greatly benefit you.

Keep working out of love for God. He will reward you generously.

These other messages were addressed to members of the Provera family whom Don Bosco gratefully considered to be his spiritual children:

A great deal of patience is needed with young people.

Bear up with other people's frailties.

Let God's glory be the goal of your activity.

(*To the father:*) Reprimand constantly; apply the stick when necessary.

Courage! We will get our reward at the end.

(*To the mother:*) Bring up your family in the faith by word and example. Help Papa in correcting and advising but do not neglect yourself. A great reward awaits you after your trials and struggles.

Watch over your own temporal and spiritual welfare and that of your family.

The distribution of these messages made history at Mirabello. While the boys were mulling over their personal messages and looking forward to Don Bosco's visit, several wrote him thank-you notes. One is so full of genuine affection that we think we should report it:

Mirabello, January 15, 1868

Very Reverend Father:

How much I kissed the beloved *strenna* you sent me in Our Lady's name. I too would like to give you a gift with all my heart if you would but accept it. I have heard such wonderful things about your Salesian Society that I can't wait to join it. This may be just a simple, fleeting emotion; if it is, you know it better than I. I want to place myself entirely into your hands because I know in whose hands you will place me. You know me and my capabilities inside out; do with me as you think best. Tearfully I beg you to set my heart at peace. In the past, there were times when I felt so elated that I was even tempted by pride, whereas at other times I felt terribly depressed and upset. How happy I was when my confessor, in whom I fully confided, assured me that I had nothing to worry about the past! But then I made my confession to you, as you surely remember, and you asked me questions which made me think. Only a short time ago, Father Director said that you had urged him to warn those who make sacrilegious confessions. He added that when he asked how he should go about it, you replied that if they claimed to be at peace on that score, a general admonition was all they needed. The responsibility was theirs! This is what makes me shiver. Please, Don Bosco, tell me my state of conscience. I am ready to obey you in all things. I fear that somehow you meant to warn me too by this. For heaven's sake, please set me at peace. Tell me everything. I'll do anything you say.

Please forgive me, dear Don Bosco, if I have taken up too much of your time. I am overwhelmingly anxious to obtain this favor, and I am confident that you will be so good as to grant it.

Filially yours,
Carones, *Cleric*

When the weather improved and the snow had been cleared off the roads, Don Bosco went to visit a son of Countess Callori at a boarding school in Valsalice [in the outskirts of Turin]. Writing to the mother about it, he also let her know that the ever-rising cost of living was aggravating the Oratory's financial straits. He informed her too of a delay in the printing of *Il Cattolico Provveduto* and of the temporary shelving of plans for a lyceum in Turin.[3]

Though constantly hard-pressed for money, he kept his heart open to those who needed help. In his chronicle Father Rua wrote:

Toward evening on January 10, 1868, Don Bosco was still in town when a beggar came up to him. By now Don Bosco had spent all the cash he had except for a single lira. Moved to pity, he told the beggar, "It is all I have. Take it, and may the Lord bless you. But before you go home, pass by the *Consolata* [Our Lady of Consolation Shrine] and recite a *Salve, Regina* for me that the Madonna may send me some money." Then they parted. An hour later, as he was on his way home, a person handed him a package postmarked "Rome" without telling him of its contents. Don Bosco thought it contained holy pictures. Upon opening it, however, he found 1,600 lire in bills! They came in very handy to pay some overdue debts.

As we shall later see, the package had been sent to him by Count De Maistre.

[3]This paragraph is a condensation. We are also omitting another short letter to Countess Callori and a request to the Department of Defense for army blankets and clothing. [Editor]

CHAPTER 5

Fulfillment of Predictions

WRITING to Chevalier Frederick Oreglia in Rome in early January 1868, Don Bosco voiced his gratitude to Our Lady for Her many favors to Her devotees and then went on to give him some news of the Oratory:[1]

The cold spell still with us and getting worse. Today [January 12] the mercury dipped to a new low of 18 degrees (centigrade).[2] The ice in my rooms has not thawed, despite my stove. This morning we delayed the boys' rising. Since most of them are still in summer wear, they try to keep warm by doubling their shirts, waistcoats, and trousers or by wrapping themselves in military capes and blankets. It looks like Mardi Gras! But they still feel the cold. In fact, during this morning's recreation period, not a single boy was outdoors playing, and that is very unusual. Under the circumstances, we sent the artisans to their shops, the students to the study hall, and whoever wished into the dining room. Notwithstanding these hardships, they are quite cheerful and content. For some months now no one has been sick, thank God.... Today, the 13th, the temperature is -21 degrees [-5 degrees F] and the snow is 60 centimeters [about two feet] deep. All the boys are well and wish to be remembered to you....

While this letter was in the mail, Don Bosco received one from Chevalier Oreglia, dated January 15, requesting prayers for benefactors and informing him that [Dominic] Cardinal Consolini had broached the subject of entrusting the management of Vigna

[1] We have omitted introductory excerpts of letters from various people recommending themselves to Don Bosco's prayers. [Editor]

[2] About 0 degrees Fahrenheit. [Editor]

Pia[3] to Don Bosco.[4] He was pleased because it was his ardent wish to have a permanent foothold in Rome for furthering the Salesian Society's interests. He felt confident that the difficulties he foresaw could be overcome. On this score we have the following entry in Father Rua's chronicle under the dateline of February 1868:

One day we were talking about taking over a Roman institution for which overtures had already been made. Since it was not autonomous but depended on another organization, some confreres objected and pointed out the danger of arousing envy, clashing with the controlling agency, and perhaps even jeopardizing our Society's reputation. Don Bosco countered that all these dangers could be easily avoided if we took care not to set ourselves up as know-it-alls, but would rather accept recommendations readily and humbly, implementing them when compatible with our rules.

Meanwhile Don Bosco's predictions were beginning to come true [as we gather from this letter of Father Francesia]:

January 20, 1868

My dear Chevalier Oreglia:

Your absence is more and more felt not only at the Oratory but in town too....

Things are fine here, though the devil tries to rouse trouble in some way or other. The annual *strenna* was important because of the announcement of three forthcoming deaths: the first one, very good; the last one, very bad.

While we were discussing these matters rather worriedly, the news came that the cleric [Joseph] Mazzarello had taken ill in Lanzo and was in critical condition.

Don Bosco assured us that Mazzarello would not make the Exercise for a Happy Death, which in fact was held last Thursday [January 16]. Our fear was as great as our suspense. Such an announcement so shook the boys that very, very few—you could count them on the fingers of one hand—did not make the Exercise for a Happy Death. Everbody wanted

[3] A type of agricultural reform school for boys in the outskirts of Rome. *See* Vol. VIII, pp. 266f. [Editor]

[4] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

to make a general confession. Our Lord always grants supernatural efficacy to Don Bosco's words.

The cold spell has waned, but the price of bread has gone up.

Bishop Gastaldi was here and just left. He asked about you and wants to be remembered to you. He paid a visit to our church and was quite pleased....

Father [John Baptist] Francesia

Joseph Mazzarello died at Lanzo on January 22 [1868]. Don Bosco's dream was beginning to prove true. It is worthwhile to recall some striking circumstances of this death—the first of the three predicted by Don Bosco. First, Mazzarello died at Lanzo where, as the dream clearly pointed out, Don Bosco did not yet know all the pupils. Second—and more striking—Don Bosco told Stephen Bourlot [5] (as he himself testified), before anyone knew of the cleric's illness, that the first one to die would be a cleric. Third, before Mazzarello took sick, Don Bosco publicly announced that the surname of the first one to die began with the letter "M."

In his chronicle Father Rua observed: "When Don Bosco was informed that the cleric Joseph Mazzarello had taken ill at Lanzo, his comments to those present were such as to convey the impression that the cleric would die, even though he himself had not seen the patient and the doctor had hopes of saving him."

Don Bosco replied to Chevalier Oreglia's last letter on the eve of Mazzarello's death. Determined to have the new church [of Mary, Help of Christians] consecrated within the year, he ordered that special commemorative medals be coined for this desired event. The medals were to bear on the front the façade of the church with the inscription: *Church of Mary, Help of Christians, Turin*, and, on the reverse side, the usual image of Mary, Help of Christians with the invocation: *Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us*. Smaller, lighter medals for popular distribution were to carry the image of Mary, Help of Christians on the front and a symbol of the Blessed Sacrament on the reverse side. These were the instructions Don Bosco gave to Chevalier Oreglia; he also entrusted him with errands and gave him news of the Oratory and its benefactors. In another letter, some days later, Don Bosco in-

[5] *See* pp. 11f. [Editor]

formed him of Mazzarello's death and also told him that he was separately mailing to him copies of circulars to promote *Letture Cattoliche.*[6]

In reply to this last letter, Oreglia sketched out his activities in Rome and explained why he had to stay a little longer. Don Bosco's answer follows:

Turin, January 29, 1868

My dear Chevalier:

After reading your letter, I agree that it is best for you to stay a little longer in Rome. Do all you can, then, for God's greater glory. Remember, though, that we owe our baker two months' payments and that our suppliers of construction material for the church keep sending us bills. So, whenever you can, send us whatever money Roman charity may have donated. In the meantime thank all donors and assure them that we shall pray for them and their dear ones who are sick. In fact, it is my intention that this Sunday, as we celebrate the feast of St. Francis de Sales, all Masses, prayers, and Communions will be offered to God to obtain health and prosperity for all our sick Roman friends who have helped us or will help us bring our undertaking to completion....

No one in the house is sick; the same can be said of Lanzo and Mirabello. The cold spell has returned. This morning we were down to -14 degrees.[7] Doctors claim that it is purifying the air and is beneficial, but meanwhile Turin's mortality rate is three times higher than usual.

My dear Chevalier, rest assured that all of us feel a most fraternal affection for you. Since your departure, I have prayed in my daily Mass for your physical and spiritual well-being, and I shall continue to do so, that God may keep us true friends on earth and sharers in the true joys of heaven. Do not forget your daily meditation and spiritual reading. May God preserve us all in His holy grace! Amen.

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco[8]

On the same day Don Bosco sent written instructions to Father Lemoyne, whom he had sent to Genoa to raise funds for the new

[6] This paragraph is a condensation. We are also omitting a digression about correspondence between Father Francesia and Chevalier Oreglia. [Editor]

[7] About -11 degrees Fahrenheit. [Editor]

[8] We are omitting a short letter from Chevalier Oreglia to Father Francesia giving him some news of happenings in Rome. [Editor]

church.[9] Meanwhile, the February issue of *Letture Cattoliche, Severino* or *The Adventures of an Alpine Boy*, written by Don Bosco, was off the press. It was the true story of a former Oratory pupil who became a Waldensian and then, tormented by remorse, returned to the Church.[10]

In 1876, while discussing a story that he was planning to write in order to point out the harm that summer vacations might bring to incautious youngsters and what they could do to forestall it, Don Bosco revealed a few things about the boy Severino. He gave the names of the two Waldensian ministers who had misled the boy, and he declared that, aside from a few minor details which in no way substantially affected the truthfulness of the narrative, the facts about Severino were strictly true. "I also have," he added, "authentic documentation concerning a companion in Severino's apostasy, who died in the Waldensian hospital in Genoa. His brother came to see me from time to time and we often talked about these past sad events."

[9]This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]
[10]We are omitting a review of this booklet by *Unità Cattolica.* [Editor]

CHAPTER 6

Annual Conference of St. Francis de Sales, 1868

THE Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, the festive oratories, the boarding schools [at Mirabello and Lanzo], *Letture Cattoliche*, and the Church of Mary, Help of Christians severely taxed Don Bosco's strength, but his overriding concern and greatest need was the Holy See's approval of his Society. Upon that depended the very survival and expansion of all his thriving projects.

To obtain such approval, he first had to secure episcopal letters of recommendation as he had previously done for the decree of praise. The bishops of Fossano and Alessandria had already sent such letters at the close of the previous year. Early in 1868, Don Bosco appealed also to the bishop of Casale, accompanying his request with this brief history of his Society:

Brief History of the Society of St. Francis de Sales

This Society's origins are found in the simple catechetical instructions conducted by Father John Bosco in a hall adjacent to St. Francis of Assisi Church with the consent and advice of Father Louis Guala[1] and Father Joseph Cafasso.[2] Its aim was to gather the most forlorn and destitute boys on Sundays and holy days in order to keep them occupied with church services, sacred songs, and wholesome diversions. Particular attention was given to young men released from prison or exposed to grave moral dangers.[3] This venture proved rewarding. Boys flocked to these gatherings and filled the hall to capacity.

[1] Founder of the Convitto Ecclesiastico. *See* Vol. II, pp. 31ff, 96f. [Editor]

[2] Don Bosco's spiritual director and now a canonized saint. *Ibid.*, p. 40 and *passim.* [Editor]

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 199. [Editor]

In 1844 Father Bosco became chaplain of St. Philomena Hospital near the Rifugio[4] and, with Archbishop Fransoni's permission, set aside a section of the building for divine worship. For some time church services were held there. The next two years the Oratory had no permanent quarters, but in 1846 a place was rented and, later, purchased. There, in due time, the present Church and Oratory of St. Francis de Sales were built. The dearly beloved archbishop came personally several times to administer Confirmation and hold sacred services. He also gave permission to hold triduums and novenas, to admit candidates to Confirmation, and to distribute Holy Communion even in fulfillment of the Easter duty.

As the number of boys kept increasing, the archbishop recommended and approved the opening of the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory at Porta Nuova in 1847,[5] [of the Guardian Angel] at Borgo Vanchiglia in 1849,[6] and finally of St. Joseph at Borgo San Salvario in 1859.[7] In due time Sunday schools, night schools, and even day schools followed.[8] When a goodly number of boys were found to be in need of food, shelter, and clothing, part of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was turned into a boarding school, which now shelters some eight hundred youngsters.[9]

To offset the decline in priestly vocations in these difficult times, a drive was started among the boys of little or no means. Thus, at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales [in Turin], in our boarding school at Lanzo, and in our junior seminary at Mirabello these lads—who for the most part want to become priests—receive a religious and scientific education along with more than four hundred other pupils.

In a certain sense, the head of all these oratories was always the archbishop [of Turin] whose judgment and advice directed everything. For practical purposes, the priests who chose to exercise their ministry in these oratories constantly recognized Father John Bosco as their superior, and to him they felt bound not by vows but by a simple promise to be at his disposal in whatever he thought would best promote God's greater glory.

On several occasions Archbishop Fransoni recommended that some means be found to insure the oratories' survival after the founder's death. In 1852, he voluntarily gave an overall approval of the regulations of the festive oratories and appointed Father Bosco as their superior

[4] An institution for wayward girls. *Ibid.*, pp. 184f. [Editor]
[5] *See* Vol. III, pp. 197ff. [Editor]
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 393ff. [Editor]
[7] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 85f. [Editor]
[8] *See* Vol. II, p. 199. [Editor]
[9] *See* Vol. III, pp. 140-46. [Editor]

with all necessary and opportune prerogatives. Even when forced into exile by adversity, he kept recommending that the festive oratories be safely allowed to continue and grow through some organization.[10] In 1859, he advised Father Bosco to go to Rome and consult the Holy Father about setting up a religious society whose members would retain full civil rights.

Kindly and solicitously the Holy Father approved the plan, laid down the basics, and helped formulate the regulations. Finally, with Francis Cardinal Gaude's assistance, the first regulations of the Society were revised, as may be seen in the enclosed copy. Pius IX himself wrote several letters of advice and suggestions for the success of this enterprise. He also directed that, after the regulations were tried for some time, they should again be submitted for the Holy See's approval.

As for the exiled Archbishop Fransoni, he studied the rules and set down in writing some observations which were duly taken into account. He then forwarded our constitutions to his vicar general, urging him to take the necessary steps for their formal approval. This beloved shepherd's death brought matters to a standstill. Under the circumstances, the vicar capitular thought it best to let matters rest till the appointment of a new archbishop, meanwhile obliging with a warm recommendation which was forwarded with others to the Holy See in 1864. The Holy Father accepted these recommendaions with fatherly interest and passed them on to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, along with the constitutions and a memorandum. A few months later this same Sacred Congregation issued a decree (copy enclosed) praising and commending the constitutions, though—as is customary—deferring formal approval of each article to a more opportune time. For the time being, however, the [Salesian] Society was vested in the person of the Superior General for life, and in his successor whose term of office would last twelve years.

This Society could thus be considered as generically approved, but now, before proceeding to its definitve approval, the Holy See wants to ascertain if it measures up to its aims. Your predecessor, Bishop Louis Nazari of [the Counts of] Calabiana, graciously recommended it to the Holy See, stressing particularly that this Society was operating and directing a junior seminary in his own diocese.

Don Bosco closed this brief history of the Salesian Society with the humble request that the present bishop of Casale would add his own letter of recommendation to the commendatory letters of other bishops.

The bishop of Casale graciously obliged, approving the

[10] *See* Vol. IV, p. 77. [Editor]

Salesian Society as a diocesan congregation and recommending it to other bishops and to the Holy Father himself.[11]

Other copies of this brief history of the Salesian Congregation, slightly adapted to local circumstances, were also prepared for other bishops. One such copy Don Bosco sent to the archbishop of Genoa on January 29, 1868.

On Sunday, February 2, the Oratory had a joint celebration of the feasts of the Purification of Our Lady and of St. Francis de Sales. On the following day, the annual conference of the Salesian Society was held.[12] A textual, interesting summary of this conference follows:

February 3, 1868. This evening, Don Bosco called the directors of all the houses and the Salesians in the Oratory to a meeting in his room. Starting with Father Dominic Pestarino of Mornese, each director presented a report.

Don Bosco approved what was being done at Mornese to keep young people from unwholesome diversions during the carnival season and stated that he was deeply gratified by the genuine piety of the village folk. Again he heartily thanked them for their contributions to his new church and encouraged their zealous friend, Father Pestarino, to continue in his holy enterprise.

He said that he was satisfied with the zeal of the superiors of Mirabello seminary in devising effective means to enhance church services and to make the Blessed Sacrament[13] and Immaculate Conception[14] sodalities attractive. Asked for advice on correcting unruly youngsters, his answer was that the superior should call them aside and, after gently showing his disappointment at their conduct, exhort them to mend their ways. Then he should follow this up by asking their teacher to take special care of them and to keep reminding them of the director's words, while doing his best to help them better themselves.

Don Bosco then commented on our school at Lanzo. He showed how the Immaculate Conception Sodality could be set up there too. If the boys were not yet ready for it, a start could be made among the young clerics, who would in turn gradually initiate their pupils and turn it over to them as soon as they could handle it.

Lastly he came to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. After briefly commenting on its operation, he pointed out that it was very difficult to present an exact evaluation of matters because of the overly large

[11] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[12] For similar conferences *see* Vol. VIII, pp. 16, 154f, 313; Vol. XI, pp. 11-19. [Editor]
[13] *See* Vol. V, p. 499. [Editor]
[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 312-21. [Editor]

number of students and artisans. Still, on the whole, things seemed to be going well, considering that there were fewer clerics for supervision and that some of these could not be fully relied upon because, having come from seminaries, they were inexperienced and unaccustomed to our way of life.

He also lamented the demise of some good confreres. Since the last annual conference, two outstanding, promising members had passed away, both so virtuous that one would be hard put to determine which had earned a greater heavenly reward. The first, cleric Joseph Mazzarello,[15] was innately good, unfaltering in resolves, and obedient; the other, Father Henry Bonetti,[16] had achieved self-mastery and had overcome all difficulties raised by his fiery temperament.

Don Bosco then went on to declare that it was very important for all Salesians to take heart and willingly make sacrifices for Our Lord's sake. He exhorted priests and clerics to set the example in observing the rules and urged all to strive to acquaint themselves with them. He recommended that the prefect of studies see to it that a few articles of the rules be publicly read every week to the assembled priests, clerics, and pupils. He rejected a suggestion not to make public the rules which bound clerics and priests. The boys, he countered, would have reason to complain if they thought they alone were bound by rules and regulations. One must be cautious in a public discussion of blameworthy incidents, yet he must frankly proclaim the rule.

Passing on to the Salesian Society, he announced that two houses had been offered to us at Novara and Rome, adding that these new foundations would be materially and morally beneficial because of the good will they would generate among important people. He then read the decree of the bishop of Casale approving our Society in his diocese, and the congratulations he had received on that score from Bishop [Eugene] Galletti [of Alba] and Bishop [Lawrence] Gastaldi [of Saluzzo]. The latter, in particular, had called this approval a spark which would set off a mammoth fire and consume all obstacles to the general acceptance of our Society. Bishop Galletti had requested and received a copy of this decree in the hope that many other prelates would join him in lending us their support.

Speaking of obstacles, Don Bosco mentioned a dream he had had in the early years of the [Salesian] Society,[17] in which he had seen his co-workers strolling down a long, shaded walkway paved with thorns and walled in on both sides by roses and thorns, while overhead, other roses formed a roof. He interpreted the dream to mean that Salesians

[15] Mazzarello had made his perpetual vows on December 6, 1865 (*see* Vol. VIII, p. 127) and had died at Lanzo on January 28, 1868. *See* p. 32. [Editor]

[16] Father Bonetti had died on July 14, 1867. (*See* Vol. VIII, p. 384) For other biographical details *see also* Vol. VI, p. 447. [Editor]

[17] *See* Vol. III, pp. 25ff. [Editor]

must not only walk over the thorns of hardships and toil, but must expect to be hurt and hindered in their work by the thorns of obstacles and opposition. The devil, the enemy of good, does his best to block those who wish to do good; what is more, in hellish spite he makes sure that obstacles are raised by devout, well-intentioned people who, miserably deceived, in turn deceive others. "Let us fight bravely and steadfastly," he exclaimed, "and with God's help we shall triumph over everyone and everything. Great undertakings are crowned with success only after great efforts. The roses overhead mean that our reward is in heaven. This is the only goal worth striving for with all our strength.

"And now," he continued, "let us try to swell our numbers. To achieve this end, each of us must take it upon himself to win over new members. Directors, especially, should shoulder this task. They must strive to win and retain the confidence of those boys who they clearly foresee have the potential for doing great good. This is the only way to draw them into the Salesian Society. I say this from experience. I assure you that if a boy consistently has had full confidence in his superior and director during his stay in our schools, he will easily be won over. Seeing in his director a father rather than a superior, he will pour out his heart to him and do all his director suggests. He will love the house and practice our rules even before he learns of our Society. And once he comes to know it, he will join, never to leave it, unless something happens to destroy his confidence. On the contrary, other boys come to us, conduct themselves blamelessly throughout the course of their studies, and probably are good and praiseworthy, but, lacking such confidence in their superior, they give but very slim hopes that they will join the congregation and persevere in it. The reason is that they did not look upon their director as a father, but as a superior who limited himself exclusively to watching over their exterior conduct. We must inspire affection in order to discover the tendencies of our pupils and of other dependents. Let this be our norm."

He concluded: "Shall we all meet again for this conference next year, or will some of us have been summoned into eternity? I do hope we shall meet again, but this rests in God's hands. Let us be ever ready for death."

Don Bosco then closed the meeting with a *De Profundis* for our beloved deceased confreres.

CHAPTER 7

Noteworthy Details

THE directors returned to their schools on February 4. A few days later, Father John Bonetti, always very concerned with the spiritual care of his pupils, wrote to Chevalier Oreglia [in Rome]:

Mirabello, February 7, 1868

Dear Chevalier:

Would you consider giving me and my dear boys a fine present? If you have a chance to approach our beloved Holy Father, please tell him how much we all love him. Ask him for a gift for us, perhaps an indulgence. Then we would have to reciprocate by holding a celebration in his honor, for we deeply love him.

This year is the [third] centenary of St. Stanislaus' [death]. I want the boys to celebrate it with solemnity, so that they may come to admire his virtues. I would be much obliged if you could get me a relic of this lovable young saint.

We are all well but fear one of us may have to die, as Don Bosco saw in his dream. He will be here next Thursday....

Fr. Bonetti

Don Bosco's dream and predictions for the year 1868 were now common knowledge. Mazzarello's death at Lanzo had triggered fears that the dream did not refer exclusively to Oratory pupils and that a similar fate might therefore befall someone at Mirabello. Don Bosco's arrival was very anxiously awaited also because everybody wanted an explanation of the yearly *strenna*.[1]

[1] We are omitting a letter of Father Francesia to Chevalier Oreglia telling him of Don Bosco's trip to Milan the previous week and of the enthusiasm he aroused there. We are also omitting a business letter of Don Bosco to Chevalier Oreglia. [Editor]

On February 13 Don Bosco went to Mirabello. One may imagine the welcome he got! After assuring everyone that the dream did not refer to them, he spent the day explaining the *strenna* and hearing confessions. The boys felt both enthused and moved by the fact that the *strenna* was an accurate reflection of their own spiritual condition. He recalled to them the seminary's good reputation and some of the saintly schoolmates who had died, urging them to emulate the virtues of Ernest Saccardi, Francis Rapetti, and eleven-year-old Joseph Allievo, son of the well-known professor of pedagogy, who had died in Milan on July 5, 1867. On that occasion, Father Bonetti had delivered a magnificent eulogy at the boy's funeral.

During Don Bosco's stay at Mirabello, a strange thing happened, of which Father John Garino has left us a written account:

> In 1868 I was teaching the senior class at the Mirabello junior seminary. In the morning of February 3, the feast of St. Blaise, I went to church with the others to have my throat blessed. Shortly afterward, it got terribly sore and I had trouble swallowing. A few days later Don Bosco came to Mirabello. When I went up with a friend of mine (Paul Albera, I think) to greet him, my friend remarked, "Don Bosco, guess what St. Blaise did for Garino! (He was a young cleric at the time.) He had his throat blessed and promptly it got sore!" Don Bosco smiled and told me to bear with it until the feast of the Annunciation (March 25). Things turned out exactly that way. I kept teaching as best I could, though in pain. Then on March 25, while I was chatting with some boys in the playground, the soreness suddenly vanished. I immediately remembered Don Bosco's words and told them what had happened. Their admiration for Don Bosco increased.

From Mirabello, Don Bosco went to Casale to thank Bishop Peter Ferrè for his approval of the Society of St. Francis de Sales. On this trip an amusing incident occurred, similar to others we have narrated elsewhere. It must be remembered that in the district of Alessandria, Casale, Vercelli, and Novara, markets were well attended by cattle dealers and merchants—often a rather earthy and vulgar lot. It so happened that a fellow passenger of Don Bosco on the train was one of those people who, fed by anticlerical literature, think they are qualified to attack the Church.[2] After some trivial remarks and a wink in Don Bosco's

[2] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

direction, this gentleman steered the conversation to religion, and in particular to Christ's miracles. Declaring they could all be explained on a natural level, he picked as an example the miracle of St. Peter walking on the water. "No miracle at all!" he exclaimed. "Everyone knows that the waters of the Dead Sea are so dense that ships cannot navigate. Thus it is quite easy for a man to walk on them. In St. Peter's time the bituminous crust may well have been thick enough to support him."

Don Bosco had kept silent, but at that point he gave the man a pitying look and remarked, "What nonsense! For your information, Our Lord was never on the Dead Sea with His disciples. You are confusing it with the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias or Lake of Gennesaret. The two are about seventy miles apart."

At this, the other people in the compartment broke out into a hearty laugh. "Well, that's what I read," muttered the poor fellow, embarrassed and peeved. "I was misinformed."

"Let me tell you something," Don Bosco went on. "If, instead of reading certain books which only tend to destroy people's faith, you were to go to church and listen to a sermon, you might not make such blunders."

On another occasion, Don Bosco was sitting opposite a fellow passenger who loudly began defending a priest he claimed had been unjustly punished by his bishop. "The Inquisition is over," he said. "Priests are now free citizens. Who gave the bishop the right to suspend him from saying Mass?"

"Jesus Christ, that's who!" Don Bosco replied. "If the bishop suspended him, then he must have had his reasons. And tell me, who appointed you judge of the Apostles' successors?"

"I have heard that this bishop, unlike others, abuses his power and opposes freedom."

"Did he suspend many other priests?"

"I don't think so. Only the one I mentioned."

"Why didn't he suspend others as well?"

The man was stumped.

"I'll tell you why," Don Bosco went on. "Because the other priests do what they are supposed to do."

Then, lowering his voice, he went on: "As for your friend, let me tell you that he was suspended because he is rarely found in church, does not care to hear confessions, and never gives a sermon. More often than not, he is in a bar and does not wear

clerical garb. His bishop warned him many times but he refused to obey. He even got worse. And you take up his defense? Would you allow such a wretch to offer Holy Mass? If you would, I won't waste another word on you because I'd be certain I wasn't speaking to a Catholic!"

The man was silent for a few moments.

"To tell the truth," he countered, "I don't even know this priest. All I know is what I heard from others."

"Well," Don Bosco concluded, "be more cautious in your speech, especially as regards bishops, for we owe them the greatest reverence. They know their duties better than we do and carry them out conscientiously."

On February 15, after returning from Turin, he wrote to an officer of the Department of Defense to obtain aid for pupils recommended to the Oratory by the same department.[3] The following week he went to Lanzo, where he spent three tireless days giving himself to the spiritual care of his beloved pupils. When he got back to Turin, he found this letter from Cosimus Cardinal Corsi, archbishop of Pisa:

February 20, 1868

Dear Reverend Father:

For some years now I have been familiar with the great amount of good done among the people by your festive oratories. Seeing the progress of your Society, I repeatedly thank God for blessing it and making it prosper. I also admire the zeal of its founder and superior and that of his tireless co-workers. Truly, I would like nothing better than to help it as best I can. I am therefore ready to issue a letter of commendation, as you requested on February 10.

I do believe, though, that you might do better if you first obtained and submitted letters of recommendation of at least the majority of the bishops of Piedmont, as well as a letter from Philip Cardinal De Angelis, archbishop of Fermo, whose word carries great weight. His long residence in Turin qualifies him as a more competent judge and more authoritative evaluator of your Society's excellence and merits. Furthermore, His Eminence is soon going to Rome, and his presence and influence would enhance the effect of his own letter of recommendation. Once these steps have been taken, let me hear from you, and I shall promptly oblige.

I am truly happy to learn that you and your confreres have been so

[3] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

good as to remember me constantly in your prayers. I am all the more grateful because of my great personal need at this time.

Yours affectionately,
✠ Corsi, *Archbishop of Pisa*

Meanwhile, the Oratory students had already begun their month-long devotion in honor of St. Joseph, the great saint in whom Don Bosco had lively faith. The artisans, especially those belonging to the St. Joseph's Sodality,[4] vied with their schoolmates by observing its rules[5] and by other devotional practices.[6]

[4] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 103ff. [Editor]
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 654ff. [Editor]
[6] We are omitting Father Bonetti's original draft of the regulations of this sodality which came to light in 1912. This draft agrees substantially with the revised edition reported in Vol. VI, pp. 654ff. [Editor]

CHAPTER 8

Unending Vexations

VERY disagreeable controversies [between Don Bosco and Archbishop Alexander Riccardi of Turin concerning the status of the Salesian Society] made it abundantly clear that the Society's definitive approval by the Holy See was an absolute necessity. In January 1868, wishing to have Francis Dalmazzo, James Costamagna, and Paul Albera ordained within the year, Don Bosco again sent Father Cagliero to the archbishop to inform him of his intentions and to ascertain the latter's will. The prelate received him courteously, but he firmly insisted that all three clerics—natives of the archdiocese—should live at least one year in the seminary prior to their ordination.[1]

This was a clear refusal to recognize in any way the Salesian Society, notwithstanding the Holy See's *decretum laudis* [decree of praise of July 23, 1864];[2] it was also an abuse of power to demand of its members what was not required of several diocesan clerics of wealthy families who were allowed to pursue their studies at home.

Father Cagliero reiterated what he had already said on his previous call in December 1867.[3]

"My decree still stands," the archbishop replied.

"Then you want to destroy the Oratory!"

"I only want my own clerics."

"Pardon me, Your Excellency, but I must again restate that this amounts to destroying the Oratory. Boarding schools can't be run without teachers and assistants. For us this is a matter of life and

[1] *See* Vol. VIII, pp. 405ff. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. VII, p. 425. [Editor]
[3] *See* Vol. VIII, pp. 426f. [Editor]

death, a question of survival, and a juridical affair as well, because everyone has a right to his own existence. Furthermore, what the Oratory has done for the diocese is self-evident. Just count the priests who were educated and formed at the Oratory."

"I am grateful for what you have done for the diocese, but now I want you to obey my decree."

"Very well, then. I'll go back to the Oratory and tell Don Bosco, 'Father, let's hand the Oratory keys over to the archbishop and let him look after it.' You will have eight hundred boys to provide for, Your Excellency."

"But, but...." the archbishop mumbled, profoundly perturbed. "You are forcing me into a difficult situation. I can't go back on my decision...."

Feeling sure that the bishop had been ill advised by others, Father Cagliero went on respectfully but fearlessly, "Consider the consequences, Your Excellency. Think of the gossip this will generate, of the boys who will have to be sent back to their homes or turned out into the streets, of the disapproval which will be voiced by the faithful."

The archbishop became more perturbed and invited Father Cagliero to sit down. Excusing himself, notwithstanding the prelate's insistence, with his permission Father Cagliero continued, "Like others, I too became a priest with Don Bosco's advice. Never would I have believed that the very person from whom I expected support would be the first to oppose what is good. I would have been better off wielding a hoe—working hard, yes, but without so much aggravation! Was it worth it for Don Bosco to undertake so beneficial a work for his own diocese, only to see it so soon destroyed?"

He then excused himself and left. The audience had lasted about an hour. More than forty persons had been kept waiting.

"You have been there for quite a while," they remonstrated, as he emerged.

Glancing about, Father Cagliero could not keep from exclaiming, "You are here to speak for yourselves! I came to speak for forty people!"

Father Cagliero's visit proved fruitless, but Bishop Gastaldi of Saluzzo and Bishop Galletti of Alba rallied to Don Bosco's cause. After warmly and repeatedly urging Archbishop Riccardi by letter

to leave Don Bosco in peace, Bishop Gastaldi came to the Oratory to ascertain the true state of affairs. He then called on the archbishop and urged him not to put any further obstacles to the ordinations of the Oratory clerics. Bishop Galletti also intervened and tried to show him that the Society of St. Francis de Sales had been canonically established and that the vows which some of Don Bosco's clerics had already pronounced were valid. Overwhelmed by such insistence, the archbishop finally consented to the ordination of Albera, Costamagna, and Dalmazzo, to take place in the latter part of Lent.

The clerics' troubles were not over. During their spiritual retreat held in the seminary, Father [Joseph] Soldati, the spiritual director, tried what he had already attempted with other Oratory clerics—he used every argument he could think of to persuade them to leave Don Bosco.[4] His maneuvers brought about the opposite effect. Francis Dalmazzo, who still hesitated to join the Salesian Society definitively, became so disgusted that he exclaimed, "I'll be a Salesian just because they don't want me to be."

On March 25 [1868] the archbishop personally administered tonsure and the four minor orders; then, on March 28, he ordained them subdeacons. After services, however, in the presence of his seminarians, he spoke some caustic words against the Oratory clerics, the Salesian Society, and Don Bosco himself, implying that they were capriciously trying to withdraw themselves from his jurisdiction.

The fact is—and we regret having to say it—that at that time Archbishop Riccardi could not stomach the Salesian Society's definitive approval by the Holy See. In spite of lengthy discussions and pertinent documents kept on file in his chancery office, he dared to state that he had no knowledge at all of the existence of the Society of St. Francis de Sales.

However, on June 6, the eve of the feast of the Holy Trinity, he conferred the diaconate on the three clerics, and later he allowed Francis Dalmazzo and Paul Albera to be ordained priests, respectively, by Bishop Balma and Bishop Ferrè on July 19 and

[4]For other similar endeavors of his *see* Vol. XI, p. 36. [Editor]

August 2. He ordained James Costamagna himself on September 19, as we shall see later on.

At this time yet another cross troubled the Oratory clerics. The rumor kept spreading that, overburdened with teaching and supervising, they could not properly attend to their theology courses. The allegation, circulated by Don Bosco's enemies, reached the archbishop, who in turn complained to Don Bosco. At this point, Stephen Bourlot, an outspoken, steadfast cleric, called at the chancery to request permission for the Oratory clerics to take mid-year theology exams at the seminary.

"But you men aren't ready for them," Father Gaude and others replied.

"Why not?"

"Because you're too busy with all sorts of things and do not attend seminary lectures."

"With all due respect, one can do more than one thing at a time."

"Impossible!"

"We passed our previous examinations, and our grades were never below those of the seminarians."

"Yes, yes, but your preparation was hasty and superficial."

"That may be, but the fact is that we know as much as they do."

"Very well, what treatises have you studied?"

"Those dictated by the seminary professors, except for the treatise on the Eucharist authored by Banaudi."

"Why this exception?"

"Because it seemed preferable."

Father Gaude duly informed the archbishop of this request. The latter consented and so, on February 22, thirteen Oratory clerics reported to the seminary for examinations. On returning home they found Don Bosco waiting for them at the Oratory gate. "How did you make out?" he asked immediately.

"Very well," Bourlot replied. "Most of us got an *optime* [excellent]; Cagliero received a *peroptime* [most excellent], and Dominic Vota, Peter Norza, and I received an *egregie cum laude* [above excellent with praise]."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely! I saw the grades myself. We beat all the seminarians."

"Deo gratias!" exclaimed Don Bosco. "Now I'll answer the archbishop's letter."

The monsignor who had presided over the examinations and did not know which clerics came from the Oratory had praised them. Since there was a seminarian named Bourlot, the monsignor believed that this was the one who had earned the *cum laude;* later he found out that it was his cousin, Stephen Bourlot of the Oratory.

As these troubles gradually eased, Father Francesia received the following note from Chevalier Oreglia: "Bad days are ahead. Fortifications in Rome are almost complete now. They wait to be put to the test. Let us hope they will meet our expectations with the help of Don Bosco's prayers. 'Unless the Lord guard the city, in vain does the guard keep vigil.' [Ps. 126, 2] Right now everything is peaceful. Even the carnival celebrations are tame. Flocks of visitors, but little merriment."

If there was little merriment in Rome, the Oratory overflowed with it. Stage plays, games, the breaking of the traditional piñata, raffles, and music, vocal and instrumental, kept the boys in high spirits during the last three days of the carnival season. Their joy stemmed from their peace of mind which had been strengthened by the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death, during which prayers had been offered up for the holy souls in purgatory, especially for the soul of the cleric Secundus Pettiva, who had recently died at St. Aloysius Hospital in Turin.

Pettiva, an Oratory alumnus and a very gifted musician, had run the music department since 1858. It might well have been called a "Music Academy" because, through Don Bosco's initiative, it trained prominent organists, composers, and vocalists for sacred services all over the world. Father John Cagliero, Father Joseph Lazzero, Father Louis Chiapale, Joseph Buzzetti, James Rossi, John Turchi, Callixtus Cerruti, and Joseph Dogliani were its first pupils and [in due time] teachers. There followed Bersano, Tomatis, Reano, Fumero, Brunetti, Dassano, and hundreds of others who in their turn trained thousands of pupils. Several years later, for reasons of his own, Pettiva took leave of Don Bosco and went to the Mirabello junior seminary, where he helped for several months. Then he also left Mirabello and, after

various events, fell ill with tuberculosis and ended up in St. Aloysius Hospital. Father Rua's chronicle has this entry concerning him:

> As his condition worsened, Pettiva asked for Don Bosco. Despite his multiple occupations, the good father went to see him twice, heard his confession, and gave him all the spiritual comfort he needed. Surprisingly, until then Pettiva had always firmly believed that he would recover by spring. After Don Bosco's first visit, however, his attitude changed completely. All he talked about was his impending death, and all his thoughts were on preparing himself for it. Without frightening him but frankly telling him that his end was near, Don Bosco had made the man understand that his hopes of recovery were just wishful thinking. He used such tact and warmth that the patient not only felt no fear, but after Don Bosco's second visit he even manifested joy, for Don Bosco had assured him that soon after his death he would go to heaven. Nor were Don Bosco's words a deception, for just a few days later Pettiva breathed his last in a most edifying manner.

When news of his death reached the Oratory, many imagined that he was one of the three youths whose death Don Bosco had foreseen in the dream, but such was not the case, as we gather from a letter of Father Francesia to Chevalier Oreglia in Rome: "Poor Pettiva died in an enviable spirit of resignation to God's will. Yet Don Bosco assures us that he was not the second youth who had to pack for eternity. He added, though, that yesterday one person of our house made his last Exercise for a Happy Death. Cheer up, therefore, because you are not the next one to go.... Meanwhile I inform you that Father Pechenino's Greek grammar has been printed, and we are now giving renewed attention to the *Italian Classics for the Young*. The program is already in writing...."

As we see, Don Bosco was thinking of founding a type of "Book of the Month Club" that would publish expurgated editions of Italian classics. On his part, Don Bosco wrote to Chevalier Oreglia, candidly stating that the Oratory's financial straits were a godsend for those who wished to obtain favors from Our Lady. He also wrote: "A lot of people say that you will remain forever in Rome. I always deny it, but they keep asking for you."[5]

[5] We are omitting the rest of the letter dealing with business and other minor details. [Editor]

Both in whispers and aloud the news was spreading that Chevalier Oreglia would no longer return to the Oratory. Full of charity toward all, Don Bosco most solicitously did his very best to help this beloved spiritual son to persevere in his vocation, as will become evident from his many other letters.

CHAPTER 9

Steps Toward Approval of the Salesian Society

THE bishops from whom Don Bosco had requested letters of commendation of the Salesian Society promptly obliged, so that by March 1868, Don Bosco had the official approval of the ordinaries of Acqui, Asti, Ancona, and Turin.[1] The archbishop of Turin, however, besides qualifying his approval of the Salesian Society, sent the following confidential letter to Angelo Cardinal Quaglia, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars:

Turin, March 14, 1868

Your Eminence:

Father John Bosco, the founder and rector of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, has insistently asked me for a letter of commendation so that this Society may be approved by the Holy See as a religious congregation on the basis of the constitutions he himself submitted. I am willing to support him in this aspiration as long as it is within limits which, in my opinion, will make his institution beneficial to the Church. I have issued my commendation and enclose a copy. Your Eminence will clearly see that my approval is restricted to the Society's original aim to gather boys for religious instruction and teach them trades or handicrafts. If I am now petitioning for its establishment as a religious congregation, I do so under the proviso of a careful revision and amending of its constitutions by the Holy See. Frankly, had I not been firmly convinced that your Sacred Congregation would radically modify this Society's constitutions, I would never have committed myself to such a step regardless of the unpleasant repercussions such a refusal could cause. Indeed, I see it as a betrayal of my episcopal duty if I were to

[1]This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

endorse a congregation which, approved in its present status, could only bring very grave harm to the universal Church, to our diocese, and to our clergy.

For the good of the Salesian Society itself, and still more for the good of the Church, I have thought it wise to submit under separate cover the more obvious observations which came to my mind upon reading the proposed constitutions. I have also made marginal notes on certain articles which I thought should be amended.

Lest I might have been prejudiced, I submitted the same constitutions to Father Maria Anthony Durando,[2] an experienced, scholarly Vincentian respected and admired by all, and he too agreed that these constitutions need amendments.

I submit all these observations to your wise judgment so that you may bear them in mind when the Sacred Congregation convenes to examine the aforesaid constitutions. I truly wish that the [Salesian] Society may find ways to perpetuate itself and grow, but within the limits of its original purpose, and that steps be taken to forestall unpleasant complications which might arise were it to be established as a religious congregation. I also entreat this Sacred Congregation not to grant any sort of approval until an impartial observer of its choice—pious, scholarly, experienced, and well versed in the education of youth—has studied matters on the spot and reported his findings. This secret investigation may unearth many deficiencies or irregularities which have escaped my own attention; it would enlighten the Sacred Congregation and enable it, by a better knowledge of the background, to amend and rewrite the constitutions in order to meet the needs of the present times.

I trust that Your Eminence and the Sacred Congregation will consider what I have had the honor of bringing to your attention in the interest of both the Church and the Salesian Society. With profound esteem, I am

Your humble servant,
✠ Alexander [Riccardi], *Archbishop of Turin*

The archbishop's observations[3] concerned the following points:

1. The Salesian Society should limit itself to educating boys, helping the diocesan clergy, and spreading good literature.
2. The status of lay religious should be more clearly spelled out.

[2] Father Durando had been given the same task by Archbishop Fransoni in 1860. *See* Vol. VI, pp. 421ff. [Editor]

[3] What follows is a summary. The original observations are found in Volume IX, pp. 97-101 of the *Memorie Biografiche del Venerabile Don Giovanni Bosco.* [Editor]

3. The course of studies of clerical and lay members is not clearly spelled out. Likewise, nothing is said about clerical members engaging in other tasks during their studies.

4. The present provisions concerning ecclesiastical benefices seem detrimental to the dioceses.

5. It does not seem proper that this Society concern itself with the formation of seminarians except on the specific request of local ordinaries.

6. Provision should be made for an ecclesiastical patrimony, since it is possible that members may leave the Society.

7. Though a probation period of at least one year is prescribed for applicants, nothing is said about where and how this shall take place.

8. Apparently one may seek admission to this Society even if only to pursue an education. This would be detrimental to its spirit.

9. Unity of purpose is lacking in this Society. Residents at the motherhouse include apprentices, secondary school students, lay religious, clerics, and priests. What can a congregation achieve if it is made up of such disparate elements?

These observations were mailed to Rome without Don Bosco's knowledge. Basically, they stemmed from ignorance of the true state of affairs, from suspicions about Don Bosco's intentions, from prejudices, from fears of imaginary dangers, from misinterpretation of articles, from demands that could not then and there be satisfied, and from erroneous conclusions. 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 antiquated.

True, the Salesian Society was not yet fully formed and some articles of its constitutions needed revision. Yet the vast good that it had already done was evident proof—if one cared to see it—that it was inspired by God.

As was his steady rule, Don Bosco again showed in those very days the reverence which was due to his ecclesiastic superior, as we see from the following letter:

Turin, March 16, 1868

Dear Reverend Don Bosco:

Sister Clarac[4] of the Sisters of Charity informs me that you wished to

[4] Sister Louise Clarac was the founder of St. Mary's Institute in Turin. [Editor]

have my consent before sending one of your priests to the chapel of the aforesaid congregation for Mass and catechetical instruction. Since I have no reason to object, I fully grant the request. May the Lord grant you all his blessings.

Your devoted servant,
✠ Alexander, *Archbishop*

Fulfillment of Predictions (Continued)

THE March, April, and May issues of *Letture Cattoliche* were entitled respectively *Angel's Flight, Reflections and Maxims on Current Events,* and *The Miracles of the Mother of God under the Title of Mary, Help of Christians.* The first dealt with the power of prayer, the second with the corruption of common sense through ignorance and irreligious publications, and the third with the power and goodness of Mary, proven by Her beneficial intervention in favor of Her devotees. Don Bosco himself had written this last issue to prepare the faithful for the forthcoming dedication of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, whose construction went steadily forward.[1]

Meanwhile, Father Francesia, writing early in March to Chevalier Oreglia, informed him that his prolonged absence was unavoidably lending credence to rumors about his intentions:

Turin, March 5, 1868

My dear Chevalier:

You were not far from wrong when you remarked that it is feared you have deserted us. Truthfully, I have never thought so, but what can you expect? You too are partly responsible for these strange rumors. When your friends from town come to see us, they immediately ask about you, and on hearing again and again that you are still in Rome, they begin to wonder and to draw their own conclusions, as you well know and lament....

Work on the church has made great progress. It now seems almost certain that by May it will be open for worship. We were surprised to

[1]This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

hear that you have already ordered thirty thousand medals. What a downpour it will be! I have received very many reports of cures obtained through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians. I think that your presence here will be not only useful but necessary in order to get things ready for that solemn occasion. You know how good we are at organizing. Much has to be done on publicity. Don Bosco is preparing a brochure, but someone has to see to its printing. It must be a neat job in both a popular and a deluxe edition, with no penny-pinching. Then, there are the Italian and Latin inscriptions and a thousand other details that call for your eagle eye. We know you are using your time well to the Oratory's great advantage and thank you for it, but we eagerly await your return....

The boys are well. Except for some slight seasonal ailments, the general heath is good. The political situation too is good. Don Bosco so far did not tell me a thing about you and your brother's wish. Perhaps he himself will write.

You know of Don Bosco's visit to Mornese and of the reception they gave him. However, the court inquiry is still going on.[2] The whole village is up in arms. The mayor and his councillors were very helpful with their report to the prefect of the province. Perhaps the whole thing will be thrown out of court....

May God bless you and bless you and bless you, dear Chevalier. Father Rua and Father Savio and the whole house wish to be remembered to you.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
Father Francesia

At just about this time Pius IX announced the elevation to the cardinalate of the following prelates: Hannibal Capalti, Edward Borromeo, Lucien Bonaparte, Innocent Ferrieri, Raphael Monaco La Valletta, Lawrence Barili, Joseph Berardi, and Eustace Gonella.[3] Their names were to be announced in the secret consistory of March 13, and the cardinal's hat was to be bestowed in the public consistory of March 16. On learning of this news, Don

[2] In December 1867 Don Bosco had gone to Mornese to accept the villagers' gratitude to Mary, Help of Christians for having saved their crops. Rumors that Don Bosco was taking advantage of the people's gullibility in order to raise funds for his new church reached the civil authorities who in turn made an investigation. *See* Vol. VIII, p. 429 [Editor]

[3] This sentence is a condensation. The Gonella family had always been very friendly to Don Bosco and to the Oratory. *See* Vol. II, p. 202; Vol. III, p. 22; Vol. IV, p. 320; Vol. V, pp. 133, 171; Vol VI, pp. 27f, 153, 436, 608f; Vol. VII, pp. 162f, 322f. [Editor]

Bosco wrote to Chevalier Oreglia, instructing him, among other things, to offer his congratulations to the new cardinals, while on March 26 he personally sent his congratulations to Monsignor [Francis] Ricci,[4] the newly appointed secret chamberlain to Pius IX.

Meanwhile, a most astonishing thing had taken place at the Oratory. At Pettiva's death[5] Don Bosco had declared that the young cleric was not the second youth he had seen in his dream,[6] but that another would die before the next Exercise for a Happy Death. The statement had been made at the end of February. Customarily, the next Exercise for a Happy Death would routinely have been held a month later. Instead, to everybody's surprise—as Archbishop Pasquale Morganti of Ravenna, then an Oratory pupil, told us—Don Bosco publicly announced at the beginning of March that the next Exercise for a Happy Death would be held two weeks in advance, on March 19, the feast of St. Joseph. He explained that this change was being made because an Oratory boy was to die before that day but would receive Holy Communion on the morning of his death. He urged everyone to prepare by a good confession.

March 18 arrived. As the day wore on talk was rife, especially among the pupils, since nobody in the house was sick.

"This time Don Bosco goofed," the boys whispered. "The Exercise for a Happy Death is about to start[7] and nobody is sick. What a blunder!"

At six that evening confessors were in their appointed places, but, strangely, the boys felt little inclined to go to confession. They left the study hall or workshops ostensibly for that reason but, once outside, they roamed about. Father Francesia tried to coax them into church but detected traces of a sneer on many faces. At his urging, several boys entered the church, only to walk

[4] *See* Vol. VIII, p. 266. This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting a letter of Father Francesia to Chevalier Oreglia giving him news of the Oratory, of generous contributions toward the new church, and of people's faith in Don Bosco's charisms. [Editor]

[5] *See* p. 51. [Editor]

[6] *See* pp. 6ff. [Editor]

[7] The Exercise for a Happy Death always began in the early evening with confession and ended the following morning with Mass, Communion, and prayers for a happy death. [Editor]

out by another door. Some of them, called out of one playground, drifted into another. Never had they been so restless!

When Father Francesia found out why, he sought to reason with them, but he too was at a loss because there were no indications whatever that Don Bosco's prediction was about to be fulfilled. Furthermore, a few newcomers seized on this apparent failure to ridicule all the amazing things they had heard about Don Bosco. Very great harm was being done, especially among the artisans.

At supper time,[8] those who were on duty as waiters went to the dining room and found that the tables were not set. Several went looking for Spirito Rossi, the man in charge of the dining room and of the wine cellar, but they could not find him anywhere. Father Rua, being informed, asked who had last seen him and was told by Cyprian Audisio that at two that afternoon he had been washing vats with Rossi in the wine cellar and had left him there.

The cellar was locked. After repeated knocking, the door was forced open. Inside, Rossi's shoes were lying on the floor. A search of the empty vats led to the discovery of his body in one of them. The fumes had killed him. His body, still warm, was immediately pulled out and brought into the open. The news spread like lightning, and all the boys flocked to view the body. The skeptics fell silent. Seized by a mysterious fear, all rushed to confession, keeping Don Bosco busy till nearly midnight. Even the most skeptical among the Oratory residents became convinced of Don Bosco's prophetic spirit. Father John Cagliero was a witness to this. Father Michael Rua made this entry in the Oratory obituary:

> March 18 [1868]. Spirito Rossi of Saliceto died today, at age twenty-six. Obedience and piety were his most outstanding characteristics. He wanted to be a priest but had to discontinue his studies because of a poor memory and limited intelligence. Upon returning to his family, he became mentally disturbed. He was lucky enough to return to the Oratory and to recover perfectly with no other treatment than blind obedience to his director. His death was sudden, but not unprovided for.

[8] Usually they had supper at 7:30 P.M. [Editor]

He received Communion this very morning and was well prepared for death.

But not even Rossi was the second youth seen in the dream. Stephen Bourlot stated in writing that, when questioned about Rossi some time after [Joseph] Mazzarello's death,[9] Don Bosco answered that the second boy would not make the Exercise for a Happy Death more than three times, his illness would last about eight or ten days, and his family would visit him, but that he (Don Bosco) would not assist him in his last moments. Rossi's death had been quite sudden. Father Francesia thus informed Chevalier Oreglia:

March 19, 1868

Dear Chevalier:

I again send you news of a funeral. Yesterday at this time, Spirito Rossi was still alive; now he is dead. He went into the wine cellar to scrub out an empty vat, but one of the staves gave in and he fell into it. The fumes gradually killed him. We found him after a three-hour search, his body still warm. Note that yesterday was the last day for the fulfillment of Don Bosco's prediction.

It came to pass with such precision that the impact was tremendous. Yesterday was the day of the Exercise for a Happy Death. [It was predicted that] one would not be able to make it, and so it happened. You know how really good Rossi was. He received Holy Communion that same morning, and thus we need not fear for his eternal salvation.

His death was a most timely warning to all. This morning saw a truly general Communion. At the very most, only one or two people failed to receive the sacraments; all the rest gave their souls a good cleanup. Don Bosco felt this tragic event very much and still looks quite grieved....

Bishop Gastaldi has promised work for our printshop.... *Vale, o dulcissime caput* [Good-bye, my dearest chief].

Fr. Francesia

As soon as the marchioness of Villa Rios heard about this death [from Chevalier Oreglia], she commented as follows in a letter to Father Francesia:

[9]*See* p. 32. [Editor]

Rome, March 23, 1868

Dear Reverend Father Francesia:

Chevalier Oreglia has informed me of the recent extraordinary happening—the prediction of the death of that unfortunate youth and the unusual manner of its fulfillment. You truly do live in the midst of wonders. The steady favors granted by Mary, Help of Christians and the exceptionally large donations you receive are indeed astounding! How fortunate you are! How happy I would be if in the lovely month of May I could be privileged to make a trip to Turin to participate in the dedication of the new church! But I see that it is utterly impossible....

Our good chevalier seems to be really in earnest about leaving Rome after Easter, unless further obstacles prevent him.... It is really incredible how much he does and how much he achieves.

[Marchioness] Villa Rios

Other letters from Rome brought news of Vigna Pia.[10] Writing to Father Francesia on March 18 about this institution, Father Joseph Oreglia made it very clear that there was absolutely no danger of arousing envy in accepting it. This type of school, its remoteness from town, and the unhealthy climate of the area were such as to discourage would-be contenders.[11]

[10] *See* Vol. VIII, p. 266. *See also* pp. 30f. [Editor]

[11] This paragraph is a condensation. We are also omitting another short business letter from Father Oreglia. [Editor]

CHAPTER 11

Gleanings from Oratory Life

AWARE of the opposition of several bishops to the Salesian Society, Father [Joseph] Oreglia [S.J.] thus wrote to Father Francesia on April 2 [1868]: "We must be patient with our opponents! No doubt they are convinced they are doing the right thing—*putantes obsequium se praestare Deo.* These oppositions, inspired or at least permitted from on high (as they always are), will always do us good in the end. Be of good cheer, therefore, and take heart. Above all, let us pray for each other."

This was Don Bosco's norm in times of adversity, the source of his constant serenity. The God of consolation constantly and generously conforted him.

Archbishop Riccardi often agreed to perform church services at the Oratory. On Passion Sunday, March 29, he administered Confirmation in the little Church of St. Francis de Sales to the festive oratory boys who had attended the Lenten catechetical instructions. To see so many lads so well behaved delighted him. After the ceremony, Don Bosco, biretta in hand, accompanied him to the dining room for coffee and then to his coach, keeping his head bare despite the cold weather.

On March 20, Bishop [Eugene] Galletti of Alba wrote to Father Rua to recommend a devout, studious boy, Thomas Cagliano, on behalf of his poor mother, who begged that her son be kept gratuitously to finish his secondary schooling. The bishop closed by saying: "Please give my most cordial respects to the revered Don Bosco. Tell him too that I am about to come to an understanding with Bishop Gastaldi of Saluzzo about ways and means to grant a unanimous approval to your well-deserving Society."

The bishop of Casale also gave Don Bosco fresh proof of his

benevolence by granting several faculties to Don Bosco personally and to the superiors of the Mirabello junior seminary. He also allowed the [Salesian] philosophy and theology students to take courses and examinations at the junior seminary itself.[1]

Don Bosco was also thrilled by the forthcoming consecration of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. In view of this he wrote to Chevalier Oreglia as follows:

Turin, March 25, 1868

My dear Chevalier:

I received your letter of last October or December, as well as those you sent me before and after your spiritual retreat. What you told me is fine....

Try to set a date for your return. Our archbishop has already scheduled the consecration for the first half of June. The festivities are to last nine days, with one bishop preaching every day while another conducts the sacred services. Just think of all that has to be done! Therefore I really need you. If you had to, you could return to Rome after the celebrations.

Last year, Archbishop Vitelleschi gave me some hope that he might favor us with a visit on this occasion. Please ask him in our name to come and consecrate our church: if that is too burdensome, then would he at least celebrate a pontifical Mass and preach? Please beg him and invite him also on behalf of the archbishop of Turin.

Please remember that you are categorically and urgently needed. I will be glad to have you here, or at least on your way, as you wrote, by Easter.

We are all well here. Dalmazzo, Albera, Costamagna, Fagnano, and Merlone are preparing for ordination.

God bless you, your work and intentions. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Please drop by the Nicoletti Bank and ask Mr. Nicoletti, a very good friend of ours, what is the best way to ship a very fine painting that has been donated to our new church.

Father Francesia added these few lines to Don Bosco's letter:

[1] We are omitting the pertinent bishop's decree. [Editor]

Don Bosco allowed me to fill this blank page. Croci, that good, cheerful Swiss boy, died at home the other night. He fell ill in Turin, and when he recovered his father forcibly took him home. It may have been the journey, or perhaps God was calling him....

Fr. J. B. Francesia

Not even this death was the one predicted by Don Bosco, as he himself declared.[2]

In April 1868 an important innovation was introduced in [the three existing] Salesian schools. Until this time, pupils were allowed home some eight days during the Easter holidays and had to return to school for a month during the long summer vacation.

Having noticed that these holidays at home were not without serious drawbacks, Don Bosco decided to do away with them. Therefore, two weeks before Easter, he informed the pupils' parents that, effective immediately, Easter recess at home was permanently abolished and that consequently their sons would spend Holy Week in their respective schools. This step naturally increased his financial burdens because the boys remained in school at his expense, but he did not mind, as long as their moral well-being was at stake. The pupils themselves, though eagerly looking forward to the holidays, readily agreed, so strong was their sense of obedience. Anyway, their Easter recess at school proved very enjoyable because, with no lessening of the Holy Week services, they were given particular activities, treats at table, and an outing, brass band and all. This last item, however, was not renewed in the ensuing years.

A month after this successful experiment, Don Bosco sent a circular from each school announcing that from then on the summer vacation would extend from September 15 to October 15, as was the practice in other well-known boarding schools.[3] Father Francesia, informing Chevalier Oreglia of this new policy in a letter dated April 8, also told him of the exceptional force of a

[2] We are omitting at this point a letter of Don Bosco to Chevalier Oreglia, dated April 3, acknowledging the latter's communication that he would be in Turin by May 1. We are also omitting a thank-you note to a benefactress for donations collected for the new church. [Editor]

[3] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

triduum that Don Bosco had preached to the boys to prepare them for their Easter duty:

Yesterday [Tuesday], April 7—he wrote— the artisans made their Easter duty quite fruitfully. The credit, however, after God, is due to Don Bosco's heartfelt, most moving sermons. On Monday night he spoke about the particular judgment. After deeply shaking everybody with a most vivid description of that fateful moment, he himself felt so moved that he could not go on. It was most soul-stirring. He was weeping and so were all the boys! That night, the eve of their Easter duty, was a "bath-night." The older artisans chose to go to confession to him and kept him busy till eleven, and again, the next morning, from six to nine. Would that this fervor could last....

Meanwhile, Don Bosco, too, was keeping up his correspondence with Rome. He had to hurry final preparations for the consecration of the church, and Chevalier Oreglia was the man for that. While asking him to see to a few more errands in Rome and Florence, Don Bosco tactfully reminded him that he was urgently needed at the Oratory. "There are many things that require your presence," he wrote. "I hope that God will send you back in good health so that together we can take care of them. The rising cost of bread puts us in severe straits. The monthly bill for the Oratory, Lanzo and Mirabello has risen to 12,000 lire. We also have enormous expenses for the church, but Our Lady keeps granting favors most generously to our contributors, and so we can go on.... Pray for me."[4]

[4]We are omitting some brief entries from Father Rua's chronicle about contributions made for favors received from Our Lady. [Editor]

CHAPTER 12

A Dream: A Raging Torrent and Wild Beasts

ON January 10 [1868] Don Bosco had written to Countess Callori: "This year at least we shall have to forget about a lyceum, badly needed though it is." Nevertheless, he kept searching for ways and means to carry out this long-desired project of his. [Fortunately] two distinguished benefactresses—Countess Callori and Mrs. Angela Chirio—came to his aid with offers of financial assistance and of a building, respectively. Don Bosco therefore drafted a tentative contract,[1] but unexpected difficulties which threatened long, harmful delays nullified his efforts.

In view of this setback, he submitted a new plan to Countess Callori on April 12 with Mrs. Chirio's approval. "For this purpose," he wrote, "I would set aside part of a building adjacent to the Oratory. Several advantages would result, such as less expense, easier movement of personnel, and full control on my part. I have already tried it out this year with twenty-five philosophy students and am very satisfied with their intellectual and moral progress. Would this plan affect your offer of financial support?"[2]

The following day, Easter Monday, April 13, Don Bosco went to Lanzo for a rest. While there he received an appreciated thank-you note[3] from Eustace Cardinal Gonella. Not feeling well, Don Bosco was unable to spend much time with the boys. At night he could not rest because of series of dreams that kept disturbing him for about ten days. He purposely delayed going to bed until eleven, hoping to sleep more soundly, but this precaution availed

[1] Omitted in this edidtion. [Editor]
[2] This paragraph is a condensation. The plan eventually fell through. [Editor]
[3] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

nothing. One of the dreams concerned the Lanzo boys, and Don Bosco told it to their director [Father John Baptist Lemoyne] on April 17, the morning of his departure, asking him to narrate it to the community. Father Lemoyne accompanied him to Turin because he had to go to Mirabello to preach the spiritual retreat, and from Turin he wrote the following letter to his boys at Lanzo to acquaint them with Don Bosco's message:

April 18, 1868

My dear sons,

My hurried departure prevented me from saying good-bye to you as I had wished, but now, while in Turin, I send you in writing what I wanted to tell you. Listen carefully because it is the Lord speaking to you through Don Bosco.

The last night of Don Bosco's stay in Lanzo was a very bad one. As you know, my room is next to his. Well, that night I was startled out of my sleep twice by what I thought were prolonged, frightening screams. I sat up in bed and listened carefully. I was sure the screams were coming from Don Bosco's room. The next morning I mulled over what I had heard and decided to mention it to Don Bosco. "It's quite true," he replied. "Last night I had dreams which truly grieved me. I seemed to be on the bank of a torrent, not too wide, but turbulent with muddy frothy waters. All the Lanzo boys were with me, trying to jump to the other side. Many took a running leap and landed safely on the opposite bank. They were good athletes. However, others did not do so well. Some barely hit the bank, fell backward, and were swept away by the current; others toppled into the middle of the torrent and vanished; still others struck rocks jutting out of the water, fracturing their skulls or suffering other injuries. This went on for a considerable time while Don Bosco fruitlessly kept shouting to them to be more careful. The torrent was now strewn with bodies which, tumbling through the rapids, were finally dashed against a boulder set in a bend of the torrent where the water was deepest, and were sucked into a whirlpool.

How many of my poor sons now listening to the reading of this letter are now in those depths and in danger of being eternally lost! But why did boys [like you]—so lively, cheerful, and nimble—fail to land safely on the opposite bank? It was because wretched companions tripped them or held them back by their coats or shoved them as they jumped. These unhappy scoundrels (a few, mind you), who are in league with the devil and try to ruin their companions, are also listening to the reading of this letter. Let me ask them in Don Bosco's own words: "Why, by your evil conversation, do you want to kindle in your companions' hearts the

flame of passions that will consume them for all eternity? Why do you teach evil to some who may still be innocent? Why crack certain jokes and make certain deals which keep you away from the sacraments? Why won't you listen to one who can put you on the path to heaven? All you gain is God's curse."

Never forget Our Lord's frightful threats that I have so often repeated. My dear sons, listen: you are a cause of evil to others, but you are still dear sons of mine and you have a special place in my heart because you need me more than all the others do. Give up sin; save your souls. If I were to know that even one of you were to be lost, I would never have a moment's peace in my life again! Your eternal salvation is my sole thought, my sole desire, my sole worry. All I want is to make good Christians out of you and help you reach heaven. You will listen to me, won't you?

The dream needs no explanation. You already know its meaning. The bank on which Don Bosco stood is our present life. The opposite bank represents eternity, heaven. The torrent which swept the boys away is sin which drags people to hell.

Stricken in anguish by such a sight, Don Bosco tried to save you with shouted warnings. He awoke and said to himself, *Oh! How I wish I could warn the boys I recognized, but tomorrow I have to leave.*

Then he fell asleep again. He seemed to find himself in a vast meadow where you were playing and running. To his horror he also saw in your midst all kinds of wild animals—fiery-eyed lions, tigers clawing the earth, wolves crouching about you, grimacing bears squatting on their haunches and stretching out their front paws to hug you. Such a horrible company! And, worse, you were at the mercy of these ferocious animals which furiously kept lunging at you.

Some of you were lying on the ground, covered by beasts which tore you to pieces with their claws and fangs; others were being pursued and were fleeing in terror to Don Bosco. At this sight the wild animals retreated. There were also boys who strove to defend themselves single-handedly, but, overcome by the beasts' superior strength, they were torn to pieces. Then—you wouldn't believe it—there were youngsters who, instead of running to safety, stood there smiling at those monsters petting them, as if they enjoyed being smothered by them. Don Bosco kept running here and there, shouting and trying to summon you to him, but no matter how much he shouted, some would not listen. The meadow was now strewn with dead and wounded. Groans and whimpers strangely mingled with the snorting and roaring of wild animals and Don Bosco's cries. It was then that he awoke a second time.

This was the dream, and you know the dreams Don Bosco has! You

may imagine my heartbreak on hearing it. If, formerly, the mere thought of being momentarily away from you weighed heavily upon me, you can be certain that after hearing the dream I would have returned to you instantly had not my duty of obedience kept me where I was. I wouldn't worry so much if you weren't so dear to me.

What do these lions, tigers, and bears represent, if not the devil and his temptations? Some boys overcome them because they run to their guide for help; others fall victims because they yield to temptation; still others love sin and the devil and freely run into his clutches. My sons, will you be brave? Will you always keep in mind that you have a soul to save?

Later, Don Bosco told me, "I saw all these boys. I came to know the sly foxes among them! But I shall keep this secret to myself. As soon as I will be able to come back to Lanzo, I shall tell each one what concerns him. This time my toothache prevented me from talking to all, but in my next visit I shall warn those who need it."

So I know nothing, my dear sons, because Don Bosco told me nothing, but a day will come—Judgment Day—when I shall know everything. How sad I shall be if, after having spent my best years working hard for you, loving you with my whole heart, I should have to be separated from some of you for all eternity! If you do not begin to love God now, you will not love Him in your later years. *Adolescens iuxta viam suam, etiam cum senuerit, non recedet ab ea* [A young man according to his way, even when he is old, he will not depart from it—Prov. 22, 6].

My sons, my children, do not belittle my words, for they are the words of our beloved Don Bosco. Spend the few days of your life trying to earn paradise. Pray that my spiritual retreat may proceed well and that my sermons may bear fruit.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Father J. B. Lemoyne

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At this time, the Italian government and Turin's municipal authorities were busily engaged in preparations for the wedding of Prince Humbert, the first-born of King Victor Emmanuel II, to Princess Margaret, daughter of the late Duke of Genoa. The festivities, marked by parades, horse races, concerts, tournaments, illuminations, and fireworks, began on April 19 and lasted several days. The religious ceremonies included a three-day exposition and veneration of the Holy Shroud in the cathedral.

The Oratory boys had an opportunity to pray in front of it.[4]

News of the popular attractions caused great excitement among the Oratory boys and also afforded Don Bosco the occasion to give a further proof of his exemplary prudence. An Oratory alumnus, now a prominent clergyman, testified under oath as follows:

> At the time of the marriage of Crown Prince Humbert of Savoy in 1868, two friends and I managed to elude our superior's vigilance one night and sneaked out of the Oratory to see the illuminations in the city. One of my friends slept in a room over the sacristy of the Church of St. Francis de Sales. Squeezing through the loose grating on the window, we were able to drop down into a backyard and run off. The following Saturday I went to confession as usual and candidly told Don Bosco about my escapade in all its details. He limited himself to a good scolding, making me understand that it was a grave disobedience. "If your superiors were to know of it, they would send you home."
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> He never availed himself of the information I gave him in confession. My companion continued to sleep in the room, the grating on the window remained the same as before, and I received no further reproof. But I never did that again! The boys were so convinced of his prudence and reserve in all that concerned confession that they preferred to confess their secret failings fully to him rather than to any other priest.

During the wedding festivities, Eugenia Telles de Gama, lady-in-waiting to the queen of Portugal, called on Don Bosco. She had been anxious to meet this priest of whom she had heard so much at home. She had a long talk with him, and on her return to the royal palace she showed the queen a picture of the Madonna which Don Bosco had given her. She spoke so enthusiastically about him as of a saint that the queen, very respectfully admiring the holy picture, exclaimed "How licky you are! If I could only disregard court potocol, I too would go to Don Bosco and ask him for a picture."

Before leaving Turin, the same lady-in-waiting mailed her calling card to Don Bosco with these few lines in French: "I lack the time to write at length, but you are so good that you will forgive me if I take the liberty of asking you for a great favor. I am sure that the sick lady of whom I spoke to you would be very happy if you would also give her a holy picture with a few words

[4] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

from you just as you did for me. Her address is: Countess de Murca, Via Formosa 139, Lisbon, Portugal. If you prefer, you may address it to me here at the royal palace in Turin, but I must have it by Thursday because I believe that we shall be leaving at four-thirty in the morning on April 26. A thousand thanks for everything."

At the close of these extraordinary festivities, Don Bosco began preparing his pupils for the solemn celebrations in honor of Mary, Help of Christians.

At the "Good Night" on April 29 he spoke as follows:

Tomorrow evening we start Mary's month, during which each of you should try to tell his companions some edifying story, preferably about the Madonna, but, in any case, on a topic that may help one to virtue. If you have none to tell, ask a companion to tell you one. If he can't, ask him, "What was today's nosegay? Did you practice it?"

If possible, go to Communion frequently, or at least make a spiritual Communion. This too pleases Our Lord. I wish, though, that those who go to Communion in the morning would not behave foolishly throughout the day. As you see, I do not demand anythng difficult from you. Each is to do his best to perform his scholastic and religious duties diligently. I'd also like you to practice the nosegays which will be suggested every night.

The following day, he mailed to Countess Callori one of the first copies of his prayerbook *Il Cattolico Provveduto* [The Well-Prepared Catholic] with this note:

Turin, April 30, 1868

Dear Countess:

Here is the book. Please forgive the delay....

Courage, my lady! I will particularly remember you daily in my Masses during Mary's month. Every day four boys will receive Communion for your intentions. Let us all have much faith and hope.

May God bless you, your husband, and your whole family. Pray for me.

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

CHAPTER 13

Steps Toward Approval of the Salesian Society (Continued)

THROUGHOUT April 1868 Don Bosco kept asking bishops for letters of recommendation of the Salesian Society to hasten its approval by the Holy See. He also wrote to Bishop [Louis] Moreno of Ivrea to assure him of his respect, hoping to reconcile him with the Oratory:[1]

Turin, April 15, 1868

Your Excellency:

I beg you to forget for a moment unpleasant memories caused by financial disagreements and see if you can grant me a request. The matter at hand is the same one I discussed with Your Excellency some time ago. As a reminder, I am enclosing copies of pertinent documents. The Salesian Society has already received the Holy See's decree of praise, but to obtain its definitive approval it would need letters of recommendation from the bishops of our ecclesiastical province, each of them pointing out what he considers worthy of distinction. I therefore respectfully but warmly beseech you to do me the great favor of a commendation which I shall forward to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

If you should decide to refuse my request for good reasons of your own which I shall always respect, I would appreciate it if you would kindly let me know.

As in the past, I will continue to pray that God may grant you health and happiness for many more years.

Very gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

After receiving no reply for more than a month, Don Bosco re-

[1] A long-drawn-out dispute about *Letture Cattoliche's* ownership had ended the bishop's friendship with Don Bosco. *See* Vol. VII, pp. 95ff. [Editor]

newed his request on May 28.[2] It fared no better. Such silence must have caused him pain, but he drew comfort from the enthusiastic commendations of the bishops of Parma, Novara, Reggio, Mondovì, Alessandria, Lucca, Fermo, Susa, Guastalla, and Albenga.[3]

Don Bosco forwarded these commendations to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars along with an authenticated copy of Archbishop Fransoni's decree—dated March 31, 1852 and signed by Canon Philip Ravina, vicar general, and Father Balladore, secretary—naming him spiritual director of the festive oratories of St. Francis de Sales, the Guardian Angel, and St. Aloysius in Turin.[4] The authenticated copy, duly notarized by Father Gaude, acting chancellor, was issued by the Turin chancery on May 12, 1868.

[2] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[3] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[4] *See* Vol. IV, p. 527. [Editor]

CHAPTER 14

A Dream: A Mysterious Vine

ON [Wednesday] April 29 [1868], Don Bosco made this announcement to the Oratory students: "Tomorrow night, Friday night, and Sunday night I'll have something special to tell you. If I were to neglect this, I believe that I would have to die before my time. What I must say is far from pleasant. I wish the artisans to be present too."

Accordingly, on the following night the artisans came from their portico, where Father Rua or Father Francesia usually addressed them after night prayers, and joined the students. Don Bosco addressed the assemblage:

My dear boys, last night I said that I had something unpleasant to tell you. It's a dream I had. I wasn't going to talk about it because I thought it was nothing but a dream and because, whenever I have narrated my dreams, remarks and objections have been made. Now, however, a second dream forces me to reveal the first, and all the more so considering that for the past few nights—particularly the last three nights—I have been repeatedly troubled by nightmares. You know that I went to Lanzo for a little rest. Well, on my last night there, no sooner had I fallen asleep than I dreamed that I saw a most loathsome toad, huge as an ox, enter my room and squat at the foot of my bed. I stared breathlessly as its legs, body, and head swelled and grew more and more repugnant, its green body, fiery eyes, red-lined mouth and throat, and small bony ears presenting a terrifying sight. Staring wildly, I kept muttering to myself: *But a toad has no ears.* I also noticed two horns jutting from its snout and two greenish wings sprouting from its sides. Its legs looked like those of a lion, and its long tail ended in a forked tip.

At the moment I seemed not a bit afraid, but when that monster began edging closer to me, opening its huge, tooth-studded jaws, I really became terribly frightened. I thought it was a demon from hell because

it looked like one. I made the Sign of the Cross, but nothing happened. I rang the bell, but no one responded. I shouted, but in vain. The monster would not retreat. "What do you want of me, you ugly devil?" I asked. As if in answer, it just crept forward, ears fully stretched out and pointing upward. Then, resting its front paws on the top of the bedstead and raising itself on its hind legs, it paused momentarily, looked at me, and crawled forward on my bed until its snout was close to my face. I felt such revulsion that I tried to jump out of bed, but just then the monster opened its jaws wide. I wanted to defend myself and shove the monster back, but it was so hideous that even in my predicament I did not dare to touch it. I screamed and frenziedly reached behind me for the small holy water stoup, but I only hit the wall. Meanwhile the monstrous toad had managed to mouth my head so that half of my body was inside its foul jaws. "In the name of God," I shouted, "why are you doing this to me?" At these words, the toad drew back and let my head free. Again I made the Sign of the Cross, and since I had now dipped my hand in the holy water stoup, I flung a few drops of water at the monster. With a frightening shriek it fell backward and vanished, while a mysterious voice from on high clearly said: "Why don't you tell them?"

The director of Lanzo, Father Lemoyne, awakened by my prolonged screams, heard me pounding on the wall. "Don Bosco," he asked me in the morning, "were you having nightmares last night?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I heard your screams."

I realized that God willed I should reveal what I had seen. For this reason, and to rid myself of these nightmares, I have decided to tell you everything. Let us thank the Lord for His mercy. Meanwhile, let us strive to carry out His admonitions, no matter what way He may choose to make them known to us, and let us use the means He sends to enable us to save our souls. Through these dreams I have come to know the state of conscience of each of you.

I wish, though, that you keep within these walls what I am going to disclose to you. I beg you not to write about it or talk about it outside the house because such things are not to be ridiculed, as some people might do, and also because I want to avoid possible unpleasant complications. I tell you these things confidentially as a father to his beloved sons, and you should listen as though it were your own father telling them to you. Well then, here are the dreams which I would rather forget but must reveal.

I began to have these dreams on [Sunday] April 5, at the very beginning of Holy Week, and this went on for several miserable nights. These dreams so exhausted me that in the morning I felt more done in than if I had been working all night. They also alarmed and upset me very much. The first night I dreamed that I was dead: the second, that I was standing at God's judgment seat to settle my accounts. Each time I awoke to realize that I was alive and had time to prepare better for a holy death. The third night I dreamed that I was in heaven. I surely enjoyed that, but it all vanished when I woke up the next morning. I nevertheless felt determined, no matter what the cost, to gain that eternal kingdom which I had glimpsed. So far these dreams did not concern you in the least and would have meant nothing to you. When one falls asleep with something on his mind, his imagination goes to work and he dreams about it.

Anyway, I had another dream, and this is the one I must tell you. The night of Holy Thursday (April 9) I had hardly dozed off when I dreamed I was standing in these porticoes with our priests, clerics, and boys around me. Then all of you vanished, and I seemed to step into the playground with only Father Rua, Father Cagliero, Father Francesia, Father Savio, and young Preti. A little distance away stood Joseph Buzzetti and Father Stephen Rumi, a good friend of ours from the Genoa seminary. Suddenly the Oratory, as we now know it, changed its appearance and looked as it had been in its very beginning, when only those just mentioned were there. At that time our playground adjoined vast, untilled fields stretching up to the citadel meadows where our boys often strayed in their games.

We sat near the present cabinet shop under my bedroom window, where once we had a vegetable garden, and began talking about the house and the boys. Suddenly a gorgeous vine—the very one that used to be there—sprouted out of the ground in front of this pillar supporting the water fountain near the entrance of the old Pinardi shed.[1] (*The platform on which Don Bosco was standing was backed against this pillar.*) We were astonished at the appearance of the vine after so many years, and we wondered how it could have happened. Meanwhile, the vine kept growing to about a man's height, spreading countless shoots and tendrils into all directions until it covered the entire playground and stretched beyond it. Oddly, its shoots did not grow upward, but spread out parallel to the ground like a very vast arbor with no visible support. Its budding leaves were a deep green, and its shoots were astonishingly

[1] *See* Vol. II, pp. 330ff. [Editor]

healthy and strong. Soon handsome clusters of grapes broke out, grew in size, and took on a purplish-red color.

"How can this vine have grown so quickly?" we asked each other in amazement. "What does it all mean?"

"Let's wait and see," I replied.

I kept watching the vine most carefully, when suddenly all the grapes fell to the ground and turned into a crowd of lively, cheerful boys. In no time the whole playground and the area covered by the vine were filled with boys who were jumping about, playing, and having a grand time. It was a sight to behold. There under that unusual arbor I could see all the boys who ever have been, are, or will be at the Oratory and in other Salesian schools. Very many were unknown to me.

You know that a guide always shows up in my dreams. Well, at this point a stranger appeared at my side and stood watching the boys with me. Then a mysterious curtain abruptly appeared before us, blotting out this joyous scene.

No higher than the vine itself, this curtain in its entire width seemed to be hanging from the shoots of the vine like a stage curtain. All we could see now was the upper part of the vine stretched out like an enormous green carpet. In the meantime the boys' cheerful hubbub had quickly turned into gloomy silence.

"Look!" the guide told me, pointing to the vine.

I got closer. The lovely grape-laden vine had now nothing but leaves, bearing this inscription: *Nihil invenit in ea!* [He found nothing on it—Matt. 21, 19] Puzzled as to its significance, I asked my guide, "Who are you? What does this vine symbolize?"

In answer, he parted the curtain. Only a portion of the great many boys I had seen before were there now, most of them unknown to me.

"These boys," he explained, "have plenty of opportunities for doing good, but they do not aim at pleasing God. They make believe they are doing good to keep up appearances, painstakingly obey house rules to avoid reprimands or loss of esteem, and are respectful toward superiors, but they do not profit by their teachings, exhortations, or efforts. All these boys strive for is some prominent, money-making position in the world. With no concern to discover their vocation, they readily reject the Lord's call while they keep disguising their intentions lest they lose any advantage. In short, they are those who do things out of necessity and derive no good for eternity."

How disappointed I was to see in that group several boys whom I believed to be very good, affectionate, and sincere!

"Unfortunately this is not all," my guide continued, letting go of the curtain. "Look up there now." And he pointed to the upper part of the arbor.

Among the leaves I could see clusters of grapes that looked very tasty. Happily I got closer and noticed that the grapes were pockmarked, overripe, moldy, wormy, pecked, rotten or shriveled—a total disaster. Their stench fouled the air.

Again the stranger lifted the curtain. "Look," he said. I saw another throng of boys, but not the countless number as at the beginning of the dream. Formerly very handsome, they now appeared ugly, sullen, and covered with hideous sores, and they walked about with great melancholy as if stooped or wasted by age. No one spoke. All were past, present, and future pupils of ours. The last mentioned were the most numerous. They all looked dejected and did not dare raise their eyes.

My companions and I were dismayed and speechless. "What happened?" I finally asked my guide. "These boys, once so handsome and joyful—why are they now so ugly and melancholy?"

"Because of their sins," was the answer, and as these boys were meanwhile walking past me, he added, "Take a good look at them."

I noticed then that their foreheads and hands bore the name of each boy's sin. To my great surprise, I recognized several boys. I had always believed them to be very virtuous; now I was discovering that hideous sores were festering in their souls.

As they filed past, I could read on their foreheads: Immodesty, Scandal, Malevolence, Pride, Idleness, Gluttony, Envy, Anger, Vindictiveness, Blasphemy, Impiety, Disobedience, Sacrilege, Theft.

"Not all the boys are as you see them now." my guide remarked, "but they will be so one day if they do not change their ways. Many of these sins are not serious in themselves, but they will lead to serious falls and eternal perdition. *Qui spernit modica, paulatim decidet* [He who despises trifles will sink down little by little—Sir. 19, 1]. Gluttony breeds impurity, contempt for superiors leads to contempt for priests and the Church, and so on!

Downhearted at such a sight, I took my notebook and pencil to jot down the names of the boys I knew and their sins, or at least their predominant sin, so that I might warn and correct them. But the guide held my arm. "What are you trying to do?" he asked.

"I want to jot down what's written on their foreheads in order to warn them so that they may amend their lives."

"You may not do that."

"Why not?"

"They have all they need to go through life unscathed. They have house rules; let them observe them. They have superiors; let them obey them. They have the sacraments; let them receive them. They have Penance; let them not profane it by concealing different sins. They

have the Holy Eucharist; let them not partake of it in the state of mortal sin. Let them check their eyes, avoid bad companions, bad books, foul conversations, and so on. Keeping the house rules will save them. Let them promptly obey the bell; let them stop trying to fool their teachers so as to idle away their time. Let them willingly obey their superiors instead of looking upon them as boresome watchdogs, self-interested counselors, or even enemies. Let them not consider it a great victory when they succeed in concealing their wrongdoings and escaping punishment. Let them be reverent in church and pray willingly and devoutly without disturbing others or chattering. Let them study when it's time to study, work when it's time to work, and behave at all times. Study, work, and prayer are the things that will keep them good."

Notwithstanding his prohibition, I kept pestering my guide to let me write down the boys' names. At this, he snatched my notebook and threw it on the ground, saying, "For the last time, I say there is no need to write down their names. God's grace and the voice of conscience will tell your boys what to do and what not to do."

"Does this mean," I asked, "that I cannot tell my dear boys anything of what I have seen? Have you any suggestion for them?"

"You may tell them whatever you will remember," he replied.

He again let the curtain drop and once more we saw the vine. Its nearly leafless shoots held handsome clusters of ruddy, full-grown grapes. I went closer and found them to be as good as they looked. Their delightful sight and pleasant smell made my mouth water.

Again my guide lifted the curtain. Under that arbor I once more saw many boys—our present, past, and future pupils. They were handsome beyond compare and radiant with joy.

"These," the stranger explained, "are the boys who, thanks to your care, are yielding or will yield good fruit. They are those who practice virtue and will greatly console you."

Delighted though I was, I somehow also felt grieved that their number was not as great as I had hoped. As I stood watching them, the bell rang and the boys left. The clerics who were with me went to their tasks. I looked about me and found myself alone. The vine was gone and my guide had vanished. At this point I woke up and was able to get a little rest.

On Friday, May 1, Don Bosco continued his narrative:

As I told you last night, I awoke thinking I had heard the bell ring, but then I returned to sleep. Suddenly somebody shook me. I found myself

in my room, answering my mail. Afterward, I walked to the balcony, gazed for a moment at the majestic dome of our new church, and then went downstairs and stepped into the porticoes. At short intervals, priests and clerics came from their various assignments and crowded around me, among them Father Rua, Father Cagliero, Father Francesia, and Father Savio. As I stood chatting with them, the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, and all our present buildings abruptly disappeared, and we found ourselves in front of the old Pinardi shed. [As in the previous dream] a vine sprouted up in exactly the same place, as if from the same roots, grew to the same height, and then spread its shoots horizontally throughout a very vast area. The shoots in turn sprouted leaves; then there came clusters of grapes that ripened under my very eyes. But no boys were to be seen. The bunches of grapes were truly enormous, like those of the Promised Land. One of them would have taxed the strength of a man. The perfectly ripe, golden grapes were oblong and extraordinarily large so that a single one would have been quite a mouthful. Briefly, they looked so good as to make one's mouth water. "Eat me," they seemed to say.

Father Cagliero and the other priests marveled, while I kept exclaiming, "How gorgeous they are!"

Unceremoniously Father Cagliero plucked a few grapes and put one in his mouth. No sooner did he sink his teeth into it than he spat it out so forcefully that we thought he was vomiting. The grape had the taste of a rotten egg. "Goodness gracious!" he exclaimed after much spitting. "What stuff! It's enough to kill a man!"

We all stood speechless. At this moment, a serious-looking man came out of the sacristry of the old chapel and determinedly strode up to me.

"How can such beautiful grapes taste so rotten?" I asked him. As if in answer, he gravely fetched a bundle of sticks, picked a well-knotted one, and offered it to Father Savio, saying, "Take this and thrash these shoots!" Father Savio refused and stepped back. The man then approached Father Francesia, but he too declined. The stranger then turned to Father Cagliero and, taking him by the arm, tried to press the stick in his hand. "Take it and strike!" he said. "Thrash and knock down." So saying, he pointed to a certain spot. Startled, Father Cagliero stepped back. "Are you joking?" he exclaimed, striking his fist into his other hand. But the stranger insisted, "Take it and strike!" "Not I!" Father Cagliero shot back. Then he hid behind me in fright.

Foiled but unperturbed, the stranger turned to Father Rua who, like Father Cagliero, took refuge behind me. The man then came up to me. "Take this stick and strike those shoots," he commanded. I made a great

effort to see whether I was dreaming or awake, but it all seemed very real to me.

"Who are you?" I asked. "Why must I knock these shoots to the ground? Am I dreaming? Am I imagining things? Are you speaking to me in God's name?"

"Draw closer to the vine," he answered, "and see what's written on those leaves!" I complied and read: *Ut quid terram occupat?* [Why does it still encumber the ground?—Luke 13, 7].

"That's from the Gospel," my guide exclaimed.

"Yes," I remarked, "but remember that in the Gospel we also read that Our Lord allowed the vinedresser to dig around it and manure it, putting off its destruction until every attempt had been made to help it bear good fruit."

"All right. We will postpone the punishment. Meanwhile, take a look." So saying, he pointed to the vine. I looked but could not understand what he was driving at.

"Come here," he said, "and read what's written on the grapes."

I noticed then that they bore the name of each pupil and his predominant sin. I was aghast at what I saw. I was particularly frightened by such inscriptions: "Proud, Unfaithful to His Promises, Unchaste, Two-Faced, Neglectful of His Duties, Calumniator, Vindictive, Heartless, Sacrilegious, Contemptuous of Authority, Stumbling Block, Follower of False Doctrines. I saw the names of those *quorum deus venter est* [whose god is their belly]; of those who *scientia inflat* [are bloated by knowledge]; of those who *quaerunt quae sua sunt, non quae Jesus Christi* [seek their own interests, not Our Lord's]; of those who scheme against their superiors and the house rules. Those names indentified past, present, and future pupils of ours. The last mentioned—quite a number of them—were unknown to me.

"This is the fruit we get from this vineyard," the man said gravely—"bitter, bad, and harmful to eternal salvation."

I immediately tried to jot down some names in my notebook, but again my guide stopped me. "What are you up to?" he asked.

"Please let me take down the names of those I know so that I may warn them privately and correct them," I pleaded.

It was no use. He would not consent.

"If I tell my boys the pitiful state they are in, they will amend their lives," I insisted.

"If they do not believe the Gospel," he replied, "they won't believe you either."

I kept insisting that I wanted to take some notes for the future, but, ignoring me, he walked up to Father Rua with the bundle of sticks.

"Take one," he told him, "and strike the vine." Crossing his arms, Father Rua bowed his head and, murmuring "Patience," glanced at me. I nodded approval. Father Rua then grabbed a stick, got close to the vine, and began to beat it at the spot indicated. He had hardly dealt a blow when the guide motioned him to stop and shouted to all of us to step back.

