

DON BOSCO AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS (1870-1887)

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«One cannot appreciate the importance of Don Bosco's professional schools», the Salesian historian Eugenio Ceria stated emphatically, «unless one considers their remarkable development both in Europe and the New World under the saint's successors. He launched them and pointed them in the right direction, thus making possible their subsequent success».¹

0. Preliminary observations

In actual fact the term «professional schools» entered the Salesian vocabulary only after the death of Don Bosco. He and his helpers (like their contemporaries) preferred to speak of «artists», «artisans», and «workshops» and, later, of «hostels for arts and trades» or «houses for artisans». The expression that gained currency within the ambit of Spanish culture was «talleres salesianos».

The most important document on this subject was elaborated by the General Chapters of 1883 and 1886 and the first manuscript version was entitled: «Provision to be made for the working class in Salesian houses and means for developing and cultivating vocations amongst that class».² The supreme legislative body of the Salesian Society was still presided over by Don Bosco.

The text of the final version was joined to another document on the Salesian Coadjutors (ie. Salesian Brothers) and published in the official *Deliberations* of 1887 under the heading: «Concerning the religious spirit and vocations amongst the coadjutors and artisans».³

¹ *Annali* I 649.

² ASC 04 *Capitolo Generale* III 1883.

³ *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuti a Valsalice nel settembre 1883-86*. San Benigno Canavese, Tip. Salesiana, 1887, 16-22.

This was the document which Don Ceria described by an expression that became very popular: «almost a *parva charta* of the Salesian professional school». It is certainly an important point of reference for anyone seeking to understand the matured plan of formation that was authoritatively proposed for «Salesian houses for artisans» while Don Bosco was still alive. In this paper I shall devote special attention to the various versions of the document in order to throw into relief the significance of its more central themes and to indicate clearly the limits of the contribution made by Don Bosco and his collaborators in elaborating those themes. To achieve this objective it will be necessary to consider the day-to-day reality of life in the institutions in which these enterprises on behalf of young workers evolved. My contribution will remain deliberately within the necessary limits of the period between 1870 and 1887 and will be limited to the sphere of just one institution, that of Valdocco.

The choice of Valdocco is obviously not arbitrary: it was the first and only institution to be directed by Don Bosco personally. In the house annexed to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales he opened his workshops between 1853 and 1862. As for the chronological limits, the final date of 1887 is obvious, since the *Deliberations* already mentioned were published only a few months before Don Bosco's death. Justification of the initial limit is less simple: at all events, materials preserved in the Central Salesian Archives (diaries, notes of the first Salesians, minutes of meetings of the Chapter or house council, etc.) permit one to assert, at least as a working hypothesis, that from the date I have indicated there was discernible a certain change of direction in significant aspects of life at Valdocco. Exactly in 1870 the decision was made to introduce a firm division between artisans and students; this is made clear by Don Rua in the minutes of what by then they called the «Capitular Conferences». Don Rua at the time was Prefect of the Salesian Society and the close collaborator of the founder.

Since I shall have to make frequent references to this and other similar documents, allow me to clarify one or two points:

a) I shall speak in the text of «Capitular Conferences» when referring to the minutes, in which Don Rua recorded (at least from 1866 to 1877) the deliberations of the meetings held by the Chapter (today called the Council) of the house. Members of the Superior Chapter (to day called the General Council) took part in these meetings.⁴

b) I shall use the expression «Monthly Conferences» to indicate the minutes (drawn up by Don Giuseppe Lazzero) of the staff meetings at Valdocco (1871-1884), usually attended by all the Salesians in the house. From

⁴ Cf. ASC 9. 132 *Rua Capitolo Deliberazioni*. On the cover of the exercise books Don Rua wrote: *Conferenze capitolari dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales...*; cf. also ASC 110 *Barberis Cronachette* (23 January, 1878).

1871 monthly conferences were held at which there were present only those in charge of the artisans of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.⁵

c) The expression «General Conferences» will be used to indicate the minutes and documents (in various hands) of the meetings between the Superior Chapter and the rectors of the various houses. These took place annually on the feast of St. Francis de Sales and were presided over by Don Bosco.⁶

My exposition will be set out as follows:

1. Don Bosco's workshops: introductory notes.
2. The progressive separation of the artisans and students and the «great improvement of the artisans» (1870-1878).
3. The artisan section: proposals for its organization (1879-1882).
4. Guidelines for a plan of formation in the «schools for artisans» (1883-1887).
5. Don Bosco's contribution and that of his collaborators: a topic for further study.

1. Don Bosco's workshops: introductory notes

Our consideration of the various stages which are the object of this study will be more secure if we first look at how the workshops came into being. A schematic synthesis of the unfolding of events relating to our theme could be presented thus:

1) the meeting with young bricklayers, plasterers and pavers, whom he entertained and instructed on feastdays (1841-1843);

2) the acceptance of young unemployed migrants for whom he tried to find work in the workshops of some «honest employer», and for whom he demanded proper contracts of apprenticeship (1844-1852);

3) finally (between 1853 and 1862), the opening of six workshops in the house alongside the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, in order to take preventive action in view of the moral dangers of the city factories: the six workshops in question were: shoemaking (1853); tailoring (1853); bookbinding (1854); joinery (1856); printing (1861); metalwork (1862).⁷

⁵ Cf. ASC 38 *Oratorio S. Fr. di Sales. Adunanze del Capitolo della Casa Ottobre 1877 - Gennaio 1884*; ASC 110 *Conferenze del Personale e del Capitolo dell'Oratorio* (title written later; on page 3 of the MS we read: *Conferenze mensili tenute fra i sacerdoti e chierici che fanno parte all'assistenza degli artigiani dell'Oratorio di S.F. Sales*).

⁶ ASC 04 *Conferenze generali*.

⁷ Cf. *Annali* I 649-659; MB VII 114-120; P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*, Roma, LAS 1980, 243-258; R. ALBERDI, *Impegno dei Salesiani nel mondo del lavoro e in particolare nella formazione professionale dei giovani*, in: *Salesiani nel mondo del lavoro*. Atti del convegno europeo sul tema «Salesiani e pastorale per il mondo del lavoro», Rome, 9-15 May 1982. Roma, Editrice SDB 1982, 9-63.

It has often been insisted that in this sector Don Bosco did not follow the scholastic models laid down by the State: «Between the old practice of attaching apprentices to a master tradesman in a business and the new type of technical school envisaged by the comprehensive law on education, Don Bosco preferred a third way: he set up large workshops which he himself owned and which produced materials for sale and for use in the school, while providing the young apprentices with useful practical training».⁸

This course of action has been variously interpreted; it should, however, be kept in mind that these experiments at Valdocco predated by several years the introduction of the comprehensive law on public education, usually referred to as the Casati law of 1859; in other words, Italian legislation (as that in some other countries) had not yet considered the problem of «professional education».

