

III. REMINDERS TO PRACTISE THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM (1884-1885)

In his 1877 booklet on pedagogy, Don Bosco highlights the advantages of the Preventive System and other reasons for which it should be preferred. At the same time he recognises that the “practical application” of the educational approach he is proposing implies “certain difficulties” for educators.

There were no lack of these difficulties at Valdocco, especially in the disciplinary area. In the early 1880s there was often a felt need to tackle the delicate question of “punishments”. On 9 March 1883, in his “general conference” or meeting of everyone involved with the boys, the day’s agenda listed what was called an “important” item: “Finding out why the boys fear us rather than love us.” Those in charge of the house note that what is happening is contrary to the Salesian spirit or “at least the spirit of Don Bosco.”³³

A few months later—on July 4, 1884—at a Superior Chapter meeting (today the General Council) of the Salesian Congregation, Don Bosco alluded to the question of “reforming the house at the Oratory” and emphasised the importance of observing in detail the “regulations practised since the early days.”³⁴

The first of the texts that follows finds its place within these coordinates: the famous Letter from Rome in 1884 (addressed to the Salesian community at Valdocco in Turin), which tells of a “dream” of Don Bosco’s—which he told his secretary Fr John Baptist Lemoyne—regarding the state of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales on two occasions during its development: before 1870 (positive

³³ José Manuel PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento tra reale e ideale (1866-1889). Documenti e testimonianze*. Roma, LAS 1992, pp. 257-258.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 275. Similar considerations moved Don Bosco to interrupt the process that had begun to give him a “Reformatory” in Madrid in 1185. On March 17, 1886, he wrote to the Spanish senator, Manuel Silvela: “Despite our willingness to do good, we cannot move away from the practice established by our Rule, a copy of which I sent you last September. An Institute modelled on the *Talleres Salesianos* in Barcelona-Sarriá would be possible for us there but it could not at the same time be a reform school modelled on the Santa Rita one.” (E IV, pp. 353-354).

aspects) and as it was in 1884 (problematic aspects). There is also a shorter version in existence, addressed to the young students at Valdocco³⁵.

*“We have no handwritten original of Don Bosco’s letter [dated May 10, 1884] but only an original (in two drafts) written by Fr Lemoyne and signed by Don Bosco. Despite this, it is considered, for its content, to be one of the best and richest of Don Bosco’s pedagogical documents.”*³⁶

There are various other letters written by Don Bosco in 1885 in a similar circumstance to the one mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. Information had arrived at Valdocco, Turin, from Latin America on less than satisfying application of his educational method in certain Salesian houses in Argentina, contrasting with the familiarity and kindness which was proper to the Salesian educational system. When he came to know about it, Don Bosco intervened personally and wrote frankly: “The Preventive System is something which is ours.”

Other than the text of the longer letter of May 10, 1884, are three letters addressed to well-known Salesian missionaries in 1885: John Cagliero, James Costamagna and Fr Dominic Tomatis³⁷. Don Bosco offers fatherly reminders to practise a pedagogy of charity, patience and kindness. In other words: to take up

³⁵ Cf. Pietro BRAIDO, *Due lettere datate da Roma 10 maggio 1884*, in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 344-390; José Manuel PRELLEZO, *La(s) Carta(s) de Roma (1884)*, in “Cuadernos de Formación Permanente” 17 (2011) 179-202.

³⁶ P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica...*, II, p. 469. In the preceding pages in reference to the “dreams”, Stella writes: “Of all of them, the one sent from Rome to the Oratory in a letter on May 10, 1884 could be considered the most effective ‘exegesis’ on loving and preventive assistance” (*Ibid.*, p. 467); cf. also Pietro BRAIDO, *La lettera di don Bosco da Roma del 10 maggio 1884*. Roma, LAS 1984, p. 8.

