

II. SPIRITUAL COUNSEL IN DON BOSCO'S LETTERS TO BOYS AND OLDER YOUTH

St John Bosco's correspondence mirrors his manifold activities as a promoter of educational and welfare type work, publishing and missionary enterprises. Also documented is the broad network of relationships he had built up. His letters are those of a man of action, the tireless organiser, avid communicator, religious founder and a passionate animator of Catholic initiatives. Little space is given to spiritual aspects which he prefers to deal with in preaching, personal talks or in the context of the Sacrament of Penance.

But there is no lack of letters, brief though they may be, with spiritual input and valuable counsel, and from these emerges the wisdom and experience of someone who is forming souls.

Here we find an example set of correspondence, addressed to boys and young men, with suggestions and some small life programmes that echo the characteristic features of his spiritual teaching, all aimed at practical Christian living filled with good work and virtuosity.

185. To Stefano Rossetti

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 500-501.

Sant'Ignazio presso Lanzo, 25 July 1860

My beloved son,

The letter you wrote me truly gave me pleasure. You have really shown by this that you have understood how I feel about you. Yes, my good friend, I love you with all my heart, and this love urges me to do whatever I can to help you progress in your studies and in piety and guide you on the way to Heaven. Call to mind the advice I have given you at various times; be cheerful, but let this cheerfulness be truly that of a conscience free from sin. Try to become wealthy - but in terms of virtue, and the greatest wealth is a holy fear of God. Keep away from bad boys and be friends with good ones; place yourself in the hands of your parish priest (arch priest) and follow his advice, and all will go well.

Greet your parents on my behalf; pray for me, and while God is keeping you some distance from me, I pray that he will always keep you as one of his own until you return to us. Meanwhile, I am yours in fatherly affection.

Fr John Bosco.

186. To Severino Rostagno

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 423.

Turin, 5 September 1860

Beloved son,

Your letter brought me much pleasure. If you found great consolation in the brief time we were together for a chat, what joy will it not be for us when, God-willing, we will be forever blessed in heaven where we will praise our Creator for eternity with one voice?

So courage my son, remain firm in faith, and grow each day in the holy fear of God. Keep away from bad companions as you would from poisonous snakes. Go to the sacraments of confession and communion. Be devoted to Mary and you will certainly be holy.

When I saw you I seemed to have an inkling of Divine Providence's plans for you. I will not tell you this yet, but if you come another time and see me I will speak more clearly and you will know the reasons for certain things said then.

May the Lord give you and your mother health and grace; and pray for me, who loves you dearly,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco.

187. To Giovanni Garino

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 144.

Calliano, 10 October 1860 [?]

My dear Garino,

I received your letter with much pleasure and I am delighted that you want so much to be good so you can become an excellent ecclesiastic. I will do everything I can for my part; but I also need you to do something. What is it? Unlimited confidence in everything regarding the good of your soul. I need you to go out and catch souls, but afraid that you might instead be caught by others I suggest that you simply make yourself a model for your companions in doing good. Moreover you will be greatly fortunate if you can do some good or prevent some wrong amongst your companions.

Love me as I love you in the Lord, and pray for me, since I am yours with all my heart,

Yours affectionately,

Fr John Bosco

188. To Emanuele Fassati

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 459-460.

Turin, 8 September 1861

Dear Emanuele,

While you are enjoying the countryside with good Stanislao, I am arriving along with your mother to visit you by means of this note that I should write to you.

My idea is to put a plan to you; so listen up. Your age and your preparation would seem to be adequate enough for you to be admitted to Holy Communion. So I would like next Easter to be the great day for your First Holy Communion. What do you say about that, dear Emanuele? Try to talk to your parents about it and hear what they have to say. But I would like you

to start now to prepare yourself and therefore be especially exemplary in the following:

1. Exact obedience to your parents and your superiors, not complaining about anything they ask you to do.
2. Fulfilment of all your duties, especially at school, without complaining about them.
3. Have great regard for your devotions. So make the sign of the cross well, kneel up straight and pray, and be exemplary at church.

I would be very happy to hear your answer regarding these proposals. Please greet Azeglia and Stanislao for me. Always be happy in the Lord. May God bless you all; pray for me, especially you, dear Emanuele, and honour me by your good behaviour. I am always your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

189. To the boys at the Oratory

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 694.

