

IV. DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE ARCHBISHOP OF TURIN

Relationships between Don Bosco and Archbishop Gastaldi went through two different stages, one of great understanding and cooperation, and another of notable difficulties and conflicts. The watershed could be considered to be Gastaldi's transferral from the Episcopal See of Saluzzo to being Archbishop of Turin in 1871.

Theologian and Canon, Lorenzo Gastaldi at the end of the 1840s appreciated and supported Don Bosco's work of the oratories, he praised him in the press, allowed his mother and sister to help the boys at the Oratory in Valdocco and when he left as a Rosminian for England in 1853 he spoke on behalf of Don Bosco. On his return to Italy, his respect for Don Bosco continued and his friendship intensified through his collaboration in publishing the Catholic Readings, his preaching to the boys at Valdocco and to the Salesians, his lessons in theology to the latter group, and his generous offerings for the church of Mary Help of Christians.

Given these precedents, once can understand how Don Bosco indicated him to Cardinal Antonelli as a possible bishop and in 1867 the Pope appointed him to Saluzzo then in 1871, again on indications from Don Bosco, as Archbishop of Turin.

At this point the "coexistence" between the two strong personalities became difficult, their mutual esteem for one another and their work diminished, their relationship grew ever more tense and ended up in open conflict, made worse by a hostile secular press, but also by writings from their religious defenders, all with the best of motives.

The reasons for dissent or bitter conflict were varied: different ways of thinking about the Church, different ways of understanding formation to the priestly and religious life, disagreement about the Salesian Society being a religious institution and its legal form, different points of view about the privileges obtained by the leader of the Society, real or pretended rights by both sides, justified complaints or sheer obstinacy, voluntary involvement or not in conflict situations for which they had no direct responsibility, the impact that other controversies had on them,

or events that were insignificant in themselves but that could lead to painful misunderstandings and mutual distrust.

Other than the roles they had and what they represented, we also need to consider that they were individuals of a very different kind and with different sensitivities, different desires, passions and dreams; but they were both fierce fighters, equally inclined to command rather than obey. They gave more consideration to the results of their actions than to seeking simple agreement, were not always available to meet together, clarify, conciliate, perhaps because of mutual disappointments, hopes, frustrations, real preconceptions.

When the one was accused of insubordination to legitimate authority he replied he was being persecuted by the other with the consequence that all attempts at mediation, at local level or by the Holy See, were doomed. It was a contest of wills that presented as a classic conflict between authority and charisma, even more so at a time dominated by Ultramontanism, and only an “accord” at the command of the Holy See in 1882 was able to resolve it.

We publish eleven texts that belong to this painful affair, almost all of them letters Don Bosco wrote to the Archbishop. He communicates the satisfaction of the civil authorities at the archbishop’s appointment to Turin (no. 79); he explains the meaning of pontifical approval of the Salesian Constitutions and how formation is given to Salesians (no. 80); he disagrees with the archbishop’s decision regarding ordination of Salesian priests, especially considering how many diocesan vocations came from Valdocco and his own involvement on behalf of Gastaldi’s appointment at both Saluzzo and Turin (no. 81); he is sorry about events causing the archbishop problems but for which he does not feel responsible (no. 82); he defends his work regarding retreats, hoping to lay aside concerns about doing things in the best way possible, in order to combat evil and promote good (no. 84); he offers some reflections and explains some details, asking that he be given reasons for a possible refusal (no. 85).

Amazed that in a personal discussion he was not given an opportunity to explain himself or correct what he was accused of—after all he had done on behalf of the two episcopal appointments—he says he has nothing else to add and merely asks forgiveness for any trouble he has caused (no. 86); he asks for renewal of

his faculties for confessions, which had expired, to avoid giving scandal (no. 87). Then follows a letter responding to a controversy on indulgences which had been referred to Rome (no. 88), before an extensive printed report at the end of 1881 (no. 89) which is a simple example of Don Bosco's circumstantial complaints concerning Archbishop Gastaldi's attitude towards him, and about which for the first two years of the Episcopal appointment to Turin (1872-1874) he had drawn up a detailed account for the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Salvatore Nobili Vitelleschi (no. 83).

This collection of documents concludes with the letter of formal acceptance of the "Accord" (no. 90)²⁴ which was really more an armistice between belligerents than a peace: real peace between the two individuals did not exist. There was mistrust or profound wounds that could not simply be put aside by a document. The true "accord" would only come about with the sudden death of the archbishop on March 25, 1883 and the granting of privileges to the Salesians on June 28, 1884, after a long ten year wait.

A good part of Don Bosco's correspondence and the documentation relating to the Gastaldi affair published here—as also the even more abundant material in the archives and partially published—has a rather polemical tone to it, making their trustworthiness suspect and interpretation difficult. So once again one needs to look at the critical biographies of the two individuals²⁵ and appropriate studies²⁶.

