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The
MAGNA CARTA
of the
Salesian Educational System

Volume 1

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASC *Archivio Salesiano Centrale*

E *Epistolario di san Giovanni Bosco*, a cura di Eugenio Ceria, I-IV volumes, Torino, SEI 1955, 1956, 1958, 1959.

E (m) *G. Bosco, Epistolario. Introduzione, testi critici e note*, a cura di Francesco Motto, 5 vol. (1835-1877), Roma, LAS 1991, 1996, 1999, 2003, 2013.

FdB *ASC, Fondo don Bosco. Microschedatura e descrizione*, Roma 1980.

MB *Memorie Biografiche di Don (del beato... di San) Giovanni Bosco*, XIX vol., (I-IX: G.B. Lemoyne; X, A. Amadei; XI-XIX: E. Ceria) + 1 vol. Indice Analitico (E. Foglio), Torino, SEI 1998-1939 (Indice, 1949).

EMB *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, XIX vol., New Rochelle, New York, Salesiana Publishers, Inc. 1965-2003.

ms manuscript

OE *G. Bosco, Opere edite*, prima serie: *Libri e opuscoli* (ristampa anastatica), XXXVII vol.; seconda serie: *Contributi su giornali e periodici*, I vol., Roma, LAS 1982 e seqq.

RSS *Ricerche storiche Salesiane*. Revista semestrale di storia religiosa e civile, Roma, LAS 1982-2012

[] the numbers between these brackets refer to the pages in the Italian *Sussidio* or Auxiliary Booklet

Preface

“Do you know what this poor old man... wants from you? Nothing else than, due allowances being made, we should go back to the happy days of the Oratory of old” *

The text now available offers the English translation of the first volume of a Dutch study consisting of two volumes. It is entitled: *The Magna Carta of the Salesian Educational System*.

This first volume contains 4 chapters:

1. The first chapter (1) should acquaint readers with certain circumstances in the extensive and multifaceted activities in the Valdocco Oratory in the years 1880-1884.
2. The second chapter (2) offers an insight into how the first section of the extended or 'combined version' (manuscript *D*) may have been constructed. This section of the larger chapter, a sort of circular letter, was meant for the Salesians in Valdocco.**
3. The longer third chapter (3) consists of the discussion of the content of the “circular letter” (manuscripts *C* and *D*).
4. The short fourth chapter (4) draws attention to the main pedagogical and pastoral components.

The detailed discussion of the third chapter provides indications that demonstrate that Fr G.B. Lemoyne had been working on the final manuscript *D* at different stages and it also reveals a quite personal emphasis.

In the second volume I shall discuss the external and internal elements showing his authorship even more clearly. That is the reason why I considered it quite useful each time to show how closely Fr Lemoyne links up with earlier statements and has included convictions, pieces of advice and instructions from Don Bosco himself.*** Moreover, I have tried to indicate how they also link up with statements taken from A.M. Teppa and F. Aporti.

At the same time I have shown that in the first part of the extended or combined version, Fr Lemoyne has copied parts of the same letter that was sent to the boys on 10 May 1884. This is, amongst others, the case for the Introduction and the part which in Dutch is called “Tussenstuk” and in English “Insertion”.

As far as the translation itself is concerned, footnotes often refer to *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, the American translation of the *Memorie biografiche*. For practical reasons the translator has not always been possible to copy the American translation. That is the reason why one will find the translator's personal translation in more than one instance.

I realize that an English translation of the Dutch synoptic view of the above-mentioned manuscripts would facilitate the reading of the third chapter of this volume. It has not been able to be provided as yet. That is why for the moment we have added an Italian synoptic presentation drawn up by Jos Biesmans, S.D.B., though the explanatory introduction to that is in English.

For the English translation as a whole I very much appreciate the work of Jean-Marie Schepens, past teacher at Don Bosco College in Zwijnaarde (Ghent, Belgium). He worked on the translation with unflagging enthusiasm and indefatigable effort. My sincere thanks include also the valuable contributions of Gaston De Neve, S.D.B. and Julian Fox S.D.B., who revised the text and prepared it for publication, respectively.

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Oud-Heverlee,
December 2012

Belgium

* *Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of St Francis de Sales*, Rome, 1997, p. 263. The phrase "fatte le debite proporzioni" has not been translated in EMB XVII, p. 93.

** As for the names "long/combined version" and manuscripts *A, B, C, D, K* see BRAIDO, P., *La lettera di don Bosco da Roma del 10 Maggio 1884*, Rome, LAS, 1984, pp. 14-27.

*** I have also tried to do this in an article written for the publication of the Dutch translation of the text "*Dei castighi da infliggersi nelle Case Salesiane*" ("*The Use of Punishments in Salesian Houses*" in EMB XVI, pp. 368-376). This article was published in "*Over de grens*, Don Boscovormingscentrum, Oud-Heverlee, 2005, pp. 53-86. Also in this case the text was not written by Don Bosco, but by Fr G.B. Francesca. See PRELLEZO, J.M., "*Dei castighi*" (1883): *puntualizzazioni sull'autore e sulle fonti redazionali dello scritto*, RSS, N. 2 (52), 2008, pp. 287-307.

Introduction

The letter of May 10 1884 addressed to the boys in Valdocco, presented and commented on in no. 16 of the DON BOSCO STUDIES, linked up with a certain tradition in Don Bosco's pastoral and pedagogical activities. Don Bosco had occasionally written letters to be read out to young people from the beginning of the sixties until the end of the seventies of the 19th century. He dispatched similar letters to Valdocco, Mirabello, Lanzo, Borgo San Martino, Valsalice and also to San Nicolas and Villa Colón, the houses in Argentina, after missionaries had been sent to South America in 1875. A suitable time to read out such a letter was no doubt after the boys' evening prayer during the good night, which had become a tradition by then. Teachers, assistants and superiors also took part in the evening prayer. That is probably why all of them are sometimes mentioned in the address.¹ So the letters turned out to be addressed to all those in residence.

After Rome had approved of Don Bosco's Society on March 1, 1869, Don Bosco fully realised that the young members of the incipient Congregation needed formation. At the same time he already had an idea how this need could be provided for. This appears in a letter of 15 August 1869, a few months after the memorable approval:

"Much more must be said on these points, and this will be done through other circulars and conferences and especially during the forthcoming spiritual retreat at Trofarello."²

He did not announce this retreat so explicitly without a purpose. The notes of that retreat clearly show how he did his level best there.³ However the letters, which can be called circulars, were long in coming. The first five or perhaps six arrived only after long intervals between June 1873 and December 1874. Letters were even less frequent in the longer period between January 1875 and November 1880. For both periods the letters were short, matter of fact and quite concrete, inspired and written by a practical mind. He addressed his letters in the first place to the rectors. They were asked to read them out and make the contents the subjects of their conferences.⁴

These letters find their origin in the need for guidance at the beginnings and development of a religious congregation. It explains why the subjects he dealt with are of a religious nature. In this way Don Bosco gave a number of directives in the 1873 and 1874 circulars concerning frugality, religious discipline, abiding strictly by the Constitutions,

¹E(m), vol. quarto, p. 194: "Caro mio D. Rua e cari tutti voi che abitate nell'Oratorio di Valdocco" ("Dear Fr Rua and all of you who live in the Oratory of Valdocco"); E III, p. 5: "Miei cari amici Direttore, Maestri, Professori, Allievi" ("My dear friends director, masters, teachers, pupils").

These letters were discussed in BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens van Valdocco (10 mei 1884)*, Sint-Pieters-Woluwe, 2007, pp. 27-36.

²E (m), vol. terzo, p. 126. MB IX, 689; EMB IX, 325.

³MB IX, pp. 985-999. This appendix was not translated into English.

⁴That occurred quite explicitly at the end of a letter in Latin after the Second General Chapter.(E III, pp. 617-618)

the vow of chastity, praying for the coming definite approval of the Constitutions, the organisation of theological studies.⁵ In a later letter Don Bosco asked his readers to circulate an outline of the life of a deceased member of the Congregation and pray for the confrere who had passed away. After both the First and the Second General Chapters (1877 and 1880) he thought it necessary to communicate the main subjects in a letter in Latin before the printed publication of the Chapters' conclusions. So all people involved could start working on the subjects right away.

Perhaps Don Bosco realised at times that he did not use or had not used the full potential of that excellent means of communication and education. When at the start of January 1884 he was thankful to have received a load of New Year's greetings, he decided to show his gratitude by means of a general letter. At the end of it he wrote a thinly veiled confession. At the same time he promised: "I think there is yet another thing I should say. Our confreres write to me from everywhere and I would be delighted to give each an individual answer. But since that is not possible, I shall try to send out these circular letters more frequently, for while they enable me to bring my heart to you all, they also serve as a guide to those who, for good and holy reasons, live away from us and are unable to listen to the living voice of their father, who loves them so dearly in Jesus Christ."⁶

In the letter itself, perseverance in the mission and faithfulness to the Constitutions are the main themes. His good resolution never led to any result for several reasons, mainly perhaps as a consequence of his steadily deteriorating health.

It does not mean that pastoral counselling and education were neglected in the circulars. In the circular on discipline (15 November 1873) Don Bosco briefly defined the tasks of the rector, prefect, catechist, teachers, assistants and in fact "all involved". According to his instructions the catechist should "prepare the pupils in brief appropriate talks to celebrate that feast with maximum ceremony and dignity." The teachers "should love all pupils equally, encouraging all, despising none. Let them feel for the less gifted, take special pains with them, drill them often." The assistants should "insist, recommend, and spare no efforts to prevent foul conversation." Furthermore: "All are warmly urged to keep the rector informed of anything that may help to promote good and prevent sin."⁷

It happened rather seldom, but it is worth coming back to it in this study or examining it further.

After the brief introduction to this limited series of letters it strikes us as quite surprising to learn how precisely in 1883 and 1884 two extended texts were composed with purely pedagogical and pastoral content.⁸ The first one is said to be intended as a cir-

⁵E (m), vol. quarto, pp. 113-115; 178-180; 215-217; 255-256; 358-359. MB X, pp. 1099-1110; EMB X, p. 490. He wants to involve the youngsters in the letter only requesting intense prayer for the approval of the Constitutions. We read in a NB: "The director of each house will read out and explain this letter to the confreres. He will also communicate this to the pupils in ways and words which are most fitting for this (E (m), vol. quarto, p. 256. MB X, p.1108. The translation of this circular was omitted in EMB X).

⁶E IV, pp. 248-250. MB XVII, p. 17; EMB XVII, p.3.

⁷E (m), vol. quarto, pp. 178-180. MB X, pp.1102-1103; EMB X, pp. 493-494.

⁸In November 1884 and in March 1885 two less extended circulars appeared on the topics of reading and

cular, *The Preventive System, Concerning the Punishments to Be Inflicted in Salesian Houses*. It is dated 29 January 1883. The second one is the so-called “extended version of the letter from Rome of 10 May 1884”, which in Salesian circles is still the only letter really known by that name as sent from Rome.

It is remarkable that neither text was written by Don Bosco himself nor had they been intentionally circulated, let alone printed.⁹ Not until after World War I were both shown at large, the combined version of the letter from Rome in 1920 and the so-called circular on punishments in 1935. Contrary to the other Don Bosco circulars, it is a common feature of both that they are extended and structured in a moderate to very clear manner. They share another common characteristic in that they originated in the final years of Don Bosco’s lifetime with the same pedagogical and pastoral background.

Guided by the latter statement I shall try to outline that background in a first chapter of this study. I shall devote two longer chapters, the third and fifth, to the results of the examination of the important themes or motives appearing in the definitive edition of the text known as “the Letter of 10 May 1884”. Both are lengthy because the idea is worked out as a letter consisting of two connected units. One unit contains a message meant exclusively for the Salesians in Valdocco. The other unit contains an attachment of elements of the letter which had actually been addressed from Rome to the youngsters in Valdocco.

In order to support these observations, I present the skeleton structure of the text, which may be called the “long” or combined version, as a preliminary to the second chapter of the study. After each large section there is a summary of the main results of that examination. They constitute the fourth and the sixth chapter. In a seventh chapter, there is a discussion on the question of whether Don Bosco and Fr Lemoyne hit their target and arrive at concrete issues. In an eighth chapter I try to draw a more complete picture of the events that took place in the Oratory during the first months after the return of Don Bosco and Fr Lemoyne.¹⁰ In this way I try to penetrate the editorial history and the impact of the text, particularly of the part meant for the Salesians.

In the ninth and final chapter I conclude with a retrospection.

For technical reasons the study is published in two volumes. The first one contains the first four chapters, the second the next five chapters. The guiding booklet with the Italian text of the available manuscripts will be attached to the first volume to facilitate the reading of the manuscript treatment. Each volume contains a reference index of keywords. The bibliography appears only in the second volume.

books for the youngsters (MB XVII, pp. 197-200; EMB XVII, pp. 173-177) and more generally “the spreading of good books” (E IV, pp. 318-321). These two circulars were written by J.B. Lemoyne. Cf. a concise note on this in: BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo della libertà II*, Rome, LAS, 2003, pp. 563-564.

⁹The issue was discussed in “*Over de grens. Gezag en structuur*”, Oud-Heverlee, Don Boscovormingscentrum, 2005, pp. 17-21, and in BIESMANS, R., *De brief aan de jongens van Valdocco (10 mei 1884)*, Don Bosco Studies nr. 16, Sint-Pieters-Woluwe, 2007, pp. 18-19 en p. 26.

¹⁰“More complete” means that the pages 68-78 from the study “*De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*” will be made complete.

1 Pedagogical and pastoral situation, 1880-1884: outline

The background to a document written in 1884 and addressed to the educators, teachers and superiors at Valdocco

In order to picture the background, I mainly use the following documents:

1. Reports of “meetings of the house chapters” in Valdocco and of “monthly meetings” of the personnel there during the school year 1879-1880. Data from the *Memorie Biografiche* may be consulted.
2. The first address by Don Bosco to the Second General Chapter in 1880.
3. Reports of the house chapter and personnel meetings in Valdocco after that General Chapter (1880-1883). Again data from the *Memorie Biografiche* and from Don Bosco’s own correspondence may be consulted.
4. The recommendations of the Third General Chapter (September 1883) with the follow-up in the Oratory in the course of the school year 1883-1884.
5. “The letter of 10 May 1884 to the youngsters in Valdocco” which was discussed in number 16 of the series Don Bosco Studies.

1.1 Meetings of local chapter and personnel meetings during the school year 1879-1880

Towards the end of 1877 the “*Regulations for the Houses of the Society of St Francis de Sales*” were published.¹ It is clear that this occurred not long after the First General Chapter which took place from 5 September until 5 October 1877 and brought certain articles of the *Regulations* up to date. This edition contained three important parts:

1. The generally well-known *Little Treatise on the Preventive System in the Education of Young People*.
2. Ten *General Articles*
3. The Regulations, subdivided into “Particular Regulations” and “Regulations for the Houses of the Society of St Francis de Sales.” The latter was meant to be a rule of life for the boys.

The Particular Regulations defined the competences and assignments of the superiors, teachers, assistants and even of the cook and the porter. Also the tasks of the male nurse and of the person in charge of the theatre were defined. The *Regulations for the Houses* contained the rules of conduct for the boys, with the instructions for behaviour in the chapel, the classrooms, the common study room, the workshops and also for the time spent outside of the Oratory.

The *Regulations* as a whole can be called the icing on the cake of years of practice by Don Bosco himself, but also by his closest colleagues or co-workers.² The brief essay on

¹*Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, Turin, 1877. Also OE XXIX [97-196] and BRAIDO, P., (a cura di), *Don Bosco educatore scritti e testimonianze*, Rome, LAS, 1992, p. 227.

²To discover this it suffices to compare all the experiences and the dealing with them in the period 1866-1876 with the points in the Regulations itself. As far as the learning from experience is concerned see BIESMANS, R., “*Op weg naar de brieven van 10 mei 1884, 1866-1876 Don Bosco betrouwbare gewijzer en minzame, maar vastberaden gids*”, Don Bosco Studies nr. 8, 1996.

the education of young people and these basic rules contain the main features of Don Bosco's pedagogical and pastoral vision in a nutshell. Together with the task description and instructions which had resulted from practice and been tested by experience, the essay and the basic rules constitute the foundation for a smooth and fruitful co-operation and good results.

'Foundation' is as good as it gets, because it would be rather naïve and over-optimistic to expect it to be sufficient for being able to work and live peacefully with it every single day. It would mean disregarding or ignoring human weakness and shortcomings. 'Twixt the cup and the lip, there is many a slip, as the saying goes. Among the practical slips there were, for example, the complex structures at Valdocco. Several schools were located there: a secondary (grammar) school, a vocational training school and a festive (weekend and holidays) and daily Oratory. Moreover, the Superior Chapter of the newly founded Congregation was located there. It did not add to clarity that there was no clear material or physical separation. Neither was there any psychological distance between youth welfare work, the personnel and young people themselves. So it would be a miracle if there were not occasional demarcation disputes over who was competent to deal with what.

In a previous study I have discussed less agreeable situations and unpleasant frictions.³ Within the present context it seems justifiable to me to recall a note by Fr G. Lazzero from a kind of diary dated 16 May 1879: "The Superior Chapter had a meeting. It was decided to refuse the Superior Chapter any right of interference in the Oratory. It means that the Oratory has to be considered like any other house in the Congregation. It should have only one rector and he alone should have the leadership much in the same way as the prefect is the only one responsible for the expenses. It was decided to bring the main (Superior) Chapter's department together into one location clearly separated from the house department. The first floor above the current department of the house was considered to be a suitable location."⁴

The data in that note will become clearer and more meaningful during the vicissitudes after the arrival of the letter of 10 May 1884, which we dealt with in 2007. The letter was addressed to the youngsters at Valdocco. But despite correct decisions being taken, the core reason for the problems remained untouched.

It all came on top of Don Bosco's absence for several months in the school year of 1879-1880. On 14 January 1880 he left for France, where he would stay until the beginning of March. From France he had to head for Rome without delay. He stayed in Rome for several weeks. On 29 March he travelled on to Naples. On his way back to Turin he took the chance to pay a visit to several houses from 20 April until early May: Magliano, Luca, La Spezia and Sampierdarena. He only got back home to Valdocco on 7 May. Contrary to the year before, Fr Lazzero did not mention this long absence in his "diary". Before, he had written: "He [Don Bosco] has been absent for four and a half months."⁵

³R. BIESMANS, "1876-1884 *Doelstellingen van opvoeding en opleiding gevat in een kernachtig motto*", Don Bosco Studies nr. 11, 1998, pp. 16-21. Cf. PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco nell'ottocento tra reale e ideale. Documenti e testimonianze*, Rome, LAS, 1992, pp. 26-29 and p. 78.

⁴R. BIESMANS, "1876-1884 *Doelstellingen...*", 19-20. "Oratory" represents all youth work on the spot.

⁵PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco nell'ottocento...*, p. 65/658.

From this entry we may no doubt conclude he had missed him dearly. Surely the months of Don Bosco's absence in 1880 were no less heavy on Fr Lazzero all the more so given that during those months a fierce school battle was being waged between the provincial school council of Turin and the Department of National Education on the one hand and Don Bosco's Oratory on the other. That struggle had started back in May 1879 with a decree to close down the grammar school at Valdocco. It goes without saying that this persistent controversy would not have left Fr Lazzero insensitive, as he was the rector.⁶

Despite the internal troubles and the worrying pressure of the continuous threat from outside, they would have enjoyed a fine number of positive events and satisfying occurrences during the school years of 1878-79 and 1879-80. The Salesians must have had quite some secret amusement. The readers of the periodical *Il Baretto* were learning some interesting facts such as that, of some thirty-two Oratory boys who had taken the state examinations at the Monviso public secondary school, twenty-two had passed, while only seven out of sixteen of the Monviso school's own students were promoted. Furthermore twenty-two of the students from Don Bosco's illegal school had obtained top scores. One of them had even beaten the very best of all eighty-two candidates by at least ten points, and the nine boys who had not made the grade in various subjects would easily pass the October remedial examinations. The article commented: "This success came in spite of the school's unrest caused by the arbitrary shutdown order."⁷ This subtle remark is quite telling and gives us the right to believe that action and spirit were excellent at Valdocco.

There are further signs and evidence of this in Lazzero's "diary" every time he looked back at a successful achievement in the large community at Valdocco. The theatrical performances in February 1880 were so popular that they had to refuse entry to 150 spectators as there were not enough seats available. In May he wrote that a large number of people turned up for the Feast of Mary, which ran very smoothly and beautifully.⁸ It needs to be repeated time and again that Fr Lazzero was a keen fan of singing, verbal art, theatre and liturgical celebrations. He had a kind of sixth sense for them and he would never omit putting the successes in the picture.⁹

Don Bosco himself loved to join in and tried to be at home in Valdocco during these festive days. Although he was frequently absent, often for a longer period of time, the boys liked him very much and in June on the occasion of his official name day celebration they used to congratulate him in writing.¹⁰ Each congratulation of 1880 is an expression of personal and confidential contact. They show a feeling of solidarity and positive attitude. As the boys were content and happy in such a positive atmosphere, they most probably responded readily to suggestions, pieces of advice and warnings from their teachers.¹¹

⁶More information on that struggle in BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco prete dei giovani... II*, pp. 392-408. Cf. MB XIV, pp. 149-215; EMB XIV, pp. 108-155.

⁷MB XIV, pp. 193-194; EMB XIV, pp. 138-139. Also internally Don Bosco expressed his satisfaction in a different circumstance. E III, p. 578; MB XIV, p. 472; EMB XIV, pp. 366-367.

⁸PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 80/1075-1079; 1085-1089. Cf. also MB XIV, p. 504/2; EMB XIV, pp. 394-395, in which the enthusiastic mood of G. Lazzero becomes more and more understandable through an added quotation from a report in the *Unità Cattolica*.

⁹BIESMANS, R., *1876-1884 Doelstellingen...*, pp. 26-28; 34; 36-54.

¹⁰For example in June 1880. Excerpts in MB XIV, pp. 508-510; EMB XIV, pp. 398-400.

¹¹I was inspired to give this comment by the beginning of a letter of Don Bosco to the pupils of the 4th

1.2 The first, long address by Don Bosco at the start of the Second General Chapter of September-October 1880

The positive experiences hid some less pleasant facts which affected educators, teachers, superiors and the boys themselves as well. The first long address at the Second General Chapter reveals that Don Bosco must have had eyes in the back of his head while visiting the houses, for instance when returning from his stay in Rome during the Spring of 1880. The fragment concerning this opens with the following communication: “Another thing which we should try to promote together, all of us, is the spirit of Christian love and loving kindness [friendliness, affability, amiability] of Saint Francis of Sales. This spirit is decreasing among us and as far as I have witnessed myself in several houses, it is dwindling particularly in the schools [in the classes].” He explained this impression, or rather this conclusion, as follows: “The teachers do not like some boys and do not treat them well. Other boys are left to fend for themselves. The teachers do not take care of them and leave them alone, by not testing them for a longer period of time or not correcting their homework. They send boys out of the classrooms and when the superiors send them back to class, they reluctantly admit them and gripe about the superior because he did not back them up. In order to avoid a row with the teacher and painful decisions against him later, the superior is sometimes forced to expel pupils and take unfriendly measures against someone who might have been attracted to religion and God if he had been treated benevolently. I beg you to practise this real spirit of loving kindness and Christian love and do your utmost to spread it among the members of the congregation in our houses, particularly among the teachers. Encouraging each other with charity and kindness (affability) will always be a pillar of our houses.”¹²

Don Bosco, however, did not lecture them on this matter by referring to *The Regulations for the Houses*. Yet there is a delicate allusion in his wording, for the words relate strongly to a few articles in the *Regulations*: “The least clever boys of the class should be particular objects of care for the teachers, who have to encourage but never to humiliate them” and: “They have to continuously and indiscriminately hear them and show great respect and care for all their pupils, particularly the slow-witted ones. They must not adopt the pernicious attitude of those teachers who leave careless or slow pupils to fend for themselves.”¹³

The phrase “pernicious attitude” of a few teachers during his address could perhaps still be interpreted at first hearing as an allusion to teachers outside Don Bosco’s schools. The teachers themselves had actually put forward as one of the main objectives of the Salesian

and 5th class in Borgo S. Martino on June 17 1879: “First I should like to reply to a few short letters which your good teacher and several boys wrote to me. As I cannot do so for every single one of you, I shall write a letter to all of you and I intend to speak to you in private during the oncoming celebration of St Aloysius.” (E III, p. 476)

¹²*I verbali del CG 2*. Copia pulita di Don Barberis, FdB 1857 C 9-10. Also BIESMANS, R., *Amore Amorevolezza (1876-1884)*, Don Bosco Studies nr. 15, pp.100-101; 170; 226-227.

¹³OE XXIX [129-130]. Cf. “*Deliberazioni del Capitolo Generale*” (1877) in: OE XXIX [392] en “*Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo Generale della pia società Salesiana*” (1880) in OE XXXIII [79-80]. In a circular hardly a year after Don Bosco’s passing away M. Rua will insist on it in turn. (*Lettere circolari Don. Michele Rua ai Salesiani*, Turin, 1910, pp. 41-42.)

society: the initiation and practice of “every work of spiritual and physical Christian love towards young people, in particular to poor youngsters.”¹⁴ And poverty has got many faces, for example intellectual poverty or lack of certain mental abilities. Still there will no doubt have been confreres who could not cope very well with the diversity of talents in classes and the pedagogical and *ad hoc* directives concerning teaching from Don Bosco.¹⁵ Certain teachers would surely have wanted, with the best of intentions, to improve standards and in order to achieve that “would have tried to separate the wheat from the chaff.” Above we have already suggested there was some kind of need to show excellent study results in the Turin school context.¹⁶ Don Bosco, however, insisted on hammering home his points of view. He was no advocate of elite schools, but promoted institutes with a heart for ordinary youngsters. His rules certainly aimed at keeping a positive and happy spirit among the youngsters present. If young people get the impression they are neglected, not taken into account or treated in a wrong or even unfair way, then criticism, discontent and a feeling of malaise are never far away. The sun of the happy atmosphere may soon be heavily clouded over and “the real spirit of St Francis de Sales” as described in his address at the Second General Chapter would dwindle before long. It indeed had disastrous consequences. As for Don Bosco, he was convinced it was in the first place detrimental to the development and conservation of religious vocations. “Every day I notice our schools growing gradually similar to other schools. One hardly finds that former fervour among the boys, I mean the fervour for good things, religion and religious persons.” [That became evident in the very radical comparison between the problematic barren present and the apparently trouble-free and fruitful past.] He concluded from this: “That is why we need to live together with Christian love and kindness.”... For “through this Christian love and the affective and amiable way of living together young people would very much be attracted to our way of life...” And further: “If then that gentleness (amiability) showing itself among the confreres flows to the pupils themselves, and they would be affected by an electric and inspiring wave and we would undoubtedly be winning their friendship and influencing their vocation.”¹⁷

It is obvious that Don Bosco blamed the Salesians in general for this decline in several areas. Generalizing can be quite dangerous. He consequently hastened to put things into perspective – as in the letter to the Valdocco boys with respect to young people – and made it clear that he meant only a limited number of Salesians and that “most of them excelled in virtue.” He insinuated this by telling the story of a boy wanting to leave the Oratory and remarking that “those few” teachers and superiors “did not constitute the spirit of the congregation.”¹⁸ But it was no use crying over spilt milk. It looked as if

¹⁴OE XXIX [251].

¹⁵Don Bosco wanted to help as many youngsters as possible and tried to realize it by clever directives about teaching, the implementation of which did not turn out to be so easy. Cf. BIESMANS, R., *1866-1876 Don Bosco betrouwbare wegwijzer...*, p. 44 and MB XI, pp. 217-218; EMB XI, p. 200.

¹⁶Cf. footnote 7 in this chapter. More information and figures on this for the years before 1877 in MB XI, pp. 219-221; EMB XI, pp. 201-202.

¹⁷*I verbali del CG 2...*, FdB 1857 C 10-11.

¹⁸Ibid., 1857 C 11-12. Concerning the word “few” cf. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 42; 67. Cf. too MB XI, p. 227; EMB XI, p. 208. It is possible obviously that

youngsters easily pass judgements based on a negative experience.

His considerations, which he formulated straightforwardly at the start of the Second General Chapter on 4 September 1880, were drawn from a personal analysis and interpretation of the situation in the houses. Which intonation of voice and which body language he used, we do not know. We may assume however that the Chapter participants were impressed by the charge, although most of them were familiar with many ideas and points of view in his critical address.¹⁹ Penetratingly though he may have spoken, the question of the actual impact of his words remains. It is not uncommon for reports of discussions and proposals to vanish into the archives after a General Chapter and remain there in long lasting if not eternal peace. Did his spectators – most of them rectors and many of them staying at Valdocco – pass on the message on arriving home? With the same accent? In the same wording? Did they freshen up the articles of the rules mentioned in this connection?

Don Bosco most probably put forward the same considerations to the communities when paying them a visit. Meanwhile the printing of the conclusions of the 1880 General Chapter did not materialize. That is certainly a reason why already at the end of November 1880 he sent a letter in Latin to all the rectors of houses reminding them of the main subjects of the Chapter. The seventh point went as follows: “Our patience, our Christian love and gentleness should light up in word and deed in such a way that Christ’s words *Vos estis sal terrae, vos estis lux mundi* [you are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world] are effected in us.”²⁰ It had turned out to be a lifeless, worn out and not even accurate summary of his glowing well-documented address.

The wording in the publication of the conclusions of the Second General Chapter, which appeared as late as 1882, does more justice to the intentions and Don Bosco’s style of speech in that long address: “The pious, punctual model way of life of the Salesians, their mutual Christian love, their well-mannered and gentle-jovial way of dealing with the pupils are efficient means to promote religious vocations because ‘words arouse examples draw’.”²¹ The context of caring for vocations is conspicuous as well as the words “*carità*” and “*dolcezza*” and the way of getting on with the pupils is emphasized.

That conclusion obviously remains a succinct reflection, which may seem a slogan or cliché forever in need of explanation in conferences and personal discussions. It seems to me an instant challenge to try and find out if any traces of explanation and application can be found. One track to be followed may be Fr Lazzero’s constant diary entries with

Don Bosco wrote or said ‘few’ more than in one case, but actually meant “quite some, several”, even “many”.

¹⁹BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza...*, pp. 33-36. Cf. too MB XI, pp. 217-218; EMB XI, pp. 200 and here earlier, footnote 12.

²⁰E III, p. 638. MB XIV, pp. 520 en 795; EMB XIV, p. 408-409. Discussing that point in BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza...*, pp. 106-107; 229-231. The translation “*mansuetude*” (meekness, mildness) was inspired by the Latin word “*mansuetudo*” in the Latin letter; the suggestion “kind” or “loving kindness, on the other hand,” by the Italian definition or translation (“*dolcezza*”) from E. Ceria in MB XIV, p. 520; EMB XIV, p. 409. In this way E. Ceria links up Don Bosco’s wording in his address at the second General Chapter. Once more concepts appear to be interchangeable. Cf. too CERIA, E., *Annali della Società Salesiana I*, Turijn, SEI, 1941, pp. 466-467.

²¹OE XXXIII [65]. BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza...*, pp. 101-103.

annotations concerning the meetings of the house chapter at Valdocco and the personnel meetings there.

1.3 Traces of the impact of the General Chapter in the reports of the house chapter meetings and meetings of personnel in Valdocco from 1880 till the first weeks of January 1884

It may seem remarkable that Fr Lazzero did not write down anything about Don Bosco's absence from Valdocco nor about a personal contribution to the General Chapter, not even an impression of its general course. Perhaps he lacked the peace of mind to look back on it and to write things down because the new school year 1880 needed all his energy and attention.

- *Efforts by Fr Lazzero to remain faithful to the "preventive system"*

Towards the end of October he resumed writing again. He laid down that the chapter had decided "to separate the theatre gigs for the pupils or students from those of the artisans because it appeared impossible for the study room to contain all the pupils." It was also decided "to often write to the parents or benefactors of those pupils whose school performances were going down offering little hope of succeeding. Seven of them would have to be sent away."²² The first decision was entirely comprehensible as it concerned order, discipline and security. In February he had already pointed out the dangers of too big a crowd in a building with too little space and insufficient load-bearing capacity.²³ The second decision perhaps did not match the point of view at all regarding adequate pedagogical and didactic ways of dealing with diversity in the classroom. It was a point of view Don Bosco had ardently defended and indeed put forward in the General Chapter.

Anyway, the expulsion from the school in Valdocco because of lack of talent or study zeal does not agree with the *Regulations for the Houses*.²⁴ These stipulated only "cursing, indecency, theft". According to Pietro Braido, "formal and systematic disobedience and insubordination" were added from practice. It is impossible to derive from the conclusion of the house council meeting in October 1880 whether the seven more or less badly performing pupils also lacked discipline and so were degrading the general good spirit in the house. Putting the consequences of expulsion into perspective most probably applied to them as Braido suggests when discussing the matter of expulsions by Don Bosco. One certainly needs to put this within the framework of Don Bosco's mindset, times and spirit.²⁵

²²PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 245/342-349.

²³PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 80/1080-1081.

²⁴OE XXIX [185].

²⁵For the complete paragraph cf. BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire non reprimere. Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, Rome, LAS, 1999, p. 218 and pp. 347-348. P Braido puts the consequences of those expulsions for the youngsters involved into perspective. The relativisation boils down to the fact that these boys "did not go back to a site of destruction. They did nothing else but go back to their family and

From February 1881 in the same school year we discover more traces pointing to the desire to take Don Bosco's words at the General Chapter (1880) more seriously and to really follow the direction which he had been indicating. On 8 February there was a meeting of "all teachers of the major and minor subjects and the respective assistants. Two Rules were read out, one for the teachers and another for the assistants. At the end the reading of the preventive system was added. Only a few remarks were made as everything appeared to speak for itself. One observation was added to the remarks: one never ought say "I'll give you a 7 or an 8 at the end of the month. Never lay down a mark, but simply say "I will have to credit you with a lower mark, a bad mark etc."²⁶

There were evidently not two "Regulations", but there were two chapters [VI – with possibly VII – and VIII of the first part] which could be applied from the *Regulations for the Houses*.²⁷ It is meaningful to mention also that the complete essay on the preventive system, i.e. *The Preventive System in the education of the young* was read out. It was particularly important to him; it needed practically no further clarification. The added note on "marks" for attitude and zeal was important because it dealt with threat and punishment which as such did not comply with the "spirit of Christian love and friendly amiability of St Francis de Sales." After all, that had been the core of Don Bosco's address at the General Chapter.

Fr Lazzero responded one of Don Bosco's wishes by this way of handling things at meetings. This desire was confirmed in a letter of Don Bosco to Fr Ronchail in Nice a few weeks later 29 March 1881: "Endeavour to summon your house chapter often, and insist that no one is to strike the boys and that each one is to read the rules which apply to him."²⁸

Although the *Regulations* and the written works of Don Bosco were outstanding in clarity, Fr Lazzero did not consider it redundant to repeat them from time to time. Not long after the beginning of the school year 1881-1882 he brought the assistants of the classes and dormitories together to read with them the respective articles of the *Regulations*. "A few essential norms were emphasised. It was decided that each assistant of the dormitories should have the specific rules for the assistants at his disposal next to the rules for the dormitories " The first reading or the freshening up of the appropriate articles was in no way a formal occurrence for the note went on: "The meeting lasted for about two hours."²⁹

About the same time "the rules or rather the task of the catechist of the pupils was explained down to the smallest detail."³⁰

In this way Fr Lazzero made a great effort to preserve and strengthen the spirit of the "preventive system" and remain loyal to "the spirit of St Francis de Sales" and consequently of Don Bosco. Thus Don Bosco's ideas and points of view remained the standard.

relatives and take up again 'the burden of the day and the burning heat' (Mt. 20,12), from which they had escaped."

²⁶PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco*... , p. 246/358-364.

²⁷OE XXIX [129-131]; [132-134] and possibly [131-132].

²⁸E IV, p. 34. Cf. also MB XV, p. 133/ item 4°; EMB XV, pp. 104-105.

²⁹PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco*... , p. 248/400-404.

³⁰Ibid., p. 248/407.

- *Practical guidance for the personnel reconciling tradition and adaptation to changed circumstances which necessitated new demands concerning order and discipline*

Meanwhile measures were taken at these meetings to promote order and discipline with the boys, especially where needed. The boys who were allowed “to leave the institute in order to go and teach catechism lessons could no longer loiter about the playground after coming back while the others were praying or studying.” The boys in the playground could be a source of disturbance. “They too had to go to the chapel, or the study room,”³¹, which was probably less agreeable to them than continuing their privileges in a sort of disturbing way.

Another kind of task which turned into a privilege for the boys involved was serving the evening meal. They were allowed to go and eat before the others. If they got too much time to do so, they apparently could cause quite some disturbance. That is why on 4 December 1881 it was decided twenty minutes would do. In this way “the discomfort of too much noise which they made in the playground in the time between their evening meal (supper) and that of the others, could be prevented.”³²

Such measures, which confined or restricted certain acquired forms of freedom of those youngsters, were preferred to employing an extra supervisor or assistant. Probably this was not unrealistic taking into account the at times rather uncontrollable force of the youngsters. That does not alter the fact that the youngsters themselves disliked those measures and sometimes showed it too.

Another habit that could no longer be tolerated was the chatter that took place after evening prayer. However, they intended to handle this “tradition” with care: “We discussed the need for silence after evening prayer. Should we go for absolute or relative silence? That was the question. We opted for relative silence in the context of the house spirit and discomfort of the room.” The way the report continues proves how delicate the matter was: “Fr Lazzero decided to first talk about it with the clerics and the assistants separately. He did so the next day and the same evening he communicated it to the boys adding they should restrict themselves to a simple good night to the persons in charge and then proceed instantly to the dormitory without any further questions about study, lessons, marks etc.”³³

More sources of abuse and lack of discipline were the running in and out of the dormitory or leaving group activities or even the house. That is why they wanted to limit the number of keys and to employ a registrar or caretaker. He would have the keys at his disposal and would also do the cleaning. They did not fully trust a layman for the job nor did they think it would be easy to find a Salesian to dust and sweep. As they could not imagine a suitable candidate, the comment remained somewhat sceptical and even ironical “we shall see and search.”³⁴ In the meantime the cause of disturbance continued to exist.

³¹Ibid., p. 248/413-415.

³²Ibid., p. 248-249.

³³Ibid., p. 247/369-376.

³⁴Ibid., p. 248/420-422 en 249/449-460. Perhaps it was about an age-old encrusted problem. Cf. on this BIESMANS, R., *1866-1876 Don Bosco betrouwbare wegwijzer...*, pp. 19-20.

Probably this hesitation and not being able to make up their minds led to a vicious incident later at the end of the school year in June 1882. It was precisely on St Aloysius' day that they witnessed a certain profanation in the afternoon. Some vandals, including some boys of the house itself, both pupils of the vocational and grammar school, had removed the flowers from the saint's statue and even more brutal rascals had broken into the collection box etc. It had happened while the superiors and a number of the assistants were still in the refectory. Two days later they regretted that the perpetrators received but a reproach and the good ones were not asked to do anything about any rehabilitation. However, "what had not been left undone would now have to be done."³⁵

It is not clear from such a short note who were exactly meant by "the good ones", maybe members of a brotherhood or a core group, but at the same time all boys not involved in the incident could have been intended. In the latter meaning it would boil down to the almost standard difference Don Bosco made between "a few rascals" and the majority of good young people. The generalising consideration in the subsequent text of Fr Lazzeri's report read equally standard: "It was suggested the boys did not have a good spirit. They are disobedient" (recalcitrant). Or were there anyway more general signs of a malaise about which no further information was left behind?

A circumstance that could have caused discontent with the pupils could have been the trouble they experienced in having their clothes etc. repaired. The superiors discussed this problem thoroughly in December 1881 and they dealt with it adequately according to the conclusions.³⁶ One could consequently expect they had got rid of an important reason to be dissatisfied, gripe or criticise.

In any case Fr Orioli, a priest of the diocese, was staying in the Oratory from April 1882 onwards, during that school year. "During his stay he had the full run of the Oratory and so came to know Oratory life very intimately." He had gone through a sticky patch in his diocese and his bishop had entrusted him to the care of Don Bosco and the Salesians in the Oratory. He wrote down his impressions in *La casa di Don Bosco in Torino* ["Don Bosco's House in Turin"]. There we read: "In this home one only notices gentle ways of behaviour which stimulate one to do good. There is an amazing aura of gentleness and joy emanating from everyone's face... If you approach them [the superiors] without knowing who they are, you would never guess that they are men of authority.... Their way of dealing with others is such that they seem to be trying to remove even the notion that they are superiors. And how your surprise grows when you see them in the midst of their young students or poor artisans, showing themselves to be more friends than superiors. In Don Bosco's house you do not find the oppressive aura of discipline that pervades other boarding schools... It does your heart good to see these degreed professors so modest in manner, so unconcerned about their genuine talents... I will not leave this house without deep feelings. I would wish that at least one house like this might arise in every town of Italy."³⁷

³⁵PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 250-251.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 249/431-447.

³⁷MB XV, pp. 562-564; EMB XV, pp. 468-469. Cf. also BIESMANS, R., *Assistentie, de essentie van Don Bosco's preventief systeem in de periode 1876-1884*, Sint-Pieters-Woluwe, 2000, p. 65/footnote 75.

The confreres themselves saw and experienced things very differently at times. One can find evidence of this in one of the twenty-one contributions to prepare for the Third General Chapter, held in 1883. Indeed Fr Domenico Belmonte wrote about the vocational school pupils: “They are demoralized by the bad examples of the workhouse superiors. They are discouraged because they aren’t making any progress in learning a trade. They take offence at the way they are treated by the assistants. How can they feel anything for the house?”³⁸ In those years Fr Belmonte was the rector of the house at Sampierdarena, which goes to show the “real spirit of Don Bosco” was not only lost in Valdocco in a certain way.

Then we have the testimony of one of the Irish boys Don Bosco had put up. On 26 August 1882 he wrote to his relatives: “There are some 13 or 14 superiors all operating under Don Bosco. They are all very gentle and friendly.”³⁹ This communication actually sounds no less laudatory than the report of Fr Orioli.

According to the Irish boy and Fr Orioli the superiors and the teachers clearly made great efforts to deal with the youngsters in the real spirit of St Francis de Sales. Had not Don Bosco insisted so emphatically on this during the Second General Chapter? One could certainly not impute the lack of “a good spirit” among the boys to a general failure of attitude.

- *A painful area on the board of an ever more complex Oratory in Valdocco*

Still, at the end of the report of the meeting discussing the so-called profanation, one cause of the lack of a good spirit among the boys is pointed out. It appears to be quite a surprising one: “The cause is a lack of unity on the board. All try to be centres on their own instead of forming one single centre in the appointed rector.”⁴⁰

Or was the cause not so surprising after all? Indeed after Mass on Christmas night 1881, G. Lazzerio wrote in his diary: “People from outside were allowed into the sacristy, but I have no idea who gave them the permission. A few thugs did indeed enter the sacristy. They surrounded the altar servers [acolytes], laughed and sneered [even] during communion and continued to do so until the end.”⁴¹ He was clearly annoyed: someone had taken a personal initiative just like that without consulting him.

In the same note he opened up about something that had hurt him deeply during the preparation for the Christmas festivities. “On 22 December of 1881 Don Bosco strictly ordered that from now on no more sausages, biscuits nor a cup of wine would be offered on any occasion; neither would drinks or biscuits be offered to the singers and musicians. Don Bosco took those measures because a narrow-minded person he fully trusted had been telling tales “out of school”. What had occurred was considered abuse, but in reality these were things the writer [of these lines] had seen over the 25 years he had been at the

³⁸PRELLEZO, J.M., *La “Parte operaia” nelle case Salesiane*, RSS (31) XVI nr. 2, 1997, p. 358.

³⁹DICKSON, W. J., *The dynamics of growth. The formation and development of the Salesians in England*, Rome, LAS, 1991, p. 51.

⁴⁰PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 251/495-497. Cf. also the lack of unity and co-operation in a report of G. Barberis from 1879 in ASC 0562, *Verbalì del Capitolo superiore* on 8 May 1879.

⁴¹PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 85/1234-1236. Something similar would occur to him at Christmas 1883. (*Ibid.*, p. 86/1268-1272).

Oratory. The writer [of this note] is a person who would never disapprove of a decision by a superior. Yet he cannot help being extremely astonished by the way things had happened. That was particularly the case if you take into account that as the rector he would be the propagator of this abuse whereas he had been trying all the time to conscientiously follow traditional ways. In order not to fail in this respect he had even composed some notes *ad hoc*. One had to bear things *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.”⁴² The anger against the narrow-minded denouncer had not yet subsided nor had the discontent and disappointment with Don Bosco’s treatment been overcome. They continued to vibrate in the fierce wording and powerful self-defence. Only after he had been able to relieve his feelings he could resume and with some sigh of relief walk the way of religious resignation.

Lack of unity must have been an enduring painful point as it was raised again after the meeting in June, 31 July 1882: “At the end the question of unity on the board was raised. It was generally recognised there existed no unity of direction at the Oratory. The chairman ordered every council member except the prefect who was leaving anyway, to study the question and report on it at the next meeting.”⁴³ One can rightfully ask the question here if explicit mention of the prefect’s leaving was not in itself a sign of discord.

It is a pity Fr Lazzero later never mentioned any report of an open, sincere and well argued debate.

- *During the school year of 1882-1883 Fr Lazzero continues walking the same path*

It is essential for everyone to continue to be informed of the requirements of their tasks so they can carry them out while also respecting the competence of others. At the start of the school year 1882-1883 Fr Lazzero made an effort to get everyone back on track. Already at the first meeting he ordered “everyone to read their own rules and those of the others so they would know what they should do.”⁴⁴ This was completely in line with Fr Lazzero’s conduct since the General Chapter of 1880, the conclusions of which were eventually published in 1882 and most probably had been freshened up this way.”⁴⁵ A couple of days later it appeared this had not ruled out all problems. The notes of 26 October 1882 do indeed mention the question that had been asked as to “who was entitled to write permits allowing the clerics to leave the house. This power belonged to the rector or to the prefect. The moment the boys go for a walk outside, they also

⁴²Ibid., p. 85/1243-1253. Cf. for the possible context MB XV, p. 460; EMB XV, pp. 381-382 and E IV, pp. 102-103.

⁴³PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, pp. 251-252.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 252/527-528. That was in harmony with the instruction which Don Bosco had given for the conference of St Francis de Sales in February 1879: “Each Salesian should have his copy of our school regulations; he should study them, so that when questioned he may give the correct answer concerning the particular rules of office, as it is printed in the book. Even if a director were to accomplish no more than succeed in having each member of his staff carry out properly the tasks assigned to him, he would be doing well enough... I also wish that all members have a copy of the deliberations of the [first] General Chapter, not only to know them, but especially to suggest what could be added.” (MB XIV, p. 44; EMB XIV, p. 27.)

⁴⁵OE XXXIII [1-96].

leave without a permit, but in an orderly fashion as their catechist would prescribe.” Thus three superiors seem to be involved. A second question logically followed the first one: “How to avoid clashes when applying their own rules to those who occupy the main positions?” The word “clashes” is clear enough and supposes that the friction amongst the superiors was not at all favourable to the spirit among the boys. The answer to the question was formulated very diplomatically or diffidently: “By the practice of prudence. No one should feel insulted when they notice other people coming on one’s ground if one realizes they were merely trying to do well.” Certainly a suitable time and place will arise for the small error to be shown and corrected in a most tactful, kind and polite way (*in bel modo*).⁴⁶ It is no doubt his way to offer advice and solutions in Don Bosco’s spirit of “*carità e dolcezza*” in his address to the General Chapter. In the recently published conclusions of that General Chapter Don Bosco’s main concern had been formulated and clearly reformulated. In this way: “The exemplary, pious and punctual life of the Salesians, the mutual Christian love, the well-mannered, sympathetic way of dealing with each other and the kindness [friendliness and affability] with the pupils are powerful means to allow budding vocations of a religious way of life to develop.”⁴⁷

In order to get everyone on the right track it was necessary for everyone to come to the meetings. Fr Lazzero insisted on it, most probably with similar patience and caution.⁴⁸ All of Fr Lazzero’s approach shows a discretion and delicacy in the reports as well as a certain lack of assertiveness or strong persistence. Those features were typical of him, even when at times a stronger hand and a firm convincing power to keep things in order and as a rector to coordinate and lead the organisation in the house in a stricter manner would have been necessary.⁴⁹ However, moral and outspoken support for it was not lacking.⁵⁰ This way of handling things must have been due to the character of the man.

⁴⁶PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 252/544-550.

⁴⁷OE XXXIII [65]. Cf. also footnote 31 in this chapter.

⁴⁸Up to twice in a short time. Cf. PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 252/526 and 530.

⁴⁹More on that in BIESMANS, R., *1866-1876 Don Bosco betrouwbare wegwijzer...*, pp. 15-16 and BIESMANS, R., *1876-1884 Doelstellingen...*, pp. 14-35. Cf. also PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, pp. 26-29.

⁵⁰During the annual rectors’ conference on the occasion of the celebration of St Francis de Sales in February 1876 they considered it necessary for example “that special care had to be taken in wording the regulations so as not to give the impression that the director’s freedom and authority were being curtailed. There was no intention to give limitless authority to a director, but since the regulations would be read by the pupils, the younger Salesians and lesser superiors, his prestige had to be safeguarded. The assembly felt that the rectors would know the limits of their authority well enough from the rules of the Congregation and the explanatory notes which had privately passed on to them.” (MB XIII, p. 84; EMB XIII, pp. 63-64.)

At the First General Chapter Don Bosco said on the subject: “This has to be the foundation: the director must fulfill the part of the director, i.e. he has to be able to make others work and function. He has to supervise, take measures, but never get down to working himself. . . He must see to it that all do their work properly. That is why I think I can never enough hammer it home that the director, as far as possible, should go through the whole house every day. There are many sites in which he will not dwell, in other places he will say nothing, but he has to drop in both in the kitchen and in the refectory and even in the cellar, in the rooms and everywhere. If he acts in this way, abuses can never take root in the house and thousands of little flaws will be avoided.” (VERHULST, M., *I Verba del primo capitolo generale Salesiano (1877)*, Rome, 1980). Cf. MB XIII, p. 258; EMB XIII,

- *Standing up for assistance as a presence among the youngsters which prevents disorder and evil and also encourages, inspires the boys and is interested in them*

Caution and even a hesitant approach may also be sensed in the reports in which Fr Lazzero urgently insisted on taking up a core task of the preventive system, i.e. assistance. It happened in November 1882 as well as at other times, not so long after the start of the new school year. “It was decided” then, in material matters, “to arrange the benches of the boys in church properly because they sat far too close to each other.” Concerning assistance during the actual religious practice, the subjunctive mood is used as well as the toned-down phrase “if possible”: “The teachers should be assisting their own classes if possible to show the pupils the good example. For this they should have a chair to kneel and sit on.”⁵¹ One could say colloquially that kid gloves were being used. In the same way they approached the preventive and stimulating presence among the boys during prayers or chapel services.

It was not the only place where Salesians turned a blind eye to preventive and supporting assistance. In a next meeting of 15 November 1882, not a fortnight later, it was noted quite crudely: “Play time: no assistance at all with the boys.” In order to improve the situation “it was decided to organize a meeting for all the clerics and priests who in one way or another had to deal with the boys – and we chose the next day to teach them some standards.”

Still, a couple of directives were laid down on 15 November. The first one: “To manage the division of playgrounds a bit more harshly.” That hesitant little phrase “a bit” will no longer be a surprise, not even knowing that three days before they had discussed “the inconveniences caused by the contacts between the grammar school pupils and the artisans.”⁵² The next thing that was prescribed was that one should “see to it [the boys] did not use the stairs to go up, particularly not up to the highest point and the superiors’ corridor. For this reason it was agreed to close down the main corridor with a barrier and also the small flight of stairs to prevent them from climbing all the way up.” Furthermore they insisted on “looking for new games.”⁵³ That way they intended to brighten up the recreation time and prevent all sorts of mischief and more serious disruption.

The meeting on the next day went down in Salesian history as “*la gran conferenza*”, i.e. the great conference. Fr Lazzero mentions the presence of clerical assistants, teachers and priests, thirty-five confreres all together. He reports to have expanded on a number of points from half past five to a quarter to six.

pp. 189-190.

Again sometime later, at the conference of St Francis de Sales in February 1879, Don Bosco said: “A second grave threat to vocations and overall discipline comes from those who try to set themselves up as leaders among the boys. It must be stressed that in each of our houses the centre of unity is the director. ... Woe betide you, when two centres develop in a house! They are like two pitched camps, two standards and if they do not face each other as direct opposites, at least they always are divisive. Love centered on one will detract from love for the other.” (MB XIV, p. 45; EMB XIV, p. 28.)

⁵¹PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 253/555-558.

⁵²Ibid., p. 254/581 and p. 253/565-567.

⁵³For the complete report on 15 November: PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, pp. 253-254. Don Bosco himself on animation in recreation time in February 1877 in MB XIII, p. 85/7°; EMB XIII, p. 64/7°.

Above all there was the vital question: “Assistants, who are they?” To which the matter-of-fact reply went: “All of us are.” Subsequently the second item came up: “Not only should one not discriminate between classes, but neither between the pupils of the grammar school and the artisans”, in which he let his heart speak by preferring the vocational trainees. Thirdly: “Do not stick together among yourselves during recreation time, but mix with the boys.” Further: “Order and discipline both with the boys and those who are providing assistance should be at the centre of our care everywhere in the house.” Then “the rules for the assistants were read and a few remarks were made with respect to this.” It strikes us that the rules were once more used as a point of reference.

“At that moment, a quarter past six,” Fr Lazzero noted “Don Bosco walked in. After he had been informed briefly about what is mentioned above, he approved of everything and confirmed it. He went on to say they should pay much attention to this: a teacher or an assistant in function is a superior with the boys. When he has finished functioning, he has to be friend, father with the youngsters. He made some more useful remarks, which I omit now, to be brief.”⁵⁴ It is a pity Fr Lazzero did not just take down these remarks because they may have contained some useful suggestions, more exactly as to the meaning of being “a friend or a father”.

- *Lack of unity (unanimity) remains a sensitive point according to Fr G. Lazzero*

“Afterwards [probably in Don Bosco’s presence] the third chapter: Discipline among educators, from *The Practice of the Christian Education* by P.A. Monfat was read.” This reading “led to further remarks in particular on the duty of unity, the need for agreement and its emanation to the boys we educate.” This important meeting took an end at a quarter past seven. The meeting was to be referred to explicitly later, for instance 8 May 1883.⁵⁵

Discussing the item of “profanation” in the chapel Fr Lazzero put forward the statement: “The cause of it all is the lack of unity of policy.” Bearing these words in mind, one will understand Fr Lazzero was trying to give prominence to the very indispensability and impact of unity [unanimity] as described in Montfat’s book.

At the next meeting Fr Lazzero would go back to the need for unity. He formulated it in a new way though: “We confined ourselves to pointing out the need to come forward as a solid block [*in solidum*].” It meant the need to sing from the same hymn sheet or stay as one man on the same page, which appeared necessary if it was about “making recommendations both in public and in private; in general and in particular each time we come across a boy who needs it.”⁵⁶ Dealing with boys so frankly and yet so delicately

⁵⁴PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 254/590-602. ... BIESMANS, R., *Assistentie...*, p. 65, where something went wrong with mentioning the points of time. Don Bosco himself spoke on the common nature of assistance in February 1877: “Assistance must be a concerted effort.” (MB XIII, p. 85; EMB XIII, p. 65). Under Fr Rua’s chairmanship, it was decided in August 1871: “Recreation time should always be spent with them [the boys] and as much as possible with those who most need assistance.” (PRELLEZO, J.M. *Valdocco...*, p. 262/46-47).

⁵⁵The report of this historical meeting in PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, pp. 254-255. For the reference to March 8: *ibid.*, p. 257/676.

⁵⁶For the complete paragraph PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 255/610-612.

was a typical course of action Don Bosco used in advising. It was very dear to him.⁵⁷ Consequently Don Bosco himself liked to have it approved of and confirmed. He must have been very pleased for Fr Lazzero had run things in complete agreement with his desire and his very own address at the Second General Chapter.

- *Efforts to better structure the groups of young people while getting rid of causes of displeasure*

The task of dealing with the boys as “a friend and a father” must have been quite often under pressure in everyday life. The pupils and the artisans mixed in the playground and under the portico. The superiors gradually got to discover it entailed a number of disadvantages. That is why they aimed at through the separation of both groups, but that implied supplying the appropriate infrastructure. They realized they had to supply drinking water on the pupils’ side and “as they were rather scarce” more lavatories were needed on the side where the artisans were. That awareness was followed by the phrase “we should at least try”, which implied the presumption that execution might take some time.

Another delicate matter was order and discipline in the dormitories, a problem which was not solved by the use of jugs and basins. Installing the wash-basins would not only mean a considerable annual saving, but also improve hygiene and morality.⁵⁸ The word “would” suggests there was more goodwill than determination in it.

As such the considerations were reasonable and aimed at prevention and one could call the decisions “weak”, but it looked as if they might go the same way as the measures needed to prevent the loss of linen ware and clothing. The point was “discussed over and over again, but it did not come near to any sort of solution.” Still, it was “a serious topic! Nearly all complain about not getting back the things they delivered for washing. After six months the boys have got almost nothing left from their collection of clothing. Where will this end?... After more than one and a half hour of discussion, it was eventually left to each one present to think about it and report back at the next meeting.”⁵⁹

Once more no result of that reflection or any reports could be discovered. As nothing had been done about it, the “good spirit” among the boys was not at all helped by it. Such circumstances and the fact that boys will be boys will have led educators, teachers and assistants more than once to take repressive action in one way or another. Yet how could they put into practice the respect for the compulsory prescription of Don Bosco: “First of all never have recourse to punishments if possible”⁶⁰ Would a warning, be it a

⁵⁷Cf. for example BIESMANS, R., *Assistentie...*, pp. 125-126; 128; 142 and BIESMANS, R., *Reflecties bij de circulaire over het toedienen van straffen in de salesiaanse huizen in Over de Grens*, Don Boscovormings-centrum, nr. 07, 2005, p. 62.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 253/568-571.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 255/614-623. Translated in one more different way: “They got stuck.” (They couldn’t reach an agreement.) That was the case despite the measures of hardly a year ago. (Ibid., p. 249/431-447). Cf. footnote 36.

⁶⁰*Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of St Francis de Sales*, Rome 1997, p. 252. See also in the text on “*Het preventieve systeem in de opvoeding van de jeugd*” in: *Don Bosco passie voor jongeren gisteren en vandaag*, Oud-Heverlee, Don Boscovormingscentrum, 2000, p. 65.

“strict warning”, for example in the case of the profanation in June of the previous school year, have been sufficient?

- *Fr Lazzero’s and colleagues’ position in the discussion on punishment in education and the intact preservation of the “preventive system”*

Although Fr Lazzero’s reports do not provide much evidence, discussion on the topic of punishment appeared to be quite intense again in that period. You may say ‘again’ indeed, for already in 1880 a new version of Don Bosco’s *Little Treatise on the Preventive System* had been published in the periodical, *Bollettino Salesiano*. In that version the concise last chapter ‘A word on punishment’ had been extended with two articles, which as a matter of fact were adopted immediately in the December issue of the French *Bulletin Salésien*.⁶¹ It remains an open question whether Don Bosco had previous knowledge or had approved of the publication. Publishing certainly shows his co-workers considered it necessary and convenient to add extensions to his directives. The texts added definitely agree with his insight and opinion, but two contemporaries no doubt take credit for the actual wording of the texts. The first one is A.M. Teppa (1806-1871). His book *Avvertimenti per gli educatori ecclesiastici della gioventù* was published in 1868 and instantly recommended by Don Bosco himself to his confreres and co-workers.⁶² The second one is the Frenchman A. Monfat (1820-1898). A loose translation into Italian of the volume *La Pratique de l’éducation* appeared in 1879. This work was mentioned here before when Fr Lazzero had the third chapter read out and commented on during the ‘general meeting’ on 16 November 1882.

If we take into account the circumstances and some frictions among staff members in Valdocco and Fr Lazzero’s serious concern about the preservation or the building up of unity, we can fully understand he wished to bring that passage to attention in that meeting.

Other co-workers were apparently more interested in the last chapters (21-26) of Montfat’s book for different reasons. Those paragraphs treated the subject of ‘repression’ or punishment, this very delicate topic in the spirit of Don Bosco’s education. In the book it was described in such a way that the Salesians could really see themselves reflected here. Novice master Fr G. Barberis made use of passages from it for his course of pedagogy, entitled *Appunti di Pedagogia Sacra, esposti agli ascritti della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales*.

Consequently, it was not surprising that in Salesian circles they were preparing a document entitled: *Dei castighi da infliggersi nelle case Salesiane* [*The use of punishments in Salesian houses*]. According to recent examination this document, written by G.B.

⁶¹BRAIDO, P., *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, Piccola Biblioteca nr. 5, Rome, LAS, 1985, pp. 24-25; 137; 156. It is quite significant that after Don Bosco’s died it was precisely this extended version that was circulated. First in 1892 by BONETTI, G. in: *Cinque lustri di storia dell’Oratorio Salesiano fondato dal sacerdote D. Giovanni Bosco*, Turin 1892; subsequently in 1904 by LEMOYNE, G.B. in MB IV, p. 552; EMB IV, p. 385.

⁶²In a letter of January 1869 to M. Rua: “Take the booklet of P. Teppa: *Avvisi* (sic) *agli Ecclesiastici* etc.: send one to Lanzo and one to Mirabello, from which they should read out one chapter in the meeting of clerics and priests every Sunday during my absence. They should do the same in Turin.” (E II, p. 4; E (m), vol. terzo, p. 40)

Francesia, is the oldest manuscript. He finished it on 29 January 1883, the day before Don Bosco left for France on a journey he would return from as late as 30 May that year.⁶³ In an introduction to the document published later on about the punishments in a collection of letters of Don Bosco [*Epistolario* IV, published in 1959] Fr Ceria provided more details. He wrote: “Before leaving the Oratory and Italy for a rather long time, he charged Fr Rua with sending or handing to the rectors his long letter on a crucial theme in the application of the preventive system. . . .”. Fr Rua had a sufficient number of copies made ready. Yet the text of this stimulating piece of writing gradually disappeared out of the picture. One single copy happened to be discovered in 1935 and restored to memory.⁶⁴

If we accept this information about Don Bosco’s instruction to Fr Rua, we still have a problem with it as there is only one single copy preserved out of quite a great number of such a carefully elaborated and far-reaching text, which was supposed to have been recommended by Don Bosco himself. Nor can one understand that not a single reference to the text was made in the house reports at Valdocco. This is all the more incomprehensible if you know Fr Lazzero “was not somebody”, as we heard him say about himself before, “who would ever disapprove of any instruction by a superior”, or, for that matter - one may add - would ignore instructions. On the other hand it would have been quite strange if Francesca had not submitted his essay to one or more Salesians since he intended to get it printed and published, but most probably his proposal had been turned down. It seems to me worth being further examined.

