

## I. RECOURSE TO PUBLIC CHARITY

*As we have just said, for the financial resources needed to supply the ever-increasing costs of his work, Don Bosco appealed to institutions: the Royal family, Government authorities, public officials (local council, provincial, state ...), existing charitable organisations locally, the National Bank, parishes, dioceses, the Holy See itself through his best supporters, including the Pope.*

*For each request for help he provided ample and precise charitable and social motivations which in his opinion would open the "purse strings" of well-stocked individuals and would lead authorities to grant him exemptions, permits, authorisations, etc..*

*Empirical evidence shows that the support of the public authorities, both civil and ecclesiastical, to Don Bosco never wavered, although he always kept individual ownership of movable and immovable property in his hands or with individual Salesians and was reluctant to establish any legally recognised moral entity. And rightly so given that legislation in force was decidedly hostile to religious institutions. As for the vow of poverty, he found a modus vivendi acceptable to the Holy See.*

*In the fifteen or so letters we publish here by way of example amongst the hundreds that have been found, we see how Don Bosco turned to local authorities for his first school furnishings (no. 108) and twenty five years later (no. 123), for expenses for the three Oratories and debts for building the church of St Francis de Sales (no. 111), for maintaining the orphans from the cholera epidemic (no. 112). He asked the King for subsidies for his poor clerics (no. 109) and for titles of honour for his generous benefactors (no. 124). He asked the War Ministry for used uniforms for his boys, to ward off the cold winters (no. 113) or for help with emergency rations (no. 119). He asked the Ministers for the Interior to pay for board for those boys accepted at Ministerial request (no. 116) and a contribution to pay the tax on income from movable wealth at the College at Mirabello (no. 118). He approached the Minister for Finance with a request to reduce the heavy tax on flour (no. 121), and the Minister for Public Education for a contribution for the schools (no. 122). He asked the Prefect of the Province to mediate in an*

*already refused request to the Minister for the Interior for a reduction on train fares for boys attending Salesian colleges (no. 120).*

*Obviously Don Bosco did not fail to make frequent recourse to ecclesiastical authorities, including bishops (no. 110), and Popes (no. 125). The circulars to his promoters of raffles/lotteries are unforgettable (no. 114) and to potential buyers for tickets gone on sale (no. 115).*

*The correspondence published here all falls within the period 1847-1876, meaning from the beginnings of Salesian work in the Pinardi house in Turin to the beginning of the Salesian work in Argentina. After this most of the requests to authorities for contributions were addressed to gain support for the missions. For this we need to look at the preceding section<sup>2</sup>.*

### **108. To the Mayors of Turin**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, p. 75.

[Turin, prior to 22 April 1847]

Distinguished Gentlemen, the Mayors<sup>3</sup>,

Fathers John Borel and John Bosco, who are involved in the spiritual direction of young boys at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales opened in Valdocco near the pious home of the Refuge, knowing how many young boys want to come there to spend some time on weekends learning to read and write, would like to endorse this yearning. It also wonderfully supports the aim of keeping young people free from idleness and vice on these days, so they have decided with a council of wise individuals to open a charitable school for them.

<sup>2</sup> See nos. 98-107.

<sup>3</sup> At the time the two city Mayors were Marquis Vittorio Colli and Count Giuseppe Ponte. After the reform of 1848, requests for assistance from the city council were addressed to the Mayor and councillors. Thus for example the request in February 1850, where Don Bosco indicates that costs for renting the three Oratories amounted to 2,400 lire: cf. RSS 22 (2003) 343-344. See also no. 110.

This is why we turn respectfully to you, distinguished gentlemen, asking if perhaps in the storerooms of the schools in this illustrious city there might be school benches, desks, tables not being used, which you would like to give the applicants to use as they see fit.

The applicants,

Fr John Borel  
Fr John Bosco

### **109. To King Victor Emmanuel II**

AST *Grande Cancelleria* m. 259/1 n. 1370, original ms ed. in RSS 13 (1994) 295-296.

Turin, 1 May 1851

Your Royal Majesty,

Clerics Ascanio Savio, Joseph Buzzetti, Charles Gastini, Felix Reviglio assisted by some charitable individuals, and with the permission of their ecclesiastical superior have donned the clerical habit, but because they lack worldly goods they have encountered serious problems in continuing with their studies, and are in straitened circumstances for providing for lodging, food and clothing. They do not know who to turn to in this serious time of need.

