

# Once Upon a Time In Old New York

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## The Background

December 30, 1842. An Italian immigrant from Genoa has landed in New York City. A tired immigration officer asks the immigrant his name. He gives it.

The officer: "What does this name mean in English?"

Knowing some English, the man replies that it means a smith.

The officer: "All right. Your name now is Smith," and he changed the name on the immigration papers.

Who was the immigrant? He was the paternal grandfather of the famous four-term Governor of the State of New York—Alfred Emmanuel Smith.

What was the immigrant's real surname? It is lost to history. It might have been "ferraio" or "fabbro," both of which mean a "smith" or a "blacksmith."<sup>1</sup>

Who can tell how many other persons' names were changed or shortened by immigration officials? It was a real possibility, as the work of the early Salesians in this country might have shown if their secretaries had kept

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert Moses, "Let's Look at the Record," in *The New York Times* Sunday, December 30, 1973, Section D, 11, column 2. Cf. also Matthew and Hannah Josephson, *Al Smith: Hero of the Cities. A Political Portrait, Drawing from the Papers of Frances Perkins*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1969, 14-18.

detailed records of all the times the Salesians were called to intercede on behalf of immigrants at Ellis Island.<sup>2</sup>

Fast forward to August 30, 1883. St. John Bosco had a dream. Or should it be called a prophetic vision? In that dream as he called it, the Saint saw the future widespread development of the Salesian work in South America.

At one moment in that famous and lengthy dream St. John Bosco asked his guide a point-blank question out of the blue:

“When shall we go to Boston, where they are awaiting us?”

The answer, vague and indefinite: “Everything at its proper time.”<sup>3</sup>

## The Archbishop of Boston, Don Bosco and Father Rua

Before the Salesians arrived in the Eastern United States in 1898 and even before they arrived in California in 1897, two other curious incidents took place which it is useful to relate. Both events, small though they might be, indicate that Don Bosco and his Salesians were not unknown nor unappreciated in the United States even at that early period in the history of the Salesian Society.

December 26, 1886. Archbishop John Joseph Williams,<sup>4</sup> the Ordinary of the Archdiocese of Boston, had previously sent a generous donation to Don

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<sup>2</sup> At Ellis Island immigrants to the United States were processed from 1892 to 1943. The immigration center was then moved to New York City, but Ellis Island was retained as a detention place for deportees until 1954. In 1965 it became part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument and was opened to visitors in 1976. In recent years Ellis Island Immigration center was renovated and in 1990 was again opened to visitors. See “Ellis Island,” in *The Encyclopedia Americana*, International Edition, vol. 10, 255, Danbury, Ct, Grolier, Inc., 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Eugenio Ceria, *Memorie Biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco*, 1883, vol. 16, 389, Torino, Italia, Società Editrice Internazionale, 1935.

<sup>4</sup> John Joseph Williams, fourth Bishop and first Archbishop of Boston, was born in Boston, Massachusetts on April 27, 1822, and died there on August 30, 1907. He was the son of Michael and Ann (Egan) Williams, Irish immigrants. John attended Boston’s cathedral school, went to the Sulpician college in Montreal, Canada, and to the Sulpician seminary in Paris, France, and was ordained there on May 17, 1845.

Bosco for the Salesian missions in South America. On that day, December 26, Don Bosco sent a letter in French, from his oratory in Turin, Italy, expressing his gratitude and promise of prayers for the Archbishop and his Archdiocese.<sup>5</sup>

Archbishop Williams appears on the scene again. This time in 1889, with a letter written in French on April 16 to Father Michael Rua,<sup>6</sup> who was then the Superior General, Don Bosco having died on January 31, 1888. Once more the Archbishop sent a very generous donation consisting of 20 pounds, 8

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Williams was a pastoral Bishop rather than a church statesman. His first tasks were to acquire priests and religious orders of men and women, to erect churches, schools, hospitals, charitable institutions, and a seminary. Williams considered the new Cathedral in Boston and St. John's Seminary in Brighton (just outside of Boston) in September of 1884 as his two most important projects. Williams attended the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1866 and the Vatican Council I in 1869.

When the Catholics of New England were severely harassed in the late 1800s, the Archbishop made every effort to mitigate the attacks and counseled prudence to the Catholics—not an easy task when his flock included rising political leaders and vociferous journalists. When some of his people faced financial ruin following the fire and panic of 1872-73, he embarked on a program to help victims of business failure. Williams founded the first conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in New England, and established the Catholic Union, which was a layman's organization providing for participation in the spiritual and secular affairs of the Archdiocese.

On the national scene he was regarded variously as too conciliatory or too conservative. He aligned himself with so-called liberals among the hierarchy on such issues as the Knights of Labor, while on others, such as the Catholic school debate, he took a conservative stand. (See "Williams, John Joseph" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 14, 943, New York, NY, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967.)

<sup>5</sup> Archbishop Williams Papers, Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston, Number 236, Brighton, MA. A photocopy of Don Bosco's letter in French to Archbishop John Joseph Williams is preserved in the Archives of the Province of St. Philip Apostle New Rochelle, NY. The letter has been made use of here with the permission of the Archivist, Ronald D. Patkus, of the Archdiocese of Boston.

<sup>6</sup> Father Michael Rua was born in Turin Italy on June 9, 1837. He was ordained at Caselle on July 29, 1860; professed at Turin on May 14, 1862. He became Rector Major upon the death of Don Bosco on January 31, 1888, and remained Rector Major until he died in Turin on April 6, 1910. He was declared Blessed by Pope Paul VI on October 29, 1972. (For a full account of the life of Blessed Michael Rua, see *The Heroic Fidelity of Venerable Michael Rua, Disciple of and Successor to Saint John Bosco*, by Rev. Angelo Franco, S.D.B., with foreword by Richard Pittini, D.D., S.D.B., Archbishop of Santo Domingo, Paterson, NJ, Salesiana Publishers & Distributors, 1955. See also *Il Servo di Dio Michele Rua, Successore del Beato D. Bosco*, 3 volumes, by Angelo Amadei, Sacerdote Salesiano, Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale, 1931.)

shillings, and 2 pence for the South American Salesian missions.<sup>7</sup> Don Rua, through his secretary, sent a letter of gratitude to the Archbishop. On the Archbishop's letter Don Rua had written, in Italian, to his secretary this brief note with two words abbreviated: "Prepari bella lett. (lettera) di ringr. (ringraziamento)." ("Prepare a beautiful letter of thanks.")<sup>8</sup>

From all of the above, is it not conceivable that Archbishop Williams had previously asked Don Bosco for Salesians to work in his Archdiocese prior to Don Bosco's missionary dream of August 30, 1883? Had he possibly asked even Father Rua for Salesians while he was Superior General? Until some letters are found showing that request had been made, we will probably never know for sure.

