

JOURNAL OF
SALESIAN
STUDIES

July – December 2016

Volume 17, Number 2

© 2016 – Salesian Society (SUO)

ISSN 2333–4061 (print)

ISSN 2333–4118 (online)

Subscription information and digital versions available online at:
SalesianJournal.org

A semiannual journal founded in 1990 and published by the

INSTITUTE OF SALESIAN STUDIES
DON BOSCO HALL | BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

*a work of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales
USA - West*

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Don Bosco & Saint Francis De Sales (1842-1880)

Concerning the question whether Don Bosco was influenced by Francis de Sales in both his personal faith and his pastoral-pedagogical practice.

by Rik Biesmans, SDB

translated by Gaston De Neve, SDB

Foreword

While preparing pilgrimages and spiritual exercises in Annecy and the neighborhood, I discovered reliable sources among the German and Dutch Oblates of St Francis de Sales. As a consequence of keeping contact with various participants, they invited the undersigned to take part in the annual meetings of their Arbeitsgemeinschaft (“study group”) in Eichstätt, Germany. More than once they asked me what Don Bosco exactly meant by choosing St. Francis de Sales and his spirituality, as a model for the members of his Congregation.

Nobody in our province (Belgium and Netherlands – BEN) will be amazed that I could give practically no answer on this matter. I stood exactly in the same shoes as Don Bosco when in July 1886 they had read him a letter from the rector of the seminary in Montpellier. During the days of reflection for priests, they were discussing the methods of accompaniment of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Francis de Sales applied with those souls on the way to perfection. They had come to the conclusion that the method of St. Vincent was suitable for generous, dedicated people, but that one could use St. Francis de Sales’ approach more easily for people in general and guide a greater number of individuals to perfection.

The director Monsignor Dupuy¹ desired to ask Don Bosco – who in his opinion had studied both great saints – whether the priests gathered at

1. Mons. Dupuy, a member of the Priests for the Mission, known as Lazarists, was the rector at the seminary at Montpellier. See Pietro Braidò, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo della libertà*, 2 vols. (Rome: LAS, 2003), vol. 1, 616-617. The Priests of the Mission, later known as The Lazarists, is a society of apostolic life with religious vows, made up

Montpellier had made a correct assessment on the methods of accompaniment used by St. Vincent de Paul and St. Francis de Sales. Don Ceria claims in volume XVIII of the *Memorie biografiche* that Don Bosco's immediate reaction – this would be about eighteen months before his death – was to exclaim: “Mah!”, implying “I do not even know myself!”²

Notwithstanding the use of the second chapter of our Constitutions and some of my writings about Don Bosco at hand, I could go no further than Don Bosco's exclamation. However, unlike Don Bosco, I not only had more time to reflect, but it also occurred to me that I should explore more deeply that whole area of my thinking. All this despite the fact that I had already become acquainted with the edition *San Francesco di Sales e i Salesiani di Don Bosco*, published in 1986.

After many years of studying other facets of Don Bosco's vision and practice, I wanted – for the new theme of this exposé – to limit myself more strictly to writings and statements of which I could be sufficiently sure that Don Bosco had in fact written or pronounced them. Finally also a restriction in time was needed: namely the years from 1842 till 1879. For, to my great surprise, I discovered that after 1879, no more texts are found in which we are sure that he referred to the patron saint.

Concerning the fourth resolution during the preparation for his ordination, the reader can learn more in the first attachment to the present study. Concerning the mentioning of Francis de Sales in the letter to the boys in Valdocco from Rome in 1884 and afterward in the so-called longer version, one should read especially the second volume of my study “The Magna Carta of the Salesian educational system.”

of secular priests and brothers. It was founded by St. Vincent de Paul and approved on 24th April, 1626. Their mission is the evangelization of the poor and the formation of the clergy.

2. See MB XIV, 395; EMB XIV, 303. MB refers to *Memorie biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco*, 19 volumes edited by Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Angelo Amadei, and Eugenio Ceria (San Benigno Canavese-Torino: Scuola Tipografica Salesiana - Libreria Salesiana Editrice, 1917 and Torino: SEI, 1898-1939). EBM refers to *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, 16 volumes, edited by Diego Borgatello (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1965-1988). This is the English translation of the first sixteen volumes from the Italian original. The letter dated 2 July, 1886 that Mons. Dupuy sent to Don Bosco, can be found in MB XVIII, 655-656.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that the chronological order shows to full advantage Don Bosco's gradual development in this area. In the whole of my research work and studies, I found immense joy in becoming aware of his overall progressive development. Through this, Don Bosco came much closer to me as a companion, fellow traveller, and inspiration. Much closer in fact – to be more precise – than when it seemed that as a nine-year-old boy he received - so to speak – the draft on a “slip of paper”, that is, in a dream, and had only to carry it out successfully, albeit having to endure opposition, health problems and lesser or greater setbacks.

With much pleasure, I wish every reader a similar beneficial and inspiring encounter with both Francis de Sales and John Bosco. The purpose of this contribution is to obtain a better insight into the inspirational model that Don Bosco acknowledged in Francis de Sales for himself and his various collaborators. An inspirational model for both his own and their shared pedagogical and pastoral activities, and also for their way of living the Christian faith.

In proposing Don Bosco's ideas, spiritual choices, and instructions, I will follow a chronologic order (as far as possible) as my guiding principle. At first, I had intended, to begin with, the fourth resolution in a series of about eight decisions Don Bosco noted in 1884 on the occasion of his planned resumption of his *Memorie dell' Oratorio*. They would be the resolutions that he had written down during or at the end of the retreat in preparation for his ordination to the priesthood in June 1841. After a further weighing up of the results of available studies on Don Bosco, I abandoned that plan. Now I prefer, to begin with, the notes Don Bosco himself wrote down during his spiritual exercises in 1842 and which are still preserved.

Notes taken by Don Bosco during the retreat in 1842 when he lived in the Convitto as a newly ordained priest

One of the preachers of the retreat was the Jesuit Fernando Minini. He outlined the profile of a holy priest as he wished him to be. Don Bosco noted that “he must be inspired by the virtues of the good shepherd characterized by meekness (*mansuetudine*).” On the 6th day of the retreat, the Jesuit spoke about zeal. Don Bosco wrote in that manuscript: “charity is the plant, zeal is the fruit; charity is the sun, zeal is the warmth and the irrigation. More flies are caught with a spoonful of honey than with a barrel of vinegar, St. Francis de Sales ... we must be zealous at the opportune time, but always

with kindness (*dolcezza*).³

Two aspects ‘charity and zeal’ stand out in these notes, though they are not connected as such with Francis de Sales. Such was the case, though rather indirectly, with the third aspect, *dolcezza* (kindness, gentleness), namely through simply mentioning a public statement of the holy bishop. They were, in fact, three virtues, three qualities of a good priest insisted upon at that time in the training of future priests. Such was the case in the Rules of the clergy: “One must use gentle charity (*soave carità*), loving affability (*affabilità*): amiable kindness and meekness (*mansuetudine*).⁴ Of course, these insistences in the training of seminarians and young priests may be due to the influence of Francis de Sales. However, in Don Bosco’s notes this is only slightly noticeable, and in the Rules for the clergy even not at all.⁵

In the course of those spiritual exercises or at the end of them Don Bosco obviously did not sum up the ideas that had struck him either in a clearly aligned trio or in a strongly formulated resolution such as: “The charity, zeal, and kindness of Francis de Sales will be my guide in everything.” Alternatively, could it be that in 1884, he then wrote the whole series together with some new ones? At any rate his notes show that living the priesthood in the way the Jesuit had proposed, appealed to him. Maybe Francis de Sales’ statement struck him in a special way and made him decide, more or less deliberately, to put the saint’s *dolcezza* into practice. But this was not a plain choice of taking Francis de Sales as the inspirational model for his own life as a priest.⁶

3. Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, vol. 1, 170-171.

4. Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, vol. 1, 171. In 1860, on the occasion of Joseph Cafasso’s death, Don Bosco would write a kind of biography. In this writing he gave a prominent place in his mentor’s practice of his priesthood to the virtues of zeal and charity (*carità*). He did this he not only when talking about the deceased’s way of life, but also when sketching the profile of the priest that Cafasso proposed to the young fellow-priests in the Convitto. In that writing, Don Bosco only incidentally mentions Don Cafasso’s friendliness and affability. The meekness, patience, and charity of St. Francis de Sales are indirectly raised by Don Bosco. See Giovanni Bosco, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Cafasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri* (Torino: 1860), in Giovanni Bosco, *Opere Edite*, Prima Serie: Libri e opuscoli, 37 vols. (Roma: LAS, 1976-1977), XII [368]-[369] [377]; [429]; [436]; [449]; and [420]; [422]-[423]. Editor’s note: henceforth, OE. The numbers in [n] indicate the page numbers of the cited volume of the *Opere Edite*.

5. As far as the zeal of Don Cafasso is concerned, his ideas can be found in Francis Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps 1815-1888* (Turin: SEI, 1996), 169-170.

6. See Appendix 1.

Descriptions of Don Bosco's moving from the Convitto to the *Rifugio* established by the Marchioness di Barolo in 1844.

Two years later, in 1844, having completed a further one year course of ongoing formation as a priest in the Convitto, Don Bosco decided, at the suggestion of Don Cafasso, to accept the post of spiritual director of Marchioness di Barolo's work for girls. At the same time, he was asked to be at the disposal for the *Rifugio*, a refuge for women, a charitable work initiated and founded by the Marchioness.⁷ In this way, he would be able to practice a meaningful apostolate with a significant group of girls between 4 and 14 years of age and would have a secured residence with a guaranteed income. Moreover, he would have enough time on Sundays and feast days to assure the spiritual and temporal welfare of some boys to whom he had given catechism lessons during his stay at the Convitto.

Two sources are available about the move from the Convitto to the place of residence near the 'work' of the Marchioness di Barolo. The first is the *Cenno storico dell' Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, dated 1854. There Don Bosco himself describes in a rather practical and concise way the catechism lessons he had given during his training years to a gradually increasing number of boys, and also some of his activities linked with this. At the same time, he mentions the first gatherings at and around his new residence. The second source at our disposal is the *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, a kind of autobiography Don Bosco wrote during the years 1872-1875. These *Memorie dell' Oratorio* contain a more detailed description of the same periods. In the course of time, Don Bosco had become an author who had mastered the art of writing. For our subject, it is important that in both the descriptions mentioned above, he mentions something about the way the name "Oratorio di Francesco di Sales" came to be. In the *Cenno storico*, he writes:

In the meantime in consultation with Don Borelli ... we had chosen a room that was meant to be the refectory and recreation room for the priests who would come to work in the *Rifugio*. It seemed to be big enough for our intention to transform it into a chapel ... Moreover, our church, which at that time began to be called Oratorio, became too small.⁸

7. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 181-182. Julie Falletti née Colbert de Maulévrier Marchioness of Barolo (1785-1864). For a biographical sketch on Marchioness of Barolo, see Arthur J. Lenti, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, 7 vols. (Rome: LAS, 2007-2010), vol. 2, 85-91.

8. Pietro Braidò, *Don Bosco per i giovani: l' "Oratorio" una "congregazione degli Oratori"*. *Documenti* (Rome: LAS, 1988), 37-38. Don Lemoyne has adapted this passage and has

So the chapel was given the name ‘Oratory.’ This given name allows us to assume that the gatherings on Sundays and feast days at the Convitto did not have that name yet. Moreover, when writing the historical survey in 1854 Don Bosco himself obviously did not add the title “of St. Francis de Sales”.

About twenty years later Don Bosco revised this passage as follows:

That kind lady was happy to put at our disposal for use as a chapel two large rooms intended for the recreation of the priests of the Refuge when they should transfer their residence there ... That was the site Divine Providence chose for the first Oratory church. We began to call it after Francis de Sales for two reasons.⁹

Moreover, as the first cause of the name, he added: “because Marchioness Barolo had in mind to found a congregation of priests under his patronage, and with this intention she had a painting of this saint done, which can still be seen at the entrance to this area.”¹⁰

There are clear differences between the two notes. In the *Cenno Storico*, we see that Don Bosco and Father Borel seize an opportunity and take the initiative. Besides, they begin to call the place for the gatherings, namely the chapel, the Oratory. Simply Oratory. Looking back after many years, Don Bosco becomes more and more convinced that he had acted under the inspiration of Divine Providence. He also seems to remember even that one had started to call the place where the boys gathered not only “Oratory,” but “the Oratory of St Francis de Sales” and he also then remembers the reason why it had happened many years before. However, from a careful reading of the text in the *Memoirs*, it is clear that the motive for attributing that name

inserted it, or better, enhanced it, in MB II, 254; EMB II, 198. See the letter Don Bosco wrote on march 13th 1846 to Michele Benso di Cavour in Giovanni Bosco, *Epistolario: introduzione, testi critici e note*, ed. Francesco Motto (Rome: LAS, 1991-2016), vol. 1, 66.9-15; 66.18.22.29; 67.34). This letter helps us to understand what happened exactly. Henceforth, the *Epistolario* edited by Motto will be referred to as E[M]. References are to page number followed by line number. Note: Don Bosco mentions Don Borelli. He is actually referring to Father John Borel (1801-1873) who was Don Bosco’s invaluable help and collaborator. For a short biography on Father Borel, see Lenti, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 1, 73-85.

9. Giovanni Bosco, *Memorie dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855* (Rome: LAS, 1991), 132. See also 112-113. The definite original version reads indeed “Esso” which applies to “il sito” (the site) or eventually to “Oratorio”, certainly not to the chapel, as the English translation suggests and as Don Bosco wrote in 1874 in the *Cenno storico*. See OE XXV. As to the meaning of the name “Oratory” see also the letter to Michele Benso di Cavour in E[M], vol. 1, 66.14.29; 67.34.

10. Bosco, *Memorie dell’Oratorio*, 132.

is not from his intention to follow St. Francis de Sales for personal, pastoral or educational reasons. It seems rather not to have come from his initiative at all but from the preference, the choice and the influence of the Marchioness di Barolo herself.¹¹

Characterizing Francis de Sales in the publication of the “*Storia ecclesiastica*” by Don Bosco in 1845

A concise form of a motto, closely resembling the fourth resolution, and possibly made at the time of his ordination, but only written down by Don Bosco himself in 1884, seems to have originated during his writing of the *Storia ecclesiastica*, [History of the Church]. He published this work in 1845 for his boys and all classes of people.¹² For the compilation of that history, Don Bosco preferred to follow the catechism method. This choice of methodology entails not presenting the subject matter in a continuous story but using questions and answers. Thus for the period ‘End of 16th century/ beginning of 17th,’ he asks the question: “What progress did the faith make in the Chablais?” Moreover, part of the answer he gave “With the weapons only of kindness and charity he (Francis de Sales) went to the Chablais.” We do not think it opportune to digress here on the situation in the Chablais.

11. A couple of remarks are in order here. Firstly, the addition “of St Francis de Sales” indeed belongs here [with the Oratory]. In the manuscript Don Bosco at first wrote: “per la prima chiesa dell’Oratorio che cominciò a chiamarsi...” But he corrected this and changed to: “Là era il sito...per la prima chiesa dell’Oratorio. Esso cominciò a chiamarsi.” See Bosco, *Memorie dell’Oratorio*, 132. Secondly, in the *Memorie dell’Oratorio*, he indicates that there were two reasons for giving the name “of St. Francis de Sales” to the Oratory. The second reason was “because we had put our ministry, which called for great calm and meekness...”. See *Memorie dell’Oratorio*, 113. However, this is an insight which he will account for only a few years later in his efforts to write the regulations, but in entirely different words, as we will show later on in this article. Finally a few words concerning the term ‘Oratory.’ If a written result of the expenses by Don Borel got the title *Memoriale dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales (1844-1849)* from the very first registration, the denomination must already have been used some time earlier. Indeed the list of his expenses start in June 1844, unless the real expenses for the Oratory should only start on page 3 of that document and the heading was given precisely at that time. See Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)* (Rome: LAS, 1980), 545.

12. Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica ad uso delle scuole utile per ogni ceto di persone*, in OE I, [160]-[556]. The 16th edition appeared in 1882. This means that a number of generations of youngsters received the image and characterization of Francis de Sales. And for many youngsters and for Don Bosco himself, this may have been more important than we presume, though the text had no moralizing recommendation.

Neither do we want to sketch the circumstances around the decision Francis de Sales had taken to do missionary work there.

In that passage of Don Bosco's book we discover for the first time the written combination "dolcezza/carità" (kindness/charity). The first 'weapon' to win over souls was kindness, in French 'douceur.' In other words, the most important thing was the manner in which Francis de Sales dealt with people. Contemporarily, 'charity' implies the Christian charity of Francis de Sales, who wanted to engage himself whole-heartedly, even at the risk of losing his life, using every available means to win back to the 'true faith' all who had become Calvinists. These included the ordinary folk as well as some intellectuals and members of the nobility. Moreover, 'charity' in this case meant that of Francis, who sought to give practical help to paupers, adults, and youngsters, especially those who were needy because of their conversion to Catholicism.

Further on in Don Bosco's answer the zeal of Francis is strongly stressed: "Through all this, the flame of zeal was kindled as he started his apostolate."¹³ Quite rightly, Francis de Sales could testify of his own life: "Non seulement vouée mais consacrée au service du prochain pour la gloire de Dieu."¹⁴

We do not think it necessary to know whether Don Bosco borrowed this motto-like formulation from another author or created it personally for this passage in the book, wording it also in this order. The choice itself of the virtues and qualities of the young priest Francis de Sales may convince us at any rate that Don Bosco felt attracted by the ardent zeal with which Francis took up and performed his pastoral work. This choice may also convince us that he wanted to accomplish his pedagogical work and his work as a priest, especially inspired by the first two characteristic virtues. It is very likely that this concise formulation struck him so strongly that he wanted to impress it on his young listeners and readers. Of course not so much to know it but rather to imitate it, in other words, to color their lives with it - or expressed in another way - to live a well-defined spirituality.

13. OE I, [479]-[480].

14. *Œuvres de Saint François de Sales, Evêque et Prince de Genève et Docteur de l'Église*, complete edition based on the autographed and original editions with numerous unpublished pieces, 27 vols; ed. Henry Benedict Mackey OSB and Jean-Joseph Navatel, SJ, analytical table by Alphonse Denis (Annecy: J. Niérat/Monastère de la Visitation, 1892-1932, 1964), vol. XVI, 126. Henceforth OEA. "Not only devoted, but also consecrated to serving fellow people in order to glorify God."