We all withdrew a certain distance. From where we stood we could see the grapes swell up and, though retaining their golden color and oblong shape, become hideous masses resembling shell-less snails. Again the guide shouted: "Watch now: the Lord takes His vengeance!" Immediately the sky darkened and a dense fog covered the vine entirely from our sight. Through the darkness lightning flashed, thunder roared, and dreadful thunderbolts struck everywhere over the playground. The vine shoots bent under the furious wind and all the leaves were stripped away. Finally a hailstorm hit the vine. I tried to flee, but my guide held me back. "Look at the hail!" he said.

I noticed that the hailstones, big as eggs, were either black or red, each pointed at one end and flat at the other, like a mallet. Those nearest to me were black but beyond I could see the red ones.

"It's weird!" I exclaimed. "I never saw hailstones like these."

"Get closer," the stranger said, "and you will see something else."

I complied, but an awful stench made me draw back immediately. At the man's insistence, I picked one up to examine it, but, unable to stomach the smell, I dropped it instantly. "I couldn't see anything," I said.

"Try again," he replied.

Overcoming my revulsion, I took up a black hailstone and read on it: "Immodesty." Then I walked over to the red hailstones. Though ice-cold, they started fires wherever they fell. I picked one up. It still smelled very badly, but I found it easier to read on it: "Pride." Somewhat embarrassed by these findings, I asked, "Are these then the two main vices threatening this house?"

"These are the two main vices that ruin most souls not only in your house but all over the world. In due time, you will see how many will plunge into hell because of them."

"Then what must I tell my sons to make them abhor them?"

"You will soon find out," he said and moved away from me. Meanwhile hailstones kept pelting the vine furiously amid thunder and lightning. The grapes were now a mess, looking as if they had been thoroughly crushed by vintners' feet in a vat. The juice fouled the air with such a sickening stench that it was hardly possible to breathe. Each grape gave out a foul smell of its own, each more repelling than the

other, depending on the number and kind of sin. Unable to stand it, I put my handkerchief to my nose and turned to go to my room. I realized then that I was utterly alone. Father Francesia, Father Rua, Father Cagliero, and all the others had fled. In that silence and solitude I became so frightened that I broke into a run and woke up.

As you see, this was a very nasty dream, but what happened the following night was much worse. I'll tell you about it soon. What these dreams imply are at present beyond your understanding. I shall explain them in due time. It is late now, and so I'll let you go to bed.

We must bear in mind that the grave faults revealed to Don Bosco did not all refer to that specific year but to future years as well. He not only saw all his past and present Oratory pupils but countless others, unknown to him, who would attend his schools throughout the world. Similarly, the parable of the fruitless vine in the Book of Isaiah spans several centuries.

Furthermore, we should not forget for a moment what the guide said: "Not all the boys are now as you see them, but they will be so one day unless they mend their ways." The path of evil leads to the abyss.

We also wish to point out that after the appearance of the vine a stranger came upon the scene who, though not immediately recognized by Don Bosco, later acted as his guide and interpreter. In narrating these and other dreams, Don Bosco occasionally called him "a stranger" in order to play down what was most striking about his dreams and—let us say it—what too clearly indicated a supernatural intervention.

Taking advantage of the intimacy with which he honored us, we often asked him about this "stranger." Though we did not get a clear-cut answer, we became convinced through other clues that the guide was not always the same. In turn, he may have been an angel, a deceased pupil, St. Francis de Sales, St. Joseph, or some other saint. On certain occasions, as Don Bosco explicitly stated, Louis Comollo,[2] Dominic Savio,[3] and Louis Colle[4] had acted as guides. Sometimes, too, other personages appeared along with them.

[2] A fellow seminarian of Don Bosco. *See* Vol. I, pp. 249-56, 339-45. [Editor]

[3] *See* Index of Volume V. [Editor]

[4] A saintly French youth whom Don Bosco prepared for death during his visit to Toulon (France) in 1881. More will be said about him in Volumes XV through XVIII. [Editor]

CHAPTER 15

A Dream: To Hell and Back!

ON Sunday night, May 3 [1868] the feast of St. Joseph's patronage, Don Bosco resumed the narration of his dreams:

I have another dream to tell you, a sort of aftermath of those I told you last Thursday and Friday which totally exhausted me. Call them dreams or whatever you like. Anyway, as you know, on the night of April 17 a frightful toad seemed bent on devouring me. When it finally vanished, a voice said to me: "Why don't you tell them?" I turned in that direction and saw a distinguished person standing by my bed. Feeling guilty about my silence, I asked: "What should I tell my boys?"

"What you have seen and heard in your last dreams and what you have wanted to know and shall have revealed to you tomorrow night!" He then vanished.

I spent the whole next day worrying about the miserable night in store for me, and when evening came, loath to go to bed, I sat at my desk browsing through books until midnight. The mere thought of having more nightmares thoroughly scared me. However, with great effort, I finally went to bed.

Lest I should fall asleep immediately and start dreaming, I set my pillow upright against the headboard and practically sat up, but soon in my exhaustion I simply fell asleep. Immediately the same person of the night before appeared at my bedside. (*Don Bosco often called him "the man with the cap."*)

"Get up and follow me!" he said.

"For heaven's sake," I protested, "leave me alone. I am exhausted! I've been tormented by a toothache for several days now and need rest. Besides, nightmares have completely worn me out." I said this because this man's apparition always means trouble, fatigue, and terror for me.

"Get up," he repeated. "You have no time to lose."

I complied and followed him. "Where are you taking me?" I asked.

"Never mind. You'll see." He led me to a vast, boundless plain, veritably a lifeless desert, with not a soul in sight or a tree or brook. Yellowed, dried-up vegetation added to the desolation. I had no idea where I was or what was I to do. For a moment I even lost sight of my guide and feared that I was lost, utterly alone. Father Rua, Father Francesia, and the others were nowhere to be seen. When I finally saw my friend coming toward me, I sighed in relief.

"Where am I?" I asked.

"Come with me and you will find out!"

"All right. I'll go with you."

He led the way and I followed in silence, but after a long, dismal trudge, I began worrying whether I would ever be able to cross that vast expanse, what with my toothache and swollen legs. Suddenly I saw a road ahead. "Where to now?" I asked my guide.

"This way," he replied.

We took the road. It was beautiful, wide, and neatly paved. *Via peccantium complanata lapidibus, et in fine illorum inferi, et tenebrae, et poenae* [The way of sinners is smooth stones and at their end are hell and darkness and pain—Sir. 21, 11]. Both sides were lined with magnificent verdant hedges dotted with gorgeous flowers. Roses, especially, peeped everywhere through the leaves. At first glance, the road was level and comfortable, and so I ventured upon it without the least suspicion, but soon I noticed that it insensibly kept sloping downward. Though it did not look steep at all, I found myself moving so swiftly that I felt I was effortlessly gliding through the air. Really, I was gliding and hardly using my feet. Then the thought struck me that the return trip would be very long and arduous.

"How shall we get back to the Oratory? I asked worriedly.

"Do not worry," he answered. "The Almighty wants you to go. He who leads you on will also know how to lead you back."

The road kept sloping downward. As we were continuing on our way, flanked by banks of roses and other flowers, I became aware that the Oratory boys and very many others whom I did not know were following me. Somehow I found myself in their midst. As I was looking at them, I noticed now one, now another fall to the ground and instantly be dragged by an unseen force toward a frightful drop, distantly visible, which sloped into a furnace. "What makes these boys fall?" I asked my companion. *Funes extenderunt in laqueum; iuxta iter scandalum posuerunt* [They have spread cords for a net; by the wayside they have laid snares for me—Ps. 139, 6].

"Take a closer look," he replied.

I did. Traps were everywhere, some close to the ground, others at eye level, but all well concealed. Unaware of their danger, many boys got caught, and they tripped, they would sprawl to the ground, legs in the air. Then, when they managed to get back on their feet, they would run headlong down the road toward the abyss. Some got trapped by the head, others by the neck, hand, arms, legs, or sides, and were pulled down instantly. The ground traps, fine as spiders' webs and hardly visible, seemed very flimsy and harmless; yet, to my surprise, every boy they snared fell to the ground.

Noticing my astonishment, the guide remarked, "Do you know what this is?"

"Just some filmy fiber," I answered.

"A mere nothing," he said, "just plain human respect."

Seeing that many boys were being caught in those traps, I asked, "Why do so many get caught? Who pulls them down?"

"Go nearer and you will see!" he told me.

I followed his advice but saw nothing peculiar.

"Look closer," he insisted.

I picked up one of the traps and tugged. I immediately felt some resistance. I pulled harder, only to feel that, instead of drawing the thread closer, I was being pulled down myself. I did not resist and soon found myself at the mouth of a frightful cave. I halted, unwilling to venture into that deep cavern, and again started pulling the thread toward me. It gave a little, but only through great effort on my part. I kept tugging, and after a long while a huge, hideous monster emerged, clutching a rope to which all those traps were tied together. He was the one who instantly dragged down anyone who got caught in them. *It won't do to match my strength with his,* I said to myself. *I'll certainly lose. I'd better fight him with the Sign of the Cross and with short invocations.*

Then I went back to my guide. "Now you know who he is," he said to me.

"I surely do! It is the devil himself!"

Carefully examining many of the traps, I saw that each bore an inscription: Pride, Disobedience, Envy, Sixth Commandment, Theft, Gluttony, Sloth, Anger and so on. Stepping back a bit to see which ones trapped the greater number of boys, I discovered that the most dangerous were those of impurity, disobedience, and pride. In fact, these three were linked together. Many other traps also did great harm, but not as much as the first two. Still watching, I noticed many boys running faster than others. "Why such haste?" I asked.

"Because they are dragged by the snare of human respect."

Looking even more closely, I spotted knives among the traps. A providential hand had put them there for cutting oneself free. The bigger ones, symbolizing meditation, were for use against the trap of pride; others, not quite as big, symbolized spiritual reading well made. There were also two swords representing devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, especially through frequent Holy Communion, and to the Blessed Virgin. There was also a hammer symbolizing confession, and other knives signifying devotion to St. Joseph, to St. Aloysius, and to other saints. By these means quite a few boys were able to free themselves or evade capture.

Indeed I saw some lads walking safely through all those traps, either by good timing before the trap sprung on them or by making it slip off them if they got caught.

When my guide was satisfied that I had observed everything, he made me continue along that rose-hedged road, but the farther we went the scarcer the roses became. Long thorns began to show up, and soon the roses were no more. The hedges became sun-scorched, leafless, and thorn-studded. Withered branches torn from the bushes lay criss-crossed along the roadbed, littering it with thorns and making it impassable. We had come now to a gulch whose steep sides hid what lay beyond. The road, still sloping downward, was becoming ever more horrid, rutted, guttered, and bristling with rocks and boulders. I lost track of all my boys, most of whom had left this treacherous road for other paths.

I kept going, but the further I advanced, the more arduous and steep became the descent, so that I tumbled and fell several times, lying prostrate until I could catch my breath. Now and then my guide supported me or helped me to rise. At every step my joints seemed to give way, and I thought my shinbones would snap. Panting, I said to my guide, "My good fellow, my legs won't carry me another step. I just can't go any farther."

He did not answer but continued walking. Taking heart, I followed until, seeing me soaked in perspiration and thoroughly exhausted, he led me to a little clearing alongside the road. I sat down, took a deep breath, and felt a little better. From my resting place, the road I had already traveled looked very steep, jagged, and strewn with loose stones, but what lay ahead seemed so much worse that I closed my eyes in horror.

"Let's go back," I pleaded. "If we go any farther, how shall we ever get back to the Oratory? I will never make it up this slope."

"Now that we have come so far, do you want me to leave you here?" my guide sternly asked.

At this threat, I wailed, "How can I survive without your help?"

"Then follow me."

We continued our descent, the road now becoming so frightfully steep that it was almost impossible to stand erect. And then, at the bottom of this precipice, at the entrance of a dark valley, an enormous building loomed into sight, its towering portal, tightly locked, facing our road. When I finally got to the bottom, I became smothered by a suffocating heat, while a greasy, green-tinted smoke lit by flashes of scarlet flames rose from behind those enormous walls which loomed higher than mountains.

"Where are we? What is this?" I asked my guide.

"Read the inscription on that portal and you will know."

I looked up and read these words: *Ubi non est redemptio* [The place of no reprieve]. I realized that we were at the gates of hell. The guide led me all around this horrible place. At regular distances, bronze portals like the first overlooked precipitous descents; on each was an inscription, such as: *Discedite, maledicti, in ignem aeternum qui paratus est diabolo et angelis eius* [Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels—Matt. 25, 41]; *Omnis arbor quae non facit fructum bonum excidetur et in ignem mittetur* [Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire—Matt. 7, 19].

I tried to copy them into my notebook, but my guide restrained me: "There is no need. You have them all in Holy Scripture. You even have some of them inscribed in your porticoes."[1]

At such a sight I wanted to turn back and return to the Oratory. As a matter of fact, I did start back, but my guide ignored my attempt. After trudging through a steep, never-ending ravine, we again came to the foot of the precipice facing the first portal. Suddenly the guide turned to me. Upset and startled, he motioned to me to step aside. "Look!" he said.

I looked up in terror and saw in the distance someone racing down the path at an uncontrollable speed. I kept my eyes on him, trying to identify him, and as he got closer, I recognized him as one of my boys. His disheveled hair was partly standing upright on his head and partly tossed back by the wind. His arms were outstretched as though he were thrashing the water in an attempt to stay afloat. He wanted to stop, but could not. Tripping on the protruding stones, he kept falling even faster. "Let's help him, let's stop him," I shouted, holding out my hands in a vain effort to restrain him.

"Leave him alone," the guide replied.

"Why?"

[1] *See* Vol. V, pp. 357ff; Vol. VI, p. 566; Vol. VII, p. 254. [Editor]

"Don't you know how terrible God's vengeance is? Do you think you can restrain one who is fleeing from His just wrath?"

Meanwhile the youth had turned his fiery gaze backward in an attempt to see if God's wrath were still pursuing him. The next moment he fell tumbling to the bottom of the ravine and crashed against the bronze portal as though he could find no better refuge in his flight.

"Why was he looking backward in terror?" I asked.

"Because God's wrath will pierce hell's gates to reach and torment him even in the midst of fire!"

As the boy crashed into the portal, it sprang open with a roar, and instantly a thousand inner portals opened with a deafening clamor as if struck by a body that had been propelled by an invisible, most violent, irresistible gale. As these bronze doors—one behind the other, though at a considerable distance from each other—remained momentarily open, I saw far into the distance something like furnace jaws spouting fiery balls the moment the youth hurtled into it. As swiftly as they had opened, the portals then clanged shut again. For a third time I tried to jot down the name of that unfortunate lad, but the guide again restrained me. "Wait," he ordered. "Watch!"

Three other boys of ours, screaming in terror and with arms outstretched, were rolling down one behind the other like massive rocks. I recognized them as they too crashed against the portal. In that split second, it sprang open and so did the other thousand. The three lads were sucked into that endless corridor amid a long-drawn, fading, infernal echo, and then the portals clanged shut again. At intervals, many other lads came tumbling down after them. I saw one unlucky boy being pushed down the slope by an evil companion. Others fell singly or with others, arm in arm or side by side. Each of them bore the name of his sin on his forehead. I kept calling to them as they hurtled down, but they did not hear me. Again the portals would open thunderously and slam shut with a rumble. Then, dead silence!

"Bad companions, bad books, and bad habits," my guide exclaimed, "are mainly responsible for so many eternally lost."

The traps I had seen earlier were indeed dragging the boys to ruin. Seeing so many going to perdition, I cried out disconsolately, "If so many of our boys end up this way, we are working in vain. How can we prevent such tragedies?"

"This is their present state," my guide replied, "and that is where they would go if they were to die now."

"Then let me jot down their names so that I may warn them and put them back on the path to heaven."

"Do you really believe that some of them would reform if you were to warn them? Then and there your warning might impress them, but soon they will forget it, saying, 'It was just a dream,' and they will do worse than before. Others, realizing they have been unmasked, will receive the scraments, but this will be neither spontaneous nor meritorious; others will go to confession because of a momentary fear of hell but will still be attached to sin."

"Then is there no way to save these unfortunate lads? Please, tell me what I can do for them."

"They have superiors; let them obey them. They have rules; let them observe them. They have the sacraments; let them receive them."

Just then a new group of boys came hurtling down and the portals momentarily opened. "Let's go in," the guide said to me.

I pulled back in horror. I could not wait to rush back to the Oratory to warn the boys lest others might be lost as well.

"Come," my guide insisted. "You'll learn much. But first tell me: Do you wish to go alone or with me?" He asked this to make me realize that I was not brave enough and therefore needed his friendly assistance.

"Alone inside that horrible place?" I replied. "How will I ever be able to find my way out without your help?" Then a thought came to my mind and aroused my courage. *Before one is condemned to hell,* I said to myself, *he must be judged. And I haven't been judged yet!*

"Let's go," I exclaimed resolutely, We entered that narrow, horrible corridor and whizzed through it with lightning speed. Threatening inscriptions shone eerily over all the inner gateways. The last one opened into a vast, grim courtyard with a large, unbelievably forbidding entrance at the far end. Above it stood this inscription: *Ibunt impii in ignem aeternum* [And these (the wicked) shall go into everlasting fire—Matt. 25, 46]. The walls all about were similarly inscribed. I asked my guide if I could read them, and he consented. These were the inscriptions:

Dabo ignem in carnes eorum ut comburantur in sempiternum [I will give fire ... into their flesh that they may burn forever—Cf. Judith 16, 21].

Cruciabuntur die ac nocte in saecula saeculorum [They will be tormented day and night forever and ever—Apoc. 20, 10].

Hic universitas malorum per omnia saecula saeculorum [Here all kinds of torments forever and ever].

Nullus est hic ordo, sed horror sempiternus inhabitat [Here disorder and everlasting horror dwell—Job 10, 22].

Fumus tormentorum suorum in aeternum ascendit [The smoke of

their torments goes up forever and ever—Apoc. 14, 11].

Non est pax impiis [There is no peace to the wicked—Is. 48, 22].

Clamor et stridor dentium [There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth—Matt. 8, 12].

While I moved from one inscription to another, my guide, who had stood in the center of the courtyard, came up to me.

"From here on," he said, "no one may have a helpful companion, a comforting friend, a loving heart, a compassionate glance, or a benevolent word. All that is gone forever. Do you just want to see or would you rather experience these things yourself?"

"I only want to see!" I answered.

"Then come with me," my friend added, and, taking me in tow, he stepped through that gate into a corridor at whose far end stood an observation platform, closed by a huge, single crystal pane reaching from the pavement to the ceiling. As soon as I crossed its threshold, I felt an indescribable terror and dared not take another step. Ahead of me I could see something like an immense cave which gradually disappeared into recesses sunk far into the bowels of the mountains. They were all ablaze, but theirs was not an earthly fire with leaping tongues of flames. The entire cave—walls, ceiling, floor, iron, stones, wood, and coal—everything was a glowing white at temperatures of thousands of degrees. Yet the fire did not incinerate, did not consume. I simply can't find words to describe the cavern's horror. *Praeparata est enim ab heri Thopeth, a rege praeparata, profunda et dilatata. Nutrimenta eius, ignis et ligna multa; flatus Domini sicut torrens sulphuris succendens eam* [For in Topheth there has been prepared beforehand . . . a pit deep and wide with straw and wood in plenty. The breath of Yahweh, like a stream of brimstone, will set fire to it—Is. 30, 33].

I was staring in bewilderment about me when a lad dashed out of a gate. Seemingly unaware of anything else, he emitted a most shrilling scream, like one who is about to fall into a cauldron of liquid bronze, and plummeted into the center of the cave. Instantly he too became incandescent and perfectly motionless, while the echo of his dying wail lingered for an instant more.

Terribly frightened, I stared briefly at him for a while. He seemed to be one of my Oratory boys. "Isn't he so and so?" I asked my guide.

"Yes," was the answer.

"Why is he so still, so incandescent?"

"You chose to see," he replied. "Be satisfied with that. Just keep looking. Besides, *omnis enim igne salietur et omnis victima sale salietur* [Everyone shall be salted with fire; every victim shall be salted—Mark 9, 48].

As I looked again, another boy came hurtling down into the cave at breakneck speed. He too was from the Oratory. As he fell, so he remained. He too emitted one single heartrending shriek that blended with the last echo of the scream that came from the youth who had preceded him. Other boys kept hurtling in the same way in increasing numbers, all screaming the same way and then all becoming equally motionless and incandescent. I noticed that the first seemed frozen to the spot, one hand and one foot raised into the air; the second boy seemed bent almost double to the floor. Others stood or hung in various other positions, balancing themselves on one foot or hand, sitting or lying on their backs or on their sides, standing or kneeling, hands clutching their hair. Briefly, the scene resembled a large statuary group of youngsters cast into ever more painful postures. Other lads hurtled into that same furnace. Some I knew; others were strangers to me. I then recalled what is written in the Bible to the effect that as one falls into hell, so he shall forever remain. *Lignum, in quocumque loco ceciderit, ibi erit* [Where the tree falls, there it shall lie—Eccles. 11, 3].

More frightened than ever, I asked my guide, "When these boys come dashing into this cave, don't they know where they are going?"

"They surely do. They have been warned a thousand times, but they still choose to rush into the fire because they do not detest sin and are loath to forsake it. Furthemore, they despise and reject God's incessant, merciful invitations to do penance. Thus provoked, Divine Justice harries them, hounds them, and goads them on so that they cannot halt until they reach this place."

"Oh, how miserable these unfortunate boys must feel in knowing they no longer have any hope," I exclaimed.

"If you really want to know their innermost frenzy and fury, go a little closer," my guide remarked.

I took a few steps forward and saw that many of those poor wretches were savagely striking at each other like mad dogs. Others were clawing their own faces and hands, tearing their own flesh and spitefully throwing it about. Just then the entire ceiling of the cave became as transparent as crystal and revealed a patch of heaven and their radiant companions safe for all eternity.

The poor wretches, fuming and panting with envy, burned with rage because they had once ridiculed the just. *Peccator videbit et irascetur; dentibus suis fremet et tabescet* [The wicked shall see and shall be angry. He shall gnash his teeth and pine away—Ps. 111, 10].

"Why do I hear no sound?" I asked my guide.

"Go closer!" he advised.

Pressing my ear to the crystal window, I heard screams and sobs,

blasphemies and imprecations against the saints. It was a tumult of voices and cries, shrill and confused.

"When they recall the happy lot of their good companions," he replied, "they are obliged to admit: *Nos, insensati, vitam illorum aestimabamus insaniam et finem illorum sine honore. Ecce quomodo computati sunt inter filios Dei et inter sanctos sors illorum est. Ergo erravimus a via veritatis* [Fools that we were! Their lives we deemed madness and their deaths dishonored. See how they are accounted among the sons of God; their lot is with the saints. We, then, have strayed from the way of the truth—Wis. 5, 4-5].

"That is why they cry out: *Lassati sumus in via iniquitatis et perditionis. Erravimus per vias difficiles, viam autem Domini ignoravimus. Quid nobis profuit superbia?... Transierunt omnia illa tamquam umbra* [We had our fill of the ways of mischief and ruin. We journeyed through impassable deserts, but the way of the Lord we knew not. What did our pride avail us?... All those things passed like a shadow—Wis. 5, 7-9].

"Such are the mournful chants which shall echo here throughout eternity. But their shouts, their efforts and their cries are all in vain. *Omnis dolor irruet super eos!* [All evils will fall upon them—Cf. Job. 20, 22].

"Here time is no more. Here is only eternity."

While I viewed the condition of many of my boys in utter terror, a thought suddenly struck me. "How can these boys be damned?" I asked. "Last night they were still alive at the Oratory!"

"The boys you see here," he answered, "are all dead to God's grace. Were they to die now or persist in their evil ways, they would be damned. But we are wasting time. Let us go on."

He led me away and we went down through a corridor into a lower cavern, at whose entrance I read: *Vermis eorum non morietur, et ignis non extinguetur* [Their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched—Is. 66, 24]. *Dabit Dominus omnipotens ignem et vermes in carnes eorum ut urantur et sentiant usque in sempiternum* [He will give fire and worms into their flesh, that they may burn and may feel for ever—Judith 16, 21].

Here one could see how atrocious was the remorse of those who had been pupils in our schools. What a torment was theirs to remember each unforgiven sin and its just punishment, the countless, even extraordinary means they had had to mend their ways, persevere in virtue, and earn paradise, and their lack of response to the many favors promised and bestowed by the Virgin Mary. What a torture to think that they could have been saved so easily, yet now are irredeemably lost, and to

remember the many good resolutions made and never kept. Hell is indeed paved with good intentions!

In this lower cavern I again saw those Oratory boys who had fallen into the fiery furnace. Some are listening to me right now; others are former pupils or even strangers to me. I drew closer to them and noticed that they were all covered with worms and vermin which gnawed at their vitals, hearts, eyes, hands, legs, and entire bodies so ferociously as to defy description. Helpless and motionless, they were a prey to every kind of torment. Hoping I might be able to speak with them or to hear something from them, I drew even closer but no one spoke or even looked at me. I then asked my guide why, and he explained that the damned are totally deprived of freedom. Each must fully endure his own punishment, with absolutely no reprieve whatever.

"And now," he added, "you too must enter that cavern."

"Oh, no!" I objected in terror. "Before going to hell, one has to be judged. I have not been judged yet, and so I will not go to hell!"

"Listen," he said, "what would you rather do: visit hell and save your boys, or stay outside and leave them in agony?"

For a moment I was struck speechless. "Of course I love my boys and wish to save them all," I replied, "but isn't there some other way out?"

"Yes, there is a way," he went on, "provided you do all you can."

I breathed more easily and instantly said to myself, *I don't mind slaving if I can rescue these beloved sons of mine from such torments.*

"Come inside then," my friend went on, "and see how our good, almighty God lovingly provides a thousand means for guiding your boys to penance and saving them from everlasting death."

Taking my hand, he led me into the cave. As I stepped in, I found myself suddenly transported into a magnificent hall whose curtained glass doors concealed more entrances.

Above one of them I read this inscription: *The Sixth Commandment.* Pointing to it, my guide exclaimed, "Transgressions of this commandment caused the eternal ruin of many boys."

"Didn't they go to confession?"

"They did, but they either omitted or insufficiently confessed the sins against the beautiful virtue of purity, saying for instance that they had committed such sins two or three times when it was four or five. Other boys may have fallen into that sin but once in their childhood, and, through shame, never confessed it or did so insufficiently. Others were not truly sorry or sincere in their resolve to avoid it in the future. There were even some who, rather than examine their conscience, spent their time trying to figure out how best to deceive their confessor. Anyone

dying in this frame of mind chooses to be among the damned, and so he is doomed for all eternity. Only those who die truly repentant shall be eternally happy. Now do you want to see why our merciful God brought you here?" He lifted the curtain and I saw a group of Oratory boys—all known to me—who were there because of this sin. Among them were some whose conduct seems to be good.

"Now you will surely let me take down their names so that I may warn them individually," I exclaimed.

"It won't be necessary!"

"Then what do you suggest I tell them?"

"Always preach against immodesty. A generic warning will suffice. Bear in mind that even if you did admonish them individually, they would promise, but not always in earnest. For a firm resolution, one needs God's grace which will not be denied to your boys if they pray. God manifests His power especially by being merciful and forgiving. On your part, pray and make sacrifices. As for the boys, let them listen to your admonitions and consult their conscience. It will tell them what to do."

We spent the next half hour discussing the requisites of a good confession. Afterward, my guide several times exclaimed in a loud voice, *"Avertere! Avertere!"*

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Change life!"

Perplexed, I bowed my head and made as if to withdraw, but he held me back.

"You haven't seen everything yet," he explained.

He turned and lifted another curtain bearing this inscription: *Qui volunt divites fieri, incidunt in tentationem et laqueum diaboli* [Those who long to be rich fall a prey to temptation and to the snares of the devil—1 Tim. 6, 9].

"This does not apply to my boys," I countered, "because they are as poor as I am. We are not rich and do not want to be. We give it no thought."

As the curtain was lifted, however, I saw a group of boys, all known to me. They were in pain, like those I had seen before. Pointing to them, my guide remarked, As you see, the inscription does apply to your boys."

"But how?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "some boys are so attached to material possessions that their love of God is lessened. Thus they sin against charity, piety, and meekness. Even the mere desire of riches can corrupt the heart,

especially if such a desire leads to injustice. Your boys are poor, but remember that greed and idleness are bad counselors. One of your boys committed substantial thefts in his native town, and though he could make restitution, he gives it not a thought. There are others who try to break into the pantry or the prefect's or economer's office; those who rummage in their companions' trunks for food, money, or possessions; those who steal stationery and books. . . ."

After naming these boys and others as well, he continued, "Some are here for having stolen clothes, linen, blankets, and coats from the Oratory wardrobe in order to send them home to their families; others for willful, serious damage; others, yet, for not having given back what they had borrowed or for having kept sums of money they were supposed to hand over to the superior. Now that you know who these boys are," he concluded, "admonish them. Tell them to curb all vain, harmful desires, to obey God's law and to safeguard their reputation jealously lest greed lead them to greater excesses and plunge them into sorrow, death, and damnation."

I couldn't understand why such dreadful punishments should be meted out for infractions that boys thought so little of, but my guide shook me out of my thoughts by saying: "Recall what you were told when you saw those spoiled grapes on the vine." With these words he lifted another curtain which hid many of our Oratory boys, all of whom I recognized instantly. The inscription on the curtain read: *Radix omnium malorum* [The root of all evils].

"Do you know what that means?" he asked me immediately.

"What sin does that refer to?"

"Pride?"

"No!"

"And yet I have always heard that pride is the root of all evil."

"It is, generally speaking, but, specifically, do you know what led Adam and Eve to commit the first sin for which they were driven away from their earthly paradise?"

"Disobedience?"

"Exactly! Disobedience is the root of all evil."

"What shall I tell my boys about it?"

"Listen carefully: the boys you see here are those who prepare such a tragic end for themselves by being disobedient. So-and-so and so-and-so, who you think went to bed, leave the dormitory later in the night to roam about the playground, and, contrary to orders, they stray into dangerous areas and up scaffolds, endangering even their lives. Others go to church, but, ignoring recommendations, they

misbehave; instead of praying, they daydream or cause a disturbance. there are also those who make themselves comfortable so as to doze off during church services, and those who only make believe they are going to church. Woe to those who neglect prayer! He who does not pray dooms himself to perdition. Some are here because, instead of singing hymns or saying the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, they read frivolous or—worse yet—forbidden books." He then went on mentioning other serious breaches of discipline.

When he was done, I was deeply moved.

"May I mention all these things to my boys?" I asked, looking at him straight in the eye.

"Yes, you may tell them whatever you remember."

"What advice shall I give them to safeguard them from such a tragedy?

"Keep telling them that by obeying God, the Church, their parents, and their superiors, even in little things, they will be saved.

"Anything else?"

"Warn them against idleness. Because of idleness David fell into sin. Tell them to keep busy at all times, because the devil will not then have a chance to tempt them."

I bowed my head and promised. Faint with dismay, I could only mutter, "Thanks for having been so good to me. Now, please lead me out of here."

"All right, then, Come with me." Encouragingly he took my hand and held me up because I could hardly stand on my feet. Leaving that hall, in no time at all we retraced our steps through that horrible courtyard and the long corridor. But as soon as we stepped across the last bronze portal, he turned to me and said, "Now that you have seen what others suffer, you too must experience a touch of hell."

"No, no!" I cried in terror.

He insisted, but I kept refusing.

"Do not be afraid," he told me; "just try it. Touch this wall."

I could not muster enough courage and tried to get away, but he held me back. "Try it," he insisted. Gripping my arm firmly, he pulled me to the wall. "Only one touch," he commanded, "so that you may say you have both seen and touched the walls of eternal suffering and that you may understand what the last wall must be like if the first is so unendurable. Look at this wall!"

I did intently. It seemed incredibly thick. "There are a thousand walls between this and the real fire of hell," my guide continued. "A thousand walls encompass it, each a thousand measures thick and equally distant from the next one. Each measure is a thousand miles. This wall

therefore is millions and millions of miles from hell's real fire. It is just a remote rim of hell itself."

When he said this, I instinctively pulled back, but he seized my hand, forced it open, and pressed it against the first of the thousand walls. The sensation was so utterly excruciating that I leaped back with a scream and found myself sitting up in bed. My hand was stinging and I kept rubbing it to ease the pain. When I got up this morning I noticed that it was swollen. Having my hand pressed against the wall, though only in a dream, felt so real that, later, the skin of my palm peeled off.

Bear in mind that I have tried not to frighten you very much, and so I have not described these things in all their horror as I saw them and as they impressed me. We know that Our Lord always portrayed hell in symbols because, had He described it as it really is, we would not have understood Him. No mortal can comprehend these things. The Lord knows them and He reveals them to whomever He wills.

The next several nights I could not fall asleep because I was still upset by this frightful dream. What I told you is but a brief summary of very lengthy dreams. Later I shall talk to you about human respect, the Sixth and Seventh Commandments, and pride. I shall do nothing more than explain these dreams, which fully accord with Holy Scripture. In fact, they are but a commentary on the Bible's teachings on these matters. Some nights ago I told you something, but I'll tell you the rest and explain it whenever I have a chance to speak to you.

Don Bosco kept his promise. Later, he narrated this dream in a condensed form to the boys of our schools in Mirabello and Lanzo. In the retelling he introduced variations but made no substantial changes. Likewise, when he spoke of it privately to Salesian priests and clerics, with whom he enjoyed greater familiarity, he would add new particulars. Occasionally he omitted details when talking to some people, while revealing them to others. Concerning the devil's traps, while discussing bad habits, he elaborated on the devil's tactics for luring victims to hell. Of many scenes he offered no explanation. For instance, he said nothing about the majestic figures he saw in that magnificent hall, which we are inclined to call "the treasure house of God's mercy for saving boys who would otherwise perish." Were these persons perhaps the principal dispensers of countless graces?

Some variations in his narration stemmed from the multiplicity of simultaneous scenes. As they flashed back into his mind, he

would select what he considered most suited to his audience. After all, meditating on the Four Last Things was a habit with him. Such meditation kindled a most lively compassion in his heart for all sinners threatened by such a frightful eternity. This ardent charity helped him overcome any reticence as he prudently but frankly invited even very prominent people to mend their ways. It also made his words so effective as to work many conversions.

We have faithfully recorded what we ourselves heard at length from Don Bosco or what was testified to us orally or in writing by various priests after coordinating it into one single narrative. It was a difficult task because we wished to record most accurately every word, every link between scenes, and the sequence of incidents, warnings, reproaches, and whatever else he said but did not explain and was perhaps misunderstood. Did we achieve our aim? We can assure our readers that we most diligently sought one thing only: to expound as faithfully as possible Don Bosco's long talks.

CHAPTER 16

Love for the Church

WITH the close of 1867 came the ending of a very serious, three-year-old scandal in the Church. Jerome Cardinal d'Andrea [bishop of the suburban see of Sabina, near Rome], a scholarly, haughty man, had for quite some time been at odds not so much with Pius IX, whose deep mysticism he often derided, as with [James] Cardinal Antonelli, whose policies he rejected and whose post he envied. Intoxicated with flattery, he left his diocese against the Pope's orders in June 1864 and went to Naples, allegedly for health reasons. He was welcomed with great honor at the border, and the liberal newspapers spread the word that as a genuine patriot and champion of progress, he had severed all connections with Cardinal Antonelli and the Jesuits.

The cardinal defended his actions in a letter of December 28, 1864 to the editors of *Conciliatore*, which closed with the statement: "From here on I remain silent, for undeniably mind and tongue are not used honestly by everyone." Later, on February 15, 1865, he sent a Lenten pastoral letter to his diocese informing the faithful that poor health had forced him to prolong his stay in Naples. Since the cardinal was residing outside his diocese, Pius IX issued a brief that same month depriving him of his revenue. In May the cardinal countered with an open letter of protest to Mario Cardinal Mattei, dean of the Sacred College. It was given ample coverage in the press, and anticlerical papers had a field day with tongue-in-cheek comments about the cardinal and his alleged opponents. Finally, on September 10, 1865, rather than comply with the Pope's request that he return to Rome, the cardinal sent a letter to his fellow cardinals and bishops in defense of his political views concerning papal temporal power in

the face of Italy's unification. He closed his letter as follows: [1]

I shall return to Rome as soon as my health, now improving, will allow me to do so. I wish to make it clear that this should not be interpreted as an act of submission, for no one has the right to ask that of me, either fairly or canonically. I shall return of my own free will when I think I have recovered sufficiently to resume my duties. . . . I hope that someday the Holy Father will open his eyes to the intrigues hatched against me and that in fairness he will deem it necessary to put a stop to it all.

As a matter of fact, the Pope had always been indulgent with the cardinal and in 1865 had even undertaken his defense against new complaints lodged against him. "Do not believe everything that the anticlerical press writes about him," he had remarked, "but be convinced that the higher a man stands, the lower he will fall if God's grace forsakes him. Let us pray for Cardinal d'Andrea and hope for the best. Do not talk to me of him until you have consoling news." Such tidings he awaited in vain. On March 23, 1866, *Lo Stivale* of Naples published another letter of Cardinal d'Andrea to the dean of the Sacred College, lambasting Cardinal Antonelli, Cardinal Caterini, various bishops, and the Roman Curia.[2] This new outburst prompted the Holy Father to consult the Sacred College as to measures to be taken in this lamentable situation. The answer was that since he had been absent two years, the cardinal should be deprived of his diocese unless he returned there within a very short time.[3]

In a brief dated June 12, 1866, the Pope withdrew the diocese of Sabina and the abbey of Subiaco from the cardinal's jurisdiction and censored him for his activities, his stubborn disobedience, and his insults to his fellow cardinals and bishops. Lamenting the cardinal's disdain of the fatherly letters he had personally written to urge him to come to his senses and repent of the scandal given to the Church, Pius IX forbade him any exercise of his sacred ministry, either private or public, and any claim of jurisdiction over the diocese of Sabina and the abbey of Subiaco.

[1] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

[2] We are omitting the fruitless intervention of the cardinal's brother—Marquis Francis Xavier—who apologized to the Pope and to the Society of Jesus for the cardinal's irresponsible behavior. [Editor]

[3] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

In retort, the cardinal notified his diocese on June 28, 1866 that the brief was to be rejected as totally null and void to all canonical effects and purposes, and that he was appealing from "a badly misinformed to a better informed Pope." On its part, the Italian government chose not to grant the *Exequatur* to the aforesaid brief.

Cardinal d'Andrea went to greater excesses with a very lengthy appeal to the Pope dated July 6, full of self-praise and of coarse insults to the episcopate and especially to the Sacred College and to the Pope himself, while protesting respect for him.[4]

Don Bosco had heard of the cardinal's scandalous rebellion through both *Unità Cattolica* and confidential letters from Rome. Deeply grieved by the outrages committed against the kind-hearted Pius IX by one who should rather have bolstered him in the midst of so many religious and political difficulties, he looked for a way to end the scandal. However, prudence dictated that since he was quite well known, he should not personally get involved in polemics. He therefore entrusted the delicate task to Father John Bonetti who was to act on his own.

Among the latter's papers we found the rough copies of five letters—two to newspapers urging them to rally to the Pope's defense, and three to the cardinal himself. The former were addressed respectively to Monsignor Nardi, editor of *La Voce della Verità*, and, probably, to Father James Margotti, editor of *Unità Cattolica*. We are not sure of this second letter because the rough copy bears no name. We cannot conceive that Father Bonetti would presume to take it upon himself at that time to admonish a cardinal. Nor do the substance and style of the three letters addressed to the cardinal sound like his own. They reveal rather the predominant traits of the one who had inspired them—Don Bosco with his frank, conciliatory, respectful, level-headed, and warm-hearted approach. He doubtless briefed Father Bonetti thoroughly, and it seems not unlikely to us that he also edited the letters to the cardinal. We believe that Father Bonetti did little more than faithfully execute a mandate.[5] Here is his first letter to Cardinal d'Andrea:

[4] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

[5] We are omitting the letters to the two newspapers. [Editor]

Mirabello Monferrato, September 1866

Your Eminence:

Lift your eyes and heart to heaven! May the purest joys and delights of this blessed kingdom enable you to trample underfoot this world's fleeting glory.

Eminence, I love you, and for this reason I fear that you have offended God, and have as a result perhaps forfeited your place in the land of the blessed. In the stillness of the night, in the intimacy of your chambers, examine your conscience and ask your heart whether my fears are unfounded or not. Perhaps Your Eminence acted unwisely. If so, do not deceive yourself with the thought that you can atone for the evil at the end of your life. Do not forget that *mors non tardat.* Therefore, recant now, and you will be happy in your last moments.

Believe me, to recant at this time would mean greater glory even here on earth than that which you can seek from those who now pose as admirers. In these crucial times your example may prove a burst of light dispelling the blindness of so many who now flounder in error. It may powerfully jolt many unfortunate people who, either through weakness or deception, have strayed from the Catholic Church and slumber in the fatal sleep of error.[6]

Your courageous recanting can do immense spiritual good and earn you the gratitude of the Church and the admiration and applause of the faithful. Jesus Himself will generously reward you. Restore peace to your heart, console Pius IX, edify the Church, and give joy to the angels. Lastly, remember that, put this off as you may, death keeps marching on. It may already be fast approaching. I again urge you to lift your eyes and heart to heaven. Sacrifice anything at all, but do not sacrifice heaven.

Most respectfully yours,
Fr. John Bonetti

The cardinal's reply was a printed self-defense, probably his appeal to the Pope of June 28. Father Bonetti countered as follows:

September 29, 1866

Your Eminence:

I have just received your public statement. If you personally sent it to

[6] This paragraph was crossed out with a pencil in Father Bonetti's original draft. [Author's note]

me, I thank you for your trouble. I do not deserve so much consideration.

Allow me to take this opportunity to make some remarks which, I believe, are prompted by my deep love for the Holy See, Christ's Vicar, and Your Eminence. You plead that you are innocent, and you declare the Holy Father guilty. Others hold the contrary. To say the least, the matter is doubtful. You may well be innocent, I grant, but even so, why should you—through your writings—act as a son who, to rid himself of infamy, thrusts it upon his own father? If this is so, Your Eminence, what can we think of you? I think that your conduct would have been far more laudable and of much greater benefit to the Church if, like St. Francis de Sales, you had contented yourself with setting forth your good reasons with evangelical simplicity and not spread written statements far and wide. They only provided ammunition to the Church's enemies and did not in the least help you to achieve your goals. Were you trying to justify yourself to the good or to the wicked? If to the former, understand that you have failed, because in this heated question the good will always side with the Pope sooner than with any cardinal. Some of these people know too that, just as in the past even great minds have erred, so also now even those gifted with your lofty intelligence can make mistakes. This is all the more credible because of expressions in your writings which are rather disrespectful to the Holy Father. Moreover, I can hardly believe that you seek to justify yourself to the wicked. Why fear their judgments? Why care about their opinions? You might well have said of them: *Quid mihi de iis qui foris sunt?* Your approach, however, achieved no good. These people could not care less; they mock both Pope and cardinals and scornfully pay no attention to either. Your statements did not make them any better, either. On the contrary, they did much harm by helping the Church's enemies. Again and again several voices made themselves heard: "If a cardinal can take this stand against the Pope, we can too!"

I tell you sincerely, Your Eminence, that I would much prefer to suffer persecution, just or unjust, than to give an occasion for scandal to our enemies, and even more so to all priests. Unwittingly, perhaps, you have rendered singular service to the adversaries of the Church, who indeed brag and are elated over it. If my plea means anything to you, please stop spreading writings which cannot help but contribute to the ruin of souls for which Jesus not only abased Himself, but shed all His precious blood. One day Jesus will ask you whether you cooperated in the salvation of these souls. Keep in mind that a fearful judgment will await you if you have scandalized any of them. I fear for you. Set yourself heart and soul to undo at least partially the evil which is still spreading through your writings.

I recommend myself to your prayers, hoping for heavenly consolation....

Father John Bonetti

It would appear that the cardinal calmed down a bit after these letters. He stopped publishing invectives, though he stubbornly remained in Naples: Previous admonitions and censures having proved ineffective, the Pope invoked the constitution of Innocent X (*Cum iuxta* of February 19, 1646) and suspended him from all honors, insignia, and rights of cardinals, including passive and active voice in papal elections. He also peremptorily ordered him to report to Rome within three months to humbly receive the Pope's orders. Failure to appear would deprive him of rank and benefices. The apostolic letter, dated September 29, 1867 (a year after the last of Father Bonetti's letters), was delivered to the cardinal on October 12. After playing a bit for time, Cardinal d'Andrea arrived in Rome on December 16 by special train, but he was not received at the Vatican until December 26, after he had first signed a statement declaring:

1. That he asked the Holy Father's pardon for his disobedience.
2. That he regretted the scandal caused by his articles in the *Esaminatore* of Florence and deplored that paper's editorial policies.
3. That he totally concurred with the bishops' statement of 1867.
4. That he declared null and void his protests against the papal brief of June 12, 1866.
5. That he humbly apologized to the Pope, his colleagues, and those he might have offended.

Two days before the signing of this statement, Father Bonetti wrote to the cardinal as follows:

Mirabello Monferrato, December 24, 1867

Praise Be to the Infant Jesus!

Your Eminence:

Just over a year ago, grieved by a regrettable false step of yours, I wrote to you in sorrow and begged you to return to the Holy Father, to

console him, and again to set an inspiring example for all. You replied with a printed declaration which brought me to tears. Thank God, those evil days are gone and the long-desired day has dawned. I am writing to you again, but this time my heart overflows with the purest joy. I thank you for your courage in trampling human respect underfoot and submitting to our most amiable Holy Father. Now indeed are you truly lofty in my estimation. Satan cannot boast of having overcome and subjugated you. Your rising has cost him far more than he gained by your fall. So go on, Your Eminence, as bravely as you have begun. God, the Blessed Virgin, and the saints are delighted with you. Be convinced that Jesus Christ will see to it that the Catholic world will forget your lamentable fall and will remember only the shining example of your glorious repentance. Do not feel dismayed by the thorns you may find in your way. If you must experience heartaches, remind yourself that Our Lord preceded you on the road of sorrow and on the Cross.

Remembering your fault will make your suffering more bearable. May the Child Jesus and His Blessed Mother shower plentiful blessings on you. Please accept my humble regards.

Most respectfully and gratefully yours,
Father John Bonetti

In a brief of January 14, 1868 the Pope restored all dignities and appointments to the repentant cardinal except the bishopric of Sabina and the abbey of Subiaco. Then, on January 18, Cardinal d'Andrea joined his fellow cardinals in the solemn recitation of the Divine Office in St. Peter's. A few months later, as he was planning to go to the Pyrenees for thermal treatments, he suffered a stroke and died on the night of May 14, 1868 at the age of 57.

CHAPTER 17

The Church of Mary, Help of Christians

ON May 8 [1868] news of the situation in Rome reached Chevalier Frederick Oreglia at the Oratory from Count Connestabile della Staffa:

At the moment everything is very quiet. Garibaldi's troops are powerless just now, but full-scale war is possible, though we have no indication that the enemy will make the first move. It is rumored that French troops are coming to our aid, but so far we haven't seen them, although billets for five thousand have been readied. On May 5, in the Vatican gardens, the Holy Father solemnly blessed two magnificent banners embroidered by ladies in Spain and in the United States of America. After formally presenting them to the gendarmes and the Zouaves, the Pope addressed the troops. Recalling that the day honored the memory of Pius V, he reminded them that this Pope's soldiers had stunningly crushed the Moslem assault and had saved Europe from enslavement. He firmly stressed his own duty to defend the Church's rights and his reliance on the proven bravery of his own militia. Indeed, he assured them that they could justly glory in having upheld the cause of religion and justice and that God would generously reward them in the next life. Alluding to the armed conflict of the year before, he exclaimed: "The past is but a prelude, a beginning. Let us not lose heart, for the Church as always will triumph, and with her the State as well. Like Pius V, I too am a prince of peace, but a warrior as well."

Pius IX fully trusted in Mary who "terrible as an army in array" would in God's own time unfailingly come to the assistance of Christ's vicar.

Meanwhile, work on the Church of Mary, Help of Christians was coming to completion. Its fame would one day be worldwide and devotion to Mary under that title would spread everywhere,

drawing countless heavenly favors upon all nations. It was a monument being readied for a victorious day! *Inde gloria mea* read the inscription Don Bosco had seen in a memorable vision.[1] Realizing the timeliness of this undertaking, Pius IX had hastened to contribute money and spiritual favors.[2]

In our preceding volumes we described the exterior of this church;[3] we shall now say something of its interior as it looked in those days and was described by Don Bosco.

The main door, designed by architect Anthony Spezia, reflects the exquisite craftsmanship of Mr. Ottone of Turin. Just past the entrance, one sees two marble columns, their pedestals carved into holy water stoups, which support a two-level choirloft designed for three hundred singers. It is the work and gift of master carpenter Joseph Gabotti of Locarno, a resident of Turin.

The walls are whitewashed because they are still damp. Socles, dosserets, and cornices are of granite. The latter are protected by iron railings which line the base of the dome as well. The imposing walnut pulpit, designed by Anthony Spezia, rises against a massive pillar at the right side of the altar, next to the balustrade, and offers a clear view of the preacher from any part of the church. All the woodcarving—the gift of an anonymous Turinese lady—was done at the Oratory. A gilded inscription on the pulpit reads: *Tribute to Mary, Help of Christians, for a grace received.*

The entire church floor is done in Venetian style, while the floors of the side chapels resemble mosaics. The sanctuary floor is exquisite in itself, so that no carpet will be needed to add to the solemnity of certain feasts.

There are five marble altars. Four have designs and bas-reliefs by Gussone of Turin, who also made the marble balustrades. St. Ann's altar in the first side chapel at the right of the entrance is outstanding because of its precious marbles: antique green, Spanish red, Oriental alabaster, and malachite. It is the work of Louis Medici and the gift of a gentleman from Bologna.

The two transepts have two doors apiece to allow for an easier

[1] *See* Vol. III, pp. 312f. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. VII, pp. 394f. [Editor]
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 393. [Editor]

flow of crowds. Two of them—one in each side—lead into the sacristies flanking the sanctuary.

The right transept will have an altar to St. Peter, the gift of a Roman noble lady for a grace received. St. Joseph's altar in the left transept will be surmounted by a painting of the Holy Family by Thomas Lorenzone, in which St. Joseph is portrayed as standing on a cloud, with the Infant Jesus resting on his left arm. The Child holds a basket of roses which he hands one at a time to St. Joseph who then drops them upon the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, visible beneath the clouds against a background of the Superga hills. The Holy Child is indescribably graceful as he smiles with ineffable sweetness at His foster father. The holy patriarch looks estatic at that divine smile, and the heavenly joy of the Divine Infant seems to increase twofold as it shines on that beloved face. The Blessed Virgin completes the charming group. Standing beside the Child Jesus, Her hands gracefully clasped in deep devotion, She seems ecstatic with joy as She gazes on this exchange of ineffable love between Her Divine Son and Her most pure spouse. Three angels—one holding a flowering rod—hover beside the Holy Family. Above the ensemble, two other angels display a scroll with inscription: *Ite ad Joseph* [Go to Joseph]. The painting is slightly more than six by twelve feet. The angel holding the flowering rod resembles Marchioness Fassati's young daughter who had died of burns a few years previously; this was a kind gesture on Don Bosco's part that profoundly moved the marchioness. This is how Don Bosco described the painting which he himself had commissioned.

The most superb adornment of the church, however, is the altarpiece, the large painting surmounting the main altar, measuring over twelve by twenty-one feet and exquisitely encased in a magnificent gilt frame. Lorenzone had every good reason to be proud of his work.

The Virgin, bathed in light and draped in a regal mantle, stands out majestically on a throne of clouds. A halo of stars and a crown proclaim Her as Queen of heaven and earth. Her right hand holds a scepter, a symbol of Her power, as if to illustrate what She had said to Her cousin Elizabeth: "He who is mighty has done great things for Me." Her left arm supports the Holy Child who also

wears a crown. His outstretched arms offer favors and mercy to all who appeal to His august Mother. Behind and above Our Lady one catches a glimpse of heaven with choirs of beautiful little angels paying homage to their Queen.

At the top of the painting an all-seeing eye symbolizes God the Father; slightly below, a dove represents the Holy Spirit, from whom light radiates and wholly envelops the Blessed Virgin, as if to say: "Hail, Mary. . . . The power of the Most High shall overshadow You."

On a lower plane, on either side of the Blessed Virgin in a descending scale, larger than life-size apostles and evangelists gaze ecstatically upon their Queen. Saints Peter and Paul stand out among them on a lower level where, between them, one can see in the distance the Church of Mary, Help of Christians and the Oratory with part of the original neighborhood and the Superga hills. From this spot the faithful give thanks to the Holy Virgin for Her favors and implore Her to continue to be their merciful Mother in the grave dangers of their present life. A singular merit of the painting is the religious sentiments it generates in all who gaze upon it.

Remarkably—and we might say miraculously—not a single accident marred the construction of this church. The only near exception was Father Angelo Savio who, while checking the work near the top of the dome, stepped on the tip of a plank and nearly fell off the scaffold. Fortunately, as the plank gave way, he managed to hang on to an upright beam and regained his balance. This preservation from accidents should cause no surprise if we consider that every brick symbolized a favor from heaven's august Queen. One-sixth of the construction cost, some one million lire, was met by the substantial contributions of devout persons, but all the rest came from small donations gratefully contributed by people who had obtained some favor or other from Mary. We know this from written records and from Don Bosco's own affirmation.[4]

Turin marveled at this achievement, especially those who had recalled, with a tinge of irony, the Gospel words: "If one of you decides to build a tower, will he not first sit down and calculate the outlay to see if he has enough money to complete the project?

[4] We are omitting a few instances of favors received. [Editor]

He will do that for fear of laying the foundation and then not being able to complete the work; for all who saw it would jeer at him, saying: 'This man began to build what he could not finish'" [Luke 14, 28].

Don Bosco had begun not only without making an estimate but without any means at all, so it was only natural that a few people would accuse him of acting unwisely. As work was starting on the foundations, a priest had told Don Bosco that he would eat a dog if construction would ever get to the roof. He now had to call on Don Bosco to offer his contribution and smilingly ask him to excuse him from his promise. Father James Margotti [editor of *Unità Cattolica*], at the close of a dinner at the Oratory attended by several priests, stood up to offer this toast to Don Bosco: "They say that Don Bosco is learned, but I am not impressed by that. In fact, I think nothing of it. They also say that he is a saint, but I smile at that. I hear that Don Bosco performs miracles, and I don't challenge that. Yes, there is one miracle which I defy anyone to deny: this Church of Mary, Help of Christians—a million-lire church built within three years with no means!"

Indeed, this miracle, like the many others that made Don Bosco's institutions possible, and Our Lady's interventions on his behalf prove his holiness, his heroic faith, and his limitless spirit of sacrifice in obedience to God's will. Divine Providence is ever ready to assist if we do our utmost by seeking advice and help, by using our talents, and by doing our very best. Don Bosco did just that because he was convinced that heavenly aid had to be earned by self-sacrifice.[5]

As part of the celebrations, Don Bosco sent out a large mailing of a booklet entitled *Miracles of the Mother of God, Invoked under the Title of Mary, Help of Christians.* Hardly a day passed that he did not try to inspire devotion to Our Lady through letters or holy pictures.

On May 14 he offered his pupils some suggestions on how to make the novena to Mary, Help of Christians:

I have good news for you. Tomorrow we start the novena to Mary, Help of Christians. As yet we cannot make it in the new church, but we

[5] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

hope to do so very solemnly next year. During this novena we shall do nothing more than in the past, but we must do it well—for instance, by putting into practice the nosegays to be announced every evening. Each of you must perform some devotion during the day and recite three *Paters, Aves,* and *Glorias* to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and three *Salve Reginas* to Our Lady. She wants to help us. Let each of you ask of Her what you most need—perhaps strength to overcome impure temptations, to rid yourself of some fault such as anger, or to refrain from using harsh words or being lazy. I want each of you to be very diligent in your duties. In this way, our chances of obtaining what we need are ninety-nine out of a hundred. And what shall I ask for myself? I shall pray that I may be able to save all of you.

On May 21, at three in the afternoon, the five church bells were solemnly blessed in the sanctuary of the new church.[6] Each bell bore inscriptions at the top and the bottom drafted by Don Bosco. The five sets of inscriptions read respectively as follows:

I. *Uni Trinoque Domino sit sempiterna gloria, MDCCCLXVIII.*
Dirigat Dominus familiam Viancino. Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro ea.

Unending glory to the One Triune God, 1868.
May God guide the Viancino family. Mary, Help of Christians, pray for them.

II. *Deo provido benedictio et gratiarum actio, MDCCCLXVIII.*
Celebrini Cristina e suo figlio Giuseppe ad onore del Beato Odino fanno ossequio a Maria Ausiliatrice.

Benediction and thanksgiving to our provident God, 1868.
Christine Celebrini and her son Joseph pay homage to Mary, Help of Christians in honor of Blessed Odino.

III. *Qui timetis Dominum, benedicite Eum, MDCCCLXVIII.*
O Rosa Mistica, Tu nos ab hoste protege et mortis hora suscipe. Famiglia Mercurelli di Roma.

You who fear the Lord, bless the Lord. [Ps. 134, 20]
O Mystical Rose, protect us from our enemy and receive us at our death. The Mercurelli Family, Rome.

IV. *Ab omni malo libera nos, Domine, MDCCCLXVIII.*
Laudo Deum, plebem voco, defunctos ploro, festa decoro. Cambone e sua famiglia.

From all evil, deliver us, O Lord.

[6] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

I praise God, call the faithful, mourn the dead, brighten feast days. Cambone and family.

V. *Sit nomen Domini benedictum, MDCCCLXVIII.*

Quando Maria prega tutto si ottiene, nulla si nega. Totum nos Deum habere voluit per Mariam.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. [Job 1, 21]

When Mary intercedes everything is granted, nothing is denied. God wanted us to obtain everything through Mary.

One of the bells was dedicated to Pius IX, and another to Archbishop Riccardi. Both bore the profiles of the prelates. Don Bosco's own profile was also engraved on two other bells.

The church was packed with boys and guests. After blessing the bells, Bishop Balma explained their symbolism and purpose. There followed a short carillon and then the bells were hoisted into place.[7]

Don Bosco was meanwhile busily planning how he might best use the land he owned in front of the church, a strip of about 50 x 150 feet that was to be fenced in by a handsome iron railing. Via Cottolengo ran in front of it, and beyond stretched a square, still undeveloped, that reached to the present Corso Regina Margherita, which Don Bosco sometimes used to cross when going to town. One day as he stood there with Father Garino, he looked at the façade of the church with manifest pleasure and exclaimed: "I would like to build a monument right here in the middle of the square, representing Moses in the act of striking the rock, with a jet of water gushing forth and gathering into a pool."

Looking about him, he added that he also planned a large building, a sort of hostel for clergy, benefactors, and parents of pupils who would make a pilgrimage to the church. However, before he could put his plans into action, he first had to purchase several adjacent lots. This he did by June of 1868.[8]

[7] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

[8] This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting a brief from Pope Pius IX granting indulgences to pilgrims visiting the new church. [Editor]

CHAPTER 18

Fulfillment of Predictions (Continued)

As the months went by, the Oratory boys quite anxiously awaited the second death predicted in Don Bosco's dream.[1] It was calculated to occur at the latest in May, and so it did. Peter Corecchio, 16, a student, died at the Oratory on May 24 after a short illness, as recorded also in *Unità Cattolica* in its obituary column of May 26, 1868.

As the dream had pointed out, the boy's parents were able to see him, but Don Bosco could not bid him farewell because he was out of town, as we shall later narrate. Other circumstances that positively identified Corecchio as the second boy destined to die were his devout reception of the Last Sacraments, his edifying death, and his eight-day illness.

Father Michael Rua recorded this death in the Oratory obituary as follows: "May [24] 1868. Death of Peter Corecchio of San Damiano (Santhià), born November 25, 1852. His faithful attendance at church services and his intellectual qualities won for him his pastor's interest and admission to the Oratory. Level-headed and usually reserved, he was quite candid with his superiors. Very diligent and talented, he gave promise of splendid success. A violent illness, patiently endured, wrested him from the love of his parents, superiors, and schoolmates and transplanted him into paradise."

Another remarkable circumstance is that Don Bosco also saw this boy's coffin in his dream, because, of the three persons who were to die, he was the only one to die at the Oratory. The first one—the cleric Mazzarello—died at Lanzo, and the third young man, as we shall see, was to die in a hospital.

[1] *See* pp. 7, 31f. [Editor]

In those days Don Bosco was at Alba, where he was to preach on St. Philip Neri to his spiritual sons on the feast of their founder. For the occasion, he had written his sermon and gone over it painstakingly, and then he had passed it on to Father Bonetti for further editing, though it proved unnecessary. Amazingly, Don Bosco managed to keep a lucid and fertile mind even when he had hardly a moment to himself. A half-hour walk usually took him two or three hours because of people stopping him or joining him to discuss business or spiritual matters. In railroad cars or stations, he always met people who wanted to talk to him. There was not a village or town in which he did not have benefactors, friends, acquaintances, or former pupils.

"The only place where no one ever disturbs me is the pulpit," he used to say. "Preaching is a rest for me."

He had the same experience in Alba, where Bishop Eugene Galletti awaited him with the affection of a saint eager to talk to another saint. We cannot adequately tell how highly he thought of Don Bosco and how often he praised him to his seminarians, whom he visited every evening. Don Bosco had brought his sermon with him, but the incessant flow of visitors until the last minute did not allow him even to glance at it. So, standing in the pulpit, he discarded his prepared text and launched into the topic in a poetic fashion as we have already described in the second volume of these memoirs.[2]

While Don Bosco was preaching, many who knew and admired his zeal for the salvation of souls, especially those of youngsters, saw his own likeness mirrored in his words, and whenever he referred to the saintly endeavors of St. Philip Neri, they would whisper: "Don Bosco! Don Bosco!"

From Alba he went to Barolo and then back again to Turin to see to preparations for the consecration of the new church. Meanwhile, in a brief of May 25, Pope Pius IX had bestowed on the main altar of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians the singular title of a "privileged" altar for seven years.[3] At this time too, the

[2] *See* Vol. II, pp. 37f. We are omitting this sermon. For an idea of Don Bosco's style in preaching, see other sermons in Vol. VI, pp. 635-38, 641-46, 649-51. [Editor]

[3] An altar is said to be privileged when, in addition to the ordinary fruits of the Eucharistic sacrifice, a plenary indulgence is also granted whenever Mass is celebrated thereon; the indulgence must be applied to the individual soul for whom Mass is celebrated. [Editor]

Oratory bookstore had put on sale *Il Cattolico Provveduto*, a prayer and instruction manual for adults, on which Don Bosco had worked for several years with Father Bonetti's assistance.[4] Countess Callori had ardently desired such a book and had also generously financed its publication. Don Bosco had mailed her one of the first copies some time before.[5]

[4] *See* Vol. VII, pp. 473f. *See also* p. 29 [Editor]
[5] *See* p. 72. This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 19

The Church of Mary, Help of Christians (Continued)

INTERIOR work for the Church of Mary, Help of Christians was now completed, but nearly all appurtenances had yet to be provided. However, God, the master of the human heart, took care of this by inspiring people to supply whatever was needed. A handsomely wrought chalice with a silver cup and a gold-plated stem came from Rome, the gift of Dr. Tancioni, professor of medicine and surgery at the University of Rome. Incurably ill and near death, he had been encouraged by friends to make a novena to Mary, Help of Christians and to promise a gift for Her church if he recovered. Halfway during the novena he was out of danger. He kept his promise faithfully and had this inscription engraved at the base of the chalice: *Familiae Tancioni Romanae votum 1868.* With the chalice he included a pall exquisitely embroidered with Our Lord's image, the work of the Sisters of the Child Jesus at Aix-la-Chapelle.

Other Roman benefactors sent two beautifully wrought chalices and a gold-plated reliquary with an authenticated relic of the Holy Cross in thanks for favors received from Mary, Help of Christians. Indeed, it seemed as if someone were telling the recipients of heavenly favors what to offer in thanksgiving. Albs, surplices, amices, palls, corporals, altar cloths, finger towels, chasubles, copes, dalmatics, missals, ciboriums, oil lamps and oil, sacristy and altar bells, monstrances, antependiums, pictures, cruets and even bell ropes—everything was marvelously provided within a short time without duplication and without the omission of a single item. There is a story behind the gift of the sacristy bell. A Turinese who suffered from headaches seemingly traceable to a spinal cord disorder came to the new church one day to implore

Our Lady's aid. Passing by the sacristy, he overheard someone remark that a sacristy bell was needed. "If I get some relief from my pain," he broke in, "I shall provide one immediately." So saying, he entered the church, prayed, and to his great joy felt perfectly cured. Delighted, he immediately carried out his promise.

Another great need was candles. Some time previously, Don Bosco had written to a manufacturer for a donation but had received a negative reply because of a business slump and the manufacturer's straitened circumstances. Others, however, made up for him. The Holy Father himself sent an exquisitely wrought candle which had been given to him by the canons of the Lateran Basilica. This prompted Don Bosco to remark that the Salesians and their boys now had the Vicar of Christ himself holding a lighted torch before the high altar to remind them that to be fervent and fruitful their faith should always be illumined and guided by the Vicar of Christ. Other benefactors sent or promised donations.[1]

Our Lady's marvelous assistance in providing all that was necessary to divine worship was matched by Her solicitude for material needs as well. Many guests who came from a distance or were taking part in the sacred services, such as bishops and their attendants, could not leave the premises without grave inconvenience. Naturally they posed a grave problem for Don Bosco, whose poverty could not provide for so many illustrious guests. Providentially a wealthy gentleman put exquisite dinnerware, silverware and glassware at his disposal. Furthermore, generous meals had to be prepared for twelve hundred Salesian pupils and for an additional five hundred guests—visiting priests, bandsmen, and singers.

How was Don Bosco to provide for such numbers? Benefactors from everywhere—some utterly unknown—sent barrels of good table wine and cases of choice bottled wines along with meats, cheese, fruits, pastries, and other delicacies.[2] A revered prelate, noticing the variety of foods and whence they came, exclaimed emotionally: "To deny that the donors were inspired by the Holy

[1] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[2] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

Spirit would be like denying the sun's light when it shines at noon!"

While donated sacred vestments were being blessed and stored away in the sacristies, seven Latin inscriptions prepared by Professor Thomas Vallauri were being put in place inside the church.[3]

We should not think that Don Bosco was engrossed solely in material preparations. He was primarily anxious that the festivities should be marked by the greatest possible splendor of the sacred services for the edification of the crowds. For this task he called upon the many talented Salesians he had at the Oratory. Altar boys, young clerics, and priests spent many hours rehearsing, especially for the pontifical services.[4] On their part, more than four hundred singers spent a good part of the day in rehearsals. Among them were many music teachers and distinguished tenors and bassos from the city who had volunteered their services. The National Guard had also freely offered its brass band for the solemn Mass on Wednesday, June 10, and for other church services. Other preparations were also afoot: flags and festoons, illuminations, stands for the sale of religious articles, novelties, and refreshments, and so on.[5]

Don Bosco had sent invitations to Archbishop Riccardi of Turin, Bishop Ghilardi of Mondovì, Bishop Formica of Cuneo, Bishop Rota of Guastalla, Bishop Galletti of Alba, Bishop Jans of Aosta, Bishop Gastaldi of Saluzzo, Bishop Ferrè of Casale, and Bishop Balma of Ptolemais, and also to city and state leaders[6] and to benefactors and friends. He was also spreading far and wide some prints of Lorenzone's painting and medals of Mary, Help of Christians which he himself had blessed. Their marvelous efficacy prompted such a great demand for them that soon there was need for a hundred thousand a year, and, after Don Bosco's death, for one million. It is also noteworthy that, at Don Bosco's

[3] *See* Appendix 2. [Editor]

[4] We are omitting a digression about weekly classes in sacred ceremonies held at the Oratory. [Editor]

[5] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

[6] We are omitting a reply on behalf of the Duke of Aosta accepting the invitation to visit the new church during the forthcoming festivities. [Editor]

invitation, some of the foremost Turinese noblemen volunteered to collect donations at the church doors.[7]

In the midst of these festive preparations, while the whole Oratory brimmed with joy and the Blessed Virgin graciously poured heavenly favors on Her devotees, Don Bosco received a letter from Bishop Lawrence Renaldi of Pinerolo informing him that he could not give a letter of commendation of the Salesian Society. At the same time, the bishop was writing to Angelo Cardinal Quaglia, prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, as follows:

Pinerolo, June 6, 1868

Your Eminence:

Father John Bosco, the excellent rector of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin, has requested a letter of commendation from me to the Holy See with a view to obtaining approval of his Society on the basis of the constitutions he has submitted. I replied that I could not oblige and stated my reasons, which I now think I should manifest to Your Eminence.

I concur with all who praise the beneficial activity of the hard-working, indefatigable Don Bosco. His sheltering so many homeless boys, feeding them, and giving them a Christian education surpass all praise, all the more so because this genuine Christian upbringing is matched by a training in those trades and crafts which will help them earn their livelihood.... On this score, Don Bosco's work deserves every support and commendation.

Not so, however, as regards the education and formation of clerics and his intention to turn the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales into a seminary for the archdiocese of Turin and other Piedmontese dioceses. In principle, I totally oppose it. I respect the opinion of my colleagues who approve of it, but I would never do so myself.

I do not contest the merits of such an arrangement. Conceivably the clerics could be given the best priestly formation along with an adequate education. What I am concerned about is every bishop's obligation, in conformity with the wise prescriptions of the Council of Trent, to supervise the education of his own clergy either personally or through others of his choice whom he may replace when necessary. Likewise, it is the bishop's duty to gather all necessary information about his candi-

[7] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

dates so that, fully knowing the facts, he may either accept or dismiss them or defer their ordination as the sacred canons or circumstances require. Painful experience shows us constantly that priests who have not been trained by their own bishops have a divided loyalty and will seek to subtract themselves in a thousand ways from proper submission—if not openly and defiantly, at least secretly.

Other problems also arise: ecclesiastical patrimony, constant limitations set by the rules in regard to the obedience due to one's bishop, examinations, directives, and controls, of which every bishop would have to strip himself to hand over to others; in addition, there are countless other consequences unpleasant to any bishop who seeks to do his duty and exercise his authority. These consequences would result from the constitutions [of this Society], as others may already have pointed out to you.

I have limited myself to a mere mention of these problems. In conclusion, while wholeheartedly praising the charity of the zealous Don Bosco in sheltering and educating so many underprivileged boys, I cannot consent that he be also entrusted with the formation of seminarians. True, conditions are getting worse every day, but we shall make every possible effort and God will assist us. If it becomes necessary, we shall move into our seminaries and live with our seminarians, we shall even turn our episcopal residences into seminaries, but we shall never abdicate our fatherly right to educate our young clergy, for this right and duty have been wisely and repeatedly mandated to us by the decrees and canons of pontiffs and councils and have been sublimely and effectively summarized by the Council of Trent.

I am convinced of my duty to constantly resist any direct or indirect attempt to remove or restrict this highly important episcopal obligation.

Your humble servant,
✠ Lorenzo, *Bishop of Pinerolo*

Obviously the bishop of Pinerolo had misunderstood our rules. In referring to the training of seminarians, our rules stated that the purpose of the Salesian Society was not only to give an education to underprivileged boys through our festive oratories and trade schools, but also to provide priestly vocations through academic schools. Don Bosco never intended to supplant seminaries. Yet a few misinterpreted his providential efforts on behalf of priestly vocations. In those trying years, when diocesan seminaries were being closed, his zeal even prompted him to pro-

vide young clerics with philosophy and theology courses so that Piedmont's dioceses could have well-trained, exemplary priests.

Bishop Lawrence Gastaldi of Saluzzo, who was far better acquainted with Don Bosco's spirit and that of the Salesian Society, expressed quite a different opinion in the following letter to Angelo Cardinal Quaglia:

Saluzzo, May 25, 1868

Your Eminence:

I, the undersigned, declare that I am thoroughly acquainted with the institute founded and directed by the Very Reverend Father John Bosco, born in Castelnuovo, in the diocese of Turin, for I myself saw the origin and growth of this institute and its steady precious fruits of Christian doctrine and virtue.

Through its motherhouse in Turin and its dependent festive oratories, this institute offers the very same edifying spectacle of the oratories once begun in Rome by St. Philip Neri.

The astounding number of boys who attend these oratories, the attitude and disposition which they there acquire toward piety and Christian life, the persevering Christian spirit which the majority retain as they grow up, and the very singular attachment they show for Don Bosco and his co-workers, and maintain even long after ceasing to attend the oratories, furnish evident proof that God showers His blessings abundantly on this institute and that it has a special mission on behalf of youth.

God's blessing on this institute is also evident in the priestly vocations it has produced. From 1848 through 1868, when the archdiocesan seminary of Turin was closed, Don Bosco educated and trained seminarians for the diocese in his Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, which also educates some eight hundred boys. Archbishop Fransoni himself, while languishing in exile at Lyons, told the undersigned how pleased he was with Don Bosco's work for vocations.

Don Bosco could have done but a fraction of such good had he not been eventually joined by companions and had he not formed a Society of clerics and priests who would carry out their charitable work to help the aforementioned boys under his direction.

The undersigned states his personal knowledge of the origin and development of this Society, its constitutions, and its fruits. He has seen the observance of the rules matched by an unflagging spirit of obedience, submission, humility, piety, concord, peace, and charity. He

always found the members of this Society to be of one mind and heart. As if by a miracle, he saw an imposing church rise within this Society—a church which arouses the admiration of all. That it cost priests who own nothing nearly a million lire is proof that God is blessing this Society.

The undersigned cannot but hope that this Society and its rules will be approved by the Holy See and recognized as a religious order; he is confident that this would vastly benefit not only the faithful, the clergy, and the Church at large, but, above all, young people who more than ever today need the finest educators. We have a need for religious orders that will look after the young with that same spirit of charity, discretion, and patience which can be found in the Society founded and directed by the aforesaid Father John Bosco.

With the deepest respect, the undersigned humbly kisses the sacred purple and remains,

Yours most respectfully,
✠Lawrence, *Bishop of Saluzzo*

The archbishop of Pisa had also sent his commendation directly to Rome, but we were not able to find this document.

CHAPTER 20

Consecration of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians

AT about noon on June 6 [1868], the Oratory's brass band and boys gave a rousing welcome to the Salesian pupils of Lanzo who had come for the festivities. Led by the band amid joyous shouts, the new arrivals filed to the porticoes, and when Don Bosco appeared on the balcony to welcome them, they greeted him with endless rounds of cheers. After lunch, the Lanzo boys went out sightseeing.

On June 7, the feast of the Holy Trinity, the Oratory and Lanzo pupils crowded into the little Church of St. Francis de Sales at the usual hour for Mass; most went to Holy Communion. Don Bosco saw to it that at breakfast that morning and throughout the festivities they should have a special treat. At ten o'clock a general rehearsal of Father Cagliero's composition *Sancta Maria, Succurre Miseris* was held, and at 5:30 Vespers, a homily, and Benediction in the Church of St. Francis de Sales. *Unità Cattolica* carried the complete program of the festivities in its issue of June 7.[1]

On Monday, June 8, the eve of the consecration, the choirboys, aside from their customary prayers, spent the entire day rehearsing. A full two hours were needed for the magnificent Mass expressly composed by Maestro De Vecchi for this solemn event. The whole day was marked by ceaseless hustle and bustle as distinguished visitors came from far and near. The Salesian pupils of Mirabello arrived early in the morning to join the Oratory and Lanzo boys who warmly welcomed them with music, applause, and friendly delight. They too were most eager to do their share in the singing, church services, and assembly pro-

[1] *See* Appendix 3. [Editor]

grams. Bishop Peter Ferrè of Casale and his secretary came on the same train with the Mirabello boys.

At six in the evening, Archbishop Alexander Riccardi of Turin arrived with his master of ceremonies and secretary for the opening rites in the Church of St. Francis de Sales. A sudden outburst of foul weather threatened to disrupt the festivities but, fortunately, wind, thunder, lightning, and hail ended abruptly and merely cleared the skies. Throughout the storm the archbishop exhibited at the St. Aloysius' side altar the relics of Sts. Maurice and Secundus—two of Turin's principal patrons—which were to be used the following day in the consecration of the new church's altars. The exposition of the relics was followed by the chanting of the Divine Office which, as required, was continued until 5:30 the next morning when the solemn consecration of the new church was scheduled to start.

At 5:15 A.M. the archbishop arrived at the Oratory and, alighting from his coach, was greeted by 1,200 Salesian pupils lined up in two long rows. As the brass band gave him a rousing welcome, he walked between the lines to the Church of St. Francis de Sales, giving his blessing as he went on. There, numerous priests and the choirboys received him.

Shortly afterward he came out processionally with the clergy and the choir and ritually circled the new church three times. Meanwhile the bishop of Casale was celebrating the boys' Mass in the Church of St. Francis de Sales. The procession finally halted at the main entrance, which, like the two side doors, was closed. One group of choirboys stood outside the church, and another inside. With his crozier the archbishop knocked on the door three times while the choirs alternated in singing:

Attollite portas, principes, vestras, et elevamini portae aeternales, et introibit Rex gloriae [Lift up your gates, you princes; be lifted up, eternal gates, and the King of glory shall enter in—Ps. 23, 7].

Quis est iste Rex gloriae [Who is this King of glory?—Ps. 23, 8].

Dominus fortis et potens, Dominus potens in proelio. Attollite portas. . . . [The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your gates. . . .—Ps. 23, 8].

Then the door was swung wide open to let the clergy in, and closed again behind them.

An X-shaped cross of ashes stretched over the entire floor. With the tip of his crozier, the archbishop traced the Greek and Latin alphabets on the arms of the cross. He then proceeded to anoint twelve small crosses set up around the interior of the church. After each anointing a candle was lit in front of each cross. Afterward, he consecrated the altars, encasing in each the relics of martyrs which had been brought processionally from the adjacent Church of St. Francis de Sales. The ceremony ended at 10:30, at which time the doors were flung open to the public.

The archbishop celebrated the first Mass, assisted by Don Bosco who had taken part in the whole ritual with ineffable joy. Father John Baptist Francesia and Father John Baptist Lemoyne were privileged to serve his Mass.

After Mass and a long thanksgiving, Don Bosco spoke at length with a Salesian priest and his mother, remarking: "You will not be the only Salesian in your family!" It was a singular prediction, for there were five other children in the family—four boys who had no thought of religious life and a little girl. Inexplicably, fourteen years later, the girl joined the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, and in 1893—twenty-five years after Don Bosco's prediction—through unforeseeable circumstances, one of the boys became a Salesian. Talking to a fellow priest in 1886 about this future conquest, Don Bosco explicitly stated: "I want to steal him for myself!"

Leaving the sacristy, Don Bosco went to the guests' dining room, which had been set up in the library, where several bishops and important people were waiting for him. Toward the end of the meal, several speakers extolled Don Bosco's great undertakings, particularly his new, imposing church, the fruit of his extraordinary unfailing courage. Showing no complacency at so many plaudits, Don Bosco replied with his usual simplicity and humility: "I claim no credit for the great achievements you have mentioned. It is all due to the Lord and to the Blessed Virgin Mary who chose to avail themselves of a poor priest for such undertakings. I put nothing of myself into it. *Aedificavit Sibi domum Maria* [Mary built Herself this church]. Each stone, each ornament, recalls a favor of Hers." This was testified to by Joseph Reano who was present. During the meal, Reano and a few others had entertained the guests with music.

At 5:30 that evening, the archbishop presided at Vespers. As the service went on, the church became so packed that some whispering was inevitable. Nevertheless, at the first notes of the antiphon *Sancta Maria, Succurre Miseris*, every whisper ceased. The three-choir ensemble was arranged as follows: a hundred and fifty tenors and bassos, symbolizing the Church militant, stood at St. Joseph's altar; two hundred sopranos and contraltos, representing the Church triumphant, were stationed high up in the dome; and another hundred tenors and bassos, symbolizing the Church suffering—i.e., the souls in purgatory—were in the choir-loft. It was extremely difficult to synchronize choirs at three different stations, but the difficulty was overcome by rigging up a type of transmitter. A long wire attached to the poles of a battery was connected to small electric bells placed in the middle of each choir and to a specially constructed transmitter. Holding it in his left hand, the conductor gave the beat on it with his right, thus activating the three bells. Through this device the choirs were kept in unison. Commenting on the masterful rendition of this antiphon, Don Bosco wrote: "Divine Providence saw to it that the execution measured up to the expectation. Both the choirmasters who had come to hear and those who joined in the singing declared themselves fully satisfied."

The harmony of all three choirs singing in unison cast a spell over the entire congregation. As the voices blended together, the listeners felt that they had been immersed into a sea of voices which rose from all directions. A distinguished guest, moved at the magical effect, exclaimed: "It feels like being in St. Peter's!" Another, overenthused, cried: "Only in heaven can such singing be surpassed!"[2]

During the singing, Canon John Baptist Anfossi was kneeling behind the main altar with Don Bosco. As far as he could remember, he had never seen or heard Don Bosco stir or say anything while at prayer. On this occasion, however, Don Bosco looked at him with moist eyes full of joy and whispered: "Dear Anfossi, doesn't it feel like being in heaven?"

After the singing, the bishop of Casale mounted the pulpit and eloquently showed how the splendor of the liturgy fulfills the needs of the faithful. He also exhorted everyone to trust heartily in Mary's goodness and generosity and closed with unstinted

[2] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

praise of Don Bosco's charitable undertakings on behalf of youth.

The *Tantum Ergo*, another excellent composition of Father Cagliero sung by a hundred boys' voices from high up in the dome and by the two other choirs in the choirloft, moved all beyond description. The bishops of Saluzzo and Alba were kneeling beside Don Bosco behind the main altar. Bishop Gastaldi was so moved that he kept gripping and shaking his prie-dieu, while Bishop Galletti, calm and motionless, kept muttering: "Paradise, paradise!"

On leaving the church, the people were treated to a gas illumination of the dome. The starry crown about Mary's statue, its pedestal, a huge "M" on the last cornice and railing—all shone with hundreds of flickering flames. This illumination was repeated every evening through the week-long festivities.

After supper, the pupils of the three Salesian schools assembled in the playground which was illumined by thousands of glimmering candlelights. There Don Bosco addressed them, intoning, as he himself wrote in his description of these festivities, a hymn of thanksgiving to Mary: *Almae Dei genitrici Mariae, amantissimae nostrae ac potentissimae Auxiliatrici, perennes cum laudibus preces* [To Mary, Mother of God, and our most loving and powerful helper, let us offer unceasing prayers and praises].[3]

What else did Don Bosco do that day? Always at everyone's service when free from other demands, he was instantly besieged by people who wanted to speak with him. Before Vespers we saw him outside the church at the top of the steps leading to St. Peter's side altar chapel surrounded by a crowd. Ailing persons begged for a cure, some just wanted to greet him, and others merely watched this spectacle. Don Bosco gave his blessing to all. A man told him that he had come to obtain relief from a severe toothache. Don Bosco suggested that he say a Hail Mary and his pain instantly ceased. Another, whose sight had failed him for years, was also instantly cured. All experienced a deep emotion and joy at the powerful intervention of Don Bosco's Madonna.

We shall see how this religious enthusiasm constantly increased during the ensuing days.

[3] We are omitting an article in *Unità Cattolica* of June 11, 1868 describing the above-narrated consecration ceremonies. [Editor]

CHAPTER 21

Consecration Festivities

AT 6:30 on the morning of Wednesday, June 10, the Oratory boys entered the new church with a large number of the faithful to recite their usual morning prayers and rosary for all benefactors of the church and the Oratory—a practice which has continued, by Don Bosco's direction, to this very day. "I will ever be grateful to you," he wrote to donors. "As long as I live, I will ceaselessly call God's blessings upon you, your families, and your friends. I will do so particularly in my daily sacrifice of the Mass. May God shower His heavenly treasures upon you, my generous donors, and grant you a long, happy life, along with the precious gift of final perseverance so that He may receive you all one day in eternal beatitude. That our merciful Lord may second these wishes, a special church service shall be held daily for all who have contributed or will contribute in any way to the church or its adjoining Oratory. This service shall consist of prayers, rosary, sacramental or spiritual Communion, and Holy Mass for all benefactors. It shall be held every morning in the new church, attended by the Oratory boys and as many of the faithful as wish to take part." [1]

That morning—like every morning during the week-long festivities—Bishop Thomas Ghilardi of Mondovì delivered a brief, fervent talk before Mass. During Mass, altar boys filled the sanctuary while the choir, accompanied by a harmonium, sang inspiring motets of famous composers. The same procedure was followed for the rest of the festivities. So many priests came to say

[1] *Rimembranza di una solennità in onore di Maria Ausiliatrice pel Sac. Giovanni Bosco.* Torino, 1868, pp. 93f. [Author's note]

Mass that each day the side altars were continually occupied from 4 to 11 A.M.[2]

At the ten o'clock pontifical Mass offered by the bishop of Casale, the choir sang the Mass which had been composed by John De Vecchi, the Oratory's bandmaster. The orchestra ensemble accompanying the Mass had at least thirty violins. The composition and the execution were masterful.

At noon a noteworthy incident occurred. A distinguished looking gentleman arrived in a coach, made his confession, and then devoutly received Communion and spent some time in prayer. Later he walked into the sacristy and left a donation, saying: "Pray for me and publicize the wonders the Lord does through the Blessed Virgin's intercession."

"May I ask who you are and what brought you here?" Don Bosco queried.

"I came from Faenza," the man replied. "My four-year-old son, in whom I had placed all my hopes, fell critically ill. His case was hopeless and I wept disconsolately for him as for a dead child. To console me, a friend suggested that I make a novena to Mary, Help of Christians and promise a donation to this church. I did so and also promised to bring the donation personally and go to the sacraments if I obtained the grace. God heard my prayers. Midway through the novena, my son improved considerably and is now in perfect health. Forever I shall consider him Mary's son more than my own. I have traveled two days to carry out my obligation, but I am happy and shall forever bless the Mother of Mercy, Mary, Help of Christians."

At that moment a woman walked in with a girl about thirteen.

"I am here to keep my promise," she said.

"Who are you?" Don Bosco asked.

"I am Teresa Gambone, the mother of this girl, Rosa."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Loggia di Carignano."

"Why have you come and why is your daughter so joyful?"

"Don't you remember? I brought her here recently. She was nearly blind, having been that way for some four years, barely able to tell day from night. You blessed her and told her to pray to

[2] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

Our Lady from Easter to the Ascension. Well, on the feast of the Ascension she regained her sight. We have come to thank the Blessed Virgin and make a humble offering. We are only poor farmers and cannot do more, but we shall always remember this great favor."

At five o'clock the Oratory boys returned from an enjoyable walk. Don Bosco had directed that during the festivities they should go for a walk every day, so as to be out of the way and under supervision. They split into groups and went to the hills or sightseeing to the city. The older boys of the Lanzo school were also allowed to go boating on the River Po. In addition, Don Bosco had asked that between church services the pupils should have other diversions such as gymnastics, displays, and musical and dramatic performances.

At six o'clock that evening, Bishop Ghilardi officiated at Vespers, and the bishop of Casale gave a sermon on the need of religious instruction in the schools, closing with a moving prayer to the Blessed Virgin.[3]

On Thursday, June 11, the feast of Corpus Christi, a large number of pilgrims attended the early morning services at which, as usual, the bishop of Mondovì preached. During Mass more than a thousand people went to Holy Communion. Since no services were scheduled between nine in the morning and six in the evening because of the solemn Corpus Christi procession at the cathedral, Don Bosco had a greater opportunity to speak with pilgrims who had come to thank God for favors received or to implore the Holy Virgin to come to their assistance in their problems.[4]

At this time something happened that drew general attention. A young lady, twenty or so, was brought into the sacristy in the hope that she might recover from a paralysis which had stricken half of her body from the shoulders down. Carried by her brother and mother into an adjoining room, she was made to kneel down as best she could, tearfully begging Mary, Help of Christians for a cure. The bystanders joined in prayer. Don Bosco then gave her a

[3] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

[4] This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting the description of two cures attributed to Our Lady's intercession. [Editor]

blessing and more prayers were offered. At this point, the young lady began to move her hand and then her arm. "I'm cured," she suddenly exclaimed, and in a burst of emotion she fainted. On regaining consciousness, she found that she had been completely cured of a paralysis that had kept her immobilized for four years. Exclamations of wonder and thanksgiving broke out on all sides. Without further ado, the girl and her relatives entered the church to offer thanks. Later, unassisted, she joyfully stepped into a coach and left with her family, while in the sacristy people still called upon Don Bosco from every side, clamoring for his blessing or trying to tell him of favors they had received. Under these circumstances it was impossible to record any depositions.

At four in the afternoon an entertainment was presented in honor of Mary, Help of Christians, attended by many guests. It opened with a triumphant march by Maestro De Vecchi to the words of a hymn entitled *Reminiscences of the Victory of Lepanto* which was sung enthusiastically by the pupils of the Mirabello and Lanzo schools. The hymn was followed by prose and poetry compositions in honor of Mary[5] and by the solemn awarding of prizes to the best pupils. The program concluded with musical and dramatic selections composed by Father James Costamagna.

At six in the evening the bishop of Mondovì presided at pontifical Vespers, and Bishop Balma of Ptolemais gave a scholarly and moving sermon on the greatness of the Virgin Mary, pointing out that She had been foreshadowed by many women of the Old Testament and that throughout all ages She had always been venerated by Christians and had been a source of comfort to them. Bishop Ghilardi then offered Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

[5] We are omitting one such poem. [Editor]

CHAPTER 22

Consecration Festivities (Continued)

EXCITEMENT abated at the Oratory by Friday, June 12, and church services were held more punctually. The bishop of Mondovì preached and said Mass at the usual time and Bishop Balma sang the pontifical Mass. On this day, too, several noteworthy incidents took place. Let one suffice. A beggar attended Mass and received the sacraments but, grieved by his inability to contribute to the new church, he dashed from the church and went begging from door to door until he collected ten *soldi*. He then returned, prayed, and brought his offering into the sacristy.

At noon Don Bosco received a telegram from Bishop Peter Rota of Guastalla: "Gavazzi, a heretic, is in Guastalla to preach impiety. I have postponed my coming. Pray to Mary, Help of Christians that She will deliver us from this evil."

At this news public prayers were said in the new church and the Blessed Virgin heard them. After a vain attempt to address the people, Gavazzi challenged the bishop and others to debate, but once they accepted, he lost his courage and, fearing defeat, sought pretexts to call it off. Public opinion soon forced him to leave in great haste, sparing that town the grave moral harm he had caused elsewhere. This incident confirmed the Church's correctness in praising Mary: *Cunctas haereses sola interemisti in universo mundo* [Single-handedly You destroyed all heresies throughout the whole world].

During the afternoon the boys enjoyed themselves playing at the breaking of piñatas, while the upperclassmen went on a tour of the Museum of Natural History, the Egyptian Museum, and the Museum of Ancient Weapons. At six in the evening, Bishop Lawrence Gastaldi officiated at pontifical Vespers and Benediction. Between services the bishop of Mondovì preached.

The early Mass on Saturday, June 13, was again said by the

bishop of Mondovì who also gave the homily. Later that morning a delegation of forty men came from Mornese, led by the mayor and Father Dominic Pestarino, to pay homage to Mary, Help of Christians and thank Her for Her favors. They received the sacraments and devoutly participated in all the religious services on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, after which they left to return to their families. At ten o'clock Bishop Gastaldi celebrated the pontifical Mass, and in the afternoon the pupils were treated to a comedy entitled *The Pickpocket.*[1]

At six that evening, the bishop of Mondovì officiated at Vespers and Bishop Gastaldi preached. He began by expressing wonder at seeing a church honoring the Mother of God in a place that had once been barren. He then summarized the history of the festive oratories, particularly that of St. Francis de Sales, whose birth and growth he had witnessed himself. The oratories' purpose led him to speak of the need of religious vocations for youth, declaring that this could only be obtained within the Catholic Church. He then exhorted Don Bosco's co-workers to keep up their good work; in conclusion, he urged the vast congregation to support and patronize this educational institution, for it would call down God's blessings and man's gratitude upon them. Services closed with solemn Benediction imparted by the bishop of Mondovì.