## The Melting Pot

What was the lower East Side in New York City like when the Salesians were called to work there toward the end of the nineteenth century? Following is a description from the book, *Al Smith—Hero of the Cities*.

Alfred Smith grew up in a district which in the seventies embraced human elements of the most astonishing diversity in character, language, and station in life. While predominantly Irish since the 1840s, the old Fourth Ward during his boyhood came to hold an increasing proportion of Germans, Italians, Jews, Spanish speaking immigrants, and even a small Chinese community in Pell Street.

...Large numbers of homeless children swarmed through the streets dodging the horse-drawn carts playing before the swinging doors of the saloons or beer dens. Indeed the downtown sector of the city was well remembered by

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<sup>7</sup> In this essay there are some references to letters received or sent by Salesian superiors and archbishops. These letters in their originals are held in the Archivio Salesiano Centrale, Via della Pisana 1111, Rome, Italy (cited as ASC followed by a number, the letter writer's name and the letter's date); or in the Archdiocesan Archives, St. Joseph's Seminary, Yonkers, N. Y. (cited as AANY followed by a number, the letter writer's name and the letter's date). Photocopies of these letters are in the Archives of the Province of St. Philip Apostle, New Rochelle, New York.

<sup>8</sup> ASC, 3824 C 6. Letter from Archbishop John Joseph Williams, Boston, MA, April 16, 1889.

visitors for its gangs of ragamuffins, those bold, half-wild abandoned or orphaned children who survived by selling newspapers, blacking boots or running errands for disreputable characters, and who slept under the docks, in cellars, or in decaying warehouses

As fantastic as anything else were the places of refuge for alcoholic derelicts known as Gospel Missions, which were run by evangelistic rescue workers. One of these called MacCauley's Helping Hand for Men was located in one of the focal centers of prostitution, on Water Street. A woman worker in one of these missions reporting on her years of service among the outcasts of the district, declared that "only a Zola<sup>9</sup> could describe adequately what any eye may see in this locality."

Indeed the old Lower East Side of New York City was transformed during the period of Alfred Smith's youth into a Dantesque region, a kind of nether world, in the eyes of observers like Jacob Riis.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Zola, Émile was born in Paris on April 2, 1840, and died there on September 29, 1902. His full name was Émile Édouard Charles Antoine. His father was an engineer of Italian descent, and Emile spent most of his youth at Aix-en-Provence. Upon his father's death he returned to Paris with his mother. There he distinguished himself quite early by journalistic pieces and art criticism. Zola's numerous works were inspired by Balzac's *Comédie Humaine*, but he fell short of the scope and creative force of that great work. Zola is sometimes credited with being the "father" of literary naturalism.

<sup>10</sup> Riis, Jacob Augustus, an American journalist, author, and social reformer, was born in Ribe, Denmark on May 3, 1849. In 1870 he emigrated to the United States. He worked at various trades until 1877, when he became a police reporter for the New York Sun. He documented with photographs the poverty and squalor of the slum areas and the crowded tenements in New York City. By his lectures and writings he attracted wide attention for reform.

Partly as a result of the work of Jacob Riis, schools and playgrounds were established in slum areas, polluted water was eliminated, and many tenement-house abuses were corrected. Riis held only one official position, that of secretary of the New York small parks commission, in 1897.

Riis was a prolific writer. His first book, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), was a probing indictment of conditions in the slums and had great influence on the movement for reform. Among his many other writings are: *The Children of the Poor* (1892); *The Making of An American* (his autobiography) (1901); *The Battle with the*

...In the bleak tenements as many as eleven persons slept in one room, with a single water pump and one toilet in each of the yards to serve the needs of the inhabitants. From the streets one could hear harsh voices in furious quarrels, the sound of crashing stove lids being hurled about, or a voice crying out, "Mike, give a dollar for the children!" To which the only reply would be a drunken oath. And throughout this teeming, noisome community, turning into a vast slum as the nineteenth century drew to a close, were thousands of the industrious poor, men and women and children, working long hours in the tenement sweatshops to make hats, envelopes, artificial flowers, dresses, pants, and even cigars.<sup>11</sup>

### The First Calls to New York City's Melting Pot

By the end of the nineteenth century a huge Italian population of 200,000 was seething in New York City.<sup>12</sup>

John Cardinal McCloskey,<sup>13</sup> the fourth Bishop and second Archbishop of New York from May, 1864, to October, 1885, and first American Cardinal, is

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*Slums* (1902); *Theodore Roosevelt, the Citizen* (1904); and *Neighbors: Life Stories of the Other Half* (1914).

<sup>11</sup> Matthew and Hannah Josephson, *op. cit.*, 28-31.

<sup>12</sup> Ceria, Eugenio, *Annali della Società Salesiana*, vol. II, part I, dal 1888 al 1898, 686, Torino, Italia, Società Editrice Internazionale.

<sup>13</sup> McCloskey, John, born in Brooklyn, NY, March 20, 1810; died in New York, October 10, 1885. His parents, Patrick McCloskey and Elizabeth Hassen, natives of Dungiven, Co. Derry, Ireland, came to America in 1808, soon after their marriage. In 1822 young John entered Mt. St. Mary's College, Emmitsburg, MD. He was ordained priest in St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York, January 12, 1834, the first native of New York State to enter the secular priesthood. His serious temperament, his thorough and elegant culture, and gentle bearing destined him for a professorship. In February, 1834, he was named philosophy professor in the new college just opened at Nyack-on-the-Hudson. He also showed himself an eloquent and graceful pulpit orator. However, the college was destroyed by fire in its first year.

Father McCloskey then travelled to Rome, Italy, where he was introduced to men who were making history—Cardinals Fesch and Weld, and others who later

known to have applied twice through his coadjutor, Bishop Michael Augustine Corrigan,<sup>14</sup> to Don Bosco for the services of the Salesians, on behalf of the thousands of Italian immigrants.

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became cardinals—Reisach, Angelo Mai, Mezzofanti, Wiseman, and Dr. Cullen. He developed a warm friendship with Pere Lacordaire. After some studies in Rome, he travelled through Italy, Germany, Belgium, France, England, and Ireland. In Rome his love for and devotion to the Holy See was deepened and became a cult of his after years.

Archbishop McCloskey attended the Vatican Council I, which proclaimed the Pope's infallibility. While holding the view that the declaration would not be expedient at that time, he nevertheless voted in favor of the definition. Pius IX said of him, "He is a man of princely mien and bearing." On March 15, 1875, Archbishop McCloskey was appointed Cardinal—the first in the United States. In the Cathedral on Mott Street, where he had been ordained priest, his investiture took place on April 27, 1875.