After the start of the civil year 1883 the Valdocco meeting reports show three blanks. The first one lasted for one month, from February 7 to March 7. The second one lasted from March 9 to April 19 and the third one, by far the longest one, from April 20 to October 20. The meetings that did take place and were minuted, contained very valuable information though.

On March 7, about two months after the so-called instruction to distribute the document, while Don Bosco was still travelling about, it was decided “to give all a small booklet: *Avvertimenti per gli educatori ecclesiastici della gioventù* by Alessandro M. Teppa, Barnabite.”⁶⁵ The next day, March 8, “all clerics and priests, who in one way or another were responsible for the good daily proceedings in the house, were present.”

First “one was briefly reminded of the points mentioned on November 16 [the so-called general meeting].” It all boiled down to a repetition of the question: “Who are the assistants?” and its matter-of-fact answer: “That’s all of us.” Subsequently the need was emphasized for an intense co-operation under the leadership of the rector. Those points are too important to be disregarded in silence.

⁶³PRELLEZO, J.M., “*Dei castighi*” (1883): *puntualizzazioni sull’autore e sulle fonti redazionali dello scritto*, RSS (52), jg. XXVII, nr. 2, 2008, pp. 289-291, 297. Cf. MB XVI, p. 15/voetnoot (1); EMBN XVI, p. 4/voetnoot 7 and pp. 368-376. J.B. Francesca was at that time director of the Valsalice college, which was situated not so far from Valdocco.

⁶⁴E IV, p. 201. J.M. Prellezo shows in his essay “*Dei castighi*” (1883) . . . , p. 290 “that the reconstruction by E. Ceria is problematic.”

⁶⁵PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco*. . . , p. 257/663-665.

Next “the meeting was about punishments.” The continuation of the report clearly shows how this item on the agenda was treated: “After the reading of Barnabite Father Teppa’s chapter on punishments and Don Bosco’s words in the *Regulations*, we concluded with intensely exchanged incentives to prefer those men, icons with experience in youth education.”⁶⁶ The last lines can only be interpreted as a reaction to consulting A. Monfat’s book *Practice of Christian Education*, at least concerning the problem of the punishments. One can also consider them as directed against the recently written work of Francesia *Letter on punishments*, which in both structure and content draws completely or to a great extent on the book by Monfat, supposing some superiors were informed about Francesia’s effort.⁶⁷

To define how teachers and educators should behave when punishments had to be imposed, the Salesians in the Valdocco Oratory needed neither Monfat’s work nor a document depending so conspicuously on him. There was no need to print or distribute it. With an overwhelming majority, almost with a standing ovation, they chose the chapter from *Avvertimenti* by Teppa and the last chapter from Don Bosco’s *Little Treatise on the Preventive System* as a guideline in this pedagogically delicate matter. That last chapter then probably only existed in its first, not extended version. Using the verb ‘to prefer’, they actually rejected the new document.

However, before agreeing they must have discussed in quite a lively way that 8 March. The discussion took so much time that a number of items on the agenda could not be

⁶⁶PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 257/677-680. Cf. also BIESMANS, R., *Redelijkheid in de omgang met jongeren (1876-1884)*, Don Bosco Studies, nr. 14, p. 109. If it is taken down that these instructions are “in our Regulations”, then G. Lazzerio must normally have got the 1877 edition in mind. In that edition the short treatise on the preventive system precedes the articles of the *Regulations for the houses*. The title for all of it is: “*Regolamento per le case della società di S. Francesco di Sales*,” OE XXIX, [97-196]. In the reports of M. Rua in the period 1866-1877 the topic “punishments” had been several times on the agenda. Cf. PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, pp.146, 147, 148, 154, 162.

Also the collected lesson preparations of G. Barberis from 1897 contain hints which prove that the piece of writing on punishments was not that successful. In his “*Appunti*” he dedicated a chapter to “Repressive action and punishments.” He did copy many paragraphs though from “*La Pratica*” of A. Monfat, but the quotations are often different from the 1883 document. Moreover, he almost literally inserted some sentences from Don Bosco’s writings. A first course of thought from the little treatise on the “*Preventive system...*” and a second one from the ten “*General Articles*”. (BARBERIS, G., *Appunti di Pedagogia Sacra, esposti agli ascritti della Pia società di S. Francesco di Sales*, Lithografia Salesiana, 1897, pp. 348 en 356). Strangely enough he omitted the adjective “*non amorevole*” in Don Bosco’s phrase “*uno sguardo non amorevole*” (a non-friendly, non charming look) or substituted it by (a severe look). As an explanation of his procedure he wrote by way of introduction: “As an addition and explanation of Don Bosco’s very wise quotes on punishments within the preventive system, the following is useful...” (Ibid., p. 347). At the same time it was a way of making it clear that the few articles in Don Bosco’s treatise of 1877 did not suffice for every day educational practice. It is as clear as daylight, for G. Barberis the addition was in those years not necessary in the way of the 1883 document. In any case he did not refer to it.

⁶⁷Cf. on that dependence: *Over de grens...*, pp. 25-27; 55, 81. His essay on punishments, must have been a deep disappointment for G.B. Francesia. It must have been one of the blows that triggered his use of words such as “*sofferenze*” (things that cause suffering), “contempt” and “distrust” in his “*Alcune memorie*” for the period 1882-1885. (PRELLEZO, J.M., “*Dei castighi*” (1883)... , p. 293 and p. 295).

treated. That is why they decided to have another meeting the next day, 9 March. The content of the brief report of that new meeting is so important that it seems justifiable to me to quote the complete text. “To find out why the youngsters fear us more than love us. That is against our spirit or at least against the spirit of Don Bosco etc. We discussed this important topic for about two hours without discovering the real cause however. It then dawned on us we possessed a booklet that could serve as a guideline; and we decided to provide everyone with the *Avvertimenti* by Alessandro M. Teppa, Barnabite.”⁶⁸

It is actually incomprehensible they should have wasted long hours, uselessly exchanging thoughts such a short time after they might have received a circular *On Punishments* (January 1883). There it says very frankly: “They [teachers and assistants] do not as a rule deal with the boys as they should. Either they impose nothing but physical punishments not achieving anything that way or they let the situation get out of hand, or they deal out punishments whether they are merited or not.” Immediately afterwards all this put together is called the root cause of the ‘malaise’: “That is the why we often see evil spreading and breeding discontent even among the better students, while the one who should be correcting the situation has become powerless to do any good.” We might not be wrong in supposing that the confreres would have had a hard time swallowing and digesting the text as it questioned their pedagogical behaviour in general, even to the point of accusing the Salesians. This is only slightly softened a little bit further in the document: “This leads me to say with some pain that we ourselves have always had our share of responsibility for the lack of prompt obedience with the boys.”⁶⁹ “Our share”, it says, a sort of milder way of putting it, which could be understood, however, as a reinforcement because the phrasing also contained the word ‘always’. All in all we can argue that the text on punishments should have stated the obvious for them. Their denying it can only mean they either did not know it before or did not like it. Their dislike was rooted in the disagreement with the diagnosis and the accusation “we have always been partly to be blamed.”

Also the phrase “fear us more than love” at the start of the brief report may have been inspired by the regulating *Letter on Punishments*. That is where we read “Let us endeavour to make ourselves loved rather than feared.”⁷⁰ To fear or dread in the sense of “to approach with a kind of awe that creates distance or not liking to seek any contact.” It is however not so sure that they were inspired by that phrase in the document during the meeting. They had been familiar with the motto for quite a time. It showed up twice in the edition of the *Regulations for the Houses*, a first time in the last very brief chapter of Don Bosco’s *Little Treatise on the Preventive System, A Word on Punishments* (1877), in the following way: “An educator should seek to win the love of his pupils if he wishes to inspire fear in them.” This means every teacher should take to heart that the boys should like him if he wants them to respect him, if he wants them to regard him highly,

⁶⁸PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 258/685-690. To detect the causes of “weakening discipline”, Don Bosco had already before founded a commission in the seventies. (AMADEI, A., *Il servo di Dio Michele Rua successore del beato D. Bosco*, vol. I, Turin, 1931, p. 291 and p. 278).

⁶⁹BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 328/65-71, 329/89-91; EMB XVI, pp. 369-370. Cf. G.B. Lemoyne’s text via the *Sussidio* or Auxiliary booklet p. 14 and p. 20.

⁷⁰BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 329/97. Cf. EMB XVI, p. 370.

if he wants them to have awe for him or allow him to have authority and at the same time not to avoid him. Hardly two pages further we read in the same volume where is repeated in the second of the ten *General Articles* that “the educator should try to be loved by the pupils if he wants to be feared.”

This article contains a further clarification of the principle: “He [the educator] will achieve that great goal if he allows the boys to experience in his words and even more so in his deeds he is exclusively concerned about their spiritual and temporary advantages.⁷¹ And were ‘Our Rules’ not explicitly referred to in the meeting of March 8? By the way, I should like to stress in this context that the effect “of being liked or loved” exclusively depends here on the active, committed Christian love or Charity.

Fr Lazzero himself most probably knew the motto even better. It was taught to the rectors in the first paragraph of the *Confidential Reminders for the Rector of the House...* which had known several editions since Don Bosco gave them to Fr Rua in 1863. One of the editions came out in 1876. This confidential piece of writing always kept the same recommendation, albeit in slightly varying words: “Try to make yourself loved sooner than feared.”⁷² That means: sooner than acquire a sort of authority creating a distance.

The next sentence of the note in the important report of March 9 runs as follows: “That is against our spirit or at least against Don Bosco’s spirit.” The note is not devoid of any irony or sarcasm. Would it not have meant then that this true spirit of Don Bosco could no longer be found or at least only partly with them? Although the reason for the malaise may have been precisely the loss of loyalty to Don Bosco’s spirit and as a consequence the Salesians themselves may have been the (co-)cause, it apparently did not dawn on them. They certainly did not manage to unravel the knot. Fortunately someone happened to have the great idea of reminding people of Teppa’s manual that would prove to be a good guidebook, and confrontation with the written works of this author would lead to a satisfactory and liberating insight. Perhaps this suggestion was a subtle urge to work out a decision that had been taken a couple of days before.⁷³ It would still take one and a half month before this ‘guidebook’ would be handed to both educators and teachers of the pupils and to the staff of the artisans on 19 and 20 April. On this occasion they did not omit explaining already ‘analogous thoughts.’⁷⁴ The phrasing ‘analogous’ probably meant ‘similar’, i.e. which could be found in instructions and guidelines of Don Bosco.

After this intensive exchange of thoughts one wonders why no more reports can be found up to the new school year of 1883-1884. Did they intend to allow each other plenty of time to go through A.M. Teppa’s 69-page document? Had they been able to find out the cause(s)? Had they been able to set up a strategy?

⁷¹OE XXIX [108] en [111]. BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 270/190-191 and 289/2. *Constitutions...*, p. 252.

⁷²BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 159/15. BIESMANS, R., *Fatti amare...*, pp. 18-19. MOTTO, Fr., *I “Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori” di Don Bosco*, RSS, III, nr. 1 (4), 1984, p. 151. Cf. also FdB 1.362 E 5. Cf. EMB X, p. 447.

⁷³Cf. footnote 66.

⁷⁴PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 258/692-695.

1.4 Recommendations of the Third General Chapter in September 1883 and follow-up in the Oratory of Valdocco

The General Chapter of 1883

There is no way of getting any answer to the above mentioned questions. Fr Lazzero kept silent from 20 April until 20 October. It does not mean they did not continue exchanging thoughts, which is proven by Domenico Canepa's reply to Fr Bonetti, who had to organize an enquiry on the subject. On June 8 1884 Canepa started his first contribution this way: "1. Last year it was suggested to examine which could be the reason why the higher classes did not show much trust nor have been showing it since then. I repeat now the answer I gave you then."⁷⁵ On the other hand the attention of the confreres or at least of the house council members may have been mainly directed to the preparation of the Third General Chapter. They had been summoned by Don Bosco himself to "dwell on topics they considered most necessary to bring onto the agenda." In order to stimulate and guide the preparation, he sent them "outlines of themes that would be discussed." Their reactions had to be "sent to Turin at the latest in the month of August."⁷⁶ It is not clear whether they put much effort into the preparation. The Chapter took place in the Valsalice College from September 1 until the evening of September 7. I mention two of the eight submitted themes, the fifth one: "Guidelines for the workers in Salesian houses and ways to foster vocations among the artisans" and the eighth: "Revising and modifying the *Regulations for the Houses*."⁷⁷ The discussion of both topics may shed light on the tackling of pastoral and pedagogical issues.

A few important recommendations from the last session

Taking into account the recommendations formulated at the end of the Chapter, it seems useful to select three of them which look quite promising in the context of this study.

1. It is necessary for us to make an effort to discern and to adapt ourselves to our times; that is, we must respect people and consequently where we can speak well about the authorities and where we can't, be silent...

2. Up to now we have been able to keep our heads high in regard to morality. Now we have been somewhat compromised by one or other imprudent person. Our good name is being re-established, but the rectors, who are responsible in the eyes of the public, must exert all their efforts to have morality preserved.

5. Concerning punishments, "whether it is convenient or inconvenient" [*opportune e importune*, 2 Tim. 4:2] insists that the preventive system be practised. It happens that some strike the boys or make them stand up at meals for an entire week. Let it be remembered that a teacher may scold or reprimand, but he is never to inflict physical punishment. He is to refer the matter to the rector, who will apply the preventive system.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 292/5-7.

⁷⁶Circular letter of Don Bosco in E IV, pp. 221-222.

⁷⁷MB XVI, p. 411; EMB XVI, p. 326.

It often happens that the boys are less guilty than was thought, as experience teaches us. Are there some who want to punish? The rector will admonish, but never in public, never before the boys. One-to-one dealing makes it very easy to get them to yield to the will of their superior and to the preventive system. Several are the advantages to be derived: (a) he will win over the boys' confidence; (b) the number of vocations will grow; (c) on leaving, they will be our friends, otherwise they will be our enemies; (d) they will never become worse; they will either be exemplary or at least never give bad example."

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The pedagogically and pastorally important 5th recommendation.

The first and second conclusions do not show up in the context of the meetings which we have explored for that purpose. They are important though for the long and short version of 'the letter from Rome'. Here all attention should be directed fully to the fifth topic. The unresolved pedagogical and pastoral question of 'punishments' must have been a hot topic at the Chapter judging from the content, no doubt because the practice did not suit the theory. Perhaps the topic was also a hot potato as a possible consequence of the document being present "On Imposing Punishments in the Salesian Houses." The latter impression needs further examination.

In any case the quoted text clearly shows that the Chapter once more had heavily emphasized the safeguarding and maintenance of the preventive system. They insisted on that point at least three times even at the beginning of the quotation. They used the clear phrase "whether convenient or inconvenient".⁷⁹ Imposing punishments seems to be the most dangerous threat for the preventive system. One can hear the same emphasis a second time where the rector is given a central role. Finally one can find it in the explanation of the principle that a boy who fell short in one way or another has to be addressed personally or face to face.

In one of the introductory paragraphs of the text on punishments (1883) a similar emphasis is placed: "In general, the educational method we must apply is the *preventive system*." It clearly uses the word 'must'. To support this, Francesia linked to the *Regulations for the Houses of the St Francis de Sales Society* (1877) by means of a footnote in the paragraph. In those rules Don Bosco had just concisely explained the difference between *repressive* and *preventive*." However, in the introduction to the so-called circular letter on punishments (1883) Don Bosco's definition of 1877 had been adapted and focused on treating the subject in the following way: "The preventive system consists of convincing the minds of our pupils in such a way that they yield to our will with no external force on our part."⁸⁰ It is meaningful that the phrase 'yield to' [*"piegarci"*]

⁷⁸ASC 1.864 B 2. Cf. MB XVI, pp. 416-418; EMB XVI, pp. 330-331. Partly re-translated. Shortened version in CERIA, E., *Annali della società Salesiana I*, p. 472. Cf. also BIESMANS, R., *Assistentie...*, p. 126 and BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco prete...* II, p. 528.

⁷⁹Don Bosco had probably acquired the phrase "*opportune ed importune*" by reading the second letter to Timothy (2 Tim. 4,2) during his training years. Cf. BIESMANS, R., *Assistentie...*, p. 143. Cf. MB XIV, p. 513; EMB XIV, p. 403 ("welcome or unwelcome at the moment").

⁸⁰BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 325/16-17. Cf. MB XVI, p. 439 and p. 417; EMB XVI, p. 368 and p. 331 (re-translated). See further OE XXIX [97]; [99-100]; *Constitutions...*, pp. 246-247.

turns up in that part of the report of the Third General Chapter in which the favourable impact of a face to face talk is described [*pieghino*]. It could be an indication of the 1883 document being readily available at that time, could it not?

The principles of ‘never in public’ and ‘never before the boys’ [fifth recommendation] do indeed seem to link up with the text of 1883. The phrase ‘one-on-one’ (Italian ‘*a tu per tu*’), used in the Third General Chapter, never appears in Francesia’s extended document nor does the Latin phrase ‘*in camera charitatis*’ of his document appear in the Chapter’s report. On the other hand the prohibition of ‘never in public’ and the thought of ‘before the boys’ had been used already in other important written efforts of Don Bosco known widely by the Salesians. One can find these phrases in Don Bosco’s *Little treatise on the Preventive System* and in the (ten) *General Articles*.⁸¹ They seem to have been common knowledge.

Personal reproach or private punishment (“*la correzione privata*”) is the rector’s task according to Fr Francesia (January 1883). The rector also has to see to it that the preventive system is applied and safeguarded as is stated in the recommendation of the third Chapter. Yet the emphasis on the key function of the rector is not necessarily due to the circular of January 1883, which had to be forwarded. *The Rules for the Houses* of 1887 stipulated that the teachers “who felt forced to impose a punishment outside of the classroom or take an important decision, had to report it and leave it to the director of studies or the rector of the house.” The assistant himself could “threaten to impose a punishment, but its application would be the privilege of the prefect or the rector.”⁸² At the end of the document *The use of Punishments* the important but delicate instruction for the rector is formulated in a clear and nuanced way. The recommendation of the Third Chapter softens it down to a rather weaker “insist that the preventive system be practised.”

A following similar point concerns the punishment of “table isolation” in the refectory. It is not unusual this measure was listed in the set of possible punishments - one of the stricter ones - in the finally proposed circular on imposing punishments. The punishment consisted of keeping the boy standing up, either in his usual spot in the refectory or at the special table. However, one would rather not expect the punishment to be mentioned once more under the recommendations of the General Chapter. Still, already in 1886 it was decided to introduce different levels: “denying a dish – denying wine – making them eat in the middle of the refectory – eat near the doorway of the refectory – on their knees – in the portico.”⁸³ Managing a refectory and maintaining order has never been an easy task. Neither is imposing punishments as is obvious in this context. It is not easy to impose these measures in a reasonable and balanced way. That is why the need is felt to

⁸¹G. Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, Rome, LAS, 1985, p. 91/III; BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 291; OE XXIX [113]; Cf. BIESMANS, R., *Assistentie...*, p. 125 and also p. 83.

For elements of looking for balance between the different instructions and possible evolution on that point cf.: BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire non reprimere...*, p. 346/footnote 29 and BIESMANS, R., *1866-1876 Don Bosco betrouwbare wegwijzer...*, p. 24/footnote (1).

⁸²OE XXIX [130/7] en [136-137].

⁸³PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 147/46-48. Cf. BIESMANS, R., *1866-1876 Don Bosco betrouwbare wegwijzer...*, pp. 33-34.

go back to this topic frequently.

A different kind of punishment, which is mentioned explicitly in the Chapter document, is hitting or physical punishment. The physical punishment already turns up explicitly in an article of the *Regulations for the Houses*, which was published together with the treatise on the preventive system in 1877. Besides, Lazzeri had these regulations read out again and again already before the Third General Chapter. In the sixth chapter it was clearly stipulated for the teachers: "It is strictly forbidden to hit or to impose defamatory or punishment injurious to health."⁸⁴ Don Bosco also insisted on not striking the boys in a letter of March 1881 to Fr Ronchail, rector in Nice.⁸⁵ Temperamental teachers and educators tend to have hands and feet that lash out quickly. The rectors of the houses had to be watchful and they had to call to order assistants of such a nature, not once but regularly.

But then again the conviction that "it often occurs that the boys are less guilty than presumed, as experience has shown" links up closely with the written communication of 1883. There we find: "Later I had to admit, a calm, unbiased investigation of the matter revealed that their guilt was appreciably diminished and sometimes was totally wiped away."⁸⁶

In the conclusion to the fifth theme of the recommendations after the Third General Chapter there are more points of resemblance with the concise treatise on the preventive system than with the document of 1883. Among other things it contains the idea that the educators "will have made friends when the boys leave at the end of their schooling or school time." It also comes down to the point that the boys "will never end up worse if that system is implemented." In the treatise on the preventive system we read indeed: "The pupil will always remain friends with his educator" and: "Parents can rest assured that their son will not become worse; indeed, it can be held as certain that he will always make some improvement."⁸⁷ It seems necessary to me to draw attention to Don Bosco nearly always taking the youngsters' stand as a starting point: "The pupil will remain ... a friend." In other words, the boys will trust and befriend teachers, educators and assistants. They will not do so, however, automatically. The Salesians too have to try to make friends with the boys both by what they do for the boys and the way they do so, that is among other things by "letting them talk nineteen to the dozen without being able to get a word in edgeways themselves."⁸⁸ That could only happen if educators and teachers mixed with them and listened to them in an unforced, confidential, jovial and interested way. Only then the youngsters could and would like to become friends.

The fifth recommendation as a whole gives very much the impression of being intended as an answer to the question asked in the previous meeting of March 9: "Why do the

⁸⁴OE XXIX [130/art. 6]. G. Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo...*, p. 91/II and explicitly in OE XXIX, p. 108/IV. Cf. BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire non reprimere...*, p. 346.

⁸⁵MB XV, p.133; EMB XV, p. 105; E IV, p. 34. Cf. also footnote 28. Cf. also BIESMANS, R., *Assistentie...*, p. 143; Id., *Amorevolezza...*, pp. 58-59.

⁸⁶BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 329/86-89. MB XVI, p. 441; EMB XVI, p. 370.

⁸⁷Both quotations: G. Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo...*, pp. 90/511-513; 84/418; 90/516-518; *Constitutions...*, p.251 (partly re-translated).

⁸⁸Cf. for example the *General Articles* in BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 289/25; *Een opvoedingsproject...*, p. 28/6.

boys fear us more than love us?”⁸⁹ That answer is: the Salesians will be able to gain the trust of the youngsters and consequently overcome suspicion and distrust as a first result of imposing fewer or no punishments, of punishing in a reasonable and personal way, of taking as a starting point that the boys are not always that much to be blamed as one had expected at first and of dealing with them moderately, delicately and respectfully. That is how they can bridge the gap between the teachers and assistants on the one hand and the youngsters on the other hand. The least one can say is that this recommendation implies that the malaise in the Oratory, and probably in the other institutions as well, was due to the teachers and assistants themselves for a considerable percentage. The boys are acquitted certainly to a greater extent. They are not always to be blamed as one would easily do.

On the whole one could view it as quite striking that the topic of punishments was put on the agenda of the General Chapter and allowed considerable space in the recommendations. That is why it is enigmatic that the existence of a document which was supposed to have been sent to all rectors only a few months before, was not openly referred to during that important meeting of a large group of Chapter members. Moreover it happened to be a document in which everything had been pointed out systematically, accurately and synthetically. It appears even more enigmatic that precisely other texts of Don Bosco had dominated the recommendations to such a high degree. Furthermore it is strange that precisely that important topic was no longer mentioned in the delayed publication of the Chapter’s conclusions. One might wonder if it was no longer that urgent. Or was it caused by a certain dislike of attributing such prominence to the topic?

It does not particularly matter on which texts the recommendations were based in the closing speech. At any rate Fr Lazzero had been provided with directives of some priority to work on during the new school year of 1883-1884.

Follow-up to the recommendation in Valdocco: Fr Lazzero remains loyal to his method of guiding his personnel

Another proposal, the consequences of which could have been very serious for the Oratory, had been put forward at the Third General Chapter. They wanted to extend the Superior Chapter of the Congregation and appoint a general councillor of studies responsible for all professional schools. The Chapter members present considered nobody better suited than Fr Lazzero. That is why they wanted to entrust the job to him and put Francesia in charge of the [entire] Oratory. Don Bosco was in favour. Yet others doubted whether this was the best solution for the Oratory.⁹⁰ It looks as if this situation was left in suspense

⁸⁹Cf. footnote 69.

⁹⁰According to information which is chronologically not completely clear in MB XVII, pp. 200-201; EMB XVII, pp. 177-178. The “*Dizionario biografico dei Salesiani*”, Turin, 1969 (p. 165A) records the appointment to head of the professional schools in 1833 [obviously meaning 1883]. On September 12th 1884 they discuss the appointment of two rectors in a session of the Chief Council. (MB XVII, pp. 201-203; EMB XVII, pp.177-180. Also MB XVII, p. 206; MBN XVII, pp.182-183). P Braido mentions that G. Lazzero was a member of the Chief Council from 1875 to 1898 and director of the oratory from 1879 to 1886. (BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 388). His still being a director in 1884 can be derived from the last paragraph of R. Biesmans’s “*de Brief uit Rome aan de jongens in*

at that moment.

In any case Fr Lazzero organized four meetings for the house chapter and three meetings for everyone in the house, “teachers, assistants, priests and superiors”, with renewed dedication a few days’ later in October and November 1883.

On October 20 he noted: “Another urgent issue was for everyone to go back to the *Regulations* and afterwards to read them again together. We have to find out how we can tackle this without causing clashes.” His way of dealing with things remained the same both for the personnel and the youngsters as it seems. It “was decided to read out *the Regulations for the Houses* in the presence of the boys the next Sunday, the final day of the usual ‘triduum’ [at the start of the school year].”⁹¹

The first element, i.e. the promotion of the knowledge of the articles involving the specific functions of each and everyone, demanded loyalty to the instruction Don Bosco had given before, and continuation of his method after the Second General Chapter. The goal also remained: internal unity and clarity for the teachers, assistants and the youngsters themselves. Yes, even the boys. Clear substantial information for the boys and what was expected from them, was absolutely necessary in the spirit of the treatise on the preventive educational method and the typically Salesian way of freshening up things. That information had always been given to them in the past.⁹²

“They read the chapter on the preventive system” during the meeting for the complete personnel two days later. They “made analogous remarks” while reading. Putting this on the agenda, Fr Lazzero continued the trend of the previous school year and conformed to the recommendations at the end of the Third General Chapter. It is almost impossible to pinpoint the exact chapter discussed in that meeting. It may well have been the complete treatise as occurred in February 1881, which would have linked up quite smoothly with the start of the school year.⁹³

Another point which had to be clarified at the start of the school year was the task of the pupils’ councillor of studies. It took place during a closed meeting of the house chapter only two days later. It showed quite some flair of practical psychology: “We discussed the educational system that had been implemented in the Oratory a few years before, i.e. the question whether the entire weight of education was to be put on the shoulders of the councillor of studies. Now they wanted to go back to the previous system, which meant that a greater part, not to say all of the responsibility was to go to the teacher. The assistant should be a help and act as one whole in harmony with the

Valdocco...”, p. 120/columns D and K, from the Italian *Sussidio* or *Auxiliary Booklet* p. 34 and also from a meeting report of the Chief Council on June 5 1884. That is where Fr Bonetti indeed said: “As a director of the Oratory G. Lazzero must be kept abreast better than all the other members of the Superior Chapter.” (MB XVII, p. 185; EMB XVII, p. 160). In September 1884 the distribution of tasks was discussed again and decided on. Cf. chapter 8 of this study in Volume 2, footnote 93.

⁹¹PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 258/702-705. Cf. Footnotes 44 and 46 in this chapter.

⁹²BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, p. 83/389-393 and p. 91/543-545; *Constitutions...*, p. 247. That occurred already in 1871 and at the start of the school year 1877-1878. (PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 166/41; p. 60/520-522). Cf. also MB XIII, p. 441; EMB XIII, p. 347-348; MB VI, p. 772; EMB VI, p.451-452; MB IX, p. 397; EMB IX, p. 183.

⁹³Cf. footnote 26.

teacher. After we had examined some consequences, we decided to try it out.”⁹⁴

Hardly a week later “that decision was presented or rather communicated” in a meeting “in which the teachers and assistants of the pupils took part. After airing some objections, the conclusion was accepted unanimously by both parties.”⁹⁵

They most probably wanted to take away some pressure from the councillor of studies and/or express more appreciation for the teachers and their (young) assistants by giving them more responsibility and share in authority.

All of this seemed to lead to a flying start for the school year and a prosperous pastoral and pedagogical year of mutual understanding and peace. Once more however there proved to be many a slip ’twixt the cup and the lip. By halfway through November a further demarcation of responsibilities and competencies was necessary. Again they resorted to reading out the articles concerning the rector, the prefect and the catechist. (The catechist also takes care of the sick bay for boys.) But on November 16 they couldn’t “agree on things or take a decision because the catechist refused to be present.”⁹⁶

How things continued remains a secret. Fr Lazzero did report though only on two more meetings. That was in December to safeguard the smooth course of the Christmas celebration in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. He noted those measures in another copy-book, the so-called “Diary”. Next, about halfway through January 1884 he noted that Don Bosco had a measure taken that the youngsters were no longer allowed to go outside to teach catechism or do any other services [in the parish].⁹⁷ But the question remains whether G. Lazzero liked it. This question arises from the conciseness of his notes compared with the large observations in the *Memorie Biografiche XVII*. At the insistence of several confreres Don Bosco may have judged that order and discipline and the general spirit in the house suffered too much from the activities outside of the house and the abuses they entailed. Not a single word can be found on a possible reaction of young people themselves.

In the same ‘Diary’ Lazzero wrote down largely the main aspects of the celebration of St Francis de Sales. On 29 January 1884 he expressed his particular satisfaction: “Actually it was one of the nicest, not to say the nicest celebration of all those that took place in the Oratory in the past.” That was due to “both the quality of the people taking part and the great time schedule of the day which was followed strictly all day long including the theatre performance. It featured the presence of His Eminence Cardinal Alimonda [the new archbishop of Turin] and it ended punctually at 8 p.m. The theatre play *Toni*, the singing performance of *The Choir of the Prisoners of Edinburgh* finishing

⁹⁴In a version of the *Regulations* in 1852 a Study Councillor was not mentioned at all (MB IV, p. 543 en pp. 735-755; EMB IV, pp. 377-378 and pp. 542-559). In the version of 1877 the Study Councilor’s task was “To organize and take care of everything teachers and pupils could need for the lessons and study.” (OE XXIX [127/1.]) One of the conclusions at the annual conference of rectors in January or February 1878 went as follows: “Discipline at school, recreation time and everything concerned with good order, the walk and similar things depend on the Studies Councillor.” (PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco* . . . , p. 259/footnote going with the lines 713-714).

⁹⁵PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco* . . . , p. 259/718-721.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 259/730-733.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 260 and p. 86/1259-1281. Formerly similar missions outside were quite usual. See *ibid.*, p. 240/207 and p. 256/651. An echo in MB XVII, p. 187; EMB XVII, p.163. Cf. footnote 31.

with *The Choir of the Lunatics* were programmed.”⁹⁸ Everybody felt it had been a joyful and relaxed day. There were different reasons for its success, but no doubt the chief one was the enjoyable show of a terrific co-operation between the teachers-educators and the youngsters to present a celebration that would stick in people’s memories for a long time.

After those notes written at the end of January Lazzero did not add anything more that school year, neither in the ‘Diary’ nor in the copy-book with reports of the meetings. He picked up writing again only in October 1884. That is quite some time after the letter of May 10, which Don Bosco wanted to be written to the Valdocco boys. So Fr Lazzero actually started to write again at the beginning of the school year 1884-1885.

We are left in the dark about the reasons of his inactivity. Not only did he have much work with the demanding general management of the Oratory, but he may also have spent a lot of his time and energy on his responsible membership of the Superior Chapter. Several circumstances also continued to preoccupy the superiors in Turin. Among them there was the alarming health condition of Don Bosco in January and February. There was also the tough journey through Liguria to France with exhausting contacts and sermons by the sick and suffering founder and subsequently without any stop or rest he went on from France back to Liguria and on to Rome in Spring 1884.⁹⁹

More than anything else Fr Lazzero missed the presence and support of Don Bosco in the course of those long months. While staying a number of weeks in Rome, Don Bosco only seldom wrote and as a matter of fact only once in his own handwriting to Fr Lazzero. That short letter is dated April 23, 1884. From the letter’s content we can derive a few issues of changing physical pain and psychological pressure that preoccupied him in Rome: “Kindly tell our beloved confreres and dear boys of the house that my health has been improving remarkably, especially in the last two days. That is why upon my return I wish to have a nice celebration in the church to thank our Madonna for the innumerable graces she has bestowed on us, and also in the refectory to drive away all melancholy and to rejoice in the Lord.”¹⁰⁰ This was his own way of putting the Valdocco rector at ease and at the same time giving him a couple of instructions for a nice celebration on May 24, the festive day of Mary Help of Christians. At that moment Don Bosco did not allude at all to his intention of writing a letter to the boys or to the Salesians. It sufficed for Fr Lazzero to bring the good news on Don Bosco’s health to the boys and to take care of organizing a celebration in the refectory so as to “drive away all melancholy”. The word ‘melancholy’ seems to announce the first line of the notes of manuscript *B*. The latter runs as follows: “Why so much boredom and so much listlessness?”¹⁰¹

In any case the second instruction to Fr Lazzero shows his great preoccupation with his

⁹⁸PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 86/1282 en p. 89/1357-1362. See also MB XVII, pp. 22-24; EMB XVII, pp. 8-10. At that day Don Bosco and his closest co-workers could rejoice particularly at the good will and the archbishop’s interest meeting Don Bosco’s needs after so many years during which they had been on strained terms with his predecessor, Monsignor Gastaldi.

⁹⁹Cf. Among other items MB XVII, pp. 206-207; EMB XVII, pp. 183-184.

¹⁰⁰E IV, p. 256. MB XVII, p. 115; EMB XVII, p. 95 (re-translated). Cf. *Constitutions...*, p. 264.

¹⁰¹Manuscript *B* in BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, p.87. *Sussidio* or *Auxiliary booklet* p. 8.

favourite institution, the Oratory in Turin. There is no doubt whatsoever Don Bosco's mind was mainly busy with what was going on in Valdocco during his days in Rome. His preoccupation must even have increased after Buzzetti had arrived in Rome and had talked to Don Bosco.¹⁰² However, Don Bosco did not manage to offer any means of help for Fr Lazerro to improve the general atmosphere or to incite Fr Lazerro possibly dealing with things in a more determined and stricter way.

On the other hand the situation in the Oratory must have kept his mind so intensely busy that his secretary, Fr Lemoyne, on his way to Rome wrote to a confrere in Turin on April 8 1884: "Our beloved father cannot speak without mentioning the heroic times of the Oratory."¹⁰³ At that moment Don Bosco had plenty of time to discuss things with his secretary, perhaps more than he liked to. He had indeed to wait for days before he was allowed an audience with the pope. He could pay only few visits as walking was problematic and he was subject to sudden nauseas. He suffered from the liver and his eye was inflamed. If at night he wanted to take a breath of fresh air, he could only go out leaning on Fr Lemoyne's arm.¹⁰⁴ In those circumstances it is easily comprehensible he entrusted to Fr Lemoyne some passing thoughts, which he would mould into a letter to the Valdocco boys later. At the end of those notes in manuscript A, we detected, however, three items concerning the Salesians themselves, i.e. (1) the 'sense of moral duty', which means one should report some well-defined matters to the superior, (2) jealousy.¹⁰⁵ It shows imperfections of the confreres weighed on him. Maybe he was thinking of calling them to order and reminding them of the second and fourth conclusion of the Third General Chapter. However, that seemed less urgent to him than a written contact with the boys.

Concluding summary

At the Oratory and in other houses, "particularly in the schools" according to Don Bosco himself, daily life was experiencing its ups and downs during the period of September-October 1879 until May 1884. It is a changing sequence of joy, enthusiasm, happiness, sadness, melancholy and dissatisfaction. Turbulent days of unrest, irritation, unwillingness and friction interfered with quiet, peaceful, almost routine-like periods. Superiors and boys live through both sun-clad, unforgettable and successful days and times of shadow, misfortune and malaise. They can enjoy brilliant school results, massive attendance of theatre shows and magnificent religious celebrations, one of them the most

¹⁰²See footnotes 14, 15 in this chapter and 48 in the third chapter of this study.

¹⁰³BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 354; BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, p. 39. In this period it appears Don Bosco spoke easily about the past. It also shows from this note in the *Memorie Biografiche*: "During his spare time, the servant of God sought relaxation by reminiscing over old times. On the 8th [of April] G.B. Lemoyne wrote to G. Bonetti: "Our beloved father cannot talk about anything without recalling the heroic days of the Oratory" (MB XVII, p. 66; EMB XVII, p. 46).

¹⁰⁴MB XVII, pp. 80, 84, 89; EMB XVII, pp. 59-60, 63, 67-68.

¹⁰⁵BRAIDO, P., *La lettera di Don Bosco da Roma del 10 maggio 1884*, Rome, LAS, 1884, p. 34. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 103 and 107. *Sussidio or Auxiliary booklet* p. 23 and p. 21 (column A).

enchancing one ever. They can enjoy and take pride in an idiosyncratic style of good spirit, which they owe to “the implementation of a special system of discipline”, i.e. to “our educational system.”¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, however, they must hear from Don Bosco’s own lips that the particular spirit, the spirit of St Francis de Sales and of himself, is weakening, tarnished and fading away in such a way that their houses, more particularly their schools, hardly appear any different from most other schools. To their very own shame and disgrace they even had to acknowledge and admit so themselves.

The Salesians, superiors, teachers and assistants can be blamed in various areas for the loss of the good spirit

In spite of the task specifications in the *Regulations*, laid down by practice, clashes are frequent with regard to competences and responsibilities. Despite repeated emphasis on the central position of the rectors, many people go their own way. Although the need for unity in leading policy and action ‘*in solidum*’ has been advised more than once, not many keep singing from the same hymn sheet. Solidarity and cooperation have vanished into thin air. Everyone plays the part of little emperor in his own little empire. No matter how frequently and strongly the superiors insist on assistance as a preventive and constructive presence among the boys, particularly in the playground, many assistants neglect it. Although they are often told that punishments, particularly heavy and physical punishments, cannot pedagogically be justified and are contrary to the spirit of Don Bosco, several confreres cannot help but to resort over and over again to these measures.

The youngsters are found guilty of criticism and misbehaviour and so harm a good understanding with superiors, teachers and assistants

Although the Salesians have to beat ‘*mea culpa*’, they are not the only ones to drop stitches. So do the youngsters. The co-workers of Don Bosco notice the boys being disobedient and even obstinate. Sometimes they are faced with very serious disorder of a kind they label vandalism. The boys are not satisfied with the lack of care for their clothes.¹⁰⁷ Most probably the boys express criticism on certain restrictions of freedom which they had been allowed previously. Others get annoyed because they are ignored. The teachers did not assess them; neither did they correct their tasks. Other boys missed the inspiring and easy accessible presence of the Salesians in the playground and they did not seem to appreciate the traditional range of entertainment. They no longer liked the games. A few of them must have turned bitter because of punishments and even beatings. The letter to the boys dated 10 May 1884 explicitly mentioned ‘grumbling’ or destructive comments. Quite a number of boys no longer trusted their superiors: the report of 9 March 1883 indeed does mention ‘the’ boys. Their behaviour showed that

¹⁰⁶E III, pp. 482 en 499.

¹⁰⁷Irish boys were discontented too about the hygienic circumstances, the food, the checking of correspondence and the experience of pressure to become a Salesian. Cf. DICKSON, W.J., *The dynamics of growth*. . . , pp. 45, 49, 52, 53-54.

they ‘feared’ the superiors, teachers and assistants rather than liked them. They avoided the Salesians.

Besides this, the letter to the boys mentions the lack of peace with God as the main cause of the malaise. Their religious practice cannot be compared with the former one, “the period until 1860 or 1870.”

The Valdocco Oratory undeniably found itself in the middle of a crisis. The original drive had been broken. Although it is virtually impossible to assess the seriousness and the real size of the problem, there is no doubt they had got themselves into a deadlock.¹⁰⁸ The superiors took the measures which as such seemed adequate enough, but did not produce any or at the best only temporary results. They tried to find the causes but could not find any. In the early eighties the malaise continued. In this way a ‘barrier’ had arisen between superiors, teachers and assistants on the one hand and the youngsters on the other hand. From the data in the first part we can derive that G. Lazzeri and his direct co-workers would have gone on in the usual way for a long time in order to stop the negative spiral and put things back on track again. But before they were able to do so, something totally unexpected occurred.

An unforeseen intervention by Don Bosco and G.B. Lemoyne

Don Bosco could not help suffering from the precarious situation of the Oratory, the ‘apple of his eye’, most particularly from the spoilt situation in the school, in which he had watched so many vocations develop. The number of new vocations had gone down over the years. These worries must have occupied his mind wherever he was or went. This was the case in Rome in April and May 1884. There he had ample time to reflect and talk with Fr Lemoyne and some confreres in the house, but also with Buzzetti. Don Bosco had requested Buzzetti to join him in Rome.

Towards the end of April and the beginning of May Don Bosco conceived the idea of writing a very serious letter to his boys and with it, perhaps, a stringent letter for the superiors, teachers and assistants at Valdocco. This latter hypothesis is based both on the final suggestions in manuscript *A* and the beginning of manuscript *B*. Manuscript *B* is introduced by the question: “Why so much boredom and listlessness?”¹⁰⁹ (ms *A* 24; ms *B* 9) Even just the word ‘*perché*’ [why?] already seems to echo the agenda of the meeting of March 9 1883. It meant: “Finding out why (*‘il perché*’)” or searching for it.¹¹⁰ It gives the impression that Don Bosco and in particular Fr Lemoyne wanted to

¹⁰⁸We can find some help for a realistic image formation with Fr A. Amadei. In 1931 he wrote about this period as follows: “The Oratory did not cause little trouble then. Even the familiarity, which unites minds and accomplishes miracles of Charity and ardour, was missing. Those days were troublesome, we said.” And somewhat more cautiously: “In those years the perfect harmony among the confreres and among the pupils, once the most striking feature of the Oratory, got poisoned a little. It was caused by small and very small things if you like to put it that way, but those little things cause damage in every institute, even more so in the mother house of the Salesian family.”(AMADEI, A., *Il servo di Dio Michele Rua...*, pp. 335, 336 en 324).

¹⁰⁹BRAIDO, P., *La lettera...*, pp. 34 en 35. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 103, 107 en 87.

¹¹⁰Cf. footnote 69.

contribute to answering that question and show a way of overcoming the malaise during their stay in Rome.

Don Bosco suggested a few thoughts to his secretary for the letter to the boys. We can find those thoughts in manuscript *A*. Notes concerning the Salesians directly are rather scattered: there are a few points of interest at the end of manuscript *A* as well as some clever remarks and suggestions for a circular to the Salesians in manuscript *B*. In the latter document some thoughts are rather concise, a kind of ‘telegraphese’, other pieces are more tentative attempts at editing. They contain some urgent questions such as: “But how can we bring these youngsters to life again, so that they can regain the liveliness, the cheerfulness, the heartiness of the old days?”[11] That is the key question. However, it is not sure at all that these thoughts and questions were suggested by Don Bosco himself.

Manuscript *C* is a further elaboration of *B*. It is an editing process that took place in Rome, but was or could not be accomplished. Manuscript *D* contains both pieces almost literally converging with *C* or *K* and parts of *C* which were rewritten, further developed or refined, and also additions, new elements and copies from the letter to the youngsters. Manuscript *D* is a final edition, which was accomplished only later. I shall try to back up this thesis gradually in passing.

Meanwhile I should like to fully focus on the outline of the content of the long or combined version and at the same time on the possible editing process of the text. For years that version has been disseminated under the title *Letter of Don Bosco from Rome 10 May 1884*. This title was kept with a little reserve in several editions of the Dutch series DON BOSCO STUDIES. Authors who try to scrutinize the educational method and spirituality of Don Bosco, have preferred to use “the long version” for a long time already now. I have opted, however, for a new name: “Written communication or proposed circular for the Salesians (in Valdocco)” and also, as to the whole of manuscript *D*, “combined version”.

Whether and to what extent the intervention by Don Bosco and Fr Lemoyne had any effect, are questions that will find their proper context at the end of the second volume.

In order to be able to follow the discussion or the gradual text treatment, it will prove useful to have regularly a look at the separate dossier in Italian called a *Sussidio* or Auxiliary Booklet, with the synoptic columns of the handwritings used.

2 Combined version

The composition of the first part of the combined version.

In order to facilitate following the discussion about the written communication to the Salesians in Valdocco, also named the “long” or combined version, it seems useful to me to first develop a supporting structure. If needed, one can consult it again. The frame of the text is not always clearly visible straight away so that one could claim a different structure in one way or another, but the following one is certainly present in the English translation, which I have retained in a separate Italian *Sussidio* or Auxiliary Booklet in column D (pages 3-25).

1. General introduction to the whole unit (ms. D)
 - 1.1 The address: “My dear sons in Jesus Christ”
 - 1.2 Considerations and sentiments on the occasion of the long lasting absence from the Oratory
 - 1.3 Explanation for Don Bosco’s not writing earlier
 - 1.4 Sensitive motivations urging him to write even before his departure from Rome
 - 1.5 Particular impulses: call for attention and practising what he has to say
2. The large part of the combined version, exclusively intended for the superiors, teachers and assistants in the Valdocco Oratory
 - 2.1 Introduction to the description of the contrasting scenes in the playground during recreation time
 - 2.1.1 Reiteration of the idea that he is “always” thinking of them
 - 2.1.2 His evening prayer: “The prayers his good mother had taught him”
 - 2.1.3 Sleepiness or absent-mindedness during prayers
 - 2.1.4 The “sight” that distracted him
 - 2.2 Description of the recreation in the playground before 1870
 - 2.2.1 Introduction of Valfrè
 - 2.2.2 Description of the joyful and vibrant recreation in the playground in the period before 1870
 - 2.2.3 The impression the recreation made on Don Bosco
 - 2.2.4 Valfrè’s comment with its main thought focussing on: “Familiarity (closeness) leads to affection, and affection brings confidence.”
 - 2.2.4.1 Familiarity as a style of social intercourse
 - * *The beneficial power of “familiarity”: the creation of affection*
 - 2.2.4.2 The fruit of mutual affection: confidence
 - 2.2.4.3 The favourable impact of trust in the educational process
 - 2.3 The recreation about 1884 under G. Buzzetti’s guidance

A) THE FIRST PART OF THAT RECREATION FOCUSES ON THE BOYS' BEHAVIOUR

2.3.1 Making acquaintance with Buzzetti

2.3.2 Description of the listless recreation focusing on the boys' behaviour

2.3.2.1 A few boys played in a carefree way ("in light-hearted joy")

2.3.2.2 Quite a number of others did not participate in the recreation

2.3.2.3 Some boys take part in playing in a listless way

2.3.3 Afterthoughts in dialogue

2.3.3.1 Some consequences of that listlessness among the youngsters

- The first consequence is apathy in receiving the holy sacraments
- The second consequence: neglect of devotional exercises
- They do not like staying at the Oratory anymore
- The fire of religious vocations is dying
- "Ingratitude" of the boys towards their superiors
- "Secretiveness"
- "Grumbling" and criticism

2.3.3.2 The second part of the commentary develops an answer to the question of Don Bosco: "How can we re-animate my dear boys again?"

- The means of healing, the remedy is "*l'amore*" [love, affection]
- Clarification of the concept by facilitating the discovery of what "amore" is not
 - Powerful plea *pro domo* by Don Bosco, based however on a wrong interpretation of "amore"
 - Reply by Buzzetti
 - Don Bosco pleads in favour of his co-workers
- Clarification of the concept: the heart of what he means by "*amore*", the very nature of "*amore*"
- Insistence by Don Bosco: "Please, explain this further!"

B. THE SECOND PART OF THE PICTURE WITH THE LISTLESS RECREATION IN 1884
PUTTING THE SALESIANS IN THE LIMELIGHT

2.4 The same scene in the playground, now focussed on the Salesians

2.4.1 Introduction: urgent request to look more closely

2.4.2 Shortcomings of priests and clerics at the level of assistance:

- the educational presence with the youngsters

- Few priests and clerics present among the boys
- Where they actually were and what they did
- Some, actually the majority, were walking and chatting with each other
- Others were watching without showing much interest
- Others were supervising at a distance
- A rare superior was giving warnings, but in a repressive way
- Unsuccessful attempts of some Salesians to make contacts

2.4.3 Key fragment: description of what should be understood as “*amore*”, [affectionate love]

- Evocation of the relationship between Don Bosco himself and the boys and vice versa in the years before 1870
 - The heart of the key fragment: “*amore*” means mutual affection, affective love. It had been and still had to be the standard.
 - Apologies by Don Bosco
 - Buzzetti points out the lasting responsibility of Don Bosco
 - Don Bosco’s ardent counter-plea and bitter disappointment
 - Conclusion by Buzzetti and promising repetition of his point of view

2.4.4 Insertion interrupting the train of thought

- The cause of the current malaise is to be situated with a number of youngsters
- The educator as a father, a brother and a friend of the youngsters
- “Unity of heart and soul” and the breakdown of the distrust barrier
- Restoration of the cordial confidence through the boys’ obedience

2.4.5 In the continuation of the course of thought which was going on before the insertion, the aspect of “familiarity”, a second key-word, is worked out

- Meaning of the term familiarity
- Jesus Christ “master of familiarity”
- Examples illustrating what familiarity and ‘being little with the little ones’ consist of
 - The teacher and the preacher who acts in the spirit of Don Bosco
 - The typical “word in the ear” of Don Bosco
- Positive effects of mutual love and trust

- Effects of the restored psychological and spiritual strength [resilience] of the Salesians
 - “you will no longer see anyone working for his own glory”
 - “you will no longer see anyone punishing out wounded self-love”
 - “you will not see anyone neglecting the work of supervision through jealousy”
 - “You won’t hear people running others down”
 - Nobody “will let his heart be conquered by a creature”
 - “No one will neglect his duty” to seek his “own ease and comfort”
 - No one will fail through human respect
- The general revival puts the Salesians back on the track of the ultimate objectives of their pastoral and pedagogical commitment

2.4.6 Additional considerations about the decline of the preventive system and the need to implement it again

- Complaint against the substitution [betrayal] of Don Bosco’s educational system
 - Cold rules chill the educational atmosphere
 - “The superiors move away from” Don Bosco’s educational rules
 - They betray the heart of the preventive system: watchful and affectionate prevention
- More precise description of the part the superior [rector] plays in implementing the original preventive system
- Beneficial impact on the boys’ conduct
- Additional instructions for the superiors and assistants
 - About ‘secretiveness’

2.4.7 Completion of the considerations on the second keyword: familiarity and G. Buzzetti’s extensive comment

- “The exact observance of the rules of the house”
- A welcoming, considerate, friendly, warm-hearted, cheerful relationship is the best dish for dinner, i.e. in education
 - The phrase concerns the Salesians in Valdocco
 - “The best dish” is “ hearty welcome”, i.e. a familiar relationship for the whole education time
 - A cheerful and happy atmosphere should reign

2.5 Close of the first extensive part of the “long” or combined version which was meant for the adults

- Differences between the close of the first extensive part of the combined version and the close in manuscript *C* and the letter to the youngsters

3 Manuscript *C* and the first large part of manuscript *D* [3-25]

Discussion of the composition, content and the important pedagogical and pastoral topics

3.1 General introduction to “the long” or combined version (ms. *D*)¹[3]

Looking at the auxiliary booklet with the Italian synoptic tables, one will notice that the introduction to the circular to the confreres in column D is almost identical to the letter sent to the boys. (Text in column K).² Fr Lemoyne wrote that introduction specifically for the boys. It is missing in manuscripts *B* and *C*, which are the provisional notes and a first attempt at editing (*B*) and the further attempt at editing a proposed circular (*C*) meant exclusively for the Salesians at the Valdocco Oratory. Yet I should like to react extendedly to the different elements of the general introduction to the letter, especially to check how it was possible for the editor to copy them inadvertently into the long or combined version.

3.1.1 *The address: “My dear boys (or sons) in Jesus Christ” [3]*

Reading this address as it runs in the English translation of the combined version, the innocent reader might simply understand from it that Lemoyne was applying it to Don Bosco’s co-workers. The Salesians were indeed as much ‘his sons’ as the boys. Actually the Salesians were even more his sons in Jesus Christ. It should be noticed in passing that the circular to the Salesians is preserved with the same date as the letter to the boys, which had really been sent from Rome, dated 10 May 1884. P. Braido however thought it necessary to write that two editions of the ‘long version’ of the letter exist: an unfinished one (ms. *C*) and a fully elaborate one (ms. *D*). Those two however, he goes on, were very likely produced with a certain time interval in between them.³ I shall return to this cautiously formulated hypothesis.

¹The English translation “sons” can be found in *Constitutions and Regulations*, Rome, Editrice S.D.B., 1997, pp. 254-264. Cf. EMB XVII, pp. 85-94. The latter contains this translation: “My most beloved children in Jesus Christ.”

²The separate *Sussidio* or *Auxiliary Booklet* is edited in the Italian language. In this study I refer to the texts in this *Sussidio* by figures between brackets: e.g. [7].

³BRAIDO, P., *La lettera...*, p. 27.

But as it happens it is not as simple as it appears. The translated address goes back to the Italian one: “*Miei carissimi figliuoli in Gesù Cristo*” (letter to the boys) respectively “*Miei carissimi figliuoli in Gesù C.*” (longer circular to the confreres). ‘*Figliuolo*’ or ‘*figluolo*’ are diminutives of the basic word ‘*figlio*’. It was used to express more familiarity, confidentiality and affection. In the context of our northern culture it is obvious to understand that the diminutive in the boys’ letter is translated by ‘sons’ rather than by ‘boys’ to suggest the familiarity in the Italian address. Taking into account his jovial and affectionate dealing with the youngsters, one may even expect Don Bosco to be keen on using that address to ‘his boys’, rather than to his grown-up assistants. However, this is not the case. For years in the seventies, he had preferred the following addresses in letters to the boys in different institutes: “*voi tutti miei cari figli di S. Martino*”, (to all my dear boys of St Martin), “*Car.mi miei artigiani*” (“My very dear artisans”), “*Miei cari amici Direttore, Maestri, Professori, Allievi*” (My dear friends Director, vocational teachers, teachers, pupils”) and “*Miei cari figli di S. Nicolas.*”⁴

There was an exception to these addresses, a letter of thanks to the boys in Villa Colón (Argentina) in 1878. There Don Bosco used the diminutive: “*Figliuoli miei amatissimi*” (“My very dear boys”)⁵ It is suitable here to quote a quite recent annotation of P. Braido: “The terms “*figli*”, “*figliuoli*”, can be considered as the plain Italian translation of the Piedmontese dialect word “*fieu*”, which simply means “*ragazzi*” (boys) in certain contexts. In the familiar language of Don Bosco and every rector these words are enhanced by a very specific nuance, i.e. including the relationship of a spiritual and educational fatherhood vis-à-vis the boys.”⁶

In the seventies Don Bosco addressed himself to the Salesians in the same way. In 1874 he used “To the beloved sons (‘*figli*’) of St Francis de Sales”, but in the text itself: “Dear beloved sons (*figliuoli*).” Next: “To my dear sons of the house of...”, “My dear Salesian sons”, “Most beloved sons in J.C.” His “Memoirs” (*Memorie dell’ Oratorio*), which he probably started in 1873, were explicitly and exclusively meant for his “very beloved Salesian sons (“*pe’ miei carissimi figli Salesiani*”).” A few lines down it simply says “*miei figli*”, my sons. Although the document was confidential. Still in 1878 in the Latin letter after the First General Chapter, it says: “Most beloved sons” (“*figli*”).⁷ Contrary to this,

⁴E (m), vol. Quarto, pp. 196,208 and E III, p. 5; E III, p. 69. Cf. BIESMANS, R, *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 34-3.

⁵E III, p. 200. This corresponds well with the address in the “*Regulations for the Houses...*” from 1877. There Don Bosco wrote: “The church, dear sons (“*o cari figliuoli*”) is the house of God.” Cf. OE XXIX [160]. Cf. also at the end of a long story during a good night in May 1868 where he asked the question: “What am I supposed to tell my boys (*ai miei figliuoli*) to instil revulsion for it into them?” (E (m), vol. primo, p. 452. Cf. MB IX, p. 164; EMB IX, p. 83 with the translation “sons”. It is a pity data are missing about the letter of 1884 which Don Bosco wrote from Rome to Fr Febraro and his pupils of the 4th and 5th year of the secondary school, pupils who were the so-called apples of his eye. (MB XVII, p. 77; EMB XVII, 57, text and footnote 4.)

⁶BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, p. 312/footnote 27.

⁷The quotations consecutively come from: E (m), vol. quarto, pp. 113; 178; 215; 255. BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, Rome, LAS, 1991, p. 30/13 and p. 30/18-19. E III, p. 404. Cf. BOSCO G., *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855*, translated by Daniel Lyons, SDB, New Rochelle, New York, Salesian Publishers, 2007, p. 30.

it already says in 1874 “To my most beloved sons (*figliuoli*) rectors and clerics of the Salesian Congregation.”⁸

As late as the eighties the sensitive address was really predominant. So it says in the new year’s letter of January 6 1884: “My dear and beloved sons” (*figliuoli*), which is repeated in the same letter. We further find the addresses in a part of the continuation of his “Memoirs”, i.e. in the so-called “spiritual testament” (1884-5-6). Twice in succession it says: “To all my dear sons (*figliuoli*) in G.C.” and “My dear and beloved sons in G.C.”⁹ Fair enough one has to state the spiritual testament had obviously not been written yet in May 1884.

To Lemoyne himself this address was not unusual at all, particularly not when concerning the boys. He himself used the phrase, for instance in a letter to the boys of Lanzo on 18 April 1868: “My dear boys (*cari figliuoli*) of the Lanzo College.” He also used it in a letter to Fr Rua on 23 April 1884: “He (Don Bosco) continues dealing with congregational matters. We can see any time how much he loves us and how many sacrifices and humiliations he bears for his sons (*figliuoli*).”¹⁰ According to the context he must have meant his confreres when he used the phrase at that time. So this address was perfectly applicable to the Salesians as well, even though it was used only after the New Year’s letter of 1884 and Lemoyne’s letter. The impact of such letters in Valdocco should never be underestimated.

To be complete it should be added that Don Bosco sent a personally written letter dated 23 April 1884 to G. Lazzero during his stay in Rome. He gave him the instruction: “to communicate to our beloved confreres (*amati confratelli*) and dear boys in the house (*cari figli della casa*).”¹¹ Using those rather simplified addresses Don Bosco did not twice mean the Salesians, but both groups: on the one hand the adults (*confratelli*) and on the other hand the youngsters (*figli*).

Anyway, copying the address from the letter to the boys into the combined written item meant for the Salesians does not come out of the blue. Even a detail such as the abbreviation ‘in G.C.’ in the written communication to the Salesians seems very usual. The original address in the letter from Rome to the boys themselves may look a little less out of the ordinary, but is not really exceptional. That was all the more so because of the circumstances in which Don Bosco found himself in Rome, in which context the familiar relationship with the Oratory and the youngsters was an important

⁸E III, p. 422. It goes even further back into the past, e.g. in a letter of 23 July 1861: “*Giovani miei e figliuoli carissimi*”, rather addressing the local confreres with “*figliuoli*” (MB VI, pp. 990-991; EMB VI, p. 595 (“My dear boys and sons.”))

⁹E (m), vol. Quarto, p. 358. “*The use of punishments in Salesian Houses*” in E IV, pp. 201-202. MB XVI, pp. 439-440; EMB XVI, pp. 368-369 (both to the adults and about the youngsters). The New Year’s letter in E IV, p. 248; MB XVII, pp.15-17; EMB XVII, p. 1 (“Dear and beloved children” is no appropriate translation, as the letter is directed to the Salesians only.) The spiritual testament in BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 409/187 and p. 410/190. Cf. *Constitutions...*, p. 267, only once.

¹⁰BRAIDO, P., *La lettera...*, p. 11. Cf. MB IX, p. 133; EMB IX, p.68: “My dear sons” should be: “My dear boys of the College in Lanzo”. You can find it also in the letters to the boys in 1875 (BRAIDO, P.-ARENAL LLATA ROGELIO, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne attraverso 20 lettere a Don Michele Rua*, RSS., Anno VII, no 1 (12) 1988, p. 147/37)

¹¹E IV, p. 256. Cf. MB XVII, p. 115-116. EMB XVII, p. 95.

aspect. Those circumstances are tangible in the general introduction, which was meant for the boys in the first place. In the same way the address with the indicated difference of detail [*Gesù C.* versus *Gesù Cristo*] suited both written communications.

3.1.2 *Considerations and sentiments on the occasion of the long lasting absence from the Oratory [3]*

Despite his worrying and also pitiful state of health, Don Bosco had left for France on March 1 1884 and travelled on to Rome at the beginning of April. So by halfway through May he had been absent from the Oratory for about two months.

That was obviously long enough to feel the need to communicate with the boys through a letter and to express the desire to be with them in reality as he had done on previous periods of absence, even more so than on other occasions. It was “a long enough time of being away from them” to make an allusion on its long lasting, also in May 1884, as he used to do in other letters and good nights, and to assure the boys he was often, actually “always thinking” of them as he stated in the letter to the boys. So had he been expressing it for a number of years to the youngsters who stayed in the Oratory in 1870. He wrote about the same feeling in a letter from Rome to Fr Rua: “Although I am concerned [not] only with the house and our boys here in Rome, my thoughts still keep flying to where I cherish my treasure in Jesus Christ, my dear boys of the Oratory.”¹² It is something Fr Lemoyne had done and written himself when he was rector at Lanzo.¹³ For that thought and formulation he did not even need the inspiration or the wish of Don Bosco. He could impersonate effortlessly the feelings and thoughts of Don Bosco using the first person. They were in complete harmony with his own thoughts and feelings in such circumstances.

Similar expressions about long lasting absence are not present in the circulars to the Salesians, but the statement of Fr Lemoyne about “always thinking of” in the letter of 23 April 1884 is significant. He wrote: “Every moment we may experience how much he loves us.”¹⁴ “Every moment” certainly does not sound less intense than “always” in his personal letter to the boys a couple of days before (16 April): “Don Bosco cherishes all of them [the boys] in his heart and he is always praying for them.”¹⁵ “I am always thinking

¹²E (m) vol. terzo, p.169/3-5. Cf. the good night from (probably) March 1872: “Throughout my illness [in Varazze] I was always here among you in my thoughts. From there I talked about you day and night, at all possible times, because all my heart was here with you. Even when I dreamed.” (MB X, pp. 45-46; EMB X, p. 38) Furthermore in a short talk at the beginning of June 1878: “But though I did not come personally, my mind was always here with you.” (MB XIII, p. 752; EMB XIII, p. 577, re-translated). The resemblance with this passage is particularly striking.

¹³BRAIDO, P., *La lettera...*, p. 11. See also BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 27-29; 34; 37-38 and J.B. Lemoyne himself (Ibid., p. 23) about similar formulations in letters and evening talks.