²⁴ In his letter to Cardinal Lorenzo Nina on 17 June 1884, Don Bosco said that "the project by lawyer (Fr) Colomiatti presented to the Holy Father" had some difficulties if it was to go ahead. He asked for "some days to make some clarifications", cf. E IV, pp. 145-146.

²⁵ For Archbishop Gastaldi see Giuseppe TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi (1815-1883)*. Vol. II. Torino, Ed. Piemme 1988, pp. 259-290.

²⁶ A. J. LENTI, *Don Bosco, his Pope ...*, pp. 65-240.

79. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 383-384.

[Passerano (Asti), beginning of November 1871]

Your Grace,

I have spent two days here in Passerano in the Radicati home²⁷ where I have spoken at length with the Vice Prefect of Turin who was also here, the lawyer Bonino. He spoke very well of the letter you wrote and the response from the Prefect, then he expressed the keen desire that when you enter your new diocese you should make a solemn *entrance*.

We need to see how the civil authorities feel about that, I replied.

“Have no doubt,” he added, “they will leave nothing to be desired. If we are able to talk about this I will then give you some of the details.”

If you are still thinking about a pro-vicar I believe you could appoint Fr Bertagna. Pious, learned, practical, well-off. Perhaps he might accept. This is only my thought and you are free to take note of it or not.

I ask for your blessing, and with deep gratitude I am,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

P. S. Please, look after your health. *Messis multa*, but it needs workers.

80. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 493-495.

Turin, 23 November 1872

Your Grace,

I thank Your Grace with all my heart for the letter you kindly deigned to write me, and although it does not lessen my pains it reveals, however, no

²⁷ A noble family of benefactors in cordial relationships with Don Bosco. Costantino Radicati Talice di Passerano was Prefect of Turin from 1868 to 1871.

reason for the attitude you have had for some time concerning myself and the members of the Society of St Francis de Sales.

You reduce matters to two issues: the lack of a good Novitiate and of an ecclesiastical and religious spirit amongst the members. These two matters demand clarification both on my part and for Your Grace. So please be good enough to read this.

Before approaching the Holy See for approval of this Congregation I had a long talk first with Mons. Svegliati and with Cardinal Quaglia, and then with the Holy Father himself. The latter one evening had me explain at length the reasons why, according to me, I judged this new institution to be God's will, to which I gave all the answers he had asked for. Then he asked me whether a Congregation was possible in times, places and amongst people who wanted to suppress them.

"How could you have a house of studies and a novitiate?" he asked. I replied, saying what some months earlier I had said in reply to Your Grace, that is that I did not intend founding a religious order which would take in penitents or converts who needed to be formed to piety and good behaviour, but my intention was to bring together young people and also adults of assured morality, morality proven over the years, who could be accepted into our Congregation.

"How do you achieve that?" the Holy Father interrupted.

"I have already achieved that," I added "and I hope to continue doing so for that category of members who are accepted into the Society. We limit ourselves to young men who have been brought up and instructed in our houses; young men who have ordinarily already been selected by their parish priests. They have seen their virtue stand out amidst hammers and hoes, so they recommend them for our houses. Two thirds of those who come return home."

Those we keep study and pray with us for four, five even seven years and of these only a few are admitted to a time of trial, even after this long practical

training period. For example this year 120 completed their rhetoric year in our houses; of these 110 entered the seminary, but only 20 remained for the Congregation, while the others were directed to their respective diocesan Ordinaries.

When they enter their trial period they do two years here in Turin where every day they have spiritual reading, meditation, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, examen of conscience, and each evening a brief little homily which I give—rarely do others do that—and this is to everyone in common, with the aspirants.

Twice a week there is a conference expressly for the aspirants, once a week for the whole Society.

When the Holy Father heard these things, he showed he was very satisfied and replied: “May God bless you, my son practise the things you have pointed out to me and your Congregation will achieve its purpose. If you find any difficulties let me know and we will look at ways of overcoming them.”

After that the decree of approval came, which you have seen. And we have done everything that we said.

From what I have explained here you can easily understand that it seems to me we have a novitiate even if not by that name.

You add that *with rare exceptions* no member of the Salesian Congregation shows the required virtues and you find them particularly lacking in humility. I would humbly and respectfully beg Your Grace not to speak in general but to point out these individuals by name, and I assure you they will be severely corrected and it will only need doing once.

Such a thing would be something hidden that needs to be revealed; hidden from me until today; hidden from Your Grace until April this year. Up until then you saw, heard, read, and I could even say, administered some of the most important things in this house. Up until then, in anything you wrote or said privately or publicly, you always said this house was an ark of salvation for the young where they learned piety and the like.

There are more things I would like to say about this that I do not wish to entrust to a letter, and I hope, when you have time to hear me out, that I can explain them in person.

Thank you for the kind words in your letter. This is the only comfort I could take from it. With gratitude, I have the honour of being,

Your Grace's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

81. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 96-98.

