Training Boys to Earn a Living: The Beginnings of Vocational Education at the Oratory

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On December 3, 1845, the *Gazzetta Piemontese* carried an announcement of the opening of an evening school in the Via delle Rosine in the center of Turin. The paper proudly declared that it was the first school of its kind, not only in the capital but in all of Italy. The reader was informed that the new school was soon to be staffed by the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The courses to be offered promised instruction in the metric system, "designed to teach the proper use of weights and measures", as well as an introduction in the fundamentals of mechanical drawing and geometry. These subjects, any interested party was assured, could be applicable in the learning of various arts and crafts. The announcement then urged parents and shopkeepers to send their children or young apprentices to the new institution, guaranteeing that "rewarding profits" in their future occupations awaited them.

This new school, sponsored by the Royal Institute for the Rehabilitation of the Indigent, was quickly besieged with applicants. When the school opened in 1846, 480 youths had filled all available places. Five years later, student enrollment had surged to more than 600. [1]

Unheralded by the press and remote from the center of the city, another evening school had begun a year earlier without fanfare in 1844. Started by a young unknown priest, it was offering classes in basic literacy in the rented rooms of young Don Bosco and his associate, Father John Borel. But because this makeshift school was isolated in the Valdocco area on the outskirts of the city, it failed to catch either the attention of the press or the eye of the public.

In later years Don Bosco recorded his early experience in what was truly Turin's first evening school. In his autobiographical memoirs he described how he and Father Borel first made schooling available to numerous poor

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[1] Luciano Panfilo, *Dalla scuola di arti e mestieri di Don Bosco all'attivita di formazione professionale, 1860-1915* (Milano, 1976), 24.

children and struggling apprentices in their rented rooms next to the Women's Shelter (the Rifugio), one of the charitable institutions of the Marchesa Giulia di Barolo.

This first-of-its kind attempt to provide schooling for poor children in the evening quickly caught on, and soon the young priest had to find larger quarters for the increasing numbers who came to his evening classes.

> "What had begun as a Sunday night school, soon proved inadequate", Don Bosco wrote in his Memoirs. "To satisfy the demands of the growing number of boys who were very eager to attend our classes, which had now become an almost nightly affair, we settled in the Moretta house and when this became too crowded, we moved our operation to the Pinardi building. Most of the boys who came to us were working boys and young apprentices who hungered for any kind of schooling they could get—something which their long days in shop or factory made it impossible for them to attain." [2]

Don Bosco's biographer, Father John Baptist Lemoyne, notes that most of the boys who attended Don Bosco's evening classes were hard–working young apprentices or youths who worked wherever they could find a job. Living virtually from hand to mouth, survival not education was their primary concern. [3] Lemoyne echoes this when he writes: "Having to work for a living and, therefore unable to attend school, they would otherwise have remained

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[2] *Journal of Salesian Studies* (Berkeley, 1990) Vol. 1, No. 1. "Don Bosco's Battle Against Illiteracy", by Michael Ribotta, 1-15.

[3] The scarcity of primary schools in Piedmont was a consequence of the poverty of the kingdom's agrarian economy during the Restoration period. The limitation placed upon education during the Restoration was also a matter of political choice. Many of the aristocracy looked upon the diffusion of education as one of the causes of the disasters that had brought about the revolutions of 1848 throughout Europe. Consequently they set their faces against virtually all forms of schooling, especially for the poor. Such attitude was typified by the King of Piedmont's (Carlo Felice) reputed remark that "he trusted no one, except those who knew neither how to read nor how to write." Quoted by John A. Davis, *Conflict and Control: Law and Control in Nineteenth-Century Italy*. (New Jersey, 1987), 149. The famed poet Ugo Fosco said much the same thing when he expressed the fear and contempt with which many members of the aristocracy looked upon the masses: "We are wasting our time when discussing the plight of the poor. All they need, in any form of government, to live their lives, is a plough to help them earn their daily bread; a priest to teach them their prayers; or an executioner to hang them if they stir up trouble." J. A. Davis, *op.cit*, 147

illiterate and deprived of even the most elementary kind of education." [4] The evening classes that Don Bosco organized for these neglected boys gave them the only chance they had to break the chains of illiteracy that would otherwise have bound them to lives of poverty and pauperism.

These early efforts by the state or a concerned citizen to provide educational opportunities for the children of the great unwashed, was a sign of things to come. A profound social and economic change was beginning to transform Piedmont from an agricultural to an incipient industrial society. As Turin was nearing the mid-century mark, an almost uncontrollable tide of youths was beginning to pour into the capital, lured by the promise of available jobs and the prospect of a better life.

Before 1850, the overwhelming majority of Italian workers were peasant farmers and agricultural laborers. It has been estimated that at mid-century, 62.5% of the total population of the Italian peninsula was attached to the land. [5] This largest segment of the population toiled in the fields all their lives and depended wholly upon the land. Industrialization, a disadvantaged latecomer in Italy, was slow in arriving. Piedmont, for example, was poorly supplied with those essential resources, notably coal and iron ore, that had given Britain and northwest Europe such a strong stimulus in creating the industrial revolution which had transformed these European countries.

Before 1848, Piedmont was less advanced industrially than Lombardy, nor did its economic and social environment show any promise of potential development. In the capital, the only influential class consisted of "a restricted aristocracy, more inclined toward the sword than the toga." A highly placed member of the court observed that, if one wanted to live at peace in Piedmont, it was necessary to think only of agriculture.

But after the failed Revolution of 1848, Piedmont began to outstrip Lombardy in economic importance. This feat was accomplished mainly by Camillo Cavour's shrewd political acumen and his innate genius for defining the realities of economics. During his all–too–brief political career, the Kingdom of Sardinia not only claimed leadership in freeing the Italian states from foreign domination, but this small kingdom aligned itself with Western Europe in four important ways: foreign trade; international loans, used to develop the economic resources of the region; the gradual but impressive

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[4] John B. Lemoyne, *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco* (New Rochelle, 1966) Vol. 2, 199. Hereafter cited as *EBM*. The Italian version of the biographical memoirs will be cited *IBM*. The author of the volume quoted will be cited.

[5] Roberto Temelloni, *Storia dell'industria italiana contemporanea dall'fine del settecento all'unita italiana.* 112-113.

mechanization of its industries; and its modern financial and banking institutions.

Cavour first entered the government's service as Minister of Marine, Commerce, and Agriculture in 1850. Within a matter of months he negotiated trade treaties with Belgium, England, Switzerland, Germany, and even Austria, its potential enemy. By 1851 Cavour had become Minister of Finance, and in the following year he was appointed Piedmont's Prime Minister. [6]

Cavour entered the political arena at about the same time that Don Bosco's apostolate among the poor working children of Turin was gathering momentum. This greatest of modern Italian statesmen, who almost single–handedly transformed the economy of post–revolution Piedmont, during the first years of his premiership, held the priest in Valdocco, five years his junior, in the highest esteem. Although biographer Lemoyne asserts that Cavour was an exemplary Catholic who used to receive Communion in the church of the Annunciation as late as 1850, there is a rush to judgment in his allegation that the Prime Minister turned against the pope and the Church. Certainly Pope Pius IX and the institutional Church were major barriers in Cavour's efforts to unify Italy, yet his deep-seated love for the Church may have wavered, but it never withered. In his dying moments, Cavour asked for a priest and received the last rites.

