

I. SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES

On April 3, 1874, Pope Pius IX definitively approved the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales and on the following April 13 the competent Congregation of Bishops and Regulars promulgated the relevant decree.

The torturous history of this complex process in drafting the Salesian Constitutions is already known thanks to the critical edition of all the preparatory texts for the text approved in 1874 and for the first text to be translated into Italian (1875)². Likewise known are the serious difficulties Don Bosco encountered in gaining the desired approval, due to opposition from the archbishops of Turin, Alessandro Riccardi di Netro first, but especially Lorenzo Gastaldi later, and also the many animadversiones from consultants and heads of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars who were deputed to give this approval.

The constant requests to the Pope with which Don Bosco solicited approval of the Constitutions, the moral support of bishops and cardinals who were in favour, and whom he had approached personally or by letter, failed to have the better of the legislation in force and the canonical practice of the era. These demanded reasonable time for experimentation and acceptance of the animadversiones, which Don Bosco instead felt ran contrary to the complete freedom of action which the Salesian Society, in his opinion, needed.

Here we publish 11 documents relating to Don Bosco the Founder over the period 1852-1884. We divide them into three distinct phases.

Above all the five occasions or acts preceding the first recognition of the Salesian Society in 1864: the appointment in 1852 of Don Bosco as director and head of the three oratories in Turin, by Archbishop Frasoni (no. 30), the choice in 1854 of the name 'Salesians' for some young men who were ready to undergo a "trial of the exercise of practical charity towards their neighbour" (no. 31), the foundation of the Salesian Society in 1859 (no. 32), the first request, which was left hanging, for diocesan approval in 1860, made to the archbishop in exile (no. 33) and the first religious professions in 1862 (no. 34).

² Giovanni BOSCO, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesci di Sales [1858] - 1875*. Critical texts by Francesco Motto (= ISS - Fonti, Serie prima, 1). Roma, LAS 1982.

Then follows the whole procedure for canonical approval of the Society and its Constitutions (1864-1874), spread over four requests and subsequent decrees, following the Methodus in force for approval of Constitutions of new Institutes: the 'decretum laudis' of 1864 (no. 35), the decree of diocesan approval for the Salesian Society in 1868 (no. 36), the decree of pontifical approval of the same Society in 1869 (no. 37), the decree of definitive approval of the Salesian Constitutions in 1874 (no. 38). The decrees, all in Latin, are offered in translation.

The third phase was the ten year wait for the granting of "privileges" by the Holy See in 1884 (no. 39) shortly prior to the official announcement of the appointment of Fr Rua as plenipotentiary Vicar of Don Bosco (and of Fr John Cagliero as Provicar for Latin America) published, however, a year later (no. 40).

In the arduous process of founding a true and proper religious institute like the Salesians, which of course Don Bosco had no personal experience of or specific theological and legal preparation for, very different factors played a part: events, situations, experiences, legal arrangements, reflections, intuitions, prejudices, personalities, friendships, civil and religious authorities; all elements, these, which are not so easy to identify, analyse, evaluate and deal with. For a broader presentation of these see contributions collected in an appropriate section of one of these volumes³. For an overall synthesis of the entire scene see the already indicated works by P. Stella, F. Desramaut, P. Braido, A. J. Lenti ..., which in turn have plenty of bibliographical references.

30. Appointment of Don Bosco as the Director and head of the three oratories in Turin

ASC A0201203 Copy conforms with the original⁴.

Marquis Louis Fransoni
Knight of the Supreme Order of the Annunciation,
by the Grace of God and of the Apostolic See
Archbishop of Turin

³ M. MIDALI, *Don Bosco fondatore della Famiglia salesiana...*, pp. 148-278.

⁴ This document can be considered as the first official recognition of Don Bosco's work by the diocesan authority.

To the reverend John Bosco of Castelnuovo.

Diocesan priest.

Greetings,

We congratulate you, worthy priest of God, for your zeal and charity in gathering poor boys in the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales in Valdocco, an enterprise that can never be sufficiently commended. We consider it only proper to register our complete satisfaction for this undertaking by officially appointing you, with this letter, Head Spiritual Director of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and also of the Oratories of Saint Aloysius and the Guardian Angel in order that the work undertaken under such felicitous auspices may prosper and develop in a spirit of charity, for God's true glory and for the great edification of the people. Therefore, we hereby confer upon you every faculty necessary and suitable to this holy purpose.

The original of this certificate is being forwarded to our chancery for filing, and the chancellor will be authorised to issue a copy to you.

Turin, March 31, 1852.

Signed: Filippo Ravina, Vicar General

Undersigned: Balladore, Chancellor

31. Choice of the name "Salesians"

ASC A4630102 ms. by Fr Michael Rua (no date, probably after the fact).

"On the evening of 26 January 1854 we gathered in Don Bosco's room: Don Bosco, Rocchiatti, Artiglia, Cagliero and Rua⁵; we were invited to engage, with the help of God and of St Francis de Sales, in an experiment in the practical exercise of charity toward neighbour, in order eventually to make a promise and later, if possible and appropriate, a vow of it to the Lord. From that evening the name Salesians was given to those who chose and would in the future choose to engage in such an exercise."

⁵ Only the last two became Salesians; Rocchiatti was one for a while.

32. Minutes of the foundation of the Society of St Francis De Sales

Critical ed. in RSS 27 (2008) 335.

*In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ
Amen*

1859. In the Year of Our Lord eighteen hundred and fifty nine, on the eighteenth of December in this Oratory of St. Francis of Sales at 9 in the evening, the following gathered in Father John Bosco's room: [Fr John Bosco] himself, Father Victor Alasonatti, the Seminarists Deacon Angelo Savio, Subdeacon Michael Rua, John Cagliero, John Baptist Francesia, Francis Provera, Charles Ghivarello, Joseph Lazzero, John Bonetti, John Anfossi, Louis Marcellino, Francis Cerruti, Celestine Durando, Secondo Pettiva, Anthony Rovetto, Caesar Joseph Bongiovanni, and the young man Louis Chiapale. All [present were] united in one and the same spirit with the sole purpose of preserving and promoting the spirit of true charity needed for the work of the Oratories on behalf of neglected young people at risk. For in these disastrous times of ours such young people are liable to be corrupted and plunged into godlessness and irreligion to the detriment of the whole of society.

The Gathered group then decided to form a society or congregation with the aim of promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls, especially of those most in need of instruction and education, while providing the members with mutual help toward their own sanctification. The project met with unanimous approval. Hence, after a short prayer and the invocation of the light of the Holy Spirit, the group proceeded to elect the members that would make up the central body of the Society and would lead this and future communities, if it should please God to grant increase.