They humbly request Your Royal Majesty to take them into kind consideration and grant them a charitable subsidy as your fatherly kindness sees fit, so they can continue in their ecclesiastical career to which they feel God has especially called them.

The petitioners, ever mindful of the benefit they hope to receive, will pray daily to the Lord that you will thrive and that He will preserve Your Royal Majesty and all the Royal Family for many long years.

The petitioners,

[Clerics Ascanio Savio, Joseph Buzzetti,  
Charles Gastini, Felix Reviglio]

The undersigned, who is fully informed, declares that the four clerics making this petition are of exemplary conduct, are teaching catechism in the parish of Borgo Dora, and especially at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales where as well as catechism they are teaching evening classes, Gregorian chant, and music, and all without remuneration. He also declares that all four are without worldly goods, have been taken in to the Oratory, and are most worthy in this regard given their poverty and conduct.

Turin, 1 May 1851

Fr John Bosco director<sup>4</sup>

### **110. To the Bishop of Biella, Bishop Pietro Losana**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 155-156.

Turin, 4 May 1852

My Lord<sup>5</sup>,

With a keen sense of gratitude to Divine Providence who in the person of your illustrious and reverend Lordship has given us an outstanding benefactor of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, I humbly thank you, My Lord, for having so zealously recommended my church to the charity of the faithful in the diocese with a special circular on September 13 last year. The offerings came to the grand sum of a thousand lire which I declare I have received from you. This is evident proof that everyone knew of the need to keep the morality of the young intact and promote Christian instruction. This is why they so willingly responded to the pious expectations of their Pastor.

Be happy then, My Lord, for having given this great benefit for the young people of Turin, and rejoice also because of the advantage it brings so many young people in your diocese who have to spend a good part of the year in the

<sup>4</sup> Don Bosco also had recourse to the King's charity to give his clerics the patrimony [benefice, title, fixed income ...] they needed to receive Holy Orders.

<sup>5</sup> Giovanni Pietro Losana (1793-1873), professor at the University of Turin, then bishop of Biella (from 1833); attentive to social problems, he was a moderate liberal.

capital because of their work. A considerable number of them are exemplary in frequenting this Oratory to enjoy themselves, be instructed, and to keep holy the Lord's day<sup>6</sup>.

You know, My Lord, that notwithstanding the generous offerings of pious and charitable individuals, I still lacked the means to continue this sacred edifice<sup>7</sup>, but Divine Providence gave me a kind hand and helped me find new funds by means of a raffle. It was well accepted by public charity as soon as it was announced and very many distinguished individuals and worthy gentlemen took part with true Catholic zeal. They promoted it and thanks to them many more gifts came in than I had expected, both for their value and number, so today they amount to more than three thousand one hundred items. Now I hope that these pious and wealthy people continue their efforts by buying tickets, which the completion of this holy work depends on.

Thus comforted and assisted, I am happy to tell you that the construction works are going ahead with all possible activity, and I trust in the Lord that on June 20, a holy day for us dedicated to Our Lady of Consolation, and to satisfy an urgent need for us, you can come to this new church to bless it and celebrate the sacred functions there. My Lord, you can imagine the joy and consolation just at the thought of this solemnity that will take place on that long-desired day!

Unable as I am to show my gratitude to Your Lordship and the people of your diocese for the offerings and for having effectively helped me with the raffle, I will be keen to welcome all the youngsters from Biella who come to the Oratory with the maximum loving kindness, and I will spare nothing to help those who want to benefit from classes and religious instruction.

What I can do, and I will not fail to do so, is to join with the boys who have in a certain way been entrusted to me by Divine Providence, and pray constantly to the Lord our God with them that he may richly reward Your

<sup>6</sup> It seems that the young people of the Biella diocese who attended the Oratory at Valdocco were around 200 in number, a third of the total.

<sup>7</sup> The reference is to the building of the church of St Francis de Sales: see no. 6.

Lordship with his blessings, and all those who in their charity have helped and are helping this charitable work in whatever way.

Allow me, My Lord, to ask you to continue your protection of the Oratory and bless the new church, the raffle, and all the boys of the Oratory, and with them also myself, since I feel I have the greatest need of all.

