



# DOMINIC SAVIO

TEENAGE APOSTLE

SAINT

*TERENCE O'BRIEN S.D.B.*

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Terence O'Brien, S.D.B.

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**GUILD PUBLICATIONS**  
30 Orbel Street London, S.W.11.

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MADE AND PRINTED  
IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
THE BURLEIGH PRESS  
LEWINS MEAD BRISTOL  
AND PUBLISHED BY  
GUILD PUBLICATIONS  
30 ORBEL STREET  
LONDON S.W.11

1969

## INTRODUCTION

THE idea and purpose of this book are brought out by St. John Bosco's Preface and the observations on it. I would simply like to add that, from work I have done over the past twenty-five years and in particular these last few years, I know only too well the enormous difficulties children and young people find themselves in on the one hand and on the other, the feeling of helplessness which often seizes on those who have to deal with them. This results from the realization that inevitably comes of the depth and intensity of the problems as they exist for the young and their own inability to make any contact in depth or evoke any real response, in spite of sincere and painstaking effort to do so.

We all need reassuring in depth (a) that the Christian life is really a **complete** way of life today both for ourselves and our children, and (b) that it is possible in practice to form our children to it.

I mean of course the Christian life properly understood in relation to the total person, and not just a series of religious practices added to everyday life.

Much work and experience in the field of psychology have made it very clear to me that the Christian life, again, may I say it, understood in depth and in relation to the whole person, offers the only **complete** way of development and fulfilment for a human being, whether young or adult. We have been afraid to commit both our children and ourselves to the totality of the Christian life. This is also because we have not really understood how to do it.

This is not just a spiritual difficulty but also a psychological one.

This book, endeavouring to show through Dominic's life that the child can develop totally through the Christian life will I hope be an encouragement and help to all those who work for the young and who are so sincerely dedicated in their endeavours for them.

Terence O'Brien, S.D.B.

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PART ONE

DOMINIC'S LIFE  
as told by  
ST. JOHN BOSCO

## PREFACE

My Dear Boys,

You yourselves have often asked me to write you something about Dominic Savio, and having done what I could to satisfy your earnest wishes, here then is his life briefly and simply written.

There have been two difficulties in particular in writing this life for you. The first one is the talk generally aroused by writing about things which many people still living saw and heard. I think I have got over this by only writing about those things which we ourselves saw. The second one was that, since Dominic lived here for three years, I have had to speak about myself in different ways. I have tried to overcome this by treating things in as historical a way as possible. If, however, in spite of this I seem to refer to myself unduly, regard it as resulting from the great affection I have for Dominic and for you all; this makes me talk freely to you and have no secrets from you.

You might ask me why it is I have written Dominic's life and not that of some of the other boys who were so marvellous and whom you were so fond of—Louis Rua, Gabriel Fascio, John Massaglia come quickly to mind, apart from many others. It is quite true that the goodness of these boys would make their lives very well worth writing, but Dominic stood out even above these. In any case, I have it in mind with God's help to write something about them for you, so that you can do the same as they did.

In the meantime, reading about Dominic's life, say to yourselves what the great St. Augustine said in similar circumstances, "Si ille cur non ego?" That is, if a boy of my age, just like me in every way, who had to meet the same temptations as I have to, could follow Christ with such courage and wholeheartedness, why should I not do the same? Remember that true religion does not mean simply saying things, but doing them. If you read something that you admire, don't content yourself with saying: "This is smashing"; say rather, "I am going to do the same".

May God give you and all those who read this little book the grace to benefit from it. May the Blessed Virgin whom Dominic loved so much, grant that we may, all of us, love God with all our heart and soul, for He alone deserves all our love and service.

Don Bosco.

## CHAPTER 1

DOMINIC's parents, Charles and Brigid Savio, were poor and hard working people and belonged to Castelnuovo d'Asti, a little town about ten miles from Turin. In 1841 they went to live in Riva near Chieri because of the shortage of work in their home town. At Riva Charles Savio worked as a blacksmith and it was here that their first child was born on April 2nd, 1842. At baptism he was called Dominic: they little realized then how completely their son was to live up to his name.

When Dominic was two years old his parents decided to return to their native place and they found a home at Murialdo on the outskirts of Castelnuovo d'Asti.

His parents dearly loved their son and had only one idea—to bring him up as a good Christian. Dominic was naturally good, with a heart which was a fertile field for the things of God. He learned his morning and night prayers readily and could already say them by himself when he was only four years old. He was constantly beside his mother, eager to help her in every way. If he did go away sometimes, it was only to go into some corner and try to say some prayers.

His parents say that at the age when children find it very difficult to keep still, and are always wanting to touch and pull things about, Dominic never gave them any bother in this way, but was always trying to bring joy to their hearts and a smile to their faces.

When his father came home at night from work, Dominic would run to meet him, take his hand, or jump up into his arms. When they were in the house he would get his father's slippers and make a great fuss of him, giving him such a welcome that his father used to look forward to returning home just for the pleasure he got from his little son.

His love did not stop at his parents; his love of God was older than his years. He wanted to say his prayers and never had to be reminded, much less driven, to say them at night and before and after meals. Rather was it he who reminded others, should they happen to forget. One day, distracted by some unusual event, his parents sat down to the meal without saying any grace. Dominic immediately said, "Daddy, we have not said our grace yet", and began himself to make the sign of the Cross and say the prayer.

On another occasion there was a visitor in the house, who was asked to stay to dinner. When the meal was put on the table, the

man sat down and began eating without making the sign of the Cross or saying any prayer. Dominic did not presume to correct the visitor, but left the table and stayed away until the visitor had gone. When asked by his parents why he had acted in this very unusual way, he said, "I did not like to be at table with one who eats just like animals do".

## CHAPTER 2

IN this chapter there are facts which some might find it difficult to believe. In giving them I quote from a statement given me by Dominic's parish priest.

"Soon after I came to Murialdo," he writes, "I often saw a little boy about five years old coming into the church with his mother. I was very struck with the serenity of his face and his unaffected piety, and I was not surprised that others noticed the same. If when he came to church in the morning it was locked, he would quietly kneel down and say his prayers, instead of beginning to play about in some way or other as boys of his age would do. It did not matter if the ground was muddy or the snow was thick on it, he knelt down just the same. Curious to know who he was, I made enquiries and found out that he was the son of the blacksmith, Charles Savio.

If ever I met him on the road he would wave while still some distance away and his face would light up with a smile. At school he made rapid progress not simply because he was clever, but also because he tried very hard. Some of the boys he had to mix with were rather rowdy and far from good, but I never saw him quarrelling. If they did try to involve him in some disturbance, he would patiently hold on and at the first opportunity quietly slip away. If they wanted him to join with them in robbing orchards, damaging property, making fun of old people or similar things, he not only refused, but stated very convincingly why he thought it was wrong to do so.

This spirit of piety did not drop off him as he grew older. He was only five years old when he learned to serve Mass and he always did so with great attention. He tried to be at Mass every day, and if there was someone else to serve, he would hear Mass from the benches. As he was rather small, he could not reach the missal when it was on the altar. It brought a smile to one's lips to see him anxiously coming up to the altar, standing on tip-toe and reaching as far as he could in the endeavour to get hold of the missal stand. If the priest saying Mass wanted to please him, he must on no account change the missal over himself, but pull the stand right to the edge, where Dominic could get hold of it and carry it in triumph to the other side.

After his first confession he used to go regularly and frequently. Seeing how grace was working in his soul so marvellously, I often thought to myself, "What promise there is here for the future; may God open up the way for him to reach the heights he is capable of attaining."

### CHAPTER 3

NOTHING stood in the way of Dominic's being allowed to make his First Communion. He knew the First Communion catechism by heart, and understood very well what the Holy Eucharist was. He had also a great desire to receive Jesus into his heart. There was only one difficulty, his age. At that time boys and girls did not normally make their First Communion until they were eleven or twelve years old. Dominic was only seven. To look at him, he seemed even younger, and so the parish priest hesitated to put him forward. He sought advice from some of the other priests and they, knowing Dominic's state, said that he need not hesitate. The way was now clear and Dominic was told that he could make his First Holy Communion.

It is not easy to describe the joy which filled him at this news. He ran home trembling with excitement and joy to tell his mother. Much of his time was given to praying and reading; he made many visits to the Blessed Sacrament and it seemed as though he was trying to outrival the angels in his devotion.

