

II. NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPANSION OF SALESIAN WORK

From 1863 onwards the Salesian work which arose at Valdocco and through other oratories in Turin began to expand rapidly, as already indicated, through numerous foundations first in Italy—Piedmont, Liguria (no. 18) and then in other regions—and finally in France and Latin America (nos. 21, 24, 25, 27).

Such broad development was helped by the new school reform in Italy, (1864), the difficulties diocesan seminaries were having, the continual requests for Salesian schools in Italy, France (1875), Spain (1881), England (1887), especially following the diffusion of a positive image of “a new Congregation for new times” as the Society of St Francis de Sales was thought to be in many places. Then the definitive approval of the Salesian Constitutions (1874) ended up by encouraging the opening of new charismatic horizons in South American mission lands (1875).

Obviously the rapid expansion was made possible above all by the growth in both male and female vocations, including adult vocations (no. 20). For the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians the Founder worked at acquiring the future Mother House at Nizza Monferrato (no. 22).

Don Bosco sought to encourage everyone with a new version of the history of the Oratory (no. 17) and through circular letters.

The enthusiastic, broad and very detailed presentation by Don Bosco to the Holy See on the moral and material state of the Salesian Society in March 1879 (no. 24), which indicated all Salesian works at the time and those about to be founded, aroused more than concern and a consequent request for clarifications from pontifical authorities, which the founder tried to respond to accurately (nos. 25, 26).

At the same time Pope Leo XIII entrusted him with the building of the church and work of the Sacred Heart in the new capital of the Kingdom of Italy (no. 28). All this while in the old capital, Turin, he was defending himself against the closure of his secondary classes at Valdocco, by having recourse to all legal venues around the country (no. 23) and even the eviction of his boys who were living there.

These boys always kept their school in grateful memory, so much so that when they became past pupils, many of them would go back each year to celebrate Don Bosco's name day and also hear a word from him (no. 29).

In its expansion outside of Piedmont and beyond Italian borders Salesian work had to confront difficulties, hostility and suffering. In Italy from the late 1870s onwards in fact it had to deal with openly secular politicians and not rarely anticlerical ones. That notwithstanding he did not hesitate to get into contact with them and also ask them for financial assistance and protection, given the broad activity of the Salesians in looking after Italian immigrants (no. 27); he founded houses in France at the time of the Third Republic which had politics that were adverse to religious Congregations (different from Spain in the Bourbon restoration); in the new liberal States in South America he had to deal with governments and local authorities who did not hesitate in traumatically breaking relations with the Holy See and promulgating anticlerical and Masonic legislation. For all of this one can logically only go to studies on Salesian work in the individual countries⁶² and Salesian houses, as well as some works which sum up the situation⁶³. For mission development in particular, see further on for the documents in the relevant section⁶⁴.

17. Conference to Salesians on the history of the Oratory

ASC A0040605 *Cronaca dell'anno 1864*, ms by Giovanni Bonetti, pp. 9-22
(cf. MB, II 406-407).

On the evening of May 8, 1864, when people had gathered for his conference [Don Bosco] began thus: Already for some time I have wanted to

⁶² For Italy the statistics published for the 150th anniversary of Salesian work might be useful: Francesco MOTTO (Ed.), *Salesiani di don Bosco in Italia. 150 anni di educazione*. Torino, LAS 2011; Grazia LOPARCO - Maria Teresa SPIGA, *Le Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice in Italia. Donne nell'educazione*. Roma, LAS 2011.

⁶³ E. g. Arthur J. LENTI, *Don Bosco. History and spirit*. Vol. 5. *Institutional expansion* and Vol. 6 *Expansion of the Salesian work in the New World and Ecclesiological confrontation at home*. Edited by Aldo Giraud. Roma, LAS 2009.

⁶⁴ See pp. 251-307.

reveal in its entirety the reason behind our Society; in other conferences we were speaking of the purpose, how to achieve it, but I have never explained everything to you. But first of all I preface this by saying that I intend to oblige each confrere not to speak about what I say just now with any person who does not belong, even if later he should leave the Society. I could not bring myself to tell this story, I prayed about it, and the idea has not left my mind now for some time, so believing that it will be for the greater glory of God, this evening I have decided to tell you everything⁶⁵. Here it is then.

Already as a child I felt inclined to do things for my friends, and other youngsters, telling them edifying stories, teaching them. So I attracted them with games at home and after having amused them somewhat, I would stand up on a bench and then give them some words of encouragement, tell them parts of a sermon I had heard before, and got them to say the Rosary, sing the litanies; not only small boys but young men of 18, 20 years of age would come to these functions in front of the house in our little yard on Sundays, and it stirred me seeing how many were ignorant of matters to do with the faith, how unwillingly they went to church and then all the other problems that belong to this age.

I continued to do this while I was living in the college. And I saw how I needed to get involved in the upbringing of youth when I was a priest in Turin, where I was able to speak with various young men whom I found there, and although they were grown up they were very ignorant of the faith. I began to ask many of them to come and see me, at first for some hours on a Sunday they came and found me at the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*) and there I instructed them, heard their confessions, advised them, and they loved me and I loved them.

Then I went to The Refuge, and there I continued to help them with instruction, and the number of them grew enormously. I heard confessions on Saturday evenings or the following morning, or on Feast Days; we said Mass,

⁶⁵ Other versions of the same history of the Oratory were rather more reserved: see nos. 10, 13 and Part 4, pp. 1170-1308.

gave them instruction; in the evening we taught catechism, many priests helping me, and things went very well.

But the time came when I had to leave The Refuge, since the Marchioness wanted this place for girls only; we were without any place to go for our meetings, and for catechism classes, and without a church. We looked for a place and we found one; but just as we were able to go there two or three times, NN forced us out saying he could not put up with the boys who were yelling too much. There were lots of lies and insults and we were forced to find another place; but the day after the good gentleman had an accident and soon went to the next life.

We then went to the holy ground [cemetery]; but the chaplain could only put up with us a couple of times, then went off and complained about us and sent us away. He also met with an accident two days later and died.

We were without a place and no one wanted us. However, given these two deaths, and such sudden deaths of people who had persecuted us, we were convinced the Lord was with us. Not that I wished evil on anyone, but I was convinced that it was God who wanted things this way and that no one would harass us. Meanwhile I was distressed.

It was then that someone paid me a visit and I saw a house not far from the Refuge which someone pointed out to me was destined for me and my boys. The following morning I immediately told Dr Borel: "Now we have a place ... And we have it for tomorrow", I told him. I immediately went to see the place. Looking around, I saw there was a house of ill-repute where vile things were happening. I was very dejected and I said: "These are diabolical illusions", then I was embarrassed at having thought this so quickly and said nothing more. We continued on merrily going to one place or another for our meetings, hearing confessions, preaching and going to Mass at the Consolata.

But then came another visit and I was shown the same house. So I thought then of tomorrow, withdrew not far from the place and wept, and I could not convince myself that I had to go to the place of ill-repute. So I said: it is time to pray and ask God to enlighten me and pull me out of all this mess. Then

came a third visit and again I was shown the same house, and this time I heard a voice telling me: “Have no fear of going to that house. Do you not know that God can enrich his people from the spoils and riches of the Egyptians?”

Then I was happy and I looked for ways to get hold of that house when lo and behold the owner of the field where we usually went came and found me. He told me that he longer wanted me to come to this field with the boys since he said they were trampling all the land and no grass could grow there any longer. I reminded him of the contract but he told me he would let me off the rent and everything, but he would no longer allow these gatherings.

So there I was again without a place. But then the next day the owner of the house I had seen came to me and told me: “I hear you are looking for a house for a laboratory; well, if you would like to rent mine, I will let it out to you.” “Certainly—I’m looking for a house for an oratory.” “Yes, a laboratory” the good man added. “No, not a laboratory, an oratory.” “Yes, yes, oratory, laboratory, it’s all the same.”

So I was ever more convinced this was God’s will, and I set off to take a look at the inside of the house and found it in a bad state, the ceiling was so low it could not really serve as a chapel. I said: “This is a little low to make it into a church”. “You want to make a church?” the other one asked me. “Yes”, and he was very happy about this and we began digging down more than a metre since we couldn’t lift the roof, and this way we got things right and had our church. Some serious disputes (*contrasti grandi*).

Then came a fourth visit in which I was made to see the house as it is at the present with the church, the main altar in the same place where it is found now; and above it was written in large letters: *Haec est domus mea; inde exhibit gloria mea*. This left such an impression on my mind and I was so convinced that I told everyone frankly: “Some time soon I will have a beautiful and spacious house here, with our own church big enough to hold many boys.” One day I found myself on a large plot of land with the boys around and I told them: “The high altar for our church will be in this same place where I am standing now” and that’s how it was. When the architect began drawing the plans up, without me pointing to the spot he said: “This is where the main

altar will be”, and he had chosen the exact spot I had told the boys some years before: “Here is where the main altar will be.”

And then came a fifth visit. In this one a person led me to a place where there was a nice road all covered with roses, not only below but also above in the form of a roof, and all around there were roses; I had never seen anything as beautiful before; and he asked me to start walking. Well, I did not want to crush such beautiful roses, so I took off my shoes. But I took a step or two and then, ouch, I had to go back since I had trodden on a thorn which really hurt, and I saw that under these beautiful roses there were lots of very sharp thorns, and not only below but everywhere. Then I said: “But you need shoes here” and others watching me added: “Certainly you need shoes.” So that’s what I did. I had a large number of priests and other people who came along with me. I began walking again and despite all my precautions just the same from time to time I trod on one or other of those large thorns. However, I got to the end of the road.

Then I turned to look back and of all those companions I saw there was nobody left. I was so upset and quickly went back to see what they were doing or where they were, but I saw nobody. I began weeping bitterly and said: “Is it possible that everyone has abandoned me and I am left alone on this road?” But then just as I was going on weeping and feeling bad about things I saw a great crowd of priests, clerics and other people coming toward me. When they reached me they said: “Here we are ready to follow you; tell us what to do and we will obey.” Then I calmed down and told them: “Well then, if you are ready to set out along this road, let’s get going”, and they all set out and I followed on behind.

Then they lost courage and began to turn back. A very large number of them were happy and courageous and got to the end of the road. I did too. Then we saw a very large and magnificent hall in front of us where there were other beautiful roses, and I looked—they were all without thorns and gave off the sweetest of fragrance. The person who was accompanying me spoke to me saying: “Have you understood all this?” “No,” I answered, “I beg you to explain everything to me” and then he said: “You know, then, that this road

stands for the care you have to take of young people. You need to use shoes to walk on this road, meaning mortification. The beautiful roses are a symbol of the ardent charity which must distinguish all your helpers in the education of youth. The thorns stand for all the obstacles, sufferings, inconveniences you will have to put up with while doing this. But never lose courage: with charity and mortification you will win out. And at the end you will have roses without thorns as you have seen in that rich hall you came to.” Of course I found myself in my bedroom, just having woken up from this dream.

The time of trial came, 1848; my helpers began setting down laws that I did not approve of. They wanted to lead the boys out into the squares and also get us to cry out “Long live Italy” and some even began preaching this way to the boys. I was soon forced to get into the pulpit and gainsay everything they had said and I was forced to tell them not to come any more, I had no further need of their work. The few that still remained were further alienated from me by the others who were angry, and I was left on my own. We can add here that I continued to say with much emphasis that I could already see a large, beautiful house with a large church; I was not only laughed at but it came to a point where some of those who seemed to me to be the most calm, and also my friends, took me aside and advised me to go to the mental asylum telling me that if I tackled this illness at its beginnings I could be returned to health, these crazy ideas would pass if I got away from it all for a while. But I told them and everyone who was laughing at me that I knew what I was talking about, was fully in my senses, and I told them again that it would not be many years before they would see what I was saying happen. So I had to hear confessions, say Mass, preach, have recreation with the boys, teach catechism, sing vespers, do instructions, give Benediction all by myself; no one came any more to give me a hand.