³⁷ The addressees of these letters published here: Bishop John Cagliero (1838-1926), future first Salesian cardinal (1915). Fr James Costamagna (1846-1921), future bishop (1894), Vicar Apostolic of Méndez y Gualaquiza (Ecuador). Joseph Vespignani (1854-1932) who became a Salesian after his priestly ordination (1876); in 1877 he was sent as a missionary to Argentina; in the 1922 GC he was elected as the General Councillor for Vocational Schools. Dominic Tomatis (1849-1912), Director for many years at the San Nicolás de los Arroyos college (Argentina). Other Italian Salesian missionaries mentioned: Fr Joseph Beauvoir (1850-1930), Fr Dominic Milanese (1843-1922), Bishop Giuseppe Fagnano (1844-1916).

the principles of the “Salesian spirit” he was proposing to “introduce in the houses in America”. The efforts of the founder of the Salesian Congregation were not in vain.

153. Letter from Rome to the Salesian Community at the Oratory in Valdocco, Turin

Critical ed. in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 377-390.

Rome, 10 May 1884

My dear sons in Jesus Christ,

Whether I am at home or away I am always thinking of you. I have only one wish, to see you happy both in this world and in the next. It was this idea, this wish of mine, that made me write this letter. Being away from you, and not being able to see or hear you, upsets me more than you can imagine. And so, although I shall be back very soon, I want to send you this letter in advance, since I cannot yet be with you in person. These words come from someone who loves you very dearly in Christ Jesus, someone who has the duty of speaking to you with the freedom of a father. You'll let me do that, won't you? And you will pay attention to what I am going to say to you, and put it into practice.

I have said that you are always and exclusively in my thoughts. Well, a couple of evenings ago I had gone to my room, and while I was preparing for bed I began to say the prayers my good mother taught me, and whether I simply fell asleep or became distracted I don't know, but it seemed that two of the former pupils of the Oratory in its early days were standing there before me. One of them came up to me, greeted me warmly, and said:

“Do you recognise me, Don Bosco?”

“Of course I do”, I answered.

“And do you still remember me?” the man went on.

“I remember you and all the others. You're Valfrè, and you were at the Oratory before 1870.”

“Tell me,” Valfrè, went on “would you like to see the youngsters who were at the Oratory in my time?”

“Yes, let me see them,” I answered “I would like that very much.”

Valfrè then showed me the boys just as they had been at that time, with the same age, build and looks. I seemed to be in the old Oratory at recreation time. It was a scene full of life, full of movement, full of fun. Some were running, some were jumping, some were skipping. In one place they were playing leap-frog, in another tig, and in another a ball-game was in progress. In one corner a group of youngsters was gathered round a priest, hanging on his every word as he told them a story. In another a cleric was playing with a number of lads at *chase the donkey* and *trades*. There was singing and laughing on all sides, there were priests and clerics everywhere and the boys were yelling and shouting all round them. You could see that the greatest cordiality and confidence reigned between youngsters and superiors. I was overjoyed at the sight, and Valfrè said to me:

“You see, closeness leads to love and love brings confidence. It is this that opens hearts and the young people express everything without fear to the teachers, to the assistants and to the superiors. They become frank both in the confessional and out of it, and they will do everything they are asked by one whom they know loves them.”

At that moment the other past pupil, who had a white beard, came up to me and said:

“Don Bosco, would you like to see and know the boys who are at the Oratory at the present time?” (This man was Joseph Buzzetti).

“Yes,” I replied, “it is a month since I last saw them.”

And he showed them to me.

I saw the Oratory and all of you in recreation. But no more could I hear the joyful shouts and singing, no longer was there the lively activity of the previous scene. In the faces and actions of many boys a weary boredom was evident, a surliness, a suspicion that pained my heart. I saw many, it is true,

who ran about and played in light-hearted joy. But I saw quite a number of others on their own, leaning against the pillars, a prey to depressing thoughts. Others were on the steps or in the corridors, or up on the terraces near the garden so as to be away from the common recreation. Others were strolling about in groups, talking to each other in low tones and casting furtive and suspicious glances in every direction. Sometimes they would laugh, but with looks and smirks that would make you not only suspect but feel quite certain that St Aloysius would have blushed to find himself in their company. Even among those who were playing there were some so listless that it was clear they were not enjoying their games.

“Do you see your boys?” asked my former pupil.

