

DON BOSCO'S OPTION FOR YOUTH AND HIS EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

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During the year 1886 Don Bosco was asked which method he preferred in order to lead souls to God, that of St. Francis de Sales or that of St. Vincent de Paul. He dodged the choice by declaring: «You want me to tell you my method. Well... I don't really know myself. I have always carried on as the Lord inspired me and as circumstances demanded».¹

His answer should not be taken too literally, as if he were really insisting that his work had been governed exclusively by external considerations. His reply seems rather an expedient to avoid pronouncing between two men to whom he was equally attached.² It is generally agreed amongst scholars that Don Bosco was more an educator than an educationalist in the strict sense. The pre-eminently practical nature of his work should not, however, lead us into thinking that he lacked any kind of theoretical plan or that he acted haphazardly. At the same time one must confess that it is difficult to gather together the many elements of his work into one unified design. The difficulty arises, in part, from the sheer quantity of relevant documentation; but even more from the line that Don Bosco followed in carrying out his mission. Although he established very early on the general principles to which he would remain faithful all his life, he always tried to act according to the needs of the moment, to adapt the way he practised his principles as historical circumstances changed. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that, while he kept certain fixed reference points, his thought reveals a certain flexibility and resists any attempt to reduce it to a rigidly neat formula. Recently the question has been asked whether, instead of «preventive system», the for-

¹ The request was made by M. Dupuy, superior of the major seminary of Montpellier, in a letter sent to Don Bosco on 2 July 1886, thanking him for a visit he had made on his return journey from Barcelona. Dupuy's letter and Don Bosco's reply can be found in the MB XVIII 165 et s., 665-667.

² P. BRAIDO, *Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco e l'utopia della società cristiana*, Roma, LAS 1982, p. 6.

mula codified in use until now, we ought now to speak rather of «systems», in the plural.³

Our present study will attempt to establish, in somewhat summary fashion, why this Piedmontese priest decided to devote himself to the education of boys, and above all how this decision was translated into reality at the various stages of his rich and crowded life. The task is not easy, aiming as it does at tracing the evolution of Don Bosco's educative work within the complex social and religious context in which that work was located. Let me say at once that, in making this present attempt, I have made particular use of the interpretative theory of P. Braido, according to which Don Bosco's early initiatives were motivated by the desire to rescue boys who were a threat to society, but that his later vision of his task was that of protecting young people from a kind of society which he increasingly saw as full of dangers for the rising generations.⁴

1. His first experiences amongst «poor and abandoned boys»

The version of the beginning of the Oratory given by Don Bosco in his *Memorie* is well known.⁵ In that account, written soon after 1870, he said that he started his work for abandoned boys on 8 December, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, 1841, when, soon after arriving in Turin to attend the ecclesiastical College run by Guala and Cafasso, he chanced to meet the young Garelli, and, with the boy's consent, began to teach him catechism. The recent publication of some hitherto unpublished writings of Don Bosco justify our thinking that the Oratory had a slightly less colourful beginning than the *Memorie* would have us believe.⁶

In the *Cenno storico dell'Oratorio* of 1854 Don Bosco recorded that he began his work by recommencing, towards the end of 1841, a Sunday Cate-

³ P. BRAIDO, *L'esperienza pedagogica di Don Bosco nel suo «divenire»*, address given at study seminar «Don Bosco e la sua esperienza pedagogica: eredità, contesti, sviluppi, risonanze», Venice, 3-5 October, 1988. The acts of this seminar appear in «Orientamenti pedagogici» 31 (1989) 3-241 and in: C. NANNI (edit.), *Don Bosco e la sua esperienza pedagogica*, Roma, LAS 1989, pp. 11-39.

⁴ This represents the view of Braido in: P. BRAIDO, *L'esperienza pedagogica preventiva nel sec. XIX - Don Bosco*, in: *Esperienze di pedagogia cristiana nella storia*, vol. II: Sec. XVII-XIX, edited by P. Braido, Roma, LAS 1981, pp. 322 et ss. See also P. BRAIDO, *Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco*, pp. 19-20, and P. BRAIDO, *L'esperienza pedagogica di Don Bosco*, pp. 20-21.

⁵ MO 124 et s.

⁶ The «inediti» works referred to have been published by P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa* 13-81. Braido actually reproduces three works: an *Introduzione* (to which he had already referred in editing G. BOSCO, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo*), the *Cenno storico dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* and the *Cenni storici intorno all'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*. According to Braido the *Introduzione* and the *Cenno storico* were written in 1854 and the *Cenni storici* in 1862.

chism class for young bricklayers that had been started a few years earlier by Don Cafasso and then discontinued.⁷ In the *Cenni Storici intorno all'Oratorio* of 1862 he stated, on the other hand, that he began his work with the express intention of doing something about young prisoners who, after being freed from prison, needed someone to whom they could turn for help.⁸

The two versions, which clearly make no mention of the episode with the young Garelli, are not necessarily contradictory. It could well be that Don Bosco, on the advice of Cafasso, continued the catechism instructions that the latter had not had time to pursue. This would explain, amongst other things, the speed with which this newly ordained priest began to give Sunday instructions only a few weeks after arriving in Turin. This does not exclude the possibility that, having been encouraged by Cafasso to visit the prisons, he conceived the idea of helping youngsters released from prison by means of those same Sunday instructions. Whatever the real reason behind the work begun by Don Bosco, the truth is that very soon it was directed not towards a special group, such as the ex-prisoners, but more widely towards all the «poor and abandoned» of Turin, including those who came to the city from the surrounding countryside: boys without any fixed abode, unemployed or, at the most, doing only casual work, living from hand to mouth and exposed to all the dangers of the streets.

Historical works have dealt amply with the cultural roots of Don Bosco. It is just worth noting that the decision to get boys together on a Sunday, entertain them with games and also instruct them in the truths of their Christian faith was no new idea. If anyone deserves the credit for initiating such work in Turin it is Don Cocchi, who in 1840 had opened the Oratory of the Guardian Angel in the Moschino district of the city.⁹

I have elsewhere argued, basing my thought on the work of several schol-

⁷ Don Bosco writes: «This Oratory, which is a gathering of youngsters on Sundays and days of obligation, began in the church of St. Francis of Assisi. For many years Don Cafasso had given a catechism lesson each Sunday during the summer to young builders in a room next to the sacristy of the church. Weight of work forced this priest to interrupt this task, which he so enjoyed. I took it over at the end of 1841, and began by gathering together young adults who were desperately in need of religious instruction. We met in the same room as before» (P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa* 38-39). Many scholars, including P. Stella have concurred in attributing the beginnings of the oratories at the Ecclesiastical College to the initiative of Don Cafasso. See P. STELLA, *Don Bosco* I 95. P. Braido records that some within the Salesian tradition have contested this attribution. See P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa* 38, the note relating to lines 54-56.

⁸ The text of 1862 unhesitatingly affirmed: «The idea of the Oratories was born of visits made to the prisons of this city» (P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa* 60).

⁹ Concerning Don Cocchi see E. REFFO, *Don Cocchi e i suoi artigianelli*, Torino, Tip. S. Giuseppe degli Artigianelli 1896; further references can be found in the study by REFFO of the *Vita del T. Leonardo Murialdo*, Torino, Tip. S. Giuseppe degli Artigianelli 1905; ample information on Don Cocchi and more general comments on the Turin oratories can be found in A. CASTELLANI, *Il Beato Leonardo Murialdo*, vol. 2, Roma, Tip. S. Pio X 1966-1968.

ars, as well as upon evidence from within Don Bosco's own circle, that, compared with the Oratory of Don Cocchi, Bosco's was distinctive for its more organized emphasis on education.¹⁰ This claim demands certain qualifications because, to tell the truth, the Oratory of the Guardian Angel, as it developed, did more than just entertain the boys with games and physical exercises; it took measures to give them also moral, religious and even civic formation. Particularly interesting in this respect, were the Sunday and evening classes which Don Cocchi, helped by Don R. Murialdo, introduced in 1847.¹¹ This was an undertaking which, at least on paper, had no call to envy the educational developments that Don Bosco was putting into effect towards the end of the eighteen-forties.

The fact that the new generation of priests, like Don Bosco and Don Cocchi, in their desire to assist the most unfortunate social groups, saw better education as a means of helping the growing numbers of poor and abandoned youngster, is hardly surprising. One needs to remember that for some time the idea of prevention, which had replaced the notions of restitution and deterrence of preceding centuries, was leading to an emphasis on the urgent need to help marginalised young people by providing them with the means of integrating themselves into society. The exponents of this approach, who were deeply worried about the social consequences of so many paupers, beggars and vagabonds, expounded the view that the harmful phenomena associated with deprivation might be contained by a series of indirect measures, chief of which would be the instruction and education of needy children and adolescents.¹² As a precaution against any misunderstanding I should add that, although these advocates of a more preventive policy were a good deal more open than those following traditional forms of repression, they still considered the existing social framework as intrinsically good; they saw those who lived on the fringes of society as "dangerous" people who needed to be helped. Their attitude remained essentially paternalistic. We cannot say whether Don Bosco knew and studied the publications of scholars like Morichini, Petitti or De Gérando,¹³ but he was, from

¹⁰ L. PAZZAGLIA, *Apprendistato e istruzione degli artigiani a Valdocco (1846-1866)*, in: F. TRANIELLO (edit.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare*, Torino, SEI 1987, pp. 16-17. For the view that Don Bosco's Oratory was superior in its educational approach to that of Don Cocchi, see especially G. CHIOSSO, *L'Oratorio di Don Bosco e il rinnovamento educativo nel Piemonte carloalbertino*, in: P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa* 83-116.