Of course, it remains a kind of motto that could make us search for a detailed explanation of this choice on his part. Did Don Bosco even know, read, and meditate on these characteristics guided by *L'Introduction à la vie devote*? Moreover, did he, given this, promote a genuine priestly and Christian life in the spirit of St. Francis de Sales? We do not know for sure.

An allegorical story from 1847 that Don Bosco told in 1864

A further step we want to make arises in connection with a talk that Don Bosco gave in 1864 to some significant confreres.¹⁵ Although the “conference” or allocution took place on the 8th of May 1864, we still wish to treat it here because, in the course of that conference, Don Bosco related an incident that, according to the reports given by Giovanni Bonetti, and also by Don Lemoyne, we had to situate in 1847.¹⁶

According to their texts Don Bosco gave his close associates a concise historical survey of the first years of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin. Among other things he talked about some five visits, he received in the early period of his gatherings with boys. What he meant by the word ‘visit,’ is not immediately transparent. Only at the end of the tale about the fifth visit, according to Bonetti whose version I follow in this exposition, comes the following detail: “And I found myself alone - quite alone - (*senz'altro*) in my room, as fully awake as I am now.” This event seems to suggest that it was a case of daydreaming or something like it.¹⁷

15. These were Victor Alasonatti, Michael Rua, John Cagliero, Celestine Durando, Joseph Lazzerio and Julius Barberis.

16. This according to the chronologic sequence in Don Bosco's story that Giovanni Bonetti had written down and that was published in Istituto Storico Salesiano, *Fonti Salesiane. Don Bosco e la sua opera: raccolta analogica* (Rome: LAS, 2014), vol. 1, 55-60. In MB III, 32; EMB III, 25, Lemoyne explicitly mentioned the year 1847. He did not however, mention Don Bonetti among the people present, although Bonetti was a teacher in Valdocco in 1863 and was ordained a priest there on the 21st of May. As a consequence it is quite possible that he was present. See *Dizionario biografico dei salesiani* (Turin: Ufficio Stampa Salesiana, 1969), 46. See also Appendix 2.

17. See *Fonti Salesiane*, vol 1, 59. Perhaps we may think of the following sentences in a letter dated February 1871 to the pupils at Lanzo: “The motive (the reason) was a visit that I paid to you some days ago” and “the visit I paid to you a few days ago without you or your superiors being aware of it.” E[M], vol. 3, 308.6-9. See also MB X, 42, EMB X, 35. He was referring to a visit he himself made in his thoughts, perhaps daydreaming out of which he then ‘awakes’ and concludes: “I found myself sitting at my desk.” E[M], vol. 3, 309.57-58. See also MB X, 45-46; EMB X, 38.

The fifth visit relates the story of what happened, or what is said to have occurred during that supposed “encounter.” Hardly has the unnamed visitor led Don Bosco to a road that is covered with roses, when he gives him the order to start walking. To avoid damaging the roses, Don Bosco takes off his shoes. However, soon he notices that there are also thorns. At a given moment his companion says he should follow the path with his shoes on, which means “with mortifications.” The unknown person repeats this in his explanation at the end of the visit: “You must walk that path with your shoes on, that is with “mortification.” He then gives Don Bosco the following explanation: “These breathtaking roses are the symbol of the ardent charity (*carità ardente*) that should characterize you and all those helping you in educating young people. The thorns mean all the obstacles, vexations and difficult things that you will have to bear while fulfilling this task.” The enchanting roses and the prickly thorns are of course elements of a very traditional and frequently used symbol. That is why it is important to mention here the application given by the unnamed interlocutor together with his encouraging final words: “Do not lose courage however: thanks to charity and mortification you will overcome everything. Finally you will reach the roses without thorns as you have seen in the splendid hall where you have arrived”.¹⁸

Referring to this idea, Don Bosco finished the whole account in 1864 in this way: “I have never lost courage and the Lord was always with us. And He will always remain with us if with courage, mortification and spiritual charity we engage ourselves in educating the souls of youngsters for him and bringing them close to him”.¹⁹

Once more we should be struck by the fact that in 1864 Don Bosco again does not refer to the example of the patron saint of the Oratorio. At that time he did not think it necessary to link with St. Francis de Sales the prominent place of *carità* in his works, as the element distinguishing himself and his fellow workers. Probably not even in 1847. Neither did he connect the assignment to practice charity with Vincent de Paul’s renowned charity. At any rate, in 1864 this prime task comes from an unknown male person.²⁰

Here we do not have to stress that the combination of “charity and mortification” is quite different from the binomial “kindness and charity.” However, it is evident that charity, that is, “ardent charity” (*carità ardente*)

18. *Fonti Salesiane*, vol. 1, 58-59.

19. *Fonti Salesiane*, vol. 1, 51; 60.

20. Expressed as “ed allora egli...” in the version of *Fonti Salesiane*, vol. 1, 51.

must come first in his life and in the life of anyone who - in one way or another - wants to collaborate with him. Maybe he retouched the story in 1864 by adding 'mortification.' On his way and the way of his close helpers a lot of thorns had been found and for this reason suffering, hard times and readiness to accept mortification were more than required. For this reason, perhaps he wished to put that aspect to the fore.

It would, of course, be an extra help to obtain a complete insight into that allegorical story if we knew exactly where Don Bosco had found the metaphor with roses and thorns and its application. Was it the gift of a very personal flash of inspiration? Or did the visit to a pergola of roses in Turin stay with him as an unforgettable an inspiring memory? Being a poet and writer, did the image of a path of life appeal to him, more than the narrow gate and hard road in St. Matthew's Gospel? (Mt. 7,13-14) Was it the remembrance of an allegory that had surprised and struck him while reading a spiritual author? And who was that author, and in which book? As far as we now know, he did not find it in Francis de Sales.²¹

Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di san Vincenzo de' Paoli, a surprising publication of Don Bosco's in 1848

In 1848 Don Bosco again published a book *Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di san Vincenzo de' Paoli*.²² Indeed it is a book about St. Vincent de Paul and not about St. Francis de Sales. In the third volume of the *Memorie biografiche* Don Lemoyne tried to explain how this had happened. And he came back on it in the fourth volume, indirectly, but in more detail.²³ In the third volume of the *Memorie biografiche*, Don Lemoyne states that Don Bosco "had a special devotion to St. Vincent de Paul." However, he also explains that in some way "Vincent de Paul, like Don Bosco himself, had been a cowherd, and later, as a student, a seminarian, and a priest, had dedicated himself to the education of boys."²⁴ In the fourth volume, Don Lemoyne then reports on the founding of an association that

21. See Appendix 2.

22. In OE III, [215]-[503]. Don Bosco published this book anonymously. He had not even signed his initials as he had done in the first edition of the History of the Church. We probably have to attribute this to the fact that in this book he was, to some extent, plagiarizing. A high percentage of his text is copied from the Italian translation of a book by the French author André-Joseph Ansart, though Don Bosco had also inserted some personal ideas.

23. MB III, 378-379; EMB III, 268. MB IV, 65-70; EMB IV, 47-51.

24. MB III, 378; EMB III, 268.

was named after St. Vincent de Paul and of which Don Bosco had become a member.

It is a fact that in Genoa on the 16th February 1846 “a fraternity of charity” or “conférence de St. Vincent de Paul” had already been founded after the example of Ozanam.²⁵ Also in Genoa the Italian translation of André-Joseph Ansart’s work had been published.²⁶ In one way or another, Don Bosco must have become aware of all this and must have been keenly interested in it.²⁷ In his work *Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà*, ‘carità’ and ‘dolcezza’ (kindness, gentleness) are treated explicitly, though in separate chapters. This separate treatment is probably due to the classification of Ansart himself, but also to Don Bosco’s planning of his book in which he had spread his material over the 31 days of the month of July.

The charity of Vincent de Paul

The book is presented to the reader with a daily meditation on one of the virtues of Saint Vincent de Paul. There are in all thirty-one meditations, reflecting the number of days in the month of July. The subject for the 3rd meditation is “His (St. Vincent’s) charity for beggars.” Precisely in the introduction to the stories and reflections of that day, we find a personal idea of Don Bosco, namely: “The virtue that essentially characterizes the Christian, is charity (*carità*). The person who does not possess this virtue - St. John says - is like a dead body that is not able to move. That is the reason why St. Paul calls it the finest and greatest of all virtues. This virtue was inextricably bound up with all Vincent’s deeds and activities.”²⁸

In his History of the Church, Don Bosco had already written that Vincent de Paul “was inspired by the real sense of charity. That is why there could be no case of disaster when he had not hastened to help.”²⁹ An unselfish love for

25. Blessed Antoine-Frédéric Ozanam (1813-1853), founded, with his fellow students, the *Conference of Charity* in 1830 and which later, in 1883, came to be known as the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

26. André-Joseph Ansart (1723-1790?) was a French Benedictine monk, historian, and ecclesiastical writer. One of his works was on St. Vincent de Paul.

27. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 310-311 and 275-276. See Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, *Vita del venerabile servo di Dio Giovanni Bosco fondatore della pia società Salesiana, dell’istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice e dei Cooperatori salesiani*, 2 vols. (Torino: Libreria Editrice Società Internazionale, 1913), vol. 1, 450.

28. OE III, [243]. Probably Don Bosco had 1 John, 3.14 in mind: “Whoever does not love is still in the power of death.”

29. OE I, [486].

one's neighbor, an unconditional engagement for the physical and spiritual welfare of needy people came first for Vincent de Paul. That undoubtedly appealed to Don Bosco. He then focused on it in his text, as he did in his writing of 1848. He primarily was addressing priests, because in the foreword of *Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà* he expressed the wish: "God grant that Vincent's charity and zeal be rekindled in priests and that they be tireless in saving souls."³⁰ This, of course, applied to himself. Vincent's love of neighbor and his zeal were undoubtedly an illuminating and inspiring example for him. In the discussion of this period in Don Bosco's life Fr. Desramaut did not disguise the truth: "Il rêvait d'une vie de prêtre aussi belle et aussi remplie que la vie de S. Vincent deux cents ans plus tôt."³¹

Charity did not stand apart from the virtue of kindness for St. Vincent.

Kindness and charity are not separated. This connection between these two virtues becomes clear from the text for the 8th day of July. On that day Don Bosco proposed to his readers to make efforts to be kind like Vincent de Paul. Already at the beginning of his reflections, we read the following comparison: "Vincent drew inspiration from St. Francis de Sales' example, whose exceeding friendliness had already struck him during the first conversation he had with him. Thanks to an attentive effort he finally became so gentle and affable that he would have been the first (*primus*) of his century if his time had not known the saintly bishop of Genève."³² In

30. OE III, 4 [218]. MB III, 379-380; EMB III, 269. These are the two characteristics of the priest that were put in the foreground and were noted by Don Bosco during the retreat of 1842. As far as 1859 is concerned, Don Lemoyne noted: "For his catechists, both day and resident, there was the affiliated chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, whose ceaseless charity Don Bosco so well described to the members." See MB VI, 189; EMB VI, 103.

31. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 275. "Il se sentait peut-être plus proche de saint Vincent de Paul (1581-1660)", see Jean-Marie Barbier, "L'honneur de qui il composa un mois de lectures quotidiennes" in *Introduction à l'esprit de saint Jean Bosco*. Groupe Lyonnais de Recherchers Salésiennes (Lyon: Maison d'Études Saint Jean Bosco, 1950), 10. Stella in his turn concludes: "His [i.e. Don Bosco's] mentality and spirituality ... found in the past perhaps the closest parallel in the Vincent de Paul's capacity of assimilation, in his opportune adjusting to the circumstances and his capability of realizing things." Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, 2 vols. (Rome: LAS, 1968-1969), vol. 1, 506. See also a study which already appeared at the end of the 19th century, in Germany. John Baptist Mehler, *Don Bosco's sociale Schöpfungen, seine Lehrlingsversammlungen und Erziehungshäuser. Ein Beitrag zur Lösung der Lehrlingsfrage*. (Regensburg: Verlags-Anstalt vorm. G.J. Manz, 1893), 2; 8.

32. OE III, [299].

truth, these are sentences copied from Ansart's work, but this borrowing undoubtedly means that he approved of this evaluation, although we cannot find out which consequences there were in Don Bosco's pastoral-pedagogical practice.

Also, in the rest of the twelve pages following Ansart's exposition, St. Francis de Sales is present. For instance where he treats of St. Vincent de Paul's contact with heretics. It is precisely in his contact with them that St. Vincent discovered that *dolcezza* (gentleness, affability, friendliness) is still more necessary." He said: "A dispute commonly closes the door of his (the heretic's) heart, whereas gentleness, kindness and friendliness (*dolcezza e affabilità*) open it." Further on he said that "the example of St. Francis de Sales was a concrete proof of this truth, because with his kind, friendly nature he had converted more heretics than with his scientific knowledge." Vincent could add the following from his experience: "I have never seen or heard that any heretic was converted thanks to the force of an argument, but thanks rather to gentleness (*dolcezza*). Such is the strength of that virtue to win souls for God."³³

Following Ansart he then developed Vincent de Paul's ideas that formed the basis of the way in which Don Bosco himself considered *dolcezza* all his life, practiced it and proposed it to his co-workers. It is the best guideline Don Bosco ever put into words about this virtue or attitude.³⁴ As far as we know he never felt stimulated to quote or propose in a similar, thorough way Francis de Sales' excellent reflections about 'douceur' in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*. That is the reason why we think it is fitting to quote Don Lemoyne here. In MB III he dwelt at length on the publication of *Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà* and remarked as follows:

Don Bosco not only sketched the life of St. Vincent de Paul, but carefully studied the saint's practice of the theological and cardinal virtues, and from that he drew guidelines for his own spiritual life. Apart from the adaptations demanded by the needs of his time [and his special vocation], Don Bosco so faithfully copied St. Vincent de Paul that a reader personally acquainted with Don Bosco would feel a strong inclination to substitute his name for that of St. Vincent; [so perfect is the likeness.] Identical were their views on spiritual matters, equal their zeal for the glory of God, their absolute trust in Divine Providence ... their charity toward the poor and imprisoned, their eagerness to

33. OE III, [301]-[302].

34. OE III, [299]-[311]. See Joseph Ansart, *Lo spirito di s. Vincenzo de' Paoli, ossia Modello di condotta proposto a tutti gli ecclesiastici, religiosi e fedeli nelle sue virtù, nelle sue azioni e nelle sue parole* (Genova: A. Beuf, 1840), 181-194.

nurse those afflicted with contagious diseases, their efforts to convert heretics ... Don Bosco, although short-tempered by nature [*di spiriti vivaci e inclinati alla colera*, meaning high spirited and prone to displays of anger] like St. Vincent, nevertheless succeeded in imitating his gentleness (*dolcezza*) and self-restraint in order to more easily to win the hearts of men. From St. Vincent, as though by reflection, he copied the amiability of St. Francis de Sales. We might say that Don Bosco's spirit could properly be defined as that of St. Francis de Sales as exemplified by St. Vincent de Paul.³⁵

From this quotation we may conclude that Don Lemoyne had seen very clearly the exemplary figure of St. Vincent de Paul and his influence on Don Bosco, but also that in the significant family chronicle of the congregation he wished to preserve the bond with Francis de Sales.

For us, all this began to imply that the stressing of 'carità' and 'dolcezza,' crystallized into a motto and the naming of the main characteristics in the spirit of Don Bosco, is most surely not due to a direct inspiration by and influence of St. Francis de Sales. Let us also not forget that he allowed *Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà* to be published anew in 1876.³⁶ This publication is so close to the redaction of the Constitutions of the Congregation that it was most probably not meant only for outsiders.³⁷

After all this it may not excite great astonishment that barely a few years after its publication the following characterization of Don Bosco appeared on 26 July 1850 in the daily paper *L'Armonia*: "Nowadays it is known by everybody that a zealous priest amongst us is renewing the examples of Vincent de Paul and of the disciples of Geronimo Emiliano."³⁸ Despite the

35. MB III, 381; EMB III, 270. Lenti states that "More importantly, the work indicates that, seven years after his ordination, Don Bosco was looking to St. Vincent de Paul as a model, at a time when Don Bosco's work of charity was already being compared to that of St. Vincent de Paul in the catholic press." Lenti, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 3, 47. Stella had already come to this conclusion.

36. Pietro Stella, *Gli scritti a stampa di San Giovanni Bosco* (Roma: LAS, 1977), 420. See also OE XXVIII, [1] also dated 1876.

37. In 1886 Don Bosco had a copy sent to the superior of the seminary in Montpellier. See MB XVIII, 126 and 655-656; EMB XVIII, 95 and 591-593. The book got a third print in 1887. See Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 1370 note 10.

38. OE XXXVIII, 15. We read: "un zelante sacerdote" (a zealous priest). See MB IV, 88; EMB IV, 61, where Don Lemoyne has used a plural instead of a singular: "alcuni zelanti sacerdoti"; "a few zealous priests in our midst who are emulating the example of St. Vincent de Paul..." See many years later the paper *La Liberté* at the time Don Bosco visited Paris (April-May 1883): "Religious circles in Paris are talking about nothing but Don Bosco an Italian version of St. Vincent de Paul." MB XVI, 114; EMB XVI, 87. In

name of the Oratory in Valdocco in that period, this writer associated the person, the mentality and the activities of Don Bosco with Vincent de Paul and not with Francis de Sales.

A less known passage in Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà

The young priest Giovanni Bosco devoted the fourth meditation to the subject: “Vincent de Paul’s love for God.” The title already raises the assumption that it may be an important chapter to discover what we have started calling “spirituality.” Here too he followed the Italian translation of Ansart’s work. This author seems to have known passage from Francis de Sales’ Treatise on the love of God. Indeed, he treats the following idea:

He, [Vincent de Paul] did not think it is sufficient to love God simply with affective love and to foster exquisite feelings in front of his mercy and great desires for his magnificence. He transformed this desire into effective love, and as Saint Gregory demands, proved it with deeds: *Probatio dilectionis exhibitio est operis* (*the crucial test of exquisite love consists in showing deeds*). That is why the saint priest exhorted his confreres to love God with the work of their hands and the sweat on their front.³⁹

Neither Ansart nor Don Bosco recall Francis de Sales. However, that would have been possible, for in the first chapter of the book VI of the *Traité de l’amour de Dieu*, Francis de Sales wrote:

The two major exercises (ways of expression) of our love of God are: one is affective and the other effective or active, as St. Bernard writes. In a first manner, we love God and what God loves. In the second we serve God and do what he commands. The first links us with God’s mercy; the second makes us fulfill his will. The first fills us with well-being, kindness, enthusiasm, desires and spiritual ardor ... ; the other creates in us the solid resolution, the firm courage and the unshakable obedience that are required to fulfill God’s will and to suffer, to agree with, approve and accept all that pleases him. The first makes us find pleasure in God; the second makes us please God.⁴⁰

Paris, he was invited by the Central Council of the Society of St.Vincent de Paul. See MB XVI, 501; EMB XVI, 399. In the same sense, the Salesianse Bode wrote in 1886: “The world-famous Don Bosco, the Vincent de Paul of Italy, recently stayed in Grenoble for three days.” See Freddy Staelens, *Don Bosco in België. Voorgeschiedenis van 1867 tot 1887* (unpublished study), 21.