“I can see them” I replied with a sigh.

“How different they are from what we used to be” the past pupil went on.

“Too true! What an apathetic recreation!”

“This is what gives rise to the coldness of so many in approaching the sacraments, to neglect of the prayers in church and elsewhere; their reluctance to be in a place where Divine Providence heaps every possible blessing on their bodies, their souls and their minds. This is why so many do not follow their vocation, why they are ungrateful to their superiors, why they are secretive and grumble, with all the other regrettable consequences.”

“I see, I understand” I said. “But how can we bring these youngsters to life again, so that we can get back to the liveliness, the happiness, the warmth of the old days?”

“With love!”

“With love? But don't my boys get enough love? You know how I love them. You know how much I have suffered and put up with for them these forty years, and how much I endure and suffer even now. How many hardships, how many humiliations, how much opposition, how many persecutions to give them bread, a home, teachers, and especially to provide for the salvation of their souls. I have done everything I possibly could for them; they are the object of all my affections.”

“I’m not referring to you.”

“Then to whom are you referring? To those who take my place? To the Rectors, the Prefects, the Teachers, the Assistants? Don’t you see that they are martyrs to study and work, and how they burn out their young lives for those Divine Providence has entrusted to them?”

“I can see all that and I am well aware of it, but it is not enough; the best thing is missing.”

“That the youngsters should not only be loved, but that they themselves should know that they are loved.”

“But have they not got eyes in their heads? Have they no intelligence? Don’t they see how much is done for them, and all of it out of love?”

“No, I repeat: it is not enough.”

“Well, what else is needed?”

“By being loved in the things they like, through taking part in their youthful interests, they are led to see love in those things which they find less attractive, such as discipline, study and self-denial, and so learn to do these things too with love.”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to explain that more clearly.”

“Look at the youngsters in recreation.”

I looked, and then asked: “Well what is special about it?”

“You’ve been educating young people for so many years and you don’t understand! Look harder! Where are our Salesians?”

I looked, and I saw that very few priests and clerics mixed with the boys, and fewer still were joining in their games. The superiors were no longer the heart and soul of the recreation. Most of them were walking up and down, chatting among themselves without taking any notice of what the pupils were doing. Others looked on at the recreation but paid little heed to the boys. Others supervised from afar, not noticing whether anyone was

doing something wrong. Some did take notice but only rarely, and then in a threatening manner. Here and there a Salesian did try to mix with a group of boys, but I saw that the latter were bent on keeping their distance from teachers and superiors.

Then my friend continued: "In the old days at the Oratory, were you not always among the boys, especially during recreation? Do you remember those wonderful years? They were a foretaste of heaven, a period of which we have fond memories, because then love was the rule and we had no secrets from you."

"Yes, indeed! Everything was a joy for me then, and the boys used to rush to get near me and talk to me; they were anxious to hear my advice and put it into practice. But don't you see that now with these never-ending interviews, business matters, and my poor health I cannot do it any more."

"Well and good; but if you cannot do it, why don't your Salesians follow the example you gave? Why don't you insist, why don't you demand, that they treat the boys as you used to do?"

"I do. I talk till I'm blue in the face, but unfortunately not everyone nowadays feels like working as hard as we used to."

"And so by neglecting the lesser part they waste the greater, meaning all the work they put in. Let them like what pleases the youngsters and the youngsters will come to like what pleases the superiors. In this way their work will be made easy. The reason for the present change in the Oratory is that many of the boys no longer have confidence in their superiors. There was a time when all hearts were wide open to their superiors, when the boys loved them and gave them prompt obedience. But now the superiors are thought of precisely as superiors and no longer as fathers, brothers and friends; they are feared and little loved. And so if you want everyone to be of one heart and soul again for the love of Jesus you must break down this fatal barrier of mistrust, and replace it with a happy spirit of confidence. Then obedience will guide the pupil as a mother guides her baby; and the old peace and happiness will reign once again in the Oratory."

“How then are we to set about breaking down this barrier?”