The «technical school» which was introduced by the Casati law, not without ambiguities and uncertainties, as part of secondary school provision was destined chiefly «for the middle-class world of small businesses, of traders and their employees».⁹ Even at the end of the century heated discussion was still going on about «the inability of the technical schools to “provide a trade”», with the accusation that the most that anyone could do after frequenting such a school was «the job of telegraph office-boy or casual work in the tax-office».¹⁰

The work initiated at Valdocco for youngsters who were unemployed, many of them illiterate, and for others just out of prison, was just one of the many private initiatives that sprang up as a result of the new awareness of the need for popular education and for the provision of workshops for the use of young apprentices.

During the years preceding the opening of Don Bosco's workshops many periodicals («L'Educatore primario», «Lecture di Famiglia», «Giornale della Società d'Istruzione e d'Educazione») were insisting on the importance of forming skilled artisans and were informing their readers about the experiments taking place in Italy («Institutes of Arts and Trades at Biella») and abroad («Écoles royales d'Artes et Métiers de Châlons-sur-Marne»).

Don Bosco may well have read «L'Educatore Primario»: the first issue of this periodical seems to be quoted in the introduction to his *Storia Sacra* (1853). He could certainly have been in contact with institutions in Turin

⁸ P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica* 248.

⁹ A. TONELLI, *L'istruzione tecnica e professionale di Stato nelle strutture e nei programmi da Casati ai nostri giorni*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1964, 13. In the law of Boncompagni of 1848 there is mention of «special schools»: «those which continue to give elementary instruction in preparation for professions for which no special provision is made in the universities» (title 1, article 4).

¹⁰ S. SOLDANI, *L'istruzione tecnica nell'Italia liberale*, in «Studi Storici» 22 (1981) 1, 110.

which provided workshops for boys, places like the «Generala» and the «Regio Albergo di Virtù di Torino».¹¹

Against the background of these earlier and contemporary experiments it becomes easy to understand the origins of Don Bosco's initiatives. On the other hand, as P. Stella has written, «the lack of documentation allows us to give only a very hypothetical account of events within the youthful communities of Don Bosco's three oratories between 1848 and 1870».¹²

This assertion would be even truer of the period that followed. Nevertheless, even if we allow for the fragmentary data and the consequently provisional nature of conclusions based on them, it still seems possible to discern, however hypothetically, certain stages in the development of the Valdocco workshops.

2. The progressive separation of the artisans and students and the «great improvement of the artisans» (1870-1878)

On 30 January 1871, during the «general conference» on the feast of St. Francis de Sales, Don Bosco, after listening to the reports on «all the individual houses», wished «to say something about the house of the Oratory», «the central house». «I see that everything is gradually becoming more organised. I am also pleased by the great improvement that has taken place among the artisans, who in previous years had been the scourge of the house. I don't pretend that they are all now angels, but the improvement is real and some are even asking to be allowed to join our Congregation».¹³

It is clear from the chronicles and from other contemporary witnesses that they were not all angels. In 1876 Don Giulio Barberis noted in his brief chronicle the serious decision taken in one of the capitular conferences to expell «some of the best artisans... on account of immorality»; and «since

¹¹ About 1842 there were 150 or so boys living in this institute. They were apprentices in a craft or one of the manual trades, so as to be «able to earn their living»: F. GARGANO, *Educazione e tecnologia*, in «Letture di Famiglia» 1 (1842) 35, 274. Cf. *Frammenti d'un viaggio pedagogico*, in «Guida dell'Educatore» 3 (1838) 281-307; *Istruzione tecnica*, in «L'Educatore Primario» 1 (1845) 18, 294-296; *Ordinamento dell'Istruzione in Piemonte*, in «Giornale della Società d'Istruzione e d'Educazione» 1 (1850) 1, 289-294; P. BARICCO, *L'istruzione popolare in Torino*, Torino, Tip. Botta 1865, 140-141; R. AUDISIO, *La «Generala» di Torino. Esposti, discoli, minori corrigendi (1785-1850)*, Santena, Fondazione Cavour 1987, 154-158. Don Bosco may have read the «Avviso-invito» launched by Don Cocchi on the 15 October, 1849, to promote the foundation of a «Society of good people, especially priests, and of young layfolk, to provide for the needs of so many destitute boys, mostly orphans, who hang about Turin, a threat to society and to individuals, and to give them some education, with the means of following a profession or trade».

¹² P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica* 171.

¹³ ASC 04 *Conferenze generali* (30 January, 1871).

the music seemed to be infected with it, it was suspended; in fact it was cancelled altogether and it took several months before it could be started again». ¹⁴ Between 1871 and 1876 we find in the «agenda» for meetings of the Oratory Chapter at least a dozen references to the «improvement» of young artisans. It is in this context that we must place the frequent references to the decision taken in 1870 to separate the artisans from the students.

It seems to me that this change was insisted upon not merely out of a desire to avoid occasions for morally dangerous contacts. It needs to be viewed within a broader field. «The general tendency in Italy after unification was to concentrate on literary education, thus making the student section the centre of attention. The artisan section, being economically more precarious, needed the support of the more flourishing student section at both Valdocco and Sampierdarena. The primordial work of the festive oratorios also benefitted from such support». ¹⁵

It might be too much to say that at that stage there was a reversal of priorities at Valdocco. During the 70's, however, one can note growing evidence that attention was being focused increasingly on the artisans.

The following table reveals the increase in their numbers.

The number of new artisan pupils and other employees who entered the Valdocco workshops between 1870 and 1879

Year	Pupils	Others	Total
1870	76	54	130
1871	43	81	124
1872	45	44	89
1873	58	56	114
1874	53	69	122
1875	71	56	127
1876	67	80	147
1877	80	90	170
1878	77	41	118
1879	75	38	113

(Source: ASC Torino Valdocco *Anagrafe giovani* 1869-1901)

¹⁴ ASC 110 *Barberis Cronachette* (23 January, 1876). Two months later (31 March, 1876), he recounts a short talk after the «prayers of the artisans», in which Don Bosco, referring to the «disbanding of and re-constitution of the music band», said: «You have already been given the reason for this. I would say that the principal reason, in fact the only reason, was that they did not play the part of the good musician which is to keep the hearts of men happy and make them participate already in the music that we shall hear in heaven; on the other hand, they played the part of the evil musician who wished to make the devil happy!».

¹⁵ P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica* 378.

