

II. INDICATORS TO THE HOLY SEE FOR THE CHOICE OF NEW BISHOPS FOR VACANT SEES (1867-1877)

One of the most difficult conflicts to resolve in relationships between the Holy See and the new Kingdom of Italy was that of the dozens of Episcopal sees left vacant for political reasons. Both parties were aware of the seriousness of the situation, but attempts to exit from the situation were shipwrecked by the persistent serious friction brought about by proclaiming a Kingdom which comprised territories taken from the Papal States (1861). Only in 1865-1867 did a process of détente coming into place, where, having overcome mutual resistance, the Holy See succeeded in appointing many bishops with the agreement of authorities of the Kingdom.

Don Bosco, involved in these complex diplomatic negotiations as unofficial representative of the Holy See in order to make contacts, lobby, refer people, seek mediation, had done his part, especially for the dozens of vacant Episcopal sees in Piedmont¹⁹. In 1865 he intervened to set up what would be called the Vegezzi mission which ended without result; in 1866-1867 he was contacted by mediator Tonello at the invitation of the President of the Council, Ricasoli and during these contacts he proposed candidates acceptable to both parties.

In the years that followed he continued to communicate with the Cardinal Secretary of State telling him that the people and civil authorities were happy with the appointments, and to express his own views, hopes and concerns regarding some of them, suggesting candidates for appointment which he knew of, and who stood out for piety, doctrine, prudence and being in tune with the Holy See.

As is clear, Don Bosco's voice was well accepted by both parties, but many other voices were raised for and against the policy of understanding, and so many positive and negative elements came into play wanting to advance or slow down negotiations taking place. So many others expressed different opinions on the new pontifical appointments and transfers of certain prelates. It was logical then that some candidates Don Bosco suggested were then appointed bishops while others were not.

¹⁹ The whole scene is presented in Francesco MOTTO, *L'azione mediatrice di don Bosco nella questione delle sedi vescovili vacanti in Italia.* (= Piccola Biblioteca dell'ISS, 8). Roma, LAS 1988.

We are publishing six letters here on these events: five sent to the Cardinal Secretary of State Giacomo Antonelli and one, much later (1877), to his successor, Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni. Don Bosco then got involved also in appointment of bishops in Argentina, including Salesian missionary Fr John Cagliero.

64. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli

Critical ed. in E(m) I, pp. 349-350.

Turin, 5 April 1867

Your Eminence,

I am taking advantage of private individuals so I can write with the liberty I would not have if using the postal service. With regard to the Fossano deputation you will find out everything from Canons Viara and Rossi, excellent priests who have been sent to plead for appointment of their bishop.

Of those who were appointed amongst us, Gastaldi in Saluzzo, Galletti in Alba, Savio in Asti there is universal acceptance, and even those who were hostile to ecclesiastical authority have good hopes for them. We could hope for the same for Colli in Alessandria, Calabiana in Milan, Ferrè in Casale.

One thing that would be very good to take into consideration is the position of Mons. Balma. This worthy prelate is deservedly thought of as a saint. This is due to his public and private behaviour; for twenty years he worked for vacant dioceses sparing no efforts—trips or the work entailed by his ministry.

But the fact that he was not considered for any appointment has had a very bad effect on everyone, and there are a thousand conjectures as to why. So much so that he is in very straitened circumstances, and lives off the charity of kind people who help him with funds.

Take this into consideration and see what can be done for someone who is so publicly regarded for his piety, learning, prudence and zeal.

Amongst those with a reputation for virtue and who would be well acceptable to all authorities are: Salvay, Vicar General at Alba, Garga, Vicar

General at Novara, Bottino, canon and priest of the Metropolitan in Turin; Nasi, also a canon there, but especially deserving of consideration is Father Marengo who is professor of theology in the seminary in Turin, and who has dedicated so much of his sacred ministry to speaking and writing. These people are very devoted to the Holy See.

Perhaps you will judge this letter as sounding over-confident; but you are kind enough to welcome me as a father and I feel I can speak with the words and heart of a son; so please forbear with me.

I renew my request to pray for our poor Congregation of St Francis de Sales; we continue to pray that you may be preserved and for the perseverance of His Holiness. May God hear our prayer.

Filled with respect and with the most heartfelt gratitude it is my honour to consider myself,

Your Eminence's most humble and indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

65. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 369-371.