The growth of the Archdiocese and increasing infirmities called for an assistant, and thus on October 1, 1880, the Right Rev. Michael Augustine Corrigan, Bishop of Newark, New Jersey, was named Coadjutor with the right of succession. Finally on October 10, 1885, John Cardinal McCloskey went to his Maker and God. (See "McCloskey, John" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. IX, 485-488, New York, NY, Robert Appleton Co., 1910.)

<sup>14</sup> Corrigan, Michael Augustine, third Archbishop of New York, was born August 13, 1839, in Newark, NJ. His parents came from Ireland. After graduation from St. Mary's College, Emmittsburg, Maryland in 1859, he entered the College of the Propaganda in Rome. He was one of the twelve students with whom the North American College was opened there on December 8, 1859. He was ordained priest in Rome on September 19, 1863, and received the degree of Doctor of Divinity there in 1864.

Upon his return to his native diocese, he filled various posts at Seton Hall College and Seminary, including its presidency, and also Vicar-general of the diocese. On May 4, 1873, he was consecrated Bishop of Newark. He brought the spiritual and temporal affairs of the diocese into conformity with the recommendations of the plenary councils of Baltimore.

The declining health of Cardinal McCloskey, Archbishop of New York, required the appointment of a coadjutor. Bishop Corrigan was chosen with the right of succession in 1880, and upon the death of Cardinal McCloskey in October of 1885, he assumed charge. He represented Cardinal McCloskey at the third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884. Upon returning from that council, he convoked a synod of the Archdiocese in November, 1886, to carry out the decrees of the council.

From the beginning of his episcopate in New York, Archbishop Corrigan was obliged to face the problem of the great influx of foreign, especially Italian, immigrants and its religious requirements. He had to guide and direct the charitable and educational interests of his diocese which rapidly and widely expanded during his administration. During the 17 years of his rule he was instrumental in the increase of the number of churches, chapels, and stations of the Archdiocese by 184, of schools by 75. His scholarship was deep and wide, extending to every branch of ecclesiastical

The first of Bishop Corrigan's letters to Don Bosco was dated December 15, 1883, from Rome, Italy. This, as well as all succeeding letters to Don Bosco and to Don Rua, were written in Italian. At the top of this 1883 letter Don Bosco wrote, "Rimandato a trattare nell' 1886." ("Postpone for treatment in 1886.")<sup>15</sup>

On March 7, 1884, Bishop Corrigan, in the name of the Cardinal, wrote to Don Bosco again, asking for Salesians to come to New York. In this letter the Bishop exclaims, "Ahime! Debbono tutti quanti gli emigranti Italiani perdere la Fede?" ("Alas, must all the Italian emigrants lose the Faith?")<sup>16</sup>

Cardinal McCloskey passed away on October 10, 1885, and bishop Corrigan became his successor as Archbishop of New York. He thereupon decided to build churches exclusively for the Italians and to turn to the religious orders to guarantee the success of the work. Thus he thought again of the Salesians.

## The Efforts to Obtain Salesians Continue

On May 21, 1887, an interesting letter was sent from Rome, Italy, and written in English by a Reverend Vincent M. De Porocco, to Archbishop Corrigan. With reference to Don Bosco the letter read as follows:

One of the chief thoughts which have occupied my mind on our arrival in Rome, has been the message which Your Grace entrusted me with, the finding of a few virtuous and good Italian priests. After careful inquiries, I was led to apply to Don Bosco, who has just opened his new church of

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learning; his piety was marked but unobtrusive; his methods gentle but firm. His devotion, his zeal, and his unceasing labors on behalf of religion make him a conspicuous figure in the history of the American Church of the nineteenth century.

Upon returning from a confirmation visit in the Bahamas, the Archbishop contracted a cold, which, aggravated by an accident, caused his death on May 5, 1902.

The only work his busy life as a priest and bishop permitted him to publish was a *Register of the Clergy Laboring in the Archdiocese of New York from Early Missions to 1885*. (See "Corrigan, Michael Augustine" In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. IV, 395-396, New York, NY, Robert Appleton Co., 1908.)

<sup>15</sup> ASC, 3319A8. Letter from Coadjutor Bishop Michael A. Corrigan, Rome, Italy, December 15, 1883.

<sup>16</sup> ASC, 3318E1-3318E2. Letter from Coadjutor Bishop Michael A. Corrigan, New York, NY, March 7, 1884.

the Sacred Heart <sup>17</sup> on the 14th, the day after we reached Rome. To my intense regret he is unable for the present, to comply with your desires, notwithstanding the influence brought to bear on him even by Cardinal Simeoni. <sup>18</sup> The opening of a house in London, England, <sup>19</sup> and of the Missions of Patagonia <sup>20</sup> entrusted to his Congregation of the Salesians, preclude all hope of help for this year. Meanwhile, his procurator in Rome would urge Your Grace to enter into direct correspondence with D[on] Bosco at his residence in Turin. In vain did I press the urgency of your claims to befriend the 55,000 abandoned Italians of your metropolitan City. The Salesians appear to act on the principle of first come first served.

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<sup>17</sup> Pope Leo XIII had asked Don Bosco to finish the Church of the Sacred Heart on the Esquiline Hill, in Via Marsala, Rome, Italy after the original builder could not finish for lack of funds. The builder had reached the laying of the foundation stone. Don Bosco undertook the task at the Pope's request, and largely through his efforts the Church was completed, and on May 14, 1887, it was consecrated (See Sheppard, Lancelot C., *Don Bosco*, The Newman Press, Westminster, MD, 1957, 151-160.)

<sup>18</sup> Simeoni, Giovanni, Cardinal, Secretary of State; born in Paliano near Palestrina (Rome), Italy, July 12, 1816; died in Rome, January 14, 1892. After teaching philosophy and theology at the Roman College of Propaganda, he became auditor in the Madrid Nunciature, titular Archbishop of Chalcedon, and Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda. After serving as Nuncio to Spain (1875-76), he became a Cardinal (1875), was secretary of State from December 18, 1876 until Pius IX's death (February 7, 1878), and thenceforth until his own death was prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith and Prefect of the Apostolic Palace. He bequeathed his notable art collection to Leo XIII. (See "Simeoni, Giovanni" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. XIII, 219, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co.)

<sup>19</sup> The Salesian Superior Chapter had already decided to found a house in London, and on November 14, 1897, a party set out to start a Salesian foundation in Battersea (London), where a young priest, Father Francis Bourne, had been advised in advance by letter from Don Bosco. Father Bourne, who later became Archbishop of Westminster and a Cardinal, had once been to see Don Bosco in Turin with the idea of becoming a Salesian. Don Bosco had told him that his future work lay elsewhere. (See Sheppard, Lancelot C., *op. cit.* 186.)

<sup>20</sup> On November 1, 1875, a band of 10 young Salesians—four priests and six lay Brothers—with Father John Cagliero (later a bishop and cardinal) at their head, left Turin, Italy, for Patagonia in Argentina. It was the first of many missionary expeditions sent out by Don Bosco himself. (See *Ibid.* 146.)

