

# AT THE ROOTS OF DON BOSCO'S SPIRITUALITY

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These pages seek to cast some light upon the kind of world in which Don Bosco lived and worked and upon the sources which inspired his spirituality and his labours as an educator. While admitting that Don Bosco had his own highly original personality, I feel it is necessary to explore his background, if we would truly understand the man.

## 1. The climate of the age in which Don Bosco lived and worked

Don Bosco grew up in the climate of the Restoration. Although the word normally has certain political and social resonances (the Congress of Vienna and the Holy Alliance, the political repression practised by governments, the aftermath of revolution), it also has a special relevance in the field of culture and religious life. Typical of the era of the Restoration was the effort to repair the fabric of a Christian society torn apart by the French Revolution (Cardinal Consalvi saw the Revolution as «the flood», and Brunone Lanteri called it «the laying waste of the world»). This reaction was based on the conviction that a vast diabolical operation was at work, aimed at destroying God's plans, of which the Church was the custodian, and that ramparts had to be erected to repel the assaults and reconquer the world for God and the Church.

The Society of Jesus, which had been reconstituted by Pius VII in 1814, became the mainspring of this religious renaissance in Piedmont. It numbered men of great stature, men like Giovanni Roothaan, rector of the college of St. Francis of Paola in Turin and later Father General of the Order, as also Francesco Pellico and Antonio Bresciani.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> P. PIRRI, *P. Giovanni Roothaan XXI Generale della Compagnia di Gesù (1785-1853)*, Isola del Liri 1930; I. RINIERI, *Il padre Francesco Pellico e i suoi tempi*, vol. 1: *La Restaurazione e l'opera della Compagnia di Gesù*, Pavia 1934.

1.1. *The "Friendships" and the Oblates of the Virgin Mary*

New Orders were founded, like the Oblates of the Virgin Mary by Brunone Lanteri and the Institute of Charity by Antonio Rosmini, the Sisters of Charity by Antida Thouret, as well as new lay societies. Conspicuous amongst these latter was the *Christian Friendship*, which arose amongst the more aristocratic and upper middle-class admirers of the Jesuits. Its aim was the spiritual formation of its members and opposition to the spirit of the Encyclopaedists by spreading works of strictly Catholic inspiration («good books» as they were called), either by lending them out or distributing them free.<sup>2</sup> The piety of the *Friendship* was centred on devotion to the Sacred Heart, in keeping with the Jesuits' effort to combat Jansenism, on frequent communion and daily meditation. The *Christian Friendship* quickly extended its activities and began to promote the Spiritual Exercises and to organize missions, as well as selecting confessors in accordance with the advice of St. Alphonsus de Liguori.

The *Friendship* disappeared in the Napoleonic era, but then was revived by Brunone Lanteri in 1817 with the title of *Catholic Friendship*. Some of its members – Cesare Taparelli d'Azeglio, Rodolfo and Giuseppe de Maistre, Luigi Provana di Collegno, Pietro Pallavicino, Renato d'Agliano, Giancarlo Brignole – occupied important political posts in the State administration of Savoy. This *Catholic Friendship* also undertook the free distribution of «good books». Since its inspiration was wholly ultramontane and defensive of the temporal power, these books all advocated the link between «throne» and «altar», professed unconditional devotion to the Holy See, defended the Pope's personal infallibility, refuted «modern errors», propagated the theological and spiritual trends favoured by the Jesuits and defended a less rigorous approach in moral matters. It was the *Catholic Friendship*, which in 1825 promoted the publication of the works of Alphonsus de Liguori by Giacinto Marietti of Turin.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The first circle of the *Friendship* was set up in Turin in the years 1779-1780 through the initiative of an ex-Jesuit, Nicolaus Joseph von Diessbach (1732-1798). Cells then sprang up in Milan, Vienna, Florence, Rome and Paris. The members operated in secret, as was common at the time, in order to avoid the ridicule of «stronger spirits» and the attentions of the police. Alongside the *Christian Friendship* for laymen in Turin there grew up in 1782 a *Priestly Friendship*, Alphonsian and anti-Jansenistic in spirit, which promoted retreats, the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, the practice of mental prayer and examination of conscience. Cf. C. BONA, *Le «Amicizie», Società segrete e rinascita religiosa (1770-1830)*, Torino 1962. See the reviews of this work by P. Stella in «Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia» 17 (1963) 329-338, and by R. Aubert in «Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique» 59 (1964) 593-598.

<sup>3</sup> C. BONA, *Le «Amicizie»*, pp. 361-371. The works of Lamennais, De Bonald, Von Haller, Bossuet, Gerdil were widely disseminated. Amongst the spiritual writers were the Jesuit Pinamonti, the Barnabite Quadrupani and, above all, Alphonsus de Liguori. Don Bosco, too, appreciated the possibilities offered by «good books» for evangelising the masses and he promoted a variety of publishing initiatives, as is indicated in the lecture of Malgeri contained in the present volume.

In 1828 the *Friendship* was suppressed by the Piedmontese government because of its links with the Jesuits. Some of its members (e.g. Provana di Collegno and Renato d'Agliano) joined the society of St. Vincent de Paul, founded in France by Frederick Ozanam and introduced into Turin in 1850.<sup>4</sup>

Many of the aims of the *Friendship* were taken over by the institute of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary founded by Lanteri (1759-1830). As a cleric the latter had been a member of the *Christian Friendship* and had later re-founded it as the *Catholic Friendship*. The Oblates promoted the preaching of the Spiritual Exercises according to the Ignatian method, gave parish missions, prepared new priests for pastoral work and disseminated «good books». The teaching and spirituality behind all this pastoral work was that of Alphonsus de Liguori. Jean Guerber has argued that the Alphonsian spirit began to penetrate into France in 1823, when Lanteri's book *Réflexions sur la sainteté et la doctrine du bienheureux A. de Liguori* was published in Lyons.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.2. The «Ecclesiastical College»

In 1817 there opened in Turin the «Ecclesiastical College» for the pastoral training of new priests. It was the initiative of Lanteri and of one of his disciples and «Christian friend», Luigi Guala. The College was a crucible in which the style of clerical and religious life was moulded in the second half of the 19th century. Several eminent priests were formed there: Cocchi, Borel, Cafasso, Bosco, Murialdo, Bertagna, Allamano. Don Bosco spent three years there after his ordination in 1841 and defined the College as «a wonderful seeding ground that did great good to the Church, especially by uprooting relics of Jansenism that can still be found amongst us», and in which «one learned how to be a priest».<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> F. MOLINARI, *Le conferenze di san Vincenzo in Italia*, in: *Spiritualità e azione del laicato italiano*, Vol. 1, Padova 1969, p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> The rules of the Oblates of V.M. were drawn up by Lanteri in 1816. Dissolved by the archbishop of Turin, Colombano Chiaverotti, in 1819, they were reestablished at Pinerolo in 1825 under the aegis of bishop Rey. Rosario Romeo recalls that marquis Michele di Cavour, the father of Camillo and Gustavo, went several times to St. Clare's at Pinerolo to make the Exercises under the direction of Lanteri (cf. R. ROMEO, *Cavour e il suo tempo*, vol. 1, Bari 1971, pp. 94-95). Concerning Lanteri cf. P. CALLIARI, *Pio Brunone Lanteri (1759-1830) e la controrivoluzione*, Torino 1976; but, above all, P. CALLIARI (edit.), *Carteggio del venerabile padre Pio Brunone Lanteri (1759-1830) fondatore della Congregazione degli Oblati di Maria Vergine*, vol. 5, Torino 1975-1976. Concerning the *Réflexions* of Lanteri and the spread of Alphonsian moral theology in France, cf. J. GUERBER, *Le ralliement du clergé français à la morale liguorienne. L'abbé Gousset et ses précurseurs (1785-1832)*, Roma 1973. On Lanteri and the spirituality of Francis of Sales, cf. T. LUPO, *Il ven. Pio Brunone Lanteri e la spiritualità salesiana nel Piemonte del primo Ottocento. Aspetti storico-ascetici*, in «Palestra del Clero» 61 (1982), pp. 1236-1247, 1308-1320, 1366-1373.

