The Day They Shut Down the Oratory School

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On June 30, 1879, after numerous attempts to stave off the inevitable, Don Bosco was finally compelled to shut down his oratory school in Valdocco. As a consequence more than 300 boys began an unexpected and prolonged vacation. But for Don Bosco it was anything but a restful respite. For him the

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"Until we have wiped out the clergy's influence in the education of youth, Italy can have no hopes of achieving any kind of moral regeneration or restoration."

Ruggiero Bonghi, Italy's Minister of Public Instruction, 1875

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school's closure was the beginning of an ordeal that would last almost eighteen months. What he had struggled so long to achieve and so hard to consolidate—his cherished oratory school—was now on the verge of extinction.

The peremptory directive from the municipal authorities gave him little choice but to comply. [1] His frequent skirmishes with the education officials

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[1]The notification of the school's closure, signed by Minghelli Vaini, was curt and crisp. It did include, however, a condition that did not endear the prefect to the students: "Under separate cover you will shortly receive the official notification from the ministry concerning

came at long last to an inglorious end. For the time being at least he would accept defeat. "I wish to inform you," he wrote to Minghelli Vaini, the prefect of the Turin Province, "that of this date [June 30,1879], all classes in the oratory school have been terminated." [2]

Don Bosco had opened his oratory school almost 25 years earlier in 1855. Even before that year he had already begun offering training opportunities in the manual arts for young working boys and apprentices: shoemaking (1853); bookbinding (1854); carpentry and joinery (1856). In succeeding years, additional trade shops, rudimentary in every sense, were added. Nonetheless they were adequate enough to provide many youths with vocational and trade skills that enabled them to begin their apprenticeships. Classroom instruction in the Oratory would have to wait until 1855. [3]

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the impending closure of the *ginnasio* [middle school] at your Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales. As per instructions from the Minister of Public Instruction, I must inform you that the closure of your school must occur no later than the thirtieth of this month. During the intervening period, however, you are authorized to conduct all necessary examinations. Eugenio Ceria, *Memorie Biografiche del Beato Giovanni Bosco*, XIV, 721. (Hereafter cited as *Memorie*)

[2] Ceria, *Memorie*, op.cit., XIV, 162.

[3] Prior to 1855 the Oratory's first schoolboys walked into the city of Turin for their schooling. It was Michael Rua's unenviable task to ride herd on the first group of classmates that attended schoolmaster Bonzanino's private school on Via Barbaroux. As Don Bosco's trusty assistant, young Michael was responsible for seeing that nobody played truant. But trying to keep a tight rein on schoolmate John Cagliero was a constant challenge—like trying to grasp a handful of quicksilver.

As soon as the little group left the oratory grounds for school, the irrepressible Cagliero would usually dash off for parts unknown. His first stop was the sprawling open market of Porta Palazzo where he watched in wide-eyed amazement the puppet show and the stunts of the jugglers and charlatans who performed for the few centimes they were able to cadge from their audience. After a brief stroll among the booths and stalls that sold everything his empty pockets could not buy, the errant schoolboy shot off for class at top speed, arriving out of breath, but before the others put in their appearance. Michael Rua tried to look stern:

> "Why can't you come to school with the rest of us?"
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> "I don't like walking the same old streets all the time. I know some good short cuts. What's wrong with that?"
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> "But you've got to do what Don Bosco tells us," Michael would protest. "You've got to obey him."
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> "I do too obey him," John would insist. "I'm supposed to get to school on time, and I always get here before you do. Why should it bother you if I want to stop a few minutes to watch the jugglers and the puppet shows?"

From the early 1870s Don Bosco had begun to spar frequently with the Ministers of Public Instruction and with the province's *provveditori* (provincial school superintendents) to forestall their interference in the running of his school. Thanks to friends in high places [4] and to his own adroitness in confrontations with school officials, the oratory school operated relatively undisturbed for twenty-five years. But when the dust had settled on that summer day in 1879, and after continuous political infighting, the school was finally shut down. Italy's anticlerical government had seemingly notched another victory in its relentless war against clergy-run schools, and Turin's most controversial priest had finally been brought to his knees.

To better understand how government authorities were able to move into Valdocco and move out its school, one must see this closure in the context of the times. In an increasing number of European countries state-controlled school systems were emerging—while church schools were being suppressed. [5]

As the number of oratory students increased and commuting into the city became too unwieldy, Don Bosco finally decided to open a school of his own. He began cautiously. He started with only one class group—the last year of the middle school, or the *ginnasio,* as it was called. Young John Francesia, at that time a seminarian of seventeen, was put in charge of instruction. (See Teresio Bosco, *Biografia Nuova*, (Torino, 1979), chapter 31).

[4] Among those friends in high places was Ferrante Aporti, undoubtedly the leading educational statesman and cleric of the first half of the 19th century. He had come to Turin in 1844 to lecture at the university there and to introduce the first "teacher training" program (normal school). Aporti was a frequent guest at oratory functions and admired the young priest, and on several occasions publicly praised his educational methods. The stature that this outstanding educator achieved in Turin served Don Bosco as a buffer against public officials who looked upon his activities in Valdocco with a jaundiced eye. For Don Bosco's first meetings with Aporti see Lemoyne, Vol.II, Chapter 23 (English version of *Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco* —hereafter referred to as English Version). For an evaluation of Aporti's educational philosophy vis-a-vis Don Bosco's *sistema preventivo* see P.Braido, *Don Bosco's Educational Experience* (LAS, Roma, 1989) p. 63f.

[5] For example, across the Alps in France, compulsory, free education supported and controlled by the state was demanded by its leaders. By a series of laws beginning in midcentury, which made education free, to the law of 1904, which closed all religious schools, education in France was secularized and brought under control of the state. The "free, compulsory, secular ideals" echoed through the Revolution thus became reality, chiefly through the work of Jules Ferry, Minister of Public Instruction. For the meat-ax method in which this was done see W.D.Halls, *Society, Schools and Progress in France* (Oxford, 1965).

So Turin's high-handed act of shutting down Don Bosco's school was not an isolated one. In Risorgimento Italy it was a sign of the times. And as the unification of the peninsula was reaching its climax, the Church found itself no longer able to cope with the problems resulting from the social changes that were taking place. It had neither the vision, the energy, nor the financial power to dominate education as it had done in the previous centuries.

Perhaps the point in time when state and church schools in Piedmont were forced to go their separate ways can be traced to the promulgation in 1848 of King Charles Albert's *statuto* (constitution). With the introduction of constitutional government in the Alpine kingdom, the times were ripe for drastic social change. During the previous year Carlo Boncompagni [6] had drafted a bill which established the groundwork for all future educational legislation. Since political and military events prevented the Chamber of Deputies from discussing the bill in the following months, the king, using the emergency powers given him during the first War of Independence, gave the bill clear sailing, issuing a decree that made it law.