¹¹ *Oratorio dell'Angelo custode*, in «L'educatore. Giornale d'educazione ed istruzione» 3 (1847) 762-765.

¹² On the debates which arose in the first half of the 19th century over the question of preventive social action cf. G. MILANESI, *Sistema preventivo e prevenzione in Don Bosco*, a paper presented at the study seminar held at Venice in the autumn of 1988, in: C. NANNI (edit.), *Don Bosco e la sua esperienza pedagogica* 148-165.

¹³ C.L. MORICHINI, *Degli Istituti di pubblica carità e d'istruzione primaria in Roma*, Roma, Stamperia dell'Ospizio apostolico presso P. Aurelj 1835; C.I. PETITTI DI RORETO, *Saggio sul*

the beginning, aware of the work done in Turin by institutions like the «Albergo di virtù» (a hospice) or the «Opera della mendicITÀ istruita» (work for the instruction of beggars), which had existed for some time and had recently increased their help for young people who were at risk.¹⁴

This brief summary enables us to establish the context within which Don Bosco set to work. His decision to place himself at the service of poor and abandoned boys was certainly inspired chiefly by considerations of Christian charity, but there is equally no doubt that this choice was initially influenced by the preventive approach of the period. In other words, Don Bosco at an early stage became convinced that the deprivation of young people had to be combated by energetic and generous care work and by education, even though he began his work in a way that resembled the approaches typical of the prevailing climate of thought, taking the view that the problem was to win back these youngsters for society. This outlook was nourished by the idea that society, by preserving the principles of Catholic tradition, would be capable of «guaranteeing order, moral health and religious peace».¹⁵

In order to be aware of the reliance that Don Bosco placed upon public order, which had been buffeted by the winds of revolution and which was now striving to get back on its feet, one has only to skim through his *Storia Ecclesiastica* of 1845 and note his adverse judgement on any movements which he saw as a threat to the equilibrium that resulted from the alliance between throne and altar.¹⁶ However, we cannot exclude the possibility that Don Bosco was also oppressed by the pessimistic view of human nature and the acute sense of sin instilled by the rigoristic theology taught in the seminary; its influence had even led him to doubt his own ability to attain salvation.¹⁷ His writings of this period (one thinks of his *Cenni storici della vita del Chierico Luigi Comollo*,¹⁸ or of his testimony concerning his companion in the Seminary, G. Burzio),¹⁹ give the impression that the attitude which Don Bo-

buon governo della mendicITÀ, degli istituti di beneficenza e delle carceri, Torino, Bocca 1837; J.M. DE GÉRANDO, *Della pubblica beneficenza*, vol. 7, Firenze, C. Torri 1842-1846.

¹⁴ Concerning the «Albergo di virtù» cf. G. PONZO, *Stato e pauperismo in Italia: L'Albergo di virtù di Torino (1580-1836)*, Roma, La Cultura 1974; concerning the «Opera della mendicITÀ istruita» cf. the ample comments in: P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*, Roma, LAS 1980, pp. 61 et ss.

¹⁵ P. BRAIDO, *L'esperienza pedagogica di Don Bosco* 20.

¹⁶ G. BOSCO, *Storia ecclesiastica ad uso delle scuole utile per ogni ceto di persone*, Torino, Tip. Speirani e Ferrero 1845, now available in: OE I 161-556.

¹⁷ Regarding the formation that Don Bosco received in the seminary at Chieri cf. Don Bosco's own memoirs (MO 89 et ss.) and the patient reconstruction of P. STELLA, *Don Bosco* I 51 et ss.

¹⁸ [G. BOSCO,] *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri, ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù, scritti da un suo collega*, Torino, Tip. Speirani e Ferrero 1844, in OE I 1-83.

¹⁹ Don Bosco's testimony appeared in: F. GIORDANO, *Cenni istruttivi di perfezione proposti ai giovani desiderosi della medesima nella vita edificante di Giuseppe Burzio*, Torino, Stamperia degli artisti tipografi 1846, pp. 96 et ss. See OE II 6 et ss.

sco at that stage had towards young people was tinged with severity. Symptomatic is his evaluation at that time of his seminary companions. It is almost as if he saw them only as vacuous and superficial, with the exception of some «truly holy ones»; but he noted that these latter «are few in number. One has, accordingly, to be extremely wary; once one has found a few good companions, one can form with them the kind of spiritual friendship which is really profitable».²⁰ Against this background which did not credit youth in general with much that was good, it was natural that, when he came into contact with abandoned boys, he should think that the only solution was to restore them to a social context in which they could be straightened out through the moral influence of religious principles.

He had not been in Turin very long, however, before experience began to broaden his views. The pastoral training at the Ecclesiastical College under the shrewd guidance of Don Cafasso, who remained Don Bosco's spiritual director until 1860, replaced the theological rigorism of the seminary with a spiritual theology that was far more balanced.²¹ Through the influence of Guala and Cafasso, Don Bosco became acquainted with authors like St. Alphonsus, St. Philip Neri and St. Francis de Sales, and as he reflected on their teaching he was able to open himself to the sense of Christian hope and of confident trust in the mercy of God, our Father.²² The Ecclesiastical College played a key part in determining the main direction of his future apostolate. Leaving behind abstract theological strictures and taking stock of the real pastoral needs of the situation, Don Bosco began to understand that, as far as the glory of God was concerned, the important thing was not one's adherence to this theological theory rather than that, but rather the practical help which, as a priest, he was able to give to people.

In October 1844, having finished his pastoral training at the Ecclesiastical

²⁰ Don Bosco claimed to have been given this judgement by his companion Comollo as part of the latter's division of his companions into three categories: «the bad», «the not bad, but not very good», and the «truly good» (OE I 63-64). It is natural to suppose that this was also Don Bosco's view. His *Memorie dell'Oratorio* give the impression that he arrived at a similar classification himself in evaluating his companions in the Latin class at the secondary school at Chieri (MO 50-51). For the rather critical judgement passed on his seminary companions in the early forties, see what he said about his companion Burzio, where he maintained that a good seminarist needed the innocence of a dove and the guile of a serpent, if he wished to escape unharmed «the rocks hidden beneath the surface and which could cause shipwreck and death even when one seemed to be safe in port». For Don Bosco the worst of these hidden «rocks» were bad companions. Cf. OE II 8-9.

²¹ For the years that Don Bosco passed at the Ecclesiastical College see P. STELLA, *Don Bosco* I 85 et ss.

²² On the links between Don Bosco and St. Alphonsus, in addition to the references in P. STELLA, *Don Bosco* I 87 et ss. cf. the comments of M. MARCOCCI, *Alle radici della spiritualità di Don Bosco* in this same volume. On the influence upon Don Bosco of the thought of St. Philip Neri and of St. Francis de Sales cf. P. BRAIDO, *L'esperienza pedagogica preventiva* 306-307.

College, he became chaplain in the «Refuge» of the Marchioness di Barolo and was able to give the Sunday meetings with his boys a more permanent character. It was while working at the Refuge that Don Bosco began to refer to this weekly meeting as the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Activities at the Oratory combined the explanation of the catechism with pleasant games and pastimes,²³ and he was anxious to consolidate the work, convinced as he was that it was only by living amongst these boys and caring for them that he could raise their vision towards things of the spirit. He realised that, if his work was to succeed, he had to convince the boys that they had found a «friend», someone they could trust and to whom they could open their hearts. Once that was achieved, once the boys felt themselves in an atmosphere of affection and sincere human concern, the problem of improving them became less difficult. Writing at a later date about these early experiences he said: «It was at that time that I discovered from experience that when youngsters are released from detention, if they can only find someone to give them a helping hand and care for them, be with them on holydays, find them a job with a good employer and visit them now and again during the week, then those young people begin to live an honest life; they forget about the past, become good Christians and honest citizens».²⁴

Some historians have wondered whether Don Bosco derived this much more emphatic idea of preventive action from any precise source. One can certainly state that he was influenced by his deepening understanding of the apostolate of St. Philip Neri and St. Francis de Sales, especially by such elements as joyfulness, a key factor in St. Philip's approach to education, or the gentleness and charity which Francis de Sales recommended to all those working for the good of souls.²⁵ In addition to these masters of the spiritual life Don Bosco was certainly familiar with other less famous authors of as-

²³ As far as formal teaching is concerned, Don Bosco began by organizing a short class each Sunday, to teach the boys the rudiments of reading and writing. In the *Cenni storici* we are told that the «Sunday school» began in 1845, but Braido believes that it began a year later. Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco per la gioventù povera* 68 and the note to lines 103-112.

²⁴ MO 127.

²⁵ Don Bosco made a brief reference to St. Philip Neri and St. Francis de Sales, together with other apostles who appeared in the wake of the Council of Trent, in his *Storia ecclesiastica* (OE I). He mentions their special characteristics, saying of St. Philip Neri: «He scoured the streets and districts of the city, collecting especially the most abandoned children; he then brought them together in some place where they could be innocently amused, far from corrupting influences, and where they could be taught the truths of the faith» (*Ibid.*, p. 473). Of St. Francis de Sales he writes: «Called by God to do great things, he set off for the Chablais, armed only with gentleness and charity. When he saw the way the churches had been knocked down, monasteries destroyed and crucifixes smashed, he was filled with zeal and immediately set to work» (*Ibid.*, pp. 479-480). In the *Memorie dell'Oratorio* he indicated why he had called his work after St. Francis de Sales; amongst other reasons, it was in order that the saint «might obtain for us from God the grace to be able to imitate his extraordinary gentleness and his ability to win souls to God» (MO 141).

etical and pedagogical works of the kind which the Church has always used in order to promote truth and Christian virtue. P. Stella concedes that one of the sources of Don Bosco's *Giovane provveduto*, written in 1847 to foster the Christian life of his boys,²⁶ was a little book by Gobinet, the author of various devotional works imbued with the spirit of St. Francis de Sales.²⁷ But in Don Bosco's thinking and practice, as he consolidated the Oratory, one can discern parallels and similarities with other writers and other educational enterprises.