The group then unanimously requested Him [Don Bosco] who has been the initiator and promoter [of the work] to accept the office of Major Superior, as is becoming in every respect. He accepted the office on condition that he should have the power to choose for the office of prefect the present writer [Alasonatti], who has held that office in the house up to the present.

The group then considered the method to be followed in electing the other members of the central governing body, and it was decided to hold the election by secret ballot. This was deemed the speediest way of setting up the council, which was to consist of a spiritual director, of a financial administrator, and of three councillors, in addition to the two already mentioned officers.

The writer [of these Minutes] was appointed secretary and [now] solemnly declares that he has faithfully discharged the task entrusted to him by general agreement. As the balloting progressed, he recorded the votes by the name of the individual concerned; and this was the result of the elections: the Seminarian, the Subdeacon Michael Rua was unanimously elected spiritual director, and he accepted [the appointment]. The same procedure was followed for the financial administrator, with the result that Deacon Angelo Savio was elected. He also accepted, pledging to discharge the duties of that office.

Three councillors remained to be elected. The balloting for the first of these resulted in the election of the Seminarian John Cagliero. The second councillor to be elected was cleric John Bonetti. The balloting for the third and last councillor resulted in a tie between seminarians Charles Ghivarello and Francis Provera. A second balloting produced a majority favouring Seminarian Ghivarello. Thus the central administrative body of our Society was definitively established.

The report of these proceedings, as summarily described herein, was read before the assembly of all the members and elected officers and was approved as true to fact. It was then unanimously resolved that this original document should be kept on file, and to guarantee its authenticity the Major Superior and the Secretary affixed their signatures.

Fr John Bosco
Victor Alasonatti, priest, Prefect

33. Request to the Archbishop of Turin, Luigi Fransoni, for Diocesan approval of the Salesian Society

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 406-407.

[Turin, 11 June 1860]

Your Grace,

We, the undersigned, motivated solely by the desire to ensure our eternal salvation, have come together in common life to more conveniently attend to those things which concern the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

To preserve unity of spirit and discipline and to practise means known to be useful for the purpose we have proposed, we wrote down some rules in the guise of a religious society which, excluding any reference to politics, aims solely at sanctifying its members especially by the exercise of charity towards our neighbour. We have already tried putting these rules into practice and have found them to be compatible with our abilities and advantageous to our souls.

But we know that the minds of individuals are too easily subject to illusion and often to error if not guided by the authority God established upon the earth, which is Holy Mother Church. It is for this reason that we humbly come before Your Grace, humbly requesting that you read the attached draft regulations, changing, subtracting, adding, correcting whatever the Lord inspires you to for his greater glory and for what is compatible with our abilities.

We recognise in you, Your Grace, the pastor who unites us to the supreme leader of the Church of Jesus Christ. Once Your Grace has spoken, we recognise the will of the Lord in your words.

While asking you to kindly accept this request of ours, kneeling before you we ask for your holy blessing, and we beg you to read the attached draft regulations signed by us,

Fr John Bosco
*a further 25 signatures follow*⁶

34. First triennial Religious Professions of sixteen Salesians

Critical ed. in RSS 29 (2010) 34.

1862. On 14 May, the confreres of the Society of St Francis de Sales were called together by the rector and most of them confirmed their belonging to the new Society by formally professing the vows. This was done in the following way: Don Bosco the rector, vested in a surplice, invited everyone to kneel and then they began reciting the *Veni Creator* which continued, verses alternating, until the end. Once the *Oremus* of the Holy Spirit was said they recited the Litany of the Blessed Virgin with its *Oremus*. Afterwards they said a *Pater, Ave* and *Gloria* to St Francis de Sales adding the invocation to him and the *Oremus*.

When this was finished, the confreres, Fr Victor Alasonatti, Fr Michael Rua, Fr Angelo Savio, Fr Joseph Rocchiatti, Fr John Cagliero, Fr John Francesia, Fr Dominic Ruffino, clerics Celestine Durando, John Anfossi, John Boggero, John Bonetti, Charles Ghivarello, Francis Cerruti, Joseph Lazzero, Francis Provera, Louis Chiapale all said the formula of the vows together and each one signed the appropriate book⁷.

35. Request to Pius IX for Pontifical approval of the Salesian Constitutions

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 37-38.

Turin, 12 February 1864

⁶ Following the founding meeting of the Salesian Society (18 December 1859), new members were admitted to the Society, amongst whom the fifteen year-old Paul Albera and the first “tertiary” Salesian, Fr John Ciattino, parish priest of Mareto (Asti). Faced with the 78 constitutional articles sent him, the archbishop had only a slight reservation on the formulation of the vow of chastity.

⁷ Four of them (Anfossi, Boggero, Chiapale and Rocchiatti) would leave the Society.

Most Holy Father,

With the glory of God and the good of souls in view as my sole purpose and desire, I humbly come before Your Holiness and kneel to petition for the approbation of the Society of St Francis de Sales⁸. Much thought has gone into this undertaking and I have long desired to bring it to completion. In 1858 I had the good fortune of being granted an audience with Your Holiness. On that occasion, I spoke to Your Holiness of the efforts exerted by heretics and unbelievers to win over the people, poor and defenceless young people in particular. Your Holiness welcomed with joy the idea of a Society that would be devoted to the care of this portion at risk of the flock of Jesus Christ. Your Holiness personally wished to lay down its basic premises, and I have done my best to follow these in drafting the present regulations.

To the best of my poor power and ability, I have tried to implement Your Holiness' counsels. But I fear that in carrying out this work I may have departed, perhaps even in essential points, from the object intended. Consequently I am asking for the correction, rather than for the approbation, of these projected constitutions.

With this end in view, Your Holiness, or whoever Your Holiness may wish to delegate for the purpose, should feel free to correct, add, and strike out to the extent that may be judged to redound to the greater glory of God. I shall not object in any way. Rather, I shall be available for any explanation that may be required or deemed useful. Even as of now, I wish to express my indebtedness to anyone who will be of assistance to me in bringing the statutes of this Society to [the desired] perfection, and in rendering them as stable and as conformable as possible to the standards of Our Holy Catholic Religion.

⁸ The "Draft Regulations" of the Salesian Society, now grown to 107 articles divided into 16 chapters and accompanied by letters of recommendation by various bishops, were sent by Don Bosco to the Pontiff along with a dossier in which he indicated the need for the superior of the Society to have full freedom in the matter of admissions to holy orders (the faculty to provide "dimissorials"). This would end up being the *punctum dolens* in the entire process of canonical approval.

These statutes, of which a copy is submitted herewith, are grouped in 16 chapters, divided into brief articles. An explanation of a number of important points is provided on a separate sheet.