¹⁴Cf. footnote 10. See also Don Bosco himself addressing the pupils and novices together at the beginning of June 1878: “Though I relentlessly [day and night] foster your well-being, during this retreat I will give myself totally to your spiritual good.” (MB XIII, p. 753; EMB XIII, p. 578)

¹⁵BRAIDO, P.-ARENAL LLATA Rogélio, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, p. 140/23-24.

of you” in the first line of the letter to the boys did not appear an exaggeration to the adults and consequently was quite acceptable to employ.

One of the main reasons why Don Bosco kept the boys so intensely in his thoughts is his deep “wish to see them happy.” His life was devoted to their happiness “both in this world and in the next.” It is the only desire Don Bosco had always been open and frank about since 1847 in the first edition of his book of prayers and meditations: *Il giovane provveduto*. In his introduction he wrote: “I propose a short and easy way of life to you, but it will suffice to be a comfort for your parents and to be an honour for your country, (and) to be good citizens on earth and one time become happy residents of heaven”¹⁶, in other words to be forever happy “in this time and in eternity”. This wording would result in the pastoral and pedagogical motto: “Form good Christians and upright citizens.”¹⁷ The tangible meaning of temporal and eternal happiness in everyday life is expressed in a letter of 1864: “All this concerns the soul. Is there nothing then for the body?... So now I ask Father Prefect to see to it that we have a nice day and, weather permitting, we shall take a walk together.”¹⁸ If the prefect got involved then, he would certainly have taken his task to heart and it would have been a festive table.

Only as recently as in a new year’s letter to his Salesians dated January 6 1884 had Don Bosco used the phrase “now and in eternity” in an emphatically alternative way: “Keep our Rules, the rules that Holy Mother Church deigned to approve for our guidance and the welfare of our souls, for the spiritual and temporal welfare of our beloved pupils.”¹⁹ It was a letter which must have greatly impressed Don Bosco’s closest collaborators, including Fr Lemoyne. Still, the distinction cannot be denied. For the boys both aspects are mentioned; for the Salesians only “the well-being of the soul.”

In Fr Lemoyne’s eyes Don Bosco’s desire to contribute to the entire happiness “now and in eternity” – also of the confreres – was no less strong than the reason for his written communications to the Salesians. That is why this thought could be preserved in the introduction of the combined version.

3.1.3 Explanation for Don Bosco’s not writing earlier [3]

“But,” the boys, the addressees of the letter from Rome, might object, “did you have to write just before your return? Couldn’t you have said things better upon your arrival back home?” The writer apparently wanted to anticipate the question and objection. In any case it is mentioned explicitly that Don Bosco would have liked to write “a week ago”, but had not got down to writing because he had been “prevented by constant work.”

From a letter of Fr Lemoyne to Fr Rua on May 6 1884 it becomes quite clear that Don Bosco “would have liked to write these few lines” to the boys “a week ago”. As a fifth item of the same letter Lemoyne wrote: “Finally I inform you Don Bosco is preparing a

¹⁶OE II [187]

¹⁷BIESMANS, R., *1876-1884 Doelstellingen van opvoeding en opleiding gevat in een kernachtig motto, Don Bosco Studies, nr. 11, 1998.*

¹⁸E (m), vol. secondo, p. 59. MB VIII, p. 875; EMB VIII, p. 382. See also BIESMANS, R., *De brief aan de jongens...*, p. 31.

¹⁹E IV, p. 249. MB XVII, p. 16; EMB XVII, p. 2.

letter he would like to write to his boys. He wants to address a number of nice thoughts to his beloved sons.²⁰ It is worthwhile noticing “boys” [*giovani*] and “beloved sons” [*amatissimi figliuoli*] converge there. This information sheds additional illumination on the use of the word “*figliuoli*” in the address of the letter to the boys in May 1884. It probably offers the best explanation of its use in that letter, in which the address was most likely written by the secretary, Lemoyne. On the other hand it leaves no doubt as to Don Bosco’s wish to write a letter to his boys only.

There is the other possibility too, that Don Bosco realized that because of his poor health he would not be able to address the youngsters upon his arrival and to explain orally what went on in his heart and mind, which made him desperately want to write. Fr Ceria indeed relates that “Don Bosco no longer talked to the boys of the Oratory after evening prayers; however, their superiors kept on talking about him.”²¹

Manuscript *B* and consequently manuscript *C* show that Fr Lemoyne and possibly Don Bosco were thinking of an explanation or a circular to the Salesians during their stay in Rome. An interview by the JOURNAL DE ROME with Don Bosco may have triggered it off. The interview was published on April 25 1884. One of the journalist’s questions was: “Would you please tell me what your educational system is?” Don Bosco had answered: “It is very simple: give the boys entire freedom to do whatever they most like doing. The secret lies in discovering the seeds of their talents and developing them. Since people are happy doing what they know they can do, I follow this principle so that all my pupils are not only working with industriousness, but they are working with love. I have not inflicted any punishment in forty-six years and I dare say that my pupils are all very fond of me.”²² It contains thoughts which in a slightly adapted version appear in the first part of the long version. In this way a second inspirational moment is interwoven with the first after Buzzetti’s arrival and thus offers a double challenge to Fr Lemoyne. At any rate he used the same kind of paper for the first notes and a first draft of a circular to the teachers, assistants and superiors in Valdocco as he did for his brief notes (ms. *A*) and manuscript *K* for the letter to the boys. There is no trace of any announcement of writing to the Salesians however in the busy correspondence between Fr Lemoyne and Fr Rua during these days.

The argument of “constant work” is used as an explanation of the rather late letter. Justly so. There is no doubt that two problems, i.e. the organisation of a lottery and obtaining privileges from the Church for his Congregation, preoccupied and also bothered him. Using his personal contacts in Rome, where he had arrived on April 14, he wanted to speed up matters and solve the questions on the spot. However, after his arrival things did not proceed smoothly.

Before leaving for France he had already complained during a session of the Superior

²⁰BRAIDO, P.-ARENAL LLATA Rogelio, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, p. 154/13-15.

²¹MB XVII, p. 17; EMB XVII, p. 4.

²²MB XVII, pp. 85-86; EMB XVII, p. 64. For the annotation about the paper which is used and mentioned in the same paragraph, see BRAIDO, P., *La lettera...*, pp. 15-16 and pp. 22-23. The texts themselves ibidem, pp. 35-36; 37-40. You can find the manuscript *B* in the *B* column from p. 10 up to and including p. 20 and manuscript *C* in the *C* column from p. 3 up to and including p. 25, both in the *Sussidio* or *Auxiliary Booklet*.

Chapter: “This lottery has become my scourge and a constant torment on account of the laziness of the people in charge [in Rome].” And “if the advocates really took the matter seriously to heart, he had thought his presence would get things going in such a way as to draw profit by selling 100,000 tickets.”²³ Upon his arrival in Rome, he rushed “to get things going” to solve the two problems. As far as the lottery was concerned, he quickly noticed the Salesians in Rome were too busy, were not up to it and did not expect very much from the lottery either. They told him, as Fr Lemoyne writes to Fr Rua on April 16 “that the sales of lottery tickets in Rome would not yield anything. It drove him mad.”²⁴ After some time Don Bosco found no better solution than calling on the coadjutor Buzzetti from Turin to come and with his experience take over the material side of things.

In spite of this Fr Lemoyne informed Fr Rua on April 24 that the lottery matter would be a long term affair. A few days later he concluded that the Catholics on the board were thwarting the project. He added bitterly and ironically: “As happened before the children of darkness may give us the help which the children of light refuse us.” Eventually on May 9 “the official communication” came through that “the mayor of Rome had formally submitted the request to organize a lottery to the prefect.”²⁵ That looked like an important step in the right direction.

The problem of the privileges was the second one, actually an eternal one according to Fr Lemoyne. Don Bosco experienced tough resistance also in this matter. One of the important opponents was Cardinal Ferrieri. One day the file Don Bosco had mailed in January, was nowhere to be found in Rome. The only thing left to do was to draw up and submit a new text, no sinecure in his situation. As soon as he had looked at the request, the Cardinal communicated that the text was not formulated in conformity with the rules, to which Don Bosco is said to have reacted as follows: “My head can no longer stand it. I shall have to forego the privileges. I will only ask for one or two of the more essential ones and then go back to Turin.”²⁶ Despite this opposition and deep disappointment they tried to meet the set requirements once more. They were not instantly successful since even after the orally granted approval of the pope during the audience of 9 May, new objections turned up.²⁷

The audience was preceded by a heavy Calvary at least as Don Bosco experienced it. He would very much have liked to speak to Pope Leo XIII and he had thought he would be able to meet him as easily as he had met his predecessor Pope Pius IX. But that did not work out. He had to respect the rules and submit a written application. He had to cope with others who having arrived in Rome after him were received before him. On May 5 he had not yet received an answer from Mons. Macchi after a week

²³MB XVII, p. 74; EMB XVII, p. 54.

²⁴BRAIDO, P.-ARENAL LLATA Rogélio, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, p. 140/30-32 and p. 146/9-15.

²⁵Ibid., p. 151/5-12; p. 155/11-13.

²⁶MB XVII, p. 133; EMB XVII, p. 112.

²⁷More details in G.B. Lemoyne's letter dated 12 May 1884 in BRAIDO, P. -ARENAL Rogélio, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, 157/10-15.

and a half. Fr Lemoyne was tempted to react: “It is bitter, but have patience.”²⁸ Don Bosco experienced the compulsory waiting and the written procedure, which had to be followed, as a humiliation. It affected his nerves and his whole constitution. At the end of April he suffered again from a three-day fever attack.²⁹

Don Bosco’s health had been up and down since February 9. His physician Albertotti vainly tried to discourage him from travelling to France. But by March 1 he had left for France anyway. If not the liver, then the legs, the stomach or the head were causing pain. At the request of the Salesians in Marseille, a doctor from the medical faculty in Montpellier came to see Don Bosco on March 25. His diagnosis was crystal clear. This doctor made an unequivocal connection between his state of mind and the irritated organs. Don Bosco found himself in a really pitiful condition.³⁰ He would never recover fully from it. His condition sometimes improved, but he relapsed time and again. It went that way until he arrived in Rome, from where Lemoyne at some point could announce that “Don Bosco felt better, the pain of the liver and the inflamed eye had subsided” and the health condition of Don Bosco “remained satisfactory”, then again he had to go back to a statement that Don Bosco was “far too tired” and “could not occupy himself with anything as his head failed to function” or “fever attacks had returned.”³¹

It is easily understandable that he had to stay in bed sometimes and as a consequence of swollen legs and sudden discomforts could pay far fewer visits than he used to while in Rome. As he was not able to go himself, many tried to come to him.³² If possible in any way, he would welcome them and talk to them. Also this coming and going belonged to his “constant work”.

Although he knew the situation well enough as an insider, Fr Lemoyne did not mention Don Bosco’s health as a reason for not writing to the Salesians, in his own introduction to the combined version. As a matter of fact he did not change anything in the introduction at all: it was the same one both for the boys and the Salesians.

There is no direct explanation for Fr Lemoyne’s not mentioning Don Bosco’s health. Neither in the letter to the boys nor in the combined version (ms. *D*). Perhaps he did not like to remind the boys of all the physical misery, as there had been some improvement for a couple of days.³³ Above all Don Bosco himself no longer wanted any allusion to his

²⁸Ibid., p. 152/11-12 and p. 153/11.

²⁹Ibid., p. 149/27 and p. 151/3-4. DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Don Bosco en son temps (1841-1888)*, Turin, SEI, 1996, pp. 1258-1259.

³⁰DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Don Bosco en son temps...*, pp. 1242, 1246; among other things with the annotation: “état nerveux entraînant une irritation des organes.” Doctor Combal’s report can be found in MB XVII, pp. 57-58; EMB XVII, pp. 38-39. In the *Memorie Biografiche* E. Ceria made that connection too: “So many hardships and the additional burden of bitter disappointments aggravates Don Bosco’s physical infirmities” (MB XVII, p. 89; EMB XVII, p. 67).

³¹BRAIDO, P.-ARENAL LLATA Rogélio, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, pp. 142/3-4, 145/5, 146/16-18, 147/29-30, 151/3-4.

³²MB XVII, pp. 80-81; EMB XVII, pp. 60-61. Many persons did not really spare the ill and overworked Don Bosco. They wanted to use him: “The requests for honour or distinction were numerous. One wanted to be a knight (*cavaliere*), another one wanted to be a Monsignor, a third one bishop and all have pieces of evidence to recommend them. It is a world, also with priests! (BRAIDO, P. – ARENAL LLATA Rogélio, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, p. 146/17-20)

³³BRAIDO, P.-ARENAL LLATA Rogélio, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, pp. 153/3, 154/16,

health. On April 23, the very day Fr Lemoyne informed Fr Rua that “Don Bosco could not possibly occupy himself with anything, Don Bosco himself wrote to Fr Lazzero in one of his very few personal letters from Rome: “Tell our beloved confreres and dear children (boys) of the house that my health has improved remarkably in the last two days.”³⁴ It goes without saying his poor and at times really bad health put his activities in Rome under heavy pressure and often made them impossible. In the meantime the Salesians in Turin were kept abreast quite accurately of the situation and during the reading out by Fr Rua they must have wondered why the editor of the letter to the boys kept silent. Later they must have even been more astonished when they actually got down to reading the circular which was addressed to them.

We did not dwell upon the real reason why Don Bosco wrote to the boys from Rome after all. He wanted to write because he was worried about the situation in the Oratory and the part the youngsters played in it. Neither has the actual reason for the written item to the adults been mentioned afterwards. And so the explanation stuck to the vague “constant work prevented me.”

3.1.4 *Sensitive motives pushing him to write yet before the departure from Rome [3]*

Instead of further explaining things, the text switches to some of Don Bosco’s deep, personal motives. This sort of concealed way of dealing with the matter is quite acceptable with regard to the boys. When informing the superiors, teachers and assistants in writing, this way of dealing with things is perhaps less correct, but Don Bosco’s sensitive motives were also valid for them. What made him write and what may be called personal motives must seem like strong feelings for the youngsters and for the Salesians as well, i.e. Don Bosco “loves them very dearly in Christ Jesus” and he also felt it “his duty to speak with the freedom of a father.” These thoughts and sentences could really be preserved as such, without any objection, within the framework of a confidential circular, particularly in the introduction to an explanation. It is an introduction which already differs in its own right from an introduction to a businesslike conference.

Don Bosco left no doubt about the certainty of his love for the boys in Jesus Christ in a statement in 1847 in *Il giovane provveduto*: “My dear boys, I love all of you dearly and that you are young is enough to make me love you very much and I can assure you that you may find books written and recommended by persons far more virtuous and learned than I, but you would hardly find anyone who loves you more dearly in Jesus Christ than I do and who is more desirous for your true happiness.”³⁵ He stood by this line until the 101st edition in 1885 in which he restricted his expression of feelings to the first sentence. Not only did he himself love the boys and dedicate his whole being to their temporal and eternal welfare, but he also called on his confreres to love and deal with the youngsters

155/14-15.

³⁴E IV, p. 256. MB XVII, pp. 115-116; EMB XVII, p. 95.

³⁵OE II [187]; OE XXXV [135].

in such a way that they could love the assistants rather than respectfully fear them.³⁶ Was it not precisely the reversal of both aspects which was regretted in March 1883 and for which no cause nor reason had yet been found?³⁷ In the meantime Don Bosco had an insight into it and wanted to use it to contribute to a solution. He did so - driven by love in Jesus Christ - by addressing himself in the letter to the youngsters to both the boys and the adults when they were listening to Fr Rua or Fr Lazzero reading it out.

The second motive is the ineradicable awareness of responsibility and the task he had as a father to the boys. He must have invited them explicitly to consider him as a father when in the beginning years of the Oratory he had expressed it to one of the boys who was having a hard time at home. "Remember", he said, "that no matter what happens, I'll always be a father to you. And if things get really bad, flee to my house."³⁸

Later in a letter of 1864 to the boys at the school in Mirabello he wrote: "I am coming to you as a father, friend and brother."³⁹ It looked as if he was not able to formulate it accurately, but "father" comes first in the presentation of himself.

The successive generations of youngsters also have experienced and acknowledged him as such. When back in 1872 everyone celebrated Don Bosco's patron saint's name many people, among them the members of the St Aloysius sodality, stood up and said: "Allow us to drop all titles from today on and address you by the sweet name of Father."⁴⁰ Don Bosco allowed the address by the sodality members to please him at a moment when he had just recovered from serious illness during the first months of the 1871-1872 school year.

These quotes are important to show how Don Bosco considered himself to be a father for the boys and also presented himself as such to them. It goes without saying that it was stressed in the introduction to the letter from Rome to the boys. These quotes make us feel this address went down well with the boys to such an extent that they not only considered him to be their father, but also wanted to address him by that title. Thirdly, they clearly show that he required his rectors to have the same sensitive attitude towards pupils and confreres.

With respect to the extended planned circular intended for the Salesians, these quotes are valuable because they suppose that pastoral and pedagogical fatherhood was a constant factor practised in daily life even before Don Bosco laid it down in *The Little Treatise on the Preventive System*.

In it he stated that in his system "the rectors or the assistants ... like loving fathers... converse with them." He went on to say that "a pupil", as a past pupil, "will look upon his teachers and superiors as fathers and brothers" thanks to the implementation of the

³⁶See BIESMANS, R., *Fatti amare...*, *Zorg ervoor dat ze van je houden*, Don Bosco Studies nr . 3, 1994, pp. 64-69. ID., "Studia di fatti amare," Quaderni di spiritualità salesiana, Istituto di spiritualità, Rome, UPS, n° 8, 1996, pp. 17-34.

³⁷Cf. the reference in footnote 59 of the first chapter of this study.

³⁸MB III, p. 341; EMB III, p. 242.

³⁹BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, p. 31. MB VIII, p. 875; EMB VIII, p. 382.

⁴⁰MB X, p. 333; omitted in EMB X, p. 163/footnote 9. Inspired by similar experiences and sentiments Cardinal G. Cagliero would testify some time: "Although we boys of the Oratory considered him as an affectionate father and dealt with him with a trust and a familiarity that was even more than filial..." (MB XVIII, p. 583; EMB XVIII, p. 496-497.)

preventive system.⁴¹ It would be an unforgivable mistake not to refer here once more to Don Bosco's intervention during "the general meeting" of the superiors in Valdocco in 1882 with "35 people present". Don Bosco had arrived late. After having listened to what had been discussed already, he said: "One should pay much attention to this: a teacher or an assistant functioning as a superior with the boys. Once the function is fulfilled, he has to be a friend, a father with the boys."⁴²

That principle must have become the common behaviour with Don Bosco's assistants. That was backed up firmly by Fr Francesia when writing his first draft text on *The Use of Punishments*: "You must never forget that you represent the parents of these dear young people.... And so, if you are to be true fathers to your pupils, you too must have a father's heart." Further: "The fatherly heart that we should have condemns such behaviour. ... In this manner you will prove to be true fathers, and your correction will be genuine."⁴³

In this context these texts are all the more important because we may accept that Lemoyne knew them very well or certainly well enough. Moreover, we may suppose that they encouraged him to keep this typical feature in the introduction as a transparent allusion to superiors, teachers and assistants. The duty for all educators to become fathers will be turned into an explicit theme in the corpus of the planned circular.

At the same time Don Bosco liked to be a father to his closest collaborators. The New Year letter of January 1884 bears this out: "I treasure such precious words and reply to them simply like a father, by saying that I am grateful to you from the bottom of my heart." And he went on: "If you will but help me in this great task, you will be doing what my paternal heart is asking of you." And in the last part of the letter: "(Those) letters will offer me a splendid opportunity to open my heart to you. They will also serve as an answer and even more as a guide for those who, for saintly reasons, stay in distant countries and therefore are unable to listen to the living voice of their father, who loves them so dearly in Jesus Christ."⁴⁴ The repetition in one and the same letter is striking and significant, particularly so short a time before the written communication to the confreres in Valdocco in manuscript *C*. It is also a letter that Lemoyne as secretary, must have known very well.

Besides, in Father Lemoyne's eyes Don Bosco was a "dearly beloved father." On April 10 1884, only a few weeks before the letter to the boys, he wrote to Fr Rua: "Wherever one goes, one will find people who always like to tell us new things about our very beloved father."⁴⁵

Undeniably, Don Bosco wanted to be a loving and affectionate father, but also a father who knew how to keep an accepted distance with a certain authority; for the boys and

⁴¹BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 254/425-426, 260/556-558. *Constitutions...*, p. 247 and p. 251.

⁴²Cf. footnote 54 in the first chapter of this study.

⁴³BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 326/31-32, 332/150, 332/166. EMB XVI, pp. 368-369, 372.

⁴⁴E IV, 249-250. Cf. MB XVII, p. 16; EMB XVII, pp. 2-3 (partly re-translated). Cf. footnote 6 in the Introduction.

⁴⁵BRAIDO, P.-ARENAL LLATA Rogélio, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, p. 138/62-63. Idem on April 22, *ibid.*, p. 145/5.

for the Salesians as well. That allowed him to act and adjust at times when this was needed. Such a time had apparently arrived. According to Lemoyne it was even the duty of a father to speak at such moments to the boys and the Salesians.

These words in the introduction to the letter to the boys may remind us of an evening talk at the start of the school year 1863-1864. On that occasion he said, particularly with respect to a great number of newcomers: “I do not want you to look upon me mainly as your superior but rather as your friend. Don’t be afraid of me. Far from it! On the contrary, trust me fully. It’s all I want, all I expect of you like true friends.” And further: “Let everyone determine to be more honest. My heart is open for anyone of you. If there is something I don’t like, I tell you. If I must admonish you, I do it right away, publicly or privately. I do not keep you in the dark; my heart is on my lips. I wish you to do the same, my dear boys (*“figliuoli”*). If there is something you don’t like, tell me about it and we shall do our best to set things right.”⁴⁶

These thoughts are not repeated so often in later good nights or talks and letters. They are however always confirmed and carried on in his lifelong preference for spontaneous, jovial, familiar and natural dealing with the boys; for friendly, cautious, supporting dialogue and closeness and for constant, available, frank and adjusting presence.

On the other hand we can hear how he expressed himself to his closest collaborators in a sort of sermon in March 1876 and in an address to the members of the Second General Chapter in 1880.

In that sermon Don Bosco talked about mutual brotherly love and he said: “We are to uphold each other, without criticizing the deeds of another confrere, without even being a little jealous of his position, his popularity and success. Why should another person be given this task and not me? That other person is in the good books and I am ignored.”⁴⁷ In his first address at the Second General Chapter he did not swallow his annoyance. On the contrary: “A further issue for which we have to fight together, is the spirit of charity and gentleness (kindness, affability) of St Francis de Sales. It [the spirit] is weakening with us and as I have been able to notice, particularly in the schools.”⁴⁸

So, the sentence “who has the duty of speaking to you with the freedom of a father” could easily and justifiably be kept indeed in the introduction to the “long” or combined version for the Salesians.

3.1.5 *Particular impulses: call for attention and practising what he has to say [3]*

The following question and impulses in the introduction fit perfectly well within that spirit and atmosphere: “You’ll let me do that, won’t you? And you will pay attention to what I am going to say you, and put it into practice?” As to both content and form

⁴⁶MB VII, pp. 503 and 506; EMB VII, pp 301 and 305. Cf. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 28-29/footnote 12 At that time also the use of the diminutive “*figliuoli*.”

⁴⁷MB XII, p. 630; EMB XII, p. 463 (the last sentence has not been translated in EMB). Cf. *Vandaag pastoraal integreren in het opvoedingswerk*, Oud-Heverlee, Don Bosco Vorming & Animatie, 2007, pp. 52-53.

⁴⁸*I verbaei del CG2*, Copia pulita di don Barberis FdB 1857 C 9-1857 C 12. BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza...*, p. 100.

they are particularly applicable to the youngsters. During the good nights Don Bosco often elicited reactions from them in a similar way, which was of course well known to Fr Lemoyne. If this written introduction had ever been put into words at the start of a good night in the sixties or seventies, the youngsters would most certainly have responded with a loud “*Si, sì*” (yes, yes).

In this way he directly demonstrates that he fully trusts them to “pay attention” and, moreover, “put into practice” what he will explain to them. What he has to say they will get to know straight from Buzzetti and Don Bosco himself. For at the end of the letter to the youngsters Don Bosco will indeed speak himself and ask them to comfort him by giving him hope and promising to do everything he wishes for the benefit of their souls.

These sentences in the introduction of the long or combined version are actually even exclusively suitable for the youngsters. However confidentially he dealt with his co-workers, we never find such boyish, even childishly formulated questions and invitations in the conferences which he held for them nor in the circulars addressed to them.

Nevertheless this introduction as a whole is a *captatio benevolentiae* which – for the several reasons dealt with above – could be used for the adults too, though it had undeniably been written for the letter to the boys.

3.2 First extensive part of the long or combined version exclusively intended for the superiors, teachers and educators in Valdocco [3-25]

3.2.1 *Introduction to the description of the two contrasting scenes in the playground during recreation time*

The specific introduction to the first large part of the planned circular meant for the Salesians consists of a transition sentence and the short survey of the circumstances in which Don Bosco had thought of the boys and their teachers and educators.

3.2.1.1 *Repetition of the idea that he is “always” thinking of them [3]*

The transition sentence “I have said that you are always and exclusively in my thoughts” resumes the first thought in the general introduction, i.e. the idea that Don Bosco is “always” thinking of them. Yes, even so “constantly” that he is also thinking of them when he is praying. Not only, as appeared to be his custom, during Mass, but also in the weeks he spent in Rome during evening prayers, did Don Bosco keep thinking of his boys and their educators and teachers.⁴⁹

⁴⁹See once more the resemblance of these thoughts with the introduction of a good night in June 1878: MB XIII, p. 752; EMB XIII, p. 577. *Constitutions...*, p. 254. Cf. *Sussidio* or *Auxiliary Booklet*, p. 3.

3.2.1.2 His evening prayer: “The prayers my good mother taught me” [3-4]

For the prayer in his room into which “he had withdrawn” he preferred “the prayers which his good mother had taught him.” We may assume these prayers were simple and popular. One might be surprised that he as a priest used those prayers. Therefore it is proper to remind ourselves of the fact that already in March 1858 Pope Pius IX had orally granted Don Bosco dispensation from reciting the Divine Office. It was a favour Don Bosco had asked of the pope “because he was often busy from morning to night with confessions, audiences and various other tasks.”⁵⁰ In one of the next volumes of the *Memorie Biografiche* we are informed that “Pius IX had already dispensed Don Bosco orally on condition that, if possible, he say at least part of it daily.” At the same time we read that in 1864 “Don Bosco wanted proof in writing” to possess a written document, which he would be able to show as a justification at any time. This he obtained through a letter on November 29 1864. Fr Lemoyne added to it: “Don Bosco gladly accepted written permission from the Church. He did try, however, to recite it totally or at least partially whenever he could. That is why the breviary was always lying on his desk and he carried it with him in travelling. Even later when his ailments increased and his sight grew dimmer, he made it a point to recite it in part daily. When finally in his last years this became absolutely impossible, he asked others what the office for the day was and sometimes had the lessons read aloud to him, as Bishop Cagliero, Father Rua and Father Berto testified.”⁵¹ Fr Lemoyne did not need this confirmation. He lived close enough to Don Bosco in those last years and particularly so when Don Bosco stayed in Rome, to know what he did and how he did it.

Concerning the kind of prayer, we can certainly state that its mention appears to be rather moralizing, written especially for the boys. Shifting “Monday night” (ms. *A*) to “one of these past evenings” (*C*, *K* and *D*) offered the editor the opportunity to present an example of Don Bosco’s way of acting and praying before going to sleep. The boys would have been familiar with the content and course of the last prayer of the day anyway. The allusion to it fits in very well with a letter addressed to them. For obvious reasons it is less or not at all suitable in a circular to the superiors and priests in Valdocco. That is the case even if we may assume that despite the vespers and the compline of the compulsory breviary prayer and their presence at the boys’ evening prayers the Salesians would probably have cherished a last personal moment of prayer before going to bed, which fitted in completely with the tradition of the time.

Looking at the notes of manuscript *A* it is actually surprising that Lemoyne writes: “on one of these past evenings”, for in manuscript *A* containing suggestions by Don Bosco, it says “Monday night.” One should not be astonished that thoughts were whirling through Don Bosco’s head during one of those nights in April (27-29 April). He had a restless sleep at that time because fever attacks had come back. Fr Ceria even reports on “one

⁵⁰MB V, p.885; EMB V, p. 579.

⁵¹MB VII, pp. 782-783; EMB VII, p. 462. The fact that he applied for dispensation from the Breviary was not appreciated by all. P. Rinaldi, the third successor of Don Bosco, head of the Congregation, still had to defend and explain this explicitly in 1926 (MB XIX, p. 400; EMB XIX, p. 369).

night”: “that on April 27 Don Bosco felt so sick that he had to get out of bed.”⁵² In this period “at certain hours of the day he was utterly tired to the point of exhaustion” or “by the end of the day, his poor head was so weary that he was often incapable of formulating or connecting ideas.”⁵³ These last pieces of information can partially explain the hesitation between “became distracted” or “simply fell asleep” in the text of the letter to the boys and in the combined document. In those days it was possible for Don Bosco to doze off standing as will be shown at the end of the large first part of the combined written item.

The situation of the weeks in Rome very much resembles the situation in Lanzo in April 1868. Don Bosco had gone to Lanzo “for a rest.” Fr Lemoyne was to be the school director there for twelve years (1865-1877). “Not feeling well, Don Bosco was unable to spend much time with the boys. At night he could not rest because of series of dreams that kept disturbing him for about ten days. He purposely delayed going to bed until eleven, hoping to sleep more soundly, but this precaution brought no respite.”⁵⁴ He must have been over-tired and preoccupied by a great many worries, not only by material ones, but also by care for the spiritual well-being of his youngsters. The dreams he talked about in Valdocco later, make us suspect obsessive ideas or straightforward nightmares as he drowsed off.

3.2.1.3 *Sleepiness or absent-mindedness during prayers [4]*

The first draft of what happened on one of those evenings, i.e. the version that we find at the beginning of manuscript *C*, is clearer and more natural than the definitive *D* edition: “As I was praying, I was overcome by absent-mindedness or was it sleep.” The idea of absent-mindedness comes first. The verb “*assalire*” referring both to absent-mindedness and sleep and actually meaning “attack” (assault) reveals the connotation “temptation”.

As such it indicates something unwanted and annoying and generally consisting of a quite quickly passing distraction. When the boys heard this sentence read out, it could have had the effect of a confession of a human flaw with a pinch of self-mockery. That meaning would have been a testimony of a spirit of open and familiar communication. The further and final work-out in the manuscripts *K* and *D* makes use of two different verbs. “I simply fell asleep” [“I was overcome by sleep”], which comes first and indicates a deeper sleep whereas “became distracted” [in fact ‘pulled out of myself’] by absent-mindedness rather suggests something beyond the ordinary, i.e. an extraordinary sort of absent-mindedness. It is no longer about a light, passing distraction. The wording of the complete sentence in manuscripts *K* and *D* looks more baroque and artificial. It even creates the impression of a hidden agenda.

⁵²BRAIDO, P.-ARENAL LLATA Rogelio, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, 151/3-4. And MB XVII, p. 89; EMB XVII, p. 67.

⁵³MB XVII, pp. 89, 83-84; EMB XVII, pp. 67, 63. Desramaut supplies arguments to literally plead for the night of Monday 5 May. (DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Don Bosco en son temps...*, p. 1264.)

⁵⁴MB IX, pp. 133, 155, 133-136, 155-164; EMB IX, pp. 67-68, 75, 68-70, 75-84.

3.2.1.4 The “sight” that distracted him [4]

This suspicion is strengthened by what follows: “It seemed that two of the former pupils of the Oratory in its early days were standing there before me.” Don Bosco often used the phrase “it looked to me” or “it seemed” like an introduction when he wanted to tell narrate a dream. This occurred in the context of considering what one might think about dreaming or after a straight announcement that he’d had a “dream”. This context is missing, but “it seemed to me” certainly seems a hint in that direction. The same effect is produced by his impression that two past pupils, who quite soon turn into discussion partners and commentators, are standing in front of him. The appearance of a guide in dream accounts was a frequent phenomenon with Don Bosco.⁵⁵ The stories are clichéd, but the present one contains fine, delicately inserted hints which will have been sufficiently transparent for the Salesians who - as tradition testifies - apparently expected to hear or read a real dream. Besides, they did not know that the presence of two past pupils was in glaring contradiction with manuscript A. There it only says: “Have seen Buzzetti.”

The meaning of “seen” in A is not instantly clear. Does it perhaps mean: “I have met Buzzetti, noticed him with my very own eyes”? Could it express: “I talked with Buzzetti”? Or is it already: “I have seen Buzzetti showing up in a half-conscious, non-conscious, sleepy mood, i.e. in my imagination”? The phrase “it seemed to me” also allows the last possibility, all the more so because “to see somebody” quite regularly occurs in Don Bosco’s dream narrations.⁵⁶ As far as I am concerned however, the short note in ms. A may well mean: “I have spoken with Buzzetti.” In that case the story of the preparation of going to bed and the phrase “it seemed that two of the former pupils ... were standing before me” are obviously literary phrasing and staging by the editor.

In order to understand the just mentioned interpretation and to have an idea of its range, it is necessary to get to know Giuseppe Buzzetti a little bit better. As a bricklayer’s hand he used to come to the Oratory in the 1840s. He wanted to become a priest, but after an accident injuring his hand, that was no longer possible in those days. However, he never left Don Bosco for good. On the contrary he made himself available as a layman for the work at Valdocco. At a later age, in 1877, he became a coadjutor and an official member of the Congregation. Don Bosco trusted him very much. He dedicated a few lines to him in his *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales (1873-1875)*. He wrote: “Among the boys attending the Oratory at the start, Giuseppe Buzzetti must be mentioned in the first place as always being present in an exemplary way. He was so much attached to Don Bosco and the Sunday meetings that he even neglected going home to his family [in Caronno Ghiringhello] as his brothers and other friends used to

⁵⁵This is the case in 1877 according to MB XIII, pp. 42, 302; EMB XIII, pp. 25, 225. In 1880 MB XIV, p. 538; EMB XIV, p. 424-425. In 1881 according to MB XV, p. 183; EMB XV, p. 148. As far as guides are concerned: MB XIII, pp. 534-536, 761-764; EMB XIII, pp. 413-415, 584-587. “A man who looked like [with the face of] Saint Francis de Sales” in MB XIV, p.123; EMB XIV, p. 88. A woman in MB XV, pp. 36-366; EMB XV, pp. 305-306.

⁵⁶For example on 30 April 1868 in MB IX, pp. 155 and 156; EMB IX, pp. 75-76. Further in 1871 in MB X, p. 46; EMB X, p. 38.

do.”⁵⁷

According to the above-mentioned letter by Fr Lemoyne to Father Rua on 19 April 1884 Don Bosco was expecting him in Rome. He had called him to take over the matter of the lottery and he would also bring the money Don Bosco so desperately needed. On April 21 Buzzetti left Turin. So he was in Rome when Don Bosco wrote a letter to Fr Lazzero on April 23 and had fever attacks again at the end of April.⁵⁸

He probably supported Don Bosco for a few days in difficult moments, for example helping him to take his medicine. He must have been acquainted with administering medicine. In those days he also gave advice to Fr Rua from Rome to help this superior get rid of the backache he was suffering from: “Buzzetti insists on taking a spoonful every day of the potion containing the anti-rheumatic concoction of the special Belmonte.”⁵⁹ Perhaps he also took turns to wake at Don Bosco’s bedside during the fever attacks and refresh him after excessive transpiration.

No doubt Don Bosco talked to him more than once in the short period they were together in Rome both during the day and in the evening, perhaps even at night. They must have talked not only about the lottery, but also about the Oratory which Buzzetti had just left at Don Bosco’s request to attend to activities in Rome. It is significant already that Don Bosco immediately wrote a letter to Fr Lazzero precisely on 23 April, just after the arrival of his much appreciated coadjutor. Moreover, in the envelope he enclosed a letter to Fr Febbraro, the studies councillor for the pupils. Fr Febbraro had probably asked for a personal intervention by Don Bosco, according to Fr Desramaut.⁶⁰ He considered an intervention necessary because the spirit among the boys in the fourth and the fifth year was going down. Don Bosco expected a lot from these same pupils. It is quite acceptable that Don Bosco felt the need to write personally both to Fr Lazzero and Fr Febbraro. Besides, it is remarkable that he alluded to “driving away all melancholy” and encouraged “rejoicing in the Lord” in a letter to G. Lazzero.⁶¹

On the other hand it remains possible Don Bosco saw Buzzetti appearing in front of him at a moment of distraction or just before falling asleep and consequently “have seen Buzzetti” would mean just that. Don Bosco used see him often in his dreams and

⁵⁷BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell’Oratorio...*, p. 124/866-870; *Memoirs...*, p. 106.

⁵⁸BRAIDO, P.-ARENAL LLATA Rogélio, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, pp. 143/26, 144-145, the explanation for this line 26. MB XVII, p. 77; EMB XVII, p. 57. See footnotes 24 and 25 in this chapter.

⁵⁹BRAIDO, P.-ARENAL LLATA Rogélio, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, p. 152/14-16. Buzzetti is present together with his friend coadjutor Enria at the end of Don Bosco’s life (DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Don Bosco en son temps...*, p. 1343). In Rome G. Buzzetti was allowed to stay in Don Bosco’s immediate surrounding just as Enria had been allowed to do in Varrazze during Don Bosco’s long period of illness (1871-1872) (DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Don Bosco en son temps...*, pp. 822-824). See also Enria’s letters to Buzzetti from Varrazze during Don Bosco’s long illness, in MB X, pp. 239, 289; EMB X, pp. 132. The next letter was omitted in the English version. See EMB X, p. 146/footnote 3. Striking and characteristic is the way in which don Bosco asked visitors about the situation in the different houses: MB X, p.292, Omitted in the EMB version.

⁶⁰DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Don Bosco en son temps...*, pp. 1265-1266.

⁶¹E IV, p.256. MB XVII, p. 115; EMB XVII, p. 95. The letter to Fr Febraro has been lost, probably because of his leaving the Congregation in 1901.

presented him as an active partner in his dream accounts.⁶²

Buzzetti had known the Oratory in its different stages of development over the years in the sixties and seventies and eighties. He knew the differences between then and now. He was outspoken about his insight into matters. We see that from a written contribution to the Third General Chapter (1883). Then he wrote quite frankly: “When we notice that two thirds of the boys who finish their training and then leave are unable to earn a living. . .”⁶³ It so happens that precisely the same contrast between “now – then” is a key point at the beginning of manuscript *A*, most probably with a nostalgia for the old times. He shared this nostalgia with his highest and honoured superior because he too knew and felt what had been going on in the house recently. That is very prominent in the first lines of *A* where Don Bosco puts questions and Buzzetti in his answer penetratingly formulates the difference between the old and present times. We should keep firmly in mind that it is precisely the data in manuscript *A* that constitutes the core of the content in the letter to the boys.

Why then, in working out *C*, two former pupils speak up remains an open question. It is really about two adult past pupils, though the translation: “Two of the former pupils of the Oratory” is not unambiguous.⁶⁴ The comment both of them deliver on the scenes in the playground sounds like it is coming from adults. The identity of the one called Valfrè has not yet been traced.⁶⁵ One of the three possible candidates was 17 years old in 1849.⁶⁶ He was as old as Buzzetti, born in 1832. Had they known each other at the Oratory and did Buzzetti drop the name in recollections and conversations with Don Bosco and Fr Lemoyne? The second one, Ferdinando Valfrè, does not seem a likely candidate. This Ferdinando appears to have been a pupil at Valdocco from May 1859 until July 1860. This is a rather short span of time to have made an unforgettable impression on Don Bosco. There is another one, Bartolomeo Valfrè, who started as a pupil at the Oratory in August 1866. The change of date from 1860 into 1870 in the fragment where he makes his acquaintance seems a hint in that direction. Or could it be simply an incidental name popping into Lemoyne’s mind when he thought of evoking the two distinct playground scenes in the Oratory by attributing them to two different assistants in order to inject some variation and a little more life into the story? Lemoyne was indeed a man with a literary turn, having written poems and dramatic texts among others. Anyway, a certain Valfrè was given a modest part in the first act describing the recreation and considerations accompanying it. If the introduction of this character was meant to bring some variation, the attempt is not very successful for soon this Valfrè vanishes in a haze, which is a minus point in the working out of the whole document.

Also the choice of the year 1870 is rather unfortunate. We can conclude that from the words at the good night or, let us call them evening talkss which Don Bosco told the

⁶²MB IX, p. 157; EMB IX, 77. MB XIII, p. 43; EMB XIII, p. 26.

⁶³PRELLEZO, J.M., *La “parte operaia nelle case salesiane*, RSS, XVI no 2 (31), 1997, p. 358.

⁶⁴In Italian: “*due degli antichi giovani dell’Oratorio.*” Most probably the intended meaning is: ‘two adults who visited the Oratory in their youth.’ G. Buzzetti is already present in another dream account from April 1868 (MB IX, p. 157; EMB IX, p. 77).

⁶⁵BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 376.

⁶⁶Cf. Don Bosco’s letter in E (m), primo vol., p. 85/20-21.

boys at Valdocco at the end of April and the beginning of May 1868. I will draw these dreams or stories more often into the discussion from here on.

Certain small differences in manuscripts *C*, *K* and *D* have to be attributed to a stylistic device which requires that parts of the dialogue are distinctly allocated to one of the participating partners. For example: “I replied” and “he added.” “He” has become even the very neutral and distant “that man” in *D*. It is a strange choice of words for a past pupil, Buzzetti, who should have been better known to the Salesians than to the boys in 1884.

3.2.2 *Description of the recreation in the playground before 1870 [4-6]*

The scene involving the recreation in the playground at Valdocco before 1870 starts with the...

3.2.2.1 *Introduction of Valfrè [4]*

He is the first one to come forward and greet Don Bosco “warmly” (*Constitutions*, p. 254) or “affectionately” (EMB XVII, p.86). Both words reflect the Italian word “*affettuosamente*” in a differentiated way. Valfrè is not only jovial, he is also well-mannered. He uses the polite Italian word “*voi*” for “you” when addressing Don Bosco, whereas the former rector addresses him using the confidential “*tu*”. It has probably been included in the letter to the boys with moralizing intent for the young listeners while the letter was being read aloud. It might have been different when directed to his co-workers.

It may appear a little surprising that Don Bosco immediately states that he remembers him “and all the others”. Don Bosco – we should not forget – was not averse to a little exaggeration now and then. Nor does Fr Lemoyne seem to be here. In ms *C* he still restricted himself to “the others”, whoever the others or all the others might have been at the moment of this meeting. Did Lemoyne want the boys at Valdocco to understand Don Bosco had not forgotten anyone and loved each and everyone of them so much that they got the impression he loved them most of all?⁶⁷ Or is it a preparatory element foreseeing groups of boys who will be crowding the playgrounds in the following scenes?

A last distinct change of *C* to *K* and *D* in the introduction of Valfrè is the year. According to *C*, “Valfrè was at the Oratory before 1860.” For reasons we have not yet traced, this became 1870 in *K* and *D*.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ At one time the idea was expressed with respect to the confreres. Cf. MB XVIII, p. 490; EMB XVIII, p. 415.

⁶⁸ The Oratory reached a climax around 1860. However, writing his *Memoirs of the Oratory* in the seventies, Don Bosco did not go back further than the year 1855.

3.2.2.2 *Description of the cheerful and vibrant recreation in the playground in the period before 1870 [5-6]*

The short introduction comes to an end here. There are no further questions about family situations, professional life or health condition. These questions would not be to the point. The editor comes straight to the issue. It is connected with Don Bosco's question to Buzzetti in A: "But did the present-day boys seem better than those of the past?" Valfrè can now come out with it and ask: "Would you like to see the youngsters who were at the Oratory in my time?" And matching Don Bosco's question to Buzzetti, Valfrè's reply does not refer to his fellow pupils' well-being. On the contrary he goes on to show Don Bosco how they were doing in their school days and how happy they were with him. To show and illustrate this point a scene is chosen from daily life at the Oratory: the course of a recreation period in the playground.

This choice is not really surprising. A year before during his stay in France in the Spring of 1883 a conversation took place at table with the Assumptionists. This conversation was published as an interview in the periodical *Le Pèlerin*, May 12 1883. Talking about "the use of punishments" Don Bosco is supposed to have said: "We have no structural repression, though occasionally we expell some boy. For punishment we substitute [friendly and informal] assistance and games [*i giuochi*]." ⁶⁹

In descriptions of youngsters Don Bosco had known or was talking about, he almost always reserved some time and space to describe their activities in the playground. It shows how he appreciated recreation in education. He had to encourage Dominic Savio "not to neglect taking part in the games", but he was still more inclined to express his admiration for Michael Magone, who "was the heart and soul of the recreation and kept the others moving." "He [Magone] brilliantly demonstrated his sparkling vivacity in the playground during recreation time." Francis Besucco took things even too seriously and said to Don Bosco: "You have told me this recreation time pleases God and I'd like to get used to playing all the games my friends play well." In "*Severino or the Adventures of an Alpine Boy*" he lets the grown-up man look back on the first years of the Oratory as a "venue for recreation." People there "would jump, run, play bocci, play skittles, walk on stilts, sing, play the brass band, laugh and joke. There were another thousand occasions to play." Severino was present when they moved to the premises at Valdocco. According to Don Bosco's written words he could conclude the retrospective view with this sharp summary: "As the space here was more suitable, one could organize the religious exercises, the recreation, the game materials, the evening and Sunday school in a more orderly way." ⁷⁰ Recreation really had its place of honour in the total picture of things.

When in April 1861 he addressed his boys, he said: "It is not that I want boys hanging around me [during recreation]. Indeed, I prefer them to go and play for the whole

⁶⁹MB XVI, p. 168; EMB XVI, p. 131. Cf. BIESMANS, R., *Assistentie...*, pp.58, 11.

⁷⁰BOSCO, G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*, 1859 in: OE XI [201]. ID., *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele*, 1861 in OE XIII [187-188] and DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Saint Jean Bosco*, Namur, 1958, pp. 83-84. BOSCO, G., *Il pastorello delle alpi ovvero del giovane Besucco Francesco*, 1864 in: OE XV [334]. ID., *Severino ossia avventure di un giovane alpigiano*, 1868 in: OE XX, [37-39,42]

recreation period.”⁷¹

He immortalized this element *par excellence* of his educational method in a line in the *Little Treatise on the Preventive System* (1877), formulating it in the following way: “Let the boys have full liberty to jump, run and make as much noise as they please. Gymnastics, music, declamation, theatricals and outings. . .”⁷²

During the conversation at table in 1883 he could thus arguably say: “We have assistance and games.” Recreation was an essential part of his educational method. He could not ignore it in his practice as a writer for young people.

In his conversations with Lemoyne and Buzzetti, Don Bosco apparently enjoyed evoking the lively, noisy and pleasing recreation of the boys in the early Oratory years as much as he had enjoyed putting the ingredients of the playground recreation into the picture in “Severino”.⁷³ Similar and almost the same words were used to describe the atmosphere in the playground and the list of games both in *K* and *D* and in Severino.

Manuscript *K* and then *D* add the ‘bar game’ (*‘bararotta’*), perhaps at Don Bosco’s suggestion, since he must have liked the game very much. In the Magone biography he says: “He [Magone] could be found in all corners of the playground. All games requiring physical agility were pure joy to him. His favourite game was what we called *“barra rotta”* and he was famous for it.” Also Severino enjoyed it: “One Sunday night I was watching intensely a game we called *“bara (sic) rotta”* among each other . . . I was on fire.”⁷⁴

Different from the scenes in the Lives he wrote of his boys is the introduction of the participation of the priests and clerics or students for the priesthood in recreation and games in *K* and *D*. They were “everywhere.” A new game is mentioned too in manuscripts *K* and *D*: “trades.” Compared with *C* the activities of priests and clerics have been interchanged in *K* and *D*. Now a priest is relating a story and a cleric joins in with “chase the donkey” and “trades”. That is actually much closer to daily reality before 1870. At that moment not many priests were present yet. In this part of the description, a very important aspect of the first manuscript (*C*), is dropped: “clerics and priests are the heart and soul of the recreation.” That element will be inserted into *K* only after outlining the playground scene in 1884 [9 and 14] and still later also in manuscript *D*. [14]

The impression of the general atmosphere in the playground scene has been preserved however both in the beginning and at the end of the talk with Valfrè: “full of cheerfulness” and “there was singing and laughing on all sides.” These words are dear to Don

⁷¹MB VI, pp. 890; EMB VI, 525. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 41-42.

⁷²BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, 85/III. *Constitutions...*, p. 249.

⁷³*Inter alia* in G.B. Lemoyne’s letter dated April 23 1884: “When he talks to me about his past, he sometimes smiles” (BRAIDO, P.-ARENAL LLATA Rogélio, *Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, p. 147/35-36). Fr Lemoyne will have invited Don Bosco more than once to talk about the past for he wanted to collect as much information as possible straight from the horse’s mouth. Cf. also an extract from a letter which is kept in the Salesian archives in Rome according to M. Ribotta. The letter is preserved under number 272. See RIBOTTA, M., *The Roman Letter of 1884 and its aftermath* in: *Journal of Salesian Studies*, vol. V, number 2, 1994, p. 3.

⁷⁴OE XIII [169-170] and OE XX, Cap. VIII [43]. In French “les barres” (*Constitutions et Règlements*, 1985, p. 244) and in German “Hindernislauf” (*Konsitutionen und Satzungen*, 1985, p. 253). In *Constitutions...* “tig”, p. 255.

Bosco; his favourite ones to characterize the atmosphere in his houses, for example in his biographies of boys at the Oratory. When Savio revealed to his spiritual leader his resolution to become a saint, Don Bosco reacted as a good educator: “In the first place I required a long term and balanced cheerfulness... I recommended him to take part in the recreation with his friends.”⁷⁵ Don Bosco was probably afraid the boy might take things too seriously. In the life of Francis Besucco (1864) he dedicated a complete chapter to “*allegria*” (cheerfulness, joy). Don Bosco backs him up: “I will support you with all my means. If you want to be a good boy, then practise three things and everything will run smoothly.” Next the boy asks: “Which are these three things?” Then Don Bosco lists all three, which have become so famous: “*Allegria, Studio, Pietà*” [cheerfulness, study, piety].” The boy reacts immediately and in an exaggerated way: “Cheerfulness ... cheerfulness... to play from morning till night. Does that put me on the right track?” To which Don Bosco replies: “Not from morning till night, but only during the hours allowed for recreation.”⁷⁶

The use of a style figure inclusion, in which certain parts of speech or sentences at the beginning of a text are repeated literally at the end of it, is significant in *K* and *D*. It emphasizes here the prominent place joyful recreation in the playground has within the preventive system.

It is not the first time that the recreation scene in the “early days of the Oratory” is described with enthusiasm and a certain nostalgia. Don Bosco himself had done so before in a good night moment in 1868. He then related: “I seemed to step into the playground... Suddenly the present-day Oratory changed its appearance and looked as it had been in its very beginning, when only those just mentioned were there... At that time our playground adjoined vast, untilled fields stretching up to the citadel meadows where our boys used to stray in their games... I kept watching the vine with wide open eyes without blinking once. Suddenly all the grapes fell to the ground and turned into a crowd of lively, cheerful boys. In no time the whole playground of the Oratory and the area covered by the vine were filled with boys who were jumping about, playing and having a grand time. It was a sight to behold. There under that unusual arbour I could see all the boys who have ever been, are, or will be at the Oratory and other Salesian schools. Very many were unknown to me.”⁷⁷ [5-7, column 6]

The least comment we can make here is that Don Bosco carried an extremely positive picture in his heart of the “early days of the Oratory” and liked emphasizing it as a model situation which was to be perpetuated. It was a picture he had in mind when talking to Fr Lemoyne in Rome. It was a picture Lemoyne had been familiar with for a long time already. He had been present when Don Bosco had been tormented by nightmares during his stay at Lanzo. He was the rector there at the time and had heard Don Bosco

⁷⁵OE XI [201].

⁷⁶OE XV [332-333]. More on cheerfulness, happiness, joy in Don Bosco’s educational method in BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 48-51.

⁷⁷MB IX, pp. 156-158; EMB IX, pp. 77-80. Also in the beginning of the sequel to that story in 1868: “the church of Mary, Help of Christians and all our present buildings abruptly disappeared.” And again he saw “the old Pinardi shed” together with a few co-workers. (MB IX, p. 161; EMB IX, p. 81). It looks as if G.B. Lemoyne were using that former description.

cry in his room.

3.2.2.3 *The impression the recreation made on Don Bosco [6]*

Before describing Don Bosco's reaction, J.B. Lemoyne inserts a neutral appreciation of the event. It has indeed not been put into Valfrè's mouth nor into Don Bosco's. It can be deduced from the use of the indefinite "one" or you: "You could see. . ." [*si videva*]. As if suddenly a third neutral observer, for that matter the editor himself, was looking on. Still, the content of the comment is no arbitrary intervention of the editor, for the first notes (*A*) already contain the suggestion for the editor: "Warm confidence should enter." Lemoyne however handles this in all freedom, not so in the working out of *C*, but he does so in *K* and then also in *D*. In the first he puts the element up front. In manuscript *A* the indication for a change of course leading to a cure for the situation in Valdocco appears only later in the train of thought. The advanced insertion does not stop the editor however from resuming the matter in Buzzetti's comment later.[16] Subsequently he develops Don Bosco's insight in his very own way. In *K* he changed the adjective "cordial" from *A* into a noun "cordiality", which as such and with that intensity does not appear in Don Bosco's writings, conferences and speeches as a rule.⁷⁸ It does appear with Fr Lemoyne though. So also in his letter from Rome dated April 10. In it he informed Fr Rua that Don Bosco, "who was very tired" had accepted the invitation which Count Riant had forwarded to him with the greatest cordiality."⁷⁹ There he preferred *cordialità* (cordiality) to "*amabilità*" (amiability), *affabilità* (affability), *benevolenza* (benevolence), or "*amorevolezza*" (kindness, friendliness).⁸⁰ Moreover he juxtaposes the important concept of "trust" or "confidence" in *D*, also accompanied by the hyperbole "greatest". Thus he prepares the first post-comment of Valfrè in *D*. The more general effect of the shift and the repetition is of course the much stronger resonance of both elements in the written communication to the confreres.

The reader can sense something else in this sentence in between: precisely the boys' attitude towards assistants, teachers and superiors is characterized in the edition of the letter to the boys. Therefore "youngsters" (or just 'boys') justifiably comes first in: "between youngsters and superiors."⁸¹ It has remained so in the version for the Salesians though parts are reversed in the comment that follows.

The actual comment is preceded by the impression which the recreation made on Don Bosco and which is made clear through the first-person narrator: "I was enchanted by that spectacle." As Don Bosco is silent afterwards, Valfrè can take the initiative.

⁷⁸Cf. for this BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 54-55.

⁷⁹BRAIDO, P.- ARENAL LLATA Rogelio, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, p. 137/10-11.

⁸⁰More info on this in BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza...*, pp. 171-189; 33-37.

⁸¹BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 58-59.

3.2.2.4 Valfrè's comment focuses on: "Closeness [familiarity] leads to affection and affection brings confidence." [6]

On the one hand his after-comments consist of a main thought which was already prominently present in manuscript *B* and then in *C*, but was still spoken by Buzzetti in *B*, and on the other hand they describe effects of trust, which had been brought about in a particular way. Those are elements we indeed find in *A* and also in *B* and *C*, albeit at a different moment of reflection on what the discussion partners have seen happening.⁸²

The main thought which Valfrè formulates in the three versions (*C*, *K* and *D*), is also typical of the main feature of the playground scene: "You see: closeness (familiarity) leads to affection and affection brings confidence." [6] As just mentioned, the word "*famigliarità*" shows up also in *B*, even twice. Surprisingly, the word turns up there and produces an enigmatic effect at the same time. It is surprising because Don Bosco had not previously or had hardly ever spoken or written the word "*famigliarità*" in good nights and letters with such a positive suggestion. It was enigmatic because no explanation at all followed in *B*. Some clarification first turned up in manuscript *C*. But even there the notification did not contain a definition of the concept. Lemoyne referred "only" to the positive effect of "*famigliarità*" in education by pointing out that "*famigliarità*" generates affection. In its turn affection "brings confidence". By the way, I should like to mention that the thought very much leans on a recommendation by F. Aporti. This Turinese pedagogue advised the teacher or schoolmaster "to win the love (*amore*) and trust of his pupils by his ways of dealing with them." Still, Aporti preferred the general "ways of dealing with" to "*famigliarità*", no doubt because he also wanted to warn "not to overdo this basic principle to the extent that affection (*affetto*) and trust would degenerate into "*famigliarità*".⁸³ This reservation strongly distinguishes Aporti's conviction from the unconditional, positive choice of Fr Lemoyne and maybe Don Bosco himself, most surely so in the letter to the boys and also in the circular (manuscripts *C* and *D*) to the adults.

After the aphorism of the main thought the editor inserts a fragment which can be found only at the end of manuscript *C*: "And then the young people express everything without fear" up to and including "by one who they know loves them." [This explains the italics in the *C* column of the synoptic survey on p. 6] In manuscript *K* almost nothing of this notification in *C* can be found. In the elaboration for the Salesians the editor does copy fully the thoughts from the repetition in *C*. In this way however he does not define the word "*famigliarità*" precisely. The readers have to construe the definition for

⁸²The main idea of "*famigliarità*" under *B* was overlooked in the Dutch synoptic tables. Cf. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, p. 85 and *Hulpboekje*, p. 7. The parts in that column were printed in a cursive letter type because the explanation in *C* appears in another spot.

⁸³BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, pp. 108-109. Then F. Aporti used also the word "*affetto*". In some manuscripts of the circular to the Salesians "*amore*" in Valfrè's aphorism was replaced by "*affetto*". (E IV, p. 262 and BRAIDO, P., *La lettera...*, p. 19.) On contacts of Don Bosco and his co-workers with F. Aporti and particularly G.A. Rayneri see PRELLEZO, J.M., *G.A. Rayneri negli scritti pedagogici salesiani*, *Orientamenti pedagogici*, Anno XXXX no. 6, 1993, pp. 1043-1047. Also P. De Damas wrote later on: "They in turn become youngsters with the youngsters without however losing the dignity which entails respect, and without stepping down to this kind of familiarity which entails contempt" (DE DAMAS, P., *Le surveillant dans un collège catholique*, Paris, 1857, p. 288).

themselves in some way for the moment. I shall try to give a brief definition. It will have to be brief right here because I should like to take up the concept more thoroughly where the text of manuscript *C* brings “*famigliarità*” to the forefront a second time. [18]

Firstly I should like to draw attention to an important item. Buzzetti was the spokesman giving the whole notification about familiarity, affection and confidence in manuscript *C*. The spokesman here in *D* is Valfrè. The editor apparently does not mind. It is very clear he not only wanted to function as an editor, but he also liked to tell a creatively built up and nicely written story. His method of working obviously strengthens the suspicion that the Valfrè character is the result of a literary find or construction. In the meantime this “past pupil” happens to be Don Bosco’s first discussion partner to get a name in *C*, where *A* only mentioned Buzzetti.

- *Familiarity as a style of social intercourse* [6]

Looking at the recreation scene again, it becomes clear that the meaning of “*famigliarità*” is connected with the way the boys have contact with the educators and vice versa. The concept relates directly to the style of dealing with each other, the kind of relationship they have with one another. The boys go and listen spontaneously to what the assistants have to tell them. They join in with the games of the teachers and assistants. They surround “the priests and clerics everywhere”. They do not shun the educators, they do not run away from them. On the contrary, they relate to them jovially, trustfully and without any complexes. The same goes for the adults. They do not observe the games and the behaviour of the youngsters from afar. On the contrary, they find themselves “in the midst of the youngsters”, which was very dear to Don Bosco. This will re-appear in a more accentuated way further on. They did not look down on joining in with the boys. They are among them as brothers and friends. Dealing with each one of them is the way it happens in a good family: spontaneous, informal, unforced, familiar in the positive sense of the word.⁸⁴

All of this is linked with what a French journalist had experienced himself in Turin hardly a year before and had written in *Le Pèlerin*, May 12 1883, as a result of Don Bosco’s stay in Paris. “We have seen this [educational] system in action. The Oratory in Turin is a large boarding school where students are not forced to line up; rather, they move in groups pretty much like a family. Each group clustered around a teacher; there is no shouting, pushing, or squabbling.”⁸⁵ After observing the final stage of a recreation time the journalist has summed up and personally characterized an important aspect of Don Bosco’s educational method using the phrase “pretty much like a family.” This way reflects something quintessential about the meaning of the word “*famigliarità*” used in the 1884 written communication (*C*).

Another part of the meaningful content was put into the picture during the table talk with ‘Assumptionists’ in Paris. *Le Pèlerin* also reported it. During the conversation

⁸⁴BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza...*, pp. 189-196. ID., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 49, 54-69.

⁸⁵MB XVI, pp.168-169; EMB XVI, pp. 130-132.

Don Bosco was asked: “But what makes up the formation of these lads?” He replied: “Two things: “Kindness (*dolcezza*) under all circumstances and an open chapel with full facilities for confession and Communion.” “under all conditions” means “in every respect”, “in every contact.” It can and should be underlined. As a result of the same dinner talk *Le Monde* published the following quote from Don Bosco around the same time (May 17 1883): “In their formative years youngsters need the helpful touch of priestly gentleness (*dolcezza*).”⁸⁶ The word “*dolcezza*” is used in that report too.

Apparently the word “*famigliarità*” was not mentioned at the table. However, the reports both in *Le Pèlerin* and *Le Monde* clearly show that the spontaneous, informal, confidential and kind way the educators deal with the youngsters is of the highest importance.

- *The beneficial power of familiarity: the creation of affection [6]*

According to Valfrè the direct result of the beneficial force of familiarity is the creation of affection. The familiar, jovial, trustful, affable and kind style of dealing with each other generates and boosts affection/love with young people in such a way that they love their assistants. For this reason this style cannot be overestimated.

In Valfrè’s kind of aphorism, which concisely explains what was visible in the playground, we notice that the original word for “affection/love”, which is created is “*amore*”. This word does not show up as suddenly as “*famigliarità*” if at least we take ms. A into account. There it appears in the expression written as “*amor per /.../ vicendevole*”, love/affection for each other [mutual love]. The word “*amore*” however is not used immediately in these fragmentary notes. It only shows up in a second series of thought fragments which contain a few means to overcome the malaise in Valdocco. The word “*amore*” however is unusual with Don Bosco. Over and over again he used “*carità*” or “*carità fraterna*” (brotherly love) in pedagogical and other writings. The difference between *carità* and *amore* obviously consists in this: *amore* refers to the great value of the affective factor in relations between people. *Amore* is indeed the word for deeply felt love, the love of sentiment.⁸⁷ Its translation consequently uses a double noun, affection and love [without an adjective].

Although I have drawn the attention to it here already, I think it rather opportune to delve into the difference between Christian love (“*carità*”) and “*amore*” more deeply further on.