Even though Cavour and Don Bosco in time found themselves on opposite sides of the political fence, and Don Bosco referred to the Prime Minister as an "anticlerical," the latter's esteem for the priest never slipped a notch. In fact, he was so impressed by what Don Bosco was achieving for Turin's poor children that he suggested to him that they ally themselves in a common cause. Cavour then made Don Bosco an offer he believed the poor

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[6] Piedmont's economy was Cavour's first priority. One of his prime projects was the removal of the naval arsenal from Genoa to La Spezia to permit the enlargement and complete reequipment of Genoa as a first-class port. Next, he secured the services of French engineers for supervising the construction of the Turin–Savigliano railroad. In the next few years there were more miles of track in Piedmont than in all the other Italian states combined. Cavour freely encouraged entrepreneurs to develop railroads, gas companies, banking and insurance companies, mines and even agricultural enterprises. In the span of only a few years Cavour had launched Piedmont to the forefront of economic progress among the Italian states. No longer did the Kingdom of Sardinia have to take a backseat to Austrian–controlled Lombardy which had long dominated the Italian peninsula as the most industrialized state. See Maurice F. Neufeld, *Italy: School for Awakening Countries* (Cornell University, New York, 1961), 34-36.

priest could not refuse: "He [Cavour] even promised me a million lire to further my work," Don Bosco is alleged to have said. [7]

The offer was declined, politely. Accepting such an immense benefaction would have tied Don Bosco to future governmental policies. If nothing else, Don Bosco was a free spirit, and avoided, like the plague, any political entanglement. No amount of money, however alluring, could have obligated him to kowtow to the designs of any political party.

In was during the early stages of Piedmont's economic development and the social problems it created that Don Bosco began to focus his attention on the plight of the city's working children. Hordes of boys, from juveniles in their late teens to children as young as eight, had begun to pour into the capital looking for work. Eager as he was to find employment for them, Don Bosco's meager resources forced him to limit his expectations in finding immediate employment for his Oratory boys. It would take another decade before he could give serious thought to introducing workshops in his school to train young apprentices and student artisans to earn a living.

In the early stages of his "wandering oratory" days, most of the youths who sought out Don Bosco's companionship and heartwarming friendship were neither juvenile delinquents nor teenage thugs as has been sometimes perceived. Many were in fact earnest young apprentices, or plain country boys eager to find any kind of work. Lost and all alone in a big city many had no place to go when not employed. They were reduced to aimlessly roaming the streets and piazzas of the capital. Don Bosco's company and his oratory, unattractive as it may have seemed, became a welcome haven.

Don Bosco found them a lonesome lot, for whom the Church had little appeal. In his autobiographical memoirs he wrote of the boys who attended his first primitive oratory at the Convitto: "As a rule, the oratory boys included stonecutters, bricklayers, street pavers, plasterers ... They were not churchgoers and most of them had no friends." [8] Even when employed, life for the city's young "disposable workers" could be harsh and punishing. Those

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[7] No doubt Lemoyne was speaking hyperbolically when quoting Cavour's offer of a million lire to Don Bosco. Such an amount was an astronomical sum when one considers that Piedmont was in the throes of its war reparations to Austria. For a fascinating and frank description of Cavour's relationship with Don Bosco, the reader is referred to *EBM*, Vol. 4, chapter eleven, entitled "Don Bosco and Count Camillo Cavour." This frank and perceptive appraisal of the Prime Minister's cherished friendship of his favorite priest should be read with caution. The biographer's account is often skewed by his anti-republican bias and reactionary interpretation of historical events.

[8] John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory* (hereafter cited *Memoirs*)(New Rochelle, 1989), 197.

who were unable to find work either returned home, or in time were reduced to vagrancy. Not a few were recruited by the increasing number of street gangs into a life of crime. [9]

By the seventeenth century the medieval guilds were most beneficial in assisting young apprentices when they entered the work force. But by the 19th century the guild system throughout Italy had outlived its usefulness and the guilds were in marked decline. [10] However, numerous guilds in time managed to retain their elaborate ceremonial religious functions at the expense of their professional and mutual assistance programs. In Piedmont the workers' guilds were legally abolished in 1844 because of abuses that had crept into their operation. Paradoxically, contends Neufeld "the suppression of the guilds blessed subsequent economic development." [11] As long as the age-old guilds had been operative they humanely protected the rights of struggling young workers. In the process they also exercised welfare and insurance functions. With their disappearance, about the time that Don Bosco appeared upon the scene, a fissure emerged into the open and was filled in the course of time by the organization of mutual aid societies. [12]

With the demise of the guilds in Piedmont, made official by royal edict, mutual aid societies began to form in earnest. Between 1850–1859, the Kingdom of Sardinia contained 69% of all mutual aid societies in Italy. Italian economists and historians concede that during Cavour's rise to power, the prosperous growth of these societies was seen not only as the emergence of social agencies that rose to help the workingman, but were also looked upon as an insurance against subversive ideas. [13]

Don Bosco was quick to realize the benefits that would accrue to his young working boys and apprentices with their participation in a mutual aid society. Now that the right of association which covered this activity was theoretically guaranteed by Carlo Alberto's liberal Constitution of 1848, he set the gears in motion. Forming such an association would not only enable him

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[9] Umberto Levra, *L'altro volto di Torino Risorgimentale* (Torino, 1989), 80–94 passim. Levra's revisionist view of Italy's Risorgimento vividly portrays the crime and grime of Turin's mean streets during Don Bosco's early years in Valdocco.

[10] Stuart Woolf, *A History of Italy, 1700-1860* (New York, 1979), 58.

[11] Neufeld, *op.cit*, 59.

[12] Lemoyne looked upon the guilds still existing in Don Bosco's times as sinister hotbeds of irreligion: "The gales of liberalism had penetrated most of these associations [workers' guilds] early in the century, destroying their religious character and cutting them off from the jurisdiction of the Church." *EBM*, Vol. 4:53.

[13] Before 1850 there were only 17 mutual aid societies in the entire Kingdom of Sardinia. By 1859 the number had risen to 98. It had become evident that these societies were now fulfilling a role that the former guilds were no longer able to do for the workers. Neufeld, *op cit*., 62.

to keep his young workers together and give them a sense of stability, but it would enable him to keep them from drifting into anticlerical groups that were now being formed in the capital. [14]

Huddling with some of his older boys, Don Bosco outlined a plan for forming the "Mutual Aid Society of the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales". His proposal met with their unanimous approval. On July 1, 1850, in a simple ceremony in the Oratory chapel, the Mutual Aid Society of Saint Francis of Sales was formally established. [15] Each member received a membership booklet outlining the regulations which bound him to the society. Accompanying the pamphlet was a membership card and a registration form which listed the member's name, place of residence, and his type of work. For working boys who had long been on their own and forced in many cases to survive by their wits, participation in Don Bosco's mutual aid society gave them a sense of belonging.