39. OE III, 254-255.

40. OEA IV, 301-302.

Moreover, he added: “The affective love is especially practiced while praying.”⁴¹ Next, he devoted to prayer - in the form of dialogue, meditation, contemplation and union with God, in both the books VI and VII of the treatise.

Thus Francis de Sales heavily emphasized the union with God while praying, especially during meditation and contemplation. In Ansart and via him in Don Bosco, we hear in the use of particular words, such as “simply,” “exquisite feelings,” “great desires” and especially in a word “but,” rather a preference for and a heavy focusing on the effective love. This focusing is confirmed and strengthened by the sentence about the work with their hands and the sweat on their fonts. All this fits in with Don Bosco’s focusing on the “Caritas,” the charity, the ardent love that dedicates itself to the temporal and eternal well-being of youngsters in the first place. Moreover, we should not forget Don Bosco’s words during a retreat in Lanzo (1876): “Work and temperance will make the Salesian Congregation flourish.”⁴²

As far as could be traced up till now, we do not find in other writings, conversations or sermons of Don Bosco to his Salesians or lay co-workers, the essential distinction between affective and effective love of God. We find neither any indication that he completed or personalized it with his spiritual experiences.

Characterization of Don Bosco by Casimiro Danna in the July 1849 issue of the *Giornale della Società d’Istruzione e d’Educazione*, a pedagogical periodical.

What was especially noticed and appreciated by a number of Don Bosco’s contemporaries was the total self-sacrifice and indefatigable commitment to the welfare of destitute youngsters that constituted the social dimension of Christian charity.

Such endeavors observed in many contemporaries, have already been witnessed by Casimiro Danna, during the previous year. In 1849 this professor of literature at the University of Turin and a pedagogue, introduced Don Bosco, who was 34 at the time, to the readers of a pedagogical review. He took up his cause and recommended him to their charity, strongly emphasizing Don Bosco’s charity. Firstly he highlighted his complete dedication in these words: “This admirable priest, who has dedicated himself entirely to alleviating the sufferings of the poor through education.” Soon

41. OEA IV, 302.

42. MB XII, 466; EMB XII, 338.

after, he singled out his generosity: “Several priests contribute to defraying the many expenses of this great work of charity. However, the main expense is borne by this true minister [Don Bosco] of Him who said to himself that he is the gentle and the loving refuge (literally: re-creator) of troubled souls.” The generous use of personally earned money evidently shows great charity, ‘the essential virtue of a Christian’ as Don Bosco wrote himself. Moreover, through the declaration and self-description of Jesus (Mt. 11, 28) Danna seems to allude at the same time to the aspect of *dolcezza* in Don Bosco’s approach and relationships. The same can be heard in another sentence of his article: “He attracts crowds of boys to the Oratory not only by gifts of holy pictures, lotteries, and an occasional free meal but by his cheerful countenance.” It is certainly striking that to characterize Don Bosco Danna lets himself be inspired by the example of Jesus Christ rather than through the influence of the distinctive kindness of Vincent de Paul or Francis de Sales.

On the other hand, it has to be mentioned that Danna interpreted the name of the Oratory in quite a personal way: “He has opened an Oratory outside Porta Susa in the Valdocco neighborhood, and has named it the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, not without reason or in vain. Even more than the name, the spirit of that ardent apostle of enlightened zeal has been breathed into this home by this exemplary priest.⁴³ Danna is obviously convinced that Don Bosco had chosen St. Francis de Sales because he admired “the ardent and enlightened zeal” of Francis de Sales and wished to be an equally zealous priest. Here we can think of the main virtues he heard about and noted during the retreat in 1842. At that moment, however, without a direct link with the patron saint.

Whilst the description of Don Bosco’s activities in the Oratory of Valdocco in the article would suggest some interview of the author with Don Bosco or data from a “flyer,” this characterizing of the good priest creates the impression of being the result of genuine appreciation and personal reflection.

43. The quotations are taken from an article of Casimiro Danna, in Giovanni Bosco, *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali* (Rome: LAS, 1987), 38- 40. See also MB III, 542-545; EMB III, 380-382. See the phrase of Don Bosco about the zeal of St. Francis de Sales in *Storia ecclesiastica*, OE I, [479]. Still in 1863 don Bosco did not hesitate to point out explicitly that he had stayed in Turin for 23 years and that he used his modest income and all his force in prisons and hospitals and on city squares for the good of abandoned youngsters. E[M], vol. 1, 589, 12-14. Also a letter to the boys on January 20 1874 in E[M], vol. 2, 339.

Don Bosco's Letter to Antonio Rosmini

Just how greatly Don Bosco was convinced of the essential place of charity or the Christian cardinal virtue par excellence we find in a letter to Antonio Rosmini, dated 11th March 1850.⁴⁴ That is the virtue which, according to the 'dream story' from 1847, should be characteristic of himself and all his fellow-workers, and according to *Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà* also of every Christian. Don Bosco expresses it as follows: "The harvest is hard but rich, and we may expect it to produce plenty of fruit; but we need priests, i.e. priests solidly formed in charity (*carità*)."⁴⁵ He may have had Rosmini himself in mind. Indeed in 1828 Rosmini had founded the Institute of Charity. The name reveals exactly where the principal focus of that congregation ought to lie. Already before 1850, Don Bosco had made contact with the Rosminians in Stresa where they had their novitiate. In January 1876 he even confided to Don Barberis that he, probably in the late forties, had thought of having himself enrolled among the Oblates or the Rosminians.⁴⁶ That conversation at a later date makes it still more conceivable that in the letter to Rosmini, he should propose a launching of the Institute, in a discreet manner, in the capital, Turin. Don Bosco was willing to cooperate with it. He declared he was prepared to reserve a few rooms, in the new building he was going to erect, for young Rosminians who would come to study in Turin. His proposal evokes the impression that he was toying with the idea that those students could help a little with the work of the Oratories. Maybe they would even give a better hand than some priests who had deserted him earlier. A better hand because they undoubtedly would have been duly formed by Rosmini in the practice of charity, no matter by which Saint this unselfish and zealous charity was inspired.

On the other hand, it is justifiable to question whether with the words "duly formed in charity" he did not mean "formed in the spirit of Vincent de Paul." This is still more possible since in 1850 he had become a member of a recently founded Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Other members we know were Don Borel, Don Cafasso, and Don Cocchi. The priest members met once a week in the church of the Cottolengo. Inspired by the associations of St. Vincent de Paul that Ozanam had started in France, in May 1850 lay

44. Antonio Rosmini-Serbatì (1797-1855), founder of the Institute of Charity (*Carità*), a congregation the members of which would later be called Rosminians.

45. E[M] 1, 99.12-16.

46. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 320 and 340, endnote 91. See also MB III, 248-249; EMB III, 172-173.

people in Turin founded the first association with that name, alongside the association of priests. They accepted Don Bosco as an honorary member. In the beginning he took part in their meetings; later on, he remained an honorary lifetime member, a friend, and a valued patron.⁴⁷

It seems that the formation in charity that Don Bosco had in mind would also have included ‘mortifications’ as a refusal of comfort and pleasures and also being disposed to contribute their money.⁴⁸ In other words, these priests, well trained in the practice of charity would, of course, have learned self-denial and total self-sacrifice for the material and spiritual well-being of youngsters.

Don Bosco’s action against the Waldensians around 1850

During the following years, Don Bosco continued to remain open to the influence of Vincent de Paul. He continued regarding him as a model for priests. This admiration comes to the fore once more in 1854 when cholera broke out in Turin. Nevertheless, there is evidence to show that in those years and especially in certain circumstances it did not prevent him from having in view - and even in pride of place - the example of Francis de Sales.

The first proof of it is found in a passage of the *Memoire Biografiche*⁴⁹ which, however, is never quoted by well-known and recognized authorities on Don Bosco, or at any rate, not in the chapter about Don Bosco’s struggle with and polemical writings against the Waldensians.⁵⁰ According to Lemoyne

47. MB IV, 65-69; EMB IV, 47-51. Ozanam’s work must have been known in regions of Italy before these two foundations. In any case don Lemoyne writes about a foundation in Genoa in 1846. The founder was Count Rocco Bianchi. Don Bosco would have counseled him therein. MB IV, 66; EMB IV, 48. So we probably understand better that don Bosco in 1848 composed and published the book *Il cristiano guidato guidato alla virtù e alla civiltà*, in OE III. See also Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 310-311.

48. Also in a letter to the inspector of the studies in Turin Don Bosco insists on his personal way of spending money: “I have stayed in Turin for 23 years and I always have used my modest income (“Le mie sostanze”) and my (best) force in prisons, hospitals and on public squares for the good of abandoned youngsters.” E[M] 1, 589.

49. MB IV, 171-173; EMB IV, 119-122.

50. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 302-310; Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, vol. 1, 247-254; Lenti, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 3, 247-252; *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 2, 233-235; *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 6, 221 and 244. Stella, however, refers to this text explicitly, but he adds that he does not quite understand why don Lemoyne draws Don Bosco into a meeting to found a secret association and why he mentions this at the end of 1850. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale*, 140, footnote 34.

this episode in MB IV must be placed in this context, that is, in the year 1850 along with Don Bosco's action against the Waldensians. That is why we want to bring up here the document with the date of 17th November 1850.

There, Don Lemoyne inserts a document to illustrate that Don Bosco cherished a plan, namely "to form a pious union of people, and particularly lay people, who would later be known as Salesian Cooperators." The first topic of the "Statement of Purpose" reads as follows:

To form a provisional pious union under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales. This saint has been chosen because of the similarity between present conditions in our country and those in Savoy during his times. By his enlightened zeal, prudent preaching, and boundless charity, St. Francis de Sales freed Savoy from the errors of Protestantism.⁵¹

Is it to be noted *en passant* that the principal exemplary and inspiring characteristics are here only "zeal and charity".

After all that proceeded, the choice of the patron saint may come rather as a surprise, especially if we take into account the basis of this choice. The activities of the Oratory for the sheltering and education of needy youngsters do not figure at all in the explanation of the intended purpose of the Union.

Again, this should come as no surprise to us. Had Don Bosco in the *Storia ecclesiastica* not especially thrown light on the missionary activity of the young Francis de Sales in the Chablais region which had become Calvinist? ⁵² At any rate, he had devoted more words to this Chablais mission than to the action of Vincent de Paul against the Turks. Although we must admit that Don Bosco did mention "the deliverance of the faithful from their slavery" as the first fruit of "the true spirit of charity of St. Vincent de Paul."⁵³

Reading that first item in the document of Don Lemoyne, with the expression "under the invocation of St. Francis de Sales" may well remind the reader of that widely known story of moving the gatherings on Sundays and feast days near to and inside the church of St. Francis of Assisi to a part of the newly-built *Rifugio* or *Ospedaletto* of Marchioness Falletti of Barolo on the second Sunday of October 1844. On that point of his story in the *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, Don Bosco writes that there were two reasons to give the name "of St. Francis de Sales" to the Oratory from that time on. These two motivations are sufficiently known.

51. MB IV, 171 and 172; EMB IV, 120.

52. OE I, [480].

53. OE I, [486].

But after these two Don Bosco adds a third, which is undoubtedly less known or not known at all, namely the following: “We had a further reason for placing ourselves under the protection of this Saint: that from heaven he might help us to imitate him in combating errors against religion, especially Protestantism, which was beginning to gain ground in our provinces, especially in the city of Turin.”⁵⁴

There can be no doubt concerning the similarity between the two wordings of the motive for giving the name.⁵⁵ There is a striking difference in the dating of them. The moving of the meeting-place for the youngsters happened in October 1844. The document with the account of the founding of a provisional Union of lay people was composed, we imagine, in the autumn of 1850. In the *Memorie dell’ Oratorio* we are undoubtedly looking at a motive that can partly – as far as the contents are concerned – be justified, but concerning the date, it is rather an anachronistic insertion. The addition is only partly justifiable as regards the content because the action against the Waldensians was not so much concerning his engagement with the youngsters of the Oratory as with a personal activity possibly exercised together with some dedicated lay-people.

From this confrontation we can remember above all that around 1850 – according to the document by Lemoyne – Don Bosco saw in Francis de Sales an example of ardent zeal for the ‘true doctrine’ and charity or extraordinary dedication to the needs of others. He observed this especially when Francis de Sales worked as a missionary in the Chablais region, where he reacted against the Calvinists and won over many people to the catholic faith. At the same time, we must conclude that Don Bosco in November 1850 – in contrast with the wording in his *Storia ecclesiastica* some time before – did not focus on the *dolcezza* of the saint. That simply means that for his struggle against the Protestants he had not the slightest wish to consider the gentle, amiable manner in which Francis de Sales treated his opponents in the Chablais as the inspirational model either for himself or his lay cooperators.⁵⁶

54. Bosco, *Memorie dell’ Oratorio*, 133; See also *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 113.

55. In MB IV and in the *Memorie dell’ Oratorio*.

56. Perhaps he could not or did not wish to focus on it, considering the vehement way in which he had started to oppose the influence of the Waldensians. See, below, Appendix 3, first and second point.

Don Bosco's attempts to compile *domestic Regulations* for the Oratory (around 1850)

Clearer proofs that Don Bosco saw in that period (around 1850) in Francis de Sales a powerful, inspiring example for the educational work among his boys are found in his attempts to formulate Regulations for the correct functioning of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. He may already have made a start on them in the years 1847-1848. Unfortunately there no proofs were found concerning the exact starting date of the discovered draft of Regulations of the *Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*.

Since Braido, Desramaut and Lenti are of the opinion that the years 1847, 1850, 1851 and 1852 deserve special consideration in this formulation of the first Regulations, we will treat this compilation attempt here.⁵⁷ We will do this in a specific way, namely by drawing attention to two quotations from Don Bosco himself on that project.

The first quotation: "We place this Oratory under the protection of St. Francis de Sales to indicate that the basis on which this association rests, both for those who command and for those who obey, must be Christian charity (*carità*) and kindness (*dolcezza*), the characteristic virtues of this saint."⁵⁸

Do we find then in the above quotation, from the draft of the Regulations of the Oratory, the complete combination *carità* and *dolcezza* and - more

57. Braido, "Don Bosco per i giovani" in *L'Oratorio una "Congregazione degli Oratori. Documenti*, 20. See also Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 297; 336, endnotes 1-3; and Lenti, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 3, 20-21. However Lenti mentions the project only *en passant*. See also Bruno Bordignon, "I salesiani come religiosi-educatori figure e ruoli all'interno della casa Salesiana", in *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane*, 58, anno XXXI, N. 1, 76; 81; 97. See also Don Bosco's personal reminder of this in *Memorie dell' Oratorio*, 177; *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 149. See also MB III, 86-90; and 91; EMB III, 64-67 and later on for the boarding house (l'Ospizio), see MB IV, 542-543; 735-755; EMB IV, 377-378; 542-559.

58. Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, vol. 1, 306. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temp*, 336, endnote 4. Likewise Joseph Boenzi, "What is Salesian in Don Bosco? Francis de Sales and Don Bosco's Pastoral Spirit", in *Journal of Salesian Studies*, Institute of Salesian Studies, Berkeley. Spring 2004, vol. 12, 236. This idea calls to mind the second motive which Don Bosco gave in his *Memorie dell' Oratorio* for naming the Oratory on the site of the *Rifugio* "Oratory of St. Francis de Sales." The reason was that his collaborators and him, "had put our ministry, which calls for great calm and meekness, under the protection of this saint in the hope that he might obtain for us from God the grace of being able to imitate his extraordinary meekness and ability to win souls." When looking back on his activities, he put the spotlight first of all on "mansuetudine" or "dolcezza" and calm self-discipline (akin to it) in the educator's contact with youngsters, and only afterward on apostolic zeal. The heavy emphasis on Christian charity (*carità*) however

importantly - together with a clear link to St. Francis de Sales? Desramaut's French text (*la charité et la douceur*) and the Italian by Braidò (la carità, la dolcezza) and maybe also Lenti's (charity and affability) give a positive answer. However, there is a 'but.' The Italian text in MB III, on page 91 and also in the definitive edition of the Regulations in 1877, and equally Stella's quotation in the first part of his standard work call for some caution

In MB III and in the edition of 1877 and Stella we do not, in fact, find "carità e dolcezza," but "modello nella carità, nelle buone maniere." Now, someone with "buone maniere" is certainly a well brought up person, well-mannered, polite and therefore winning, amiable.

Remarkable is the fact that this expression or combination does correspond fully with what Don Bosco prescribes in the 7th chapter of that project of Regulations. It concerns the *invigilatori* or stewards (chapel assistants): "If they should notice a boy dozing or chatting, they should call him to order in a polite way" (*con belle maniere*). What he exactly meant with this, he makes still more concrete with this guideline: "Never under any circumstance hitting anybody, never scolding in a harsh or loud voice."⁵⁹ Then there comes a short chapter about the peacemakers (*pacificatori*). His guideline for them runs as follows: "The peacemakers must always, in a pleasant way (*con modi graziosi*), prevent anyone from leaving the church during the services."⁶⁰

is entirely missing here. See Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 1, 108. See also Jaroslaw Rochowiak, "Il Capitolo Generale 2° della Società Salesiana (1880), problemi di rieducazione e di vita Salesiana" in *Philosophisch Theologische Hochschule der Salesianer Don Bosco Benediktbeuern* (Benediktbeuern: Theologische Diplomarbeit, 1993), 107 and 109. See, on the other hand, - much later - a very important intervention of his during the second General Chapter in 1880.