With God’s help I always kept going. Then I began to have boys at home and I taught them Latin, and in the evening while I was eating I demonstrated plainchant to some, others music, a sight never seen before; but I was happy because I saw that it would not be long before I had boys who could even know how to teach these things to me. Some clerics I was teaching began to help me in some things.

Meanwhile the house which initially was only let to me, I purchased, with the help of some charitable people; we soon began putting up a part of the workshop. In 1851 we laid the foundation stone for the new church, and things were going well. Some of the same ones who thought I was crazy, came back to me when they saw how things were going and one of the ones who had been the most excited about things at the time, often came to preach in this same church, and used to say with great passion: "It was me who was crazy, not Don Bosco." Archbishop Fransoni⁶⁶ was very happy with our work and on one occasion when he called me he said: "Don Bosco you are but mortal; it would be good for you to also think about how the work of the oratories can continue after your death." From then on I began thinking of putting down the foundations for a Congregation of people who would be all consecrated to the good of youth.

But then came stormy days and Archbishop Fransoni had to go into exile. From there he always continued protecting us and helping us in all kinds of ways. I needed to take advice from people with their finger on the pulse and this is why I went to Rome. There I went to find Pius IX, who after I had spoken a few words said to me: "Don Bosco, you are mortal; have you thought of perpetuating the work of the oratories?" I assure you I was moved to tears when the Supreme Pontiff spoke these words to me that Archbishop Fransoni had already said and I replied: "Holy Father, this is why I came to Rome", and we began to speak at length. On one occasion we spent almost an hour and a half talking about these things and it was he himself who told me how to lay down this foundation. So I told the Pope all these things that I have told you. No one else knew these things, only the Pope. Someone might now well say that these things are all for the glory of Don Bosco. Nothing of the sort: all I have to do is render a fearful account to God as to whether I have worked in such a way as to fulfil God's divine will. I am convinced that this has only been God's project and one he has deigned to show us. I have

⁶⁶ Luigi Fransoni (1789-1862), Archbishop of Turin from 1831 until his death, was expelled by the Government and exiled to Lyon in 1850, but he continued to govern the diocese through his vicar general. He placed great trust in Don Bosco, supporting him especially at the beginning and at crucial moments of the Oratory.

always been of the opinion that I could achieve these things. Sometimes I will certainly have been imprudent, and I don't want to tell you about these occasions, but I am always at work, and everything I do I have done for this end. In afflictions and tribulations, in persecutions I have always been given strength, and have never lost courage. The Lord has always been with us and will be if with courage, mortification and spiritual charity we work to raise up and draw souls and the young to him.

18. Agreement between the city council and Don Bosco to open a school and boarding section at Alassio (1870)

Archivio Comunale della città di Alassio, *Registro deliberazioni*⁶⁷; ed. in MB IX, 875-877.

The year of the Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy, on the first day of the month of June, in Alassio, in the city council. Present were the following gentlemen: 1. B. Lazzaro Brea, Mayor and President; 2. Count G. Batta Morteo 3. Francesco Biancardi. Rev. Fr John Bosco was also in attendance.

With the above-mentioned gathered at city hall, the president explained the purpose of the present meeting as being to draw up an agreement relating to the opening of a school with a boarding section in this city, Alassio, a project of the Rev. Fr John Bosco already decided on by this council in its decree on the second of December one thousand eight hundred and sixty nine, and approved by the school council of the province of Genoa by decree on March 30, 1870. The above-mentioned council team was then called upon to draw up such an act.

The city council: following on from this invitation, and noting the above-mentioned order and decree; after having agreed with the aforementioned Don Bosco on certain additions or alterations to the said project which would

⁶⁷ After the brief experience of managing the seminary at Giaveno (1859-1862), and opening colleges (school plus boarding section) at Mirabello (1863), Lanzo Torinese (1864) and Cherasco (1869), Don Bosco drew up this agreement for opening the first house in Liguria. We publish it as a model of many other agreements drawn up for Italy and overseas, after lengthy negotiations with local, civil and church institutions.

be favourable to the council, as well as certain clarifications they considered opportune; bearing in mind what is laid down by art. 93, no. 4, of the municipal legislation, has come to the following agreement with Don Bosco:

Art. 1. Father John Bosco commits himself and those who follow him to opening a school with a boarding section in this city, Alassio, and to offering primary and secondary education to local boys, and to those from outside the municipality who wish to take part.

Art. 2. The same Father Bosco will offer five teachers for the primary classes with appropriate registration, and will also provide suitable and sufficient number of teachers for the five secondary classes. Furthermore he will provide a technical course of French and Italian language, geography and arithmetic, spread throughout the secondary classes and corresponding to the subjects as given in normal technical and classical courses, without Father Bosco being obliged to add further teachers other than those established for the secondary classes.

Art. 3. Instruction in the primary and secondary classes will be offered according to the legislation and discipline established in programmes by the Ministry for Public Education.

Art. 4. All expenses for the furnishings of the boarding section will be borne by Father Bosco. The city council for its part as proprietor, and in conformity with what is prescribed in art. 1604 of the Italian *Civil Code* commits itself to:

1. All repairs needed for the use and maintenance of the building and attached areas.

2. Providing and maintaining the furnishings and other things necessary for the primary and secondary classrooms, and will retain the ownership of such.

Art. 5. The city council commits to paying Father John Bosco nine thousand lire a year for the teaching staff of the primary and secondary classes up to the two classes of Rhetoric, which will be at his expense, other than allowing him an income from fees as indicated further on.

Art. 6. The city council also commits to paying the same Father Bosco two thousand lire for five years for expenses for initially setting up, and then maintaining the boarding section.

Art. 7. This present contract will last for five years with the intention of it being renewable, unless one of the parties gives prior notice of five years that it will not be renewed.

In the event that for circumstances beyond our control the contract is to be dissolved within the first five years, the city council will no longer be bound to pay the annual amount, nor other costs in the following years.

Art. 8. Should a provincial school be opened in Alassio, Father Bosco is obliged to bring the number of classes in the municipal school, at both secondary and upper secondary levels up to the number prescribed by law, subject to proper understanding with the competent provincial council.

Art. 9. The city council temporarily offers the priest Don Bosco the use of the existing school for the aforementioned classes, and the Palazzo Durante with its attached courtyard and small garden for the boarding section. When this building is definitively established as a school and boarding section, the council will also provide the garden run by Giovanni Schivo, and which is adjacent to the said building.

Art. 10. For the secondary classes, as agreed by both parties, a fee will be established according to the laws dealing with teaching students, and can be fixed by Father Bosco; that is, for the two Rhetoric years the *maximum* will not exceed thirty lire, and for Grammar level, twenty four lire. Pupils from Alassio can be given a reduction, that is, the *maximum* for the Rhetoric years to be set at twenty lire, and for the Grammar years, sixteen lire. Poor students, those recognised as such by the council, are exempt. The council will see to fee collection through the appropriate role of fee collector. Those who board at the college, and for that matter all pupils in the primary classes, will be exempt from this fee.

Art. 11. We state that it is permissible for any day student to attend classes for individual subjects given to the boarding students and they will fit in with the discipline and timetable of each class.

Art. 12. In terms of arrangements for behaviour and religious instruction, the Council defers to the prudence of Father Bosco and the parish priest of the district in which the college is located.

Art. 13. The management and administration of the school, boarding section and classes is entrusted totally to Father Bosco, but dependent on the district delegate, according to laws currently in force for Public Education.

However he will be extremely grateful for any advice or counsel the mayor, members of the council deem necessary for the academic, moral, and hygienic benefit of the school grounds and buildings, and pupils who attend there. He will deal directly with Father Bosco concerning these matters, or with whoever represents him at the school and boarding section at Alassio.

Art. 14. Classes will be opened at the commencement of the 1870-1871 school year.

These minutes have been drawn up, read and confirmed by the undersigned.

Fr John Bosco
B. L. Brea president
G. B. Morteo councillor for the aged
G. B. Armato secretary.
V. - Approved.

Genoa 20 June 1870,

Prefect and President of the Council for Public Safety

E. Mayr

Registered in Alassio, first July 1870, in Reg. 7 sheet 67 N. 458, paid dues of a hundred and fifty lire, eighty cents, received by the undersigned.

Morando, receiving clerk
copy conform for official use
Alassio, 6 July 1870
Council secretary
B. G. Armato

19. Circular for the Church of St John the Evangelist with hospice and classes for poor children in Viale del Re in Turin

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 261-262.

Turin, 12 October 1870

A densely populated area has sprung up in Turin city from Piazza d'Armi as far as the Po for about three kilometres, without there being schools for the children nor churches for religious worship.

And amongst this population, as everyone knows, the Protestants have put up their so-called church with a hospice, classrooms and an infant school.

So due to the deplorable lack of nearby churches and Catholic schools, and due to the nearby heterodox establishment it is a serious ordeal for fathers of families to send their sons and daughters where they have to mix with Protestant children and to the infant school under the specious pretext that necessity has no laws.

For many years the *Oratory of St Aloysius* has existed there with classrooms and a playground, but along the extension of via San Pio V this area has been divided in two and this makes it unable to serve its purpose.

With the help of charitable people land was purchased between via San Pio V and Via Madama Cristina, fronting on viale del Re, with a view to providing in some way for the seriousness of this need.

The intention is to build a church which can also serve for the adults, but with buildings large enough for a school, hospice, playground for the children to play on Sundays and where they can be protected from the dangers of immorality and prepared for some art or trade.

With the support of Divine Providence work has begun; the boundary wall is already finished, and while a worthy engineer is completing the drawings for the church and connected building we are also going about finding construction materials.

But the difficult times we are going through, the poverty felt everywhere are a great obstacle to completing a work such as this, for which we have not

a single penny in the budget. The charity of Catholics has never diminished in other similar situations and we are certain it will not be lacking now; the situation is too serious to doubt it.

As everyone can easily be convinced, we are dealing here with preserving a great number of children, and perhaps also adults and entire families, from the serious and deadly danger of being led into error against the holy Faith, and almost unconsciously being alienated from the holy Catholic Church and her supreme Head and Pastor, ending up, indeed finding themselves caught up in heresy almost without knowing it.

We are seriously inviting and warmly asking those who love the glory of God, the good of the holy Catholic Church and the salvation of their neighbour, to reflect on these issues.

We hope that works will be completed in two years and in this period of time we make a humble but warm appeal to all good people, asking them to give some offerings that God will inspire them to, for exceptional needs.

Such offerings can be money or any other material that could help with the building or decorating of the church or its adjacent building.

This is about saving souls, and whoever offers a kindly hand will have sure hope of hearing these words from our Saviour one day: "You saved a soul, your own was predestined."

The Supreme Pontiff Pius IX has praised this enterprise and blesses all who take part in it. His Grace, our beloved Archbishop, not only encourages us, but is playing his part with whatever means his circumstances allow. We appeal to Christians in general, but especially those living in the vicinity or who have some land there.

The church is dedicated to *Saint John the Evangelist*, and the altarpiece will represent the Saviour entrusting St John to Our Blessed Lady at the foot of the cross, as is described in the holy Gospel.

Offerings can be given to the undersigned or to Fr Traversa, the priest at San Massimo, to whose parish the land chosen for the building belongs.

May God fill with graces and Heavenly favours all worthy donors, and grant them happy days of rich reward here on earth and much more in blessed eternity. So be it⁶⁸.

Fr John Bosco

20. The work of Mary Help of Christians for vocations to the Ecclesiastical State

Critical Ed. in *Opera di Maria Ausiliatrice per le vocazioni allo stato ecclesiastico benedetta e raccomandata dal Santo Padre Pio Papa IX*. Torino, Tipografia dell'Orat. di S. Francesco di Sales 1875 (OE XXVII, 1-8).

Turin, 30 August 1875

Your Excellency,

I ask your Lordship to be kind enough to read what I set out here concerning the Work of Mary Help of Christians the plan and programme of which I am attaching. Without me explaining at length you can easily understand what its purpose is; to prepare older young men over time to be good priests. I believe you could lend me effective support in two ways:

1. By taking an interest in this Work, supporting it, making it known, promoting it with whatever moral and material means, which with zeal and charity your Lordship can, in good time.
2. And if you know some student who fulfils the conditions for the programme, you could kindly send him in my direction.

