

# **Don Bosco's Oratories in 1849-1852**

## **Conflict, Crisis and Resolution**

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### **Introduction: Historical Context**

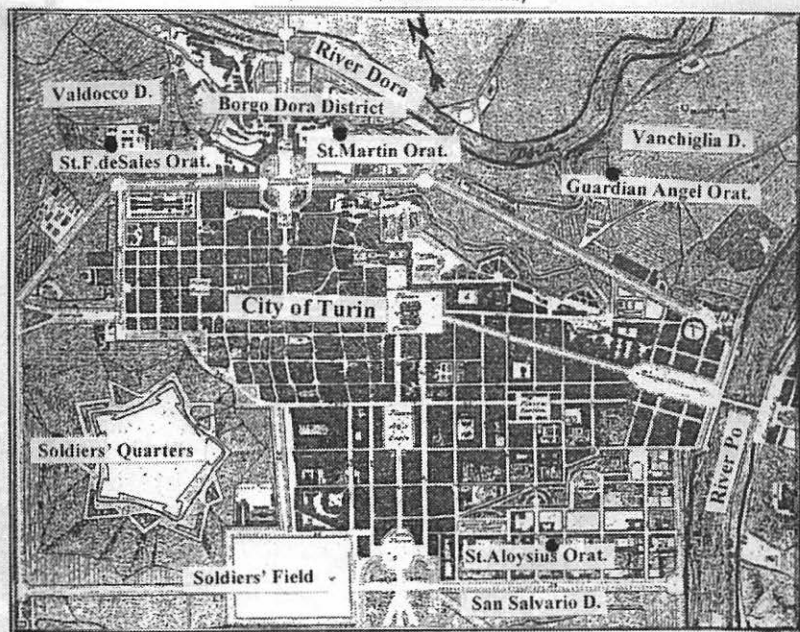
**D**on Bosco's Oratory of St. Francis de Sales after much "wandering" found its permanent home at last in 1846, in an isolated house and property located in the district of Valdocco, on the northern fringe of the city of Turin. Once settled in that little house, Don Bosco established there a home to shelter the most destitute among the lads attending the oratory (1847). He called it "the Home attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales."<sup>1</sup> That same year he opened a second oratory on the opposite side of the city, which was gradually expanding to the south—the Oratory of St. Aloysius. Two years later (1849), Don Bosco opened a third oratory, of the Guardian Angel. It was located in the ill-famed district of Vanchiglia, on the northeastern fringe of the city.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Oratory of St. Francis de Sales," is the name originally given to the gatherings of boys that flocked to the Valdocco site on Sundays for church services, recreation and religious instruction. The same name designates "the Home Attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales" for boarders (apprentices and students). The Home is often simply referred to as "the Oratory." The context will show which is intended.

<sup>2</sup> The Oratory of the Guardian Angel had been founded by Fr. Giovanni Cocchi in 1840, the first such oratory in Turin. It had been closed in 1848, at the onset of the war with Austria. It was taken over and reopened by Don Bosco in 1849.

TURIN in 1840  
(P. Baricco, *Torino Descritta*)



Meanwhile on the political-social scene momentous events were occurring. The liberal revolutions of 1848 and the granting of constitutions in several European nations spelled the end of the post-Napoleonic Restoration and opened the way to the rise of modern states with parliamentary governments.

These liberal developments gave new impetus to the *Risorgimento*, the patriotic movement for the unification of Italy, still divided into regional states under foreign rulers. In the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, King Charles Albert besides granting the constitution that made Piedmont a constitutional parliamentary monarchy, became the tragic leader and victim of *Risorgimento* aspirations. Defeated in the first war of independence against Austria (1848-1849), he abdicated in favor of his son, Victor Emmanuel II, and died shortly thereafter in voluntary exile.

Under the new king, the liberal revolution, the introduction of the constitution guaranteeing basic liberties, and a comprehensive secularization program had the effect of weakening the power of the Church and its control of social institutions. The school system in the realm was secularized in principle through the Boncompagni ordinances (1848), and more systematically through the Casati reform of public education (1859). In 1850-51 Parliament stripped the Church of traditional privileges and immunities, and in 1854-55 proceeded more radically against religious corporations, abolishing many religious communities and confiscating their property.

Archbishop Louis Fransoni of Turin, who in 1850-52 had stood firm in defense of the rights of the Church, suffered imprisonment and permanent exile.

It is in this context of historic events and political-social upheaval that Don Bosco sought to strengthen his work of charity, particularly in the Valdocco Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. There he developed a building program designed to replace the original small house and chapel with new and larger premises. By 1856 the buildings could house over 150 boarders.

The church of St. Francis de Sales, dedicated in June 1852 and replacing the old chapel, was the first and most important of such building projects.<sup>3</sup>

This was also the context in which, in 1849-52, the oratory crisis discussed in the pages that follow rose to threatening proportions and was finally resolved.

## **1. The Situation of the Oratories in Turin in 1849-1852**

The priests and lay people who were committed to working for young people at risk in Turin were numerous. The personnel staffing the oratories in particular formed a kind of informal

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<sup>3</sup> To raise the necessary funds for the building Don Bosco launched, with the City's permit, a great raffle or lottery. As will be discussed below, the circular letter of appeal written by Don Bosco for the occasion provided a rebellious group of oratory personnel with a pretext for a confrontation.

association of men and women bonded primarily by the same desire to help poor young people. In 1849 Don Bosco's Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco was regarded as the most important in terms of numbers and activities, also for being better staffed and operated. The Oratory of St. Aloysius in the southern Borgo San Salvator, though established by Don Bosco, was run by highly motivated priests and lay people. So was the Oratory of the Guardian Angel in the northeastern Borgo Vanchiglia, originally established by Fr. Cocchi and recently reopened by Don Bosco. In 1851-52 Fr. Cocchi opened another oratory at the mills in Borgo Dora, the Oratory of St. Martin.<sup>4</sup> All these oratories were staffed by a director and a sufficient number of catechists, both priests and lay people (some very young) that assisted the boys and supervised activities.

## 2. Don Bosco's Early Associates and Collaborators in Oratory Work

Before discussing the oratory movement and its problems in the years 1849-1852, we should first say a word about Don Bosco's associates and collaborators in the work of the oratories. We shall draw on early documentation in which oratory workers and collaborators are mentioned.

### 2.1. Don Bosco's Letter, February 20, 1850 to the *Mendicizia Istruita*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> There were also in Turin a number of parish-based oratories that functioned as part of parish programs of catechetical instruction. These oratories do not concern the present discussion.

<sup>5</sup> Motto, *Epistolario* I, 96, #47.

For the full text of the Letter, see Appendix II (8.3.1) below. The *Regia Opera della Mendicizia Istruita* (Royal Institute for the Instruction of the Destitute), an association legally established toward the end of the eighteenth century, had the purpose of providing help and instruction to the poor. It was a well-established and well-endowed association. It was approved by royal decree toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. In the mid-1840s this



In an early letter to the administrators of the *Mendicità Istruita* (Society for the Instruction and Care of the Poor), Don Bosco mentions oratory workers and writes:

Up to now the work has been carried forward thanks to the help offered by a number of charitable priests and lay persons. The priests that are involved in a special manner are: Dr. [Giovanni] Borrelli, Dr. [Giacinto] Carpano, Dr. [Giovanni] Vola, Fr. [Pietro] Ponte, Fr. [Giovanni] Grassino, Dr. [Roberto Felice] Murialdo, Fr. [Giovanni Francesco] Giacomelli, and Dr. Prof. [Francesco Giovanni] Marengo.

## 2.2. Fr. Borel's "*Memoriale dell'Oratorio*"<sup>6</sup>

Names of a number of very early benefactors are recorded in a notebook of Fr. Borel called *Memoriale dell'Oratorio* (Oratory Records Book). The *Memoriale* records the name of donors and their offerings. It does not specify in what other way they helped the work of the oratories. The list includes:

Canons Fissore, Vacchetta, Melano, Duprez, Fantolini and Zappata, Frs. Aimeri, Berteù, Saccarelli, Vola, Carpano, Paul Rossi, Pacchiotti, Pullini and Durando, Count Rademaker, Marquis Gustavo Cavour, General Michael Engelfred, Charles Richelmy, Attorneys Molina and Blengini, Baroness Borsarelli and her daughter, Miss Moia, Chevalier Borbone, Countess Masino, Mrs. Cavallo and Mrs. Bogner, Benedict Mussa, Anthony Burdin, Gagliardi, and the Bianchi family.

## 2.3. Don Bosco's *Cenni Storici* (Historical Outlines) of 1862<sup>7</sup>

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society established day and evening schools for poor children, entrusting the boys' schools to the De La Salle Christian Brothers and the girls' schools to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy.

<sup>6</sup> ASC 123 Persone, FDBM 552 E4-12.

Fr. Borel kept the Oratory "books" for a number of years.

<sup>7</sup> The Historical Outlines of 1862 are in ASC 132 Oratorio 2.1, FDB 1,972 C10-D4 (Don Bosco's autograph); 2.2 FDB 1,972 E9 - 1,973 A6 (copy

In a comment added to the final paragraph of the Historical Outlines of 1862 Don Bosco mentions a number of very close collaborators in oratory work.

Among the priests who deserve recognition for the moral and material help rendered in the work of the festive oratories the following should be mentioned: Fr. Sebastiano Pacchiotti, Dr. Giacinto Carpano, Dr. Giovanni Vola, Fr. Giuseppe Trivero, Fr. Pietro Ponte, Dr. Leonardo Murialdo, Dr. Chevalier Roberto Murialdo, Fr. Michael Rua, Fr. Victor Alasonatti. But the distinction of having been in a very special way the promoter and support of the work goes to Dr. Giovanni Borrelli. He made himself available, and worked devotedly and effectively, at all times and in all ways.

#### **2.4. Don Bosco's Article in the *Bollettino Salesiano*, September 1877, on the Early Salesian Cooperators<sup>8</sup>**

Writing in the recently founded *Bollettino Salesiano* in 1877, Don Bosco speaks of his first and other early cooperators, that is, of the people who were associated with the work of the oratory in various ways. He mentions 58 names, priests and lay people, men and women:

[...] Many zealous priests and Christian lay persons wished to be associated with Don Bosco in this ministry.

