

Saint John Bosco's Dealings with the Cavour Family

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In carrying out his humble apostolate on behalf of poor and abandoned boys, Saint John Bosco (1815-1888) came into frequent contact with the wealthy and the powerful of Piedmontese society. Among the first with whom he dealt were the Benso di Cavour family of Turin. His relations with them were warm—in both senses of that term: heated with controversy and friendly intimacy.

The Benso di Cavour family could trace its noble ancestry back to about the twelfth century. By the eighteenth century, the head of the family claimed the title of marquis. In the middle of that century, two young men of the family endeared themselves to the royal family of Savoy by saving the life of King Charles Emmanuel III. It was also at this time that Marquis Joseph Philip II married Josephine di Sales, a descendant of Saint Francis' brother.

Michael Benso di Cavour (1781-1850) collaborated with the French during the Napoleonic occupation of his country, thus recovering much of the wealth and prestige the family had lost in the initial revolutionary shockwave. One source of this recovered wealth was the purchase of property that the French government had seized from the Church. The marquis also became a Freemason. The restoration in 1814, however, meant the loss of place and of influence for all who had served the French, and the Cavour family was out of favor and out of sight for the next seventeen years. But already one can see some factors that must have influenced the ideas of young Camillo Cavour.

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Marquis Michael shrewdly maintained his loyalty to Prince Charles Albert when the latter was also out of favor from 1821-1831. Consequently, when Charles Albert became king (1831-1848), the fortunes of the Cavour family likewise rose. The marquis became president of the city council of Turin in 1833 and royal vicar for police in the city in 1835. In the latter post he showed that he had completely repudiated his earlier liberal ideas and became the scourge of any would-be revolutionaries.

It was as vicar for police that Marquis Michael Cavour made contact with Don Bosco, who in December 1841 had begun gathering the poorest and least cared for boys of the city to teach them catechism, provide them with the sacraments, offer them some wholesome fun, and help them find good, steady employment. From 1841-1844 Don Bosco's Sunday and feastday Oratory had a fixed home, first at the church of Saint Francis of Assisi and then at St. Philomena's Hospital. But in the summer of 1844 the period of the "wandering Oratory" began, when Don Bosco had to gather his hundreds of boys in the city squares, suburban fields, or wherever he could. This period would last until April 1846. Such large and regular gatherings soon attracted a great deal of public attention—including Michael Cavour's. In 1845-1846 he and Don Bosco played a game of cat and mouse with each other, with Don Bosco in the role of the mouse.

Don Bosco would later look back on those early days very fondly, including his battle with Cavour. Our record of the battle comes mainly from two sources: Don Bosco's *Memoirs of the Oratory* and a conversation with some of his Salesians on December 27, 1877.¹ In the latter, he regretted that there were no photographs of Cavour's policemen seated or standing among the oratory boys, supervising their games or listening to sermons—which Don Bosco directed as much to them as to the youths, so that he succeeded in bringing some of them back to the sacraments. Don Bosco also revealed that Cavour was nicknamed "Pegleg," but he does not say why. (It was also in this reminiscence that he expressed the wish that the Salesians keep accurate records of what they did and what happened to them, for the benefit of later generations.)

As of March 23, 1845, Marquis Cavour was on record as an opponent of the Oratory.² Unnamed individuals for unknown reasons had begun to criticize Don Bosco for making the young men of the city "irresponsible, disobedient to their parents, and undisciplined," hence potential delinquents. And

¹ *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales from 1815, 1855*, trans. Daniel Lyons, SDB (New Rochelle: Don Bosco, 1989), pp. 244-46, 276-79; henceforth cited as *MO*. Eugenio Ceria, SDB, *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, trans. Diego Borgatello, SDB (New Rochelle: Salesiana) henceforth cited as *BM*, 13 (1983):314-15.

² Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, SDB, *BM* 2 (1966):218.

in that unsettled period soon to burst into the First War of Italian Independence (1848-1849), people also noticed how easily Don Bosco commanded the boys, leading them from games to prayers, controlling hundreds of rough-and-tumble youngsters in catechism classes, and marching them to different parts of the city and beyond on outings. Here was a potential revolutionary, "dangerous and capable of inciting revolt in town."³

Since many of these boys certainly had been juvenile delinquents—Don Bosco exercised a regular and efficacious ministry in the jails—perhaps some of these fears and rumors are understandable.