There was, for example, the educational approach of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the teaching of Aporti, the themes of those educators who were connected with «L'educatore primario». There was, in fact, a growing tendency, even though it lacked any coordinated programme of action, to attach great importance to popular education and to emphasize a style of formation which was based not on reprimanding and punishing but on preventing boys from getting into trouble.²⁸ Despite these interesting parallels, P. Braido has demonstrated that there is not enough documentary evidence for us to be able to speak of Don Bosco's direct debt to these writers and groups of people, though he certainly was in contact with some of them.²⁹ One cannot conclude that he worked out his educational principles solely on the basis of his own experience, strengthened by the spiritual and ascetical traditions mentioned above. The similarities between his approach and that of other groups shows that they were all influenced by a common cultural climate.

What is certain is that by the late eighteen-forties this young priest had acquired a more benign vision of youth, without falling into an undue optimism, after the style of Rousseau, about which he would have had grave

²⁶ G. BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de' suoi doveri degli esercizi di cristiana pietà per la recita dell'Uffizio della Beata Vergine e de' principali vesperi dell'anno coll'aggiunta di una scelta di laudi sacre, ecc.*, Torino, Paravia 1847, in: OE II 183-532.

²⁷ The booklet of Gobinet referred to is *Instruction de la Jeunesse en la piété chrétienne, tirée de l'Écriture-Sainte et de ss. Pères*, which appeared in 1655 and became rapidly a most popular work of spirituality for the young. There were various Italian translations, such as: CH. GOBINET, *Istruzione della Gioventù nella pietà cristiana*, Torino, Associazione presso i librai Maspero e Serra 1831 (which constituted volume 23 of the «Scelta biblioteca economica d'opere di religione»). For comment on the relationship between the *Giovane provveduto* and the writings of Gobinet cf. P. STELLA, *Valori spirituali nel «Giovane provveduto» di san Giovanni Bosco*, Roma, Scuola Grafica Borgo Ragazzi Don Bosco 1960.

²⁸ Regarding this matter cf. P. BRAIDO, *Stili di educazione popolare cristiana alle soglie del 1848*, in: *Pedagogia fra tradizione e innovazione*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero 1979, pp. 383-404; P. BRAIDO, *L'esperienza pedagogica preventiva* 310-313; G. CHIOSSO, *L'Oratorio di Don Bosco*, in: P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa* 107 et ss.

²⁹ He does not share the view of someone who, like Caviglia, is inclined to make Don Bosco dependent on the educational approach of the Brothers of the Christian Schools or of those pedagogists who followed the line of «L'educatore primario». Cf. P. BRAIDO, *L'esperienza pedagogica preventiva* 310, note 28; 313, note 39.

reservations. The *Giovane provveduto* reveals how his vision was steadily maturing, based on a theological concept of God very far from that of the rigorists in the seminary, a God seen as a loving father, anxious to help his sons to achieve eternal happiness. This vision of God is reflected in Don Bosco's words to his boys: «Since we are convinced, my dear boys, that we have all been created for heaven, we must direct all our efforts towards that goal. Your most powerful motive for making such an effort should be the love which God has for you. Although it is true that God loves everyone, because he made everyone, nevertheless he has a special affection for the young, taking a special delight in them: *Deliciae meae esse cum filiis hominum*. So you are objects of delight and of love to that God who made you. He loves you because you have still time to do a lot of good; he loves you because at your age you are still uncomplicated, humble, innocent, and have not yet become the prey of the evil one».³⁰

The foundation of his future preventive system was thus already laid. If youth was the section of humanity most loved by God, as well as the most important time for securing one's salvation, then adults had the delicate task of watching over the young with fatherly love and reasonable concern, in order to support them in their vulnerable condition and to help them grow, with God's grace, in the love of virtue and of the Christian life. Don Bosco was embarked upon a programme of education which, while acknowledging the help of social structures, was aimed chiefly at building up the interior resources of each boy, so that each would gradually become capable of discerning and embracing what was good.

2. The background of political tensions and anti-religious propaganda

By 1846 the Oratory was finally settled at Valdocco, on the outskirts of Turin, and was therefore able to enjoy the benefit of new activities. Don Bosco realised that the reading and writing that had been taught to the boys on Sundays was too intermittent to be of any lasting value; he therefore decided to start evening classes with lessons in reading and writing, later adding arithmetic and some drawing.³¹ Initially this instruction was purely subsidiary to religious instruction, but it was soon seen to have real intrinsic value, because it helped towards both the religious and social rehabilitation of the

³⁰ OE II 190-191.

³¹ Regarding the dating of the first evening school in 1846 cf. the testimony of Don Bosco in the *Cenni storici*: P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa* 72. In the *Memorie dell'Oratorio* there is reference to the winter of 1845, while Don Ceria even talked of the possibility of 1844. Cf. MO 150-151 and the note on line 33. Braido takes the view that Don Bosco's evening classes probably began during the winter of 1846-1847 (See his *Don Bosco nella Chiesa* 72, the note on line 127).

boys. Don Bosco took the clear view that spiritual growth was linked to the development of the whole human person: as early as 1847 he was telling his boys that, provided they followed the instruction given to them, they would become «the consolation of their [...] families, a credit to their country and good citizens here on earth», before becoming the «happy inhabitants of heaven».³²

This explains his preoccupation with finding a suitable job for each of his boys, so that they would be saved from idleness and be able to live a decent life as active members of society. Don Bosco was steadily moving towards an approach which combined profound religious inspiration with the careful nourishing of all that was truly human. One can assert that from the very start his project on behalf of the boys aimed at providing them with everything they needed: first of all, of course, the means to grow in the life of faith, but at the same time, material aids: work, friendship, health care, advice and spells of light-hearted recreation.³³

The provision of such a «total programme of aid» was made relatively more easy once he could count on a fixed abode, which, however modest initially, had the advantage of offering the boys stable, dependable support. Once the Pinardi house became available in the spring of 1847, Don Bosco offered to let some boys lodge there. From that moment Valdocco was able to provide a hostel, side by side with the oratory and evening classes, thus enabling a number of youngsters to work at various jobs in the city, or have classes with private tutors, and then return in the evening to the Oratory, where the loving presence of Don Bosco's mother, busy about the house, created the warm atmosphere of a real family.

In order to understand the importance that the provision of a hostel acquired in the strategy of this saintly priest (a strategy later extended to include colleges for boarders), one needs to recall the political turmoil of those years. P. Stella suggests that in the first months of 1848 Don Bosco was inclined to sympathize with a «neo-Guelph» movement, when, during something of a crisis, «the majority of the clergy (and even some of the bishops, who later abandoned the nationalistic cause and adopted a more intransigent stance) favoured the "neo-Guelphs" and supported the war of independence».³⁴ In support of this hypothesis one can adduce the use of the word «great», to describe Gioberti in the 1848 edition of Don Bosco's *Storia Ecclesiastica*,³⁵ as well as certain motifs that can be discerned in the first issue

³² OE II 187.

³³ When emphasizing the comprehensive nature of this assistential work, Braido speaks of «an overall programme of assistance». Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il progetto operativo* 9.

³⁴ P. STELLA, *Don Bosco* II 78.

³⁵ After praising Pius IX, Don Bosco wrote: «Sovereigns learned from him the right way to govern their subjects. His mere presence arouses wonder in those who see him. The great Gioberti says that the day he saw him was the most wonderful in his life»: SE 21848, p. 182. In the later edition of 1870 Don Bosco left out the reference to Gioberti.

of the «Amico della gioventù», a political and religious journal that Don Bosco began to publish in the October of 1848.³⁶ In an article entitled *Religion and Liberty*, which appeared anonymously, but almost certainly with his approval, if it was not indeed by him,³⁷ it was argued that the Church, contrary to what its enemies suggested, was not opposed to progress or national aspirations: «In fine, it should be ever more obvious that Catholicism, progress and nationhood are more easily reconcilable than at first seems to be the case, and that the latter two brought benefit to the first and need its support if they really want to succeed».³⁸ But if he cherished some sympathy for the «neo-Guelphs», he quickly shed it and began to fear that events like the abolition of censorship (30 October 1847), the granting of Statutes (4 March 1848), and, in particular, the granting of equal civil rights³⁹ to the Waldensians (17 February 1848) and to the Jews (29 March 1848), were the warning signs of political changes that would seriously threaten the Catholic religion. Don Bosco felt that the State, under anti-Catholic influence, was abandoning the policy it had hitherto enthusiastically pursued of protecting the Church in exchange for the latter's support. The introduction of a further series of reforms, beginning in 1850 with the abolition of the ecclesiastical «forum» and the adoption of certain measures like the expulsion of Mons. Frasoni, archbishop of Turin, seemed to provide bitter confirmation of his worst fears.⁴⁰ From that moment onwards, despite his declarations that he

³⁶ The paper was not very successful and in the May of 1849 it was merged with «L'istruttore del popolo». Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco* II 78 et s.

³⁷ The article can be found in the last volume of the *Opere edite*, which were published recently: OE XXXVIII 291-292.