<sup>6</sup> G. BOSCO, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo* 80; P. BRAIDO, *L'esperienza pedagogica preventiva*

The Ecclesiastical College diffused the teaching and spirit of Alphonsus de Liguori, who was considered by Guala and Cafasso as the writer best qualified to mediate between the rigorists and those following a superficial «benignism»;<sup>7</sup> but it also spread abroad the spirit of St. Francis de Sales and St. Philip Neri. It counterbalanced the diocesan seminary and the theological faculty of the University of Turin, which were more rigoristic in moral theology and were critical of the infallibility and jurisdictional primacy of the Pope. In fine, the College wanted to root out the Jansenistic and rigoristic Gallican influences that still insinuated themselves into the ranks of the Piedmontese clergy.<sup>8</sup>

There is, therefore, a clear link between the *Friendships*, the Oblates of the Virgin Mary and the Ecclesiastical College even though there were differences worthy of note. The *Friendships* were aristocratic and élitist and had a limited function, whereas the Oblates and the College developed a much broader spread of activities on behalf of the clergy and the people.

It is worth noting within this context, as Francesco Traniello has pointed out, that the first spiritual treatise, *Massime di Perfezione*, in which, according to Rosmini himself, the spirit of the Institute of Charity was condensed, had an edition published in Turin by Marietti in 1832. This work was based upon self-abandonment to divine Providence («the principle of passivity») and so was a healthy antidote to the rigorism typical of Piedmontese spirituality.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.3. Rigorism, «benignism» and Alphonsian moral theology

Mention has been made of Alphonsian moral theology, of rigorism and of Jansenism. This important question calls for certain clarifications. First of all

nel sec. XIX, in: P. BRAIDO (edit.), *Esperienze di pedagogia cristiana nella storia*, vol. II, Roma, LAS 1981, pp. 305 et s.

<sup>7</sup> On the Ecclesiastical College of Turin, cf. G. USSEGLIO, *Il teologo Guala e il Convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*, Torino 1948; G. TUNINETTI, *Lorenzo Gastaldi (1815-1883)*, Casale Monferrato, Piemme 1983, pp. 179 et ss. The influence of ultramontanism was not limited to the Ecclesiastical College but made its way also into the Faculty of Theology of the University of Turin. It gained a victory with the dismissal in 1829 of Giovanni Maria Dettori and his replacement by Luigi Massara, lecturer in the Jesuit college of St. Francis of Paola. Dettori, who occupied the chair of moral theology from 1814 onwards, was opposed to probabilism and Liguorian moral theology.

<sup>8</sup> R. TRANIELLO, *Cattolicesimo conciliarista. Religione e cultura nella tradizione rosminiana lombardo-piemontese (1825-1870)*, Milano 1970, pp. 25-27; P. STELLA, *Giurisdizionalismo e giansenismo all'Università di Torino nel secolo XVIII*, Torino 1958. Luigi Guala was influenced by the spiritual tradition of the Jesuits. Between 1831 and 1847 he had an interesting correspondence with Fr. Giovanni Roothaan, the Jesuit superior general on the method of making the Exercises. Guala, assisted by Lanteri, had restored the sanctuary of St. Ignatius on the hill at Lanzo, near Turin, and had introduced there in 1808 the giving of the Spiritual Exercises to priests and lay people. Cafasso frequently preached the Exercises there.

<sup>9</sup> R. TRANIELLO, *Cattolicesimo conciliarista* 80.

a blanket use of the word *Jansenism* must be avoided. One is not necessarily Jansenistic simply because one is opposed to Molina: one can be anti-Jesuit without being a Jansenist. Similarly, one can hold rigidly jurisdictional views in politics and religion, or rigorist views in moral theology, without necessarily being a Jansenist. In its strict sense, Jansenism was already in decline in the early decades of the 19th century. The same, however, is not true of rigorism, which was, in fact, very widespread in pastoral practice.

It is well known that in circles inclined towards Jansenism a severe ideal of the Christian life was cultivated. They called for conversion of heart, they opposed any form of Christianity based on habits with its exterior devotions, passing enthusiasms, sugary traditions, and they disapproved of prayers based on mechanical repetition. Their ideal was a pure form of religion, free from accretions, and rejecting all accommodations, based upon biblical and patristic sources, shunning contact with a world that was enmeshed in sin. To postpone or to refuse absolution to penitents whose perseverance seemed uncertain, and certainly to anyone who had not carried out their penance, was seen as a normal way of provoking a psychological shock, and so of bringing about a true and lasting conversion. The grace of the sacrament of penance was seen as a reward rather than as an aid to spiritual health and new strength in the fight against evil. It could be received only if the soul had reached an appropriate degree of purification. For Alasia, the author of a treatise on moral theology that was widely used by the Piedmontese clergy and an acquaintance of Don Bosco at the seminary at Chieri, to delay absolution was a medicinal remedy that the confessor could use whenever he saw fit.<sup>10</sup>

Not allowing people to go to communion for a certain period was held to be an appropriate penance for those who easily fell again into the same sins (the so-called «recidivists»). This practice was based on the premise that the eucharist was not a medicine for the weak but a reward for the holy, and that, therefore, before communicating, a person must acquire a certain interior strength, which would render him worthy to receive his Lord. Not enough research has been done into sacramental practice in Piedmont during the 18th and 19th centuries, but it seems possible to affirm with reasonable security that the general pastoral approach in the parishes and in the seminaries inclined towards rigorism. Giuseppe Cafasso wrote, and his testimony

<sup>10</sup> Cf. P. STELLA, *Giurisdizionalismo e giansenismo*; ID., *Crisi religiose nel primo Ottocento piemontese*, Torino 1959; ID., *Giansenisti piemontesi nell'Ottocento*, Torino 1964. Hot debate also raged concerning the conditions for valid reception of the sacrament of penance. Is it sufficient to have *attrition*, which is sorrow for sins because one fears the punishment incurred, or is it essential to have *contrition*, which is sorrow for sins because they have offended an infinitely good God? The rigorists denied that attrition was enough in order to obtain forgiveness; sorrow for sin out of fear of the pains of hell was merely a form of selfishness.

is worthy of attention, that according to the pastors of that period it was «difficult to keep the commandments, difficult to receive holy communion well, even difficult to hear Mass with devotion, difficult to pray as one ought, difficult, above all, to be saved, so that very few achieved salvation».<sup>11</sup>