As a politician who followed Cavour's doctrine of "a free Church in a free State", Boncompagni applied this principle almost ruthlessly in his bill of much-needed scholastic reform. All privileges of religious orders were abolished; no interference in the state schools on the part of bishops was admitted; and all seminaries were ordered to keep to the rule that only youths who intended to take Holy Orders should be instructed in them. [7] Boncampagni's Law, as the new

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In Germany, Bismarck's kulturkampf (the state's struggle to subdue the Catholic Church to the demands of nationalism) succeeded in expelling the Jesuits—seemingly a favorite nineteenth century pastime—and usurping their schools. By 1872 education was secularized in a country that had first been a land of church schools before it became a land of state factories. Purged of its ecclesiastical control, the Prussian school system became an instrument to serve the state.

[6] The person principally responsible for the restructuring of Italian education, Carlo Boncampagni di Mobello (1804-1880), was no stranger to Don Bosco. When still a member of the Chamber of Deputies, he was among a group of prominent civic leaders who attended a Sunday School demonstration at the Oratory. The visitors were so delighted with the performance of Don Bosco's boys that they authorized, on the spot, prizes and awards to be distributed to the most deserving. On that occasion Don Bosco had added another admirer to his list of "friends in high places". For the account of this performance see Lemoyne, vol. III, 21 (English version).

[7] Often the choice of a youth to pursue a seminary education in Italy during this time was neither evidence of religious zeal nor an answer to a "vocation" to the priesthood or religious life. For a young man eager to secure an education, entering a seminary was dictated by necessity. Vocation or not, for youngsters from relatively poor families, a seminary education was still a ticket out of the fields and workshops. Moreover it was generally cheaper than a secular education, particularly if the prospective seminarian came from a devout family and had

legislation was to be known, put Piedmont in the vanguard of secular educational progress in Italy. But the Piedmontese church was alarmed.

It was not the intent of the Boncompagni Law to eradicate religion from the curriculum, or reduce education to a purely secular activity. Piedmont's renowned social and cultural historian, Francesco Cognasso, avers that Boncampagni's code was neither anticlerical in character, nor did it intend to stifle the Church's role in education. While the state served notice that all elementary and secondary schools were now the monopoly of the state, the teaching of religion was still retained. Moreover, religious chaplains were now being installed in the state's boarding schools—most of which had been taken over from the Jesuits who were now banned in Piedmont. [8]

For the time being Don Bosco had no cause for alarm at the direction the Boncompagni Law was taking. After all, instruction in the Catholic faith, the official State religion, was safeguarded by article 10: "Religious instruction in public schools shall be founded on the Catholic religion. Special acts and by-laws shall determine the rules to be followed in the religious training of non-Catholic pupils." [9] For the next decade Piedmont experienced a vigorous debate on education: how education could be freed from Church control and made more responsible to the "dynamic forces of society". The character of pre-1859 Italian education reflected the cultural, political, and economic diversity of the country. Yet, a clear pattern towards greater state control of education was emerging.

Don Bosco's shrewd intuition made him realize that unless the Church became actively involved in education, the future of non-state operated schools would be jeopardized. His biographer noted his perceptive insight when he wrote that Don Bosco viewed the Church as facing a formidable challenge that had to be met head-on for "the time had come for building Catholic schools immediately, regardless of cost."

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found a clerical sponsor. The problem—and one which Don Bosco himself had encountered during his seminary years in Chieri—was that young boys were enrolled by their parents in a seminary in the hope that after they had completed their education, they would qualify for white-collar jobs in the secular world, or at least find a position in the civil service. Unfortunately there were also those who came under pressure to become priests, since a number of them were from illustrious families which for generations had produced learned clergymen and bishops. It was expected of them that they would continue in that tradition. See Clara M. Lovett, *The Democratic Movement in Italy, 1830-1876* (Harvard University Press, 1982) chapter 4, passim.

[8] Francesco Cognasso, *Vita e Cultura in Piemonte* (Torino, 1969), 331.

[9] *The Journal of American Education* (New York, 1857), p. 495. From the article, "Public Instruction in Sardinia" by Vincenzo Botta. All sixty-six articles of the Boncampagni Law are printed in English in this issue of the *Journal*.

During the years between the enactment of the Boncompagni Law (1849) and the Casati legislation (1859) encounters between Church and State in the educational arena became acrimonious. One day, while auditing a lecture by Professor Pier Alessandro Paravia at the University of Turin, Don Bosco was rather shaken by the lecturer's gloating challenge: "In the past all education rested in the hands of the clergy. But all this will change soon. The Church has had its day. Now it's the State's turn. The day is near when even priests, who up to now were the proud purveyors of education, will have to come to us if they wish to pursue their university studies." [10]

The first sign of open confrontation between "town" and "gown" occurred when the university authorities announced that students were no longer required to seek their bishop's approval for the subject of their university theses. A more telling blow came when the Piedmontese hierarchy was summarily informed that diocesan prelates were no longer welcome to sit as examiners for student examinations.

Most members of the hierarchy took umbrage at such an unprecedented unilateral decision and moved to boycott the university by pulling out their seminarians. But a few had second thoughts. Using subterfuge, they directed their seminarians to continue to attend university lectures—a position that Don Bosco himself supported. He told anyone who would listen that the Boncompagni legislation and the secularization of education would remain in force for the foreseeable future. Consequently, to sever all ties with the university would prove self-defeating. He strongly believed that only by continuing to patronize the university would the Church be able to influence effectively education in the days ahead.

Four years after Don Bosco had quietly opened his oratory school, a landmark piece of legislation was enacted. On November 1, 1859, the Lex Casati, the education code that would direct the course of schools and schooling in the newly established Kingdom of Northern Italy, received official approbation. [11] Its 374 articles made it clear that education had now become an

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[10] Lemoyne, (English version), Vol. III, 448.

[11] The Casati Law promulgated on November 13, 1859, remained the fundamental code for public and private instruction in Italy until 1923. Though it survived into the 20th century, its contents were not spared the uninterrupted sequence of revisions, adaptations, and *ritocchi* to which texts such as these are duly and unduly subjected. It is a sign of great vitality for any Italian law, especially in the field of education, to last for more than sixty years.

The man who gave his name to this charter for the Italian schools was the then minister for public instruction, Count Gabrio Casati (1789-1873). He was neither an educator nor an educationist. This is apparent in the fact that of its 374 articles, most dealt with

official state function. This is not to say that private schools, as we shall shortly see, were suppressed. The Casati Law did give them a restricted degree of recognition. On the basis of this official tolerance of non-state schools, Don Bosco was able to continue his oratory school undisturbed.

Following the enactment of the new legislation, Don Bosco stayed increasingly on top of current educational developments. When the Casati Law was promulgated, for example, he perused its contents immediately: "He was seen coming out of the house one day carefully reading the Casati Law and its demands upon instruction in his schools." And some of these demands, he quickly realized, could have grave implications. The time would come when, in his forthcoming battle with the school authorities, his expert knowledge of the law and its precise application would be his strongest asset.