The Bishops of Cuneo, Acqui, Mondovì, Susa, Casale, as well as the Capitular Vicar of this our Archdiocese, have been kind enough to write letters of commendation in support of this Society. Its members now number over seventy-five, and their only desire is to devote their life and means for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

United in prayer, we await any decision that Your Holiness, as the Supreme Head of the Church, may [see fit to] render; and we kneel to beg Your Holiness' apostolic blessing, as a token of this hoped-for and signal favour.

As for me, I deem it the highest honour to kneel before Your Holiness and to profess myself,

The Church's and your Holiness' most humble,
most indebted, most devoted Son,

Fr John Bosco

*Decretum*⁹

Pauperum adolescentulorum miserans conditionem sacerdos Ioannes Bosco e Dioecesi Taurinensi, iam ab anno 1841 aliorum Presbyterorum etiam auxilio fretus, illos in unum colligere, Catholicae fidei rudimenta edocere, et temporalibus subsidiis levare instituit. Hinc ortum habuit Pia Societas, quae a Sancto Francisco Salesio nomen habens, ex Presbyteris, Clericis et Laicis constat. Socii tria consueta simplicia vota obedientiae, paupertatis et castitatis profitentur, Superioris Generalis, qui Rector Maior nuncupatur, directioni subsunt, et praeter propriam sanctificationem, praecipuum hunc habent finem, ut quum temporalibus, tum spiritualibus adolescentium praesertim miserabilium commodis inserviant.

⁹ The decree "praised and commended" the new Congregation but it also asked for some corrections to the text of the constitutions (indicated in 13 attached *animadversiones*) in view of its future approval.

Iam inde a Piae Congregationis principio, quae ad huiusmodi consilii rationem pertinere arbitrati sunt, adeo studiose diligenterque curarunt, ut maximum ex eorum laboribus Christianae Reipublicae fructum accessisse, exploratum omnibus sit; et quamplures Antistites in proprias eos Dioeceses advocaverint, quos tamquam solertes strenuosque operarios in vinea Domini excolenda sibi adiutores adsciscerent. Verum, praenominato sacerdote [Ioanni] Bosco, qui Fundator simulque Superior Generalis Piae Societatis est, multum sibi suisque sociis deesse visum est, nisi eidem Societati Apostolica accederet confirmatio.

Commendatus idcirco a plurimis Antistitibus praefatam confirmationem a SS. Domino Nostro Pio Papa IX humillimis precibus nuperrime postulavit, et Constitutiones approbandas exhibuit. Sanctitas sua in audientia habita ab infra[scripto] Domino pro Secretario Sacrae Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium sub die prima Iulii 1864, memoratam Societatem, attentis Litteris Commendatitiis praedictorum Antistitum, uti Congregationem votorum simplicium, sub regimine Moderatoris Generalis, salva Ordinariorum jurisdictione, ad praescriptum Sacrorum Canonum et Apostolicarum Constitutionum, amplissimis verbis laudavit atque commendavit, prout praesentis Decreti tenore laudat atque commendat; dilata ad opportunius tempus Constitutionum approbatione.

Insuper Sanctitas Sua, attentis peculiaribus circumstantiis, indulget, veluti huius Decreti tenore indulget, ut hodiernus Moderator Generalis, seu Rector Major, in suo munere, quoad vixerit, permaneat; quamvis constitutum sit, ut eiusdem Piae Societatis Superior Generalis duodecim tantum annis suum officium exercent.

Datum Romae ex Secretaria Sacrae Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium hac die 23 Iulii 1864.

A. card. Quaglia, Praefectus
Stanislaus Svegliati, Pro-Secretarius

(Translation)

Moved by the pitiable condition of poor young people, Father John Bosco, a priest of the diocese of Turin, as far back as the year 1841, with the help

of other priests began to gather those [young people] together, instruct them in the rudiments of the Catholic faith, and assist them with material help. From this [ministry] was born the pious Society named after St Francis de Sales and consisting of priests, seminarians and laymen. The members profess the traditional simple vows of obedience, poverty and chastity, and are under the authority of a superior general known as Rector Major. Besides attending to their own sanctification, their main purpose is to work on behalf of poor young people especially by helping them both materially and spiritually.

From the start the members of the pious congregation have sought to cultivate with great zeal and diligence whatever they thought would contribute to the advancement of such a purpose. Because of this [commitment] their labours, as is known to all, have brought the greatest benefits to Christian society, and many bishops have asked them into their own dioceses and have taken them, like the faithful and tireless workers that they are, as associates in the care of the Lord's vineyard. However, the aforementioned Father Bosco, who is both founder and Superior General of the pious Society, as well as his associates [rightly] feel that the founding would be incomplete if the society did not receive the confirmation of the Apostolic See.

Therefore, with the commendation of many bishops, he has very recently most humbly petitioned our Holy Father, Pope Pius IX, to grant such confirmation, and [to that effect] he has presented Constitutions for approval. After giving careful attention to the above-mentioned letters of commendation from bishops, in an audience granted on July 1, 1864 to the bishop and under-secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, His Holiness bestowed the highest praise and commendation on said Society as a Congregation with simple vows [working] under the authority of a Superior General, but respecting the jurisdiction of diocesan Ordinaries in keeping with the Sacred Canons and the Apostolic Constitutions. It is therefore the intention of the present decree to praise and commend the pious Society—even while putting off the approval of the Constitutions to a more suitable time. Moreover, His Holiness, taking special circumstances into consideration, has graciously granted, as it is also the intention of this decree so to do, that the present Superior General, or Rector Major, remain in office

for life, although the constitutions provide that the Superior General of this pious Society should hold that office only for twelve years.

Given in Rome by the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on this day July 23, 1864.

A. Cardinal Quaglia, Prefect
Stanislao Svegliati, Pro-secretary

36. Petition to the Bishop of Casale Monferrato, Pietro Maria Ferrè, for Diocesan approval of the Salesian Society

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 461-462.

Turin, 19 December 1867

My Lord¹⁰,

Herewith the humble request that the members of the Society of St Francis de Sales make to Your Lordship with a view to gaining diocesan approval of their Society should you consider this to be for the greater glory of God.

I note here only that the decree, a copy of which is attached¹¹, is made on the basis of the rules printed later and following the copy I believe I sent you. According to this you may establish the guidelines for having this 'guest' in your home, where we are already temporarily living.

If need be I can visit Casale whenever.

With all my heart I wish you every blessing from Heaven, and in recommending us all to your holy prayers I profess my deep gratitude.

