

PIETRO STELLA

# DON BOSCO

## AND THE DEATH OF CHARLES

An appendix to *Don Bosco: Life and Work*



DON BOSCO PUBLICATIONS



## DON BOSCO AND THE DEATH OF CHARLES

This monograph, originally published as an appendix to Pietro Stella's *Don Bosco: Life and Works*, is a landmark study in the application of scientific historical research to religious tradition.

St. John Bosco, better known simply as *Don Bosco*, was beyond dispute one of the great miracle workers and most popular charismatic figures of nineteenth century Europe. His biography, assembled by his contemporaries over a period of more than thirty years, fills twenty large volumes of *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*.

Here, the eminent Italian historian, Don Pietro Stella, examines the *Biographical Memoirs* account of one of Don Bosco's most famous miracles: the "resurrection from the dead" of a boy named Charles. By carefully tracing each of the oral and written accounts of the event leading to its publication, the author shows how exact historical records, the vagaries of memory, depositions gathered at the Apostolic Process, and the certainties borne of first hand knowledge work together to shape the historical traditions of a religious community.

This monograph is essential reading for persons involved with *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco* and a valuable contribution to all who are interested in religion and history.



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PIETRO STELLA

DON BOSCO  
AND THE DEATH  
OF CHARLES

*Translated by John Drury*

This monograph was originally published  
as an appendix to *Don Bosco: Life and Work*  
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BY PIETRO STELLA:

*Don Bosco in the History of Catholic Religious Thought and Practice*

- Volume I Don Bosco: Life and Work  
Volume II Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality  
(translation in progress)  
Volume III Don Bosco: Later Influence and Continuing Significance  
(forthcoming)

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- AS Archivio Salesiano: The Salesian central archive in Rome
- BM *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*. An American edition translated from the original Italian (see MB below). Rev. Diego Borgatello, S.D.B., Editor-in-Chief. New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1965–.
- DA Documentary Accounts at the end of this monograph.
- Documenti* *Documenti per scrivere la storia di D. Giovanni Bosco . . .* (AS 110).
- Indice* MB E. Foglio, *Indice analitico delle Memorie biografiche di S. Giovanni Bosco nei 19 volumi*, Turin, 1948.
- MB G.B. Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco . . .*, then, *Memorie biografiche del Venerabile Servo di Dio Don Giovanni Bosco . . .*, S. Benigno Canavese-Turin, 1898–1917, Volumes 1–9.  
G.B. Lemoyne and A. Amadei, *Memorie biografiche di S. Giovanni Bosco*, Volume 10, Turin, 1938.  
E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche del Beato Giovanni Bosco . . .*, Volumes 11–15, Turin, 1930–1934.  
E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco*, Volumes 16–19, Turin, 1935–1939.  
(See BM above)





## *Introduction*

Some time ago the *Memorie biografiche* of Saint John Bosco, a monumental work in nineteen volumes, began to attract the attention of scholars dealing with the nineteenth century. In the annotated bibliography added to the Italian translation of Roger Aubert's *Le pontificat de Pie IX*, Father James Martina describes the *Memorie biografiche* as a "first-rate historical document based on the direct narration of Don Bosco and only a short remove from the events narrated." And he adds: "Although dealing mainly with facts having to do with the growth of the Salesians, the *Memorie* contains noteworthy particulars about many contemporary events."<sup>1</sup>

Even earlier the *Memorie* had been used by Massè.<sup>2</sup> Now an English translation is being undertaken by the Salesians of the United States. Unlike the Italian edition, the American edition is available for sale to the reading public.<sup>3</sup>

In his important doctoral thesis on the first volume of the *Memorie*, a volume which covers the life of the saint up to his ordination as a priest in 1841, Salesian Father Francis Desramaut brings out the method of the volume's author, John Baptist Lemoyne. A Salesian from 1864 on, Father Lemoyne was entrusted in 1883 with the task of gathering documentation on Don Bosco and his works, under the supervision of Don Bosco himself.<sup>4</sup>

With great conscientiousness Lemoyne did the work of a fine compiler. He brought together, sometimes in their actual literary form, doc-

<sup>1</sup> R. Aubert, *Il pontificato di Pio IX*, Italian trans., p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> D. Massè, *Il caso di coscienze del Risorgimento*, Alba: 1961<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> See BM in the list of Abbreviations.

<sup>4</sup> F. Desramaut, *Les Memorie I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne. Etude d'un ouvrage fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint Jean Bosco* (Lyon: 1962).

uments and oral sources of information stemming partly from Don Bosco and partly from other witnesses who may or may not have given depositions at the diocesan information-gathering process in connection with Don Bosco's beatification.

As I see it, Father Desramaut's work was mainly that of literary criticism. He was concerned to pinpoint the sources employed by Father Lemoyne and to see how he used them as a compiler right up through the final published text. Only rarely does Desramaut check the objective value of the sources by comparing the data used by Lemoyne with other outside data. The literary critic may well be satisfied with the minute and careful analysis done by Desramaut, but the historian cannot help but feel a little apprehensive. It turns out that many of Lemoyne's sources are much later than the events described; hence their real value, beyond what they had for Lemoyne as a writer, must be more carefully weighed and judged.

By way of justifying this assertion, in this monograph I would like to analyze one of the most fascinating episodes in the life of Don Bosco: the temporary resurrection of a youth named Charles. Lemoyne writes that Charles died one morning in 1849, reawakened to life in the afternoon at Don Bosco's call, made his Confession, and after a while fell asleep in the Lord once more. Lemoyne devotes almost eight pages to the episode (MB 3:495–503; see BM 3:349–355), of which the last five pages provide testimony to the authenticity of the event.

### 1. *The Charles of tradition*

The oldest account for the general public dates from 1881 and comes from Charles d'Espiney, a doctor in Nice. He had close relations with the Salesians, who had established themselves in Nice in 1875. He was also a devoted admirer of Don Bosco, readily offering him his services as a physician on more than one occasion.<sup>5</sup>

The *Dom Bosco* of D'Espiney is an anecdotal profile, a fluid presentation of brief episodes.<sup>6</sup> From annotations by Father Michael Rua to

<sup>5</sup> Charles d'Espiney died in Nice on April 13, 1891. His obituary is in the *Bulletin salésien*, 13 (1891), pp. 92–94.

D'Espiney is also cited with regard to *Grigio* ('Grey'), the dog who helped Don Bosco in critical situations on several occasions: *Bollettino sal.*, 6 (1882), p. 13; *Bulletin sal.*, 4 (1882), p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> D'Espiney, *Dom Bosco* (Nice: typographie et lithographie Malvano-Mignon, 1881).

a letter of D’Espiney we learn that in Turin, where the doctor had sent his manuscript, people wanted more historical accuracy and indeed hoped that the whole work would be recast.<sup>7</sup> D’Espiney asked to have the manuscript back, perhaps revised it here and there, and sent it to press a year later.

The episode of the resurrected youth concludes the biography. D’Espiney entitled it, “Arise!” We are reminded of the words that Jesus spoke to the son of the widow of Naim. The episode is placed in Rome. Don Bosco supposedly rushed there from Florence. As we shall see, the whole event is narrated in such a way as to focus attention on its miraculous nature.<sup>8</sup>

Don Bosco was displeased by this undesired publicity. From a letter of Salesian Father Louis Cartier, who was director in Nice from 1886 to 1902, we learn that the saint did not fail to complain to D’Espiney about the matter, while not denying that the event had happened and dodging D’Espiney’s pressing questions designed to make him admit that he had in fact resurrected a dead person.<sup>9</sup>

Don Bosco’s reaction certainly would explain why D’Espiney’s biography did not at first meet with a very cordial reception in official Salesian circles. The *Salesian Bulletin* presented explicit notices of the *Don Bosco* by Albert du Boys, published in Paris in 1883, while barely mentioning the work by the doctor in Nice.<sup>10</sup> Yet D’Espiney’s biography had its own little share of success. The second and third reprintings came

<sup>7</sup> “Okay, but changes are required [in the manuscript] in several places: (1) some mistakes in chronology; (2) eliminate something not suitable in these times.” Annotation to letter from D’Espiney, Nice: July 15, 1880. AS 123 D’Espiney.

Elsewhere D’Espiney himself expressed uncertainty about the period in which he placed the Charles episode: “The facts have been told to me with so many variations that I fear many inaccuracies.” To D. [Rua], Nice: June 21, 1880.

<sup>8</sup> See DA 1. The account of Charles with D’Espiney’s circumstances passed to M. Spinola, *Don Bosco y su obra por el obispo de Mila* (Barcelona: 1884) p. 47 f. Spinola commented: “Such miracles and others, too many to recount, prove that D. Bosco is a true miracle worker.”

<sup>9</sup> See DA 12.

<sup>10</sup> A. du Boys, *Don Bosco et la Pieuse Société des Salésiens* (Paris: Jules Gervais, 1883). The Italian translation appeared the next year and went through several printings (S. Benigno Canavese: tip. e libr. Salesiana).

The respective notices are in: *Bulletin salésien*, 6 (1884), pp. 64, 83 f.; *Bollettino salesiano*, 8 (1884), p. 119 f.

The *Bulletin* alludes to D’Espiney also, whose intention had been “to spotlight the wondrous intervention of the omnipotent goodness of Mary Help of Christians” (p. 64).

in 1882, with no changes in the episode of Charles.<sup>11</sup> His work may have inspired the extemporaneous verses by a seminarian of Saint-Sulpice in Paris:

Don Bosco a fait de grands miracles,  
Ressuscité des morts, et rendu des oracles. . .<sup>12</sup>

His work certainly helped to foster the atmosphere of sympathy and veneration that surrounded Don Bosco in France, particularly in 1883. That same year a new edition appeared in Nice. It was a revised and enlarged edition, now without the episode of Charles.<sup>13</sup>

Its official entry into the Salesian world came in 1888 with the tenth edition. It was completely revised and considerably enlarged, and the subtitle expressly indicated that the work was “approved by the Salesians.”<sup>14</sup> In the *Salesian Bulletin* Father Cartier vouched for the author’s credentials: “The close and constant relationship that M. d’Espiney has always enjoyed with Don Bosco himself, with Father Rua, Don Bosco’s vicar and now his successor, with Father Durando and the entire Superior Chapter of Turin, and with the *Patronage Saint Pierre* in Nice, gives his account an air of authority on which the reader can rely.”<sup>15</sup> In the new edition facts and events were arranged chronologically. The resurrection of Charles no longer figures in the book.

★ ★ ★

The handing down of the episode was to be entrusted to a much more authoritative document, on which later tradition would be based: the *Memorie biografiche* of Don Bosco written by Salesian Father John Baptist Lemoyne (1839–1916).

The resurrection of Charles is narrated with many details in Volume III, which appeared in 1903.<sup>16</sup> The redaction of the MB may seem to be

<sup>11</sup> Nice: Malvano–Mignon, 1882.

<sup>12</sup> “Don Bosco worked great miracles/ raised the dead and delivered oracles” (*Bulletin salésien*, 53 (1931), p. 167 f.; MB 16:172, footnote).

<sup>13</sup> C. d’Espiney, *Dom Bosco*. . . *Louée soit Notre-Dame Auxiliatrice*, New Edition (Nice: Impr. et Libr. du Patronage St.-Pierre, 1883).

<sup>14</sup> C. d’Espiney, *Dom Bosco*. . . *dixième édition entièrement refondue et enrichie d’un grand nombre de faits inédits. Ouvrage approuvé par les Salésiens et orné du portrait*. . . (Nice: Impr. ed Libr. du Patronage St.-Pierre, 1888). The first notice in the *Bollettino* is in the book notices of November (p. 4). The first Italian version of the eleventh French edition was published in Genoa: S. Pier d’Arena, 1890. Numerous reprintings, editions, and translations into other languages followed.

<sup>15</sup> *Bulletin salésien*, 10 (1888), p. 97.

<sup>16</sup> *Memorie biografiche di don Giovanni Bosco* raccolte dal sac. salesiano Giovanni

quite unitary. In actual fact it involved continual retouches and, above all, additions, most of which can be reconstructed and evaluated today.

Lemoine states that he heard Don Bosco himself narrate the episode at the Salesian school of Borgo San Martino in 1882.<sup>17</sup> That account—and another earlier one mentioned by Father Julius Barberis in a diary (*Cronichetta*) of 1876—may well have served as the main inspiration for the version that Lemoine put together, while Don Bosco was still alive, for the third volume of the *Documenti per scrivere la storia di Don Giovanni Bosco, dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales e della Congregazione salesiana*.<sup>18</sup>

Examining the entire volume, I could not find any item that might enable us to determine exactly when Lemoine drew up the episode about Charles. Inadequate for our purpose here, for example, is the biographical note on Canon Ortalda, founder of the Apostolic Schools in Turin, who died in 1881.<sup>19</sup> But from a letter to Bishop John Cagliero dated December 7 (1885 or 1886), we learn that Lemoine already had prepared more than two hundred chapters on the life of Don Bosco up to 1859, and that he had arranged and written material up to 1865.<sup>20</sup> So we have good reason to assume that Lemoine had already composed the account of the resurrected youth before December 1886.

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Batt, Lemoine, ediz. extra-commerciale (S. Benigno Canavese: Scuola tipografica e libreria salesiana, 1903), III, 495–500. See heading MB in the list of Abbreviations. Citations of this particular volume are given as follows in this monograph: (e.g.) MB 3:500/14–23 refers to Volume 3, page 500, lines 14–23.