First and foremost among them we remember the zealous and much lamented Dr. Giovanni Borel, Fr. Giuseppe Caffasso, and

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corrected by Don Bosco and 2.3 FDB 1,972 E1-8 (last copy corrected by Don Bosco); edited in Pietro Braido, *Don Bosco per i giovani: l'“Oratorio” una “Congregazione degli Oratori.” Documenti.* (Piccola Biblioteca dell'Istituto Storico Salesiano, 9. Roma: LAS, 1988).

In 1862 (some two years after the founding of the Salesian Society in 1859), Fr. Michael Rua and Fr. Victor Alasonatti, both Salesian priests, were Don Bosco's closest associates at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

<sup>8</sup> Don Bosco's detailed statement was published in the *Bibliofilo Cattolico* or *Bollettino Salesiano* 3: #6 (September 1877), transcribed by Eugenio Valentini, “Preistoria dei Cooperatori Salesiani,” *Salesianum* 39 (1877) 114-150. For full text see Appendix below.

Canon [Carlo Antonio] Borsarelli [di Riffreddo]. These were the first cooperators from among the clergy. But since they had other demanding commitments, they could be on hand only at certain hours and on certain occasions.

Consequently, we turned to gentlemen from the nobility and the middle class for help, and we drew a generous response from a good number of them. They came and were assigned to teaching catechism, conducting classes, supervising the boys in and out of church. With exemplary dedication they led the boys in prayer and song, they prepared them for the reception of the holy sacraments of penance, communion, and confirmation.

Out of church, they would be on hand to receive the boys as they arrived at the oratory, to assign to them places for recreation, to take part in their games, maintaining order in a kindly manner.

Another important concern of the cooperators was *job placement*. Many boys were from out of town, sometimes from distant places; they found themselves alone, without a livelihood, without a job, without anyone who would care for them. Some of the cooperators then would go after those lads; they tried to clean them up; they placed them with some honest employer, and got them ready to make their appearance at the work place. During the week they would visit those youngsters, and see that they came back to the oratory the following Sunday, so that they might not lose in one day what they had gained by the labor of several weeks.

Many of these cooperators at great personal sacrifice came faithfully every evening during the winter season, and taught classes in reading, writing, singing, arithmetic, and Italian language. Others instead would come daily at noon to teach catechism to those youngsters who were most in need of instruction.

[...]<sup>9</sup>

Among the many priests who became associated with the work we may mention the following: the brothers [Giovanni] Ignazio and Giovanni [Battista] Vola, Dr. [Paolo Francesco] Rossi, who died as director of the Oratory of St. Aloysius, Dr. Attorney [Giovanni Battista] Destefanis. All of them God has already called to their heavenly home. To these must be added Dr. Fr. Roberto Murialdo, the present director of the *Famiglia di S. Pietro*, and Dr. Fr. Leonardo Murialdo, at present director of the *Artigianelli* Institute.

Among the earliest priest-cooperators who are still with us (may God be praised) the following should be mentioned: Fr. Giuseppe Trivero, Dr. Chevalier Giacinto Carpano, Fr. Michelangelo

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<sup>9</sup> Many laymen are mentioned.

Chiatellino, Fr. Ascanio Savio, Fr. Giovanni Giacomelli, Dr. Prof. [?] Chiaves, Fr. Antò Bosio, now pastor; Fr. Sebastiano Pacchiotti, Fr. Prof. [Giovanni Battista] Musso, Canon [?] Musso, a teacher, Fr. Pietro Ponti [Ponte], Canon Luigi Nasi, Canon Prof. [Francesco] Marengo, Fr. Francesco Onesti, a teacher, Dr. Emiliano Manacorda, now bishop of Fossano, Canon Eugenio Galletti, now bishop of Alba.

[...]<sup>10</sup>

We had cooperators not only from among the men, but also from among the women. Some of our pupils (*allievi*) were nothing but dirty, unkempt ragamuffins. No one could stand them, and no employer wanted them in his workshop. A number of charitable ladies came to the rescue. [...] The leader of the ladies was Mrs. Margherita Gastaldi.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.5. Comment

All the above “coworkers, helpers, benefactors, cooperators” of the earliest years, were associated with Don Bosco in oratory work in various ways. Fr. Giuseppe Cafasso, and Fr. Giovanni Borel were by far the most important. Next in importance were Fr. Giacinto Carpano, and the cousins Frs. Roberto and Leonardo Murialdo. Of the lay helpers, perhaps the most dedicated were Baron Bianco di Barbania, Marquis and Marchioness (De Maistre) Fassati, Count Balbo di Vinadio, and Margherita Gastaldi.

What this means is that Don Bosco from the beginning conceived of the work of the oratory as a collaborative work to be undertaken and expanded by a coalition of many diverse forces. This was no doubt his earliest concept of the “society” that was to work for poor young people, a voluntary association of concerned people devoting themselves and their resources (in varying degrees) to the work of the oratories.

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<sup>10</sup> At this point a short paragraph describes how order was kept and the oratory run, according to a set of regulations, without recourse to threats or punishments.

<sup>11</sup> Margherita was Archbishop Gastaldi’s mother. Ten other ladies are mentioned.

It is in this sense that Don Bosco could later speak of the Salesian Society, and of the Salesian constitutions themselves, as existing already in 1841. He never left behind the idea of a collaborative ministry, even after the founding of the Salesian Society as a religious congregation with common life and simple vows (1859-1874). For, it should be noted, the Salesian Society was not meant to be a substitute for the older coalition, but was meant rather to be the inner group of those that were completely committed to the work. Writing in the *Salesian Bulletin* in 1877, he saw the recently "founded" Salesian Cooperators as continuing the collaborative ministry of earlier times.<sup>12</sup>

"Spiritual favors" obtained from Rome in 1845 and 1850, and Archbishop Frasoni's decree of 1852 making Don Bosco spiritual director-in-chief of three oratories (see below) were cited by Don Bosco as documents of ecclesiastical approval of this association of collaborators over which he presided as "Superior."

### 3. Critical Phase in the Oratory Movement in Turin and Don Bosco's Emergence (1849-1852)

EBM IV, 215-221, 254-266. A. Castellani, *Leonardo Murialdo* (Roma, 2 vol., 1966 and 1968), I, *passim*, esp. 400-401; Teresio Bosco, *Don Bosco. Una biografia nuova* (Leumann (TO): Elle Di Ci, 1979), 159-208, *passim*, and 138-139.

#### 3.1. Issues and Ideological Diversity among Oratory Workers

Through the 1840s, sharp differences in oratory philosophy and organization arose among the various oratory directors and

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<sup>12</sup> The founding (or reorganization) of the Salesian Cooperators in 1876 was intended to continue on a new basis the original collaborative ministry. The Cooperators were not meant to be "benefactors" of the Salesian Society, but collaborators with the Salesian Society in ministering to poor young people.

catechist groups. Don Bosco differed in the way he did oratory work and in his concept of what an oratory should be like. Perhaps to a greater degree than any of his associates, he emphasized the *religious and educational* nature of the oratory, as he conceived it. Castellani remarks that Fr. Cocchi's oratory of the Guardian Angel placed such high priority on gymnastics and drills that it resembled a military training camp.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to differences in pastoral practice, there were differences in political ideology, which were accentuated by the political and military crisis of 1848-49.<sup>14</sup> When that crisis passed, the differences did not abate. Indeed they grew more pronounced as the movement of the *Risorgimento* accelerated, and as the work of the oratories received new impetus through the induction of new forces and through grants from the St. Vincent de Paul Society. By this time Don Bosco (though outwardly claiming neutrality) had taken a conservative position in solidarity with Fr. Cafasso, Archbishop Franssoni and Pope Pius IX. So had Frs. Borel, Carpano, Roberto and later Leonardo Murialdo and others, both priests and laypeople.

Thus Don Bosco found himself at odds with the more "patriotic" priests engaged in oratory work, such as Frs. Cocchi and Ponte. There also were more practical problems. Oratory directors and catechists would be frequently replaced; clashes and disagreements would arise inside and outside the oratory from questions of competence, from a desire to act independently, from difficulties in dealing with pastors, from uneven sharing of resources, from competition in securing

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<sup>13</sup> Castellani, *Leonardo Murialdo*, 400; also *EBM* III, 319.

As will be noted below, Don Bosco saw the necessity of introducing some of the very same forms of recreation.

<sup>14</sup> The turbulent years 1848-1849 were the years of liberal revolutions and of liberal constitutions, of the First War of Italian Independence waged against Austria by King Charles Albert of Piedmont, and concomitantly the year 1849 marked the establishment of the Mazzinian Roman Republic and the flight of Pope Pius IX from Rome.

benefactors, etc. Nor should difficulties arising from personal character be discounted.

We should again note that the early oratory movement was a collaborative ministry in which priests and lay people worked together as equals, as associates and colleagues. Don Bosco, on the other hand, sought from the start to create "his own" oratory, regarding coworkers as his subordinate helpers and himself as the "superior" of a "congregation of the oratories."

As early as 1847 a proposal was made to federate the Turin oratories (present and future) and other youth ministries under some diocesan structure that would safeguard the interests of each, and arbitrate cases of dispute. This was the view of a group of highly respected priests such as Fr. Marcantonio Durando (Superior of the Vincentians), Fr. Prof. Amedeo Peyron, Canon Giuseppe Ortalda and Canon Lawrence Gastaldi. Don Bosco and Fr. Cocchi as directors of oratories were asked to accept these terms. Don Bosco, however, while declaring his willingness to work together with others, declined to enter into any formal union that would jeopardize his independence.

As reported (or as interpreted) by Lemoyne in the *Biographical Memoirs*, Don Bosco presented his reasons:

1. Strategy in oratory work—"Fr. Cocchi is all for gymnastics and, to attract boys, drills them with sticks and [mock] rifles; he, however, has little use for church services. The sticks and rifles I intend to use are rather the word of God, confession, and frequent Communion; everything else I regard solely as a means to draw boys to catechism class.