One Sunday Marquis Cavour and a friend chanced upon Don Bosco and his boys at play in the meadows near the Citadel. (Could this have been how this unusual priest first came to his attention?) On learning who the priest was, Cavour is reported to have remarked, "He's either a lunatic or a candidate for the Senate"—the Senate was the popular name for one of the city jails.⁴

Cavour's efforts to stop Don Bosco's work came to a head in March 1846—already the blackest period of Don Bosco's life because he was faced with the extinction of his work for lack of a place for his boys to meet (about to be resolved with the offer of part of the Pinardi property). The police commissioner, who also presided over the city council—the kingdom of Sardinia was still an autocratic state—summoned Don Bosco to city hall and ordered him to stop meeting with his boys because the meetings disturbed public order and would only cause the priest grief in the end.⁵ Don Bosco objected, reasoned, and pleaded, but the marquis was determined. He threatened to arrest Don Bosco, who then laughed. "That's the way to treat a criminal, and you could never commit such an injustice, Marquis. Only a villain would treat a poor innocent priest as though he were a criminal. That is why I'm not afraid of you."⁶

Cavour realized that he could not persuade Don Bosco to stop, and he also realized that the priest was humbly obedient to his bishop. So he appealed to Archbishop Louis Fransoni. The archbishop fully supported Don Bosco, leaving the marquis only the recourse of finding some real danger to public order. Don Bosco had also asked Count Joseph Provana of Collegno, the royal treasurer and a member of the city council, to intercede with Cavour. On March 28, Cavour wrote a more conciliatory letter to Don Bosco, inviting him back to his office for further discussion.⁷

³ *BM* 2:313; *MO*, p. 244.

⁴ *BM* 2:313.

⁵ *MO*, pp. 244-45; *BM* 2:314.

⁶ *BM* 2:315.

⁷ *BM* 2:316.

The next meeting occurred on March 30. Cavour tried to impose conditions that Don Bosco could not accept: limiting the number of boys who could attend the Oratory, not allowing group outings through the city, forbidding older boys to attend.⁸ It was quite evident that he really believed these youngsters would cause trouble.

The whole month of March, Cavour had been sending carabinieri and city police to keep an eye on the Sunday and feastday gatherings. This amused Don Bosco, who later used to say that their presence and the general atmosphere of those last weeks of the "wandering Oratory" made it "the most adventurous period in the history of the oratory."⁹

Sometime after Don Bosco's purchase from Francis Pinardi of a large shed (which he converted into a chapel) and an adjoining lot (which became a playground) in the Valdocco section of Turin, beyond the city walls, Cavour again summoned the young priest to city hall. This time he demanded that the Oratory be closed. Don Bosco patiently explained again that he was only doing his citizen's duty: teaching boys the three R's and the practice of their faith—which made the marquis's job easier because it made the boys better citizens. He would obey the archbishop, for certainly the hearing of confessions, preaching, saying Mass, and teaching catechism offered no offense to the city officials.¹⁰

Having failed to persuade either Don Bosco or Archbishop Frasoni, Marquis Cavour began maneuvering to close the Oratory by decree of the city council. He convened an extraordinary session of the council at the episcopal residence because he wanted the archbishop present and Frasoni was ill; but not too ill to remark that the presence of so many magnates made the moment seem like the last judgment.¹¹

Cavour and his supporters had managed to convince the majority of the city council of the advisability of closing the Oratory when Count Collegno intervened. "It is the king's desire and his specific will," he said, "that these Sunday gatherings of boys be promoted and protected. Should there be any danger of disorder, suitable measures should be taken to prevent it, but nothing more."¹² The meeting ended abruptly. Several councillors who had been hostile to Don Bosco's work soon joined King Charles Albert in supporting it.

Cavour did not quit. He again summoned Don Bosco to city hall and renewed his threat to disband the Oratory at the least sign of disorder. He continued to send police to watch the proceedings and report back to him, while

⁸ *BM* 2:317.

⁹ *Ibid.*; *MO*, pp. 244, 278.

¹⁰ *BM* 2:243.

¹¹ *MO*, p. 276; *BM* 2:344.

¹² *BM* 2:344-45; *MO*, pp. 276-78.

Don Bosco continued to enjoy their unintended help in keeping order among the boys and the opportunity to preach to them and lead them to the sacraments.