A two-inch commemorative medal bore on one side the image of Mary, Help of Christians with the inscription: *Maria, Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis—Augustae Taurinorum Anno MDCCCLXVIII* [Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us—Turin 1868]; on the reverse was a fine bas-relief of the new church. Some time previously Don Bosco had told Father [Paul] Albera: "We shall strike a medal to commemorate the consecration of this shrine. I think I'll have these words engraved on it: *Totum nos Deus habere voluit per Mariam* [God willed that everything be given to us through Mary].[2]

On Sunday, June 14, no sooner had the church opened than it was filled to capacity. Bishop Ghilardi said Mass at six o'clock and delivered the homily. At 10:30 Bishop [Eugene] Galletti of Alba celebrated the pontifical Mass, after which the church seemed

[1] This paragraph and the preceding ones are condensations. [Editor]
[2] We are omitting a list of the recipients of this commemorative medal. [Editor]

more crowded than before; as a result, the bishop of Mondovì again stood in the pulpit and delivered a moving address.[3]

There were several reasons for such an unusually large attendance in a newly consecrated church: sacred services and sermons by bishops who were well known for their eloquence; the fact that it was a Sunday; then, too, a keen desire to hear again the choir sing the Mass with orchestra accompaniment, the antiphon *Sancta Maria, Succurre Miseris*, and the *Tantum Ergo*; finally, there was the ever increasing rumor that on this solemn occasion the Blessed Virgin would grant special favors. Many people, in fact, asserted that they had come with members of their families or friends to thank God for favors received. For these same reasons many distinguished persons had come from as far as Milan, Venice, Bologna, Florence, Rome, Naples, and other cities. The church remained literally packed throughout the day, so that at times people could neither enter nor leave. Many claimed to have received favors that day, but since they were spiritual favors for the most part, they were not publicized; other favors were temporal, but the persons concerned thought it best to keep quiet about them.[4]

At four o'clock that afternoon Bishop Galletti officiated at Vespers and Bishop Gastaldi gave the sermon. We cannot say how many thousands heard that sermon. Certainly those outside the church waiting for their chance to enter were even more numerous than those jammed inside.

It was certainly due to Our Lady's special protection that with such a crush there was no disorder either inside or outside. Everyone waited patiently to express his personal devotion. After the sermon, Bishop Galletti imparted Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

At seven o'clock an outdoor gymnastics display was given first by the Lanzo pupils and then by teams of Oratory boys; a huge audience of pupils and visitors attended. Don Bosco watched the show from the second floor balcony without saying a word or applauding, just being delighted to see his boys enjoying themselves. He chose to enhance their enjoyment by his presence, but his mind was absorbed in other thoughts.

[3] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

[4] We are omitting the description of a few physical cures. [Editor]

CHAPTER 23

Consecration Festivities (Continued)

MONDAY, June 15, saw undiminishing crowds of the faithful attending services at the new church. Bishop Gastaldi celebrated the usual early Mass and delivered a simple but deeply moving sermon on Christ's love for us in giving Himself as nourishment in the Holy Eucharist. Then, at ten o'clock, the bishop of Mondovì offered the pontifical Mass.[1]

At three in the afternoon, the Oratory boys staged a Latin comedy entitled *Phasmatonices* or *Larvarum Victor* [The Ghosts' Conqueror].[2] Don Bosco liked to have such plays now and then to give his pupils a chance to become familiar with the pronunciation, reading, and understanding of the ancient, majestic language of Rome and of the Church, thus proving that religion is by no means hostile to science or literature. The presence of a well-educated, scholarly audience, including bishops and distinguished visitors from the city and elsewhere, further heartened the actors to deliver their lines well. At six o'clock the bishop of Mondovì officiated at Vespers, and Bishop Galletti delivered the sermon.[3]

On Tuesday, June 16, the closing day of the festivities, the bishop of Mondovì celebrated the early Mass and gave a short homily before Communion. At ten o'clock came the pontifical Mass celebrated by Bishop Galletti. At three in the afternoon the pupils enjoyed a comedy, *Heritage in Corsica,* staged by their companions.

[1] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[2] *See* Volume VIII, p. 72. [Editor]
[3] We are omitting an outline of the plot. [Editor]

At six o'clock Bishop Galletti officiated at Vespers. Bishop Ghilardi delivered the final sermon, in which he depicted the Catholic Church as a veritable earthly paradise by virtue of the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist, a presence which of itself suffices to fill us with joy and delight. Then a solemn *Te Deum* was sung and Bishop Galletti imparted Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

During the week-long festivities special prayers had also been offered daily for those contributors whom God had called to Himself before the new church had been opened for worship, but on June 17, at seven in the morning, all the Oratory pupils and those of Lanzo and Mirabello gathered for a special commemorative service attended by many of the faithful. Special prayers and the rosary were offered for the dead; afterward Bishop Galletti celebrated Mass and gave Holy Communion to a large number of boys and others in attendance. He closed the service with an appropriate sermon and Benediction. Thus ended the week-long festivities.[4]

June 17 was a joyful day, too, until it was time for the Mirabello and Lanzo pupils to return to their schools. At two in the afternoon they all lined up in the playground facing Don Bosco's window, and Don Bosco bid them good-bye from his balcony. The Oratory band then escorted them to the gate amid cheers and farewells.

During the week-long festivities nothing had happened to cast a shadow of sadness over the Oratory, but an hour after the departure of the visiting students, a zealous Salesian, Father Joseph Bongiovanni, breathed his last.

As the consecration of the new church had been drawing near, Father Bongiovanni had continued to work extra hard to train the altar boys and have them ready to perform their tasks with devotion throughout the octave-long services. On retiring the night of June 8, the eve of the consecration, he left his window open. During the night a sudden storm chilled the air abruptly. The next morning, Father Bongiovanni felt his chest congested and found it so hard to breathe that he was unable to get up. In spite of the solicitous attention of his doctors and confreres, his

[4] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

condition remained critical for a few days. He kept praying fervently to Our Lady to favor his ardent wish of offering at least one Mass in the new church. On Sunday, June 14, he felt so much improved that he was able to say Mass with intense joy. Afterward, he told several friends that his happiness was such that he was ready to sing his *Nunc Dimittis.* Indeed, so it happened. His strength waned, and he returned to bed never to rise again. On Wednesday morning, June 17, he seemed to have improved considerably, but toward three that afternoon he suffered a relapse and was given the Last Sacraments. Within an hour, assisted by Don Bosco and his dearest friends and confreres, Father Joseph Bongiovanni went to his reward.[5] However, his was not the third expected death, although it had indeed been most edifying.[6]

The week-long festivities were judged a triumph for the Church, as can be said of the annual feast of Mary, Help of Christians. Contributing to this triumph had also been countless spiritual and temporal favors granted by the Madonna—favors which people firmly believed had been obtained through Don Bosco. Hence the steady flow of letters from persons seeking his prayers or thanking him; hence, the respect and esteem they showed him. Don Bosco did not want all this attention but submitted to it with dignity as one aware of being the Madonna's servant and executor of Her wishes. In his humility, he never took the least credit for such heavenly favors, declaring always by word and by writing: "If you seek favors from the Blessed Virgin, make a novena, saying three *Paters, Aves* and *Glorias* daily to the Blessed Sacrament, three *Salve Reginas* to Mary, Help of Christians, and these two invocations: *Blessed and praised every moment be the Most Holy and Divine Sacrament* and *Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us.* Also receive the sacraments at least once."

When honored, applauded, or made the object of veneration by crowds imploring his blessing at the Oratory and elsewhere in Italy, France, or Spain, he refused to regard these manifestations as directed to him personally, but rather to his priesthood and to

[5] This paragraph is a condensation. For other biographical details *see* Vol. V, pp. 313, 499f, 517; Vol VI, pp. 181, 362; Vol. VII, pp. 101, 199, 202, 330; Vol. VIII, p. 168. [Editor]

[6] *See* pp. 6-8. [Editor]

the Church. He often remarked, as Father John Bonetti testified: "Let us thank the Lord for so much faith among the people," or "Such great faith and such respect people have for the priesthood," or "Who would even think of Don Bosco if he didn't belong to the Church? They treat him this way because he is a priest. It is the only reason."[7]

[7]This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting five letters of Don Bosco to Marchioness Mary Fassati dating back to 1865 and seeking her aid in the disposal of lottery tickets, in the construction of the new church, and in the provision of an ecclesiastical patrimony for one of his ordinands. [Editor]

CHAPTER 24

Noteworthy Details (Continued)

TRUE to his promise, Bishop Peter Rota of Guastalla arrived at the Oratory on June 19 to see the new church, to preside at several services, and to thank Mary, Help of Christians for having rid his diocese of the pernicious influence of Gavazzi.[1] He also joined in the observance of Don Bosco's name day on June 24.[2] At the close of the entertainment in his honor, Don Bosco thanked all those who had honored him in prose, poetry, song, and music. He also expressed his regret that for some time several boys had refused to open their hearts to him while others had kept away from him. He urged them all to be firm and determined in virtue, promising to forget past faults if their conduct improved, warning them too that relapses would only result in ruin. He begged them to save their own souls and to pray for him that he not neglect his. He ended by saying: "The sole purpose of the Oratory is the salvation of souls."

By a happy coincidence, the June issue of *Letture Cattoliche* was a biography of St. John the Baptist.[3]

On Saturday, June 27, after confessions, Don Bosco read a letter at suppertime to several Salesians, among them Father Rua and the cleric Berto. It had come, with an offering for favors received, from some nuns in southern Italy who, realizing that their community had grown lax, had prayed to Mary, Help of Christians and had found that soon all the nuns had regained their

[1] *See* p. 134. [Editor]

[2] At his baptism, Don Bosco had been named after the Apostle John, but in 1846 the Oratory boys, believing his name to be John the Baptist—a very popular saint in Turin—began to celebrate his name day on June 24, the feast day of this saint. [Editor]

[3] We are omitting a letter to Bishop Rota from the archbishop of Modena concerning letters of commendation of the Salesian Society. [Editor]

fervor. The conversation then turned to the causes which adversely affect the spirit of piety and obedience, such as attachment to one's own comfort and habits contracted against the spirit of the rules. It was also brought out that many religious orders had been destroyed by their own wealth. Indeed, attachment to earthly matters weakens and often totally extinguishes the desire for the things of heaven. To show how an immoderate attachment to wealth can enslave even good souls, Don Bosco narrated the following two incidents.

A very elderly marchioness, an outstanding benefactress of the Oratory where she was well known, fell seriously ill and sent for Don Bosco. "Have I come to the end of my days?" she asked apprehensively after making her confession. Don Bosco replied that only God knows the limit of our days and that we should therefore remain tranquil and fully trust in Him.

"Must I leave this world and all I possess?" she went on, partly delirious. "Will I lose everything?"

Don Bosco tried to comfort her with the thought that God's reward for those who love Him makes earthly riches seem as worthless as mire, but the elderly marchioness paid no heed. "Must I leave this palace, my suite, my lovely drawing room?" she rambled. "I have felt quite comfortable here. Why must I leave?" She called for her servants and ordered them to carry her into the drawing room. They hesitated lest she die in the attempt, but when she insisted, Don Bosco thought it best to indulge her whims, lest a refusal prove more harmful. The drawing room was furnished with many precious and rare artifacts. A Persian cloth draped a table in the center of the room. The marchioness had her bed put down next to that table and, fingering the cloth, kept exclaiming: "How lovely! Is this to be my last look? Do you know, Don Bosco, this cost me 40,000 lire. . . . And to think that it will no longer be mine!"

She then glanced about that luxurious room, as in a final good-bye. And it was there, in that very room, that she died shortly afterward. How difficult it is for the rich to detach themselves from earthly things, and how painful is the separation when death wrests them from all they possess.

Don Bosco recalled another incident which must not be con-

fused with a similar one formerly narrated.[4] We heard this from Don Bosco ourselves. A Turinese millionaire couple were very much upset by the thought that, being childless after twenty-five years of marriage, they would have to leave their fortune to distant relatives. In vain they had prayed for a child and made pilgrimages. At last, they called on Don Bosco for his blessing, promising a handsome donation to the Oratory and the new church if their prayers were heard. Don Bosco encouraged them to consider the favor as granted. In fact, they did have a healthy baby boy. They went back to Don Bosco to thank him profusely, but said nothing about their promise. Don Bosco reminded them of it, but they adduced excuses for not keeping their word. "I have no personal interest in this," Don Bosco replied, "but your ingratitude will not go unrewarded. Remember that He who gave you your boy can also take him away." A few months later the child became ill and died.

In their bereavement, the couple waited nearly a year before calling on Don Bosco. They acknowledged their fault, again sought his blessing, and renewed their promise. Moved by their tears, Don Bosco gave them some wise advice, promised to pray for them, blessed them, and again assured them that the favor would be granted. They did have another son, but this time they did not even bother to thank Don Bosco and completely ignored their promise. Don Bosco waited for over a year and then paid them a visit. They, ill at ease, received him and when he pointed out that it was not wise to disregard one's promise to the Madonna, they advanced a lot of excuses for their lack of integrity. Don Bosco took leave convinced that such shameless greed would not go unpunished. Soon afterward the little boy became ill. Don Bosco was sent for at once, but he refused to go and the child died. Eventually, the couple's vast fortune went to the very people to whom those selfish parents would never have left it of their own accord.

Don Bosco used to say that the generosity and unselfishness of the poor generally draws wondrous favors upon them, whereas extraordinary efforts are needed to induce the rich to make any considerable sacrifice.

[4] *See* Vol VIII, pp. 230ff. [Editor]

The feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga was observed on Sunday, June 28 with a solemn High Mass, homily, procession, and fireworks. That evening, the eve of the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul and of the name day of Bishop Peter Rota, the Oratory boys strove to show the bishop their gratitude with vocal and instrumental music, prose and poetry, illumination of the buildings, and spontaneous cheers.

The feast of Sts. Peter and Paul was observed very solemnly. St. Peter's altar in the right transept of the new church was handsomely adorned with candles and flowers. Above the altar, a painting, surmounted by the keys and papal tiara, portrays Our Lord handing the keys of heaven to His Vicar, the first Pope. It is the work of Carcano, a renowned Milanese artist. On several occasions Don Bosco had stated that the feast of St. Aloysius should no longer be transferred to June 29, as had often been done in the past, because he wanted this day to be dedicated exclusively to St. Peter. Bishop Rota said the Pontifical Mass at ten o'clock and officiated at Vespers, after which he delivered a magnificent homily—later published—on the theme: *Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo Ecclesiam Meam, et portae inferi non praevalebunt adversus eam* [You are Peter and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it—Matt. 16, 18].[5]

That evening news reached Turin that on that very day the Pope had issued a bull convoking an Ecumenical Vatican Council on December 8, 1869, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. In this memorable document, the Pope explained that the Council was necessary in order to find remedies for a host of evils, such as the very distressing state of human society, the widespread contempt for Church authority and dogma, the profanation of sacred things, the dissolution of religious orders, the confiscation of church property, the harassment of the clergy, the growth of anticlericalism, and the evil influence of an irreligious press and pernicious secularistic education.

This announcement stirred up strong feelings everywhere. Pius IX's considerate invitation to Protestants only managed to irritate them, and his invitation to schismatic bishops stirred up old ani-

[5] We are omitting a long excerpt from this sermon. [Editor]

mosities, prejudice, and pride. Both invitations were rejected. However, before the close of the Vatican Council, God summoned both the Greek and Armenian patriarchs of Constantinople as well as the Greek and Coptic patriarchs of Alexandria to His judgment seat. The news of this forthcoming Council gladdened all genuine Catholics and strengthened their conviction that the Holy Spirit would inspire the Council to condemn the errors of the century. Many bishops also expressed the hope that the Council would define the dogma of papal infallibility, although the Pope had not as yet expressed his own opinion on this matter.[6]

On June 30 the bishop of Guastalla reluctantly took leave of Don Bosco, but he obligingly accepted his invitation to visit the Mirabello junior seminary before returning to his diocese. Father John Cagliero went ahead of him to arrange for his worthy reception and to preach a triduum in preparation for the feast of St. Aloysius, which was to be celebrated on Thursday, July 2. A slight problem arose in Turin at the bishop's departure. Due to some misunderstanding, the person who had been told to purchase first-class rail tickets for the bishop and his secretary did not show up at the station. Don Bosco, punctilious in such matters, immediately sent a note to Father Bonetti at Mirabello to remedy this blunder. He also gave his opinion of the latter's biography of [Ernest] Saccardi:[7]

Turin, July, 1868

Dear Father Bonetti:

When Bishop Rota arrives, please tell him that Chevalier Oreglia, through some mixup, went to Porta Nuova instead of Porta Susa with the rail tickets. Please give a refund to the bishop's secretary. Arrange this with Father Cagliero.

I have read your book and like it very much. I have already given it to the printer and you will soon have the proofs. I thought it best to edit out what could lead readers to accuse us of going overboard in practices of piety, or to think that lack of recreation gravely affected Saccardi's health. I also deleted the *Corona Quotidiana.* It is an excellent thing, but it might be considered excessive on top of everything else. See the proofs and edit as you judge best.

[6] We are omitting two letters to Don Bosco telling him about Count Vimercati's death. [Editor]

[7] *See* Vol. VIII, pp. 137, 189ff. [Editor]

Best wishes to you and to your dear pupils for the forthcoming celebration.

Yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Bishop Rota paid his respects to Bishop Ferrè of Casale and then joined him in the celebrations at the Mirabello junior seminary. Bishop Rota said the Community Mass and Bishop Ferrè the High Mass. At dinner Father Bonetti offered toasts to the two prelates. Afterward the pupils paid homage to them with prose, poetry, and song. At Vespers Bishop Ferrè preached on St. Aloysius. The sermon was followed by a solemn procession and Benediction.[8]

Shortly before Bishop Ferrè's departure, a pupil read the following address:

Dear Bishop:

Someone told me you are an angel. I've never before seen an angel, and so I am grateful to you for having come to us today. I shall now recite the prayer which my mother taught me to say to my guardian angel: "Angel of God, you who are my guardian, look after me this day, enlighten my mind, govern my affections, and guide my sentiments so that I may never offend the Lord, my God. Amen."

My good angel, I ask yet another favor of you. I hope that you will grant it because you are so good. Stay with us always. We will build you a lovely church and make you feel welcome and love you with all our hearts. Are you glad? Please say yes; otherwise we shall hold you by your wings and not let you fly away.

And if you do not want to stay always with us, at least come to see us often and tell us how to become very, very good and how to turn into angels so that we too can fly with you to heaven. Good-bye, dear angel, good-bye, good-bye.

We have dwelt upon these details to make ever clearer the veneration which Don Bosco himself felt and instilled into his sons toward the shepherds of the Church.

[8] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 25

Special Charisms

To expedite the printing of *Letture Cattoliche,* the Oratory received in July [1868] an additional printing press purchased in Don Bosco's name by Chevalier Fredrick Oreglia for 8,500 lire.[1] The September issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* entitled *A Biography of Ernest Saccardi,* a pupil of the Mirabello Junior seminary, had been written by Father John Bonetti. Don Bosco's letter to the author[2] has already demonstrated the former's care in reading and correcting the biography. It was Don Bosco's custom at this time to examine closely every writing of his co-workers intended for publication, and he likewise insisted that they examine his own.

At the "Good Night" of July 5, he told both students and artisans: "On the 15th we shall solemnly open the Forty Hours' devotions. Bishop Balletti will come to preach. To prepare, let us concentrate on nothing but our duties, be they spiritual, scholastic, or manual, each according to his own condition."[3]

The Forty Hours' devotions were carried out with the greatest solemnity. Kneeling at the foot of the altar, altar boys, clerics and priests took turns in around-the-clock adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. During the day, students and artisans adored in groups at the altar rail. The faithful attended in large numbers, drawn also by the sermons of the saintly Bishop Galletti.[4]

[1] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

[2] *See* p. 145. [Editor]

[3] We are omitting a letter of Don Bosco agreeing to check out the scholastic standing of Count Provana's sons and an exchange of news between Father Francesia and Chevalier Oreglia in Rome. [Editor]

[4] We are omitting a thank-you note from Bishop Ferré of Casale to whom Don Bosco had donated a complete set of *Letture Cattoliche.* [Editor]

On July 16 Don Bosco received a letter from the Department of Railroads recommending a boy to the Oratory. Thousands of similar requests reached him every year, and he only wished that he could accept them all. To his co-workers he kept repeating—and we heard him ourselves: "Take in as many boys as you can. Fill the house, the attic, and even the space under the stairs. If you have no other place, put them in my room and under my bed!"

Bearing in mind Our Lord's words: "Whoever receives one such little child in My name receives Me" and "It is not the will of your Father in heaven that a single one of these little ones should perish," he was genuinely happy to be able to accept yet another boy and grieved when he had to refuse one. In every lad he saw a soul to be saved, and he left no stone unturned in order to save it.

Father Rua's chronicle entry of July 20 reads: "People keep coming in large numbers to our new church to seek Our Lady's favors. We may say that never a day goes by without letters pouring in from people who recommend themselves to Mary, particularly through Don Bosco's prayers and those of his sons. Likewise we may say that we daily receive letters of thanksgiving for favors received."[5]

On July 25, Don Bosco was at Fenestrelle near the Alps. The curate of the nearby village of Rua had been bitten by a rabid dog, and was so scared that he wanted at all costs Don Bosco's blessing. Yielding to the insistence of friends waiting for him at Pinerolo, Don Bosco went to the poor priest, and blessed him. Reassured, the latter fully recovered and lived many more years.

On Sunday, July 26, the feast of St. Anne, Don Bosco preached in the chapel of Puy in the parish of Fenestrelle. The next day he went to Usseaux, the birthplace of Joseph Ronchail, who had just completed his philosophy courses and wanted to become a priest. His grandfather, instead, bent on making a merchant out of him, had already placed him with a Lyons firm and had even arranged for him to leave for Lyons that Saturday. The young man had not dared raise objections. Upon arriving in Fenestrelle, Don Bosco called on the pastor. When his presence became known in town, two of Joseph's friends who were studying theology at the

[5] We are omitting one such letter from an Austrian baroness. [Editor]

seminary, called on him to tell him of Don Bosco. Ronchail had not only never met him, but had never even heard his name. The seminarians, however, had heard so much about Don Bosco that they were extremely eager to meet him, and they invited Ronchail to go with them immediately. He obliged.

No sooner had the three been ushered in than Don Bosco, ignoring the seminarians, warmly greeted Ronchail. Grasping his hand, he exclaimed: "Here is a bird that should be caged." His words made a deep impression on the young man and aroused his dormant priestly vocation. After a second meeting with Don Bosco, his determination to dedicate himself to God's service became so strong and unshakable that he decided to follow him to Turin. There was still his grandfather to convince, but an extraordinary incident swept all obstacles away. Our source is Father Charles Gros, who in 1904, at 82, was the pastor at Pomaretto. He described the incident to Father Peter Pestarino of Rossiglione so that it could be forwarded to us.

In 1868 Father Gros was a chaplain in that area. One blustery day he met Don Bosco who was returning to Fenestrelle from Laux in a carriage with Stephen Bourlot.[6] As they rode along, they were greeted by Joseph Ronchail, his mother, and his two younger sisters. As Bourlot halted the carriage, the good woman begged Don Bosco to bless her daughters. The elder, just fourteen, was nearly blind, while the younger suffered from a chronic eye inflammation which forced her to keep her eyes closed because of the pain caused by the daylight. Don Bosco suggested that they make a novena to Mary, Help of Christians and say daily three *Paters, Aves,* and *Glorias* and one *Salve Regina.* Then, having told Joseph to lead his mother and sister in these prayers, he blessed them. The elder girl recovered her sight instantly and completely and never again suffered any eye ailment; the younger girl continued the novena. On the last day, shortly after saying the suggested prayers, she noticed that the inflammation had vanished, leaving only a tiny scar as a reminder of her former affliction. She too regained her sight perfectly.

[6] Stephen Bourlot (1849-1910) first met Don Bosco in 1866 and spent some time with him at the Oratory. In 1871, after completing his theological studies in the Turin seminary, he was ordained. Later he returned to Don Bosco, became a Salesian in 1876, and that same year was assigned to Argentina. *See also* pp. 12f. [Editor]

These extraordinary happenings caused her brother to become a firm believer in Don Bosco. Convinced of the latter's supernatural enlightenment regarding his vocation, Ronchail entered the Oratory on October 1 of that year. Later we shall see the important mission that the Lord had reserved for him in France. He himself confirmed this story to us.

According to the chronicle, Don Bosco left Fenestrelle on July 27. Toward evening that day, two unknown priests came to the Oratory to see him. Since he was still away, they waited till nightfall without identifying themselves. As soon as he saw them, Don Bosco warmly greeted them. "I am Monsignor Ricci, chamberlain to His Holiness," one said. The other identified himself as Father Guglielmotti, O.P., the famous historian of the papal navy. Both were happy to accept Don Bosco's hospitality. The following day, after a tour of the Oratory, Father Durando escorted them to our school at Lanzo. On the morning of July 29 they left for Rome. Seemingly they were on a special mission. Their visit gave Don Bosco the opportunity to write to Monsignor Ricci in September to enlist his help in obtaining a papal honor for one of his benefactors.[7]

On July 28 Don Bosco had to beg leave of his distinguished guests and absent himself for nearly two days because of a previous commitment at Borgo Cornalese [some fifteen miles from Turin]. During his absence, Father Rua had an attack of acute peritonitis. Overworked for the past several months and constantly weakened by a scanty four-hour rest each night, he collapsed on July 29. Very devout, he immediately sought and received Holy Viaticum. The doctor had given him up. Later, Dr. Fissore, who had first treated him, declared that his condition had been so serious that his chances for survival had been two out of a hundred, at most.

We may well imagine the anxiety that swept the whole Oratory. Don Bosco was called back and arrived by evening. The superiors and boys swarmed around him in large numbers to tell him of Father Rua's critical condition and to urge that he hasten to give him the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians. "Hurry," they insisted. "He may die at any moment!"

[7] We are omitting this letter. [Editor]

"Be at ease," Don Bosco replied smilingly. "I know Father Rua. He will go nowhere without my permission!"

Since the Exercise for a Happy Death was starting that evening, Don Bosco went straight to his confessional, where he was kept busy a very long time. When he was finished, his secretary, Father Berto, insisted that he visit the patient. "Yes, I'll see him," he replied. "Don't worry!" However, nothing daunted, he went to the dining room for supper. Only after having brought some papers to his room did he finally go to see Father Rua. After some small talk, Father Rua feebly asked: "Don Bosco, please tell me honestly if this is my last hour. I am ready for anything!"

"Dear Father Rua," he replied, "I do not want you to die. You've still got to help me with many things."

After a few more heartening words, he blessed him.

The following morning Don Bosco went to visit Father Rua after Mass. There he met Dr. Gribaudo who told him that the patient was critical and that there was little hope for his recovery.

"No matter how critical he is," Don Bosco replied, "Father Rua must get well because he has a lot more to do." Then noticing the oil of the sick on the night table, he asked: "What is that doing here?"

"To anoint Father Rua."

"Whose idea was that?"

"Mine," Father Savio replied. "If you had seen how sick he was yesterday! We all were afraid. Even the doctors...."

"You are indeed people of little faith," Don Bosco interrupted. "Take heart, Father Rua! You couldn't die now even if you jumped out of the window!"

In fact, Father Rua had begun to improve the very moment that Don Bosco had blessed him. Some days later, contrary to expectations, he was out of danger. A two-month convalescence in Trofarello completely restored his strength and even rid him of the headaches that had frequently tormented him.

An earlier prediction assured Father Rua that he would live at least another thirty-five years. He testified to this himself as follows:

In 1853, while preparations were afoot in Turin for the centennial

celebrations of the miracle of the Blessed Sacrament,[8] our good father Don Bosco wrote a pamphlet to help prepare the faithful for the solemn anniversary. I was then sixteen and acting as his secretary. A few months after the close of the festivities, Don Bosco and I were returning from the summer residence of our good friend, Father Matthew Picco, where Don Bosco used to spend a few days every year to work at his writing in the peace of the countryside, availing himself of the extensive literary, historic, and scientific knowledge of the learned professor. When we reached the city's outskirts, not far from the Great Mother of God Church, our conversation turned to the recent centennial celebration and the popularity of his pamphlet. At one point, Don Bosco, looking to the future, remarked: "When the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary is celebrated in 1903, *I shall no longer be here, but you will.* As of now, I entrust its reprint to you."

"I gladly accept so welcome a task," I replied, "but what if death should play its tricks on me before then?"

"Have no fear! Death will play you no tricks, and you will be able to carry out the task I am now entrusting to you."

Hearing him speak with such conviction, I then and there put aside a copy of the pamphlet to have it on hand for a reprint in 1903.

He did indeed reprint it, prefacing it with a statement similar to the above and also mentioning his 1868 illness and recovery.

[8] The miracle of the Blessed Sacrament took place on June 6, 1453. A soldier had stolen a monstrance containing the Blessed Sacrament and was carrying it off in a sack flung over a mule. On reaching the spot where the Church of Corpus Domini was later built, the mule refused to budge in spite of repeated whippings and blows. The sack broke open, the monstrance fell out, and the Host arose to remain suspended in midair for all to see. When word reached the archbishop, he rushed to the spot, and only after many prayers of the faithful did the Host descend into a chalice held by him. [Editor]

CHAPTER 26

Special Charisms (Continued)

IN August [1868] Don Bosco went to St. Ignatius' Shrine at Lanzo for his spiritual retreat. There, as in previous years, he was awaited by many laymen who sought him out for confession and guidance. Among them was a fine young man who had been introduced to him some time previously at the Oratory by a benefactor wishing to have him admitted there. On that occasion Don Bosco had kindly received the youth in the sacristy, but after questioning him, he had frankly told him that his lot was not with the Salesians. The youth had felt hurt at this answer and left.

Now—a few years later—this young man was at St. Ignatius' Shrine for his spiritual retreat and again met Don Bosco. After making his confession to him, he told him of his desire to become a Salesian. Don Bosco remained noncommittal, but one day, as the youth was enthusiastically talking about St. Stanislaus Kostka, he gently remarked: "Well, then, why don't you join the order in which St. Stanislaus became a saint," thus again giving him to understand that he was not called to the Salesian life. Taking the suggestion, the youth entered the Society of Jesus. His name? Father Sasia, Jesuit provincial in California until 1894 when he was recalled to fill the same office in Turin. He himself is our source of the above.

Though advising others, Don Bosco did not shy from receiving advice himself. Seeing that his blessing healed even people who were critically ill, he realized that this was due to Mary's intercession, and he took pains not to let the poison of vanity creep into his heart. He constantly and determinedly prayed: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory." [Ps. 113, 9] He thought so humbly of himself that he frequently sought advice

from learned and saintly priests. Bishop John Baptist Bertagna, former professor of moral theology at the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin, testified as follows at the diocesan process for Don Bosco's beatification:

I am convinced that Don Bosco possessed the supernatural gift of healing. He told me so himself when we were both making our spiritual retreat at St. Ignatius' Shrine in Lanzo. He confided in me because he wanted my advice on whether or not he should continue giving his blessing to the sick along with holy pictures of Mary, Help of Christians and of Our Savior. He was ill at ease because many cures seemed prodigious and caused a lot of talk. I believed he was telling the truth, and for better or worse I advised him to continue giving his blessing.

His humility helped him to find ways to divert attention from himself when people, realizing the power of his blessings, flocked to him in such numbers that he could not attend to his own duties. Lest the extraordinary happen then and there, he often advised people to make a novena or to recite certain prayers for a period of days, thus setting the time when the Madonna would grant the grace. In thus seeing to it that the favors were received in distant localities, he aimed at making his assurances of a cure less striking. Remarkably, his petitioners' prayers were answered on the day and month he designated. The Madonna left that up to him. Equally effective were the letters he sent with a holy picture of Mary, Help of Christians, as demonstrated by the grateful thanks he received from everywhere. Unfailingly he credited these cures to the prayers and fervent Communions of his pupils, constantly urging those who had been healed to be grateful to and appreciative of the Oratory boys.

At the close of the retreat, Don Bosco took up a collection for the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory and then returned to Turin. Since the new church of Mary, Help of Christians still lacked several appurtenances, he organized various drives for memorial gifts. He disliked purchasing all necessary or desirable articles lest benefactors think that their help was no longer necessary.[1]

People had great faith in Don Bosco. A religious community of

[1] This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting a circular to benefactors and a letter from the superioress of a convent to Father Francesia. [Editor]

Turin, sorely grieved by the mortal illness of Count Clement Solaro della Margarita, wrote to Chevalier Oreglia to learn Don Bosco's opinion about his recovery. Don Bosco in turn called upon the illustrious patient, with whom he was quite friendly, to give him a blessing and assure him of the Oratory boys' prayers.

"It must be remembered though," he often said, "that recovery is sometimes refused because it would do the soul no good, and at times it is granted partially so that the sick person may acquire greater merit."

The following incident illustrates this point:

In 1868 my mother and I called on Don Bosco. I sought his blessing because, at twenty-five, I was afflicted with a relentless fever, slight but resistant to treatment, which drained me of my strength. The saintly priest suggested a simple laxative and asked me to recite five *Paters, Aves,* and *Glorias* for about a month until the feast of the Assumption. His smile and confidence made me certain that I would be cured. Before dismissing me, he gave me a booklet and a medal and then had me kneel and say three Hail Marys with him.

He prayed standing, all the while resting his hand firmly on my head. When I arose, he looked sad. "Do not be surprised if you will always have some ailment," he said. "The blessing I gave you may not help you physically, but it will help you spiritually. Still, do as I said." I left somewhat disheartened, but took the laxative and recited the prayers. On the feast of the Assumption I felt worse than ever, but later I gradually improved. My fever, though, still bothered me quite often. In fact, I can truthfully say that since my visit to Don Bosco I have not had one single day of perfect health. I am convinced that, as we were saying the three Hail Marys, Don Bosco saw that I would have to sacrifice the health of my body for the good of my soul.

Delfina Marengo

We will now here recall how Don Bosco also continued to reveal occult matters. Father Joachim Berto testified as follows:

One morning in 1868 two unknown ladies came to the Oratory to see Don Bosco. As they were ushered into his room, he smilingly said to one: "Have no fear of becoming a nun. Be sure that it is God's will."

Shortly afterward the two ladies left, visibly moved. Curious, I asked

Don Bosco why they were crying. "You see," he replied, "those two ladies are sisters. One wants to become a nun, and the other opposes her. They agreed to seek my advice."

"Why were they crying?"

"Because I gave them the answer to their question before they could say a word. It really affected them."

"How did you know the problem?"

"You ask too many questions! I had a dream last night and saw those two ladies come to me and ask my opinion on that matter. As soon as they walked in I recognized them and simply repeated the advice I had given them in my dream."

Other similar instances are recorded in our archives. Don Bosco was also endowed with an admirable spirit of prophecy, as we have already narrated.[2] For instance, one evening at supper he told this dream to several at the table with him, including Father Berto:

I saw an Oratory boy lying on the floor in the middle of his dormitory amid blunted knives, pistols, rifles, and severed human limbs. He was dying. "What happened?" I asked. "Can't you tell?" he replied. "I committed murder and in a few hours I shall be executed."

I know that boy, Don Bosco went on. I'll strive to straighten him out and make him devout and good-hearted, but his nasty disposition makes me truly fear that he will come to a sad end.

Eventually this boy joined the army, shot an officer, and had to face a firing squad. Fortunately he repented and devoutly received the Last Sacraments.

Don Bosco also predicted several years in advance the suicide of another Oratory boy. He was a good lad, and devout while at the Oratory, but years later he was betrayed and ruined by a vicious companion. Unable to stand the loss of his fortune, family, and reputation, he ended his life with a bullet. The two boys' names are in our archives. Many witnesses—Father Rua among them—can testify to these predictions and their fulfillment.

Thus did Don Bosco's saintliness and charisms win him everyone's esteem and confidence, including noble families of Turin

[2] *See* Indexes of Volumes II, IV, V, VII, VIII, and XI under "Predictions." [Editor]

and other cities who often called upon him for counsel in bringing up their children.[3] He took equal if not more tender care of his own pupils. As the summer vacation approached, he constantly gave them salutary advice. Father Bonetti kept this record:

Don Bosco's Suggestions to the Boys on August 18, 1868

1. Go home with the determination to stay good.
2. Try to bring back to the Oratory with you some good boy, the kind you know Don Bosco likes to have.
3. Give a good example to your brothers or sisters to make up for the bad example you may have given them in the past in word and deed.
4. As you leave, do not damage or break water pitchers or tear books, as many destructive boys usually do. Give them rather to your needy companions who remain here or will come later on.
5. Be polite to your parents, teachers, and pastors. If you are invited to dinner, help yourselves sparingly, and watch how well-mannered people behave. Do not sit down or leave the table ahead of others; wait till your host has done so.

On Sunday, August 30, the novena in honor of Mary's Nativity began. During the first few days a rare phenomenon was observed by the Oratory boys who interpreted it as a happy omen. We mention it simply because Father Berto made note of it and because it brings out this good confrere's diligence in recording every incident. His report follows:

One evening after supper I was with some boys near the bindery when a nearby group of youngsters cried out: "Look up there!" I looked up. A red globe, about five inches in diameter, was gliding forward some twelve feet above the roof of the classroom building, slightly zigzagging and wavering at the speed of a sparrow darting from place to place. It cruised over the study hall, Don Bosco's room, and the rest of the building near the belfry of the old church, and then continued its flight almost as far as the railroad tracks, leaving a white tapering tail that faded away into white smoke at its far end. The boys were playing, and a lot of them stopped to watch it, mystified by such a phenomenon.

[3] This sentence is a condensation. We are omitting two letters of Don Bosco to benefactors showing his concern for their children. [Editor]

CHAPTER 27

Spiritual Retreat for Salesians, 1868

THE Oratory chronicle records only three "Good Nights" by Don Bosco during the novena of Our Lady's Nativity:

September 2, 1868

It's hard to understand, but whenever we begin a novena, some boys ask to leave the Oratory, and others must be dismissed. Take one youngster, for instance. He was the worst troublemaker of all, but various reasons kept us from expelling him. Would you believe it? Some mysterious force just drove him to leave on his own.

Now let us talk of something else. Imagine that you see me coming through the main entrance, walking up here and facing a majestic Lady who holds a ledger in Her hands. Without my saying a word, She hands it to me and says: "Read!" I take it and read the title, *Novena of Mary's Nativity.* Then I open the book and see in letters of gold, on the very first page, the names of a very few boys. The second page bears a somewhat longer list of boys' names in ordinary ink. All the other pages are blank. Now, can anyone tell me what this means? (*He asked one boy and helped him with the answers.*) The ledger contains the names of the boys making the novena. Those very few boys listed in gold letters are those who are making it fervently. The rest are those who are making it with less fervor. What about all the other boys whose names are not even listed? How do you explain that? I believe that the long walks we had [during the past festivities] so distracted these boys that they can no longer pull themselves together. What would Dominic Savio, Besucco, Magone, or Saccardi say if they were to come back now? "How the Oratory has changed!" they would exclaim.

To please Our Lady, therefore, let us receive the sacraments frequently and practice the nosegays which Father Francesia or I suggest every night. Let this be tomorrow's nosegay: "Do everything diligently."

September 3, 1868

Don Bosco told the boys about a dying woman who even in those last moments could not bring herself to confess a sin she had committed at the age of nine. In her delirium, however, she kept crying: "Poor me! I shall go to hell!"

"Why?" asked the confessor at her bedside.

"Because I committed a sin I have never dared confess."

At the priest's encouragement, she finally made a good confession. This teaches us, my dear sons, not to wait till death to put our conscience in order. If any of you have to make a general confession, do so. But if your confessor tells you that you do not need it, don't worry any longer, and leave all responsibility to your spiritual father.

September 4, 1868

A few days ago a woman lay critically ill in a hospital but refused to make her confession. As her condition worsened, some friends suggested that she call for Don Bosco.

"I don't care who comes," she replied. "I will not make my confession."

When I reached the hospital, they told her of my arrival.

"I'll make my confession when I'm well," she replied.

"But Don Bosco will make you well."

"Let him do that first, and then I'll confess my sins."

Ignoring her words, I offered her a medal of Mary, Help of Christians, on a chain. To the surprise of the bystanders, she took it and put it around her neck. I asked everyone to leave. As I made the Sign of the Cross over her, she blessed herself and then began her confession. Later she remarked joyfully: "I can't believe it! I made my confession when I had set my heart against it."

"I can't explain it either," I replied. "It must be that the Blessed Virgin wants you to be saved." I left her in a very Christian frame of mind.

Let us therefore put all our trust in Mary. Let those who still have no medal get one. Let us kiss it when tempted or when awake at night, and we shall be the better for it.

In the lost and found articles tonight there is a wallet with some small bills and two medals wrapped in paper. The person who lost it may come to get it.

Tomorrow's nosegay is: "Give up something." For instance, stop playing a minute or so to visit the Blessed Sacrament, or do something similar.

On September 8 [1868] the final examination marks were solemnly read off to the Oratory boys at six in the evening, and prizes were awarded to the best pupils. That day, so rich in reminders of the good done by Don Bosco for his beloved sons, ended as in the past with a delightful entertainment of prose and poetry, music and song, skits and farces. As usual, the assembly opened with a talk by a faculty member and closed with an address by Don Bosco. Both talks were well deserving of the boys' attention.

Next morning, after Mass with a homily by Don Bosco on how to spend one's vacation and a hymn of thanksgiving, most of the students left for their homes, bearing with them Don Bosco's earnest recommendation to honor Our Lady and to place full confidence in Her for all spiritual and temporal needs.[1] While the events of the previous chapters were taking place, several people, well-intentioned perhaps, had advised Archbishop Riccardi of Turin not to approve the spiritual retreat which the Oratory ordinands planned to make at Trofarello during the fall Ember days in preparation for their ordination. Pressure was mounting on Don Bosco's clerics to make their retreat either in the seminary or in the Redemptorist retreat house with the diocesan ordinands. When informed of this decision, Don Bosco sent Father Cagliero to Carmagnola where the archbishop was visiting to persuade him to revoke the order. Don Bosco was determined to exert his utmost efforts in this matter for reasons he could not make public, such as the strong attempts that had been made at the last retreat in the seminary to promote defections from the Salesian Society.

The archbishop listened to Father Cagliero. Thanks also to Bishop Gastaldi's timely intervention and to information he had received that the bishop of Asti was allowing the deacon Fagnano to make his spiritual retreat at Trofarello in preparation for his ordination, the archbishop relented.

Therefore, on September 13, the feast of the Holy Name of Mary, Don Bosco gathered half of his Salesians, including the ordinands, for the first of the spiritual retreats to be held there. He preached the instructions himself, and Father Joseph Bona of Brescia handled the meditations. Solicitous that all Salesians

[1] We are omitting some correspondence about devotion to the Blessed Virgin and favors received from Her. [Editor]

make a spiritual retreat, he notified Chevalier Oreglia and Father Celestine Durando that a second retreat would start on September 21.[2]

His sermons were more than usually effective. Sound in doctrine, full of ardor, based upon Scripture and the Church Fathers, and illustrated with church history, the lives of the saints, contemporary events, similes, and parables, they held the retreatants spellbound, convincing them, kindling their fervor, and motivating them to follow their vocation.[3]

On September 19, Ember Saturday, the spiritual retreat came to a close with the perpetual profession of Father Paul Albera, while the clerics Louis Lasagna and Joseph Bologna made their triennial vows.

The archbishop held ordinations in the chapel in his residence, Deacon James Costamagna had to leave Trofarello in the early morning to get there on time. After the ceremony, all the newly ordained priests, diocesan and religious, waited to greet the archbishop. When it was Father Costamagna's turn to kiss the prelate's ring, the latter lightly slapped him, loudly exclaiming: "Here is one who does not want to acknowledge his own archbishop!"

"Your Excellency," he protested, "I respect and love you, but I also love Don Bosco as a father."

Turning his back to him, the archbishop began conversing with others. Father Costamagna felt hurt. The seminarians, especially those from Susa, were shocked. Some of them were former Oratory pupils and knew nothing of the differences between Archbishop Riccardi and Don Bosco.

That day Father Joseph Fagnano was ordained by Bishop Ferrè at Casale.

[2] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

[3] We are omitting a summary of Don Bosco's talks by one of his listeners. [Editor]

CHAPTER 28

Spiritual Retreat for Salesians, 1868 (Continued)

AFTER the retreat was over, as Father Rua's chronicle informs us, Don Bosco started out with a companion for Villastellone to spend a day with his former teacher, Father Appendini,[1] but he unluckily missed the train. The chronicle continues:

Not at all disturbed, Don Bosco took out a thick manuscript and, while walking, began proofreading it as he would at his own desk. When he got to his destination, he looked up and remarked: "This was a godsend. I could not have done as much if I had stayed at home!"

From Villastellone he went to Saluzzo to comfort Bishop Gastaldi's mother who was seriously ill and to show her his gratitude for all her kindnesses to the Oratory.[2] Both mother and son were delighted by his visit, but Don Bosco was moved to pity by her sufferings and the thought that her end was so near.

He also called on an old priest, a fellow seminarian, who had been ailing for years. After a cordial exchange of greetings, Don Bosco inquired about his illness and found that his friend was not only ill in body but depressed in soul. Having received no relief from doctors and all kinds of medicines, he had given up all hope and despaired of any recovery. Don Bosco tried to cheer him by exhorting him to trust in Mary, Help of Christians, who had already granted so many favors to others, and by assuring him that, if he had complete faith in Her, he would be able to say Mass again within two weeks. However, despite his efforts, he could not arouse the priest's confidence in his heavenly Mother. He left deploring the fact that many priests, even good priests, as a result of continued association with people of the world, gradually lose their spirit of faith and prayer, so that it becomes harder to revive this spirit in them than in ordinary lay people.

[1] *See* Vol. I, p. 339. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. II, p. 414; Vol. III, pp. 178f; Vol. IV, p. 99. [Editor]

Thus reads Father Rua's chronicle. On his way back, Don Bosco made a brief stop in Turin [before retruning to Trofarello for the second retreat]. A month before, in mid-August, Steven Bourlot, the young cleric who diligently recorded Don Bosco's New Year's predictions,[3] had asked him: "What about the third person in your dream who was supposed to die?"

"He will make the Exercise for a Happy Death once more," Don Bosco had replied. "I hope to save him, though at present he is not yet ready for this great step."

As a matter of fact, the Exercise for a Happy Death was held the first week of September. On the ninth, John Baptist Bonenti, 18, a blacksmith apprentice of Carpignano Novarese, became seriously ill and had to be taken to Sts. Maurice and Lazarus Hospital at Porta Palazzo, not far from the Oratory. He was obviously the third youth who, in Don Bosco's dream, was supposed to die in a place nearby.[4]

Many years later, Father Steven Bourlot told us that he had forgotten the youth's name but that it began with a "B" and that the boy had been a blacksmith's apprentice. One of Bourlot's classmates, however—Archbishop Pasquale Morganti of Ravenna—remembered the youth's name, his birthplace, his trade, and also his appearance, which was somewhat stout and flabby, as though he were ill with dropsy. His physical build must have affected his personality, since he was apathetic and indifferent even in matters of the soul. Shortly after he had been hospitalized, the doctors realized that his illness was incurable. He received the sacraments routinely without realizing his hopeless condition.

From time to time in the months past Don Bosco had given him spiritual advice, but now, informed of the youth's imminent death, he heeded the order given to him in his dream.[5] Hastening to his beside, he comforted him, aroused sorrow for his sins, and heard his confession. The following morning, he visited him again and found him weeping.

"Why are you crying?" he asked.

"Had I died last night after my confession and the papal

[3] *See* pp. 6-11. [Editor]
[4] *See* p. 8. [Editor]
[5] *Ibid.* [Editor]

blessing, I would have been certain of going to heaven," the youth replied. "Now, instead, I may still fall into sin...." Then he broke into sobs.

Don Bosco comforted him, whispered short invocations to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and, realizing that death was near, once more absolved him. The hapless youth, an orphan, died on September 22 at 1:30 in the morning. Only Don Bosco had come to see him. Every detail of the dream had been fulfilled to the letter.

Meanwhile, on September 21 the second spiritual retreat had begun at Trofarello. Don Bosco gave the instructions, but [a summary of] only two have reached us. The first one deals with the mortification of the senses; the second was the closing sermon of the retreat. We quote both here:

I

We have a great enemy who never leaves us alone night or day—our own body. We must resist it, lest it rebel; we must mortify it to keep it under subjection. Of this Our Lord Jesus Christ gave us a most shining example throughout His entire life. For over twenty years He earned His bread by the sweat of His brow. He began His mission by a fast of forty days and forty nights; He endured fatigue on endless walking tours; He suffered thirst and hunger, spent long nights in prayer, and endured a grueling passion.

By self-denial and prayer He taught us how to war against the body. One who does not mortify it can't even expect to be able to pray properly. All the blessed in heaven and all good priests have followed or are following Christ's example. They are our models....

The body is the oppressor of the soul. "The corruptible body burdens the soul and the earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns." [Wis. 9, 15] The body weighs on the mind and keeps it constantly laden with a host of earthly thoughts and cares. Adam's soul, St. Bernard remarked, was free of this burden as long as his body remained incorruptible. God had given him such freedom from passion that, midway in creation, he could freely elevate himself to the highest things without difficulty, or lower himself to the level of the worst without passion or urge; likewise, he could comprehend the loftiest things with an instinctive intelligence and purity of mind and lord it over the lowest as their master.

However, Adam's sin disrupted this astonishing physical and spiritual harmony and effected that conflict to which St. Paul refers in his epistle

to the Romans: "My inner self agrees with the law of God, but I see in my body's members another law at war with the law of my mind; this makes me the prisoner of the law of sin in my members. What a wretched man I am. Who can free me from this body under the power of death?" [Rom. 7, 22-24]

St. Augustine thus explains this spirit of rebellion: The disobedient man finds punishment within himself in the rebellion of his own members. The soul, however, must prevail and the body must be enslaved. Left free to give itself to intemperance and vice, the body turns man into a mere animal. In that state man can no longer understand or appreciate the things of God, but will care only for his base appetites; [as the Psalmist says] "Man in his prosperity forfeits intelligence: he is one with the cattle doomed to slaughter." [Ps. 49, 20] Obviously such a state would be most unbecoming to a priest who is to be an example to others. "The beloved grew fat, and kicked; he grew fat, and thick and gross; he forsook God who made him, and departed from God his Savior." [Deut. 32, 15]

We must then subdue this animal [as Holy Scripture says]: "Fodder and whip and loads for a donkey ... food, discipline, and work for a slave ... and for a wicked slave punishments in the stocks." [Sir. 33, 25, 27]

Therefore, this is the way to deal with the body: mortification. Thus dealt St. Paul who wrote: "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection." [1 Cor. 9, 27] Notwithstanding his hard apostolic work, he toiled to earn his own keep and that of his companions.

Jesus Christ declared: "Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish." [Luke 13, 5] To show us how to tame this enemy, Our Lord kept repeating: "Whoever wishes to be My follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in My steps." [Luke 9, 23] Until when? Until death. He who does not want to suffer with Christ cannot be glorified with Him. [Cf. Rom. 8, 17] For indeed Jesus also said: "Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. What profit does he show who gains the whole world and destroys himself in the process?" [Luke 9, 24-25] These words show the extent to which we must war against our own body rather than lose the grace of God.

At the very beginning of their mission, the Apostles, after being flogged at the synagogue's order, "left the Sanhedrin full of joy that they had been judged worthy of ill-treatment for Jesus' sake." [Acts 5, 41] Following their example down to our present times, countless martyrs have undergone the cruelest, most atrocious tortures; likewise, numberless lay people and religious have tamed and still tame their

passions by fasting, vigils, discipline, and other penances which so frighten the worldly-minded and the spiritually weak. Though we are certainly not bound to sacrifice our bodies in this manner (if necessary, God would assist us with His grace), we must nevertheless refuse to pamper our senses; we must curb them and forestall their snares. In this struggle we are to draw courage from this sublime warning: *Memorare novissima tua et in aeternum non peccabis* [Remember your end and you will never sin—[Sir. 7, 36].

Those attached to this earth and its comforts and pleasures must keep in mind what awaits their bodies. This body of ours, so pampered, will soon feed most loathsome worms. Let us make the Exercise for a Happy Death with great faith....

Away with vanities, ambitions, and self-indulgence. Let us not seek privileges as regards room, clothes, and books, but accept the consequence and discomforts of poverty to which we have pledged or will pledge ourselves by vow. Let it be our ambition to save souls through sacrifice.

Let us mortify our senses. Let us restrain our eyes in looking and reading, let us be satisfied with the food served to us, let us not keep drinks in our rooms, let us have nothing special. Let us forbear and persuade others to do likewise; let us bear with one another, let us forgive sincerely, let us be punctual in our duties. Let teachers and assistants be reserved with their pupils, never laying hands upon them, bringing them into their rooms, or forming special friendships with them.

Observe the Friday fast; endure heat, cold, illness, and deprivations. Travel only when necessary.

Through these little mortifications we shall be more fervent in prayer and victorious over temptation. We shall become more virtuous, and our congregation will become an earthly prardise.

II

During the past few days I would like to have spoken of our practices of piety, but time has run out. Though we dealt at length on our vows and the religious life, I shall still say something about meditation, spiritual reading, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and the examination of conscience.

Meditation is mental prayer. How does one go about meditation? First, let him place himself in God's presence and choose the subject he wants to consider. Next, let him concentrate on that subject and apply it to himself as it fits him. Finally, let him conclude by resolving to over-

come certain faults and practice certain virtues. Throughout the day let him follow up his meditation by practicing his resolve. We must also try to arouse ourselves to sentiments of love, gratitude, and humility toward God; we should ask Him for the graces we need and in true sorrow and tears beg His pardon for our sins. Let us always remember that God is our Father and we are His sons.... I therefore recommend mental prayer.

If you cannot meditate this way because of travel or some other urgent duty, do at least what businessmen do. No matter where they are, their thoughts are always on business: buying, reselling at a profit, avoiding losses or making up for them, rejoicing in their profits or planning to increase them. Our examination of conscience resembles that. Before retiring, let us check if we have practiced our resolutions on some specific fault; let us ascertain our gain or loss in a sort of spiritual auditing. If we discover a failure in our resolution, let us renew it the next day, until we have succeeded in acquiring the virtue we are striving for or shall have destroyed or avoided the fault we wished to correct.

I also suggest visits to the Blessed Sacrament. "Our most sweet Lord Jesus Christ is there in person," the Curé of Ars used to exclaim. If time is limited, let us at least kneel before the tabernacle and say a *Pater, Ave,* and *Gloria.* This alone will steel us against temptation. I assure you that the man of faith who visits the Blessed Sacrament and makes a daily meditation with sincerity of heart will not fall into sin. I urge spiritual reading, especially to those who need a book to meditate. Let us read a passage and reflect on it to discover what needs correcting in our lives. This will help us also to love the Lord increasingly and encourage us to save our soul.

If possible, make your spiritual reading and your visit to the Blessed Sacrament with the community; otherwise do so in private. The same goes for meditation.

Remember that our rule binds us to say the rosary daily. How grateful we should be to the Blessed Virgin who has so many graces in store for us!

Go to confession every week, even if you have nothing serious to confess. It is a pleasing act of humility to God because it reawakens our remorse for sins already forgiven; it makes us realize how imperfect the small faults of every day make us.

Let us each strive to derive spiritual benefit from what we see, hear, do, and read, even in pagan authors. For example, if you are teaching the works of a pagan author and come upon an edifying maxim, value it, call it to your students' attention, and draw a useful moral from it for

yourself and others. Consider the bee. It sometimes travels several miles to find honey and knows how to separate it from wax and deposit within the tiny flower a poisonous fluid which could be fatal to itself and its companions. We should do likewise. Let us choose what is good and rid ourselves of what is faulty and sinful. Thus we may find good in everything and everybody.

I would also have liked to emphasize that ours is an active life which obliges us to work as much as we can. Now let me just mention a few other things. First, let us be charitable to one another, bearing with faults patiently and being mutually indulgent. Let us encourage each other to do good, to observe our rule, and to love and respect each other like brothers. Let us pray that we may all form one heart and one soul to love and serve God.... I particularly urge directors to meet as often as possible with their confreres to discuss personal matters and concerns of the boys.

Let us also remember that in the Gospel Our Lord *coepit facere et docere;* before teaching He first practiced the things He taught. After you have observed all the rules of the house yourselves, see to it that the boys observe them too. Be very kind in admonishing them, but never permit yourselves any gesture or word that might arouse an evil thought. Look after the downhearted and the sick; cheer them and encourage them to be patient. We must not do this only with those whom we like because they are good or talented, but also with those who are not that good or clever, and even with those who are downright bad. Did not Our Lord say that the healthy have no need of doctors?

Never let any punishment look like revenge. Never throw back in someone's face his past offenses, especially if he has been forgiven. Rather, do your best to show greater affection than before, and forget the past. Study the boys' characters carefully, advise them, and edify them by word and example. Be more understanding with boys who are oversensitive and easily hurt, and pray for them.... Do your utmost to teach them respect for their superiors.

One last thought: this spiritual retreat may well be the last for one of us. Let each of us put his conscience in order and be ready for death at any moment.

The spiritual retreat ended on September 26 with the renewal of vows and the singing of the *Te Deum.* The day before, Joseph Bertello and Joseph Rossi made their perpetual vows. Three months later, on Christmas Day, three other applicants (two clerics and a coadjutor brother) made their triennial vows at

Lanzo. The new members had joined the congregation during the first spiritual retreat.

During the second spiritual retreat Don Bosco received a welcome letter[6] from Pius IX, to whom he had sent an account of the solemn festivities attending the consecration of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, along with several commemorative medals. The Pope had been particularly gratified by Don Bosco's report, for he had eagerly awaited news of those memorable week-long festivities. He admired Don Bosco and his enterprises. Whenever he received visitors from Turin, he would exclaim: "Turin is lucky to have Don Bosco!" He called the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales "the house of miracles." Thus wrote Father John Bonetti. In turn, Canon John Baptist Anfossi testified: "Thanks to a letter of recommendation from Don Bosco, when I went to Rome I managed to obtain a private audience with Pius IX. During the next twenty-two minutes, the Holy Father kept expressing his high esteem of Don Bosco's charitable undertakings and intense love for the Holy See."

In the fall, Don Bosco took the first steps to obtain certification of the Salesian school at Lanzo, but difficulties arose and the matter was temporarily shelved. He also tried to prod the city authorities of Turin into allowing him to complete a wall which would enclose the festive oratory to the west of the new church. At this time too the October issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* entitled *Novena of Prayers for the Holy Souls in Purgatory,* was mailed to subscribers. Written by a masterly pen, the little booklet dealt with dogma and the pains of purgatory and exhorted the faithful to help their beloved departed ones.[7]

[6] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

[7] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 29

Steps Toward Approval of the Salesian Society (Continued)

FROM June to September of 1868 matters far more important than those we have mentioned taxed Don Bosco's strength. [In June] he had again appealed to Pius IX for approval of the constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales or, at least, for permission to issue dismissorial letters to his ordinands and dispense his subjects from triennial vows. He had also requested that his ordinands be promoted to sacred orders *titulo mensae communis* [under the title of common board]. To this end he had sent a printed *Notitia Brevis Societatis Sancti Francisci Salesii et Nonnulla Decreta ad Eamdem Spectantia* [Brief History of the Society of St. Francis de Sales with Pertinent Decrees] [1] to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Acting upon it, Monsignor [Stanislaus] Svegliati, its secretary, wrote to Monsignor Cajetan Tortone, the Holy See's unofficial representative to the government in Turin, for information concerning the intellectual and priestly formation of Don Bosco's clerics at the Oratory.[2] Following is Monsignor Tortone's reply:

Turin, August 6, 1868

Most Reverend Monsignor:

In addition to my own extensive knowledge of the institute founded by Father John Bosco, I have sought more precise information about it so as to give you adequate material for a fair evaluation of matters as they stand. I am only sorry that the need for cautious procedure, lest the real aim of my search be known, somewhat delayed my answer to your letter

[1] This was an updated version of the memorandum he had presented to Pius IX in 1858. *See* Vol. V, pp. 635ff. [Editor]

[2] We are omitting the secretary's letter. Its contents are clear from Monsignor Tortone's reply. [Editor]

of July 28, No. 12417-9. Now I hasten to report conscientiously on the subject.

The institute founded and directed by Father John Bosco is made up of clerics and boys; the latter either attend school or learn some craft or trade on the premises. Originally, only abandoned or thoroughly destitute boys were admitted—and gratis—but now only those boys are accepted whose parents or benefactors agree to a monthly fee, even if they come from very poor families. To be honest, one must admit that Don Bosco has done and is still doing a vast amount of good for these poor boys by givng them a Christian education and training them in a craft or trade. This primary intent of Don Bosco's institution has had admirable and consoling success, but seemingly the same cannot be said of the intellectual and ecclesiastical formation of the young clerics who belong to his institute. It seems that Don Bosco had originally planned to form a clergy of his own distinct from that of the diocese. In fact, I have learned that from the beginning he tried to obtain—and did indeed later obtain—permission for his clerics to take philosophy and theology courses at the Oratory. This went on somewhat shakily for a few years. Then, since these clerics either did not report for examinations [at the seminary], or, if they did, fared poorly, the Turin chancery prescribed that they had to study philosophy and theology at the seminary. A few clerics—better off financially—were admitted to the Chieri seminary, but were found to be so poor in studies that the rector himself had to concede that they did not understand Latin. They have, however, improved considerably since then, though not all report for examinations, realizing that they are not yet up to par.

Such mediocre intellectual standing is not surprising if we bear in mind that Don Bosco entrusts these same clerics with teaching and supervising responsibilities that take up the time they should put into studies.

Though this institute poses several obstacles to the intellectual formation of its members, even greater are the obstacles facing those whose task it is to instill into these clerics that ecclesiastical spirit and good breeding which are proper to priests. I would think that a steady contact with pupils in an overly informal and familiar way is not conducive to a good ecclesiastical formation.

I happened to visit this institute several times during recreation time, and I must confess that I was very painfully shocked to see young clerics playing with apprentice tailors, carpenters and cobblers, and even exchanging playful slaps with little clerical decorum. Our good Don Bosco is satisfied with his clerics' devout demeanor in church and has

little interest in forming them to a genuine ecclesiastical spirit and to a consciousness of the dignity of the life they wish to enter. Regretfully, many of them who appear humble and meek are, I have learned, proud, stubborn and vain, since they lack wise guidance. I repeat that Don Bosco has done and still does much good, but he would have done better to stick to the primary purpose of his institute and never have become involved in starting a makeshift seminary for which he has not even a set of rules. As it stands now, this institute is totally unsuitable for clerics. The Church may expect no good from it unless these clerics are isolated from the pupils who are learning crafts and trades and are entrusted to a wise spiritual director who would discern whether they have a genuine vocation and are endowed with the proper ecclesiastical spirit.

Since Your Reverence has also kindly informed me of Don Bosco's petition to the Holy Father for the important faculty of issuing dimissorials to his ordinands, I trust that you will forgive me if, in my concern for the true welfare of the Church, I make free to offer my own opinion in this matter. If Don Bosco should be granted such a request, the clergy of this archdiocese, especially the cathedral chapter, would be most unfavorably affected. A member of the chapter, a very devout and zealous canon whom our archbishop has wisely appointed prefect and director of the clergy of this city, has several times sadly remarked to me some deficiencies of Don Bosco's clerics and the grievous damage that would follow if they were to be taken completely from the ordinary's jurisdiction.

From what I was privileged to set forth above, you may form an idea of the deficiencies of these clerics in both intellectual and priestly formation. How much more dismal would the prospects be if Don Bosco should succeed in obtaining the faculty to issue dimissorials and thus take these clerics from the supervision and jurisdiction of their ordinary! Inevitably, besides jeopardizing episcopal authority, it would lead to a division among the clergy, harm ecclesiastical discipline, and open the door to abuses.

As to this last point, I feel I must inform you that the archbishop of Turin, knowing the poor intellectual and ecclesiastical formation of this institute's clerics, subjected them to the rules which bind all diocesan clerics in matters of examinations and holy orders; with the approval of all right-thinking people, he also wisely ordered them to spend one year in the diocesan seminary. Such measures did not please Don Bosco, and to this very day he keeps complaining that the archbishop is not being fair to his institute, that his clerics are the target of the animosity of seminary professors and examiners, and that if things continue this way, he will be forced to shut his institute, all because of the archbishop. Don

Bosco made these very same complaints to me personally a few months ago, only to learn that I do not share his views.

I take the further liberty to point out one more thing—truly the last, since I do not care to abuse your kindness. I mention it because it may shed more light on the situation. On his return from his last visit to Rome—which took place, I think, in the spring of 1867—Don Bosco (more out of simplicity than vanity, I'd rather believe) went about telling several distinguished friends of his, as well as his priests and clerics, that he had received a very hearty welcome in the Eternal City, had gained high-placed and valuable patronage, and had been sought after and visited by prelates and cardinals, some of whom had even knelt before him for his blessing. This last detail was related to me elatedly by one of his own priests, to which remark I merely commented that this proved the piety and humility of the cardinals and Roman prelates.

Since Don Bosco has a wide circle of acquaintances among noble Turinese families who generously support his institute, such statements and rumors quickly made the city rounds. However, if they created the impression in some that Don Bosco is a very important man, they found but little credence in others. If Don Bosco should obtain the faculties he requests, his success would only strengthen the poorly-founded belief of his patrons and pupils: namely that, because of the high esteem he commands in Rome, he can obtain whatever he wants. Under the present circumstances, many might see this as a victory over the archbishop.

I deeply regret that I have to bring up matters and circumstances not favorable to Don Bosco. I have great esteem and affection for him, but, with God's help, I shall never sacrifice truth, justice, and my sacred duty to the Holy See, which I have been privileged to serve for over twenty years, to the esteem and affection I feel for this most worthy priest or for anyone else.

While I express my sincerest thanks to Your Reverence for the honorable mission you have entrusted to me, I would feel repaid indeed if my humble report could help you in some measure with your task. Humbly offering my services, I gladly take this occasion to declare myself,

Your humble and obedient servant,
Father Cajetan Tortone

"Poor Don Bosco! He would have gotten nowhere if God had not been with him!" Thus wrote Father Bonetti in the margin of this document when it came into his hands. From beginning to

end the above report is a tissue of untruths and misjudgments. We unhesitatingly concede Monsignor Tortone's good faith, but we must state that Don Bosco was being unfairly judged by several people. Those who spoke thus of him understood not an iota of his educational method, his apostolic mission, and his Society, which had already received a decree of praise from the Holy See. Blinded by prejudice, they accepted as incontestable truth every accusation made by his enemies. Though these volumes eloquently and exhaustively refute these accusations, we cannot refrain from adding a few considerations of our own.

From the Oratory's beginning, Don Bosco's clerics always attended seminary classes and for the most part passed examinations very successfully. At the same time, at the cost of personal sacrifice, toil, and privations, they helped send hundreds of students to seminaries. Thanks to their efforts, many dioceses which were short of priests were able to swell their ranks considerably. In view of this, can we believe that these clerics had no ecclesiastic spirit?

The Oratory had come into being through a simple catechism lesson. Later, other things were added: games, evening and Sunday schools, a hospice for homeless boys, a school of arts and trades and one for secondary studies. Under divine inspiration, this work gradually expanded. In addition to poor boys, youngsters of lower middle class families flocked to the Oratory because their parents wished them to be under Don Bosco's guidance. There was no reason why he should refuse them or not ask for a modest monthly fee which would suit their means, while at the same time a large number of needy boys were being cared for gratis.

Concerning the more pernicious personal criticism of Don Bosco, we can and must state explicitly that never did we hear him boast of receptions given for him in Rome or elsewhere. Only on rare occasions did he mention such things privately to his sons, crediting the Salesian Society of which he was the superior the honor paid to his person, and he did this to hearten his sons who were sorely opposed in so many ways and to give humble thanks to Our Lady. Furthermore, in the specific instance quoted, was not Father Francesia with him? And who was to stop Father Francesia from telling of the honor paid to his dearly beloved father?

It is likewise naive to regard as indecorous the familiarity between the clerics and the boys, whether artisans or students. What raised the eyebrows of superficial observers delighted Don Bosco, for he could then know that all moral danger was averted and he could personally evaluate the clerics' abilities and character. One day, for instance, he happened to step into the playground while the cleric Louis Lasagna was playing ball with his pupils. After a moment's observation, he remarked to Father Garino who was beside him! "Look at Louis. He will make a good missionary!" Lasagna did indeed become a missionary and later a bishop.

Don Bosco soon learned of Monsignor Tortone's report and manifested his keen displeasure to the members of the chapter because of the sinister impression it could make on the cardinals. Still he held no grudge against Monsignor Tortone. Father Berto testified: "One day the monsignor called on Don Bosco and was received as warmly and respectfully as if he were one of Don Bosco's best friends."

Such visits took place several times. Indeed, Don Bosco even had the opportunity of doing the monsignor a good turn, and he did so gladly. In 1869 Monsignor Tortone was bedridden with arthritis. Overcoming his reluctance, he sent his brother to the Oratory to ask Don Bosco to see him and give him his blessing. The monsignor's brother, a true benefactor of the Oratory and a dear friend of Don Bosco, frequently visited him and attended all the Oratory celebrations because he admired Don Bosco's methods and the candor of his boys. On receiving his request, Don Bosco promptly obliged, and his blessing freed the monsignor of his pains. From then on, the latter became a good friend of the Oratory, as Father Paul Albera testified.

Notwithstanding this unfavorable report, Don Bosco still hoped to have his Society approved by Rome, though he doubted he would obtain the faculty of issuing dimissorials. He nevertheless kept insisting on it, foreseeing perhaps the trouble he would have for many years to come. Likewise, he never stopped seeking the advice of influential friends [such as Father Joseph Oreglia, S.J. and Constantine Cardinal Patrizi].[3]

[3] We are omitting replies from both to Don Bosco about his request for dimissorials. [Editor]

Meanwhile Monsignor Svegliati had submitted his report[4] to the Pope, suggesting that the approval of the Salesian Society be postponed. In turn the Pope directed that the matter be thoroughly discussed in a formal session of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. When it convened under the chairmanship of Angelo Cardinal Quaglia, the consultor—Father [Angelo] Savini, a Carmelite—basing himself upon the regulations of the Sacred Congregation, declared that the constitutions submitted [by Don Bosco] were inadequate and that some articles ran contrary to canon law. He concluded by stating his opinion that approval should be denied.

Accepting the consultor's statement, the Sacred Congregation voted in the negative, and on October 2, 1868 Monsignor Svegliati so informed Don Bosco.[5]

The difficulties encountered by Don Bosco in obtaining the Holy See's approval of his Society stemmed from its constitutions. They somehow seemed unprecedented because they met the needs of the times, which were then, as we have already remarked, very difficult. They also stemmed from the opposition offered by one person who wished the Oratory to remain a diocesan institution and nothing more, and who therefore felt annoyed by any step Don Bosco had to take as the founder of a new religious society. They stemmed, too, from an erroneous interpretation given the first article of the constitution, stating that the "education of seminarians" was also a purpose of the Salesian Society. Its meaning was that the pupils of our schools were to be trained chiefly for the priesthood. Only secondarily did the rules refer to diocesan seminaries.

Don Bosco, however, was not dismayed by this refusal. Forced to make modifications which conflicted with his own ideas on the purpose of his institute, without fear, though always ready to obey, he calmly kept explaining and intensifying his efforts in order to achieve his end. He knew that Pius IX was very favorably disposed toward him, and that he had even personally surmounted certain doubts of the prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. But the Pope's prudent policy was to let

[4] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[5] We are omitting this official notification. [Editor]

ecclesiastical matters take their routine course and to use his supreme authority only in exceptional instances, In moments of severest trial, as we shall see later, it was always Pius IX's advice that helped Don Bosco to overcome the most serious obstacles.

CHAPTER 30

Priestly Chastity

WHILE he was getting ready to go to Becchi with some boys for the feast of the Holy Rosary, Don Bosco received official notice of a three-hundred lire government grant to the Oratory. At this time of year donations were usually at their lowest, since all his wealthy benefactors were away on vacation.[1] He had no sooner read this notification than a kindly old woman called on him, cheerfully saying: "Look, Don Bosco! I am alive, thanks to Mary, Help of Christians. I was in my room when a sudden fire broke out, blocking all exits. As the flames finally surrounded me and my clothes caught fire, I immediately screamed: 'Mary, Help of Christians, do not let me die such a horrible death!' At my words the flames died out around me, and even the burns on my hands and body disappeared. People helped me out of the building, but as long as I was there the flames did not advance."

So saying, she handed Bon Bosco all her life savings—three thousand lire. This incident was described by Chevalier Oreglia in a letter to Mother Galeffi in Rome.[2]

Don Bosco left for Becchi on Saturday, October 3. The next day, church services were sparsely attended because of the inclement weather. While there, Don Bosco wrote to Chevalier Oreglia at Turin, to Father Lemoyne at Lanzo, and to Father Provera at Mirabello, giving instructions and advice.[3] Father Lemoyne's letter had this postscript:

[1] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

[2] We are omitting a short note of Don Bosco to a countess promising prayers for her and her family. [Editor]

[3] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

Most Important Advice to Directors

1. Be alert to everything.
2. Make the rounds [of the house].
3. Talk with everybody.
4. Confide in your co-workers.

Consult often with Father Bodrato. With all my strength I recommend subscriptions to *Letture Cattoliche.*

In his letter to Father Provera Don Bosco gave this instruction: "Tell M... I will accept him only if he promises not to give scandal by word or deed to his companions. Tell him also that at the slightest immodesty, I shall have to dismiss him instantly."

Don Bosco returned to Turin on Friday, October 9. At the "Good Night" the following Sunday, he urged all the boys to celebrate devoutly all of Our Lady's feasts during that month and exhorted them to seek Her help in avoiding sin, especially sins against purity. That "Good Night" served, so to speak, as an introduction to the many admonitions he would give during the year. In his sermons we often heard St. Paul's admonition to the Corinthians: "Evil companionships corrupt good morals." [1 Cor. 15, 33] In one "Good Night" he commented on the verse: "Hear not a wicked tongue and set barred doors over your mouth." [Sir. 28, 24] When he spoke of the need of avoiding bad companions, he made his own St. Paul's words: "I write to you not to associate with one who is called a brother, if he is immoral ... or evil-tongued; with such a one do not even take food." [1 Cor. 5, 11]

With the utmost prudence and tact he kept trying to instill love of purity in his boys, often appealing to good manners, politeness, courtesy, and mutual respect in order to discourage excessive familiarity. According to Father Francis Dalmazzo, he was a model of modesty. "Ever since I first met Don Bosco," he declared, "I was impressed by his modesty and his friendliness in talking with his boys. He never allowed himself even those familiarities to which no one would take exception. He usually kept his eyes lowered when talking, although the pupils were aware from an occasional flashing glance that his was a very sharp, discerning eye."

His speech, too, as we have often stated, was most guarded. If he overheard freely uttered remarks about the vice of impurity, he would say: "This is something which St. Paul did not want

Christians even to mention," and then he would add: "Why not extol purity instead of defiling your lips by such words?" If anyone chanced to mention in his presence a scandal reported in the press, he would first frown and then silence the speaker, plainly showing that he would not tolerate such talk.

Inwardly he constantly prayed to be safeguarded from sin. One day Father Merlone accompanied him to the Rifugio[4] and heard him whisper at the entrance: *Fac Domine ut servem cor et corpus meum immaculatum Tibi ut non confundar* [O Lord, help me to keep my heart and body unsullied so that I may not be confounded]. After uttering this prayer, Don Bosco turned to him. "My friend," he said, "a priest faithful to his vocation is an angel. Unfaithful, he becomes an object of pity and contempt."

All regarded Don Bosco as an angel. Father Francis Dalmazzo testified that one day in 1861 he accompanied him to a girls' orphanage in Turin. He was astonished to see the nuns and more than a hundred girls fall reverently to their knees as if in the presence of a saint. Upon leaving the orphanage, Father Dalmazzo asked Don Bosco the reason for such veneration. "It's because they highly regard priestly chastity," he answered. "When a priest lives a pure and chaste life," he went on, "he becomes the master of all hearts and arouses the veneration of the faithful."

Don Bosco showed extreme reserve in dealing with the countless women who called on him from 1865 to the end of his life seeking priestly aid or recommending boys. He never stared at them or shook hands with them, and only on occasion did he allow them to kiss his hand. In his room he always sat at a distance from them and tried to make the interview as brief as possible. If the conversation at times dragged on, as an excuse he would quote St. Francis de Sales: "Is it not a great charity to let them talk? They need it badly, poor souls."

All admired his reserve. Though on holy days women would crowd about him in the sacristy or in the playground to seek his blessing, their deep respect and veneration was very noticeable. Not the slightest criticism of his conduct was ever heard.

Bishop Galletti of Alba had such a high opinion of him that

[4] An institution for wayward girls where Don Bosco had been a chaplain. *See* Vol. II, pp. 184f. [Editor]

once, when he came to see Don Bosco and was ushered into his room while he was still out, he exclaimed: "Such an air of sanctity we breathe here!" There Don Bosco prayed, spent nights of vigil, worked, and mortified himself even in the most insignificant things. It was the room of an untainted soul.

Canon Berrone, an Oratory pupil in 1868, testified: "One could detect his chastity in his glance, demeanor, words, and gestures. One had but to look at him to perceive the fragrance of his purity. I am fully convinced that he preserved his baptismal innocence to death. I joyfully recall that, thanks to his holy teaching and example, the virtue of purity flourished at the Oratory."[5]

Father Rua's chronicle informs us that at this time [October 1868] Don Bosco decided to set up a bakery of his own at the Oratory. The ovens, installed in the basement of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, were blessed on November 19, the vigil of the feast of Sts. Solutor, Adventor, and Octavius.[6] Twelve to fourteen hundred pounds of bread were baked daily.[7]

Meanwhile the Oratory pupils had returned from their vacation, warmly welcomed by those who had remained at the Oratory and by some one hundred newcomers. Natually their first talk was of Don Bosco. Those who had just returned were sure that no one had died at the Oratory since June. Apparently they were so taken up by the consecration festivities, final exams, and summer vacation that they had either completely forgotten or only faintly recalled Don Bosco's *strenna* for 1868.[8] We can imagine their astonishment to learn of Bonenti's death.[9] Immediately they recalled Don Bosco's words, verified the circumstances, and found that they matched those indicated in the dream concerning the death of the third youth—his unreadiness to face God's judgment with confidence, Don Bosco's solicitude to prepare him, no

[5] We are omitting a report about the day school attached to the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory in Turin, other scholastic matters, and the start of an additional building at the Oratory. [Editor]

[6] The principal patron saints of Piedmont to whom Don Bosco was greatly devoted. These soldiers of the Theban Legion were martyred in Turin under Emperor Maximian. *See* Vol. II, pp. 233f, 260, 268; Vol. IV, p. 443; Vol. V, p. 540; Vol. VI, p. 124. [Editor]

[7] This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting two short notes of Don Bosco to a priest in Lucca. [Editor]

[8] *See* pp. 6-11. [Editor]

[9] *See* p. 163. [Editor]

visits from relatives, and lastly the news of his death at a place not very far from the Oratory.

This event aroused their curiosity all the more about Don Bosco's other prediction that six more deaths were due to occur that year.[10] Pettiva, Rossi, Croci, and Bongiovanni had already passed away.[11] A fifth death is recorded in the Oratory's obituary: "Venerando Catello of Turin, apprentice carpenter, died in the latter half of October."

On Monday, October 18, Don Bosco spoke as follows to his pupils:

> I am glad to see you again. [Tonight] I will just quote St. Paul: *Qui stat, videat ne cadat.* Let him who is in the state of grace be glad but careful too not to fall. If anyone has fallen, let him arise immediately and regain God's grace through confession. Try to receive Holy Communion tomorrow and pray for a very important favor which shall be almost entirely to our advantage. I too shall pray during Holy Mass.

Don Bosco's concern for the boys' spiritual welfare was matched by his solicitude for their physical well-being. As winter drew near, he applied to the government for army clothing and blankets, and his request was granted.

Just as he provided for the Oratory boys, so did his heart swell with compassion at the sight of public misfortune. In the last days of September and in early October, heavy rains had caused severe floods in various parts of northern Italy, with untold damage to property and lives. Responding to appeals, Don Bosco generously offered free board and tuition at the Oratory to two boys of needy families.[12]

[10] *See* p. 13. [Editor]
[11] *See* pp. 50f, 60f, 138f. [Editor]
[12] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 31

Fatherly Talks

DON Bosco formally opened the Oratory's school year of 1868-69 by presiding with the other superiors at the reading of the house rules in the presence of the entire community. He was cheerful and confident and saw a good omen in the repeated reports of very extraordinary favors granted by Mary, Help of Christians to many of her devotees.

As regards the Oratory's theology students, their lectures were scheduled to start after the feast of All Saints under the tutorship of Canon [Francis] Marengo, a seminary professor, Father John Cagliero, and Father Michael Rua who taught respectively dogma, moral theology, and Holy Scripture. The arrangement had been suggested by the archbishop who had excused the Oratory clerics from attending the seminary. For a few more years, however, they continued taking examinations there. Later on, Don Bosco invited diocesan examiners to the Oratory and directed that his theology students follow substantially the seminary curriculum and use the same textbooks. Canon Marengo supervised the theology and philosophy courses and was succeeded at his death by Father [Francis] Molinari, another seminary professor. These two revered friends of Don Bosco volunteered their services with self-sacrifice, teaching the Oratory clerics when the latter were free from their duties with the boys.

As customary at the beginning of each shool year, the Oratory pupils complied with a very important prescription designed to prevent the deliberate or accidental entry of bad books or provide for their instant removal. We have already stated [1] that, ever since he started accepting resident students at the Oratory, Don

[1] *See* Vol. V, p. 231. [Editor]

Bosco had prescribed that at the beginning of each school year they should hand in a list of all books in their possession and that they should likewise submit for approval any other book they might later get. Books judged harmful were destroyed: books unsuitable to the pupil's immaturity were temporarily stored away and later returned to the owners. Novels were predominant in the latter category, for Don Bosco was strict in forbidding even so-called good ones. He often stated that such readings aroused the boys' passions and distracted them from their studies.

He never advised boys to read *I Promessi Sposi* [The Betrothed], for he maintained that this novel was unsuitable for them.[2] "Believe me," he repeatedly affirmed, "I know that this novel has caused the loss of many vocations." He tolerated it only when it became required school reading by order of the Minister of Public Education.

As the new school year progressed, Don Bosco continued to give wholesome advice to his boys whenever he could. The Oratory chronicles preserve a few of his "Good Nights." On October 30, after night prayers, he narrated a dream recorded by Father Joachim Berto:

I wanted all of you here tonight—students and artisans—because I have an important message for you. Picture to yourselves all the boys at play during a recreation period. As dusk lowers, games and shouts subside and the boys form groups or stroll about while waiting for the bell to summon them to study. Meanwhile it grows darker and it becomes hard to distinguish one boy from another except at close range. Suddenly two pallbearers, carrying a coffin on their shoulders, come into the playground, briskly walk to its center facing the prefect's office, and lay the coffin down on the ground. Then all of you form a circle around them and, gripped with fear, dare not to say a word. The pallbearers take the lid off the coffin.

At that moment the moon comes out and slowly moves in a circle around the dome of the new church. Around it goes once, twice, and a third time, but the last round is not completed. The moon remains poised over the church, threatening to fall upon it.

Meanwhile, in the moon's light, one of the pallbearers twice walks around the boys, closely searching each face until he spots one boy

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 328f. [Editor]

having the word *Morieris* [You shall die] on his forehead.

"It is your turn," he says, grabbing him and trying to force him into the coffin.

"I am still young," the boy screams. "I need more time to get ready and do good deeds."

"That's your problem," the pallbearer replies.

"But at least let me see my parents once more."

"That's not within my power to grant. Do you see that moon? It has just passed the halfway mark in its third round. As soon as it goes down, you shall have to come with me."

Soon after, the moon sinks below the horizon. The pallbearer seizes the boy and forces him into the coffin, screws the lid on, and, aided by his companion, bears him off.

See this story as an allegory, a parable, or a dream, as you wish. But I have told you stories of this sort before, and they have come true. I once described a dream in which I saw a boy's coffin set down here in the porticoes. That boy died. The pallbearers, contrary to instructions, carried the coffin through the playground, and then, with the excuse that they had forgotten something, laid it upon the spot where I had first seen it in my dream.[3]

I don't mind if inwardly you say, "It won't be me," and you keep having fun. But let each of you put his conscience in order, so that, after two and a half rotations of the moon—that is, two and a half months or so—the one who is to die may be ready. Remember that death comes like a thief in the night. Let us treasure this advice by celebrating the feast of All Saints properly. All may gain a plenary indulgence if they have gone to confession within the week. If you do gain it, you will be sinless before the Lord, just as you were after baptism. Since tomorrow is a fast day, practice some self-denial.

This prediction, believed by most of the pupils, was to be fulfilled toward the middle of January 1869. We add here a remark of Father Berto himself: "We were already so used to seeing such predictions fulfilled that we would have been astonished had one not come true. It would have been an exception to the rule. I can remember only one such case. A certain boy whose name began with 'C' fell seriously ill, but after receiving Holy Viaticum and Anointing of the Sick he recovered. He is now a priest." Commenting on this, after confirming that this boy was among those

[3] *See* Vol. VII, pp. 77, 83. [Editor]

marked for death, Don Bosco added: "The Lord chose to be merciful to him in response to prayers, perhaps also because he was not sufficiently well prepared." The chronicle continues:

November 1, 1868

After night prayers, Don Bosco spoke thus to the boys:

"Let all we do tomorrow be for our deceased parents and relatives. Each should also say a special prayer for the one among us who shall be the first to die. Visit the cemetery, look at the freshly dug graves, and choose the one in which you would like to buried.

"Since last year's feast of All Saints, five thousand people have been brought to that cemetery; perhaps the number will be even larger next year. Anyway, another five thousand or so will be brought there during the next twelve months. Their bodies will corrupt, but their souls will go into eternity."

November 2, 1868

Today the boys visited the cemetery. After night prayers, Don Bosco addressed them as follows:

"Just two words. We have started a new school year. Let us guard against two obstacles which keep us from our duties: laziness which prevents us from studying, and lukewarmness which makes us neglect our practices of piety.

"Let the good ones among you take heart and bravely ignore what bad companions may say. And let the latter beware of mocking those who devoutly carry out their religious duties. I know that last year, for example, the word 'Bongiovannist' was thrown at devout boys.[4] It grieves me to hear this, because it reminds me of Father Bongiovanni, who is well remembered as a good cleric and good priest.

"I urge teachers and assistants to be alert and to report to me anyone using that name or mocking any of his devout companions. We shall not tolerate the least disrespect to religion and piety. Some of these mockers came back to school with airs of importance—the fools! If lower fees need to be granted, who shall benefit—the bad ones or the good ones? Today I was given a list of these swaggerers. They are not as few as you may think. I also received a list of those asking for a reduction of fees and of those who are on probation.

"Let's do this: let us all begin to do what is right, thus pleasing God and superiors as well."

[4] *See* Vol. VIII, p. 168. [Editor]

November 3, 1868

Don Bosco urged the boys to apply themselves diligently to their studies. In particular, he urged them not to waste time through idleness or useless reading, to pay full attention to their teachers, and to ask questions whenever the matter is not clear. He also exhorted them not to balk at difficulties. He told them of St. Jerome's constancy in Scripture studies when undertaking to translate the Bible from Hebrew into Latin. To do so, he retired to a cave. After lengthy studies in Hebrew, he still found the task too difficult and decided to give up. But one fine day, on coming out of his cave, he noticed a hole in a rock. Curious as to its cause, he soon realized that it had been made by the steady dripping of water. He said to himself, "This may be a sign from God not to lose heart, but to continue my work. If dripping water can eventually bore through stone, then I too can succeed if I keep at my task." He did not give up, took lessons from a learned rabbi, and accomplished his monumental task to the inestimable benefit of Christendom. *Gutta cavat lapidem* [A drop can hollow a rock).

November 4, 1868

Don Bosco spoke of the concern, respect, and charity that each pupil should always have without exception toward his companions. One is to deal the same way with those who are genteel or coarse, handsome or ugly, well-dressed or poorly dressed, intelligent or obtuse, peevish and spiteful or amiable and courteous.

Why! Imagine a solemn procession, such as that on the feast of Corpus Christi. Confraternities, religious orders, and secular clergy march in orderly ranks between rows of devout spectators. As the plain silver-plated processional cross passes them, the faithful bow. They pay the same homage to many other processional crosses, be they artistic or ordinary, precious or plain, because they see in them only the image of their Savior.[5] We must do the same in dealing with our companions. Each bears God's image; each is a member of the body of Jesus Christ. We are all heaven's citizens, whence Our Savior Jesus Christ will one day come to transform our vile and abject body into an incorruptible one, free of all sickness and disease. With His divine power He shall transform our body into a glorious one, like His own. These are the reasons why we should show mutual respect and charity. From the cross we are told again and again: "This is My commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you." [John 15, 12]

[5] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

November 5, 1868

In speaking of the real presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, Don Bosco told the boys how Napoleon publicly testified to this Catholic dogma during his exile in St. Helena. On that solitary island he fondly discussed religion with some officers of his who had also been deported there by the British. One seemed reluctant to accept this dogma, leaning rather toward Calvin's heretical opinion that the Eucharist was merely a figure or symbol of Our Lord's body.

"It is not possible," Napoleon retorted, "that at that solemn moment Jesus could have given us only a symbol, a souvenir of His body. Any man—even I, for example—realizing his approaching end and wishing to leave a memento to his best friends, would give his most precious possession. You know that Jesus was God and that He certainly could leave us something infinitely more precious than anything that I or anybody else could to those who were faithful to Him. We must therefore conclude that He really left us His body. Had He given what you claim to His beloved disciples, He would have left us nothing extraordinary. He had to leave a really divine gift, as He promised. And He truly did keep that promise."

November 6, 1868

After night prayers, the Oratory priests and clerics, as well as the boys who were to don the cassock, assembled in the dining room.

"[As you know]—Don Bosco told them—the school year has begun. To the clerics who are to enter the seminary and to the boys who will don the clerical habit I say: 'The cowl does not make the monk.' We must be 'the light of the world, the light burning and shining in the house of the Lord,' because a cleric is observed by thousands of people. Woe to him if he is not a shining example. One of the things in which we have to excel, believe me, is the virtue of modesty. Spiritual masters tell us that to preserve this virtue we should diligently make our meditation, our visit to the Blessed Sacrament, our spiritual reading, and our examination of conscience. We should also rely on short invocations. All this is very helpful, but it is not enough; we must also take steps to prevent falls. Do not lay hands on others, walk arm-in-arm, kiss for any reason at all, or put your arms on each other's shoulders. Likewise, control your eyes, beware of giving small gifts to the more handsome boys, and avoid shaking hands except when leaving or welcoming someone. Never allow anyone to enter your private quarters; never have little secret parties, etc. None of these things are bad in themselves, but if nothing more,

they give occasion to the evil-minded to gossip and to place a bad interpretation on them because they certainly are a danger to the virtue of modesty. I would also like to see the assistants' cubicles in the dormitory restricted in size, with room for only a bed and chair, because larger cubicles have already been the source of enough trouble. Fortunately we have been spared grave disorders, but we came very close on some occasions. Furthermore, no one should agree to buy books, groceries, and other things or to hold money for the boys. Rather, you too should deposit your money with the prefect.