2. Political involvement—"The other priests engaged in oratory work are in varying degrees enmeshed in politics, and often their sermons are patriotic exhortations rather than religious instructions. Instead, I intend to steer absolutely clear of politics."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> EBM III, 320-21.



Another attempt in the same direction was made in 1849, under the sponsorship of Fr. Cafasso himself, whose moral authority as spiritual father, and patron of most of the priests involved in youth ministry carried much weight. But no agreement was reached. The cataclysmic events of 1848-49 (liberal revolution, war against Austria, etc.) and the imprisonment and exile of Archbishop Fransoni in 1850 prevented further initiatives.

#### 4. Crisis at the Oratory of St. Aloysius with Fr. Pietro Ponte<sup>16</sup>

##### 4.1. Directors at the Oratory of Saint Aloysius: Fr. Carpano and Successors

Goffredo Casalis in 1851, speaking of charitable institutions active in Turin has words of praise for Don Bosco's three oratories and for the priests who staffed them. He singles out Fr. Giacinto Carpano for special praise and writes:

In these oratories boys find an environment that refines and educates their minds and hearts. Within a short time they acquire good manners, develop a liking for work, and become good Christians and upright citizens. Such impressive results should induce the government to lend full support to an undertaking that is of great benefit to the poorer classes. Many zealous priests have dedicated themselves to this social work of rescuing from idleness many boys who would undoubtedly come to a sorry end without their solicitous care.

Here we must also mention the well-deserving Fr. Carpano, who plans to open a center for workmen recently released from hospitals and unable to return immediately to work either because of poor employment conditions or because of their need of time to convalesce. This project will become a reality as soon as Fr. Carpano manages to find the support he hopes to receive.

Some may object that we have devoted too much space to these [charitable] institutions. But this is clearly not the view of those who

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<sup>16</sup> *EBMIV*, 215-221.

Here Lemoyne tells the story clearly not without a certain bias.

realize that public recognition is the sole reward these worthy people receive for their constant, tireless labors. These priests dedicate their entire lives to the welfare of the young, and it would be most unjust to deny them the praise they so eminently deserve.<sup>17</sup>

According to Casalis' statement, it seems that Fr. Carpano was planning to move on to other ministries, though we cannot specify the date and the circumstances under which he withdrew from the oratories. We know, however, on Fr. John Bonetti's testimony,<sup>18</sup> that Fr. Carpano served as first director of the Oratory of St. Aloysius when it opened in 1847; then of the Oratory of Guardian Angel when it was re-activated under Don Bosco in 1849. He probably left oratory work in 1853.<sup>19</sup>

At St. Aloysius several directors followed Fr. Carpano for very short terms, until the appointment of Fr. Pietro Ponte, a zealous and capable priest, under whom the oratory experienced considerable expansion.<sup>20</sup> He had the assistance of Fr. Felice Rossi and Attorney Gaetano Bellingeri (among others) and of a group of catechists. Fr. Ponte was succeeded by Fr. Paolo

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<sup>17</sup> Goffredo Casalis, *Dizionario geografico, storico-statistico-commerciale degli Stati di S. M. il Re di Sardegna*, Volume 21 (Torino, 1851), 714-718.

<sup>18</sup> Bonetti, "Storia dell'Oratorio [...]," in *Bollettino Salesiano* and *Cinque Lustrì*, translated as *Don Bosco's Early Apostolate*, 103-117.

<sup>19</sup> The date and motive of Fr. Carpano's withdrawal from the oratories to go on the other ministries are unclear. Regarding the date, Lemoyne makes contradictory statements: in *EBM* III, 395, in 1853, but in *EBM* IV, 215, prior to 1851.

<sup>20</sup> Pietro Ponte was born at Pancalieri (Turin) in 1821. Once ordained, he lived "with Don Bosco" at Valdocco for over one year (1847-1848) [*EBM* III, 176-177], and was one of his early collaborators in oratory work. At the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*) he was in charge, under Fr. Cafasso, of the catechetical instruction of the chimneysweeps in association with Fr. Carpano. Fr. Ponte served as director of the Oratory of St. Aloysius from 1849 to 1851. He then served as chaplain to the Marchioness Barolo and her works, and as testamentary executor after her death. He supervised the building of the Church of St. Julia, built through the munificent testamentary disposition of the Marchioness in the Vanchiglia district, and served as its first rector. He died on October 2, 1892.

Francesco Rossi, a man of great zeal but in rather poor health. He died shortly thereafter at 28 years of age. There followed an interval of some years during which there was no fixed Director. By this time Don Bosco began to have at his disposal some seminarians that he sent to "St. Aloysius" on Sundays and holy days. Each week he secured the services of a priest of Turin, who went there for confessions and holy Mass, as well as preaching. Occasionally a priest would be on hand for the sermon and devotions in the evening.

#### 4.2. Crisis at the Oratory of St. Aloysius

The crisis we are speaking of came to a head during Fr. Ponte's tenure, which may be dated to the years 1849-1851.

As noted above, not everyone agreed with Don Bosco's view of how an oratory should be run. There was in fact dissatisfaction among catechists at Don Bosco's three oratories.<sup>21</sup> Dissension erupted in 1851, involving the catechists at the Oratories of the Guardian Angel and of St. Aloysius. Fr. Ponte seems to have been at the center of it. Perhaps Don Bosco's demand for unity of direction was resented and interpreted as a desire to dominate or to gain recognition.<sup>22</sup>

Probably at Fr. Cafasso's suggestion, a meeting of oratory priests (six are named including Fr. Roberto Murialdo and Fr. John Cocchi) was called. "Fr. Ponte was invited to attend and state his grievances, but he declined. At this meeting Don Bosco declared himself ready to make concessions but not to abdicate the authority that was his by right."<sup>23</sup>

As a temporary solution, Don Bosco suggested that Fr. Cafasso should recommend Fr. Ponte to Marchioness Barolo,

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<sup>21</sup> For an episode that occurred at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales see *EBM* IV, 216-217, cited by Lemoyne from Joseph Brosio's *Memoir*, of which we shall speak below.

<sup>22</sup> See Don Bosco's statements in the Introduction to the *Regulations for the Boys Oratory* of 1854. For this text see Appendix V (8.5) below.

<sup>23</sup> *EBM* IV, 217.

who was looking for a personal chaplain. Fr. Ponte accepted the Marchioness' offer, and in October 1851 accompanied her and her secretary, Silvio Pellico, to Rome.<sup>24</sup> Don Bosco asked Fr. Felice Rossi to take over as director of the Oratory of St. Aloysius. (As mentioned above, Fr. Rossi died shortly thereafter.)

A correspondence between Fr. Ponte and Fr. Borel (writing for Don Bosco) followed. In response to a letter from Fr. Ponte in which he listed his grievances, with certain related episodes, Fr. Borel indirectly reveals some aspects of the dispute. He writes:

Concord is impaired when the other oratories are not allowed to use certain things provided for one oratory. Likewise, it is perturbing when, in the same oratory, a member reserves some things for his exclusive use so that no one may use them even when he is absent.

We have therefore agreed that any donation to one oratory must be regarded as given to all the oratories, and the directors are bound in conscience to inform the benefactors of this policy of ours.<sup>25</sup>

In his reply to Fr. Borel, Fr. Ponte writes among other things:

I believe that this deplorable discord resulted from the fact that we have no one in particular to turn to and from a serious lack of communication among ourselves. [...] If you can do something about this, I am sure all unrest will vanish.

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<sup>24</sup> Silvio Pellico (1789-1854) was a patriot and a writer, and the founder and editor (1818-1819) of the liberal patriotic journal *Il Conciliatore*. Suspected of revolutionary activity in the 1821 Carbonari uprising, he was condemned to hard labor (1822) for 15 years and imprisoned in the fortress of Spielberg (Austria), but was released in 1830. Thereafter he lived in Turin, and from 1834 served as librarian and secretary to the Marchioness Barolo. He was active in prison reform, as was the Marchioness. He is known especially for the memoirs of his imprisonment, *Le mie prigioni* (1832), but he also wrote plays (tragedies) and produced a translation of Byron's *Manfred*. He was also the author of mystic and religious poetry.

<sup>25</sup> Fr. Borel to Fr. Ponte, October 23, 1851, in *EBM* IV, 218.

See also full text in Appendix III (8.3.1) below.

I cannot go back on the decision that I previously revealed to you. I made this decision only after careful soul-searching and I cannot change it for any reason. If the things I left at the St. Aloysius Oratory are in the way, I'll remove them as soon as I return to Turin. [...] From now on (should God will that I continue to work in behalf of the oratories) I shall willingly abide by the decision you mentioned.<sup>26</sup>

Fr. Cafasso attempted to restore harmony. He addressed a letter to Fr. Ponte, who by this time had gone from Rome to Naples with Marchioness Barolo.<sup>27</sup> With regard to that unspecified decision, he wrote: "I urge you to put aside all worry [...] regarding the decision you plan to take in the matter you mention." He gave him assurance that the oratory co-workers bore him no grudge or ill will, and in fact hoped for his continued cooperation. Fr. Cafasso then continued:

Since the items under discussion are yours, you have the right to make whatever arrangements you wish as to their use. However, if you want my opinion, [...] you would be well advised to put them at the disposal of the oratories [...]. You would, in any case, retain priority for their use for as long as you will be able to help in this work so blessed by the Lord.

Fr. Cafasso's suggestion went unheeded. Fr. Ponte went on to serve as chaplain in the Barolo institutions, and a little later as director of the Oratory of St. Martin at the Mills, opened by Fr. Cocchi.

### 4.3. Comment

What were the precise terms of the dispute? The sources in our possession are insufficient for a detailed reconstruction of the

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<sup>26</sup> Fr. Ponte to Fr. Borel, November 4, 1851, in *EBM* IV, 219-220. See also full text in Appendix III (8.3.2) below.