Please accept my sincere gratitude, and with the deepest respect I have the honour of being,

Your Lordship's most humble, devout and obedient servant

Fr John Bosco

### **111. To the city authorities in Turin**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 201-202.

[Turin, 3 August 1853]

Distinguished Gentlemen,

With sentiments of sincere gratitude for the aid you gave me last year to benefit the oratories set up in this city for abandoned youth, I dare to approach you once more, finding myself more in need than ever.

I should firstly give you some indication of how these three oratories are going. This year they have gone ahead with great success given the greater number of youngsters who have been coming. Just in the Oratory at Valdocco they have sometimes surpassed two thousand, all youngsters who have spent their weekends fulfilling their religious duties while receiving moral and civic instruction such as reading, writing, arithmetic, the metric system, drawing, singing and some instruments. In the midst of all this there have also been games, basic gymnastics such as: hurdles, see-saw, bowls, quoits, running and jumping, especially to entice those who would not come otherwise. The evening classes this year were not able to achieve the results I expected because of our lack of means. Because they are all poor youngsters they often dropped out of school because they did not have what they needed. Nevertheless the number of students often rose to about three hundred.

Besides the cost of rent and maintenance of the church and paving of the Oratories at Vanchiglia and Porta Nuova, which cost no less than two thousand two hundred francs, we have to add the serious costs involved in the construction of a church in Valdocco as well as the construction or rather the restoration of part of the building intended as classrooms, and to provide shelter for those who are absolutely poor and abandoned.

The usual benefactors have dropped away due to the sheer number of expenses, to the point where I still owe an entire year's rent for the oratory at Porta Nuova. If the Council cannot help me in this particular need I will find myself forced to close one of these oratories, and this would mean that a considerable number of poor and abandoned boys would cease to receive instruction.

This is why I am turning to you, worthy gentlemen, asking you to take into kind consideration what I have explained above and grant me the charitable subsidy that your generosity will suggest to you, given the gravity of my current need.

We are all happy to put all our efforts towards the poor children of the people. I am only asking for aid to pay the debts contracted for the buildings mentioned above, and for the rent and maintenance of the respective venues.

Full of trust in the proven kindness of the Turin City Council, with the greatest gratitude I am,

Your distinguished gentlemen's humble petitioner,

Fr John Bosco

## **112. To the Mayor of Turin, Giovanni Battista Notta**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 243-244.

Turin, 25 January 1855

Your Excellency the Mayor<sup>8</sup>,

<sup>8</sup> He was Mayor from December 1852 to February 1861.

Given the serious expenses which the Turin City Council had to face during the fatal emergency of the *colera morbus* I had decided not to make a request for funds this year, but my present needs force me to. In addition to the many expenses involved in setting up the building in a healthy state as required in these times, I now have about ninety five boys to keep, clothe and provide a bed for. I wanted to decrease the number but the orphans resulting from the cholera<sup>9</sup> increased them instead. Amongst them are those given me by the charitable committee dealing with cholera victims, and those I myself encountered in the streets and squares. I have taken in around forty of these unfortunate lads.

I am not asking for aid to pay rent or for classrooms, nor for work carried out there. I am asking only for funds to help me provide bread for these poor boys of mine to get them through the winter. Later I hope the Lord will provide something and I can at least locate some of them elsewhere.

To this end I am recommending myself to your Excellencies' proven kindness asking you to help me with this exceptional need, convinced that you lack neither the means nor the willingness to help these children of the people who are the poorest and most abandoned of them.

With the sincerest feeling of gratitude, I am,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **113. To the Minister for War, Giacomo Durando**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 268-269.

[Turin, November 1855]

Your Excellency the Minister,

I respectfully put to Your Excellency the need to provide for more than a hundred boys taken into the home attached to the Oratory of St Francis de

<sup>9</sup> In October 1854 Don Bosco had offered to take into the Oratory many children orphaned by the cholera and the Mayor had agreed.



Sales, and also the need to provide for more than one thousand five hundred who attend the boys' oratories in Valdocco, Porta Nuova and Vanchiglia. I had recourse to the War Ministry asking for the gift of certain items of clothing which are either too worn or of no use any more for the regular troops. The request was favourably accepted and the good Minister came to my aid.

The straitened circumstances this year have put me in an even more calamitous situation than for past years, and I find the need to turn to Your Excellency, asking you to take into kind consideration the unfortunate state of these poor and abandoned young men, and give them items of clothing which are needed in the first instance if they are to ward off the cold of the coming winter, and so continue working and earning their bread by some honest trade.

