

I. BEGINNING, EXTENSION AND CHARISMATIC AND INSTITUTIONAL CONSOLIDATION OF THE WORK AT VALDOCCO

Don Bosco, at the advice of his spiritual director, St Joseph Cafasso⁵ from autumn 1844 to summer 1846 lived at the Barolo Refuge⁶ as chaplain of the Little Hospital of St Philomena, opened in August 1845. In the same place and in other temporary places not far from Valdocco, he carried out his early priestly ministry on behalf of boys, mostly immigrant lads who had no parish of reference. On the vigil of his move to the Pinardi house, he drew up for the civil authorities of the city of Turin, who were responsible for and concerned about public order, a very brief account of his three years of catechetical activity, indicating the aims and results he had achieved that were positive both for civil society and the Church (no. 1).

Three years later (1849), the oratory work at Valdocco had already extended to another two parts of the city (Porta Nuova, Vanchiglia), was frequented by around a thousand boys, but had been extended especially through school activities and a small boarding house (no. 3).

Three years later again (1852), always in view of tackling new needs of the youngsters, the structures at the Oratory at Valdocco were considerably extended with new buildings, including a new church, thanks also to the results of a raffle (lottery) which enabled Don Bosco to succeed in considerably broadening his circle of benefactors (no. 6). Amongst these were well-known city authorities and personalities invited to attend an academic performance put on by his evening classes for young working lads (no. 7).

⁵ Fr Joseph Cafasso (1811-1860), teacher at and Rector of the Pastoral Institute, Turin. Proclaimed Saint in 1947 by Pius XII.

⁶ Pious Work founded by Marchioness Giulia Falletti di Barolo, nee Colbert (1785-1864), to take in women (for free) who had been in prison or had been involved in prostitution.

The attention of this sub-alpine educator however was potentially addressed to a very wide circle of young people: young Piedmontese who needed moral education at a time of freedom of the press, by means of a newspaper for them (no. 2), to young apprentices at the Oratory whom he helped internally by means of a Mutual aid Society (no. 4) and whom he helped outside with regard to their rights from their employers in town (no. 5), to Italian youth in general and the ordinary people in the country needing protection at a time of strong secularisation, through a range of publishing initiatives (no. 9).

During the years of the “home attached” at the Oratory, by now economically guaranteed (no. 8), this was now enriched with new activities: internal secondary classes (no. 11), arts and trades workshops (no. 12), a large church (no. 16). All this was realised at a time that was religiously and politically difficult, feeding suspicions amongst the governing authorities who also appreciated the work at Valdocco. Don Bosco sought to defend himself through personal contacts and detailed self-defence in correspondence (no. 15).

For the internal use especially of his growing Salesian Congregation he drew up occasional accounts of the history of the Oratory, where he was the main character, actor, witness, and the only formator of its personnel (nos. 10, 13, 17).

Meanwhile in Turin the Oratory of St Aloysius at Porta Nuova was also growing, with the construction of a new church (no. 19).

In turn the Oratory (and the home attached) at Valdocco, to which Don Bosco dedicated all his concern, and in which and from his direct experience he developed his educational system and formed his teachers, began to become, because of its chronological precedence, its coverage and prestige, the mother house for youth works and the Salesian Congregation itself. In the early seventies the tiny ‘kingdom’ of Valdocco was ready to extend its boundaries under the banner of a mission perceived as desired and blessed from on high. The charismatic figure of Don Bosco and the original experiences of his ‘sons’ by his side at the mythical Oratory at Valdocco became sources of inspiration for whoever left home to be transplanted under other skies.

The 16 documents published here in chronological order (along with the other 22) mark in a certain way the main stages of internal development of the Oratory at Valdocco. Obviously for a better understanding of its history, you should go to the bibliography at the end of the volume.

1. To the Vicar of the city, Marquis Michele Benso di Cavour

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 66-68.

Turin, 13 March 1846

Your Excellency⁷,

The role which Your Excellency plays in everything to do with the public good, both civil and moral, leads me to hope that you will not find it disagreeable [*discaro*]⁸ to have some information concerning our catechetical programme, that has the good of youth at heart. Its purpose is the good of young people, and you yourself have shown favour and support for it on a number of occasions.

This catechetical programme began three years ago in the Church of St Francis of Assisi and, since the Lord blesses his own work, young people attended in greater number than the place could accommodate. Then in 1844, for reasons of employment I established myself at the Pious Work of the Refuge and these good young people continued coming there for religious instruction. It was precisely at that time that Rev. (Dr) Borel⁹ and Rev. Fr Pacchiotti and myself presented a petition to the Archbishop, who then authorised us to convert our room into an Oratory where we could

⁷ Marquis Michele Benso di Cavour (1781-1850), father of statesman Count Camillo, was Vicar General of policy and the police from 1835 to 1847 with the task of seeing to public order in the city and its suburbs.

⁸ *Discaro*, translated here as 'disagreeable'. *Discaro* is not common today in Italian.

⁹ Fr John Borel: Turinese priest (1801-1873), doctor in theology, royal chaplain (1831-1841), spiritual director of the college of St Francis da Paola (1829-1843) then spiritual director of the Works of the Marchioness Barolo. He was, with Fr Cafasso, a valuable supporter and collaborator of Don Bosco especially at the beginnings of the Oratory, when he took on the responsibility of dealing with civic and church authorities.

teach catechism, hear confessions, celebrate Mass for the above-mentioned youngsters.

But since their number grew and they could no longer fit in there, we put the issue to our illustrious City authorities and they authorised us to relocate our catechism classes to St Martin's Chapel at the city mills. Lots of youngsters turned up there; at times more than two hundred and fifty of them.

But the City authorities asked us to relocate our catechetical programme elsewhere, come January, without offering us a reason. This was a serious dilemma for us, since to have to abandon the good work we had begun seemed such a pity. Only His Excellency, Count Collegno¹⁰, gave us the courage to continue after speaking with you.

During the winter we carried on using our own room and some other rooms we rented. Finally, this week we negotiated a site with Mr Pinardi¹¹. We agreed on the sum of two hundred and eighty francs for a large room which we can use for the Oratory plus another two rooms with some adjacent land. This place seems convenient to us, because it is very close to The Refuge and also because it is far from any Church but close to some homes. It remains for you to indicate that this is acceptable for the neighbourhood and the wider community.

The purpose of this catechetical programme is to gather young people on weekends and holy days who, left to their own devices, would not attend any Church for instruction. We do this by encouraging them to be good through our words, promises, gifts and the like. Our teaching is limited simply to this: 1. Love for work. 2. Frequenting the holy Sacraments. 3. Respect for all their superiors. 4. Flight from bad companions.

These principles which we make every effort to inculcate in the hearts of the young have produced marvellous results. In the space of three years

¹⁰ Giuseppe Luigi Giacinto Provana di Collegno (1785-1854), special councillor for the King. From 1840 he was President, chief and general comptroller of Finances.

¹¹ Francesco Pinardi, who migrated from Arcisate (Varese), with a contract dated 1st April 1846 rented out the "shed" to Don Bosco, as the stable place for the Oratory.

more than twenty have embraced the religious state, six are studying Latin so they can undertake an ecclesiastical career, many others who now have better sentiments go to their respective parishes. This is noteworthy given the quality of these boys, most of them between ten and sixteen years of age, without any religious or educational background and most of them prey to vice and at risk of being cause for public complaint or being sent to a place of correction.

You are good-hearted and love whatever can redound to the public civil and moral good. Hence we ask you to protect our efforts which, as can be well seen, have no shadow of material gain in mind but only gaining souls for the Lord.

The costs involved in finding and setting up the place indicated have been considerable. Count Collegno, gratefully mentioned above, has offered to help us and gave us permission to put our case to Your Excellency. He indicated he would then explain the matter to you in detail. Whenever you should wish to speak with me and my colleagues, we are ready at the slightest indication. It is our most eager wish.

And in asking you to look kindly on the liberty I have taken, I wish you everything that is good from the Lord and regard it as the greatest honour that I can express my esteem and profound respect.

Your Excellency's most humble and indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco
Spiritual Director at the Refuge.

2. Circular for support of the magazine the *Friend of Youth*

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 83-84.

[Turin, January 1849]

Distinguished Sir,

Freedom of the press, the confusion that some magazines are creating in religious matters to dishonour and vilify religion, persuade us of the great

need there is for religious magazines to oppose those who deal so cunningly with the truth¹².

It is for this purpose that we are, to our great satisfaction, in the third month since *The Friend of Youth* came into being. But because of the need for an antidote against the lack of religion not only amongst youth, but amongst other classes of people, we have resolved to produce it in such a way that it can be the friend of every Catholic family.

Huge expenses are required for this enterprise and since the number of associates is not sufficient we are inviting Your Excellency to buy shares in it.

They are of various amounts: 20, 50 and 100 francs, given the good will and possibilities of contributors. At the end of the current month a quarter of the shares will be paid back. The rest will be paid by quarterly advance. As soon as the magazine reaches the stage where subscriptions cover expenses Your Excellency will receive reimbursement for what was advanced with a *free* subscription and a premium corresponding to what the magazine earns.

The well-known zeal of Your Excellency in looking after the people, your obvious fondness for everything regarding religion, makes us hopeful of your powerful cooperation in this determination of ours that everything be done to maintain morality and preserve religion.

You can help us not only with shares, but also by promoting the magazine, which is why we are sending you some numbers of the magazine to offer to people who can only be pleased at the efforts of someone whose only reward for his labours is the preservation and sound progress of the Catholic Religion.

Meanwhile, imploring Heaven's every blessing on you we are greatly honoured to be,

¹² After freedom of the press was granted (1848), Don Bosco and others founded *The Friend of Youth* to control the influence of anticlerical magazines. It was a religious, moral and political magazine aimed at "confirming the people in their Catholic Faith ... and instructing them, educating them in virtue", "so in this magazine nothing will be spared of what can serve to enlighten the human intellect and improve the heart" (editorial of no. 1, October 21, 1848, p. 1). The magazine only survived a few months due to financial difficulties.

Your Excellency's humble servants,

For the administration
Fr John Bosco, manager

P.S. Shareholders in the city are asked to send the undersigned bill to the management at the printers where this magazine is published. By provincial post.

3. To King Victor Emmanuel II

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 89-90.

[Turin, prior to 14 November 1849]

Your Royal Majesty¹³,

Fr John Bosco, who lives in this Capital, humbly describes for Your Majesty how he wanted to provide for the needs of the most abandoned youngsters, and so began to gather them on Sundays and Holy Days in one or other place around the city, always with the consent of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities. The Lord blessed this work and now it has been established at Valdocco between Porta Palazzo and Porta Susa as an Oratory under the title of St Francis de Sales. More than five hundred boys flock there, a large number of them having been released from prison or who are in danger of ending up there.

The place indicated above then became too small for the great number who wanted to come, so in 1847 another Oratory, under the title of St Aloysius, was opened at Porta Nuova between the viale de' Platani and R. Valentino.

Given that in present times abandoned youth find themselves in greater need of both education and religion, the Vanchiglia Oratory run by Fr Cocchi, assistant priest at the church of the Annunciation¹⁴ which was closed for a

¹³ Victor Emmanuel II of Savoy (1820-1878), last King of Sardinia (1849-1861) and first King of Italy (1861-1878).

¹⁴ Fr John Cocchi (1840-1895), enterprising initiator of educational and social works for young workers. The Guardian Angel Oratory which Fr Cocchi had been forced to close in the critical period following on

year, has now been reopened under the title of the Guardian Angel. In all three places using sermons, catechism lessons and school, we constantly nurture love for work, respect for authority and law according to the principles of our Holy Catholic Religion. There are also Sunday classes for teaching the metric system, for those who can come. We also have a home with twenty five beds to provide for the most urgently in need of these boys. The usual number who attend these Oratories together amounts to around a thousand, for Sundays and Holy Days.

Up until now everything has gone ahead with the help of some charitable individuals and with the help of a good number of zealous priests and also lay people.

Now the supplicant, finding himself in charge of the three Oratories, is in difficulty given that between the three places the rent costs two thousand four hundred francs, including expenses for maintaining the three chapels respectively, where we have all the sacred functions every Sunday and Holy Day, and then there is the difficulty of the other daily expenses, the result of the extreme poverty of some of the children, and despite all the efforts the supplicant has made he now finds himself in the tough position of not being able to continue.

He therefore begs Your Royal Majesty to give kind consideration to a work that has already provided and we hope will continue to provide for the well being of so many abandoned individuals. It is a work that already received charity from Your august father¹⁵. The supplicant beseeches You to grant the charitable aid that Your father would look kindly upon.

I have the honour... etc.

Petitioner
Fr John Bosco

from the first war of independence, was reopened under the responsibility of Don Bosco and Fr Borel, and entrusted to the management of Fr Robert Murialdo.

¹⁵ Charles Albert of Savoy (1798-1849), King from 1831 to 23 March 1849, then abdicated in favour of his son Victor Emmanuel II, after the military defeat at Novara by the Austro-Hungarian army.

4. Mutual Aid Society

Critical ed. in *Società di Mutuo Soccorso di alcuni individui della Compagnia di San Luigi eretta nell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales* (Mutual Aid Society for some individuals in the St Aloysius Sodality, erected at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales). Torino, Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero 1850 (OE IV, 83-90).

[June 1850]

Notice

Dear boys, here is a set of regulations for your Society. It can serve as a rule so that the Society goes ahead in an orderly and advantageous fashion. I can do no less than praise this effort of yours and your diligence in promoting it. It is very prudent of you to put aside one coin a week, money that you would easily otherwise spend but which will be of great help to you when you find yourselves in need. So you have my full approval.

I only recommend that while you show yourselves to be zealous for the good of the Society, you do not forget about the rules of the St Aloysius Sodality on which your fundamental advantage depends, that of your soul.

May the Lord infuse your hearts with true love and joy, and may the fear of God accompany all your actions.

Fr John Bosco

Regulations of the Mutual Aid Society

1. The purpose of this Society is to lend a hand to companions of ours who fall ill or find themselves in need and therefore involuntarily without work.

2. No one may be admitted to the Society unless enrolled in the St Aloysius Sodality, and whoever ceases for some reason to be a member of said Sodality will no longer be considered to be a member of the Society.

3. Each member will pay 5 cents [*a soldo*, actually equivalent to about 5 cents at the time] every Sunday, and cannot benefit from the Society until six months after he has been accepted. But he can have immediate right to

assistance from the Society if upon entering he pays fr. 1.50, so long as at that time he is neither ill nor unemployed.

4. The assistance given to anyone who is ill will be 50 cents a day until he returns to full health. In the case where the sick person has to go to a pious work [understand 'hospital' in modern terms] this assistance will cease and will not be paid except when he has come out of there for a period of convalescence.

5. Those who through no fault of their own are put out of work will begin to receive the above-mentioned assistance eight days after they have become unemployed. When the aid goes beyond twenty days the Council will make appropriate decisions to either increase or decrease it.

6. All offerings for the benefit of the Society will be gratefully accepted, and every year a special collection will be taken up.

7. Whoever fails to pay his quota for a notable period of time can no longer benefit from the Society until he has satisfied the unpaid amount, and then may not take anything for a month.

8. The Society is administered by a director, vice-director, secretary, vice-secretary, four councillors, a visitor and substitute, a treasurer.

9. All the Society's administrators, beyond exact payment of 5 cents [*soldo*] each Sunday, will take utmost care to observe the rules of the St Aloysius Sodality, thus attending to their own sanctification and encouraging others in virtue.

10. The natural director of the Society is the superior of the Oratory. He will see that the administrators do their duty, and that members' needs are satisfied according to the current regulations.

11. The vice-director will help the director, and will give appropriate orders to the secretary regarding meetings, and will present to the Council whatever could be of benefit to the Society.

12. The secretary will take care of collecting quotas each Sunday, noting carefully those who fulfil their obligation, and will exercise much charity

and kindness. It is also the secretary's task to send notes to the treasurer with the name, surname and address of anyone who is ill: all decisions of any importance taken in council will be written up by the secretary. In all these many things he will be helped by the vice-secretary who will also take his place whenever needed.

13. The four councillors will offer their opinion on whatever can be of benefit to the Society, and will vote on whatever pertains to the administration of matters, such as appointment of members.

14. The natural visitor of the Society is the spiritual director of the St Aloysius Sodality. This individual will go in person to the home of anyone who is sick, in order to check what his needs are and make the required report to the secretary. Once the note indicating aid has been obtained he will take it to the treasurer's home, after which he will bring the funds to the sick person. When the visitor hands over the funds he will take every care to see that he reminds the sick person of some maxim of our holy religion and will encourage him to receive the sacraments should the illness become serious. He will be assisted in this by his substitute, who will show the utmost concern in helping the visitor, especially bringing the aid and consoling those who are sick.

15. The treasurer will look after the funds of the Society and will give an account of them every three months. But he cannot give money to anyone without a note declaring what the need is, brought by the visitor, and which is also signed by the director.

16. Each member of the executive will hold his post for one year; he can be re-elected.

17. Every three months the Council will give an account of its administration.

18. These current regulations come into force on the first of July 1850.

5. Work contract for a young man at the Oratory

ASC A2200101, original handwritten ms. by Don Bosco (cf. MB IV, 295-297).

[November 1851]

“By virtue of this document which can be called on at the simple request of one of the parties, drawn up at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales between Mr Carlo Aimino and the youth Giuseppe Bordone, pupil at the said Oratory, assisted by his guarantor, Mr Ritner Vittorio, it has been agreed as follows:

1. Mr Carlo Aimino receives the youth Giuseppe Bordone, son of Giuseppe (dec.) native of Biella, as an apprentice in his glazing trade and promises and obliges himself to teach him that trade over a three year period which will come to an end on the 1st December of the year one thousand eight hundred and fifty four. During the course of his apprenticeship he will give him the necessary instruction and the best rules regarding his trade as well as appropriate advice relating to good behaviour, correcting him where he should fail with words and nothing else. He also obliges himself to see that he is gainfully employed in work related to the trade and not extraneous to it, being careful to see that it does not go beyond his strength.

2. The same master craftsman will leave his apprentice completely free every Sunday or Holy Day in the year so that he can attend to the sacred functions, Sunday school and other duties that he has as a pupil of the aforementioned Oratory. When the apprentice, for reasons of illness, is absent from his duties, the master has a right to remuneration for any period of time exceeding fifteen days in the course of one year. This indemnity will be paid by the apprentice for that number of days when he has finished his apprenticeship.

3. The same master craftsman obliges himself to pay the apprentice his day's pay for the years indicated above, that is: for the first year one lire, the second year one lire fifty cents, and the third year two lire, paid weekly.

4. This employer obliges himself, finally, to write up a frank monthly report on his apprentice's behaviour, on a sheet that will be provided for this purpose.

5. The youth Giuseppe Bordone promises and obliges himself [to offer] during his time as an apprentice of the master craftsman who is his employer, his prompt, diligent and attentive service, to be respectful and obedient to his employer and act as a good apprentice should in his regard. By way of guarantee of his obligation, he offers as security Mr Ritner Vittorio, jeweller, who is here present and accepts, and obliges himself to make restitution for any damage which occurs for the master craftsman and employer should it be the fault of the apprentice.

6. Should it be the case that the apprentice does not correct some fault and is sent away from the Oratory because of it, any influence from and relationship between the director of the said Oratory and master craftsman and employer will cease, but if the apprentice's fault does not particularly impact on the master craftsman he should, despite everything, carry through this contract drawn up with the apprentice, and the latter should carry out all his duties towards the master craftsman until the end of the agreed time under the guaranty indicated above.

7. The director of the Oratory promises to offer his assistance regarding the good behaviour of the apprentice and to deal immediately with any complaint that the employer may have as a result of the apprentice he has taken in.

Thus, both the master craftsman-employer, and the apprentice-pupil, assisted as indicated above, promise to attend to and observe what pertains to them to do, under pain of damages.

Carlo Aimino

Giuseppe Bordone

Fr John Bapt. Vola

Ritner Vittorio guarantor

Fr John Bosco director of the Oratory¹⁶

¹⁶ Protecting young apprentices and their formation in their profession was an objective that Don Bosco followed up tenaciously at a time in history when industrial development was just getting underway.

6. Circular promoting a lottery on behalf of the new church at the Oratory

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 139-140.

Turin, 20 December 1851

Your Excellency,

A modest charitable work was undertaken some ten years ago in a district of this City, under the title of *the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, directed solely to the intellectual and moral good of that portion of youth who through parental negligence, bad companions or lack of means, finds itself exposed to the constant risk of corruption. Some individuals keen on the proper education of the people regretfully noticed that there was a growing number of young people who were idle and ill-advised, living on what they can borrow or by fraud on street corners or in the squares. They weigh on society and are often instruments of all kinds of misdeeds. They also saw with great sadness that many who had spent some time at work, were going out on Sundays and Holy Days spending their time in gambling or drinking away the little they had earned during the week. Wanting to remedy an evil that can only have very sad consequences, they decided to open a house for Sunday gatherings, where everyone could be at ease in fulfilling his religious duties and also receive some instruction, some advice or guidance for living his life in an upright and Christian way.

Therefore the Oratory of St Francis de Sales was set up with the charitable help of generous people who usually spend money on things to do with the public good. Items useful for celebrating religious functions and for giving the youngsters moral and civil education were made ready. Similarly for games equipment that would help develop their physical strength and provide honest recreation, in this way trying to make their stay in the place useful and pleasant.

It is difficult to explain how the youngsters took to the invitation extended without any real publicity; it was simply of the kind that usually gets passed on amongst family members, to come to the Oratory every Sunday or Holy Day. But it gave encouragement to enlarge the enclosure and over time introduce

the improvements that ingenious and prudent charity suggested. Then classes began on Sundays and later on winter evenings: reading, writing, elements of arithmetic and Italian, and a special opportunity for getting the youngsters familiar with the use of the measurements they felt they had most need of, given that many were working with trades.

The aim was to instil in them affection for their families, fraternal charity, respect for authority, gratitude to benefactors, love for work, and more than anything else instruct them in Catholic and moral teaching to lead them away from the road to wrongdoing, infuse in them the holy fear of God and give them timely instruction on the observance of religious precepts. These are the things that zealous priests and lay people have worked hard at the last ten years and given most of their concern to.

So while there are people who have worked laudably at spreading scientific knowledge or helping the arts progress, assisted industry and the education of better-off young people in boarding schools and senior high schools, in the modest Oratory of St Francis de Sales it has been mainly a case of religious and civil education for young people who also have the strength and will to be useful for themselves, their families and the country, although they are less favoured by fortune.

However, recognising that the chapel was too small to accommodate the great number of boys, and not wanting to leave off halfway in such an effort that had begun so well, the promoters, full of confidence in the generosity of their fellow citizens, decided to put their hand to a bigger building better suited to the purpose and so ensure the lasting nature of such a useful educational institution. Putting aside any delay and overcoming any doubts, they courageously laid the foundations for the new Oratory.

Donations, gifts, encouragement have not failed thus far and so much progress was made in the work that in a few short months the building has reached as far as the roof.

But ordinary means are no longer enough to bring this building to completion, and it is necessary for the inexhaustible charity of the public to come to the aid of private charity. It is to this end that the undersigned

promoters of this pious work turn to Your Lordship, asking your agreement to and proposing a way that has already been successfully employed by other well-deserving institutions and will certainly not fail for the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. The proposal is a lottery or raffle of items which the undersigned are thinking of undertaking to supplement the cost of completing the new chapel and which Your Lordship, we have no doubt, will agree to considering the excellence of the work it is to be directed to.

If Your Lordship could offer us any item of silk, wool, metal, wood or some craft item or something made by some charitable noblewoman, it will all be gratefully accepted because when it comes to charity, any small help is a big one, and because even small offerings by many may be enough to complete the desired work when put together.

The undersigned trust in your Lordship's kindness, certain that the idea of agreeing to the proper education of abandoned youth could do no less than encourage you to give something. For the rest it is enough to remind you of the singular kindness that people of every kind and status have shown and promised to achieve the extension. Especially valuable has been the vote of the first legislative body of the State which, after having taken things into kind consideration, appointed a commission to receive precise details, and once they knew them they warmly recommended this idea to the King's Government. Also valuable has been the generous two year subsidy decreed by the unanimous vote of the Turin City Council. His and Her Majesties have shown extraordinary largesse, deigning to offer help, and venerable bishops and distinguished people pleased to recommend it to public charity have shown a special kindness.

The undersigned extend their anticipated thanks to Your Lordship for the courteous cooperation you will offer for the successful outcome of the proposed lottery, and we implore Heavens blessings upon you.

Your most indebted servants,

The Promoters ¹⁷

¹⁷ The names of 16 members of the Commission follow, made up of priests and laity belonging to the aristocracy and middle class.

7. Invitation to an academic performance

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 157.

Turin, 14 May 1852

Your Excellency,

Given the eagerness with which your Lordship has deigned to be part of matters regarding the good of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, I hope you will not be displeased with this invitation by which I invite you to come along next Sunday, May 16, from 2 to 5 in the afternoon, to honour with your presence the display that the young men from our evening classes will give of their simple studies this school year¹⁸.

You will not see great things but without doubt you will see the good heart and good will of these young men of ours.

The subjects of this performance are:

1. Reading and writing – Elements of arithmetic – the metric system and Italian grammar. – Singing and music.
2. A little bit of sacred geography, Scripture - New Testament – Singing and music.
3. Dialogues: Journeys to Palestine—A young man unrewarded—A number of passages and poems will be recited and interspersed amongst the various branches of instruction.

Convinced that you will want to respond to this humble invitation of mine I want to thank you for what you have done and I hope you will want to continue on behalf of these youngsters of mine. Once again my sincere thanks and I am respectfully,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco ¹⁹

¹⁸ This invitation is to demonstrate the positive results of the educational work on behalf of young workers.

¹⁹ Invitations to artistic and musical performances were happening continuously in Valdocco, especially for the annual distribution of school prizes. On September 5, 1869 Don Bosco did not hesitate to ask the mayor to extend an invitation to those taking part in the National Pedagogical Conference taking place in the city: cf. E(m) III, pp. 131-132.

8. To Canon Lorenzo Gastaldi

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 175-176.

Turin, 24 November 1852

Dear Canon²⁰,

Here is the reply you are waiting for regarding my position before the government. Given that the property is mine, I believe that in whatever event, a new building would belong to the owner of the land; nevertheless to also remove this doubt I have done things so that offerings coming to me from private charity, the lottery included, are all used for building the church, putting aside a sum taken from a small amount earned from the sale of a nearby house some years ago, as well as revenue from the land there, all used in fact for building the house. I have been thus assured by the best lawyers that the Government cannot touch this property in any way.

But ... was Don Bosco dead? Here was the problem. Considering the circumstances of the times and not being able to otherwise ensure holding onto the property, I invited Dr Borel, Fr Murialdo, Fr Cafasso to play a part in purchasing the above, so we drew up a document of mutual accord so that in the event of the death of one, the property would be passed on to the three survivors, who would certainly be free to involve another partner: given this situation it would be advisable to pay the death duties [right of succession] of the deceased.

I consulted a number of legal people whom I trust and had no other possible expedient in that regard. So with regard to the new acquisition under

²⁰ To a friend who had entered the Rosminians and was worried about the position of the Work at Valdocco with regard to civil legislation which was hostile to ecclesiastical institutions, Don Bosco replies in a reassuring way. On February 19, 1851, he bought the Pinardi house and adjacent land, forming a private legal society with Frs Joseph Cafasso, John Borel and Robert Murialdo (on January 26, 1853 the property would come into Don Bosco and Fr Cafasso's hands alone by deed, and the latter, in his will, left the property entirely to Don Bosco as its sole owner: cf. Fedele GIRAUDI, *L'Oratorio di don Bosco*. Torino, SEI 1935, pp. 95-99). Thanks to Don Bosco's prudence the laws of suppression of congregations and confiscation of their goods, emanating from Turin in 1855 and extended to the rest of Italy in 1866-1867, had no effect on Salesian work.

discussion I will accept entirely what Fr Rosmini in his prudence will consider convenient, making available to him whatever poor efforts I can to cooperate in everything that could be for the glory of God and to the advantage of souls²¹.

Meanwhile I offer my humble respects to the praiseworthy Fr Rosmini, and recommending myself to your prayers, I wish you every blessing from the Lord. I remain,

Your most affectionate servant and friend,

Fr John Bosco

P.S. As I write your mother is working²² in the laundry cleaning and mending; your visit gave her great joy.

9. Circular on disseminating the *Catholic Readings*

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 233-234.

Turin, [30] October 1854

Your Excellency,

Although I am fully convinced of the interest you have in all things regarding the good of souls, nevertheless seeing the artful skills the enemies of our holy religion are employing to spread error and ruin the morality of the people, I have decided to write you a special letter with a view to asking you if you could lend me a hand in disseminating and promoting the *Catholic Readings*, aimed at shoring up the Christian people against the snares set for them in matters of religion.

²¹ Don Bosco was in contact with Fr Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855) and various members of his religious family for years. The acquisition of the land at Valdocco was done with a view to collaborating with the Rosmini Institute of Charity.

²² Gastaldi's mother, Margaret, was one of Don Bosco's mother's most active helpers in looking after the boys' laundry.

Associative membership, as I believe you already know, is very well-priced (fr. 1.80 in the city and in Episcopal sees, and where 50 members can be gained, the booklets are sent free of freight charges). But it is utterly important for the 'Readings' to be better known, and Your Excellency can offer me great assistance in this work of charity, both by doing all you can in particular, and by recommending them to or getting some good person involved whom you certainly know, who can *arguat, obsecret, increpet in anni patientia et doctrina*.

This way it seems to me we can stem the growing evil, and if we cannot stop it entirely, at least before God we will have the consolation of having done as much within our power as we could.

Perhaps Your Excellency is amazed that I so keenly recommend you for this affair, but we are convinced that we are in times that are calamitous for the followers of the Catholic religion. The risks we face demand the cooperation and concern of all good people and especially the clergy.

Meanwhile I beg your kind forbearance if I do not send this letter free of charge, as I would like, as I also beg you to kindly accept this act of confidence. Thank you and I ask Heaven to bless you, while respectfully and with gratitude I offer you whatever I can do.

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

P.S. In the *Catholic Readings* office at via Bogino no. 3/2 there is a considerable number of booklets already printed and available at a reasonable price for anyone who wants some of them for himself or to peddle to others.

Attachment

The plan for the *Letture Cattoliche* Association

Critical ed. in ASC A2230503 (MB IV, 532-533).

1. The books we are proposing to give out will have a simple approach, in popular language, and contain material exclusively regarding the Catholic religion.

2. Each month we will publish a booklet of around 100 to 108 pages or more, depending on the material being dealt with. The paper, font and format is similar to what you see here.

3. The cost of the association is 90 cents half-yearly to be paid in advance, arriving at the modest sum of L. 1.80 a year. For those wanting to receive the booklets by post the cost is L. 1 cent. 40 for six months, or L. 2 cent. 80 a year.

4. To make things as easy as possible for all well-deserving clergy and laity who wish to lend a hand to this work of charity, the books will be sent free of freight costs, to all parts of the kingdom and beyond, as far as the borders, so long as associates form a centre to which we can address no fewer than fifty booklets.

5. In provincial cities and places, associations will be accepted by people designated by their respective diocesan Ordinaries, to whom the Work is particular recommended and of whom we provide names and addresses etc.

10. Draft regulations for the boys Oratory of St Francis De Sales in Turin in the Valdocco district – Historical Outline

Critical ed. in Pietro BRAIDO, *Don Bosco per i giovani: L'“Oratorio”, una “Congregazione degli Oratori”*. *Documenti* (Piccola Biblioteca dell'ISS, 9).

Roma, LAS 1988, pp. 9-56²³.

Introduction

Ut filios Dei, qui erant dispersi, congregaret in unum. Joan. c. 11 v. 52.

It seems to me that the words of the Holy Gospel, which tell us that our divine Saviour come down from heaven to earth to gather together all the children of God scattered all over the world, could be applied literally to the young people of our times. These young people, the most vulnerable yet most valuable portion of human society, on whom we base our hopes for a happy

²³ Written around 1854 for his own close helpers, this is the first document offering the broad details of the beginnings of the work at Valdocco. It contains some variations by comparison with similar documents (cf. nos. 13 and 17) and the *Memoirs of the Oratory* (cf. no. 309).

future, are not of their nature depraved. Were it not for carelessness on the part of parents, idleness, mixing in bad company, which happens especially on Sundays and other Holy Days, it would be so easy to inculcate in their young hearts the principles of order, good behaviour, respect and religion. For if it so happens that they are ruined at that young age, it is due more to their thoughtlessness than to ingrained malice.

These young people have a real need of some kind person who will take care of them, work with them, guide them in virtue and keep them away from vice.

The problem lies in finding ways of gathering them, being able to speak to them, and of instructing them in the moral life.

The Son of God was sent for this purpose, and his holy religion alone can achieve it. This religion is of itself eternal and unchangeable, and has been, and will always be, the teacher of people. But the law it contains is so perfect that it can adapt to changing times and suit people's different characters. The oratories are regarded as being amongst the most fitting means for instilling the spirit of religion in hearts that are uncultivated and abandoned. These oratories are gatherings in which young people, after they have attended church services, are entertained with pleasant and wholesome recreation.

The support which the civic and Church authorities have given me, the zeal shown by many worthy people who have given me material aid, or have helped directly with the work, are a clear sign of the Lord's blessing and of the public's appreciation.

It is now time to set out a regulatory framework that might serve as a plan for a proper organisation of this part of the sacred ministry, and as a guideline for the numerous priests and lay people who work in it with such dedication and charitable concern.

I have often begun [to draft such a framework], but have always given up on account of the innumerable difficulties I had to overcome. Now, to ensure the preservation of unity of spirit and uniformity of discipline, as well as to

comply with the wish of persons in authority who have counselled me to do so, I have decided to complete this work, no matter what the outcome may be.

But I wish it understood from the start that it is not my purpose to lay down law or precept for anyone. My one aim is to set out what we do in the Boys' Oratory of St Francis de Sales at Valdocco, and the way it is being done.

Some expressions found herein may lead some people into thinking that I am seeking my own honour and glory. Let them not think so; let them rather put it all down to my commitment to write [about the oratory] as things actually developed and as they are even at the present day.

When I dedicated myself to this part of the sacred ministry, I fully intended to consecrate every effort of mine to the greater glory of God and to the good of souls. My resolve was to work to make these young people good citizens for this earth, so that they might be one day worthy inhabitants of heaven. May God help me and enable me to continue in this endeavour to my last breath. So be it.

Historical Outline of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales

This Oratory, a gathering of young people on Sundays and holy days, began in the Church of St. Francis of Assisi. For many years during the summertime, the Rev. Fr Cafasso used to teach catechism every Sunday to bricklayers' boys in a little room attached to the sacristy of the aforementioned church. The heavy workload this priest had taken on caused him to interrupt this work which he loved so much. I took it up towards the end of 1841, and I began by gathering two young adults in that same place who were in serious need of religious instruction. These were joined by others, and during 1842 the number went up to twenty, and sometimes twenty-five. From these beginnings I learned two very important truths: first, that in general young people are not bad in themselves but more often than not they become such through contact with evil companions; second, that even these bad youngsters, if separated one from the other, are susceptible to great moral change.

In 1843 the catechism classes continued on the same footing and the number increased to fifty, the most that the place assigned to me could accommodate. All the while, while visiting the prisons of Turin, I was able to verify that the poor unfortunates committed to that place of punishment are generally poor young men who come into the city from far away either because they need to find work, or encouraged by some rascally companion. These young people are left to themselves particularly on Sundays and Holy days and spend the little money they earn during the week on games [of chance] or on sweetmeats. This is the beginning of many vices; in no time at all, these young people, who were good, are found to be at risk themselves and putting others at risk. Nor can the prisons better them in any way, because while detained there they learn more refined ways of doing evil so that when they are released they become worse.

I turned therefore to this class of youngster as the most abandoned and at risk; and during the week, either with promises or with little gifts, I tried to win over more pupils. I succeeded, and their number increased greatly, so that, when larger premises were placed at my disposal in the summer of 1844, I found myself at times with some eighty youths around me. I experienced great happiness at seeing myself surrounded by pupils who behaved as I wanted, all of them started on a job, and whose conduct both on weekdays and Sundays I could some how vouch for. As I looked over them, I could visualise one of them returned to parents from whom he had run away, another placed with an employer, and all of them well on the way to learning their religion.

But the community life characteristic of a place like the Pastoral Institute of St Francis of Assisi (Convitto), the silence and good order required by the services conducted in that public and very well attended church, got in the way of my plans. And even though the well-deserving, late-lamented Dr Guala²⁴ encouraged me to persevere, nevertheless I clearly perceived the need for new premises. Because religious instruction occupies the young people for only a certain period of time, after which they need some outlet: hikes, games.

²⁴ *Luigi Fortunato Guala* (1775-1848), teacher and theologian, rector of the church of St Francis of Assisi, and founder of the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto ecclesiastico*).

Providence arranged that in late October 1844 I should be appointed to The Refuge (Rifugio) as spiritual director. I invited my boys to come and visit me at my new residence and the following Sunday they gathered there in much larger numbers than usual. My room served both as oratory and playground. What a sight! No chair, table or anything else in the room could escape the attack of that friendly invasion.

Meanwhile, I and the Rev. Dr Borel, who from then on became the Oratory's staunchest supporter, had chosen a room that was intended as dining room and common room for the priests working at the Refuge, and that seemed big enough for our purposes. We adapted it as a chapel. The Archbishop gave his kind approval, and on the day of Mary's Immaculate Conception (December 8, 1844), the chapel we had long hoped for was blessed, with the faculty of celebrating the holy sacrifice of the Mass, and of giving Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament.

The news of a chapel destined exclusively for the young, the liturgical services prepared especially for them, a bit of open space to romp around in, proved to be powerful attractions, so that our church, which began to be called 'Oratory' at that time, became quickly overcrowded. We made do as well as we could. Catechism classes were held in every corner: in rooms, kitchen and corridors.

Things were moving along when an occurrence (or better, Divine Providence acting with hidden purposes) turned our oratory upside down. On August 10, 1845 the Little Hospital of St. Philomena²⁵ was opened and the premises we had been using for nine months had to be given over to other uses. Another meeting place had to be found. Following a formal request, the Mayor of the city allowed us to go to St Martin's chapel near the *Molazzi* or city Mills. So on Sunday we announced the change of place. The boys were partly sad at having to leave a place they had come to like as their very own and partly anxious about something new but they readied themselves to go.

²⁵ Don Bosco was taken on by Marchioness Barolo as chaplain at the Little Hospital ten months before the opening, which took place in August 1845.

You would have seen one carrying a chair, another a bench, some carrying a picture or statue, others the vestments or altar cloths or cruets. Some of the more playful ones would have stilts or bocce balls or throwing discs, but they were all keen to see the new oratory.

Two months went by peacefully there, although we could not do things perfectly since we couldn't celebrate Mass or have Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, nor was it all that easy to have recreation. But that period of calm was a prelude to a storm that would put the Oratory to a more severe trial. Word got around that these gatherings of youngsters were dangerous and that at any moment they could move from having recreation to creating a riot. What kind of riot could ignorant, penniless boys without weapons cause! They were only gathering to learn catechism; they would have trembled even at hearing a crow flutter! But despite this the rumours kept growing and a report was sent to the mayor in which I was described as the head of the gang, and that they were making an intolerable racket at the mills, a disturbance that nobody could put up with; damage was being done to the walls, benches and even the paving in the courtyard. I had quite something to say about the fact that these claims had no substance but it was all in vain. An order was issued that we had to immediately evacuate the locale we had been previously given.

I then asked if we could go to the Holy Cross cenotaph church, known as St Peter in Chains. Permission was given. We happily went off there but it was just a single festive occasion, because new reports were written and sent to the mayor in which our gatherings were described as acts of insubordination and we were soon prohibited from setting foot there ever again.

I make no mention of the names of individuals who sent these acrimonious reports off to the City [authorities]; I merely observe (God forbid that I take any delight in it) that one person lived just one more day and the other just three days after having made their report. This was something that made a deep impression on the youngsters who were aware of the fact.

What could be done? I found myself with a heap of materials for the church and for games, a crowd of youngsters that followed me everywhere and not an inch of ground where we could go to.

Afraid that my children would stop coming, I hid all my worries and on Sundays took them off one day to Sassi, another to the Madonna di Campagna (Our Lady of the Fields), and another to the Mount of the Capuchins. The number of boys grew rather than diminishing. In the meantime, as the winter was drawing near, and the weather no longer favoured excursions into the countryside, I and Dr [John] Borel rented three rooms in the Moretta²⁶ house, a building not far distant from the present site of the Oratory in Valdocco. During that winter our activities were limited to simple catechism lessons on the evening of each Sunday and holy day.

At this time the gossip that had already been making the rounds for some time, that the oratories were a deliberate way of getting young people away from their own parishes in order to instruct them in suspect principles, grew more insistent. This allegation was based on the fact that I allowed my young people every kind of recreation as long as they did not sin or do anything that could be regarded as reprehensible conduct. In response to the allegation, I pointed out that my purpose was to gather together only those young people who did not belong to any parish. As a matter of fact most of the youngsters were from out of town and did not even know which parish they belonged to. But the more I tried to explain the truth of the matter, the more sinister was the cast thrown upon it.