#### 1.4. *Saint Alphonsus and his teaching*

The person and the doctrine of St. Alphonsus were given considerable prominence by his beatification in 1816, and by the process for his canonization, which took place in 1839, and finally by the publication of his works in Turin from 1825 onwards. His influence coloured not only the various ultramontane movements in Piedmont, led by men like Roothaan, Lanteri, Guala, Cafasso and Bosco, but also the work of the mission-preachers throughout the region and the pastoral work of the clergy in general. Alphonsus de Liguori and the congregation he founded had a decisive influence on trends in moral theology, advocating as they did that rigorism in sacramental practice should be abandoned. In the early stage of his priesthood, Liguori too had been a rigorist, because he had been formed on rigorist manuals, like that, for example, of Francis Genet. His conversion came about, he himself confessed, when he began to devote himself to giving missions to ordinary people; in other words, when he came up against real human beings, caught up in the miseries of their condition and barely touched by superficial forms of christianization. Alphonsus realised that southern Italy would never be won over by a gloomy and oppressive pastoral approach that concentrated on God the judge rather than on God the Father, on sin rather than forgiveness and on hell rather than heaven. After this radical contact with the people Alphonsus was converted to a more humane theology that was marked by emphasis on the goodness and mercy of God and on the confidence and trust that we should have in him.<sup>12</sup>

The cities were well provided with clergy, secular and regular, with preachers and catechists, but the missionaries preached to the rural population who were poorly cared for. They accordingly imitated Alphonsus in trying to

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in F. ACCORNERO, *La dottrina spirituale di S. Giuseppe Cafasso*, Torino 1958, p. 110. On this problem cf. P. STELLA, *L'Eucaristia nella spiritualità italiana di metà Seicento ai prodromi del movimento liturgico*, in: *Eucaristia, memoriale del Signore e sacramento permanente*, Torino 1967, pp. 157-159; J. SCHEPENS, *L'activité littéraire de Don Bosco au sujet de la pénitence et de l'Eucharistie*, in «Salesianum» 50 (1988) 9-50.

<sup>12</sup> T. REY-MERMET, *Il santo del secolo dei lumi. Alfonso de' Liguori (1696-1787)*, Italian translation, Roma 1983 (French edit. Paris 1982); G. DE ROSA, *S. Alfonso e il secolo dei lumi*, in «Rassegna di teologia» 28 (1987) 13-31; G. ORLANDI, *S. Alfonso de' Liguori e l'evangelizzazione del Cilento nel Settecento*, in: *La società religiosa nell'età moderna*, Acts of the convention on social and religious history studies, Naples 1973, pp. 845-851; G. CACCIATORE, *S. Alfonso de' Liguori e il giansenismo*, Firenze 1942.

adapt their pastoral methods to the real living conditions of these poor people. Alphonsus's Redemptorists, the priests of the Precious Blood of Gaspare del Bufalo, the priests of the Mission of St. Vincent de Paul, the Passionists of Paul of the Cross, the Oblates of Rho of Giorgio M. Martinielli and the Jesuits all became aware that, faced with a penitent, it was not enough to apply rules; in addition to evaluating his interior dispositions the priest needed to consider the actual conditions in which he was living.<sup>13</sup>

Priests engaged in the care of souls or in giving spiritual direction (one thinks of the work done for groups in Verona by Gaspare Bertoni from 1802 onwards, of Pietro Leonardi, Vincenzo Pallotti, Luigi Biraghi, Giuseppe Benaglio, Giuseppe Frassinetti) began to work along the same anti-rigoristic lines.<sup>14</sup> Alphonsian moral teaching, inclined as it was towards understanding

<sup>13</sup> From 1730 onwards St. Alphonsus and the Redemptorists worked amongst the peasant population of southern Italy and Sicily. For information concerning their mission preaching cf. G. ORLANDI, *Missioni popolari e drammatica popolare*, in «Spicilegium hist. Congr. SS. Redemptoris» 22 (1974) 313-348; S. GIAMUSSO, *Le missioni dei Redentoristi in Sicilia dalle origini al 1860*, *ibid.* 10 (1962) 51-176; O. GREGORIO, *Contributo delle missioni redentoriste alla storia socio-religiosa dell'Italia meridionale*, *ibid.* 21 (1973) 259-283. On the opposition of the Redemptorists to Jansenism and rigorism cf. G. ORLANDI (edit.), *Direttorio apostolico ossia metodo di missione*, Roma 1982; G. DE ROSA, *Linguaggio e vita religiosa attraverso le missioni popolari del Mezzogiorno nell'età moderna*, in «Orientamenti sociali» 36 (1981) 24.

<sup>14</sup> On Gaspare del Bufalo (1786-1837) and the Missionaries of the Precious Blood cf. G. DE LIBERO, *S. Gaspare del Bufalo, romano*, Roma 1954; A. REY, *Gaspare del Bufalo*, vol. 2, Albano Laziale 1987 (3rd edition); *Nel primo centenario della Congregazione del Preziosissimo Sangue*, Grottaferrata 1915. Concerning the Passionists who from 1720 onwards worked in Maremma and in the malaria-infested regions of Lazio cf. E. ZOFFOLI, *S. Paolo della Croce. Storia critica*, vol. 3, Roma 1963-1968. On the Oblates of Rho cf. G. BARBIERI, *Un prete del Settecento lombardo. Padre Martinelli fondatore degli Oblati di Rho*, Milano 1982. Concerning the Vincentian missions cf. L. MEZZADRI, *Le missioni popolari della Congregazione della missione nello Stato della Chiesa (1642-1700)*, in «Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia» 33 (1979) 22-44; *Id.*, *Le missioni popolari dei Lazzaristi nell'Umbria (1675-1797)*, in: *Vincent de Paul. Actes du Colloque international d'Etudes vincentiennes* (Paris 24-26 September, 1981), Roma, Ed. Vincenziane 1983, pp. 310-361. Concerning the Jesuit missions in southern Italy cf. E. NOVI CHIAVARRIA, *L'attività missionaria dei Gesuiti nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia tra XVI e XVIII secolo*, in: G. GALASSO - C. RUSSO (edit.), *Per la storia sociale e religiosa del Mezzogiorno d'Italia*, Napoli 1982, pp. 159-185; R. RUSCONI, *Predicatori e predicazione (secoli IX-XVIII)*, in: *Storia d'Italia, Annali*, vol. 4: *Intellettuali e potere*, Torino 1981, pp. 1006-1018. He comments that the missions given in the 19th century adhered to the same plan as those of the 18th century, but with certain new elements, such as the attention paid to catechesis and the better religious instruction of the people. Concerning Pallotti (1795-1850), the founder of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate for the diffusion of good books, for preaching and giving missions, cf. F. AMOROSO, *Dal nulla al Tutto. Il cammino spirituale di Vincenzo Pallotti*, Roma 1982. Concerning the Milanese priest, Luigi Biraghi (1801-1879), who founded the congregation of the Marcelline Sisters in 1838, cf. M. FERRAGATTA, *Monsignor Luigi Biraghi fondatore delle Marcelline*, edited by A. Rimoldi and G. Parma, Brescia 1979. Giuseppe Benaglio (1767-1836), vicar-general of the diocese of Bergamo and a leading advocate of a more benign moral theology, wrote a book, published posthumously, *Dell'attrizione quasi materia a parte del sacramento della penitenza secondo la dottrina del Concilio di Trento*, vol. 2, Milano 1846. Concerning Benaglio cf. L. DENTELLA, *Il conte canonico Giuseppe Benaglio ed un secolo di storia ecclesiastica berga-*

and readiness to listen, became more widely accepted as the Church became more interested in the rural population and more sensitive to people's real living conditions.<sup>15</sup>

Comparison with Vincent de Paul seems natural to a historian as he notes the similarities between southern Italy and the atmosphere in the France of the 17th century. Vincent de Paul, Eudes and Olier were opposed to Jansenism for pastoral and spiritual reasons. In contact as they were with a French peasantry worn out by famine and war, brutalized by despair and defenceless before the powerful, they realised that they could not preach to this suffering people the doctrine of a God who chose a few privileged souls out of the «*massa damnata*». The harsh, radical message of the Jansenists, so élitist and aristocratic, might be suitable for the devout middle class, but not for poor country folk. Spiritual French men had seen that Jansenism was an obstacle to any reform of the popular masses.<sup>16</sup> Alphonsus de Liguori, Gaspare del Bufalo, Vincenzo Pallotti came, like St. Vincent de Paul, to exactly the same conclusion and opted for the same solution.