The society's manual clearly defined its scope. Its goal was not limited only to social and welfare benefits; it also aimed at providing some kind of spiritual sustenance for spiritually-starved young workers. The spiritual and material benefits it aimed at were underscored in the society's official title: "The Mutual Aid Society of the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales for Members of the Saint Aloysius Sodality". No applicant, therefore, could enroll without also becoming a member of a religious group whose principal objective was to encourage the reception of the sacraments every two weeks. Consequently, each young worker claimed a dual allegiance: he belonged to a mutual aid society, and thereby made a commitment to a sodality under whose umbrella the association functioned. [16]

Don Bosco prefaced the regulations in the members' manual with a brief fatherly exhortation:

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[14] Lemoyne notes that no sooner had Don Bosco's mutual aid society gotten underway that "some of the older boys who were members stopped frequenting the Oratory." Shortly after, Joseph Brosio informed Don Bosco that two gentlemen had attempted to bribe him by offering him 600 lire and a good-paying job if he stopped attending the Oratory. It was then that Don Bosco learned that the aggressive proselytizing Waldensians had targeted some of the members of the society and had lured them away from the Oratory with money and job offers. Don Bosco decided that discretion should be the better part of valor and enjoined silence about the matter to Brosio "so as not to arouse the greed of some who might not be strong enough to resist." But some did not resist; despite these defections the mutual aid society flourished. See Lemoyne, *EBM*, Vol. 4:54-55.

[15] Lemoyne, *EBM*, Vol. 4: 53.

[16] Lemoyne, *op.cit.*, 53.

My dear young friends: The following regulations of our mutual aid society are intended to serve as a norm of conduct which will enable the society to operate in an orderly and rewarding fashion. You who are now its members have been wise in joining it. By setting aside one soldo each week—of little value when spent you must admit—your trifling contribution will in time serve you well, and you will receive worthwhile benefits therefrom.

I have only one suggestion to add: While furthering the good of the society with your dues and membership, do not forget to carry out the duties that are enjoined upon you as members of the Saint Aloysius Sodality. Doing so will bring you rich spiritual blessings. May the good Lord fill your hearts with love and joy. And may you live in the fear of the Lord who loves you.

When Don Bosco drafted the regulations for his mutual aid society, he focused on the real problems that working boys, new in a large city and desperately looking for work, would inevitably face: sickness and unemployment. Listed below are some of the practical regulations that addressed these two potential problems:

REGULATIONS

1. One of the aims of our society is to provide assistance for those members who may be in need during illness or unemployment.

2. The weekly dues for each member will be one soldo. No member will be eligible for any benefits from the society until six months after his admission. However, he will have the right to immediate assistance if, upon admission, he pays one lira and 50 centesimi as his entrance fee, and at the time of its payment he is neither ill nor unemployed.

4. The daily workman's compensation in times of illness or unemployment shall be 50 centesimi. This amount will continue to be paid until the complete recovery of the member. This aid will cease if the sick party receives free hospital care. However, payment will be resumed when the sick member is released from the hospital and begins his convalescence.

5. Members who are unemployed and unable to find work shall begin to draw their unemployment compensation eight days after they have been laid off. ...

7. Any member who fails to pay his weekly dues over an extended period of time shall forfeit his benefits until he has met his

full obligations. Only then will he be eligible for assistance for a one–month trial period.

8. Besides prompt payment of their weekly dues, all officers of the society shall diligently observe the regulations of the Saint Aloysius Sodality. By their exemplary conduct they will serve as models of good example to their companions. ...

12. The secretary of the society will collect the weekly membership dues every Sunday, and he will be responsible for keeping an accurate and up–to–date account of all moneys received. But let this be done with tact and courtesy. The secretary will also furnish the treasurer with compensation vouchers which should bear the name and place of lodging of each member. It shall also be his task to keep the minutes of each meeting.

14. By virtue of his office, the spiritual director of the Saint Aloysius Sodality will be an honorary officer of this society. He shall visit sick members where they live, inquire about their needs, and make a full report of his visits to the secretary. [17]

The mutual aid society met with instant success. In fact, it did not take Don Bosco long to add a few new wrinkles to his overall plan of operation. "To inspire the younger members" (and in the process widen the society's scope) he recruited some of Turin's more outstanding citizens and inducted them into the Oratory Mutual Aid Society as honorary members.

Successful as the society may have been, it is difficult to reconcile Lemoyne's contention that the Oratory society was "from the start the first seed of countless other societies or unions of Catholic workers ... in Italy." Such an assertion does not square with the facts. Writing in 1869 Pietro Baricco notes that a mutual aid society for printers, begun under the auspices of the Augustinian Fathers, already existed in Turin in the early years of the eighteenth century. In 1736 a mutual aid society for hatters was already operating out of the city's Albergo di Virtu. And eight years later, with the encouragement of the friars minor of Saint Francis, a mutual aid society for coachmen and grooms had received archdiocesan approval. [18]

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[17] Lemoyne, *IBM*, Vol. 4:75-77. In the English version, Don Bosco's introductory exhortation and the "Regulations of the Mutual Aid Society" can be found in appendix #2 in Vol. 4:518-520.

[18] Pietro Baricco, *Torino Descritta* (Torino, 1869), Vol. 2, 874-919. Other mutual aid societies founded in Turin before 1850 were: doctors and surgeons (1839); hairdressers (1842); master cobblers (1846); tailors (1848). In his very detailed study Baricco notes that by 1869 (the terminal point of his exhaustive study of Turin), there was a total of 43 mutual aid societies in the capital with a total membership of

One historical fact, however, is indisputable, Don Bosco's creation of a mutual aid society targeting young working boys in the capital was the first of its kind. Nor was did his pioneer efforts go unnoticed. In later years mutual aid societies and workers' organizations throughout Italy paid him due recognition by "choosing him to be their honorary president." [19]

It was just a matter of time before Don Bosco realized that he had bitten off more than he could chew. The demands which the daily operation of the society put on his time signaled the beginning of the end of Don Bosco's personal involvement in its affairs. Keeping track of financial records, disbursing the society's funds, seeing that the sick received care and attention, finding jobs for out–of–work boys filled his already busy workday. Lemoyne notes with some finality: "He could soon see that in the long run it would become impossible for him to manage a mutual aid society ... eventually he had to call a halt." [20]

Separating himself from the society's daily activities did not mean that Don Bosco gave up on the organization he had created. Nor was it phased out in time. Its continuing operation was transferred to the St. Vincent de Paul Society. The society did, however, continue to maintain its headquarters at the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales.

What motivated Don Bosco to organize his own mutual aid society? By mid-century he had spent almost a decade in Piedmont's largest city. He had witnessed at close range that young apprentices and working youths lived at the lowest level of bare subsistence. To improve the conditions of the working poor Don Bosco realized that the social bond between the worker and the Church had to be encouraged and strengthened. Lemoyne notes perceptively : "Don Bosco saw that it was necessary for the clergy to draw closer to the working class and guide it." In organizing his mutual aid society for working youths he was living up to his convictions. [21]

27,152. But Don Bosco's group, established specifically for young workers, was still the only one of its kind.

[19] Lemoyne, *op.cit.*, 56.

[20] Lemoyne, *op. cit.*, 56.