Full of faith in your cooperation, I ask God to duly recompense you, while with profound gratitude I have the honour of being,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Two years later he took the initiative of building the church of San Secondo sending a similar circular out to citizens living in the area between Porta Nuova and Piazza d'Armi: cf. E(m) III, pp. 448-449. But the building would be completed by the Archbishop.

⁶⁹ In tune with the ecclesial significance of devotion to Mary under the title of Help of Christians, and which was growing rapidly after building the church dedicated to her at Valdocco, Don Bosco, with the Pope's

Work of Mary Help of Christians

*Messis quidem multa, operarii autem pauci;
Rogate ergo Dominum messia ut mittat operarios
in messem suam. (St Luke. 10: 2.)
The harvest is great, but the workers
are few: ask then the Lord
of the harvest to send workers into his harvest.*

For years we have been lamenting the need for workers for the Gospel, and the lessening of vocations to the ecclesiastical state. This lack of vocations is felt in every diocese in Italy and throughout Europe; it is felt in religious congregations who lack postulants, in the foreign missions who are constantly saying with St Francis Xavier: *Send us workers for the Gospel to help us*. Indeed we know of not a few foreign missions close to going out of existence for the sole reasons that they lack workers for the Gospel. So it is necessary to pray to the Lord of the harvest, that he may send workers into his mystical vineyard: but we have to add our cooperation to our prayers. Already in Germany, France, England and many parts of Italy charitable works have been founded for this purpose and they show good results, but they are insufficient for the many and urgent needs. While we highly praise this works that have been begun, and pray to God with all our heart, that he allow them to prosper even more to his greater glory, it seems appropriate to propose yet another that perhaps could more quickly be of help. This is a course of studies *for young adults who intend to consecrate themselves to God in the ecclesiastical state*.

From experience we know that of ten youngsters who begin their studies with an idea of enrolling in the army of Jesus Christ, on average only two

assent and the recommendation of many bishops, launched a vocations programme with a great future. The Work of Mary Help of Christians for adult vocations, begun in September 1875, found immediate success, both at Valdocco under the guidance of Fr Luigi Guanella, and at Genoa-Sampierdarena, where Don Bosco in 1877 reprinted, with additions, that first set of statutes reproduced here.

get as far as the priesthood, while from older young adults who have already thought about and studied their call, the number is eight out of ten.

We have also seen that over a very short period, therefore at less expense, they complete their literary studies, because they separated from the younger ones who have to gradually work through all their classes, and thanks to shortened courses can very soon reach their goal.

For these and other reasons we are proposing a course of secondary studies for young adults including those who are less well off, but who have the exclusive intention of an ecclesiastical career.

Fees

No fees are set, the work is entrusted totally to the piety of the faithful. Each one can help as a donor, *correspondent or benefactor*.

1. *Donors* commit themselves to giving 10 cents [2 *soldi*] a month or one franc a year. For priests it is enough that they celebrate one Mass providing the stipend for the benefit of the Work.

2. The *Correspondents* are those who, in honour of the twelve apostles, become the leaders of one or more groups of a dozen donors, collect their offerings and send them to the director of the Work. Correspondents can accept with gratitude whatever small offering their may be, even if it is just 5 cents [1 *soldo*] a year.

3. *Benefactors* is the name given to those who are happy to give some offering of money or in kind for example foodstuffs, linen, books and the like.

Those who offer fr. 300 a year can send any student of their choice to the institute. If the offering is fr. 800 the student will be kept on for the full time of his literary studies. Offerings will be sent to Father John Bosco in Turin, or to Father Paul Albera⁷⁰ the director of the St Vincent's hospice where the

⁷⁰ Fr Paul Albera (1845-1921), a pupil of Don Bosco and his second successor as Rector Major of the Salesian Society (1910-1921).

new pupils will be gathered for now. At the end of the year correspondents will be given a particular account of the number of pupils, offerings received and results obtained.

Observations

This work is placed under the aegis of the Blessed Virgin the Help of Christians, since Mary was proclaimed by the Church as *Magnum et singulare in Ecclesia praesidium*; she will certainly deign to protect a work aimed at finding good ministers for the Church. In fact God in these times has granted countless graces to whoever calls on his august Mother under the title of Help of Christians.

Does this work cause problems for any other already existing work?

It does not cause them problems but supports them. Without priests, preaching, sacraments, what would become of the *Work of the Propagation of the Faith*, of the *Holy Childhood* and all the other pious works?

Spiritual advantages

1. Those who send along even the smallest offering will receive a special blessing from the Holy Father, who blesses and recommends the *Work of Mary Help of Christians*.

2. The merit of having contributed to a great work of charity. *One cannot do something better*, says St Vincent de Paul, *than contributing to producing a priest*.

3. A Mass will be said every day in the church of Mary Help of Christians: our pupils will attend Mass and offer their communions with special prayers for their benefactors.

4. The donors will benefit from the merits of all masses, preaching, other good works, and the wonderful merits from souls whom the priests, formed by their charity, will win over for God as they exercise their ministry. Certainly the words of St Augustine apply to them: *Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti*.

5. Indulgences etc.

Indulgences will be described separately, and a separate note will be sent out to anyone who puts his or her name to this work of charity directed to the general good of the Church.

Programme

Purpose of the Work

The purpose of this work is to bring together young adults who have a clear desire to do their literary studies thanks to suitable courses so they can embrace the ecclesiastical state.

Acceptance

1. Each student must belong to an upright family, be healthy, strong and of good character, and between 16 and 30 years of age. Acceptance will be given preferably to those who have completed military service or who have some probability of being exempted from it (1).

2. They should have a certificate declaring that their behaviour has been edifying, that they attend parish functions and frequent the sacraments, and that they have a clear desire to embrace the ecclesiastical career and have at least completed a primary level course in Italian.

3. Birth certificate, smallpox certificate, and a note indicating if they can pay at least some of the programme's expenses.

4. They will not go for holidays during the autumn holiday season. They will find the required relaxation at the college or some other place chosen for this purpose.

5. When the literature course is finished each student is free to become a religious, go to the foreign missions or return to his diocese and ask his bishop for the faculty of taking the clerical habit. In this latter case the director of the work will make it his task to humbly recommend the candidates to their

respective ordinary so that according to merit he may deign to take them into his kind consideration.

Study

1. Studies cover the classical course up to but not including philosophy; teaching extends only to Italian, Latin, history, geography, arithmetic, the metric system and elements of Greek.

2. Excluded from these classes will be those who have not attained the age described above, or who do not intend to consecrate themselves to the ecclesiastical state.

3. The fixed fee is fr. 24 a month, paid in advance each term. fr. 300 per year. For the complete time of literary studies, fr. 800.

4. This fee covers all expenses for literary classes, plainchant, music, recitals, food and lodging, medical, haircuts. Expenses for clothing, hosiery, repairs, medicines and books must be paid by the students.

5. Meal arrangements are as follows: breakfast and morning tea - sufficient bread; soup, second course, wine and bread if desired for lunch; supper will be soup, bread and butter and more bread if desired.

Clothing

Students will have secular attire, and no uniform is required. On entering they will bring two sets of clothing for summer and two for winter, one for weekday wear in the house, the other for Sundays or if going out.

The wardrobe should include at least 6 shirts - 4 sheets - a blanket and winter cover - pillow with three pillowslips - 6 pairs of socks - 3 pairs of underwear - sweater - 8 handkerchiefs - 4 towels - 2 pairs of shoes - 2 hats or birettas - a trunk - a mattress 175 m. wide, 0.70 m. long.

The establishment will provide only a litter and straw, for which there will be a once-off payment of fr. 12.

N.B. Requests for acceptance should be made to Father John Bosco in Turin, or Father Paul Albera, the director of St Vincent's hospice in Sampierdarena.

With ecclesiastical approval⁷¹.

(1) Those over thirty can be accepted, so long as they have already completed a course in literature.

21. To Fr Joseph-Marie Timon-David

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 178-179.

[Varazze, after 20 July 1876]

Dear Father⁷²,

Lawyer Ernest Michel from Nice, a good friend of mine, has often hinted at a large number of Italian youths who with their family or in search of work come to Marseilles.

They are barely educated either school-wise or in religion, and do not speak French, so they are exposed to serious moral risk. In saying that he indicated that one of our houses could do some good. This was the main reason for his proposal.

As far as you are concerned Father, I am telling you with good heart, that if I can in any way help, or throw my bit in amongst all the works of charity that exist in Marseilles, I would willingly do so so long as:

1. I have prior agreement of the archbishop, on whom I intend to depend not only in matters of religion but in anything he might simply be able to offer advice on.

2. That your honourable self judges it convenient and that your work for young workers gives me moral support.

⁷¹ The setting up of the work for adult vocations and its dissemination in print was hindered by Archbishop Gastaldi the archbishop of Turin.

⁷² A French priest (1823-1891), founder in 1847 of the *Work of the Sacred Heart for young workers* and in 1852 of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart serving the same group. The foundation of the Salesian house in Marseilles in 1878 began with this contract.

3. Our houses live off Providence and we need very little, and we never seek an annual recompense. It is enough for me to have a place where we can gather the poorest of them on Sundays, and provide shelter for those who are completely abandoned. We have seen that any already existing works have never clashed with what the Salesians do.

With that as a premise I would kindly ask you to speak on my behalf to His Grace the Archbishop of Marseilles and get his general opinion, and if you have something to suggest to me in this regard, you will do me a great favour by letting me know.

In the course of next autumn when I go to our house in Nice it would be easy for me to take a trip to Marseilles and more positive explanations can be given on the spot.

If you or others ever come down to our parts, I will willingly offer you this house for whatever service it might be able to render.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always remain with us. Please pray for me. I remain your,

Most humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

22. Circular for the house of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Nizza Monferrato

ASC A1760326 Circulars, invitations to others, written up by a third person with author's corrections.; ed. in E III, pp. 306-307.

Turin, March 1878

Worthy Sir,

Nearby the city of Nizza Monferrato a convent with attached church has existed for some centuries under the title of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Graces. All the citizens still recall the time this blessed place was a residence for holy monks whose austerity of life and constant fervent prayer, brought blessings from Heaven on the Christian people.

The church which was open to public worship, and where the monks from the monastery regularly officiated, was a true sanctuary, a peaceful refuge of piety where many sought consolation from the travails of life, and not a few rediscovered the way to salvation that they had lost. But when the monks were forced out by political events, the church and monastery were sold and converted to profane use as a wine storage area.

This profanation of a holy place caused bitter regrets in the hearts of the faithful, and everyone requested that it be returned to pious use, and many devout citizens asked for this by making vows and through prayer. It was then that, encouraged by good and respectable clergy and lay people I set about things and with agreement of the bishop of the diocese and with religious, previously having sought permission of the Holy See, I bought the monastery and church and am now repairing them so they can be returned to use for public worship.

The church will be provided with priests so that the faithful can comfortably do their devotions and the monastery will change into a house of education⁷³, and while this will be a nice addition to Nizza as a city it will also be an easy means for raising their children in knowledge and piety.

But to complete such a task considerable funds are needed, since it costs 32 thousand francs and only half has been paid. To do the restoration, provide furnishings we completely lack the essential means. Everyone knows that this poor person writing would not have begun the work unless he trusted in the Lord's Providence and in the piety of those who have such a work at heart which will be useful to religion and civil society.

Therefore I address myself to your honourable self asking you to help in whatever way your situation allows and piety suggests.

Other than money we will accept construction materials, furniture, clothing, wood for building or for burning and anything else that could contribute to the above-mentioned purpose.

⁷³ Don Bosco does not explain that the institute would be used for education of girls under the direction of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

While we would be grateful for large offerings, we will be grateful for even the smallest, since the Lord takes no less account of the widow's mite than the larger almsgiving of the rich.

In order to receive these offerings in Nizza we have appointed a commission in the kind persons of Fr Bisio, the vicar of san *Giovanni*, the surveyor, Mr Luigi Terzani, and Mr Berta.

In Turin, with the undersigned.