Your Lordship's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

¹⁰ Pietro Maria Ferrè (1815-1886) was transferred from Pavia to Casale the preceding March, thanks to an accord between the Holy See and the Italian State in which Don Bosco also played a part (cf. no. 64).

¹¹ Cf. no. 35.

*Decretum*¹²

Critical ed. in OE XVIII, 579-582.

*Nos Petrus Maria Ferrè
Dei et Apostolicae Sedis gratia
Ecclesiae Casalensis episcopus, et comes*

Sicuti praecipuum est Episcoporum munus a Vinea Domini totis viribus malas herbas eradicare, ita maxima est eis cura adhibenda ut bonae arbores, quae bonos fructus facere portendant, in eadem Vinea serantur, colantur, atque custodiantur.

Cum autem Divina providentia factum sit ut Societas a Sancto Francisco Salesio dicta tamquam nova plantatio in Nostra hac Dioecesi constitueretur, eam omni prorsus animi favore prosequi Nobis est in Consilium.

Acceptis itaque epistolis supplicatoriis una cum constitutionibus, quas Ioannes Bosco Sacerdos, eiusdem Societatis Superior Generalis, Nobis obtulit, optimum in Domino factum Nobis est visum hanc eandem Societatem rite adprobare.

Istius enim Societatis constitutiones quindecim capitulis constat; capitula autem in articulis dividuntur. Finis est Sociorum sanctificatio praecipue per exercitium christianae charitatis erga adolescentulos diebus festis derelictos; pauperiores vero quibusdam domibus receptos alere; et si bonum Ecclesiae postulaverit, Iuniorum Seminariorum curam suscipere, quemadmodum in hac Nostra Dioecesi, in pago, cui est nomen Mirabello, iam pridem est factum, ubi centum circiter et quinquaginta parvuli ad scientiam ac pietatem informantur, quemadmodum eos decet qui in sortem Domini sunt vocati. Deinde sacris praedicationibus, catechesi, bonorum librorum diffusionem, ut animarum lucrum Socii optineant, operam dabunt.

Attente igitur hisce constitutionibus perlectis, fine, ac forma memoratae Societatis consideratis, peculiari quoque benevolentia permoti erga Domum iam antea in hac Dioecesi constitutam, ut ipsa magis atque magis firmetur, eiusdemque fructus uberiores evadant;

¹² This is a request for canonical recognition and not just a simple commendation.

Habita ratione commendationem Antecessoris Nostri, qui eam erigendam curavit, et etiam atque etiam commendavit;

Adhaerentes Sacrae Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium Decreto, quo hanc Societatem, attentis litteris Commendationis plurimorum Episcoporum, Maximus Ecclesiae Pontifex amplissimis verbis laudare et commendare dignatus est uti Congregationem votorum simplicium sub regimine Superioris Generalis;

Hisce demum omnibus attente consideratis ac perpensis, Societatem a Sancto Francisco Salesio dictam commendandam atque adprobendam esse duximus, uti praesenti Decreto commendamus, et tamquam Dioecesanam Congregationem adprobamus secundum constitutiones Nobis relatas.

Insuper cum ex memorato Decreto constet Superiorem Generalem eiusdem Societatis esse rite constitutum, Nos benevolenti animo parati sumus omnes facultates et privilegia eidem concedere, quae necessaria aut opportuna videbuntur, ad maiorem Dei gloriam et ad bonum Societatis promovendum.

Veruntamen cum supralaudata Sacra Episcoporum et Regularium Congregatio absolutam Constitutionum adprobationem ad opportunius tempus distulerit, volumus omnes correctiones ac reformationes, additamenta, quae Sancta Sedes in his constitutionibus inserere iudicaverint, eadem admittantur, in constitutionibus accommodentur et observentur, sicuti et Nos admittimus et observare intendimus.

Dum autem hanc Societatem apud omnes Catholicos Episcopos commendamus, ut opere ac consilio eam firmiorem reddant eique pro viribus faveant, Supremum Ecclesiae Antistitem demissis precibus enixe obsecramus, ut absolutam Apostolicam Constitutionum adprobationem huic Societati concedere tandem dignetur.

Hanc denique probationem esse tantum Dioecesanam declaramus salva aliorum Episcoporum iurisdictione.

Datum Casali, in Aedibus Nostris Episcopalibus, die 13 ianuarii anni 1868.

† Petrus Maria, Episcopus
Can. Briatta, Cancell. Episc.

(Translation)

We, Pietro Maria Ferrè
By the grace of God and the Apostolic See
Count and Bishop of Casale

Since the main task of the bishops is to use all their strength to remove the weeds from the Lord's vineyard, they need to employ every effort to see that in it plants offering good fruit are sown, cultivated and looked after.

And since, by the intervention of Divine providence it has happened that the said Society of St Francis de Sales has been newly planted in this diocese of ours, it is precisely our will to protect it and offer it all our support.

Therefore, having received the letters of request and the Constitutions sent to us by Father John Bosco, superior general of the same Society, we consider it an excellent thing in the Lord to grant due approval to this Society.

The Constitutions of this Society consists of fifteen chapters, each with its articles. The proposed aim is the sanctification of its members to be pursued especially through the exercise of Christian charity on behalf of abandoned teenagers at weekends; to gather the poorest of them and provide them with a home; and if the good of the Church requires it, to look after young seminarians, as has already been done for some time in this diocese, in the town of *Mirabello*, where about a hundred and fifty youngsters are being educated in knowledge and piety, as is required for those called to the service of the Lord. Moreover the members dedicate themselves to preaching, teaching catechetics and spreading good books to help with the salvation of souls.

Having read these Constitutions carefully, examined the aim and form of the Society, and urged on also by a special benevolence towards the Society which has already been set up in this diocese for some time, so that it may consolidate yet further and bring about more fruitful advantage;

Bearing in mind the recommendation of our predecessor who sought to have it set up and often praised it;

In complete fidelity to the decree of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars by which the Supreme Pontiff of the Church, after considering the letters of recommendation of many bishops, deigned to praise this Society and recommend it as a Congregation of simple vows led by a superior general;

Having examined and duly pondered all these things, we consider it our duty to recommend and approve the said Society of St Francis de Sales, as we declare in this decree, and confirm that it is a diocesan Congregation which conforms to the Constitutions given us.

Moreover, as pointed out by the decree it appears that the superior general of the Society has been duly constituted, so we are kindly disposed to grant him all the faculties and privileges retained necessary or opportune, with a view to promoting the greater glory of God and the good of the Society.

Nevertheless, since the said Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars has delayed its definitive approval until an opportune time, we would like all the corrections, variations and additions that the Holy See judges to be appropriate to insert be so adopted and observed, as we intend to accept and observe them.