From the Sanctuary of Oropa (Biella), 6 August 1863

My dear students,

If you could find yourself on the top of this mountain, dear boys, you would certainly be moved by the experience. There is a large building with a church at the heart of it, and together they make up what is commonly known as the Sanctuary of Oropa. There is a constant coming and going of people here. Some are thanking the Virgin for graces she obtained for them; others are asking to be freed from some spiritual or temporal evil; while others are praying to the Virgin to help them persevere in doing good, and asking for a holy death. There are young and old, rich and poor, farmers and gentlemen, Knights, Counts, Marquises, workers, merchants, men, women, farmhands, students of all kinds can be seen in great numbers going to the sacraments of confession and communion then going to the foot of a huge statue of Our Lady to ask for her heavenly help.

But in the midst of so many people I have one great regret. What is this? I could not see my own dear students. Ah! Yes. Why can't I have my boys here, take them to Mary's feet, offer them to her, put them under her powerful protection, make them all like Dominic Savio and also St Aloysius?

To give my heart some comfort I went before her special altar and I promised that once I got back to Turin I would do what I could to encourage devotion to Mary in you and while recommending you all to her I asked for these special graces for you. Mary, I said to her, bless all our house, keep even the least shadow of sin away from our boys; be a guide for our students; be the true seat of wisdom for them. Let them be all yours, always yours, and keep them as your sons, keep them amongst your devotees. I believe that the Holy Virgin will have heard my prayer and I hope you will give me a hand so we can correspond to Mary's voice, and to God's grace.

May the Holy Virgin Mary bless me, bless all our priests and clerics and all those who are working in our house. May she bless you all. She helps us from heaven so let us make every effort to deserve her holy protection in life and in death. *Amen.*

Your affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco.

190. To Emanuele Fassati

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 607.

From your village at Montemagno – 1 October 1863

Dear Emanuele,

Before I leave, dear Emanuele, listen to two words from a friend of your soul.

Since you will have arrived at the College which your parents have prudently chosen for you, try to put this advice into practice:

1. Have great confidence in your superiors.
2. See that you put the advice of your confessor into practice.
3. Avoid idleness and companions whom you

happen to hear speaking improperly. 4. Pray to the holy Virgin every day that she may allow anything to happen to you except falling into sin.

May God bless you and keep you in health and grace until we see each other again in August 1864, if we are still alive. *Amen.*

Your affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco.

191. To the pupils at Mirabello

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 629-630.

Turin, 30 December 1863

To my beloved boys at the Junior Seminary of St Charles in Mirabello.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us. *Amen.*

The signs of filial affection you showed me, dear boys, when I had the pleasure of visiting you, made me resolve to visit you again over these days of festivity and best wishes. But now that my special work is preventing me from doing that, I restrict myself to writing you a letter to manifest some of the thoughts of my fatherly heart.

But first of all I want to thank you for what you have done for me, the greetings you have sent me, the prayers lifted up to God for the good of my soul. I also thank you for the affection you have shown Fr Rua and the other superiors at the Seminary. Since I was with you and often went to see what kind of spirit you had, I believe it might be good to tell you what I observed in particular (I will write some separate notes on this) and in general.

To my real satisfaction I observed more people frequenting the holy sacraments of confession and communion, more devout behaviour in church and prayer, especially in the evening, more charity in putting up with your companions and a real effort by many to do better in their studies, fight vices and bad temptations. I observed all this with great pleasure, but do allow me to tell you that I also saw many things which made me sad.

I saw some going to church without giving any sign that they were entering a holy place; listening to the sermon (and there was more than just a few) but constantly distracted and without taking away something to put into practice for the good of their soul. I saw a few others begin their prayers but then get to the end without having any idea what they had said and mostly not even opening their mouths. I found others pushing and shoving, and others who because they could not take revenge were getting their bile and hatred up for the ones they didn't like.

Then there were a few who were escaping from hard work like it was an enormous boulder hanging over their heads. But what saddened me most were the ones trying to introduce ideas and topics that St Paul did not want Christians even to mention. Then there were a few others, very few, who, well, what can I say? They approached the holy sacraments unworthily.