After a while, Don Bosco initiated a meeting with the marquis in order to repair whatever fences had been damaged. Using his great tact, he soothed Cavour's feelings, re-explained his work, and then asked for his support. The marquis acknowledged the good Don Bosco was doing, promised not to hinder him any more, and let himself be inspired by Providence to give Don Bosco 200 lire (a very considerable sum in 1846, worth roughly \$500 today).

Don Bosco maintained cordial relations with Michael Cavour thereafter; in any case, Cavour was soon compelled to leave public life. Don Bosco continued to call on him from time to time, especially during his final illness. It was probably during these visits that he became acquainted with the marquis's sons Gustavo and Camillo.

Gustavo (1806-64), the elder son, was born and died in Turin. The Cavour name ended with his sons, one of whom died in the war of 1848 and the other of whom never married; a daughter carried on the family lineage through marriage. After his wife's premature death in 1833, Gustavo took up philosophy; he became very friendly with Father Antonio Rosmini and helped spread his ideas throughout Piedmont, Switzerland, and France. It was at Cavour's residence that Rosmini stayed when he came to Turin, and it was there that Don Bosco met the philosopher-priest-founder and became his friend, while Rosmini became his benefactor.¹³

A writer of some ability, Gustavo Cavour sparred with Gioberti in *L'Univers*, the French Catholic journal, and cofounded the Turinese Catholic paper, *L'Armonia della religione e della civiltà*. After inheriting his father's title, he served in five Piedmontese/Italian parliaments (1849-64) and fought his younger brother, the prime minister, strenuously on church matters and on the alliance with Great Britain and France in the Crimean War. The two brothers were quite different in both their politics and their temperaments.

Camillo (1810-61), Michael's younger son, seems to have been more receptive to the influence of his Protestant mother. Though he had distinctly conservative instincts, from his youth he abhorred absolutism in any form, and

¹³ *BM* 2:349; cf. Lemoyne, *BM* 4 (19~7):26.

he proved to be "open to all the political, religious, and social movements of the period."¹⁴ He was never a fervent Catholic.

Still, early in his political career, Camillo was not ashamed to join Gustavo in the procession in honor of Saint Aloysius at the Oratory, walking alongside the saint's statue with candle in one hand and prayer book in the other, joining the sacred ministers and oratory boys in singing hymns. Gustavo had himself enrolled among the youthful members of the Saint Aloysius Sodality.¹⁵

Both brothers admired Don Bosco and his work very much. They visited the Oratory often, supported the work, and enjoyed the sight of so many boys at wholesome activities. Count Camillo often remarked on the providential nature of such a work that kept young men out of jail and spared the government much expense by producing "good citizens earning an honest living, to their own advantage and that of society."¹⁶

When Pius IX was in exile at Gaeta in 1849, the boys of the Oratory took up a modest collection for him. It amounted to thirty-three lire. Gustavo Cavour was one of the committee that came to the Oratory to pick it up and add it to other donations. He described the little ceremony in an article in *L'Armonia* and went on to extol Don Bosco's moral and social work as well as the generosity of those poor working boys.¹⁷

On at least one occasion, Marquis Gustavo filled in for Don Bosco, teaching catechism while the priest showed a friend of the marquis around the Oratory.¹⁸

Gustavo earnestly supported Don Bosco's lotteries to raise funds for his boys' needs, visiting the prizes on display and buying tickets. Count Camillo, minister of finance, visited the lottery of 1852 with a friend, after having granted Don Bosco an exemption from postal fees, presumably for flyers and tickets, and permission to use government premises to display the thousands of prizes.¹⁹

Don Bosco's coworker Father John Borel kept a ledger of donations to the Oratory from 1844-50. Among the many names of benefactors in it is Gustavo Cavour's. He was a regular benefactor of the boys on feast days, vying

¹⁴ Umberto Marcelli, *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago, 1975), 3:1029-31.

¹⁵ Lemoyne, *BM* 3 (1966): 289; Pietre Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, 2d ed. (Roma: LAS, 1981), 2:99-100, citing Don Bosco's own ms. notes (Archivio Salesiano Centrale 132 Perquisizioni, 20 quaderno, p. 94); all translations from this text are my own.

¹⁶ Lemoyne, *ibid.*

¹⁷ *MO*, pp. 346-47; *BM* 3:359-61.

¹⁸ *BM* 4:23-24.