In connection with this important matter of which, on my part, I promise not to lose sight, I am happy to say that, just here at the Minerva, I have made the acquaintance of an excellent Venetian nobleman, who appears to enjoy the full confidence of the Patriarch of Venice.

[The letter goes on to relate a possibility of obtaining priests from that area, and finally closes with very little else.]<sup>21</sup>

Don Bosco's death on January 31, 1888, precluded any direct negotiations with archdiocesan authorities for sending Salesians to New York City. This task would be left to his successor, Father Michael Rua.

On November 14, 1888, Don Rua had written to Archbishop Corrigan, explaining why Salesians had not been sent to his Archdiocese. "Poor Don Bosco, in his great heart, had wanted to come to the aid of souls wherever there was need, but the means did not always match his good will." Don Rua went on to explain how the houses in Europe and South America were in need of help. He said that as soon as he could, he would send help to his Archdiocese, and hoped the Archbishop would, in his goodness, always remain the friend and protector of the Salesians.<sup>22</sup>

However, Archbishop Corrigan did not forget the Salesians and did not relent in his efforts to obtain them. Therefore, on October 26, 1897, he wrote to Don Rua. In that rather lengthy letter the Archbishop noted,

"Conscio del felice successo dell'Istituto del R. D. Bosco di b. m. sia nelle opere intraprese in Europa sia anche nella Patagonia, ardisco rivolgermi a lei come Superiore Generale dei Salesiani e proporle l'impresa di una chiesa italiana nella città di New York." ("Aware of the happy results of the Foundations of the Rev. Don Bosco of blessed memory, in Europe as well as in Patagonia, I am anxious to turn to you, the Superior General of the Salesians, and to offer you a church for the Italians in New York.")

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<sup>21</sup> AANY, C-13. Letter from Rev. Vincent M. De Porocco, Rome, Italy, May 21, 1887.

<sup>22</sup> AANY, C-21. Letter from Father Michael Rua, Turin, Italy, November 14, 1888.

In the same letter the Archbishop said that building churches in New York cost very much, and the land was very costly as well. At the beginning, he said, the mission would begin in a rented hall, and when a congregation would have been formed, it would be possible to think about building a church. He did not hide the fact that the sacrifices would not be light as regards the life of the priests and the finances. The Archbishop then added,

“Conosco bene che un Istituto Religioso, quale quello dei Salesiani, può far fronte a sacrificii più che il Sacerdote secolare.” (“I know that a religious institute like the Salesians can meet these sacrifices better than the secular priest.”)<sup>23</sup>

In his reply to that letter Don Rua wrote on November 8, 1897, that when the parish or church or locality would have been decided upon, the Salesian work in New York would commence with a few Salesians. A similar practice had been initiated in San Francisco, California. In time and as circumstances would call for, Don Rua continued, additional Salesians would be sent to further the work. Don Rua's letter read:

“Quando tale designazione (chiesa, o parrocchia o località) verrà stabilita, si comincerà con poco personale, come abbiamo fatto a S. Francisco di California e poi poco alla volta, a misura del bisogno e della possibilità si andrà aumentando.”<sup>24</sup>

As soon as Archbishop Corrigan received this answer, he replied on November 30, 1897,

“I am very happy to learn from your letter of the 8th, that the Institute of the Salesian Fathers is disposed to assume the charge of an Italian parish in the City of New York.” The Italian read, “Sono ben lieto apprendere dalla sua dell' 8 corr., che l'Istituto dei Padri Salesiani è disposto ad assumere l'incarico di una parrocchia italiana nella città di New York.”

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<sup>23</sup> ASC, 3319A2-3319A5. Letter from Archbishop Michael A. Corrigan, New York, NY, October 26, 1897.

<sup>24</sup> AANY, G-69. Letter from Father Michael Rua, Turin, Italy, November 8, 1897.

Archbishop Corrigan then went on to say that he hoped the Salesians would begin very soon. He reiterated what he had said in his letter of October 26, that the going would not be easy, and that when a congregation of the faithful would be formed, then land would be bought and a church built.<sup>25</sup>

### The Final Answer

Archbishop Corrigan must have been quite anxious about the coming of the Salesians, because on February 24, 1898, he wrote again to Don Rua a pleading letter, saying that the spiritual necessity of the faithful did not admit delay. Then he went on:

“Attesi ogni giorno una risposta definitiva, ma inutilmente: e perciò ardisco di nuovo inviarle la presente, pregandola affrettare la risoluzione del noto affare, poichè incombe il gravissimo obbligo di coscienza di provvedere alla salvezza delle anime.” (“Every day I wait for an answer, but I wait in vain. I am, therefore, writing again, begging you to speed up the resolution of this matter, since a grave obligation hangs on my conscience to provide for the salvation of souls.”)<sup>26</sup>

Undoubtedly after receiving this letter Don Rua must have been sorely tried, first because there were not sufficient Salesians available to staff even the works already in existence; and secondly because he himself felt the urgent desire to acquiesce to the archbishop's insistent requests. Thus the best he could do was to promise to send Salesians the coming October. The letter in which that promise was made seems to have been lost. However the promise is known first from a marginal note added to the archbishop's letter of February 24. The note said that a firm date would be in October. Secondly, the promise is known from

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<sup>25</sup> ASC, 3319A6-3319A7. Letter from Archbishop Michael A. Corrigan, New York, NY, November 30, 1897.

<sup>26</sup> ASC, 3319A9. Letter from Archbishop Michael A. Corrigan, New York, NY, February 24, 1898.

the Archbishop's letter of April 13, 1898, in which he acknowledged the promise, saying,

“Ricevei a suo tempo la preg<sup>ma</sup> della P. V. Rma. In riscontro mi affretto significarle che attenderò fino al prossimo ottobre, dal momento che prima di tale epoca sarebbe impossibile per l'Istituto inviare sacerdoti in New York.” (“I received in due time the very esteemed letter of your Reverence. In reply I hasten to tell you that I will wait until next October, since before then it would be impossible to send priests to New York.”)<sup>27</sup>

On May 17, 1898, Don Rua wrote to Archbishop Corrigan a letter which must have perplexed the prelate. In that letter Don Rua had written that he had hoped to send a fine Salesian confrere, working in Argentina at the time, to New York in October. But since the school year was in progress, it was not possible to meet his commitment of sending him in that month. However, the letter noted, there was still time to fulfill his promise of sending a Salesian to New York before that time if circumstances at the hands of Providence would allow.<sup>28</sup>

The next letter is also from Don Rua. He wrote it on October 21, 1898, and reminded Archbishop Corrigan that he had not forgotten his promise. Don Rua then gave the Archbishop the good news that three, or perhaps even four Salesian confreres, with the best of will, were making final preparations for their departure to New York.<sup>29</sup>

On November 7, 1898, Don Rua wrote to Archbishop Corrigan that the Salesians destined for New York had left Turin during the last week of October to obtain the blessing of the Holy Father in Rome. They would then go to Le Havre, France, by way of Turin, and from Le Havre sail for New York and would arrive on the 26th or 27th of the current month. Don Rua added that a party of

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<sup>27</sup> ASC, 3319A10. Letter from Archbishop Michael A. Corrigan, New York, NY, April 13, 1898.