<sup>27</sup> Fr. Cafasso to Fr. Ponte, January 6, 1852, in *EBM* IV, 255-256. See text (re-phrased) in Appendix III (8.3.3) below.

episode. From the texts quoted above, it appears that the issue had to do with the independent direction and independent use of equipment and revenues in each oratory. Fr. Ponte and his staff were devoting time, and apparently also resources, to the Oratory of St. Aloysius. But did that fact justify a claim to independence? We cannot tell whether other factors of a personal, political or pastoral character were involved. Fr. Ponte's claim that "we have no one in particular to turn to" is particularly puzzling, as is also Don Bosco's "silence" throughout this whole episode.

## 5. Crisis at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and the Challenge to Don Bosco

### 5.1. Introduction: Archival Source and Nature of the Crisis

Fr. Lemoyne speaks of another, more serious challenge made to Don Bosco and the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales by a group of disgruntled oratory workers led by an unnamed priest to whom he gives the pseudonym, Fr. Rodrigo.<sup>28</sup>

Lemoyne's source for this new oratory crisis is a 46-page memoir authored by one of Don Bosco's oldest catechists and youth leaders named Giuseppe Brosio. Brosio's memoir is preserved in the Central Salesian Archives.<sup>29</sup>

The memoir was probably written, so it appears, soon after Don Bosco's death (1888) when Fr. John Bonetti was collecting material in view of Don Bosco's diocesan process of beatification. At one point in his memoir, Brosio addresses Fr. Bonetti specifically.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *EBM* IV, 256-265.

<sup>29</sup> *ASC* 123 Persone, Brosio Giuseppe "Il Bersagliere," *FDB* 554 E10 – 555 D8.

As far as I know this memoir remains unpublished. For a biographical sketch of Giuseppe Brosio see Appendix I (8.1) below.

<sup>30</sup> Brosio, *Memoir*, Part I, 23, *FDBM* 555 B10.

As we find it in the archives, the memoir falls into two separate parts: Part I in six chapters (pp. 1-32) and Part II in one continuous narrative (pp. 1-14). The memoir as a whole describes events at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and relates anecdotes in praise of Don Bosco. Quite a bit of space is given to Brosio himself as leader of the oratory boys in their recreation. He portrays himself as a confidant of Don Bosco and as a protagonist in the events of the crisis.

The memoir covers a wide range of Brosio's recollections from different periods. Of interest to our story are two reports of the activities of a clique of priests and gentlemen, led by the Unnamed Priest and followed by catechists and older boys. They were intent on challenging Don Bosco's authority and disrupting the oratory.<sup>31</sup>

Both reports speak of a "conspiracy" to wreck the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales by getting oratory workers to leave Don Bosco. Specifically, the first report (Report I) describes efforts to entice oratory personnel away from Don Bosco, while the second report (Report II) speaks of a meeting to accuse Don Bosco of slandering oratory personnel in a circular written for the raffle of 1851-52<sup>32</sup>. Actual confrontations also occurred.

Brosio's testimony has sometimes been called into question, but there seems no real reason to doubt its reliability.

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<sup>31</sup> The first report is found in Part I, Ch. 4, 6-19, *FDBM* 555 B3-6. The second report is found in Part II, 1-5, *FDBM* 555 C7-11.

Brosio speaks of priests (*preti*, *signori preti*) and of one priest (*il prete*) in particular who seems to be the leader of the group. He also speaks of "signori," by which he may mean "gentlemen," or may be referring to the same priests. These are the "conspirators." With them are catechists and young men (leaders among the oratory boys) whom the ringleaders have won over, or are trying to win over. No one is ever identified by name.

<sup>32</sup> For the lottery and the "offensive" circular letter see below under Report II.



### 5.2. Brosio's First Report: Efforts to Entice Personnel away from the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales

It is quite possible that when Fr. Cocchi's plan to open an oratory at St. Martin's at the Mills in the Borgo Dora (less than half a mile to the east) became known, a number of the Valdocco catechists would consider joining the new venture. Fr. Cocchi was a well-known and colorful oratory worker. He had founded the oratory of the Guardian Angel in the Moschino (District of Vanchiglia), the first of its kind in Turin. After the war of 1848-49, that oratory had been taken over by Don Bosco, while Fr. Cocchi and other oratory priests in 1849-50 organized a Society to help Young People at Risk.<sup>33</sup> Now Fr. Cocchi's projected oratory at St. Martin's would need catechists and other personnel. Perhaps a request for help had been made, and some of Don Bosco's catechists found the offer attractive.

It seems, however, that some of the Valdocco catechists and personnel had become disaffected and antagonistic, and they may have been looking in Cocchi's direction because (among other possible reasons) they were dissatisfied with the way Don Bosco's oratory was run. Brosio's report takes us one step farther; he speaks of a real conspiracy (*congiura*) with powerful people behind it. He writes:

In 1850 or 1851 a secret plot was hatched to destroy the Oratory [of St. Francis de Sales]. [The schemers] themselves admitted as much, and Reverend Priests [... names withheld...] who attended the Oratory were among the leaders of the conspiracy. On Sundays these gentlemen came to the Oratory and invited the older lads for outings into the country, treating them to dinners and refreshments in restaurants. Consequently, on most Sundays quite a number of older boys were absent.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Società di carità a pro dei giovani poveri ed abbandonati* (announced in October 1849). This society eventually founded the *Istituto per gli Artigianelli* (1861-1863), out of which Fr. [Saint] Leonardo Murialdo founded the Society of St. Joseph (1873).

<sup>34</sup> Brosio, *Memoir*, Report I, 16, *FDBM* 555 B3.

Brosio, as the undisputed leader of youth activities at Valdocco, had been approached by the "Protestants" (Waldenses) and offered a lucrative job and security if he would leave Don Bosco and take boys away from the Oratory. He adds: "Not only the Protestants, but Catholic gentlemen as well—and priests too—offered me presents both of money and valuables, if only I would act to disrupt the oratory."<sup>35</sup> Then he relates one such incident.

One Sunday the Priest [...name withheld...] invited me for an outing he was planning into the country. I was to tell no one about it, but I discussed it with Don Bosco, and he told me to accept the invitation. The following Sunday, after morning services, I left the Oratory to keep my appointment at the designated place (Porta Palazzo), where the group of companions and the Gentlemen [...names withheld...] were already gathered and waiting for me. I was greeted with enthusiasm, hugs and kisses, and a great show of joy. The Gentleman (Priest?) [...name withheld...] announced: "Our party today will be a happy one because our dear and close friend [Brosio] is joining us." (They had thought I wouldn't show up.)

We took the Milan road out into the country, and stopped for refreshments at the Inn of the Centaur. At noon we were served a rich and elaborate dinner with choice wines in abundance. We spent the afternoon with games, songs and more wine until evening. Back at Porta Palazzo we stopped for coffee, and before saying good-bye and heading for home, we all agreed to meet on the following Sunday morning at the Church of [...name withheld...]. On my way home I stopped by the Oratory and made a detailed report to Don Bosco. He listened attentively, and when I told him about the invitation for the following Sunday, he decided that I should go along.

The following Sunday we all met for Mass at the church as pre-arranged, after which the Gentlemen [...names withheld...] took us to the St. Charles Gallery Café at Porta Nuova for coffee and breakfast.

On both occasions, the sermons [at Mass] kept suggesting that we should quit the Oratory, since God is everywhere and one can

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

become a saint anywhere.<sup>36</sup> After dinner I reported to Don Bosco and told him that I had been invited to a great afternoon party (*grande merenda*) for the following Sunday. He forbade me to go.

The Priest [...name withheld...] had offered me six silver dollars (*scudi d'argento*) as a way of obligating me to attend their meetings.<sup>37</sup> I didn't want to accept them, but he kept arguing and pressing the money into my hand. I was so stunned and powerless that I took the money. Immediately remorse began to trouble my conscience, robbing me of peace of mind. I feared that by taking that money I had betrayed Don Bosco. I decided to give it to a man whose family apparently was in real need. [...] When I made my report to Don Bosco, he assured me that I could have kept the money without qualms, but added that I had done a good deed by giving it as alms.<sup>38</sup>

From the first report as a whole it emerges that a coalition of Catholic laymen, priests, and one priest in particular, for some reason were determined to undo Don Bosco and the Oratory by going after his Oratory personnel. They tried to entice the catechists away by bribes of money, dinners and a good time, in the hope perhaps of swinging their allegiance to the oratory that Fr. Cocchi was about to open at St. Martin's.

### 5.3 Brosio's Second Report: The "Outrage" of Don Bosco's Lottery Circular

The enmity of the "conspirators" did not abate, as Brosio related in another episode (to be dated in late 1851 and early 1852). The same group of "gentlemen" (*signori*) led by the Unnamed Priest (apparently a powerful figure in town), took umbrage at what

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<sup>36</sup> These people, though bent on mischief, as "good Catholics" they heard Mass and the sermon. The Unnamed Priest apparently had arranged to hold Sunday services at the designated church.

<sup>37</sup> The *scudo*, worth 5 lire, was equivalent to about one U.S. dollar at the time. This was a considerable sum of money.

<sup>38</sup> Brosio, *Memoir*, Report I, pp. 16-19, *FDBM* 555 B3-6.

As an afterthought Brosio adds that a canon of St. John's Cathedral was promising him the earth if he would leave Don Bosco and work instead at St. Philip's parish oratory.

they construed to be Don Bosco's expansionist plans, for he had decided to build a proper church (St. Francis de Sales) and was launching a great lottery to raise funds for it. They pretended to take offense at the way he described the oratory lads in the appeal circulated on that occasion. Taking advantage of dissatisfaction among oratory personnel at Valdocco, the dissidents attempted again to entice the best catechists away, and so disrupt the Oratory. To this end the "conspirators" called a meeting for the purpose of accusing Don Bosco of having slandered oratory workers in the circular he had written for the lottery.

### (5.3.1) The Lottery and the Circular

Since acquiring the Pinardi house and property (February 19, 1851), which became the permanent home of the Oratory, Don Bosco had been planning to expand the whole facility at Valdocco. His first major building project was the Church of St. Francis de Sales, dedicated on June 20, 1852. His charity base being small and still insecure, on advice from friends, he obtained the City's permit to launch a lottery, the first (and perhaps the most successful) of the nine held in Don Bosco's lifetime.<sup>39</sup> In his appeal Don Bosco gave a brief history and description of the Oratory.