<sup>17</sup> MB 3:500/14–23. Lemoine was already a priest when he entered the Oratory on October 18, 1864. His statement is reproduced by Father Eugenio Ceria in the volume covering the events of 1882. The episode is placed in July, when Don Bosco went to Borgo for the feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga (MB 15:572).

<sup>18</sup> See DA 2 and DA 14. The *Documenti* are oversize volumes with black cloth covers. On the spine the number of the volume is printed in gold at the top, in Roman numerals. In the center is a picture of Mary Help of Christians. At the bottom the years covered in a given volume are noted. The volumes are made up of thick, blank sheets. Pasted on them are long lists of paper on which are printed the account elaborated by Lemoine and documents properly so called, reproduced from original and printed manuscripts or from copies of various sorts. Often clippings from newspapers or other printed matter have also been pasted or inserted into the volumes.

Thus every page has a column of printed matter and a blank column on which Lemoine made additions or corrections. The binding was done after the work of pasting and inserting various printed items. The numbering of the pages was done last.

<sup>19</sup> *Documenti* III, 287 f.

<sup>20</sup> Reported by Desramaut, *Les Mémoires I*, p. 59, n. 11.

Examination of the *Documenti* will enable us to better appreciate the editing work that went into the text in the MB. The episode is placed in 1847 in the *Documenti*. The youth in question is described in sufficiently informative terms. In the MB the more obvious particulars would be eliminated:

***Documenti* III, 169**

“A boy of fifteen who had been in the habit of attending the Oratory of D. Bosco fell seriously ill in 1847 and soon found himself at death’s door. He lived in the *Gelso Bianco* restaurant [*trattoria*] at the corner of Carmine and Quartieri Streets and was the son of the innkeeper [*albergatore*].”

**MB 3:495/22–26**

“A boy of fifteen, named Charles, who had been in the habit of attending the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, fell seriously ill in 1849, and soon found himself at death’s door. He lived in a restaurant [*trattoria*] and was the son of the innkeeper [*albergatore*].”

The section in the *Documenti* for marginal additions bears only three notes in Lemoyne’s hand. With slight revision they went into the MB. These additions are given *in italics* below:

***Documenti* III, 169**

“A day and a half later he died, *manifesting the desire* to speak with D. Bosco.”

**MB 3:496/2–3**

“A day and a half later he died, often asking to speak with Don Bosco.”

“. . . he met a waiter, and immediately asked him for news of the youth, but this man replied [. . .]”

**MB 3:496/9–10**

“. . . he first met a waiter, of whom he immediately asked news of the sick person: — You have come too late, he replied [. . .]”

“. . . if you only knew [. . .] I have had a dream that scared me greatly [. . .]”

**MB 3:497/7–9**

“. . . if you only knew [. . .] I have had a dream that scared me greatly [. . .]”

Contrary to what some have stated<sup>21</sup>, not only did Lemoyne not destroy or disperse the original documents he used to compose the bi-

<sup>21</sup> Ceria, MB 15:11; Desramaut, *Les Memorie I*, p. 62.

ography of Don Bosco, he did not even destroy the copy he often made of them and the rough draft of the elaborated text he drew from the *Documenti* for the final draft of the MB.<sup>22</sup>

Some of this rough draft has been preserved for us, making sufficiently clear the annalistic approach of the biographer. He arranged the items chronologically, almost always wrote them on separate sheets of foolscap size, and noted the year at the top in blue pencil. If he was unsure of the precise year, he noted the range of years within which certain episodes were to be placed.

As his work progressed and the mass of transcriptions mounted, however, for facts relating to Don Bosco's last years he sometimes used the back of sheets on which he had written episodes that were put in the early volumes of the MB. This happened with the sheet containing the resurrection of Charles. We now possess only half of that sheet. Originally of foolscap size, the lower half has been torn off. The halfsheet contains only the opening sentences. Comparing it with the *Documenti* and the MB, we find that the sequence of the three redactions is clear and fixed: i.e., the rough draft depends on the *Documenti* and precedes the MB. Note the additions and variants that clearly place the rough draft before the MB: *named Charles; 1849; in a restaurant (trattoria); seeing him in danger; he died, often asking to speak with Don Bosco. . .*

<p><i>Documenti</i> III, 169          "A boy of fifteen who had been in the habit of attending the Oratory of D. Bosco fell seriously ill in 1847 and soon found himself at death's door. He lived in the <i>Gelso Bianco</i> restaurant [<i>trattoria</i>] at the corner of Carmine and Quartieri streets and was the son of the innkeeper [<i>albergatore</i>].</p>	<p>110 (3) Lemoyne, 1849          "A boy of fifteen, <i>named Charles</i>, who had been in the habit of attending the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, fell seriously ill in <i>1849</i> and soon found himself at death's door. He lived <i>in a</i> restaurant [<i>trattoria</i>] not far from the church on Carmine Street and was the son of the Innkeeper [<i>Albergatore</i>].</p>	<p>MB 3:495/22–32;          496/1–5          A boy of fifteen, <i>named Charles</i>, who had been in the habit of attending the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, fell seriously ill <i>in 1849</i>, and soon found himself at death's door. He lived <i>in a</i> restaurant [<i>trattoria</i>] and was the son of the innkeeper [<i>albergatore</i>].</p>
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<sup>22</sup> AS 110 (3) Lemoyne. This escaped Desramaut, but few sheets refer to Volume I of the MB.

*Documenti* III, 169  
Seeing the danger, the doctor advised his parents to ask him to go to Confession, and they, grief-stricken, asked their son what priest he wanted to be called for him. He showed a great desire that they call in his ordinary confessor, who was D. Bosco. They sent for him immediately, but with *great* [*gran*] *regret* the response was that he was out of Turin. The youth displayed a *profound* grief and asked for the assistant parish priest who soon came. A day and a half later he died, *manifesting the desire to speak* with D. Bosco.

Arriving home after two days, D. Bosco was immediately told that they had been there seeking him for that youth.”

Lemoyne returned to the Charles episode (very probably before composing his draft for the MB) in Volume XLIII of the *Documenti*. On the spine of that volume we read: *Additions from 1815 to 1842*. In fact, it contains records and documentation for later years as well, up to 1882; and it seems to have been compiled in 1891–92 with the help of records of Father John Bonetti.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Desramaut would place the first lines of Volume XLIII in 1892 (*Les Memorie*

110 (3) Lemoyne, 1849  
Seeing him in danger, the doctor advised his parents to ask him to go to Confession, and they, grief-stricken, asked their son what priest he wanted to be called for him. He showed a great desire that they call in his ordinary confessor, who was D. Bosco. They sent for him immediately, but with *great* [*grande*] *regret* the response was that he was out of Turin. The youth displayed a *great* grief and asked for the assistant parish priest who soon came. A day and a half later he died, *often asking to speak* with D. Bosco.

Barely returned home, Don Bosco was immediately told that they had been there *several times* seeking him for that youth.”

MB 3:495/22–32;  
496/1–5

Seeing him in danger, the doctor advised his parents to ask him to go to Confession, and they, grief-stricken, asked their son what priest he would like to be called for him. He showed a great desire that they call in his ordinary confessor, who was D. Bosco. They sent for him immediately, but with *great* [*grande*] *regret* the response was that he was out of Turin. The youth displayed a *great* grief and asked for the assistant parish priest who soon came. A day and a half later he died, *often asking to speak* with D. Bosco.

Barely returned home, Don Bosco was immediately told that they had been there several times seeking him for that youth.”



Insofar as Charles is concerned, the first thing we note is that the dialogue between Don Bosco and the waiter who reported the youth's death to him at the door of the *Gelso Bianco* is rephrased in Piedmont dialect.<sup>24</sup> That dialogue had already found a place in *Documenti* III, and the MB drew its dialogue directly from there.<sup>25</sup>

We also find some notes regarding what took place between Don Bosco and Charles:

“Scarcely had Don Bosco blessed him, he stirred, turned around and immediately began to say: ‘It was a bad companion!’ ”

In the MB, reference to the blessing is included in the various acts that Don Bosco performed to awaken the youth.<sup>26</sup> The phrase, “It was a bad companion,” completed with an instrumental complement (“with his discourses”) was placed after a series of exclamations, part of which Lemoyne had noted in *Documenti* III and part of which he had drawn from the sources I shall soon present.<sup>27</sup>

Another series of additions deals with the handing down of the event and the guarantees for its truthfulness: the first echoes among the young people of the Oratory, the attestation of a Christian Brother, exposition of the event deriving from Don Bosco himself (specifically at Borgo San Martino in 1882, where Lemoyne himself was a witness who heard it).

All these particulars went into the MB.<sup>28</sup> They indicate that Lemoyne saw more clearly the need to document his statements as well as possible by supporting himself with the authority of various witnesses. He could now avail himself of this sort of documentation, thanks to a new event: the diocesan information-gathering process for the beatification of Don Bosco, which opened in 1891.

The resurrection of Charles was recalled by two laymen: Peter Enria, a Salesian Coadjutor; and John Bisio, a former student of the Oratory.

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I, p. 59). Lemoyne's manuscript composition would have gone on during the preceding year. As the pages proceed, we find citations of documents of successive dates: February 18 (p. 91); March 14 (p. 146); March 18 and October 9 (p. 356); December 2 (p. 371); February 22, 1891 (p. 432). But even if the final compilation is carried to 1892, it has no significant impact on what I have to say here.

<sup>24</sup> See DA 3 and DA 15.

<sup>25</sup> MB 3:496/9–16.

<sup>26</sup> MB 3:496/30.

<sup>27</sup> MB 3:497/15.

<sup>28</sup> MB 3:499 f.

Their way of expressing themselves indicates clearly that their texts, unlike other texts, are independent of Lemoyne's *Documenti*.<sup>29</sup> While agreeing on the substance of the event, both have their own terminology and circumstances that Lemoyne would readily find to contradict what he had known and written.

Enria seems to have placed the event in the Oratory, as if the youth were a boarder lying in the infirmary: "Don Bosco went to the infirmary to see him."<sup>30</sup> The mistake is not inexplicable. As Lemoyne notes in the MB, Enria was one of the youths whose family was devastated by cholera in 1854, and it was only in that year that he entered the Oratory.<sup>31</sup> He became an expert infirmarian at Valdocco, and he served Don Bosco elsewhere in that capacity as well.<sup>32</sup>

According to John Bisio, the youth was named Louis and would have died without the sacraments in the absence of Don Bosco.<sup>33</sup> But as Lemoyne tells us once again in the MB, Bisio entered the Oratory in 1864.<sup>34</sup>

Both Enria and Bisio heard the story from others. Enria alludes to two oldtime youths of the Oratory: Joseph Buzzetti, already dead in 1891, and Charles Tomatis, still alive at the time.<sup>35</sup> Bisio claims he heard the story from 'some' of the first pupils of the Oratory and from Teresa Martano, by then deceased.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>29</sup> That was not the case with some of the witnesses (Barberis, Berto, Lemoyne. . .). See Desramaut, *Les Memorie I*, pp. 192–202.

<sup>30</sup> See DA 5.

<sup>31</sup> MB 3:499/8.

<sup>32</sup> Enria was born in S. Benigno Canavese on June 20, 1841. He entered the Oratory on September 6, 1854. He died on June 21, 1898 (Secretariat General of the Salesian Superior Council, registered list of deceased confrères).

<sup>33</sup> See DA 6.

<sup>34</sup> MB 3:499/9. John Bisio was born in Capriata d'Orba on April 23, 1837. He entered the Oratory on August 2, 1864, after completing military service. He was fifty-seven when he gave a deposition at the diocesan process on March 26–27, 1895. He said he was a businessman, proprietor, and father of a family. See *Processo diocesano per la beatificazione di D. Bosco*, manuscript copy in AS 161.1/25 (the text that Lemoyne had in hand). File data on Bisio in the so-called *Anagrafe dei giovani* (Register of youths), AS 38, Turin–S. Franc. di Sales, covering enrollment from 1847 to 1869. Bisio died in Piosasco (Turin) on August 12, 1905.

<sup>35</sup> On Buzzetti and Tomatis see footnotes 42 and 50 and their related texts in this monograph.

<sup>36</sup> Teresa Martano, a native of Chieri, was a maid for the family of Count Rademaker in Turin. See BM 2:135, 245 f.

The contradictions have to do with secondary matters, not substantive ones. Lemoyne must have noted them, but he did make use of both reports. Let me present each in turn with the corresponding text of the MB, first that of Bisio, then that of Enria:

**Bisio**

“Drawing near his bed, he uncovered his face [. . .] The youth opened his eyes and exclaimed: ‘Oh you, D. Bosco! I longed so much to see you. You did well to come to see me and wake me because I have had such a terrible dream that scared me awfully. I seemed to be on the edge of a furnace, and I saw many ugly monsters who wanted to throw me in. But there was a lady there who opposed it, saying—Wait, he has not yet been judged. This struggle had gone on for a long time when you, D. Bosco, woke me up.’”

**MB 3:497/3–23**

“[. . .] he uncovered his face. He [. . .] opened his eyes [. . .] and said: ‘[. . .] Oh! D. Bosco! Oh! If you only knew! I longed so much to see you [. . .] You did so well to come and wake me! [. . .]’