### 1.5. *The influence of St. Alphonsus on piety*

These new pastoral insights influenced also the expressions of piety. During the 19th century the kind of piety that prevailed was warm, human and popular, with an emphasis upon feeling and imagination, and with a taste for the marvellous; it set great store upon sensible elements, tangible, bodily things, at the risk of a certain superficiality; it advocated more assidu-

*masca*, Bergamo 1930. Concerning Gaspare Bertoni (1777-1853) cf. G. STOFELLA, *Il venerabile Gaspare Bertoni fondatore dei Preti delle Sacre Stimmate di Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo*, Verona 1952; G. STOFELLA (edit.), *Epistolario del ven. servo di Dio D. Gaspare Bertoni*, Verona 1954. On Pietro Leonardi (1769-1844), who in 1796 founded an association called «The sacred Brotherhood of Hospitallers, priests and laymen» to work for the sick in hospitals, and in 1799 founded the «Ramighelli» for abandoned boys, and in 1809 the Congregation of the Daughters of Jesus for the Christian and civil education of poor girls, cf. D. GALLIO, *Introduzione alla storia delle fondazioni religiose a Verona nel Primo Ottocento*, in: *Chiesa e spiritualità nell'Ottocento italiano*, Verona 1971, pp. 227-310, in particular, pp. 254-267; CRISOSTOMO DA CITTADILLA, *L'amore operativo. Il servo di Dio D. Pietro Leonardi*, Verona 1952. On Giuseppe Frassinetti (1804-1868), founder of the Sons of Mary Immaculate (1861) and ardent advocate of frequent communion, cf. C. OLIVARI, *Della vita e delle opere del servo di Dio sac. Giuseppe Frassinetti*, Roma 1928. Pietro Scavini wrote a successful *Theologia moralis universa*, in which he follows the line of St. Alphonsus. It was published at Novara in 1841 and was several times reprinted.

<sup>15</sup> G. VERUCCI, *Chiesa e società nell'Italia della Restaurazione*, in «Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia» 30 (1976) 25-72; G. MICCOLI, *Vescovo e re del suo popolo*, in G. CHITTOLINI - G. MICCOLI (edit.), *Storia d'Italia, Annali*, vol. 9: *La Chiesa e il potere politico dal Medioevo all'età contemporanea*, Torino 1986, pp. 919-922.

<sup>16</sup> L. MEZZADRI, *Fra giansenisti e antigiansenisti. Vincent De Paul e la Congregazione della Missione (1624-1737)*, Firenze 1977.



ous use of the sacraments and the practice of a wide range of private devotions. Many exuberant expressions of Marian devotion flourished – one of the more significant features of 19th century piety – with processions and pilgrimages, and with a considerable literature on the month of May, on the rosary and the prerogatives of Mary, the Virgin Mother. These writings often indulged in a style that was rather sugary and sentimental.<sup>17</sup>

Other devotions, to Christ's passion, to the Sacred Heart, to the Precious Blood, to the five wounds, to the three hours of Christ's agony, inspired a spirit of reparation and appealed to the affectivity of the senses. Alphonsus was familiar with the mystics like St. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, but wished to bring their kind of spirituality within the reach of ordinary folk. Better than any other Italian writer on ascetics, he interpreted the needs of simple souls, and his writings, full of affective warmth, answered the needs and sensibilities of that period. This is the secret of their huge success. With his taste for the use of the imagination and the emotions, for what we may call «the reasons of the heart», he produced a kind of piety that was naturally suited to the prevailing climate of romanticism.

The Church, therefore, reacting against the austere, demanding élitist spirituality of the Jansenists, with its vein of spiritual snobbery, as also against the chilly rationalism of the 18th century, encouraged this gentler, warmer type of piety that was accessible to the masses. It had, of course, its weaknesses; devotions were multiplied endlessly, including many of secondary or even doubtful value, the practice of indulgences became exaggerated, and sentiment was overindulged. The proliferation of pious practises, divorced from scripture and the liturgy, tended to lead to devotions that were theologically impoverished.<sup>18</sup>

Don Bosco promoted certain practices of piety at the Oratory (visits to the Blessed Sacrament, the «via crucis», devotion to Mary and to the guardian angels, the monthly exercise for a happy death, the novenas in honour of St. Aloysius Gonzaga and of St. Francis de Sales), but he did not indulge in the more exuberant devotions typical of the 19th century, for fear of wearying his boys and putting them off. For example, the practices in honour of the Sacred Heart and the Precious Blood which, with devotion to Mary, were so important in the 19th century don't seem to have featured so

<sup>17</sup> R. AUBERT, *Il pontificato di Pio IX (1846-1878)*, [Italian translation], Torino 1964, pp. 694-707.

<sup>18</sup> According to G. Lanza, her main biographer, the marchioness di Barolo had a special devotion to the Holy Trinity, the Sacred Heart, the Blessed Sacrament, the three hours of Christ's agony, Our Lady of Consolation and Our Lady of Sorrows, the Guardian Angels, the souls in purgatory, St. Joseph, St. Teresa, St. Julia, St. Anne, St. Mary Madgalen, Sts. Cosmas and Damien. See G. LANZA, *La Marchesa Giulia Falletti di Barolo, nata Colbert*, Torino, 1892, pp. 178 et ss. P. Stella comments that «the marchioness was probably not exceptional in her many devotions» (*Don Bosco* I 89).

significantly for Don Bosco as they did for others like Gaspare Bertoni, Gaspare del Bufalo and Vincenzo Maria Strambi.<sup>19</sup>

### 1.6. *The influence of St. Francis de Sales*

This is the place to consider the influence of St. Francis de Sales and of St. Philip Neri. Piedmont, for geographical and historical reasons, was permeated with the spirit of Francis de Sales. Important elements in spreading this Salesian leaven had been the convent of the Visitation at Turin, founded by Jane de Chantal in 1638, the massive circulation of the writings of Francis de Sales, which went through several editions in the 18th century, and the life of the saint written by a Piedmontese priest, Pier Giacinto Gallizia (1662-1737), published at Venice in 1720 and frequently reprinted.<sup>20</sup> Other works that circulated in Piedmont and were impregnated with the Salesian spirit were *L'istruzione della gioventù nella pietà cristiana* by the French priest Charles Gobinet (1655), and the *Guida angelica, ossia pratiche istruzioni per la gioventù* by an anonymous Milanese priest (Turin 1767), which Don Bosco drew upon heavily in producing his *Giovane provveduto*.<sup>21</sup>

Francis de Sales was better known in the cities than in rural areas and on the basis of his *Introduction to the Devout Life* rather than his *Treatise on the love of God*.<sup>22</sup> Francis de Sales was welcomed in Piedmont as the friendly saint who taught Christians how to live in the world, the man for whom «devotion», seen as love of God and love of neighbours, was not the privi-

<sup>19</sup> In the second part of the *Giovane provveduto* the Chaplet of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Prayer to the most Sacred Heart of Mary appeared amongst the particular exercises of Christian piety. There is no reference to devotion to the Most Precious Blood, which was most popular in Rome and in Lombardy and the Veneto.