This was the period in which there was considerable increase in the number of Coadjutors, that is Salesian Brothers, who at the explicit wish of Don Bosco were to play a most important part in running the workshops. In 1870 there were 23 Coadjutors; by 1880 they numbered 182.¹⁶

Contemporary factors also had a stimulating effect. During 1870 and 1871 the Catholic movement on behalf of workers' unions was just beginning, with the foundation of the Catholic Workers' Union by Leonardo Murialdo who – we are assured by his biographer – «set Don Bosco aflame with the same idea. He asked him to be present and to speak at the opening of new sections, hoping thus to get the young workers from his Oratories involved in the Catholic Workers' societies, as well as to create harmonious relations between the youth leaders, the Unions and the parish priests».¹⁷

During those same years, as a result of the work of Murialdo, the organization of the «Collegio degli Artigianelli» was being steadily improved, while echoes of the work being done in France by Léon Harmel and Timon-David for the instruction and education of young workers were also reaching Piedmont. In Madrid in 1871 the first «Escuela de Artes y Oficios» was opened (decree of 5 May, 1871)

The improving economic situation in 1872 allowed Don Bosco to give a fresh impetus to his «Letture Cattoliche», to the bookbinding shop and printing house. This latter, after some initial trouble with the Turin printers, won wide approval. «During these days», writes Barberis in one of his short chronicles of 1878, «many other things happened at the Oratory that merit special mention. First of all, three printing machines were procured from Germany. [...]. And they were really needed. All through winter they had to work all night. With seven machines working, two of which can print on double sheets, really a lot of work was done».¹⁸ Besides, the participation of Don Bosco at the General Exposition of 1884 is also noted.¹⁹

¹⁶ P. STELLA, *I coadiutori salesiani (1854-1974). Appunti per un profilo storico socio-professionale*, in: *Atti del Convegno Mondiale Salesiano Coadiutore*, Roma, 31 August - 7 September, 1975, Roma, Esse Gi Esse, 1976, 57. Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Religiosi nuovi per il mondo del lavoro*. Documentazione per un profilo del coadiutore salesiano, Roma, PAS 1961.

¹⁷ A. CASTELLANI, *Il Beato Leonardo Murialdo*, vol. II: *Il pioniere e l'apostolo dell'azione sociale cristiana e dell'azione cattolica (1867-1900)*, Roma Tip. S. Pio X 1967, 409. Don Leonardo Murialdo (1828-1900) had been one of Don Bosco's helpers, as Rector of the Oratory of St. Aloysius from 1857 to 1865.

¹⁸ ASC 110 Barberis Cronachette (11 May, 1878).

¹⁹ Cf. E IV 299-301. In the meeting of the Superior Chapter of 16 January, 1884, certain problems connected with the bookbinding shop were mentioned: «4. The Turin Exhibition, at which we shall be taking part with the machine for the paper factory and our collection of bound books. Don Sala pointed out that the bound books need to be prepared and that people will be needed who can look after the items at the exhibition. We should therefore either make use of two novices who are bookbinders from San Benigno or else hire a couple of past pupils from outside. There are no capable workers left at the Oratory, because some have left and the rest have been expelled [...]. Don Bosco decided that, if necessary, it would

When they talked at Valdocco about «improving the conditions of the artisans», they were thinking of the religious and moral situation but not exclusively: there are also explicit references to taking work seriously and to the need for making the workshops «more productive». There is an interesting reference to a hatters' shop at Valdocco in 1873, but which was in difficulty through lack of personnel. When Don Bosco was informed of the situation, «he expressed his opinion that the shop should be closed».²⁰

In the late 70's more attention was paid to cultural and educational aspects in general, and the participants at the Capitular Conference saw a close connection between the genuine improvement in the young artisans and the «provision of schooling for them throughout the entire year».²¹

The question of schooling was not new: a meeting held on 23 October, 1867, had already discussed «evening classes for the artisans», and at a meeting of 6 November, 1870, «it was decided to give a talk to all the teachers, in order to provide them with the norms needed in order to ensure the success of their various classes». Don Rua later recorded in the minutes: «After this talk the masters worked hard at their classes and the evening school began very successfully».²²

From then on, at the beginning of the new school year in October and November it was decided who were to be «the teachers for the evening classes for the artisans». With data available one can elaborate the following table:

be better to get the novices from San Benigno rather than call in externs» (ASC 0592 *Verbali delle riunioni capitolari*).

²⁰ ASC 9.132 *Rua Capitolo* (9 February, 1873). In 1878 a photo-lab was opened which did not make much progress. Coadjutor Pietro Barale, the director of the book-shop and the "photography department", in a report made at the request of Don Rua in 1884, declared that «the photography department had been begun directly at the warm recommendation of Mr. Carlo Ferrero and with great expectations of a large profit, which eventually turned out to be a loss, in no way small [because of two reasons]: 1) the delay in finishing the work, and 2) the poor execution of the same» (ASC 123 *Relazione del Direttore dello Stabilimento fotografico* [14 June, 1884]). C.A. Ferrero («an aspirant to the Salesian religious life» in 1877) presented a more positive version of his own activities (cf. ASC 123 *Relazione Rendiconto Triennale dell'Esercizio Laboratorio Chimico-Fotografico dal 1877-78-79-80 e relative proposte di attuazione pel incremento progressivo fatto per cura di C.A. Ferrero*).

²¹ «Discussion followed on ways of improving our artisans and three measures were suggested and approved, for the time being: the first is to give them class all the year round, beginning this year with summer classes for the most backward. Once evening classes finished, arrangements would be made to give them school in the morning after Mass» (meeting of 21 February, 1875).

²² ASC 9. 132 *Rua Capitolo* (6 November, 1870).

The teachers for the evening classes for the artisans

years	1871	1872	1873	1874	1875
1 Junior	Remotti	Boido	Becchio	Berno	Bernasconi
2 Senior	Borio	Davico	Bini	Ghione	Ghione
2 Primary	Delgrosso	Albano	Mazzarello	Beauvoir	Pavia
3 Primary	Rocca	Farina G.	Piacentino	Piacentino	Piacentino
French	Martin	Borio	Rocca	Chiesa G.B.	D. Paglia
Drawing	Enriù	Rocca	Enriù	Enriù	Enriù
Music	—	—	—	—	Devecchi D. Cipriano

(Source: ASC 9. 132 *Rua Capitolo*)

These deliberations regarding lessons did not remain a dead letter at Valdocco. This can be deduced from the fact that after 1870 there used to be a «prize day for the artisans», with a function in church, followed by a concert of vocal and instrumental music in the playground, together with sketches acted by the pupils.

We do not, however, have any details regarding the content of the lessons; the Salesian Archives have not preserved even an outline of the programme followed at that time. Speaking of the evening classes in a rather different context, Don Bosco did give a few general indications: reading, writing, the elements of arithmetic and of the Italian language, catechism and sacred history. We also know that there were lessons in politeness and that there was an insistence upon cleanliness and hygiene, things that were badly needed by some of the boys arriving at Valdocco, if we are to believe the testimony of more than a few people. One finds frequent references to this subject. In the General Conference of 1874 Don Bosco made this curious but precise comment: «In order to ensure that the smaller boys have clean heads, a man or a woman of mature years can be appointed to comb their hair every day».²³

If we leave aside such interesting elements as vocal and instrumental music and the acting of short plays which were meant to «amuse and instruct», the cultural fare of the artisans was fairly modest. In this respect Valdocco was typical of the times: the root problem was, amongst other factors, the prejudices and reservations that many people entertained regarding any widespread effort to educate the masses.²⁴

²³ ASC 04 *Conferenze generali* (1876).