I have had a dream that scared me greatly. I dreamed of being on the edge of a huge furnace and fleeing from many devils who were pursuing me and trying to catch me. They were just about to push me over and hurl me into that fire when a lady stepped in between me and those ugly monsters, saying—Wait, he has not yet been judged. After some time of anguish, I heard your voice calling me and I woke up [. . .].”

In this passage we can very clearly see Lemoyne’s concern not to lose any *new* detail. In *Documenti* III, he had simply written: “I dreamed of fleeing from many devils who wanted to catch me, and who were just about to push me over and hurl me in the inferno, when I heard you call me.”<sup>37</sup> In the MB, Lemoyne not only introduces the ‘lady’ but is also anxious not to lose the detail of the ‘ugly monsters’, while still retaining the ‘devils’ already explicit in the *Documenti*.

Enria’s account is brief and it offers only one new thing: one phrase.

**Enria**

“He heard his Confession and then said to him: ‘Goodbye, until we meet in heaven’, and the youth expired.”

**MB 3:498/11**

“Goodbye, then, until we meet in heaven.”

<sup>37</sup> See DA 2.

The words put in Don Bosco's mouth tell us that Lemoyne is basing himself on Enria's testimony at the diocesan proceedings, not on the account that Enria drew up privately for his deposition. In the latter account we find slight variations. For example, he puts the words of farewell cited above in the mouth of the dying youth.<sup>38</sup>

One redaction that we would not expect to serve as a source for the MB is that of D'Espiney. We do not know whether Lemoyne was aware of Don Bosco's reservations about D'Espiney's account of the Charles episode. We do not know how Lemoyne finally interpreted Don Bosco's desire that the resurrection of Charles not be spoken of. Did Lemoyne share D'Espiney's view that Don Bosco had said that out of humility? Finally, we do not even know when or how Lemoyne came to know of the French text, of which there is no trace in his redaction of the *Documenti*.

From D'Espiney he borrowed the most sensational passage, the one that might well have displeased Don Bosco the most since it clearly highlighted the miraculous interpretation of the event. And it did so with circumstantial details that Don Bosco may well have known to be as fanciful as others: e.g., placing the episode in Rome and attributing an attitude of intractable impenitence to the dying youth.

#### D'Espiney

"When Don Bosco entered his room, he found him lifeless on his funeral bed.

'Leave me alone', he said; and when everyone had left, he began to pray. Then, in a loud voice and a commanding tone, he called the dead person three times: 'Charles, arise! Charles, arise! Charles arise!' Lo and behold, Charles sat up."

#### MB 3:496/20–21; 28–32

"Don Bosco [. . .] was immediately ushered into the death room [. . .] Turning to the one who had brought him in, he said: 'Withdraw. Leave me alone'. After reciting a brief but fervent prayer, he blessed [him] and called the youth twice in an imperative tone: 'Charles, Charles, get up!' At that voice the dead [one] began to stir."

First, let us notice a point where Lemoyne varies from D'Espiney. The latter wrote that Don Bosco called the dead youth three times whereas Lemoyne says only twice. The change is due to Lemoyne's desire to harmonize the various accounts. John Bisio was the one to claim that Don Bosco called the dead youth twice, and that the youth's name was Louis.

<sup>38</sup> See DA 5.

The concluding dialogue between Don Bosco and Charles also derives from D’Espiney:

**D’Espiney**

“Don Bosco [. . .] embraced him and said to him: ‘My son, you are now in the state of grace; heaven is open to you. Do you want to go there or remain with us?’

‘I want to go to heaven’, replied the young man; and he immediately fell back lifeless.”

**MB 3:498/7–13**

“At last, Don Bosco said to him: ‘Now you are in God’s grace; heaven is open to you. Do you want to go up there or remain here with us?’

‘I want to go to heaven’, replied the youth [. . .]

And the boy let his head fall back on the pillow, closed his eyes, did not sitr, and fell asleep in the Lord again.”

Comparing the MB redaction with the original text of the *Documenti* III, we can see that the inclusion from D’Espiney simply damages the overall account. Further on in the MB, Lemoyne notes that “Don Bosco had acted with the greatest simplicity *in stating* that the youth was not dead.”<sup>39</sup> But it seems that he acted with the same simplicity in all his behavior during this episode. According to the account of the *Documenti*, unaffected by other reports except for that of D’Espiney, there was nothing staged or ritualistic in Don Bosco’s behavior, nothing to suggest that Don Bosco was preparing or asking for anything extraordinary. According to the *Documenti*: “Don Bosco drew near him and thought: Who knows if he made a good Confession! Who knows what fate awaited his soul?” These phrases, particularly the first, might well indicate what Don Bosco was really thinking at that moment; for he, of course, was always concerned with the problem of the soul’s salvation.

The simplicity and naturalness of the events are not affected at all by what is added in the *Documenti* regarding Don Bosco: “After reciting a brief prayer, he called the dead [one] by name.” This phrase survives in the MB, but the influence of D’Espiney’s account has wrought changes in it: “‘Leave me alone’. After reciting a brief but fervent prayer. . .” At Don Bosco’s call, the youth stirred and his mother (according to the *Documenti*), “frightened by this spectacle and outside herself, went out and started calling people.”

The command borrowed from D’Espiney (“Leave me alone.”) should

<sup>39</sup> See MB 3:498/15–16.

have caused some alteration of the text of the *Documenti*, but Lemoyne likes to harmonize his accounts. The order is addressed to the one who escorted Don Bosco to the room. The youth's mother remains in the room so that she can witness to the two calls issued in an imperative tone: "Charles, Charles, get up!"

On the basis of the account in the *Documenti* III, we can picture Don Bosco approaching the corpse, surrounded by weeping relatives. Don Bosco is concerned about the state of the youth's soul. He senses that there is still time and affectionately whispers the youth's name. It is the very human gesture of calling him and trying to rouse him, if that is still possible.

D'Espiney's text transforms everything. Don Bosco's attitude is already that of a miracle worker, like Elijah before the son of the widow of Sarephath or Jesus before the daughter of Jairus. He is certain of the death, yet full of the strength that gets him a miracle.

Thanks to D'Espiney's account, the second and last death agony of the youth is also raised to the level of the completely miraculous in the MB. In the *Documenti* we read only: "He stayed that way about two hours [ . . . ] Then he expired again." The MB and D'Espiney report him dying in a flash, right after he expresses his desire to go to paradise. It is as if the miracle worker, who had obtained his resurrection in the first place, had stepped in here again.

In support of his own account Peter Enria appealed to the testimony of Charles Tomatis. Whether at the suggestion of Lemoyne or someone else, Tomatis was interviewed by Salesian Father John Garino, a native of Busca, which was not far from Tomatis's native area and residence: Fossano. The interview took place on two dates: March 28 and July 5, 1901. We have Garino's handwritten report of the two meetings.<sup>40</sup> In the interview of March 28, Tomatis spoke of his first encounter with Don Bosco in terms that made their way literally into the MB. This assures us that Garino's pages got into Lemoyne's hands in time enough for him to use them for the resurrection of Charles as well.<sup>41</sup> Asked specifically about that incident, Tomatis replied that he didn't recall that at all. His statement was a serious matter. Born in 1833, Tomatis began to attend

<sup>40</sup> AS 123, Tomatis. See the testimony of July 5, 1901, in DA 8.

<sup>41</sup> MB 3:175/1-10 is transcribed literally from his first account (see BM 3:118). The testimony and wording of Tomatis appears elsewhere in the MB: on DB's multiplication of chestnuts in 1849 (MB 3:576/15-16; 578/1-2; see BM 3:404-405) and on a malignant pustule (MB 3:595/19-24; BM 3:419).

Don Bosco's place in 1847. He began to live at the Oratory on November 5, 1849; and he stayed there for more than a decade, up to February 1861.<sup>42</sup>

In the MB Lemoyne did not mention the name, Tomatis, nor did he eliminate the phrase he had already put in the *Documenti XLIII*: "the report went undisputed at the Oratory for many years."<sup>43</sup> But Tomatis may also have influenced Lemoyne in introducing reasons why the event did not create a 'big stir' in the city.

Father Garino does appear among the witnesses, however.<sup>44</sup> He had entered the Oratory in 1857, at the age of twelve. His testimony does not go back directly to Don Bosco, but to others at the Oratory who spoke about the incident: "I recall that being told. . ."<sup>45</sup>

After the testimony of Garino, Lemoyne must not have had any other concrete documents that could have enriched the MB text. Lemoyne's exposition was elaborated in three parts: a detailed account of the resurrection of Charles; the reasons why the fact made just a stir at the Oratory and went undisputed, even though there was no talk of it elsewhere; and mention of the persons who guaranteed the veracity of the events narrated.

Besides such witnesses as Garino, Enria, Bisio, Martano, Father Anthony Sala, and the Christian Brother, three others should be mentioned: Father Bonetti, Cardinal John Cagliero, and Father Michael Rua. John Bonetti had died on May 21, 1895. His testimony indicated that the tradition was alive more than five years after the event, since he had entered the Oratory on July 10, 1855.<sup>46</sup> Salesian John Cagliero (1838–1926), who later became a Cardinal, arrived at the Oratory of Castelnuovo d'Asti on November 3, 1851.<sup>47</sup>

The testimony of Michael Rua is of particular importance. Born in Turin on June 9, 1837, he came to know Don Bosco as early as

<sup>42</sup> *Anagrafe dei giovani*, which is confirmed by an older register handwritten by DB, *Repertorio domestico*, f. 10r: "The Tomatis youth came with D. Bosco on November 5, 1849. Sig. D. Barberis gave me the alms-donation for said youth, November 10, 1849." See AS 132 Quaderni (Notebooks).

<sup>43</sup> See DA 3; MB 3:498/24.

<sup>44</sup> John Baptist Garino was born in Busca on April 19, 1845; entered the Oratory on October 13, 1857; died there, a Salesian priest, on April 25, 1908 (Secretariat General of the Salesian Superior Council, registered list of deceased confrères).

<sup>45</sup> See DA 8.

<sup>46</sup> *Anagrafe dei giovani*.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

September 1845 and began to attend the Oratory regularly in 1849.<sup>48</sup> His penchant for exactness and his close familiarity with Don Bosco for more than forty years lend great weight to his assertions. Those assertions are cited by Lemoyne in the MB, and we also possess a manuscript report of them: “When I was attending the elementary grades in the school of the Christian Brothers in Turin in 1849. . . Don Bosco often came to hear our Confession. And I recall hearing him tell us in a sermon of a youth named Charles. . .”<sup>49</sup>

The other witness given special emphasis by Lemoyne is Joseph Buzzetti, a Salesian Coadjutor, who died in Lanzo Torinese on July 13, 1891.<sup>50</sup> Writes Lemoyne: “Although he did not see the event, he unquestionably did hear of it immediately afterward from one who had been present, for, years later, he never doubted the authenticity of the facts, as he himself told us several times.”<sup>51</sup> On the basis of this statement it seems likely that Joseph Buzzetti was one of Lemoyne’s privileged informants, alongside Don Bosco himself and Father Rua. Joseph Buzzetti and his brothers were among the first to attend the catechism lessons given by Don Bosco as regulars, starting near the end of 1841 or soon afterwards. Joseph Buzzetti remained one of his most faithful and valued co-workers, someone on whom Don Bosco was able to depend for the rest of his life.

Don Bosco’s testimony remains very much in the forefront. In *Documenti* XLIII, Lemoyne wrote that Don Bosco had narrated “this incident to his youths a hundred times, never alluding to himself but always giving the same details without alterations or additions.” In the MB he was a bit more specific: “Don Bosco told the story to the Oratory youths more than fifty times, and hundreds of times to those of his other houses.”<sup>52</sup> The numbers can only puzzle us when we notice that the testimonies of Tomatis, Garino, and Bisio, which cover a good twenty years, either

<sup>48</sup> *Processo diocesano per la beatificazione di D. Bosco*, deposition of April 29, 1895; see DA 7. These data were used by A. Amadei, *Il Servo di Dio Michele Rua, successore del Beato D. Bosco* (Turin: 1931–34), 3 vols.

<sup>49</sup> MB 3:499/20–24; AS 161.1/26. See DA 7.

<sup>50</sup> G.B. Francesia, *Memorie biografiche di Giuseppe Buzzetti coadiutore salesiano* (S. Benigno Canavese: 1898). E. Pilla, *Giuseppe Buzzetti coadiutore salesiano* (Turin: 1960).

<sup>51</sup> MB 3:499/3–6; BM 3:351–352.

<sup>52</sup> MB 3:500/6–8.



are negative or appeal to indirect reports. Lemoyne's figures are a bit inflated, I would suggest, but they do indicate that Don Bosco told the account often, at least after 1860.

One item that made its way from the *Documenti* to the MB was the statement that Don Bosco recounted the incident repeatedly, "although he never once alluded to himself."<sup>53</sup>

A precise and gracious statement was sent to Lemoyne by Father Joseph Bologna on June 13, 1904. Bologna indicated that in his presence Don Bosco had told "the matter as described" in the MB. But in the grip of emotion, notes Bologna, Don Bosco slipped and revealed himself to be the priest who was Charles's friend.<sup>54</sup>

\* \* \*

The text of the MB was incorporated by Lemoyne himself into his biography of Don Bosco, which was published in two volumes (1911–1913).<sup>55</sup> Some slight revisions for the sake of clarity did not change the overall account. The most noticeable differences have to do with the enumeration of the witnesses supporting the veracity of the fact. The testimony of Father Rua that went back to the time when he was a student of the Christian Brothers is replaced by testimony deriving from him that goes back to 1858 and 1862 and that is corroborated by a contemporary document. The latter is called the 'Chronicle of the Oratory' in Lemoyne's biography. In fact, it is one of the notebooks which Father John Bonetti compiled under the title *Annali* ('Annals'). If we put

<sup>53</sup> MB 3:500/8.