Meanwhile, friction between Church and State in the field of education exacerbated, but the Casati Law was enforced without much difficulty. The State by now had made it clear that it had established its superiority over the Church in school-related matters—it was the State which permitted the presence of the clergy and religious in its schools for religious instruction, not the other way around.

In fairness to Gabrio Casati, the legislator was not out to squelch the private school. [12] Indeed, at no time in its first application could one maintain

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administrative matters, spelling out the functions and powers of the ministry of public instruction and its local representatives.

At first the Casati Law made it clear that religion was not to be banned from schools; however, in the new secular state it was no longer to be the basis of education. In secondary schools it was to appear only as tolerated. The State, the law averred, was the real spiritual director, if any such should be required, in a lay and anti-dogmatic education.

Other than perhaps some unpublished dissertation, there is no English work on this crucial educational law. Giuseppe Talamo's very readable treatment of the Legge Casati, *La scuola dalla legge Casati alla inchiesta del 1864* (Milano, Giuffre, 1964), is worth pursuing.

The original version of the Casati Law made religious instruction in the state elementary school compulsory. Article 135 reads: "Elementary education shall consist of two grades—the lower and the higher. Instruction in the lower grade shall include religion, reading, and writing."Another article stated that "Pastors shall examine the pupils of elementary schools on religion, and this examination shall be held at a time and place fixed by common agreement between the municipality and the pastors."All the articles of the Casati Law cited in this essay can be found in *Raccolta delle Legge Speciali e Convenzioni Internazionali del Regno D'Italia,* edited by Emidio Pacifici-Mazzoni, Series 6, vol.l. (Torino,1881)

12 Curiously enough the Salesian Society would become the beneficiary of article 246 of the Casati Law that gave any citizen "who meets established moral standards" the right to open a boarding or day secondary school. That person turned out to be Don Bosco. In 1863 the Reverend Pier Berizzi, disturbed by the news that a private school operated by the Christian Brothers in Turin was closing, invoked the provisions of this article to continue its operation. With six other priests, Father Berizzi formed a legal corporation and the group continued to

that the state was out to monopolize elementary and secondary education. Nevertheless, the provisions of the Casati Law gave rise to incessant criticism, especially from Catholic interests. Catholic authorities aspired to a wider educational freedom based on three points which to them symbolized equality between public and private education: a) The right of private schools to confer their own degrees and diplomas; b) Limitation of state interference to a simple control and supervision of the methods to which degrees would be granted; c) Financial parity between state and private schools. Needless to say, these demands were studiously ignored.

Meanwhile in Rome papal consternation over the expanding secularization of education made itself heard in the famous Syllabus of 1864. The Syllabus was a catalog of "errors" that had been appended to Pope Pius IX's encyclical *Quanta Curia*. Though not part of the encyclical, the Syllabus listed eighty propositions that were condemned by the Catholic Church. Its release in 1864 created a brouhaha throughout the Catholic and Protestant world. Its real purpose was to enable the Catholic bishops throughout the world to take in at a glance "all the errors and pernicious doctrines" prescribed and condemned by the reigning pontiff. No document better reflects the "liberal spirit" of the nineteenth century than this catalog of errors listed in the Syllabus. [13]

Of special interest to our study was the condemnation of the position towards public education taken by the new Kingdom of Northern Italy (though not directly alluded to). Proposition 45 condemned the notion that the entire

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maintain this private boarding school situated below the green hills of Turin across the Po River. However, their institution soon began to founder due to financial losses, inept administration, and a running feud with the school officials. At this point in time, newly appointed Bishop Gastaldi stepped into the breach and prevailed on Don Bosco—not without some arm-twisting—to salvage the institution. Reluctantly and at considerable expense, Don Bosco's Salesians in 1873 took over the operation of what was then being called "Berizzi's folly"and turned it into the prestigious Salesian Liceo of Valsalice.

[13] The eighty "errors and pernicious doctrines" which constitute the Syllabus of 1864 can be found in English in *The Papal Encyclicals in Their Historical Context* edited by Anne Freemantle (New York, 1956), 143-152. From an historical perspective the Syllabus generated more heat than light. In England, France, and the United States its proscriptions seemed like anathemas hurled at their most cherished ideals ("progress", "modern civilization", "education"). Lemoyne noted that the Syllabus and encyclical were "both gratefully received by the episcopate and by the faithful, but were violently attacked by the Church's enemies". See *Biographical Memoirs* (English version) vol. 7, 491. A straightforward and enlightening analysis of the Syllabus is contained in E.E.Y. Hales' biography, *Pio Nono* (New York, 1954). Hales addresses the accusation of numerous liberal historians who saw the Syllabus as an "incredibly unreasonable and tragic blunder on the part of the papacy." Many anticlericals grabbed at the Syllabus as a stick with which to beat the Pope.

control of schools, including the appointment of teachers, belonged as a right to civil authority. It read as follows:

> The entire direction of public schools in which the youth of any Christian state are educated may and must belong to the civil power; and this in such a way that no other authority whatsoever shall be recognized as having any right to interfere in the discipline of schools, the direction of studies, the conferring of degrees, and the choice and approval of teachers.

The culminating point in the history of Italian unification was the acquisition of Rome. In 1870 an unexpected defeat of France by Prussia forced the protecting French garrison to withdraw from the Eternal City. Shortly after, the Italian army breached the Vatican walls at Porta Pia, and King Victor Emmanuel entered Rome as its conquering hero. A plebiscite among the inhabitants of Rome put a final seal on the process of national unification. The Risorgimento, for the time being, seemed to be complete.

The king was hardly settled in his Quirinal Palace when the first drastic measures were taken to purge Rome of its church-run schools. Upon its occupation, the Italian Government found that the clergy were in complete charge of all elementary instruction. Moreover, the Jesuits, established in the Collegio Romano, were the sole dispensers of secondary education, while the University of Rome was controlled by the Church.

The king's cabinet at once took up the question of secularizing Rome's educational system. Visconti-Venosta, in a circular dated November 25, 1870—only two months after the capture of Rome—invoked the law of the kingdom to justify the establishment of state-controlled institutions in closing Catholic secondary schools and ousting the Jesuits. It was the Jesuit schools that first suffered the brunt of the government takeover. [14]

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[14] During the second half of the 19th century, expelling the Jesuits seemed to become a favorite political pastime in the "Catholic" countries of Western Europe. Whenever Catholic schools were threatened with suppression, Jesuit institutions were always high on the list. Italy was no exception. Although the Jesuits had provided incalculable service in the country's schools, they were frequently a primary target. "We should probably be a little careful of talking of their [Jesuits] 'gaining control of education'—as though education were something

Meanwhile the Italian Government was preparing for its most significant victory in its attempt to wrest control of education from the Church. With elementary and secondary schools pretty well muzzled, could higher education be far behind? In 1872 a bill was introduced in Parliament that demonstrated the secularism which inspired the government's attitude in this matter. The bill called for the abolition of the chairs of theology in all state universities. Its enactment into law in January 1873 had long been one of the objectives of Italian liberalism. From *asilo* to *ateneo* the government was now in charge.