<sup>20</sup> Editions of the works of Francis de Sales were common in Piedmont. Noteworthy were *Introduzione alla vita devota...*, Torino, Guibert e Orgeas 1779; *Massime ricavate dalle opere di S. Francesco di Sales...*, Torino, Marietti 1837; *Massime distribuite... cavate dalle opere di S. Francesco di Sales...*, Torino, Paravia 1838; *Breve dizionario delle massime di S. Francesco di Sales...*, Torino, Paravia 1838. Cf. also V. BRASIER, E. MORGANTI, M. DURICA, *Bibliografia salesiana*, Torino, 1956. The *Life* of the saint written by Gallizia (1662-1737), who had been chaplain to the convent of the Visitation in Turin, is ultramontane and benign in tone. In 1837 Marietti published the *Compendio delle vite di S. Francesco di Sales e di Giovanna Francesca Frémot di Chantal scritto da un barnabita*, Torino, 1839. The Barnabite in question was Alessandro Gavazzi. Also in circulation was the work by the Turinese Camillian C.A. SACCARELLI, *Vita della S. Madre Giovanna Francesca Frémot fondatrice dell'ordine della Visitatione di Santa Maria*, Roma, Komarek 1734 (reprinted by Simone Cocchi at Venice in 1785).

<sup>21</sup> P. STELLA, *Valori spirituali nel «Giovane provveduto» di san Giovanni Bosco*, Roma 1960.

<sup>22</sup> P. STELLA, *Don Bosco e Francesco di Sales: incontro fortuito o identità spirituale?*, in: J. PICCA - J. STRUŠ (edit.), *San Francesco di Sales e i Salesiani di Don Bosco*, Roma, LAS 1986, pp. 139-159. The *Treatise on the Love of God*, being a good deal more speculative and mystical in character, is a lot less accessible than *The Introduction to the Devout Life*. Don Bosco himself preferred the latter.

leged preserve of cloistered religious but a goal that was within the reach of all Christians by simply carrying out the duties of their state of life.

In response to the pessimism of the Calvinists, Francis had affirmed the continuity between nature and grace and the balanced relationship between God and man. His spiritual vision was rooted in reality and rich in psychological insights; he was against making the spiritual life complicated, but had a sense of proportion. His spirituality was based on a confident exchange with God, who desires the salvation of everyone and who for this purpose sent a Redeemer to make that salvation universally available.

Lanteri, Guala, Cafasso, Cottolengo and Bosco, and the 18th century biography of Pier Giacinto Gallizia, all helped to make the kind and gentle figure of the bishop of Annecy widely known. In the 17th century Antoine Arnauld and Etienne Le Camus, bishop of Grenoble, had presented Francis de Sales in a more Jansenistic, rigoristic light, making him appear as a stern pastor, an interpretation which reached into Piedmont; but the men listed above disseminated throughout the region, during the first half of the 19th century, a picture of the saint that was the very opposite, bringing out his gentleness and the reasonable nature of his piety, which was alien to all excesses.<sup>23</sup>

### 1.7. *The spiritual tradition of St. Philip Neri*

Interwoven with the Salesian element was the spiritual tradition of St. Philip Neri. This was kept alive in Piedmont by the Oratory at Turin, by the extraordinary figure of Sebastiano Valfré (died 1710),<sup>24</sup> by the 17th century biography of Philip Neri by Bacci,<sup>25</sup> and by a series of *Ricordi ai giovanetti* that Don Bosco knew well.<sup>26</sup>

The fusion of the Salesian and the Philippian elements is not surprising. The spiritual programme of Philip Neri was based, like that of Francis, on harmonising nature and grace; it was nourished by confidence in human nature and by a love of art (the «oratorio» was born within the context of the meetings Neri held), avoiding the gloomy and forbidding in favour of a festive, joyful approach. Alphonsus de Liguori, although learning something

<sup>23</sup> P. STELLA, *Don Bosco e Francesco di Sales* 144-146.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. SE in: OE I 489.

<sup>25</sup> G. BACCI, *Vita di S. Filippo Neri, fondatore della Congregazione dell'Oratorio*, Roma 1622. It went through numerous Italian and foreign editions. Noteworthy is the 19th century edition in Rome, Bernardino Olivieri, 1818, and that in Rome, Marini, in 1837.

<sup>26</sup> P. Stella has pointed out that the *Ricordi ai giovanetti* of Philip Neri were contained in an anonymous work, well known to Don Bosco, entitled, *Un mazzolino di fiori ai fanciulli e alle famiglie...*, Torino 1836 (cf. P. STELLA, *Valori spirituali* 41 et s.). The *Ricordi generali di San Filippo Neri alla gioventù* were edited by G. BOSCO in *Porta teo cristiano* (1858), to be found in: OE XI, pp. 34-36.

from Teresa of Avila, was really the spiritual son of Philip Neri and Francis de Sales. In fact his spirituality was matured under the direction of the Oratorian Tommaso Pagano; later he came under the influence of Mons. Falcoia, who was soaked in the Salesian spirit.<sup>27</sup> Francis de Sales was one of the authors most read in Oratorian circles.<sup>28</sup> The young Rosmini was also led to read the books of Francis de Sales through the influence of the Oratorians.<sup>29</sup> Cottolengo, too, breathed the spiritual atmosphere of Philip Neri (his spiritual director was the Oratorian Michele Fontana) and Francis de Sales, although it was through reading the life of Vincent de Paul that he discovered his vocation. As for Don Bosco, Francis de Sales and Philip Neri were the models who most inspired him.

### 1.8. *The Vincentian tradition*

The case of Cottolengo illustrates how influential was the Vincentian tradition in Turin, kept alive by the members of the Congregation of the Mission, which had six houses in Piedmont in 1827, by the Daughters of Charity and by the various foundations which, as offshoots of the Daughters of Charity, preserved their spirit and adopted their rule.<sup>30</sup> While the Lazarists promoted popular missions in the country regions of Piedmont, the

<sup>27</sup> G. CACCIATORE, *Fonti storico-letterarie dell'insegnamento ascetico di S. Alfonso M. de' Liguori*, in: A.M. DE' LIGUORI, *Opere ascetiche. Introduzione generale*, Roma 1960, p. 127.

<sup>28</sup> Salesian influence is strong in the work of Antonio Cesari (1760-1828) of the Verona Congregation of the Oratory and it is mixed with Ignatian, Vincentian and Oratorian elements. This combination is evident in *Lezioni storico-morali sopra la Sacra Scrittura*, Milano 1815-1817 (cf. A. VECCHI, *La dottrina spirituale di A. Cesari*, in: *Chiesa e spiritualità nell'Ottocento italiano*, Verona 1971, pp. 173 et s.).