<sup>54</sup> DA 9. Father Bologna places the event at the triduum in preparation for Easter of 1864 or 1865. Lemoyne prefers the latter date (BM 8:93), but it may be more correct to place Don Bosco's sermon in the spring of 1864. Otherwise it is hard to explain why John Bisio, who arrived at the Oratory in August 1864, expressly cited Teresa Martano as his source of information instead of appealing directly to Don Bosco's own words. Unusable was a brief allusion to it by Father John Baptist Anfossi at the diocesan information-gathering process: "When I came to the Oratory in 1853 [December 23], everyone there was convinced that Don Bosco had performed miracles. . . had raised the dead and multiplied hosts and chestnuts" (BM 4:467–468).

Joseph Bologna was born in Garessio on May 15, 1847. He entered the Oratory on September 1, 1863, and he died there on January 4, 1907.

<sup>55</sup> Lemoyne, *Vita del venerabile servo di Dio Giovanni Bosco fondatore della Pia Società Salesiana* (Turin: 1911) I, 438–441. There were several reprintings, up to 1920, of the 2-volume second edition of 1914; the Charles episode is in I. 430–433.

the two texts side by side, it seems certain that Bonetti's text was Lemoyne's new source:

**Bonetti, *Annali*, II, 41 f.**<sup>56</sup>  
“One day at table Father Rua (who at that time did not have any orders) recounted that *the Romans*, when he was in that city with D. Bosco, told him of the miracle worked by Don Bosco in Turin some years before, thus demonstrating they were very well informed. Don Bosco heard *this account*, even though a little distance away, and we noticed him get very red in the face. Then, *turning to the narrator*, ‘Be quiet’, he said in a serious tone. ‘I have never said it was me, and no one is to know it.’”

**Lemoyne, *Vita*, 1911, I, 433, footnote 1, lines 1–11**

“The report of this went even beyond Piedmont. In 1858, the Servant of God took his first trip to Rome, accompanied by Michael Rua, then a subdeacon. Well, on that occasion Rua learned how widely known to many *Romans* was all I have presented above. One day in 1862, while Father Rua was sitting at table and mentioning this to those near him, ‘Don Bosco,’ reports the Chronicle of the Oratory, ‘*even though he was sitting a little distance away*, nevertheless was paying attention to *this whole account* and we noticed him get very red in the face. Suddenly, *turning to the narrator*, he interrupted him and said to him in a serious tone: ‘Be quiet’. I have never said it was me, and no one is to know it!’ ”

Note that Bonetti does not specify the miracle in question. Nor can that be figured out from the context of his *Annali*. Both before and after the above statement the *Annali* report other episodes that are wholly independent of each other. In any case, Don Bosco's reply as given by Bonetti is already in the MB, and the context is readily reconcilable with the *Annali*. According to the MB, Rua tried to evoke a reply from Don Bosco by direct questioning.<sup>57</sup> I don't think we can rule out the possibility that we are dealing with the same episode, and hence that Bonetti's record of what took place might well be a better account than that of Lemoyne (or Rua).

<sup>56</sup> AS 110 Bonetti.

<sup>57</sup> “He [D. Bosco] answered me: ‘I have never said I was the author of that deed’ ” (MB 3:500/1–2). This text is dependent on AS 161.1/26, copy A, p. 345: see DA 7.

Insofar as Michael Rua's ecclesiastical status in 1858 is concerned, we find an obvious difference in the two above reports. Lemoyne writes that he was a subdeacon; Bonetti records that he had no sacred orders. In fact, Rua received tonsure and the minor orders in Turin on December 11, 1859, and he was made a subdeacon on the seventeenth of the same month.<sup>58</sup>

The accounts in the MB and Lemoyne's *Vita* became the *received texts*, as it were, and were drawn upon by biographers and popularizers of every sort. In 1920, the *Vita* was revised and somewhat touched up by Father Angelo Amadei. But he left wholly unchanged the episode of Charles, right down to the typographical plates of the second edition (1914).<sup>59</sup> In a new edition Amadei limited himself to adding the name of the Marchioness Fassati to the list of those vouching for the fact.<sup>60</sup>

Among those writing popular accounts of Don Bosco, one who deserves to be noted here is Father Eugene Ceria. He was the first to make use of indications about the identity of Charles in a work written for the public: "The fifteen-year-old son of the proprietor of the *Gelso Bianco* at 11 Carmine Street."<sup>61</sup> Ceria, who carried on the MB from Volume XI to Volume XIX (1930–1939), made extensive use of the *Documenti*. The address information ('11 Carmine Street') does not come from the *Documenti*, however. Apparently it comes from Lemoyne's deposition at the Vatican process for the beatification of Don Bosco. At that time he summed up all he had written and gave, as a new datum, the address as the scene of the events.<sup>62</sup>

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The documentary situation underwent an unexpected change on May 7, 1922, when Marquis Philip Crispolti handed over some memoirs of Marchioness Fassati to the third successor of Don Bosco, Father Philip Rinaldi. The memoirs of the marchioness had been transcribed by her daughter, Azelia, who turned them over to Crispolti shortly before her

<sup>58</sup> Secretariat General of the Salesian Superior Council, registered list of deceased confrères.

<sup>59</sup> Lemoyne, *Vita*, New edition (Turin: 1920) I, 430–433.

<sup>60</sup> Lemoyne, *Vita*, New edition edited by Father Angelo Amadei (Turin: 1943) I, 407.

<sup>61</sup> Ceria, *San Giovanni Bosco nella vita e nelle opere*. . . (Turin: 1938) p. 93.

<sup>62</sup> See DA 10.

own death.<sup>63</sup> Written in French, the documents were published in an Italian translation for the first time in the *Salesian Bulletin* for September 1922.<sup>64</sup> As far as I know, they were first incorporated into a biography of Don Bosco by Father Angelo Amadei in 1929.<sup>65</sup>

The valuable qualities of the Fassati account are evident from a simple reading of it. She concludes: "I have this account from the mouth of Don Bosco himself, and I have tried to write it down as faithfully as possible."<sup>66</sup> Her account is quite detailed; and it reflects the traits of simplicity and naturalness in Don Bosco's behavior that best explain, according to Father Lemoyne, why the incident passed without any immediate clamor or public reaction.

Fassati reports that Don Bosco went to Charles's house with the feeling that the youth was not yet dead. He approached his bed and called him by name. . . . The awakening of Charles threw panic into several of the people present. The major difference between the MB and Fassati's account lies in the nature of this central point.

A minor but interesting difference has to do with the youth's dream. In *Documenti* III, Lemoyne had described struggles with devils. Then, borrowing from Bisio he added the appearance of a heavenly lady and a blazing furnace into which the 'ugly monsters' wanted to throw him. The Fassati account talks about a long, narrow, airless cavern in which the youth found himself; here the images and sensations suitably express the exhaustion and nightmare oppressing the dying youth.

## 2. *The historical Charles*

What is the real identity of the youth, Charles? What is his last name? Where and when did he die?

We get only partial answers to these questions from the documents

<sup>63</sup> On Maria Fassati Roero San Severino, née De Maistre (1823–1905), see F. Guasco di Bisio, *Tavole genealogiche di famiglie alessandrine e monferrine*, Volume XII, tav. IV of the Fassati; A. De Foras, *Armoirial et nobiliaire de l'ancien duché de Savoie* (Grenoble: 1893), table De Maistre; her obituary in the *Bollettino salesiano*, 29 (1905), p. 94.

On Azelia Ricci des Ferres, née Fassati (1846–1921), besides Guasco and De Foras see *Bollettino salesiano*, 45 (1921), p. 279.

<sup>64</sup> *Bollettino salesiano*, 46 (1922), pp. 229–232.

<sup>65</sup> Amadei, *Don Bosco e il suo apostolato. Dalle sue memorie personali e da testimonianze di contemporanei* (Turin: 1929) I, 223–225.

<sup>66</sup> See DA 11.

we have examined. I felt that an exhaustive answer was possible on the basis of their suggestions, despite uncertainties and contradictions.

First of all, I undertook to examine what the documents offered for research into the historical Charles.

In the accounts that give a proper name, the youth is consistently named Charles (*Carlo*). The only exception is Bisio, whose testimony we know to be late and indirect.

The youth's age is indicated only by Lemoyne: he was fifteen. Fassati writes simply that he was a 'young man'.

All agree that he was known by Don Bosco. The majority add that he used to attend the Oratory. Lemoyne asserts that Don Bosco was his ordinary confessor.

Not all of the documents expressly mention the youth's family. Fassati reports that his father and mother were on the scene. From his very first redaction Lemoyne wrote that the parents, at the suggestion of the doctor, took a personal interest in having their son make his Confession. Lemoyne tells us that the youth's mother and an aunt were attending the corpse when Don Bosco approached it. It is also Lemoyne who informs us that Charles had a brother (a young man, it seems) who participated in the war of independence or at least its closing phase. This brother was wounded at Novara and came back home, where he died soon after.

The specific profession of his parents is again mentioned only by Lemoyne: they were owners of an inn (*albergo*) or restaurant (*trattoria*).

Both Lemoyne and Fassati inform us that Don Bosco was escorted into the mortuary chamber by a waiter or household servant.

Both tell us that many people witnessed the events. According to Fassati, those present fled in terror when the youth revived. According to Lemoyne, they came running in response to the emotional outcry of the mother, who witnessed the reawakening.

Only Lemoyne writes that the assistant pastor of the parish was called since Don Bosco was not around. In his deposition at the Vatican process Lemoyne changed that to the pastor.

The year is uncertain. We must reject out of hand the dates offered by D'Espiney (Rome, hence 1858) and Bisio (shortly before August 1864). The testimony of the Christian Brother, in conjunction with that of Father Rua, does not allow for any date beyond 1849. Undecided between 1847 and 1849, Lemoyne finally placed the resurrection of Charles in 1849. His account assumes that the incident took place before the death

of the brother who was wounded at the battle of Novara (March 22–23); hence it would have to be placed somewhere in the first three months of the year. No one tells us the month or day, however, and we get no help from the fact that Don Bosco was away from Turin temporarily.

Many inform us of the time that went by between the first attempt to get hold of Don Bosco and his return to Turin (two days later). We also get information on the time that elapsed between his arrival back in Turin and his visit to the youth's house. He went right away, says Lemoyne. It was in the afternoon of the following day, says Fassati. Almost all allude to the time that elapsed between the youth's death and Don Bosco's visit: six hours (Bisio), half a day (Lemoyne), a whole day (Fassati). Fassati specifically indicates that Don Bosco arrived to see the corpse around 4:00 P.M.

As far as the locale of the event is concerned, we must rule out Enria's testimony that the youth died in the infirmary (of the Oratory?). Aside from everything else, the Oratory did not have one in 1847–1849. The few rooms that Don Bosco could have had at his disposal were occupied by the dozen or so youths he was housing. According to Lemoyne and Fassati, the youth died at home in the presence of his relatives.

Lemoyne is the only one to tell us that the house was the *Gelso Bianco*, at 11 Carmine Street and the corner of Quartieri Street, which was owned by the parents of Charles. We are struck by Lemoyne's discrepancies on the exact nature of the *Gelso Bianco*. He tells us it was an inn (*albergo*), tavern (*osteria*), restaurant (*trattoria*), wine shop (*bottiglieria*).<sup>67</sup> This uncertainty is reflected by Father Ceria, who makes Charles "the fifteen-year-old son of the *trattore* of the *Gelso Bianco*."<sup>68</sup>

In all likelihood, Father Lemoyne did not verify this item. From Marzorati's *Guide to Turin* we learn that the *Gelso Bianco* was always an *albergo* ('inn'), but does not rule out the possibility that it had a public

<sup>67</sup> "He lived in the *Gelso Bianco trattoria*. . . and was the son of the *albergatore*" (*Documenti* III). "On the corner of Carmine Street. . . there is still the *Gelso bianco bottiglieria*, scene of this event"; "The youth. . . was the son of the *oste* of the *Moré Bianco*" (*Documenti* XLIII). "Charles. . . lived in a *trattoria* and was the son of the *albergatore*" (MB 3:495/25–26). "Charles, son of the *albergatore* of the *Gelso Bianco*. . ." (see DA 10).