<sup>28</sup> AANY, G-69. Letter from Father Michael Rua, Turin, Italy, May 17, 1898.

<sup>29</sup> AANY, G-69. Letter from Father Michael Rua, Turin, Italy, October 21, 1898.

four would arrive—two priests, a lay Salesian, and a layman. Father Ernest Coppo,<sup>30</sup> 30 years of age, had been assigned as head of the group.

Upon receiving the above letter, Archbishop Corrigan wrote to Don Rua on November 25, 1898:

...mi faccio un dovere significarle che già furono prese tutte le disposizioni necessarie per collocare i Padri Salesiani e per incontrarli al porto. Pel momento la situazione sarà precaria, e dopo qualche tempo verrà definitivamente sistemata. Mi auguro che gli eredi dello zelo e dello spirito di D. Bosco abbiano ad operare energicamente nella mia Diocesi.

(...I am fulfilling my duty of notifying you that everything has been arranged to accommodate the Salesian Fathers and to meet them when they reach port." The Archbishop then repeated an earlier warning: "For a while the situation will be precarious, but after some time things will definitely improve. I hope that the heirs of the zeal and the spirit of Don Bosco may work energetically in my Diocese.")<sup>31</sup>

## The Arrival at New York's Melting Pot

On November 12, 1898, the expedition of three Salesian missionaries, accompanied by a lay person whose name has been unrecorded, set out for New York from Le Havre, France. The Salesians were Fr. Ernest Coppo,<sup>32</sup> Father Marcellino Scagliola,<sup>33</sup> and the lay brother, Faustino Squassoni.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> AANY, G-69. Letter from Father Michael Rua, Turin, Italy, November 7, 1898.

<sup>31</sup> ASC, 3319All. Letter from Archbishop Michael A. Corrigan, New York, NY, November 25, 1898.

<sup>32</sup> Ernest Coppo was born at Rosignano (Alessandria), Italy, on February 6, 1870. He was a pupil at the Salesian School of Borgo San Martino and met St. John Bosco when the saint visited that school on various occasions.

Ernest went to the diocesan seminary at Casale for high school, college, and theology and was ordained priest for the diocese on August 7, 1892, at the age of 22.

After a year in the diocese as a teacher in the junior seminary he was attracted to the Salesian life and on September 20, 1893, entered the novitiate at

Foglizzo. On October 4, 1894, Father Coppo made his perpetual profession in the Salesian Society at Ivrea, into the hands of Father Michael Rua.

Father Coppo led the first group of three Salesians to begin the Salesian work in New York City in 1898. At various times and places in New York he filled the offices of pastor, director, and provincial of the Province of St. Philip Apostle, which at the time included the entire United States. In 1922 he was appointed Vicar Apostolic for the missions of Kimberly, Australia, and was consecrated Bishop for that purpose on December 24, 1922. He returned to Italy in 1927, because in that year the Pallotine Fathers, who had previously been encharged with that mission and had had to leave, now returned.

Back in Italy, Bishop Coppo preached retreats and was engaged in various pastoral works in and around Turin. Suddenly on December 28, 1948, Bishop Coppo took ill and died the same day at the Salesian Motherhouse in Turin. He was 78 years of age.

During his many years of active Salesian life, Ernest Coppo, both as a priest and later as a bishop, founded numerous groups of the Holy Name Society, for the purpose of defending the Holy Name of Jesus against profanity and blasphemy. (See "Coppo, Mons. Ernesto, Vescovo" in Valentini, Eugenio and Amedeo Rodino, *Dizionario Biografico dei Salesiani*, Torino, Italy, Ufficio Stampa Salesiano, 1969, 96; also obituary letter of Ernesto Coppo, by Father Pietro Ricaldone, Torino, 28 febbraio, 1949.)

<sup>33</sup> Marcellino Scagliola was born on September 16, 1843, at Calosso in the Province of Alessandria, Italy. He made his first profession on September 23, 1869, and perpetual profession on September 27, 1872. He was ordained priest in Buenos Aires on January 27, 1878. He died in Guadalajara, Mexico on May 24, 1931.

His obituary letter, written by the Provincial, Luigi J. Pedemonte, calls Father Marcellino "one of the many unsung missionaries sent by Don Bosco to South America in the missionary expedition of 1876." Father Marcellino worked in Buenos Aires and also in the City of Rosario, the Falkland Islands, and later in Spain, the United States, and finally in Mexico. Father Marcellino had a sanguine temperament and robust health and was an indefatigable worker in the missions. He was very much sought as a confessor. He died at the age of 85 on the Feast of Mary Help of Christians. His funeral brought out a large multitude of mourners. (See obituary letter for Sac. Marcellino Scagliola, by Sac. Luigi J. Pedemonte, Ispettore. Ispettorìa Messico-Cubana di N. S. di Guadalupe, Guanabacoa (Cuba), 12 giugno 1931.)

<sup>34</sup> Faustino Squassoni was born on July 17, 1871, at Borgo Trento (near Brescia), Italy. He entered the Salesian School at Treccate on October 15, 1895, made his novitiate at Ivrea, beginning on August 15, 1897, and he professed perpetually at the Oratory of Valdocco Turin, Italy on October 24, 1898. A few weeks later he was one of the three missionaries who left for New York City and landed on November 28, 1898, to work among the Italian immigrants in that metropolis.

Lay brother Squassoni was a humble person of simple needs and tastes. His health was not of the best, and after having worked in New York for 16 years, he returned to the Oratory of Valdocco in 1915. He never refused his Director's requests or offered excuses even for reasons of health. He died at Chieri, Italy on December 20,

When the missionary group arrived in the New World in the evening of November 28, 1898, the port of New York was dark and fogged in. Nearly all ships lay at anchor in the harbor. Father Coppo later recalled that the few vessels which moved warily (like the French ship, *La Tourainne* on which the Salesians were passengers) created an eerie atmosphere with the ships' fog horns blowing and dim ship lights shining through the fog. When the three pioneer Salesians finally disembarked that evening they were welcomed by Msgr. John Edwards<sup>35</sup> and Father J. Dougherty,<sup>36</sup> the representatives of Archbishop Corrigan.<sup>37</sup>

At this point it seems worthwhile to quote in full the following letter of Archbishop Corrigan, written on December 6, 1898, to Don Rua:

Rmo Padre Generale: Mi affretto parteciparle che il 28 dello scorso novembre giunsero in New York I Rev. Padri Coppo e Scagliola con due compagni laici. Vennero a visitarmi, e tutto fu disposto perchè nulla loro mancasse: si è

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1922 at the age of 51. (See obituary letter for lay brother Squassoni, Faustino, by Don Giov. Boselli, Collegio Municipale Alassio, Genova, Italia, 23 dicembre 1922.)