The expressions of affection from the youngsters in their turn touch the adults and elicit positive feelings from the educators leading them to love like the boys and love them with all their hearts.⁸⁸

- *The fruit of mutual affection: trust (confidence) [6]*

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 168 and p. 169; EMB XVI, p. 131 and p. 132. Both quotations respectively from *Le Pèlerin* and *Le Monde*.

⁸⁷See for example Saint Francis de Sales. FRANCOIS DE SALES, *Traité de l’amour de Dieu*, Paris, La bonne presse, 1925, Livre I, XIII-XIV, pp. 33-35.

⁸⁸This reciprocity is very strongly noticeable in a letter of thanks to the boys of the Lanzo secondary school in 1874 (E (m), vol. IV, p. 193; BIESMANS, R., *De brief aan de jongens...*, p. 33).

The second part of Valfrè's thesis draws attention to the fruits of mutual affection. It is trust: "and affection [love] brings confidence." That is how the element of "confidence" is anticipated in the extended writing for the Salesians and, contrary to the previous versions, it is explained immediately as well.

In the letter to the boys Valfrè had been forced to restrict himself to the general thesis and its not explicitly born out effect: "confidence in the confessional and outside it". (*K*, column 5) That was already an adaptation of what at the start of *A* had been indicated by the opposite, i.e. "the present-day boys do not have much confidence in confession." The phrase "present-day boys" in the notes reveals that the thought rather belongs to the comment on the second scene led by Buzzetti. On the other hand it is quite acceptable and proper to anticipate and draw the Salesians' attention to the beneficial effect of affection [love].

In order to explain the effect of confidence "outside the confessional" and "inside the confessional", the editor uses the suggestions in *A* for the elaboration in *D*. They had already been developed in *C* too, but they were spoken there by Buzzetti, at a moment very different from the talk with Don Bosco.⁸⁹

- *The favourable impact of trust in the educational process [6]*

Valfrè is allowed now to demonstrate three examples of the boys' behaviour showing the beneficial impact of trust in the educational process.

1. The first evidence of the boys' confidence consists of opening their hearts and showing everything in broad daylight without fear. Everything. They come with all possible problems, with their joys and grievances. Openness, unrestricted freedom of the heart was indispensable for Don Bosco to be able to educate: it is not surprising then that he impressed the following on the boys' minds in the *Rules for the Houses*: "Open your hearts to them [the superiors] voluntarily. Consider them as fathers wishing your happiness fervently."⁹⁰
2. Next they show their trust particularly by candour in the sacrament of penance: "They become open-hearted inside the confessional and outside it." This is almost in conformity with the formulation of *K*, which added to *A*, at any rate on that spot of Valfrè's comment, only "outside the confessional", without the least explanation of "outside". The explanation can only be found in *D*, probably taken from *C* where the thought was added at the very end of the elaboration. Don Bosco attached a very great importance to open-heartedness in confession. In the 1860s he wrote to

⁸⁹That is why it is printed cursively in the synoptic column C. About the displacement of the text, see also above footnote 82.

⁹⁰OE XXIX [172/art.7]. This no doubt copies young John Bosco's model in front of Father Calosso, who had approached him and had shown an interest talking to him. He concludes: "I put myself promptly into Fr Calosso's hands...) Every word, every thought, and every act I revealed to him. This pleased him because it made it possible for him to guide me responsibly in both spiritual and temporal respect" (BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell'Oratorio...*, p. 47/392-396; *Memoirs...*, p. 44/ partly re-translated). On the way Don Bosco tried to get his convictions "inside and outside confession" across to the boys, see BIESMANS, R., *Assistentie...*, p. 123. Cf. also footnote 40 in this chapter.

the boys at Mirabello: “Just give me your heart for a few moments, and you will be glad.”⁹¹ That is one of his great hobby horses, if I may call so the attachment to this form of open-heartedness.

3. Thirdly, “they will do everything they are asked by one who they know loves them”. This last quote is in conformity with “who they loved and obeyed” in the notes in A. This conviction and Teppa’s thesis look like two peas in a pod. Teppa wrote: “They always like listening to someone who is loved and they always like obeying him.”⁹² Obedience has always been very important to Don Bosco. In the *Rules for the Houses* he wrote that four “virtues which constitute the most charming ornament of a young Christian are: purity, modesty, obedience and charity.” The eighth chapter of the *Rules* starts with the article: “The foundation of a boy’s virtue is the obedience to his superiors.” This obedience has to be “immediate, respectful and cheerful to every order.”⁹³ In the dream account concerning Dominic Savio one of the seven flowers in the bouquet which the boy is carrying is the sunflower of obedience.⁹⁴ When he was talking about dreams at Lanzo in May 1868, he had the guide say: “Precisely! Disobedience is the root of all evil.”⁹⁵ But obedience had nothing to do with scrupulous respect and least of all with fear. To consider obedience as a fruit of love was typical of Don Bosco. In his *Memoirs* he related about the period during which he was a pupil in a secondary school. During the holidays he entertained some youngsters: “It was a kind of Oratory, attended by about fifty children, who loved me and obeyed me as if I were their father.” The moralizing touch is present in the choice of the word “father”, where “older brother” would probably have been more suitable. In the same *Memoirs* he wrote in the same sense about his activities in the early Oratory years in Valdocco: “Each of them became so dear to me that they not only obeyed my every command, but they were eager that I should give them some task to do. . . Really, the obedience and affection [*l’ubbidienza e l’affezione*] of my pupils bordered on foolishness.”⁹⁶ Looking back on his life Don Bosco intertwined his pedagogical preference and the instruction to his co-workers. That it was meant as an instruction we may hear in the words “my

⁹¹E I, p. 483; E (m) , vol. secondo, p. 59. MB VIII, p. 875; EMB VIII, p. 382. Fr. Motto puts this letter under the date “beginning of July 1864” in E (m), vol. secondo, pp. 58-59. G. Ballesio’s testimony is striking: “Our hearts went out to to him with intimate, joyful und total abandon. We all wanted to go him for confession.” (BALLESIO, G., *Vita intima di D. Giovanni Bosco nel suo primo Oratorio di Torino*, Turin, 1888, p. 21.) Cf. MB VI, p. 387; EMB VI, pp. 213-214. See further in this chapter, footnote 222.

⁹²TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, p. 21. How well the Salesians knew Teppa’s work was demonstrated in the first chapter. Also F. Aporti taught: “So it will happen that they [the children] will behave well with respect to conduct and study to please the teacher after they have experienced and recognized his affection” (BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, pp. 108-109).

⁹³OE XXIX, [160 7]; [171-172/6]. Cf. BIESMANS, R., *1876-1884 Doelstellingen...*, p. 143. On the boys’ obedience, see also BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, pp. 250-253, 307-308.

⁹⁴BIESMANS, R., *1876-1884 Doelstellingen...*, p. 142. MB XII, p. 592; EMB XII, p. 438.

⁹⁵MB IX, p. 179; EMB IX, p. 97. Cf. other significant utterances in these tales (MB IX, pp. 159, 160, 169, 173; EMB IX, pp. 79, 80, 87-88, 91).

⁹⁶BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell’Oratorio...*, pp. 86/1297-1298; 146/291-298. *Memoirs...*, pp. 74; 124.

pupils” instead of “my boys”. The latter would suit better for the period described. Years later Don Bosco’s heart was still full of similar reminiscences and insights, for he was checking them for publication in the *Bollettino Salesiano* by Fr Bonetti, who in January 1879 began the *Storia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* series. Fr Lemoyne too must have been very familiar with such reminiscences, among other things thanks to the publication of some excerpts in the eighties.

By explaining these three beneficial results of trust on the part of the boys, the mutual process of giving and receiving confidence has been lost. This reciprocity, this mutual familiarity had been suggested though through the description of the recreation in *C*. In *D* it is all explicitly about the trust [not about familiarity] youngsters give and the educators win thanks to their confidential, familiar style of dealing with people.

Valfrè’s part has become larger in *D* than in manuscript *C* as a consequence of the part in which the youngsters express their trust. It is once more a proof of the freedom Lemoyne allowed himself in the composition when using the data he had at his disposal.

After that explanation of confidence Valfrè’s part has come to an end. He disappears from the stage to make room for the discussion partner from the first notes (*A*). Due to the digression on trust his part had been longer than planned in the attempt in manuscript *C*. In this way however, the author did not reach a real balance between the comment on the first scene and the one on the second scene. From a compositional point of view it is not very successful to have Valfrè take ‘French leave’ and not to allow him back for any contribution to the reflections in the second part of the recreation time. As he was present anyway, Valfrè could voice the responsible opinion of an adult person about the next scenes and contribute his position, possibly in the shadow of Buzzetti.

3.3 *The recreation about 1884 under G. Buzzetti’s guidance* [6-24]

A) The first part of the recreation focuses on the boys’ behaviour [6-14]

3.3.1 *Making acquaintance with Buzzetti* [6-7]

The guide in the second scene did not receive a proper name in *C*. It remained “that other past pupil” and “said that past pupil.” In *K* he had been introduced in a somewhat more concrete way as “my other past pupil with a very white beard.” In *C* this striking appearance was not significant yet for the story. It is not mentioned there, but it is found in the letter to the boys. The beard serves further in the text as a means to avoid all confusion of identity about the speaker (*K*, 6). It is quite possible the writer could make the boys guess the identity of the second discussion partner because most of them were familiar with the appearance of the aged Buzzetti.⁹⁷ It is also possible, however, the

⁹⁷Buzzetti was a member of the brass band. On an 1870 picture he has a beard which was then described as full and ginger-coloured. See SOLDA’, *Don Bosco nella fotografia dell’800 1861-1888*, Turin, SEI, 1987, pp. 122-123. CERIA, E., *Profili di 33 coadiutori salesiani*, Colle Don Bosco (Asti), 1952, pp. 19-24. He was present quite often in dream accounts which Don Bosco related as evening talks, for

author wanted to keep things general and indefinite so as not to stir up any suspicion about Buzzetti's journey to Rome to inform Don Bosco.

The supposition that mentioning the white beard could be an incidental feature not referring to a known person occurs to me because Lemoyne considers it necessary to reveal the Christian name and surname of the second past pupil directly now in *D*. ("This man was Joseph Buzzetti.") By revealing the name of the "other past pupil" Lemoyne does justice to the first fact of manuscript *A*. Perhaps he considered it more practical not to only present criticism, especially concerning the situation in or around 1884, as coming from Don Bosco or himself directly, but from someone who knows the ropes. Buzzetti was a man who had worked for years as a layman and "friend of Don Bosco" in the Oratory and had put himself totally at the service of the Congregation as a Salesian Coadjutor since 1877. He had been with Don Bosco from the start, had lived through a lot of events and had remained loyal through rough patches. He could speak with authority.

Without any preliminary procedure he asks Don Bosco the question with a directness similar to Valfrè's: "Don Bosco, would you like to get to know and see the boys who are staying at the Oratory at the present time?" [8] "Get to know" even precedes "to see" both in manuscripts *K* and *D*. In *C* it was the other way round. What the author meant by it, remains uncertain, all the more so because Don Bosco only speaks about "seeing" in his answer.

As Valfrè did, Buzzetti uses the polite form [in Italian] for you addressing Don Bosco, who again is keen on answering "yes". This time he does not justify his agreement with the friendly confirmation that "I would like that very much." That was the same in the three manuscripts (*C*, *K* and *D* p. 5, Valfrè). Vis-à-vis Buzzetti he now gives the same reason for his "yes" in *D* as in *K*: "it is a month since I last saw them!" It could be formulated more precisely "already for more than a month" or "almost one month and a half", for he had left Turin on March 1. It is clear that his explanation, in which an element of the general introduction, i.e. the long absence, comes through, is meant rather for the boys than for the superiors, teachers and assistants. Buzzetti asks indeed if Don Bosco "wants to get to know and see the boys who are staying at the Oratory at the present time" and Don Bosco replies "he had not" seen "them" since a month. The author had consequently better gone back to the plain text of *C* without any further argument.

3.3.2 *Description of the listless recreation focusing on the boys' behaviour [7-9]*

When in the little passage in between, Buzzetti using his finger, points at "them", undeniably the boys are once more intended. The description of the recreation right now has been clearly and even one-sidedly directed at the boys' behaviour. And when in the same piece inbetween, Don Bosco suddenly switches to the address "all of you", he directly and

example in the retreat's period of 1875 (MB XI, p. 258; EMB XI, p. 240). We can find it also in a Pius IX story, which he told only the rectors in 1877 (MB XIII, p. 43; EMB XIII, p. 26). Cf. the testimony of don Bonetti in "*Storia dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, Capo V*", *Bollettino Salesiano*, 1879, no. 5, p. 6.

exclusively addresses himself to the boys who have been pointed out by his discussion partner's finger. This direct address to the youngsters of course does not match the narrative structure, which in the first draft edition (*C*) had been consistently maintained by the phrase: "I saw the Oratory and all the boys..." Evidently there also 'all the boys'. The switch from indirect to direct speech can only be explained by the elaboration as a letter for the boys (*K*), most probably in order to liven up the reading out of the letter to a young audience. Afterwards this formulation sneaked into the circular to the educators, but less appropriately. Buzzetti's question at the end of the description would rightly be: "Have you seen your boys?" In this way the author framed the playground scene again with an inclusion. It will strike us that Buzzetti now uses the confidential address for the second person Italian: [*Hai visti*] in the concluding question. It may be a leftover from manuscript *C* which the author disregarded.⁹⁸

The start of the description of the recreation in 1884 catches our eye through a sharp contrast between the beginnings of the outline of the first scene, but also by putting what can be heard in the foreground. The result of 'looking' comes afterwards. The letter to the adults again takes up the characteristic "no more could I hear the joyful shouts and singing" from manuscript *C*, from which precisely the typical "joyful" had been dropped in the letter to the boys. Manuscript *D* does respect, though, the shift in the letter to the boys where "no more shouts" had indeed been put in front of "singing". All of this reveals the author's intention. For the Salesians he wants to powerfully accentuate the need for cheerfulness and joy for a good education through a negative phrase – the lack of cheerfulness – as much as through the positive approach in the description of the first scene. In fact he wants to do so with even more emphasis, which is comprehensible because the text is now meant for the educators themselves. They should be aware that good education is not possible in a sad and melancholy atmosphere.

In the above-mentioned good night of 1868 this sort of recreation was described in an embryonic way. Don Bosco carried on with his story: "At this point a stranger appeared at my side and stood watching the boys with me. – You know that a guide always shows up in my dreams. Then a mysterious curtain abruptly appeared before us, blotting out this joyous scene... In the meantime the boys' cheerful hubbub had quickly turned into gloomy silence." Then the guide explained what was going on with the boys. Subsequently the veil was lifted a second time and another throng of boys became visible. "Formerly very handsome, they now appeared ugly, sullen, and covered with hideous sores. They walked about with great melancholy as if stooped or wasted by age." This scene elicited Don Bosco's question: "What happened? These boys, once so handsome and joyful – why are they now so ugly and melancholy?"⁹⁹ [7, column 6] The contrast was not less

⁹⁸According to E. CERIA Don Bosco was not such a great fan of using the confidential form of "*tu*" ("you"), let alone he would allow it to be used. Cf. anecdote with G. Vespignani. One day in 1878 he made it clear he wanted Don Bosco to use the confidential form when addressing him. Don Bosco however replied: "I will do so when you have become better." – Don Bosco waited until 1880 (MB XIII, p. 878; EMB XIII, pp. 685-686. Cf. E III, pp. 378-379). How the practice really was is shown in a letter of Donato Edoardo from 1860 in MB VI, p. 592; EMB VI, p. 338.

⁹⁹MB IX, pp. 158-159; EMB IX, pp. 78-79. Cf. also footnote 101 in the first chapter study and footnote 77 in this chapter. The phrase "gloomy silence" strikes one in the 1868 tale. In Italian "*un malinconico silenzio*." "*Malinconia*" also turned up in Don Bosco's letter to Fr Lazzerio (23 April 1884) (footnote

sharp then and in the description the same words were used.

Although the impression of this short introductory scene to the overall picture in 1884 is general and catastrophic, the next description shows immediately that the real situation in the present-day Oratory requires some nuance.

First and foremost “one” could not read “a weary boredom, a surliness, a suspicion” in the faces of all involved, but ‘only’ [if one may say so] “in the faces and actions of many boys.”

The first kind of nuance already occurred in the letter to the boys, where the generalization “of all the boys’ behaviour” of the first manuscript (*C*) was softened to “many of you.” The editor appears as careless as in the letter to the boys mixing up the use of “one” and the personal first person (“I”).¹⁰⁰ He is careful enough though to change the direct address “among you” and “in your faces”, which were obviously meant for the boys, into “many boys” and “in their faces”.

3.3.2.1 *A few boys played in a carefree way [“in light-hearted joy”] [8]*

Apart from these “many” there are another “many who ran about and played in light-hearted joy.” It reads so in the letter to the boys and now reads much more favourably in the extended version than in the first (ms. *C*) stating: “There actually were a few boys who...” Those “many” look a lot like the group of boys who had been shown at a third raising of the veil in 1868. “They were handsome beyond compare and radiant with joy.” So on April 30 1868 the story ended with a cheerful, optimistic note. Don Bosco himself, however, had mixed feelings at that time. He was delighted, but also felt grieved because “their number was not as great as I had hoped.”¹⁰¹

3.3.2.2 *“Quite a number of others” did not take part in the recreation [8-9]*

After the very brief evocation of “the good ones”, all attention goes to the “others” who are said to be “not a few” [*non pochi*].¹⁰² Those “others” consist of or are spread over different groups.

- Some of them “on their own, leaning against the pillars”. “Others were on the steps or in the corridors” or were sitting on “little walls around the garden” “to be away

61 in this chapter). In the *K* and *D* Italian versions G.B. Lemoyne uses four words. In the English *Constitutions...*, p. 256: “weary boredom, surliness, and suspicion.”

¹⁰⁰The verb forms “*udiva*” and “*vedeva*” are archaic forms for the I-person. “*Si leggeva*” is the impersonal “one”, which dominated the C edition. Apart from that the alternation of the simple past (*vedeva*) and the passato remoto (*vidi*) is not so simple to put oneself in.

¹⁰¹MB IX, p. 160; EMB IX, p. 80.

¹⁰²On the use of “not few”, see BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 29, 34, 40, 42. Cf. also footnote 18 in the first chapter. See further in the narration of April 1868: “Only a portion of the great many boys” (MB IX, p. 158; EMB IX, p. 78). And in 1863 we read in a letter to the boys of the first secondary school outside Turin: “There were a few boys, very few actually, who – dare I say so? – received the holy sacraments in a state of disgrace.” (E (m), vol. primo, p. 629/31-32) It seems to have become a cliché over the years.

from the common recreation". Cf. the first chapter of this study in footnote 53 on the measures which were taken then.

- Only the combined version (*D*) stresses the aspect "**common** recreation".¹⁰³ 'Leaving the big group' had always annoyed Don Bosco. One of the conclusions of the First General Chapter formulated his serious concern as follows: "It will contribute significantly to morality never to allow access to hidden locations."¹⁰⁴ These are places where one can hide from the eyes of the educators. It may seem far-fetched to notice in the phrase "common recreation" an allusion to the confreres' attitude of not participating in the boys' recreation (according to the meeting of November 16 1882), but it is not totally impossible.
- There are also boys who were "strolling about" and "talking in low tones". Those groups are particularly aimed at in the proposed circular to confreres. It occurs in a fragment which expressively reflects how St Aloysius would react in their company. It only turns up in this text and alludes to the boys being busy with talks which in those years were characterized as "bad".^[9] Those boys look like the youngsters showing up after the second raising of the veil in the story of April 1868. There all sorts of shortcomings written on their foreheads in Latin, for example: "Immodesty, Scandal, Malevolence, Pride, Idleness, Gluttony, Envy, Anger, Vindictiveness, Blasphemy, Impiety, Disobedience, Sacrilege, Theft." That is why they have to "check their eyes, avoid bad companions, bad books, foul conversations and so on."¹⁰⁵ Bad conversations had always been a nightmare to Don Bosco, who never managed to chop off all the heads of this seven-headed dragon.¹⁰⁶

Don Bosco himself had always done his utmost to kill the monster and he had also called on his assistants to help him in that struggle. He gave an important instruction to the rectors from the original version to Fr Rua of the *Confidential Reminders for Rectors* in 1863 up to the last version of 1886. They had to "organize several meetings of the teachers, assistants, the chief responsible people of the dormitories and the walks, and urge them to make an effort to prevent foul conversations." They had to take the same action for the coadjutors and the domestic personnel.¹⁰⁷ We can find the following

¹⁰³Cf. the first chapter of this study in footnote 53 on the measures which were taken then

¹⁰⁴VERHULST, M., *I verbali del primo capitolo generale salesiano* (1877), p. 342/174-175. OE XXIX, [427/item 8]. The discussion on it in VERHULST, M., *I Verbali ...*, p. 193/176-179. That point of attention was kept during the second General Chapter (1880), OE XXXIII [62]. In an address on March 11th 1875 he had already said to his confreres: "When you cannot join their games, at least assist them, make the rounds of the house in its remotest corners, and try to prevent evil. You cannot believe how much good you may do by climbing a staircase, walking down a corridor, or strolling about the playground." (MB IX, p. 576; EMB IX, p. 271) As a sequel to this a council meeting of the house decided in Valdocco on December 26th 1875 "to remove the hiding-places" (PRELLEZO, J.M., Valdocco ..., p. 213/385).

¹⁰⁵MB IX, pp. 159-160; EMB IX, pp. 79-80.

¹⁰⁶Cf. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 32, 34, 42-43. E (m), Vol. terzo, pp. 307-309. Cf. MB X, p. 42-43; EMB X, pp.35-36. MB XIII, p. 420; EMB XIII, pp. 329-330.

¹⁰⁷BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 161/71-162/95. Cf. MB VII, p. 525 and 526; EMB VII, pp. 317-318. Cf. EMB X, pp. 448-449.

pieces of advice for young Salesians concerning the recreation time before 1870: “A cleric should join each little group adroitly. One should always remember well that indecent talk will contaminate the heart if one does not act this way.”¹⁰⁸ His preoccupation was so strong it penetrated his *Little Treatise on the Preventive System* (1877): “Let the greatest vigilance be exercised so as to prevent bad books, bad companions or persons who indulge in improper conversations from entering the college.”¹⁰⁹

It is also clearly enough, though less explicitly indicated, in G.B. Francesia’s text on punishing (1883): “In some sad cases where the pupils had caused annoyance.”¹¹⁰ There is a similar remarkable way of presenting St Aloysius, the example *par excellence* of the virtue of purity. In the company of those boys he would have “blushed to find himself in their company.”

It is therefore not surprising that this constant care, when writing to the confreres, receives special attention at Valdocco. It is all about protecting and preserving vocations, which Don Bosco cared so much for, particularly in relation with the fourth and fifth year in secondary schools.

It is astonishing though that it did not appear in the letter to the boys. He wrote about it to them frankly during new year, 1874. First he wrote to the boys in Borgo San Martino: “I ask a great favour of you... that all of you make a great effort to prevent and ban foul conversations.” Then he addressed the ‘artisans’: “Flee from the source of all sins, i.e. the bad conversations which ruin good morality.”¹¹¹ In a brief good night on April 15 1877 he did not hide the fact that “the causes of his discontent” consisted of: “ill conduct, foul talk, reading and passing around bad books.”¹¹² The years show how incessantly he was waging that war.

Fr Lemoyne, however, has remained quite loyal to his first draft (*C*) in the letter of May 10 1884 to the boys, so it appears straighter and not so overdrawn as in the proposed letter for the adults

The boys who leave the group or avoid the company of the educators grieved Don Bosco deeply more than once. He used one of his good nights to relieve his heart in 1861. “Some boys have been here since the start of the year, and yet I hardly know them. I don’t like it. There are two extremes in this house: some boys are always around me, and others not only never come near but, as soon as they see me, they disappear. This grieves me”.¹¹³ It apparently also occurred to Don Bosco in that ‘golden’ time. It will have happened to him before. And he would not have “sighed” any less then. It makes it easier to understand why the negative groups are mentioned.

¹⁰⁸MB XIV, p. 84; EMB XIV, no translation.

¹⁰⁹OE XXIX [104-105]. Cf. *Constitutions...*, p. 250/5.

¹¹⁰BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 339/329-330.

¹¹¹E (m), vol. quarto, p. 196 and p. 208. Also BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...* p. 34. That was still in the same spirit of what he had written to the boys in Mirabello in 1866: “One should never be able to say that you speak foul language or listen to dirty talk. When you happen to hear people talking foul language, follow the example of our protector, St Aloysius: either reprimand them or fly from the dangerous company.” See (E m), vol. secondo, p. 230/33-35.

¹¹²MB XIII, p. 420; EMB XIII, pp. 329-330. Cf. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 42-43. See footnote 106 in this chapter.

¹¹³MB VI, p. 889; EMB VI, pp. 524-525. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, p. 41.

3.3.2.3 *Some boys take part in playing in a listless way [9]*

At last something is said about the boys who did play. “Even among those who were playing, there were some so listless” that it was crystal clear that “they were not enjoying their games.” In this way the description of the playground scene ends less kindly. The editor returns to a part of the scene he had already raised, i.e. the scene with the many boys who kept on playing. The side note towards the end obviously weakens the previous part as it is putting things into perspective. It does, however, strengthen the sense of absence of joy and the presence of listlessness and boredom. In this way the author has again included some figures of speech. The description of the groups is inclusive again in that way: at the start: “there was evident weary boredom, a surliness” and at the end: “there were some so listless.” The end of the evening story offered some perspective in 1868 whereas the description of the different groups left a discouraging and rather pessimistic impression in 1884. Still, the continuous resemblance between both texts (1868 and 1884) is notable.

3.3.3 *Afterthoughts in dialogue*

Contrary to the letter to the boys, Buzzetti’s comment now (in *D*) immediately follows the description of the different kinds of groups that caught the eye. At that moment in the letter of 10 May 1884 Fr Lemoyne did not only focus on the boys’ conduct, but also on the Salesians’ behaviour. Striking with regard to the educators was there that “only very few clerics and priests could be seen among the boys” and “the superiors were no longer the heart and soul of the recreation times.”¹¹⁴ According to the draft edition (*C*) those two aspects of the playground situation then will only be thrown light on and commented in a second part of the description for the Salesians themselves.

3.3.3.1 *Some consequences of listlessness among the boys [10-11]*

The comment is introduced by Buzzetti’s question: “Have you seen your boys?” (Using, as emphasized before, the informal form of “you”) To which Don Bosco replies: “I can see them”, as if he goes on observing the youngsters. In this version he answers “with a sigh”. [9] The writer thus underlines now how painful it was and is for Don Bosco to see time and again “the listlessness in that recreation”. He cannot get rid of the impression of “listlessness” which to him contrasts so sharply with the “vivacity” he longed for so much.

Buzzetti’s exclamation is the quick repartee to Don Bosco’s sigh: “How different they are from what we used to be!” Here Buzzetti introduces the idea of “differences” into the conversation. That matches the notes in *A* very well. There it said: “The difference between those of now and those of then” and: “But there is a considerable difference between those of the past and those of today.” [9] In the letter to the boys this question

¹¹⁴BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, p. 22. More about that passage: ibidem, pp. 60-61. Cf. *Sussidio*, p. [14].

had been asked by Don Bosco. His question indeed was: “But where does the difference come from?” [9] This change of *A* as to the speaker fitted in with the course of the conversation following the description of the first part of the second playground scene. It is one of the indications, perhaps small pieces of evidence, which show that the editor freely handled the data he had at his disposal.

Buzzetti adds something extra. He sharply contrasts “they” versus “we”. The exclamation “how different they are from what we used to be” indeed suggests a lot. There is not even the slightest nuance, not the least softening, which did occur during the preparation of the feast of All Saints in 1876. In that period not everything went off as desired either. Don Bosco voiced that one evening. Then he also contrasted past and present very sharply, albeit at a religious level: “I recall how several boys, like Dominic Savio, Micahel Magone, Francis Besucco and others made this novena with extraordinary devotion and fervour. . . But the enthusiasm of former times is lacking. Then everybody was fired up” At that moment this contrast led him to ask the question: “But you will ask: what has caused this change?” And the answer with some nuance was: “Could it be that this poor Don Bosco no longer talks to his boys or can no longer make himself understood as in the past? Could it be that you do not understand him or no longer want to understand him, as those boys of old did? Whether one or other side is the cause or both sides at the same time I do not wish to know now.”¹¹⁵ This approach bears witness to a strong sense of reality and restraint as to judging and condemning. The blame was put on neither side for the moment.

Contrary to that time in 1876 the causes of the differences between then and now are not questioned regarding the Salesians in 1884. Still, this was logically done immediately in the letter sent to the boys on 10 May. In the letter to the confreres it will be done, however, further on and in another context.¹¹⁶ Buzzetti immediately sets out to describe a series of six bad consequences of listlessness here, contrary to the letter to the boys, in which the question of the cause is justly asked. The six consequences are the symptoms which G.B. Lemoyne had listed briefly and concisely one by one at the start of manuscript *B* except one. He had clarified them here and there afterwards in *C* and added one more important consequence. The very focus on the consequences of listlessness gives evidence in its very own right how important lively games and cheerful recreation were to Don Bosco.

- The first negative consequence is conspicuous at the level of religious practice: apathy or listlessness or “*coldness in approaching the sacraments.*” Manuscript *D* specifies “holy” sacraments and refers as such still more explicitly to the fundamental sacraments of confession and Holy Communion. These two sacraments were

¹¹⁵MB XII, p. 557; EMB XII, p. 407 (partly re-translated). Cf. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens ...*, pp. 38-39.

¹¹⁶“This is “logical” if we consider that “the reason why” had been so important on the meeting of March 9 1883. See first chapter of this study footnote 69 and in this chapter footnote 37 and furthermore the pages where I shall treat the content of an “unexpected insertion” (*Sussidio* or *Auxiliary Booklet*, pp. 17-18)

allocated a very important part in the biographies of Savio, Magone, Besucco and Severino.

- The second negative consequence: “*neglecting prayers in church.*” This was not only the case in church, but also “*elsewhere.*” Here is another example of the liberty the editor allows himself in the continued elaboration.
- The third negative consequence is also a religious one and is linked to the predominant atmosphere of listlessness. The boys cannot feel fine in such an atmosphere. That is why they no longer like staying in the Oratory and even forget that “*Divine Providence heaps every possible blessing* on them.” (*B*) Those blessings are further defined in *C* and *D*: all that is good for “their bodies, their souls and their minds.” They owe everything, their physical health, their religious and intellectual education, their “temporal and eternal well-being” to God’s good grace. The awareness of this, however, fades away in the current circumstances.
- Where the flame of devotion is burning low, the ardour of *religious vocations* is being extinguished as well. The reference to this negative effect was missing in *B*. Manuscript *D* here is following *C*. The factor “vocations” will play a major part in its own way in the Valdocco Oratory in June 1884. It may not be superfluous to stress that “many” indeed means a great number, but on the other hand it is also a way of putting things into a certain perspective.
- A fifth negative consequence can be felt in the boys’ “*ingratitude*” towards their superiors. How or through which signs this ingratitude was expressed, is not mentioned.
- Then there is the “*secretive*” behaviour. It was described extendedly and rather pathetically in the outline of the different kinds of groups, more particularly in the digression about the “strolling and whispering little groups.” This secretive behaviour must have weighed heavily on Fr Lemoyne’s and Don Bosco’s minds. It was illustrated already before in the quotes of the “foul conversations”. It annoyed them so seriously that more attention was paid to it after the listing of the other consequences which could not directly be derived from the scene.
- The same thing can more or less be said about the “*grumbling*” or the criticism which concludes the series of bad consequences named as such together with secretive behaviour. Eventually they seem to be the root cause of “all the other regrettable consequences.” Or is the author perhaps still thinking of more consequences he does not like to deal with right now?

Time and time again Don Bosco regretted, denounced and fought grumbling and vicious criticism in word and action. In November 1873 at the start of the school year, he wrote on “the discipline among the pupils.” He prescribed the following for the assistants then: “Let them also strive most anxiously to forestall grumbling against superiors or the house management. Mostly, let them insist, recommend, and spare no efforts to prevent foul

conversation.”¹¹⁷ The second one of his great preoccupations may be heard here. The first use of the phrase “most anxiously” is really no less insisting than the second one “insist, recommend, and spare no efforts”. The twelfth volume of the *Memorie biografiche* has a chapter with the title “*le mormorazioni*” (grumbling or criticizing). It contains two more large parts of an evening talk which Don Bosco held in January 1876.

The first one is a free reconstruction of Jesus’ Parable of the Sower. There are the birds that pick away the seeds: in his interpretation they stand for “the grumbling”, the criticism on a sermon or a good book. “After hearing an inspiring sermon, one lad joins his companions and finds fault with the preacher’s gestures, voice or some word of his. He destroys the good effect of the sermon. . . . A third one ridicules the preacher’s Italian. Again the sermon is made fruitless. The same can be said about good books; finding fault with them destroys the good they can do. Murmuring is all the nastier because it is generally done on the sly; it grows and thrives where we would least expect it.” This utterance reminds us of the secretive behaviour described during recreation time. “If there is murmuring or back-biting or some similar thing, all is wiped out instantly. Whose duty is it to sound the alarm, take a firm stand, cry out and make sure that murmuring and unbecoming talk are silenced? You [Don Bosco himself intended] know the answer. . . . My dear boys, avoid murmuring because it is a very grave evil. Shun it like the plague and try to make others avoid it too.” In a short interview after that speech, he explained to some Salesians: “You should see to it that criticism be avoided and have it stopped along with any kind of wrongdoing, especially unbecoming talk. . . . I want it to be known and borne well in mind that when I say ‘murmuring’ [criticism] I do not mean merely back-biting, but every expression, every pun, every single word that may destroy the wholesome effect of God’s word. In conclusion, I insist that it is a serious evil to keep silent in the face of wrongdoing taking no personal action to stop it or have those in charge do so.”¹¹⁸ With this last quotation he went back to the core of his statement of that evening.

Lack of openness and candid contact must have hurt and saddened him deeply. After all he has always been the educator who invited the boys to have “no secrets” for him as he had no secrets for them. “He wore his heart on his sleeve” and tried to convince them to do the same.¹¹⁹

3.3.3.2 *The second part of the commentary develops an answer to Don Bosco’s question: “But how can we bring my dear boys to life again?” [11]*

Don Bosco reacts to Buzzetti’s explanation as follows: “I grasp, I understand.” Justly so G.B. Lemoyne has dropped “I see” from the *B* version, because actually nothing had been ‘seen’ of most of the mentioned consequences. According to Fr Lemoyne and Don Bosco however the repercussion of the recreation time situation on the religious experience in

¹¹⁷E II, p. 321. E (m), vol. quarto, p. 180/86. MB X, p. 1103; EMB X, p. 494.

¹¹⁸MB XII, pp. 40, 44-45, 49; EMB XII, pp. 28, 31-32, 36.

¹¹⁹See footnote 46 in the third chapter. And the long quotation in BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp., 28-29.

the chapel and “elsewhere”, on the vocations and the relationships with teachers and educators, was evident. G.B. Lemoyne must have sensed very well what Don Bosco meant and felt. Don Bosco is a man of action. It is quite obvious he asks how things can be remedied without delay. It is also normal he thinks he and his confreres should take proper action. And logically according to his experience and opinion the remedy boils down to repairing or re-animating the earlier recreation atmosphere. He instantly speaks about repair, i.e. “recuperating” the atmosphere which excelled by “liveliness, cheerfulness and exuberance of the old days”. It is this atmosphere under which irresistible spell he had been in the scene before 1870. It characterizes the quintessence of his “system”.

It does not occur to Don Bosco in his dialogue with Buzzetti here that the youngsters themselves might be blamed and consequently should make a contribution. In the letter to the boys he did put forward the idea of their guilt. It will be clear in one of the next parts which I will give the title ‘Intermezzo’ or ‘insertion’. The idea will get its full attention when discussing the second large, added part of the ‘long version’ in another volume of the study.

- *The means of healing, the remedy is “l’amore” [love, affection] [11]*

The only remedy Buzzetti offers is love. Buzzetti uses the Italian word “*amore*” in the three manuscripts (*B*, *C*, and *D*) at that spot in his comment. He does not use the word “*carità*”, which is suggested by the English translation in the *Constitutions and Regulations*. It is an unexpected remedy. How one can characterize it as unexpected can be read in the subsequent conversation. What Buzzetti precisely means indeed requires a more ample explanation. The future readers of the document will gradually be getting a better grip on it thanks to an interestingly constructed opposition. On the one hand it becomes clear what is not meant by “*amore*” and on the other hand understanding can grow as to what the content of “*amore*” really is. To concretise the notion “love”, the playground scene will have to be viewed again.

- *Clarification of the concept by facilitating the discovery of what “amore” is not*

To clarify what “amore” does not mean for Buzzetti, Don Bosco himself can start to explain what has always been the heart of the matter when he spoke or wrote about love. That is the beginning of the Socratic way, which Don Lemoyne will be following here.

° A powerful plea *pro domo* by Don Bosco, based however on a wrong interpretation of “*amore*” [11-12]

Don Bosco is allowed to deliver a speech which sounds like a strong defence *pro domo*.

He gives a survey of what he has been doing for forty years for his boys. His list is an elaboration of “every possible blessing on their bodies, their souls and their minds, which Divine Providence heaps on the boys.”¹²⁰ They are benefits which had been described

¹²⁰OE XXIX [111]. Cf. *Een opvoedingsproject...*, pp. 27/1, 291/1+2. Cf. BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 288/1 and p. 289/1+2. Don Bosco’s listing looks like a very personal variant of A.M. Teppa’s point of view. That went as follows: “For love spiritual educators should enjoy bearing the efforts, the troubles, the agonies, the difficulties, the sufferings which their task entails” (TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, p. 62).

fully and concretely in manuscript *B*. [12] At the same time it is a concretisation of one of the ten *General Articles* of 1877. That particular rule impressed upon the Salesians “that everyone should see to it he is liked. . . . He will reach that great goal when he shows in words and more so in deeds that his entire preoccupation is exclusively aimed at the spiritual and temporal welfare of his pupils.”¹²¹

The self-defence agrees almost literally with what Fr Lemoyne had already written in the third person a few days before during his stay in Rome. On April 23 1884 he wrote to Fr Rua: “Every moment we can see how much he loves us and how many sacrifices he himself makes and how many humiliations he bears for his boys/sons (*figliuoli*). When talking about the past, he smiles. But who listens to him, feels his heart is shrinking. How he has suffered for forty years! That should be a subject to be talked about by everyone both the grown-ups and the youngsters: too bad really since one does not think about it enough. Sometimes we complain about things we seem to miss while we forget how much it took Don Bosco to provide us with what we have.”¹²² When Fr. Lemoyne talks about “sons” in his letter to Fr Rua, he means both “grown-ups” and “youngsters”. When considering it necessary to speak or preach about this issue, Fr Lemoyne himself takes the lead here in the conversation.

He makes the fragment in the item written for the Salesians more touching by having Don Bosco himself speak and conclude: “I have done everything I possibly could for them.” The word “done” (to do!) is strongly emphasized. It is not redundant to point out that in the three versions Don Bosco has done his utmost for the welfare of the boys. They are emphatically the only ones that are mentioned. “They are the object of the affection of his whole life,” The word “*affetto*” introduces surreptitiously a completely different aspect of love. The phrase reminds us of a paragraph in the introduction to his *Il Giovane Provveduto*. There it said from the start of his apostolate: “My dear ones, I love you with all my heart and to me it suffices for you to be young to be loved very much.”¹²³ Love coming from the heart, the constituting element of love was a constant

¹²¹BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 289/7-10, 288/3-6. That was also F. Aporti’s conviction: “The teacher should show his/her sincere concern for their moral and material well-being” (BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, p. 108).

¹²²BRAIDO, P.-ARENAL LLATA Rogélio, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, p. 147/34-40. Both authors show that this letter should be dated April 23. In the *Memorie biografiche* E. Ceria writes it should be dated the first week of May. (MB XVII, p. 89; EMB XVII, p. 67). In the little treatise on “*The Preventive System...*” Don Bosco already used the phrase: “I have been dealing with youngsters for about forty years.” (OE XXIX [109]; *Constitutions...*, p. 253. Don Bosco did not hide the fact he did not spare himself. In April 1861 Fr Ruffino noted: “Yes, but how can you be so sure that by working less I will live ten years longer? O no! As long as I can, I want to use all my energies for God’s glory and the salvation of souls. I have no intention of ruining my health. Not that, I just intend to do all I can” (MB VI, p. 889; EMB VI, p. 524). It still means he did more than was good for his health. Marchioness Barolo had noticed that already in the early Oratory years. She is said to have told Don Bosco in one of their conversations: “But I cannot allow you to kill yourself” and “so many diverse activities are detrimental to your health ... there are the gossip about your mental health... Your health is ruined.” In the same conversation we can read Don Bosco saying about himself: “I will devote myself seriously to the care of abandoned youngsters. ... My life is consecrated to the good of young people.” (BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell’Oratorio...*, p. 151; *Memoirs...*, pp. 127-128.) It was all about dedication proceeding from active and effective Christian love.

¹²³OE II [187] 1st edition, 1847; OE XXXV [135] edition 101, 1885. More on “*affetto*” hereafter in footnote

factor in his life. This factor however is dominated here in his defence by the extreme effort, the ultimate dedication, in other words by Christian charity.

° *Reply by Buzzetti [12]*

Buzzetti reacts to Don Bosco's solid argumentation quite coolly: "I am not referring to you!" This reaction seems to show Buzzetti accepts Don Bosco's active interpretation. He leaves Don Bosco convinced at least that he is on the right track when reacting somewhat indirectly. Buzzetti did not aim at his superior himself by indicating and naming the way to remedy things. Buzzetti's reaction must have convinced Don Bosco that he himself was not the one who had failed, but others. If Buzzetti had not meant him, then the failure his discussion partner suggested could only be attributed to his closest colleagues. Don Bosco however could not accept that either.

° Don Bosco pleads in favour of his co-workers [12]

He pleads for them with the same vigour. They sacrifice themselves fully no matter how young they may be. Their total dedication to the boys should be easily noticed through their daily effort, study and work. This defence connects smoothly with Don Bosco's New Year letter, January 6 1884. There he had praised his assistants only a few months earlier: "Therefore let me say that I am very pleased with you and the eagerness with which you face up to all kinds of work, even shouldering immense burdens in order to further the greater glory of God in our houses and in the midst of the boys who are entrusted to us day after day by Divine Providence."¹²⁴

He had also defended them at the celebration of his name-day feast in June 1875. Then he formulated it as follows: "I have dedicated my whole life to you [boys] and have repeated this more than once. What I say about myself is to be understood as applying to all your Superiors because they help me to save your souls. All that you say about me (my activities, my dedication, and my self-sacrifice) must be understood to apply not to me alone but to everyone else who works with me for your benefit. Now I assure you that I have always done whatever I could for you; I cannot promise that I shall do more than I have done, but I do promise to go on working for young people as long as our Lord shall permit me to remain in this world."¹²⁵ This was obviously valid for all who following his example, dedicated themselves to the welfare of the boys without any reservation.

¹⁴⁶ in this chapter.

¹²⁴E IV, p. 249. MB XVII, p. 17; EMB XVII, p. 1. How much mastery of this active, effective love as an ideal they have achieved, is clear from a note in the report of February 1872. The reporter wrote down: "When the boys notice an assistant taking care of their well-being, they can only love him." (PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 263). See footnote 163 in this chapter.

¹²⁵MB XI, p. 228; EMB XI, p. 210. That was completely in the spirit of the little treatise on the preventive system. There he wrote: "It follows that the Rector must devote himself entirely to the boys he wants to educate." (BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, p. 85/436; *Constitutions...*, p. 249.) On December 8th 1878 he wrote to the sisters: "I give them [printed copies of the rule] ..) most suited to help you grow in God's grace and belong to Jesus as you dedicate your whole life to your fellow people, particularly to the Christian education of poor girls." (E III, p. 421. MB XIII, p. 211; EMB XIII, p. 151).

In the final text (*D*) the author restricts himself to the two aspects mentioned before: study and work. (*B*, the first edition, had more to offer). The choice of these aspects of their lives is not arbitrary since it opens the way for what follows.

- *Clarification of the concept: the heart of what is meant by “amore”, the very nature of “amore” [12-14]*

Indeed, Buzzetti makes use of this opening to try and penetrate the heart of the matter. He sees and knows all of it and realizes how the matter stands. But he states: “It is not enough.” There is more: “The best thing is missing.” After such an intriguing, provoking utterance the next impatient question is obvious: “What is it that is missing?” [12]

The explanation which follows may sound simple and clear, but it is not at all obvious. The answer makes a rather enigmatic impression. On the one hand Buzzetti confirms Don Bosco’s interpretation of love: the boys must “be loved”. Don Bosco and his closest helpers do well when loving the boys with such selfless, self-effacing and altruistic love, as he and they have experienced and still experience every day. However, there is a “but”. Indeed: “They [the boys] themselves should know [should become aware] that they are loved.” The Italian word “*conoscere*” can normally be understood as an activity of the mind “comprehend, grasp, see through” as was the point in the previous quotation from the ten *General Rules*. In an unexpected way it is about the behaviour of the boys themselves. The missing link, the best thing seems to be expected from them now. The question is whether Buzzetti means it that way.

Don Bosco is carried away. Somehow piqued, he seizes on this as an opportunity to ask: “Have they not got eyes in their heads?” This strong outburst is only apparently softened instantly by the roundabout expression: “Do they not possess the light of intelligence?” It actually means: ‘do they not use their minds?’ He finishes by airing his disappointment and disbelief once more. He wonders how it is possible, for God’s sake, that “they cannot understand that everything that is being done, is done out of love for them?”

This massive reaction brings Don Bosco back to the main idea of his self-defence and the plea in favour of his colleagues: “How much is done?” And so he shows how he keeps to his view on love. This is one more reason for Buzzetti to repeat that Don Bosco has a blind spot, and to ultimately clarify the meaning of his statement: it is necessary “that the boys themselves [can] comprehend that they are loved.”

In this way the author adroitly makes the road smoother for the actual new insight. Don Bosco’s question here is not of a general nature: “What is it that is missing?” It is now specific and meant for himself and his Salesians: “What else is needed?” [“Which thing is required from us then?”] The insight suggested by that question is : Don Bosco and the Salesians should not expect the solution from the boys in the first place, they themselves possess the key to the “renewed liveliness, the happiness, the warmth of the old days” themselves. They need to help and lead the boys to comprehension and awareness by contributing “something more” and putting in “the best thing”. It is actually not up to the boys to comprehend. It is up to the Salesians to create a situation which enables the boys to be aware that their educators love them. The teachers, assistants and superiors are responsible.

It is not easy, however, to do justice in translation to the point of Buzzetti's input. The original manuscript *B* and its translation make prominent the fact that the boys should "be loved in the things they enjoy", in the things they like. Manuscripts *C* and *D* and their translation into Dutch emphasize the following: "That the boys know or feel they are loved" if the educators, teachers and superiors "take part in their youthful interests." Participation is added to this final text as a means which makes love visible, tangible and empirical. It boils down to the following if you express it in still another way and is also more faithful to the Italian version: "If the boys are loved in the things they enjoy by participating in the youthful tendencies they have as youngsters, they will learn to see love too..." The teachers, educators and superiors have "to be part of the things to which the boys tend or incline as children or youngsters." Only then can it really penetrate into the boys' minds that the Salesians love them. Only then will they realize and sense that their teachers, assistants and superiors love them. That will be so even if their educators insist on "discipline, study and self-denial." [13]

The text, completed with "participating in things which their youthful inclinations (or interests) turn to", can perhaps be understood well through the advice Teppa gave the clerical educators. The first chapter has proven that the Salesians consulted his manual regularly in the eighties. He wrote: "Whoever wants the pupils to love him... must meet them and fulfil their honest desires as far as possible for him. He should honestly share [participate in] all their lives' joys [sweet] and sorrows [bitter] [sweet and bitter things]." ¹²⁶ In the Italian version of Buzzetti's answer the resemblance is more striking than in the translation because "*partecipare*" [participate] is closer to "*prenda parte*" of Teppa and the subsequent phrase "*piacciono poco*" in its turn is closer to the noun "*piaceri*" [wishes, desires] of Teppa.

It will further strike us that Buzzetti digresses on the effect of that kind of love: the boys cannot but help learning to see the affection [the felt love] in things that do not please them naturally. They will discover that the adults also prescribe those rules and requirements because they are driven by love for their own best interests, for their welfare.

The story of Don Bosco's meeting and conversation with Cardinal Tosti during his first stay in Rome in 1858 fits in well here as an illustration of the real meaning of this fragment. Don Bosco must have taken so much pleasure in this incident that he could not help talking about it time and again to his young Salesians. So this anecdote became part of Valdocco's pleasant legacy. Fr Lemoyne however may also have heard about it only later, when conducting confidential, but planned conversations with Don Bosco to get him to talk about the past. The incident can be found in the fifth volume of the *Memorie biografiche*. As Don Bosco took up Cardinal Tosti's invitation for an outing in a carriage, he said: "Your Eminence, it is impossible to form boys well if they have no trust in their superiors." Upon which the cardinal went on to ask how that confidence could be won. Don Bosco: "By trying to attract them and by eliminating whatever alienates them."

¹²⁶ Cf. first chapter, footnotes 62, 65, 66, 68, 73. TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti*... p. 22. Fr Ceria has tried at one point to clarify this text. He wrote: "They see they are being loved when one likes the things they enjoy." The things they like and enjoy. CERIA, E., *Annali*... (1841-1888), p. 673. He switched to the verb "see". To see is concrete, it precedes getting to know, knowing, becoming aware, realizing.

This entailed the cardinal's next and logical question: "How can we attract them to us?" leading inevitably to Don Bosco's very typical reply: "By going to them first, by trying to adapt to their tastes [*gusti*], by becoming like them" [by making ourselves equal to them]. Then Don Bosco proposed to try the proof on the Piazza del Popolo where many boys got together. The cardinal was quite open to it and Don Bosco was successful in his experiment.¹²⁷

- *Insistence by Don Bosco: "Please, explain that more clearly!" [14]*

Strictly taken, Buzzetti has not yet clearly indicated what love, which he has indicated as a remedial means, consists of. That is why Don Bosco insists: "Please, explain this more clearly!" The exclamation mark carries its full meaning. It is not yet clear enough for him.

B) The second part of the picture with the listless recreation in 1884 putting the Salesians in the limelight [14-24]

3.4 *The same scene in the playground, now focused on the Salesians*

3.4.1 *Introduction: urgent request "to look at the youngsters in recreation" [14]*

Buzzetti no longer puts Don Bosco's patience to the test, which differs from the draft editions of *B* and *C*. He will help him along for a while not so much by talking as by showing him, providing examples. Without further ado he invites him to look again at the listless recreation in the playground from a different angle now.

That different angle is not immediately conspicuous because in manuscript *D*, Buzzetti advises Don Bosco to observe the boys, only the boys. In his own words: "Look at the youngsters in recreation." Again he addresses Don Bosco, using the polite form of 'you': "*osservi*". He had done so in his very first question. [8] In the draft editions of *B* and *C* he had been allowed to use the informal form of 'you' in that stage of the conversation. The author is (even) less consistent with the pronouns in this piece of writing (*D*).

It looks very much as if the playground scene on the background has come to a standstill in the meantime and is now being blended in again in slow motion. Don Bosco does not notice anything special at first and candidly expresses so by asking: "Well what is special about it?"

Faced with so much obtuseness, Buzzetti can allow himself a touch of irony. Don Bosco has taken pride in having sacrificed his life completely for "a good forty years" in his *oratio pro domo*. So now "the past pupil with the beard" can suggest it surprises him that "so many years educating young people" have not given him more insight. [Literally: "You have been spending so many years in the education of boys and you still do not

¹²⁷MB V, p. 917; EMB V, pp. 600-601. That conversation would have taken place in 1858. Cf. further footnote 221 in this chapter.

understand?"] He will put him on the right track, then. Don Bosco has got to watch "more closely" [*Guardi meglio!*], but not by following once more the behaviour of the boys. Buzzetti's previous invitation could apparently mislead Don Bosco in spite of the latter's long-time experience. As an educator he should first and foremost look at the Salesians, yes "our" Salesians. In *B* and *C* it still ran as follows: "Where are your [informal 'your'] Salesians?" Buzzetti no longer remains the objective guide, he becomes the committed confrere. He takes Don Bosco's side. He knows which painful confrontation awaits the honoured leader.

3.4.2 *Shortcomings of priests and clerics at the level of assistance, the educational presence with the youngsters [14-15]*

- *Few priests and clerics were present among the boys [14]*

From that particular angle it first strikes Don Bosco that "only a few priests and clerics mixed with the boys." Secondly he noticed "even fewer [Salesians] still were joining in their games." And it struck him as being even worse "that the superiors were no longer the heart and soul [the initiators] of the recreation."

- *Where they actually were and what they did [15]*
 - Some, actually the majority, "were walking up and down, chatting among themselves without taking any notice of what the pupils were doing." The majority seemed to be the sad followers of those who had been warned "not to spend the recreation time with each other but with the boys" at the start of the 1882-1883 school year.¹²⁸ Or were those people perhaps still the same ones? The author seems to allude here to elements of that very important meeting.
 - Other Salesians were watching the recreation but with indifference: "They looked on at the recreation but paid little heed to the boys."
 - "Others supervised from afar" without interfering where it was necessary so that the boys were not assisted at all.¹²⁹ In other words a great number of

¹²⁸Cf. first chapter, footnote 54. Cf. *infra* in this part, footnote 139. Around that time the diocesan priest Fr Orioli was present in Valdocco. He had a very good impression though. On the other hand Don Bosco needed to point out serious failings on March 11 1869. He then addressed all members of the young society. He said: "I wish therefore that you try always to be among the boys during recreation periods, conversing, playing with them, and giving them good advice." He spoke in that sense because he had noticed something he was "not too happy about." "I have noticed: cliques of two, three, four, or five confreres, always the same and nearly always apart from the rest." (MB IX, p. 576; MBN IX, p. 271.) And this was in the successful period before 1870.

¹²⁹G. Lazzerio complained about this in the meeting of November 25 1882. (PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...* p. 253/278) In a circular of November 1873 Don Bosco urged the prefects to act in such a way "that the assistants and in general those who exercised power, should be present in the midst of the boys during recreation time." (E (m) vol. quarto, p. 179/56-57.)

priests and clerics could not care less about an essential element of assistance, i.e. the educational constructive presence among the boys during recreation time.¹³⁰

The sentences about the lack of educational interference by not mixing with the boys, chatting with each other and not giving warnings are new and later insertions in manuscript *D*. They cannot be found in *B* nor in *C*.

- The additions promptly entailed another insertion, a kind of exception. One can indeed notice the rare superior who does not allow things to get out of hand. He does not belong to “the majority” of “uninterested” (indifferent) people “who supervised from afar.” In itself there is nothing wrong with his action, but he spoils his interferences in a way that is quite inadmissible in Don Bosco’s spirit. He interferes “in a threatening manner.” And is this not just what Don Bosco had denounced in his treatise on *The Preventive System*? Did not the implementation of the repressive system precisely show that “the words and looks of the superior must always be severe and even threatening”?¹³¹ Had he not lectured his audience at the start of the Second General Chapter with the introduction: “A further issue we need to work on is the spirit of Charity and gentleness (affability, kindness) of St Francis de Sales. This spirit is weakening with us and as far as I have been able to notice, it is particularly weakening in the schools.”¹³²
- The action of some superiors was well intended as such, but fundamentally reprehensible. This picture becomes more complete by adding that some Salesians show a more positive approach. They are taking steps “to mix with a group of boys.” Their efforts do not succeed though. The boys themselves tend to keep them out. It is neither new nor exceptional that such boys existed in 1884. Don Bosco must have faced them quite often. Otherwise he would not have included the following in his *Rules for the Houses* (1877): “The ones who are never seen near the superiors act badly. They actually hide and sneak off when they [the superiors] arrive.”¹³³ This article did not come out of the blue. He expressed his discontent in a good night in June 1875. It was a dialogue or interview. Fr Barberis asked questions

¹³⁰ BIESMANS, R., *Assistentie...*, among others p. 58.

¹³¹ OE XXIX [100]. *Constitutions...*, pp. 246-247.

¹³² BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza...*, p. 100. Cf. footnote 48 in this chapter. When Don Bosco had mainly young co-workers at his disposal, he asked them to assist during recreation time. They had to “keep an eye on cliques and find a way to slip in and break them up discreetly.” [Or: “and join them in a kind and polite way and dissolve them cautiously.”] (MB X, p. 1020; EMB X, p. 428.)

¹³³ OE XXIX [172/4]. Don Bosco himself faced this. He said so in a good night on June 16 1867. He recounted a dream. He boldly said: “I got closer to see if I knew any of them. All were Oratory boys. Very many I had never before seen, but all claimed to be Oratory pupils. Among those I did not know were also a few who are now here. They never let themselves be seen by Don Bosco, never ask his advice, always dodge him: in one word they are the boys *he does not know yet!*” (MB VIII, p. 842; EMB VIII, p. 362.)

and Don Bosco replied. He said: “Dear boys, those are the ones who are tight-lipped with their superiors; they do not open their hearts to them; they are not sincere. Whenever they see a superior coming their way, rather than meet him, they go off in the opposite direction... I could have said: you have no confidence in your superiors, you never open your heart to them. Now all of you remember this: There is nothing that can be of greater help to you than opening your hearts to your Superiors, having great trust in them, and being utterly sincere.”¹³⁴

By describing the boys’ behaviour towards their superiors, the blame is shifting to the youngsters again, although it was all about the adults. That is why the short extract fits in well with the letter to the boys whereas to form a more systematic coherence it should have linked up more closely with those who were “talking in low tones”. It is almost its variant. In the circular to the Salesians the ‘avoidance’ on the part of some boys rather has the effect of being an excuse for the educators. This does not agree with the general tendency of the longer addition. This remark about the behaviour of “a group of boys” is the end of the revision of the second scene.

All the same, most statements do contain an outspoken accusation, a sharp disapproval. The aloofness, the lack of interest in what the boys enjoy or like doing, the laxity and the repressive interference of the teachers and educators do not do justice at all to a genuine assistance and preventive method of education. It is as clear as crystal that because of this they themselves are the cause of the listlessness, the bad atmosphere, the growing distrust of the boys and the origin of “the fatal barrier”, which Buzzetti will be talking about further. [18]

3.4.3 Key fragment: description of what has to be understood by “amore” [affectionate love] [15-17]

After they had looked at the recreation together from another angle, Buzzetti does not say clearly or straightforwardly what he means, precisely, by “amore”. Instead of defining “amore”, he goes even further back into the past, “the old days at the Oratory”, the time before 1870, even before 1860. It is the time Valfrè had been allowed to call to mind. The return to that time increases the likelihood of Valfrè’s being a literary splitting off of the Buzzetti figure.

- *Evocation of the relationship between Don Bosco himself and the boys and vice versa in the years before 1870. [15-16]*

In the reminiscence of the distant past, two words are very important because they already occur in manuscript A. They are even more important because of the content they carry. The first word is “*antichi tempi*” (the old days), respectively “*anticamente*”

¹³⁴MB XI, pp. 262-263; EMB XI, p. 245.

(formerly) in the *A* manuscript. Buzzetti's evocation goes back to days long gone by. However, those were "wonderful years", "they were a foretaste of heaven" for the youngsters in the Oratory. "*Antichi*" is the word Don Bosco had already used in his brief evening address just before the feast of All Saints on October 27 1876.¹³⁵ The word was relevant for an audience of boys who stayed in the Oratory after 1870. He also reminded the youngsters of the "former boys" (*antichi giovanetti*) who did understand him and practised what he stood for. In 1884 it is not the first time they try to challenge and inspire a new generation by referring to the good and 'wonderful' example of the past. It is not the first time the past is called upon to set up a new drive.

The foundation of that heavenly atmosphere and of those happy days in the past consisted of the constant reality summed up in the second word: "*in mezzo a*", ("in the midst of, amid, among"). Don Bosco always stayed "among the boys, especially during recreation." [Buzzetti uses the polite form of 'you' here as in the letter to the boys, which is contrary to the parallel fragments in *B* and *C*. A moment before he had just suddenly made use of this polite form in the reminder.] In the early Oratory years Don Bosco had begun to introduce a leitmotif through his addresses, writings and particularly his action: it is the constants presence among the boys, especially during recreation time.

In 1863 Don Bosco appointed Fr Rua as rector at Mirabello. For the occasion Don Bosco wrote the first version of the *Confidential Reminders for Rectors* and instilled it into him: "Try as much as possible to stay amidst the boys through the complete recreation time."¹³⁶ As Don Bosco's representative he ought to stay with the boys and try to deal with them in the same way Don Bosco had done and still did. He would repeat that rule several times later on in front of so many new rectors. His advice was ultimately ratified and laid down in a generalized way in the *Little Treatise on the Preventive System*: "Moreover, he [the rector] should always be with his subordinates, [i.e. his pupils], whenever they are not engaged in some occupation."¹³⁷

After Don Bosco had received the decree of approval of his Congregation, he held a conference for all members of the Society, the professed ones and the applicants. And he said: "I wish therefore that you try always to be among the boys during recreation periods, conversing with them or playing with them and giving them good advice."¹³⁸ Assistance has a wide range of practices, but the heart of them all is undeniably "being in the midst of" or "among".

¹³⁵Cf. footnote 116 in this chapter. Cf. also Don Bosco's address during the second General Chapter in 1880: "The beauty of the old Oratory (la bellezza dell' Oratorio antico)." (FdB 10858 C 7). There was the nostalgic expression also then. In the beginning of a good night on December 2 1859 he must have said: "What better thing could a house like ours have than confidence in superiors? This alone could transform the Oratory into earthly paradise and make everybody happy." (MB VI, pp. 320-321; EMB VI, pp. 171-172)

¹³⁶MOTTO, Fr., *I "Ricordi confidenziali..."*, RSS (4) anno III, n°1, 149/83-84. Cf. BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza...*, p. 195 and footnote 261 there. Cf. EMB X, p. 449 and footnote there.

¹³⁷BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, pp. 58/1 and 132/1. *Constitutions...*, p. 249 (partly re-translated).

¹³⁸MB IX, p. 576; EMB IX, p. 271. Later on in "*Il sistema preventivo*" (OE XXIX 100 and 103). Cf. *Constitutions...*, pp. 247 and p. 249. His co-workers could not always bear this, which is shown at a personnel conference in August 1871. Cf. footnote 53 in the first chapter.

In the circular of November 1873 he gave the prefect the following instruction: "See that assistants and, generally some superiors are amidst the boys during playtime."¹³⁹

E. Ceria relates that Don Bosco listed seven secrets of the Oratory in the eleventh part of the *Memorie biografiche* at the start of June 1875. The fifth went as follows: "The superiors always offered plenty of trust and gladly mingled with the boys, but always in such a way as to discourage excessive familiarity." That secret corresponds with a thought from the conference during the retreat of August 1875 in Lanzo: "I always recommend you stay among the boys... Let us understand each other well. We have to stay with the boys, in the midst of them, but never relating to each other as individuals, never more with one than with the other."¹⁴⁰ That is plain language, but the main matter is safeguarded.