<sup>68</sup> Ceria, *San Giovanni Bosco nella vita e nelle opere*, p. 93. A curious distortion is that of D. Fierro, *Vida de San Juan Bosco*. . . (Madrid: 1957). The resurrection is supposed to have taken place in an "inn called the *Muletto*" (p. 263).

table or *trattoria* ('restaurant').<sup>69</sup> For the year 1838 the indicated proprietress is Mary Anthony (*sic*) Giuliani, and the name of the inn is the *Moré Bianco*.<sup>70</sup> Mary Giuliani is still listed as the owner in the *Guida* for 1848<sup>71</sup> and 1858.<sup>72</sup> The *Guida* for 1876 tells us that Victor Detomatis had become the owner.<sup>73</sup> The *Guida* for 1890 indicates that the *Gelso Bianco* was no longer in existence.<sup>74</sup> Thus Lemoyne's statements in the *Documenti* XLIII about the continued operation of the *Gelso Bianco* after 1891 were incorrect. The reason for his mistake may be surmised from his letter to Bishop Cagliero in 1885 or 1886: "I am working day and night [on the *Documenti* for the biography of Don Bosco]. I don't take time out for recreation, I never go out, I turn down any other assignment, I am almost always alone. . ."<sup>75</sup> It seems that Father Lemoyne had fallen prey to the common temptation of people who find themselves with a huge quantity of documents at their immediate disposal. They may fail to consider, or reject, the necessity of adequately evaluating the sources they intend to use by having recourse to other documentation of a solid, trustworthy nature.

★ ★ ★

Despite uncertainties about accidental details, it seemed to me that it would not be difficult to find out exactly when Charles, son of the *Gelso Bianco* innkeeper, died. I had the data indicated by the various pieces of testimony and the last name provided by Marzorati's *Guida*.

No. 11 Carmine Street is and has always been part of the Carmine Street parish about thirty meters away. I consulted the parish registers of the deceased. Since the year of the incident was uncertain, I started with the year 1841, when Don Bosco was ordained a priest. That date seemed improbable, of course, because Don Bosco did not yet have faculties for Confession and could not have been the ordinary confessor of

<sup>69</sup> Actually the widow Giuliani, owner of the *Gelso Bianco*, is also described with other words in the parish records: *obergista* in the death record of her daughter Josephine, *ostessa* in the death record of her son Peter. In Piedmont usage the term *obergista* includes the notions of landlady and innkeeper. See Vittorio di Sant'Albino, *Gran dizionario piemontese-italiano* (Turin: 1859), p. 812.

<sup>70</sup> [G. Marzorati], *Guida di Torino per il 1838* (Turin: n.d.), p. 272.

<sup>71</sup> [Marzorati], *Guida. . .pel 1848* (Turin, n.d.), p. 79.

<sup>72</sup> [Marzorati], *Guida. . .pubblicata il 26 aprile 1858* (Turin, n.d.), p. 109.

<sup>73</sup> [Marzorati], *Guida. . .pubblicata il 7 marzo 1876* (Turin, n.d.), p. 158.

<sup>74</sup> [Marzorati], *Guida di Torino pubblicata il 1° marzo 1890* (Turin: 1890). As I already indicated, the *Documenti* XLIII are to be dated in 1891–1892.

<sup>75</sup> Letter of December 7, 1885 (or 1886). See footnote 20 above.

Charles Giuliani (or Giuliano). I chose December 1860 as the terminal date.

From the parish records I learned that during those years no Giuliani had died in the Carmine Street parish. Indeed there was no death of a youth between ten and twenty years of age who was described as the son of innkeepers or the like. The only Charles to die around that period, in the ten to twenty age group, was one Charles Conti: ten, native of Cùnico, died on August 20, 1850, son of Felix, a peasant.

Perhaps the Giuliani lived elsewhere. To get data on Charles, I would have to trace down their domicile. Thus the field of inquiry was unexpectedly enlarged to include other parishes. Far from easy inquiries in Turin and elsewhere were required before I had a sufficiently solid basis of documentation. A search was made of the following archives:

- (1) Archives of the archdiocesan chancery of Turin, which have copies of the Baptism, Matrimony, and death records of all the parishes, at least for the years in question, and also of some of the municipal hospitals.
- (2) Archives of the municipal parishes of St. Augustine, St. Barbara, St. Eusebius (St. Philip), St. Francis of Paola, St. Teresa, Carmine (records of Baptism, Confirmation, Matrimony, and deaths).
- (3) Archives of Bruino parish (diocese of Turin).
- (4) Municipal Archives of Turin, register section.
- (5) State Archives of Turin, *sezioni riunite*: military draft registrations.

I got the following picture of the Giuliani family. George Hermenegild Giuliani, son of Victor, native of Aquila in Valle di Blenio (Switzerland, but diocese of Turin), married Mary Frè (*sic* in the parish register of St. Augustine, but it is Piedmontese dialect; in other registers one reads *Ferrè* or *Ferrero*), daughter of John Battista, of Turin, on September 21, 1820. The two of them had been domiciled in the parish of St. Augustine, where they remained until at least August 1831. There they had six children:

- (1) Mary Frances, born February 19, 1823.
- (2) Giacinta (female, Hyacinth) Mary Geltrude, b. November 15, 1824.
- (3) Victor Mary Joseph, b. June 3, 1827.
- (4) Joan Mary Pia, b. May 5, 1828.
- (5) John Joseph George, b. May 2, 1830.



(6) Giacinto (male, Hyacinth) Rocco Anthony Victor Mary, b. August 16, 1831.

They changed their domicile to the parish of St. Thomas. There their seventh child was born:

(7) Josephine Clotilde, b. December 16, 1832.

The eighth and ninth children of the Giuliani were born in the parish of Bruino:

(8) Joseph Flavian Martin, b. December 22, 1833.

(9) Peter Mary, b. April 10, 1835.

Their tenth child was born in Turin, in the parish of St. Francis of Paola:

(10) Dominic Hermenegild, b. January 1, 1837.

An important datum was provided by the Bruino registers. On the death certificate for Giacinto (1838), the sixth child, we learn that his father George had also died and that he was a man of means. Thus the series of births was closed by the death of the father, but I could not find his death certificate in the civil and church registers I was able to consult in Bruino or Turin. A search for further children in the city and diocese of Turin also proved to be negative.

Thus no child of George Hermenegild Giuliani bore the name Charles as a first, second, or even third name. But I could not rule out the possibility that Don Bosco used an assumed name, given the delicacy of the episode. I had to check whether any of the Giuliani had died in the time period in question: before 1850, in Turin. Lemoyne also noted the death of a brother. So I also wanted to check whether any of them had died in 1849 at the battle of Novara, or shortly afterwards, as the result of wounds.

By 1839, two boys and two girls had died. The third child, Victor, died in the parish of St. Augustine on August 8, 1829. The sixth child, Giacinto, died in Bruino on October 15, 1838. The first child, Mary Frances, died in the parish of St. Augustine on February 24, 1828. The seventh child, Josephine Clotilde, died on June 18, 1839, in the Carmine Street parish, at the Dogliotti house (which turns out to be the place of the *Gelso Bianco*).<sup>76</sup>

Further inquiries produced the following information on the surviving six children.

<sup>76</sup> *Topodexia della città di Torino per rintracciarne facilmente le vie, le piazze, le case ecc.* (Turin: 1825), pp. 33, 63.

The second child, Giacinta, married Joseph Victor Detomatis (who later became the proprietor of the *Gelso Bianco*) in the Carmine Street church on February 27, 1849. The fourth child, Joan, married Anthony Ros in the same parish on January 2, 1853. The marriage took place where the spouses were domiciled. The mother, Mary Ferrero, was still living and described as an innkeeper (*albergatrice*).

The fifth child, John, married Margaret Dro[v]etti and had children in the parish of St. Eusebius: John George, b. August 17, 1862; Victor Joseph Delfino, b. November 25, 1868. He died in the parish of St. Barbara, Boucheron Street, on November 11, 1907. His wife had died earlier in the same parish on December 14, 1904.

The ninth child, Peter, died at his mother's domicile on November 18, 1855. The tenth child, Dominic Hermenegild, was selected by lot for military service in 1855; but he was declared exempt in 1858 by reason of Swiss nationality.<sup>77</sup>

The only child on whom I could not get useful data was the eighth, Joseph Flavian Martin. All I found was that he was confirmed in Carmine Church on April 1, 1844. Did he emigrate from Turin?

I had enough data to be convinced that any other results would be based on sheer suppositions. If the Charles of tradition was indeed one of the Giuliani, it could only be Joseph Flavian Martin. He was fifteen around 1848–1849. But in that case many of the details of the Charles of tradition fall apart, some of them deriving from testimony of no little value. Joseph Giuliani certainly did not die at the *Gelso Bianco*. He had not died in Turin up to 1855. He did not die in the presence of his father and mother, as Don Bosco told Fassati, because the father was already dead. Charles had to be a fictitious name. None of his brothers died after the battle of Novara, nor at the *Gelso Bianco* or elsewhere in or outside of Turin in the immediately following years.

But what if all the information of Father Lemoyne pointing to the *Gelso Bianco* was mistaken? Then the search would have to be based on whole layers of suppositions, one more untrustworthy than the next. We could look for Charles among the relatives of the Giuliani of the *Gelso Bianco*: the Ferreros, the Blanchins, and other Giuliani.<sup>78</sup> We could

<sup>77</sup> Turin, State Archives, sez. riun., provincial draft of youths born in 1837. Alphabetical list completed by the *Sindaco* on January 12, 1855: "Dominic Giuliano. . .draft selection. . .cancelled by reason of Swiss citizenship following the decision of the war minister contained in a dispatch of March 27, 1858."

<sup>78</sup> Ferrero is an extremely common last name in Turin. Joseph Blanchin was a

assume that somehow the relations were brought closer so as to equate the two families.

One could also assume that the 'Charles' of Don Bosco was some other boy who died between 1848 and 1849. If he did not belong to the *Gelso Bianco* (a young waiter?), perhaps he was part of the Carmine Street parish. That could be Dominic Odasio, son of John Baptist, who died at the age of fourteen on June 27, 1848. It could be a girl, Anna Gilli, daughter of Joseph (*cantiniere*) and Cecilia Giacchero, who died at the age of sixteen on September 29, 1848.

We can go still further along these lines. Suppose we assume that, no matter what, it was a Charles, his parents were alive, and he was somehow connected with an inn (*albergo*). In fact, there was such a Charles. He died not far from Valdocco, at what was then Piazza Italia 1 (now Piazza della Repubblica), in the parish of St. Augustine. His name was Charles Vinzia, and he died on January 20, 1848.<sup>79</sup> He was a native of Boleto, on Lake Orta, in the province of Novara.<sup>80</sup> A brother of his

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declarant for the death of Peter Giuliani (1855); in 1876 he was proprietor of the Zecca inn at 36 Rome Street (*Guida di Torino*. . .1876, p. 159). Teresa Blanchin, née Giuliani, was godmother at the Baptism of George Augustine Detomatis (Carmine Parish, July 7, 1862); and we find her to be proprietress of the *Cavallo rosso* inn at 34 Rome Street (*Guida di Torino*. . .1876, p. 157).

Among the Giuliani of Swiss origin there was also a Charles Victor, son of Louis Victor and Mary Giuliana (*sic*), born in Aquila. At the age of forty-four he married Agata Asinari from Tigliole d'Asti, in Turin, at the archdiocesan parish, on May 2, 1849. Toward the end of the century he was still the owner of a chocolate factory on Academy of Sciences Street. See *Guida di Torino*. . .1858, p. 49; *Guida di Torino*. . .1893, p. 171).

<sup>79</sup> One item that could dovetail with the Charles of Don Bosco: Charles Vinzia died at 8:00 A.M. A very interesting item: in writing, it clearly says that Charles Vinzia died on the *twentieth*; his death was certified on the *twenty-fourth*; his burial took place on the *twenty-fifth*. The official document is signed by the assistant parish priest, Dominic Massa (another little coincidence with the Charles of tradition).

The item 'twentieth' must have struck whoever made the transcription for the chancery. The chancery record has *twenty-fourth* for the day of death as well. The latter date places the death unusually close to the day of burial, which usually took place two days after death. In any case, neither date in itself has any direct bearing on the possible coincidences with the Charles of Don Bosco.

<sup>80</sup> Charles Vinzia was born on July 7, 1809, the son of John Baptist and Mary Parodi. When he was selected for military service, he was employed as a waiter. In 1829, he was assigned to the artillery corps (Turin: State Archives, *sezioni riunite*, Province of Novara, youths born in 1809, Selection List for the Orta district, n. 28).

could have fought at Novara and died at home or somewhere in his native region.<sup>81</sup> Charles Vinzia was the owner of the *Rosa Bianca* inn: not much difference between *Rosa Bianca* and *Gelso Bianco*. He died at eight in the morning. But he was thirty-eight and married at the time! Even that does not rule him out as a youth (*giovane*), the way Don Bosco used the term. We have a handwritten document by Don Bosco listing *giovani* ('youths') of three Oratories: *Nota dei giovani degli Oratori di S. Francesco di Sales, di S. Luigi Gonzaga, del Santo Angelo Custode*.<sup>82</sup> Its date, September 21, 1850, is after the resurrection of Charles. Among the *giovani* are some over forty, some over thirty, and twenty-four over twenty. Charles Vinzia would not be out of place in such a listing of *giovani*.

Suppositions. In the final analysis the historical Charles evades identification based on compelling proofs.

### 3. *The resurrected youth of Don Bosco and similar ones in the tradition of Catholic hagiography*

By way of hypothesis, one may assume that the Charles episode is entirely fictitious; that Don Bosco told his youths an incident that had occurred with St. Philip Neri and that is reported in Bacci's biography of the saint; then that the atmosphere of veneration around Don Bosco wrought some transpositions: from Rome to Turin, from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century, and from St. Philip to Don Bosco. Like the Charles of Don Bosco, the boy Paul de'Massimi was dear to Philip Neri and died without the saint being in attendance:

His father closed his eyes and the parish curate, who had given him the holy oil and recommended his soul to God, departed. The members of the household prepared the water to wash him and readied the clothes to put on him. A half hour had passed when the holy priest arrived. He was met by a weeping Fabrizio who said: "Paul is dead . . ."