[21] Workers in Italy rushed to organize themselves into mutual aid societies, but the formation of trade unions, their highest aspirations, took long in coming. Unions in a unified Italy, as late as 1889, were virtually forbidden by a law of 1864. Consequently, the strike, labor's strongest weapon was illegal unless the workers could show 'reasonable cause'. Illegal strikes did occur, but often with bloody results. Italy's penal code before 1889 forbade agreements among workers for the purpose of "ceasing, hindering, or increasing the costs of work without reasonable cause." See Shepard B. Clough, *The Economic History of Modern Italy* (Columbia University Press New York, 1964), 151.

In the year following the creation of the Oratory mutual aid society, Don Bosco came up with another way of assisting working youths and young apprentices who attended his Oratory. Its outreach, however, was more limited than the society he had established for them a year earlier. To assure himself that young workers were being dealt with fairly and were treated humanely on the job, he drafted "work contracts" in their behalf. Several of these documents, extant in the Salesian archives in Rome, are among the first such contracts drawn up in Turin between apprentice and master.

At mid-century no trade or manual arts schools, as we understand them today, existed in the capital. Since there were no vocational schools, one wanting to learn a craft or trade found his way into the vocation through apprenticeship. [22]

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[22] As an ancient method of training children for the world of work, the origins of apprenticeship are lost in the mists of time. In the Old World specific conditions and provisions for apprentice labor and training date from the regularization of the system that took place in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, of England, particular to a law called "The Statute of Artificers" (1563).

In time a pact between employer (master) and a youth's parents or guardian was struck, which was basically the same everywhere. In older contracts (17th and 18th centuries), often called indentures, the apprentice agreed to serve his master faithfully for at least a period of seven years, and to keep secret the workings and details of his trade (hence the expression, 'trade secret'). In the beginning the apprentice's moral conduct was closely supervised. To insure that he was kept within bounds, many indentures or apprenticeship contracts, used the following formula: "The apprentice will not play at unlawful games ... frequent taverns, be guilty of immorality, ... and contracted not to marry."

At the end of his service period, the apprentice, now equipped with a trade, was given a new suit of clothes, a set of tools, and sent out into the world to earn a living. Compared to our modern concepts of working hours, vacations, sick benefits, the life of the apprentice of yore was a demanding and hard one.

It was not unusual for the apprentice to work all seven days of the week at his trade. And though the master's parental concern required and expected him by law to bring up the youth in good Christian cultivation, this injunction was often ignored. In Puritan New England, for example, some apprentices complained that they were forced to break the Sabbath by working on Sunday. Puritan divines, however, put their minds at ease by assuring them that the apprentice did not commit sin by working on Sunday. The apprentice's employer was considered the sinner. But that did not bring rest on the Lord's day. It merely shifted the blame for the apprentice's Sabbath-breaking. For apprenticeship conditions in Colonial America, see Edmund S. Morgan's classic *The Puritan Family* (New York, 1944), 68-78. An insightful study of the child in the workplace is Edith Abbott's "A Study of the Early History of Child Labor", *The American Journal of Sociology*, XIV (July, 1980), 15-37. Philippe Aries' *Centuries of Childhood* (New York, 1962) is very revealing and informative.

For centuries it had been the common practice in Western European countries for parents or guardians to "bind out" their children or wards, by some kind of legal contract, to a "master" who taught the aspiring apprentice a trade or salable skill. On his part it was the master's responsibility to teach his apprentice a trade to the best of his ability. Since the young apprentice frequently resided in the home of the master, who acted towards him "in loco parentis," it was also his obligation to provide the youth with "convenient meat, drink, lodging, and washing." In some cases, as was the common practice in England and colonial America, to furnish him with "seven pounds per annum to find his apparel".

In essence the master agreed to teach the apprentice "the art and mystery" of his craft in return for the apprentice's labor for a specified number of years. When finalized in writing and in the presence of witnesses then, "apprenticeship constituted a contractual exchange of vocational training in an atmosphere of family nurture for absolute personal service over a stated period of years." [23] One quickly sees, therefore, that such a contract created a condition of dependency, a childlike state of legal incompetence in which the master's role and responsibilities were indistinguishable from the father's, and the apprentice's obligations were as total, as moral, as personal as the son's.

Certainly Don Bosco had little quarrel with the hands–on or on–site training young apprentices who frequented his Oratory were receiving under the prevailing system. His grief was with the masters or employers who were supplying that training. From his first Convitto years, when he made the rounds of the city's mean streets and piazzas, his alert eye caught the harsh treatment and the brutal conditions that young working children were subject to. Teresio Bosco vividly portrays the way Don Bosco, as a young priest, invaded the workplace where young people were employed and how he would draw them into conversation and plant the seeds of friendship during those brief encounters:

> The young priest from the Convitto soon became a familiar figure in the city's workshops and construction sites. His little friends, some as young as eight, could be seen in all kinds of weather teetering on scaffolds, loaded down with baskets of bricks and stones, or climbing up shaky ladders with their hods of lime or mortar.
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> The winter months were lean months for Turin's young workers. Jobs were hard to find, and many youths became stranded in the city. To help them survive, Don Bosco spent many hours

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[23] Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society,* (University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 17.

knocking on shop doors, visiting construction sites, talking to shop owners—always searching for work for his boys. But finding them jobs was only the start. "I used to look in on them during the week where they worked. They always were happy to see me because I was probably the only one who really cared about them. Their bosses were glad to see me too. I suppose it was good for business to have young hired hands in their employ for whom a priest made himself personally responsible."

In those years of unregulated child labor, young workers put in long and hard hours on the job and were sometimes driven mercilessly by hard–hearted padrones. Whenever Don Bosco learned that one of his boys had lost his job or was being abused by ruthless foreman, he would quickly descend upon him and iron out whatever grievances existed.

Word soon got around that shop owners and construction bosses could expect a visit from a young priest from the Convitto, who could become very hardheaded, if any of his boys were being mistreated or were being paid less than a fair wage. [24]

The almost total neglect of any kind of religious instruction in the life of an apprentice compelled Don Bosco to address this abuse in his work contracts. What especially grieved him was the common practice of employers to deny their apprentices any kind of respite on the Lord's day—which made it virtually impossible for them to receive the sacraments.

A study of the Aimino–Bordone contract reveals that a provision is clearly in place for young Joseph to be free on Sundays so that he may "attend church services and religious instruction." Nor will master Charles Aimino "require his apprentice to work on Sundays and holy days." [25] Thus was the young apprentice afforded every opportunity to fulfill his religious duties. One striking provision in the Bordone contract is the more–than–generous compensation which Charles Aimino was required to pay his apprentice. Article three calls for the master to pay him "one lira a day during the first year, one and-a-half lire during the second year, and two lire a day during his third year of service. For an apprentice still learning his trade, this was a magnanimous

[24] Teresio Bosco, *Don Bosco: una biografia nuova* (Torino, 1979).

[25] A translation of the Aimino–Bordone work contract is found on page 75. For the Italian version see Lemoyne, *IBM,* Vol. 4:295-297.