In towns belonging to the diocese of Acqui the work is humbly recommended to the zeal and charity of reverend parish priests, reequoting them to promote and receive any donations and to send them to the writer or to the aforementioned Fr Bisio in any way they judge to be suitable.

I am happy though to assure all worthy donors of the apostolic blessing of the new reigning Pontiff, Leo XIII, who willingly deigned to impart it on February 23 last.

For my part, as well as my sincere and unalterable gratitude, I assure them of the warm offering of prayers, masses, all the works of religion which take place every day in the above-mentioned church, and thus imploring the copious blessings of Heaven on these benefactors.

With great gratitude I have the honour of being,

Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

23. The Oratory of St Francis De Sales

Critical ed. in *L'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales – Ospizio di beneficenza. Esposizione del sacerdote Giovanni Bosco*. Torino, Tipografia salesiana, 1879 (OE XXXI, 257-267)⁷⁴.

[Turin 1879]

*The Oratory of St Francis de Sales is not a private secondary school*⁷⁵

The designation 'private secondary school', incorrectly assigned to the hospice of St Francis de Sales in recent days, has caused harm and no minor disturbance to the youngsters who live here.

With a view to giving the school authorities and other authorities of State a correct idea of the nature and purpose of this institute some historical information will certainly be of help, from which it will be apparent what its relationships with the public authorities have been, and how these latter have consistently recognised it as a work of charity from its beginnings until the present.

The beginnings and the purpose of this Oratory

It is to be noted how, frequenting the prisons in this city, the writer could ascertain that a great number of youngsters were paying the penalty for crimes that neglect and lack of consideration rather than malice had dragged them into. He was also convinced that such young men, had they a kind soul to support them at the time of their release, would not commit these crimes again; and many who were at risk, mostly foreigners, thanks to fatherly help, could easily stay away from doing wrong.

⁷⁴ The appendices quoted here are not published.

⁷⁵ On May 16, 1879 a ministerial decree forced the closure of the secondary classes at Valdocco because the teachers did not have legal titles or registration. Don Bosco appealed to the Minister for Public Education (26 June), and made a petition to King Umberto I (6 July). He asked the King for the annulment of this decree (13 November) and the King passed on this request to the Council of State (24 December). At the same time the Printing Press at Valdocco printed both the Petition reproduced here, and his recourse to the Council of State (OE XXX, 449-480), in which he claimed that the ministerial decree was illegitimate. The matter was closed when this recourse was rejected (29 November 1881), but in the meantime Don Bosco had seen to registered teachers.

It was with this purpose that I began the work of the oratories or recreation centres in 1841, where poor and abandoned boys would gather especially at weekends. Here they got involved in gymnastics, public speaking, music, small theatricals, and other games of pleasant recreation. Elementary instruction, the study of religion and the rules of good manners were also part of this.

Evening classes began in 1846, and these were visited by a deputation of city councillors. They showed their great satisfaction, and having provided a report for the council plenary meeting, a gift of a thousand francs with an annual subsidy of 300 francs was decreed for the evening classes, a subsidy that continued until 1877.

A commission also visited from the Work for the Education of the Poor, and as a sign of its approval it also gave us a gift of fr. 1,000.

Amongst the young people who attended the oratories were some who were so poor and abandoned that any concern for them would have been useless if they were not brought into a hospice where they could be housed, clothed, fed and set on the path to some art or trade. Thus in 1847 the so-called hospice or Oratory of St Francis de Sales opened. Every evening there the pupils had elementary classes, vocal or instrumental music, drawing, the metric system, arithmetic and other studies adapted to their trades.

During the day they were occupied in trades such as carpentry, boot-making, tailoring, metalwork, book-binding, printing, compositing, font-making, stereotype printing, copper-engraving, painting, photography etc.

Some who were brighter or because they belonged to families who had fallen on hard times then took up technical courses, French and some took up academic (classical) studies. This way we have provided compositors for the printing press at the institute, assistants in the hospice, while not a few have taken up a military career, or gone on to literary studies, and in a short period of time have been able to earn themselves an honest living. In this way we were able to support the inclinations of our young men and set up a system of education appropriate for an institute which in a short time was looking after 900 young men many of whom currently are pupils of our hospice.

Up until now the Oratory of St Francis de Sales was considered to be a hospice of charity for the benefit of poor and abandoned children. School authorities helped us morally and materially.

The Senate of the Realm and the Minister for the Interior

This new model for bringing together and educating the children of the most needy portion, and we could say, of the portion at most risk, attracts people from various parts.

The Mayor of Turin, Chevalier Bellono, the Prefect, a number of parliamentarians and senators pay us a visit with great pleasure, spending hours in the school workshops and even joining in recreation with the children.

Count Sclopis came one day with Marquis Ignazio Pallavicini and Count Luigi Collegno, all Senators of the Realm. They visited the hospice, the classrooms, the recreation centre and the weekend gatherings. They especially admired the care with which we tried to place boys with a good employer, and who might be without work but who had reached the age of applying themselves to a trade.

When they left they said they would like to refer everything to the Senate so it could make a warm recommendation to the Government and commit it to helping an institution with the purpose, they said, of decreasing the number of urchins and those who end up populating the prisons.

In fact at their meeting on March 1, 1850, the Senate gave a splendid testimony to the work of the oratories. The Senate commission that visited us, keenly recommended the work of the oratories to the Government to encourage and support it with moral and material means, as a truly useful and eminently humanitarian and Christian institution for our times.

You can see a report on this visit in the acts of the Senate, as in Appendix no. 1.

The Government, and especially the Minister for the Interior, took the senators' recommendation into special consideration and cooperated with the development of the hospice also with material means.

Ministers Rattazzi, Cavour, Farini, Lanza, Peruzzi, Ricasoli, Nicotera judged this institute to be almost their own work, sending us all kinds of abandoned boys. Then when there was some gymnastic display, distribution of prizes, some small theatrical performance, or musical concert, these worthy gentlemen said they were happy to be there like fathers in the midst of their own children. It happened more than once that the Prefect of the Province and the Mayor of Turin accompanied the Minister for the Interior and also Princes from the Royal House to take part in our family feast. Some letters in Appendix no. 2 testify to this and make clear the judgement these people made concerning the institute.

Turin city council

Turin city council has always considered the work of the oratories to be a charitable institution. It encouraged it with prizes, helped it with material means and directed a large number of boys at risk there.

When the *colera morbus* struck our region in 1854, the Mayor of Turin brought the children who had been orphaned by this deadly disease together in a suitable place, and entrusted its care and running to the writer. Around fifty of the most abandoned were sent by the same Mayor to this hospice, where they were brought up, instructed and prepared for an art or trade. See Appendix no. 3.

A further 20 children, struck by the same misfortune, were sent here by the Prefect of Ancona; a few from Sassari, Naples; nine from Tortorigi in Sicily and other towns in Italy.

Classes at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales and school authorities

For more than 35 years, our primary, technical and secondary classes both for internal students and external ones, were always the object of kindness on the part of the school authorities.

The Boncompagni law of 1848 considered this hospice as a refuge for poor boys, an institute of arts and trades, and left us totally under the Ministry for the Interior. (See Boncompagni law, art. 3).

The Lanza Law in 1857 said similarly. The Minister not only left our classes free in terms of choice of teachers, but often helped them, and by a letter on April 29, 1857 gave us L. 1,000, assuring us of his support and all the means dependent on it so this institute could have greater development.

The Casati law in 1859 also left our classes autonomous; the school authority continued personally and with financial help to support this institute, which continued to enjoy freedom in its choice of teachers.

In 1865 the Royal Superintendent of Studies, unaware of the completely special character and nature of the institute, wanted to consider it as a private secondary school, and therefore obliged to have registered teachers; but a letter from the Minister for the Interior and another from the Mayor of Turin, addressed to the Minister for Public Education, declared this to be a work of charity in the strict sense of the word and they noted that the obligation of having registered and therefore salaried teachers in its classes would bring it to ruin since there was not a cent in the budget. Once this statement was made the Minister and the Royal Superintendent said nothing further about the legality of our teachers. See the letter in Appendix no. 4.

Over all this time (1841-1877) the Ministers of Public Education have constantly sent poor boys to us and the Royal Superintendents felt that they themselves could come into the classrooms and offer teaching ideas to the teachers and give lessons to the pupils. All these school superiors always promoted our teaching and never considered submitting it to the common law for the reasons that:

1. It is a charitable hospice; it lives off charity each day; it does not compromise anyone's public or private interests. Indeed it is to the advantage of the Government itself which often does not know how to provide for certain children who are not urchins but abandoned and in evident risk of becoming so.

2. These youngsters for the most part are taken in for free, except for the alms from benefactors who recommend them. This is what our benefactors and Ministers of State have been accustomed to doing. (See Appendix no. 5).

3. Pupils receive their education totally for free; and for the most part we even have to give them books, paper and similar stationery items for free.

4. The teachers then carry out their particular duties zealously, and with self-sacrifice worthy of the highest praise and find time to give lessons to their pupils for free.

5. The excellent results of the pupils in public exams, the bright career that some of them have in letters, philosophy, various university faculties, the military and in commerce are a clear argument that the education given by these teachers satisfied common expectations.

An error of fact

What has been explained thus far would clearly seem to demonstrate that the Oratory of St Francis de Sales is a shelter, a charitable hospice where amongst the education offered they can also freely take up secondary, technical and professional studies. This is how all the Ministers of Public Education have judged things and have done things, as well as the Royal Superintendents for 35 years or more. Only in 1878 did the Superintendent of Studies in Turin, not well informed of the purpose and nature of the institute, want to designate it as a private secondary school attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, and therefore subject it to the law controlling private secondary schools. This is where the request for registered teachers comes from, and the obligation to be in the classroom for a determined period of time, and ultimately the closure of the institute and the sending away of its pupils.

This is an error of fact, because the secondary school attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales has never been such and no one can point to where it exists. Everyone knows and can describe this Oratory as a work of charity to which other charitable oratories are attached, where amongst the internal and external students, amongst those who come on weekdays and weekends, amongst those who attend day classes and those who come for evenings ones, are thousands of poor children who come to be educated in learning, morality, work.

Petition

The above explanation is not intended as an accusation of any kind or complaint against anyone: I only want to protect the future of my pupils; therefore I humbly petition the Minister for Public Education to still consider this institute as a charitable hospice where its director truly takes the place of the father in conformity with the Casati law art. 251-252, and grant the writer of this letter, under his responsibility and vigilance, to freely continue to educate or give instruction in elementary and technical courses according to art. 356;

That those parts of the secondary course may continue to be taught which are considered suitable for the printing press, commerce, the military or other career, and that may continue to be of advantage to poor young people in this institute;

That we may be able once again to freely gather them, remove them from risk, and complete an education that will give them the means by which they can quickly and honestly earn their bread of life.

24. Report to the Holy See (1879)

Printed Ed. in *Esposizione alla Santa Sede dello stato morale e materiale della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel marzo del 1879*. Sampierdarena, Tipografia salesiana 1879
(OE XXXI, 237-254).

[Introduction]

The Constitutions of this Society in Chapter VI prescribed that every three years a report needs to be made to the Holy See on the moral and material state of the Society and its progress. This has been kept to approximately in the past, because with the opening of new houses, and the modifications which the young Congregation has had to make because of the special circumstances of time and place, we were hindered from making the complete and exact report which was due. The Rector Major of this Congregation, desirous of being duly respectful to the Holy See in everything, and with complete trust in receiving the observations and counsels that can contribute to the greater

glory of God, is now fulfilling this duty, humbly laying out the state in which the Pious Society finds itself in the various countries in which it exercises some sacred ministry, or is active in the academic or artistic education of the young.

Brief information on the Congregation of St Francis de Sales from 1841 to 1879

In 1841 this Congregation was nothing other than a catechism class, a weekend recreation centre, to which a Hospice was added for poor working boys in 1846, thus becoming a private institute in the guise of a large family. Various priests and gentlemen lent a hand as outside helpers to this pious enterprise. In 1852 the Archbishop of Turin approved the Institute, with a *motu proprio* granting all the necessary and appropriate faculties to Father John Bosco, making him the superior and head of the work of the oratories. From this year until 1858 a common life began; school, education of clerics, of whom a number became priests and remained with the Institute. In 1858 Pius IX, of happy memory, advised Father Bosco to set up a Pious Society with a view to preserving the spirit of the work of the oratories. He also kindly drew up the Constitutions, reduced in practice for common life for the use of an ecclesiastical Congregation of simple vows.