<sup>29</sup> A. VECCHI, *La dottrina spirituale*, *ibid.*, p. 185, note 139; A. VALLE, *Momenti e valori della spiritualità rosminiana*, Roma 1978, pp. 43 et s. When Rosmini was only a little more than 20 years old he wrote an enthusiastic outline of Philip Neri's life, *Delle lodi di S. Filippo Neri*, Venezia, G. Battaglia 1821.

<sup>30</sup> One who encouraged Vincentian work in Piedmont was Fr. Marcantonio Durando, the friend and adviser of Cafasso, Cottolengo, Bosco, Murialdo and Allamano. He was superior of the house in Turin in 1831, visitor of the Turin province of the Vincentians in 1837; he introduced the Daughters of Charity in 1833 and in 1836 founded the association of the Ladies of Charity, composed of noble women who dedicated themselves to helping the poor and the sick. On Durando see L. CHEROTTI, *Il p. Marcantonio Durando (1801-1880)*, Sarzana 1971. In 1842 there were 20 houses of the Daughters of Charity in Piedmont and by 1848 there were 40 (cf. CHEROTTI, *op. cit.*, p. 112). Other foundations broke off from the Daughters of Charity, while keeping its spirit, especially the Daughters of Charity of Antida Thouret and the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception founded by Antonia Verna at Rivarolo Canavese (Turin). For these cf. F. TROCHU, *Santa Giovanna Antida Thouret, fondatrice delle Suore della Carità*, Milano 1961; A. PIEROTTI, *La vita e l'opera della serva di Dio Madre Antonia Maria Verna, fondatrice delle Suore di Carità dell'Immacolata Concezione d'Ivrea (1773-1838)*, Firenze 1938.

Daughters of Charity devoted themselves to caring for the poor, the sick and the soldiers who were laid up in military hospitals.<sup>31</sup>

This mingling of spiritual traditions encouraged the extraordinary series of initiatives aimed at relieving the material and spiritual needs of the poor, the sick, the imprisoned and of unfortunate girls, which characterised the early decades of the 19th century in Piedmont. The «Little House of Divine Providence» opened in 1832, under the auspices of St. Vincent de Paul, for sick people who, on account of their deformities, had been turned away from other hospitals. The spirituality of Cottolengo was based on total abandonment to Divine Providence and on the service of the very poor. «*Charitas Christi urget nos*» was the motto that he placed over the «Little House».<sup>32</sup>

Giulia di Barolo, a penitent of Lanteri, of Guala and later of Cafasso, promoted works for imprisoned women, for the rehabilitation of prostitutes and for the care of sick girls.<sup>33</sup>

Giuseppe Cafasso devoted himself to helping the chimney sweeps who came to Turin from the Val d'Aosta, visited the imprisoned and accompanied condemned men to the scaffold. He involved the young priest Bosco, then just 26, in this last form of apostolate and the young man was shattered by the experience.<sup>34</sup>

The poor quarter of Valdocco became the heart of this work of charity; the «Little House» of Cottolengo was located there, as also the works of the marchioness of Barolo and, from 1846, the Oratory of Don Bosco.

From the outline I have sketched a significant fact emerges. In the Piedmont of the Restoration a spiritual milieu was created from diverse elements, yet with a common denominator as the basis of them all, namely a concern for the human. If I may use an expression dear to Bremond, this Piedmontese spirituality could be said to be governed by *devout humanism*. This spirituality embodies the principle of Catholic theology that grace does not destroy nature, but heals it, raises and perfects it. The underlying intuition is that nature is fundamentally orientated towards God, despite the fact

<sup>31</sup> The nursing of sick soldiers aroused consternation in the ecclesiastical circles of Turin, one influential member of which declared that if Fr. Durando went to confession to him he would not be inclined to grant him absolution on account of his boldness (cf. L. CHEROTTI, *Il p. Marcantonio Durando* 276).

<sup>32</sup> V. DI MEO, *La spiritualità di san Giuseppe Cottolengo studiata nei suoi scritti e nei processi canonici*, Pinerolo 1959.

<sup>33</sup> R.M. BORSARELLI, *La marchesa Giulia di Barolo e le opere assistenziali in Piemonte nel Risorgimento*, Torino 1933. In the October of 1844 Don Bosco became chaplain in one of the institutes of the marchioness di Barolo, the hospital of St. Philomena for sick girls.

<sup>34</sup> In the MO Don Bosco uses the verb «inorridire» (cf. G. BOSCO, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo* 81). One charitable institution worthy of note was a lay establishment called *Mendicizia istruita* (School for the poor), set up in Turin under royal patronage in 1771. It had a new lease of life during the period of the Restoration, catering for the education of the poor. The boys' section was entrusted to the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the girls' to the Sisters of St. Joseph.

that it has been wounded by sin, and grace acts upon that fundamental orientation.

The Jansenists had proclaimed the primacy of grace over nature, of the action of God over the action of man, setting up a dichotomy between man the sinner and the God of grace; devout humanism affirmed the continuity of nature and grace and the harmonious relationship between the natural and the supernatural. It removed from Christianity the features that made it gloomy and alien to life and gave it back an attractive, human face.

It is significant that in Piedmont there was little evidence of the French spirituality that found its inspiration in Augustinian thought (one thinks of Bérulle and his followers) and which had as its main themes man's imitation of Christ in his death on the cross by a kind of annihilation (*anéantissement*), abnegation, interior death and mortification of our sin-contaminated nature (Bérulle). Holiness was oblation, sacrifice, immolation, by which the creature honours his Creator not by adoration, which is the recognition of one's own nothingness, but by sacrifice, which is the destruction of self as an immolated victim (Condren, Mary of the Incarnation, Bernières, Mechtilde of the Most Holy Sacrament). Murialdo had himself been influenced by French spirituality, especially by Olier, having studied at Saint-Sulpice, but he tempered the austerity of that spirituality with the sweetness of Francis de Sales and the affectivity of Alphonsus de Liguori.<sup>35</sup>

## 2. The attitude and mentality of Don Bosco

Such was the spiritual soil in which Don Bosco was rooted,<sup>36</sup> which inspired him, and determined his attitude and mentality. As a priest from the

<sup>35</sup> Traces of the French Oratorian tradition were found in Lombardy and Veneto. *L'idea del sacerdozio e del sacrificio di Gesù Cristo*, with explanations of the prayers of the Mass put together by Condren and touched up by Quesnel, was published at Lodi in 1823 on the initiative of bishop Giovanni Battista Pagani. The work presents the priest as associated with Christ in his immolation on the cross, which is made present in the celebration of Mass: cf. P. STELLA, *Giansenismo e restaurazione in Lombardia. Problemi storiografici in margine alle lettere di mons. Pagani vescovo di Lodi (†1835) a mons. Tosi vescovo di Pavia (†1845)*, in: *Chiesa e spiritualità nell'Ottocento italiano* 335 et s.. Traces of Bérulle are found in *La vita di Gesù Cristo* by the Oratorian Antonio Cesari (cf. VECCHI, *La dottrina spirituale di Antonio Cesari*, in: *Chiesa e spiritualità nell'Ottocento italiano* 195-198). On Murialdo see A. CASTELLANI, *Leonardo Murialdo*, vol. 1: *Tappe della formazione. Prime attività apostoliche (1828-1866)*, Roma 1966; D. BARSOTTI, *San Murialdo e la vita di fede*, in: D. BARSOTTI (edit.), *Nella Comunione dei Santi*, Milano 1970, pp. 373-394 (especially pp. 377 et ss.).