The new law touched off an explosion of wrath in the Catholic press. The *Osservatore Romano* bristled at the news. The impending suppression of the chairs of theology, the *Osservatore* charged, was just another link the state was forging in its chain to enslave the Church. Now the taxpayers' money would no longer be used to teach religion but to subsidize the propagation of ideas that were "destructive of every true social principle". The abolition of theology in state universities pure and simple, represented another step toward the establishment of the socialist order. [15]

The *Unitá Cattolica* turned the financial problem around. The king and his ministers were described as insolent and audacious men who, having despoiled the Church of its property and sources of income, were now commanding it to educate their priests and teach theology at its own expense. If all the property that belonged to the Church were returned, the *Unitá* averred, there would be no bone of contention and no quarrel. [16]

For centuries the Church had directed the course of the Italian university. Italian ecclesiastics had looked upon institutions of higher learning almost as their own private preserves. Academic degrees were bestowed only by their authority, and a churchman was frequently the chancellor of the university. But the Church had had its day and now had to run second best to the civic authorities who now paid the salaries and the bills. By abolishing the chairs of

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everybody else was providing when the Society emerged and snatched it out of their hands. Education in those years was something generally neglected, something which a few enthusiastic religious bodies, both Catholic and Protestant, provided by sacrifice and self-denial. But they were not alone in the field. Perhaps their success was the parent of their unpopularity." E.E.Y. Hales, "Expelling the Jesuits" in *History Today*, November, 1957, 694f.

15 The purple prose of the Vatican press was typical of the times and of the intensity of the debate. *Osservatore Romano*, May 8, 15, 1872. For a less testy and disputatious account see Bernardino Ferrari, *La soppressione della Facoltá di Teologia nelle Universitá di Stato in Italia* (Brescia, 1968).

16 *Unitá Cattolica*, May 8, 1872.

theology the Italian state succeeded in securing a virtual monopoly of higher education in Italy which exists to this day. [17] The point was firmly made when, before the end of the decade, the Italian Government blocked Pope Leo XIII's attempt to establish a Catholic university in Rome. [18]

With the Italian universities now under government control, the state continued to flex its muscles. Rome's seminaries were targeted next. Article XIII of the Law of Guarantees provided that Catholic seminaries in Rome were to continue under the aegis of the Holy See without state interference of any kind.[19] However, when government authorities began to observe a large number of lay students enroll in the various seminaries, they became alarmed. The Holy See was immediately informed that if the seminaries were to impart instruction to any and all students, they would forfeit their special immunity and become subject, like all other educational institutions, to the supervision of the state.

Government inspectors were dispatched, but the seminarian authorities bolted their doors to these representatives of the civil power. The Italian cabinet rose to the challenge. It ordered the closing of these recalcitrant institutions. The

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[17] The state's obdurate grip on post-secondary education was finally loosened in the twentieth century with the founding of the University of the Sacred Heart in Milan which was erected by the episcopate in December, 1920. On October 2, 1924, the Italian government recognized the University and authorized it to confer degrees. The latest available figures show that the University of the Sacred Heart has a student body of 15,500 with a teaching staff of nearly 600. Its library houses 800,000 volumes and 4,000 periodicals. Since the early 1960s, large university residences for men and women as well as for ecclesiastics have grown up around the University. Today, besides the "Cattolica", as the University of the Sacred Heart is popularly known, there are five other nonpublic institutions of higher learning in Italy: Luigi Bocconi, Urbino, Aquila, Chieti, and Lecce. The latest, and perhaps best, albeit unsympathetic study of the Italian University (in English), which its author views as an "opaque educational structure", is Burton C. Clark's *Academic Power in Italy: Bureaucracy and Oligarchy in a National University System.*(Chicago University Press, 1977).

[18] A consequence of such high-handed action made the Pontifical Gregorian University, founded by St. Ignatius and St. Francis Borgia, the central pontifical university for ecclesiastical studies in Rome.

[19] The Law of Guarantees was the law by which the government of Italy in 1871 regularized to its own satisfaction the position of the Holy See whose states it had seized. Its main points were: that the pope's person was sacred and inviolable; he was entitled to royal honors and protection; an annual sum of 3 million lire was at his disposal; the Vatican and the Lateran palaces and the villa at Castel Gandolfo remained his property and were extra-territorial (St. Peter's was a national monument except when the pope was actually in it); the pope or conclave of cardinals had complete freedom of communication with the outside world; freedom of assembly of the clergy. The Holy See always refused to recognize this law, maintaining its sovereignty by divine right as against a statutory concession of the Italian state as to one of its subjects, which might be repealed at its will. In particular in 1872 Pope Pius IX rejected the proffered income, which none of his successors touched. The law was abrogated by the Treaty of the Lateran in 1929. *A Catholic Dictionary*, Donald Attwater, ed. (New York, 1958).

ecclesiastical authorities relented and the ministerial order was revoked. In December of 1872 the ministry of public instruction issued a circular which formally resolved the controversial issue. It laid down the principle that the ecclesiastical hierarchy was free to determine the curriculum of candidates for the priesthood. It added, however, that whenever seminaries should be opened to lay and foreign students, the regulations of the civil educational authorities would have to be complied with.

Though the Vatican realized there was little it could do to counter this unilateral decision, it was furious. "The Church is so free," the *Civiltá Cattolica* mordantly remarked, "that the chains already binding it are never enough." [20]

In 1875 Ruggiero Bonghi, Italy's minister of public instruction, stunned a session of parliament when he declared: "Until we have wiped out the clergy's influence in the education of youth, Italy can have no hopes of achieving any kind of moral regeneration or restoration." Acting on that cue, the Casati Law was emended in a way that shocked the Italians. In all the intermediate schools in the public sector, the teaching of religion was abolished. This was the Coppino Law of July 1877, which rendered elementary education obligatory for all up to the third elementary grade. Within article two of the Coppino Law, in the list of subjects to be taught, there was no provision made for the teaching of religion. Instead, the state replaced religion classes by making every teacher responsible for inculcating in his pupils "the duties of education for citizenship." [21]

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[20] *Civiltá Cattolica*, IX (8th series; January 25, 1873), 371.

[21] But religion was too deeply rooted in the life and culture of the Italian people to legislate it out of existence. A continuous protest against the secularization of instruction showed that the Coppino Law reflected neither the will nor the mood of the people. In Milan, for example, a referendum held shortly after the Coppino Law was enacted, overwhelmingly supported religious instruction in the schools. Of the 26,893 households polled, 25,380 favored some kind of religious education in the classroom. See G.Penco, *Storia della Chiesa in Italia* (Milano, 1978) vol.2, 419.