These, my beloved boys, are the things I noted about how things are going at the junior seminary at Mirabello. Do you think maybe I am writing these things as a reprimand? No, I am writing only to advise you so that the good ones can be encouraged to persevere, the lukewarm ones can be encouraged to fire up a bit with the love of God and whoever needs to can get out of the situation he finds himself in. I have many things to write to you about this but I will reserve them until my next visit. Let me tell you what the Lord God wants from you during this year for you to deserve his blessings.

1. Avoid idleness, and be very diligent in fulfilling your religious and school duties. Idleness is the father of all vices.

2. Frequent communion. What a great truth this is that I am telling you at the moment. Frequent communion is the great column which supports the moral and material world to stop it falling into ruin.

3. Devotion and frequent recourse to Mary Most Holy. It has never been known anywhere in the world that someone who has trusting recourse to this heavenly mother is not promptly heard.

Believe me my dear boys, I believe I am not saying too much if I state that frequent communion is the great column that one pole of the world balances

on; devotion to the Madonna is the other column on which the other pole balances. So I tell Fr Rua, the other superiors, teachers, assistants, and all the boys to recommend, practice, preach, insist with all the efforts of the love of Jesus Christ that you never forget these three reminders I am sending you for the greater glory of God and the good of your souls which are so dear to Our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

While I assure you that every day I recommend you to the Lord at Holy Mass, I also recommend my soul to the charity of your prayers. All the boys in this house also recommend themselves to your prayers and wish you every blessing from heaven. May the holy Virgin preserve you as her own, always. *Amen.*

Yours most affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco.

192. To Fr Michael Rua, the Salesians and the boys at Mirabello

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 57.

Turin, 19 June 1864

To Fr Michael Rua and all my dear sons at Mirabello.

Dear Fr Rua, and all my beloved sons at Mirabello, I know you are waiting for me for [the feast of] St Aloysius. And you can easily imagine how great would be my pleasure in being able to satisfy you. But I have some ongoing business matters that are absolutely going to prevent me from coming. Amongst other things they are digging the foundations for the new church and that needs constant assistance for the modifications that might be needed at any moment to adjust the boundaries. So we shall have to put off this pleasure until the first fortnight in July and then we can chat, laugh and joke and have a nice celebration [*brindisi*] together.

Just the same I would like to celebrate St Aloysius here with you. The 21st here will not be solemn since we have shifted the Solemnity to the 29th of

this month. So I can celebrate Mass for my beloved Mirabellians. So let's come together in the spirit of the Lord and ask St Aloysius for three things:

1. Health and grace so you can prepare well for the exams and that way your holidays can be more enjoyable.

2. Imitating St Aloysius in his good example especially in avoiding improper talk.

3. That Fr Rua on my account will make you happy first in church, then at dinner and finally with a nice outing. If you celebrate St Aloysius like this we will all be happy.

Of course I love you all in the Lord and few hours of the day go by when I do not 'visit' you and think about you. Let us love one another, but love one another to serve the Lord throughout our life so we can enjoy him in eternity.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us. Amen.

With all my affection, I am,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr J. Bosco

P.S. Greetings to your mother, subdeacon Franceschino, Fr Bonetti and all the Provera family. Amen.

193. To the pupils at Mirabello

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 58-59.

[Turin, beginning of July 1864]

To my dear boys at Mirabello.

I have delayed, dear boys, in visiting you as I had promised, but what saddens me is that I could not even come to celebrate the Feast of St Aloysius. I am now looking for a way of making up for this delay by staying longer with you. God willing, I will be at Mirabello late on Tuesday evening. But why warn you? Wouldn't it be enough just to come as I usually do? No, my

dear friends, it would not be enough. I need to speak to you in public to tell you some things that I know you will like, then to speak privately of less pleasurable matters, but which are necessary for you to know. Then I would like to offer a word in the ear to some of you to break the horns of the devil who wants to become your master and owner. Here I add a note that in a visit made recently, I was able to offer some warnings for those who had special need of them and I ask Fr Director to tell them for me that I seriously need to speak to their soul, heart, conscience, but this need of mine is only so I can do good for their souls.

I also tell you that in the frequent visits I make, I have seen things that give me much consolation; especially those who are exemplary in going to holy communion and in doing their duties. I have also noted minor carelessness by some, but I do not want to make too much of this.