Borgo San Martino, 14 May 1873

Your Grace,

The letters that you had your secretary Chiuso write to me, especially the most recent of these²⁸, have given me much to think about and in order not to make too hasty a reply to this last one, I went to our house at Borgo San Martino to make a three day retreat, after which, as if I were presenting myself before the Lord's judgement, I am explaining my thoughts concerning this.

You are telling me that you will not admit any of our clerics to ordination unless cleric Borelli is sent away from us (he has not been with us for two weeks), and cleric Rocca. Plus you wanted a formal promise that we will no longer receive anyone who belonged to the clergy in Turin into any house of the Congregation.

Since you have given no reasons for this I believe I can offer you some thoughts on the matter.

If these clerics have been expelled from the seminary, what does it matter if they find refuge in a house where they can reflect on their lot, or get ready

²⁸ Letters of April 10 and 29 and a letter of May 10. Tommaso Chiuso (1840-1904) was the archbishop's secretary and chancellor.

for some exams, learn a trade so they can earn some bread for themselves? Just because these clerics have lost their vocation, should they become refugees and victims of a sad future?

It would seem to me better to help them find somewhere to go where they can do something and provide for their situation. Bishops we are on good terms with have done this and still do so. Perhaps it could be said that they must ask permission, and this would resolve any problem.

One could answer that the obligation to ask permission is a serious imposition on them and for the Congregation or house they are asking to go to. Since such a condition was not part of the arrangement, the superior is not authorised to add it. Especially since this permission was requested a number of times, and up until now was not given.

In these cases you should consider that if it is said that clerics expelled from the seminary must not be taken into any house by order of the archbishop, or if they are then they have to be sent away, you also make enemies of their friends or their parents, or so it seems to me.

Especially since some of them have already begun a course of studies, and others have already begun to learn a trade.

This declaration, which I believe you have no authority to make, puts a wall between the Salesian Congregation and the diocese to whose good it is dedicated and for which it has worked for more than thirty years.

Of course if there is some prescription of the Church which I am unaware of in this regard, then I will obey, and totally.

As for all my clerics who have been presented for ordination, I observe that you will refuse them if you find any problems with any of them, but if they are worthy of being ordained, could you refuse them out of reprisal and for reasons that have nothing to do with them, thus depriving the Congregation, Church and your own diocese of priests, given that there is such a shortage of priests?

It seems to me that this Congregation deserves some consideration. It has worked for this diocese without any self-interest of any kind and since 1848 until now has supplied no less than two thirds of the diocesan clergy. Especially since when a cleric or other member of the clergy comes to the oratory, all he is doing is changing residence. He would still be working in the diocese and for the diocese of Turin.

In fact on the three occasions Your Grace decided not to admit our clerics to ordination, all you did was to diminish the number of priests working in the diocese.

Having said that, I would like Your Grace to be keenly convinced that you and I have people around us who would subtly have us understand that they would like to go public and say: the archbishop has also broken relations with poor Don Bosco.

You know what I have done in this regard, and even just a few days ago I made no small sacrifice to stop publicity of certain defamatory articles.

And again I would like you to be informed that certain documents pilfered from Government files, are circulating in Turin. From these papers one may learn that Canon Gastaldi owes his appointment as bishop of Saluzzo to Don Bosco's mediation. And likewise it was through Don Bosco's mediation that he was made archbishop of Turin. These papers also recall the difficulties that had to be overcome in the matter and give the reasons why I championed your cause, amongst others the great good you had done for our house, our Congregation.

Everyone knows the great good we can do for one another if we are of common accord, and that evildoers will greatly benefit from any ruptures between us.

Now, Your Grace will be saying: "but what does Don Bosco want?"

Full obedience, full accord with my ecclesiastical superior. I ask for nothing else than what the Holy Father has said many times, and that Your Grace said many times when you were bishop of Saluzzo: that is that in the difficult times in which we find ourselves, a new Congregation needs all the indulgence

compatible with the authority of the Ordinary, and when difficulties do arise it needs to be helped with whatever advice and effort is possible.

I have written this letter with the sole desire of telling you what could help both of us and would be useful for the glory of God; however if some inappropriate word has slipped out, I humbly beg forgiveness. With deep veneration I profess that I am

Your Grace's most humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

82. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 143-144.

Sant'Ignazio [Lanzo], 12 August 1873

Your Grace,

The bishop of Vigevano has told me of a letter concerning me, with a reply from Your Grace. If it had not been written to a bishop I would say it was written in jest. Instead it is serious. I am sorry about this and I am sorry too that you have to put up with thorns, but that these thorns were planted by Don Bosco is something I cannot accept. I have always tried to lessen your problems, and I know how much sacrifice that has meant for me. I have always had good will. I have never asked anything except that you tell me what you are unhappy about in my regard, and I was never given a positive response.