I only note here that given the absolute poverty of these young boys we will accept with the greatest gratitude any kind of clothing items be they shoes, tunics, jackets, shirts, underwear, sheets, blankets, socks, no matter how patched or worn out, even torn blankets or anything else. We can mend them and they can serve our needs.

Full of trust in your well-known kindness, and with the greatest of gratitude also in the name of the above-mentioned boys I am,

Your Excellency's most indebted petitioner,

Fr John Bosco

#### **114. Circular for the Raffle**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 317-320.

Turin, [21] February 1857

The charity of the Gospel inspires a man to the most wonderful works of charity while avoiding calling the attention of others on himself. However, where the glory of God and the benefit of one's neighbour so requires it, he does not hesitate to overcome his shyness and extend his hand to benefit people, and sometimes tell others of the good done. This invites and encourages others

to come to the aid of needy. This thought has led the Committee running this Raffle to offer an idea of the main work done in these Oratories, and so let everyone know what the proceeds coming from it will be destined for.

We believe it is publicly well-known that Father John Bosco, in his desire to promote the moral benefit of abandoned youth, has opened three boys' Oratories in three main parts of the city, which on weekends gather the largest number of boys possible, the ones most at risk in the city and who come to the city from towns in the province. There is a chapel in these oratories for religious functions, some classrooms and a recreation centre. They are attracted there with prizes, amusements, some gymnastics or other honest form of recreation, after they have attended the sacred functions. The number who attend sometimes exceeds three thousand. When the season allows it, there are classes in reading, writing, singing, playing. A considerable number of pious gentlemen help this work by doing various things and teaching catechism. Boys who are unemployed are found work with an upright employer, and they are given all the loving assistance that a good father would give them.

At the Oratory at Valdocco there are also day and evening classes especially for boys who, because of their poor clothing, or their lack of discipline, cannot be accepted into the public schools.

The evening classes are very well attended. There too they are taught reading, writing, vocal and instrumental music, and this to keep them away from bad companions where they would certainly run the risk of losing what little they had earned from work, as well as their morality and religion.

Amongst these boys, either from the city or the towns in the province, we find some (mostly orphans) who are so poor and abandoned that they could not be set on the path to an art or trade without giving them lodging, food and clothing. We have provided for this with a home attached to the Oratory at Valdocco where more than a hundred and fifty have been taken in. There they are given what they need to become good Christians and upright young workers.

Having thus pointed out the situation of these oratories one can easily understand where the proceeds from this Raffle are directed to: paying the rent for the various buildings, maintaining the classrooms, the churches, giving bread to the hundred and fifty living in are all serious expenditures.

Moreover, three years ago with the fatal cholera epidemic we had to set up an appropriate place to accommodate forty orphans, a few of whom are still in the home. This year we had to complete one part of the building still under construction. All these works, although carried out with careful economy, meant expenditure of more than forty thousand francs. With the help of charitable individuals most of this sum has been paid, but twelve thousand francs are still owing.

To pay these expenses and offer the possibility of continuing the good begun, we have found no other way than to hold a raffle of some items, to open up the possibility for people in any situation to help in whatever way and to whatever extent their charity suggests.

For this purpose due authorisation was asked of the Royal government who looked favourably on our request, and by decree on the 2nd of this February gave us all the permissions we felt we needed for this raffle to succeed.

We are keenly convinced that our fellow citizens and charitable people in the provinces since the oratories also benefit them, will want to join us and take no small part, sending us items destined to serve as prizes, and buying tickets. A select number of good individuals graciously accepted to be promoters, committing themselves to collect items and sell tickets according to the attached rules.

We have simply explained the purpose of the oratories and the principal means by which they can continue. The work in itself seems to be sufficiently commendable without needing to add further words. We simply note that by taking part in this charitable work you will be providing for both a public and private utility and you will be blessed by both God and human beings. By God who will not fail to reward you; and by human beings since you will

have their deepest gratitude, while a group of young men will forever bless the kind hand that removed them from the perils of the street, set them on the right path to work and for the salvation of their soul.

The Committee<sup>10</sup>

### 115. Circular for promoters of the Raffle

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 476-477.