Its sole purpose is the intellectual and moral welfare of those young people who, because of parental neglect, association with bad companions and lack of material means find themselves in continuous danger of being perverted. [...] [Some of us, priests and laymen] were deeply distressed at seeing the increasing number of young people who idly roamed the streets with bad companions and lived by begging and thieving, thus becoming a burden to society and the cause of all kinds of mischief. [...] [We] were also saddened at seeing that many of those young men that were already employed

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<sup>39</sup> For the story of the lottery in detail see *EBM* IV, 222-230, 246-253.

in workshops and factories squandered their meager wages on Sundays in gambling and drinking. [...]

[The Oratory was established] to rescue these boys from evil ways, to inspire them with a holy fear of God, and to accustom them from their early years to the practice of religion."<sup>40</sup>

By these and similar expressions Don Bosco was guilty (so the opposition claimed) of labeling the whole oratory population, without distinction, as vagabonds and thieves. He had to be confronted, and satisfaction demanded.

### (5.3.2) Meeting Called to Accuse Don Bosco

To press this point and with the ultimate aim of persuading oratory personnel to leave Don Bosco, a meeting was called. Brosio writes:

One Sunday, after church services at the Oratory, certain gentlemen (*certi signori*) invited us to a conference, to deal with a matter that concerned our good name. The sole agenda item was to show that Don Bosco had dishonored us publicly by labeling us "vagabonds and thieves." This accusation was based on the recent letter that Don Bosco had had printed and circulated for the lottery. [...] The circular failed to mention that many young men [the catechists in particular] were persons of good character, from good and even well to do families.<sup>41</sup>

When the terms of the "indictment" were read, the whole assembly was seething with angry excitement. At this point Brosio asked for the floor. In his address he urged everybody to think and act calmly, then he continued [in summary]:

If Don Bosco apologizes we should accept his apology. If not, then we can decide on an appropriate course of action. However, we

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<sup>40</sup> The circular letter (lottery appeal), dated December 20, 1851, is given in Motto, *Epistolario* I, Letter #94, 139-141, and edited in *EBM* IV, 228-230.

<sup>41</sup> Brosio, *Memoir*, Report II, 1, *FDBM* 555 C7.

should first examine his statements and see if they warrant a violent reaction on our part. His words might sound offensive, but may not be such as to damage our reputation. If the circular failed to make the proper distinctions, the omission might be accidental. Under no circumstance would Don Bosco smear the good name of the people he loves so well. If we respectfully take our grievance to him, I'm sure he will be the first to suggest terms of reconciliation. This course of action would avoid a greater evil for all concerned, something we might later have to regret."<sup>42</sup>

Brosio's conciliatory speech fell on deaf ears. An ominous silence settled over the room; then there were whispers, then angry shouts and catcalls. Most of those present particularly the ringleaders (*fautori e promotori*) had no desire to forego the opportunity of a showdown. A certain person ("*individovo*") stood up to speak.<sup>43</sup> His address was punctuated by shouts of approval as he tried to show that Brosio's compromise would not suffice to restore their good name. Don Bosco would only offer hypocritical apologies or explanations. "Is that what you really want?" he concluded. A furious, angry roar (*ruggito*) rose from the audience. It was clear that those gentlemen (*signori*) had put up with Brosio's talk of reconciliation only to test the mood of the audience. Now they were bent on seeking a violent break.<sup>44</sup>

### (5.3.3) A Confrontation at the Oratory

The following Sunday, a small group of the more angry young men, led by [... name withheld...] cornered Don Bosco in the

<sup>42</sup> Brosio, *Memoir*, Report II, 1-2, *FDBM* 555 C7-8. The paragraph is a condensation of Brosio's tortured text. Lemoyne, while purporting to quote, gives a more elaborate interpretation.

<sup>43</sup> The person may have been the Unnamed Priest (as Lemoyne believes), or one of the gentlemen.

<sup>44</sup> Brosio, *Memoir*, Report II, 2-3, *FDBM* 555 C8-9.

Lemoyne (always purporting to quote) adds by way of conclusion, "It was finally decided that all present should abruptly quit the Oratory. Thus an open breach was declared."

sacristy. Brosio was at the moment organizing a military drill at recreation, but heard the shouting. Without delay he stepped into the sacristy to see what was going on. That young man had finished talking, and Don Bosco was explaining that the circular spoke in general of youngsters at risk who actually formed a good part of the oratory population, because the oratory was meant for them. Catechists and young men of good character and from good families who came to the oratory should feel honored by the opportunity of helping with this work of charity. The young man who had launched the attack paid no heed, and began to spit out insults. Brosio was about to deal physically with the miscreant. But Don Bosco himself, while holding Brosio back, intervened in defense of the Oratory. Brosio continues:

[Don Bosco] was furious; he turned on the lad and gave him a piece of his mind, calling him a rascal ("*birichino*") and threatening him with expulsion from the oratory. [...] I swear, and it's the truth, in my forty-three years of acquaintance with Don Bosco I have never seen him in such a rage. And he had every reason to be angry, for they were trying to destroy his most precious possession, his oratory and his children.<sup>45</sup>

The defection of personnel from the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was significant and damaging. The dissident group included catechists, priests and gentlemen (*signori*) who were involved directly or in a supporting role in the running of the Oratory.

In February 1852, Fr. Giovanni Cocchi opened the planned oratory at St. Martin's chapel at the city's mills in Borgo Dora. Many of the dissidents gravitated toward St. Martin's, and Fr. Cocchi (in no way involved in the dispute) accepted them, for they were after all dedicated workers and constituted a valuable resource. At St. Martin's they enjoyed a

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<sup>45</sup> Brosio, *Memoir*, Report II, 4, *FDBM* 555, D10.

Lemoyne softens the language in this passage, by omitting all reference to Don Bosco's fury and anger.



better table than at Valdocco. The catechists that had remained faithful, Brosio for example, broke off all relation with the dissidents. But others (like Carlo Gastini?) thought they could divide their time between the two oratories. Don Bosco put up with this situation for a while, but then told them to make up their minds.<sup>46</sup> Lemoyne adds that this turn of events forced Don Bosco to train new catechists in a hurry, choosing them also from among the best oratory lads.<sup>47</sup>

### (5.3.4) Dénouement

Brosio closes his report with the notice that, although the opposition stood defeated in their efforts to disrupt Don Bosco's oratory, steps were taken to increase recreational activities, perhaps to make the oratory more attractive (and competitive with St. Martin's?). Brosio for his part stepped up his military drills and mock war games. Since the oratory playground proved too small, his army used the empty southern field, the field that Don Bosco had recently bought from the seminary and that would later be identified as the "Field of Dreams." From there Brosio's army would wander eastward through the still vacant lands as far as the San Donato district (hence, near St. Martin's!). Brosio continues: "Once at our destination, I would buy two large baskets of fruit with money supplied by Don Bosco for that purpose, and I would distribute it to all my soldiers."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> EBMIV, 262-263.

Carlo Gastini (1833-1902) was an early oratory boy who became a boarder at the Home of the Oratory (*Casa annessa*). On February 2, 1851, together with Joseph Buzzetti, Felix Reviglio and James Bellia, he received the clerical habit. He was a talented and devoted oratory worker.

<sup>47</sup> EBMIV, 262-266.

Here Lemoyne speaks of the catechists, old and new, information not found in Brosio's memoir.

<sup>48</sup> Brosio *Memoir*, Report II, 4-5, FDBM 555 D10-11.

## 6. Don Bosco and His Oratories Gain Preeminence

Don Bosco had for some time wanted Church authorities to know about the work of the oratories and to give their approval. For example, in 1850, he had applied to Pope Pius IX for special spiritual favors on behalf of the three "congregations" of which he was Director, and that (in his own words) were "legitimately" established in Turin for the purpose of "instructing abandoned young people in religion and piety." The petition was granted.<sup>49</sup> Don Bosco made much of such encouragements by Church authorities and took them as tokens of "approval."

More important still was the decree from exiled Archbishop Frasoni of March 31, 1852. By this Decree the Archbishop appointed (recognized) Don Bosco "Spiritual-Director-in-Chief" of the three oratories of St. Francis de Sales, St. Aloysius, and the Guardian Angel. With it he also granted faculties pertaining to attendance at Mass, the reception of the sacraments, catechetical instruction, etc., which in practice made those oratories independent of any parish. As Don Bosco expressed it, "the oratory is the parish of youngsters without a parish."

A second decree bearing the same date, and equally important at least for its implications, made Fr. Roberto Murialdo "Spiritual Director of the Oratory of the Guardian Angel," but subject to Don Bosco.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The papal decrees, dated September 28, 1850, were in reply to petitions by Don Bosco dated August 28. [Cf. Motto, *Epistolario* I, 110-111.] The decrees granted indulgences to a "Congregation established under the title and patronage of St. Francis de Sales," and to a "Congregation established under the title and patronage of the Guardian Angel." These two papal documents are in the Central Salesian Archives. Presumably there was also a third decree for a "Congregation established under the title of St. Aloysius." The Editor of *EBM* preposterously notes that "this petition is particularly important because Don Bosco for the first time mentions the Salesian Congregation." [!] [Cf. *EBM* IV, 64 and 521 (Appendix 3).]

<sup>50</sup> The original decrees are in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Turin and (in an authenticated copy of May 12, 1868) in the Central Salesian

These decrees in a real sense brought the crisis to a close and vindicated Don Bosco. The forces at work and the events leading up to this important decision by the Archbishop are not well documented. What has been said above represents the best judgment in the matter.

As far as the action taken by the Archbishop is concerned, it would appear that he saw the necessity of giving stability to the work of the oratories. Hence he did not hesitate to prefer Don Bosco to other priests similarly involved. But he did not have the heart to curb Fr. Cocchi's initiatives by subjecting him to Don Bosco. His decree, however, practically eliminated "the opposition" and tied Don Bosco's name permanently to the work of the oratories—thereby conferring on Don Bosco a right that later he would not hesitate to claim.