¹⁹ *BM* 4:75, 249-53; Lemoyne, *BM* 5 (1969):172.

with other distinguished gentry and clergy to see that the young folks ate well.²⁰ And he informed Don Bosco of Father Rosmini's latest condition just after returning from a visit to the dying priest-philosopher.²¹

After 1855, Gustavo seems to have dropped out of Don Bosco's affairs, at least as far as public memory is concerned. We shall see below that some secret correspondence, at least, passed between them. Not so his more famous brother. At the beginning of his parliamentary career, Count Camillo Cavour was an independent tending toward conservatism. As minister of finance in 1850, he began to move for cautious reform and to attract the interest of more radical elements. A major step in this process was Cavour's support for the Siccardi Laws of 1850, which aimed at a number of significant social reforms by eliminating some of the ancient privileges of the Church.²²

In February 1852, Cavour and the moderate conservatives had formed an alliance with Urbano Rattazzi and the moderate left; they succeeded in bringing down Massimo d'Azeglio's conservative government. By November Cavour was installed as prime minister, a post he held in almost unbroken continuity until his death eight and a half years later.

The noted British historian Denis Mack Smith has described Cavour's ecclesiastical policies thus: He believed that the contemplative orders were "useless and even harmful" to society; the clergy ought to stay out of civil politics and leave the civil authorities free to act in the public interest; he had no desire to control the Church, but he feared a civil war between more radical elements and reactionary ones; his judgment that the Church would quietly accept a moderate liberal triumph in Italy was mistaken.²³

Some churchmen and conservatives viewed all liberals and revolutionaries as alike. Thus Father Lemoyne wrote that in August 1852, while he was out of office briefly, Cavour had gone to London to consult with Palmerston, Russell, and Gladstone, "all three vying to surpass one another in their hostility to the Catholic Church and in their support of revolutionary wars." Cavour returned by way of Paris, where he consulted with the Emperor Napoleon III regarding a common policy on the unification of Italy and on the papacy. "Needless to say," continues Lemoyne, "the anticlericals in Europe were pressing Cavour to wage a holy war against the Pope."²⁴

²⁰ BM 4:319-20.

²¹ BM 5:172.

²² Denis Mack Smith, *Cavour* (New York, 1985), pp. 48-49.

²³ Denis Mack Smith, *Italy: A Modern History* (Ann Arbor, 1959), p. 89.

See also the comments of William Roscoe Thayer, *The Life and Times of Cavour* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 2:443-45.

²⁴ BM 4:362.

Certainly Don Bosco was wary of Cavour and other politicians. On one occasion which Lemoyne does not specify, Cavour offered Don Bosco a million lire for his work. The saint politely declined "because what is given to me ... today might be taken away tomorrow. You yourself may be the one to take back what you so generously offer me now." The count changed the subject.²⁵

At any rate, major legislation was under consideration early in 1855, providing for the suppression of most monasteries and convents in Piedmont and Sardinia and the confiscation of their extensive properties. Prompted by a dream, Don Bosco wrote several letters to King Victor Emmanuel II on the subject, to no avail. The king's mother, wife, and brother all died suddenly in January and February 1855, and the king himself fell ill. Some people (besides Don Bosco's private letters) advised the king that these deaths were a heavenly punishment for the proposed laws.

Meanwhile, Cavour was conducting secret negotiations with Cardinal James Antonelli, the papal secretary of state, with some hope of reaching a compromise. Some modification was made in the bills, but Pius IX remained firmly opposed. The prime minister forced the legislation through, finally, by threatening to resign if it failed. The Pope excommunicated everyone who had voted for or signed the bill.

This was the Cavour who greatly favored Don Bosco's oratories (three in number in the 1850s). His friendship, as well as that of other eminent anticlericals, required Don Bosco to be extremely cautious neither to alienate the government nor to compromise his loyalty to the Pope. Cavour, Vigliani, Rattazzi, and others frequently invited the humble priest to dinner to speak with him about his projects and to assure him of their support. "The boys of the Oratory were preferred to others who belonged to long-established institutes of charity, and they were chosen to draw the numbers in the State lottery ... and in this way earned a fee which was given to the Oratory." With Cavour, in particular, Don Bosco was duly respectful, alternating in his speech between frankness and circumspection—and always charming.²⁶ Don Bosco later recalled,

I was not too keen about sitting at the count's table, despite his cordial invitations; but since I occasionally had important business to discuss with him, I had to see him either at home or at the ministry. Often, when he was a cabinet minister, he straightforwardly told me he would refuse me an audience unless it be at dinner or lunch, and that if I needed a favor from

²⁵ *BM* 4:74.