The evening before he went to his mother and said: "Mother, tomorrow I am receiving Jesus in Holy Communion for the first time; forgive me for anything I have done to displease you in the past: I promise you I am going to be a much better boy in every way." Having said this, he burst into tears. So did his mother, as she put her arms round him, unable to say anything except: "Pray for me and for your Daddy; pray that God may keep you always his own."

Dominic was up early next morning, dressed himself in his best clothes and hastened off to church. It was not yet opened so he knelt down on the steps, as was his custom, and tried to pray. With Confession, preparation, thanksgiving and sermon, the service lasted five hours. Dominic was the first in church and the last to leave. Time seemed to mean nothing to him and he scarcely seemed to know whether he was on earth or in heaven.

It was a wonderful and never-to-be-forgotten day for him; it was a renewal of his life for God, a life that can be taken as an example by anyone. If one got him to talk about his First Communion several years later, his face lit up with joy and happiness as he said:

“That was the happiest and most wonderful day of my life”. He made some promises on that day which he preserved carefully in a little book, and often re-read them. He let me have this little book to look at and I give them here just as he wrote them.

“Promises made by me, Dominic Savio, when I made my First Communion at the age of seven years:—

1. I will go often to Confession and I will go to Holy Communion as often as I am allowed.
2. I will try to give the Sundays and holy days completely to God.
3. My best friends will be Jesus and Mary.
4. Death, but not sin.”

These promises were the guiding light of his life until he died.

If among those who read this book there are any who have yet to make their First Communion, I would urge them strongly to try to do as Dominic did; to let him inspire them in their preparation and all that they do. With all my heart too I recommend to parents, teachers and all those who are responsible for the young, to give the greatest importance to this great act. Be assured that the First Communion very well made is a solid moral foundation for the rest of the child's life. It will certainly be an extraordinary thing to find anyone who has made this great act with real devotion and care and has afterwards gone astray. On the other hand there are thousands of young people who have gone astray and who are the despair of their parents and those responsible for them; I would not hesitate to say that the trouble began with the little or no real preparation for their First Communion. It is better to delay making it, or not to make it at all, than to make it badly.

## CHAPTER 4

It was clearly high time for Dominic to go to another school as he had gone as far as he could in the little village school. Both his parents and himself desired this very much, but they had not the money which would make this possible. They could only turn to God and ask him to make it possible. “If I were only a bird,” Dominic would say sometimes, “I would fly morning and evening to Castelnuovo, and so I would be able to carry on with my lessons.”

His keen desire finally overcame all difficulties, and it was decided that he should go to the county school, although this was about three miles away. Dominic cheerfully walked the six miles there and back every day. The varieties of weather, the dust and the very hot sun in summer, mud, rain, storms and fierce winds at other times of the year, never got him down or stopped him from going to school,

although he was barely ten years old when he started. A local farmer used sometimes to see Dominic on the road, and one afternoon when the sun was beating down mercilessly he approached the boy and started talking.

“Aren’t you afraid to be on your own on this lonely road, especially in the dark winter evening?”

“But I am not alone: my guardian angel is with me.”

“But don’t you get fed up having to go backwards and forwards in heat like this?”

“No, I am doing it for a Master who pays well.”

“Oh, who is that?”

“Jesus, who rewards even a cup of water given for his sake.”

The farmer used often to recount this incident and prophesy a great future for Dominic.

Some of his school companions were not very good, and on one occasion he was in grave danger of doing wrong. In the hot weather some of the boys used to go swimming in the river and other places where water was available. Bathing has its physical dangers and, not infrequently, the death by drowning of young people and adults has to be lamented. It can also have its dangers for the soul in certain circumstances, when boys are stripped together and have little care and respect for each other.

Dominic was persuaded by some of his companions to go swimming with them on one occasion. But when he saw what was done and said, he was profoundly grieved and made up his mind never to go again.

A short time afterwards two of the same boys came to him again.

“Dominic, are you going to play?”

“What are you going to play at?”

“We’re going swimming.”

“I’m not going. I am afraid of being drowned.”

“Come on, be a sport: we’ll have a great time and feel much fresher in this heat.”

“But I am afraid.”

“Don’t be afraid. We’ll teach you, and soon you will be swimming like a fish, and leaping about like the rest of us.”

“But is it not wrong to go to such a dangerous place to swim?”

“Not at all. If so many go, how can it be wrong?”

“Still, I feel uneasy about it and don’t know what to say.”

“Come on, take our word for it, we’ll look after you.”

“I think I’ll go to ask my mother if it is all right for me to go.”

“Don’t be stupid—don’t say anything to your Mum. She won’t let you go, and she will also tell our parents and we will be in for a good hiding.”

“Well if my Mum would not let me go, I’m not going. In any case if you want the truth I’ll tell you. I went once before, but never

again; not simply because it is easy to get drowned there, but more still because from what I saw last time it is also easy to offend God; so don't talk to me any more about swimming. In any case if your parents don't want you to go, you know you should not go. God punishes children who disobey their parents."

Thus did Dominic answer the harmful suggestions of his companions and in doing so avoided a grave danger through which, if he had allowed himself to go, he might well have lost his innocence, the loss of which leads on to so many sad consequences.

## CHAPTER 5

FROM his experiences at this school Dominic learned how to determine his relationship with the other boys. If he saw one who did his best, was obedient, tried hard at his lessons, he made him his friend. Those who were always giving trouble, making no effort to learn, ready with bad talk and such like, he avoided completely. Those who were in between he tried to help, if he could, in whatever way was possible; but he never became intimate with them.

Dominic's life at the school at Castelnuovo can be a model and an inspiration for any boy who wants to get on, to follow God and also prepare himself for life. I give here what Don Allora, the priest who was the head of this excellent school, wrote about him:—

"I am very glad to write what I know about Dominic Savio, who in a very short time won my admiration and esteem. I have an un-failing memory of his exemplary life and happy disposition.

"I cannot say very much about his piety and devotion as he was excused from taking part in the school religious services, on account of his living so far away.

He passed the entrance examination with distinction and was admitted on June 21st, the feast of St. Aloysius, Patron of Youth. He was not very strong physically, but he had a very pleasant appearance and was very well mannered. He was always cheerful and good tempered and never imposed himself on anyone. He made a very good impression on his teachers by his diligence and made up for some of the others who never bothered or showed interest, no matter what was done for them. He lived up to his name not only in his lessons, but in everything he did and said. (The English equivalent of Dominic's name would be Wisdom or Wiseman). Right from the first moment he made progress in his studies. He quickly got to the top of his class and remained there getting high marks in all subjects. This was not simply because he was clever but because he worked very hard and came to have a great love for his lessons. It was also because his studies were not simply for himself but for God.

“Although he was not very strong physically he never missed a day off school. It should be remembered that he had over two miles to walk four times a day in the mud, snow and cold of the winter and the oftentimes intense heat of the summer.

“I had great hopes for Dominic and it was with great regret that I saw him go away. His parents had to move to another district and so it was necessary for him to leave; I was afraid that for one reason or another he might not be able to continue with his studies; this would have been a tragedy for so wonderful a boy.

“It was a great joy for me when I heard later that he had been accepted at the St. Francis de Sales school; I knew that there he would have great opportunities both for his mind and soul.”

Thus the testimony of Don Allora.

## CHAPTER 6

It seems that Divine Providence wanted to help Dominic to realize that this world is a place of exile where we have no resting place. It may be, on the other hand, that it was God's design that he should be known in as many places as possible, so that his goodness and strong virtue might be a source of inspiration to all who saw him.

Towards the end of 1852 his parents left Murialdo and set up house in Mondonio, a village near Castelnuovo. Here Dominic continued the same way of life. His teacher, Don Cugliero, among other things had this to say about him:

“I can truthfully say that in twenty years of teaching boys I have never had one to equal Dominic. He was only a boy in age but he had the sense and judgment of a fully mature man. He was very diligent and applied himself to his lessons, and his good naturedness and readiness to help won him the affection both of his companions and teachers. I could not help marvelling at the way he could fix his attention in church, and I often said to myself, ‘This is certainly an innocent boy, whose heart and affections are already in heaven’.”

The following is an incident recounted by Don Cugliero. “One day an incident took place at the school of so serious a nature that expulsion was the obvious punishment for those responsible. The culprits realized this and sought to save themselves by coming to me and laying all the blame on Dominic. I could not imagine that the boy had done anything so stupid, but his accusers were so insistent and emphatic about it that I believed them. I was very annoyed and went to the classroom. I left the boys in no doubt as to what I thought about the whole affair, and then I turned to Dominic and minced no words in telling him off, saying that he deserved to be expelled and that he would have been, had it not been the first time

he had done such a thing, and that he should make sure it would be the last time. Dominic did not say a word, but stood there with his head bowed, accepting humbly all that was said to him.