So while we recommend this Society to all Catholic bishops to consolidate it through their works and advice and favour it according to their possibilities, with humble prayers we beseech the supreme pastor of the Church that he may finally deign to grant definitive apostolic approval of the Constitutions of this Society.

We declare finally that this approval is only a diocesan one and respects the jurisdiction of other bishops.

Given at Casale (Monferrato), from our bishop's palace, on January 13, 1868.

† Pietro Maria, bishop
Can. Briatta, Cancell. Episc.

37. Petition to Pope Pius IX for Pontifical approval of the Salesian Society

Critical ed. in E(m) II, pp. 545-546.

*A domo sodalitia pagi Mirabelli,
quarto idus junii MDCCCLXVIII [10 June 1868]¹³*

Beatissime Pater,

Humillime ad pedes Sanctitatis Tuae provolutus supplex deprecor ut Sancti Francisci Salesii Societatem paterna ac consueta bonitate tua adspicias, eidemque, sienti optimum in Domino visum fuerit, provideas.

Abhinc quatuor annis amplissimis verbis hanc nascentem Congregationem commendare dignatus fuisti ad instar Congregationum votorum simplicium, dilata tamen ad opportunius tempus Constitutionum approbatione. Attentis peculiaribus circumstantiis generalem superiorem, ejusdemque successorem constituebas.

Temporis vero opportunitatem ad hoc opus perficiendum praesens tempus, Beatissime Pater, ex tui cordis erga nos voluntate, habere dignare. Nam per octo et viginti circiter annos existentia hujus Societatis inter tot malorum temporum perversitates; commendatio, quam saepe saepius de eadem fecisti; adprobatio Dioecisana Episcopi Casalensis; litterae supplicatoriae Antistitum Provinciae Ecclesiasticae Taurinensis, aliorumque Antistitum et praecipue Eminentissimorum Cardinalium De Angelis, Sanctitatis Tuae Camerlingi; Antonucci Archiepiscopi Anconitani; Corsi Archiepiscopi Pisani; dies denique mei, qui jamjam vertunt ad occasum; atque alia quae separatim adnotantur, Salesianae Societatis approbationem esse summopere necessariam suadere videntur.

Quod si Sanctitas Tua, Beatissime Pater, hanc supremam approbationem bonum in Domino non dijudicaverit saltem concede ut socii, qui clericalem militiam prosequuntur, sacros ordines admitti possint et valeant ab Episcopo Casalensi, licet ad aliam Dioecesim pertineant. In illa enim Dioecesi juniorum

¹³ This is the fourth request Don Bosco addresses to the Pope after the *decretum laudis* of 1864. The main problem is the question of dimissorial letters for ordinations.

seminarium et sodalitia domus jam pridem fuit instituta.

Congregatio ista, quae creatura tua dici potest, Beatissime Pater, benedictionem, soliditatem, certum quodam existendi modum, summa videlicet atque Apostolica approbatio, a Te expectat. Faxit Deus, ut nostrorum votorum compotes fiamus.

Dum autem ad hunc finem quotidie preces ad Deum enixe perfundimus, omnes ad Pedes Sanctitatis Tuae provoluti humiliter tuam sanctam et Apostolicam benedictionem expostulamus.

Mihi autem prae omnibus felicissima sors contingit ut nominatim possim me profiteri.

Beatitudinis Tuae

Humillimus, addictissimus filius et famulus

Sacerdos Joannes Bosco

(Translation)

Most Holy Father,

Kneeling humbly before Your Holiness, I beg you to turn your customary kind gaze on the Society of St Francis de Sales and meet its needs, if this seems appropriate to you.

Five years ago you deigned to comfort us with great praise of the Congregation which then came into being as a Congregation of simple vows, putting aside approval of the Constitutions till an opportune time. Bearing in mind the particular circumstances, you established the superior general and his successor.

Deign, most Holy Father, to consider in the kindness of your heart for us, this present opportunity as the most appropriate one for completing this work. In fact it has lasted for 28 years amidst the many setbacks of these sad times; you have often made recommendations in its regard; it has received diocesan approval from the bishop of Casale; petitionary letters of bishops

from the ecclesiastical province of Turin and other bishops witness in its favour, and especially from his Eminence Cardinal De Angelis, Camerlengo of Your Holiness, and from their Excellencies Antonucci, Archbishop of Ancona, and Corsi, Archbishop of Pisa. Moreover, deign to consider my advancing years now reaching their end. These and other situations indicated separately seem to indicate that approval of the Salesian Society is highly necessary.

If then, most Holy Father, you do not judge in the Lord that your definitive approval is opportune, at least grant that its members who are preparing for the priesthood can and will obtain the required admission to holy orders from the bishop of Casale even though they belong to another diocese: in that diocese in fact for some time a junior seminary and a religious house has been set up.

The Congregation, which can be considered to be your creation, most Holy Father, awaits from you, evidently [through definitive apostolic approval], blessing, stability and sure pledge of its continued existence. May it be God's will that our aspirations be heard.

While every day we raise our prayers to God for this end, kneeling humbly before Your Holiness, we implore your holy and apostolic blessing.

I have the singular grace of declaring myself Your Holiness',
most humble and affectionate son and servant,

Fr John Bosco

*Decretum*¹⁴

Printed ed: OE XXXII, 153-157.

Salus animarum, quarum curam a Principe Pastorum accepit SS. Dominus Noster Pius Papa IX, continuo Eum vigilem reddit, ut nihil inexpertum relinquat,

¹⁴The response of the Holy See to both requests had been negative. Don Bosco succeeded in getting the Salesian Society approved and obtaining a faculty for ten years for issuing dimissorials for clerics who had entered Salesian Houses before 14 years of age, only through a series of personal interventions with competent authorities over a long period in Rome at the beginning of 1869.

quo sacrosancta Catholica Fides, sine qua impossibile est placere Deo, ubique terrarum vigeat semper, atque augeatur. Quocirca singulari sua Apostolica benevolentia eos potissimum ecclesiasticos viros prosequitur, qui in Societatem adunati, iuventutis curam suscipiunt, eam spiritu intelligentiae ac pietatis imbuunt, omnique studio et contentione, uberes in vinea Domini fructus virtutis, et honestatis afferre conantur. Quum Sanctitas Sua inter huiusmodi Societates accenseri noverit Piam Ecclesiasticorum Virorum Congregationem, quae a S. Francisco Salesio nuncupata, anno 1841, a sacerdote Ioanne Bosco, Augustae Taurinorum erecta fuit, illam sub die prima Iulii 1864 Apostolicae Laudis decreto condecoravit.