59. MB III, 102; EMB III, 445-446. Braidò, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, vol. 1, 307. See *Buona notte* of January 1864: "everybody can in a kindly way cool the tempers of quarrelers and fighters ("tutti possono colle belle maniere..."), MB VII, 601; EMB VII, 365-366.

60. MB III, 105; EMB III, 449. Striking examples of that custom we read also in the Regulations for the adjacent house ("casa annessa", boarding house) of the Oratory from 1852-1854. Such is the task of the catechist: "he shall also ascertain in a kindly and loving manner ("con maniere dolci e caritatevoli") whether they (the new boys) need religious instruction." See MB IV, 738; EMB IV, 544. And the doorkeeper "shall always be courteous and affable ("con maniere dolci ed affabili") in accepting and delivering messages. Courteousness ("mansuetudine") and affability ("affabilità") should be his outstanding traits (virtù)." MB IV, 744; EMB IV, 549. See also Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 433-434; and 439. See also Frater Agathon, *Le dodici virtù d'un buon maestro secondo i principi e le massime di S. Giov. Batt. de la*

From these passages we may deduce that those expressions very carefully match the meanings of *dolcezza*, and are so to speak synonyms of it. That is shown by the rule for the rector himself: “With gentle amiability and with his exemplary life and manner he is sure to win the boys’ esteem and sympathy.”⁶¹ However, we should listen attentively and hear still more, namely that all these expressions in the text of the project impart something that characterizes exterior behavior, exterior manners, and exterior demeanor. That is confirmed by what is required from the catechists (those who give religious instruction): “The catechist should always show a pleasant disposition, literally a cheerful face.”⁶² Don Bosco is clearly aiming at forming relationships between the educators and the youngsters: it should be characterized by visible and audible affability, courtesy and cheerful joviality, tangible tokens of kindness and self-discipline. Moreover, according to the first chapter in the “Project of Regulations”, he seems to have observed and appreciated these manners in Francis de Sales. Quite rightly, for that is the essence of the concept ‘*douceur*’ that was so typical of his writings, and especially in his daily contact with people.

Attributing it to Francis should not disguise the fact that - thanks to Ansart’s book - he had already stressed these exterior forms of expression of *dolcezza* in the life of St. Vincent de Paul. Precisely on the eighth day of *Il cristiano guidato guidato alla virtù e alla civiltà*, we read: “One never noticed any change in his (Vincent’s) features, never a sharp word on his lips, never even an expression of boredom in his exterior behavior.” Also, “the second strand of kindness (*dolcezza*) consists in being very amiable and friendly with a serenity of face that reassures anybody who comes close to you.”⁶³

Should we not consider - or better - repeat here Don Lemoyne’s final remark after his analysis of *Il cristiano guidato guidato alla virtù e alla civiltà*? Or do we betray Don Bosco with it? Moreover, would we betray him still more if we say that, on close examination, it is evident that his institutional guidelines in the draft of the Regulations, are based even on purely human experience and reflections quite independently of any religious or faith-

Salle, fondatore dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane (Turin: Marietti, 1835), 38: “quelle maniere obbliganti [detto di ciò che, per la sua deferenza e gentilezza, obbliga a un comportamento analogo.” (“in an amiable, affable way; obliging] e persuasive [convincing, winning].”

61. Braidò, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, vol. 1, 307.

62. MB III, 104; EMB III, 448. Braidò, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, vol. 1, 307.

63. OE III, [300] and [307].

inspired basis whatsoever?”⁶⁴ Reading the Project of Regulations, we can be rock-solid sure that Don Bosco wished his close collaborators in different sectors of the pastoral and pedagogical areas, to distinguish themselves from others by being amiable, friendly, affable, winning, kind, tactful, obliging, and courteous with youngsters. Moreover, they should do this after the example of Francis de Sales.

The second quotation that we wish to offer comes from the second chapter of that same project formulation where we read: “Our St. Francis de Sales says that the preacher should be more concerned about people wanting to hear him than whether he could ever be provoking them.” Moreover, it reads: “Young people need and even want to listen, but must never be provoked.”⁶⁵ It is a pity that Fr. Desramaut does not give any reference to the original text of Francis de Sales. In the meantime, we have been searching, but we have not found anything.⁶⁶ Of course it would be interesting to learn how and with what means a preacher could “see to” this.⁶⁷

The search for the origin and the meaning of the combination ‘Christian charity and kindness’ (*carità e dolcezza*) clearly shows the sources Don Bosco drew from in order to get to know Vincent de Paul himself, to admire and imitate him and to propose him to his co-workers and the faithful for imitation. Sources that show he found inspiration in Francis de Sales however,

64. That will become later in 1884 totally different in don Lemoyne’s draft of a circular with the explicit reference to the example of Jesus himself. This draft is more or less the first part of the so-called letter from Rome in 1884. See Pietro Braido, *La lettera di don Bosco da Roma del 10 Maggio 1884* (Rome: LAS, 1984), 27-30; 39, footnote 75; 39, footnotes 103-105; 40, footnotes 117-118.

65. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 299; 336 end of endnote 4. Desramaut however does not give any reference to the place where don Bosco had found this idea in Francis de Sales. Morand Wirth, *Da don Bosco ai nostri giorni: tra storia e nuove sfide* (Roma: Las, 2000), 187. See also and Kurt G. Fischer and Michele Borrelli, *Giovanni Bosco: Pädagogik der Vorsorge* (Paderborn : F. Schöningh, 1966). 102-103. Yet we should not exclude that here we have a disfiguring application of an idea from the “Regulations for conversations and meetings” of St. Francis de Sales: “Je parleray peu et bon, a fin que la compagnie s’en retourne plustost avec appetite de nostre rencontre qu’avec ennui.” OEA XXII, 38. “I shall speak little and well, so that people should go home rather with appetite (desiring more) than with boredom (aversion).”

66. Even not in the explanation of his *Traité de la prédication* for the archbishop of Bourges in OEA II, 5-29; and partly maybe in art. VII, 28.

67. It would be worthwhile, I think, to read in the *Memorie dell’ Oratorio* the reflections of don Bosco himself after his first sermons. See Bosco, *Memorie dell’ Oratorio*, 96-98; and *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 84-85. See also MB I, 449-451; EMB I, 334-336; MB II, 19 and 21; EMB II, 14-15 and 16.

remain hidden, leaving us completely in the dark.

Maybe the pedagogical writings of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, with whom Don Bosco had friendly relations, have played a more major part than we presume. At any rate St. Francis de Sales was a privileged person of reference for these educators, too. Especially as far as *dolcezza* and *amorevolezza*, are concerned.⁶⁸ At all events, in the sketch of regulations, written by his associates, Don Bosco exclusively refers to Francis de Sales. In that project he wants them to take him as their model and to imitate him in his outlook and ways.

Don Rua looking back on a meeting of Don Bosco with some aspiring co-workers in January 1854

Members of the Salesian Family have a better knowledge of Don Rua's notes about the frequently told and oft-quoted meeting of 26th January 1854, than of the draft of the Regulations for the Sunday and Feast-days Oratory, or of the Regulations for the living quarters (*casa annessa*). Let us brush up on this a little:

On the evening of January 26th, 1854, we gathered in Don Bosco's room. Present were Don Bosco, [Joseph] Rocchiotti, Artiglia, [John] Cagliero, and [Michael] Rua. Don Bosco suggested that, with the help of the Lord and St. Francis de Sales, we should first test ourselves by performing deeds of charity towards our neighbor, then bind ourselves by a promise, and later, if possible and desirable, make a formal vow to God. From that evening on, those who agreed – or would later agree – to this were called 'Salesians.'⁶⁹

The date of 26th January suffices for Stella to write that this meeting took place “in the climate of the ecclesiastical feast of St. Francis de Sales.”⁷⁰ After his death in Lyons on 28th December 1622, Francis was taken to the Episcopal city of Annecy and buried there on 24th January. That was the reason for the church feast being celebrated on that date, and in Valdocco it was preceded by a novena. That Francis de Sales was chosen as their model, seems quite normal. Christian charity - like love of one's neighbor - stands

68. Pietro Braido, *Prevenire non reprimere. Il sistema educativo di don Bosco* (Rome: LAS, 1999), 115-116. On page 117, Braido himself judges “mansuetudine” the same as “dolcezza.” He writes: “Tipico è il tema della mansuetudine ossia dolcezza.”

69. See MB V, 9; EMB V, 7-8.

70. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale economica* (1815-1879) (Rome: LAS, 1980), 263. See also Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 1, 140, footnote 34.

at the center and quite on its own without any connection with *dolcezza* as can also be seen in the letter of 11 March 1850 to Rosmini.

We do not attach too much importance to Don Rua's note. Moreover, no importance at all to the information concerning the name 'Salesians.' This, as Desramaut stresses, does not refer to a report, but to a note "that was written down many years after the event. Perhaps only after Don Bosco's death." Desramaut is especially vexed at the designation 'Salesians' on the occasion of that meeting.⁷¹ Of course, it might be instructive if we had a real report at our disposal with Don Bosco's literal proposition and his final justification or explanation concerning the choice and significance of St. Francis de Sales for them. Don Lemoyne though speaks about the preparation of their hearts through his sermons, but how this was done, we are told only vaguely. There is only a poor summing up of themes without the slightest link with sermons or writings of St. Francis de Sales.⁷²

Of course, it is important to remember that the question was about the commitment "to practice Charity" with the help of the Lord and St. Francis de Sales." In the light of the notes taken during the retreat in 1842 and of other texts where charity takes the first place, this aspect of the image of Francis de Sales that he formed for himself, and that had to be an example for him and also for his close collaborators, is a constant factor.

Dominic Savio meets Don Bosco in 1854

The meeting mentioned above with the chosen four in Don Bosco's room took place in January 1854. In the last term of that same year, an outstanding meeting took place with a boy named Dominic Savio.

In his biography of this boy, Don Bosco tells how Dominic had come to see him quite soon after his arrival as a boarder at the Oratory at the beginning

71. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 390 and 413, endnotes 12 and 14. Braido also prefers to mention en passant only the first part of don Rua's note about the engagement to "a period of probation of actual practicing charity." Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, vol. 1, 345. Lenti inserts the whole note, even twice, but in a footnote he nevertheless agrees with Desramaut. Lenti, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 3, 314 and 321. The same passage is mentioned in a less critical way, in Fonti salesiane, vol. 1, 114. Don Bosco himself at times seems to be more prudent in using the name. See the anecdote in MB XI, 436; EMB XI, 408-409. From the same year he seems to like referring to the gospel words about the salt and the light in order to characterize the identity of a Salesian. MB XI, 518; EMB XI, 487 in a conference to novices; MB XIV, 565; EMB XIV, 449 in a short letter; MB XIV, 795 in a circular; EMB XIV, no translation [meaning no translation into English from the Italian origin].

72. See MB V, 9-10; EMB V, 8.

of the school year 1854-55. During the conversation, the boy caught sight of a motto on the wall. It was: *Da mihi anima, caetera tolle*. According to Don Bosco, he commented on the adage, saying that “St. Francis de Sales used to repeat those words”. Then he explained its meaning to the boy: “O Lord, give me souls and keep all other things.” Thereupon Dominic showed that he had understood: “Here you do not do business in money but in souls. I have understood it, and I hope that my soul may be part of this business.”⁷³ However, the question remains whether Francis de Sales, the patron saint of the Oratory, had ever chosen that motto himself.

Stella regrets that Don Bosco has not mentioned the basis he had for attributing that motto to Francis de Sales.⁷⁴ At the same time, Stella quotes a few sources which contain the same interpretation of Gen. 14,21 as the explanation Don Bosco gave to Savio.⁷⁵ Of course, this does not explain where Don Bosco stood in all this. Indeed, we should not forget that the virtue of zeal for souls was, according to the *Regula Cleri*, one of the most important virtues of the good priest. Hence maybe the prayer: “Lord, you who love souls, grant that I may love you so that I can then say: “Give me souls.”⁷⁶

73. Giovanni Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell’ Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales*, in OE XI, [188]. About twenty years later this conversation will have its counterpart in the *Memorie dell’Oratorio* where the mature and skilled writer talks about his youth. As a boy of twelve he meets an unknown seminarian on a carnival Sunday in October. It appears to be Joseph Cafasso. The conversation between the young adult and little John attains an incredibly serious and deep level. That is even true for the witticism that the about sixty years old writer lets the boy bring in as a playful addition to a well-known summing up in the Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament (Ch. 3): “Though what you say is true, there’s a time for everything, a time to pray and a time to play.” Then the cleric starts laughing. And why not also the writer don Bosco himself? Then the cleric continues very earnestly: “A cleric gives himself to the Lord. Nothing in the world must be more important to him than the glory of God and the salvation of souls.” Are these not rather Don Bosco’s words to his future Salesians reading the *Memorie dell’Oratorio*? See Bosco, *Memorie dell’ Oratorio*, 52; and *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 47-48.

74. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 2, 14-15. Morand Wirth concludes firmly: “Essa (una interpretazione nuova) è associata al nome di Francesco di Sales (1567-1622), senza che si possa affermare con certezza che sia proprio lui l’autore. Del resto non si trova nelle sue opere.” See Morand Wirth and Carlo Buzetti, *Da mihi animas che cosa vuol dire?* (Rome: UPS, 2008), 9.

75. Wirth and Buzetti, *Da mihi animas che cosa vuol dire?* 14, footnote 6.

76. Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, vol. 1, 171. In the Italian version: “Signore, che ami le anime, dammi l’amore di Te, in modo che possa quindi dire: “Da mihi animas.”

Nor is it easy to find out when Don Bosco had hung up this motto in his room. We do not even know which room was his from 1846 till 1853. On the outside of the architrave of the front door he had attached the short prayer, “Sia lodato Gesù Cristo.”⁷⁷ What is beyond doubt is that he could only move into the new building of 1853 in the fall of that year. By that time, the building with classrooms, refectory, and the dormitory was ready, and he could arrange a room for himself on the second floor. This place he would keep for a few years, from 1853 till 1861.⁷⁸ He must have received Savio and spoken with him there.

Six months later Don Bosco himself instigated a new conversation with Dominic, which finished with the following advice: “The first thing you must do to become a saint is to make every effort to win souls for God. Because nothing is saintlier in this world than working for the good of souls.”⁷⁹ Here the main aim of his motto is gaining force and clarity.

When the building of 1853 was extended in 1861, Don Bosco moved to the end of the extension towards the playground. He would live and work there for another 27 years.⁸⁰ There too Don Bosco must have hung up the motto on the wall. For on December 31st, 1863, he spoke to the technical and high school students together with their Salesian members of staff to give a ‘strenna’ for 1864. He did so in this way: “As a new year begins, what

77. Aldo Giraud and Giuseppe Biancardi, *Qui è vissuto don Bosco. Itinerari storico-geografici e spirituali* (Turin: Elle Di Ci, 1988), 169-170. See also MB III, 30; EMB III,

78. Fedele Giraudi, *L’Oratorio di don Bosco. Inizio e progressivo sviluppo edilizio della casa madre dei salesiani in Torino* (Turin: SEI, 1935), 124; 123 (illustration.); 146 and ground-plan n. 4. See also Giraud and Biancardi, *Qui è vissuto don Bosco*, 225. See also Bosco, *Memorie dell’Oratorio*, 216; and *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 178 with the phrase “the room which I first took is the one which, by God’s grace, I still occupy”, formulated in the seventies. That doesn’t agree with the facts. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale*, 90. Still Lenti seems to doubt whether the boy could have read the motto there: “The saying he (reportedly) (= reputedly, as is said) read in don Bosco’s room”. Lenti, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 3, 183. In this period (1854) the pastoral priority is shown by analogy in the introduction to a historical sketch by Don Bosco: “When I devoted myself to that part of the priestly work, I had the intention to engage all my forces for the greater glory of God and the well-being (vantaggio) of souls.” See also Braidò, *Don Bosco per i giovani: L’ “Oratorio” una “Congregazione degli Oratori”*. *Documenti*, 19 and 34, footnotes 47-48.

79. OE XI, [203].

80. Giraud and Biancardi, *Qui è vissuto don Bosco*, 227-229. Giraudi, *L’Oratorio di don Bosco*, 140-141 and 146; ground plan 6. Teresio Bosco and Carlo Fiore, *Sulle strade di don Bosco. Guida ai luoghi salesiani* (Leumann (TO): Elle Di Ci, 1987), 50-51.

shall I ask of you or promise you or suggest to you? As for a request, I can only restate the goal of this house which you see displayed in my room: *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*. All I ask of you is your soul, your spiritual well-being.”⁸¹ Then follows what he promises and advises them. At this point of the research, we believe a wider look at the motto will prove useful and add some clarity.

Many years later, on July 1st, 1880 in Borgo S. Martino, he gave the Salesian Cooperators (men and women) a talk rich in content. The most important parts of it have been preserved almost entirely in his words. Here is an example: “I am daily aware of how much the Salesian Cooperators are doing and how they not only practice charity but also urge others to do so. I trust that they will continue showing that they are true disciples of St. Francis de Sales, who became ‘all things to all people’ to win all to God. ‘Give me souls and take all the rest,’ he often used to say.”⁸² In this talk, Don Bosco clearly expressed once more that he had adopted the motto from St. Francis de Sales.

That motto received an official and definitive confirmation in 1884. In September of that year, the superiors of the Congregation met to decide on the maxim for the coat of arms they wanted to have made. Meaningful slogans were proposed. Among others *Sinite parvulos venire ad me, Temperanza e Lavoro*. Finally, Don Bosco himself cut the knot: “A motto was already adopted in the early days off the Oratory at the time of the Convitto when I was visiting the prisons: *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*. His words made a great impression and received general approval.”⁸³ On that day, however, he did not find it necessary to refer to the origin of the motto. On the coat of arms St. Francis de Sales was represented as a writer. In fact, whether Don Bosco had already started using that motto in the Convitto and hung it up may be left an open question. Even if he had started later with it, for instance after

81. MB VII, 585; EMB VII, 354.

82. MB XIV, 542 and especially 546-547; EMB XIV, 428 and especially 433. For the subject of this topic an extract from the report of an assembly of the women cooperators of Valdocco may be relatively more important: “Two hundred ladies were present. The procedure was the usual one, except that the reading from the life of St. Francis de Sales was replaced by a reading from the biography of St. Jeanne de Chantal.” See MB XIV, 132; EMB XIV, 96. However, we are not told how Don Bosco usually dealt with such readings. Did it remain a simple reading or did he further pursue into the matter? And how did he do so?

