

III. SODALITIES AND SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIPS

Christian education of youth in popular works with a markedly missionary character like the Oratories on the outskirts of Turin, frequented by boys who were mostly abandoned and uneducated, required processes that were gradual and geared to each one's possibilities. The Companion of Youth offered a complete but essential proposal adapted to everyone. Starting with this, Don Bosco used the sacrament of penance, personal chats, suggestions of optional and practical devotions and offered books to read and meditate on. He set up personalised processes which were more adapted to youngsters who were more capable of greater moral and ascetic effort.

Mindful of his fruitful experiences as a boy, like the Society for a Good Time, which he had led while he was attending school in Chieri, he was concerned with promoting amongst the boys at the Oratory and house an organised set of sodalities and free friendly societies with a clear spiritual and apostolic purpose, to encourage amongst the more sensitive and well-disposed boys to develop a holistic and virtuous Christian lifestyle, guiding them to act as a leaven in their youthful community.

The founding of the St Aloysius Sodality (April 12, 1847) was the result of a process of consolidation of the festive Oratory and testifies to a shift towards a more systematic formation aimed at "encouraging piety through stable and uniform practice", and encouraging members "to give good example in and outside of church; avoid improper conversations and frequent the sacraments."¹²

The Immaculate Conception Sodality, which came into being through Dominic Savio's initiative with some of his friends in June 1856¹³, is a further development of Don Bosco's spiritual proposal. It was made up of a choice group of young students in view of a vocation to priesthood and decidedly leaning towards Christian perfection and apostolic activity amongst their companions. This

¹² Giovanni BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*. Introductory essay and historical notes by Aldo Giraud. Roma, LAS 2011, p. 170.

¹³ Giovanni BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in ID., *Vite di giovani. Le biografie di Domenico Savio, Michele Magone e Francesco Besucce*. Introductory essay and historical notes by Aldo Giraud. Roma, LAS 2012, pp. 78-81.

Sodality's regulations contain "an entire programme of spiritual pedagogy perfectly in tune with the Regulations for the students of the house."¹⁴

The ever clearer awareness of the centrality of the Eucharist for nurturing interior life inspired the founding of the Blessed Sacrament Sodality (1858). Later on the St Joseph Sodality (1859) came into being to nurture devotion and spiritual commitment amongst the trade students and the working boys and to foster Salesian lay vocations.

Don Bosco's best disciples were forged in these spiritual 'upper rooms' which were true "schools of practical faith and charity."¹⁵

From the regulations of the St Aloysius Gonzaga, Immaculate Conception and Blessed Sacrament Sodalities included here, it is possible to see the moral and spiritual quality of Don Bosco's educational approach and the fervent atmosphere that he was able to infuse amongst his boys.

206. St Aloysius Gonzaga Sodality (12 April 1847)

ASC A2300201 *Compagnia di S. Aloysius. Regolamento*, ms by another hand, with authentic corrections by Don Bosco (cf. MB III, 216-220).

The aim of this sodality is to engage young people in practising the main virtues that stood out most in this Saint. Therefore before joining, each one will have a month's trial to carefully think about the requirements and will not go ahead unless he feels he can fulfil them.

Requirements

1. St Aloysius was a model of exemplary conduct; therefore, all who want to become members of his Sodality must follow his example. They must behave in such a manner as not only to avoid giving any kind of scandal, but also to strive constantly to set a good example everywhere but especially in church. When St Aloysius went to church, people flocked to see his modest demeanour and his recollection.

¹⁴ P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani...*, I, p. 330.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

2. Endeavour to go to confession and communion every two weeks or even more frequently, especially on solemn feast days. These Sacraments are the weapons by which we triumph over the devil. As a young boy, St Aloysius received them every week, and as he grew older, more often. Any member unable to fulfil this obligation may substitute some other act of devotion, with his superior's advice.

3. Flee from bad companions as from a plague, and be very careful to avoid improper conversation. St Aloysius not only shunned such talk, but showed such modesty that no one even dared to utter an unseemly word in his presence.

4. Practice the greatest charity toward your companions, readily forgiving any offence. St Aloysius repaid insults with friendship.

5. Be very committed to keeping good order at the Oratory. Urge others to practise virtue and join this sodality. St Aloysius, out of love for others, volunteered to nurse the victims of a plague, and thereby sacrificed his own life.

6. When a member falls sick, all the others should pray for him and also give him material assistance according to their means .