Debate on the religious issue became more spirited as time went on, and as the twentieth century neared, the Catholic laity took things into their own hands despite strong anticlerical opposition. A survey made in 1897 showed that religion was taught in 33,000 of the 49,800 schools visited, and that 1,500,000 of the 2,300,000 pupils attended the classes in religion. The survey also revealed that of the 8,258 municipalities, 5,975 provided such instruction on request, and that of the teachers of religion, 11,000 were men, 20,000 women, and that only 2,600 were priests. *Comparative Education Review*, February, 1962, p. 202.

There was no need for Don Bosco to toss straw into the air to see which way the wind was blowing. He was convinced that his own oratory school would soon become the target of government oppression. The Coppino Law which had eliminated obligatory religious instruction in the elementary schools was a clear omen of things to come. As he saw the Casati Law being pruned and emended almost every year, he realized that that same law which had originally guaranteed to safeguard the nonpublic school, could just as likely exert leverage to compel costly reform in the private sector.

In fact, the school authorities of the Turin Province were already setting their sights on what they believed was the weakest link in the chain of Don Bosco's school organization—teacher certification. Time would prove they had no case, and that all their clumsy ruses revealed nothing more than the pursuit of a personal vendetta against Don Bosco. But for the latter it would become a lengthy ordeal.

Don Bosco's biographer noted that Don Bosco had somehow anticipated government interference in the area of teacher qualifications, even though his "parental" school enjoyed exemption from employing certified teachers.

> A ruling of the Department of Education had just been released that gave Don Bosco cause to expect that the school authorities would soon create problems for his oratory school. This ruling mandated the presence of certificated teachers in all secondary schools. [22] The Congregation at the time did have a number of certified personnel, as well as some Salesians and laymen who had recently acquired provisional teaching licenses. But they fell far short of the number of instructors needed in the boarding schools which had recently been opened. [23]

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[22] To better understand the age level (10-16) of the boys who attended the oratory school, it is important to get an accurate fix of the grade scale of elementary and secondary education as contemplated in the Casati Law. Elementary education consisted of two levels: the lower:(the first three years), and the upper (two years). Elementary education was to be free and made available in every municipality, with the municipalities being required to contribute to their upkeep according to their ability to pay.

Secondary education, in the context of the Casati Law, did not correspond to the American high school; rather it was comparable to what we now refer to as the middle school (grades six through eight) and the first two years of high school. Secondary classical instruction was to be given in two stages and in separate institutions. The first stage, lasting five years, was to be given in an institution known as the *ginnasio* (the object of our study). The second stage, lasting three years, was to be given in schools that were distinct from the *ginnasi* and known as *licei*.

[23] Ceria, *Memorie*, XIII, 457.

Playing for time, Don Bosco wrote in haste to Commendatore Barberis, a former schoolmate and now an official of the school Ministry in Rome. It was the lull before the storm, but his letter to Barberis had an undisguised tone of urgency:

October 1, 1877

Dear Friend,

In view of our long-standing friendship, allow me to appeal for your help in a moment of real need. Up to now, the school authorities in this city have never interfered with our school in Valdocco because of its special nature—a "parental" school which shelters and educates the poorest of the poor.

However, I have just been informed by the province director of education that as of October 15, every class in our school must be taught by a certified teacher.

It is impossible for me to meet this demand immediately. Consequently I have petitioned Minister Michael Coppino for a three-year delay to allow us sufficient time to enable our teachers to secure the proper qualifications.

The minister seems favorable to my request, but he has informed me that he wants to bring this matter to the attention of the state school board of which you are the chairman. For my sake—or rather for the sake of the poor children of the Oratory— I urge you to please put in a good word for us.

. . . Kindly drop me a note relating to this matter at your earliest convenience and inform me of the measures you have taken on our behalf. [24]

With fondest regards,

Father John Bosco

At least for the moment, Don Bosco's request seemed to have its desired effect. The oratory school continued to operate undisturbed, and Don Bosco could now breathe more easily. To assure himself that there would be no further government interference he took advantage of a visit to Rome to petition the ministry of education for exemption from strict adherence to the requirement of certificated teachers, even though this requirement did not apply to his school.

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[24]Ceria, *Memorie*, XIII, 457.

As long as Michael Coppino was minister of public instruction, he would let sleeping dogs lie, but his tenure as chief education officer in the kingdom would be short-lived since the fall of the Cairoli cabinet was imminent.

Meanwhile Don Bosco sensed he was living on borrowed time and by the fall of 1878 he could see signs of the gathering storm. In a conversation with some Salesians he commented in hushed confidentiality, that the Salesian schools would soon feel the effects of government harassment:

> So far our schools have managed to run pretty smoothly. We have tried to stay on the safe side of the law as much as possible, and no one has interfered in their operation. But now it's going to be open war—and we are the enemy. The state is determined to shut down all diocesan schools as well as those run by religious groups. The school officials are now becoming increasingly critical toward us, and they do not hide their hostile intent. Our task will be to meet them on our own terms. What will make this difficult will be the fact that I foresee the opening of new schools every year in the future. Our problem will be to operate these schools with fully certificated staffs.
>
> Until recently the government was very understanding toward us. They granted provisional certification to many of our teachers who were rushing to complete their teaching requirements at the university. But this has all been terminated. Fortunately we do have men pursuing courses at the university; namely, people like Fathers Bertello, Bordone, Cinzano, Caesar Cagliero, Piccono, the seminarian Besso Gallo, and several others. More of our people will enroll next year, so the problem eventually will be solved. But our eventual success will mean that we have to keep on our toes and insure a continuing flow of certified teachers in our schools. [25]

And keep on his toes he did, by closely following the shifting tides of ministerial changes in Rome. But nothing prepared him for the thunderbolt that was to come. It hit during the novena of Mary Help of Christians in 1879. With no previous warning Don Bosco received an official communication ordering him to shut down the Oratory's secondary school. The order was signed by Minghelli Vaini, the prefect of the Turin Province. [26]

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[25] Ceria, *Memorie*, XIII, 885-886.

[26] The development of the role of the "prefect" in nineteenth century Italy is anything but clear. Early in the century the Italian prefect was considered the most reliable state official in the field, an official who could safely be entrusted with the more delicate ministerial

As was his wont, Don Bosco ignored the school board secretary, who had been the bearer of bad tidings, and went directly to the top. He conferred with Vaini, the province prefect, and countered the charges and allegations brought against him. Painstakingly Don Bosco crafted a detailed memorandum, still extant, that went directly to the heart of the matter. Following is a précis of that memorandum.

Memorandum and Background History of the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales

Turin, May 18, 1879

Dear Sir:

Allow me to bring to your attention some vital information concerning the children who are at present being sheltered and educated at the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales.