After six years the Holy See, with the appropriate decree, praised and commended the Institute and its Constitutions, and appointed the Superior. In 1870 [1869] the Institute and its Constitutions were definitively approved with the faculty of providing dimissorials for Salesian clerics who had entered the houses of the Congregation before they were 14 years of age.

In 1874 the Constitutions were definitively approved in its individual articles, with the faculty of providing all dimissorials *ad decennium*. Then the Holy See at various times enriched this Pious Society with the more necessary privileges for an ecclesiastical Congregation of simple vows. Meanwhile various houses have been founded bit by bit as Divine Providence has given us the opportunity and means: and since they have grown considerably in number, they have been divided into inspectorates or provinces.

The confreres spread across the various Houses of the Congregation, are dependent on the Rector of their respective communities; the Rectors are subject to a Provincial who presides over a determined number of houses making up the Inspectorate or Province. The Provincials depend on the Rector Major. With his Superior Chapter he administers the entire Congregation, with direct and absolute dependence on the Holy See.

Although the Congregation has as its purpose to occupy itself in a particular way with youth at risk, nevertheless its members willingly lend a hand in parishes and charitable institutes preaching occasional triduums, novenas, retreats, missions, helping by celebrating Mass and hearing the confessions of the faithful. They also write, publish, disseminate good books, sending out more than a million a year.

Piedmontese Province

Mother House of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. This name includes:

1. The church of Mary Help of Christians which more than a thousand people attend, coming for catechism, to hear Mass, sermons, frequent the sacraments and other similar practices of piety.
2. A school with all five secondary classes.
3. A studentate for clerics.
4. A House of Novitiate.
5. A home and workshop for working boys where we have the principal trades in civil society.
6. A church dedicated to St Francis de Sales, with a weekend recreation centre for boys coming from outside Turin city.
7. Day and evening classes for the poorest and most abandoned boys in Turin.
8. On the other side of the city there is a church and recreation centre under the title of St Aloysius, where boys come for all the sacred functions

and religious instruction; we are building a church there in honour of Pius IX, with an attached hospice.

9. Attached to this Oratory are day classes for the poorest and most abandoned boys. This oratory and these classes have the purpose of keeping these boys away from the Protestants who have a nearby church, hospice, classrooms and a hospital.

10. The oratory, church, recreation centre are under the title of St Joseph and in the parish of Sts Peter and Paul.

11. Also entrusted to the sacred ministry of the Salesians is the St Joseph's workshop for elderly women who need work and special help.

12 They also look after the Institute of the family of St Peter, whose purpose is to take in women who have gone astray and come out of prison but want to work and be involved in Christian life.

13. The same religious service is offered to the so-called Institute of the Good Shepherd, aimed at keeping girls at risk from ruin, and taking in repentant ones who are seeking a safe shelter from immoral behaviour.

14. Near Turin we have the college at Valsalice for better-off boys. This has the complete primary, lower secondary and upper secondary courses.

15. There is a chaplaincy at the same college for de la Salle Brothers who are invalids.

16. Outside Turin and not far from Caselle there is an oratory and chaplaincy for the benefit of the public, with classes for the children. The novices of the Congregation also spend their summer here.

17. Near Lanzo in the town of Mathi there is a paper factory where young people are always working and making paper for our printing presses at the Institute in Turin, S. Pierdarena, Nice, Montevideo and Buenos-Ayres.

18. In Lanzo there is St Philip Neri College with 250 boarders and the same number of day students, and with a public church. This offers primary and secondary classes.

19. Near this town a chaplaincy is entrusted to the Salesians under the title of the Holy Cross.

20. In the diocese of Ivrea, at San Benigno there is a huge building with a studentate for clerics and priests of the Congregation. There is a public church attached to the Institute and school instruction is given to boys from the town.

21. In the diocese of Casale, in the town known as Borgo San Martino, there is a junior seminary or the college of St Charles with primary and secondary education for more than 200 boys.

22. Primary and secondary education is also offered to all children from the local population.

23. In Mornese, diocese of Acqui, there are public classes for boys of the district.

24. In the diocese of Mondovì, at Trinità, there is an Institute under the title of Mary Immaculate with a public church, oratory and weekend recreation centre, evening and day classes.

Liguria Province

The provincial house in this province is in Alassio, diocese of Albenga.

Here there are:

25. A public church by the name of Our Lady of the Angels, functioning for the benefit of youth and adults in the city.

26. A college with more than 200 boarders and more than 400 day students. They offer all primary, secondary and technical classes.

27. Attached to the college at Alassio is the administration of public schools in the town of Laigueglia.

We can note that Dr Francesco Cerruti, the Rector of this college, has been appointed by the Ordinary of the diocese as general spiritual director for all women's religious institutes in the diocese.

28. In the diocese of Ventimiglia, in the town of Valle Crosia, is the house of Mary Help of Christians. Here there is a public church and primary schools founded to keep boys away from the Protestants who have opened schools, a church and a hospice nearby.

29. In the diocese of Savona, in the city of Varazze is the St John the Baptist college with primary, technical and secondary classes for around 150 boarding students.

30. The same is offered to around 500 day students.

31. In the public church in this city we gather as many boys as we can for religious instruction and to frequent the sacraments.

32. In the diocese of Genoa, at Sampierdarena, there is the St Vincent de Paul hospice and public church, where thousands of faithful attend mass, go to confession, take part in sermons and catechism.

33. Here too is the college of Mary Help of Christians for adults who aspire to the ecclesiastical state. There are about 200 of them.

34. There are also trade students here with respective workshops.

35. There are evening and day classes also for boarders and day students.

36. The Archbishop of the diocese entrusted the Salesians with the additional parish church of Our Lady of Graces.

37. In the diocese of Sarzana in the city of Spezia is St Paul's Oratory. Here there is a public church for all the faithful, day and evening classes and a semi-boarding institute. The principal purpose of these classes is to draw young people away from the Protestant schools that have opened a short distance from the hospice.

This institute was founded at the request and with the charity of the Supreme Pontiff Pius IX of happy memory, and is maintained with help from His Holiness Leo XIII, happily reigning.

38. In the diocese and city of Lucca there is a hospice, public church, oratory and weekend recreation centre for children of the city.

Roman province

39. In Magliano, capital of Sabina, the Salesians administer and direct the minor and major seminary, teaching primacy and secondary education including philosophy and theology. Students from the city attend these classes. Here there is also a hostel for ordinary young citizens.

40. In the diocese and city of Albano there are secondary public schools, as well as municipal ones, and a junior seminary.

41. Here too there is a public church for the benefit of the faithful.

42. In the city of Ariccia there are primary classes, a public church for young people and adults.

43. A professor of fine arts teaches at the seminary of Montefiascone.

Appendix to the Piedmontese province

44. In the diocese of Padua, and in the city of Este, there is a college and hostel called Manfredini college offering primary and secondary education.

Appendix to the Liguria province for houses in France

45. The Congregation began expanding into France in 1875. The first house was established in the diocese and city of Nice, known as the *Patronage de Saint Pierre* where there are 120 children living, and who study arts and trades and some who have applied to study for the ecclesiastical state.

46. In another part of the same city is an oratory and weekend recreation centre where about a hundred poor boys come for religious practices and for Sunday games.

47. In the diocese of Frejus, in the La Navarre district, there is a farm where a few boys learn about cultivation, others study as aspirants to the ecclesiastical state.

48. In Saint-Cyr, not far from Toulon, there is another agricultural establishment where a notable number of boys are assisted and introduced to farming.

49. In the diocese and city of Marseilles is the *Oratoire de Saint-Léon*; this takes in a few abandoned boys who do different trades.

50. The so-called *Maîtrise* in the parish of St Joseph can also be found there, with classes in literature, music and ceremonies. The main purpose here is to cultivate vocations to an ecclesiastical career.

The American province

With the advice and also charitable help of Pius IX, we undertook sending Salesians to America. The Supreme Pontiff proposed three aims: 1. To go and look after Italian adults but especially Italian youth who are spread in large numbers across the southern part of the Americas; 2. Open houses near the natives [‘selvaggi’ or savages, is the word he uses] to serve as a junior seminary and provide shelter for the poorest and most abandoned; 3. This way make progress in propagating the Gospel amongst the natives in the Pampas and Patagonia. The first departure was in 1875. Wanting to cooperate with the pious intentions of the Holy Father, 10 went to Rome to receive the blessing and their mission from the Vicar of Jesus Christ, and on November 14 that year left Genoa and arrived on the 14th of the following month in Buenos-Ayres, capital of the Argentine Republic. Currently there are more than 100 Salesians in America working as follows:

51. In the diocese and city of Buenos-Ayres, the provincial house, and in the recently erected parish of St Charles in Almagro, around six thousand souls.

52. The Pius IX hospice where some 150 boys are learning arts and trades.

53. Public schools, an oratory and weekend amusements for day students.

54. A novitiate and studentate for the Congregation.

55. The Boca parish dedicated to St John the Evangelist with around 27 thousand inhabitants, almost all of whom are Italian.

56. Public schools for poor children.

57. They are in charge of the church of *Mater Misericordiae or de los Italianos*. This church is especially for Italian adults and children who come there in great numbers for religious instruction from all across the city and nearby towns.

58. In the city of San Nicolás de los Arroyos not far from the natives [savages] there is a college or junior seminary for the missions where a number of vocations are coming from.

59. A public church for adults in the city.

60. We also run the Ramallo parish which is a village of some 4000 souls. Inhabitants from the homesteads around usually come to this parish for religious practices at least on Sundays, and especially for baptisms and marriages.

Republic of Uruguay

61. The Pio College at Villa Colón and a seminary for the missions. This college is also considered to be a minor seminary for the diocese and connected with the State university.

62. There is also a public church there for the nearby population.

63. In Montevideo, the capital of the Republic, there is an oratory with classes for poor and at risk children.

64. In the city of Las Piedras we run a parish of six thousand souls, with public classes and a weekend oratory.

Houses which the Salesians will soon be running

A college in the diocese and city of Milan, in the parish of the Crowning of Our Lady.

A hospice, oratory and weekend recreation centre in the diocese and city of Cremona.

A hospice and oratory in the city of Lugo which comes under the diocese of Faenza.

Likewise in the cities of Brindisi, Catania and Randazzo in Sicily.

In Challonges near Annecy, in Auteuil in Paris, in Santo Domingo, Brazil and Paraguay etc.

Observations

General observations:

1. The houses of the Congregation are the property of its members; we have some debts but we have property for sale of sufficient value to be able to pay them.

2. There are some 40,000 young people receiving a Christian education, or education in arts, literature in Salesian houses. Of these, around 300 enter the clergy each year. When pupils have decided on their vocation most return to their dioceses, others embrace the religious state, some dedicate themselves to the foreign missions. After our definitive approval by the Holy See vocations grew in a most consoling way. When the Congregation was approved by the Holy See (April 3, 1874), there were 250 Salesians; currently they total more than 700, and the 17 works then entrusted to them have grown to be 64.

The Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

When I presented the catalogue of our Pious Society, also noted was the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, founded in Mornese, diocese of Acqui, in 1873. Its purpose is to exercise works of charity for poor girls just as the Salesians do for poor boys. This humble institute which then had only one house, also, thanks to divine kindness, has had a notable increase as follows:

1. In Mornese a house for the professed, a house for the novitiate and postulants.

2. There is education for poor girls in the same city, public schools with a weekend religious gathering for adults.

3. In Nizza Monferrato in the house named after Our Lady of Graces, there is a boarding school, classes and workshops for day students, a studentate for the Sisters.

4. In the diocese and city of Turin there is the Institute of St Charles where they have day classes for poor girls, an oratory, weekend classes, also for adults.