Do not be too worried about all of this: I am coming amongst you as a father, friend and brother; just put your heart in my hands for a while and we will all be happy. Be happy for the peace and grace of the Lord which your soul will certainly be filled with; and I am happy that I will have the great and much-desired consolation of seeing you all friends of God your Creator.

So is all this about the soul and nothing for the body? For sure, once we have given the soul what it needs we will not leave the body without anything. Right now I am recommending Fr Prefect to give the right orders so you can spend a nice day and if time allows to also go on an outing together.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always be with you and may the Holy Virgin make you all rich with the true richness which is the holy fear of God. Amen.

Pray for me. With all my heart I am,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

P.S. Special greetings to the priests, teachers, assistants and the Provera family, especially to dear papa.

194. To Annetta Pelazza

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 60.

Turin, 20 July [1864]

My precious young Annetta Pelazza,

1. Obedience is your sure path to Heaven.
2. To carry out the idea you sometimes are thinking about (you have not told me but I seem to see it in your mind: to become a Sister) put yourself entirely into the hands of your good superiors.
3. When you need something go and ask Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Immaculate, and you will be heard.

May God bless you and grant that you all may progress along the way that leads to the salvation of your soul.

Pray for me,

Your humble servant in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

195. To Fr Michael Rua and the pupils at Mirabello

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 97-98.

Turin, 30 December 1864

To my dear boys at Mirabello.

The kindness and signs of filial affection you showed me when I had the beautiful pleasure of visiting you, the letters, greetings that some of you have sent me and which I preserve as grateful memory, encourage me to return as soon as possible and spend some time with you, my dear and beloved boys. Up till now I have not been able to satisfy this desire of mine, but I will shortly. Meanwhile to satisfy the affections of my heart in some way, I thought of writing you a letter that can be a messenger for my arrival there.

But what good is a letter to say the many things I would like to say? I will just keep things brief.

So let me say that I want to thank you for all the signs of kindness shown me and the confidence you showed me on that beautiful day I spent at Mirabello. The voices, the liveliness, the kissing and shaking my hand, the warm smiles, our speaking about matters of the soul, the mutual encouragement to do good are all balm for my heart and there is little I can think of in this that does not move me to tears.

I often have you in my thoughts and I enjoy seeing the good number of you that go to holy communion; but if they don't do better I'd like to have a sharp word with Prot, Maggiore, Pernigotti, Cigorza ... the names escape me; let me say no more.

I also tell you that you are the apple of my eye and that every day I remember you at Holy Mass; I ask God to keep you healthy, in his grace, make progress in learning, and that you may be able to be the consolation of your parents and Don Bosco's delight. He loves you so much.

What will Don Bosco give you as a Strenna (New Year's gift)? Three very important things: a warning, a piece of advice and a means.

A warning. My dear friends, flee every sin of immodesty; deeds, thoughts, looks, desires, words, conversations against the sixth commandment should never, as St Paul says, even be mentioned amongst you.

A piece of advice. Jealously guard the most beautiful, sublime queen of all virtues, the holy virtue of purity.

A means. The most effective means for holding down and overcoming the enemy with certainty and ensuring you preserve this virtue is frequent communion, but made with the right attitude.

Here I would like to say more things to you which are not for a letter; I merely recommend to Fr Rua that he be good enough to give you no fewer than three brief instructions or reflections on each of the topics mentioned.

Finally, dear friends, let me tell you I have great affection for you and desire so much to see you. That will be soon. I want you all to give me your heart so that every day I can offer it to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament while I am saying Mass. I am coming to see you with the great desire of speaking to each one about matters of your soul and to tell each of you three things; one about the past; one about the present; and the third about the future.

May the Holy Virgin keep you as her own always and may the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always be with us. Amen.

Long live my dear boys at Mirabello.

Your affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco.

P.S. Courage, patience and tolerance are my wishes for your director, prefect, teachers, assistants, domestics, dear papà Provera and all his family, Mamma Rua and my little friend Meliga, Chiastellardo, dear Ossella who wrote me a beautiful letter etc.

196. To Gregorio Cavalchini Garofoli

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 252.