<sup>36</sup> P. Stella has proved by very detailed study that Alphonsus de' Liguori is the author most used by Don Bosco. Both the *Giovane Provveduto* and the *Mese di maggio* owe something to the *Massime eterne* and the *Apparecchio alla morte*. Don Bosco's Marian piety was nourished by the *Glorie di Maria*, and the *Visite al SS. Sacramento*, the *La pratica di amare Gesù Cristo*, the *Vera sposa di Gesù Cristo* were all works that Don Bosco recommended to people: cf. P. STELLA, *I tempi e gli scritti che prepararono il «Mese di maggio» di Don Bosco*, in «Salesianum» 20 (1958) 648-694.

peasant class, he was keenly aware of the new situation of young people who came to Turin fresh from the country, or even from prison, searching for work in a city that was in the first throes of industrialization. He based his educative work for these «poor and abandoned» youngsters on kindness and love, adopting the same gentle pastoral approach that had characterised the preaching of the missionaries of St. Alphonsus, Vincent de Paul and Gaspare del Bufalo amongst the rural population.<sup>37</sup> Young people would be led to God not by sternness but by kindness. In a letter that goes back to 31 August 1846, only a few months after the establishment of the oratory at Valdocco, when his educational experience was just beginning, Don Bosco recommended that «all our dishes in the oratory should be served with oil».<sup>38</sup>

### 2.1. *His priestly formation in a rigoristic climate*

We need to be clear about a number of points. In the first place, one must remember that Don Bosco studied philosophy and theology in the seminary at Chieri (1835-1841) in an atmosphere of great austerity. There he was brought into contact with a rigoristic approach to moral theology in the text of *Alasia* which was used at the seminary. Don Bosco recalls that relations between clerics and superiors were based on fear rather than on familiarity.<sup>39</sup> Contact with this austere style of life led him to adopt a regime of strong asceticism, including much fasting and abstinence. He later expressed disapproval of the abstract nature of the teaching, with its taste for syllogistic sophistry and the lack of any historical perspective.<sup>40</sup>

### 2.2. *The decisive influence of Cafasso*

After ordination to the priesthood (5 June 1841) Don Bosco entered the «Ecclesiastical College» of Turin. His formation there was to be decisive. The spiritual climate had the balance learnt from St. Alphonsus; above all he met Don Cafasso, teacher of moral theology and a serene, wise man, who became John Bosco's confessor. In Cafasso the young man found the model of a zealous, fervent priest who worked for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, but with the kind of gentleness that attracted and won people over. In place of a grim, remote God, Cafasso set up the image of God as a

<sup>37</sup> It should not be forgotten that, according to Don Bosco himself, the idea of the oratory grew out of his visits to the Turin prisons (cf. G. BOSCO, *Cenni storici intorno all'oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* (1862), in: P. BRAIDO (edit.), *Don Bosco nella Chiesa* 60 et s.

<sup>38</sup> E I 18.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. G. BOSCO, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo* 59.

<sup>40</sup> Despite the scanty documentation, P. Stella has reconstructed Don Bosco's intellectual and spiritual development in the seminary at Chieri (cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco* I 51-83).

merciful father. For Cafasso perfection consisted in doing perfectly the will of God, but as found in the circumstances of daily life. Holiness did not consist in carrying out extraordinary acts but in the faithful fulfilment of the duties of one's state of life. Cafasso was extraordinary in the way he faithfully practised the ordinary virtues. He condemned austere mortifications, which are often a temptation of the devil. True mortification consists in the sacrifice that is inseparable from fidelity to one's duty.<sup>41</sup>

Cafasso was behind the fundamental choices that Don Bosco made. After ordination he ought to have been sent to a parish but it was on Cafasso's advice that he entered the «Ecclesiastical College».<sup>42</sup> In 1844 after this period of pastoral training, it was again on Cafasso's advice that he dedicated himself to work on behalf of abandoned youngsters, who often ended up in prison or on the gallows.<sup>43</sup> At the «College» the harsh image of God which Don Bosco had formed while in the seminary was softened; there he became convinced that he would lead souls to God not by sternness but by kindness. It is significant that three years after leaving the «College» Don Bosco composed an *Exercise of devotion to the mercy of God* (1847) for the marchioness Barolo, who was then a penitent of Don Cafasso. The booklet reveals Don Bosco's basic approach: confidence in God as a merciful Father who has «created everyone for heaven». He speaks of the «kindliness» with which God welcomes the sinner, using for the first time the word («amorevolezza») that was to become so dear to him and to his Salesians.<sup>44</sup> God is «such a loving Father» that he pardons even the greatest sins and strengthens weak and sinful people with his body and blood, thus preserving them from the attacks of the devil.<sup>45</sup> One is struck in this early work of Don Bosco by the emphasis upon confession and communion, «the pillars» of his «edifice of education».<sup>46</sup>

### 2.3. *The central importance of St. Francis de Sales*

Don Bosco accorded a central importance to Francis de Sales, choosing him as his model and borrowing several of his main characteristics. This in-

<sup>41</sup> G. CAFASSO, *Meditazioni e istruzioni per esercizi spirituali al clero*, vol. 2, Torino 1892-1893; F. ACCORNERO, *La dottrina spirituale di S. Giuseppe Cafasso*, Torino 1958; A. PEDRINI, *San Giuseppe Cafasso nella scia della dottrina del Salesio*, in «Palestra del Clero» 62 (1983) 625-637, 718-736.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. G. BOSCO, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo* 79.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88 et s.

<sup>44</sup> The *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio*, in: OE II 71-181. In this work the words «amorevole» and «amorevolezza» recur with thematic frequency.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 170 and 175.

<sup>46</sup> G. BOSCO, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo* 295; SCHEPENS, *L'activité littéraire de Don Bosco* 9-50.



terest in Francis de Sales began in the seminary of Chieri. In the notes written in May 1841 on the eve of his priestly ordination we read: «The charity and sweetness of St. Francis de Sales will be my guide in everything».<sup>47</sup> This binomial «charity-sweetness» became familiar to John Bosco through the strong influence of the saints I have mentioned above, but his interest in Francis de Sales, which began in Chieri, developed at the «Ecclesiastical College» and through his contact with the charitable works of the marchioness Barolo.<sup>48</sup> The choice of Francis as his *exemplar* was not mere chance. Francis incarnated in himself both the Tridentine spirit (and Piedmont was at that time experiencing the growing influence of the Waldensians) and, above all, the spirit of kindness and charity, of balance, discretion and optimism.<sup>49</sup> Don Bosco recommended the reading of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, because the book taught that God should be served with confidence and childlike trust.<sup>50</sup>

Don Bosco could be accused of a reductionist interpretation of the saint of Savoy, since the latter's spirituality had other elements as well as gentleness, but Don Bosco tended to make use of whatever seemed to serve his educational purpose. From being the model of pastors, Francis became the model of educators; his kindness became an educational approach and, in

<sup>47</sup> G. BOSCO, *Scritti pedagogici* 315.

<sup>48</sup> Don Bosco mentions in the MO that the marchioness di Barolo had had the picture of Francis de Sales painted over the entrance to the priest's quarters in her «Refuge», because «she was planning to found a congregation of priests with that title». It was at the «Refuge» that Don Bosco began the oratory which he called after Francis de Sales (cf. G. BOSCO, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo* 93 et s.).