In 1844 I opened a boys' home in Valdocco to shelter destitute children. One of the principal reasons for starting this institution for these unfortunate boys was to set up some kind of facility that would enable me to provide them with basic vocational training that in time would help them to acquire some salable skill and so earn an honest livelihood when they left. Since some of these lads showed a promising aptitude for study, I also began a secondary school for them. [1855]

During all this time the school authorities have looked upon our institution as a work of charity; that is, a private parental

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powers. At first the Italian prefect tended to attract dedicated men from the nobility and the upper classes, but by the late 1870s most prefects had no independent means of livelihood and hence became increasingly subservient to the political demands of changing ministries in Rome. For an exhaustive treatment of the Italian prefects, and perhaps more than the ordinary reader might care to learn, see Robert C.Fried's, *The Italian Prefects: A Study in Administrative Politics,* (Yale University Press).

Except for this unfortunate episode, little is known about Minghelli Vaini and his relationship with Don Bosco. A city councillor named John B. Dupraz allegedly wrote a lengthy letter to Don Bosco giving him background information on the province prefect. It was anything but flattering. It seemed that Vaini had been a militant activist during the Revolution of 1848. He was apparently rewarded for his activism and given a sop in the form of an appointment as warden of a prison in Oneglia, a city on the Ligurian coast. There his administrative incompetence, oddly enough, earned him a similar appointment as warden of a women's prison in Turin. Obviously it was not a matter of what you knew but of whom you knew. In rapid succession the gregarious Vaini became a member of parliament, superintendent of prisons, and prefect of Cagliari. Finally, as prefect of Turin he had reached the level of his incompetence.

school offering instruction with food and lodging for neglected and abandoned children. Our modest school, such as it is, has conformed to articles 251-252 of the Casati Law. From the very beginning the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales has received support and encouragement from the province's school superintendents as well as the endorsement of the various ministers of public instruction. Even the Royal House has favored us with its patronage. Our present reigning sovereign, Humbert I, continues to favor us with financial assistance and timely counsel.

During all this time we have never been required to have certificated teachers in our classrooms, although certified personnel do teach in most of our classes. In fact, it was only last year that the province school superintendent for the first time informed us that we were required to have certified personnel. He even threatened to shut down our school if we did not comply.

As head of this school I certainly do not intend to evade my responsibility of meeting state requirements concerning certified teachers. However, I must bring to your attention the fact that *no article of the Casati Law requires a private parental school, such as ours, to conform to either the school programs that obtain in state schools, or to staff our school with teachers who possess the required teaching diploma* [Italics mine]. Nevertheless, in time, we intend to conform completely to this state policy. However, to realize the secretary's demands, I shall need more time to meet the requirements concerning the use of fully certified personnel.

Hence, as a personal favor, I appeal to you to grant me a reasonable extension of time to enable our teachers to comply with the certification mandate, even though this course of action will entail for us a costly and burdensome change. Finally, I beg you to use the influence of your office to persuade the province school board to support the course of action I have outlined above. If we are denied this, those who will suffer will be the children who most need our help. [27]

Respectfully yours,

Father John Bosco, petitioner.

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[27] For the full text of Don Bosco's "Memorandum" see Ceria, *Memorie*, XIV, 152-154. To leave no stone unturned, Don Bosco made sure that key officials in high places also received a copy of his memorandum. Among others: Prime Minister Agostino Depretis; Minister of Defense General De la Roche; Commendatore Barberis of the education ministry in Rome.

Crucial to appreciating the import of the Vaini memorandum was Don Bosco's telling reference to the Casati Law. Don Bosco emphasized that he had begun his school before that legislation was enacted, and for almost twenty years, after it had become the law of the land, the government had given him free rein in running his institutions.

Don Bosco then pointedly wrote that while the Casati Law put private secondary schools within the jurisdiction of government inspection, his oratory school was not a private secondary school but a private "parental school", and as such exempt from certain requirements—such as the use of certificated teachers. Had he begun his *ginnasio* as a private secondary school, as the school superintendent viewed it, then such intent would have been recorded in writing as required by article 247 of the Casati Law. There was no record of such intent.

> Any citizen who wishes to avail himself to use this privilege of opening such a school, must forward his request in writing to the school superintendent of his respective province. This request should always include the following: The municipality and town in which he wishes to open his school; the courses of instruction to be given, and the names of the teachers who hold certificates or degrees. [28]

Don Bosco had never applied for such a permit as the record showed. Consequently his school in Valdocco fell into the category of a secondary "parental" school and, therefore, exempt from regulatory inspections governing private schools, and the need to employ duly qualified personnel.

Such then was the type of school Don Bosco insisted he was conducting. The nature and scope of the parental school was covered by articles 250 and 251 of the Casati Law which defined it as one which imparted schooling "in the privacy of the family by the father or legal guardian to his children or to the children of his relatives". It also applied to schooling "imparted to children under the supervision and responsibility of several parents who joined together for the purpose", and as such "was exempt from all state inspection." [29]

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[28] *Il cittadino che vorrá usare di questa facolta fará conoscere, con un dichiarazione per iscritto, la sua intenzione al provveditore della rispettiva provincia. A questa dichiarazione, in cui sara indicato il commune ed il locale dove lo stabilimento sará aperto saranno annessi il programma degli insegnamenti e i nomi degli insegnanti, coi titoli di cui sono muniti.* Emidio Pacifici-Mazzoni, *op.cit.* Articolo 247, p.399.

[29] Perhaps the nature of a "parental school" as recognized by the Casati Law can better be understood in the context of a growing movement of schooling children at home. In the United States, for example, this has become a controversial movement which is growing

The school authorities chose to ignore the fine distinction between a private secondary school and a private parental school, and insisted that the latter was subject to the same rules and regulations as the former.

If the school bureaucrats expected Don Bosco to give up the struggle and retreat quietly, they miscalculated badly. Their injunction to close the school only steeled Don Bosco to seek some form of redress. Meanwhile, as he was pursuing avenues of appeal, much to the discombobulation of the school authorities, a furious newspaper war erupted.

The wars of Italian unification had produced a welcome casualty—the censorship of the press. A liberal spirit swept away many restrictions on the press, and newspapers and reviews mushroomed throughout the peninsula. Each publication had a mind of its own, often representing most divergent views. Libel suits were still unknown and personal vendettas were pursued through editorials which often turned vicious. No one was safe from being besmirched by printer's ink. In Turin the closing of the oratory school quickly became a cause célèbre in the press.

On Don Bosco's side the charge was led by Giacomo Margotti's *Unitá Cattolica* .[30] Taking its cue from the fall of the Depretis cabinet, the *Unitá*

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bigger as parents revolt against what they decry as the failure of the public schools. Home schooling has become a national phenomenon among Christian fundamentalist sects. It is motivated by the notion that learning should be unpolluted by the classroom. Upwards to 500,000 U.S. children are being schooled at home, a tenfold increase in a decade, reports *Time* magazine (October 22, 1990).