You refer to mediation by the Canon at the cathedral. It seems to me I have done everything you asked me. You wanted me to make a declaration that I would not accept any clerics without permission. I did that. You spoke to me about Borelli, who was only in our house for a brief time to make a retreat, after which he put off the clerical habit. You spoke of Rocca, and we agreed that sending him away immediately would only increase the number of people speaking ill of him; we would do this as soon as the holidays came. Fr Marengo agreed and this is how things were decided. On September 4 the school year finished in Lanzo, after which the cleric went back home.

Had I been in Your Grace's place I would have given him permission to stay where he was, both to leave a cleric with Don Bosco, who sends some every year to the diocesan seminary, and to make it clear that when a cleric loses his vocation he is not abandoned by his superior, who will help him in whatever way he can. But however that may be, if he did not get the permission which he tells me he had asked for several times, then he would go home when the school year finished.

As for other things said there, I can say that there are things in my life for which I must give account to the Lord, but I know of none regarding Your Grace.

I believe that whatever I have said in private or in public proves what I am saying.

For sixteen months I have been asking what your problem with poor Don Bosco is, and up till now all I have is a few vague things. If there is something I do not know about, tell me and I will humbly ask forgiveness from that moment. Let us not add thorns to thorns.

I know that your concern is for the greater glory of God, and I do what I can for the same; so why are we not in agreement? Try telling me what you want from me.

I do not cease to pray and get others to pray that your health may be preserved. I have the honour of being,

Your Grace's humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

**83. To The Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars,
Arch. Salvatore Nobili Vitelleschi**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 287-290.

[Turin, 21 May 1874]

Your Grace,

The fear that difficulties with our archbishop would continue, especially regarding the ordination of clerics, has unfortunately come to pass. I say this referring to the archbishop of Turin, since with the forty four other bishops we have relations with there is only kindness and support.

So that Your Grace can have a correct idea of things I believe it opportune to note how Archbishop Gastaldi while he was a Canon, both before and after he left the Rosminians, was a zealous collaborator of our boys' oratories.

When he became bishop of Saluzzo he was zealous in our regard. When he became archbishop of Turin he continued for some time to show benevolence and like all the other Ordinaries, often admitted our clerics to ordination. But ten months ago his attitude changed.

I will skip over a number of facts referring to other matters: here I am speaking only of ordinations.

I begin by saying that he did not intend to admit any of our clerics to ordination unless they had first undergone theology exams set by a commission he had appointed. This was a novelty in our towns; the bishops had usually admitted religious ordinands who had taken their exams with their respective superiors.

Despite this I quickly obeyed and sent my clerics for the exams as requested; then the archbishop added that he himself wanted, forty days prior, to examine these candidates: when they entered the Congregation, what vows they had taken, where they had done their preliminary studies, who had been their superiors, what reasons they had for leaving the diocese and joining a Congregation etc. etc.

This unusual request interfered not a little with our pupils' vocations.

Nevertheless I obeyed and calling in ordinands from quite some distance away I presented them for the requested scrutiny.

He indicated that he was happy with them all but did not want to admit them to ordination.

These things, he said, were sufficient enough for the pupils, but not for the superior. "I want the superior to formally declare that in the future none of his houses will accept any cleric or priest who belongs to the Turin clergy."

Although it was beyond his right to demand it, I wanted to comply, but I believed it was my duty to insert the fact that the declaration was to be understood in such a way that it in no way went against the prescriptions of the sacred canons safeguarding the freedom of religious vocations. He was unhappy with this clause and did not want to admit any candidates for ordination.

When I made further humble requests he answered that he disapproved of the triennial vows; he did not recognise the authority of the superior of the Congregation. I observed that the requests were in conformity with the decree of approval on March 1, 1869, a genuine copy of which was kept in the archbishop's archives and another copy along with the Constitutions had been given him personally.

He said he had no memory of that and that therefore other copies should be sent. This was done but he did not reply. Meanwhile two years went by without him wanting to admit anyone for ordination and this caused serious disturbance and difficulty for the Congregation.

After the definitive approval of the Constitutions, all of which was shared with him, I again renewed my request for ordinations.

He answered that he did not want to decide until he had seen the decree granting the issuing of dimissorials. I presented it to him; he read it then said that he did not want to say yes or no until there was a genuine copy of the decree lodged in the archbishop's archives.

The observation was made that this ran contrary to what was usually the case for Religious orders and ecclesiastical Congregations, where it was enough for the proper person to see the decree, especially given that two copies of the rescript had already been presented, in accordance with the requests for them, to the Curia and that they had been lost, causing us a problem but without ever being told about it.

Given that he was always negative I judged that it would be good to tell him that I was authorised to allow the decree to be seen by whoever had the right to see it, but not to give copies of it to anyone. He remained negative.

I asked him, I begged him not to cause further problems, given that we both had people around us who were opposed to us. He did not alter his views.