"What would you say if you were to see a cleric behaving poorly in church, making careless genuflections, and yawning during spiritual reading, whereas a mere boy deports himself modestly and devoutly, even sacrificing part of his recreation to visit the Blessed Sacrament? One would rather tell that boy: 'Don the cassock and hold on to it until that cleric becomes as good as you are.' What I tell you, you should in turn pass on to the boys."

Sunday, November 8, 1868

Don Bosco said: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom, whereas pride is the beginning of all vice." He said this again and again to all those crowding around him after supper.

November 10

Announcement by Don Bosco: "Confessions will be heard tomorrow evening and the Exercise for a Happy Death will be held on Thursday. Let us strive to do it well, because it will be the very last one for one of us."

On November 22 Don Bosco mentioned a few of the altar boys' errors at Mass.[6] He also urged all the boys to behave kindly to all, not to pilfer, and to avoid anything unseemly.

On many other occasions Don Bosco had insisted on the exact performance of sacred ceremonies. In past years, he had also spoken of the importance of honoring God by external worship, hoping thereby to instill in them a love for the priestly calling. One evening he said: "From now on, when I have no admonitions, announcements, or directives to give, I shall content myself with explaining one by one the various orders leading to the priest-

[6] Omitted in this edition because of the recent liturgical reforms. [Editor]

hood." In due time, he described the duties, importance, dignity, and distinctive vestments of each order and their relationship to the Holy Eucharist and the faithful.

At other times he explained the various ranks in the Church's hierarchy and each of the liturgical articles. His brief, colorful descriptions were flavored with historical tidbits or anecdotes which proved so interesting that often, as soon as he stood on the platform—that same old platform which should be now preserved as a relic—the boys would break out into a shout for more of the same.

[We shall now proceed to other matters.] The November-December issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* entitled *Recollection of a Solemn Feast in Honor of Mary, Help of Christians* by John Bosco, dealt with one of the most cherished events at the Oratory—the consecration of the new church....

While this issue was being mailed to subscribers at the end of October, Don Bosco was inviting learned people well versed in foreign languages—French especially—to translate or write worthwhile booklets and thus promote wholesome reading. He also wrote to Countess Charlotte Callori to thank her for her inexhaustible charity and invite her to Mirabello for the feast of St. Charles. From this letter, as well as from others we have quoted or will quote, we see how this gratitude was not limited to words alone. He constantly prayed for them, blessed them, and visited them when sick.[7]

This solicitude for their welfare strengthened the bonds of charity between them.[8] For instance, Louis Cova, the top official of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus and councilor to the Court of Appeal, was on intimate terms with him. When he went to Lanzo for the opening of new wards in the local Mauritian Hospital, he publicly showed his esteem for Don Bosco by paying homage to one of his sons. While being escorted to the railroad station by municipal authorities and a large number of officers of the Mauritian Order, he asked the director of the Salesian School to walk at his right.

On another occasion, Don Bosco called on Chevalier Bartholo-

[7] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

[8] We are omitting the letter of a benefactor recommending an orphan to Don Bosco. [Editor]

mew Bona, Minister of Public Works, but the receptionist kept him waiting with various pretexts. Another official, seeing this, greeted him cordially, and after ushering him in, informed the minister that Don Bosco had been kept waiting unnecessarily.

Bona, Don Bosco's great friend and benefactor, received him most warmly, talked with him at length, and finally asked him to accept a thousand-lire donation. Don Bosco thanked him for his timely generosity, but Bona hushed him, saying: "It isn't Don Bosco who needs the government! It's the government that needs Don Bosco!" Then, rising to his feet, he added: "Now we'll teach my receptionist a lesson!" With that, he escorted Don Bosco through the waiting room to the head of the staircase while everyone gazed in sheer wonderment.

CHAPTER 32

Steps Toward Approval of the Salesian Society (Continued)

ROME'S underprivileged youth were very dear to Don Bosco's heart. When his hopes for a Salesian foundation at Vigna Pia[1] vanished, he conceived a bold plan to achieve his purpose. While remaining open to new proposals of the Holy Father, he looked into the possibility of acquiring the Church of the Holy Shroud and an adjacent building easily convertible into a boys' home.[2]

His aim—which he wanted his co-workers to make known to all—was to do good to as many people as possible, to do harm to no one, and to be allowed to help underprivileged and forsaken boys lest they end up in jail. "As a citizen," he declared, "I respect all civil authorities, but as a Catholic priest I am a servant of the Pope."[3]

This undertaking did not keep Don Bosco from furthering other very urgent matters, above all the Holy See's approval of the Salesian Society. Undeterred by the negative reply of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, he bided his time, meanwhile soliciting and obtaining other episcopal recommendations. So far he had secured commendatory letters from nineteen bishops and two vicars capitular. No reply had come from seven other bishops. Only one—the bishop of Pinerolo—had replied unfavorably. Not quite content with individual epsicopal commendations, Don Bosco also tried to obtain the collective approval of the bishops of Turin's ecclesiastical province, who at that time had been summoned in assembly by the archbishop of

[1] *See* Vol. VIII, pp. 265ff. [Editor]

[2] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

[3] This paragraph is a condensation. Since his plans for the Holy Shroud Church ultimately fell through in 1874, we shall abridge other passages on the same topic. [Editor]

Turin to discuss proposals for the forthcoming ecumenical council and other inter-diocesan matters. After clearing this move with Archbishop Riccardi, Don Bosco sent his petition to the whole assembly.[4]

Afterward, anxious to re-establish friendly relations with Bishop [Louis] Moreno of Ivrea—one of those who had not replied to his letter—and to dissipate all misunderstanding or at least investigate its source, he wrote the following letter:

Turin, November 11, 1868

Your Excellency:

Our most revered archbishop has agreed to my request and will read a brief report on the current state of the festive oratories and of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. Your past support makes me hope that you will speak in their favor. To this end I am enclosing some pertinent literature.

May I hope that Your Excellency, generously forgetting the past,[5] will visit the new Church of Mary, Help of Christians? In any event, I beg you to accept my sincerest regards.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

The letter went unanswered. When Don Bosco's petition was read to the assembled bishops, Bishop Ghilardi 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 matters in Rome."

[4] *See* Vol. VIII, pp. 177f. [Editor]
[5] *Ibid.* [Editor]

CHAPTER 33

Apostolate of the Press

DON Bosco was a shrewd connoisseur of his times. Well aware of the intellectual and moral ruin caused by an irreligious and licentious press, he took countermeasures toward a wholesome moral reform with the publication of *Letture Cattoliche.* A man of wide views, he knew how to pack its issues with stirring and edifying events culled from the history of the Church and of nations, from the biographies of saints and great men, and from the charming, humble lives of his own Oratory boys. Dogmatic and moral principles, spurned or ridiculed by anticlericals, found dauntless defenders in him and his associates. Through their combined efforts, countless libels and prejudices harmful to the Church and to civil society were quickly dispelled. Later on, when he had a fully equipped printshop of his own, he set out to counteract the wide moral harm being done to secondary school students through the study of unexpurgated Latin classics. To Father John Baptist Francesia and others holding degrees in Latin literature he entrusted the task of expurgating the more commonly studied Latin authors, publishing them under the title *Selecta ex Latinis Scriptoribus.* He did the same with dictionaries. Since they abounded with obscene words and phrases, he asked Father Mark Pechenino to compile a Greek-Italian and Italian-Greek dictionary, and Father Celestine Durando a Latin-Italian and Italian-Latin dictionary.[1] Both men performed their long and arduous task with admirable love and diligence. Later, Father Durando also prepared an abridged edition for junior high schools. An Oratory cleric assisted Father Pechenino as his copyist.

[1] *See* Vol. XI, pp. 406f. [Editor]

However, Don Bosco sought further goals. He wanted to neutralize and rectify pagan ideals and replace them with Christian ideals, and therefore he seriously considered publishing Christian Latin classics—that is, the Fathers of Church and other early Christian writers. He also wanted to vindicate the excellence of their style and language as in no way inferior to those of the pagan authors of the golden age. These Christian authors were to be used as textbooks in his own schools for weekly lessons. As we shall see, he began by publishing the works of St. Jerome.[2] Through this initiative, he intended to enhance the glory of the Catholic Church and enrich textbooks with Christian ideals.

All these undertakings required substantial outlays of money, but Don Bosco never faltered. He willingly made any sacrifice whenever he could safeguard souls from sin and prevent false principles from harming them.

The arduous task of expurgating the Latin classics would have been incomplete had Don Bosco not also given thought to doing the same with the Italian classics. As a preliminary step, in 1868 he asked Father Francis Cerruti to compile an Italian dictionary and instructed him to eliminate even the slightest example of immodesty. Father Cerruti obliged and compiled a work which was praiseworthy from every point of view.

Certainly the Italian classics presented a graver moral danger because some of our most famous writers occasionally forgot moral risks. This reason had already made Don Bosco consider publishing an expurgated classical series. Like a prudent gardener he wanted to uproot poisonous weeds before allowing an innocent child to enter the garden. He realized that some teachers would protest in the name of art against this "barbarous mutilation"—as they would call it—and would continue to use unexpurgated textbooks in their classrooms, but he ignored their criticism. Indeed, it only proved how wise and necessary such expurgation was. Over a period of several months, after repeated consultations with Father Matthew Picco,[3] he made a selection of Italian classics and parceled them out for expurgation and comment to professors in public and private secondary schools,

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 402f. [Editor]

[3] Father Picco conducted a private school of humanities and rhetoric in Turin. [Editor]

lyceums, and universities. Soon he had a select group of brilliant teachers eagerly interested in this wise undertaking. He deeply appreciated their help, while they in turn felt bound to him by genuine friendship. They joined in the Oratory festivities and occasionally met to discuss their work on the classics. Don Bosco was averse to publishing certain authors such as Machiavelli and Leopardi because they posed serious editorial problems and presented a constant danger, but since state programs required them, he suggested careful editing of less harmful passages. He also offered suggestions as to how to eliminate dangers in explaining them and how to present the truths to refute the authors' errors. He always urged that the classics be explained on the basis of Christian precepts. His first collaborators in this task were: Mr. Charles Bacchialoni, associate professor of literature; Father John Bosco,[4] doctor of letters; Father Celestine Durando, professor; Father John Francesia, doctor of letters; Mr. Augustine Lace, professor; Mr. Charles H. Melanotte, doctor of letters; Father Mark Pechenino, professor; Father Peter Peinetti, professor; and Father Matthew Picco, professor.

When sufficient material was ready, *Unità Cattolica* announced the forthcoming series of publications in its issue of November 18, 1868:

Italian Classics for the Young

Don Bosco's Oratory of St. Francis de Sales will publish *Italian Classics for the Young*, an expurgated and updated edition of the best Italian authors in some one hundred volumes. Each book will be about 250 pages. The volumes will be published at the rate of one per month and are available through subscription at six lire per year.

In turn Don Bosco sent out a circular with more detailed information. The response was most favorable.[5] The first volume, entitled *History of Italian Literature,* was published on January 9, 1869. The series of 204 paperbacks was completed in 1885. Its

[4] Not our Don Bosco but a distinguished priest and former teacher of his. *See* Vol. I, pp. 206. 270f. [Editor]

[5] We are omitting Don Bosco's circular and responses from Roman friends and benefactors. [Editor]

subscribers numbered about three thousand. During Don Bosco's lifetime, besides mail orders, over 570,000 copies were sold to schools, to the pupils' great moral advantage. Even after his death thousands of copies were sold year after year. James Della Chiesa, today [1917] Pope Benedict IV, was a subscriber, as he himself stated to our Father Francis Cerruti.

We will close this chapter and its factual presentation of Don Bosco's zeal for a wholesome press by reprinting [an excerpt from] the preface to the 1869 issue of *Il Galantuomo,* the national almanac sent to subscribers of *Letture Cattoliche.* It further proves Don Bosco's love for the Catholic Church and the purity of faith:

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

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

Another gentleman declared: "I would deem it Italy's ultimate disaster were anything to perturb the religious unity which it still retains."

And yet another has said, "The Italian sky cannot bear the twilight of the Protestant Reformation."

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

Your friend,
Il Galantuomo

The Church's triumph lay in the forthcoming Vatican Council and the dogmatic proclamation of papal infallibility.

CHAPTER 34

Special Charisms (Continued)

FATHER Rua's chronicle records this extraordinary item: "November 1868: Don Bosco was invited to Florence by Premier [Louis F.] Menabrea[1] to discuss important matters." The chronicle gives no other information, but we learned from Don Bosco himself that even before 1868 he had been called to the capital for grave reasons and that, lest his absence from the Oratory be noticed, he had left with the morning express and returned the same day. He did not elaborate.

The premier's invitation had been preceded by an exchange of correspondence, as may be seen from this excerpt from a letter of Don Bosco to [Charles] Canton, an official of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, dated September 22, 1868: "Please give the enclosed thank-you letter to His Excellency Menabrea. It also contains some confidential matters you may be asked to handle."[2]

In reply to the premier's invitation, Don Bosco stated that he would go to Florence as soon as possible, though not at the moment. In fact he delayed for about a month.

On Wednesday, December 1, he visited the Lanzo school and at one "Good Night" urged the boys to put their consciences in order because during that school year one of them would be summoned to God's judgment seat. Privately he confided to a superior that the boy who was to die was in the second grade, and that his name began with "V". We should note that Don Bosco had not yet met the new pupils.

Back in Turin, on Friday, December 3, he spoke to the Oratory boys in the study hall after night prayers and gave them the novena nosegay in honor of the Blessed Virgin:

[1] Menabrea was premier of Italy from 1867 to 1869. [Editor]
[2] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," says Holy Scripture. It also says: "The proud and the arrogant are called ignorant." You know what I mean. Don't think too highly of yourselves. Obey your superiors readily and accept their advice willingly. Then you will certainly grow in knowledge.

As a nosegay for tomorrow I recommend the virtue of modesty, because humility, charity, and modesty need one another. Each cannot stand alone.

On another evening he said to them:

Occasionally some of you ask me, "How does Don Bosco come to know things no one ever thought could possibly be discovered? Is he inspired by God?" No, my dear boys. To know that someone is proud is enough to know that he is also immodest. I know this from books I have read and from thirty-five years of experience.

If you wish to keep the virtue of modesty and offer it to Our Lady on Her feast day, wear Her medal and often say any of these short prayers: "Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us," or "Blessed be the holy and Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary," or "Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us."

Tomorrow, as a nosegay, tell an edifying story to a companion; it need not concern the Blessed Virgin. If you don't know any, at least suggest some good maxim, or come to me and I'll give you one.

Throughout the Immaculate Conception novena and even after the feast he continued his nightly talks. The chronicle reports his "Good Night" of December 13:

Since it is not very late, we can talk about a few things. How is it that I am always surrounded by new boys, while only a few of the old ones come around? I do not mean that they all shy away from me. Most of them do have confidence in me and come around, but a certain number stay away. The other day a teacher brought me his pupils' homework. I glanced at the names—those of the older boys, I mean—and realized that I had not yet seen half of them. How can these boys expect to discover their vocation if they shy away from their superiors and close their hearts to them? One day I asked a young boy why so many of the older boys avoided me. "Maybe it's because they have done something wrong," he answered. "Their conscience bothers them and they don't want you to know it." But it is precisely the upper classmen whom I wish

to see more often. I do not imply that I don't like to see new boys around me, but my hopes are with the older ones.

Therefore, resolve to put your conscience in order—also for your future's sake. I would not like any one of you to decide on his own to become or not to become a priest because from it your eternal salvation or damnation could well depend.

Let each first do his utmost to carry out his duties. Then, let him open his heart to his superior and say, "I will do whatever God asks of me, whatever is best for my soul." After consulting his superiors, let him follow St. Peter's advice: "Strive even more by good works to make your calling and election sure." [2 Pet. 1, 10] Your superiors do all they can, but you have to cooperate with them and follow their advice.

On my part, mulling over the reasons why certain boys shun Don Bosco, I am inclined to believe that they are afraid of being called a squealer by some companions. Such name-calling is strictly forbidden. Anyone who has been warned and still continues to do so will be expelled. Imagine a ravenous wolf stalking our playground and heading for a boy to tear him to pieces. A companion shouts, "Watch out! Run!" But another lad retorts, "Shut up, you squealer!"

"But the wolf will come after us too," the first protests.

"Shut up! Don't be a squealer!"

What are we to say of those who let their companions be devoured because they fear being called names? Shout, letting your superiors and teachers know who the wolf is, so that none of your companions may become his victim. You have noticed that since my last talk some of your companions have left. A few were expelled because of stealing, but nearly all the rest because of foul talk or scorn for our practices of piety or for those frequenting the sacraments.

Incidentally, there are still a few who like to make fun of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Blessed Sacrament and Altar Boys sodalities and try to browbeat their members. While I have no respect at all for these scoffers, I think very highly of the others and hold them very dear. Therefore, let each of you beware of belittling or disparaging them. Good night.

The day before, Don Bosco had written to Count Xavier Provana of Collegno to inform him that on the first day of the Christmas novena, the Oratory boys would offer Mass, Communion, and the rosary for him and his family. On December 16 he wrote to Charles Canton to tell him that he would be in Florence in early January.

Before leaving Turin, he sought to insure the success of his efforts in Rome. Defeated in his attempt to enlist the support of the episcopal conference of the Turin province, on December 19 [1868] he wrote to Bishop Ghilardi of Mondovì for help in overcoming difficulties and opposition. After telling him of his inconclusive dealings with the archbishop of Turin, he went on: "To break this deadlock, I have decided to follow Monsignor Svegliati's suggestion and leave it to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars to insert in the decree of approval a formula which may guarantee the existence of our Society while respecting episcopal jurisdiction. To this end I have decided to go to Rome at the beginning of January, for I feel sure that my explanation will carry more weight when given in person rather than by letter. In view of this, I would very much appreciate it if you would write to the Holy Father along these lines: that Don Bosco is going to Rome to plead with the Holy Father for some form of existence for the Salesian Society and that you recommend such favorable consideration as the Holy Father may wisely deem suitable, especially in view of the present calamitous times and Don Bosco's need to consolidate his congregation. This and similar recommendations I plan to bring personally to the Holy Father. I would also be delighted to do you any errand you may wish."[3]

At the beginning of the Christmas novena Don Bosco was called out of town, as we gather from a letter of Father Francesia, dated December 18, to Mother Magdalene Galeffi in Rome: "Don Bosco is away. Rumor has it—it may even be certain—that the Oratory has received an exceptional favor from the Madonna. I may not yet tell you what it is, but I will let you know as soon as I know more."

What was this exceptional favor? It may refer to the fact that Don Bosco had been asked to bless a critically ill child. Countess Cays, née Garofoli, the wife of Count Louis who was the son of the Oratory's great benefactor, dreamed one night that her son Charles, born in September 1865, was seriously ill. She was

[3] We are omitting another letter of Don Bosco to Bishop Ghilardi dated June 1, 1867 but discovered only after the publication of Volume VIII. This letter also deals with Don Bosco's efforts to obtain the Holy See's approval of his Society. [Editor]

deeply grieved, for this was her first-born. In her dream she sent for the family doctor, Joseph Timmermans, and then paid a visit to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. Seemingly she saw Our Lady in person just as She is portrayed in the painting above the main altar. "Bring your most precious possession to My church," Our Lady told her, "and your child will recover." She immediately found herself once more at the side of her very sick child.

"Mamma, give me something to eat or I'll die of hunger," the little boy said. She fed him and the boy recovered. This was her dream.

A few months later, after the countess had almost forgotten her dream, her little boy began to feel weak and soon fell ill with typhoid and miliary fever. The family doctor was immediately summoned. He diagnosed the illness as very serious, but, having other matters to attend to, he recommended an excellent young doctor from nearby Rivoli. The latter arrived and lived in for a week, but the child's condition kept worsening. The countess then remembered her dream, prayed, and vowed to offer her most costly bracelet to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians.

Shortly afterward, the child, who had been dozing fitfully and refusing nourishment, suddenly aroused himself.

"Mamma," he said, "give me some tea and cookies."

Since he had never taken tea before, the countess asked the doctor's advice. "Give him whatever he wants," the latter replied. "Nothing can make him any worse."

The child drank the tea and ate a little. From that moment he began to improve and in a few days was well again. The first time he joined his parents at table, he brought along his mother's bracelet. "When shall we take it to the Madonna?" he asked.

[A few days later] the countess and her child called on Don Bosco who, on hearing the story, remarked: "Countess, don't give much credence to dreams!" His warning was prompted by certain illusions of hers.

We heard the full story, in the presence of all the members of the Superior Chapter, from Count Louis Cays.

"My wife," he stated, "had asked Don Bosco's blessing on our child. She was so happy [at his recovery] that, had Don Bosco requested 25,000 lire for the Oratory, she would have obliged

immediately. Don Bosco knew that asking would have been tantamount to receiving, and that I too would have consented, but he asked for nothing. I have often revealed this to a good many people in order to silence evil tongues that were accusing Don Bosco of greed for money and legacies. I particularly made it a point to tell this story when people kept suggesting that my father's decision to become a Salesian had brought me no gain.[4] I pointedly told them that my father's death at the Oratory had not in the least affected my inheritance."

Meanwhile, everyone at the Oratory was awaiting the fulfillment of Don Bosco's prediction of November 10—namely, that a pupil would make the Exercise for a Happy Death only one more time.[5] The exercise was held on December 12. A few days later, the student Paul Vacchetta fell ill and died on December 21.[6] Besides the three predicted in the dream, six other pupils had died during that year.

As December drew to a close, Don Bosco exchanged greetings with his principal benefactors. Among those thanking him for the prodigious effects of his blessing was the noble lady Christine Pittatore, née Celebrini, who was renowned for her charity and piety. The Lord had tested her virtue with the premature deaths of several of her children. Widowed and with only one son, Joseph, still living, she feared that he too might encounter the fate of his brothers. She therefore called on Don Bosco to speak of her fears and beg his blessing on her son so that God might spare him. She had great hopes that he might become a priest, but Don Bosco smilingly told her: "Do not be afraid. Your son will live and will be a great comfort to you, but he will not become a priest."

His prediction was fulfilled. The lady died at Fossano in December 1909, at the age of 84, lovingly assisted by her son Joseph, a distinguished magistrate. He and his family had indeed been a great comfort to her.

In December 1868, Mrs. Pittatore reciprocated Don Bosco's

[4] Count Charles Cays (1813-1882) became a Salesian in 1877 and was ordained the following year. After serving as director in one of the Salesian schools in France, he was recalled to Turin to manage *Letture Cattoliche.* He died October 4, 1882, as he himself had predicted. [Editor]

[5] *See* p. 18ϱ. [Editor]

[6] We are omitting the recording of this death in the Oratory obituary. [Editor]

Christmas greetings by sending her son to the Oratory with her reply. The latter had gone there several times before to see Don Bosco and Chevalier Oreglia. Don Bosco deeply loved this fine boy and invited him to stay a few days. After his return home, his mother wrote thus to Chevalier Oreglia on January 1, 1869: "Joseph is very happy to have spoken with Don Bosco. Who wouldn't be? Is there anyone not anxious to see and listen to this holy man? Your lot, my good Chevalier, is similar to Mary's. How fortunate you are in having made such a wonderful choice. May the Lord allow you to enjoy it for many years."

On December 24 Don Bosco was pleasantly surprised by a 200 lire donation from Prince Amadeus of Aosta.[7]

[7] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 35

Year's End, 1868

"CHRISTMAS of 1868 was a solemn celebration," Father Rua wrote in his chronicle. "Large crowds flocked to Midnight Mass and many received Holy Communion. A motet was sung by three choirs; outstanding were those representing the shepherds and the angels, the latter singing from high up in the dome." [1]

Don Bosco gave the usual catechetical instruction, choosing as his topic the strict avoidance of scandal and the need to make immediate amends. He also recalled Jesus' predilection for St. John, who was a model of purity, and His indignation and threats against scandal-givers. He had started giving these Sunday instructions [in 1846] in the Pinardi chapel and had continued them in the Church of St. Francis de Sales and in the new Church of Mary, Help of Christians, where his strong voice reached every corner. However, [at the close of 1868] he relinquished this task to Father Michael Rua, who for years spoke on the history of the Catholic Church from its origins in the Old Testament....

On December 28, he sent a copy of the third edition of his booklet *St. Peter's Centenary* to the archbishop of Turin and to his vicar general along with a letter proving his humble, filial devotion to the Holy See:

Turin, December 28, 1868

Your Excellency:

On April 27, 1867, the secretary of the Sacred Congregation of the In-

[1] We are omitting at this point a letter of Don Bosco to Countess Callori thanking her for her greetings and promising prayers and a visit before leaving for Rome. We are also omitting the description of the healing of a young girl and of a benefactor through Don Bosco's blessing. [Editor]

dex wrote to you about my booklet *St. Peter's Centenary* and enclosed a report by a consultor [of the same Sacred Congregation].[2] The letter ended with suggestions for a few corrections in a future edition.

Both the letter and the consultor's report called for clarifications which I sent to Rome with your previous consent. After an exchange of letters, the same secretary informed me on July 15, 1867 that, leaving intact the narration of St. Peter's life, I only needed to eliminate two paragraphs: one in the Appendix in which I had stated that St. Peter's coming to Rome was extraneous to the faith, and another at the end of the booklet in which it was not sufficiently explained how in certain cases by breaking a law a Christian becomes guilty of transgressing all the others as well. These two paragraphs were duly eliminated.

I now enclose a copy of the new edition of this booklet, whose Preface gives a clearer indication of its sources.

Since both the letter and the report of the aforesaid consultor of the Sacred Congregation [of the Index] are probably on file in your chancery, I beg you kindly to file this new booklet and letter of mine with them. They prove the execution of the advice given and the full and total submission of the humble author who declares that it is his will, now and forever, to submit to any order, advice, or suggestions of the Holy See or of Your Excellency.

Thanking you wholeheartedly for the grave inconvenience you have had to put up with in this matter and requesting your kind advice, admonishment, and counsel in what may redound to God's greater glory, I wish you God's blessings and declare myself,

Very gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

The new booklet was entitled: *"Life of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles* . . . by Father John Bosco, Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, 1869.

In the Preface Don Bosco stated that, since his intent was "to offer a somewhat informal treatise of religion through the lives of these saints," he had "seen fit to omit quotations that did not seem absolutely necessary, and this solely in order not to encumber his readers with all too frequent quotations. But since doubts and even misunderstandings had arisen regarding the authenticity of some incidents, [he had] thought it best to

[2] As regards the trouble it caused Don Bosco, *see* the Index of Volume VIII under the same heading. [Editor]

comment on the main sources of this new edition."

After giving ample references, Don Bosco continued: "In this edition, I have also taken pains to recast certain phrases which might have been interpreted in a manner quite different from that intended."

That same evening, December 28, he gathered his Salesians and young clerics in the dining room and spoke to them thus:

Our Divine Savior once asked His disciples: "Do you love Me?"

"Indeed we do," they answered.

"Then, if you love Me, do as I say."

If I were to ask you the same question, you might give me the same answer. Now, here are a few things I'd like to tell you. If you love me, you'll carry them out. Some of you go out, stroll along the arcades of Via Po where vile publications are displayed on newsstands, and frequent cafés. The other day, respectable people took me to task for this. "Do your clerics really patronize cafés?" they asked me.

If you must go for a walk, please tell the prefect first, but never go downtown except for a grave reason. Go instead to the outskirts, to the parade grounds, toward Rivoli, or beyond the Mosca Bridge.

I also urge that each of you go about your duties seriously. Obey the bell from the moment you rise till you retire at night. If you have nothing to do, come to me and I shall give you some work. Besides, there are many church history books [in the library] waiting to be dusted. Flee idleness, my beloved sons.

Before buying books, check the library. If the book you need is not there, tell the one in charge and he will get it for you. These things should also be told to the boys. I also wish that no contemptuous words such as "Biongiovannist"[3] be leveled at anyone because this casts ridicule upon piety. If a member of the Altar Boys Sodality or any other is at fault, never reproach him for his membership. Instead, urge the boys to join these sodalities so as to promote piety among them. If, for instance, a boy tells you he belongs to the St. Aloysius Sodality, congratulate him and encourage him to be a credit to it. Never discredit the sodalities by saying: "Keep away from that crowd." If faults have to be corrected, do not criticize but strive to remedy the situation through your superiors. Meanwhile respect and praise the boys' good will.

On December 29, Don Bosco wrote to Monsignor [Francis]

[3] *See* Vol. VIII, p. 168. [Editor]

Ricci, domestic prelate of Pius IX, to thank him for forwarding a special plenary indulgence the Pope had granted to the members of the Salesian Society.[4] The same evening Don Bosco lost a distinguished benefactor, the eighty-four-year-old banker Joseph Cotta,[5] who had been extremely generous to many local charitable institutions, including the Oratory. Don Bosco had prayers offered for the soul of his friend and never ceased to cite him as a model to his benefactors.[6]

On December 30 and 31, he sent the yearly *strenna* to our schools at Mirabello and Lanzo. Writing to the director at Mirabello, he also thanked him for a generous donation:

Turin, December 30, 1868

Dear Father Bonetti:

Thank you for your New Year's gift. It will help me wonderfully in clearing up the Oratory's debts. Thank Father Provera too. Now here is my *strenna*:

For You and Father Provera: Always point out each other's faults charitably.

For the Salesians: Economize in traveling. As far as possible, do not go home. Rodriguez[7] has some very timely material on this subject.

For the Boys: Let them promote frequent Communion and devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary by word and deed.

Three Topics for Sermons: 1. Avoidance of foul talk and books. 2. Avoidance of companions who are light-minded or give evil advice. 3. Avoidance of idleness and in its stead introduction of practices which contribute to preserving the holy virtue of modesty.

Keep an eye on everything. Keep in touch with everyone. The good Lord will do the rest.

Best wishes to you and all at Mirabello. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Tell the prefect of studies to push *Italian Classics for the Young.*[8]

[4] We are omitting this letter. [Editor]

[5] *See* Vol. IV, p. 192; Vol. V, p. 204; Vol. VIII, pp. 211f. [Editor]

[6] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

[7] Alonso Rodriguez, S.J. (1526-1616), author of the *Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection.* [Editor]

[8] *See* pp. 195f. [Editor]

The following day he wrote to the Salesian community at Lanzo:

Turin, December 31, 1868

Dear Father Lemoyne:

I was very pleased with the affectionate letters of your boys and mine. I read each one from beginning to end and would gladly answer each but for lack of time. Please tell them that they truly pleased me, that I thank them wholeheartedly, and that I shall do all I can for their physical and spiritual welfare.

Since I am particularly anxious that devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary be on the rise this year, I enclose holy pictures for both boarders and day students. I would like them all to learn the prayer composed by the Holy Father which is printed at the bottom. Incidentally, tell them that he sends them his blessing along with a plenary indulgence to be gained on a day of your choosing, as long as they receive the sacraments.

Now here is the *strenna.*

To You and for You: Look after your health. Confer often with the other superiors and always be frank with them. Be most patient and vigilant with all.

For Salesians: Economize as much as possible on traveling, and do your best not to go home. Read Rodriguez on this point.

For the Boys: Let them promote frequent Communion and devotion to the Blessed Virgin by word and deed.

For the Prefect of Studies: Let him find many subscribers to *Letture Cattoliche* and to *Italian Classics for the Young.*

For Sala[9] *and Bodrato:*[10] Save plenty of money.

Finally, I have a favor to ask of all: say a *Pater, Ave,* and *Gloria* and a *Salve, Regina* daily to the Blessed Sacrament from January 7 to March 8, possibly receiving Holy Communion for a pressing need of mine. I

[9] Anthony Sala (1836-1895) entered the Oratory in 1863 at the age of twenty-seven after giving up the management of his family's silk mill. He took his vows as a Salesian on December 29, 1865 and was ordained a priest in 1869. In 1875 he was appointed councilor to the Superior Chapter, and in 1880 became Economer General of the Salesian Society, a post to which he was re-elected in 1886 and 1892. He died in Turin on May 21, 1895. [Editor]

[10] Francis Bodrato (1823-1880) came to Don Bosco as a widower in 1864 and took his first vows as a Salesian in 1865. Ordained a priest in 1869, he held various offices at Alassio, Borgo San Martino, and the Oratory. In 1876 he led the second group of missionaries to Argentina. Two years later, Don Bosco appointed him provincial. He died at Buenos Aires on August 4, 1880. [Editor]

shall strive, my beloved boys, to recompense you with a gift which shall greatly please you.

To you, dear Father Lemoyne, I recommend that you stress the following topics throughout the year:

1. Avoidance of foul conversation and of those who indulge in it. Emphasize the scandal inherent in it.
2. Avoidance of idleness and idlers.
3. Preciousness of modesty and the means to preserve it.

For my part I shall remember you all daily in the sacrifice of the Mass and shall pray that both you and I persevere till the end, that we may see each other often in this world, but, above all, that we may all gather together around Mary, Help of Christians in eternal beatitude. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Father John Bosco

He gave his *strenna* orally to the Oratory boys, as we gather from the Oratory chronicle: "December 31, 1868. On this last day of 1868, everyone—students and artisans, priests and clerics, teachers and assistants—assembled in the study hall for Don Bosco's yearly *strenna*." After night prayers, he addressed them as follows:

At midnight tonight, 1868 will end and 1869 will begin. It is a momentous night because this year will join the eternal years of God, never to return. The year 1869 will be followed by 1870, 1871, and 1872—which we hope to see, if the Lord grants us life—but the year 1868 will never return. One year of our life has gone forever.

During the past year, as you yourselves have seen, we had to send several boys home because of their foul conversation or for other serious reasons. Please strive by good conduct not to renew such grief for Don Bosco.

Several things will happen in 1869 both in the Oratory and outside. We leave to God whatever will happen outside. As for what concerns us directly, I foresee much good for our house. Still, six of you shall go into eternity—to heaven. Be prepared.

Now what will Don Bosco give as a *strenna*?

First, to Himself: That while trying to save others, he must not forget himself.

To Father Prefect: Patience with all.

To All the Priests, Clerics, Assistants, and Teachers: Be vigilant.

To Assistants: Be punctual at your posts.

To Teachers: Prevent foul conversation; do good to all; harm no one; question your pupils when teaching.

To All, in Brief: Do everything for God's greater glory.

To Those Engaged in Manual Tasks: Diligently fulfill all your duties.

To All Students and Artisans, from First to Last: Avoid bad talk, whether it be against morals, religion, or piety.

You might wonder why Don Bosco insists so much on avoiding evil conversation. Do you want to know why? Because *corrumpunt bonos mores colloquia mala.* Immoral conversation is the frightful cause of spiritual ruin. St. Paul tells us so. I already foresee expelling several boys from the Oratory because they will indulge in foul conversation. These boys are here now, listening to me; they can still mend their ways. Be grateful to Don Bosco and to all the superiors who seek your well-being. How? By ceasing to give scandal, by earnestly striving to reform; otherwise you shall be sent home.

But I must also say that I foresee many good things in this coming year. For now, I must say that I have a very important matter at heart, and so I ask you to recite a *Pater, Ave,* and *Gloria* to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and a *Salve, Regina* to Mary, Help of Christians, daily from January 7 to March 7. It would be wonderful if you also received Communion for this same intention.

I likewise urge you to pray and receive Holy Communion for your parents, brothers, and sisters, and for all those who sacrifice on your behalf. Be grateful. Perform some acts of self-denial in suffrage for your deceased parents. Surely, each of you must have relatives or benefactors who are deceased. Well, do something for them, be it Holy Communion, a prayer, or a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Our relatives or benefactors have helped us in one way or other. A non-Christian poet said that to do good to one who is ungrateful is a waste. Be grateful therefore to your superiors, teachers, and others who contribute to your well-being.

We do not know if we shall all see the end of this year. Let us therefore be prepared. I will recommend all of you to the Lord. Please pray for me too, so that, should death come suddenly upon us, we may all be ready. One more thing: remember to deposit your money with Father Prefect. Don't have things purchased for you outside the house.

Now let us say a *Pater, Ave,* and *Gloria* for our parents and benefactors, and a *Pater, Ave,* and *Requiem* for our deceased companions, closing with a *Salve, Regina.*

Don Bosco's exhortations to the pupils of the Oratory,

Mirabello, and Lanzo aimed at shielding them from sin, promoting priestly and religious vocations among them, and obtaining from God the Holy See's approval of the Salesian Society.

Through God's inspiration and support, his influence was felt not only cumulatively by all his pupils but, in many instances, individually as well. Anthony Varaia of Leynì (Turin), a very needy orphan, was studying that year at Lanzo. Having lost two generous benefactors, he was planning to return to Mathi to live with a sister and take up his shepherd's staff once again. On his last night at school, he had no sooner fallen asleep than he seemed to find himself crossing the small inner courtyard on his way to the reception room beyond which there stood a small swing with which he hoped to distract himself from his grief. To his wonder and fear he saw Our Lord in the room, and was so overcome by His splendor and majesty that he suddenly fainted and collapsed. The Divine Savior lifted him and lovingly told him, "Do not fear. Since men forsake you, I will be a father to you Myself. Trust Me."

Kneeling beside Him, the boy replied, "Oh Lord, grant me the grace of becoming a priest and a missionary."

With the same ineffable smile, Jesus answered: "Yes, both the one and the other!"

Varaia then felt that he was being carried into a distant land inhabited by enemies of the Christian faith where, after witnessing persecutions, he himself was crucified. While, nailed to a cross, he was reciting the hail Mary with all his heart, Our Lady appeared to him with great splendor, filling him with heavenly joy. Suddenly, however, a mysterious red veil fell between him and the Blessed Virgin, blocking his vision. With Her own hand, however, the Blessed Virgin drew the veil aside and again showed Herself to him. While seemingly dying, he had the impression of still kneeling at Jesus' feet in the reception room until, still dreaming, he heard the bell summoning all to Mass.

"Lord," the boy said, "that's the bell for Mass. May I go?"

"Go," the Lord answered. He then woke up, and indeed the bell was ringing for chapel.

Reassured by his dream, Varaia went home to his sister in Mathi, but he often returned to Lanzo to spend a few hours at the school. In one of his visits he told the director of his dream and the latter kept a record of it. Two years later, Don Bosco accepted him back in school free of charge and provided for all his needs.

After completing his secondary schooling, Varaia transferred to the Oratory for philosophy and theology courses, and after taking his vows as a Salesian, he was ordained in 1877. A model of priestly virtues, simplicity, humility, and ardent zeal for the salvation of souls, he was appointed director first at Mathi and then at Saint-Cyr (France). Finally, in December 1891 he was sent to Palestine. Untiring in the priestly ministry, he greatly benefited the boys of the our schools of Cremisan, Beitgemal, Bethlehem, and Nazareth, finally dying in Jerusalem on October 19, 1913 at the age of 64, after having been director in several houses for over fourteen years.

CHAPTER 36

Fulfillment of Predictions (Continued)

DON Bosco's last talk to his boys on December 31, 1868 had closed with a warning [next year "six of you shall go into eternity"].[1] Like the prediction of December 31, 1867,[2] this too would be fulfilled. As regards the first prediction, it bears repeating that generally, in Don Bosco's visions of the future, three main tableaux were projected simultaneously—the Catholic Church, the Salesian Society, and the Oratory boys. In commenting on such a dream, at times he dwelt mostly upon the first two tableaux whose scope was wider, but more often than not, ignoring or barely mentioning the first two, he chose to dwell at length on the third as the most salutary to his boys, occasionally sacrificing clarity in order to minimize whatever might sound like self-praise.

In the dream he had narrated on December 31, 1867, he had seen not only what concerned his boys, but also such public calamities as pestilence, famine, and war, which would prove to be a scourge for several years. That dream had so vividly impressed him that he recalled it seventeen years later. In 1884 he stated: "The events of my dream began to take place in 1868, but unless they will be delayed by unforeseen causes dependent upon man's free will, they will not be wholly fulfilled until 1888, a year of great events for the Church."

After pondering a while, perhaps thinking of something else, he added, "Great events in 1888 and 1891!" We report this for the sake of preciseness in our narration.

The first scourge Don Bosco had predicted was pestilence. By

[1] *See* p. 210. [Editor]
[2] *See* pp. 6-9. [Editor]

the end of 1867, this terrible epidemic seemed to have run its course, and people were beginning to believe that all danger had passed. Under the circumstances, predicting another pestilence might have seemed a facile prophecy, but Don Bosco, disregarding what people might say, felt bound to reveal what he had seen in his dream, which he knew was important. The scourge had been lifted for a while to give people a respite for penance, but had not been stamped out. Don Bosco therefore warned his boys to beware of offending God.

Throughout 1868 and the following four years there were sporadic outbreaks of cholera without specific focal points of infection. Now and then, Don Bosco informed his pupils of this, convincingly assuring them that the medal of Mary, Help of Christians would shield them from the disease. On this score he had received a firm promise from God, who alone could make it. And this promise was kept in a wondrous manner, as we shall see.

In 1873 the disease also flared ominously in various parts of northern Italy, and for three months fatalities ran close to a hundred daily. The epidemic waned in 1874, but other calamities scourged the country. Throughout 1883, 1884 and 1885 the cholera broke out in Egypt, southern Italy, southern France and Spain, claiming thousands of victims. On and off, the scourge continued till 1887.[3]

Another scourge Don Bosco had predicted was war. This began on September 8, 1868 with a revolution in Spain that forced Queen Elizabeth II to seek refuge in France and gradually resulted in a bloodbath for the nation. Then there followed the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and the seizure of Rome. Finally as far as Italy was concerned, military action erupted in Eritrea.[4]

The third scourge predicted by Don Bosco was famine. The newspapers of 1868 amply document the extreme hunger which plagued many provinces of southern Italy, particularly Sicily. Although Don Bosco had warned his boys of this forthcoming serious famine, he had not dwelt on it at length, speaking rather of the sorry straits to which their families and the Oratory would be subjected. Dwindling charitable contributions in the aftermath of natural disasters and an enormous increase in taxes,

[3] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[4] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

especially on wheat flour, were indeed going to impose serious hardships on the Oratory.

What Don Bosco had seen in his dream obviously did not concern Italy alone. His gaze had reached far beyond its frontiers. "We ... came upon a countless multitude of people," he said, "who were pale, dejected, emaciated, and exhausted, with their clothes in tatters.... I watched them hunting for food and finding none, searching for water and having nothing to quench their thirst."[5]

In 1868, the *Courrier de l'Algerie* reported that, as the result of a summer drought, at least 200,000 Arabs had died of starvation, their corpses lying unburied about the countryside and along the roads to towns and villages where they had roamed in search of food. Those who were able to reach European settlements were given generous assistance, but those living in the interior had to subsist on wild herbs, roots, and the bark of trees.

Amid such horrors shone the charity of Archbishop Charles Lavigerie of Algiers. Scores of orphans arrived daily at his residence, and their number soon swelled to nearly 1,800. Overcoming all difficulties, the archbishop managed to rescue them and give them a Christian education. In need of personnel, he insistently asked Don Bosco for a group of Salesians. The latter, however, either because he could not spare them or because he felt that then and there this was not God's will in his regard, deferred his consent. When, however [in 1869 and 1870], the archbishop sent him several orphans of the Kabili tribe so that he might educate them, Don Bosco welcomed them warmly. Later on, in 1891 the Salesians did establish themselves along the African coast with schools in Algiers and Oran. Finally in 1896 they opened houses also in Tunis, Alexandria, and Cape Town.[6]

[5] *See* p. 10 [Editor]

[6] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 37

Don Bosco's Third Journey to Rome

AT the start of 1869, the Salesian Society had 22 priests; all but one were perpetually professed. Additionallly, there were 26 other members with perpetual vows, 33 with triennial vows, and 31 postulants.

"The boarders," states Father Rua's chronicle, "numbered over 800, and the Oratory was totally dependent on the loving generosity of Divine Providence. . . ."[1]

Because of Don Bosco's most loyal attachment to the Pope, the anticlerical press dubbed him "The Garibaldi of the Vatican and of clericals." He lived up to this reputation with the January issue of *Letture Catoliche,* entitled *The Pope's Temporal Domain* by Father Peter Boccalandro. It was a rebuttal of the arguments advocating the abolition of papal temporal power. Don Bosco himself authored the February issue, entitled *The Catholic Church and Her Hierarchy,* in which he brought in the Pope's temporal power along with a short history of the schisms and heresies that had cropped up in the course of centuries.[2]

Beloved by the Pope because of his wholehearted devotion, Don Bosco was equally dear to the king and to the government because of his cordial respect for civil authority. Father Rua's chronicle reports: "January 1, 1869. His Majesty the King sent Don Bosco the gift of two deer. Not long ago he again invited him to Florence."

There is no additional comment to this last entry, but the king's invitation, following that of Minister Menabrea,[3] hinted at

[1] We are omitting details about the Oratory's financial straits at the beginning of this year and a timely bequest received at that time. [Editor]

[2] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

[3] *See* p. 198. [Editor]

serious and urgent matters. The chronicle goes on to narrate a triumph of God's mercy:

January 2, 1869. Today a man came to visit the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. Indifferently he walked around, observing everything. Stopping at the main altar, he paused to contemplate Our Lady's painting and then continued his rounds till he reached the main entrance. Then he turned around and slowly walked up to the main altar through the center aisle. At that hour, the church was empty. He seemed to have been drawn there by a mysterious gentle force. As he stood under the dome, he spotted a slip of paper that had accidently dropped from some boy's prayerbook. The church had been swept that very morning, but the sacristan had missed that scrap. After looking around, the man bent down and picked it up. "On such and such a day in December," he read, "one of your companions died. He was the same age as you are. What would befall your soul if death should surprise you? What would your fate be if right now you had to face God's tribunal? Would you be eternally happy in paradise, or eternally damned in hell?"

The man was stunned. His sorely troubled conscience stirred up within him a violent conflict that he vainly tried to suppress. Mary's voice prevailed. He slipped the note into his wallet and walked into the sacristy. Distraught and disheveled, he looked terribly upset. He turned to the sacristan, but in his emotion could not utter a word. Finally, after pacing up and down, he asked for a priest, fell to his knees, and made his confession. Afterward, radiant with joy, he took out the note and showed it to the confessor. "Can you recognize the handwriting?" he asked.

"Yes, a very fine boy wrote it."

"Well, tell this boy to rejoice because Mary availed Herself of this note to save a soul. I am a lawyer and have not gone to the sacraments for the past twenty years. I promise, though, that from now on I shall live as a good Christian. Tell that boy that I wish I could thank him on my knees for the good he has done for me and that I shall keep his note as long as I live in memory of Mary's mercy.

On January 7, Don Bosco asked Monsignor Joseph Zappata, the vicar general, for permission to absent himself from the diocese for three months and for a letter of recommendation. Under the same date, Father Rua's chronicle reports Don Bosco's farewell "Good Night" to all the Oratory boys gathered in the study hall before his departure for Rome:

I meant to leave secretly [he said] but, since yesterday, news of my departure has become so widespread that in town today someone stopped me to entrust an errand to me. Do you want to know, my dear boys, where I am going? I am going to Rome for very important business on your behalf—for financial help, hopefully, and for another matter which I'll tell you about in due time. You'll like it very much because it will greatly benefit the Oratory. Since I'll be in Rome at the most until the first of February, we shall postpone the feast of St. Francis de Sales to the middle of the month. If things go well, I shall stay away longer; if not, I'll return sooner. Pray for me, go to Communion for me, and then be good and behave yourselves.

Let us celebrate St. Francis' feast this year in such a way as to outdo past and future celebrations. Pray much for me. Help me with your prayers. I earnestly urge you to say a *Pater* and a *Salve, Regina* for my intention until March 7. Good-bye and God bless you.

Don Bosco's main purpose in going to Rome was to secure the Holy See's approval of the Salesian Society. A secondary motive was to obtain indulgences for a confraternity of Mary. Ever since the start of the construction of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, the faithful had insistently asked that a confraternity be founded in honor of Our Savior's Mother, under the title of "Help of Christians." After the church's consecration, requests had increased from both young and old, rich and poor, near and far. And Don Bosco, as we shall see, planned to satisfy their wish.

A desire to honor the Virgin Mary was constantly afire within him. The rules he was bringing to Rome bore another token of his great love for Her. An addition to them made official what was already a constant practice—namely the daily recitation of the rosary by priests and clerics. The 1864 draft had prescribed it for lay members only.

Don Bosco set out alone for Florence on January 8, 1869. That day, Bishop Lawrence Gastaldi wrote to the cardinal prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in Rome. After briefly outlining the origin and growth of the Oratory and of the schools at Mirabello and Lanzo,[4] he went on:

Obviously, if such undertakings are to continue and grow, they call for a large number of helpers. These, in turn, could not live together,

[4] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

could not be single-minded and imbued with the necessary zeal and spirit of sacrifice, without the bond of vows uniting them into a religious Society. For this reason, from the very start Don Bosco began to train his own clerics and priests, imbuing them with his own spirit. With their help he successfully ran his institutions. Now these same clerics and priests are giving shape to a Society which will perpetuate a work already so well established.

The undersigned has witnessed the birth and 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.

To this end it is indispensable that it obtain from the Holy See the sanction without which it could never attain stability. Father John Bosco has already submitted the rules of his nascent Society to the Holy See, and he pleads for the favors and exemptions necessary to all religious societies.

The undersigned warmly urges Your Eminence to second this desire of Don Bosco and to assist him in obtaining from the Holy See whatever is required for his Society's definitive approval. As in the past, this Society will doubtless continue to promote what is most urgent nowadays—the Christian education of youth.

Most respectfully yours,
✠Lawrence, *Bishop of Saluzzo*

Don Bosco was very eagerly awaited in Florence by Father Dominic Verda, O.P., a very zealous promoter of *Letture Cattoliche.* In 1866 he had recommended himself to Don Bosco's prayers lest he be exiled from St. Mark's Monastery by the suppression of religious institutes. Now, in 1869, he was still there. When he had first visited the Oratory in 1868, he had marveled at the whole complex and at the warm welcome given to him by Don Bosco and his boys. He was also indebted to Don Bosco for the gracious hospitality Mr. Joseph Guenzati had extended to him during his stay in Milan.[5] Having seen the Oratory, he hoped all the more to see it duplicated in his own city of Florence, and he had expressed this hope to Chevalier Oreglia in a letter of November 24, 1868.[6]

[5] *See* Vol. VIII, pp. 114f, 162. [Editor]
[6] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

CHAPTER 38

Don Bosco in Florence

UPON his arrival in Florence, Don Bosco was taken directly to Marquis Uguccioni's. The marchioness took it upon herself to write to the Oratory that same evening to inform them of his safe arrival.[1] More detailed news was given to Chevalier Oreglia from Father Dominic Verda, O.P., in this letter:

Florence, January 10, 1869

Dear Chevalier:

Our saintly Don Bosco arrived Friday evening. He is well. Marquis Uguccioni and Mr. Charles Canton, departmental head of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, met him at the station. The marquis took him home for dinner. After ten that same evening Don Bosco called on the archbishop.

Saturday morning I sought to learn where he was staying. Informed that he was the archbishop's guest, I went there between nine and ten, but he was already gone. Hurrying over to Mr. Canton's office, I discovered that he wasn't there either, but I finally located him in the building's courtyard trying to find his way to Mr. Canton's office. You would never believe his surprise on seeing me. I took him in tow and led him to Mr. Canton's. When his meeting was over, I took him to Father Julius Metti[2] and then escorted him to the government building to see Minister Menabrea.

Yesterday afternoon, after three, I called on him and waited a long time without being able to speak with him....

Tomorrow, Monday, he will say Mass at the Uguccionis. At five we will have dinner together at the Cantons. Mr. Canton has offered to take Don Bosco to several places.

[1] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

[2] A member of the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri and a collaborator on *Letture Cattoliche.* [Editor]

My dear Frederick, I have yielded to a strong temptation and asked our good Frances to obtain our Father General's permission for me to accompany Don Bosco to Rome. He would stay with the Marietti family and I at St. Quiricus. What luck if I succeed! I have discovered that Don Bosco may take a companion with him gratis....[3]

Today he is dining with the archbishop. He is well and cheerful and is making the rounds of the government offices.

Father Dominic Verda

At his first meeting with Minister Menabrea who awaited him impatiently, Don Bosco courteously told him: "Your Excellency, I'd like you to know that I side with the Pope in everything!" After this preliminary, several conversations had followed.

About what? Father Rua's chronicle simply states: "What precisely Don Bosco did in Florence we do not know." Nor do our archives contain any further information. It is certain, however, that those urgent calls he had received [to go to Florence] must have concerned important matters. Our guess is that he was being asked to act as a quasi-offical mediator between the Italian government and the Holy See. A brief reference to the political situation of the times will clarify our statement.

On November 24, 1868, two anarchists—Joseph Monti and Cajetan Tognetti—had been executed for having blown up part of the Serristori barracks in Rome the year before, killing 27 Zouaves. Their purpose was to provoke an insurrection against the papal government and give inside aid to Garibaldi's march against Rome. Pressured by the revolutionaries, Victor Emmanuel II intervened on their behalf, but the papal supreme court confirmed the death sentence because of the gravity of the crime and the demands of public safety. The uproar throughout Italy was indescribable. Newspapers printed extremely vile attacks against the Church and the Pope, while the parliament hailed the two criminals as martyrs. Meanwhile, Joseph Mazzini was planning the violent overthrow of Victor Emmanuel II and Napoleon II, the seizure of Rome, and the formation of a republic with neither religion nor pope. New secret societies were already at work on

[3] Don Bosco had a pass for himself and a companion on the southern railroad network, valid through 1869. [Editor]

such designs. The revolution was to break out simultaneously in Milan, Turin, Genoa, Naples, and the whole of Romagna. The army was also involved in the plot, mostly through non-commissioned officers. The interception of some mail, however, revealed the plot and the revolt was quelled immediately. In the midst of all this turmoil, Victor Emmanuel II repeatedly sent word to Don Bosco that he was anxious to see him in Florence. The trial of other anarchists for the treacherous killing of some soldiers had begun in Rome and the death penalty was contemplated. Fearing the outcome of the trial and violence that might ensue, the king once more pleaded for clemency.[4]

It was under these circumstances that Don Bosco called at the Pitti Palace, but he could never see the king who allegedly had left Florence. Anyway, when Don Bosco arrived in Rome the trial was over and the death penalty had been commuted to life imprisonment.[5]

However, Don Bosco had also gone to Florence for a reason of his own—the opening of a house in Rome near the Holy Shroud Church.[6] On this occasion he submitted to Mr. Canton some tentative proposals for the acquisition of a building, adjacent to the Holy Shroud Church, over which the House of Savoy retained certain rights.[7]

Don Bosco remained in Florence for a week, calling on several cabinet ministers and other important officials and being cordially received by everyone, for he was the personification of courteousness and affability. In his friendly talks with the minister, he expressed his grief that the breaking off of negotiations for the appointment of bishops in 1867[8] had left the Piedmontese dioceses of Acqui, Fossano, and Susa still vacant. The minister listened respectfully as he outlined the basis of an agreement which, in his opinion, might prove successful—subject, however, to approval by the Pope. Thus he revived interest in a problem which, though not immediately solved, was eventually acted

[4] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[5] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[6] *See* p. 192. [Editor]
[7] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[8] *See* Vol. VIII, pp. 43-46, 239f, 259ff, 279f, 301, 329f. [Editor]

upon. We shall see [in Volume X] how zealously he strove to solve it. At the same time he also tried to plead the cause of seminarians whose exemption from military service was in jeopardy.[9]

Only late in the evenings was Don Bosco able to spend some time with the archbishop, because his days were filled visiting benefactors and prominent people. He also visited a few churches and religious institutes and said Mass at St. Mark's. The Dominican superior general allowed Father Verda to accompany him to Rome. Together they left on January 14, to the regret of Florentines who longed to see him soon again.[10]

[9] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]
[10] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 39

Don Bosco in Rome

ANXIOUSLY awaited by the foremost Roman families, Don Bosco arrived in Rome with Father Verda on Friday morning. January 15 [1869]. Three princely carriages—two of which belonged to Cardinal Berardi's brother—were waiting for him and his companion. The cardinal's major-domo, inviting him to board the first one, informed him that the prelate was putting a carriage at his disposal for his entire stay.[1]

"I can't accept," Don Bosco objected. "I'm not accustomed to such luxuries...."

"Please," the major-domo insisted.

"No, I can't. Please let me walk."

He was reluctant to enter the city in such regal fashion. At his firm refusal, the major-domo dared not press him any further.

"Very well, then, the cardinal would like you to call as soon as possible on his young nephew who is seriously ill. He asks that you recommend the boy to Mary, Help of Christians and cure him with your blessing."

Don Bosco promised to see the boy. As he began walking, Monsignor Emilian Manacorda reminded him that he had just had a tiresome journey and that furthermore he would disappoint the cardinal by refusing his offer of a carriage. Therefore, just this once, at least, he should accept. Don Bosco relented. The first two coaches took him and his distinguished friends to the Church of San Bernardo alle Terme for Mass, while the third brought Father Verda to the Dominican monastery.

While Don Bosco was saying Mass, a messenger arrived from

[1] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

the cardinal's brother who had been unable to meet him at the station, requesting Monsignor Manacorda[2] to ask Don Bosco if he would kindly pray for the little child whose condition had become critical. The monsignor immediately complied. Don Bosco nodded assent and continued Holy Mass, totally absorbed in God as always.

Delighted at having Don Bosco in his church, the procurator general of the Cistercians, Father Bottino, invited him for coffee after Mass. From there Don Bosco was driven to the residence of the cardinal vicar, to whom he paid his respects, and finally to the home of Chevalier Peter Marietti, where he had arranged to stay. These details were supplied to us by Monsignor Manacorda.

Don Bosco had planned to keep out of sight so as to have greater freedom of movement and more time to attend to his own business, but he did not succeed. As soon as news of his arrival spread, great numbers of Romans and tourists began to flock to the Marietti home.[3]

Don Bosco had come to Rome for various reasons, including the task entrusted to him in Florence, but his main concern was the Holy See's approval of the Salesian Society and authorization to issue dimissorials to his clerics. Setbacks had not disheartened him. He had bided his time. Again and again he had renewed his petitions personally or in writing—generally without success—but he had not given up hope, content to overcome at least one little obstacle at a time. And now, in Rome, though he had bolstered his position with many episcopal letters of recommendation, he immediately found hesitation and difficulties. We have jotted down his remarks in a memorandum:

As soon as I arrived in Rome, [he said] I sized up the situation and found that unfortunately only a few prelates would support me. While most were merely unsympathetic and skeptical, the more influential ones were firmly against me. Letters very hostile to our Society had reached Rome. True, they praised Don Bosco, his intentions, the Oratory, and all the good that was being done for the young, but they still opposed our Congregation, especially because of the articles which

[2] *See* Vol. V, p. 77. [Editor]
[3] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

would have withdrawn our clerics from the jurisdiction of the bishops. Memoranda and rescripts were quoted to support this point of view. Not even Cardinal de Angelis[4] [Don Bosco's personal friend] favored granting this privilege.

I kept pointing out that the granting of dimissorial letters was a fundamental feature of religious congregations with houses in various dioceses, and that, except for diocesan congregations, all others enjoyed this privilege in our region. I added that many bishops, as evidenced by their letters of commendation, wished to cooperate in consolidating the Salesian Society and helping it in every expedient and suitable way. In rebuttal I was told that such privileges, if granted, would be included in the approval of the constitutions, but that, for the present, the only matter at hand was the Society's approval—and this would be no easy matter, either.

Even Father James Margotti,[5] so attached to Don Bosco, agreed with Cardinal De Angelis and other prelates. Not content with the information supplied by Monsignor Tortone and the archbishop of Turin, the Holy See had confidentially asked this theologian for an accurate report of the differences between Archbishop Riccardi and Don Bosco and of the teaching being imparted in the archdiocesan seminary. Father Margotti's reply to Monsignor Svegliati [secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars] follows:

Turin, Feast of St. Francis de Sales, 1869

Very Reverend Monsignor:

The better to fulfill my delicate task, I consulted pious, well-informed persons without, however, revealing my true purpose. Here are the results of my investigation.

1. The course of clerical studies in Don Bosco's Oratory is highly commendable in every aspect. His clerics are trained in deep piety and sound doctrine. From this standpoint, too, Don Bosco's Oratory has rendered and is rendering signal service to the Church at large and to the Turin archdiocese in particular.

2. Teaching in the archdiocesan seminary has shown an extraordinary improvement these days. Of the three professors named, perhaps

[4] *See* Vol. VIII, pp. 234ff. [Editor]

[5] Founder of *Unità Cattolica*, a Catholic weekly. *See* Vol. VII, p. 332. [Editor]

Father [Francis] Barone is the only one to worry about. At first, several seminarians complained about his teaching, but these complaints ceased a year ago. No complaint was ever lodged against the other two professors, Father Barbero and Father Testa. The latter especially is a man of excellent character and profound learning.

3. Any course of studies independent of the archbishop of Turin could have serious consequences and give rise to two factions, not only among the younger clergy, but also among the older priests. Things would then be worse than now.

4. Supervision should be exerted over the teaching imparted in the seminary. Should complaints arise, one can be certain of a prompt remedy to the situation if it is brought to the archbishop's attention. It matters a good deal that he recognize the need to watch over it.

5. Don Bosco's Oratory deserves every possible favor, but I must stress that its independence [from episcopal jurisdiction] would prove a fatal germ of strife and schism. Practical-minded people whose only concerns are the glory of God and the welfare of the Church believe that the best course of action is to recommend the Oratory to the archbishop so that it may obtain all it needs to prosper and grow.

Since I am truly stating this in God's presence, I have no fear to sign this report.

Devotedly yours,
Father James Margotti

In the above-mentioned memorandum, Don Bosco continued:

I realized then that nothing short of a miracle would bring about a change of heart. There was no other way to achieve my end. Our poor rules were being taken apart and insurmountable difficulties raised with every word. Those who could have done the most for me were determinedly opposed. But, trusting in Our Lady and the prayers being said in the Oratory, I still hoped to overcome all difficulties.

In turn, Father Rua wrote in his chronicle: "During Don Bosco's stay in Rome, the boys faithfully said the prayers he had requested.[6] In fact, they overdid themselves by taking turns in receiving Holy Communion every day as an act of gratitude to their good father." Their prayers were answered.

Several days had passed since Don Bosco's arrival and he

[6] *See* p. 219. [Editor]

seemed to have forgotten Cardinal Berardi's request. The eleven-year-old boy was the only son of very wealthy, noble parents and the heir to a vast fortune. Naturally, all hopes rested in him. For the past two weeks typhoid fever had so drained the lad of strength that his case had become hopeless. Several times the cardinal had sent for Don Bosco, but for one reason or another the latter had been unable to oblige. At last, anguished and impatient, the prelate sent this message: "I beg you, come and see if there is any hope for the boy."

Don Bosco complied. As soon as he entered the palace, the boy's parents, uncle, and members of the household crowded around him. "Make him recover, Don Bosco! Make him recover!" they pleaded.

As if oblivious of the child, Don Bosco turned to the cardinal and said: "Your Eminence, I came here to enlist your support toward the Holy See's approval of the Society of St. Francis de Sales."

"Make my nephew well and I will speak favorably of your Society to the Holy Father."

Ushered into the youngster's room, Don Bosco approached the bedside. "Have faith," he told the parents, "and start a novena to Mary, Help of Christians. And you, Your Eminence, show care for the Society of St. Francis de Sales." He said a few prayers and blessed the little patient. The fever left him immediately. The cardinal renewed his promise to do his best for the Salesian Society, and to overcome difficulties instead of raising them, if his nephew recovered.

The novena was started immediately. Three days later, Don Bosco returned and found the boy sitting up in bed.

"Oh, Don Bosco," he cried on seeing the priest, "I'm feeling better! I've already eaten some meat." It was only the third day of the novena and he was already out of danger. Within a short time he was quite well again.

This extraordinary recovery—evidently a favor from the Madonna—deeply moved the whole family. Beside himself with joy, Cardinal Berardi called on Don Bosco.

"Dear Father," he said, "I'll do whatever you ask of me. Just speak."

"You know what I want. Take my Society to your heart, talk about it to the Holy Father, and try to arrange matters so that I may obtain my wish."

"I shall do all I can. I'll see the Holy Father immediately. Rest assured of that."

He did indeed obtain an audience with the Pope and enthusiastically told him about what had happened, earnestly recommending the Salesian Society to him. Surprised at all he heard, the Pope expressed a desire to see Don Bosco soon.

In the meantime the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had already met several times to examine the Salesian constitutions. Their greatest objection centered on an apparent contradiction between the vow of poverty and ownership. They could not see how a member of a congregation professing poverty could still retain ownership of his estate. It seemed absurd for a person to consider himself poor while owning real estate and other goods and retaining the right to dispose of his possessions by testament.

Don Bosco meanwhile was calling on the consultors of the same Sacred Congregation to prove to them that the practice of evangelical poverty expressed in his rules was not contrary to the nature of this vow, and that this was the only way to save the property of religious orders from confiscation by the state. These theologians were perhaps unaware of the Holy See's approval of the Institute of Charity.[7] Only after serious study of the matter did they accept Don Bosco's point of view. They too then realized that, in the situation then current, the only possible way of providing for the sustenance of members of religious communities was for them to retain their own property.

Word of Don Bosco's position in this matter reached the Roman monasteries, and the superiors of the Dominicans and Franciscans came to consult him on his concept of the vow of poverty. They also asked him for a copy of his rules, declaring that if the Church were to approve them, they would revise their own accordingly. In fact, some years later, all the ancient orders did just that. But even at this time several cardinals assured Don

[7] Usually referred to as the Rosminian Fathers, after their founder, Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855). [Editor]

Bosco that the forthcoming ecumenical council would take his rules as a basis for ensuring the existence of all religious orders.

"Thus," Don Bosco declared in a conference to his Salesians, "the Lord availed Himself of us to propose a new concept of the vow of poverty in keeping with the requirements of the times. All this redounds to the glory of God, because it was He who did it all."

Nevertheless, since some of the more influential members of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars were of the opinion that the Salesian constitutions could not be approved, Don Bosco called on Cardinal Antonelli, both to fulfill the unofficial mission he had accepted from the government in Florence and also to win over a friend to his cause. He knew that the successful outcome of the matter depended in part upon him. Like many others, Cardinal Antonelli did not think it possible that the Salesian Society could be approved at this time, especially because of certain contradictions in its rules.

When Don Bosco called on the cardinal, he found him suffering from gout.

"Come in, my dear Don Bosco," the prelate welcomed him.

"How are you, Your Eminence?"

"Quite poor, as you see. I have been a prisoner of this chair for some days now. My gout disappeared after your last visit through your prayers to Mary, Help of Christians, but now it is again causing me atrocious pain."

"Your Eminence, help me in matters which I have at heart and I guarantee your recovery."

"What do you want of me?"

"That you take an interest in the Society of St. Francis de Sales."

"That is quite a difficult matter, I would think. Anyway, I promise that I shall put in a good word for you as soon as I can call on the Holy Father."

"The matter is urgent."

"You know I can't move. Generally the Pope comes to see me when I am unable to call on him. When he comes, I shall speak to him."

"Have faith in Mary, Help of Christians and go to him soon. All

I ask now is a promise that you will push for the approval of the Society of St. Francis de Sales."

The cardinal kept looking at him silently.

"Please go and see the Holy Father soon," Don Bosco repeated.

"When? exclaimed the cardinal, staring at him in astonishment.

"Tomorrow!"

"Do you really mean I shall be able to go?"

"Yes, you will. Tomorrow!"

"But how can that be?"

"Just have faith, lively faith in Mary, Help of Christians; otherwise nothing can be done."

"Very well, I will go tomorrow. But what if my gout gets worse?"

"I guarantee you that tomorrow you will feel better. Leave it all to Mary. She knows what to do."

"Very well, I will go tomorrow. If your promise is fulfilled, I shall do everything I can for your Congregation."

The following morning Cardinal Antonelli felt much better, called on the Holy Father, and told him of his conversation with Don Bosco and of his recovery.

CHAPTER 41

Don Bosco in Rome (Continued)

AT the start of the carnival holidays, all business offices in Rome closed, thus affording Don Bosco more time to concern himself with the Oratory which was never far from his thoughts. He took advantage of the respite to write several letters to Father Rua, who kept him constantly informed about the Oratory and the other two houses. Here is his first letter:

Rome, January 31, 1869

Dear Father Rua:

For some particular reason I want you to suspend printing of the Latin dictionary until I return. Tell Buzzetti and all those who have anything to do with the printshop that, for the future, I do not want anything printed without my consent or yours whenever I give you specific authorization.

It might also be wise for you to give a conference stressing the necessity of obedience in deed and not in word, pointing out that he who does not know how to obey will never be qualified to command.

Take care of your health, rest as much as you can, and avoid unwholesome foods. As regards the Divine Office, omit Matins until the middle of February. Say just the minor hours, Vespers, and Compline, and not all at one time.

Your friend,
Fr. John Bosco[1]

During those days Don Bosco said Mass and prayed at St. Peter's tomb, as he always did when in Rome, for he felt himself drawn there by a most ardent love.[2]

[1] We are omitting two other letters to Father Rua about various errands. [Editor]

[2] We are omitting an entry in the register of St. Peter's sacristy concerning a Mass Don Bosco said on January 22, 1867 and also a reference to a cure obtained from Mary, Help of Christians in that same year. [Editor]

On February 2, he was invited by the superior of a distinguished order to attend a solemn church service followed by dinner. He arrived in mid-moring and went into the sacristy with the intention of going to confession before saying Mass. "Is there a priest available?" he asked the sacristan. "I would like to go to confession."

"There is no one here," he was told.

"Aren't confessions being heard today?" he insisted. "Isn't the superior around?"

"Yes, he is."

He was then led into a hall adjoining a room where the superior was playing billiards with some friends. When told that a priest wished to see him, he told the messenger to ask what he wanted.

"Tell him I would like to go to confession," Don Bosco informed him.

The superior then came to the door and somewhat resentfully told Don Bosco: "Don't you know that I do not hear confessions?"

"Is there anyone who does?" Don Bosco countered.

"Yes, those who can't do anything else!"

Returning to the sacristy, Don Bosco found the religious who had invited him there, a good friend of his and the sole member of the order that he knew. The latter warmly welcomed him and then heard his confession.

After Mass, he was introduced to the superior who did not as yet know him personally. Afterward, Don Bosco gently chided him: "Father Abbot, it's hard to believe, but here was a priest who wanted to go to confession and could not find a confessor on a very solemn feast! When I asked for Father Abbot, I was told that he did not hear confessions. Worse yet, to my surprise I was informed that here confessions are heard only by those who can do nothing else."

"Ah, Don Bosco, forgive me. I didn't know you. I was wrong. Please do not tell the Holy Father about it."

"I won't, but never again say that here confessions are heard only by those who can do nothing else. Let me suggest this: appoint your most learned and experienced priests as confessors, for this is the most delicate task of the sacred ministry."

Several friends of his were anxious to know the fate of Rome, of

Pius IX, and of papal temporal power. Don Bosco told them that in 1871 Pius IX would celebrate his [silver] jubilee as Pope and would surpass St. Peter in regard to the length of his pontificate. When sounded out on political matters, he evaded a direct reply but did say that Napoleon would withdraw his troops. He also clearly predicted the seizure of Rome. Years later, on January 9, 1874, Father Joachim Berto was in Rome with Don Bosco. In town they met a gentleman who, among other things, remarked to Don Bosco: "I did not want to believe that the Italians would enter Rome, and neither did Father Verda. But in 1870 when Italian troops poured in, I recalled what you had told me a year before—that the Italians would definitely seize Rome."

Don Bosco also visited some institutions, though he did his best not to attract attention.[3] On Quinquagesima Sunday, he was scheduled for an audience and went to the Vatican in grand style. After his return to the Oratory, he himself narrated the moving event in a fatherly way to his Salesians in order to show Pius IX's goodness to him:

> When the day came for the audience, Pius IX told his household: "Don Bosco has no coach. Fetch him in mine." They left and called for me at the house where I was staying. I entered the coach. It was large enough to seat a dozen people and was completely covered with silk and brocades. Imagine me sitting there all by myself! I was driven to the Vatican, and by the Pope's orders the coach waited for me and took me to the Vitelleschi residence where I wished to go. There too the coachmen wanted to wait for me, but when I told them that my stay would be long, they finally yielded and returned to the Vatican.

This audience was most comforting to Don Bosco. As soon as he was ushered in, Pius IX said to him: "Don Bosco, I would like you to do me a favor. Would you be willing to open a house of studies and an oratory, like the one you have in Turin, right here in Rome?

"Holy Father, that was just what I had in mind to ask you"

"Well then, go to St. Caius and see if the building next to the Incarnation Convent suits you. Then try to strike a deal with the owners."

[3] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

Solicitously, the Holy Father went on to tell Don Bosco that if the project went through, he wished to send some priests and clerics from Turin that very year to study philosophy and theology at the Minerva and Gregorian universities. After earning doctoral degrees, they would return to teach at the Oratory, thus putting an end to the complaints of the archbishop of Turin. The Pope himself, through his vicar, would confer sacred orders on Don Bosco's sons!

Don Bosco gratefully accepted the proposal, and after a lengthy exposition of the state of affairs of the Salesian Society, he informed the Holy Father of an insistent demand that a confraternity be canonically erected in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. He assured Pius IX that he would submit the confraternity's by-laws to the archbishop of Turin and ask him to establish it canonically; in the meantime, would the Holy Father grant it various indugences? The Pope readily obliged. Don Bosco also asked him for several honorific titles for a few distinguished benefactors, and the Pope again graciously consented. At the close of the audience, Pius IX gave Don Bosco a box of crucifixes endowed with an indulgence of 400 days every time they were kissed.

In due time Don Bosco went to the Quirinal to inspect the vacant building at St.Caius belonging to the Incarnation Convent, also known as the Barberini Sisters' Convent because it was a foundation of the Barberini family.[4] The building the Pope had in mind had two large wings, one of which, vacant for quite some time, would have well suited Don Bosco's plans. Adjoining it were a church and a very large field suitable for future construction.

Meanwhile, in Turin, permission had been granted to all charitable institutions to set up stands in Piazza Castello during the carnival holidays and sell whatever they wished. Don Bosco had originated the idea. In those days the carnival holidays in Turin were the most decorous, peaceful, and entertaining in the whole of Italy. A special commission with full police powers was charged to ensure order, morality and mutual respect.

[4] A powerful Florentine family that established itself in Rome and gave to the Church Pope Urban VIII, two cardinals, and a prefect of the city. [Editor]

Aware of the Oratory's needs, Don Bosco, before leaving for Rome, had told his co-workers to make plans for the carnival fair. Everyone had been highly surprised and almost shocked.

"What? Are we to take part in the carnival?"

"Yes, we shall, but not in its insanity. We shall not lower ourselves but will make others come up to our level." Many objects had been left over from the last lottery, and Don Bosco intended to put them up for sale along with many other things that were being donated by generous-hearted Turinese. After leaving the whole matter in Chevalier Oreglia's hands, Don Bosco left for Rome.

The chevalier set up a nicely decorated booth on a large platform in Piazza Castello behind the towers of Palazzo Madama[5] facing Via Po. He also sent out a charming poem in the Piedmontese dialect to his friends and acquaintances, asking them to come and admire his booth and spend their money there. He even sent several such invitations to Rome.

His booth turned out to be one of the most attractive and best stocked, especially with books. A great number of people were drawn there by the Oratory brass band, for which Maestro De Vecchi had composed a special fantasia entitled "Gianduia's Fair."[6] The young musicians wore yellow masquerade costumes, while Chevalier Oreglia, dressed as Gianduia himself, summoned one and all in witty, wholesome, Piedmontese rhymes. All the nobility of Turin hastened to his booth where he sold his merchandise at handsome prices.

Even Prince Amadeus of Savoy came to watch him, shook hands with him, and left him a hundred-lire donation.

"What will you do with it, Gianduia?" the prince asked.

"Your Highness, I shall share it with my friends, the poor, and we shall pray that you may have a long life."

"Bravo, Gianduia!"

[5] Palazzo Madama, located in the center of Piazza Castello in the heart of Turin, is a massive building consisting of three structures of different origin—Roman, medieval, and modern—summing up the city's two thousand years of history. Its magnificent internal staircase and its eighteenth-century façade by Filippo Juvarra represent one of the finest creations of European baroque. Palazzo Madama was the seat of the Subalpine Senate from 1840 to 1860 and of the Italian Senate until 1864. At present it houses the City Museum of Ancient Art. [Editor]

[6] Gianduia was a popular puppet of the Piedmontese theater. [Editor]

As Chevalier Oreglia, after entertaining the crowds, would take time to rest his lungs, the band would fill in with selections by famous composers, but at each new piece the crowds would shout, "We want Don Bosco's polka," and the band had to oblige. This was the name they had given to De Vecchi's musical fantasia. Performed by costumed players with instruments which were to a large extent improvised, the ensemble produced a most pleasing effect. In those years this composition was part of every musical repertoire.

For three days the booth was also enthusiastically patronized by great numbers of priests and religious. Those were days of genuine, wholesome, godly amusement, once more proving how true was Don Bosco's oft repeated saying: "One can have fun without offending God."

While people amused themselves in town, the Oratory boys had plenty of fun with a variety of games and other entertainment. Then, on the last day of the carnival [February 9], they offered their Communion for the souls in purgatory and prayed for those companions of theirs whom God might call into eternity. These prayers were to benefit two boys especially. Among our own notes and in the Oratory register we find the following information: "Bartholomew Ferrero, Latin III student, born at Villafranca d'Asti, fell seriously ill and left the Oratory on January 1, 1869. He died at home." There is no indication as to the place or the day of his death. Most likely this was the boy of Don Bosco's dream on October 30, 1868.[7] About the second boy the register had this entry: "Angelo Oriali, son of Thomas, born at Castelletto Ticino, left the Oratory on February 8, 1869, convalescing from an illness, and died at home."

These were the first two of the six deaths predicted by Don Bosco.[8]

[7] *See* pp. 184f. [Editor]
[8] *See* p. 210. [Editor]

CHAPTER 42

Don Bosco in Rome (Continued)

LENT had begun and Don Bosco's petitions were now under definitive consideration by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. In the course of several meetings the constitutions and pertinent observations of several bishops were subjected to a detailed examination, during which Monsignor Svegliati informed the commission of cardinals about the Pope's wishes. Don Bosco was also called in for further explanations. For about a month now, Father Verda declared, these very important matters had weighed on Don Bosco's mind, forcing him at times to withdraw from others and walk alone with his thoughts into solitary places. One day, at the end of a meeting, [Raphael] Cardinal Monaco La Valletta, desiring Don Bosco's company, asked him to share his coach. The latter, however, exhausted and unable to engage in further talk, humbly begged off, candidly manifesting his reason and his chagrin at being unable to accept such an honor. The cardinal was disappointed but did not insist.

On these solitary walks, he occasionally met some well-known monsignor.

"What? Don Bosco walking?"

"Yes, Monsignor."

"All alone? I'll keep you company!"

"Thanks, Monsignor, but I need to be alone."

"Won't you get lost?"

"Today that might be just as well. I need some rest."

He must indeed have been tired and distressed to talk that way.

When he was told of the date when the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars would reach a final decision on the Salesian Society, he had word sent to the Oratory that, throughout that

day, the boys should take turns in adoring the Blessed Sacrament. Many students and artisans who had not been assigned any specific time went to the church on their own, willingly sacrificing a good part of their play time. Such piety pleased the Lord.

On February 19, 1869 the Salesian Society was approved by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and Pius IX joyfully ratified its decision. That same evening Don Bosco went back to the Vatican to thank the Pope, saying: "Throughout this week my boys were on pins and needles for my sake, and they stormed heaven with prayers for the success of my mission."

At these words Pius IX was moved to tears. Commenting on the approval, he remarked to Don Bosco: "Now, Father, you must hurry to get the constitutions approved. I am acquainted with everything, I am familiar with your goals, and I'll back you up in every way I can, but I am old and may die at any moment. Who knows who the next Pope will be and how things may drag on!"

"Holy Father," Don Bosco replied with habitual serenity, "the Lord still has great things in store for you for the good of the Church."

"Ah," Pius IX said, "there is only another year and a half before my silver jubilee and I'll have to face up to the *non videbis annos Petri.*"[1]

"That's not an article of faith!"

"True, but this saying has never yet been proven false."

"Go easy, Your Holiness," Don Bosco countered. "We must first deduct the year and a half which you spent in exile at Gaeta; then, we must add the seven years that St. Peter spent at Antioch and the two in Jerusalem. I therefore can tell Your Holiness that not only will you match St. Peter's reign, but you will surpass it as well."

"Well, we shall bear that in mind, and when we shall have reached that point, we shall praise you for your prediction."

The Holy Father then gave him wise norms for an ever deeper religious formation of the Salesians and bade him to make them known for their practical guidance. He also offered advice for his young pupils. The audience had lasted an hour.

[1] A reference to an old saying that no Pope would reign longer than St. Peter who was Pope for twenty-five years. [Editor]

That same evening Monsignor [Emilian] Manacorda[2] wrote to Turin:

Rome, February 19, 1869

Dear Father Rua:

Don Bosco received your letter a few hours after I mailed my last one. Now that everything is settled in regard to the Salesian Congregation, we are busying ourselves with finding money for the purchase of a new house in Rome. Things look good. I trust that the Lord will not forsake His faithful servant in this matter, either. The deed of sale will be drawn up Monday or Tuesday and Don Bosco will be able to return to Turin with two very important documents: the purchase of a building and the approval of the Salesian Society. Blessed be God and Mary, Help of Christians!

Father Savio has Don Bosco's permission to conclude the sale of the building you know about. The deed will be drawn up as soon as he gets back.

Settle what pertains to Father Bongiovanni as you think best....

Emilian Manacorda

After taking leave of the Pope, Don Bosco lingered a few more days in Rome. While waiting for the Pope's signature on the decree of approval of the Salesian Society and on some papal briefs, he busied himself with bringing to a successful conclusion the two-week-long negotiations involving the building at St. Caius. He called on the nuns who owned the vacant building and found them agreeable to his proposal. He also approached Prince Barberini who by this time was undoubtedly acquainted with the Pope's intentions. An agreement was reached for 50,000 lire. Divine Providence also saw to the funds for a down payment. As soon as Cardinal Antonelli heard that the contract had been signed, he sent 2,000 lire to Don Bosco with this note: "This is my first offering in thanksgiving for the favor obtained from Mary, Help of Christians. It will not be the last, either."

Don Bosco still needed someone to handle the details and thus leave him free to attend to other business. He soon found his man

[2] *See* Vol. V, pp. 77, 380; Vol. VII, pp. 442f; Vol. VIII, p. 44. [Editor]

in the person of Attorney Ignatius Bertarello, whose only son Don Bosco had cured. On that occasion the attorney had exclaimed: "Don Bosco, ask me anything and I'll do it." At Don Bosco's request he agreed to do all the legal work on the contract. On his part, Don Bosco continued to look for money for that purchase and found his benefactors quite responsive to his appeals.[3]

Father Rua had received news from Don Bosco himself as well:

Rome, February 26, 1869

My dear Father Rua:

I cannot as yet set the date of my departure. Perhaps I'll leave next Monday or Tuesday, but by Friday, God willing, I shall be at the Oratory. You will hear from me from Florence. Meanwhile get things ready for a solemn celebration of the feast of St. Francis de Sales on Sunday, March 7. Please let Count Viancino know of it because he is the chairman of the festivities. Ask him to do us a favor by spending the whole day with us. Tell Father Solari that I have a holy picture to give him which he will like very much.

As matters stand now, our Society is definitively approved, we may have our members ordained *titulo mensae communis*, and we may issue dimissorial letters for our ordinands.[4] We have also signed a contract for the purchase of a church and a building at St. Caius on the Quirinal Hill. It is one of the loveliest spots in Rome, perhaps *the* loveliest. Between the Four Fountains and Porta Pia there stands the Barberini Sisters' Convent, and next to it we shall have our house of studies ... and whatever else God will decide. The first outlay amounts to 50,000 lire. I'll see what down payment I can make, but I hope to be able to return with some funds. Other very important things I'll tell you personally. You may share this news with our confreres, but please warn them to keep it to themselves. We must be prudent in everything and pray. Send this news also to Lanzo and Mirabello. Tell Father Bonetti that I'll pay him a visit two weeks after my return.

[3] This sentence is a condensation. We are omitting at this point extracts of letters sent to Chevalier Oreglia from Roman benefactors and friends about their esteem for Don Bosco. [Editor]

[4] This last faculty was restricted to a period of ten years and only for candidates who had entered Salesian houses before puberty. [Editor]

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always. Praise and thanks forever to the Most Holy and Divine Sacrament. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Tell Father Borel that, during an audience, the Holy Father sent him his blessing and a medal which I shall give him. He also blessed all his religious communities.

I am somewhat tired, both physically and mentally. I'd really appreciate your seeing to it that no reception be prepared for my return—nothing more than if I were just coming in from town. It would be a great relief for me.

Upon receiving this letter, Father Rua had Father Berto make handwritten copies, omitting references to individuals, and he sent them to Lanzo and to Mirabello.

CHAPTER 43

Don Bosco in Rome (Continued)

PROMINENT among Don Bosco's many Roman patrician friends was Rudolph Boncompagni Ludovisi, duke of Sora and later prince of Piombino, who had met Don Bosco through Chevalier Oreglia in the mid-sixties. The ensuing cordial relationship lasted until Don Bosco's death. The prince, who was thirty-five in 1867, died on December 12, 1911. Among his papers were several letters from Don Bosco and this brief account of Don Bosco's visit in 1867:[1]

On January 12 of this year [1867] Don Bosco said Mass and gave Communion to several people in our private chapel. Immediately afterward, at the request of Father Caesar [Calandrelli], our son's tutor, he addressed a few words to the small congregation. After remarking that priests should say Mass with genuine fervor, he exhorted us to make it a habit to attend Mass daily and visit the Blessed Sacrament in order to obtain favors, offer up our worries, and fervently pray for the Pope and the uprooting of heresies now spreading throughout Italy. Warming up to his subject, he exclaimed: "Faith, faith, faith is what we always need, especially now in these very distressing times." Afterward, in the drawing room, he spoke privately with each member of the household, including Bertelli, our domestic, who was convalescing.

When it was my turn, I began by recommending P... and his speedy conversion, promising a donation for the Church of Mary, Help of Christians if the favor was granted. He personally assured me that he would write to him as soon as he got back to Turin to recommend his boys and his church to him. When I told him of my lack of fervor, he said not to worry....[A week] later, I made my general confession to him. When I was through, he told me that he was reconciling me to God and

[1]This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

absolving me from all my sins. He exhorted me to do better and overcome my spiritual indolence, promising to pray for me and my family. Two hours later, I returned with some doubts. "Be at peace," he reassured me. "I take the responsibility for all your sins up to 10:30 P.M. of January 19, 1867. Just forget them!"

After his return to Turin, Don Bosco wrote the following letters to the duke and duchess:

Turin, March 29, 1867

My dear Duke,

I was very glad to hear from you and I am grateful for your remembrance of me. On my part, I will pray for you and your whole family in my daily Mass. Starting tomorrow, Sunday, I will offer a novena of Masses, and some of my very best boys will receive Holy Communion for the duchess. Cheer her up. Let us pray with great faith and keep hoping. I shall remember our dear Hugo in my holy Mass. Please let me know the date of his First Communion, and I shall say Mass for him that day....

May God bless you and all your household. May the Blessed Virgin help us all to persevere along the path to heaven. Amen. I recommend myself to your prayers.

Very gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Please give my regards to Father Caesar.

Turin, July 30, 1867

My dear Duchess:

I was delighted by your greetings inspired by such genuine Christian spirit and charity. May God reward you a hundredfold by bestowing upon you and your entire family those blessings which you so generously invoked upon me on my name day.

In my anxiety to hear from you, I had just written to Rome for your address when I received your letter. Please tell the duke that I have prayed and will continue to pray for his health. I firmly believe that, through the assistance of Mary, Help of Christians, nothing untoward will happen to you under the present circumstances.[2] Tell my dear Hugo

[2]At this time cholera had broken out in Rome. [Editor]

that I shall gladly pray that God will grant him humility and charity as he requested in his letter. I shall also beg the Blessed Virgin, Help of Christians, to make him a model of virtue for his brothers and the joy of his parents. Please tell Father Caesar that I am grateful for his gracious postscript to Hugo's letter. I shall recommend him in a special manner to the Lord, that He may so inspire his words and thoughts as to turn each member of your family into another St. Aloysius.

Now here is some news concerning us. We are all well here, but the cholera is raging in neighboring towns, according to a letter from Rome. We fully trust in the protection of Mary, Help of Christians. You too and your whole family should remain tranquil. No one who contributes to the construction of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians shall fall victim to these evils, as long as they have faith in Her.

Incidentally, I am glad to tell you that work is progressing rapidly, thanks to Our Lady's constant supply of funds. We hope that by the end of this year the church will be ready. Will you or your family perhaps come to visit us? Or will Don Bosco perhaps see you in Senigallia? We shall see. God bless you and your whole family. May He grant to all of us the grace to persevere along the path to heaven till the end of our days.

Please remember me and my boys in your devout prayers.

Very gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

When Don Bosco returned to Rome in 1869, their correspondence continued and visits were resumed.[3] We wonder how many other letters [of Don Bosco] and other memoirs about him may be hidden in stately mansions not only in Rome but in a hundred other cities throughout Italy, France, and Spain where noble families met and hosted our founder!

[3] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 44

Don Bosco's Return to Turin

ON March 1 [1869] Mother Magdalene Galeffi informed Chevalier Oreglia that Don Bosco was about to leave Rome. The following morning Don Bosco said Mass at St. Peter-in-Chains for a large number of people. Shortly afterward, a messenger brought him an envelope bearing the seal of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. It contained the decree of approval of the Salesian Society which he was to deliver to Archbishop Riccardi of Turin. Toward midnight, coaches provided by Cardinal Berardi and the Vitelleschi and Villa Rios families took him and Father Verda to the railroad station, where many other friends were waiting to see them off....[1]

In Florence Don Bosco was the guest of the archbishop. During his short stay, he briefed Mr. Canton about his successful negotiations for the building at St. Caius without, however, abandoning his plans concerning the Holy Shroud Church. He left Florence for Turin on March 4 at eleven at night.

In his chronicle, Father Rua describes Don Bosco's arrival at the Oratory as follows:

Friday, March 5. Don Bosco arrived at about 7:30 in the evening, accompanied by one of Chevalier Marietti's sons. The brass band met him at the main entrance. Two rows of tall poles surmounted by glass-encased candles and flaming torches formed a wide path from the entrance to the porticoes, lined with cheering students and artisans. Led by the band, Don Bosco passed through their ranks amid thunderous applause. Illumination of the balconies enabled all to see him and the inscriptions hanging in his house. He walked to the prefect's waiting

[1] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

room where he rested a while and took some refreshment while commenting briefly on his stay in Rome. He took pains to show the layout of the new house he had purchased there and its adjoining church which alone was valued at 150,000 lire. Meanwhile, the band kept playing various selections in the playground. *Vivas* were endless amid unrestrained manifestations of joy.

That evening a moving incident greatly impressed both the Salesians and the boys. Nearby, at the Rifugio, Father John Borel lay seriously ill. Hearing music and joyful shouts, he guessed that Don Bosco was back. Since he was at the moment unattended, he got up, dressed, and then, leaning against the wall, went downstairs. Supporting himself on a cane, he walked out of the Rifugio and dragged himself to the Oratory. Staggering through the playground, he finally reached the porticoes just as Don Bosco, surrounded by boys, was about to go up to his room. Indeed he had already mounted the first step.

"Don Bosco, Don Bosco!" he cried out feebly.

The boys made way for him.

"Oh, Father," Don Bosco exclaimed, quickly turning around.