*Charitas benigna est patiens est.*

*Charity is kind and patient.*

*(St Paul)*

Turin, [30 January] 1862

Distinguished Sir,

The charity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is kind and patient in everything, gives me the hope that Your Excellency will kindly forgive any disturbance I am causing you. The matters that Divine Providence has placed in my hands has meant that this year I need to appeal to private and public charity through a raffle. It is true that this approach has been very often employed over time and has therefore become less acceptable to some, nevertheless I cannot find any other way suitable for our times and more adapted to our need. So that you can have a good idea of the kind of expenses we are dealing with I will give you a brief indication here.

Firstly there are the three Oratories - St Francis de Sales at Valdocco, St Aloysius at Porta Nuova, the holy Guardian Angel at Vanchiglia. We hold sacred functions in these three churches morning and evening, administer the Holy Sacraments and instruct young people who are most at risk, large numbers of these come along. These boys for whom we often have to provide

<sup>10</sup> Of all the Ministers, the Minister for War, Alfonso Lamarmora, accepted and paid for 40 tickets, the Minister for the Interior Urbano Rattazzi paid for all 400 and gave them back, the Minister for Public Education, Giovanni Lanza gave them back without paying for any, limiting himself to praising Don Bosco's charitable work, however later that year he did send a contribution of 1,000 lire.

food and clothing, inasmuch as we can, are then placed with an employer to learn a trade. But the three churches have no fixed income to provide what is needed for divine worship and are without appropriate furnishings. Furthermore we are renting the venues at Vanchiglia and Porta Nuova, the first at 650 francs a year and the second at 500 francs a year. As well as the current rent there are other debts which should be paid as soon as possible. In these same venues and for the day and evening classes we have had to carry out many essential repairs, most still to be paid for. We also have a considerable number of young students and working boys living in the home attached to the Oratory at Valdocco, for whom we provide bread, instruction, clothing, board and a trade; the cost for these is very great.

[Finally, a small but essential expense has been needed to establish workshops in the house. There are serious reasons why we have not been able to allow the working boys to go and learn their trade in the city workshops].

Having thus pointed out the purpose of the raffle I humbly invite Your Excellency to come to our aid:

1. To collect the items charitable individuals want to give us, then give a hand to distribute tickets at the appropriate time.

2. Should you know someone who would accept the kind role of promoter for this raffle, especially if lay people, could I ask you to give me their name, surname and place of residence so that I can invite them myself.

3. Should Your Excellency for some special reason not wish to be listed amongst the promoters I would ask you respectfully to let me know so that there is no need to bother you further.

I hope soon to be able to send you the draft regulations along with other information regarding the raffle that I am especially recommending to your well-known and proven charity.

May the Lord God who is infinitely rich in favours reward you substantially and grant you health and copious blessings. Meanwhile for my part and in

the name of the boys who will benefit I offer you my heartfelt thanks. With esteem, I have the honour of being,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco <sup>11</sup>

**116. To the [Secretary of the] Minister for the Interior,  
Ubaldo Peruzzi**

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 625-626.

Turin, 22 December 1863

Distinguished Sir<sup>12</sup>,

Given the very many youngsters urgently requesting to be taken into this home, it was not possible to take up all the kind recommendations of your Ministry on behalf of certain poor young boys. Nevertheless the matter was not forgotten and things were done as follows.

*Malabailo Carlo Enrico*, recommended by letter on September 22, 6th division 2nd section 5826, was finally accepted on November 1 and placed with someone to learn a trade.

*Benna Giovanni Battista* from Biella recommended by letter on October 8 was accepted on November 10 last and since he was in serious need of instruction was admitted for studies.

*Grassero Giuseppe* recommended by letter on October 13, N° 6.522 has been definitely accepted and his entry has been fixed for January 12.

*Ferrero Lorenzo* recommended by letter on November 5, given the serious need he finds himself in, is also accepted and will enter the house on the 24th.

<sup>11</sup> At the same time as this circular, Don Bosco sent out another signed by 22 members of the Committee headed by the Mayor of Turin, Emanuele Luserna di Rorà, cf. E(m) I, pp. 478-479.

<sup>12</sup> With the approach of Italian unity (1861) and until the early 1870s, dozens of poor boys were recommended to Don Bosco by various ministers (the Interior, Justice and Worship, Agriculture, War, Public Education ...). He accepted almost all of them in exchange for a small payment for room and board.

I take this same occasion to repeat what I wrote halfway through October in response to the letter of September 22, regarding young *Pivetta*.

His mother at the time owed L. 330; now we have to add two months at 15 francs a month, which brings the total to 360 francs.