²⁴ In 1841, the year in which Don Bosco began his work, the archbishop of Turin, Mons. Franson, expressed reservations, in one of his pastoral letters, about «the modern concern to

I do not offer this comment in order to cover up deficiencies which, though real, did not negate the significance of the evening classes for the artisans during the '70's.

There is another fact which is worthy of note: it began to be felt in several quarters that someone ought to be appointed to see that the various suggestions were put into effect in a consistent fashion; and so, in 1876, when dealing yet again with «ways of improving the condition of the artisans... it was proposed to appoint a catechist who could have special responsibility for them» (9 January, 1876). This was seen as a measure of fundamental importance. Don Bosco welcomed the suggestion. The definitive edition of the «Regulations for Salesian houses» in 1877 introduced the office of «Catechist to the artisans» in addition to the traditional offices of «workshop assistant» and «craftsman», to care for the religious and moral formation of the boys.

Despite this there remained a number of unresolved practical questions.

3. The Artisan section: proposals for its organization (1879-1882)

The need to improve things for the artisans was part of the general organization of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales which was presenting some problems. Reasonable individuals were speaking in 1879 of «undesirable situations» and «disorders» and even of the lack of any «true overall administration». Don Giulio Barberis, after recording this severe stricture in the minutes of the Superior Chapter, added: «Le cose vanno avanti "alla buona" (things are rather loose). But saying this in an important matter sounds like "si va avanti male" (things are going badly)».²⁵

In the May of that year Don Bosco and his helpers gave long and serious consideration to the problem. The general view was summed up, probably with more objectivity, by Don Barberis. He wrote: «At first sight it seems that the main source of all the disorders is the lack of someone active at the centre of things to control all the secondary activities that revolve around him. It is no longer possible for Don Bosco to be, as he once was, at the

impart to everyone the mania for reading [...], which can be a grave threat to public order» (quoted by R. ROMEO, *Cavour e il suo tempo (1810-1842)*, vol. I, Bari, Laterza 1969, 791). Solaro della Margherita, minister and first Secretary of State to Carlo Alberto, wrote in 1853: «If instruction is indeed necessary, it is prejudicial rather than necessary to impart it to all equally [...]. It is useful for each one to know what is helpful in exercising his particular profession; it is superfluous and harmful to give people further knowledge than that. What use are geography, astronomy, history and other sciences to a cobbler, a joiner, a tailor?» (*Avvedimenti politici*, Torino, Tip.-Libr. Speirani e Tortone 1853, p. 136). Cf. also G. MIALARET - J. VIAL, *Histoire mondiale de l'éducation*, vol. III: *De 1815 à 1945*, Paris, PUF 1981, 291-318.

²⁵ ASC 0592 *Verbali del Capitolo superiore* (8 May, 1879).

head of every activity, because he is burdened with so many serious responsibilities».

A committee was set up «entrusted with the task of forming some plan for the orderly coordination of everything». After some lively discussion the following measures were eventually adopted:

1) To separate the Superior Chapter of the Congregation from the superiors of the Oratory;

2) To nominate a Rector (Don Giuseppe Lazzero) who, though working closely with Don Bosco, «would have the same freedom to act as the other rectors of the houses»;

3) To set up a «central administrator» or a «Prefect in charge of the entire economic, industrial and commercial business of the craftshops».²⁶

This reorganization was meant to meet the real demands of the situation and to have a real impact on the running of the workshops.²⁷ Particular emphasis was placed upon unifying the diverse departments of the «Mother House» of the Congregation, even though the specific characteristics and demands of those departments were not yet fully appreciated. Those responsible for the artisan section of Valdocco presented this request to the General Chapter of 1880. One of the documents that has been preserved bears this eloquent title: *Project for a better regulated administration of the artisan section, in accordance with the actual requirements of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*.²⁸

In drawing up this statement account was taken of the documentation that had been gathered during «four years of experience based on the many submissions of the craftmasters and those heading the commercial administration». The phrase «artisan section», found for the first time in these documents and constantly repeated, needs to be noted. The reflections that are contained in these writings are based on the actual situation: «The Oratory is at present made up of two categories, one is the students, the other the artisans».

The authors of this project took into account the situation beyond the walls of Valdocco and discovered in the contemporary context («the requirements of the various trades... the commercial developments») certain factors which explained «the continual increase in the artisan category» during the previous four years, so that «the artisans are now only slightly less numerous than the students». Between «pupils and those working in the various offices» they numbered 317.

This development and the specific needs of the artisans called for proper organization and a degree of administrative autonomy. In brief, the authors of the project, by common accord, made the following proposals:

²⁶ ASC 0592 *Verbali del Capitolo superiore* (16 May, 1879).

²⁷ Cf. ASC 110 *Lazzero Diario dell'Oratorio* (May, 1879).

²⁸ ASC 04 *Capitolo generale II* 1880.

1) «That Don Bosco should again take over all the general administration»;

2) «That [...] in contrast to previous practice, the internal administration should be split in two: one section being the students and the other the artisans. Each of these administrative sections should have its own regulations and each should have at its head a person nominated by Don Bosco as Rector or Vice-Rector».

Probably wishing to give prominence to the urgency of these proposals, they added the crude comment that «in the view of the majority [...] the main need of the artisans is that some life should be injected into the *Management of the workshops*, which has so far consisted of a printed card (on the door) and a Secretary who ignored both the workshops and their personnel».

The Salesians at Valdocco were not concerned only with administrative problems at that period; there is in existence a document (*Various needs of the artisans to be submitted to the General Superior Chapter of 1880*) which forcefully underlines «the need for a school for the artisans». There is no signature, but it is stated that the proposals represent the views of «all those responsible for the artisans».²⁹ The «plan» – “progetto” (this is the word they use) – outlined in the document is simple but, in certain respects, very interesting. It requests that, in addition to the classes we have already mentioned (1st to 4th Elementary, French and Drawing), teachers and classrooms should be provided for a «professional and commercial school». It is also suggested that the more ignorant artisans, whatever their age, «should be given an hour of instruction in addition to the normal classes».

If we seek an explanation for this request, made in 1880, it may perhaps be provided by recalling the fact that «until then the Valdocco apprentices followed the common evening classes that had been started in the house, even though these were combined with the occasional special course for them».³⁰

We have, however, seen that even before the '70's there was constant reference at Valdocco to «the school for the artisans». The organization and functioning of that school is a quite separate problem. In fact, the writers of the document of 1880, after stating that it represents «the view of all those responsible for the artisans», requested that «the school timetable should be changed», so that classes could be held in the morning, from 7.00 to 7.45. They considered the evening arrangement to be unsuitable because «after working all day the boys are exhausted with fatigue and worries, so that they are in no state to give their attention to study or instruction».