Your Grace can easily understand how much damage and discouragement an attitude of this kind does to a poor Congregation just starting out. At least one should know the reasons for it. But no one knows.

This is a simple outline of the facts that I have written down briefly here after placing myself in God's presence and looking at the Crucifix.

I now ask Your Grace to communicate my stance to the Holy Father or to whoever else you believe can give me advice or a guide to follow.

Would it be too bold if I asked for dimissorials *ad quemcumque episcopum*?

Forgive this disturbance on my part and please accept my profound gratitude etc.

[Fr John Bosco]

84. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 316-318.

Turin, 10 September 1874

Your Grace,

The close scrutiny which Your Grace gives to the progress of our poor Congregation, shows that you want it to have exact observance of its Rule and ecclesiastical prescriptions and this can only be a good thing; it keeps us vigilant in our duties, something I thank you for with all my heart.

However there are certain things that I do not understand well, or whether they are according to the spirit of the Church or to anyone's advantage.

I am not speaking about the frequent private letters we have exchanged; not about your insistence that I had some of Your Grace's letters published, something that has never even crossed my mind. I speak only of the letter which

you had addressed to me on August 23 last, concerning the scheduled retreat to be held at our college in Lanzo, for the sole reason that this information was published without my knowledge or involvement. And at the time it was decided that this retreat would no longer take place, so it seems to me that this was enough to remove any idea of there being opposition to ecclesiastical authority. But the printed invitation sent to parish priests was not without your knowledge, even though a copy was not sent to the archbishop.

Amongst other things the letter says: *Retreats of this kind cannot be offered without the consent of the ecclesiastical authority.* I do not know where you find a rule of this kind.

I know what the Council of Trent says (sess. V, c. 2), and what the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars says, that religious preachers not approved for preaching must in certain cases ask permission, in other cases ask for the Ordinary's blessing.

I am not ignorant of what the Synod's Constitutions published by Your Grace have to say but all these items concern public churches, and I would certainly follow them in such cases; indeed before communicating information about the preaching I would not have failed to follow the usual procedures.

But in our case we are only talking about some teachers who wanted to come together in one of our colleges and rather than doing something else, wanted to spend a week on retreat.

It is also worth noting that our priests are all approved by Your Grace for preaching and that from the early days of the Oratory the ecclesiastical authority has granted the faculty for us to have triduum, novenas, retreats when we want in the oratory's churches and chapels.

In March 1852 the appropriate decree *granted this Institution all the necessary and appropriate faculties.*

You have the originals of these in the Curia; I even brought a copy personally to Your Grace. Archbishop Riccardi²⁹ confirmed all these faculties

²⁹ Arch. Alessandro Riccardi di Netro (1808-1870), archbishop of Turin from 1867 to 1870.

and when Your Grace granted certain parochial rights to the church of Mary Help of Christians you assured us that these were not intended to detract in any way from whatever had been granted by your predecessors.

This is why several times a year we have offered retreats in Turin, Moncalieri, Giaveno and Lanzo without ever having recourse to ecclesiastical authority.

And when Your Grace was a Canon, you often preached here at Valdocco and Trofarello with much zeal, but neither you nor I ever asked permission. In all these cases for all these retreats we are only talking about members of the Congregation and young people educated in our houses, never of people from outside who have been publicly invited. So by doing what we had customarily done for many years, I was clearly convinced that I was not undertaking anything that might be contrary to canonical prescriptions, or Your Grace's orders, which are always respected.

Before I received your letter I had already heard from one or other individual of your resentment, but always with a bad interpretation put on it almost as if you wanted to hinder the good of the faithful.

Many of the things that refer to me or Your Grace are exaggerated and distorted by public opinion or those who want to denigrate others.

And now I beg you to allow me to speak for a moment with the language of the heart.

It seems to me that before the judgement seat of the Lord, a day that is not so far off, we will be much happier if we can leave aside this concern for doing things in the best way possible and get on with fighting evil and promoting good. It would be good if those days could return when you judged any idea of poor Don Bosco's to be something to be put into action.

Letters should not be written here or there which do nothing else but increase our woes, and provide the enemies of religion with cause for blame or ridicule.

Would it not be better if you wrote not vaguely but concretely and specifically about what you want from our poor Congregation, whose members are working with so much effort for the good of the diocese which Divine Providence has entrusted to you? And also could we just bury forever the idea that some people crazily suppose is Don Bosco's, that he wants to rule over someone else's house?

I have written with no intention to offend or to cause further problems for Your Grace, but if some involuntary expression is unacceptable, I humbly beg your forgiveness.

In this house we have always prayed and will continue to pray that your health may be preserved. I have every confidence that you know that the poor writer has always been and remains,

Your Grace's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

85. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 350-351.

Turin, 10 November 1874

Your Grace,

Your Grace's reply has been communicated to me regarding the fact that our clerics have not been admitted for the next set of ordinations at Christmas time. You know that it is the strict duty of a superior to provide for the good of his religious, and that it is also the Church's duty, and you certainly know the cases where an Ordinary can refuse such ordinations.