"God, however, protects the innocent, and next day it came out who the real culprits were. Somewhat ashamed of all the abuse I had heaped on his head, I took him aside and asked him: 'Why did you not tell me you were not responsible?' He replied: 'I knew that these boys had already been up to so much mischief that this would certainly earn them expulsion, and I thought I would try to save them, as I probably would not be expelled, seeing that it was my very first time . . . also, I remembered that Jesus had been blamed unjustly and had not said anything, and I thought I should do the same.'

"No more was said, but all admired Dominic's patience, which was able to return good for evil and was even ready to accept serious punishment to save those who had told such lies about him."

## CHAPTER 7

WHAT follows in the succeeding pages can be given with more detail, because I shall be dealing with things which happened before my own eyes and also in the presence of many boys who can bear testimony to their truth. This period begins in 1854 when Don Cugliero, already mentioned, came to see me about one of his pupils. "You may have in your house," he said, "boys equally good and clever, but there are none who are better than him. Give him a chance and you will find you have another St Aloysius."

It was arranged that Dominic should come to see me when next I visited the Becchi. It was my custom to spend a few days there each year with some of my boys round about the time of the feast of the most holy Rosary.

It was on the morning of the first Monday of October that I saw a boy coming towards me with his father. His serene expression, and charming but respectful manner captured my gaze.

"Who are you and where do you come from?"

"I am Dominic Savio about whom Don Cugliero has spoken to you and I have come with my father from Mondonio."

I took him aside and asked him about himself and his studies. We found common ground immediately and a relationship of trust and mutual confidence sprang up spontaneously.

I recognized in him a soul where the Holy Spirit reigned supreme, and I marvelled at the way grace had already worked in his young heart and mind.

We talked together for quite a time and, as I was going to call his father over, Dominic said to me:

“Well, Father, what do you think? Will you take me to Turin to study?”

“Well, I think there is good stuff in you.”

“Good stuff for what?”

“To make a beautiful garment for Our Blessed Lord.”

“Wonderful! I am the cloth and you are the tailor. You will work on me to make something beautiful for Jesus.”

I then said that I wondered if he were strong enough for a long course of studies.

“Don’t worry, Father, Our Blessed Lord has helped me so far and I am sure he will continue to do so.”

“And what are you going to do when you finish school?”

“I should love to be a priest, if that were God’s will.”

“Very good. And now let’s try a little intelligence test. Take this little book, go over this page, learn it by heart and tomorrow come back and both explain it to me and recite it by heart.”

I then left him free to go and play with the other boys while I had a talk with his father. No more than ten minutes had gone by when suddenly Dominic appeared, smiling, by my side.

“If you wish I will repeat my lesson now.”

I took the book and, to my surprise, he not only recited the page by heart but explained simply and clearly the meaning, showing that he understood it very well.

“Splendid,” I said, “you have been quick and so shall I. I will take you to Turin, and from this moment I consider you one of my chosen sons. From now onwards, often ask Jesus to help us both to do God’s holy will in all things.”

Not knowing how better to express his happiness and his gratitude he took my hand and kissed it several times and then said:

“I hope always to act in such a way that you will never have reason to complain of me.”

## CHAPTER 8

It is characteristic of youth to change suddenly. Not infrequently does it happen that what today is wonderful is far from being so tomorrow. At one time a boy can show great promise and soon after he can act in a way that would show the exact opposite. And if one is not careful, a career that began with the highest hopes can end with disappointment and sorrow to all concerned. It was not so with Dominic. All the virtues which had begun to grow at different stages of his life now continued their growth in a wonderful way, without any of them impeding the others.

As soon as he arrived at the Oratory (Don Bosco’s school), he came immediately to my room in order to put himself completely in

my hands. Almost immediately his gaze fell on the wall where a piece of cardboard displayed in large letters a saying which I often used: 'DA MIHI ANIMAS CETERA TOLLE'. He looked at them attentively and I helped him to translate them as follows: 'Give me souls, and take away everything else'. He thought for a moment and then said: "I understand; here you do business not with money, but with souls; I hope that my soul will have its share in this business."

For a time his life was quite ordinary. He studied very hard and was very faithful in carrying out the school rules. He always listened to talks and sermons with great joy, as he was already convinced that the word of God was a sure guide along the road to heaven. He was not worried if sometimes they were a bit long. If there was anything he did not understand, he never hesitated to ask for further explanations. This was the root and source of his exemplary life and steady progress in virtue which could hardly have been surpassed.

In order to make sure that he understood well the rules and discipline of the school, he went to one of the masters and asked him to help and advise him how best to be faithful to them and to correct him if he neglected any of his duties.

His relations with his companions showed the same wisdom. He refused to have anything to do with those who were rowdy, disobedient and who showed little respect for the things of God. He made friends with those who tried hard, made good use of their time and were a source of good example and good spirit in the school.

December 8th, feast of the Immaculate Conception, was drawing near. It was the Rector's custom to say a little word of encouragement and exhortation to the boys so as to prepare them to keep the feast in a way worthy of Mary most holy. He insisted especially that they should ask Mary for the grace they had greatest need of.

That year, 1854, the whole Catholic world was in a state of excitement because of the approaching definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception at Rome. At the Oratory we did our very best to keep the feast with fitting solemnity and devotion.

Dominic was among those who had a great desire to keep the feast very well. He wrote out nine deeds to be done in honour of Our Lady and drew out one by lot each day. He prepared himself well, and made a general confession so that his soul might be as pleasing as possible to Mary most holy.

On the eve of the feast he went to Our Lady's altar and, on the advice of his Rector, renewed the promises he had made at his First Communion, and then he repeated many times:

"O Mary, I give you my heart; please keep it always as your own. O Jesus and Mary, be always my friends. Please, please, rather let me die, than that I should ever offend you seriously."

So he took Mary as the guide of his spiritual life, and with such effective results that I began from that time to note down the different incidents or facts of his life, so that I should not forget them.

I have thought it better in what follows to group together the various facts according to their relationship with each other, and not just to give them in chronological order as they happened. This will make for greater clearness and understanding. Accordingly I will divide the remainder into as many chapters as there are matters to be treated of, beginning with his classical studies which were the chief reason for his coming to the Oratory.

## CHAPTER 9

DOMINIC had begun his Latin at Mondonio and, with the progress he made by his hard work and more than ordinary intelligence, he was very soon moved from the first into the second form. Here he came under the care of Don Joseph Bonzanino, because as I had little help in those days, I had to send some of the boys out each day to his school. I will tell you about some of the things which arose out of this.

Don Bonzanino said on a number of occasions that he could not remember having had a better pupil than Dominic, one who was more attentive, more docile, more respectful. His clothes were poor, but he was always neat and clean and his manners and bearing were easily equal to those of boys who came from richer and nobler families. These boys eagerly made friends with Dominic and accepted him as an equal, being drawn by his manners and good qualities. Whenever there was a boy who was a bit scatter-brained and talkative the teacher would put him beside Dominic, and his influence and example would lead the boy to better behaviour and application.

It was during the course of this year that an incident took place which shows clearly the heroic stuff of which Dominic was made. Two of the boys fell out very badly and they became so angry with each other that they determined not only to have a fight but to have a duel with stones, that is, to stand at a distance from each other with a pile of stones and throw them at each other until one of them was badly injured. Dominic got to hear of it, but he wondered how he could manage to stop the duel, as the boys were both older and much stronger than he was.

He tried to reason with them and persuade them to give up and become friends again. They refused. He threatened to report them, and thereby get it stopped, but this only increased their anger and determination to have it out at all costs. Dominic was very worried both on account of the serious injury which was likely to happen and also for the serious offence against God.

When they were about to go off to a quiet spot for the duel, he went to them and asked them to agree to one condition.

"What is it?"

"I will only tell you when you are ready to begin."

"You are trying to fool us or you are going to bring someone to try to stop us."

"I should, but I promise you I will not."

They agreed and the three of them went off together. Dominic had quite a job to stop them from attacking each other on the way. When they reached the appointed place Dominic, without saying a word, let them go ahead with their preparations, and then, when they stood ready at a little distance from each other, each with his pile of stones beside him and a stone in his hand to begin with, he said:

"Now I want you to keep your promise," and so saying he took out a little crucifix which he carried under his shirt, and holding it high in his hands he said:

"I want each of you to look at this crucifix and throw the first stone at me, saying clearly these words: 'Jesus Christ who was innocent died forgiving his enemies; I, a sinner, am going to offend him by this deliberate act of revenge.'"