Ast memoratus Fundator nuperrime Urbem petiit, atque penes Sanctam Sedem enixe postulavit, ut praefatam Congregationem, eiusque Constitutiones approbare dignaretur. Summus vero Pontifex in audientia habita ab infrascripto D. Secretario huius Sacrae Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium, sub die 19 Februarii 1869, attentis Litteris Commendatitiis plurimorum Antistitum, enunciatae Piam Congregationem, uti Societatem votorum simplicium, sub regimine Moderatoris Generalis, salva Ordinariorum iurisdictione ad formam sacrorum Canonum et Apostolicarum Constitutionum, approbavit, et confirmavit, uti praesentis Decreti tenore approbat, atque confirmat, dilata ad opportunius tempus approbatione Constitutionum, quae emendandae erunt iuxta animadversiones ex mandato Sanctitatis Suae iam alias communicatas, excepta quarta, quae modiflcanda erit prout sequitur; nempe Sanctitas Sua supplicationibus sacerdotis Ioannis Bosco benigne annuens, eidem tamquam enunciatae Piae Congregationis Moderatori Generali facultatem tribuit, ad decennium proximum tantum duraturam, alumnis, qui in eiusdem Congregationis aliquo collegio, vel convictu ante aetatem annorum quatuordecim excepti fuerunt, vel in posterum exipientur, ac nomen praefatae Piae Congregationi suo tempore dederunt vel in posterum dabunt, relaxandi Litteras Dimissoriales ad Tonsuram, et Ordines tam Minores, quam Maiores recipiendos; ita tamen ut, si a Pia Congregatione quavis de causa dimittantur, suspensi maneant ab exercitio susceptorum Ordinum, donec de sufficienti Sacro Patrimonio provisi, si in Sacris Ordinibus sint constituti, benevolum Episcopum receptorem inveniant.

Contrariis quibuscumque non obstantibus.

*Datum Romae ex Secretaria Sacrae Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium
sub die 1 Martii 1869.*

A. Card. Quaglia, Praefectus
S. Svegliati, Secretarius

(Translation)

The salvation of souls entrusted to the care of His Holiness Pope Pius IX prince of pastors, means he is constantly vigilant in order not to overlook anything to ensure that the holy Catholic faith, without which it is impossible to please God, may always flourish and spread throughout the world. Wherefore he bestows his special apostolic kindness on these men of the Church who have come together in a Society to look after youth and teach them the spirit of knowledge and piety, and who make every effort to result in abundant fruits of virtue and honesty in the Lord's vineyard. So as soon as His Holiness learned that amongst societies of this kind was the Pious Congregation of religious which took its name from St Francis de Sales, begun in Turin in 1841 by Fr John Bosco, he honoured it with the *decretum laudis* on July 1, 1864.

The above-mentioned founder soon came to Rome and insisted with the Holy See that it would approve this Congregation and its Constitutions. The supreme pontiff, then, in an audience given the undersigned bishop and secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on February 19, 1869, and noting the letters of commendation from many bishops, approved and confirmed this Congregation under the government of its superior general, respecting the jurisdiction of Ordinaries according to the form of the sacred canons and apostolic constitutions, as is the tenor of the current decree confirming and approving it. But he put off to a more opportune time the approval of the constitutions which are to be corrected following observations by order of His Holiness which have already been communicated on other occasions. The exception is for the fourth, which must be modified as follows: that is, that the Holy See in kind response to the requests of Father John Bosco, grants him, as superior general of the Pious Congregation, the faculty, valid only for the coming ten years, of issuing dimissorial letters for receipt

of the tonsure and both minor and major orders, to his own pupils who had entered a college or hostel prior to their fourteenth year, or who will enter thus in the future, and who will in time join said Pious Congregation or will do so hereafter; but in such a way that if for any motive they should leave the Pious Congregation, they will remain suspended from the orders they received, until they find some bishop who will kindly accept them.

Notwithstanding anything to the contrary.

Given in Rome by the secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on 1 March 1869.

A. Cardinal Quaglia, Prefect
S. Svegliati, Secretary

38. Petition to Pope Pius IX for Pontifical approval of the Salesian Constitutions

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 59-60.

Taurini, 1° martii 1873

Beatissime Pater,

Societas Salesiana quam tu, Beatissime Pater, opere et consilio fundasti, direxisti, consolidasti, nova beneficia a Magna Clementia Tua postulat. Etenim hujus Congregationis constitutionum existentia et praxis ferme triginta annorum; difficultates et gravia pericula superata, admirabile ejus incrementum, sunt totidem argumenta quae Dei digitum ostendunt, quemadmodum ipsi Episcopi in eorum litteris commendatitiis asserunt.

Nunc vero ad hujus operis complementum duo summopere adhuc desiderantur: Absoluta Constitutionum approbatio, et facultas dimissoriales litteras relaxandi abs-que exceptione. Haec sunt duo beneficia quae humillimis et enixis precibus exopto.

Ut autem uno oculorum ictu Congregationis status dignoscatur hic adnectuntur:

1° Brevis notitia sive collectio documentorum ad hanc congregationem spectantium.

2° Nonnulla exemplaria constitutionum de ultima editione.

3° Declarationes supra aliquas parvi momenti mutationes, quas experientia ad processum et soliditatem Congregationis peritiles ostendit.

Caetera, quae desunt, addere dignetur bonitas et clementia Tua.

Dum autem hoc magnum negotium nostrum in manus Domini commendamus, omnes salesianae Congregationis socii, qui omnes filios tuos esse gloriantur, corde et animo Deum deprecamur, ut, quidquid in oculis Domini melius sit, ipse perficiat, tibi que suggerat.

Interim ad Tuae Sanctitatis pedes provolutus, caeteris felicior suppliciter [me] subscribo

Humillimus filius

*Joannes Bosco sacerdos
Sup. Gen.*

(Translation)

Turin, 1 March 1873

Most Holy Father,

The Salesian Society that you, most Holy Father, through your efforts and counsel have founded, directed and consolidated, implores new favours of your Holiness; the existence and practice of the Constitutions of this Society for almost thirty years, the difficulties and grave risks that have been overcome, and its marvellous growth are likewise proof that we can see the hand of God at work, as the bishops also state in their commendations.

Now, then, to complete the work, we desire two things above all: the definitive approval of the Constitutions and the full faculty to issue dimissorials¹⁵.

These are the two favours I humbly and insistently implore.

¹⁵ The faculty was valid only for those clerics accepted into a Salesian house prior to their 14th year.

So you can quickly see the state of the Congregation the following attachments are included:

- 1) Brief information or collection of documents relating to this Congregation.
- 2) Various copies of the most recent edition of the Constitutions.
- 3) Some statements concerning a number of small variations that experience has shown to be very useful in developing and consolidating the Congregation.