“By a friendly informal relationship with the boys, especially in recreation. You cannot have love without this familiarity, and where this is not evident there can be no confidence. If you want to be loved, you must make it clear that you love. Jesus Christ made himself little with the little ones and bore our weaknesses. He is our master in the matter of the friendly approach.

The teacher who is seen only in the classroom is a teacher and nothing more; but if he joins in the pupils' recreation he becomes their brother. If someone is only seen preaching from the pulpit it will be said that he is doing no more and no less than his duty, whereas if he says a good word in recreation it is heard as the word of one who loves. How many conversions have been brought about by a few words whispered in the ear of a youngster while he is playing. One who knows he is loved loves in return, and one who loves can obtain anything, especially from the young. This confidence creates an electric current between youngsters and their superiors. Hearts are opened, needs and weaknesses made known. This love enables superiors to put up with the weariness, the annoyance, the ingratitude, the troubles that youngsters cause. Jesus Christ did not crush the bruised reed nor quench the smouldering flax. He is your model. Then you will no longer see anyone working for his own glory; you will no longer see anyone punishing out of wounded self-love; you will not see anyone neglecting the work of supervision through jealousy of another's popularity; you won't hear people running others down so as to be looked up to by the boys: those who exclude all other superiors and earn for themselves nothing but contempt and hypocritical flattery; people who let their hearts be stolen by one individual and neglect all the other boys to cultivate that particular one. No one will neglect his strict duty of supervision for the sake of his own ease and comfort; no one will fail through human respect to reprimand those who need reprimanding. If we have this true love, we shall not seek anything other than the glory of God and the good of souls. When this love languishes, things no longer go well. Why do people want to replace love with cold rules? Why do the superiors move away from the observance of the rules Don Bosco has given them? Why the replacement little by little of loving and watchful prevention by a system which consists

in framing laws? Such laws either have to be sustained through punishment and so create hatred and cause unhappiness or, if they are not enforced, cause the superiors to be despised and bring about serious disorders. This is sure to happen if there is no friendly relationship.

So if you want the Oratory to return to the happiness of old, then bring back the old system: let the superior be all things to all, always ready to listen to any boy's complaints or doubts, always alert to keep a fatherly eye on their conduct, all heart to seek the spiritual and temporal good of those whom Divine Providence has entrusted to him. Then hearts will no longer be closed and deadly subterfuge will no longer hold sway. The superiors should be unbending only in the case of immoral conduct. It is better to run the risk of expelling someone who is innocent than to keep someone who causes others to sin. Assistants should make it a strict duty in conscience to refer to the superiors whatever they know to be an offence against God.

Then I asked a question:

"And what is the best way of achieving this friendly relationship, this kind of love and confidence?"

"The exact observance of the rules of the house."

"Nothing else?"

"At a dinner the best dish is a hearty welcome."

With that my past pupil finished speaking, and I went on looking at that recreation with great displeasure. Little by little I felt oppressed by a great weariness that became worse at every moment. Eventually it got so bad that I could resist no longer, and I shook myself and woke up. I found myself standing beside my bed. My legs were so swollen and hurt so much that I could not stand up any longer. It was very late and I went to bed, resolved to write these lines to my sons.

I wish I did not have these dreams, they tire me so much. The following day I was dead tired, and I could hardly wait for the hour to come to go to bed that evening. But I was hardly in bed when the dream began again. Before me

once again was the playground, with the boys at present at the Oratory and the same past pupil as before. I began to question him.

“I’ll let my Salesians know what you have told me, but what should I say to the boys of the Oratory?”

“Tell them,” he said, “to realise how much the superiors, the teachers, the assistants, plan and wear themselves out for love of them, since they would not sacrifice themselves so much if they didn’t love them. Let them never forget that humility is the source of all peace of mind; let them be able to put up with each other’s shortcomings, because there is no perfection in this world, only in heaven. Tell them not to grumble because it freezes the heart. But especially, tell them to live in the holy grace of God. If you are not at peace with God, you cannot be at peace with yourself, nor with others.”

“Are you telling me then that among my boys there are some who are not at peace with God?”