Then he ran to the first boy and, kneeling before him said:

"Throw the first stone at me."

The boy began to tremble and said:

"No, no, I have nothing against you, and would be only too willing to defend you against anyone else."

Then he went to the other boy.

"You throw the first stone at me."

"No, never: you are my friend; I would never do a thing like that."

Then Dominic rose to his feet and standing between them with his crucifix and a stern look on his face said:

"There you are; because I am your friend, you would not throw a stone at me who am only a poor creature. But yet you are ready with this terrible act of revenge to offend Jesus who is not only your best friend but God also, and who shed the last drop of his blood for you."

He stood there motionless between them with his crucifix held high, and the boys, shaken to the depths of their being, dropped their stones and hung their heads in shame.

One of the boys said later:

"At that moment I was shaken to the depths and began to shiver all over. I felt thoroughly ashamed that a boy like Dominic had had to go so far to make me see sense. I had no difficulty in forgiving my companion and I asked Dominic to take me to some understanding priest to whom I could make a good confession and do better in the future."

Dominic never mentioned anything about this incident and nothing

would have been known of the part he played in it, if the boys concerned had not related all that happened to their companions.

For boys from the country not very used to the excitement and varied activity of the town, going backwards and forwards to school from the Oratory had its dangers and difficulties. Dominic used it as an opportunity to do something for Our Blessed Lord. He carried out implicitly whatever was laid down by his superiors, and made the journey without letting his eyes roam everywhere or his ears listen to things that were far from good. He did not let himself be drawn into mischievous pranks, or waste time in the silly escapades that easily suggest themselves to schoolboys.

"I enjoy myself most in doing what is expected of me and, if you are really my friends, you will help me to do this and not the opposite," he would say, if some silly prank were suggested.

Nevertheless he was nearly caught out one day when the group he was with decided to play truant and spend the day at the fair which had come to the town. Dominic had agreed and had started off with them, when he suddenly realized what it was he was doing, and refused to go any farther.

"I am going to school. If we stay away we are displeasing God and also our superiors. I am sorry I agreed to do wrong, and I hope this is the last time you will try to persuade me to follow you in doing wrong. If it is not, we will not be friends any more." Dominic won the other boys over and they all went to school, and there was no more trouble in the future.

At the end of the year his hard work won him promotion to a higher class, but, when the new school year began, it was decided to let him study privately at the Oratory, as he seemed to be failing in health. In this way it was felt he could be better looked after.

This plan succeeded and when he came to pass into the next class his health was very much improved. He was sent to attend the classes of Don Matteo. These were considered to be among the best in Turin, and Dominic was admitted free, because of the high opinion this good priest already had of him.

## CHAPTER 10

WE come now to a decisive point in Dominic's life. When he had been about six months at Don Bosco's School, he heard a talk about an easy way to become a saint. The preacher made three points. 1. That it is God's will that each one should become a saint. 2. That it is easy to become a saint. 3. That there is a great reward waiting in heaven for those who try to become saints.

This talk penetrated deeply into Dominic's soul. It was like a spark that set off into a consuming blaze the love of God in his heart. For some days he said nothing, going about very quietly without his usual joyful spirit. His companions noticed this, and I did also. My first thought was that he was not feeling well, and I asked him was there something wrong.

"No", he said, "it is something good."

"What do you mean?"

"I feel that I must become a saint. I never saw before that it was both possible and easy. Now that I see it, I can have no peace inside until I really begin to do so. Please, will you help me?"

I praised Dominic's good desires but urged him not to let himself get too worked up, because in that state it is not easy to know what God wants. I said to him that for the moment he should regain his customary cheerfulness, persevere in his regular life of study and piety, and especially not neglect to be with his companions in games and recreation.

I said to him one day that I would like to make him a present of something that would please him, and that I left the choice completely to him.

His prompt and immediate reply was:

"I want you to help me to become a saint. I want to give up everything to Jesus and for always. If I am not trying to be a saint, I am doing nothing at all. I will not have any peace if I don't keep on trying."

On another occasion I wanted to show my affection for the boys and make them a little present, so I said that they could ask me for whatever they wished and, if it were possible, I would give it to them. The requests were to be written down, and it can be imagined that there were some strange and bizarre requests made by some of the boys. On a piece of paper I received from Dominic were these words:

"I ask one thing only, that you help me to save my soul and make me a saint."

Another day explanations were being given about the meaning of words.

"What does Dominic mean?" he asked.

The reply was: "Belonging to God."

"There you are," he said, "you see how right I am in asking you to make me a saint. Even my name says that I belong to God, so I must at all costs become one. I can't be happy if I do not."

This 'bee in his bonnet' that Dominic had about becoming a saint, did not spring from the fact that he was not living a saintly life but from the fact that he wanted to go the whole way, including severe penances and long hours in prayer, and his Rector would not allow these on any account.

## CHAPTER 11

THE first advice Dominic was given to help him to become a saint, was to set out to win souls for God, because there is no holier work in this life than to work for the good of souls for whom Jesus Christ shed the last drop of his blood. Dominic grasped this completely and often was heard to say:

“How happy I would be if only I could win all my companions for God.”

He never let slip any occasion of giving a friendly word of advice or of quietly recalling to duty anyone who said or did anything contrary to God’s law.

What really shook him, affecting him even physically, was hearing any form of blasphemy or God’s name being taken in vain. If, going through the streets, he happened to hear anything of the kind, he bowed his head in sorrow and reparation, saying fervently to himself: “Praised be Jesus Christ.”

One day when they were walking through the town a companion noticed him taking off his cap and murmuring something to himself.

“What are you doing? What did you say?”

“Did you not hear that carter, cursing and swearing? If I thought it would have done any good I would have spoken to the man, but as he is in a temper I am afraid it would only make things worse. So I was trying to make a little act of reparation by taking my cap off and saying: ‘Praised be Jesus Christ.’”

His companion was very moved at hearing this, and to this day never tires of inspiring others by telling them about it.

One day on his way back from school he heard an elderly man utter a horrible blasphemy. He trembled when he heard it and said his short prayer. Then, on a sudden, he went to the man and with great respect and politeness asked him if he could tell him the way to the St Francis de Sales School. The man was completely taken by the boy’s charm and politeness, and said very affably:

“I am very sorry, I am afraid I have no idea.”

“Oh,” said Dominic, “I wonder, since you can’t do that, could you do me another favour?”

“Certainly, certainly. What is it?”

Dominic then went very close to the man, and speaking softly into his ear he said:

“Do you think that, when you are in a temper, you could say something else instead of blasphemies about God?”

The man was both astonished and full of admiration for the boy, and said:

“Well said; you are quite right. I see that I have a very bad habit and I promise you I will try to overcome it.”

Another day, near the gates of the school, he came across two boys of about nine years old, quarrelling. While doing so, one of them used the Holy Name of Jesus in a curse against the other. Dominic felt justly indignant, but, restraining himself, he separated the two boys and got them to make peace. Then he said to the one who had sworn:

“Come with me. I’ve something special for you.”

The boy agreed and Dominic took him by the hand and led him into church. He led him to the high altar and then, kneeling down beside him, he said:

“Tell Jesus you are sorry for having taken his Holy Name in vain.” As the boy did not know the act of contrition, he said it with him. Then he said: “In reparation say after me: ‘Praised be Jesus Christ. May his holy and adorable name be always praised.’”

Among the lives of the saints his preference was for those who stood out for their work for souls. He spoke readily of those on the missions who endure so much to save souls. He had no money to send them, but he prayed for them every day and never failed to offer his Holy Communion once a week. Several times I heard him say:

“How many souls there are in England waiting for our help. If only I were strong enough and good enough, I would go there immediately and by preaching and example try to win them all for our Blessed Lord.”

He also often remarked with grief how little help children received to know and love God.

“As soon as I am a seminarian, I will go to Mondonio and get the children together so that I can teach them their catechism, tell them stories and encourage them to become saints. How many young people may perhaps lose their souls, for want of instruction and encouragement.”

These were not only words. He used to teach catechism at the Sunday school and on other occasions. And he would coach individual boys privately at any time they wanted, gladly giving up his recreation for this purpose. He was always happy if he could speak to them of God and lead them to an understanding of the wonder and value of their immortal soul. One day a light-headed companion made fun of him for telling a good story to a group of boys.

“Why do you bother telling stories like those?” he said.