Turin, 1 June 1866

My dear Gregorio Garofoli,

I was very pleased to receive your letter and I gave your news to the boys who were part of the caravan at Tortona. They were delighted and gave me the pleasant task of thanking you and greeting you. I would certainly like to speak with you at some length, but the things I would like to tell you cannot be entrusted to a letter. If you would like to you can visit me next holidays and I will tell you what I would like to be writing.

As a friend of your soul, I can but give you certain basic reminders. There are three of them, three 'F's. They are:

1. Flee from idleness.

2. Flee companions who indulge in immoral conversations or give you bad advice.

3. Fervent and frequent Confession and Communion.

Please greet your two brothers for me, Emanuele Callori and other Piedmontese there whom you have made known to me. May God bless you and keep you in his holy grace. Pray for me.

I am yours affectionately in the Lord,

Fr John Bosco

197. To the pupils at Mirabello

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 279-281.

Turin, 26 July 1866

To my dear boys at Mirabello.

I had decided to come to you next Sunday, then suddenly demanding reasons have forced otherwise. I am very sorry about this. I had already set my mind on what I wanted to tell you. Patience, God wants us to hold our consolation until after the holidays so then I hope to spend not one day but a week with you.

Meanwhile I think I should wish you happy holidays with some fatherly advice that I feel is necessary for your souls.

1. I thank your director, prefect, teachers, assistants and all the others at the junior seminary for all their courtesies, patience shown me and the prayers for my poor soul. Continue, dear boys; I assure you that I pray for you every day in my Holy Mass.

2. Before leaving each one should clean his conscience with the firm resolution to keep it that way until the return from the holidays, for the week or day established for returning. Don't allow yourself to stay at home for some frivolous reason beyond the established time, unless it is your health that does not allow you to return.

3. Once you arrive home immediately greet your parents, parish priest, teachers and others you should greet on my behalf and on behalf of your superiors. This is a strict duty of gratitude which will please others and will also benefit you.

4. At home make your usual meditation, go to mass, do some daily reading as you do at college. Be just as regular with confession and communion.

5. Let it be seen by your behaviour with the family that your year at school was not wasted; be models for your relatives and friends in the virtue of obedience, charitably put up with others, make no demands in food, rest, clothing and the like.

6. Let it never be said that you got involved in improper talk or even only listened to such. If you hear someone doing this, imitate our protector St Aloysius: either reprimand the one doing it or immediately leave such a dangerous friend.

7. Try to recount some deed, some example you have read, heard, studied to those who want to listen to you; or read a good book, but avoid bad books as being deadly poison for your souls.

Certainly, my dear boys, there are many other things I would say to you if a brief letter would allow me. I can certainly tell you that when you go elsewhere you will find people who are more learned and far more virtuous than me, but it will be difficult to find someone who seeks what is good for you more than I do.

So remember me each morning when you hear Mass. For my part I will not fail to remember you each day as I am celebrating it. What a great consolation for me, what great fortune for you if you go home and return without losing the Lord's grace! Make sure you rest, be happy, laugh, sing, go for walks and do whatever you like, so long as you do not commit sin.

Happy holidays, my dear boys, and happy return as well. May the Lord's blessing accompany you at every step.

The director of classes will get you to read and also copy this letter for whoever wishes to.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always be with us and may the Holy Virgin Mary assist and help us to persevere on the way to heaven. *Amen.*

Believe that I am always, with fatherly affection, completely yours in the Lord,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco.

198. To the pupils at Lanzo Torinese

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

Turin, 26 July 1867

Dear boys at the College in Lanzo,

I have put off writing to you until now, dear boys, because I thought I could personally speak with you before the holidays. But now I see that the demands of my work are going to deprive me of this pleasure, which I will try to satisfy through the pen.

Let me tell you that I am grateful for the offering you made for the church of Mary Help of Christians and the dear letters that you have been pleased to write to me. You cannot imagine how much pleasure it has given me to read each one and it felt I was speaking with each one of you. While reading, my heart was giving the answer that it was not possible to give in writing to each one of you.

Be convinced my dear boys that you have written some beautiful thoughts, but these thoughts find echo in my heart and I hope that your heart and mine will be one in loving and serving the Lord. So be blessed and thanked for your charity and the kindness you have shown me.

Meanwhile, since the holidays are approaching, I would like to farewell you with some friendly words.