³⁸ OE XXXVIII 292. «We are similarly dedicated to the good of the young, and we have determined to devote ourselves to this wonderful age of hope, inviting young people to make full use of their liberty» (*Ibid.*). This echoes what had been written in the same issue of «L'amico della gioventù» under the title *Programma*. It can be found in OE XXXVIII 289-290. In appealing to his readers to help him in the work he had undertaken the «Director» wrote thus: Young people «are the most favoured section of the human family, since upon them rest the hopes of their fatherland, the support of their families, and the good name of Religion and the State» (*Ibid.*, p. 290). Don Bosco expressed himself in a similar vein in the *Avviso sacro*, which he published during the same months: «Youth is the portion of humanity upon which rest the hopes of the present and the future, the portion which is worthy of the most careful attention» (MB III 605).

³⁹ The Waldensians were granted emancipation by Royal Letters Patent on 17 February 1848; the Jews by a Royal Decree of 29 March 1848. The equality of non-Catholic citizens was soon given a further, more solemn confirmation. On 19 June 1848, a law was passed with a single article, stating that difference of cult no longer constituted «a bar to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights or to admission to civil or military office». Concerning the emancipation of the Waldensians and Jews cf., amongst others, G. SPINI, *Risorgimento e protestanti*, Napoli 1956; S. FOA, *Gli ebrei nel Risorgimento*, Roma-Assisi 1978.

⁴⁰ For Don Bosco's views on 1848 see what he wrote in his *La storia d'Italia raccontata alla gioventù da' suoi primi abitatori sino ai nostri giorni*, Torino, Paravia 1855, found in OE VII 1-558 and in MO 204 et ss. For comment on Don Bosco's version of these events, especially in his *Storia d'Italia*, cf. F. TRANIELLO, *Don Bosco e l'educazione giovanile: la «Storia d'Italia»*, in:

had nothing to do with politics, Don Bosco looked back with nostalgia to the socio-political order of the «Ancien Régime». That nostalgia explains his constant opposition to the separation of Church and State and his strictly hierarchical vision of society.

The main cause for his concern, after 1849, was the active propaganda with which the Waldensians, profiting from their newly acquired freedom, sought to extend their influence amongst the population. One can imagine what Don Bosco felt in 1851, when he saw a Waldensian church built at Porta Nuova, just where he had begun another oratory dedicated to St. Aloysius. His writings of this period, from his *Avvisi ai cattolici* to *Il cattolico istruito*,⁴¹ echo his deep concern about the Waldensian proselytism in Piedmont. For Don Bosco protestantism was not only a religious heresy (seen by 18th century apologists as the fruit more of immorality than of the apostasy of reason),⁴² but also a political phenomenon that tended to undermine all legitimate authority.

A typical example of his thinking is the way he represented the consequences, as he saw them, of the principle of freedom of conscience: «To say: you are free to choose your religion is the same as saying "do what you like; rob, refuse to obey, kill your king and his ministers and anyone else who seems guilty in your eyes; you will be doing what is right, so long as you think your actions are right"».⁴³ In the course of his campaign against the «sects» he accordingly tended to identify protestantism with «revolution» and to represent Catholicism, in contrast, as the religion which led people to live peacefully together.⁴⁴

This context explains the importance that his hostel acquired in Don Bosco's educational activities. It served to counteract the harmful influences that surrounded his youngsters during the day as a result of the people they met, the conversations they overheard, the newspapers that came into their hands. It is significant that Don Bosco decided to give his boarders «a very brief talk each evening after prayers, aimed at explaining or confirming some truth that they might have heard questioned in the course of the day».⁴⁵

Between 1851 and 1853 Valdocco enjoyed the benefit of the new church of St. Francis de Sales and a new building for boarders. In 1853 these numbered about twenty and included, in addition to some artisans and students,

F. TRANIELLO (edit.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare* 81-111.

⁴¹ G. BOSCO, *La Chiesa cattolica-apostolica-romana è la sola vera Chiesa di Gesù Cristo. Avvisi ai cattolici*, Torino, Tip. Speirani e Ferrero 1850, found in OE IV 121-143; also G. BOSCO, *Il cattolico istruito nella sua religione. Trattenimenti di un padre di famiglia co' suoi figliuoli secondo i bisogni del tempo*, Torino, De Agostini 1853, found in OE IV 195-646.

⁴² P. STELLA, *Don Bosco* II 47 et ss.

⁴³ OE IV 590.

⁴⁴ P. STELLA, *Don Bosco* II 81 et ss.

⁴⁵ MO 205.

a number of clerics to whom Don Bosco had offered hospitality when the diocesan seminary closed during the first war of independence. Their presence involved him in yet another form of educational experience.⁴⁶ By this time the Oratory was clearly very different from the simple Sunday meeting-place of the early eighteen-forties, but behind its organizational evolution there was a change that went far deeper. The events of 1848 caused Don Bosco to revise his original idea in taking in homeless boys, namely, that of saving them for society. He was coming to the conclusion that young people in general, not just those who were homeless, needed to be protected from the harmful social influences that surrounded them. Once he had come to that conclusion, the hostel was merely a stepping-stone to something further.

During 1853, since he had more space at his disposal, Don Bosco set up the first two workshops at Valdocco (shoemaking and tailoring); to these, over a period of about ten years, four more would be added (bookbinding, joinery, printing and metalwork). In 1855, moreover, he added a third class to his secondary school, which was then, within the space of four years, integrated into a complete five-year secondary course. As a result of these developments the hostel was turned into a proper boarding school, where the boys could sleep, have their meals and pursue their studies or craft. This transformation of Valdocco, always preserving the festive Oratory, was carried out in response to the demands of changing circumstances, as for example, when it became necessary to furnish the Oratory boys with new clothes and shoes, or when Don Bosco's work as a writer and editor made it useful to have printing and bookbinding shops.⁴⁷ At the same time, basic to the whole evolution was the desire to protect the boys from the influence of a society which, in Don Bosco's eyes, was becoming ever more harmful to their moral and spiritual life. He was, in particular, concerned for those who were still too immature and lacking in personal conviction to be able to resist such influences.

By the middle of the eighteen-fifties Don Bosco had already worked out the general structures which were going to form part of his educational strategy. It would be interesting to analyse closely the documents and ideas which he worked upon at that time in an effort to give a faithful picture of his daily work. One thinks, for example, of the collection of *Regolamenti* drawn up from 1852 onwards, of the *Introduzione* and of the *Cenno storico*, which I have already mentioned. Then there is his *Conversazione* with Rattazzi in 1854, although to be truthful, the contents of that conversation were not to be published in the «Salesian Bulletin» until 1882, and so were

⁴⁶ Don Bosco used to be happy to say that after 1848 the Oratory became the diocesan seminary for almost twenty years: MO 212.

⁴⁷ On the reasons which led Don Bosco to set up his workshops at Valdocco see L. PAZ-ZAGLIA, *Apprendistato* 20 et ss.

somewhat adulterated by the introduction of subsequent judgements and evaluations.⁴⁸

For our purpose a few simple comments may suffice. These and other documents provide us with a clear picture of the more positive impression of youth that Don Bosco had gradually formed. They are «the most precious delicate section»,⁴⁹ «not intrinsically bad»,⁵⁰ they go wrong «through thoughtlessness [...] not through deliberate malice». ⁵¹ In his *Introduzione* the saint was coming to the conclusion that, if one could remove certain obstacles, such as «their parents' neglect» (often a failure to give them affection), or «laziness», «bad companions», then it should be «a simple thing» to educate the boys and «to instil into their tender young hearts the principles of discipline, of morality, of respect and of religion». ⁵²

The rapid definition which he gives of education, coloured as it is by his optimism as an educator, needs to be given prominence and placed side by side with what he said in 1854 in his conversation with Rattazzi. On that occasion he contrasted two methods of education which we can call the «repressive» and the «preventive», though at the time of the interview Don Bosco himself was not yet using those terms. He explained to Rattazzi the nature of preventive action: «First of all, we here seek to infuse a holy fear of God into the heart of the boys; by means of catechetical and appropriate moral instruction they are taught to love virtue and to recoil from vice, and by timely and friendly advice and, especially, by the pious exercises of our faith, they are guided towards and supported in the practice of what is right». ⁵³

This definition of education was certainly more precise than the one I have referred to in the *Introduzione*; both, however, had a common inspiration. Don Bosco was increasingly taking the view that, although it was important to find somewhere where his boys could «meet together», a more important and more constructive element in «prevention» was the attempt to «infuse» and «insinuate» into the hearts of his boys the principles of natural and supernatural virtue. This conviction helps us to understand more pre-

⁴⁸ The text has recently been republished by A. FERREIRA DA SILVA, *Conversazione con Urbano Rattazzi*, in: G. BOSCO, *Scritti pedagogici* 55-69.

⁴⁹ P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa* 34.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

⁵³ G. BOSCO, *Conversazione con Urbano Rattazzi* 65. Going on to explain to Rattazzi the features of an educational institution devoted to genuine «prevention», Don Bosco added: «In addition, the boys are lovingly supervised everywhere in recreation, as far as that is possible, as well as in class and at work. They are encouraged with kindly words, and if they show signs of forgetting their duties, they are gently reminded. In a word, every effort that Christian charity suggests is made to help them do what is right and avoid evil by means of a well-formed conscience and the help of Religion» (*Ibid.*, pp. 65-66).

cisely the atmosphere of great freedom which, as one reads in the *Cenno storico*, he claimed to have introduced into the Oratory, despite the fact that his methods, especially at the start, drew upon him, from some wise people, the accusation that he was teaching his boys «suspect ideas». «This last accusation was based especially on the fact that I allowed my boys every form of recreation, provided it was not sinful and not opposed to good behaviour».⁵⁴

3. The festive oratory and the boarding school: two systems of education

By the middle fifties Don Bosco had defined not only the «areas» of his work but also the key educational principles that would govern it. To gain a better understanding of how he achieved his objectives it would be necessary to analyse his work very attentively, especially in view of his claim that any correct strategy in education must be adapted to the specific demands of each situation. In actual fact, as he progressed in the realization of his task, Don Bosco made use of two different systems: the festive oratory, which had moved on from the early improvised meeting, limited to Sundays, to the greater continuity of a daily meeting: and the boarding school, which, although it began with two laboratories in 1853, was given its clear, precise character only when the five-year cycle of secondary classes was complete.