83. MB XVII, 365-366; EMB XVII, 337.

the move to the Pinar di house or only in the new building of 1853, it was only right that he should speak his mind.

Furthermore, Father Michael Rua, in a circular dated January 29th 1896, left this meaningful testimony: “May the Lord hear my prayers and keep in our hearts forever the holy fire that was lighted in us when we heard the mighty cry of Don Bosco: *da mihi animas* and when we saw how he had spent all his energy and his whole life practising charity.”⁸⁴ When Michael Rua did hear that motto for the first time, and when that fire was lighted in his heart, we, unfortunately, do not know. We do know however that he was well into his 15th year when on 24th September 1852 he became a boarder in the *casa annessa* of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and that he received the cassock from Don Bosco’s hands. During the whole of his life he remained an extraordinarily devoted collaborator of Don Bosco, you might say Don Bosco’s right hand. He must have known Don Bosco through and through.

How much Don Rua felt called to keep that motto alive comes to the fore again in a circular of 31st January 1907. He warns all the confrères: “However, we would work in vain if the world did not see and become convinced that we do not seek riches or comfort and that we are faithful to Don Bosco’s motto: *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle!*” In the course of time it had become for him simply the motto of Don Bosco. Yet Don Rua shows a certain link with Francis de Sales: “Oh! May the words of St Francis de Sales be strongly imprinted in our spirit, namely, that not only are the poor evangelized, but the poor themselves evangelize.”⁸⁵ So let this be a link that previously was not immediately evident.

Don Rua was certainly not one to ‘shout in the desert.’ Don Bosco’s choice for this motto, was confirmed by the solemn declaration of Pope Pius XI at the beatification of Don Bosco on 19th March 1929. There the pope asked: “But whence did this great servant of God draw the inexhaustible

84. *Lettere circolari di don Michele Rua ai salesiani* (Torino: Tip. SAID Buona Stampa, 1910), 142. That is at any rate the text on that spot in the circular. Yet Stella refers to the same circular and the same page with the following passage: “He (don Bosco) made not a single step, did not speak a single word, did not start a work without having the aim of saving souls. Piling up treasures, striving for pleasant things and honors he left to others. Don Bosco really only took to heart the saving of souls. He said ‘*Da mihi animas, caetera tolle!*’ with acts and not only with words.” Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 2, 13. But these words cannot be found on that spot in the circular.

85. *Lettere circolari di don Michele Rua*, 368-69. Here too a reference to a distinct source is missing.

energy demanded by so many undertakings? He constantly revealed this secret in the slogan which is also seen wherever Salesians labor, his very own motto: *Da mihi animas, cetera tolle* (Give me souls, away with the rest).⁸⁶ It has simply become the motto of the Salesians without any further thought, as coming straight from Don Bosco. This statement gave Amadei, the compiler of the 10th volume of the *Memorie biografiche*, the idea to begin the first part of his extensive volume covering the years 1871-1874 with the title: “Da mihi animas, cetera tolle.”⁸⁷ Don Bosco’s motto, had truly become the motto of the Congregation. It is strong evidence of the firm rooting of a maxim that has engendered a new spirit both in the life and mission of the Salesians themselves and in the whole Salesian family, a motto that was linked more and more to the life and work of Don Bosco himself. This is much more than to the choice of Francis de Sales as a model.

First years after the approval of the Constitutions of the Society (Congregation) of Saint Francis de Sales (1876-1880)

Need and desirability to justify the choice of Francis de Sales as patron saint and inspirational model.

Through the conversation with Dominic Savio and the talk to the Cooperators (men and women) in Borgo S. Martino, it has become clear that in certain writings and sermons, Don Bosco has made a link with the personality of Francis de Sales. How loose and unsystematic the link may have been, it was there. Moreover, it was there not only when Don Bosco himself was speaking but also when one of his Salesians had the floor. Thus Don Lazzerio noted on 19th January 1878 in a Diario, a kind of diary or chronicle, as follows: “Start of the novena to St. Francis”. Moreover, more explicitly on 26th January: “We have a triduum with sermons and a solemn benediction in honor of St. Francis. Preacher Don Cagliero.”⁸⁸

With the year 1878, we evidently take a significant chronological step from the mid-fifties to the period of the highly critical and deliberate

86. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 20-21 March 1929. See MB X, 2; EMB X, 1. Even if the pope let himself be inspired by the superiors of the Salesian congregation, this fact does not diminish at all the force of the statement.

87. MB X, 1; EMB X, 1. Owing to all sorts of circumstances that volume was published in 1939 as the last of the series.

88. José Manuel Prelezio, *Valdocco nell' Ottocento tra reale e ideale, documenti e testimonianze* (Rome: LAS, 1992), 63 and 86. When outsiders were invited to preside, things probably changed. (see same 19; 82; 87.) It also became a custom to prepare the feast of St. Francis de Sales with a novena. Then don Bosco liked to give a ‘little flower’

consolidation of the congregation itself, its work for the young, and its unique educational system. This consolidation took place in the mid-seventies and early eighties. We have only to think of the starting of the *Memorie dell' Oratorio* in 1873-1875 and of the preparation, the working sessions and the conclusions of the first General Chapter in 1877.

As the years passed, Don Bosco must have concluded that more had to be done and, still more, that the work to be done had to be tackled systematically to justify the choice of St. Francis de Sales as the patron saint of the Congregation. That we learn from Don Lemoyne:

There was also need to make known the life and works of St. Francis de Sales. There were biographies already in existence, but they were unsuitable both for the young and for these times. Don Bosco therefore in January 1876 publicly invited the more outstanding Salesians to compile two lives of the saint: a short one, in one volume, suitable for the general public and the young, to be stocked in schools and parishes; the other ... for educated people. Once the life of St. Francis was in print, he planned to publish a handy edition of his works as well. In the meantime, he was eager for an early publication of the saint's *Philothea* in an attractive format, edited for young people and educational Institutions.⁸⁹

This desire leads us to suppose that the *Introduction to the Devout Life* was no longer circulating among the young and not even among the Salesians. We cannot be sure since the reading of the *Imitation of Christ* remained strongly recommended for college pupils. Until 1876-1877 this booklet had to be used in the Latin lessons.⁹⁰ That could be at the same time an important source of a specific spirituality, for a well-determined way of Christian life for the young. Alternatively, this supposition is not quite

or item of attention for each day. That was the case in 1863. But there was only one day then, the 8th day of the novena, where with the 'little flower' he explicitly referred to the example of the saint himself: "In imitation of St. Francis de Sales, I shall avoid bad companions and associate with good ones." See MB VII, 375; EMB VII, 225. See also January 1866 in MB VIII, 292; EMB VIII, 152. Thus it might be possible that don Bosco himself thought of a known incident when Francis as law student in Padua was made a fool of by fellow students and ended up at a courtesan's. Don Bosco will have preferred not to tell this to his boys. Did he also know the "Règles pour les conversations et rencontres" that Francis wrote after that for him so painful incident, or did he know perhaps a seriously arranged version of it? OEA XXII, 37-44.

89. MB XI, 437-438; EMB XI, 410.

90. At any rate that was don Bosco's intention according to his invitation to the 1st General Chapter: "In former times one always used *De Imitatione Christi*. (...) But the reading of the book *De Imitatione Christi* must constantly be recommended." OE XXVIII, [319]

justified, for from the first edition onwards of *Il giovane provveduto* (1847), he advised as spiritual reading along with the *Imitation of Christ*, the *Philothea* of St. Francis de Sales, in that order.⁹¹ That said, we leave out the reading of biographies such as those of Comollo, Magone, Savio and other youngsters - reading that was more and more clearly recommended.

According to his invitation to the 1st General Chapter, the intentions of Don Bosco were clear enough, but the whole project seemed to aim too high.⁹² Thus one had to manage with the current editions. We learned this from the first General Chapter in September 1877. During the second session the theme “studies of the Salesian Confreres” came under discussion. The 14th item of the debate during the Chapter, stipulated that: “Among the authors who seem to be most adapted for use in a series of retreats both for youngsters and for adults, we suggest that our members make use especially of the following ... for the instructions, all the works of St. Francis de Sales.”⁹³ It is worth observing that these works are given first place in the final summing up. Whether anything of this was observed, and especially what the exact results had to be researched more closely.

A “good night” for the boys by Don Bosco in January 1876

From this period of consolidation, we undoubtedly may consider a “good night” given by Don Bosco in January 1876 as a significant, concrete datum.

On 7th January he had already given a “good night” to instruct the boys how to cope with the severe cold that continued at that time in Turin. On another evening he availed himself of the novena in preparation for the feast of the patron saint of the Oratory to say the following:

As you know, St. Francis de Sales is the Saint of kindness (*mansuetudine*) and patience. During this novena, I would like all of you to strive to imitate these

91. OE II, [198]. See also the 101st edition of 1885. In the course of time he experienced and understood that the text which was circulating, was not suited for youngsters. Hence probably that wish in the years 1876-1877. See footnote 90. In a collection of pieces of advice for a Christian, called “Porta teco, cristiano” (Handbook for Christians”) in 1858, he gave fathers of the family the task to read on Sundays and feast days from books such as “The imitation of Christ” and the “Philothea”. And in this sequence again women were advised to get acquainted with the “Philothea of Francis de Sales and the life of Philip Neri.” OE XI [29] and [55].

92. See MB XI, 438-439; EMB XI, 410-411.

93. Marcel Verhulst, *I verbali del primo capitolo generale salesiano* (1877). Edizione critica (Rome: Las, 1980), 98, 101 and 103. See also in same, 112 (the literal contribution of don Bosco) and the notes on 26; 27-28.

virtues. Store up a large amount of kindness in your heart so that you may always be inclined to love your companions without getting angry at them and without using an insulting or sarcastic tone of voice. Always do good whenever you can. Never harm anyone in any way.⁹⁴

We notice at once that Don Bosco comes straight to the point. He supposes that his young and adult listeners know Francis de Sales well enough, and in any case know that he is the saint of gentleness and patience. He seems to consider both virtues as one: *questa virtù*.. Whether he has said “*mansuetudine*” or “*dolcezza*”, there’s no way of knowing. We are aware of the “good night” itself, only from notes of some listener.

It is important for the subject of this article that the idea is indeed found in Francis’ *Introduction à la vie devote* wherein he has devoted two chapters to the concept of ‘douceur’ (kindness, gentleness). At the end of the 8th chapter of part III we find this idea: “Lorsque vous êtes en tranquillité et sans aucun sujet de colère, faites grande provision de douceur et de débonnairété, disant vos paroles et faisant toutes vos actions petites et grandes en la plus douce façon qu’il vous sera possible.” And even before that: “que ce chrême mystique composé de douceur et d’humilité soit dedans votre coeur.” This wording is found almost literally within Don Bosco’s writings. Besides, the title of that chapter eight of the *Philothea*, is quite remarkable: “De la douceur envers le prochain et remède contre l’ire” (against rage, fury, anger).⁹⁵ The latter we hear in Don Bosco’s words “never get angry (*adirarvi*).” The similarity with and the possible influence of Francis de Sales are evident. That is why we may believe it was an idea that served as a guideline for him, and that he knew thanks to reading the *Introduction to the Devout Life* or more likely, through his knowledge of extracts from it or an anthology of notable quotations.

Further on during the delivery of his “good night”, Don Bosco passes on to an application of these ideas in the ordinary daily life of the boys and also of the Salesians present. He does so by first taking first a positive approach, and then a negative one: “I would like you to resolve to show your love for your companions by giving each other good advice and never - as

94. MB XII, 32; EMB XII, 20.

95. OEA III, 165; 162. “When you are at peace and without any anger make a great provision of gentleness and kindness. Do this by saying all your words and doing all your actions both small and great with the utmost gentleness possible.” So, we may wonder why this most important piece of advice is missing on the list of maxims of St. Francis de Sales that we can read in the 101st edition of *Il giovane provveduto* in OE XXXV, [267-268] edited in 1885. By the way it may be baffling that the expression “More flies are caught...” is missing there as well.

unfortunately happens in the world - leading each other into evil ways.” The latter, and other modes of behavior, are concerned rather on how to practice charity. They no longer directly refer to “*douceur*” so much as getting on affably, amiably, in a friendly way, tactfully and in a well-mannered way with each other, in this way putting into practice such expressions as *con buone maniere*; *con belle maniere*; *con modi graziosi*.⁹⁶ This nuance appears only later: “on the contrary – and this is true – a companion can do a lot of good with timely, friendly (using the word *amorevolmente*), wholesome advice.”⁹⁷

Toward the end of his talk, Don Bosco inserts the second aspect, namely “patience.” This virtue too is explicitly treated by Francis de Sales in the third part of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*. He puts it first in the summing up of the so-called “little virtues”: “Such as patience, good-heartedness, mortification of the heart, humility.”⁹⁸ Subsequently, we find a complete chapter entitled *De la patience*. Amongst others, we find this introductory idea:

Ressouvenez-vous souvent que Notre Seigneur nous a sauvés en souffrant et endurant, et que de même nous devons faire notre salut par les souffrances et afflictions, endurant les injures, contradictions et déplaisirs avec le plus de douceur qu’il nous sera possible.” And further: “Ne bornez point votre patience à telle ou telle sorte d’injures et d’afflictions.”⁹⁹

Then Francis gives in the Philothea a few examples of insults and sad, painful experiences. These examples are less suited for Don Bosco’s evening talk to the youngsters. For him, there are more critical applications. He talks clearly and openly about the very disagreeable feelings and inconveniences brought on by the exceptionally severe winter. Thick, warm sweaters were still a thing of the future, and without a doubt, Don Bosco could not provide sufficient means to combat cold and damp. In the spirit of the time, he demands that “during this novena you endure cold and dampness and other discomforts without complaint in honor of St. Francis de Sales”.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, he goes back to the earlier references to abuse and insults.

96. Or also “con piacevoli maniere” in the project of Regulations for the adjacent house “(casa annessa)”. MB IV, 750; not translated in EMB IV, 554. Also see Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 433-447.

97. MB XII, 32, EMB XII, 20.

98. OEA III, 132: III part, chapter II.

99. OEA III, 134.

100. MB XII, 33; EMB XII, 20.

Moreover, finally, he adds: "If anyone would like to do something else equally good he may do so, especially if he strives to imitate our Saint in observing silence and self-control and in speaking with concern for his companions' feelings."¹⁰¹ It looks as if Don Bosco wants to call up St. Francis de Sales for everything. Does Francis not write in the chapter twenty-four of part III: "Frankness, simplicity, amiability, and modesty are appreciated in any conversation"? Moreover, about solitude, he writes: "practice spiritual solitude (*la solitude mentale*); where you can better isolate your spirit in your heart as wished, and unbend your soul employing good, saintly ideas or through spiritual reading."¹⁰² But, maybe we exaggerate in desiring to see in that part of his talk some further link with St. Francis de Sales.

On the other hand, there are perhaps more resemblances hidden in that good night than I have discovered. Could it be that Don Bosco regularly read the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and that he was well versed in Francis de Sales' way of thinking? We neither dare confirm nor deny it. However, it certainly means that he was familiar with some statements of the saint and that, on certain occasions, he reminded his boys of particular aspects of the life and spirit of St. Francis and that he invited them to live in that spirit.

We would like to mention the following *en passant*. We may say that Christian spirituality in a general sense is the personal or familiar way to live as a faithful Christian, inspired, encouraged and supported by way of life, stories and statements of Jesus. As a corollary to that, spirituality in a specific sense means that same manner of Christian life, but nuanced by particular characteristics of a known guide or even of several guides such as Francis de Sales, Vincent de Paul and, nowadays, Don Bosco himself. Maybe too in the final analysis, that nuanced way of Christian life, was further characterized by and enriched by personal preferences and common spiritual and devotional accentuations of the time. If that is the case, Don Bosco undoubtedly intended with such a 'good night' to promote elements of St. Francis de Sales' spirituality among the boys and the Salesians present.

A remarkable passage in a sermon on 14th march 1876

Don Bosco spoke by choice and with clear intent about St. Francis de Sales to his close fellow-workers. The many evidence of this are quotations

101. MB XII, 33; EMB XII, 21.

102. OEA III, 224-225: "En toutes conversations, la naïveté, simplicité, douceur et modestie sont toujours préférées"; "où plus à souhait vous puissiez retirer votre esprit en votre coeur et récréer votre âme par des bonnes cogitations et saintes pensées, ou par un peu de bonne lecture."

from writings and statements of Don Bosco in the course of the first ten years of his work as a priest and educator which we have already recalled here. The witness of it in the consolidation period is a passage in a talk he gave in the Oratory on 14th March 1876 for an audience of about 200 people on the theme “*Messis quidem multa, operarii autem pauci*” (The harvest is rich, but the workers are few).¹⁰³

Quite remarkable is the following passage: “If the Salesians were really to live their faith as St. Francis de Sales understood it in his zeal (*zelo*), charity (*carità*) and meekness (*mansuetudine*), I could truly be proud, and there would be reasons to hope for a vast amount of good to be done! In fact I might say that the world would come after us, and we would master it!” It looks like a summary of the main characteristics of Francis de Sales (*zelo, carità e mansuetudine/amorevolezza*) that Don Bosco often focused on either separately or together and that he impressed on them. At the same time such a passage seems to lack further explanation or realization.

It must be said that a few moments before, he had come out with something more resounding about “the firm, natural, and totally loving, kind and meek” attitude of Francis de Sales regarding his father about certain difficult conversations the two had had. Such arguments happened when he, a recently qualified university-student, announced to him that he wished to become a priest, and again a couple of years later in reference to disagreements when Francis de Sales wanted to go as a missionary to the Calvinist region of the Chablais. Don Bosco again alluded to this relationship in a passage of this sermon, showing young confreres and older students how they must react in similar situations. According to the text noted, in addition to speaking of *carità*, he also linked the terms *amorevolezza* and *mansuetudine*.¹⁰⁴

Of course, the fact remains that the secretary Don Barberis, is honest enough to warn us “he was more concerned with substance rather than the actual words”; this means he “rather reproduces the mainstream of ideas than the literal words.”¹⁰⁵ This warning may especially apply to the use of the word *mansuetudine* because Don Bosco himself used to prefer *dolcezza*.

103. MB XII, 141 and 625-631, especially 630; EMB XII, 113 and 459-464, especially 463. For more details about the document see the annual *Vandaag pastoraal integreren in het opvoedingswerk. Perspectieven & uitdagingen* (Oud-Heverlee: Don Bosco Vorming & Animatie, 2007), 22-24.