<sup>35</sup> John Edwards was born in Killaloe, County Clare, Ireland on January 5, 1833. He died on August 30, 1922, being almost 90 years old. He always enjoyed vigorous health and remained active until some months before his death. With his father he came to the United States at age 16, and they settled in Connecticut; but young John came to New York at 19 and entered St. Francis Xavier College on West 16th Street. He taught with the Jesuits for seven years. He then entered St. Joseph's Seminary in Troy, New York, to prepare for the priesthood. John was ordained by Archbishop McCloskey on August 17, 1866, and was appointed to the Seminary staff. For seven years he filled the posts of treasurer and teacher of sacred eloquence.

In 1873 Father Edwards returned to New York and became pastor of the Church of the Immaculate Conception on East 14 Street, and labored there for 33 years. It was during this time that he was charged with meeting the Salesians as they disembarked as missionaries to work among the Italian immigrants. At the age of 74 he was appointed pastor of St. Joseph Church on 6th Avenue and was made an irremovable pastor by Cardinal Farley and then a Monsignor.

<sup>36</sup> Father James J. Dougherty was born in New York, and was left an orphan at an early age. He studied for the priesthood at St. Charles College in Baltimore, Maryland, and made his theological studies at the Seminary of Our Lady of the Angels in Niagara Falls, New York.

During the 32 years of his priesthood he had been superior of the Mission of the Immaculate Virgin for 16 years. During that time he largely extended the scope of the institution and erected a number of handsome buildings at Mount Loretto, Staten Island, New York.

<sup>37</sup> Salesian Chronicle of Mary Help of Christians Church, 440 East 12 Street, New York, New York.

già presa una casa in affitto, che penserò fornire del bisognevole: di più ho assegnato a ciascuno dei due Sacerdoti una Cappellania, dalla quale prendono un mensile per far fronte alle spese della vita, prima che possono giungere a formare una congregazione di fedeli: intanto i Padri Salesiani esercitano il S. ministero per gl'italiani nel basamento della Chiesa di S. Brigida: appena le circostanze lo permetteranno si penserà a costruire la Chiesa.

Ho fatto il mio possibile perchè i Padri non si perdessero d'animo al primo arrivo in America: vari Sacerdoti di New York si occupano dei medesimi, e spero siano soddisfatti. L'impresa è difficile, però non dubito che coll'aiuto del Signore si riuscirà a far del bene a migliaia di anime.

Ossequiandola e ringraziandola di cuore, con rispetto mi riaffermo Devmo Servo, Michele Agostino, Arciv...o di New York. <sup>38</sup>

(Very Rev. Father General: I hasten to inform you that on the 28th of last November there arrived in New York the Rev. Fathers Coppo and Scagliola with two lay companions. They came to visit me and everything was arranged, for nothing is lacking to them: Already a house has been rented, which I think will supply what is necessary. In addition, I have assigned to each of the two priests a chaplaincy, from which they will receive a monthly stipend to meet their living expenses before they can set themselves to form a congregation of faithful. Meanwhile, the Salesian Fathers are exercising the Sacred Ministry for the Italians in the basement of the Church of St. Brigid. The present circumstances hardly will allow one to think of constructing a church.

I have done my best so that the Fathers may not lose heart at the start of their arrival in America. Various priests of New York are occupied with the same things, and I hope they are satisfied. The enterprise is difficult, but I do not doubt that with the Lord's help it will succeed in doing good for thousands of souls.

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<sup>38</sup> ASC, 3319A12-3319B1. Letter from Archbishop Michael A. Corrigan, New York, NY, December 6, 1898.

With regards, and thanking you from my heart, with respect, I reaffirm myself Your devoted servant, Michael Augustine, Archbishop of New York.)

Upon receiving that letter, Don Rua answered on December 18 from Rome, saying he was very happy that his dear sons had arrived safely; and he was grateful for the “exquisite generosity of His Excellency and the fraternal kindness of the priests in providing for the needs of the Salesians.”

Don Rua went on to reassure the Archbishop of his recognition of the favor granted his sons, and of the appreciation of the entire Salesian family. He promised that the Salesians would offer special prayers for the Archbishop, so that he might be able to continue for many years his work for the greater good of his Archdiocese.

Finally Don Rua extended cordial good wishes for a happy end to the current year and an auspicious start of the next.<sup>39</sup>

## Planting the Seed

On that first night in New York the Salesians enjoyed the hospitality of the Institute of the Immaculate Conception on Lafayette and Third Streets. There they stayed until arrangements could be made for them to occupy the basement and first floor of a tenement house at 315 East 12th Street. From there they began their work for the Italian immigrants. The solemn opening Mass was to be celebrated on December 8, 1898. Father Coppo, an energetic man, carefully prepared the basement of the Church of St. Brigid for the solemn service. He was especially anxious that there be enough room for the expected crowd of faithful. The big day finally arrived. Lo! All of nine persons showed up.

Disappointed but not discouraged, the heroic pioneers decided to trudge through the entire neighborhood. Zealously moving from door to door, they distributed leaflets in Italian announcing their arrival.

The next big public celebration was set for Christmas day, 1898. Twelve people turned out! The following Sunday, perhaps because of the cold and snow, only eight showed up for the new “Italian People’s Mass.”

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<sup>39</sup> AANY, G-69. Letter from Father Michael Rua, Rome, Italy, December 18, 1898.

Despite the inevitable discouragement stemming from such poor results of their zealous efforts, the three Salesians turned to Mary Help of Christians for assistance and continued their door-to-door house calls, at the same time ministering to the Italian Catholics in the hospitals.<sup>40</sup>

## The Seed Sprouts

During the Lenten season of 1899 an Italian mission was preached at St. Brigid's Church. That mission brought 100 persons to the Sacraments, and the following Easter Sunday saw 600 people at the Italian Mass. These worshippers told their friends about the services the Salesians were offering and about the enthusiastic preaching of Father Ernest Coppo .