²⁶ *BM* 4:73-74; Ceria, *BM* 11 (1964):292; Ceria, *BM* 12 (1980):2.

him, I was to remember that there was always a place at his table for me. "These are the moments," he would say, "when we can talk at leisure. At the office there is too much pressure. We hardly have time to exchange a few words hastily, almost rudely, and then we have to part." In this he acted like his brother, Marquis Gustavo. He, too, would listen to me only at table. I had no alternative but to accept this courteous—yet for me, burdensome, condition. Once when I called at Count Camillo's office on an urgent matter, he refused to receive me but had me ushered into a private waiting room, telling me that he wanted me for dinner and that if I accepted he would listen to me. He always granted whatever I had come to ask for.²⁷

We do not know exactly what favors Don Bosco used to ask of the cabinet minister. He certainly did obtain the free use of government premises and exemption from postage fees for his first lottery. He might have been doing some special pleading for the Oblates of Mary. There are no records of government subsidies and, as we have seen, Don Bosco does not seem likely to have accepted them if they were offered. As yet the oratories were high in the government's favor, so he was not seeking protection from abuse. There is reason to believe that he interceded on behalf of Archbishop Fransoni at the time of the latter's imprisonment and was allowed to visit him (August or September 1850). In general, Don Bosco was quite secretive about his dealings with government officials; we know that he dealt in some very delicate matters with them in this way.²⁸

As a result of Don Bosco's frank letters to the king in 1855, some members of the government wished to act against him. Lemoyne attributes to public opinion their failure to do so. It seems to me more likely that Camillo Cavour chose to act more deviously rather than to betray openly a friend and to risk public censure as well. Lemoyne himself suggests as much in another context.²⁹ Cavour tried to compromise Don Bosco in the matter of the suppressions and confiscations that had led to the letters and to Don Bosco's presumed opposition to the laws. Cavour ordered that various items confiscated from the Dominicans and Capuchins, such as furniture and linens, be sent to the oratories as gifts of the government. Shrewdly, Don Bosco refused to accept them until he had received instructions in the matter from the various religious

²⁷ *BM* 4:75.

²⁸ *BM* 4:75-76.

²⁹ *BM* 4:74.

superiors concerned. Eventually large properties and buildings would be offered him as gifts or bargain purchases by the central government, by municipal councils, or by individuals; Don Bosco never accepted them without papal approval.³⁰

The suppression of the monasteries in 1855—and perhaps Don Bosco's perception of Cavour's attempts to compromise him—marked the end of their friendly public relations. Nevertheless, the count was never personally hostile to Don Bosco, who years later regarded the prime minister as a friend.³¹ Don Bosco also remained close friends with two of Cavour's personal secretaries, John Baptist Gal and Chevalier Cugia Delitala.³²

The government fiercely applied the secularizing laws. Archbishop Fransoni had been in exile at Lyons since 1852. As more of Italy became attached to the kingdom of Sardinia in the war and revolutions of 1859-60, Sardinian law spread. Bishops who opposed it were arrested, and five cardinals were prosecuted in five years, including the Cardinal Archbishop of Pisa for trying to block in his own cathedral a *Te Deum* intended to celebrate the expulsion of the pro-Austrian government and unification with the kingdom of Sardinia under Victor Emmanuel II.³³

The government finally decided in 1860 that it had to investigate Don Bosco, whose loyalty to the archbishop and to the Holy See were so well known. On the pretext that the priest was corresponding with Fransoni, Interior Minister Charles Farini ordered the first of several searches of the Oratory. Cavour, who was prime minister and who knew Don Bosco so well, allowed the search warrant to be issued, saying only that the search would be a waste of time: "Don Bosco is smarter than all of us. Either he has not compromised himself or by this time he has destroyed all evidence."³⁴ Don Bosco himself left notes on this and subsequent episodes placing a good part of the blame on Camillo Cavour.³⁵

On July 16, 1860, Farini received a visit from Don Bosco, who demanded justice for his boys; Farini attempted to grill him about his alleged antigovernment sentiments and actions. In the midst of their meeting, Cavour walked in and, playing dumb about what was happening, offered to straighten things out. Don Bosco was a bit relieved because of their past friendship and the count's knowledge of the Oratory. He explained what had been going on—at that

³⁰ *BM* 5:220-21.

³¹ *BM* 4:74, 77.

³² *BM* 4:77.