However, before asking Rome how I should go about things, I consider it good that I explain certain thoughts of mine, and this only to not increase the problems and regrets that I have always tried to lessen, whatever you may want to say.

I did ask if I should or could make a declaration not to accept clerics from the seminary according to the tenor that I had the honour to present to Your

Grace and I was offered no little criticism for that. In the end you said: “Go and read the Constitution of Benedict XIV which begins: *Ex quo dilectus*; consult the declarations of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars *Super ingressu clericorum saecularium in Regulares*. Dec. 20, 1859. Also consult the responses given to the bishop of Pinerolo on May 3, 1839 and you will have norms to guide you.”

Despite all that I am asking you to believe that of the clerics expelled from the seminary in Turin it has not been the case that any of them belong to our Congregation neither as professed members or as novices.

At the very most a few came for a while because they had been abandoned, but as soon as they found somewhere else to go they went there; others came to make a retreat to help them prepare for laying aside the clerical habit, as cleric Borrelli did.

All of these, however, were sent to ask Your Grace’s permission, and when this was refused, we also refused to accept them.

Also be kind enough to believe me when I say that if I did decide to take these clerics in temporarily, it was to mitigate the acrimony of their parents and friends who were spitting out *plagas* endlessly against you, as if these young men had been completely abandoned.

Having said that, I ask Your Grace to admit our clerics for ordination, as was humbly requested. If you should decide to be adamant in your refusal, I ask you at least to write to me with the reasons, so I can be guided.

However things may be and whatever anyone wants to say about me, I can assure you that I have always, in accordance with my strength, acted for the good of my ecclesiastical superior and for the diocese that Divine Providence has entrusted to you, and in the hope that I can continue to do so for the rest of my life I have the honour of declaring myself,

Your Grace’s humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

86. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, p. 536.

Turin, 28 October 1875

Your Grace,

Yesterday Your Grace decided to tell me everything you thought appropriate without even allowing me to offer a word to clear myself or correct what you were accusing me of.

I feel sorrier for Your Grace than I do for myself. I had in mind to tell you things that would have helped diminish, perhaps free you of serious regrets.

With all the respect due to the dignity of an archbishop, which is your due, I believe I can say that if you were the bishop of Saluzzo and then became the archbishop of Turin, if serious difficulties that could have come between us were ironed out, all that, and Your Grace knows this, has been due to the proposals and concerns of poor Don Bosco, who now is not allowed to even say a word and is sent away as you well know. I believed I could say something, and indeed I felt it my duty to; now I believe I am fully exonerated.

Excuse me for the regrets caused. I believe that with the greatest reverence I have always been and will never cease to be,

Your Grace's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

87. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 586-587.

Turin, 26 December 1875

Your Grace,

Only on Christmas Eve did Fr Rua show me that my faculty for confessions had expired last September. Finding myself with a sacristy full of boarders and day students waiting for confession, I decided that for this occasion I

could use a faculty obtained from the Holy Father for special cases that might happen to me in any place.

Today however I stopped, and tomorrow I will leave Turin so I don't have to answer questions beginning to circulate about this fact.

Now I humbly ask you to renew this faculty to avoid gossip and scandal; and since this supposes serious reasons, thus as a poor priest and as Superior of a Congregation definitively approved by the Holy See, and properly appointed as such, I respectfully ask you to point out what I must do or make amends for if there has been any failure on my part. If you decide not to explain this to me but rather to Rome, I renew my humble request to remove a situation from me that is painful for everyone and even more so for the superior of a Congregation involving many houses.

Whatever your response may be I ask you to address it to the Oratory where it will be immediately passed on to the place where I am staying.

I have the honour of declaring my due esteem and respect and that I am

Your Grace's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

88. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 508-510.

Turin, 22 November 1877

Your Grace,

Out of respect for your letter of the 9th inst., it is my duty to assure you that regarding the Mass celebrated by a Salesian priest on September 16 this year in a private oratory at Rivara I do not intend to invoke any privilege.

The priest who did this, not being able to celebrate because refused by his parish priest, believed in good faith supported by reasons which he thought sufficient, that in this circumstance he could celebrate in a place that had become the property of the Salesian Congregation.

If there had been time to ask me, I would not have agreed and I will not agree in any case, given the situation I am in. I hope that since before God there is no fault, Your Grace will accept this frank declaration, and I reverently request this.

As for the matter of indulgences for Cooperators I regret very much that Your Grace's decision was made public, even if only to the parish priests, before being examined by the Congregation for indulgences. Because I believe this publication would be a scandal and a stumbling block for the faithful and those without faith who would not fail to come to know about it.