"Is the Salesian Society approved?" Father Borel went on.

"Yes, it is!"

"*Deo gratias!* Now I can die happy!"

Without another word, he turned around and went back to his bed. What love and respect he had for Don Bosco! In 1870, in somewhat better health, he met Father Albera in town.

"You men think you know Don Bosco! But what you know is next to nothing! You'd be amazed indeed had I the time to tell you all the marvelous things that I know about him." This good priest knew the Oratory thoroughly and was well aware of the boundless respect of the boys for Don Bosco, whom they regarded as an extraordinary saint.

Don Bosco hastened to call on the archbishop. Father Rua's chronicle has this entry: "March 6 [1869]. Don Bosco delivered the decree of approval of the Salesian Society to Archbishop Riccardi, together with an explanatory letter from Rome."

The decree follows:

CHAPTER 45

Family Briefings

DON Bosco constantly strove to kindle his pupils' interest in anything concerning the Oratory because he wanted them to consider it as their own home. He kept them informed on matters which he believed they should know. He followed the same policy even after establishing the Society of St. Francis de Sales, hoping that many of his pupils would see in it their ideal of Christian life, the goal of their studies, the safe harbor of their vocation, and their opportunity to share in the undertakings and glorious destiny promised by the Madonna. Therefore, on Monday, March 8 [1869], when all the Oratory boys had gathered in the study hall for night prayers, he told them why he had gone to Rome, explaining that the Oratory was not standing on a cloud but was resting on a religious Congregation as its foundation. He then continued:

I went to Rome against everyone's advice. Some kept telling me that mine would be a useless trip because I would achieve nothing; others declared that if I did go, I would return empty-handed. But I felt that I had to go, for I very much wanted our Society to be approved. As matters turned out, the very people who had tried to dissuade me from the trip ended up helping me to achieve my goal. So now our Society has been definitively approved by the Pope. Your prayers have been heard. Instantly the Lord brought about a change of heart in the people whose help I needed and furthermore saw to it that those very same people should have need of Don Bosco. Tomorrow night Father Francesia will tell you about that. In a word, through prayer we obtained what we wanted from the Madonna.

Our Congregation was approved and given authority to issue dimissorial letters. That means that any boy who wishes to join our Congrega-

tion may become a priest even without a patrimony, provided that he entered one of our houses before his fourteenth year.

The Holy Father thinks so highly of you that he believes you are all young saints like St. Aloysius. I told him that indeed you were, but while saying so I kept my fingers crossed under my cloak.

"I hope I'll meet some of them," the Holy Father interjected, "if not in this world, at least in heaven, where I hope to go before long."

"Holy Father," I objected, "we both still have a lot to do before going to heaven!"

Another thing that I want to tell you is that immediately after our Society was approved, the Holy Father suggested that I buy a house in Rome. That was exactly what I had in mind to tell him. "Do you know that you have taken the words out of my mouth?" I replied.

"Then, obviously it is the Lord who inspired us. Go to look at the premises at once."

I did. The house is now ours and is practically all paid for. There is something else you might like to know. I came back with some money. Part of it made possible the nice time we had yesterday.

The Holy Father gave me this message for you: *Dominus vos benedicat et dirigat vos in semitis Suis.* May the Lord bless you and guide you along His paths. He then granted you a 300-day indulgence each time you say *Maria, Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis.*

I have also brought back crucifixes for all of you, with the privileges of those I gave out before: that is, a 400-day indulgence every time anyone kisses the crucifix, and a plenary indulgence at the end of the month, if one has kissed it daily. A plenary indulgence may also be gained by kissing it at the point of death.

The Pope also granted indulgences to devotees of Mary, Help of Christians and to others as well, as you will be told in due time. Meanwhile, continue to pray for me as I shall pray for you. I am glad that, on the whole, you have behaved well during my absence.

I know that much praying was done—and is still being done—at Lanzo and Mirabello. Let us thank the Lord for all the benefits He has granted us. This has truly been a miracle, and it is due to your prayers. The good Lord simply could not resist your pleas. Therefore let us thank Him with filial love, for it was He who granted us all these favors.

In Rome we shall open a house of studies for priests and clerics, and later we shall also send boys who excel in conduct and diligence.

One more thing. The Holy Father advised me to tell you to hurry to make your will, if you own money or land, so that you won't have to worry about it when you're dying. (*General laughter*) Good night!

On March 8 and 9, Don Bosco summoned the chapter to review the Society's roster and see whether there were any applicants. Several were, in fact, admitted as postulants. March 8 was a memorable day because Don Bosco issued his first dimissorial letter for the cleric Joseph Monateri of Mirabello.

On Thursday, March 11, after night prayers, Don Bosco gathered all the members and postulants in the clerics' dining room and addressed them as follows:

Last Sunday night I spoke about the success of my journey to Rome, and how our Society was approved by the Church and empowered to issue dimissorial letters.

I am now delighted to inform you that two of our confreres—Joseph Monateri and August Croserio—will soon benefit from this privilege and will present themselves for ordination with no other claim than that of belonging to the Society of St. Francis de Sales. We thank the Lord for using us as instruments of His glory and the welfare of souls. It is certainly a token of His special predilection that none of our clerics ever had to interrupt their studies or postpone their clerical investiture or their ordination because of financial reasons. Divine Providence has always been wonderful in this regard. It is a sign that it will continue to help us even more now that we have truly offered ourselves to God, body and soul.

It is time now that we gradually explain what must be done through a set of rules. As you all know, until now our Society has had no crystallized rules. We went along without clearly spelled-out duties. Lacking ecclesiastical approval, our Society was, in some ways, somewhat suspended in air and in danger of collapsing from one day to another. This precarious condition made it inevitable that some laxity should creep in. But now, my dear sons, things are no longer the same. Our Congregation is approved; we are mutually bound: I to you, you to me, all of us to God. The Church has pronounced herself, God has accepted our services, and we have an obligation to keep our promises. We are no longer private individuals but a Society, a moral body with certain privileges. The whole world is watching us and the Church is entitled to our services. From now on, every article in our rules must be faithfully observed. I do not want a sudden turnabout at the Oratory which would only cause disorder and would be impossible, anyway. Little by little, however, we must shape up. Since there is much to be set up, much to be remade, I shall have to bring it to your attention more frequently.

Tonight I shall tell you only a few things, but these must be borne in mind since they are, so to speak, the very basis of our Society. We are the ones who must set these principles on firm foundations so that those who come after us need only follow us. Let us always remember that we have chosen to live in a community. *O quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum,* exclaimed the prophet David when, divinely inspired, he spoke of religious congregations. Oh how good, how delightful it is for all to live together like brothers! It is beautiful to live united by a bond of brotherly love, comforting one another in prosperity and hardship, in joy and in sorrow, in mutual assistance and counsel by word and deed. It is wonderful to live free of all earthly ties, progressing steadily toward heaven under our superior's guidance. But if we want these benefits to accrue from our Society, we must always safeguard its growth and well-being. And, so that this community life may be pleasant, we must rid it of all envy and jealousy. We must love one another as brothers, help one another, assist one another, respect one another, be understanding with one another. Each of us must guard against belittling our Society; rather, each must strive to make it respected by all. We have chosen to live *in unum,* together. What does living together mean? Briefly it means *in unum locum, in unum spiritum, in unum agendi finem*—unity of abode, of spirit, and of will.

First, unity of abode—the first requisite of any religious Society. Like the human body, a religious Congregation needs a head and limbs, the latter subordinate to one another and all subordinate to the head. A head may be handsome and perfect, but detached from the body, it is horrifying. Similarly, I cannot do without you who are the body; neither can you, the members, exist without a head. But only one head is needed because our Society—like a body—would look monstrous with two or more heads. It would lose its oneness. There must therefore be but one head with corresponding members, which, in turn, must perform those tasks that are proper to them, instead of trying to do something else.... If a Society such as ours is to prosper, it must of necessity be properly organized with one giving orders and the others obeying, each performing tasks according to his aptitude. He who obeys should not envy the lot of him who commands, nor should he who works envy him who studies, and so on, because both are necessary. Were all to study, all to give orders, there could no longer be variety. A body composed of all eyes, all ears, all hands would be a monster. Just as each member of the body has its proper function, so each member of the Congregation must do what he is told, not anything else.

In our Society we need preachers, confessors, students, teachers, and

those who must provide for material and moral needs. The superior must be obeyed when he assigns tasks to each one. This is, so to speak, the hinge on which our whole Society revolves. Without obedience chaos would reign. If, instead, obedience rules, we shall form but one body and soul to love and serve the Lord.

Let each one therefore be obedient. Let no one think of doing this or that or say: I'd like to have this or that job. Rather, let each be ready to do whatever is entrusted to him, stay wherever his superior places him, and perform his office diligently. Let each of you accustom himself to seeing God's will in that of his superior. Let each work according to his strength and capabilities. . . . And what is the reward? The reward—and this is the great advantage of community life—is the same for all, irrespective of the office held. Preachers, confessors, teachers, students, kitchen helpers, dishwashers, janitors—all have the same merit. In our Society, both good and bad are shared by all. . . . If all strive to do what is good, all equally earn merit with God, but if one does wrong, the whole Congregation suffers. . . .

Secondly, there must be unity of spirit and of will. What kind of spirit? Charity, my dear sons. Let there be charity in mutual forbearance and correction of faults, in never complaining about one another, and in upholding one another. Let there be charity especially in never speaking ill of our confreres. This is very essential to our Society, because if we wish to do good in the world, we must stand united and enjoy a good reputation. Speaking ill of our Society's members would be the greatest misfortune to befall our Society. Away, therefore, with those cliques of clerics or other persons busily chewing away at this or that fellow or, worse, a superior. Let us defend one another, let us consider as our own the honor and well-being of our Society, and let us be convinced that anyone who is not ready to sacrifice himself to save the Society cannot be a good member.

Let each of us be ever ready to share his joy with others and equally willing to share another's sorrow. If one receives a notable favor, let this make his confreres rejoice too. Is anyone afflicted? Let his confreres seek to alleviate his pain. Should anyone commit a fault, let all try to correct him and feel sorry for him, but let us never despise someone for his physical or moral defects. Always let us love one another like true "brothers," as the prophet David has said.

Finally there must be unity of obedience. Of necessity a body must have one head to control its movements. It will be all the more active and efficient, the readier its members are to obey the head. Similarly, in our Society someone will have to command and others will have to obey. It

may happen at times that the one who gives orders is the least worthy member. Are we to deny him obedience for this reason? No, for in doing so the body would lose its organization and become unable to operate. Let us ever bear in mind that the superior is God's representative, and that in obeying him, we obey God Himself. What does it matter if in many respects he is inferior to us? Our submission will be all the more meritorious. On the other hand, please remember that authority is a weighty burden and that a poor superior would gladly forego it, were he not obliged to exercise it for your good. Therefore, seek to lighten his burden by readily obeying and above all by willingly accepting his orders and admonitions. Bear in mind that he is not anxious to do these things. Should he notice that his words anger or upset you, he might not dare to admonish you on other occasions, and this would harm both you and him. If, as members of this body, we will be willing to perform any task, if we will be animated by charity and guided by obedience, our Society will prove its worth and will have the energy to perform great deeds for God's glory, for the good of our neighbor, and for the welfare of its members.

But this does not mean that one is bound to carry unbearable burdens. If anyone feels he cannot fulfill the task entrusted to him, let him speak out and it will be taken from him. All that is asked of you is that you be willing to do what you can. When necessary, even a priest should be willing to wash dishes. In fact, right here we have seen several doing just that.

We must also always keep in mind our Society's purpose, which is the moral and intellectual education of poor, destitute boys by the use of such means as Divine Profvidence shall send us.

Still following the metaphor of the body, let me add that though the head controls the whole body, there are members who, subordinate to the head, preside over and direct the movements and tasks of the other members. Here I refer to the superior chapter of our Society, whose members act in Don Bosco's name and who are to be obeyed as Don Bosco himself. Each must therefore know whom he is to obey. Father Rua is the prefect, Father Cagliero is the spiritual director of the clerics, Father Francesia is the prefect of studies, and the others are already known to you. This guarantees unity.

Now that our Congregation is gaining ground, we shall have to meet more often to explain the more essential things, leaving the rest to other occasions. The privileges granted to our Society are already coming in handy. In a few days we shall send two of our confreres for holy orders with no title but that of being members of the Society of St. Francis de Sales.

Now I'd like to give you two specific pieces of advice. First, beware of breaking this unity. I am not too happy about something I have noticed: cliques of two, three, four, or five confreres, always the same and nearly always apart from the rest. I do not know what they are doing and I do not want to be so rash as to suggest they are speaking ill. Why these cliques? Do these confreres have different interests from their companions? I wish therefore that you try always to be among the boys during recreation periods, conversing with them, playing with them, and giving them good advice. Keep an eye on them. When you cannot join their games, at least supervise them, make the rounds of the house in its remotest corners, and try to prevent evil. You cannot believe how much good you may do by climbing a staircase, walking down a corridor, or strolling about the playground.

Secondly, be faithful to your daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament, as prescribed by our rules. Thus, by aiming at sanctity ourselves, we will be able to set an example for others, and we will receive spiritual favors for ourselves and for those entrusted to our care.

You must also know that from now on, whenever a cleric is to receive holy orders, the superior is bound in conscience to judge whether or not the candidate is sufficiently pious and learned.

Lastly, we must put our trust in Divine Providence. If formerly we managed to get along, lacking nothing, we have good reason to be extremely hopeful about the future.

CHAPTER 46

Noteworthy Details (Continued)

SHORTLY after his return to the Oratory, Don Bosco received a letter from Mr. Joseph Guenzati[1] reminding him that he was expected in Milan, as he had promised. His frequent absences disappointed the young clerics who eagerly crowded around him to listen to his words. On Saturday, March 13, after hearing confessions as usual, he went to supper and, while eating, told them about the death of a woman and the reason why a novena to Our Lady had proved fruitless.

"I visited her," he said, "and after giving her my blessing, I invited her relatives to make a novena to Mary, Help of Christians. The woman's condition had been very critical for several days and her relatives promised to donate 3,000 lire to the Oratory. Immediately the patient began to improve and take liquid food. On seeing this, her relatives said they would give only 500 lire. In no time her condition again became critical. Once more they promised 3,000 lire, and again the woman improved with hope of full recovery. The family then sent word to Don Bosco that they would split their offering three ways: 1,000 lire each to the Oratory, to St. Peter's Pence, and to some other charitable enterprise. The sick woman worsened once more."

"And now she is dead," Chevalier Oreglia concluded.

This incident recalled another which had taken place some years earlier, showing that greed is more deeply rooted among the rich than among the poor. A very wealthy woman, after receiving the Last Sacraments at 80, was so frightened by death that she sent for Don Bosco, begging him to obtain the grace of her re-

[1] A Salesian cooperator. [Editor]

covery. "Yes," Don Bosco replied. "Our Lady will grant you this favor if you make a generous donation to the church being built in Her honor at Valdocco."

"How much should I give?"

"That's up to you. I cannot tell you how much. Give an amount proportionate to your means, one that would not cause you a grave inconvenience but would still be a sacrifice on your part."

"What amount do you suggest?"

"I can only repeat what I've said. Prove to Our Lady that you are making an unselfish offering for Her love. You surely understand that in your condition God is your only hope. You are critically ill and elderly. If you die, you'll have to leave everything forever. To avoid that, it is surely wise to make even a substantial sacrifice."

"But I wonder what I should do for your church."

"If you want my advice, I suggest that you donate an altar in one of the side chapels."

"How much would it cost?"

"Six to eight thousand lire."

"Eight thousand lire? That's a bit too much. I couldn't do that."

"I made a suggestion because you asked me. I do not know your financial holdings. Do what you think best. Were you to give only one *soldo*, as long as this was all you could afford, the Madonna would grant you the grace."

"Very well! I'll think it over."

Don Bosco left sickened by such avarice. Meanwhile the old woman's condition grew much worse. As her death drew near, two of her cousins—her only relatives—called on Don Bosco.

"Forgive us, Don Bosco," they said after introducing themselves, "but 8,000 lire is a bit too much."

"What do you suggest?"

"Couldn't you make our cousin recover for a more reasonable sum?"

"My good people, who is going to make her recover—I or Our Lady? I named a sum because I was asked to. Yet, what is eight or even a hundred thousand lire for so rich a woman? Do you expect the Madonna to grant so exceptional a favor to so stingy a person? Let her do what she wants! I'll have nothing more to do with this!"

"But . . . but . . . " they stammered. Courteously but firmly Don Bosco dismissed them.

The next day the woman died. Such was her love of money that she had been unable to part with a fraction of it.

March 14 was King Victor Emmanuel's birthday. We mention this because on that day, just as on other patriotic celebrations, Don Bosco attended the diplomatic banquet hosted by Count [Constantine] Radicati, prefect of Turin. Only high-ranking politicians and dignitaries were guests. To please his very pious wife, who unfortunately had lost her sight, the count also invited Don Bosco. The countess herself urged Don Bosco to attend so that his mere presence might discourage attacks upon religion.[2] An accomplished gentleman at all times, Don Bosco outdid himself on these occasions by tactfully winning over even people of contrary ideas without ever sacrificing truth. At such affairs, guests were drawn from all political parties and ideologies; there were liberals, democrats, rationalists, and also a few Catholics.

On one such occasion, toasts were offered by various guests to Italian unity, to freedom, to Cavour, to the king, to Garibaldi, and so on. Don Bosco too was called upon to offer a toast. Calmly he stood up. "My toast!" he said. "Long live His Majesty, long live Cavour, Garibaldi, and all our cabinet ministers under the Pope's banner, so that all may save their souls."

A burst of applause and hilarity greeted his words.

"Don Bosco really seeks no one's death!" was the general comment.

Toward the middle of March [1869] he went to Mirabello, as he had promised. It was on this occasion that [twelve-year-old] Evasius Rabagliati,[3] a pupil since January 8, first met Don Bosco and heard him narrate a dream at the "Good Night."

[2] We are omitting a digression about the countess' faithful observance of church laws. [Editor]

[3] Evasius Rabagliati (1855-1920) became a Salesian in 1875. The following year, he joined the second expedition of Salesian missionaries to Argentina and began his apostolate among the Italian immigrants of Buenos Aires. Ordained a priest in 1877, he first accompanied Bishop James Costamagna to Patagonia, and they—from 1880 to 1886—directed the Salesian school of San Nicolás de los Arroyos. In 1886, he crossed the Andes to reach his new assignment at Conception, Chile, where he remained until 1890 when Father Rua sent him to Bogotá, Colombia, to open a trade school. After completing this assignment, he interested himself in the local leper colonies and greatly improved their

The first night after his arrival at Mirabello Don Bosco had dreamed that he was in the room where the pupils took their exams. Suddenly two persons materialized before him: one, leaning on a cane, held a lantern, and the other had a sheaf of papers under his arm. They asked him to follow them into the dormitories, where they halted at the foot of each bed, one lowering the lantern so that Don Bosco might recognize the face of the sleeping boy and the other pulling a paper from the sheaf and leaving it on the bedspread. The sheet of paper bore the number of years which each boy still had to live.

The narration of this dream made a very deep impression on the boys. Rabagliati too approached Don Bosco to find out how many more years he would live. Don Bosco replied with a smile: "Are you good at arithmetic?" Then he made him add and subtract on his fingers a long series of figures until the total came to 27. Rabagliati never forgot this number. Twenty-seven years later, in Buenos Aires, he fell so critically ill that everyone believed he would die. Racked by constant and ever more violent convulsions, he was utterly unable to sleep. Knowing of Don Bosco's prediction, Father James Costamagna asked the Salesians of several houses to pray for Father Rabagliati, and he recovered.

Several times before leaving for Argentina, Father Rabagliati had asked Don Bosco about the meaning of this dream and had received such answers as, "Don't be so credulous," or "The years might be counted from the date of the dream or from the day you asked to become a Salesian or made your vows."

Don Bosco had replied in this manner because obviously Rabagliati was too worried, but everyone believed that the prayers of his confreres had prolonged his life. Father Rabagliati, apostle and father of the lepers in Colombia, is now [1917] a missionary in Chile and, together with Bishop Costamagna, confirms what we have said. Don Bosco had other such dreams during

services. In 1896 he became provincial of the newly established Salesian province and governed it until 1910 when, for reasons of health, he had to retire. Sent back to Chile for a well-deserved rest, he continued to work indefatigably in the priestly ministry and in seeking funds for the Colombian lepers. He died in Santiago, Chile, on May 2, 1920. His death was signally recognized by the Colombian government which declared a day of mourning in his honor. [Editor]

which he saw swords hanging by a thread over some of the beds, or charts at the head of each bed listing the sins of the occupant. In other dreams, the boys' sins were revealed by a word on their foreheads.

Meanwhile, at Valdocco and at the other two festive oratories in Turin, the Lenten catechetical instructions were coming to a close. As in the past, Don Bosco sent a printed notice to the boys' parents and to their employers. It was similar to the one he had mailed in 1849 for the spiritual retreat held in the Church of the Confraternity of Mary.[4]

While souls were thus being looked after, additional work on the Church of Mary, Help of Christians was in progress. Each of the two belfries flanking the façade was to be surmounted by an angel, nearly eight feet tall, fashioned from gilded wrought copper, according to Don Bosco's own plan. The angel on the right held a banner in his left hand bearing the word "LEPANTO" drilled in large letters through the metal, while the one on the left offered with his right hand a laurel wreath to the Blessed Virgin standing atop the dome.

In a previous design, the second angel too held a banner on which the figure "19" was drilled through the metal followed by two dots. It stood for another date, "nineteen hundred," without the final two numbers to indicate the specific year. Though ultimately, as we have said, a laurel wreath was put into the angel's hand, we have never forgotten the mysterious date which, in our opinion, pointed to a new triumph of the Madonna. May this come soon and bring all nations under Mary's mantle. The Broggi brothers of Milan ably cast the two statues. At this time too a contract was signed with the Lingiardi firm of Pavia for a magnificent pipe organ.[5]

While looking after the completion of Our Lady's shrine, Don Bosco did not forget the multitude of devotees who were eagerly waiting all over the world to place themselves under the mantle of Mary, Help of Christians. On March 31, therefore, he wrote to Monsignor Ricci in Rome inquiring about the result of his petition

[4] *See* Vol. III, pp. 424-27. [Editor]
[5] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

to the Holy Father for indulgences for the Confraternity of Mary, Help of Christians.... The coveted decree, dated March 16, 1869, duly arrived shortly afterward.[6]

Don Bosco also gladly reminisced about the many boys in whom he had kindled a most fervent love for the Blessed Virgin Mary, and whom, now dead, he believed to be in paradise—constantly interceding for him before the throne of their heavenly Mother. In thought he was often in their midst, exclaiming fervently, *Benedictus Deus in sanctis Suis* [Blessed be God in His saints]. As proof of their holiness, there were the favors received through their intercession by those who had called on them, especially on Dominic Savio. Between 1868 and 1885 many such factors were reported to Don Bosco. We shall quote one pertaining to this year:

Toward the end of March 1869 I had to take to my bed because of severe abdominal pains. While in this condition, I was fortunately given a copy of the life of Dominic Savio and read it all within three days. Then, feeling better, I got up for a while to regain my strength, hoping to rest with greater ease a little later. On returning to bed, however, I was assailed by such acute pains that I could neither lie down nor get up. In this torment I thought of making a vow to Dominic Savio. I put aside the thought three times, but finally I did pray to him: "If you are in heaven, please lessen my pain, if it be God's will."

I then promised to recite for nine days three *Paters, Aves*, and *Glorias* in his honor and then and there began to say those prayers. Incredibly, I had hardly finished the third *Pater* when a pleasant drowsiness came over me, easing my pain and putting me to sleep. Half an hour later I awoke, completely free of all pain.

Joan Quarati Bergamasco of Alessandria

[6] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 47

A Dream: Deadly Nooses

ON Wednesday evening, March 31, just as the Salesian pupils at Lanzo—most of whom subscribed to *Letture Cattoliche*—were absorbed in the April issue, *The Valley of Almeria*, Don Bosco arrived for a visit.

At the "Good Night" he spoke of his audiences with the Holy Father—his good health, keen intelligence, and warm affection for them—and passed on to them the advice the Pope had given him—the same he had already delivered to the Oratory boys in the Pope's name.[1] He also told them of the Pope's blessing.

All through the school year there had not been the slightest illness at Lanzo. All the pupils were in excellent health and had long forgotten Don Bosco's prediction of the past December [that one of them would die during this school year].[2] Only those very few to whom he had confided more on the matter watched and kept silent.

Don Bosco spent considerable time in hearing confessions, but he also managed to inspect the house, hold conferences, and interview superiors, subjects, and anyone who wanted to see him. He also sent written proposals to the municipal authorities to enlist their aid in expanding the school facilities but was unable to reach an accord.[3] Despite that, Don Bosco did enlarge some classrooms and also built a new dormitory at a cost of about 20,000 lire.

He left Lanzo on Saturday, April 3, after telling the boys of a dream he had had a few days previously in Turin but had not yet narrated to the Oratory boys. He did so on Sunday, April 4, in the study hall after night prayers, as follows:

[1] *See* p. 266. [Editor]
[2] *See* p. 198. [Editor]
[3] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

I dreamed that I walked out of my room and instantly found myself in church. It was packed tight with the pupils of the Oratory, Lanzo, and Mirabello, as well as many other youngsters unknown to me. The boys were not praying aloud but seemed to be preparing for confession. I observed a very large number crowding around my confessional beneath the pulpit and began to wonder how I could possibly hear them all. I suspected that I must be dreaming. To make sure I was awake, I clapped my hands and distinctly heard the noise they made. To be sure beyond question, I stretched out my arms and felt the wall behind my confessional. With no room for doubt, I said to myself: *I might as well start.* And so I began hearing confessions. Soon, concerned for the number of boys, I got up to see if there were any other confessors, but there were none, so I made for the sacristy hoping to find help. It was then that I noticed that some boys had a noose around their necks which nearly choked them.

"What is that rope for?" I asked. "Take it off." In reply they just stared at me.

"You," I said to a youngster, "go to that boy and slip that noose off his neck."

The boy went but came back, saying: "I can't get it off. Someone is holding it. Come and see."

I more closely scrutinized that huge crowd of boys and thought I saw two very long horns jutting out behind many of them. I got closer to the one nearest me and, drawing up behind him, surprised a large, hideous cat tightly clinging to the noose. Surprised in the act, it tried to crouch lower and hide its snout between its paws. I asked this boy and the others their names, but they did not answer. I questioned that frightful beast but it only crouched lower.

"Go to the sacristy and ask Father Merlone for the holy water," I directed one of the boys.

He soon returned with it, but meanwhile I discovered that behind each boy crouched a cat as hideous as the first one. I continued to hope that it was all a dream. Seizing the sprinkler, I turned to one of those large cats.

"Tell me who you are," I ordered.

Alternately opening and closing its jaws, the hideous animal broke into a growl and prepared to lunge.

"Answer me!" I insisted. "What are you doing here? I do not fear your rage. Do you see this holy water? I'll thoroughly soak you with it."

In dismay the monster began to writhe in unbelievable contortions and again seemed ready to leap at me. I kept my eye on it and noticed that it was holding several nooses in its paw.

"What are you doing here?" I asked again, while threatening it with the holy water. The monster then relaxed its taut position in order to run away.

"Stop!" I demanded. "You stay right here!"

"Look then," it growled, and showed me its nooses.

"What are they? What do they mean?" I asked.

"Don't you understand? I rope these boys into making bad confessions. With these nooses I drag nine-tenths of mankind into hell!"

"How? In what way?"

"That's one thing I won't reveal because you'll tell the boys."

"You must tell me. Speak, or I'll drench you with holy water."

"Please don't! I'd rather go back to hell."

"Then in the name of Jesus Christ, speak!"

Writhing hideously, the monster answered: "With the first noose I make the boys conceal their sins in confession."

"And with the second?"

"I make them confess without true sorrow."

"And with the third"

"I won't tell you!"

"You had better tell, or you'll be drenched with this holy water!"

"No, no, I will not! I've talked too much already!" And it growled in fury.

"Tell me so that I can inform the directors of our schools," I demanded, raising the sprinkler.

Flames and even a few drops of blood darted from the beast's eyes as it grudgingly muttered: "With the third noose I keep them from making a firm resolution and carrying out their confessor's advice."

"You hideous beast," I exclaimed. I wanted to question the monster further and force it to tell how I could remedy this great evil and offset its diabolical efforts, but all those hideous cats, which until now had done their utmost to stay hidden, began to mutter and then broke out into loud shouts against the one which had spoken. Amid the general uproar, I realized that I could get nothing more from the monster. Therefore, lifting the sprinkler and flinging holy water upon the one who had spoken, I commanded, "Go away," and it disappeared. Then I sprinkled holy water all about, and in the pandemonium which ensued, all those cats scurried away. The din awakened me, and I found myself in bed.

My dear boys, I would never have thought that so many of you had nooses around your necks. You know what they stand for. The first noose shames a boy into concealing sins in confession or lying about the

number of times—for instance, accusing himself of commiting a sin three or four times when it was exactly four times. This is just as insincere as concealing sins. The second stands for lack of sorrow, and the third for lack of a firm resolution. If we are to rid ourselves of these nooses and wrench them from the devil's clutches, let us confess all our sins, be truly sorry for them, and firmly resolve to obey our confessor.

Shortly before flying into a rage, the monster told me: "See how much good boys draw from confession! If you want to know whether or not I hold them in leash, see if they are becoming better."

I also forced the devil to tell me why he was crouching behind your backs. "So that I can't be seen," it replied. "That way it is easier for me to drag them down into hell." Those of you who had these monsters behind their backs were far more numerous than I would have believed.

Make what you will of this dream, but it is a fact that I did check on these things and found that what I had dreamed was quite true. Let us therefore take advantage of this opportunity of gaining a plenary indulgence by making a good confession and Communion. Let us do our utmost to free ourselves of the devil's nooses. On the occasion of the golden jubilee of his ordination, the Holy Father has granted a plenary indulgence to all those who next Sunday, April 11, after receiving the sacraments, will pray for his intention. This coming Saturday, Chevalier Oreglia will have a private audience with the Holy Father and will offer him an album bearing your signatures and those of the boys attending our schools [and oratories]. In the meantime, see whether your past confessions were well made. I will remember you all in my Holy Mass next Sunday.

The album to which Don Bosco referred was a large, elegant, 48-page-book bearing the date "April 11, 1869" on its frontispiece. The following pages contained a Latin inscription commemorating the golden jubilee of the Pope's ordination and a congratulatory letter in Italian signed by 32 Salesian priests, 73 clerics, and 3,430 pupils.[4]

But in Don Bosco's eyes, the handsomest tribute he could pay to Pius IX was to train the Salesians according to the Pope's recommendations. He therefore never tired of exhorting them to live as exemplary religious. Unfortunately our chronicles record only a few of his conferences, and these few are outlines rather than conferences. Nevertheless, we do not want to omit what little has been preserved:

[4] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

April 6, 1869

The annual conference of St. Francis de Sales took place in the Oratory library after night prayers. The *Veni, Creator Spiritus* was recited alternately, and then Don Bosco, vested in a surplice, presided as Father [John] Garino and Father [Francis] Dalmazzo pronounced their triennial vows, witnessed by Father [Michael] Rua and Father [John] Cagliero. After the recitation of the *Te Deum*, Don Bosco made these pertinent remarks:

"When someone makes his vows, we customarily offer some suitable important advice. First, I want no one to talk to ousiders about anything that goes on here. If you are asked, just give a generic answer. For instance, you can say that our Society has been approved, but reveal nothing about what we say or do within the house, as, for instance, the advice of superiors, disagreements between confreres, disorders, or difficulties. Outsiders do not understand these things, and are not sympathetic. Worldly-minded people will only remark that we were fools to forsake the world. Should anything unpleasant occur, let it remain inside; let no one else hear of it. Christian prudence dictates this course. Let each one of you be content with what his superior shall entrust to him without seeking other duties. Let us strive to be of one heart and one soul. I recommend that we all form one will with our superiors. As regards food, let each of us be satisfied with whatever Divine Providence sends us. Let there be what is necessary, and nothing more. Idling, wining, and dining are the ruin of chastity.

"*Idling.* Our flesh is a formidable enemy. To overcome it, we must avoid idleness. Let us make it a point to observe our timetable. Let no one wander about when he should be at work, except for reasons of health. Let each one do his own job and nothing else. Let us visit the Blessed Sacrament and go regularly to confession and Communion. Let us be determined to put into practice all the rules of our Congregation. In the morning when the bell rings for rising, let us get up, unless we are sick, and go to church for community prayers. If we cannot make our practices of piety with the community, let us make them privately.

"*Wining.* It is not our business to see what others are doing, but if we chance upon unbecoming things, we cannot help seeing them. For instance, at times we come across some unfortunate diocesan priests who have become heavy drinkers. They frequent taverns, get drunk, and sink into a most deplorable condition. How can chastity be safeguarded under these circumstances? Indeed only by a genuine miracle is it not lost!

"*Dining.* Let us be moderate in eating. There is no danger here at the

Oratory because we only have the essentials, but, as far as possible, let us observe our Friday fast.

"We have to expect problems because, though our Society has been approved, it has to be reorganized on a firm basis. We must see which individuals are not suited to our Society and dismiss them. Those who are undecided must make up their minds. Let each one heed his own problems. The superior has to take action.

"We may expect religious and priests to seek admission to our Congregation, but we must be very wary in accepting them because they would like to come in to give orders with the best of intentions. They could cause trouble, and only with difficulty could they adapt themselves to our way of life.

"Let us be careful not to change any of our traditions: otherwise it will be difficult to rekindle our former fervor.

"Listen! Once there was a rector who wanted to reform his monastery. Having noticed that his monks went out mornings and evenings for walks with the excuse that they really needed them, he planned to cut down their meals so that they could digest their food more easily. He went through with his plans, but the monks complained to the provincial that their local superior was starving them to death. The latter defended his measure, claiming that the monastery revenues did not allow much outlay for food.

"'Look,' the provincial countered, 'your monks will endure discipline, and even vigorous penances, but if you hit them in their stomachs you will never win their obedience, and they will walk out on you.'

"'I feel I have to do that,' the rector retorted. 'I shall appeal to the superior general.'

"'Don't, or your monastery will be closed.'

"No step was taken. This monastery would have been safe from confiscation by the state, but because its monks had been hard hit in their stomachs, it broke up of its own accord. The monks left even before the state made any attempt to close it. Do you understand?

"In another conference we shall provide for the replacement of the chapter members whose term of office is about to expire. We shall also discuss procedures for their election. Perhaps only the perpetually professed members will have the right to vote. Then we shall also have to think of some place or private chapel for our meetings.

"Let us earnestly strive to be worthy founders of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, so that those who shall read our history may see us as exemplary models. Let us not cause them to exclaim: 'What founders they were!'

"Help me in this great undertaking with your good will and obedience. It is up to you to make my task easier. It is easy to say: 'Head a congregation!' One has to realize how very difficult and burdensome it is to shape into one heart and one soul people of different temperaments and minds. But this task will become easy with your filial assistance."

At this time many foreign pilgrims who were on their way to Rome for the golden jubilee of the Pope's ordination stopped in Turin for a visit to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians and to Don Bosco.[5]

On April 10, Chevalier Oreglia was received in a private audience by Pius IX and presented him with the Oratory's album. At eight the following morning he too assisted at the Pope's jubilee Mass in St. Peter's. A jammed multitude of nearly 100,000 people thronged the basilica, crowding into even the wide central aisle, which is usually kept clear on such occasions, and the atriums.

At that same hour in hundreds and thousands of churches all over the world, immense crowds, in comparison with which the faithful assembled in St. Peter's were but a handful, were also attending jubilee Masses, united in spirit to Pius IX. The flow of pilgrims had doubled the population of Rome and many people were obliged to sleep in church lobbies and porticoes. The splendid religious, civic, and military festivities lasted three days, to the great joy of the faithful.

Don Bosco's schools and festive oratories participated in the universal filial joy with Communions for the Pope, music, and illuminations. In this way Don Bosco offered Pius IX the tribute of his ardent love which encompassed the whole Catholic Church. It was not a momentary tribute but rather one that encompassed every instant of his active, zealous, self-sacrificing life. It was also limitless, for it extended to every one of the faithful with whom he lived, met, conversed, and corresponded. In everyone, irrespective of social condition, he venerated the image of God, that sacred character which marked him as a Christian.[6]

[5]This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

[6]We are omitting a short comforting letter to a lady. [Editor]

CHAPTER 48

The Daughters of Mary Immaculate

ON April 18, 1869 the archbishop of Turin approved the by-laws of the Confraternity of Mary, Help of Christians, submitted to him by Don Bosco, and declared it canonically erected in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, thus enabling its members to gain the indulgences previously granted by Pius IX.[1] Grateful to God, Don Bosco quickly completed the May issue of *Letture Cattoliche* which dealt entirely with this confraternity, and after arranging for this issue to be mailed before the end of April, he left for Mornese in response to Father Pestarino's invitation.

Every trip he made was marked by some singular incident. Here we would like to report one. We do not recall precisely when it took place, but it was certainly after the consecration of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. We also want to stress that this incident is not to be confused with similar ones already narrated.

Don Bosco was riding in a second-class railroad coach. Soon, a well-dressed fellow passenger began to talk disparagingly of the archbishop of Turin, of Marquis Fassati, and of many charitable institutions, singling out the Cottolengo Institute. Finally he also spoke most abusively of Don Bosco, alleging that he had squandered a vast amount of money on a church instead of giving it to the poor. Don Bosco kept quiet throughout, but a lady who had her little son with her said to that man: "I imagine that you must have given Don Bosco a great deal of money to be so indignant at his wasting it on a church."

[1] We are omitting the by-laws of the association and the decree of canonical erection. [Editor]

"What!" the man replied. "Me give money to Don Bosco? I'd sooner throw it away."

"Then why complain?" the lady retorted. A Jew not personally acquainted with Don Bosco, but known by him, took up his defense, declaring that Don Bosco was an honest man and that he too had personally contributed fifty lire toward his church.

Nettled by such opposition, the slanderer turned against the Oratory itself in such shameless language that the good woman covered her child's head with her shawl, shielding his ears with her hands.

"What are you doing?" the man exclaimed. "Aren't you afraid of smothering him?"

"Its better than letting him hear such talk as yours!" the woman replied.

"So that's it!" the man exclaimed, exploding into coarse laughter. "People educated by priests are afraid of everything! Why are you so finicky? After all, these words are commonplace."

And he kept up his guffaws and coarseness, pitying the lady's ingenuousness, as he called it.

The good woman turned red with embarrassment. Don Bosco, who had kept silent till then, came to her defense.

"Sir," he said, "it is time to put an end to all this."

"Whom are you talking to?"

"To you. Watch your language, especially in the presence of ladies."

"I don't intend to take lessons from you!"

"Like it or not, what I said stands."

"Do you think I can't make you swallow your words?"

"I am not afraid of you or a hundred like you!"

"You're not, eh?"

"Right! I am not afraid because you are neither a scoundrel nor a good-for-nothing. You come from a good family, have a place in society, and are well-educated. I know we can settle this matter peacefully."

The man's jaw fell at such an unexpected answer. "So you know me?" he asked less aggressively.

"I certainly do. You are Commendatore B..."

He was a business agent of Marquis Fassati of whom he had just spoken most disparagingly.

Knowing himself bested by an unknown priest and most anxious to regain the upper hand, he went on: "That sly fox, Don Bosco, is quite good at hooking people in. He gets money from them to feed his boys and then buys fields and vineyards at Castelnuovo for his brothers who are already well off and can afford a coach and horses."

"I'm sorry to contradict you, sir, but you are badly misinformed. Don Bosco has no brothers."

"I know what I'm talking about."

"I tell you that Don Bosco has no brothers and so they cannot have a coach and horses. If you go to Castelnuovo, everyone will tell you that Don Bosco has nephews who are farmers as their father was. By talking about things you do not know, you expose yourself to being called a liar. Furthermore, do you think it wise to speak ill publicly of someone who could do you some harm? Do you think Marquis Fassati would be happy with what you said about him?"

"Well, we were only talking...."

"Yes, but you were maligning a man well known for his charities. Aren't you afraid that someone may report what you said about him? Then what would happen to your job?"

"I don't think that anyone here would do that. Would you?"

"Suppose I did?"

"I can't believe that!"

"Still, I promise you that if I find out you have again indulged in this kind of talk, I shall promptly inform the marquis! I am warning you, I'll do just that!"

"I promise I'll never again say such things," the man stammered, "but who are you?"

"I am Don Bosco's sacristan!"

The man was silenced, and his fellow passengers could not help smiling at his embarrassment....

When Don Bosco arrived at his destination, he got off the train and was at once surrounded by several people who were waiting for him. The commendatore too had alighted. Hearing those people greeting Don Bosco by name, he approached him.

"Are you Don Bosco?"

"Yes!"

"Please forgive me...."

"Listen," Don Bosco soberly replied. "Since you felt free to malign upright men in the presence of other people, I think I can inform them privately of what you so freely said publicly against them."

"Please don't.... I'd be ruined."

"I make no promises. We must be fair and square."

The man kept pleading, but Don Bosco firmly refused to commit himself, so that the man withdrew in utter mortification.

Don Bosco arrived at Mornese toward evening of April 19, joyously received by a host of friends. As was his custom, he gave several inspiring talks during his stay, heard confessions, and blessed the sick. He also inspected the large boys' school under construction. It was still far from completion, although a small part was already habitable. Father Charles Ghivarello had drawn up the plans and was supervising its construction. The people of Mornese, intent on seeing the school built, were contributing free labor on Sundays and holy days, transporting building materials, while Father Pestarino provided them with refreshments and with fodder for their horses and oxen. The Daughters of Mary picked rocks from the vineyards and carried them to the road for pickup by carts. At Mornese Don Bosco conferred with Father Pestarino about ways and means of speeding up the construction, and both agreed to entrust the manufacture of doors and windows, desks and iron works to the Oratory workshops. Don Bosco also promised to send a few carpenters from the Oratory in due time.

Though he seemed completely absorbed in providing for boys, one could sense that he was already thinking about gathering under the mantle of Mary, Help of Christians, generous souls who would dedicate themselves to the welfare of girls. He knew this to be a pressing need. This was not merely an idea of his, but a genuine inspiration of the Blessed Virgin who, as the Help of Christians, wished to gather Her daughters too beneath Her mantle. Where would their first girls' school be? In Mornese, a village far away from business centers, railroads, and other transportation. When and with what means? God knew, and that sufficed. Would Don Bosco staff it with nuns from well-established religious congregations? No, he would pick the personnel from the Daughters of Mary Immaculate—uneducated country girls,

most of them illiterate and totally ignorant of pedagogy but predestined to this work by God, the font of all knowledge. They would be the ones to open the new Congregation's first house, gather the first pupils, and lay the basis of a religious Congregation which would see to the professional training of its personnel and educate thousands of girls in hundreds of flourishing schools throughout the world in the name and under the protection of Mary, Help of Christians. And whom would Don Bosco appoint to head so grand an undertaking? A saintly young woman who, regardless of opposition, toil, privation, and sacrifice, had succeeded in her fervent charity to win over to the Lord all the girls of her native village. For some years, Don Bosco had already appreciated the treasure she was. Some details concerning her are quite in order.

Around 1862 Don Bosco attended a clerical conference at Acqui being sponsored by the ordinary, Bishop Modesto Contratto. There he met Father Pestarino. Traveling homeward together from Acqui to Alessandria, they discussed their priestly ministry, and in the course of their conversation Father Pestarino told Don Bosco about a parish sodality called "Daughters of Mary Immaculate" which he directed and of its activities on behalf of the local girls. Before parting at Alessandria, Don Bosco invited Father Pestarino to visit him at the Oratory. Some months later, Father Pestarino obliged and, fascinated by the Salesian spirit, asked Don Bosco to accept him among his sons, offering himself and all he owned. Don Bosco admitted him into the Congregation, but, as we have already narrated, he asked him to continue his apostolate in Mornese.[2] Undoubtedly, in April 1869 they discussed both the Daughters of Mary Immaculate and the woman who led them all by her good example—Mary Mazzarello.

This admirable girl was born on May [9], 1837 of peasant parents, exemplary Christians deeply aware of their parental responsibilities. Under their care she grew up as a very obedient child. Her father's name was Joseph, and her mother was Magdalene Calcagno of the neighboring village of Tramontana. Mary's girlhood was guilelessly spent in farm work. When she

[2] *See* Vol. VII, p. 175. [Editor]

was barely ten, Father Pestarino admitted her to First Communion and shortly afterward allowed her to receive every Sunday and then daily. At about fifteen she took a vow of perpetual virginity. Though living far from the church, she never failed to attend early Mass both winter and summer, regardless of the weather, always returning home in time to begin her work in the fields with the others. Her strong arms wielded the spade without fatigue, and she also attended to all the housework.

She prayed constantly, loved spiritual reading, mortification, and fasting, and possessed an extremely delicate conscience. She delighted in visiting the Blessed Sacrament at every chance.

At seventeen she was among the first five girls to enroll in the Daughters of Mary Immaculate at the invitation of Angela Maccagno[3] who later saw the membership rise to seventeen.

In 1860 an epidemic of typhoid hit Mornese. When the whole family of one of Mary's uncles was stricken, she spent an entire month nursing them so carefully as to deserve to be called a Sister of Charity. Her patients recovered, but she fell a victim herself and lay at death's door for almost two months, edifying the whole village by her resignation to God's will.

On her recovery she realized that she had lost her former strength and could no longer work in the vineyard. With the counsel of her parents and Father Pestarino, she decided to learn dressmaking. Just as the young farmboy John Bosco had been inspired to learn sleight-of-hand tricks to do good to youngsters, she too hoped to learn dressmaking as a means of saving the souls of young girls. In dreams she had often seen herself surrounded by large numbers of them, and this thought never left her mind. She confided in a good, close friend of hers, Petronilla Mazzerello, who not only approved of her plans but offered to join her in the same endeavor. This was the year 1861, and Mary Mazzarello was just barely twenty-three.

With her faithful friend she called on the village tailor, Valentine Campi, to learn about sewing and fabrics. Another seamstress, Mrs. Antoinette Barco, taught them dressmaking. When, a few months later, Mrs. Barco moved to another village with her family, the womenfolk of Mornese turned to Mary and

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 174 [Editor]

Petronilla. A few mothers, noting the quality of their work, asked them to teach their daughters. They obliged and took in two or three young girls whom they instructed in catechism, sewing, and dressmaking. Their first workshop was a small dark room, but they soon moved to another room near the church, lit by two windows, and were able to accept a few more pupils while continuing to give a good example to all. In their zeal they gave spiritual counsel also to the young women and mothers who came to order clothes from them.

After a while they began to take in a few needy little girls to live with them. A widowed merchant asked Mary and Petronilla to accept his two little daughters as boarders because his business kept him constantly away. They agreed. Some time later, Mary rented two more rooms across from her shop, each large enough for five beds, and took in five little girls. Petronilla moved in with them as a housemother and brought them up in the fear and love of God and prayer. The children's families provided the meals because both Mary and Petronilla had dinner and supper at home, though at different hours so as not to leave their pupils alone.

Matters stood thus at Father Pestarino's first visit to Don Bosco's Oratory. Don Bosco was very pleased to hear of the exemplary conduct of both young women and asked Father Pestarino to bring a medal of Our Lady to each. In doing so, Father Pestarino told them: "Don Bosco asks you to wear these medals devoutly. They will guard you from many evils and help you all through life. He also suggests that you pray much and that particularly you do your utmost to prevent sin, even venial sin."

The two young women did not know Don Bosco, but Father Pestarino explained that he was a holy priest who looked after boys. Possibly even then Don Bosco had seen in Mary Mazzarello the cornerstone of the Congregation he intended to found for young girls. However, he kept prudent silence about this design. The medals he had sent them were a reward of sorts for their zeal, and his advice was the first token of his fatherly care for their future Congregation.

Unaware of God's plans, Mary and Petronilla continued their work as best they could without specific rules. In 1863, however,

Father Pestarino, returning from the Oratory where he had spent the feast day of St. Francis de Sales, brought them a daily schedule prepared for them by Don Bosco himself. He explained it as Don Bosco had told him and urged them to follow it. It was a slight variation of the Oratory timetable and a first step to infuse its own spirit into them.

While zealously fostering virtue, piety, and frequent reception of the sacraments into her girls, Mary Mazzarello started a kind of festive oratory in a courtyard facing the workshop windows. At first she invited only her own pupils, but on the following Sunday they brought their friends along, so that before long all the little girls of the village attended.

In the afternoon, since the premises were inadequate, she took them to a wayside chapel dedicated to St. Sylvester, about fifteen minutes from the village. There they played in an adjoining meadow until a bell rang for religious instruction in the parish church. After that and services, they went home. In summer they used to go back to St. Sylvester's chapel and resume their games. Mary Mazzarello was always in their midst, forever coming up with new games, entertaining them with edifying stories, and frankly and prudently admonishing and counseling those in need. She tried to make the girls unashamed of practicing their faith, to prevent sin, and to make them fervent Christians. She succeeded thoroughly, for they all loved and obeyed her. Her influence was such that no girl would go to dances any longer.

In October 1864, Don Bosco visited Mornese with about a hundred Oratory boys, as we have already narrated.[4] The task of arranging for meals and lodging had been entrusted to Mary Mazzarello and her Daughters of Mary Immaculate whom Father Pestarino introduced to Don Bosco the day after his arrival, asking him to bless them. Don Bosco obliged, and in a short exhortation he encouraged them to persevere in the virtuous life they had chosen. His simple, fervent words, straight from the heart, were wondrously effective, prompted as they were by God's Spirit. Those pious maidens, deeply impressed, felt a surge of inner fervor, while Mary Mazzarello herself experienced something

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 449f. [Editor]

extraordinary within herself, something she could not explain. Don Bosco's words so fully matched her desires and aspirations that she would have liked him to go on and on. When Don Bosco dismissed them so that they could return to their duties, she left, glad to have seen him so close but extremely anxious to see him and hear him again. Her wish was fulfilled. Every night throughout his stay at Mornese, Don Bosco gave his boys a talk. Hurrying through her tasks or postponing them, Mary Mazzarello would rush over, elbow her way as close to the front as possible, and listen with rapt attention. "How did you ever get the nerve to elbow your way through so many men and boys?" Petronilla and her companions would ask.

"Don Bosco is a saint, a saint!" she answered. "I know it."

She delighted in the esteem people had for him, and her enthusiasm reached its peak when Don Bosco preached in the parish church on the powerful protection of the Virgin Mary.

Thus did God acquaint Mary Mazzarello with Don Bosco, gradually preparing her, unawares, to cooperate with him in his vast undertaking for the salvation of youth. Father Pestarino, who lived in the center of the village, had built himself a small house near the parish church, with five rooms on the main floor and four above. He lived there mostly in winter so as to be on hand for early Mass and confessions. All the villagers, except for a dozen or so, went to confession to him. It was Father Pestarino's intention to turn his house over to the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, not just as a meeting place, but as a home for those members who might lose their parents and might not or would not live with their brothers and sisters.

In 1865, on his yearly visit to the Oratory for the feast and conference of St. Francis de Sales, he consulted Don Bosco on this. They both agreed to hand over the house for that purpose immediately, and so, on his return to Mornese, Father Pestarino privately and prudently asked each of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate whether they might like to live in that house. Several chose to continue living with their families. Mary Mazzarello not only declared herself ready to move in, but she joyfully urged others to join her, happy to be able to realize her aspiration of dedicating herself totally to the welfare of young girls. In all, five

Daughters of Mary Immaculate moved into their new home. They took three pupils with them and some others soon joined. The residence was named "The House of Mary Immaculate." Don Bosco sent a woman teacher to them from Fontanile, but she remained very briefly.

Neither the Daughters of Mary Immaculate nor Father Pestarino had any intention of forming a religious congregation. Counseled by Don Bosco, Father Pestarino had told them: "Live here and give it a try. Keep doing as before and then we shall see. If any of you wants to return to your family, you are free to do so."

In 1867 Don Bosco returned to Mornese, as we have already said,[5] to attend the blessing of the chapel of the school under construction. On this occasion he visited the Daughters of Mary Immaculate and spoke to them, studiously refraining from revealing his plan. His policy was to follow rather than rush ahead of the orders of Divine Providence.

Not even in 1869, when his decision had already matured, did he disclose his plans for the new school still under construction. He just kept urging its speedy completion, making it clear to people that he had great things in mind for it.

Before leaving Mornese, he wrote to Father Rua on April 21 about various matters to be taken care of and added this postscript: "I'll be back on Thursday evening. During the next few 'Good Nights' to the artisans, harp on the evil of foul conversation."[6]

[5] *See* Vol. VIII, p. 428. [Editor]
[6] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 49

Noteworthy Details (Continued)

ON his return to Turin Don Bosco resumed work on a new, thoroughly revised and enlarged edition of his *Church History.*[1] Among the many words of advice he gave to his young readers was a caution alerting them to the danger of belonging to secret societies. A constant flow of pilgrims, however, often interrupted his work.[2]

At this time too, Don Bosco took steps to remedy an abuse that yearly deprived the Oratory of substantial sums. Toward the end of April he had Father Rua mail a circular informing parents and guardians who intentionally or through negligence were not paying the fees agreed upon that failure to do so within two weeks would be sufficient reason for their boys' dismissal.[3]

There was also another reason for this measure. It was a tactful way of ridding the Oratory of unsuitable boys, correcting abuses, and publicizing the charity done at the Oratory. Some greedy people, in fact, though well off, were deceitfully seeking a free education for their children at the expense of other needy boys. As a faithful executor of Don Bosco's orders, Father Rua exemplarily fulfilled his duties. He succeeded in collecting some overdue sums and sent a few pupils home. To many others who were genuinely good, Don Bosco granted a deferment of payment or erased their debt, irrespective of the financial condition of their families. Charity always triumphed.

We will report just two incidents on this score. The parents of a

[1] *See* Vol. II, pp. 257-61; Vol. III, pp. 215-21. We have omitted a passage at the start of this chapter about an obligation for Masses undertaken by Don Bosco with a family. [Editor]

[2] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

[3] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

very fine boy could no longer pay even the modest fee they had promised. When the youngster heard of the letter sent to his family, he was deeply upset and called on Don Bosco, pleading not to be sent home.

"Don't worry," Don Bosco told him.

"But meanwhile...."

"If they put you out of the Oratory gate, come back through the church door. No one will bother you."

The boy grew ever more firmly attached to Don Bosco and felt himself strengthened in his vocation to the religious life.

Another incident concerns our confrere, Father Anthony Aime, and further proves Don Bosco's charity. He himself narrated it to us:

In March 1877 the whole Oratory was fervently honoring St. Joseph. Toward the middle of the month I got a letter from my sister, informing me that she could no longer pay for my board and incidentals and that I would therefore have to come home and plan something else for my future, all the more so because the prefect of the Oratory had informed her that if she did not pay, I would be sent home. I can't describe my anguish that day, that night, and the following morning. I cried and prayed for light. During the day I felt inspired to appeal to St. Joseph. I prayed at length, kneeling at his altar, offering him all the prayers of my good and fervent companions, and somehow waiting for an answer. Finally I got up and left the church, my eyes still swollen with tears.

Near the sacristy door I met Father Joachim Berto. Seeing me so sad and disheartened, he insisted on knowing the reason. Still choked with grief and unable to speak, I handed him my sister's letter, the invoice, and Father Prefect's letter. Father Berto read everything and then said: "Do not worry. Come with me. Don Bosco will set everything right." He took me to Don Bosco's room and handed him the above-mentioned papers. Don Bosco read them carefully and then smilingly bade me to sit down on the sofa beside his desk. Taking a little box of Spanish snuff from a drawer, he invited me to take a pinch. I did, and when I began sneezing violently, he laughed so heartily that I could not help joining him. "I am glad that you are cheerful again," he said. "Go straight to Father Prefect and tell him that Don Bosco will pay your debts—past, present and future—and that from now on he should pass your bill on to me."

You may well imagine how happy and how grateful I was to the great

patriarch St. Joseph and to our beloved father, Don Bosco. From that very day I felt myself a Salesian, and by God's grace I hope to die in our beloved Congregation.[4]

Toward the end of April 1869 an unpleasant incident occurred which regretfully we must mention in order that the reader may form an adequate idea of the struggles that the fledgling Salesian Society had to go through.

One day, Archbishop Riccardi of Turin went to None, Father Paul Albera's birthplace, to administer Confirmation. For the occasion Father Abrate, vicar of None, had invited all the priests of his and the neighboring parishes. Among them were Father [John] Borel and our confrere Father Albera, whom Father Abrate had sponsored. To please his benefactor, who was delighted at the idea, Father Albera read a poem to the archbishop. The latter, however, studiously averted his glance from him, to the surprise of the bishop's secretary who could not refrain from deploring such discourtesy. Toward the end of dinner, Father Albera was introduced to the archbishop. Embracing him, the latter remarked: "You do not recognize your archbishop. You do not love him. You care only for Don Bosco. For you Don Bosco is everything. That's all you think about!"

"I love my archbishop," Father Albera remonstrated, "but if I am a priest I owe it...."

"Hush, hush," the prelate interrupted. "I can't understand why you are so fond of Don Bosco. What kind of saint is he when he dares write to his bishop 'I am surprised' just because I ordered him to send his fourth-year theology students to attend the seminary lectures? He is proud and does not want to submit. He wants to found a Congregation in order to exempt himself from his archbishop's authority. If he is a saint, let him prove it by deferring to his superior."

"But, Your Excellency," Father Albera protested, trying to defend Don Bosco.

[4] Immediately after his ordination in 1885, Father Aime was sent to Sarrià (Barcelona). In 1901 he was appointed provincial. After two years in this office he was transferred in the same capacity to Colombia where he remained till his death on July 7, 1921. He was most active in behalf of the poor and the lepers. At his death the government declared a national day of mourning. [Editor]

"Silence!" the archbishop exclaimed with a glare. "Rome has informed me that your so-called Congregation has been approved. But what does your Congregation amount to? It's a nonentity. I am certain that ten years from now we won't hear any more about it. It can't be otherwise. We shall see! We shall see!" And he went on mouthing remarks against Don Bosco.

Nearly all the bystanders concurred with the archbishop. Father Albera, bitterly grieved, found himself held tightly for about ten minutes while the prelate attacked Don Bosco. Afterward, the archbishop freed him from his grasp and walked to his coach, followed by his clergy. He said not another word to Father Albera who was also respectfully following him. Father Abrate had been absent during this incident. When informed of what had happened, he declared: "I am sorry I was not there to answer him. I would have told him that even now, at my request, Don Bosco houses, feeds, and educates at the Oratory some ten boys who hopefully will become pious and zealous priests."

Don Bosco, who looked to God and not to men for help and reward, was not perturbed by such incidents. When Father Albera told him of this, he remarked: "Archbishop Riccardi has no ill will against Don Bosco and his Salesians. Excessive love for his diocese or some unfavorable report from someone hostile to us occasionally prompts him to talk like that."

Other Salesians frequently heard Don Bosco express himself in about the same terms concerning this episode. On his part, Don Bosco always acted respectfully and affectionately toward the archbishop and always strove to forestall any misunderstanding.[5]

[5] We are omitting a letter of Don Bosco to the provicar general supplying him with the names of clerics of the Turin archdiocese who had entered the Oratory before their fourteenth year and wanted to join the Salesian Congregation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 50

Fulfillment of Predictions (Continued)

ON May 5, 1869 a young apprentice bookbinder died at the Oratory. His death was the third [of the six] Don Bosco had predicted [on December 31, 1868].[1] The Oratory obituary carried this entry:

May 5, 1869. Adolph Ciocca of Giaveno, aged 17, died today at the Oratory. Led astray by bad companions, he did not turn out as promisingly as expected. He was, however, constantly grateful to those who had helped him enter the Oratory. A dream he had at the start of his illness made him take stock of himself and repent of his past. He asked pardon of God and his superior, and after receiving the Last Sacraments he peacefully died in the Lord.

His death came about this way. On May 3, the Oratory choir was to sing at church services in a town not very far from Turin. Adolph was not feeling well, but since he was a good singer and pianist, his participation was highly desirable. Not feeling too ill, he yielded to the urgent entreaties of his companions, got out of bed, and went along with them, but after a half-hour's ride on the train he became so sick that as soon as they reached their destination he was carried to the nearest inn, put to bed, and solicitously looked after.

Meanwhile the choirboys did their singing and later were treated to a fine meal. Their joy, however, was tempered by the thought that their companion was in pain. When evening came,

[1] *See* p. 210. We have omitted a passage at the beginning of this chapter about Father Bonetti's activities, under Don Bosco's guidance, to caution the faithful against militant Protestant proselytizing. [Editor]

Father Cagliero paid the innkeeper and had the boy taken to the train. An hour later, upon his arrival in Turin, a coach took him to the Oratory, where he was immediately put to bed. While the doctor was on his way, Adolph asked for Don Bosco, pleading that he had something to tell him.

Don Bosco went to him at once. "Ah, Don Bosco, forgive me!" the boy immediately told him. "I sincerely beg your pardon. I am truly sorry."

"Yes, my dear Adolph," Don Bosco said affectionately. "I do forgive you. Be at peace!"

"Forgive me," Adolph repeated. "I want your pardon."

"Of course I forgive you. What's bothering you?"

"The night before we left I had a dream which I very much fear is about to come true. I seemed to be with you, together with many of my companions. Little by little, though, I began to stray away from you. The farther I strayed, the closer I came to a fierce, angry dog which had been eyeing me from some distance and was gradually advancing toward me. Afraid that he might attack and kill me, I stood still. After a while, though, I again got farther away from you and again the dog drew nearer to me. Shortly afterward I was so far away from you that the dog lunged at me, knocking me to the ground, and began tearing me to pieces. I immediately screamed for help. You heard me and, running to my aid, snatched me from its jaws, carried me to the infirmary, and cleaned and bandaged my wounds. Then I felt well again. I know who that dog was—the devil himself who was trying to drag me down into eternal damnation."

Don Bosco soothed the boy and helped him to make a good confession. At peace again, he later told Don Bosco: "The bad companions I went with are these three. (*And he mentioned their names.*) Please admonish them and tell them in my name that I would rather have been poisoned or killed outright than have to suffer this bitter remorse. I also ask pardon of all my companions whom I have scandalized by my language."

Don Bosco promised to relay his messages and with soothing words instilled in him full trust in God's mercy. A few hours later Adolph passed peacefully away.

This incident clearly shows how painful at the point of death is the recollection of having given scandal to one's companions, in-

dulged in foul talk, and associated with bad companions. We find some allusion to this in the postscript of Don Bosco's letter to Father Rua from Mornese on April 21: "During the next few 'Good Nights' to the artisans, harp upon the evil of foul conversation."[2] As a result of these warnings, the artisans showed greater fervor in frequenting the sacraments and taking part in the May devotions.

Among the good deeds performed by Don Bosco around this time we must mention his [successful] efforts to free from prison a past pupil of his—Bartholomew Vaschetti—who had deserted the Italian army and sought refuge in the Papal States. As a matter of policy, all foreign deserters were being jailed until some citizen would vouch for them. Don Bosco's efforts helped free this young man after five months of confinement at Civita Castellana.

On May 27 [1869] the Italian parliament passed a law abolishing clerical exemption from military service. Instructed by Don Bosco, Father Joseph Lazzero sent word to the directors of our schools at Mirabello and Lanzo, adding: "Don Bosco also asks me to tell you to hearten those who are wavering, because no one in our Society will be affected [by this law]." The clerics were heartily relieved by this promise. In truth, for many years no Salesian had to serve in the armed forces. The protection of Our Lady, the tireless charity of Don Bosco, and the generosity and active assistance of benefactors worked wonders. For as long as the law allowed it, a ransom fee was paid for them all.[3]

Don Bosco meanwhile was still trying to obtain the Holy Shroud Church in Rome, and he kept after his friends in Florence, urging them to take effective action with the competent authorities. In reply, Mr. [Charles] Canton, department head at the Foreign Ministry, advised him to write to Minister [Louis] Menabrea, specifically requesting permission to service the Holy Shroud Church and assuring him that the Holy See would be favorable to this transaction. Don Bosco complied immediately and asked Mr. Canton to deliver his request personally. Mr. Canton obliged and so informed Don Bosco.[4]

[2] *See* p. 294. [Editor]
[3] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[4] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 51

Special Charisms (Continued)

FATHER John Bonetti testified in writing that Don Bosco was generously endowed with the charism of healing the sick and handicapped and that he did so in his presence as well as at a distance. So manifest and proven was this charism that many sick persons or their relatives daily traveled to Turin, even from far away, to seek his prayers and blessing.

This explains why people flocked to him wherever he went. His mail was usually heavy and very often included telegrams from abroad. More often than not, those who were dying rallied and recovered astonishingly; in other cases, if ill-disposed to die, they would change their outlook and devoutly prepare themselves for a Christian death.

The constant linking of the names of Mary, Help of Christians and of Don Bosco explains the popular belief that the Madonna granted favors because of the prayers of Her faithful servant. If common belief is any proof in establishing truth, then this proof did most certainly exist in regard to Don Bosco. At the Oratory, during the novena and the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, many such wonderful cures took place. We cite here a few that occurred in 1869, as testified to by Father Francis Dalmazzo:

At about 5 P.M. on May 16, Pentecost Eve, the sacristy of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians was crowded with boys preparing for confession and waiting for Don Bosco to come down from his room. As I crossed the sacristy to enter the church, an elderly woman came in, leading a little girl by the hand. The latter—about ten or twelve years old—was blind and her eyes were bandaged. Her name was Mary Stardero and she had come from Vinovo to seek Don Bosco's blessing. I stopped to say a few words with the elderly woman who had temporarily

removed the bandage. I was grieved to see that the young girl's eyes had no corneas and resembled two white marbles.

Had I stayed, I would have seen this extraordinary cure in all its details, but the boys who witnessed it told me about it a few minutes later.

When Don Bosco stepped into the sacristy, the elderly woman, who was the child's aunt, took her to him for his blessing.

"How long have your eyes pained you?" he asked the girl.

"A long time, but it's perhaps two years since I went blind."

"Has any doctor seen you? What did he say? Have you done what he told you?"

"Yes," the aunt replied, breaking into sobs. "We have tried everything, but in vain. Doctors claim that her eyes are too far gone and beyond all hope."

"Can you tell whether things are big or small?" Don Bosco asked the girl.

"I can't see a thing," she replied.

Don Bosco then had the bandage removed and led the girl to a well-lighted window.

"Do you see the light through this window?"

"I see nothing at all!"

"Would you like to see?"

"Oh, yes! It's the only thing I want! How unfortunate I am!" she sobbed.

"Will you use your eyes for the good of your soul and not to offend God?"

"I promise I will with all my heart!"

"Good! You will regain your sight!"

Don Bosco then asked both the woman and her niece whether they had devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and trusted in Her. At their affirmative reply he told them to kneel. He then asked the girl if she knew the Hail Mary and to join him and her aunt in prayer. Yes, they said, they knew the Hail Mary and also knew the Hail Holy Queen. They recited both prayers. Then, encouraging both to have absolute trust in the Madonna, he blessed the girl, and, holding a medal of Mary, Help of Christians in front of her, said: "For the glory of God and the Blessed Virgin, tell me what I am holding in my hand."

"She can't, Father!" the aunt interjected. "She is blind!"

Don Bosco paid no attention. "What do I have in my hand?" he repeated.

"I can see!" she frantically exclaimed.

"What do you see?"
"A medal! A medal of Our Lady!"
"What's on the other side?"
"St. Joseph holding a flowering rod!"
"Blessed be the Virgin!" cried her aunt. "Do you really see?"
"Yes, I do. The Blessed Virgin has granted me the favor."

Then she stretched out her hand to take the medal that Don Bosco was offering to her, but it fell and rolled into a dim corner of the sacristy. The aunt made a motion to retrieve it, but Don Bosco held her back.

"Let her pick it up. Let's see if the Holy Virgin has thoroughly restored her sight." Unhesitatingly the girl retrieved the medal. Overjoyed and moved to tears, the aunt profusely thanked Don Bosco and left with tears of joy. The girl herself, wild with happiness, dashed on ahead of her, heading straight for home, while her aunt and another woman accompanying her followed along at some distance. Father Alfonse Scaravelli, Francis Genta of Chieri, and Maria Artero, a teacher, along with many Oratory pupils, witnessed this miracle.

Soon afterward the healed girl returned to the Oratory to thank the Blessed Virgin and make a modest donation to Her church. Ever after, she had no trouble with her eyes and to date [1916] still enjoys perfect sight. Likewise, the aunt was freed of rheumatism in her right shoulder and arm which had crippled her, especially when working in the fields.

Another miracle was wrought that same month by Our Lady. Writing of it to the Mother Superior of Tor de'Specchi [in Rome] Father John Baptist Francesia stated: "Among the many pilgrims who came to thank the Madonna for graces received was a Turinese nobleman who, after receiving the Anointing of the Sick, had been promised by Don Bosco that he would recover and participate in the festivities honoring Mary, Help of Christians. He participated indeed, to the amazement and edification of all. Following are the details:

On Saturday, May 22 [1869], Don Bosco heard the confession of a general who was very critically ill, but, to the surprise of his family, he did not administer the Last Sacraments, although the doctors had declared that death was imminent. "My dear general," Don Bosco told the sick man, "the day after tomorrow we shall celebrate the feast of

Mary, Help of Christians. Pray to Her fervently, and in gratitude for your recovery come to receive Communion in Her church that very day."

The following day the general's condition worsened. Fearing that he might die at any moment, the family wanted him to receive the Anointing of the Sick, and since Don Bosco had insisted that they call him if they thought it necessary, they hurriedly sent for him at eight in the evening. The doctor had just told them that the patient might not survive the night. On that day, the vigil of a feast so dear to the whole Salesian family, Don Bosco had been in the confessional since dawn and had returned at about six in the evening. When the message reached him, he had a large number of boys still waiting to go to confession.

"The general is dying," the messenger told him. "Come quickly or it will be too late!"

"But I can't send these boys away," he objected. "I'll come when I am through." And he continued hearing confessions until eleven, as the coach waited three hours. "Please hurry," the messenger insisted. Don Bosco replied that he was exhausted and needed food, since he had not taken anything since noon. "You can eat at the general's. Come!" Within minutes they were there. "Quick, quick!" the relatives cried. "It may already be too late. The poor man is so much worse!"

"What little faith you have!" Don Bosco chided. "Didn't I tell you that tomorrow the general will receive Communion in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians? It is nearly midnight and I must have some food, because tomorrow morning I must be in the confessional again at five. Please get me something to eat."

He then calmly sat down at table. After eating a bit, he blessed the sick man. Then, making no reference whatever to the Anointing of the Sick, he got back into the coach and returned to the Oratory. The general, whom everyone thought to be dead, had actually slipped into a coma. Early the next morning he awoke and told his son to fetch his clothes because, as he had told Don Bosco, he wished to go to church and receive Holy Communion from his hand. Toward eight, just as Don Bosco was vesting for Mass, a very pale man approached him. "Here I am, Don Bosco," he said.

"Fine, but who are you?"

"Don't you know me? I'm General...."

"Blessed be Mary, Help of Christians! Didn't I tell you that you would come to Her shrine today?"

"Yes, indeed! But now I'd like you to hear my confession, because I want to receive, as you suggested."

"Didn't you make your confession only two days ago?"

"Yes, Father, but I would like to confess my lack of faith. I'm guilty of that."

Don Bosco heard his confession and gave him Holy Communion. Later, the general returned home, completely cured.

On Sunday, May 23, the last day of the novena, a large number of people attended the services. On May 26, *Unità Cattolica* reported the splendid celebration of the feast of Mary, Help of Christians as follows:

> The second annual celebration of this cherished feast was even more splendid than last year. Countless crowds flocked to the new church despite the rain, and several thousand received Holy Communion. Bishop [Lawrence] Gastaldi of Saluzzo presided at second Vespers and archbishop of Turin imparted solemn Benediction.
>
> Canon [Louis] Nasi, speaking as a loving son of his greatest and most loving Mother, addressed the vast congregation on Mary's power and goodness, extolling Her more with his heart than with his words. A four-hundred voice choir sang the antiphon *Sancta Maria, succurre miseris,* a masterly composition of Father John Cagliero, so appropriate in these troubled times. It was a sea of voices calling for the Blessed Virgin's motherly and powerful intervention on behalf of the Church and her ministers: *Interveni pro clero.* That such a celebration could take place in peace and devotion in these times is itself a triumph of Mary.

There were other instances of the Madonna's goodness. For example, a greatly renowned doctor called at the Oratory one day and asked for Don Bosco. After a greeting and introduction, he told Don Bosco, "People say that you can cure all diseases. Is that true?"

"Not at all!" Don Bosco replied.

"But I have been told so! I was even given the names of the people involved and the ailments they were cured of."

"Look," Don Bosco went on, "many come here to seek favors through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians. If after a triduum or a novena they obtain what they sought and recover, it is not due to me, but solely to the Blessed Virgin."

"Well, let Her cure me and I too will believe in these miracles."

"What's your ailment?"

The man told him that he was an epileptic and that his condition

had so worsened over the past year that he dared no longer venture out alone for fear of a sudden seizure. Known remedies had proven ineffective, and so he too, like many others, had come to the shrine of Mary, Help of Christians to be cured.

"Then do what the others do," Don Bosco told him. "If you wish the Virgin to heal you, kneel, pray with me, and prepare to purify and strengthen your soul through confession and Communion."

"Suggest something else, because I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because it would be a sham. I do not believe in God, the Virgin, prayer, or miracles."

Don Bosco was grieved by this avowal of unbelief, but, with God's help, he spoke so convincingly that the doctor knelt and made the Sign of the Cross.

"I am amazed that I still know how to make it!" he exclaimed. "I haven't blessed myself for the past forty years."

He then prayed and made his confession. When he was through, he declared that he felt like a new man, brimming with a joy he could never have believed possible. His health improved so much that he never again had an epilepsy attack, and was thus able to return often to give thanks to Mary, Help of Christians who had healed him in both soul and body.

On May 30, after closing the Marian festivities, the Salesian school at Lanzo prepared to celebrate the feast of St. Philip Neri, its patron. Both church and premises were festively adorned. The news that Don Bosco would arrive on the morning of May 29 and that the Oratory choir and band would follow that evening had aroused indescribable enthusiasm among the boys.

Regretfully, however, not all the boys could take part in the general rejoicing. Seven pupils had been stricken with smallpox, and, on doctor's orders, had been confined to the infirmary.[1] Unhappy with their fate, they hatched a little plan of their own.

"If we can get Don Bosco up here," they said, "he will bless us and we will be well again and enjoy the feast." Immediately they sent for the director [Father John Baptist Lemoyne] and begged him to bring Don Bosco to their room as soon as he arrived. Meanwhile each one had his clothes ready at the foot of his bed.

When Don Bosco arrived, all the pupils ran to him with cheers

[1]This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

and kept him in their midst for over a half hour until a messenger from the infirmary pleaded with him to visit the patients. Don Bosco obliged.

"Oh, Don Bosco, bless us and make us well!" they all shouted as soon as he entered the room.

Don Bosco smiled at their request and asked if they had faith in the Madonna. On their affirmative reply, he added, "Then let us all say a Hail Mary together!" After the prayer, he blessed them.

"May we get up now?" the boys asked, reaching for their clothes.

"Do you really trust Our Lady?"

"Yes, yes."

"Then get up!" Don Bosco said. And he left, accompanied by the director.

Hurriedly the boys threw on their clothes. After escorting Don Bosco to his room, the director returned to the infirmary to see what had happened, but six of the boys were already gone. Only one—John Baravalle—had lingered in bed to ask whether he might get worse if he were to get up. Seeing that he lacked faith and considering the gravity of his illness—although his condition was no worse than that of the others—the director ordered him to stay in bed and then went down into the playground. A humid, cold wind was blowing on the Alpine height. Worried, particularly because the doctor had insisted that the patients should not be exposed to the open air, the director went around the playground looking for his sick pupils. When he found them, he checked their faces, necks, and arms. All pustules and blotches had disappeared. Among the boys who had been instantly cured were Joseph Demagistris and Charles Passerini, who later taught respectively in the lyceums and technical schools of Turin. Both are willing to testify under oath to the above.

On the following day, May 30, St. Philip Neri's feast was celebrated with great joy. It closed in the evening with the solemn awarding of testimonials of excellence to six pupils chosen by their companions. A large number of guests attended the ceremony.

The first boy called to receive the award was Demagistris.

"He is sick," Dr. Magnetti responded.

"Present!" the boy shouted. The doctor was amazed.

The second boy called out was Passerini. Again the doctor responded "Sick!" but, as before, the boy shouted "Present!" and walked to the stage. The doctor could hardly restrain his indignation. Calling the two boys over, he examined them and declared that their pustules had merely subsided, that their condition was serious, and that the superiors would be held responsible for whatever might occur. He then went up to the infirmary, and when he found only Baravalle there, he went home exceedingly upset.

Truthfully, without supernatural intervention those boys could not possibly have gone from a warm room to a cold playground and stayed there any great length of time without serious complications. However, they fared very well. Baravalle instead remained quarantined for another twenty days under Dr. Magnetti's solicitous care until the disease ran its course.

Back in Turin, Don Bosco wrote[2] to Father Almerico Guerra thanking him for a complimentary copy of his book *Priestly Vocations* in which Father Guerra repeatedly and lavishly praised Don Bosco for his zeal in promoting priestly vocations and highly recommended various writings of Don Bosco, particularly his expurgated edition of the Latin classics. He called Don Bosco's schools "genuine nurseries of virtue" which "provided excellent clerics and priests."

In turn Don Bosco had a mutual friend—Father [Salvator] Bertini, also of Lucca—send copies of *Letture Cattoliche* to Father Guerra. Coincidentally, the June-July issue, entitled *Finding One's Place in This World*, was also about vocations, though in a more comprehensive sense.

[2] We are omitting this thank-you letter. [Editor]

CHAPTER 52

Unexpected Harassment

IN 1867, Urban Rattazzi, Minister of the Interior, learned of the decree of praise of the Salesian Society issued by the Holy See on July 23, 1864.[1] He curiously asked Don Bosco to let him see the papal document. Don Bosco obliged, so as to be able to say that he had done nothing of which the government was not informed. Rattazzi had acted out of sheer curiosity, and there was never any mention of a royal *exequatur*, or any other inquiry. As we have already narrated, years before the aforenamed minister himself had advised Don Bosco on certain legal aspects of the constitutions of the Salesian Society.[2]

However, the king's attorney general in Turin took a keener interest in the Holy See's decree of March 1, 1869 [approving definitively the Salesian Society]. Threateningly he demanded that Don Bosco hand over the papal decree exempting the Oratory from episcopal jurisdiction and instructed him to apply for the royal *exequatur*, causing one to wonder why there should have been so much interest in a strictly ecclesiastical matter.

Don Bosco hastened to comply, declaring that although he had not thought it necessary to anticipate the request by sending the decree, he was not opposed to applying for a royal *exequatur*. Indeed he asked the attorney general to initiate the process. Later, he himself submitted a formal request.

About six weeks later, the attorney general replied that before he could process the application, Don Bosco had to send him also the decree of February 19 alluded to in the decree of March 1, 1869.

[1] *See* Vol. VII, p. 425. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. V, pp. 460f. [Editor]

Don Bosco replied that there had never been any papal decree concerning the Society of St. Francis de Sales dated February 19, but that the date in question simply indicated the day on which the approval of the Society of St. Francis de Sales had been debated and granted by the Sacred Congregation [of Bishops and Regulars] and by the Holy Father, as was clearly set forth in the decree of March 1. Ultimately, the application was returned to Don Bosco with the following note, dated November 23, 1869: *"Exequatur* denied. Eula, *Attorney General."*

The decree of approval of the Salesian Society was not returned. This confiscation, however, had no unpleasant consequences because, through the intervention of some influential person, the attorney general gave up his demands and Don Bosco was free to enjoy the privilege granted to him.[3]

A report from the Department of Justice [which also handled matters pertaining to the exercise of religion] pointed out that through the Holy See's decree of March 1, 1869 Don Bosco was endowed with *quasi-episcopal* jurisdiction over the members of his Society to the detriment of diocesan ordinaries. It also hinted that the Salesian Society was "but a replica of congregations abolished under the law of July 7, 1866." Doubtless, some ill-intentioned person was conspiring against Don Bosco and stooping to any means to destroy his Congregation. It is easy to guess who might have put all this in motion, perhaps thoughtlessly, and we need not name him. The mere mention of this incident will suffice to point out ever more clearly the obstacles Don Bosco had to overcome and the battles he had to wage in order to found the Salesian Society. It will also make us better appreciate the special assistance which Mary, Help of Christians granted to him at all times.

[3] We are omitting a lengthy exchange of letters between Don Bosco and the attorney general. [Editor]

CHAPTER 53

Admirable Tact

THE feasts of St. John the Baptist—Don Bosco's name day—and of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, in which he heartily participated, did not slow down his activities. He enjoyed them for the glory they gave to God and the spiritual advantage they offered to his pupils, especially through the reception of the sacraments. On such days he found rest in sharing the common joy. It was natural for him to "rejoice with those who are rejoicing." His serene, bright countenance and his loving smile enhanced his boys' contentment, enthusiasm, and gratitude. He made them feel like true sons of his. This was also true in June 1869 on the feasts of St. John the Baptist, which was celebrated with the usual solemnity, and that of St. Aloysius Gonzaga.[1]

At this time he must surely have been delighted to receive a letter from a former co-worker of his—Louis Mussa—reminiscing about old times and dedicating to him the translation of *Bethlehem* by the famous English convert, Father William Faber:

Mondonio, Feast of St. Aloysius, 1869

Dear Don Bosco,

It is now more than twenty years since I used to come on Sundays to teach catechism to the little urchins in what was the cradle of your future Oratory. A small room on the main floor, with the ceiling and overhead garret supported by an upright in the middle of the room which did duty as a pillar—its rough finish disguised by strips of wallpaper—in an out-of-the-way, uninhabited area on the city outskirts: this was the seed

[1] We have omitted introductory details along with a letter of Don Bosco to a countess and one to him from a government official about the Church of the Holy Shroud in Rome. [Editor]

sown in good soil which later grew into a tree to shelter thousands of birds.

How many things have happened since then! One I shall never forget is the death of saintly Father Cafasso. Another, which also deeply moves me, is that the Pope, though his domain has been dismembered, still thrives as much as ever, his power even greater. Exalted to the skies by good Christians both then and now, while evil men conspired against him in the dark, he still lives, while so many who often chanted his funeral dirge are now in the grave, their souls at the mercy of the Supreme Judge!

I take comfort too in the forthcoming ecumenical council at a time when we took it for granted that after the Council of Trent it would be impossible to convoke another. How great an impact it will have on the world!

The small room which did duty as a chapel, where God's little ones came to hear the teachings of the Church through whom Christ Himself speaks, was my Bethlehem and Nazareth, where the Child Jesus dwelt in a squalid cave and lowly house. And since it so pleased our beloved Jesus to consider favors to His poor ones as done unto Himself, I, like Bethlehem's shepherds, felt that I was doing something for Him in speaking of God to the boys who had been drawn there by His Holy Name. Nor does the comparison stop here. Today I miss that poor little room which served as our chapel. Just as humble Bethlehem has become the astounding, divine edifice of the Universal Church, so too our little chapel has grown into a magnificent church, one of Turin's loveliest.

Translating the famous book *Bethlehem* by Faber inevitably recalled these fond memories. In offering this translation to the public, I found it only natural to put it under the asupices of a name equally dear to me—your own, Father. I do not seek to draw renown upon either the book or upon Your Reverence, for both surpass all renown which any effort of mine could arouse. My only purpose is to renew the fond, tender sentiments which ever link us, and to make sure that Your Reverence will not forget, especially in your prayers, the humble soul of your most affectionate son.

Louis Mussa

If this letter delighted Don Bosco, he must have felt ever so much more thrilled to receive from Pius IX a reply to his letter [of congratulations on the occasion of the Holy Father's golden

jubilee of ordination]. The signed letter was dated June 23, eve of the feast of St. John the Baptist:

POPE PIUS IX

Beloved Son, Greetings and Apostolic Benediction.

The many tokens of faith and devotion which you have given Us certainly aimed at acquainting Us with your firm attachment to the Apostolic See and to Ourselves. They show too that not only do you diligently strive to arouse in others the love you bear Peter's Chair, but also that many feel as you do. Another splendid token of this We have received on the occasion of Our golden jubilee of ordination and First Mass in the very affectionate letter you sent Us in your name and in behalf of the oratories and institutes you direct. We need not tell you how welcome these filial congratulations are to Us. We will appreciate it if you share Our sentiments with your priests and boys. Indeed, you may add that, in response to their wish, We remembered them in Our Holy Mass as We particularly recommended to Our Lord all who pray for Us. We shall be grateful if they continue to pray, as We hope, for the conversion of souls gone astray, that they may all know and love Our Heavenly Father and Him whom He sent, Jesus Christ. Him, albeit unworthily, We represent on earth. Meanwhile, in token of Our particular benevolence and a sign of divine grace, We most affectionately impart Our Apostolic Benediction to you and your beloved sons. Rome, St. Peter's, June 23 , 1869, the Twenty-Fourth Year of Our Pontificate.

Pius PP. IX

But joys and sorrows—or troubles, at the very least—follow each other endlessly on this earth. For Don Bosco the worst annoyances came from bequests left to him for charity by heirless admirers and friends, most of which were attended by hosts of grave inconveniences, hostilities, and nearly endless litigations coming from persons who had been excluded from the inheritance. For this reason Don Bosco always insisted, "Whoever wants to give to charity should do so while he is well and not wait until he is dying."[2]

Though beset by these problems, he did not stop trying to pur-

[2] We are omitting the details of a contestation of one such legacy. [Editor]

chase land to expand the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory near Porta Nuova.[3]

Another important matter preoccupied him during these same months. The municipality of Cherasco had asked him to open a boarding school in that town and negotiations had already made great progress. The terms of the agreement—substantially those proposed to the municipality of Cavour—were accepted. The school was to occupy the premises of the magnificent monastery of Our Lady of the People, which had formerly belonged to the Somaschi or Clerics Regular of Somasca[4] before the suppression of religious orders. These religious had also cared for the adjoining parish church and for the local public schools. Bishop [Eugene] Galletti of Alba approved the contract and stipulated that at the death of the present administrator of the church, the pastor would be appointed by Don Bosco.

The Church of Our Lady of the People is regarded as one of Piedmont's most stately churches in view of its magnificent façade, its almost octangular interior, its huge and lofty dome, and its many valuable stuccoes.

This would be the fourth Salesian house, not counting the one at Trofarello,[5] and Don Bosco had to provide a staff. Unavoidably he found that he had to shift some personnel, and therefore he wrote to a few Salesians whom he had in mind. In reading these letters, one cannot but admire the amiable and tactful wording of his requests. He wrote to Father Anthony Sala, the prefect at Lanzo, as follows:

Turin, July 3, 1869

Dear Father Sala,

An economer is absolutely needed here at the Oratory because Father Savio can no longer handle this [on top of everything else.]. Please tell me if you could hurry your coming, without upsetting your office.

[3] We are omitting a letter of Don Bosco to a Genoese lady exhorting her to make a novena and also recommending to her his plans for the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory. [Editor]

[4] A religious order founded by St. Jerome Emiliani in 1528 to care for orphans and to teach Christian doctrine. The founder died in Somasca (from which the order took its name), a town near Bergamo, Italy, on February 8, 1537. [Editor]

[5] This house had been donated to the Salesian Society and was mainly used as a retreat house for Salesians. [Editor]

Bodrato[6] might handle it with some assist from Father Costamagna.[7] You could stay here for a short while and return to Lanzo for days and even weeks when exams are in session. For your information, no one knows that I am writing to you, so tell me freely what you think of my proposal. God bless you and your work. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

A few days later he also wrote to Father Francis Provera,[8] the prefect at Mirabello:

Dear Father Provera:

I am always thinking up new plans, and here is another one. How would you feel if we were to send Bodrato to Cherasco and you to Lanzo? That's what I'm planning to do if, first, it is to your liking, and second, if you truthfully have nothing against it. I would like to make this change of personnel because Bodrato knows about farming and is familiar with elementary schools.[9] Since, for this year at least, the actual teaching is in the hands of laymen, we need someone to supervise them. Please keep this to yourself, at least for now. Write to me at Trofarello. May God bless us. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco[10]

Before the end of July [1869] Don Bosco went to St. Ignatius' Shrine for his spiritual retreat. During his absence three boys sneaked out of the Oratory to go for a swim in the Dora River, but, frightened by a mysterious hand that repeatedly kept sharply

[6] *See* Chapter 35, footnote 10. [Editor]

[7] Costamagna entered the Oratory in 1858 at the age of twelve, became a Salesian in 1867, and was ordained in 1868. He led the third group of Salesian missionaries to Argentina in 1877, opened the first Salesian house in Talca, Chile, in 1887, and was consecrated bishop and appointed First Vicar Apostolic of Mendex and Gualaguiza, Ecuador, in 1895. He died at Bernal (Argentina) on September 9, 1921. [Editor]

[8] Francis Provera entered the Oratory in 1858 at the age of twenty-two, made his triennial vows in 1862, was ordained a priest in 1864, and filled important administrative and teaching posts. He died in 1874 after much suffering, as Don Bosco had foretold. For further details *see* the Index of Volume VI. [Editor]

[9] *See* Vol. VII, pp. 451f. [Editor]

[10] We are omitting two other letters of Don Bosco to a diocesan priest and to a layman concerning the new school at Cheraso. [Editor]

smacking them on the shoulders, they hastened back to the Oratory and confided to their friends what had happened to them, thus confirming what Don Bosco revealed in a letter.[11] Father Louis Rocca, economer general of the Salesian Society, who was a rhetoric student that year, assured us repeatedly that all the pupils knew about this incident and the culprits.

From St. Ignatius' Shrine Don Bosco went to the Salesian school at Lanzo, where he heard that Count [Louis] Cibrario[12] was in town at the Cappel Verde Inn on his way to Usseglio in the Alps for a vacation. Don Bosco called on him with the director of the school [Father Lemoyne]. The count was rather annoyed just then because a boy he had recommended had been expelled from one of our schools. Expecting a rather lively discussion, Don Bosco decided to face the problem squarely and obviate all misunderstanding. Leaving Father Lemoyne in the waiting room, he closeted himself for over an hour with the count. Later, he confided that the reception he had received had been far from friendly. Within a few minutes, though, the count calmed down and invited Father Lemoyne to join them. Don Bosco was seated at the count's right. The latter began talking about how eager Americans were for honorific titles and insignias despite laws prohibiting them from publicly using them, adding that they willingly gave as much as 30,000 lire to charity just for a simple cross to display in their drawing room. At this point Don Bosco gratefully recalled how helpful the count had been to the Oratory by such means.

The count thanked him, saying that he would always do his utmost for Don Bosco. The latter countered by saying that the count had helped him in many other ways too.

"How?" the count asked. "Aside from getting some donations channeled to you through a few honorific titles, I can't see how else I helped you."

"Yet you did. You can't imagine how useful your historical writings were to me. Only in them did I find the natural, obvious

[11] For similar incidents *see* Vol. III, p. 290 and Vol. VII, pp. 134f, 137f. [Editor]

[12] A benefactor of the Oratory and a renowned statesman, historian, senator, and minister of finance, public instruction, and foreign affairs. His historical works include *Storia di Torino* [History of Turin] and *Della Schavitù e del Servaggio* [Of Slavery and Serfdom]. He died in 1870 at the age of 68. [Editor]

solution to intricate questions that I had not thoroughly grasped." And he went on praising the count's many valuable works and the care he took despite his many other occupations.