“Why do I bother?” replied Dominic. “I bother because we are all brothers and we should all help each other in the most important thing of all, the saving of our souls, which cost the blood of Jesus. I bother because God himself has urged us to do this and because I know also that, if I can succeed in saving one soul, I will make sure of saving my own.”

This concern for others was not simply a term-time one. During the holidays when he was at home he kept up his good work. Any

little gifts he got, or prizes that he won during the term time, were set aside carefully so that he could use them during the holiday to gain the good will of the boys and to encourage them to do better. He would also make the rounds of his superiors before he went home, to ask them if they had any little things to spare, which he might take home with him, "to make my companions happy".

Very soon after he got home he would be in touch with many boys, big and small. He would give out his presents and discreetly find out how things were going on.

With the ascendancy he gained over them he could get boys to go with him to Mass, to Sunday school and so on; and these were boys who otherwise would not have gone.

He would show great patience in getting a boy to make the sign of the cross well and with real devotion, and encourage him with the promise of a little present. He had a great desire to see the sign of the cross well made, and was never shy to make it well in front of others, so as to encourage them to do likewise.

He took under his special care two little boys living nearby, teaching them to read and write and to learn their catechism. He would say morning and night prayers with them and take them to church, show them how to bless themselves properly with holy water, and how to behave well while there. Time that he might have legitimately spent in walks and various pastimes was spent in helping others, by word or by any other means possible. He made a point of making a visit to the Blessed Sacrament every day, and it was a great joy for him when he managed to get someone to come with him. It may be safely said that he never let slip any occasion of helping anyone or of speaking a word which could do good to a soul.

This apostolate was not, of course, made an excuse for neglecting any of his obligations or duties. He fulfilled them all with great care.

## CHAPTER 12

THE thought of winning souls to God never left him. He was the life of the games in the time of recreation but in everything he somehow or other made them serve not only the body but also the soul. He did not monopolize the conversation or keep butting in, but if silence came he was always ready with something interesting, a difficulty which had cropped up in class or an interesting story. The others were always glad to be with him. If someone started grumbling or criticizing, he would raise a laugh over something else and so distract them and dispel the word of criticism.

His cheerful smile and spirit of zest made him popular also with those who were not too fond of religious things. They were always

glad to be in his company and whenever he gently chided them it was taken in good part.

On one occasion a companion wanted Dominic to go with him and 'dress up'. Dominic would not go, and said to the boy:

"Would you really like to be what you are going to dress up as—two horns, a big nose and a clown's costume?"

"Of course not", replied the other.

"Well, why make yourself look like something you would not want to be and in addition deface the nice face that God has given you?"

Another time a stranger came into the playground. He soon had a group around him which quickly became a crowd as the laughter of the boys at his stories attracted more and more. As soon as he had a crowd he changed his tune and was soon trying to poison the minds of the boys with all sorts of horrors, including making fun of holy things and persons. Some of the boys moved off when they heard this but more still stayed on, hanging on his words as though hypnotized. At this moment Dominic came along and as soon as he grasped what was on, cried out:

"Come on, let's get away from this unfortunate man who wants to ruin us."

The spell was broken and all the boys, obedient to a friend whom they loved and respected, scattered, leaving the man talking to the air. He was never seen again.

On another occasion some wanted to go off swimming. This, without due care, can be dangerous anywhere, in more senses than one, and it is especially so round Turin where there is deep and fast-moving water, claiming many young victims each year. Dominic heard about it and tried to make them forget it by occupying their time with him in an interesting way. But when he saw that their minds were made up he spoke out boldly.

"Don't go, it's better not to."

"But we are not doing any harm."

"You are being disobedient, you are putting yourselves in danger and running the risk of getting drowned and you say you are not doing any harm!"

"Yes, but this heat is terrible."

"Maybe, but it is not as hot as another place I know, and what will you do if you end up there?"

Moved by Dominic's attitude they changed their minds, and also did not dodge the evening service in church as they had intended to.

Some of the boys had formed a little group pledged to try to lead the not so good to better things. Dominic was one of its most earnest members and used to use various things given him—an apple,

orange, crucifix, little book—to help him in this work. He would appear in the playground holding up whatever he had, and crying out: “Who wants it, who wants it?”

There were many cries of “I do” and there would be a concerted rush. “Just a moment”, he would say, “I will give it to the one who answers best this catechism question.” He would confine himself to the least good boys, and as long as they made a shot at it the prize was theirs.

He had also other methods, such as talking and walking with them, playing a game with them that they liked, and so he might be seen one day carrying a large stick on his shoulders like Hercules with his club, on his way to play the game which was most in vogue at the time. During it he might suddenly stop and say to a boy:

“What about coming with me to Confession on Saturday?”

The other, because Saturday seemed a long way off, and because he was anxious to get on with the game, or just to please Dominic, would say: “Oh, all right.” Dominic did not say any more, but in the succeeding days he kept his quarry in view, and when Saturday came would go with him to church, make his own Confession first of all, and if necessary ask the priest to go out of his way to help the boy coming in after him. He would then stay in church with the boy and they would make their thanksgiving together.

These incidents were by no means uncommon and were a great source of joy and consolation to Dominic. They were of great benefit to his companions and boys who were insensible to sermons and exhortations in church would often yield to his gentle but persistent persuasion.

It also happened sometimes that a boy did not keep his promise and at Confession time on Saturday, Dominic would look for him in vain. When next he ran into him, he said, good humouredly:

“Hey, you rascal, you led me up the garden, properly!”

“Well, I wasn’t ready. I didn’t feel like it.”

“My poor friend” Dominic would reply “it was the devil who was tempting you and you fell for it completely. I can see that you are not in the humour for it now, but I promise you, if you take the plunge and go to Confession, you will be much happier than you have been for a long time.”

In most cases, after the boy had taken Dominic’s advice, he would come to him smiling and full of happiness:

“What you said was quite true. I am very happy and I have made up my mind to go to Confession regularly in future.”

In any school of any size there are always some boys who are left on their own by their companions. This can be because they are rough in their ways, labouring under some disability, difficult to get on with. What they need is to experience real friendship, and as this is what they normally do not find, they suffer accordingly.

Dominic made it his business to be their friend. He would play with them during recreation, willingly talk to them, so that when they were ready to do something wrong and he suggested otherwise, they would listen, because they realized it was a friend who spoke to them, who wanted only what was best for them.

So it was when boys were sick, Dominic was always asked for: those who were discouraged and in trouble would go to him and pour their troubles into his ear. Thus the way was opened to him to do good to those around him at all times and to increase in merit before God.

### CHAPTER 13

AMONG the gifts with which God had enriched Dominic was fervour in prayer. As a result of his efforts he got so accustomed to talk with God, that no matter where he was, or what noise was going on round about him, he could briefly recollect himself, sending his heart soaring to God.

When he was praying with the others, he appeared out of this world. There was no fidgeting and continually changing position; he knelt there motionless, his face radiant, head slightly bowed, eyes lowered. Just to see him this way was an inspiration.

In 1854 Count Cays became President of Honour of the Company of St Aloysius which was established in the school. On the occasion of his first visit to take part in the church services, he noticed a boy obviously praying with great devotion and attention and he was so struck that he afterwards asked who he was; he was told that it was Dominic Savio.

He used to try to spend a part of his free time in reading a good book, or in making a visit to the church. He would normally have some other boys with him and they would pray together and also visit Our Lady's altar.

There was no limit to his devotion to the Mother of God. Every day he made some little act of mortification in her honour. He never let himself gaze or stare at a girl, and when walking through the streets, did not let his eyes roam about. Things happening on the way that his companions were all eagerness to see, he never bothered about and often even never saw. When on one occasion he was asked what he thought about something which he had not even noticed, one of his companions burst out impatiently:

"What is the use of having eyes, if you don't use them to look at what is going on around you?"

Dominic replied: "Instead of using my eyes on useless things, I

should like to keep them to gaze on the beauty of Mary Most Holy, when, by God's mercy, I shall be in heaven."

He had a very special devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Every time he went to church he would pay a visit to her altar, and kneeling there before her, beg her to keep his heart free from all impurity with the following little prayer of his own:

"O Mary, I want to be your son always. Please let me die rather than that I should ever sin against holy Purity."

Every Friday he would get some of his friends together and take them to church with him where they would say together the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows of Mary or the Litany.

He was never happier than when he could succeed in bringing someone else to Mary's feet to honour her and ask her help. He did not always succeed easily. One winter Saturday he asked one of his companions to make a visit to Our Lady and they would say the Vespers of Our Lady's Office together. The boy objected that his hands were cold; so Dominic took off his own gloves and gave them to him. Another time in similar circumstances he gave the other boy his coat and made him put it on.