By the Feast of Pentecost on May 22, 1899, there were enough parishioners to begin a St. Vincent de Paul Society for men and a Society of Mary Help of Christians for women. A new parish was born.<sup>41</sup>

## The Seed Becomes A Young Sapling

On January 20, 1902, Father Michael Rua gave well-deserved recognition to the hard, self-sacrificing work of these Salesian pioneers in New York City by transferring the responsibility for their work from the Provincial of Venezuela-Northern Brazil, who had received it from the Provincial of Mexico-Venezuela in 1899, to Father Michael Borghino,<sup>42</sup> who was assigned as

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<sup>40</sup> Eugenio Ceria, *Annali della Società Salesiana*, vol. II, Part I, 1888-1898, Torino, Italia, 1965 686-689.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 686-689.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Borghino was born in Vigone, in the province of Turin, Italy on November 22, 1855; professed at Lanzo on September 17, 1877; ordained at Montevideo, Uruguay on February 26, 1889. He died at Turin on November 14, 1929. He was a very hardworking Salesian missionary, of an energetic personality, profound spirit of piety, and capable of enduring severe difficulties on behalf of souls. He was the first Provincial of the entire United States from 1902 until 1908.

the vice-Provincial of the Salesian houses in the entire United States. His residence was at Saints Peter and Paul Church in San Francisco, California. Then in 1903 the vice-province was raised to the status of a province, and Father Borghino was appointed provincial. His residence was moved to 60 Croke Street in San Francisco.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, the Italian parish, growing larger in the basement of St. Brigid's Church, was creating problems for Father Patrick F. McSweeney,<sup>44</sup> the pastor. It needed a place of its own. Houses and land were bought on East 12th Street during the following years so that eventually on that street the Church of Mary Help of Christians was built. It was blessed on February 10, 1918,<sup>45</sup> while the first world war was raging in Europe.

The saga of the Salesian Pioneers continued. Meanwhile, in all of New York City the Italian population had increased. In 1901 there were 145,433 Italians who had been born in Italy; 214,799 born in America of Italian parents; and 10,616 of an Italian father and a non-Italian mother, making a total of 370,848 Italians.<sup>46</sup>

On May 1, 1902, Transfiguration Church on Mott Street was put in charge of the Salesians. At that time the church had a debt of \$50,000.<sup>47</sup> In

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(See "Borghino Sac. Michele, Ispettore" in Valentini, Eugenio-Amedeo Rodino, *Dizionario Biografico dei Salesiani*, Torino, Italy, Ufficio Stampa Salesiano, 1969, 49.)

<sup>43</sup> *Elenco Generale della Società Salesiana*, 1897-1900 and 1901-1904. Also the Archives of the Province of St. Philip Apostle Provincial House New Rochelle, New York 1896-1939, 6-8.

<sup>44</sup> Patrick F. McSweeney was born on July 9, 1839, in County Cork Ireland. He came to America in April 1849, studied at St. Francis Xavier's, and in October, 1856 entered the College of the Propaganda Fidei in Rome, Italy. There he earned a Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1858 and a Doctor of Divinity degree in 1862. He was ordained on June 14, 1862. Between 1862 and 1877 he served at St. Joseph's Church on 6th Avenue and at old St. Patrick's Cathedral, both in New York City. He was pastor in Peekskill and at St. Peter's in Poughkeepsie. There in Poughkeepsie he bought the edifice which became St. Mary's Church, formed the new parish, built a residence, and enlarged the convent. He also repaired the church and other property at St. Peter's in Poughkeepsie without increasing the debt.

From November, 1877, Father McSweeney was pastor of St. Brigid's on 8th Street in New York City. It was during his pastorate there that the Salesians used the basement of his church for services. Father McSweeney was made a domestic prelate to Pius X in March, 1904.

<sup>45</sup> Eugenio Ceria, *op. cit.*, vol. II, part I, (1888-1898), 689.

<sup>46</sup> Eugenio Ceria, *op. cit.*, vol. III, part II, (1899-1910), 269.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

1898, the year the Salesians arrived in New York City, Transfiguration parish had 1,400 English-speaking parishioners and 8,000 Italian-speaking people.<sup>48</sup> In time the parish would undergo a rapid transformation and become completely Italian and would see the emergence of a small Chinese community. The Salesians labored at Transfiguration for half a century. By 1949 the Chinese presence in the Parish had become pervasive; and since most of the Italian residents had moved on to other neighborhoods, Francis Cardinal Spellman<sup>49</sup> entrusted Transfiguration parish to the Maryknoll Fathers.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Transfiguration Church—A Church of Immigrants, 1827-1977, A Commemorative Book printed for the Sesquicentennial of the Parish*, Park Publishing Company, New York, New York, 1977, 46, col. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Spellman, Francis Cardinal, was born on May 4, 1889, in Whitman, Massachusetts. He died in New York City on December 2, 1967. He was the son of William and Ellen Conway Spellman. After attending public elementary and secondary schools in Whitman, Francis Joseph Spellman entered Fordham College, where he received a bachelor of arts degree in 1911. He entered the North American College in Rome, and in 1916 he received a doctorate in theology. In 1925 Pope Pius XI appointed him to the Vatican Secretariat of State, the first American to hold such a position. It was there that he became friendly with Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, the future secretary of state and later Pope Pius XII. Pope Pius XI named him auxiliary bishop of Boston, and he was consecrated in St. Peter's Basilica by Pacelli on September 8, 1932. Spellman returned to Boston where he became pastor of Sacred Heart parish in Newton Center. When Pacelli visited the United States as papal secretary of state in 1936, Spellman accompanied him on his visits throughout the country.

With the death of Patrick Cardinal Hayes on September 4, 1938, the recently elected Pope Pius XII appointed Spellman as Archbishop of New York on April 15, 1939. On February 18, 1946 he was named cardinal by the same Pope. Under Spellman the Archdiocese of New York underwent years of extraordinary expansion and development.

Cardinal Spellman sponsored the publication of *The Catholic Encyclopedia for School and Home* (1965), and the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967).

His influence extended far beyond the limits of his archdiocese, since he was military vicar of the armed forces, consisting of more than two million servicemen and their families and 2,700 chaplains. From 1942 until 1966 he journeyed throughout the world visiting military installations, and was preparing his 17th annual Christmas pastoral visit when he died.

In 1960 Pope Paul VI appointed him to the Central Preparatory Commission for Vatican Council II. He was a member of the coordinating commission which directed the work of the conciliar commissions. He was also appointed by the Pope to the Central Post-Conciliar Commission to implement and interpret the decrees of the Council. He spoke frequently during the four sessions of the Council and was especially influential in the formulation of the Declaration on Religious Freedom

## Some Details of the Pioneer Salesian Work in New York City

The Salesians in the two New York City parishes in their charge not only had to fulfill what pertained directly to the sacred ministry, but they also had to dedicate themselves to particular parochial activities demanded by the circumstances. These activities included schools, festive and daily youth works, clubs and associations of various kinds and secretariats. These were all means used to protect the Italian immigrants from the real and ever present dangers to their faith and morals.

In an account sent to the Salesian headquarters in Turin, Italy, by the Salesian cleric John Tedeschi,<sup>51</sup> there is a summary of the work accomplished in one year by the secretariat for the Italian immigrants in the Transfiguration

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during the third and fourth sessions. (See "Spellman, Francis, Cardinal" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. XVI, Supplement, 1967-1974, 430-431, New York, New York, McGraw-Hill Company, 1974.)