Smiling contentedly, Count Cibrario remarked: "Indeed I have never wasted time. Unfailingly, I get up daily at 4 and work at my desk until about 9, when people begin to call on me. Occasionally, I return to my desk in the late evening and work until about midnight."

"Then we can happily look forward to more writings of yours which will bring honor to our country."

"Yes, I do happen to be working on something, but I am getting old. I am nearly seventy, you know!"

"You, old? Only the sick are old. You are healthy and strong, both in mind and body. There is plenty of room for hope!"

"Yes, let us hope, but man is still mortal. Willy-nilly, I may not last long."

"I wish you a very long life, but, with your permission, I would like to say something."

"Speak up!"

"You know that I care for you and deeply respect you. Well, then, should your life last only a little while longer, remember that you have something to settle with the Church."

At this unexpected remark the count grew serious, bowed his head, and became momentarily silent. Then, grasping Don Bosco's hand firmly, he said: "You are right. I have already been thinking about it. I shall do it. I most certainly shall ... and soon."

Thus ended that visit, and it was to be the last.

CHAPTER 54

A Keen Disappointment

WHILE continuing negotiations with the Italian government to acquire the Church of the Holy Shroud in Rome, Don Bosco did not slacken his efforts in regard to the Barberini Sisters' convent near St. Caius.[1] His agent was Monsignor [Emilian] Manacorda,[2] to whom he had given power of attorney. During his stay in Rome the transaction seemed to have been settled, but now the nuns, fearing that an adjacent institution might seriously upset their routine and tranquillity—as some people were intimating—were having second thoughts about selling. When the Pope heard of it, he sent word to them: "Either sign the contract or We shall act *absque consensu capituli* [without your chapter's consent]."

The jocular remark clearly spelled out the Pope's wish. Then and there the nuns appeared to acquiesce, but they were again aroused by some people who argued that the sum offered was too low and that buyers could be found who would give up to one hundred and fifty thousand lire. As a result, negotiations dragged on.

Prince Barberini himself, at first favorable to the sale, staunchly upheld his family's patronage over the convent and sought to have the agreement annulled. Furthermore, the cardinal protector of the Barberini nuns lent a benevolent ear to the objections they were raising against the sale.

Acquainted with all these maneuvers, Don Bosco wrote most courteously to the cardinal as follows:

[1] *See* p. 244. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. V, p. 77. [Editor]

Turin, July 21, 1869

Your Eminence:

I beg your forgiveness for adding to your grave occupations. Please hear me out kindly and graciously give me the advice Your Eminence deems best for God's glory in reference to the planned purchase of the premises of St. Caius, adjoining the ancient convent of the Barberini nuns. Last January, I expressed a wish to the Holy Father of opening a house of studies for our clerics here in Rome. The Holy Father liked the idea and suggested the above property, empowering Monsignor Franchi to transact the sale. My first step was to call on the nuns to ask their opinion. They replied that they were reluctant to sell, but that financial straits forced them to do so, adding, however, that considering the exclusive religious purpose for which both the church and adjoining home would be used, they preferred me to any other bidder.

I then called on the aforenamed Monsignor Franchi and asked him whether the premises were really for sale and if any other negotiations were pending. He told me that a sale had definitely been decided upon and that no commitments had been made to anyone else. I then asked if he was the one I should deal with. He replied that he had been entrusted with this business and that in due time he himself would contact the cardinal protector.

With this prelate's introduction I visited the premises and discussed the price. It was finally set at 50,000 lire and I accepted. To confirm the closing of the contract, drawings and blueprints of the premises were handed over to me and an agreement was reached on installments and dates of payment. We all understood that the contract was definitely concluded. On that occasion Monsignor Franchi informed me that Your Eminence was cardinal protector of the nuns. In agreement with him, I tried to contact you, and for this purpose I called several times at your residence. Your many duties and my own ignorance of your schedule kept me from obtaining the appointment I wanted.

Meanwhile, since important matters called me back to Turin, I legally empowered Monsignor Manacorda to act as my business agent in regard to the St. Caius property. Moreover, with funds supplied by generous people and other money I had managed to set aside, I was ready to draw up the instrument at any time. Thus the contract seemed definitely closed and I felt myself legally bound.

Vague rumors gave me to understand that the nuns feared the noise of children but had no such qualms about our clerics. The patronage of Prince Barberini was also adduced. On this score too the rights of this

excellent, charitable gentleman would remain unprejudiced by the transfer of this property to us.

I also heard that Your Eminence was displeased with this contract because you were not informed of it in time, as you should have been. I regret this, but it was quite involuntary. In fact, it was against my will because I sincerely wished to please Your Eminence, whom I have long known by reputation and always highly revered.

I do not dwell on the Holy Father's consent; insofar as he is concerned, he is totally in favor of this transaction. In conclusion, I make bold to beg Your Eminence to act as advisor not only to the nuns, but also to my own humble person, and, for Our Lord's sake, to tell me, in whatever manner you find most convenient, whether this contract still stands as we stipulated, and, if such is the case, what further steps are needed to have the instrument drawn up. Should the contract be conclusively broken, I will reconcile myself, returning the drawings and blueprints of the premises notwithstanding the genuinely grave harm I would also suffer because I believed the contract had been closed, and I will consider myself free to look elsewhere for suitable premises.

I beg you to kindly forgive my lengthy letter. This was unavoidable considering the matter at hand. I pray with all my heart that God will grant you a long, happy life.

Very truly yours,
Fr. John Bosco

We have no evidence that the cardinal replied. On his part, the Holy Father yielded to Prince Barberini's insistence. Informed of this, Don Bosco humbly and peaceably abandoned the project, though with regret. However, the nuns may soon have regretted their decision. After seizing Rome, the Italian government suppressed convents and religious houses, confiscating also the Barberini convent. These nuns were the first to be expelled and deprived of all their possessions in October 1871. Monsignor [John Baptist] Fratejacci[3] used to tell us: "Had that huge building been in Don Bosco's hands, the whole complex would have been spared, and Salesian priests would have provided for the nuns' spiritual needs. Others too had reason to regret that loss."

On his part Don Bosco did not leave idle the sum he had been

[3] A member of the staff of the cardinal vicar of Rome and a great friend of Don Bosco. [Editor]

holding in readiness to purchase the St. Caius property. Instead he bought a piece of land adjacent to the Oratory for the sum of 44,000 lire. Divine Providence kept coming to his aid.[4]

In August, subscribers of *Letture Cattoliche* received a timely booklet that Don Bosco had intermittently written in his spare time. It was entitled *Ecumenical Councils and the Catholic Church*.... The booklet was aglow with Don Bosco's ardent love for the Pope and the Church. Through it he voiced the hope that, although already accepted and unassailable, the doctrinal infallibility of the Pope might be defined at the forthcoming ecumenical council as an article of faith, to the glory of God and His Church, to the reassurance and consolation of the faithful, and to the enhancement of Peter's successor by the addition of a new and lovelier jewel.

The booklet went on to suggest special prayers with an invocation to Mary, Help of Christians and urged the faithful to say them daily until the termination of the council for the following intentions: (1) that the council would not be prevented from convening or disturbed by the enemies of God and His Church; (2) that schismatics would be reunited to the Catholic Church; (3) that all Protestants—Anglicans, especially—would return to the unity of the faith. To this end he suggested two means which he considered extremely effective for obtaining the desired grace. The first was for pastors, superiors, and parents to urge boys and girls to form groups of ten or twelve for the common recitation of these prayers.[5] He explained the second means as follows:

Approximately two years ago, Catholics were invited to make a vow to believe, profess, and defend orally and in writing—and, if necessary, with their very lives—the personal infallibility of the Pope, even though this truth had not yet been declared an article of faith. We could believe it much in the same way that devout Catholics believed in the immaculate conception of Mary before its solemn definition by the gloriously reigning Pius IX on December 8, 1854. We gladly take this propitious opportunity to extend such an invitation to our readers; indeed, we cordially urge them to make this vow in honor of Jesus Christ and His

[4] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[5] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

Vicar on earth, in order to acquire greater merits for heaven. We also pray that God in His mercy will hasten the day when this consoling truth shall be solemnly proclaimed a dogma by the Church.

We believe that Don Bosco made such a vow.[6]

Anyone pondering Don Bosco's life marvels at the multiplicity of his activities. In addition to everything else he personally handled every matter concerning his young clerics: their investiture, patrimony, dimissorials, and ordination. In our archives we came upon this paragraph: "In a rescript dated August 13, 1869 Pius IX grants authorization to issue dimissorial letters to an ordinand who entered the Salesian Society after his fourteenth year."

At just about this time Don Bosco also drafted a petition to the Holy See[7] for authorization to issue dimissorials to the cleric [Francis] Bodrato. Later on, he renewed the petition to include all those who had entered the Oratory after their fourteenth year and had applied for admission to the Society. The Holy Father graciously obliged. Don Bosco also applied for the incardination of a Friar Minor into the Salesian Society.[8]

[6] We are omitting a quotation from the cardinal archbishop of Dublin concerning the confidence and courage of Pius IX in calling an ecumenical council. [Editor]

[7] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

[8] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 55

A Providential Delay

IN Don Bosco's vocabulary, relaxing meant finding time to spend with his Salesians, either individually or in groups. He enjoyed talking with them or even just thinking about them in the quiet of an evening, searching for ways to meet their needs. At this time of the year he was looking forward with joy to the yearly spiritual retreats at Trofarello over which he would preside in just a few weeks. Love for his spiritual family was the overwhelming need of his heart. A sight to delight him was that expressed in the psalm: "Your sons round your table like shoots round an olive tree." [Ps. 127, 3]

In order to foster even more of this family spirit in them, he sent the following circular to all his houses during August:

Feast of the Assumption, 1869[1]

Beloved Sons:

Divine Providence has willed that our Society be definitively approved by the Holy See. While humbly and heartily thanking the good Lord, we must utterly strive through the exact observance of the rules to live up to the purpose for which we entered this Congregation.

Among the articles there is one concerning the relationship and openness which must exist between superiors and subjects. "Let each member have great confidence in his superior," says Art. 6, Ch. 5; "let him not hide from him any secret of his heart."

This article is most important. Experience shows that dialogue between superior and subjects is very beneficial. Through it, while a religious can freely make his needs known and seek opportune advice, the

[1] In the first edition of the two-volume *Life of Don Bosco* this circular appeared dated "Feast of the *Annunciation*, 1869," but the correct date, as proven by several authentic documents, was the feast of Our Lady's *Assumption*, August 15. [Author's note]

superior comes to know his mind, can provide for his confrere's needs, and can make such decisions as may facilitate the observance of the rules to benefit the entire Society. This seems to be the precious meaning of the Holy Spirit's words: "Woe to the man by himself with no one to help him up when he falls down." [Eccles. 4, 10]

Scripture also says: "Better two than one by himself.... If one should fall, the other keeps him up." [Eccles. 4, 9] In this manner, adds St. Thomas, the religious achieves his goal, is alerted to dangers, and is assisted to his feet again when he falls.

For the benefit of our Society it has been thought desirable to establish the following norms as practical applications of the above-quoted article:

1. Every month two talks shall be given: one on the rules with a simple explanation of the same, another on a moral topic geared from a practical point of view to the capacity of the listeners.

2. Once a month each confrere shall confer with his director about what he judges conducive to his spiritual life. If he has doubts about the observance of the rules, he shall manifest them and seek such advice as he may believe opportune for his spiritual and temporal well-being.

On his part, with due charity, the director shall be at the confrere's disposal at a chosen time. He shall also make sure to ask each confrere privately about his health, duties, religious observance, studies, or tasks entrusted to him. Finally, he shall encourage him, and by word and deed try to help him enjoy peace of mind and tranquillity of conscience, which must be the principal goal of all members of our Society.

3. Generally once a month, the director of each house shall give the Rector Major an accurate account of the physical and moral state of all his subjects. He shall also acquaint him with the material condition of the house.

A small exception is made for the motherhouse. Members of the house chapter and those priests who so wish may confer with the Rector Major whenever they feel it necessary.

Giving an account of oneself to a superior is a general practice in religious congregations. It has been found very helpful, and I very much hope that it will be among us too, especially for obtaining the peace of heart and tranquillity of conscience so necessary to all of us.

Much more must be said on these points, and this will be done through other circulars and conferences and especially during the forthcoming spiritual retreats at Trofarello if God, in His infinite mercy, will spare us until then, as I trust He will, and will allow us to gather there together during the coming month of September.

Courage, my dear sons! We have a great mission ahead of us. Many souls are looking to us for salvation; first among them must be our own, then the souls of our confreres, and finally those of any of the faithful whom we may be able to help. God is with us. Let us strive to respond to His heavenly favors. We hope that He will bestow them on us even more abundantly in the future.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always, and may He grant us genuine fervor and the precious gift of perseverance in our Society. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. This letter is to be read to all members of our Society.

On Saturday, August 14, Don Bosco left for Montemagno, where he was expected for the solemn feast of the Assumption. Marquis Fassati was looking forward to having him as guest of honor at a banquet for a large number of his friends. Father Francesia had preceded him there by one day. When the coach arrived without Don Bosco, the marquis, who was deeply attached to him and counted on his presence, flew into a rage. Turning to Father Francesia, he railed, "You, champion defender of Don Bosco, can you tell me what excuse he will dare give for not showing up?"

Unperturbed, Father Francesia replied, "My long experience has taught me that even when Don Bosco does something wrong, it somehow turns out for the best."

Around 5 P.M. the guests sat down at table, but the marquis was in a bad mood. What had caused Don Bosco's delay? Upon arriving in Asti, he had called on the Cerrato family, who had purposely made him miss the coach by keeping him busy with visitors. On realizing the late hour, he rushed to the station, only to get there a half-hour too late. While he was planning his next step, his host, who was secretly delighted by his ruse, asked him to visit the festive oratory of Canon John Cerruti. This was the purpose of the whole trick. Don Bosco obliged. There he preached, heard confessions, and gave Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Then, as dusk came on, he set out for the Cerratos. While walking along, he heard somebody behind him cry out, "By golly! That priest looks just like Don Bosco!"

Hearing his name, Don Bosco turned around. A thickly bearded man approached and greeted him most warmly, exclaiming, "It's really you, Don Bosco! How are you?"

"Fine!"

"Do you still remember me?"

"Of course! Your first name is James, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is! Oh, I am so glad that you still remember me. It's been fourteen years that we haven't met. I always said that you did care for me. And to think of all the scrapes I got into and all the trouble I caused you!"

"I am truly glad to see you too and to know that you remember me. Yes, I did care for you and still do. By the way, what are you doing for a living?"

"I'm a merchant, and I can't complain about business."

"Are you still good?"

"Yes, but not quite as good as you might wish me to be."

"What do you mean?"

"I'd rather not say.... Well, I never found another Don Bosco! There is only one like you! I just can't bring myself to go to confession to other priests; I just can't."

"Would you confess to Don Bosco?"

"I could never refuse him. I'd be ready any time he asked."

"Aren't there other friends of mine here in Asti besides you?"

"Oh, yes, there are several of us, and we are forever talking about you and the Oratory, but we have not been to confession since we left."

"Then why don't you all come tomorrow morning?"

"It's a deal!"

"You won't back out?"

"Not at all! Perhaps we shall not persevere, but we shall certainly not break our word to you. Tell me where you will say Mass tomorrow and we shall all be there."

Before he got back to the Cerratos, several other former pupils approached him. The next morning, fifteen married and single men went to confession to him and received Holy Communion from his hand. Then they took him to his coach, pressing about him with tears of joy and bidding him fond farewells.

"Thanks for all the good you have done for us and for making us so happy," they told him. "It's not only the gentry who love you,

but everyone—the poor people too!"

Townsfolk idling in the square were surprised to see so many men showing such respect and affection for a priest.

When Don Bosco reached Montemagno, Marquis and Marchioness Fassati gently reproached him. "You didn't keep your word!" they chided.

"Why did you say that?" he replied, seemingly unmindful of his delay.

"You're a day late!"

"Oh! You are right. Well, this is what happened." And he told them.

"In that case," the marquis commented, "I wish you many more such delays whenever I invite you to my house."

"Well, Marquis," Father Francesia added, "isn't it true that even when Don Bosco does something wrong, it somehow turns out for the best?"

"I can't deny that!" the marquis replied.

Meanwhile a prediction Don Bosco had made in Lanzo at the end of the year 1868 was being fulfilled. He had said that during that school year a pupil in the second grade whose name began with "V" would die.[2] As of July 1869 no pupil had died. Then Ulderico Valagossa, a very sturdy second-year boy, fell seriously ill and took to his bed for a month. Attorney Louis Andreis, who knew of the prediction, kept himself informed of the course of the illness. To anyone who voiced hope for the boy's recovery he would counter: "Valagossa will die. Don Bosco said so."

Meanwhile the lad began to improve and finally got out of bed. His father came to visit him and, finding him at play with his friends, decided to leave him there rather than take him home to recuperate. Within a week, however, the boy had a relapse and died. "Don Bosco had predicted it!" exclaimed the attorney, and with him the whole school concurred.

Valagossa died on a Sunday, eight days after again taking to his bed, while his companions were in church singing Vespers, and these words, *Et misericordia Eius, a progenie in progenies, timentibus Eum* [And His mercy is from generation to generation

[2] *See* p. 198. [Editor]

on those who fear Him], could be heard throughout the building. He was a very fine boy.

Municipal records at Lanzo carry this entry: "Ulderico Valagossa, eleven-year-old son of Felix and Frances Bismara, born at Biassona (Monza), died at Lanzo on August 22, 1869 at 4 P. M."[3]

During this same month news was to reach the Oratory of the fourth and fifth deaths among the six Don Bosco had foretold.[4] We read in the Oratory obituary:

> Ferdinand Boggiatto, Latin II student, son of Joseph, born in Testona, died at home in July 1869.
>
> Charles Giacchetti, first-year theology student, son of Lawrence, born in Lessone, left the Oratory on July 17, 1869 *et requievit in Domino* [and slept in the Lord].

Coincidentally, the September-October issue of *Letture Cattoliche*, entitled *Devotion to the Holy Souls in Purgatory*, served to draw the boys' thoughts to the afterlife....

The school year was now ended and Don Bosco mailed invitations to prominent local citizens to attend Awards Day on Wednesday, September 8, at 6 P.M. Since it was the feast of the Nativity of Mary, there were solemn church sevices in the morning. Many parents and guests were present at the awarding of prizes and greatly enjoyed the musical selections offered by the Oratory choir and band. The main speaker was Charles Bacchialoni, doctor of literature and philosophy. His splendid address is preserved in our archives.

As the school year ended, Don Bosco scheduled two spiritual retreats at Trofarello for his Salesians so that they might all participate in them without having to leave unattended the boys who had stayed on at the Oratory and in our other schools.[5]

[3] In those days the school year began in mid-October and ended in August. [Editor]

[4] *See* p. 13. [Editor]

[5] The last two paragraphs are condensations. [Editors]

CHAPTER 56

A Heartfelt Loss

THE first spiritual retreat for Salesians began on Monday, September 13 [1869], with Don Bosco preaching the instructions[1] and Father Rua handling the meditations.[2] The retreats consisted of several priests, many young clerics, coadjutors,[3] students, and artisans[4] who aspired to join the Salesian Society.

Don Bosco introduced the retreat with a brief history of the beginning and growth of the festive oratories and of the Society of St. Francis de Sales from 1841 to 1869. His voice, feelings, and words showed his immense gratitude to Our Heavenly Mother.

Fortunately, we have the outlines of all of his instructions in a single notebook. We also have on loose sheets the outlines of talks that he probably gave in 1870 at the retreats held at Lanzo. We publish them verbatim in the Appendix to this volume.[5] Here we will only mention the topics Don Bosco preached on during the first spiritual retreat in 1869. A check with those who took notes confirms that these topics match the outlines contained in the above-mentioned manuscript. They were as follows:

· Monday, September 13, evening: Introductory Brief History of the Salesian Society.

[1] Mid-morning and mid-afternoon talks on practical points of religious life, such as the vows and rules, the practice of virtue, advantages of the religious life, mortification, etc. [Editor]

[2] Early morning and evening talks on eternal verities such as death, judgment, hell, heaven, prayer, Christian devotions, and so on. [Editor]

[3] *See* Salesian Glossary, p. xix. [Editor]

[4] *Ibid.* [Editor]

[5] Since they are only outlines and are substantially similar to those found in any pre-Vatican II homiletic handbook, we are omitting them in this edition. Those who are interested can find them in *Memorie Biografiche del Venerabile Don Giovanni Bosco,* Vol. IX, pp. 697-710, 987-999. [Editor]

Tuesday, September 14, morning: Advantages of the Religious Life. Evening: the same.

Wednesday, September 15, morning: Vow of Obedience. Evening: Obedience to One's Superiors.

Thursday, September 16, morning: Vow of Poverty. Evening: Detachment from Parents.

Friday, September 17, morning: Vow of Chastity and Positive Means for Preserving It. Evening: Negative Means.

Saturday, September 18, morning: Keepsake of the Retreat—Let us work with faith, hope, and charity toward God, our superiors, our confreres and our subjects.

Every evening after night prayers Don Bosco again gave a short talk in the chapel, a custom he kept from then on. Here is a summary of these short talks:

September 13. We have mentioned the signs of a religious vocation. I shall add two more that are very important to us as Salesians: associating willingly with boys and desiring to foster in them a priestly vocation.

September 14. Detest the evil committed in the past, amend your present life, regret the failure to do good, and firmly resolve to cooperate in the salvation of others at the cost of any sacrifice.

September 15. He announced that those who had decided to make their vows should give their names to Father Rua or to Father Cagliero, and he asked them to draw up a will.

September 16. Four confreres made perpetual vows, among them Father Angelo Savio and Father Julius Barberis. Five more made triennial vows.

After night prayers Don Bosco explained that, for grave family reasons or the serious illness of a parent or relative, a confrere could and should be allowed to go home without violating the constitutions. For other reasons, however, such as the need of a rest, change of environment, or convalescence, there were suitable, properly equipped houses at Chieri, Lanzo, Mirabello, and Trofarello and soon there would be one also at Cherasco. He also pointed out that, if it were possible, he would forbid the reading of newspapers. He added that he did tolerate private reading of good dailies, but he would never allow it in the presence of the boys.

On September 17 a long letter from Father [Daniel] Comboni[6] to Don

[6] *See* Vol. VII, p. 488. [Editor]

Bosco was read aloud at table. This missionary was readying the premises for a Salesian foundation in Cairo to serve as a mission base for Salesian work in Africa.

That evening four members took triennial vows. After night prayers Don Bosco spoke thus:

"Today we spoke of the vow of chastity and someone became somewhat disturbed. 'In dealing with boys,' he objected, 'is it possible to avoid taking them by the hand or feeling a liking for them? If an evil thought rises in the mind, are we to run away and lock ourselves in our room?' (*Don Bosco went on listing other objections that had been raised.*)

"I repeat and reassert what I have already cited as a cause of grave peril and therefore to be avoided, but one should not be overly concerned when the matter is not sinful in itself. I did not mean to imply that a handshake, an honest liking, or an affectionate word—even if it might give rise to an evil thought—is sinful; it is not as long as one does not yield. I meant only that one should not put oneself into situations which may endanger a weak soul. I will even say: show brotherly kindness when necessary, but always use reserve and do not make it a habit. The right intention, God's grace, constant work, prayer, sacraments, and obedience to the rules are so sturdy a shield that the devil will have a hard time trying to penetrate it. Outstanding confreres of ours working among our boys are a splendid proof of this. Besides, my advice to anyone who feels that he cannot preserve this virtue in the midst of boys is not to join our Society."

On September 18 Don Bosco gave the closing talk, from which we quote a few reflections:

Let us not love people—friends, parents, relatives, superiors, and companions—for any earthly reason. Let us love God above all else and our fellow beings as ourselves for God's sake. "He who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." [1 John 4, 16] "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." [Phil. 4, 13]

Work with faith, hope and charity. Work with faith, striving toward the reward awaiting us in heaven. Let us not toil to be praised by our superior or our companions. Let us strive not for such paltry things but only to please the Lord.

Let us work with hope. When we are weary or afflicted, let us raise our eyes to heaven. A generous reward awaits us in this life, and an eternal one at death. Let us be like the hermit who drew comfort from heaven by

gazing through slits in his tiny, dingy cave. "He who trusts in the Lord shall not be put to shame." [Sir. 32, 28]

Work with love for God. He alone—the true rewarder of every little thing we do for Him—deserves to be loved and served. He loves us as an affectionate father, for Holy Scripture tells us: "I have loved you with an everlasting love." [Jer. 31, 3]

We are also bound to show love to our subjects and help them. We are never to say imperiously: "Do this or that." Let us always be gracious, pleasant, and amiable. In a disagreement with a coadjutor or a domestic, never say: "Shut up! Obey! Who are you? You're only a servant." This really hurts me a great deal. In our houses no one is a servant. We are all equal before God. Jesus Himself did not want people to address Him as master. He wanted to be called "father" or "teacher," explaining that He had come down to earth to serve, not to be served. The superior in our houses is no more the master than is the most humble sweeper....

Let each superior consider the temperament of his charges, their character, inclinations, skills, and mental makeup, so that he may learn how to make obedience easy. Let him keep in mind that one who does not know how to obey is not qualified to command. He must never order people to do things too difficult or repugnant.

When a holy picture, a little card, or a book will serve to induce someone to do what is right or to win over a soul, give it gladly, but only for that purpose.

Our aim is also to spread good books. Let us do whatever we can in this field at the right time and place.... Let us patiently bear with each other's faults, as St. Paul exhorts us: "Bear one another's burdens." Let us strive to love one another like brothers, helping one another, putting up with one another, and mutually defending our honor. Never give harsh reproof or ridicule, but only charitable mutual admonition! Let us shun all coarse speech; let us be civil, courteous, and charitable with each other.

Let us also be charitable toward our superiors, putting up with their failings. Let us practice what we preach. Let us jealously guard our rules, even the smallest, and especially our vows....

How sad it is to see crowds of boys badly in need of intellectual and moral formation and no one to take care of them. Occasionally, even in a festive oratory, one may find priests or clerics whose only concern seems to be their own fun rather than giving religious instruction to those entrusted to them by God's mercy.

Teach catechism readily, tell youngsters about the heroic deeds of charity performed by the saints, and use examples to illustrate God's

mercy and justice. Boys will listen eagerly.... How many boys are just waiting for religious instruction, eager to learn of God's law. Prepare them to receive the sacraments frequently. "The little ones have asked for bread, and there was no one to break it unto them." [Lam. 4, 4]

We have chosen the best thing in this world: to save souls. True, there are not enough of us to meet the need, but let us do what we can. The field is wide open. From India, Africa, and America, from Genoa and Rome, people write asking for our help. Pray to the Lord to send laborers. "The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few. Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest." [Luke 10, 2]

Courage! Saving souls is the most divine of tasks. Let worldlings say that religious congregations are things of the past and that monasteries and convents are falling into ruin everywhere. We intend to cooperate with the Lord in the salvation of souls, no matter what the cost.

The world is not concerned about the soul. In Paris, Florence, St. Petersburg, Berlin, and London, legislators discuss and deliberate over finances, armaments, wars, and conquest, but no one thinks of the soul, as if there were no such thing. "Therefore the nether world opens wide its throat and gapes with measureless jaw to swallow up her thronging nobility as they are shouting for joy."

The retreat closed with the *Te Deum* and a farewell banquet. Afterward each one returned to his own house. Everybody was satisfied: those who had made their vows and those who had deferred them; those who had formally applied for admission and those who had chosen to wait a bit longer or even to be incardinated into some diocese. Don Bosco put pressure on no one. As long as their conduct was satisfactory, he lavished fatherly care on everyone, even until the completion of their studies. His prudent advice and his affectionate concern for all without exception worked wonders within them, as the following example illustrates.

Father Merlone had been in the Oratory for over twelve years without ever showing any intention to join the Congregation. One day, when he was already a priest, he decided to leave. Before doing so he took a walk with Don Bosco outside the Oratory and had a long talk with him. On their return home, Father Barberis noticed that Father Merlone seemed elated. "I have always considered Don Bosco a saint," the latter explained, "but I am

even more convinced of it today. He has solved all my problems and put my heart at rest. Obviously saints do not think only of themselves. Don Bosco truly has a big heart! He does not limit his thinking to his own Congregation. All he cares for is that good be done, no matter where. He showed me what a diocesan priest can do in the immense field which awaits cultivation. I had decided to leave, but now—though he did not ask me to wait—I want to stay a little longer to see whether my vocation is to remain here."

He remained two more years at the Oratory and then joined the diocesan clergy and became an assistant pastor. In his chronicle Father Barberis wrote: "This incident so impressed me that, although it occurred six years ago, it is still fresh in my mind, owing to Father Merlone's enthusiasm."

After the retreatants returned to their houses, Don Bosco mourned over an expected loss. After nine years in the Salesian Congregation, Chevalier Frederick Oreglia,[7] widely known throughout Italy as a Salesian, was leaving to enter the Society of Jesus. Since he was highly respected for his virtue by countless noble families, had indefatigably promoted Don Bosco's undertakings, and had been an exemplary religious, this step might well have provoked puzzlement and gossip outside the Oratory, as well as a most distressing impression within it. Chevalier Oreglia humbly explained his decision in a letter to Don Bosco:

Turin, September 19, 1869

Praise be to Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Very Reverend Father:

I must definitely leave this coming week. Whether my decision be sound or fanciful, I feel that I must at least test it out. You could not bring yourself to approve of it, but I hope that you will understand and regard it as something I feel bound in conscience to do.

You can readily believe how bitter it is for me to leave the Oratory where I have enjoyed your full affection and confidence for over nine years.

I am not ashamed to say—in fact, I shall always feel honored to

[7] Frederick Oreglia, a late vocation, came to the Oratory in 1860. He made his triennial vows as a lay religious on May 12, 1862 (*see* Vol. VII, p. 101) and his perpetual vows on December 6, 1865. *See* Vol. VIII, p. 127. [Editor]

say—that I lovingly broke bread with you for nine years, and that whatever I did in repayment of your kindness was far too little, though not for lack of good will.

On leaving this house, I take with me the cherished burden of all that I owe to you and to my superiors and companions. If I shall not be able to discharge my debt, I will at least be content to acknowledge that I am forever indebted to you and them. Should I ever be of use to you, the Oratory, the Congregation or any member, please look upon me always as your servant, friend, and brother.

I shall always feel bound in gratitude and justice to pray that the Lord will bless you and your entire family.

From you and the other confreres I ask that you charitably remember me at Mass and occasionally when you recite the *Salve Regina* after the rosary.

I wish to say that I am leaving, as you suggested through Father Vasco, without anyone inside or outside the house knowing the true reason. Willing to do anything which may somehow give me a chance of showing my gratitude, I am happy to tell you that not even my closest relatives—my own mother and brothers—know anything about it. Within the Oratory I spoke of it only to Buzzetti who knew of it from you, and to Father Sala who had noticed my preparations.

This is for your information, to confirm what you yourself did not see fit to tell me directly.

I am enclosing three identical letters whose purpose is to stop any gossip which ill-intentioned outsiders might indulge in to the detriment of the house or of the Congregation in connection with my departure. You may hand them out, keep them, or destroy them as you see fit. Should you need any other written statement from me later on, you may always count on my cooperation as long as my superiors will allow me.

I regret very deeply having to leave without being able to say good-bye and express my thanks to all the members of the Congregation and of the house, but since a silent and secret departure seems best to you, I willingly accept this genuine sacrifice and ask you to make this desire and regret of mine known in due time to someone at least who in turn might tell others.

I beg you to forgive all the trouble and displeasure I have given you in different ways and on various occasions and also any harm I may have caused you, the Congregation, the house, or any confrere through my bad example in either word or deed.

Please forgive me also for all the good which I did not do, to the possible harm of the house.

Lastly, please believe me when I say that as I leave this house, my heart is most deeply attached to it and, were it possible, even more full of love for it than in the past.

The Lord knows what debt of gratitude I feel toward you personally and your spiritual family. Though leaving, I shall not cease trying to discharge the many obligations I have toward you. May the Lord send me many and frequent opportunities of this kind.

If from now on I shall no longer have the right to call myself your son, I shall always be deeply happy to have you regard me now and forever, to my joy and comfort, as

Your devoted servant,
Frederick Oreglia

The three identical letters were addressed to Father Michael Rua, Father Celestine Durando, and Father John Baptist Lemoyne. We quote its main passage:

By inspiring me to enter the Society of Jesus, the Lord is calling me to a life which undoubtedly will be more austere. This is not a hasty decision, but one that has matured with the advice of people indisputably experienced and eminent for their piety, learning, and knowledge of souls. I am absolutely convinced that this is God's precise will in my regard, although I will not hide the fact that our most beloved common father, Don Bosco, gave only his simple acceptance, not his approval of this decision of mine.

It won't do now to explain why others held a different view, nor why their opinion prevailed. What matters, and I explicitly wish it to be known, is that the sole reason for my decision is my firm conviction that this is God's will. No discontent or irritation with the rules, orders from superiors, differences of opinion, or coldness triggered or strengthened this decision. If anything brought me to this step, which truly is painfully hard for me, then it must be my sins which undoubtedly made me unworthy of continuing to be a member of this new phalanx of Jesus Christ. Rather than abandon me to my own devices, He mercifully inspired me to embrace a more austere life, thus rescuing me from those dangers which my self-mistrust might have made unavoidable in a Congregation inspired by such gentleness as to make all ties and obligations easy and light as though they did not exist. I felt it necessary to make this declaration in order to forestall doubts and exhaustively explain the true reason of my departure from the Oratory and the Congregation, lest

it may hurt the confreres or entice some to imitate my gesture by ascribing it to false reasons. I also want to prevent anyone from trying to twist my departure into an argument or weapon for instigating so unjust and unfair a battle as has been waged for years against our most beloved Don Bosco and his Congregation.

Having thus fulfilled my obligation, and inspired by my knowledge of human malice which subtly persecutes our dear Don Bosco in his undertakings and especially in his Congregation, I will close, asking God and you, and through you all your confreres, to forgive my unpleasantness, any lack of respect, or any voluntary or involuntary offense which I may have committed....

Chevalier Oreglia left for Rome on September 20, the same day on which the second spiritual retreat began at Trofarello.

Don Bosco could not but regret losing a member who had rendered substantial services to his fledgling Congregation. His regret stemmed not from the loss of help—for he used to remark that "God's works have no need of human aid"—but from his fatherly heart and the very high esteem in which he held this new handiwork of the Lord [the Salesian Society]. One day, when several confreres were talking very admiringly of different religious orders and pointing out the merits of each, one of them singled out one such congregation, highly praising its valiant undertakings and indomitable zeal, and concluded by saying that if he were not a Salesian he would gladly join that order. At this point, Don Bosco who had shared warmly in his praises exclaimed with impressive calm, "Oh, no! If I were not a Salesian, I would become a Salesian!"

CHAPTER 57

Fair and Just

WHEN free from priestly duties, Don Bosco would work at his desk. A letter of his to Sister Eudocia, mother superior of the Institute of the Faithful Companions of Jesus in Turin, shows the humble and deep gratitude he had for those who benefited his pupils, as well as the divine spirit which animated him:

Turin, September 21, 1869

Very Reverend Mother:

I have been guilty of an unpardonable delay in this duty that I must fulfill. I am glad to inform you that in due time I received the 130 lire you sent me....

Thank you for all you do for us throughout the year, especially for mending our poor boys' linen. Believe me, Reverend Mother, God keeps an accurate account of these acts of charity in the book of eternal life. Since Christ promised a hundredfold even in this life, these good works will surely draw special heavenly favors upon you and the fortunate family that Divine Providence has entrusted to you.

No less grateful am I for your donation. It will buy some of the many things needed in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians.

If you have occasion to write to Mother General, please tell her that I have remembered her and all her sisters in my daily Mass. Tell her too that the graces we ask will be fully granted, with the sole difference that at times, instead of granting us what we want, God gives us something more conducive to His greater glory....

God bless you and your entire institute! May everything turn out for His greater glory and the good of souls. Amen.

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

Like a good father, he wrote to Father Dominic Belmonte on September 22, advising him on how to reply to his parents who had invited him home. He also informed him of his intention to appoint him prefect at Mirabello:

Trofarello, September 22, 1869

Dear Father Belmonte:

Someone said to the Savior: "I will follow You, Lord, wherever You go . . . but let me go and bury my father first." But Jesus replied, "Follow Me, and leave the dead to bury their dead." [Matt. 8, 20-21] "Your duty is to go and spread the news of the kingdom of God." [Luke 9, 60] Another said, "I will follow You, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home." Jesus said to him, "Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." [Luke 9, 60-62] Therefore, write [accordingly] and pray. I shall do likewise. Now, let's go on to something else.

You added a few words which stated or, better, confirmed the filial affection you have always felt for me. I have always done my best to entrust to you those tasks that seemed more suited to your character and to God's greater glory. With this in mind I plan to appoint you prefect at Mirabello. As you see, it is a big step upward. Today, a simple subject; tomorrow, superior and adminstrator of a boarding school housing nearly two hundred people. You will succeed [if you follow these suggestions]:

1. Aim at God's glory in all you do; help everyone you can; harm no one, and be ever alert.
2. Obey your director like a son, follow his wishes, and help him in his work. Since many things are beyond your strength, certain duties will be reserved to him.
3. Let money be deposited with the director and let payments be made to him unless he decides otherwise.
4. Let thrift go hand in hand with contentment on the part of pupils and staff. Provide what people need, but staunchly oppose abuses and waste.

For your own peace of mind, I would also suggest that you send your brother to Turin. This would spare you trouble and perhaps heartaches. Anyway, let us abandon ourselves into God's hands. Since He is with us, we can say with St. Paul: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." [Phil. 4, 13]

God bless you and your efforts. Remember me to Father Provera and to all our confreres.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

The same day he made arrangements for the novena and feast of Our Lady of the Rosary at Becchi.[1]

On September 23 Don Bosco presided over the religious profession of nine members. Seven made triennial vows and two made perpetual vows. At this year's retreats, a total of six Salesians had made perpetual vows and sixteen had made triennial vows. Furthermore, on April 15, Father Francis Dalmazzo and Father John Garino had also taken triennial vows.[2]

Meanwhile there ended in Turin a contention that had gravely displeased Don Bosco. Two brothers, Caesar and Dominic Bongiovanni, orphaned at a very tender age, had been cared for by their widowed aunt, Domenica Bongiovanni, who, holding Don Bosco in high esteem, entrusted them to him so that they might learn a craft or trade. At her death, she left a will naming Don Bosco sole heir with the proviso that he see to it that they learn some craft that would enable them to earn an honest living. She also warmly urged her nephews to respect and love him and stay at the Oratory as long as possible or at least until they were twenty-five. If, however, upon reaching legal age, either should resolutely refuse to stay, Don Bosco would then have to pay a yearly sum of a hundred lire in two installments to either of them who might choose to leave. Lastly, when they became twenty-five, he would have to pay them two thousand lire each as a final settlement, unless he chose to anticipate this payment or defer it until their thirtieth year if, in his prudence, he should believe this to be expedient or advantageous to them.

Don Bosco looked after these orphans, and finding them very intelligent and morally good, he steered them at their request to the priesthood, for which they showed an inclination. Dominic, in

[1] We are omitting a routine request to the chancery to authorize Father Bonetti to hear confessions. [Editor]

[2] We are omitting a letter of Don Bosco promising prayers for a sick lady, an article in Unità Cattolica about the new Salesian school at Cherasco, and a circular to parents concerning the new school year at the Oratory. [Editor]

particular, formally asked to be allowed to study, saying that he was renouncing whatever money was coming to him.

On his part Don Bosco provided for all their needs throughout their secondary schooling and their philosophical and theological studies, taking no benefits for himself. After ordination, the elder brother Joseph remained with the Salesians until his death, while the younger one, Dominic, who had grown insubordinate, asked to leave. Don Bosco, who had provided his ecclesiastic patrimony prior to ordination, allowed him to join the diocesan clergy.

Upon leaving the Oratory a few days before his twenty-fifth birthday, Father Dominic Bongiovanni asked for the 100-lire annual pension and the two thousand lire he was entitled to. Hoping that he would think it over and change his mind, Don Bosco refused.

We must consider that the estate bequeathed to Don Bosco consisted of modest cottages valued at most at five thousand lire, although many years later they were sold for a respectable sum when the government expropriated them to make way for an arsenal. The fact remains that Don Bosco had spent far more than he had received on the boys' education and that for this reason alone he considered this request exorbitant.

All those who were aware of the facts felt equally disgusted by Father Bongiovanni's conduct. Bishop [Lawrence] Gastaldi, too, seriously remonstrated in a letter to Father [Felix] Golzio, rector of the Convitto Ecclesiastico[3] where Father Dominic Bongiovanni was studying pastoral theology, for permitting a lawsuit to be instituted against such a respectable person as Don Bosco.

Through his lawyer, Don Bosco defended the rights he was convinced were his, all the more so since [Joseph] Buzzetti[4]—the orphans' guardian—had clearly explained the testator's in-

[3] An ecclesiastical college specializing in pastoral theology. It was here that Don Bosco started his work for boys while attending courses immediately after his ordination. *See* Vol. II, pp. 31ff, 54-61. [Editor]

[4] Buzzetti and his brother Charles had been among the first boys to attend Don Bosco's festive oratory before it acquired permanent quarters. In 1847, Don Bosco persuaded Joseph to study Latin and prepare for the priesthood. He donned the clerical habit in 1852 at the age of twenty. Unfortunately, the loss of his left finger shortly afterward (*see* Vol. IV, p. 253) disqualified him from priestly ordination. He remained with Don Bosco and greatly helped him in many tasks. In 1877 he took his vows in the Salesian Society as a coadjutor brother. He died at Lanzo in 1891. For further details, *see* the Index of preceding volumes. [Editor]

tentions to him. When the matter was finally settled, Don Bosco readily forgave the man wo had brought him both damage and grief. Father Dominic Bongiovanni, not satisfied with having Don Bosco forced to pay him two thousand lire, pressed further legal demands for another two thousand lire, the share of his very pious brother, Father Joseph, who had died a Salesian at the Oratory, as we have already narrated in Chapter 23 of this volume. Commendatore Dupraz, a generous friend of Don Bosco, intervened and settled out of court with Father Bongiovanni for 1,400 lire.

"After this lawsuit," the plaintiff himself declared under oath, "Don Bosco always treated me fairly and I might say almost cordially. I myself always showed him deep respect and veneration, and I always joined in the manifestations of filial affection which took place and still do every year in his honor, contributing also to a gift for him. I likewise regularly attended the dinner he held for his former pupils. I have then reason to believe that Don Bosco harbored no grudge or coldness toward me, though, regretfully, I cannot say the same of myself."

Father [Paul] Albera assured us that in his last years Father Dominic Bongiovanni often expressed keen regret for having so disappointed Don Bosco. Recalling his deeds, he repeatedly wondered, *Who knows if I shall be saved?*

But even after death, Don Bosco gave evidence that he had forgiven this former pupil, who was then the pastor of St. Alphonsus, a new parish in Turin. Caught in desperate financial straits in constructing a new church, Father Bongiovanni often went to the Salesian house at Valsalice [in the outskirts of Turin] to pray at Don Bosco's tomb. The necessary funds were soon forthcoming. He himself told us of his financial problems and of the favor received.

At this point we think it fitting to comment on Don Bosco's practice of justice to a heroic degree, giving each one his due. Totally dedicated to the good of all, he hardly thought of himself, content with the little he had and shunning every least comfort. Injustice could find no abode in one who spent his whole self for others.

Despite his poverty and the obstacles he had to overcome in his multiple undertakings, Don Bosco always paid his workmen and

suppliers. No one ever had to complain that he had suffered losses at Don Bosco's hands. This is confirmed by many people, such as the contractors Joshua and Charles Buzzetti who began their career with the work they did for Don Bosco.

Charles Buzzetti worked for him for many years and also built the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. Some time later, while constructing another church in Turin, he lamented the trouble he was having.

"To me a word from Don Bosco is worth far more than any promissory note," he declared. "For him I would be ready to build ten churches at once."

When ordering work or supplies, Don Bosco used to warn those concerned that he would probably be late in paying because he depended on whatever Divine Providence sent to him, but whenever he had the means he would pay even without being asked. When unable to pay in full, he made partial payments. At times, when burdened with weighty debts, he would humiliate himself by asking his creditors to condone them in part as an act of charity toward his pupils. If this attempt failed, he paid his creditors to the last cent. Likewise, when he owed money to several creditors and could not pay them all, he would first satisfy those who were in greater need. In short, he always met his obligations, regretting a delay when he could not pay on a due date, and even more when he had to ask for a further postponement.

However, the Madonna always came to the rescue. When the mail brought donations, Don Bosco would tell Father Rua: "How wonderful is Divine Providence! Most of our donors do not know us and have never seen us, and yet the Lord inspires them to come to our aid. See this money; it's from France, Belgium, Austria, Germany, and Russia. How grateful we should be to Divine Providence!"

He looked to God for everything. Always trusting in Him, he did not engage in business transactions when in need of funds. John Bisio[5] once suggested that he purchase something he could later resell at a profit, but Don Bosco chided him by saying that Providence would help him in some other way.

When he could, he conscientiously speeded payment of his bills

[5] One of Don Bosco's first pupils. [Editor]

lest his creditors suffer a lot by his delay. Once Joseph Rossi[6] told him that some money had arrived and that some bills were due.

"Then go and pay them at once," Don Bosco said. "This money no longer belongs to us but to our suppliers."

Another time he received some money toward evening. "If it weren't too late to knock at their doors," he again told Rossi, "I would satisfy my creditors tonight."

"He was so detached from earthly things," the aforementioned Joseph Rossi testified, "that he was equally happy with or without money. 'How much do we owe?' he would sometimes ask me. When occasionally I told him that our debt exceeded one hundred thousand lire, he would answer, 'We'll pay! We'll pay! I've already thought it out. We shall satisfy everybody.'"

On many occasions we also had to admire his solicitude in urging dependents to be extremely conscientious in exercising justice—a virtue he constantly stressed in sermons.

Because of his keen sense of justice and his persistent efforts to pay his debts promptly, his suppliers and contractors were ever ready to do business with him.

"We feel more at ease working for you and supplying your needs than we do with any other customer, no matter how big," several used to tell him. They also told Joseph Rossi, "If our customers were like the Oratory, it would be a pleasure to be a supplier."[7]

In conclusion, his honesty and fairness were so well known that many of his creditors trustingly came to him for a peaceful settlement of their [family] troubles. His advice always re-established peace and concord in their families.

Their trust was also rewarded in other ways. The Lord seemed to take pleasure in blessing those who extended credit to His servant. They themselves attributed their wealth or an upsurge in business, formerly rather shaky, to the services they had rendered to Don Bosco.

[6] Joseph Rossi entered the Oratory in 1859 at the age of twenty-four and became a lay Salesian the following year. In 1869 Don Bosco appointed him purveyor for the Oratory and the other Salesian houses. In 1877 and 1886 he took part in the General Chapters as a consultor at Don Bosco's invitation. He continued to enjoy the trust of Don Bosco's successor until his own death in 1908. *See* Vol. VI, pp. 159f, 274, 362, 426, 559ff. [Editor]

[7] We are omitting a few other similar statements. [Editor]

The Lord likewise blessed all his benefactors. We heard many declare: "The more I give to Don Bosco, the more my business prospers."

CHAPTER 58

Oratory Family Life

IN a letter dated October 2, 1869, Don Bosco asked Bishop Eugene Galletti of Alba to forward a memorandum to the Holy See requesting permission to open a school at Cherasco in his diocese.[1] The bishop examined it and forwarded it to Rome with a letter expressing his full approval. Rome's reply was favorable.[2]

During these proceedings, Don Bosco left for Becchi on October 3 with a group of boys to take part in the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. In this tranquil interval he readily talked about the ecumenical council, fondly voicing the hope that the dogma of the personal infallibility of the Pope would be proclaimed in view of the incalculable benefits that would ensue from it. Never neglecting an opportunity to instruct his priests, clerics, and boys on such matters, during those days he directed his conversation to dogmas in general. Father Bonetti, who was present, jotted down his remarks:

A dogma [Don Bosco explained] is a supernatural truth explicitly or implicitly contained in Holy Scripture and defined by the Church, assembled in council or otherwise. Dogmas must be preached. They were the favorite topic of the Fathers of the Church; they are the backbone of our religion and are intimately linked with its moral precepts. The faithful must therefore be instructed and become familiar with them. Dogmas should be explained properly and accurately, lest the faithful derive more harm than good.

It would seem that dogmas are today somewhat neglected in our

[1] The Holy See's definitive approval of the Salesian Society had the proviso that permission was to be requested for each new foundation. [Editor]

[2] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

preaching. We must reverse this trend. We must not be dismayed by the difficulty of the subject matter; rather, we must prepare ourselves properly. Dogmas should be preached because:

1. They are the noblest and most vital elements of religion.
2. They are the signs by which we can distinguish the faithful man from the infidel.
3. They are the seed of supernatural virtues.
4. They are the substance of our faith. As St. Paul says. "Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that are not seen." [Heb. 11, 1] Dogmas, therefore, must be made known to the people so that they may make acts of faith.
5. They show the relationship between natural and supernatural truths. They are above reason, but never against it. Dogmas are so interrelated that if we reject one, all the others must logically be rejected as well.
6. They should be proclaimed because they foster humility, the foundation of our moral life, whereby the intellect bows to God's revelation and the Church's teaching.

When Don Bosco returned to Turin, two Arab lads of the Kabili tribe, who had lost their parents during the great drought-induced famine that had orphaned thousands of unfortunate children, were expected from Algeria. Archbishop [Charles] Lavigerie had rescued hundreds of them, even by buying them in slave markets, to give them a Christian education. He had also asked Don Bosco to take into the Oratory a few who had resisted all his attempts to educate them.[3] Don Bosco obliged, and the archbishop sent these two twelve-year-olds, Ali and Caruby, who were as yet unbaptized.

Landing at Genoa on October 7, they were taken to the railroad station and entrusted to the train conductor. On reaching Turin, they were left on their own but managed to find their way. Dressed in their native flowing white mantle and red fez with a blue tassel, and undauted by the language barrier, they asked directions with the only two words they knew: "Don Bosco!" Sign language showed them the most direct route to the Oratory. By repeating "Don Bosco" at every street corner, they finally reached their destination. Don Bosco was just finishing his meal when the

[3] *See* p. 216. [Editor]

two youngsters arrived. Taking them kindly by the hand, with smiles, a gentle pat, and a few words in French he sought to make them understand that they were welcome and that he would be their friend. He then entrusted them to a young cleric who knew a little Arabic from having been in Palestine.

On October 8, Don Bosco went to Villastellone to discuss some matters with Father [John Baptist] Appendini [his former seminary professor].[4] The following Sunday he was in Calliano, whence he replied to a young cleric's letter:

Calliano, October 10, 1869

Dear Garino:[5]

I was glad to receive your letter telling me of your firm resolve to improve and become a good priest. On my part, I'll do all I can to help you, but I shall need your cooperation too. What in particular? Your unlimited confidence in whatever concerns your spiritual welfare.

I should try to make you a hunter of souls, but lest you become the prey, I only ask that you become a model to your companions. Consider yourself fortunate each time that you can do some good or prevent some evil among your companions.

Love me as I love you in the Lord, and please pray for me too.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The following day, Don Bosco was back in Turin.[6] Meanwhile, the director, Father John Baptist Francesia, and his staff had left to open a new school at Cherasco. That same month *Unità Cattolica* carried a brief article on the Salesian school at Lanzo.[7]

In the meantime at Valdocco Don Bosco had instructed Father Charles Ghivarello[8] to draw up plans for new offices and had also taken steps to revive the festive oratory whose enrollment had

[4] *See* Vol. I, p. 339. This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

[5] John Garino was already a priest. *See* p. 282. [Editor]

[6] We are omitting a letter of Don Bosco to a benefactress and a short note to the superioress of a convent. [Editor]

[7] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

[8] Charles Ghivarello (1853-1913) entered the Oratory at the age of twenty and received the clerical habit from Don Bosco the following year. He made his first formal vows in 1862 and was ordained a priest in 1864. His building expertise greatly helped Don Bosco. He filled important positions until his death in 1913. [Editor]

considerably declined because of crowding, as space was lost to the ever increasing number of resident students and artisans. Oratory attendance kept dropping also because many teenagers had to work on the mornings of feast days; a third reason was that after the opening of the new Church of Mary, Help of Christians, that of St. Francis de Sales had been temporarily converted to several other purposes. The well-attended Lenten catechetical instructions alone reflected the festive oratory's former popularity; after Easter the number of boys attending Sunday services in the new church would again fall off. This downtrend, however, was not a final setting but merely a partial eclipse. To boost attendance Don Bosco reserved for the festive oratory boys the large sacristy on the west side of the new church, and he put Julius Barberis, then a young cleric, in charge. In the wake of the first comers, more and more youngsters kept coming and soon filled it to capacity. Religious instruction was given in the morning and the evening, and through the doors opening into the sanctuary the boys could hear Mass and assist at Benediction. The long narrow courtyard on the west side of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians served as their playground.

The boarders too were Don Bosco's constant concern. In November his request to the Department of Defense resulted in a gift of a large supply of blankets and bed linen. Meanwhile, he saw to the printing of a booklet of his as the November issue of *Letture Cattoliche*. It was entitled: *Angelina* or *The Little Orphan Girl of the Appennines*.[9]

Besides writing and publishing, Don Bosco also meticulously edited his spiritual sons' manuscripts intended for publication. For instance, after carefully going over a biography of the cleric [Joseph] Mazzarello which Father Lemoyne had written at Don Bosco's request, he gave his suggestions to the writer in the following letter:

Turin, November 3, 1869

Dear Father Lemoyne:

Your manuscript is excellent, but we must not lose sight of its purpose and suitability. To this end:

[9] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

1. Eliminate or at least tone down flights of fancy. Delete purely descriptive passages.

2. Remember that this is a biography; therefore any moral must be woven into the narrative rather than offered apart.

3. Certain digressions, such as the Jesuits' banishment from Genoa, are inopportune, considering the present political climate.

4. In view of this the chapter "Mornese" should be shortened. By way of introduction, its location, history, and characteristics could be drawn from Casalis.[10] Of course, mention your sources and then go on with your story.

5. I have marked off a few passages to call your attention to their meaning and interrelation. I enclose your first two notebooks; I'll return the other two as soon as I have read them—soon, I hope. This is your first attempt at writing, so be patient. You will do better after a careful reading of these edited notebooks.

Take heart and hope in the Lord. God bless you and your efforts.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

While Don Bosco was attending to all these matters, the Oratory again filled up with pupils who would be the fortunate witnesses of his striking virtues. Several of them left us written declarations. We report one to show how Don Bosco forged ahead in his mission and how his reputation for sanctity constantly spread.

Among the newcomers there arrived at the Oratory on the feast of All Saints [1869] a student named Joseph Bernard Corno whose mother had introduced him to Don Bosco at Becchi. After completing his secondary schooling and his first year of philosophy at the Oratory, he had to return home for reasons of health, but he always kept in touch with Don Bosco, for whom he felt deep veneration and gratitude. This former pupil, now a doctor of theology, diocesan chancellor, and papal domestic prelate, when called upon to testify in the diocesan process concerning the life and virtues of Don Bosco, summed up his impressions of his five years at the Oratory as follows:

[10] A renowned geographical, historical, statistical, and commercial dictionary of over twenty volumes compiled by Goffredo Casalis. [Editor]

It was common belief that Don Bosco possessed supernatural gifts. On various occasions he predicted the death of several boys. He could read into the hearts of others, as I myself heard from one who had had that experience. It was repeatedly proven that, though he was absent, he could see what was happening at the Oratory. I can confirm that some boys were afraid to be seen by him because they feared that he might read their misdeeds on their foreheads. His reputation for sanctity was well known also outside the Oratory.

He solicitously looked after his boys, educating them personally or through his co-workers. On Sundays and holy days he preached on the truths of our faith and vigorously promoted piety. Every evening he gave us a short talk before going to bed. His system of education was totally fatherly. Boys were drawn to him by his kindness and were very fond of him. He trained them to receive the sacraments frequently; many in fact received them weekly and most even more often. On feast days and on the occasion of the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death nearly everybody went to Communion. He heard confessions assiduously and for long periods, though he also had other priests helping him out in order to safeguard the penitents' freedom of choice. He was also exceptionally prudent. Though so many boys came from so many places, grave disorders never broke out.

We may now add a few items. To spur his boys on to greater good, Don Bosco revived the waning custom of inviting deserving pupils to dine with him on certain occasions. This custom had declined mainly because of the swelling numbers of Salesians and the smallness of the superiors' dining room which was in the basement near the kitchen. In 1869, after its relocation to a large room on the main floor, where in 1846 there had stood the Pinardi shed which served as the Oratory chapel, Don Bosco directed that the best boys in each grade and workshop should again dine with him on Sundays. This served to increase emulation among the pupils. He was glad to see them, enjoyed their company, and kept up this custom even over the objections of others. He felt that it was most important for the best pupils to have frequent opportunities to approach their superiors.

At table, however, they did not sit next to Don Bosco. Since the early days this privilege had been reserved to the boys chosen for the Washing of Feet on Maundy Thursday, the Rector Major himself performing the ceremony. The chosen ones greatly

benefited by this treat. At the close of the dinner, they unfailingly thanked Don Bosco individually, and to each of them he would address a few words that always did them a lot of good. Sometimes he would casually hint at the state of life that a boy should choose or drop a word that would plant the seed of a priestly vocation or would strengthen it or even make it certain. On certain occasions, he would treat each of them to some pastry.

The boys who had been chosen for the Washing of Feet eagerly looked forward to this honor and talked about it days ahead of time. For years afterward, they recalled the privilege they had had of dining with Don Bosco.

Those who were not so lucky did not wait for a special invitation to get near to Don Bosco. The joyous, moving scenes which we have amply described elsewhere,[11] and which since 1850 had enlivened the superiors' dining room, were routine also this year, especially after supper. As soon as the Salesians left the dining room, a swarm of boys would rush in and crowd around Don Bosco.

Before long, though, they had to content themselves with enjoying his company only in the playground. People calling on Don Bosco in the dining room and frequent guests eventually put an end to these cherished, familiar contacts. How fondly we remember them!

However, the custom of inviting the best pupils to dinner lasted till Don Bosco's death. Our archives still preserve the names of many who enjoyed this privilege.

[11] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 39f; Vol. VII, p. 141. [Editor]

CHAPTER 59

Unending Vexations (Continued)

ARCHBISHOP Riccardi of Turin [in late October or early November of 1869] instructed Father [Frederick] Albert,[1] vicar at Lanzo, to interview the young clerics of the local Salesian school about their vocation. At the vicar's suggestion, the director—Father Lemoyne—wrote to Don Bosco that the vicar would appreciate directives from him on how to go about this task. Don Bosco's reply follows:

[No date]

Dear Father Lemoyne:

I enclose a report of sorts that vicar might use as a guide. Let him change it as he pleases.

Next Thursday we shall hold the Exercise for a Happy Death. I could leave for Lanzo in the afternoon if you think that all the pupils will be back in school by then.

Tell Bodrato's father that I shall look after his worthy son, provided that he doesn't run out on me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. What is Guidazio[2] doing?

What follows is the report that Don Bosco suggested to Father

[1] Years before, at the very beginning of the Oratory, Father Albert had offered his services to Don Bosco. (*See* Vol. III, p. 152) At the start of this chapter we have omitted the narration of Don Bosco's unsuccessful efforts to obtain reduced railroad fares. [Editor]

[2] Peter Guidazio (1841-1902) entered the Oratory in 1862 at the age of twenty-two. Two years later, Don Bosco opened the Lanzo school and sent him there to teach. He stayed six years and showed himself to be a good teacher. Ordained in 1874, he was appointed prefect of studies at the Oratory. Later, he successively held important offices and greatly contributed to the spread of Salesian schools in Sicily, where he died in 1902. [Editor]

Albert as a guideline in his reply to the archbishop of Turin. Don Bosco prefaced his report with the words "Father Albert could answer in these terms":

I could not interview Father Paul Albera, Father Francis Dalmazzo, and Father Peter Racca because they reside at the Oratory in Turin.

In response to my query, Father James Costamagna and the clerics Joseph Daghero and Modesto Davico replied that they have already made their vows in the Salesian Society. They joined this Congregation because, lacking financial means, this was the only way they could pursue their studies. They saw it as a path opened to them by Divine Providence for saving their own souls and doing good to others.

When asked if they intended to withdraw from your jurisdiction, they all agreed that they had never thought of doing so and that they have been teaching, catechizing, and supervising up to now only in the firm belief that this was your wish. Furthermore, they assured me that they had always interpreted their rule in this sense. In the copy I saw, Chapter 8, Article 3 states: *Tamquam superiori subiicientur episcopo illius dioecesis, ubi domus est ad quam pertinent.*[3] Article 2 of the same chapter likewise states: *Post Romanum Pontificem,*[4] etc.

Thus, while they are very firmly determined to belong to the Salesian Congregation, they will never do anything that might even remotely conflict with the strictest obedience to Your Excellency. They strongly insist that this was always their understanding of the above-quoted article and that it was always explained to them in this sense. They also maintain their determination to catechize, teach, and hold church services for no other purpose than to please you and do the utmost good to others, always within the limits of their respectful submissions to Your Excellency, as prescribed by their rules.

This is their line of thinking. As for me, to tell the truth, I must say that since the arrival of the Salesians in Lanzo, my parish—the young, especially.... (Here the vicar may add whatever he thinks best in the Lord.)

We regret to say it, but this investigation was further proof of the difficulties being raised against Don Bosco. The archbishop even went so far as to threaten to suspend any non-Salesian priest

[3] They shall be subject to the bishop of the diocese in which their house is located as to their superior. [Editor]

[4] After the Roman Pontiff.... [Editor]

residing at the Oratory, but the fact was that every priest there was either a postulant, novice, or professed member.

Deacon Joseph Cagliero of Castelnuovo d'Asti, who had entered the Oratory before he was fourteen, had already applied for admission but had not yet made his vows. When ordination time drew near, Don Bosco had him call on Archbishop Riccardi to seek his permission to be ordained. The archbishop asked him to state whether he wished to belong to the diocesan clergy or to the Salesian Congregation and, after giving his reasons, concluded: "I will ordain you if you promise, in writing, to leave the Oratory." Cagliero had listened in silence. Pushing a pen into Cagliero's hand, the archbishop ordered: "Write!"

"I will not," Cagliero replied, true to his temperament—somewhat brusque, curt, and determined—and dropped the pen.

"Very well, then," the prelate went on, "resign yourself to not being ordained."

"So be it! I'll wait."

"Why do you want to stay with Don Bosco?" the archbishop pressed, seeing him so determined. "What is this Congregation of yours anyway? Who belongs to it? How many of you are there all together?"

"I do not know."

"Here! Write their names on this sheet of paper."

"Your Excellency, I do not know them all. Ask Don Bosco. I will not write anything."

"Then *I* will write!"

Seizing a pen, the archbishop wrote Don Bosco's name and then waited for Cagliero to dictate, but the latter kept silent.

"Well!" the prelate exclaimed. "Who else besides Don Bosco?"

Cagliero remained mute. Writing down Father Albera's name, the prelate remarked: "Father Albera ... who belongs to Don Bosco even more than Don Bosco himself."

Seeing that nothing could sway Cagliero, the archbishop rose and said: "If that's how it is, you may go."

The deacon bade the archbishop good-bye, went back to the Oratory, and told Don Bosco what had happened. The latter drafted the following letter, and Cagliero copied it:

Turin, November 6, 1869

Your Excellency:

Fear and respect kept me from talking frankly yesterday, all the more so because the decision involved was one which I had been advised to reach very slowly because of the irrevocable obligations it entailed.

After much prayer, I again open my heart, as I would if I were about to die.

I am firmly determined to join the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. I came here as a young boy,[5] and had I not received moral and material assistance, I would not have been able to pursue my studies. I therefore feel deeply attached to the place and to the persons who gave me intellectual and moral nourishment. Don Bosco has always left me free to stay or go. Physically and morally I have always belonged to this Congregation, though I never committed myself to it as I do now through this letter.

Please hear me out. You asked me repeatedly whether I wanted to belong to you or to the Oratory. On this score I must inform you that in explaining the rules of the Congregation, Don Bosco has always maintained that in all matters he has constantly been guided by the archbishop. Our constitutions state that the bishop of the diocese is our legitimate superior. On my part, I have always given religious instruction, taught, and taken part in church services with the full conviction that this apostolate had your blessing and approval. At the last ordinations I was delighted to see that more than twenty of the twenty-five ordinands had been pupils of mine here at the Oratory.

I therefore beg Your Excellency to believe me when I say that I have always desired—and still do—to obey you, to submit to your every wish, and to do all I can for the good of the diocese in conformity with the rules of the Salesian Congregation, which explicitly state this in Chapter 8, Articles 2 and 3.

Kindly overlook the inadequacies of this letter. It comes straight from the heart. As in the past, I shall pray for your constant good health.

Your devoted servant,
Cleric Joseph Cagliero

These difficulties, added to reiterated inducements of a lucrative and honorable future, only made this excellent disciple of Don Bosco ever more resolute and determined to stay with him.

[5] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 200-04. [Editor]

Casting aside all hesitation, he made his vows on November 12 [1869] in the humble and harassed Society of St. Francis de Sales. The following day, in Don Bosco's absence, the Superior Chapter accepted the suggestion of several of its members and assigned the newly professed deacon to the house of Mirabello. Then, on November 14, Bishop Ferré of Casale, who was holding ordinations outside the prescribed time, promptly ordained him. He was well acquainted with Don Bosco and the Salesian Society, which he had already approved as a diocesan institute, and was aware of the difficulties that were besetting it.

Word of this soon reached Archbishop Riccardi who wrote Don Bosco as follows:

Turin, November 26, 1869

Very Reverend Father:

To my very painful surprise I heard that, without my knowledge, Deacon Joseph Cagliero, a member of the Salesian Congregation founded in this city and directed by Your Reverence, was ordained a priest on the 14th of this month by Bishop Peter Maria Ferré of Casale.

Both you and Deacon Cagliero knew quite well that I would hold ordinations this month. I admit that, according to the decree of March 1, 1869 of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, you have the right to issue dimissorial letters to your subjects for tonsure and both minor and major orders, but these should have been addressed to me as bishop of this diocese, unless I happened to be absent or was not holding ordinations.

Now, by having your subject, Deacon Cagliero, ordained a priest by the bishop of Casale, without any such justifying reasons, you have violated the prescriptions of the sacred canons and my own episcopal rights which I am bound to safeguard and defend.

Under the circumstances—and I cannot see it otherwise—in accordance with the aforesaid decree of March 1, 1869 I can only regard the ordination of Deacon Cagliero as totally illicit.

While I perform the unpleasant duty of bringing this to your attention, I must also add that Your Reverence, Father Cagliero, and Bishop Ferré of Casale have incurred the penalties threatened for such transgressions by the decree of Pope Clement VIII, March 15, 1596, and the Bull of Benedict XIV, February 27, 1747 for having taken part in the aforesaid illicit ordination. In particular, you have incurred the loss of your office, dignity, as well as both active and passive voice; Father Cagliero has

incurred suspension and will contract irregularity if he exercises his ministry; and the bishop of Casale cannot easily avoid the canonical penalties established against those who presume to ordain another bishop's subject with inadequate dimissorials.

In pointing this out to Your Reverence and through you to Father Cagliero for your information and action, I remain,

Your devoted servant,
✠ Alexander [Riccardi], *Archbishop*

Don Bosco humbly replied:

Turin, November 28, 1869

Your Excellency:

You cannot imagine my regret and distress on receiving your letter concerning the ordination of the cleric Joseph Cagliero. At all times, particularly after the approval of our humble Congregation, I have stressed and constantly taught our members that we must all do our utmost to avoid even the slightest contrariety or displeasure to our bishops, and particularly to Your Excellency. Our rules explicitly command this. I hope that a sincere exposition of what happened, though not fully justifying its occurrence, may at least make it deserving of consideration.

You will perhaps recall how a short time ago you saw fit to threaten suspension for any diocesan priest who would continue to share in the activities of our Congregation. This thoroughly frightened our ordinands. That is why the cleric Cagliero could hardly speak or write when he called on Your Excellency. As the time for his ordination drew near, I took pains to call at your office several times, both morning and evening to consult with Your Excellency on this and other matters which thought best not to put in writing. However, I was unable to see you. either because you were out of town or because you were not receiving visitors at that time. I therefore decided to send the cleric to Mirabello t be ordained by the bishop of Casale who was holding ordinations outside the prescribed time. To my knowledge, Your Excellency had not scheduled ordinations at that time. You only did so several weeks later.

I thought that I had the right to have Cagliero ordained at Casale, intending not in the least to slight your episcopal rights. I acted in accordance with the decree of the Council of Trent quoted by Benedict XIV in *De Ordinatione Regularium, February 27, 1747,* which reads: *Congregatio Concilii censuit superiores regulares posse suo subdito*

itidem regulari, qui praeditus qualitatibus requisitis ordines suscipere voluerit, litteras dimissorias concedere, ad episcopum tamen dioecesanum, nempe illius monasterii in cuius familia ab iis, ad quos pertinet regularis, positus sit. [6]

I also inquired if this decree applied to my case and received an affirmative reply. (I also wanted to ask your opinion on this matter.) Basing myself on the above-mentioned reasons, I believed that, with the consent of the bishop of Casale, the candidate might well be ordained by that same bishop whose jurisdiction extended over the religious house where the candidate had been transferred. Another reason for doing so was the spiritual retreat. You consider our retreats at the Oratory and at Trofarello inadequate [for ordinands], as was the case last September when we held them there because of the financial burden involved in sending our clerics to the diocesan spiritual retreat.

If, despite my good will and faith, I may have unwittingly misrepresented what I have stated, I beg you graciously to excuse it as unintended. I assure you that your wishes will be faithfully respected in the future. Moreover, in the words of the above-mentioned Pontiff, I implore you by Our Lord's mercy and the charity of the Holy Spirit, which unites us all in the bond of faith in cultivating the Lord's vineyard, to condone whatever may have displeased you in this incident.

You know how I have always done my best—little though it be—over the past thirty years for this diocese. Many diocesan seminarians, curates, and pastors are former Salesian pupils. I have never sought a salary or an office. The only remuneration I have always sought—and still humbly and heartily seek—is indulgence and advice in those matters which Your Excellency deems conducive to God's greater glory.

For these reasons, and in view of the total ignorance and innocence of Father Joseph Cagliero, I did not have the heart to tell him of the passage in your letter concerning him, and I shall not do so unless you inform me that this is your specific will.

Ever anxious to do all I can in the priestly ministry, I am

Most respectfully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

That same day the archbishop, after solemn services in the

[6] The Congregation of the Council decreed that religious superiors may issue dimissorial letters to their religious who, properly qualified, seek ordination. Such dimissorials, however, must be presented to the bishop of the place where the religious house is located and to which the religious has been assigned by his superior. [Editor]

cathedral, left for Rome, where a few of his suffragan bishops had already preceded him. His vicar general, Monsignor [Joseph] Zappata, took over the administration of the archdiocese. From Rome Archbishop Riccardi wrote again to Don Bosco:

Rome, December 8, 1869

Very Reverend Father:

I readily believe that my letter caused you regret and sorrow. I sincerely believe it because I am convinced that my complaints concerned matters due to ignorance rather than to evil intent. But, since it was not up to me to redress the situation, I had to write in those terms so that all concerned might provide for themselves. Indeed, I did not write solely to complain of the manner in which you, Father Cagliero, and the bishop of Casale acted in my regard, but rather to have you apply to the Holy See for absolution. Having stated this, I think it necessary to reply point by point to your letter in order to rectify its contents and avoid misunderstandings.

Some time ago, I threatened to suspend young diocesan priests who intended to remain in your houses. I had to take this measure in order to learn who were your clerics and who were my own. I was forced to do so by the discrepancies between your letters to me and Cagliero's statements to chancery officials.

Secondly, I cannot understand why your ordinands should be frightened. All I asked was whether they intended to remain under their archbishop. I never said anything to show that I wanted personally to lure from the Congregation those who sought to be part of it. Truthfully I don't know what to make of your excuse of having called on me several times, both morning and evening, to discuss the ordination of the cleric Cagliero. I was always available and never refused to receive anyone. Besides, in this instance you could and, indeed, should have applied to the chancery, where we have an official in charge of such matters. He is well known to you because you have dealt with him on several other such occasions. Your decision, therefore, to send Cagliero to Mirabello cannot be ascribed to your inability to speak with me. I do not deny your right to send the cleric Cagliero to Mirabello if he was in possession of all the documents required by the sacred canons and had duly applied to my chancery for dispensation from the required age. His being transferred, one might say, almost on the vigil of ordination was a breach of church laws and a ruse to circumvent the bishop by removing from his jurisdiction through evasion of the law a cleric who had been his subject

until a few days previously. This is all the more inexcusable since ordinations were to take place in his diocese only a week later. Further proof that the cleric Cagliero was transferred merely to evade the law is the fact that he returned to Turin immediately after his ordination. This also shows how ill-advised you were in your interpretation of the decree you quoted, since the aforesaid decree explicitly requires that the religious present his dimissorials to the bishop of the diocese in which he resides, not to the bishop of the diocese where the religious is conveniently transferred for ordination purposes; otherwise this decree would be entirely pointless. Certainly, had you spoken to me or to the chancery official in charge of ordinations, we would have pointed this out to you, and we would also have proven that this has always been the correct interpretation.

As regards the spiritual retreat, I wish to say that when I told Cagliero to make it in the diocesan retreat house I was sure that he was not a member of your Congregation. In view of this, it was only fair that I should so act, both because I did not wish to discriminate and because the spiritual retreat for ordinands is quite different from the usual, especially as regards sermons. My belief that Cagliero was not a member of your Congregation originated not only from what he told me himself, but even more from the fact that he personally applied to the chancery for dispensation from the prescribed age, a thing he need not otherwise have done since it is the religious superior who should apply on behalf of his subjects and recommend them.

From all the above, I am justified in suspecting in this matter an intrigue which I am at a loss to explain but which I seriously deplore and do not wish to see repeated. Besides, let me say once more that I did not write to you only to complain, but rather that you might all seek absolution from the censures you have incurred. As for me, I willingly forgive, hoping that there will be no more such regrettable incidents in the future.

Yours devotedly,
✠Alexander [Riccardi], *Archbishop of Turin*

Upon receiving this second letter, Don Bosco turned for advice to Canon Celestine Fissore:

Turin, December 18, 1869

Dear Canon:

How many woes plague us in this world, and to how many troubles is poor Don Bosco exposed!

During my absence, a cleric of our Congregation was ordained in Casale, in whose diocese we have a house and have been approved as a diocesan congregation. At someone's suggestion perhaps, our archbishop looked upon this as an attack upon his authority, though my intentions were quite different. He wrote to me, I replied to him, and he promptly sent me another letter.

Please read all this correspondence and see if there has been any recent directive *ad hoc*. This is how the decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Council is generally interpreted by the religious orders that I have consulted. If that is not so, then they would all be liable to the penalties threatened.

Benedict XIV does mention and reprove the case of a superior who for false reasons would switch the domicile of a subject for the purpose of ordination and then would send him back to his former domicile, but in that case no penalties are threatened.

My reasons were very serious, as I hope to be able to disclose to you in person. Please note that ordinations in the [Turin] archdiocese were held not one, but two weeks later. One might also ask: If a superior has authority over his subjects, may he not switch their domicile for ordination purposes if he has grave reasons?

Please do me this act of charity. Study the problem and then let me know when I can best see you. I will call at your house, unless you prefer to come to the Oratory.

I assume that you have a copy of the *Bulla de Regularium Ordinatione* which I have quoted. If not, I will send you one promptly.

I entrust the entire matter to your prayers. Thanking you in advance, I am

Gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. It is worth remembering that the bishop of Casale is quite well versed in these matters.

The canon replied promptly:

Turin, December 17, 1869[7]

Very Reverend Don Bosco:

I will study your problem, but to reach a sound judgment I must necessarily consult the decree of March 1 of this year, which I do not know

[7] Since Don Bosco's letter to the canon is dated December 18, the canon's reply could not be dated December 17. Obviously one of the two dates is wrong. [Editor]

at all. Therefore, please send it to me. I will be able to see you next Tuesday morning between 8:30 and 10:30 at my home. I heartily sympathize with your tribulations and pray that God will comfort you.

Your devoted servant,
Canon Celestine Fissore

The real reason why the Superior Chapter had decided to send the deacon Cagliero to Mirabello so that he could be ordained at Casale was to shield him from renewed pressure to leave the Oratory.

No further action was taken. Father John Cagliero, who as spiritual director of the Salesian Society was always fully informed in matters of this sort, testified that Archbishop Riccardi had also remonstrated to the bishop of Casale, and that the latter had effectively rebutted him.

"These differences with the archbishop," Father Cagliero went on, "were known only to Don Bosco, the few interested parties, and the members of the Superior Chapter. For all I know, from then on things went on very placidly until about the end of 1870 when Archbishop Riccardi died. While the see was vacant, Don Bosco was left in peace. As far as I know, there were no differences with the vicar capitular."

We think it apropos to quote here what Canon Fissore wrote on the occasion of Don Bosco's death to Father Rua, his successor. At this time Canon Fissore was archbishop of Vercelli:

> I was among the first to notice the sound priestly virtues which the dear deceased revealed even when he was only a student at the Convitto Ecclesiastico. Thereafter I had the constant opportunity of seeing him grow in virtue in public and private life. I unequivocally wish to be among the first to regret the void he leaves behind him on earth, though believing that he has already received his heavenly reward.

Such was the esteem which this outstanding prelate always felt for Don Bosco, whose long and thorny controversies with the diocesan authorities in subsequent years were well known to him.

CHAPTER 60

The Superior Chapter, 1869

THE controversies we have just mentioned kept Don Bosco busy through the last two months of 1869, but even so these months were as spiritually rich as the preceding. Keeping his promise, Don Bosco visited the Lanzo school on Thursday, November 11. His visits always did as much good as a retreat. Meanwhile the December issue of *Letture Cattoliche*, entitled *The Vatican Council's Jubilee Year*, came off the press. From Lanzo he went to Mirabello and to Cherasco.

In between, he solicited contributions for the purchase of a piece of land near the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory at Porta Nuova where he intended to build a church and to name it after St. John the Evangelist in honor of Pius IX whose first name was John. The first substantial offering came on December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. On that day, Baron Feliciano Ricci des Ferres agreed in writing to contribute one percent of all expenses, as long as they did not exceed a hundred thousand lire.[1]

That same day the Twentieth Ecumenical Council solemnly opened in St. Peter's in the presence of nearly seven hundred bishops from all over the world, except Russia whose government had vetoed the Catholic bishops' departure. One can imagine the impressive and lengthy procession of priests, religious superiors, monsignors, abbots, bishops, patriarchs, and cardinals preceding the Holy Father and his entourage, such as usually escorted him when he appeared as spiritual and temporal sovereign. After celebrating a pontifical Mass in the chapel at the right of St. Peter's Confession,[2] Pius IX intoned the *Veni Creator*; when the

[1] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

[2] This term was originally used to designate the tomb of a martyr; later, it also included the altar erected over the tomb and the underground chamber which contained it. [Editor]

hymn was over, he declared the Council opened. Archbishop Passavalle of Iconia then delivered the opening address to nearly fifty thousand people who were present.

Don Bosco and his boys celebrated the event. For the occasion the cleric Albera wrote a hymn which Father Cagliero set to music. It was sung repeatedly throughout the following year and once again in 1916 when the newly-elevated Cardinal Cagliero visited the Oratory. The whole house rejoiced also over the spiritual rehabilitation of a priest who had been entrusted to Don Bosco several months previously.[3]

A conference Don Bosco gave at this time is recorded in the minutes of the Superior Chapter's meetings, as follows:

December 10, 1869. 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,* Father John Bosco, rector, in accordance with the rules, proceeded to reconfirm Father Michael Rua as prefect and Father John Cagliero as spiritual director. Afterward, 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 director of the new Salesian school at Cherasco.

We also have unofficial accounts of this meeting. According to these, Don Bosco prefaced the elections as follows:

"We have met here tonight," he said, "to re-elect our Chapter whose members were appointed three years ago and whose term of office has now expired. The Chapter consists of a prefect, a spiritual director, an economer, and three consultors. By rule the Rector Major appoints the prefect and the spiritual director, while the rest are elected by plurality vote. Only perpetually professed members may vote. This is clearly stipulated by our rules, and we must abide by them. It is still unclear whether temporarily professed members may be elected, but for the present we will leave this unresolved and proceed as in the past. I wish

[3] We are omitting an article on this in Unità Cattolica. [Editor]

to point out that former or present Chapter members may be re-elected. The latter are: Father Rua, prefect; Father Cagliero, spiritual director; Father Savio, economer; Father Ghivarello, Father Durando, and Father Francesia, consultors. The last will have to be replaced since he is no longer here."

At this point someone asked whether two economers were to be elected—one for the house and one for the Society—or just one who would administer both offices. It seemed clear that one person could hardly do justice to both tasks.

"The economer of the Society," Don Bosco replied, "must not be confused with the economer of the house. These two offices can be kept quite distinct. The economer of the house is somewhat of a vice-economer or assistant, the relationship being that of the vice-prefect to the prefect. Let this guide those who have the right to vote and also the rest so that they may know who their superiors are."

A count was then taken of the perpetually professed members—fourteen in all. Those receiving the highest number of votes would be elected. After the *Veni, Creator* and other prescribed prayers, Don Bosco, in conformity with the rules, confirmed Father Michael Rua and Father John Cagliero in their respective offices of prefect and spiritual director. Afterward, the perpetually professed members cast their secret ballots for the economer and the three consultors. When the votes were tallied (by Father Rua and Father Cagliero), it was found that Father Angelo Savio had been elected economer, Father Charles Ghivarello and Father Celestine Durando had been reconfirmed as consultors, and Father Paul Albera had been elected consultor to replace Father Francesia who had been appointed director of the new Salesian school in Cherasco.

Father Ghivarello and Father Durando were unanimously elected; Father Anthony Sala, the house economer, received several votes for the office of economer of the Society; Father Joseph Lazzero had one vote less than Father Albera, who obtained eight votes.

Don Bosco, as Rector Major, officially announced the balloting results and then went on as follows:

"Now our [Superior] Chapter has been re-elected. At all times it must be the symbol of authority in our Society. This is not merely a home-made arrangement, but is the standard structure of all religious orders—such as the Dominicans, the Barnabites, and many others—and quite distinct from the house Chapter. Its members are therefore easily known. The religious orders I mentioned even have a separate dining room for the Superior Chapter, a thing we too shall introduce in due time.

"Those who have been elected must bear in mind that their office requires patience and sacrifice, and that no reward is promised other than the one which the Lord shall grant us.

"I cannot hide from you that our path is strewn with thorns, and that we shall have much to suffer from people and circumstances. We are the first to walk on thorns because our Society is just beginning, but we must be heartened by the fact that we are not alone. Our Divine Savior and the Blessed Virgin are at our side, striding with us, pointing the way, comforting and upholding us.

"What the Lord has most wished to tell us is that after the thorns come the roses—plenty of them. He promises us much help and many spiritual and temporal blessings. Our conditions will greatly improve. God will also abundantly see to our temporal needs as long as we use everything for His greater glory.

"What heartens me—and I say it with a certain complacency—is that this year our Congregation is off to a good start and everyone is doing his best to keep things going smoothly. Our situation seems much better than last year. I want a list or catalogue of all the members of our Society to be printed before the end of this civil year and a copy given to all, so that all may easily know who the members are. This list or catalogue, however, is not to be given to others.

"I also wish that space be reserved at the end of this list for names of those whom the Lord shall summon into eternity during the course of the year. A copy of the catalogue shall be preserved each year along with a brief biography of the deceased, highlighting the virtues which characterized each, so that, eighty years or so from now, people will know its progress or decline. The list will be kept updated. Each house will also have its own personnel list."

At this meeting, Don Bosco no longer spoke of the importance of having a house in Rome. All hope had been abandoned for St. Caius, and negotiations for the Church of the Holy Shroud were at a standstill.[4]

At the Oratory, meanwhile, the last of the six deaths[5] predicted by Don Bosco at the end of 1868 took place. Father Rua made this entry in the Oratory obituary:

John Bonelli, son of Luke, of Vico (Mondovì), died at the Oratory on December 19, 1869. A simple and extremely timid man and a former

[4] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]
[5] *See* p. 13. [Editor]

Franciscan, he was admitted to the Oratory when religious orders were suppressed. He gladly lent his services, first as doorkeeper and then as sexton, willingly doing whatever his health allowed. He was outstanding for his silence. It may be safely stated that throughout his stay at the Oratory he never said one word too much.

This moving death enhanced, if it were possible, the prestige which Don Bosco enjoyed among the boys.[6]

On Christmas Day the two young Algerian boys [who had arrived at the Oratory in October][7] received Baptism. Educating them and instructing them in the Christian faith had not been easy, as it also would not be with other Algerians who came the next year. Archbishop Lavigerie had warned Don Bosco that they were unbearable boys, and when Don Bosco put them to the test, he had to admit that they were worse than he had anticipated.[8]

Dressed in Arab garb, they were baptized in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians amid the deep emotion of the crowd who attended. Ali took the name of Stephen; Caruby took that of Peter. Godparents were Attorney Leo Fontana, later mayor of Turin for many years, and his mother, Mrs. Oriola, both well known in town for their charitable activities.

The year closed with an act of generosity and love for the Vicar of Jesus Christ on the part of the Oratory boys. As reported in *Unità Cattolica* on December 28, 1869, the Oratory sent an offering of 205 lire and 15 centesimi to Pius IX for the Ecumenical Council.

We have no record of the usual *strenna* on the last day of the year, but we are inclined to believe that Don Bosco spoke to them of prayers to be offered for the successful outcome of the Vatican Council.[9]

[6] We are omitting Don Bosco's Christmas greetings to a benefactor. [Editor]

[7] *See* p. 348. [Editor]

[8] We are omitting a flowery description of the moral transformation of these two boys by Count Charles Conestabile in his *Opere Religiose e Morali in Italia.* [Editor]

[9] We are omitting an excerpt about the Vatican Council from *Il Galantuomo,* the yearly almanac for subscribers to *Letture Cattoliche.* [Editor]

CHAPTER 61

Vatican Council I

ON December 10, 1869, at the assembly of Salesians [for the election of the Superior Chapter], Don Bosco had announced that from 1870 onward a directory would be published every year. From this first directory we gather that the membership stood at 102: 28 perpetually professed, 33 in triennial vows, and 41 novices. No mention is made of 22 aspirants. Four schools were in operation in Turin, Mirabello, Lanzo and Cherasco.[1]

The arrival of the first two Algerians at the Oratory in October 1869 and the news that Archbishop Lavigerie would be sending others perhaps inspired the January 1870 issue of *Letture Cattoliche* entitled: *Nicolò Olivieri and the Ransom of Arab Schoolgirls.* It was a brief history of the sacrifices and success of a saintly priest, Father Olivieri, in ransoming thousands of young girls.[2] This pamphlet reawakened the Salesians' desire to work in the foreign missions. From the first days of the Oratory, Don Bosco had from time to time mentioned opening houses in Africa, America, and Asia, and several times Father Francis Dalmazzo had heard him say that the Salesians would soon leave for distant regions.

During the first few days of January, Don Bosco was able to win over a new benefactress whom he had met through Father Anthony Sala. Our founder's exquisite benevolence daily won hearts over to him. The lady described her encounter with Don Bosco as follows:

[1] We are omitting a request by Don Bosco to a government agency for subsidies to his clerics engaged in teaching and supervising boys. [Editor]

[2] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

In 1870 I was traveling to Rome with two of my nieces. Among our fellow passengers between Milan and Turin was a clergyman who graciously engaged us in conversation and told us that he was one of Don Bosco's priests. When we arrived in Turin where we were staying overnight, he took leave of us, saying: "I'll be expecting you for Mass tomorrow at 9 in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. Afterward I'll introduce you to Don Bosco." Since our stopover would be very short, not even a full day, I was somewhat annoyed by the invitation since it would interfere with my plans. Still, not wanting to appear impolite, I persuaded my nieces to agree to attend Mass, which, after all, would be a good start. We got to the church on time and saw the priest waiting for us. When he spotted us, he immediately went to the sacristy to vest, and after Mass he offered to take us to Don Bosco. I admit that I would have foregone the visit, for I was more anxious to leave than to be introduced to someone in whose presence I might feel ill at ease. In the waiting room were several distinguished-looking people, but in a flash our guide disappeared, leaving us to our own devices. "Who knows how long we'll have to wait!" I remarked to my nieces, only to see the door open immediately and Don Bosco himself motioning us in. His venerable, saintly countenance instantly won us over, and to our surprise, as if by set plan, we all knelt at his feet. He bade us sit and talked a good fifteen minutes with us. Feeling at ease, we told him about our trip and received helpful suggestions. Though I already had numerous letters of recommendation with me, he insisted on giving us his own too, saying that it would come in handy. He then blessed us, adding: "In two weeks I shall be in Rome too. It may be that I shall see you again."

We left happy at not having inconsiderately declined such an unexpected treat. Eight days later, after stopovers at Genoa, Bologna, and Florence, we arrived in Rome. Our lodgings had been reserved for us by a priest who had already returned home. Exhausted and headachy after a sleepless night on the train, we took a coach to our destination and were shown our room. Access to it was only through another room occupied by a man who willy-nilly would be our sentry. I immediately paid for my reservation and pointed out the inconvenience of the arrangements to the landlord; then I told the coachman to take us to the convent of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart in Via Graziosa. On the way I kept asking myself, *Now where shall we spend the night?* My letters of recommendation were addressed to bishops of the Bergamo region who were taking part in the Council, to Monsignor Cenni, a Vatican official, and to religious priests and nuns for purposes other than finding me accommodations. As I fretted, I suddenly remembered

Don Bosco's recommendation. Unloading our baggage at the convent, I had the coachman take me to Via dei Coronari. The man Don Bosco had recommended me to was a real gentleman, very much devoted to Don Bosco. He owned a religious store. As soon as he heard of my predicament, he immediately got his brother-in-law to find me lodgings. The Vatican Council was in session and Rome had an overflow of visitors. After much hustle and bustle our friend finally found us rooms at the Tenerani Palace in Barberini Square, in a tourist home run by a young couple for foreign families. We remained in Rome for an entire month. So many were the tangible instances of the assistance of the saintly priest who had blessed us in Turin that to tell of them would be endless. Let me just mention two audiences with Pius IX—one private audience and one with four ladies of our own acquaintance. The services of that gentleman, as Don Bosco assured us, proved most useful to us in our visit to Rome's many monuments.

Dalm Clementina

Don Bosco too was determined to go to Rome. His heart and soul were attuned to the Vatican Council. The Pope's personal infallibility in matters of faith and morals when he speaks *ex cathedra* was as ancient and universal a belief as the Church itself, and now both shepherds and flock were pleading that this truth be solemnly proclaimed a dogma. Don Bosco, who had always esteemed this prerogative of the Roman Pontiff and was more and more convinced of the necessity of its dogmatic definition, rejoiced at these manifestations of faith. However, since the proclamation of the Council in 1868, while the hierarchy and the faithful were expressing their hopes, hostility was beginning to build up in liberal Catholic circles in France, Germany, Austria, Hungary, and England, even though the schemata of the constitution *De Ecclesia* said nothing of papal infallibility.[3]

Meanwhile the [European] Masonic lodges were doing their utmost to sow discord in Catholic circles, with partial success. Don Bosco realized it and was deeply distressed to find that several bishops were opposing the dogmatic definition as inopportune. Before the Council opened, Bishop [Felix] Dupanloup of Orléans had come to Piedmont not only to champion unyieldingly

[3] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

the untimeliness of the definition, but also to oppose, perhaps, the entire Catholic doctrine on this point. To this end he called on several bishops to win them over to his views. Among them were Bishop [John] Sola of Nice, Bishop [John] Losana of Biella, Bishop Louis Moreno of Ivrea, Bishop [Lawrence] Renaldi of Pinerolo, Bishop [Lawrence] Gastaldi of Saluzzo, and Archbishop [Alexander] Riccardi of Turin.