But it was in the month of May that his devotion to Mary reached its peak. He arranged with a group of his friends to do some special deed in her honour every day. He got together a collection of interesting stories and facts about Our Lady and willingly told them to others in order to inspire them with devotion to her. He urged his companions to frequent Confession and Communion likewise in her honour and he himself went to Communion every day, showing great recollection and devotion.

The boys in his dormitory had decided to put up in their dormitory a little altar for Our Lady. They had a meeting to decide what each one should give, and Dominic, who was enthusiastic about the project, found that he had no money to pay his share. He was at a loss wondering what to do and then an idea struck him. He hurried off and got a very nice book that had been given him as a prize, and brought it back to his companions telling them to raffle it and so get money that way.

Others were inspired by his generosity and produced little treasures of their own; a very successful raffle was held and with the proceeds all the required materials were bought. The boys worked hard to get the altar ready but in order to finish it in time it was necessary that some of them stay up late the night before the feast.

Dominic wanted to be one of these, but because he had recently been ill, he was not allowed. He was very disappointed, but accepted the decision as an act of obedience.

"At any rate", he said to one of his companions, "come and wake me up as soon as you have finished; I want to be one of the first to see our altar in honour of Mary Most Holy."

## CHAPTER 14

EXPERIENCE has amply shown that the greatest helps and aids to development in time of youth are the sacraments of Confession and Communion. Any boy or girl who receives these sacraments regularly and well, will develop in time of youth, reach great maturity and go on to old age, if God spares them, showing forth a way of life which is an inspiration to all who know them.

Would that all our young people could grasp this and try to carry it out; and that all those concerned with their upbringing and education could grasp it likewise, in order to help in its fulfilment in the young.

Before coming to our school Dominic used to go to Confession and Communion once a month as was usual. After he came here he started going more frequently. One day he heard a talk in church which recommended three things. Go often to Confession: go often to Communion: choose a priest as confessor that you can easily talk to and open your heart to and don't change to another priest unless there is real need for it. Dominic grasped these counsels immediately and completely.

He chose a priest as confessor and went regularly to him all the time he was here. So that the priest might know him completely and thereby be better able to help him, he made a General Confession to him. He began by going to Confession and Communion every fortnight and then every week. His confessor seeing what great progress he had made spiritually, suggested receiving the Holy Eucharist three times a week and at the end of the year suggested to him to go every day.

For a time he was troubled with scruples and wanted to go to Confession every three or four days and even more often, but his spiritual director would not allow this, and kept him at weekly Confession.

Dominic had the most complete confidence in his spiritual guide and would speak to him with the greatest simplicity about his soul and matters of conscience also outside the confessional. Someone advised him to go to another priest sometimes, but he would not hear of it. He replied: "The confessor is the doctor of the soul. People do not go about chasing from one doctor to another unless they have lost confidence in their own doctor or their case is pretty desperate. I have full confidence in my confessor who is so kind and helpful to me and I don't think I have any trouble that he cannot cure."

Nevertheless his confessor did suggest that occasionally, e.g. at the time of retreat, he should go to another priest and Dominic did so without any hesitation.

Dominic was very pleased with this state of affairs. He said: "If I

have any problem I take it to my confessor and he solves it for me according to what God wants. Jesus has said that the voice of the priest is the voice of God. If I have some particular need I go to Holy Communion in which I receive the body, blood, soul and divinity which Jesus offered for us on the cross. What more do I need to make me happy? Nothing in the wide world. Only one thing remains—one day to see revealed in heaven, him whom we can only see with the eye of faith here below.”

Filled with this spirit, Dominic's days were full of happiness. This was the source of that wonderful cheerful spirit which was the soul of all his actions. It should not be imagined that he went about in a dream half the time or that he did not realize what sort of life it was necessary to live, if one went to daily Communion. He was fully alive to everything and his conduct was irreproachable. I have asked his companions to tell me of anything wrong they found in him or any good quality which he did not show evidence of, during the three years he lived amongst us and all have agreed that there never was anything that they needed to correct in him, or anything they could suggest for him to do that he was not already doing.

His preparation for Holy Communion was most thorough. Before going to bed the previous evening, he said a special prayer to prepare himself, which always ended as follows: “Blessed and praised every moment be the most holy and divine sacrament.” In the morning he carried on his preparation, but his thanksgiving was liable to have no end to it. If he were not reminded he would forget about breakfast, recreation and even morning school, so caught up was he with God. It was really a joy for him to be able to pass some time before the Blessed Sacrament, and as often as he could he would get others to come with him. There was a little group of prayers in reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the many sins of mankind which he was very fond of saying when making such visits.

In order to make his Holy Communion as fruitful as possible and to encourage himself to renewed fervour every day, he made a plan for his Communions as follows:

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| Sunday.    | In honour of the Most Blessed Trinity.   |
| Monday.    | For all those who have been kind to me and done me good.                       |
| Tuesday.   | In honour of my guardian angel and St Dominic.                                 |
| Wednesday. | To Our Lady for the conversion of sinners.                                     |
| Thursday.  | For the Holy Souls.  |
| Friday.    | In honour of the Passion of Jesus.   |
| Saturday.  | In honour of Mary Most Holy and to obtain her protection in life and in death. |

He took part with great joy in any ceremonies connected with the Blessed Sacrament. If when out in the town he met the viaticum

being taken to the sick, he knelt down no matter where he was and if he were free he would reverently accompany the little procession to its destination.

One day when such a little procession with the viaticum was passing by, it was raining and the ground was very muddy. Dominic knelt down without any hesitation. His companion said that in such circumstances it was not necessary, God did not expect you to dirty your clothes like that. Dominic replied quite simply: "Everything belongs to God including our clothes and so everything must do him honour. I would not only kneel down in the mud when he passes by, but I would throw myself into a furnace if by so doing I would gain a spark of that love which moved him to give us this wonderful sacrament."

On a similar occasion a soldier was standing near him but made no effort to kneel down. Not daring to ask him to do so, he took out his handkerchief and spread it on the muddy ground in front of him. The soldier looked a bit startled but took the hint and went down on his knees.

On the feast of Corpus Christi he was sent with some of his companions to take part in the procession of the Blessed Sacrament being held in the parish. Dressed in cassock and cotta, Dominic was overjoyed. No present that it would have been possible to make him could have given him more joy.

## CHAPTER 15

DOMINIC's youth, his far from robust health and his innocent life would certainly have dispensed him from any sort of penance; but he knew and understood that only with the greatest difficulty can a boy keep himself intact without some penance, and so the path of mortification seemed to him to be strewn with roses. By penance and mortification I do not mean patience in meeting the unpleasant things of daily life, nor do I mean the self-control and sacrifice necessary to be able to pray at all times and in all places; such things were in the ordinary way of life for him. I am referring only to penances which affected him physically.

He decided in honour of Our Blessed Lady to fast every Saturday on bread and water; this was forbidden him. He started off fasting for Lent, but after a week his Rector heard about it and stopped it. He wanted at least to go without breakfast, but this was not allowed him either. The reason of course was that his superiors did not want his health to be ruined. What was he to do then?

Dominic was not daunted; he took to afflicting his body in other ways. He put pebbles or bits of wood under his sheet so that he

would not be comfortable in bed. He got hold of a very rough shirt, very irritating to the skin and wore it. These penances were also forbidden him. He tried again. When summer passed into autumn and winter he did not add any blankets to the very thin covering which was sufficient in the hot summer. In the bitter cold of January this was all he had. His Rector came to see him once when he was in bed with some disturbance. When he got to the bed he saw Dominic lying there shivering violently and he realized that there was only the thin summer covering over him.

“What on earth are you up to?” he asked him. “Do you want to die of cold?”

“No”, he replied, “but Jesus in the stable of Bethlehem was much worse off than this.”

He was then forbidden absolutely to undertake any kind of penance whatsoever without the express permission of his Rector. Dominic accepted this obedience, but one day I came across him looking somewhat sad, and I asked him what was the matter. He replied:

“I am properly in the soup. Our Blessed Lord says that if I don’t do penance I will not get to heaven. I am forbidden to do any penance; what chance then have I of heaven?”

I explained to him that the penance Jesus wanted from him was complete obedience, patience with others and the unpleasant things of life; to accept equally the heat and the cold and the rain; to be cheerful when tired and not feeling so well and so on.

“But,” said Dominic, “these things come to you whether you like it or not.”

“Precisely”, I replied, “offer them willingly to God; there is nothing will please him more, and you will be doing real penance.”