³³ Mack Smith, *Italy*, p. 90.

³⁴ Lemoyne, *BM* 6 (1971):310-11.

³⁵ Cited in Stella, 2:99-100.

time unaware of the count's consent to the searches—and concluded, "I don't know what will happen to me, but these things cannot be long suppressed from the public, and sooner or later will be avenged by God."

Cavour assured the saint of his continuing friendship but opined that Don Bosco had been deceived by some of his friends into entering politics. Don Bosco denied that and lamented the accusations made against him without proof.

But, Cavour answered, Don Bosco's spirit was "incompatible with the government's policies. You are with the Pope, and the government is against the Pope. Therefore, you are against the government." To this the priest rejoined that he was with the Pope religiously, but he was a good citizen and had never spoken or acted against the government in twenty years of public life. He challenged both ministers, Farini and Cavour, to produce proof to the contrary, or else to leave him in peace. He demanded freedom of conscience in that age of freedom of opinion, and again he repeated his innocence and all the good he was doing for the nation.

Cavour tried to use the Gospel to show that Don Bosco had to be opposed to the government, but Don Bosco answered with the "Render to Caesar and to God" passage (Matt. 22:21). The politicians ended with a warning to Don Bosco to be prudent because the times were dangerous, and they promised that he would not be bothered any further. They all shook hands. Cavour reassured Don Bosco of his friendship and asked for his prayers for both ministers.³⁶

That incident in Farini's office, until very recently, was the last recorded encounter between Don Bosco and Count Cavour. Correspondence between Gustavo Cavour and Don Bosco, however, and at least one more meeting between the priest and the prime minister came to light a few years ago.³⁷

From February 21 to April 14, 1858, Don Bosco was in Rome on business connected with the eventual establishment of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales. It was his first visit to the papal city, but he had already been in contact with various curial offices and with the Pope himself. Don Bosco met twice with Cardinal Antonelli and thrice with Pius IX: March 9, March 21, and April 6.³⁸

While he was in Rome, the Turinese priest also received a letter from Gustavo Cavour; this apparently was in March, and it is presumed that the marquis was speaking for his brother's government. The marquis asked Don Bosco to intercede with the Holy See for the resolution of the Frasoni case, suggesting that the exiled prelate be named a cardinal and given a coadjutor with

³⁶ BM 6:389-93.

³⁷ Francesco Motto, "Don Bosco mediatore tra Cavour e Antonelli nel 1858," *Ricerche storiche salesiane*, 5 (1986):3-20.

³⁸ Motto, p. 7.

right of succession; and he named four possible nominees. Don Bosco conveyed Cavour's ideas to Antonelli and the Pope, bringing the letter with him; it has not been found in the Vatican archives.³⁹

After his last audience with the Pope, Don Bosco requested a meeting with Cardinal Antonelli in a note of April 9. He mentioned having received a letter from Turin, which seems to be a second letter from Cavour. The priest postponed his departure from Rome from April 11 to the 14th, and he returned to Turin with a charge from the cardinal to bring the Holy See's proposals to Cavour.⁴⁰

On June 14, 1858, Don Bosco wrote directly to Pius IX, assessing the situation. He said, in part:

I do not know whether Cavour's idea offers any semblance of good to Your Holiness. If it is a matter of making a beginning [toward a general resolution of conflicts], I would not put much faith in it; as a solution for one particular problem [the archbishop's exile], it offers some hope, especially since he [Cavour] still shows the same desires. At any rate, to avoid evils that are certainly hard to repair, Your Holiness must provide somehow for the needs of the diocese of Turin.⁴¹

By June 22, the saint was conveying the Holy See's conciliatory reply to Gustavo Cavour, who promised to pass it on to his brother. The marquis also told Don Bosco that Count Camillo was pleased by the Holy See's regard for Archbishop Fransoni and wanted to meet with Don Bosco later the same week at his own residence (not the ministry) to continue the discussion.⁴²

Don Bosco met with the prime minister on June 26. Cavour agreed with the Holy See's desire to replace the bishop of Asti and to allow the archbishop of Cagliari in Sardinia to return to his see (two other problems between the Sardinian government and the Holy See). The current bishop of Susa was acceptable as the new archbishop of Turin. Archbishop Fransoni could return from Lyons provided that it was in order to resign his see in short order; Cavour was afraid that the uncompromising prelate would refuse to resign once he had safely returned, and the government wanted the Holy See's assurance that there would be no problem about it. Don Bosco and Cavour were keeping a rigid

³⁹ Motto, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Motto, p. 9.