### **7. Closing Comment: Characteristics of Don Bosco's Oratories**

Don Bosco had before him earlier experiences and patterns in oratory work: e.g., the oratories in Lombardy (Milan, Bergamo and Brescia), and more distantly the oratories of St. Philip Neri in Rome. In Turin, he had before him a capital experiment, Fr. Cocchi's Oratory of the Guardian Angel. One may therefore say that Don Bosco was following precedents, and that from this prior experience he derived the essential characteristics of the oratory—religious instruction and recreational activities directed towards an educational purpose. The Oratory was, as every Salesian work for young people should be, a home, a church, a school and a playground.

Don Bosco stood in a tradition, but he succeeded in creatively endowing his oratories with the unique characteristics. We may enumerate a few of these with the note that other oratories (Fr. Cocchi's for example) differed primarily for their

specific emphases. The following remarks take especially the parish-based oratories for comparison.

Traditionally, the oratories were parish activities, or at least they gravitated around a parish. Don Bosco's oratories transcended the parish institution. Perhaps he had recognized very early the insufficiency of the parish structures and their inability to cope with the new situation of young people. This perception produced a new understanding of how problems affecting young people should be addressed. The isolated location of his Oratory in Valdocco, chosen in spite of the unsavory character of the area, guaranteed independence in its operation.<sup>51</sup>

Traditional oratories were exclusively "festive oratories," that is, they met only on Sundays and holy days, and then only for a few hours in the afternoon. Don Bosco gathered the young people for the whole day, providing all that this required. Then he extended the oratory by establishing evening and day classes, by visiting the young people on their job and by "assisting" them, that is, meeting all their real needs. This approach made for a sustained weeklong contact. This, together with the stress put on religious instruction and education was probably the most distinctive character of Don Bosco's oratories.

The traditional oratory was basically defined from attendance at church and meeting in designated parish facilities. The boys who attended the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, even after the wandering phase had come to an end, went "to spend the day with Don Bosco." That's where the oratory was "located." Premises were "tools" used for doing oratory.

The traditional oratories were selective, that is, centered their attention on the best youngsters. Parents would present their children and guarantee their good conduct. Don Bosco, on the contrary, created an oratory for all, giving preference

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<sup>51</sup> In his letter of March 13, 1846 to Marquis Michael Cavour, the King's appointed vicar of Turin, requesting permission, Don Bosco notes the fact that the Pinardi site was far from any parish church.

(whenever possible) to the truly poor and abandoned, juveniles released from prison, unemployed and drifting youngsters at risk from the poorest strata of society.<sup>52</sup>

In the traditional oratory the role of play and the playground was very limited. The playground was a “garden of recreation,” a term which Don Bosco sometimes uses for convenience’ sake to describe the playground of his own oratories (!). Don Bosco’s playground, and the games played on it, allowed full scope to youthful exuberance, with oratory personnel even taking the initiative.

## Appendix I

### 8.1 Giuseppe Brosio the *Bersagliere*: Biographical Sketch

Who was Joseph Brosio? In his memoir, he claims the honor of having known Don Bosco when the latter was still a seminarian in Chieri and spent time with the local lads. When the seminarians walked to the “cathedral” for church services, everybody sought out the “seminarian with a head of curly hair.” Brosio was so impressed with the way Seminarian Bosco approached young people that he wished to know him better. He found it easy because he was close to the Comollos, and when he visited Louis Comollo in the seminary, he always found him in Bosco’s company. He thus became Don Bosco’s friend.<sup>53</sup>

From his memoir it emerges that he moved to Turin and eventually started in business as a shopkeeper, all the while helping with the oratory. Lemoyne states that Brosio had been helping Don Bosco with the oratory since 1841 and remained close to him for 46 years.<sup>54</sup> At the time of the writing of the

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<sup>52</sup> Don Bosco did not permit members of gangs or young men obdurately opposed to religion to join the oratory indiscriminately. He tried to win them over and often succeeded.

<sup>53</sup> Brosio, *Memoir*, Part I, 1. *FDBM* 554 E12.

<sup>54</sup> *EBM* III, 76.

memoir, so Brosio himself states, he had known Don Bosco for 43 years.<sup>55</sup> The memoir was probably written, so it appears, soon after Don Bosco's death (1888) when Fr. John Bonetti was collecting material in view of Don Bosco's diocesan process of beatification. At one point in his memoir, he addresses Fr. Bonetti specifically.<sup>56</sup>

After an honorable discharge from the *Bersaglieri* Corps, into which he was drafted during the war of 1848-49, Brosio continued to be Don Bosco's faithful helper. Since he always showed up in military uniform he was known as *il Bersagliere* (the Sharpshooter) ever after.<sup>57</sup> The *Bersaglieri* were an elite, highly mobile rifle corps in the Piedmontese army. Mounted on bicycles, they could be quickly deployed. In the context of the First War for Independence (1848-49) patriotic enthusiasm ran high, and Don Bosco permitted the boys at recreation to engage in military drills and mock battles under the *Bersagliere's* direction.

When Fr. John Vola became director of the Oratory of the Guardian Angel in Vanchiglia (following Fr. Carpano and Fr. Grassino), Don Bosco sent Brosio to that oratory to teach catechism and to direct boys' recreation. The area was the home turf of a fearsome gang of toughs. Brosio introduced gymnastics and war games, and occasionally the boys, "armed" and in military formation, had to confront the gang and their leader (*Il Barabba*).<sup>58</sup>

The oratory crisis passed, not without damaging effects, and Don Bosco emerged vindicated by the Archbishop's decree of 1852. Don Bosco occasionally used Brosio's home nearby as a retreat where he could write and work undisturbed. At one point he urged the good man to start studying to become a teacher. Brosio tried, but after a while he had to admit that he

<sup>55</sup> Brosio, *Memoir*, Part II, 4, *FDBM* 555 C10.

<sup>56</sup> Brosio, *Memoir*, Part I, 23, *FDBM* 555 B10.

<sup>57</sup> *EBM* III, 309-310.

<sup>58</sup> Brosio, *Memoir*, Part I, Introduction, 3-4, *FDBM* 554 E12 – 555 A1, edited in *EBM* III, 395-397.

had neither the time nor the inclination. But he continued to be part of oratory life to the end.

## Appendix II

### 8.2. Don Bosco's Statements on the Early Oratory

#### (8.2.1) Letter to the *Mendicità Istruita* (February 20, 1850)

(February 20, 1850)<sup>59</sup>

Honorable Gentlemen:

In an effort to promote the social, religious and moral advancement of the most neglected (*più abbandonati*) young people [of this city], in 1841 Fr. John Bosco began by gathering several such young people in a place attached to the church of St. Francis of Assisi. By force of circumstance, their number was limited to seventy or eighty.

[...The move to the *Rifugio* and the wandering are alluded to.]

In the year 1846 he succeeded in renting a place in Valdocco, and the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was established there. The number of young people, between the ages of 12 and 20, reached as high as six or seven hundred. Many of these youngsters had just been released from prison or were liable to being sent there.

[...The opening of the Oratory of St. Aloysius in 1847 is mentioned.]

In response to the ever more pressing need to educate and help neglected (*abbandonati*) young people, in October 1849 the Oratory of the Guardian Angel was re-opened. Fr. Cocchi, curate at the church of the Annunciation and a most

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<sup>59</sup> Motto, *Ep* I, 96f. from the archive of the *Mendicità Istruita*; Ceria, *Ep* I, 29f.; *IBM* XVII, 853-854.



zealous priest, had been forced to shut it down the previous year. The number of young people attending the three oratories jointly often reaches one thousand.

[... Oratory activities are described.]

We also have a Home (*ospizio*) capable of housing from twenty to thirty youngsters of the kind that find themselves in dire need (*estremo bisogno*), as it is all too often the case.

Up to now the work has gone forward with the help of a number of charitable persons, both priests and lay people. The priests that are committed to this work in a special way are: Fr. Dr. [Giovanni] Borrelli, Fr. Dr. [Giacinto] Carpano, Fr. Dr. [Giovanni Ignazio] Vola, Fr. [Pietro] Ponte, Fr. [Giovanni] Grassino, Fr. Dr. [Roberto] Murialdo, Fr. [Giovanni Francesco] Giacomelli, Fr. Dr. Prof. [Francesco] Marengo.

[... Financial needs are outlined and a request for help is made on grounds that the purpose of the oratories coincides with that of the *Mendicizia Istruita* ...]

**Note:** In response to this petition, the administrators of the association voted a subsidy. But they did not always respond favorably to Don Bosco's appeals.

### **(8.2.2) Early Associates and Cooperators of Don Bosco in Oratory Work. Don Bosco's Statement in the *Bollettino Salesiano*.<sup>60</sup>**

As far back as 1841 catechetical instruction began to be provided to the poorest and most neglected young people, namely to those youngsters who at any moment found themselves in danger of being sent to prison. The harvest was great, and was increasing by the day. Don Bosco would often find himself surrounded by five or six hundred children, and would find it impossible to keep them properly occupied and to

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<sup>60</sup> Don Bosco published this article in the recently founded Salesian Bulletin: *Bibliofilo Cattolico o Bollettino Salesiano* 3: 6 (September 1877). It is transcribed by Eugenio Valentini, "Preistoria dei Cooperatori Salesiani," *Salesianum* 39 (1977), 140-150.

tend to their need. It was under these circumstances that many zealous priests and Christian lay persons wished to be associated with Don Bosco in this ministry.

First and foremost among them we remember the zealous and much lamented Dr. Giovanni Borel, Fr. Giuseppe Caffasso, and Canon [Carlo Antonio] Borsarelli [di Riffreddo]. These were the first cooperators from among the clergy. But since they had other demanding commitments, they could be on hand only at certain hours and on certain occasions.

Consequently, we turned to gentlemen from the nobility and the middle class for help, and we drew a generous response from a good number of them. They came and were assigned to teaching catechism, conducting classes, supervising the boys during services in and out of church. With exemplary dedication they led the boys in prayer and song, they prepared them for the reception of the holy sacraments of penance, communion, and confirmation.

Out of church, they would be on hand to receive the boys as they arrived at the oratory, to assign places for recreation to them, to take part in a kindly manner in their games, to maintain order.