Philip entered the room where the dead boy was and threw himself on the side of the bed. He spent a good quarter of an hour in prayer, displaying the usual bodily tremors and heart palpitations.

<sup>81</sup> For this brother of a Charles, too, the information remains uncertain and the field is wide open for suppositions.

<sup>82</sup> AS 132, Oratorio, 5: see BM 4:523–524.

Then he took holy water and sprinkled it on the boy's face, letting a little go into his mouth. Then, breathing on his face with his hand on his forehead, he called the boy twice in a loud, resounding voice: "Paul, Paul." At which the boy suddenly opened his eyes, as if awakened from a dream, and said: "Father, I had forgotten a sin and so I would like to go to Confession." Then the holy priest sent away those around the bed . . .

Then the holy priest asked the boy if he wanted to die and the boy said yes. The holy priest gave him a blessing, saying: "Go and may you be blessed, pray to God for me."

With a calm expression and no stir, the boy immediately died again in the arms of the holy priest.<sup>83</sup>

The similarities between this episode and the Charles episode of Don Bosco are truly noteworthy: calling the boy's name twice, hearing his Confession, and then asking him if he is content to die. Moreover, there is overwhelming evidence that Don Bosco knew the life of St. Philip Neri and recounted it to his youths.<sup>84</sup>

One detail missing in the Neri episode is the nightmare. But that detail is to be found in a similar episode recounted in the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory the Great, which was cited by Beyerlinck in a work that Don Bosco used to quote: *Magnum theatrum vitae humanae*. It concerns a priest named Severus who arrives too late to hear a dying person's Confession. Returned to life, the person tells Severus he was being dragged off to a terrible place until saved by an angel and restored to his body, thanks to the tears of Severus. He goes to Confession, does seven days of penance, and then dies again:

Severus sacerdos, vocatus ad cujusdam aegrotantis confessionem audiendam, cum paulum tardius venisset, vita defunctum offendit. Eaque de re vehementer anxius, et afflictus, lamentis cadaveri incumbens, cum acerrime fleret, revixit qui jacebat mortuus, dixitque: se, dum ab impiis spiritibus ad horrenda tenebrarum loca raptim

<sup>83</sup> Pietro Giovanni Bacci, *Vita di S. Filippo Neri* (Monza: 1851), Book III, Chapter XI, II, 219. Quite a few copies of that edition were to be found in Valdocco. The similarities between the episode of St. Philip Neri and that of Don Bosco were noted by Jesuit Father John Franco in a letter to Father Lemoyne from Rome dated February 24, 1891; see BM 3:353–354.

<sup>84</sup> Don Bosco offered panegyrics of him and assimilated his views. See *Indice MB*, 601.

traheretur ab angelo protinus dimitti, atque corpori restitui jussum, quod diceret, Deum id Severi lachrymis indulsisse. Igitur ubi confessus est, peracta septem dierum poenitentia, iterum obiit.<sup>85</sup>

Faced with these and similar texts, one might be inclined to say that the revival of a dead person in need of sacramental absolution is a motif of Catholic hagiography, akin to the eucharistic miracles that prove the real presence. Hence, by way of hypothesis one might conclude that there is no objective basis at all for the Charles episode as an actual fact. But such a conclusion means stripping away testimony of great weight: e.g., that of Father Bologna, Marchioness Fassati, and Father Lemoyne, who go back directly to Don Bosco and describe his behavior as that of a person involved in a real-life happening.

Before coming to any conclusions, I think the wisest course is to take a closer look at the ways the episode has been transmitted, and to weigh the various forms of testimony more carefully.

One channel of transmission was the catechesis and preaching of Don Bosco. It must be said right away that he did not have much recourse to it. In the beginning he must have told the incident outside the Oratory. If he spoke of it at Valdocco too, he must have told it in such a way that his listeners did not suspect he himself was involved. Otherwise we cannot explain why Charles Tomatis was unaware of the fact that Don Bosco had been credited with the temporary resurrection of a youth.

The Oratory tradition or transmission must have been twofold: (1) among Don Bosco's intimates; (2) among the youths and those less intimate with Don Bosco. The first group (Rua, Cagliero, Bonetti, Buzzezzetti, etc.) were probably convinced that Don Bosco was the priest who heard the Confession of Charles, and that a real resurrection had taken place. The second group seems to have heard indirectly (e.g., Bisio). If they heard directly (e.g., Bologna), it seems to have come from something Don Bosco said in a sermon.

We cannot check the eventual transmission of the fact by other channels, though it cannot be doubted that there were some. There was

<sup>85</sup> L. Beyerlinck, *Magnum theatrum vitae humanae*, under the heading 'Resurrectio' (6, Venice, 1707, 1198/C), which also reports an incident involving St. Francis of Assisi as reported by St. Bonaventure. A similar case is given under the heading 'Mors' (5, Venice 1707, 268/E). Beyerlinck picks up the original text of St. Gregory the Great, *Dial.* I, Chap. XII in Migne: PL 77, 212 f. (Rome: ed. Moricca, 1924, p. 68 f.).

Joseph Buzzetti who, according to Lemoyne, “unquestionably did hear it from someone else who had been present.” And there was the Christian Brother, whose testimony may go back to the preaching of Don Bosco.<sup>86</sup>

Neither can we check out the ways in which news of the ‘miracle’ might have circulated in Rome, as noted by Bonetti in his *Annali*.

Among the various redactions that have come down to us, that of the MB is the best known. Yet, as I think I have documented here, it does not seem to be the most faithful to the narration of Don Bosco. It is overlaid with elements which, if stripped away, might give us a better chance of hearing the event as told by Don Bosco. Some additions simply do not bring us closer to a likely reconstruction of the episode.

To get back to Don Bosco’s account and the objective event, it seems advisable to adopt the accounts of Fassati and the *Documenti* III, even though we do not know the precise precedents of the latter. For example, its statement that the *Gelso Bianco* was the scene of the event must be ruled out.

<sup>86</sup> Lemoyne describes in great detail the conversation between Sala and the Christian Brother: “Father Anthony Sala, while traveling by train to Parma, met an elderly Christian Brother who was stationed there. When the conversation got around to Don Bosco, the Brother told Father Sala that he had been an elementary school teacher in Turin in 1849, and that the event in question, the temporary resurrection of Charles, was an undisputed fact” (MB 3:499/13–19; BM 3:352). On the basis of inquiries graciously made at my request by Father Francis Gherzi of the headquarters of the Christian Brothers, we learn that none of their members residing in Parma in 1889 could have been a teacher in Turin before 1867. From 1867 to 1878 Brother Maximus (Paul Mazzi) was there. He was born in Reggio Emilia in 1848.

In all likelihood Father Sala found himself on the train with the Turin provincial of the Christian Brothers, who also had their Parma house under his jurisdiction. His name was Brother Genuine (John Baptist Andorno). Brother Genuine was almost an exact contemporary of Don Bosco, born in San Paolo (Asti) on June 7, 1826. He entered the novitiate on February 10, 1843. By January 1844 he was in Pinerolo, then went to Saluzzo and Racconigi before returning to Saluzzo again. In 1847 he was sent to Turin and the community of Santa Pelagia, where he taught at the upper elementary level and showed rare gifts as an educator. From 1863 on, he was Visitor (or Provincial) of the Turin area. He died in Turin on November 8, 1901.

If Brother Genuine is the one in question for us here, it is easy enough to understand how Sala and Lemoyne might have misunderstood his connection with the Parma house. It is even possible that Brother Genuine did not want to make known his title as provincial superior. He might have simply said that he was going to ‘his’ house in Parma—‘his’ because he was its superior.

It is primarily the Fassati account that sheds light on Don Bosco's way of dealing with his young people and with Doctor D'Espiney. For the former, Don Bosco used the episode to get across an educational and religious point: the need for sincerity with one's confessor and the necessity of overcoming considerations of human respect in dealing with him. This theme was stressed repeatedly in Don Bosco's catechesis, and the incident certainly would get across the point Don Bosco wanted to make. But those who knew the man teaching them, who had in mind the multiplication of the chestnuts and hosts or the extraordinary graces effected through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, were instinctively inclined to assume that the reawakening of Charles had been a miracle worked by the protagonist, Don Bosco. This interpretation became the heart and soul of the account in D'Espiney's *Dom Bosco*.

Don Bosco protested against that account. In all likelihood he was aware of many inconsistencies in the details given by D'Espiney. But he himself may also have been unsure of the exact nature of all that had happened. Any reconstruction of the event must certainly consider what Don Bosco's state of mind might have been. But it should describe his behavior in terms of naturalness and matter-of-fact conduct, the very qualities that are compromised by the MB borrowings from D'Espiney.

#### 4. Conclusion: Lemoyne's use of sources for the MB account

I think we can now say something about the way Father Lemoyne went about composing the text of the MB.

Insofar as his sources, or sections of them, were not mutually contradictory, Lemoyne used them as if they were complementary documents. But the authors of the documents had no such intention, and some of the documents themselves can hardly be called complementary. Peter Enria's *infirmarium* and John Bisio's *lady*, for example, seem to be the results of confusing the resurrection episode with other incidents involved in their own testimony or in the life of Don Bosco. Enria was an *infirmarian*, and there are frequent references to "a Lady" in the dreams of Don Bosco.

Nevertheless the various testimonies about Charles do have real value. They indicate how the account was perceived and passed on in various circumstances by people of diverse mentality and training: e.g., Enria, D'Espiney, Rua, Lemoyne, and others drawn to the personality of Don Bosco. But insofar as the fact itself and Don Bosco's presentation



of it are concerned, their value is diverse and secondary because they are often late and indirect sources.

I think the same holds true for the MB. The redaction is faulty for two reasons: (1) it is a conglomeration of fragments of unequal historical value; (2) it reveals an obvious failure to check out sources not contained in the Salesian archives, which could have helped to prevent inaccuracies. Some of those inaccuracies could easily have been avoided, even if they had to do with only secondary matters. If certain mistakes had been avoided back then, we today might have been able to place the Charles of tradition in a satisfactory historical context.

Examination of the various redactions suggests several final considerations regarding any critical work on them.

It is obviously worthwhile, eminently worthwhile, to consider how Father Lemoyne operated in composing the MB. Those volumes will always retain an eminent place for anyone who wants to know Don Bosco or to study how he was seen by a whole epoch: i.e., the generation that accompanied the saint during his lifetime and continued his work immediately after his death. They are also valuable because up to now they have served almost exclusively as the inspiration for devoted followers, hagiographers, and scholars.

## DOCUMENTARY ACCOUNTS

### DA 1. From *Dom Bosco* by Charles d'Espiney: "Arise!" (1881).<sup>87</sup>

A young man, educated at the Oratory, was dying in Rome. The unfortunate fellow had lost the faith and obstinately refused to go to Confession.

The broken-hearted family then turned to Don Bosco in the hope that he could triumph over the fatal blindness of his former child.

Unfortunately Don Bosco was in Florence at the time. At the first news he set out in all haste, but he arrived too late. The patient had just

<sup>87</sup> D'Espiney, *Dom Bosco* (Nice: 1881), p. 177 f.

expired; when Don Bosco entered his room, he found him lifeless on his funeral bed. "Leave me alone," he said; and when everyone had left, he began to pray. Then, in a loud voice and a commanding tone, he called the dead person three times: "Charles, arise! Charles, arise! Charles, arise!" Lo and behold, Charles sat up.

Don Bosco heard his Confession immediately, then gave him Communion in the presence of his relatives and neighbors.

That done, he embraced him and said to him: "My son, you are now in the state of grace; heaven is open to you. Do you want to go there or remain with us?"

"I want to go to heaven," replied the young man; and he immediately fell back lifeless.

## DA 2. Lemoyne, *Documenti*, "A Dead Person Resurrected" (1885–1886).<sup>88</sup>

The enthusiasm of young people for D. Bosco was not aroused solely by his charity, his words, and his ways but also by certain extraordinary deeds which, seen by some and believed by all, caused him to be regarded as a person who was a friend of God.

A boy of fifteen who had been in the habit of attending the Oratory of D. Bosco fell seriously ill in 1847 and soon found himself at death's door. He lived in the *Gelso Bianco* restaurant at the corner of Carmine and Quartieri streets and was the son of the innkeeper.

Seeing the danger, the doctor advised his parents to ask him to go to Confession, and they, grief-stricken, asked their son what priest he wanted to be called in for him. He showed a great desire that they call in his ordinary confessor, who was D. Bosco. They sent for him immediately, but with great regret the response was that he was out of Turin. The youth displayed a profound grief and asked for the assistant parish priest who soon came. A day and a half later he died, *manifesting the desire to speak with Don Bosco*.