For a complete picture, however, we need to take into account a further sub-division within the boarding-school system, because although Don Bosco's principles remained the same, he modified details according to whether he was providing for artisans, students or young clerics. This was even more the case when the five secondary classes were complete and he had to leave behind the very simple arrangements for a regimen, within the various sections, that was more demanding and precise. Since it is impossible to go into a detailed examination of the various educational works that Don Bosco was gradually developing, we shall here limit ourselves to a few general reflections on the arrangements for externs in the Oratory and for boarders in the college.

In examining the way Don Bosco's ideas for the festive oratory matured during these years of great activity, it is worth considering the first «Regulations for the Oratory» which he began to draw up about 1852 on the lines of the rules of certain oratories in Milan. This was necessary for the proper control of the youngsters that were flocking into Valdocco on Sundays and in the evenings and who, following the introduction of boarders, came to be referred to as the «externs».⁵⁵ The Regulations defined the aim of the Oratory:

⁵⁴ P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa* 45.

⁵⁵ This *Regolamento* was published by Lemoyne in MB III 91 et s. and 98-108. According to Lemoyne the regulations go back to 1847, but Braido is probably right in thinking that

«to entertain youngsters on Sundays and days of obligation with pleasant and fitting forms of recreation, after they have attended the church services».⁵⁶ Don Braido has warned against too reductionist a view of this description, saying that what Don Bosco had in mind was not just a «playground» or «meeting place for children», but a «school where instruction was imparted, religion was practised and youngsters were inspired to live a Christian life».⁵⁷ Obviously the word «school» is not used in its literal sense, since although there were spells of real schooling, the instruction of the boys who attended was done very informally and depended very much upon the circumstances and the teacher's powers of improvisation. What Don Bosco wanted was a happy and serene educative «environment», which would use all the various elements, such as lessons, games, theatre, outings, in such a way as to provide genuine help to the boys in their moral, spiritual and religious development.

The organization needed to achieve this objective required a division of labour. The Regulations laid down that the Rector («the chief superior who is ultimately responsible for everything in the Oratory») should be aided by a small group of collaborators, ranging from the bursar to the spiritual director, who, on account of their responsible duties, had to be priests, and by a further group of assistants, supervisors, sacristans, monitors, catechists, librarians, all of whom were selected from amongst the most able and exemplary of the boys.

Don Bosco insisted that anyone who wanted to enter the Oratory had either to have a trade or, at least, the intention of taking one up: «Anyone unemployed but anxious to find work should apply to the assistants and he will receive help from them».⁵⁸ It is not surprising that work meant so much to this Piedmontese priest that it was made a condition for entry to Valdocco. The Regulations for externs reflected his rooted conviction that laziness and unemployment encouraged every kind of vice and made all religious instruction quite useless.⁵⁹

It is evident, however, that these new rules tended to alter the original concept of the Oratory. Whereas it had previously been seen principally, though not exclusively, as a means of helping boys who were just out of

they go back to about 1852 (P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa* 36, note on lines 24-27). The definitive text of the Regulations for externs appeared in 1877: *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per esterni*, Torino, Tip. Salesiana 1877. It can be found in: OE XXIX 31-92.

⁵⁶ MB III 91.

⁵⁷ P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, Zürich, Pas-Verlag 1964, p. 322. On the festive oratory see what Braido has written in his *L'esperienza pedagogica preventiva* 160 et ss.

⁵⁸ MB III 92.

⁵⁹ MB III 92. I had occasion to deal at greater length with Don Bosco's insistence on the contrast between an active and a lazy life, when I spoke at a study seminar in Venice. The paper was entitled *Il tema del lavoro nell'esperienza pedagogica* and appears in: C. NANNI, *Don Bosco e la sua esperienza pedagogica* 113-131.

prison and had no means of support, it now became a form of service open to all boys, who, while engaged in some form of work, wanted to make positive use of their free time. This probably resulted from the fact that Don Bosco concentrated on finding gainful employment for his boys, so that the Oratory was progressively frequented by more and more young artisans. This new development did not mean that Don Bosco was not also aware of the changing social context, which led him to see the urgency of helping not just a particular group of young people, but youngsters in general, whether they were students or young workers.⁶⁰ It must be said, however, that, despite this widening of his educational horizons, Don Bosco continued to insist that special attention should be paid to the most needy.

The festive oratory was now conceived as providing for ever more numerous groups of youngsters, and so, in terms of its inmates, it became all-embracing. The Regulations laid down that it should be open even to the most troublesome boys, provided they did not give scandal and showed some willingness to improve their behaviour.⁶¹ This declared tolerance should not, however, lead anyone to imagine that Don Bosco favoured a vague and flabby type of education. The central element around which everything rotated in the Oratory was religion. Speaking of the Rector, the Regulations declared: «He must be like a father amongst his sons and do all he can to instil into their young hearts the love of God, respect for holy things, frequenting of the sacraments and childlike devotion to Mary most holy».⁶² The Rector's task as an educator clearly extended to every aspect of the Oratory: everything was to be ordered towards promoting not only the knowledge of Christian truths but towards their application in daily practice.

If one wishes to appreciate Don Bosco's deeply rooted concern that his boys should make the truths of faith their own, one need only skim through *La forza della buona educazione* which he published in 1855, even though the first part of this was actually almost a word for word translation from a French booklet.⁶³ The young hero, Pietro, who is represented by Don Bosco

⁶⁰ The *Regolamento* stated expressly that, although the Oratory was chiefly for «young workers who are exposed to great moral and physical dangers on festive days», there was no reason to exclude «students who wished to frequent it on feastsdays and holidays» (MB III 91). Students had already been coming to Valdocco for some time, even though it was for a particular reason. We know that from the beginning Don Bosco used to make use of singing and reading books; he accordingly invited «youngsters who were well-behaved and better educated» to help him in keeping order and in giving lessons in reading and hymn-singing (MO 128).

⁶¹ MB III 92.

⁶² MB III 98.

⁶³ G. Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione. Curioso episodio contemporaneo*, Torino, Paravia 1855. Can be found in OE VI 275-386. Don Bosco stated in the preface that he had used a French book entitled *Un mari comme il y en a beaucoup, une femme comme il y en a peu*. P. Stella has discovered a copy of the 1869 edition of this booklet, which appeared anonymously, possibly having some connection with the Brothers of the Christian Schools. P.

as frequenting the Valdocco Oratory, is made an outstanding example of Christian virtue, attending Mass not only on days of obligation but even daily, making regular use of the sacraments of confession and holy communion, doing some spiritual reading each day (from *Il Giovane provveduto*), avoiding bad companions and shunning idleness.

In Don Bosco's view the Oratory should help to root the boys in Christian virtue but also ensure that they became men of probity: «When a boy enters this Oratory», the Regulations stated, «he must realise that this is a religious place which aims at producing good Christians and honest citizens». ⁶⁴ These words made it understood that the Oratory would promote virtues like unselfishness, honesty, a sense of duty and respect for lawful authority. Once again it is interesting to note the kind of model that Don Bosco proposed in the pages of *La forza della buona educazione*. Peter respected his mother and father and was ready to make sacrifices for their sake; his behaviour at work was most commendable and earned him the esteem of his employer, who valued his «fidelity, punctuality and industriousness». He was equally liked by his companions «who could not have had anyone more patient or charitable put in charge of them». He was no less loyal and generous towards his country when he was called up to do military service. ⁶⁵

Although it is easy to discern the features which Don Bosco cultivated in the festive oratory during the decade from 1850-1860, it is a good deal more difficult to determine just how far his ideal was translated into daily reality. Some Salesians have unhesitatingly testified that the Regulations for the externs were never practised in their entirety even in Turin. ⁶⁶ So far there has, unfortunately, been no detailed research done into the festive oratory during

Stella kindly lent me the copy of the 1869 7th edition, which was published at Caen by the Chénel Libraire, under the above French title. Study of *Un mari...* and *La forza della buona educazione* reveals that the first six chapters of the latter book are merely a translation of the entire French work. The remaining chapters, which follow the young hero, Pietro, from the day of his first communion to the day he began his military service, were probably written by Don Bosco. Even the section that is a translation contains some significant additions and variants. For example, when Pietro's mother is advising her son to tell her each evening the things he has heard his companions at work talking about, Don Bosco adds a comment that reveals the educator: «In that way», he makes the mother say, «I shall be able to give you advice about what you ought to do and what you ought to avoid» (OE VI 282).

⁶⁴ MB III 92. See also the definition of the Oratory that Don Bosco gave on 20 December, 1851, in an appeal to his fellow citizens during the first great lottery that he organized. «A house for Sunday gatherings, where everyone could find it easy to satisfy their Sunday obligations and receive instruction and advice to help them live an honest Christian life» (E I 49).

⁶⁵ Pietro, seeing his father upset over his going off to do military service, expressed himself thus: «Don't be upset, father; we are citizens and we have to serve our country» (OE VI 345).

⁶⁶ Cf. the conclusions of the preparatory commission in preparation for the XIth General Chapter: *Annali* IV 7.