APPRENTICESHIP CONTRACT

Albany, New York 1783

This Indenture witnesseth that Jacob Stayley, son of Mary Stayley, hath put himself, and by these presents, by and with the Consent of his Mother doth voluntarily, and of his own free will and accord make himself Apprentice to Jacob Hochstrasser of the Hellenbergh in the County of Albany Weaver, to learn the Art, Trade and Mystery of Weaving and after the manner of an Apprentice, to serve from the day of the date,—hereof for and during the Term of Twelve Years and Three Months, next Insuing during all which time the said apprentice, his said Master faithfully shall serve, his Secrets keep, his lawfully commands everywhere readily obey, he shall do no damage to said master, nor see it to be dun by others, without letting or giving notice thereof, to his said Master. Shall not waste his Masters goods, nor lend them unlawfully to any. He shall not commit fornication nor Contract Matrimony within the said Term; at Cards, dice or any other Unlawful Games he shall not play, whereby his said Master may have damage, with his own goods or the goods of others: without license from his said Master he shall neither buy nor sell, he shall not absent himself day or Night from his Masters Service or Play in his leave, nor haunt Ale Houses . . . [several words illegible] . . . for him sufficient Meat, drink, Apparel, lodging and washing, fitting for an Apprentice during the said term of Twelve Years & three Months, and at the Expiration of said Term, shall give the said Apprentice, an Outfit of New Apparel and a young mare and for the true performance of all and singular, the Covenant and Agreements, afore said, the said partners by themselves, each unto the other, firmly by presents. In witness whereof the said partners interchangeably set their hands and seals here dated the Second of August in the seventh year of the Independence of this State Adommini, One Thousand and Seven Hundred and Eighty three—

Signed Seal'd and deliver'd
In the presence of us—

his
Jacob X Stayley
mark

Anthony Turch
George Van Arnem

Jacob Hochstrasser

To make the above reproduction of the apprenticeship contract of 1783 as authentic as possible, grammar, spelling, and punctuation have been left as they appeared in the original contract.

Work Contract

Turin, November 1851

This contractual agreement, drawn up at the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales between Mr. Charles Aimino and Joseph Bordone, a student of the aforementioned Oratory, and for whom Mr. Victor Ritner acts as guarantor, may be voided at any time at the request of either of the contracting parties. It is therefore agreed that:

1° Mr. Charles Aimino shall accept as apprentice glassblower, Joseph Bordone of Biella, to whom he will teach his trade for the next three years, ending December l, 1854. In addition, Mr.Aimino obligates himself to give to the aforesaid Bordone all the requisite instruction and information regarding the mystery of his craft during his apprenticeship, together with suitable advice concerning his proper deportment, and, if necessary to reprimand him verbally, but by no other means. He also pledges himself to employ his apprentice only in such tasks as are directly related to his craft, and he shall avoid taxing the youth beyond his strength.

2° In order that said apprentice may attend church services, religious instruction, and other activities at the aforementioned Oratory, the master shall not require his apprentice to work on Sundays and holy days. If illness (or some other legitimate reason) should force said apprentice to absent himself from work for more than fifteen days per year, the master shall be entitled to have that number of missed days of work added as additional workdays at the end of the apprenticeship period.

3° The master agrees to pay the apprentice during his period of service, one lira a day for the first year, one-and-a-half lire during the second year, and two lire a day throughout the third year. Wages are to be paid weekly. (The said apprentice shall be entitled to the customary two-week vacation).

4° The master agrees to produce a written and truthful report on the conduct of the apprentice at the end of each month, using the appropriate form supplied to him for this purpose.

5° On his part Joseph Bordone, apprentice, obligates himself to serve his master industriously and diligently throughout his period of service; he promises, further, to be obedient, respectful, and docile toward his master, to conduct himself in a manner befitting a good apprentice. Mr. Victor Ritner, goldsmith, here present, vouches for the youth and pledges to make compensation for any damage caused by the negligence of the apprentice.

6° In the event that said apprentice should be dismissed from the Oratory for culpable cause (thus ending all relationship with the director of the aforementioned Oratory) all agreements between the director of the Oratory and the master shall also cease forthwith.

7° The director of the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales hereby promises to supervise the conduct of the apprentice during his stay at the Oratory. He will also promptly review any complaint filed by the master against his apprentice during the latter's period of residence at said Oratory.

compensation. In fact, young Bordone's daily pay compared favorably with the daily wage, at that time, of a day laborer in the mines, a worker in a paper mill, or a textile worker in the city. In Piedmont the average daily wage of men in workshops has been calculated at 1.35 lire a day. Women and children earned .50 and .40 lire a day respectively. Day laborers in Turin received from one lira to 1.25 lire a day. The wages of bricklayers varied from 1.80 to 2.25 lire. [26]

Besides the better–than–average daily wage an apprentice generally earned, Don Bosco's work contract also called for an unusual bonus. His apprentice was to be given the "customary two–week vacation every year." None of the contracts examined for this period reveals a perquisite of this nature. Which leads one to wonder what means of persuasion Don Bosco used to convince masters of his prospective apprentices to agree to such liberal terms.

Generous as the terms of the work contract may have been, it was not open–ended. Don Bosco acted as the young man's surety contingent on his good behavior. "In the event that the apprentice should be expelled from the Oratory through his own fault (thus ending all relationship with the director of said Oratory), all relations between the director of the Oratory and the master of the apprentice shall cease forthwith" (Article 6).

Until 1853 Don Bosco's efforts to improve the conditions of working children in Turin had been restricted by his limited resources. A mutual aid society and work contracts only went so far, and there was much more to be done. The time had arrived for him to take a giant stride forward, even though it was to be preceded by a few stumbling and even errant steps. He was now determined to establish his own workshops on the Oratory premises so young people could learn a trade out of harm's way. [27]

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[26] In his article in the *American Historical Review,* "French Finance and Italian Unity: The Cavourian Decade" (Vol. 62: 552-569), Rondo E. Cameron notes that the gold lira was equal at that time to the gold franc and was worth about 20 cents in pre-1914 dollars. No accurate way of measuring the lira's value in terms of present-day currencies exists, but it can be said that the gold lira or franc in 1850 was roughly the same as that of a United States dollar in 1950. A comparison of various tables listing the salary earnings of this period is less than uniform. However, the figures cited above compare favorably with O. Barie's study of 19th-century wage earners in Piedmont. See *L'Italia nell'ottocento* (Torino, 1964), 395-398. Also helpful is Sussidi, Vol. 1 (Roma, 1986 *pro manuscripto)* part IV.

[27] It is difficult to ascertain the time and circumstances in which the possibility of introducing vocational training first took germ in Don Bosco's mind. As early as 1849 he had sent Father Peter Ponte, then director of the Saint Aloysius Oratory in Turin, to Milan and Brescia to study the organization and operation of several working boys' homes. Father Ponte was instructed to examine the methods that were being used in those *ospizi* (hospices which sheltered working boys). He was advised also to focus his attention especially on the type of discipline, the administrative practices, and the quality of religious instruction that prevailed.

What finally led Don Bosco to take action and introduce workshops in Valdocco? Certainly he had not devised any bold or innovative master plan for a trade school. Nor had he experienced any dream directing him to channel his energy into vocational education. Like Eva's Topsy, the Oratory shops were never born—they "just grow'd".

Biographer Lemoyne attributes the beginning of the Oratory workshops to two factors. The first alleged that Don Bosco at this time realized that vocational education was destined to become part of his educational master plan ("della sua visione educativa"). This allegation, though difficult to substantiate, did in time find form and substance.