Another important concern of the cooperators was *job placement*. Many boys were from out of town, sometimes from distant places; they found themselves alone, without a livelihood, without a job, without anyone who would care for them. Some of the cooperators then would go after those lads; they tried to clean them up; they placed them with some honest employer, and got them ready to make their appearance at the work place. During the week they would visit those youngsters, and see that they came back to the oratory the following Sunday, so that they might not lose in one day what they had gained by the labor of several weeks.

Many of these cooperators at great personal sacrifice came faithfully every evening during the winter season, and taught classes in reading, writing, singing, arithmetic, and Italian language. Others instead would come daily at noon to teach

catechism to those youngsters who were most in need of instruction.

Among the many laypersons who deserve recognition for their charity and dedication one of the most outstanding was Mr. Giuseppe Gagliardi, a businessman. He generously devoted all his free time and all his savings to helping the youngsters of the oratory. He would always refer to them affectionately as *our children*. He passed away only a few years ago; and he will be gratefully remembered as long as the work of the oratory endures. The following dedicated cooperators God has already called to himself: [?] Campagna, a banker; Gioanni Fino, a businessman; Chevalier Giuseppe Cotta; and the well known Count Vittorio di Camburzano.

Among those who are still with us, we wish gratefully to acknowledge Count Carlo Cays; Giuseppe Dupré; Marquis Domenico Fassati; Marquis Gioanni Scarampi; the three brothers, Counts Carlo, Eugenio, and Francesco De Maistre; Chevalier Marco Gonella; Count Francesco [Viancini di] Viancino; Chevalier Clemente di Villanova; Count Casimiro di Brozzolo; Chevalier Lorenzo d'Agliano; Mr. Michele Scanagatti; Baron Carlo Bianco di Barbania and many others.

Among the many priests who became associated with the work we may mention: the brothers [Giovanni] Ignazio and Giovanni [Battista] Vola; Dr. [Paolo Francesco] Rossi, who died as director of the Oratory of St. Aloysius; Dr. Attorney [Giovanni Battista] Destefanis—all of whom God has already called to their heavenly home. To these must be added Dr. Roberto Murialdo, the present director of the *Famiglia di S. Pietro*, and Dr. Leonardo Murialdo, at present director of the *Artigianelli* Institute.

Among the earliest priest-cooperators who are still with us, God be praised, the following should be mentioned: Fr. Giuseppe Trivero; Dr. Chevalier Giacinto Carpano; Fr. Michelangelo Chiatellino; Fr. Ascanio Savio; Fr. Gioanni Giacomelli; Dr. Prof. [?] Chiaves; Fr. Antò Bosio, now pastor; Fr. Sebastiano Pacchiotti; Fr. Prof. [Giovanni Battista] Musso;

Canon [?] Musso, a teacher; Fr. Pietro Ponti (Ponte); Canon Francesco Luigi Nasi; Canon Prof. Marengo; Fr. Francesco Onesti, a teacher; Dr. Emiliano Manacorda, now bishop of Fossano; Canon Eugenio Galletti, now bishop of Alba.

We must above all acknowledge the contribution of our archbishop, the then Canon [Lawrence] Gastaldi. He would faithfully be available for preaching, hearing confessions, and teaching classes. He always regarded the festive oratories as a providential work, a work guided and sustained by God.<sup>61</sup>

All these cooperators came down to the fields of Valdocco to work. The district is now completely built up, but at the time it was fairly uninhabited. They came and spent time, money, and their best efforts on behalf of young people at risk—to gather them together in order to instruct them in the truths of faith and return them to society as good, productive citizens.

[...] <sup>62</sup>

We had cooperators not only from among the men, but also from among the women. Some of our pupils (*allievi*) were nothing but dirty, unkempt ragamuffins. No one could stand them, and no employer wanted them in his workshop. A number of charitable ladies came to the rescue. They washed, they sewed, they patched, they even provided new clothes and linen for these boys, as need demanded.

The leader of the ladies was Mrs. Margherita Gastaldi, who worked at the oratory as a cooperator together with her daughter (both gone to their reward) and her niece, Lorenzina Mazzè. Other faithful workers were the Marchioness Maria

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<sup>61</sup> One should bear in mind that this was written in late 1877, at the time when the conflict between Don Bosco and Archbishop Gastaldi was reaching the breaking point, after a long series of clashes, with the publication of the first anonymous defamatory pamphlet.

<sup>62</sup> At this point a short paragraph describes how order was kept and the oratory run, according to a set of regulations, without recourse to threats or punishments. These would be the *Regulations for the Boys' Oratory* of 1854, from which we quote Don Bosco's own *Introduction* and the *Historical Outline* (see Appendix V (8.5) below).

Fassati, Countess Gabriella Corsi, Countess Bosco-Riccardi and her daughter Giulietta, Countess Casazza Riccardi, the noble Miss Candida Bosco, Countess Bosco-Cantono, Mrs. Vincenza Occhiena, Mrs. Bianco Juva, and many others. A number of charitable and educational institutes also joined in the effort on behalf of poor young people.

Everyone seemed fired with enthusiasm in this work of mercy, which was very much like "clothing the naked." The youngsters, too, grateful for the benefits received, offered themselves willingly for singing and for serving as altar boys in those same institutes. They also expressed their gratitude by praying morning and evening for their benefactors.

### **Appendix III**

#### **8.3. Correspondence: Frs. Borel, Cafasso, Ponte on the Oratory Crisis**

##### **8.3.1. Letter: Fr. Borel to Fr. Ponte<sup>63</sup>**

[Fr. Pietro Ponte, in a letter to Fr. John Borel, had complained about the oratory situation and about alleged hurts he had to endure. Fr. Borel replied:]

Turin, October 23, 1851

Reverend and dear Fr. Ponte,

Since the welfare of the oratories is very close to our heart, we are convinced that harmony between all members, regardless of their rank, is the best policy. Only thus will God be with us! Therefore, with God's help, we are determined to promote this concord by closer cooperation among ourselves and by the removal of any obstacle that may arise.

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<sup>63</sup> Borel to Ponte, October 23, 1851, edited in *EBMIV*, 218.

Concord is impaired when the other oratories are not allowed to use certain things provided for one oratory. Likewise, it is disturbed when, in the same oratory, a member reserves some things for his exclusive use, so that no one may use them even when he is absent.

We have therefore agreed that any donation to one oratory must be regarded as given to all the oratories, and the directors are bound in conscience to inform the benefactors of this policy of ours.

We have reached this conclusion as a result of your letter and a subsequent episode of a similar nature. Since it may happen that, due to our limited supply of sacred vestments, one of the oratories may need to borrow them on special occasions, it is only right that the other oratories come to its assistance just as we already do with personnel and other things. In case one of us sees fit to lend to an oratory something he has, or to borrow something from others, besides being grateful, he must promptly return the borrowed goods. This has always been our practice. Such was the case, for example, with the crib kindly loaned to the St. Aloysius Oratory.

We must not think that Divine Providence will fail us because we have adopted this procedure. Indeed, we have reason to hope that it will result in even greater blessings. By mutual help we widen the field of our charity, open new avenues for doing good to the young, share more intimately in the communion of saints, and strip ourselves of selfishness and pride. Our charity will then be more genuine inasmuch as it will be untainted by personal interests. No one has anything to lose, because each oratory, by sharing its material goods with the others, will in turn be entitled to the same benefits. Let us be ever grateful to Our Lord for the blessing of concord. In this spirit let us work on behalf of youth in every part of the city.

I am delighted to inform you that the oratories are well cared for and that our boys, docile and devout, keep coming in droves. Fr. [Robert] Murialdo has generously taken over our dear Fr. Grassino's post at Borgo Vanchiglia [Guardian Angel

Oratory]. Our zealous Fr. Rossi takes excellent care of the St. Aloysius Oratory, and up to All Saints' Day will preach the afternoon instruction while I shall continue to give the morning sermon. Don Bosco provides the preachers at the St. Francis de Sales Oratory, and when necessary he substitutes for them.

The new church [St. Francis de Sales] is now ready for the roof, and before winter sets in it will be covered.

I have learned that you and the marchioness have safely arrived in Florence, but I am sorry to hear that Mr. [Silvio] Pellico found the journey uncomfortable.<sup>64</sup> Yesterday the Sisters of St. Mary Magdalene again prayed for the safe return of their foundress and benefactress.<sup>65</sup> I pray daily to the Lord that he grant her prosperity, health, and happiness. I have nothing to report regarding the convent or the *Rifugio*. Everything seems to be going well. This should reassure the marchioness and contribute to her peace of mind.

All the priests, including myself, are well. I am now at home and I intend to stay here as long as possible to assist these religious communities and to defer to the wishes of the marchioness who is so interested in them.

I would like to ask you a further favor. Please give me your comments on what I have told you about the oratories and our policy in running them. Let me also know what you want done with belongings that you left behind.

Please accept my sincere best wishes. I remain,

Your devoted and faithful friend,

Fr. John Borel, Director of the *Rifugio*

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<sup>64</sup> Silvio Pellico was a writer and patriot who served as secretary and librarian to the Marchioness Juliet Barolo. (Cf. note 21 above for more on Silvio Pellico.)

<sup>65</sup> The Sisters of St. Mary Magdalene (*Maddalene*) were a cloistered community of repentant women desirous to lead a retired life. It was founded by the Marchioness as an offshoot of the *Rifugio*.



**8.3.2. Letter: Fr. Ponte to Fr. Borel<sup>66</sup>**

Rome, November 4, 1851

Reverend and dear Father,

I was very pleased to receive your kind, heartwarming letter. I was longing to hear news of the oratories and was beginning to be worried about them. Now, thank God, I feel tranquil.

Let me now comment on your letter. I too am worried and desire concord among the directors of the oratories. I wholeheartedly wish all differences of opinion to be resolved so that, united in mind and will, we may with greater reason expect more abundant help from the Lord and a greater reward for our labors. I believe that this deplorable discord resulted from the fact that we have no one in particular to turn to and from a serious lack of communication among ourselves. This opinion is also shared by others. If you can do something about this, I am sure all unrest will vanish.