104. MB XII, 630 and 628; EMB XII, 463 and 461. See Biesmans, in *Vandaag pastoraal integreren*, 52.

105. MB XII, 141; EMB XII, 113.

That may be seen once more in the following story where the word *dolcezza* is used twice and yet at the end also *mansuetudine* and in the comment that follows: “mansueti con tutti.”¹⁰⁶

An allegorical story told by Don Bosco during a retreat at Lanzo in 1877.

An intentionally motivated reference to the patron saint of the oratory of Valdocco is also shown in a little story, that the listeners might also “call a fable, a dream, a fantasy.” He narrated it in August 1877 at the end of the retreat in preparation for the third missionary expedition to South-America. Confreres not destined for the missions were also taking part in the retreat.¹⁰⁷

Don Bosco related that, after a visit to a sick person on his way home, he had seen a woman at work, selling roasted chestnuts. As she was using what for him was an important appliance for a very personal recipe, he went up to her inquisitively and asked her what she was cooking. She answered: “Candy for the Salesians.” The sweets not only had different colors but on top lay “some sticky icing sugar which looked like freshly fallen drops of rain or dew.” For Don Bosco, her words were an answer and also an enigma requiring further explanation.

Here his question about the meaning of the sugar is the most important one. The woman gave him this explanation:

It (the sticky icing) signifies the sweetness of the Saint whom you have taken as your model. The resemblance to dew means that much effort and sacrifice are

106. MB XIII, 303; EMB XIII, 226-227. In the English translation once “sweetness” and twice “gentleness” and also “kind to everyone” in the comment.

107. MB XIII, 301 and 302-303; EMB XIII, 225-227. Ceria had several versions at his disposal, written respectively by Don Lemoyne, Don Barberis and Don Vespignani. In a footnote he justifies his preference for the notes of Don Lemoyne, that were written down – just like those by Don Barberis – “immediately” after Don Bosco had told his story. This was in contrast with Don Vespignani who wrote it down in his booklet years later. See Giuseppe Vespignani, *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco (1876-1877)* (Turin: SEI, 1932), 115-118. And then Ceria is very courteous to Vespignani who had changed Don Bosco’s word “una donna” into “una Signora” with a capital letter, which made it easier for him to make Don Bosco understand that he meant “Maria Santissima Ausiliatrice.” In this same footnote Ceria says that Don Bosco told the same story on Saturday evening 28 September during the General Chapter. This must have happened before a smaller audience, because it was precisely in the week when the General Chapter was interrupted, namely from 23 September till 2 October 1877. See Verhulst, *I verbali del primo capitolo generale*, 279, footnotes 2-3, 50 and 271.

needed to maintain such gentleness and that sometimes it can be preserved only by the shedding of one's blood.¹⁰⁸

That may undoubtedly be interpreted as meaning that Don Bosco had chosen St. Francis de Sales as a model because the saint excelled in loving kindness. Through his exceptional practicing of kindness in his contact with his fellow men, he was identified with this virtue. And Don Bosco wanted not only to possess this virtue himself at all costs but also that all Salesians should practice it: "the sweets" were meant for all.

What seems significant to me is that the sugar is put on the outside. The *dolcezza* of the patron saint of the Salesians had indeed to do with his outward appearance and his way of making contact: the open features and glance, the smile, the calm voice, the friendly, winning, courteous, patient attitude. That does not alter the fact that these outward manners must be nourished and supported by the important internal attitude of kindness, preferably as an increasing capital, a growing stock of meekness. Bear in mind that Don Bosco had invited his listeners to foster that never diminishing care in the 'good night' of 1876.¹⁰⁹

The meaning of the story – in our opinion - consists in the fact that Don Bosco brings *dolcezza* into relief as an essential element both of Francis de Sales and of the Salesians, and that in his imagery he so clearly refers to the outward indications of this virtue. Thus this imagery can also remind us of the guidelines in the Project of Regulations (1852), especially of the expressions "buone maniere", "con belle maniere", "con modi graziosi." The related anecdote serves at any rate to confirm the sound basis for this. Nevertheless, Don Bosco never came to adopting the chapters from the *Introduction to the devout life* or giving them to everybody as he had done with St. Vincent de Paul's idea about *dolcezza*.¹¹⁰

108. MB XIII, 302 and 303; EMB XIII, 225 and 226 for the various quotations.

109. Francis de Sales succeeded in neatly wording this: "Mais prenes garde, Philotee, que ce chresme mystique composé de douceur et d'humilité soit dedans vostre coeur; car c'est un des grans artifices de l'ennemi de faire que plusieurs s'amusement aux paroles et contenance exterieures de ces deux vertus, qui n'examinans pas bien leurs affections interieures, pensent estre humbles et doux et ne le sont neanmoins nullement en effect." OEA III, 162.

110. See Appendix 4.

An autographical story of Don Bosco in May 1879, told to the members of the Salesian Congregation.

On 9th May 1879 Don Bosco again told a story, a dream-tale exclusively meant for the members of the Congregation. This story is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, we possess an autographic version of this story.¹¹¹ Secondly, the guide Francis de Sales and Don Bosco himself are the main actors.¹¹² The text transmitted consists of two separate, original stories. A first, very short one, is rather confused and cryptic and has no link at all with the real story that is going to be told. It looks as if, soon after starting to write, Don Bosco suddenly loses the thread or is overwhelmed at once by another inspiration, yet still leaves the beginning as it stood.¹¹³ For that reason we omit any reference to it here.

It is no new phenomenon that in the transition between the first and the second paragraph, a sort of thunder and lightning should occur. This occurrence often happens with Don Bosco, just as the motive of the garden repeatedly takes place in his tales. We must not be led astray. What we want to call attention to, is not the lengthy story from December 1876 which is well known, thanks to the conversation with the guide, Dominic Savio, and the explicit indication “Salesian garden.”¹¹⁴ That is mainly about the boys and just a little about the congregation, and the fruitful effects of it in the past. The dream-tale told here concerns only different aspects of the congregation itself.

111. Cecilia Romero, *I sogni di Don Bosco. Edizione critica* (Turin: Elle Di Ci, 1978), 54-57. The whole text leaves the impression that they are first notes for a still more extensively to be written talk “in the form of a dream.” However, from the introduction to the story by Don Ceria in MB XIV, we must conclude that Don Bosco had really orally communicated the content as it is. This is not a little surprising because there is no diversity of notes available. See Romero, *I sogni di Don Bosco*, 110.

112. MB XIV, 123-125; EMB XIV, 88-90.

113. Some aspects in his notes remind us of other stories. So is there in the ‘good night’ on 4 May 1875 also a valley, a plain, monsters, battles (“battaglia”), the recognizing of youngsters as boys of the Oratory. See MB XI, 257-260; EMB XI, 239-243. There are similar resemblances with the particularly strange story from October 1864 in MB VII, 796-800; EMB VII, 467-470, where some boys also carry “a splendid banner”.

114. That story is found in MB XII, 586-595; EMB XII, 432-441. As regards the motive “garden” see the story in 1847 as told in 1864 in part 4 of this article. See also MB XII, 469-470 and EMB XII, 432-441. There exists an autographic text of the dream-tale “the Salesian garden,” a text that is much shorter than the version in MB XII. See Romero, *I sogni di Don Bosco*, 37-44.

In the first part of the encounter, the unknown person of the dream does not reveal his identity. He presents himself as a “guide”, but says little or nothing at all of what is so characteristic of Francis de Sales himself. He does not give a speech but instead gives a booklet to be read. Whether this is one of his works, is not mentioned. Don Bosco reads: “*For the novices*: Obedience (and punctuality) in all things. *For the Confreres*: Jealously safeguard the virtue of chastity. *For the Directors*: Take every care, make every effort to observe and promote observance of the rules through which everyone’s life is consecrated to God. *For the Superior*: Total self-sacrifice, so as to draw himself and his charges to God.” Saint Francis has certainly written some fascinating ideas on these themes in the Introduction to the devout life. Especially of course for the laity: “Only love makes us complete. However, obedience, chastity and poverty are the three principal means to attain perfection.”¹¹⁵ Moreover, in the following chapter, we read: “The lily among the flowers is chastity, that gives men the likeness of angels.”¹¹⁶ However, did Don Bosco at that moment have in mind such considerations of St. Francis de Sales? There is no evidence of that here.

Are the virtues mentioned (obedience – punctuality – chastity) in fact not always constantly-recurring, particular themes of Don Bosco himself? Significant in this respect amongst others are some talks were given during the retreat at Lanzo in September 1875.¹¹⁷ On that occasion he did not look to Francis de Sales but drew on the authority of St. Augustine and Philip Neri.¹¹⁸ Significant also is a circular of January 1876.¹¹⁹ On 4 November 1878, a relatively robust discussion had taken place in the General Council about accepting or rejecting some candidates as novices.¹²⁰ Besides, at that time Don Bosco was being confronted with severe criticism by Mgr. Gastaldi, concerning the recruitment and formation of his Salesians.¹²¹ Furthermore,

115. OEA, III, chapter XI, 172.

116. OEA, III, chapter XI, 110.

117. MB XI, 573-584. See especially 574 and 580-583; not translated in EMB XI.

118. Also see the text about the future in the ‘dream-tale’ with Domenico Savio. See MB XII, 593; EMB XII, 439. Lajeunie names as privileged virtues: “Il la fonda (son institution religieuse) sur les trois vertus préférées du Seigneur: la charité, l’humilité, la douceur.” See Étienne-Jean Lajeunie, *Saint François de Sales, l’homme, la pensée, l’action* (Paris: Guy Victor, 1966), 386.

119. MB XII, 25-27; EMB XII, 14-16.

120. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 1203-1205. Also 1218.

121. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 1203.

a good month after 9th May 1879 Don Bosco wrote a letter to the 4th and 5th-year pupils in the College of Borgo San Martino. In this letter of 17th June 1879, there were only general guidelines. Still... he promised he would show personal concern: "I will do so in person and will explain the obstacles each of you will face in choosing a state of life." Was Don Bosco able to fulfill this promise? Whatever the case may be, in the following, extensive part of his "dream-tale" he will sum up some useful elements.

In the transition to that more extensive part of the advice, the mysterious guide leading him in Don Bosco's dream, will not say clearly and distinctly who he is. Maybe Don Bosco lifts up a corner of the veil by describing the attitude of the guide: "He looked steadily and calmly at Don Bosco." Moreover, now he starts speaking, though Don Bosco tells nothing about the person's tone of voice. The man in question now says that he has the task of communicating something about the future of the Congregation. That will take place in the form of dialogue. Now Don Bosco may ask questions. There will be about ten of them. In the first instance, it concerns about the subject vocations about which he felt so strongly: "How can I foster vocations?"

In February 1878 that theme had once more become opportune during the yearly gathering of St. Francis de Sales. There both at the beginning and at the end of his talk Don Bosco had emphasized the frequent use of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Communion, and especially the frequent reception of Holy Communion. Moreover, when summing up, offering "Some excellent ways of fostering or safeguarding a priestly vocation or even kindling a desire to become a Salesian," he then put first: "1. Treat boys with kindness (*carità*),¹²² meaning 'treating the youngsters with Christian love, in such a way that they also become aware of that love. In the dream-tale we are now dealing with, this is confirmed and ratified with the expression: "by being endlessly kind towards their pupils (*trattando con somma carità gli allievi*)." Where with "trattando con somma carità" undoubtedly is meant "have affable, amiable, heartfelt contact with the youngsters." Moreover, even later in the story "trattare con benevolenza," also with confreres of any age group.¹²³ In this application, we do not know of any comparable contribution of St. Francis de Sales, who - on the contrary - devotes a whole chapter to "frequent holy communion."¹²⁴ Neither did Don Bosco refer to it in his talk in early February 1878.

122. MB XIV, 44; EMB XIV, 27.

123. MB XIV, 124; EMB XIV, 89.

124. *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 2nd part, chapter XX in OEA III, 116-120.

What should one bear in mind when admitting novices?

Don Bosco frequently makes a butt of lazy and greedy people.¹²⁵ Is there a better summary of his conviction in both areas than the 9th piece of advice to the missionaries: “Shun idleness and disputes, and observe great moderation in eating, drinking and sleeping.”¹²⁶ Here it is again merely a topic, a pet subject of Don Bosco himself.

In referring to the novices being admitted to the vows, the interlocutor strongly stresses the importance of chastity: “Make sure that they are well grounded in chastity.” However, once more Don Bosco himself seems to be speaking. For he always stressed the necessity of this virtue in a congregation that works for and with young people: “Without it [the virtue of chastity], one single person may bring ruin on the Congregation.”¹²⁷ He also put this condition for the success of the congregation in the mouth of Dominic Savio: “There is but one condition: that your sons be devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary and that all of them learn to preserve the virtue of chastity which so delights God.”¹²⁸ A twofold condition which in Don Bosco’s eyes is but one.

What about the right spirit to be maintained within the Congregation? Don Bosco was well aware of the significance of written contact through personally addressed letters. Maybe the abundant personal correspondence of Francis de Sales was known by him. Alternatively, perhaps he was not aware of it. Don Bosco had more problems with the writing of circulars. The houses outside Turin he visited several times, so he had personal contact with the confreres. They were also allowed to knock at his door, and he treated everybody with gentleness (*con benevolenza*), that is in a winning, friendly, amiable way. He required the same manner of contact with the confreres from those in authority. At any rate, his wish is that the superiors follow his example: “Let superiors often write, visit and welcome the confreres, dealing kindly with them,” to maintain the right spirit in the houses.

With regards to “foreign missions,” the guide advised to simply take from Don Bosco’s first advice to the first Salesians who left for South America in 1875, amongst others the following: “to foster vocations to the priesthood,

125. See the dream-tale from 1876 with a monstrous bear, and on two fearful teeth the inscription: idleness (*otium*) and gluttony (*gula*). MB XII, 354-355; EMB XII, 253-254.

126. Giovanni Bosco, *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali*, ed. Jesús Borrego Arruz et al (Rome: LAS, 1987), 122, footnote 20. See also MB XI, 389; EMB XI, 364.

127. Talk at the beginning of the holidays in July 1875. MB XI, 299-300; EMB XI, 279.

128. MB XII, 593; EMB XII 439.

you should recommend: (1) Love chastity.”¹²⁹ That is seen here in the dream-tale in the advice: “Send men of sound morality and recall any who give serious reason for doubt.”

The present and future of the congregation

In his autobiographical conference, Don Bosco asks three questions in quick succession; questions gauging the general situation of the Congregation: “Is our Congregation on the right path?”, “Will the Congregation grow?” and “Will it have a long life?”, which means: “what sort of future has it?” The latter is a repetition of the question he had already raised in the long conversation with Dominic Savio.¹³⁰ In fact, on this item, it is not about a prediction of the future, but rather an appeal to all the members to come up with the required conditions that guarantee the future of the Congregation. We should not rest on our laurels, for standing still means falling back. Each one of the superiors must do his part, and before all: every member must “love work and temperance.”¹³¹ This last aspect is typical of Don Bosco. In a talk, he is said to have declared that he would “promise bread, work and paradise” to a person willing to become a member of the Congregation.¹³² During a talk he gave in April 1875, he said: “Let us work hard to do much good.”¹³³

Moreover, we should not forget that strong statement during a conversation at the table in August 1876: “For each of us who might die of work – Don Bosco explained – a hundred others would be drawn to the Congregation.”¹³⁴ Perhaps also during the same evening in August: “Our Congregation will never diminish or decline in numbers; indeed, it will keep growing as long as we work hard and are ruled by temperance.” Moreover: “There are three things which undermine a religious congregation. The first I have already mentioned: idleness, too little work ... The second cause is

129. Bosco, *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali*, 123, footnote 41. See also MB XI, 390; EMB XI, 365.

130. MB XII, 591-593; EMB XII, 437-439.

131. MB XIV, 124; EMB XIV, 89. We probably may presume an affinity with chapter XXIII of the third part of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* especially with the following idea: “Si le travail que vous feres vous est necessaire, ou fort utile à la gloire de Dieu, j’ayme mieux que vous souffries la peyne du travail que celle du jeusne.” OEA III, 218. Yet, that does not mean that there is an inspirational ‘dependence.’

132. MBXII, 598; EMB XII, 443.

133. MB XI, 169; EMB XI, 155.

134. MB XII, 382 and 383; EMB XII, 274 and 275.

being fastidious about food and drink.”¹³⁵ Don Bosco did not shrink at all from repetitions. Certainly not when it was about qualities which, in his eyes, were characteristic and fundamental. Without these specific elements “work and temperance” without even “one of these two pillars” his congregation would experience the fate he had spoken about at table a few years earlier. Whether these critical attitudes were ever necessary for Francis de Sales, Don Bosco does not seem to know. His experience probably had given him sufficient inspiration. That experience he had indeed already formulated in the story of 1847.

A hiatus is caused during the dream when all of a sudden a coffin is brought in. The incident is not so much a moment for Don Bosco to reflect on the number of years that might still be in store for him. The idea of death undoubtedly occupies his mind. Such preoccupation is shown by his quick-thinking question: “Who is that for?” This issue is more direct and more explicit than the one at the end of the long conversation with Dominic Savio: “What will happen to me?”¹³⁶ The arrival of the coffin serves in the first place to convince the audience that Don Bosco is the one who has shown the way and that all of them should follow it. He said, “While you are still living you must see to it that your sons put into practice now what they must continue to practice after your death. Such is the legacy, the inheritance you must bequeath to them”, according to the advice, or better, the order of St. Francis de Sales. Thus this advice, or warning even, might have constituted a vision in the eyes of confreres such as Vespignani.

After this interruption, the attention is back on what would be the future of the Congregation. He asks the unknown guide of the dream: “Can we expect flowers or thorns?” This is not only a question for him but for all, present and future Salesians. The guide answers: “Many roses and joys are in store, but very sharp thorns also threaten. They will cause all of you acute distress and sorrow.” It is an idea that is already contained in Dominic Savio’s answer: “If you only knew how many tribulations still await you!”¹³⁷ We can even hear an echo here of the story about the ‘pergola’ and the roses with and without thorns in 1847.¹³⁸ So in 1879 Don Bosco’s long experience certainly plays a crucial part. The presentation and the significance of the ‘pergola’

135. MB XII, 383; EMB XII, 275.

136. MB XII, 593; EMB XII, 439.

137. MB XII, 593; EMB XII, 439.

138. In a lecture on 3 February he alluded to it. See MB IX, 68 and 69; EMB IX, 39-40. It was a favorite metaphor of Don Bosco’s; not of St. Francis de Sales.

are running like a red thread through the life-story of Don Bosco and his Salesians.