I enclose here also a note regarding the boys *Rissoli Gesualdo* from Naples and *Durazzo* from Turin who could not be taken into the home because they were too young, but following letters from the Ministry were placed with Master Miglietti at 65 cents each per day<sup>13</sup>.

Given his need and at his request I had to anticipate the sum due although I myself am in straitened circumstances.

In the hope that he wishes to continue giving bread to poor young people, of whom there are now more than seven hundred living here, could you please tell His Excellency the Minister for the Interior, that I will always do my utmost to accept abandoned young people and especially those who are in any way recommended to me by him.

Finally, at a time when we are wishing people the best, I pray that Heaven may bless you and I am, with the greatest respect,

Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### 117. To the Director General of Railways in Upper Italy

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 33.

[Turin, end of January 1864]<sup>14</sup>

[Distinguished Sir],

I am appealing to Your Excellency for a work of public charity. In the heavily populated suburb of Valdocco there has been an enormous housing

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Letter to the Minister for the Interior, Ubaldino Peruzzi, February 23, 1863, in E(m) I, pp. 555-556.

<sup>14</sup> Don Bosco made similar requests, always accepted, in the years that followed, especially for the transport of the construction materials needed for the church of St John the Evangelist.

development for around thirty thousand inhabitants who have no church, big or small, for divine worship.

Urged by the need and the desire to provide for this serious deficiency, I decided to attempt to build a church that can be used by our youngsters who usually come on weekends and for the public who wish to avail themselves of it. We bought land for this purpose and plans were drawn up for the building.

Everything begins with and is entrusted to the charity of the citizens. Many have already taken part. Now that we want to start on the construction we have acquired two hundred thousand miria [1 miria = ca.10 kg] of stone from Borgone. It is for the transport of this stone that also in the name of the citizens of Valdocco I am recommending myself to your kindness, asking you to provide free transport of these materials from Borgone to Turin.

This work is for the public benefit which you are willingly involved in. Therefore, confident of being heard I assure you of the gratitude of all those who will benefit and especially my own. I consider it always a great honour every time to wish you all of Heaven's blessings, and I am,

Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **118. To the Minister *Ad Interim* for Finance, Urbano Rattazzi**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, p. 416.

Turin, 5 August 1867

Your Excellency,

Father John Bosco respectfully explains to Your Excellency how last year, for want of due completion of formalities, I had to pay a penalty on taxable income from movable goods. Your Excellency gave consideration to the circumstances and purpose of this institution, which is to remove poor and at risk children from danger, and granted a charitable subsidy of 600 francs corresponding with what I had to pay for the house at Mirabello, which is the issue at stake here.



Now I find myself in an identical situation for the current payment for the 2nd semester 1866 and I am asking Your Excellency to renew the same favour assuring you that it will be to the exclusive benefit of the most abandoned children of poor people. I note meanwhile that since I have been able to provide appropriate clarifications in good time, the tax agent has taken everything into kind consideration.

The petitioner, along with the young people who will benefit and full of trust in your proven charity, wishes you every heavenly blessing and is,

Your Excellency's humble petitioner,

Fr John Bosco<sup>15</sup>

### **119. To the Minister for War, Ettore Bertolè Viale**

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 497-498.

Turin, 11 February 1868

Distinguished Sir,

Our growing poverty this year urges me to have recourse to Your Excellency's proven charity, which I have experienced many times. The number of poor boys [recommended] by the Minister has grown somewhat, but what is really putting us in difficulties is the high price of food staples. Last year at this time we were paying 0.30 cents a kilogram for bread; now it has almost doubled and we can say the same for other food items.

This is why I warmly recommend myself to your well-known kindness so that this year too you may come to the aid of these poor boys and grant us as much as you see fit.

<sup>15</sup> Though the request of June 7, 1867 to the Minister for Finance, Francesco Ferrara, was not considered, this one to his successor brought a grant of 600 lire.

Along with the boys, I do not fail to express my heartfelt gratitude and daily invoke blessings on you. Filled with respect, I have the distinct honour of being,

Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

**120. To the Prefect of Turin, Costantino Radicati Talice di Passerano**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 219-220.

[Turin, after 20 June 1870]

Distinguished Sir,

I have received the letter by which Your Excellency communicated that the Ministry for the Interior has decided not to continue the favour of repatriating poor young men who come out of this establishment<sup>16</sup>.