I cannot go back on the decision I previously revealed to you. I made this decision only after careful soul-searching and I cannot change it for any reason. If the things I left at the St. Aloysius Oratory are in the way, I'll remove them as soon as I return to Turin or, if necessary, before. From now on (should God will that I continue working in behalf of the oratories) I shall willingly abide by the decision you mentioned—namely, that donations made to the director of one oratory should be considered as made to all. Whenever possible, I shall so inform our benefactors.

I am very pleased to learn that the St. Aloysius Oratory is thriving, thanks to your personal efforts and those of our good Fr. Rossi. For my part, although physically absent, I am constantly with you in spirit and I never cease recommending

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<sup>66</sup> Fr. Ponte to Fr. Borel, November 4, 1851, edited in *EBM* IV, 219-220.

this work to God. Soon, I hope, I will have an audience with the Holy Father. I shall beg his blessing for the directors and boys of our oratories.

So far our journey has gone well. The Marchioness is in good health and she was very happy to receive such good news about her institutes. Mr. Pellico feels much better now. Pray for me and have the boys pray, too. Give my regards to all the priests in the oratories. Hoping to receive more good news of the oratories, I remain,

Your devoted friend,

Fr. Peter Ponte

**8.3.3. Letter: Fr. Cafasso to Fr. Ponte<sup>67</sup>**

Rev. Fr. Peter Ponte  
c/o Marchioness Barolo  
Naples

Turin, January 6, 1852

Dear Fr. Ponte,

I thought I would be able to reply to your welcome letter before you left Rome, but a long series of chores and problems made this impossible.

I shall come immediately to the point. I urge you to put aside all worry and disquietude regarding the decision you plan to take on the matter you mention. Your fellow workers are not motivated by preconceived ideas or animosity toward you, nor do they desire to break with you. On the contrary, I do know that they look forward to your cooperation as soon as—God willing,

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<sup>67</sup> Fr. Cafasso to Fr. Ponte, January 6, 1852, edited in *EBM* IV, 255-256.

hopefully very soon—you will return to Turin. The items under discussion are yours, and therefore you are perfectly free to do whatever you wish with them. However, if you want my opinion, I think that, as things are now, you would do well to put them at the disposal of the oratories rather than of any individual. You can, of course, reserve priority rights for yourself as long as you will be able to help in this work so blessed by the Lord. Should you judge otherwise, do what you think is best and disregard my suggestion.

I again advise you to be cheerful, serene, and tranquil. Crosses there will always be, but the Lord loves peace and serenity, too.

Please tell the Marchioness that, though distant, we can pray for each other. I remember her in my prayers. My best regards to Mr. Pellico. With all my heart, I am,

Affectionately yours,

Fr. Joseph Cafasso

## Appendix IV

### 8.4. Archbishop Fransoni's Decrees of March 31, 1852<sup>68</sup>

**8.4.1. Decree Appointing Don Bosco Officially Head Spiritual Director of the Three Oratories of St. Francis de Sales, of Saint Aloysius and of the Guardian Angel**

#### MARQUIS LOUIS FRANSONI

**Knight of the Supreme Order of the Annunciation, by the  
Grace of God and of the Apostolic See Archbishop of Turin**

**To**

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<sup>68</sup> Decrees edited in *EBM IV*, 527-529 (Appendices 7 and 8).

**The Very Reverend John Bosco of Castelnuovo,  
Diocesan Priest**

Greetings!

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

Therefore, we herewith confer upon you every faculty necessary and suitable to this holy purpose.

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

Turin, March 31, 1852

Signed: Philip Ravina, *Vicar General*

Balladore, *Chancellor*

This copy agrees with the original.

Balladore, *Chancellor*

**[Editor's Note]**

The chancery of Turin had granted the following faculties to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales:

1. To celebrate low and high Mass, give Benediction with the Holy Eucharist, hold triduums, novenas, and spiritual retreats.

2. To teach catechism, preach, admit children to First Communion, and prepare them for the sacraments of Penance and Confirmation.

3. To allow children and adults to make their Easter duty in any of the chapels of the oratories, to bless sacred vestments and clerical habits, and to confer such habits on those young men who manifested a vocation for the priesthood but only if they intended to work in the oratories and boarded in the adjoining hospice.

These authorizations in practice frequently gave rise to uncertainties. Therefore, Archbishop Fransoni, with his decree of March 31, 1852, granted them without any limitation and thus included whatever was opportune or necessary for the smooth and proper running of the three Oratories of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco, of St. Aloysius at Porta Nuova, and that of the Guardian Angel in Vanchiglia.

**8.4.2. Accompanying Decree Appointing Fr. Roberto Murialdo Spiritual Director of the Guardian Angel Oratory in Dependence under Don Bosco**

**MARQUIS LOUIS FRANSONI**

**Knight of the Supreme Order of the Annunciation, Knight of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus, by the Grace of God and of the Apostolic See, Archbishop of Turin**

**To**

**The Very Reverend Fr. Robert Murialdo,  
Diocesan Priest**

Greetings!

In consideration of the deep commitment and fervent zeal with which, as a worthy priest, you diligently and assiduously labor on behalf of the Christian education of poor boys gathered in the Guardian Angel Oratory in the Vanchiglia district, We deem it proper to give public testimony of our complete satisfaction by officially appointing you, with this letter, Spiritual Director of the above-mentioned Oratory, under the sole condition that you faithfully preserve its unity and dependence under the Reverend John Bosco, Head Director of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco and founder of this Guardian Angel Oratory. We therefore grant you all the necessary and opportune authorizations connected thereto.

We are forwarding the original of this certificate for filing to our chancery. Our chancellor is authorized to issue a copy thereof to you.

Turin, March 31, 1852

Signed: Philip Ravina, *Vicar General*

Balladore, *Chancellor*

This copy agrees with the original.

Signed: Balladore, *Chancellor*

## Appendix V

### 8.5. Introduction to the Draft Regulations of the Boys' Oratory (1854)

The archival manuscripts of Chapter I (Introduction) and Chapter 2 (Historical Outline) of the Draft Regulations for the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin, District of Valdocco of 1854 (*Piano di Regolamento dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales*) have now

been critically edited, with introductory study and notes, by Pietro Braidò: *Don Bosco per i giovani: L'Oratorio, una Congregazione degli Oratori. Documenti* (Piccola Biblioteca dell'Istituto Storico Salesiano, 9). (Roma: LAS, 1988), 30-34 (Introduction) and 34-55 (Historical Outline).<sup>69</sup>

Here (in translation) is the first chapter (Introduction) of these Regulations. It states the rationale and principles of oratory work, and hints at the critical circumstances that made a set of regulations necessary (italicized in my translation).

These regulations began to be drafted in the early 1850s. The *Draft* under consideration dates from 1854. It should be emphasized that these are the Regulations for the original boys' oratory, that is, the gathering of young people on Sundays and holy days for religious services and instruction and for recreation.<sup>70</sup> The last paragraph of the Introduction expresses Don Bosco's indomitable resolve and dedication. The italicized lines toward the end seem to allude to the Oratory crisis described above.

### Introduction

*Ut filios Dei, qui erant dispersi, congregaret in unum* [To gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. John 11:52]. It seems to me that the words of the Holy Gospel, which tell us that our divine Savior come down from heaven to earth to gather together all the children of God scattered all over the world, could be applied literally to the young people of our times. These young people, the most vulnerable yet most valuable portion of human society, on whom we base our hopes for a happy future, are not of their nature depraved. Were it not for carelessness on the part of parents, idleness, mixing in bad company, which happens especially on Sundays, it would be so easy to inculcate in their young hearts the principles of order, of

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<sup>69</sup> Don Bosco's autograph Ms. of the Introduction and Historical Outline is in ASC 132: Oratorio 1, FDB 1,872 B3-C5.

<sup>70</sup> Lemoyne edited parts of the *Introduction* (lines 1-25, 47-51 of the original) in the *Biographical Memoirs*. [EBM II, 35-36.]

The *Historical Outline* (*Cenno storico*), however, remained unpublished until Braidò's critical edition cited above.



good behavior, of respect and of religion. For, if it so happens that they are ruined at that young age, it is due more to their thoughtlessness than to ingrained malice.

These young people have a real need of some kind person who will take care of them, work with them, guide them in virtue and keep them away from vice.

The problem lies in finding ways of gathering them, of being able to speak to them, and of instructing them in the moral life.

The Son of God was sent for this purpose, and his holy religion alone can achieve it. This religion is of itself eternal and unchangeable, and has been, and will always be, the teacher of people. But the law it contains is so perfect that it can adapt to changing times and suit the diverse character of all people.

The oratories are regarded to be among the aptest means for instilling the spirit of religion in hearts that are uncultivated and abandoned. These oratories are gatherings in which young people, after they have attended church services, are entertained with pleasant and wholesome recreation.

The support which both civic and Church authorities have given me, the zeal shown by many worthy people who have given me material aid, or have helped directly with the work, are a clear sign of the blessing of the Lord, and of the public's appreciation.

It is now time to set out a regulatory framework that might serve as a plan for a proper organization of this portion of the sacred ministry, and as a guideline to the numerous priests and lay people who work in it with such dedication and charitable concern. *I have often begun [to draft such a framework], but I have always given up on account of the innumerable difficulties I had to overcome. Now, to ensure the preservation of unity of spirit and uniformity of discipline, as well as to comply with the wish of persons in authority who have counseled me to do so, I have decided to complete this work, no matter what its outcome may be.*

But I wish it understood from the start that *it is not my purpose to lay down law or precept for anyone. My one aim is to set out what we do in the Boys' Oratory of St. Francis de Sales at Valdocco, and the way it is being done.*

*Some expressions found herein may lead some people into thinking that I am seeking my own honor and glory. Let them not think so; let them rather put it all down to my commitment to write [about the oratory] as things actually developed and as they are even at the present day.*

**When I dedicated myself to this portion of the sacred ministry, I fully intended to consecrate every effort of mine to the greater glory of God and to the good of souls. My resolve was to spend every effort to make these young people good citizens for this earth, so that they might be one day worthy inhabitants of heaven. May God help me and enable me to continue in this endeavor to my dying breath. So be it.**