It would certainly damage the Congregation, because such a serious accusation could not be mistaken; but perhaps the worst damage would not be caused for the Congregation nor myself. Mere knowledge of the existence of this dispute would already be a reason for much criticism and for contrary judgements not all unfavourable to myself.

It would then be necessary for me to have recourse to the Roman Congregations, and if as I believe the decision would be in my favour, how inconvenient it would become when this decision was made known! I do not want to hinder anything that Your Grace does that your zeal for religion dictates, but allow your unworthy servant to request that before taking this step you should ask learned and prudent individuals about it, if only to see that you are protected from any criticism and the malevolence of your adversaries, as Your Grace had already done for certain letters published in the Calendar.

And then, why not have recourse to the mature and authoritative judgement of the Roman Congregations who would not fail to give the matter due consideration and decide according to what would be right?

And to tell you sincerely what I think, I would be very sorry if the question of forbidding Masses were not treated in the same way, and that printed matter of a reserved nature should prejudice the decision.

Since the controversy had been referred to Rome by Your Grace, would it not have been more appropriate for matters to have been dealt with there? The Sacred Congregation would see if this publication really had something to say on the matter .

Now despite myself I will have to respond, and certainly a defence against sufficiently serious accusations, and where I believe I am in the right, could never be without proportionate disapproval of the points and reproaches of Your Grace against my way of acting.

I ask your forgiveness in advance, and if it seems to you that I have gone too far in something, attribute it to my need to defend myself and to the very real regrets that I have. But why not deal with this problem in a fatherly way, and with the indulgence that a Congregation just starting out deserves, one that sincerely wants what is good, and that could err through ignorance but certainly not through malice?

God will judge Your Grace and his poor servant on our right intentions, on the Christian charity and humility with which we have acted, on the efforts we have made to find proportionate means to defend and promote the interests of his holy religion: in Him I trust.

I must not leave matters without responding to the observation made to me that I accepted a cleric without testimonials in the Congregation (now Fr Rocca) who had been expelled from the seminary in Turin. Your Grace will allow me to remind you that cleric Rocca had requested these testimonials five times. On another occasion Fr Rua requested them, and the writer on yet another occasion, without ever being given them. As a consequence of that we went ahead in accordance with the instructions of the Sacred Congregation of Discipline for Regulars dated January 25, 1848 (*Collectanea* pag. 891).

I respectfully kiss your hands and declare that I am,

Your Grace's most devoted, respectful servant,

Fr John Bosco

89. Report for the Holy See (15 December 1881)

Critical ed. in *Esposizione del sacerdote Giovanni Bosco agli eminentissimi cardinali della Sacra Congregazione del Concilio*. S. Pier d’Arena, Tip. di San Vincenzo dei Paoli 1881, pp. 51-53, 75-76 (OE XXXII, 99-101, 123-124)³⁰.

1879

On 12 January this year the archbishop of Turin went to Chieri and brought together the Canons of the College in a Chapter. In an effort to lead them to pass a motion of no confidence in the oratory Don Bosco had opened there for young girls, he likened the Salesians to a steam train that had gone off the rails, producing more bad than good.

Since he could not get enough votes against the oratory, on the 12th and then 14th of February he suspended the Salesian director from³¹ hearing confessions anywhere in the archdiocese, as we indicated above.

On February 20, Don Bosco and the main superiors were outside of our main house in Turin when the archbishop arrived suddenly, without invitation, to take part in a performance in our theatre, while a few days earlier he had sent Fr Bonetti notice of his suspension from hearing confessions not only in Chieri but in the whole diocese, as he said. Following that, he wrote that “*he attended our performances during Carnival, to prove without doubt his benevolence towards the Salesian Congregation*”.

We ask: why did the archbishop refuse so often to come to functions in our church, and also to administer Confirmation when he was invited, and then turn up at the theatre without any invitation?

On the 26th he wrote to Don Bosco asking him to call in and see him about a very serious matter. The very serious matter was the question concerning Fr

³⁰ Of this long report (76 pages) we have extracted some passages from 1879-1880 and the conclusion.

³¹ John Bonetti (1838-1891), was one of the first and most brilliant Salesians. He was the editor of the *Salesian Bulletin* and as director of the girls’ oratory at Chieri he had a long-running dispute with Archbishop Gastaldi regarding differences of opinion with the parish priest at the cathedral in Chieri. Don Bosco and the pontifical authorities were also caught up in this dispute.

Bonetti, for which for certain letters that had come to him from Rome he had first said that he would absolutely give him back his faculty for hearing confessions, but then told him he was still suspended for Chieri, making him feel that he was culpable in the very field of his labours. Don Bosco went and saw him that evening, and the archbishop said he would restore Fr Bonetti's faculties for hearing confessions anywhere, leaving it up to Don Bosco's prudence whether to send him to Chieri or not. When Don Bosco brought this news home everyone was happy, but it was of short duration, because in the morning the archbishop sent him a new letter, going back on what he had said the evening before. Here is this letter:

“Turin, 27 May 1879.