²⁹ ASC 04 *Capitolo generale II 1880*.

³⁰ L. PAZZAGLIA, *Apprendistato e istruzione degli artigiani a Valdocco*, in: F. TRANIELLO (edit.), *Don Bosco nella cultura popolare*, Torino, SEI 1987, 44.

One small detail may help us to appreciate the cultural climate in which this document was produced. One is struck by the fact that the authors of these proposals felt the need to devote a long paragraph (31 lines out of a total of 86) to proving that the suggested change in the timetable would not result in «serious harm to the work», in other words, to the number of hours spent in the workshops. This defense of their suggestions probably implies that they more or less took for granted a style of artisan apprenticeship that prepared boys for a manual art or trade by long hours of practical work.³¹

The classes for the artisans continued to be given in the evening. In this, as we shall see, Valdocco was no exception to contemporary practice. It may be opportune to note here that about this time Don Bosco wrote a description of his work to the Prefect of Turin and stated, with what is perhaps an understandable exaggeration, that the boys «who are naturally inclined towards the practice of certain arts and trades of a superior kind», like printing, are also «given a little instruction in Latin, Greek, French, Geography and Arithmetic».³²

It is not at all easy to produce documentary evidence that these subjects did, in fact, form part of the programme of the printers at Valdocco. It seems to me that both the mind of Don Bosco and the actual facts of the situation are better reflected in words that Don Bosco uttered a few months later in 1881, when speaking to past pupils: «I don't want my sons to be walking encyclopaedias; I don't want my joiners, metal-workers and shoemakers to be lawyers; nor do I want the printers, bookbinders and booksellers to play at being philosophers and theologians. I am quite satisfied if each one knows properly his own job; if an artisan knows all that is necessary for the exercise of his trade he knows all that is needed to make him a worthy member of society».³³

Meanwhile the 2nd General Chapter had been held. It does not seem that the proposals of those in charge of the artisans at Valdocco were even

³¹ One needs to remember the actual situation at Valdocco. On the 15 November, 1878, Barberis wrote in his *Cronachetta*: «The printing shop is so overwhelmed with work that, even if there were double the number of workers, they could not manage [...]. Don Bosco appealed to Don Lazzero to help; some means should be found to do what is necessary; it would be a great pity to leave work uncompleted. Workers must be sought; let work carry on during the night. Such workers as there are could at least work late into the evening, or they could work in shifts, some beginning at 4.00 a.m. and going on till 10.00 a.m.; the others coming on at 10.00 and not going off until 4.00 p.m. [...]. The other workshops are in the same situation as the printers. The tailoring shop is a disaster: there are clothes to be repaired for the artisans and a huge amount of work for the missionaries [...]. To say nothing of the joiners, who are working day and night, since it is necessary to carry out a lot of work outside the house...» (ASC 110 Barberis *Cronachetta* [15 November, 1878]).

³² E II 598.

³³ *Annali* I 658.

considered. In fact one gains the impression from the minutes that there was little real discussion of the question of the artisans at all.

An interesting thing stands out. In the eighth conference, while discussing the feasibility of founding a «boarding school» at Cremona, this general criterion was outlined: «It was repeated what was said at other times under other circumstances that that which holds us up and must always be our special scope should be boarding schools and hostels for artisans, oratories, and schools that are for the common folk, for the poor and abandoned youth. These works are more in line with our scope».³⁴

In the final *Deliberations*, published in 1882, there was, however, one point worth noting. One of the tasks assigned to the Economist of the Superior Chapter was that of keeping «in touch with the Provincials concerning the improvement of the professional schools, so that the workshops may be well run from both a material and moral point of view».³⁵

By now the «artisan sections» no longer depended on the «General Councillor for Schools»: a further step had been taken towards a more autonomous form of organization which corresponded better with their needs.

Within the broader Italian context things were also changing; a significant influence upon those changes was the awareness of educational experiments being carried out elsewhere in Europe. Professional education (regulated by the law of 30 May, 1878, and entrusted to the Minister of Agriculture, Industry and Commerce) was begun in 1879-1880, encouraged by the circulars of the Minister Cairoli «on the institution of evening and Sunday schools of arts and trades».³⁶

In France the law of 11 December, 1880, governed the running of the «écoles manuelles d'apprentissage», as well as creating various «Écoles Nationales Professionnelles»: at Vierzon in 1881, Armentières in 1882, and Viron, also in 1882.

New incentives and demands came from the world of labour. Under the influence of early industrial developments the Milanese section of the «Workers' Party» included in its manifesto for 1882 the provision of «complete, secular and obligatory professional schools of arts and trades».³⁷

³⁴ ASC 04 *Capitolo generale II 1880* (ms. of Don Marengo). In the previous conferences there was a discussion about the novitiate for the coadjutors.

³⁵ *Deliberazioni del secondo capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana*, held at Lanzo Torinese in September, 1880. Torino, Tip. Salesiana 1882, 13.

³⁶ G. CANESTRI - G. RICUPERATI, *La scuola in Italia dalla legge Casati ad oggi*, Torino, Loescher 1976, 97.

³⁷ Quoted in C.G. LACAITA, *Istruzione e sviluppo industriale in Italia 1859-1914*, Firenze, Giunti-Barbera 1973, 84.

4. Guidelines for a plan of formation in the «schools for artisans» (1883-1887)

Between these two elements – the requirements experienced within the «sections for the artisans» and the new interest in schools of arts and trades shown by the State – there came the 3rd Salesian General Chapter of 1883. One topic proposed for study was: «V. The training of working boys in Salesian houses and means for developing the vocation of young artisans». It was the first time that the supreme legislative body of the Congregation had systematically studied such a problem.

Before the work of the Chapter began, there arrived in Turin the comments and proposals on the various topics, as requested by Don Bosco. Some of the better informed drew attention to the urgency of the topic concerned with the question of schooling for the artisans and their preparation for practising a trade: «If we look at the facts», wrote a coadjutor, Giuseppe Buzzetti, «two thirds of the boys who finish their apprenticeship leave us without being able to earn their living».³⁸

The problem was not confined to Turin. Don Belmonte, future Prefect General of the Salesian Society and at that time Rector of Sampierdarena, drew up a rather pessimistic diagnosis of the artisans: «The young artisans are not making any progress with us here either in virtue or in their trade, because: 1) there is a shortage of wise and prudent assistants; 2) there is a lack of craftsmasters who are, I would not say religious, but even honest Christians; 3) there is a lack of serious work on which they can practise in order to become good tradesmen; 4) finally, there is a lack of instruction. Some boys leave the Hostel after 4 years without even being able to write. They are demoralized by the bad example of the craftsmasters. What with being discouraged at making no progress in their craft and irritated by the way the assistants treat them, what love can they feel for the house? Things may be different elsewhere».³⁹

The results of the 1883 General Chapter's study of what ought to be done for working boys were not immediately published. The Chapter ran out of time to finish the task, and so the matter was again taken up «briefly» at the General Chapter of 1886 and brought to a conclusion.⁴⁰ The scanty

³⁸ ASC 04 *Capitolo generale III 1883*, Ms. («Proposte dei confratelli»).