Don Bosco's life. The minutes of meetings and conferences for the personnel of the house in Turin furnish us with nothing worthy of note for the period which they cover.⁶⁷ It would be simplistic to conclude from this silence, even if it occurs in something as significant as conferences, that the festive oratory was, as it were, running out of steam. Nevertheless, so far as one can judge, it seems that after the period between 1840 and 1850 during which the Oratory was given great prominence as an educational institution, it gave some signs of being in a state of crisis.⁶⁸

Perhaps it is relevant to note that once Pius IX had been told in 1858 that Don Bosco had decided to found a religious congregation to ensure the continuity of his work, the saint was constantly travelling, and consequently obliged to delegate to his close collaborators like Don Rua and Don Francesca, the day to day responsibility for running his work. These helpers were undoubtedly most valuable, but they were also young; indeed initially they were the contemporaries of some of the boys they were looking after. They lacked the charisma of the founder and their attention was so absorbed by the life of the establishment that they were unaware of the profound socio-cultural changes taking place in Turin and in the country at large. It is, therefore, perfectly understandable that the festive oratory at Valdocco, which depended so much on Don Bosco's special gift for attracting boys, now entered upon a less lively phase. It was a phase which, in all truth, was destined to last quite a long time and from which the oratory would emerge only in the years after 1880, when the Third General Chapter of 1883 initiated reflection on the festive oratory,⁶⁹ and when, in 1884, Don Bosco de-

⁶⁷ Regarding the conferences cf. the relevant minutes which can be found in ASC, 0592 *Deliberazioni del Capitolo dal 1866-1877*; 38 *Torino Oratorio S. Francesco di Sales Adunanze del Capitolo della casa Ottobre 1877 - Gennaio 1884*. These minutes are, obviously, of prime importance for the history of life at Valdocco as well as for that of the Society in general. J.M. Prelezo has been working on them for some time. Cf., amongst his other studies, *Fonti letterarie della circolare «Dei castighi da infliggersi nelle case salesiane»*, in «Orientamenti Pedagogici» 37 (1988) 625-642, and the more recent *Studio e riflessione pedagogica nella congregazione salesiana 1874-1941. Note per la storia*, in RSS 7 (1988) 35-88.

⁶⁸ P. Stella shares this view. Basing his conclusions on the festive oratories in general rather than just on Valdocco, he writes: «The festive oratories, the press, boarding schools and agricultural colleges are all referred to in the rulings of the General Chapters, but the festive oratories seemed to go through a period of contraction and deterioration during the last decades of the 19th century» (P. STELLA, *Don Bosco* I 124).

⁶⁹ The Third General Chapter, which took place at Valsalice between 2 and 7 September 1883, dealt with the festive oratories under heading VII: *Impianto e sviluppo degli Oratori Festivi presso le Case salesiane*. To assist these deliberations the rectors of the various houses were asked to submit useful suggestions. Cf. ASC, Capitolo Generale III, 1883, 041-042, *Convocazione Proposte*. Once these suggestions were received, the Chapter discussed the problem during the session on the evening of 5 September. The minutes of the session record a comment which confirms that initially the whole responsibility for the oratory at Valdocco rested on Don Bosco's shoulders: «From the very start Don Bosco had to do everything. It is necessary to find clerics or good, suitably qualified young people who could do the jobs of secon-

cided to place the intelligent and dynamic educator, Don Pavia, in charge of the festive oratory at Valdocco.⁷⁰

Nor should we overlook the fact that from 1860 onwards Don Bosco and his helpers were mainly absorbed in the task of developing the boarding school. Certain considerations made this concern for the college all the more necessary. Recall that round about 1854-55 Don Bosco was planning a religious institute composed of people dedicated to the education of youth. In 1859, with the encouragement of Pius IX, he invited a few clerics, who were already aware of his project, to declare their formal allegiance to the Salesian Society. The boarding school at Valdocco acquired a singularly important function in the light of this new development: it would serve as a recruiting ground of those disposed to share in Don Bosco's special apostolate of education. It was all the more valuable because the two distinct sections of students and artisans would make it possible to provide vocations for the priesthood and the lay brotherhood respectively.⁷¹ Once the Salesian Society was firmly established, and then further strengthened by papal recognition in 1869, it grew, as we know, with extraordinary rapidity and spread far and wide; consequently, the college at Valdocco was not capable of providing all the requisite vocations, and so it became necessary to rethink the whole problem and make specific provisions for the entire process of formation.

One thing that reinforced Don Bosco's plan for boarding schools was the fact that the State was persistently whittling away the freedom of action that the Church had up to then enjoyed. One need only recall that in 1855, the year in which, not wholly by chance, Don Bosco was planning the Salesian society, the government had ordered the suppression of all religious congregations with the exception of those devoted to education and care work.⁷² By the end of the decade, the government was creating problems for the Church in the area of schools. The Casati law of 1859 allowed the opening

dary importance. This needs to be written into the Regulations». Don Bosco formulated the following rule: «The Rector of the particular house shall choose, in agreement with the Provincial, a priest who will have special responsibility for the festive Oratory» (ASC 046, Capitolo generale III, 1883, *Verbali*). After the discussion the General Chapter laid down general rules for the oratories. However, not being able to deal exhaustively with everything that was on the agenda, the work of the Third General Chapter had to be completed by the next Chapter in 1886. The decisions regarding the festive oratories appeared, therefore, in *Deliberazioni del Terzo e Quarto Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuti in Valsalice nel settembre 1883-1886*, S. Benigno Canavese, Tip. Salesiana 1887. See OE XXXVI (the new «Regulations for the festive oratories» can be found on pages 274-276).

⁷⁰ Regarding don Giuseppe Pavia (1852-1915) cf. *Un apostolo degli oratori festivi*, Torino, Tip. Salesiana 1919.

⁷¹ As is well known, the Society that Don Bosco founded was made up of priests, clerics and lay-brothers. For a summary history of the lay-brothers (or coadjutors), see the documentation collected by P. BRAIDO, *Religiosi nuovi per il mondo del lavoro*, Roma, PAS 1961.

⁷² Concerning the difficulties that Don Bosco had to overcome as a result of the law of 29 May 1855, cf. the detailed reconstruction in P. STELLA, *Don Bosco* I 129 et ss.

of private secondary schools, but demanded that those teaching in them must have the same qualifications that were required for teaching in a state secondary school.⁷³ This law gave the controllers of education the legal justification for a form of harassment which was often motivated by purely ideological considerations and which took the form of controls and inspections to ensure conformity with the law.

The secondary school at Valdocco and the boarding school founded by Don Bosco at Mirabello Monferrato in 1863 did not escape these vexations. One should also take into account the fact that in 1861 the new Parliament was not only proclaiming the Kingdom of Italy but also, in what was largely a symbolic gesture, declaring Rome the capital. This contentious move increased the tensions that already existed between Church and State, while the sects intensified their attacks on the Catholic faith. It is, therefore, not surprising that Don Bosco was confirmed in his concern about the socio-political developments and became convinced of the urgent need to set up a network of boarding schools as privileged educational establishments, which would protect young people from the disruptive effects of the revolution and from the growing trend towards atheism.

Don Bosco considered that «preservation» and «immunization» were indispensable, if the rising generations were to receive sound moral and religious formation.⁷⁴ This helps us to understand the detailed rules that he introduced in the boarding school at Valdocco in the early sixties, especially in view of the fact that it was being used as a junior seminary. While the festive oratory was an «open» institution which the boys could enter and use on the sole condition that they had (or sought) a job and accepted the human and religious values of the oratory, the college took on the aspect of a «closed» institution as regards the outside world, and was controlled by precise rules that governed admission and residence. In the first «Regulations for the parlour», drawn up for Valdocco in 1860, one can read the following rules: «1. The boys of the Oratory may not speak with any visitors without the explicit permission of the Superiors or of the Supervisor. They may not receive parlour visits more than twice a month, and, then only from 12.30 to 2.00 p.m. on all days except feastdays. 2. Boys are never allowed out alone,

⁷³ As many writers have pointed out, the Casati law was based on the idea of «guarded freedom». One of the considerations that motivated the legislator in formulating the law was the fear that a system of total freedom could be used against the State; he was also anxious that any private schools should provide schooling of the requisite quality. I dealt with the Casati law and Catholic reactions to it some years ago: L. PAZZAGLIA, *Educazione e scuola nel programma dell'Opera dei Congressi (1874-1904)*, in: *Cultura e società in Italia nell'età umbertina*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero 1981 (see especially pp. 423 et ss.).

⁷⁴ On Don Bosco's ideals regarding boarding schools cf. the comments of P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo* 330 et ss., and in: *L'esperienza pedagogica preventiva* 389 et ss. See also P. STELLA, *Don Bosco* I 121 et ss.

either with relatives or others. [...] 7. Relatives are never allowed into the boys' dormitories».⁷⁵

A similar strictness is found in the recommendation that Don Bosco gave to Don Rua in a letter of 1863 that became, under the title «Confidential Advices to Rectors», one of the classic texts of Salesian pedagogy: «Never accept pupils expelled from other colleges or whose morals you know to be bad. If, despite all your care, such a person happens to be accepted, appoint at once a reliable companion to help him and keep a constant eye on him. If he is guilty of obscene behaviour give him one warning, but if he fails again he must immediately be invited to return home».⁷⁶ The «Regulations for the houses» of 1877, which Don Bosco and his helpers touched up in successive versions, also insisted on the need for prudence and caution in accepting pupils.⁷⁷

One should not, however, conclude that at Valdocco and in the other institutes which were steadily established, the spirit of joyfulness was replaced by rigorism or a gloomy vision of things. Don Bosco was convinced that happiness was a «form of life» that was suited not only to boys but to any Christian, since Christianity, by its proclamation of the truth, should generate interior joy.⁷⁸ He wanted the boarders to be able to enjoy every kind of suitable recreation, in a general climate of confident optimism. According to Don Caviglia, «the saying *Servite Domino in laetitia* could be considered as Don Bosco's eleventh commandment».⁷⁹ Nor did he wish, in making the college a place of serious study and discipline, to destroy that family spirit which meant so much to him and which was closely linked with the fatherly affection that he wanted the Rector to show towards each of his boys.