Don Bosco has written a very meaningful text in his *Memorie dell' Oratorio* from the 1870s: "This only served to inflame my heart to become a priest as quickly as I could so that I could associate with young people [*per trattenermi in mezzo ai giovanetti*], help them, and meet their every need."¹⁴¹ That is how Don Bosco looked back on his study time in the seminary and how he made clear to his readers – at first only Salesians – that their presence amidst the boys was a vital element of his and their vocation to become a priest.

He did not only express this inner desire and ever returning instruction in words, but also in deeds. When he had his photo taken, one of his favourite positions was in the middle of his youngsters.¹⁴²

The actual significance of this continuous presence, which really made staying among the boys so meaningful and worthwhile, is not explained by Fr Lemoyne. We can however deduce it from the contrasting elements between Don Bosco's attitude and that of a lot of Salesians. They just ignored the boys: They were not taking any notice... They kept a distance. "They were no longer the heart and soul of the recreation." (14-15 and 17) The phrase about Don Bosco himself "always among the boys, especially during recreation" is quite the opposite of that, which means Don Bosco was very interested in the boys in those years. He took an active interest in "the things the boys liked." He took part in their games, "played with them." He lived with them. And apparently the most important thing of all: he talked to them.¹⁴³ The latter point is set off very sharply with a sentence in the letter to the boys: "When you, Don Bosco, could converse with us continuously." (16, column K) 'Converse' could consist of informal conversations, but also of the appreciated and sometimes a partly feared "word in the ear", with which Don Bosco used to praise, reprimand or advise someone in passing. That is how he wanted it done by

¹³⁹E (m), vol. quarto, p. 179/56-57. MB X, p. 1103; EMB X, p. 493-494.

¹⁴⁰For the two quotations from 1875. First MB XI, p. 222; EMB XI, p. 203 (partly re-translated). Further in MB XI, p. 340/through footnote to p. 583; omitted in EMB XI. Further BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza...*, pp. 202-203.

¹⁴¹BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell'Oratorio...*, pp. 91-92; *Memoirs...*, p.80. Cf. MB I, p. 377; EMB I, p. 281. Cf. also *Memoirs...*, p.80.

¹⁴²SOLDA, G., *Don Bosco nella fotografia dell'800, 1861-1888*, p. 240. Cf. Alfred Ost's drawing in MBN XII, p. 240.

¹⁴³Cf. also footnotes 137 and 138 in this chapter. See for this BIESMANS, R., *Assistentie...*, pp. 107-113.

his rectors too, in the first place by Fr Rua. He gave him the following instruction: “Try as much as you can to spend the whole recreation period among the boys and endeavour to whisper some kind word, as you know, in their ear. This is the great secret to win the heart of the boys.”¹⁴⁴ The translation of “*qualche affettuosa parola.*” is ‘some kind word’.

This continuous closeness conceived and actualized in this way was the pleasing source of the good, positive and festive atmosphere at the Oratory. The continuity of Don Bosco’s presence and the constant nearness offered opportunities to meet and talk, which is illustrated very clearly and made explicit in the letter to the boys: “When you could converse with us continuously” including the memorable, direct and confidential phrase “with us”. [K, 16] It is rather strange therefore that Fr Lemoyne left out precisely that sentence, which appeared elsewhere anyway in the *K* document. Using a slightly adapted reformulation it would have been perfectly possible to keep the sentence. It would even have put more in the picture that not so much the active efforts of Don Bosco and his selfless sacrifice from morning till night proved his gratuitous kindness, but actually his constant, interested and participating presence did so. In other words this qualitatively rich relationship showed “the best” Don Bosco offered. His closeness elicited the reciprocal affective love of the boys in times long gone by. It is suggested it could still elicit this today. Particularly the dialogue, the spontaneous and informal talks, but also the serious, confidential “word in the ear” made life a heavenly feast at the Oratory. They had an invaluable psychological meaning in the relationship of boys with their assistant. One of the very positive effects was what is written in the letter to the boys: “And we did not hold any secrets from you.” [the polite form of “you” is still being used.] They entered into spontaneous, candid and fair conversations with him.

- *The heart of the key fragment: “amore” means mutual affection, affective love. It had been and still has to be the standard. [16]*

We find the same effect in this writing to the Salesians, but it is preceded now by a digression that puts forward a thought which does not occur in the other editions. The explanatory phrase “to converse continuously” in the letter to the boys is omitted. It is substituted by a clarification of “love” (“*amore*”), which is linked with closeness. Only the use of the word “love” refers to the writer putting a link with a statement on the way or the means “to get back to the liveliness, the cheerfulness and delight of the old days.” [11] Buzzetti replied to Don Bosco’s question after all: “With love” (“*coll’amore*”).

As he had done in the letter of May 10 to the boys Buzzetti suddenly speaks here in a generalizing and at the same time committed way on behalf of all past pupils: “a period of which we have fond memories, because then love was the rule [for us].” The generalization seems to be a sign it concerns a very important insertion. This impression is confirmed if one takes into account that the insertion is very much related to a paragraph from the

¹⁴⁴MOTTO, Fr, *I “Ricordi confidenziali”...*, p. 149/83-85. Cf. MB X, p. 1043; EMB X, p. 449. Cf. also the personal practice of Don Bosco in the biographies of a few boys in BIESMANS, R., *Assistentie...* p. 115-116. On the way of addressing people in BIESMANS, R., *1866-1876 don Bosco betrouwbare wegwijzer...*, pp. 51-52.

treatise “*The Preventive System*”. There it says: “By the *preventive system* pupils acquire a better understanding, so that an educator can always speak to them in the language of the heart, not only during the time of their education but even afterwards.”¹⁴⁵ It says literally: “*Il Sistema Preventivo rende affezionato l’allievo*”, i.e. “makes the pupil affectionate” or to put it more generally, causes the pupils to like and love their educators, teachers and superiors.

The original quote from Don Bosco’s treatise can contribute to grasp the meaning of the word ‘love’ in the phrase “love was the rule for us”. “*Affezionato*” is “affectionate, devoted” and “*affezione*” is “affection.” In Buzzetti’s memory the old times are now unmistakably marked by affection, sensitive love, which the boys gave to Don Bosco after they had experienced themselves the same love from him. Buzzetti means sensitive, confidential and trust generating affection. This affectionate love emerged and became stronger thanks to the constant presence of Don Bosco among them. In this way they could experience he loved them. He made time for them, he was available. He listened to them. He made them feel he held them in great esteem and appreciated what they enjoyed. Moreover, they could experience through these contacts they were really so valuable to him that he wanted to see them, talk to them, enjoy things with them and take an interest in what they liked. That is why the phrase “you could converse with us continuously” was so well chosen in the letter to the boys. [16] They could sense he was glad and happy to see that they were around. Positive feelings dominated the pedagogical relationship. It spread like a spark. Affectionate “reciprocal love became the standard.”¹⁴⁶ Buzzetti’s suggestion is clear and clarifying: in this way also today’s

¹⁴⁵ According to the edition in August 1877 with the Italian and French text juxtaposed in OE XXVIII [428-429], i.e. “*rende affezionato*” next to “*fait que les élèves s’affectionnent de plus en plus à leur Instituteur.*” Cf. BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, p. 84/421. But *Constitutions...*, p. 248. It becomes clear quite early that not every co-worker of Don Bosco appreciated the emotional word “*affezionato*”. “*Affezionato*” was replaced indeed by “*avvisato*” (well-considered, well-advised) already in the publication of *Rules for the Houses* in 1877. Cf. OE XXIX [102]. This version was copied by Don Bonetti in the September issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano* of 1880. Cf. BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, 131/5. It has left its traces. For the French speaking provinces Fr. Desramaut released for example in 1958: “*forme des élèves réfléchis*” (DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Saint Jean Bosco*, p. 146). In the renewed *Constitutions* it is still “*avvisato*” and “*des élèves réfléchis*” (*Costituzioni e Regolamenti*, s.d., p. 238 and *Constitutions et Règlements*, 1986, p. 238). In the Dutch speaking territories the wording is: “*maakt de leerling zo bedachtzaam dat*” (*Constituties en Algemeen Reglement*, 1986, p. 255), although the association of “*bedachtzaam*” with the consequence “*dat de opvoeder steeds de taal van het hart kan blijven spreken*” is more than enigmatic. In the German speaking provinces the twist in the twenties of the last century was solved as follows: “*Das vorbeugende Verfahren macht es dem Erzieher möglich mit dem Zöglinge stets in der Sprache des Herzens zu reden.*” (DR. LECHERMANN, *Charakterbild Don Boscos nach Johann Lemoyne*, Amberg 1921, p. 50). In 1966 K.G. Fischer tried the following: “*Das Präventivsystem ermahnt den Jugendlichen derart, dass der Erzieher stets die Sprache des Herzens reden kann*” (FISCHER, K.G., *Giovanni Bosco, Pädagogik der Vorsorge*, p. 95). In the *Konstitutionen* it became: “*wendet sich der Erzieher so an den Jugendlichen, dass er immer die Sprache des Herzens sprechen kann.*” (*Konstitutionen und Satzungen*, 1984), p. 245. All those translations and also the English one have preferred “*avvisato*” to “*affezionato*”.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 44-45, 47-48. Perhaps an incident of some years ago in Flanders may shed some light on the case. A grammar school pupil was no longer so pleased with his school after a couple of years. He switched to a secondary technical in a Don Bosco School. After one or two days he came home after school in quite a good mood. This made

boys (in 1884) may “realize [grasp, feel, experience with their whole being] they are being loved.” They in turn can express then that they are glad and happy he is with them and they offer him affection. That is why it seems to me incomprehensible that the reminder of “conversing continuously” as an example and standard to be followed does not appear or has not been included in the circular to the confreres. Perhaps something of “continuous” and particularly “common” had already been suggested in manuscript *C*, in Italian, especially by the plural of “their recreation”, their periods of recreation.

The affection of the boys before 1870 was the sort of affection by which they spontaneously became open-hearted, “opened up their hearts fully to the Superiors they loved and obeyed” to say it with the very first words of Don Bosco (*A*). And in this version: “We had no secrets from you.” Open-heartedness is the proof of a very great, unlimited trust and to Don Bosco it is actually the most valuable effect of his gratuitous, loving presence among the youngsters. It is the proof of his education with and from the heart.

This affective love is furthermore so big and strong it is a determining factor for life. It is so determining it leads Buzzetti to say indeed: It was “a period of which we have fond memories.” It is a striking transposition of what Don Bosco had written years before: “so that an educator can always speak to them in the language of the heart, not only during the time of their education but even afterwards.”¹⁴⁷

Thus that piece of Buzzetti’s comment is the key fragment. The affective love is reciprocal: giving and receiving, receiving and giving. This particular type of love is what Buzzetti meant when he said: “With love” (“*coll’amore*”). Affective love is “the best thing” which is missing, however, around and in 1884. It is essential “to reanimate the boys”, i.e. “to get back to the liveliness... of the old days.”

A number of readers are still convinced that the letter to the boys emerged from a simplification of the so-called extended or long version, the circular to the Salesians. Not taking into account a number of other elements which make such an interpretation highly unlikely, it has to be indicated here there was no reason at all to justify a possible omission of the key fragment. Buzzetti’s consideration on affection on the side of the youngsters as a standard or “rule” would have been just the thing to fit in the letter to

his mother ask him if his new school environment pleased him so well. Yes mum, he replied. The teacher addressed me by my Christian name. I’m no longer a number.

It is very meaningful that Salesians who later on start spreading the letter to their Valdocco confreres choose an edition in which “*amore*” has been replaced by “*affetto*”: “*un’ epoca che ricordiam sempre con amore, perchè l’affetto era quello che ci serviva di regola.*” precisely in the phrase: “because then love was the rule.” (Cf. the translation in *Constitutions...*, p. 258) That is the case in int.al. E IV, p. 264 and MB XVII, p. 110 with the accurate translation in MBN XVII, p. 72. According to P. Braidò the term “*affetto*” is stricter, more neutral and less warm. (BRAIDÒ, P., *La lettera...*, p. 19) It means “emotion”. Very general. If it is so, the substitution is in line with the previous one: “*avvisato*” instead of “*affezionato*”. If “*affetto*” however was a synonym of “*affezione*”, “*attaccamento*” (attachment), “*tenerezza*” (tenderness), it would mean that those who put the change through, captured the heart of Buzzetti’s statement well in that respect. (Cf. ZANICHELLI, *Sinonimi e contrari*, Bologna, 1987). P. Stella follows the same train of thought when he describes *amorevolezza* as “the attitude (or the way of dealing with) through which one shows personal sympathy, personal affection (*affetto*), understanding and compassion, participation in the other person’s life.” (STELLA, P., *La famiglia Salesiana riflette sulla vocazione nella Chiesa di oggi*, Turin, Elle Di Ci, 1972, p. 162)..

¹⁴⁷BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, p.84/421-423. *Constitutions...*, p. 248/4.

the boys. But the author had not made it up yet. That thought was also missing in *B* and *C*. It must have been introduced into the text at a later stage.

Don Bosco can only confirm the evocation of the happy past and Buzzetti's clarifying words with a powerful "Yes, indeed!" Moreover they elicit from Don Bosco the nostalgic reflection from which is obvious that the type of affective love which is meant, has nothing to do with sentimental show neither from Don Bosco nor from the boys.¹⁴⁸ They enjoyed joining him. They loved being with him. But fundamentally this could happen because they felt, nay they "knew" [experienced] he loved them and assisted them very well with all his heart. "They used to rush to get near him and talk to him; they were anxious to hear his advice and put it into practice." [16] And, if one could put it that way, he made full use of their attachment, open-heartedness and their very great trust, "to give them good advice."¹⁴⁹ After all it was not restricted to the satisfaction and happiness of being loved on Don Bosco's side. All the same, he did not hide that their attachment and willing co-operation were a great source of joy: "Everything was a joy for me then." [16] On the other hand he had expressed the wish the boys would not hang around him so much. He would prefer them to take part in the whole recreation.¹⁵⁰

- *Apologies by Don Bosco [16]*

The reflection on the happy past makes him realize he himself is hardly passing any time amidst the pupils himself now. At the same time he understands this continuous presence is no longer possible for him. He would like to explain this a little bit. Appointments or "these never-ending interviews", looking after "business matters" and his deteriorating or "poor health" prevent him from staying personally with the boys. Unfortunately there is no other alternative. Contrary to the introduction of the letter to the boys and the introduction of united circular for the Salesians the matter of his health is mentioned here. The arguments are reasonable, but they are also a kind of apology.

- *Buzzetti points out the still lasting responsibility of Don Bosco [16-17]*

That is why Buzzetti is willing to accept his explanation. That's all "well and good", he says. As Don Bosco's good friend however, he cannot let the matter rest. The sound

¹⁴⁸Cf. Footnote 140 in this chapter. Cf. the testimony of a past pupil in 1867. He wrote: "For I noticed you have always loved me and show a certain affection for me, which is not particular but divine... You have never forgotten me and I should like to thank you sincerely for it by this short note." And: "when I noticed that you still love me with all your heart." (MOTTO, Fr., *Ricordi e riflessi di un'educazione ricevuta. Un exallievo del primo Oratorio scrive a Don Bosco*, RSS, VI (11), pp. 363, 365. Is that the meaning as well of this reflection: "Each one of them became so willing to me that they not only listened very well to my orders, but were actually very keen on getting a certain task"? And further: "My pupils' obedience and affection actually bordered on madness." (BOSCO, G., *Memorie del Oratorio...*, pp. 146/291-293 and 297-298. Cf. footnote 96 in this chapter.

¹⁴⁹Cf. footnote 138 in this chapter.

¹⁵⁰MB VI, p. 889; EMB VI, p. 525. BIESMANS, R., *De brief aan de jongens...*, p. 41. Cf. in this chapter footnote 103.

arguments should be no excuse to sit back, do nothing and shake off all responsibility. Don Bosco has a new responsibility, which has adapted itself to the changed circumstances of life. It is indeed impossible to stay in the midst of the youngsters as he used to do. He can however “insist”, even “demand” that his co-workers deal with the boys the way he used to do. The verbs are not weak at all. “Command”, as in the *B* and *C* editions has become now “demand”. The heart of the matter is the way of dealing with the boys: “that they treat the boys as you used to do” [“as you used to deal with them.”] [He is still making use of the respectful, yet somewhat distant polite form of ‘you’.] It reminds one of “among the boys” in the broad sense of the word, i.e. including everything. The use of the word “demand” or “require” has a hard ring about it. The underlying question itself ‘why he did not do it’ has an even harder ring.

- *Don Bosco’s vehement counter-plea and bitter disappointment [17]*

Don Bosco reacts vehemently to Buzzetti’s question, which must have made the impression of an undisguised reproach: “I speak, I talk till I’m blue in the face.” This vehemence recalls an address to the Second General Chapter, especially its introduction: “A next issue we should tackle and dedicate ourselves to, is the spirit of Charity [“*carità*”] and gentleness [“*dolcezza*”: kindness, affability, charm] of St Francis de Sales. It is weakening with us and as far as I have been able to notice in several houses, it is particularly decreasing in the schools.”¹⁵¹ That moment too he spoke plainly. Then too he “was talking till he was blue in the face.”

In 1884, however, he has yet to acknowledge bitterly that “but unfortunately many are no longer willing to work as hard as we used to.” The editor keeps focusing on the word “many”. Moreover, the phrase “no longer willing” or even stronger “not have any desire left” gets an additional touch of incrimination and guilty verdict by the phrase “unfortunately”. On the whole Don Bosco’s reaction sounds even fiercer in the definitive edition of the planned circular to the confreres because the excusing circumstance of *B* and *C* has been dropped. There it said, in the introduction: “I speak . . . , but be sure I too see how the teachers and assistants (*B*) respectively the teachers (*C*) are tired from teaching (*B*) and what a pity it is they no longer feel able to make the former efforts (*C*).”¹⁵² [17]

¹⁵¹*I Verballi del CG 2*. Copia pulita di Don Barberis, FdB 1857 C 9- 1857 E 12. ROCHOWIAK, J., *Il Capitolo generale 2°*; p. 107 and p. 10. Cf. also BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza* . . . , p. 100. Cf. footnotes 48 and 132 in this chapter. During his canonical visit to the Lanzo house Don Bosco felt it his duty to note: “Would it please the rector to more often converse with the boys and get to know their spiritual and temporal needs and so prevent cliquishness and attempts to to get away.” (BRAIDO, P., *Don Michele Rua primo autodidatta “Visitatore” Salesiano*, RSS, 16, IX, n° 1, 1990, p. 160/528-529.

¹⁵²In the translation of the *B* and *C* editions the phrase “to feel unable to/not feel up to” can be justified because fatigue can really be an obstacle. In the definite version where excuses are no longer allowed, “*molti non si sentono più di far le fatiche di una volta*” is translated as “not everyone nowadays feels like working as hard as we used to”. (*Constitutions* . . . , p. 258.) In the French speaking regions they stick to “*beaucoup ne se sentent plus la force de supporter les fatigues d’autrefois*.” (*Constitutions et Règlements*), p. 247). The German speaking people have chosen “*finden viele sich nicht mehr bereit*.” (*Konstitutionen und Satzungen*, p. 257).

No more excuses here. They just have to realize that they have committed themselves to implementing his educational method and this requires constant strong efforts. Don Bosco had made that clear to them through his *Little Treatise on the Preventive System*, at first in a sort of cover-up: [The preventive system] contains a few obstacles, i.e. “Some may say that this system is difficult in practice.” But afterwards he sounds very open and clear: “An educator... should be ready to face every difficulty and fatigue in order to attain his object, which is the civic, moral and intellectual education of his pupils.”¹⁵³ There was no lack of clarity or insistence then. Neither was there any on Fr Lazzeri’s part, who took Don Bosco’s text in hand regularly. This is clear from the first chapter from the recommendations and conclusions of the meetings he presided.

• *Conclusion by G. Buzzetti and promising repetition of his point of view [17]*

Buzzetti has little defence against that argumentation. If that is the case, he can only conclude that “they”, i.e. the many, are wrong and even stupid. “They neglect the lesser part” and so “they waste the greater.”

The meaning of the latter sentence is not immediately apparent. The Italian comparative “lesser” contrasts with the superlative “most important”, which according to Buzzetti consists of “all the work [the efforts] they put in.” In the total picture this no doubt refers to the demanding activities of “their study and work” from the plea Don Bosco had defended them with just a while ago. In other words it refers to their enormous devotion at the expense of “their youth.” It reminds us of their commitment which Don Bosco boldly and candidly compared with martyrdom. [12] In manuscript *B* it was stated in all clarity: “and this greater thing”, or more accurately: “most important thing”, happens to be precisely “their efforts.” [17] “This greater thing” or more precisely “this most important thing” [Cf. the translation in EMB XVII, p. 89: “So by neglecting to do what costs them least, they lose what is most important, and waste all their efforts thereby.”] means ‘their active Christian love [“*carità*”] for the boys’. As a counterpart “the least thing” is then obviously “the presence amidst the boys” including everything required to implement the preventive system. The “least thing” actually consists in the expressions of affective love, particularly the sympathizing, interested presence among the boys.

If that meant the least important thing versus the most important one, the contrast does not agree with the previous line of thought nor with the point of view which follows.

¹⁵³BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, p. 90/506-508. *Constitutions...*, p. 251. Still, the question remains justified whether the neglect of their task was only a matter of fatigue or one of indolence. Might it not have been a matter of principle with some? Just like some diocesan priests and superiors had been against it? What Mons. Gaetone Tortone wrote to Rome in 1868 may well illustrate this: “I have visited this place [the Oratory in Valdocco] several times during recreation time. I must confess that it made always a painful impression when I saw those clerics mixing with the boys who attended classes to become a tailor, a carpenter, a shoemaker etc. Those clerics were running, playing, jumping and even getting a bump on their heads sometimes with little dignity on the one hand and little or no respect on the other hand. The good Don Bosco... pays little attention...) to impressing on them those predicaments for dignity of the state they were aspiring to.” (STELLA, P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. I, Zürich, PAS-Verlag, 1968, p. 150.)

Indeed, he once more formulates the controversial point of view of a moment before, i.e. that “the boys need to know and experience that they are loved through the participation of the educators in the things the boys like [to which their inclinations tend].” He does so by resuming that thought in the following way: “Let them like what pleases the youngsters.” This kind of love remains the heart of the matter, the best thing that was missing [12] and therefore also the most important. It follows that the content of the “least v. most” or “smaller v. most important” contrast is only meaningful if it is meant ironically. This means it has to be interpreted and understood as an ironical rendering of both the conviction and mistake of many Salesians. According to Buzzetti’s judgement they think and act incorrectly as if active, performing, self-effacing Christian love is the most important thing on the one hand and affective, empathic, sympathizing kindness the smaller, indeed the less important thing on the other.

We could interpret the contrast however also in the following way: the so-called “smallest”, the least thing is actually what requires the least effort, i.e. which is the easiest object to realize. And that is the way of dealing with the youngsters in Don Bosco’s spirit, a way which many do not fully value and consequently neglect. In that case the so-called “more/most” or “most important” is everything that requires a lot of efforts, very heavy strain and even involving physical and psychical fatigue. Many however estimate this absolutely necessary and highly valuable. Reality’s irony however shows that “the more/most” is useless if it is not combined with “the least”.

The beneficial effect of action according to insight – consisting of the reversion of the proportional value between both kinds of educational love – is a more agreeable and lighter life for the teachers, assistants and superiors. Buzzetti voices it as follows: “the youngsters will come to like what pleases the superiors.” [17] The experience of mutual love will put the icing on the cake: the daily efforts and “fatigue”, which should really not be underrated, “will be light to bear”. It is a promising perspective.

Observing the 1884 recreation scene again thus becomes a reason to prove and elaborate the main idea or the key fragment in the comment given after the first view of the same recreation scene.

Looking at manuscript *B*, you can see that after Buzzetti’s promising conclusion, Lemoyne had Don Bosco ask the normal question: “And what then is ‘the smallest thing’ or ‘the least thing’?” [18] In the first version Buzzetti was allowed to answer briefly and concisely: “Familiarity!” As concisely as before: “*Coll’amore*” (With love/affection). [11] The resemblance in style gives a foretaste of what he means by the unusual concept. Familiarity and love (affection) seem to be two words for the same reality there. When the word ‘familiarity’ was used in manuscript *C* for the first time, parallel with manuscript *B*, Don Bosco was allowed to ask the following question: “What am I to recommend then to my Salesians?” To which Buzzetti replied: “Familiarity with the boys particularly during recreation time.” Using this terse phrase he takes up an important idea from Valfrè’s comment anyway. In the definitive text (*D*) containing reflections attributed to Buzzetti, the concept of familiarity is highlighted significantly. That is why I shall dwell on this in that final context, i.e. after an unexpected interruption of his commentary.

3.4.4 *Insertion interrupting the train of thought [17-18]*

Instead of immediately focussing on the content and the meaning of the concept of familiarity, the author of *D* interrupts the natural course which had been indicated straightforwardly in *C*. Without any transition phrase Buzzetti suddenly comes up with a reply to a question which had even not been asked before. Judging from the beginning of that fragment, one may suppose a question had been asked about the present-day change in the Oratory. The author has Buzzetti reply to the concealed question simply with a part of the letter to the boys. Before beginning that fragment in the letter to the boys, Don Bosco asked this question very definitely: “Where does the great difference between ‘the boys then’ and ‘the boys now’ come from?” His question in the letter to the boys fitted into the construction of the letter very well. [9] Buzzetti’s explanation was completely and consistently based on data from manuscript *A*, which had so far not played any significant part in the item for teachers and assistants, nor would it do so in the following pages. It suffices to consult the synoptic tables to notice this.

Lemoyne did not re-arrange the sequence of thoughts for the unexpected insertion into the extended or combined version. Nor did he justify or clarify the insertion by an explanation. Comparing both texts it becomes conspicuous that he has deleted a remarkable fragment from the letter to the boys. It is the one about the effect of the continuous, near and dialoguing presence of Don Bosco. “Do you remember those wonderful years when you, Don Bosco, were constantly dealing with us? It was a heavenly feast and we had no secrets for you.” [16]

A consequence of the otherwise literal copy from the letter to the boys (*K*) is that the blame is put on the boys. Even the full blame. Indeed it reads now: “The cause (*la causa*) of the present change” whereas in the letter to the boys the formulation “cause” (*causa*) was cautious and indefinite. This blame obviously contrasts strongly with what has just been said in the conversation, which precisely pointed at the Salesians as the main cause of the changed behaviour of the boys.

- *The cause of the current malaise is to be found in a number of boys [17-18]*

According to the beginning of the insertion and remaining loyal to the letter to the boys, the difference between then and now is after all to be put on ‘a certain number of boys’ or according to the English translation “many of the boys”. These boys are noticeable by their *lack of confidence*. One may spontaneously imagine that they were the very boys who shunned the common recreation and certainly those boys who secluded themselves into small cliques, “talked to each other in low tones and cast furtive and suspicious glances in every direction.” [8-9] This behaviour makes them strikingly different from the former boys, who have been qualified twice already as candid and open-hearted and consequently trusting Don Bosco and the superiors highly. This trust was expressed the first time by Valfrè at the end of his considerations. [6] It occurred for the second time when Buzzetti reminded them of “having no secrets from Don Bosco” in earlier years. [16] Moreover, “they used to love” their teachers, assistants and superiors and “*they gave them prompt obedience.*” [17] Also Valfrè had drawn attention to “willingness” [6]. During

the talk with Buzzetti Don Bosco himself rejoiced because “the boys used to rush to get near to him and were anxious to hear his advice and put it into practice.” [16]

The actual and profound meaning of these positive attitudes of trust, love and prompt obedience is expressed in a negative way through the disposition of the present-day generation of boys. I have to admit a certain generalization when I use the qualification “the present-day generation of boys”. I do so however taking the text as a basis. The generalization is backed up by phrases such as “but nowadays” and “*the superiors* [also generalized] are *thought of precisely as superiors*.” Putting the sentence in the active voice, it reads: he boys [in a very broad and general sense] consider the superiors “as superiors”. Don Bosco did not make explicit what he meant by this precisely in the train of thought he had suggested to Fr Lemoyne one evening at the beginning of May in Rome. (A) The bitter word “feared” and the vague abbreviation “etc.” (A) followed the disappointing statement “but nowadays the superiors are considered as superiors”. Perhaps the vague abbreviation “etc.” had been suggestive enough to remind the Salesians of the image of the superior Don Bosco had drawn when writing about the repressive system in the *Little Treatise on the Preventive System*. “According to this [repressive] system the words and looks of the superior must always be severe and even threatening... In order to give weight to his authority the Rector must rarely be found among his subjects, and as a rule only when it is a question of punishing or threatening.”¹⁵⁴ Such superiors must obviously be feared and approached with strong awe creating a distance.

In the May 10 letter to the boys Lemoyne completed the “etc.” with the contrasting and desired situation behind it: “and no longer [thought of] as fathers, brothers and friends.” There he suggested that the boys had to change both attitude and act according to the *Regulations of the Houses*.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore he added “and little loved” to “feared” in the suggestions in A. The first addition could now well be a reminder of the *Little Treatise on the Preventive System* to the Salesians, at least partly as Don Bosco had characterized, in the letter, the Rector and assistants he longed for as “affectionate [loving and caring] fathers.”¹⁵⁶ Copying this addition now Lemoyne suggests powerfully that the fatherly, affectionate and loving attitude has been lost nowadays as well as the one of a brother

¹⁵⁴BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, p. 83. *Constitutions...*, pp. 246-247.

¹⁵⁵According to the *Rules for the Houses* they had to respect the superiors as fathers. (OE XXIX 172/art.7) See footnote 90 in this chapter. Slightly further in the letter literal change of behaviour is required from them albeit quite one-sided with the stress on obedience. “May the pupil be led by obedience.” In the good night of April 1868 a number of similar thoughts popped up: “Let them promptly obey the bell; let them...) Let them willingly obey their superiors instead of looking upon them as boring watchdogs, self-interested counsellors or even enemies. Let them not consider it a great victory when they succeed in concealing their wrongdoings and escaping punishment.” (MB IX, p. 160; EMB IX, p. 80) You can find the same thing in the following good night on 1 May 1868. There they speak about “scheming against their superiors and the house rules.” (MB IX, p. 163; EMB IX, p. 82.)

¹⁵⁶BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, p. 83. *Constitutions...*, p.247. Don Bosco already used the characterization “loving father” in 1873 when he remembered the unforgettable period with the old priest Fr Calosso in his “*Memoirs of the Oratory*” in 1873. This was what this good man suggested him as a young boy: “So, leave that unreasonable brother of yours. Come and live with me. And you will have a [loving] father.” (BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell’Oratorio...*, 50/452. MB I, p. 214; EMB I, p.159. Cf. *Memoirs...*, p. 46, with a translation which is less faithful to Don Bosco’s text.).

and a friend. Buzzetti's comment creates a gap: on the one hand "they and them" (the superiors) and on the other hand "we and us" (the boys). Buzzetti will soon mention the "fatal barrier" in complete agreement with the *A* manuscript. The gap is deepened and widened by fear. In his own words: the barrier is heightened and strengthened by fear. The verb "*temere*" has been rightly translated here by "to fear". "To approach with awe or respect" would be too weak in this context. Separating fear reigns instead of uniting affection and willingness. This has the disastrous consequence that the superiors "are feared and little loved" and a "barrier" has been erected.

It does not exclude any exaggeration. Yet that may have been needed to put things in focus and refer to a discussion which had taken place about a year before.

The sequence of the text: "Consequently they are feared and little loved" must sound indeed like an echo of the statement at the Valdocco meeting, March 9 1883, to the Salesians. After that meeting they did not leave it as simply an insight gained. The following was added: "This is against our spirit or at least against Don Bosco's spirit."¹⁵⁷ It was not only an honest thought, then. The formulation of the minutes by secretary Fr Lazzero was not devoid of any irony. That is why one may presume that a year later not all Salesians had forgotten all the words spoken at that meeting. In the letter to the boys and the circular to the confreres we should interpret the quote "feared and little loved" as a disapproval and at the same time a call for reversal. It ought to be the other way round to be in line with Don Bosco's spirit: much loved and little feared or even not feared at all. "To fear" is really meant to have the meaning of "in fear of".

Parenthesis about some important concepts in the writings and pieces of advice of Don Bosco.

The motto: An educator should aim at being loved rather than feared by the boys nor should he keep them at a deferential distance

The exhortation to "make sure they like and love you" and consequently are not afraid of you has indeed become a life motto of Don Bosco and a frequently recurring call to his co-workers. Braido has given evidence of this by a list of references.¹⁵⁸

According to an annotation in the sequel to his *Memoirs*, i.e. in the *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6*, quite early in his pastoral and pedagogical activity Don Bosco must have been convinced of the value of this motto or at least of an important part of it. Anyhow under the heading "*Tempi diversi*" he recorded: "Make sure you are loved, then it will be easy to be obeyed."¹⁵⁹ In that memory you can already find the emphasis on the favourable consequence: obedience, willingness, an effect which is also made prominent here. There is already a strong emphasis on the educator's responsibility too. He is to make sure. He is to take the initiative.

Addressing his boys in a good night on December 21 1859, Don Bosco brought up the second part of the motto. Preparing for the celebration of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception he gave the youngsters the following thought for the day: "*I'll try to put*

¹⁵⁷ Cf. footnotes 68 and 89 in the first chapter and footnote 37 in this chapter.

¹⁵⁸ BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 283-284. I have elaborated and completed this in BIESMANS, R., "*Die Liebe von Franz von Sales soll mir in allem Vorbild sein*", Benediktbeuern, 1994, pp. 44-66. ID., *Fatti amare...*, pp. 5-41.

¹⁵⁹ BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 402/79. Not taken up in MB XVII, p. 256.

great trust in my superiors.” He added as a basic rule: “We superiors do not want to be feared; we wish to be loved and trusted.”¹⁶⁰ “To fear” has the meaning of “approaching with reserve”, even plain “being afraid of.” That evening he clearly meant the way the youngsters looked at the situation, i.e. approached the superiors.

This concrete and authentic address to the boys got an objective, moralizing touch in an historical outline of the Oratory in 1862. He wrote: “A long-standing experience has shown that the good result [success] of youth education particularly coincides with ‘making ourselves loved’ to afterwards ‘making ourselves feared’.”¹⁶¹ No doubt he meant the educators then. He does not explain though how they can do this or go about it. The word “feared” rather means “respected, held in high regard.” According to that principle both are needed. There is indeed in the text: “in order to subsequently make ourselves respected, i.e. with the intention of making ourselves respected. Using the phrase “a long-standing experience” Don Bosco obviously meant his twenty years of dealing and working with youngsters.

The next years of experience and coaching co-workers made him formulate in a more refined and nuanced way. When he appointed Fr Rua rector of the first foundation outside Valdocco in 1863, he gave him a few *Confidential Reminders*. One of them was: “Try make yourself loved sooner than feared [having authority].”¹⁶² “By translating “*prima di*” as “sooner” I respect the previous “*di poi*”, which means “subsequently” and in 1862 put a chronological link between “being loved” and “being feared”. Both are worth being aimed at. That is why “to fear” means acquiring regard, respect and authority.

The chronological link between “make yourself loved” and “make yourself feared” appears to have caused some problems to his assistants though. The house chapter report of February 1872 bears witness to this. They express their experience and conviction in this way: “All should aim at making themselves both loved and feared by the boys.” “Feared” clearly means “regarded” or “respected”. “This can be easily done,” the reporter added immediately. He backed that up and that is why it is right and proper to quote the rest of the report: “When youngsters see an assistant genuinely concerned about their welfare, they cannot help but love him. So also, when they see he keeps a tight rein on them and calls them to task if they kick over the traces, they cannot help feeling a certain fear of him, a reverential fear [“*un timore riverenziale*”] which they should have for superiors. One thing that assistants must very carefully avoid is lowering themselves too much to the boys’ level in speech and actions, and especially in games. They should join in all activities, but at the same time they should keep their place and show by their demeanour that they are educators. This very recommendation was made last year but

¹⁶⁰MB VI, pp. 320-321; EMB VI, p. 171. Cursive letters in the text of *Memorie*. Cf. further footnote 178. It is possible that the first letter of Saint John had a certain influence. The teaching runs as follows: “Love does not allow fear. Perfect love drives out fear.” It was an idea which also influenced St Augustine: “Perfecta dilectio foras mittit timorem.” (MIGNE, J.-P., *Augustini opera omnia*, vol. I, Paris, 1877, p. 1450.)

¹⁶¹BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco per i giovani: “l’Oratorio una “Congregazione degli Oratori”*, Rome, LAS, 1988, pp. 63-64. ID., *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 138-139. Variants in the editions and copies demonstrate how Don Bosco and the copyists grappled with the accurate rendering of his idea.

¹⁶²MOTTO, Fr., *I “Ricordi confidenziali...”*, p. 146/23. EMB XI, p. 447.

it bears repeating.”¹⁶³

Their point of view and comment coming with it are all the more valuable because Don Bosco himself had hardly returned from Varazze to Valdocco on February 15. He had been very ill in Varazze and his full recovery would take quite some time. In the meantime they met under Fr Rua’s leadership.¹⁶⁴ Their rewording of Don Bosco’s “motto” is all the more remarkable for that reason. They kept Don Bosco’s contrasting choice of words, but not his way to connect both pedagogical requirements. Their explanation left no doubt as to what they understood by “fear”. It concerned “a certain fear”, i.e. regard or recognition of a distinction creating some sort of distance, no matter how minimal it could be in practice. It remains a question where they got the term “*timore riverenziale*” from. To maintain that form of regard it seemed necessary to them that assistants (and teachers) avoid “lowering themselves to the boys’ level.” The point of view of “taking part in everything” in its turn reflects clearly Don Bosco’s spirit.

The option of simultaneity had been announced a few months before in August 1871. It was decided then to stimulate the assistants of the ‘artisans’ “to stand united to aim at one goal, i.e. to love each other and to counsel each other well to enable them to gain the boys’ obedience, affection (*amore*) and esteem (*stima*).”¹⁶⁵ The use of the word “*stima*” can contribute to understanding how they interpreted Don Bosco’s concepts of “*timore*” (fear) and “*temere*” (to fear) on that day. The phrase “reverential fear” of February 1872 is similar. By its choice of words the decision of the superiors of the house in 1871 linked more closely with Teppa’s wording. In his well-known work he had stated that educators “could not have any moral authority if they did not deserve it.” To put it more clearly: “One can only deserve it by making oneself regarded, respected and loved.” There are three concepts here but no mention of fear whatsoever. The three notions are closely connected and all three are necessary elements in education. It strikes one that “regarded and respected” come first. That author also used the concise form: “When a teacher is really loved and regarded by his pupil.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, pp. 263-264. Cf. footnote 124 in this chapter.

Cf. also MB X, p. 316-317; EMB X, p. 159. And BIESMANS, R., *1866-1876 don Bosco betrouwbare wegwijzer...*, pp. 42-43. They did mean “love” and then “respect, respectful esteem”, which is proved by the report of a few months before. Then they used the words “love” [*amore*] and respect or esteem [*stima*]. Cf. PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 262/44. The simultaneity is also present in a pedagogical work of Brother Agathon (1835). P. Braido twice quotes from his work. A first quote is: “He [the teacher] wants to make himself regarded and respected.” A second quote: “This authority is also acquired by linking gentleness with vigour and love [*amore*] with fear [*timore*]” in: BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, pp. 116-117.

¹⁶⁴MB X, pp. 307-310, 315-316; EMB X, 152-155, 158-159.

¹⁶⁵PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 262/43-45. BIESMANS, R., *1866-1876 don Bosco betrouwbare wegwijzer...*, p. 40. In 1863 Brother Théoger wrote: “*inspirar loro riverente timore*”. Cf. BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, p. 118.

¹⁶⁶TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, p. 16 (in Italian: “*col farsi stimare, rispettare ed amare*”) and p. 43. It is possible too that they knew of the Italian edition of a Charles Rollin book: “*Della maniera d’insegnare e studiare le belle lettere*” from 1828. To him the capacity of a director primarily consisted in “making himself esteemed and loved (*nel farsi stimare ed amare*), winning their trust,” (BRAIDO, P., *Breve storia del “Sistema preventivo”*, Rome, LAS, 1993, p. 57). There too both components and terms are juxtaposed. In C. Rollin we read too: “So a fortunate mixture of gentleness and strictness, of love (*amore*) and fear (*timore*).” “Such a type of teacher will know how to make himself both feared (*temere*) and loved (*amare*)” (BRAIDO, P., *Breve storia...*, p. 56). So we find here the combination of fearing and loving. Fear comes first though, but at the same time simultaneity is suggested. In

Despite the demanding activities Don Bosco started writing the *Memorie dell' Oratorio* or his *Memoirs* in 1873. Between 1873 and 1875 he recalls his secondary school days. He remembered his teacher Banaudi with great gratitude and appreciation. It is clear from the characterization: "Without ever having recourse to punishment, he succeeded in making all his pupils fear [respect] and love him. He loved them all as if they were his own sons and they loved him as a tender father."¹⁶⁷ Don Bosco kept the pair of notions, but surprisingly put "to be feared" in front position. Moreover he then shared the conviction one should strive after both components at the same time. It is not redundant to point at the manner of loving "as a dear father", which seems to suggest he was thinking of affective rather than effective love.

For a new version of his *Confidential Reminders* to the rectors published in March 1876, Don Bosco returned to his former sequence of the pair of notions, but at the same time he re-wrote the motto. He formulated it this way: "Strive to make yourself loved if you want to be feared."¹⁶⁸ The reader feels he means by "fear": "If you want to obtain authority, if you want the youngsters to have pedagogically justified awe or regard for you." So he remained faithful to his use of words, but he changed the position of loving and fearing. Being loved had become the condition for authority or looking up at someone with awe. That is how he showed understanding for the teachers' and assistants' desire of sufficient authority and respect from the youngsters. On the other hand he emphasized his conviction that it comes down to being loved and liked in education. The rest [authority, awe, respect] follows automatically. But if you do not succeed in making the boys love you, the consequence is inevitable: they will be afraid of you, fear you really and avoid you.

The relation between the two aspects was defined by Don Bosco in 1877 in an official way through the publication of ten *General Articles* and the *Little Treatise on the Preventive System in the Education of the Young*.

In a first draft of the *General Articles* Don Bosco returned to his sixties formulation discussed above. He wrote in the first article: "Everyone should always remember: to make oneself feared by the boys, one should make oneself loved first." "Fear" has no pejorative meaning at all. It is an element which has its place in education. However, acquiring a certain degree of "authority and regard" is only possible through acquiring the boys' affection first. This wording has not lasted long. It did not seem to be satisfactory. In the definitive version of the articles, which came about not much later, the clearly expressed conditional relation was restored in the second article: "Everyone has to make sure he is loved if he wants to make himself feared." A further explanation followed: "He will achieve this high goal if he shows in word and action that his preoccupation

his lessons of pedagogy G. Barberis will still [or again?] present the simultaneity and equivalence to the young Salesians in the nineties: "The assistant will walk in the middle of the road so as to be loved and feared [treated with awe]" (BARBERIS, G., *Appunti...*, p. 342). Perhaps he wanted to take their young age into account.

¹⁶⁷ On the period of the emerging the *Memoirs*, see BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell' Oratorio...*, pp. 18-19 and 6. Quotation, *ibid.*, p. 71/907-909. Cf. *Memoirs...*, p. 61.

¹⁶⁸ MOTTO, Fr., I "*Ricordi confidenziali...*", p. 151/variants on line 13, according to a correction by Don Bosco in the E manuscript; pp. 134-135; 140-141; 144. Cf. FdB 1.362 E. Also MB X, pp. 1040-1041; EMB X, pp. 446-447/footnote 2.

is exclusively directed at the spiritual and temporal benefit of his pupils.”¹⁶⁹ From this objective appears once more how big and strong the impact of effective love was in Don Bosco’s view with respect to pedagogical love.

During this same month of April Don Bosco had been working on the edition of a little *Treatise on the Preventive System*. In it he remained faithful to the second version of the basic rule in the ten articles in the very concise last chapter *on punishing*. He wrote as follows: “An educator should seek to win the love of his pupils if he wishes to inspire fear in them.”¹⁷⁰ The latter has evidently the meaning of “respect him”, “grant him authority.”

The way of expressing things by ‘if’ or ‘when’ had become quite normal for Don Bosco at that time as is shown in “The Story of a Cleric in volume XIII of the *Memorie biografiche*. Don Bosco had given a Salesian trainee, Bernardo Vacchina, the task of school teaching. One day he asked him if he managed to keep discipline in the classroom. “Not always,” Vacchina answered. Don Bosco gave him a good piece of advice in plain and informal language: “Listen well. If you want to be obeyed and respected, make yourself loved.” The conditional can be taken in an informal way. The phrasing “to be obeyed and respected” clarifies very well what Don Bosco means by the notion of “fear” in the positive sense. It indicates that respect is focused on being obeyed by the boys. He added an extra hint at making oneself loved, albeit through a prohibition: “But, mind you, no caressing, especially their faces, and no holding hands.”¹⁷¹ Don Bosco had no problem with expressing affective love, but he refused to accept sentimentality.

However, not all confreres copied his normative new formulation just like that. The Salesian P. Guidazio reported on his activity as a teacher in Montefiascone in a letter to Don Bosco in 1879. Don Bosco had been asked to take over an existing college there. Guidazio as the only Salesian did not find himself there in an easy situation. Still, he was pleased with his personal success: “Nonetheless I make fun and laughter in class and achieve much more than many others. The boys love and respect me.”¹⁷² He too preferred the combination of “love” and “respect”. This can be attributed most probably to the recommended reading of Teppa and Guidazio’s personal experience and conviction.

The *Little Treatise on the Preventive System* and the conversation with Vacchina did not guarantee however that Don Bosco remained faithful to the formulation with the ‘conditional relation’ in all circumstances or considered it to be the definite expression of his insight. When he celebrated his name-day on 29 July 1880, he addressed a group of past pupils who had become diocesan priests. He called on them to help him in youth education particularly in the religious field. “Come to Don Bosco’s aid to attain

¹⁶⁹BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 288/3-4 and 289/7-10. In 1941 E. Ceria preferred this formulation in: CERIA, E., *Annali della società salesiana dalle origini alla morte di S. D. Giovanni Bosco (1841-1888)*, Turin, SEI, 1941, p. 665.

¹⁷⁰BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, p. 91/532. *Constitutions...*, p. 252.

¹⁷¹MB XIII, p. 826; EMB XIII, pp. 639-640. In Italian it reads as follows: “Vedi, se vuoi essere obbedito, fatti voler bene.” He uses the confidential form of you to address him. He uses the familiar phrase “voler bene”, not the more formal “amare”. And instead of the not so unambiguous “temere” he uses the more directly comprehensible “rispettare”. Cf. the opinion of Brother Agathon in footnote 148.

¹⁷²Letter in MB XIII, p. 980. EMB XIII, however, no translation of this letter. On the circumstances see MB XIII, pp. 692, EMB XIII, pp. 532-534.

all the more readily and on a larger scale our noble goals – the welfare of the Church [the spreading of the good message of religion] and of civil society – by caring for [by educating] destitute youngsters... In order to succeed with youngsters”, so he impressed on these parish priests, “take great pains to be kind to them; win their love, not their fear... In a word, act in such a way that once they spot you, they will run over to you rather than dash off, as so often happens, and justifiably so because they fear a beating.”¹⁷³ The latter thought expresses well how they had to interpret “fear”, i.e. as being afraid of, not liking to deal with, avoiding, “remaining at a distance.” It also sheds a light on the phrase used in 1884: “Consequently they are feared and little loved.” Addressing the past pupils, Don Bosco made use of a strong contrast which recalls memories of the striking good night in 1859.

In the first draft on *The Use of Punishments* (January 1883) the principle was formulated by Fr Francesia in yet another way already at the end of the first paragraph: “and let us endeavour to make ourselves loved more [rather than] feared.”¹⁷⁴ Fear has to be interpreted as dealing with us in an awesome, highly respectful and reserved way. There is in that guideline no more talk of chronological sequence nor of one being the condition of the other. The distinction now consists of a difference in degree. The intensity of the efforts by which a teacher tries to be loved should be greater than the one by which he tries to be respected and win authority. Love and affection prevail without discussion.

That is why the situation in Valdocco is so stunning and tragic in March 1883. The boys fear the Salesians more than they love them. “The boys” – speaking very generally and without any shade of meaning – are afraid; they avoid teachers and assistants, literally “us”. This is also said in a general way without nuance. It is a great pity too they cannot find out where the cause lies. The question of the cause was also haunting Don Bosco. Sure, he stayed in France at the time of the meeting. He must have been informed though in one way or another. It can be inferred from Domenico Canepa’s answer to an enquiry which was organized in Valdocco later, in June 1884. Canepa was a catechist with the pupils at that time of his life. He started his contribution on June 8 as follows: “It was proposed last year to examine what the reason could be why the higher classes had no trust and continue having no trust. What I answered then, I’ll answer now.”¹⁷⁵ It shows that the situation was considered as being irregular, and seeking solutions preoccupied

¹⁷³MB XIV, p. 513; EMB XIV, 402-403. According to G. Bonetti’s notes in the September 1880 issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, year IV, no. 1, 1880, p. 11. (Also MB XIV, p. 510; EMB XIV, p. 400/footnote 9.)

¹⁷⁴BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 329/97. Cf. EMB XVI, p. 370. In Italian: “*E cerchiamo prima di farci amare che temere.*” Literally: “And let us make an effort to be loved rather than to be feared” The phrase “*prima di... che*” means “rather” or “preferably”. The version is very similar with C. Rollin’s one, a French author who was quite well-known through A. Monfat in Valdocco. It runs as follows: “Because one can see it being practised by people who possess the rare capacity of making themselves feared and even more loved.” (BRAIDO, P., *Breve storia...*, p. 56.) It is also a matter of gradation. That corresponds with the Benedictine tradition: “*et studeat plus amari quam temeri*” [and he - the abbot – will aim more at being loved than feared].” (*Rule*, chapter LXIV, p. 15). Cf. St Augustine, *Praecepta* (Rule of Saint Augustine), pp. 7, 13. Agathon, Brother of the Christian schools, expressed it as follows: “Far from resolving only to be feared [respected], his main objective is to win trust.” (BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, p. 116.)

¹⁷⁵PRELLEZO, JM, *Valdocco...*, p. 292/5-6.

the minds and was a topic of discussion and communication with Don Bosco.

In April and May 1884 anyway it was on Don Bosco's mind and on Fr Lemoyne's as well. The latter had been called to Valdocco in November to function as secretary to Don Bosco and the Superior Chapter. One of the thoughts Don Bosco told Fr Lemoyne [manuscript A], gives away his worry: "The superiors are thought of as superiors /.../ feared etc." [A, 17-18] The thought even suggests knowledge of the content of the report of March 9 1883. "Fear" has the same negative connotation for the editor as in the report. He does not fall, however, into a pessimistic exaggeration in the version for the adults, he does not put really "feared" and on top of that "not beloved". He keeps the nuance "little loved" as in the letter to the boys.

Everything which we have gathered about the use and the evolution of his motto leads us to understand well how urgent he must have thought it for both the boys and adults to contribute to reach again the level of loving very much and fearing little or not at all. And in this way "the barrier would be broken down."

Not only about Valdocco did Don Bosco have to worry. Also other houses even in South America preoccupied him. It shows in his letter to Bishop Cagliero. He wrote to him on some months later, February 10 1885, and again made use of the old black-and-white contrast he had formulated for past pupil priests a couple of years before. "Urge all our confreres to concentrate all their efforts ... to make themselves loved but not feared."¹⁷⁶ It is a very strong and indeed an absolute way of expressing outspoken preference for making oneself loved in pedagogical and pastoral contacts and particularly for the way in which it has to be achieved.

When it was decided to commemorate and celebrate the 45th anniversary of the Oratory's foundation on December 8 1886 Don Bosco would review the *Confidential Reminders for the Rectors*. He chose to formulate his motto as follows: "*Studia di farti amare, piuttosto che farti temere*", which is: "Strive to make yourself loved rather than feared."¹⁷⁷ This is a clear confirmation of the way of the expression characterized by difference in degree. Both are necessary, but love most of all. That is precisely what is impressed on the Salesians in Valdocco already in 1884.

- *The educator as a father, a brother and a friend of the youngsters [18]*

That background reveals what teachers, assistants and superiors should strive after again about 1884. The text suggests very clearly: they have to apply themselves to being loved very much and "feared" very little or not at all. In order to achieve that – according to the text – they have to be fathers, brothers and friends for the youngsters and as such love

¹⁷⁶E IV, p. 13. MB XVII, p. 309; EMB XVII, p. 284.

¹⁷⁷MOTTO, Fr., I "*Ricordi confidenziali...*", p. 151/13. MB X, p. 1041/footnote 2; EMB X, p.447/footnote 2. Moreover, Don Bosco would end the definite text by the general conclusion: "That is like a will which I intend for the rectors of the houses." He adds a variant: "And in a particular way for the director of the Chief House in Turin" (MOTTO, Fr., I "*Ricordi confidenziali...*", p. 159/183). In this way one can understand that A. Amadei put this type of motto on top of a series of selected, pertinent directives in the Xth part of the *Memorie biografiche*, which was published in 1939. (MB X, p. 1047; EMB X, p. 453). Cf. also footnote 162 in this chapter.

them and deal with them. It follows that the youngsters in turn can see their teachers, assistants and superiors as their “fathers, brothers and friends” and not be afraid of them, but trust them consequently and love them. At the beginning of the insertion the author does not really do anything else but repeat the content of the key fragment in a new way. Could that be the reason why G.B. Lemoyne has included that fragment?

Don Bosco has clearly given a deliberate example of this pedagogical and pastoral vision on the educators’ dealing with youngsters. In the course of the years gone by he has repeated this call upon his assistants several times.

Years before during a good night in September or October 1863, he must have introduced himself to the new boys as follows: “I don’t want you to look upon me mainly as your superior but rather as your friend. So don’t be afraid of me at all. Far from it! Trust me fully. It is all I want, all I ask you, all I expect of real friends.”¹⁷⁸ In the above context too he reassures them they do not have to be afraid. The friendship is bilateral in Don Bosco’s perception: he does not only call himself their friend, but he also calls the boys his friends. They can consider themselves as his friends and behave as such.

Ten years later, in 1873, he met Maggiorino Borgatello in the college of Varazze. According to Borgatello’s testimony Don Bosco must have said at the end of a conversation with him: “Remember I want to be your friend.”¹⁷⁹

A friend will no doubt do everything for the well-being of his friends, but the relationship will not be real friendship without healthy affection or affective love.

When he wrote a letter to the boys in Mirabello in July 1864 to announce his visit, the words ran as follows: “I’m coming to you as a father, friend, and brother.”¹⁸⁰ Here he used the three qualities side by side. This took place about three years before the publication of Teppa’s inspiring book: “*Avvertimenti per gli educatori ecclesiastici*”. The author, who was recommended by Don Bosco, also postulated clearly and resolutely: “Who wants his pupils to love him, must be the first one himself to deeply love them with the affection of a father and a friend.”¹⁸¹ The aspect of “brother” is also important

¹⁷⁸MB VII, p. 503; EMB VII, pp. 302-303. Cf. footnotes 39 and 160 in this chapter. Cf. also BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, p. 28/ footnote 12. We may think of an influence of F. Aporti, a professor of pedagogy in Turin. Around 1844 he presented his students the following: “Have patience like a father” and “live with them [the children] as a wise friend and a counsellor and a director, love them like your own children.” (APORTI, F., *Scritti pedagogici, raccolti e illustrati da A. Gambaro II*, Turin, 1945, p. 51. Cf. BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, p. 109). Interesting information on Don Bosco’s relationship with F. Aporti during the second half of the forties in MB II, pp. 188-189; 209-219; 398; EMB, II, pp. 148-149; 165-172; 311. Taking a closer look, we cannot exclude that G. Bonetti processed one or two thoughts which Don Bosco developed and expressed only later, in those notes.

¹⁷⁹MB X, p. 20; EMB X, p. 16-17.

¹⁸⁰E (m), vol. secondo, p. 59. MB VIII, p. 875; EMB VIII, p. 382. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, p. 31. Cf. footnote 39 in this chapter of the study.

¹⁸¹TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, p. 22. Even earlier Don Bosco may have been acquainted with the book “*Le dolci virtù di un buon maestro accennato dall’ Ab. De la Salle*” (1835) by Agathon, Brother of the Christian schools. He wrote: “Love is won by love. A teacher must primarily and above all cherish a feeling of a father for them [the pupils].” (BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, p. 117.) On the other hand we know that already in 1854 Don Bosco wrote in a draft of a “*Rule of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales for the day pupils*”: “He [the director] has to show himself continuously as a friend, comrade and brother of all.” Cf. BOSCO, G., *Regolamento dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per*

to Don Bosco. It should put emphasis on his preference for a certain form of equality, solidarity and harmony in dealing with each other.

He has often repeated the triad, for example in 1874. After a very long absence, he wrote via M. Rua to the boys in Valdocco: “Your father, your brother, the friend of your soul leaves Rome today [April 14] after a three and a half month absence.”¹⁸² This utterance shows at once that the reference “of your soul” indicates that the relational qualities only make sense if they spring from a deep, inexhaustible spiritual source.

When working on his *Memoirs of the Oratory*, he wrote about the priest Father Calosso: “It was then that I came to realise what it was to have a regular spiritual director, a faithful friend of one’s soul.” The similarity is striking. Some pages further it is said somewhat more generally but as clearly: “Who knows? I thought to myself, if these youngsters had a friend outside [the prisons], who would take loving care of them, help them, teach them religion on feast days... Who knows but they could be steered away from ruin, or at least the number of those who return to prison could be lessened?”¹⁸³

He also offered his closest co-workers counsel and directive. It consisted of what he himself thought important and efficient for his pastoral and pedagogical education. In 1873 he wrote to M. Rua: “*In omnibus caritas.* (Christian charity in all things). Act in such a way that all who deal with you may become your friends.”¹⁸⁴

The year 1877 was the most important year of consolidation. In the publication of the *Rules and Regulations for the Houses* he included two influential texts: the *Little Treatise on the Preventive System* and *General Articles*. The following points are particularly meaningful for the present case: “The pupil will always remain the friend of the educator... He will look upon his former teachers and superiors as fathers and brothers.” “Fathers and brothers” are two of the three qualities in that important little essay. As if it were an addition and at the same time a counterpart of the boys’ attitude, the seventh item of the “*General Articles*” runs as follows: “Each superior should show himself to be their friend.” Meant in the first place is: “The friend of the tough and even rebellious pupils.”¹⁸⁵ In the *Rules of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales for the Day Pupils*, also published in 1877, we read: “He [the rector] should show himself continuously to be friend, companion, brother of everyone.” “Everyone” could possibly only refer to the confreres. Anyway, the directives for the rector continue as follows: “He has to be like a father amidst his own children.”¹⁸⁶ It is about “youthful hearts” [*giovani cuori*] in this context. These are items of advice which may have affected Lemoyne’s commentary as voiced here by Buzzetti.” Those official documents show that the Salesians including Lemoyne must have been well informed on Don Bosco’s point of view. It is also clear from the first chapter that these texts were regularly read out in Valdocco. The everyday

gli esterni in: BOSCO, G., *Scritti sul sistema preventivo nell’educazione della gioventù*, (a cura di P. Braido), Brescia, La Scuola, 1965, p. 364, p. 360/footnote 1 and p. 365/item 7.

¹⁸²E (m), vol. quarto, p. 278.

¹⁸³For both quotations BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell’Oratorio...*, pp. 47/397-398; 120/757-760. *Memoirs...*, p. 44 and pp. 101-102. Cf. MB II, p. 63; EMB II, p. 49.

¹⁸⁴E (m), vol. quarto, p. 142. MB X, p. 1183; EMB X, p. 514.

¹⁸⁵OE XXIX [107] and [112/7]. *Constitutions...*, p. 251/1 (translated according to the text in: BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, p. 90/511-513). See footnote 41 in this chapter.

¹⁸⁶OE XXIX [35/2-36/7].

practice however shows knowledge is not sufficient to move people to action. Moreover it is possible that the novices and clerics in training were not made familiar enough with Don Bosco's directives.

In the meantime Don Bosco himself had been very consistent in the period following the consolidating writings. When in 1878 the very young Fr Perrot was appointed rector of the new foundation in La Navarre, he gave him the following advice: "Do not go as a superior but as a friend, brother and father."¹⁸⁷ That was true for dealing with the confreres but no doubt for the contact with the boys too. In that respect he had to show the way for the others. The sequence of the three qualities is not always the same, but this may be arbitrary. It may be the consequence of a well-thought-through intention vis-à-vis the new rector.

This is the place to remind ourselves of the "great meeting" in Valdocco. Don Bosco joined the meeting towards the end of it (November 1882). After he had listened to a summary of the discussion, he approved of it then said: "Pay especial attention to the teacher or assistant as the superior of the boys when in carrying out that role. However, when service and function do not apply, he is to be a friend and father to the boys."¹⁸⁸ His directive clearly gives evidence of his intention to impress his point of view firmly on his co-workers.

The entire advice as he gave it to Fr Perrot was so defining for Don Bosco that he wrote it down again when he was working on the sequel to his personal *Memorie dell'Oratorio* with intervals during the years 1884-1886. He gave his successor - as Rector Major - the instruction "to assure [all voters] he would be the father, the friend and the brother of all."¹⁸⁹ after the election. It is not so daring to interpret "all" very broadly in this instruction for just like a rector he is also - and even to a larger extent - "the most important superior who is the ultimate responsible person for the things occurring in the Oratory."¹⁹⁰

The quotes and testimonies may be quite overwhelming but they do not reveal very clearly precisely what he meant by the concepts 'father, friend and brother'. Some of the quotes certainly do not offer more insight into the way the boys and closest co-workers understood them. That is why I am going to try to give a more accurate explanation of the meaning of the concepts.

- *About being a father*

¹⁸⁷E III, p. 360. About a month later he reminded G. Ronchail, director in Nice, of one of his most important missions with a *post scriptum* in a letter of August 1878. It ran: "Never forget that you are the father of all. You are to lead all to Jesus." (E III, p. 380.) So there he limited himself to the aspect of "fatherhood". Cf. MB XIII, p. 716; EMB XIII, p.548.

¹⁸⁸Cf. footnote 42 in this chapter and footnote 53 in the first chapter of this study. I should like to quote here a reflection of P. Braido about the current renewal of the educator's function. "It entails a radically new way of interpreting and trying out the idea and role of "father", "brother" and "friend". (BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, p. 401.)

¹⁸⁹BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p.412/251-252.

¹⁹⁰OE XXIX [35].

How Don Bosco imagined 'being a father' was obviously influenced and defined by his education at the seminary and later on by his reading, both of which offered him ideas on the spiritual fatherhood of the priest seen from the perspective of the Christian tradition. No lesser impact must have come through his own experience when he was a youngster.