Since you, Mr Prefect, know the miserable state of this institution, I would thus ask you to remind His Excellency, the Minister for the Interior, of the state of the boys who have been recommended. Of around 800 who live here more than a hundred are sent by the Government and are given free board here.

If I do not have this favour of repatriation, I would find myself in a difficult position, since we are receiving no further favours from the Railways. At other times the Minister concerned gave us a grant every year, but this has also ceased for some years.

So after taking a boy into the home for nothing, in the end I now also have to repatriate him at my own expense. For example a few days ago I had to send two boys home, one to Ancona, the other to Tortorici in Sicily at a cost that was considerable for us given the straitened circumstances of this establishment.

Also note the tax of 10,000 francs we have to pay for flour<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> See previous letter.

<sup>17</sup> See following letter.

You can see from this, Mr Prefect, that despite all my good will I find myself needing to decrease the number that I take in, while continuous and insistent requests for shelter are on the increase.

I leave everything to you<sup>18</sup> and these poor boys will not fail to call down Heaven's blessings on you as they do each day for all their benefactors.

Believe me that I am grateful and,  
Your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### **121. To the Minister for Finance, Quintino Sella**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 236-237.

Turin, 15 August 1870

Your Excellency,

The straitened circumstances of the poor boys who have been taken in to the home known as the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, urge the undersigned to appeal to Your Excellency's charity.

The number of them, which between all our establishments amounts to 1,200, the decrease in charitable help, the increase in taxes, the multitude of abandoned children from all over Italy asking to be taken in, give me hope of, if not a complete exemption at least a partial one, from the tax on flour which exceeds twelve thousand francs.

This is the petition I make in the name of these poor boys and that I hope will be taken into kind consideration for this exceptional case.

With gratitude, I am,

Your Excellency's humble petitioner,

[Fr John Bosco<sup>19</sup>]

<sup>18</sup> A similar petition in April 1870 to the President of the Council of Ministers [Prime Minister] and the Minister for the Interior, Giovanni Lanza, had been rejected.

<sup>19</sup> The request was rejected.

## **122. To the Minister for Public Education, Cesare Correnti**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 279-280.

Turin, 11 December 1870

Your Excellency,

The concern Your Excellency has for promoting education for the lowest stratum of the population, a group so much in need of it, gives me hope that you will take into consideration what I am about to explain.

In this establishment we have around five hundred boys who live here. They belong precisely to the poorest level of the population and they are doing classical studies. There are, besides, around five hundred others, both boarders and day students, who attend primary classes we offer for poor youth both on weekdays and at weekends, not only during the day but also in the evenings.

Your Excellency can well understand how much it costs to run this establishment, both to maintain professors and teachers, and the classrooms, as well as providing books, exercise books and other school items, given that many of those who attend our classes are too poor to provide these things for themselves and we give them these items for free.

On the other hand note that we have no income, and that public charity is our only resource.

Although in the past we have been able to manage such huge expenses, we nevertheless now find ourselves in especially straitened circumstances and perhaps we will be obliged to limit our charitable work unless some kind hand offers us help.

This is why I turn to you, trusting in Your Excellency's kindness and asking you to help us in the way that you see fit. I assure you of our heartfelt gratitude, not just my own but of the entire administration of this house and the large group of young people who will benefit from your charity. They will certainly not fail to implore every blessing on Your Excellency.

Please accept my deepest respect, and I have the honour of being,  
Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

[Fr John Bosco<sup>20</sup>]

### **123. To the Mayor of Turin, Felice Rignon**

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 463-464.

Turin, 26 August 1872

Your Excellency the Mayor,

Valdocco is certainly one of the most heavily populated parts of Turin and it is teeming with children. A few go to school in Santa Barbara which is of course not far away. But the greater number, either because their parents don't care, or because they are poorly dressed or are simply dissolute, spend their whole day wandering around to their own detriment and causing problems for authorities responsible for public safety.

In an effort to provide for these poor children, other than evening classes I have also begun day classes. Since this year I have a few more venues, the number of pupils has grown considerably and at the moment their number is effectively more than three hundred.

We need to educate them for free, and for not a few of them provide school items, books, paper and pens etc, and for some of them even, clothing and bread. These are all the efforts of a private individual who cannot continue without a special grant.

This is why I am appealing to Your Excellency asking you to take this need into careful consideration, and offer whatever financial help you consider appropriate.