The question taken up again as to whether he will die soon

There followed a question that concerned one of the most difficult situations in which he would find himself. The question concerned whether he would soon die or not. It refers especially to the complications around the request for privileges for the Congregation from Rome.¹³⁹ Since Pope Leo XIII had succeeded the late Pius IX, contact with the pope and Rome had become much more challenging for Don Bosco on several levels. Indeed he had already experienced that “the greatest prudence and the most refined caution were required.”

The answer is as elusive as before. The mysterious guide stresses once again, but differently, about Don Bosco's responsibility and workload, and offers written guidelines and words of inspiration especially regarding the Constitutions as the basis of a religious life lived with commitment. The closing of the dream-tale occurs according to a clichéd process: a sudden noise stops the musing, brooding and dreaming. In this case, again it is a peal of thunder with flashes of lightning that at once bring about a literary encapsulation of the whole dream-tale.

After having read and discussed the entire story in this way, we might say with some sense of humor that Francis de Sales feels more at home in earlier statements and writings of Don Bosco than does Don Bosco in those of the patron saint of his Oratory and Congregation. In fact, it is not Francis de Sales who succeeds in giving Don Bosco good advice out of his rich experiences. It is Don Bosco who puts his experiences and views in the mouth of St. Francis. The patron saint is needed to confirm and ratify the insights and advice of Don Bosco with a certain authority.

Thus the text does not contribute much to the knowledge and practice of a Salesian way of Christian life, of Salesian spirituality in the strict meaning of the word. However, it does confirm some known accentuations in Don Bosco's religious instruction and lifestyle. Moreover, it does not matter much whether Don Bosco has told the story once or several times. Finally, we have “the Constitutions and the books” as he concludes.

139. Fr. Desramaut summarizes it as follows: “En ce triste été 1879, don Bosco se découvrait des ennemis autant dans le monde ecclésiastique que dans le monde laïc de Turin.” Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 1140.

Don Bosco's first speech at the second General Chapter (1880)

When it comes to the heart of this small study, the speech of Don Bosco on the first day of the second general Chapter, together with a short Latin circular letter to diffuse some conclusions of that Chapter, are likely more important than that dream-tale of 1879.

In a rather emotional and lecturing way, he said at the beginning of that Chapter: "A subsequent cause we must all together devote us to, is to foster the spirit of Christian charity (*carità*) and meekness (*dolcezza*), friendliness, affability, amiability) of St. Francis de Sales." The ground for this statement was indeed painful, but the obvious conclusion he had made after visiting the houses: "It (this spirit) weakens with us, and as far as I have experienced in several houses, it declines especially in schools." Moreover, directly addressing himself to the rectors: "Mind that you should cultivate this true spirit of gentleness and charity and leave no stone unturned to spread it to the confreres. To encourage each other in this caring (*con carità*) and friendly, gentle (*e dolcezza*) way will always be the supporting power of our houses."¹⁴⁰

Once again Don Bosco explicitly connects his preference for the span, *caritas*, and *dolcezza*, with the holy patron saint, Francis de Sales. He is repeating that pair of words several times in the parts of his orientating introduction to the Chapter. As we read in the notes of Don Barberis: "Therefore I say and repeat, the affability, the Christian charity between us and towards youngsters are the most effective means to educate them properly and to foster their vocation."¹⁴¹ Precisely that sentence will determine a great conclusion of the second General Chapter. These determinations follow generally the classification of the decisions of the first General Chapter (1877). The third part deals with the theme "devotion and morality." As opposed to 1877 there's an additional chapter on "the means to foster a spiritual vocation." There the first standard reads: "The exemplary, pious, and punctual way of life of the Salesians, their mutual fraternal love, their well-mannered and friendly appealing companionship with the pupils are efficient means to encourage spiritual vocations because words arouse sentiments, but examples attract followers."¹⁴² The explicitly repeated span "*carità e dolcezza*" is exactly the unique heart of the fourth resolution in the series of conclusions Don

140. Rochowiak, *Il Capitolo generale 2°*, 107 and 109.

141. Rochowiak, *Il Capitolo generale 2°*, 88.

142. OE XXXIII [65]. Cf. OE XXIX [472]. See Indice with the chapters of the 3rd part.

Bosco chronicled in February 1884. However, there is no reference to Francis de Sales.¹⁴³

Furthermore, the Latin circular, dated at the beginning of December 1880, in which Don Bosco tried to avert the danger of postponing the publication of the deliberations of the Second Chapter, contains a remarkable instruction. It says that, "On the same day (the day of the exercise of the Good Death) a chapter of our Constitutions must be read or the letter of St. Vincent de Paul, preceding the Constitutions."¹⁴⁴ It is a guideline we cannot pass by in the spirit of this entire study. It proves again that Saint Francis de Sales remained a source of inspiration for religious life for Don Bosco.

By way of conclusion

In this still, incomplete exploration of St. Francis de Sales' influence on the religious development and practice and pedagogical guidelines of Don Bosco, some valuable constants of the religious and moral identity of Don Bosco have been looked at afresh. But to identify relevant aspects of a genuinely Salesian spirituality, inspired by the life and writings of St. Francis de Sales in the pious lifestyle and pedagogical practice of Don Bosco, much remains to be done. In the meantime we should perhaps reduce Francis de Sales' influence to these rather general aspects: an intentional priority of charity, a striking zeal for the temporal and eternal spiritual well-being of the young and adults, winning, amiable, friendly relations and probably also work and temperance.¹⁴⁵ In all this, we must - according to Don Lemoyne - be disposed to recognize and respect the mediating role of Vincent de Paul in specific aspects.

APPENDIX 1

Regarding Don Bosco's resolutions during the preparation for his ordination (especially the fourth resolution)

As a matter of fact, researchers such as Pietro Braido, Francis Desramaut, and Arthur Lenti put Don Bosco's ordination in 1841.¹⁴⁶ This date accords with the facts of his life-story. We find it less evident that in their exposition

143. See also Appendix 1.

144. MB XIV, 794. In EMB XIV, 408-409 a summary of the contents can be read.

145. This conclusion considerably coincides with the one by Stella in, *Francesco di Sales e i salesiani di Don Bosco*, ed. Juan Picca e Josef Strus (Rome: LAS, 1986), 154 and 156.

146. See Braido, *Don Bosco Prete dei giovani*, vol. 1; and Francis Desramaut, *Les Memorie I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne: étude d'un ouvrage fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint*

on Don Bosco's ordination, they reproduce in that time-scale the eight or nine resolutions that Don Bosco might have written down during or at the end of the retreat that preceded his ordination on 5th June that year. Don Lemoyne, in 1898, had in fact done that very thing before them.¹⁴⁷

We do not think it is justified to place these resolutions at that time in Don Bosco's biography because, as far as we know, he mentioned these resolutions only much later, namely in January-February 1884, when he was obliged to stay in his room on account of illness. At this time the idea seems to have crossed his mind to continue and eventually complete his *Memorie dell' Oratorio* from the years 1872-1875. But he was not successful. He certainly must have thought then of his ordination and his preparation for it, since he promptly started writing about it. At the same time, he mentioned his resolutions. Whether he still disposed of the slip of paper with the resolutions, is questioned by Desramaut and seriously doubted by Lenti.¹⁴⁸ Surprisingly Lenti nevertheless would hold that Don Bosco could still remember that list

Jean Bosco (Lyon: Maison d'Études Saint Jean Bosco, 1962), 136. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 196, 120-121. Lenti, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 1, 379-382.

147. MB I, 518; EMB I, 385.

148. Concerning the date January-February 1884 see Francesco Motto, "Giovanni Bosco, Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6" in *Don Bosco Educatore, Scritti e testimonianze* (Rome: LAS, 1992), 395. As to the doubts, see Desramaut, *Les Memorie I*, 136, footnote 5. He even reprimanded his confrere Auffray, who asserted that don Bosco copied them from a slip of paper ('transcribes fidèlement'). See Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 120 where he asserts: "Les résolutions d'ordination ... étaient probablement authentiques, à quelques nuances exceptées." Lenti, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 1, 380, footnote 27: "transcribe/recall." Don Lemoyne only mentions a little 'quadernetto' (small notebook). See MB I, 518; EMB I, 385. These can only be the notes of the "Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 ai suoi figliuoli Salesiani". See Bosco, *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali*, 307. More about this question can be found in a contribution of Stella in *Francesco di Sales e i Salesiani di Don Bosco*, 140. He too has his doubts concerning the originality of the fourth resolution. On the other hand, the characterization of the saint by Don Bosco in the *Storia Ecclesiastica* seems to him to strengthen the credibility. See *San Francesco di Sales e i Salesiani di Don Bosco*, 140, footnote 3. The change of the sequence "dolcezza/carità" in the edition of the *Storia Ecclesiastica* does not seem to bother him. May I distinctly recall here that the series of resolutions from 1884 differs a lot from the ones taken during Spiritual Exercises led by a Jesuit and a canon in 1847. Don Lemoyne mentions them in MB III, 245-246; EMB III, 170. There, in any case, is neither a recollection of, nor the sign of a change in any resolutions at the time of his ordination. See also *Fonti Salesiane*, vol.1, , 970 and 972.

in 1884 and that he actually could have formulated them also in this manner in 1841, though he too sometimes seems to be unsure.¹⁴⁹

At any rate, after studying the pros and cons, we are convinced that the resolutions in a biography concerning the life, work, and spirit of Don Bosco would find a better place in the period of the severe illness in 1884.

APPENDIX 2

The “dream-tale” of the “pergola”

Don Lemoyne has his version of this story, a version that – all things considered – looks like a remake. In 1864 he could not have been present, for at that time he was still a diocesan priest in Genoa. Only in October 1865 did he come to Turin.¹⁵⁰ His text shows significant similarities to Don Bonetti’s version we dealt with in the article, but also striking and remarkable differences.

A pretty recognizable resemblance, if not complete similarity with that of Bonetti, is primarily found in the text containing spoken words. For example: “The path strewn with roses and thorns is an image of your mission among boys. You must wear shoes, a symbol of mortification.” Whoever looks carefully already notices a ‘word-change’ and an insert, namely ‘via’ instead of ‘strada’ and the parenthesis ‘*la via da te percorsa*’ (the way you have gone amid roses and thorns). Then follows a long insert: “the thorns on the ground stand for sensible affections, human likes and dislikes which distract the educator from his precise goal, weaken and halt him in his mission, and hinder his progress and heavenly harvest.”

Then follows the almost same explanation: “The roses symbolize the burning charity which must be your distinctive trait and that of your fellow workers. The (other) thorns stand for the obstacles and disappointments

149. Lenti, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 1., 381-382. In connection with the beatification of Don Bosco Don Rua quoted the whole series, probably on the basis of what Don Bosco wrote in 1884. But he added that he had spent all his life in Don Bosco’s company and that he had been able to notice that don Bosco had been faithful to these and also to other resolutions. See Desramaut, *Les memorie I*, 433-434. At the time of writing a special form of biography of Giuseppe Cafasso at the end of the fifties Don Bosco showed to be interested in the initial resolutions of Cafasso: “Egli medesimo ci lasciò scritto le deliberazioni prese sul principio del suo sacerdozio” in Bosco, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Cafasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri*, in OE XII, 71. Whatever “sul principio del suo sacerdozio” may mean.

150. *Dizionario biografico dei salesiani*, ed. Eugenio Valentini, Amedeo Rodinò, et al (Torino: Scuola Grafica Salesiana, 1968), 166.

you will experience. But you must not lose heart. Charity and mortification will enable you to overcome all difficulties and lead you to roses without thorns.”¹⁵¹ In the last quotation, Don Lemoyne had to add the word “other” roses because he had already explained the roses on the ground also. In that way, the intended parallelism is better shown. It also becomes clear that he wanted to change the singular ‘tu’ into the plural ‘vi’ because of concern to instruct.

Then there are also the differences between the two versions. For instance, the visible satisfaction Lemoyne finds in detailed descriptions and in choosing the word ‘pergola,’ a word that had not come into Don Bosco’s mind. While in Don Bonetti’s version of the dream, the way leads into a hall, Don Lemoyne lets the whole group finally arrive “in another enchanting garden,” a garden that at the beginning of the story he had announced as being ‘beautiful.’ The mention of “garden” seems to be influenced by the expression “Salesian garden” in the ‘dream-tale’ where Dominic Savio will be the guide.¹⁵² But this is not yet the main difference. That is both the replacement - already in the first lines of the story - of “una persona,” which in Don Bonetti’s version is clearly a man, by “The Queen of Heaven,” and the use of the verb “compare”: “The Queen of Heaven appeared to me.”¹⁵³

Thus he resolutely goes in the direction of a dream that is not an ordinary human idea, but a supernatural happening as often occurs in the writings of the Old and New Testament. So it is plausible that, shortly before telling the dream-tale of the roses in the third chapter of MB III, he wrote about Don Bosco’s room. In that passage, we find written that “The boys always regarded

151. The different quotes are borrowed from MB III, 35; EMB III, 27/ the translation of the first quotation does not quite respect the original.

152. See MB III, 35 and 32; EMB III, 27 and 25 and for comparing MB XII, 585-95, especially 591; EMB XII, 434-441, especially 437.

153. MB III, 32; EMB III, 25. It is truly not surprising that Lemoyne has made this change, for a year before (January 1863) for instance Mary had been given by don Bosco himself an important role in the ‘dream-tale about the furious elephant’. See MB VII, 356-360; EMB VII, 213-216. And when evoking the occurrence with the purse full of little papers with short recommendations for each boy of the Oratory, about 700 of them, a few months later (in early June 1863) don Lemoyne again interprets himself “una persona” as “e pare fosse la Vergine Benedetta.” See MB VII, 472; EMB VII, 281. Or is this a double of what happened in early 1862 with the copybook full of individual ‘strenna’s’ or motto’s for the staff and for the boys? Then Don Bosco himself – according to the chronicles of don Ruffino and don Bonetti – had insisted that everyone should be satisfied with the knowledge that the slip of paper came from the Madonna.” See MB VII, 3 and in general 2-10; EMB VII, 2 and 1-9.

Don Bosco's room as a mysterious sanctuary of virtue, as a shrine where the Madonna was pleased to make public Her wishes, or as an antechamber to heaven."¹⁵⁴

Whether he chooses the right direction or not remains to be seen. In the introduction to the version of the real talk on the evening in May 1864 Don Lemoyne has Don Bosco saying: "I have already told you of several things I saw as in a dream. From them we can infer how much Our Lady loves and helps us", but this is most clearly an introductory note of Don Lemoyne himself.¹⁵⁵ Besides, the formulation "as in a dream" (*in forma di sogno*) is not so unambiguous, though it tallies with a consistent way of speaking and relating of Don Bosco himself.

The latter also applies to the sentence introducing the story: "One day in 1847 after I had spent much time reflecting on how I might help others, especially the young, the Queen of Heaven appeared to me." Compared to Bonetti, this sentence is also Don Lemoyne's.¹⁵⁶ With the piece of information "after I had spent time reflecting on," which also, maybe added unconsciously, shows the human source of the content of the "dream," Don Lemoyne tallies with what is proper to Don Bosco when he relates some dream-tales.

To conclude the comparison between Bonetti's text with the one of Lemoyne, I still refer to the change in the last line of the 'pergola-allegory.' Don Bonetti finishes it with the following sentence: "Ed io mi trovai senz' altro, desto come al presente sono", "And I was totally alone in my room, awake as I am now." With Don Lemoyne it has become: "As soon as the Mother of God finished speaking, I awoke and found myself in my room." "Rinvenni" is the word that he will also use at the end of the longer part of

154. MB III, 30; EMB III, 24. Thus it is not surprising that Don Lemoyne introduced the reference to another visit (the fourth) in that historic survey with the sentence: "While asleep he was favored with splendid visions. These he narrated to [Michael] Rua and the others in the first years of his work." See MB II, 406; EMB II, 318. However, we should not forget the human aspect, namely that don Bosco already in December 1862 talked in ordinary speech about building "a more beautiful, bigger church, that must be splendid, with the title: Church of Mary, Help of Christians". See Giraudi, *L'Oratorio di don Bosco*, 165; 171. See also MB VII, 333-334; EMB VII, 196-197.) Also see the later and extended story of Don Bosco, where "una persona" then is named "pastorella" (shepherdess) and respectively "pastora" (shepherdess) in the *Memorie dell' Oratorio*, 129 - 130; *Memoirs of the Oratory*, 109-110.

155. MB III, 32; EMB III, 25. The original text reads: "in forma di sogno." see. the text of Bonetti I have treated in section 4 of this article.