Arriving home after two days, D. Bosco was immediately told that they had been there seeking him for that youth, who was in danger of death and had insistently asked for him. He went out and headed right away for the dying or dead boy's house, just in case, he said, he might

<sup>88</sup> *Documenti per scrivere la storia di D. Giovanni Bosco, dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales e della Congregazione salesiana*, III, 169 f: AS 110, Lemoyne, *Documenti*.

still be in time. Arriving there, he met a waiter and immediately asked him for news of the youth, but this man replied that he had been dead for half a day. Then, chuckling, Don Bosco replied: "Oh! he's asleep and you think he's dead." At these words the other people in the house broke into tears, saying he was, alas, no more. Almost jokingly, D. Bosco replied: "I'll bet a pint he's not dead. Let me go see him." He was ushered into the mortuary room where the mother and aunt were praying by the deceased. The corpse, with a change of clothes for burial, was covered with a veil, wrapped and stitched, as usual, in a tattered sheet. Near the bed was a lighted lamp. Don Bosco drew near him and thought: Who knows if he made a good Confession! Who knows what fate awaited his soul? After reciting a brief prayer, he called the dead [one] by name. At that voice the dead [one] began to stir. D. Bosco quickly hid the lamp and, with a strong pull of his two hands, tore apart the sheet to free the youth. The latter, as if waking from a deep sleep, opened his eyes and looked around, rose up a little, and said: "Oh! How did I get like this?" Then he fixed his gaze on Don Bosco. As soon as he recognized him, he exclaimed: "Oh, D. Bosco! Oh, if you only knew! I was looking for you specifically. . . I need you very much!" His mother, frightened by the spectacle and beside herself, went out and started calling people. Meanwhile, D. Bosco replied: "Tell me everything you want. I am here for you." The youth proceeded: "Oh, D. Bosco, I was bound for the place of damnation. In my last Confession I did not dare to reveal a sin committed a few weeks ago. I have had a dream that scared me greatly. I dreamed of fleeing from many devils who wanted to catch me, and who were just about to push me over and hurl me in the inferno, when I heard your voice. Now I want to go to Confession." The poor kid immediately began his Confession with signs of real repentance. And as D. Bosco was raising his hand to give him absolution, his mother reentered the room with about twenty people who were able to be witnesses to the fact.

Turning to her, her son said: "This priest is saving me from hell."

He stayed that way about two hours, during which he was in possession of his mind. Among other things, he told D. Bosco to urge sincerity in Confession on young people insistently and always. Then he expired again. One remarkable thing was noticed in this resur[r]ection. All the time the youth moved about, looked around, and talked, his body remained the cold corpse it had been before the resuscitation.

### DA 3. Lemoyne, Additions to the *Documenti* (1891–92).<sup>89</sup>

The youth said to have been resurrected was the son of the innkeeper [*oste*] of the *Morè bianch*. When D. Bosco entered the house and said that the boy was not dead, the manservant replied: “*A le nen mort?*” Replied Don Bosco: “I bet a pint *ca le nen mort!*”

Scarcely had Don Bosco blessed him, he stirred, turned around and immediately began to say: “It was a bad companion!”

The report went as undisputed fact at the Oratory for many years. Traveling to Parma in 1889, Father Sala met an elderly Christian Brother on the train who was from their Parma house. The Christian Brother, who had been in Turin around 1848–1849, considered it an undisputed fact.

As for its veracity, we have these indirect proofs. (1) Don Bosco narrated this incident to his youths a hundred times, never alluding to himself but always giving the same details without alterations or additions, so that it was apparent that he was present at the event which had impressed itself on his memory.

(2) Telling the incident to the youths one evening after night prayers at Borgo S. Martino, midway he switched from the third person to the first person without realizing it. He said: “I said to him, he replied to me. . .” Then he went back to the third person. That was in the latter years of his life and Father Lemoyne was present.

On the corner of Carmine Street and Quartieri there is still the *Gelso bianco* wineshop, scene of this event.

### DA 4. Father Barberis, On the proprietors of the *Gelso Bianco* (1885–93).<sup>90</sup>

The present owner of the *Gelso Bianco* in Turin is Mr. Vittorio Detomatis, who has three sons: Joseph, Henry, and Anthony. Anthony is a telegraph operator at the Porta Susa station.

But forty years ago the owner (*padrone*)<sup>91</sup> of said inn was Mr. [*il signore*]<sup>92</sup> George Giuliano, residing at 8 Bucheron Street, third floor, Turin.

<sup>89</sup> Lemoyne, *Documenti*, XLIII, 11: AS 110, Lemoyne, *Documenti*.

<sup>90</sup> Autograph ms. of Father Julius Barberis, AS 123 Carlo.

<sup>91</sup> *Padrone* corrected from *padrona*.

<sup>92</sup> *Il signore* corrected from *la signora*.

Son of this gentleman is Mr. Dominic Giuliano, residing in Bruino, Milano Farm.

This Giuliano family is Swiss. The mother was a Ferrero. One of the daughters was married to the aforementioned Detomatis.

This is all we could learn, after many inquiries by our confrère Eula of Valsalice, about the owners of the *Gelso Bianco*.<sup>93</sup>

Rev. Julius Barberis

**DA 5. Peter Enria, Deposition at the diocesan information-gathering process for the beatification of Don Bosco: Personal Notes (1891–93).**<sup>94</sup>

On one occasion D. Bosco was out of Turin for a couple of days. When he returned, he was informed of the death of a youth who had had a great desire to go to Confession to D. Bosco. He was sorely grieved for the youth, asked about him, and sadly wanted to know [*sempre*<sup>95</sup>] when he had died. They told him some hours earlier. Then Don Bosco went to the infirmary, where the dead youth was, went up to the bed, called him by name, and the youth opened his eyes and exclaimed: “Ho!<sup>96</sup> D. Bosco, I was looking for you. I need to go to Confession.” He went to Confession. After his confession, he talked a bit with D. Bosco and then said with a smile: “Goodbye, until we meet in heaven.” Then he expired. This incident I heard [*lo*<sup>97</sup> *sentito*] from Joseph Buzzetti and Tomatis the painter. I also heard it was confirmed by Don Bosco himself.

<sup>93</sup> From the register list of the Secretariat General of the Salesians and the annual roster of the Salesians we learn that there was only one Salesian named Eula while Barberis was alive (1847–1947). He was Vincent Eula from Villanova (Cuneo), who made his religious profession on September 26, 1893, was in the Valsalice high school in Turin (1893–1894), and then left the Salesians. The remark of Barberis assumes that the *Gelso Bianco* was still operating, suggesting that the Eula’s checking might have been done even earlier: i.e., while he was simply living in the Salesian institute of St. John the Evangelist in Turin (1885–1891) or in the novitiate at Valsalice (1891).

<sup>94</sup> Autograph, AS 110 Enria, 1–2, p. 74 f. The orthography of the original is pretty bad, and I have taken the liberty of revising the punctuation.

<sup>95</sup> *sempre* = *seppe*.

<sup>96</sup> *ho!* = *oh!*

<sup>97</sup> *lo* = *l’ho*.

**Peter Enria. Deposition at the diocesan information-gathering process (January 30, 1893).<sup>98</sup>**

On one occasion D. Bosco, returning to Turin after an absence of a couple of days, found out that a few hours earlier there had died a boy who had expressed a desire to go to Confession to him. Hearing that, D. Bosco went to the infirmary to see him, approached him and called him by name. The boy opened his eyes and said: "Ah! D. Bosco, I was looking for you. . ." He heard his Confession and then said to him: "Goodbye, until we meet in heaven." And the youth expired. I heard this told by Buzzetti and Tomatis. The latter is still alive.

**DA 6. John Bisio, Deposition at the diocesan information-gathering process for the beatification of Don Bosco (March 27, 1895).<sup>99</sup>**

I was told by Teresa Martano, an outstanding benefactress of the Oratory now deceased, that in my early years at the Oratory a youth living in Turin fell seriously ill and wanted to go to Confession to Don Bosco right away; but he was away and so the youth died without receiving the sacraments. When D. Bosco got back to Turin, he was told that this youth Louis, whose last name I don't remember, had called for him to hear his Confession and then had died a few hours ago. Hearing this, D. Bosco rushed to see him. Entering the house, he met the mother, who told him tearfully that her Louis had longed greatly to go to Confession but had died six hours ago without receiving the sacraments. Don Bosco asked to see him. Drawing near his bed, he uncovered his face and called him twice by name. The second time, the youth opened his eyes and exclaimed: "Oh you, D. Bosco! I longed so much to see you. You did well to come to see me and wake me because I have had such a terrible dream that scared me awfully. I seemed to be on the edge of a furnace, and I saw many ugly monsters who wanted to throw me in. But there was a lady there who opposed it, saying, 'Wait, he has not yet been judged.' This struggle had gone on for a long time when you, D. Bosco, woke me up." D. Bosco then told him to pull himself together and make his Confession, and he did. When his Confession was finished, D. Bosco told him that he should not be afraid any longer, that those monsters would no longer cause him harm, and that he was no longer

<sup>98</sup> AS 161.1/14, copy A, p. 45.

<sup>99</sup> AS 161.1/25, copy A, p. 43 f.

meant for this earth. The youth closed his eyes and died. This incident I also heard from some of the first students of the Oratory.

**DA 7. Father Rua, Deposition at the diocesan information-gathering process (1895).<sup>100</sup>**

When I was attending the elementary grades in the school of the Christian Brothers in Turin, Don Bosco often came to hear our Confession. And I recall hearing him tell us in a sermon of a youth named Charles who had fallen gravely ill and was in danger of death. So his confessor was sought but could not be found. The youth died in the meantime. When the confessor arrived, he found the parents in tears because their son had died without being able to speak to his confessor.

The latter asked to be brought to the bedside of the deceased. After calling him by name, he saw him open his eyes and heard him say: “Oh! You’re here! I’m really glad to see you. You have come in time to save me. I found myself being pursued by horrible monsters who wanted to throw me into a furnace.”

Then his confessor had the parents withdraw, heard his Confession, and gave him absolution. Then the boy fell asleep in the Lord.

Later I heard this incident told by several people who attributed it to Don Bosco himself. Taking advantage of my close and confidential relationship with him, I once asked him (when I was already a priest or shortly before ordination) if he indeed was the author of the deed that had been attributed to him. He replied: “I have never said I was the author of that deed.” I did not pursue the matter further, satisfied that he did not deny he was, but simply denied he had ever said he was. Anyway, I didn’t want to abuse his confidence. I don’t know any other particulars about the matter.

**DA 8. Father Garino, “Deposition of Mr. Charles Tomatis” (1901).<sup>101</sup>**

Tomatis of Fossano does not recall either the multiplication of hosts or the resurrection of a dead person. He does say that D. Bosco used to visit the hospitals, even those with patients who had the most contagious diseases. Once he was attacked by the malignancy. A pustule formed on his arm, but he recovered without taking anything (in 1847–1848).

He says that during the cholera epidemic 40 died on the periphery

<sup>100</sup> AS 161.1/26, copy A, p. 345 f.

<sup>101</sup> Autograph of Father Garino; AS 123 Tomatis.

of the city or in the area around the Oratory (known as *Cor d'oro*).

In the first chapel, where there had been a shed or the like, many outsiders also came to Mass and there were many Communions.

When the house fell, the first section to fall was between the central staircase and D. Bosco's room. The house had been built with last-resort material, sand, stone of poor quality or small quantity, lime. The contractor was a man named Bocca. There was someone there to supervise for Don Bosco, but he may have been more on the contractor's side. The other part fell after dinner one day, collapsing about ten minutes after people had left. No injuries. One boy had been in danger of going blind from the sand, but he came out okay.

D. Bosco multiplied the chestnuts at the door of the Church of St. Francis de Sales. Mamma Margaret put a small quantity there and D. Bosco ladled them out in large quantity.

★ ★ ★

July 5, 1901

I recall in particular that Don Bosco said to me one day, as we were in the courtyard of Mary Help of Christians and looking at the church: "Here I would like to build a monument depicting Moses striking the rock in which there was a spring of water." Likewise that it was his intention, in the meadow area where the carpenters had wood stockpiles and where there were stone masons, i.e., right across from the sisters, to build a big house that might serve as lodging for Salesian Cooperators, priests, etc.

Rev. Garino

P.S. About Don Bosco resurrecting a dead person, I recall that being told: how he went to visit a sick boy, got there after he was dead, revived him, heard his Confession, and then the boy died again.

**DA 9. Father Joseph Bologna to Father John Baptist Lemoyne.**<sup>102</sup>

Paris

June 13, 1904

Dear Father Lemoyne:

I read for the first time, in your third volume of the *Memoirs* of Don Bosco, the account of the incident involving young Charles, resurrected, etc. . . I remember having heard D.B. himself recount the incident in

<sup>102</sup> Autograph original, AS 123 Bologna.



1865 (perhaps it was 1864), when he was preaching a triduum in the Church of St. Francis de Sales in preparation for Easter Communion. He recounted the matter as described, speaking of the priest in the third person. But after having mentioned the priest, he added: "And that priest was Don Bosco." He could not add a single word. The tears and emotion forced him to leave the pulpit. We all were beside ourselves, and he remained like that for a long time before he could intone the litanies. I remember it as if it were yesterday.

J. Bologne (*sic*)

**DA 10. Father Lemoyne at the Vatican process for the beatification of Don Bosco (July 17, 1912).<sup>103</sup>**

In 1848 a boy from the Festive Oratory fell ill. His name was Charles, son of the innkeeper of the *Gelso Bianco* at 11 Carmine Street, still in existence ten years ago. He called insistently for Don Bosco, but he had to go to Confession to his parish priest since the Servant of God was away. Returning to Turin, the Venerable hastened to his house as soon as he learned of the request. There he found the boy's mother and aunt praying by Charles's dead body. Don Bosco blessed him and called him by name twice. Charles opened his eyes and sat up, saying: "Oh! Don Bosco! You did well to wake me!". . . And he told him how he had kept silent about a sin out of shame, and then found himself on the edge of an horrendous furnace into which horrible monsters wanted to throw him. But a lady had protected him, saying: "Wait! He has not yet been judged!" Don Bosco heard his Confession. Then the boy turned to his mother and said: "Don Bosco has saved me from hell!" The whole family that had rushed into the room witnessed the miracle. Then the boy fell back again on his pillow and remained immobile once and for all. Report of this incident remained undisputed for many years at the Oratory. Joseph Buzzetti, who certainly heard it from someone who had been present, told it even in his later years and had no doubts about it. In 1864, Father Charles Ghivarello spoke to me of it for the first time. There was knowledge of the deceased's first and last name, native place, and residence near the Carmine Street Church. The incident was known to, and told by, Miss Teresa Martano, who knew D. Bosco even before

<sup>103</sup> *Sacra Rituum Congregatione. . . Taurinen. Beatificationis et canonizationis ven. Servi Dei sac. Ioannis Bosco. . . Positio super virtutibus. Pars I. Summarium* (Rome: 1923), p. 1005 f.

1849. Father Rua and Father John Cagliero assured me that they were informed of it by schoolmates soon after they entered the Oratory; so also Father John Garino, Father Bonetti, and others. In Parma, in 1889, Father Anthony Sala met an elderly Christian Brother who had taught a class in elementary school in Turin in 1848–49, and who told him that the temporary resurrection of a youth by Don Bosco was a sure and proven fact. The Venerable himself recounted this incident many times; but he never said he had been the protagonist, and he did not reply on being asked.

**DA 11. Report of the Marchioness Maria Fassati née De Maistre.<sup>104</sup>  
A.M.D.G.**

One day they came seeking Don Bosco for a young man who usually attended the Oratory and who was said to be gravely ill. Don Bosco was away and did not return to Turin until two days later. He was not able to visit the sick youth's home until about 4:00 P.M. of the following day. Arriving at his home, he saw the black crepe on the door with the name of the youth he had come to see. He went in nevertheless to see the poor parents and console them. He found them in tears. They told him that their son had died in the morning. D.B. asked if he could go to the room where the body of the deceased was so that he might see him one more time. A household servant escorted him there.

“On entering the room,” said Don Bosco, “the thought came to me that he was not dead. I approached the bed and called him by his name. Charles! Then he opened his eyes and greeted me with an astonished air. ‘Oh! Don Bosco, he exclaimed, you wakened me from a frightful dream!’ At that point several people who had been in the room fled in terror, screaming and knocking over the lamps.” Don Bosco hastened to undo the shroud in which the youth had been sewn. The youth went on to say: “I seemed to be being pushed into a long, dark cavern, so narrow I could hardly breathe. At the end I saw a larger and brighter area where many souls were undergoing judgment. My anxiety and terror kept growing because I saw a great many of them condemned. Then my turn came, and I was going to share their terrible fate for having made my last Confession badly, when you woke me up!”

Then Charles's father and mother rushed in, having learned that their son was alive. The young man greeted them cordially but told them not to hope for his cure. Having embraced them, he asked to be left alone with Don Bosco. He told Don Bosco that he had the misfortune

<sup>104</sup> Manuscript of Azelia Ricci des Ferres née Fassati: AS 123 Fassati.

of falling into a sin he believed to be mortal; that when he found himself very ill he sent people for Don Bosco with the firm intention of confessing it, but when Don Bosco could not be found they brought another priest whom he did not know and to whom he would never dare reveal that sin. God had just shown him that he merited hell for that sacrilegious Confession. He then made his Confession with great sorrow. After he received the grace of absolution, he closed his eyes and calmly expired.

I have this account from the mouth of Don Bosco himself, and I have tried to write it down as faithfully as possible.

#### DA 12. Father Louis Cartier to Father Eugene Ceria.<sup>105</sup>

Marseille

April 23, 1940

Note for Father Ceria, historiographer of St. John Bosco

I have heard some confrères maintain that the fact of the resurrection of young *Charles*, recounted by Father Lemoyne in the *Biograph-*

<sup>105</sup> Original signed autograph of Cartier: AS 123 Cartier. Louis Cartier was born in Colomban (Savoy) on February 7, 1860; entered Valdocco on October 27, 1877; made perpetual profession in Marseille on January 13, 1879; was ordained a priest on June 29, 1883; was director of the Nice Salesian house from 1886 to 1902, 1914 to 1918, and 1921–1923; died in Nice on December 29, 1945. Information from Secretariat General of the Superior Council of the Salesians, register of deceased confrères.

A protest against D’Espiney’s first-edition *Dom Bosco* was made by Count Francis di Viancino, who saw himself described as Count V. in the episode entitled: “Providence is a good treasurer” (pp. 132–135). In a letter dated December 6, 1881, the Count asked Don Bosco to get the episode deleted, or at least for some guarantee that he was not the person described, since he did not acknowledge the truth of the circumstances if the person was supposed to be he. The original of this letter with a copy of D’Espiney annotated by Father Berto, is in AS 123 *Viancino*.

In his letter of reply to the Count, Don Bosco expresses himself in terms that seem pretty tough with regard to D’Espiney: “Doctor D’Espiney is a fine Catholic; but in his book his aim is to tell whoppers at the expense of Don Bosco. So don’t be surprised to find flaws and even mistakes in his exposition. But I will see him in Nice next January, and I will not fail to make him take out or, at least, correct some of the tall tales in his account” (*Epistolario*, 2250). The original of this letter is in AS 131.01 *Viancino*.

Contrary to what Father Ceria writes in MB 15:71, the Count Viancino episode remained unchanged in the second edition.

From Don Bosco’s letter we can surmise that his talk with D’Espiney, as recorded by Cartier, must have taken place in March 1882 when Don Bosco was in Nice (MB 15:512–515).

*ical Memoirs* of Don Bosco, was debatable. Now here is what I can state on the basis of a conversation I had with Dr. Charles d'Espiney, who was the first to publish an anecdotal life of Don Bosco in 1880 or 1881. We have a copy of the third edition printed in Nice by Malvano–Mignon in 1882. That edition reports the resurrection of Charles as having taken place in Rome. The locale. . . is wrong since it took place in Turin rather than Rome, but the fact itself is indisputable. You see, Don Bosco complained to Dr. D'Espiney about his having reported the incident. The doctor replied to him: "If the fact is a mistake, I will suppress it. But I beg you, Father, to tell me outright that the resurrection did not take place." Don Bosco replied that there should be no talk of it. The doctor answered: "Tell me it is not true." Asked a third time by D'Espiney to say that the miracle had not taken place, Don Bosco merely kept his silence. Now if the miracle had not taken place, Don Bosco would certainly have said so to Doctor D'Espiney. His silence is an admission.

Doctor D'Espiney himself told me of a conversation he had had with Don Bosco. He told me that Don Bosco was greatly pained by this publicity indeed, because of his humility, but he could not say that the resurrection of Charles had not taken place.

Doctor D'Espiney edited his account in accordance with all the conversations he had with Don Bosco. I myself will never forget the conversation in which Doctor D'Espiney told me all that I have just recounted.

So as not to annoy Don Bosco and cause him pain, Doctor D'Espiney eliminated the account of Charles's resurrection from subsequent editions of his book.

*Vale in Domino,*  
L. Cartier

**DA 13. Father Dominic Ruffino, 'Happenings that are reported'.<sup>106</sup>**

It is said that D. Bosco resurrected a dead person, a youth who fell ill and went from bad to worse. He sent for D. Bosco, who arrived after the youth had died. The parents were sorely grieved. Don Bosco tried to console them, then went to see the deceased and offered a brief prayer. At that moment the cold corpse came back to life and cried out: "Oh, Don Bosco, if I had not been freed soon, the devils would have carried me off to hell." Then he confessed all his sins and expired again.

<sup>106</sup> D. Ruffino, *Cronaca*, quaderno I (1859–1860), p. 34; AS 110 Ruffino.

DA 14. Father Julius Barberis, *Cronichetta* [Little Diary].<sup>107</sup>

Saturday

January 5, [1876]

Today I heard this from Father Tamietti about Don Bosco. It is magnificent. In these past days, when at Borgo, speaking publicly to the youths and urging them to be sincere in Confession, Don Bosco recounted this incident:

It is not so many years ago that the following incident took place in Turin. A youth of fifteen fell gravely ill. Seeing the danger, the doctor advised his parents to ask him to go to Confession. The parents asked the youth what priest he wanted to be called. He showed a great desire that they call in his ordinary confessor, a zealous priest who worked hard in the church ministry in Turin. They sent for him immediately, but with regret the response was that he was out of Turin. The youth displayed keen regret and asked for the assistant parish priest. A day and a half later he died. His ordinary confessor got back to Turin after two days and was informed that the youth had sent for him. He wanted to go see him, in case he might still be in time; but he found that he had been dead for more than half a day. Indicating a desire to see him, he was led to the mortuary room where the mother and the [*here there is a gap in the original*] were praying by the deceased, who had been changed for burial and covered with a veil [*outside his bed? already in the coffin?*]. Approaching him and looking at him, the priest thought to himself: "Who knows if he made a good Confession? Who knows how things have fared for him?" Having said a brief prayer, he simply called him by name. The youth awoke as if from sleep, looked around, rose up a little, and said: "Oh, how did I get like this?" Then, seeing the priest: "Oh! I was looking for you specifically. I need you very much."

Frightened by this spectacle and beside herself, his mother went out to call people. About 20 people came in to witness the event. Meanwhile the youth called me and said: "Oh, I was bound for the place of damnation. In my last Confession I did not dare to reveal

<sup>107</sup> AS 110 Barberis, 1, Quaderno 3, pp. 60–62. Handwritten document of Father Julius Barberis. Alongside the first line, ms. of D. Berto (?): "Il risuscitato da D. Bosco." Alongside each line are quotation marks indicating that Father Lemoyne knew and transcribed the text. Ms. copy in AS 110 Barberis, 1 bis, ff. III–60 and III–61.

a sin.” And he went to Confession to the priest. Turning to his mother, he said: “This priest is saving me from hell.” He stayed that way about two hours, during which he was in possession of his mind. Among other things, he told his confessor to urge sincerity in Confession on young people insistently and always. Then he expired again. One remarkable thing was noticed in this resurrection. All the time the youth moved about, looked around, and talked, his body remained the cold corpse it had been before the resuscitation.

Then Don Bosco went on to urge sincerity in Confession. After the youths had gone to bed, said Tamietti, when I was alone with the director and Don Bosco, I asked: “Were you by any chance that priest, Don Bosco?” He replied: “Oh, why?” I said: “I thought you said, ‘the youth called me’.” Don Bosco: “I didn’t mean to say that. If I did, it was inadvertently.” The conversation ended there.

“I [Tamietti] was not aware of this incident with these details. But, eleven or twelve years ago, I heard vaguely that Don Bosco had resurrected a youth, who was able to go to Confession and then died again. I then asked someone if he knew anything, but I could not get any solid information. But the person who told me said he heard it from Father Ruffino (of happy memory) and that would confirm it wonderfully.”

**DA 15. Father John Bonetti, ‘The boy awakened from the dead’.**<sup>108</sup>

A boy who had been in the habit of attending the Oratory of Don Bosco fell seriously ill and soon found himself at death’s door. Seeing the danger, his folks sent for Don Bosco. Since the latter was not at home, he could not go right away and the youth died without being able to go to Confession.

Arriving home, Don Bosco was immediately told that people had come looking for him for the youth, who was in danger of death. He went out and headed right away for the dying or dead boy’s house. Arriving there, he met a waiter and immediately asked him for news of the youth, but this man replied sadly that he was dead. Then, chuckling, Don Bosco said: “*Oh!* he’s asleep and you think he’s dead.” At these words the other people in the house broke into tears, saying he was, alas, no more. Almost jokingly, Don Bosco replied: “I’ll bet a pint he’s

<sup>108</sup> Ms. notebook of Father Joacim Berto, wrote on the cover: “Ms. of Father Bonetti.” The episode is at f. 6r-v; AS 110 Bonetti 9.

not dead (he was the son of an innkeeper). Let me go see him.” He entered the youth’s room alone, approached and called him. He was already wrapped and sewn, as usual, in a long sheet, and there was a lamp nearby. After calling him, Don Bosco noticed him beginning to stir. He hid the lamp quickly and, with a strong pull of his two hands, tore the sheet to free him. The youth, as if waking from a sound sleep, opened his eyes and saw Don Bosco. As soon as he recognized him, he exclaimed: “Oh, Don Bosco! If you only knew! I need you very much.” “Tell me what you want,” said Don Bosco, “I am here for you.” The youth proceeded: “I have had a dream that scared me awfully. I dreamed of fleeing from many devils who were trying to catch me and were about to grab me and throw me into hell, when I heard you call me. Now I want to go to Confession because some weeks ago I committed a sin that I have not yet confessed.” Don Bosco heard his Confession right away. He showed real repentance, received absolution, and expired again.

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