Don Bosco faced the same question in his day that confronts home schoolers today: "Who is in charge of children—parents or state?" While the backbone of the home-school movement, at least among the Christian Fundamentalist community, believes that religion is either abused or ignored in the classroom today, Don Bosco's problem was even more fundamental. Since most of the children attending the oratory school were homeless and poor, no schooling or vocational training would have been available to them had they been uprooted and forced to leave the Oratory.

30 Having Margotti in his corner certainly did not hurt Don Bosco's cause. Influential and vocal this feisty and combative journalist, founder and editor of the *Unitá Cattolica*, was a thorn in the side of the liberal press. Don Bosco used his paper as a forum to express his side of the story. It was Giacomo Margotti's famous formula, "*ne eletti, ne elettori*" ("Catholics will neither serve nor run for public office") that epitomized the Catholic opposition to the liberal state. This abstentionist policy reflected the Holy See's early official recommendation of abstention from politics in the new Italy. Though both journalist and priest

labeled the closure of Don Bosco's school as "the government's last glorious accomplishment." [31] Several days later Margotti appealed in an editorial to the conscience of the king, urging him to come to Don Bosco's rescue: "There is still someone in Turin, a man of eminent rank, who has a human and loving heart, and that man is King Humbert I." The Milanese daily, *Lo Spettatore*, warned the people of Turin of the consequences that awaited them: "... These poor youngsters will be turned out into the streets and return to a life of crime and lawlessness." [32]

But the liberal press delighted in seeing a hapless Don Bosco skewered through by a journalist's pen. The inflammatory *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, and Don Bosco's avowed enemy, alerted its readers: "He has a genius for agitating people. ... Woe to Italy if it had a Don Bosco running loose in each of its cities."

Caught in this crossfire, Don Bosco even became a target of Turin's popular review, *Il Fischietto* [The Whistle]. In a titillating cartoon, "The Wonder-man of Turin" was caricatured armed with a snuffer (a device used for extinguishing church candles) and with a hobo's bindle over his shoulder, astride a fleeting cloud, "on his way to America, now that his dirty work in Turin has been uncovered."

The newspaper war even crossed the Alps where Paris' *Le Figaro*, in its August 13 issue, ran a capsule biography of Don Bosco and then lashed out at the stupidity of the childish order that called for the closing of a school dedicated to educating poor children.

Don Bosco's attempt to keep his distance from friend and foe during the newspaper war was short-lived. His patience ran out when he broke his silence in an open letter to the *Gazzetta del Popolo*. The paper had carried an article by School Superintendent Joachim Rho that charged that Don Bosco's claims to running a parental school were fraudulent, and that his school was staffed with unqualified teachers. These were base lies and Don Bosco counterattacked in the *Unitá*.

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projected distinctive public personas (Don Bosco: warm, congenial, patient; Margotti: short-tempered, and marked with a crusading if acerbic spirit) the two enjoyed a close relationship. For some enlightening comments on this relationship see Ceria, *Biographical Memoirs*, (English version) vol.XV, 372f.

[31] *Unitá Cattolica*, July 8, 1879.

[32] *Lo Spettatore*, July 12, 1879.

August 2, 1879

To the Editor:

In recent issues your paper has commented on the shutdown of our school, known to the public as the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales. Lest the truth become a victim of this debate, and lest the well-being of the children sheltered at our Oratory be further jeopardized, I wish to take this opportunity to set the record straight.

A good number of the boys attending our institution are learning various trades, while others who show a capacity for academic study are receiving a secondary school education.

The statutes of the Boncompagni Law of 1848 and the Casati Law of 1859 have always been observed in our school as far as has been possible. Moreover, for the past thirty-five years all the province superintendents and the various ministers of public instruction have looked favorably upon our workingboys' home and school, and have regarded it as a parental school in which the legal father was the person in charge, in accordance with articles 251, 252, 253, of the Casati Law. I would also like to remind the reader that this institution subsists entirely upon the charity of friends and benefactors, and that the boys who are taught by unsalaried teachers, receive a free education.

Obviously all this has recently been disregarded by the school superintendent. He has ignored our parental school status and has informed us that we must now abide by rules and regulations that pertain specifically and only to private secondary schools.

Despite this inequity I have acted to show my respect for the law, although it does not apply directly to our case. Even though parental schools are not required to have certificated teachers, I have nevertheless assigned five certified instructors to each of our classes as demanded by article 246 of the Casati Law — a regulation that applies only to private secondary schools.

This evidence of good will was promptly ignored by the school superintendent who further demanded that we follow the public school schedule and timetables. This is a patent violation of the article that allows private secondary schools to operate within a time frame they find convenient to their circumstances.

Because we did not follow the school schedule obtaining in public schools, and because some of our certified teachers were occasionally substituted by teaching aides, the province school board ordered us to shut down our school. The minister of public instruction, believing that the above allegations were all based on fact, ordered the closure of our school on May 16, although I was not notified until June 23.

I wish to affirm that the above information outlined by me is accurate and true, and that I have described events exactly as they happened.

But there is still one thing that sticks in the craw of anyone who wants to see justice done—the person most directly concerned with this case has never been granted a hearing. Civil Law and school statutes everywhere in modern society allow the accused to present his case. I was prevented from doing so. And the ones who will suffer are the children whose basic rights to an education for their future are being denied this education. The same applies to those lads who are being deprived of earning an honest living by acquiring a trade.

It is my confident expectation that the new minister of public instruction will redress the harm done to the common good by assuring that all children of this nation will be given the right, assured by law, of securing an education.

With genuine appreciation for the opportunity of presenting my side of the story, I remain gratefully yours, [33]

Father John Bosco

The end of the school year brought the Valdocco controversy to an impasse. Though tempers cooled, Don Bosco's efforts to seek redress continued unabated. Up to that time most of the oratory students had been blissfully unaware of what was happening to their school. But they surely must have been more than a little puzzled to find themselves among the constant stream of groups taken into the countryside or into the green-clad hills on the outskirts of the city where their instructors conducted classes alfresco.

Matters took a sudden turn when, late in the fall of 1879, an expected change in the province administration took place. A new prefect, Bartholomew Casalis, replaced the meddlesome Menghetti Vaini. This was followed by even more welcome news—the intractable minister of public instruction, Michael Coppino, found himself in disfavor with the ouster of the Cairoli cabinet. He was quickly sacked.

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[33] Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XIV, 185-186.

With this change in appointments, Don Bosco's pen immediately went to work. He wrote several times to the School Ministry requesting that his institution be officially recognized for what it truly was: a school harboring homeless and needy children and giving them an education they could not find elsewhere. He asked that it be restored to its proper status as a parental school. For weeks his letters languished under piles of official correspondence. Finally, Don Bosco received a reply from the Minister of Public Instruction. The communication acknowledged what he had insisted on all along: the oratory did indeed qualify as a parental school and was, therefore, exempt from the use of certified teachers, even though the record clearly showed that properly certificated instructors had been present in the classroom. In view of that concession, the Minister noted: "This will allow you to reopen your school; therefore, please contact the provincial school board for the proper authorization." [34]

On the surface this sounded like the very reply Don Bosco was hoping for, and it should have restored his hopes of reopening the school. But he knew better. He had wanted the official approbation to come from the Rome Ministry directly, and not from the functionaries of the superintendent's department who played by a different set of rules. He also knew that having to deal anew with the local school authorities only meant more frustrating delays and devious negotiations that would doom the issue to proceed at a snail pace. And he was right.