“Among other reasons you already know, this is the principal cause of bad spirit. There is no need for me to tell you that you must do something about it. The one without trust is the one with secrets to guard, the one who is afraid the secrets will become known and bring him shame and trouble. At the same time, if his heart is not at peace with God he will be a prey to restless anxiety, intolerant of obedience, and get upset over nothing. Everything seems to go wrong for him, and because he has no love himself he thinks the superiors do not love him.”

“But see here, my friend; look how many go to confession and communion here at the Oratory.”

“It is true that many go to confession, but what is radically lacking in the confessions of so many youngsters is a firm resolution. They tell their sins but they are always the same, always the same occasions, the same bad habits, the same acts of disobedience, the same neglect of duty. This goes on, month in, month out, even for years and some even continue in this way till they leave school. These confessions are worth little or nothing, and so they do not

restore peace, and if a youngster in that state were to be called before God's judgement seat, it would be a serious matter indeed. But in comparison with the whole group in the house they are only a few. Look." And he pointed them out to me.

I looked, and I saw those boys one by one. There were not many, but in them I saw things that brought profound bitterness to my soul. I do not want to put such things in writing, but when I come back I want to have a word with each one about what I saw. For the moment I limit myself to saying that it is time to pray and make firm resolutions, with facts and not just words, so as to show that the Comollos, the Dominic Savios, the Besuccos and the Saccardis are still among us.

I put a final question to my friend:

"Have you anything else to tell me?"

"Preach to all, young and old alike, that they must remember they are children of Mary Help of Christians. Tell them she has gathered them here to take them away from the dangers of the world, so that they may love one another as brothers and give glory to God and to her by their good behaviour. Tell them that it is Our Lady who provides them with bread and the means to study, by endless graces and wonders. Remind them that they are at the vigil of the feast of their holy Mother, so that with her help that barrier of mistrust will fall which has been raised between boys and superiors by the devil, who knows how to use it to ruin certain souls."

"And will we be successful in breaking down this barrier?"

"Certainly you will, as long as young and old are ready to put up with some small mortifications for love of Mary and do what I have told you."

Meanwhile I continued to watch my youngsters, but at the sight of those I had seen heading for eternal damnation I experienced such heartache that I awoke. I still have to tell you many important things that I saw, but I have neither time nor opportunity at present.

And now I must finish. Do you know what this poor old man who has spent his whole life for his dear boys wants from you? Nothing else than, due allowances being made, we should go back to the happy days of the Oratory of old: the days of affection and Christian confidence between boys and superiors; the days when we accepted and put up with difficulties for the love of Jesus Christ; the days when hearts were open with a simple candour; days of love and real joy for everyone. I want the consolation and hope that you will promise to do everything I desire for the good of your souls.

You do not realise how lucky you are in having come to the Oratory. I declare before God: it is enough for a young person to enter a Salesian house for Our Lady to take him under her special care. Let us all agree on this then: may the charity of those who command and the charity of those who must obey cause the spirit of St Francis de Sales to reign among us.

My dear children, the time is coming when I will have to tear myself away from you and leave for eternity.

(Secretary's note: at this point Don Bosco broke off the dictation; his eyes filled with tears, not of sorrow but because of the inexpressible tenderness that was evident from his face and voice; after a few moments he went on.)

And so I want to leave you, my dear priests and brothers and my dearest boys, on the road the Lord himself wants you to follow. For this purpose the Holy Father, whom I saw on Friday May 9, sends you his blessing from the bottom of his heart.

I will be with you on the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, before the statue of our loving Mother. I want this feast to be celebrated with full solemnity, and that Fr Lazzero and Fr Marchisio see to it that you have a good time in the dining-room as well. The Feast of Mary Help of Christians should be a prelude to the eternal feast that we will all celebrate one day together in heaven.

With much love, your friend in Christ Jesus.

Fr John Bosco

154. Letter to Bishop John Cagliero

Critical ed. in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 445-447.

Turin, 6 August 1885

My Dear Bishop Cagliero,

Your letter has given me great pleasure, and although my eyesight has become very weak, I wanted to read it myself from beginning to end, despite that handwriting of yours, which you say you got from me, but which has degenerated from its original form. Others will respond to administrative matters for me. For my part what I have to say is as follows.