7. Be very diligent in your work and in the fulfilment of your other duties. Promptly obey your parents and superiors.

207. Immaculate Conception Sodality

ASC E452 *Compagnia dell'Immacolata*, ms by Giuseppe Bongioanni with Don Bosco's own notes (cf. MB V, 479-483)¹⁶.

We, Joseph Rocchietti, Louis Marcellino, John Bonetti, Francis Vaschetti, Celestine Durando, Joseph Momo, Dominic Savio, Joseph Bongioanni, Michael Rua, John Cagliero, after receiving the sacraments of Confession and

¹⁶ These regulations, with certain variants, were published by Don Bosco in his *Life of Dominic Savio*, cf. Giovanni BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell'Oratorio di san Francesco di Sales*. Torino, Tip. G. B. Paravia e Comp. 1859, pp. 76-83 (OE XI, 226-233).

Communion, this day, June 8th [1856], give ourselves completely to Mary Immaculate and promise to work unceasingly for her and with her: to help ourselves to do this and to maintain our love for her we, here before her altar, solemnly promise, in agreement with our spiritual director, to follow in Louis Comollo's footsteps to the best of our ability. Here we bind ourselves as follows:

1. To carry out with the greatest exactness the rules of the house;
2. To help and encourage our companions: helping them by pointing out in a friendly way whatever needs correcting; encouraging them to do good through our words but especially through our good example;
3. To always be busy, making strict use of our time.

To make it possible to be faithful to these obligations and to help us to persevere in them, we submit the following rules to our spiritual director for his approval.

Charity makes us perfect, but only by obedience and chastity can we acquire this state that brings us close to God.

1. Our first rule therefore is to be perfectly obedient to our superiors and submit ourselves to them with boundless confidence.
2. The carrying out of our duties will be our first and special concern, and this will be preferred to those religious practices which we are not obliged to observe.
3. A true spirit of charity will unite the members of the group in genuine friendship among us and also with our fellow members. We will not hesitate to correct anyone when so doing in a friendly way would help.
4. We will meet each week for half an hour and after a prayer to the Holy Spirit and a short spiritual reading we will consider how the Sodality is getting on in its work of devotion and virtue. We will help each other with doubts and to get rid of any faults or wrong habits which we have. This we will do privately except when someone has displayed quite blameworthy indifference and diminished his zeal for obedience and fervour.

5. Separately, however, we will admonish each other even while acknowledging that there are faults which we must correct in ourselves.

6. We will try hard to be even-tempered and good-humoured, being patient with each other, and trying to help each other.

7. There are no special prayers to be said; whatever time is left over after having carried out our own duties should be devoted to whatever will be most useful for our souls and this out of fear that there being too many of these, we not prevent fulfilment of those that each one has taken on himself for want of time, especially since true devotion does not consist in long vocal prayers, but rather in purity of heart and the total sacrifice of our will. However, we do take upon ourselves these few practices: We will go as often as possible to the Sacraments when we have been granted permission to. We trust that the greater use we make of such a means of salvation, so much the more will we feel encouraged to persevere in our enterprise and so much greater will be the strength we will have to overcome obstacles.

8. We will receive Holy Communion every Sunday, holy days of obligation, days dedicated to the Oratory's patron saints and all Solemnities of Our Lady.

9. We will also receive Holy Communion on Thursdays, unless we are prevented by some necessary obligation.

10. We will add the Rosary to frequenting the Sacraments. We keenly recommend it be said, but without saying that it is a daily obligation.

11. We will recommend our society to Mary each day, asking her to obtain for us the grace of perseverance, and the virtues necessary for an exact observance of these rules and to win her patronage.

12. Every Saturday we will try to practise some mortification or prayer or other practice in Mary's honour.

13. We will try our best to edify our neighbour. We will be very well behaved during prayer, reading, services in church, study and at school. We will jealously treasure the Word of God and will go over the truths we have meditated on. We will carefully avoid any wasting of time to safeguard

ourselves from the temptations which come so easily and so strongly at times of idleness.

14. Therefore whatever time remains after the discharge of our own duties will be spent in useful and good reading or in prayer.

15. Recreation is tolerated and indeed is desirable after meals, and when the mind is tired from studying it cannot help but be a relief, except when the company of superiors or just good manners might hold us back in order not to be rude.

16. We will make known to our superiors whatever will help our spiritual progress, guaranteeing that our actions will be submitted to their judgement.

17. We will not abuse the goodness of those over us by constantly asking for those permissions which in their goodness they are willing to give. The exact observance of the school rules to which we have pledged ourselves should help us to avoid this abuse of too many exceptions.