A second factor, far more compelling, was Don Bosco's moral imperative to rescue youth at risk. From his first years in Turin he was greatly disturbed by what working youths had to experience while employed in the city's factories, mills, and workshops. These experiences he witnessed firsthand. In one of the first issues of the *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings) he narrates the gauntlet he himself had to run through when visiting some of his boys at work:

> No sooner did I enter a factory or workshop than the Lord's name was bandied about in an irreverent and sometimes blasphemous manner—no doubt for my benefit. As I made my way among the workers looking for my young friends, I was shocked by obscene remarks directed my way and spoken loud and clear for me to hear. But that was only the beginning. The Church and her priests were next made the targets of contempt and ridicule. And more than once I had to witness a group of young apprentices huddled around some older worker listening to his shameful and vile stories. [28]

No doubt the pleas of anxious mothers asking him to find work for their sons away from such corrupting influences must have spurred Don Bosco to take some kind of action: "Worried mothers often came to him seeking ways to get their sons out of vicious circumstances they found themselves in, and to place them where they could learn a trade or craft without endangering their souls." [29]

Francesco Traniello, describing the disturbing social changes which industrialization had created in the capital, confirmed Don Bosco's fears and apprehension:

Biographer Lemoyne notes that the visitor returned to Turin after a few weeks "loaded down with notes." Lemoyne, *EBM* Vol. 3:403-404.

[28] Lemoyne, *IBM*, Vol. 4:664.

[29] Lemoyne, *EBM*, Vol. 4:461.

> When Don Bosco's boys left the Oratory for their jobs in city, there always existed a clear and present danger, even though their places of work may have been carefully screened. Because they were Don Bosco's boys, they were often the constant target of ridicule and even moral entrapment. [30]

It was no wonder then that Don Bosco became determined to do everything within his power to keep his boys as close to home as possible. ("sotto il suo stesso tetto") .

Salesian historian, Pietro Stella, suggests a third (and pragmatic) reason which may have also induced Don Bosco to favor the presence of workshops in his Oratory. Such facilities helped defray the mounting expenses that were draining his resources. Moreover, a well–managed workshop could very well generate income for the school.

If Don Bosco did entertain this possibility, then he had conjectured well. Time would show that the tailor and shoemaking shops did help considerably in cutting down the cost of clothing his boys and keeping them shod. The metal and carpentry shops proved to be useful in meeting the many needs of ongoing construction frequently underway as the Oratory expanded its facilities. And the print shop not only served to supply much–needed textbooks, religious manuals, and educational materials, but helped, after an uncertain start, to generate badly needed income.

The opportunity Don Bosco had been waiting for came with the addition of the new Oratory wing. The year was 1853. The first two shops were begun with little fanfare and under almost primitive circumstances. The shoemaking shop was started on a shoestring: two cobbler's workbenches and

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[30] Don Bosco's fears about his boys being subjected to immoral conditions in a city often described as "half cloister and half barracks" was well founded. Poverty created by harsh working conditions easily bred crime. Many families (often forced to live in a single room) lived from hand to mouth, and survival was a struggle. Long work days (14-16 hours) were not uncommon, and wore down both morale and morality.

Don Bosco's fears were not limited to foul talk and blasphemy (the latter could bring a six-year prison sentence). Prostitution was now becoming more flagrant. By 1850 it had become a menacing health problem. Even though the Health Office was taking severe measures to curb vice and immorality, the city's Sifilicomo (Syphilitic Asylum) had over 1,000 prostitutes in confinement; it was reckoned that there were still another 2,000 plying their trade in the capital.

For a rare look (in English) of crime and immorality in Italy during this period see John Anthony Davis, *Conflict and Control: Law and Order in l9th Century Italy* (New Jersey, 1988), 91f.

four stools comprised the entire inventory. The tools used, if not begged or borrowed, were the cheapest available. Don Bosco was the first teacher. A circle of boys, curious and eager eyed, watched as he resoled a pair of old shoes, demonstrating as he deftly plied the cobbler's awl, that he had not lost the skill he had learned in his boyhood. A crash program in cobbling quickly followed, and Dominic Goffi, the Oratory porter, was pressed into service as the shop's first instructor.

A tailor shop was the next undertaking. It invaded Margaret Bosco's primitive kitchen even as her pots and pans were being relocated into the new wing which now housed a larger and improved kitchen. Again Don Bosco, this time assisted by his mother, was the teacher. The skill he had learned at Giovanni Roberto's tailor shop during his school days in Castelnuovo, stood him in good stead.

Pleased with the modest success of the first two shops, a third was begun—an adventure in bookbinding—amid playful banter and good humor. Teresio Bosco in his inimitable style captures the charm of the birth of what was to become the Oratory bindery:

> One day Don Bosco gathered several of his boys around a table on which he had stacked the printer's signatures of his pamphlet, *Our Guardian Angel.* None of the boys had the slightest inkling of what the craft of bookbinding was all about. To each of them it was a totally arcane subject.
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> Glancing casually around, Don Bosco's glance fell on one of the boys. Pointing to him he said:
>
> "You're going to be our bookbinder."
>
> "Me? I don't even know what the word means."
>
> "It's easy," Don Bosco assured him. "Look. Do you see these large sheets of paper? They're called signatures. You fold each one in half. Then again, and again once more. Finally one more time. Now you try it."
>
> Eager and willing hands soon had the signatures folded. Don Bosco next stacked them neatly in a pile. Asking his mother for a large sewing needle, the job of stitching the signatures together was quickly finished. A little flour and water provided the mucilage needed to glue on the paper cover. But one last operation remained. The rough edges still had to be trimmed. A few moments of hesitation. How to trim the pages to secure a smooth even edge? Everyone around the table had a quick solution: "Use a pair of scissors," said one. "A sharp knife will do it, cried another. "Someone get a file," piped up a third.
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> Then it was Don Bosco's turn. Disappearing into the pantry, he soon returned with a razor-sharp, crescent-shape cleaver which his

> mother used to shred vegetables. With a few swift strokes, the edges of the pamphlet were neatly trimmed. Clapping and general laughter around the table. The bookbinding shop was born. [31]

Eight years later in 1861 the print shop at the Oratory was begun. This was the one shop that Don Bosco had long had his heart set upon, and the one which in time would bring the Oratory acclaim and recognition. At first lack of space, later shortage of funds, had delayed its opening. As early as 1853, Don Bosco's friend, the renowned philosopher Antonio Rosmini had learned that he was toying with the idea of starting a print shop. Rosmini wrote to Don Bosco from Stresa, informing him that an associate of his, the Reverend J. Bellati, had established a print shop in his school in Brescia "to provide work for some poor youngsters, and at the same time secure a source of income for their education." Rosmini then urged Don Bosco to "do the same thing for your boys in Valdocco."