When you write to the Propagation of the Faith and the Work of the Holy Childhood be mindful of all that the Salesians have done at various times. I understand you have with you the proformas that you should make use of in setting our affairs out before their respective Presidents, who are quite happy to receive letters in Italian, whenever there is any difficulty with writing in French. If one does not suffice, write several letters concerning the travels of Fr Fagnano, Fr Milanese, Fr Beauvoir, etc. In particular note (the number of) those baptised, confirmed, instructed, given shelter, now or in the past. I am of the opinion that in setting things out for Propaganda, you should cover everything, but in general. For the Propagation of the Faith, travels, trade, discoveries; for the Holy Childhood say in detail the sorts of things that might concern boys and girls, the Sisters, or the Salesians.

If by chance you do not have exemplars for setting out these reports, let me know, and we will send them to you. There is real good will in wanting to help you. However it is good that at this end I should be aware, at least in general terms, of whatever you write from there, since I could be asked questions at any time.

Regarding the matter of the Coadjutor Bishops, I need a positive proposal, and at this stage I am hoping to achieve something. The formalities for getting a *Cardinal's* hat for the Archbishop were well-advanced under Cardinal Nina, but now unfortunately for us he has passed into eternal life. I have tested other waters, and I'll let you know in due course.

I am preparing a letter for Fr Costamagna, and for your guidance I will particularly touch on the Salesian Spirit we want to introduce into our houses in America.

Charity, patience, gentleness—never degrading rebukes, punishments, never— do good to those you can, evil to no one. This holds for the Salesians among themselves, with their students and others, those who live with us, and outsiders. In dealing with our Sisters have great patience, but be strict in the matter of the observance of their Rules.

In general then, although things are tight here, we will make every sacrifice to come to your aid. But urge everyone to avoid putting up buildings or acquiring property that is not strictly necessary *for our use*. Never buy things with a view to reselling them: neither fields or land or buildings with a view to financial profit.

Try to help us this way. Do what you can to get vocations whether for the Sisters or for the Salesians, but do not take on too many works. Those who want too much achieve little and waste much.

When you have cause to speak to the Archbishop Espinosa or personalities of that sort, say that I am entirely at their service, particularly in matters regarding Rome.

Tell my niece Rosina to take great care of her health, and that she take great care not to go to heaven alone. She should go, of course, but accompanied by the many souls she has saved.

God bless all our Salesian sons, our sisters the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. May he grant them all health, holiness, and perseverance along the road to Heaven.

We will pray for all of you morning and evening at Our Lady's altar. You too, pray for this poor, half-blind man who will always be yours in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

PS. Countless people want to be remembered to you, and to pay their respects.

155. Letter to Fr James Costamagna

Critical ed. in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 448-450.

Turin, 10 August 1885

My dear and always beloved Fr Costamagna,

The time for our annual retreats is approaching, and in my declining years I would like to have all my sons and our sisters in America with me. This not being possible, I have thought to write you a letter at the time of your retreats, which are not far off for us, which might serve as a guide for you and our other confreres for becoming true Salesians.

Before anything else we ought to bless and thank the Lord who in his wisdom and power has helped us overcome many great difficulties, which we could never have done on our own. *Te Deum, Hail Mary*, etc.

Furthermore, I myself would like to give a sermon, or better a talk, on the Salesian Spirit which ought to inspire and guide our actions, and every word we say. The Preventive System is truly ours. Never punishments for their own sake, never humiliating words, no severe dressings-down in the presence of others. Instead, gentle, kind, patient words should be heard in the classrooms. Never biting words, never a blow, heavy or light. Use should be made of negative punishments, and always in a way that those who have been warned become our friends more than ever and are never discouraged when they leave us.

There should be no grumbling against the decisions of the Superiors. Instead we should put up with things not to our liking, or things that give us grief, or displease us. Every Salesian should become each one's friend, and should never seek revenge. He should be quick to forgive, and to forget the things he has forgiven.