For the next twelve months the school controversy took on the scenario of a tug-of-war. Don Bosco continued to pour his energies to vindicate his position. He was countered with every kind of political skulduggery and anticlerical chicanery.

The appointment of Francis Perez to succeed Michael Coppino gave Don Bosco cause for hope. Perez was known to be a fair-minded and compassionate man. But being a man of principle was probably the cause of his undoing and his brief tenure. He was replaced by the outstanding scholar and renowned educator, Francis De Sanctis, who had held the position of minister of public instruction almost two decades earlier. [35]

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[34] Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XIV, 151.

[35] Francis De Sanctis (1817-1883) who had headed the ministry of education from March 24, 1861 to March 3, 1862, brought with him experience and a temperament which differed dramatically from those of his predecessors. He was also a fearless innovator in educational development. Just two years before, De Sanctis had founded women's teachers' colleges in Rome and Florence. The press carried on a vigorous campaign in favor of the expansion of such colleges. There was, however, a "conservative" current which opposed the establishment of such institutions. This current was personified by the crusty Ruggero Bonghi

On November 13, 1879, Don Bosco forwarded him a position paper which explained the true nature of the oratory school and detailed the unfair treatment it had received at the hands of previous administrations. He pleaded with the new Minister "to bring my statement to the attention of the Council of State, so that, before giving a verdict on this regrettable situation, they may have a clear picture of the state of affairs."

Don Bosco's memorandum presented a clear and cogent case. If the facts were true they could not be ignored. The Ministry then requested a report from Superintendent Rho for a comparative study and to examine the other side of the case.

But Rho was in no hurry to oblige. When his report did reach the Ministry—four months later—Don Bosco's memorandum was either forgotten or conveniently ignored. In fact, had not one of Don Bosco's friends, Baron Celesia, attended the meeting in which Superintendent Rho's slanted report was reviewed and almost approved, Don Bosco's request for the recognition of his school would have remained dead in the water indefinitely. Baron Celesia rose up in indignation when Don Bosco's case was proposed to be tabled. "What? Are we going to pass judgement without hearing the other [Don Bosco's] side? Gentlemen, this is a rigged court!" The Baron's fiery objection prevailed and a further study of the case, to be supported with documentation, was ordered.

At the request of Bartholomew Casalis Don Bosco submitted a response to five questions which were intended to get to the bottom of the oratory school controversy. The questions were:

1. Explain the nature of your school and specify the reasons for for beginning your secondary school at the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales.

2. How many students are taking vocational training? Give also the number of pupils pursuing the academic program, and the number of seminarians and priests in your institution.

3. How many students are receiving a free education at the Oratory, and how many are being housed and educated at reduced rates?

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and supported by parents who did not want to see their daughters "fraternize with young men attending the universities." To Don Bosco's advantage De Sanctis preferred to deal with individual problems on the basis of their unique nature rather than on the basis of formal legislation. With reference to schools he always maintained that a well-founded educational policy should favor the "people's schools" against the "schools of the rich." This undoubtedly gave Don Bosco an edge in his confrontation with officious school authorities.

4. List the number of students who have taken the state examination and the number who have passed it.

5. Within the past five years, how many students have completed the fifth year of the *ginnasio*? How many of these graduates have gone on to begin their studies for the priesthood in the Salesian Society?

Although Don Bosco had answered such queries numerous times, he sensed the import his responses would have in the presentation of his case to the new prefect of the province. He composed a masterful and comprehensive response. Benedict Viale, member of the Secretariat of the Council of State, acknowledged that it was crafted "with sound reasoning and written in tempered, dignified language. The overall impression it leaves on the reader is that it was penned by a writer who patently had no intention of deceiving the reader."[36]

Then the incredible happened. Don Bosco's report was allowed to gather dust on the prefect's desk for ten months. It did not reach the School Ministry until July of the following year. It was enough to try the patience of a saint. But if Don Bosco was a saint he was an industrious one. As soon as he discovered that his report to Prefect Casalis was scheduled to be examined by an ad hoc committee, he learned the identity of its members and forwarded each of them a copy of his position paper and documentation which supported it. Another snag precluded the committee's July meeting. It was unanimously decided that since the summer "ferie" were imminent, the committee decided that discussing school business in some stuffy room during the oppressive Roman summer was completely out of the question. The meeting was postponed until November.[37]

Finally, the tragic comedy came to an end. The objections that had been leveled at Don Bosco's oratory school were disallowed, and on December 22

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[36] This remarkable document, too lengthy to be cited in its entirely, well deserves the reader's attention. Dated July 7, 1880, it is a remarkable exposé not only of Don Bosco's philosophy for conducting his school, but reveals fascinating information about the Oratory itself. It makes for compelling reading. It can be found in the English version of the *Biographical Memoirs*, Ceria, vol. XIV, 148-151.

[37] The *ferie*, or summer holidays, constituted a sacrosanct Italian tradition that had prevailed for centuries. Until modern times only the affluent could afford to escape the oppressive heat of urban centers and seek the cooling mountains or the seashore. The committee designated to study Don Bosco's case were not to be denied. Even today, the Italian everywhere looks upon the *ferragosto* (the August dog days) as their God-given right to desert the city and flock to the sea for respite from the torrid summer heat.

King Humbert I signed a decree which recognized Don Bosco's school as indeed a parental school and thereby allowed it to reopen. After eighteen months, classes were once again resumed at the oratory school of Saint Francis of Sales.

Eugenio Ceria, who chronicled in detail Don Bosco's struggle to reopen his school, concluded that "Don Bosco ... was one of the first to experience the effects of the tyrannic monopoly of education exercised by Italy's government." The fact that he had won his case against the government must have rankled Ruggiero Bonghi who soon succeeded in emending the Casati Law to stop effectively the opening of new parental schools such as those operated by Don Bosco.

Well into the twentieth century would the state continue to tighten its grip upon education. Francesco Crispi, the former Garibaldean who was destined to succeed Agostino Depretis as the dominant figure in Italian politics, rattled the saber in the course of an address at Palermo in 1883. The clergy, he declared, was the principal enemy of Italy. Upon the state rested the obligation of doing what it could to prevent religion from becoming a weapon of political warfare. Prayer, and prayer alone was the province of the priest. He was not qualified to venture into the realm of public administration. Educational and philanthropic agencies must be controlled by the laity.

This was the ideology that Salesian institutions would have to contend with well after the death of Don Bosco. The task would not be an easy one.