Don Bosco himself, along with other bishops, prelates, and theologians, vigorously upheld the timeliness of such a definition as a means to root out Gallicanism[4] in France and Febronianism[5] in Germany. He also pointed out that the definition was necessary for the success of the Church's missionary work and for the good of the entire Church should the Pope ever find himself in Pius VII's plight. Bishop Gastaldi of Saluzzo, unconvinced by Dupanloup's reasoning and his invitation to join the opposition, had called at the Oratory before leaving for Rome to discuss the matter at length with Don Bosco, according to the statement of Father Michael Rua. Don Bosco, therefore, had good reason for being somewhat apprehensive. He prayed and had others pray for the Church. Rome too saw endless discussions about papal infallibility. He must surely have been greatly relieved to hear that on Christmas Day 1869 the archbishop of Malines proposed that it be declared a dogma. From that very moment this infallibility became the most important topic at the Council.

The Council's second session was held on January 6, the feast of the Epiphany. It opened with the solemn ritual procession of faith by the Pope and each bishop. On the vigil of this memorable solemnity, Don Bosco saw in a dream what we report below. He himself put it down in writing:

God alone is almighty, all-knowing, all-seeing. God has neither past nor future; everything is present to Him, everything at a single point of

[4] Erroneous theories, in vogue in France from the 17th to the 19th centuries, tending to restrict the authority of the Church with regard to the State and the authority of the Pope with regard to councils, bishops, and clergy. [Editor]

[5] A politico-ecclesiastical system outlined by Johann Nikolaus von Hontheim (1701-1790), auxiliary bishop of Trier, under the pseudonym Justinus Febronius, with a view to reconciling Protestant bodies with the Catholic Church by curtailing the Pope's authority and facilitating the establishment of national churches and the subordination of bishops to the State. [Editor]

time. Nothing eludes God. No person, no place is distant from Him. In His infinite mercy and for His glory He alone can unveil the future to man.

On the vigil of the Epiphany of this year, 1870, all material things in my room disappeared, and I found myself contemplating supernatural matters. It was only a matter of an instant, but I saw a great deal. Although what I witnessed was sensibly present, I find it extremely difficult to communicate it to others intelligibly, as one may realize by what follows. This is the Word of God in human parlance:

"War will come from the south, peace from the north.

"The laws of France no longer recognize the Creator. The Creator will reveal Himself by visiting her three times with the scourge of his wrath. The first time he will destroy her pride by defeat, pillage, and destruction of crops, cattle, and men. On His second visit the great whore of Babylon, whom the faithful grievingly call Europe's brothel, shall lose her leader and fall prey to chaos.

"Paris! Paris! Instead of fortifying yourself with the Lord's name, you surround yourself with houses of ill repute. You yourself shall destroy them; your idol, the Pantheon, will be razed to the ground, so that it may truthfully be said that 'iniquity has lied to itself.' [Ps. 26, 12] Your enemies will plunge you into anguish, famine, terror, and the contempt of nations. But woe unto you if you do not recognize the hand which smites you! I want to punish your immorality, your desertion, your contempt for My law, says the Lord.

"On My third visit, you shall fall under the foreign yoke. From afar your enemies will see your palaces in flames, your homes in ruins, soaked in the blood of your heroes who are no more.

"But behold a great warrior from the north appears, a banner in his right hand, his arm bearing this inscription: 'Irresistible is the hand of the Lord.' At that moment the Venerable Old Man of Rome went forward to meet him, wielding a flaming torch. The banner then grew larger and its blackness became white as snow; in its center stood out the name of the Almighty in golden letters.

"The warrior and his followers bowed profoundly to the Venerable Old Man and joined hands with him.

"Now the voice of Heaven is addressed to the Shepherd of Shepherds. Your are in solemn conference with your co-workers, but the enemy of good never stands idle. He cunningly plots and sets all his wiles against you. He will sow discord among your helpers and will rear enemies among My sons. The powers of the world shall vomit fire. They would love to smother My words in the throats of the guardians of My law, but

they shall not succeed. They shall do much harm, but only to themselves. Hurry! If knots cannot be untied, sever them. Do not halt in the face of difficulties, but go forth until the hydra of error has been beheaded. At this blow earth and hell shall tremble, but the world will be saved and the faithful shall exult. Gather around you only two co-workers, yet wherever you go, carry on the task entrusted to you and bring it to completion. Days go by swiftly and your years are reaching their appointed number, but the great Queen shall always assist you, and, as in the past, She shall always be *magnum et singulare in Ecclesia praesidium* [the powerful, prodigious defense of the Church].

"But you, O Italy, land of blessings, who has plunged you into desolation? Not your enemies, but your own friends. Do you not hear your children begging for the bread of faith, unable to find one to break it for them? What shall I do? I shall strike the shepherds and scatter the sheep so that those who sit upon the chair of Moses may seek better pastures and their flock may gently listen and be fed.

"But My hand shall be heavy upon both flock and shepherds. Famine, plague, and war shall cause mothers to mourn the blood of their sons and husbands shed on foreign soil.

"What shall befall you, ungrateful, effeminate, proud Rome? You have reached a point when you seek and admire nought in your sovereign but luxury, forgetting that both your glory and his lies on Golgotha. Now he is old, frail, defenseless, and dispossessed. Nevertheless, though captive, his words cause the whole world to tremble.

"O Rome! Four times shall I come to you! The first time I shall smite your regions and its people. The second time I shall bring slaughter and destruction to your very gates. Should not that make you open your eyes? A third time shall I come, and I will demolish your defenses and defenders. At My Father's command, terror, dismay, and desolation will reign.

"My wise followers flee, but My law is still trod underfoot. Therefore, I shall come a fourth time. Woe to you if My law again shall go unheeded. There shal be defections among both learned and ignorant. Your blood and that of your children shall wipe out your transgressions.

"War, plague, and famine are the scourges to smite human pride and malice. Where are your magnificent villas and palaces, you people of wealth? They have turned into the litter of squares and streets!

"And you, priests, why are you not prostrate between the vestibule and the altar, weeping and praying that the scourge cease? Why do you not take up the shield of faith and preach My word from the rooftops, in the houses, streets, and squares, and even in inaccessible places? Do

you not know that this is the terrible two-edged sword which smites My enemies and placates the wrath of God and man?

"These things shall inexorably come to pass, all in succession.

"Things follow too slowly upon each other, but the great Queen of Heaven is at hand, and the Lord's power is Hers. Like mist She shall scatter Her enemies. She shall vest the Venerable Old Man with all his former garments.

"There shall yet come a violent hurricane. Iniquity is at an end, sin shall cease, and before two full moons shall have shone in the month of flowers, the rainbow of peace shall appear on the earth.

"The great Minister shall see the Bride of his King clothed in glory.

"Throughout the world a sun so bright shall shine as was never seen since the flames of the Cenacle until today, nor shall it be seen again until the end of time."

Don Bosco had Father Julius Barberis transcribe the original and took this copy with him to Rome. Some few weeks later he had another copy made by Father Joachim Berto, who made the following entry in his diary: "Don Bosco showed me a written prophecy which began with these words: 'God alone is almighty, all-knowing, all-seeing.' He cautioned me to keep it a perfect secret and never to reveal the writer's identity. Among other things, this prophecy concerned war between France and Prussia, the Church's condition, and the desolation which threatened Italy, as he explained when I asked him about it. He had me make a copy of it to send to a prelate in Rome."

Civiltà Cattolica[6] mentioned the above prophecy in 1872, quoting several passages verbatim and prefacing them with this authoritative statement: "We are pleased to recall a most recent, never published, and generally unknown prophecy which was sent from northern Italy to someone in Rome on February 12, 1870. We do not know the sender, but we can prove that we had it in our hands prior to the German bombardment of Paris and the burning of that city by the communists. We must admit our astonishment at finding the fall of Rome predicted as well, for at that time it was not seen as either imminent or likely."

We have several copies of this prophecy, the most authoritative in Father Berto's handwriting. At the top of the page appears this

[6] Volume VI, Series 8, 1872, pp. 299 and 303. [Author's note]

note: "Sent to the Holy Father on February 12, 1870." The manuscript has several marginal notes in Don Bosco's own hand and at the end a few "Clarifications" evidently written or previously dictated and then revised by Don Bosco. The marginal notes and clarifications shed light on and pinpointed the predicted events which, to a large extent, as we shall see, took place shortly afterward, though a few, at the time of writing [1917], have still to occur. Seemingly, according to Don Bosco, these were to take place about the year 1874, "unless," as he wrote in his own hand, "new iniquities further provoke God." We must add that, when questioned later about the fulfillment of these events, Don Bosco said frankly that they might not take place, for in His mercy the Lord sometimes points out to men the path they should follow in one circumstance or another in order to get out of some difficulty, and nothing more. If the directions given are not followed, it is obvious that what has been foretold [and is contingent upon them] will not occur either. Father Berto's manuscript contained a second prophecy (of which we also have the original), bearing the date May 24—June 24, 1873, as well as a prophetic letter dated May 24, 1873—June 24, 1873 with some pieces of advice which Don Bosco gave to Pope Leo XIII, under the title:

Preliminary Summary of What Is Most Needed by the Church

May 24—June 24, 1873

It was a dark night, and men could no longer find the way back to their own countries. Suddenly a most brilliant light shone in the sky, illuminating their way as at high noon. At that moment from the Vatican came forth, as in procession, a multitude of men and women, young children, monks, nuns, and priests, and at their head the Pope.

But a furious storm then broke out, somewhat dimming that light, as if light and darkness were locked in battle. Meanwhile the long procession reached a small square littered with dead and wounded, many of whom cried for help.

The ranks of the procession thinned considerably. After a two-hundred-day march, all realized that they were no longer in Rome. In dismay they swarmed about the Pontiff to protect him and minister to him in his needs.

At that moment two angels appeared, bearing a banner which they

presented to the Supreme Pontiff, saying: "Take the banner of Her who battles and routs the most powerful armies on earth. Your enemies have vanished; with tears and sighs your children plead for your return."

One side of the banner bore the inscription: *Regina sine labe concepta* [Queen conceived without sin], and the other side read: *Auxilium Christianorum* [Help of Christians].

The Pontiff accepted the banner gladly, but he became very distressed to see how few were his followers.

But the two angels went on: "Go now, comfort your children. Write to your brothers scattered throughout the world that men must reform their lives. This cannot be achieved unless the bread of the Divine Word is broken to the peoples. Teach children their catechism and preach detachment from earthly things. The time has come," the two angels concluded, "when the poor will evangelize the world. Priests shall be sought among those who wield the hoe, the spade, and the hammer, as David prophesied: 'God lifted the poor man from the fields to place him on the throne of the princes of His people.'"

On hearing this, the Pontiff moved on, and the ranks began to swell. Upon reaching the Holy City, the Pontiff wept at the sight of its desolate citizens, for many of them were no longer. He then entered St. Peter's and intoned the *Te Deum,* to which a chorus of angels responded, singing: *Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis* [Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good will].

When the song was over, all darkness vanished and a blazing sun shone. The population had declined greatly in the cities and in the countryside; the land was mangled as if by a hurricane and hailstorm, and people sought each other, deeply moved and saying: *Est Deus in Israel* [There is God in Israel].

From the start of the exile until the intoning of the *Te Deum,* the sun rose two hundred times. All the events described covered a period of four hundred days.

At this time too Don Bosco was compiling a report on the state of the Salesian Congregation to submit to the Holy See.[7] He was also anxious to point out to the diocesan authorities that his philosophy students were studying. In the previous year, the diocesan examiners had been unduly severe with them. Naturally the latter had complained, but Don Bosco did not allow them to withdraw from the midterm examinations when the time came.[8]

[7] *See* Appendix 5. We have limited this report to the brief information about the motherhouse and the Society's all-inclusive statistics. [Editor]

[8] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 62

Vatican Council I (Continued)

DON Bosco finally decided to go to Rome and bring "The Voice of Heaven to the Shepherd of Shepherds." At the last moment, however, when he found himself without suitable clothing, there was a scurrying about the house in search of what he needed. Benefactors often gave him clothes and linens, but since he was loath to keep them for himself, he always sent them to the house wardrobe. Father Berto [his secretary] would have liked to store some essential articles in Don Bosco's room, but the latter never allowed him to do so.

"Don't you realize," he objected, "that if I kept these things for myself, the Lord would send me no more? When I give things away, Providence immediately resupplies me. Then there is enough for me and everyone else."

On January 20 [1870], Don Bosco walked to the station alone and from there penciled a quick note to Father Rua about some items to be sent to him.[1]

En route to Bologna, two newlyweds, accompanied by an elderly man and a few other people, boarded Don Bosco's compartment. On spotting a priest, they reacted as against an evil omen and stood stock-still. Their appearance, however, showed that they were not the swaggering anticlerical type.

"Be at ease," Don Bosco told them. "I see that you have just been married. Don't mind that I am a priest. A priest represents the sacrament you have just received. I wish you all the blessings that you yourselves desire. Just hours ago you stood before God's minister, and now you are in the company of another."

The newcomers exchanged troubled glances but no longer seemed reluctant to join their fellow passenger.

[1] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

"You were married in church, weren't you?" Don Bosco continued.

Neither answered.

"Speak up; you tell him," the newlyweds whispered to each other. The old man came to the rescue.

"Father, is it really necessary to be married in church? Can't one declare one's intention before the mayor?"

"Isn't marriage a sacrament?" countered Don Bosco. "Who if not the Church should administer sacraments?"

"I suppose you are right.... Funny that it never occurred to me. I thought that the civil ceremony was enough."

"Well, now you know better."

"What should we do now?"

"Go to your pastor and straighten things out."

"But we have no trust in our pastor."

"Then go to your bishop or to the vicar general, and everything will be taken care of."

For a few moments the newlyweds exchanged views in whispers as to what they should do. Fortunately, they were sensible people.

"What if we were to call on the bishop of Bologna when we get there?" they asked.

"That will do, but go as soon as you arrive and do what he says."

"We'll take your advice," they agreed. With amiable frankness Don Bosco always managed to help people who met him, no matter how briefly.

He stayed in Florence a few days, and from there he sent another short note to Father Rua on January 24 just before leaving for Rome, where he arrived that evening.[2]

We shall describe his activities there in his own words, drawing from his letters to the Oratory, from his conference to the Salesians on March 9, and from reliable, sworn depositions:

The first thing I did on getting to Rome was to call on Cardinal Quaglia and give him the report on the state of our Society, a thing which is to be

[2] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

done every three years. This report deals with the growth or decline of the Society, its material gains or losses, its undertakings, its new foundations, and the moral and intellectual condition of its members. The cardinal showed extreme surprise at the extraordinary growth and smooth running of our Society. "If this keeps up for the next fifty years," he remarked, "its membership will be over 2,000."

"Your Eminence," I replied in jest, "if fifty years from now you will want a report on that, I will give it to you."

"Neither of us will be around then," he countered. He then heartily praised our Society and drafted a detailed report for the Holy Father.

After dutifully calling on Archbishop Riccardi, who received him courteously though somewhat coldly, Don Bosco took stock of how the Council was going. He learned that the Belgian bishops and a hundred others were in favor of the proposal of the archbishop of Malines—namely that papal infallibility be defined as a dogma. Such was also the desire of most of the Council Fathers.

Two groups were shaping up in the Council: a majority group favoring the definition and a minority opposing it as inopportune.[3] A member of the latter, Cardinal Rauscher, drafted a petition to the Holy Father against such a definition and had it signed by German, Austrian, and Hungarian bishops. A similar petition was presented by French bishops, a third by North American bishops, a fourth by Orientals, and a fifth by several bishops of northern Italy. Together, the signatures amounted to 136. All these petitions cited the difficulties and reasons why, in the signers' opinion, such a definition was inopportune. Cardinal Schwarzenberg submitted all five petitions with a covering letter to the proper commission.

This commission studied them, and on February 9 it voted unanimously, except for Cardinal Rauscher, to recommend that the Pope accept the petitions favoring the dogmatic definition. These carried a total of over 400 signatures. Two prelates particularly—Monsignor Manning and Monsignor Senestrey—had worked tirelessly for the success of the definition.

Don Bosco was fired by the selfsame zeal, but he chose to keep out of sight as much as possible so as to obviate any demon-

[3] We are omitting details about the membership of the minority group. [Editor]

stration of affection or reverence on the part of his friends. He declined invitations to visit religious communities or to preach, and he excused himself, as far as he could, from visiting and blessing the sick, declaring that the circumstances made such things inopportune. He followed this course because, in his love for the Church, he sought to dedicate all his efforts to the triumph of a dogma which the Lord wanted proclaimed.

At his arrival in Rome, he had learned from Monsignor Manacorda that the Pope had voiced regret over Bishop Gastaldi's support of Bishop Dupanloup of Orléans, especially regarding the inadvisability of the definition. Easily impressed by Dupanloup's fear of grave religious and political repercussions which he felt were inevitable, Bishop Gastaldi had thrown his lot with him, and rumors had it that he was also drafting a memorandum on the inappropriateness of the definition.

Without delay Don Bosco called on Bishop Gastaldi to dissuade him from such a step. He argued with him at great length that he should not hinder God's designs, pointing out that his fears were exaggerated and that the time for retreating and keeping silent was long since past, for at stake now was a fundamental truth denied and blasphemed by heretics. Eventual consequences of the definition, he argued, should be left in God's hands. The zealous and deeply pious Bishop Gastaldi, who highly revered and loved Don Bosco, was thoroughly convinced by his arguments.

"I accept your point of view," he declared. "I'll start drafting a memorandum in favor of the Pope's personal infallibility and of the advisability of its dogmatic definition."

"Why not prepare a thorough dissertation for delivery to the full Council assembly?" Don Bosco suggested. "I assure you that it would delight the Pope and would do you great honor in the whole Church."

This unforeseen turnabout in Bishop Gastaldi's stand struck his friends like a bolt from the blue. No one had any inkling of his conversation with Don Bosco.

After this discussion Bishop Gastaldi repeatedly called on Don Bosco, who, at his request, referred him to theological works treating the matter in depth and even underscored more impor-

tant passages for him. Canon John Baptist Anfossi and Father John Turchi testified to this. Furthermore, he personally made sure that Rome would know of the fine spirit of his old friend, the bishop, as we gather from this letter to Father Rua:

Rome, January 27, 1870

Dear Father Rua:

I received the letter you forwarded to Florence. Hearten Father Sala[4] while I pray for him.

Send to Bishop Gastaldi's Vatican address a hundred copies of each of his booklets *The Curé of Ars and The Roman Pontiff's Authority.*[5]

Talk to Father Savio[6] and then let me know whether I should bring back what little money I have collected for the Oratory or take out an annuity which might come in handy for the house we hope to open next October.[7]

That's all for today. I will write again soon at greater length. God bless us all. I hope that all of you will pray [for my intentions]. So far, things are going well for us.

I am eagerly waiting for those books for the Pope and the music for Cardinal Antonelli and Cardinal Berardi. Keep well in the Lord. Good-bye.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Regards from Monsignor Emilian Manacorda.

Don Bosco's intervention with Bishop Gastaldi was his first contribution to the Council's success, toward which he ardently sought to cooperate. Though he had nothing at all to do with its work directly, he carried significant weight against the erroneous ideas of several [Council Fathers] through his many connections with bishops and theologians. Throughout his stay in Rome he also strove to sway members of the opposition into supporting the

[4] Father Sala was in charge of the house administration at the Oratory. [Editor]

[5] By spreading these booklets in Rome, Don Bosco hoped to publicize the author's fine spirit. [Editor]

[6] On December 10, 1869 Father Savio had been elected economer general of the Society. [Editor]

[7] Don Bosco still hoped to obtain the Church of the Holy Shroud and its adjacent building. [Editor]

dogmatic definition of papal infallibility. On this score we have several depositions. Bishop John Baptist Anfossi testified: "Bishop [John] Losana of Biella told me how Don Bosco toiled tirelessly in those days to achieve this triumph for the papacy." Father Rua declared: "He had the satisfaction of clearing up the doubts of several bishops on this matter and of being able to dissuade them from the active opposition they were planning. I can mention Bishop [Eugene] Galletti of Alba and Bishop [Lawrence] Gastaldi of Saluzzo, who from then on became staunch champions of papal infallibility." Father Francis Dalmazzo also testified to this under oath, adding: "What I have just said, I repeatedly heard from [Bartholomew] Cardinal D'Avanzo with whom I often spoke during my stay in Rome."

Trying to change the mind of some Piedmontese bishops who belonged to the opposition proved a hard task. They looked askance at Don Bosco's undertakings and firmly held to their ideas.

"Don't be discouraged," Pius IX told Don Bosco that same year. "Your adversaries are mine also! I see this as a further proof that your work is God's."

Bishop [John] Sola of Nice was one who refused to change his mind. When the definition of the dogma of papal infallibility was proposed, he attacked it openly, despite the assembly's painful reaction. He even caused an uproar when, to give more weight to his opinions, he exclaimed: "I earned my theology degree in the famous University of Turin."

"And that is a black mark against you," retorted [Hannibal] Cardinal Capalti, implying that the university's teaching was dubious.

Don Bosco put himself wherever he might speak in favor of the burning question of the day, conferring with prelates to show them, simply and convincingly, that papal infallibility and the advisability of its solemn definition were not matters for debate, such a question seeming ridiculous to him. Since the Pope had proposed it and the Council had accepted it, the definition was certainly opportune, for, after all, it was the Pope's prerogative to decide such a question.

"As to papal infallibility itself," Don Bosco remarked to some

who, in the light of their studies on this subject, harbored reservations, "refusing to accept it is a blatant contradiction of facts. All your priests teach it in the churches, seminaries, and schools, and the faithful believe in it as already an article of faith. It does not even dawn on them that there may be any question about it. Our Lord bestowed infallibility on His Church; it only remains to see in whom this infallibility resides. Since every bishop is certainly fallible, this gift cannot be found in them individually or collectively. What makes them infallible then and gives them something they do not possess? It is their being linked to the Pope! Therefore infallibility has its source in the Pope. A body can survive the loss of some limbs, but cannot live without a head.

"Granted," interjected one bishop, "but there are difficulties. For instance, several popes seem to have made mistakes."

"The historians were mistaken!" retorted Don Bosco, and he went on refuting all the instances cited, naming certain theologians and prelates quite qualified to clarify the matter.

Monsignor [William] Audisio, canon of St. Peter's and former president of the Ecclesiastical Academy at Superga,[8] headed a group which opposed the Pope's personal infallibility or at least wanted it curtailed. When he got wind that some of his followers, even bishops—including some from abroad—were consulting Don Bosco and, as a result, had become firm defenders not only of papal infallibility but also of the advisability of its dogmatic definition, he took offense and called on him one day at Via della Pedacchia [where he lodged with Monsignor Manacorda].

Twice Don Bosco was unable to see him because of other visitors. The monsignor returned a third time, resolved to talk with him at all costs. After a long wait, he was finally admitted and engaged him in serious dispute. He knew of Don Bosco's knowledge of history and feared him in argument. While they were thus debating, others called for the same purpose and were invited to join the discussion. In their presence, Monsignor Audisio attacked papal infallibility and brought up [as an example of fallibility] Pope Honorius I.[9] Had he not erred in the matter of Mono-

[8] *See* Vol. II, p. 299. [Editor]

[9] Honorius I, Pope from 625 to 638, was condemned as a heretic by the Sixth General Council in 680. This condemnation was based on a letter of Honorius I to Sergius, patriarch

thelism?[10] Had not his two letters to Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople shown hesitancy to condemn this new heresy? Were they not couched in terms which failed to show him as the teacher of truth? Would Don Bosco be persuaded by this case to switch sides?

Don Bosco could have retorted by reminding him of what could hardly be called good faith on his part. On his desk Don Bosco had a copy of *Storia Religiosa e Civile dei Papi* [Civil and Religious History of the Popes] by William Audisio, Canon of St. Peter's and law professor at the Sapienza University, published in Rome in 1865.

On pages 292 and 494 of Volume II, Monsignor Audisio had defended Pope Honorius I against the lies of sectarians by proving that this Pope had not been guilty of either silence or abeyance of judgment, and that he had been above reproach in matters of doctrine. The author had concluded by saying that, at his death, Honorius "enjoyed the reputation of a great and irreproachable shepherd, most munificent toward the splendor of the liturgy and churches, whose much slandered prudence toward the Monothelites had, for the time being, ended the schism of Grado and Istria."

Don Bosco could have answered the monsignor by simply handing him the book the monsignor himself had written, but he did not want to offend him by so blunt a confutation. Pleading that he was no match for such a scholarly author, he declined to answer.

However, the monsignor repeated his question and insisted on an answer. Present were Father [John] Perrone [S.J.], Bishop Galletti of Alba, and another bishop. Don Bosco replied that he should not be the one to speak in the presence of such learned historians. Monsignor Audisio then began to wax eloquent

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of Constantinople, who sought advice on an expression relating to the Incarnate Word which was then being used to refute the Monophysite heresy and which he considered dissonant with Catholic doctrine. The papal answer, which was undogmatical, glassed over the error and gave no decision, but since Honorius neither defined nor condemned anything and did not speak *ex cathedra,* papal infallibility was not involved. However, the idea prevails that Honorius may have been wrong in fact, but not in intention. [Editor]

[10] A heresy which arose in the 7th century under the leadership of Sergius. It grew out of an attempt to reconcile Monophysites to the Catholic Church. According to this heresy Christ had only one nature—divine. [Editor]

against the Pope's personal infallibility. He dealt so masterfully with history, raising questions and giving answers, that it was a delight to listen to him.

Don Bosco let him talk on for an hour without interrupting. Monsignor Audisio had flung himself wholeheartedly into the matter; and it was obvious that his words were inspired by a strong partisan spirit.

When he was done, Bon Bosco praised his learning but sought his indulgence for being unable to follow all his arguments. He again admitted not having made intensive studies on the subject and added: "Since the matter under discussion is most important, I cannot be content with giving my own reasons and proofs. I have with me an authority that you too will readily accept, I am sure. It is the work of a learned, pious, and conscientious author. If you allow me, I shall read you a page which clarifies the problem. I fully agree with this distinguished author who has done an excellent job and is well known to you."

"What is that? What author do you mean? I do not share opinions in conflict with my own."

"Once you know whom I mean, you will surely agree with him."

"Impossible! Anyway, let's hear who he is and what evidence he offers."

With engaging slowness, Don Bosco picked up the book, concealing its title and author. "Here are concise and very solid arguments upholding papal infallibility," he stated. "The writer is such an authority that we could not desire better." He then began to read.[11] After listening attentively for a few moments, Monsignor Audisio suddenly realized that he had been trapped, and he tried to take the book from Don Bosco's hands.

"See for yourself if I have read correctly," Don Bosco said, handing him the *Civil and Religious History of the Popes* written by the monsignor himself.

"Enough," laughed Monsignor Audisio. "Let's drop the subject."

"Why? Isn't this a highly esteemed and authoritative author?"

[11] What passage Don Bosco read is not known. The author of these memoirs reports an excerpt about Pope Leo the Great, prefacing it with: "Perhaps Don Bosco read also this passage about St. Leo the Great." We are omitting it in this edition. [Editor]

"You tricked me, and your aguments cannot be rebutted. But I would like to say that I no longer hold some of the opinions expressed there. I now think differently about infallibility."

"That does not matter," Don Bosco answered. "The reasons you gave then are sound."

"But how," Monsignor Audisio went on, "in the midst of all your work, could you dig up these pages of mine?"

"I always consult your books. As you see, your writings express sentiments very different from those you have just now expounded."

"It is one thing to write for public consumption," Audisio said, "and quite another to think for oneself." Thus ended their dispute, but not without some badly concealed irritation on the monsignor's part and delight among the others.

Monsignor Scalabrini too went to Don Bosco and showed him a paper he had written on papal infallibility. Don Bosco read it and advised him to publish it. When the time came for the appointment of new bishops, he recommended Monsignor Scalabrini for the see of Piacenza.

This flow of visitors to Via della Pedacchia stopped on the feast of the Purification of Our Lady when all the Council Fathers flocked to St. Peter's for the blessing of candles and the papal Mass. Don Bosco went too. As the Pope was being borne in on his portable throne, Don Bosco overheard a British Protestant standing nearby mutter indignantly: "What a shame! This is sheer idolatry! Catholics really worship the Pope!"

"Excuse me," Don Bosco broke in courteously. "If the Pope were not carried in this way, neither you nor I nor anyone else in this crowd could see him!"

This kindly remark calmed the Englishman. "You are right," he commented after a minute's reflection. "That's a good reason!"

CHAPTER 63

Vatican Council I (Continued)

IN his efforts to contribute effectively to the good of the universal Church, Don Bosco did not neglect his pupils. Though he was far from them, he could still see their behavior, and on detecting anything reprehensible, he would inform the directors of it. A letter he wrote at the beginning of February to Father Rua proves this. Only part of it concerned the Oratory boys, but Father Rua read the whole letter one evening to the entire community, omitting the postscript:

[No date]

Dear Father Rua,

Although other matters besides the interests of our Society keep me busy here in Rome, my thoughts continually turn to my treasure in Jesus Christ—my beloved Oratory boys. I visit the Oratory several times a day and see Father Cagliero in the confessional, boys going to Communion or praying fervently, and others thinking of Don Bosco or playing. I see a goodly number who visit the Blessed Sacrament during the day. I find this a most heartening sight.

But to my bitter sorrow I have also seen things to horrify everyone were I to put them in writing. I shall only say that scattered among the many good boys were some I saw resembling pigs with inscriptions of this sort on their foreheads: *Quorum deus venter est* [whose god is their belly—Phil. 3, 19] or *Iumentis insipientibus comparatus est* [He is compared to senseless beasts—Ps. 48, 13]. And each acted in the way marked by these inscriptions.

What particularly struck me was the sight of many lads whose tongues seemed to bloom with fragrant roses or lilies. One day, however, I noted quite a number of youngsters, students and artisans alike, whose mouths held hideous snakes spewing poisonous drivel. I called to them

but they ran away and would not hearken. Shall I name them? I'll just tell Father Rua who some of them are, and it may suffice for him to admonish them. On their foreheads they bore the words: *Corrumpunt bonos mores colloquia mala* [Foul conversations corrupt morals—1 Cor. 15, 33].

But let us go on to something else. Last Friday night I was called to assist the Grand Duke Leopold of Tuscany in his last moments. He recognized me, and among other things he said: "I heartily forgive my enemies and invoke God's mercy on them." I stayed with him from 10 till 12:30 in the morning [of January 29] when he passed away at the age of 73 in the presence of his wife, the duke of Parma, the king of Naples, and several other prominent people. Worldly honors and dignities could not prolong his life a single moment. With him he took only the little good or bad that he had done during his lifetime, as St. Paul says. Dear boys, let us remember that at death we reap what we have sown.

Now to other things. When will I be back with you? God willing, I shall leave the evening of the 21st; by the evening of the 25th I should be with you, to be all yours. But please do not try to give me a reception. What I like best is to see all of you in good health and to be told that your conduct has been good. I'll try to add to your happy spirits. I hope we can have a grand celebration in honor of St. Francis de Sales on the Sunday after my arrival. What I would most appreciate is a general Communion on that day. That is the most important thing; the rest is secondary.

May God bless you all and grant you a long, happy life along with the precious grace of perseverance in virtue.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. M..., M..., B..., P..., M..., and a few other are among those who have *venenum aspidis super linguas eorum* [the venom of asps under their lips—cf. Ps. 139, 4].[1]

So far Don Bosco had not been able to talk to the Pope, but shortly afterward he was granted two audiences which he later described in a conference to his Salesians at the Oratory as follows:

These days it has been very difficult to obtain an audience with the

[1] We are omitting other parts of the postscript dealing with details unrelated to the contents of the letter. [Editor]

Holy Father, since over two-thirds of the bishops have not yet been able to see him privately. The Holy Father, however, managed to read—certainly with some inconvenience—my report on the state of our Society, and he was pleased with it. While waiting, I made no effort at all to obtain an audience. Then one day the Holy Father sent word that he wished to see me on the morning of February 8 at 9:30. I was ushered in at 9:45 and immediately offered him a one thousand lire bill toward Peter's Pence which he accepted, exclaiming: "This is a wonder! To think that you, who are always penniless, should bring me money. Well, my safe is always empty too. Your name is John, and so is mine, but we should both change it to Francis. We would both make a fine pair of [poor] Franciscans."

I had had someone bring along a full set of *Letture Cattoliche* and a copy of the few volumes of *Italian Classics for the Young* in print. I presented them to him, saying: "Here, Holy Father, are the endeavors of the members of the Society of St. Francis de Sales."

"What books are these?" he asked.

"This is a set of *Letture Cattoliche* whose publication began seventeen years ago with the aim of spreading good books and banishing bad ones."

"Praised be the Lord for having inspired you to undertake such a holy task," he exclaimed, looking at the books and admiring their exquisite binding. Then, picking up a few, he read scattered passages with evident interest. He seemed to enjoy looking at them. He also examined several volumes of *Italian Classics for the Young* and was very glad to see that they had been expurgated. "Good," he exclaimed. "This shows that your Congregation is truly what its name implies." He also browsed through many pages of *The Divine Comedy,* and after praising the commentator, he asked who he was. I replied that it was Father Francesia, the priest who had accompanied me to Rome three years before. He verified it by checking the title page. Then, turning to me, he said: "I know that last year you had to contend with enemies and that you beat them. I admire and commend you because those who opposed you last year are fighting me this year. By this I recognize your undertaking as holy, and theirs to be diabolical."

Dropping this subject, he passed on to other things of which I may not speak. He acquainted me with some of the main objections which certain writers believe they can dig up from church history against papal infallibility and asked my opinion. I answered as best as I could, but briefly. Leaving the matter there, he abruptly remarked: "You have a lot to do, haven't you?"

"Thank God, yes, Your Holiness."

"Could you not," he went on "initiate a course in church history, imbued with the spirit you just displayed as you rebutted those hateful objections? Please bear in mind that this is not an order, for I have neither the right nor the wish to make it a command, but if a suggestion will do, I heartily urge this task."

"If Your Holiness wishes," I replied, "I shall with the help of my co-workers touch up and update some material before it goes to press to make it conform as far as possible with your suggestion."

He then turned to the subject of our Society and, having many other things to tell me, invited me to return that evening. I knelt for his blessing and left. He purposely kept *Letture Cattoliche* and the *Italian Classics for the Young* on his desk throughout that day, showing them to all his callers, reading scattered passages to them, praising the undertaking and its collaborators, and highly recommending their purchase. Afterward he told his valet: "Take these books and place them neatly on the shelves." The valet set about this task, but since the books were many, the Pope himself placed a few in the lap of his cassock and climbed on a footstool, over the objections of his valet who had never before seen the Pope do anything like that. "I am master in my own house!" the Pope responded to his objections. After carefully putting them on the shelves one by one, the Pope stepped down, took a good look at them, and then climbed up once more to make them more noticeable, so pleased was he with them. This I learned from the valet himself.

In the evening Don Bosco returned to the Vatican. He described his second audience as follows:

Pius IX talked to me at great length about our Society. He told me that at one Council session a bishop gave a long, well-applauded talk on the pressing need of a religious society whose members should be bound to the Church while remaining free citizens before the State, and that another bishop (the bishop of Parma) had stood up and said: "I am glad to inform you that such a society already exists and is doing very well. It is called the Salesian Society." He too was applauded. As a result—the Pope went on—a third bishop (the bishop of Mondovì) was called upon to give a precise, detailed report on it.

I then asked for and obtained spiritual favors. Our boys and benefactors will now gain a plenary indulgence each time they receive Holy Communion, and our priests will gain one whenever they celebrate Holy Mass. To me, as superior of the Society, he granted the faculty of im-

parting the papal blessing to the sick, of blessing rosaries and medals, and of giving our members permission to read forbidden books. The first two faculties I hereby grant to all our priests; as regards the reading of forbidden books, I shall grant permission according to each case and need.

I asked him for a message to give to our boys, and he said: "Tell them to practice all that their bishops recommend in their pastoral letters."

"But," I insisted, "tell me something special which I can pass on to them in your name."

"Tell your boys," he said, "that their only need is to persevere in following the good path they are now on and to be convinced that this is God's will."

"Thank you, Holy Father," I said. "I am glad because, in telling us to persevere, you imply approval of what we have done. We shall make every possible effort to persevere and to labor always for God's greater glory."

"If you want your Congregation to grow and keep prospering, be very slow to admit postulants and very quick to let them go. Your members will be fewer but good, and that is much better than a crowd of malcontents."

Then, dropping the subject, he said: "The plans we made last year for a house in Rome fell through, but I am still of the same mind and I shall find a place for you. Have you seen the Church of San Giovanni della Pigna?"

"No, Your Holiness."

"Go look at it and let me know how you like it."

After coming home from the audience, Don Bosco spent a good part of the night writing letters. Since he had obtained an indulgence for the entire population of Mornese, he sent the joyful news to Father Pestarino. He also wrote to Father Rua, to Father Bonetti, director of the Mirabello junior seminary, and to Father Francesia, director of the new school at Cherasco, mainly to acquaint them with the spiritual favors granted by the Holy Father.[2] To Father Bonetti he also expressed his grief at the death of Father Provera's father:

I was deeply sorry to learn that our beloved Father Provera's dad is dead. God wished to take him to Himself when we least expected it. May

[2] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

His holy will be done. Try to console the family. Call on Mrs. Provera and tell her that I am praying for her and for the deceased.

I recommend that you keep all your boys happy. Give them a special treat at table so that they may have a reason to cheer Don Bosco. But tell them that I want them all to stay healthy, strong, and happy so that the infirmary may be closed shut and the doors of the dining room flung wide open.

For Father Francesia he had some personal news:

I was with the Holy Father yesterday [he wrote] and you came in for some praise. He welcomed me most cordially and was especially pleased with my gift of a full set of *Letture Cattoliche* and of *Italian Classics for the Young*. He read a passage from Dante and recalled (these are his exact words) the "good Father Francesia" who had annotated it, of whom he had already heard so much.

We also discussed many important matters connected with our Congregation's welfare which I do not think should be entrusted to a letter. Come to the Oratory for the feast of St. Francis de Sales with those priests you can spare from duty, and we shall then be free to talk....

Tell Father Provera that I have prayed much and have had others pray for his dear deceased father and that, while I grieve for his loss, I am consoled to think that he may already possess the heavenly glory whence he protects and awaits us. The time that must pass before we join him in the land of the blessed, I hope, will be but a film of smoke.

I want all your boys to be happy. Therefore, the day after you get this letter, give them some special treat at table which may set their tongues wagging and make them shout lusty vivas to Don Bosco.

At this point we would like to point out Don Bosco's fatherly cordiality and his insistent endeavors to put it to good use. There are expressions and remarks in these letters which, even now as we read them, increase our love for him. How effective they must have been with those to whom they were addressed!

We must further note that in telling his Salesians about his first audience with the Pope, he said: "[Pius IX] passed on to other things of which I may not speak." He also told them of the Pope's wish to have another talk with him because "he had many other things to tell [me]." Of these he made no mention because they were important Council matters. What delicate mission could the

Vicar of Christ have entrusted to him that we have no knowledge of? Whatever it was, the fact is that he kept trying to convince members of the opposition that the definition of papal infallibility was a necessity. He also kept attending the sessions of particular commissions and reported to the Pope whatever he considered suitable or necessary. Thus he worked indefatigably for a cause to which he had devoted his entire life: the glory of the papacy and of the Church. The Pope was deeply gratified.

Hopes for a Salesian house in Rome again ran high. Don Bosco informed [Angelo] Cardinal Quaglia of Pius IX's proposal concerning the Church of San Giovanni, and the cardinal reacted favorably. Later he went to inspect the church with an official in charge of Vatican property. It was small but beautiful, with five marble altars and a brand new organ. He also looked at a large house adjacent to and owned by the church, estimating that it could comfortably lodge fifteen people. He was also shown another building some distance away which was much larger. It too was owned by the same church, and its lease yielded six thousand francs a year.

After his tour of inspection, Don Bosco was again received by the Holy Father on February 12. "Your Holiness," he said, "I saw both the house and the church."

"Good," the Holy Father answered. "If you like them, they are yours."

"I am most grateful to Your Holiness, and I accept."

Afterward Pius IX opened his heart to him and disclosed confidential plans and deliberations concerning the Council.

"What about the obligation of secrecy?" Don Bosco remarked smilingly.

"I am not bound by it!" the Pope replied, returning the smile.

Then, in a serious vein, he went on: "I hear that unfortunately a few not only attack the advisability of the definition, but even doubt or deny infallibility itself."

"Their strong point is Honorius I," Don Bosco observed.

"And how do you rebut them? What do you say to them?"

"I think and say what the most respected scholars have thought and said in defending Pope Honorius with very sound arguments which have also salvaged papal infallibility. In his two letters to

Patriarch Sergius, Pope Honorius neither defined anything as head of the Church nor erred even as a private theologian, because what he wrote is orthodox in its context. St. Maximus testified to his holiness and orthodoxy, and St. John Damascene never once mentioned Pope Honorius in his writings against the Monothelites. Honorius hesitated to fight this new heresy because he may not have been fully aware of its perniciousness. A respected scholar called him a 'hesitator,' guilty at most of negligence, but I feel that if he did hesitate and play for time, he did so out of prudence. Since one may well stall for time without fault, I feel that Pope Honorius was free even of a venial sin."

"Quite right!" agreed Pius IX. Then, after a moment's silence, he scanned Don Bosco's face searchingly. "Have you anything specific to tell me regarding the Church and her present circumstances?"

Don Bosco decided that the moment had come for informing the Pope of his dream or vision of January 5, of which he had written a summary.

"Your Holiness," he replied, "I think that, should the Lord care to reveal anything about the present or the future of the Church, He would reveal it to His Vicar on earth sooner than to any ordinary priest. Still, here is a message addressed to you. The person who gave it to me does not lie."

That paper contained only the passages which concerned the Pope and the Council under this heading: "The Voice of Heaven to the Shepherd of Shepherds." We are acquainted with its contents. The message was a peremptory, absolute command that difficulties should not be debated but done away with, that fears should be cast aside, that the task at hand should be pursued and swiftly brought to a conclusion, and that the Blessed Virgin's help was guaranteed. The Lord wanted the dogmatic definition of papal infallibility.

The Pope read and reread the message, stood pensively, asked questions, and—as we believe—then and there decided to hesitate no longer. Before dismissing Don Bosco, he asked: "Could you leave Turin and come to stay at Rome with me? Would your Congregation suffer by it?"

"Holy Father, it would be its ruin!"

The Pope did not insist, but it was obvious that he wished to have him at his side in Rome as a cardinal.

"I love my boys too much to leave them," explained Don Bosco. Father Rua was right when he described him as "a man in whom God raised spiritual fatherhood to its highest degree."[3]

Meanwhile, convinced that the Lord would not abandon him, Pius IX went serenely ahead with Council decisions. The very defections were a further incentive to speed matters up. The obstinacy of the Chaldean Patriarch Audu, the Armenian revolt at Constantinople, the defiance and flight to Rome of the Armenian monks of St. Anthony with the encouragement of several French bishops, the unauthorized return of many prelates of the opposition to their dioceses, the shameful agitations in Switzerland against the dogma of infallibility under the leadership of Herzog, who was later sacrilegiously consecrated bishop of the Old Catholics—all these things were predicted in the message handed to the Pope: "He [the enemy of good] will sow discord among your helpers and will rear enemies among My sons."[4]

However, the message also said "The great Queen shall always assist you," and so She did. Several European powers tried to disrupt the Council by persuading France to recall its troops from Rome, but all their maneuvers came to naught.[5]

[3] We are omitting another letter to Father Rua about this audience with Pius IX and other matters. [Editor]

[4] *See* p. 374. [Editor]

[5] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 64

Vatican Council I (Continued)

DON Bosco had gone to Rome with the firm intention of avoiding publicity and busying himself only with Council matters and those of his Society, but his frequent meetings with prelates soon made his presence known. Affectionate, insistent requests of friends and admirers and demands of charity drew him into public view.

On February 16, 1870 Father Michael Picati, a pastor of the Turin archdiocese, wrote from Rome to a friend of his: "The esteem and devotion in which the whole city—Pope, cardinals, prelates, senators, princes, and people from all walks of life—holds Don Bosco would be unbelievable, had I not witnessed it myself. His name is known in town and suburb. The day before yesterday he had to rush to the bedside of a person fifteen miles away from Rome. Once his presence is known, he is besieged by overwhelming crowds. Most of the time he cannot get to his breviary till late at night. To be sure of a brief interview, one must catch him as soon as he rises. That's what I have had to do several times."

Don Bosco, however, was not accorded the welcome of earlier visits because he could no longer assure the Romans that their city would stay unharmed. Rather, in carefully phrased words, on various occasions he hinted at its possible seizure by Piedmont. Several prelates who belonged to noble Roman families, relying on a hoped-for veto of European powers, believed this to be impossible. Some even fooled themselves into expecting direct intervention from on high, trustingly maintaining that the revolution would never reach Rome, and that if it did, it could not gain a foothold, for within months order would be re-established. They naturally resented Don Bosco's view.

True, in 1867 he had assured them that Rome would see no political upheaval, but his words referred to that year,[1] while his listeners had given them a much wider interpretation and had blindly refused to give up that comforting hope.

They therefore began to mistrust him. Realizing the danger of being hailed as a prophet of doom, Don Bosco from then on gave only evasive answers about Rome's future, but these people, eager to have him bolster their deadly self-deception, interpreted his answers as they wished. There were some who even began to doubt and question Don Bosco's prophetic gift, thus forcing him—who previously had momentarily flashed the sad truth upon them—into a most rigorous silence. He knew that it would be both useless and unwise to talk to people who did not want to hear the truth; furthermore he did not want to jeopardize his own interests.

Still, his concern for others prompted him to recommend, directly or through friends, that the clergy and religious superiors especially should hurry to salvage what they could of movable and immovable goods. Generally his advice was received with indifference and skepticism.

Only the Father General of the Carthusians, foreseeing the expropriation of religious property, accepted his advice and decided to hand over to him with restrictions the Church of St. Mary of the Angels and its monumental cloister at the Diocletian Baths. However, the Order's procurator general considered his superior's fears unfounded and opposed the decision, stating that since all religious orders kept a house in Rome, they should do likewise. Others too supported his views, and the plan fell through. Things took their course, and the Carthusians, like all other religious, lost their property.

Several other skeptics learned how right Don Bosco had been when, through their inactivity, both real estate holdings and cash reserves were confiscated.

Clearly foreseeing what would happen this very year, Don Bosco wrote to Father Rua on February 14 instructing him not to prepare any festivities for his return the following week. He also told him that a Salesian house would probably be opened in Rome

[1] *See* Vol. VIII, p. 249. [Editor]

in the fall. He wrote to Father Bonetti and to Father Lemoyne on the 17th, giving them just about the same news.[2]

He paid his last call on the Holy Father on the evening of February 21. He thanked him for his many favors and, expressing the hope of again being received by him in the near future, he once more assured him that he would celebrate his jubilee as Pope in 1871, surpassing the years of St. Peter's pontificate in Rome.

The Pope kept him at length to discuss conciliar matters. For years Don Bosco had fervently wished for a concise catechism containing in clear, simple language the fundamentals of Christian doctrine to be introduced into the universal Church and to replace all others. Nearly every diocese then had a catechism of its own, occasionally quite different from that of an adjacent diocese. All taught the same truths, but their presentations differed considerably. At a time when people were beginning to travel around their own countries—a prelude to a forthcoming massive emigration—the lack of a standard catechism was bound to create serious difficulties, especially among those who were poorly educated. It was reasonable therefore to see to it that the faithful, children especially, should find the same catechism everywhere they went—a universal, mandatory catechism, compiled and promulgated by the Holy See.

The confidence that the Pontiff had in him heartened Don Bosco. He knew that the vast majority of bishops decidedly favored the idea and that relatively few of them, for admittedly sound reasons, had declared themselves against it. It was practically certain that the Council would approve this project.[3]

Toward the end of that audience, Don Bosco appeared somewhat troubled. He had with him the complete prophecy of January 5 concerning the disasters threatening France and Italy and the Papacy's ultimate triumph, but he could not bring himself to hand it to Pius IX. Still, the Church's interests were at stake, and he overcame his reluctance.

[2] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

[3] At the 49th general congregation, after lengthy debate and extensive discussion, 535 bishops declared themselves in favor of such a catechism and 56 were opposed. If the Council had not been interrupted before the final balloting took place, the resolution on a single catechism would have been adopted. [Author's note]

"Would you like me to disclose something to you, Holy Father?" he asked.

"Speak."

"May I tell it as it is?"

"I order you to."

Thus he spoke of the outcome of the war between France and Prussia which everyone now believed to be inevitable, Napoleon III's abandonment of Rome, the collapse of the Napoleonic empire, and the terrible calamities which would befall France, especially Paris.

At this point, uneasy and moved, Don Bosco wondered whether he should continue. Pius IX fortunately relieved him of his embarrassment. "Enough!" he cut him short. "If you tell me more, I won't be able to sleep tonight."

He then changed the subject. When Don Bosco left, he realized that his audience had lasted an hour and a half.

The next morning, wishing to hear the rest, Pius IX sent for Don Bosco, but he had already left for Florence. His written prophecy, however, came into the Pope's hands that year, as is proven by the following letter in Don Bosco's own handwriting to a cardinal—possibly [Louis] Cardinal Bilio. The letter, found among Pius IX's papers, is unsigned. Whether this was deliberate or not we cannot say, but we do know that the cardinal could recognize Don Bosco's handwriting as well as we:

October 29, 1870

Your Eminence:

The enclosed document comes from someone who has on other occasions proved that he is endowed with supernatural gifts. I had it with me in Rome this winter.

I did mention a few things to the Holy Father but did not dare leave him the manuscript. Now that he has kindly sent me word to speak clearly and explicitly, leaving nothing out, I have decided to forward it to you. There are other things which cannot be entrusted to paper but may be said in person with all the secrecy that the subject demands. Should anything herein seem obscure, I will try to offer clarification. You may freely make use of the document. All I ask is that you do not mention my name in any way, for reasons that you will readily appreciate.

If I knew a reliable messenger for the king of Prussia, I would certainly have things to say which might please him. Grant us your holy blessing.

We have a photographic copy of this letter. Furthermore, Father Joachim Berto testified that in corroboration of these predictions Don Bosco declared: "A revolution will break out. There shall be apostacies among both the learned and the ignorant. Prussia will be converted. Then shall follow a great victory for the Church, a great triumph for the Pope."

Many years later we too heard Don Bosco reaffirm these predictions. We state this for the sake of exactness.

CHAPTER 65

Annual Conference of St. Francis de Sales, 1870

DON Bosco left Rome on February 22, and after a two-day stopover in Florence, he arrived in Turin on Friday, the 25th. As he had requested, there was no welcoming demonstration. The first news he received was of the death of two Oratory residents quite dear to him: Felix Valsania, 41, and Bernard Mellica, 24, who had died on the 14th and 20th of February respectively.[1]

On Saturday, Sunday, and the next two days he spent long hours hearing the confessions of his pupils who gladly again opened their hearts to him. The spirit that animated him was always the same. While hearing the confession of a youth, Anselm Vecchio, he urged him to be very good. "A grave misfortune will befall you this year," he cautioned. The boy asked what would happen, but Don Bosco replied that he could not say. Some months later the lad's father died in spite of excellent past health.

The feast of St. Francis de Sales was celebrated on March 6, the first Sunday of Lent. On that day Don Bosco suffered a grave loss in the death of Father Anthony Cinzano, 66, to whom he was deeply indebted.[2] An exemplary pastor of Castelnuovo for thirty-eight years, the priest was greatly mourned by all who had known him. In his last years, he had talked only of preparing for death. He had put his parish records in order and made arrangements for resigning from his parish and retiring to the Oratory "to get ready for my last moments under the mantle of Mary, Help of Christians." This he again stated just a few days before his death.

[1] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]
[2] *See* the Indexes of Volumes I and II. [Editor]

However, Don Bosco's sorrow was followed by great joy. The Ecumenical Council agreed to discuss the topic of papal infallibility. On March 7, a decisive step was taken in attaching a rider to the schema *De Ecclesia* stating that "the Roman Pontiff cannot err in defining matters of faith and morals." Then, on April 23, in answer to a petition signed by 150 bishops, the Pope allowed the matter to be submitted to the general congregation. The discussion of this subject at large lasted through fourteen general congregations between May 14 and June 3; its specifics occupied 18 general congregations between June 6 and July 4. Opponents of the definition had ample opportunity to voice their opinions, reservations and doubts, and many did, striving their utmost to prevent the dogmatic definition, first by dilatory tactics, then by seeking an adjournment because of the summer heat. The majority, however, stood firm.[3]

Among those who spoke in favor of papal infallibility were the bishops of Mondovì and Casale. Bishop Gastaldi spoke twice with with such eloquence and forceful logic that he emerged as one of the staunchest supporters, effectively contributing to the success of the dogmatic definition. His vigorous argument so enthused the Council Fathers that he was hailed by tremendous applause. Don Bosco too had some merit in this triumph, as we have already remarked and as Bartholomew Cardinal d'Avanzo told Father Francis Dalmazzo. This was Don Bosco's most significant contribution to the Church and to the Pope during his stay in Rome.

On March 7, while these developments were beginning to unfold, Don Bosco held the annual conference [of St. Francis de Sales][4] at the Oratory. All the directors participated, as did Father Pestarino of Mornese. Don Bosco opened his address as follows:

I really had no serious motive to go to Rome again this year. Still, I saw that, as a response to the invitation of several important people, my trip might prove beneficial to our interests and in other ways, too, I did

[3] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

[4] For similar previous conferences, *see* Vol. VIII, pp. 16, 154f, 313; Vol. XI, pp. 11-19. [Editor]

my best to get as much out of this journey as I could. So, while I seemed to be in Rome for leisure, I imitated the birds which fly everywhere but, on spotting a cricket, swoop upon it.

After this preamble, he described his visit to Angelo Cardinal Quaglia and his first two audiences with the Pope, which we have already detailed.[5] He told them of Peter's Pence and of the set of *Letture Cattoliche* he had given to the Pope, of the spiritual favors received, and of the Holy Father's advice for the boys. He also announced that the Salesian Congregation had been favorably mentioned at a Council congregation. At this time, though, he said nothing of what he had learned—and that was a great deal—from Pius IX and from other sources or of what he had done to lessen opposition to the desired dogmatic definition of papal infallibility. Rather, he spoke of the proposal he had received and accepted to open a Salesian house in Rome at San Giovanni della Pigna. He spoke about its lovely church and adjacent building and the advantages of having a house in the city of the Popes.[6] He then went on to mention other matters, as described in this summary:

Therefore, barring adverse circumstances, we shall send a few of you to Rome in August or October of this year. Likewise, some will be assigned to the school we are opening at Alassio, between Oreglia and Albenga. Such is the understanding I had with the Holy Father.

Last year I built up a small fund for the house we expected to open in Rome. Drawing from this fund and other sums, I have taken out a monthly annuity of 100 francs on the public debt to provide for those who will be leaving for Rome this year.

I had a few requests for the Pope about dimissorials, and I believe that he would have granted them, but then considering that the Council had discussed these matters quite favorably, I decided to let it settle them rather than introduce new items into their program. If adjustments are needed, I shall request them of the Holy Father after the Council closes. He has full powers and will gladly grant anything which redounds to God's greater glory.

[5] *See* pp. 390-93. [Editor]

[6] This church with its adjacent dwelling was put at the disposal of the Salesian Society by Pius X in 1905. It immediately became the residence of our procurator general to the Holy See. [Author's note]

I also spoke to several bishops. Having heard of our Society at the Council congregations, they earnestly begged me to help their dioceses by opening a house there. I made no promises, not because of lack of means but because of insufficient personnel.

I was able to bring back a tidy sum for several building projects: a portico from here to the church, a square facing the church, a sizable wing at Lanzo, another at Mirabello, and a church at Porta Nuova. As you see, our projects always seem presumptuous, but as long as I see that the Lord is with us, I shall forge ahead intrepidly. Should He withdraw his assistance, I would immediately stop, lest I cut a sorry figure.

Toward the end of his talk he touched on various items: membership growth, houses and pupils, the generous assistance of benefactors, his fervent hopes for the future, the Oratory's extraordinary reputation, the Pope's love of our Society, and the high esteem in which thousands of people held our undertakings. Finally he concluded:

Let us earnestly strive to do good. Let each of us do his utmost to find new members, drawing them to us by work, words, and example. I may well urge and call, but without your help I am a solitary drummer marching alone. Let each director inquire if there are boys in his own house who might suit us. If they have to take examinations, let us know so that we can make arrangements. Each of us must truly strive to be realistic about the spiritual well-being of the boys entrusted to his care.

Taking a sharp look at ourselves forgetting the praise, flattery, and wonder which others lavish upon us, we have good reason to rejoice at the Lord's guidance, but we must also earnestly endeavor to observe our rules more perfectly and give them the importance they deserve.

It was at this conference that the opening of a house at Alassio was first announced. Don Bosco's evaluation of himself and his undertakings was always marked by deep humility and confidence in God. In a conversation some time earlier, Father Berto had touched on the subject of Don Bosco's death and the widespread mourning it would cause.

"At my death," Don Bosco very calmly remarked, "people will say: 'Poor man! He too is gone!' and there the matter will end. But the devil will be glad and snicker with glee: 'The one who

fought me so hard and so often foiled my attempts has finally disappeared.'"

This he could say nightly in reference to all his efforts—not that he was capable of such results by himself, but thanks to Our Lady's powerful assistance, as he admitted and re-emphasized time and time again. It was the powerful Queen of Heaven who fought and defeated the infernal enemy!

One Saturday night, Father [Louis] Lasagna[7] waited for Don Bosco to finish hearing confessions and kept him company at supper. It was 11:30. Sitting by him, he remarked that as long as Don Bosco lived, the Salesian Society would have no trouble, thanks to his support and guidance, but that once he was gone it might fall apart for lack of means and cohesion, so that its members would be forced to return to their own homes.

"You rely too heavily on human factors," Don Bosco replied. "We must rather put our trust in the supernatural. Look, either Don Bosco is powerless or he can do something. In the latter case, he will undoubtedly help you even after his death, but if he is powerless, then so much the better. God will take over, and He can do everything!"

At the end of the conference, Don Bosco went to Mirabello. Upon his return to Turin, he found a decree[8] from Pius IX confirming in perpetuity the indulgences granted the previous year to the Confraternity of Mary, Help of Christians.

After March 14 Don Bosco went to Lanzo, and after March 20 he went to Cherasco. In between he gave several "Good Nights" to the Oratory boys. The first evening he told them of the Pope's counsel for them. Another night he warmly exhorted them to repeat often the invocation "Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us," reminding them that they could gain a 300-day indulgence

[7] Louis Lasagna (1850-1895) first met Don Bosco in the summer of 1862 during one of the latter's country outings with the Oratory boys. In October, Louis entered the Oratory. (*See* Vol. VII, pp. 164, 166, 179f) He received the clerical garb in 1866, made his first vows in 1868, was ordained a priest in 1873, and joined the second missionary expedition to South America in 1876. As director and provincial, he achieved marked success in the fields of education, social action, agriculture, priestly vocations, and church construction or renovation. In 1893 he was consecrated a bishop and entrusted with the evangelization of the Indians of Mato Grosso (Brazil). He died in a train collision on November 6, 1895. [Editor]

[8] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

every time it was recited and a plenary indulgence once a month if said daily. In another "Good Night" he narrated, omitting the name, how the first-born son of Count Callori, after attending a ball at court that he had keenly looked forward to, caught pneumonia while going home and died within a few days. "Earthly pleasures vanish as swiftly as lightning," he commented.

He urged them, as was his custom, to think of their guardian angel, who, he said, accompanied them everywhere, protecting, counseling, and comforting them. He also emphasized recourse to one's angel when tempted and vividly described how hundreds of angels of their companions kept watching them. Finally, he urged respect for one's angel through constant modest behavior.

When hearing confessions, he often assigned as penance some prayer to the guardian angel. Hence, he had inserted such prayers in *The Companion of Youth.*[9] He himself was most fervently devoted to his own guardian angel, as we have already said.[10]

On March 27, he again gathered all his Salesians and postulants for a conference. The summary of his address follows:

Adam, created innocent by God, lived happily in his earthly paradise, but as St. Augustine tells us, this happiness was short-lived because, moved by envy, the devil tempted him, caused him to fall into disobedience, and through him ruined all of mankind. We can apply this to ourselves.

Our Society began well as far as our members are concerned, but we can see that, though we are still at the beginning, the devil has already started to work his way through jealousy and discontent, and he strives to make headway. Knowing how evil he is, we must not be content to watch his doings; rather, we must be on guard and fight back. For some time now I have seen things which should not be, and they must stop. I see us heading toward division and factions. At all costs this must be avoided in a religious congregation.

In my visits to our houses in Lanzo, Mirabello, and Cherasco I took care to ask the directors and individual confreres if they had any

[9] A prayerbook for boys compiled by Don Bosco and first published in 1847 under the title *Il Giovane Provveduto. See* Vol. III, pp. 7-18. [Editor]

[10] *See* Vol. II, pp. 204-10; Vol. III, p. 105. [Editor]

thoughts on the state of our Society. As though by common agreement, all felt that in their opinion the confreres of the motherhouse lack the enthusiasm that is visible in their confreres in other houses. There it is the same confreres who teach and supevise in the study hall, dormitories, and playground. After teaching, they get into the midst of things, organizing games and supervising. They really work hard. In my concern for them, I offered to send help but, content to remain as they are, they declined my offer, preferring to share heaps of work with a few and be at peace with each other, rather than have more help at the cost of harmony. I was really very glad of this, and I thank the Lord for it. But when I asked again if they knew of anything else to be corrected, one bright young man told me that when he came here on business on one occasion, he saw one of us petting a boy in a way which he felt should be avoided in a religious Society like ours.

"Was there anything evil in it?"

"No," he replied, "but still I couldn't stand it."

I said nothing, but meanwhile I have come to realize that this too must be corrected. On the whole, they were of the opinion that there were defects to be done away with, especially here at the Oratory. Therefore, let us search ourselves for things to be avoided and, on finding them, shun them.

For example, I have sometimes noticed how some of you at table make faces at the food being served and then scornfully push it away. Apples may be served, and the complaint will be that they are too small, too few, or worm-eaten. Then there are complaints about the wine, or the soup, or the main course. Such things cause harm and unpleasantness and bring discontent into a religious community. Let each one briefly reflect on this: If we were to try to satisfy everyone's taste, there would never be an end to work in the kitchen. As far as possible, we shall strive to provide what is needed in food, drink, and all the necessities of life. "But must I eat what makes me ill?" you may ask. My answer is that, in some fifty years of community life in the diocesan seminary, at the Convitto Ecclesiastico, and here at the Oratory, I never came upon food which I knew would make me ill. What I learned was that if one did not care for a particular dish, he should take less of it and eat more from some other dish.

Please bear in mind that what I say applies to those who are in good health and have no special needs. If one is not well, this rule ceases. Another thing I heard during my visits is that there is too much going out of the house with insufficient reason.

But let us come to the more important matter of over-affection in

petting some boys. On this point I yield not one inch. Most earnestly I wish that no one lay a hand on anyone or exchange confidences with any of the boys, whoever they may be. Only a few days ago, one of you seriously risked ruining a boy and himself and casting infamy on the whole house. As of now, I absolutely forbid anyone to take a boy into his room for any pretext at all. I know that sometimes a boy is called into one's bedroom to sweep or make the bed or fetch water or carry books. I do not want this to happen again. Neither do I want boys of one dormitory to be allowed into another. Nor do I want boys in your dormitory to enter your curtained cell.

Another thing too I must point out—namely that each of you has obligations to carry out, either of justice or of charity. Obligations of justice are those pertaining to one's duty. Teachers, assistants and monitors are entrusted with enforcing house rules, but only using legitimate means. They must not strike anyone or send anyone out of the room or inflict intolerable punishment. I know that some of you may sometimes be hot-tempered and fight back. Then we have a tussle which shocks all and seriously jeopardizes our authority. Let me give you an example. A teacher is bound in justice to teach his pupils. He can do what he pleases, but he must bear in mind that charity demands that he be very tolerant. Likewise, he must not think that his authority as a teacher extends over his pupils also outside the classroom. There, all the boys must be equal in his eyes, regardless of grade, because then his duties call for charity, and all the boys are equally entitled to that. I say this because I have seen duties conflict, the duties of a teacher versus those of an assistant. This fosters jealousies, so that duties are no longer carried out as they should be. A boy may offend one superior while under the supervision of another, and the former waits for the boy to come under his authority in order to take revenge. This is wrong. If, for instance, a boy is insolent in the playground, his teacher has no right to punish him for it in the classroom, though he may admonish him in a friendly, brotherly way. Similarly, one may not prohibit his pupils from going with this or that companion for whimsical reasons.

In conclusion, let us take heart and keep working. Our efforts are abundantly blessed by God, and He will bless them even more if they are made solely to please Him.

During these days Don Bosco was also ministering to two beloved sons, both critically ill. They died in early April at the Oratory. Their obituaries read as follows:

Father August Croserio of Condove died April 1, 1870, at the age of 26. Highlights of his life can be found in the funeral oration delivered by Father Francis Cerruti. The day before Father Croserio's death, Don Bosco saw him in a dream: he was going to the altar for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, wearing a richly embroidered cope studded with jewels and shining stars. He looked most handsome. *How can Croserio be here?* Don Bosco wondered. *Isn't he sick? Oh, I see. This is the sign that he is about to go to heaven!* In fact, Father Croserio died the following day.

John Baltera of Masserano died April 12, 1870 at the age of 15. A cheerful and lively boy, he was an excellent student. He obeyed readily and cheerfully in all circumstances. He suffered headaches and endured them very patiently, never complaining about a few companions who uncharitably mocked him for his ailment. Despite his youth, he was very pious and frequently received the sacraments. He was deeply missed by superiors and classmates.

CHAPTER 66

Manifold Activities

AT the annual conference of St. Francis de Sales on March 7, Don Bosco had mentioned his intention to add on to the motherhouse, to the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory at Porta Nuova, and to our two schools at Lanzo and Mirabello. Money had to be found. He did seek it, but without worry or loss to his principles. "Toward the end of March 1870," Professor John Turchi wrote, "two gentlemen called to give Don Bosco the sum of 500 lire allotted to the Oratory as a charitable donation by the carnival committee. Don Bosco thanked them for their kind thought, but he refused the money, explaining that he had not the least intention of benefiting from the receipts of plays, dances, and what were often vulgar, unbecoming carnival games."

Even while awaiting charitable contributions, he began construction. We shall mention his projects in this chapter, letting the facts speak for his multiple endeavors.

Most urgently needed at Lanzo was an imposing three-story wing some two hundred feet long, with wide porticoes and a large playground, extending from the existing building to the parish church square.

For various reasons, however, this plan was set aside in favor of another which added another floor at the total cost of 200,000 lire. For three years, a crew of over thirty men was punctually paid every other week. We must note that a shortage of construction workers—due to a building boom in the Lanzo area—forced Don Bosco to raise wages. We must also mention that Father Albert cooperated very effectively in this project. On completion, the building was all paid for, notwithstanding the extra expense involved in blasting the crest of the hill and carting water from the valley.

Don Bosco's second undertaking was the opening of an elementary and secondary school at Alassio in response to a long-standing invitation from the bishop of Albenga and Canon Francis Della Valle, pastor of Alassio. Aware of the need, Don Bosco had accepted. Back in 1869 the pastor had expressed his wishes in this regard to the municipal authorities and they agreed, offering buildings for both a day and resident school. Don Bosco, however, having learned that the state owned an ancient monastery within the township, declared his wish to buy it, planning to turn it into a resident trade school for poor boys. He wrote to the pastor who in turn talked to the town authorities. All were in favor, and steps were immediately taken to buy the monastery from the state. The latter, however, informed them that the law required the monastery to be auctioned.[1] [This eventually took place on September 12, 1870.]

Don Bosco had set May 4 aside to visit the Mirabello junior seminary where an addition was needed to house the increasing number of pupils. No work had as yet been started, pending a decision—highly favored by the staff—to relocate the seminary in Borgo San Martino because the extremely hot summers had injured the health of the boys, many of whom had in fact been sent home to recover. Don Bosco wanted to see things for himself before coming to a decision.

Shortly before leaving, he wrote to Countess Callori, clearly alluding to the recent loss of her son.[2] We do not know what Don Bosco may have written or said to the noble lady immediately after her son's death:

Turin, April 28, 1870

Dear Countess:

Your letter traveled by much the same route as that which I had addressed to Mary Louise, your daughter.

God willing, I shall leave the Porta Susa station at 12:30 P.M. on Tuesday [May 3] and will be in Casale shortly after 5. The following day I shall pay a flying visit to Mirabello and then return to Turin. That you should ask me to forgive you for postponing your donation both shames

[1] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[2] *See* p. 408. [Editor]

me and makes me chuckle to think that you intend to add the interest to make up for the delay. Well, let us do all for God's greater glory.

Since I have loads of things to tell you, would you please let me know whether you will have guests at about the time mentioned? If so, I shall postpone my trip a little.

Be brave, dear Countess; draw courage from Our Lord. *Nascimur in lacrymis, lacrymosos ducimus annos; terminat in lacrymis ultima nostra dies* [In tears we are born; in tears we live; in tears we shall die], but after this *semper cum Domino erimus* [we shall ever be with the Lord].[3] Such is our hope. In any event, clear skies follow every storm.

May God grant you, your husband and your family holy resignation and a long and happy life. Pray for me.

Gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Before leaving he purchased an orchard adjoining the Oratory and another piece of land. At the same time he submitted plans to the city authorities for the square which he intended to build on his own land facing the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. Besides these and other heavy expenses which we shall mention, he foresaw other substantial outlays for the school at Cherasco.[4]

In the midst of all these material cares he did not forget his benefactors. Toward the end of April, he sent them a letter as a souvenir of his trip to Rome. We found a copy among the papers of Father [John Baptist] Appendini:

Turin, April 29, 1870

I am very glad to tell you that, in the audience granted me last February 8, His Holiness Pope Pius IX, in token of his paternal benevolence toward the benefactors of our boys and of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, granted the following spiritual favors to Rev. John Baptist Appendini:

1. Apostolic benediction and a plenary indulgence *in articulo mortis.*
2. A plenary indulgence each time you celebrate Holy Mass and pray for the Holy Father's intention.
3. All these indulgences are applicable to the souls in purgatory.

[3] 1 Thess. 4, 16. [Editor]

[4] We are omitting a pertinent letter to the mayor of Cherasco outlining the needs of that school. [Editor]

I am glad that I can inform you of the above favors, and I wish you heavenly blessings.

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

He also wrote on this topic to Mother Eudocia, superioress of the Institute of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, enclosing several of the above-mentioned form letters for her community:

Turin, April 12, 1870

Dear Reverend Mother,

Though I wanted to present you and your daughters personally with the authentic certificate of the favors granted by the Holy Father to your institute, I thought it best not to delay your gaining these favors and thus I have mailed the certificate. Please fill out the name and surname of each of the sisters on this printed form so that everyone may keep it as a souvenir.

Please send one in my name to Mother General and to all the nuns who in some way or other, no matter how small, have helped our church and house.

All heavenly blessings upon you and your entire institute. Pray for me too and for my poor boys.

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

CHAPTER 67

Manifold Activities (Continued)

OTHER important matters kept Don Bosco busy throughout April. Frequently the police recommended abandoned or needy youngsters to him who might go astray. In such cases Don Bosco obliged easily and accepted the boys gratis or nearly so. In return the police department would issue railroad passes to Oratory boys who had to go home for some reason or other. This went on till the spring of 1870 when a decree from the Minister of the Interior put an end to the practice. A lengthy exchange of letters between Don Bosco, the police department, and the Minister of the Interior toward reinstating the privilege proved unsuccessful.[1] As a last resort, Don Bosco wrote to Count Radicati, prefect of the province of Turin, as follows:

June 20, 1870

Dear Sir:

I received your letter informing me that the Department of Interior has decided to discontinue free railroad transportation to poor boys of this institute. Since you know our sorry financial straits, I beg you to point out to the Minister of the Interior the plight of the boys whom we have been asked to take.

Of some eight hundred residents, over one hundred were recommended by the government and accepted free of charge. If I must now lose the privilege of sending them home gratis, I shall find myself in a very difficult situation because the railroads no longer give us free passes, and the Department of the Interior has long ceased contributing the annual subsidy of years ago. Thus, after keeping a boy without charge, I must even send him home at my own expense. A few days ago,

[1] We are omitting all this official correspondence. [Editor]

for instance, I had to send a boy to Ancona and another to Tortorigi, Sicily, at a cost truly heavy for us in view of our very limited means. Let me also mention that we are still being taxed 10,000 lire for our ground flour.

You realize that, despite my good will, I shall have to restrict the number of residents at a time when applications for admission are at an all-time high. I leave the whole matter in your hands, assuring you that these poor boys will invoke God's blessings upon you, as they do daily for all their benefactors.

Gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Certainly Count Radicati, Don Bosco's great friend, did all he could in this matter, all the more so since Don Bosco was accepting into the Oratory two boys recommended by the count himself. He also took in at the same time sixteen boys sent by the Regio Ospizio Generale di Carità in Turin which undertook to pay for their board and tuition until their eighteenth year.

In May the regional school authorities gave Don Bosco a token of their esteem by this invitation to the Oratory Press:

Prefecture of the Province of Turin
The Superintendent of Schools

Turin, May 1, 1870

The many educational, didactic, and popular works published by fearless publishing houses, among which yours holds such a distinct position, is an accomplishment which has made our province superior to all others in the country, especially in the field of popular education.

In the school exhibit to be held in Naples in September on the occasion of the Pedagogical Convention, I intend to present statistics of popular works published in this province over the last ten years, and I cannot overlook Your Reverence, for you rightly belong among those who honor this noblest of modern arts.

Kindly fill out the enclosed form and give pertinent information on the titles I have checked. I shall be very grateful to receive the form by the end of the month.

Your devotedly,
V. Garelli, *Superintendent of Schools*

We have no record of what Don Bosco did in this matter, but the superintendent of schools always remained his sincere friend. Some days later he wrote again to recommend an orphan.

The goal of Don Bosco's activities never varied—God's greater glory and the welfare of souls—so that even material tasks and financial burdens became pleasant and never dampened his priestly zeal. From his heart flowed a spring of living water, welling up into life everlasting. To Father Caesar Thornasset of Aosta, a former Oratory pupil who had sought his counsel on a truly priestly way of life, he wrote:

[No date]

Dear Father,

Try this: devout preparation for and thanksgiving after Holy Mass; earnest meditation every morning; visit to the Blessed Sacrament during the day; spiritual reading.

I shall pray to Mary, Help of Christians and our good Jesus for you. *Fratres, sobrii estote.* Pray for

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

To a seminarian tormented by scruples he replied:

Turin, April 16, 1870

My dear ...

I do not want your letter to go unanswered. I shall pray for you. On your part, make your meditation properly, go often to Holy Communion, and you will be free of all danger.

Come to the Oratory for a few days during your next vacation and we can talk this over.

Get subscribers to *Letture Cattoliche* wherever you go, and you will receive the Holy Father's blessing and Our Lord's blessing as well.

God bless you and your efforts. Please pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

He also had the habit of jotting words of counsel, short invocations, and blessings in his own hand on the back of holy pictures of Mary, Help of Christians. We offer a few samples dating from different times:

To Joseph Zanetti of Verona, for his clerical investiture: Mary, bless Your beloved son, and guide him always along the road to heaven.

To my dear Quaranta: Avoid sloth; love virtue and work. Obedience is the key to all other virtues. God bless you.

To Mr. Michael d'Agliano: God bless you and your whole family. May Mary guide you all along the road to heaven.

To Mr. Joseph Grisi Rodali: God bless you and your whole family and generously reward your charity. May Mary, Help of Christians guide you all to heaven.

To Mrs. Caroline Denina: Mary, pray for us and free us from physical and spiritual danger.

To a boy: May Mary bless you.

To Countess Antonia Cays of Giletta: Have a filial love for Her. She will help you and yours in life, comfort you in death, and make you happy in heaven. May 7, 1870.

CHAPTER 68

Feast of Mary, Help of Christians, 1870

THE Blessed Virgin, whom Don Bosco ceaselessly invoked with affection, was the Oratory's defense against mishaps, and many a time She wondrously safeguarded its residents from grave accidents, as all have repeatedly affirmed. For instance, several times the steam pressure of the boiler activating the printing press shot far beyond safety limits and should have blown the entire building—dormitories and all—sky-high, but the mishap never occurred. Often, when the steam gauge showed a pressure twice the safety limit, the custodian trembled as he opened the valves but was amazed that his fears were never realized. Grateful for Mary's protection, the pressmen calmly kept wholesome publications running off the presses, particularly *Letture Cattoliche*.... The May issue, *Novena to Mary, Help of Christians,* prepared by Don Bosco himself, contained in the Appendix the papal brief of April 5, 1870[1] canonically raising the Association of Devotees of Mary, Help of Christians to the rank of archconfraternity.

At about this time, too, final negotiations were scheduled in Rome concerning the much desired house to be opened there. With this enterprise very much at heart, Don Bosco wrote to Father Lemoyne at Lanzo, and perhaps also to the other Salesian houses, as follows: "On Friday [May 13] our plans for the Church of San Giovanni della Pigna will be discussed in Rome. On that day I would like you to suggest that all Salesians who are well should fast; suggest likewise that priests include this special intention at Mass, and that the others receive Communion. Let us

[1] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

pray that all things may turn out to God's greater glory. I believe that Father Pestarino is expecting Father Bodrato on Sunday. He will pass through Turin: please remind him that I have something to give him. I shall be there on Monday"

Don Bosco arrived in Mornese on the morning of May 9 with Father James Costamagna[2] to take part in the ordination and first Mass of Father Pestarino's nephew.[3] According to Father Costamagna, toward the end of dinner—some twenty priests were present—such a delicious dessert was served that someone jokingly asked whether such luscious fruit would be found in heaven. Taking the cue, Don Bosco remarked that in heaven our glorified senses would receive an ineffable reward that would suit the body's new condition, for there at the most sumptuous of banquets Our Lord Himself would serve heavenly dishes to His elect. Quoting Holy Scripture, he brought forth truths so profound and enthralling that, forgetting their food, the guests sat in awe and rapture, hands clasped, as though hearing an angel.

A letter of Don Bosco to Countess Callori mentions his trip to Mornese and the results of the meeting concerning the house to be opened in Rome. It also reveals Don Bosco's gratitude, esteem, and almost filial confidence in the countess:

Turin, May 15, 1870

Dear Countess:

Your letter reached me in Mornese, Acqui's earthly paradise. You are most kind and charitable and I thank you. I had a pleasant trip. Away from my usual duties, with rest and good meals, I feel much better physically. Thank you wholeheartedly for all you have done and keep doing for us. I'll try to make it all bear fruit a hundredfold before God and man....

If I can get to Mirabello, I'll let you know and will certainly stop off at your house.

The day before yesterday there was a meeting in Rome concerning the Church of San Giovanni della Pigna. The outcome was favorable to us. I may have to take a trip there, and I wrote today in the hope that I may skip or at least postpone it.

[2] *See* Chapter 53, footnote 7. [Editor]
[3] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

I won't be in Turin on Tuesday, but I will be there from Wednesday until the 24th. Won't you pay us a visit? We will give you a first-class reception. Today the novena starts. Every day we shall say a Mass at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians for your intentions, and particularly for our dear Victoria's lasting recovery.

God bless you, the count, and your whole family.

Very gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

The novena of Mary, Help of Christians set the whole Oratory in motion. Eight hundred copies of the schedule of services had been spread about. Festivities included the blessing and installing of three new church bells which, in unison with the other five, were to form a concert in E flat. On Sunday, May 22, Father Cagliero conducted a general rehearsal of the Mass, Vespers, and his new composition *Saepe dum Christi* in the presence of invited guests and benefactors.

Then came the great day of May 24, the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. *Unità Cattolica* thus described the celebration:

With genuine pleasure we attended the services in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians which was thronged with citizens and pilgrims. It was a veritable triumph of religion. From four in the morning to one in the afternoon, Holy Communion was distributed with hardly an interruption by two priests. The entire musical program was most beautiful, but the *Saepe dum Christi* set to music by Father John Cagliero, in commemoration of the famous battle of Lepanto, surpassed all expectations. Word got about, and many storekeepers had closed their shops to be free to attend. At six in the evening the immense church was crowded with no less than ten thousand listeners, while an enormous crowd stood outside. Both accompaniment and voices—basso, tenor, soprano, contralto, and solo—were so interwoven that while the overall effect was that of a martial drama, the music most vivdly reproduced Mary's glory at Lepanto's renowned victory, so vividly portrayed in this majestic hymn. Every note, especially the beautiful quartet for contraltos—*Virgines castae puerique puri*—was a pleasure. The hymn lasted some forty minutes, but it seemed only a moment. From everywhere requests keep pouring in for an encore. There was also a devout, sublime *Tantum Ergo* sung by tenors, bassos, and three hundred sopranos, the latter positioned in the dome. Festivities closed with an enchanting display of

fireworks simulating a battle in the sky. Chairmen of the festivities were Count and Countess Giriodi of Monasterolo.

The feast of the Ascension was also solemnly observed on the 26th. That morning provided a fresh proof of the efficacy of Don Bosco's blessing.

Peter Marchino, a second-year Oratory student, had been in the throes of a violent fever from the beginning of May. He was so weak that on the Sunday before the feast of the Ascension he could scarcely stay in church until the end of Mass. He then went straight to bed, took some medicine, and seemed a bit improved. In no time, however, his fever returned. On Ascension Thursday, realizing that he was getting no better, he got out of bed, dressed, and headed for the sacristy where Don Bosco was about to vest for Mass. Approaching him, he said: "Father, I have a fever. Please bless me." "I am going for Mass now," Don Bosco replied gently. "When I'm finished, I'll give you my blessing." Marchino picked up the missal, ready to serve Mass. Don Bosco put on his amice and then took it off, saying: "Dear Marchino, I'll give you my blessing now. Kneel down." The boy did so and Don Bosco blessed him. He served Mass and was no longer troubled by fever. He testified to this after his priestly ordination.

Following a long-standing custom,[4] the night after the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, Father Rua summoned all who had helped to organize the festivities. Each one reported whatever deficiencies or disorders he had noticed and offered suggestions for improving the celebration. Minutes were recorded to be read by those concerned shortly before the next year's feast of Mary, Help of Christians. After any occasion that altered Oratory routine, similar meetings were held, with the minutes recorded in a "Handbook of Experience." This was the secret of trouble-free celebrations.

[4] *See* Vol. V, pp. 42f; Vol. VII, p. 316. [Editor]

CHAPTER 69

Manifold Activities (Continued)

DON Bosco was warmly devoted to St. Joseph and had deep faith in his protection. When a petition signed by 14,000 people, including many bishops and all religious superiors general, had been presented to the Council Fathers that St. Joseph be proclaimed the principal patron of the universal Church, Don Bosco, in his desire to second this move, asked Father Innocent Gobio, a Barnabite, to write a pamphlet on the holy patriarch. The result was the June issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* entitled *History of St. Joseph's Cult*. . . .

During the last few days of May, Don Bosco went to Alassio with Father Rua to sign the contract for the school he was about to open there. Plans for a hospice had been set aside, although Don Bosco still had in mind to bring a few apprentices—cabinetmakers, tailors and shoemakers—to take care of the boarders' needs. The trip was rather uncomfortable because they had to change from the train to a coach at Savona, but Don Bosco was too anxious to please Bishop Raphael Biale, who for months had begged the Salesians to come to his diocese, to pay any heed to the inconvenience.

The contract[1] was signed at the town's council meeting, and a certified copy is preserved in our archives. Afterward Don Bosco left for Albenga. There he called on the bishop who received him with warmth and gratitude.

On returning to Turin, he gave fresh proof of his humility in a reply to the archbishop of Urbino who had forwarded some critical comments made by the diocesan seminary's professor of church

[1] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

history concerning Don Bosco's *Storia Ecclesiastica* [Church History]:[2]

June 3, 1870

Your Excellency:

I am not sure that I answered your most courteous letter of a few months ago. It seems not to have been acknowledged, so I do so now again.

Your letter offered observations on my recently published *Storia Ecclesiastica.* I much appreciate them and will take them under advisement in a subsequent edition.

If this same professor or anyone else finds something which he feels should be corrected or improved in this or any other work of mine, I shall always appreciate his comments. He will only be rendering valuable service to historical truth.

Should Your Excellency pass through this city, you would greatly honor me by accepting my humble hospitality.

Please thank the professor on my behalf and kindly give me your blessing.

Yours devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

A few days later he wrote to the director of the Mirabello junior seminary praising his prudent zeal and asking for the teaching certificate of Father Cerruti whom he had decided to send to the new Salesian school at Alassio.

June 6, 1870

Dear Fr. Bonetti,

I fully agree with you. The best is what we aim at but, as things are now, we must regretfully settle for less. Times are bad. Nevertheless, let us be satisfied with what we have achieved. Let us humble ourselves before God, acknowledging that we are entirely dependent on Him, and let us pray. Recommend yourself, your efforts, and your spiritual sons to Him, especially at Mass, at the Elevation. In due time we shall take opportune steps for an increase of [priestly] vocations. Meanwhile let us get busy, have faith and pray....

Tell Father Cerruti to send me at his convenience his teacher's certificate. Tell him also to keep very cheerful and in top shape spiritually....

[2]This was a revised edition. For the original edition, *see* Vol. II, pp. 257ff; Vol. III, pp. 215-20. [Editor]

May God bless you all. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. As of today we have forty attractive requests to open schools, seminaries, etc. What an abundant harvest!

Since the Mirabello junior seminary was about to be transferred to Borgo San Martino, Don Bosco tactfully informed Countess Callori of the move.

Turin June 16, 1870

Dear Countess:

I owe you several letters. I received the thousand lire which you kindly sent for the printing of my church history; it needs but the imprimatur to go to press. I also received the money you sent for the lottery tickets and the extra tickets you had received. God will surely reward you. Amen.

Now I have surprising news for you. We must move our junior seminary to Marquis Scarampi's mansion at Borgo San Martino for these reasons: it has a large playground and vegetable garden: furthermore, the building is spacious and near the railroad. On the contrary, Mirabello has hardly a place in which to play—a rather unhealthy situation; moreover, the school is far from the railroad, and townsfolk are icily indifferent to us. To enlarge the present premises, including a chapel, would take more than 120,000 lire, whereas the new premises, including woodland valued over 20,000 lire, would cost us only 114,000 lire. Since we began Mirabello under your auspices, I do not want to reach a decision without first requesting your opinion.

Please note that I am not asking you for money. I am ever so grateful for all you have already done and shall try not to bother you now; many times and in many ways have I enjoyed your charity in the past, and I still do.

May the Lord bless you and your entire family. May He grant all of you lasting good health and a long, happy life, with the precious gift of final perseverance. Please remember me in your prayers.

Yours devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

He also sent the long awaited news to Father Bonetti:

Turin, June 16, 1870

Dear Father Bonetti:

The price has been definitively set at 114,000 lire including flower and vegetable gardens, woodland, and ordinary furniture. The contract will be signed at the latest by the beginning of August....

Tell your boys that Don Bosco loves them all dearly in the Lord and will remember them all in a special way at Mass on the feast of St. John the Baptist. Since I cannot be with them on that day, I promise them a treat on my next visit. Of them I ask an act of charity: that they offer their Communions for my intention that I will save my soul. Another favor I ask is a very special resolve on their part to flee, avoid, and prevent foul talk.

May God bless you all and keep you on the road to heaven. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Besides assuming this additional financial burden, Don Bosco also had to find funds for the organ of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. He organized a music festival whose highlights were a fantasia by Maestro John De Vecchi and the *Saepe dum Christi* of Father John Cagliero, as already described. The festival, held on June 17, was a huge success. Among the guests were the mayor of Turin and Count Masino of Valperga.[3]

Notwithstanding so many undertakings already afoot and the burden of financing them, Don Bosco's zeal prompted him to make a start toward constructing a large church at the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory at Porta Nuova.

A new housing development had sprung up in this southern area with no church of the city within two miles to provide for the spiritual needs of the people. Don Bosco intended to meet this need and, above all, to stem the flood of Protestant proselytizing that had deluged that area, especially through the Waldensians who did their utmost to entice Catholic adults to their church and children to their heretical schools.

Don Bosco decided to dedicate the new church to St. John the Evangelist, whose purity he often praised in talks and sermons.

[3] This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting a notice from Don Bosco asking the sellers of lottery tickets to send in their returns. [Editor]

How often he described John's vision of the virgins following the Lamb! As we have already said,[4] he also intended to erect a lasting monument to the angelic Pius IX whose baptismal name was John.

Absorbed in thoughts of the Pope and the Council, he felt that he had to speak about them to his boys and contribute, with his priests, to an appeal of *Unità Cattolica* to help Pius IX, as the paper announced in an article dated June 21, as follows:

> In tribute to the Supreme Pontiff, Father John Bosco and his brother priests of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin offer 24 lire, the stipends of two Masses each. Father John Bonetti and his brother priests of St. Philip Neri at Lanzo offer 8 lire, the stipends of two Masses each. Father John Francesia and his brother priests of Our Lady of the People in Cherasco offer 8 lire, the stipends of two Masses each.

On June 2, *Unità Cattolica* had also reported a contribution of some Oratory boys to Peter's Pence as follows: "Turin. Several poor boys from the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales offer 6 lire."

And now, June 24, the feast of St. John the Baptist [and Don Bosco's name day], was again at hand.

This year the feast was enhanced by a new demonstration of gratitude by former Oratory pupils which became a yearly event. A few who had frequented the Oratory in its early years proposed to observe Don Bosco's name day by attending and offering a few gifts. As expected, this noble proposal met with everybody's enthusiastic approval, and soon very many former pupils, including priests, asked to join this pioneer group. In a few years it became a vast association with an executive committee at its head.[5]

On his part, as Canon [Anthony] Berrone declared, Don Bosco warmly welcomed his former pupils who each year came to tender their homage, gratitude, and good wishes. He urged them to come in ever greater numbers, despite his considerable expense in inviting them all to dinner. On these occasions he kept urging them to keep the Oratory spirit alive in their association. Many availed themselves of this opportunity to seek his counsel.

[4] *See* p. 365. [Editor]
[5] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

This yearly celebration was always a great benefit to both past and present pupils; for that reason Don Bosco allowed them to give full vent to their enthusiasm and gratitude. Father [John] Giacomelli told us: "Once, when I pointed out to him that the boys went overboard on his name day, he replied: 'I like it very much because these things do a lot of good by arousing love and respect toward superiors.' "

Something noteworthy occurred right after this feast. The cleric Louis Pesce was critically ill at Cherasco. One night, as his condition worsened, he was given Holy Viaticum and a telegram was sent to Don Bosco: "Doctors say Pesce hopeless." To this Don Bosco immediately replied: "Do not fear. His hour has not come yet." Pesce recovered completely and lived till 1910.[6]

[6] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 70

Manifold Activities (Continued)

AT times Divine Providence further lit up the horizons of the vast field of action entrusted to Don Bosco. We have already mentioned that back in 1858 his name was known and esteemed in Constantinople. Now his thoughts turned to future sons of his in the Turkish empire. At this time a disastrous fire had razed part of that city and *Unità Cattolica* had launched a relief drive in an article entitled "From the People of Turin to the Homeless of Constantinople." The first list of contributors was published on July 24, and with it a brief note: "Well-deserving Don Bosco has offered to accept two boys gratis for life in his Oratory, regardless of their faith."