1. As much as possible, come back on the day that classes are due to recommence, which I believe is the 16th of August; unless some illness prevents you.

2. Greet your family, parish priest, teachers on my behalf.

3. If you find a virtuous companion in your village try to get him to come back to college with you; for those who don't seem so good do not talk to them about coming to college.

4. While you are at home at least go to communion on Sundays. During the week do not omit your meditation every morning.

5. Every morning say an *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary* with a *Glory be* to the Blessed Sacrament so you can join with me as I pray for you every day at Holy Mass that none of you become a victim of cholera which is having a terrible impact on nearby towns. And regarding this terrible disease I would advise that if it is in your town do not go there for holidays, so that you do not endanger your life unnecessarily.

Pray to God for me, dear boys and let us pray for one another that we can avoid offending the Lord during our life and be together one day to praise, bless and glory the divine mercies in heaven. *Amen.*

Your affectionate friend, father, brother,

Fr John Bosco

P.S. Long live the Director, Prefect, Teachers, Assistants and all my dear sons at Lanzo.

199. To Giovanni Turco

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 445.

Turin, 23 October 1867

My dear Turco,

Your letter gave me much pleasure and was so much the more pleasing in that you spoke to me with our old confidence, and this for Don Bosco is the dearest thing in the world.

Looking at your letter from just one point of view I thank the Lord that during the most difficult years of your life he helped you to maintain the

healthy principles of religion. One could say that the difficult age has passed and that the more you progress in years, the more will the illusions man has about this world vanish and you will be more confirmed than ever in what you have told me - that only religion is steady and can always and in any age make man happy now and in eternity.

With that bit of philosophy behind us I advise you to continue on with your work as a surveyor, and practising your religion especially with frequent confession which is a true balm for you; but do everything possible to be with and console your good father in his current old age which, thanks be to God, seems to be going well.

As I have always prayed for you at Holy Mass in the past, I will do so even more gladly now in the future because you have asked me to. You will also pray for me, that's right isn't it?

I have some nice books to be translated from French. Would you translate some for me? They are to be printed in the *Catholic Readings*.

I will always find consolation when you write to me.

May God bless you and your father and keep you both *ad multos annos* with a happy life.

Fr Francesca, Fr Lazzero, Chiapale and many other of your friends greet you. I will always be, in the Lord,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

200. To Luigi Vaccaneo

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 458.

Turin, 11 December 1867

My dear Vaccaneo,

I received your letter and you gave me pleasure by writing to me; I will not fail to pray to the Lord for you at Holy Mass. You pray for me too.

For now God does not want us to live under the same roof; who knows what will happen at another time? May everything be for his greater glory.

There are three things I recommend to you: attention to meditation in the morning; going with more prayerful companions; temperance in eating.

May God bless you and all my boys from the Oratory who are with you; greet them for me, and pray for me. I am with all my heart,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

**201. To Fr Joseph Lazzero and the trade boys'
community at Valdocco**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, p. 208.

Rome, 20 January 1874

My dear Fr Lazzero and dear boys,

Although I have written a letter to all my beloved boys at the Oratory, because the trade students are the apple of my eye, and since I have asked the Holy Father for a special blessing for them, I would like to please you and satisfy my own heart by writing to you.

There is no need to tell you how much affection I have for you. I have given you clear proof of that. Nor do I need you to tell me of your love for me, because you have shown that so often. But what is our mutual affections based on? On money? Not mine, because I spend it on you; not yours because (and don't be offended) you have none. So my affection is based on the desire I have to save your souls. You were all redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and you love me because I try to lead you along the path to eternal salvation. So the good of our souls is the basis of our affection.

But, my dear boys, does each of us really behave in a way that leads to saving our souls, or rather to losing them?

If our Divine Saviour would call each of us at this moment to his divine tribunal to be judged would he find us all ready? Resolutions made and never

kept; scandals committed and not amended for; conversations which teach bad things to others are all things we should fear reproach for.

However while Jesus Christ could rightly reproach us for these, I am convinced that many will present themselves with a clean conscience and with their state of soul well-adjusted, and this is my consolation. At any rate my dear friends, take courage; I will not cease praying for you, working for you, thinking of you. Help me with your good will.