In the above letter to Don Rua, while recommending that no compromises should be made concerning the boarders' rectitude of behaviour, he also advised: «Try to make yourself loved rather than feared. When you command or correct, do so with charity and patience, and act in such a way that it becomes obvious to everyone from what you say and do that you are seeking only the good of souls. Put up with anything, if by doing so you can

⁷⁵ MB VI 597-598.

⁷⁶ The *Ricordi confidenziali ai Direttori* are available, edited by F. Motto, in: BOSCO, *Scritti pedagogici* 71-86. The passage quoted is on page 82.

⁷⁷ *Regolamento per le case della Società di San Francesco di Sales*, Torino, Tip. Salesiana 1877. It can be found in OE XXIX 97-196. In the chapter dealing with the criteria to be adopted in admitting boys, the Regulations laid down: «Care shall be taken not to admit boys or other individuals who could do harm to their companions on account of their bad behaviour or undesirable conversation. A certificate of good conduct from their parish priest must therefore be produced» (pp. 156-157).

⁷⁸ P. BRAIDO, *L'esperienza pedagogica preventiva* 370.

⁷⁹ A. CAVIGLIA, *Il Magone Michele* (Vol. V of *Opere e scritti editi ed inediti di Don Bosco*), Torino, SEI 1965, p. 149.

prevent sin».⁸⁰ It is well known that for Don Bosco it was essential that each boy should feel himself palpably surrounded by affection and valued as a person; only thus could each be helped to develop the interior riches given him as the gift of God. Consequently he believed that the boarding school, far from irritating the youngsters by a rigorous and mortifying discipline, should create for them the serene environment of a family. Such relationships of mutual trust and kindness would diminish the inevitable tensions between superiors and subjects and allow the latter to achieve their full growth as persons.

It seems superfluous to insist that, for Don Bosco, the value of a boarding school was to be measured above all by its capacity for imparting moral and religious formation. At the same time he was careful not to neglect human and professional formation. His Christian perception was impregnated with a healthy humanism, so that he considered it essential, for example, that his poor artisans should practise a trade, because unless they could live a dignified life they were unlikely to be sensitive to spiritual and religious values. Nevertheless, his conviction that the main thing was to prepare them to be «the happy inhabitants of heaven», meant that the *raison d'être* of any college was, in his eyes, its ability to help the pupils grow in the love and fear of God and in the life of grace.

In colleges whose pupils were destined for the seminary the religious formation was obviously more pervasive and the spiritual climate was more or less the same as that normally associated with priestly formation. This is brought out clearly in the lives that Don Bosco wrote of D. Savio (1859), M. Magone (1861) and F. Besucco (1864), three boys who lived at Valdocco in those years.⁸¹ Their lives show that the fundamental spirituality on which they were nourished – from prayer to the frequentation of the sacraments, and from the fulfilment of the duties of their state of life to devotion to Our Lady – was more or less that of a seminary.

A story called *Valentino, or a lost vocation*, published by Don Bosco in 1866,⁸² may help convey his concept of a Catholic college. In it two colleges which Valentino had attended are contrasted: one a well known institute of secular character, and the other a Catholic school to which his father had

⁸⁰ G. BOSCO, *Ricordi confidenziali* 79.

⁸¹ G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales*, Torino, Paravia 1859 (in: OE XI 151-292); also *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales*, Torino, Paravia 1861 (in: OE XIII 155-250); also *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d'Argentiera*, Torino, Paravia 1864 (in: OE XV 243-434).

⁸² G. BOSCO, *Valentino o la vocazione impedita*, Torino, Tip. dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales 1866 (in: OE XVII 179-242). A critical text of this work has recently been produced: G. BOSCO, *Valentino o la vocazione impedita*, with introduction and critical apparatus by M. PULINGATHIL, Roma, LAS 1987. The quotations that follow are drawn from this edition.

sent him because he was dissatisfied with the results of the first school, and where the boy had discovered that he had a religious vocation. The points of difference between the two schools are significant. Don Bosco contrasts the basic approach of each: the secular school attached marginal importance to religious practices («there was no meditation, no spiritual reading; prayers were recited in common but only once a day, said in great haste while standing up»); the Catholic school made religion its central inspiration («the teaching of religion, the way it is inculcated and practised, is quite exceptional»). The editor of the critical edition has pointed out that the two colleges also differed in their general approach.⁸³ While the first seemed preoccupied exclusively with discipline, at least in those sections devoted to the rector, the second promoted a much broader style of education in an atmosphere of cheerfulness, study and piety; amongst other things it benefitted from the continuous but discreet presence of a rector who had a fatherly concern for the moral and spiritual refinement of his pupils, who were treated like sons.⁸⁴

4. The need for rules and the new problems facing educators

Once the Salesian Society had been granted papal recognition in 1869, Don Bosco was fully absorbed by the worries of a juridical and organizational nature; he had to draw up the Constitutions and obtain their approval (1872-1874), as well as follow the development of the society at a time when it was spreading beyond Italy and launching out into missionary work. It was most important that this rapid growth and expansion should not be allowed to destroy the essential unity of purpose. He was consequently forced to reflect on the real nature of his work and on the specific forms that it should take.⁸⁵ The *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, which Don Bosco produced in the early seventies, grew out of this process of reflection and were written with the clear purpose of furnishing his collaborators with a lively reminder of their origins. The definitive formulation of the Regulations for the festive oratory

⁸³ G. BOSCO; *Valentino* 42-43.

⁸⁴ This is what was said about the first of the two rectors: «[Valentino] had a affable rector, but he was very firm in giving commands and stern in demanding obedience. He was harsh in everything pertaining to discipline» (*Valentino* 58). The priest running the Catholic college, on the other hand, is represented as an affectionate person, without being too «sugary»; able to understand the inner problems of the boys who speak to him and intelligently concerned about the good of their souls: «From that day onwards Valentino's life was a source of satisfaction to his rector, who never overlooked this new spiritual son that had come to him» (*Ibid.*, p. 71).

⁸⁵ Concerning the special attention paid by Don Bosco and his helpers to the deepening of their understanding of their programme of education during the years in question, cf. J.M. PRELLEZO, *Studio e riflessione pedagogica* 41-43.

and for the houses was another product of the same process. They were published in 1877.

The origin of his *Il sistema preventivo* was altogether more fortuitous. We cannot here go into details of its genesis and contents; we should, in any case, be repeating what P. Stella and P. Braido have already said so well. They have drawn attention to the similarities and parallels between this booklet and the writings of authors like the De La Salle brother Agathon, the abbé Blanchard, Canon Audisio, the Lazarist Monaci, the Barnabite Teppa and Mons. Dupanloup.⁸⁶ This miniature treatise grew out of a conference that Don Bosco gave on 12 March, 1877, at Nice, for the inaugural celebration of the Patronage de Saint Pierre. It quickly, however, acquired an importance, both inside and outside the Salesian Society, that the author had never anticipated. There is a reason for this. During those months, Don Bosco, together with his helpers, was engaged in revising the «Regulations» and decided to include the conference given at Nice amongst the «Regulations for the houses».⁸⁷ As a consequence this exposition acquired the nature of a *lex fundamentalis* in the eyes of his Salesians and rapidly became the yardstick against which the various Salesian houses could judge how far their activities were in conformity with the principles and spirit of the Society.⁸⁸

The *Il sistema preventivo* had, of course, the great merit of presenting in a brief and effective manner the criteria that had inspired Don Bosco during more than thirty years of experience. Leaving aside the terms «repressive» and «preventive», which were new for Don Bosco, we may note that the work drew attention to three principles – reason, religion and kindness – which summed up his whole educational approach throughout the course of his work, that began with helping homeless boys and gradually branched out into the training of students and even future priests. It is therefore understandable that this short work should have acquired such importance within the Salesian Society and that Don Bosco and his helpers became convinced that they had in their possession a genuine educational system which was capable of being applied beyond the confines of their own educational environment.⁸⁹

Today we can be more detached and so can the better discern the limitations of this mini-treatise. P. Stella has pointed out the way it tended to

⁸⁶ Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco* II 441-474. See also P. BRAIDO, *L'esperienza pedagogica preventiva* 313-319, and especially his ample notes to G. BOSCO, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, with introduction and critical apparatus edited by P. Braido, Roma, LAS 1985.

⁸⁷ OE XXIX 99-109.

⁸⁸ P. BRAIDO, *L'esperienza pedagogica di Don Bosco* 28 et ss.

⁸⁹ This conviction was reinforced by the positive assessments that were beginning to be made of the preventive system as a result of specialised studies. Cf. P. BRAIDO, *L'esperienza pedagogica di Don Bosco* 32 et ss.

exaggerate the antithetical terms «repressive» and «preventive» with the consequent neglect of other problematical aspects of education. The work ran the risk of making it appear that the only problem was to prevent the boys doing wrong; in this it was unduly conditioned by the situation in a boarding school, which demanded, for example, «continual visual supervision» of the boys by their educators.⁹⁰ One could perhaps sum up the matter by saying that, despite its unquestionable merits, *Il sistema preventivo* did not do justice to the whole spread of activities and structures that Don Bosco had initiated, or to the richness of the religious and educational inspiration which sustained them. The truth is that Don Bosco's theoretical formulation never did justice to the actual projects which his limitless energy and clear-sighted realism led him to undertake, as he laboured to match his ideals as a priest and educator to the needs of the many types of youngsters that he met in the course of his life.