⁴¹ Printed in Motto, p. 15 (my own translation).

⁴² Letter of June 23, 1858, from Fr. Gaetano Tortone, the Holy See's minister at Turin, to Card. Antonelli, printed in Motto, pp. 16-17.

silence about their negotiations out of fear of the press and hostile political reaction.⁴³

Cardinal Antonelli quickly clarified (or perhaps changed?) the Holy See's position: it was ready to name a coadjutor archbishop with right of succession, but it did not contemplate Archbishop Frasoni's immediate resignation.⁴⁴

The Holy See wanted the public to perceive that the Holy See had won its point with the Sardinian government; therefore it would not compel Archbishop Frasoni's resignation. Cavour, however, wanted a thorn in his side—the archbishop and poor relations with the Church—removed.⁴⁵ He had a very ambitious political agenda immediately ahead, as soon became apparent, and evidently wanted to minimize tensions.

Cavour was away from Turin for most of July (for his secret meeting with Napoleon III at Plombières). So Don Bosco could not meet with him immediately after the secretary of state had clarified the Holy See's position. On August 4, 1858, he sent a note to Cavour's home, urging him not to forget the diocesan business they'd been discussing and letting the prime minister know that he was ready to serve his country and his religion in any way he could. As far as is known, Cavour did not reply. The archbishop of Cagliari was allowed to return to his see only in 1866, while Archbishop Frasoni remained in exile till his death in 1862, and the see of Turin stayed vacant till 1867.⁴⁶

The saint's dealings with the great statesman were still not finished; but after 1858 they were decidedly "long-distance."

With most of the Italian peninsula united under the House of Savoy—only Austrian-ruled Venezia and papal Lazio were excluded—Cavour declared in the Chamber of Deputies in October 1860 that Rome had to be the capital of a united Italy. Don Bosco later quoted the count as asking in the same speech, "Who knows which of us will be here in six months?"⁴⁷

A short time after the speech, writes Lemoyne, Don Bosco made one of his famous predictions of the future. In the coming year, 1861, he said, a famous statesman would die totally unexpectedly, and all of Europe would be surprised. Several guesses as to the man's identity were made, but Don Bosco would not

⁴³ Letter of June 26, 1858, from Tortone to Antonelli, printed in Motto, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁴ Letter to Tortone, July 3, 1858, giving further instructions for Don Bosco; printed in Motto, p. 18.

⁴⁵ Motto, p. 12.

⁴⁶ Motto, pp. 13-14.

⁴⁷ Quoted by Stella, 2:100. Lemoyne quotes Cavour through the Ruffino chronicle slightly differently, *BM* 6:575.

reveal it. No one thought of Prime Minister Cavour, a relatively young and apparently vigorous man.⁴⁸

However, Cavour's health was in fact breaking down, and by the end of the year some people thought he would have to resign. He made some improvement and continued in office. Meanwhile, the laws of monastic suppression and confiscation were being applied in the newly acquired lands, with objecting bishops being jailed or exiled and some priests and monks being shot. In March 1861, Victor Emmanuel II was proclaimed King of Italy, and Cavour again stated in Parliament that Rome had to become the national capital.

The first Sunday in June was Constitution Day, a great holiday commemorating King Charles Albert's granting of the constitution and limited democracy in 1848. With the character of the celebration and the nation changed in 1861 after the seizure of most of the Papal States and the confiscation of hundreds of monasteries, the Turinese clergy refused to take part in the celebration, according to Lemoyne.⁴⁹ Thayer, however, reports that "the churches [of Turin] resounded with *Te Deums* in honor of the Constitution and unification."⁵⁰

According to Lemoyne again, Cavour retaliated to the clerical snub by forbidding government officials to take part in the Corpus Christi procession and persuading the city council of Turin neither to participate nor to make the customary contribution toward the expenses of the religious pageantry. The prime minister poured his energy into making the national celebration a spectacular event.⁵¹

The day before Corpus Christi, May 29, Cavour underwent a stormy and somewhat unfavorable session in the Chamber of Deputies. On reaching home, he fell grievously ill. On May 30, the Corpus Christi procession was completely devoid of civic officials, as Cavour wished. Three days later, Constitution Day, Cavour suffered a second and worse attack, and he died on June 6 (the Octave of Corpus Christi, according to the pre-Vatican II liturgical calendar, and the anniversary of the 1453 miracle of the Blessed Sacrament at Turin—two coincidences noted by the Oratory chronicler Father Dominic Ruffino).⁵²

Years later Don Bosco wrote in the previously quoted memo on the house searches,

⁴⁸ *BM* 6:457.