Hoping that he would take him up on his proposal, Rosmini made his friend an offer he was sure he would not refuse: "I would be willing to advance you a modest sum to get you started," he wrote. He followed this offer with an attractive pitch that he was sure would get his attention: "With a print shop in your school you could produce educational and religious materials that are in much demand. There is a great need for such items. And I can assure you that you will receive print jobs from our Institute of Charity that will keep you busy. Please think it over and let me know." [32]

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[31] Teresio Bosco, *op.cit.*, 226. An account of this episode can also be found in Lemoyne, *EBM,* Vol. 5:22f. On November 9, 1854 the Catholic newspaper, *L'Armonia*, carried the news item that a bookbinding shop had been opened at the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales. On Don Bosco's behalf it solicited orders from clients who had books that needed binding. They were assured that they would benefit from the "lower prices" that were offered to first–time patrons.

[32] Rosmini entertained high hopes for the success of Don Bosco's print shop venture. From his letter one infers that clients, including his own Institute, would beat a path to his door. But he had no way of foretelling the economic recession that would take place a few years later when the capital of the New Italy was transferred from Turin to Florence. When this did actually occur, Turin went into a severe economic slump. Shops closed, factories were boarded up, unemployment rose sharply. With the flight of military and government offices to Florence, many of the print shop's clients also vanished. In a letter to Cavaliere Oreglia Don Bosco complained that his print shop had almost nothing to do ("I tipografi sono senza lavoro"), and no new job orders were coming in. But Don Bosco hung on resolutely. To keep his presses running he turned to the school market. Besides his *Catholic Readings,* he began to publish textbooks *(The Children's Library)* and his series of expurgated Latin classics. By 1870 Turin was experiencing an economic boom, and

Don Bosco did think it over—carefully and astutely. Two major obstacles stood in the way: lack of a suitable place to accommodate a print shop, and despite Rosmini's generous offer, lack of funds to keep the operation going. His reply to his benefactor was straightforward: "Just how much capital can you supply?" As for Rosmini's cautionary remark that he might find it difficult to secure "a good foreman and dependable managers, Don Bosco dismissed both potential predicaments as irrelevant: "They will not present any problems at all." Time would prove him wrong on both counts. After carefully weighing all the pros and cons, he decided that at that point in time, starting a print shop was not feasible.

A press of his own may have been out of sight, but it was never out of mind. Finally, after cutting through a mountain of bureaucratic red tape, Don Bosco secured the required license to open a print shop. The date was December 31, 1861.

An undated flier, printed by the student artisans themselves, proudly announced to Oratory friends and benefactors that the Oratory Press was now open for business. The first client to respond was the ecclesiastic Canon Christopher Schmid. His novelette, with a decidingly unappealing title, *The Pleasing Tale of Theophilus, the Young Hermit,* appeared in one of the first issues of the Catholic Readings which were now being printed in Valdocco. On the inside cover of Schmid's adventure tale was the simple caption: "Printed by the Oratory Press of Saint Francis of Sales.

Frustrating as the beginnings of the print shop had been, and despite the initial use of outdated and broken-down equipment, Don Bosco lived to see the day when his Oratory Press would rival the most modern and up–to–date printing firms in Turin. [33]

Don Bosco's Oratory Press began to prosper. See Stella, *op.cit.*, 247; *Epistolario,* Ceria Vol. 1:534; Pazzaglia, *op.cit.*, 36.

[33] Ten years after the Oratory Press began operation, Don Bosco had to defend its success. In 1872 at a convention meeting of printers and booksellers, a motion was made to induce the municipal authorities to pass an ordinance forbidding all print shops connected with public or private schools to compete on the open market with the city's print shops and bookstores. It was no secret that the thriving Oratory Press was one of the principal targets of this discriminatory proposal. Don Bosco was quick to inform the convention officials that his was a private entrepreneurial operation whose sole purpose was the training of boys to earn a living. The Oratory print shop was an educational enterprise and not a money–making business. Whatever profits derived from its operation were used to defray the cost of lodging, feeding, and educating the student artisans who were taught their trade in the school shop. Could the printing–firm owners and operators make the same claim for their employees? The proposal was quietly tabled.

Biographer Lemoyne attempts to capture the excitement that swept through the Oratory at the opening of the new print shop. In spite of his typical florid flourishes, his description is not far off the mark:

> Having launched out on this new enterprise, Don Bosco hastened to distribute circulars which informed his Oratory friends of the new addition to the shops in Valdocco. Congratulations poured in from everywhere. The school's benefactors especially expressed their delight at the latest development. Yet, at the moment, no one could have foreseen that two small presses would soon double and then triple, and that their manual operation would yield to steam– and then electric–driven machinery. Nor did anyone ever expect that stereotyping, copper plating, and typecasting would all become part of the whole operation. Who could ever have foreseen the vast funds that divine Providence would channel Don Bosco's way to purchase the huge stores of material and equipment he needed to make his press a success? Who could have foreseen the endless stream of books, pamphlets, religious tracts—many in foreign languages—that would roll off the presses, even in Don Bosco's lifetime? Who could possibly have foretold the numerous awards that would be won by the Oratory Press when they participated in European fairs, such as Rome's Vatican Fair and London's Italian Fair? Nor could anyone have anticipated the high praise and prizes that would be won at the International Fair in Brussels, and at Turin's National Exposition of 1884. [34]

It did not take long for Don Bosco to learn that operating a school shop for boys would be more difficult than staffing one with men. Through a process of trial and error he eventually arrived at a workable solution, but the snags he encountered along the way proved to be numerous and disconcerting. The final and satisfactory solution for staffing and managing the Oratory shops had to await the arrival of the lay Salesian. But that was still a decade away.

Perhaps Don Bosco's proudest and finest hour regarding the accomplishments of the Oratory Press came during the National Exposition of 1884 held in Turin. But it was a bittersweet moment of victory. Although Don Bosco's exhibit did not win the gold medal it richly deserved, his presentation was recognized as the best in the Workers Pavilion. See Natale Cerrato's article in this issue: "EXPO '84 and Don Bosco's Peerless Pulp-to-Paper-to-Print Presentation".

[34] Lemoyne, *IBM*, Vol. 7:60.

Meanwhile salaried *giornalieri* (skilled and experienced laymen) assisted Don Bosco as the shops' first teachers. [35]

At the beginning of the 1857–58 school year the number of working boys and student artisans at the Oratory had increased considerably. Records show that of the 199 boys who lodged at the Oratory, more than a third (78) were student artisans—a term that included apprentices, boys learning a trade, and working youths who continued to go to work every morning in the city.

Filling his workshops with youths eager to learn a trade was an easy matter for Don Bosco. But, as Father Rosmini had warned, finding reliable "foremen" and trustworthy "managers" would plague Don Bosco during the first years.

In the beginning the practice that obtained in each school shop focused more on production than instruction. The shop teacher was expected to meet a certain quota assigned to him. To meet his quota, therefore, he skimped on the time he should have spent teaching the basic skills of the trade to his students. Most of his time and attention went into completing his assigned quota of the shop's expected products.

The failure of the shop instructor to make teaching a trade his first priority prompted Don Bosco to take another tack. This time he ordered each instructor to reach a balance of teaching *and* producing. Thus he was to assume the full responsibility of what went on in his shop—he controlled both labor and management. Moreover, as the *padrone di bottega* he was permitted to pocket whatever profits the shop reaped. His only requirement was to pay each of his student artisans at least the equivalent of a minimum wage.