This new burst of charity was quite pleasing to God. Years later the Salesians opened hospices, schools, and festive oratories in Constantinople, Smyrna [now Izmir], Nazareth, Beithgemal, Bethlehem, Cremisan, Jaffa, and Jerusalem. But in July of this year a missionary again wrote asking him to go to Africa:

Rome, July 3, 1870

My dear Don Bosco,

Knowing quite well your good heart and holy ideals, I make this straightforward request of you which calls for an answer as promptly as possible.

May I have two or three young priests and four or five of your most dependable shopmasters and catechists for my boys' school in Cairo, where we have a church and suitable residence? They would join my staff and be under my care. In return I will pay all expenses and give them enough leeway that soon, recruiting native vocations, they could open a mission in central Nigeria which would be fully in the care of your

institute. As you see, I wish to help you gradually transplant your Congregation into central Africa with some of the means God has given me. Since you would find it difficult to do this by yourself because the large Order that now has jurisdiction in Egypt might raise obstacles, you will find it necessary to gain a footing as part of my own institute which is already established and will soon receive a large mission in central Africa.

If you can let me have these two or three priests by next September a id, better still, also the above-mentioned lay religious, please reply at once. I shall discuss the matter with the bishop of Verona (who is truly an angel for us) and together we shall take necessary steps here in Rome and see to everything. All you need to do is to prepare your personnel. I shall come to Turin and take them to Egypt, not far from where the Holy Family lived for seven years in exile in the land of the Pharaohs.

I await your reply, which I hope will be favorable. Then with authorization of the bishop of Verona we shall draw up the necessary papers and launch this new venture in God's name.

My three institutions in Egypt are doing well. We now number 55. Many indeed are the souls rescued from paganism and brought into Christ's fold.

Yours affectionately,
Father Daniel Conboni

P.S. I hope you have received the petition I sent to the Vatican Council on behalf of the negroes of central Africa.

Father Comboni had already been at the Oratory where he had sparked the boys' enthusiasm by his vivid talks.[1] Don Bosco answered that for the time being he could not spare anybody but would generously accept any young negro he might recommend to him. He had done this also with Archbishop Lavigerie. Then, over the years, Our Lady's promises became realized, and the Salesians opened hospices and resident and day schools at Alexandria, Tunis, the Cape of Good Hope, the Congo, and Mozambique. However, in July 1870 these were only dreams.

Meanwhile one of Don Bosco's earnest wishes was being realized. On July 18 the Pope presided over the Fourth Session of the Ecumenical Council at which 533 of the 535 bishops present

[1] *See* Vol. VII, p. 488. [Editor]

voted in favor of the dogmatic definition of papal infallibility; only two [Louis Riccio, of Caiazzo, Italy, and Edward Fitzgerald, of Little Rock, Arkansas] voted against it. Pius IX ratified the Council's decision. At this the Council Fathers and the multitude filling St. Peter's instantly broke into thunderous applause. The session closed with the singing of the *Te Deum*.

Thus after working in peace through nearly a hundred plenary congregations the Council Fathers were able to draft such wonderful documents as the doctrinal constitutions *De Fide* and *De Ecclesia Christi*, the latter containing the much contested chapter on papal infallibility. The Council had not met in vain. Now it could afford to adjourn in perfect serenity and await more propitious times.

Other details of Don Bosco's vision were now being fulfilled, or so it seems to us: "Worldly powers shall vomit fire, wishing to smother My words in the throats of the guardians of My law, but they will not succeed. They shall do much harm, but only to themselves."[2] In fact, soon after the dogma's proclamation Austria rescinded its concordat with the Holy See; Bavaria gave aid and comfort to Döllinger[3] by embracing the Old Catholic movement; Italy ordered her magistrates to put bishops and pastors under surveillance and to imprison and fine anyone who, by publishing the dogmatic constitution on papal infallibility, should violate national institutions; France withdrew its troops from Civitavecchia; and Prussia authorized Victor Emmanuel II to march upon Rome.

These repercussions seemed to justify the apprehension of those who had opposed the definition as inopportune, fearing that European powers would resent any such declaration, but it was not an adequate reason to silence truth. At the dawn of a new age, when freedom of thought would ensnare even the minds of priests, God had wanted this definition. On the other hand, subsequent events showed that in any case the bitter war being waged against the Church, as a divine institution, would not have abated.

[2] *See* p. 375. [Editor]

[3] Johann von Döllinger (1799-1890), theologian and leader of the Old Catholic movement, was excommunicated in 1871. [Editor]

A singular fact must not be overlooked. The dogma was solemnly proclaimed on July 18, and the next day Napoleon III declared war on Prussia. Until that moment God had stayed the fearful storm, but now, upon the completion of what He had decreed, He allowed the storm to vent its wrath.

All the bishops, including those who had opposed the definition and those who had left Rome, responded with *Credo* [I believe] to the Pope's proclamation. As they returned to their sees, some stopped off at the Oratory. "Among others," Father Francis Dalmazzo testified, "were two Franciscan prelates from China who purposely came to see Don Bosco because of his renown for holiness and to look for missionaries." They were Bishop Louis Moccagatta, titular bishop and apostolic vicar, and Monsignor Eligio Cosi, who later became a bishop and apostolic vicar.[4] It was already routine to see venerable bishops and archbishops, not only from Piedmont but also from distant regions, stop off at the Oratory in Turin, after calling on the Pope, for the sole purpose of discussing ways and means of combating current evils with Don Bosco. Many bishops were seen to kneel for his blessing.[5]

After his annual retreat at St. Ignatius' Shrine, Don Bosco spent the rest of July looking after his schools.[6] To Countess Callori, who had contributed thousands of lire toward constructing the Mirabello junior seminary and had her misgivings about moving to Borgo San Martino, he again explained his reasons for the move.[7] A few days later he wrote to Father Bonetti:

Turin, July 24, 1870

Dear Father:

The contract for our school in Borgo San Martino will be signed this Saturday, July 30. Prepare 10,000 lire or more and bring the sum to me on Thursday or Friday. If possible, stay with us until after the legal formalities; if not, I'll let you go back. It's best not publicize this until after the signing.

[4]This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

[5]We are omitting a letter of Don Bosco to Father Pestarino inviting him to Turin to discuss some matters of common interest. [Editor]

[6]This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

[7]*See* p. 426. [Editor]

Cheer up! Remember me to Father Cerruti and to the rest. May heavenly blessings pour down on you abundantly. Amen.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Meanwhile Countess Callori had again written to Don Bosco, and he tried most delicately to dispel her depression:

Turin, July 27, 1870

Dear Countess,

...During your brief stay in Turin I noticed in you a mixture of resignation, failing health, and longing for heaven. I wish that you will stay healthy in this world for your own family's good and—see my selfishness—that you may help me complete a series of projects which will gain souls for Our Lord. Among many requests to open new houses I have one from Algeria, another from Cairo, Egypt, and a third from California. The last may be given preference.

Meanwhile join us daily with a *Pater, Ave, Gloria,* and *Salve Regina* until the feast of Our Lady's nativity. I'll see to it that six Holy Communions and a Mass will be offered daily until that feast to obtain perfect health for you from the Lord. This Saturday we shall reach a decision about Borgo San Martino. Prayers are being offered in our house. May God arrange things as is best for His glory....

Yours devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

The countess wrote once more, telling him that she was then feeling weak, ailing, and depressed. Don Bosco hastened to console her, banishing her fears with a declared promise:

Turin, August 3, 1870

My dear Countess,

Do not worry. Father Cagliero is not planning your Requiem.

Years ago you wrote and told me the very same things. My reply then was that Our Lady wanted your help for the construction of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. That church has been built and you have attended services there. Now I will tell you something else: God wants you to help build a church, school, and hospice at Porta Nuova. The

church will be built, you will see it go up, you will attend its consecration, and you will walk through it. Is that clear? Therefore, do not think of anything but living cheerfully in the Lord....

Last Saturday we signed the contract for Borgo San Martino after several revisions were made in our favor. Father Bonetti tipped the scales against Mirabello by telling us that enrollment had dropped from 180 to 115 because of illness.... We shall open Borgo San Martino in October, God willing. May our merciful and generous God grant you and your whole family health and final perseverance! Pray also for me.

Yours devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

The good countess was greatly consoled by this letter and placed her whole trust in it. In fact, she died in 1911 at the age of 85, 41 years after Don Bosco's promise and 29 years after the consecration of the Church of St. John the Evangelist.[8]

[8] We are omitting correspondence with school authorities and with the Holy See in connection with the opening of the new Salesian School at Alassio and a petition to the government for a reduction of the state tax on flour.

CHAPTER 71

Manifold Activities (Continued)

WE have already seen the fatherly welcome Don Bosco extended to sixteen orphan boys sent to him by the Regio Ospizio Generale di Carità of Turin in April 1870.[1] Four months later an orphanage closed down in Piacenza and turned to him for help. Don Bosco again opened his arms and, in return for a lump sum of 5,000 lire, promised to educate ten orphans until they reached the age of eighteen.

They arrived at the Oratory on August 30, the day that the organ of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians was inaugurated in the presence of many invited guests. The guest organist was Chevalier Petrali of Crema. *Unità Cattolica* reported the event in two articles on August 27 and September 15, respectively.[2]

While the solemn tones of the organ and the sound of Gregorian Chant, music, and joyous shouts from hundreds of boys resounded through the Oratory in anticipation of their summer vacation, the war between France and Prussia was reaching its peak. From August 4 to 16 the French suffered serious defeats. Finally, on September 2, surrounded on all sides at Sedan and faced with extermination, they were forced to surrender. This crushing defeat left Napoleon a prisoner in a castle near Kassel, Germany. Deposed [on March 1, 1871], he went into exile [in England where he died on January 9, 1873].[3]

Don Bosco's vision[4] had had this message for France: "The Creator . . . will visit her three times with the scourge of His wrath. The first time He will destroy her pride by defeat, pillage,

[1] *See* p. 417. [Editor]
[2] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[3] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[4] *See* p. 374. [Editor]

and the destruction of crops, cattle, and men. On His second visit . . . she shall lose her leader and fall prey to chaos." We shall speak later of the third visit. Nearly 800,000 enemy troops were now occupying French soil.

Although eager to take advantage of the Franco-Prussian war to seize Rome, the Italian government, unsure of its former ally's ruin, at first pursued a hands-off policy, but soon after witnessing France's crushing defeats and Napoleon's imprisonment, it decided to annex Rome.

Considerable forces were mobilized along the borders, and an attempt was made to incite the Romans to revolt. Then, on September 8, Count Ponza of San Martino delivered a letter from Victor Emmanuel II to Pius IX, informing him that, for the security of Italy and the Holy See, it had become absolutely necessary for Italian troops guarding the borders of papal territory to occupy key locations to protect His Holiness and to maintain order. Pius IX replied by stating that he could not accept such demands and that he was entrusting his cause to God.

In those very days Don Bosco gave a yet further sign of his insights into the future, as we gather from a letter of Countess Felicity Cravosio of Caramagna to Father Rua:

> In 1870 when our government was preparing to seize Rome, I had three sons in the army and feared that one or all of them might be sent to combat the Holy Father. I rushed to confide my fears to Don Bosco and, finding him in the midst of his boys in the playground, I begged him to tell me what I should do to avert such a misfortune. He stood pensively for a few moments and then smiled as usual, saying: "You must pray, but do not worry. None of your sons will have to do anything against the Pope or enter Rome in this instance."
>
> As things developed, the units to which Vincent and Caesar belonged were not given marching orders. Shortly afterward, though, we read in the papers that the regiment of my youngest son, Theophilus, a lieutenant had arrived in Frosinone en route to Rome. As I fretted with worry, my young officer arrived home that same evening on a two-month furlough he had not even requested. We were even more surprised when, immediately after the seizure of Rome, he was recalled to the same regiment. Don Bosco's words were prophetic.[5]

[5] We are omitting two letters of Don Bosco, respectively to Countess Callori and to Marchioness Fassati, on behalf of two of his clerics who had been drafted but could be exempted through payment of a certain sum. [Editor]

Due to the increased number of Salesians, the house at Trofarello became inadequate. To obviate the need of holding three separate spiritual retreats, Don Bosco decided to gather all his Salesians at Lanzo from the 12th to the 17th of September. Father Dominic Pestarino also came in from Mornese. Father Rua preached the meditations and Don Bosco handled the instructions.

On September 12, in snatches between sermons, confessions, and conferences, Don Bosco drafted a petition to the Holy Father requesting an extension of the privilege of issuing dimissorial letters to ordinands who had entered the Oratory after their fourteenth year. His request was granted for the seven ordinands he had chosen.[6] From Lanzo he also wrote to a perpetually professed cleric who was wavering in his vocation:

Turin, September 13, 1870

My dear G...,

You will always feel restless and, I might say, unhappy too until you practice the obedience you promised and put yourself fully under your superiors' guidance. So far the devil has cruelly harassed you, urging you to do the opposite. Your letter and our conversations do not suggest any reason for dispensing you from your vows. Should such reasons exist, I would have to write to the Holy See, which has reserved this faculty to itself. But *coram Domino* [before God] I would advise you to consider the *abneget semetipsum* [let him deny himself—Luke 9, 23] and to remember that *vir obediens loquetur victoriam* [the obedient man shall speak of victory—Prov. 21, 28].

Trust my experience. The devil is trying to deceive both you and me. He has partially succeeded with you, but he has totally failed with me. Put full trust in me as I have always done with you, not in words but in deeds, with a firm will and humble, prompt, and limitless obedience. These are the things to make you happy here and in eternity; they will truly comfort me.

May God bless you and grant you the precious gift of persevering in doing good. Pray for me who loves you as his own son.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

[6]This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

These few lines had their effect. How many similar notes he had to write! Rescuing faltering vocations was not the least of his many toils.

Around this time he also wrote to the vicar capitular of Pinerolo to inform him that the diocesan priest who had been entrusted to him for rehabilitation seemed quite ready, and that his conduct during the spiritual retreat at Lanzo had been exemplary. In reply, the vicar capitular granted him permission to resume saying Mass at the Oratory or wherever Don Bosco should send him.[7] On September 13, Don Bosco wrote to the Department of Transportation pleading for reduced rates for his pupils on the railroads of northern Italy.[8] Meanwhile the papers had announced that an ancient Franciscan monastery at Alassio would go on the auction block [on September 12]. When Don Bosco read the news, he immediately wrote to Canon [Francis] Ampugnani and asked him to bid for it on behalf of a third party whose name he would reveal in due course. The canon replied on September 2 as follows: "I shall attend the auction on the 12th and do my best to purchase it for the use you have in mind. I believe, though, that you should come here within the next few days to plan with me and, hopefully, discourage potential bidders. This is also the opinion of the mayor and pastor who anxiously await you."

Unable to go to Alassio himself, Don Bosco decided to send Father Angelo Savio to represent him. Canon Ampugnani, a missionary in America, was both an exemplary priest and a businessman. Some of the townsfolk—among them a certain Joseph Morchio, who had planned to buy the monastery and convert it into a warehouse—withdrew when they learned of Don Bosco's intention.

The auction was held on September 12, 1870, with the starting price at 15,000 lire. Only two bidders showed up: Canon Ampugnani and Father Savio, each bidding on his own. After two or three bids shot the price far too high, Father Savio withdrew.

The monastery went to Canon Francis Ampugnani for the sum of 25,000 lire. Since nothing had been said about a third party whose name would be revealed in due course, Don Bosco seemed

[7] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]
[8] We are omitting this letter. [Editor]

excluded. Believing that their hopes for a [Salesian] boarding school had been dashed, the townsfolk became enraged. Meanwhile, Don Bosco, not knowing the auction's outcome and relying on the canon's promise of generous assistance, wrote to Father Savio as follows:

Lanzo, September 13, 1870

Dear Father Savio:

I am enclosing the power of attorney you requested. Do whatever is necessary. Tell Canon Ampugnani that I appreciate the fine gesture he is making. God will reward him in His own good time, and we shall remember him gratefully. As long as our Congregation exists, he will have friends on earth to pray for him. Please note that it is my wish that his gesture be made public, so that his example may contribute to God's glory in the sight of men. Later we shall discuss the course of action which will best help souls.

There are eighty of us here at Lanzo for our spiritual retreat. At the next, the number will be slightly less, and that means it will be impossible to hold it at Trofarello.

We have prayed for the pastor and trust that God will soon restore him to health. He will receive the prospectus [of the new school]. Have any applications come in?

Please thank the agent of the demesne for me and tell him that I am looking forward to a visit from him in Turin. God be with you, and stay well. *Vale in Domino, et valedic.*

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

A week had passed since the purchase of the monastery, and many townsfolk were still grumbling. Father Savio therefore sought an explanation from the canon. The latter's reply follows:

Alassio, September 19, 1870

Dear Father Savio:

You requested an immediate answer in writing.... Upset by the public's insinuations that I deceitfully deprived Don Bosco of these premises, I find it necessary to give them the lie. I am therefore ready to

transfer the property to you at the price I paid, abstaining for the time being from any further contribution.

Yours devotedly,
Canon Francis Ampugnani

Father Savio wasted no time in borrowing 20,000 lire for that purpose from Mr. Joseph Morchio of Alassio.[9] With great delight the entire population now saw the monastery being readied for its opening in October and welcomed the first Salesians who arrived. From that day on this school has been the pride of the town. There, too, the Lord was preparing another friend for Don Bosco in the person of Canon [Edward] Martini who used his vast wealth to become a most generous benefactor of Don Bosco's [South] American missions.

[9] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 72

Manifold Activities (Continued)

ON September 16 [1870] at Lanzo, eight retreatants pronounced triennial vows and three took perpetual vows; among the latter was Father Joseph Fagnano. [1] One of the two official witnesses was Father Joseph Lazzero who had made his perpetual profession in Turin on January 16. The following day a solemn *Te Deum* and the usual renewal of vows closed the retreat.

Some time previously, in his writing room on a Saturday evening after confessions and supper, Don Bosco had repeatedly remarked to several confreres—Father Joachim Berto among them: "If all the people of Rome would now daily visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, their city would remain in the Pope's hands." Don Bosco knew exactly what was going to happen, but, man of God that he was, he neglected no means to further convince his Salesians how effective is prayer to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

On September 15 King Victor Emmanuel II ordered five divisions to invade papal territory against 8,000 papal troops. [2] On the 19th Don Bosco returned to Lanzo for the second spiritual retreat. Mail and telegraph service with Rome had meanwhile been sus-

[1] Fagnano came to the Oratory at the age of fifteen as a seminarian for the Asti diocese. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 433f.) Shortly afterward he returned home, joined the army, and served as an orderly in the Asti military hospital. After his discharge he returned to the Oratory, pronounced his first vows in 1864, and was ordained in 1868. In 1875 he took part in the first missionary expedition to Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego (*see* Vol. XI, p. 349); years later, the Holy See appointed him Prefect Apostolic of that area. He died in Santiago, Chile, on September 18, 1916. [Editor]

[2] This sentence is a condensation. We are omitting an article in a Catholic periodical describing a miracle that happened on that same day in Soriano (Calabria). [Editor]

pended, but Don Bosco's thoughts dwelt on the vision he had had on January 5.[3] On September 20 he wrote to Commendatore John Baptist Dupraz: "Courage and hope, Commendatore. Remember this: a storm, a tempest, a whirlwind, and a hurricane cloud our horizon, but they will be short-lived. There shall follow a bright sun the like of which has not shone from St. Peter's day to ours."

On September 20 Rome was taken. The first news reached Piedmont on the 21st. The following day *Unità Cattolica* announced: "Troops led by Nino Bixio and Raphael Cadorna entered the Eternal City on September 20, 1870 at 10 in the morning."

Don Bosco heard the news while he was having breakfast. He listened with the calm of one who had long known what would happen. He said not a word. His icy tranquillity astonished everybody.[4]

Meanwhile the spiritual retreat was coming to a close at Lanzo. On September 23, seven retreatants pronounced triennial vows, and two—Father James Costamagna and the cleric Dominic Tomatis—made perpetual vows. The [Superior] Chapter also admitted aspirants to the novitiate.[5] Father Rua recorded the names of all the retreatants, and this became a practice from then on.

The retreat ended on the 24th. Among the very important admonitions Don Bosco gave on this occasion were the following regarding the manner of dealing with boys:

1. Never write overly affectionate letters to them.
2. Never hold them by the hand.
3. Never embrace or kiss them.
4. Never be alone with them [in secluded spots], still less in one's own room, regardless of the reason.
5. Never look too fondly upon them.

Youth is a very dangerous weapon of the devil against persons consecrated to God.

The director of Lanzo asked him privately how he should notify a boy's parents of his expulsion from school.

[3] *See* pp. 373-76. [Editor]

[4] We are omitting a letter dated September 20 to Count Viancino for financial help toward the planned Church of St. John the Evangelist. [Editor]

[5] At this time the year of novitiate was spent at the Oratory in a separate wing. [Editor]

"Never put down in writing the boy's fault," Don Bosco replied. "*Scripta manent.*"

"What should I say?"

Taking a piece of paper, he wrote: "Please, come immediately. Your son cannot remain here any longer. You will be told the reason in person."

On Sunday, September 25, he received the vows of a confrere at the Oratory. He also dropped a short note to Countess Callori to tell her that he would arrive at Vignale on Tuesday evening and stay there till Wednesday night.

In Rome, meanwhile, when the initial shock wore off, several members of the papal household advised Pius IX to seek a safer refuge. Pius hesitated. Nevertheless, out of prudence, he gave the necessary instructions. He then had someone ask Don Bosco's advice, with the assurance that it would be followed. When prelates pressed him to flee, he would respond: "Let us wait for Don Bosco's reply."

After much prayer, Don Bosco sent this message through a trusted envoy: "Let the sentry, the angel of Israel, remain at his post and guard God's stronghold and His holy ark."

On reading it, Pius IX called off preparations for departure and stayed on, disregarding contrary opinions. Father John Cagliero, who was kept well informed on this matter since he himself had copied the letter to be sent to the Holy Father, told us this several times.

What a great service to the Church in general and to Italy in particular Don Bosco rendered by his advice! Perhaps he hinted at his message to Pius IX in a letter to Father Rua dated September 29 from Casale, telling him among other things: "If possible, go personally to the chancery to bring the news to the vicar general and the archbishop according to the enclosed memorandum."

From Casale he returned to Turin and then went to Becchi for the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, whose novena was being preached by Father Paul Albera. This year he did not bring along the band and the choir, but only a few choirboys. He confidentially gave his reason to Father Albera: "How can we make merry while the Father of the faithful is a prisoner in the Vatican?"

On October 2 he wrote to Father Rua from Bricherasio, entrusting him with some business. On October 7 he was back in Turin, resolved to concentrate his attention on constructing the Church of St. John the Evangelist. The land he needed was owned by different people and had to be bought piecemeal from each between 1870 and 1875 at the cost of some 70,000 lire. This did not keep him from proceeding with the project. Count Arborio Mella was his architect, the Buzzetti brothers were his building contractors, and Count Reviglio was his lawyer. Through October 1870 and afterward he appealed for public help for this new undertaking which was to cost over 400,000 lire. Since the archbishop had approved the construction, Don Bosco was able to add the prelate's recommendation to a circular he sent out.[6]

Archbishop Alexander Riccardi passed away on October 16, sadly missed for the good he had accomplished in the archdiocese. A solemn requiem Mass was offered for him at the Oratory. In due time a splendid monument by the eminent sculptor Della Vedova was erected over the archbishop's tomb showing him kneeling in prayer. The epigraph reads: "Alexander Octavianus Riccardi, bishop of Savona for 25 years, archbishop of Turin for 3 years and 7 months, admirable model of meekness, prudence, charity and zeal, was loved in life and mourned in death."

[6] This paragraph is a condensation. We are also omitting the circular. [Editor]

CHAPTER 73

Christian Education

WHILE seeing to the printing of separate prospectuses for each of his schools, Don Bosco directed that material concerning boarders should be the same for all. Meanwhile, all household goods had been moved from Mirabello to Borgo San Martino, where the boys were thrilled to see, not far from the railroad station, a magnificent mansion, vast playgrounds, and shady groves and footpaths. Bishop Ferrè of Casale, who had taken the school under his patronage, and to whom parents could also apply for the admission of their sons, was likewise very pleased on his first visit and continued to regard it as his junior seminary.

In the meantime Father Francis Cerruti had gone to open the new house at Alassio. At the time of his departure he had felt so weak that he feared he would not live through the journey. "Go!" Don Bosco had told him after listening to his reasonable objections. Father Cerruti obeyed. During the first few hours he felt that he might drop at any moment, but at the end of an uncomfortable seven or eight hours' trip by train and coach he arrived at Alassio feeling much better. Later, Don Bosco told him: "When you will want to explain *vir obediens loquetur victoriam* [the obedient man shall triumph], you will not have to hunt through books for an example." He also gave Father Cerruti valuable advice, described by the latter as follows:

> Don Bosco was particularly anxious that we Salesians should help the local pastor, as was the practice at the Oratory. On this score I remember him telling me: "Give promptly and constantly all the help you can, as long as your school does not suffer." I once asked him what policy to follow in regard to the requests of vacationers or wealthy families for the celebration of Masses. "Give priority to Masses with lower stipends," he

replied, "and follow this order: parish church, confraternities, public churches, and then wealthy families or vacationers." He likewise wanted his Salesians to make themselves available for preaching, hearing confessions, and teaching catèchism—never, however, to the detriment of their school duties.

The cleric John Garino was to join Father Cerruti as a catechist,[1] but a lingering sore throat was keeping him at the Oratory. "One day," he told us, "before leaving for my new destination, I was strolling with Don Bosco, telling him how sorry I was that I could no longer teach. 'Well,' he replied, 'when you can no longer teach, you will write!' At the moment I did not pay much attention to those last words, but they did come true. I took up teaching again for a while when I felt better, but I soon found myself forced to write, and so I published several little works, just as Don Bosco had seemed to indicate when he told me I would write."

While Don Bosco strove to open genuine Christian schools, religious instruction in [public] schools was being abolished. In 1870, a decree of the Minister of Education ordered school boards and municipalities to restrict religious instruction just to those pupils whose parents had explicitly requested it. In point of fact, parents nearly everywhere asked for the continuation of religious instruction; indeed, many protested when certain municipalities arbitrarily abolished it. Education of youth without the Ten Commandments and the holy fear of God, the sole restraints over human passions, is impossible.

Through catechetical instruction in his schools and churches Don Bosco sought to counteract as far as possible the evils he had foreseen. As a result, piety, a benefit in all ways, flourished at the Oratory. It was not enforced, but was constantly nourished by communal prayer, daily Mass, frequent confession and Communion, and the timely "Good Nights" for which Don Bosco was singularly gifted. "I listened to him at the Oratory," Bishop [Thomas] Reggio of Ventimiglia said many years later, "and I was amazed to see the crowd of boys who seemed to be hanging on his every word. Pleasant and profound at one and the same time, he had a way of instilling wisdom, which he defined as the ability to

[1] A staff member in charge of all religious activities and health. [Editor]

control one's will. He truly possessed this gift which he considered essential in training young people. Artless and modest, he proved himself an expert pedagogue and a master of popular polemics." He then concluded: "Don Bosco is a saint!"

Don Bosco saw to it that brief passages carefully culled from good books were read aloud frequently during the day: after Mass as food for meditation, at dinner and supper for some ten to fifteen minutes, at the end of the study period for five or six minutes, and again in the dormitory for five or ten minutes while everyone was getting ready for bed. *Gutta cavat lapidem.* [A drop hollows a rock.] Wholesome thoughts dripping three, four, and five times a day over a period of four, five, and six years into a boy's soul could not help but leave an imprint and influence him to lead a virtuous life. With religious instruction Don Bosco was able to win a youngster's heart; with a kindly smile, he taught each boy to show respect, love, and humility toward all.

The pupils saw him as a model of the virtues he taught them in their catechism. What made Don Bosco so lovable was his constant availability to all in the house, great or small. Like Our Lord he could repeat: "I did not come to be served, but to serve." [Matt. 20, 28] A hundred different incidents testify to this. We will recall one here.

"I was vesting for Mass one morning in the sacristy of Mary, Help of Christians," a brother priest told us, "and was waiting for an altar boy, but since it was late, no one showed up. Don Bosco had already said Mass and was making his thanksgiving nearby. He arose and came over to me.

"'Are you waiting for someone?' he asked.

"'An altar boy.'

"'Let's go! I'll serve your Mass.'

"I hesitated, not wanting him to inconvenience him, but he would not hear of it and took up the missal. We went to St. Peter's altar, where he served my Mass until a cleric came to replace him during the Offertory."

His example and method of education closely endeared superiors to boys. When any superior, even a young cleric, walked into the playground, he would be quickly surrounded by a cluster of small friends. Many boys unabashedly told their faults to their

superiors and often confided their innermost secrets to them while strolling along the porticoes during recreation.

Father T... narrated that once, during his third year of high school, he said to Father Cagliero while walking with him and several boys: "Tomorrow is Sunday, but this evening, what with music class and sacred ceremonies, I could not go to confession."

"Very well, you can make your confession now," Father Cagliero replied.

And as they continued their walk, he made his confession, while his companions, totally unconcerned because they had done the same thing at other times, kept up their cheerful banter. Nor did such familiarity jeopardize respect, because their catechism had taught them to obey their superiors.

The young artisans too, who were brought up on the same principles, showed by their conduct the efficacy of their religious training. Many a former pupil brought credit to the Oratory by his loyalty and honesty. Being an Oratory pupil was itself the best recommendation for finding employment. In fact, employers personally called on Don Bosco to offer jobs to his young artisans....

One day a large sum of money was stolen from a safe at a military base. Circumstantial evidence implicated a former Oratory pupil who protested his innocence. His conduct had always been so blameless that the colonel and his staff were convinced of his innocence. Because of their warm affection for him, they made a careful search and eventually discovered the real culprit.

We will cite still another instance. Once, during parade drill, a strapping artilleryman was called out by the general.

"Were you a pupil of Don Bosco?" the officer asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Would you care to be my orderly?"

"Gladly."

Three months later the general retired and the serviceman was made a corporal. Later he was promoted to sergeant, a rank he held for sixteen years, and ultimately he rose to command a frontier garrison. He remained always faithful to his religious practices. From there he wrote: "Blessings on Don Bosco's house, where I learned to obey. How many of my buddies, intolerant of military discipline and moral restraint, have I seen shut behind

bars, some even sentenced to death. Thanks to my religious training, I always carried out my duties faithfully, and I patiently put up with things I did not like. I never received the slightest punishment. That's how I rose in the ranks." Numberless other former pupils had very successful careers for the same reason. The holy fear of God is not without temporal advantages too.

What shall we say about the catechetical instructions imparted by Don Bosco's co-workers in the festive oratories to thousands of youngsters over so many years? One story may well be that of countless others who were mostly very ignorant, but who gradually became excellent Christians and a credit to society. This is the story of one of them:

I was a lost sheep. Reared in a family where even the simplest religious practices were looked upon with cold indifference if not open hatred, I grew up in almost total ignorance of the lofty teachings of the Gospel. I never completely turned against our holy religion, but I looked at it as a heap of tiresome, boring practices, and I feared it, much as a schoolboy fears Latin and Greek....

One day—I can't remember how—some friends took me to a Salesian festive oratory, telling me that we could have a good time there and free candy. True, one had to put up with church services, but then there would be a stage play which was always very exciting. Charmed by the vision of this little promised land, I went jubilantly, with great expectations.

I returned every Sunday and stayed all day, playing all sorts of games with my friends and the young clerics, who proved to be kind, friendly companions. Naturally I also attended church with little attention and very little devotion. After Mass we had a down-to-earth sermon which I found somewhat interesting, and in the afternoon there was a catechetical instruction.

I had been assigned to one of the lower classes where more elementary truths were being taught.... Advancing from grade to grade I finally got to the top. Meanwhile, without realizing it, I was developing a religious awareness. I continued to have fun but I was also beginning to reflect on my catechism lessons. Church services no longer bored me; I rather liked them and eagerly looked forward to them. In church my mind no longer wandered. I was now able to concentrate in thoughtful, humble, and sincere prayer. I was being born to the spiritual life.

I was totally absorbed and won over by the environment. I was touched by the thoughtful goodness of those Salesians—by their solicitous attention, their kind interest in me, and their words alive with faith and charity. I was drawn to them as an insect is drawn to light. While with them, I felt that I was breathing a purer air, and I seemed to feel better. The concerns of daily life magically seemed to vanish, and I was happy to be with them, feeling as though I belonged to a large family where I could find counsel, love and protection.

When I finally attended adult catechism classes, the subject matter became more serious, profound, and complex. I listened attentively and strove to grasp and assimilate those truths. Faith in the supreme truths revealed by Christ was beginning to take hold of my soul. The longer I meditated on them, the stronger my faith grew. I was beginning to experience that sublime happiness which the awareness of faith brings to us.

I attended that festive oratory for five or six years. Then life's responsibilities took me from my cherished Sunday routine. However, I did not forget. The remembrance of those lovely days of my youth, when in admirable simplicity and under the sturdy influence of good example I was taught goodness and honesty and to love God and my fellow man, remains vividly in my heart more than in my mind.

D.B.

The same principles were being taught to other youngsters and to people at large through *Letture Cattoliche,* whose subscribers received with the November-December issue a complimentary copy of the new edition of Don Bosco's *Storia Ecclesiastica* [Church History]. In his Preface Don Bosco declared: "This little work has already gone through several editions, but since the more recent were made without the author's consent or supervision, variations and even errors have crept in. I therefore acknowledge as my own only this last edition, which may be truly called a new edition."

While looking after *Letture Cattoliche* and *Italian Classics for the Young*, he was also selecting personnel for the motherhouse, the four schools, and the festive oratories, presiding at the clerical investiture of postulants, and giving blessing and counsel to those who had decided to enter the diocesan seminary. One of the latter, Louis Spandre of Caselle, today bishop of Asti, jotted down

what Don Bosco said to him on that occasion:

I shall never forget Don Bosco's keepsake on the morning I left the Oratory to enter the diocesan seminary. After hearing my confession, he said: "Serve my Mass. It may be the last time."

"I feel deeply honored," I replied, "but I hope it will not be the last time." Nor was it, because I served many other Masses for him, both as a seminarian and as a priest.

After Mass he took off the sacred vestments and then said: "Kneel down, because I still want to give you my blessing." He blessed me, and then, placing his holy hand on my head and pressing lightly, he added: "Louis, if one day, with God's help, you will be a priest, work for souls, not money." These words and his penetrating look went straight to my heart, and I never forgot them. They became my program of action, a sublime salvific ideal. It was the program followed by this man of God to whom all the rest was as nothing, since the only thing he had at heart was the salvation of souls: *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle.*

What veneration, gratitude, and love keep burning in my heart for Don Bosco!

No different were the sentiments of most of his pupils who chose to enter the seminary. As ordination drew near, many would come to the Oratory to open their hearts to their former spiritual father and seek his advice. For instance, Monsignor [Dominic] Muriana, the pastor of St. Teresa's in Turin, told us that in 1867 he and ten other seminarians went to the Oratory to make their confession to Don Bosco.

In October [1870] the Oratory swarmed with pupils, including some from the Near East and northern Africa. On October 5, Joseph Smain Siam, 30, an artisan, and John Maria Smain, 12, a student, arrived at the Oratory on the recommendation of the patriarch of Jerusalem, whence both of them came. They did not stay long, but by their presence they too showed that Don Bosco's fame had reached their land. They were followed on October 31 by four Algerians of the Kabili tribe who had been orphaned during the great famine. They were sent by Archbishop Lavigerie of Algiers who had recommended them to Father Vincent Persoglio, the rector of St. Torpete's in Genoa. They had already been baptized, and three had also been confirmed. Their names

were Anthony Allel, Augustus Seid, Adel Kader, and Agapitus Siamma. Warmly welcomed by the Algerians who were already there, two were enrolled as students, since they wished to return to their native land to teach the Gospel to their countrymen. [2]

Meanwhile Don Bosco's predictions made in January[3] were coming true. As soon as news of the disaster at Sedan reached Paris, the leaders of the Republican Party stirred the people to revolt, proclaimed a republic, and on September 4 formed a "Government for National Defense." At the first uprisings, Empress Eugenie, the regent, fled from Paris and sought refuge with her only son at Chislehurst, England, where Napoleon joined her after seven months' imprisonment. The new government set about pursuing the war with great vigor. It mustered 300,000 soldiers in the capital, built new fortifications, and, to eliminate likely shelters for the enemy and obstacles to its own artillery, razed many mansions, mostly havens of vice and corruption in the outskirts. Elsewhere in the city the Communards set fire to buildings. Don Bosco had warned: "Paris! Paris! Instead of fortifying yourself with the Lord's name, you surround yourself with houses of ill repute. You yourself shall destroy them."[4]

After a two-day lull following the capture of Sedan, the Prussians rushed to lay siege to Paris with 250,000 soldiers and 904 cannons. Shortly afterward, on September 20 and October 29 respectively, after a long, bloody resistance, Strasbourg and Metz fell to other Prussian armies 200,000 strong.

[2] We are omitting biographical details of Charles Delloro, 61, and John Bertola, 19, who died at the Oratory on October 23 and November 27, 1870 respectively, and of Joseph Villa, who had attended the Valdocco festive oratory since 1855. [Editor]

[3] *See* pp. 373-76. [Editor]

[4] *See* p. 374. [Editor]

CHAPTER 74

Year's End, 1870

THROUGH 1869 and 1870 Don Bosco underwent a strange experience. The frontal bone of his skull gradually pushed upward, raising a lump on his head.[1] However, at the same time the severe headaches that had bothered him on and off for some six months suddenly ceased. Much later, in 1884, during an illness, his doctors noticed that a rib on his left side was out of place. Long before this discovery Don Bosco had complained of a pain that he thought was caused by the heart. As God is wont to do with His saints, He sent him still other tribulations. An ailment which he uncomplainingly endured and hardly ever mentioned for over thirty years was the swelling of his legs.

Yet he never stopped working. An endless cause of worry was providing for the bodily needs of his boys and the extraordinary building expenses which we have already mentioned. Fortunately some laymen generously came to his aid. Wanting to express his gratitude, he sought decorations for them from the Order of Sts. Maurice and Lazarus. He also wrote to the Department of Education for help to his schools and to the Department of Defense for army blankets.[2]

Meanwhile work on the Church of St. John the Evangelist had been suspended because of the winter season, but, thanks to an article in *Unità Cattolica*, contributions kept pouring in. Count Francis Viancino donated 1,000 lire, but an even more generous contribution came under unusual circumstances. One day a gentleman told Don Bosco: "I would like to do something for your projects, but I cannot just now. Someone owes me 20,000 lire, and

[1] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]
[2] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

I have just learned that I can count the sum as good as lost."

"The person who told you might be wrong," Don Bosco pointed out.

"Impossible! My agent is quite experienced, and he made it clear to me that we cannot count on it any longer."

"What would you do if you were able to collect?"

"I'd give you half of it! However, now it's a total loss."

"Who knows?" Don Bosco went on. "What you have promised is for my boys, so I am going to ask them to pray."

That gentleman again contacted his debtor. A few days later the creditor's agent forwarded him 5,000 lire with a note that the money had been paid unexpectedly; another 5,000 lire followed, and finally the balance. Keeping his word, the creditor sent someone to thank Don Bosco for the prayers, and to his thanks he added 10,000 lire.

Father Felix Reviglio, who heard this story from some Salesians, narrated it one day to Chevalier Michael d'Agliano, only to be told by the latter: "I can tell you more about it. The creditor was my own son Charles!" Father Reviglio has left us a written account.

Toward the end of this year Don Bosco had an embarrassing experience. Smallpox had broken out in Turin, and every precaution had been taken at the Oratory to prevent contagion, including a check of the pupils' vaccination certificates or of their immunity through previous infection. The premises were carefully kept clean. At the beginning of November, however, the disease showed up in a few boys. Soon fifty were stricken with it. The victims were immediately isolated in a large dormitory, amid much fear and prayer. Thanks to Our Lady's protection, no one died. When the health authorities came for an inspection, they found no fault with Don Bosco but censured the physicians for delaying to report the outbreak of the disease. Grateful for the doctors' services, Don Bosco repeatedly took up their defense, pointing out that the censures were partially based on misinformation.[3]

At this time too Don Bosco was considering opening houses in Liguria. In Genoa he had become acquainted with several noble families, with members of the middle class, and with distinguished clergymen. He was sure that all would come to his

[3]This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

assistance. On December 28, Marchioness Julie Centurione informed him through her secretary that he could count on her hospitality whenever he should travel to Genoa. Two days later, Canon Paul Bonora, the pastor of St. Ambrose Church in Varazze, wrote to ask him in the mayor's name to take over the local municipal school.[4]

Thus ended the year 1870. The banner of Savoy waved over Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome, the Prussians were laying siege to Paris, and Prince Amadeus, the duke of Aosta, was setting foot in Spain, whose crown he had accepted on December 4.

We have no record of Don Bosco's usual predictions for the new year. We have, however, Father Matthew Torazza's word concerning a prediction of Don Bosco in 1870, when the former was an Oratory pupil. There lived at the Oratory at that time an elderly layman, a fine speaker who was doing some confidential work. He was ailing, but not confined to bed. One day Don Bosco stated that by the next Exercise for a Happy Death one of the Oratory's residents would pass into eternity. This made a deep impression on young Torazza who, falling sick a few days later with angina, feared that he would be the one to die. Others too in the infirmary shared his view. Torazza himself overheard another boy, Joseph Beauvoir, who was there momentarily, whisper the rumor to someone else. Torazza, however, recovered quickly, whereas the elderly man fell ill and died shortly before the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death.

With this deposition we end the narration of what we were able to gather about the year 1870. We are very sorry that we have no record at all of what Don Bosco said in ushering in the new year. We will try to compensate by reporting the advice Don Bosco offered to subscribers of *Letture Cattoliche* in the Preface of *Il Galantuomo*, his almanac:

> Let me leave you a keepsake, the same left by a good father to his son. "If you want to lead a happy life," he told him, "blessed by God and respected and loved by your fellow men, you must make yourself worthy by being good-hearted with all. Love your friends, be patient and forgiving to enemies, weep with those who weep, do not be envious of the success of others, do good to all, and harm no one."

[4]This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

May you all have a long, happy life. May God grant that you and I will lead a truly Christian life and will be together one day in the land of the blessed for ever and ever.

CHAPTER 75

Apostolic Zeal

WE shall end this volume by describing one of Don Bosco's many apostolic endeavors which, though important, remained almost unknown because it developed slowly—in the shadow, as it were, of other more glamorous undertakings—and because it had to be kept secret. The apostolic endeavor we refer to was that of preserving the faith in a Swiss valley from which, had it not been for Don Bosco's zeal, the Catholic faith might well have vanished. The problem extended over many years, and we shall reveal here all that we know of this endeavor.

From 1855 through 1872 Swiss radicals spitefully lorded it over the Ticino Canton, especially because of its Catholic faith. Life was made unbearable for parish priests, particularly in the Onsernone Valley. Banishment, death, and a dearth of vocations caused a growing lack of priests. Knowing the spiritual needs of this territory, Don Bosco indefatigably took the matter to heart from the very start of the crisis despite his many other occupations. He came to learn of this deplorable situation through students at the University of Turin who came to him for confession.

To remedy the evil, a few priests and zealous laymen would often ascend to the famous shrine of Madonna del Sasso [Our Lady of the Rock] above Locarno for secret meetings with the Capuchin rector, Father Louis Arnaboldi. Don Bosco had suggested that the latter make up for the lack of local vocations with priests from Italy, convinced that, being uninvolved in local politics, these priests would be more acceptable to civil authorities. It was a wise counsel, as we shall see. We may get an idea of the spiritual needs of some parishes of the Ticino Canton from the following excerpt of a letter sent on March 9, 1869 by Fr. Angelo

Modini, the pastor of Losone, to the vicar capitular of Como, Monsignor Octavius Calcaterra, on Father Arnaboldi's behalf:

> [Father Arnaboldi] asks how he is to deal with penitents he may encounter at Easter time who have:
>
> 1. Cooperated in confiscating church property in the name of the municipality.
> 2. Bought church property put up for auction.
> 3. Participated in burning confessionals and in demolishing wayside stations of the cross and public churches.

Father Arnaboldi took Don Bosco's advice and, with the permission of the Como chancery, appealed to the vicar general in Turin for some priests. Due to Turin's own lack of priests, the reply was regretfully turned down.

Don Bosco resolved therefore to meet this urgent need himself. For several years Father Arnaboldi had pointed out to him what parishes were vacant, and Don Bosco managed to provide for them, not through his own Salesians, who were then too few, but through other priests. He also sent a few good monks who had been expelled from their own monasteries under the law of suppression. We know this through Father Paul Albera who communicated with Father Arnaboldi in Don Bosco's name during these years.

Don Bosco regularly selected priests whom he personally knew to be blameless, zealous, and learned. In turn, they sought authorization from the Como chancery on the strength of his recommendation.

However, this charity on Don Bosco's part was not appreciated by all. One day he chanced upon Monsignor [Joseph] Zappata [vicar general capitular of Turin] who asked him why he was sending priests to Switzlerland.

"For years they have been begging for priests," Don Bosco replied, "and the Turin chancery always told them that no priests were available. Those people were badly in need, and so I decided to help out."

The monsignor contested the point, almost turning it into an issue of rights, but Don Bosco observed: "I send no one. I simply

suggest. It is the chancery which issues testimonials to the priests requesting them. Others have blamed me for this. We have discussed the matter, but I've unfortunately had to conclude that we don't see eye to eye. *Ubi non est auditus, nec effundas sermonem* [It's no use talking to people who do not want to hear]."

Monsignor Zappata, a very upright man and an admirer of Don Bosco, called on him the following day to apologize.

"It is I who should apologize," Don Bosco countered, "but heresy was at the gates and something had to be done!"

Monsignor Zappata approved Don Bosco's action, and so he fulfilled this holy mission with the full consent of his ecclesiastical superiors. We sadly regret that his correspondence with Father Arnaboldi never came into our possession, but Father Angelo Modini, the pastor at Moghegno (Val Maggia) in the Ticino Canton, did somewhat make up for our loss with two letters dated respectively January 22, 1900 and November 26, 1902, and with several other documents which are now in our archives. From the first letter we gather that Don Bosco had twice planned to go to Father Modini's parish in the Onsernone Valley, once to preach on the feast of St. Gothard, the principal patron, and again on the feast of the Holy Name of Mary; unfortunately he was unable to do so because of the critical condition of Father Victor Alasonatti. Father Cagliero replaced him the first time and stayed on for a few days to arrange for the admission of some boys to the Oratory. As regards Don Bosco's interest in the spiritual welfare of those people, Father Modini stated: "Though his many extraordinary occupations prevented him from visiting us as he had planned, he still did all he possibly could to promote the welfare of our people. How many times I appealed to him to take boys into his Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin! Such instances were many, and each time I was promptly satisfied, and everything was done to expedite matters."

But Don Bosco's greatest service to the Ticino Canton was, as we have said, supplying good priests to vacant parishes, as Father Modini testifies in his first letter: "His apostolic action in the Ticino Canton was more evident and fruitful in the Onsernone Valley, where the need was greatest. How deplorable was the moral and religious condition of that unfortunate valley and how

intensely Freemasons kept striving to strangle the faith of our fathers! I shall try to explain this in the report which I shall send to you as soon as it is completed."

Father Modini did not send a formal report, but in addition to the information already given he did send us other interesting documents.[1]

In 1900 he wrote: "Had I foreseen that one day I would be called upon to furnish evidence of the zeal of this apostle raised by Divine Providence to meet the needs of our times, I would certainly have kept records of all he did, but I had no inkling of it. Sixteen or so years ago, when I left Losone and the office and responsibilities of vicar forane at Onsernone, I could indeed have submitted a more exact and detailed report of the events marking my seventeen-year stay there."

In 1902, in order to give us "an idea of those calamitous times, of the scarcity of priests, and consequently of Don Bosco's helpfulness," Father Modini sent us a copy of his petition to the Holy Father, dated February 20, 1873, for permission to celebrate two Masses on Sundays:

> At the present time only three priests attend to the spiritual needs of the entire valley ... and their efforts are further hampered by heavy snowfalls which usually last five to six months, and by the distance—some six to ten miles—which they must travel between their own and the vacant parishes.
>
> Since all attempts to fill vacant parishes have proved useless, the undersigned ... implores Your Holiness to allow such priest or priests, as you may decide, to celebrate two Masses on Sunday, one in his own parish and the other in one of the vacant parishes.... This same faculty is sought also for Father Louis Arnaboldi, an apostolic missionary, who with tireless patience and apostolic zeal has won the trust of the faithful by his manifold activities and sacrifices.

On November 26, 1902, Father Modini again wrote: "At my request, in full agreement with the bishop of Como, Don Bosco several times sent me good priests to minister to the spiritual needs

[1] These documents and other details fill Chapter 76 of this volume in the original Italian. In this edition we are fusing together Chapters 75 and 76. [Editor]

of the faithful in the Onsernone Valley. I am enclosing the list of those names I still remember."

The list[2] carried nineteen names. To each priest Don Bosco usually gave a letter of recommendation for the chancery of Como or for Father Modini.[3] The latter also sent us two other documents which show Don Bosco's care in choosing priests for the Ticino Canton. The first is a letter of Father William Buetti, the pastor at Locarno, to Father Augustine Anzini, the rector at Solduno, dated February 23, 1900:

Father Edward Bernardi, the pastor at Magadino, who died in 1892 at the age of 70, once told me this incident. In 1866 or 1867, the Italian government suppressed the Franciscan monastery in Turin. Having nowhere to go, Father Bernardi called on Don Bosco for advice. After reflecting for a few moments, Don Bosco asked: "How about going to the Ticino Canton in Switzerland?"

Though totally unacquainted with that region, Father Bernardi replied: "I shall do whatever you say."

"All right, then," Don Bosco said. "I'll write immediately to Father Rossi, a close friend of mine in Locarno, and he will find you a parish *where you will do much good.*"

Quite happy with this solution, Father Bernardi left for Locarno and was warmly received by Father Rossi, who later took him to the parish at Magadino. "Stay here," he told him, "as long as the good Lord gives you life."

Father Bernardi obeyed. Don Bosco's prediction that he would do "much good" was fully realized. The parish, once a haven of vice, soon became a garden of virtues. Its zealous pastor restored the church and established sodalities.... The church, once empty, became crowded, as I myself saw when I was invited there to preach. Services were conducted with solemnity and the sacraments were frequented. Father Bernardi died in his rectory, deeply missed by all. The whole parish considered him a saintly priest. I am ready to confirm the above under oath.

The second document is a letter which Father Vincent Minella, a missionary in the Ticino Canton, wrote to Don Bosco in 1869:

[2] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[3] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

Father Louis Arnaboldi told me that he has written to you for a priest to be sent to Onsernone; he asks for a good priest—if not a scholar, at least one gifted with real prudence.... His salary would be 600 francs, plus sufficient firewood, butter, etc. What we are looking for is a priest interested in the welfare of souls rather than in his own profit. Anyone dreaming of making a fortune in these very poor villages would be fooling himself. As for me, I am more than happy with my set-up. Both Father Edward and I are loved and esteemed here, all because of our dear Don Bosco.

The spiritual needs of this poor canton were always vast, and the priests to be sent there had to be chosen with care and prudence. This was made clear to Father Modini by the vicar capitular of Como, Father Octavius Calcaterra, in a letter of November 22, 1869. The vicar wrote: "I must remind you that good, dependable priests are rare, especially among those without an assignment and willing to leave their diocese. In this most delicate matter it pays to go slowly and cautiously, never omitting a careful investigation."

A letter of Father Paul Albera to Father Modini in Don Bosco's name testifies to Don Bosco's constant solicitude and to the high regard in which his confidential information was held:

Turin, February 15, 1870

Dear Father:

I am very glad to tell you that two zealous priests are willing to join you in your apostolic labors. They are Father Chiantore, who was previously recommended to you, and an equally zealous priest, Father Bartholomew Pavesio, whom I recommend in Don Bosco's name. He believes that these good Christians will gladly thank the Lord for having sent them two such fine shepherds. He likewise hopes that all will turn out for the good of souls and God's greater glory.

Yours devotedly,
Father Paul Albera
for Don Bosco

The last sentence of this letter must have encouraged Father Modini to trust in Divine Providence. Indeed, a most beneficial reaction set in a little later in several areas of the canton, and

eventually the majority of the Ticino population put an end to their weary oppression. They won a temporary respite in 1875 and again in 1877, but they achieved permanent religious freedom only in 1886 when a massive campaign, mounted by radicals and Freemasons to discredit the Church, was totally defeated, thanks also the prayers of Don Bosco and of his boys.

Nor did Don Bosco's prayers cease after his death. In 1889, Bishop Vincent Molo of Basel opened a boarding school in Mendrisio and gave it to the Salesians; in 1894 he again called on them to run St. Charles School in Ascona. This marked the beginning of a sizable number of priestly vocations in the Ticino Canton. How true, delightful, and consoling are the words of the Psalmist: *Clamaverunt ad Dominum cum tribularentur, et de necessitatibus eorum liberavit eos* [They cried to the Lord in their tribulations, and He delivered them out of their distress—Ps. 106, 6].

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

NOSEGAYS

(*See* Chapter 1, footnote 12)

[1] Say a *Salve, Regina* for the Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

[2] Hear a Mass for the conversion of sinners.

[3] Recite the *Miserere* for the conversion of scandal-givers.

[4] Say five mysteries of the rosary and the Litany [of the Blessed Virgin] for the conversion of heathens, heretics, and schismatics.

[5] Do bodily penance or fast for intemperate sinners.

[6] Recite the Act of Hope and a *Salve, Regina* for people in despair or grave distress.

[7] Offer your heart to Jesus and Mary.

[8] Recite the Acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity for the Church's needs.

[9] Hear a Mass for the conversion of England.

[10] Pay a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament in reparation for the sins committed against Him in this sacrament.

[11] Recite the Litany of the Blessed Virgin and a *Salve, Regina* at Our Lady's altar for all your companions.

[12] Contribute to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

[13] Say five *Paters, Aves,* and *Glorias* in honor of Our Lord's Passion.

[14] Recite The Seven Joys of the Blessed Virgin and the accompanying litanies for all God's ministers.

[15] Recite the *Veni, Creator* to obtain from the Holy Spirit enlightenment and favors for yourself and all sinners.

[16] Say seven Hail Mary's in honor of Our Lady of Sorrows to obtain Her protection in life and especially at the point of death for yourself, your parents, and your relatives.

[17] When tempted, promptly say: "My Jesus, have mercy. Mary, help me."

[18] Receive Communion in honor of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary for all your confreres, living and dead.

[19] Say five mysteries of the rosary for your spiritual and temporal benefactors.

[20] Say three Hail Mary's to obtain final perseverance for yourself and your parents and relatives.

[21] Say the *Veni, Creator* to obtain the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

[22] Recite the *Ave, Maris Stella* for those who are not in the state of grace.

[23] Ask the Blessed Virgin to enlighten you on your vocation.

[24] Say three Hail Mary's and three Glory Be's asking Jesus and Mary for humility, purity, and charity.

Appendix 2

CHURCH OF MARY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS—INSCRIPTIONS

(*See* Chapter 19, footnote 3)

I

Maria Augusta—cuius adumbratam imaginem—illustriores quaedam feminae apud Hebraeos retulerunt—Mater Christianorum indulgentissima divinae benignitatis thesaurum—in liberos Suos effudit.

The August Virgin Mary, most generous Mother of Christians, prefigured by several most illustrious Hebrew women, bestowed on Her children the treasures of divine bounty.

II

Mariae patrocinio—saepe hostes Christiani nominis sunt profligati—sed praesens Eius auxilium—in navali certamine ad Naupactum maxime eluxit—quum per Hispanos Allobroges Venetos—Turcarum copiis disiectis—Pius V Pont. Max. victoriae auspex—Mariam Auxilium Christianorum—iussit appellari.

With Mary's assistance, Christianity's enemies were often routed, but Her visible aid was most evident in the naval battle of Lepanto, when combined forces of Spain, Savoy, and Venice routed the Turkish fleet, and Pius V, victorious leader, decreed that Mary be invoked as the Help of Christians.

III

Ad delendam maculam—navali pugna susceptam—infesto exercitu Vindobonam Turcae obsident—anno MDCLXXXIII. Christiani principes—auctore Innocentio XI Pont. Max.—socia arma iungunt. Ceteris potior insperato adest Ioannes Sobieskus—Polonorum rex. Commisso proelio barbari fugantur funduntur—magna pars vulneribus confecti procumbunt—ferociam in vultu adhuc retinentes.

To erase the shame of their naval defeat, the Turks laid siege to Vienna with a mighty army in the year 1683. At Pope Innocent XI's call, Christian princes joined forces, chief among them John Sobieski, king of Poland. Engaged in battle, the barbarians were repelled and routed and a large number perished, covered with wounds, yet still breathing defiance.

IV

Eius victoriae ergo—et Augustae Taurinorum et Monachi in Vindelicis—sodales creati Mariae Adiutricis—inter quos viri ex omni ordine spectatissimi—certatim student referri.

To commemorate this victory, sodalities of Mary, Help of Christians were founded in Turin and Munich, and most distinguished laymen eagerly sought to be enrolled.

V

Pius VII Pont. Max—ad propagandam memoriam diei VIII calendas iunias—quo Virginis Matris auxilio—ex Savonensi captivitate est liberatus—diem festum instituit nomini recolendo—Mariae Sanctae Adiutricis Christianorum.

To commemorate the 24th of May when with Mary's help he was released from prison at Savona, Pope Pius VII instituted the feast of Mary, Help of Christians.

VI

In sacrario apud Spoletinos—iam inde ab anno MDLXX—imago Mariae opiferae fuerat depicta. Post diuturnam oblivionem—puer quinquennis visu admonitus—XIV calendas apriles anno MDCCCLXII aediculam rimis fatiscentem—in hominum memoriam revocat. Exinde innumera prodigia—vim Mariae numenque declarant—maximum

templum ab inchoato excitatum—ad quod magnus undique adorantium numerus quotidie confluit.

By 1570 a painting of Mary was being venerated in a chapel near Spoleto. It had been long forgotten, but on March 19, 1862 a five-year-old boy was told in a vision to remind people that this little shrine was going to ruin. From then on, countless favors revealed Mary's great power, and a magnificent shrine was built, to which swelling crowds of the faithful daily flock from all over the world.

VII

Heic ubi martyrium fecerunt—seculo III Christiano—Octavius et Adventor milites legionis Thebaeorum—Taurinenses divino tantum numine et auxilio confisi—templum difficillimis temporibus extruendum curavimus—in honorem Mariae Adiutricis Christianorum—quod iacto lapide auspicali—inchoatum V calendas maias anno MDCCCLXV—solemnibus caeremoniis rite consecratum est—VII idus iunias anno MDCCCLXVIII—XXII sacri principatus Pii IX Pont. Max.

Here where Octavius and Adventor, soldiers of the Theban legion, suffered martyrdom in the third century after Christ, we Turinese, confiding solely in God's power and help in these extremely trying times, have set out to build a church in honor of Mary, Help of Christians. The cornerstone was laid on April 27, 1865, and the church was solemnly consecrated on June 9, 1868, the twenty-second year of Pius IX's pontificate.

Appendix 3

CONSECRATION OF THE CHURCH OF MARY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS

(*See* Chapter 20, footnote 1)

Program

Tuesday, June 9

5:30 A.M.—Consecration of the church by Archbishop Riccardi of Turin.

6:00 P.M.—Solemn Pontifical Vespers, homily, Benediction.

During Vespers three choirs, totaling over three hundred voices, from the Oratory, the two Salesian schools at Lanzo and Mirabello, and other volunteers from town, will sing the antiphon *Sancta Maria, succurre miseris.* A *Tantum ergo* will be sung by more than two hundred voices with orchestra accompaniment. Both compositions are by Father John Cagliero.

Wednesday, June 10

7 A.M.—Mass, homily, general Communion, and prayers for contributors to the church building fund.

10 A.M.—Solemn High Mass, accompaniment with orchestra, sung by a choir of tenors and bassos, especially composed for the occasion by Maestro John De Vecchi.

6 P.M.—Solemn Vespers, sermon, Benediction.

Thursday, June 11

There will be no Solemn High Mass because of the Corpus Christi procession which will originate at the cathedral.

6 P.M.—Solemn Vespers, sermon, Benediction.

Friday and Saturday, June 12-13

Same program as on Wednesday.

Sunday, June 14

10 A.M.—Solemn High Mass, homily.

4 P.M.—Solemn Vespers, sermon, Benediction. The antiphon *Sancta Maria, succurre miseris* and the *Tantum ergo* will be sung again at Vespers and Benediction.

Monday and Tuesday, June 15-16

Morning program as on the previous days.

6 P.M.—Solemn Vespers, sermon, *Te Deum,* and Benediction.

Wednesday, June 17

7 A.M.—Requiem Mass for deceased benefactors of the church and of the Oratory.

Throughout the eight days low Masses will be celebrated, and ample opportunities will be given to receive the sacraments.

As customary at the Oratory, religious celebrations will also allow for legitimate diversions, as follows:

Thursday, June 11, 3 P.M.—Musical and literary entertainment in

honor of Mary, Help of Christians and awarding of prizes to Oratory pupils.

Saturday, June 13, 3 P.M.—Amusements.
Sunday, June 14, 7 P.M.—Gymnastics display.
Monday, June 15, 3 P.M.—Latin comedy.
Tuesday, June 16, 3 P.M.—Amusements and band concert.

Appendix 4

NOSEGAYS FOR ST. JOSEPH'S NOVENA

(*See* Chapter 44, footnote 5)

1. Suffer and even die rather than commit sin.
2. What will riches, honors, and pleasures avail me at the moment of death?
3. Sooner or later I will have to appear before God's tribunal.
4. It is folly to seek happiness away from God.
5. Oh, how long eternity will be!
6. As one lives, so shall one die.
7. God does not abandon a virtuous youth.
8. How delightful it is to be at peace with God.
9. O Paradise, how beautiful you must be! I want to deserve you.
10. In honor of St. Joseph, I shall never defile my tongue by indecent words.

Appendix 5

STATE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES IN 1870

(*See* Chapter 61, footnote 7)

As of January 1870 this Society directs four schools:
1. St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco, Turin.

2. St. Charles junior seminary at Mirabello.
3. St. Philip Neri at Lanzo.
4. Our Lady of the People at Cherasco.

We have also a convalescent home at Trofarello.

St. Francis de Sales School

This is the motherhouse. Its origins are as follows:

1841. Start of catechism classes for a group of destitute boys on the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

1843. The number of pupils increases astonishingly.

1844. The first chapel for the exclusive purpose of imparting religious instruction to the young is blessed on the feast of the Immaculate Conception with the authorization of Archbishop Louis Fransoni of Turin.

1846. Start of night and Sunday school for older boys with excellent results. Toward the end of this year several of the poorer and more imperiled boys are given food and shelter. This marks the beginning of the hospice at the motherhouse.

1847. Due to an ever-increasing number of boys, the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory, with a chapel, classrooms, and playground, is blessed and inaugurated at Porta Nuova on the feast of the Immaculate Conception with the archbishop's permission.

1849. The Guardian Angel Festive Oratory is likewise opened in the vicinity of the Po River.

1851. Construction of the Church of St. Francis de Sales.

1852. To date the archbishop had granted several faculties, but on March 31 of this year he issued a decree approving the festive oratories and naming Father John Bosco as their director, with all necessary or opportune faculties for such office.

1853-57. During these years the number of day and resident boys increased beyond all expectations. Secondary schools were opened and several boys were directed to the priesthood.

1858. After repeatedly suggesting the formation of a congregation, the archbishop of Turin sends Father John Bosco to Rome with a letter of recommendation from him to ask Pius IX's advice concerning the establishment of a congregation to ensure the existence and the spirit of the oratories. The Holy Father gives the outlines of a congregation whose members are genuine religious in the eyes of the Church but free citizens in the eyes of the State.

1863. The constitutions of this religious Society are submitted to the Holy Father with many episcopal letters of commendation. He in turn

graciously hands them over to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. This same year this Society takes on the direction of St. Joseph's Festive Oratory in the Parish of Sts. Peter and Paul.

1864. On July 1, the above-mentioned Sacred Congregation announces that the Holy Father graciously praises the Salesian Congregation and appoints Father John Bosco as its superior for life. His successor's term of office, however, is limited to twelve years.

1868. The bishop of Casale approves the Society of St. Francis de Sales as a diocesan congregation and grants its superior many spiritual faculties.

1869. Accompanied by letters of commendation from twenty-four bishops, the revised constitutions are again submitted to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. In a decree of March 1, the Salesian Society is definitively approved with the limited faculty of issuing dimissorial letters for ordinands. Approximately eight hundred boys now reside at the motherhouse, more than half of them being trained for the priesthood. The festive oratory boys number some three thousand. The premises are owned by the Salesian Society represented by the Rector Major.

General Statistics

The members of the Salesian Society total 124, of whom 60 are professed members, 42 are novices, and 22 are postulants.

Boarders in the four houses of the congregation: 1,210.

Day boys in schools or festive oratories: approximately 3,500.

Total number of boys entrusted to the members of the Salesian Congregation by Divine Providence: 4,710.

INDEX

ABBREVIATIONS

B.S.	Blessed Sacrament
D.B.	Don Bosco
E.H.D.	Exercise for a Happy Death
G.N.	Good Night
I.C.	Immaculate Conception
L.C.	*Letture Cattoliche*
M.H. of C.	Mary, Help of Christians
S.C.	Salesian Congregation

A

Adversaries: D.B.'s reaction to, 175; of both Pius IX and D.B., 391

Ailments: that afflicted D.B., 454

Albera, Paul: ordination, 48; perpetual profession, 161; unpleasant encounter with the archbishop of Turin, 297f

Alumni: D.B.'s solicitude for, 301; attachment to D.B., 326ff; a past pupil's reminiscenses of D.B., 351f; start of the Salesian Alumni Association, 428

Amiability: of D.B., 220, 223, 388, 394, 448

Angels: a challenge to the, 19f

Antonelli, Card. James: support of the S.C., 231f

Arabs: request to D.B. to accept A. orphans at the Oratory, 216; their arrival at the Oratory, 348f, 452; their baptism, 369

Authorities, Civil: D.B.'s respect for, 192

Authorities, Ecclesiastical: D.B.'s respect for, 192 357, 359

B

Baptismal Innocence *see* Innocence, Baptismal

Benefactors: D.B.'s gratitude for 130, 190, 339, 414f, 454; D.B.'s solicitude for, 190, 414f; esteem for D.B., 190f; reminiscenses of, 252f, 371; prosperity of D.B.'s b., 345

Biblioteca della Gioventù Italiana *see* *Italian Classics for the Young*

Bishops: D.B.'s efforts to obtain letters of recommendation from, 35-38, 73f, 201; favorable to D.B., 35, 37f, 47f, 53, 73f, 123f; unfavorable to D.B., 73f, 121f, 297f, 354-64; respect for b. fostered by D.B., 146; D.B.'s influence in the appointment of, 223f; visit of b. to the Oratory, 433. *See also* Riccardi, Alexander

Blessed Sacrament: value D.B. attached to visits to the, 17, 167, 271, 389, 442; a booklet by D.B., on the B.S. and a prediction, 151f; adoration of the B.S. to obtain the approval of the S.C. 247f

Blessing (D.B.'s): efficacy of, 148ff, 229, 258, 302-08, 423; advice sought by D.B. on whether or not he should continue giving his b., 153f. *See also* Charisms, Cures, Predictions

Bologna, Joseph: triennial profession, 161

Bonetti, John: copy editor for D.B., 1; writings, 2; deep piety, 2ff; letters from D.B. to, 4, 21, 208f, 393f, 425f, 427, 433f; unusual letter to D.B., 19f; love of the Church, 103-06

Bongiovanni, Joseph: illness and death, 138f

Books: Oratory pupils required to hand in list of, 184

Borel, John: heroic dedication to D.B., 256

Boys: love for D.B., 28; importance

of gaining their affection, 40; trust in D.B., 71; tips to, 157; tips on dealing with, 168, 409f 443. *See also* Pupils

C

Cagliero, John: unpleasant encounters with Archbishop Riccardi, 46f, 355ff

California: request for a Salesian foundation in, 434

Cardinals: scandalous rebellion of a, 101-07; D.B.'s cure of the nephew of a cardinal, 229; Pius IX's wish to make D.B. a c., 397

Carnival: D.B.'s participation in the Turin c. of *1869*, 244ff; D.B.'s rejection of a donation from the proceeds of the c. season, 412

Catechisms: D.B.'s desire for a standard c. for the whole Church, 400

Catholic Press: D.B.'s promotion of the, 17; D.B.'s *Selection from Latin Classics*, 194f; D.B.'s *Italian Classics for the Young*, 195ff. *See also Letture Cattoliche*

Cattolico Provveduto: complimentary copies to benefactors, 72; publication of, 117

Cerruti, Francis: literary works, 195; director at Alassio, 446

Charisms: of Salesian pupils, 212f

Charisms (D.B.'s): reading of hearts 153, 155f, 352; vision of things from afar, 316f; 389; bilocation, 316f. *See also* Cures, Predictions (D.B.'s)

Charity: D.B.'s exhortations to, 17, 168; 262, 268f; of D.B. toward the poor, 29, 148, 295f

Chastity: testimonials about c. of D.B., 179ff; safeguards for, 188f, 199, 282f, 332, 443

Cheerfulness: D.B.'s efforts to foster c., 3, 296, 394

Christian Formation: constantly imparted by D.B., 168, 447f

Church (Catholic): scandalous rebellion of a cardinal, 101-07; D.B.'s love for the, 103, 322f

Church History: partial work by D.B. and Fr. Bonetti on a universal c.h., 2; new edition of D.B.'s c.h., 295, 451; suggestions of Pius IX to D.B. about a, 392; criticism of D.B.'s c.h., 424f

Church of M.H. of C.: description of interior, 109ff; amazement at its completion, 111f; blessing of the bells, 113f; appurtenances, 118f; gift of Pius IX to the, 119; Latin inscriptions, 120, 468ff; consecration festivities, 125-29, 130-33, 134-38; sacred music, 128f; spiritual favors obtained during the consecration festivities, 132f; commemorative medal, 135; closing of the consecration festivities, 137f; L.C. booklet on the consecration festivities, 190; the bell towers, 276; inauguration of the organ, 436

Church of St. John the Evangelist: preliminary plans, 365, 427, 445, 454

Cinzano, Vincent: death, 403f

Circulars (D.B.'s): confidence in the superior, 324ff

Clerics: letters to D.B., 28; attempts to alienate D.B.'s c., 48; false accusations about their intellectual formation, 49; D.B.'s advice to, 166, 188f, 207, 210f, 451f; attachment to D.B., 452

Comboni, Daniel; invitation to D.B. to send Salesians to Egypt, 430f

Companions: D.B.'s admonitions about avoiding bad c., 23, 68f, 90, 179, 208, 211, 300

Conferences (D.B.'s): annual c. of St. Francis de Sales: *1868*, 38ff; *1869*, 282ff; *1870*, 404ff; on avoiding certain disorders, 207, 408ff; about the approval of the S.C., 260-63; on unity, 268-71; on the religious life, 282ff; about the election of the members of the Superior Chapter, 366ff; about his audiences with Pius IX, 390-93. *See also* Circulars (D.B.'s), Sermons (D.B.'s)

Confession, Seal of *see* Seal of Confession

Confessions: fruits and frequency of, 167, 281; causes of bad c., 279ff; D.B.'s zeal in hearing c., 258, 327

Confessors: qualifications for, 242

Confraternity of Mary, Help of Christians: origin, 219; steps toward canonical erection, 244; decree of erection, 277; diocesan approval, 285; L.C. issue on the, 285; promotion to archconfraternity, 420

Constantinople: orphans from C. accepted at the Oratory, 430

Conversation: D.B.'s insistent admonitions on avoiding evil c., 68f, 200, 208, 210, 300f, 389f, 427

Conversions: of a skeptical doctor, 306f; of a fallen-away priest, 366
Costamagna, James: ordination and rebuff from the archbishop of Turin, 161
Cures (D.B.'s): miscellaneous c., 42, 129, 149, 154, 229, 231f, 239f, 258, 302-09, 423; reasons why occasionally c. are not granted, 155. *See also* Blessings (D.B.'s), Charisms, Predictions

D

Damnation: main causes of, 86f, 90, 98, 280
Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians: beginnings, 288-94; reticence of D.B. to disclose his plans about the, 294
Daughters of Mary Immaculate: D.B.'s first knowledge of the, 289; activities, 290ff; exhortation by D.B., 292, start of community life, 293f
Death: a frequent topic of D.B., 31, 40, 472
Debts: D.B.'s promptness in clearing d., 344f
Devil: in D.B.'s dreams, 68f, 87; D.B.'s incessant war against the, 406f
Dimissorials: D.B.'s efforts to obtain authorization to issue d., 170, 226f; authorization to issue d. granted to D.B., 237f, 257, 261, 438; first d. issued by D.B., 267
Dioceses: D.B.'s help to the archdiocese of Turin, 298; D.B.'s efforts on behalf of Italian vacant dioceses, 223f
Directors (Salesian): tips to, 179, 208, 446f; annual school report, 181
Directory (Salesian): first issue, 368, 370
Disobedience: dire effects of, 97f
Dominic Savio, St.: favors received through the intercession of, 277
Dreams (D.B.'s): comments on, 5f, 214; *Predictions for 1868,* 6-11; mysterious personages, 8, 78, 80f, 84; *A Raging Torrent and Wild Beasts,* 68ff; *A Mysterious Vine,* 75-84; *To Hell and Back,* 85-99; about people's future, 155f; *Two Pallbearers and a Coffin,* 184f; about boys' lifespan, 275; *Deadly Nooses,* 279ff; *The Voice of Heaven,* 373-76
Dreams (D.B.'s): Symbolic Animals—lions, tigers, wolves, bears, 69; toads, 75; worms, 94; pigs, 389
Durando, Celestine: Latin-Italian dictionary, 194

E

Egypt: invitation to D.B. to send Salesians to, 430f
Esteem: for D.B., 139, 180, 226, 234, 256, 334f, 352, 364, 398, 417, 433, 447f
Exercise for a Happy Death: exhortations to make it well, 59, 189. *See also* Predictions (D.B.'s)
Expedients (D.B.'s): invitation to best boys to dine with D.B., 352f
Experience, Handbook of: 423

F

Fathers of the Church: D.B.'s intention to publish all their works, 195
Fear of God: Importance D.B. gave to the, 189, 199
Festive Oratory of St. Aloysius: plans for expansion, 315, 365
Festive Oratory of St. Francis de Sales: causes of attendance decline, 349f
Festive Oratories: a pupil's reminiscenses, 450f
Fiction: D.B.'s criticism of *I Promessi Sposi,* 184
Florence (City): D.B.'s second trip to, 219, 221-24, 255
Fortitude: of D.B. in trying circumstances, 175ff, 226f, 297f, 341ff, 354-64
Francesia, John Baptist: letters to F. Oreglia, 57f, 61; literary works, 194; letters from D.B. to, 394

G

Galantuomo, Il: excerpt from Preface, *1869,* 197; *1871,* 456f. *See also Letture Cattoliche*
Garino, John: prediction of D.B., 447
Gastaldi, Lawrence: letter to the Holy See in support of D.B., 219f; defense of papal infallibility, 404
Generosity: of D.B. with needy boys, 148, 182; with the ungrateful, 341ff
Good Nights (Salesian): Dates—*September 1868,* 158f; *November 1868,* 186-89; *December 1868,* 199f; *January 1869,* 218f; *March 1869,*

265-71; *March, 1870,* 407f
Good Nights (Salesian): Topics—devotion to Our Lady, 72, 112, 159, 199; novenas fatal to bad boys, 158; sincerity in confession, 159; deathbed repentance, 159; tips for safeguarding purity, 179f, 188f 199; All Souls' Day, 186; laziness and lukewarmness, 186; constancy in overcoming difficulties, 187; mutual charity, 187; real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, 188; good example by priests and clerics, 188f; church hierarchy, 190; liturgical appurtenances, 190; humility, 199; openness with superiors, 199f; amazing conversion, 218; journey to Rome, 265f; Guardian Angels, 408. *See also* Dreams (D.B.'s)
Greed: Punishment of, 143, 272ff
Guardian Angels: D.B.'s devotion to the, 408

H

Hail Mary: instant cures through the recitation of a, 129
Heaven: delights of h. as described by D.B., 421
Hell: a dream on, 85-99
Holy Water: its power against the devil, 76, 279f
Humility: of D.B., 127, 139f, 153f, 205f, 406f, 424f, 448

I

Idleness: avoidance of, 98, 208, 263, 282
Immaculate Conception, Feast of the: a challenge to the angels, 19-28; G.N. in preparation for the, 199f
Impurity: gluttony, pride and i., 79, 199; prudence in talking about i., 179f; symbols of i. in D.B.'s dreams, 389 *See also* Purity
Infallibility of the Pope *see* Popes—Infallibility
Innocence, Baptismal: belief in D.B.'s b. i., 181
Inscriptions: on the leaves of a vine (dream), 78, 82; on boys' foreheads (dream), 79; on hailstones (dream), 83; on the gates and various sections of hell (dream), 89, 91f, 94ff; on the bells of the Church of M.H. of C., 113f; inside the Church of M.H. of C., 120, 468ff
Italian Classics for the Young: expurgated edition, 195f

J

Jesuits: Pius IX's exhortation to D.B. to imitate the J. in their spirit of solidarity, 262
John the Evangelist, St.—Church of *see* Church of St. John the Evangelist
Joseph, St.: altar and painting in the Church of M.H. of C., 110; issue of L.C. on, 424
Journeys (D.B.'s): incidents 42ff, 285ff, 326ff, 379f; to Casale (*1868*), 42; to Fenestrelle (*1868*), 148f; to Florence (*1869*), 219, 221-24, 255; to Rome (*1869*), 225-54; to Rome (*1870*), 379-402

L

Lanzo: visit by D.B. and dream about the L. pupils, 67-70; participation in the Oratory festivities, 125, 138; D.B.'s prediction about a boy's death, 198; visit by D.B. and narration of a dream, 278-81
Lasagna, Louis: triennial profession, 161
Last Things: *see* Death, Heaven, Hell
Latin: D.B.'s promotion of, 137
Legacies: drawbacks of, 314, 341ff
Lemoyne, J.B.: letters from D.B.,17, 178f, 209f, 350f, 354, 420f
Letters (D.B.'s): to Salesians, 4, 17, 21, 30, 33, 41, 64, 208, 250, 315f, 340f, 349ff, 389f, 393f, 418, 425, 427, 433f, 438; to benefactors and their families, 14, 426, 434f; to prelates, 193, 205f, 425; to a mother superior, 339; to a seminarian, 418. *See also* Circulars (D.B.'s)
Letture Cattoliche: issues, 16, 34, 57, 141, 147, 169, 190, 206, 217, 278, 285, 309, 322, 350, 365, 370, 420, 424, 451; biography of E. Saccardi, 147; D.B.'s quest for collaborators, 190; presentation of set of L.C. to Pius IX, 391. *See also* Catholic Press, *Galantuomo*

M

Mary, Blessed Virgin: messages for the Mirabello boys, 21-28; D.B.'s efforts to instill devotion to, 72, 112f, 159, 179, 209, 215; protection in dangers, 178, 420; prelates cured through the intercession of, 231f, 239f. *See also* Mary, Help of Christians
Mary, Help of Christians: medals of, 32, 58, 120; L.C. issue on, 57;

efficacy of invocation to 136; inscription on a banner seen by D.B. in a dream, 378; feast of (*1870*), 422f
Mass: D.B.'s respect for sacred ceremonies, 189, policy concerning M. stipends, 446f
Maxims (D.B.'s): *"Gutta cavat lapidem,"* 187: "Idling, wining and dining are the ruin of chastity," 282; *"Nascimur in lacrymis, lacrymosos ducimus annos, terminat in lacrymis ultima nostra dies,"* 414; "Work for souls, not money," 452
Mazzarello, Mary, St.: biographical notes, 289f; enrollment among the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, 290; zeal for souls, 290ff; high opinion of D.B.'s sanctity, 293
Mirabello: an amazing challenge, 19f; Our Lady's messages to the boys of, 21-28; visits by D.B., 42; participation in the consecration festivities of the Church of M.H. of C., 125f, 138; visit of Bishop Rota, 145; plans to move to Borgo San Martino, 413, 426
Modesty: of D.B., 179f
Mornese: visit by D.B. in *1869,* 285, 288
Mortification: D.B.'s insistence on, 164ff, 282ff

N

Name Day (D.B.'s): celebration of D.B 's n.d., *1868,* 141; *1869,* 312; *1870,* 428f
Nigeria: remote plans for sending Salesian missionaries to, 430f
Nosegays (D.B.'s): for Fr. Bonetti, 3, 467f; in preparation to the feast of the Nativity of Mary, 158f; during the I.C. novena, 199
Novels *see* Fiction
Novenas: tips for the n. in honor of M.H. of C., 112f, 139; efficacy of the novena to M.H. of C., 131, 136, 240; fatal to bad boys, 158; ineffective because of greed, 272ff

O

Obedience: and eternal salvation, 91, 98; things that undermine o., 142; remarks by D.B. on, 241, 268ff, 419
Obituary Letters: D.B.'s first mention of, 368
Oratory (Valdocco): deaths—*1868,* 32, 60f, 115, 182; *1869,* 299f, 368; *1870,* 403, 411, 453; new policy as regards holidays and vacations, 65; unique goal, 141; general admission policy, 148; installment of an additional printing press, 147; opening of a bakery, 181; statistics of *1868-69,* 217; reception for D.B. at his return from Rome (*1869*), 255f, 258ff; family spirit, 265, 324, 352f, 448f; piety, 447f, 455; character formation, 449f; epidemic, 455
Ordinations: difficulties encounterd by Salesians for their o., 46ff
Oreglia, Frederick: letters from D.B., 30, 33, 41, 64; rumors about his leaving the S.C., 52, 57; withdrawal from the S.C., 335-38

P

Papal Infallibility: *see* Popes—Infallibility
Past Pupils *see* Alumni
Pastors: relations between Salesian schools and p., 446f
Patience: of D.B. in trying circumstances, 176f, 193, 226f, 354-64; in his ailments, 454
Pestarino, Dominic: first meeting with D.B., 289: gift of a house to the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, 293f
Piety: things detrimental to piety, 142; means to strengthen p., 447
Pius IX; convocation of Vatican I Ecumenical Council, 144; goodwill toward the S.C., 169, 234, 236f, 239, 248, 393; audiences granted to D.B., *1869,* 234-37, 243f, 248; *1870,* 390-93, 400; predictions about the length of his pontificate, 243, 400; invitation to D.B. to open a house of studies in Rome, 243f, 393; advice to D.B., 248f, 262f, 393; message for the Oratory boys, 266, 393; gift from the Oratory boys to, 281, 284; golden jubilee of ordination, 281, 284; letter to D.B., 313f; desire to have the Salesians in Rome, 243f, 393, 395; copy of D.B.'s prophetic dream given to, 396; Pius IX's desire to have D.B. move to Rome, 397; D.B.'s message to Pius IX about fleeing from Rome, 444
Politics: D.B.'s p., 192
Poor: D.B.'s generosity toward the, 29, 148, 295f
Popes: L.C. issues on the popes, 16, 217; D.B.'s love and veneration for

the, 119, 144, 284, 322; D.B.'s mediation between the Italian Government and the Holy See, 221f
Popes—Infallibility: D.B.'s contribution to the proclamation of the dogma of papal i., 322f, 372, 381-88, 395f; hostility toward the, 372f, 381; formal discussion at the council, 404; proclamation of dogma of papal i., 431f. *See also* Vatican Council I
Poverty: D.B.'s practice of, 225, 379
Practices of piety: D.B.'s moderation in setting p. of p. for boys, 145; sermon by D.B. on the p. of p. for Salesians, 166ff
Prayer: necessity of, 98; D.B.'s reliance on, 211, 219, 265, 442
Predictions (D.B.'s): observations on, 5f, 12f, 214; about deaths, 6ff, 12f, 59f, 185, 198, 210, 456; about wars, 9; about epidemics, 10; about families, 10; fulfillment of, 12f, 32, 59f, 115, 127, 163f, 181, 214ff, 246, 299, 328f, 368f, 429, 434f, 437f, 453, 456; about boy's future, 127, 156, 203, 275, 403; about Pius IX's pontificate, 243, 248; about the seizure of Rome, 243, 398f; miscellaneous p., 437f; about clerics & priests, 447. *See also* Charisms (D.B.'s), Cures.
Preventive System (Salesian): application of the, 38, 168, 195f, 271, 332, 410, 443; expurgation of text books, 194ff
Pride: sad effects of, 83, 199
Priests: weak faith of some p., 162 D.B.'s charitable concern for fallen-away p., 366, 439; D.B.'s exhortations to a newly-ordained p., 418; D.B.'s zeal in providing p. for the Ticino Canton, 459-62
Providence, Divine: interventions in D.B.'s behalf, 29, 118ff, 249; and D.B.'s benefactors, 345f
Prudence: of D.B. in seeking the Holy See's approval of the S.C., 233
Punishments: tips on, 168, 410
Pupils: tips for the Christian formation of, 167f; causes for dismissal of, 200; D.B.'s policy of making p. feel to be members of his family, 265; tips to directors on how to inform parents of their boy's dismissal, 443f
Purgatory: L.C. issues on the souls in, 169, 329; special prayers at the Oratory for the souls in, 246
Purity: tips for preserving p., 166, 179ff, 188f, 199, 410, 443; exaggerations to be avoided, 332

R

Religious Education *see* Christian Formation
Retreats (Salesians): *1868,* 160f, 164-69; *1869,* 330-35; *1870,* 438, 442f
Riccardi, Alexander: controversy with D.B. about ordinands, 46ff; reservations about the S.C., 53ff; frequent visits to the Oratory, 63; consecration of the Church of M.H. of C., 126f; hostility toward D.B., 161, 297f, 354-64; letter from D.B. to, 205f; receipt of decree of approval of the S.C., 256f; approval of the confraternity of M.H. of C., 285; death, 445
Riches: danger of attachment to, 142f
Rome: D.B.'s trip to, 225f; audiences with Pius IX, 234ff; D.B.'s predictions about fall of, 243; invitation to D.B. to open houses in Rome, 243f, 249f, 301, 319ff, 368, 393, 395; D.B.'s advice to religious superiors in anticipation of the seizure of, 399; seizure of, 422ff; prediction of D.B. about future of, 443. *See also* Journeys, Pius IX, Vatican Council I
Ronchail, Joseph: first meeting with D.B., 148f
Rosary: daily recitation of the, 167, 219
Rosary, Feast of Our Lady of the: at Becchi in *1868,* 178; *1869,* 347; *1870,* 444
Rua, Michael: excerpts from the chronicle of, 29, 31, 51, 148, 162, 181, 198, 205, 217, 255f, 258f; critical illness, 150ff; prediction of D.B., 152; letters from D.B., 241, 250, 383, 389f

S

St. Peter's Centenary: third revised edition, 250f
Salesian Congregation: membership: *1868,* 4; *1869,* 217; *1870,* 370; D.B.'s efforts toward obtaining the Holy See's approval of the, 35ff, 226ff, 231f, 247f; brief history of the S.C., 35ff; approval by the bishop of Casale, 37f; religious professions, 161, 168f, 282, 331, 341, 442f;

obstacles to the approval of the, 170-77, 226f; 238f; individual episcopal commendations, 192; D.B.'s unsuccessful efforts for a collective episcopal commendation, 192f, opponents of approval won over by D.B., 229-32, 239f; definitive approval of the S.C., 248, 257f, 261; delivery of decree of approval to the archbishop of Turin, 256f; conferences by D.B. on the approval of the S.C., 260-64, 265-71; Pius IX's advice about admission of members, 262; decree of approval demanded by the king's attorney general, 310f; opposition from civil authorities, 311; election of members of the Superior Chapter, 366ff; decision to publish a Salesian directory, 368; annual report on the state of the S.C., 378; mention of the S.C. at a session of Vatican Council I, 392. *See also* Dimissorials, Pius IX, Salesian Congregation—Houses, Salesian Congregation—Rules

Salesian Congregation—Houses: preliminaries about foundations in Rome, 30f, 62, 192, 223, 243f, 249f, 301, 319ff, 368; Florence, 220; Cherasco, 315; California, 434; Alassio, 406, 413, 439, 446; Borgo San Martino, 446; Varazze, 456; D.B.'s view about accepting the direction of houses partially controlled by outside agencies 31; requests for other foundations, 39, 426, 430; Pius IX's exhortation about working for the poor, 263; relationship between Salesian houses and parishes, 446f

Salesian Congregation—Rules: public weekly reading, 39; observations of the archbishop of Turin to the Holy See, 53ff; Holy See's refusal of approval, 176, 230; D.B.'s trips to Rome, 219, 225-54, 379-402; D.B.'s physical exhaustion, 247f; encouragement from Pius IX, 248f

Salesian Schools: solemn reading of the regulations, 183; relationship with local parishes, 446f

Salvation of Souls: the purpose of all D.B.'s undertakings, 113, 141, 148, 318, 418; the noblest mission, 334

Savio, Dominic, St. *see* Dominic Savio, St.

Scandal: frequent topic of D.B.'s talks and sermons, 69, 200, 205, 300f; a church s., 101-07

Seal of Confession: scrupulously maintained by D.B., 71

Selections from Latin Classics: D.B.'s purpose in planning the publication of, 194

Serenity: of D.B. under all circumstances, 193, 319ff

Sermons (D.B.'s): tips by D.B. on topics and presentation, 14ff; popularity and efficacy of, 161; on mortification, 164ff; on the practices of piety, 166ff; exhortation on mutual charity, 168; on scandal, 205

Sin: symbols of the state of, 68f; horror of s. instilled by D.B., 79, 82, 389; D.B.'s charism in detecting the state of, 389f; D.B.'s efforts to prevent s., 195f

Spiritual Life: D.B.'s solicitude for his boy's s.l., 447f

Spiritual Reading: symbolized in a dream, 88

Stipends (Mass) *see* Mass

Strenna: 1868, 6, 11; *1869,* 208ff; *1870,* 369

Superiors: tips to, 178f, 333, 340, 443f; respect due to, 270

Switzerland: D.B.'s contribution to the preservation of the faith in the Ticino Canton, 458-64

T

Tact: of D.B., 315-18

Temperance: D.B.'s exhortations, 282f

Temptations: tips on how to overcome t., 167, 332

Theater: stage plays at the Oratory, 137

U

Unity: D.B.'s exhortations to, 268-71, 408f

V

Vacations: new Oratory policy as regards v., 65; tips for, 157

Vatican Council I: convocation, 144f; D.B.'s interest in, 347; solemn opening of, 365f; donation of the Oratory boys to, 369; prophetic dreams of D.B., 373-76; mention of the S.C. at a session of, 392; formal discussion of papal infallibility, 404; proclamation of the dogma of papal infallibility, 431f. *See also* Popes—Infallibility

Victor Emmanuel II: invitation to D.B. to see him in Florence, 217, 223

Vincentians: help to D.B. in his efforts to obtain approval of the rules, 233
Vocation (Salesian): ways of attracting candidates, 40, 265, 406; signs of a, 331; D.B.'s lofty esteem of the, 338
Vocation (Priestly): D.B.'s ways of fostering v., 40, 189f, 265, 406

W

Work: to be inspired by faith, hope and charity, 332f
Writings (D.B.'s): D.B.'s insistence on submitting his w. to his co-workers, 147. *See also* Catholic Press, *Galantuomo, Letture Cattoliche*