⁴⁹ *BM* 6:574; Stella, 2:100, quoting Don Bosco.

⁵⁰ Thayer, p. 488.

⁵¹ *BM* 6: 574.

⁵² Quoted by Lemoyne, *BM* 6:575.

On the day fixed for his own great celebration, the feast of national unity, in which people both great and small and all the revolutionaries came to take part, the principal promoter of all those things was kept from them, struck by a grave illness that shortly took his life without his having the comforts of our holy religion. He had his feet at the top of the ladder of glory when he tumbled into the tomb.⁵³

On June 6 the Salesians and boys were keeping the exercise for a holy death. At the good night talk, according to the Ruffino chronicle, Don Bosco announced the prime minister's death:

We must indeed feel pity for Count Cavour. In his last moments he did not have one sincere friend of his soul. Let us hope, however, that through the intercession of St. Francis de Sales—a relative on his mother's side—God may have touched his heart in time and had mercy on him.⁵⁴

Don Bosco seems to allege in his memo and in his good night that Cavour died without a priest or the sacraments. But the dying man did summon a priest who heard his confession, anointed him, and gave him Viaticum—for which the curate was later censured by the Holy See. He was buried from the church of Our Lady of the Angels.⁵⁵ Don Bosco's allegation could be based on lack of information. Or he may have been aware of Cavour's lack of regret for his political actions and concluded that the prime minister died at odds with religion; he was not truly, but falsely, "comforted"; the curate was not a "sincere friend" but a false one in that he did not induce repentance for Cavour's apparent attacks on the Church.

At this point, the students remembered Don Bosco's prediction about the death of an important political figure, made the previous October, and they concluded that the saint had foreseen Cavour's death.

On June 10, Don Bosco spent some time walking after night prayers, conversing with several clerics including John Bonetti and Dominic Ruffino, both of whom recorded the event in their chronicles. Don Bosco was describing the special gifts that God had granted to a number of boys at the Oratory. One boy had just seen on June 2 "a globe which filled the entire church [of Saint

⁵³ Quoted in Stella, 2:100.

⁵⁴ Thayer, pp. 489-91, 493-95.

⁵⁵ Quoted by Lemoyne, *BM* 6:575-76. Note the error concerning the descent from the de Sales family, which was actually on the paternal side.

Francis de Sales, at the Oratory] and then gradually shrank to the size of a hazelnut as it hovered in midair above the ciborium. Then it grew a bit again, shrank, and finally disappeared."At the time neither the boy nor Don Bosco had been able to discern its meaning. But June 2 had been Constitution Day, the day Cavour's condition took the decisive turn for the worse. So, according to Bonetti and Ruffino, Don Bosco now interpreted the boy's vision in this way:

Cavour, world-renowned for power and fame, died on June 6... Just as Cavour was about to fade away [by death], swollen [with pride] he raised himself even above the Blessed Sacrament, and then collapsed and disappeared. We could give it another interpretation: The globe might portend a rebellion against the Church, but as the Church seems about to be crushed, the rebellion disintegrates and frightened onlookers find no trace of it. From afar, the rebellion seems a mighty one, but then it dwindles into nothing and disappears.⁵⁶

Given the timing of the boy's vision, the priest cannot help linking it to Cavour's apparent irreligion and bad end. He makes no pretension, however, to a final answer and offers an alternate possible meaning (on a favorite theme of his)—which, even so, might be interpreted as a reference to Cavour and men like him.

Concerning Don Bosco's final thoughts about Cavour and others who had harassed him and the Church, we have his own written statement, again in the previously cited memo:

I hope that all these people have found mercy before the Lord, as we and our boys have prayed wholeheartedly. I just wanted to note these facts in order to assure my Salesian sons that God blesses those who bless us, and he blesses our benefactors abundantly; and he has punished with no slight scourge those who have opposed us.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Quoted by Lemoyne, *BM* 6:578-79. Note that Lemoyne's usual method is to redact both chronicles into one narrative, sometimes interpreting with 50 years' hindsight as he writes and paraphrases.

⁵⁷ Quoted by Stella, 2:100.

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