Thus reassured, Dominic was very happy and completely at peace.

## CHAPTER 16

DOMINIC was so natural in his self-control and right way of acting, that it could be easily imagined that he was made that way. But those who knew him well or were helping in his education knew differently. It only resulted from great and persevering effort helped by the grace of God.

His eyes were very alive, naturally darting here and there, and he had to do no small violence to himself to bring them under control. He once told one of his friends: “When I realized I must control my eyes, it cost me great effort resulting sometimes in violent headache.” He achieved such mastery in this respect, that his companions never saw him even glance at anything that was not as it should be.

He used to say: "The eyes are two windows. Through these windows there passes what you let pass. You can let an angel in or you can let a devil in, and whichever you let in can get possession of your heart."

A young relative of one of the boys came to see him and thoughtlessly brought with him a magazine with bad pictures in it. A group of boys gathered round fascinated to see the indecent pictures. Dominic saw the group and came along to see what all the excitement was about.

When he saw what they were looking at, with a sudden gesture he snatched the paper from the boy's hand and quietly tore it to pieces. This action and the look on his face silenced the boys and they stood looking at each other. Then he spoke:

"What fools we are! God has given us our eyes to admire the wonders of creation, and we use them to look at the filth that the evil genius of men produces to ruin souls. You know well enough that one look is enough to stain your souls, and yet you go feasting your eyes on this."

"It was only a joke," said one shamefacedly.

"Fine joke, that can open the way to hell for you! Do you think you would think it very funny, if you had the misfortune to go there?"

Another said: "Nonsense, there is nothing wrong in looking at pictures like that."

"If that is really so, it means that your eyes are already used to looking at such horrors. That you are used to it does not make it any less sinful for you. Job was an old man and covered with sores, but he made a bargain with his eyes that they would never look at anything shameful."

All were silenced and no one dared to make any further observations.

To this care of his eyes, Dominic joined great control over his tongue. He would never butt in when others were speaking, and he never monopolized the conversation. It was asserted equally by his superiors and companions that he never said a wrong word in class or recreation, or spoke when he was supposed to be silent. If anyone tried to pick a quarrel with him, he would not let himself get drawn into it, but would quietly try to calm the other and make him at peace.

One day he tried to correct a companion of a bad habit which he had. The boy did not take it at all well, turned on Dominic and punched and kicked him. Dominic was well able to give more than he received, but although he got very red in the face he kept his temper and when the boy stopped he said to him:

"You have done me wrong, but I forgive you. However, you had better think twice before trying that on anyone else."

Much could be said about his mortification of the other senses of the body, but I limit myself to a few instances.

In spite of the fact that he suffered badly from chilblains in winter-time, he never complained or sought relief. It seemed rather that they were a source of pleasure to him. He used to say: "The bigger the chilblains the better for the health." Meaning of course the health of his soul.

Many of his companions testified that in very cold weather he would walk slowly, so as to feel the cold more and suffer accordingly.

In schools, especially boarding schools, boys can always be found whom nothing satisfies. At one moment they complain of the food, at another of having to go to church, at another of not being allowed to do what they like, and so on. These boys are a real pest, because their grumbling can quickly spread and a very bad spirit grow among the others.

Dominic had no complaints. It was never too hot, or too cold, and he was equally cheerful in bad or good weather. Whatever was served at table was equally acceptable to him. If others found the food overdone or underdone, too salty or not salty enough, it found no echo in him. "It's quite all right for me," he would say.

He would stay behind in the refectory after the others and pick up any pieces of bread lying around, put them in his drawer and eat them at the next meal. To his companions who wanted to make a fuss about it, he said with a smile: "It is good manners to break your bread before eating it, it saves trouble if it is already broken."

The same applied to other food; he would do anything rather than that it should be wasted. He would easily give away his share of a dish that was especially nice.

When some of his friends asked him why he was so careful he explained:

"Everything that we have is God's precious gift. Of his material gifts the most precious is that of food because our lives depend on it. We should always therefore be very thankful for it and try very hard never to waste it."

With great joy would he do for others what they were least ready to do for themselves, such as cleaning their shoes, getting the mud off their clothes, doing unpleasant jobs in the sick room, sweeping, scrubbing and so on. "If we all do what we can, everything will be all right," he used to say. "I can't do great things; these things I can manage, and I am very pleased to be able to do them for Jesus. I hope that they will please him and that in his infinite goodness he will accept them."

To eat things he did not like; easily leave alone those he did like; not let his eyes roam uselessly around; accept unpleasant smells; surrender his own way; accept willingly anything which went against

him in body or soul: these are things which were a normal part of his daily life.

There are many other facts and incidents which I am omitting. They all testify to how great was Dominic's spirit of penance and charity and how industriously he was making use of all the little occasions which came his way, to live more and more completely for God and gain merit in his sight.

## CHAPTER 17

THE whole of Dominic's life can be said to be an act of love for Mary most holy. He never let slip any occasion of pleasing and honouring her. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception was solemnly defined in 1854. Dominic had a very great desire to leave behind him at the school some lasting reminder of this great event. He said:

"I would like very much to do something in honour of my Mother Mary; but I will have to do it quickly, as I do not think I have much time left."

Spurred on by his ever present desire to help his companions, he asked some of those whom he knew well and relied upon to join him in forming the Company of Mary Immaculate. The aim was to obtain the special protection of the Mother of God in life, and especially at the hour of death. Dominic proposed two means to this end: to honour, and to bring others to honour, Mary by different means, and to encourage frequent Communion. In agreement with his friends and after much careful thought, he drew up a set of rules. On June 8th, nine months before he died, he went with his friends before the altar of Our Lady and they read it over together. I give these rules here so that they may be an inspiration and guide to others.

We, Dominic Savio etc. (there follows the names of the others), after receiving the sacraments of Confession and Communion, do this day, June 8th, give ourselves completely to Mary Immaculate and promise to work unceasingly for her and with her: to help ourselves to do this and to maintain our love for her we here before her altar solemnly promise, in agreement with our spiritual director, to follow in the footsteps of Louis Comollo to the best of our ability. Here we bind ourselves as follows:

- A. To carry out with the greatest exactness the rules of the school.
- B. To help and encourage our companions: helping them by pointing out in a friendly way whatever needs correcting; encouraging them by being first in doing the right thing and supporting their own efforts.

C. To be always busy with something useful.

To make it possible to be faithful to these obligations and to help us to persevere in them, we submit the following rules to our Rector.

1. We will be very exact in carrying out what we are expected to do and have great confidence in those over us.
2. The carrying out of our own duties will be our first and special care.
3. A true spirit of charity will unite the members of the group in genuine friendship among themselves and also with their companions. We will not hesitate to correct anyone when so doing in a friendly way would help.
4. We will meet each week for half an hour and after a prayer to the Holy Spirit and a short spiritual reading we will consider how the Company is getting on in its work for Jesus and Mary.
5. We will help each other to get rid of any faults or wrong habits which we have. This we will do privately.
6. We will try hard to be even-tempered and good-humoured, being patient with each other, and with those who are awkward and troublesome.
7. There are no special prayers to be said; whatever time is left over after having carried out our own duties should be devoted to whatever will be most useful for our souls.
8. However, we do take upon ourselves these few practices:
  - a. We will go as often as possible to the sacraments.
  - b. We will receive Holy Communion every Sunday, holyday of obligation, the novenas and feast-days of Our Lady and our patrons.
  - c. We will also receive Holy Communion on Thursdays, unless we are prevented by some necessary obligation.
9. Every day, especially in the Holy Rosary, we will ask Our Lady to bless our Company, and help us to come safely home to heaven.
10. Saturdays will be kept in honour of Our Lady and on that day we will offer her some special act done in honour of the Immaculate Conception.
11. When praying and at the services in church, during lessons and at study time, we will try to make our exterior behaviour and manner such as to encourage our companions to do their best.
12. We will treasure the word of God and we will go over again together the talks we have heard.
13. We will carefully avoid any wasting time, to safeguard ourselves from the temptations which come so easily and so strongly at times of idleness.
14. Therefore whatever time remains after the discharge of our own duties will be spent in useful and good reading or in prayer.