³⁹ ASC 04 *Capitolo generale III 1883*, Ms. (letter to the moderator of the Chapter, Don Bonetti, dated 11 August, 1883).

⁴⁰ The minutes of the Superior Chapter make it clear that Don Bosco would have liked the decisions of the 1883 Chapter to have been published before 1886. At the session of 24 October, 1884, «Don Bosco invited the Chapter to have the final decisions of the General Chapter of 1883 put in order so that they could be printed. He observed that the excuse that people had been too busy to get the work done earlier was fair enough, but it was important that the next Chapter of 1886 should not take them by surprise. The Chapter authorised Don Barberis and Don Bonetti to arrange the reports and conclusions of the General Chapter of

minutes of the meetings do not allow us to reconstruct the discussions in any detail, and the problem of tracing the development of the work is compounded by subsequent confusion in dating and classifying the relevant material in the archives.

This is not the place to go into a detailed comparative analysis of such material. It will be sufficient for our purpose to state that amongst the available papers in the ASC there are three authoritative documents which probably represent successive versions of what eventually appeared as the *Deliberations* in 1887, in other words, the so-called «*parva charta*» of the Salesian professional schools.⁴¹

I shall single out a few central points that are relevant to the developments I have been trying to trace.

a) One needs, first of all, to note the terminology that was used. In the titles of the different versions there is mention of the «working class» or the «working section»; in the body of the discussion, on the other hand, the expression constantly used is «houses for artisans». We are probably justified in concluding that these differences reflect various stages in the evolution, from a renewed interest in the artisans (1870-1879) through a growing awareness of the need to organize an «artisan section» with greater autonomy (1879-1882) to the final explicit proposals to establish «houses for the artisans» (1883-1886). In 1886 serious consideration was, in fact, given to the desirability of ensuring that «every house for artisans should be totally separate from the students».

There was already a widespread conviction that the mere presence of a «catechist for the artisans», written into the Regulations of 1877, was not enough to ensure that all would go well; it was necessary to appoint a prefect and a Rector who would be devoted exclusively to the care of these boys.⁴²

1883. The work is to be done at S. Benigno and Don Bonetti is to draw up the document» (ASC 0592 *Verbali delle riunioni capitolari* [24 October, 1884]).

⁴¹ Cf. *Annali* I 649-658; L. PAZZAGLIA, *Apprendistato* 46-60. The publication of the critical edition of these documents will make possible a more detailed analysis of the various themes, the modifications introduced in successive editions and the authors of each.

⁴² In 1876 it was decided at a meeting of the Superior Chapter «to call to the Oratory Don Branda, the Prefect at Valsalice, so that he could gradually assume the rectorship of the artisans» (ASC *Verbali del Capitolo superiore* [27 January, 1876]). But in 1884 «Don Cagliero insists that it is necessary to appoint two distinct rectors, each acting quite independently, one for the students and the other for the artisans» (ASC 0592 *Verbali delle riunioni capitolari* [4 Sept. 1884]). At the same meeting Don Durando «observed that there was need for a total division between the students and artisans: division in the house, division in the church, etc.». A few days later there was already mention of «Don Lazzero, the rector of the artisans». In March 1875, Don Barberis had written: «But the principal thing which distinguished this feast from all the others was a religious academy which the artisans held in honour of their patron and to have a feast for Don Lazzero Giuseppe, Vice-Rector of the Oratory and in previous years Rector of the artisans» (ASC 110 *Barberis Cronachette* 1875).

At the level of the Superior Chapter, the title and office of «Councillor for Professional Schools», introduced in 1883, were finally confirmed after the death of Don Bosco; the Catalogue of members of the Salesian Society for 1887 already designated Don Giuseppe Lazzero, a member of the Superior Chapter, as «General Councillor for Professional Schools». His function was summed up as responsibility for everything that related to «the teaching of arts and trades».⁴³

This completed an organizational framework that remained largely unchanged until the '60's of the present century.

b) This organizational effort and the more central importance attached to this field of work corresponded, perhaps, to the growing awareness of the significance of the world of labour during the closing decades of the 19th century. The first version of the above capitular document opened with the declaration: «The world of labour is today assuming an influence in civil society which causes us to think seriously, because according as that influence is good or bad, so also will be the state of society».⁴⁴

From that premise there followed a fundamentally important conclusion: «accordingly, the work done in our houses on behalf of the working section must be such as to realise the good that our Pious Society sets itself in working for the education of this type of citizen, namely, to instruct the young artisans in a way that ensures that, when they leave our houses after their practical training, they will be qualified in their trade and so able to earn their living, as well as being well grounded in the religious and general knowledge that is appropriate to their state of life».

The introductory comment on the «influence» of the «world of labour» disappeared in the subsequent versions, which were more schematic and made no reference to actual situations. The final version of 1886 contains, however, a new element that is far from insignificant: it not only links the training of the young workers with the educational aims proper to the Salesians but it also repeats that rescuing destitute boys and providing them with a trade or craft is «one of the principal works of charity that our Pious Society undertakes».⁴⁵

When viewed in this light, the words spoken by Don Bosco in Spain during that same year acquire a special significance: «As an industrial city Barcelona has more reason than any other city for promoting the Salesian *Talleres* [professional schools]. From houses like these there go forth yearly

⁴³ At the session of the Chapter held on 4 September, 1884 Don Rua proposed «that Don Lazzero, the actual Rector of the Oratory, should be appointed to the new office of Councillor for Professional Schools which had been created by the General Chapter of the previous year» (ASC 0592 *Verbali delle riunioni capitolari*).

⁴⁴ ASC 04 *Capitolo generale IV 1886* («Proposte»).

⁴⁵ *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuti a Valsalice nel settembre 1883-86*, San Benigno Canavese, Tip. Salesiana 1887, p. 18.

numerous young people who are useful to society, taking wholesome ideas with them into factories and workshops. In this way they keep clear of prison or forced labour and become living examples of healthy values. The youth who grows up on your streets will begin by begging an alms; then he will claim it as his right; and he will end up by demanding it with a gun in his hand».⁴⁶

There is another point in the early versions that is worthy of note: the need to prepare a young worker to overcome the difficulties of «modern society» without «failing in either justice or charity». And in the final version there is a noteworthy variant: not only, it states, is it desirable that the young workers should be enrolled as Salesian Cooperators once they have finished their training; they should also be put in touch with «some Catholic workers' association». Just a few months earlier, on 24 June, 1886, the section of the Catholic Union of Workers of Turin, under the patronage of St. Joachim, had made Don Bosco its honorary president.⁴⁷

c) It is not really possible, on the basis of these facts, to argue that Don Bosco and his helpers were fully conscious of the social implications of their work and of the steps we have outlined for its realization. The central importance they attached to education is, however, well documented. Their preoccupation during the '70's with «improving the behaviour of the artisans» by means of some sort of moral formation became an explicit programme of education during the '80's. All the capitular documents repeat that «the education of the artisans must be threefold: moral, intellectual and professional». All the structured planning of objectives and means revolves around these three elements.