Put into practice St Paul's words which I translate here for you: persuade the younger men to be moderate, never forget that it has been established that all must die and that after death we must all present ourselves before the law court of Jesus. Whoever does not suffer with Jesus Christ on earth cannot be crowned with glory with him in Heaven. Flee sin as your greatest enemy, and flee the source of sin, the immoral talk which is the ruin of good behaviour. Give one another good example in what you do and say, etc. etc.

Fr Lazzerio can tell you the rest. Meanwhile my dear friends, I recommend myself to your charity. Pray for me especially, and for members of the St Joseph Sodality. May the most fervent amongst you make a holy Communion for my intentions.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always and help us persevere in doing good until death. Amen.

Your affectionate friend,

Fr J. Bosco

202. To the Salesians and pupils at Lanzo Torinese

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 385-386.

Turin, vigil of the Epiphany [5 January] 1875

To my dear boys, the director, teachers, assistants, prefect, catechist, pupils and others at the college in Lanzo.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always remain with us. *Amen.*

Up until now, my beloved boys, I have not been able to satisfy the keen desire of my heart to visit you. An uninterrupted series of complicated affairs and some minor health problems, have prevented this.

Just the same I want to say something that you will find it hard to believe: many times a day I think of you and every morning at Holy Mass I pray for each of you in particular to the Lord. For your part you also give clear signs that you remember me.

Oh! What pleasure it gave me to read your greetings; with what pleasure I read the name, surname of each pupil, each class, from the first to the last at the college. I seemed to be in your midst and in my heart I often said: *Long live my boys at Lanzo!*

I begin then by thanking you all from my heart for the Christian and filial greetings you sent me and I ask God to bless you a hundredfold, you and all your relatives and friends. Yes. May God give you all many years of happy life.

But since I want to give you a particular greeting I ask heaven to give you health, study, good behaviour.

Health. This is a precious gift from heaven so look after it. Beware of excess, perspiring too much, getting overtired, moving too quickly from hot to cold. These are the ordinary sources of illness.

Study. You are in college to learn things with which in due time you can earn a living. Whatever be your situation, your vocation, your future state you ought to act in such a way that should you no longer receive support from home, you can still be able to earn an honest crust. Let it never be said that we live off others' sweat.

Good behaviour. The bond that holds health and study together, the platform on which they are based, is good morals. Believe me my dear boys, I am telling you a great truth. If you maintain good moral conduct you will progress in studies, in health; you will be loved by your superiors, your companions, relatives, friends, patriotic people, and if you want me to say so, you will be loved and respected even by wrong-doers. Everyone will compete to have you with them, praise you, be good to you. But give me people who

do not have good morals - oh what an ugly thing. They will be lazy and they will be known as donkeys. They will use improper language and will be known as scandalous types to be kept away from. If they are known at college everyone dislikes them and sings a *Te Deum* on the happy day they return home. And at home? Generally despised. The family and town dislike them, no one supports them, everyone avoids their company. Their soul? Alive they are unhappy, and when they die since all they have sown is bad they only have sad fruits to reap.

So courage, dear boys, look for and try to study, preserve and promote three great treasures: health, study, good morals.

One more thing. I hear a voice from afar crying out: "O young man, O pupil at Lanzo, come and save us!" These are the voices of so many souls looking for a kindly hand, one which will pull them back from the brink of perdition and set them on the way to salvation. I am telling you this because a few of you are called to a sacred career of winning over souls.

Take courage; there are many of them waiting for you. Remember St Augustine's words: "*Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti.*"

Finally, boys, I recommend your director to you. I know that his health is not so good; pray for him, console him with your good behaviour, be good to him, be boundless in your confidence in him. These will be of great comfort to him and of great benefit to yourselves.

While I assure you that every day I pray for you at Holy Mass, I recommend myself to your good prayers also, so that I may not have the misfortune of preaching to save others and then lose my own poor soul. *Ne cum aliis praedicaverim, ipse reprobus efficiar* [1Cor 9,27].

May God bless you all. I am, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

N.B. Fr Director is asked to explain these things in case they are not well understood.

203. To young seminarian Antonio Massara

ASC A1720724 *Copie semplici*; ed. in E III, p. 390.