[Rome, 12 September 1871]

[Your Eminence],

Having pondered all aspects of the matter before the Lord and offered special prayers:

1. Giovanni Battista Bottino. He is a doctor in theology, a canon of the cathedral [in Turin] and a preacher of renown.

2. Celestino Fissore. He is a canon of the *same* [cathedral]. He is a doctor in theology and canon law, and a jurist of renown. He has been for many years vicar general of the diocese of Turin.

3. Giorgio Oreglia. He is a canon, provost and Vicar General and capitular of the diocese of Fossano.

All three men are well to do.

Canon Luigi Nasi is worthy in every respect. But he is in very poor health.

Both Canon [Stanislao] Gazzelli [di Rossana] and Canon [Carlo] Morozzo [della Rocca] can be recommended and are moreover readily acceptable to the king. But in the present circumstances they are not as desirable as the first three above.

Recommendable but less appropriate would be the nomination of Provost Gaeti, vicar forane of Castel Ceriolo. He is completely acceptable to the king to whom he is very close, but his theological education is inadequate.

Mons. Andrea Scotton, a canon of Bassano Veneto. He preached in the cathedral [of Turin] and gave evidence of saintliness and great learning. He comes recommended by numerous works and supporting reports. He is well to do, in great health and courageous to a fault.

Canon [Anacleto Pietro] Siboni, Vicar General and capitular of Albenga, comes highly recommended from many quarters.

Bishop [Lorenzo] Gastaldi of Saluzzo has support among the best of the clergy on account of his learning and piety. They would like him transferred to Turin. As a doctor in theology on the faculty of the University of Turin he would be ideally placed to keep theological studies at the University on the right track.

[Fr John Bosco]

66. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli

Critical Ed. in E(m) III, pp. 418-419.

[Turin, 4 April 1872]

[Your Eminence],

Amongst the clergy with a reputation for zeal, piety, learning, prudence, devotion to the Holy See and who work hard in their priestly ministry, and

who could be listed as candidates for vacant diocese, for example Aosta and Bobbio it seems we could list:

– Canon Duc currently Vicar General and capitular at the cathedral in Aosta.

– Provost Silvestro Tea, Rector at the main parish in Ivrea, the parish of san Salvatore: a learned man.

– Canon Salvaj who has been Vicar General at Alba for many years

[Fr John Bosco]

67. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 53-54.

[Turin], 17 February 1873

Your Eminence,

God has called the Bishop of Biella to himself and some tell me also the Bishop of Tortona.

I do not intend to make proposals, just some indications. From what one hears said publicly, suitable bishops for today's needs could be:

1. Canon Giorgio Origlia Canon, Provost and Vicar General at Fossano.
2. Baron Luigi Nasi Canon at the cathedral in Turin. He is of a noble but solidly Catholic family.
3. Theologian Tea Silvestro, rector and parish priest in Ivrea.

They are all pious, learned, prudent and working well in their sacred ministry.

I hope I can greet you in person in a few day's time, meanwhile I have the honour of being

Your Eminence's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

68. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 118-119.

[Turin], 10 June 1873

Your Eminence,

God has called to himself a zealous pastor, a pillar of the sub-alpine Church in the death of the Bishop of Mondovì, Bishop Ghilardi.

It seems that a good successor could be Canon Stanislao Eula, parish priest of the cathedral in that city. He is generally known as a pious, learned, prudent person, especially erudite in Canon Law and theology. He preaches often and is very devoted to the Holy See.

This is only an indication. You do as God inspires you to do.

I am always happy to give indication of my deep veneration and assure you that we pray for you. I am,

Your Eminence's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

69. To Secretary of State, Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 396-397.

Turin, 27 June 1877

Your Eminence,

The Bishop of Albenga, Bishop Siboni has died. May I be bold enough to remind Your Eminence of those whom I indicated to His Eminence Cardinal Antonelli as candidates, with advice from the Archbishop of Genoa.

Perhaps the Vicar Della Valle who knows the diocese very well, could be best; but I leave it all in Your Eminence's hands, asking God to enlighten you in the choice of a Pastor who can meet the need.

Please accept the poor tribute of our prayers while I have the honour of being

Your Eminence's most humble servant

Fr John Bosco

Fr Antonio Campanella, doctor, professor of elocution, prior, parish priest of Carmine, Genoa. Mitred Abbot, Agostino Sanguinet, parish priest of the Maria del Rimedio College, Genoa. Fr Andrea Scotton, renowned preacher, prelate of His Holiness, well-known writer, much loved and known in the diocese of Albenga although he ordinarily resides in Bassano, Veneto.