At a second stage talk is no longer about «moral direction» but, significantly, about «religious and moral direction». However, the growing emphasis on the religious dimension and the stressing of certain devotions does not mean that less attention was paid to other aspects of the educational process.

I shall draw attention to a few of the more interesting norms and directives that were proposed as a means of achieving the desired goals, namely: the elaboration of a programme of studies to be followed in all Salesian houses for artisans; the provision of craftsmasters of guaranteed quality; due attention to the preferences of the boys when selecting a craft or trade for them; a minimum of at least five years of practical training for apprentices; the division of pupils into groups in accordance with their level of attainment; the division of the work in any given craft or trade into progressive stages, which the apprentices could go through step by step.

⁴⁶ Quoted by *Annali* I 659.

⁴⁷ Cf. BS 10 (1886) 7, 74-76.

d) Salesian scholars who have concerned themselves with this matter have pointed out the value of these directives.⁴⁸ Scholars outside the Salesian sphere have adopted more varied positions. Redi Sante Di Pol, referring to the «important norms» of 1886, writes: «The primitive workshops were transformed into genuine professional schools, with a structure that provided the boys with a complete formation and turned them into good Christians, conscientious citizens and qualified workers». He adds that the introduction of some of the above features during the closing decades of the 19th century «placed these schools in the vanguard of institutions of this type, whether religious or otherwise».⁴⁹ Luciano Pazzaglia, however, in his recent, well documented study, while recognizing that these were all «features of no small importance», thinks that «the project put into operation in 1886 by Don Bosco and his helpers fell short of being a real school and continued to be modelled on the idea of an apprenticeship. It respected individual inclinations and aptitudes, but demanded that every boy should at once take up some precise trade or craft amongst those taught in the workshops».⁵⁰

One is forced to confess that little time was devoted to intellectual activities; an hour of class when the day's labour in the workshops was finished, and then, for those with special needs, a further hour each morning after Mass. This was a step forward compared with the situation in 1880; but it was a very timid step forward. I fancy the members of the Chapter realised this, because they added a significant comment: «Should the laws demand more, it would be well to adapt ourselves to what they prescribe».

Those, moreover, who had played a part in drawing up the capitular document had clearly demonstrated the need to remedy a negative situation: «In most of our houses for artisans evening classes already operate, with the aim of giving some intellectual formation. It has been widely noted, however, that up to now these classes have been left entirely to the discretion of the individual teachers. Either because the material is badly chosen or because too little time is devoted to it, the poor boys do not show any sign of having benefitted from the courses, even after attending them for 6 or 7 months».⁵¹

⁴⁸ Cf. R. ALBERDI, *Impegno salesiano nel mondo del lavoro* 9-63; L. PANFILO, *Dalla scuola di arti e mestieri di Don Bosco all'attività di formazione professionale (1860-1915)*. Il ruolo dei salesiani, Milano, LES/Libreria Editrice Salesiana 1976; F. RIZZINI, *Don Bosco e la formazione professionale. Dall'esperienza alla codificazione*, in «Rassegna Cnos» 4 (1988) 2, 15-56.

⁴⁹ R.S. DI POL, *L'istruzione professionale popolare a Torino nella prima industrializzazione*, in: *Scuole, professioni e studenti a Torino. Momenti di storia dell'istruzione*, Quaderni di Centro di Studi «Carlo Trabucco», Torino, Centro Studi sul Giornalismo Piemontese, 1984, 81. Cf. V. MARCHIS, *La formazione professionale: l'opera di Don Bosco nello scenario di Torino, città di nuove industrie*, in: G. BRACCO (edit.), *Torino e Don Bosco*, Vol. 1: Torino, Archivio Storico della Città di Torino 1989, 217-238.

⁵⁰ L. PAZZAGLIA, *Apprendistato* 63.

⁵¹ ASC 04 *Capitolo generale IV 1886* («Proposte»).

The same diagnosis could have applied to not a few educational institutions of those days;⁵² but the seriousness of the situation could not pass unnoticed by the capitulars at Valsalice. The measures they took may seem extremely feeble to us today, but it is fair to acknowledge that there were promising features in that project of 1886. It was firmly asserted that the artisans needed to be equipped with a «framework of literary, artistic and scientific knowledge». Above all the decision to work out a scholastic programme that was to be followed in all the houses for artisans produced positive results in the development of the professional sector of Salesian work.

That scholastic programme was not compiled until many years after Don Bosco's death. Amongst the papers from 1886 there remains only the summary outline of a form of elementary instruction. There is repeated insistence that the young artisans «need the knowledge that is suited to their state of life», but one has the impression that this is meant to refer to general knowledge. The potentially rich proposals which were present in the 1886 document have not yet fully matured. In 1883 Don Branda had suggested that the young apprentices ought to be well instructed in religion and reading and writing, but that they also needed to have explained to them the theory of their chosen craft or trade.⁵³ Someone had suggested that, once certain deficiencies and gaps in their training had been made good, «professional schools» ought to be set up in Salesian houses. The proposal came from Don Louis Cartier. This is the first time that the expression «professional schools» («écoles professionnelles») occurs in any Salesian document so far consulted. Years earlier, in 1880, writing to another French Salesian, Don Ronchail, Don Bosco had said: «We must always remember that we are founded to give instruction in farming and in arts and trades. If we give some of our pupils professional schooling and Latin it is in order to train them as supervisors, school-teachers and heads of workshops, especially printers, engravers and type-founders».⁵⁴

This leads us to the consideration of one last point.

5. Don Bosco's contribution and that of his collaborators: a topic for further study

From the examination of the different versions of the documents for the Chapters of 1883 and 1886 there emerges a rather surprising fact: none of the numerous corrections and additions that occur in the original manuscripts can be attributed to the hand of Don Bosco. The minutes of '83

⁵² Cf. G. BIFFI, *Opere complete*, vol. IV: *Riformatori per giovani*, Milano, Hoepli 1902.

⁵³ ASC 04 *Capitolo generale III 1883* («Proposte dei confratelli»).