5. Attached to the same house is the studentate for the Sisters preparing for the public exams for teaching.

6. In Chieri there is a school, classes for day students under the protection of St Teresa.

7. In the same city they have opened an oratory and weekend classes for adults attended by more than 400.

8. In Lanzo Torinese they look after the kitchen and laundry for the Salesians' St Philip Neri college.

9. In the diocese and city of Biella they look after the kitchen and laundry for the bishop's seminary.

10. In the diocese of Casale in Borgo San Martino they lend their services to the kitchen, laundry, wardrobe, and bring the older girls of the town together on Sundays.

11. In Lu they have an infant school, a school and workshop for poor girls, a school and religious gathering on Sundays for older girls.

12. In Quargnento, diocese of Alessandria, they look after the infant school and have a Sunday school and religious gathering for the older ones.

13. S. Pier d'Arca, diocese of Genoa, they look after the laundry, clothing, kitchen for the St Vincent's hospice and gather the older girls on Sundays.

14. They provide the same service for the college at Alassio, diocese of Albenga.

15. In the diocese of Ventimiglia, in Valle Crosia they have a school with a workshop, a Sunday religious gathering for adults to draw them away from the Protestants who have opened schools and a hospice there attracting them to go there with gifts and promises.

16. In the diocese and city of Nice they offer the service of clothing and laundry for the Patronage de St Pierre.

17. In the diocese of Frejus in the Navarre district they look after laundry, clothing, and the kitchen for the agricultural school established there.

18. At Saint-Cyr the same service as for Navarre.

Houses in America

19. In the diocese of Montevideo the sisters have recently opened public classes for poor girls in the parish of Las Piedras.

20. At Villa Colón they have a school, workshops on weekdays and a Sunday religious gathering for poor girls.

21. In the city and diocese of Buenos-Ayres they recently opened a school and workshop with a summer school for poor and abandoned girls.

Observations

All the houses the Sisters live in belong to the Congregation, but a Salesian is in charge. On the moral side the spirit of piety and regular observance are very satisfying; therefore we have reason for thanking the Lord for his mercy. On the material side they have some debts but there are assured means for paying the instalments. As seen from what has been reported above, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, who in 1874 had only one House, now have 21, and the Sisters who were between 10 and 15 in number then have grown to more than three hundred, while there are many requests for admission, and there are keen requests coming in from many places to open new Houses or take over the running of already existing ones, but which are in need of support.

The moral state of the Salesian Congregation

Having reported on the state and material growth which divine goodness has granted to the humble Salesian Congregation here is a brief indication of its moral state.

1. The observance of the Constitutions, thanks be to God, has been maintained in all houses, and up till now there has been no Salesian forgetful of himself who has caused scandal. The work is greater than the strength and number of the individuals; but no one is dismayed and it seems that effort is a second nourishment after material nourishment. It is true that some are victim of their zeal both in Europe and in the foreign missions; but all this does is to increase the desire of other Salesians to work. However we have seen that no one works beyond his strength to the detriment of his health.

2. Requests from Salesian aspirants are many, but our experience has been that many have a vocation to other religious orders or to the secular priesthood, not to join the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales. There are around three hundred requests annually, of who, about a hundred and fifty are admitted to the novitiate; those who profess are on average around a hundred and twenty.

3. We have very good relationships with the diocesan Ordinaries and parish priests; we could say they are our fathers and benefactors. We have encountered difficulties with just one Ordinary and we really do not know the real reason why⁷⁶. With patience, the Lord's help and by working under his diocese we hope to gain the same benevolence we experience in all other dioceses.

4. Another great difficulty we met was regarding privileges. We believe the Salesians should have the privileges which religious orders and other ecclesiastical congregations normally enjoy, but which up until now the Holy See has not judged fit to grant⁷⁷. Our material and moral progress would be

⁷⁶ The allusion is to the Archbishop of Turin, Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi; see the section in this volume given to the conflict (nos. 80-90).

⁷⁷ This happened only ten years later (see no. 38).

much more easily assured thanks to the granting of these privileges, which we humbly and keenly ask for.

5. The first General Chapter was held in 1877. Very important matters were dealt with concerning the practice of our Constitutions, but before sending the decisions we made to the Holy See we thought it opportune to put them into practice for a time, introducing modifications to understand the corrections we needed to make and then present them to another General Chapter, which God-willing will be held in September 1880.

6. The members of the Congregation join with their Rector Major in paying homage to the Holy See and in professing their inviolable attachment to it, and beg the Supreme Authority of the Church to continue his fatherly assistance towards them, while they with all possible effort will not cease to support the faith, and obedience to the Vicar of Jesus Christ in all countries where they have houses, both in Europe and America.

Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam.

Fr John Bosco
Rector Major

**25. “Clarifications for the Prefect of
the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars,
Card. Innocenzo Ferrieri, regarding the earlier report”**

Archivio Congregazione dei Religiosi e degli Istituti Secolari, T 9.1 R, ms written by another person with author’s corrections.; ed. in E III, pp. 505-508.

Turin, 3 August 1879

Your Eminence,

I have received a copy of the observations which the authoritative Congregation of Bishops and Regulars has deigned to offer regarding the report on the moral and material state of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales.

First of all I humbly thank Your Eminence, assuring you that I will value the comments made and use them to the advantage of our Salesian confreres and they will serve as a norm for the future reports which should be made every three years to the Holy See.

Meanwhile I shall fulfil the task here of offering the clarifications requested, following the numerical order of the observations made:

1. Nothing was said in the aforementioned Report about the financial state of the Institute, nor on the novitiate. This should be done according to the norms established by the sacred canons and apostolic Constitutions.

Explanation.

[R] The Pious Society does not exist legally, therefore it cannot own anything or contract debts or credits. The Houses of the Congregation (as on p. 13 of the mentioned Report) are the property of each member; there are debts, but one member has a property for sale of sufficient value to pay them. But the Congregation both as a moral and legal entity does not own, nor can it own, anything.

One Novitiate house is here in Turin, approved and regulated by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars itself, and all the established and approved norms as in Chap. XIV of our Constitutions are followed; with the same norms and decree of approval of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide another Novitiate house was opened in Buenos Aires, capital of the Argentine Republic.

With the authorisation of the aforesaid Congregation of Bishops and Regulars one has also been set up in Marseilles, where we are completing a building adapted to and appropriate for all the prescribed observances to this end.

We should soon be opening a new Novitiate in *Spain* and in the diocese of *Seville*, for which in time we will make a formal request to the Holy See for due authorisation.

A request had been made to open a Novitiate in *Paris* too; but certain difficulties have arisen that make this improbable, so all that discussion has been suspended for now.

A priest of known piety and learning is the director of novices. Two other priests are helping him. Each day meditation, spiritual reading, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament are regularly made, and the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin is said. Each evening they gather in the church to receive the blessing of the director. Each week they go to confession, and go to communion almost daily. Two conferences are given each week and one instruction on the Constitutions. Thus far religious observance has been maintained.

2. *The Pious Society cannot be divided into Inspectorates, which is not usual, but into Provinces for the erection of which permission from the Holy See must be obtained in each case.*

R. The Pious Society is divided into Inspectorates according to article 17 Chap. IX of our Constitutions, expressed thus: *Si opus fuerit, Rector Maior, Capitulo Superiore adprobante, constituet visitatores, eisdemque curam quamdam demandabit certum domorum numerum inspiciendi, ubi earum distantia et numerus id postulaverit. Hujusmodi visitatores, sive cognitores, Rectoris Maioris vices gerent in domibus et in negotiis eisdem demandatis.*

His Holiness Pius IX, of ever venerated memory, recommended that we eliminate any terms that might clash with the secular spirit in the first body of rules for the humble Salesian Society. Therefore instead of saying *monastery*, he proposed we should say *house, college, hospice, orphanage*; in place of general to say *rector major*; and for the name *prior*, or *guardian* substitute *director*; and for provincial or province some equivalent term.

It would be appropriate to say that division into inspectorates has not yet been put into place but is only proposed *ad experimentum*, and when we know it is possible to do so then due recourse will be had to the Holy See. But our sad times and the constant and serious difficulties we have to face daily do not let us see any other tolerable division in the midst of secular society, therefore we ask that we can temporarily use it.

3. *With regard to the article "Piedmontese Province" it is said that certain refuges for women have been entrusted to the sacred ministry of the Salesians. This cannot be done other than with the authority of the respective bishop, and it should have indicated if he was involved and what this sacred ministry consists of.*

R. In opening female institutes and in taking on spiritual direction all the norms described in Chap. X of our Constitutions were followed. These are Institutes in fact lacking in material means, and the Salesians charitably offer their religious service to them at the request of the Ordinaries. This sacred ministry is always agreed upon and circumscribed by the diocesan Ordinary in everything referring to the sacraments of confession, communion, celebration of Holy Mass, the Word of God, catechism classes and the like.

4. *From the Report it would seem the Salesians have colleges, schools etc., but nothing is said about whether this is with the permission of the respective Ordinaries, and whether the teaching depends on the sacred canons, and especially the Holy Council of Trent.*

R. The rules approved by the Holy See for opening new houses were followed as described in Chap. X of our Constitutions, so there were due arrangements with the diocesan Ordinaries beforehand as prescribed by the sacred canons and the Holy Council of Trent.

5. *A report is added in the same Report on an Institute of women under the title of Mary Help of Christians, and nothing is said about whether this Institute has a superior general (male) on whom the Sisters depend, and whether it is completely independent, as it should be, from the Salesian Institute.*

R. When the Salesian Constitutions were approved we talked about and dealt with what regarded the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

The Institute of Mary Help of Christians depends on the Superior General of the Pious Salesian Society in temporal matters, but in what concerns the exercise of religious worship and the administration of the sacraments they are totally subject to the jurisdiction of the Ordinary. The superior of the Salesians gives the Sisters material means and with the consent of the bishop

establishes a priest with the title of spiritual director for every house of the Sisters. A few bishops have already approved this female Institute, and we are now going through the due experimentation to understand in practical terms the modifications to be introduced before submitting them to the Holy See for approval. Since the limits of the Sisters' dependence on the Superior of the Salesians have been noted at various points of their Rule, a copy of their Rule is attached for whoever wants to gain greater clarification on this. We note also that the Mother House of the Sisters is in Mornese in the diocese of Acqui, whose Ordinary has always overseen the origins, progress and spread of the Institute.

6. We add that the Sisters look after the kitchen, take care of the laundry, the wardrobe in seminaries, hospices run by males, and this has always been approved by the Holy See.

R. At any rate we have always had previous understanding with the diocesan Ordinaries, and indeed it was they who made the requests. We have followed all the rules that the sacred canons prescribe and that prudence suggests.

7. This Sacred Congregation cannot but recognise at least how singular and inappropriate it is that this Report was printed, while the three-yearly report to be given by superior generals of Institutes has no other purpose than to make known to the Holy See the disciplinary, personnel, material, financial state of each pious institute, and how things are going with the novitiate.

R. I had the Report printed for one sole purpose—to facilitate its reading. This being the first time I was sending a report of this kind to the Holy See I followed the example of a superior of another institute who told me: “The Holy See prefers a printed Report.” Next time I will see it as my strict duty to send it as a manuscript.

Having given the required clarifications, I beg Your Eminence to keep this poor Society in your kind consideration. Our times, civil laws and authorities, the efforts they make to wipe out ecclesiastical Institutes, urge me to beg of Your Eminence all the support and indulgence compatible with the prescriptions of the Holy Church.

These clarifications should have been sent to Your Eminence last May, but for serious problems this house has been subjected to I have had to put it off until today.

With the highest veneration it is my greatest honour to declare myself to be,
Your Eminence's most humble and indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

26. Further clarifications on new “observations” received

ASC A 1710419 *Lett. orig. Ferrieri*, ms. written by another with author's corrections.; ed. in E III, pp. 540-544. Additional passages from Card. Ferrieri's letter are included in square brackets, but which were missing in the original.