Furthermore, certain events took place that forced us to leave the Moretta house, so that in March 1846 I had to lease a small grass field from the Filippi brothers, at the location where the pig-iron foundry is at present. And there I was under the wide and starry sky, in the middle of a field bordered by a sorry-looking hedgerow that kept out only those who did not want to come in. There I was with some three hundred young men who found their heaven on earth in that oratory—an oratory the roof and the walls of which were nothing but sky.

To make matters worse, the Vicar of the City, Marquis Cavour²⁷, informed but prejudiced against these weekend gatherings, sent for me. He briefly

²⁶ A two-storey building belonging to Fr John Baptist Moretta (1777-1847).

²⁷ See doc. no. 1.

reported what was being rumoured about the oratory and then said to me: “My good Father, let me give you a sound piece of advice. Get rid of those villains, because these gatherings are dangerous.” I replied: “All I am trying to do is to better the lot of these poor boys. If the City would care to provide any kind of premises for me I have every hope of being able to very much lessen the number of troublemakers, and at the same time, the numbers of those who go to prison.”

“You are fooling yourself my good priest; these efforts are all in vain. Where will you get the money? I cannot allow such gatherings.”

The results we have had convince me that these efforts are not in vain: the money is in the Lord’s hands, and sometimes he uses the most paltry of instruments to carry out his work ...”

“I cannot allow such gatherings.”

“Don’t grant them for me, Sir, but grant it for the good of these boys who will end up badly left to their own devices.”

“I am not here to argue; this is a disorder and I want to put a stop to it. You do know that without permission no assembly is allowed.”

“My assemblies have no political aim; they are merely to teach catechism to poor boys and I do this with the Archbishop’s permission.”

“The Archbishop has been informed of these matters?”

“He is informed and I have never put a foot out of place without asking him for his advice and consent.”

“But I cannot allow these assemblies.”

“I do believe, Sir, that you would not want to prohibit me from teaching catechism, which has the Archbishop’s permission.”

The Archbishop had knowledge of everything and urged me to be patient and have courage. In the meantime I was forced to resign from the Refuge in order to be able to attend more directly to the care of my boys, and as a result I was without employment and without means of support. Every project of

mine was given a sinister interpretation. I was physically exhausted with my health undermined, to the point that the word was put around that I had become insane.

Failing to make others understand my plans I sought to mark time, because I was deeply convinced that events would prove me right in what I was doing. Furthermore, I wanted so much to have a suitable site that in my mind I imagined this to be already a fact. This was the reason why even my dearest friends thought that I was out of my mind. And my co-workers abandoned me entirely, since I would not give in to them and desist from my undertaking.

Dr Borel went along with my ideas. However, since no other course seemed open to us, he thought we should pick a dozen of the younger children and teach them their catechism privately, and wait for a better opportunity to go forward with our plans.

“No,” I replied “This is not the way. This is the Lord’s work; he began it, and he has to bring it to completion.”

“But meanwhile,” he insisted, “Where will we gather our boys?”

“In the Oratory.”

“But where is this Oratory?”

“I see it there already: I see a church, a house, and an enclosed playground. It is there, and I see it.”

“But where are these things?”

“I do not know where they are, but I see them.”

I insisted because of my lively wish to have these things. I was thoroughly convinced that God would provide them.

Dr Borel felt sorry for me in that condition, and he too reluctantly expressed doubts about my sanity. Father Cafasso kept telling me not to take any decision for the duration. The Archbishop however was inclined to agree that I should stay with the work.

All the while Marquis Cavour firmly held to the position that these gatherings, which he claimed were dangerous, should stop. But not wanting to take a decision that might displease the Archbishop, he with his office staff (the equivalent of our city council) arranged for a meeting at the Archbishop's palace. The Archbishop later confided to me that it looked like the last judgement. The discussion was brief, but the verdict was that such gatherings must absolutely stop.

Fortunately Count Provana di Collegno at the time was serving in the Vicar's Council as Head of the Accounting Department. He had always encouraged me and supported my work financially both from his own private purse and on behalf of His Majesty King Charles Albert. This Sovereign of grateful memory, appreciated the work of the oratory and would send financial help in times of special need. Through Count Collegno he often expressed to me his satisfaction with our special priestly ministry. He placed our ministry on a par with the work of the foreign missions and would have liked to see such gatherings of young people at risk held in every city of the realm.

When he learned of my predicament he sent me 300 francs through the same Count, with words of encouragement. He also let the Vicar's office know that he wished such Sunday gatherings of young people to continue. The Vicar was to take care to prevent any disorder that might arise. The Vicar obeyed and took steps to that effect. He ordered a number of archers, a kind of security guard, to attend our meetings and report.

They were there for catechism classes, sermons, singing practice and recreation, and reported everything in detail to the Vicar. By and by his attitude changed for the better, and so did the situation at the Oratory.

The beginning of the current Oratory at Valdocco and its growth until the present day

It was a Sunday evening on the fifteenth of March, a memorable day for our Oratory, when seeing such a huge number of boys playing and seeing myself alone in their midst, my health and strength at an end, without knowing where I could go now that the field we had rented was to be put to other use, I

became so emotional that I burst into tears. “My God,” I began saying, raising my eyes to heaven, “Why don’t you let me know where you want me to gather these dear boys of mine? Oh please let me know, tell me what I must do!”

These were the kinds of words that were churning in my heart when at that moment a certain Pancrazio Soave came to me saying that there was a Mr Pinardi who had a place I could rent which would be very suitable for my purpose. I went immediately. It was a shed. We spoke about it, agreed on a rental price and on how we could turn the place into a chapel. It all took just a few minutes. I ran back quickly to my boys, called them together and overwhelmed with happiness began to shout: “Courage boys, we have an Oratory. We will have a church, a sacristy, a place for school and for recreation.”

This news was greeted with enthusiasm. And on Easter Sunday in April we carried all the equipment for church and recreation there and the new chapel was inaugurated. A little later other rooms in the same Pinardi house were rented where we started the Sunday and evening classes. Chev. Gonella²⁸, an outstanding benefactor of this Oratory, was so pleased with these classes that he set out to introduce them at St Pelagia’s. The city itself took the evening schools into consideration and opened them in various suburbs around the city where today it is easy for any worker who so desires to get basic education. Since the things that followed this period are well known to everyone, I limit myself to noting them briefly.

1846. One Sunday in April the current church was blessed and given faculties for celebrating Mass, teaching catechism, preaching and having Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

The Sunday and evening classes made good progress teaching reading, writing, singing, bible history, arithmetic and Italian. Oratory pupils put on public demonstrations of what they were learning.

²⁸ Andrea Gonella (1770-1851), banker and textile industrialist. Also his son Marco (1822-1886) would be a great friend and benefactor of Don Bosco.

In November, I took up residence in the Home attached to the Oratory. Many priests, including Frs Vola, Carpano, Trivero²⁹ took part in things at the Oratory.

1847. The St Aloysius sodality was set up³⁰ with the approval of the ecclesiastical authorities. A statue of the Saint was arranged for and the six Sundays leading up to the feast of St Aloysius were grandly celebrated. On the feast day itself the Archbishop came to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to a large group of boys and we enacted a comedy with singing and music.

Additional rooms were rented thanks to which a number of evening classes were added. We took in two poor young orphaned boys, without a trade and ignorant of religion. This is how the Home began and it continued to grow.

Given the large number of boys that were coming to the Oratory and because the church and the enclosure at Valdocco had become too small, *a new Oratory was opened at Porta Nuova* in the Vaglietti, now the Turvano house, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception under the title of St Aloysius Gonzaga, and Fr Giacinto Carpano was put in charge. This new Oratory began using the same rules and had the same aim as the one at Valdocco; soon it too was filled with boys.

1848. The number of boys taken in as boarders had increased to fifteen. Following a number of problems that had arisen because we were preparing the boys for admission to Holy Communion, the Archbishop formally gave faculties for preparations for Confirmation and Communion and for fulfilling the Easter duties in the chapel at the Oratory.

The first Retreats were held for a selected group of boys at the Home attached to the Oratory and we saw excellent results. The City council sent a commission to visit the Oratories and after sending a letter expressing

²⁹ Fr Giacinto Carpano (1821-1894) and Fr Giuseppe Trivero (1816-1894) were already helping out with spiritual and material assistance of young migrants.

³⁰ See doc. nos. 4 and 206.

their satisfaction they offered a subsidy of 600 francs. The Institute for the Education of the Poor (*Mendacità*) also came to the aid of the Oratories with a temporary subsidy. We made a solemn procession to Our Lady of Consolation (The *Consolata*) for Communion in May in honour of Our Blessed Lady. We had already done that for two years, but without the procession. The pictures of the *Stations of the Cross* were blessed and together we made a visit to the Altar of Repose on Holy Thursday; then in the evening that day for the first time we held the ceremony of the *lavabo* (Washing of the feet).

This same year piano and organ lessons began, and the boys began to go out to sing Mass and Vespers with church choirs in Turin, Carignano, Chieri, Rivoli etc.

1849. The entire Pinaridi house, the area in front and behind the house was rented; The church had been extended by at least half. The number of boys in the Home was now thirty. The Pope fled Rome and went to Gaeta in the Kingdom of Naples and the boys at the Oratory took up a collection which deeply moved the Holy Father and he had Cardinal Antonelli write a letter of thanks and sent his blessing on the boys at the Oratory. Then from Gaeta he sent a packet of 60 dozen rosaries for the boys at the Oratory and these were distributed with much celebration on July 20. *See the booklet printed on that occasion.*

Because of the war, Fr Cocchi closed the Guardian Angel Oratory and it remained closed for a year and was then entrusted to us. Fr Vola was asked to run it.

The Senate and the Ministry sent a commission to visit the Oratories and their report and discussion was favourable. See the *Piedmontese Gazzetta* of March 29, 1849.

Savio Ascanio was the first young man in the Oratory to receive the clerical habit³¹.

³¹ Ascanio Savio (1832-1902), received the cassock on November 1, 1848; he then left Don Bosco and joined the Oblates of the Virgin Mary.

1850. We bought the Pinaridi house and the house attached to it. The number of boys living in was now fifty. The number of boys coming to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales was extraordinary so we planned a new church and on 20 July Chev. Cotta³² laid the foundation stone and Canon Moreno³³ blessed it amidst a huge crowd of people. *The acts of this function are in writing.*

The Bishop of Biella in a circular of his recommended the building of the new church and collected a thousand francs. Since we lacked money to continue the church we organised a lottery which was held the following year and was very favourably received. We collected three thousand three hundred items which, deducting expenses, produced a net result of 26 thousand francs³⁴.

On the first of June the Mutual Aid Society began. The statutes can be seen in the printed booklet³⁵.

1851. On June 20, the Feast of Our Lady of Consolation, the new church was blessed with much pomp, many distinguished people were in attendance and there was much joy, and the first sacred ceremonies were held there. The attached poem gives a hint of how much was done on that day: *'Come augel di ramo in ramo'* etc.

Various purchases were made for the church; the St Aloysius altar was bought. The choir loft was built.

1852. The explosion at the powder mill on April 26 the year before rocked the Home at the Oratory and damaged it considerably, so this year we built a new construction workshop. It was close to being finished (December 2)

³² Giuseppe Cotta (1785-1868), banker and member of important city institutions. Senator from 1848, in the three years from 1849-1852 he was a city councillor.

³³ Ottavio Moreno (1777-1852), canon at the cathedral, senator and head of the Royal Apostolic Treasury. He had great respect for Don Bosco's work for which he obtained substantial financial aid.

³⁴ See no. 6.

³⁵ See no. 4.

when it almost completely collapsed causing much fear and damage. Nobody, fortunately, was injured.

Mr Michael Scanagatti³⁶ offered a set of elegant candelabra for the main altar. The bell tower was built. Since there was no further space for evening classes, some were held in the new church. The old church was turned into a dormitory and study and classrooms.

Fr Cafasso had the current pulpit built.

1853. Building started on the part of the house which had collapsed: it was completed, furnished and by October was being lived in. The new area meant that the dormitories and refectory for the boys who were living in could be better organised. By now there were 65 of them.

Chev. Duprè³⁷ bought a communion rail of marble and embellished the St Aloysius altar. Marquis Fassati³⁸ provided a marble railing and a set of brass candelabra for Our Lady's altar.

Count Cays, the prior of the St Aloysius sodality bought a bell which was blessed by the parish priest of Borgo Dora. He provided the current Baldacchino.

For the first time we held the Forty Hours and the Octave for the Easter festivities.

We rented out the entire Belleza house in order to get rid of the disturbances from this tavern and all the people of suspect behaviour who went there.

1854. Because of the financial crisis this year no new works were undertaken. We simply finished off some of the most essential things. Count

³⁶ Michele Scanagatti (1803-1879).

³⁷ Giuseppe Luigi Duprè (died 1884) banker, and at the time held many public roles. With other well-known personages on 9 December 1851 he had supported Don Bosco's request to the head of the Finance Department for authorisation to launch a lottery, cf. E(m) I, pp. 136-137.

³⁸ Domenico Fassati Roero, Marquis a great benefactor of Don Bosco along with his wife Maria de Maistre (1824-1905).

Cays³⁹ was re-elected as prior of the St Aloysius sodality and provided a long new frieze⁴⁰ which ran the length of the church cornice.

The lack of food, work which exposed many young people to danger in body and soul meant that we took in many more boys and their number increased to eighty six.

11. To the Minister for the Interior, Luigi Carlo Farini

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 407-408.

Turin, 12 June 1860

Your Excellency⁴¹,

I humbly beg your Excellency to kindly read what I am outlining regarding the house known as the Oratory of St Francis de Sales.

In the space of a fortnight I had to undergo two detailed searches without knowing the reason for them⁴². Things like this upset the spirit and order of the boys. If Your Excellency would be kind enough to explain the reasons for these searches I assure you I would give you every satisfaction according to the truth.

Meanwhile I want you to be fully convinced that:

1. I have been carrying out my priestly ministry for twenty years in prisons, hospitals, the streets and squares of this city, picking up abandoned boys to

³⁹ Carlo Cays Count of Giletta and Caselette (1813-1882), president of the St Vincent de Paul Conference, member of the subalpine parliament (1857-1860), was widowed, became a Salesian and also a priest (1877).

⁴⁰ The word he uses is a Piedmontese term for drapery.

⁴¹ Luigi Carlo Farini (1812-1863), Former Minister for Public Education (1851-1852), was Minister for the Interior for three months. On the same date Don Bosco wrote a reminder to the Minister for Public education, Terenzio Mamiani: cf. E(m) I, pp. 408-410.

⁴² He refers to a detailed search carried out by the police for political motives (26 May) and a school inspection (9 June) of secondary classes at the Oratory, cf. Pietro BRAIDO - Francesco MOTTO, *Don Bosco tra storia e leggenda nella memoria su "Le perquisizioni"*. *Testo critico e introduzione*, in RSS 8 (1989) 111-200.

set them on the path to good conduct, work, according to their intelligence ability and inclination, without ever having received or asked for payment of any kind. Indeed I have used and will willingly continue to do so today, whatever funds of my own I have to build the house and support these poor boys.

2. Over all this time I have always been in agreement with the Government and have always had support and benefactors from amongst its Ministers. Boys who are at risk and abandoned have been sent to me both from your Ministry⁴³ and the War Ministry⁴⁴ and I have always taken them in; then when I found myself in exceptional need I had recourse to these Ministries and received help. This kindness of the Ministry was also supported by two orders of the day, one in the Senate, the other the House of Representatives, recommending this work of charity to the King's Government. I am attaching a copy of several of the many letters the Minister of the Interior has written to me encouraging me to promote this work of charity.

3. I have never meddled in politics. In everything I have said, done, written or had printed over these twenty years no one could honestly find a single word running contrary to government legislation. It is forbidden to talk politics of any kind in this house; no one has ever been associated with any newspaper. I have always been convinced that the priest must exercise his ministry of charity in any time and place; given any kind of legislation or government, respecting and indeed assisting the authorities while keeping rigorously out of politics.

4. Should Your Excellency have any advice, counsel, or anything else to offer me for this work of the oratories I respectfully beg you to do this as a father who wants what is good for his children, not in a threatening way that could cause irreparable damage to the work that has cost twenty years of appealing for government and private help.

⁴³ Cf. E(m) I, pp. 433 e 436.

⁴⁴ Cf. E(m) I, p. 362.

I ask you to give kind consideration to these humble but sincere reflections, and in recommending these poor young lads to your clemency, I take the opportunity to wish you blessings from Heaven. It is an honour for me to express my esteem and gratitude, and I remain,

Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

12. To the Prefect of the Turin province, Giuseppe Pasolini

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 465.

Turin, 26 October 1861

Your Excellency,

Fr John Bosco, director of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, respectfully informs Your Excellency that the increasing numbers of boys taken into this house means having some other professions in place other than carpentry, tailoring, boot making and bookbinding. It seems that it would be highly useful to begin a small printing press.

With this in mind we need to ask Your Excellency for authorisation:

1. To open a printing press in this house under the title of *Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press*.

2. To allow the director of the same Oratory to be the manager, given that the purpose of this small press is exclusively a charitable one, and given the meagre means and work we will have to restrict ourselves to.

3. Prior to commencement of printing work the applicant is obliged to provide a master printer who can guarantee the work to be undertaken.

Since this small Press aims to give work to and benefit the most abandoned and poorest boys in society, the undersigned, trusting in your well-known

kindness hopes that his request will be taken into kind and favourable consideration⁴⁵. I have the greatest honour in declaring myself to be,

Your Excellency's most humble petitioner,

Fr John Bosco⁴⁶

13. Historical Outlines concerning the Oratory of St Francis De Sales

Critical ed. in P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani...*, pp. 9-29, 56-77.

[1862]

The idea of the Oratories came from frequenting the prisons in this city. In these places of spiritual and temporal misery there were many young men in the flower of their youth, alert, good-hearted, well able to be the consolation of their families and an honour to their town; and here they were locked up, discouraged, the opprobrium of society. Carefully considering the reasons for this misfortune one could see that for most of them they were unfortunate more for want of education than out of malice. One could note also that little by little they could be led to appreciate their dignity as human beings, that they could reason, and that they must earn their bread in life through honest effort and not by stealing. In other words as soon as their minds were enlightened by a moral and religious principle they began to feel something good in their hearts which they could not explain but which made them want to be better people. In fact many changed their behaviour while still in the prison, while others when released lived in such a way that they would not end up there again.

⁴⁵ Giuseppe Pasolini (1815-1877) was State Minister for Commerce, Fine Arts and Agriculture in the Papal States (1848-1849). Senator of the Kingdom from 1868, he was Prefect in both Milan and Turin. In 1876 he took up the role as President of the Senate.

⁴⁶ The request was granted on condition that it be a professional Press and thus in the first months of 1862 a new trade workshop was added to boot-making, book-binding, carpentry and tailoring, opened in previous years. The printing workshop did not fail to alarm city presses for its presumed competition factor.

So we had confirmation that these young men were unfortunate for want of religious and moral instruction and that these two educational means were ones that together could keep good boys good and lead the unruly ones to make wise judgement when they were released from these places of punishment.

As a trial, some appropriate catechetical programmes were begun in the prisons around the capital and a little later in the sacristy of the church of St Francis of Assisi. And thus the Sunday gatherings began. Boys released from prison were invited as well as others who we found and collected here and there in the streets and squares and workshops during the week. Moral and religious stories, hymns, small gifts, some games were the lure we used to deal with them on Sundays and other holy days.

Throughout 1841 on average around seventy boys attended. With great satisfaction the oratory continued at St Francis of Assisi for three years, until the extraordinary number of boys forced us to choose a larger place. Then in 1844 Don Bosco, for reasons of Church employment, had joined the administration of the pious work of the Refuge in Valdocco. There a suitable place was selected and on December 8, 1844 the first chapel destined exclusively for the young people was blessed. This chapel consisted of two rooms next to the building used by the two priests who were running the aforesaid work of the Refuge. The Oratory lasted a year here.

In autumn 1845, because of the growing number of boys, a number that often exceeded two hundred, the building which up until then had served as a chapel was now to be used for something else, so it was necessary to seek a more appropriate place. For about four months we went to St Martin's near the city Mills but finished there to give way to another catechism program for young people. St Peter's in Chains cenotaph, the Moretta House, an enclosure belonging to the Filippi house served as an Oratory up until spring 1846.

That year we rented and then bought the Pinardi house in the Valdocco district, and this is where the Oratory of St Francis de Sales arose. The number of boys grew such that in 1850 it often went beyond two and also three thousand.

With a view to providing for this need, in 1851 the current church was put up and that was done with help from the Lotteries, raffles of items and other private donations.

The Oratory of St Aloysius at Porta Nuova. In 1847, seeing that such a huge number of boys could no longer be contained in the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, another was opened at Porta Nuova between dei Plantini and Valentino streets. Administration of this was entrusted to Fr Giacinto Carpano, and then was passed on to others. Currently Fr Leonardo Murialdo⁴⁷ is its zealous director. The average number of boys is around 500.

The Guardian Angel Oratory. The extraordinary number of boys coming to the Oratory at Porta Nuova soon made us realise that another site was needed where the greatest need was felt. Vanchiglia is a heavily populated part of Turin and full of youngsters who just wander about on Sundays and Holy Days. The worthy Fr Cocchi had already opened an oratory there but had to abandon it due to other things he had to do. So in the same place with an almost identical purpose, in 1849 we reopened the Guardian Angel Oratory there, near the Po. Administration was entrusted to Fr Robert Murialdo, but since his health is currently up and down it has been entrusted to Fr Michael Rua⁴⁸. The average number presently attending this Oratory is around four hundred.

General observations. We could call these Oratories places aimed at dealing with youngsters at risk on Sundays and other Holy Days by offering them pleasant and honest recreation after they have attended the church services. So as well as the churches there are enclosures that are large enough for recreation and other suitable places for lessons and to bring the pupils under cover

⁴⁷ Leonardo Murialdo (1828-1900), Saint, former collaborator at the Guardian Angel Oratory in Vanchiglia (1851), took on the running of the St Aloysius Oratory at Porta Nuova, at Don Bosco's request in 1857, and remained there until 1865. Following that he became the director of the Collegio degli Artigianelli (a boarding school for trade students), set up by Fr Cocchi in 1849, and then founder of the Congregation of St Joseph; he carried out intense activity in the social sector, especially on behalf of workers.

⁴⁸ Michael Rua (1837-1910), Blessed, Don Bosco's principal collaborator from the earliest days of the Oratory, would succeed him in leading the Salesian Congregation (1888-1910).

during bad weather in the cold season and when it rains. Ways of attracting them to come are: small prizes, games and a kind welcome; medals, holy pictures, fruit, something to eat or a snack; sometimes a pair of socks, shoes or other clothing item for the poorest ones; finding them work, going to see their families or their employers. The games are: bocce (bowls), quoits, stilts, see-saws of various kinds, leap-frog, gymnastics, military exercises, singing, concerts with instruments and vocals. But what attracts the youngsters most is the kind welcome they receive. Long experience has led us to understand that the good result of education of the young consists especially in knowing how to make oneself loved so that one can then be feared.

The religious services on Sundays and other holy days are as follows: Mass followed by a story from the bible or Church history, or an explanation of the Gospel of the day; then recreation. After midday catechism in classes, vespers, a brief instruction from the pulpit, Benediction and then followed by the usual recreation. Once religious services are over everyone is free to stay and play or to go home. Once night falls we send everyone home and the Oratory is closed.

There is a set of rules guiding everything in church, recreation and school. Those taking part are priests, clerics and some good citizens who help out with everything. During Lent, in all three places there is catechism each day at midday for those who are not free at other times during the day. We even celebrate Mary's month with a sermon or spiritual reading, rosary and Benediction at sunrise or at the time in the evening when we say the Hail Mary according to circumstances.

People taking the most active part at the beginning of the Oratory have been, as well as those already mentioned: Fr Ponte⁴⁹, Fr Trivero, Fr Pacchiotti⁵⁰, Dr John Vola. Of particular help has been the worthy Fr John Borel. He has been the soul and support of things exercising his priestly ministry and in

⁴⁹ Fr Pietro Ponte (1821-1892) chaplain of the Opere Barolo. He stayed with Don Bosco in the Pinardi house for more than a year (1847-1848).

⁵⁰ Fr Sebastiano Pacchiotti (1806-1885), chaplain at the Opere Barolo.

material and moral assistance. Chevalier Dr (Fr) Baricco⁵¹ has also taken part several times.

Sunday school. Many youngsters, either for lack of means or facilities are already moving on in years but have not had the necessary instruction for learning a trade. During the week they were not able to attend school of any kind, so this need suggested Sunday classes. We started these in 1845. It seemed difficult at the beginning given that there were no books or people to give advice or direction. We had school, we taught things but during the week, what had been taught and learned on Sundays was mostly forgotten. Just the same we mostly overcame this serious obstacle by taking just one area of study at a time and having just one lesson to be learned through the week. This way we succeeded in getting them to learn how to read and write and then the four arithmetical operations, and then the elements of the metric system, Italian grammar and Bible history, but without ever passing on to something new if what we already had in hand was not yet well understood. The public performances that were offered satisfied important personages who honoured us with their presence, amongst whom Fr Aporti⁵², the city Mayor, Chevalier Bellono⁵³, and Chevalier Fr Baricco.

Evening classes. Amongst the multitude of boys who came another need appeared, since although the Sunday classes produced good results, nevertheless they were not sufficient for many. So we began to invite them to come during the week on days and at times that were most convenient for the pupils. One boy encouraged another and in a short while it was considered appropriate to set a fixed time and this was in the evening, just when the working boys had finished their day's work.

⁵¹ Dr (Fr) Pietro Baricco (1819-1887), professor, member of the Turin city council, responsible for public education in the city.

⁵² Ferrante Aporti (1791-1858), priest and pedagogue from Mantova, the first in Italy, in 1828, to open infant schools. Classes given in Turin in 1844 at the Higher School of Method brought him to the attention of public opinion, so much so that after the 1848 war he took refuge in the city, was made a senator and took on various important roles in citizens' cultural institutions.

⁵³ Giorgio Bellono (1806-1852), Mayor of the city from 1850 to 1852.

In 1846 the evening classes began for the first time. Attendance was extraordinary to the point where we had to limit ourselves to the number of pupils we could physically take in the squeezed circumstances. Since evening schools were then opened by the city administration in many parts of the city it was not necessary to offer them in the other oratories. They continue until the present only in the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. The subjects taught are: reading, writing, the metric system, Italian, plainchant, vocal music, instrumental music and some drawing, pianoforte, organ and also French.

Day school during the week. Another type of boy can be found on the loose wandering the city and these are the ones who are either very poorly dressed or since they cannot settle down to discipline are not accepted in the public schools or are expelled from them. For the most part they are either orphaned or neglected by their parents even at a tender age and so they wander the streets and squares brawling, cursing and stealing. We opened a school for them in the Oratory of St Francis de Sales and another in St Aloysius. A considerable number attend in both oratories and through the careful and kindly concern of the teachers satisfactory results have been obtained in terms of proper behaviour and discipline. A few of them were then admitted to classes in town, others in evening schools and some others yet found employment.

The Home at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. Amongst the young people who come to these Oratories we find some who are so poor and abandoned that almost anything we did for them would be almost useless without providing somewhere where they could live, eat and be clothed. We tried to do this with the attached Home at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. At the beginning we rented out a small house there in 1847 and began to gather up a few of the poorest boys. At the time they went out to work in the city coming home to the Oratory to eat and sleep. But the serious need that we became aware of, from various towns around the province, made us determine to extend our acceptance also to boys who were not attending the Turin oratories.

One thing happened after another. Abandoned young people swarmed in from everywhere. So we established a platform whereby we accepted only boys between the ages of twelve and eighteen, without father and mother, completely abandoned and poor. But since going into the city into public workplaces had bad consequences, we extended our place, rebuilt existing parts and built new (we have seven hundred boys) workshops so that everything is now here at home. The trades taught are tailoring, boot-making, book-binding, carpentry, printing and study for those whose behaviour and attitude to academic subjects make them suitable for it.

The earnest desire many showed for taking regular academic courses meant we had to make exceptions in our acceptance conditions. So for studies were also accepted boys who were not abandoned nor completely poor so long as their behaviour and attitude to study was such that it left no doubt that they could hope for an upright and Christian success in an academic career.

Administration. In the house we even have a set of regulations to guide everything. There is a Rector on whom everyone depends. He has a prefect as his vice and who is responsible for accounts and correspondence. A Director looks after the school, keeps in touch with the teachers and study assistants, catechists or spiritual directors. A bursar looks after service staff, repairs and all the domestic arrangements in general. The shop heads or master craftsmen in each workshop also depend on him. There are no fixed fees, so the house is supported only by charity coming mostly from private donations. The city council usually gives an annual grant of 300 francs for lighting and wood for the evening classes during winter. It is not possible to calculate the precise expenses for the whole house or for each individual but we could establish somewhere around 60 cents per day per person all up. The church, the buildings, the site for the house and oratory at Valdocco are the property of Don Bosco. Those at Porta Nuova and Vanchiglia are leased.

Results. To understand the results obtained in these schools, the Oratories and the Home at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales we need to divide the pupils into three groups: the undisciplined, the restless and the good. The

good ones stay that way and make marvellous progress in goodness. The restless type, those already accustomed to wandering around not doing much work achieve some success through a trade with assistance, instruction and by being kept busy. The undisciplined ones mean we have a lot to do. If we can get them to gain some taste for work we can mostly win them over. By the means already indicated we can obtain some results which could be explained thus: 1. That they do not get worse. 2. Many improve in common sense so can earn their bread in an upright manner. 3. Those who seemed to be insensitive under vigilance over time become more pliant—if not completely, at least to some extent. We leave it to time to profit from the good principles and know how to put them into practice.

This means that every year we have been able to place more than a hundred boys with good employers where they can learn a trade. Many have returned to the families they fled from and are now more docile and obedient. Not a few were placed with upright families as domestics.

The coming and going of boys from the Home at this Oratory comes to around three hundred a year. A few of them have found a place with the National Guard or Military Band, others continue with the trade they learned here while some serve in upright families and yet a sizeable number of others take up teaching. These ones sit for the regular exams or remain here at home or go as teachers to towns that are asking for them. Some also take up other civic careers.

Amongst the students many set out on an ecclesiastical career. These, once they have finished their secondary studies, are mostly sent off to the various bishops who look after them lovingly to help them and allow them to continue in the career they have aspired to. Amongst these we have chosen a number who carry out a teaching role in this house, teach catechism in the Oratories, assist in the various workshops and dormitories. When they become priests they continue to exercise their sacred ministry on behalf of the boys here or those who attend other oratories in the city. Others follow their inclination and are assigned to other aspects of ministry which the ecclesiastical superior judges them suitable for.

One very deserving person in the oratories and this house is Fr Victor Alasonatti⁵⁴ who has tirelessly dedicated all his efforts for many years in these charitable works.

As for all the personnel of this house and the oratories, including domestic staff, nobody receives a stipend, but each offers his work for free.

14. To the Superintendent of Studies in Turin, Francesco Selmi

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 541-543.

Turin, 4 December 1862

Distinguished Sir⁵⁵,

I am respectfully presenting to your Excellency that in the desire to promote secondary education amongst the less well-off classes in the population, I have begun secondary classes for poor lads who we have been taken into our house with a view to those who would like to earn an honest living through arts or trades, or academic studies. In the past our curriculum was never completely along the lines of government programmes and subjects. But now, wanting to gain regular recognition for these classes, I am requesting you, Honourable Sir, for approval of these classes as a private institute following the norms of article 246 of the legislation on Public Education⁵⁶.

The curriculum will follow the programmes and subjects laid out by the government in the above-mentioned article, as has already been the case.

With regard to teachers

⁵⁴ Fr Vittorio Alasonatti (1812-1865), first Prefect of the Oratory at Valdocco (from 1854) and of the Salesian Society (from 1859 until his death).

⁵⁵ Francesco Selmi (1817-1881), former superintendent of studies in Brescia, took up the same role in Turin in 1862. He was also Director General for the Ministry of Public Education. He then left his administrative roles to take up the Chair of Chemistry and Pharmacy at the University of Bologna.

⁵⁶ The article envisaged the possibility of opening private schools under certain conditions involving teachers, teaching programmes, and possible ministerial inspections.

For the first year secondary I am proposing Fr Victor Alasonatti who is registered for fourth year Latin according to the former legislation.

For arithmetic Fr Angelo Savio who is a registered teacher for 4th grade primary.

For 2nd year secondary, cleric John Anfossi.

For 3rd year secondary cleric Celestine Durando.

For 4th year secondary cleric Francis Cerrutti.

For 5th year secondary, Fr John Francesia⁵⁷.

The four last-mentioned have no titles other than a declaration by their professors, but as well as their experience of six years of teaching at their respective levels, they also attended lectures in Greek and Latin at our Royal University. Their young pupils have benefited from this in an outstanding way. None of them receives a wage and all these teachers offer their services voluntarily. I am requesting temporary approval for these last four, giving me a fixed time in order to re-present them or others, but this time with all the titles required by law⁵⁸.

Studies are under the direction of the worthy professor of rhetoric, Fr Matthew Picco⁵⁹, as they have always been up until now.

⁵⁷ Only the second of these, John Anfossi (1840-1913), would leave the Salesian Congregation in 1864 to join the diocese, but remained very affectionate towards Don Bosco. Angelo Savio (1835-1893) was Economist General of the Salesian Congregation for years, before leaving as a missionary for Latin America, where he died. Clerics Celestine Durando (1840-1907), Francis Cerrutti (1844-1917) and John Baptist Francesia (1838-1930) became priests, writers and authoritative members of the Salesian Society, taking on roles of responsibility.

⁵⁸ Don Bosco always wanted his secondary classes to be within the private system according to the legislation in force at the time (cf. no. 11), but later sought exemption from certain obligations of this legislation (such as legal titles for his teachers). The ambiguity of his position, which went undetected for some fifteen years due to support from compliant Ministers and benevolent Superintendents, was discovered and condemned at the end of the 1870s with a consequent decree closing down his classes (cf. no. 21).

⁵⁹ Matthew Picco (1812-1880), priest, teacher at his own privately run school.

I note here in passing that the purpose of this house has been that these secondary classes are a kind of junior seminary, for young men to be able to study who have both the intelligence and virtue but lack the means or at least have limited means.

With complete faith that my humble request will be given kind consideration I have the honour of being,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

15. To the Minister of the Interior, Ubaldino Peruzzi

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 583-584.

[Turin, May-June 1863]

Your Excellency⁶⁰,

Although I remain calm concerning what your Excellency has written to me, that is [that] given the need to make some observations, you would of course have made these directly to me, nevertheless since you have passed on to me certain reports, and given that there has also been publicity in the papers I believe I should note here that there are some unfounded rumours that have been of concern to the Superintendent of Studies, the Minister for Public Education and Your Excellency yourself. Here are the rumours and here are my responses.

1. *The studies and spirit of our clerics are not in harmony with Government institutions today.*

R. Our clerics have the same treatises, studies and subjects as the diocese, and our clerics regularly attend classes at the seminary in Turin with the exception of certain secular subjects for which they go to our Royal University

⁶⁰ Ubaldino Peruzzi (1822-1891), former Minister for Public Works, took up the Interior Ministry Portfolio on 9 December 1862. Don Bosco defends his own book *History of Italy* (which went to a fourth edition in 1863) in a letter to the Ministry for Public Education (cf. E[m] II, pp. 584-585).

since they are not available at the seminary. I believe there is nothing else that needs to be proven in this regard.

2. There is no picture of the King put up.

R. I might say that nor is there one of the Pope or the Bishop; I could also add that there is no law which commands or advises such. But I could say other things; I can say that this second item of hearsay is totally baseless. The picture of the King is in any number of rooms, and all three of our offices have a picture of our Sovereign. His image is also in the thousands of young men who leave this house and are now honourably serving their country in the ranks of the army; it is in the hearts of the young men in this house, who offer special prayers for their sovereign morning and evening and for whoever is concerned about the good of the State with him.

3. But the History of Italy is not according to the desired spirit.

R. This *History of Italy* is not a school textbook. On the other hand I did write it at the invitation of the Minister for Public Education, it was printed under his very eyes and he gave me a gift of fr. 300 when I brought him the first copy. It is already in its fourth reprint, but always under the eyes of the Minister, who, and this is no small thing, recognised it with a special decree or better had it listed amongst the best books. It is true that in the earlier editions there were expressions that needed to be altered following the events of 1860-1-2. These were modified as everyone can see in the fourth edition published this year. If there should be something which still merits lack of approval it is enough to tell me and it will be corrected in the next edition.

On the other hand I have spent 23 years putting my life and all I have into public ministry. The squares, streets, prisons, hospitals have been the places I have dealt with. What I have said, done, written, were always public and no one, private individual or public official who has been in power in the past has noted anything that would censure my work.

I do not currently ask the government for employment, honours, money; I ask only moral support, help so that with common agreement I can

promote and provide the necessary development for a work that aims solely at preventing abandoned youngsters from filling up our jails, and that those who come out of these place will not have cause to return there. These things seem to me to be completely in the interests of the government.

[Fr John Bosco]

16. First circular for collecting funds to build the Church of Mary Help of Christians

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 41-44.

[Turin, halfway through March 1864]

Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis. (Laurentine Litany)

Tu nos ab hoste protege et mortis hora suscipe. (The Church).

Mary Help of Christians, pray for us

In the final hour – of our life. Mother, protect us.

Worthy Sir⁶¹,

While the city of Turin sees a growing number of factories every day, and its population is continually increasing, there is also a need for new buildings consecrated to the practice of our religion. Amongst other parts of the city this need is keenly felt in the district known as Valdocco (1), where amongst some 20,000 or more inhabitants there is no other church with a certain capacity except for the parish church at Borgo Dora (2), and that cannot hold more than 1,500 individuals.

However in the district around this parish there are the smaller churches of the Little House of Divine Providence and the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, where there is public access on Sundays and Holy Days. However both of these are not even big enough to serve the large community for which they were built, and there is little room left for anyone from outside.

⁶¹ Other appeals to charity would follow in the three years during which the church was being built (1865-1868).

So desiring to provide for the urgent need of the inhabitants of Valdocco and for many young people who come to the Oratory on weekends from various parts of the city, and who cannot fit into the existing small church, I have decided to set about building a sufficiently large church to respond to this double purpose, and which could also in time become a parish when the ecclesiastical authorities see fit. A worthy engineer has drawn up plans in the shape of a Latin cross, already approved by the competent authority; the space inside will be around 1,000 square metres, and costs around L. 200,000.

The church will be put up in via Cottolengo on land acquired through the generosity of certain good people. This land is adjacent to the current building belonging to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. The excavations have already been dug, and we are already working on the foundations.

To bring this pious work to completion, and not having the necessary funds, I can do none other than put all my trust into the hands of Divine Providence and recommend myself to the charity of those who are devotees of Mary, amongst whom I believe I can with good reason list your worthy self.

I say devotees of Mary, because it is precisely in honour of the Immaculate Mother of Jesus Christ, under the title of *Auxilium Christianorum*, or Help of Christians, that this sacred building will be erected. While we hope that it will be an instrument of salvation for many people, it will also be a tribute of our gratitude to Mary Most Holy for the benefits received and an invitation to our most merciful Mother to always protect us in the future, and help us maintain the faith and practise all the Christian virtues in this city.

It is to you, therefore, that I have humble recourse. Whatever sum of money, whatever object, even construction materials, will be accepted with a keen sense of gratitude. It will take three years to complete this work, so if your Lordship cannot currently help out, it will be possible to do so later.

I attach some sheets for you and for other charitable people whom you may judge to propose this work of public charity to.

Where the sheet has been filled in according to the attached form, I humbly beg you to send it to my address in accordance with the work to be done.

When there is no other way of sending to its destination what your charity has inspired you to offer it could be securely done through a postal order.

I have every trust that whatever you shall offer in this exceptional case will certainly deserve copious blessings from the Blessed Virgin Mary in spiritual and temporal matters.

Finally I beg you to give kind forbearance if this has caused you any bother and I wish you every blessing from heaven. With heartfelt gratitude, I am honoured to be,

Your worthy Sir's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

Qui elucidant me, vitam aeternam habebunt. (Eccl. 24, 31). Domus Dei aedificetur in loco suo. (Esd. 5).

Mary says: Those who are devoted to me will have eternal life. May the Lord's house be built in an appropriate place.

1. This suburb is called Valdocco from the abbreviation *Val Oc. Vallis occisorum*, or *Valley of the murdered*. It was called this in ancient times because of the martyrdom here of Saints Avventore and Ottavio. This is why this part of the city seems so blessed by God as shown by its many pious and charitable institutions. It has been watered by the blood of the martyrs.

2. From the parish church at Borgo Dora drawing a line to the church of the Consolata and that of St Donato, then across to the Royal powder factory as far as the River Dora, there is an area covered by houses where 35,000 inhabitants live without a public church.