Writing his *Memoirs* he thought back to Father Calosso. He characterized him in the following words: "I idolised Fr Calosso, loved him as if he were my father. ... That man of God lavished affection on me, and he would often say: don't worry about the future. As long as I'm alive I'll see that you want for nothing. And I'll make provision for you after my death." In this way Don Bosco emphasized the fatherhood of the priest, "man of God". It strikes us Don Bosco gave prominence to the man's affection for him: "He lavished affection ('*affezione*') on me." It is a repetition of what Fr Calosso had told him before. "John, my boy, you have put your trust in me and it will not be in vain. So, leave that unreasonable brother of yours; come and live with me. And you will have a [loving] father." Affection, the affective love has always been a very important aspect in the human and pastoral and pedagogical relationship. A real father, also a real spiritual father, shows and makes a son feel he loves him. He gives safety, the feeling he is fully accepted. He is a loving and dear father, according to the *Memorie dell'Oratorio* "*padre amoroso*". It is the expression which Don Bosco had made official in his little *Treatise on the Preventive System*.¹⁹¹

At the same time a true father is preoccupied with the future and well-being of his children. He will make sure and if needs be fight for his children to be better off than he himself has been. Don Bosco put affective love, more precisely reciprocal love, in focus when picturing his teacher, Banaudi: "He loved them [his pupils] all as if they were his own children [sons] and they loved him like an affectionate father." Also the boys must have felt tangible affection for Don Bosco so much so they still liked to address him by the "sweet name of father" as past pupils.¹⁹²

In the social and cultural context of the time - bearing in mind the absence of co-education in schools - this accent might be the emphasis on the essential female, motherly component. The prominence can also be attributed to his mother's love which he, as the youngest of the family, had been able to enjoy so much. Yet it also refers to the kind of love he had missed out on at least subconsciously by the early death of his father.

A good father - in the eyes of Don Bosco - is nevertheless also always a man who "sees that the boys want for nothing"; he supplies everything they need. It is the father who shows by his actions that he loves his boys, as Don Bosco stated in his *oratio pro domo* in discussion with Buzzetti. "How much did he not bear and suffer to provide them with daily bread, a house, teachers and especially to provide for the salvation of their souls." A real father does not only wish temporal and spiritual happiness for his children, but he does everything "he possibly can" for them. [11-12] Moreover, he makes time

¹⁹¹BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell'Oratorio...*, p. 50/450-463. BOSCO, J., *Memoirs...*, p. 46. Cf. MB I, p.214; EMB I, p.159. BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, 83/392. *Constitutions...*, p. 247.

¹⁹²BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell'Oratorio...*, p. 71/909. ID., *Memoirs...*, p. 61. Cf. MB I, p.325; EMB I, p.244. Cf. also footnote 167 in this chapter. As far as past pupils are concerned, cf. footnote 40 in this chapter. Hereafter on his friendship with L. Comollo: *Memorie dell'Oratorio...*, p. 95/209-213. *Memoirs...*, pp. 58-60. Cf. MB I, p.403; EMB I, p. 300.

for them. He talks to them, listens to their desires and needs, he counsels, stimulates and encourages them, he backs them up, is a refuge and inspires confidence. He keeps watch over his children's behaviour. He acts with authority where needed and tries to correct by resolutely but "kindly pointing out errors", punishing moderately and certainly not applying any kind of corporal punishment whatsoever. It always comes down again to friendly, gentle, jovial, confidential and familiar dealing with the youngsters and like Banaudi to succeed in both "being respected and loved", even more loved than feared. [18]

- *About being a friend*

By this confidential, jovial and benevolent dealing the father figure is also qualified as a friend. It is striking how often Don Bosco combines father and friend in the collected quotes. It is obvious he wanted to be both a friend and a father to the youngsters.

Yet he had been able to experience what friendship among young people could mean in his youth. In his *Memoirs* he testified to Luigi Comollo: "This marvellous companion was my fortune. He could, as the occasion demanded, advise me, correct me, or cheer me up, but all with such charm and charity that I even welcomed his admonitions and looked for them. I dealt familiarly with him and I was naturally lead to follow his example." (See footnote 192) The effective and active Christian love which showed itself through warning, correcting and following, possibly prevails in his retrospect on their friendship. The affective component is strongly present as well, as is clear through mentioning cheering up and confidential, familiar contact: sympathy, knowing and feeling oneself safe without any touch of sentimentality.

That was also the case when he told about Dominic Savio's friendships. Don Bosco had the boy say to Giovanni Massaglia in his brief biography: "I want us to be real friends. [That means] real friends for matters of the soul. That is why I should like the one to be the monitor of the other in anything that can contribute to spiritual well-being."¹⁹³ The cement of their friendship was congeniality: cherishing the same ideals and supporting each other unconditionally. Both friendships are about young people among themselves evidently. The same tendency is to be found in the reaction of the young priest Giovanni Bosco when visiting young prisoners. He quite soon made the following reflection: "If these youngsters had a friend outside [of prison] who would take care of them, help them, teach them religion on feast days... Who knows but they could be steered away from ruin, or at least the number of those who return to prison could be lessened?"¹⁹⁴ That is how he described what he would like to do for these youngsters because he took their destiny to heart. It was also because he loved them not solely as human beings but equally wanted to assist them as a priest and a friend.

Later a good night made it clear he considered the sympathy, the affection and ties of friendship as a source from which youngsters could draw much trust in him and the

¹⁹³OE XI [89].

¹⁹⁴BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell'Oratorio...*, p. 120/756-761; *Memoirs...*, pp. 101-102.

educators. At the same time he made them understand they could be his “real friends”. This means he invited the boys to love him and deal with him’ and with each other in a spontaneous, confidential and open-hearted way.¹⁹⁵ True friendship goes both ways. It contains a certain attraction towards each other, appreciation and preference for each other, open-heartedness and togetherness on both sides. Friendship also implies that you can blindly count on each other in all circumstances. It is an educator-youngster relationship which may overshadow the father-son relationship or the father figure in puberty. Could that be the reason why the “roles” of father and friend in a teacher, educator and superior are not so often mentioned together as being complementary? And would he not have switched to the father image in that same evening address at the moment when he was about to speak about reprimanding and punishing? He wanted to be both the fatherly friend and the friendly father.

- *About being a brother*

The quotes above also nearly always contain the word “brother”. In the *Little Treatise on the Preventive System* Don Bosco restricted himself to father and brother.

Don Bosco had an ambiguous experience of brothers in a family: a negative one with his elder step-brother Anthony and a positive one with his slightly older brother from his father’s second marriage. He informed us about the vicissitudes with the first one in his *Memoirs*. However, he did not write anything there about the relationship with Joseph.

The brother aspect is the least transparent of the three in the texts treated up to now. We may suppose that being a brother generally meant being equal to one another, understanding each other, pleading for each other’s causes and a friendly relationship, togetherness and willingness to forgive, including spontaneous and informal ways of dealing with each other. Don Bosco’s view of a healthy, fine and ideal family was inspired by all these elements. One might think Don Bosco meant this aspect particularly for his younger assistants. However, that is not the case. He equally wanted the adult teachers and educators and even the rectors to behave like brothers to the boys. Perhaps he meant the kind of older brothers who do not only give protection and wise counsel, but are also able to enter their world and take part in it. Seen from their point of view, he wanted the boys to consider their educators as brothers and deal with them as older brothers. That is how being a brother gets its own complementary value added to the other two aspects.

Don Bosco used each of the three aspects to stress specific accents which constituted a typical identity of his teachers, educators and superiors. He epitomized this identity when he wrote or said that he “was among them as a father, a friend and a brother.” This identity has possibly not yet been fully examined and explained even taking into account all that has been quoted and discussed here.

- *“Unity of heart and soul” and the breakdown of the distrust barrier [18]*

¹⁹⁵Cf. footnote 178 in this chapter. Cf. the text through footnote 89 in chapter 1.

The piece inserted into the letter to the Valdocco Salesians describes the beneficial mutual relationships in yet another way. We find it in the following fragment: “And so if you want everyone to be of one heart and soul again...” This idea and wording too come from a connected series of suggestions which came to Don Bosco’s mind “on one of the past evenings” in May and is preserved in manuscript *A*. The statement: “presently the superiors are considered as superiors /.../ feared” and then the conditional “if one wants to constitute one heart and one soul”, are separated by “etc.” in the original notes. As mentioned above, in the letter to the boys Lemoyne had added to this “etc.” the explanation: “and no longer as fathers, brothers and friends” and also “little loved.” It was enough for him to make a link between “feared and little loved” and “one heart and one soul” through using “thus” or “that is why”. In this way, however, he did not reveal the underlying logical sequence. Neither does he do so when writing to the Salesians. The link probably consists of this: unity of heart and soul arises when educators deal with the youngsters in a jovial, trustful and familiar way as fathers and brothers and the youngsters in turn respond to this friendly and benign behaviour with visible affection, obedience and willingness.

The main idea, “one heart and one soul”, comes from *The Acts of the Apostles* (4,32). Adding “for love of Jesus”, which Don Bosco had suggested already from the start (manuscript *A*), Lemoyne revealed the religious motivation which should inspire everybody to strive after unity and to give this pursuit a sound foundation. Human motives alone do not seem to be sufficient for him. The quote from The Acts is an ideal which Don Bosco referred to more than once in the seventies of his century. He did so particularly in the writings and addresses for his closest co-workers.

It is very significant that he integrated this characterization of Jesus’ disciples into the Congregation’s Constitutions. In the first article of the second chapter in 1874 he wrote: “All members live communally bound only by the ties of brotherly love and simple vows. These hold them so close together that they constitute one heart and one soul.”¹⁹⁶ He later (1877) added a chapter on brotherly charity [*carità fraterna*] in the introduction to the same Constitutions. There he resumed with an edifying intention: “This is the praise given to the early Christians by St Luke, that they so loved one another that it seemed that they had but one heart and soul.”¹⁹⁷

At the end of a retreat for the members of a new expedition of missionaries to South America (also in 1877) Don Bosco encouraged them “to stay together and to do what the Holy Scripture says about the early Christians: *cor unum et anima una*” (one heart and one soul).¹⁹⁸

In one of the reports of the Second General Chapter (1880) it says: “Everyone should be convinced that matters in the school and house are going smoothly and well when all are working as members of the Congregation having one single heart and one single soul.” To foster this in practical terms, at the Chapter Don Bosco recommended the conferences

¹⁹⁶OE XXVII [55]. Compare with the introduction of the edition *Constituties van de Sociëteit van de H. Franciscus van Sales*, 1938, p. 67.

¹⁹⁷OE XXIX [232]. *Constitutions...*, p. 236, cf. also p. 228.

¹⁹⁸MB XIII, p. 304; EMB XIII, p. 227. According to information of Fr Lemoyne Don Bosco must have quoted the words of the Acts much earlier. Cf. MB XIV, p. 845; omitted in EMB XIV.

which, according to the First General Chapter, should be held every fortnight. “These are”, he said, “like a second connecting line for his confreres and rector to be one single body and one single soul.”¹⁹⁹

Don Bosco also confirmed this valuable and typical accent in the continuation of the *Memorie dell’Oratorio*: “... All Salesians living in the same house must be one in heart and one soul with their rector.”²⁰⁰

All the above references concern the unity of heart and soul among the straight followers and co-workers. Don Bosco was also thinking of the unity of heart and soul between the educators and the boys and between the boys and the teachers, assistants and superiors. It can be read in his *Memoirs*. For the celebration of his dear teacher Banaudi, he wrote: “Both teacher and pupils were of one spirit [*un cuor solo*, one single heart].”²⁰¹ It was his ideal too. He presented it as an example in that autobiographical and also moralizing writing.

It is harder to find out whether he also drew the boys’ attention as frequently to the ideal image of the early Christians. It is certain he referred to it in a letter of 1861: “May God help us to be one heart and one soul.”²⁰² It is equally certain he incited everyone, evidently including the boys, to serve the Lord with love and cheerfulness. “The Lord desires that what we do for Him is to be done gladly. This is how we shall all form but one heart with which to love the Lord.”²⁰³ If this was meant as a reference to the Christians’ situation in *The Acts*, it could only be efficient when he confronted the boys with it more often and more explicitly.

Whichever way it may have been, the idea was included in the letter to the boys. There it was stated that this affective unity and consequently the spontaneous and confidential mutual affection could only get a new chance in life if one “broke down this barrier of mistrust” and restored “the cordial confidence” in the relationships. These quotes all go back to manuscript A. This phrasing reminds one of the impressions that Valfrè and Don Bosco had while watching the recreation time in the first scene. This impression was laid down in the letter to the youngsters using the phrase “the greatest cordiality” and in the united version it read as “the greatest cordiality and confidence.” [6] At this point of the

¹⁹⁹ASC 046: FdB 1.858 C 6 and 8-9. *Verbale del 2° Capitolo Generale del 1880, quaderno Barberis I*, 75 and 78. Cf. page numbering ROCHOWIAK, J., *Il Capitolo generale 2° della società salesiana (1880)*, Benediktbeuern, 1994. Ibid., pp. 113, 114-115. The first hyphen consisted of the monthly “rendiconto” to him.

²⁰⁰BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 428-429. *Constitutions...*, p. 268. Cf. MB VI, p.; EMB VI, p.215. It is uncertain, however, when Don Bosco said this, though G.B. Lemoyne inserted it in volume VI volume of the *Biographical Memoirs*.

²⁰¹BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell’Oratorio...*, pp. 71-72; *Memoirs...*, p. 61.

²⁰²E (m), vol. primo, p. 453. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, p. 28.

²⁰³MB XII, p. 610; EMB XII, pp. 454-455. He also requested this unity of the Salesians and the boys for a special intention of prayer in 1874 (E (m), vol. quarto, p. 255 and MB X, p. 1107; EMB X, p. 353 and p. 497/footnote 6). He dared summon even quite unknown listeners to act in the spirit of the first Christians. On April 14 1876 he delivered an address to the members of the academic circle of Arcadia. He subtly and daringly incited: “Let us form one heart and one soul following the example of the first Christians in order to dispel the serious dangers that surround us.” (MB XII, p. 641; Not translated in EMB XII). On the circumstances. Cf. MB XII, pp. 159-160; 171-173; EMB XII, 126-127; 133-134.

letter to the Salesians Lemoyne has now copied the connection between both qualities into “the cordial confidence” from the original suggestions.

- *Restoration of “the cordial confidence” by the boys’ obedience [18]*

The preceding thoughts could have concluded the insertion, but the editor is further led by the notes in *A* and their incorporation into the letter to the boys. It includes the connection by using the word “*quindi*” [“thus/consequently” or “then”] between the preceding part and the instruction which concerned only the boys. To “break down the fatal barrier” and restore “the open-hearted confidence”, the pupils had to allow being led [again] by “obedience”. He put into prominence only one of the two aforementioned elements [the boys “loved them and gave them prompt obedience”] to regain the “wide-open trust”. He was not thinking of blind obedience or rigid discipline but of the kind of obedience which is present in the mind when trusting a wise loving mother. She knows what is best for her child.

It is a nice image. Yet there is something problematic about its the logical coherence. Can only the boys’ obedience make open-hearted trust replace distrust? Is obedience not rather the consequence of the fatherly, brotherly and friendly love of the educators conquering the boys’ hearts? Had the correct sequence not been justly rendered before by “the boys loved them”, in first position, and “obeyed promptly”, afterwards? And why did the boys love them? They loved them because the educators were interested in them and dealt with them in a sympathizing way.

The mother and child image certainly conforms to Don Bosco’s data in manuscript *A*, but there the image is preceded by a space. It was inserted between the preceding “wide-open trust” and the wish “obedience may guide the pupil”.²⁰⁴ Lemoyne continues smoothly with the text that was already available. This connection in the content somehow fits in with the letter to the boys because it is really the boys’ move in the context. Moreover the cautiously expressed instruction to obey may function as a preparation for the list of things to do which follows immediately in the letter to the boys. [26-27] This breakthrough and decisive function of the boys’ obedience does not fit very well or not at all in the letter to the confreres.

The complete text was copied almost literally from the original data. These suggestions began by stating: “But there is a considerable difference between the former and the present-day boys.” [Manuscript *A*, 9] In the first place the letter to the boys and the above-mentioned insertion mainly discussed the features of the former boys. They were the better ones anyway. Lemoyne idealized them even more by writing in the letter to the boys: “All hearts were open” instead of “their hearts” from *A*. Further he wrote without making any distinction: “the boys loved them and obeyed.” Love and obedience had been present from the start. The *A* manuscript concluded the metaphor on obedience by “etc. etc.”

²⁰⁴Cf. here BRAIDO, P., *La lettera...*, p. 33/17. In an 1883 edition for girls Don Bosco reminded us of St Augustine calling obedience the “mother and guardian of all virtues”. (OE XXXIII ([90])). That image may have had some impact here. Cf. BIESMANS, R., *1876-1884 Doelstellingen...*, pp. 172-173.

That open ending (etc. etc.) allowed the author to try to give further explanation. He did so pretty correctly in the letter to the boys: “Then the peace and the joy of former days will prevail in the Oratory.” Both elements do not strike the right note in the explanation for the Salesians. They seem to appear out of the blue. Though being “full of cheerfulness” in the first scene with Valfrè and Don Bosco was a sign of the positive atmosphere in the playground and the Oratory, cheerfulness did not seem the decisive factor in Valfrè’s conclusion. [6] Moreover, peace was not mentioned at all as a characterization of “the old days”, the ideal past. This element is discussed only much later, in the second part of the combined manuscript. It was raised in connection with the practice of sacramental confession as an explanation in the letter to the boys.

The inserted part suited the train of thought in the letter to the boys but was completely out of place in the letter to the educators. On the contrary, it is an obstacle to the logical continuation of the train of thought supposing such a continuation was still necessary after Buzzetti’s closing sentence before the insertion.

3.4.5 In continuation of the line of thought going on before the insertion, the aspect of “familiarity”, a second keyword, is worked out [18]

Before the insertion the optimistic conclusion went as follows: “In this way their work [their efforts] will be made easier [will be lighter to bear].” Did that not include everything or at least the most important task of the Salesians “to inspire the boys again”, “to bring these youngsters to life again”? Had the author thought, however, that the Socratic exchange could not be stopped because there was much more to be clarified, he would have had to have Don Bosco ask another question as he still had not fully understood Buzzetti’s directives. So far Lemoyne had been asking a question in both versions (*B* and *C*) leading to a normal or possible continuation of the conversation. In *B* it ran as follows: “Which then is the smaller one [the less important one]?” This is really a very natural question following Buzzetti’s statement, which proved not to be very clear opposing the least and the most important items. In *C* it went thus: “What am I to recommend to my Salesians?” [18] This is less self-evident after the counsel he had received in *C*, but somewhat acceptable because it was all about the Salesians and continues to be so. The question was very much in line too with the confidential conversation alternating the pronouns “you” and “I”. Moreover, the question need not really be surprising because asking for more information was not uncommon in his dream accounts, in which Don Bosco used the dialogue as a predominant style.²⁰⁵

The switches between *B* and *C* did not satisfy Lemoyne apparently when looking for an appropriate connection between the inserted text on the boys’ guilt and their part in the restoration and the thoughts which would follow. He found them in the letter to the boys: “How then are we to go about breaking down this barrier?” [18] or in the passive voice: “What has to be done to break down that barrier?” Contrary to the beginning

²⁰⁵So in MB XVI, p. 16; MBN XVI, p. 4. It is about a dream from mid August 1883 asking the question: “But what am I to tell our confreres? ... What recommendation do you give me concerning our boys?” And “What else?”

of the insertion passage he manages to squeeze in a literary technical link between the insertion and his following reflections taking up once again the wording “to break down that fatal barrier” but expressed as “to break down that barrier”. Yet something is wrong with the wording of the question. It is phrased in too general a way no matter whether the Italian is translated by the active “we” or the passive “to be done”. In the letter to the boys it could be formulated in a general way because the continuation contained both a shorter part for the adults and another longer part addressed to the boys. The “we” in the translation was fully justified there. The editor had both groups, adults and youngsters, in mind there, rightly or wrongly. [18, 26-27 ff.] The reply contained some elements for both, but was understandably more elaborated for the youngsters, who disappear from sight again in the letter to the Salesians. Lemoyne uses “we” in the continuation, meaning solely the Salesians, assistants, teachers and superiors.

Buzzetti resumes the concept of “familiarity”, a key word in Valfrè’s comment [6], to give a reply to Don Bosco’s newly constructed question about the options to break down the barrier. That is why it seems to me it would have contributed to a better build-up if the author had given the response he gave to Valfrè again. The past pupil could then have expanded on his earlier introduction of the concept of familiarity and his first comment. The addition “especially in recreation” in Buzzetti’s reply clearly explicates the connection with that part of the writing. It is as though he wishes to recall the description of the “heavenly” atmosphere of the first playground scene and make it visible and tangible again. On the other hand he suggests there is a broader implementation possible by using the word “especially”. It will prove more than a mere suggestion.

- *Meaning of the term familiarity [18-20]*

Like Valfrè Buzzetti does not define the term “*famigliarità*”, at least not straightforwardly. Like Valfrè he first connects it with the two important concepts of “love (affection) and “trust” and consequently also with the (first) key fragment. However, he does so in his own way: “Without familiarity one does not show one’s love and if one does not make it visible (evident), there can be no confidence.” [18, re-translated] In this way he introduces something new at the same time.

According to Valfrè “closeness [familiarity] leads to affection” in the words of the translation. That is how Valfrè distinguished between familiarity and love. He did not go any further. Now Buzzetti states that familiarity is the outward appearance of affective love and is the means to “show” such love. Not this love in itself “brings confidence”. Only the kind of affection which is made visible by familiarity does so. It reads like a working out of Valfrè’s aphorism. It is also an addition and clarification accompanying Buzzetti’s own comment, for he impressed it on Don Bosco that “the boys not only need being loved, but that they themselves should know (realise, see and feel) they are being loved.” [13] “Being part of their youthful interests” [13] and also by “always staying among the boys, especially during recreation” [15 and 18] and by “liking what pleases the youngsters.”

[17] Now he adds that the way they participate, are present and love the boys is still more important. It comes before affection. In order to characterise that way and style of dealing with people, Buzzetti takes up the term 'familiarity' which was already used in Valfrè's comment as we indicated before

Discussing the word 'familiarity' in Valfrè's considerations I have written that the use of this term was surprising because up to 1884 it had not occurred very often in the writings of Don Bosco. And when the word was used, it had a rather less favourable or even pejorative meaning.

Excursus on Don Bosco's use and the meaning of the word 'familiarity'

Such rather pejorative use can be found in the *Confidential Reminders* to Fr Rua in 1863. Rua had to see to it that the service personnel did not deal with the boys in too familiar a way. It is meant literally: "They are not to deal familiarly with the pupils." Considering the nature and tasks of this personnel this was not about an illegitimate pastoral and pedagogical relationship. He chose another expression for that. In the same recommendations we read indeed: "Let them [the teachers] avoid particular friendships and partiality."²⁰⁶

This directive is probably inspired by widespread morals of that time. It seems a variant of the warnings of the pedagogical writers, contemporaries of Don Bosco. I have already cited Aporti's reservation with respect to that principle.²⁰⁷ Agathon, a Brother of the Christian Schools, was quite categorical in the 1835 translation of his writing: "He [the teacher] scrupulously shuns friendship, dangerous familiarity [*famigliarità*] with them." This meant practically: "That directive forbids furthermore: touching their face, caressing them, laughing with them, and receiving a hug from them."²⁰⁸ It remains an open question whether the expression "dangerous familiarity" allows us to suppose there were also kinds of familiarity which are not dangerous.

One of the seven secrets Don Bosco listed in June 1875, according to Ceria, becomes quite understandable in this sort of atmosphere. The fifth secret ran as follows: "The Superiors gave much trust and liked being in the midst of the boys, but always in such a way as to discourage excessive familiarity."²⁰⁹ It says here too "excessive familiarity", which may lead us to suppose that a normal and positive familiarity was possible in

²⁰⁶Both quotations from E (m), vol. primo, pp. 614-615. MOTTO, Fr., I "*Ricordi confidenziali...*", p. 148/65 and 147/41-42. EMB X, p. 449/1 and p. 448/3.

²⁰⁷Cf. footnote 83 in this chapter.

²⁰⁸BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, p. 117/1. BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza...*, p.197. I think I may understand "*Il ridere con essi*" as a refuse of "jesting" (*ischerzare*) as with F. Aporti. It would come down to a condemnation of "jesting together with the boys." It probably meant telling ambiguous jokes or allowing these jokes with double meaning to be told. Cf. Don Bosco's advice to Vacchina through footnote 170 in this chapter. Also P. De Damas pointed out the danger of familiarity or familiar dealing with the boys. He wrote: "During recreation time they mix with the boys who do not play...) They take it in turns to become kids with the kids without losing the dignity which creates respect or without stepping down to such a kind of familiarity which entails contempt." In : DE DAMAS, P., *Le surveillant...*, p. 288.

²⁰⁹MB XI, p. 222; EMB XI, p. 203 (re-translated). Cf. also footnote 140 in this chapter.

agreement with both Don Bosco's and Brother Agathon's conviction. This conviction becomes candidly prominent in his *Memoirs of the Oratory* [*Memorie dell' Oratorio*], which he was writing during the years 1873-1875. Looking back on the time of his youth and education, he wrote frankly there that he "could not strike up a close relationship". So, he could not deal with some parish priests in a natural and confidential way. To express his wish he used the phrase "*contrarre familiarità*." The reflection vis-à-vis those priests means it was not possible for him because they were not willing to deal with him in a friendly, jovial and natural, i.e. familiar way in the good sense of the word.

As far as dealing with his peers is concerned, experience taught him he needed to distinguish. He faced three groups of fellow pupils: "the good, the indifferent and the bad." "The bad ones I avoided them absolutely and always. The indifferent I associated with only when necessary, but I was always courteous with them. I made friends with the good one, and then only when I was sure of them." Here too he used the phrase "*contrarre familiarità*." Luigi Comollo was a really good friend. Don Bosco had genuinely jovial and confidential conversations with him [*famigliari discorsi*] and he dealt familiarly with him" [*trattava familiarmente*].²¹⁰

For these last two memories Don Bosco could call on reflections he had written in 1844 in his Life of Luigi Comollo. He had divided his fellow students of the seminary into three groups: "A few of them are bad, others are not bad, but not particularly good either, still others are really good. You should absolutely avoid the first group; you should make contact with the second group when necessary, but not in a familiar way [*con familiarità*]; you should often meet the third group... It is true that the comrades of the third group are not numerous... If you have found them, deal with them and allow the contact to take the form of spiritual familiarity [*spirituale familiarità*] for your own benefit."²¹¹

It is easy to show Don Bosco has moved that fragment nearer to his secondary school days in his later *Memoirs*. That is not really of any particular significance here.²¹² It is important though to notice he knew and used the concept "*familiarità*" in a positive meaning at the time.

Notwithstanding his industrious writing and his particular usage in the *Memoirs*, during the period 1873-1875 Don Bosco called for caution when he listed the seven secrets in June 1875. In November of the same year he again called for prudence though it was in a different context. After his speech in the basilica of Mary Help of Christians he wrote down a few pieces of advice for the first missionaries leaving for Argentina. In the second recommendation he encouraged them: "Be charitable and most courteous towards all, but avoid conversations and familiarity with persons of the opposite sex or with persons whose conduct is open to suspicion."²¹³

²¹⁰For both paragraphs: BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell'Oratorio...*, pp. 53/527-536; 59/663-664; 92/149-152; 95/201; 95/212; *Memoirs...*, pp. 48; 53; 82-83. Also BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza...*, pp. 190-192.

²¹¹BOSCO, G., *Cenni storici della vita del chierico Luigi Comollo*, Turin, 1844. OE I, [63-64].

²¹²In a certain sense it is the herald of the pedagogical distinction in the *Articoli Generali* (1877). BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 288/9-10; 290/1516.

²¹³In Italian "*fuggite la familiarità*." Cf. *Constitutions...*, p. 265/point 2. It is a repetition of a concern he had expressed before during the retreat in September (?)1875 in Lanzo. There he insisted on

His recommendation to deal with youngsters sounded quite different, particularly with boys who showed signs of spiritual vocation. Concerning them he asked the missionaries “to show their Christian love [*carità*], affability or amiability [*amorevolezza*] and especial kindness [*benevolenza*].” This is a translation following the text of the eighteenth stimulus in the *Memorie biografiche* corresponding with the version of Fr Chiala in his book “*Da Torino alla Repubblica Argentina*.”²¹⁴ There are obviously important points which differ from the writing of 1884 to the adults in Valdocco (column C). The content of the recommendation in 1875 concerns the dealing with a limited group of youngsters. Not “*amore*”, but the concept of “*caritas*” is used. Moreover “*caritas*” on the one hand and “*amorevolezza*” and “particular benevolence” on the other hand are juxtaposed. There is no talk of a relationship between Christian love [*carità*] on the one hand and affectionate behaviour and also kindness on the other hand. Nevertheless the ways of dealing which win the hearts of people are explicitly mentioned. This in itself is very important.

The relationship between *caritas* and typical ways of behaviour are accurately pointed out in the version of the recommendations which P. Braido has published. Indeed, one may have this impression at first sight. The fifth point of the eighteenth recommendation literally runs as follows: “charity [*carità*] with help of signs of ‘*amorevolezza*’ and particular benevolence.”²¹⁵ The stimulus is in fact only really meaningful if you interpret it as addressed to the Salesians. They have to practise charity or Christian love. Yet it needs to be love which makes itself visible, tangible and noticeable by the signs of kindness and benevolence. This first and normal interpretation however clashes with the formulation of the eighteenth recommendation, which indeed does contain a series of five attitudes. Following the construction of the complete sentence, the missionaries should promote all five of them including charity [*caritas*] or impress them on a special group of youngsters. However, that does not seem evident through the combination of “*carità*” and “signs of affability, amiability and willingness”.²¹⁶ It is more meaningful if that fifth special task is reserved for the missionaries. They themselves have to be gentle and express that love by dealing with the boys in an affable, kind and willing way.

That must have been the train of thought of Don Bosco’s secretary, G. Berto, too. The hand-written copy of the text of November (?) 1875 corresponds with Chiala’s one: “Show Christian love [Charity], affability...” Berto too, using the separate imperative, reserves this part of the recommendation for the Salesians. However, he has replaced “*amorevolezza*” by a synonym “*amabilità*” for a reason we are not able to explain.²¹⁷

avoiding (flying) relationship (*la familiarità*) with persons of the opposite sex, also familiarity with persons of the same sex. Cf. MB XI, pp. 581 and 583; not translated in EMB and BIESMANS, R., *1866-1876 don Bosco betrouwbare wegwijzer...*, p. 44-45/footnote 2.

²¹⁴MB XI, p. 390; EMB XI, p. 365. CHIALA, C., *Da Torino alla Repubblica Argentina*, Letture Cattoliche, 286-7, 1876, pp. 58-60. Don Chiala had been entrusted the correspondence with the missionaries for a certain time. Cf. *Constitutions...*, p.266/18.

²¹⁵BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 207/46. *Constitutions...*, p. 266.

²¹⁶Translators do not have an easy task. This is clear from the French and German texts. In French: “de la charité, des marques d’affection et de bienveillance particulière (*Constitutions et Règlements*, p. 254). In German: “Liebe geprägt von Liebenswürdigkeit und besonderem Wohlwollen” (*Konstitutionen und Satzungen*, p. 226). Cf. also the adequate translation in MBN XI, p. 301.

²¹⁷In Italian: “*Abbiate carità, amabilità...*” Cf. BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 194-195. See

The wording of the instruction for the missionaries regarding these youngsters is almost identical to a piece of advice of Teppa's in *Avvertimenti per gli educatori ecclesiastici*. In a chapter with directives on punishing, he described one of the best possibilities for a teacher to show his discontent to a boy who had failed. It went as follows: "[You need to] adopt a more serious and reserved attitude towards him. Leave these signs (expressions, utterances) of kindness and familiarity, which you used to pay as a tribute to him." His hints may seem rather vague. They become more concrete in the total picture of his work. You can see them in the perspective of a directive in the chapter on how to exercise authority. There we read: "One will be able to deal with another [pupil] in a kinder, more affable, and more jovial way [*usar modi più amorevoli e famigliari*]." ²¹⁸ It is obvious that the context of both pieces of advice [Don Bosco and Teppa] is quite different. Of course, Teppa juxtaposed "*benevolenza*" and "*famigliarità*" and Don Bosco did the same with "*benevolenza*" and "*amorevolezza*". Yet, both use the same words and mention "signs, expressions" of kindness. Moreover, Don Bosco's "*amorevolezza*" is a synonym of Teppa's "*famigliarità*".

This last interpretation becomes more powerful when we listen to Don Bosco's presentation for a rectors' meeting on February 4 1876. His topic is again about "hints which may greatly help to foster vocations. His second item was: "Do show a lot of loving kindness [*grande amorevolezza*] to our boys: treat them really well. Let this good treatment and kindness [affability, amiability] be a trait of all superiors without exception. All of them together can hardly attract one youngster, but a single one of you can turn them all away. God knows how important it is for a boy to feel himself treated well! He entrusts his very heart to his superiors." The third point: "As regards older boys, especially those who seem inclined to the priesthood, the superior – besides dealing kindly with them – should also show them great trust." The sixth item links up with it: "It will also be very helpful to treat a boy familiarly [*dare famigliarità*]" by taking a walk with him, conversing, laughing, listening to what he has to say, and encouraging him to tell us about his home life, his parents' farm, vineyards, the cheese room and so on. If, as a result of these friendly contacts, they ask about their vocation, advise them to mention it in confession." ²¹⁹

In this conference Don Bosco used the terms "*amorevolezza*" and "*famigliarità*" as equiv-

also E (m), vol. quarto, p. 548 and especially E II, p. 517 and CERIA, E., *Annali... (1841-1888)*, p. 255. In both last texts the fifth item is clearly distinguished from the other four [*usate con loro...*] and is meant for the personal behaviour of the Salesians. Cf. BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza...*, pp. 222-236 on the convertibility of certain terms.

²¹⁸TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, pp. 44 and 25. Cf. there also page 40.

²¹⁹BRAIDO, P., *I molti volti dell'amorevolezza*, *Revista di Scienze dell'Educazione*, (37), 1999, p. 28. BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza...*, p. 34. Cf. MB XII, pp. 88-90; EMB XII, pp.68-71.

In a sort of manual M. Rua wrote down a number of items he wanted to pay attention to during his official visits to the houses around 1874-1875. Under the feature "Youngsters" he mentioned the keywords: "Study, zeal and 'familiarity' with teachers, assistants and superiors" (BRAIDO, P., *Don Michele Rua primo autodidatta "Visitatore"...*, p. 139). Whether Fr Rua meant this "familiarity" in a positive or negative way is difficult to figure out. There is no trace of this in the reports which he drew up in the 1874-1876 period. In any case it is about the attitude of the youngsters themselves. Cf. also BIESMANS, R., *1866-1876 don Bosco betrouwbare wegwijzer...*, pp. 44-45.

alents and even one for the other. They clearly are synonyms, interchangeable concepts and terms.

The relation of several quotes with Buzzetti's thesis is evident. Just like the concept "*famigliarità*" in his comment, certain statements in the *Memoirs* and both the recommendation to the missionaries and the advice for the rectors boil down to the following: Youngsters cannot experience the educator's love nor can they give him trust without receiving his signs of familiarity or of the jovial, confidential, affable, kind and spontaneous way of dealing with them.

At any rate the term "*famigliarità*" is present in his principled writing, *Little Treatise on the Preventive System* (1877). It is found already in the introduction where he describes the disposition and attitude of the rector who stood for the repressive system. "The words and looks" of such a superior "must always be severe and even threatening and he must avoid all familiarity with his dependants." Don Bosco implicitly suggests and even stresses in his own typical way how the words and the appearance of a superior – the preventive one – should be: gentle, kind, amiable and inviting contact, spontaneous, jovial and confidential. The text itself shows the following wording: "The Rector and the assistants who like loving fathers converse with them, are a guide for every problem and in a kindly way [*amorevolmente*] give advice and corrections."²²⁰ Once more we notice how "*famigliarità*" and "*amorevolmente*" are used one for the other with similar meaning.

About that time G. Vespignani, a newly ordained diocesan priest, went to make the acquaintance of Don Bosco. He was to be a trainee for a year in order to get to know the spirit and the work of Don Bosco more closely. That was in the period of 1876-1877. The pedagogical aspect must not have pleased him completely if we are to judge from a question he once asked Don Bosco: "And how do I have to find ways to get to know them [the boys] and in turn to let them know me better?" Don Bosco replied: "Good question! By mingling with them in a familiar way [*famigliarmente*] and by behaving like one of them." Vespignani had little faith in it. He objected: "But where and when can I join them? I am not made for joining them in games, running and laughing with them. My physical complaints and my weak heart prevent this." Don Bosco again: "Why, walk to the pump. Around breakfast time you will meet a lot of boys there. They come to the pump to drink. They talk about study, class, games, everything. Join them, become the friend of all of them. Then start the reconquest and you will succeed."²²¹ This advice sounds like a prologue to the writing to the Salesians in 1884.

As I have demonstrated, "presence among the boys" together with spontaneous, jovial and confidential behaviour constitutes two important elements of the advice. The addition "behave like one of them" could mean taking part in the boys' activities and more

²²⁰BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, p. 83/381-383; 391-393. *Constitutions...*, pp. 246-247. On the use and consequently the possible influence of Don Bosco's little treatise, see the first chapter footnotes 26 through 66. Also PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, p. 258/708.

²²¹VESPIGNANI, G., *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco (1876-1877)*, Turin, SEI, 1932, pp. 67-68. The sandwiches were eaten with a couple of swigs at the pump in the morning. Using the word "re-conquest" Don Bosco probably meant a sort of "second match", a "revenge match" after he had lost the first apparently. During the trainee year Don Bosco used the polite form of "you". Cf. footnote 98 in this chapter.

generally taking an interest in all the things they like. Some caution should be observed with respect to that statement. In 1932 the reporter [Fr Vespignani] – in order to reflect his trainee experience - may have made use of insights and phrasing which he acquired only later. The question he asked Don Bosco is very similar indeed with an instruction to every rector in the *Confidential Reminders*, according to an 1876 version. There we read: “Strive to make yourself known to the pupils and to know them.”²²²

According to the available documents Don Bosco seems to have ceased using the term familiarity in its positive sense for years. When he discussed the ways of dealing with the youngsters, he preferred “*amorevolezza*” or “*dolcezza*” [gentleness, affability, kindness] and “*usare belle maniere*” [charming, good manners, agreeable] in dealing with people. We can find it in an address to past pupils who had come to Valdocco to celebrate his name day. “In order to succeed with youngsters [in parishes],” he pointed out the necessity to “take great pains to be kind to them [*usare con essi belle maniere*]; win their love, not their fear.” He expressed the conviction that “the signs of affectionate kindness [*i tratti di amorevolezza*] will leave an impression on their hearts and minds.” They would not only stay in their happy mental memories, but also in their hearts, the symbolical residence of lasting affection. At the end of this address he emphasized: “I stress again, never forget loving kindness [*dolcezza dei modi*] in your way of dealing with the youngsters. Win over the boys’ hearts through love [*amore*].”²²³

The gentle, affable and kind ways of dealing with people show and prove the affective love, which is their source. The ways of dealing are the vehicle of love, one could say. The keyword familiarity is missing, but the content is there. Undeniably.

At this point I should like to indicate that Don Bosco made it clear he was aware of

²²²MOTTO, Fr., *I Ricordi confidenziali* . . . , p. 155/variants in the lines 90-91 and pp. 140-141; FdB 1.363 A5. Cf. also chapter 8 in the second volume footnote 122. EMB X, p. 449/footnote 8.

A similar reservation has probably to be made about an anecdote in the fifth volume of *Memorie biografiche* (MB V, pp. 917-918; EMB V, pp. 600-601). That is where G.B. Lemoyne tells about a meeting between Don Bosco and Cardinal Tosti in 1858. The Cardinal had asked him to speak to the boys of the St Michael’s house in Rome. Afterwards he had a talk with Don Bosco about the most appropriate educational system. Now “Don Bosco was more than ever convinced that the pupils in that hospice were not spontaneous, jovial, confidential towards their superiors [*non avevano familiarità*],” so G.B. Lemoyne wrote. On the contrary “they actually feared them.” That is why he said: “Your Eminence, it is impossible to form boys well if they have no trust in their superiors.” (cf. also footnote 127 in this chapter). To finish the anecdote the story gets told of how Don Bosco tried to get into touch with the boys on the Piazza del Popolo. The incident reminds us of Don Bosco meeting Michele Magone and his comrades at the station of Carmagnola, which Fr Lemoyne had described just before. (MB V, pp. 738-739; EMB V, pp. 487-488). Questions arise here. In the first place there is the question whether a reliable and detailed source of the 1858 talk was available to G.B. Lemoyne. Subsequently one wonders if he did not feed the conversation between the Cardinal and Don Bosco by phrases and expressions from the united version of 1884. The correspondence of thoughts is crystal clear, the wording is literally the same at times.

²²³MB XIV, pp. 513-514; EMB XIV, pp. 403-404. BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza*..., p.99. Cf. footnote 173 in this chapter. It is no wonder a past pupil, G. Ballesio, testified about Don Bosco in a disarming way in 1888. He wrote: “D. Bosco was an example of real Christian amability (*Cristiana amorevolezza*, Christian affability, kindness) to us and he avoided artificial formalism and strictness which creates an abyss between the one who commands and the one who obeys. And our souls opened up to him with a profound, happy and total devotion. All of us wanted to go and confess to him.” (BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore*..., p. 277/comment.) Cf. footnote 91 in this chapter..

the difference in meaning between “*carità*” and “*amore*” in the address to the priests, past pupils]. One will notice this even better if one knows that the use of “*amore*” in the quote’s last sentence fully corresponds with the use on June 29 1877. There too he used it in an emotional thank-you on the occasion of his name day celebration. A lot of people from outside the Oratory, his co-workers and youngsters were present. He addressed the boys directly though: “My heart has been truly touched to see so many boys around me, so joyously expressing love [*amore*] and gratitude. How wonderful affection [love/*amore*] is when it is connected with Christian love [*carità*]! And why are there so many pious people who offer a portion of their livelihood to be used so sacredly for aid to these boys? And why again are there so many who abandon the world, devote themselves to God by the ties of virtue and brotherly love [*amore fraterna*] and dedicate their whole lives to make those tender seedlings grow for heaven? Through charity [*carità*]. Yes, the ties of virtue keep us closely together in the Lord so that we can help each other kindly [*amorevolmente*].”²²⁴ He could hardly describe more clearly the difference between the effective active Christian love or Charity on the one hand and the affective love and typical way of dealing with people on the other hand.

Would it be so astonishing that a thought of St Francis de Sales had been featuring for years as one of the proverbial phrases, which from the first publication of the *Bollettino Salesiano* had been splashed on the front page? It was the following one: “A tender love for one’s fellow-man [*un amore tenero verso al prossimo*] is one of the greatest and most excellent gifts bestowed on people by God’s Grace.”

In September 1880, shortly after the festive meeting of 1880, he delivered a moving address at the Second General Chapter. Up to seven times he stressed the combination “*carità e dolcezza*”. A first time as follows: “A further matter we have to attend to is the spirit of Christian love [*carità*] and gentleness [*dolcezza*: affability, kindness] of St Francis de Sales.” And further: “When we have shown this gentleness to the confreres, it must be beneficial as well for the pupils themselves. They will be struck by it and we will have a considerable impact on their affection and their vocation too.”²²⁵

The content is practically a resumption of the explanation for the rectors in February 1876 when the topic of vocations also inspired him. However, at that moment he preferred “*amorevolezza*” and “*dare familiarità*”. During the Chapter he returned to the use of the familiar “*dolcezza*”. The meaning is manifestly identical. Once more certain concepts of Don Bosco appear to be interchangeable. It seems opportune to me to emphasize now that both fragments have a pastoral nature. Don Bosco’s ways of dealing with people are put forward as equally important, meaningful and efficient for the success of both pastoral and pedagogical activities with youngsters.

It is remarkable that the term “*familiarità*” is used by Francesia in the *The Use of Punishments in Salesian Houses*, which may have been intended as a circular letter in January 1883. In the 3rd paragraph on “*Do not make it appear that you are acting out of anger*” Jesus Christ’s way of dealing with the apostles is presented as a shining

²²⁴ *Bollettino salesiano*, year IV, n° 9, p. 12. Cf. MB XIII, p. 149; EMB XIII, pp. 112-113. Cf. also BIESMANS, R., *De brief aan de jongens...*, p. 47.

²²⁵ FdB 1.857 C 9 and 1.857 C 11. Cf. also footnotes 49, 134, 151 in this chapter. About the convertibility of words and concepts, see STELLA, P., *Don Bosco nella storia... II*, p. 465-466.

example. “He tolerated their ignorance, rudeness and shaky fidelity, reaching out to sinners with such ease [*dimestichezza*] and charming affability and familiarity [*famigliarità*] as to astonish some people, practically to scandalize others, and to kindle in many the blessed hope of receiving divine pardon.” Of course, behind the apostles and sinners we should perceive the youngsters, who fall short and are to be blamed because of their ignorance, lack of manners and little belief. Pastoral and pedagogical preoccupations are most intricately mixed there again.

In the same chapter of the circular Fr Francesia copied an anecdote from hagiographer A.J.M. Hanon’s *The Life of Saint Francis de Sales*, the “dear, meek patron saint” of the Congregation. The quote reports an event in the saint’s life. It so happened that one day Francis was blamed for treating a boy with excessive kindness [*douceur, dolcezza*]. The boy “had had a bad run with his mother.” It says Francis defended himself against the reproach as follows: “This lad was in no condition to benefit by my corrections because the bad attitude of his heart had deprived him of reason and good sense. A sharp reprimand would have done him no good and would have hurt me as badly by making me act like one who drowns attempting to save others.”²²⁶

Also in both quotes “*famigliarità*” and “*dolcezza*” show an intricate connection. It is all about the gentle, affable, spontaneous, confidential and kind dealing of educators and pastorally committed people with youngsters who have been entrusted to their care.

It may be useful to remark in this context that Francesia had borrowed neither of those two fragments from Monfat. There is a certain resemblance though with Teppa, who in certain circumstances advised “denying the boys signs of willingness and familiarity which one used to give them otherwise.”²²⁷ There may be just influence from the word usage and the pedagogical atmosphere with Don Bosco and his co-workers.

During all those years Don Bosco had been familiar with the positive content of the concept of “*famigliarità*”. His writings and explanations do not create the impression he would attribute a key importance to the word itself – and so to its real content – to label a certain component of his pastoral and pedagogical thinking and acting. This is now, however, the case in the writing to the Salesians and in the preparatory texts for it. Emphatically so. In the meantime it must have become clear that next to the context of the 1884 writing also a few earlier texts can really help to disclose meaning and content of the word.

Positive familiarity in itself is not a desirable component in education. It serves the indispensable affection and the equally important and indispensable trust. Using Buzzetti’s words, familiarity is necessary to make affection visible or – and that is a continuation

²²⁶For the two quotes see BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 332/156-160 and 333/186-200. Cf. EMB XVI, p. 371-372. During the last three or four years before his death in 1888 Don Bosco did not write very much anymore. At the beginning of 1884 however he had started to continue his *Memoirs*. There we find a recommendation to the rectors. It must have been written around 1885-1886. “Generally speaking the director of a house should contact his confreres often and with great familiarity.” (BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 428/671-672.) It is not about pastoral-pedagogical relations with youngsters, but it confirms how important this characteristic way of dealing with people was to him.

²²⁷TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, pp.43-44.

of the comment – “to show one’s affection.” [18-19] If one does not show this, one cannot expect to be loved.

Showing one’s love to the children was essential also for F. Aporti in order to make affection tangible. Replying to the question “whom do the children love?” he said: “The ones who welcome them, show that they love them and do well to them and do them good.”²²⁸ We may indicate here that his reply contains both affective and effective love.

To conclude the long discussion on the use of the concept of familiarity by Don Bosco, we may state that he preferred the words “*dolcezza*” and “*amorevolezza*”. At the same time the digression on familiarity has shown the three terms are synonyms with regard to the content. It is impossible though to find out why the different editions of the 1884 exposition preferred the term familiarity and introduced it so prominently.

• *Jesus Christ “our master” of familiarity [“the matter of the friendly approach”] [19]*

As a paramount example of showing willingness and affability [amiable kindness] Aporti immediately presented Jesus Christ: “Jesus Christ is the great example [*esempio*] for all of us.” He illustrated this by the following event from the Gospel: “When his apostles had not yet been enlightened by The Holy Spirit, they wanted to keep the children away from Jesus, but he stopped them. He welcomed the children with benevolent and kind words.”²²⁹

In a similar way Lemoyne tried to ground familiarity and the showing of affection on the foundations of Jesus Christ’s way of acting. He had already done so in the first manuscripts (*B* and *C*) even at two different moments of his texts. The first moment was when he had put forward as a premise that the youngsters must be loved in “the things that please them.” To explain this principle, he too then referred to Jesus: “The Divine Saviour made himself little with the little ones and bore our weaknesses.”²³⁰ [14 and 19] He combined two Gospel texts, Matthew 18, 1-5 and 8, 17, respectively: “Unless you change and become like little children” and “Anyone who welcomes one little child like this in my name, welcomes me” (Mt. 18, 1-5 and the key to F. Aporti). Then he continued: “He bore our sicknesses away and carried our diseases” (Mt. 8, 17 and Jes.

²²⁸BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, p. 108. Cf. also footnote 126 in this chapter where E. CERIA’s paraphrase “to see” is important. Youngsters ought to be able to see, to perceive they are being loved really. It obviously implies that educators “have to show”.

²²⁹Ibid., p. 108.

²³⁰BRAIDO, P., *La lettera...*, p. 35/24-29, and p. 38-39/70-76. The quotation from F. Aporti as stock phrase of the Christian tradition and the biblical references of G.B. Lemoyne as well prevent us from seeing here an allusion on a dream of the very young Giovanni Bosco, the wording of which he elaborated about 1873. There the “nobly-dressed adult” [Jesus] gave the little boy this directive: “Not by blows but by gentleness [*mansuetudine*/meekness] and charity [*carità*] will you have to win over these friends of yours.” (Cf. LENTI, A.J., *Don Bosco History and Spirit 1.*, Rom, LAS, 2007, p. 178.) It is remarkable though that Don Bosco added “*e colla carità*” to the original wording: “not by blows but by gentleness”. (BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell’Oratorio...*, p. 35/134-135 and original wording. Cf. *Memoirs...*, p. 34.) Cf. in the same personal *Memorie dell’Oratorio* Don Bosco used only “*calma e mansuetudine*” and “*straordinaria mansuetudine*.” (Ibid., p. 133/1084-1087. Cf. *Memoirs...*, p. 113.) It appears in Fr Lemoyne’s text that the final version of the dream as it was written down in the *Memorie dell’Oratorio*, was not well-known yet in 1884.

53, 4). Jesus welcomed the children and identified with the little ones. He made himself little, which means he stooped to their level. Thus he showed how much he loved them. In both these manuscripts (*B* and *C*) of Lemoyne it can only mean that he wishes the educators to love the boys and therefore to stoop to the boys' level and to empathize with their desires and activities. In this way they can show their affection, particularly during recreation, but obviously not only then.

This interpretation is confirmed in what immediately follows in both versions. In the manuscript *B* containing the first elaboration we already find the description of Don Bosco's presence amidst the boys particularly during recreation time. It is also present in *C*, the next elaboration. The evocation of Don Bosco's dealing with the boys was expressly preceded there by the sad statement "very few clerics and priests were taking part in the boys' recreation". [14] They did not make themselves little apparently.

It is rather surprising Lemoyne linked a second quote with it there: "and he has borne our weaknesses" (*B* and *C*). It is a quite liberal application of the original Gospel text (Mt. 8, 17) for it is a thought which does not quite fit in with the main idea: mingle with the youngsters, take an interest in what they enjoy and immerse into their world because you love them.

The second time he used the quote from the Bible in manuscript *B*, Lemoyne linked the reference to Jesus directly to familiarity as a means to make love tangible. The words there went as follows: "Familiarity in the way of Jesus Christ." The reference was followed again by an explanation and pointing at the feature of Jesus' conduct: "He became little for the little ones and endured [*sopportò*] our weaknesses." [19] On the spot it read indeed "for the little ones" and no longer "with the little ones" like the first time in *B*. In accordance with familiarity it must mean Jesus stooped to the level of the little ones to be able to deal with them confidentially with the ultimate goal: for their happiness.²³¹ It remains an open question whether "our weaknesses" each time instead of "their weaknesses" was a deliberate choice and at the same time a kind of hint.

Lemoyne also put the link between familiarity and the afore-mentioned quote in *C*, the second elaboration of the text, but he did so referring to Don Bosco's question: "What do I have to recommend to my Salesians?" That was a question which was asked clearly with the intention of inserting directives concerning the behaviour which for Lemoyne was necessary to deal with youngsters in the founder's spirit. Don Bosco was allowed to express the idea with these words: "Jesus Christ became little with the little ones and took our weaknesses upon him. That is the model of familiarity." [18-19, column C]

The link between familiarity and taking weaknesses upon oneself or carrying them is there not clear at all. We have to interpret weaknesses as failures, flaws and shortcomings of the youngsters. It seems a sort of anticipation of what is to follow about weariness, annoyance, ingratitude and similar things. [20]

²³¹The link between familiarity and making oneself little reminds us of the text on *The Use of Punishments* of January 1883. There Jesus was said to "reach out to sinners with such ease and friendliness [*famigliarità*] as to astonish some people, practically to scandalise others." See BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 332/156-160. In the *B* manuscript G.B. Lemoyne used apart from "*portare*" [bear, take upon one] also "*sopportare*" [tolerate]. For the boys it is about "*misericordia*", [misery], moral limitations, flaws] for the Salesians it is about "*infermità*" [weak points].

Buzzetti had put in K the emphasis on the necessity “to break down the fatal barrier of mistrust”. It offered Lemoyne the opportunity to ask another yet evident question in *D*: “How then are we to set about breaking down this barrier?” [18, columns K and D] The personal pronoun “we” [possibly the neutral “one”] may indicate he was in the first place thinking of what Don Bosco and his Salesians had to do.²³² Besides, it appears from the very answer in the letter to the youngsters: “To you and your co-workers [*e ai tuoi*] I say: Jesus Christ became himself little with the little ones and bore our weaknesses [*miserie*].”²³³

It is rather strange to me that this answer and this quotation which were both specifically meant for Don Bosco himself [*a te*] and the adults [*e ai tuoi*], are found in the letter of May 10 to the boys. In the same letter Lemoyne unexpectedly added a new quotation: “He [Jesus] did not crush the bruised reed nor quench the smouldering flax”, and also a moralizing conclusion: “He is your model.” [19, column K] The additional quotation, which had appeared in neither *B* nor *C*, contains words from the book Isaiah (Is. 42, 3) about Yahweh’s servant. In his Gospel (Mt. 12, 20) Matthew applied the words to Jesus in order to characterize Jesus’ patience, power of endurance (resilience) and probably also his clemency. With this quotation Lemoyne seems to strengthen the idea of “he bore our weaknesses” or “he endured our weaknesses”. It also contained no doubt the hint that teachers and assistants have to learn from Jesus to tolerate in turn the flaws, failures and shortcomings of unpredictable youngsters. The adults have to be willing to dilute the wine. They will normally have understood this better than the boys during Fr Rua’s reading of the letter to the youngsters before Don Bosco’s return in Valdocco.

It is quite remarkable that Lemoyne inserted this instruction for teachers, assistants and superiors into a letter to the boys in such a way. The quotations appear indeed quite isolated there. As pointed out already they miss in this letter the link with the important idea of familiarity, which indeed does not turn up at all in the letter to the youngsters. Moreover, a context that could clarify the meaning for the boys is lacking. In other words, motivation for including the quotes is missing. Of course, one may suppose that in the letter which was actually dispatched, Lemoyne, maybe together with Don Bosco, wanted to give the Salesians a tip which only the adults could understand. One could further wonder whether both of them wanted to avoid the impression of blaming only the boys as if their “misbehaviour” caused the malaise in Valdocco and as if change of attitude were only to be expected from them. It is possible. But then again we would have to suppose that the boys could sense the range of the quotations. Moreover we have to take into account that as far as the reading of the letter goes, this fragment was not even read out by Fr Rua.²³⁴

After the digression which I have explained, the editor did not have any better switch-over but the question of version *K*. He could replace the questions of manuscripts *B*

²³²Fr Rua thought it useful to introduce the pronoun “io” (I). BRAIDO, P., *La lettera...*, p. 43/variant on line 75.

²³³Buzzetti did use indeed the confidential form of “you”.

²³⁴BRAIDO, P.- ARENAL LLATA Rogélio, *Don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne...*, p. 157/5-9. Cf. also BIESMANS, R., *De brief aan de jongens...*, p. 26.

and *C* by the one from the letter to the boys. The subsequent explanation is again an almost literal copy of manuscript *C*, even the phrase “with the little ones”. The editor now indeed simply copies the *C* elaboration save one important variant.

For example he substitutes the word “model” or ideal image (in *C* and *K*) by “master”. Perhaps he did so in order to be in concordance with Jesus’ statement in the Gospel according to St John: “You call me Master and Lord” (St. John, 13, 13) or still more so with the lesson in St. Matthew: “Since you have only one Master. . .) You have only one Teacher, the Christ” (St. Matthew 23, 8 and 10). It is possible though he simply meant: the truly good teacher is the one who does not solely teach from his lecturer’s desk, but seeks contact and tries to meet his audience and the people who listen to him, and converses with them. Consequently, he will illustrate that immediately by the teacher’s conduct as Don Bosco’s heart desired it. By following the *C* text so closely in the meantime, the second Isaiah quotation on the bruised reed and the smouldering flax is not mentioned. However, he does mention Isaiah’s utterance on Yahweh’s servant in his text for the Salesians later. Rightly so as will become clear below.

- *Examples showing practically what familiarity and making oneself little with the little ones consist of [19-20]*

Also afterwards he preserves the further considerations from the *C* edition which Buzzetti is allowed to put forward in his comment now. They are examples showing practically what familiarity and consequently becoming oneself little with the little ones may consist of.

° *The teacher and the preacher who act in Don Bosco’s spirit [19]*

The first two illustrations touch closely on the familiarity theme. They already turned up in the first manuscript (*B*). The first example concerns the basic pedagogical activities and the second one the immediate pastoral activities of the Salesians.

A first contrast evokes the image of a teacher who really works and lives as a teacher in Don Bosco’s spirit as opposed to one who does not. The first one looks after his teaching but does not care about his pupils outside the classroom. He does not share their lives or their choice of pastimes. The second one has got an eye, an ear and a heart for his boys in the playground too. He takes the initiative to go to the pupils and to meet them; he talks spontaneously and jovially with them and takes part in their recreation.

In the biographies of his boys and in his personal *Memoirs of the Oratory* he purposely paid great attention to the elaboration of meetings and dialogues with youngsters. A teacher, an assistant, a superior following Don Bosco’s heart should mix and move with them on their level and behave “like an elder brother.” He may be considered or experienced “as a brother” by his boys. Manuscripts *B* and *C* render Don Bosco’s desires even more exact. By his conduct the teacher “becomes a brother” (*B*), even a “respected brother” (*C*). Both elements, nearness and a certain distance, authority and affection are present together. After reading the insertion it is not clear at all why G.B. Lemoyne has weakened or changed in *D* the original versions of *B* and *C*.

A second contrast compares the priest-educator strictly in his function as a proclaimer of faith on the one hand and the preacher or catechist on the other, who has contact

with youngsters also outside the church, particularly during their leisure time. The latter considers the recreation and playground an essential time and place of contact, jovial interaction and showing interest in what captures the youngsters' interest. He joins in with the boys. He talks with them. He sometimes gives a personal encouraging or correcting word. Thus "he gives a sign" (*B*), i.e. that he likes being with them. He shows he loves them by taking part in an interested way. He is the one who shows their games and so they themselves are worth while to him.

In this way Don Bosco's statement at the end of the November 1882 meeting is confirmed in the conduct of the two models. That is, when he said what has been quoted in the first chapter, and also before: "When a teacher is an assistant in function, he is a superior for the boys. When he is not in function anymore, he has to be a friend and father for the boys." [see chapter 1]

- *The characteristic "word in the ear" of Don Bosco [19-20]*

When Buzzetti says "a few words whispered unexpectedly in the ear", he obviously alludes to Don Bosco's so dear and typical "word in the ear". This allusion is an opportunity for a new reference to Don Bosco's model conduct.

Buzzetti starts by evoking memories of the impact of the word in the ear. The personal contact and little word by Don Bosco during recreation have more than once been the starting point of an important turnaround and conversion in a boy's life. Magone's and Besucco's biographies testify to it. In 1880 Don Bosco told past pupils who had become diocesan priests in a touching way about a meeting he'd had a few weeks before. A past pupil, a captain in the army, had come to see him. In the course of the conversation he said: "Seeing you [Don Bosco] reminded me of all the tricks you used to keep me on the right path: the words you used to whisper in my ear, and your exhortations to go to confession. These memories have kindled the desire in my heart and prompted me to do it now." Concluding, Don Bosco told the priests: "I stress again, never forget loving kindness: win over the boys' hearts through love [*amore*]. Always bear in mind the maxim of St. Francis de Sales, "More flies are caught with a cup of honey than with a barrel of vinegar."²³⁵ They too should not think their mission was accomplished by teaching catechism and preaching. They too needed to comprehend that personal contact and talks were invaluable. G. Buzzetti himself was very likely to cherish such very dear memories.

Another element of reference can be linked to the experience of contact and word as an expression of affection and consequently as arousing reciprocal affection. In manuscript *C* this reciprocal confidential affection is noticeable in the use of the personal pronoun '*tu*', which was substituted by the reverential or distant '*Lei*' in the official manuscript *D*. In order to explain the radical impact of the individualized word in the ear, the editor takes up again the statement from *B* which was elaborated in *C*: "One who knows [who realizes, is aware of] he is loved, loves in return and one who is loved, obtains everything,

²³⁵MB XIV, p. 514; EMB XIV, 404. Cf. also footnotes 173 and 223 in this chapter.

especially from the young.”²³⁶ [20] “knows” is the translation of the Italian “sa” of the verb “sapere”. In an earlier part of his comment Buzzetti said the boys themselves “should be able to understand, realize or grasp [*conoscano*] that they are loved. [13] In the original text it said “*che conoscano*” from the verb “*conoscere*”. Both words [*sapere* and *conoscere*] seem to refer to a cerebral activity: understand, know, grasp, realize. The rest of the conversation however clearly shows there that Buzzetti was thinking of more or something completely different from “haven’t they got the light of intelligence”, words used by Don Bosco before.

Besides, both Buzzetti’s statements evoke the memory of the conclusions of Valfrè’s considerations. Corresponding with a previously copied part from *C* [Braido, C p.40/137] Valfrè could state in conclusion that the boys “will do everything they are asked by one [teacher, superior or assistant] of whom they are sure he loves them.” [6] Also the wording “they are sure” suggests that there is a deeper dimension to the words “*conoscere*” and “*sapere*”. When it comes down to love, certainty emerges no doubt because you comprehend that everything someone does is done for your welfare. This person’s effective, active affection can be noticed. It can be rationally deduced from the acts being done to one’s benefit. Certainty emerges as well, if not more, by perceiving signs of trust and appreciation for who and what you are, signs of being loved, and also by feeling the underlying moving affective love. This affective love is among other ways, shown by the sympathetic teacher, educator’s brotherly way of being on familiar terms and by the interested priest and preacher who is in constant dialogue with the youngsters. That is why Fr J. Vecchi justifiably used the verb “*avvertire*” in his reflections in 1999 on Valfrè’s statement. “*Avvertire*” indeed means “to feel, perceive, sense, experience.”²³⁷ This means: to experience existentially. Following the same train of thought we can interpret “*conoscere*” and “*sapere*” in a broader and deeper sense. “*Conoscere*” and “*sapere*” should not be read here as “to know rationally, to realize, recognize.”