[Turin, 12 January 1880]

Your Eminence,

I am saddened that, despite my good will, I have not succeeded in providing the desired clarifications about the three-yearly Report made to the Holy See about our humble Congregation. So that this and any other matter can be explained in a way that is compatible with this Congregation and at the same time in the way required by the sacred canons, I am sending Fr (Dr) Francesco Dalmazzo as our procurator with the task of placing himself at Your Eminence's command, or at the command of whoever you indicate to him.

Meanwhile I am explaining here some of my thoughts in respectful response to the letter Your Eminence deigned to address to me on October 3, 1879. The above-mentioned Father Dalmazzo can explain these where necessary.

[Regarding the explanation provided for observation no. 1 you say that the Pious Society does not legally exist, therefore it cannot own things or contract debts. You go on then to say that the houses of the Congregation are the property of some of its members; that there are debts, but one member is selling property that can pay them. You conclude then that the Congregation as both a moral and legal entity, does not own nor can it own things. It is the opinion of this Sacred Congregation that all these expressions about non-legal existence are to be understood in reference to civil law which is hostile to pious institutes. With regard to the

laws of the Church, before which civil laws have no standing, all pious institutes, therefore also those of the Salesians, have legal existence according to the sacred canons. Therefore they are subject to the Holy See for goods they have under any title, and they may be acquired and they may possess them.

All the pious institutes in their three-yearly Report pay no attention to civil laws of any government, and they make their report on their financial state, reporting succinctly what goods they possess under what title, what income they know of, wherever it may come from, and how it is provided; and if they need to sell goods even if owned by third persons, or create debts, this Sacred Congregation has always encouraged the need for apostolic permission, and they have shown themselves to be obedient. Only you have attached the civil law to exempt yourself from such obligations.

You reflect that the Constitutions were approved by the Holy See with the obligations that are seen in art. 2 in Chap. VI and art. 3 in Chap. VII even though the said civil laws had been enacted at the time of the aforementioned approval].

1. Regarding ownership

This Pious Society of ours is a moral entity that cannot own anything neither before civil society, nor before the Church. In Chapter IV no. 1 of our Constitutions we read: *“Ideoque qui sunt professi in hac Societate dominium radicale, ut aiunt, suorum bonorum retinere poterunt”*. In the same Chapter no. 2 it says as follows: *“Poterunt vero sodales de dominio sive per testamentum, sive (permissu tamen Rectoris Maioris), per acta inter vivos libere disponere”*.

Since because of our sad times this point was fundamental for us I asked, in having our Constitutions approved, how the words of Chapter VII article 3 should be understood—expressed thus: *“In bonorum alienationibus Societatis, et aere alieno conflando, serventur quae sunt de iure servanda iuxta Sacros Canones, et Constitutiones Apostolicas?”*

Through Monsignor then Cardinal Vitelleschi, the former secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, their Eminences replied: “The response is in the same article, viz., *in alienationibus bonorum Societatis*” and that should mean that when time or place allow us to own something in common, or in the name of the Pious Society this article should be observed

as it is observed by all religious and ecclesiastical congregations. That seems to be in conformity with no. 2 of the above-mentioned Chapter VII where it says of the Rector Major: “*Nulla, quod ad res immobiles attinet, emendi vel vendendi ei erit facultas, absque Superioris Capituli consensu*”.

This is the meaning I have always given to our Constitutions from the beginning of this Pious Society’s existence. And this was always the understanding of the Supreme Pontiff Pius IX, always of glorious memory, as also of the eminent cardinals chosen to examine and approve our Constitutions.

So considering stable goods owned personally by members to be subject to the prescriptions of the sacred canons and as ecclesiastical goods would throw things into confusion for us; because all the Salesians made their religious profession on the basis of the first article of Chapter IV De voto paupertatis, which begins thus: “*Votum paupertatis, de quo hic loquitur, respicit tantummodo cuiuscumque rei administrationem, non vero possessionem*”.

[In the same clarification on observation no. 1. you assert that the novitiate in Marseilles was set up with the authorisation of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Since I do not know that the aforesaid Sacred Congregation had given such authorisation, I see the need for you to send it, pass on the rescript showing permission to open the novitiate in Marseilles].

2. Novitiate in Marseilles

Regarding authorisation for the Novitiate in Marseilles that you want to see, I think there is a misunderstanding; because the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on 5 February 1879 asked the bishop of the city, on February 23, 1879, and he replied to the Sacred Congregation in favour and considered the matter closed, while it still seems to be ongoing. The documents relating to this are attached and I renew my request to grant this favour.

[In the response you made to observation no. 2 you say that the Pious Society is divided into Inspectorates, following art. 17 Chap. IX of the Constitutions. Now in the aforesaid art. 17 it speaks of ‘visitors’ being set up by the Rector Major *si opus fuerit, Capitulo Superiore approbante* and not yet of provincials. All other institutes in whatever other part of the world

are divided into Provinces, after approval by the Holy See, which has never allowed this division to be done under another name. You should hold to the general rule].

3. By dividing into inspectorates instead of provinces I judged this to be the practical application of article 17, Chapter IX of our Constitutions: *“Si opus fuerit, Rector Maior, Capitulo Superiore adprobante, constituet visitatores, eisdemque curam quamdam demandabit certum domorum numerum inspiciendi”*.

The terms ‘province’ and ‘provincial’ in these calamitous times would throw us amongst wolves who would devour us or scatter us. This nomenclature was suggested by Pius IX himself, of ever dear and grateful memory. If you absolutely want the old terms, I request that this obligation at least be limited to dealings with the Holy See, with the freedom to use the terms that are possible in these times in secular society.

[In the clarification that you offer on observation no. 3 you say: “In opening female institutes and taking on spiritual direction for them all the norms described in Chap. X of the Constitutions were followed.” In this Chapter it speaks of opening Houses for clerics, young men and boys to be educated by the Salesians; it certainly does not speak of opening Houses for women that would be directed by them. Nor can it be said that it was in the mind of the Holy See to allow opening and direction of such houses by the Salesians in approving the Constitutions, because that runs contrary to the maxims founded on very reasonable grounds. The Salesians can have spiritual direction of Houses of women when this is entrusted to them by the respective Ordinaries, and this spiritual direction must consist in administration of the sacraments and in preaching the word of God, if and when this is required by the said Ordinaries].

4. In matters relating to the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians the Salesians do not have any other involvement in their houses other than spiritual, within the limits and in the way the Ordinaries in whose diocese a Sisters, House is, allow and prescribe.

[On observation no. 4. you respond thus: “When the Salesian Constitutions were approved we spoke of and dealt with what regards the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. The Institute of Mary Help of Christians depends on the Superior General of the Pious Salesian Society.”

Given the voluminous material on the Salesian position, especially the part dealing with the approval of the Constitutions, we observe that it never dealt with, and even less so discussed what regards the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Had that been true this Sacred Congregation would certainly have ordered the separation of these two Institutes. It was never its custom to approve, especially in more recent times, that women's Institutes depend on male Institutes: and if a dependence of the kind had ever occurred, it would have immediately ordered that it cease. You wish to introduce a contrary idea, that this Congregation can do no less than reject].

5. In what refers to the Institute of Mary Help of Christians as to whether or not it was proposed in approving the Constitutions I can respond that in the printed summary by the Sacred Congregation in examining definitive approval of our Constitutions, where there is a list of the houses opened at the time, on p. 10, no. 16 we read as follows: As an appendix and depending on the Salesian Congregation is the *House of Mary Help of Christians* founded with the approval of the ecclesiastical authority in Mornese in the diocese of Acqui. Its aim is to do for poor girls what the Salesians are doing for boys. There are already forty Sisters taking care of 200 girls.

The aforementioned eminent cardinals had some questions on the nature and purpose of this institution and showing that they were satisfied with my verbal declarations concluded that the matter would then be dealt with more carefully when their Constitutions were presented for the appropriate approval by the Holy See.

When this Sacred Congregation, in observation no. 5 on your three-yearly report, wrote asking how the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was managed, there was a question as to whether this had a Superior General (female), and not a Superior General (male), as you mistakenly wrote when reporting on the above-mentioned observation].

6. In the clarifications required of April 5, 1879 it was asked: *"If this Institute, of the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians had a superior general on which the Sisters depended, and if it were totally independent, as it must be, from the Institute of the Salesians."*

The response was affirmative adding what was its authority in conformity with the Constitutions of the Sisters. Now your eminence asks if the above-

mentioned Sisters have a superior general (female). I respond affirmatively that they have a *superior general (female)* and their own Superior Chapter conforming to title III of their Constitutions.

Having explained everything above I beg Your Eminence to consider with paternal kindness that the Pious Salesian Society without material means, in calamitous times began and continues to support itself up till now amidst growing difficulties, and with endless opposition. Therefore it needs all the benevolence and indulgence compatible with holy mother Church.

We have opened almost a hundred houses offering Christian education to around fifty thousand children, of whom more than six hundred every year become clerics. On the other hand I believe I can assure Your Eminence that the Salesians have no other aim than to work for the greater glory of God, and to the advantage of the holy Church by spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ amongst the natives of the Pampas and in Patagonia, therefore we all ask for benevolence, advice, material and moral help.

Kneeling before Your Eminence I ask forgiveness if I have involuntarily written some inconvenient word, while I have the great honour to declare myself,

Your Eminence's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

27. Report to the President of the Council and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Benedetto Cairoli, concerning Salesian activity on behalf of Italian migrants in Argentina and Uruguay

ASC A072 *Documenti per scrivere la storia di don Giovanni Bosco...*, vol. XXIII, pp. 81-82; ed. in E IV, pp. 4-6.

Turin, 16 January 1881

Your Excellency,

This is now the sixth year that I have presented myself to the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Rome, explaining the need for an Italian mission in South

America. Having examined and come to know the importance of the project the Minister approved it and encouraged it with flattering words, helping me with a subsidy for the voyages. Therefore on November 14, 1875 I sent 10 members of our Institute who arrived in the Argentine Republic on the 14th of the following month. A further four expeditions were sent.

I would like now to offer a brief outline of what has been achieved in this period of time.

Uruguay

In the city of Montevideo, the capital of the Republic, we founded a school attended by more than 300 poor boys, most of whom are children of Italians.

In Villa Colón not far from the capital, we have begun a college where Italian is taught and spoken. The same education is offered to Europeans living in the eastern cities of La Plata.

Argentine Republic

In Bocca, a thickly populated suburb of Buenos Aires, there are more than 20,000 Italians living. A parish was set up here, and schools for boys and girls with a hospice for around 200 poor boys.

Then in the centre of the city is the Church of the *Misericordia* [Our Lady of Mercy]. In the same city we have the San Carlos de Almagro hospice which takes in more than 200 poor boys. The Salesians look after this and offer religious worship to a large number of adults and children who come to what we might call their national church where preaching is in Italian and Italian is spoken.

In the city of San Nicolás de los Arroyos there is also a college with boarders and day students where Italian is spoken and taught.

We also look after many Italian settlements amongst which the most important of them is *Villa Libertad* in Entrerios with 200 Italian families who have established themselves out in the countryside in places that are far from

the city and commerce. They are involved exclusively in the cultivation of the very fertile countryside.

Patagonia

We were soon able to set up six native settlements in Patagonia, on the banks of the Rio Negro, which many Europeans, mostly Italians, also came to. The Salesians have founded schools, education centres and hospices there for children, adults and anyone who needs to learn some art or trade and ways of cultivating the land.

The idea is to continue these Italian missions as far as the Magellan Straits and from there on to Cape Horn. But I need to speak about this personally with Your Excellency as I hope to do, if you grant me the opportunity, next March.

The current state of things

The latest statistics indicate there are some 30,000 Italians in the Argentine Republic of whom 50,000 are in the capital, without counting the suburbs. We have already sent five expeditions of Salesians, who are presently spread over thirty four locations where they give instruction and education in general to the most poor and abandoned, but always with special concern for Italians.

Projected events

We are currently putting together a new expedition to help those already working in the Republics with the same need for someone who will look after youth and the adults. This expedition is of 22 individuals some of whom will leave towards the end of the current month on the steamship Umberto I, which belongs to Rocco and Piaggio Co.

The others will depart on February 3 next on the mail boat belonging to Lavarello Co.