Very Reverend Father,

The need I have to suppress without delay the discord that has arisen in Chieri obliges me to ensure that Fr Bonetti is kept away until I have re-examined matters 'in loco' and made a decision with full knowledge of the case. Thus I consider it necessary that for all this period of time this priest not exercise his ministry of hearing confessions in Chieri and that consequently I am withdrawing from Fr Bonetti (*if he is withdrawing it, then it is a sign that he had given it the evening before*) the faculty of sacramentally absolving until the time indicated above. Given my current physical state, I cannot yet determine when that will be. This is what I had told Fr Rua at the beginning of this month and what, reflecting on our conversation yesterday evening, I believe I must declare to your Reverence. I am,

Your devoted servant,

Lorenzo, Archbishop”.

Whose fault is it then, if we could not reach a peaceful agreement from the beginning?

1880

On March 22 the archbishop of Turin sent Father John Cagliero a letter in which he offered a house, land and L. 6,000 if the Salesian Congregation

would open a festive Oratory and two primary day schools offered for free to children of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Turin.

Having looked carefully at everything and seen that the same offer had been made to other religious corporations who had not accepted, and that the Salesian Congregation, already lacking in personnel and means, was not able to open a new house with all that was required for only L. 300 a year, which would be the result of an offer of L. 6.000, he answered that it would not be possible for now to shoulder the burdens that would result from such a decision. The archbishop himself, finding Fr Cagliero's observations correct, also agreed that the Congregation would not have been able to open a house for just L. 300 a year and said he would suspend negotiations until the opening of the new church and house of St John the Evangelist, which was close to the site being offered and where it would be much easier to send the two teachers for classes in the morning and evening. Not long went by before, having forgotten these understandings, he complained to Cardinal Lorenzo Nina, our benevolent protector, and to turn him against his protégées told him that the Salesians had been decidedly cold towards his offer, and *that he was still waiting for a definite response.*

Upon receipt of such a grievance, His Eminence wrote to Don Bosco on June 23 asking for further information. Don Bosco informed His Eminence with the following letter adding another one from Fr Cagliero who had personally dealt with the archbishop about the matter.

...

A plea

I do not intend accusing anyone or defending myself with this Report. I only wish to make it possible for the Holy See to understand the situation of this Pious Salesian Society so it can offer me valid support, prevent any renewal of these problems which cost time, effort and money, all things that I strongly want to dedicate entirely to the glory of God and for the good of souls.

Therefore I humbly beseech the eminent Cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, and through them the Holy Father, to come to the aid of our young Congregation, whose interests I am obliged in conscience to promote and safeguard.

When the Holy See approved the humble Salesian Society, it also took it under its protection, and therefore I have complete faith in it wanting to support it so that amidst our calamitous times it can pursue the purpose for which it was funded and approved.

And this even more so now that the merciful God has helped the Salesians found 140 houses in which Christian education is given to more than 80 thousand children. Of these houses a good 35 are in South America and also amongst the poor wild natives. All these institutes need time and tranquillity for me to govern and administer them, and see that they pursue their purpose which is to propagate the Gospel, and the salvation of souls.

Declaration

Having explained these thoughts, the Superior of the Salesian Congregation kneels before His Holiness Leo XIII, humbly asking forgiveness for any disturbance of an involuntary kind. He assures him that he will obey whatever disposition, counsel and advice His Holiness sees fit to give him. He promises in advance to accept them and make them an unalterable rule for himself and for the Congregation which Divine Providence has entrusted to him. It came into being, was sustained and strengthened through the moral and material help of the supreme pontiff, and therefore all Salesians will glory in living and dying, working and serving and pleasing Him who gave them life and preserved them in it before the Church and the world.

90. To Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin

Archivio Segreto Vaticano, *Segreteria di Stato*, anno 79, rubrica 257,
original by another but signed by the author.; ed. in E IV, p. 151.

Turin, 8 July 1882

Your Grace,

His Holiness, considering that the various disputes which have arisen for some time between Your Grace and the humble Congregation of the Salesians are the source of misunderstanding and friction to the detriment of authority and the admiration of the faithful, has deigned to let me know that it is his will that there cease to be any disagreement between us, and that we re-establish a true and lasting peace.

Hence, to accommodate the fatherly and wise intentions of the august Pontiff, which have always been my intentions, I express my regret to Your Grace that in recent times some incidents have altered the peaceful relationships which once passed between us, and caused bitterness of soul for Your Grace. Indeed if Your Grace has ever believed that I or any individual of the Salesian Institute, has influenced things in this way, I beg pardon of Your Grace and ask you to forget the past.

In the hope that Your Grace will look kindly on these sentiments, I take this auspicious occasion to hope that God gives you his choicest blessings, while I have the distinct honour of declaring myself with great esteem and profound reverence

Your Grace's most respectful servant,

Fr John Bosco