Also the continuation of Buzzetti’s statement - “and one who is loved, can obtain everything, especially from the young” – links up with Valfrè’s words. It is a repetition of Valfrè’s conclusion on the willingness of boys who “are sure” educators, teachers, assistants and superiors love them. [6] It is precisely so because “in recreation time” they have a confidential, spontaneous, affable, kind and interested contact with them.

- *Positive effects of reciprocal affection and confidence [20]*

In the following paragraphs Buzzetti’s comment takes up a couple of elements again from Valfrè’s reflections on “familiarity”, i.e. the connection with affection and trust and its beneficial effects.

²³⁶ St Francis de Sales wrote: “If somebody knows that he is loved, he feels stimulated to love reciprocally.” (FRANCOIS DE SALES, *Traité de l’amour de Dieu*, Paris, Monastère de la Visitation, 1995, Livre VII, ch. VIII, p. 305. Don Bosco or G.B. Lemoyne or both may have known the text. In French it says: “Si un homme sait d’être aimé.” In that context Don Bosco used the verbs “*sapere*” and “*conoscere*” several times. The text of the *Constitutions and Regulations* (p. 259) has been re-translated on account of the passive form in Italian: “*chi è amato*”.

²³⁷ *Don Bosco ci parla di educazione*, (a cura di G. B. Bosco), Turin, Elledici, 1999, p. 45.

In the next part of the text reciprocal affection and trust are juxtaposed. By using the word “confidence” he does indeed refer to the verbs “is loved” and “loves in turn”. It concerns both Salesians and youngsters. The confidence which is generated by love is effective like “an electric current between youngsters and their superiors” It is an image Don Bosco already used during the Second General Chapter. It was most probably much more significant and clear than we can suspect now.²³⁸ Its effect is extremely positive. Just like Valfrè, Buzzetti says “it opens the boys’ hearts” in such a way that “they make known their needs and weaknesses.” They speak with their superiors in spontaneous and open-hearted way and deal with them very jovially in turn.²³⁹

This trust from the boys has a beneficial influence on the Salesians themselves. The adults may feel and experience this confidence as an expression of honest and deep affection. That may make their lives lighter and more agreeable, enhance their resilience and strengthen their endurance. The spontaneous and unaffected expressions of affection help “to put up with the weariness” of a constant presence among the boys, a continuous attention for their well-being and a natural participation in the weal and woe of the youngsters. It also contributes to their ever ready willingness to patiently bear “the annoyance, the ingratitude, the troubles, the shortcomings and neglects that youngsters cause”. [20] This thought is an echo of Buzzetti’s previously expressed conviction and prediction that “their work would be made easy.” [17] Once more this humane motivation does not suffice. He directs the Salesians to their most important model, Jesus Christ, as a more profound motive to act patiently, tolerantly and empathetically. Animated and moved by Jesus’ example, they will “not crush the bruised reed nor quench the smouldering flax.” Here Fr Lemoyne inserts the quotation from the letter to the boys. It is justly so, as it fits in with the context entirely.²⁴⁰

- *Effects of the restored psychological and spiritual strength [resilience] of the Salesians [20-21]*

After dwelling a long time on the need for familiarity and illustrating it with practical examples of familiar conduct of a teacher, a preacher and Don Bosco himself and after

²³⁸Cf. the text in the first chapter of this study through footnote 1. In 1867 a past pupil wrote in a letter to Don Bosco: “I perceive you as someone who could reverse my soul completely. I was confused, thrilled, fascinated (“*eletrizzato*”) by your speeches.” (MOTTO, Fr., *Ricordi e riflessi di un’educazione ricevuta...* p. 365.) A similar metaphorical use is still applied nowadays. “I have a sort of electricity with children” from an interview with Hadise, “*I like staking my femininity*” in *Magazine*, 27 September 2008, p. 14. Don Bosco must have used more metaphors from the technological world. One of his clerics wrote to him in June 1860: “I beg you to *magnetize* me as only you can, to pray for me, and to find some way to cheer me. Please forgive me if I have been overly familiar.” (MB VI, p. 592; EMB VI, p. 338.) To magnetize in the sense of “to attract, to fascinate, to charm.”

²³⁹To get a good insight into the repetition, one can use the footnotes 90-96 in this chapter. Cardinal G. Cagliero testified about that open-heartedness and the jovial behaviour of the boys. After Don Bosco had deceased, he said: “We boys of the Oratory considered him as an affectionate father and dealt with him with a trust and familiarity that was even more than filial.” (MB XVIII, p. 583; EMB XVIII, p. 496-497.)

²⁴⁰As it fits in the *Rule of Benedict*, chapter LXIV, p. 13. It is a sign of fame and of the fact the quotation is used among the confreres, perhaps only in later periods. Cf. MB XIV, p. 112; EMB XIV, p. 79-80.

pointing out its positive influence on the youngsters and the adults, the editor goes on to list some seven pleasing effects of affection and confidence between the youngsters and the superiors.

At the same time it is a series of attitudes or ways of behaving which have to be changed or improved. It is partly inspired by a reflection we find at the end of document A. It is a note which actually does not belong to the suggestions for a letter to the boys. A bracket [‘(] separates it from the rest. Apart from that the series is also based on a concise mentioning of five focus points in B, written down in a sort of telegram register. It shows to which extent the so-called B version is actually a basic document which we could or perhaps ought to put next to A. The still provisional edition of C partly changed the content of the reprimands, reduced them to three and softened the formulation tone by the use of the repetition of the negative sentence structure with “neither, nor, nor”. In D it has become a sevenfold enumeration after the equally diplomatic introductory phrase: “Then you will no longer see anyone.”

In manuscript B no link at all was made with the preceding explanation on familiarity and the reciprocal love won back and the trust which was present again. It was connected though with a “heartless” [*eguale al ferro*] sticking to the rules. The link with the positive consequences of reciprocal affection turned up only in manuscript C. There Lemoyne made the correction of failures in the Salesians’ behaviour look as if it evidently came from the reborn trust, the renewed open-heartedness and affection of the boys, and the tolerance capacity of the teachers, assistants and superiors. He did so by means of the connector “so that” [*sicché*]. In the definitive version D he strengthens that link through the word “Then” and conjures up a sevenfold hopeful perspective for the Salesians. At the same time they remain seven reprimands although they may seem quite covered up or indirectly presented.

- The first phenomenon that corresponds with the recaptured good feeling and acting in Jesus’ spirit with the Salesians, is the statement “they will no longer work for their own glory.” That is actually stating they were busy doing so. Which kind of glory they should be permanently after from now on will be explicated later on.
- The second phenomenon is the fact they will no longer punish to revenge “wounded self-love.” The formulation of both improvements which are predicted goes back quite accurately to the schematic formulation in B. The allusion which concentrates on giving punishment is both a narrowing down and a clarification versus B. This allusion will astonish less if we take into account G.B. Francesia had started to write “*On the Use of Punishments*” just about a year before. The content of it here is not a copy but certainly bears some relation with it. It originates from the same surrounding. The 1883 writing was a little bit more reserved on the problem “to eliminate all doubt that one is trying to assert his authority.”²⁴¹ The part *Advice and Rules* of “*Unpublished Earlier Documents*” in *Memorie Biografiche XIV* is much clearer on this matter. This is an anthology of texts composed by Lemoyne. We find the following principle in it: “Punish rightly and with Christian love: never

²⁴¹BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 332/148-149. EMB XVI, p. 371.

show any anger. Otherwise they will say that it is not the rule [which leads to punishment], but wounded self-love that wants to take revenge.”²⁴²

- His co-workers can also fail in their duty by not interfering. In an earlier stage of the Buzzetti conversation Don Bosco had to notice that “others supervised from afar, not noticing whether anyone was doing something wrong.” [15] Somewhat in the spirit of the note in *A* this wrong attitude has been attributed to jealousy in a third point. They do not interfere because they are afraid of being less popular with the boys than the confreres who leave them alone. Don Bosco considers this a pernicious sort of action which completely misses its objective. That is how he must have made his point more often at conferences. He must repeatedly have referred to “the boys being smart observers.” He then said: “Boys can see through you. If they spot jealousy, envy, or pride in a superior, or a preoccupation to outshine others, that superiors’ influence is done for.”²⁴³ In 1869 he felt forced to lecture everyone – both the professed and aspiring confreres – in a good night: “And so that this community life may be pleasant, we must rid it of all envy and jealousy. We must love one other as brothers.”²⁴⁴ In the already mentioned “*Unpublished Earlier Documents*” this warning has also been included: “and much less so from any kind of jealousy.”²⁴⁵ Jealousy seems to be an ineradicable weed. Don Bosco must have been more than fed up with it so as to make use of the words “terrible” or “awful jealousies” [*feroci gelosie*] in the suggestions [manuscript *A*, 21].
- The fourth effect is about “*no more gossiping*” or “running others down.” This silly pastime consists of revealing or highlighting failures of others and slandering in order to gain the boys’ favour at the expense of others. Those confreres think they will become popular and loved by the boys.²⁴⁶ That is not the way things work out though, Buzzetti can say. On the contrary, “they earn for themselves nothing but contempt and hypocritical flattery.” Slander does not just happen to turn up just here. It is an old sore. During that same address of March 1869 Don Bosco resolutely called for ‘unity of spirit and purpose’ and: “Away, therefore, with those cliques of clerics or other persons busily chewing away at this or that fellow or, worse, a superior. Let us stand united and defend one another.”²⁴⁷ This

²⁴²MB XIV, p. 850; (not translated in EMB XIV.) Still, the question may be asked here whether it is about a piece of advice which was given earlier or later. “Later” means that the advice had just been given and written explicitly in the here and now discussed written communication to the confreres in Valdocco.

²⁴³MB VI, p. 389; EMB VI, p. 215. Another statement: “Youngsters notice everything.” (MB XIV, p. 845.)

²⁴⁴MB IX, p. 572; EMB IX, p. 268.

²⁴⁵MB XIV, p. 845. Cf. footnote 47 in this chapter. Grounding on Domenico Ruffino’s chronicle (period 1861-1864) G.B. Lemoyne reports that already in 1861 Don Bosco summons people in a talk with youngsters and a few clerics who were present: “not to be resentful or jealous, and not to be upset if others held higher positions of authority.” (MB VI, p. 998; EMB VI, p. 598.)

²⁴⁶On the fear of losing popularity or gaining it the wrong way, see one of the selected directives in MB XIV, p. 849/11. Not translated in EMB. A few thoughts show correspondence with Fr Francesia’s assessment in 1883. See text through footnote 7 in chapter I.

²⁴⁷MB IX, p. 574; EMB IX, p. 269.

is a personal extension added later on by Fr Lemoine. I should like to pay more attention to it in chapter 8 (volume 2) of the study.

- The fifth phenomenon embroiders on what was implied in the previous part, i.e. the idea of wanting to gain the boys' favour and affection by excluding the fellow educators. It makes us suspect that it was about allowing and furthering "particular friendships". Still, this term, which is used frankly in the B manuscript, is not used in the description of the fifth effect. Nevertheless the text is semantically clear enough with the somewhat covering words "people who let their hearts be stolen by one individual" and "neglect all the other boys to cultivate that particular one". It is a serious pedagogical and pastoral error [failure] and often an extremely harmful offence both from psychological and moral point of view. Don Bosco had repeatedly warned against it.²⁴⁸

Don Bosco delivered one of his most striking explanations in a conference during the retreat at Lanzo in 1875. There he said: "We have to stay with the youngsters, to be among them, but never as individuals with individuals, never more with one than with another. Let us be outspoken about it: the downfall of religious congregations devoting themselves to educating the young is caused by it... never kiss the boys, no caressing by stroking the face, no hugging or similar things. No particular friendships, no preference for one boy against another, certainly no favouring the more attractive boys. No letter writing. If only you knew how many boys have been depraved by sending this sort of notes... What to say next about somebody who would invite boys to his room even with the best intentions and lock the room to reprimand or keep them with him to talk about secret business? Neither can anyone show oneself to be one boy's greater friend than another one's. You should never show a boy that he is your favourite. I notice with great approval that a certain good practice is being implemented already and I hope it will spread ever further. It consists of the following elements: when leaving the refectory, church etc. one should join the first boy coming out and pay no attention to his age or the form or grade he is in and then chat with him about all sorts of things."²⁴⁹ An article in the *Rules for the Houses* is significant too (1877): "Teachers, craftsmasters and assistants must be of acknowledged morality. They should strive to avoid as they would the plague every kind of affection or particular friendship for their pupils. They should also remember that the wrongdoing of one alone is sufficient to compromise an educational institute."²⁵⁰ He tackled that tricky problem again during the Third General Chapter. I quote some statements from the reports. "Up to now we have been able to keep our heads high in regard to morality. Now because of a few imprudent members we have been somewhat compromised. Our good name is being re-established, but the rectors, who are responsible in the eyes of the public, must exert all their efforts to have the good reputation preserved... Remind the confreres that by failing in morality they compromise their own house and the entire Congregation not only before God, but also

²⁴⁸More on it in BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza...*, pp. 196-205.

²⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 202-203. Cf. MB XI, p. 583. No translation in EMB XI. Cf. with the circular of January 12 1876. (MB XII, p. 26; EMB XII, p. 15/2. And E (m), vol. quinto, p. 43/2°.)

²⁵⁰OE XXIX [103]. *Constitutions...*, p. 249/2.

before the world. Before God, one's soul is lost, before the world, one's honour."²⁵¹ Even in a thank-you for the best wishes of Christmas and New Year 1883-1884, he could not suppress his preoccupation. He uttered thoughts and used words for them which also appeared with G.B. Lemoyne a few months later: "We consecrated ourselves to God to obey, not to give orders. We did this to practice charity to our neighbours solely for the love of God, not to become attached to His creatures."²⁵²

Neither Don Bosco [21, column A] nor Lemoyne want to pass by this menace silently. Both grasp the opportunity to highlight positive possibilities. They point out that particularly the experience of a spontaneous, happy, genuine and grateful affection from the boys dispels the danger of particular friendships. Their warm-hearted affection is indeed the very answer to the good familiar way of how educators deal with the youngsters and also to the patient and cheerful efforts involving a constantly interested, stimulating and correcting presence among the boys. [15-16; 18-20]

- The penultimate element of the list of rather indirectly expressed shortcomings emanates from the conviction that seeking "one's own ease and comfort" impedes an adequate pedagogical and pastoral functioning. This phrase goes back to a concise mentioning in the B manuscript. The elaboration in D now states that the willingness to take on the fatigue and burden of staying amid the boys and also the fulfilling of "the strict duty of assistance" will eliminate the desire for one's "own ease and comfort" from now on. [21]
- The last aspect of some seven indirect reprimands was also inspired by manuscript B. There it is called "fear of what people will think" and labelled as "the insistence not to be conspicuous"; it was clearly indicated as the cause "why one did not do what one should." That was expressed in a very general way. The definite elaboration reduces the impact of "human respect" and applies it very specifically to reprimanding or warning where necessary.

The seven faulty ways of behaving are rather covered up and yet very much outspoken. They do blame as strongly as the seven or eight ways of behaviour listed by the editor describing the second part of the listless recreation in the playground about 1884. Consequently the terrible failures of the Salesians in the Oratory are spread over two packages separated in space. The complaint that "nowadays many do not feel like working as hard as we used to" comes in between the two listings of faulty behaviour. [17] Despite the separation an occasional reading of the lists may have caused a heavy stomach with those involved.

- *The general revival puts the Salesians back on track of the final objectives of their pastoral and pedagogical commitment [21]*

²⁵¹MB XVI, pp. 416-417; EMB XVI, pp. 330-331. Cf. DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Don Bosco en son temps...*, pp. 1226-1227.

²⁵²E IV, p. 250. MB XVII, p. 17; EMB XVII, p. 3.

Fr Lemoyne finishes the listing by a consideration encompassing the total with a sort of inclusion. In the beginning it said: “Then you will no longer see anyone working for his own glory”, i.e. human, selfish honour. Now at the end it says contrasting with it: “We shall not seek anything other than the glory of God and the good of souls.” [21] These are the objectives they have committed themselves to when joining Don Bosco. Under the seven conditions these will remain their ultimate objectives. They will act in the spirit of the *Rules for the Houses* due to the change in their behaviour. It stipulated: “The rector must often remind the teachers of their duty to work for God’s glory.”²⁵³ It implies commitment for “the saving of the souls”, among other things through “not crushing the bruised reed nor quenching the smouldering flax.”

The inclusion is less clear in the final edition than in *C* because the author weaves the following novelties into it at the end: “If we have this true love” and: “It is just when this love languishes...” Besides, both references are not the best of their kind since it is not clear what the writer wants to refer to with “this true love” and “this love” in the concluding end. None of the seven ways of changing behaviour can be singled out for it. Nor does this sentence, which can be found a bit before: “This love enables superiors to put up with the weariness.” [20] This is the case because “this love” in the context of the latter sentence can only be the boys’ affection which can be experienced because of their “confidence” and “their frankness”.

That is why the question arises whether it really is about a reference to a previous text on love. Is not the insertion of a new word and a new idea – new vis-à-vis manuscript *C* – the cause of its being unbalanced and obscure here? Perhaps in a later stage of the writing the editor has found inspiration for that addition and the phrase “true love” in the conclusions of the Third and Fourth General Chapter which he could have been informed about. One of the conclusions prescribed: “One has to see to it very carefully that they [the artisans] experience/realize that the superiors love and esteem them. This can be obtained if one treats them with this true Christian love [*vera carità*], which is recommended by the Holy Gospel.”²⁵⁴ He did substitute “*carità*” by “*amore*”, at least in the original version of *D*.

Furthermore Fr Lemoyne omitted the following thought from *C*: “according to the example of Jesus Christ.” This reference would have gone very well together with the considerations just before the sevenfold listing, in which Jesus is also called here “your model”. It would have been a better kind of inclusion.

²⁵³OE XXIX [128/10]. Cf. MB IX, p. 575; EMB XI, p. 270. G.B. Lemoyne included this thought among the statements Don Bosco kept repeating. Cf. for this MB VI, p. 389; EMB VI, p. 215. The text runs: “If we seek only the glory of God, we shall continue to enjoy the golden days of the Oratory, but if we are after our own glory, then discontent, division and disorder will be upon us.” This formulation itself which occurred in the sixth volume of the *Memorie biografiche*, may of course have been inspired by the letter of 1884.

²⁵⁴OE XXXVI [270-271]. These conclusions were published only in 1887.

3.4.6 *Additional considerations about the decline of the preventive system and the need to implement it again [21-23]*

The optimistic vision on the future in the conclusion leaves the strong impression that Buzzetti had been allowed to say everything he had to say on the subject. We perceive the continuation of his comment as rather unexpected, even more so in the first version (*C*) than in the definite one (*D*). It is connected with the way Buzzetti's comment was and is continued. After all his efforts to explain things, the question "*Do you know why the present-day Oratory differs from the earlier one?*" [*C*] comes out of the blue: abrupt and disturbing, inconvenient and more than redundant. Had it said: "Do you know why today's Oratory *also* differs from the earlier one?", it would have been more acceptable. It would have been an introduction to a fragment into which a couple of loose thoughts of manuscript *B* still could have been structured and incorporated. Fr Lemoyne had not yet treated them in the definitive version although they were certainly important. He had introduced the answers to that question in *C* by repeating "because" three times. In doing so he attributed the difference between "the earlier Oratory" and "the present one" to causes of a rather structural nature. It showed they had been abandoning the preventive system in Valdocco and adopting the repressive system.

In the final edition he had made the transition slightly smoother by stating beforehand that "when this love languishes, things no longer go well" and immediately linking it to the question: "Why do people want to replace love?"²⁵⁵ It makes one suspect that he has got affective love, i.e. affection of the Salesians for the boys on his mind. This is the sort of love which only becomes visible, and tangible and can be experienced through familiarity, kind, jovial and interested relating to each other. Next to the "languishing of that love" [21] he will soon juxtapose the "lack of familiarity". [22]

- *Complaint against the betrayal and even substitution of DonBosco's educational system [21-23]*

Manuscript *C* would certainly not have pleased Fr Lemoyne. He replaces the persistent "because" of the answers in *C* by three "why" questions. This change is still put into Buzzetti's mouth, which apparently cannot be stopped. Perhaps it is merely a style tool to fan the flame of attention. Whether the change is intended or incidental does not matter: the content becomes more forceful and the tone gets even more reproaching as a consequence of the clear climax now.

- *Cold rules chill the educational atmosphere [21-22]*

²⁵⁵In later Italian manuscripts and editions this verbal link even got lost. G.B. Lemoyne himself accepted a substitution of "*amore*" by "*carità*" at a certain moment. This version came into the *Constitutions* of the Salesians and The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians via the *Memorie biografiche* (MB XVII, p. 111; EMB XVII, p. 88) and *Epistolario* (E IV, p. 266). The Dutch, German and French translations did not pay attention to this. The acts of the Chief Council and B. Fascie published the original edition though in 1927. (*Atti del Capitolo Superiore of 1920*; FASCIE, B., *Del metodo educativo di Don Bosco*, Turin, SEI, 1931, p. 77)

The first question runs as follows: “Why do people want to replace love with cold rules?” It is obvious: “cold rule is meant to be disapproving and has no connection whatsoever with his own *Rules for the Houses*. That Rule, his Rule suffices. The clear statement “more and more ruling” or making up more rules, as put in the original *B* edition, had perhaps been preferable. That will become clear from the other “why’s”.

The word “rules” enables us to shed a light on several aspects. Only mentioning “cold rules” obviously strengthens the contrast with the warmth of concepts such as affection and kind, jovial and cordial way of dealing with people. Coldness evokes the atmosphere of barriers and distance.

° *The superiors move away from Don Bosco’s educational rules [22]*

The second “why” is phrased as follows: “Why do the superiors move away from the observance of the [educational] rules Don Bosco has given them?” This does not only refer to his *Rules for the Houses*, but also to oral and written instructions, which have been repeated several times.²⁵⁶ Looking at it from an editor’s perspective, we must notice that the editor has left the dialogue style of a talk between Don Bosco and Buzzetti with the phrase “Don Bosco has given them”. G. Buzzetti could not talk in this way. In manuscript *C* “this past pupil” or “this friend”, who could not be anyone else but Buzzetti, had been able to still use the confidential form of ‘you’: “which you have prescribed for them.” [9, 15-16] That keeps it within the spirit of the whole project. Could the change in style be incidental or due to absent-mindedness? Or could there be more to it? Could the change be attributed to a later intervention by Lemoyne because he thought it worthwhile to emphasize that the rules concerning the essential matter of the educational rules and system came from Don Bosco himself? It looks as if he wanted to give the content of the question more prominence by making Don Bosco subject of the sub-clause.

However, he has preserved the plural “your Salesians” [*i tuoi*] by writing “the superiors”. This is meaningful considering what is to follow.

° *They betray the heart of the preventive system: watchful and loving prevention [22]*

The perspective of speaking with authority - also and even more so - goes for the third question, which freshens up essential elements from the *Little Treatise on the Preventive System* very well. Two totally different systems are indeed juxtaposed here just like in the little treatise, but in reverse order. In the little treatise Don Bosco describes the repressive system first. Here the preventive system comes first using the same typical vocabulary, i.e. “loving and watchful prevention.” The wording in Italian is: “*prevenire colla vigilanza*” and “*amorosamente*”. These words are intended to recall a memory of the first chapter of the little treatise. There Don Bosco used the Italian wordings “*sorvegliare in guisa di*” [watching carefully so that] and “*padri amorosi*” [loving fathers, dear fathers indeed]. In this way both previous aspects of his system are confirmed here: watching, keeping on eye on things and also coaching affectionately. He also means doing these

²⁵⁶It was the *Rules for the Houses* which had emerged from years of experience. However, I should like to recall some pages here in MB XIV, pp. 838-850. During the good nights in April-May 1868 Don Bosco clearly shows that the *Rules* should be sufficient for the boys. They should stick to them and observe them. (MB IX, pp. 160, 173; EMB IX, pp. 79, 91.)

things at the same time. Manuscripts *B* and *C* on the contrary demanded only attention for “the fatherly system” [22, *B*] and for the “loving prevention” [22, *C*], which really fitted in perfectly with the frame of the previous explanation. On the other hand the idea of prevention being exclusively intended as putting an impediment or an obstacle remains the same in the three texts (*B*, *C* and *D*). It aims indeed only at the “prevention of disorders.”²⁵⁷ That may have been the direct consequence of the problems prevailing at Valdocco, mentioned in the teachers’ meetings and already discussed at length in this writing.

The repressive system fully contrasts with the watchful and loving prevention in the term’s full meaning, i.e. the central item in Don Bosco’s system and practice. The repressive system “consists in “framing laws to be sustained through punishment” which is “less troublesome and works faster for the person in command.” [22] In the little treatise it was called “making the law known to the subjects”, “inflicting, when necessary, the punishment deserved” and: “this system is easy, less troublesome.”²⁵⁸

The repressive system may be easier for the teachers, assistants and superiors, but with the boys it only “creates hatred and causes discontent” and “contempt for the educators” because imposing punishments plays a main part. If one neglects demanding that the boys respect the rules, then the same regulations will “bring about serious disorders”. Don Bosco had warned for such pernicious consequences in his little treatise. He used the following words: “Experience teaches that the young do not easily forget the punishments they have received, and for the most part foster bitter feelings, along with the desire to throw off the yoke and even to seek revenge.”²⁵⁹ This reflection in the definite large version has been a development of *C* in a later continued editing, which was substantiated partly by *B* and partly by complementary opinions inspired by an exchange of ideas after the return to Valdocco. Yet all elements support a re-confirmation and the hammering home of the conclusion of the Third General Chapter, which instructed: “As concerns punishments, whether it is convenient or inconvenient [2 Tim. 4:2] [“*opportune* ed *importune*”] insist that the preventive system be practised.”²⁶⁰ The second scene of the second description of listless recreation had demonstrated that his own system was at stake.

The editor does not end the three-question fragment with an inclusion. This would have been possible by stating for example that the discouraging and deplorable consequences of the “gradual” deterioration towards the repressive system “necessarily” emerge from the “languishing”, yes indeed the lacking of “that love”. No, he prefers the word “familiarity”: “This is sure to happen if there is no familiarity [‘friendly relationship’].” Choosing that link he also puts this part of his writing within the framework of the second theme he had

²⁵⁷More on it in BIESMANS, R., *Assistentie...*, pp. 71-80. OE XXIX [100]. *Constitutions...*, p. 247.

²⁵⁸OE XXIX [99-100]. *Constitutions...*, pp. 246-247. How firmly Don Bosco was convinced that his system was more difficult, is clear from the words: “It certainly does present some difficulties” for the educators. Cf. OE XXIX [106]; *Constitutions...*, p. 251. The sentence “less troublesome for the person in command” is failing in *Constitutions...*, p. 260. Cf. also footnote 153 in this chapter.

²⁵⁹OE XXIX [101-102]. *Constitutions...*, p. 248. Cf. also the introduction to the circular on punishments. (BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 325-326. EMB XVI, p. 368.)

²⁶⁰Cf. first chapter footnotes 76-79, particularly 79. As far as the addition is concerned, see chapter 8 in the 2nd volume.

tackled. There he explained what he meant by familiarity, the second key concept and how this could contribute to the question: “How then are we to set about breaking down that barrier?” [18] It is not the presence of affection or affective love that is defining, but the mutual exchanges or demonstrations of love are, which means the familiar, natural, informal, affable, kind and cordial ways of dealing with one another.

He re-formulates this conviction once more in all its clarity: “If the Oratory is to return to its former happiness, the former system has got to be restored.” The first part of this sentence reminds us of the description of the vibrant and cheerful scene in the playground with the confidential, spontaneous and jovial interactions between youngsters and educators. It evokes the “wonderful” festive atmosphere [“a foretaste of heaven”]. [16] The implementation and experience of Don Bosco’s educational system, particularly of the “familiarity” component, is so important that the revival of the former happy atmosphere and living together depends on it. In *C*, Lemoyne justly made a strong connection with that quite distant idea considering the picture of the total text. The repetition of phrases, which were used previously in the train of thought of the extensive and ever expanding comment, confirms this. It concerns sentence parts such as: “by being loved in things they like” and “let them like what pleases the youngsters”. The link between the “former happiness” and the implementation of the “former system”, in which familiarity occupies a central position, is undeniable there.

However, he does not definitely finish off the larger part meant for the Salesians with his sharp and consistent conclusion, on the contrary so.

- *More precise description of the part the superior [rector] plays in implementing the original preventive system [22-23]*

In *D* the editor indeed continues by unfolding in a personal way what he means by “the former [the old] system”, which “has to be restored” and implemented through a renewed drive. The wording “the former system”, particularly the use of the word “system”, may refer to the title of Don Bosco’s *Little Treatise on the Preventive System*. However he does not literally copy Don Bosco’s words in this well-known little treatise. He characterizes the system in a personal and at the same time new way now. The new element only strikes one when one compares *D* with *C*, which links up more closely with the ongoing comment, we have to admit. This summary, which links up so closely and connects strongly, no longer appears in *D*. Lemoyne puts forward other elements here. Neither does he keep the plural “superiors”, which before was so conspicuous in “your people” [“*i tuoi*”] and the “superiors”. The complete fragment, which follows, indeed concerns only “the superior”. Superior is singular now. He re-writes the first elaboration [*C*] really completely, giving us however no insight into the reasons why he does so.

It is obvious that a reader can immediately interpret the singular “superior” as “*pars pro toto*”, i.e. representing all superiors, teachers and assistants. It is evident too for him that Fr Lemoyne wanted to address every single Salesian even more directly by changing the plural in *C* into the singular in the final text. Thus he wanted to summon each confrere. Everyone had to feel personally called upon to implement the preventive system in loyalty to Don Bosco.

There is an attractive ring about that opinion, but it is not certain at all that things went so smoothly. It rather appears that Lemoyne was influenced by the fifth and also the sixth conclusion of the Third General Chapter. There it reads: “insist [the rector has to insist] that the preventive system be practised” and “he [the teacher or craftsman] is to refer the matter to the rector, who will apply the preventive system”, further: “let the rector abide by the Rule.” The rector is no doubt the most important superior. Contrary to this, it has to be admitted that the plural “rectors” had been used in the second and fourth conclusion of the General Chapter. It is possible though that the editor’s previous insistence on loyalty to the preventive system must have reminded him of the address at the Chapter’s end, particularly because Don Bosco had repeated the term “the preventive system” up to three times in the fifth conclusion.²⁶¹ The idea to change the text of *C* for that reason must have come on to him between the elaborations of *C* and *D*.

It is plausible. Yet I think it strange that he has not simply substituted “superiors” by “rector” for instance. I got the gradual impression that he has only carried out the change after the problem had been discussed in the General Council of the Congregation in the months after his return from Rome. He then resumed his work as a secretary. In those days keeping only one rector for the ever growing educational work at Valdocco was a frequent item of discussion. In this context one had to reflect on the key tasks of a rector, the ultimate responsible and most important superior of a house and work of Don Bosco. Rewriting his first draft in *C* testifies to this reflection and those discussions. I will demonstrate this in a more justifying way in the eighth chapter of this study (volume 2).²⁶²

Whatever the cause of that change may be, the rewriting strengthens the already arisen suspicion that Buzzetti has vanished from the range of vision and that Lemoyne’s attention to the real dialogue has gone. The writer speaks more clearly than ever before for himself. He takes over himself even though, according to the general concept of the script, Buzzetti continues commenting.²⁶³

Generally speaking the “former system” consists of: “let the superior be all things to all” in both versions (*C* and *D*). It is an idea with which the apostle Paul has characterized his total personal commitment within a letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor., 9, 22). “To all I have become all things.” And he goes on: “I try to accommodate all [everybody] in all things by pursuing not my own advantage, but the advantage of many so that they may be saved” (1 Cor., 10, 33).²⁶⁴ The order of the word-group all things/to all – that is in the Greek version – made the first part of the statement suitable for an adapted

²⁶¹For all these quotations, see ASC D 5790263; FdB 1.864 B2 and 1.864 A 12, 1.864 B1. Compare MB XVI, pp. 416-418; EMB XVI, pp. 330-332. Cf. also footnote 79 in the first chapter of this study.

²⁶²The possibility of the proposed hypothesis will be treated more extensively in chapter 8 of this study.

²⁶³We do not want to underrate G. Buzzetti. Cf. footnote 63 in this chapter, but there are limits.

²⁶⁴In *Salesianum* E. Valentini quoted in 1953 the Latin version of Cor. 1, 9, 22: “Omnibus omnia factus sum” [to all I have become all]. Cf. VALENTINI, E., *La pedagogia mariana di D. Bosco*, Salesianum, anno 15, Turin, 1953, p. 146. The translation of the verse (10,33) from St Paul’s letter is personal in this study. It links up much more directly with the original texts. The tendency in translations to interpret “many” simply as “all” in the second part of the sentence remains present. Cf. per G. Barberis: FISSORI, M., *Il Vade mecum di don Giulio Barberis: spunti di indagine e sguardi d’insieme*, RSS XXX N. 1 (58) p. 44.

and implemented crystallization to the motto “all things to all” [everything to all], “to become all things to all” [everything to all]. The motto became an inspiring challenge and slogan for bishops and priests in religious circles. This practice may have inspired Don Bosco and also Fr Lemoyne during their training years so that they took it up among the stimulating ideals and mottoes which gave direction and impulses to their sacerdotal service.

They may also have been struck by it in the devotional writings of St. Francis de Sales. That device was used to mark his life, especially his life as a bishop. People still pray as follows in the churches in the bishop’s celebration day prayer: “God, You have inspired Saint Francis de Sales with such devotion for the people’s salvation that he has become all things to all.”²⁶⁵

The link with the holy bishop of Geneva must have been made during his formation years at the Ecclesiastical College (*Convitto*). The contact was made through L. Guala and G. Cafasso, two priests in charge there. They thought St Francis de Sales an ideal saint to be presented to the students as a personal model and an example to be followed in a priest’s life. It should not cause surprise that Don Bosco characterized and appreciated theologian Luigi Guala in this way in the *Memorie dell’Oratorio*: “Had he not been all for all under the government of Napoleon I?”²⁶⁶

Don Bosco knew the phrase and used it too. This is also said in the report of the *Bollettino Salesiano* about an address he delivered for the co-operators and woman co-operators in Borgo San Martino in 1880. He called upon them to show “that they are true disciples of St. Francis de Sales, who became all things to all people in order to win all to God.”²⁶⁷

In his little treatise on youth education Don Bosco described this ideal in his own way: “The Rector must devote himself entirely to the boys” and: “An educator is one who is consecrated to the welfare of his pupils.” The words ‘consecrate’, ‘devote himself entirely’ suggest something definite and all encompassing. It means total and lifelong dedication which bans personal ambition, pursuit of personal success, jealousy and indolence. For himself and consequently for the superiors, teachers and assistants it also meant some-

²⁶⁵Perhaps the motto has a connection with what St Francis de Sales confided to Jeanne de Chantal at one time: “When I was installed as a bishop, God took me from myself to possess me for him. Then he gave me to the people. It means he turned me upside down of what I was for myself and turned me to what I would be for them.” In French: “Quand je fus consacré évêque, Dieu m’ôta à moi-même pour me prendre à lui, puis il me donna au peuple c’est à dire qu’il m’avait converti de ce que j’étais pour moi à ce que je fusse pour eux.” (LAJEUNIE, E.-J., *Saint François de Sales, L’homme, la Pensée, L’Action**, Paris, Editions Guy Victor, 1966, p. 479).

The cross-heading “All things to all” of A. Amadei in the tenth volume of the *Memorie biografiche* (1939) testifies to the conviction of the motto fitting in with Don Bosco’s life, even though it was ‘only’ put above a short paragraph with brief letters and listings of Don Bosco’s benefactors. (MB X, p. 208; EMB X, p. 117). G.B. Francesia had been convinced as thoroughly years before: “They say about St Francis de Sales that “he had become all things to all with the only intention to gain all for the Lord. That is for us the epitome of Don Bosco’s life: All things to all!” (FRANCESIA, *Vita breve e popolare di don Giovanni Bosco*, San Benigno Canavese, 1903, p. 331.).

²⁶⁶BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell’Oratorio...*, 117/714. The translation in *Memoirs...*, p. 100 [“he was everyone’s friend”] does not agree quite well with the Italian original.

²⁶⁷MB XIV, p. 547; EMB XIV, p. 433.

thing all encompassing: a permanent availability for all. Outspoken preference for one or the other and each kind of exclusiveness such as particular friendship is incompatible with the total dedication. All aspects which had already appeared in the script are reduced to their essence in the motto here now: “to be all to all.”

After all the things that had received attention, Lemoyne reveals what this word “all (things)” particularly contains in the practical circumstances of Valdocco by means of three points of interest. In the first place the superior must have a listening ear. The editor phrases this instruction as follows: “The superior must always be ready to listen to any boy’s complaints or doubts.” Subsequently he has got to be “always alert to keep a paternal eye on their conduct.” It is not only about watching out. It is particularly about doing so in a fatherly way. In the third place he has to be “all heart to seek the spiritual and temporal good of those Divine Providence has entrusted to him.” In the latter process effective loving commitment for the boys’ complete happiness goes hand in hand with affective affability.

Reading the summary of requirements for a Superior, it does look as if they are mainly expected from the rector. This impression is strengthened if we take into account the texts on a rector’s tasks as Don Bosco had phrased them previously. We find an example in the *Rule for the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales for the Day Pupils*: “The rector has to show constantly that he is the friend, comrade and brother of all.” Further: “He has to be like a father amidst his own children.” More in the *Regulations for the Houses*: “It is the rector’s task to take care of spiritual, material and scholastic affairs”, in other words the spiritual and temporal well-being of all boys. In the *Confidential Reminders for Rectors* we read: “Everyone should be able to conclude from your acts and words that you are seeking the welfare of souls... Concentrate your efforts on the spiritual, physical and intellectual well-being of the boys entrusted to you by Divine Providence.”²⁶⁸ These are all indications that by the singular “superior” he meant the rector of the house.

- *Beneficial impact on the boys’ conduct [23]*

The effect of being a superior and acting as such in this way consists once more of a spontaneous and susceptible openness from the boys’ side: “Then hearts will no longer be closed.” This general open-heartedness will prevent and eliminate the feared and intensely loathed secretiveness: “and deadly subterfuge will no longer hold sway.”

- *Additional instructions for the superiors and assistants [23]*

The contrast between vivifying open-heartedness and “deadly subterfuge” inspires Lemoyne to talk about additional tasks of superiors and assistants. He cannot be satisfied with simply mentioning upsetting reticence, which is this “secretiveness”. The term itself should be clear enough though, for - as an editor - he had inserted an unambiguous new

²⁶⁸MOTTO, Fr., *I “Ricordi confidenziali...”*, in BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 160. MB X, p. 1041; EMB X, p. 447. “Physical” is actually “sanitario”, i.e., in the original text, with respect to health.

paragraph at the end of the description of the playground by Buzzetti. He was talking about St. Aloysius, who would have been ashamed about what was being whispered and told in certain little groups. [8-9] Still, he now adds a completely new fragment to *C* here.²⁶⁹ It contains two topics. The first and totally new one is about expelling certain youngsters. The second urges the duty to report. For the second one Lemoyne uses a thought which he had jotted down at the end of manuscript *A*. I intend to discuss the remark on this addition in chapter 8, second volume.

As far as secretiveness is concerned, the editor thinks it necessary to remind us of the policy which had been adopted up till then. According to the addition tradition requires “the superiors [plural again now] to be unbending only in the case of immoral conduct.” For that point of view he could refer to his own experience and the written directives.²⁷⁰ A couple of these directives can be found in an article on the conclusions of the Second General Chapter, which were published in 1882. One directive stipulated the following: “As soon as a boy causes problems morally, he has to be removed instantly from his friends and sent back to his family.” The other directive said: “The boys and persons who are known to be morally and spiritually dangerous must be mercilessly removed from our houses.”²⁷¹ The document “*The Use of Punishments in Salesian Houses*” testifies to this norm in 1883. It confirms and at the same time refines this norm. It does so as it makes use of Monfat’s wording. The way to be followed according to the document was: “In the sad event, however, that a pupil gives grave scandal or offends the Lord, he is to be referred to the rector who will prudently take the measures which he judges will be effective and opportune. Should this pupil be deaf to these thoughtful measures for his improvement and continue to give bad example and scandal to others, he should be summarily dismissed, his good name being protected as much as possible. This can be done by suggesting that the lad personally ask his family to withdraw him from the school or by directly advising the family to change schools in the hope that their son will do better elsewhere. This kind of charity has proved to be effective.”²⁷²

Using the words “only”, “in the case” and “unbending” [relentless], and even “immoral

²⁶⁹It might be a bit blunt to suggest that G. Buzzetti was allowed to be quite active afterwards.

²⁷⁰On his experience cf. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 73-75.

²⁷¹OE XXXIII [62 and 67]. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, p. 74. In his chronicle (1875-1879) G. Barberis had already written: “It is the Rule of the House that under no circumstances bad boys, who might corrupt their companions in any way, will be tolerated. One single indecent conversation or the smallest immoral act suffices to dismiss the guilty one from the House. But this cannot be done without first talking the matter over with Don Bosco.” P. Braido thinks that Fr Barberis’ harshness is to be attributed to his responsibility of novice master. (BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, p. 348). Cf. also the note of January 23 1876 in MB XI, 458; EMB XI, 429. Don Bosco himself during an evening address on April 15 1877. Cf. MB XIII, pp. 420-421; EMB XIII, p. 330.

²⁷²E IV, p. 208. MB XVI, pp. 446-447; EMB XVI, p. 375. This cautious method is no doubt also inspired by a book of MONFAT, A. *La pratica della educazione Cristiana*, 1879, p. 190. On expulsion, see BIESMANS, R., *Redelijkheid in de omgang met jongeren (1876-1884)*, 2000, pp. 120-126. It is a problem Don Bosco had to deal with regularly. He put it on the public agenda, for instance in a good night. Also then he meant only “a small number” of youngsters: “Now I intend to wait a while to see if these boys will decide to behave; because if they don’t, I shall have to take measures which, unfortunately, had to be taken with some other boys, that is, dismiss them.” (MB XI, p. 227; EMB XI, p. 208. Cf. MB XI, pp. 459-460; EMB XI, p. 430.)

conduct” Lemoyne repeats one of the measures of 1883 and especially of the Second General Chapter in a very condense way. Using the word “only” the editor seems to emphasize just like Don Bosco that expulsion should nonetheless remain a very heavy and exceptional punishment. On the other hand it is a measure which has to be taken at times, certainly in an institution where an important, if not the most important and almost the only objective has become to raise and preserve religious vocations.

It does not appear redundant to me to repeat that this paragraph was added here in a later stage of the editing. It explains what is meant by secretiveness and also why Don Bosco wanted to impress an article of the *Rule* or *Regulations* at the end of the first series of suggestions. [23, column A]

The foundation of his suggestion and the paragraph in this elaboration of circular (*C*) seems to be indeed article 5 of the tenth chapter of the *Regulations for the Houses*. The title is: “Assistants or Responsible Persons in the Dormitory.” Part of it ran as follows: “*Impuditia nec nominetur in vobis* [Impurity must not even be mentioned among you]. If one discovers a failure in that field, it is one’s strict duty to report it to the rector.”²⁷³ It is a moral duty. In the context ‘to fail’ means to commit a serious” sin. As it is a very serious matter, everyone must co-operate. It is not a matter for the assistants only. Also during recreation time everyone has to watch out and listen. However it does not involve an attitude which shows effective love or is a benefit for the familiar, open and jovial way of dealing with the boys. It really is about fulfilling “a strict duty in conscience” which allows a necessary disciplinary intervention for moral failures and guarantees responsible action. The purpose is to preserve a wholesome moral climate and consequently spiritual well-being. It is for this goal that “the rectors [plural], who are responsible in the eyes of the public, must exert all their efforts to have morality preserved.”²⁷⁴ That was their mission according to the second decision of the Third General Chapter and, as it seems, in the addition at the end of the original notes in manuscript *A*.

Because of the emphasis on harshness and strict duty the additional thoughts do not fit in or at least fit in less with the previous reflections on the absolute necessity of trust and loving healthy familiarity.

3.4.7 *Completion of the considerations on the second keyword “familiarity” and G. Buzzetti’s extended comment*

Buzzetti’s reaction to Don Bosco’s pressing question about what had to be done to break down the barrier was actually brief and concise: “Familiarity” [18], but the explanation of this concept has become a very long, more or less consistent essay, as had been the case with the clarification of the concept “*amore*”. That is why it is not at all surprising that the editor makes Don Bosco now ask Buzzetti this question: “And what is the best way of achieving this familiarity [friendly relationship]?” It looks as if Don Bosco cannot see

²⁷³OE XXIX [137/5]. The Latin text comes from St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (Eph. 5,3). A similar duty applies to the assistants in the workhouses. Cf. OE XXIX [134/4].

²⁷⁴FdB 1.864 A1. MB XVI, p. 416; EMB XVI, pp. 330-331.

the wood for the trees. What has to be done urgently now? What is the most important thing to do? However, Lemoyne does more. At the same time he makes Don Bosco also ask for the means to make a triumph possible for “this kind of love and confidence” too. In this way he picks up again the three bearing concepts of Buzzetti’s statement at the start of his explanation of familiarity. They were: “Without familiarity [friendly informal relationship] one does not show one’s love and if one does not make one’s love visible [tangible, evident], there can be no confidence.” [18] Thus this sentence realizes another perfect inclusion again.

Yet it is quite possible Fr Lemoyne means more. In the way of a third dimension he could allude here to the whole conversation, all the directives regarding familiarity and regarding affective love and mutual trust as well. Valfrè too said after the description of the lively and cheerful recreation time: “Familiarity [closeness] leads to affection, and love brings confidence.” [6] His statement contained the three concepts which would be developed in the two comments. In that case Don Bosco’s question now becomes the question as to what is the main element of Buzzetti’s input, and indeed of everything both past pupils have been telling and presenting him.

- “*The exact observance of the rules of the house*” [23]

At first hearing the answer: “The exact observance of the rules of the House” is disappointing. This is not only the case because of its content but also because of its neutral tone. This tone is even more disappointing when compared with the previous manuscript (*C*). There Buzzetti was allowed to address Don Bosco directly by the confidential and straightforward “you”, viz. “The accurate observation of the rules you have set.” Retaining this answer would have been better for the dialogue style. Moreover, the word “rules” would unequivocally have reminded of the “rules Don Bosco has given them” as mentioned in the second reproach. [22]

When we go deeper into what has been written in the final edition, we can still discover a deeper dimension. In the first place attention must be paid to the change of the previous term: “rules” in “*Rules of the House*.” [23] Fr Lemoyne must have had a good reason for that change. Perhaps he had written “*regole*” in manuscript *C* merely because that abbreviation was clear enough after “the educational rules” in the second blame. It is also possible however he had been influenced by Don Bosco’s summary at the end of the Third General Chapter. In the context of the second conclusion Don Bosco had said at the time: “The means are the rules [regulations] and decisions [the chapter] deliberations, which must be observed by them [the rectors] and their dependants. But this means they must know the rules. Let them be taught in the two monthly conferences. Learned conferences are not required; it is enough to have them read and then followed by a brief exhortation and explanation.” In the sixth conclusion it said: “In the beginning Don Bosco was free to go and visit the houses often and personally direct them. Now let the rector abide by the Rule and never treat anyone brusquely.”²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵FdB 1.864 B1 and B2. That is where we find both “*Regole*” and “*regole*”, with and without capitals. MB XVI, pp. 416 and 418; EMB XVI, p.330 and p. 332.

The first thing one may suppose is that at the Chapter Don Bosco, by “Rule(s)”, was referring to the Constitutions and by “Decisions”, to “*Deliberazioni*” or Conclusions of the Chapter in 1883. He had expressed himself indeed in a similar way when the conclusions of the Second General Chapter were published. In the preface he wrote: “The development and spiritual progress of our pious Society and its members largely depend on an accurate observation of our Constitutions and of these conclusions which are their practical implementation.” He goes on a bit further: “We shall be able to obtain it by an accurate observation of our Constitutions and these conclusions.”²⁷⁶ Each time he preferred the unambiguous term “Constitutions” in that preface.

Further the statement “in the two monthly conferences” meant a powerful reminder and perhaps not a redundant refresher of a conclusion of the Second and First General Chapter on interiorising the Constitutions.²⁷⁷

It was consequently no surprise that Lemoyne must have experienced the word “rule(s)” as less or even not suitable for the definite version of his script to the confreres, which was pedagogical in the first place, just because of the connotation with “Rule(s)” in the meaning of Constitutions. Here only the “*Regulations for the Houses*” is unmistakable and most suitable.

The benefit and appropriateness of the change are confirmed by the correspondence or similarity of quite some fragments of the comment in the writing for the confreres with directives in the *Rule or Regulations for the Houses*. We were able to demonstrate these correspondences often enough in this chapter. It does not exclude however that the similarity with ideas of the Constitutions can be shown. An example is the fragment where “unity of heart and soul” was discussed.²⁷⁸ This possibility of a reference was rather exceptional. Moreover it should be underlined that Lazzero often had parts from that *Rule [Regulations]* read out and explained according to the quotes in the first chapter.²⁷⁹ Fr Lemoyne’s point here is the thorough knowledge and the strict application of the articles of that *Rule*. I attribute it to Lemoyne because it is stated in an addition of his hand without any equivalent in the manuscripts *B* and *C*.

Buzzetti’s answer means that superiors, teachers and assistants need ownership of the *Regulations for the Houses*, certainly the “Rule” for Valdocco’s House too. They have to be familiar with it and bring it into practice with heart and soul. That can be called the “best way”, the most important means, because it contains so many aspects which have been discussed. If the superiors, teachers and assistants manage to interiorize that

²⁷⁶OE XXXIII [4-5]. Cf. MB XIV, p. 521; EMB XIV, p. 409.

²⁷⁷See in this chapter footnote 199. In 1868 things were even less complicated. The Rule or Constitution of the religious Congregation did not then yet have the significance they had after 1873 and around 1884. In 1868 Don Bosco could still have the friend say in the grapes story with respect to the house rules: “They [the boys] have house rules.” (Cf. MB IX, p. 160; EMB IX, p. 79.) It is even possible that this utterance had influenced Fr Lemoyne next to other elements from the story. In May 1879 it is already completely different. A figure with the appearance of St. Francis de Sales pointed out to him: “You have the rule(s) and other books. Practise what you preach and be vigilant.” (MB XIV, p. 125; EMB XIV, p. 90) In this context “le regole” were the Constitutions, of course.

²⁷⁸Cf. in this chapter footnotes 197, 198.

²⁷⁹In this chapter for example the footnotes 90; 94; 104; 190; 268; 274. In the first chapter the following footnotes apart from other elements: 23; 34; 37; 93; 95; 105.

means they will see that familiarity, love and trust flourish and they will not only break down the barrier but also clear it away completely.

It is as if Buzzetti and therefore Lemoyne also mean: ‘Look, everything which has been written down here is nothing new. You can find it all in the *Regulations for the Houses*. The conversation between Buzzetti and Don Bosco is a sort of compendium, a summary, a Magna Carta of his educational rules. It puts certain emphases into the spotlights, viz. “*amore*”, “*familiarità*” and “*confidenza*” (trust), but all that is in harmony with Don Bosco’s intentions. So we can conclude that everything that had to be told, is told now.

- *The welcoming, familiar, friendly, warm-hearted, cheerful relationship is “the best dish at a dinner”, i.e. in education [23-24]*

At least if we do not take Don Bosco’s and Fr Lemoyne’s way of narrating into account. Just like in the elaboration of stories which he told during good nights, Don Bosco is allowed here to be an unstoppable questioner. Even after Buzzetti’s comment and clear advice had come to a close, he could not be stopped.

Sometimes though he did not manage to ask one more question at the end of an otherwise vivid dialogue story. Circumstances got in his way. It occurred in a sort of dream dialogue with St. Francis de Sales in May 1879. He “wanted to ask more questions, but muffled thunder through the air with flashes of lightning” put an abrupt end to the conversation. After a heavy night with pain and dyspnoea [difficult breathing] in January 1883 he said: “I wanted to continue our conversation, but, in exquisite tones more resonant than can ever be imagined, he [Father Provera] began to chant solemnly.”²⁸⁰ The song’s ‘amen’ also meant ‘amen’ for the dream and no further questions were asked. Also in April 1868 he had not got what he had wanted. He was quite piqued then and concluded: “Does this mean that I cannot tell my dear boys anything?” And then he had another go: “Tell me at least what I can tell them and which piece of advice I am allowed to give them.” The extra question seems a stylistic device to raise the tension. The conversation partner allowed half of a concession for once then: “You may tell them whatever you will remember.”²⁸¹ As the friend removed the veil once more, Don Bosco managed to cap the story by a comforting finish. Over the years this sort of insistence could of course easily turn into a stereotype stylistic device.

Obviously a similar ultimate question could not fail in the writing of 1884. This time Don Bosco receives an answer which has racked the brains of the translators. In Italian it is a well-known phrase, which has got in Dutch the following as an equivalent since many years: “The best dish at a dinner is a cheerful face.”²⁸² This translation,

²⁸⁰MB XIV, p. 15; EMB XIV, p. 90 and MB XVI, pp. 16-17; EMB XVI, pp. 4-5.

²⁸¹MB IX, p. 160; EMB IX, p. 79 (partly re-translation).

²⁸²At any rate it is like this in the Dutch translation of volume XVII of the *Memorie biografiche*: MBN XVII, p. 74. That part of the translation appeared in 1966.

The Italian ran: “*Il piatto migliore in un pranzo è quello della buona cera.*” (MB XVII, p. 112 and E IV, p. 266.) The translation in EMB XVII, p. 91: “The most appetizing course in any meal is a good cheer.” In the *Constitutions* (1997): “At a dinner the best dish is a hearty welcome.” (*Constitutions...*, p. 261.)

however, is not evident, for the same dictionaries had led others previously against the common explanations to the following: “The best dish in a dinner is the one with the most powerful food.”²⁸³ This should not be ridiculed. The conviction that the main course should contain the most nutritious food could be behind it because Buzzetti’s reflections focused on the best and most powerful elements of the educational system. On the other hand it is not impossible that the new and still valid Dutch translation using the phrasing “cheerful face” was inspired by the French one: “*Le meilleur plat d’un diner, c’est un bon visage.*”²⁸⁴ Whichever way, it does not teach us very much. Questions inevitably rise: “How does this saying fit in here anyway?” “What is its meaning in the practical context?” As it is, there should be a link.

The context leaves no doubt as to the fact that something is expressed with respect to superiors, teachers and assistants in Valdocco. They had been the subject all the time anyway. It goes without saying that Buzzetti’s statement is the icing on the cake after the whole comment. A first useful key of interpretation is offered, I think, by Fr Valentini, Fr. Desramaut, Fr Viganò and the English translation.

° *The phrase concerns the Salesians at Valdocco*

In 1953 Valentini warned: “In order to prevent this last sentence from being misunderstood, it is necessary to be aware of the fact these words were addressed to the educators.” It is obvious. Yet he did not think it redundant to draw attention to it in Italy. The explanation he gave does hold good although it sounds somewhat exaggerated and is at times abstract, not to say woolly: “It is all about... reminding the Salesians that the affective [loving] norms of the preventive system are fully founded on Charity and have to be put into practice with the boys. The icing on the cake is the everlasting smile and the imperturbable peace. The educator has to show it continuously in order to give the pupil a nicer and more agreeable life and solve nine tenths of the troubles in that way.”²⁸⁵ The following sentence is very important: “The icing on the cake is the everlasting smile and the imperturbable peace.” Yet he did not make a neatly defined connection with the concept of familiarity and he did not paraphrase the word explicitly either. His strong emphasis on Charity or “Christian love” [*carità*] in his explanation must be attributed to the version which was at Fr Valentini’s disposal. In it “*amore*” had been substituted by “*carità*”. It clearly does not correspond with the actual text (*D*). He justly states in his comment that continuous kindness and imperturbable peace of mind should characterize the educator’s dealing with the boys. That is the icing on the cake to maintain the culinary metaphor.

A year later, in 1954, Fr. Desmaraut quoted a verse of the French author Corneille to make the Italian phrase comprehensible for the French speaking readers. “The phrase,”

²⁸³ Don Bosckring [Don Bosco Circle led by Father M. Baert], *De dromen van Don Bosco*, Oud-Heverlee, 1959. The degree of difficulty they experienced dealing with the phrase “*buona cera*” may be derived from another text. In volume IV of the Italian *Memorie Biografiche* we read: “*faceva loro buona cera*”. The Dutch translator had a wild guess and indeed preferred a “deviant” and shortened sentence. (MB IV, p. 375; MBN IV, p. 240; EMB IV, p. 260: “Brosio was seemingly receptive to the idea.”)

²⁸⁴ Cf. DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Saint Jean Bosco*, p. 165. This is still the official translation. Cf. *Constitutions et Règlements*, 1984, p. 249.

²⁸⁵ VALENTINI, E., *La pedagogia mariana...*, p. 151.

he wrote, must be perceived in the perspective of “Corneille’s verse which has become a proverb: ‘*La façon de donner vaut mieux que ce qu’on donne*’ [The way we give is more valuable than what we give].” As a simple explanation he stated: “Don Bosco appeals to the tactfulness of the educator.”²⁸⁶ The sensitive, polite way of behaving seems to be a present of the educators for the boys, i.e. their guests, invited to the meal of education. It is particularly significant to notice that Fr. Desramaut, like Valentini, interpreted the original proverb as a call up for the educators. It can certainly be questioned whether Lemoyne was actually thinking of “tactfulness”. Personally “*bon visage*” reminds me of an open, kind face, beaming eyes and smile on the face. That means with the words and in the spirit of the text [D]: thinking of “familiarity”, the confidential, jovial, affable and spontaneous dealing of superiors, teachers and assistants with the youngsters. That is the most important aspect just like a welcoming, kind and affable attitude of hosts and serving household members are extremely important for the guests, it is ‘the best dish’. Both this welcoming kindness and “spoiling the guests” are the true tokens of friendship.

In this sense I also understand Fr Viganò’s way of bringing it up to date. To explain the 1984 strenna he listed some of Don Bosco’s striking thoughts. Quoting the Italian phrase he put things into a modern perspective and suggested between two brackets: “a cordial face...”²⁸⁷ It corresponds with the explanation of the phrase in the “Zingarelli” dictionary. There we read: “*fare buona cera: accogliere, ricevere cordialmente.*” “*Fare buona cera*” means welcome cordially, receive kindly.²⁸⁸ Of course it is not revealed in this concise update whether Fr Viganò meant the lord and lady of the house and their personnel or all the people at the table. As he had put the interpretation under the subheading: Kindness in the School of Don Bosco” and as he spoke for the Sisters and members of the Salesian Family, we can assume he meant to apply the proverb to all people concerned with the welfare of young people. Precisely because he was also convinced that in the script of 1884 all Salesians were intended. All – both now and then – must be aware of the heart of the matter in dealing with the boys, i.e. affability, kindness, warm-heartedness, trust, joviality, in short healthy familiarity. All should act according to this.

° “*The best dish*” is “*a hearty welcome*”, i.e. a friendly relationship for the whole education time

The English translation is in the same line: “At a dinner the best dish is a hearty welcome.”²⁸⁹ A hearty welcome or reception can be interpreted as restrictive though. It would then characterise the good, kind, cordial and familiar reception at the start of a meeting. That however would not do justice to the actual objective of the complete context of familiarity in the script. A real welcome does indeed last the whole time of the meal. Of course, it goes without saying that again all educators have to take care of that hearty, kind, polite and familiar welcome.

²⁸⁶ DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Saint Jean Bosco*, p. 165/footnote 119.

²⁸⁷ VIGANO, E., “*Non basta amare!*” *strenna 1884*, Rome, Casa generalizia FMA, 1984, p. 9. In Italian: “un viso cordiale.”

²⁸⁸ ZINGARELLI, Nicola, *Lo Zingarelli 1996, Vocabulario della lingua italiana*, Zanichelli, 1996, p. 331.

²⁸⁹ *Constitutions...*, p. 261.

I should like to add here a lively and at the same time enlightening detail. After his return from Rome Don Bosco put together a commission. It had to investigate the opinions and suggestions of the confreres at Valdocco through oral contacts and written questions. S. Fumagalli, the vice prefect, seized the opportunity to put forward his point of view on the expulsion of certain boys. He thought that “they were far too patient with bad or depraved pupils”. To support his point of view he added how good youngsters thought about the matter: “They complain and do not understand why some rapacious wolves are allowed among them. They would not even be tolerated in a school governed by laymen. They would not be kept in a state school. They can stay here and are even treated kindly.”

To indicate they are treated kindly he uses the phrase “*si fa loro buon viso*”, which means “treat kindly, welcome cordially”. Fr Lemoyne copied this paragraph nearly literally in a summary of that submission, but he made a change in the phrase. It became: “*si fa loro buona cera*.”²⁹⁰ That did not change though S. Fumagalli’s meaning of the words. Next to other little alterations this change only showed the stylistic and linguistic care emoyne used to take of texts as an author who had a certain ambition and style preferences. The most important thing here is we are given a key to better comprehend the last words he had put into Buzzetti’s mouth.

It is a meaning which fits in very well with the end of the description in the first recreation scene with roaring and cheerfully shouting boys and the Salesians spontaneously living with the boys and taking part in the playground games. That scene had indeed been closed by this appreciation: “You could see that the greatest cordiality and confidence reigned between youngsters and superiors.” [6] One could obviously remark that the cordiality and trust in that comment apparently mainly came from the boys. It is clear however that it can only be so because the superiors themselves behaved cordially and confidentially. That is why it is necessary to take Valfrè’s next comment into account. This comment started by putting forward the concept of “familiarity” and subsequently referring to the creative power of familiarity, i.e. the power of jovial, kind, affable and familiar dealing of the Salesians with the boys. Particularly their conduct was a source of affection and affective love. [6] Their familiarity was already there in the text the best dish.

The suggested interpretation seems to be backed up by a couple of Don Bosco’s texts where he speaks about the meaning of the pedagogical look or eye contact. In a paragraph of the little treatise on *the preventive system* he wrote: “It has been noticed that in the case of some boys an unkind look [*uno sguardo non amorevole*] is more effective than a slap in the face would be.”²⁹¹ This is particularly the case when it means that the teacher or educator withholds from the boy concerned or refuses his usual friendly look, his normal, kind, warm-hearted and clear glance. It is from this sort of experiences and directives more than from reading Monfat that Francesia could write in his essay on

²⁹⁰S. Fumagalli’s text and the corrections and change by G.B. Lemoyne in: PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco...*, pp. 299/51-61 and 306-307. Cf. also the Italian explanatory dictionary “*Lo Zingarelli 1996*”, p. 331/C, 1.972/A. More on S. Fumagalli’s contribution in chapter 8 (second volume) of this study.