<sup>50</sup> *Transfiguration Church—A Church of Immigrants (1827-1977)*, *op. cit.*, 47, column 1.

<sup>51</sup> On page 785 of the *Annali della Società Salesiana*, Volume III, part II (1889-1910); the author Father Eugene Ceria, states that the cleric John Tedeschi sent the report quoted above. However according to the obituary letter of John Tedeschi received from the Central Salesian Archives in Rome he was never assigned to the United States. John Tedeschi became a priest in the Salesian Society but he spent all his life of 80 years in Italy and died on April 25, 1968 in Soverato.

The Tedeschi who came to the United States was named Eugene. He was born on March 20, 1867, at Negrar in the Province of Verona, Italy. He entered the Salesian School at the Oratory in Turin on April 25, 1894. Before his novitiate he studied philosophy for a year as a lay brother aspirant at the Oratory. He made his novitiate in 1895 and professed first triennial vows in 1896. He made temporary profession until 1912, in which year he professed perpetually on April 1, in Hawthorne, New York, where were then situated the Columbus Salesian Institute and the Salesian Novitiate.

Eugene was assigned to Jamaica, West Indies, from 1903 to 1908. From 1909 to 1911 he was in Turin. From 1911 to 1916 he was assigned to the Church of the Transfiguration in New York City.

Apparently it was Eugene Tedeschi, not John, who sent the secretariat report to Turin. Eugene left the Salesian Society on August 11, 1917, from Oakland, California. (Information on Eugene Tedeschi was provided by the Archivio Salesiano Centrale, Rome, by Father Vendel Fenyo, the Archivist, with document number 96A324.)

parish alone. The following statistics compiled by the secretariat for only one year speak volumes:

Children placed in Catholic institutions: 360  
 Recommendations for work: 210  
 Repatriated to country of origin: 194  
 Families recommended for assistance: 250  
 Recommendations for hospitals: 42  
 Intercessions for judicial clemency: 34  
 Intercessions for executive clemency: 6  
 Intercessions to the courts for pardons for boys: 30  
 Legal help sought for: 15  
 Compensation obtained for labor accidents: 3  
 Recommendations to admit persons detained on immigration ships: 44  
 Recommendations to homes for the aged: 24  
 Cases of adoption of orphans: 12  
 Cases presented to the Society for Protection of Children: 21  
 Help to obtain working papers for boys and girls: 10  
 Licenses obtained to exercise a small business: 16  
 Petitions presented to the Court of Domestic Relations: 12  
 Cases of different kinds from the above: 2,000<sup>52</sup>

### The Plant Becomes a Tree

By 1920 other parishes with Salesians in charge were opened for Italian immigrants in Paterson, New Jersey; Port Chester, New York; and Elizabeth, New Jersey. A youth club had been opened in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with evening classes, and small shops, in the hope of eventually opening a school. Schools were begun in New Rochelle, New York and in Ramsey, New Jersey. In 1928 a Salesian Seminary was begun in Newton, New Jersey, so that by the year 1954 the Salesian work in the Eastern Province of St. Philip Apostle was well established with 20 houses, 239 confreres, four missionaries, and 95 secondary school aspirants. In the same year the San Francisco Province of St. Andrew Apostle, which had been canonically erected in May of 1926, had 12

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<sup>52</sup> Eugenio Ceria, *op. cit.*, vol. III, part II (1899-1910), 785-786.

houses, 123 confreres, four missionaries, and 60 secondary school aspirants to the priesthood.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

During the years following the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the Italian immigrant made his way, educated his children, and contributed his many talents to the great melting pot, not only in New York City, but in the whole of the United States.

From this essay which covers only the first early years of the Salesian presence in the eastern United States two important facts stand out:

1. Archbishops and bishops requested the Salesians to come to work in the United States for one sole purpose—namely, to help save the Catholic Faith of the Italian immigrants.

2. From New York City, additional Salesians went forth to fulfill the same task in eastern cities like Port Chester and Albany, NY; Paterson and Elizabeth, NJ; Tampa and Ybor City, Florida; and Toronto, Ontario, Canada.<sup>54</sup>

Speaking at the consecration ceremonies of Bishop Joseph Maria Pernicone<sup>55</sup> on May 5, 1954, Auxiliary Bishop James H. Griffiths,<sup>56</sup> chancellor

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<sup>53</sup> *Elenco Generale della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, 1954, vol. I, 376-391.

<sup>54</sup> Salesians had gone to San Francisco, California in 1897, to work among the Italian immigrants. From San Francisco they spread their apostolate to Oakland, California, and eventually to other cities for the same purpose. (See "The Road Not Taken," by Michael Ribotta, S.D.B. in *Journal of Salesian Studies*, vol. I, No. 2, Fall 1990, 47-67.)

<sup>55</sup> Joseph Maria Pernicone was born on November 4, 1903 in Regalbuto, Sicily, Italy, the son of Salvatore and Petronilla (Taverna) Pernicone. He was educated at Cathedral College, New York, New York; Seminario Vescovile di Nicosia, Nicosia, Italy; Seminario Arcivescovile di Catania, Catania, Italy; St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie, New York; and the Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C.

He was ordained priest on December 18, 1926 in New York by Bishop John Joseph Dunn, Auxiliary to the Archbishop of New York, and then engaged in pastoral work in the same Archdiocese from 1928 to 1954.

On May 5, 1954 he was consecrated Bishop by Francis Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York. He attended the Second Vatican Council, and died on February 11, 1985. (See "Pernicone, Joseph Maria" in *Dictionary of the American Hierarchy (1789-1964)*, by Joseph Bernard Code, with a preface by His Excellency,

of the Military Ordinariate, said: "...the faith of Italo-Americans has grown in depth and breadth until it has become today a symbol of the most successful immigration in the history of the Church... The Italian immigrant and his son in this country need no eulogist or apologist."<sup>57</sup>

Through the providence of God, the Salesians of Don Bosco have had a part in producing this "symbol of the most successful immigration in the history of the Church."

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the Most Rev. Egidio Vagnozzi, D.D., New York, New York, Joseph F. Wagner, 1964, 238.)

<sup>56</sup> James H. Griffiths was born in Brooklyn, New York on July 16, 1903 of James Henry and Helen Agatha (O'Neill) Griffiths. He was educated at St. John's University, Brooklyn; Collegio Capranica, Rome, Italy; Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome; Pontifical Institute of the Apollinaris, Rome; Fordham University, Bronx, New York.

<sup>57</sup> Archdiocesan Archives, St. Joseph's Seminary, Yonkers, New York. *The Catholic News*, Archdiocese of New York, New York, May 8, 1954, 2-3.