During the last decade of his life, moreover, Don Bosco's field of operation was far wider than when he wrote his booklet in 1877. His concern over the situation of young people had increased. His state of mind was influenced, as always, by the political situation, especially the sharpening of tensions between Church and State, which entered a new critical phase after the fall of Rome. Don Bosco feared that the whole fabric of society was collapsing, largely as a result of the disintegrative effects of state education. Immediately after the forced entry of the Porta Pia on 20 September 1870, the Minister of Education, C. Correnti, had sent out a circular which changed the requirements of the Casati law and laid down that in the elementary schools religious instruction should no longer be given to everyone but only to those who requested it.⁹¹

In the *Memorie dell'Oratorio* Don Bosco looked back nostalgically to the situation he had been familiar with as a secondary pupil in Chieri; it is difficult not to see this as a contrast with the disappointment he felt on seeing the Italian government's opposition to the teaching of religion in schools: «You should recall that in those days religion formed a fundamental part of education. Any teacher who even in jest said something irreligious or indecent was immediately dismissed. If teachers were dealt with like that you can imagine the severity with which undisciplined or badly behaved pupils were treated».⁹²

⁹⁰ P. STELLA, *Don Bosco* II 462 et ss.

⁹¹ This ruling was confirmed by the circular of 12 July 1871, which laid down that the communes were empowered to see that religious instruction was given by teachers or other persons who were suitably qualified. Concerning these two circulars and the policy pursued by Correnti when in charge of Education, cf. B. PISA, *Cesare Correnti e il dibattito sulla laicità dell'insegnamento*, in «Rassegna storica del Risorgimento», 62 (1975) 212-229, and the comments in my own contribution, *Educazione e scuola nel programma dell'Opera dei Congressi* 426-427.

⁹² MO 54.

Don Bosco must have experienced even deeper disquiet when, in 1877, following the so-called «parliamentary revolution», the left-wing government of Depretis promulgated, on the initiative of the Minister of Education, two laws that further advanced the laicization of the schools. One was the law of 23 June, which abolished the post of spiritual director in secondary schools, higher secondary schools and technical institutes; the other was that of 15 July, which no longer recognised religion as one of the subjects to be taught in elementary schools, thus setting a seal upon the administrative changes introduced by Correnti.⁹³ Don Bosco was further confirmed in his conviction that not only the poor and homeless would suffer but that all boys, given their tender age, would pay a heavy price in a society that was gradually obliterating all religious values.

The journeys that he had for some time been undertaking in Europe to visit Salesian houses enabled him to see that situations which placed boys at risk were widespread, so that the problems of boys in Turin, Genoa or Rome were not much different from those of their contemporaries in Paris, Marseilles or Barcelona. Don Bosco had the impression that in the different countries of Europe society was, for a variety of reasons, becoming alienated from religion, which had formerly been a unifying factor in people's personal and collective existence. He felt there was a danger that boys, especially in the great conurbations, where traditional social controls were much weaker than in rural communities, would all be equally exposed to the danger of growing up devoid not only of the truths of faith but of any sound moral standards. At this point he saw the problem of education as being ever more closely identified with the problem of the regeneration of society, or, in the case of missionary countries, with the problem of civilizing the inhabitants. In proportion as Don Bosco was aware of the serious difficulties facing the young, he became more convinced that if he could assist and liberate young people at the human and religious level, he would have laid the foundations for a renewal of society itself.

The Salesian missionary experiment, to which he drew attention in a letter addressed to Cardinal Franchi on 31 December 1877,⁹⁴ is relevant to these considerations. After arriving in Latin America the Salesian missionaries had decided it was better not to go immediately to work amongst the so-called «savages» but to establish themselves «on the fringes of civilised communities», setting up churches, schools and hostels for the benefit of «those Indians whose religious and other needs had driven them to seek shelter

⁹³ Regarding the legislation of Coppino and on the general educational policy of the left, cf. A. TALAMANCA, *Libertà della scuola e libertà nella scuola*, Padova, Cedam 1975, pp. 202 et ss.; M. BENDISCIOLI, *La sinistra storica e la scuola*, in «*Studium*» 73 (1977) 447-466; L. PAZZAGLIA, *Educazione e scuola nel programma dell'Opera dei Congressi* 438 et ss.

⁹⁴ E III 256-261.

amongst the Christians».⁹⁵ The reasoning behind this decision was that these Indians, once integrated into a civilized Christian community, could become in turn the evangelizers and educators of their own tribes: «make contact with the parents through their children, so that savages can be evangelized by one of themselves».⁹⁶

One could say that Don Bosco felt that analogous reasoning should direct any efforts towards the regeneration of society. The way to revivify moral and religious values at the heart of the community was to instil those values into the rising generation. His declaration, whether following the events of 1848 or in the last decade of his life, that he wanted to steer clear of politics, now acquires a clearer significance. In actual fact, as he finally had to admit, his work, especially during this final phase, had broad civil and political implications, especially wherever he was hoping to use education as an instrument for the transformation of society. «Would you like me to suggest to you», he asked the Cooperators of Turin on 31 May 1883, «a relatively easy undertaking that will be most beneficial and bear results as rich as you could desire? Well then – devote yourselves to the sound education of youth, especially the poorest and most needy, who seem to be in the majority; in that way you will wisely succeed in giving glory to God, in benefitting religion, in saving souls and in contributing effectively to the reform and well-being of society. Reason, religion, history and personal experience all show that religious and civil society will be either good or bad according as young people, who are our greatest treasure, are good or bad».⁹⁷ This reveals Don Bosco's plan for the transformation of society: work that aimed to educate boys, especially the poor and abandoned, so that they could live a decent, dignified life; but the final objective was to ensure the widest possible diffusion of ethical and religious values that would promote respect for the public authorities and for the established political order.

From a missionary point of view his work was aimed at carrying «the word of eternal life» to entire nations; from the social and religious point of view it was aimed at spiritual regeneration of traditionally Christian societies and at the revival and strengthening of religious and ethical values that had been lost or enfeebled. Such work called for adequate instruments and resources. Awareness of the sheer size of the task led Don Bosco to found the Salesian Cooperators, whose aim was that of the Salesians themselves, to get boys off the streets and find ways of changing them into good Christians and honest citizens. Nor did he wish to stop there; he wanted to enlist the help of as many people as possible in carrying out his projects. He knew the limits of his own resources and possibilities and so, far from being entrenched

⁹⁵ E III 257.

⁹⁶ E III 257.

⁹⁷ BS 7 (1883), n° 7, p. 104.

within his own institutions, he understood the need for a sharing of initiatives with other bodies irrespective of their specific character, provided they had the same desire to help and educate. Speaking to the Cooperators in 1877, he said: «We don't want to suggest that this is the only way of benefiting society; far from it; we approve and applaud any institutions, unions and associations, whether public or private, that seek to benefit humanity».⁹⁸

There came a point, however, when his concern for education led him to the idea of a movement which would cooperate in his work and be no less wide than the entire body of Christians.⁹⁹ As far as the means were concerned, Don Bosco no longer at this stage seemed to want to limit himself predominantly to the opportunities which boarding schools had afforded him; he aimed to utilise every possible kind of opportunity for educative work which he had encountered during a lifetime's experience. The Salesian Society was engaged on a number of fronts and had a multitude of needs in its educational undertakings, and no one formula met all requirements. In one case a college could be the answer, in another an oratory or an evening school.

There seems reason to believe that during the final years Don Bosco was inclined to revise some of his thinking, as for example the conclusion he had come to during the period when he was opening boarding schools, that his formative presence among the pupils meant constant close supervision. When his many journeys took him away from Turin, so that he could not always be physically present amongst the boys for whom he was responsible, he adopted a «kind of loving and preventive presence» that was more unobtrusive, though equally attentive.¹⁰⁰

Above all he became ever more convinced that education should help each boy to become a mature adult, or what P. Braido has called «a man renewed yet traditional»; this required that the pupil, far from being the object of educational action, should become himself the main agent in the reconstruction of Christian society.¹⁰¹ Interesting light is thrown upon this by the many conferences which Don Bosco gave to the Cooperators and which were duly reported in the «Salesian Bulletin». «The money you donate», he declared in a meeting in 1881, «affects body and soul, society and religion, time and eternity [...]. It affects the family and civil society, because if our dear boys are trained in our workshops, they will become capable, through the exercise of their skill, of supporting their own families; at the same time their work and industry will be of considerable benefit to society. Those

⁹⁸ BS 3 (1877), n° 8, p. 2.

⁹⁹ P. BRAIDO, *Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco* 33-34.

¹⁰⁰ From this angle, it would be interesting perhaps to reread all Don Bosco's writings, talks and letters during the last years of his life.

¹⁰¹ P. BRAIDO, *Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco* 24; also G.C. MILANESI, *Sistema preventivo* 163-164.

studying science and literature will be equally useful to society through the exercise of their talents or through their work in the employment of the state. But what is more important, both these groups will not only be well trained but wisely educated, and so will help to guarantee morality and public order within the population».¹⁰²

Don Bosco's insistence on the value of almsgiving grew out of his anxiety to emphasize the far-reaching benefits which such charity had, already here on earth, without waiting for the reward to come in heaven. It also revealed the total dedication with which he devoted himself to the works that were made possible by the generosity of his benefactors, works that were directed towards the human and religious growth not only of each individual but also of society in every aspect of its activity.

¹⁰² BS 5 (1881) n° 12, p. 5.