²⁹¹OE XXIX [108]. *Constitutions...*, p. 252/2.

imposing punishments: “Indeed we obtain more with a friendly glance [*uno sguardo di carità*], with a word of encouragement, which arouse confidence in a lad’s heart, than with a flood of reprimands.”²⁹² The positive effect of the open and kind eye contact will certainly not have been restricted to moments when giving punishments was necessary.

However important the eyes and the whole face may be, the total outward appearance and non-verbal behaviour play the key part. That is why a translation such as “the friendly and hearty appearance and the kind presence is the best dish in a meal” is to be preferred or as a variant: “the friendly appearance and welcome.” In the words of E. Valentini this is indeed the crowning glory of the conversation between Don Bosco and Buzzetti. It is the climax.

° *A cheerful and happy atmosphere should reign*

When we compare the Dutch and the later German translation with the original text, we quite quickly notice a shift in meaning.²⁹³ The stress is no longer on kindness, joviality or cordiality and tactfulness at the welcome and on the continuously charming, affable dealing with the guests and consequently, as far as the implementation is concerned, not any longer on the familiarity of the Salesians towards the youngsters. The stress is on the cheerfulness of the table partners, i.e. the youngsters: “The best course of a meal is a cheerful face.”

This translation may have been influenced by a synonym of “*fare buona cera*”: “*far baldoria*”. It carries indeed an archaic meaning: “*allegria rumurosa*” [noisy exuberant joy] or “*fešta allegra*” [merry, cheerful feast].²⁹⁴

No doubt cheerfulness and joy constitute a topic in this writing. It remains restricted though to the games and the atmosphere among the boys in manuscript *D*. It is doubtlessly a characteristic of the way of living together Don Bosco wanted and promoted. Consequently he asks Buzzetti “how the youngsters can get back the liveliness, cheerfulness and exuberance of the old days”. [11] Buzzetti’s answer cannot be misunderstood. Thanks to the boys’ “obedience, peace and cheerfulness will reign once again in the Oratory.” [18] Next to that Don Bosco considered another element very important to promote joy and cheerfulness on a festive day. From Rome he already asked Fr Lazzero on April 23 1884 to make sure that the coming feast of Mary Help of Christians should be a nice feast “also in the refectory... to drive away all melancholy and be happy [cheerful] in the Lord.”²⁹⁵ He insisted again on that element at the end of the letter to the boys in May 1884: “I want this feast to be celebrated with full solemnity, and Fr Lazzero and Fr Marchisio see to it that we are pleased [cheerful] in the refectory as well.” [34] It goes without saying that he wanted the boys to be satisfied and happy because

²⁹²E IV, p. 206. EMB XVI, p. 373.

²⁹³In German we find: “Der beste Topf auf dem Tisch ist ein frohes Gesicht” (KORTE, R., *Gedanken zu Don Boscos Brief aus Rom*, Don Bosco Aktuell, nr. 18, Ens Dorf, 1980, p. 13) next to “Der beste Gang beim Mahle ist ein frohes Gesicht” (*Konstitutionen und allgemeine Satzungen*, 1985, p. 260). The constant element is clearly “a happy” or cheerful face.

²⁹⁴ZINGARELLI, N., *Lo Zingarelli...*, p.190.

²⁹⁵Cf. footnote 103 in the first chapter. Cf MB XVII, p. 115; EMB XVII, p. 95. BOSCO, G., *Valentino...*, pp. 202-204; 226.

they got something festive and extra on their dish. He had wanted it that way already in 1864 when he had announced his arrival to the boys in Mirabello. “And what about the body?” he asked them in the letter. As an answer he was looking forward: “So I now I ask Father Prefect to see to it that we have a joyful time together with a nice picnic.”

²⁹⁶ The youngsters and the educators will have understood this very well.

The translation “cheerful” or “happy face” has indeed got a foundation. The foundation becomes more solid as the reports of the lay past pupils’ meeting for Don Bosco’s name celebration in 1880 was published in the periodical *Bollettino Salesiano* entitled: “*La gratitudine filiale a lieta mensa colla bontà paterna*.” The reporter certainly emphasizes the happy and cheerful [*lieta*] atmosphere around the table.²⁹⁷ It cannot be denied that only the happy and cheerful atmosphere with the table mates is thought of here. They think of the guests who are invited and seated around the festive table. The atmosphere is growing more congenial as the meal is being consumed.

That seems to be what inspired K.G. Fischer: “The best thing of a lunch is everyone’s satisfaction.”²⁹⁸ Did he think of the boys or the Salesians who lunched in the same refectory? Or was he inspired by the personal pronoun “us” used by Don Bosco? “Us” in the letter to the boys could be due to Don Bosco’s psychological identification with his youngsters. But even if “all” encompasses the adults and hosts at the table and satisfaction does not solely refer to the rather unusual or ‘copious’ dishes, but possibly also to the festive and cheerful ambiance, the translations “a happy face” or “a cheerful face” do not take the specific context of the combined or united version’s first large part into account.

I cannot help having the impression that the Dutch and German translations have overlooked the large and direct context focusing on one of the most important topics in the circular to the Salesians. It concerns the focus on the superiors’, teachers’ and assistants’ mission for a kind and jovial reception and a familiar, informal and confidential conduct. That is why I prefer the following translation: kind appearance, friendly, affable looks. This implies a benevolent welcome and a continuing jovial, interested meeting as well. That is the best dish completely in the spirit of the comment of Buzzetti, alias Lemoyne.

A statement in this matter which is not uninteresting, is this one: Treating topics in Don Bosco’s pedagogy and pastoral work such as joy, cheerfulness and happiness on the one hand and familiarity on the other hand authors do not refer to these meanings or translations of the saying at the end of the discussion between Don Bosco and his two past pupils. At the same time they silently pass by the evident quotation value of the final chord in the first large part of the combined version. They obviously do not seem

²⁹⁶E (m), vol. secondo, p. 59. Letter with a corrected date “beginning of July 1864”. Cf. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, p. 31. MB VIII, p.875; EMB VIII, p. 382.

²⁹⁷“*La gratitudine filiale a lieta mensa colla bontà paterna*”, *Bollettino salesiano*, anno IV, no. 9, September 1880, pp. 9-10. Translation of the title: “The child-like gratitude at the cheerful (merry) table with the fatherly goodness.”

In his memories of a similar event in 1877 G. Vespignani wrote: “The rest of the day passed by in the sincerest happiness culminating at the brotherly festive dish (“agape fraternal”). VESPIGNANI, G., *Un anno alla scuola...*, p. 71.

²⁹⁸FISCHER, K.G., Giovanni Bosco, *Pädagogik der Vorsorge*, p. 74.

to envy each other this rather tough point or to contend with each other for it.

3.5 *Close of the first extensive part of the “long” or united version which was meant for the adults [24-25]*

Just before he allowed Buzzetti to deliver that sort of proverb, Fr Lemoyne went back to the dialogue format. Don Bosco had again asked a question and Buzzetti had again emphatically taken the floor. He did not do so for long since he “finished speaking” after his rather enigmatic utterance, at least in this version. Apparently he has got nothing more to add to his comment on “something special [to be seen]” (15/o/) in what I called “the second scene of the listless recreation”. Don Bosco keeps quiet as well. He is impressed by the recreation described earlier: He went on “looking at that recreation with great displeasure.” No matter how much insight he has acquired or how many good pieces of advice he has been given, he does not feel fine at all. He is subject to a “great displeasure”. The latter wording could perhaps be better translated as “intense sorrow” or possibly “deep sadness”. “*Dispiacere*” is a synonym of “*rammarico*” in *C*, but its nuance certainly does not express less pain.²⁹⁹ As a consequence of this psychic burden his physical tiredness or “weariness” keeps increasing.

As he mentions an increasing sleepiness the editor can go back to the initial situation, in which Don Bosco lost his concentration by sleepiness during evening prayer and was troubled by absent-mindedness. He has been standing up apparently during all the time of the conversation and becomes aware of his “standing beside his bed” only when he tries to shake off this sleepiness and feels his swollen legs “hurting so much that he could not stand up any longer.”

During the first half of 1884 the confreres have been making mention of Don Bosco’s swollen legs. It goes without saying that Ceria also mentions it often in volume XVII of the *Memorie Biografiche* as for example during the night of February 10: “The swellings in his legs that had pained him for years, had now also reached in his thighs.” “He had a violent fever attack on the 15th . . .” Besides, “he passed entire nights sleepless.” “On the 17th he confessed to Father Lemoyne that the swelling in his legs had climbed to the pit of his stomach where he had a round swelling the size of an egg.” “On February 21, 22 and 23, Don Bosco took walks with great difficulty with Father Lemoyne.”³⁰⁰ We must imagine him being supported quite considerably by his secretary.

Early March Don Bosco left for France against the advice of Dr. Albertotti and his closest colleagues. Everything went off better and more successfully than most had feared or expected. On his way back early April he paid a visit to the houses at the Ligurian coast, but then he had to travel on immediately to Rome. “But in 1884, the difficulty he had walking in addition to the other infirmities from which he was suffering obliged

²⁹⁹In the *C* version it read “*vivo rammarico*” [great sorrow, fierce bitterness] versus “*vivo dispiacere*” [great displeasure, great dismay] in the definitive edition for the Salesians at Valdocco. (*Constitutions...*, p. 261.) It is not easy to sense or render the nuances of the synonyms.

³⁰⁰MB XVII, pp. 27, 30, 32; EMB XVII, pp. 12, 15, 16.

him to drastically limit his social calls.” “So many hardships and the additional burden of bitter disappointments aggravated his physical infirmities. His liver ached and one eye was inflamed. On April 27 he had an attack of fever that lasted three days. He felt so sick one night that he had to get out of bed. And at certain hours of the day he was utterly tired to the point of exhaustion.”³⁰¹

When he was eventually allowed to meet the pope at an audience on May 9, “Don Bosco knelt down and kissed the pope’s foot, then asked if he might remain standing, since he could not remain on his knees.” The pope must have reacted to that: “Do not stand, but sit” and he is said to have “motioned Bishop Macchi for a chair to be brought forward.”³⁰²

It is impossible, however, to say how long his absent-mindedness lasted that evening in May. We know such a thing need not last long. Real time may have been very short in contrast with the psychological perception. In agreement with his large editorial board G.B. Lemoyne chose real time using the sentence “It had already become very late”. So he could leave it to Don Bosco to decide to go to bed without thinking of another attempt at praying attentively. On the other hand he did not let Don Bosco to do so without resolving resolutely: “to write these lines to my sons [*figliuoli*]”. The whole sentence in *D* is interesting because it concerns the phrase which Lemoyne had written at the start: “For that reason I would have liked to write these few lines to you a week ago.” [3] In this way the writing has come full circle in its literary way.

At first sight the description of coming round differs little from the C version and the original end of the letter to the boys. However, apart from the above mentioned substitution of the word “*rammarico*” [dejection, bitterness] in *C* by “*dispiacere*” [displeasure, sadness] in *D* and the different wording “to write these lines to you, my dear sons [*o miei cari*]” in *C*, there are more important differences, also in comparison with the letter to the boys.

In the letter to the boys for example, strong feelings as a reaction to the continuation of looking on are not mentioned. To go on looking is not even mentioned at all. Don Bosco “felt his weariness increasing gradually whereas his friend was talking.” It looks as if he has been aware of this ever growing tiredness all the time. It looks as if he has not completely been abducted or numbed by a distraction. This possibility conforms with the full elaboration of the letter to the boys. By the way, in that letter Lemoyne did not use the word “dream”. That will be different soon in the combined or united version. In the latter edition Don Bosco feels the weariness going crescendo only at the end. That was when Buzzetti “stopped talking” and Don Bosco was staring very sadly at the situation in the playground.

Emphasis on tiredness is a very natural thing here. Don Bosco had already mentioned it with the first suggestions in manuscript A. [24, at the bottom of column A] He must have been tired, nay overtired after his trip to France and the tensions in Rome in February. This is proved by an incident that took place on his return to Turin in May 1884. “On

³⁰¹MB XVII, pp. 80, 89; EMB XVII, pp. 59-60, 67. Cf. in the first chapter of this study footnotes 100, 105 and in this chapter footnotes 30-32.

³⁰²MB XVII, p. 97; EMB XVII, p. 76-77.

his return from Rome on May 14 1884 Don Bosco had a stopover of some four hours at the station of Orte. It was late, about 10 P.M., and Don Bosco tried without success to doze on a waiting-room bench." In this condition he suddenly "saw" Louis [Colle] turning up. "Don Bosco walked up to him." Among other things he said to the "appearing" boy: "I am tired and in poor health." The state of confusion did not appear less striking from his questions addressed at the chief conductor. Even Fr Lemoyne was perplexed.³⁰³ It is clear Don Bosco then was a victim of a hallucination in such a stressful and exhausting situation.

At the end of the reading of the letter by Fr Rua the boys listening must have experienced the increasing tiredness and the pain in the legs as quite natural causes of absent-mindedness or dozing off while standing up. The generation of youngsters who attended classes at school in Valdocco in 1884, was not familiar with the sort of evening addresses in which Don Bosco made use of dreams. They were evidently not familiar either with the subtle hints in the letter of May 10 1884 where the editor suggested it was about a dream. According to the data of the *Memorie Biografiche* the last dream Don Bosco narrated for the boys, went back to October 24 1878. It was the so-called dream about the consequences of the holidays. He introduced it as follows: "You all know that dreams come in sleep and don't have to be believed. However, just as there is nothing wrong in disbelieving them, sometimes there is no harm in believing them, and they can teach things. So, too, this dream." And he concluded: "And this was my dream. Even though it is only a dream, it carries a message which will not harm those who accept it."³⁰⁴ The young listeners in 1878 belonged to a long row of generations who used to listen to Don Bosco's "dreams". As was often the case in the past, introduction and conclusion appeared to be explicit and put things into perspective also in 1878. Not the way the message was worded, but the "instruction" itself was most important.

The situation was completely different for the Salesians. As members of the Superior Chapter, novices or confreres they had been listening continuously to Don Bosco's dream accounts for years. They would have quickly understood that it was all about a dream although Lemoyne had put a fine Botticelli fabric on his 'painting' of this version in this particular case. It was usually obvious that Don Bosco's inspiration for moralizing stories was dressed up as a nightly dream.³⁰⁵

³⁰³MB XV, pp. 90-91; EMB XV, 69. Cf. MB XVII, pp. 119-120; EMB XVII, p. 99.

³⁰⁴MB XIII, pp. 761-764; EMB XV, p. 585 and p. 587.

³⁰⁵Don Bosco himself sometimes operated in both a concealing and revealing way. An example: "For some days now I have been thinking about a year motto for you, my dear boys. But until last night, no matter how much I racked my brains, I could think of nothing worthwhile. Even last night, after going to bed, I kept wondering what to tell you for the new year [1868], and for the life of me I couldn't think of a thing. After a long while worrying about it, I finally fell in a twilight sleep, that middle stage in which one can still hear and even reply if addressed. In such a state, then, I began to dream, though I wasn't really dreaming. I seemed to be in my own room. [This is a rather literal translation: "It was a moment in which one can hear and one is quasi conscious. It was a state of sleeping in which one can know what one does, hear what one says and answer if asked a question. In such a state I got overwhelmed by the power of a dream, though it wasn't really a dream. I seemed to be still in my own room."] (MB IX, p. 11; EMB IX, p. 6).

- *In the three versions there is clearly a different attitude vis-à-vis Buzzetti.*

In the letter to the boys Don Bosco calls him “the friend” [“my friend”] most cordially and in a most appreciating way. Manuscript *C* shows the greatest distance: “As the other one stopped talking.” It became less aloof, but quite cool in *D*: “My past pupil finished speaking.” The author must have had reasons for this. These cannot be derived from the text though.

We can state still that kindness and confidentiality were maintained throughout the complete letter to the boys. This effect was achieved not only by Don Bosco’s repetition of a typical detail, but also by the term “friend”. We read at the start for example: “At that moment my other past pupil, who had a very white beard, came up to me.” [6] This continues. When the description of the scene in the playground was finished, Don Bosco reacted: “Then I asked my friend with the white beard.” [9] Later when Don Bosco opposed Buzzetti: “Still, my dear, don’t you see. . . ?” [28] Still further in the conversation in order to introduce the recommendations for the oncoming feast of Mary Help of Christians: “In finishing I asked this friend of mine.” [30] And finally: “Whereas the [my] friend was talking.” [31, manuscript *K*]

It reads much more matter of factly in manuscript *C* from Buzzetti’s appearance onwards: “At that moment the other past pupil of the Oratory came up to me.” [6] And it further remains in that register. After the description of the recreation event it goes as follows: “Have you seen your boys?” – said that past pupil.” [9] And finally: “Whereas the other one stopped talking.” [24] Only in between it reads once: “Then that friend resumed.” [15] [This substituted the sentence in *B*: “And the other one resumed”].

The elaboration for the Salesians can be situated between *C* and *K*. At first it is jovial and familiar when Buzzetti is introduced: “At that moment my other past pupil, who had a very white beard, came up to me.” [6] However, it becomes matter of fact afterwards: “Have you seen your boys? that former pupil asked me.” A bit further: “That past pupil exclaimed.” [9-10] He even uses twice the pronoun “that”. And at the end of the conversation: “With that my past pupil finished speaking.” [24] In between again it reads as follows like in *C*: “Then that friend of mine [*quel mio amico*] resumed.” [15] Moreover Buzzetti himself used in *D* more often the polite form of “you” [*Lei*]. [15] The general impression is really neutral and aloof in that respect.

This elaboration must have been carefully prepared and changed. At the time Buzzetti must have been a popular character with the boys in Valdocco, being the chief of the printing office and the brass band front man. Perhaps both Fr Lemoyne and Don Bosco wanted to emphasize for the artisans and the pupils that he was a good past pupil and a really good friend of Don Bosco. These two aspects of the relationship between Don Bosco and G. Buzzetti have a model function for the young people at Valdocco. The aspects gave him more of a say and attributed more importance to his words. It seems to have been different for the confreres.

- *Furthermore it should strike us that the *C* version finishes as follows:*

“Determined to write these lines to you, my dear ones [*o miei cari*].” The letter to the boys has preserved this vivid address: “determined to write these lines to you, my dear boys [*o miei cari figliuoli*].” At the same time Fr Lemoyne specified that they were addressed to his “dear boys”. He formulates it again differently when writing to the adults: “resolved to write these lines to my dear sons.” In this way Lemoyne resumed the beginning of the circular: “my dear sons”, but in doing so the direct address “to you” [both in polite and more confidential form of you] of the letter to the boys got lost. It looks as if Lemoyne has gradually realized that it has become an explanation or a sort of conference for all confreres wherever at work rather than a writing to the Salesians in Valdocco. It was valid for all in the same way like the address at the General Chapter in 1880, particularly for those at work in schools.³⁰⁶

Those differences do not remove the impression that the end of the part addressed to the Salesians seems to be a slightly touched up copy of the completion of Don Bosco’s and Buzzetti’s full conversation in the *C* manuscript. This completion was the end of the *C* edition. The next sentences of the close of the so-called “long” version show a larger similarity with the conclusion to the conversation between Don Bosco and Buzzetti in the letter to the youngsters. Eventually both look like a re-written text of manuscript *C*.

These afterthoughts about the conclusion show that this short final section of the large circular meant for the Salesians in Valdocco, is mainly a refined and elaborated edition of *C*. It remains the real final part as no new considerations are added. The next sentences of the united version form a transition to the attachment of the remaining and not yet highlighted pages from the letter to the boys. Chapter 5 in the second volume will rightly focus on that transition. That is why the detailed discussion of the content-based and formal aspects of the part for the teachers, assistants and superiors in Valdocco can be considered as finished here.

³⁰⁶ Cf. footnote 1 in the first chapter).

4 Essential elements of Don Bosco's educational method

The topics in the large first part of the combined or united version form a compendium of essential elements of Don Bosco's educational method

In the previous chapter I have tried to achieve two things at the same time. It is an attempt at both quite accurately discussing composition and content (elements) of the circular to the Salesians in Valdocco and demonstrating that most ideas and points of view correspond with pedagogical and pastoral insights and convictions which Don Bosco had expressed earlier and elsewhere.¹ I wanted to do the second aspect more extendedly because I am not sure at all that Don Bosco inspired – let alone dictated – the insights and directives which Fr Lemoyne integrated into the first part of the joined version. He most probably did not read his secretary's text and certainly he did not correct it either. There is not a single trace of Don Bosco's check-up or correction in the manuscripts *B*, *C* and *D*, which are considered to be the oldest among the known manuscripts and may be the original ones. The corrections were accomplished by Lemoyne himself.² Moreover, Don Bosco never signed these texts.³ That is why it seemed to me quite necessary to amply illustrate that the topics that are discussed and sometimes the formulations too can be traced back to Don Bosco.

Fr Lemoyne must have acquired a strong ownership of Don Bosco's body of thought. No doubt this process became quite intense when they stayed together in Rome. P. Braido wrote about this period: "In the period of time (end of April and beginning of May 1884) the symbiosis of thoughts and feelings between Don Bosco and his secretary was so strong that not the slightest discord of intentions and ideas was imaginable between the Father and Master and the writings of the spiritual son and pupil."⁴ It is fair to mention as well in this context that Lemoyne's contacts as a rector of Lanzo and his years of passionate collecting Don Bosco's admired words and acts had furthered their common intentions and ideas already much earlier.

Referring to the real situation in Valdocco during the early eighties even a third aspect cropped up now and then apart from the two above mentioned aspects. That is why

¹I have done the latter more extensively than P. Braido did with notes going in the critical edition of the letter to the Salesians in 1984: BRAIDO, P., *La lettera...*, pp. 47-58.

²Ibid., p. 17 and, as far as the corrections go, p. 37/Sigle and p. 47/Sigle. Less clear is a paragraph in BRAIDO, P., *Luce intellettuale piena d'amore. Per il centenario di una "lettera pedagogica"*, *Orientamenti pedagogici*, anno XXXI, n° 6, 1984, p. 1068.

³Only in connection with the letter to the boys does P. Braido mention that Don Bosco himself signed it personally: BRAIDO, P., *Luce intellettuale...*, p. 1068.

⁴BRAIDO, P., *Luce intellettuale...*, p. 1068.

it seems meaningful to me to present a survey of the most important themes which were discussed. Two categories will help to achieve this. The first category contains confirmation of important points of view and the second one adds rather remarkable shifts of emphasis in Don Bosco's thoughts and theories and the ones of his confreres or Fr Lemoyne himself.

4.1 Confirmation of the quintessential elements of Don Bosco's "system" or method

4.1.1 The privileged position of the recreation

The first thing which prevails in the composition and discussion is the eminent position occupied by recreation time in the educational process. Only the description of the two contrasting scenes already takes some forty lines. The comment on them requires another sixty. It is a wonderful illustration of Don Bosco's answer to the interviewer of *Le Pèlerin*. His reply – "we have the assistance and the games" – could cause the impression of a certain witticism.⁵ Actually it comes to the heart of the matter.

Games and consequently the playground occupy a double role in education in Don Bosco's spirit.

- *No doubt it is about the games, recreation as such*

The description of the recreation time before 1870 (or 1860) shows that. Don Bosco was "overjoyed at the sight" which consisted of "a scene full of life, full of movement, full of cheerfulness." [6; 5] From his childhood on Don Bosco had experienced how important movement, games and healthy recreation were for children and youngsters. They provided an answer to an essential need of young people. He was disappointed and annoyed by the contrary, the absence of vivacity and movement in the second scene: "Too true! What an apathetic recreation!" [10] At the end of Buzetti's comment "he went on looking at that recreation with great displeasure." [24] It was a recreation time which was a mockery of what it ought to be according to him. The biographies of Michael Magone and Severino are brilliant testimony to Don Bosco's great appreciation of that aspect of recreation and games. They are samples of practical pedagogy which is crowned by the simple but unparalleled stance: "There has to be full liberty to jump, run, make as much noise as they please."⁶

- *Times of games and recreation enjoy an invaluable pedagogical appreciation in Don Bosco's preventive system*

⁵Cf. chapter 3, footnote 69.

⁶OE XXIX [105]; *Constitutions...*, p. 249/3.

In order to realize and experience that value, the educator, the teacher and the superior should spend these times amidst the youngsters. One of the reasons is: by simply joining in [5], by “participating in the things they like” [13], by “making themselves little with the little ones” [19] the Salesians can make themselves loved. This is however not really satisfactory for Don Bosco. The educators should be willing like himself to “continuously converse” with the youngsters.” [16] They should do so in an informal, genial, relaxed and relaxing way, but also educationally and with a sense of purpose. That could happen through the encouraging, interested, directing or warning “word in the ear”, “the word of one who loves.” [19-20]

Asking for the reason of this intensive and extensive confirmation of that particular aspect of Don Bosco’s educational method is also asking for the link between the third and the first chapter of this study. It is crystal clear that the editor based himself upon the “great conference” of 16 November 1882, which had a sequel in March 1883. He is not satisfied with simply repeating that there are some educators who “pass the recreation time among themselves”. On the contrary, he reprimanded his confreres in his writing to the Salesians “they were chatting among themselves without taking any notice of what the pupils were doing.” [15] The next thing he does is confirming Don Bosco’s stand that “whoever is not in function as a teacher or an assistant, has got to be with the boys as a friend, [and] a father.”⁷ At the same time he develops the idea. Now the idea of “brother” is more emphasized. These correspondences are obviously a strong piece of evidence proving that Don Bosco indeed “talks till he is blue in the face.” [17]

4.1.2 Cheerfulness, vivacity, joy are constitutive elements in the Preventive System

Rather by the way but audible enough description and comment prove that cheerfulness and joy are essential for an education in Don Bosco’s spirit. Things happening in the playground in the first scene do not only excel by “vivacity and movement”, but also by “singing and laughing on all sides”, by “cheerful rhubarb”. [5-6] Furthermore Don Bosco asks the crucial question: “But how can we bring these youngsters to life again, so that we can get back to the liveliness, the happiness, the expansiveness of the old days.” [11] Cheerfulness is indispensable. Cheerfulness belongs to it just like water belongs to a river.⁸ However, according to Don Bosco, this does not merely express some volatile outward pleasure, but specifically a deeper sentiment of satisfaction and existential joy: “Everything was a joy for me then” [16] And at the end of the insertion G. Buzzetti concludes: “the old peace and cheerfulness [*allegrezza antica*] will reign once again in the Oratory.” [18] Cheerfulness is indeed a constitutive element to Don Bosco.

⁷Cf. chapter 1 footnotes 54 and 55.

⁸On the part of joy or cheerfulness, cf. chapter 3 via footnotes 75-77 and 203. Cf. BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, pp. 311, 324-328.

4.1.3 The boys' obedience in the meaning of willing co-operation is a condition *sine qua non* in education

Again and again Don Bosco has explicitly referred to obedience as a prerequisite for a successful education.⁹ At first sight this point of view might seem to be less prominently present, but if one takes a closer look, one will discover it in several spots, for instance already in Valfrè's comment on the first scene. One of the points scored by a cheerful and really buoyant atmosphere in the playground is: "They will do everything they are asked by one whom they feel loves them." [6] Apparently it cannot be the kind of obedience forced upon people by disciplinary measures. It has got to be a compliance or willingness inspired by love. That was Don Bosco's message to the young cleric B. Vacchina during the school year 1876-1877: "If you want them to obey and respect you, make yourself loved."¹⁰ That is just like "it used to be" when "all hearts were wide open to their superiors when the boys loved them and gave them prompt obedience." [6; 16; 17] The same sort of obedience is suggested by the image: "May obedience guide the pupil as a mother guides her child." [18] Don Bosco prefers the kind of obedience which a loving mother gets. Naturally this image recalls the rather stereotype contrast with the obedience which a strict and authoritative father enforces. This sort of obedience clearly does not please Don Bosco. One also senses it in the following: "One who is loved can obtain everything, especially from the young." [20]

Obedience is expected from the boys' side. It is however, equally necessary for the Salesians to make themselves loved. Whether the boys can and will obey depends to a large extent on their familiar relationship with them.

4.1.4 In Don Bosco's educational method teacher, assistant and superior should try to be "a father, a friend and a brother" of the youngsters.

They should spare no pains to make themselves loved rather than to try to be respected or acquire authority

When Don Bosco speaks or writes on fatherhood he always does so explicitly mentioning or at least suggesting the qualifications "loving" or "amiable".¹¹ It is the educator's mission to be a father, a friend and a brother and rather to be loved than to be respected or feared. These are two main themes in Don Bosco's writing and speaking.¹² They are discussed very emphatically in this script, actually twice. They turn up a first time when a complaint is filed about "the superiors being thought of precisely as superiors and no longer as fathers, brothers and friends; consequently they are feared and little loved." [17-18] It seems a simple repetition of the statement during the meeting on 9 March 1883. Still, it is as clear as crystal that here Lemoyne lets Don Bosco say that he wants precisely the opposite. A second time around it is even more tangible. To be a brother

⁹Cf. footnotes 91-96 in chapter 3.

¹⁰MB XIII, p. 826; EMB XIII, p. 640. Cf. footnote 171 in chapter 3.

¹¹As in the booklet on *"The Preventive System in the Education of Young People."* Cf. OE XXIX [100]; *Constitutions...*, p. 247.

¹²Cf. footnotes 39; 42-43 and 155-156, 167, 180-182, 186-189, 221, in chapter 3.

of the youngsters is the positive feature of the teacher “joining the pupils’ recreation.” He “becomes a brother” through his interested and jovial presence. According to ms *C* he becomes a “respected brother.” [19]

4.1.5 Christian love [*carità*], the unselfish and ardent commitment for the boys’ general well-being continues being an important means to make oneself loved

A few years of Oratory practice had convinced Don Bosco that the daily work for abandoned and morally, socially and religiously at risk youth required a high degree of charity. In 1850 he wrote to A. Rosmini: “It is all about erecting a new building for the Oratory the goal of which is the civil, moral and religious education of a deserted youth. . . . But we need priests who are well trained in Christian love [*carità*].” This desire is along the lines of the fourth resolution at his ordination: “The charity and the kindness of St. Francis de Sales will guide me in everything.” Years of experience eventually led him to write in 1877: “The practice of this [preventive] system is wholly based on the words of St Paul who says: *Caritas patiens est, benigna est. Omnia suffert, omnia sperat, omnia sustinet.* Christian love is patient and kind. . . . Charity bears all things... hopes all things, endures all things.”¹³

In the circular to the Salesians at Valdocco that resolutely stated opinion receives a remarkable correction and important completion. Indeed, according to Buzzetti – Lemoyne, ‘caritas’ no longer remains the most important element: “I repeat: it is not enough.” [13] Its real meaning however is not lost. On the contrary, it still keeps its fundamental value, but “it is not enough.”

4.1.6 The Salesians have to stay loyal to the practice (implementation) of the Preventive System

Just like one of the conclusions of the Third General Chapter (1883) this piece of writing serves as a consolidation of his educational method [the Preventive System]. A few pertinent questions are crystal clear. [21-22] For example, “Why do the superiors move away from the observance of the rules Don Bosco has given them?” Due to the introduction of the term “system”, Buzzetti’s next question is unequivocal: “Why the replacement little by little of loving and watchful prevention of disorder, by a system which is less inconvenient and works faster for who is in command?” The next fragment: “So if you want the Oratory to return to the happy situation of old, then bring back the old system” sounds even more resolute. It means that the superior is focused on guiding the boys’ behaviour in a fatherly [or ‘paternal’] way. [22, ms. *C*] In this sentence the word “fatherly” will remind the future readers of the first paragraph of the little treatise on the Preventive System.

Prevention through being close, and assistance, not only means preventing or stopping what is detrimental to the development and growth of youngsters. It includes a positive

¹³The three quotes subsequently: E (m), vol. primo, p. 99/7-11; BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 400/23-24 and finally OE XXIX [102]; *Constitutions...*, p. 248-249.

contribution to becoming a good Christian and upright citizen. Buzzetti is allowed to illustrate this superbly through the role models of the teacher and the preacher who join in with the boys during recreation, take an interest in them and whisper a kind word of encouragement in their ear; [19-20] a little word of comfort, serious but jovial correction, a word of genuine interest and sympathy. Had that not been the core of Don Bosco's presence in the years before 1870? It was a heavenly, a wonderful time for the boys because Don Bosco was "always among the boys, especially during recreation." [15] That was not only to join in with the games, but also "to continuously converse with them", listen to them or seriously talk with them.

4.1.7 Moral integrity of the educator

In the definitive edition of the letter to the Salesians at Valdocco Fr. Lemoyne pays more attention to ideas which occur in telegraphic style in *B*, but hardly appear in *C* or even not at all. It concerns jealousy and particular friendships. It is clear he considered it necessary going on warning delicately for certain moral dangers. Caution is to be recommended particularly when implementing the Preventive System and its closeness to youngsters as is required by it. Don Bosco put it into strict and concise words in his *Little Treatise on the Preventive System*: "Teachers, craftsmasters and assistants must be of acknowledged morality."¹⁴ It is a constant factor in Don Bosco's addresses. It is too essential to the full context of the text to push it aside as incidental or irrelevant in this survey.

Each of these items is a confirmation of essential elements in education in Don Bosco's spirit. They are essential to such an extent that it caused Valentini to qualify this item as "the Magna Carta of the Salesian educational system". The qualification can be further justified if we connect it to other aspects which also occupy a prominent place in the circular to the confreres. These aspects are related to confidence, affective love [*amore*] and familiarity.

4.2 The explicit denomination and emphasis of elements which were less present in this way or even absent up to 1884.

It is virtually impossible not to acknowledge the emphasis both Buzzetti and Valfrè put on the necessity of trust for a good and successful education.

4.2.1 Trusting each other is indispensable in education

In a first reaction to the description of the pre-1870 lively playground scene the letter to the Salesians immediately puts the positive quality of mutual trust into the picture.

¹⁴BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, p. 85/440-441; *Constitutions...*, p. 249/2. Cf. footnote 251 in chapter 3.

This is realized by the summary thought: “You could see that the greatest cordiality and confidence reigned between youngsters and superiors.” [6] “And the [greatest] confidence” is a valuable addition to the previous *K* edition and a meaningful division of a suggestion in *A* where it was noted simply as: “may cordial trust enter”. Valfrè, the first past pupil, makes this quote even stronger and explains: “Look: familiarity (closeness) leads to affection [*amore*] and affection brings confidence.” [6] Subsequently he describes the beneficial influence of the trust thus created on the boys’ conduct. [6] After this emphasis it is rather strange that Don Bosco does not mention “confidence” when asking for the possibility of “re-animation” or revival. [11]

Like Valfrè, Buzzetti too emphasizes the need for confidence in order to “break down the barrier of distrust.” In doing so he turns cordiality and trust, which before had been juxtaposed, again into a unity: “replace it with cordial trust.” It concerns the kind of unity which Don Bosco had indicated when suggesting the cursory notes of manuscript *A*. [18] Also according to Buzzetti familiarity and the creation of trust belong together and the beneficial influence on the young is the same: “this confidence creates an electric current between youngsters and their superiors” and “hearts are opened.” [20] At the end of the conversation with Buzzetti, trust receives the position it deserves, i.e. in Don Bosco’s question: “And which is the most important means to allow familiarity, love and confidence to triumph?” [23] This instantly puts the three factors together in the spotlights.

Trust can be created and won by stepping down from teaching and the pulpit, by being amidst the boys on their level, by taking part in their conversations and listening to what preoccupies them, what makes them happy or sad. [19-20] The story of Don Bosco’s interview with Cardinal Tosti illustrates this brilliantly in the comments of chapter 3.¹⁵

Highlighting giving and prompting confidence is no unexpected novelty in Don Bosco’s thinking and speaking. The discussion of the content elements reveals that Don Bosco talked about it openly in his good nights.¹⁶ We could always add some more of his quotes. In the discussion of the text it was pointed out in the third chapter that he had once mentioned trust among the seven secrets of his method. In the conclusions of the Third General Chapter he put forward this aspect as one of the profits of the rector’s adequate intervention concerning punishments.¹⁷ Furthermore we ought not to forget that he gave the following recommendation to the rectors in 1876: “[Besides dealing kindly with the older boys] the superior should also show them great trust, especially those who seem inclined to the priesthood.”¹⁸ Trust is an “electric current” in both directions. The adults give and receive, receive and give. The boys give and receive, receive and give. Still the component trust does not turn up frequently in studies about Don Bosco’s educational method.¹⁹ It could be attributed partly to the small amount

¹⁵Cf. text via footnote 127 in chapter 3.

¹⁶Cf. footnotes 134, 160, 178 and footnote 209 in chapter 3.

¹⁷Cf. footnotes 140 and 209 in chapter 3 and footnote 79 in chapter 1.

¹⁸Cf. footnote 219 in chapter 3. Cf. MB XII, p. 83/item 3; EMB XII, p. 69.

¹⁹J. Schepens and E. Valentini wrote part of an article on confidence in education, but based themselves exclusively on “The Letters from Rome”. SCHEPENS, J., *De brieven uit Rome charter van vertrouwen en geloof in de opvoeding in Begeesterd door don Bosco*, Opvoeding en spiritualiteit, Oud-Heverlee,

of clear utterances by Don Bosco himself before 1884.²⁰ It can also be partly attributed to the uncertainty about the exact date and the content of his evening addresses written down after these good nights. That is the case for the little speech at the start of the school year 1863-1864.²¹ Lack of strong evidence or scientific usefulness of certain quotes also plays a part.²² On the other hand this remarkable silence about the role of confidence in education is incomprehensible, for in one of his works P. Braido quotes straightforwardly the recommendation of 1876.²³ Moreover he supplied a critical edition of the ten “*General Articles*” in 1987. There Don Bosco wrote in 1877: “They [the great majority of the youngsters] have to be encouraged to work. This is done by small rewards and by showing you put a great trust in them without neglecting surveillance.”²⁴ That is a very important guideline for its very content obviously, but also because Don Bosco seamlessly joins the 1876 conference. A year later in that standard of the *General Articles* he would again emphasize trust, which educators need to have in the boys. This article becomes even more significant if one pays attention to the context. This context consists of a concise summary of essential articles or pedagogical guidelines. Finally there are the conclusions of the Third General Chapter. They have been taken down in a sufficiently reliable way.

Anyway, in this circular to the Salesians not only the need for the boys’ trust towards their educators is very strongly emphasized, but also the ways how educators may win that trust.

The emphasis on the term familiarity is no less explicit. Both Valfrè’s and Buzzetti’s comment introduce the term and put it in the full limelight.

4.2.2 Familiarity

After Valfrè and Don Bosco had watched the scene of the first described recreation time with great pleasure, Valfrè concluded: “You see, familiarity (closeness) creates love and love creates confidence.” [6] He uses the word familiarity to characterize the way Don Bosco’s co-workers dealt with the boys and the way the boys dealt with “the clerics and the priests.” This way consisted of Don Bosco’s co-workers playing, singing and shouting spontaneously and cheerfully with the boys and also of their jovially relating stories or engaging in a familiar conversation. This confidential and jovial way of dealing with each other manifested itself through “the greatest cordiality and the greatest confidence” according to the editor’s appreciation. [6]

Buzzetti too thinks that familiarity is of crucial importance, especially “during recreation”. An unforced, jovial and confidential attitude towards the boys is absolutely indispensable “to break down that barrier.” [18] For him too familiarity consists of the

Don Boscovormingscentrum, 05, 2003, pp. 55-69. VALENTINI, E., *La pedagogia mariana...*, pp. 144-147.

²⁰ As far as the letters are concerned only in: E (m), vol. terzo, pp. 144 and 501. E (m), vol. quarto, p. 164. BIESMANS, R., *De brief uit Rome aan de jongens...*, pp. 31 and 36.

²¹ BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire...*, p. 345.

²² Cf. RICALDONE, P., *Don Bosco educatore I*, Asti, 1951, pp. 197-201 and further pp. 201-228.

²³ According to footnote 219 in chapter 3.

²⁴ BOSCO, G., *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali*, Rome, LAS, 1987, p. 217/6° and p. 215/5°.

Salesians “being always among the boys, especially during recreation” as had already been mentioned in the paragraph on recreation following Don Bosco’s example. [15] Recreation time is the ideal moment for a kind and informal contact and talk and for a familiar dealing with each other to jovially win hearts. This presence is active. It means that the grown-ups “love the things the boys like.” [17] It also means that the educators “make themselves little with the little ones.” [19] They should “join the pupils in recreation and become like a brother” and “say a good word.” [19] They are present among the boys “as one of them.”²⁵ Without this close, kind, cordial and jovial attitude, without these signs of genuine interest in the actual personality of the youngsters and the things that capture their interest, in one word without familiarity, the boys cannot experience the educators’ affection. Thanks to this familiarity recreation and the whole life at Valdocco can be “a foretaste of heaven”. [16]

Don Bosco had already known and appreciated the attitude of familiarity much earlier. This can be proved by the description of how he dealt with his friend Comollo and the outspoken desire of confidential and jovial contact with his superiors in the seminary. His knowledge and appreciation of familiarity are also proved by the guidelines for rectors on how to deal with youngsters in the context of his care for religious vocations in 1876. His advice to Vespignani is very clear.²⁶ In spite of these signs of appreciation of “familiarity” Don Bosco was very much aware of the negative connotation of the word. He was afraid of certain excesses and was often reticent on familiarity and preferred other terms to characterize his very own style of dealing with youngsters.²⁷

This piece of writing contrasts sharply with the hesitations and the use of other words and expressions. Never before had it sounded so clearly, radically and predominantly. It is a very important shift of emphasis and content, even from manuscript *B* to *C*. This must be doubtlessly attributed to Lemoyne himself.

4.2.3 Affective love

A similarly remarkable and clear nuance occurred through the use of the word “*amore*”, affective love.

- Don Bosco has frequently asked his co-workers to take more pains or care in the first place for being loved rather than being respected or even “feared.” To put it still in another way: to make a greater effort to be loved than to acquire authority. Never

²⁵Cf. footnote 221 in chapter 3.

²⁶Cf. inter alia footnotes 203, 221 in chapter 3. A clear insight into the normative pedagogical views at the time is more important than you might think at first sight: it is a focus in a listing of aspects which M. Rua is to “inspect” (audit) during the years 1874-1876 in every single house. Cf. BRAIDO, P., *Don Michele Rua primo autodidatta...*, pp. 105-106 and pp. 139/20-21. As far as the youngsters are concerned, it is mentioned in a brief telegram register: “Devotion to study and confidential, spontaneous dealing (famigliarità) with the teachers, assistants and superiors.” It is about how the boys behave towards their educators. We may conclude it is about a positive quality as “familiarity” is put on the same level as the positive “study-diligence.” Cf. BIESMANS, R., *Op weg naar de ‘brieven’ van 10 mei 1884...*, p. 44.

²⁷Cf. via footnotes 140 and 209 in chapter 3. Quite an extensive discussion in BIESMANS, R., *Amorevolezza...*, pp. 189-207.

or seldom did he however explain how they had to go about making themselves loved in practice. If he expanded on it, he wrote in the sense of one of the ten *General Articles* (1877): “He [teacher and/or educator] will reach that great goal if he shows in words and even more in actions that all his efforts are aimed at the spiritual and temporal welfare of his pupils.”²⁸ He meant by this that their indefatigable and self denying commitment and hard labour for the boys would yield reciprocal love. In 1880 this is the basic tone in an address to past pupils who had become diocesan priests. “In order to succeed with youngsters”, he said, “you must take great pains to deal with them in a charming and agreeable way. Make yourselves loved, not feared.” His fundamental advice follows next: “Show them convincingly that you desire the saving of their souls. Correct them with patience and charity and above all, do not strike them.” He talked also about “signs of *amorevolezza*” [affability, kindness, gentleness]” but did not come up with any illustrating examples.²⁹ His co-workers sometimes were even less practical. In a certain meeting it remained: “The assistants should love each other and advise each other well on the way in which they can win the boys’ obedience, affection [*amore*] and respect or esteem [*stima*].”³⁰ Still, to indicate the positive sentiments of the boys for their teachers, assistants and superiors they used in August 1871 the words “*amore* and “*stima*”.

All in all it is very comprehensible that in the discussion Don Bosco defends himself and his co-workers versus Buzzetti by referring to the efforts over all the years and his and his co-workers’ complete devotion to the physical, spiritual and moral well-being of his boys. These are so many pieces of evidence of his and their charity, of his and their active and effective Christian love [*carità*]. “*Caritas*” is the driving and bearing power, the most important component of his obliging life.

- This very rock solid conviction is pulled down by Buzzetti’s comment in the script. *Caritas*, the effective and active love is really not the most important element in education and pastoral care, but “*amore*” is, affective love, affection. [11 and 17] The word “*amore*” had already been the verbal option in de drafts of the manuscripts *B* and *C*. It must be a strongly intended shift of emphasis. It clearly is a key fragment. The explanation of how educators can win this affection or love is not scarce at all in this circular. There is no stopping Buzzetti demonstrating things very visually.

²⁸Footnote 82 in chapter 1.

²⁹Footnotes 173 and 225 in chapter 3. At times the meaning of words is synonymous. St Francis de Sales is Don Bosco’s personal guide in a dream that he related on 9 May 1879. Don Bosco asked him what he should do to promote vocations. The guide replied to this: “The Salesians will harvest many vocations by their good example, by being endlessly kind [*trattando con somma carità*] toward their pupils” [by dealing with the greatest charity].” In other circumstances Don Bosco himself preferred the phrase: “deal with them affably, kindly” using the term “*amorevolezza*”. A few moments later in the same tale Don Bosco asked: “How are we to maintain [better] the right spirit in our houses?” The answer of his guide went as follows: “. . . dealing kindly with them.” “*Trattare con benevolenza*” means ‘kindly, cordially, affectionately’ dealing with them. Cf. MB XIV, p. 124; EMB XIV, p. 89.

³⁰Footnote 165 in chapter 3.

One first “way” consists of “taking part in their youthful interests.” [13] Entering into their interests. Share their lives. Next Buzzetti reminds Don Bosco of the exceptional meaning of “always staying among the boys” and “engaging in conversation with them” [16], always of course in the way Don Bosco put it into practice. That is why he encourages him to insist on his co-workers dealing with the boys in the same way he had done [16] i.e. step down from teaching and preaching, “join the boys in recreation”, talk with them personally [“whisper a good word into a boy’s ear”], listen to their joys and complaints [19], have them experience through this that they themselves and their desires and preferences are worthwhile for the educators. Furthermore it contains “become themselves little with the little ones” [19], empathize and move onto their level, “become (like) brothers.”

It is this affection, this kind of love which “can obtain anything” [20]. Anything. That also means the willing obedience and open-heartedness [6, 16, 17, 20], which are indispensable factors for successful education according to Don Bosco.

Also Fr Fascie, the General Councillor for schools, had discovered the heart of the system in 1920. He then wrote that Father Superior, Fr Albera, “had recommended this love [*amore*], this affable (cordial) interest in youngsters, which had been the secret of Don Bosco’s admirable influence on youngsters.” Fr Albera had done so when he had announced the singular edition of Don Bosco’s *Little Treatise on the Preventive System*. He had backed up his recommendation by “standards and precious stimuli from a letter of the Founder dated 10 May 1884.”³¹

The emphasis on affective love in Fr Lemoyne’s explanation does not deny effective love or charity though. This is quite comprehensible for Don Bosco completely agreed with Vincent de Paul’s often repeated words on love for God. Don Bosco had clearly put the experience and conviction of this holy man into the picture in his work, *The Christian Guided onto the Road to Virtue and Decency* (1848 and 1876). There we read the quote: “So many acts of love for God and so many other feelings of a tender heart, however good and desirable they may be, will still be suspect if they do not go hand in hand with effective love.”³² According to Don Bosco this statement was quite valid.

- As “*amore*” occupies such a central position and the concept is explained so elaborately in the manuscripts *C* and *D* it will not astonish that Braido had once characterized this text as “the poem of educational love.”³³ On the other hand it does

³¹ *Atti del Capitolo Superiore della pia società salesiana*, Catania, Milaan, Parma, SEI, 24 June 1920, p. 14. Cf. the circular letter of 6 April 1920 in: *Lettere circolari di D. Paolo Albera ai Salesiani* Turin, SEI, 1922, p. 312. Don Fascie published the original version of document D.

³² OE XXVIII [38]. In 1876 Don Bosco published the same book, “*The Christian guided in the practice of virtue and social life according to the Spirit of St. Vincent de Paul*” a second time. A little before he had written about St. Vincent: “He was not satisfied with loving God in a simple affectionate way [*semplice amore di affetto*] and cherishing high sentiments about his goodness and great desires for his glory, but he turned this love into actually *effective love*.” Ibid., [37-38]. Don Bosco himself italicized the letters.

³³ In Italian: “*Il poema dell’amore educativo*.” In 1954 P. Braido had written a short contribution with the challenging title: “*It does not suffice to love to be good educators*.” (BRAIDO, P., *Non basta amare per essere buoni educatori* in: *Orientamenti pedagogici*, vol. 1, 1954, pp. 87-89). Speaking out in

astonish as he gave this appreciating title to an edition which deviated in considerable parts from the original Fr Lemoyne version [the *D* manuscript], on which this study is based. In the fifties and sixties Braido used the text of the editions of CERIA.³⁴ Something strange had occurred in these editions though. The word “*amore*” had been replaced by “*carità*” in crucial spots. It happened for example in the key fragment where Buzzetti says: “*Coll’ amore*” (by affection, by affective love). [11] Also in Buzzetti’s question: “Why do people want to replace love with cold rules?” the word “*carità*” had replaced “*amore*”. [21-22] In other places “*affetto*” has pushed aside the original word “*amore*”. This is the case for example in the second part of the evocation of feelings in past times which Buzzetti qualifies as inspiring past pupils with affection because this (affectionate) love was the standard or the rule then. [16] In the first part of the sentence “*amore*” had been preserved. In the second part however it had been replaced by “*affetto*”.³⁵

Despite these changes, which he had published himself in 1959, Braido discovered the heart of the first part of the united text. He wrote pointedly and correctly in the introduction to this edition: “The Practice of the ‘Preventive System’, as a general educational methodology, is a work of *ratio* (reasonableness) and religion, realized in the climate of charity (*carità*), or rather the climate of affective love (*amore*), of “*amorevolezza*” better still, the style of Don Bosco’s pedagogy.”³⁶ The gradation from “rather” to “better still” is very significant. He clearly used “*amorevolezza*” as a synonym of the term “*famigliarità*”, which dominates the writing to the Salesians in Valdocco.

- The underlying motivation of the word changes in certain editions has not been revealed up to now. It is quite surprising that Fr Lemoyne must have executed the changes himself in a version which was written later on. It reads as if he had not sensed that these changes crashed frontally with the tendency of a very large part of the comment on both pictures of the second playground scene.

In the meantime the later introduction of the concept “*carità*” does not seem to be carried through consistently. “*Amore*” has simply been preserved in several utterances or thoughts, for example in: “You cannot show affection without this familiarity.” [18] It looks less evident in: “If we have this true love, we shall not seek other than the glory of God” and “when this love languishes.” [21] This kind of unchanged fragments was enough to inspire Braido for the sharp characterization “poem of educational love”. This strong appreciation is obviously all the more justified for the original text with the dominating word “*amore*” with respect to the first part of the combined version.

this way he wanted to denounce self-complacency and firmness versus any renewal or updating of the Salesian system in the pedagogical field.

³⁴E IV, pp. 261-269. MB XVII, pp. 107-114; EMB XVII, pp. 85-94. Besides, that is still the text in the several editions of the renewed *Constitutions and General Rules*.

³⁵Cf. footnotes 83, 138 and 146 in chapter 3.

³⁶BRAIDO, P., *10 Maggio 1884* in: *Orientamenti pedagogici*, anno VI, n° 4, 1959, p. 547.

4.2.4 Religious foundation

Where Valfrè pointed out to Don Bosco the significance of familiarity and affection, it was clear that his statement was exclusively based upon human considerations. He said: “You see, familiarity (closeness) leads to affection, and affection brings confidence.” [6] This also goes for Buzzetti’s initial comment. It is his conviction that the boys “feel they are loved” if the educators “take part in their youthful interests” [13] or also when educators and teachers “like what pleases the youngsters.” [18] To him too familiarity consists of “demonstrating [making experience] that one loves.” [18] Precisely with respect to this latter point of view, Buzzetti reveals the underlying motive to deal with the boys in a familiar, jovial and natural way. To elaborate this comment Lemoyne makes use of a fundamental thought from the suggestion in manuscript *B*, which may have been inspired by Don Bosco himself during their stay in Rome. A first version of this inspiration concerns a question of Don Bosco and the answer of an interlocutor who had not yet got a name. Don Bosco asked the question: “What do they want from us then?” The answer was: “Through knowing and feeling that they are loved in the things they like, the boys are led to see the love [of the educators] in those things too which they find less attractive.” The boys should also learn to like doing these less agreeable things.” The listing of “these things” is succinct [“discipline, study and self-denial”], but typical of the situation of the youngsters in the Oratory. [13-14]

The reply did not appear clear enough for Don Bosco. He wanted further explanation. He got it with the notification in the manuscripts *B* and *C*: “The Divine Saviour made himself little with the little ones and he bore our weaknesses.” [14] Manuscript *C* contains a second version of this orientating thought. It is a separate sentence, but it is linked already with the concept of familiarity. “Familiarity is the way Jesus Christ made himself little with the little ones and bore our weaknesses.”³⁷ [19] The link between familiarity and Jesus’ conduct is instantly clear. It looks as if it consists of Jesus putting himself on the little ones’ level and loving to be among them despite the weaknesses he faced. He bore them because he liked and loved them.

The *C* edition and the letter to the boys expanded this idea. The *C* edition changed “for the little ones” (in *B*) into “with the little ones.” Fr Lemoyne probably did so because he meant “together with them”, “among them”. The religious reference was even strengthened in *C*: “You see, the model of familiarity.” In the letter to the boys the connection between the quotation and familiarity did not appear at all. The word familiarity was simply omitted. However, with an eye on Don Bosco himself and the Salesians, a new quotation was inserted: “Jesus Christ did not crush the bruised reed nor quench the

³⁷BRAIDO P., *La lettera...*, p. 36/59-60 The identification with the little ones has had a profound impact on the spirituality of educators and care providers in the Christian tradition. It also had a great impact on Don Bosco himself according to his impulse: “Let us treat young people as we would treat Jesus if he were a pupil in one of our schools.” (MB XIV, pp. 846-847; omitted in EMB XIV.) It influenced his co-workers too. In September 1884 the first draft of a coat of arms for the congregation was presented. On the lower portion of the design, a waving streamer with the words: “Sinite parvulos venire ad me” [“Let the little ones come to me”]. Eventually the motto “Da mihi animas, caetera tolle” [Give me souls, take away the rest] would prevail thanks to the argumentation of Don Bosco. (MB XVII, p. 365; EMB XVII, p. 337.)

smouldering flax.” As a conclusion: “He is your model.” In the circular for the adults it was again put into the context of familiarity: “He is our master in the matter of familiarity [of the friendly approach].” [19] The second quote was shifted to the comment on the power of love, which the educators can receive from youngsters. Again it is not only the human experience of affection which can strengthen them to help bear fatigue, ingratitude, disruption, failures and neglects of the boys. Affection is supported and deepened by the impressive example of Jesus Christ. He is their role model in bearing and tolerating because he did not crush the bruised reed nor quench the smouldering flax. [20] It is a broad interpretation of the pericope in St. Matthew’s gospel, which became clear when discussing the comments, but both the quotation and the message fit in better there.

Solely human underpinning of the fundamental and basic attitude of familiarity does not suffice. A deeper and spiritual foundation must motivate the acts of the Salesians.

Moralizing applications must have been current among Don Bosco’s closest co-workers in those years. G.B. Francesia proceeded in the same way in a written out but probably not published treatise on punishments. He justified his views, which he often borrowed from a work by P. A. Monfat, personally at a deeper level by referring in several spots to Jesus’ acts. This is the case where he states that the teacher or educator has got to allow the boy “time to reflect, to return to his senses, to become aware of his wrong and of the justice ad need for punishment, and thus allow himself to benefit from it.” He added as a foundation to this conduct: “I am always reminded of how our Lord chose to deal with St. Paul... Jesus in His goodness did not strike Saul down *immediately*. He threw him to the ground only after a long journey, after he had had time to reflect upon his mission and was far from anyone who might strengthen his resolve to persecute the Christians. I would like my dear Salesians to form themselves after this divine model, so that with enlightened patience and solicitous love, they may in God’s name await the *opportune moment* to correct their pupils.”³⁸ Also to him Jesus Christ was the model for the patient and temporizing way of dealing with the youngsters, which can be seen as evidence of their real love for the boys.

No less relevant is the following fragment from Fr Francesia’s text: “Let us place ourselves at their service [of the boys] like Jesus, who came among us to obey rather than to command. Let our authority over them be to serve them with increased dedication. Thus did Jesus act towards His apostles, tolerating their ignorance, rudeness, and shaky fidelity, reaching out to sinners with such ease and friendliness [*con una dimestichezza e familiarità*] as to astonish some people, practically to scandalize others, and to kindle in many the blessed hope of receiving divine pardon. Hence he tells us to be “meek and humble of heart.”³⁹

In the same way Fr Francesia summoned people to bear disagreeable things following

³⁸BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 331/128-144. EMB XVI, p. 371.

³⁹BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco educatore...*, 332/153-161. The well-known Gospel text in Matthew 11, 29. EMB XVI, p. 371.

41a and 41b For both quotations from the Little Treatise: BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, p. 84/429-433. *Constitutions...*, pp. 248-249. Cf. TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, pp. 61-69.

Jesus Christ's example, but even more striking is the other image he offers as an ideal to the educators. Jesus Christ confidentially, gently and politely deals with sinners, adults and youngsters alike, who are weak and failing. It is an image which deviates from the dominating representation of Jesus as someone who sacrifices himself completely, effaces himself, who is willing to serve the sick, weak, expelled and sinful people in any possible way. Jesus is the one who sacrifices his life, practises Charity in the highest degree and is the incarnation of active, effective love. Next to this, Francesia and Lemoyne put another example: Jesus, the man of the spontaneous and open-minded contact, the man of the heart conquering affable social intercourse. The way Jesus dealt with children and adults is extremely important to them. Not only his self-sacrifice, but also his confidential, intimate, kind, tender and familiar interaction must inspire educators to imitate him.⁴⁰

Perhaps both authors wanted not only to strengthen, but also to develop the way Don Bosco himself had stipulated in his *Little Treatise on the Preventive System*. Probably in the wake of Teppa, Don Bosco had quoted from the thirteenth chapter of the letter to the Corinthians in the little treatise: "The practice of this system is wholly based on the words of St Paul who says: *Caritas patiens est, benigna est, omnia suffert, omnia sperat, omnia sustinet.*" [*Caritas* or Christian love is patient and kind; it bears all things, but hopes all things and endures all things.]⁴¹ Apart from bearing and enduring the words patient and kind are present. Yet both authors dig deeper. They develop these concepts and both visualize and make these aspects more concrete.

The quotes and interpretations of Don Bosco and his co-workers indicate that the Preventive System and particularly the Salesian relational style of social intercourse stem from a Christian spirituality. That could explain why Don Bosco boldly concluded in the little treatise: "Hence only a Christian can apply *the Preventive System* with success."⁴² He means the kind of Christian who is inspired by Jesus Christ himself. It is certainly a statement which shows a strong connection with an utterance of his during a conversation with the Turin prefect at a not quite defined point in time. Don Bosco is supposed to have said at that moment: "I do think it is impossible to obtain something good from the youngsters without religion."⁴³

It is however possible that it had become trendy among the confreres to clear the "evangelical" sources of inspiration of the preventive system. This is shown in a conclusion of the two General Chapters which were held in 1883 and 1886. The conclusions were edited together in one document. The conclusion which is meant, has been formulated as follows: "One has to see to it in all possible ways that the boys [can] be aware of their superiors loving and respecting them. This is obtained by treating them in the

⁴⁰Here we can refer to the double image in the *Constitutions* of the Salesians. There we find in article 11: "Reading the Gospel we become more aware of certain aspects of the figure of the Lord... The preoccupation of the Good Shepherd who wins the hearts by gentleness and self-giving." (*Constitutions and General Rules*, p. 21). In Italian "*con la mitezza e il dono di sé.*" (*Costituzioni...*, p. 21.)

⁴¹BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, p. 84/429-433. *Constitutions...*, pp. 248-249. Cf. TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, pp. 61-69.

⁴²BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, p. 84/429-433. *Constitutions...*, pp. 248-249. Cf. TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, pp. 61-69.

⁴³MB XIII, p. 557 and also p. 558; EMB XIII, p. 430-431/footnote 3.

true spirit of Christian love recommended by the Holy Gospel.”⁴⁴ Which particular texts in the New Testament crossed the minds in this respect remains uncertain, but we may surely think of Matthew 5,43; 19,19 and 22,39. ⁴⁵ These conclusions do not only put the active and effective Christian love into the picture, but with “loving and respecting” also the affective love.

Moreover, in the spirit of Fr Lemoyne’s explanation, all actions of the Salesians must be inspired by “seeking the glory of God and the good of souls.” [21] Manuscript *C* also mentions “following Jesus Christ’s example”, an explicit addition which he dropped in the definite version for whichever reason. [19] It is a fact that he wanted to give a foundation to the covering thought in a first stage of the elaboration. From the compositional point of view it is a pity he omitted that phrase from manuscript *C* in the definitive version.⁴⁶

After all they are only scarce elements in the text meant for the Salesians, but their presence does matter and is of course important.

4.2.5 Conclusion

When we consider the complete picture of essential factors for education, it turns out that the extended part of the proposed circular intended for adults is so rich that Braido considered Don Bosco’s little document was even a “a pedagogical manifesto.”⁴⁷ That is in line with the appreciative name Valentini gave it. To him the written communication to the Salesians at Valdocco was “the Magna Carta of the Salesian educational system.”⁴⁸ If one takes into account that the discussion on its composition and particularly the coverage of the different aspects in the first part of the combined or united version have shown how many of Don Bosco’s essential thoughts and points of view have been assembled in that piece of writing, the above-mentioned characterizations can certainly be justified.

To put it less lyrically we can state that this item was a compendium of Don Bosco’s most important and characteristic pedagogical beliefs. That is why a serious and profound acquaintance with this “little document” is still highly desirable.

⁴⁴OE XXXVI [270-271]. Cf. also footnote 254 in chapter 3 and 120 in chapter 5 (in the second volume). These conclusions were published in 1886. So, there may have been influenced by the united version (document *D*) as far as the wording of that conclusion is concerned.

⁴⁵Probably also John, 15,13; Math. 5, 9-13 and 11,29; Luke, 19,1-11.

⁴⁶It does not cause any surprise consequently that P. Stella has not taken up this reference into the paragraph on “Religious Elements in Don Bosco’s Educational System”. STELLA, P., *Don Bosco nella storia... II*, p. 469.

⁴⁷BRAIDO, P., *10 Maggio 1884*, p. 545.

⁴⁸VALENTINI, E., *La pedagogia mariana...*, p. 137.

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