18. We will observe strict silence while studying, putting aside any pretext for speaking, making noise, or going outside. We recommend the greatest caution and patience in this rule.

19. We will accept from our superiors whatever is spent on food, and not try to be any different from our companions nor accept (anything special) that might be offered us, lest it becomes a cause of harm to someone.

20. We will not complain about our food and we will try to dissuade others from doing so, whatever it tastes like.

21. Whoever wants to be part of this society should first of all purge his conscience at the tribunal of Confession and then eat from the Eucharistic table; he should then do a week of novitiate; he should read these rules carefully and promise God, Mary Immaculate and his spiritual director that he will observe them in detail.

22. On the day he is admitted, his fellow members will go to Communion (approach the table of the angels), and ask the divine Majesty to give the neophyte the virtue of perseverance and obedience, love of God and Mary our mother.

23. The society is placed under the aegis of the Immaculate Conception, from whence it draws its name and whose medal we will devoutly carry. A sincere, filial and limitless confidence in Mary, a constant devotion and loving affection for her, will make us overcome all obstacles, clinging tenaciously to our resolutions, be firm with ourselves, gentle and kindly towards others, exact in everything. The members are urged to write the holy names of Jesus and Mary first of all in their hearts and minds and then on their books and other objects that might come to mind.

The most reverend Don Bosco is requested to examine these rules and give us his opinion about them. We assure him of our complete willingness to accept whatever modifications and amendments he will consider suitable. He will be, as has been till now, our good and loving father and we will be (what we unfortunately have not been till now) his sincere and obedient children.

And you, O Mary, bless our efforts, since the idea of the Sodality is all yours. Smile on our hopes, accept our promises, and thus under your mantle and made strong by your loving care, we will come safely through the storm-tossed sea of this world and be victorious over the temptations of the devil. So too will we be able to help our companions by what we do, give joy to those over us, and in all things be your loving sons.

And if God gives us the grace of becoming priests, we promise you to give all our energies and powers to this work, distrusting ourselves, trusting completely in God; and so after our exile on this earth we trust that, consoled by Mary at our side, we shall safely receive the eternal reward that God reserves for those who serve him in spirit and truth.

Seen. Approved with the following conditions:

1. That the above-mentioned promises do not have binding force as vows.
2. They do not oblige under pain of sin.
3. When you meet, set up some kind of external work of charity: like neatness in the church, taking the wilder boys in the house in hand, or the more ignorant ones, etc.

4. Share out the days of the week so each day will have some going to communion.

5. Do not add any religious practices without the permission of the superiors.

6. Make it your fundamental purpose to promote devotion to Mary Immaculate and the Blessed Sacrament.

7. Before accepting anyone get him to read the life of Louis Comollo.

The first two and the fifth conditions are obligatory, the others advisory.

Turin, June 9, 1856

Fr John Bosco

208. Blessed Sacrament Sodality (1857)

ASC A2300202 *Compagnia del SS. Sacramento*,
ms by Don Bosco himself (cf. MB V, 759-761)¹⁷.

Here are the main articles in the regulations for this sodality:

1. The principal aim of this sodality is to foster adoration of the Blessed Eucharist and make reparation to Jesus Christ for the insults he receives in this most august Sacrament from infidels, heretics and bad Christians.

2. For this purpose members will try to share their times for going to Communion so that someone receives Communion every day. Each member, with the permission of his confessor, will go to Communion on Sundays and once during the week.

3. A member will be especially ready to attend all functions directly concerned with the worship of the Blessed Eucharist like serving at Mass,

¹⁷ This document was drawn up by Don Bosco when he wrote the Life of Michael Magone and was reproduced in a note to Chap. XIII of this life cf. Giovanni BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*. Torino, Tip. G. B. Paravia e Comp. 1861, pp. 69-70 (OE XIII, 223-224).

assisting at Benediction, accompanying Viaticum when it is brought to the sick, visiting the Blessed Sacrament during the 40 Hours exposition.

4. Each member will try to learn how to serve Mass well carrying out all the ceremonies properly and devoutly and distinctly repeating the words that belong to this sublime ministry.

5. There will be one spiritual conference a week, which everyone will be keen to attend, and invite others to come and to be punctual.

6. During the conferences, deal with matters directly regarding worship of the Blessed Sacrament, like encouraging going to communion with the most recollection, instructing and assisting those making their first communion, helping those who need it to do their preparation and thanksgiving, distributing books, holy pictures, pamphlets about this sort of thing.

7. After the conference make a practical spiritual resolution to be put into practice during the week.