156. MB III, 32; EMB III, 25. Compare it with the already treated text of Bonetti.

the so-called 'long' letter from Rome in 1884. That is the part that as a sort of circular was meant for the confreres.¹⁵⁷

During a talk for all the rectors of 3rd February 1868, hardly four years after the story of 1864, Don Bosco again raised the question of the contents of the allegory. He did so at the moment he wanted to speak about the "obstacles" they met in their work. According to Don Lemoyne, Don Bosco called the story from the beginning of the Society merely a 'dream.' That is entirely possible for, as regards telling stories, Don Bosco had been speaking already for a long time to his Salesian confreres and the boys of his houses openly and freely about 'dreams.' Still, in 1868 he adapted the explanation and the applications to the subject of his talk. don Lemoyne states that Don Bosco "interpreted the dream to mean that the Salesians must not only walk over the thorns of hardships (*privazioni* = mortification or abstinence) and toil but must expect to be hurt and hindered by the thorns of obstacles and opposition." And about the last part of the way, a vault or 'pergolata' with nothing but roses: "The roses overhead mean that our reward is in heaven. This reward is the only goal worth striving for with all our strength."¹⁵⁸

Over the years the whole story and without doubt certain elements in it must in Don Bosco's mind have become conscious and often used imagery and reminiscence. In one of the slips of paper he wrote for his co-workers and his boys on 1 January 1862, he wrote for instance for Perucatti Giacinto: "Remember that life's thorns become roses at death."¹⁵⁹ This letter came before he told his story on 9 May 1864. Not so much time after that 9th of May during a 'good night' on 22 October 1864, he said the 'dream-tale' of the ten hills. There he said: "As Don Bosco kept wondering which way to go, a broad level road strewn with thorns opened before him."¹⁶⁰ After the pronouncing of vows by Count Cays on 8 December 1877 Don Bosco spoke to all the members with vows, the novices and aspirants and said - amongst others - quite frankly: "Religious life is not a bed of roses! Just the opposite - it is one of thorns!"¹⁶¹ After the pronouncing of vows by Count Cays on 8 December 1877, Don Bosco spoke to all the members with vows, the novices, and aspirants and said - amongst others - quite frankly: "Religious life is

157. Braido, *La lettera di don Bosco da Roma del 10 maggio 1884*, 57, footnote 199. See also same, 37-40.

158. MB IX, 69; EMB IX, 40.

159. MB VII, 6; EMB VII, 6.

160. MB VII, 797; EMB VII, 468.

161. MB XIII, 233; EMB XIII, 170.

not a bed of roses! Just the opposite – it is one of thorns!” That was true for members of his congregation as well as for Don Bosco himself. We prove this in part of this exposition when mentioning his question towards the end of the ‘dream-tale’ on 9th May 1879: “Can we expect flowers or thorns?” And the answer was: “Many roses and joys are in store, but very sharp thorns also threaten. They will cause all of you acute distress and sorrow.”¹⁶² After the story about the woman who was preparing candies, Don Bosco added some further thoughts. Amongst them the following: “Let us take heart, my sons! Many thorns we shall run into, but remember that there are many roses as well. Let us not lose heart through dangers and difficulties.”¹⁶³

There is no room left for doubt: Don Bosco often alluded to the allegory of the roses and the thorns. He repeated it so often that the Salesians got quite familiar with it. This repetition is confirmed in the foreword of Ceria in the XIVth volume of the *Memorie biografiche*: “Time and again in going through these pages, the readers may feel that Don Bosco is visibly bleeding and that he walks beneath the arbor, described in his well-known dream. It was a beautiful rose arbor: roses above him, roses under his feet, roses on every side, but all of them bristling with sharp, unseen thorns which ripped his flesh at every step.”¹⁶⁴

Ceria’s introduction not only proves that when the volume was published in 1933, Don Bosco’s followers still considered the allegory as “a widely known dream.” It also shows that the core of its contents inspired and encouraged their religious engagement and task of educating and also the practice of their faith, in the footprints of their predecessor.

APPENDIX 3

In this appendix, we wish to take up two aspects: (i) Don Lemoyne’s document from 1850 (found in MB IV); and (ii) the added third part from the *Memorie dell’ Oratorio* to name the site of the gatherings with the boys “Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.”

162. MB XIV, 125; EMB XIV, 90.

163. MB XIII, 304; EMB XIII, 227.

164. MB XIV, 7; EMB XIV, XIII (Author’s Preface). Eventually from 1880 the pages 537-538 in MB XIV; EMB XIV, 424-425.

The document about the “provisional pious Union” in MB IV.

About ten years after the publication of the IV volume of the *Memorie biografiche* Don Lemoyne published the second volume of a biography of Don Bosco. There he devotes part of the XI chapter of the fourth section, to the history of the Salesian Co-operators and he apparently used his earlier data to write: “Already in 1850 Don Bosco ardently wanted a provisional Pious Union (*Pia unione provvisoria*) with the name St. Francis de Sales. He had chosen this saint because of the analogy between the present-day circumstances in our country and those in Savoy at the time of the saint who with his illuminated zeal, prudent preaching, and his unlimited charity freed that region of the errors of Protestantism.”¹⁶⁵ In this biography, he then interprets that desire, that dream of Don Bosco as a step towards the passage about the non-resident Salesians in the first Constitutions of the Pious Society.¹⁶⁶

From this passage in his biography, it appears that Don Lemoyne had no doubts at all concerning the authenticity of the document he published in MB IV, for he still uses it so many years later.

In an article about the “Pre-history of the Salesian Co-operators,” Eugenio Valentini has taken up that document from the MB IV.¹⁶⁷ Probably he chose this document because he was confident that Don Lemoyne had at his disposal an authentic writing. However, an original specimen of the account of that meeting in November 1850 does not seem to be available.

165. Lemoyne, *Vita del venerabile servo di Dio Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 2, 161.

166. Lemoyne, *Vita del venerabile servo di Dio Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 2, 161. Desramaut describes how Don Bosco tried to preserve the chapter “De externis” in the Constitutions of his Congregation that he had to propose to the authorities concerned in Rome. See Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 978-980. However what is missing is the justification of the fact that don Bosco would only then have started thinking and writing about ‘de externis’. Is it not more natural that he would have thought and spoken earlier of it? Or is Desramaut also thinking this way when he says: “L’homogénéité de ses projets depuis le début des années soixante était évidente.” See Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 979. That is certainly possible because in a contribution in 1975 Desramaut copied a short autographic text of don Bosco with the title: “Unione di S. Francesco di Sales”. In his opinion this must have come before a draft of a chapter concerning the “Esterni” that was inserted in a manuscript of the Salesian Constitutions in 1860. See the documents of the symposium *Il cooperatore nella società contemporanea: Friburgo (Svizzera)*, 26-29 agosto 1974, ed. Francis Desramaut and Mario Midali (Turin: Elle Di Ci, 1975), 23-24.

167. Eugenio Valentini, “Preistoria dei Cooperatori Salesiani”, in *Salesianum* XXXIX, n° 1, 1977, 117-119.

Moreover, we see that the names of the promoters and the signatories of the original are not mentioned in Borel's "Repertorio domestico," a list of the names of persons who had given money especially from 1846 till May 1849.¹⁶⁸ Neither can they be found in the list of groups with names that Don Bosco made available when he published the first issue of the *Bibliofilo cattolico* or *Bollettino salesiano mensile*.¹⁶⁹ It is also strange that "before going to Milan, he wanted above all to witness the success of certain measures..." but then he simply left on 28th November. Lemoyne, at any rate, has him leaving without saying anything about the outcome of the meetings that had been announced as important ones.¹⁷⁰

On the occasion of a survey of the history of the 'terza famiglia' (the third family) Amadei, the compiler of the 10th volume of the *Memorie biografiche*, also recalls that Don Bosco had wished to start a "Pia Unione" in 1850. Moreover, in his turn, he makes the link with the "Esterni" in later drafts of texts of the Constitutions of the Salesian Congregation.¹⁷¹ Most probably Amadei does so following Lemoyne.

In the volume XI of the same series of the *Memorie biografiche*, Ceria proceeds in another way. He publishes a text that Don Bosco had written himself in 1876 or 1877 with the title *Cooperatori salesiani*.¹⁷² The following paragraph is of interest for this discussion:

In 1850 Don Bosco informed His Holiness that a Congregation had been legitimately established in the city of Turin in the name and under the protection of St. Francis de Sales, and he begged for more extensive favors on behalf of its members besides other spiritual benefits for non-members. These favors were granted in a Rescript dated September 28, 1850, and signed Dominic Fioramonti, Secretary of *Latin Letters to His Holiness*.¹⁷³

168. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale*, 78-80.

169. Available in the *Salesiaanse Bibliotheek at Oud-Heverlee* under the united number 1877-78-79. Also Lenti, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 6, 238.

170. MB IV, 171-175; EMB IV, 120-122.

171. MB X, 1307-1308 and 1309; EMB X, 558. In these later documents Don Bosco does not use only the word "Unione", but also "Associazione". MB X, 1309-1318; EMB X, 559-567.

172. MB XI, 84-86; EMB XI, 73-75. See also Lenti, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 6, 244-248; and vol. 3, 293-297.

173. MB XI, 85; EMB XI, 74. The Rescript can be read in MB IV, 94; EMB IV, 521. In the footnote G.B. Lemoyne gives this personal comment: "Don Bosco for the first time mentions the Salesian Congregation of St. Francis de Sales in his request to the pope, under which name are meant all those who lead the Oratories and who – priests or

This survey written by Don Bosco himself and published by Ceria, shows that some events in 1850 had held a great significance for Don Bosco. In fact, Don Bosco wrote that the “Congregation of Salesian Promoters was thus established *de facto in the eyes of the local ecclesiastical Authority and the Holy See.*”¹⁷⁴

The requests for obtaining spiritual favors (indulgencies) occurred at the end of August 1850. The meeting to which Don Bosco had invited some laymen and about which Lemoyne has written, however, was planned on 17 November 1850. Thus it is probably rather premature to think of the use of the word “congregation” in the requests also of the *Pia unione provvisoria*. However, that does open up the possibility that in the requests of August 1850: “the analogy of the present-day circumstances of our country and those in Savoy at the time of this saint,” and also the “illuminated zeal (ardor), the prudent preaching and unlimited charity” of St. Francis de Sales, could play from that time on a distinct part in affirming the choice of the patron saint of the “congregation” or association of laymen in the Oratory around 1850.

It remains remarkable that Don Bosco more than once retains and uses the term “Pia Unione.” As late as 1880 in a speech to the cooperators (men and women) in Borgo San Martino. According to registered notes, Don Bosco had said that once

it became apparent how much people united together could do to help our poor youngsters, we decided to found a formal Association (*Associazione*) under the name of the Association (*Pia Unione*) of Salesian Cooperators and sought to have it approved by the Vicar of Jesus Christ, Pope Pius IX ... indeed, con-

laypeople – engage themselves for the benefit of the boys who frequent these institutions.” See MB IV, 93; EMB IV, 64, partial translation. And he adds: “Rome has accepted this name.” With this sentence Don Lemoyne actually suggests more than the text itself permits. This is shown in the requests of Don Bosco who - on 28 August - sent at the same time three requests for spiritual favors to Rome. Two of them concerned the two Oratories that were under don Bosco’s authority at the time. For each of them he used the term “Congregation.” First “Congregation with the name and under the protection of the guardian Angel ... which has no other goal than to instruct the abandoned youth in piety and religion” and then “Congregation under the name and protection of St. Francis de Sales ... Its purpose is the religious instruction of abandoned youth.” It is clear that in Rome the term ‘congregation’ could only be interpreted as ‘fraternity’ or ‘association’ (unione). See the requests in E[m], vol. 1, 109-110. See also MB IV, 93-94; EMB IV, 521.

174. MB XI, 85; EMB XI, 74. Don Bosco himself wrote c. 1850 : “The Congr. of Salesian Promoters.” See Lenti, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 6, 244-246, especially 244.

cerned that the Association (Italian: La Pia Unione) should grow, opened to it the Church's treasury of indulgences.¹⁷⁵

However, the timing of Don Bosco's "once it became," remains indefinite.

The added third reason for the name of the Oratory in the Memorie dell'Oratorio.

While inserting the first two reasons for the patronage of the Oratory Desramaut writes about the third reason in a endnote: "une autre raison, très douteuse en 1844". He justifies his doubt about the date with: "L'idée d'imiter François de Sales, apôtre du Chablais et auteur des *Controverses* ne vint certainement pas à l'esprit de Don Bosco avant 1848-1850, quand les Vaudois se mirent à faire parler d'eux à Turin."¹⁷⁶

Without further reference to this added reason, Desramaut describes in one of the following chapters the activities of the Waldensians in Turin and the polemical counter-attack of Don Bosco. Concretely he begins: "In 1850 he started, this time, an ideological war in the public domain that would last a long time."¹⁷⁷ What this amounts to is that when Don Bosco was writing in his *Memorie dell'Oratorio* the paragraph about the reasons why they had started to call the Oratory at Valdocco in 1844 "Oratory of St. Francis de Sales", he attached a third reason. This reason was borne in upon him by the similarity between his questionable activity against the Waldensians and Francis de Sales' struggle against the Calvinists. However, this was a resemblance that could only have prompted him some years after 1844, more precisely about 1850. Consequently, this must be an anachronism in his *Memorie dell'Oratorio* which should not surprise us with Don Bosco. One must be careful about data and numbers with him.¹⁷⁸

Lenti does not tackle the problem. When dealing with the period when the youngsters were allowed to meet at the Rifugio, he does mention the passage from the *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, but he only gives the first two reasons. At the same time, he emphasizes that he has the impression "These words of Don Bosco seem to indicate that St. Francis de Sales ... had been the special patron of the priests engaged in oratory work since the move out

175. MB XIV, 543; EMB XIV, 429-430. (The original text shows: Pia Unione).

176. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 216, endnote 66.

177. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps*, 302 and also 303-310: "En 1850 il engagea, dans le domaine public cette fois une guerre idéologique destinée à durer."

178. See Desramaut, *Les Memorie I*, 124.

of St. Francis of Assisi.¹⁷⁹ In his 3rd volume, Lenti also attaches importance to the fact that in October 1847, Don Bosco (together with others) refused to sign a petition for the “emancipation” (official recognition of rights) of the Waldensians and Jews.¹⁸⁰ But even then 1847 remains rather far from 1844.¹⁸¹

Braido looks at the phase of Don Bosco’s stay in the Rifugio from a purely personal angle. Thus, Don Bosco’s justification of the name of the Oratory is entirely left out by Braido.¹⁸² A little further on in another discussion Braido esteems plausible the second reason for the name of the Oratory and the added stimulus for his resistance against the Protestants in the *Memorie dell’ Oratorio*. Moreover, this resistance is confirmed on account of the passage in the *Storia ecclesiastica* that we have dealt with at the beginning of this article.¹⁸³ In the text about the arrival of the Waldensians in Turin and the reaction of Don Bosco, he uses the same years (1848-1850) as Desramaut and Lenti.¹⁸⁴

In 1968 Stella’s point of view concerning the date of the naming of the gatherings of the youngsters at the Rifugio is still traditional. Indeed he simply adopts the complete text from the *Memorie dell’ Oratorio*.¹⁸⁵ To the recognition of rights and the increasing activities of the Waldensians, he paid little or no attention. Still, we also find the date 1848 in his book.¹⁸⁶

As a conclusion we would add the following: the (third) for naming the Oratory after and placing it under the “patronage” of Francis de Sales, which Don Bosco added to the first two while composing his *Memorie dell’ Oratorio*, is based on an anachronism. The main reason for that conclusion is the exact date of the decree ‘Recognition’ (1848) and the subsequent period of intense activity of the Waldensians in Turin and the written action and reaction of Don Bosco, which followed in 1850-1854. Don Bosco’s discussions or

179. Lenti, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 2, 68, text and footnote.

180. Lenti, *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 3, 247.

181. Don Bosco’s writings against the Waldensians, started in 1850.

182. Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, vol. 1, 173-178.

183. Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, vol. 1, 192.

184. Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, vol. 1, 36 and 247-251. Of course because of all this we may consider Lemoyne’s explanations as outdated. See MB II, 252-254; EMB II, 196-198.

185. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 1, 108-109.

186. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 1, 117.

arguments with the Waldensians, must have been external and which are not in the text of the *Memorie dell' Oratorio* but from elsewhere. A second, an internal argument may be the wording: amongst others the word “mansuetudine” instead of “dolcezza.” However, this internal argument requires further careful examination. All things considered, we may conclude that the first of the three motives for the patronage of the Oratory, the influence of Marchioness Barolo, was the most probable and the only one in 1844.¹⁸⁷

APPENDIX 4.

Ideas of St. Francis de Sales about “douceur” in relationships with one’s fellow human beings according to the Introduction to the devout life.

It may still be useful to dwell a little more on how Don Bosco may have understood the meaning of the word *douceur* according to the spirit of Saint Francis de Sales. We think it can be found in the eighth chapter of the 3rd part of “Introduction à la vie devote” (1609) of Francis de Sales. The title of that chapter reads: “About kindness towards one’s neighbors and remedies against anger.”¹⁸⁸ With this wording, Francis de Sales himself puts gentleness and kindness in opposition to anger, outbursts of rage. For anger or rage, he uses synonyms: violence (*violemment*), and irascibility (*impétueusement/ impétuosité*). We may also think of violent demeanor, anger, passion, or a hot temper. Opposite to these are the synonyms of ‘douceur’ in that chapter. They are named as kind-heartedness (*débonnaireté*), amiable (*amiable*), peaceable (*paisiblement*), quiet, calm (*tranquillement*), and tranquility (*tranquillité*), gentle, and pleasant presence (*suavité de la conversation civile*).

Moreover, from Francis de Sales’ exposition, we would like to take two more ideas. The first is “La douceur et débonnaireté... comme estant la fleur de la charité laquelle selon saint Bernard, est en sa perfection quand

187. Here it suits to draw attention to this sentence: “Whereas traditional writers of memories (Bonetti and Lemoyne) tend to blur and, in a certain sense, to minimalize the relations between Don Bosco and marchioness di Barolo, more recent investigations of Salesian historians on the contrary stress with a certain accent what the young priest owes to the experience he gained during his activity in the works of di Barolo.” And citing don Braido: “That was for Don Bosco the first organized, but not academic schooling in the preventive system.” See Giorgio Chiosso, *Carità educatrice e istruzione in Piemonte: aristocratici, filantropi e preti di fronte all’educazione del popolo nel primo ’800* (Turin: SEI, 2007), 176, footnote 9. As to the second reason, that too came later in *Don Bosco’s life and work*.

188. OEA III, 161.

non seulement elle est patiente mais quand en outre cela elle est douce et débonnaire.”¹⁸⁹ The second and probably better known one in the Salesian Family, is “Lors que vous estes en tranquillité et sans aucun sujet de cholere, faites grande provision de douceur et debonnaireté, disant toutes vos paroles et faisant toutes vos actions petites et grandes en la plus douce façon qu’l vous sera possible.”¹⁹⁰

This explanation and this advice make it clear that ‘douceur’ (kindness, amiability, winning ways, cordiality) is for Francis de Sales, just as for St. Bernard, actually an aspect of Christian love. It is indeed the flower of it. This aspect at the same time is mainly external. Just like the flower, it is colorfully visible and attractive through the pleasant fragrance it emits. Concurrently, gentleness can be noticed in the tone of speaking and a large diversity of actions during contact with one’s fellow human beings.

189. OEA III, 161. Translated as “gentleness and kind-heartedness being the flower (N.B. singular) of charity according to St. Bernard attains its perfection when it is not only patient but when besides this it is gentle, sweet and kind-hearted.”

190. OEA III, 165. Translated as “and further, when you are tranquil and without any cause for anger, then make a good provision of kindness and kind-heartedness pronouncing all your words and doing all your actions (little ones and big ones) in the kindest way you are able to.”

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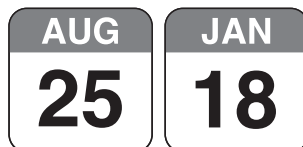
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