The weakness inherent in the first method was compounded in the second. Since each shop student was now answerable to his shop instructor (who also paid him for his performance) it was to the latter that the student gave his complete loyalty. As a consequence the *autorità* of the Oratory superiors was placed in jeopardy. The 'sacred' school schedule, for example, was often conveniently ignored; chapel attendance slacked off; the participation of the student artisans at traditional Oratory practices became spotty at best. The life of the shop student now revolved around his shop teacher. What his hands could produce and the weekly wage he received became his chief and sometimes only interest.

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[35] The laymen who assisted in the Oratory shops in the early years ("personale laico") were either skilled or willing workers who were motivated by Don Bosco's religious goals and educational ideals. A number of them remained with him at the Oratory for many years. In time some professed as lay Salesians. Peter Enria and Joseph Buzzetti are examples of shop instructors who became so committed.

To counter the ascendancy that shop instructors had gained over their pupils, Don Bosco placed himself squarely in the middle—between teacher and student. He himself took over the administration of each shop and entered into a quasi–financial partnership with each instructor. Both were to share equally in the profits and expenses in the operation of each school work shop. But before long Don Bosco learned that some of his instructors were making private deals and consummating jobs for secret clients and in the process were being paid under the table ("cercavano d'accordarsi sotto banco con il contraente"). [36]

Rosmini had been right all along. "Good foremen" and "honest managers" were hard to find. It would take time before the internal organization of the Oratory school shop would function to Don Bosco's satisfaction. As the lay Salesian became an integral part of the Salesian school staff, this creation of Don Bosco stepped into the breach and provided the efficiency and honesty that made the shop program at Valdocco a success:

> Things vastly improved in the running of the Oratory shops when the Salesian lay brother *(coadiutore)* became an indispensable part of the Oratory personnel. As their number increased and as their shop skills and expertise in the teaching of trades reached a high level of competency, they gradually replaced the laymen who from the onset had played the major role in the operation of the school shops. [37]

The opening of the print shop in 1861 was the high point in the creation and development of the shop program in Valdocco. As it turned out the Oratory

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[36] Lemoyne takes a dim view of the skullduggery on the part of some of the early shop teachers towards Don Bosco. Among other abuses that he cites was the frequent practice of some instructors to use the students' tools and equipment rather than their own, thus saving wear and tear of their own tools: "At first Don Bosco insisted that each instructor furnish his own tools while the Oratory would provide all necessary equipment to be used by the student artisans. However, as it turned out, the teachers borrowed the Oratory tools to save wear and tear on their own." *EBM* 5:498. This issue is also treated by Ceria in his *Annali,* Vol. 1, 650-651. Lemoyne also notes that some of the early shop teachers did not have the best interests of their best students at heart. Fearing the possibility of eventually being replaced by the more talented student artisans they were given minimum attention and training. See also Morand Wirth, *The Salesians* (New Rochelle, New York, 1982) Translated by David de Burgh, SDB, 34.

[37] Luciano Pazzaglia, "Apprendistato e istruzione degli artigiani a Valdocco (1846-1886) in *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare,* ed. Francesco Traniello (Torino, 1987), 27.

Press of Saint Francis of Sales would become the jewel in the crown of the Oratory's half-dozen shops. [38]

The early 1860s saw a sharp rise in construction and industrial development in Turin and its environs. The proximity of this subalpine city to sources of motor energy and low–cost transportation, afforded by navigable rivers and canals (both absent in the South), and because of nearby ore deposits, the machine industry settled around the two major cities of Northern Italy, Turin and Milan. This created a great demand for iron products, resulting in a surge of employment opportunities of more than 12% in Turin between 1857–1862. [39] Although machine technology was still in its infancy in the city by the Po, Don Bosco saw the commercial viability for a new work shop at the Oratory that would create jobs for ironworkers and mechanics. In 1862 he opened a metal shop, the last major Oratory shop begun in his lifetime.

By 1870 the vocational program at the Oratory was alive and well. The student artisans by now were well represented among the school's student population. In his preface to volume 10 of the *Memorie Biografiche (vi.)* Angelo Amadei notes that in that year there were 428 boys living at the Oratory. More than half (228) were student artisans learning a trade. [40]

But it took some time before the shop students were fully accepted into the school community. In the beginning there was an uneasy coexistence between shop and classroom. The schoolboys who filled the well–ordered classrooms of the *ginnasio* were a breed apart from the rough and tumble world of the student artisans. In the early years, the latter, unused to discipline or to the rigid school schedule in effect made the Oratory superiors apprehensive. Even Don Bosco, recalling those struggling years, had to admit: "They drove everybody crazy because they were so undisciplined." ('altri anni erano per

[38] Actually, a seventh shop that taught the trade of the hatter was also in operation at this time. Amadei notes in his preface to volume 10 (vi.) of the *Biographical Memoirs* that five boys were learning this craft at the Oratory. At a time when adults wore some kind of headgear, and men rarely appeared hatless in public, a shop to train future hatters seemed a promising endeavor. However, difficulty in finding a skilled and competent layman to run the shop caused Don Bosco gradually to phase it out.

[39] Stella, *op. cit.*, 249.

[40] For some inexplicable reason these statistics are omitted in the English version of the *Biographical Memoirs*. More's the pity. Amadei's tenth volume also includes some remarkable historical photographs of student group photos. Very revealing are the group pictures of the student artisans of the print shop (p.640); the carpentry shop (p.800); the tailor shop (p.944). A photo session in those days must have been a very grim business. There are no smiling faces in the groups.

indisciplina vero flagella per la casa') [41] Uncouth in their manners, often disheveled in appearance, distrustful of authority, the young workers whom Don Bosco harbored in his Oratory must have taxed his patience to the breaking point. They proved to be a greater challenge perhaps than he had ever anticipated:

> I am very pleased that now many of the boys and apprentices who learned their trades in our shops come around to see me frequently. I don't mean only to go to confession. Now they drop in for a friendly chat or talk with me on the playground. It was not always like that. There was a time when they used to look at Don Bosco as though he were a bogeyman and steered clear of him ('si guardava Don Bosco come se fosse un apauracchio e lo fuggivano sempre'). In those early times our students used to throng around my confessional, especially on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings. But our shop boys were never in sight. Hard as I tried I barely managed to get just a few to come to confession. Sometimes not even a single one of them would show up. [42]

Also frustrating was the instability of the first student artisans during their shop training. Unlike the ginnasio schoolboys, their dropout rate was much higher. Some remained at the Oratory only a few months; and after they had mastered the basic skills of their trade they abruptly left. Others would remain longer, but the moment a job–offering came their way they too departed, sometimes without even a passing farewell.

By the mid seventies the student artisans became more integrated with the Oratory community. No doubt Don Bosco's abiding patience and the presence of the lay Salesian who trained them for the world of work had won the day.

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[41] Don Bosco often made allowances for the lack of discipline that may have marked the student artisans in those early years. He knew only too well what life in the streets and in factories and workshops was like. As he himself admitted: "They don't have to be angels." (*EBM*, Vol. 10:640). In fact his tolerance and patience in time paid off. Don Bosco was very gratified to watch his student artisans who in the beginning "drove everybody crazy" gradually settle down and adjust to Oratory life. And he must have been extremely delighted when "several have asked to join our Congregation." (*ibid.*, 460).

[42] Ceria, *IBM*, Vol. 12:150.