Finding myself pressed for preparing the necessary items and paying the voyages I am turning to Your Excellency to help me in this endeavour,

which will certainly bring great honour to the Italian nation and all those who promote it. I also believe that you will be pleased to know how the Salesians have so often been ready to render service to Italian officials resident in Montevideo and Buenos Aires, as you will see from the report these officials have made to the Italian Government.

Here then is the work I would like to put under Your Excellency's protection: a work that has the aim of spreading knowledge, morality, civilisation, business and agriculture in those distant countries where Italian families continue to flow.

Full of trust in your well-known kindness I have the great honour of declaring myself to be,

Your Excellency's humble representative,

Fr John Bosco

28. Circular for the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome

ASC A1760419, printed copy of the circular ⁷⁸

Turin, 29 January 1881

All works which redound to the glory of our holy religion must certainly interest Christians throughout the world and in a special way when they are destined to the advantage and adornment of the city of Rome, soul and centre of Christianity, and when promoted by the supreme leader of the Church itself. It is works of this kind which are described below and which are to be completed in the capital of the Catholic world. They are judged to be of the greatest value to religion and civil society and therefore are proposed by the enlightened mind of our zealous Pontiff Leo XIII gloriously reigning. The works are as follows:

⁷⁸ The ASC has preserved two printed copies dated 16 July 1881 and 10 February 1882, with minor variants concerning progress in the work on the church: cf. E IV, pp. 18-20.

1. A church at the Castro Pretorio on the Esquiline hill and consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It will also serve as a parish for twelve thousand souls, and a monument to the immortal Pius IX. The parish is already established as a legal entity and recognised by civil and ecclesiastical authority;

2. A recreation area where we can gather boys especially on weekends, amuse them with pleasant games after they have fulfilled their religious duties;

3. Evening classes for older youth. This category of young people, occupied in hard work throughout the day, often lacks the means for having the right education which they have great need of;

4. Day classes for children who, due to their poverty or because neglected, are not able to attend public schools;

5. A hospice where children who wander the streets and squares of whatever town, city or nation they belong to will be instructed in knowledge, and arts and trades. Because of this many of them come to Rome trusting to find work and money, but when their hopes are dashed they fall into poverty, are exposed to the risk of wrongdoing, and as a consequence end up populating the State prisons. This hospice should be able to hold around five hundred poor orphans following the already existing model of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales in Turin.

The state of things

Since 1878 an appropriate commission of respectable individuals was set up by initiative of the reigning Pontiff, under the presidency of his Cardinal Vicar, with a view to building the above-mentioned sacred edifice.

Once the land was bought, work immediately began based on a design by Architect Count Vespignani⁷⁹, and work went ahead quickly. But since funds were lacking to continue the work, while on the other hand wanting

⁷⁹ Francesco Vespignani (1842-1899) was responsible for a number of buildings, mainly in Rome, amongst which the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for which, at Don Bosco's indication, he modified the original plan, increasing its size.

to provide more effectively for the needs of youth at risk, the Holy Father decided to entrust the building, and the care and administration of the work, to the writer (1). At the same time, given this lack of funds, His Holiness authorised him to have recourse to the charity of all the Christian faithful.

Ways of helping

1. Help can be given as finance or as building materials;
2. Everyone can help through prayer, and by advising people who are well-off to become benefactors;
3. All Cooperators are asked to send their donations to Rome to His Eminence Cardinal Raffaele Monaco La Valletta, Vicar General of His Holiness, or to Fr (Dr) Francesco Dalmazzo⁸⁰ – Torre dei Specchi N. 36, Rome; or to Father John Bosco in Turin;
4. Some who will have the title ‘collector’, will be authorised to collect donations. But these are not to go asking for donations unless furnished with a written document noting the purpose of the request, name, surname and that they are collectors, the signature of Father John Bosco, and a seal with the words: *Pia Societas Sancti Francisci Salesii*;
5. Without need for this formality we respectfully ask the Most Reverend Archbishops of various dioceses, the reverend parish priests, curates and rectors of churches to be collectors amongst the Christian faithful living within their respective jurisdictions, and to send to any of the three above-named individuals any money they have been able to collect, and to help any of the collectors who have the required documentation.

Advantages for donors and collectors

1. A special blessing from the Holy Father, who approves and recommends this pious endeavour, for all who love to see an increase in our holy religion, upright behaviour, the good of youth and all of civil society;

⁸⁰ Francesco Dalmazzo (1845-1895), put in charge of following up the works for the church of the Sacred Heart, was living with the Oblates at Tor dei Specchi.

2. When this sacred building is finished and consecrated to divine worship, every Friday a Mass will be celebrated at the main altar and the praises of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and other particular prayers for benefactors will be said;

3. The same will also happen on the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Feasts of Our Lady, Christmas, the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament and on all the Feasts of the holy Apostles;

4. With a view to offering special respect to the august Mother of God and invoking her powerful protection on all our benefactors, each evening a third part of the Rosary will be said, the Loretto Litanies or the *Ave Maris Stella* will be sung, followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The function will conclude with the *De Profundis* and *Oremus* or with a *Pater, Ave* and *Requiem*, in suffrage for deceased benefactors;

5. These celebrations of masses, prayers and exercises of Christian piety will be in *perpetuum*.

Fr John Bosco

(1) Following the kind disposition of the Holy Father, it was possible to acquire more land to extend the church and to put up the planned hospice, classrooms and workshops.

29. Address to the Past Pupils

Critical edition in BS 7 (1883) 8, pp. 127-129.

[Address to lay Past Pupils, 15 July 1883⁸¹]

... At the end, Don Bosco, visibly moved, took his turn to speak. He spoke of his real joy at seeing so many of his beloved sons; He assured them that he always loved them and loved those too who were not there in body but were certainly there in affection; He thanked them for their filial demonstration, and that their numbers were constantly growing; He praised their pious thought in offering him a gift that would look very nice in the Church of

⁸¹ They came to Valdocco for the occasion to celebrate with Don Bosco.

Mary Help of Christians, and he spoke with special affection of the Provost of Faule.

“It is true”, Don Bosco said, “that the orator and poet, speaking of Don Bosco, broke into pious exaggeration and used the rhetorical manner of speech that we call hyperbole, but this was forgivable licence for his dear boys whose expression of feelings was a response more to the dictates of their heart than their mind. However, always remember that Don Bosco was not and is none other than a poor tool in the hands of a very competent artist, indeed a most wise and omnipotent artist, who is God. Let there be praise, honour and glory given to God”. “Then,” Don Bosco added “our Fr Colletti spoke well when he said that the Oratory had done great things up till now, and I add that with God’s help and with the protection of Mary Help of Christians it will accomplish other things still. Other than Heaven’s help, what helps us and what will help us to do good is the very nature of our work. What we aim to do is looked upon well by everyone including those who do not share our idea of religion. If there is someone who creates obstacles for us we need to say that they either don’t know us or they do not know what is being done. Civil instruction, moral education of youth who are either abandoned, or at risk, removing them from idleness, wrongdoing, disgrace, and maybe even prison – this is what our work aims at. So what wise man, what civil authority could possibly stop us?

Recently, as you know, I went to Paris, and I spoke in various churches to plead the cause of our works and, let us put it in frank terms, to find money to give bread and soup to our boys who never lose their appetite. Now amongst the audience there were some who came only to get to know Don Bosco’s political thinking. Some even thought I had gone to Paris to stir up a revolution, others thought I was there to find people for a political party, and so on. There were some benevolent people who feared that someone would play some silly prank on me, but from the moment I began speaking all these weird ideas ceased along with their fears and Don Bosco was left free to go from one end of France to the other. No, truly, we do not engage in politics with our work. We respect constituted authority, we observe the laws that

have to be observed, we pay our taxes and we keep on going, asking only that they let us do good for poor youth and save souls. If you want, we also play politics but in an entirely innocent way, indeed to the advantage of any Government. Politics can be defined as the art and science of governing the State well. Now the work of the Oratory in Italy, France, Spain, America, in every country where it has been established, working especially to offer relief of those most needy young people, tends to lessen the number of vagabonds and unruly types. It tends to decrease the number of young wrongdoers and thieves. It tends to empty out the prisons. In a word it tends to form upright citizens who, far from causing grief to public authorities, help them to keep order, calm and peace in society. This is our politics. This is the only thing we have been concerned about up till now and which will be our concern in the future. It is precisely this approach that has allowed Don Bosco to do good firstly to you and then to so many other young people of every age and place. So why enter politics? With all our efforts what could we obtain? Nothing else, maybe than to make it impossible to carry out our work of charity. Political matters today are like a steam train charging along the rails dragging a wagon behind it, probably heading for a cliff and ruin.

Would you like to stand on the rails to stop it? You would be run over. Would you like to shout at it and scare it? It doesn't hear anything and you would go hoarse for nothing. So what do you do? Stand off to the side and let it go either until it stops of its own accord, or God stops it with his omnipotent hand. Certainly there must be those in the world who interest themselves in political matters, to give advice, to point out perils and the like, but this is not a task for us poor people. For us, religion and prudence tell us instead: Live as upright Christians, concern yourself with the moral education of your children, teach your children their catechism properly in [boarding] schools and parishes, and that's it.

This, I repeat, is Don Bosco's way of behaving. He is so non-political that he doesn't even read a newspaper. So let this be your way of behaving, my dear sons and you will have that great good that I want you to have, I mean harmony, peace in your families, prosperity in your temporal business affairs, a long life free of serious preoccupations and suffering, and especially the

best of all good things which is to persevere in God's grace and happiness in Paradise, where I hope that through the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ and through the intercession of Mary Most Holy we will one day find ourselves together again singing his eternal glory." ...

[Address to Past Pupil priests, 19 July 1883]

... Afterwards, everyone came to speak with Don Bosco, and barely overcoming his emotion, which almost forced him to choke his words, he expressed his great consolation at seeing so many of his beloved sons and zealous priests, and thanking them for the affection they continued to show him, he promised that for his part he would show his gratitude until death, praying for them and helping them in any way that was possible for him to do so.

Then he said how the Lord and the Blessed Virgin blesses the Oratory and its works, and then made some observations that we would particularly like to indicate.

He said that for some time people had been saying and the newspapers were publishing that Don Bosco had worked miracles. This was an error. Don Bosco had never claimed and had never said that he was working miracles; none of his sons should attempt to propagate this false notion. Let's be clear how things stand: Don Bosco prays and gets his boys to pray for people who are recommended to his prayers, to obtain this or some other grace, and God in his infinite kindness often grants the graces asked for, some of them being extraordinary and miraculous. But to tell the truth, Don Bosco has so little to do with it that often the graces are granted without him knowing anything about it.

Here he repeated what he had said on other occasions and added: "Our Lady Help of Christians: here is the miracle-worker, here is the worker of graces and miracles through the great power she has received from her Son Jesus. She knows that Don Bosco needs money to allow so many thousands of poor boys to eat, that these weigh on his shoulders; she knows that he is poor and that without material aid cannot carry on the work undertaken to the

advantage of religion and society, so what does Mary do? Like a good mother she goes looking, looking for those who are ill and says to them: do you want to be healed? Well then, be charitable to these poor boys, give a hand to these works and I will give you the grace of healing. She sees the desperation in a home where the child has gone off the rails and she says to the father or mother: do you want this unfortunate lad to leave his mistaken ways? Well then for your part do something to remove so many other poor abandoned children from danger to body and soul and I will see that your son receives help from healthy advice. So in order not to go on too long, Mary Help of Christians, in a thousand ways, consoles those who help the Oratory, and we can do no other than to make sure we are not unworthy of her protection.

And if Mary helps the Oratory children she will help you too, since you were once those children and can still claim to be so. Always live as good priests, as this old friend of yours taught you and encouraged you to be; be zealous for the salvation of souls who unfortunately may be lost; take special care of the young in your villages, for society's hope rests in them; remain united to the head of the Church, the Vicar of Jesus Christ; let us always love one another, pray for one another, and pray especially for your poor Don Bosco, who is getting ever closer to death, so that through the mercy of God we may all be saved, and save countless others as well."