⁵⁴ E III, 555.

transcribe an intervention on the specific topic of the young artisans: «Hence it should not happen that some workshops are under-used, while others are overcrowded. Don Bosco recommends that whoever sees to the admissions should find out which workshops need more personnel and should lay it down as an absolute condition that new pupils should be employed in those workshops».⁵⁵

This recommendation seems to contradict the general principle laid down a little later: «Above all, give the boys freedom to choose the trade to which they feel naturally inclined». It is, therefore, possible that the intervention cited above may have influenced the more nuanced drafting of the final document: «As far as possible try to accommodate the boys' inclinations in choosing a craft or trade».⁵⁶ (The phrase «as far as possible» was inserted above the line, by the secretary of the General Chapter, Don Marengo, in the final draft).

Don Bosco had been moved by practical considerations. It may be useful to recall another intervention of the same period but in different surroundings. In 1885, in the presence of the members of the Superior Chapter, he described the origins and significance of his work in these terms: «The first boarders at the Oratory were the students and then the artisans as a help to the students. First came the shoemakers, then the tailors. Books were needed and, therefore, also bookbinders. The first bookbinder was Redino, nicknamed the Boss; then came the building, so joiners and metalworkers were needed. The students did the labouring for the artisans».⁵⁷

It may appear to us that this was a hand-to-mouth way of solving problems, without any long-term view. But the necessity of responding to the practical needs of the moment is a factor that cannot be ignored if one wishes to understand Don Bosco's work. He was equally concerned to provide his young workers with a craft or trade that would enable them to earn their living. These were two aspects of his one and the same preoccupation, and they together throw light on all his statements and experiences.

Keeping these facts in mind we may sum up, in somewhat schematic fashion, the part played by Don Bosco in providing for the artisans during the period in question. Personal intervention, like that between 1870 and 1878 (the publication of the Regulations, the acquisition of machinery for the workshops, the closing of some of the shops, etc.) became more rare after

⁵⁵ ASC 04 *Capitolo generale III 1883* (6 September, 1883). On that occasions mention was made of the novitiate for the coadjutors: «The question was raised whether it is necessary to open a novitiate specially for the artisan aspirants. Don Bosco thought that their position would be improved if they were separated from the rest of the artisans. Nearly everyone favoured a separate foundation. A decision on this important topic was postponed, but an effort will be made to do something at San Benigno».

⁵⁶ *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto capitolo* 21.

⁵⁷ ASC 0592 *Verbali delle riunioni capitolari* (14 December, 1885). Cf. *Annali* I, p. 650.

1879, once it had been decided to give the house at Valdocco greater autonomy. The part played by his helpers, already considerable during the 1870's, becomes more marked, even dominant, during the final period from 1883-1886.

I am not referring solely to the contribution made by those who drew up the final document for the General Chapter. The part that Don Bosco himself wanted them to play was more extensive. In 1883 he had sent a circular letter to the rectors of all the Salesian houses, inviting them to consult their house chapter and then to suggest whatever was considered necessary matter for discussion at the General Chapter. Don Bosco himself then told the members of the commissions appointed to study these questions to adhere «strictly to the rules, to the existing Deliberations and to the proposals submitted».

Any talk, therefore, on «Don Bosco and the professional schools» is closely related to the wider topic of «Don Bosco's helpers and the professional schools». This, in turn, is linked with the need to consider the real life of institutions within their varying cultural contexts. This need was made clear by the international character of the commission which, in 1886, studied the «direction in which the artisan section ought to develop». The commission was composed of Don Luigi Nai (Prefect of the novitiate of the coadjutors at San Benigno and entrusted with the presentation of this topic), Don Giuseppe Lazzero (General Councillor for Professional Schools), Don Giovanni Branda (Rector of the «Talleres Salesianos» of Sarriá-Barcelona), Don Pietro Perrot (Rector of the Agricultural School of Navarre), Don Domenico Belmonte (Rector of the house of Sampierdarena) and the coadjutor, Giuseppe Rossi.⁵⁸

This, clearly, is not the moment to begin discussion of a fresh topic but, rather, to conclude this rapid outline with the following final considerations. Leaving aside the foundation and early running of the workshops, we need to locate within a wider field of reference Don Bosco's work for artisans during the period under consideration.

a) First of all, there was his own experience as an educator. This includes such important elements as the advice he gave in his «good nights», in his letters, in his conversations and talks to the students and artisans on simple but crucial topics: love of work; doing one's duty; frequenting the sacraments. These are themes which will be considered in the course of our present Congress. At this moment I wish merely to refer to one issue. In the «proposals» and in the discussion relating to the artisans in 1886, complaints

⁵⁸ The commission of 1883 was composed of Don Lazzero and Don Perrot, as well as Don A. Sala (Economer General), Don C. Ghivarello (Rector of Mathi), Don J. Ronchail (Rector of Nice), Don P. Albera (Provincial of France and Rector of Marseilles), Don G. Bologna (vice-Rector of Marseilles).

were made about certain harsh disciplinary measures and about the way young apprentices were, at times, «abandoned» and left to themselves. Before bidding farewell to the members of the Chapter, Don Bosco made a heartfelt appeal that all «harsh methods» should be avoided and that the Preventive System should be put into practice. An addition, penned by his Vicar, Don Rua, in drafting the final document of 1886 is illuminating: «Do all you can to ensure they (the boys) know that they are loved and respected by their superiors. This will be achieved by treating them with that spirit of true charity which alone can make them better». (In the famous letter of 1884 there is a very similar expression).

b) There was a steady increase in the number of pupils in the artisan section of Valdocco.

The number of new artisans and other employees who entered the Valdocco workshops between 1880 and 1887

Year	Pupils	Others	Total
1880	90	61	151
1881	73	64	137
1882	96	81	177
1883	150	58	208
1884	116	50	166
1885	126	69	195
1886	144	51	195
1887	195	74	269

Source: ASC Torino Valdocco Anagrafe giovani, 1869-1901

At a time of economic depression, when little public attention was paid to professional instruction, the Salesian workshops offered many boys from peasant families or from working-class backgrounds the chance to better themselves. The demand was not limited to Piedmont or even to Italy. During the last years of Don Bosco's life Salesian schools of arts and trades were opened in France (Nice, Marseilles), Argentina (Almagro, Buenos Aires), Spain (Barcelona-Sarriá), Brazil (Niteroy, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo).

The realistic and flexible introduction to the *Deliberations* of 1887 made it possible to overcome, in practice, previous limitations by following suggestions and directions that were rich in potential. In 1895 Don Rua felt it necessary to remind the Salesians that the proper name for our workshops was

«professional schools».⁵⁹ Clearly, this was not a question of mere terminology. Equally clear is the fact that the unfolding of Don Bosco's work had been guided by the recommendation that he himself gave to the General Chapter of 1883: «To understand and adapt ourselves to the times in which we live».⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Lettere circolari di don Michele Rua ai salesiani*, Torino, SAID «Buona Stampa» 1910, 126.

⁶⁰ ASC 04 *Capitolo generale III 1883* (minute of «7 Settembre Sera Ultima Conferenza», ms. of Don Marengo).