<sup>49</sup> In describing the manner of St. Francis de Sales Don Bosco used a whole range of expressions: «amiability», «calm», «mildness», «courteous manners», «meekness», «sweetness», «kindliness», «charity». In the *Storia Ecclesiastica* of 1845, a year after leaving the Ecclesiastical College, Don Bosco gave a brief outline of Francis de Sales, dwelling upon his «sweetness» and «charity» (cf. OE I 479 et s.). In the earliest regulations for the Oratory that we have, going back to 1851-1852, the Oratory is placed «under the protection of St. Francis de Sales, because those who intend to dedicate themselves to this kind of work must follow the example of this saint in his great charity, and kindly demeanour, which will ensure that we achieve the good results that we hope for in the Oratory» (cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco* I 108). The same words recur in the official version of the Regulations of 1877 (cf. G. BOSCO, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo* 363 et s.). When writing his *Dei castighi da infliggersi nelle case salesiane* (1883), Don Bosco defined Francis de Sales as «our dear, gentle Francis», the «mild, wise educator of hearts» (*ibid.*, p. 311). In letters to his spiritual sons he insistently reminds them of the «charity», the «sweetness», the «patience» of Francis de Sales. Cf., for example, the letters to Don Fenoglio (13 July 1882), to Don Dalmazzo (26 November 1882), and to Don Lasagna (30 September 1885), in: E IV 153, 186, 340.

<sup>50</sup> The *Introduction to the Devout Life* was warmly recommended in the publications at Valdocco and was used by Don Bosco in the *Giovane Provveduto*, the *Mese di maggio* and in other works. For the relationship between Don Bosco and Francis de Sales see J. PICCA - J. STRUŠ (edit.), *San Francesco di Sales e i salesiani*; E. VALENTINI, *Saint François de Sales et Don Bosco*, in: *Mémoires et documents publiés par l'Académie Salésienne*, Annecy 1955; ID., *Spiritualità e umanesimo nella pedagogia di Don Bosco*, in «Salesianum» 20 (1958) 416-426.

general, a whole style of Christian life. That kindness was based on the theological virtue of charity which is «kind and patient, suffers all things, hopes all things, and endures all things». Don Bosco saw St. Paul's hymn to charity in the first Corinthians as the foundation of his system of education.<sup>51</sup>

#### 2.4. Reference to St. Philip Neri

Don Bosco considered that by being present amongst his boys he was fulfilling a religious mission aimed primarily at the salvation of their souls. But he realised that one can only reach the young through understanding, trust, friendship and kindness; by placing the emphasis on joy and creativity; by making the most of every positive human reality: work, study, music, theatre, games, gymnastics and outings. For Don Bosco *allegria* (happiness) was not just an external feature but a theological value, since it was the expression of that interior joy which is the fruit of grace. In a letter of 25 July 1860 he exhorts a pupil of the Oratory to feel real happiness «the kind which comes from a conscience free from sin».<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, melancholy, sadness, tepidity and sloth, that make the soul arid, dull and devoid of enthusiasm and closed to God and to all things good – these are the weeds that grow in the heart unless it is illuminated by grace.<sup>53</sup>

Philip Neri, defined as «the great friend of youth», was a perfect exemplar for Don Bosco. There seems good reason to believe that already, while at the «Ecclesiastical College», Don Bosco had had the chance to come to know the figure of St. Philip Neri, if in 1845 he draws a brief but dense sketch of him in his *Storia Ecclesiastica*.<sup>54</sup> In a panegyric on the saint which he gave at Alba in May 1868, he presented the Roman apostle as one who «has imitated the sweetness and mildness of our Saviour» and who has spread «the great fire of divine love» which Christ had brought to the earth, practising «the zeal for salvation of souls that has its root in the zeal of Christ himself».<sup>55</sup> In these words Don Bosco seems almost to be describing himself and the Salesian ideal.

Along with the life by Bacci and the *Ricordi di S. Filippo Neri alla gioventù*, Don Bosco made use of and disseminated the sayings of Philip Neri: «My sons, be happy: I don't want any scruples or sadness: it is enough for me if you do not sin»; «Do whatever you like; I don't mind, provided you

<sup>51</sup> Cf. BOSCO, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo* 294.

<sup>52</sup> E I 194.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. OE II 185 et s.; XI 236 et s.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. OE I 473. As to whether Don Bosco already knew of Philip Neri while still in the seminary, cf. P. BRAIDO, *L'esperienza pedagogica preventiva nel secolo XIX*, in: P. BRAIDO, *Esperienze di pedagogia cristiana* II 306.

<sup>55</sup> MB IX 214-221.

don't sin»; «I won't have any scruples or melancholy in my house»; «Don't burden yourself with too many devotions, but be persevering in the ones you have undertaken».

### 2.5. *The appeal of St. Vincent de Paul*

For similar reasons Don Bosco was attracted by the figure of St. Vincent de Paul, who incarnated the spirit of charity, sweetness and gentleness of manners combined with zeal for the salvation of souls. In the *Storia Ecclesiastica* of 1845 he drew a glowing picture of the saint. «Animated by the true spirit of charity, he sought to relieve every possible kind of suffering: Christians enslaved by the Turks, abandoned babies, youths leading dissolute lives, young girls in moral danger, fallen women, pious widows, galley slaves, pilgrims, the sick, artisans unable to work, beggars and madmen, all experienced the fatherly love of Vincent».<sup>56</sup>

Don Bosco advised against harsh bodily mortifications like «severe fasting»;<sup>57</sup> he recommended care for «the precious gift of health», a reasonable night's sleep, and doing only as much work as one was capable of.<sup>58</sup> He was in favour of interior mortifications, the kind involved in carrying out the duties of one's state in life and in putting up with annoyances caused by other people.<sup>59</sup>

He was equally uneasy about the multiplication of practices of piety which might scare the boys off or weary them. In the biographical sketch of young Michael Magone in 1861 he wrote: «I would strongly recommend that care be taken to ensure that only easy practises are undertaken, so as not to scare off or even tire the faithful, especially young people. Fasts, long prayers and other similar austerities tend to be neglected or, at best, are practised with reluctance and difficulty».<sup>60</sup> From these few data one can easily perceive the calm, balanced and human quality of Salesian spirituality.

<sup>56</sup> OE I 486; III 217. One should recall that Don Bosco made the Spiritual Exercises in the house of the Mission at Turin in preparation for his subdiaconate (September 1840) and for his priestly ordination (26 May - 4 June 1841).

<sup>57</sup> G. BOSCO, *Ricordi confidenziali ai Direttori*, in: G. BOSCO, *Scritti pedagogici* 79.

<sup>58</sup> «Look after your health. Work, but only as hard as your strenght will allow» (G. BOSCO, *Ricordi ai missionari del 1875*, in: G. BOSCO, *Scritti pedagogici* 123). «You must have seven hours of sleep each night» (G. BOSCO, *Ricordi confidenziali ai Direttori* 79).

<sup>59</sup> «Your mortifications should be diligence in your duties and in putting up with other people» (G. BOSCO, *Ricordi confidenziali ai Direttori* 79).

<sup>60</sup> G. BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovinetto Magone Michele*, Torino 1861, p. 46. In the *Regulations for the houses of the Society of St. Francis de Sales* of 1877, Don Bosco advises his sons: «Do not take on any new devotion without the permission of your confessor, and remember what St. Philip Neri said to his sons: "Do not load yourself with too many devotions but be persevering in the ones you have undertaken"» (G. BOSCO, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo* 433). Don Luigi Guanella also recommended that «exercises of piety should not hinder your