Turin, 26 September 1878

My dear friend in Jesus Christ,

Your neat writing shows your good will and invites me to speak to you with confidence. God is great, God is merciful. We sometimes do not think about him, but he thinks about us and when he sees us running away he places his hands on our shoulders and stops us to bring us back to him. Is that not true? May the Lord be blessed in everything and his decrees adored. When your health allows you to take up your studies again, I will not be far from advising you to push on ahead as far as priesthood. If you would like a life in common and would like to come with me, I will list you amongst my dear and beloved sons.

Meanwhile prayer, work, mortification, frequent confession and communion, will help you conquer the old enemy of your soul. Other matters cannot be entrusted to a letter.

Goodbye my dear friend and may God bless you.

Pray for me, your ever affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,

Fr John Bosco

204. To Fr Giovanni Branda and the trade school boys at Valdocco

ASC A000206 *Cronichetta 1878-1879*, Quad. 14, ms by Giulio Barberis, pp. 104-106;
ed. in E III, pp. 435-436.

Marseilles January 1879

My dear Fr Branda,

I am always thinking of my poor working boys and praying for them. If only I could visit them I would be amongst them to speak with and console them often during the day. But I would like to demonstrate with deeds that

I remember them in a special way. So tell them that the greetings they gave me at Christmas and New Year were very pleasing and I thank them with all my heart. I have heard good news about them and I bless the Lord who gives them good will and the grace to be virtuous.

I find myself here in the house in Lyon where there are already around sixty boys who little by little will become true followers of the working boys at the Oratory. Indeed some of them have shown that they are committed to being better than them in obedience and piety. I have told them that they won't succeed! Let's see!

Meanwhile tell everyone that I heartily recommend that they go frequently to confession and communion; but let both these sacraments be received with due dispositions so that each time we can see progress in some virtue. God willing I could say that every working boy is a model and good example to the others! That depends on you my dear boys, to give me this great consolation.

I know that you pray for me and I attribute the improvement in my sight to your prayers; continue them. I thank you and may God reward you.

The gift that I ask is a holy communion for my intentions.

May God bless you, dear Fr Branda, bless all the assistants, workers, all the boys and grant them the great grace of being one heart and soul in loving and serving God on earth and then one day being able to praise and enjoy him forever in heaven.

I am, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

205. To pupils in 4th and 5th secondary at Borgo San Martino

ASC A1920601 *Copie semplici*; ed. in E III, pp. 476-477.

Turin, 17 June 1879

My dear sons,

I would have liked to have replied before now to some of the letters written by your dear teacher and some of you. Not being able to do so for each one in particular, I am writing a letter to you all, reserving the opportunity to speak to each one privately on the coming feast of St Aloysius.

You know then that men in this world must walk on the path to Heaven in one of two states: ecclesiastical or secular. For the secular state each one must choose the studies, employment, profession that allows him to fulfil his duties as a good Christian and which will also please his parents. For the ecclesiastical state we have to follow the rules established by our Divine Saviour: renouncing comfort, worldly glory, earthly enjoyment to give oneself to God's service, and so assure oneself of the everlasting joys of Heaven.

In making this choice each one should listen to the opinion of his confessor and then without worrying either about superiors or inferiors, parents or friends, resolve to do what will facilitate the way to salvation and console you most at the moment of your death. The young man who enters the ecclesiastical state with this intention, has the moral certainty of doing great good to his own soul and the soul of his neighbour.

In the ecclesiastical state there are many branches which spread out from one point and tend to the same centre, who is God. Secular priest, religious priest, priest in the foreign missions are three fields in which labourers of the Gospel are called to work and promote the glory of God. One must choose what one has most at heart, most adapted to one's physical and moral strength, accepting advice from pious, learned and prudent people.

At this point I should deal with the many difficulties that refer to the world that would like to have all young people at its service, while God would like them all for himself. Nevertheless I will try to respond verbally or better

explain the difficulties which each one could face in making one of these very important decisions.

The basis of a happy life for a young man is frequent communion and reading the prayer to Mary Most Holy every Saturday, for his state in life, as described in *The Companion of Youth*.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with you and grant you the precious gift of persevering in doing good. I recommend you to the Lord every day. Please pray for me.

I am affectionately yours in Jesus Christ.

Fr John Bosco