<sup>20</sup> There is no indication of any response. Don Bosco would continue to renew his request. In January 1865 he informed the Director General of Railways for Upper Italy, Paolo Amilhou, that to the seven Salesian houses in Turin, the ones at Lanzo Torinese, Borgo San Martino, Varazze and Alassio he would need to add that of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Mornese, cf. E(m) IV, pp. 387-388.

If you would ever like to send someone to visit these classes, they are open in the area behind the church of Mary Help of Christians and he would be welcomed with all the respect to the invitee and the one who sent him. There are four elementary classes: some of these because of numbers are split into two and divided into two sections.

Please accept my usual gratitude,  
Your Excellency's most indebted servant,

[Fr J. Bosco<sup>21</sup>]

### **124. To King Victor Emmanuel II**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 557-558.

[Turin, 16 November 1875]

Your Royal Majesty,

The poor boys, around 850 of them who live at the Hospice of St Francis de Sales, through their director are appealing to Your Royal Majesty to ask for a sign of public recognition for one of the most upright citizens of Turin. This is Mr Michele Lanza a member of this city's City Council.

Under separate cover are the titles which make him especially worthy; here we highlight only his charity to us, especially the generous donation given not long ago of the sum of 10,000 francs.

Although this honourable citizen is not seeking honours, nevertheless given his domestic and social position he would receive with great satisfaction the awarding of the decoration of Saints Maurice and Lazarus. Indeed, such an honour would encourage him to continue dispensing his considerable wealth in works of charity for this and other institutes which are supported daily by charity.

<sup>21</sup> The Mayor's reply was delayed. Three years later Don Bosco would ask the same individual for school desks given the growing number of pupils at Valdocco, cf. E(m) IV, pp. 383-384.

These youngsters humbly petition Your Majesty that to the many benefits you have already granted them you would add the requested decoration for this outstanding benefactor.

In the hope of being heard, and with their hearts filled with gratitude, they pray that God will fill you with his blessings and grant you many years of happy life.

In their name and in my own, I am,

Your humble petitioner,

Fr John Bosco

Sir Michele Lanza di Vittorio, Turin, piazza Solferino, via Giannone 1, his private residence, 48 years old, former stearic acid industrialist for the Lanza Co. City councillor, member of the taxation commission; supports schools for poor children; meritorious for his work with correctional institutes, and for the destitute, and finally for the Oratory of St Francis de Sales with the sum of ...

### **125. To Pope Pius IX**

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 106-107.

[Roma, after 9 April 1876]

Most Holy Father,

Father John Bosco, kneeling before Your Holiness, humbly explains how four years ago he opened a shelter in Sampierdarena near Genoa for poor boys who come to the city from various towns.

It began with a small number but the very large numbers asking at any moment for bread and shelter forced him to buy more land and put up a new building.

Now there are around three hundred boys living there, of whom about thirty of the older ones have applied themselves to studies and are preparing for the ecclesiastical state; the others are doing arts and trades.

To buy the land, put up the building, provide furnishings, give bread and clothing to those living there we had to contract certain debts that we do not know how to pay. There are still more than seventy thousand francs weighing upon this poor institute or rather on this poor petitioner.

So in this exceptional need they are turning to the inexhaustible source of charity, to Your Holiness whom all proclaim to be the father of the unfortunate.

The help we are asking for depends on your supreme Authority and it is to allow the parish priests of this diocese of Genoa, to whose benefit this institute is especially directed, that on holy days of obligation they may be able to celebrate Mass *pro populo* and provide the stipend for the benefit of this orphanage.

We are limiting this to holy days of obligation, because the stipends for the ordinary Sundays and Feasts are already destined by the Ordinary of the diocese for the various needs of the young clergy.

This favour, which they say has already been granted in cases of serious need, would only be for three years.

Everything has been agreed with the Archbishop of Genoa, who will willingly present this work to his parish priests, and indeed he joins with me in making this request to Your Holiness in asking for this grace so long as it is the mind of the supreme pontiff.

With the greatest gratitude on the part of this petitioner and of the youngsters who will benefit, we assure you of our daily prayers that God may long preserve Your Holiness for the good of the Church and for the support of so many people in need. Kneeling, we all implore your holy blessing.

I have the honour etc.

[Fr John Bosco<sup>22</sup>]

<sup>22</sup> The pontiff granted the request, but for a local diocesan seminary and ecclesiastical vocations. Don Bosco managed to include his *Sons of Mary* amongst the beneficiaries.