Out of your goodness and kindness you may add anything that is lacking.

And while we trustfully place this grand affair into the Lord's hands, all the members of the Congregation glory in being your sons, and cordially and intimately pray to God that he himself will complete and suggest to you what is best in his eyes.

Meanwhile, kneeling before Your Holiness, I am more happy than anyone else to call myself,

Your most humble son,

Fr John Bosco
Superior General

*Decretum*¹⁶

Sanctissimus Dominus Noster Pius Papa Nonus, in Audientia habita ab infrascripto D. Secretario S. Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium, sub die 3 Aprilis 1874, Feria VI in Parasceve, attentis Literis Commendatitiis Antistitum Locorum, in quibus Piae Societatis Presbyterorum a S. Francisco

¹⁶ The long interval of time that intervened between the request on 1 March 1873 and the pontifical approval of the Constitutions (13 April 1874) was due to objections by Archbishop Gastaldi, received by heads at the Vatican, to certain articles (dimissorials, novitiate, studies ...). The definitive approval of the Constitutions was given only after corrections (not only formal ones) required by the "Particular Congregation" of cardinals tasked with examining the constitutional text.

Salesio nuncupatae Domus extant, uberibusque fructibus quos ipsa in Vinea Domini protulit, suprascriptas Constitutiones, prout in hoc exemplari continentur, cuius Autographum in Archivio huius S. Congregationis asservatur, approbavit et confirmavit, prout praesentis Decreti tenore, approbat atque confirmat, salva Ordinariorum iurisdictione, ad praescriptum Sacrorum Canonum, et Apostolicarum Constitutionum.

Datum Romae ex Secretaria memoratae S. Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium die 13 Aprilis 1874.

A. card. Bizzarri Praefectus

S. Archiep. Seleucien. Secret.

(Translation)

His Holiness Pope Pius IX, in an audience granted the undersigned bishop and secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on April 3, 1874, Good Friday, having carefully noted the letters of commendation by the bishops of places where there are houses of the Pious Society of priests of St Francis de Sales and the abundant fruits produced in the Lord's vineyard; approved and confirmed the Constitutions as contained in this sample and whose original is kept in the archives of the Sacred Congregation. This is the tenor of this decree of approval and confirmation, while respecting the jurisdiction of the Ordinaries, according to the prescriptions of the sacred canons and apostolic constitution.

Given in Rome by the secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on April 13, 1874.

A. Card. Bizzarri prefect

S. Archbishop of Seleucia secretary

39. Last request, to Pope Leo XIII to grant certain “Privileges” to the Salesian Society

Archivio Congregazione Religiosi e Istituti Secolari 18130/12, original by another but with an authentic signature. (cf. MB XVII, 714, 720).

Taurini, die 1° aprilis 1884

*[Romae, die 24 maii 1884]*¹⁷

*Beatissime Pater*¹⁸,

Jam undecimus annus agitur ex quo, Beatissime Pater, humilis Societas ex S. Francisco Salesio dicta absolutam et specificam constitutionum adprobationem consecuta est. Aliqua privilegia omnimode necessaria a Supremo Ecclesiae Antistite tunc elargita fuerunt. Hoc temporis decursu socii Salesiani toti in eo fuerunt ut eorum constitutiones ad praxim traducerent, novitatum, studia perficerent, pietatis exercitia inter socios eorumque alumnos promoverent et ita societatis finem consequerentur, qui gloria Dei lucrumque animarum semper fuit. Post absolutam adprobationem, adiuvante Deo, factum est ut haec humilis societas, vere pusillus grex, mirum in modum citissime augetur et in diversas Italiae partes, in Galliam, in Hispaniam, in Americam Meridionalem usque ad Indos et ad Patagones se se extendit.

Cum haec Congregatio suam adprobationem est consecuta, sexdecim domos dumtaxat habebat in quibus septem millia circiter adolescentuli Christianam educationem habebant; socii tercentum adnumerabantur.

Nunc vero Domus sive familiae alumnorum sunt centum quinquaginta: alumni ultra centum milia: religiosi quatuor centum supra mille.

Inter tot alumnos et socios, inter tot domus unam ab aliis tam dissitam magna difficultas exorta est ob deficientiam privilegiorum, quibus coetera Ecclesiastica instituta gaudere solent.

Sed cum non amplius privilegiorum communicatio concedi assoleat, aliqua

¹⁷ Numerous constantly updated manuscripts of the request are preserved.

¹⁸ To obtain the desired “privileges” from the Holy See, similar to those given to other religious families, Don Bosco had to struggle for ten years. The positive outcome came after the appointment of a new Archbishop of Turin.

praecipua et pernecessaria privilegia aliis Congregationibus concessa in pagella hic adnexa descripta, et pro humili Societate nostra nunc fidenter postulo.

Per huiusmodi concessionem, Beatissime Pater, pia Salesiana Societas tutam et cognitam viam habet quam sequatur; facillime Ordinariis locorum innotescent privilegia quibus fruatur praecipue in Missionibus suscipiendis et domibus in externis regionibus adaperiendis.

Ob tantum beneficium Salesiani omnes grato animo Deo et tibi quotidie laudem dicent; unusquisque pro virili parte ad vineam Domini excolendam operam dabit.

Ego vero videns solidatum opus, quod Sancta Dei Ecclesia mihi concredidit, cum gaudio cantabo: Nunc dimittis servum tuum Domine.

Humillimus filius

Joannes Bosco sacerdos

(Translation)

Most Holy Father,

Eleven years ago the humble Society under the title of St Francis de Sales obtained definitive and specific approval of its Constitutions: certain privileges that were absolutely necessary were then bestowed by the supreme pastor of the Church. Over this period of time the Salesian members have dedicated themselves entirely to putting their Constitutions into practice, to making their novitiate and to completing their studies; promoting the practices of piety amongst their members and the pupils and thus pursue the purpose of the Society which was always the glory of God and to win over souls. After its definitive approval, and with God's help, this humble Society, a truly small flock, very rapidly and prodigiously spread to various parts of Italy, into France, Spain, Southern America to the natives and to Patagonia.

When the Congregation gained approval it had only sixteen institutes where around seven thousand teenagers received Christian education: it had three hundred members. Now instead there are one hundred and sixty six

religious houses with pupils; day students and boarders combined are around a hundred and fifty thousand; there are one thousand four hundred religious.

With so many members and pupils, with so many houses so far from one another, great difficulties arise for want of the privileges which are usually given to other ecclesiastical institutes.

But now, although it may not be usual to grant the privileges, some of them important and very necessary, that are granted to other congregations as indicated on the attached sheet, I am also asking them for our humble Congregation.