The orders of the Superiors should never be criticised and everyone should strive to give good example, and encourage the giving of it. Every one should be urged—and this should be a constant recommendation—to promote religious vocations whether to the Sisters, or to the Salesians.

Gentleness in speaking, in acting, in giving advice will win over everyone and everything.

This will be the line you and the others who will share the preaching of the forthcoming retreats will follow.

Give everybody much freedom, show them much confidence. Anyone wanting to write to his Superior, or who might receive letters from him, should on no account have these letters read by anyone, unless the one who receives the letter would like that to happen. Regarding the more difficult matters, I warmly advise the Provincials and the Rectors to give appropriate talks. Indeed, I recommend that Fr Vespignani should have a clear understanding of these things and explain them to his novices and candidates with due prudence.

As far as it lies in my power, I hope to leave the Congregation without discomfiture. Therefore I have in mind appointing a Vicar General who would be an *alter ego* for Europe, and another for America. But you will receive instructions in this matter in due course.

From time to time during the year, it would be very appropriate for you to call a meeting of the Directors/Rectors of the Province to put to them the guidelines set out above. Read, and encourage the reading and the understanding, of our Rule, in particular the chapter dealing with the regular prayers, the introduction that I have written to this same Rule, and the deliberations taken at our General and local Chapters.

You can see that my words might require a lot of explanation but you are certainly capable of understanding them, and where necessary explaining them to our confreres.

As soon as you can, go and see Archbishop Espinosa, the Vicars General, Mr Carranza, Rev. Dr Terrero, and our other friends, and greet each and all humbly and respectfully, as if I were speaking personally to each one.

God bless you, dear Fr Costamagna, and with you may He bless and keep all our confreres and Sisters in good health. And may Mary, Help of Christians guide us always along the road to heaven. Amen.

Please pray for me, all of you.

Your loving friend in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

156. Letter to Fr Dominic Tomatis

Critical ed. in *DBE, Scritti*, pp. 451-452.

Mathi, 14 August 1885

My dear Fr Tomatis,

Since I rarely get letters from you I must presume you are very busy, and I believe it. But letting your dear Don Bosco know how you are getting on surely merits being one of the matters you should not overlook. You will ask, "What should I write about?" Tell me about the state of your health, and that of your confreres; whether the Rules of the Congregation are faithfully observed; whether the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death is made, and how well; how many pupils you have, and what hopes you hold for their success. Do you do anything to cultivate vocations, do you have any hopes in this regard? Is Mons. Ceccarelli always a friend to the Salesians? I am looking forward with great pleasure to your replies to these matters.

Given that my life is fast racing to its conclusion, things I want to write to you in this letter are those I would want to recommend to you in the last days of my earthly exile, that is, my testament to you.

Dear Fr Tomatis, keep firmly in mind that you became a Salesian to save your soul. Preach and recommend the same truth to all our confreres. Remember it is not enough to know things, they must be put into practice. May God help us so that the Lord's words, "They speak, but they do nothing" not be addressed to us.

Try to see the things that concern you with your own eyes. When some one is lacking, or negligent, warn him promptly without waiting for evils to multiply.

Through your exemplary manner of life, by your charity in speaking, in giving orders, in putting up with the defects of others, many will be won over to the Congregation. Constantly recommend frequenting the sacraments of Confession and Communion.

The virtues that will make you happy in time and in eternity are humility and charity.

Always be a friend and father to our confreres. Help them in every way you can both in spiritual and worldly matters. Know how to make use of them for everything that will bring glory to God.

Each of the thoughts expressed on this page needs something of an explanation. You can do this on your own behalf, and for others.

God bless you, my ever-dear Fr Tomatis. Give my warmest greetings to all our confreres, friends and benefactors. Tell them I pray for them every morning during the Holy Mass, and that I humbly commend myself to the prayers of all.

God grant we might be able to see each other again in this mortal exile, but that in any case we might one day praise the holy name of Jesus and of Mary in a blessed eternity. Amen.

Before long I will write to you, or have others write, on matters of some importance.

May Mary keep us safe and guide us along the path to Heaven. Amen

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco