

**DON
BOSCO and**

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

by Francis Desramaut



DON BOSCO PUBLICATIONS



DON BOSCO AND THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Don Bosco (1815-1888) was the acrobat-saint, priest, journalist, and apostle of poor and abandoned youth. But was he also a man of the spiritual life, and did he leave a spiritual heritage? Yes, says Father Francis Desramaut. And in some ways it is a heritage very like that of our own age, stirred and renewed by the Second Vatican Council.

This book, one of the first to deal with Don Bosco's spirituality, is drawn from sources which were largely unknown or ignored by earlier authors. It presents a Don Bosco free of fanfare, rooted in the tradition of the great spiritual masters, creative in view of his own times.

Don Bosco is perhaps the most characteristic saint of the nineteenth century and represents the synthesis which makes for modern sanctity. By the grace of God, he was a man of strenuous activity, a priest in all things, and an amiable ascetic.

Contents: Don Bosco in His Century; The Road to Life; The Supernatural World; The Means of Perfection; Christian Perfection and Human Fulfillment; His Indispensable Asceticism; At the Service of the Greater Glory of God; Don Bosco in the History of Spirituality. Documents, Bibliography, and Index.

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A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SAINT JOHN BOSCO

Someone has defined a saint as a person who takes Christ seriously. The average Christian is willing enough to accept the Savior's call to a life of commitment, but with reservations. The injunction: "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" is watered down to a less demanding prescription by adding the reservation "if this process will not be too inconvenient for me." The run-of-the mill Christian admits Christ's summons to "Love thy neighbor," but modifies it somewhat by insertion of the clause "if my neighbor suits my tastes." But for the saints, Christ's message cannot be diluted. They take Him at his word, seriously and completely.

On January 31 of each year the Catholic Church celebrates the feast of Saint John Bosco, a modern saint whose life proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that he took Christ seriously.

He was born on August 16, 1815, in the village of Becchi in northern Italy, the son of hard-working peasants, who eked out a living on a few acres of land and pastured their few sheep and cattle in the rolling hills nearby.

John's father died when the lad was only two years old. The death of the family breadwinner hastened the day when the little Bosco boy had to take his share of responsibility. But the curly-haired lad proved a quick learner, and before long could keep stride for stride with his two brothers in the field.

Early Schooling

John Bosco's early schooling was a sometime thing. At the age of six he shuttled between his sheep in the field and the rectory of a neighboring priest, Don Calosso. This elderly pastor had been so impressed with the lad's intelligence and seriousness that he volunteered to teach him Latin. The vision of life as a priest was already taking

shape in John's mind, and he made no secret of his plans. Quite thoughtfully, Father Calosso had quietly earmarked \$1500 for John's seminary tuition later on. But the priest died suddenly, and long-lost relatives relieved little John of the key to the money box.

The lad continued his education at neighborhood schools, invariably coming off with top honors in all his courses. In the meantime, his sights were set on the priesthood, and the day finally dawned when his mother wrapped up his few articles of clothing and whispered words of encouragement as she gazed lovingly into the excited dark eyes of her sixteen-year-old son, eager to begin advanced studies in the town of Chieri. It was November 4, 1831, and as John's sturdy figure disappeared into a pocket of hills, his mother wiped away tears of expectation. John was advancing toward the priesthood. He was taking Christ's call too seriously for her to have any doubts.

"This Bosco lad is a serious, hard-working fellow," his employers would comment, and to a man his teachers applauded his academic work. His keen intelligence and photographic memory earned him the "highest honors award" at graduation, and in 1835 Becchi's peasant lad was ready to enter the major seminary at Chieri.

This final stage of preparation for the priesthood passed rapidly as he looked forward to the day when he could take Christ at His word and carry His message far and wide, particularly to the young. Time and again his mind would flash back to the revelation he had at the age of nine when the Virgin Mary appeared to him in a dream-vision and blueprinted his life's work for him. "My son," she had told him, "become humble, strong and dedicated." And in his mind's eye he saw again the endless fields of that vision where thousands of youngsters milled about aimlessly, waiting for someone to give meaning to their lives.

Ordained a Priest

Ordination day dawned on June 5, 1841, for Father John Bosco. His mother was there, grayer now than on that day in 1831 when John had trooped off to Chieri, and she was fully aware of what the priesthood implied. "John," she whispered, "now you are a priest. Never

forget that to begin to say Mass is to begin to suffer.” The wisdom of a Christian mother.

After ordination, Father Bosco put in a year of postgraduate work in theology at the Ecclesiastical College in Turin. Here he deepened his learning and had abundant opportunity to see, firsthand, the tragic plight of Turin’s youth. Thousands of youngsters had left their farm houses in search of a quick dollar in this industrializing city’s factories. For the majority, this pipe-dream of instant money was shattered by the stark realities of hunting for jobs, food, and a place to sleep.

The young priest had no second thoughts. This was it. Here was the nameless field of the vision. It was time to roll up his clerical sleeves and become involved. The priesthood was no spectator sport for him. Christ had asked that the little ones be allowed to come to Him, and Father Bosco was anxious to take these words seriously.

Where and how to begin—that was the question. Appropriately enough, he began on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1841. He was vesting for Mass in the sacristy of the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi, when he heard a scuffle near the door. There he found the sacristan putting his candle extinguisher to novel use as he pummelled a hapless youngster. Don Bosco reassured the lad with his winning smile and a few soothing words. The lad, Bartholomew Garelli, warmed to the good priest at once and promised to take other boys to Don Bosco. The priest was committing himself to a lifetime of work for the youth of Turin and the world. And an unlikely sacristy served as his launching pad in an apostolic venture into new frontiers.

Garelli brought others to meet Don Bosco later that week, and before long the priest was the recognized leader of a shabby troop of drifters. This sort of activity went on for several years as Don Bosco was driven from one part of Turin to another, gathering his boys wherever he could. Finally, in 1851, he was able to purchase a tumbledown shed and a plot of land. Here he gradually improvised sleeping quarters, classrooms, mess halls, and general headquarters. Getting maximum mileage out of some primitive equipment, he also organized workshops for printing, tailoring, and woodworking. His schoolboy skills came into good use as the good priest doubled as a teacher, shop instructor, confessor and general handyman. This was his Operation Headstart.

Founding of the Salesians

But the saint did not want his program of youth rehabilitation to be a temporary achievement. With the passing of years, Don Bosco realized he would have to band together zealous fellow-workers, and draw up laws and by-laws for a religious Society. In 1859 he assembled sixteen young men who had unofficially pledged their lives to the glory of God and the salvation of souls in the spirit of their leader, Don Bosco. He greeted them as the nucleus of his religious congregation. Rome set its seal of approval on the Constitutions of the Salesian Society in 1874. A few years later he collaborated with Sister Mary Mazzarello to found the Salesian Sisters.

Social worker with plus values and founder of religious organizations with a world-wide scope, Don Bosco ran the gamut of apostolic labors. His enterprises blossomed in Italy in spite of concerted opposition from civic and ecclesiastical authorities. He launched similar youth programs in France and Spain, and in 1875 dispatched ten missionaries to South America.

In the meantime, many of his original foundations developed into first-rate schools, technical institutes and colleges, while membership in his Salesian Society spiraled upward at a phenomenal pace.

Man for All Seasons

The natural talents God had granted him made him a modern man for all seasons. He preached with a fire and force that touched the stoniest heart; he authored books that became standard texts in Italy; he served as a go-between for Popes and Italian statesmen, and where high prelates failed, he succeeded. He was the confidant of several popes, and a welcome visitor at the courts of diplomats and aristocrats. The boy from Becchi had come a long way when in the early winter of 1888 his weary body weakened, and his illness took a turn for the worse, bringing him to his death on January 31, 1888.

Forty-six years after his death, on Easter Sunday, 1934, Don Bosco was canonized by Pope Pius XI, and was immediately hailed the world over as the Patron of Youth.

Sainthood came to the priest Don Bosco as the crowning confirmation by the Church that the little lad of Becchi had taken Christ seriously. During his lifetime he had embraced the difficulties of the working class and the young and labored side-by-side to improve their lot in this world. But the activities of his life are a small achievement when viewed alongside the program of the spiritual life which he developed and shared with others.

Under his tutelage, Dominic Savio, Mary Mazzarello, and Michel Rua achieved heights of sanctity worthy of the honors of the altar. He inspired his followers to martyrdom (Calixtus Caravario and Louis Versiglia led a band of over forty Salesian martyrs whose causes of beatification and canonization have been introduced). In less than four generations, Don Bosco's spiritual heritage has inspired the life of holiness in children (Zepharino Namuncura and Laura Vicuna) and adults (Philip Rinaldi, Prince August Czartorisky of Poland, Father Andrew Beltrami, and many others) whose claim to sainthood is presently being examined by the Church in Rome.

In Don Bosco's own lifetime, Pope Pius IX described Don Bosco, the active boys' priest, as "union with God," and after the saints' death, Pope Pius XI spoke of the miracles and dreams of Saint John Bosco with such enthusiasm that he could say, "With Don Bosco the extraordinary has become ordinary."

Only in recent times has the world come to appreciate and explore the riches of spirituality which are the heritage of the priest who played with children, spoke with popes, and founded the second largest religious family in the Church today.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life by Francis Desramaut, SDB, is a deep and careful study of the life and times of a great saint and founder of nineteenth century Italy. In many ways, Don Bosco was very much a man of his times. In other ways, however, he was an innovator, a man concerned about adapting the Gospel to the needs of his contemporaries, especially to the needs of young people, whose world often reveals prophetic signs of an age to come.

Father Desramaut's study should be especially welcomed in the English-speaking world. There are very few books available in English on Don Bosco's spirituality. This work should be especially valuable to English-speaking Salesians, who have so often been exposed to works about Don Bosco written mostly by Italians. Father Desramaut gives us a cismontane point of view, which seems to me to be more objective. He is able to point out to us those elements of Don Bosco's spirituality which are essentially Italian (and more specifically Piedmontese) and those which are innovative or are derived from other influences.

If there is one single impression which stands out in this study of Don Bosco, it is his evangelical humanity: his goodness, loving-kindness, patience, and gentleness. Don Bosco chose Saint Francis de Sales as his patron for these qualities, and many Salesians and Salesian admirers such as Pope John XXIII have been able to incarnate these same qualities in their lives.

I found the work of translating this book quite challenging because very often I was dealing with a French rendering of Italian sources and documents: Father Desramaut had to translate Don Bosco's statements and writings into French. I worked with both Father Desramaut's text and with the Italian translation of his book by Father Luigi Motatto, SDB and Dino Dinadoni, which contain the documents and sources in the original Italian.

I am very grateful to Father Lucien Trudel SDB for his revision of my manuscript and to the people at Don Bosco Publications for their careful editing.

Father Roger B. Luna, SDB
August 15, 1979

A WORD ABOUT NOTES

References to the *Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco* are given in all cases to the Italian edition prepared by Fathers Lemoyne, Amadei, and Ceria. English references have been added for the first eleven volumes of the 20 volume *Memoirs*. Translation of volumes 12 through 19 is still in progress.

References to the *Life of the Boy Dominic Savio* are given in all cases to the Italian editions of 1859 and 1880 prepared by Saint John Bosco. Equivalent English references have been added where possible. The best English text, translated with notes by Rev. Paul Aronica, entitled *Saint Dominic Savio* by Saint John Bosco, is based on the fifth edition of Don Bosco (1878) and so does not correspond to Desramaut's sources in every particular.

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Introduction

Theme

This book originated with a desire to clarify and contextualize the religious thought of a nineteenth century saint who was our contemporary up to very recent times.

The nineteenth century has now become part of the church's past. The historian has the pleasant impression of coming upon a new scene when he analyzes this era marked by such ingenuousness that Catholic writers thought they had almost at their fingertips all the facts about the creation of the world. It was the age of the first railroads and of the first typewriters.

Saint John Bosco lived from 1815 to 1888, in the most exciting part of this period, which may appear both very near and very remote to us. He was not familiar with biblical criticism, psychoanalysis, or the friendly overtures of the Protestant churches. He was therefore unaware—and fortunately so—of the forces which overturned so many habits of thought among Catholics of the twentieth century. The reading of his works puts us in contact with a mentality which is no longer ours. In an effort to demonstrate that he spoke of nothing extraordinary in his preaching, his best biographer has recently compiled an index of the topics of his sermons. This list is worth reproducing: "The importance of saving one's soul, man's final purpose, the brevity of life, the uncertainty of death, the gravity of sin, the lack of repentance at death, the pardon of injuries, the restitution of stolen goods, false shame during confession, lack of temperance, blaspheming, the acceptance of poverty and affliction, keeping holy the Lord's day, the need of prayer and its various forms, the frequent reception of the sacraments, the holy Mass, the imitation of Christ, the devotion to the

Blessed Virgin, the ease of perseverance.”¹ Will these themes still be used by preachers a century after the death of Don Bosco?

A meticulous cataloguing of Don Bosco's thought within the framework of his times might displease some of his followers who in their hearts would rather remember him apart from the vicissitudes of his times. It might be necessary to remind these devotees of that Piedmontese quality of realism which was an enduring characteristic of his personality. In reality, because of his authentic greatness, the image of their saint has nothing to lose and everything to gain from situating him critically within the space, time, and life of his age. Be that as it may, our changing times now encourage historians to highlight the dominant features of his spirit, within an ever more precise background, so that his image might reveal itself in ever clearer relief. Thanks to our historical perspective, the work of reconstructing his times is less risky today than in the past. If all goes well, very soon it will be easier to determine through careful research the historical bases and foundations of his ideas and tendencies.

In the past, those who have written about the heart of Don Bosco's spiritual teaching have not been completely unaware of the historical questions which are frequently raised in their own works. In our judgment, however, even the most qualified among these authors have done very little to highlight the historical dependence of his thought. For example, the comments of Father Auffray about Don Bosco's dependence on Saint Francis de Sales and on Saint Alphonsus Liguori are extremely brief.² Besides, the quality of the documentation of these writers is a problem today. Perhaps they were too afraid of being pedantic,³ or they did not suspect that from the very beginning their readers would accept their statements, even the most surprising, with a minimum of prudent scepticism. In their works there is almost a total lack of a reference to sources. They drew with abandon (the simple path attracts even those with the best of intentions) from the immense flood of *Biographical Memoirs* (Memorie biografiche), edited by a conscientious compiler who had very little expertise in dealing with the dangers involved in historical research, for future scholars who would be more skilled in this regard. He included in his work all the testimony about Don Bosco, without carefully examining the source of each item of information. He also used a method of editing which is

at least questionable.⁴ Finally, the greater number of these authors⁵ did not give due importance to the published works of Don Bosco on spiritual matters, even though these works represented his more considered thought compared to the intuitive reflections of his admirers which were passed on to others with varying degrees of accuracy. A careful historian of the Christian spirituality of the nineteenth century is naturally uneasy when he examines books which are often worthwhile but not homogeneous and quite deficient in historical depth.

In an attempt to put forth some of Don Bosco's true ideals, we will do our best to consider the problem of "Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life." In choosing this title, we have opened ourselves to a basic difficulty: the expression *spiritual life* is not understood in the same way by all writers.⁶ But we have to choose a title. The expression *spiritual life*, in this book, will be taken in a wide sense. The word *spiritual* will not refer to Christians who "have lived and revealed in their souls a mystical experience of the presence of God and a very personal and deep religious rapport with him, or who have devoted themselves to living in union with God, a union lived with simplicity and single-mindedness down to its very essence—this is the case with Taulero—or from the point of view of a particular experience: prayer, the cross, detachment . . ." ⁷ The very existence of a personal experience of the presence of God by Don Bosco will not be made an issue in this book, either to deny it or to confirm, it. In accordance with the meaning of the term *spiritual* in the New Testament, we will understand by *spiritual life* "everything that relates to the life of a Christian which is guided by the Spirit—more precisely, all those varied experiences which flow from the spirit of God or from the spirit of man—or in effect, the whole of the Christian life."⁸ We will consider, then, the whole area of relationships with God according to the teaching and practice of Don Bosco. For our part we would like to set forth not only the history of his religious consciousness, but especially his convictions about the goals of individual Christians.

Considering the problem in the above terms, any serious scholar would have to be either very naive or very presumptuous to attack it. In fact, an understanding of this kind is so demanding that it induces a feeling of vertigo. The reason for this is that to study the spiritual life of a man requires that one determine, through first-hand and

concrete evidence about him in his daily life, how he lived and applied his teachings. It means discovering his unique and living synthesis of the spiritual life, how he chose to apply the great traditional aspects of the spiritual life, and what particular aspects he emphasized, particulars which are part of the complex tradition common to all. It also means evaluating, as far as possible, how his interior life fits within the total environment—historical, geographical, literary, artistic, scientific, and religious—in which he was born.⁹ Evidently, we are dealing with a great historical problem. (We would like to state once and for all that we have not necessarily taken a position regarding the merit of the teachings described in this book). However, notwithstanding these intentions, we recognize the fact that often we have been reduced to mere mumbling about some very important questions.

The consideration of the vastness of our undertaking, however, has freed us from scruples from the very beginning. The discussion of the existence of a “spirituality of Saint John Bosco” would have been superfluous if there had been agreement about it. Probably it would not be appropriate, as was indicated above, to classify him among the doctors and writers of the spiritual life,¹⁰ although he explicitly had intended to promote a “particular style of Christian life.”¹¹ For the past century, many people—two canonized saints among them (Saint Dominic Savio and Saint Mary Mazzarello)—have considered him the master of their spiritual life. Even if Don Bosco had been just a simple Christian confined to his time, it would be impossible to deny that he had a particular spirituality; that is, his own way of living and, of expressing the spiritual life. Every religious person has his own history and unique characteristics which are worthy of attention. It would be strange to deny an original spirituality to a canonized founder of a religious order, unless this denial would be based on a rigid interpretation of the adjective *original*. In this case it is necessary to state and repeat that “there is a constant rule in all manifestations of the life of the Church: Among those chosen to promote it, the flame of a new ideal of Christian perfection is never kindled in a transcendent world that is cold and stripped to its pure ideals.”¹² The world where he lived, as well as the make-up of his own character, has marked for all time the “spirituality” of Don Bosco without destroying its “originality.”

The Structure of the Book

In order to remain true to our project, we ought to begin by describing the deep roots of Don Bosco's convictions in the spiritual field. The first chapter, then, according to us, is not a mere digression. The published works of the saint make their own contribution to his thought. In order to get an in-depth knowledge of Origen's teachings, for instance, one has to become familiar with at least the most essential aspects of the environment of Alexandria in the third century. One would have to know something about the tradition of Philo, the methods of exegesis used in the schools of that time, and be aware of the persecutions of Septimus Severus, the death of Leonidas, the disputes between Alexandria and Caesarea, and many other things besides. If one were to neglect the intimate struggles of Saint Augustine and the fascination which he still felt for some time for Manichaeism, he would be unable to fully understand his theories of grace and sin. For historians of their spirituality, it is dangerous to forget the Burgundian blood of Bernard of Clairvaux, the poor state of preaching at the time of Dominic of Osma, the Spanish origins of Ignatius of Loyola and his youthful discussions about the incipient Lutheran reform. For our part, we have to get to know a very lively boy who grew up in an Italy which had just been liberated from French domination, we follow John Bosco through the schools of Piedmont which left upon him an indelible mark; and we reflect on the teachers who enjoyed his confidence and on the books which he most certainly studied.

Since Don Bosco did not think up elaborate theories, his experience and his spiritual thought—the principal objects of this book—could not be presented on the basis of an autobiography or of works of his which would merely have to be summarized. We had to seek out in his works the salient characteristics of a teaching which was lived or applied within the context of a life lived in union with God. Little by little we discovered these characteristics in certain formulas which he used very often: for example, "Work and temperance," "Work, piety, and joy," ("*Oportet pati cum Christo*" "It is necessary to suffer with Christ,") "Be good Christians and good citizens," "For the greater glory of God and for the salvation of souls." These characteristic ideals were also revealed through his way of acting in his struggles in the

service of the church, his high regard for the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, his creation of societies whose members, whether clerical or lay, living in or out of community, would attain holiness through "active charity" in the service of men. Don Bosco told us, more clearly than we dared to hope, how he conceived the Christian life, what he thought about the means to achieve holiness, the role of asceticism and of the service of God and men through a life lived according to Christ. All these ideas will be explained by Don Bosco himself in the following chapters which try to describe his spirituality.

Perhaps two of these chapters require some particular justification. One chapter, that devoted to the religious ideas of the saint, is not extraneous to his spiritual life. Our reflecting upon his times, in fact, urged us to examine his fundamental, motivating ideas. How many spiritual choices are defined by the idea that we have of God, of Christ, and of the Church? Whether God is thought of as a judge or father, whether Christ is model, is friend or Lord, whether the Church is seen centered around the Pope or more in its community dimensions: these basic ideas modify the essential characteristics of a spirituality. Another chapter will consider the human achievements in the mind of John Bosco. The practical relationship between the spiritual life and the ordinary life of everyday was too important to John Bosco for us to ignore here.

In our study of these questions, we will give Don Bosco's own words the first place among the commentators. A flurry of texts, for the most part inaccessible to the French (and English) speaking public which have been translated with succinct commentaries in the back of this volume will permit the reader to pursue a conversation with Don Bosco himself.

All this should have constituted a solid introduction to the historical knowledge of the spiritual life of Saint John Bosco and a detailed response to the question of his place in the history of the spiritual life. Unfortunately, we are far from having achieved this goal. At times we had to content ourselves with texts of inferior editions. Our many warnings to our readers when we have had to use these texts and our efforts to compare their contents with authentic texts (from original texts or from microfilm copies which we had at our disposal) have not freed us from all remorse. One might object to lacuna in these chapters.

Other points of view would have been possible. . . We console ourselves with the thought that a considerable body of studies on Saint Peter Damien and Saint Bernard, for example, was inspired by one only source, Migne's *Latin Fathers*, while our documentation on the whole is much more secure. Even a voluminous work on Don Bosco, with countless subdivisions and ponderous chapters, would still have been incomplete. Some day an almost perfect work, based on very sure and clear sources,¹³ the fruit of scholarly studies of details and of a broad knowledge of Italian spirituality of the first part of the nineteenth century, will be produced. In the meantime, the two-fold ambition of this book is to clear up, with all possible diligence, an area which has been quite encumbered and to calm for the time being the anxious expectations—quite justified—of admirers and disciples who are ignorant of how much time it takes to compose a “definitive” work. If, on the other hand, we have been useful to some specialists in the history of the spirituality of the nineteenth century—a field in which, as we have already stated, documented works do not abound—we can say that we consider ourselves satisfied.

The author of these pages, out of a sense of justice, has to add that it is not by chance that he uses the plural in referring to himself; in fact, these pages are not exclusively the result of my work. The author, without the contributions of some thirty studies published in mimeographed form and collected under the title of *Introduction to the Spirit of Saint John Bosco*, which were written during a workshop in historical studies under his direction, and more especially without the center for Salesian Research at Lyons—would not have gone beyond pious intentions.¹⁴ In fact, this book has taken advantage of the research and observations of young conscientious students who read and reread Don Bosco's talks, letters, and also his yellow and blue notebooks, which none of them had known about. Perhaps the most knowledgeable Salesians—not only in France but also in Italy—were not even aware of the titles.

(Lyone-Fontaniere, October 1965).

NOTES

1. E. Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio*, new edition, Colle Don Bosco, Asti, 1947, p. 189.

2. A. Auffray, *En Cordes derriere un guide sur, Saint Jean Bosco*, Lyon, s.d. (1948), pp. 3-4. The works of P. Scotti, *La dottrina spirituale di Don Bosco*, Turin, 1939, and of A. Caviglia, *Savio Domenico e Don Bosco*, Turin, 1943, are more balanced and informed on this subject.

3. The fear of being pedantic was a phobia of the beloved Father Eugenio Ceria (died 1957).

4. With reference to the literary form of the *Memorie biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco* (Turin, 1898-1948) and their principal sources (among others, the process of canonization of Don Bosco), see my book: *Les Memorie I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Etude d'un livre fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint Jean Bosco*, thesis, Lyon, 1962. The three successive authors of this work (G.B. Lemoyne, A. Amadei, and E. Ceria) worked conscientiously and reported from their "sources" in general with great care. (Translator's note: the *Memorie biografiche* are now available in English, under the title *Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, Rev. Diego Borgatello, S.D.B., Editor-in-chief, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, N.Y.)

5. I will exclude at least A. Caviglia, already cited, and D. Bertetto, *La Pratica della vita cristiana secondo San Giovanni Bosco*, Turin, 1961.

6. Cf. J de Guibert, *Leçons de theologie spirituelle*, Toulouse, 1943, pp. 9-12, and L. Boyer, *Introduction a la vie spirituelle*. Paris, 1960, pp. 3-6, for a discussion of the terms *Interior life, religious life, and spiritual life*.

7. Y.M. Congar, *Langage des spirituels et langage des theologiens*, in *La Mystique Rhenane. Colloque de Strasbourg* (May 16-19, 1961), Paris, 1963, p. 16.

8. J.P. Jossua, *Chretiens au monde . . .* in *Supplement a la vie spirituelle*, 1964, p. 457, footnote.

9. Jean Leclercq, *Saint Pierre Damien, ermite et homme d'Eglise* (Coll. *Domini e dottrine*, 8), Rome, 1960, p. 8.

10. Cf. A. Auffray, *En Cordée derrière un guide sûr*, pp. 5-6.

11. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto* (Companion of Youth), 2nd edition, Turin, 1851, p. 5: "I wish to teach you a method of Christian life . . ."

12. H. Rahner, *Servir dans l'Église, Ignace de Loyola et la genèse des Exercices*, French translation, Paris, 1959, p. 21.

13. In 1963 the Commission for Historical Monuments of the Salesian Society was established.

14. Here is a list of these writers (most of them contributed articles to the collection): Jean-Marie Barbier, Edouard Barriga, Aloys Bartz, René Bonnet, Dominique Britschu, Paul Charles, Alexandre Cussianovitch, Gilles Delalande, Victor Deravet, Jean Devos, Michel Duhayon, Alphonse Francia, François Garrido, Roland Ghislain, Pierre-Gilles Glon, Julian Lizin, Pierre Morteau, Georges Parent, Raymond Parent, Bernard Poulet-Goffard, José Reinoso, Kees Van Luyn, Wim Van Luyn, Adam Xuan.

1

Don Bosco
in His Century

The Times of Don Bosco

The spirit of a man is shaped by his life. John Bosco did not escape from this common law. His life unfolded in nineteenth century Italy, under the pontificates of Pius VII, Leo XII, Pius VIII, Gregory XVI, and above all of Pius IX and Leo XIII. In what was then the small kingdom of Sardinia and from 1861 on the kingdom of Italy, he witnessed the *Risorgimento* and the unification of the peninsula, achieved at the cost of the Papal monarchy. During his life, the century passed from a certain form of Gallicanism and of Jansenism to the spirit of Vatican I and of the triumphant spirit of Saint Alphonsus of Liguori.¹ John Bosco was successively a priest in a suburb, a leader of a group of young people, and a founder of a religious society. As man of action he confronted a variety of popular movements. At times he went along with some, at times he reacted, and at times he fought against them. He spoke much and wrote much. But we will always insist on stating that his idea of life and of the Christian life—that life which we will try to describe in basic outline in these chapters—was never detached from his times. In particular, his first thirty years and the apostolic orientation of his works were very decisive forces in the formation of his spirit.

The Rural Environment of His Early Years

“The day consecrated to the Assumption of Mary into heaven was the day of my birth, in the year 1815, in Morialdo, a suburb of Castelnuovo D’Asti.”²

In reality, according to his baptismal certificate, dated the 17th, this little event took place on August 16.³ From another point of view, the exact date matters little. But one fact is certain: John Bosco was born in a cluster of country houses about eighteen miles (thirty kilometers) from Turin, the capital at the time of the kingdom of Sardinia, two months

after the Battle of Waterloo (June 18, 1815). It was at a time in Europe when the political movement of restoration, initiated the year before, was becoming more difficult on account of the brief revolutionary awakening of the One Hundred Days.

But the civil agitations were not to upset him so soon. The spirit of the youthful John Bosco would be shaped at first by the quiet world of the family circle and the rural surroundings.

He barely knew his father, Francis (1784-1817), and lived with his mother, Margaret Occhiena (1788-1856), his revered and sometimes feared paternal grandmother, Margaret Zucca (1752-1826), his step-brother, Anthony (1808-1849), born of the first marriage of Francis, and his older brother, Joseph (1813-1862).⁴ It is easy to imagine the trauma suffered by the child, and later by the adolescent, at the loss of his father. At the age of sixty, he could still recall the painful moment in which his mother had dragged him out of the room where his father had died.⁵ At the house of Becchi, both ladies assumed the role of authority. Later on, however, when the grandmother died, Margaret took over alone. It is true that Anthony—rough and vain in the judgment of his brother, who never admired him—tried to impose himself as head of the family, but Margaret did not allow him.

Margaret was an energetic countrywoman, intelligent, hard-working and rich in supernatural spirit.⁶ Her three sons, one adopted and two of her own, were aware of this fact. It was necessary to work: little Johnny had to watch the turkeys and the cow, and then to cultivate the small family fields. Around the age of fourteen, most likely between 1828 and 1829, he lived for eighteen months in a neighboring farm called Moglia in Moncucco. Both at Becchi and at the Moglia farm, religion was held in great respect, daily prayer was organized and the religious functions on Sunday were scrupulously attended.

John did not remain locked up in the house. He was an alert boy, somewhat talkative. He liked to set traps, raid nests, raise birds, at times fall from trees rashly climbed, and never missed the shows put on by jugglers at the neighboring fairs and markets. He liked the company of the neighboring country boys and he knew how to be their leader. His skill in commanding easily controlled them.⁷ All were amazed at his acrobatic feats, because already, at eleven years of age, he could perform sleight of hand tricks, do death-defying leaps, and walk on his hands. He

could walk, jump, and dance on a tight rope, just like a professional acrobat.⁸ He had also learned to read. His stories attracted "people of all ages and conditions"⁹ whom he entertained and instructed in the faith.

The idea of using his talents for apostolic ends had come to him as early as the age of five, according to a confidence made in his old age to his secretary Father Viglietti.¹⁰ Often he repeated how much a dream which he had had as a child had influenced him in this direction. "A venerable gentleman" had ordered him to conquer with gentleness a large crowd of ruffians which he pointed out and to instruct them "about the ugliness of sin and the excellence of virtue."¹¹ He could not forget that dream. On Sundays, before they could enjoy his shows, he forced his admirers to say the rosary and to listen to a summary of the sermon of that morning's Mass or to some edifying story.¹²

A family of sound Christian tradition, but deprived of the presence of a father; a hard-working rural environment; and also a youthful dream in which he believed he could discern a missionary future prepared by God: these seem to have been the principal factors of his formation in 1829.

His Cultural Initiation During the Revolution

It is natural that in an environment imbued with faith, Margaret, a very devout woman, should have thought of making her "Benjamin" a priest.¹³

Her son also was convinced that he was to become a priest, but Anthony's implacable opposition prevented Johnny, even at the age of fourteen, from beginning his secondary schooling. A priest of Morialdo came to his assistance in November of 1829.¹⁴ Father Calosso got him started in Latin and at the same time instilled in him the principles of the spiritual life. He was a simple priest, more simple at any rate than his fellow priests of Castelnuovo, and his pupil found a father in him.

Father Calosso's death in November of 1830 for the time being dashed Johnny's hopes of receiving some education.¹⁵ It also made Margaret decide to overcome the resistance of Anthony. Anthony took his share of his inheritance and left the family. In this way John was at last able to attend the public school at Castelnuovo (1831), and then the municipal school of Chieri (1831-1835).¹⁶ The world of the Piedmontese restoration welcomed him in its very strict and religious schools.

In 1814 the kingdom of Sardinia was returned to the old Savoy dynasty. Charles Emmanuel I (1802-1821), and then Charles Felix (1821-1831), had endeavored to restore to Piedmont some aspects of the past. During their reign the rightful monarchy, the Church and in general all traditional authorities which were especially mistreated during the time of the triumph of the Revolution, officially recovered their prestige. Very soon, the religious festivals of the eighteenth century were reinstated, especially that of Saint Joseph.¹⁷ The Jews had to divest themselves of their properties (except for ghettos and cemeteries) which they had been permitted to acquire under the toleration of the preceding governments (1816).¹⁸ Some of the religious who had been expelled by the French and their collaborators were able to return to their monasteries.¹⁹ A whole series of small dioceses was reconstituted: Alba, Aosta, Biella, Bobbio, Possano, Pinerolo, Susa, Tortona, Alessandria, all with their respective seminaries.²⁰ Finally, a very meticulous set of rules of Jesuit inspiration²¹ signed by Charles Felix on July 23, 1822, served to restore a very decided Catholic, if not clerical, image to the public schools. John Bosco, therefore, grew up in a climate of restoration, a particular fact that we must not overlook.

Let us listen to him as he speaks, not without nostalgia, of the scholastic organization which reigned in the high school of Chieri: "Here it is good that I record the fact that in those times religion formed a fundamental part of education . . . On weekdays Mass was heard in the morning. At the beginning of the classes the *Actiones* and the *Hail Mary* were recited devoutly. At the end the *Agimus* and a *Hail Mary* were said. On Sundays and feast days all the students were gathered in the parish church. As the young people entered, a spiritual book was read, followed first by the singing of the *Little Office of the Blessed Virgin* and then by Mass and an explanation of the Gospel. In the evening there was catechism, vespers, and an instruction. Everyone had to go to the sacraments, and to prevent any negligence of these important duties, the students were obliged to present once a month at Mass a ticket proving they had gone to confession. Anyone who had not fulfilled this duty was not allowed to take his final exams, even though he might have been among the best students."²² Religious liberalism had no appeal for Don Bosco even in 1875, when

he wrote these lines, and there is no reason to suspect that forty years before he might have rebelled against a regime which imposed such intolerant measures.

In this setting, John pursued all his secondary courses. Besides his studies, he was also involved in many other activities, because he very much liked "to sing, to play musical instruments, to declaim, and to act." He took part in these varied entertainments with great zest.²³ He had already founded in his school the *società dell'allegria* (Society of Cheerfulness).²⁴ Often (in fact, too often, because his health suffered very serious damage) to distract himself, he would read the Latin classics far into the night in a closet of the boarding house. He read such authors as "Cornelius Nepos, Cicero, Sallus, Quintus Curtius, Titus Livius, Cornelius Tacitus, Ovid, Horace and others."²⁵ He was receiving, and also giving himself, a humanistic education according to the best traditions of the Jesuit Fathers. He harmonized his frequent and regular religious practices with entertainments and secular reading. The next stage of his formation would be in direct opposition to his humanistic training, but his humanism had become so much second nature to him that he could hardly reject it forever.

His Seminary Formation

For a certain period of time, young John Bosco believed that he had a vocation to the Franciscans, and he was received as a postulant into the order.²⁶ His counselors persuaded him, however, not to follow that path. Thus in the month of November 1835, at the age of twenty, he began his life as a diocesan seminarian. There were four seminaries in the diocese: at Turin, Bra, Chieri, and Giaveno.²⁷ John was trained at Chieri, in a former monastery of the Filippini, recently (1829) acquired by the diocese of Turin.

His life as a seminarian opened up for him a clerical world characterized in Piedmont by the spirit of the eighteenth century, rather rigorous, if not Jansenistic, oriented more toward piety than toward learning,²⁸ and not quite free of "Gallican" feeling which had been spread through active propaganda under the Napoleonic rule.²⁹ The University of Turin, which in the preceding century had oriented its

indoctrination successively toward Thomism, "probabiliorism," and the monarchy, and which had opposed the Roman Curia in the preceding century,³⁰ continued to exert its influence. The case of a popular anti-Liguorian professor, a certain Dettori, who after Rome intervened in 1827 was suspended from his duties at the school of theology of that university confirmed the fact that the mentality of "probabiliorism" persisted there.³¹ In general, the burdens of the Christian life and in particular the difficulty of attaining salvation were insisted upon. According to the priests of that era—as Father Joseph Cafasso explained later—it was "difficult to keep the commandments, difficult to receive Holy Communion worthily, and even difficult to hear Mass with devotion, difficult to pray as one ought, difficult above all to attain salvation, and there were very few who were saved."³²

Although he was scarcely enthusiastic about the infrequent reception of the sacraments at the seminary (he would sneak out of the seminary in the morning in order to receive Communion in the parish church), seminarian John Bosco submitted himself to the doctrine and to the style of life which were imposed on him during his stay at Chieri. It was the time in which he discovered the *Imitation of Christ*,³³ studied Alasia (a probabiliorist theologian) and read the *Church History* of Fleury, without discerning yet its "Gallican" tendencies.³⁴ The rather unfriendly attitude of his professors made him wish for a style of education that would be a little more cordial.³⁵ When he worked or engaged in discussions in the study clubs which were organized at the seminary, he preferred to study the Bible or church history, both subjects which were taught very little or completely neglected. To the purely theological sciences he devoted the minimum of interest necessary for him to succeed in the examinations on the scholastic treatises—he succeeded brilliantly because he was very intelligent and had an excellent memory.³⁶ His recollections about his relationship with his friend Louis Comollo appear to us to indicate some uncertainties that he had at that time.³⁷ Louis Comollo had a meticulous dedication to piety and was sometimes tense, something which the spirituality in vogue at that time developed in the generous souls which undertook it in earnest. With a certain amount of uneasiness, we read about his crises on his deathbed (1839) when hallucinations about hell made him fall into despair. John Bosco allowed Comollo

to correct him in everything: he was greatly influenced by him. But, he confides—and this seems very revealing—“in one thing only (and here he provides eloquent details) I did not even try to imitate him: in his mortification.”³⁸ At the same time, Comollo’s rigorous self-denial had amazed him and perhaps even attracted him, but he preferred a spirituality which was at least a little more adapted to his temperament, a type of spirituality which, beginning in 1841, he would find in broad outlines at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* of Turin.

This *convitto* was founded in 1817 by Father Luigi Guala, a theologian, with the assistance of his spiritual director, Father Bruno Lanteri (died 1830), one of the true constructors of the reform of the Church at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This *convitto* was meant for the pastoral formation of the junior clergy³⁹ and the spirit of the institution differed very noticeably from that of the seminary in Chieri. Father Guala chose the tradition of the Jesuit Fathers in moral and dogmatic theology and the primacy of love over the law.⁴⁰ In his courses, the moral solutions offered were probabilioristic, his ecclesiology favored Rome, his views on the sacraments and on asceticism were relatively broad.⁴¹ Kindness replaced the rigorism then in vogue.⁴² At Father Guala’s *convitto* the Company of Jesus promoted the spirit which animated it in Italy at the time: “Ignatian asceticism,” open war against Jansenism and “royalism” (support for a united Italian kingdom), a sincere and tender devotion to the Sacred Heart, to the Blessed Virgin, and to the Pope, frequent reception of the sacraments, and moral theology according to the spirit of Saint Alphonsus.⁴³ Anyone who graduated from the seminary at Chieri did not, however, experience a radical change. In spite of the emphasis given to studies, intellectual pursuits did not lure the students of the *convitto* more than the students of the seminary. To compensate for studies, pious devotions and the practice of apostolic activities⁴⁴ had an important part in their lives.

It is true that the young priests found in that institution the tendencies espoused by the “*Amicizia cattolica*” (Catholic Friendship), a movement which was founded also in Turin by Father Lanteri at the beginning of the restoration.⁴⁵ It would be interesting to know if the thought of Joseph de Maistre had also influenced this movement as it had his own group of Savoyard followers who had been involved in

his activities from the very beginning.⁴⁶ At any rate, the *convitto* was one of the crucibles in which the “new ecclesiastical and religious style” (R. Aubert) which took over during the second part of the nineteenth century received its form, at least in northern Italy.

The *convitto* greatly influenced Don Bosco at the beginning of his mature years, during the three years that followed his ordination on June 5, 1841. Under the direction of his two masters, Guala and Cafasso, he learned “how to be a priest,” something for which the seminary of Chieri, according to him, had not sufficiently prepared him.⁴⁷

The training he received in this institution received its final form from his professor, Father Joseph Cafasso (1811-1860). It will always be difficult to establish exactly the extent of the influence of this future saint on the formation of Don Bosco. At least one can reflect on this sentence of Don Bosco: “If I have done any good, I owe it to this worthy priest, in whose hands I put every one of my decisions, every course of my studies, every act of my life.”⁴⁸ He was for Don Bosco a guide and a model of a true priest and apostle, especially between 1841 and 1860.⁴⁹ Underlying the overly emphatic words of his funeral oration in 1860, we can discern the admiration which the young priest John Bosco had for Cafasso’s virtues, which he not only admired but taught himself to imitate. Just as Father Guala had set his sights on Father Cafasso when he was looking for a collaborator at the *convitto*, so Don Bosco was attracted to him by his “profound humility, his sublime piety, his extraordinary intelligence, his heavenly innocence, and his consummate prudence.”⁵⁰

If one wonders at the transformation of a lively adolescent from Chieri into a well-balanced director of a school in Turin (at the time of Dominic Savio), we have to remember that it was not due only to the fact that he was older. He was also greatly influenced by the never-forgotten lesson of the dream which he had at the age of nine and which was repeated afterwards. He was greatly influenced by the example of Louis Comollo, by the relatively rigorous discipline of the seminary, by the Liguorian spirituality of the *convitto* and by the twenty years of spiritual direction he received from Father Joseph Cafasso, this humble, calm and selfless priest.

His Apostolate in the City Among Abandoned Boys

At the age of twenty-nine, in 1844, Don Bosco concluded his studies. Certain characteristics of his teachings and of his spirit will not change any more. He will always be "Liguorian" (with a few other leanings which we will try to discover), without, however, rejecting completely the severe God of his youth. He will combine his natural humanism, with a sense of the extreme weakness of the human creature, of the ascendancy of Satan in the world, and of the allurements of concupiscence on men. Still, he will grow. Life will give him some further lessons. His idea of the Church will acquire different shades of meaning with the development of the "Roman Question," and his belief in the "sanctifying" value of ordinary actions will become stronger. His sacramental piety will increase with the pressures of the times and of his personal experiences.

Don Bosco's urban apostolate had begun in Turin at the end of 1841. Turin was then a capital of about 130,000 inhabitants, not yet industrialized but already a center of attraction for young men from the countryside around it. There, Father Bosco had created a type of club or youth center, had visited the prisons, and had devoted himself to the ministry of preaching . . . He had to wait, however, until he graduated from the *convitto* in order to have a permanent appointment. He was to become spiritual director of an institution for about "400 young girls"⁵¹ —an assignment he liked little. During this period of his life we see him working in three different fields: working for abandoned working boys, working with seminarians from the poor class, and working for simple people whose faith wavered during the political and religious confusion of the years after 1848.

He gave his best efforts in the service of pre-delinquents. From 1841 certain scenes which he witnessed in the prisons of Turin had shaken him: "To see a crowd of young men, from the ages of twelve to eighteen, all healthy, strong, intelligent, but to see them there idle, being eaten up by vermin, deprived of material and spiritual food, was a thing that horrified me."⁵² He founded an "oratory" for boys, that is, an oratory in the original sense of the word, "a place where boys could enjoy pleasant games after they had fulfilled their religious duties."⁵³ At the beginning the oratory was open only on Sundays and on feast

days. Don Bosco, then, would become the educator of young working boys who were almost completely deprived of schooling and little by little he would see them being transformed and becoming good under his very eyes, through religious instruction, the practice of virtue, and their access to the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist. His confidence in the methods which had been taught to him would increase as he saw the growing success of his ministry. The greater part of his beliefs about the Word of God, the "spiritual practices" and the sacramental life would not vary much in the future.

During these years he also published a history of the Church (1845), a mathematics book (1846?), and a book of devotions in honor of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga. All these books were aimed at young people. His health, however, declined. The Marchioness Barolo, disappointed in seeing him wearing himself out in activities which were beyond her control, asked him to choose between her "young girls" and the boys. Don Bosco did not hesitate in submitting his resignation (1846).⁵⁴ From now on, he would devote himself completely to the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales, the center of his urban ministry, established in a district of doubtful repute. His work would develop rapidly. Soon some boys were lodged in a house next to the Oratory ("The house of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales") and, from 1853 on, some boys were able to learn a trade in very primitive shops built there. Thus the Salesian technical school was born, a school destined from the very beginning for abandoned boys.

The Political and Religious Climate of Piedmont From 1848 to 1860

Contrary to a widely spread opinion, this school was far from exhausting all of Don Bosco's activity. Most of his young charges were laborers, especially bricklayers. The events that had transpired in Piedmont between 1847 and 1848 directed his attention to other social spheres, yet without allowing him to forget the lower classes.

For several years now the political climate had been changing. In 1831 Charles Albert had succeeded Charles Felix. Now, as the discreet Canon Chiuso had written shortly before, this king seemed

“not to have broken away in fact from the leaders of the revolution.”⁵⁵ This means that he appeared disposed to remain aloof from the spirit of the restoration, that he was somewhat inclined toward the liberal spirit, and that, to the astonishment of the conservative Mr. Solaro della Margherita, his spirit was not insensitive to certain suggestions of the *Risorgimento*.⁵⁶ When from 1847 on, the pressure of public opinion made the liberal current prevail, everyone believed that the king agreed with the trend. The constitutional reforms of that year aroused great enthusiasm in Turin.⁵⁷ The Statute of 1848, which proclaimed liberty of the press (Art. 11) and guaranteed individual liberty (Art. 12)—even the Jews and the Waldensians would benefit from this common legislation—engendered further popular enthusiasm.⁵⁸ The change was, however, too abrupt. The conservative spirit was entrenched among the higher clergy, and they attributed the new legislation to the work of sectarians. Very soon an anticlerical movement began. The Jesuits and the Mesdames of the Sacred Heart were the first victims. Archbishop Fransoni of Turin, an aristocrat who would not allow himself to be manipulated, was imprisoned, and in 1850, he had to go into exile to Lyons.⁵⁹ A series of laicizing measures aimed at removing clerical privileges began to transform completely the life of the clergy in the kingdom of Sardinia. Church tribunals were suppressed, as were ecclesiastical immunities; tithing was abolished; laws were introduced which instituted civil marriage (1852), and decreed the occupation of the diocesan seminary of Turin (1854).⁶⁰ Finally the law for monasteries was passed (1855) according to which “all houses belonging to religious orders which were not used for preaching, for education or for assistance to the sick ceased to exist as moral persons recognized as such by civil law.” (Art. 1)⁶¹

It was now necessary to reckon with a mentality which was harmful to the institutional Church, at least in regard to the structures of time and place. Don Bosco, without being too sensitive to the dire consequences of the “principles” which had prepared the Statute of 1848,⁶² put all his energies at the service of the Church especially in two areas, namely, the care of seminarians and the fight against errors among the simple people.

His Efforts on Behalf of Seminarians

He was worried about the lessening number of seminarians. "While the members of religious orders were being dispersed, the secular clergy were despised, some thrown into prison, others forced into house arrest. Humanly speaking, how was it possible to cultivate interest in vocations?"⁶³ In order to assure the future of the Church in Piedmont, Don Bosco, as he later related, turned to those "young men who wielded the hoe and the hammer."⁶⁴ According to him, these young men were much surer prospects than the students who attended the public schools or the famous "private schools." In this way an academic secondary school was born at the Oratory of Valdocco in 1849. Among the students who attended it were Dominic Savio (1854 to 1857), Michael Magone (1857-1859), and Francis Besucco (1863-1864). A number of the students were late vocations. Within a few years the number of priests who had come out of the center was already impressive. We must conclude that the spirituality proposed by Don Bosco reached along with all types of city dwellers, those souls most refined in matters of religion.

The Fight Against the Waldensians

The evolution of political events led him to fight at the same time on another front. The Waldensians took advantage of the equality of rights and of the liberty of the press which they had recently acquired in order to extend their influence, especially among uneducated people. The number of these people was great, because the statistics for 1848 tell us that two-fifths of the people in Turin did not know how to read or write.⁶⁵ According to Don Bosco—and he was quite categorical about this point—the Waldensian missionaries operated with all the more success because "Catholics, who had been accustomed to rely on the civil laws which had protected and defended them, published only a few journals, some classical or learned works, but not a single newspaper or book which could be put into the hands of the people."⁶⁶ Don Bosco—always the apostle—responded in 1850 (and perhaps from as early as 1848) with his *Avvisi ai Cattolici* (Advice for Catholics)

which he distributed by the handful. In two months, he tells us, "more than 200,000 copies were circulated."⁶⁷ Delighted by this undisputed success, in 1853 he initiated an offensive on a greater scale with his magazine entitled *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings), which matched the *Evangelical Readings* put out by the Waldensians. The magazine, at first bi-monthly, had about 100 pages. The battle was spirited. The editor of the new publication received visits, was threatened and provoked, but he defended himself and launched a counter-attack. His opponents did not limit themselves to verbal disputes: Don Bosco was convinced that he had them to blame for several attempts on his life from which he escaped unharmed.⁶⁸ He was more fortunate than Abbot Margotti.⁶⁹ These violent attempts did not discourage him, and the *Catholic Readings* continued to come out. History records the fact that in Piedmont, "from 1860 on, the lack of success of the Waldensian movement became evident."⁷⁰

Don Bosco, then, was not merely an acrobat who entertained boys. In the middle of the nineteenth century, at a time and place when leaders of the church felt the earth slipping away beneath their feet, he effectively defended the lives and the faith of young workers and of the "lower class."

The Founding of Religious Societies

From about 1858, without giving up his editorial activity or the personal direction of his boys, Don Bosco dedicated himself above all to the founding and to the development of his religious societies. This undertaking moved him to include in his religious doctrine some teachings about the religious vows, and, on a different plane, to reinforce his "ultramontane" opinions.

Don Bosco worked in the Church of Pius IX (1846-1878). He saw only the first years of the pontificate of Leo XIII (1878-1903). Under Pius IX, the Catholic community, shaken on the temporal plane by the dismemberment of the Papal States and the seizure of Rome on September 20, 1870, rallied around its leader. Pius IX had been immortalized by his undeserved misfortunes and by a series of religious decisions of vast consequence, such as the definitions of the dogmas of

the Immaculate Conception of Mary in 1854 and of Papal infallibility of the Supreme Pontiff during Vatican Council I in 1870.⁷¹ The ultramontane trend swept away all resistance in Italy, in France, in Germany, and in Great Britain. We must add, then, that when he was founding his world-wide work, Don Bosco, a disciple of Saint Alphonsus and a graduate of the *convitto*, was passing on this spirit enthusiastically. He was drawing the main lines of his specific ideal of apostolic perfection. His devotion to Our Lady was under the title of Help of Christians, of a queen who had been involved in the battles of the Church. The Church itself was now centered in the person of Pius IX, of whom the bishops were merely delegates. In the kingdom of God, he thought of the apostle as a fighter to whom was reserved the task of fulfilling all the desires of an infallible Pope.

Let us go back a few years.⁷² In 1852 Don Bosco had been named director by Bishop Fransoni of the three Oratories in Turin. Very quietly, during the following years, he developed the framework of the project which he was envisioning. In 1855 young Michael Rua (1837-1910), his future successor, made his private vows. But the society wasn't truly born until four years later.

In 1858 Don Bosco had gone for the first time to Rome for an audience with Pius IX, to whom he had entrusted a letter of recommendation from Bishop Fransoni and an outline of a "Rule" for his society. The Pope had received him very kindly, and, according to Don Bosco's later recollections, had advised him: (1) to create "a society with simple vows, because without vows the necessary bonds between members and between superiors and subjects would be lacking;" (2) not to impose a special habit on the members nor practices or rules which would distinguish them from people of the world.⁷³ These ideas suited Don Bosco very well. He made them his own. They were confirmed by the example of Antonio Rosmini, the founder of the Institute of Charity, and by the ideas of Mr. Urbano Rattazzi.⁷⁴ In 1880 he was able to respond to an official inquiry about the Oratory of Valdocco with this description of the Salesian Society: "I believe it necessary to state that we do not belong to a religious order but only to an association named after Saint Francis de Sales. The purpose of this society is to work for the education of boys, especially poor and abandoned boys. The undersigned and all those who form part of it are free citizens and de-

pend for everything on the laws of the state.”⁷⁵

On December 9, 1859, he spoke openly for the first time about his project to his Salesian followers. After a few days of recollection, fourteen Salesians met on the 18th. The minutes of the meeting state: “All those present were pleased to consider themselves a society or congregation which would have as a goal helping one another grow in holiness and promoting the glory of God and the welfare of souls, especially of those most in need of instruction and education.”⁷⁶

At this point a clarification seems necessary to understand properly the first article of the *Salesian Constitutions* in the oldest edition which has come down to us. The article states: “The aim of this society will be to gather together the members, priests, clerics and laymen with the purpose of perfecting themselves by imitating the virtues of our Divine Savior, especially his charity towards poor boys.”⁷⁷ On these premises, then, which conform with the express thought of Don Bosco and with the experience of the Salesian Society up to that time, the perfection of the members of his society is achieved by the practice of apostolic charity.

The Salesian Congregation took shape after 1860, thanks to the tenacity of its founder and to the effective support of the church officials in Rome, especially Pius IX. On December 16, 1876, Don Bosco wrote to Cardinal Ferrieri the following: “We can say that the Holy Father is our founder and that he has directed us almost personally.”⁷⁸ The society was granted a *decretum laudis* (literally, a “decree of praise”) in 1864, and a decree of approbation by the Holy See in 1869. The definitive approval of its *Constitutions* was given in 1874, and the bestowal of the privileges of the Redemptorists, which made it an exempt Pontifical Congregation, was granted in 1884. During these years, the original intentions of Don Bosco were not fully realized. Just the same, in 1864 and in all the subsequent editions, the article of the *Constitutions* referring to the goal of the society introduced the distinction between perfection and active charity, as two goals which had to be attained simultaneously. Moreover, a short chapter which included “extern” members in the community disappeared in 1874 in spite of the efforts made by Don Bosco between 1864 and 1873 to retain it. He took his revenge in the following years, however: he instituted the association of Salesian Cooperators (1876)

which captured, with some necessary changes, this last phase of his project. With the founding of the congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to evangelize young girls in 1872—their constitutions were almost a word-for-word repetition of the *Salesian Constitutions*—Don Bosco completed the spiritual family which he had dreamed about.

His original project had expanded. Now it included every apostolic activity, including foreign missions.⁷⁹ It would be false to suppose that his activities were uniformly modeled on those at Valdocco.⁸⁰ In 1884 a French biographer remarked wisely: “Up until now, the founders of congregations and religious orders intended to fulfill a special work within the body of the Church. They observed the law which modern economists call the law of distribution of the work. Don Bosco seems to have conceived the idea of having his humble community undertake all types of work . . .”⁸¹ This openness to indefinite horizons was not motivated by a spirit of presumption. Rather he was sure he was guided by God, to whom he quietly attributed the soundness of his decisions and all of his successes.⁸²

As his apostolates grew, so did his spiritual influence. His instructions were valid not only for Italian youth, but also for religious and lay people throughout the Christian world engaged in all sorts of activities.

Don Bosco as a Writer

Many of his ideas were made known through his pamphlets and books, several of which were translated into French and into Spanish during the last years of his life. The *Catholic Readings* were a great success. The best issues and the most widely sold contained much material from Don Bosco's books.⁸³

From our point of view, the merit of these books appears to be very uneven. Some works, for example, his life of *Dominic Savio*, his *Angelina* and also his *History of Italy*, are delightfully straightforward. Others, mostly the lives of the popes and biographies of martyrs, have little literary or scientific interest. Just the same, these writings allow us to reconstruct Don Bosco's thought, to understand

him and to place him within a definite spiritual tradition.

From his writings, a coherent body of teachings emerges, especially if one is careful to clarify the meaning of his books by reading his letters and talks. It appears evident, for instance, that Don Bosco had only *one* style of spirituality which he presented to young people and to adults alike.⁸⁴ For instance, the beginning of his *Chiave del Paradiso* (Key to Paradise), a method of Christian life written for adults, is for the most part a repetition of his *Companion of Youth* (Giovane provveduto), which was written for young people (more precisely for adolescents). In some pages the only evident difference is the change of personal address from "My dear Christians" to "My good young people." Surprisingly enough, Don Bosco, who knew adolescents quite well, did not judge it indispensable to have a special spirituality for them, and his lessons for adults came from his experience as an educator of young men.

As an apostle of the young and of the common people, he tried to speak in such a way that his words would be understood by farmers and working people, nothing more. He did not consider it his duty to do long research beyond his competence. A few books of accepted merit appeared to him sufficient to constitute good documentation. He had no scruples about taking not only phrases from these books but entire paragraphs, especially when he was pressed for time. Always harassed by time and never pretentious, he did not hesitate to ask help from less distinguished collaborators. The way he saw things, the first quality of a popular writer was to have a simple and clear style. He wrote the following to a translator: "Dear Mr. Turco: Here is a book for you to translate from French. I am confident you will produce a free translation, in a style which is popular, well constructed, with short, clear sentences, etc., free of unwonted eloquence, just as you usually write . . ." ⁸⁵ John Bonetti, John Cagliero, and John Baptist Lemoyne were all his collaborators. His correspondence shows how generously John Bonetti offered his services. John Lemoyne wrote letters and even accounts of "dreams" signed later by Don Bosco.⁸⁶ As "principal" author, Don Bosco reviewed attentively the material written by his assistants and then assumed responsibility for the writings whose contents and form were not necessarily and absolutely his own.

Don Bosco's Sources

His intellectual life depended on a library which was better stocked than what one would expect from such an active man. Considering the importance of the sources of his published works, of his correspondence and of his talks, we should dwell a little on this matter.

We could discuss at length his knowledge of the Biblical, not a fleeting knowledge for sure because he wrote a *Bible History*. His knowledge of the *Fathers* was, it seems to us, second-hand. His historical knowledge was based on the Baronio's *Acta Santorum* (Acts of the Saints) and *Annales*. We will limit our consideration to that of masters of the spirit with whom he was certainly familiar.

Some day it will be necessary to establish the influence of the *Imitation of Christ* in the formation of his thought and in the development of his work. We know that in his youth he valued it very much for the depth of its wisdom.⁸⁷ Father Ceria attests to the fact that Don Bosco meditated on some verses of this book every night before going to bed.⁸⁸ One of his former students, educated at Valdocco and himself a founder of a congregation, Father Joseph Allamano, assures us that Don Bosco had a great regard for the *Imitation*.⁸⁹ Don Bosco recommended it in his *Life of Dominic Savio*.⁹⁰ Some aspects of his spirituality have an affinity with the "modern devotion" of this famous little book.

Don Bosco lived in nineteenth century Italy, which was greatly influenced by the Reformation and the Counter Reformation triggered by the Council of Trent. All his work showed this influence. He was more or less familiar with the defenders of a "humanistic" theology, who were also the adversaries of the Reformation mentality. They included the Jesuits in Italy, Saint Philip Neri (1515-1595), Saint Francis de Sales (1567-1622) and all those who had chosen them as their spiritual masters from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. The influence of all these writers, both as persons and up to a point as writers, is found in his books and in his talks.

It seems that he never quoted Saint Ignatius. But his contacts with him, even though indirect through his dealings with the followers of Ignatius in Italy, were numerous and of decisive importance. In reality, Don Bosco was close to the Ignatian tradition all his life. In the seminary he had read the Jesuit Paul Segneri (1624-1694), at least we

think, his *Cristiano provveduto*, a work imbued with the spirituality of the Company of Jesus.⁹¹ Besides, he spent three and a half months of a vacation at a Jesuit house at Montaldo.⁹² The *convitto* of Turin, which had determined the orientation of his thinking, was under the influence of the spiritual tradition of the Jesuit Father Diessbach. Father Secondo Franco (1817-1893), superior of the Jesuit residence in Turin, wrote three issues of the *Catholic Readings*. In 1877 at Don Bosco's invitation, Father Franco participated at the plenary sessions of the first general chapter of the Salesians and said a few words.⁹³ Don Bosco wrote a life of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga with a commentary, summarizing a work by the Jesuit Father Pasquale De Matei. This book alone would have sufficed to put him in contact with the spirituality of Saint Ignatius.⁹⁴ Very logically, then, on many occasions he used to refer to Father Alonso Rodriguez, S.J.,⁹⁵ (Translator's note: the reference is to Father Alonso Rodriguez, S.J., *The Practice of Christian Perfection*.)

He learned the teachings of Saint Philip Neri from spiritual writers and biographers of the saint, probably from Father Bacci in particular.⁹⁶ Some typical expressions found in his *Porta teo* (Your Companion),⁹⁷ in the life of Michael Magone of 1861,⁹⁸ in the *Treatise on the Preventive Method of 1877*,⁹⁹ and in significant documents produced in the years of his active life, reflected how well he had integrated Saint Philip's spirituality into his thinking. Like Saint Philip Neri, he was also a founder of oratories. He always had before him the image of this saint. He was sure he was continuing in the nineteenth century the work and the spirit of this great Florentine of the sixteenth century.¹⁰⁰

More than a spiritual writer, Saint Francis de Sales was for Don Bosco a model to be admired and imitated by his Salesians.¹⁰¹ Several times he quoted him or copied some of his works, most probably indirectly.¹⁰² He was especially attracted to him by his gentleness and his energy in the defense of the truth. He used to state explicitly that he agreed fully with the teachings of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, which was constantly being recommended in the publications at Valdocco.¹⁰³

To complete the picture, to these three great men of the Counter Reformation it would be necessary to add at least Saint Charles Bor-

romeo (1538-1585)¹⁰⁴ and Saint Vincent de Paul (1581-1660). Don Bosco wrote a pamphlet¹⁰⁵ about Saint Vincent based mostly on an Italian translation (Genoa 1840) of *Esprit de saint Vincent de Paul, ou Modèle proposé à tous les ecclésiastiques* (1780), by Andre-Joseph Ansart. This source is a little uncertain.

With Saint Vincent he left the Catholic Restoration properly so called. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries new masters had appeared after those of the sixteenth century, some of whom became sources for Don Bosco's writings—at the *convitto* he had been taught how to choose from among the ranks of the anti-Jansenist writers.

One of these writers was the Piedmontese Father Sebastian Valfré (1629-1710), beatified by Gregory XVI in 1834, at the very time when John Bosco was making his decisions about his priestly vocation. As a priest, Don Bosco would meditate on Valfré's life and teachings. Saint Philip Neri and Saint Francis de Sales were the only authors quoted by Blessed Sebastian in a rule of life published in 1651, which Don Bosco reproduced in 1858 in his *Porta teo* (Your Companion): "Read willingly some books of devotion, but not those which speak about rigorous things but rather those which teach you to serve God with holy love and warm confidence. You should become familiar with Saint Francis de Sales' *Philothea* and the life of Saint Philip."¹⁰⁶

Truly the similarities between Valfré and Don Bosco are many. Valfré collaborated in the founding of an Oratory of Saint Philip in Turin. The whole of his apostolate in the city during the seventeenth century, taking care of the poor, instructing children, and fighting against error, had anticipated in a very interesting way Don Bosco's work in the same city between 1841 and 1858.¹⁰⁷

According to us, Saint Alphonsus of Liguori (1697-1787), as interpreted by Father Cafasso at the *convitto* of Turin, surpassed all the other spiritual sources of Don Bosco, when one considers the amount of material Don Bosco borrowed from him. A study of the sources for just two of Don Bosco's works of spirituality reveals the important influence and essential orientation which these Liguorian writings had on his works.¹⁰⁸ For example, the *Eternal Maxims* of Saint Alphonsus were introduced almost *in toto* into the *Companion of Youth* (Il giovane provveduto).¹⁰⁹ It is also easy to show how Don Bosco's

Esercizio sulla misericordia di Dio (Exercises on the Mercy of God, ca.1847) reflects the influence of Saint Alphonsus' *Preparation for Death*.¹¹⁰ The *Glories of Mary* was one of the sources of Don Bosco's little book on the novena to Mary Help of Christians.¹¹¹ Don Bosco's *Atti di devozione da fare davanti al santo Sacramento* (Acts of Devotion to be done before the Blessed Sacrament), which are found in his booklet on the miracle of the Eucharist in Turin, were explicitly drawn from Saint Alphonsus.¹¹² Finally, Don Bosco followed him closely in his explanation of religious life. In his "Introduction to the Salesian Constitutions" (1875, 1877, 1885) Don Bosco used long passages adapted from Saint Alphonsus' *True Spouse of Christ* and from his *Advice on Vocation*. Don Bosco's ideas about the reception of the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, about the practice of mortification, about the flight from dangerous occasions of sin, etc., were at least in part the same ideas which Saint Alphonsus had taught in his own time.¹¹³ Around 1875, Don Bosco made this saint the official author of moral theology and of asceticism for the Salesians.¹¹⁴ We shall see later, however, whether Don Bosco was exclusively Liguorian. At any rate it is evident by now that the writer of the book knew how to guide himself quite securely in his choices. He believed that the originality of Saint Alphonsus himself was relative: he walked along the same path as Saint Francis de Sales and, through Saint-Jure and Nepveu, was very close to the original Ignatian school.¹¹⁵ And thus, Don Bosco could discover one of the great forms of modern spirituality by modelling himself after Saint Alphonsus.

We have limited ourselves to the essentials. However, it is probable that one day we will realize that the influence of Don Bosco's contemporaries and of those slightly before him on his writings and on the evolution of his thought has been ignored. These contemporaries could be anonymous, like the author of the book *Guida Angelica* (Angelical Guide), or somewhat disquieting political and religious writers, like Abbot de Barruel or Joseph de Maistre,¹¹⁶ or more congenial neo-humanists, like the Oratorian Antonio Cesari (1760-1828),¹¹⁷ or famous writers of philosophy, theology, and spirituality, such as Antonio Rosmini, Giovanni Perrone, Bishop de Ségur and Giuseppe Frassinetti.¹¹⁸ But this does not void the conclusions which we have indicated above. Don Bosco nourished himself certainly from the Bible

and the *Fathers*, but his true “authors” were modern writers of the Counter Reformation and of the anti-Jansenistic tradition, such as Paolo Segneri, Saint Philip Neri, Saint Francis de Sales, the Blessed Sebastian Valfré, and Saint Alphonsus Liguori, without mentioning again his master Father Joseph Cafasso. From this enumeration alone, it is easy to observe that he did not belong to the line of the abstract authors of the Rhenish and Flemish world, the line of Spanish mystics, or the group of French “devotional” theologians of the seventeenth century. His education and his tastes had taken him into a world which was quite varied.

His Dreams

A reading of Don Bosco’s works, including those describing his nocturnal visions, easily reveals his attitude toward his own “dreams.” In fact, in the *Memorie dell’Oratorio* (Memories of the Oratory), in his letters and in the chronicles of his house, we find several narratives of his dreams. The *Biographical Memoirs* (*Memorie biografiche*)—the work in which they were first compiled—contains a total of 120 dreams. Don Bosco used to have astonishing dreams about the state of the souls of his young men and about the future of his works. He would tell these dreams very willingly to his close friends, and even to the students in his school. Nowadays, while some people are cynical about these dreams, others ascribe them totally to supernatural origins. Is it possible to hold that both positions are open to criticism?

The problems presented by the dreams of Don Bosco have to be put into different categories. First of all, the textual tradition of each written account has to be examined carefully. We have observed that the dreams of 1831, 1834, and 1836 were simply variations of the first dream of 1824 (*circa*).¹¹⁹ Prudence advises us to be circumspect in interpreting these dreams. They had a very important place in the life of Saint John Bosco, and he was convinced that he communicated with the hereafter through them. Some predictions of deaths which he foretold, basing himself on his dreams, were startling. Just the same, it is good not to exaggerate their importance, or at least to imitate the discretion of Don Bosco himself. When he was about sixty, he

remarked about his dreams: "It is said that we should not bother about our dreams. Truthfully, I tell you that for the most part I agree with this opinion. However, at times, even though they don't reveal future things, they serve to help us solve some very complicated problems and to act with prudence in various affairs . . . Therefore we may consider them for the good they offer."¹²⁰ Up until his old age he remained true to this principle of discernment. He wrote in 1885: "I would like to recommend to you that you do not pay attention to dreams, etc. If they help you understand moral matters, or our rules, it's fine, mind them. Otherwise do not give them any importance."¹²¹ These declarations should not be watered down. Honesty and simple prudence demand it. "It has been said of the 'dreams' of Saint Peter Damien and other more subtle medieval writers that 'a narrative is a good way of presenting a deep truth' and this is what is most important."¹²² Instead of systematically attributing a miraculous origin to the dreams told by Don Bosco, it is better to see them, as long as they have some moral or spiritual value, as documents of his thought, written surely not without the help of the grace of the Lord. In this way they will not delude us. Let us leave to psychologists and to experts in mystical theology the task of determining the extent of the intervention of God in their unfolding. This undertaking is infinitely delicate and it is understandable that several have made futile attempts in this matter.¹²³

The Controversy with Archbishop Gastaldi

Did the reputation of miracle worker and prophet attributed to Don Bosco by his admirers perhaps contribute to make the Archbishop of Turin, Lorenzo Gastaldi, ill-disposed toward him? We would be pleased to believe it.

Don Bosco's activities, which apparently did so much good, were not liked by all, even by some bishops, and for reasons which were not mere mean jealousy. His activities were motivated by a different vision of the work of the Church. Taken as a whole, the Salesian institute set Don Bosco at variance with the chancery in Turin, especially with Msgr. Gastaldi, who was Archbishop of Turin from 1871 to 1883. And yet, for 30 years, from 1841 to 1870, as a priest and then as a Bishop,

Gastaldi had been one of Don Bosco's confidants.¹²⁴ But Gastaldi, like Archbishop Darboy of Paris, had ideas about governing the Church from another era. Not content with preferring Rosmini to Saint Thomas and finding Saint Alphonsus Liguori too flexible,¹²⁵ he was annoyed by the defenders of the privileges of religious¹²⁶ and by those who exalted the Pope at the expense of the bishops.¹²⁷ It is superfluous to add that these positions did not agree with those of Don Bosco, a graduate of the *convitto* and a convinced follower of Saint Alphonsus, who with the explicit consent of the sovereign pontiff had released his society from episcopal control. The deplorable battle between them, which soon became public through anonymous brochures by means of which the chancery thought to discover the extent of Don Bosco's influence, lasted for twelve years. Low blows, libelous accusations, arbitration by bishops at the request of Rome, the summoning of Don Bosco to appear before Church tribunals, nothing was missing in this painful controversy. Only the death of the Archbishop and his replacement by a friend of the founder of the Salesians put an end to it in 1883.¹²⁸

Don Bosco and the New Italian State

Humanly speaking, Don Bosco was able to influence his world so much on account of his diplomatic ability. He was also able to be instrumental in bringing together the Italians and the Holy See in two crucial troublesome questions: namely, the nomination of bishops to vacant sees and the settlement of revenues provided by their benefices. Since 1860, the occupation of new territories by the Piedmontese and their opposition to the Pope had resulted in exile or imprisonment for many bishops and numerous vacancies throughout the Italian dioceses. In 1865, 108 dioceses were without bishops.¹²⁹ Don Bosco intervened for two years (1866-67) and suggested to both parties a solution which seems to have been accepted on the occasion of the Tonello mission:¹³⁰ both parties would propose a list of candidates, and as far as possible, those chosen who would be acceptable to both parties—independent of official ordination which had been rendered impossible on account of the break—would assume direction of the

vacant sees. It was in this way that thirty-four bishops were named in the consistory of February 22 and of March 27, 1868. Some years later, in 1873 and 1874, the press confirmed the official intervention of Don Bosco in solving the controversy and his role in settling the question of the temporal goods of bishops and pastors.¹³¹

The confidence which both Pope Pius IX and the Italian ministers of state, Crispi, Lanza, and Vigliani, had in him at that time indicates his position during the unyielding struggle which, during the second half of the nineteenth century, pitted a conservative Church against a liberal Italian state determined to adapt itself to the modern world. On the one hand, he did not like revolutions¹³² and believed in the necessity of the temporal sovereignty of the Popes.¹³³ His friendship with the journalist Abbot Margotti, who certainly had no tender feeling for the new regime was unfailing.¹³⁴ On the other hand, he preached submission to the constitutional powers—therefore to the new state, although it was liberal and anticlerical¹³⁵—and he integrated into his works the economic and social progress of the world in which he lived. It seems, moreover, that after 1870 this latter tendency prevailed over the first. All things considered, even under Pius IX he was in favor of a reconciliation between the two opposing forces.

This satisfaction was denied to him by lack of time. He was engaged in the daily direction of a religious society in full development and was occupied by the vicissitudes which we mentioned (in addition to so many undertakings, he was building a large church in Rome, about which we have not said anything so as not to prolong our discussion). In spite of his natural robustness, his health broke down ahead of time. In 1884, crippled with infirmities, Don Bosco entered into a premature old age. He died in Turin on January 31, 1888.

Don Bosco in His Century

Let us summarize. Don Bosco was born in a rather conservative country hamlet, but his natural intelligence, the demands of his life, and the evolution of his era motivated him to adapt himself to the needs of the world he lived in. His love for literature, for games and shows would have made him a humanist in the ancient tradition of

his country, if his spirituality, which was rooted in the *Imitation of Christ*, had not intervened to moderate his youthful enthusiasm. He was educated by rigorous priests, more or less Jansenistic, followed by tutors of the Liguorian and ultramontane schools. He was attracted to Saint Philip Neri, Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Vincent de Paul, both as persons and as teachers, and to other followers of the same traditions. These traditions triumphed in the Church at the time of Vatican I. He believed in the redemptive and sanctifying value of his apostolic activities and he founded some congregations whose members, while trying to resemble as closely as possible other ordinary Christian associations, pronounced religious vows. He proposed one single rule of Christian life for young people and adults, for lay people and religious, and for anyone he reached through his institutions, conferences and numerous publications. The gradual evolution of his thought, quite evident in several points, took place without any serious disturbances and there were no grave crises in his life.

Progress and tradition, the two currents of his century, met in him, and to a certain extent, were harmonized in his mind and in his teaching. The sources he drew from helped make Don Bosco a man of the "middle road," a position in which, along with the inevitable opportunists and empty heads, many realistic and well-balanced persons were found. He would define his goals clearly and, with a clear determination, would seek to fulfill them.

NOTES

1. On this point, cf. G. Cacciatore, *S. Alfonso de'Liguori e il giansenismo*: the ultimate fate of the Jansenistic movement and the restoration of Catholic thought in the eighteenth century, Florence, 1844, pp. 293-300, 569-574.

2. S. Giovanni Bosco, *Memorie dell'Oratorio . . .*, ed. E. Ceria, p. 17. The *Memorie dell'Oratorio de S. Francesco de Sales* [The term "memorie," often misunderstood, does not mean the personal records of the founder of the Salesians, but rather "records" which give the history of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales."] were written and revised by Don Bosco between 1873 and 1878.

3. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 8.

4. Data were checked in the parish registers and are found in *Don Bosco nel mondo* (Don Bosco in the World), 3rd edition, Turin, 1964, in the table after the text. In this chapter we also drew some conclusions from F. Desramaut, *Les Memorie I*, Lyons, 1962.

5. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 19.

6. G.B. Lemoyne, *Scene morali di famiglia esposte nella vita di Margherita Bosco*. Racconto edificante ed ameno, Turin, 1886. Don Bosco read this book and approved its contents.

7. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, pp. 27-28.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

10. Viglietti's notebook, used by G.B. Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. I, 143 (English ed., p. 109); cf. Father Desramaut, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

11. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 23.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

14. For this detail of F. Desramaut, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

15. About the relationship between John and Father Calosso, cf. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, pp. 33-44.

16. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, pp. 44-83, with E. Ceria's notes about the chronology of Don Bosco's life.

17. T. Chiuso, *La Chiesa in Piemonte dal 1797 ai giorni nostri*, Turin, 1889, III, 12. It is necessary to state that Canon Chiuso, who had been one of the assistants of the Archbishop of Turin, was very well informed about the affairs of the Church in Piedmont.

18. T. Chiuso, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-37.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

21. The work of L. Taparelli d'Azeglio, these regulations were, we are told, "made more for novices in a monastery than for students in a public school" (M. Sancipriano, *Il pensiero educativo italiano nella prima metà del secolo XIX*, in the collective work *Mementi di storie dell' pedagogia*, Milan, 1962, p. 274).

22. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, pp. 54-55.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

27. T. Chiuso, *La Chiesa*, vol. III, 139-140.

28. This was little supported by Archbishop Fransoni, if we believe M.F. Mellano, *Il caso Fransoni e la politica ecclesiastica piemontese (1848-1850)* (Coll. *Miscellanea historiae pontificiae*, 26) Rome, 1964, pp. 7-8. Fransoni was Archbishop of Turin from 1832 to 1862.

29. Cf. P. Stella, *Crisi religiose nel primo Ottocento piemontese*, Turin, 1959; *Il giansenismo in Italia*, Zurich, 1966, vol. I, part one, 15-30.

30. Cf. the second part of the article by P. Stella, *La bolla Unigenitus e i nuovi orientamenti religiosi e politici in Piemonte sotto Vittorio Amedeo II dal 1713 al 1730*, in the *Revista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia*, 1961, vol. XV, 216-276.

31. Cf. for example P. Pirri, *P. Giovanni Roothaan . . . , Isola dei Liri*, 1930, pp. 137-147.

32. G. Cafasso, *Manoscritti vari*, VII, 2791 B; cited by F. Accornero, *La dottrina spirituale di S. Giuseppe Cafasso*, Turin, 1958, p. 110.

33. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 110.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 111, 113.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 94, 108, 111.

37. *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo . . .*, written by a fellow student, Turin, 1844.
38. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 95.
39. There is no real biography of Guala but A.P. Frutaz has prepared a very interesting report about him which was published in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualite* VI, coll. 1092-1094. About the origins of the *convitto*, there is a lot of information and discussion in A.P. Frutaz, *Beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Pii Brunonis Lanteri . . . Positio super introductionis causae et super virtutibus*, Vatican City, 1945, especially pp. 199-215.
40. Cf. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 122. The correspondence between Father Guala and Father J. Roothaan, superior general of the Jesuits is extensive (*Epistolae J. Roothaan*, vol. 4, 5, Rome, 1939-1940, *passim*).
41. *Ibid.*, p. 122, and the biographies of Saint Joseph Cafasso.
42. F. Accornero, *La dottrina spirituale di S. Giuseppe Cafasso*, *op. cit.*, pp. 108, 128.
43. F.M. Bauducco, *S. Giuseppe Cafasso e la Compagnia di Gesù*, in *La Scuola Cattolica*, 1960, p. 289; according to P. Braido, *Il Sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, 2nd ed., Zurich, 1964, p. 80, footnote.
44. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, pp. 121, 123; G.B. Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. II, 51-52 (English ed., p. 41).
45. C. Bona, *Le "Amicizie." Società segrete e rinascita religiosa, 1770-1830*, Turin, 1962. *L'Amicizia* of Turin ceased in June of 1828, the victim of party strife (*op. cit.*, p. 453).
46. T. Chiuso, *La Chiesa . . .*, vol. III, 37; C. Bona, *op. cit.*, pp. 345-347.
47. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 121.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
49. Cf. some outlines of two discourses given by Don Bosco after his death and collected under the title: G. Bosco, *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso*, Turin, 1860. Don Bosco spelled the name *Caffasso*.
50. G. Bosco, *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso*, p. 75.
51. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 133.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
53. G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi*, Turin, 1864, pp. 70-71, footnote.
54. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, pp. 161-163.

55. T. Chiuso, *La Chiesa*, vol. III, 125.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 208-209. It seems that Charles Albert was trapped and that the Statute, far from being his work, had been forced on him, after a long struggle, by his counselors, especially by Thaon de Revel. (Cf. E. Crosa, *La Concessione dello Statuto. Carlo Alberto e il ministro Borelli redattore dello Statuto*, Turin, 1936).
58. Cf. T. Chiuso, *op. cit.*, pp. 220, 230-231, etc.
59. Cf. on Bishop Fransoni, G. Martina, *Il Liberalismo ed il Sillabo*, Rome, 1959, pp. 65-67, M.F. Mellano, *Il caso Fransoni e la politica ecclesiastica piemontese (1848-1850)*, already cited.
60. This seminary was closed to seminarians after 1848. The particulars are given in T. Chiuso, *La Chiesa*, 1892, vol. IV, 168-169. About the question of civil marriage, cf. V. Eligio, *Il tentativo di introdurre il matrimonio civile in Piemonte (1850-1852)*, Rome, 1951.
61. T. Chiuso, *op. cit.*, p. 209. Cf. also R. Aubert, *Le pontificat de Pie IX*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1963, pp. 77-78.
62. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 217.
63. G. Bosco, *Cenno storico sulla congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales e relativi schiarimenti*, Rome, 1874, p. 3.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
65. G. Melano, *La popolazione di Torino e del Piemonte nel secolo XIX*, Turin, 1960, p. 75.
66. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 240.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
68. T. Chiuso, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, 25. Giacomo Margotti was the director of the newspaper *L'Armonia* (E. Spina, *Giornalismo cattolico e liberale in Piemonte, 1848-1852*, Turin, 1961, pp. 12, 17-24).
69. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, pp. 243, 246-251.
70. R. Aubert, *Le Pontificat de Pie IX*, *ed. cit.*, p. 73, footnote. About the Waldensians in Italy of the nineteenth century, cf. the very good work of G. Spini, *Risorgimento e Protestanti*, Naples, 1956, which rightly gives them an important place.
71. *Ibid.*, pp. 497-503: The balancing of a pontificate.
72. Many times Don Bosco traced the history of his religious society: in the introduction to the Salesian Constitutions, in his documentation for the Church authorities and in conferences to the Salesians. The history is taken up, with some additional details, in the

beginning of a publication by E. Ceria, *La società salesiana, Fondazione, organismo, espansione*, Colle Don Bosco, 1951. It is a chapter of a work by the Lyons Center for Salesian Research: *Précis d'histoire salesienne*, Lyon, 1961, pp. 47-50.

73. G. Bosco, *Cenno*, pp. 6-7.

74. Don Bosco was in contact with Antonio Rosmini for about ten years (cf. *Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco*, vol. I, 31) The conversation of Don Bosco and Minister Urbano Rattazzi to which I refer took place in 1857, according to G.B. Lemoyne. This writer reports it in its entirety, according to G. Bonetti (*Storia dell'Oratorio*, in the *Bolletino Salesiano*, 1883, p. 97), and in the *Memorie biografiche*, vol. V, 696-700 (English ed., pp. 460-620.).

75. G. Bosco, *All'Eccellentissimo Consigliere di Stato*, Turin, 1880, p. 10.

76. Published in G.B. Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. VI, 335-336 (English ed., pp. 181-82).

77. *Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales*. Unedited manuscript, Turin. ACS [Archive of the Salesian Congregation] S.02.025. *Appendix*, Document 12 below).

78. *Epistolario*, vol. III, 127.

79. Cf. for example a letter of G. Bosco to Bishop A. Espinoza, secretary of the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, late in 1874, in the *Epistolario*, vol. II, 429.

80. G. Bosco, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

81. A. du Boys, *Dom Bosco et la Pieuse Société des Salesiens*, Paris, 1884, p. 149.

82. Among others, cf. the dream about the "House of Mary," in the *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, pp. 134-136.

83. From the bibliography given below, we can see that eighty-three works were signed and recognized by him and that he revised, corrected, and published another sixty. In these latter works a sharp critic can find certain formulas of his. In this book we will only refer to works which are explicitly recognized as Don Bosco's. We will make some exceptions for a purpose, for instance, the second part of the *Regulations for the Houses*, Turin, 1877, whose ascetical lessons drew, as we have been able to verify personally from manuscripts, from a chapter of a set of *Regulations* which was in part an autograph. We will cite only works which easily offer to those who examine them a guarantee of authenticity. The editions indicated were chosen to begin with because they are of particular interest, or in general on account of the date found in the life of Don Bosco, or at times because they indicate

the original state or the final state of a text (as is the case of the 6th edition of the Life of Dominic Savio).

84. We are dealing with an interesting observation made at a conference of E. Valentini on *La spiritualità di D. Bosco*, Turin, 1952, pp. 24-25.

85. G. Bosco to Turco, September 2, 1867, found in the *Epistolario*, vol. I, 497.

86. E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. XVI, 430; vol. XVII, 107 *Epistolario*, vol. II, 142-144, 208, 412, 422. F. Desramaut, *Les Mémoires I*, p. 45, footnote.

87. Cf. footnote 33 above and also p. 266.

88. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 110, text and footnote.

89. P.L. Sales, *La vita spirituale dalle conversazioni ascetiche del servo di Dio Giuseppe Allamano*, 2nd edition, Turin, 1963, p. 627.

90. G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*, 6th edition, Turin, 1880, pp. 88, 90. [*St. Dominic Savio* by St. John Bosco, trans. and ed. Paul Aronica, 2nd ed., Don Bosco Publications, New Rochelle, N.Y., 1979., p. 111].

91. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 111.

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

93. E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. XI, 161 (English ed., p. 147); vol. XIII, 253, 255. About Secondo Franco: an article by M. Colpo in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. V, col. 1014-1016. On Diessbach: C. Bona, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-229, 307-314.

94. *Le Sei domeniche e la Novena di San Luigi Gonzaga con un cenno sulla vita del Santo* (1st ed., Turin, 1846) were promoted throughout Don Bosco's life, either separately (9th ed., Turin, 1888) or inserted in the *Giovane provveduto* starting with the 2nd edition, Turin, 1851. This booklet showed similarities to a work by a Jesuit of the preceding century: Fr. De Mattei's *Considerazioni per celebrare con frutto le Sei domeniche e la Novena in onore di S. Luigi Gonzaga della Compagnia di Gesù*, Rome, 1766; new editions. Cf. P. Stella, *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane provveduto" di San Giovanni Bosco*, Rome, 1960, pp. 40, 70-76.

95. G. Bosco to G. Bonetti, December 30, 1868, in the *Epistolario*, vol. I, 360. *The Practice of Christian Perfection* by Rodriguez was recommended in the *Cattolico provveduto* (p. 209), compiled by Giovanni Bonetti under the direction of Don Bosco. It appeared in that same year 1868.

96. J. Bacci, *Vita del B. Filippo Neri*, Rome, 1622; new edition.

P. Stella, (*Valori spirituali*, pp. 41-42) pointed out that the *Ricordi* of Saint Philip Neri are found in an anonymous work which Don Bosco knew well: *Un mazzolin di fiori ai fanciulli ed alle famiglie, ossia Antiveleno cristiano a difesa dell'innocenza*, Turin, 1836, pp. 243-245.

97. G. Bosco, *Porta teco, cristiano*, Turin, 1858, pp. 34-36: *Ricordi generali di San Filippo Neri alla gioventu*.

98. G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele*, Turin, 1861, ch. 9, pp. 44-46. [Bosco's biography of Magone is the primary source for an English biography of the boy by Peter Lappin: *General Mickey*, New Rochelle, N.Y.: Don Bosco Publications, 1977.]

99. *Introduzione al Regolamento per Le case della Societa di San Francesco di Sales*, Turin, 1877, pp. 7, 10.

100. Cf. the panegyric in honor of Saint Philip Neri, written entirely by Don Bosco to be delivered at Alba, before an audience of priests (published by G.B. Lemoine, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. IX, 214-221 (omitted in the English ed.); cf. Documents below.

101. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 141.

102. Some passages from the *Controverses* are found in *Il Cattolico nel secolo*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1883; some passages from the *Introduction to the Devout Life* in *Il giovane provveduto*, Turin, 1847, and in the *Porta teco*, 1858; some material from *Entretiens spirituels* in the *Introduzione alle Regole o Costituzioni*, Turin, 1877; some material from the Constitutions of the Visitation Nuns in the Salesian Constitutions. This list is not complete (Cf. in this regard, P. Stella, *L'influsso del Salesio su D. Bosco*, mimeographed copy, Turin, 1954).

103. The article in the *Church History* (new edition, Turin, 1870, fifth period, ch. 4, pp. 301-303; cf. also document 27) dedicated to Saint Francis de Sales by Don Bosco shows Don Bosco was attracted by the gentleness of his fellow countryman and by his zeal in defending the faith. The *Introduction* is recommended in the *Giovane provveduto*, first part, under *Cose necessarie*, art. 6. (2nd ed., Turin, 1851, p. 18; 101st ed., Turin, 1885, p. 17), in the *Chiave del Paradiso* (2nd ed., Turin, 1857, p. 38), in the *Porta teco* (cf. above) and in the *Cattolico provveduto*, "Regole di vita cristiana" (Turin, 1868, p. 209).

104. Cited in G. Bosco's *Porta teco*, Turin, 1858, p. 3.

105. *Il cristiano guidato alla virtu ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo de Paoli*, Turin, 1848.

106. G. Bosco, *Porta teco*, ed. cit., p. 55.

107. About Blessed Sebastian, data from *Vies des saints et bien-heureux*, by Jules Baudot et Chaussin, Paris, 1935, vol. I, 625-627.

Charles Gobinet (1613-1690), author of *Instruction de la jeunesse en la piété chrétienne, tirée de la l'écriture Sainte et des SS. Pères*, 1655, from which P. Stella has brought to light its direct or indirect influence on the *Giovane provveduto* of Don Bosco (P. Stella, *Valori spirituali*, pp. 22-36), was another important source, to which we should also probably add the *Spiritual Combat* attributed to L. Scupoli, a work recommended in *Cattolico provveduto* (Turin, 1868, p. 209).

108. P. Stella, *I tempi e gli scritti che prepararono il "Mese di maggio" di Don Bosco*, in the *Salesianum*, 1958, pp. 648-695; *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane provveduto"* already cited.

109. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, p. 35 ff.

110. *L'Appareccio alla morte*, of which we now have a critical edition by O. Gregorio, Rome, 1965.

111. G. Bosco, *Nove giorni*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1885, first and ninth day.

112. G. Bosco, *Notizie storiche intorno al miracolo del SS. Sacramento*, Turin, 1853, pp. 35-39.

113. Some details from my commentary on *S. Jean Bosco, Saint Dominique Savio*, 3rd ed., Le Puy et Lyon, 1965, pp. 99, 107, 108, 116.

114. G. Bosco, *Cenno storico*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

115. G. Carriatore on *S. Alfonso M. de' Liguori, Opere Ascetiche. Introduzione generale*, Rome, 1960, 207.

116. P. Stella (*Valori spirituali*, pp. 46-79) brought to light the contribution in the writing of the *Giovane provveduto* of an anonymous writer in the tradition of C. Gobinet, an anonymous writer whose book: "*Guida angelica, o siano pratiche istruzioni per la gioventù*" was very influential in the Italian tradition. This work, very practical for all young people, was published by a secular priest from Milan, and was corrected and expanded in Turin in 1767. In his *Fondamenti della cattolica religione*, Turin, 1883, pp. 36-37, Don Bosco recommended De Barruel to his readers. In his *Storia d'Italia* (5th ed., Turin, 1866, 4th period, ch. 41, pp. 448-451), Don Bosco dedicated an entire chapter to Joseph De Maistre which included a long quotation of his on the infallibility of the Pope. And all those who have read the biography of Joseph de Maistre know how close he was to his nephew, Eugene de Maistre.

117. There is a chapter dedicated to him in G. Bosco, *Storia d'Italia, ed. cit.*, 4th period, ch. 43, pp. 456-458, and references to his works in G. Bosco, *Vita di S. Paolo*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1878, pp. 116, 145.

118. It seems that Don Bosco's esteem for Antonio Rosmini (1787-1855) was unailing (cf. G. Bosco *Storia d'Italia, ed. cit.*, pp. 476-479).

In the second year of the *Letture Cattoliche*, in May and then in July of 1854, there appeared two articles by Giovanni Perrone (1794-1876), a native of Chieri, and a Roman theologian. The articles were: "Catechismo intorno al Protestantismo ad uso del popolo" and "Catechismo intorno alla Chiesa ad uso del popolo." In January of 1867, Don Bosco gave him some documentation for a work against the Waldensians (*Epistolario*, vol. I, 443-444). Very soon he would be the official author in dogmatic theology for the Salesians (G. Bosco, *Cenno storico*, *op. cit.*, p. 15). It should be added that there was nothing unusual about this: Fr. E. Hocedez, who wrote a biographical sketch about him in his *Histoire de la theologie au XIX^e siecle*, (Brussels and Paris, 1952, vol. III, 353-355), said that Perrone was "the most universally known theologian of his time and probably the most influential." Five works of Bishop de Ségur are found in the *Letture Cattoliche* between 1860 and 1879; *Le pape* in 1860; *L'Eglise* in 1861; *La très sainte communion* in 1872; *Tous les huit jours* in 1878; *Venez a moi* in 1879. *La très sainte communion* was quoted in G. Bosco, *Nove giorni*, 6th day. Giuseppe Frassinetti (1804-1868), one of the best promoters of frequent Communion in the middle of the nineteenth century (R. Aubert, *Le Pontificat de Pie IX*, *ed. cit.*, p. 464), was very close to Don Bosco (cf. G. Vaccari, *San Giovanni Bosco e il Priore Giuseppe Frassinetti*, Porto Romano, 1954). Among the nine articles which Frassinetti prepared for the *Letture Cattoliche*, from 1859 on, the following deserve to be mentioned on account of their special significance: "Il Paradiso in terra nel celibato cristiano," November 1861, and "Due gioie nascoste," December 1864.

119. F. Desramaut, *Les Memorie I*, pp. 250-256.

120. A talk at the closing of the spiritual retreat of September 1876, according to a text written by Fr. Lemoyne, revised by Don Bosco, and found in E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. XII, 463.

121. G. Bosco to G. Cagliari, February 10, 1885, in the *Epistolario*, vol. IV, 314.

122. Jean Leclercq, *Saint Pierre Damien, ermite et homme d'Eglise*, Rome, 1960, p. 206.

123. Attempts by E. Ceria in the *Memorie biografiche*, Turin, 1936, XVII, 7-13; and in *San Giovanni Bosco nella vita e nelle opere*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1949, pp. 285-292, are probably the best.

124. G. Bosco to Bishop Fissore, January 12, 1875, in the *Epistolario*, vol. II, 445.

125. E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. XV, document 42, p. 751.

126. G. Bosco to the bishop of Vigevano, in the *Epistolario*, vol. II, 455.

127. Account of L. Fiore on the diocesan synod of Turin, November 1881, found in E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. XV, document 21, 716.

128. Some details about this controversy are found in A. Auffray's *Un grand éducateur, saint Jean Bosco*, 7th ed., Lyon, 1953, pp. 430-441. The account and many references in A. Amadei and in E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. X-XVI, *passim* and in the *Epistolario*, vol. II-IV, *passim*.

129. Estimate of E. Ceria, in *San Giovanni Bosco*, *ed. cit.*, p. 210.

130. About the Tonello mission, cf. R. Aubert, *Le Pontificat de Pie IX*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

131. Cf., for example, E. Ceria, *San Giovanni Bosco*, pp. 209-219. However, like the controversy with Bishop Gastaldi, the problem of Don Bosco's role in the relations between the new Italian state and the Holy See has not yet been perfectly clarified. In this case, the Salesian documentation leaves much to be desired because Don Bosco discussed these matters only orally with his colleagues and even afterwards he remained very reserved when discussing them. Nonetheless, the essentials which I have assumed here are well founded.

132. The publication in the Catholic Readings of the anonymous *Catechismo cattolico sulle Rivoluzioni* (5th ed., Turin, 1854) which considered revolutions outrageous procedures, is indicative of his thought in the first part of his life as a priest. We believe that after 1870 he changed his way of thinking.

133. His ideas are found in G. Bosco, *Storia d'Italia*, 5th ed., Turin, 1866, pp. 179-180: The temporal goods of the Church and the properties of the sovereign pontiff.

134. Don Bosco's words of praise for Giacomo Margotti "by virtue of the bonds of friendship which have united us for many, many years, and in homage to the solid Catholic principles which he defended so fearlessly" were written in an album he sent to this priest journalist on July 27, 1873, and were published in the *Epistolario*, vol. II, 294-295.

135. Interventions by Don Bosco in the first general chapter of the Salesians, 1877, according to the acts which are available in E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. XIII, 288.

2

The Road of Life

A Very Simple Anthropology

Don Bosco was not afraid of discussing very serious problems in spiritual matters. In the first lines of his manual of prayers for boys, which was also a book of spirituality, he spoke about God, about man and his destiny.¹ In his booklet, "the Month of May," the reflection for the first day is about "God our Creator" and "our soul."²

He had very simple ideas about human nature which he never attempted to develop, since he was not a gifted original theologian. He had acquired these ideas from his parish catechism classes in Castelnovo and from his classes at Chieri. In later years, his reading and more still his audience of boys and working people did not encourage him to develop his ideas in any special way, at the risk of complicating them. These ideas, however, more or less consciously guided his spiritual and pedagogical decisions. It seems, then, indispensable in a study of his thought, to try to discover these basic ideas. His vague and non-technical vocabulary sometimes makes this undertaking difficult.

It is important to note that his sayings expressed his real convictions. A thorough knowledge of his correspondence, of his talks, of his conversations, and in general of his life, excludes any dichotomy between his vision of things, although abstract, and the decisions of his daily life. Excluding some very rare cases, there seems to be no serious doubt that these ideas were related and homogeneous.

Body and Soul

Man is composed of body and soul. Don Bosco was not ignorant of the accepted fact that the body is the "matter" of which the soul is the "form," a belief which could lead to a type of dualism, but he

saw things and spoke about them in more concrete terms. The body serves as a casing for the soul, "given to us to cover our soul,"³ and is united to it.⁴ But it is a weight on the soul, and the prospect of being freed from it has obsessed the saints from Saint Martin to Dominic Savio.⁵

The soul "is that invisible being which we feel within us. It is like the spirit of God which, in the first days of the creation, was breathed into the body of man. This internal "breath" is "simple," "spiritual" and "immortal." It has the "capacity of originating ideas, of linking them together, and of producing masterpieces . . ." ⁶ Don Bosco gives specific details about the faculties of the soul in his *Esercizio di devozione alla misericordia di Dio* (Practice of the Devotion to the Mercy of God): "Through his intellect, man knows the truth, through his reason he knows right from wrong, through his will he practices virtue and acquires merits before the Lord, and through his memory, the gifts of speech, reasoning, and knowing . . ." ⁷ In lining up these faculties he followed an opinion which was not very Thomistic. In his life of Louis Colle, he reproves educators who "ignore the true nature and interdependence of our faculties, or who lose sight of them too much. They tend to overdevelop the faculties of knowing and of feeling, which for some deplorable, but very common error, they take to be the faculty of love. On the other hand, they completely neglect the principal faculty, the only source of true and pure love, of which feeling is no more than a false image, namely, the will."⁸ This "Scotistic" position, which a study of his teaching about charity will clarify beyond a doubt, brings Don Bosco very close to Franciscan and "Salesian" spirituality (that of Saint Francis de Sales).

The Wonders of Human Nature

Don Bosco admired human nature. We have already noted his Liguorian and clearly anti-Jansenistic education. He was impressed by the perfection of the senses "as so many masterpieces of a craftsman of infinite ability,"⁹ as also by the wonders of thought, of courage, and of love. History had offered him many examples of these marvels, and Judaeo-Christianity did not have a monopoly on them.

He found these marvels outside the Christian world, among the virtuous men of ancient Italy. About Cato, the younger, he wrote: "His learning, his diligence, his simple life, his kindness made him dear to all and made him acclaimed as a model of virtue."¹⁰ He called Scipio a "great leader" of "outstanding honor,"¹¹ Hadrian a person who "loved peace, justice, and sobriety,"¹² and Caesar himself one who knew how to make himself "loved by the people through his kindness and generosity."¹³

Since he accepted a strict interpretation of the principle "outside the Church there is no salvation," he did not believe that there was a supernatural influence on the behavior of these Romans¹⁴ and saw their actions and expressions merely natural virtue. He admired other "natural" virtues, such as those of children who are at an age of "simplicity, humility, and innocence . . ." ¹⁵ We will have occasion to show how he wished to see the development of these natural virtues. Very often he would wish the recipients of his letters a happy life here on earth!

From this point of view, Don Bosco was clearly a humanist.

The Road of Life and the Way of Salvation

However, he was in no way absolutely satisfied with this transitory life. He considered life as a road which led to heaven, provided the right way was chosen. "Life is a journey toward eternity," Saint Alphonsus had told him.¹⁶

His very real humanism, which encouraged him to make the world more pleasant for his young men and to work in concrete ways for the good of the whole of human society, did not prevent him from being very aware of the transitory character of this life and of the trials which it brings. After death, there is no rest and true joy if not in God, and life itself is a painful journey, an "exile in which we go from place to place on pilgrimage."¹⁷ Fortunately, there is a lamp which guides man. According to Don Bosco, Dominic Savio had given this advice to a companion who was suffering: "This carcass (the body) will not last forever, will it? It has to wear out little by little, until it goes to the tomb. And then, my dear friend, our soul will be freed from the cares

of the body and will fly glorious to heaven and will enjoy health and unending happiness.”¹⁸ If Dominic Savio really said these words,¹⁹ he had captured his master’s thought perfectly. According to Don Bosco when we die “with joy on our face and with peace in our hearts, we will go to meet our Lord Jesus Christ, who will welcome us with kindness and will judge us according to his great mercy. He will lead us . . . from the tribulations of life to a happy eternity, to raise us and bless us forever.”²⁰

The sobering part of this view is that there are several possible roads to take, but only one “sure” one which leads to salvation.

The attainment of eternal salvation was one of the major worries of Saint John Bosco. The fear of not being saved was a source of great anxiety for him as it was for others. “Remember, Christian, that we have only one soul. If we lose it, everything will be lost forever.”²¹ “The first, the most important, indeed the only concern should be to save your soul. Oh! the Lord exclaims: What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, if he loses his soul?”²² Of the three inscriptions which he placed over the door and on the walls of his room, two reminded him of personal salvation. One read: “One thing alone is necessary: to save your soul” and another, “Give me souls and take away the rest,” was the motto which urged him to work for the salvation of others.²³ Was he himself really afraid of being damned? All his sayings about salvation did not have equal value and some, perhaps, were no more than formulas which had become habitual. Nonetheless, he asked his readers and his correspondents often to help him avoid this final disgrace of losing his soul.²⁴

It is good, then, not to hazard the “way of perdition” but to follow “the way of salvation.” In the introduction to the *Life of Saint Peter*, Don Bosco prayed for his readers and himself that “the merciful God . . . help us to maintain ourselves constant in the faith of Peter, which is that of Jesus Christ, and thus to walk along the sure way which leads us to heaven.”²⁵ In saying this he did not simply express a pious desire.

Repose in God

Man comes from God. If he is faithful to his destiny, he returns to him. Salvation is given to those who at the end of their days find rest in him.

His *Storia Sacra* (Bible History) and his *Mese di maggio* (Month of May) explain that the soul was created “to the image and likeness” of God²⁶ and the rules for his houses of 1877, state that man was created “to love and serve God (his) creator.”²⁷ His *Esercizio di devozione alla misericordia di Dio* (Devotion to the Mercy of God) goes a step further in stating that God created us “capable of profiting from his grace.”²⁸ Finally, in his *Mese di maggio* (Month of May) he also states that the Creator gave us this soul which “in the midst of the many pleasures of this earth . . . is always restless until it rests in God. For this reason only God can make it happy.”²⁹ All this might seem very traditional. But in order to grasp the idea which Don Bosco had of man and of life, it is necessary to imagine him concentrating his thoughts on God as the rewarder on the last day.

The Important Theme of the Last Things

Don Bosco was logical. Given that man finds himself busy traveling down a road whose destination is extremely important, the theme of the last things would have to acquire great importance in his catechesis and in his spiritual pedagogy. The instructions which he had received and his personal ideas about man's destiny coincided in an almost perfect way with his experience as a director of souls. This encouraged him to speak frequently about the final destiny of man. Around 1840 and for some time before that, a long line of masters of the spirit had counseled beginners to meditate every day and in a concrete way on the last things. Saint Alphonsus had said: “The confessor must first of all prepare (his soul) for mental prayer, that is, meditate on the eternal truths and on the goodness of God.”³⁰ Don Bosco was an educator. For him the death of one of his spiritual sons under uncertain conditions was an irreparable failure. He knew his boys, their moral weaknesses, their illusions and their false ideas about life and

about happiness and he was not ignorant of the fact that mature men are not much different. For him the thought of death could correct all deviations of both young and old.

Thus he spoke about the last things. In the first section of his manual of prayers for boys, his initial exhortation and six of the seven meditations (which we know were inspired mostly by Saint Alphonsus) were on death, judgment, hell, and paradise . . .³¹ His educational biographies for adolescents described in the most minute details their last hours;³² truly, the thought of death often preoccupied this director and this friend of the young.

Death is a personal problem. Apparently, the works of Don Bosco do not contain anything really original about the last things of man and of the world, questions which in the twentieth century would deeply involve Catholic theologians. The "general judgment" would reduce itself to the solution of personal cases taken as a whole.³³ His reflections on the last things were in accord with the tradition of the nineteenth century. His themes were: the inevitability of death, the uncertainty of the moment of death, the supreme importance of death, and eternal happiness or unhappiness. His teaching was practical and moralizing, as was that of Saint Alphonsus in his *Preparation for Death*, a book which Don Bosco recommended to his boys.³⁴ In his sermons and, in particular, in his "good night" talks, he would remind his boys and his co-workers of the need to be prepared for death. The numerous deaths which occurred in the house of Valdocco offered him the occasion to return often to this "great truth." Nothing is more uncertain than the moment of our death. Death does not wait . . . "It can take place a year from now, a month from now, a week, a day, an hour, or perhaps as soon as you finish reading this thought. My Christian reader, if death struck us at this moment, what would become of your soul? What would become of my soul?"³⁵ These warnings were enough for him. He did not usually resort to realistic descriptions which would have shocked his listeners. Don Bosco spread peace, even when he spoke about death. At times the images in his "dreams" were strong, but never tormenting. It is no longer surprising, then, that he should insert in his manual of prayers for young men a *Prayer for a Happy Death*, attributed to a person who had been "converted." In comparison with other passages of the devotional literature of the eighteenth century,

this prayer, all things considered, seems harmless.³⁶

He used to speak eloquently about heaven, too. A conversation about "the great reward which God prepares in heaven for those who preserve their baptismal innocence" made Dominic Savio go into an ecstasy.³⁷ We know from a reliable witness that Don Bosco used to speak about heaven "as a son would of his father's house."³⁸

It was natural, then, that he should consider life to be lived in reference to this last end. Wise Christians fulfill their duties in a way which will give them satisfaction at the hour of their death. At the beginning of one of his sermons, Don Bosco wrote: "The end of man. Remember your last end and you will never sin."³⁹ A little later he would explain that Saint Martin had had this insight. When God revealed to him that his death was approaching, "he was full of happiness, because all his actions and all his words had always been directed toward the final day of his life . . ."⁴⁰ Don Bosco used to love to repeat: "One reaps what he has sown."⁴¹ It is necessary to acquire many merits for the hereafter. Everyone who thinks about his final end cannot help doing it.⁴²

In this he found himself in accord with such writers as Saint Robert Bellarmine and other humanists. He did not imitate emotional fanatics like Father Giovanni Battista Manni, who had described death in the darkest colors. He did not even follow Saint Alphonsus literally, who was already more moderate than others.⁴³

Exercise for a Happy Death

This orientation of Don Bosco can be explained by considering his monthly exercise of a happy death, to which he gave the greatest importance. It taught him to direct all his life toward its final purpose.

Father Joseph Cafasso, who had advised him to practice this devotion,⁴⁴ was not the author of it. In 1840 "the exercise for a happy death" had been in use for several centuries.⁴⁵ It is known that after a time of disuse, it flourished again in the second half of the seventeenth century. Its outline, for example, was found in the writing of Father Claudio Judde (died in 1735), who wrote thus: "To practice dying means to take one day—either once a month or at least a few times

during the year—in which we will do everything that we will have to do on the last days of our life: a good examination of conscience, a fervent Communion with the acts of devotion which are customary during the reception of Holy Viaticum, and reading from the ritual the prayers for Extreme Unction, which the Church recites for the dead and which are so very appropriate for those who are dying. Finally we would imagine ourselves before the tribunal of God . . .”⁴⁶

Don Bosco recommended with insistence this practice of going to confession and receiving Communion with the sentiments which someone should have who has to appear at any moment before God. He even said: “I believe that the salvation of a religious can be assured, if every month he receives the Holy Sacraments and adjusts the matters of his conscience as if he had, in fact, to leave this life for eternity.”⁴⁷ This practice frees both young people and adults from a troubled conscience and urges them to seek perfection. In this way their life becomes regulated and their energies are committed to the service of God. “Do not neglect the exercise of a happy death once a month,” Don Bosco wrote to a young cleric (Translator’s note: the word *cleric* in this book means a young professed Salesian who is a student for the priesthood. In Don Bosco’s time it was also applied to any student in a major seminary who had officially received a cassock at a formal ceremony of “clerical” investiture), “and examine your conscience to see what you should acquire, correct, or take away, so that you might be a good soldier of Christ.”⁴⁸ In short, he considered this exercise as “the key to everything else.”⁴⁹

Prudent Trust in Men

He was diffident about men who were weak and sinful, and yet at the same time gave them his trust. He believed that nothing was securely attained on this earth. The severe principles of his youth had been tempered only by his Liguorianism, which was not a permissive school of thought. His experience in dealing with souls did not allow him to adopt a rosy view of life.

He was aware of the weakness of human creatures. Good will among young people, as was the case with Michael Magone, is often but “a

cloud" which vanishes under the pressure of bad influences.⁵⁰ "A young person is at a fickle age when he changes his mind often."⁵¹ Even in the adult world, people of the character of a Dominic Savio are quite rare. One does not have to be a psychologist to know this.

He believed also in the existence of the prince of darkness and in his activity among men. In his *Storia sacra* (Bible History) he told in the most traditional way how sin had entered this world after the temptation of Adam.⁵² Later on he insisted in strong terms, especially in his "deams," on the harmful influence of the spirit of evil in the lives of men. In his dreams, this spirit appeared in strange forms, worthy of the *Life of Saint Anthony* and of the *Divine Comedy*. He appeared as a serpent, as an elephant, as a large car or an infuriated bull with seven moving horns.⁵³ His evil activities are depicted in a colorful variety of images: he closes mouths in confession;⁵⁴ he sets traps for the unfortunate in which they ensnare themselves for good: these traps are pride, disobedience, envy, lust, stealing, gluttony, anger and sloth.⁵⁵ He rejoices shamelessly over confessions badly made⁵⁶ and over the evil conversations of his victims.⁵⁷ Don Bosco saw that the evil spirit was preparing snares even for the Salesians.⁵⁸ Around 1860 he was tempted by Satan as was the Curé of Ars, his contemporary.⁵⁹ To ignore the fact that the devil was always lying in wait, wandering about day and night "like a roaring lion," would mean to neglect one of the important elements of his spirit and of his teachings.

A realist always, he was also aware that evil is found in man. From his earliest childhood he considered the dangers of going around with "bad companions" in school and even in the seminary in Chieri.⁶⁰ In the prisons of Turin he discovered "how great was the malice and the misery of men."⁶¹ He denounced the evils of bad companions in the very first pages of his manual of prayers and repeated the same warning to hundreds of thousands of persons whom he counseled.⁶² In his instructive biography of Dominic Savio, he praised the prudence of this holy young man, who though apparently invulnerable, nonetheless shunned bad company.⁶³ We discovered another pessimistic declaration from the pen of this great optimist. He said that we must resign ourselves: "the whole world is seated in wickedness. And we cannot change it . . ." ⁶⁴ The "world" for this man among men was an "enemy," "full of sin."⁶⁵ Evil exists and is contagious.

This having been said, his spirituality, like his pedagogy, was based on two pivotal principles: trust in God who does not abandon his creatures and trust in the wisdom and good-heartedness of men.

We will have ample opportunities to demonstrate how much he worried about letting God have the first place in helping people become holy. On the other hand, considering just his pedagogy, which was quite remarkable for its sense of human progress—in all fields, including holiness itself—making the young “tow the line” did not satisfy him any more than letting them follow their every whim. His method appealed to their “reason” and to their “heart,” terms which we will soon be forced to define. He wanted to conquer a young man’s mind and develop in him good feelings and sound judgments. Very deliberately he used “reason, religion, and kindliness”⁶⁶ as a lever. Mild-mannered and kind, he tried to arouse good will for the kingdom of God. In the happy atmosphere which he knew how to create, he found intelligent minds which were willing to understand and wills which desired to love good things and to do them. Here we find ourselves at the heart of the most definite principles of his spirituality, as also of his pedagogy and his pastoral activity. In fact, he lived according to these general convictions about the goodness of human nature. Perfectly consistent in his admiration of people and of young men in particular, he respected them and gave them, prudently, his confidence.

Don Bosco, then, was neither a simpleton who navigated in the realms of illusions, nor a pessimist who despised God’s most obvious masterpiece on this earth. Aware of the limitations of human beings, he believed in their goodness. A real trust in man corresponded to his optimism.

The Universal Call to Holiness

He also preached the universal call to perfection, or more exactly, to holiness.

A saint is entirely “for the Lord,” observed Dominic Savio perceptively.⁶⁷ He shows this by his virtuous life. Don Bosco believed that a saint is a man of God whose virtue is heroic. “The Christians of the first generations were called saints on account of the virtuous and

mortified lives which they led.”⁶⁸ The introductions to the biographies which Don Bosco wrote about people who were striving for holiness confirms this idea. For instance, speaking about Michael Magone, he praised “his exemplary diligence in doing his practices of piety,” his “punctuality in fulfilling his duties,” his “devotion to the Blessed Virgin,” his special care in “preserving the virtue of purity” and his charity towards his neighbor.⁶⁹ In concrete terms, he believed in a simple and direct road toward holiness which was “not extraordinary or showy, but common, ordinary, and perhaps seemingly insignificant.” It was the road which Father Joseph Cafasso had certainly pointed out to him.⁷⁰ This same master had taught him to fulfill his duties in life “with order and prudence according to the needs and circumstances of time, place, and people. When a person does things well, this is enough to make him holy, whether he is a lay person, a father or mother, or a priest.”⁷¹ Neither Joseph Cafasso nor John Bosco, then, believed it was necessary to have the extraordinary gift of infused contemplation in order to reach holiness.⁷² Nothing stands out in the teachings of Don Bosco which refers to the three ways or the three degrees of perfection.

He didn't think of this type of holiness as being reserved only for some, but rather as something proposed and even prescribed by God for all men. It did not seem to him admissible to divide all of humanity into two groups: a mass of mediocre persons who limit themselves to practice the commandments and a few elect who alone are capable of following the counsels. He interpreted the verse from Saint Paul: “It is God's will that you grow in holiness” (1Thess. 4,3) in the sense that perfection was obligatory for all.⁷³ As Father Joseph Cafasso had also taught him, holiness is for all, and besides it is easy.⁷⁴ On a spring day in the year 1855 at the school at Valdocco during a sermon, a priest took time to develop with special care three ideas which made a deep impression on the soul of Dominic Savio: “It is the will of God that we all become saints. It is easy to do it. And there is a great reward waiting in heaven for anyone who becomes a saint.”⁷⁵ This preacher was either Don Bosco—the most probably hypothesis—or else someone who shared his ideas. We read, for example, in Don Bosco's *Porta teco* (Your Spiritual Guidebook) of 1858, words addressed to all Christians: “God wants all of us to be saved. More than that, it is his

will that we all become saints.”⁷⁶ He made himself understood. A certain amount of eagerness, perhaps a little too intense, in striving for holiness is seen in the lives of several members of the first generation of his followers. Dominic Savio is the most well-known, but Michael Rua is the best example.⁷⁷ The fidelity of all these good souls in the quest for holiness was not, from another point of view, entirely irreproachable, because some of them were inclined—who would believe it?—toward a certain amount of pessimism, and unconsciously took a path contrary to that of their master.⁷⁸ The history of the spiritual descendants of Don Bosco would hold a few surprises.

Progress in the Search for God

Don Bosco traveled his own road at a lighter pace. His mottos could even promote a type of innocent Pelagianism. Both to Dominic Savio and to his director the ambiguity of the phrase “make yourself a saint”—a phrase which was commonly used in their language—escaped them.⁷⁹ Don Bosco’s teachings, however, took everything into account. The importance that he gave to the sacraments in his pedagogy would be enough to assure us of his belief in the preeminence of the role of God in our efforts to acquire holiness. Very rightly he believed that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was necessary for anyone who wished to progress “in life and death, and to keep him strong along the way which leads to heaven.”⁸⁰ He also believed very strongly that “no small amount of violence” on the part of human beings was necessary.⁸¹ If holiness is not conceivable without God, “without whom all men’s efforts are in vain,”⁸² it is just as necessary that every individual take God’s loving call quite seriously. “. . . The effects of the grace of God are marvelous only in those who strive to correspond to it.”⁸³ We must say that for him everything was balanced by his favorite quotation from Saint Paul: “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.”⁸⁴ He was inclined neither toward a horizontal naturalism nor toward a utopian and ineffective “angelism.”

The Role of Reason in the Search for God

Since human nature was invited with so much insistence to participate in the striving for holiness, we can ask ourselves if Don Bosco did not have a special liking, either consciously or not, for one or another of man's faculties. Certain forms of spirituality are believed to be voluntaristic, others intellectualistic or affective.

"Reason" assumed a role of primary importance to his religious pedagogy and, for that matter, also in the whole of his spirituality. By reason he meant, often in very inexact language, the human ability to judge and to reflect. The educator, described in his treatise on the preventive method and in several of his letters, appeals to the "reason" of his students, because he explains to them the rules of the institution, gives a generous amount of advice, and justifies his reprimands.⁸⁵ When Michael Magone, a very impetuous young man, after separating some boys who were fighting, told them: "We are reasonable beings, so we go by reason and not by force,"⁸⁶ he was repeating Don Bosco's very words. In spiritual matters, Don Bosco did not believe in systematically molding his boys; he preferred to show them what God, acting through him, expected of them. In this regard, the formation of Dominic Savio is typical.

Sometimes his spirit directed him to discuss points of morality or of asceticism and to give edifying examples. However, he did not dwell upon theological speculation. All his life long he practiced the lesson which, as we know, he received on the night of his dream at the age of nine: "Begin immediately, then, to instruct them about the ugliness of sin and about the beauty of virtue."⁸⁷ On the other hand, an apostolic person of the nineteenth century had only to allow himself to be carried by the theological current of the times to act in this way. His ideas were influenced by the moralistic spirit of the age, which the *convitto* had also developed in him.

He was certainly capable of reasoning about his own convictions. Nevertheless we must be careful not to give undue importance to some statements of his. For example, "Faith and prayer. These are our weapons and our supports,"⁸⁸ in no way proves that he was a fideist. Some of his pamphlets contain short polemical discussions about matters of controversy between Catholics and Protestants: the visible

Church, the sacraments, purgatory, relics, the veneration of the Blessed Virgin. The arguments are scrutinized one by one. A Catholic attacks, makes marginal concessions, discusses essential matters, concludes his discussion with assurance, emboldened by a set of reasons which unseat his adversary or convince him.⁸⁹ In 1870 Don Bosco the apologist did not have the slightest difficulty in accepting the teachings of Vatican Council I about the active role of reason in the sphere of supernatural truths.

It seemed to him that beyond the possession of ordinary faith, growth in holiness had to be guided by an ever deeper knowledge of Christian theology. In this connection, a few statements found in his biography of Dominic Savio—these remained unchanged in subsequent editions—are very clear: “Whenever he heard something in a sermon or at catechism which he had not understood well, he immediately asked for an explanation. In this way his exemplary style of life had its beginning. He advanced from virtue to virtue and was very exact about fulfilling all his duties to the point where it was difficult to do more.”⁹⁰ Without an appropriate amount of instruction, then, Dominic Savio would not have become a saint. The religious orientation of his “reason” was at the basis of his marvelous progress in his knowledge and love of God. Don Bosco attested to this fact and, by citing this example, asked his readers to draw the same conclusions for themselves. We should not forget that all of his biographies were didactic.

The Role of the “Heart” in the Search for God

Don Bosco’s temperament and his teaching experience were enough to prevent him from considering only reason in spiritual direction. Deep within a man who makes a very “rational” decision, he discovered what he termed the “heart.” By this term we should understand according to the context such things as feelings, the will, love, and also the expression of the whole soul, or even more, to use contemporary language, the expression of the whole person.⁹¹ The word *will* occurs rarely in his talks and in his writings. Sometimes it is necessary to look for references to this faculty—a superior faculty, as he indicates in the life of Louis Colle⁹²—in those expressions where he indicates the

“heart” as being either good or bad. In essence, what Don Bosco meant by having a good “heart” meant to be sensitive, understanding, inclined to do good and to love.

The Opening of One's "Heart" and Its Conquest by God

Don Bosco looked for an enlightened reason in his aspirants to holiness, but also and above all for an open “heart.” He used to think a great deal about openness to God and, probably even more, about openness to God’s go-betweens, whether official ministers or simple Christians. We read in the biography of Michael Magone that a companion of his who was “very wayward” was entrusted to him to help him feel better about things. Michael “began by befriending him. He joined him in recreation, gave him presents, wrote notes to him, and thus was able to build an intimate relationship” with this difficult boy.⁹³ We become aware of what down-to-earth measures a follower of Saint John Bosco who was absolutely faithful to his directives used to “open a heart” to God.

It is superfluous to point out that this task is especially expected of educators. In 1884 Don Bosco recalled, not without a touch of sadness, the happy times (around 1860) when his assistants had imitated his way of doing things. “Those were the days of affection and of Christian trust between boys and superiors; the days of a spirit of acceptance and putting up with each other for the sake of Jesus Christ; the days of hearts open with utter simplicity and candor, the days of love and true joy for all.”⁹⁴ In the field of religious education, he was afraid of a cold atmosphere which does harm to love and to spiritual progress.

He was convinced that an open “heart” eventually gives itself up effectively to God, provided one takes care to orient it to him. In 1877, on the occasion of the first General Chapter of his society, he reminded the directors of the houses: “As far as possible, we have to try to impress religion upon the hearts of all and to impress it as deeply as possible.”⁹⁵ Nevertheless, it is clear that the heart of the student does not belong to his educator—even if the disciple responds by wishing to offer it to him. It belongs to God to whom it must always

return. He wrote to the students of the school of Mirabello before going to visit them: "I want you all to give me your heart, so that I can offer it every day to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament when I say Mass."⁹⁶ It was his ordinary way of speaking. Thus can be explained, at least partially, his great solicitude for frequent and sincere confessions among his boys: these confessions allowed him to take temporary possession of their "hearts" to purify them and restore their peace with God.⁹⁷

If, finally, we had to decide about the priority of reason or love in the search for God, in the mind of Saint John Bosco, we would without a doubt agree that it was love. Familiarity and loving kindness, that is, a spirit of cordiality and affection, were worth more for him, all things considered, than indispensable reason itself. All the spiritual progress of his disciples would be imbued with affective love or, to use his manner of expression, dictated by the "heart." Loving kindness invested his counseling and teaching. This combination of loving wisdom and farsighted affection produced for him "marvelous results and brought about changes which appeared to be impossible."⁹⁸ No matter how one interprets Saint John Bosco or Saint Francis de Sales, perhaps considering them sentimental, the affective nuances of their spirituality were about equal.

Conclusions

We have asked Don Bosco the question: "What is man? and what is life?" In responding, he has used certain expressions or certain examples from the Bible, interpreted by the optimistic tradition after the Reformation. He was not a man with only one tendency. The descriptions of the priestly document in *Genesis* have to be toned down with the bitter sentences of *Ecclesiastes*. Certainly man was created good, but he is also marred by weakness and by evil. The body is marvellous, but it weighs down the soul. Life is a generous gift of the Lord, but after death there is no rest except in Him. God wishes all to be holy, but how many are headed for hell? Don Bosco's optimism was thus very much tempered. According to him, life was a race run until death and its true destination might always be missed. But blessed is he who

advances toward God by using his reason and above all by using his "heart," because he will then be saved! If he practices "virtue," perhaps "he will also become a saint." Then this is the spiritual world in which Don Bosco moved: a world with a God who is just and good, with a Christ who is a friend, a model and the source of life, with a Virgin Mary who is radiantly holy and inexhaustibly good, with a whole procession of saints, and finally with the visible Church. This vision could not but have encouraged him to holiness which he understood as the heroic practice of Christian virtue.⁹⁹

NOTES

1. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, pp. 9-10.
2. G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, 8th ed., Turin, 1874, pp. 26-35.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 31: "To this body God has united a soul."
5. G. Bosco, *Vita di San Martino*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1886, p. 76; G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., Turin 1880, pp. 102, 113 (English ed., pp. 127, 140).
6. G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, ed. cit., pp. 31, 32.
7. G. Bosco, *Esercizio di divozione*, Turin, (circa 1847), p. 31.
8. G. Bosco, *Biographie du jeune Louis Fleury Antoine Colle*, Turin, 1882, pp. 23-24. Although it was signed by Don Bosco, this biography was written by Camille de Barruel, a Salesian professor of philosophy.
9. G. Bosco, *Il cattolico nel secolo*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1883, p. 22.
10. G. Bosco, *Storia d'Italia*, 8th ed., Turin, 1873 "prima epica" ch. 28, found in A. Caviglia, *Opere e scritti*, vol. III, 79. According to the commentator, this passage was an addition made for this edition.
11. G. Bosco, *op. cit.*, 5th ed., Turin, 1866, p. 57.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 100: "When I say that there were *good* emperors, you should understand that they were only as *good* as a pagan can be."
15. G. Bosco, *Il giovane*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, p. 11.
16. St. Alphonsus M. Liguori, *Preparation for Death*, 14th consideration, title.
17. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, ed. cit., p. 24 (English ed., p. 45).
18. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
19. I have shown elsewhere that Saint John Bosco introduced moral lessons into the words of his heroes. (Cf. F. Desramaut, *Les Memorie*, vol. I, 111, n. 66,67).
20. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, ed. cit., p. 129.
21. G. Bosco, *Porta teco*, Turin, 1858, p. 5.
22. G. Bosco, *Nove giorni*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1885, "quarto giorno."
23. Cf. E. Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio*, new ed., Colle Don Bosco, 1947, p. 85.
24. G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi*, Turin, 1864, p. 181 (Cf. also Document 19); Bosco's letter to the Countess Luigi Barbo, May 30, 1866, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 396; to Fr. Alessandro Checucci, Feb. 9, 1867, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 446. letter to the Salesians and students of the school at Lanzo, December 26, 1872, *op. cit.*, vol. II, 246, to the same parties, Jan. 5, 1875, *op. cit.*, vol. II, 438, and letter to Fr. Giacomo Margotti, a theologian, September 13, 1876, *op. cit.*, vol. III, 96; etc.
25. G. Bosco, *Vita di S. Pietro*, Turin, 1856, p. 10.
26. G. Bosco, *Storia sacra*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1863, "Antico Testamento, prima epoca," ch. I (in *Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 131); G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, 8th ed., Turin, 1874, p. 31.
27. *Regolamento per le case*, Turin, 1877, p. 63, second part, chapter 3.
28. G. Bosco, *Esercizio di divozione*, p. 103, sixth day.
29. G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, ed. cit., p. 31, second day.
30. St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Praxis confessarii*, ed. Gaude, Rome, 1921, p. 210.
31. G. Bosco, *Il giovane*, Turin, 1847, pp. 31-50: Seven considerations for each day of the week. These meditations were retained throughout Don Bosco's life in the various editions of this book.

32. Cf. the biographies of Comollo, Savio, Magone, Besucco and also the letter to Margherita Baccardi, July, 1866, on the death of her son Ernesto (*Epistolario*, vol. I, 408-410). Cf. also December 16, below.

33. Cf. G. Bosco, *Il mese*, ed. cit., 1874, pp. 110-116, Seventh day: "The Universal Judgment."

34. *Preparation for Death* was one of four books recommended in Bosco's *Il giovane*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, p. 18.

35. G. Bosco, *Il mese*, ed. cit., 1874, pp. 100-101, Fifteenth day.

36. G. Bosco, *Il giovane*, Turin, 1847, pp. 140-142; this prayer is found in all the later editions of this book.

37. According to G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, ed. cit., 1880, pp. 96-97 (English ed., p. 115).

38. Cardinal Cagliero, quoted in E. Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio*, ed., cit., p. 112.

39. Autographed manuscript, signed "Bosco," December 3, 1841, ACS, S. 132.

40. G. Bosco, *Vita di San Martino*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1886, pp. 75-76.

41. Gal. 6,7.

42. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 115 (English ed., p. 139); this resolution is found in all the editions. Cf. the edition of 1880, p. 112. Also Bosco's letter to M. Rua, 1870, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 71. "Everyone will receive his recompense, good or bad, according to the way he lived." (2. Cor. 5, 10) a quotation found on a bookmark in Don Bosco's breviary (Cf. E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. XVIII, Document 93, 806-808; cf. also Document 5, below).

43. G. Cacciatore, in his collection of *S. Alfonso M. de'Liguori Opere ascetiche*, Rome, 1960, pp. 212-216, remarks that Saint Alphonsus, for his part, had chosen a middle way in his *Preparation for Death* between these two tendencies.

44. Cf. a description of this practice of Father Caffasso in Bosco, *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso*, Turin, 1860, p. 111.

45. About this "exercise," cf. some comments in H. Bremond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux*, Paris, 1932, IX, 350-368; P. Tihon art. *Fins dernières*, in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. V., col. 372-374.

46. C. Judde, *Oeuvres spirituelles*, vol. I, 181ff., in H. Bremond, op. cit., p. 365.

47. G. Bosco, *Introduzione alle Regole o Costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales*, Turin, 1885, p. 37.

48. G. Bosco's letter to Thomas Pentore, Aug. 15, 1878, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 381, "What you need to add, correct, or suppress in order to be a good soldier of Christ."

49. G. Bosco's letter to John Cagliero, Aug. 1, 1876, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 81.

50. G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele*, Turin, 1861, p. 58.

51. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., 1880, p. 30 (English ed., p. 53).

52. G. Bosco, *Storia sacra*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1863, "epoca prima," ch. 2 (in *Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 132-133).

53. Cf. G.B. Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. VII, 238-242, 356 (English ed., p. 143-147) vol. VIII, 34 (English ed., p. 21); E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. XII, 469.

54. "Dream of the Wheel," 1861, Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. VI, 903, 926. We have to say here that even if this edition of documents is not perfect, their substantial authenticity seems to us beyond question.

55. "Dream of Hell," 1868, Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. IX, 169 (English ed., p. 87).

56. "Dream of the Valley," 1875, E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. XI, 259 (English ed., pp. 241-42).

57. "Dream about a Visit to Lanzo," Bosco's letter to the boys at Lanzo, Feb. 11, 1871, A. Amadei, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. X, 43 (English ed., pp. 35-36).

58. E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. XVII, 384.

59. Cf. G.B. Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. III, 28-30 (English ed., pp. 22-24); vol. V, 694 (English ed., p. 458). vol. VII, 68-77 (English ed., pp. 45-51). The details of these happenings and their interpretation by some biographers who are eager for other worldly phenomena have to be carefully scrutinized, but Don Bosco certainly believed in the devil's activity in his life, and for us this is essential.

60. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 50-52, 91-92.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

62. G. Bosco, *Il giovane*, Turin 1847, "Things to be especially avoided by young men," Art. 2. "Avoidance of bad companions," pp. 21-23, a constant theme of Don Bosco: cf. *op. cit.*, 101st ed., 1885, pp. 20-22.

63. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, p. 21 (English ed., p. 41).
64. "The whole world is under the evil one." . . . (Cf. Bosco's letter to J. Bonetti, Apr. 17, 1870, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 85) Don Bosco quoted 1 Jn. 5, 19.
65. Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. IX, 986 (omitted in English ed.): Bosco, Note *autografe di conferenze*. (cf. also Doc. 26 below).
66. G. Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo*, I, *Regolamento per le case*, Turin, p. 4.
67. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., 1880, p. 42 (English ed., p. 64).
68. G. Bosco, *Vita di San Pietro*, Turin, 1856, p. 101. Cf. in the part of the Life of Don Bosco this short section of a dream of September 10, 1881, according to the version written by him: "This should be a topic for preachers, morning, noon, and night. Gather together bits of virtue and you will build up a great structure of holiness. Woe to you if you despise small things: you will fall little by little (ACS., S. 111, Sogni; E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XV, 184).
69. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, ed. cit., ch. 6-10, titles.
70. G. Cafasso, *Manoscritti vari*, VI, 2590 A; cf. F. Accornero, *La dottrina spirituale di San Giuseppe Cafasso*, Turin, 1958, p. 44.
71. *Ibid.* The following text, whose author is unknown to us, is found in a booklet published by Don Bosco during his last years: "We will say with Saint Philip and Saint Francis de Sales, that it is not true that holiness consists in doing very difficult and extraordinary things so that few people can attain it. No. it consists in doing well whatever we have to do. But if someone believes he can reach this goal with very little effort or with flighty good resolutions, we would say that he can't." (Anonymous, *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti negli anni 1883 e 1884*, Turin, 1885, p. 29).
72. About this matter, cf. Ch. Baumgartner, art. "Contemplation," in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. II, col. 2180-2183. Recall Thessalonians 4:3 "For this is the will of God, your sanctification."
73. It is in this sense that we should interpret the following reflection of Dominic Savio: "Whoever wishes to do the will of God, wants to become holy. Do you, then, wish to become a saint?" (G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 86 (English ed., p. 63). This fact might go unobserved.
74. Quotations of unpublished manuscripts, found in F. Accornero, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-55.
75. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., Turin, 1880, pp. 40-41

(English ed., p. 63).

76. *Porta teco*, Turin, 1858, p. 7 (cf. also Doc. 11 below). Cf. also G. Bosco's letter to G. Bongiovanni, Jul. 29, 1857, *Epistolario*, vol. 1, 150 (and also Doc. 9, below). The theme of the universal call to perfection was equally underlined in *Il Giovane provveduto*. Don Bosco urged his boys, for instance, to say the following prayer during the course of the day: "Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, Saint Joseph, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, obtain for me the grace of becoming a saint." (G. Bosco, *Il giovane*, 101st ed., Turin, 1885, p. 83).

77. Cf. A. Amadei, *Il servo di Dio Michele Rua*, Turin, 1931-1934.

78. "The task of becoming holy and trying to reproduce in ourselves the image of the prototype, of the model *par excellence*, Jesus Christ, is certainly a very difficult and risky business, especially if we consider how weak our efforts are in comparison to what has to be done to reach that goal. To carry the cross with Jesus, the cross of being despised, of humility, of obedience, of resignation, of self-denial and of the renunciation of everything which is carnal and worldly, demands very much from our corrupt nature which is attached to base things of this world. There is no doubt about it: the way which leads to Paradise is difficult . . ." (*Biografie dei Salesiani defunti negli anni 1883 e 1884, op. cit.*, pp. 65-66: the beginning of the anonymous sketches by Giovanni Battista Fauda, a cleric.

79. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., 1880, p. 40. This passage is not different from the first edition of 1859.

80. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele, ed. cit.*, p. 6.

81. Formula of G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., 1880, p. 66 (English ed., p. 93) in reference to Dominic Savio.

82. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 123.

83. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele, ed. cit.*, p. 5.

84. "It is true that I keep thinking often about what you have told me repeatedly: 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me.'" (Passage from a letter of Carlo Cays to G. Bosco, found in the *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti nel 1882*, S. Pier d'Arina, 1883, pp. 28-30: unsigned entry S.V. "C. Cays") A reading of Don Bosco's correspondence confirms this statement by Count Cays.

85. G. Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo, I, Regolamento per le case*, Turin, 1877, pp. 4-6; Bosco's letter to Prince Gabrielli, from Rome, 1879. *Epistolario*, vol. III, 481-482.

86. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele, ed. cit.*, p. 49.

87. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 23.

88. G. Bosco's letter to Mrs. Quisard, Apr. 14, 1882, *Epistolario*, vol. IV, 436.

89. Cf. Bosco, *Il Cattolico istruito nella sua Religione*, Turin, 1853; *Una disputa tra un avvocato e un ministro protestante*, Turin, 1853; *Due conferenze tra due ministri protestanti ed un prete cattolico intorno al purgatorio e intorno ai suffragi dei defunti*, Turin, 1857; *Severino, ossia Avventure di un giovane alpigiano*, Turin, 1868 (ch. 24); *Massimino, ossia Incontro di un giovanetto con un ministro sul Capioglio*, Turin, 1874.

90. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 39; 6th ed., Turin, 1880, p. 31 (English ed., p. 54).

91. Dominic Savio's heart was filled to overflowing with "holy joy" at the news that his First Communion was approaching. (Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1880, p. 14 (English ed., p. 33-34). The criticism of the bad boys at Valdocco "chilled hearts" which were made to love (Bosco's letter to the boys of the Oratory of Valdocco, May 10, 1884, *Epistolario*, vol. IV, 267). The heart of Jesus symbolizes his love (talk of Don Bosco on June 3, 1875 according to E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XI, 249 (English ed., p. 231). Michael Magone's "heart" was engulfed in "serious thoughts" (Bosco, *Magone Michele*, ed. cit., p. 35)

92. Cf. above, p. 52.

93. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, ed. cit., pp. 50-51.

94. Bosco's letter to all the boys of the Oratory of Valdocco, May 10, 1884, *Epistolario*, vol. IV, 268.

95. E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol., XIII, 284.

96. Bosco's letter to the students of Mirabello, Dec. 30, 1864, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 332. A similar greeting is found in the Latin letter to Giovanni Garino, Jul. 25, 1860, *ibid.*, p. 196.

97. Cf., for example, for conversation between Don Bosco and Michael Magone, just before Michael's first Confession, found in *Magone Michele*, ed. cit., pp. 16-20, especially this statement: "I want you to allow me to become master of your heart for a moment . . ." (p. 18).

98. G. Bosco, *Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori*, Turin, 1886; in Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X, 1044, note (English ed., p. 450, note 11).

99. We don't believe it is necessary to stop here and discuss the idea of holiness as it has evolved in the last one hundred years.

3

The Supernatural World

Religious Concepts

The uniqueness of a style of spirituality does not depend only on the means which have been used to achieve it: prayer, the sacraments, or apostolic activity. Familiar ideas from one's environment have a very important role. The shock of the Spanish Carmelite, Anne of Jesus, who was suddenly thrust into the Dionysian world of France, in which the person of Christ was substituted by the ineffability of God,¹ is by itself a lesson that like religion, "spirituality" is necessarily objective. Don Bosco's spirituality evidently did not escape from this general law. He lived in a supernatural world with particular ideas of God, of Christ, of Mary, of the saints and of the Church, which led him consciously or not to choose various positions in the spiritual life. It is necessary, then, to look at these options and to clarify them. This clarification is especially needed now because contemporary Christians do not accept very willingly some of these religious concepts. No matter what the opinions are on this subject and no matter how ancient their tradition, these ideas were linked in some way to the nineteenth century.

His Idea of God

We have reason to affirm that the God of John Bosco's infancy was a severe God. Margaret Occhiena, Johnny's mother, had inculcated in him the idea of the universal presence of God and of his rigorous justice, tempered somewhat by his benevolent Providence.² The seminary at Chieri strengthened these ideas, which are found again in the second part of the first work published by Don Bosco in 1844, based on notes taken in the seminary. The God of Luigi Comollo's

sickness and death was a judge. In Don Bosco's dreams and visions, sympathy and understanding were incarnated in the person of the Virgin Mary.³

We know that life eventually gave him a more reassuring idea of God which was also staunchly defended by his teacher, Joseph Cafasso. The God of the Liguorian School was a God of love. His fatherliness and his goodness were keys of Joseph Cafasso.⁴ He used to preach that "God was a father, but a father so unique and so lovable that he not only had no equal in heaven and on earth, but it will always be impossible to imagine another who would be better, more tender, more patient, more affectionate, etc."⁵

John Bosco understood this idea. One of his first works was an anonymous booklet entitled *Esercizio di devozione alla misericordia di Dio*⁶ (Devotion to the Mercy of God), in which he demonstrates how "the Lord gives proof of his goodness for all indiscriminately,"⁷ whether they be good or bad. In the course of his life as a priest, he would insist on the idea of the goodness of God, without, however, forgetting his justice, especially terrible for the sinner when he appears before the divine tribunal after death.

The Idea of God as a Judge Here and in the Hereafter

God, Don Bosco would say, renders to each one according to his works, and this judgment begins right here. This watchful God often punishes in this life the transgressors of his law. "There is a Providence which decides the fate of men and who most of the time makes the oppressors of the weak pay dearly for their sin by allowing them in turn to be oppressed by others."⁸ Apparently, from his earliest youth, John Bosco had relied on this rather distressing explanation of the problem of suffering.⁹ It was destined to become one of his fundamental ideas about the theology of history: the evil a wicked person does has a habit of eventually inflicting itself upon him. He found justification for this in the Bible: "The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and no torment shall touch them."¹⁰ But "he who despises wisdom and instruction is doomed. Vain is their hope, fruitless are their labors, and worthless are their works."¹¹ He would see

also many applications of his theory in the most varied situations in the history of the world. Let us recall some cases: the flood,¹² the tragic death of Romulus,¹³ the adventure of Tarquinius the Proud,¹⁴ the horrible death of Herod "eaten alive by worms,"¹⁵ the destruction of Jerusalem in 70,¹⁶ the sack of Milan at the hands of Frederick Barbarossa in 1162,¹⁷ the tragic death of Ugolino of Pisa at the end of the thirteenth century,¹⁸ etc. The strong arm of Don Bosco's God was not short.

In general, however, God is merciful on earth even in dealing with evil persons, whom in his mercy he does not annihilate. As Father Joseph Cafasso used to say, his justice remains "suspended" and "this earth continues to tolerate me."¹⁹ But with death, everything changes. The difference was clear in the mind of Don Bosco: "the mercy and justice of God are the two attributes which most reflect his divine power. As long as man lives on this earth, it is time for mercy. But once he dies, the time of justice begins."²⁰

His warnings and some descriptions found in his instructive dreams were meant to show "how horrible it is to fall into the hands of a God who is judge,"²¹ and who will scrutinize everything that we have done in our life."²² Don Bosco wrote, in his *Mese di maggio* (Month of May); "Up above us will be an angry judge; on one side our sins will accuse us, and on the other side there will be devils quick to execute our damnation; within us our conscience will agitate and torment us, and below us hell will be ready to swallow us up."²³ At the approach of death, little Michael Magone anticipated the terrible step with great fear: "At the judgment I will be alone with God,"²⁴ and he could only be reassured by invoking the comforting assistance of Mary at that tribunal.²⁵ In a less direct way, Don Bosco repeated this teaching in the *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings), in which he published the life of this young man.²⁶

God, an Infinitely Good Father

Was God's goodness, the second most important attribute of his omnipotence, greater than his justice in Don Bosco's mind? A scrupulous study of his writings and of his words would probably reveal that

towards the end of his life, Don Bosco loved to imagine God as a loving and tender Father. At that time he wanted to realize an ardent desire of his infancy of having a father, even though only in a religious sense. As we know, he had been orphaned at the age of two. This also explains the great concern of his mature years: to be a father to abandoned boys.

God is good, infinitely good. John Bosco would demonstrate this fact especially by referring to God's creation. "In this world, everything that meets the eye speaks to us of the majesty, the power, and the goodness of God the Creator."²⁷ All good things, material and spiritual, come from him. "What sentiments of gratitude, of respect, of love should we not have towards a God who is so great and at the same time so good!"²⁸ From this point of view, all creatures are objects of his goodness.

God is especially benevolent toward children, the baptized, and sinners . . . "God loves children very much," wrote Don Bosco, basing himself undoubtedly on a not too orthodox interpretation of the verse: "My delight is to be with the children of men."²⁹ And what is to be said about the baptized? Although he was by nature somewhat reserved in the way he expressed himself, when he spoke about baptism he almost became lyrical. He would say: "At that moment (of baptism) you become an object of God's special love. In your soul are infused the virtues of faith, of hope and of charity. When you became a Christian, you were able to lift up your eyes to heaven and say: "God, the Creator of heaven and of earth, is also my God. He is my father, he loves me, and he commands me to call him by that name: Our Father who art in heaven!"³⁰ As a priest who worked in an environment still strongly Jansenistic, he often had the occasion of emphasizing the goodness of God towards sinners. This is the theme of his little booklet *Esercizio di devozione alla misericordia di Dio* (Devotion to the Mercy of God). This theme is also found in some of his dreams and in the life of Michael Magone.³¹ "Although he is greatly upset at our offenses, God, in his infinite goodness, puts up with us, spreads a veil over our sins, and waits for us to repent."³² This common teaching was quite understandable if we consider what we explained above.

According to Don Bosco, the list of those especially loved by God is unlimited. He was aware of God's loving influence on his own life and

in that of his disciples. His own autobiography of the years 1873 to 1878 was to a great extent a song of thanksgiving to Divine Providence. As he put it, this writing "will show how God himself has guided me in everything and at all times . . ." ³³ Right after describing his ordination to the priesthood, he exclaims in the words of Mary's *Magnificat*: "How marvelous are the designs of Divine Providence: God has literally taken a poor boy off the land and placed him among the most important of his people." ³⁴

Let us sum up in his own words: "God is merciful and just. He is merciful to those who want to take advantage of his kindness, but he is also rigorously just with those who do not wish to avail themselves of his mercy." ³⁵

Divine Providence: a Father and Judge

According to Don Bosco the two attributes of justice and goodness were united in the person of a provident God, in whom he saw both a father and judge.

It is through the same providence that God rewards the good and punishes the bad. Towards the end of his little morality play entitled "*La casa della fortuna*" (The House of Fortune), the old man Eustachius evidently interprets the feelings of the author. He finds out that when the two orphans he was taking care of reached the house of their grandfather, the coach driver cheated them, but later on he himself was almost murdered. Here Eustachius reflects: "I would like to point out to you and to everyone that this is a frightening lesson. Let us never forget that God's providence exists and watches over the destinies of men. Often it allows the same evils which men do or wish to do to others to fall upon their own heads." ³⁶ It is the Divine Providence of Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*, which rewards and punishes at the same time. ³⁷

Christ According to Don Bosco

Don Bosco's idea of Christ is basically the same as that of God but somewhat more complex. He saw Christ with the eyes of a "Latin" of the nineteenth century who would typically be less familiar with a glorious Christ, who is the living head of his body which is the Church, the principle of unity in the present and future world. Rather he would be familiar with the historical Christ, the master and model of the Christian life, Christ the Redeemer who became man to take away the sins of the world, the Christ of the Eucharist who through his uninterrupted presence down through the ages gives souls God's power and life. He could write words like the following: "Jesus Christ through his death founded the Church and became head of all the just, who were and still are the principal members of his body."³⁸ But towards the end of his life in his spiritual testament to his Salesians, he could mention Christ and spontaneously say: "Jesus Christ, your real superior, will not die. He will always be our master, our guide, our model. But remember that in due time he himself will be our judge and will remunerate us according to our fidelity in his service."³⁹ We should, then, apply to Don Bosco what has been said about Saint Francis de Sales: "In this (Salesian) method, then, Christ does not, strictly speaking, fulfill a primary role and is not considered primarily as the Incarnate Word. He is referred to more as an example to imitate rather than as a mediator to turn to."⁴⁰ We can say nothing more.

Christ, a Loving Companion and a Model to Imitate

The affective spirituality of Don Bosco and the tendency of adolescents to form friendships sometimes led him to consider Christ as a friend and companion, who moreover was the martyr of the way of the cross. He did not dwell on him as a young man or as a worker at Nazareth. It is rather strange, for example, that he should say to his boys: "Why is it that we have so little liking for spiritual things? This is because we love Jesus crucified so little."⁴¹ This preference, not at all morbid, should be considered in a true and reasonable light: in his last hours, Christ showed the fullness of his love for men and thus made

himself most worthy of being loved.⁴² His disciples lived happily in his company: He sustained them and gladdened them. According to Don Bosco, when Francis Besucco was at the point of receiving Holy Viaticum he exclaimed: "If Jesus is my friend and my companion, I have nothing more to fear. Rather I have everything to hope for from his great mercy."⁴³ A few years before, Dominic Savio had used the same words and had asked his master to proclaim this "always" and "to all."⁴⁴ This very little known aspect of Don Bosco's thought must be included in his general teaching about spiritual friendship.⁴⁵

These words of Besucco and Savio, although insistent, do not prevent us, however, from believing that Don Bosco very often saw Christ more as a master and model than as a companion and friend.

Christ is the master of wisdom. In answer to the question "What did Jesus Christ say about himself?" he was to reply: "He said about himself that he was the only Son of God, the Savior promised to men, who came from heaven to earth to show them the road to salvation."⁴⁶ The Savior is a teacher. Not surprisingly, one notices that half of a chapter devoted to doctrinal considerations in his booklet *Il mese di maggio* (The Month of May) and entitled "The Redemption" summarizes the moral teachings of the Gospel.⁴⁷ In fact, he preferred Christ's moral teachings on "penance, and forgiveness of injuries, detachment from riches, the denial of self."⁴⁸ When he decided to devote one chapter of his *Storia sacra* (Bible History) to the parables, he chose those of the "Lost Sheep," the "Prodigal Son," the "Ten Virgins," the "Rich Man and Lazarus," all stories with an easily applied moral.⁴⁹ Without a doubt, he was motivated to do this by his youthful audience, but also by the customs of the nineteenth century and of the traditions of the Liguorian school.

When he was a mere boy, he had been impressed by the rich content of the *Imitation of Christ*.⁵⁰ For him the whole life of Christ was a lesson to ponder and to imitate. It would suffice to look at the first articles of the *Salesian Constitutions* to convince us. He states that "by imitating the virtues of our Divine Savior," the members of the Society will perfect themselves.⁵¹ And elsewhere we find: "the model which every Christian has to copy is Jesus Christ. No one can boast that he belongs to Jesus Christ if he does not endeavor to imitate

him. Consequently in the life and in the actions of a Christian, the life and the actions of Jesus Christ himself should be revealed.”⁵²

We do not hold, however, that all the “mysteries” of Christ were equally the objects of his meditations. It was normal that certain aspects should interest him more than others. When the occasion presented itself, he would point out to his disciples and his boys the obedience of Jesus,⁵³ his extreme humility,⁵⁴ his constant poverty from the crib to the cross.⁵⁵ Let us not forget that the spirit of the age looked to the suffering Christ, broken under the weight of the sins of the world. This was the vision which the readers of his *Mese di Maggio* (Month of May) were supposed to acquire. In fact, he concluded this booklet with this presentation of Christ.⁵⁶ Francis Besucco, a great devotee of the way of the cross,⁵⁷ loved this image of Christ and so did Dominic Savio, who wanted very much to become like Christ crucified.⁵⁸ Just the same, in his maturity and in his old age, Don Bosco allowed himself to act according to his own inclinations and rediscovered the gentle and kindly Christ who looks for the wandering sheep and caresses little children. “Gentleness is the favorite virtue of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁹ The cures described in the Gospels were for Don Bosco signs of Jesus’ “outstanding kindness.”⁶⁰ He wrote very clearly as follows: “Everyone who read the Gospel knows that Jesus Christ was born of a Virgin named Mary by the sole power of the Holy Spirit, that he was born in a stable; that he lived by the work of his hands; and that he possessed all virtues, especially kindness and gentleness.”⁶¹ He could not be more explicit. It is legitimate to conclude, then, that for Don Bosco, Christ was not only an understanding friend, but a suffering master, gentle and kind. Christ reconciled these virtues perfectly with his “zeal for the greater glory of his heavenly Father.”⁶² And Don Bosco loved to point out these same virtues wherever he found them.

Christ the Source of Life

Don Bosco also saw Christ as the mediator of divine life through the mystery of the Eucharist.

His teaching about redemptive Incarnation was rather “negative.”

He believed that the Son of God had become man "to destroy sin,"⁶³ or that he "had come to this world to save sinners"⁶⁴ and through his death free all men from the slavery of Satan.⁶⁵ In a dictionary which he wrote, he defined the Redeemer in these terms: "A name given *par excellence* to Jesus Christ who bought us back from sin, from death and from slavery of Satan."⁶⁶ On a more positive note, he wrote in the life of Dominic Savio that "Jesus Christ shed all his blood to free (our soul) from hell and take it with him to paradise."⁶⁷ It doesn't matter: the life-giving role of Christ is little emphasized in his teaching about the Incarnation.

We have to look elsewhere for his ideas about Jesus as the new life of believers. In general, he used to affirm that "Jesus Christ . . . is holiness itself," "the source of all holiness,"⁶⁸ and that his holiness is the source of strength: "We are not alone. Jesus is with us and Saint Paul says that with the help of Jesus we can become all-powerful."⁶⁹ Christ, the principle of supernatural power, is surely found in the Church which, through the bishops and the Pope, unites Catholics with their invisible head.⁷⁰ But Christ is found in a very particular way in the Eucharist, his most sacred mystery, in which he is present in a very tangible way. When in a short talk on Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, he had to choose two mysteries of Christ's life for the inspiration of his boys, Don Bosco chose that of Jesus crucified and that of the Blessed Sacrament, i.e. that of the Passion and that of the Eucharist.⁷¹ His adherence to the spirit of the Catholic Counter Reformation, reinforced by his militant attitude against Protestantism, brought him to insist on the real presence. We will see that his heroic young men became holy, among other things, through their sacramental and spiritual Communion with the Bread of Life.⁷² Thus it is that where we would expect to hear about the Lord or the Savior, Don Bosco would sometimes, and perhaps frequently, speak about the "sacramental" Christ, that is, the Christ in the tabernacle. He wrote, for example, to a Salesian: "Entrust everything to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Help of Christians and you will see what miracles are."⁷³

We will point out the great place that Mary occupies in his spirituality. First, however, it is necessary to show what he thought of Jesus Christ. It is not possible, in fact, to understand why he recommended with so much insistence the virtues of gentleness and understanding and the practice of the Sacraments of Penance and of the

Eucharist, if one is not aware to what degree Christ, who was "gentle and humble of heart," was his guide and his support in his activities as a man and as a priest.

Mary in Don Bosco's World

Mary was around him everywhere. He first discovered her name on the lips of his mother. She made him recite the *Angelus* three times a day and a least one Rosary daily.⁷⁴ The hamlet where he was raised celebrated the feast of the Maternity in the month of October as its patronal feast.⁷⁵ Obedient to a recommendation of his mother, both as a student and as a seminarian he preferred to associate with boys who were devoted to Mary.⁷⁶ Turin, with its shrine to Our Lady of Consolation, was a Marian city. Besides, we should not forget that his favorite spiritual writer, Saint Alphonsus Liguori, had written the *Glories of Mary*, a very popular book in those days.

The Marian devotion of Luigi Comollo, which Don Bosco himself mentions, is an indication of the atmosphere in Turin. The way in which he describes Comollo's devotion allows us to imagine what the most fervent of his circle of friends thought of this devotion. Comollo recognized without any reservations the loving power of Mary, whom he loved "with tenderness," and for whom he showed his affection with long and burdensome prayers. "From the time he was first able to pronounce the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, he always thought of them with tenderness and reverence . . ." ⁷⁷ "Whenever he spoke about the Madonna (with his confidant—that is, very probably with John Bosco), he appeared to be overcome with tenderness. And after he had told or heard tell about some cure which Our Lady had granted, his face would turn red and sometimes he would be moved to tears and exclaim: "If Mary works so many miracles for this miserable body, how many favors will she not grant to the souls of those who invoke her."⁷⁸ He recited the rosary daily and fervently⁷⁹ and, when he had a little bit of time, the *Little Office of the Blessed Virgin* "with a friend."⁸⁰ "Before Communion he would spend a day of rigorous fast in honor of Mary Most Holy."⁸¹ On Saturdays of each week he would fast in honor of the Blessed Virgin.⁸² At the end of his life, on his death-

bed, he believed that he had seen Mary⁸³ and expired pronouncing the "names of Jesus and Mary."⁸⁴ In 1844 the young priest John Bosco would propose Luigi Comollo as a model of Marian piety for "the seminarians of Chieri."⁸⁵

For Don Bosco Mary was always a most holy mother, very loving and powerful. He promoted devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Mary and the devotion to Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, which had been popular for many centuries.⁸⁶ However, on account of the circumstances of his times and on account of his own personal inclinations, he definitely preferred to speak about the Immaculate Conception and, even more, about the motherly goodness of Mary in the service of the Church.

The Unrivalled Beauty of the Immaculate Conception

The definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary by Pius IX (1854) encouraged him to consider her as the symbol *par excellence* of purity and of holiness. Proofs of this are his thoughts found in his *Mese di maggio* (Month of May) and in the biography of Dominic Savio, the first editions of which were published in 1858 and 1859. The Catholic Church proclaims Mary's holiness by definition that she was exempt from every fault, and she invites us to invoke her with the following beautiful words: "Queen conceived without original sin, pray for us who have recourse to you!"⁸⁷ On December 8, 1854, his disciple, Dominic Savio, "gave his heart" to Mary and begged her to allow him to die rather than commit a venial sin against modesty.⁸⁸

In general, Don Bosco's veneration of the Immaculate Conception rendered him and his imitators uncompromising with their own weaknesses and eager for heroic holiness. This demanding spirit is found in the last article of the regulations of the Sodality of the Immaculate Conception, in the form approved and circulated by Don Bosco. It read: "The society is placed under the protection of the Immaculate Conception, whose title we shall carry and whose medal we shall wear. By our sincere, filial and limitless trust in Mary, our special tender love for her and our constant devotion, we shall succeed in overcoming every obstacle, persevere in our resolutions, be strict with ourselves, loving with others, and exact in everything."⁸⁹

Mary, Mother and Helper

The relative rigidity of such a behavior was moderated by the contemplation of Mary as the Mother of God, and therefore the Mother of Christians. "Having been redeemed by Jesus Christ, we become her children and the brothers of her divine Son. Thus, by becoming mother of Jesus, true God and true man, she also becomes our mother. Jesus Christ in his great mercy wants to call us brothers and by doing so makes us adopted children of Mary."⁹⁰

Even up to about 1862, Don Bosco did not yet speak about Mary Help of Christians. In 1845, in his first edition of *Storia ecclesiastica* (Church History),⁹¹ he does not yet make any reference to the victory of Lepanto under Pius V. It is true that his boys from 1847 on, sang the following song:

"We are sons of Mary:
Let the breeze and wind repeat it,
Let the whole earth echo it
In pleasing harmony.
We are sons of Mary."⁹²

Was this a veiled reference to the Help of Christians even before he honored her with this title? In reality, he had to move gradually from the mother of life to the queen of the world.

About 1863 Don Bosco began to honor Mary under the title of Help of Christians for various reasons, among which was certainly the construction, through his initiative, of a great church at Valdocco, completed between 1864 and 1868. A few years before, in 1862, in the diocese of Spoleto, a miraculous image of Mary, which the archbishop venerated under the title of Help of Christians, had been discovered under very usual circumstances which had occasioned a huge pilgrimage.⁹³ Then also, there was the crisis of the Papal States, which appeared to be without solution. The Church of Peter appeared to be crushed and was desperately seeking miraculous assistance. The title of Help of Christians, already very appealing to him for these reasons, appeared to Don Bosco to be all the more opportune inasmuch as the people of Turin, at least from the eighteenth century on, had become familiar with the Confraternity of Mary Help of Christians which had

been erected in Munich.⁹⁴ Furthermore, Pius IX, who had spoken to Don Bosco about it, appears to have expressed himself in favor of this title.⁹⁵ Nothing more was needed: the church under construction was dedicated to Mary Help of Christians.

From that moment on, Don Bosco would turn to the Help of Christians as mother and queen of Christians and of the Church. A great painting above the main altar of the shrine, executed under his guidance, illustrates the idea which he had of Mary under this title. "Mary most holy stands in a sea of light and majesty; enthroned on banks of clouds and crowned with stars which proclaim her the Queen of heaven and earth. A band of angels, encircling her, do homage to her as their Queen. In her right hand she holds a sceptre, the symbol of her power . . ." ⁹⁶ She is a glorious queen who rules the world and the Church. This is symbolized in the painting by the apostles and by the evangelists Luke and Mark.

Besides building the new church, Don Bosco also published six booklets between 1868 and 1879, to explain and extol this title.⁹⁷ These writings take us back into a period of battles for the survival of Christendom. "The church attributes to Mary the defeat of heresies."⁹⁸ The Help of Christians was the queen of the Battles of Lepanto in 1571 and of Vienna in 1683, and also it was she who saved Pius VII from the prison of Fontainebleau in 1814.⁹⁹ She was and still remains the protector of "the armies which fight for the faith."¹⁰⁰ Whenever Christians find themselves in difficulty, Mary Most Holy intervenes immediately with her powerful help. To Don Bosco it seemed that Mary's help was more than ever needed in his day because there "were never so many lukewarm persons to make fervent, sinners to convert, and innocent persons to protect. The Catholic Church itself is being assaulted."¹⁰¹

It is necessary to add that his devotion to Mary Help of Christians during the last twenty-five years of his life (1863-1888) did not displace his devotion to the most loving mother, the Immaculate Conception, which figured so prominently in the first years of his priestly life. According to the circumstances, he found in Mary all that his soul desired: the well-spring of life, a model not to be equaled, and a victorious source of strength.

The Saints, Models of Perfection

In the painting of the church in Turin, the angels and the saints surround Mary in reverential admiration. The spiritual world of Don Bosco was in fact populated with angels and saints in whom he certainly saw powerful intercessors and, above all, models which Christians concerned about their growth in holiness should imitate.

After his first years of priesthood, when he published a little book entitled *Il divoto dell'angelo custode* (The Devotee of the Guardian Angel),¹⁰² and asked Silvio Pellico to write the beautiful hymn "*Angioletto del mio Dio*" (Little Angel of My God), which he introduced into his *Giovane provveduto*,¹⁰³ Don Bosco did not speak much about angels. At any rate, the angel of the hymn was the angel of good counsel: it reflected the spirituality of Don Bosco summarized in the phrase "Serve the Lord with gladness. You will fear your God, he would say to his soul, "but as a child who is not afraid of raising her eyes to her own father." "Laugh, then, but let your smile be a joy from heaven!" The saints also reveal heaven and Christ to us. Above all they show us that God is admirable. The most outstanding among them "are endowed with such an array of virtues, of knowledge, of courage and of heroic deeds, which makes it very evident to us how marvelous God must be: God is marvelous in his saints."¹⁰⁴

Christians consider the saints also as heroes who are found "in every age, in every place, and in every social condition."¹⁰⁵ Thus they can be imitated by people in every state of life. Admiration for the saints, God's masterworks, should transform itself into a desire to imitate them. "If he can do it, why not I?"¹⁰⁶ In order to edify his readers, Don Bosco wrote books about Luigi Comollo,¹⁰⁷ Saint Vincent de Paul,¹⁰⁸ Saint Martin,¹⁰⁹ Joseph Cafasso,¹¹⁰ etc. The purpose of edifying was also uppermost in the biographies which could be considered more specifically doctrinal in character, such as those of Saint Peter¹¹¹ and of Saint Paul.¹¹² At the end of this last biography, Don Bosco confessed candidly: "It is not necessary to say anything specific about his (Saint Paul's) virtues, since everything that we have said up to this point reveals a pattern of heroic virtues which shone forth in every place and time, and with every type of person."¹¹³ More definitely, what he said about the life of Mary of the Angels could

be applied, making the necessary adjustments, to his sermons, to his books, and even to the biographical sketches in his *Storia ecclesiastica* (Church History). He wrote as follows about Mary of the Angels: "Reader, you will find in the life of Blessed Mary of the Angels a perfect model of virtue and of holiness which can be imitated by every Christian according to his proper state of life. In view of this, I think it is a good thing to publish this summary of the life of this remarkable spouse of Christ in the *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings) so as to offer to our readers a timely means of drawing some spiritual profit."¹¹⁴ The lives of the saints help reproduce the very holiness of God and manifest it to the world.

The Church Visible in the Religious World

According to Don Bosco, God's heaven, Christ's, Mary's and the saints', is made manifest in man's world through the visible Church, which is a papal institution and the only ark of salvation and of holiness.

After his education at the *convitto ecclesiastico*, his struggles in life led him to defend with great energy his ideas about the Church of Peter. The Waldensian propaganda which he strongly opposed, the "Roman question," which made him one of Pius IX's men in Turin, and the creation of the Salesian Society, which Pius supported, encouraged him to defend the theory of one Church strongly united with the Pope of Rome. Without being necessarily involved in all its trials, he belonged to the vanguard of the Church of the nineteenth century represented in France by Joseph de Maistre, Louis Veuillot and Bishop de Ségur, which made an impact on Vatican Council I. He was also loyal to the Pope, whom he considered to be the indispensable source of Church unity.¹¹⁵

The Church Is a "Papal" Institution

Naturally, he regarded the Church as the "daughter of God the father," "the spouse of Jesus Christ" and the "living temple of the

Holy Spirit,"¹¹⁶ but he insisted much more on its earthly, social, and organic aspects than on its mystical dimension. In the tradition of Saint Robert Bellarmine, he defined the Church as follows: "Before ascending into heaven, Jesus Christ founded a Church, which is the congregation of faithful Christians who, under the guidance of the Supreme Pontiff and the lawful pastors, profess the religion established by Jesus Christ and participate in the same sacraments."¹¹⁷ This definition would reappear in similar words or perhaps in even more rigid terms every time he had to speak in precise terms of the Church.¹¹⁸ It is almost a quotation *verbatim* from the definition given by the theologian Giovanni Perrone in his *Catechismo sulla Chiesa cattolica* (A Catechism of the Catholic Church) published in 1854 in the *Letture Cattoliche* (*Catholic Readings*).¹¹⁹

The "kingdom" or the "family" of the Church¹²⁰ has only one head or father without whom there is no Church. According to the testimony of Father Michael Rua during Don Bosco's process of canonization, the first chapter of the Gospel which Don Bosco required of his clerics to memorize was *Mt. 16*: "You are Peter . . ." ¹²¹ Christ built the Church on Peter and Peter has remained its foundation. Peter commands with confidence because he is its head. And he must be obeyed lovingly because he is its father.

Peter is a leader who commands. According to Don Bosco, the various wars which the Church had to endure—wars which he described in his historical works—highlighted this responsibility of the Pope. A comparison of Don Bosco's *Ecclesiastical History* written in 1845 with his *History of Italy* (1855) and *Ecclesiastical History of 1870* shows that his admiration for certain outstanding Popes, especially Gregory VII, Pius V, and of course Pius IX, appears to have grown with the passage of time. In 1870 he described Pope Gregory VII as "one of the greatest Popes who has ever governed the Church,"¹²² and Pius V as "one of the most illustrious pontiffs who has ever ascended the throne of Saint Peter."¹²³

As head of the Church, the Pope is inspired. Nevertheless, we must admit that the period of history when Don Bosco so resolutely defended the infallibility of the papacy was not as definite on this point as those biographers who base themselves on Lemoyne's *Biographical Memoirs* would have us believe.¹²⁴ In 1854 Perrone's *Catechism* put forth

the certain belief that the Pope is infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra* in matters of faith.¹²⁵ But ten years later, the booklet written by Monsignor Lawrence Gastaldi and also published in the *Catholic Readings* was already much more assertive. Monsignor Gastaldi, who would later be a member of Vatican Council I, held that "the Church could declare, whenever she willed, in express terms that whoever did not believe in the infallibility of the Pope was a heretic."¹²⁶ We are not mistaken in believing that this position at this time was shared by Don Bosco, who was the editor of the *Letture* (Readings). At any rate, on the eve of Vatican I, his teaching was not much more clear. "We say that the Pope is infallible . . ." he would state in 1869. And he would support the validity of this position with historical and theological arguments.¹²⁷

He would translate into popular terms his teaching about the Pope as one who commands and teaches: the Sovereign Pontiff is the father of all Christians. This image from family life is very clearly presented, for instance, in his doctrinal summary entitled *Avvisi ai cattolici* (Advice for Catholics), which was published for forty years under this title in various publications and under the title of *Fondamenti della religione cattolica* (Fundamental Principles of the Catholic Religion). "The Roman Church . . . has always been considered as the visible society of the faithful united in the same faith under the guidance of the same head, the Roman Pontiff, who like the father of a large family has guided his children, all the faithful, in the past and will guide them in the future along the path of truth until the end of time."¹²⁸ The history of the Popes of the Church has to be explained and read in this spirit. Don Bosco would say: "Just as a son should naturally want to listen with pleasure to the accounts of the great deeds of his father, so also we as spiritual children of Saint Peter and of his successors, should be very happy to read about the glorious deeds of the Popes, who for eighteen centuries have governed the Church of Jesus Christ."¹²⁹ His defense of Pius IX was an act of filial devotion. He would publicly ask his followers to speak often about the Pope and to pray for him. Several collections were organized among his students to help the Pope. In 1871 Pius IX's jubilee was celebrated with a "feast of the Pope," featuring an attractive program.¹³⁰ According to G.B. Lemoyne, on the occasion of an audience

in January 1867, the Pope asked Don Bosco if his boys loved him, and Don Bosco replied without hesitation: "Do they love you? They have you always in their hearts! For them your name is interwoven with the name of God."¹³¹ We do not know if he actually said these exact words, but certainly this was the desire of a man who had committed his religious society, which he spent a lifetime organizing, to the service of the Supreme Pontiff.¹³²

His ideas were very clear. His teachings and his affection together led him to believe that the autonomy of the bishops in the Church and the initiative of the faithful were limited. All authority was vested in the head. The local hierarchy had to limit itself to receive orders from this authority and to transmit them to the laity. In the charged atmosphere of the years of preparation for Vatican I, he subscribed to statements which in other times, certainly and with good reason, would have been surprising. Take this statement, for instance: "The bishops receive the petitions of the people and listen to their needs; they then take them to the supreme ruler of the Church. The Pope then, as the circumstances warrant it, communicates his orders to the bishops of the world, and they in turn make them known to the ordinary Christian faithful."¹³³ The turmoil of his times does not suffice to explain this view. From as far back as the troubled times of 1848, this key idea of his had been expressed in this fundamental formula: "Our pastors, especially our bishops, unite themselves with the Pope, and the Pope unites himself with God."¹³⁴ For him the Pope was truly an extension of Christ in the world.

The Church Is the Only Ark of Salvation

This Church, governed by the Pope, is the only ark of salvation and even more of holiness.

It alone is holy, it alone is divine, it alone can lead men to God. Don Bosco was guided by this conviction, which explained among other things his constant battle against the Waldensians. He circulated hundreds of thousands of copies of excerpts from his works which explained that "there is only one true religion," that "the churches of the heretics do not have any divine character," and that "the Church

of Jesus Christ is not found in the churches of the heretics.”¹³⁵ In effect, Jesus Christ is with the Pope, whom the heretics have abandoned. In accordance with his theology, Don Bosco would make his own such statements as the following: “He who is united to the Pope is united to Jesus Christ, and whoever breaks this tie undergoes shipwreck in the stormy sea of error and is miserably lost.”¹³⁶ Or another statement like: “Fortunate are those who are united with Peter in the person of the Popes, his successors. They walk the road to salvation, while those who find themselves off this road and are not united with Peter do not have any hope whatsoever of salvation because Jesus Christ has assured us that holiness and salvation can be found only if one is united with Peter, upon whom rest the immovable foundations of his Church.”¹³⁷ There is only one Church which is the mother of all men, and that is the Church of Peter.

Those who are acquainted with the life of St. John Bosco know how much his zeal was motivated by this idea. His apostolic activities, whether journalistic, liturgical, or scholastic, must be considered in the light of his ideas on the Church. It is necessary not to overlook this influence even in the idea which he had of holiness. Whoever wants to become holy must be closely united with the Church and with the successor of Peter. The duty of the faithful who agree with this definition of Christianity is to accede to the directives, the manifest intentions and even the simple wishes of the universal shepherd. In his mature years—and certainly during the time of Pius IX and Leo XIII—Don Bosco clearly saw the Pope as the representative of God on earth. His faith, his hope and his charity were inspired by this vision of the Church, which the spirit of the times focused on the Holy See.

The Religious World of Don Bosco

Don Bosco did not confine his religious outlook to the visible, institutional Church. We know that his religious world was infinitely broader. It would not be incorrect to describe him as being theocentric or Christocentric. But the type of love which he manifested for the visible Church merits deeper reflection. These activities were a good index of his temperament. All things considered, in Don Bosco's

spiritual universe concrete beings occupied a very prominent position, while the profound mystery of God, of the Church, and even of the Holy Spirit appeared quite infrequently. And when we try to find out why he definitely preferred to be among ordinary people, the reason was certainly his effort to be down to earth. A country boy in his youth, a man of affairs in his mature years, and always Piedmontese—that is, with little inclination for nebulous and ineffective projects—he mistrusted all types of abstraction, even books which were too theoretical. He also applied this tendency to his vision of the religious world. He had lived under the watchful eye of a God who was both judge and father, in the company of an historical Christ who was gentle and good, of a Eucharistic Christ “present in the tabernacle,” in the company of the Immaculate Virgin and Queen “awesome as an army in battle array,” and the company of legions of angels and saints who could point out the way of salvation and of perfection to men of “every age and condition.” We can explain his mentality by considering his education, the signs of the times, and the needs of his audience and of his readers. He preferred to be practical in all things. And he applied this same tendency in choosing the best means to achieve holiness: he always opted for the most simple, the most solid, and therefore for these very reasons, the best means.

NOTES

1. Cf., for example, J. Dagens, *Berulle et les origines de la Restauration catholique* (1575-1611), Bruges, 1952, p. 208.

2. Some information about Margherita Occhiena's maxims is found in G.B. Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. I, 44-45 (English ed., p. 34 ff.); one should be careful not to believe that they were dreamed up by the compiler.

3. G. Bosco, *Cenni Storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo*, Turin, 1844, ch. 4-5, pp. 42-72. These chapters were based on a sketch found in the manuscript *Infermità e morte del giovane Chierico Luigi Comollo*, written by John Bosco, his fellow student, and preserved at Turin in the ACS., S. 123, Comollo.

4. Cf. the chapter on "Confidenza," in F. Accornero, *La dottrina spirituale di S. Giuseppe Cafasso*, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-130.

5. G. Cafasso, *Manoscritti vari*, vol. VIII, 2444 B.; in F. Accornero, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

6. G. Bosco, *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio*, Turin. This book appeared between 1846 (since it includes a document from that year, p. 12) and 1856, because it is mentioned in Don Bosco's last will and testament of July 26, 1856, according to the version in A. Amadei, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. X, 1333. [This reference is found in a list of Don Bosco's writings, compiled by him in 1856. Omitted in the English edition volume X, it is given earlier in English ed., vol. V, 472 - trans.] P. Stella (*Valori spirituali*, p. 51) has uncovered some references to the *Esercizio* in *Il giovane provveduto* of 1847, but the similarities which he mentions are not convincing. Nonetheless, the chronology which Don Bosco follows in his last will leads us to date this booklet from around 1847.

7. G. Bosco, *Esercizio*, *ed. cit.*, "primo giorno," p. 29.

8. Bosco, *Storia d'Italia*, 5th ed., Turin, 1866, p. 223. A similar idea is found in the same work, pp. 24, 25.

9. We read, in fact, in a record of a conversation with Luigi Comollo: "It is the hand of God which weighs heavy upon us. Believe me, our sins are the reason for this." (G. Bosco, *Luigi Comollo*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1854, Chapter 4, p. 50), an idea which is not found in the preceding edition (Chapter 4 p. 42) and which was probably suggested by the natural flow of the conversation.

10. Wis. 3,1, quoted among the *Massime morali ricavate dalla Sacra Scrittura* in the appendix of G. Bosco's *Maniera facile per imparare la Storia Sacra*, 5th ed., Turin, 1877, p. 100.
11. Wis. 3, 11, quoted *ibid.*, according to the *Latin Vulgate*.
12. G. Bosco, *Maniere facile*, *ed. cit.*, #6, pp. 18-19.
13. G. Bosco, *Storia d'Italia*, 5th ed., Turin, 1866, p. 13.
14. G. Bosco, *Storia d'Italia*, *ed. cit.*, pp. 24, 25.
15. G. Bosco, *Vita di San Pietro*, Turin, 1856, p. 121.
16. G. Bosco, *Maniera facile*, *ed. cit.*, #28, pp. 78-79.
17. G. Bosco, *Storia d'Italia*, *ed. cit.*, "epoca terza," p. 223.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
19. *Esercizi spirituali di S. Giuseppe Cafasso al clero*, Turin, 1955, p. 173.
20. G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, 8th ed., Turin, 1874, eighteenth day, pp. 116-117.
21. *Ibid.*, sixteenth day, p. 107.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
23. *Ibid.*
24. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, *ed. cit.*, p. 70.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
26. The biographies written by Don Bosco did not have merely a documentary purpose, but were also meant as an instruction. We cannot say this often enough.
27. G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, *ed. cit.*, first day, p. 29.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
29. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, Part I, Article 2, pp. 10-11; and repeated in all the editions (cf. the 101st ed., 1885, pp. 10-11). The same idea is found in Bosco, *Porta teco*, Turin, 1858, p. 42; it was included in the second edition of this book, Turin, 1878, p. 49. P. Stella points out that for this idea found in *Il giovane provveduto*, Don Bosco was indebted to Charles Gobinet and to his followers. (P. Stella, *Valori spirituali*, pp. 27, 98). As so often happens, a book could have reminded him of the words of the Bible and of the life of Jesus Christ.
30. G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, *ed. cit.*, ninth day, p. 69. This idea is found again in another important statement inspired by a thought from Saint Alphonsus and repeated by Saint John Bosco throughout

his life in various editions of *Il giovane provveduto*: "He made you his child through holy Baptism. He loved you and loves you as a kind-hearted father, and the only purpose for which he created you is to be loved and served by you in this life in order to make you happy in Paradise." G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, p. 32. Only the style was revised in the 101st ed., Turin, 1885, p. 36.

31. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, ed. cit., pp. 16-24.

32. G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, ed. cit., p. 128.

33. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, introduction, p. 16.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

35. G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, ed. cit., twentieth day, p. 131.

36. G. Bosco, *La casa della fortuna*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1888, Act II, Scene 4, p. 45. The identical thought is found later on in the same booklet (Act II, Scene 5) p. 52; G. Bosco, *Storia d'Italia*, 5th ed., Turin, 1866, p. 244.

37. A recent commentator of *I Promessi Sposi* is inclined to separate the two aspects of Divine Providence: its goodness and its justice, which he is surprised to see combined. (M.F. Sciacca, *Il pensiero italiano nell'eta del Risorgimento*, 2nd ed., Milan, 1963, p. 219).

38. G. Bosco, *Storia sacra*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1863, *Storia sacra del Nuovo Testamento*, "Introduzione" (*Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 286).

39. G. Bosco, *Testamento spirituali*, circa 1884, in E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. XVII, 258.

40. L. Cagnet, *La spiritualité française au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, 1949, p. 52.

41. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, *Le Sei domeniche e la Novena di S. Luigi Gonzaga*, Sixth Sunday, p. 66. A little later it will be included in the Fifth Sunday: cf. *Il giovane provveduto*, 101st ed., Turin, 1885, p. 63.

42. Cf. Bosco, *Storia sacra*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1863, ch. 9 (in *Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 334): it is a talk given in preparation for the feast of the Sacred Heart in 1875, found in E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XI, 249 (English ed., p. 231).

43. G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi*, Turin, 1864, p. 158.

44. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 112. It will be found later in ch. 24; cf. the 6th ed., Turin, 1880, p. 110 (English ed., p. 136).

45. Cf. below, ch. 4, note 107.

46. G. Bosco, *Maniera facile per imparare la Storia sacra*, 2nd ed.,

Turin, 1855, #20 (*Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 57). The formula is exactly as that found in the 5th ed. of that booklet: Turin, 1877, p. 59.

47. G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, 8th ed., Turin, 1874, third day, pp. 36-38.

48. G. Bosco, *Storia sacra*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1863, ch. 4 (*Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 305).

49. *Ibid.*, ch. 6 (*Opere e scritti, ibid.*, pp. 316-320).

50. Cf. above ch. 1, pp. 18 and 30.

51. *Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales*, a manuscript, chapter: "Scopo di questa congregazione," art. 1-2 (cf. below Document 12). The "Christian perfection" of the members mentioned in subsequent editions, that is, after around 1864—the edition approved by Rome in 1874 stated: "So that the members striving together for Christian perfection"—is referred to as the perfection "of the imitation of Jesus Christ" in the preceding versions.

52. G. Bosco, *La Chiave del Paradiso*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1857, p. 20.

53. G. Bosco, *Introduzione alle Regole o Costituzioni*, Turin, 1877, p. 21.

54. G. Bosco, *Storia sacra, ed. cit.*, ch. 7 (*Opere e scritti, ibid.*, p. 325).

55. G. Bosco, *Introduzione alle Regole o Costituzioni, ed. cit.*, p. 28. On the other hand we are not unaware that this introduction, based on a draft written by Don Bosco's collaborators, does not necessarily reveal his usual thinking on all points.

56. G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, 8th ed., Turin, 1874, "primo giorno," p. 191.

57. G. Bosco, *Il pastorello*, Turin, 1864, p. 53; pp. 60-61; p. 102.

58. G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., Turin, 1880, pp. 65,70,103,108,114 (English ed., pp. 90,95,127,135,140).

59. G. Bosco, *Introduzione alle Regole o Costituzioni, ed. cit.*, p. 35.

60. G. Bosco, *Storia sacra, ed. cit.*, ch. 5 (in *Opere e scritti, ibid.* p. 313).

61. G. Bosco, *Storia sacra, ed. cit.*, "Introduzione alla Storia Sacra del Nuovo Testamento" (*Opere e scritti, ibid.*, p. 285).

62. "Question: 'Of which virtues did Jesus Christ give us an example?' Answer: 'Jesus Christ has given us an example of all virtues, but especially of charity, patience, and zeal for the glory of His heaven-

ly Father.' "(Bosco, *Maniera facile*, 5th ed., Turin, 1877, p. 59). After 1870, Don Bosco was very anxious to exalt the Heart of Jesus along with his fellow Catholics. This devotion, it is true, had an important place in his spiritual thinking rather late in his life. *Il giovane provveduto* of 1847 had only the "Chaplet of the Sacred Heart of Jesus" (p. 105), without any explanation of the devotion. There was also nothing more in the first editions of *Chiave del Paradiso* (Turin, 1856). As regards *Il giovane provveduto*, the situation remained the same until 1874 (39th ed.). The article: "Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and a brief prayer (Offering to the Sacred Heart of Jesus to be said before his holy picture)" seems to have appeared only in 1878 (75th ed.) and the Promises made by Jesus Christ to Blessed Margaret Alacoque only in 1885 (101st ed.). His *Chiave del Paradiso* of 1881 (3rd ed., small format, p. 10) contained a picture of the Sacred Heart with a saying by Margaret Mary. One may think that Don Bosco knew enough about the devotion, which had been promoted before him by Saint Alphonsus. It seems, rather, that the pressure of the times, probably also pressure from some of his collaborators, to whom we may attribute the subsequent additions in his devotional books, moved him to become a promoter of this devotion at the end of his life. The first lines of the "instruction" quoted above read: "My dear boys, listen to how the devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is growing more and more every day, had its origin . . ." Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 101st ed., Turin, 1885, p. 119, would justify this interpretation.

63. G. Bosco, *Storia sacra*, ed. cit., ch. 3 (*Opere e scritti, ibid.*, p. 302).

64. *Ibid.*, ch. 6 (in *Opere e scritti, ibid.*, p. 316).

65. *Ibid.*, ch. 7 (in *Opere e scritti, ibid.*, p. 323).

66. *Ibid.*, "Dizionario dei vocaboli, s.v. Redentore" (in *Opere e scritti, ibid.*, p. 392).

67. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., Turin, 1880, p. 104 (English ed., p. 128).

68. G. Bosco, *Il cattolico nel secolo*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1883, p. 146.

69. G. Bosco's letter to Sr. Maddalena Martini, (Aug, 1875), *Epistolario*, vol. II, 492.

70. Cf. further ahead.

71. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851: *Le Sei domeniche*, p. 65. The text did not change in Bosco's *Le Sei domeniche*, 8th ed., Turin, 1886, p. 32.

72. Cf. also ch. 4.

73. G. Bosco's letter to G. Cagliero, Nov. 13, 1875, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 518.

74. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, pp. 21-22, 24.

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

77. G. Bosco, *Luigi Comollo*, Turin, 1844, p. 5.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

80. *Ibid.*

81. *Ibid.*

82. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

85. *Ibid.*, according to the preface of the first edition, p. 3.

86. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851: "Prayer to the Most Sacred Heart of Mary," p. 108; cf. also the allusions to the Heart of Mary and to the Sorrowful Mother in the *Life of Dominic Savio*, (6th ed., Turin, 1880, pp. 55, 56) and in the booklet on the apparitions of Our Lady of La Salette (Bosco, *Apparizione della Beata Vergine sulla Montagna di La Salette con altri fatti prodigiosi*, Turin, 1871; these also appeared in Bosco, *Raccolta di curiosi avvenimenti contemporanei*, Turin, 1854, pp. 46-83). On the beginnings of this devotion in the Middle Ages and its full development in modern times, cf. E. Bertaud, *Doumeurs*, in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. III, col. 1689-1701.

87. G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, 8th ed., Turin, 1874, p. 20. Cf. the whole chapter of introduction.

88. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 40; unchanged in the 6th ed., Turin, 1880, pp. 32-35 (English ed., p. 55). This text is close to an account by Don Bosco on Nov. 28, 1876, according to E. Ceria, whole chapter of introduction.

90. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 81. Cf. the edition of 1880 p. 77 (English ed., p. 99). The association of boys, called the Company of the Immaculate Conception took on a definite form in 1856 at the Oratory of Valdocco, under the leadership of Dominic Savio, among others. The first Salesians were formed in this spirit.

90 G. Bosco, *Il mese*, ed. cit., p. 21.

91. G. Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica*, Turin, 1845, "epoca quinta" (in

Opere e scritti, vol. I, 124).

92. Cf. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, pp. 340-341. As far as we know, this hymn is found in all the editions of the prayer manual.

93. The account, according to Archbishop Arnaldi of Spoleto, is found in Bosco, *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio Invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Turin, 1868, pp. 95-103. Cf. also the article documented by P. Brocardo, "L'Ausiliatrice di Spoleto e Don Bosco," in *Accademia Mariana Salesiana*, "L'Immacolata Ausiliatrice," Turin, 1955, pp. 239-272.

94. The details are found in Bosco, *Maraviglie*, *ed. cit.*, pp. 104-106. Cf. about this confraternity, C. Mindera, *Origine e sviluppo del culto di Maria Auxilium Christianorum in Germania, Accademia Mariana Salesiana* "L'Ausiliatrice della Chiesa e del Papa," Turin, 1953, pp. 77-90.

95. G. Bosco, *Maraviglie . . . ed. cit.*, p. 108-109.

96. G. Bosco, *Maria Ausiliatrice col racconto di alcune grazie*, Turin, 1875, ch. 6, pp. 54-55. To underscore the new form which Don Bosco's Marian piety assumed, let us note the rather late appearance in the *Giovane provveduto* of a first hymn, with a very significant first verse: "O del Cielo gran Regina" (O great Queen of Heaven), a verse which the first two editions of 1847 and 1851 did not have. We find it in the manual of 1863 (9th ed.), the approximate date of its inclusion, but it had already been included in editions which have disappeared between 1851 and 1863. This hymn is evidence of Don Bosco's insistence on honoring the queenship of Mary.

97. Cf. the bibliography given below.

98. G. Bosco, *Maria Ausiliatrice*, *ed. cit.*, p. 9.

99. G. Bosco, *Maraviglie*, *ed. cit.*, pp. 71-80, 89-94.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

101. *Ibid.*, "Preface," pp. 6-7.

102. G. Bosco, *Il Divoto dell'Angelo Custode*, Turin, 1845.

103. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, Turin, 1847, (Cf. the 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, pp. 358-359). This hymn has been "traditionally" attributed to Silvio Pellico (cf. Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. II, 133; (English ed., p. 105).

104. G. Bosco, from a panegyric in honor of Saint Philip Neri, 1868, found in Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 214 (omitted in the English ed.). The same idea is found in reference to the Blessed Mary of the Angels and to Catherine of Racconigi, in Bosco, "Prefazione alla biografia

anonima," *Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1866, pp. 3-4; and in Bosco, *Cenni storici intorno. . . B. Caterina de' Mattei da Racconigi*, Turin, 1862, p. 3.

105. G. Bosco, *Al lettore*, in *Le Sei domeniche e la Novena di San Luigi Gonzaga*, 8th ed., Turin, 1886, p. 3.

106. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., Turin, 1880, p. 5 (English ed., p. 24).

107. G. Bosco *Luigi Comollo*, Turin, 1844, pp. 3-4 (cf. also Doc. 6 below).

108. G. Bosco, *Il Cristiano guidato. . . secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo de' Paoli*, Turin, 1847, pp. 3-4.

109. G. Bosco, *Vita di San Martino*, Turin, 1855.

110. G. Bosco, *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso*, Turin, 1860.

111. G. Bosco, *Vita di San Pietro*, Turin, 1856.

112. G. Bosco, *Vita di San Paolo apostolo*, Turin, 1857.

113. G. Bosco, *op. cit.*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1878, ch. 33, pp. 149-150.

114. G. Bosco, *Prefazione alla Vita della Beata Maria degli Angeli*, *ed. cit.*, p. 4.

115. To understand the ideas of the time, cf. the collection *L'Ecclésiologie au XIX^e siècle* (coll. *Unam sanctam*, 34), Paris, 1960.

116. These statements which are found towards the end of Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica, nuova ed.*, Turin, 1870: "What is to be learned from Church history," p. 369 (Cf. *Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 503) were not in the corresponding passage of the first edition (Turin, 1845, cf. *Opere e scritti, ibid.*, p. 155); this would lead us to believe, along with other evidence, that they were not familiar to Don Bosco.

117. G. Bosco, *La Chiave del Paradiso*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1857; a compendium of what every Christian should know, believe, and practice, p. 10 (cf. R. Bellarmino, *Disputationes de controversiis christianae fidei*, "quarta controversia," *lib. III*, ch. 2).

118. It is found, more simplified and blunt, in Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica*, Turin, 1845: "Nozioni Preliminari" (*Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 13), a very close definition, almost word for word, to that found in the edition of 1870 of this work, p. 6 (*Opere e scritti, op. cit.*, p. 242). The definition is similar to that found in *Chiave del Paradiso* of 1857 in Bosco, *Il centenario di S. Pietro apostolo*, Turin, 1867, triduo, pp. 202-203; in the 3rd ed. of Bosco, *La Chiave del Paradiso*, small format, Turin, 1881, p. 24, etc.

119. G. Perrone, *Catechismo intorno alla Chiesa Cattolica ad uso del popolo*, Turin, 1854, lesson I: "About the origin and nature of the Catholic Church," p. 5.

120. The comparison of the Church to "a kingdom, an empire, a republic, a city, a fortress, a family" is found in Bosco, *Il centenario di S. Pietro Apostolo*, Turin, 1867, triduo, p. 206.

121. M. Rua, "Apostolic Process of Canonization," ad 42, in *Positio super virtutibus*, vol. I, 335.

122. G. Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica*, new ed., Turin, 1870, "epoca terza," ch. 5 (*Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 384).

123. *Ibid.*, "epoca quinta," ch. 3 (*Opere e scritti, ibid.*, p. 442). Whatever John Bonetti's contribution was in this edition, the fact remains that Don Bosco accepted it.

124. To show that Don Bosco favored the doctrine of papal infallibility as early as 1848 when he published his *Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo de' Paoli*, Lemoyne (*Memorie*, vol. III, 380; English ed., p. 269) used a later version of this book. In the "giorno vigesimo secondo" section there was a chapter entitled "The Christian's filial attachment and submission to the Supreme Pontiff" (cf. 3rd ed., Turin, 1887, pp. 173-184), which was not found yet in the edition of 1848. This edition had in its place a title which was to disappear later: "On conformity to the will of God" (1st ed., 1848, pp. 228-234).

125. G. Perrone, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

126. L. Gastaldi, *Sull'autorità del Romano Pontefice*, 1864, ch. 3, p. 75.

127. G. Bosco, *I Concili generali e la Chiesa cattolica*, Turin, 1869, p. 52 ff.

128. G. Bosco, *Avvisi ai Cattolici*, Turin, 1850, p. 13. Cf. Bosco, *Fondamenti della Cattolica religione*, Turin, 1883, p. 8; and we should take note of the fact that the image of father and children applied to the Pope and the faithful is found later on, in a passage of the booklet (p. 28): it is missing in *Avvisi ai cattolici*, which was the first version of *Fondamenti*.

129. G. Bosco, *Vita di S. Pietro*, Turin, 1856, pp. 6-7.

130. Cf. Bosco's letter to J. Bonetti, June 13, 1871, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 164.

131. Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. VIII, 719 (English ed., p. 313).

132. Cf., about this conclusion, his words to Cardinal Alimonda, on December 26, 1887, in G. Alimonda, *Jean Bosco et son siècle*,

French translation, Nice, 1888, pp. 54-55.

133. G. Bosco, *Il centenario di S. Pietro*, Turin, 1867, p. 211. Cf. also Bosco, *La Chiesa Cattolica e la sua Gerarchia*, Turin, 1869, ch. 4, especially p. 75.

134. G. Bosco, *Avvisi ai cattolici*, Turin, 1853, epigraphs.

135. *Ibid.*, "titles #2,3,4." The title of #4 was to be changed; later it would read: "The Church of Jesus Christ is not the Church of the heretics" (Bosco, *Fondamenti della Cattolica Religione*, Turin, 1883, #4).

136. G. Bosco, *Il centenario di S. Pietro*, Turin, 1867, *Presentation*, p. v.

137. *Ibid.*, p. 190. We could add, along with many other similar statements, the following answer to a question: "Can those (heretics) who die as adults be saved!" "Adults who live and die separated from the Catholic Church cannot be saved because anyone who is not with the Catholic Church is not with Jesus Christ, and those who are not with Him are against Him. The Gospel says this" (Bosco, *Maniera facile*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1855, #32; in *Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 70. The statement is identical with that of the 5th ed. of the little book, Turin, 1877, number 31, p. 86).

4

The Means of Perfection

The Means of Perfection

Always a practical man, John Bosco was more interested in how to do things than in the speculative justification of results. When he had set a goal for himself, he would immediately apply to it his quick intelligence and all the available resources to reach that goal. He founded an “oratory” to gather young working boys. He established workshops to give these boys a good secular and religious education and at the same time to remove them from the dangers of the city. Through well-organized publicity he was able to circulate his *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings) throughout the whole of Italy. He founded the association of Salesian Cooperators to bring together people of good will in Italy, in Western Europe, and eventually in the whole world . . . How did he succeed? This is the question. No one will be surprised if he acted the same way on the spiritual plane. Throughout one’s life, one’s soul has to be enlightened, guided, nourished and encouraged by appropriate aids and “instruments.”¹

Don Bosco certainly believed in asceticism and in sanctification especially through the exercise of charity, as we will demonstrate later. But he believed first of all in the guiding power of the Word of God, in the support given by the Sacrament of Penance, in the divine power which the Eucharist gives, and in the spiritual sensitivity effected by spiritual exercises and devotions.

The Word of God

The basic nourishment of the soul is the Word of God. “Just as without food our body becomes ill and dies, so the same thing happens to our soul if we do not give it food. The nourishment and the food of

the soul is the Word of God.”² We must not misunderstand, however, the meaning which Don Bosco gave to the expression “the Word of God.” If we easily took it for granted that Don Bosco meant to refer only to the Bible, which had “God for its author,” we would be greatly mistaken. For him the Bible, which he carefully distinguished from human words, was certainly the pre-eminent Word of God. In an autographed note about the Bible histories which were used in the schools of his time, he pointed out that “Bible histories destined for schools should have three qualities: they should be 1. truthful, 2. moral, 3. discreet.” He said this about the first quality: “Truthful. We are speaking about the Word of God, so whatever is not contained in the holy books should not be included or the reader should be advised about it, so that he might not take for the Word of God what is the word of man.”³

This reservation did not stop him, however, from understanding the expression the “Word of God” to include the teachings of the Church. The passage quoted above from the *Giovane provveduto* (The Companion of Youth), explains the expression: “the Word of God, that is, the sermons, the explanations of the Gospel, and the catechism.”⁴ For Don Bosco, considering the Word of God to be exclusively the text of the Bible suggested “free” interpretation, a grave sin into which—according to him—the Protestants had fallen.⁵ Only the Church is in a position to give the Word of God a true life “when it is listened to carefully. The Word generates faith but it has to be listened to when proclaimed by the sacred ministers and explained by them as Saint Paul said: “Faith, then, comes through hearing, and what is heard is the Word of Christ.” (Rom. 10,17)⁶

The word which inspires the spiritual life produces the same results. Dominic Savio “had a firm conviction in his heart that the Word of God was the guide of man on his way to heaven. Therefore, every saying that he heard in a sermon was for him an unchanging message which he never would forget.”⁷ We know that this young man was very diligent in looking for explanations of the Word of God. According to Don Bosco, “from this practice his exemplary way of life developed, his constant progress from virtue to virtue, his exact fulfillment of all his duties, of excellence to a degree difficult to surpass.”⁸ His holiness, then, was based on a very well-assimilated body of the teachings of the

Church. Don Bosco would have been unable to imagine a work of charity worthy of the name which was not based on faith illuminated by the living Church. With praiseworthy consistency, he gave to the Word of God the first place among the means of acquiring holiness.

Spiritual Reading

To the study of the Word of God he added spiritual reading. The following advice was valid for every "Catholic who fulfills the duties of a good Christian": "During the day, or after morning or night prayers try to do a little spiritual reading. Read, for example, a chapter of the Gospel, the life of some saint, the *Imitation of Jesus Christ*, the *Philothea* and *Introduction to a Devout Life* by Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Alphonsus' *Preparation for Death* or *The Practice of Loving Jesus Christ*, or other similar books."⁹ The first two suggested readings of this list merit some consideration.

At the head of the list we find "a chapter of the Gospel" and the "life of some saint." Nowhere in the writings of Don Bosco do we find him advising someone to read the whole Bible. Convinced though he was of the power of its teaching, nonetheless he wished to "popularize as much as possible the knowledge of the holy Bible" through his *Storia sacra* (Bible History).¹⁰ The preface to the first edition of his *Storia sacra* (Bible History) contains high praise for the Bible, followed, probably out of fear of giving ground to the Protestants, by an effort to tone this down by directing his readers to read Bible stories.¹¹

His *Storia sacra* (Bible History), which according to his preface was first told and then written, shows how Don Bosco read the Bible and got others to read it. He would select particular episodes in the Bible which he would set forth with great care. And whenever a Bible story offered him the opportunity, he would highlight briefly the moral lessons which he thought flowed from the story. After his narration of the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, we read the following: "God always blesses those who are obedient to his commands."¹² After describing the episode of Dinah, who was "insulted" on the occasion of a feast in the neighborhood of Shechem, he writes: "The episode of Dinah teaches us how dangerous public shows are for young people."¹³

After the death of Joseph, the patriarch, he comments: "Those who live a virtuous life are not afraid of the hour of death."¹⁴ He did not neglect the symbolic meaning of the Old Testament. The paschal lamb "prefigures the Savior who, by his blood, rescued us from death and opened for us the road to eternal salvation." The manna "prefigures the Most Holy Eucharist"; the bronze serpent "prefigures Jesus Christ who would have to be raised on the cross on Mount Calvary . . ." ¹⁵ He underlined the Christian meaning of the journey of the Hebrew people through the desert: "It is the pilgrimage which men undertake in this world." The promised land "recalls paradise."¹⁶ In the course of the book he tried to show that "the entire history of the Old Testament can be said to be a faithful preparation of mankind for the extraordinary event of the birth of the Messiah."¹⁷ Naturally, he gave more particular details about Christ in the last part of the book, which told his life.

The Lives of the Saints and Pious Examples

For Don Bosco the Gospel was an account of the most extraordinary life that was ever lived. It was not by chance that he put the Gospel before the lives of the saints in his list of recommended readings for Christians. A hundred years ago, Don Bosco believed in the lived and written power of witness upon the harmonious development of Christians in the spiritual life. The terms might change—he usually speaks about "examples"—but he kept to his principle, the value of which was proved by experience. His method conformed to a tradition of the Middle Ages, which had remained in force in his country. It held that moral truths had to be not only illustrated by "examples" but also supported by them. With the passage of time, in some places which had been tainted by the spirituality of the Reformers or of the Jansenists, "examples" had become suspect in religious literature. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the Italy of Saint Alphonsus Liguori, writers continued to use examples extensively, while in neighboring France, where writers were more intellectual and more skeptical about pious stories, they ordinarily preferred abstract reasoning.¹⁸ It is well known, for example, that when Charles Gobinet crossed the Alps

just before Don Bosco's time, his French spiritual tradition underwent some change.¹⁹ As a Jesuit of the eighteenth century put it, Italian writers who used examples "do not like to use numerous reasons to inculcate virtue nor merely to confirm their teachings with examples, but rather they love to present virtue as already realized or, so to speak, incarnated in the lives of other young people, whose example can more easily be imitated . . ." ²⁰

The pious example, little by little, gained prominence in spiritual writing and took the place of ascetical exposition. This was the case with the book which was the primary source for Don Bosco's *Giovane provveduto* (The Companion of Youth).

The book *Guida angelica* (Angelical Guide) fits Don Bosco's methods perfectly. Ten years before he wrote his own book of devotion he had decided that every day he would relate some good saying or some "example."²¹ It was an application, somewhat remote but still tenable, of the old saying of Saint Maximus of Turin. Don Bosco had this saying written down in a bookmark in his breviary: "Examples are more effective than words and one teaches better with deeds than with speeches."²² A little later, his spiritual biographies were meant to edify Christian readers. Dominic Savio himself, who would become a model held up for imitation by his master, used "examples" as a key technique of his apostolic activity.²³ Michael Magone scrupulously did the same thing, as did many others.²⁴ This preference for example, whether conscious or not, was probably one of the characteristics of the Salesian literature of the first generation.

Be that as it may, those writers ordinarily chose their own examples with good judgment. Don Bosco drew the greater part of his examples from the world familiar to his readers or listeners and did not avoid using stories which had been overused by spiritual writers. Some of these stories can be found in his *Mese di maggio* (The Month of May).²⁵ He did make an effort to appeal as closely as possible to the living conditions and circumstances of his audience. The "examples" found in his works took place, for instance, at Modena²⁶ or Turin at the time of Father Cafasso,²⁷ or even better were eye-witness accounts of Don Bosco from his life at Chieri (Luigi Comollo) or Valdocco (Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, Francis Besucco). For him the convincing power of the virtue of others was more potent if it was proximate in

time. He also held that this phenomenon applied not only to young people, as we might be led to believe, but also to adults. He would say to his Salesians: "Let us always recall that the virtues of others should spur us on to do good, according to the saying of Saint Augustine: 'If he can do it, why can't I?'"²⁸

It has to be noted that in proceeding this way, he did not forget Christ. In fact he referred to him often. He would say, "Try very hard, young men, to imitate Jesus in his obedience. He should be your only model in this."²⁹ The Gospel should come before the lives of the saints. It is the most recommended book of spirituality, the source of daily nourishment for Christians.

The Sacraments

In his concern for the study and the preaching of the Word of God, he did not neglect the sacraments, which he considered essential factors in the spiritual progress of the soul according to traditional Catholic teaching. Besides, they also provide occasions for the proclamation of the message of salvation.

Let us not expect to hear sensational revelations on his part about each of the sacraments, even though he spoke about all of them from Baptism to Matrimony.³⁰ In most cases, he did not present them on a deeper level than that of a modest catechism. According to him, the sacraments were "so many visible signs established by God to give our souls the graces necessary for salvation" and "seven channels through which heavenly gifts are communicated from God to man."³¹ His interest centered on two sacraments in particular, namely, Penance and the Eucharist, which in his judgment excelled the other five in the ordinary daily life of a Christian. Whenever he spoke of the sacraments without any further qualification, he would refer to these two. Father Lemoyne quotes one of Don Bosco's sayings which reflects his thinking very well: "There are two wings with which to fly to heaven: they are confession and communion."³²

The Sacrament of Penance

His ever-increasing esteem for the Sacrament of Penance has to be linked to his fundamental convictions about eternal life, about the effective mediation of the Church, about the worth of man, and about the gravity of sin. During the course of his priestly career, Don Bosco understood ever more and more that the progress of a soul to the heights of divine contemplation is not on a straight line. According to the "dreams" he used to tell, he would spot the boys at his school who had been scarred by sin and had become true friends of Satan. He believed in grave sin. He also believed in hell and he would speak about its existence to his readers and listeners.³³

Upon reflection, however, he was also convinced that God, represented so clearly as the affectionate and long-suffering father of the prodigal son, is mercy personified.³⁴ His goodness is such that he wished to "leave us a plank to save ourselves after our shipwreck." This is how he once described the Sacrament of Penance.³⁵

Don Bosco asked his penitents to understand this sacrament, the proper disposition for its reception and the true role of the confessor.

With reference to the first two points, Don Bosco did not depart from the traditional teaching. He said: "If God had told us that he would pardon our sins only through the Sacrament of Baptism and not those sins which we would unfortunately commit after Baptism, how many Christians would certainly go to hell! But God, knowing our great weakness, established another sacrament in which sins committed after Baptism are forgiven and this is the Sacrament of Confession."³⁶ Its benefits are three-fold or four-fold. It was "instituted by Jesus Christ to communicate to our souls the merits of his passion and death, to break asunder the chains with which the spirit of evil has us shackled, to close for us the gates of hell and open wide the gates of heaven."³⁷ Don Bosco would enumerate without any originality the acts of the penitent, which are "the examination of conscience, sorrow, purpose of amendment, confession, and the penance," underlining the fact that "the most important (dispositions) were sorrow or contrition and purpose of amendment."³⁸ However, his view of the confessor as the agent of spiritual progress of the adult faithful³⁹ was even more instructive.

*The Role of the Confessor in the Spiritual Progress
of the Penitent*

He had learned from Saint Alphonsus the “four functions that the confessor has to exercise; namely, that of father, doctor, teacher, and judge.⁴⁰ For his part he would insist on the functions of father and doctor more than on those of teacher and judge.

First of all, following the example of Father Joseph Cafasso, he believed that the confessional was not suitable as a place for the teaching of doctrine. And so in his listing of the duties of a confessor, the function of *teacher* yielded to that of *guide*.⁴¹ Also the role of judge was toned down considerably in his teaching on pastoral practice, and even more in his practice of the sacrament. In his *Mese di maggio*, he pointed out that the confessor “is a judge, not to condemn us, but to absolve us and free us from eternal death.”⁴² Later on he would not mention this function anymore or hardly at all. According to the *Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, which he carefully reviewed, the sisters should learn that God intends their confessor to be a “father, teacher, and guide of their souls.”⁴³ In vain does one look for the designation of judge in this list. This indicates the final stage of an evolution of thought of which the scholar can determine the beginnings. This evolution must have begun quite early in his life because from the time of Dominic Savio’s presence at the Oratory (1854-1857), Don Bosco would act as follows: If he judged that the guilt of the penitent was only probably, his questions would be aimed above all at determining the integrity of the confession and the sorrow for the sins committed. For him the age of the Jansenistic confessors of the eighteenth century had passed.

The Confessor as Spiritual Father

According to the mind of Don Bosco, of the four roles Saint Alphonsus assigned to the confessor, only the function of father remained. It is, however, not certain that this designation satisfied him completely.

A father commands and protects, so Don Bosco would remind Christians, even if they were Dominic Savios, of their duty to obey

their confessor.⁴⁴ For him “the fatherhood” whether of God or of man evoked not so much the role of authority as that of a good person who helps or assists. More than other teachers of his time, it seems that he rejected the stifling and childish passivity of spiritual paternalism. His love for the term *friend* when he speaks of the confessor proves this fact. He would speak often to his boys about the fact that the confessor was the “friend” of their souls.⁴⁵ He would describe his task in terms of the love and service which are characteristic of friendship. This unique interpretation was of the utmost importance for the confessor who was invited to abandon all patronizing airs, and for the penitent who would expect to find understanding and support.

Friendship is not imposed on people. It is available, generous, ready to offer itself. It is necessary, then, to provide “every opportunity to the students to go to confession whenever they wish to.”⁴⁶ In 1880, in a conversation with Leo XIII, Don Bosco bemoaned the fact that many priests had little concern for this ministry.⁴⁷

A father, who is also a friend, receives with gentleness and simplicity (with *charity*, in Don Bosco’s words) anyone who opens up to him. “Receive with kindness all types of penitents (he would say to confessors) but especially the children.”⁴⁸ It is necessary at all costs to avoid letting them get discouraged. Rather one should try to help them achieve a liberating openness. Friendship requires that the confessor go over the examination of conscience of those less educated, especially of young people. Sacrilegious confessions, which he believed to be many, dismayed Don Bosco. In 1861 he wrote: “I assure you, my dear boys, that as I write, my hand trembles at the thought of the great number of Christians who go to eternal perdition only because they held back or were not completely honest about certain sins in confession!”⁴⁹ To prevent such disasters, and faithful to the advice of Saint Alphonsus,⁵⁰ he helped his penitents express themselves more clearly and completely without embarrassment. He would give examples of these problems in his books.⁵¹ Don Bosco would, however, deal with respect and delicacy with those who gave him their trust. He would say, “Never give harsh reprimands,” but always have that “benign charity recommended by Saint Paul.” “Correct them with kindness, but never scold them.”⁵² “The confessor is a father, who ardently desires to do as much good to you as possible and tries to keep away from you every sort of evil.”⁵³

Confession and Spiritual Direction

As soon as he is aware that his approach is effective, a confessor can progress from being a friend to becoming also a doctor and guide. Don Bosco would consider such a confessor to be an ordinary spiritual director of his penitents.⁵⁴ "However, so that your confessor can give you advice which is appropriate for the good of your soul,"⁵⁵ it is necessary for you to choose him carefully and to go to him faithfully. Following the example of Saint Philip Neri,⁵⁶ Don Bosco became a promoter of the idea of "regular confessors," especially for young people. Unless one does not love him any more, one does not abandon his friend, he would say to Michael Magone in a conversation about confession.⁵⁷ One goes to his friends regularly. Dialogues with the confessor, then, during confession should be frequent, according to the gravity of the sins committed and also the penitent's concern for his own spiritual progress. "Whoever thinks a little about his soul, goes to confession once a month; whoever wants to save his soul, but does not feel too strongly about it, goes every fifteen days; whoever wants to reach perfection, however, should go every week (he would say to his boys). Not more often, though, except when something is weighing upon his conscience."⁵⁸ He made these statements in 1876, but he does not seem to have changed much in this matter afterwards. Between 1859 and 1864, in his instructive biographies of Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, and Francis Besucco, he stated that a conscientious teenager under his direction went to confession every week or at least every fifteen days.⁵⁹

The mere fulfillment of definite functions, however, does not sufficiently explain what the confessor has to do in the Sacrament of Penance. Don Bosco, for his part, did not follow his own directives to the last detail but only in general. His deep spirit of prayer and his clear insight into the hearts of his penitents led the boys of the Oratory to say that when he "read the look on their faces" he could "guess their sins."⁶⁰ Kindness radiated about him ever more with the passing of the years, and created around him an aura which produced unexpected healings. He was quick, however, about putting his penitents at their ease. Like Father Cafasso, he did not get lost in lengthy admonitions.⁶¹ Ordinarily, a short but appropriate word of advice sufficed.⁶² For

example, in reply to Father Vespignani, who asked him how he was to deal with boys who had a habit of sin, he said: "Insist that they go to confession often and remember the eternal truths. Keep repeating to them the phrase 'watch and pray' and encourage them to have devotion to the Sacred Heart and to Mary Help of Christians."⁶³

His chief concern was to elicit from the souls he directed positive acts of repentance and of spiritual progress. He would often deplore the uselessness of confessions, which, though frequent and integral, lacked a firm purpose of amendment. It is necessary to make resolutions in confession, in spite of Satan who has an extreme fear of them.⁶⁴ The mechanical reception of the sacraments did not satisfy him. He wrote to the catechist (spiritual director) of the apprentices at Valdocco: "From the bottom of my heart I recommend frequent Confession and Communion, but both of these sacraments should be received with the proper dispositions so that progress in virtue can be made each time."⁶⁵

God's pardon provides for the soul the indispensable sense of security needed for one's spiritual progress. This pardon is the source of joy and peace.⁶⁶ This is the peace of a son who has been reconciled with his own father. It removes all alienation but is not a gratuitous form of security. After every Confession, the penitent, who also receives spiritual direction, should feel himself moved to reject every form of evil and to practice the virtues which he most needs. Constantly purified by the blood of Christ in the sacrament, he will be spurred on to constant progress. Don Bosco did not separate the Sacrament of Penance from the Eucharist, that most marvelous source of ardent Christian love. To grow in holiness, it is necessary to go to Confession and Communion!

His Teaching on the Eucharist

His teaching on the Eucharist, which was "traditional" and, according to us, solid, was also modelled on the thinking and the language inherited from the Counter Reformation. Consequently, when he spoke of the Eucharist, nine times out of ten he thought not of the Mass but only of Communion.

Just the same he would have occasion to speak about the total mystery of Mass and Communion—always in very restrained terms—without succeeding in harmonizing one with the other satisfactorily. At any rate, his choice of words was simple but profound.⁶⁷ The Mass, he would teach, was the memorial of the Passion. “To assist at the Holy Mass is the same as seeing the Divine Savior leaving Jerusalem and carrying his cross to Mount Calvary. Upon reaching it he is crucified amid the most barbarous torments, shedding his blood to the last drop.”⁶⁸ The offering of the Mass is as real as that of the cross. “The Holy Mass is called the Sacrament and the sacrifice of the body and blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is offered and distributed under the species of bread and wine. This sacrifice was offered by Jesus Christ on Calvary, and this sacrifice is called *bloody*, that is, with the shedding of blood. This same sacrifice is that which is offered in the Holy Mass with the only difference that this sacrifice is unbloody, that is, without the shedding of blood.”⁶⁹ As regards sacramental Communion we read in a text which is, among other things, quite late and therefore possibly the work of a collaborator, that Communion is for Christ “a way of uniting himself with us in a most ineffable union.”⁷⁰ All things considered, his teachings confirm the fact that he was not only aware of the fundamental doctrine of the mystery of the Eucharist but that he knew it quite well.

It is true that he preferred to emphasize some aspects which would be less important in our century: namely, that Christ is really present under the sacred species and is there for the nourishment of the faithful. Thus in his *Storia sacra* (Bible history), after having told the story of the Last Supper of Christ, he continued in these very revealing lines, in which the two truths (the real presence and Communion) seem to constitute the Eucharist as such: “This is the institution of the Blessed Sacrament in which the Savior, under the species of bread and wine, and by means of the power given to priests, gives his body and his blood as spiritual nourishment for our souls. Let us recall well that this sacrament is not a memorial of what Jesus did, but is a sacrament in which the same body and blood which he sacrificed on the cross are given to man.”⁷¹ Such dogmatic preoccupations were not new in 1860. It is now held that these preoccupations had engendered in medieval theologians an “antiliturgical concept (of the Eucharist)

which separated the liturgical action from Communion.”⁷² The ordinary sources of Don Bosco’s education, who had lived in the atmosphere of the Counter Reformation, as also his own polemical struggle against the Waldensians from 1850 to 1860, had driven these ideas deeper into his mind. The Calvinist Reformers with whom he was acquainted did not believe in the real presence at all, or believed in a merely transitory presence at best. So the Catholics of the nineteenth century along with Don Bosco reacted by celebrating the real and continuous presence of Christ under the consecrated species. Besides, Don Bosco would also teach the traditional doctrine about the bread of life, so often explained before him by Saint Alphonsus and by Saint Leonard of Port Maurice, and found in the works of such contemporaries as Bishop de Ségur. In 1872 Don Bosco published in the *Letture Cattolice* (Catholic Readings) Bishop de Ségur’s little book on Holy Communion.⁷³ Since Christ acts out what is signified in the Eucharist he becomes, under the species of bread, a saving nourishment. “Now listen how Jesus Christ invites us to receive Holy Communion. ‘If you,’ he says, ‘do not eat my flesh and do not drink my blood, you will not have eternal life. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I in him, for my flesh is truly food and my blood is truly drink.’ ”⁷⁴

The following observation was more original. Given the fact that all of creation depends on Christ, Don Bosco seems to have believed that the entire world, both animate and inanimate, finds its stability and its strength in the reception of the flesh and blood of the Son of God by Catholics. “What a great truth I tell you at this moment!” he wrote one day. “Frequent Communion is the great pillar which upholds the moral and material world so that it might not collapse into ruin.”⁷⁵ And he would insist: “Believe me, my dear children, I think I do not overstate the fact by saying that frequent Communion is the great pillar upon which one pole of the earth rests.”⁷⁶ He did not fail to bring his own material worries to Christ in the Eucharist, in particular during his visits to the Blessed Sacrament of which we will speak later.

Eucharistic Devotion

These ideas, many of which are not considered so important in the current spirituality of the second half of the twentieth century, justified his advice regarding Eucharistic devotions.

Don Bosco did not live in an age like ours in which Christians try to unite themselves with the prayer of the celebrant. We can, however, discover a tendency in him anticipating modern practice in a little work written with the mentality of his times.⁷⁷ According to the custom of his time and the custom of his country, his boys recited the Rosary during daily Mass.⁷⁸ At a second Mass which they attended on Sundays, they said the *Little Office of the Blessed Virgin*. But we would be mistaken if we were to consider him the only advocate of this practice. However, it seems that he never established it as the only way because he proposed other methods of assisting fruitfully at the Eucharistic Sacrifice. His *Giovane provveduto* (Companion of Youth) and his *Chiave del Paradiso* (Key to Paradise)—works which provided a lot of materials—suggested to the faithful a series of brief prayers in accordance with the flow of the liturgy and they were meant to be read during Masses celebrated in Latin in which the celebrant was not concerned very much about being understood. As we read them today we experience a little distress when faced by such humble prayers as: “Receive, O Lord, the prayers which are being directed to you for me by this priest” which was to accompany a perpetually obscure opening prayer (Collect).⁷⁹ Could a Piedmontese writer of the nineteenth century have done better before the distribution among his readers of translated missalettes?

However the case might be, Don Bosco’s ever-increasing insistence on Communion by the faithful proves that he leaned toward an effective participation of the faithful in the Holy Sacrifice. Christ is there as “Healer, Master, and (above all) as food”:⁸⁰ it is necessary to draw our sustenance from him.

For this reason, little by little he got further away from the common practice of the generation which had preceded him. Without being truly Jansenistic, the Piedmontese hierarchy at that time leaned toward a cautious approach to frequent Communion. At the end of the eighteenth century, a confessor of sisters who had asked the archbishop of

Turin to allow a penitent of his, a lay sister, to receive Communion daily, received the following reply: "Daily Communion is to be permitted only to persons who are of proven and perfect perfection. (sic). Provided Sister Irene Silvestri is truly virtuous and, animated by the Spirit of God, will be humble, docile, and especially obedient to her Superiors, she will be content to be permitted to receive Holy Communion four or five times a week. And if she is not satisfied with this, one can have doubts about the spirit by which she is moved. In this case, she will be allowed to receive Communion less frequently . . ." ⁸¹ Forty years later, as a teenager, John Bosco was surprised when his confessor at Chieri invited him to go to Confession and to receive Communion more often than what he was doing, because as he would immediately note, "it was a very rare thing to find someone who would encourage you to receive the sacraments frequently." ⁸²

When he in his turn became a priest, he opted for frequent Communion. Just the same, for the first twenty years of his priestly life he followed the rules drawn up by Saint Alphonsus. He, therefore, encouraged weekly Communion for Catholics who were well disposed—that is, for those who did not fall into mortal sin or who fell only rarely through frailty and who had resolved to correct themselves. He recommended frequent Communion, that is Communion a couple of times a week, to those who were truly striving to advance in virtue and who abstained from deliberate venial sin. He suggested daily Communion only to those who showed an even more perfect disposition and who corresponded with the graces of the sacrament. ⁸³ He applied these principles to Dominic Savio, his pupil from 1854 to 1857. Up until that time, "according to the practice in the schools," Dominic had gone to Confession and Communion once a month. At Valdocco "he began to go to Confession every fifteen days, then every eight days, receiving Communion with the same frequency. His confessor (that is Don Bosco), observing his great progress in the things of the Spirit, advised him to receive three times a week, and at the end of one year allowed him daily Communion." ⁸⁴ It is to be noted that Dominic Savio, quite different from Michael Magone, was already an example of Christian holiness at his arrival at the "house of the Oratory." Besides, his decision to "become a saint," which coincided with decisive steps forward in his spiritual life, took shape as early as the spring of 1855.

It is necessary to admit that Don Bosco, who authorized him to communicate daily only six months afterwards, was quite strict. But after that time, he could not possibly refuse this joy to the young man. His dispositions were "perfect." "Let us not think" we read in his biography, "that he did not understand the importance of what he did and did not have the degree of Christian life which is proper to one who desires to receive Communion daily for his conduct was blameless all around."⁸⁵ So the principles were safeguarded.

The evolution of this practice on Don Bosco's part, which had begun several years before,⁸⁶ became evident only in 1864.⁸⁷ It was due, it seems to us, to various pedagogical experiences which had demonstrated to him the influence of the Eucharist in the spiritual life.⁸⁸ He was also influenced by the current of thought in those days which was beginning to show itself in favor of frequent Communion.⁸⁹ The decisive factor which finally induced him to speak out seems to have been the publication of a book by Prior Giuseppe Frassinetti entitled *Le due gioie nascoste* (The two hidden joys), which extolled frequent and daily Communion together with perfect chastity. It is very probable that he had already become acquainted with this work and had decided to publish it in his *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings),⁹⁰ when on the occasion of a "Good night," talk in June of 1864 he dared to take a stand in these terms: "If you want to know what I desire, here it is: Go to Communion every day. Spiritually? The Council of Trent says *sacramentally*! And so? And so do it."⁹¹

From that time on he became a promoter of frequent, if not daily, Communion for anyone, even a mediocre person who wished to progress in the spiritual life. The practice of the early Church, of Saint Augustine and Saint Philip Neri helped him to support his view. In this spirit, he revised some works which he had published before. For instance, he would write the following: "What is meant by the words (referring to the first Christians) 'They persevered in the breaking of the bread'?" His answer now was not his previous one: "These words meant that those early Christians attended the Holy Eucharist often."⁹² His answer now was the following: "These words mean that the early Christians went to Communion often."⁹³ And in a booklet on the Novena to Mary Help of Christians which he published in May 1870, we read this argument from Saint Thomas (but taken from Bishop de

Ségur): "When someone knows from experience that daily Communion makes the love of God grow in his heart, he should communicate daily."⁹⁴ Permissions which at one time were granted sparingly were now becoming almost routine.

Just the same, there were reservations. As a disciple of Saint Alphonse, Don Bosco did not yet admit without any restrictions that the faithful in the state of grace should regularly communicate at all the Masses which they attended. He was not ready to reconcile himself to mechanical or purely convenient Communions. Communion should make one "grow in the love of God." In his own way, even in this matter he showed the depth of his religious and Christian spirit. Outside of God and of Christ any sort of progress is unthinkable. The Incarnation demands that we seek Christ in the sacraments and especially in the great sacrament, "the greatest wonder of God's power," by which "God found a way of giving our souls a suitable and spiritual food, that is, his very Divinity."⁹⁵ But how can one think of finding God and Christ, if not by means of supernatural charity which transforms only those who sincerely try to look for it?

Exercises and Devotions

According to Don Bosco's thinking, the search for God demanded patience and very often humble actions. Father Pasquale De Mattei, a Jesuit, wrote a little book for young people which Don Bosco used as a basis for his *Sei domeniche in onore di san Luigi Gonzaga* (Six Sundays in Honor of Saint Aloysius).⁹⁶ After considering Saint Aloysius' love for God, he thought he could propose to the devotees of this saint the following practices: "1. Choose a few acts of love of God; 2. When you feel listlessness or aridity about loving God, try at least to desire to love him. This pain and this desire will obtain true love for you; 3. Rejoice over the trials which God sends you or over the pain or trouble which you experience in his service."⁹⁷ Don Bosco descended with ease from this level to a more practical one. After proposing the same consideration, he wrote: "Endeavor to recite morning and night prayers before a crucifix and kiss it often . . . if you can, make a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, especially

where he is exposed for adoration during the Forty Hours.”⁹⁸

Father Joseph Cafasso had passed on to him his great esteem for the common religious exercises: the sacramentals, the use of holy water, morning and night prayers, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, the gaining of indulgences, making the Sign of the Cross, saying Rosaries . . . ⁹⁹ For him these practices made up the “bark” of the spiritual tree. Without this bark, the tree quickly dies.¹⁰⁰ In the footsteps of his master and strongly convinced by his own experience, Don Bosco in turn taught that “although any one of these practices in itself does not seem to be great, nonetheless each one contributes effectively to build the great edifice of our perfection and of our salvation.”¹⁰¹ Whether they were stereotyped or not, he did not want these practices to be complicated or difficult to do: “I would advise you very strongly to be careful that the exercises proposed are easy to do, that they do not scare off the Christian faithful or tire them, especially young people. Fasts, long prayers and other similar rigid and severe practices are usually omitted or are done painfully or carelessly. Let us hold on to easy practices but let us do them with perseverance.”¹⁰²

There should be a variety of these pious exercises as there is a variety of virtues.¹⁰³ Dominic Savio used to do acts of fraternal charity as much as he did penances, and practiced the virtue of purity as much as piety (that is, the virtue of religion). After having observed him at his duties as a solicitous infirmarian, Don Bosco added: “In this way he had an open road to practice charity continually towards his neighbor and to gain merit before God.”¹⁰⁴

Our two saints, however, were far from making themselves slaves of their pious practices. Don Bosco never gave the impression of being scrupulous. Dominic Savio was severely reprimanded by Don Bosco one day when he fell into this defect, and he corrected himself immediately. Don Bosco offered him Michael Magone as a model, a boy “with a lively temperament, but pious, good and devout, who loved very much the little pious practices . . . which he carried out cheerfully, in a relaxed way without scrupulosity.”¹⁰⁵

Here Don Bosco was thinking about pious exercises which were daily, weekly, monthly, yearly or occasional. These exercises were found in his manual of piety. We have had to mention them already several times in this book. They were as follows: The Sign of the

Cross on getting up in the morning, the prayers of Christians, the meditation, pious ejaculations, the Rosary, spiritual reading, serving at the altar, the *Little Office of the Blessed Virgin*, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin, the examination of conscience, the chaplet of the Sacred Heart, the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows of Mary, the Exercise for a Happy Death, the Way of the Cross, the Month of Mary, the Six Sundays in honor of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga,¹⁰⁶ the Christmas Novena, etc. He also recommended spiritual dialogues,¹⁰⁷ and would give "spiritual nosegays" during novenas in preparation for solemn feasts and spiritual mottos at the beginning of each new year.¹⁰⁸ As we shall see, he was inclined to reduce the number of these practices. It is certain, however, that these devotions and exercises derived from local and universal customs and were numerous in the life and in the teachings of Don Bosco.¹⁰⁹

If we should try to mention those practices which were dearest to his heart, we would not mention meditation nor the examination of conscience of which he did not speak much except to his religious, but rather we would mention the Exercise of a Happy Death and the yearly retreat, and then visits to the Blessed Sacrament, so much valued by Saint Alphonsus Liguori.

In his view, visits to the Blessed Sacrament allowed the believer to encounter Christ, his friend and his support, and to unite himself with him during the course of the day, even when he could not receive him sacramentally. A visit well made could send the soul into a state of true contemplation. One's eternal salvation, final perseverance, and spiritual perfection were made easier by these moments of recollection before the tabernacle. Don Bosco said to his Salesians assembled for their yearly retreat in 1868: "Go to the foot of the tabernacle and say one *Our Father*, *Hail Mary*, and *Glory* when you can't do any more. This is enough to strengthen you against temptations. If someone has faith, makes visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and makes his daily meditation, and does not have worldly motives, I tell you, it will be impossible for him to sin."¹¹⁰ He would have Michael Magone say: "I am very afraid of falling again into sin, so I go to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to ask him to give me the help and the strength to persevere in his holy grace"¹¹¹ When you read the life of Dominic Savio you learn about his long silent periods of contemplation before

the tabernacle and you understand their connection with his heroic love of God.

Normally, the spiritual communion was part of the visit. According to Saint Leonard of Port Maurice, whose treatise on the Eucharist was published by Don Bosco,¹¹² "Several doctors say that a case can very well occur in which someone makes a spiritual communion with so much fervor that he receives the same grace which is received in a sacramental communion."¹¹³ Don Bosco held the same opinion and he highly recommended this way of uniting oneself with God at every moment: "Receive the sacraments as often as possible, and do not become upset when this is not possible. In that case, make spiritual communions more often and conform yourself to the holy will of God, the most loving thing of all."¹¹⁴

Along with the Bible, whose maxims he loved to repeat, with the teaching of the Church, which was very familiar to him, with the Sacraments of Penance and of the Eucharist, true pillars of his religious pedagogy, the spiritual communion was one of the means he used to keep himself in the presence of God. The greater part of these practices were quite simple, based on a very Catholic idea of divine grace, which provides for us "the will and the actual doing" of good deeds, and they were well adapted to a spirituality which was not out of tune with the abundant resources of human nature.

NOTES

1. "Instruments," in the sense in which Cassian uses the term in *Collationes*, Conf. I, ch. VII-X. Cf. especially in ch. VII: "Fastings, vigils, meditations on the Scriptures, deprivations and getting rid of all goods are not perfection but only the instruments of perfection . . ."

2. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, art. 6, p. 18 (Cf. also Doc. 5, Sentence 12 below).

3. *Avvertenza intorno all'uso da farsi nelle scuole delle Storie Sacre tradotte da lingue straniere*, (circa 1847, according to A. Caviglia), published in *Opere e scritti* Turin, 1929, vol. I, 20.

4. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, loc. cit. Elsewhere we read: "By tradition we understand the Word of God which was not written down in the sacred texts" (Bosco, *Maniera facile per imparare la Storia Sacra*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1855, #1; *Opere e scritti* vol. I, Part One, p. 30); this leads us to think that he believed in a "transmitted word," found as much in the sacred texts as in other ways, a living word, which was the teaching of the Church in his time.

5. "Among them, each one is free to interpret the Bible as he wills, and so can form a new religion as he wills" (Bosco, *Maniera facile*, ed. cit., #30; *Opere e scritti*, op. cit., p. 68. This statement was identical in the 5th ed., Turin, 1877, #29, p. 81). "The belief of the evangelicals, that of free interpretation of the Bible, goes back to the time of the reform of the Catholic Church." (Bosco, *Massimino, ossia Incontro di un giovanetto con un ministro protestante sul Campidoglio*, Turin, 1874, p. 19). The statement is attributed to a Protestant who is introduced in this part of the book.

6. G. Bosco, *Vita di S. Paolo*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1878, p. 42.

7. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., 1880, p. 31 (English ed., pp. 53-4).

8. G. Bosco, *Ibid.*, Cf. above, ch. 2, p. 63.

9. G. Bosco, *La Chiave del Paradiso*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1857, p. 38. A similar counsel, but for young people, is found in *Il giovane provveduto*, (101st ed., Turin, 1885, p. 18).

10. G. Bosco, *Storia sacra*, Turin, 1847, "prefazione" (*Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 6). The same sentence is found in 3rd ed., Turin, 1863 (*Opere e scritti*, *ibid.*, p. 122).

11. "The Bible is the foundation of our Holy Religion: it contains its teachings and proves them." Bosco, *Storia sacra*, Turin, 1847, "prefazione" (*Opere e scritti, ibid.*, p. 6). "The study of Bible History is an excellent study in itself and does not have to be recommended since it is the most ancient of all histories. It is most trust-worthy since God is its author; it is most praiseworthy since it contains God's will shown to men; it is the most useful because it contains and proves the truths of our Holy Religion" (*op. cit.*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1863 "prefazione"; *Opere e scritti, ibid.*, p. 123).

12. *Ibid.*, ch. 2 (*Opere e scritti, ibid.*, p. 150).

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 4 (*Opere, ed. cit.*, p. 156).

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 7 (*Opere, ed. cit.*, p. 169).

15. *Ibid.*, ch. 10 (*Opere, ed. cit.*, p. 177); "epoca quarta," ch. 1 (*Opere, ed. cit.*, p. 181) and ch. 2 (*Opere, ed. cit.*, p. 187).

16. *Ibid.*, "epoca quarta," ch. 3 (*Opere e scritti, ed. cit.*, p. 190).

17. *Ibid.*, "introduzione," (*Opere e scritti, ed. cit.*, p. 283).

18. Cf. R. Cantel and R. Ricard, *Exemplum*, in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. IV, col. 1885-1902, especially 1901; G. Cacciatore, *La Letteratura degli "exempla,"* in S. Alfonso M. de Liguori, *Opere ascetiche*. "Introduzione generale," Rome, 1960, pp. 239-290.

19. P. Stella (*Valori spirituali*, p. 34) quotes some typical works in this style: *Guida angelica, o siano pratiche istruzioni*, Turin, 1767; *La Gioventù divota dell'angelico giovane S. Luigi Gonzaga*, Carmagnola, 1805; *Voce angelica ossia l'Angelo custode che ammaestra una figlia*. Pinerolo, 1835.

20. G.A. Patrignani, P. Stella, *Valori spirituali*, pp. 34-35.

21. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 88 (cf. Doc. 2 below).

22. Bookmark in Don Bosco's breviary, E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. XVIII, doc. 93, 806-808 (cf. below doc. 5, sentence 15). Cf. the first words of the biography of Luigi Comollo: "Since the example of virtuous deeds is worth much more than any polished sermon . . ." (Bosco) *Cenni storici sulla vita del Chierico Luigi Comollo*, Turin, 1844, p. 3.

23. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., Turin, 1880, pp. 46, 48, 56, 100 (English ed., pp. 67, 80, 124).

24. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, *ed. cit.*, p. 67.

25. For examples, various anecdotes of the Fathers of the desert or of the adventure of Beausejour, a soldier, told by "many authors" (G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, 8th ed., Turin, 1874, p. 169).

26. G. Bosco, *Il mese*, p. 131.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
28. G. Bosco, presentation of the *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti negli anni 1883 e 1884*, Turin, 1885, p. iv.
29. G. Bosco, *Storia sacra*, 3rd. ed., Turin, 1863, "epoca settima," ch. 2 (*Opere e scritti, ibid.*, p. 298).
30. At least in *Mese di maggio*.
31. G. Bosco, *Il mese*, *ed. cit.*, p. 64.
32. G.B. Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. VII, 50 (English ed., p. 37), according to the chronicle of J. Bonetti (Jan. 1862). A similar statement is found in the *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales per gli esterni*, Turin, 1877, "parte seconda" ch. 7, art. 1.
33. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 101st ed., Turin 1885; "mortal sin," pp. 39-41; "Hell," pp. 47-49. Bosco, *La Chiave del Paradiso*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1857, p. 17; and *Il mese*, 8th ed., Turin, 1874, "Sin," pp. 94-99; "The pains of hell," pp. 116-122; "The pains of hell are eternal," pp. 122-127.
34. Cf. above, ch. 3, p. 80.
35. G. Bosco, *Novella amena di un vecchio soldato*, Turin, 1862, ch. 2: "Confession and the practices of piety," p. 22. Other explanations by Don Bosco on confession are found in *Il giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, "parte seconda," "A practical way of receiving worthily the Sacrament of Confession," pp. 93-98, an explanation which was soon divided into different sections with their own titles: "On the Sacrament of Confession," "Proper dispositions for making a good Confession," "A practical way of receiving worthily the Sacrament of Confession," "After Confession: (101st ed., Turin, 1885, pp. 94-105); Cf. the same titles with a text adapted for adults in G. Bosco, *La Chiave del Paradiso*, 3rd ed., small format, Turin, 1881, pp. 153-195. Cf. also the following works of Don Bosco: *Conversazioni tra un avvocato e un curato di campagna sul Sacramento della Confessione*, Turin, 1855; *Il mese*, 8th ed., Turin, 1874, "La Confessione" pp. 133-138 and "Il Confessore" pp. 139-143; *Magone Michele*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1880, "Una parola alla gioventù" pp. 22-26; *Il pastorello delle Alpi, ovvero Vita del giovane Besuccio Francesco*, Turin, 1864, "La Confessione" pp. 100-105; cf. also Doc. 15 below.
36. G. Bosco, *Il mese ed. cit.*, p. 134.
37. G. Bosco, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1872, p. 7. The first point, in which he showed the link between the sacrament and the death of Christ, interested Don Bosco in a very special way: "He (the confessor) knows how much greater than your sins is the

mercy of God, this mercy which grants you pardon through his ministry. He applies to you the infinite merits of the precious blood of Jesus Christ with which He can wash away all stains from your soul" (G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, ed. cit., pp. 24-25).

38. G. Bosco, *Chiave del Paradiso*, ed. cit., p. 158.
39. G. Boco, *Il mese*, ed. cit., "giorno ventiduesimo."
40. St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Praxis confessarii*, ed. cit., p. 5.
41. Don Bosco considered only the functions of father, doctor and judge in *Il mese*, ed. cit., p. 140; and in *Conversazioni tra un avvocato*, ed. cit., p. 86.
42. G. Bosco, *Il mese*, *ibid.*
43. *Regole o Costituzioni per le Figlie di Maria SS. Ausiliatrice*, Turin, 1885, ch. 17, Article 4, p. 83.
44. "The penance which the Lord wishes from you, I told him, is obedience. Be obedient and that's enough." (Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., Turin, 1880, p. 65 (English ed., p. 90.))
- S45. *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales per gli esterni*, Turin, 1877, parte seconda, ch. 7. art. 8; cf. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1880, pp. 49-50, taken up again later.
46. G. Bosco's letter to G.B. Francesia, 1878, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 426. This freedom was one of Don Bosco's basic themes as an educator.
47. Something to be borne in mind by the historians of the pastoral ministry of the nineteenth century: "Greater care and greater charity in hearing confessions of the faithful. The majority of priests never administer this sacrament and others scarcely hear confessions during the paschal time and then no more" (notes for an audience with the Supreme Pontiff, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 561).
48. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1880, p. 25.
49. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, Turin, 1861, p. 25; cf. 3rd ed., p. 23.
50. Cf. St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Praxis confessarii*, ed. cit., pp. 41-87.
51. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1880, pp. 16-18; and *Severino, Ossia Avventure di un giovane alpigiano*, Turin, 1868, pp. 44-45. This chapter describes the life of Severino at the Oratory of Valdocco.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
54. Cf. "Progetto di Regolamento per la casa annessa all'oratorio San Francesco di Sales," parte prima, Appendice, ch. 1, art. 3 (The

edition of Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IV, 746, agrees perfectly—except for a little touching up—with the reproduced manuscript which we have collated).

55. *Ibid.*, art. 4.

56. Cf. *Ricordi generali di S. Filippo Neri alla gioventù*, G. Bosco, *Porta teo*, Turin, 1858, p. 35.

57. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, ed. cit., 1880, pp. 49-50.

58. "Good night," Nov. 2, 1876, according to the "reconstructed" version of E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XII, 566.

59. It seems that Don Bosco took no position on the question of adults.

60. Cf. E. Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio*, ed. cit., pp. 297-301.

61. Cf. A. Grazioli, *La Pratica dei confessori nello spirito del Beato Cafasso*, 2nd ed., Colle Don Bosco, pp. 99-100.

62. Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio*, ed. cit., p. 181. It should be noted that Fr. Ceria was an eye witness to what he relates in this case.

63. Conversation of 1877 recorded by Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XIII, 321.

64. G. Bosco's letter to the boys at Lanzo, Feb. 11, 1871, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 150. The theme of this statement is found again in a "Good night" talk of May 31, 1873 (recorded by A. Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X, 56 (English ed., p. 48). also in a letter of Don Bosco to the technical students at the Oratory of Valdocco, Jan. 20, 1874 (*Epistolario*, vol. II, 339); and in a letter on charity in education May 10, 1884 (*Epistolario*, vol. IV, 267); etc.

65. G. Bosco's letter to G. Branda (1879), in *Epistolario*, vol. III, 436. This letter was dictated.

66. G. Bosco, *Conversione di una Valdese*, Turin, 1854, p. 97 Bosco, *La Forza della buona educazione*, Turin, 1855, p. 26-30; *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 136 (English ed., p. 147); *Magone Michele*, Turin, 1861, pp. 20-23. Evidently the same remark is found in the later editions of this work, which were very widely circulated during Don Bosco's lifetime.

67. The same expressions are found in his most famous doctrinal booklets: Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, pp. 84-86, 98-99, etc.; *La Chiave del Paradiso*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1857, pp. 43-46, 73-74; *Il mese*, Turin, 1858, pp. 134-144. Certain considerations of a practical nature about the Eucharist were revised in later editions of these works.

68. G. Bosco, *Il giovane*, ed. cit., p. 84.

69. G. Bosco, *Il mese*, 8th ed., Turin, 1874, p. 145.

70. G. Bosco, *Nove giorni*, "quinto giorno" (1st ed., Turin, 1870). It can be that this idea is found already in the following answer to the question (found in earlier editions): "Why did he institute this sacrament?" "Jesus Christ instituted this sacrament to give us a sign of the great love he has for men and to give us adequate nourishment for our souls" (Bosco) *Maniera facile*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1855 #21; *Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 58.

71. G. Bosco, *Storia sacra*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1863, "epoca settima," ch. 7 (*Opere e scritti*, loc. cit., p. 325). It seems that in his fervor, Don Bosco almost denied the proposition of the "memorial," which he nonetheless supported in parallel editions of *Il Mese di maggio*.

72. J. Duhr, *Communion fréquente*, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. II, col. 1259.

73. Bishop de Ségur, *La Santissima comunione* (coll. *Lecture Cattolique*), Turin, 1872. Here we read: "The specific grace of the Eucharist is, then, a grace of nourishment and of perseverance" (*op. cit.*, p. 6).

74. G. Bosco, *La Chiave del Paradiso*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1857, p. 74. This principle is central in the instructive conversation between Don Bosco and Francis Besucco on the reasons for receiving Communion. This conversation was recorded at a time in which his teaching on this sacrament seems to have been quite definite (Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi*, Turin, 1864, ch. 20: "Holy Communion," pp. 105-109).

75. G. Bosco's letter to the students at Mirabello, Dec. 30, 1863, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 299.

76. *Ibid.*

77. "The importance of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the order of redemption and the obligation which Holy Church imposes on the faithful of hearing Mass on Sundays and Holy days make it imperative for the faithful to understand and appreciate properly this great act of our holy religion. They should not be mere passive spectators, but should know how to take an active part and a keen interest in what corresponds to them. The faithful do not merely assist at the divine Sacrifice, but offer it also through the hands of the celebrant, as the Church tells us in the Mass itself: (*Avvertenza* unsigned in the anonymous book: *Trattenimenti intorno al sacrificio della S. Messa* (Turin, 1854), which appeared in the *Lecture Cattolique* (anno II, fasc. 11 and 12), in a period when Don Bosco had close editorial control. Consequently, it could have been written at his

suggestion, but its style would not allow us to attribute it to him.)

78. He used to invite all the boys to attend Mass every day (Bosco, *Il giovane*, 101st ed., Turin, 1885, p. 87) and he gave similar advice to adults (Bosco, *Il mese*, 8th ed., Turin, 1874, p. 148).

79. G. Bosco, *Il giovane*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, p. 87; and *La Chiave del Paradiso*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1857, p. 48.

80. G. Bosco, *Il giovane*, 101st ed., Turin, 1885, p. 111.

81. Answer of the chancery of Turin to Giovanni Cappone at Savigliano, Jul. 19, 1793, preserved in the archives of the chancery of Turin; quoted by P. Stella, *Crisi religiose nel primo Ottocento piemontese*, Turin, 1959, p. 65 note.

82. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 55. "At that time (in the seminary) there was no opportunity of receiving Communion except on Sundays" (Bosco, *Luigi Comollo*, Turin, 1884, p. 66).

83. Cf. for St. Alphonsus, F.X. Codts, *Exagérations historiques et théologiques concernant la comunion quotidienne*, Brussels, 1904, pp. 67-70.

84. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, pp. 68-69 (English ed., p. 83).

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

86. "Just as the manna was the daily nourishment of the Hebrews in the desert, so Holy Communion should be our support and our daily nourishment" (Bosco, *Il mese*, Turin, 1858, p. 141).

87. A Caviglia, in his important study on *Savio Domenico e Don Bosco*, Turin, 1943, pp. 341-383, showed this evolution.

88. "Experience confirms the fact that the most solid spiritual supports of young people are the Sacraments of Confession and Communion" (Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, pp. 67-68 (English ed., p. 83)).

89. A little book by Bishop de Ségur, "La tres sainte Communion," appeared in 1860, (*Oeuvres*, first series, Paris, 1867, vol. III, 413-479).

90. G. Frassinetti, *Le due gioie nascoste*, makes up the Dec. 1864 issue of the magazine. It seems we have to admit at least a period of six months between the decision to publish and the actual publishing.

91. "Good night" talk of June 18, 1864, according the *Cronaca* and the reconstruction of Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. VII, 678 (English ed., p. 408). Don Bosco had the same thoughts (which to a certain extent confirm those of the "good night") in the biography of Francis Besucco, published that same year in the *Letture Cattoliche* (Jul-Aug.

issue): G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi*, Turin, 1864, p. 109. It is to be noted that Bishop de Ségur (*Coll. cit.*, p. 421) referred to the Council of Trent to justify frequent Communion.

92. G. Bosco, *Maniera facile*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1855, #38 (*Opere e scritti*, loc. cit., p. 66).

93. G. Bosco, *Maniera facile*, 5th ed., Turin, 1877, #27, p. 76. The manuals of devotion now contained an article on "Frequent Communion."

94. G. Bosco, *Nove giorni*, Turin, 1870, "sesto giorno," Cf. also Bosco, *Il mese*, 8th ed., 1874, pp. 149-153 (see also Doc. 28 below).

95. G. Boscò, *Il mese*, ed. cit., p. 65.

96. Cf. above, p. 31.

97. P. de Mattei, *Considerazioni per celebrare con frutto le Sei Domeniche e la Novena in onore di S. Luigi Gonzaga*, Novara, (circa 1840) p. 53 ff.

98. G. Bosco. *Le Sei domeniche*, 8th ed., Turin, 1886, pp. 33-34. This comment is by P. Stella, *Valori spirituali*, pp. 73-74.

99. Cf. L. Zanzi, *Le pie pratiche del sacerdote. Spirito del Ven. D. Cafasso*, Bagnacavallo, 1914.

100. G. Cafasso, *Manoscritti vari*, V, 2097 B; quoted by F. Accornero, *La dottrina spirituale di S. Giuseppe Cafasso*, p. 103.

101. G. Bosco, *Introduzione alle Regole o Costituzioni*, Turin, 1877, p. 37. It contains a list of the practices of piety, from daily meditation and the Friday abstinence to the Rosary.

102. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1880, p. 41. Don Bosco concluded: "It is the way that led our Michael to a marvelous degree of perfection."

103. About the various meanings of the term "spiritual exercises," cf. A. Rayez, *Exercices spirituels*, in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. IV, col. 1922-1923.

104. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 62 (English ed., p. 76).

105. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, ed. cit., p. 57.

106. Exactly, in honor of the six years which this saint spent in the Company of Jesus, if we believe the anonymous book: "*Divozione di Sei Domeniche in onore de' sei anni che San Luigi Gonzaga della Compagnia de Gesu visse in religione: da praticarsi da chiunque brami efficacemente procurarsi il potentissimo di lui Patrocinio*," Turin, 1740, (quoted by P. Stella, *Valori spirituali*, p. 38, note). The same

writer (*op. cit.*, p. 37, note) mentions a little book about the ten Sundays in honor of Saint Stanislaus Kostka.

107. From the biographies of Luigi Comollo and Dominic Savio, we see the good results of conversations of this type among friends. Don Bosco believed in the benefits of friendship and of fraternal correction: "Blessed is he who has someone to correct him!" (*Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 54).

108. Spiritual "strennas" for a director of a school: Don Bosco's letter to J. Bonetti, Dec. 30, 1868, in *Epistolario*, vol. I, 600-601; Bosco's letter to Bonetti, Dec. 30, 1874, *Ibid*, vol. II, 434 (cf. also Doc. 24, 29 below). These "strennas" were traditional at Valdocco.

109. As we shall see, he required, with St. Philip Neri, that they should not be multiplied indiscriminately. (*Regolamento per le case*, Turin, 1877, p. 64) and he reduced them to a minimum in his regulations for Salesian Cooperators (ch. 8; cf. below p. 310).

110. Notes taken by one present at a course of spiritual exercises, Trofarello, Sept. 26, 1868; according to the edited version of Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 355-356 (English ed., p. 167); cf. Doc. 23, below.

111. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, *ed. cit.*, p. 55.

112. "*Il tesoro nascosto ovvero Pregi ed eccellenze della Messa, con un modo pratico e devoto per ascoltarla con frutto*" (coll. L.C., anno VIII, fasc. XII) Turin, 1861.

113. Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice, *Oeuvres, trad. Sainte Foi*, Paris, 1869, vol. III, 60.

114. G. Bosco's letter to Mrs. and Miss Lallemand, Feb. 5, 1884, *Epistolario*, vol. IV, 422. This letter was written in French.

5

**Christian Perfection
and Human Fulfillment**

Human Perfection

“What do you want to do as a follower of Don Bosco?” he asked Francesco Provera, a friend of his and a late vocation, who had just indicated his intention of entering the Salesian life. “This house does not suit you: here we talk only about the Madonna, the Our Father, and about heaven!”¹ We know that Don Bosco did not neglect any means that would develop the spiritual life. However, he never lost sight of “human nature,” which he exalted in his books. He never forgot it in his preaching, in his sacramental devotions and other spiritual practices which gave the impression that he was keeping his disciples far away from the world and its joy. Just the opposite! These devotions helped to guarantee them the peace and happiness which Don Bosco valued so much. In doing this, he probably left behind the Liguorian tradition, which was less concerned than he was about earthly joys. He was closer to the tradition of the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri, and through it to the whole tradition of the Italian Renaissance.

One adverb was enough to show clearly how far removed he was from a directive of St. Alphonsus. According to the passage found in his book *Eternal Maxims*, Saint Alphonsus seemed to overlook for man any other goal than the other worldly: “You were not born nor should you live to enjoy life, to get rich or become powerful, to eat, drink and sleep like the beasts, but only to love your God and attain eternal salvation.” Apparently, the saint considered earthly goods only as means offered to man “to help him reach his last end.”² In adapting these statements for his *Giovane provveduto* (The Companion of Youth), Don Bosco, who had not forgotten the last things, wrote as follows: “The only purpose for which (God) created you was to be loved and served (by you) in this life.” And at the risk of contradicting

himself he added: "You are not in this world *only* to enjoy, become rich, eat, drink and sleep, as the beasts do, but your goal is to love your God and save your soul."³ In this way he added some natural goals, that is, to enjoy, become rich, etc., to the supernatural end which was the end that really interested him: to love God and save one's own soul. The only purpose of his "method of life," a method of spirituality, as he explained to his boys, was to allow them to "become at the same time a source of consolation for their parents, do honor to their country, and be good citizens on this earth in order to be one day happy citizens of heaven."⁴ Thus, this goal did not look only to the hereafter.

He wanted his students to fulfill their legitimate desires and to achieve happiness on two levels: on the level of grace first of all, but also on the natural level. He wrote in a letter to a correspondent: "May God make you happy both in time and in eternity."⁵ To another person he wrote: "I will not fail to continue to pray that God will keep you all in good health, happy, and in his grace."⁶ And to a third: "Let us work so that we can be happy in time, but let us never forget the sublime end of man, which is to be happy forever in a blessed eternity."⁷ For the most part, he did not believe in a dualistic anthropology, which sometimes seems to underly his books and inspire his attitudes.⁸ A view of the Christian life which downplayed human values would have appeared suspect to him. He wanted to work for the physical, intellectual and moral development of the people around him. His brand of Christianity not only allowed but demanded a definite human development.

The Health and Care of the Body

His concern for the well-being of the body has not always been presented in this light. Certain images and descriptions—authentic but out of context—do an injustice to Don Bosco's ideas about the care of the body. They portray him as working till dawn when he was a student in Chieri and, at seventy years of age, prematurely worn out by a life of work without any letup. Such expressions as "I will rest in paradise" and "It will be a great victory the day when it will be said that a Sale-

sian died of overwork” have been repeated *ad nauseam*.⁹ In reality he was guided by sound principles and was more balanced than what some panegyrists would have led us to think. He did not waste his energies and even less those of his followers and collaborators.

Faithful to the recommendation made to him in his dream at the age of nine he had always wished to be “strong” even from his earliest days.¹⁰ Some anecdotes, told by him and related by Father Lemoyne, show that even up to the threshold of his old age, he remained very proud of his physical strength.¹¹ To him health always appeared to be a great blessing: “a great gift of the Lord,”¹² “a precious gift from heaven,”¹³ an “indispensable” good,¹⁴ “the first treasure after the grace of God,”¹⁵ etc.

Now the wise man administers prudently the gifts from heaven, so Don Bosco took care of the health of his boys and of his fellow workers. His correspondence was full of very concrete recommendations which were not mere trifling formulas. He lavished attentions on his religious who were tired. To a Salesian who was especially weak in health, he wrote: “Take great care of your health: and if you find walking difficult, mail these letters without inconveniencing yourself.”¹⁶ He wrote on another occasion to his principle assistant: “Take care of Father Bonetti and order him, on my authority, not to recite the Breviary until the day when I give him permission to do so again. Make him take as much rest as he needs and give himself to exercise, although not in tiring hikes. Give him the room of the Archbishop of Buenos Aires if he cannot get warm in his own room.”¹⁷ According to a statement which he made in 1870—which refers to only one house—he wanted only “healthy, robust and cheerful” young men in his houses. He would have wished that everywhere “the infirmary be closed and the doors of the dining room wide open.”¹⁸ His solicitous concern made him attend even to the most minute details: he would tell his boys not to wear too much clothing in hot rooms; when going outside to protect their nose and mouth against the intense cold which could be harmful to their lungs; not to leave the dormitory too quickly in the morning; to be careful to cover their shoulders and throats at night, etc.¹⁹ These concerns were truly motherly. He spoke often about drafts, colds, excessive sweating, about staying too long in the sun, but always without the exaggerations and pettiness of a short-sighted man or

woman, given the fact that he always believed in simplicity.

If, then, the hygienic conditions in his houses were not perfect, the deficiencies were not to be attributed to an inhuman asceticism which might be found in the schools of Montaigu. Don Bosco suffered from the lack of means of the common people at the beginning of the industrial era. Frequently the boys at Valdocco did not have enough clothes. They ate very simple food and the common living quarters were crowded.²⁰ The death rate in this institution seems to us excessive, in the absence of statistics and accurate comparisons which alone could clarify this question. In 1878, when an epidemic of conjunctivitis raged, a medical commission made an unfavorable report about the sanitary conditions of the house to the prefect of Turin.²¹ From these considerations one can conclude that Don Bosco and his boys were authentically poor and that the organization of the house probably left something to be desired. It did not mean, however, that he neglected everybody's health or that he practiced a strict form of austerity, which would have contradicted, among other things, his own directives and rules.

He wanted everyone to take care of his body, to keep it free from all sickness. We will not expect extraordinary prescriptions from him. He would give basic advice which experience taught him. He did not believe in drugs. He ignored hydrotherapy and pointed out the harm caused by baths, without pointing out their advantages.²² He believed, however, in the benefits of sleep, of good nourishment, of work interrupted by reasonable breaks, of exercise, and of peace of mind. Often he was upset about the brief hours of sleep and poor sleeping conditions of his religious.²³ He did not wish them to be under pressure from the very beginning to the very end of their apostolic life. He himself took a long rest after his sickness of 1846 and again after that of 1872. He believed that a strenuous game is healthy for a boy and a vigorous walk invigorates an adult. He was already aware that the overuse of horse-drawn carriages and of trains was harming the physical fitness of his contemporaries.²⁴ He would force those who were depressed to recover their '*joie de vivre*' by cheering them up with his smile, with his attentions, and by patiently discovering their talents and the most appropriate means to make the most of them.²⁵ Here, as in all things, charity which wishes well to all inspired him.

Moral and Social Reasons for Intellectual Development

Charity would also lead him to justify his promotion of intellectual development, but not necessarily for the reasons that we would perhaps wish. According to Father Ricaldone, "Don Bosco outlined for Father Barberis, the author of a treatise on 'Sacred Pedagogy'²⁶ the true goals of an intellectual education: to help a student form the habits of perceiving, reflecting, judging, and reasoning correctly."²⁷ In general, however, one gets the impression that Don Bosco's literary works did not give very much attention to these excellent motives for cultivating the mind. He judged men by their religious, moral, and social worth. He valued their virtue and the services which they rendered to the human community, but he thought little about the uplifting of souls which is the result of the search for truth, an elevated pursuit to which the Dominican school, for example, is much inclined.

He justified study, as all other activities, by the law of fulfillment of the duties of one's state of life²⁸ and by the purifying and energizing effects of study on the soul. Studying helps one develop his will. And he added to these moral motives the social ones. In the contemporary world a certain amount of basic education is given to all. "Society" needs people who are educated and also scholars. It is impossible, then, to serve society with dignity without at least a minimum of learning. Finally, Don Bosco held that the Church in general, and his congregation in particular, could not do without teachers of recognized competence. In spite of the contrary opinion of certain priests in Turin, he wanted his religious to obtain degrees from the public universities not so much for their own benefit as for the advantages which his institutions would derive from it²⁹ The chancery of Turin, on the other hand, reprimanded him for admitting to sacred orders clerical students who were lacking sufficient knowledge. This was an erroneous evaluation, which Don Bosco challenged by listing the studies they had successfully completed.³⁰ No matter what their age, his students were heard to comment: "After piety, what is most recommended to us is love for studies." And Don Bosco would add: "Through your work you can become respectable members of society, of the Church, and do good to your souls, especially if you offer God your daily chores."³¹

Education for Life Through Vocational Training

The same principle governed the serious importance which he gave to vocational training for himself and for his students.

A reading of his "autobiography" shows us how, up to the age of thirty and beyond, John Bosco, who always wanted to be a good priest, bettered his own ideas and developed his skills. He consulted books and teachers, he observed, discussed, and experimented. His successes as preacher-acrobat were the result of persevering work. In the beginning of his experience as a young confessor he was guided both in theory and practice by Father Joseph Cafasso. This man of God introduced him to the apostolate of the wayward young. We also know the importance which publishing books had in his life. Although not a very good writer when he published his first book in 1844, ten years later he proved to be quite capable because he had had the intelligence of allowing himself to be corrected and guided closely. A copy of a manuscript of his *Sei domeniche e la novena di San Luigi Gonzaga* (The Six Sundays and the Novena of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga) of 1846, which is preserved in the archives at Valdocco, would suffice to prove this from the many corrections of errors in spelling, grammar and vocabulary which were made by a more experienced friend. The following editions of his *Storia ecclesiastica* (Church History) confirm his progress. In 1845 the book which, according to Father Caviglia's generous comment, was admirable for its "humble simplicity," could not have been presented in a worse way. "It had strange punctuation, shaky spelling, incorrect or stilted language and style" and "typical Piedmontese expressions."³² The edition of 1870 would be much improved.³³ And in 1874, certainly "through the good offices of his admirers" the hesitant writer of Turin was finally admitted, under the pompous name of Clistenes Cassiopeus, to the Roman Academy of Arcadia, one of the cenacles of literary (and moralizing) humanism of Italy of that time.³⁴ A thorough examination of his works shows how seriously he devoted himself to the task of studying the history and rules of the orders, congregations, and confraternities of religious and lay persons, when he decided to found the Salesian Society and later on the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and the Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators. His study of Church

History in the seminary at Chieri and later on at Turin, during which time he assembled material for his *Storia ecclesiastica* and for his lives of the Popes, had prepared him ahead of time for this very particular work. He was not content with his investigations, however, and in 1857 he sought more information from various sources to broaden his knowledge. The archives at Valdocco, some of his statements, and an analysis of the text of the *Salesian Constitutions* leave no room for doubt.³⁵ Even in this field, then, he endeavored to acquire a real professional competence.

His boys followed the same course of studies which Don Bosco wanted all his students to follow without exception. Along with their religious education they also received the specialized education which they would need. In his special ministry among abandoned boys he had begun with the first phase: his first activity on their behalf had been a catechism lesson,³⁶ but following this he had begun to teach them trades. A statement found in the *Salesian Constitutions* of 1874 reveals in a significant way his intentions and his activities for nearly twenty-five years: "(Our boys) will be instructed in the truths of the Catholic faith and will also be encouraged to learn some art or trade."³⁷ A man must be able to earn his living. On leaving the school, his vocational students would have learned a trade which would have raised their social condition above the level of hunger and poverty. Don Bosco's ideas about this matter are in a curious way reflected in this passage from his life of Saint Paul: "It was a custom among the Hebrews to have their sons learn a trade while they were studying the Bible. They did this to preserve them from the dangers of idleness and also to occupy both their body and mind in an activity which could help them earn their bread later on in the serious predicaments of life."³⁸ His primary interest for their moral education did not preclude his concern for the professional caliber of their preparation.

The Primacy of Moral Education

Since he was definitely concerned primarily about the salvation and the sanctification of his boys, he believed that their progress in the natural moral virtues even to the point of heroism should go hand in

hand with their progress in holiness. He gave the greatest importance, then, to their growth in these virtues. He was especially concerned about some virtues which his own temperament, his mission and his very life had linked with his spirituality to the point of becoming identified with it. Besides brotherly love and other virtues like chastity—which we will discuss in the chapter on asceticism—Don Bosco preferred such virtues as love of work, boldness, prudence, and being good to people with a smile. He was happy to find all these virtues among the best of his disciples and he praised them to the sky, for example, in his life of Dominic Savio.

Love of Work

Don Bosco's energetic activity, something he valued very much, is seen throughout his life. He loved to work. Along with the cardinal virtue of temperance, strenuous activity—a term which he always used when he referred to work³⁹—would guarantee man's true greatness and real effectiveness. "Always remind all of our Salesians of our motto: Work and temperance. These are two weapons with which we will succeed in overcoming everyone and everything."⁴⁰ This very sober motto perhaps appears strange to those who only imagine John Bosco as a twelve-year-old dancing on a tight rope! We will try to go deeper into this.

From Syracuse to the Swiss border, Italy is a very long peninsula. In the nineteenth century its inhabitants were even more different from each other than now. John Bosco did not grow up in a Neapolitan environment, as a typical rightly or wrongly Frenchman imagines him to be. He was not raised in the traditions of southern Italy "in which the right to rest is as sacred as the right to work and where the golden rule is that it is necessary to work in order to live and not to live in order to work."⁴¹ In the Piedmontese countryside, by tradition, people worked very hard, and the same might be said of the urban dwellers of pre-industrial Italy. From his earliest childhood, his mother's sayings had taught him the necessity of energetic effort and proper skills in life.⁴² Some of his countrymen were very harsh on idlers and gave him his first dramatic lessons on the proper way to work. He

lived in more or less close contact with skilled Turinese workers and heads of businesses in Turin, little worlds in which the "religion" of work flourished—"laborism," as Emmanuel Mounier would call it. It was characteristic of the capitalistic and bourgeois society of the nineteenth century. In their excessive practicality, these fanatics for material progress detested whomever they considered useless, beginning especially with monks and nuns in monasteries and cloisters.⁴³ "Bourgeois morality made work the primary virtue: work, perseverance, sobriety, thrift."⁴⁴ Saint John Bosco often used the same language. His spirituality, born in the modern western world, of efficiency was influenced by the mentality of a century which worshipped work.

He himself worked intensely and by the same token had those around him work hard. He wrote to Father Dalmazzo on May 7, 1880: "I myself work, and I intend that all Salesians should work for the Church until their last breath."⁴⁵ He would speak with joy about the "immense amount of work" which he had to do and about the constant shortage of personnel for his works which were continuously expanding⁴⁶ On some days which were especially hectic, he who was always so calm was caught by surprise writing these words: "My work is driving me crazy"⁴⁷ or "I am half drunk from working"⁴⁸ or "I don't know any longer where to begin and where to stop."⁴⁹ His example did not allow lazy ones to sleep. He succeeded so well in conveying to his fellow workers this zeal for work that he felt obliged to thank them, in the last days of his life, for having "offered themselves courageously with him, and to share his fatigue, his burdens, his glory on earth."⁵⁰ The industriousness of the group of men who would form the Salesian Society at the beginning of the twentieth century was in fact worthy of admiration.

His philosophy of life, inspired by the Bible and by his reflections on the history of man, determined the very important place which he gave to work in his life.

From the very beginning, even before he sinned, man had to work. "For to instruct us about the need to flee idleness, God commanded Adam to work, but this only for pleasure and without painful fatigue."⁵¹ And he would further explain to his readers, according to Job: "Birds are born to fly and man is born to work."⁵² Work is written into man's destiny: without work the human race will perish.

Furthermore, an idle man becomes corrupt, while an industrious man ennoble himself. He saw proofs of this two-sided proposition in history. For the first part he referred to the vicissitudes of Hannibal taken in by the delights of Capua,⁵³ and of Antony being seduced by Cleopatra.⁵⁴ For proof of the second part of the proposition he referred to Augustus, who even after he became emperor continued to study,⁵⁵ or to Muratori, "one of the most learned and hard-working of men of whom Italy is very proud,"⁵⁶ and to many other courageous persons whom he enthusiastically described in his books. He deplored very often the misdeeds born of sleepy idleness. In a pamphlet entitled *Ricordi per un giovanetto che desidera passar bene le proprie vacanze* (Advice for a Boy Who Wishes to Spend His Vacation Well), published anonymously but to which he had contributed essential ideas, one reads this sentence which immediately appears to be out of his style: "Your greatest enemy is idleness; fight it without letup."⁵⁷ Work, on the other hand, takes away evil desires and purifies men.⁵⁸ Passing on from his consideration of individuals to that of the human race as such, he would compare mankind to a beehive in which everyone has to carry out a determined task through the disposition of Divine Providence. Whoever does not do it or neglects it is a parasite, a veritable disgusting thief. He would love to repeat Saint Paul's words: "... anyone who would not work should not eat."⁵⁹ Finally, we have only to recall the main reason for human labor according to Saint John Bosco: It is willed by God. We serve God by working. The true Christian is a good servant who expects his salary in the hereafter. "As we endure fatigue and sufferings, let us never forget that we have a great reward waiting for us in heaven."⁶⁰

Even though he moved easily in a world of limited horizons and shared with it its "love for work" to such an extent that he recommended it to his boys in the rules for his schools,⁶¹ he rose above the vulgar motivations with which the world was content: immediate self-interest and ambition. He looked for higher motivations within the very nature of man, within the corporate social structures and, above all, within the supernatural destiny of a redeemed human race.⁶²

Boldness and Prudence

Coupled with the virtue of love of work, were the related virtues of Christian fortitude and prudence which permitted him to live out his sanctity in an era of change, of conflicting interests, and of countless pressures. He would find ways of being an innovator, of asserting himself, and with great charity, of being the direct opposite of a passive imitator. At least one writer believes that the gift of wisdom was the main characteristic of his holiness.⁶³

Let us observe him again as he grows and asserts himself in the nineteenth century, this little country boy from northern Italy who laid down the foundations for one of the greatest undertakings of the Catholic Church of his time. He could have become a hard-working farmer in the countryside of Asti, or an exemplary follower of Saint Francis of Assisi, or also a zealous Piedmontese parish priest. Life, in fact, offered him a variety of these occupations together with others which were even more illustrious.⁶⁴ He chose different avenues, however: he became an apostle of abandoned boys, a Catholic editor and writer, a builder of churches and a founder of a religious society. All these things flowed from his extraordinary daring which God favored.

The virtue of boldness was characteristic of Don Bosco's contemporaries. The nineteenth century in Turin was fertile ground for exceptional vocations. Various adventurers left Piedmont to seek their fortune in America. Business men found prosperous enterprises in the expanding city of Turin. Political men, many of whom were in contact with Don Bosco, were the architects of Italian unity between 1850 and 1870. The environment in which he lived encouraged ambitions hitherto unheard of.

Daring was second nature to him. His temperament would not have allowed him to adapt himself to an existence as an insignificant and meticulous functionary, secure about his future. He stood out among his peers: among his playmates in his infancy, among his schoolmates in school and in the seminary, and among the priests of the diocese of Turin.⁶⁵ According to a "tradition," which would be interesting to try to prove, Don Bosco's originality impressed even the person who knew his soul the best. When Father Cafasso was asked once "Who is Don

Bosco?" he replied enigmatically: "A mystery!"⁶⁶ Aside from the veracity of this incident, Don Bosco puzzled even those closest to him with his initiatives. But the air of mystery which surrounded him did not isolate him. John Bosco rallied around him many energetic people. He would be carried away into battles, which without the Gospel, would have been ruthless. In the dream he had at the age of nine, his first impulse had been to strike out. He responded in not too friendly terms to his brother Anthony's jeering because he loved books,⁶⁷ and at the age of seventeen he beat up some fellow students who had attacked Luigi Comollo.⁶⁸ His love of a good fight manifested itself a little later in his polemics against the Waldensians, the Protestants, and the anti-clericals. His works confirm the fact that in his mature years the fire never disappeared from his character. In the eighteenth century, and in another vocation, he would have been a good officer in the Sardinian state, which was the military reservation of the peninsula.

As a man of action, he did not venture out into the world of theories. Don Bosco was not interested in theoretical principles, except perhaps in the field of education and even here there is room for doubt.⁶⁹ We become ever more and more aware that his philosophy, his theology, and his social and political ideas—to be sure, guided and tempered by his experience—were those of teachers and authorities approved by the Church. Don Bosco did not wish to adopt original doctrinal positions or even to choose from between controversial opinions.⁷⁰ His place is not next to Gioberti or Rosmini, but rather next to Saint Vincent de Paul and the Curé of Ars. His thought could at times reveal the unique energy of his temperament, but it was never rash. Like Saint Vincent, his mind was always alert and eager to search out and to organize ways of carrying out his ministry. We know that he was not afraid to compromise his own peace of mind and his own security in his mission of evangelization, first of all for poor working boys, and then in his venture of publishing the *Lecture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings), which earned for him many overt threats and attempts on his life. His boldness was also evident in his founding of a worldwide congregation, in spite of the opposition of two successive Archbishops of Turin, namely Riccardi di Netro and especially Gastaldi. His lack of means further increased the merits of his countless undertakings. Don Bosco could only count on resources which came to him

by chance. At the beginning of his main work there were no adult collaborators around him, as had happened to Saint Ignatius Loyola, but only young men who were not all geniuses by any means. Just the same, he dared . . .

Furthermore, he was completely free of any form of presumption. Possessing acute intelligence, he would temper his boldness with reflection and would direct it with prudence. His confidential statements in his old age bear witness to the fact that throughout his life he would ask for advice and take stock of the opinions of others, whether these opinions came from his mother, from Luigi Comollo, from Father Comollo, pastor and uncle of Luigi, from Father Cafasso, from Archbishop Fransoni, from Minister Ratazzi or from Pius IX.⁷¹ "I have never taken a step without the consent" of my Archbishop, he would confide one day to Michele Cavour, father of the famous Camillo Cavour.⁷² It's true that he said that in 1846, when the Archbishop's name was Fransoni and his orders did not contradict the desires of the Sovereign Pontiff! Don Bosco did not act completely by inspirations. Even his dreams were more controlled than what one at times could imagine. The expression "alla buona" (in a slipshod way), which was so common in his country, was displeasing to him. "To say that one goes ahead 'alla buona' means to say that one is going ahead badly."⁷³ He made his decisions only after reflection, perhaps rapid, but always attentive to the circumstances. He often worked things out very slowly, as seen for instance in his constant revision of the regulations of the Oratory and those of his religious society. When he was finished they had both derived strength from the many models he had consulted and from his own personal experience.⁷⁴ As the years passed he advised some of his followers who were inclined to be rash and easily stirred up to be calm, to wait, to put things off.⁷⁵

His boldness, furthermore, was not provocative, as we will see soon. His activity was not that of an egoist who exhibits his skill, nor that of a rude person who ignores the presence of others. His educational approach was based on a delicate respect for people. He was the loving teacher of children for whom others cared little. He gathered young men together to work without ostentation, for their human and supernatural good. He wrote without showing off his learning simply to instruct his readers. His gifts belonged to God, to the Church, and to

“society.” Wisdom counseled him, among other things, against a habitual restlessness, disordered, thoughtless, and therefore useless and harmful. He repeatedly counseled: “Do as much as you can. God will do what we can’t do ourselves,”⁷⁶ and “Work, but do only as much as your own strength can take.”⁷⁷ He knew that work was only a means, and he did not worship it. He was also quite shrewd and diplomatic. Certainly, to use one of his expressions, when it was a question of “saving young people from danger” and of “saving souls for God” he would plunge “forward even to the point of rashness.”⁷⁸ You can’t deny something that his whole life has borne out. But Father Ceria, basing himself on a conversation of Don Bosco with Father Giulio Barberis in 1876, observed with good reason that “the spirit proper of the Salesian Society,” which here as usual is confused with that of the founder, is this: “Never to confront adversaries, not to work stubbornly where nothing can be done, but to go where one can spend one’s energies usefully.”⁷⁹ In accordance with this principle, Don Bosco used to hand out bits of advice full of ancient wisdom: test the worth of the persons around you,⁸⁰ and do not proceed in anything without the “prudence of a serpent” joined with “the simplicity of a dove.”⁸¹ Do not pretend to better the world at the risk of destroying the good that exists, because “the better is the enemy of the good,”⁸² and in looking for perfection, learn to “content yourself with the mediocre.”⁸³

The journey of a son of the kingdom toward God was understood in these terms by Don Bosco, who knew how to do battle and to maneuver intelligently. Through the example of his life and with his exhortations he preached the love of work and prudence, boldness and wisdom. He practiced these virtues simultaneously, and without a doubt, they prevented him from becoming a mere useless meteorite in history.

Kindness and Gentleness

He did not believe in trying to dazzle or impress anyone. Those who were witnesses of his mature years have preserved a record of a smiling man, simple and possessed of an exquisite kindness, which consisted in

an "habitual effort to cheer up your neighbor, stop him from being sad."⁸⁴ His words mesmerized some of his listeners. He lavished on his sons, his Salesians, on his cooperators, both lay and clerical, and on his boys, an infinite number of attentions: disinterested acts of assistance, small gifts, friendly letters, attentive gestures, words of reassurance, the mere recollection of which would restore peace to their hearts.⁸⁵ "All those who had the good fortune of living at his side attest to the fact that his looks were always so full of love and affection toward all his students," wrote Father Albera from firsthand experience.⁸⁶ Even among adults, many thought they were his favorites⁸⁷ because he always naturally wished to spread happiness around him, and he found his joy in doing this.

Very simple motives predisposed his heart which was quick to love, to manifest its goodness. In this regard his adolescent friendship with Luigi Comollo is significant. He was attracted by the world, and by a human nature which sin had not completely corrupted, by the innocent and pitiful weakness of young people and adults,⁸⁸ and by accounts which made him reflect. Luigi Comollo was friendly and comical, delicate and full of attentions.⁸⁹ Father Joseph Cafasso's kindness, certainly quite outstanding, was gentle and understanding. Don Bosco took it up as a model with so much success that some of the traits which he mentioned in the funeral oration for this saint in 1860 could very well have described either master or disciple without any difference. This, for example, is something that could be believed to be a signed eyewitness account of his endless interviews during his last days. "At times he was tired to the point that he could no longer make himself heard, and not rarely he had to deal with uneducated people who understand nothing and who were never satisfied. Nonetheless, he was always serene in appearance, friendly in word, without ever allowing a word or an action to betray any sign of impatience."⁹⁰

Bold and energetic though he was, Don Bosco, like Father Cafasso, was repelled by the harsh military approaches of "repressive" methods⁹¹ and would coat his kindness with the varnish of gentleness. When, after some failures, he finally acquired this quality of gentleness, no external crust of austerity or gruffness, which he had deplored in the clergy of his infancy,⁹² ever hid it from the sight of those he lived with and those who met him during his life. He preferred, on principle,

a type of kindness which was visible, palpable, and a gentleness in his way of acting, in his appreciation of the virtues of others, in his silence about their defects and in his determined effort to look for their human and supernatural good. He once wrote to Father Cagliero: "Have charity, patience, gentleness, never give humiliating reprimands, never inflict punishments, do good to all you can, and evil to none."⁹³ And to Father Bonetti: "Act in such a way that all those you talk to become your friends."⁹⁴ Every type of person benefited from his gentleness: children who had been brought up wrong,⁹⁵ public functionaries, priests (and bishops) more or less hostile to him and even scoundrels who assaulted him on the streets. Don Bosco's patient gentleness has given a very marked character to his holiness and distinguished him in the world of canonized saints. Try to describe him before a sympathetic audience: very often the faces of those present begin to relax and appear to be like his.

From a certain point of view, this gentleness was one of his tactics. Concerned about elevating men to God, Don Bosco willingly put on this attractive kindly appearance which his dream at the age of nine had urged him to assume. He recognized the power which it gives to the apostle. He asked the Salesian directors to use gentle expressions when they gave orders and added: "Experience has shown that this approach becomes very effective in good time."⁹⁶ For someone of a malicious bent this might lead him to consider Don Bosco a hypocrite. In reality, his kindness was rooted in the love which Saint Paul had taught him and which is something else completely: "Love is kind and patient; it endures all things, hopes all things, bears with all things."⁹⁷ His kindness and his gentleness, handmaids of love and authentic virtues in themselves, were part of the solid foundations of his spirituality.

Joy and Peace

Joy and peace were for him the fruits of virtue, especially of charity. On the other hand, they also made possible the smooth development of charity.

It used to happen, at times, that when Don Bosco was writing a letter, he would compose some verses, as he had done so often in his youth.⁹⁸ One day, one of his correspondents received these unpretentious lines:

“Try always to be kind
Be always of good cheer
For all good deeds sincere
Alone do bliss endure.”⁹⁹

For Don Bosco, these verses contain a very important truth: joy is the effect of virtue. He crowned his spiritual edifice with his joyful spirit.

After his childhood, he was always cheerful, because according to an excellent insight by Father Caviglia, he was by temperament, “a saint who was always in good humor.” He was a keen observer and very perceptive of the humorous sides of various situations, and he loved to joke around very much. He played practical jokes on canons,¹⁰⁰ parish housekeepers,¹⁰¹ naive companions in the *convitto*,¹⁰² etc. He would joke around readily with his friends. He would address a humble working man whose family was anything but noble, as a marquis, a knight, or a poet.¹⁰³ He would jest with a good priest who was upset about being so short,¹⁰⁴ or with a seminarian who was complaining about too much work.¹⁰⁵ He would laugh about some academic title which he happened to accept.¹⁰⁶ He would laugh with his friends about a government official who had given him a very insignificant gift for his missions: “This is a little better than a punch in the eye,” as Gianduja would say.¹⁰⁷ It was not by chance that Saint Philip Neri and Saint Francis de Sales were his best models.

He loved, then, to live in a spirit of joy. The sentence from *Ecclesiastes* (according to the Vulgate): “I understand that there is no other happiness for them than to be joyful and to make their life cheerful”¹⁰⁸ was so dear to him that he wrote it down on a bookmark in his breviary.¹⁰⁹ Here is another bit of evidence of his love for the spirit of joy: when he first saw Dominic Savio, his “cheerful expression” and “his smiling spirit” impressed him from the very first moment.¹¹⁰ He always preached about cheerfulness. He started a campaign for cheerfulness around the year 1832, at the age of seventeen or nineteen, when

he founded the *Società dell'allegria* (The Society of Cheerfulness) at the school at Chieri. The name of the "society" was very fitting for this group, as he would explain later, "because it was of strict obligation that everyone look for books, introduce conversations or jokes which would help to make them happy. On the contrary anything that would make them sad was forbidden."¹¹¹ In 1841 one of the purposes of the Oratory was certainly to keep the boys of Turin happy. At that time he accepted whole-heartedly the views of Saint Philip Neri, who three centuries before, had said: "My sons, keep cheerful: I do not want scruples or sadness. I'm content as long as you do not sin."¹¹² He also accepted the writers of the "Aloysian" tradition. In 1836, one of them, an anonymous author, published in Turin these suggestions which could very well have been Don Bosco's. "Be happy in the Lord. Amuse yourselves, be cheerful, rejoice, because you have a perfect reason to do so. God is happy about it, and men will also love you more for it."¹¹³ He was already familiar with the quotation "Serve the Lord in gladness," which Luigi Comollo loved so much.¹¹⁴ Don Bosco would include it in the text of his *Guida angelica* (Angelical Guide), which he would compile as his introduction to his *Giovane provveduto* (The Companion of Youth) of 1847.¹¹⁵

Without doubt a particular nuance of the quality of his joy must be acknowledged. Don Bosco imposed upon himself a certain restraint and limit. His joy was peaceful. He would repeat the saying of Saint Philip Neri: "Shun immoderate merrymaking because it destroys all the good that you have acquired."¹¹⁶ And it is true. Everyone who knew him or who studied him close up, saw him only as relaxed and smiling, but could not imagine him shaken by uncontrolled laughter.¹¹⁷ In his mature years, after the few escapades of his youth, Don Bosco's conversations were imbued with a spirit of calmness, kindness and politeness. Some portraits, which annoyed Father Ceria,¹¹⁸ showed him with a silly expression and a fake smile. On the other hand, in another medium which was more expensive, but not altogether successful, a biographer of his, with very good intentions, portrayed him as a bold adventurer.¹¹⁹ But he missed the point. A true artist should be capable of depicting the good-natured sparkle which transfigured the gaze of his great and penetrating soul, and the calm peacefulness of his face which at times was enough to restore serenity to troubled souls.

To impatient persons who wanted to solve very complex problems in an instant, he would usually say: "Let's hurry slowly, slowly."¹²⁰ And he would remain peaceful and friendly, practicing that marvelous virtue of moderation, a virtue which he would unconsciously propose to the society of leisure which would arise from the era of the industrial age.¹²¹ He was against anything which produced nervousness, agitation, confusion and tension. Rather he favored peace and serenity which engendered good spirit. For him, these factors were both the conditions and the effects of joy and were found in souls which are free, calm, and open to God. He extolled this type of joy as the gateway to grace.

An Open Spirit of Humanism

If humanism is a philosophy which tries to make man happy by means of his human gifts, no one can doubt that Don Bosco's spirituality contains a form of humanism. He tried to make men feel happy about their human nature, their physical and moral gifts, and in the world which is theirs until the end of their lives.¹²² But he was also convinced that no true happiness is possible without God and without a true relationship with him. He would speak about "true joy" which comes from "peace of heart, from the tranquility of a good conscience."¹²³ Don Bosco drove home this teaching throughout his priestly life: "We see that those persons who live in God's grace are always cheerful and happy even in afflictions. On the contrary, those who give themselves up to pleasures live in a state of irritability and worry and try very hard to find peace in their pastimes, but they are always unhappy. "There is no peace for the wicked," says the Lord.¹²⁴ We admit that there is a slight exaggeration for purposes of instruction in these statements which contrast in a simplistic way the joy of the devout with the unhappiness of the wicked. The fact remains, however, that the purpose of "religion"—which according to him consists of the life with God and of the means to attain it—is first and foremost the acquiring and the preservation of "true joy." To avoid all misunderstandings, then, one should be aware of this fact if he wishes to correctly interpret what Dominic Savio told his friend Gavio: "You know,

here we make being good consist in being very cheerful.”¹²⁵ We know that Don Bosco, who intentionally included this teaching in his biographies, cherished the most simple human pleasures, such as those provided by a good bottle of Frontignan,¹²⁶ a good meal at school,¹²⁷ or a good game on the playing field.¹²⁸ He also cherished the more noble human joys such as that of the friendship of two young men inspired with love for perfection.¹²⁹ He praised this type of joy which is a rare and precious effect of virtue.¹³⁰ But he always had in mind a type of joy rooted in God, which respects his will and follows it. According to a saying which we read very often in his works, he wanted “that everyone should be happy in body and soul and let the world know how one can be happy in body and soul without offending the Lord.”¹³¹ This joy of the soul was in some respects supernatural.

Summarizing his thought, then, he would say that “only the constant practice of religion can make one happy in time and in eternity.”¹³² In one way or another he would keep saying that “besides taking care of his body, a man has to strengthen his spirit, but he can’t do this except through religion which alone can lift up his thoughts and the affections of his soul to a sublime and perfect good, which is not found in the present life.”¹³³ Without “religion” both individuals and nations collapse, because “only religion is the support of kingdoms and it alone can create happiness for the people.”¹³⁴

One can thus understand his fear that the cultivation of the intellect in schools, which in those days was based almost entirely on the explanations of Latin and Greek classics, does not produce minds which are sufficiently Christian and might compromise their true good. In fact, he took part with great interest in debates raised in the middle of the nineteenth century about introducing pagan authors into the secondary school curriculum. He was more in agreement with Abbot Gaume¹³⁵ than with Bishop Dupanloup.¹³⁶ He believed that it was necessary to expurgate these authors and even to prefer Christian Latin authors to them. He explained his thinking to the directors of his houses on July 27, 1875,¹³⁷ in the following words: by substituting Christian authors for pagan, “we will be able to build up a dam against a great evil current of our times.” Whether he was right or wrong, his response to this difficult question does not concern us. What interests us here is only his rejection of a closed education and of a pure humanism,

that is, of a pagan humanism.

As long as human nature does not abandon itself to the grace of God, it remains incomplete. Human nature is awaiting this heavenly dew, and when it receives it, what rejoicing! Even death itself is transformed into "a joyful dream."¹³⁸ In a funeral oration which was delivered thirty days after the death of his old friend Don Bosco, Cardinal Alimonda said that "among them (the followers of Don Bosco) their bodies and their spirits rejoice because religion invigorates human nature and love perfects knowledge."¹³⁹ The careful observer will be very aware of man's incompleteness according to Don Bosco, who, like Saint Francis de Sales, was more rigorous with himself than what appearances would lead us to suppose. He gave to asceticism an important part in the Christian spiritual life. There is no happiness without God, and there is no holiness at all without renunciation.

NOTES

1. According to the biographical information given after the death of this Salesian (1836-1874) in the *Brevi biografie dei confratelli salesiani chiamati da Dio alla vita eterna*, Turin, 1876, p. 6.

2. Saint Alphonsus Liguori, *Opere ascetiche*, Turin, 1846, vol. II, 473.

3. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, Turin, 1847, "Seven considerations . . ." p. 32. The underscoring is ours. The comparison of these texts was done by P. Stella, *Valori spirituali*, p. 66.

4. G. Bosco, *Il giovane*, ed. cit., p. 7.

5. G. Bosco's letter to Countess C. Callori, Oct. 3, 1875, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 513.

6. G. Bosco's letter to Countess G. Corsi, Oct. 22, 1878, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 397.

7. G. Bosco's letter to A. Boassi, Jul. 21, 1875, *Epistolario* vol. II, 487.
8. Cf. also, ch. 6, the section on chastity.
9. Two of these statements are found in E. Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio, ed., cit.*, p. 113. He, however, does not exaggerate their importance.
10. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 24 (cf. also Doc. 1 below).
11. Cf. Lemoine, *Memorie*, vol. I, 130-135. We have been able to verify the fact that these accounts, for the most part, were taken from the notebooks of Carlo Viglietti, Don Bosco's secretary, in which he had recorded them between 1884-1885 (A.C.S. S.110, Viglietti).
12. This expression is from a "Good night" talk of 1864, found in Lemoine, *Memorie*, vol. VII, 834 (English ed., p. 494).
13. G. Bosco's letter to the Salesians and students at Lanzo, Jan. 5, 1875, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 437.
14. G. Bosco's letter to F. Bodrato, (May, 1877, according to E. Ceria), *Epistolario*, vol. III, 172.
15. G. Bosco's letter to A. Fortis, Nov. 29, 1879, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 531.
16. G. Bosco's letter to G.B. Lemoine, Jan. 29, 1868, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 539.
17. G. Bosco's letter to M. Rua, Jan. 29, 1878, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 285. The room referred to had been used by this bishop on the occasion of his recent visit to Italy. Cf. also, among writings of a similar nature, Bosco's letter to J. Bonetti, 1874, *Ibid.*, vol. I, 327 (also Doc. 19 below) and Bosco's letter to J. Cagliero, Dec. 4, 1875, *ibid.*, vol. II, 531.
18. G. Bosco's letter to J. Bonetti, Feb. 9, 1870, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 74.
19. All this was said during a "Good night" talk of Jan. 7, 1876, recorded by E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XII, 28. It should be noted that in Turin the winter is very hard.
20. A confession in the middle of a difficult winter: "Our misery increases terribly: bread is 50 cents per kilo, or about 12,000 francs a month, and we are two months in arrears; there is half a meter of snow on the ground and the cold is intense. Half of the boys are wearing summer clothes. Let us pray . . ." (G. Bosco's letter to F. Oreglia, then at Rome, Jan. 3, 1868, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 525).
21. Cf. G. Bosco's letter to Dr. Losana, May 21, 1878, *Epistolario*

vol. III, 346, with a report of the editor. Not all of the evaluations of this type of Don Bosco's work were so unfavorable. There is proof of this in 1870 in a report by Dr. Serafino Biffi, published at Milan (an excerpt is found in *Epistolario*, vol. II, 139).

22. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., 1880, pp. 18-19 (English ed., p. 38).

23. Cf. *Memorie biografiche*, items in the Index under Sanità.

24. According to a conversation recorded by E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XII, 343.

25. Cf. in the passages quoted, his dealings with John Bonetti.

26. Turin, 1897, 588 pages.

27. P. Ricaldone, *Don Bosco Educatore*, Colle Don Bosco, 1952, vol. II, 107.

28. Cf. also, ch. 6.

29. Cf. E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XI, 292 (English ed., p. 271).

30. For example, Bosco's letter to G. Oreglia, S.J., Aug. 7, 1868, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 570.

31. *Regolamento per le case*, Turin, 1877, p. 68.

32. A. Caviglia, *Opere e scritti*, Turin, 1929, vol. I, 12, note.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 237ff.

34. E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XII, 159. About this academy, cf. G. Toffanin, *Storia dell'Umanesimo*, vol. IV: *L'Arcadia*, 2nd ed., Bologna, 1964, a book otherwise rich in details but which does not mention the "Arcadians" of the nineteenth century; in French, P. Arrighi, *La littérature italienne*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1961, pp. 50-52.

35. We are preparing a book on the *Salesian Constitutions* (cf. F. Desramaut, *Les constitutions salésiennes de 1966. Commentaire historique*, I, Rome, 1969).

36. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, pp. 124-127.

37. *Regulae seu Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii*, Turin, 1874, ch. 1, art. 4.

38. G. Bosco, *Vita di S. Paolo*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1878, ch. 1, p. 5.

39. Don Bosco usually gave the word *work* the meaning of manual labor, which he opposed to *study*. But as we shall see in his correspondence with Salesian priests, when he encouraged them to "work," he meant any kind of productive activity, whether short term or long term, manual, intellectual, or apostolic. He always distinguished between work, play and prayer.

40. G. Bosco's letter to G. Fagnano, Nov. 14, 1877, *Epistolario* vol. III, 236.

41. J. Folliet, *Réflexions critiques sur la civilisation du travail*, in *Recherches et débats*, 1956, Bk. 14, 164. Among other things, the author praises this "ancient wisdom. . . full of good sense." It is interesting that Alphonsus Liguori, a Neapolitan, was a model for John Bosco on account of his constant activity from as early as the period of John's friendship with Luigi Comollo: "(Comollo) had read in the life of St. Alphonsus how he had made that great vow of never wasting any time. Comollo admired St. Alphonsus very much for this and sought to imitate him as best he could, from the time he entered the seminary. (G. Bosco, *Luigi Comollo*, Turin, 1844, p. 27).

42. Cf. G.B. Lemoyne, *Scene morali di famiglia nella vita di Margherita Bosco*, Turin, 1886, ch. 24. This chapter is dedicated to the "Proverbs and Sayings" of Don Bosco's mother.

43. Above (ch. I) we have spoken about the "law of the monasteries," promulgated in this spirit by the government of the Sardinian State in 1855.

44. J. Folliet, *Réflexions critiques*, art. cit., p. 165.

45. *Epistolario*, vol. III, 585. The most important part of this statement is that referring to the loyalty of the Salesian Society to the Catholic Church.

46. G. Bosco's letter to G. Costamagna, Aug. 9, 1882, *Epistolario*, vol. IV, 160.

47. G. Bosco's letter to M. Rua, (April, 1876, according to the editor), *Epistolario*, vol. III, 53.

48. G. Bosco's letter to J. Cagliero, Nov. 16, 1876, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 114.

49. G. Bosco's letter to Countess G. Coris, Oct. 22, 1878, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 397.

50. G. Bosco's letter to Salesians, Jan. 6, 1884, *Epistolario*, vol. IV, 249.

51. G. Bosco, *Storia sacra*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1863, "epoca prima," ch. 1, *Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 131.

52. G. Bosco, *Maniera facile*, 2nd ed., Turin, "Moral maxims taken from the Scriptures," *Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 81. Job's statement was substantially found in (Bosco), *Giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, "Things to be avoided," art. I, p. 20.

53. "The soldiers were no longer accustomed to fatigue and discomforts. This should teach us that idleness is usually accompanied by

other vices and that only hard work makes men virtuous, courageous and strong" (Bosco, *Storia d'Italia*, 5th ed., Turin, 1866, p. 57).

54. "These vices (i.e. idleness and dissipation) dishonor men and make them fall into disrepute with good men" (*Ibid.*, pp. 77-78).

55. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 380.

57. *Ricordi per un giovanetto che desidera passar bene le vacanze*, Turin, 1874, p. 2. This page appears to have been written completely by Don Bosco, according to a letter to M. Rua, (Aug. 1873), *Epistolario*, vol. II, 295.

58. G. Bosco's letter to N.N., Jan. 12, 1878, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 272. Cf. also Bosco's letter to T. Remotti, Nov. 11, 1877, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 235; and *Avvisi importanti ai giovani intorno ai loro doveri* #4, art. 4, found in G. Bosco, *Porta teco*, Turin, 1878, p. 50.

59. 2 Thess. 3, 10. Quoted in Bosco, *Maniera facile*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1855, "Moral maxims . . ." (*Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 81); in the "projected regulations" for the house attached, "parte seconda," ch. 2, art. 1, published by Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IV, 748 (English ed., p. 553); etc.

60. G. Bosco's letter to the first Salesian missionaries, Nov. 11, 1875. *Epistolario*, vol. II, 517. Add: "If someone enjoys receiving great rewards, he should not shirk the hard task of competing for them" (Bosco's letter to Salesians, Jan. 6, 1884, *Epistolario*, vol. IV, 250).

61. "Everyone should reflect that man was born to work, and that those who work hard and with love have peace in their hearts and find exertions easy to take" (*Regolamento per le case*, Turin, 1877, p. 75). The author of this article is unknown. The article appeared later in the body of the text. It is sure, however, that Don Bosco knew about it and approved it.

62. About Don Bosco's ideas on work, some enlightening information is found in E. Ceria, *Don Boco con Dio*, ed. cit., pp. 262-269.

63. C. Pera, O.P., *I doni dello Spirito Santo nell'anima del beato Giovanni Bosco*, 1930, pp. 291-309.

64. At least a tutor in a wealthy family (*Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 120).

65. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, pp. 27-28, etc. The anecdote about the two priests who were supposed to take him to the insane asylum because of his "fixed ideas," and who ran the risk of being committed themselves is well founded. In fact, it was told by Don Bosco himself

in his "autobiography" (*ibid.*, p. 164), and E. Ceria also knew the names of the victims: Vincenzo Ponzati and Luigi Nasi (*ibid.*, note 81).

66. This comment was made in 1853. Cf. E. Ceria *Don Bosco con Dio, ed., cit.*, p. 104).

67. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 38. This scene gives us an idea of how violent the arguments were which divided the little family.

68. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, pp. 60-61. We should take note of these rather eloquent lines: "Since I didn't have a stick or a chair handy, I grabbed a fellow student by the shoulders and I used him as a club to hit my attackers. Four of them fell to the ground and the others fled screaming and begging for mercy . . ." (p. 61).

69. A critical study of *Metodo preventivo nell'educazione della gioventù* should be made to clear up ideas on this point.

70. But he was aware of different opinions as we can gather from an oral response which was recorded in a diary of Domenico Ruffino with the date of Jan. 16, 1861: "I studied these opinions very much (the theories about the efficacy of grace); but my belief is that which most redounds to the glory of God. What does it matter if I have a strict opinion or a broad opinion provided I send souls to paradise." (D. Ruffino, *Cronache*, notebook 2, pp. 8-9, A.C.S., S. 110. Also in Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. VI, 832 (English ed., p. 489), although not completely true to the original).

71. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, pp. 31, 60, 81, 113, etc.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

73. According to E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XIV, 114-115. These words are found in the last part of the biography of Don Bosco, at a time when his talks were recorded with great care, and so we are inclined to accept them with great confidence.

74. The greater part of the rough drafts of the *Salesian Constitutions* between 1859 and 1874 have been preserved in the archives at Valdocco, and it is easy to consult them.

75. Cf. A. Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X, 1018 (English ed., p. 427). We see there a maxim which he wrote on a bookmark in his breviary: "My brothers, carry with you the key to your room and the key to your tongue" (Saint Peter Damien; cf. also Doc. 5 below).

76. G. Bosco's letter to G. Cagliero, Nov. 13, 1875, *Epistolario* vol. II, 518.

77. G. Bosco's letter to Salesian missionaries, Nov. 11, 1875, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 517.

78. G. Bosco's letter to C. Vespignani, Apr. 11, 1877, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 166.
79. E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XII, 255. This idea was also developed by G.B. Lemoyne in the diocesan process of canonization; found in *Positio super introductiones causae*. "Summarium," pp. 665-666.
80. "In everything which concerns Professor Nuc (sic), "omnia probate, quod bonum est tenete (test everything, only keep what is good)" (Bosco's letter to M. Rua, Jan. 21, 1879, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 439).
81. "This is a matter of principle; now in practice, more specifically, I believe it is good to deal with these matters with the simplicity of a dove and with the prudence of a serpent" (Bosco's letter to G. Uselli, Nov. 26, 1877, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 243).
82. "In regards to your situation, do not forget the saying: 'Whoever finds himself standing well, should not move, and whoever is doing well should not seek to do better.' Many have been deluded themselves, and have not followed this maxim. They have sought the better with the result they have not even achieved the good, according to the proverb 'the better is the enemy of the good.' I speak completely from the heart . . ." (Bosco's letter to L. Guanella, Jul. 27, 1878, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 369-370). This letter is a very precious document for its interpretation of a proverb which was very much quoted by Don Bosco. At times this proverb led others to mistake Don Bosco for a conservative.
83. Advice of Don Bosco, to G. Bonetti, June 6, 1870 in *Epistolario* vol. II, 96.
84. H.D. Noble, *Bonté*, in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. I, col. 1861.
85. Some details are found in E. Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio*, ed. cit., pp. 76-77, 224-231. His correspondence provides a hundred other examples.
86. P. Albera, *Lettere circolari ai Salesiani*, Turin, 1922, p. 289: Letter of Apr. 20, 1919.
87. Comment of E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XVIII, 490.
88. Cf. his emotional reaction to the sights in the jail cells of Turin (*Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 123).
89. G. Bosco, *Luigi Comollo*, Turin, 1844, ch. 2, p. 24; and *passim*.
90. G. Bosco, *Rimembranza storico-funebre dei giovani dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales verso al Sacerdote Caffasso Giuseppe*, Turin, 1860, ch. 5, p. 32.

91. G. Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo*, I, found in *Regolamento per le case*, Turin, 1877, Introduction, pp. 3-6.

92. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 44.

93. G. Bosco's letter to G. Cagliero, Aug. 6, 1885, *Epistolario*, vol. IV, 328.

94. G. Bosco's letter to J. Bonetti, Dec. 30, 1874, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 434 (cf. also Doc. 29 below).

95. The scene between Don Bosco and the young leader of a juvenile gang on the station platform at Carmagnola is a classic example of Don Bosco's power of winning people over (Bosco, *Magone Michele*, Turin, 1861, pp. 7-11).

96. G. Bosco. *Ricordi confidenziali*, Turin, 1886, art.: "On Giving Orders."

97. Condensed from I Cor. 13, 4-7, in Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo*, in the *Regolamento per le case*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

98. Some notebooks of verses are preserved in the archives of the Salesian Society.

99. G. Bosco's letter to G. Rinaldi, Nov. 27, 1876, *Epistolario* vol. III, 119.

100. Cf. the episode about Canon Burzio, pastor of the cathedral of Chieri, who suspected him of practicing black magic (*Memorie dell'Oratorio*, pp. 72-73).

101. G.B. Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. I, 428-431 (English ed., pp. 318-21).

102. *Ibid.*, vol. II, 99-102 (English ed., pp. 78-80).

103. "P.S. Greet Mr. Pelazza, the Marquis Barale, and Mr. Cottino, the poet, for me" (G. Bosco's letter to G. Dogliani, 1875, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 462).

104. "So Fr. Bologna has grown taller?" (Bosco's letter to M. Rua, Mar. 8, 1875, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 464).

105. G. Bosco's letter to G. Rinaldi, Nov. 27, 1876, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 119.

106. Cf. the letter quoted above sent from "Turin, the conservatory of my Muse" (*Ibid.*, p. 119), and also note 34 above on Don Bosco and the Academy of Arcadia.

107. G. Bosco's letter to G. Cagliero, Nov. 14, 1876, *Epistolario* vol. III, 112. In the original the comment by Gianduaia, a witty story teller of nineteenth century Turin, was in Piedmontese dialect.

108. Eccl. 3,12. One should notice that Don Bosco gives this message a moral meaning which is not found in the Biblical context.

109. Cf. also, Doc. 5, below.

110. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., Turin, 1880, p. 28 (English ed., p. 48).

111. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 52.

112. G. Bosco, *Porta teco*, Turin, 1858, "General advice of St. Philip Neri for young people," p. 34.

113. *Un mazzolin di fiori ai fanciulli ed alle fanciulle*, *op. cit.*, Turin, 1836, p. 235; quoted by P. Stella, *Valori spirituali* p. 45.

114. G. Bosco, *Luigi Comollo*, Turin, 1844, p. 24.

115. P. Stella, *Valori spirituali*, p. 50.

116. G. Bosco, *Porta teco*, Turin, 1858, p. 34.

117. G.B. Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. I, 95 (English ed., p. 72); according to a confidence by Don Bosco to Carlo Viglietti, as we have been able to verify.

118. Cf. *Don Bosco con Dio*, *ed., cit.*, pp. 88-89.

119. N. Duino, *L'homme au chien gris* (col. Marabout junior) Verriers (circa 1956).

120. A. du Boys, *Dom Bosco et la Pieuse Société des Salésiens*, Paris, 1884, p. 302.

121. Cf. H. Rahner, *Eutrapélie*, in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. IV, col. 1726-1729.

122. This is why the following lines written a long time ago by a French eyewitness seem quite pertinent: "His approach consists in helping souls attain a perfect balance. It could not be more contrary to an "illuminism" which weighs and measures everything that is required in the conduct of one's life; it could not be more opposed to an exaggerated asceticism which demands from every individual the highest degree of intellectual and moral activity." (A. du Boys, *Dom Bosco*, *op. cit.*, pp. 310-311).

123. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, Turin, 1861, p. 16. Cf. also "Be cheerful, but let your joy be true, like that which comes from a conscience free of sin." (Bosco's letter to S. Rossetti, Jul. 25, 1860, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 194).

124. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, Turin, 1847, p. 28: *Le Sei domeniche*, a. 6; this was repeated in all subsequent editions.

125. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., Turin, 1880, p. 83 (English ed., p. 106).

126. E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XVI, 264.
127. G. Bosco's letter to J. Bonetti, Feb. 9, 1870, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 74.
128. G. Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo*, in the *Regolamento per le case*, Turin, 1877, "Introduction," p. 7.
129. He himself and Comollo, Dominic and Gavio, Dominic and Massaglia, without mentioning examples found in history.
130. "You can see, my dear boys, how true it is that worldly honors do not bring true happiness. A man cannot be considered happy if he doesn't practice virtue . . ." Bosco, *Storia d'Italia*, Turin, 1866, p. 115.
131. G. Bosco's letter to all those living in the school at Lanzo, Jan. 3, 1876, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 5.
132. G. Bosco, *Il Pastorello delle Alpi*, Turin, 1864, p. 180.
133. G. Bosco, *Fatti contemporanei esposti in forma di dialogo*, Turin, 1853, p. 12. This thought is found again stated more briefly in Bosco, *La Forza della buona educazione*, Turin, 1855, p. 48; in his letter to G. Turco, Oct. 23, 1867, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 507 and in some advice for an engaged couple, in his letter to A. Piccono, Sept. 4, 1875. *Epistolario*, vol. II, 508.
134. G. Bosco, *Storia d'Italia*, 5th ed., Turin, 1866, p. 107; in an article on the Roman Emperor Alexander Severus, whose syncretism was well disposed toward Jews and Christians.
135. J.J. Gaume, *Le ver rongeur des sociétés modernes, ou le paganisme dans l'éducation*, Paris, 1851.
136. On this matter, cf. R. Aubert, *Le pontificat de Pie IX*, *op. cit.*, p. 57; J. Leflon, Gaume, Jean-Joseph, in *Catholicisme*, vol. IV, col. 1783. This heated controversy which pitted especially Louis Veuillot against Bishop Dupanloup is quite well known.
137. According to the minutes of the meeting reported by E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XI, 29 (English ed., p. 18).
138. In the case of Michael Magone, cf. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, Turin, 1861, p. 84; cf. also Doc. 16, below.
139. G. Alimonda, *Jean Bosco et son siècle*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

6

His Indispensable Asceticism

Temperance

We have to recognize and admit the fact that Don Bosco's smiles and his gentleness not only did not hide his true spirit of asceticism, but that asceticism itself occupied a place of primary importance in his teaching. To begin with, two quotations will make the point clear: "Let us detach our hearts from the pleasures of this earth. Let us raise our minds to our heavenly home, where we will enjoy truly good things. There are many enemies who spread out snares before us and seek to ruin us. We have to fight them courageously, but, as Saint Paul says, let our shield be a living faith, a working faith which makes us abandon evil and love virtue."¹ And an even more emphatic quotation: "Whoever wants to save himself has to put the thought of eternity in his head, God in his heart, and the world under his feet."²

Have those who imagine him to have been very soft and gentle reflected on the watchword which he gave to his religious society? His motto "Work and temperance" summoned up a program of combat and of painful privations, that is, a real program of asceticism to which one could give a true Christian value. It was first of all a program of privations but above all of "perseverance" in spite of difficulties. It is good to underscore what a contemporary writer says in this connection: "we consider it a good thing that a Christian impose a fast upon himself to practice asceticism, but we also consider the fact that those among us who have experienced hunger in concentration camps, were able to practice the most Christian form of asceticism by accepting and in a certain way attaching ourselves interiorly to the privations which are imposed from the outside."³ Don Bosco preached about voluntary renunciation of pleasures and the acceptance of a way of life which was always more or less austere.

Let us not soften the “temperance” part of his motto. Temperance means deliberately abstaining from the satisfaction of the senses involved, for example in looking, eating, drinking, sleeping, touching, and feeling, and also a certain willingness to undergo all forms of austerity and penance. As a seminarian, John Bosco would write: “I will love and practice a retiring life and temperance in eating and drinking. I will sleep only the number of hours strictly necessary for my health.”⁴ Almost at the very end of his life, a handwritten text of a dream which he had in 1881 explained: “About temperance. If you take away the wood, the fire dies. Make an agreement with your eyes, with your mouth, with your sleep, so that these enemies do not take possession of your souls. Intemperance and chastity cannot live together.”⁵ “Jesus Christ recommended temperance by teaching us that if we do not do penance we will be eternally lost.”⁶ And elsewhere: “The fourth secret (of Father Cafasso on how to do much good) was temperance, which we would more appropriately call severe penance.”⁷ For him temperance did not only mean moderation but austerity.

Don Bosco was concerned about not losing the dynamic power of the Christian life. Those aspiring to holiness necessarily had to embrace some form of asceticism.

Painful Penances

His sense of moderation could mislead us. While on the one hand in his recommendations no “painful” penances like severe fasts, hair-shirts and the discipline appeared—in general he did not put much faith in them—on the other hand, he respected these penances and to some degree recommended them.

In the seminary he had imitated Luigi Comollo in everything, except in his austerity. Let us recall this admission already referred to in a previous chapter: “In one thing alone I didn’t even try to imitate him: in his mortification. To see this young man of nineteen fasting rigorously during the whole of Lent and on other days ordered by the Church, fasting every Saturday in honor of the Blessed

Virgin, foregoing his breakfast frequently and sometimes having only bread and water for dinner, bearing up with all forms of insults and injuries without the slightest show of resentment; to see him most exact in fulfilling even the smallest school duties or acts of piety—these things astonished me.”⁸ Someone might detect in these lines a virtuous form of jealousy. It might be true. But notice the remarks which he made to Dominic Savio, to Michael Magone, and to Michael Rua, who were looking for physical penances in order to sanctify themselves.⁹ And do not forget the Liguorian tradition which was little inclined toward this form of mortification, in favor of other forms which will be mentioned later.¹⁰ Ordinary Christians usually consider penance to be reserved for the saints whose souls have already been tried, and would consider it presumptuous to classify themselves with them. Not without a touch of humor did Father Joseph Cafasso say that to accept self-imposed mortifications you had to have “souls bigger than ours.” He advised an audience of priests to practice “giving up small things: a word, a look, some little object, some little satisfaction. True, I could defend myself, excuse myself, amuse myself, follow any whim, but I would say: Let this be a proof that I love God.”¹¹ And this holy man was not at all easy with himself.¹²

We must be no less, however. Good sense will decide. Don Bosco did not remove from his asceticism that deliberate abstaining from the joys of life. It is true, he forbade his boys to perform rigorous mortifications “because they were not compatible with their age.”¹³ The chapter which he wrote about the “self-imposed bodily penances” of Dominic Savio opened with the statement that “his age, his weak health, the innocence of his life would certainly have dispensed him from every sort of penance”¹⁴ If we are to interpret this statement logically, we should conclude that an adult in good health should mortify his body. His balanced teaching on self-imposed penances did not eliminate from the Christian life all asceticism, and not even the austere penances which a rigorous view of religion had made excessive use of, it seemed to him, in the preceding generations. In fact, asceticism appeared to him to be intimately linked to the teachings lived by Christ.

The Motives for Asceticism

His asceticism was rational, as can easily be demonstrated from a study of his words and writings. If it is true that the spiritual man is not bound to have clear ideas and, even less, to explain the motives which determine his actions, yet his decisions—even if not very orderly—can be very enlightening.

Whoever reads Don Bosco's works will not find many human explanations for his austerity. Human asceticism exists. Saint Paul himself alluded to the fact, that for a perishable crown, the athlete imposes a severe training program on himself.¹⁵ Don Bosco, on the other hand, appears to have had little interest in the natural benefits of practical asceticism. Every now and then, as a consequence of an anthropology which was vaguely platonic, one of his expressions might suggest that "the body is the oppressor of the soul." The body resembles a skittish horse that has to be tamed by mortification. . .¹⁶

The motives which he did mention often, however, were of another kind: to prevent sin or expiate for it, to lead us on the road to contemplation and above all to imitate Christ crucified.

After the fall of Adam, there remained in man a strong inclination to sin. When man disobeys God, he can no longer control himself without some hard struggles.¹⁷ Bodily mortification, which brings our body under the control of the spirit, helps us overcome temptations which could take us far from God. Dominic Savio "knew that it would be difficult for a boy to preserve his innocence without penance,"¹⁸ and he was praised for this by Don Bosco. (Actually, going by the spirit rather than the letter of the text, we should say that this conviction was first of all that of the author (Don Bosco), who attributes it to Dominic Savio, and not without good reason). Mortification prevents sins. Don Bosco believed Saint John's declaration: "All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh (pleasures of the senses), the concupiscence of the eyes (riches), and the pride of life (vainglory)."¹⁹ It was not the spirit of Jansenism which inspired these hard statements about the "world," expressions which have by now become familiar to us: "The world is full of dangers . . . Saint Anthony saw the world covered with snares."²⁰ His religious sense warned him about the universal influence of Satan over what the Gospel calls his kingdom. He could see clearly

the "ambiguity" of a world always turned to God and always against God. He was convinced that a certain amount of yielding was the effect of either light-mindedness or of *naïveté*. The kingdom of darkness has the same extension as the kingdom of the light. The Christian who lives within the kingdom has to make a choice: the unavoidable presence of the cockle obliges him to struggle in order not to be destroyed by it and, so to speak, to try to "free himself" from evil."

We are not sure, but as far as we know, Don Bosco usually did not suggest that asceticism be practiced to expiate for the sins of others. Rather we notice that he would love to tell stories about saints, who were models from the beginning to the end of their lives.²¹ Besides, his teaching about Divine Providence portrayed a God who punished evil people on this earth. Through this type of reasoning, he could safeguard his belief in the expiatory value of suffering. Moreover, his trust in the divine mercy, incarnated in the Church, prevented him from insisting on the traditional expiatory purpose of penance. The Sacrament of Penance sufficed: after confession the penitent leaves with his soul light, definitely pardoned by God.

Don Bosco was not very outspoken, either, about the connection between mortification and contemplation. In one of his writings he says that detachment from material things is a very good means of fixing one's sights on God and of praying without distractions.²² But these explanations are not very frequent.

To tell the truth, Don Bosco gives only one motive for the spiritual man's growth in asceticism: to become one with Christ. It is necessary "to suffer with Christ." The crucifixion of Christ was the fundamental motive for Don Bosco's asceticism. The Christian accompanies the suffering Christ throughout his whole life. "The first step which those who want to follow God have to take is to renounce themselves and carry their cross" after him.²³ "Up to which point?" Don Bosco asked himself in a sermon outline. He replied: "Even unto death, with the warning that 'he who does not want to suffer with Christ, cannot rejoice with Christ.'" ²⁴

We do not believe that we should attribute too readily a mystical meaning to this "suffering with Christ," which Don Bosco preached with so much zeal. "To suffer with Christ" is first of all to imitate Him in His sufferings. For this reason alone Dominic Savio would lie in bed numb

from the cold in the middle of winter.²⁵ It was a way of proving his love by means of enduring pain. In his description of the last illness of Luigi Comollo—let us not forget Luigi was being presented as a model for all young Christians—Don Bosco made this observation: “When he was delirious and weighed down by the pain of his illness, if one would ask him, ‘Comollo, for whom are you suffering?’ he would suddenly seem to recover and with a look of utter happiness, as if the words had taken away his illness, would reply: ‘For Jesus crucified. . . .’”²⁶ If we interpret his thought well, Don Bosco believed that Comollo’s love for God, shown by his joy in thinking about him and perhaps in consoling him (the asceticism of reparation) reached its climax in suffering “with Christ,” that is, in suffering “like Christ suffered.” In the end, the asceticism of suffering opened the gates to eternal glory. Suffering with Christ meant to prepare oneself for eternal bliss. From the time of the publication of the little book on the *Six Sundays in Honor of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga* (1846) and of the manual of piety in which the Six Sundays Devotion was included (1847), Don Bosco would often repeat this maxim in his works: “He who wants to rejoice with Christ, must suffer with Christ.”²⁷ Don Bosco found no other expression better suited to show that asceticism is essential for man from his youth. “To one who tells you that it is not good to treat your body so rigorously,” he said, “answer this: The one who on earth refuses to suffer with Jesus Christ will be unable to rejoice with Jesus Christ in heaven.”²⁸

In 1867, in one of relatively few letters addressed to all the Salesians, he explained this maxim: “But up to what point do we follow (Christ)? Up to the point of death, and, eventually even to a death on a cross. This is what someone in our society does when he spends his energies in the sacred ministry, in teaching or in other priestly ministries, even until death, even a violent death in prison, in exile, by the sword, by water, or by fire, so that after having suffered with Jesus Christ upon earth, he might go to rejoice with him in heaven. This, it seems to me, is the meaning of those words which Saint Paul addressed to all Christians: ‘He who wants to rejoice with Christ, must suffer with Christ.’”²⁹ These words echo a familiar teaching of his, and we read these same words again in his letter of 1874 to vocational students in the house of Turin,³⁰ in his first conference to the Salesian novices in 1875³¹ and in a circular letter which he addressed in 1884 to all the members of his society.³²

In the cross of Christ he found the sufficient motive for Christian asceticism, be it an asceticism of renunciation or of acceptance.

An Asceticism of Denial

In spite of appearances, he also renounced "the world." Certainly this apostle of the modern city remained very much in the "world" which he at times inveighed against. His "Oratories" were (or were about to be) established in the suburbs of industrial cities: Turin, London, Liege, Buenos Aires

When the Italian State, which came into being after the *Risorgimento*, tried to challenge the influence of the Church and professed itself to be anticlerical, Don Bosco did not take refuge in a theoretical desert, but pursued a clear course among the hostile policemen and ministers of a thoroughly secular government. He was always ready to submit to its demands. To the extent that the law of God imposed the state on him, his loyalty to Caesar seems to have been always faultless. Perhaps he experienced a crisis around 1860 when he was torn between his loyalties to Pius IX and to the Piedmontese government. At any rate, it was not in any way a violent crisis, and around 1875 it was all resolved. In a solemn tone which was not usual for him, he stated on the occasion of the General Chapter of 1877: "Our purpose is to make known that we can give to Caesar what is Caesar's, without compromising anyone. And this takes nothing away from our giving to God what is God's. In our times it is said that this is a problem, and I will add, it is the greatest of problems, but one which was already solved by our Divine Savior Jesus Christ." The difficulties involved in such a submission to the state did not make him yield ground: "There is no one who does not see the evil conditions through which the Church has to pass these days. I believe that from the time of Saint Peter until the present there have not been such difficult times. They have refined their methods and they have limitless means. Not even the persecutions of Julian the Apostate were so hypocritical and harmful. And what shall we do? We shall try to watch out for the legalities in everything. If they impose taxes on us, we will pay them;

if community property is no longer allowed, we will make it individual; if they require examinations, we will take them; if they require certificates and diplomas, we will do everything possible to obtain them”³³ He followed the exact opposite road that a hermit would: originally from a little hamlet lost in the countryside, he worked among the people of the densely populated capital. In 1848 the people rose up against the enemies of liberty; in 1854 they were decimated by a horrifying cholera epidemic; and in 1859 they acclaimed the French soldiers of Napoleon III, an ally of their king against the Austrians. Don Bosco lived among the people.

Flight From the “World”

Don Bosco still surprises his readers, some of whom are inclined to simplify everything. For instance, he recommended with insistence a flight from the “world,” in which he, nonetheless, was immersed. He formulated some arguments in support of this flight. According to him, the “avoidance of idleness” was nothing more than the negative aspect of his “love for work” even if the negative expression evidently implied an element of rejection, whether of the deceits of Satan or of morbid thoughts which are the result of an idle mind.³⁴ Elsewhere this term quite clearly implied a break with the “world.” It could be the avoiding of company which is dangerous to faith and morals—a practice which he followed, even in the major seminary at Chieri³⁵—it could be the avoiding of dangerous occasions,³⁶ of particular friendship,³⁷ or of bad books, against which he raised the bulwark of the *Letture Cattolice*.³⁸ To sum up, “avoiding idleness” meant the “flight from the ‘world’ and all its principles.”³⁹ With this refusal to connive in any way with an attractive but sinful and deceitful “world,” Don Bosco practiced and made others practice a “retiring sort of life,” in accordance with the resolution he had made at his clerical investiture. He praised Francis Besucco, a young shepherd from an Alpine village, for saying these words every morning when he got up: “Leave this world which deceives you.”⁴⁰ And Francis would keep himself free from its snares

with a series of ascetical acts calculated not to allow him to be satisfied only with good intentions.

This ascetical flight is indispensable for anyone who wants to serve God, because evil is everywhere and first of all within oneself.⁴¹ The lesson of Christ being tempted in the desert is valid for all: "If someone should want to give us the whole world to induce us to adore Satan, that is to say, to commit even only one sin, let us reject with horror any offer of the kind. We should rather lose everything than commit sin."⁴²

Nonetheless, with the exception of these evil "occasions," Don Bosco did not impose on his followers any restrictions in their social life. He recommended a few moments of silence during the day, and a few prayers in the quiet of one's room. Moments of peace were brief in their full lives: a very short morning prayer, a day of recollection every month,⁴³ and about six days of retreat every year according to a common practice among religious with vows and their lay helpers.⁴⁴ Don Bosco adopted a middle course in the question of vacation periods for his boys. Quite aware of the harm done by the "infernal falcon" (Satan)⁴⁵ during these periods, he preferred to keep his students with him. The view that a "Christian institution" should be a shelter against the world, which irritates contemporary Catholics who are enthusiastic about their sense of mission and of their freedom, was defended only by Dominic Savio in the biography written by Don Bosco. Don Bosco disregarded it and sent his boys home for a limited vacation period.⁴⁶ However, we are well aware that when he spoke of vacations for his religious, he clearly followed in the footsteps of the spiritual writers of the Counter Reformation and of many of the writers who had preceded them. In 1868, in a letter to a director, he proposed this "strenna" (yearly motto) to him: "For the good of the society: let us cut down on traveling, and as far as possible, no one should go home. Father Rodriguez, S.J., has very surprising things to say about this matter."⁴⁷ The need to limit their visits home, which up to this point had not been considered inappropriate for the Salesians who lived near their home town, but which would become burdensome for a society which was extending itself to distant places, does not in itself suffice as a reason for Don Bosco's insistence. He took literally the evangelical counsel about detach-

ment from one's family, which he summed up in these words: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, etc., he cannot be my disciple. A man's enemies are those of his own household."⁴⁸ And to support his point, he would choose paradoxical sayings from the Bible. Let us read some of his reflections: "He who says to his father and mother: 'I don't know you' and to his brothers: 'I must ignore you' will be true to your word and will keep your covenant."⁴⁹ Numerous passages from his conferences about relatives and visits home repeat the same ideas: visits to one's family weaken Christian life, and to a greater degree the religious life of a consecrated person. A religious (and at times he said this about priests too) has changed families. The family of a religious is like the family of Christ, made up of those "who do the will of my heavenly Father."⁵⁰ It is not necessary to add, here as always, that with his usual sharp sense of adaptability even after he had enunciated these principles, Don Bosco did not fail to allow one or another of his religious to go home for brief periods of rest.⁵¹

The fact is that while he rejected sin he allowed himself to be guided once again by his motto: "It is necessary to suffer with Christ." The bent of his thinking was ascetical. Following an ancient Christian tradition, he wanted Christians to consider themselves wayfarers and that especially those in certain vocations should consider themselves strangers in their own country, truly pilgrims in the service of Christ and of his kingdom.⁵²

Detachment from Worldly Goods

The Son of Man did not have a stone whereon to lay his head. In another age and with another mission, we could have imagined Don Bosco being as demanding as Saint Francis of Assisi about the renunciation of earthly goods. For some time he had thought of following Saint Francis' example. In reality, however, it seems to us that his spirituality was evidently different on this point from that of the poor man of medieval Umbria.

Don Bosco never cursed "money as detestable." "Whatever we

have in the world is a precious gift given to us by God.”⁵³ “When God gives temporal wealth to a man, he gives him a grace.”⁵⁴ Throughout his whole life, Don Bosco was always short of money, always begging, always collecting huge sums of money, and thanks to this, always expanding his operations. God himself, who intervened in his work did not need money, this resource “which his Divine Providence has put in our hands.”⁵⁵ Don Bosco valued those things which money allows us to acquire. As the founder of the Salesian technical schools, he followed closely the inventions made during his century. On the occasion of the industrial exposition of 1884 in Turin, the paper mill machine intended for his house at Mathi created a sensation.⁵⁶ Some people said that at that time he had the best ecclesiastical library and the most modern printing press in the city.⁵⁷

Just the same, he repeated the curses of Saint Luke against the rich, and he taught that the goods of this earth are dangerous for those who withhold them. Don Bosco had a keen sense of the relative emptiness of the temporal, in which one enjoys transitory goods, in contrast with the fullness of an eternity in which God alone would suffice. With this view he interpreted the mind of the Italian people of his age who did not accept the optimistic prophecies of the middle class which came to power in the second half of the nineteenth century. The rich man who takes delight in his wealth in contempt of God and of his fellow men, who does not begin to practice during this life the inevitable detachment which will take place at the moment of death, and who lets his charity dry up on account of his greed for money, appeared to him to be harmful and ridiculous.⁵⁸ He would very readily accept Father Joseph Cafasso’s very pertinent statement: Do not hope to get anything from earthly goods. Be always ready to do without them.⁵⁹ The salvation of one’s soul is the only thing that is truly necessary for a Christian. All the rest of the things on this earth have to be viewed in this light. Let us be logical: “If we ourselves wish to detach our hearts from the goods of this world and love the things of God, we should begin by despising those earthly things which are an impediment to our salvation and esteem only those things which help guide us to a blessed eternity, saying with Saint Aloysius: ‘That which is not eternal is nothing.’”⁶⁰ Don Bosco took this teaching from the Gospel: “He (Jesus) inculcated the pro-

per use of riches by saying that only one thing was necessary, and that it profits a man nothing to gain the whole world if he then loses his own soul."⁶¹ In using earthly goods, Christians fix their sights on their final destiny which teaches them about the necessity of detachment and about the usefulness of poverty.

The Poor According to Don Bosco

Whatever his "age and condition," the disciple of Christ should be interiorly detached. If he has possessions, he gives away what is superfluous to those in need around him. Whether he is a layman, a religious or a priest, he should commit himself to live an evidently austere life if possible.

Don Bosco preached detachment to all, even to his boys who surely could not have possessed anything of worth. He used to ask them to be "detached from food and drink which are occasions of gluttony. Detachment might refer to nothing more than an item of clothing, to a bunch of rags, with which you might allow yourself to wish to cut a good figure or to appear as clever and ambitious as some young dandies."⁶²

He counseled detachment from things through the vow of poverty. The *Salesian Constitutions* allow the lawful ownership of personal property by the religious: "The observance of the vow of poverty in our Congregation consists essentially in the detachment from all earthly goods . . ."⁶³ This annotation which is found in the oldest editions of the *Constitutions* gives meaning and spirit to the juridical explanations in which it is later submerged.⁶⁴

Christian morality led Don Bosco to consider the usefulness of earthly goods at least in terms of their social benefit, if not altogether in their community dimensions. All the goods of this earth are just as much for the poor as they are for the rich. The rich can keep for themselves only what is necessary. The "rest" to which he strictly applied the term of *superfluous*, has to be distributed. In those days when personal property, defined as "the right to use or to abuse things," appeared to be immune from attack, such ideas clashed with current

opinions. In July of 1882, *Bolletino Salesiano* (Salesian Bulletin) had to publish a "Reply to a Courteous Objection about the Obligation and the Extent of Almsgiving."⁶⁵ The preceding year in very bad French, but in very clear terms that left no room for doubt, Don Bosco explained his ideas on the subject to the "Cooperators" of Marseilles: "You ask me, 'What do you mean by superfluous?' Listen to me, my worthy Cooperators. All temporal goods, all riches, have been given to us by God. And in giving us these things, he gives us the liberty to keep whatever is necessary. Nothing more. God, who is master not only of us, but of our property and of all our money, demands a strict account of the things that are necessary if we do not give them away according to his commandment . . . You might say: 'Is it obligatory to give away everything that is superfluous?' I do not want to give any other answer than that which the Divine Savior gave when he commands us: Give away what is superfluous. He did not set limits and I do not dare change his teaching."⁶⁶ His religious heard from him similar lessons: "Everything that is beyond food and clothing is superfluous for us and is contrary to religious poverty."⁶⁷ Don Bosco did not allow exceptions to this whether they were small or big, personal or by the community. He wrote to his followers in America: "I ask all of you to avoid the construction or the acquisition of buildings which are not strictly necessary for *our use*. You should never own things for resale, neither fields or land or houses to make a profit from."⁶⁸ As with the belongings of lay people, what is superfluous to religious has to be distributed to the poor or given to those who can use it.

If they have a true Christian spirit and a desire to be perfect, both lay people and religious use the same necessary things with simplicity, if not with austerity. Those who are truly poor according to the spirit of Christ, lead a simple life, compatible with their own social condition. Everyone, Don Bosco must have thought, could practice the way of life which he recommended to his Salesian Cooperators. "Modesty in dress, frugality in eating, and simplicity in furnishings."⁶⁹ He knew that in itself this minimum would perhaps become a cross in places where people were generally well off. The advice which he gave to his religious, to whom he would forbid all "wordly comforts," that is, all the various means of making life com-

fortable, was, on the other hand, more severe. Some decrees of the general chapters convoked during his life time and under his control even give an impression of stinginess. Even given the difficulties resulting from a treasury which was usually out of funds, these measures had to be explained by the will of the founder of the Salesians to simplify the style of his religious. Food, clothing, trips, books, buildings, and everything within these buildings had to give the impression of limited resources rather than of abundant.⁷⁰ Don Bosco set the example. La Verende speaks about Don Bosco's cassock and big shoes, really "infantry boots," of which many who lived close to him preserved an indelible memory.⁷¹ At times his shoelaces were only pieces of string dyed with ink.

His mother, one of "the poor of Yahweh" in the New Covenant, had impressed upon him her liking for an austere life which he identified with her Christian faith. The remarks which she made to her son when he decided to follow his vocation are well known: "Do not worry about me. I expect nothing from you. Remember this well: I was born poor, I have lived in poverty, and I wish to die poor. Moreover I warn you: if you become a secular priest and by misfortune become rich, I will not go to visit you ever"⁷² The spirit of poverty was, then, deep-seated in her son. "It is necessary to have poverty in your heart and to practice it" she would love to tell Don Bosco.⁷³ Without complexes, he lived this effective renunciation of the goods of the earth, under the influence of a capitalistic bourgeoisie and in an age of the *nouveaux riches*.

His mental equilibrium was noteworthy. He valued material things, and he allowed their possession even by those who practice the evangelical vows. God's creatures are always lovable. He, however, wished that all Christians should practice a continual interior detachment, so that their superfluous goods could be placed at the disposition of others and so that their use of necessary goods should be governed by an authentic austerity.

Purity

The follower of Don Bosco was to control with even greater austerity the use of his sexuality. In fact, Don Bosco, like most Catholics of the time, had the greatest concern for purity, a virtue which only a vigorous asceticism could preserve or restore.

If we wish to understand Don Bosco, it is necessary that we walk in his world. A passage from one of his sermons of 1858, just as it has come down to us, reflects very well his thinking on this virtue. "The theologians say that by purity we should understand a hatred, an abhorring of anything which is against the sixth commandment, so that any person, in his own state of life, can preserve the virtue of purity."⁷⁴ At this time (that is the end of the nineteenth century) purity of heart and of body was not merely one of the Christian virtues. It was *the* virtue,⁷⁵ and Don Bosco fully accepted it as such. He did not limit himself to consider it only a virtue or even a "great virtue." According to him, no adjective could do justice to the "beautiful, sublime virtue the queen of virtues, the holy virtue of purity."⁷⁶ Chastity or purity is more than a human virtue: it is an angelic virtue and, in accordance with the Gospel of Matthew, those who live it become like the angels.⁷⁷ Those who promoted devotion to Saint Aloysius, whose influence on Don Bosco is becoming more and more evident, had insisted on the resemblance between an angel and a chaste man.⁷⁸ In the booklet entitled "*Modo facile di imparare la storia sacra*" (An easy way of learning Bible History), Don Bosco recalled the only reference to chastity, He (Christ) counseled us to imitate here on earth the purity of the Angels who are in heaven."⁷⁹ Since the angels are pure spirits, the integration of sexual values in the Christian life posed a problem whose solution was evidently most difficult. We should not blame Don Bosco for not having even referred to this problem.

The admirable virtue of purity is also a fundamental virtue, without which the edifice of perfection soon falls into ruin. "I don't know if I am giving a false principle—Don Bosco remarked one day—but I hold that whoever possesses it is sure of possessing all the other virtues, and whoever does not, might possibly possess other virtues but they all remain weak and very soon will disappear."⁸⁰ Sanctity and purity in his teaching came to the point of being interchangeable. And, sup-

ported by this maxim "This is the will of God, your sanctification," he explained that the sanctity mentioned here consisted in "showing oneself to be pure and chaste as was Jesus Christ."⁸¹ In line with the confusion proper of the time,⁸² he looked for a perfect purity comparable to the candor and innocence of a baby.

Finally, he incessantly praised the marvels of a pure heart: "Those who have the good fortune of speaking with souls who have preserved this precious treasure, discover a tranquility, a peace of heart, a happiness which is above all the good things of the earth. You will find them patient in suffering, charitable toward their neighbor, calm in accepting insults, resigned in their illnesses, attentive to their duties, fervent in their prayers, and anxious to hear the Word of God. You discover in their hearts a living faith, a firm hope and a burning love."⁸³ Truly, "all good things came to me together with her."⁸⁴ In the virtue of chastity, he could discern many rich blessings which were in accord with his spirit. He made this virtue characteristic of his followers. "That which should distinguish our society from others—he would repeat clearly—is chastity, just as poverty distinguishes the sons of Saint Francis of Assisi and obedience the sons of Saint Ignatius."⁸⁵

Sexual Asceticism

Perhaps now we can understand how Father Caviglia could have had him say, without too much exaggeration: "Let us leave theology aside, moral, mystical, and ascetical theology. Everything boils down to this: to preserve ourselves pure and holy in God's sight."⁸⁶ Don Bosco could not do less than to insist on the means of preserving and restoring purity. Rightly understood, along with the "positive" means such as a healthy and happy atmosphere, prayer, devotion to Mary, and the sacramental life, he gave a lot of attention to the means which he defined as "negative," and which were exercises of asceticism in reference to sex.⁸⁷

The separation of the sexes was considered essential for the "protection" of chastity. Don Bosco's attitude here consisted of being reserved, a reservation sometimes dubbed "savage" by some commentators who perhaps did not see the whole picture. Among the book-

marks in his breviary, the only maxim which refers to chastity is a warning about temptation to the opposite vice: "Keep away from her, approach not the door of her house."⁸⁸ In plain terms, it is necessary to flee. We find here again an ascetical principle which we have already encountered. "All the negative means can be summed up in the rule of Saint Augustine which says: 'Take to flight if you wish to speak of victory.'⁸⁹ In order to combat other vices, it is necessary to face them head on; but for this vice, only the cowards conquer it," said Saint Philip, "that is, those who flee."⁹⁰ The spirituality of Don Bosco had incorporated very well a recommendation which had by now become classical: "If you wish to overcome the temptations of the flesh and its passions, do not even dream of engaging them in combat, but rather flee. This is the only means which remains for you to succeed. Whoever has taken to flight most quickly and gone the farthest, will be the most sure of victory."⁹¹

Flight is a form of asceticism. Another form is the systematic mortification of the senses in order to master one's sexual life, and a true and personal sense of reserve. Don Bosco asked a chaste person to control his looks, his hearing, and his bearing. He was especially concerned about his eyes, these indiscreet "windows" of the soul which his manual of devotions for boys spoke about.⁹² His books proposed as a model Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, who did not even raise his eyes to look at the queen of Spain, and also Luigi Comollo, who was forced to admit before his jeering companions that he could only judge the height of his female cousins when they came to visit him at the seminary by the length of their shadows. Aside from this, he was not able to say anything about their external appearances. He also proposed Dominic Savio as a model. Dominic stubbornly refused to linger along the streets of Turin, and he had "strong headaches" on account of guarding his eyes, which he was saving to contemplate Mary in heaven.⁹³ Don Bosco's religious heard the same ascetical advice about their guard over their senses, which also included the control of their affections and of the gestures which showed them.⁹⁴ They were furthermore supposed to exclude from their vocabulary all terms such as impurity and in chastity, which could arouse their own imagination or that of their hearers or readers. "Nec nominetur in vobis (Let these things not even be mentioned among you.)!"⁹⁵ Don Bosco kept a close guard

over himself, especially when he dealt with youngsters.⁹⁶ He was careful about any lack of control, whether great or small, which would threaten the temple of purity, so bright and shiny that even one breath can tarnish it.

Principles such as these, if applied without proper discernment, could evidently run the risk of forming a community of very ornery or very timid persons. Fortunately, Don Bosco's spiritual doctrine did not remove his followers from reality. His asceticism was at the service of virtue and of the virtuous man, and not *vice versa*. As far as Don Bosco himself is concerned perhaps after a difficult period, and certainly after the age of forty, he was cordiality personified with all, both men and women. His correspondence with some ladies with whom he cultivated a special relationship (Carlotta Callori, Gerolama Ugucioni, Gabriella Corsi) is characterized by a charming relaxed spirit.⁹⁷ This correspondence reveals a situation in which he felt at ease. It is quite useful to consider this fact, because in the generations after Don Bosco people were tempted, as always happens, to make general statements, which a certain amount of balance, wisdom, and a dose of charity inspired by Saint Francis de Sales would have tempered in daily practice. During Don Bosco's lifetime, for instance, these nuances escaped his friend Count Cays, who later became a Salesian. In 1882, during his last illness at Valdocco, he would not allow his sister-in-law to stay up and keep watch at his bedside during the night. The old man was reprimanded by a Salesian who was known for his austerity: "The Oratory is not a monastery," Father Rua told him, "but a hostel, where mothers and sisters have assisted sick students and other persons before." This was certainly permitted to him. Count Cays yielded.⁹⁸

Don Bosco would not become entangled in his own principles. The severe reserve which he commanded and practiced did not make him fall into prudery.

An Asceticism of Acceptance

Among the principles mentioned above, the contemporary reader discovers, perhaps not without some surprise, the ascetical principle: "to fulfill one's own duties." This expression appears unusual on the

lips of a man who was closer to being a prophet than a "man with a sense of duty" and who seemed to know no other law than that of the imitation of Christ. In reality, Don Bosco had a great concern for "duty" whether he discerned it as an agent of God's will or whether he made of it an exercise of asceticism. The most beautiful asceticism is imposed by daily life which God makes us assume as a "duty."⁹⁹

The formula comes up insistently in Don Bosco's writings. In his *Porta teco* (Your Spiritual Guidebook) of 1858 he stated: "Everyone is obliged to fulfill the duties of his state in life."¹⁰⁰ The following year the first edition of the biography of Dominic Savio was published. In it Dominic stated to his companions: "My best entertainment is doing my duties: and if you are true friends of mine, you should advise me about doing them well and about never neglecting them."¹⁰¹ One day he asked his director (Don Bosco) how he could celebrate the month of Mary in a holy way. He received this first assignment: "You will celebrate it by doing your duties well."¹⁰² Two years later, in the life of Michael Magone, Don Bosco praised the triumph of duty over daydreaming. Michael Magone (a livewire) told a friend whom he was helping: "Flee from idleness, be cheerful as you want, as long as you do not neglect your duties."¹⁰³ And speaking of Magone, "as soon as the signal was given for study, for school, for rest, for meals, for church, he would interrupt everything and run to do his duties."¹⁰⁴ Don Bosco, who dedicated an entire chapter to the "punctuality" of a young man in doing his "duties,"¹⁰⁵ found this solicitude marvelous. In 1878 one of his "strennas" (spiritual yearly mottoes), quite exacting in spite of its pleasant form, recommended to all the residents of Valdocco "an exact fulfillment of the duties of their own state, beginning with Father Rua and including Giulio," that is to all from the prefect (Vice Rector) to the street sweeper.¹⁰⁶ Many Salesians educated at his school would later be praised for their "extraordinary devotion to duty"¹⁰⁷ or for their "extraordinary punctuality in everything that concerned their duty."¹⁰⁸ Some repetitions are useful.

One's duties are dictated by the will of authority and by the ups and downs of human existence which manifest God's will.

As a representative of God, the head of the civil society or of the Church community must be ready to render to God an account of the acts of their subordinates. Parents represent God to their children,

civil rulers to those under their jurisdiction, and religious superiors to those under them, and so on.¹⁰⁹ "All power comes from God." Don Bosco would stretch Saint Paul's principle.¹¹⁰ "The true Christian obeys his parents, his masters, his superiors because he sees in them God himself, whose place they take."¹¹¹ One of the writings which he signed drew an extreme conclusion from this principle: "Be obedient to your superiors and be submissive to their orders, since not the inferiors but the superiors have to watch as if they had to render to God an account of the things which regard the good of your souls."¹¹² For him, the "obedience given (by a young Christian) to his superiors is given to Jesus Christ . . ." ¹¹³

Ordinary events can also be instruments of Divine Providence and God's way of speaking to us. We read the following in a conversation of Don Bosco dated Sept. 13, 1862: "The easiest way for us to become saints is to recognize the will of God in everything that our Superiors command and in everything which happens in our life. Sometimes we will feel weighed down by some calamity or by some distress of body or spirit. We should not lose heart, but rather console ourselves with the sweet thought that everything is ordered by our loving heavenly Father and is for our good . . ." ¹¹⁴ He himself lived by this deep conviction when he had some heavy cares, such as those involved in the building of the great Church of Mary Help of Christians. "Try to imagine how many expenses, how many worries, how many tasks fell on the shoulders of Don Bosco at that time. Don't think for any reason that I was discouraged: I was tired, nothing more. The Lord gave me things, changed them, took them away whenever he pleased. Blessed forever be his holy name!" ¹¹⁵

The fulfillment of one's duties, the virtue of obedience and of submitting oneself to the demands of life were for Don Bosco ascetical and purifying virtues. We know this through what he said to Dominic Savio who was afflicting himself with all sorts of self-imposed penances: "The penance which the Lord wills from you is obedience. Obey and it is enough for you."¹¹⁶ He praised Michael Magone because in honor of Mary "he would readily pardon any insult and would endure cold, heat, displeasures, fatigue, and thirst . . ." ¹¹⁷ Don Bosco did not recommend to the directors of the houses any austere practices but the following: "Your mortification should be your diligence in doing your

duties and in putting up with the annoyances of others.”¹¹⁸ And he wrote—in a very Salesian way—to some French correspondents of his: “As regard bodily penances, these are not good for you. For persons who are well-advanced in age, it is enough that they put up with the pains of old age for the love of God. For persons of weak health, it is enough for them to bear their discomfort patiently for the love of God and follow the advice of their doctors or of their relatives in a spirit of obedience. Enjoying well prepared food out of obedience is more pleasing to God than fasting against obedience . . . Submit to the holy will of the most loving God in everything.”¹¹⁹

A Humble and Joyful Submission

He practiced the daily asceticism of meeting life’s demands according to one’s state, and he recommended it to working people and to all Christians. Needless to say, his activities did not leave room for leisure. Born into a family of farmers, he was used to uncomfortable straw mattresses, very early risings, very plain food and fatiguing work. He did not offer a comfortable house and an easy life to his boys and Salesians, most of whom came from the same background as his, especially if they wanted to make their religious vows. Everyone lived a simple life and worked within the limits of his strength. They were truly very poor and did not even have the freedom to choose their own penances. Sufferings of every kind were their daily fare: bad weather, hunger, thirst, ill-fitting clothes, arduous work and fatigue. If they were true to their master, they accepted all these things with serenity.

In order to have its full ascetical value, this submission has to be in fact “ready, humble and cheerful,” a series of adjectives for which Don Bosco had a weakness. An article of the rules for Salesian houses summed up this oft-repeated teaching: “Let your obedience be prompt, respectful, and cheerful to all commands, without making excuses to avoid doing what is commanded. Obey even if the thing commanded is not to your liking.”¹²⁰ Don Bosco recalled throughout his life Luigi Comollo’s prompt obedience: Luigi interrupted his work at the first stroke of the seminary bell.¹²¹ Joseph Cafasso was also described by Don Bosco as exceptionally rigorous about obeying promptly.¹²²

Besides a prompt obedience, however, the followers of Don Bosco practiced a humble obedience, that is, the respectful submission of subjects to their superiors, and they avoided criticizing them, and even—like that excellent boy Francis Besucco¹²³—anticipated their wishes with great consideration. Did they not have the “humble Don Bosco” and the “poor Don Bosco” as a model to imitate? Finally, the spirituality which they learned led them to prefer persons who obeyed cheerfully to those who complied with morose looks or bad will.¹²⁴ “God loves a cheerful giver.”¹²⁵

“Ask for nothing, refuse nothing.” Don Bosco made his own this directive of Saint Francis de Sales to the Visitation Nuns, a directive which he had probably already seen applied by Joseph Cafasso.¹²⁶

He loved to praise blind obedience, and used to compare Christian young men to handkerchiefs in the hands of their superiors. Should we deduce, perhaps, that his asceticism produced spineless and flabby shellfish? If it was a type of submission without spirit, the asceticism of the will which he proposed could not have been otherwise. But he himself practiced and expected his collaborators and even his boys to practice an enlightened and dynamic obedience. The biography of Dominic Savio assures us that this “submissive” boy, who was held up as a model, was very inventive, and not in any way stifled. On the contrary! The minutes of the house councils over which Don Bosco presided also makes us aware of the spontaneity of his fellow workers, much less controlled, if we can make a comparison, than Saint Vincent de Paul’s followers.¹²⁷ It would be well worth our while to report the incident in 1877, of which we have a full description, when Father Lemoyne and Father Costamagna received very definite “obediences,” one as chaplain to the Salesian Sisters, and the other as a missionary to South America. Don Bosco, who gave the obedience in person, listened to their objections, smiled, and agreed. At the end, Father Costamagna had a good laugh at the expense of poor Father Lemoyne.¹²⁸

He did not believe, however, that those responsible should normally go against the inclinations of those under them. He told some superiors of the Salesian Sisters the following: “At times some think that it is a virtuous thing to tame the will of others by assigning them this or that duty which is contrary to their liking. This only causes harm to the Sister involved and to the Congregation. Your concern should rather be

to teach them to mortify themselves and to sanctify and 'spiritualize' their inclination."¹²⁹ Likewise he told his Salesians: "Superiors should study the temperaments of their subjects, their character, their inclinations, their abilities, and their way of thinking, in order to know how to command them in a way that makes their obedience easy."¹³⁰ And furthermore: "Orders should never be given which are disagreeable. Rather the greatest care should be exercised to take into account the inclinations of each one and to assign him preferably the duties which you know are particularly to his liking."¹³¹

God's gifts, no matter what they be, should never be wasted. That is why Don Bosco expected a conscientious obedience from all Christians—including religious—the same lucid and optimistic obedience which he himself practiced. Those who know his life cannot imagine him acting otherwise even with the civil and political authorities of Piedmont as well as with the religious authorities of Turin and Rome. Although he was sometimes engaged in lengthy conflicts with these authorities (something which he did not believe contrary to the healthy submission of will which he preached) he always conducted himself with humility and courtesy.

Asceticism and Happiness

Don Bosco guaranteed peace to those who practiced such a spirit of renunciation and acceptance. "God rewards generously the sacrifices which we make to obey his holy will."¹³² "You are sure to find spiritual happiness and tranquility of heart when you obey blindly the suggestions of your confessor."¹³³ In a word, obedience is a guarantee of a "truly peaceful and happy life."¹³⁴

He lived a difficult life always with a smile on his face. We are not referring now to his apostolic life. His illnesses, which became ever more serious as he got old, were a great trial for him. Those who witnessed his last ten years knew how much pain his eyes and his legs caused him. One of his crosses came to light only after his death, when they prepared his body for burial: Herpes disease (an acute inflammation of the skin) which he apparently contracted in 1845 during an epidemic which broke out at the Cottolengo Hospital. He

could not have put up with a more horrible hairshirt than this, wrote Father Ceria.¹³⁵ This affliction did not in any way prevent Don Bosco from continuing to be always cheerful and smiling. He found a certain amount of pleasure in an asceticism of body and soul, preferably accepted than chosen, which made him more like Christ in his passion and which gave him to hope of joining him in his glory, because "it is necessary to suffer with Christ in order to be glorified with him."

"Temperance," the battle against evil, and the arduous submission to the trials of life, although somewhat rigorous and never absolutes, were for him a way of serving God with joy. This was the supreme goal of his existence and a short way to holiness. This was his constant teaching.

NOTES

1. G. Bosco, *Cenni storici intorno alla Vita della B. Caterina De Mattei*, Turin, 1862, p. 186 (Cf. below Doc. 17). Here Don Bosco alludes to Eph. 5, 14-17.

2. G. Bosco, *Porta teco*, Turin, 1858, "General advice for Faithful Christians," #21 (cf. below Doc. 11). It was repeated in the edition of 1878.

3. L. Cognet, *L'ascèse chretienne* (mimeographed study by the Catholic Institute of Paris), Paris, 1965, p. 5. Several ideas from this very balanced book have been introduced into this chapter.

4. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 88 (cf. below, Doc. 2).

5. Dream of Sept. 10, 1881, in E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XV, 184, according to the A.C.S., S. 111, "Sogni." According to Fr. Ceria, the original copy written by Don Bosco disappeared, but other copies have preserved it quite accurately. Cf. also his published talks or resumés of his talks on the same topic, *ibid.*, vol. XII, 353 (Dream of 1876 on "Faith, our shield and our victory"); vol. XIII, 432-433 (talk of Aug. 31, 1877: "Try to practice moderation in eating and drinking . . .");

vol. XIV, 363 (Sermon during a retreat, Sept. 1879: "At times I have to fast in order to overcome my temptations . . ."); etc.

6. G. Bosco, *Maniera facile*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1855, #20 (in *Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 56).

7. G. Bosco, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso*, Turin, 1860, p. 94.

8. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 95.

9. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, pp. 72-75 (English ed., pp. 89 ff.); *Magone Michele*, Turin, 1861, p. 41; A. Amadei, *Il servo di Dio, Michele Rua*, Turin, 1931, vol. I, 178.

10. St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Praxis confessarii*, ed. Gaudé, pp. 247-253.

11. G. Cafasso, *Manoscritti vari*, in F. Accornero, *La dottrina spirituale, op. cit.*, p. 61.

12. Cf. chapter on "The Mortified Life" of Fr. Cafasso in Bosco, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso*, Turin, 1860, pp. 29-34.

13. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele, loc. cit.*

14. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico, op. cit.*, p. 72 (English ed., p. 89).

15. I. Cor. 9, 25.

16. A four-page leaflet, A.C.S., S.132, C. 3 and Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. IX, 998.

17. *Ibid.*

18. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 72 (English ed., p. 89).

19. Excerpt from one of Don Bosco's notebooks: notes of some talks for his confreres, in Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 986-987 (omitted in English ed.) Cf. also Doc. 26, and 1 Jn. 1, 16.

20. *Ibid.*, These notes were taken by Don Bosco from St. Alphonsus Liguori's *The True Spouse of Christ*, ch. 2.

21. Don Bosco did not neglect to point out that David and also Michael Magone did penance for their sins (Bosco, *Storia sacra*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1863, "epoca quarta," ch. 8; in *Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 209; *Magone Michele*, Turin, 1861, p. 50.).

22. G. Bosco, *Luigi Comollo*, Turin, 1844, pp. 47-48.

23. G. Bosco, *Il cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo de' Paolo*, Turin, 1848, p. 139.

24. Four-page leaflet cited above, Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 998 (omitted in English ed.).

25. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 74 (English ed., p. 90).

26. G. Bosco, *Luigi Comollo ed. cit.*, p. 65.

27. "Whoever wants to rejoice with Christ must suffer with Christ." Cf. 2 Tim. 2, 11; Rom 8, 17.

28. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, Turin, 1847, "Le Sei domeniche," p. 58.

29. G. Bosco's letter to his Salesians, June 9, 1867, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 474. He paraphrases St. Paul.

30. G. Bosco's letter to the vocational students at the Oratory, Jan. 20, 1874, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 339.

31. Edited by E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XI, 508-518 (English ed., pp. 475-87), from a manuscript of Giulio Barberis, master of novices (cf. pp. 513-514; English ed., pp. 481-83).

32. G. Bosco's letter to Salesians, Jan. 6, 1884, *Epistolario*, vol. IV, 250.

33. In E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XIII, 288; from the minutes of the chapter (cf. below Doc. 31).

34. Cf. for example: Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto* 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, "Things to Avoid," p. 20.

35. *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, pp. 91-92. Cf. Bosco, *Luigi Comollo*, Turin, 1844, p. 63; *Regolamento della compagnia di San Luigi Gonzaga*, manuscript of 1847, corrected by Don Bosco, #3: "Avoid bad companions like the plague . . ."; *Il giovane provveduto, ed. cit.*, "Le Sei domeniche," p. 61; *Avvisi ai cattolici*, Turin, 1853, p. 25; *Porta teco*, Turin, 1858, pp. 34, 41, 44; *Magone Michele*, Turin, 1861, p. 44; letter to O. Pavia, July 15, 1863, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 275; *Il Pastorello delle Alpi*, Turin, 1864, pp. 62-64; letter to G. Garofoli, June. 1, 1866, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 398; we will do well to remember that these recommendations were all intended for the boys.

36. A conference by Don Bosco to Salesians, 1878, according to a revised copy by Giulio Barberis, in E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XIII, 800.

37. Conference of Don Bosco to Salesian seminarians, Jan. 1876, Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. XII, 21-22.

38. Cf. for example, the unedited manuscript cited above: *Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales*, "The Purpose of This Congregation," art. 6, (also cf. Doc. 14 below).

39. G. Bosco's letter to his Salesians, Jan. 12, 1876, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 8.

40. G. Bosco, *Il Pastorello delle Alpi*, ed. cit., p. 64.

41. Consider this reflection on "bad companions" in the house at Turin: "I would not even want to suppose that there are any. But be careful. A bad companion is one who in some way can be the occasion of an offense against God. Often it happens that even someone who is not bad deep down in his heart becomes for others an occasion of sin against God. And so he would have to be considered at least a dangerous companion for these others" (Conference quoted in 1878, in E. Ceria, *op. cit.*, vol. XIII, 800).

42. G. Bosco, *Storia sacra*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1863, "epoca settima," ch. 3 (*Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 301).

43. Cf. above, ch. 2, the paragraph on the "Exercise for a Happy Death."

44. It is true that in the beginning, according to the example of Jesus of Nazareth, his first followers were prepared for this manner of life with a sufficient spiritual and intellectual orientation: "Jesus began by 'doing then by teaching.' so the members of this congregation will begin by perfecting themselves through the practice of interior and exterior virtues, by acquiring learning, and then they will devote themselves to benefit others." (*Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales*, art. 2; cf. also Doc. 12 below).

45. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 91 (English ed., p. 110).

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92 (English ed., pp. 110-11).

47. G. Bosco's letter to J. Bonetti, Dec. 30, 1868, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 600 (cf. below Doc. 24). More than Rodriguez, the principal source seems to have been the *True Spouse of Christ* by St. Alphonsus Liguori, ch. 10. In his conference he not only includes St. Alphonsus' ideas but also his biblical and patristic references.

48. Cf. Mt. 10, 35-37. This quotation is found in a notebook of sermon outlines by Don Bosco, published in Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 990 (omitted in English ed.); cf. also "Relatives," A.C.S., S. 132, "Prediche," E. 4, p. 8.

49. *Ibid.*, on Deut. 33.9.

50. Conference to the Salesians of the Oratory of Valdocco, June 25, 1867, edited by Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. VIII, 852-853 (English ed., p. 367); conference during a spiritual retreat, Trofarello, Sept. 16, 1869, *op. cit.*, vol. IX, 703-705, 990-991; (omitted in English ed.); general conferences of April 17 and 18, 1874, Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X 1071 (English ed., p. 469); "Good night" talk of May 11, 1875, E. Ceria *Memorie*, vol. XI, 240 (English ed., p. 221); "Good night"

talk of May 20, 1875, *ibid.*, pp. 242-243 (English ed., pp. 223-24); conference to clerics of the Oratory of Valdocco, Jul. 6, 1875, *ibid.*, p. 297 (English ed., p. 275); conference to the novices, Dec. 13, 1875, *ibid.*, pp. 516-517 (English ed., pp. 485-86); conference during the spiritual exercises at Lanzo, 1875, *ibid.*, pp. 575, 580 (omitted in English ed.); Don Bosco's circular letter to the Salesians, Jan. 12, 1876, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 8; conference during the spiritual exercises at Lanzo, Sept. 17, 1876, E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XII, 452-454; conferences to the Salesians of Valdocco on Oct. 30, 1876, *ibid.*, pp. 561-562, and on Dec. 25, 1876, *ibid.*, p. 602; "Good night" talk of June 18, 1878, *op. cit.*, vol. XIII, 807.

51. Cf. G. Bosco's letter to G. Giulitto, Sept. 26, 1871, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 181, and to Louis Cartier, Sept. 17, 1880, *ibid.*, vol. III, 626.

52. About the pilgrim idea, cf. A. Stolz, "ascèse chrétienne," French translation, Chevetogne, 1948, pp. 87-102, *et passim*. Don Bosco's sacramental spirituality was in line with the spirit of renunciation which he professed. (About this matter, cf. A. Stolz, *Théologie de la mystique*, 2nd ed., Chevetogne, pp. 50-57, 215-236).

53. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., Turin, 1880, p. 71 (English ed, p. 96).

54. G. Bosco, *Angelina*, Turin, 1869, p. 46 (cf. below Doc. 25). The story of Angelina, today quite forgotten but nonetheless a very good and pleasant bit of writing, was practically a eulogy of ascetical poverty.

55. Don Bosco's circular letter to Salesian Cooperators, *Bollettino salesiano*, 1882, ann. VI, 4.

56. Cf. E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XVII, 243-248.

57. According to the catalogues which have been preserved, his library would have had thirty thousand books, an estimate which should, however, be verified. (Translator's note: The following information is found in the Italian translation of this book, appended to this same note: "In a review of the French edition of this book, Eugenio Valentini has observed that the above information notwithstanding, the metropolitan library of Turin had a much greater collection than that of Don Bosco").

58. Cf., for example, *Angelina*, ch. 8-9 (also Doc. 25 below).

59. Cf. the quotations collected by F. Accornero, *La dottrina spirituale*, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.

60. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, "Le Sei domeniche," p. 62. These words are found in all later editions of the *Giovane provveduto* and of the "Sei domeniche."

61. G. Bosco, *Maniera facile*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1855, #20 (*Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 56).

62. Preparation for the feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, 1864, Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. VII, 680 (English ed., p. 409).

63. Società di S. Francesco di Sales, 1864, ch. 6; Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. VII, 877 (omitted in English ed.).

64. Cf. *Regole o Costituzioni*, Turin, 1874, ch. 4; A. Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X, 960 (omitted in English ed.).

65. *Bollettino salesiano*, 1882, ann. VI, 109-116. The "courteous observation" came from a "respectful cooperator," as the article informs us (p. 109).

66. A conference given by Don Bosco at Marseilles, Feb. 17, 1882, based on an outline preserved in a manuscript in A.C.S., S. 132, "Prediche," H. 5 (*Memorie*, vol. XV, 694; cf. the note, *ibid.*, p. 49).

67. G. Bosco, Introduction to the *Regole o costituzioni*, Turin, 1877, p. 29.

68. G. Bosco's letter to G. Cagliero, Aug. 6, 1885, *Epistolario*, vol. IV, 328.

69. *Cooperatori salesiani*, 8, art. I (cf. also Doc. 33 below).

70. *Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo generale*, Turin, 1882, distinzione 5: *Economia*, pp. 77-88.

71. J. de la Varende, *Don Bosco, le XIX^e saint Jean*, 1951, p. 235.

72. According to Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. I, 296 (English ed., pp. 221-22); most probably based on a direct confidence of Don Bosco in his last years, as the rest of the text leads us to believe.

73. According to Lemoyne on the apostolic process of canonization, *ad 67*, in the *Positio Super Virtutibus*, vol. I, 905.

74. Sermon of Don Bosco, according to J. Bonetti's chronicle, A.C.S., S. 110, Bonetti, I, p. 2 (*Memorie biografiche*, vol. VI, 63 (English ed., p. 32).

75. F. Mauriac, *Ce que je crois*, Paris, 1962, pp. 71-72.

76. G. Bosco's letter to the boys of the school at Mirabello, Dec. 30, 1864, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 332.

77. Cf. Mt. 23, 30.

78. "A virtue so precious that whoever practices it to perfection deserves to be called an angel" (Anonymous), *Divozione di Sei Domeniche in onore de sei anni*, *op. cit.*, Turin, 1740, p. 11; quoted in P. Stella, *Valori spirituali* p. 37.

79. G. Bosco, *Maniera facile*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1855, #20 (*Opere e scritti*, vol. I, 56).

80. Conference to Salesians, summer of 1875, according to G. Barberis' notes in E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XI, 581 (omitted in English ed.).

81. Conference to Salesians, June 16, 1873, according to Cesar Chiala's notes, in A. Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X, 1089 (English ed., p. 480).

82. "Innocence and purity are two virtues which can be called twins: one resembles the other so much that when one wants to distinguish them they seem to fuse into one." (G.A. Patrignani, *Vite di alcuni nobili convittori stati e morti nel seminario romano segnalati in bontá*), Turin, 1824, vol. II, 167; quoted by P. Stella, *Valori spirituali*, p. 36, note).

83. G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, 8th ed., Turin, 1874, p. 162.

84. Conference to Salesians, June 4, 1876, in E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XII, 224.

85. A. Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X, 35 (English ed., p. 29). Cf. also E. Ceria, *ibid.*, vol. XII, 224; etc.

86. A. Caviglia, *Conferenze sullo spirito salesiano* (lithographed pamphlet) Turin, 1949, p. 55.

87. About these and others, cf. Bosco's letters to G.D., Dec. 7, 1855, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 118; Bosco, *Magone Michele*, Turin, 1861, p. 44; a manuscript by Don Bosco on the Novena of the Immaculate Conception, December, 1862, Lemoynes, *Memorie*, vol. VII, 331 (English ed., p. 194); a conference to Salesians, 1869, *ibid.*, vol. IX, 708, 922 (omitted in English ed.); a conference for Salesians, 1875, E. Ceria, *ibid.*, vol. XI, 581-583 (omitted in English ed.); Bosco's letter to Salesians, Jan. 12, 1876, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 8; etc.

88. Prov. 5, 8 (cf. Doc. 5, below).

89. "Apprehende fugam si vis referre victoriam."

90. Conference mentioned in 1875, E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XI, 581 (omitted in English ed.).

91. *Spiritual Combat*, ch. 19: "How one fights the vice of impurity."

92. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, "Divozione a Maria Santissima," p. 53.

93. *Le Sei domeniche*, 8th ed., Turin, 1886, pp. 26-27; Bosco, *Luigi Comollo*, Turin, 1844, p. 35; and *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., pp. 55, 66-67 (English ed., pp. 80, 93).

94. Conference of 1869, in Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 706-707 (omitted in English ed.); conference of Sept. 24, 1870, according to an outline that was transcribed, *ibid.*, p. 922 (English ed., p. 442); letter of Jan. 12, 1876, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 8.

95. Cf. Eph. 5, 3. He gave this verse the sense that "impurity should not even be mentioned," a meaning which was evidently not intended in the Bible.

96. A reading of his *Storia sacra* is revealing.

97. The first person mentioned was born in 1827. Cf., in the *Epistolario*, this correspondence which could perhaps provide material for someone to write a book about him like the one which H. Rahner wrote about St. Ignatius: *Ignace de Loyola et les femmes de son temps*, French translation, Paris, 1964.

98. (Anonymous), *Il Conte D. Carlo Cays di Giletta*, in the *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti nel 1882*, S. Pier d'Arina, 1883, pp. 40-41.

99. Cf. the interesting article of J. Tonneau, *Devoir*, in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. III, col. 654-672, especially 659-672.

100. G. Bosco, *Porta teco*, Turin, 1858, p. 7 (cf. Doc. 11 below).

101. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 48 (English ed., p. 60).

102. *Ibid.*, p. 101 (English ed., see p. 53 ff.).

103. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, Turin, 1861, p. 53.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

105. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-39.

106. G. Bosco's letter to M. Rua, Dec. 27, 1877, in *Epistolario*, vol. III, 254.

107. The cleric Giovanni Arata (1858-1878), in the anonymous booklet *Biografie dei Salesiani defunti negli anni 1883 e 1884*, Turin, 1885, p. 14.

108. The cleric Francesco Zappelli (1862-1883), *ibid.*, p. 82.

109. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, p. 15.

110. See, for example, a "Good night" talk of Mar. 30, 1876, in E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XII, 147.

111. G. Bosco, *La Chiave del Paradiso*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1857, "Portrait of the True Christian," pp. 21-22 (cf. also Doc. 8, below).

112. G. Bosco, *Introduzione alle Regole o Costituzioni*, Turin, 1877, p. 22. The verse (Heb. 13, 17) which is quoted here to corroborate his argument does not, in fact, use the negative expression, "they are not inferiors."

113. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, *loc. cit.*, p. 15. The text adds rather surprisingly: "to Mary most holy and to St. Aloysius!"

114. According to J. Bonetti's chronicle A.C.S., S. 110, "Annali," III, 54-55). Cf. Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. VII, 249 (English ed., p. 152).

115. G. Bosco's letter to Countess C. Callori, Jul. 24, 1865, in *Epistolario*, vol. I, 355-356. Five of his chief collaborators became ill; Fr. Ruffino had just died and Fr. Alasonatti was at the point of death.

116. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 74 (English ed., p. 90).

117. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, Turin, 1861, p. 40.

118. G. Bosco. *Ricordi confidenziali*, Turin, 1886; recorded by A. Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X, 1041 (English ed., p. 447).

119. G. Bosco's letter to Mrs. and Miss Lallemand, Feb. 5, 1884, *Epistolario*, vol. VI, 422 (according to the copy of one of the recipients).

120. *Regolamento per le case*, Turin, 1877, p. 76.

121. G. Bosco, *Luigi Comollo*, Turin, 1844, p. 28; cf. the 4th ed., Turin, 1884, p. 46.

122. Cf. Bosco, *Giuseppe Caffasso*, Turin, 1860, p. 28.

123. G. Bosco, *Il Pastorello delle Alpi*, Turin, 1864, p. 17.

124. Cf. a conference to Salesians, Oct. 30, 1876, in E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XII, 564.

125. 2 Cor. 9, 7.

126. G. Cafasso, *Manoscritti vari*, VI, 2240 A., quoted in F. Accornero, *La dottrina spirituale*, p. 38 note 18. Cf. Bosco's *Regole o Costituzioni*, Turin, 1874, ch. 3, art. 3: "Let no one be anxious about asking or refusing anything."

127. Cf. St. Vincent de Paul, *Entretiens spirituels aux missionnaires*, ed. Dodin, Paris, 1960.

128. Cf. G.B. Francesca, *Suor Maria Mazzarello, I primi due lustri delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, San Benigno Canavese, 1906, p. 295-297.

129. Conference to Salesian Superiors, June 15, 1874, in A. Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X, 637 (English ed., p. 287).

130. Conference to Salesians, Sept. 18, 1969, according to Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 713 (English ed., p. 333).

131. G. Bosco, *Ricordi confidenziali*, Turin, 1886, in A. Amadei,

Memorie, vol. X, 1046 (English ed., p. 452).

132. "Good night" talk, May 20, 1875, according to E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XI, 243 (English ed., p. 224).

133. Letter to a Miss N.N., Nov. 10, 1886, in *Epistolario*, vol. IV, 405.

134. G. Bosco, *Introduzione alle Regole o Costituzioni*, Turin, 1877, p. 23.

135. E. Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio*, ed., cit., p. 150.

7

**At the Service
of the Greater Glory of God**

The Service of the Lord

The spiritual life of Saint John Bosco was founded upon God who sustained it until the end. In "the Month of May" he urged the devout faithful to say: "I have been created by God to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this life, and by doing this to go one day to be happy with Him in Paradise."¹ He was not too concerned about the first and second verbs on this list. He was not inclined toward speculation, so he did not give knowledge the first place. And as for love he often gave it too much of an affective emphasis, to be the epitome of Christian life. So he emphasized the third item, service, in a manner very similar to our modern idea of active charity.

Had not Christ loved his Father by serving him? "But the world must know that I love the Father and do as the Father has commanded me."² Don Bosco, then, would simply say that God "had created us to serve him."³ So when he would present to his young followers a "method of Christian life," he would certainly not have chosen to teach them to "love God," as we would have done, but he would have gotten them to a point where they could repeat with David, "Serve the Lord with gladness."⁴

At times he gave examples of this service in terms which were somewhat legalistic: "this expression *to serve Him* means to do those things which please Him and to avoid those things which displease Him. Therefore the service of God consists in obeying strictly the Commandments of God and of the Church."⁵ As a chapter from the life of Dominic Savio shows, the young saint does the will of God cheerfully and "fulfills very exactly all his obligations and his practices of piety," because everything can be summed up in the maxim: "Let us serve the Lord with holy cheerfulness."⁶ In essence, Don Bosco was preaching submission to the will of God, a teaching which was dear to his

master Saint Alphonsus. On the other hand, he often invoked the principle of discernment between the things which pleased and displeased God. This principle gave to the maxim "serve the Lord with gladness" a positive, deep Christian meaning.

The One Absolute

All things considered, Don Bosco recognized only one absolute: that is, the glory of God, to which all things tended, whether in the spiritual life or in the apostolic life. Duty, service, work, and salvation itself were relative values. It was the glory of God which constituted the supreme norm of the perfection of man's actions.

We will say that those who testified at his process of canonization were nearly unanimous in stating: "The servant of God would say, 'Do everything for the Lord. Let us do all we can for the greater glory of God. We will rest in Paradise.'" ⁷ "Don Bosco had an admirable and heroic fortitude in controlling his passions, in enduring fatigue, discomforts, tribulations and in undertaking and supporting the most difficult projects, always for the greater glory of God and for the benefit of souls."⁸ Along with Father Barberis and Father Rua, the authors of the above testimony, there were other witnesses like Abbot Giacomelli,⁹ Canon Ballesio,¹⁰ Father Reviglio (a parish priest),¹¹ and of course his most faithful disciple, Bishop Cagliero,¹² and Father Berto.¹³ We can also add his master and friend Joseph Cafasso¹⁴ to this list. All of these men repeated this about Don Bosco: He worked for the greater glory of God.

When these witnesses expressed themselves in these terms, they did not merely capriciously repeat a devout saying which would aid the cause of their hero. Don Bosco always had the phrase *the glory of God* on his lips or under his pen: "He used this phrase constantly in speaking to his Salesians, in communicating with his Cooperators, in his writings, and in his correspondence."¹⁵ We will demonstrate that the adverb *constantly* is not excessive. Its repetition, in fact, has given rise to doubts about its true meaning. There are some traditional expressions which we repeat in our talks or at the conclusions of our letters, to which it would be useless to give great importance. But in Don Bosco's

case this suggestion too is groundless. In 1845, when Don Bosco stated in his *Storia sacra* (Church History) that he had written it “solely for the greater glory of God and principally for the spiritual benefit of young people,”¹⁶ he used perhaps only a convenient formula common among Church people. But the same expression assumed a more personal character in the preface to his *Sistema Metrico decimale* (The Decimal Metric System), which was published the following year: “If my poor efforts have not pleased everyone, at least they will be worthy of your patience. Test everything and keep only those things which appear to be best for the greater glory of God who is the giver of all good things.”¹⁷ A similar example can be drawn from a letter in which Don Bosco refused to publish some “prophecies,” because circulating them did not appear to him to “work toward the glory of God.” Although he would not judge their “merits,” he declared that he did not discern in them “the spirit of the Lord which is all charity and patience.”¹⁸ He had considered well the words which the boys recited after Communion: “Watch over all my sentiments so that all my thoughts, all my actions have no other goal than your greater glory and the spiritual good of my soul.”¹⁹ He also wrote to a person who was very worried about the division of his property: “Proceed like this. If he (the Marquis Massoni, who was supposed to make the decision) recognizes in this the good of his soul and the glory of God, let him go ahead with the division. If not, let him suspend its execution.”²⁰ An even more significant example is this bit of advice which he gave to Father Rua, his chief assistant: “Think for a while before you decide anything of importance and in case of doubt always see if the decision appears to be for the greater glory of God.”²¹

It is evident that the glory of God was one of the beacons of his life. He also demonstrated that this goal illuminated the way of other saintly souls like Saint Paul, who “desired nothing more than to promote the glory of God,”²² Saint Philip Neri, who “moved by a desire for the glory of God,” abandoned everything which he held dear and embarked on a difficult mission in the Rome of the sixteenth century;²³ Saint Francis de Sales, who died “after a life completely spent for the greater glory of God,”²⁴ and Dominic Savio, who said: “I can’t do great things, but whatever I can do, I want to do it for the greater glory of God;”²⁵ “The virtues and the actions of the saints

were all oriented toward the same end, which is the greater glory of God . . . ”²⁶ As for himself, he could not choose a more elevated principle for his life.

In adopting this guiding principle, he showed his close affinity to Saint Ignatius of Loyola, so concerned about the greater glory of God. Saint Ignatius repeated the expression “for the greater glory of God” two hundred and fifty-nine times in his *Constitutions* alone.²⁷ This similarity should not surprise us in an alumnus of the *convitto* and in a person who was quite familiar with the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius at Lanzo.

At the Service of the Greater Glory of God

Unfortunately for us, Don Bosco did not try to explain his thinking in regard to this expression, and it would be very arbitrary to research its meaning directly from the Bible, from theologians, and spiritual writers. The objective procedure is to compare the texts in which this phrase is used by Don Bosco with the interpretations given by those who know his thought thoroughly.

The first result that emerges is that, on his lips, the words *glory* and *honor of God* were synonymous. Their frequent use side by side does not seem to us to be merely coincidence. According to one of his perceptive confidants, Don Bosco often said that “without the help of God he would not have been able to complete any of his projects and he attributed everything to the honor and glory of the Almighty and to the protection of Mary Help of Christians.”²⁸ In his writings also, he united the two terms of honor *and* glory in a very significant way.²⁹ He never uses the term *glory* in any other sense. Another observation: the glory of God is achieved through the manifestation of his works on earth. After having dedicated a chapter to the special graces received by Dominic Savio, Don Bosco wrote in the biography of this youthful saint: “I omit many other similar facts. It is enough for me that I have written them down. I leave to others the task of publishing them when it will be for the greater glory of God.”³⁰ A normal consequence of this was that in a truly Christian heart, knowledge of the works of God elicits acts of thanksgiving and praise

to the Lord. Once, after calling attention to an act of charity a priest had done for him, Don Bosco said: "Notice that I desire such a grace to be known, so that its example will serve to glorify God among men."³¹ He also asked a certain Mother Eudoxia to write, "for the greater glory of God and His Blessed Mother," the most detailed account possible of the extraordinary protection her Parisian works of charity had received during the Commune of 1871.³² To give glory to God would mean, then, to give him public honor which is due to him for his intervention in the world. Don Bosco took pains not to neglect to do this ever. Father Secondo Marchisio, a Salesian, says the following: "As a priest he did everything possible to render honor and glory to God. He would attribute everything to him."³³

Today this expression has lost its impact for reasons which are not up to us to research. But it is necessary to explain fully the expressions found in Don Bosco's correspondence, which he used with all types of persons, from the most humble to those in the highest positions of the hierarchy. We will limit ourselves to the years 1866 to 1870. During that time he wrote to a marchioness: "Do whatever you can for the greater glory of God."³⁴ And to a seminarian: "Have just one goal in mind: to choose a place which will be for the greater glory of God and for the greater benefit to your soul."³⁵ To a layman: "Seek the glory of God in your work."³⁶ To a canon: "I ask you as a real favor to give me always that advice and counsel which you judge to work for the greater glory of God."³⁷ To a Salesian priest who had just assumed the position of prefect of the house of Mirabello: "You will succeed, first, if you see the glory of God in what you do . . ."³⁸ To a Cardinal: "Listen to me with kindness, and then please give me the advice which your Eminence thinks better for the glory of God."³⁹ To an Archbishop of Turin: "The only recompense which I have always asked for and which I now ask with all humility of heart is sympathy and advice in the things which your Eminence will judge to be for the greater glory of God."⁴⁰ And finally, to a Roman Congregation: "Whatever comment or advice which the worthy Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars should judge to give for the greater glory of God will be received as a great treasure by all members of the Congregation of Saint Francis de Sales."⁴¹ "Regardless of how things are doing we offer everything for the greater glory of God."⁴²

The meaning of this glory, so dear to his heart, comes from and develops with the fear of the Lord, a virtue to which Don Bosco gave an importance which is probably unknown, but which is very much in line with the training which he had received. God is great, He is the omnipotent Creator and will be the judge on the last day. This fear constitutes "true wealth" for a man.⁴³ One reads in his *Porta teo* this nugget of sound advice: "Raise (your children) with great care in the holy fear of God, because on this depends their health and blessings for your house . . ." ⁴⁴ Reverential fear gives us a sense of the omnipotence of the Lord and of our own relative insignificance, a sense of God which is indispensable for every religious commitment.

Service for the greater glory of God—to which Don Bosco, by virtue of his basic convictions had dedicated himself completely—took on numberless aspects: preaching, writing, working, constructing, praying, all of these prompted by his concern to promote the honor of the Lord in accordance with his will.

To us it seems that he divided his good works into two categories: the works of devotion and the works of charity. Both of them allow a person not only to serve the greater glory of God but at the same time to grow in holiness. In his regulations for the Salesian Cooperators he gave only two ways of reaching perfection: devotion and the active exercise of charity.⁴⁵ Similarly one of his last circulars spoke about "taking up again the works of religion and of charity, which are needed more and more for the greater glory of God and the good of souls."⁴⁶

A very practical man, Don Bosco could not help arriving at this conclusion. Once he had accepted a principle and had allowed a conviction to take root in his mind, he was totally taken up by the desire to translate it into action. According to him "devotions" and active charity together allow one to render to God the glory and honor are due him.

Prayer and Devotions

The devout man is a man of prayer. Now prayer, even that of pure petition, a form almost exclusively practiced by Don Bosco, serves the greater glory of God. A petition by itself, honors the person who is being addressed. Furthermore, Don Bosco held that rendering glory required of prayer certain qualities, especially truth and dignity.

As a Christian educator and writer, very often he had to decide between long or short prayers, scholarly or popular, varied or uniform. To all, whether children, adolescents, lay people or clerics who were his Cooperators, and later on to his religious, he proposed the same simple and dignified style of piety. His *Ricordi per un giovanetto che desidera passar bene le proprie vacanze* (Suggestions to a Youth Who Wants to Spend His Vacation Well) state: "Go to Mass every day and, if possible, serve it. Do a little spiritual reading. Say devoutly your morning and evening prayers. Every morning make a brief meditation on a truth of our faith . . ." These recommendations resembled those which he would make to adult correspondents and religious experts.⁴⁷

He was afraid of multiplying practices of piety for all groups of people. Compared to the instructions of his trusted master, Saint Alphonsus of Liguori, his directives showed a real tendency to simple devotions most of which he definitely wished to be done in common.⁴⁸ "Do not burden yourselves down with too many devotions," Saint Philip of Neri would say.⁴⁹ He did not seek to build up a spirituality for special groups and, at the same time, he required a minimum number of practices, without which all spiritual life soon collapses. His simplicity was that of a poor man who asks God to help him in his daily difficulties and in his painstaking progress toward eternity. He did practice the prayer of praise and of thanksgiving—witness the opening formula of the morning prayers included in his *Giovane provveduto* (The Companion of Youth) and in his *Chiave del Paradiso* (The Key to Heaven): "I adore you (O my God), and I love you with all my heart. I thank you for having created me, made me a Christian, and preserved me during the past night. I offer you all my actions."⁵⁰ His ordinary reflections, however, were geared toward the prayer of petition, the only form which is mentioned, for example, in the chapter on prayer in his *Sei domeniche e la novena in onore de S. Luigi Gonzaga* (Six Sundays and the Novena in Honor of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga).⁵¹

He would insist that this prayer of poor men be without show, without studied phrases, but rather authentic, in "praise of the glory of the Lord." Don Bosco would not resign himself to the superficial, which unfortunately degraded the prayer of humble people whom he directed. According to one of his alumni, Giovanni Battista Anfossi,

he replied to a person who took him to task for having his boys say too many prayers: "I do not demand more of them than is demanded of all good Christians, but I take care that these prayers are said well."⁵² At any rate, he would say: "Vocal prayer without mental prayer is like a body without a soul"⁵³ and "It is better not to pray than to pray badly."⁵⁴

A proper posture at prayer and the proper recitation of the formulas concerned him greatly. In his youth he had admired and tried to imitate Luigi Comollo, the seminarian who believed in long and fervent prayers.⁵⁵ Later on he also included Dominic Savio as a model. About him he said that he was "motionless and composed at prayer, without leaning on anything, supported only by his knees, with a smile on his face, with his head somewhat inclined, with his eyes lowered. One would have called him another Saint Aloysius."⁵⁶ He also mentioned the imitators of this holy youth, such as Michael Magone and Francis Besucco, who prayed on their knees with their bodies erect and with their faces relaxed.⁵⁷ And as to the "clear, devout and distinct" pronunciation of the words, he wanted this to be a characteristic quality of his religious.⁵⁸ He would find fault with the "excessive speed" of the prayers of his boys, who did not enunciate the "syllables and consonants" as he would have desired.⁵⁹

Meditation and the Spirit of Prayer

These directives applied to vocal prayer, the most common form usually mentioned in his writings. His manuals of devotions were crammed with formulas. On the other hand, he spoke little about meditation. A certain sense of realism, which perhaps cannot be disputed, prevented him from recommending mental prayer to the average Christian. And when he would recommend it he would say to lay people: "Spend at least a quarter of an hour every morning and evening in prayer."⁶⁰ However, we are not sure that he meant meditation. A fact which is without a doubt surprising for an admirer of Saint Francis de Sales, the first edition of his *Salesian Constitutions* provided only for a half hour of daily prayer "between mental and vocal."⁶¹ The "half hour" of daily meditation for his religious was introduced

only after the observations of an astonished consultor in Rome.⁶²

On the other hand, Don Bosco made lay people meditate just like clerics. To convince us of this, it suffices to consult again his manuals of devotions, including this time John Bonetti's *Cattolico provveduto* (A Companion for Catholics). But let us not expect anything complicated. Meditation consisted often in reading a spiritual book slowly, absorbing the contents with relish. We find his method quite elementary. It can, however, be traced back to the Benedictine tradition in certain of his instructions to his religious where he proposed the following steps: choose the topic, place yourself in God's presence, read or listen to the text of a book, reflect on the ideas which are of personal value for you, make practical resolutions and do not forget acts of love, of thanksgiving, and of humility.⁶³ If in the question of terminology, we recognize in this method some characteristics of that which Saint Francis de Sales proposes in his *Introduction to a Devout Life*, it is necessary to say that it does not prove that Don Bosco recommended Saint Francis' method or that he was even acquainted with it through personal study. Most probably he was influenced by Father Joseph Cafasso, who recommended that "in meditation lay people should read a spiritual book for a short period of time with several short pauses for reflection and for intimate affective colloquies."⁶⁴ He also drew from the practice at the seminary of Chieri where he was trained as a young man.⁶⁵

These considerations together with those which result from an examination of how Don Bosco lived out his day, have led some to imagine that he had minimized the service of God through prayer.⁶⁶ These persons do not realize that they have touched merely the surface of his behavior.

The frequent elevations of the spirit, which nourished him and his disciples throughout the day, correct these negative impressions. "Direct every action to the Lord by saying, 'Lord, I offer you this work. Please bless it.'"⁶⁷ Another corrective was provided by his teaching on the spirit of prayer. These pious elevations of one's thoughts (called ejaculatory prayers) were supposed to create, with the assistance of God's grace, a state of prayer, which he referred to as piety, or better still, a spirit of prayer.⁶⁸ He had admired this spirit of prayer in Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, in Dominic Savio and Francis

Besucco. The examples of these young men helped him give practical lessons on the spirit of prayer. Saint Aloysius had attained the "privilege" of not suffering any distractions in prayer and had to take almost "violent" measures to stop himself from praying.⁶⁹ Among the "gifts with which God had enriched" Dominic Savio, "the greatest was his fervor in prayer. His spirit was so accustomed to conversing with God that he was able to recollect his thoughts and raise his heart to God with pious affection no matter where he was, even in the midst of the noisiest game."⁷⁰ Francis Besucco "loved prayer so much and was so used to it, that as soon as he was alone or free for a moment he immediately began to say some prayer. It is related that, in the middle of a game, among his shouts, the words "Our Father" or "Hail Mary" would occasionally come out. His friends would laugh about it, Don Bosco continued, but this showed "how much his heart loved prayer and how capable he was of recollecting his spirit to raise it to the Lord. This phenomenon, according to the masters of the spirit, is a sign of a high degree of perfection which is rarely observed even in persons of consummate virtue."⁷¹

Therefore, Don Bosco did not propose to his followers and to his readers a type of sanctity which downplayed prayer. These short prayers, like a network of small arteries in an organism full of blood, energized his soul and transformed his actions and those of his best pupils. Cardinal Cagliero said about Dominic Savio that he "lived only by God, with God, and for God."⁷² And Don Bosco said that "the innocence of his life, his love of God, and the desire for heavenly things had transported Dominic's mind to such a state that one could say that he lived habitually absorbed in God."⁷³ This was also his own personal spiritual practice, according to those who knew him best. Don Bosco conversed with God not only in his dreams but in the midst of the bustle of his daily life.⁷⁴

We have to insist and repeat that one would undoubtedly be mistaken if he imagined him immersed in pure adoration like the Seraphim of the sanctuary in the book of Isaiah.⁷⁵ We believe we are not doing him an injustice by saying that such splendor could not be applied to "poor Don Bosco," who would rather echo the tormented prayer found in the Psalms. He would write: "Let us also try to acquire the spirit of prayer. In every need, in all trials, in misfortunes, before undertaking

any difficult action, let us not neglect to have recourse to God. But especially in spiritual needs let us turn to him with confidence.”⁷⁶ Yes, “Keep my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts in you . . . have pity on me, O Lord, for to you I call all the day.”⁷⁷ With these prayers, in his own way, he served the glory of God, whose power and goodness he celebrated.

The Service of God Through Action

Don Bosco combined “piety” with active charity. He was convinced that in the “difficult times” in which he lived the best way of serving the glory of God was this form of charity.⁷⁸ Taking for granted that it is possible to attain a life of perfection, whether through “piety” or through the exercise of works of charity, by preference he was ready to devote his energies to the works of charity. He explained that the “older Third Orders . . . tended toward perfection through the exercise of piety” while “our principal purpose (in the Union of Salesian Co-operators) is the exercise of charity toward one’s neighbor, especially toward youth which is exposed to the dangers of the world and to so much corruption . . . ”⁷⁹ This observation applies to all who claim his spirit.

The service of others is first of all on the material plane. We know about Don Bosco’s insistence that all superfluous things be given to the needy. Those who refuse to do this steal from the Lord and “according to Saint Paul cannot possess the Kingdom of God.”⁸⁰ He congratulated those who left their superfluous goods to the poor in their wills but jokingly remarked: “in the Gospel it is not written, ‘Give what is superfluous to the poor at the time of your death’ but simply ‘give what is superfluous to the poor.’ ”⁸¹ On the same material plane, the true Christian nurses the sick, instructs and educates children, mediates conflicts between people without having to be begged and as soon as he can.⁸² The history of the saints of the Church—especially that of Saint Vincent de Paul, which Don Bosco knew well—was sufficient to show him that Christian charity is inexhaustible.⁸³

But this was only the first step. Don Bosco practiced and preached a “missionary” charity. He set in motion a program of life which we

well know: Give me souls and take away the rest.⁸⁴ As we have already pointed out, often he would add to his favorite formula, "for the greater glory of God," *and* the words: "for the salvation of souls." We will cite two more examples from the history of the Church that inspired him. Saint Paul had appealed to Caesar and had wanted to go to Rome "where by divine revelation he knew how much he would labor for the glory of God and for the welfare of souls."⁸⁵ Don Bosco interpreted in the same way Saint Martin's saying at the end of his life: "I do not refuse work." "With these words he showed his ardent desire to go to heaven, but he would have postponed it still if it had been for the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls."⁸⁶ Don Bosco, then, did not imagine that material service would not lead to spiritual service. He taught that the sick have to be prepared for eternal life, young people instructed in the knowledge of salvation, and Christian books circulated so that the Good News can be announced, etc.⁸⁷ There are so few people who are concerned about spiritual things, he would observe with some melancholy, whereas these matters should be their first concern.⁸⁸ While he remarked that Dominic Savio and Michael Magone did all sorts of services for their fellow students like making their beds, shining their shoes, dusting their clothes, and taking care of them when they were sick,⁸⁹ he advised that they should be imitated preferably for their "dedicated charity," when they formed apostolic groups or involved their friends in their own religious progress.⁹⁰ Don Bosco was always a man looking to eternity.

Active Charity and Spiritual Perfection

Both groups of people help us: active Christians and those who benefit us by the sweat of their brows. "Whoever saves a soul saves his own." Don Bosco saw his communities grow in perfection by virtue of their spiritual works of charity.

He would say to all Christians: "An effective but often neglected means of gaining Paradise is almsgiving,"⁹¹ a term which we have to interpret, as often happens with Don Bosco, in a wider sense, "By almsgiving I mean any work of mercy exercised toward one's neighbor for the love of God,"⁹² One day in 1855, Dominic Savio asked his

director for a program of holiness, and he was immediately given a high goal: "The first thing that he was advised to do to become a saint was to become involved in winning souls for God."⁹³ About four years later, one of the first versions of the *Salesian Constitutions* affirmed: "The purpose of this Society is to bring its members together . . . in order for them to perfect themselves by imitating the virtues of our Divine Savior, especially through the exercise of charity toward poor youth."⁹⁴ Certainly Don Bosco had not changed his mind when in 1868 he gave a panegyric on Saint Philip Neri and remarked that in the tradition of Saint Ambrose "faith is acquired through zeal, and through zeal man is led to the possession of justice." He also quoted Saint Gregory the Great's words: "No sacrifice is so pleasing to God as much as zeal for the salvation of souls."⁹⁵ Let us jump six or seven years ahead to read a passage in a preparatory outline of the regulations for Cooperators which is a little clearer in this regard than the final text: this association "can be compared to one of the ancient Third Orders, with the difference that in those orders Christian perfection was proposed through the exercise of piety. In this association the principal purpose is an active life dedicated to the exercise of charity toward one's neighbor, especially toward youth in danger. This constitutes the specific end of this Association."⁹⁶ Passages such as these are surely rare, but they are found in documents which were well thought out and carefully written. Their clarity leaves no room for error. Don Bosco believed that charity which is lived and practiced with a spirit of prayer enables one to attain the same sanctity which others seek through different ways, or better still, by insisting on different values.

This doctrinal position of Don Bosco, which did not enjoy the approval of all in Church circles,⁹⁷ is of too great interest for us not to ask how he supported it. The sum total of his "reasons," is not disappointing.

He pointed out that, according to the Scriptures, "almsgiving obtains pardon for sins, even when they are very many" and from this he deduced the fact that Christian charity "frees us from eternal death," "prevents" souls from falling "into the darkness of hell" and allows us to obtain "mercy in the eyes of God."⁹⁸ His belief in the meritorious value of good works is not foreign to these reflections. "It is cer-

tain that sooner or later death will come to both of us (Don Bosco and the reader) and perhaps it is closer than what we could imagine. It is certainly evident that if we do not do good works during our life, we will not be able to reap their fruits at the moment of death, nor expect any of their reward from God."⁹⁹ Active charity, especially if it is apostolic, is a source of excellent good works and hence, of merits. Don Bosco would appeal to the authority of Saint Augustine: "If you have saved a soul, you have predestined your own soul."¹⁰⁰ He would have Dominic Savio say: "If I succeed in saving one soul I will also be sure of saving my own,"¹⁰¹ a statement which was evidently inspired by this sentence. The statement was followed by a paragraph on the brotherly love of Dominic: "In this manner he had a way open for him to exercise charity continually towards his neighbor and to accumulate merits before God."¹⁰² The increase in merits is quite clearly stated as being proportional to the exercise of Christian charity. It is necessary to recall that in his theology, which was in direct opposition to that of the Reformers, charity was strictly associated with merits.

Don Bosco surely knew that the love of neighbor and the love of God are compatible. Like Michael Magone, who practiced "the most dedicated charity towards his companions," he "knew that the exercise of this virtue is the most effective means for us to grow in the love of God."¹⁰³ The charitable person comes closer to God through Jesus Christ who is seen in his brothers. In spite of the religious socialism of 1848, which was however quite ephemeral, Don Bosco's generation discussed the topic of Christian brotherhood and of the union of all men in Christ much less than we do now. Nevertheless, Don Bosco knew the most traditional elements of these truths. According to him, one day when some people were asking Dominic Savio why he worked so hard to serve others, he replied: "I do it because we are all brothers."¹⁰⁴ Don Bosco himself used to speak with simplicity about his brothers, the poor.¹⁰⁵ The chapter of Saint Matthew about the universal judgment had taught him about the identification of Christ with all men, especially if they are suffering: "It is a great stimulus to charity to see Jesus Christ in the person of one's neighbor and to reflect that the good we do to a fellow human being, the Divine Savior considers as done to himself, according to these words: 'I assure you as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me.'"¹⁰⁶ Finally, the last reason, which

apparently was not used very much by Don Bosco but which merits a closer look was this: apostolic charity sanctifies us because it makes us like Christ the Redeemer. "There is nothing more holy in this world than to cooperate in working for the good of souls, for whose salvation Jesus Christ shed the last drop of his precious blood."¹⁰⁷ This reflection found in the life of Dominic Savio is Don Bosco's.

Summarizing then, when apostolic charity sincerely works for the Christian transformation of men, when it is patient and merciful as God is patient and merciful, it leads to heroic holiness. Is not this, perhaps, the way that led Don Bosco to spiritual perfection and which the Church was pleased to recognize in him?

All these things, however, did not complicate his life. He kept on repeating frequently that he was working only for the greater glory of God. The salvation of a soul increases this glory, so a sentence of his found in the first edition of his *Giovane provveduto* (The Companion of Youth) stated explicitly.¹⁰⁸ The two ends, at first subordinated, tended, it is true, to be put together. It should be said that they were combined even more in the later Salesian tradition, once this procedure was initiated during Don Bosco's time. But let us not forget how much he always had the glory of God in view. To be true to his thinking, even when it was not expressed in all its details, his disciple would have to try to serve the honor of God with his "piety" certainly, but above all with his active charity. In this way, the holiness he strove for with simplicity would grow in union with Christ.

The Various States of the Christian Life

Don Bosco believed this growth in holiness was possible in the various states of the Christian life. We have heard him say that everyone can get to heaven by fulfilling the duties proper to "his state."¹⁰⁹ Perhaps it is good to note that by this term he did not intend to refer only to the important states of Christian life. The subtitle of his *Porta teco* (Your Spiritual Guidebook), a book meant for fathers and mothers of families, for boys and girls, for hired hands and servants, read as follows: "Important information about the duties of Christians given so that everyone can attain his own salvation in the state in which he

finds himself:" Evidently, this little book was meant only for lay people. But, given his position, Don Bosco naturally had to explain to his priests and religious how they also could attain perfection. In the course of his life, he believed in three principal vocations among Christians: the lay vocation, which he called simply the Christian vocation, the religious vocation and the priestly vocation.¹¹⁰ His reflections about the first vocation can be forgotten often enough, but they were not less numerous.

The Lay Christian

Let us recall that between 1850 and 1860, Don Bosco was one of those who inspired Piedmontese Christians through his religious writings. It was for them that he wrote flyers, pamphlets, doctrinal summaries and edifying biographies. On various occasions he tried to bring Catholics together, especially lay people, to form apostolic associations. Throughout his life, he counseled lay people with whom he corresponded and numberless other persons who wanted to talk to him. He had, therefore, thousands of occasions in which to express his own ideas about the life of a Christian who lives in the "world."

Just as we are accustomed to do today, Don Bosco would begin with the eminent dignity acquired at Baptism, from the moment of his entrance "into the bosom of Holy Mother Church." The lay Christian can be called son of God, who is his father, brother of Christ to whom he belongs and beneficiary of the treasures of the graces of the Church. "The Sacraments, instituted by our loving Savior, were instituted for me. Through his death Jesus opened heaven for me and prepared it for me. And in order that I might have someone who would look after me, he wished to give me God himself for my Father, the Church for my mother, and the Divine Word for my guide."¹¹¹ We know that Jesus did not consider uneducated artisans and unrefined country people unworthy of greatness. The fact that they were baptized was enough to transform them in his sight.¹¹² For him holiness seemed to be possible in the most humble states of life. "Within the bosom of the Catholic Church everyone, no matter what his condition, can reach perfection in all virtues. A poor farmer has proven this well . . ." ¹¹³

And he would tell the story of Saint Isidore the farmer.

Don Bosco would direct lay aspirants to holiness without urging them to imitate clerics and monks (a form of imitation he did not like). He would say to mothers of families: "Moderate your devotions in such a way that they will not get in the way of your duties as a mother of a family."¹¹⁴ The lay person sanctifies himself in his own "state" and in his own "condition." In fact, as we read in a book which is often attributed to Don Bosco and certainly supervised by him: "Holiness does not consist in doing extraordinary things, but in doing our duty well according to our state and our condition. Our greatest concern, then, should be to fulfill the duties of our state, even the most simple. On this depends our holiness, our salvation, our eternal happiness or unhappiness. The most indifferent actions such as manual labor, wholesome recreation, eating and drinking can have great merit."¹¹⁵ The holiness of a lay person consists in doing the duties of his state, not because they are commanded, but because they are an expression of the will of God. In these duties of one's state, religious duties are included. However, the good lay person, according to Don Bosco, not only does his duties perfectly, but he is of the world and serves it as best as he can. In the books he wrote, he described mothers of families who achieved their salvation by sewing, sweeping, and cooking,¹¹⁶ women servants who sanctified themselves by taking care of the livestock and by obeying their bosses,¹¹⁷ and soldiers, like Peter of Crimea, who sanctified themselves on the battlefields and in the service of their country.¹¹⁸ When a lay person assumes public office he has the duty of sanctifying himself by working for "society" as a whole.¹¹⁹ According to Don Bosco, Saint Louis, King of France, "energetically promoted the good and the prosperity of his people."¹²⁰ And he did not think that his manner of fulfilling his functions as head of state had stood in the way of his sanctity. A good Christian is necessarily a good citizen; not only, but Don Bosco would have willingly turned the proposition around to say that only good Christians or at least those who are friends of God, make good citizens. In one of his bulletins he explained: "My life experience has been that only the practice of religion can assure concord in families and the happiness of those who live in this valley of tears."¹²¹ Here again appears one of his favorite theses.

Virtues of a Lay Christian

The Christian profession demands of a lay person the faith of a soldier. Even in his old age, Don Bosco would repeat this when he was telling one of his dreams: "Take up the shield of faith, so that you can resist the assaults of the devil."¹²² The collapse of some church institutions and the confusion of opinions hurt a large number of Christians. One of the worst problems was "human respect," which prevented the weak from praying in public, from frequenting the sacraments and defending the truth. In one word, human respect divided Christians.¹²³ He expressed his distress in his life of the apostle Saint Peter: "If Christians of our day had the courage of the faithful of the first days, overcame their human respect, and professed their faith fearlessly, we would not see so much disrespect for our holy religion. And perhaps many who seek to make fun both of religion and its ministers would have been influenced by the goodness and innocence (of believers) to respect both religion and its sacred ministers."¹²⁴

He would also encourage lay people to practice another virtue which was dear to his heart. He did not tolerate an idea of Divine Providence which favored idleness. He did not call for a systematic social development of the poor class and it happened, though rarely, that he would even preach to the most unfortunate about being resigned to their lot.¹²⁵ His moderate spirit was not inclined to revolutionary causes, but we know that he spent all of his energies in effectively aiding the needy. He acted out of conviction and not only because he enjoyed doing good: "Let us place in him (God) our trust and let us do as much as we can to sweeten the bitter things of this life."¹²⁶ "Take heart, then, let our program be one of economy, work, and prayer."¹²⁷ In spite of their clumsy composition, Don Bosco could make his own the words of advice which his friend Peter had addressed to his own family and which he himself had circulated throughout Piedmont in 1855: "Tell my brothers and my sisters that work makes good citizens, that religion (he probably meant religious practice) makes good Christians, and that work and religion lead to heaven."¹²⁸

Are a living faith and assiduous work sufficient guarantees of happiness in the life of a lay Christian? Certainly Don Bosco would also preach to the faithful about chastity, patience, prudence, gentleness,

and goodness, as we have demonstrated in the preceding chapters.¹²⁹ We will not repeat ourselves. We merely want to understand whether his idea of lay people—an idea very much influenced by the working class mentality of the nineteenth century—incorporated, and to what degree, the spirit of service in an age when, without a doubt, the spirit of individualism reigned supreme.

Thanks be to God, there's nothing to be scandalized about. The exemplary lay people held up for admiration by Don Bosco did not believe that they were alone in the world. Besides fulfilling the duties of their state, they attended to the corporal and spiritual needs of their neighbor.

A father of the family thinks first of all of his wife, his children and his relatives.¹³⁰ Then he generously practices hospitality¹³¹ and takes part in the life of the local community. A model parishioner is described in the following terms: "Besides attending Vespers, Benediction, High Mass, he also succeeded in choosing some boys with good voices and good will and taught them singing . . . He was choir director, treasurer of many charitable works, a member of the town council, and mayor for some time. The pastor had a faithful parishioner in Peter and called upon him when he needed help or advice in the most serious and confidential problems."¹³² Such a zeal is quite admirable, and it seems that he did not demand anything more of the readers of his *Porta teco* (Your Spiritual Guidebook) of 1858. Don Bosco's apostolate and the spread of his society made him widen the horizons of his readers and hearers beyond their church belfry. He considered Christian service as extending to the whole Church which, as we know, he viewed as a family directed by the sovereign pontiff. "Among Catholics there are neither *our* works nor *their* works. We are all children of God and of the Church, children of the Pope, who is our common father."¹³³ In this spirit, the Salesian Cooperators worked for their parishes, dioceses, and, through the missions, for the whole Church.

Lay people, according to Don Bosco, were supposed to be apostles both by deeds and example. They were to spread Christian truth, look for vocations to the priesthood and encourage them, and try to educate young people who are the hope of the future of society and of the Church of Christ. In their endeavors, Christian lay people should imitate the example of unbelievers and anti-clericals and be more united than they. "We who profess that we are Christians should unite our-

selves in these difficult times to propagate the spirit of prayer and charity with all the means which our religion provides . . ."134 The Union of Cooperators was born from this concern of being effective: if a cord is taken by itself it is easily broken but a three-ply cord is not easily broken. Besides, Don Bosco added to this principle the doctrinal motives for the apostolate which he placed on the lips of Dominic Savio, namely the universality of redemption, the brotherhood of all Christians in Christ, obedience to God and, finally, one's individual growth in holiness.¹³⁵

To praise Don Bosco it is not indispensable to consider him as the precursor of the spirituality and of the apostolate of the laity in the second half of the twentieth century. Yet it is interesting to point out that he thought of adult Christians in their real life situations, of their missionary role in the Church and of their growth in holiness by means of their ordinary lives and the direct apostolate. Taken as a whole, his ideas do not seem to have changed much. He kept repeating that it was necessary to propose to lay people a spirituality and an apostolic style which was very simple and which would not take them away from their real life situations and from their ordinary occupations. Certain similarities between his teachings and that of noted contemporary theologians who speak in the name of many others are quite striking.¹³⁶ Don Bosco was among those in the nineteenth century who prepared Christians for the battles of the twentieth century.

Religious of the Active Life

Don Bosco was concerned above all with lay people up to the middle of his mature years. The problem of religious life, which he had only occasionally confronted in his youth, entered his teaching after 1855. From this time on he looked for a style of religious life suitable for the life of priest-educators whom he thought of uniting in a new congregation. This idea did not occur to him from out of nowhere. Everything in his formation and in his environment had led him to consider founding a society of clerical religious or of priests. He had been inspired by lessons learned from the Jesuits, Barnabites, Redemptorists, the Oblates of Mary of Father Lanteri, the Rosminians, and of the Laz-

arites.¹³⁷ Evidently, this fact advises us against looking to him for an original theory of the eremitical or monastic life. In reality, he had in mind only active religious who separate themselves from the world without fleeing from it, who do not fast and do not pray more than fervent lay people, who practice with simplicity the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience in an organic community, and who try to harmonize the quest for "perfection" demanded by their state as consecrated persons with the needs of the apostolate to which they are vowed.¹³⁸

To avoid any misunderstandings, however, we would like to say that Don Bosco wanted his Salesians to be true religious. Only reasons of prudence and adaptation to the spirit of the times motivated him to avoid using the title of "father, superior, provincial, etc.," which would have given his work a monastic air which the very delicate sensibilities of people around him would have rejected. He proposed to his spiritual sons a style of life which would keep them removed from the dangers of the world, give them well-honed weapons against the "triple concupiscences" and would help them grow in holiness.¹³⁹ It is probable that one day he said the following words (which we find in his biography): "(The purpose of the Salesian Society) is to save our souls and then also to save the souls of others."¹⁴⁰

In his mind, religious life was characterized by the practice of the vows, of the constitutions and of community life. The vows consist of a gift of oneself to God, but a gift that one is always tempted to take back. "Take care and make sure that neither the love of the world, nor attachment to one's relatives, nor the desire for a more comfortable life should lead you to break and profane your sacred vows and thus to betray your religious profession through which you have been consecrated to the Lord. Let no one take back what he has given to God."¹⁴¹ The vows are then a serious matter. Remember, Don Bosco would continue, the story of Ananias and Sapphira, those unfortunate persons who failed to keep the promise of poverty which they had made and were immediately punished.¹⁴² He would often refer to Saint Anselm's teaching that a good deed done without a vow is like the fruit of a plant, while if it is done with a vow it is like the fruit and plant together.¹⁴³ Finally, the vows have the advantage of uniting religious with their superior, the superior and the congregation

with the Pope, and through the Pope with God.¹⁴⁴ Don Bosco's ecclesiology also defined his ideas about religious life.

The observance of the vows is well defined in the *Constitutions*, "those rules which Holy Mother Church was pleased to approve as our guide for the good of our souls and for the spiritual and temporal good of our beloved students."¹⁴⁵ Don Bosco did not wish that these rules, which are an expression of the will of God through those who are his authentic representatives, should be burdensome because the yoke of Christ is first of all "light." Nonetheless, he recognized the ascetical character of his *Constitutions* no matter how easy they were. "My dear friends, do we perhaps want to go to heaven in a limousine? We have become religious not to enjoy ourselves, but to suffer and to earn merits for the other life. We have consecrated ourselves to God not to command but to obey, not to attach ourselves to creatures but to practice charity toward our neighbor for the love of God, not to create for ourselves a comfortable existence but to be poor with Jesus Christ, to suffer with Jesus Christ on this earth in order to become worthy of his glory in heaven."¹⁴⁶

The vows and the constitutions tie a religious to community life, which Don Bosco imagined to be modeled after that of the Church of Jerusalem, in which all goods were held in common, in which the resources of each one were used for the happiness of all, and in which, in short, the faithful were of "one heart and one soul."¹⁴⁷ "The members of the Society lead a common life in all things, and as regards food and dress."¹⁴⁸ They help each other grow in perfection. "A person who is alone is unfortunate (Woe to those who are alone)" while the religious is guided by his superiors, in whom he has total confidence. He listens to them and puts into practice their timely counsels for his sanctification and for the success of his ministry.¹⁴⁹ Charity, which benefits the soul so much, transformed the communities which flourished according to the heart of Don Bosco. Unfortunately we only have sketchy information about these communities, only touching souvenirs and very cordial and fervent letters.¹⁵⁰ The common life was meant to moderate the harshness of the vows. In spite of their asceticism, something which they did not neglect, these communities could not have been happier. Don Bosco was cheered by their happiness, because joy is a blessing too precious to be misinterpreted. "Oh,

if our brothers entered the Society with these dispositions, our houses would certainly become a true earthly paradise . . . We would have, in short, a family of brothers gathered around their father in order to promote the glory of God on earth and then one day go to heaven to love him and praise him in the unlimited glory of the saints.”¹⁵¹

This purpose of religious life was less oratorical than it might seem. In fact, Don Bosco tied together the religious life and the apostolic life with his constant principle of serving God and his glory. It is true that “our vows . . . can be considered as spiritual cords with which we consecrate ourselves to the Lord and place our wills, our good, our physical and moral energies in the hands of the superiors so that all together we might be of one heart and one soul in order to promote the greater glory of God according to our Constitutions . . . !”¹⁵²

Priests

At the center of priestly life Don Bosco always placed the service of the Lord.

The priest protects “God’s great interests,”¹⁵³ and expects a reward only from him. To the marchioness who thanked him for introducing “Gregorian Chant (‘the song of songs’), music, arithmetic and even the metric system” into her schools, Don Bosco answered: “There is no need to thank me. Priests have to work. God will repay everything, so let’s not talk about this any more.”¹⁵⁴ When the necessity presented itself, he spent himself completely for God: “Do we really have to work? I will die on the battlefield of work ‘like a good soldier of Christ.’ ”¹⁵⁵ He was “God’s thurible,” according to an expression of his conceived a few years after his ordination to the priesthood.¹⁵⁶ When he reflected on the special significance of his priestly function, Don Bosco evidently pointed out the sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacrament of Penance, which gave a priest precedence “over the angels themselves.”¹⁵⁷ We believe we are not mistaken when we state that for him the priest was above all a minister, that is, a worker or a soldier of God.

Along with many writers of the Counter Reformation, especially Saint Alphonsus, who was in turn a close follower of Saint Charles

Borromeo,¹⁵⁸ Don Bosco drew up a list of the most indispensable virtues for priests. The first virtue in the list was ascetical detachment. "In the priestly state the norms established by our Divine Savior have to be followed: that is, to renounce all comforts, all worldly glory, all earthly pleasures in order to give oneself up to the service of God."¹⁵⁹ The spirit of prayer, which is very necessary for lay people, is even more so for the priest. He wrote in 1847: "Prayer for a priest is like water for a fish, air for a bird, and a spring for a deer."¹⁶⁰ Finally, without a doubt, he considered zeal, nourished by faith and love, to be the characteristic priestly virtue.

Sometimes he felt disappointed by the lack of faith, of love and of zeal among the priests who surrounded him. He believed that the imitators of Saint Vincent de Paul were far too few.¹⁶¹ Just the same, priests of Saint Vincent's caliber had existed in the past and existed in the present. There were, for instance, Saint Philip Neri, Father Joseph Cafasso, and also a priest friend of his, Father Carlo Valfré (1813-1861), pastor of Marmorito, whom he praised highly in his life of Dominic Savio: "He was tireless in carrying out his duties. Instructing poor children, assisting the sick, and helping poor people were typical expressions of his zeal. For his sheer goodness, charity, and service, he could be held up as model for any priest who had the care of souls entrusted to him . . ." ¹⁶² In a panegyric in honor of Saint Philip Neri which he gave to an audience of priests, he zeroed in on the "zeal on which depended, as on a hinge, all his other virtues—zeal for the salvation of souls! This is the type of zeal recommended by the Divine Savior when he said: 'I have come to light a fire on the earth. How I wish the blaze were ignited!'" ¹⁶³

The activities of a priest demand this kind of ardent zeal. "Some might say: 'Saint Philip Neri worked these wonders because he was a saint.' I would put it this way: Philip worked these wonders because he was a priest who acted according to the spirit of his vocation . . . But what should absolutely move us to carry out our priestly function with zeal is the very strict account which we as ministers of Jesus Christ will have to give before his Divine Tribunal of all the souls entrusted to our care."¹⁶⁴ True zeal moves us to take the measures which are most needed. "Souls are in peril and we have to save them. We are obliged to help as simple Christians, whom God has commanded

to take care of their neighbors: 'And he will demand of each one an account of his neighbor.' We are also obliged because it is a question of helping to save the souls of our brothers because we are all the children of the same heavenly Father. We should feel ourselves encouraged to work to save souls in a special way because this is the most holy of holy activities: 'The most divine of all divine things is to cooperate with God in saving souls (Denis the Areopagite).' ¹⁶⁵

Conclusion

The best conclusion for this chapter is the eulogy in honor of Saint Philip Neri whom he called "one of the wonders of the sixteenth century."¹⁶⁶ According to Don Bosco, his activities "serve as a perfect model of virtue for simple Christians, for fervent monks, and for the most hard-working priests."¹⁶⁷ He was a man whose deeds, like those of all the saints, were directed toward one end: "the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls."¹⁶⁸ He was a man who practiced the virtues which Don Bosco valued the most: chastity—"he could tell by a certain odor whether those around him possessed this virtue or were defiled by the opposite vice"—¹⁶⁹ and supernatural charity, neither unreasonable nor harsh, but gentle, kind, made pleasant by an inexhaustible cheerfulness which he reserved for the poor and for children, who are especially loved by Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁰

NOTES

1. G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, 8th ed., Turin, 1874, p. 83.
2. Jn. 14, 30.
3. G. Bosco, *Il mese*, *loc. cit.*, p. 85.
4. G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, p. 6. The expression comes from Ps. 99, 2.
5. G. Bosco, *Il mese*, *loc. cit.*, p. 86.
6. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, pp. 86-87 (English ed., see p. 106). cf. Doc. 14 below.
7. G. Barberis, *Diocesan Process of Canonization*, ad 22; in the *Positio super introductione causae. Summarium*, p. 427.
8. M. Rua, *ibid.*, ad 22, in the *Positio*, *op. cit.*, p. 667.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 732.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 734.
11. An especially positive witness: "The servant of God had as a primary and absolute goal the glory of God and the sanctification of his protégés" (*ibid.*, ad 16, in the *Positio*, *op. cit.*, p. 154.)
12. *Ibid.*, p. 22, p. 651.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 600 (according to the *Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori*).
14. Quoted (but by whom?) in the *Responsio ad Animadversiones R.P.D. Promotoris fidei super dubio*, Rome, 1907, p. 3, par. 5.
15. E. Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio*, *ed., cit.*, p. 243.
16. G. Bosco's letter to Br. Herve de la Croix (October, 1845, according to Fr. Ceria, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 15).
17. G. Bosco, *Il sistema metrico decimale ridotto a semplicità*, 4th ed., Turin, 1851, p. 4.
18. G. Bosco's letter to Count U. Grimaldi de Bellino, Sept. 24, 1863, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 280.
19. G. Bosco *Il giovane*, *ed., cit.*, p. 102.
20. G. Bosco's letter to the Countess de Camburzano, Dec. 26, 1860, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 201.

21. G. Bosco's letter to M. Rua, 1863, *Epistolario* vol. I, 288. The evolution of this document, which was to become a classic in the Salesian tradition, would lead us to believe that the statement was not completely clear for the Salesians during the last years of Don Bosco. In 1886, the statement reads simply: "In matters of greater importance raise your heart briefly to God before deciding" (*Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori*, 1886, in A Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X, 1041 (English ed., p. 447). This is very interesting.

22. G. Bosco, *Vita di S. Paolo*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1878, p. 12. and *ibid.*, p. 25: "The holy Apostles, who sought only the glory of God..."

23. Panegyric written in May, 1868 already cited; in Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 215 (omitted in English ed). Cf. "Documents" below.

24. G. Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica*, new ed., Turin, 1870, p. 302 (cf. also Doc. 27).

25. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., Turin, 1880, p. 71 (English ed., p. 96). Cf. also the address of Professor Picco on his pupil Dominic, *ibid.*, p. 122 (English ed., pp. 144 ff).

26. The text adds: "and the salvation of souls" (panegyric in honor of St. Philip Neri quoted in Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 214 (omitted in English ed.); Cf "Documents" below. We are distinguishing the two ends before trying to combine them later on.

27. According to A. Brou, quoted by P. Pourrat, *La spiritualité chrétienne*, Paris, 1925, vol. III, 51.

28. G. Cagliero, Diocesan Process of Canonization, ad 22; in *Positio super introductione causae. Summarium* p. 748.

29. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico* 6th ed., Turin, 1880, p. 63 (English ed., pp. 83 ff.); Bosco's letter to Salesians, 1868, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 551 and letter to C. Louvet, May 3, 1887, *ibid.*, vol. IV, 477.

30. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, *ed. cit.*, p. 98 (English ed., p. 119). A similar reflection can be found in ch. 27, p. 128 (English ed., p. 151).

31. G. Bosco's letter to A. Savio, Sept. 13, 1870. *Epistolario*, vol. II, 117.

32. G. Bosco's letter to the superior of the Faithful Companions, June 16, 1871, *ibid.*, p. 165.

33. S. Marchisio, Diocesan Process of Canonization, ad 22: *Positio super introductione causae. Summarium* p. 604.

34. G. Bosco's letter to Marchioness M. Fassati, Apr. 21, 1866, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 387. The date which the editor of this collection seems to have forgotten to transcribe, was obtained from Lemoyne,

Memorie, vol. IX, 292 (omitted in English ed.)

35. G. Bosco's letter to G.B. Verlucca, Jul. 18, 1866, *Epistolario*, vol. I, p. 413.

36. G. Bosco, spiritual "gift" for a member of the Provera family, 1868, Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 38 (English ed., p. 27).

37. G. Bosco's letter to Canon A. Vogliotti, May 20, 1869, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 29.

38. G. Bosco's letter to D. Belmonte, Sept. 22, 1869, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 48.

39. G. Bosco's letter to Cardinal P. De Silvestri, Jul. 21, 1869, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 38.

40. G. Bosco's letter to the archbishop of Turin, Nov. 28, 1869, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 63.

41. Report to the Holy See about the Salesian Society in 1870, Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 788 (omitted in English ed.).

42. G. Bosco's letter to Countess C. Callori, Apr. 28, 1870, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 87.

43. G. Bosco's letter to the students at Lanzo, Dec. 26, 1872, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 245.

44. G. Bosco, *Porta teco*, Turin, 1858, p. 24; according to Eph. 6, 4.

45. Cf. *Cooperatori salesiani*, 3 (also Doc. 33 below).

46. G. Bosco's letter to Salesians, May 1, 1887, E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XVIII, 759.

47. Cf., for example, Doc. 23 below, notes of a conference given on Sept. 26, 1868, according to Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 355-356 (English ed., pp. 166-68)

48. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, Turin, 1861, pp. 46-47 cited above.

49. *Regolamento per le case*, Turin, 1877, p. 64.

50. G. Bosco, *Il giovane*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, p. 77. *La Chiave del Paradiso*, Turin, 1857, p. 30.

51. *Ibid*, *Le Sei domeniche*: "Saint Aloysius, Model of Prayer," pp. 68-70.

52. G.B. Anfossi, Diocesan Process of Canonization, ad 22; *Positio, Summarium*, p. 442.

53. Manuscript notes, A.C.S., S. 132, "Prediche," C.3; cf. Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 997 (omitted in English ed.).

54. *Regolamento per le case*, Turin, 1877, p. 63.

55. G. Bosco, *Luigi Comollo*, 4th ed., Turin, 1884, p. 32.
56. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 63 (English ed., p. 79).
57. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, Turin, 1861, pp. 29-31; *Il Pastorello delle Alpi*, Turin, 1864, pp. 114-115.
58. "Personal recollectedness, a clear, devout and distinct pronunciation of the words of the divine office, modesty in speech, in looks and in hearing, both inside and outside the house, ought to be such as to distinguish them from all others." (*Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales*, approved in 1874, ch. 3, art 2; ed. A. Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X, 982 (omitted in English ed.).
59. G. Bosco's letter to the students of the Oratory of Valdocco, Jul. 23, 1861, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 207.
60. G. Bosco, *La Chiave del Paradiso*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1857, p. 29.
61. Cf. Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. V, 940 (English ed., p. 644) the edition of an old manuscript of the constitutions whose exactness we have been able to verify; chapter on "The Practices of Piety," art. 3.
62. S. Svegliati, *Animadversiones in Constitutiones Sociorum sub titulo S. Francisci Salesii in Diocoesi Taurinensi*, 1864, art. 8: "It is to be hoped that the members devote more than an hour to vocal and mental prayer daily . . ." (Ed. by Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. VII, 708 (omitted in English ed.).
63. According to a conference given by Don Bosco at Trofarello, Sept. 26, 1868, edited by Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 355 (English ed., pp. 166-67).
64. Testimony by Prato at the diocesan process for canonization of Joseph Cafasso, p. 875; according to A. Grazioli, *La pratica dei confessori*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
65. Judging by the *Regulae Seminariorum archiepiscopalium clericorum*, Turin, 1875, rules which in this case were quite like those of the Salesians.
66. Cf., for example, E. Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio*, *ed., cit.*, pp. 2-3.
67. G. Bosco, *La Chiave del Paradiso ed. cit.*, p. 39.
68. Cf. the articles or chapters on the spirit of prayer in Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, pp. 62 ff. (English ed., pp. 79 ff.); *Il Pastorello delle Alpi*, Turin, 1864, pp. 113-119.
69. G. Bosco, *Il giovane*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, p. 69.
70. G. Bosco, *Savio Demenico*, *ed. cit.*, p. 62 (English ed., p. 79).

71. G. Bosco, *Il Pastorello*, ed. cit., pp. 117-118.
72. G. Cagliero, Apostolic Process of Dominic Savio, ad 17; *Positio super virtutibus*, Rome, 1926, p. 129.
73. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, ed., cit., ch. 19 (English ed., see p. 79).
74. Developed at length by E. Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio*, ed. cit., ch. 17: "Dono di orazione," pp. 327-349.
75. Is. 6, 1-3.
76. G. Bosco, *Il giovane*, ed. cit., p. 69.
77. Ps. 85, 2-4.
78. *Cooperatori salesiani*, I (cf. below Doc. 33).
79. *Ibid.*, 3.
80. Conference given at Lucca, *Bollettino salesiano*, 1882, ann. VI, pp. 81-82.
81. Sermon given at Nice, Aug. 21, 1879, according to E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XIV, 258. The lack of sources makes this assertion doubtful, but it is in plain accord with other expressions which are certainly Don Bosco's.
82. G. Bosco, *Il mese*, 8th ed., Turin, 1874, p. 178.
83. "Christian charity, which had already worked so many wonders, would work new wonders, and in some respects, greater wonders in the person of St. Vincent de Paul" (Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica*, new ed., Turin, 1870, p. 308).
84. Cf. also Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, ed. cit., p. 38 (English ed., p. 53).
85. G. Bosco, *Vita di S. Paolo*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1878, ch. 21, p. 99.
86. G. Bosco, *Vita di S. Martino*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1886, p. 79.
87. G. Bosco, *Il mese*, loc. cit., p. 178.
88. Cf., for example, his conference to Salesians, Sept. 18, 1869, already cited.
89. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., Turin, 1880, p. 71 (English ed., p. 96); *Magone Michele*, ed. cit., pp. 48-49.
90. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, ed., cit., ch. 11 (cf. also Doc. 13 below); and *Magone Michele*, ed. cit., ch. 10-11, *passim*. Here once again we notice the affinity between his teaching and that of St. Alphonsus, for example, that of the *True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, ch. 12: "On Charity Towards One's Neighbor."

91. G. Bosco, *Il mese*, *loc. cit.*, p. 175.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 175. This definition was given explicitly by Don Bosco: "By almsgiving, I intend whatever work of mercy . . ."

93. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 53 (English ed., p. 67); cf. also Doc. 13 below.

94. *Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales*, manuscript cited above, chapter: "Purpose of this congregation, art. I (cf. Doc. 12 below).

95. Panegyric in honor of St. Philip Neri cited above, Lemoyne, *Memorie*, IX, 216 (omitted in English ed.); cf. Doc. 21 below.

96. *Associazione di buone opere*, Turin, 1875, III, 6. After having received a brief from Pius IX, Don Bosco will claim papal support for this idea in the final text.

97. Lacking further information, we draw this hypothetical conclusion about the evolution of this article quoted from the *Salesian Constitutions* in which the only object given in the original text is: Christian perfection through the practice of charity. This single end began to split into two joint ends, namely, Christian perfection *and* the practice of charity, around the time when the constitutions were submitted to Rome for approval. In the version approved in 1874, one reads the following: "The object of the Salesian Society is that its members, while striving to attain Christian perfection, shall be engaged in works of charity, both spiritual and temporal, on behalf of the young, especially of the poorer classes." (ed. Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X, 956; omitted in English ed.)

98. G. Bosco, *Il mese*, *ed. cit.*, pp. 175-176.

99. G. Bosco, *Il Pastorello delle Alpi*, Turin, 1864, pp. 179-180 (cf. Doc. 18 below). See also *Maniera facile*, 5th ed, Turin, 1877, p. 101, the 19th and 20th quotations from the Scriptures.

100. Panegyric in honor of St. Philip Neri, Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 221 (omitted in English ed.), cf. "Documents" below; *Cooperatori salesiani*, S. Pier d'Arena, 1877, "Introduction."

101. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, p. 56 (English ed., p. 69).

102. *Ibid.*, p. 62 (English ed., see chapter 11).

103. G. Bosco, *Magone Michele*, *ed. cit.*, p. 47.

104. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, *ed., cit.*, p. 55 (English ed., p. 69).

105. G. Bosco, *Il mese*, *ed. cit.*, p. 177: "But do not forget that the poor are your brothers."

106. G. Bosco, *Introduzione alle Regole o Costituzioni*, Turin, 1885,

p. 34. The beginning of this paragraph is missing in the editions of 1875 and 1877, and so was added later, although with Don Bosco's knowledge and signature. The same idea is expressed in *Il mese di maggio*, ed. cit., p. 175; and in a talk to the Salesian Cooperators of La Spezia, Apr. 9, 1884, according to the *Bolletino salesiano*, May 1884, quoted in E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XVII, 70.

107. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, ed. cit., p. 53 (English ed., p. 67). The same idea will appear again in the same chapter, p. 55 (English ed. p. 69) but in a less precise form (cf. Doc. 13 below).

108. "May the Lord grant that, after you put into practice these few suggestions, you may attain salvation and thus increase the glory of God, which is the only purpose of this little book" (Bosco, *Il giovane*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1851, p. 8). Perhaps because it appeared to be too complicated for the boys, the above was rewritten as follows: "May the Lord grant that, after you put into practice these few suggestions, you may increase the glory of God and thus attain your salvation, which is the main purpose for which we were created" (*op. cit.*, 101st ed., Turin, 1885, p. 8). At any rate, this shift of emphasis deserves closer study.

109. Cf. ch. 6, above.

110. Don Bosco's views about the question of vocation to various states of life deserves a special study. His teaching was related to that of St. Alphonsus: whoever refuses the call of the Lord endangers his salvation. (cf. G. Cacciatore, in S. Alfonso M. de'Liguori, *Opere ascetiche. Introduzione generale*, 1960, pp. 228-229).

111. G. Bosco, *Il mese*, ed. cit., pp. 68-70.

112. Cf. ch. 2 above.

113. G. Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica*, new ed., Turin, 1870, p. 216.

114. G. Bosco, *Porta teco*, Turin, 1858: in a series of counsels taken from a letter by the Blessed Valfré.

115. (Anonymous) *Il Cattolico provveduto*, Turin, 1868, p. 532; in the course of a meditation which was probably copied.

116. For instance, Peter's mother, in G. Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione*, Turin, 1855.

117. G. Bosco, *Angelina*, Turin, 1869.

118. G. Bosco, *La forza*, pp. 75-101.

119. G. Bosco, *Porta teco*, Turin, 1858, "Avvisi particolari pei capi di famiglia," "Condotta pubblica nel paese." pp. 30-32.

120. G. Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica*, new ed., Turin, 1870, p. 237.

121. G. Bosco, *Severino*, Turin, 1868, p. 175.

122. Dream written down on Sept. 10, 1881, E. Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XV, 183.

123. G. Bosco, *Severino*, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-161, et *passim*.

124. G. Bosco, *Vita di San Pietro*, Turin, 1856, pp. 80-81.

125. We were able to find only the following thoughts by Allegro, one of the pleasant characters of the *Casa della fortuna*: "No, no, money and wealth cannot satisfy the human heart. Only the good use of money and wealth can do so. Everyone should be happy with his state in life without seeking to have more than he needs. A piece of bread, a serving of polenta, and a bowl of soup are enough for me: (Bosco, *La Casa della fortuna*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1888, p. 9).

126. G. Bosco, *Severino*, *op. cit.*, p. 22. This comment by Severino's father reflected certainly the mind of the biographer.

127. *Ibid.*, In passing, we should note that considering prayer of equal importance with work was in no way part of Don Bosco's thinking, no matter what has been said on this point. Fr. A. Auffray's chapter in *En Cordée derrière un guide sûr, saint Jean Bosco*, Lyon (1948), pp. 31-36 entitled: "To work is to pray," is not, therefore, quite right.

128. G. Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione*, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

129. Cf. also Bosco, *La Chiave del Paradiso*, 2nd ed., Turin, 1857, pp. 20-23 (cf. also Doc. 8 below).

130. G. Bosco, *Porta teco*, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-29.

131. Cf., for example, Bosco, *Severino*, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

132. G. Bosco, *Angelina*, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

133. Conference cited above, Lucca, 1882, according to the *Bolletino salesiano*, 1882, ann. VI, 81.

134. *Cooperatori salesiani*, I (cf. Doc. 33 below).

135. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1859, pp. 55-58 (English ed, p. 69); Cf. Doc. 13 below.

136. Cf. J. Guitton, *L'Eglise et les laïcs*, Paris, 1963, p. 143-150.

137. Also from other less-known societies, such as the Congregation of Secular Priests of the Schools of Charity, founded in Venice by Antonio Angelo and Marco De Cavanis and approved by Gregory XVI on May 21, 1836.

138. Don Bosco's teaching on the religious life is found above all in his conferences and circular letters to Salesians, Cf. in particular the

outlines of conferences from 1872 to 1875 found in Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X, pp. 1083-1091, and the following circular letters: "On Entrance into the Society," June 9, 1867, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 473-475; "On Unity of Spirit and Administration," *op. cit.*, p. 555-557 (this letter, edited from an autographed outline, was probably never sent out); "On Family Spirit," Aug. 15, 1869, *op. cit.*, vol. II, 43-45. "On Economy," June 4, 1873, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-286; "On Religious Discipline" Nov. 15, 1873, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-321; "On the Salesian Constitutions," Aug. 15, 1874: *Introduzione alle Regole o Costituzioni*, Turin, 1875 (the text was expanded in the editions of 1877 and 1885 without modifying the date of the document); "On Some Points of Religious Discipline," Jan. 12, 1876, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 6-9, "To the Directors of the Houses on Some Problems of the Religious Life"; Nov. 29, 1880, *op. cit.*, pp. 637-638; "On the Observance of the Constitutions," Jan. 6, 1884, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, 248-250; "Spiritual Testament," circa 1884, Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XVII, 257-273; cf. also concerning this last letter, *Epistolario*, vol. IV, 392-393.

139. Cf. the autographed notes of conferences on the religious life, edited by Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 986-987 (omitted in English ed.); cf. also Doc. 26 below: Bosco, *Introduzione alle Regole o Costituzioni*, Turin, 1877, "Entrance into Religion," pp. 4-5.

140. Conference of Oct. 29, 1872, according to the notes of Cesare Chiala, published in Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X, 1085 (English ed., p. 476). Cf. also: "In order to assure the salvation of his soul, (Aloysius Gonzaga) resolved to enter the religious state: Bosco, *Le Sei domeniche*, 8th ed., Turin, 1886, *Cenni sopra la vita*, p. 15.

141. Spiritual testament, *Epistolario*, vol. IV, 392.

142. Conference of Sept. 1, 1873, from Cesare Chiala's notes, Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X, 1087 (English ed., p. 478).

143. *Ibid.*, and G. Bosco, *Introduzione alle Regole*, ed. cit., "Vows," p. 19.

144. G. Bosco, *Introduzione alle Regole*, *ibid.*

145. G. Bosco's letter to Salesians, Jan. 6, 1884, *Epistolario*, vol. IV, 249.

146. *Ibid.*, p. 250.

147. Cf. on the Church of Jerusalem, Bosco, *Vita di San Pietro*, Turin, 1856, p. 82; *Storia ecclesiastica*, new ed., Turin, 1870, p. 24; *Maniera facile*, 5th ed., Turin, 1877, p. 75, etc. It is evident that the expression, which he loved to quote so much, "one heart and one soul," came from his idea of this Church.

148. *Regulae seu Constitutiones*, 1874, ch. 4, art. 7 (cf. Amadei, *Memorie*, vol. X, 962, omitted in English ed.).

149. G. Bosco's letter to Salesians, Aug. 15, 1869, *Epistolario*, vol. II, 43-44.

150. Cf., for example, Bosco's letter to G. Garino, 1863, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 276; letter to G. Bonetti, 1864, *ibid.*, p. 327; and letter to D. Tomatis, Mar. 7, 1876, *ibid.*, vol. III, 26-27 (cf. Doc. 18, 20, 30 below).

151. G. Bosco's letter to Salesians, June 9, 1867, *Epistolario*, vol. I, 475.

152. G. Bosco, *Introduzione alle Regole*, Turin, 1877, "Vows," p. 19.

153. According to a reliable witness at his process of canonization, Don Bosco said, "A priest is always a priest . . . To be a priest means to have always in view God's best interests, that is to say, the salvation of souls." (Lemoyne, Diocesan Process of Canonization, ad 13, in *Positio super introductione causae. Summarium*, p. 122).

154. According to *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, p. 161.

155. G. Bosco's letter to a pastor of Forlì, Oct. 25, 1878, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 399 (Cf. Doc. 32 below).

156. Record of resolutions taken by Don Bosco after the spiritual exercises of 1847, according to Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio., ed., cit.*, p. 93.

157. Notes taken in 1868 by someone present during a sermon by Don Bosco on the priesthood, edited by Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 343-344 (omitted in English ed.); cf. Doc. 22 below.

158. Cf. on the sources of the works of St. Alphonsus on the priesthood, G. Cacciatore, *Introduzione generale, S. Alfonso M. de Liguori, Opere ascetiche, op. cit.*, pp. 224-231.

159. G. Bosco's letter to the students of the upper grades of Borgo San Martino, June 17, 1879, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 476.

160. Record of resolutions cited above, in E. Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio, ed. cit.*, p. 93.

161. Cf. *Il Cristiano guidato*, Turin, 1848, Preface, p. 4; notes taken by someone present in 1868, in Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol. IX, 344 (omitted in English ed.); cf. Doc. 22 below.

162. G. Bosco, *Savio Domenico*, 6th ed., Turin, 1880, p. 92, note (note found in English ed.).

163. Panegyric cited above, May 1868, Lemoyne, *Memorie*, vol.

IX, 215 (omitted in English ed.); cf. "Documents" below.

164. *Ibid.*, pp. 219-220 (omitted in English ed.); cf. "Documents" below.

165. *Ibid.*, p. 220 (omitted in English ed.); cf. "Documents" below.

166. G. Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica*, new ed., Turin, 1870, p. 295.

167. Panegyric, pp. 214-215.

168. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

169. G. Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica*, pp. 295-296.

170. Panegyric, pp. 217-219.

CONCLUSION

Don Bosco

in the History of Spirituality

The Spiritual Life According to Don Bosco

Now it is possible to review the chief characteristics of the spiritual life according to Don Bosco before trying to assign a place to his thought in the history of Catholic spirituality.

Don Bosco considered this earthly life as a road to happiness: and along this road the highest possible degree of holiness leads to personal happiness. Man finds himself on his way with all his natural and supernatural resources. In following this road, man finds joy and peace as long as he does not go astray. He travels on his way following the directions given by the Church. His world includes God, Christ, the Immaculate Virgin Mary who is the Helper of Christians, the angels, the saints, the Pope and his brothers in the faith. Christ and the saints, in particular, are images of God's perfection to admire and imitate. In this spirituality, the visible Church is of supreme importance. God speaks through it today. And we see a tendency to center the Church in the person of the Supreme Pontiff.

In his spiritual journey, the Christian is guided and sustained by God. The word of the Lord which he finds in the Church shows him the goals which he has to seek, puts before him the essential truths he is to believe and gives him a moral code he is to practice. The Sacrament of Penance raises up those who fall and the Sacrament of the Eucharist nourishes the faithful with the body of Christ. The Sacraments are the pillars of the religious life, which is enriched equally by good "examples" and by pious practices which should, as far as possible, be very simple and available to all Christians.

But this is not enough. The Christian life consists in practicing virtue, and its development is quite difficult. It is necessary "to suffer with Christ in order to be glorified with Him." In its essentials, Don

Bosco's asceticism presupposes an intelligent acceptance of life, because God is the author of life and all living things have to turn to him. There is no holiness except in carrying out his will—often a difficult thing. This expression is frequently interchanged with that of “fulfilling one's duties.” Furthermore, a good Christian knows how to get rid of superfluous things. He keeps only those things which are necessary for his condition in life; he is humbly submissive to those who speak in the name of God; and, with special care, he avoids even the slightest shade of sin, especially in the area of chastity in which Don Bosco had a rather strong sense of “reserve.” Finally, he serves God and his glory. Prayer, simple and continuous to which he is devoted, keeps him in contact with God. Nevertheless, although piety appears to him to be indispensable in the service of the Lord, the faithful Christian finds in “active charity” which is practiced “for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls,” a veritable springboard to perfection.

This road is open to all, priests, religious and lay people. Holiness is “easy,” not at all restricted to a small number of the elect. Don Bosco did not divide spiritual progress into different stages. Right or wrong, he ignored the purgative way, the illuminative and unitive, as also other divisions made by specialists. Finally, it does not seem that mystical phenomena, which were seen and recognized in the life of Dominic Savio and in his own, ever appeared to be essential for a consummate (degree of) holiness.

Characteristics of the Spiritual Thought of Don Bosco

Every spiritual thought which claims kinship with (*claims to witness to or seeks to model itself on*) Christ supposes a certain understanding of man, a method of asceticism and of prayer and some preference for one of the two types of Christian life which are represented traditionally by Martha and Mary.

Don Bosco was an optimist. Let us recall one of his favorite expressions, transcribed on a bookmark for his breviary: “I have known that there was no better thing than to rejoice and to do well in this life”¹ — (taken from Ecclesiastes III 12, Douay version). By temperament, by submission to revered teachers and by acquired convictions, he admired

man and relied with great confidence on his own resources. Traces of an excessive "Augustinianism" are found rarely in his mature thinking. Yet, we have seen that he did not have the naïveté of professing a simple humanism. The inclination to sin has to be watched because it always threatens to set itself ablaze (catch fire). Furthermore, a man without religion is an eternal wretch.

His asceticism was demanding, although it has escaped the attention of more than one of his superficial observers. The motto "work and temperance," which he gave to his followers, obligated the followers to a constant surveillance over themselves. He felt repugnance for external penances and extraordinary mortifications of the flesh. He preferred spiritual mortifications which help control the will, and obligatory mortifications by force of necessity, which one assumes through submission to God in the world. He preached a hidden (veiled) asceticism, of which he found the model in Christ crucified. At any rate, suffering and renunciation appeared to him part of the Christian life.

His style of devotion which he favored was sacramental—I would not dare call it liturgical. He certainly recommended and promoted the pious devotions which were in use in his environment and no others, with the exception of the Exercise for a Happy Death, but he never allowed them to impede the sacramental life. He spoke little about a method of prayer, and he emphasized Penance and the Eucharist.

Finally, he chose for himself and for his followers a type of holiness achieved by means of action without, however, giving up a type of habitual contemplation which was maintained by a "spirit of prayer" to which he was very attached. He imitated Christ in his active, enterprising, and boundless charity in the service of young people. His spirituality was dynamic. An overly worried critic would perhaps accuse him of Pelagianism. Without a sufficiently clear understanding of his activities, people could have slandered him. And Don Bosco certainly never experienced even the smallest temptation to Quietism.

Don Bosco, then, had a great idea of man. He wanted people to practice secret mortifications, and to grow in holiness through their sacramental life and through an active charity nourished by prayer.

Don Bosco's Place in a Spiritual Tradition

These characteristics allow us to classify the spiritual thought of an Italian saint of the nineteenth century who admired Saint Philip Neri and Saint Francis de Sales probably more than all the other canonized saints.

It is evident that all the connections which we are about to point out do not serve to explain all of Don Bosco's thought. Don Bosco was original, as are all persons who are true to themselves and who do not resign themselves to be simply mirror images of the models they find. It has been written, at times with an almost excessive emphasis, and we will also state it, that he did not seek to stand out for his singularity. Rather, the contrary is surely true. In fact, he was concerned about holding on to the most reliable positions of the Church without trying to rethink Christianity and the principles of perfection with quotations from the Bible and the Fathers. It was a logical consequence of his fight against Protestantism and Jansenism. He was tied to a tradition flowing from the spiritual world which he was helping to build. This tradition was made up of Liguorians mostly and in general of the best writers of his native land between the years 1850 and 1860. Thus he was part of a very definite historical current. To try to deny this reality—a temptation that we wish no one had fallen into—would only result in complicating a problem which can now be solved.

*Don Bosco and the Italian School
of the Catholic Counter Reformation*

In fact and by intention, Saint John Bosco belonged to the period of Western Catholicism after Trent. Excluding Germany and England, which were shaken by the Reformation, three or four great national spiritual currents emerged in Europe: those of the Spanish, French, Italian and Flemish Schools. The Flemish School continued a medieval tradition.² It is risky to divide trends, but this division is simple and well grounded, because national characteristics which have always been present, were affirmed in Europe after the end of the Middle Ages.

Don Bosco's thought has little to do with the "French School"

of Berulle, Olier, Condren, Bourgoing, etc., except perhaps by way of Saint Vincent de Paul. At any rate he did not hold its great principles like that of devotion to the Incarnate Word, a predilection for the virtue of religion, and an Augustinian idea of grace. The Spanish School of the sixteenth century was less foreign to him. His affinity to Saint Teresa and Saint Ignatius of Loyola is certain. From Saint Teresa he got his deep devotion to the majesty of God and from Ignatius his energetic struggle against evil and his cult for the greater glory of God. Finally, some try to put Saint John Bosco among the disciples of Saint Francis de Sales, but the similarities between the two saints refer more to their tastes and their work rather than to a doctrinal dependency, which has not been proved. However, they both shared the heritage of the Italian School of the Catholic Counter Reformation.

This "school," taken in a broad sense, is not too homogeneous but nonetheless real.³ It was born among the Franciscans of the Middle Ages and was influenced by the current of humanism in the fifteenth century and at the beginning of the sixteenth century. It assumed its modern aspects in the sacramental and militant atmosphere of the Reform of Trent. The mystical subtleties which were so prevalent in Italy at the time of Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Catherine of Genoa, had disappeared. The dominant spirituality, which began to be studied seriously,⁴ was still characterized in this country by a humanistic optimism which the Protestant response had accentuated. It was, however, weakened by the rigorous atmosphere of the eighteenth century. The spirituality was marked by a simple piety, by little concern for methods, by an evident preference for practices and for an interior asceticism which was hidden under pleasant appearances, by a conscious search for joy and for peace of soul, both elements of a sound spiritual life, and finally by a habitual opposition to paganism and Protestantism, which were the great temptations for Catholics of that era. In various degrees these characteristics marked the teachings of Saint Philip Neri and of Saint Catherine of Ricci, as also those of the *Spiritual Combat* and those of Cardinal Bona, of John Baptist Scarmelli and of Saint Alphonsus of Liguori.

These traits also appeared very clearly in John Bosco.⁵ We will not dwell again on his fight against Protestantism and Jansenism, when he became well known as a disciple of Saint Alphonsus and an adversary of

the Piedmontese Waldensians. But some remarks about the other five characteristics will help us to place him better in his world.

In following the humanists—not however without some reservations due to the influence of Trent, of his rigorous formation in his youth, of a certain fear of the flesh and of a deep rejection of every religious system which was closed to others—Don Bosco believed that it was necessary to help people grow in holiness as they are and deal with them as they find themselves. He emphasized the mortification of the spirit rather than the wasting away of the body, and he shied away from using fear and harshness in directing souls and saw God as a father to be loved rather than as a tyrant to be feared.⁶ The “dream” which he had around the age of nine and which had a considerable influence on his life, illustrated principles in this line. His concern for human nature was great and was as much as possible partial to it. Among the maxims which he copied we read: “Correct the evil which you discover in yourself. Hold on to what is good, adjust what is bad, hold on to what is beautiful, preserve what is wholesome, strengthen what is weak.”⁷ He allowed some boys to receive Communion frequently and as soon as the resistance around him weakened, even daily. He admired and promoted technical progress, games, music, shows, in a word, evident joy.⁸ In this, he imitated Saint Francis de Sales, and according to us, even more Saint Philip Neri. He found himself in the company of other illustrious members of the Italian School, like Saint Cajetan of Tiene, Saint Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, Saint Angela Merici and the author of the *Spiritual Combat*.⁹ He imitated them even in those things which to us seem to be contradictory such as fleeing from carnal passions. According to the *Spiritual Combat*,¹⁰ victory against these passions is fleeting if one does not flee “with all possible care from every occasion and every person which presents the slightest danger.”

Don Bosco also chose a clearly Italian tradition in his simple piety and his rejection of methods which were even a little complicated. He thus chose a trend different from that of modern Flemish, French and Spanish spiritual masters and also from that of Saint Francis de Sales. If perhaps he did read the *Introduction to the Devout Life*,¹¹ he surely did not take anything from the chapters on the mechanics of meditation. His sermons on prayer—those which are known—do not make any reference to them. Freedom in spiritual matters appeared

to him to be a good thing. He was proud of the ease with which his boys proceeded to go to Confession and Communion. Spiritual direction, with which he was far from being uninformed, for him did not have a well-defined form which was characteristic of Saint Francis de Sales and of the Ignatian tradition. If we need to look for masters and writers that agree with him, we have only to refer to Saint Philip Neri and to the *Spiritual Combat*. At its height, Italian spirituality rejected all elements which were not indispensable: "The temperament of the spirit of the Italian Renaissance did not adapt itself well to things which were complicated or oppressive. It needed air and space. Anything which impeded its movement was not tolerated," etc.¹²

Don Bosco opted also for a practical spirituality, not for a theoretical or scientific one, such as had developed in France and Spain at the beginning of the seventeenth century. His works do not contain abstract teachings. The make-up of his audience in itself does not sufficiently explain this omission. "Italian spirituality will always be oriented toward action. It will always be less speculative than the Spanish. It is a spirituality found applied in religious institutions and in the lives of saints—as in France in the sixteenth century—in theories and in books . . ." ¹³ Don Bosco taught a dynamic spirituality in his sermons, which are full of examples, as also in his *Storia ecclesiastica* (Church History), his *History of Italy*, and in his *Mese di maggio* (Month of May) and even more in his biographies and collections of edifying anecdotes from his life of Luigi Comollo to his relating of contemporary facts, for which he always had a special liking. Like the spiritual masters of the Catholic Reformation, for example, Battista da Crema (died in 1534),¹⁴ he believed in a holiness achieved through the practice of virtue, that is, first of all through a concerted effort against one's personal evil tendencies and against the evils of society.¹⁵

Let's not forget, finally, that according to the life of Dominic Savio, the followers of Don Bosco made "holiness consist in always being cheerful." This was also a principle which was proper to the Italian tradition which combined it with hidden mortification and with a devotion to the Passion of the Lord. According to a scholar researching Saint Philip Neri, spiritual mortification was one of the characteristics of this saint.¹⁶ We have proof that Saint Philip Neri reminded Don Bosco of the necessity of the joy of the soul. This was not an exception in the

spiritual world of Italy in the sixteenth century and in the following generations up to the nineteenth century. Saint Mary Magdelene of Pazzi wanted her religious to be guided by the same open spirit.¹⁷ Saint Catherine de Ricci preached Christian joy to those around her.¹⁸ Finally, to quote again from the *Spiritual Combat*, "If we preserve this tranquility of soul and this unchangeable peace in the middle of even the most annoying sufferings, we will be able to do much good. Otherwise our efforts will meet with little or no success."¹⁹ Tranquility is part of the best spiritual Christian traditions, both of East and West. We cannot avoid being impressed by the similarity between these recommendations of Italian masters and the joyful tranquility of Don Bosco.

The fact that Don Bosco belongs to the generation which brought into being the Italy of modern times cannot surprise us when we have learned to recognize among his most common inspirers Saint Philip Neri (along with the Oratorian Sebastian Valfré), Saint Alphonsus Liguori, a group of Italian Jesuits, some of whom promoted devotion to Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, and finally Father Joseph Cafasso. Father Cafasso tried to combine in his teachings the Liguorian and Ignatian points of view in order to combat foreign influences, those inclined toward Jansenism and others which disturbed the people around him. In spite of the many writers whom he studied, Saint Alphonsus did not create a European spirituality. He was a Neapolitan and stayed on the peninsula. On the other hand, like Saint Francis de Sales, he was often a link between his predecessors and John Bosco. Don Bosco was indebted to him in some ways for certain nuances of his spirituality, like his affective love for God and for Mary, and his esteem for holiness which is achieved by means of the practice of virtue. But he was not indebted to him for his humanism or his cheerful kindness. He chose the passages from his treatises which suited him. Some day it will probably be possible to demonstrate that he was guided by a Franciscan and "Philipian" spirit, with a crowning influence of northern realism. Without forgetting that Italian influence spread throughout Europe as far as England in the middle of the nineteenth century—it would be enough to point out the Oratory of London and the success of Father Faber's *All for Jesus* to show this²⁰—Saint Francis of Assisi²¹ and Saint Philip Neri at opportune moments led him back into a spiritual stream which was genuinely Italian. His

immediate teachers, the pressures of his apostolic life, in particular his struggles against the Protestants, and the rather belated implementation of the decrees of the Council of Trent, which became truly permanent in Piedmont only around 1830, oriented him toward a type of spirituality which had appeared at the end of the sixteenth century.

Don Bosco, a Spiritual Man of the Nineteenth Century

Several traits of his spirit make him an original spiritual man of the nineteenth century which witnessed Vatican Council I and *Rerum Novarum*. A historian of the spirituality of the time wrote without sacrificing too much to oratory: "Saint John Bosco's convictions . . . recapitulate all the currents of the spirituality of his time."²²

We could mention his devoted love for people and especially young people, his esteem for human values, and to a certain extent, for freedom, his over-riding concern for education, his spirit of solidarity with the poor and his yearning for justice (through legal means) for the disadvantaged both in industrialized and in underdeveloped countries.²³ All these traits certainly made him a person in tune with his century. It seems, however, that his love for the Pope and his will to sanctify himself through the most common work set off his spirituality in a special way. In the latter part of his active life, his feeling for the Church was marked by a devotion to the Sovereign Pontiff so intense that it has not been seen in any other saints in different times and places. For example, although they had an indisputable devotion to the Holy See, Saint Bernard and Saint Ignatius do not appear to have taught the type of loving and almost absolute submission to the Pope which we find in Saint John Bosco. In this respect, he lived in tune with his times which glorified, in an almost exclusive way, the Pope in the Church. As regards a life of action, which was the cornerstone of his spiritual method, he made it consist above all in work, which was a supreme value during the first century of industrialization. Through work he became incarnated in his world. It does not seem that Don Bosco, who could quote Cassian, ever preached a spirituality of the desert (which he nonetheless respected). We believe that this fact separated him somewhat even from his dearest master, Joseph

Cafasso, whose life was much more retiring than his.²⁴

We now come to the heart of the matter—essential in the judgment of many—which questions the originality of his thinking in the matters of the spiritual life. One fact appears to be incontestable: in the nineteenth century there lived a man, John Bosco by name, who had a concrete spiritual experience which was certainly based on the trends of his country. He was guided by masters and by an inner, special, historical synthesis which was truly singular not only because he submitted himself to some providential instruction²⁵ but simply because he responded in his own personal way. He was not a Saint Philip Neri, nor an Anthony Maria Zaccaria, nor a Cajetan of Tiene, nor an Alphonsus of Liguori, nor a Joseph Cafasso, all saints whom he unconditionally admired. He was just simply Don Bosco.

Let us observe him and listen to him at the end of his life when he had those characteristics which posterity would associate with him. He acquired holiness in his struggles with his exuberant temperament. His physical strength was legendary. The very word “virtue” on his lips had a sense of strength. He exercised his virtues among young people who always made their needs quite simple. They reminded him of the benefits of an outgoing joyful spirit which produces peace and of the effectiveness of a spiritual instruction which is conveyed by a lived example. These young people at time astounded him by the heights of spirituality which they could reach. The tradition in which he was brought up did not believe in complicating simple things and he excelled in this trend. Having seen first hand some adolescents make great strides along the way that leads to God, he believed with his whole being in the power of the sacraments and of an active charity which led these young men to him. His particular esteem for the virtue of purity—a fundamental concern of these young men—was affirmed by his knowledge of their struggles and their victories. He deplored the weakness of those who failed habitually and he admired the strength and the dynamism of those chaste persons who never fell. Furthermore, his life of struggle in the service of the greater glory of God in the Church was quite successful. He had experienced in a very palpable way God’s intervention in his work. Any glorification of failure in itself would have surprised him. He advanced in the “school of hard knocks,” it is true,²⁶ but his experience had taught him that the Lord of hosts

does not abandon his soldiers. No matter what might be thought of them, his "dreams" held him within the divine sphere and that of the Virgin Help of Christians. His faith and his hope grew with a cheerful and docile enthusiasm which was almost too easy. He combined the realism which he inherited from his ancestors with an ardent "mysticism." The spiritual progress of Saint John Bosco, who was a humanist by inclination and was as unsentimental as a Piedmontese citizen can be, gave him a style all of his own. His prudence was lively, his mental acumen quite open, his kindness transparent, and his humanism quite religious.

These characteristics are found again, although not so clearly, in his instructive writings and they emerge effortlessly from his spiritual biographies (Dominic Savio, Michael Magone) and in the testimony of his close associates.

His spontaneity explains the fact that some experts are reluctant to place him in the ranks of great men of character on whom history has already passed judgment. Those who lived in his company, or only knew him through the direct testimony of living witnesses, or for lack of any other means, through his letters or books, understand the perplexity of these experts. Similar hesitations are experienced in trying to put a Saint Francis of Assisi, a Saint Philip Neri or a Saint Francis de Sales in a specific category. Their personalities—which were so natural—impressed their admirers too much. Nonetheless, this fact does not prevent us for practical purposes from locating Saint Francis of Assisi within the evangelical movement of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Saint Francis de Sales within the humanism of the first Catholic Reform and Saint John Bosco within the humanism which was characteristic of the reform after the Council of Trent. Thus it can be said of Saint John Bosco that notwithstanding his evident originality and the austerities and narrowmindedness common to the times—altogether contrary to his own spirit—he was deeply rooted in the nineteenth century, at a time in which the Council of Trent was bearing fruit and in which spirituality was recouping in a very natural way the great lessons of an Italy entering the modern era.

We will stop here, leaving to others the task of analyzing the theology of this school of thought and of illustrating, at their own risk and peril, how much this thought can benefit Christians in a very different

period such as that which followed Vatican Council II. Nevertheless it seems that along with his ideas on education, Don Bosco's spiritual thought will continue to be useful. In reality, just as Saint Francis de Sales had a following in the seventeenth century and Saint Alphonsus of Liguori in the eighteenth, this nineteenth century saint has a great following now. The continuous expansion of the societies which he founded bear witness to this along with other facts like the favorable reception which the world gave to Dominic Savio. The exuberance of his heart and spirit, his love for action and other characteristics which he inherited from the humanism of the sixteenth century bring the spirit of Saint John Bosco close to another form of humanism, which according to the optimists is even more beneficial than the first—the historian has perhaps some reservations about this—and which is conquering the western Christian world during the second part of the twentieth century. This humanism is concerned about personal hygiene, both of body and mind, about the joy of living, about abandoning the "mystique" of prayer in favor of action, about the acceptance of reparation, and humility without masochism.²⁷ Let us also add love of one another. But could it not be that Don Bosco also has some antidotes for inevitable deviations. Yesterday, those who praised Don Bosco found that he was in perfect accord with his own times. Perhaps tomorrow those who praise him will find that the markedly religious quality of his spirituality, his true and complete renunciation, his "eschatological" inclination—what an authentic surprise—easily harmonized with his "incarnation" in his own reality. His genuine Catholic sensitivity to the living and sacramental presence of God in the world and other precious values can correct or complete those contemporary tendencies which cannot lead to the promise of eternal life. No matter in which century he might live, the Christian will not find true holiness except in Christ who died and rose again.

NOTES

1. Eccl. 3, 12 (cf. Doc. 5, #5 below).
2. M. Pourrat, from whom we adopted this classification, put St. Francis de Sales in a different school (Pourrat, *La spiritualité chrétienne*, Paris, 1925, vol. III, vi-vii, *passim*).
3. Cf., for example, P. Pourrat, *op. cit.*, vol. III, 344 ff; L. Cognet, *De la dévotion moderne a la spiritualité française*, Paris, 1958, pp. 44-47.
4. We are waiting with interest for the article on it in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* and for what the last volume of the *Histoire de la spiritualité chrétienne* (Paris, 1960) will say about it.
5. The fact that he belongs to a long line of Italian humanists has been shown by P. Scotti, *La dottrina spirituale di Don Bosco*, Turin, 1939, pp. 76-77.
6. This description was inspired by F. Bonal, *Le chrétien du temps*, Lyon, 1672; quoted by H. Bremond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux*, Paris, 1916, vol. I, 406-408.
7. Found on a bookmark in his breviary (cf. Doc. 5 below).
8. Cf. E. Valentini, *Spiritualità e umanesimo nella pedagogia di Don Bosco*, Turin, 1958.
9. Cf. P. Pourrat, *La spiritualité chrétienne*, vol. III, 390-394.
10. Ch. 19: How one should combat the vice of impurity.
11. The problem at present is insoluble.
12. P. Pourrat, *op. cit.*, p. 392.
13. P. Pourrat, *op. cit.*, p. 344.
14. Cf. I. Colosio, *Carioni*, Jean-Baptiste, in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. II, col. 153-156.
15. Cf. the *Regolamento Cooperatori salesiani*, S. Pier d'Arena, 1877, I.
16. A. Capecelatro, *La vita di San Filippo Neri*, Rome, 1889, vol. I, ch. 11. Cf. also L. Ponnelle et L. Bordet, *Saint Philippe Néri et la société romaine de son temps (1515-1595)*, Paris, 1928, p. 535.
17. *S. Marie-Madeleine de Pazzi, Oeuvres*, trad. A. Bruniaux, Paris, 1873, pp. 387-389, where the words "joyful" and "peaceful"

acquire a very important meaning.

18. Cf. P. Pourrat, *op. cit.*, p. 374.

19. *Spiritual Combat*, ch. 25.

20. Cf., for example, L. Cognet, Faber, Frédéric-William, *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. V, col. 5, 9.

21. Let us recall once again that at one time Don Bosco believed he had a vocation to the Franciscans. He was enrolled in the Third Order of St. Francis. (Ceria, *Memorie*, vol. XVIII, 154-155).

22. F. Weyergans, *Mystiques parmi nous* (coll. Je sais, je crois), Paris, 1959, p. 89.

23. Cf. M. Nedoncelle, *Les Leçons spirituelles du XIX^e siècle*, Paris, 1937.

24. Cf. G. Cafasso, *Manoscritti vari*, quoted by F. Accornero, *La dottrina spirituale*, *op. cit.*, pp. 62, 79-93.

25. Those who know Don Bosco can recall at this point his most important dreams.

26. We have been inspired by the following words: "In 1872 he said: 'We took a beating when the Oratory was being born and while it was growing, and we will continue to take a beating now that it is functioning.' " (Ceria, *San Giovanni Bosco nella vita e nelle opere*, *ed. cit.*, p. 173).

27. According to J. Lacroix, *Le sens de l'athéisme moderne*, Paris, 1958, pp. 86-89. A similar vision is found in A.M. Bresnard, O.P., *Visage spirituel des temps nouveaux*, Paris, 1964.

Documents

1. THE FIRST DREAM ABOUT CHRIST AND MARY¹

Saint John Bosco, *Memorie dell'Oratorio* (Memoirs of the Oratory) edited by E. Ceria, 1946, pp. 22-26.

At that age I had a dream which made a profound impression on me for the rest of my life. In the dream it seemed to me that I was near the house, in a very wide field, where a large crowd of boys were gathered to play. Some laughed, others played, and many used bad language. On hearing this bad language I immediately rushed into their midst and used blows and shouts to make them keep quiet. At that moment a respectable middle-aged man appeared, richly attired. A white mantle covered his whole person but his face was so bright that I could not keep looking at him. He called me by name and ordered me to put myself in charge of those boys. He said: "Not with blows but with gentleness and with love will you win over these friends of yours. Begin immediately, then, to tell them about the ugliness of sin and the beauty of virtue."

Confused and frightened, I said that I was a poor and ignorant boy, incapable of speaking about religion to those boys. At that moment those boys stopped fighting, making noise and swearing, and gathered around him.

Almost without knowing what I was doing I said: "Who are you? You command impossible things."

"Precisely because these things appear to be impossible, you have to make them possible through obedience and education."

"Where and how will I be able to get an education?"

"I will give you a teacher, under whose care you will become wise, and without whom all wisdom becomes foolishness."

"But who are you who speak to me like this?"

"I am the son of her whom your mother taught you to greet three times a day."

"My mother told me not to associate with strangers without her permission, so give me your name."

"Ask my mother."

At that moment I saw a lady of majestic appearance next to him, dressed in a mantle which shone all over, as if every point of it was a very bright star. Realizing that I was becoming more confused in my questions and answers, she motioned me to approach her and took me kindly by the hand. "Look," she said. I looked and became aware that the boys had disappeared and in their place was a great number of goats, dogs, cats, bears and several other animals. "This is the field where you have to work. Make yourself humble, strong, robust. What you see happening to these animals you will have to do with my sons."

I looked again and now, instead of fierce animals, gentle lambs appeared. They were running around, jumping and bleating as if they were putting on a celebration for the man and the lady.

At that point, still in the dream I began to weep and I asked them to speak in a way I could understand because I did not know what everything meant. She then placed her hand on my head, saying: "You will understand in good time."

After these words, a noise woke me up and everything vanished.

I was bewildered. It seemed to me that my hands hurt from the blows I had given and that my face also ached from the hits I received. The dignified man, the lady, all the things which I said and heard so filled my mind that I was not able to sleep any more that night.

In the morning I immediately told my dream with great excitement, first to my brothers, who began to laugh, and then to my mother and grandmother. Each one gave his own interpretation. My brother Joseph said, "You will take care of goats, sheep and other animals." My mother said dryly: "Maybe you will become a leader of bandits." But my grandmother, who knew nothing about theology—she could not read or write—gave the final opinion: "We should not pay attention to dreams."

I agreed with my grandmother. Nevertheless, I was never able to get that dream out of my head. The things that I will describe in a moment will give it some meaning. I always kept it a secret: my relatives did

not pay attention to it. But when in 1858 I went to Rome to talk with the Pope about the Salesian Congregation, he asked me to tell him in every detail everything which might have had even only the appearance of the supernatural. I told him then for the first time the dream which I had had at the age of nine, going on ten. The Pope commanded me to write it down word for word and to leave it for the encouragement of the sons of the Congregation, about which I had gone to Rome to consult him.

2. THE RESOLUTIONS WHICH HE MADE AT HIS CLERICAL INVESTITURE.²

Memorie dell'Oratorio (Memoirs of the Oratory) *ed. cit.*, pp. 87-88.

In order to draw up a stable plan of life which I would not forget, I wrote down the following resolutions:

1. In the future I will not take part in public shows at the fairs and marketplaces. I will not go to dances or theaters. As far as possible, I will not go to dinners which are given on such occasions.

2. I will no longer do juggling acts, magic, acrobatics, slight of hand, tightrope walking. I will not play the violin nor hunt. I consider all these things contrary to the seriousness of the ecclesiastical spirit.

3. I will love and practice a retiring life and temperance in eating and drinking. I will sleep only the number of hours strictly necessary for my health.

4. As in the past I have served the world by reading secular literature, so in the future I will try to serve God by devoting myself to religious reading.

5. I will combat with all my strength everything, every reading, thought, conversation, all words or deeds which are contrary to chastity. On the contrary, I will do everything, even the smallest thing which can help me preserve this virtue.

6. Besides the ordinary practices of piety, I will never neglect to make a short meditation daily and a short spiritual reading.

7. Every day I will tell some anecdote or mention some maxim which is beneficial for the souls of others. I will do this with my com-

panions, friends, relatives, and when I can't do it with others, I'll do it with my mother.

These are the resolutions which I drew up when I received my cassock. And so that they would remain well impressed on my mind, I went before the image of the Blessed Virgin and read them, and after a prayer I made a formal promise to this heavenly Benefactor that I would observe them at the cost of whatever sacrifice.

3. READING IN THE SEMINARY.

Memorie dell'Oratorio (Memoirs of the Oratory), *ed. cit.*, pp. 109-111.

During my studies I fell into an error which would have had sad consequences if an act of Providence had not taken it away. I had become accustomed to read the classics during my secondary course of studies and was used to the graphic characters of mythology and of pagan fables, so I did not relish ascetical works. I had convinced myself that literature and rhetoric could not be reconciled with religion. Except for the religious principles which they set forth forcefully and clearly, the works of the Fathers seemed to be products of limited minds.

At the beginning of the second year of philosophy, one day I went to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. I did not have my prayer book with me, so I read from the *Imitation of Christ*. I read a chapter before the Blessed Sacrament. As I was carefully considering the sublimity of the thoughts and the clear and at the same time well-ordered and eloquent way in which those great truths were expressed, I began to say within myself: "The author of this book was a gifted man." As I continued again and again to read this golden little book, it did not take long for me to realize that just one single verse of this book contained more teaching and morality than I had found in the thick volumes of the ancient classics. I am indebted to this book for stopping my reading of secular literature. I devoted myself to reading Calmet's *History of the Old and New Testament*, Joseph Flavius' *Of Jewish Antiquities* and *Of the Jewish Wars*, Bishop Marchetti's

Reflections on Religion and the works of Frayssinous, Balmes, Zucconi, and many others religious writers.³ I also enjoyed reading Fleury's *Church History*, which I did not know was to be avoided. With even more profit I read the works of Cavalca, of Passavanti, of Segneri and the whole *History of the Church* by Henrion.⁴

Perhaps you might say that since I busied myself with so many readings, I could not attend to my studies. It was not so. My memory continued to help me, so that the mere reading and explanation of the treatises in class were enough for me to fulfill my duties. Therefore, I could spend all the time established for studying doing a variety of reading. My superiors knew about it and allowed me to do it.

4. THE *CONVITTO ECCLESIASTICO* AND SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGUORI

Memorie dell'Oratorio (Memoirs of the Oratory), *ed. cit.*,
pp. 120-123.

After that vacation,⁵ I was offered three jobs, from which I had to choose one: the office of tutor in the house of a Genoese gentleman with a stipend of one thousand francs a year; chaplain of Murialdo, where the people were so anxious to have me that they offered to double the salary; and assistant pastor in my home town.⁶ Before making a definite decision I wanted to go to Turin to seek the advice of Father Cafasso, who for some years had become my guide in both spiritual and temporal matters. That holy priest listened to everything, the offers of good salaries, the insinuations of my relatives and friends and my good will to work. Without hesitating for a moment he addressed these words to me: "You need to study moral theology and the art of preaching. Decline for the time being all these offers and come to the *Convitto*." I followed his wise advice very willingly, and on Nov. 3, 1841, I entered *Convitto*.

The *Convitto Ecclesiastico* can be considered as a complementary phase of the course of theological studies, because in our seminaries students take only matters which are disputed. Here one learns how to be a priest. Each student applies himself with diligence to meditation,

reading, two conferences daily, lessons in preaching, a quiet life, with every facility for study, and for reading good books.

At that time two famous men were in charge of this very practical institution: Father Louis Guala, a theologian, and Father Joseph Cafasso. Father Guala was the founder of the *Convitto*. He was a selfless man, very learned, prudent, and courageous. He had become all things to all men at the time of Napoleon I. In order that young priests who had finished their seminary studies could learn the practical life of the sacred ministry, he founded his marvelous "glass house" from which the Church derived much good, especially in getting rid of some of the roots of Jansenism which were still found among us.

Among other questions, the one about probabilism and probabiliorism was the most controversial. At the head of the first camp⁷ was Alasia, Antoine and other rigid writers, whose opinions could lead to Jansenism. The probabilists followed the doctrine of Saint Alphonsus, who has now been declared a doctor of Holy Church. His authority comes from the fact that his theology can be called that of the Pope because the Church proclaimed that his works can be taught, preached, and put into practice. There is nothing in them that merits censure. Father Guala remained firm in the middle between the two camps, putting the charity of Our Lord Jesus Christ at the center of every opinion. He succeeded in bringing together the two extremes. Things reached such a point, thanks to Father Guala, that Saint Alphonsus became the master of our schools with the advantage, that since he had been admired for a long time, the good effects of his teachings were now felt. The strong arm of Father Guala was Father Cafasso. Through his virtue which withstood all trials, through his outstanding calmness, and through his shrewdness and prudence he was able to take away the bitterness which remained among some of the probabiliorists against the Liguorians.

There was a gold mine hidden in the Turinese priest, T. Golzio Felice, who was also attending the *Convitto*. He made little noise in modest life, but with his tireless work, with his humility and his learning he was a great support or rather a strong arm for Guala and Cafasso. The jails, hospitals, pulpits, charitable institutions, the sick at home, towns and country places, and we can say the palaces of the great and the hovels of the poor experienced the saving effects of the zeal of

these three luminaries among the clergy of Turin.

These were the three models which Divine Providence put before me, and all I had to do was to follow in their footsteps, follow their teachings and imitate their virtues. Father Cafasso, who had been my guide for six years, was also my spiritual director. If I have done any bit of good, I owe it to this worthy priest in whose hands I put every decision, every course of studies, every action of my life.

5. FAVORITE SAYINGS OF FATHER JOHN BOSCO⁸

Memorie Biografiche (Biographical Memoirs), vol. XVIII, 806-808.

1. All rivers go to the sea, yet never does the sea become full. (*Eccl.* 1,7)

2. The Lord is good, a refuge on the day of distress; He takes care of those who have recourse to him. (*Na.* 1,7)

3. Keep your way far from her, approach not the door of her house. (*Prov.* 5,8)

4. Receive my instruction in preference to silver and knowledge rather than choice gold. (*Prov.* 8,10)

5. I recognize that there is nothing better than to be glad and to do well during life. (*Eccl.* 3,12)

6. Honor the Lord with your wealth, with first fruits of all your produce; Then will your barns be filled with grain, with new wine your vats will overflow. (*Prov.* 3,9-10)

7. If you have the knowledge, answer your neighbor; if not, put your hand over your mouth. Honor and dishonor through talking! A man's tongue can be his downfall. (*Sir.* 5, 14-15)

8. May each one receive his recompense, good or bad, according to his life in the body. (*2 Cor.* 5,10)

9. My son, rob not the poor man of his livelihood; force not the eyes of the needy to turn away. (*Sir.* 4,1)

10. Glory not in your father's shame, for his shame is no glory to you! (*Sir.* 3,10)

11. No matter the wrong, do no violence to your neighbor, and do

not walk the path of arrogance. (*Sir.* 10,6)

12. Correct the evil which you discover in you. Preserve what is right, get rid of what is ugly, keep what is beautiful, guard what is healthy, strengthen what is weak. Read constantly the Word of God. By means of it you will be able to know which way to follow and the dangers to avoid. (Saint Bernard)

13. Keep the faith (of Pope Innocent) and do not accept any different teaching, no matter how wise and supported by proofs it appears to you to be. (Saint Jerome)

14. My brothers, carry with you the key to your room and the key to your tongue. (Saint Peter Damien)

15. Good example is more effective than words and it is better to teach with deeds than with lectures.

16. Let our riches, our treasure be the saving of souls, and let the deposit of our virtues be hidden in the secret of our hearts. (Saint Peter Damien)

17. We climbed up, he first I second — So high that through a round hole I saw lovely things which spoke of heaven — So we came out to see that star again. (Dante's *Inferno*)

18. I returned from the most holy lake—Purified and ready to climb the stars. (Dante's *Purgatorio*)

19. Love, which moves the sun and the other stars. (Dante's *Paradiso*)

20. Let the Italian believe in great virtues, Let the State hope in God's assistance, And thus believing and hoping, love and proceed — To conquer the eternal truths (Silvio Pellico)

6. THE VALUE OF GOOD EXAMPLE⁹

Cenni storici sulla vita del Chierico Luigi Comollo (Biographical notes on the Life of the Cleric Luigi Comollo), Turin, 1844, "Preface," pp. 3-4.

Since the example of virtuous deeds is worth more than any learned speech, it will not be unreasonable for me to present to you some insights into the life of a person who lived in the same place as you and was under the same discipline. He can serve as a model for you so that you can make yourselves worthy of the sublime goal to which you

aspire, and succeed one day to become very good priests in the vineyard of the Lord.

It is true that this writing lacks two outstanding qualities which are a polished style and elegant diction. So I have delayed until now, so that a pen better than mine would want to assume such a task. But realizing that my delay was useless, I became determined to do it myself in the best way possible, encouraged by the repeated urgings of several colleagues of mine and of other important persons. I was convinced that the affection which you showed to this most worthy companion of yours and your very special piety would overlook and even supply the limitations of my writing ability.

Even though I was not able to delight you with the charm of my expressions, I consol myself with the thought that I can with all sincerity promise to write things which are true, which I myself saw and heard from persons worthy of credence. You yourselves can judge for yourselves since you were to some degree eye witnesses.

If in reading this writing you feel encouraged to imitate any of the virtues pointed out, give glory to God for it. While I pray to him that he be propitious to you, I consecrate this task to him alone.

7. A LETTER OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION TO A SEMINARIAN¹⁰

TO THE SEMINARIAN G.D. OF THE SEMINARY OF
BRA, edited in the *Epistolario* (Letters) vol. I, 118.

Turin, Dec. 7, 1855

My dearest son,

I have received your letter. I praise your sincerity and I thank the Lord for the good will that inspired it. Follow the advice of your confessor: "He who hears you, hears me,"¹¹ says Jesus Christ in the Gospel. Try to correspond to the inspirations of divine grace which knock at your heart. Who knows whether the Lord calls you to a sublime degree of virtue!

But let us not deceive ourselves. If you do not report an accomplished victory in that problem, do not go ahead nor seek to advance

to sacred orders without at least one year in which there have not been any further falls.

Prayer, avoidance of idleness and of the occasions (of sin), frequency in receiving the Sacraments, devotion to Mary Most Holy (wear a medal around your neck) and to Saint Aloysius, and the reading of good books. But have great courage. "In him who is the source of my strength I have strength for everything,"¹² says Saint Paul.

Let us love each other in the Lord, let us pray for each other, that we might be saved¹³ and be able to do the holy will of God. Believe me your dearest friend,

Father John Bosco

Saint Ambrose, pray for us.¹⁴

8. EVANGELICAL ASCETICISM¹⁵

La Chiave del Paradiso in mano al cattolico che pratica i Doveri di Buon Cristiano (The Key to Heaven for the Practicing Catholic), by Father John Bosco, 2nd edition, Turin, 1857, pp. 20-23.

One day God said to Moses: "Remember to carry out my orders well and do everything according to the model which I showed you on the mountain." God says the same to Christians. The model which every Christian has to copy is Jesus Christ. No one can boast that he belongs to Jesus Christ if he does not endeavor to imitate him. Therefore in the life and actions of a Christian the life and actions of Jesus Christ himself should be found. A good Christian should pray like Jesus Christ prayed on the mountain, with recollection, humility, and confidence. He should be available like Jesus Christ was to the poor, the ignorant, the children. He should not be proud, should not have pretensions nor arrogance. He should make himself all things to all men so that he can win over all for Jesus Christ.

A good Christian should treat his neighbor like Jesus Christ treated his followers; therefore his dealings with them should be edifying, charitable, full of seriousness, gentleness and simplicity.

A good Christian should be humble, as was Jesus Christ, who

knelt down to wash the feet of his Apostles. He washed even Judas' feet although he knew that that traitor was going to betray him. The true Christian should consider himself to be the least among others and the servant of all.

A good Christian should obey as Jesus Christ obeyed. He was submissive to Mary and to Saint Joseph and obeyed his heavenly Father until death and a death on the cross.

The true Christian obeys his parents, his masters, his superiors, because he sees in them no one but God himself, whose place they take.

When he eats and drinks, the true Christian should be like Jesus Christ was at the marriage feast of Cana of Galilee and at Bethany; that is sober, moderate, attentive to the needs of others and more concerned about spiritual nourishment than about the food which nourishes the body.

The good Christian should behave towards his friends like Jesus Christ did toward Saint John and Saint Lazarus. He should love them in the Lord and for the love of God. He should spontaneously confide to them the secrets of his heart, and if they fall into evil, he should take every measure to make them return to the state of grace.

The true Christian should suffer privations and poverty with resignation as did Jesus Christ, who had nowhere to lay his head. He knows how to bear contradictions and slanders, as Jesus Christ bore those of the Scribes and Pharisees, leaving to God the task of justifying him. He knows how to bear affronts and outrages as Jesus Christ did when they hit him, spit on his face and insulted him in a thousand ways at the Praetorium.

The true Christian should be willing to endure the sufferings of the spirit as Jesus Christ did when he was betrayed by His disciples, denied by another and abandoned by all.

The good Christian should be disposed to accept with patience every type of persecution, sickness and even death as did Jesus Christ, who with his head crowned with piercing thorns, with his body torn from the beatings, with his feet and hands pierced by nails, commended his soul in peace into the hands of his Heavenly Father.

In this way the true Christian should say with the Apostle Saint Paul, "It is not I who live but it is Jesus Christ who lives in me."

Whoever follows Jesus Christ according to the model described here will be sure of being glorified one day with Jesus Christ in heaven and of reigning with him in eternity.

9. A RULE OF LIFE FOR A YOUNG CLERIC¹⁶

Epistolario (Letters) vol. I, 150.

My dearest Bongiovanni,

If I can, I will very willingly provide for your aunt the money which you indicate, but I cannot say anything until I have gone to her house and have deducted the debits from the credits.

You will tell your aunt to hope in the Lord and he will take care of us. Apply yourself then to your studies and to prayer. Be very cheerful. See to it that you become a saint: "It is God's will that you grow in holiness,"¹⁷ says Saint Paul.

Believe me in the Lord,

Your most affectionately,

Father John Bosco

St. Ignatius, Jul. 29, 1857

10. THE HOPE OF A CHRISTIAN¹⁸

Epistolario (Letters) vol. I, 158.

Dear Anfossi,

Who knows what has happened to Anfossi? Without a doubt he must always have done his part. Therefore continue. But remember that the Lord has promised a crown to those who are vigilant. How fleeting are the pleasures and how eternal the torments. And the sufferings of the present time are not in any way to be compared with the future glory which will be revealed in us.¹⁹

Love me in the Lord and may Mary bless you.

Yours affectionately,

Father John Bosco

Rome, March 18, 1858

11. GENERAL ADVICE FOR GOOD CHRISTIANS²⁰

Porta teco, cristiano, ovvero Avvisi importanti intorno ai doveri del cristiano, acciochè ciascuno possa conseguire la propria salvezza nello stato in cui si trova (Your Spiritual Guide, O Christian, or Important Advice about the Duties of a Christian, So That Everyone Can Be Able to Attain His Own Salvation in the State in Which He Finds Himself), Turin, 1858, pp. 5-7. Pages entitled: "General Advice for Faithful Christians."

1. Remember, O Christian, that we have only one soul; if we lose it everything is lost for us for all eternity.

2. Hold fast to only one God, one faith, one Baptism and one true religion.

3. This one and only true religion is the Christian religion, that is, the one which those who find themselves in the Church of Jesus Christ profess. Outside of it no one can be saved.

4. The Church of Jesus Christ has these four characteristics which distinguish it from all the sects which presume to call themselves Christian also: the Church of Jesus Christ is one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

5. The founder and invisible head of the Church is the same Jesus Christ, who from heaven assists her every day until the end of time.

6. The visible head is the Roman Pontiff, who assisted by Jesus Christ, takes his place on earth and for this reason is called the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

7. To make sure that the Holy Church would not fall into error, Jesus Christ told Peter: I have prayed for you, Peter, so that your faith should not falter.

8. The successors of Saint Peter are the Sovereign Pontiffs, who one

after another have governed the Church of Jesus Christ up to the present reigning Pontiff Pius IX, and they will govern the Church until the end of the world.

9. Let us remember well that the head of the Catholic Church is the Pope and that no one is Catholic without the Pope, and that no one can belong to the Church of Jesus Christ if he is not united with this head whom he put in charge.

10. A good Catholic should keep the Commandments of God and of the Church. Disobeying one of these Commandments makes a man guilty of all of them.

11. Those who disobey these Commandments will be punished with an eternal punishment in hell, where one suffers all sorts of painful things without experiencing any good thing at all.

12. Those who fall into hell will never more get out!

13. Those who keep the Commandments of God and of the Church will be rewarded by God in heaven where they will enjoy all sorts of good things without experiencing the bad things.

14. If we have the good fortune of going to paradise, we will be there for all eternity. We will be happy there forever.

15. One mortal sin alone is enough to make us lose paradise and condemn us to hell for all eternity.

16. We have to believe firmly all the truths revealed by God to the Church and which the Church proposes for our belief.

17. Whoever does not believe the truths of our faith will be condemned.

18. We should be willing to die rather than to deny our faith or commit a mortal sin of whatever kind.

19. God wants all of us to be saved: even more, it is His will that we all become saints.

20. Whoever wants to be saved must put eternity in his mind, God in his heart, and the world under his feet.

21. Everyone is bound to fulfill the duties of his state in life.

12. ACTIVE CHARITY AND PERFECTION²¹

Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales (The Congregation of St. Francis de Sales) a manuscript (Central Salesian Archives, S. 02.025, pp. 5-6)

Purpose of this Society

1. The purpose of this Society is to gather together its members, priests, clerics and laymen in order to have them perfect themselves by imitating the virtues of our Divine Savior, especially his charity toward poor boys.

2. Jesus Christ began to do and to teach; so likewise the members of the congregation will begin by perfecting themselves by practicing interior and exterior virtues, by acquiring learning, and then they will devote themselves to help their neighbor.

3. The first exercise of charity will be to gather together poor and abandoned boys to instruct them in the holy Faith, especially on Sundays, as is now being done in this city of Turin in the three Oratories of Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, and of the Guardian Angel.

4. Some boys are found to be so abandoned that for them it is useless to help them unless they are taken in as boarders. For this purpose and wherever possible boarding schools should be opened, in which, through the means which Divine Providence will place at our disposal, lodging, food, and clothing will be provided for these boys. While they are being instructed in the truths of the faith, they will also be encouraged to learn some art or trade as is now being done in the house attached to the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales in this city.

5. In view of the dangers to which young men who desire to enter the priesthood are exposed, this congregation will take care to nurture the piety and cultivate the vocation of those who show a special ability for study and have a good outlook towards prayer. When it is a question of taking in boarding students, preference will be given to the poorest boys, because they lack the means to pursue their studies elsewhere.

6. The need to bolster the Catholic religion is felt very much also among adults of the poor class and especially in country places. There-

fore the members of the congregation will devote themselves to giving spiritual retreats, circulating good books, and using all the means which charity will dictate, so that through their preaching and through books they can keep in abeyance the godlessness and heretical views which in so many ways try to infiltrate among the uneducated and the ignorant. At present we are doing this by giving retreats every now and then and by publishing the *Lecture cattoliche* (Catholic Readings).

13. ZEAL FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS²²

Saint Dominic Savio, Saint John Bosco, translated with notes by Paul Aronica, SDB. 2nd edition, New Rochelle, N.Y. 1979, Chapter 11. (*Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico, allievo dell'Oratorio di san Francesco di Sales, per cura del Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni*, Turin, 1859, pp. 53-56).

The first suggestion given Dominic to become a saint was to strive to win souls to God, for there is no work in the world so holy as helping to save those souls for whom Jesus shed every drop of His precious blood. Dominic understood the importance of this and was often heard to say, "If I could win all my schoolmates over to God, how happy I'd be!"

He would miss no occasion of giving good advice and warning one who had offended God in word or deed. The one thing that horrified him and even hurt him physically, was blasphemy, hearing God's holy name used in vain. When he heard any such expression in the street, he used to bow his head immediately and say in all the sincerity of his heart, "Praised be Jesus Christ!"

One day, while walking with a friend across a city square, he abruptly took off his cap and muttered something under his breath.

"What are you doing? What did you say?" asked the boy.

"Didn't you hear that workmen use God's name?" replied Dominic. "If I thought it would help I'd go up and tell him, but I know that would only make matters worse. So I just took off my cap and said, 'Praised be Jesus Christ!' That way I make up for some of the insult given the Lord's holy name."

His companion admired Dominic's courageous action and still tells this incident to edify his schoolmates.

Another day, on his way from school, Dominic overheard an elderly gentleman utter a horrible blasphemy. He was shocked. Praising God in his heart, he did a fine thing. He ran up to the man and very respectfully asked him if he could point out the way to the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales.

His heavenly manner calmed the man.

"Sorry, my lad," he answered. "I really don't know."

"Well then, if you can't tell me that, would you do me another favor?"

"Sure. What is it?"

Dominic got close to him and whispered, "Next time you're angry say something else instead of the Lord's name."

Very pleasantly surprised, the man responded, "Fine! You're right! This is a very nasty habit I must get rid of!"

One day a nine year old boy got into a fight over by the church and in his anger let slip the holy name of Jesus. Though justly angry at hearing him, Dominic quietly stepped between the two lads, quieted them down, and then firmly told that boy, "Come with me, you won't be sorry."

The boy gave in to his kindness. Dominic took his arm and brought him to church, right up to the altar. They knelt together.

"Ask the Lord's pardon for having insulted His name," he advised.

Since the boy did not know an act of contrition, Dominic said it with him and then added, "Now say these words to make up for your insult to Jesus, 'Praised be Jesus Christ! May His adorable name be ever praised!' "

He preferred the lives of those saints who had especially labored to save souls. He fondly spoke of missionaries who labor in far off lands for the salvation of souls. Unable to send them money, he prayed for them everyday and at least once a week offered his communion for them.

More than once I heard him exclaim, "How many souls in England await our help! If I had strength and virtue, I'd go there right away and lead them all to God by preaching and good example."

He was often discontented with himself and would complain to his

friends about the little interest people show to teach their children the truths of faith. "As soon as I am a seminarian," he would say, "I will get all the children of Mondonio²³ together to teach them religion. I will tell them interesting stories and make them all saints. How many children may be lost because they have nobody to instruct them in the truths of faith."

He backed his words up by deeds. As far as his age and schooling allowed, he gladly taught catechism at the Oratory. If at any time, any day, someone needed help, he was ready to teach him, his sole aim being to talk about spiritual things and show others the value of saving even one soul. One day a boy interrupted him while he was talking this way.

"Why bother about this stuff?"

"Why bother?" came the answer. "I bother because Jesus died for my schoolmates. We're all brothers and have to love each other's soul. God wants us to help each other be saved. If I save one soul, I save mine too."

Even while home on vacation, Dominic's zeal for souls did not slacken. He used to save up all the prizes he got in school during the year, all pictures and medals and crosses and books, and then, before going home he used to ask his teachers for any such things they could spare in order, he used to say, "to entertain my friends." At home he was generally surrounded by quite a crowd of friends, both younger and older, and would give away these articles for a correct response to a catechism question or to reward a good deed.

These little gifts helped him get boys to attend Mass or catechism class with him or go to some other devotion.

I have been told that he worked for quite some time to teach one boy. "If you learn to make the sign of the cross," he promised, "I'll give you a medal, and I'll take you to a priest who will give you a book, but I want you to make it really well. As you say the words, your right hand must touch your forehead, then your breast, then your left shoulder, then your right, and when you say Amen you must join your hands."

He was anxious that this sign of our redemption should be made properly, and he often made it while standing in front of his friends, asking them to imitate him.

Besides carefully carrying out every duty of his own, Dominic took over the schooling of his two brothers, whom he taught to read and write as well as to say their morning and evening prayers. He used to take them to church and show them how to make the sign of the cross with holy water. Much of his playtime he spent telling exemplary stories to his family or to the people who came to hear them. Also at home he paid a visit to the Blessed Sacrament everyday; it was a great gain when he got someone to go with him.

We can truthfully say of Dominic that he never missed an occasion of doing a good deed or saying a good word if it could help someone's soul.

14. HOLINESS AND JOY²⁴

Saint Dominic Savio, by Saint John Bosco, New Rochelle, N.Y., 1979, Chapter 18 (*Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*, Torino, 1859, pp. 85-87).

Gavio lived just two months with us, but it was enough for him to leave a deep impression on the Oratory. Because of his glowing piety and his exceptional talent for painting and sculpture he was sent by the town council of Tortona, where he lived, to Turin to continue his schooling and attend art lessons. When he arrived at the Oratory he had just gotten over a severe illness and, probably because he was still convalescing and somewhat homesick and unacquainted with the boys, he used to stand about during recreation, lost in thought. Dominic saw him and, going over to cheer him up, opened up the following conversation:

"Hi! Don't you know anybody around here?"

"No, but I like to see them all having a good time."

"What's your name?"

"Camillo Gavio. I come from Tortona."

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"You don't look very chipper. Have you been sick?"

"Yes, very sick. I had an attack of rheumatic fever that almost killed me, and I haven't recovered yet."

“You’d like to be well, wouldn’t you?”

“Not really. I only want to do God’s will.”

These last words convinced Dominic of this boy’s exceptional piety, and he was thrilled. In all confidence he answered, “One who seeks to do God’s will wants to sanctify himself. Is that what you want?”

“Yes, very much.”

“Good. Our number is growing. You will join our Company in doing all we can to become saints.”

“Gladly! What am I supposed to do?”

“It’s simple. Here we make holiness consist in being very joyful. Our only worry is to avoid sin as the great enemy of our souls which steals God’s peace and grace from our hearts. We try to do our duties well and willingly pray. You can start right now and take as your slogan, “*Serve the Lord in holy joy!*”

Gavio felt these words come upon him like a balm healing his hurts. From that day on, he became Dominic’s faithful friend and imitated his virtues.

15. THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE²⁵

Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele, allievo dell’ Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, (Biographical notes about the Young Man Michael Magone, a Student of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales) by Fr. John Bosco, Turin, 1861, pp. 24-27.

Magone’s mental uneasiness and distress on the one hand and his open and determined way of attending to the matters of his soul on the other, offered me the occasion to put before you, my dear boys, some recollections which I believe will be very useful for your souls.

Take them as a sign of the affection of one of your friends who is very much concerned about your eternal salvation.

First of all, I recommend that you always confess all your sins, without allowing yourself to be induced by the devil to hold back any one of them. Remember that the priest has the power from God of taking away any type and any number of sins. The more serious

the sins you confess, the more will he be glad in his heart because he knows that the mercy of God which is offered to you through him is even greater. He applies to you the infinite merits of the precious blood of Jesus Christ with which He can wash away all stains from your souls.

My dear young men, remember that the confessor is like a father who very much desires to do you as much good as possible, and tries to keep away from you every kind of evil. Do not be afraid of losing his esteem for you by confessing grave sins for fear that he will reveal them to others. The confessor cannot use any information he receives in confession for any worldly gain or loss whatever. He has to be ready to lose even his own life; he does not tell nor can he tell anyone even the smallest detail relating to anything he has heard in confession. On the contrary, I can assure you that the more sincere you are and the more confidence you place in him, the more will he place his confidence in you and be able to give you counsels and advice which will be very necessary and appropriate for your souls.

I wanted to tell you these things so that you will not allow yourselves to be deceived by the devil into not mentioning a sin in confession out of shame. I assure you, my dear boys, that as I write these words my hand trembles at the thought of the great number of Christians who go to their eternal perdition only for having held back or for not having clearly expressed certain sins in confession! If anyone of you examines his past life and realizes that he has willfully held back any sin, or even if he just has a doubt about the validity of a past confession, I would like to say to him right away: My friend, for the love of Jesus Christ and for the sake of the precious blood which He shed to save your soul, I beg you to straighten out the matters of your conscience the first time you go to confession. Express sincerely whatever would cause you any worry if you found yourself at the point of death. If you don't know how to say it, simply tell the confessor that there is something from your past life that is bothering you.

This is enough for the confessor. Do only what he says and then be sure that everything will be straightened out.

Go to confession often, pray for your confessor, and follow his advice. When you have chosen a confessor whom you know can take care of the needs of your soul, do not change confessors without

necessity. Not until you have a steady confessor in whom you have placed your total confidence will you have a real friend of your soul. Have confidence also in the prayers of your confessor. During his daily Mass he prays for his penitents so that God will grant them the grace of making good confessions and of being able to persevere in being good. Pray also for him.

You can change confessors without scruples when either he or you move away or when it is very hard to go to where he is, or if he is ill, or if on the occasion of a big celebration he is very busy with other penitents. Likewise if you have something on your conscience which you do not dare reveal to your ordinary confessor, rather than commit a sacrilege change your confessor not only once but a thousand times.

16. DEATH UNDER THE PROTECTION OF MARY²⁶

Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele (Biographical Notes about the Young Man Michael Magone), Turin, 1861, chapter 15, pp. 80-84.

It was something which filled anyone who looked at him with amazement. His pulse indicated that he was at the very end of his life, but his peaceful appearance, his cheerfulness, his smile, and the complete use of his reason indicated that he was a young man in perfect health. It wasn't that he did not feel any pain. His labored breathing which was the effect of a ruptured intestine caused him great discomfort and severely taxed his moral and bodily strength. But Michael had asked God many times to allow him to do his purgatory in this life so that he could go immediately to paradise right after death. This thought enabled him to bear all sufferings with joy. Even those pains which for ordinary people would produce great discomfort and distress produced in him only joy and pleasure.

Thus by a special grace of our Lord Jesus Christ not only did he appear to be insensitive to pain but rather to feel a great sense of consolation in the midst of his sufferings. It wasn't necessary to make religious suggestions to him because every now and then he himself would recite very moving ejaculations. It was 10:45 p.m. when he

called by my name and said to me: it's time, help me. Be at peace, I told him, I will not leave you until you have reached the Lord in paradise. But since you tell me that you are about to depart from this world, don't you want to say farewell to your mother?

"No," he replied, "I don't want to cause her too much pain."

"Won't you at least leave a message for her?"

"Yes, ask my mother to pardon me for all the annoyances which I have given her in my life. I'm sorry for them. Tell her that I love her. Tell her to persevere courageously in being good and that I die willingly and leave this world in the company of Jesus and Mary and go before her to wait for her in paradise."

These words made all those present weep. Just the same to keep up his spirits and to occupy his mind with good thoughts during those last moments, I would ask him some questions from time to time.

"What do you want me to tell your companions?"

"To make sure they always make good confessions."

"Of all things you have done in your life, what gives you most consolation now?"

"What gives me most consolation at this moment is the little things that I have done in honor of Mary. Yes, this gives me the most consolation. O Mary, at the moment of death, how happy are those who have devotion to you."

"But," he added, "there is one thing which worries me. When my soul is separated from my body and enters paradise, what will I say? Whom should I talk to?"

"If Mary wants to accompany you herself to your judgment, let her worry about you. But before you leave for paradise, I would like to give you a message for her.

"Please tell me, I will do what I can to obey you."

"When you will be in paradise and will have seen our great Virgin Mary, give her a humble and respectful greeting from my part and from the part of all those in this house. Ask her to give us her holy blessing and to take us all under her powerful protection, and help us so that no one who is here or whom Divine Providence will send to this house will ever be lost."

"I will very willingly carry out this request. And what else?"

"Nothing for now, rest awhile."

In fact, it seemed that he wanted to sleep. Even though he kept his usual calm spirit and his use of speech, his pulse indicated that death was very near. For this reason I began to read the prayer "Depart, Christian soul." In the middle of the prayer he awoke as from a deep sleep and with his usual serenity and with a smile on his lips said: "In a few moments I will carry out your request and I will try to do it exactly. Tell my companions that I'll be waiting for them in paradise." Then he raised the crucifix to his lips and kissed it three times and said these last words: "Jesus, Mary and Joseph into your hands I commend my soul." Then closing his lips as if he had wanted to smile, he peacefully expired.

This happy soul left this world to fly, as he piously hoped for, to God's bosom at 11:00 p.m. on Jan. 21, 1859, at the age of fourteen. He did not suffer an agony of any kind. He was not in the least bit upset, showed no evidence of suffering, discomfort, or any other pain which one naturally experiences during the frightful separation of body and soul. I wouldn't know how to describe Magone's death except by saying that it was like a joyful dream which took his soul from the sufferings of this life to a happy eternity.

17. GENERAL COUNSELS ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN LIFE²⁷

Cenni storici intorno alla vita della B. Caterina De-Mattei da Racconigi, dell'Ord. delle pen. di s. Dom. (Biographical Notes about the Life of Blessed Catherine De-Mattei of Racconigi of the Order of Penance of Saint Dominic), by Father John Bosco, Turin, 1862, "Conclusion," pp. 186-187.

Now that we have gone over briefly the glorious deeds of Blessed Catherine, I would like, dear reader, to make some reflections together for the benefit of our souls.

Man's life is brief; our days pass like a shadow, like a wave, like a flash of lightning, all things pass not to return any more. Please! Let us not waste uselessly the days which God gives us to earn eternal blessings. Let us imitate Blessed Catherine: let us do good deeds while we have time. Let us detach our hearts from the pleasures of this earth; let us raise our minds to that heavenly country where we will enjoy

truly good things. Many enemies lay out snares for us and seek to lead us to destruction. We should fight them courageously, and our shield should be, as Saint Paul says, a living faith, a working faith which makes us give up evil and love a virtuous life. Let our weapons be fervent prayer, good deeds, receiving Communion frequently and a tender devotion to Mary Most Holy. O yes, if we would only use these weapons and continue to be true sons of Mary, we would live secure. We would be able to report a complete victory against the enemies of our soul. But let us not delay to start out on the road of virtue. From this very moment let us give ourselves to God from the bottom of our hearts, let us give ourselves completely to Him as did Blessed Catherine. By doing this we will also be able to hope for the grace of the Lord and for peace in our hearts in this mortal life and at the point of death. That grace and that peace can only be hoped for by him who lives a life of good deeds. Doing good deeds merits for us the favor of heaven in the course of our life, consoles us at death and becomes a sure guarantee of eternal life.

18. A LETTER OF DIRECTION
FOR A SOMEWHAT TIMID YOUNG SALESIAN²⁸

Epistolario (Letters), vol. I, 276. Date completed by
E. Ceria.

My dearest Garino,

Your last letter hit the target. Do as you have written and you will see that we will both be happy. But as I have told you before, I need to have your complete confidence, something which you will surely give me if you think about the solicitude which I have shown for you and of other ways which I will use in the future in whatever can benefit your soul and also your temporal welfare.

In the meantime remember these three bits of advice: avoid idleness, avoid companions who are dissipated and go with friends who are pious. For you this is enough.

Pray for me who will always remain,

Very affectionately in Jesus Christ;

Father John Bosco

Saint Ignatius, Jul, 20, 1863

19. CHRISTIAN COURAGE²⁹

Il Pastorello delle Alpi, ovvero Vita del giovane Besucco d'Argentera (The Little Shepherd of the Alps, or the Life of the Young Man (Francis) Besucco of Argentera), by Father John Bosco, Turin, 1864, pp. 179-181.

With this I conclude the life of Francis Besucco. I still have several other things to tell about this virtuous boy, but since this could encourage those who refuse to recognize the marvels of the Lord in his servants to criticize me, I will save these facts for publication at a more opportune time, if God in His goodness gives me life and grace.

In the meantime, dear reader, before I terminate this writing of mine I would like that both of us would draw a conclusion which could benefit us. It is certain that sooner or later death will come for both of us and perhaps it is closer to us than we can imagine. And likewise it is certain that if we do not do good deeds in the course of our lives, we will not be able to reap their fruits at the point of death nor will we be able to expect any recompense from God. So since Divine Providence is giving us some time in which to prepare ourselves for the last moment, let us use this time, use it to do good deeds and be sure that we will reap the good fruit we have earned in due time. People who will make fun of us, it is true, will not be lacking because we show that we are not prejudiced in matters of religion. We do not pay attention to people who speak like this. They deceive and betray themselves and those who listen to them. If we want to appear wise before God we should not be afraid of appearing to be foolish in the eyes of the world, because Jesus Christ assures us that the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. Only the constant practice of religion can make us happy in time and in eternity. Whoever does not work during the summer does not have a right to enjoy life during the winter, and whoever does not practice virtue during his life will not be able to expect any prize whatever after death.

Take courage, then, O Christian reader, and do good works while you are in time. The present sufferings are brief and our joys will last for an eternity. I will invoke God's blessings on you. Please pray that the Lord God have mercy on my soul, so that after I have talked about virtue and how to practice it and about the great reward which

God has prepared for those who practice it in the next life, I should not experience the terrible disgrace of neglecting it with irreparable harm for my salvation.

May the Lord help you and help me to persevere in observing his precepts every day of our lives, so that we will be able one day to go to enjoy in heaven the supreme reward for ever and ever. Amen.

20. THE HUMANITY OF DON BOSCO³⁰

Epistolario (Letters), vol. I, 327.

My dear Bonetti,

As soon as you receive this letter go immediately to Father Rua and tell him very bluntly that he should help you be cheerful. Don't even talk then about saying your breviary until Easter: that is, you are forbidden to recite it. Say your Mass slowly not to get tired. All fasting and all mortifications in the matter of food are forbidden. In one word, the Lord is preparing work for you, but does not want you to begin to do it until you are in perfect health and especially free of your cough completely. Do this and you will please the Lord.

You can make up for everything with ejaculations, by offering to the Lord all your discomforts, and by your good example.

I was forgetting one thing. Put a mattress on your bed and adjust it as you would for an out-and-out lazybone. Keep your body warm both in and out of bed. Amen.

God bless you.

Yours most affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Father John Bosco

Turin, 1864

21. THE ADMIRABLE APOSTOLIC CHARITY OF SAINT PHILIP NERI³¹

This is an excerpt from a sermon on Saint Philip Neri, written in its entirety by Don Bosco and given at Alba to a group of priests at the end of May, 1868. See the *Memorie biografiche* by G. B. Lemoyne, vol. IX, 215-217 (omitted in English ed.).

To prepare the way for the theme which I have announced, listen to an interesting episode. It is about a young man of barely twenty years of age who was moved by a great desire for the glory of God and left his parents—he was an only son—renounced the considerable wealth of his father and the inheritance promised to him by a rich uncle. Alone, and without anyone knowing it, without any material means, but only supported by Divine Providence, he left Florence and went to Rome. Now look at him: he is taken in by a charitable fellow Florentine (Caccia Galeotto). He stops in the corner of the courtyard of the house: he looks steadily toward the city absorbed in his thoughts!

Let us approach him and question him:

“Young man, who are you and what are you looking at with so much concern?”

“I am a poor stranger. As I am looking at this city, one thought possesses my mind, but I am afraid that it is foolish and rash.”

“What is it?”

“The thought, of devoting myself to do good to these poor souls, to so many poor boys who for lack of religious instruction are going down the way to perdition.”

“Do you have an education?”

“I have only finished the primary school.”

“Do you have material means?”

“Nothing. I do not even have an extra piece of bread besides that which my master gives me every day out of charity.”

“Do you have any churches, any houses?”

“I only have a poor little room whose use has been given to me out of charity. My wardrobe is hanging from a rope stretched out from one wall to another: my clothes and my entire outfit.”

“How, then, without a name, without an education, without finan-

cial means, and without facilities do you want to undertake such a huge project?"

"It is true. The lack of means and of proper preparation is on my mind. On the other hand, God, who inspires me with courage, who can convert stones into children of Abraham, this same God is the one who . . ."

This poor young man, gentlemen, is Philip Neri who stands planning how to reform the mores of Rome. He looks at that city, but alas, what does he see? He sees it as the slave of foreigners. He sees it horribly tormented by epidemics, by misery. He sees it being besieged for three months and then beaten down, conquered, sacked and for all practical purposes destroyed.

This city will be the place where young Philip will reap abundant fruit. Let us see how he gets down to work. With only the assistance of God, he resumes his course of studies, completes his philosophical and theological studies. Following the advice of his spiritual director, he consecrates himself to God as a priest. With his sacred ordination he redoubles his zeal for the glory of God. Once a priest, he learns from the writings of Saint Ambrose that by means of zeal, faith is acquired and that by means of zeal, man is led to the possession of justice. "Faith is acquired by zeal and by zeal justice is possessed" (Saint Ambrose: "On Psalm 118"). Philip was convinced that no sacrifice is as pleasing to God as that of zeal for the salvation of souls. "No more pleasing sacrifice can one offer to God than the zeal for souls" (Saint Gregory the Great: "On Ezekiel"). Moved by these considerations it seemed to him that crowds of Christians, especially of poor boys, continuously shouted with the prophet against him! "The children asked for bread and there was no one to give it to them." When he was able to visit public institutions, go into the hospitals and prisons and see people of all ages and conditions involved in fights, cursing, stealing, and living in the slavery of sin, he began to think how so many people insulted God the Creator without hardly knowing him. They did not keep the divine law because they did not know it. The sighs of Hosea came to his mind (4, 1-2): because the people do not know the things which relate to eternal salvation, the worst, the most abominable crimes have spread throughout the earth. How his innocent heart was filled with bitterness when he became aware that a large number of

these poor souls were going along miserably lost because they were not instructed in the truths of the faith. The people, he would exclaim with Isaiah, have not heard about the things that relate to salvation, so "because my people do not understand . . . therefore the nether world enlarges its throat and opens its mouth without limit; down go their nobility and their masses, their throngs and their revelry" (Is. 5, 13-14).

Confronted with all these evils which were increasing, Philip followed the example of the Divine Redeemer, who at the beginning of his preaching did not possess anything in the world except the great fire of his divine charity which urged him to come to earth from heaven. He followed also the example of the Apostles who were lacking all material means when they were sent to preach the Gospel to all nations on earth, these nations which were all miserably engulfed in idolatry, in every vice or, according to the expression of the Bible, buried in the shadows of death. He made himself all things to all men in the streets, the squares, and public institutions. He slipped into public and private establishments and with his polite, gentle, pleasant manner which indicated his love for his neighbor, he began to preach about virtue and about religion to those who did not wish to know about either. There was a lot of gossip circulated about him. Some called him stupid, some ignorant, others called him a drunkard, and without fail some pronounced him insane.

Philip courageously allowed each one to say his piece. Even more, on account of the censure of the world, he was sure that his work was for the glory of God because what the world considers wisdom is foolishness for God. Thus he continued fearlessly in his holy undertaking.

22. THE VIRTUES OF A PRIEST

An outline of notes taken by someone during a talk given by Don Bosco in September, 1868, during a spiritual retreat preached by him at Trofarello and published by G.B. Lemoyne in the *Memorie biografiche*, vol. IX, 343-344 (omitted in English ed.).

Today I will tell you what we must do as priests and aspirants to

the priesthood. I will tell you what a priest is and what he should become.

The priesthood is the highest dignity to which a man may be raised. To him and not to the angels was given the power to change the bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. To him and not to the angels was given the faculty to forgive sins.

He is the minister of God who is thrice holy . . .

What should be the holiness of a priest or of an aspirant to the priesthood? He should be almost an angel, or rather a man completely immersed in heaven; he should possess all the virtues required by his state and especially great charity, great humility and great chastity.

The priest is the light of the world, the salt of the earth. The lips of the priest should relish learning and so his greatest effort should be to devote himself to sacred studies.

Let us examine ourselves to see if we have all the virtues necessary to become good priests, and if we do not have them yet, we should at least make a courageous effort to acquire them and practice them.

Let us exclude at the same time from our motivations all self-interest and all ends which are not in conformity with the will of God because it is the Lord who has to choose us: "It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you."³²

The priest should have a very ardent faith and charity, which unfortunately at times are not found in seminarians, not to mention priests. Instead they are found in farmers, street sweepers, and servants. They are found in the disciples while the master who teaches these virtues, who should possess them to a much greater degree, is at times almost lacking them.

Oh the power of good example! Let us remember that a priest does not go to hell or to heaven alone but always accompanied by people.

23. THE DAILY EXERCISES OF PIETY³³

Notes taken during the same spiritual exercises at Trofarello on Sept. 26, 1868. G.B. Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. IX, 355-56 (English ed., pp. 166-67).

During the past few days I would like to have spoken of our practices of piety, but time has run out. Though we dealt at length on our vows and the religious life, I shall still say something about meditation, spiritual reading, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and the examination of conscience.

Meditation is mental prayer. "Our conversation is in heaven."³⁴ How does one go about meditation? First, let him place himself in God's presence and choose the subject he wants to consider. Next, let him concentrate on that subject and apply it to himself as it fits him. Finally, let him conclude by resolving to overcome certain faults and practice certain virtues. Throughout the day let him follow up his meditation by practicing his resolve. We must also try to arouse ourselves to sentiments of love, gratitude, and humility toward God; we should ask Him for the graces we need and in true sorrow and tears beg Him pardon for our sins. Let us always remember that God is our Father and we are His sons . . . I, therefore, recommend mental prayer.

If you cannot meditate this way because of travel or some other urgent duty, do at least what businessmen do. No matter where they are, their thoughts are always on business: buying, reselling at a profit, avoiding losses or making up for them, rejoicing in their profits or planning to increase them. Our examination of conscience resembles that. Before retiring, let us check if we have practiced our resolutions on some specific fault; let us ascertain our gain or loss in a sort of spiritual auditing. If we discover a failure in our resolution, let us renew it the next day, until we have succeeded in acquiring the virtue we are striving for or shall have destroyed or avoided the fault we wished to correct.

I also suggest visits to the Blessed Sacrament. "Our most sweet Lord Jesus Christ is there in person," the Curé of Ars used to exclaim. If time is limited, let us at least kneel before the tabernacle and say a *Pater*, *Ave*, and *Gloria*. This alone will steel us against temptation. I assure you that the man of faith who visits the Blessed Sacrament

and makes a daily meditation with sincerity of heart³⁵ will not fall into sin. I urge spiritual reading, especially to those who need a book to meditate. Let us read a passage and reflect on it to discover what needs correcting in our lives. This will help us to love the Lord increasingly and encourage us to save our soul.

If possible, make your spiritual reading and your visit to the Blessed Sacrament with the community; otherwise do so in private. The same goes for meditation.

Remember that our rule binds us to say the rosary daily. How grateful we should be to the Blessed Virgin who has so many graces in store for us!

Go to Confession every week, even if you have nothing serious to confess. It is a pleasing act of humility to God because it reawakens our remorse for sins already forgiven; it makes us realize how imperfect the small faults of every day make us.

24. A SPIRITUAL "STRENNA" FOR 1868³⁶

Epistolario, vol. I, pp. 600-601. Also in *Memorie biografiche*, vol. IX, 457-58 (English ed., p. 208).

Dear Father Bonetti:

Thank you for your New Year's gift. It will help us wonderfully in clearing up the Oratory's debts. Thank Father Provera too.³⁷ Now here is the *strenna*.

For you and Father Provera: Always point out each other's faults charitably.

For the Salesians: Economize in traveling. As far as possible, do not go home. Rodriguez has some very timely material on this subject.

For the Boys: Let them promote frequent Communion and devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary by word and deed.

Three Topics for Sermons: 1. Avoidance of foul talk and books.
2. Avoidance of companions who are light-minded or give evil advice.
3. Avoidance of idleness and in its stead introduction of practices which contribute to preserving the holy virtue of modesty.

Keep an eye on everything. Keep in touch with everyone. The good Lord will do the rest.

Best wishes to you and all at Mirabello. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Father John Bosco

P.S. Tell the prefect of studies to push *Italian Classics for the Young*.³⁸

25. WEALTH AND DETACHMENT³⁹

Angelina, o l'orfanelle degli Appennini (Angelina, or the Little Orphan Girl from the Apennines) by Father John Bosco, Turin, 1869, pp. 41-48.

My sufferings increased on account of the wasting of money on useless things and sometimes harmful things. There were forty servants for four people: I, my parents and a brother. There were two carriages for each of us, one for summer and the other for winter with a corresponding number of horses and coachmen. There were two doorkeepers, two coachmen, two butlers, two masters of etiquette, or as we say, masters of ceremonies. The rest were occupied in the various domestic chores. There were too many servants: a tenth part of them would have been enough for everything and for everyone! Gold and silver were lavished on the chairs, floors, beds and tables. It wasn't that my father was not religious because he treated friars and priests well whenever the occasion presented itself. On the contrary, when he could, he enjoyed having with him at table some illustrious personage such as a canon, parish priest, or a prelate, but he did this for a human end, to make them talk about him and to be praised.

If he was asked to contribute to some charity most of the time he exclaimed that he had many expenses, many debts, a lessening of his income and similar things. In the meantime he found enormous sums of money to put on parties for his friends, undertake long and very expensive trips, change and modernize the furnishings of the house every year without counting the continuous replacing, selling and buying of carriages, horses, with an immense outlay of money.

And when alms were given, I certainly did not see done what the Gospel says: the left hand should not know what the right hand is doing. Just the opposite. If people did not bow deeply, offer public and repeated thanks or if publicity in some way was not given for an offering made, most often this offering was the last and no one would be able to obtain even one penny more under the excuse that so and so was ungrateful. In reality, however, it was because he had not sounded the trumpet to the four winds. It seemed to me that one could say with the Savior: They have received their reward. One day I asked my father how he understood the words of the Gospel: "What is superfluous give to the poor." He answered that this was a counsel, not a command. It seems to me that I added that the word "give" was in the imperative mood and, therefore, a true command and not a counsel. He did not give me any reply. Another time I asked him how he understood those other words of the Gospel: "Woe to the rich; it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be saved." "These things," he said, "should be studied, learned, but should not be dwelt upon too much, otherwise they make one lose his peace of heart, and even more turn his brain around if he thinks too much about these things."

This reply was like a spark for my troubled mind. If it is a truth, I said, why not meditate on it always. Why is it forgotten by the world? Does that "woe to the rich" perhaps mean that they will all have to be lost? If a big miracle is needed to have a camel pass through the eye of a needle, so will it perhaps be necessary that a miracle of this type be worked so that a rich man can be saved? If it is so difficult for a rich man to be saved, is it not better to put into practice the counsel of the Savior: sell everything that you have and give it to the poor? My father said that to think seriously about these things could turn his brain around. But if the thought alone produces this terrible effect, what will become of him who should have the misfortune of experiencing the consequences of the Savior's threat, which would be eternal perdition?

Disturbed by the thought of the difficulties which a rich man has in being saved, I went to a holy priest to receive instruction and consolation. That man of God told me that those words should be interpreted in their true sense. The Savior wishes to indicate, he said, that

riches are real thorns and an evil source of dangers on the road to salvation. This is on account of the great abuse that is made of them: useless expenditures, inappropriate trips, lack of moderation, dances, games, oppression of the weak, defrauding workers of their pay, yielding to unworthy passions, unjust litigations, hatred, anger and revenge. This is the fruit which many people reap from their riches. For them their wealth presents a great danger of spiritual harm and it is precisely of them that the Savior says: "Woe to the rich; it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be saved."

But those who use their riches well, who use them to clothe the naked, to feed the poor hungry people, to give drink to the thirsty, to take in the traveler, they who without vainglory and without ambition give their superfluous goods to the poor, they, I say, have a means of salvation in their wealth, and know how to change their riches, which are truly thorns, into flowers for eternity. Believe me: when God gives wealth to a man, he gives him a grace, but this grace is greater when he inspires him with the courage to put that wealth to good use.

You, in the meantime, concluded the director, do not worry about the riches which you have since by means of them you can do many good works and acquire many merits for the next life. Only make sure that you put them to good use. I recommend, however, two very important things to you. The first thing is not to be too strict in determining what is superfluous. Some think that by giving a tenth or a twentieth as alms they can put the rest to whatever use best pleases them. It is not so. God said to give the superfluous to the poor without mentioning a tenth or a twentieth. Therefore we should only keep for ourselves what is necessary and give the rest to the poor.

Secondly, I recommend that you should not forget that we will not take with us any of our wealth to the tomb, and for this reason, whether we want to or not, or through love or through force, or in life or in death, we have to leave everything behind. It is better, then, to detach ourselves from earthly things voluntarily with merit and make good use of them in this life, than to abandon them by force and without merit at the point of death.

Instead of calming me, this simple and clear answer increased my distress. I was convinced that riches are a great source of spiritual harm and that it is hard to make good use of them.⁴⁰

26. THE ADVANTAGES OF RELIGIOUS LIFE⁴¹

Notes for two conferences for Salesians, jotted down by Don Bosco himself during the spiritual exercises at Trofarello, September, 1869 and published in Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche*, (Biographical Memoirs) vol. IX, 986-987 (omitted in English ed.).

The Christian: his creation within the Catholic religion, his education, instruction, means of salvation.

Entrance into a world full of dangers—greater safety in religious life—example of a voyage in a boat or on a raft; by carriage or on foot; staying in a fort or in an open field.

Signs of a vocation: concern whether religious life is better than that out in the world—having been admitted into the community—Manete in vocatione (“Remain in your vocation”), etc.⁴²

Comparison with a businessman who works hoping for a profit.

In the Congregation *Homo vivit purius - cadit rarius - surgit velocius - incedit cautius - irroratur frequentius - quiescit securius - moritur confidentius - purgatur citius - remuneratur copiosius* (man lives more purely - falls more rarely - rises up more quickly - walks more on his guard - on him the dew of grace more frequently falls - is more at peace - dies full of confidence - the time of purification after death is shortened - he is more amply rewarded (Saint Bernard, *De bono Religionis*).⁴³

Vivit purius (lives more purely) because he is free of worldly cares (whether he wants to or not, in the world he has to think about material things). Purity of intention means doing what pleases God and we are sure of doing this through obedience. In the world people do whatever good they want to do and whenever they want to. The religious never does his own will, but always the Lord's on account of obedience. Their self-will spoils their good works: “Why do we fast, and you do not see it? afflict ourselves, and you take no note of it?” Because “lo, on your fast day you carry out your own pursuits . . .”⁴⁴ —Various examples.

Cadit rarius (falls more rarely). — The farther one is from a danger the safer he is from falling into it. The world is full of dangers. “Carnal allurements (pleasures of the senses), enticements for the eye (riches),

the life of empty show (vanity)—all these are from the world.⁴⁵ Saint Anthony saw the world covered with traps.—Those who live in the Congregation live removed from these dangers and separate themselves from everything through the three vows.

Therefore they will rarely fall. Besides they have many things that help them persevere in religious life which are absent in the world.

Surgit velocius.—Rules, advice, reading, meditation. The example of others.—“Woe to the solitary man! For if he should fall, he has no one to lift him up.”⁴⁶ But in the Society “if the one falls, the other will lift up his companion.”⁴⁷ He is assisted by his brethren to rise up again.⁴⁸

Incedit cautius.—He walks more on his guard.—Retirement.—Rules.—The law of God is like a fortress, around which there are fortified outposts which are the Constitutions.—“A strong city have we; he sets up walls and ramparts to protect us.”⁴⁹ One is defended in the Congregation—monthly manifestation—The great ones of the world, the rich, the powerful do not have people who counsel them but who flatter them, etc.

Irroratur frequentius (on him the dew of grace more frequently falls)—The world is dried-up land; the Congregation is watered land. Heavenly dew falls often from God on our souls; by means of it we abandon everything and are able to work. Through the Sacraments which we have to frequent by rule, through the superiors whose duty it is to counsel and correct us.—A man in the world might often want to do likewise but he does not have the means which abound in religious life.

Quiescit securius (is more at peace).—Nothing can make us content in the world. “Vanity of vanities,”⁵⁰ etc.—Theodosius in solitary confinement, said: “Father? Do you know who I am? I am Emperor Theodosius. Happy you who lead a happy life on this earth, far from the cares of the world. I am a great personage in the world, I am an emperor. But for me, O Father, there is not a day in which I can eat my meals in peace.—Then: “When a strong man fully armed guards his courtyard, his possessions go undisturbed.”⁵¹ The Congregation is a fortress in which we can rest peacefully. Jesus Christ, the superiors, the rules, the confreres are all so many guards of our souls, etc.

Objection 1: In religious life people are not happy. But because

they do not observe the rules.

Objection 2: There are many trials also in religious life. But these are daily crosses which will lead us to glory.

“It is for a good reason that God has hidden the grace of religious life, because if people knew what happiness it brings, everyone would abandon the world and would run to embrace it.”⁵²

Moritur confidentius (dies full of confidence).—The death of a person in the world: doctors, notaries, relatives, everyone talks about material things, only with difficulty about spiritual things.

A religious is among brothers who help him, pray for him, comfort him. Everything is taken care of on this earth. He is ready for heaven. “Moreover, everyone who has given up, etc.”⁵³ “God has promised eternal life to those who have given up these things. You have given them up: what prevents you from being reassured by his promise?”⁵⁴ A brother of Saint Bernard dying in the monastery was singing because “Happy now are the dead who die in the Lord!”⁵⁵

Purgatur citius (the time of purification after death is shortened). Saint Thomas says that when one enters religious life one obtains pardon of all his sins and of the punishments due to sin as in Baptism. And he adds: “That is why we read in the lives of the Fathers that when religious enter religious life they receive the same grace which the baptized receive at their baptism.”⁵⁶ Later there is encouragement, prayers, Communions, Rosaries, Masses, etc.—Either no purgatory or very little. “Such fly with ease from their cells to heaven” (Saint Bernard).⁵⁷

Remuneratur copiosius (he is more amply rewarded). God rewards us for a cup of cold water given in his name. What reward will he not give, then, to someone who has left all, or better, given everything away out of love for him? What reward will not all the good deeds of religious life, the mortifications, fastings, acts of obedience receive in heaven? And then the merit that is acquired for the good works which are done for him. “The just shall shine, etc.”⁵⁸

The worldlings say instead: “We, then, have strayed, etc.”⁵⁹

Saint Alphonsus says that in the seventeenth century of sixty canonized saints only six were laymen. All the rest were religious.

Temporal advantages:

1. Those Jesus Christ had: at birth, in life, and at His death He did

not have a place to rest., etc. However, He promised that nothing would be lacking to us, if etc.: "Look at the birds in the sky."⁶⁰

2. Nothing is lacking to us whether in a state of health, sickness, at death. Example of . . .

3. How many people are in need in the world! But we have food clothing, lodging, etc.

27. SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES⁶¹

Storia ecclesiastica ad uso della gioventu, utile ad ogni grado di persone (Church History for Young People, Useful for persons from all walks of life) by Father John Bosco, new edition revised and expanded, Turin, 1870, ch. 4, pp. 301-303.

St. Francis de Sales and the Chablais. St. Francis de Sales was raised up by Divine Providence to combat, and I might add, destroy the errors of Calvin and Luther in the area of Savoy called the Chablais, which had been infected by these monstrous errors. His last name *de Sales* comes from the name of his birthplace, a castle in Savoy. From his earliest years he gave himself to God, preserved carefully his virginity, and enriched his heart with every virtue, especially those of kindness and gentleness. Not without serious opposition from his father, did he renounce offers of brilliant careers in the world and consecrated himself to the sacred ministry. Led on by the voice of God which called him to extraordinary things, he left for the Chablais armed only with the weapons of charity. At the sight of churches which had been torn down, monasteries destroyed, crosses knocked over, he was overcome with zeal and began his ministry. The heretics shouted against him, insulted him, and tried to kill him. However, through his patience, preaching, writings and miracles he calmed down the hecklers, won over the assassins, disarmed hell itself, so that the Catholic faith triumphed. In a short time in the Chablais alone he led back into the bosom of the Church 72,000 heretics. The reports of his holiness spread far and wide and despite his reluctance he was made Bishop of Geneva, with his residence, however, at Annecy. Here he redoubled his zealous efforts, not holding back when necessary from even the most humble chores in the ministry of the Church. After a

life totally spent for the greater glory of God, revered by the people, honored by princes, esteemed by the Supreme Pontiffs, respected by the heretics, he yielded his soul to God at Lyons in the house of the gardener of the convent of the Visitation where he had taken up lodging.

It was the feast of the Holy Innocents, 1622.

He was the founder of the Order of the Visitation Nuns. He wanted that candidates who could not be accepted into other convents for reason of age or health should be received into its convents.

28. HOLY COMMUNION⁶²

Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata, ad uso del popolo (The Month of May, Consecrated to the Most Holy Immaculate Virgin, for Use by the Faithful), by Father John Bosco, 8th edition, Turin, pp. 149-153.

1. Do you understand, dear Christians, what it means to receive Holy Communion? It means approaching the table of the angels to receive the body, blood, soul and divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gives Himself as food for our souls under the appearance of consecrated bread and wine. During Holy Mass, at the moment when the priest pronounces the words of consecration over the bread and wine, the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The words which Our Divine Savior used when he instituted this Sacrament are: "This is My body, this is My blood." The priest uses these same words in the name of Jesus Christ during the sacrifice of the Holy Mass. When we go to Communion we receive the same Jesus Christ, body, blood, soul and divinity, that is true God and true man, alive as He is in heaven. It is not an image of Christ, nor a representation of Him like a statue or crucifix, but it is the same Jesus Christ who was born of the Immaculate Virgin Mary and died for us on the cross. Jesus Christ Himself assures us of His real presence in the Holy Eucharist with these words: This is My body which will be given up for you. This is the living bread which came down from heaven. The bread which I will give you is My flesh. The drink which I will give you is My real blood. He who does not eat of this bread and drink of this blood will not have life in him.

2. Jesus instituted this Sacrament for the benefit of our souls and wishes that we should receive it frequently. Here are the words with which he invites us: "Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you" (Mt. 11, 28). And in another passage he says to the Hebrews: "Your ancestors ate the manna of the desert and died, but he who eats this food prefigured by the manna, this food which I give, this food which is My body and My blood, he will not die forever. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood lives in Me and I in him, for My flesh is real food and My blood real drink" (translator's note: this is an adaptation of Jn. 6, 49 ff). Who could resist these loving invitations of Our Divine Savior? He is there waiting for us like he was for the first Christians who accepted his invitation and went every day to listen to the Word of God and to receive Holy Communion. He is present in this Sacrament in which the martyrs found strength, the virgins, fervor, and the saints, fortitude.

And how often do we receive this heavenly food? If we pay attention to the wishes of Jesus Christ and to our need, we should receive Communion often. Just as the manna served as daily material food for the Hebrews during the time they lived in the desert, so that they could reach the promised land, so Holy Communion should be our refreshment, our daily food in the midst of the dangers of this world to guide us to the true promised land of Paradise. Saint Augustine put it this way: "If we ask God every day for our material food, why do we not also nourish ourselves daily with spiritual food in Holy Communion?" Saint Philip Neri encouraged Christians to go to confession once a week and to receive Communion even more often, according to the advice of their confessor. Finally, Holy Church indicates its strong desire that Communion be received frequently when it says in the words of the Council of Trent: "It would be a very desirable thing for every Christian to keep himself in such a state of conscience as to be able to receive Holy Communion every time that he assists at Holy Mass." In order to encourage Christians to receive more frequently the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion, Pope Clement XIII granted them this favor: Those faithful Christians who have the praiseworthy custom of going to Confession weekly, can obtain a plenary indulgence every time they receive Holy Communion.

3. Someone might say: "I am too much of a sinner." If you are a

sinner, endeavor to put yourself in the state of grace through the Sacrament of Confession, and then go to Holy Communion. You will receive a great amount of help. Another might say: "I go to Communion rarely so as to have more fervor." This is a false notion. Things which are done rarely are usually done poorly. On the other hand, since your needs are frequent, help for your soul should also be frequent. Others might add: "I am full of spiritual infirmities and do not dare receive often." Jesus Christ answers: "Those who are healthy have no need for a physician." Consequently, those who are more often victims of illness should visit the doctor more often. Take courage, then, Christians. If you wish to do something which is glorious in the sight of God, very pleasing to the saints of heaven, which is very effective against temptations and sure to help you persevere in being good, it is certainly receiving Holy Communion.

29. SPIRITUAL STRENNA (1874)⁶³

Epistolario (Letters), vol. II, 434.

My dear Father Bonetti:

For you: Act in such a way that all those with whom you speak become your friends.

For the prefect: Lay up treasures for time and for eternity.

For teachers: "By patient endurance you will save your lives."⁶⁴

For students: Frequent Communion.

For all: Do one's duties just right.

May God bless all of you and grant you the precious gift of persevering in being good. Amen.

Pray for me in Jesus Christ.

Your affectionate friend,

Father John Bosco

Turin, 12-30-74

30. FRATERNAL CHARITY⁶⁵

Epistolario (Letters), vol. III, 26-27.

My dear Father Tomatis:

I received the news you gave me and was very glad to hear that you had a good trip and are anxious to work. Go on like this. A letter which you wrote from Varazze indicates that you are having a disagreement with a confrere. This has created a bad impression especially if the letter is read publicly.

Listen to me, dear Father Tomatis. A missionary has to be ready to give up his life for the greater glory of God. Should he not then be able to bear up with a little aversion he feels toward a companion, even if he has very big defects. Listen to what Saint Paul says: "Help carry one another's burdens; in that way you will fulfill the laws of Christ. Love is patient; love is kind . . . Love endures all things. If anyone does not provide for his own relatives and especially for members of his immediate family, he has denied the faith."⁶⁶

And so, my dear friend, give me this great consolation, rather this great pleasure: it is Don Bosco who requests it. In the future let Molinari be your great friend, and if you cannot love him because he has defects, love him for the love of God, love him for my sake. You'll do it, won't you? Otherwise I am very happy with you and every morning at Holy Mass I recommend to the Lord your soul and all your labors.

Don't forget to translate the arithmetic book, adding the weights and measures used in the Republic of Argentina.

Tell good Doctor Ceccarello that I have not been able to obtain a catechism from that archdiocese, and that I would like to have one—the small one—so that I can insert the acts of Faith in the *Companion of Youth* (Giovane provveduto) as found in that archdiocese.

May God bless you, dear Father Tomatis. Do not forget to pray for me, who will always be in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Father John Bosco

31. GIVE TO CAESAR THE THINGS THAT ARE CAESAR'S

Excerpt from the acts of the first general chapter of the Salesians (1877); cf. E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. XIII, 288.⁶⁷

Our purpose is to make the fact be known that we can give to Caesar what is Caesar's without compromising anyone. And this takes nothing away from our giving to God what is God's. In our times it is said that this is a problem, and I will add, if you will, that it is the greatest of problems, but one which was already solved by Our Divine Savior Jesus Christ. In practice, it is true that there are a series of difficulties. Let us try to solve them, not only leaving the principle intact but with reasons and arguments which flow from this same principle and explain it. My great concern is this: to study practical ways of giving to Caesar what is Caesar's and at the same time to give God what is God's.

But, you might say, the government supports the worst criminals and perhaps circulates false teachings and erroneous principles. It's true, but we would say that Our Lord commands us to obey and respect superiors, "even those who are harsh,"⁶⁸ as long as they do not command things which are directly evil. And even when they command evil things, we still respect them. We will not be doing something evil, but will continue to show respect for the authority of Caesar, as Saint Paul clearly says by obeying authorities because they bear the sword.

There is no one who does not see the evil conditions through which the Church has to pass these days. I believe that from the time of Saint Peter until the present there have not been such difficult times. They have refined their methods and they have limitless means. Not even the persecutions of Julian the Apostate were so hypocritical and harmful. And what shall we do? We shall try to watch out for the legalities in everything. If they impose taxes on us, we will pay them; if community property is no longer allowed, we will make it individual; if they require examinations, we will take them; if they require certificates and diplomas, everything possible will be done to obtain them, and in this way we will go ahead.

"But this means inconveniences, expenses: it will create a mess." None of you can see things as I see them. Even more, I do not point

out to you the greater part of the difficulties in order not to scare you. I sweat and labor all day long to see if I can put things in their place and avoid inconveniences. Just the same we have to have patience and learn to bear up with things. Instead of filling the air with whimpering complaints, work harder—that goes without saying—so that things will move forward well.

This is what I hope to make known bit by bit and in practical ways in the *Bolletino Salesiano* (Salesian Bulletin). Without saying too much directly, we will make this principle prevail with the grace of God, and it will be a source of immense good both for civil society and for the Church.

32. TO A DISCOURAGED PASTOR⁶⁹

Epistolario (Letters) vol. III, 399.

My dear friend in the Lord,

I received your nice letter and the eighteen francs. Thank you: God will reward you. It is like manna which falls as a relief for our great needs. Be at peace. Don't talk about leaving your parish. Is there too much work? I will die in the field of my labors, "as a good soldier of Christ Jesus."⁷⁰ I am not good for much? "In Him who is the source of my strength I have strength for everything."⁷¹ Are there thorns? With these thorns converted into flowers the angels will plait for you a crown in heaven. The times are difficult? They have always been like this, but God has never withheld His help. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today."⁷² You ask for advice? Here it is: take special care of children, of old people and of the sick and you will become master of the hearts of all.

When you come to visit me, we will talk at length about other things.

Father John Bosco

Turin, Oct. 25, 1878.

33. THE APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY AND PERFECTION OF SALESIAN COOPERATORS⁷³

Cooperatori salesiani, ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume ed alla civile societa (Salesian Cooperators, or a practical way of promoting learning and of being of service to society), Albenga, 1876, pp. 25-26, 27-28, 33-34.

I. It is necessary for Christians to unite to do good works.

At all times it has been considered necessary for good people to unite in order to help one another do good and keep away from evil. The early Christians did this. They were not dismayed by the dangers which confronted them every day. United in heart and mind they encouraged one another to stand fast in the faith and not to be upset by the assaults of the enemy. Such also was the advice given to us by the Lord when He said: "When weak forces unite they become strong. If a cord is taken by itself it is easily broken, 'but a three-ply cord is not easily broken.'" (Eccl. 4,12)⁷⁴ Men of the world usually do this in their affairs. Should the children of light be less prudent than the children of darkness? Certainly not. We Christians ought to be united in these difficult times to promote the spirit of prayer and of charity with all the means which religion provides so that we can get rid of or at least lessen those evils which jeopardize the good morals of young people in whose hands the destiny of society rests.

III. The purpose of the Salesian Cooperators

The fundamental purpose of the Salesian Cooperators is to benefit themselves by leading a life similar to that of religious in the common life as much as they can. Many would be willing to enter a religious community but because of their age, health, or state of life, or through lack of opportunity, they are definitely unable to do so. By becoming Salesian Cooperators, however, they can remain in the midst of their ordinary occupations, in the bosom of their own families, and live as if they were in a religious community. For that reason this association is considered by the Holy Father to be a third order with this difference: in the older third orders Christian perfection was viewed as consisting in the exercises of piety. This association, on the contrary, has for its principal end an active life in the exercise of charity toward one's neighbor, especially young people who are in moral danger.

VIII. Religious practices

1. No exterior practices are prescribed for Salesian Cooperators. But so that their life can in some way be like that of the Salesians who live in community, it is recommended that they practice modesty in dress, frugality in eating, simplicity in furnishing their homes, purity in speech, and conscientiousness in fulfilling their duties. They should take care that their dependents keep Sundays and days of obligation holy.

2. They are encouraged to make at least a few days of spiritual retreat every year. On the last day of the month or on some other suitable occasion they should make the Exercise for a Happy Death and should go to Confession and receive Holy Communion as if it were their last. During their retreat or on the occasion of the Exercises for a Happy Death, they can gain a plenary indulgence.

3. Every day, each one will recite an *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary* in honor of Saint Francis de Sales, according to the intentions of the Holy Father. Priests and those who recite the Divine Office or the Office of Our Lady are dispensed from these prayers. For them it is enough that they have this intention when reciting the Divine Office.

4. They should endeavor to receive with greater frequency the Sacraments of Confession and Communion, because each one can gain a plenary indulgence every time.

5. These indulgences, both plenary or partial, can be applied to the souls of purgatory, except in the case of an indulgence at the point of death ("in articulo mortis"). This indulgence is exclusively personal and can only be gained when the soul is separated from the body and leaves for eternity.

NOTES

1. John Bosco had this dream around the age of nine, and according to what he himself says, he remained "deeply impressed by it for his whole life." The purpose of the dream was pedagogical, but his dynamic spirituality learned from Christ and Mary (without a doubt in dreams but also in states of consciousness!) seems to have been formed very early in his life. On the other hand, one should note that the author of this account was about sixty years old when he gave it its definitive form which we will read. Consequently, in all probability he included in it ideas from his mature years.

We would like to underline the fact, at the beginning of this collection of his writings, that his extant manuscript notes are very few. It will be useless, then, to look for more information about persons mentioned by name or for exact references for texts which are quoted or for sources which are indicated, which a critical edition of the works of Don Bosco could furnish. This task still remains to be done. Our purpose is different. It is to give more complete information to the reader who is interested in Don Bosco's spirituality by giving him a variety of substantial samples of his writing, which are presented with only very brief comments.

2. According to the introduction, these resolutions were made by John Bosco in 1835, a little while after his clerical investiture, in order to "reform radically" his life, which he considered to be very dissipated. These resolutions indicate his efforts to adapt to a clerical world which was quite strict, if not rigorous.

3. Flavius Josephus (c. 37-c. 100). Augustine Calmet, O.S.B. (1672-1757), Giovanni Marchetti (1753-1829), Denys Frayssinous (1745-1841), Ferdinando Zucconi, S.J. (1647-1732). The Spaniard Jaime Balmès (1810-1848). Balmès, who was then almost unknown in Piedmont, apparently was included in this list by error.

4. Claude Fleury (1640-1725), Domenico Cavalca, O.P. (1270?-1342), Jacopo Passavanti, O.P. (1302-1357), Paolo Segneri, S.J. (1624-1694) Matthieu Henrion (1805-1862).

5. Summer of 1841. John Bosco was ordained a priest in June.

6. Castelnuovo d'Asti, now called Castelnuovo Don Bosco.

7. The context shows that Don Bosco was speaking about probabiliorists, and so was referring to the "second" camp.

8. These quotations were found on bookmarks in Don Bosco's breviary when he died in 1888. The selection of texts in itself invites many interpretations. The Biblical quotations—according to the Latin Vulgate Bible—those from the Fathers were originally in Latin; the quotations from Dante and Silvio Pellico, in Italian. The references to the Bible were checked by us.

9. This is the preface to the first book published by Don Bosco at the age of 29, when he was completing his stay at the *Convitto*. His style was certainly labored, but one has to go beyond the apparent impression of weakness which is given, an impression of which the author was conscious and which he admitted with simplicity. One should note the origins of his concrete spirituality in which pious examples had from the beginning a very important place.

10. One of Don Bosco's letters in which he gives spiritual direction. It is extremely brief, lacks theological reflections and shows a definite preference for simple and practical advice. One should note that the year of perseverance with "relapses" (most probably referring to sin of impurity) asked for in this letter was reduced to a period of six months in a later letter to the same seminarian, dated Apr. 28, 1857 (*Epistolario*, vol. I, 146).

11. Lk. 10, 16.

12. Phil. 4, 13.

13. Cf. Jas. 5, 16.

14. The invocation to St. Ambrose is explained by the date of the letter which happened to be the day of the liturgical feast of this saint.

15. This is an excerpt from a collection of advice and prayers explicitly compiled for "Catholics who fulfill the duties of a good Christian" (title). The "true Christian," according to the image of Christ, is humble, kind, obedient, sober, friendly and patient.

16. The program of Christian life outlined in the second part of this letter to a boy whom Don Bosco was lodging at his Oratory was that which he had given to Dominic Savio, who had died that same year (1857).

17. Don Bosco's quotations from the Latin Vulgate and his interpretation of them are at times different from those of modern biblical scholars.

18. "The unfading crown of glory" (1 Pt. 5, 4) was one of Don Bosco's favorite themes. This letter to the Cleric Giovanni Battista Anfossi speaks only of hope, and not really of a blessed hope.

19. Ex. 4, 12; Mk. 13, 33; 2 Cor. 7, 17.

20. The essence of St. John Bosco's spirituality for lay people is found in these traditional statements (cf. in particular numbers 1, 2, 9, 19, 20, 21). None of these refer to apostolic activities.

21. This is the oldest manuscript (1858-1859) that has come to light of the Salesian Constitutions and is still unedited. This is the first chapter, taking into account Don Bosco's own annotations. One notices some of the forms which, according to him, apostolic charity should take and the relationship between apostolic charity and perfection (Art. 1).

22. The principles of Don Bosco about the role of apostolic activities in furthering growth in holiness were clear from the first edition (1859) of the biography of Dominic Savio, which had an obvious didactic purpose.

23. The hamlet near Castelnuovo, where Dominic lived.

24. Holiness consists in fulfilling cheerfully the will of God, Dominic Savio would point out to his future friend, Camillo Gavio. This chapter repeated the dialogue from Don Bosco's teaching which was found, for example, in the *Giovane provveduto* (2nd ed., Turin, 1851, pp. 5-8).

25. Excerpt from the first edition of the biography of Michael Magone, on the integrity of confession and on spiritual direction which confession makes possible. It will become clear that for Don Bosco the confessor was a father and a friend.

26. Joy and peace accompany the Christian even up to the point of his death if he has been a friend of Christ and Mary during his life. Don Bosco demonstrated this fact with his moving description of the death of his pupil Michael Magone on Jan. 21, 1859.

27. Some general principles of St. John Bosco on the spiritual life have been summarized in this conclusion of the biography of a nun.

28. In this letter, the cleric John Garino received some of Don Bosco's favorite words of advice: confidence, work, avoidance of bad companions.

29. The conclusion of the life of a young student at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales who very quietly resisted human respect in order to practice virtue. The author took this occasion to write a convincing eulogy about "good works."

30. "In November, 1864, Don Bosco had gone to visit the Salesian house of Mirabello. He found Fr. Bonetti disturbed by a misunderstanding and also ill. On his return to Turin, he wrote to him right away to encourage him" (E. Ceria, San Giovanni Bosco, *Epistolario*,

vol. I, 327). His letter also shows that he had a kind heart and that he was opposed to all that was unnecessarily burdensome.

31. Saint Philip Neri, whom Don Bosco describes in this sermon, was certainly the ideal apostle who gives all to all, who sanctifies himself through his zeal, the model he sought to imitate. According to Lemoyne (*op. cit.*, p. 221) this was the impression of his hearers.

32. Jn. 15, 16.

33. These notes were jotted down by someone present and were published by Fr. Lemoyne without being too worried about being exact. Nonetheless they reveal Don Bosco's ideas about the "practices of piety" of his religious community.

34. This is a translation of Don Bosco's *Latin Vulgate* quotation from Phil. 3, 20. (Translator's note: The *New American Bible* translation of the verse is: "we have our citizenship in heaven . . .").

35. For Don Bosco, therefore, meditation and spiritual reading are very similar.

36. At the end of 1868, Fr. John Bonetti, director of the school at Mirabello, had gone to wish Don Bosco a Happy New Year and to give him a gift of some money he had saved up. In his abrupt style, typical of his letters to his students, Don Bosco acknowledged Bonetti's gift, in turn giving him a spiritual *strenna*. [A "strenna" is a New Year's gift customary in Italy. From the beginning of the Oratory, Don Bosco had started the custom of giving a spiritual *strenna* or gift to his boys and co-workers on the last day of the year. It took the form of a motto or slogan to be practiced throughout the New Year.—trans.]

37. Fr. Provera was Fr. Bonetti's treasurer.

38. The *Italian Classics for the Young* was a collection of Latin classics compiled and edited by Don Bosco.

39. *Angelina* is a story presented by Don Bosco as if it were true. This rich girl, who led a very comfortable life at home, was uneasy about her wealth and would eventually run away and end her life as a humble servant in a farmhouse. The last part of the story, which is told entirely by Angelina, contains Don Bosco's teachings on riches and poverty: Riches are a gift from God but one has to use them well and know how to be detached from them.

40. Her reading of Saint Jerome and what followed after her mother's death made Angelina decide to leave her father's house.

41. These notes, it seems to us, illustrate very well the growth of Don Bosco's spiritual thought: his consideration of two ways of life for a Christian, recourse to arguments from Scripture and from tradi-

tion, his use of examples, images, and concrete applications. He followed the example of Saint Alphonsus Liguori (*The True Spouse of Christ*, ch. 2), who in turn had recourse to other authors. The framework of Latin phrases used by Don Bosco comes ultimately from a *homily on Saint Matthew*, "The kingdom of heaven is like . . .", which is commonly attributed to Saint Bernard (cf. *Patrologie latine*, J.P. Migne, vol. CLXXXIV, col. 1131-1134). This presentation of the advantages of religious life would be included a little later in the "Introduction" to the *Salesian Constitutions*.

42. Cf. 1 Cor, 7, 20: "Everyone ought to continue as he was when he was called."

43. Cf. note 41 above.

44. Is. 58, 3.

45. 1 Jn 2, 12.

46. Eccl. 4, 10.

47. Ibid.

48. The "angelic doctor," Saint Thomas.

49. Is. 26, 1.

50. Eccl. 1, 1.

51. Lk. 11, 21.

52. Saint Lawrence Justinian.

53. Mt. 19, 29.

54. Saint John Chrysostom: "On the Proverbs."

55. Rv. 14, 13.

56. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a, 2ae, quest. 189, art. 3, ad 3.

57. Cf. *Lettre aux freres du Mont-Dieu*, attributed to William de Saint-Thierry, ch. 4.

58. Wis. 3, 7.

59. Wis. 5, 6.

60. Cf. Mt. 6, 26.

61. Saint Francis de Sales impressed Don Bosco not by his ideas found in such books as *The Treatise on the Love of God*, the *Vrays entretiens*, nor the *Introduction to the Devout Life* but by his life as a zealot and understanding apostle. Don Bosco wrote about Saint Francis' life in his *Storia ecclesiastica* (Church History).

62. Don Bosco's solid teaching on the Eucharist followed nineteenth century currents as one can see from the following reflections which were taken from a little book written for simple folk. One notices, however, that already in 1874 he was openly advising lay people to receive Communion daily. This was by no means a common practice in those days. The Latin phrases, which were translated into Italian, were drawn from the canon of the Mass (in turn from Jn. 6, 51, 1 Cor. 11, 23, and Mt. 11, 28.)

63. Don Bosco set forth his guiding principles in the spiritual *strenna* he gave to his followers every year. [For an explanation of the word "*strenna*," cf. note 36 above. —trans.]

64. Lk. 21, 19.

65. Shortly after his arrival in South America, Fr. Domenico Tomatis, one of the first Salesian missionaries, had written a rather strong letter to one of his friends, in which he had said that "he was not getting along with anyone and that very soon he would have to return to Europe" (Bosco's letter to G. Cagliari, Feb. 12, 1876, *Epistolario*, vol. III, 17). The lesson which Don Bosco gives in this letter was both friendly and to the point. It indicates his marvelous rapport with his sons.

66. Gal. 6, 2; 1 Cor. 13, 4,7; 1 Tim. 5, 8.

67. In order to interpret correctly these proposals of Don Bosco made during the general chapter of the Salesians, it is necessary to recall the atmosphere created in Italy by the seizure of Rome in 1870 and the rejection of the "law of guarantees." One should also remember Abbot Margotti's *Ne eletti ne elettori* and the *Non expedit* of the Sacred Penitentiary (cf. F. Fonzi, *I cattolici e la societa italiana dopo l'unita*, 2nd ed., Rome, 1960, pp. 31-32, 53-54). Don Bosco, as we shall see, favored conciliation, and perhaps was also a conciliator (cf. R. Aubert, *Le pontificat de Pie IX*, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-100).

68. Cf. 1 Pt. 2, 18.

69. Some marvelous words addressed to a discouraged parish priest of Forli: "Have confidence, work hard, Christ is alive!"

70. 2 Tm. 2, 3.

71. Phil. 4, 13.

72. Cf. Heb. 13, 8.

73. This is an excerpt from the *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators*, according to the translation which Don Bosco sent to the French Cooperators. (The version which we have transcribed bears his signature.) It is a document in which he very clearly expresses his faith in

the sanctifying value of apostolic activities, when considered especially as a fight against evil, without in any way, however, excluding detachment and prayer.

74. We should note that the quotation is not from the Gospel but from Eccl. 4, 12.

ABBREVIATIONS

- A.C.S. Archivio Centrale Salesiano (Central Archives of the Salesian Society), preserved at Casa Generalizia Opere Don Bosco, Roma-Aurelio, Italy.
- Epistolario*. *Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco* (Letters of Saint John Bosco), ed., E. Ceria, Turin, 1955-59, 4 vols.
- L.C. *Lectures cattoliche* (*Catholic Readings*: A periodical founded and edited by Saint John Bosco), Turin, 1853.
- Memorie biografiche* G.B. Lemoyne, A. Amadei, and E. Ceria, *Memorie biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco*, San Benigno and Turin, 1898-1948, 20 volumes. Also in an American edition: *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, Diego Borgatello, editor-in-chief, New Rochelle, New York (Salesiana Publishers), 1956—.
- Memorie dell'Oratorio* S. Giovanni Bosco, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855* (*Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855*), ed. E. Ceria, Turin, 1946.
- Opere e scritti*. "Don Bosco." *Opere e scritti editi e inediti nuovamente pubblicati e rivveduti secondo le edizione originali e manoscritti superstiti* ("Don Bosco.") Edited and unedited works and writings, newly revised and published according to their original

editions and best manuscripts), a cura della Società Salesiana, Turin, 1929—.

*Positio super
introduzione causae.
Summarium*

Taurinem. Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Ioannis Bosco Sacerdotis . . . Positio super introductione causae. Summarium et Litterae Postulatoriae (Turin. Documents relating to the introduction of the cause of beatification and canonization of the Servant of God, John Bosco . . .), Rome, 1907.

*Positio super
virtutibus, I*

Sacra Rituum Congregatione . . . , Taurinem, Beatificationis et Canonizationis Ven. Servi Dei Sac. Ioannis Bosco . . . Positio Super virtutibus (Turin. Documents relating to the virtues, . . . beatification, and canonization of the Venerable John Bosco, Priest), Pars I, Rome, 1923.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

We have limited our bibliography to those source materials and other works which relate directly to Saint John Bosco. We have, on rare occasions, also included general works which were most suited to placing Don Bosco in the context of his times and therefore of clarifying his thought. These latter include the works of R. Aubert on the history of the Church under Pope Pius IX; of T. Chiusso, A.C. Jemolo, M. Vaussard, F. Fonzi on the history of the Church in Italy during the nineteenth century; of H. Bremond, P. Pourrat, Jean Leclercq, L. Cagnet on the history of spirituality; of E. Hocedez on the history of theology in the nineteenth century; and finally, for certain fine points of the spiritual life, J. de Guilbert, A. Stolz, and L. Bouyer

I. MANUSCRIPTS

The documented manuscripts of Saint John Bosco and related materials have been collected at the Archivio Centrale Salesiano (abbreviated A.C.S.) in Rome and are found principally in location S. 131: *Letters of Don Bosco*; S. 132: *Manuscripts of Don Bosco not intended for publication, programs and signatures*; S. 133: *Manuscripts intended for publication*; and S. 110: *Chronicles and other accounts from Salesians concerning Don Bosco*. Documents concerning the Constitutions and Regulations of the Salesian Society are in a separate section (S.02.025). Most of these have been edited or used in the *Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco* (Memorie Biografiche) and in the documentary appendices of other works by E. Ceria. Some letters and talks of Don Bosco were reported during his life-time in the *Bolletino Salesiano*. In 1963 a commission was created under the auspices of the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome to prepare a critical edition of all these documents, but we have found that works already published and Don Bosco's "autobiography" are the most helpful:

1. S. Giovanni Bosco, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1855 al 1855*, ed. E. Ceria, Turin, 1946.

2. S. Giovanni Bosco, *Epistolario*, ed. E. Ceria, Turin, 1955-1959, 4 vol.

We ought also to note the documents which make up the informative and apostolic process of beatification and canonization preserved in the Salesian Archive and in the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome. The depositions have been edited and published in:

3. *Taurinen. Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Ioannis Bosco Sacerdotis Fundatoris Piae Societatis Salesianae. Positio super introductione Causae*. Summarium et Litterae Postulatoriae, Rome, 1907.

4. *Sacra Rituum Congregatione . . . Taurinen. Beatificationis et Canonizationis Ven. Servi Dei Sac. Ioannis Bosco Fundatoris Piae Societatis Salesianae necnon Instituti Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatricis. Positio super virtutibus*. Pars I: *Summarium*, Rome, 1923.

II. PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS

Preliminary — This grouping is somewhat vague and includes both authentic works and those of questioned authenticity listed in chronological order. Therefore we have divided the list into three parts: 1. works signed or reviewed by Don Bosco; 2. works published anonymously but largely under Don Bosco's direction; and 3. works published anonymously whose origin has not been perfectly established but whose qualities are typically of Don Bosco. This division is of course subject to dispute, but it will save us the trouble of debating authenticity.

We should also note that some anonymous works were identified by Don Bosco himself as his own in the testament of July 26, 1856 (preserved in A.C.S., S. 132, and edited by A. Amadei, *Memorie Biografiche* X, 1032-33); that several works published without the author's name on the frontispiece in their first editions bore Don Bosco's name in subsequent editions; and finally that some lists of titles published in his own establishment in Turin during his lifetime attributed, rightly or wrongly, several other anonymous works to him.

Our constant point of reference is the only complete bibliography of Don Bosco to-date, found in P. Ricaldone, *Don Bosco educatore*. Colle Don Bosco, Asti (1952), II, 631-50. It has merit because it exists, although research has advanced beyond it thanks largely to Father Pietro Stella, once the archivist of the Salesian Archive in Turin, who has been kind enough to share some of his findings with us. Here we have attempted to restore the complete titles of each work in its first edition, allowing us to distinguish the anonymous texts from the

signed and to underline the important differences in subsequent editions. Translations are not generally mentioned.

1) WORKS SIGNED OR REVIEWED
BY DON BOSCO

5. *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo, morto nel seminario di Chieri, ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù, scritti da un suo collega*, Turin, 1844.

6. *Storia ecclesiastica ad uso delle scuole, utile ad ogni ceto di persone, dedicata all'Onorat.*^{mo}.

7. *Il Sistema metrico decimale ridotto a semplicità, preceduto dalle quattro prime operazioni dell'aritmetica, ad uso degli artigiani e della gente di campagna*, per cura del Sacerdote Bosco Gio., Turin, 1846 (?). Reprints: 1849², 1851⁴, 1855⁵, 1875⁶, 1881⁷. The sixth edition was titled: *L'Aritmetica e il Sistema metrico portati a semplicità . . .*

8. *Il Divoto dell'Angelo Custode*. Aggiuntevi le indulgenze concecute alla compagnia canonicamente eretta nella chiesa di S. Francesco d'Assisi in Torino, Turin, 1845.

9. *I sette dolori di Maria considerati in forma di meditazione, Anonimo*, also named *Corona dei Sette dolori di Maria, con sette brevi considerazioni sopra i medesimi esposti in forma della Via Crucis*, 3rd ed., Turin, 1871. Douteux.

10. *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio*, Turin, s.d., (around 1847). Cited: *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio. Anonimo*.

11. *Le Sei domeniche e la Novena di San Luigi Gonzaga con un cenno sulla vita del Santo*, Turin, 1846. Reprints: *Le Sei domeniche e la Novena in onore di San Luigi Gonzaga con alcune sacre lodi* (L.C.), Turin, 1854, became: *Le Sei domeniche e la Novena in onore del medesimo santo e con altre lodi sacra*, S. Pier d'Arena, 1878⁷; *id.*, Turin, 1886⁸ (L.C.), 1888⁹.

12. *Storia sacra per uso delle scuole, utile ad ogni stato di persone, arricchita di analoghe incisioni*, compilata dal Sacerdote Giovanni [sic] Bosco, Turin, 1847. Reprints: 1853², 1863³, 1866⁴, 1874⁸, 1881¹³, 1881¹⁴, 1882 (?)¹⁶.

13. *Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de'suoi doveri, degli esercizi di cristiana pietà, per la recita dell'Uffizio della Beata Vergine e de' principali vespri dell'anno, coll'aggiunta di una scelta di laudi sacre, etc.*, Turin, 1847. Reprints: 1851², 1863⁹, 1873³³, 1874³⁹, 1875⁴², 1875⁴³, 1877⁶⁵, 1878⁷⁵, 1880⁸¹, 1881⁸³, 1885¹⁰¹, 1888¹¹⁸.

14. *Il cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo de' Paoli. Opera che può servire a consacrare il mese di luglio in onore del medesimo Santo*, Turin, 1848. Reprints: 1877², 1887³.

15. *Maniera facile per imparare la Storia Sacra ad uso del popolo cristiano, con una carta geografica della Terra Santa*, per cura del Sac. Giovanni Bosco, Turin, 1850. Reprints: 1855² (L.C.), 1863³, 1877⁵, 1882⁶.

16. *Avvisi ai Cattolici*. La Chiesa Cattolica-Apostolica-Romana è la sola e vera Chiesa di Gesù Cristo, Turin, 1850. Reprinted under these titles: *Avvisi ai Cattolici*. Introduzione alle Letture Cattoliche, Turin, 1853; *Fondamenti della Cattolica Religione*, per cura del Sacerdote Giovanni Bosco, Turin, 1872.

17. *Il Cattolico istruito nella sua Religione*. Trattenimenti di un padre di famiglia co' suoi figliuoli secondo i bisogni del tempo, epilogati dal Sac. Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1853. Or: *Il Cattolico nel secolo*. Trattenimenti famigliari di un padre co' suoi figliuoli intorno alla Religione, pel Sac. Giovanni Bosco, 2nd ed., (L.C.), Turin, 1883. Reprints: 1883³, 1887⁵.

18. *Drama. Una disputa tra un avvocato ed un ministro protestante* (L.C.), Turin, 1853, or *Luigi, ossia Disputa tra un avvocato ed un ministro protestante*, esposta dal Sacerdote Giovanni Bosco, 2nd ed., Turin, 1875.

19. *Notizie storiche intorno al miracolo del SS.^{mo} Sacramento avvenuto in Torino il 6 giugno 1453, con un cenno sul quarto centenario del 1853* (L.C.), Turin, 1853.

20. *Fatti contemporanei esposti in forma di dialogo*, Turin, 1853.

21. *Conversione di una Valdese*. Fatto contemporaneo esposto dal Sac. Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1854.

22. *Raccolta di curiosi avvenimenti contemporanei*, esposti dal Sac. Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1854.

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24. *Conversazioni tra un avvocato ed un curato di campagna sul Sacramento della Confessione*, per cura del Sac. Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1855. Reprints: 1872³.

25. *Vita di San Martino, vescovo di Tours*, per cura del Sacerdote

Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1855. Reprints: 1886².

26. *La forza della buona educazione*. Curioso episodio contemporaneo, per cura del Sac. Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1855. *Pietro, ossia la Forza della buona educazione*. Curioso episodio contemporaneo, pel Sac. Giovanni Bosco, 2nd ed., Turin, 1881. Reprints: 1885 (in the *Bibliotechina dell'operaio*).

27. *La Storia d'Italia raccontata alla gioventù dai suoi primi abitatori sino ai nostri giorni, corredata da una carta geografica d'Italia*, dal Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni, Turin, 1855. Reprints: 1859², 1861³, 1863⁴, 1866⁵, 1873⁸, 1880¹⁴, 1882¹⁵, 1885¹⁶, 1887¹⁸.

28. *Vita di S. Pancrazio martire, con appendice sul santuario a Lui dedicato vicino a Pianezza* (L.C.), Turin, 1856. Reprints: 1867³, 1873⁴, 1876⁵, 1888⁶.

29. *La Chiave del Paradiso in mano al cattolico che pratica i doveri di buon cristiano*, Turin, 1856. Reprints: 1) 1857², 1872⁶, 1875³⁶, 1888⁴⁴; 2) 1874², 1881³, 1888.

30. *Vita di San Pietro, principe degli apostoli, primo Papa dopo Gesù Cristo*, per cura del Sac. Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1856 (actually: 1857). Reprinted under the title: *Il centenario di S. Pietro apostolo, colla Vita del medesimo principe degli apostoli ed un triduo di preparazione della festa dei santi apostoli Pietro e Paolo*, pel Sacerdote Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1867; Rome 1867. Under the title: *Vita di San Pietro . . .*, Turin, 1867, 1869, 1884.

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35. *Vita dei Sommi Pontefici S. Sisto, S. Telesforo, S. Igino, S. Pio I, con appendice sopra S. Giustino, apologista della Religione*, per cura del Sac. Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1857.

36. *Vita de' Sommi Pontefici S. Aniceto, S. Sotero, S. Eleutero, S. Vittore e S. Zeffirino* (L.C.), Turin, 1858.

37. *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS.^{ma} Immacolata ad uso del popolo*, pel Sacerdote Giovanni Bosco (L.C.), Turin, 1858. Reprints: 1864², 1869(?)³, 1873⁴, 1873⁵, 1873⁶, 1874⁸, 1879¹¹, 1885¹².

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39. *Vita del Sommo Pontefice S. Callisto I*, per cura del Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1858.

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44. *Vita e Martirio de' Sommi Pontefici San Lucio I e Santo Stefano I*, per cura del Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1860.

45. *Rimembranza storico funebre dei giovani dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales verso il Sacerdote Caffasso Giuseppe, loro insigne benefattore*, per Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni, Turin, 1860.

46. *Biografia del Sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri*, del Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1860.

47. *Il Pontificato di San Sisto II e le glorie di San Lorenzo Martire*, per cura del Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1860.

48. *Una famiglia di Martiri, ossia Vita dei Santi Martiri Mario, Marta, Audiface ed Abaco e loro martirio con appendice sul Santuario ad essi dedicato presso Caselette*, per cura del Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1861.

49. *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele, allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, per cura del Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1861. Reprints: C. 1866², 1880³.

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51. *Il Pontificato di S. Felice primo e di S. Eutichiano, Papi e martiri*, per cura del Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1862.

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Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1863.

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55. *Il Pontificato di S. Marcellino e di S. Marcello, Papi e martiri*, per cura del Sacerdote Bosco Giovanni (L.C.), Turin, 1864.

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