Thanks to this concession, most Holy Father, the Salesian Society will have a known and secure path to follow; it will be much easier for local Ordinaries to know the privileges which can be of special advantage in benefiting mission centres and opening institutes in foreign regions.

All the Salesians will thank God for this great gift and will give praise to you every day; Each will try to put all his effort into working in the Lord's vineyard. And I, seeing the work that the holy Church of God has consolidated, will joyfully sing: *Now, Lord, let your servant go in peace.*

Your most humble son,

Father John Bosco

Decretum

SS. D. No. Leo PP. XIII in audientia habita ab infrascripto D. Secretorio S. Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium die 13 Junii 1884 Sacerdotem Joannem Bosco fundatorem et Superiorem Generalem Piae Societatis Presbyterorum a S. Francisco Salesio nuncupatae illiusque Socios specialibus favoribus et gratiis prosequens, omnia et singula Indulta, Privilegia, Exemptiones et Facultates Congregationi SS. Redemptoris concessa, iisdem Socios eorumque Ecclesiis, Capellis et Domibus benigne communicare, extendere atque in perpetuum elargiri dignatus est, cum omnibus Clausulis et Decretis necessarii et opportuni. Ceterum eadem Sanctitas Sua mandavit declarari, prout praesentis Decreti tenore

declaratur, Privilegia, Facultates, Gratias Spirituales sive ad tempus sive oretenus concessa, omnino revocata, abolita et suppressa esse. Contrariis quibuscumque non obstantibus. –

Datum Romae ex Secretaria S. Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium hac die 28 junii 1884.

I. Card. Ferrieri, *Praef.*

I. Masotti, *Secretarius*

(Translation)

His Holiness, Pope Leo XIII, in an audience granted the undersigned bishop and secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on 16 June 1884, desiring to accompany with special favours and graces, Father John Bosco, founder and superior general of the Pious Society of priests known as St Francis de Sales and its members, has kindly deigned to communicate and bestow *in perpetuum* all and each of the indults, privileges, exemptions and faculties granted to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, to their churches, chapels and houses [religious], with all the clauses and decrees that are necessary and opportune. Moreover His Holiness has ordered us to declare, conforming to the tenor of this decree, that all privileges, faculties and spiritual faculties granted orally or temporarily are completely revoked, abolished and suppressed.

No norm or obstacle may run contrary what has been established.

Given in Rome, by the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and of Religious, today June 28, 1884.

I. *Cardinal* Ferrieri, *Prefect*

I. Masotti, *Secretary*

40. Official communication to Salesians concerning the appointment of Fr Michael Rua as Plenipotentiary Vicar and of Fr John Cagliero as Pro-Vicar for Latin America

ASC A1750502, printed copy with original signature of Don Bosco; ed. in E IV, pp. 347-349.

Turin, 8 December 1885

My dearest sons in Jesus Christ,

Troubled by various problems, and feeling that my strength is diminishing by the day, I have already for some time considered the need to have relief and support in fulfilling the mission the Divine Providence has entrusted to me.

I saw the need for someone who could help me effectively in carrying out my tasks and who could also be placed in charge of everything that is essential for the smooth running of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales.

For this purpose, therefore, I have thought of choosing a vicar to represent me and be another me, a vicar who would have this special task so that the traditions we have thus far observed are kept intact and will be preserved after me by those who follow us. I am speaking of traditions that are the practical norms for understanding, explaining and faithfully practising the rules that were definitively approved by the holy Church and that make up the spirit and life of our Pious Society. So, it is my keen desire that when it comes time for me to pass into eternal life, nothing will disturb or change what is ours.

Some time ago, while I was meditating on this need, the supreme pontiff wrote to me of his own accord through his Grace Archbishop Domenico Jacobini asking me who it seemed to me would be able to take my place in the supreme direction of the Pious Salesian Society.

Thanking the Holy Father for his benevolence, I replied, proposing Fr Michael Rua as my vicar, because even chronologically he is one of the first members of the Society, and because for many years he has already to a great extent carried out this role and because, in the end, this appointment would find great acceptance from amongst all the confreres. A few weeks ago, the

Holy Father, through our beloved Archbishop, deigned to indicate to me that this proposal was most acceptable to him.

Therefore, my dearest sons, after having prayed over a long period to the giver of all good things, after having called on the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit and the special protection of Our Lady Help of Christians and your patron St Francis de Sales, and applying the faculty granted me by the supreme pastor of the Church, I appoint Fr Michael Rua as my Vicar General, currently the Prefect of our Pious Society, and everything that I can do he can do too with full powers in all public and private matters which refer to this Society and all the personnel who make it up.

The new Vicar, I am certain, in dealing with important matters will always gratefully accept the kind advice and counsel that will be given him.

To you then my dearest sons, I recommend that you give him the complete obedience that you have always professed for the one you call father and who loves you with fatherly love - the obedience that has up until now and will always be, I hope, my consolation.

As a consequence then of this choice I also note that, using the faculties given me by the Rule, I appoint Fr Celestine Durando as Prefect of the Pious Salesian Society, exonerating him from the office of School Councillor which he has occupied up until now, while in his place and in the office of School Councillor for our Pious Society I choose and appoint Fr Francis Cerruti, currently the Provincial of Liguria Province and Rector of the college at Alassio. He of course will remain Provincial until such time as I make new arrangements.

With regard to our missions in South America I appoint Bishop John Cagliero as my Pro-vicar with full authority over all personnel and all the houses and Provinces in those parts¹⁹.

On this same occasion I believe you will be happy if I share with you that my health has improved somewhat, and I attribute this to the charitable

¹⁹ John Cagliero (1838-1926), native of Castelnuovo, head of the first missionary expedition (1875), was consecrated bishop just a year before (December 7, 1884). He would be made a cardinal in 1915.

prayers that I know you have raised up to God for me. I truly thank you from my heart, and I assure you that with the little strength and few days that the merciful God will still deign to grant me, I intend to dedicate myself totally to the advantage of our humble Congregation and to the benefit of our souls.

May the Lord bless the new vicar, the other superiors and all our confreres, and may he see that all are one heart and one soul in promoting the glory of our Heavenly Father and the sanctification of our souls.

Most affectionately in Jesus,

Fr John Bosco

Note 1. The Rectors of individual houses will read this letter at the first conference they hold for our beloved confreres.

Note 2. I recall that on other occasions I have already recommended, that in addressing letters and in all public and private writings not dealing with our relationships with ecclesiastical authorities, we never use the titles of Congregation, but only civil titles such as *director*, *doctor*, *professor*, *master*, *prefect* etc. So missionaries writing from America to Europe to a confrere should not use the title father, but *priest* or *Mr*.