15. Our recreation times will be after meals and after lesson time and study time.
16. We will make known to our Rector whatever will help on our spiritual progress.
17. We will not abuse the goodness of those over us by constantly asking for those permissions which in their goodness they are willing to give. The exact observance of the school rules to which we have pledged ourselves should help us to avoid this abuse of too many exceptions.
18. We will not grumble about food and we will try to prevent others from doing so.
19. Those who want to join our society must first of all make a good Confession and receive Holy Communion, spend a week on trial, read these rules carefully, and promise Jesus and Mary Immaculate to be faithful to them.
20. On the occasion of anyone being received into the Company, the others will assist at Mass and receive Holy Communion, praying that God will give their new companion the grace of perseverance, obedience and real love of God.
21. Our Company is placed under the care of Mary Immaculate whose name we bear and whose medal we always carry with us. A sincere, filial and limitless confidence in Mary, a constant devotion and loving affection for her, will make us overcome all obstacles, clinging tenaciously to our resolutions, be firm with ourselves, gentle and kindly towards others, exact in everything. The members are urged to write the holy names of Jesus and Mary first of all in their hearts and minds and then on their books and similar objects, so that they can be easily reminded of them. Our Rector is asked to go over these rules and if necessary change them according as he thinks best. We accept completely whatever he decides in the matter.

And you, O Mary, bless our efforts, since the idea of the Company is all yours. Smile on our hopes, accept our promises, and thus under your mantle and made strong by your loving care, we will come safely through the storm-tossed sea of this world and be victorious over the temptations of the devil. So too will we be able to help our companions by what we do, give joy to those over us, and in all things be your loving sons. And if God gives us the grace of becoming priests, we promise you to give all our energies and powers to this work, distrusting ourselves, trusting completely in God; and so after our exile on this earth we trust that, consoled by Mary at our side, we shall receive safely the eternal reward that God reserves for those who serve him in spirit and truth.

The Rector read the rule very carefully and gave it his approval under the following conditions:

1. That the promises have not the force of vows.

2. None of them bind in any way under pain of sin.
3. Some external act of service or help should be undertaken by each one at the weekly meeting.
4. The week will be arranged so as to have some at Communion every day.
5. No special religious practice may be added without the express permission of the Rector.
6. The principal aim of the Company will be to further devotion to Mary Immaculate and Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.
7. Everyone before being accepted must read the life of Louis Comollo.

## CHAPTER 18

EVERYBODY was friendly with Dominic. Those who could not understand him completely, at least respected him for his good qualities. He could get on well with everyone. He was so confirmed in the things of God that he was asked on occasion to associate with boys who were far from good, so that he might try to win them over to God. To do this he made use of free time, different kinds of games, conversation, using them all in different ways for the spiritual advantage of those concerned.

His best friends, however, were the other boys in the Company of Mary Immaculate. With these he had regular meetings, and they would gather together also for acts of devotion. These meetings had the permission of the Rector, but they were presided over and carried through by the boys themselves. In the meetings they decided how best to help an active participation in the novenas and solemn feasts; how to maintain and increase love for the Blessed Sacrament and frequent Communion; how to help boys who easily got into trouble and were going astray. Each of them would 'adopt' one such boy and make it his business to help him and encourage him in every way possible.

Dominic was the soul of the meeting, its guide and mentor. There is much I could say about many of the boys who took part in those meetings, but as most of them are still alive, it is better I should not. I will mention two only who are already dead: Camillo Gavio of Tortona, and John Massaglia of Marmorito. Camillo Gavio was only two months with us, but it was long enough to leave a wonderful memory of him.

His outstanding character and the great promise he showed in painting and modelling moved his town council to send him to Turin, so that he might have a real chance of developing his talents. He had been very ill not long before and was not yet fully recovered, also it was his first time away from home, and among so many boys whom he did not know, it was little wonder that he was somewhat

downcast and stood sadly watching the others playing their game with great zest. Dominic saw him and immediately went over to talk to him and make friends. Something like the following dialogue took place. Dominic began:

"Hullo, don't you know anyone yet?"

"No, but I am enjoying watching the others playing."

"What is your name?"

"Camillo Gavio, and I come from Tortona."

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"You are looking sad; have you not been well?"

"Yes, I have been very ill with some sort of heart trouble and I am not yet fully better."

"You would like to be completely better soon, wouldn't you?"

"No, not absolutely. I only want to do God's will."

These last words made Dominic realize that Gavio was a boy of more than ordinary piety, and his heart warmed to him. With renewed interest he went on:

"Anyone who only wants God's will has a real desire to become a saint; do you want to become a saint?"

"Oh yes; I want that more than anything else."

"That's great; you can be one of our special group, if you like, and share completely what we do together to help us to live for Jesus and Mary."

"Yes, I would like to do that; but what have I got to do?"

"I will tell you in a few words. For us here it means doing all that is necessary to be always in good spirits. We hate and detest sin as something that robs us of God's grace and makes us very unhappy inside; we try to be very faithful to all our duties and to be foremost in taking an active part in all exercises of piety. Try taking for your own special motto: 'Servite Domino in laetitia'—Be very happy while following God."

These few words were like a ray of sunshine in the gloom, and greatly comforted the boy. From that day he became a close friend of Dominic and followed him faithfully in the path which he trod. However, his illness flared up again after two months and despite every care he grew steadily worse and in a few days he died. He received the last sacraments with great reverence and joy and gave up his soul to God on December 30th, 1856.

Dominic visited him regularly while he was ill and as the end drew near wanted to spend the night at his bedside. This he was not allowed to do. As soon as he heard that death had come, he went to his bedside and with tears in his eyes said:

"Goodbye Camillo; I am sure you have gone straight to heaven—get a place ready for me there also. I will always be your friend as long as I live. I will pray for the repose of your soul."

Afterwards he got the boys of the Company of Mary Immaculate together and they all went to pray beside the body. They also said many other prayers for him and received Holy Communion in reparation for his soul. Dominic himself did this a number of times.

He said to his friends several times: "Do not let us forget the soul of our friend. Please God he is already in heaven, but we must carry on praying for him. All that we do for him God will get done for us in due course, when our own time comes."

## CHAPTER 19

MORE intimate and maintained over a longer period of time were Dominic's relations with John Massaglia. They both came to the Oratory at the same time, they were from neighbouring villages, both wanted to become priests, and they had a common desire to live for God.

Dominic said to his friend one day, "Don't let us stop at saying we want to be priests, but let us get busy trying to grow in the virtues that are needed by a priest."

"Quite true," the other replied, "but if we do all that we can, God in his goodness will give us the great grace of becoming priests."

At Easter time there was the annual retreat; this they made with great fervour. When it was over, Dominic said to John: "Let us be friends in the best way possible, anxious for the welfare of each other's soul. We could be that if we were to correct each other in whatever way might be needed. So will you tell me whenever you notice me doing anything I should not, or if you see there is some good I can do and I am not doing, please point it out."

"Very gladly, although you don't really need anything like that. It's me that needs it, as I am older and exposed to greater temptations. So will you do that for me?"

Dominic replied with a smile: "Let's cut out the compliments and be really serious about helping each other."

From that moment Dominic and John became true friends. Their friendship was lasting because it was founded on their life for God, striving earnestly together to help each other to resist evil and do good.

After the examinations at the end of the school year, the boys used to go home for the holidays. Some boys for a variety of reasons used to ask to remain at the school during the holiday period. Dominic and John were among these. I knew that their parents were very anxious to have them at home and I also thought it would do them a lot of good to go home for a while since neither of them was very strong, so I suggested this to them.

Instead of replying they both began to laugh.

“What are you laughing at?”

Dominic replied:

“We know that our parents would be very glad to have us at home, but we know also that while the bird in the cage loses its liberty, still it is safe from the claws of the vulture; outside the cage he may fly where he likes but also at any moment he can fall a victim to the evil bird of prey.”

In spite of this, I judged it advisable for them both to go home for some time and they went without hesitation in a spirit of obedience, remaining just the time that I suggested.

If I were to write about the good example and virtues of John Massaglia I should be largely repeating what I have already written about Dominic, whose faithful follower he was, as long as he lived. He enjoyed good health and showed great promise in his studies. When he had finished his humanities, he passed with distinction the exam prior to receiving the clerical habit. But he was not able to wear for long the cassock that he had looked forward so eagerly to having.

After a few months he became unwell, but not thinking much of it, he did not want to interrupt his studies. His parents were worried, however, and took him home, so that he might have a good rest away from his books. But, he did not improve and after some weeks Dominic received the following letter:

Dear Dominic,

I thought I should only be a few days at home, so I did not bring any books or notes home with me. However, my sickness is going on and on, and I am wondering how it will all end up. The doctor says I am getting better; my own private opinion is that I am getting worse. We shall see who is right!

I am lonely, dear Dominic, so far away from you and the others; there are not the same opportunities here for all the spiritual things we had at school. I comfort myself with the memory of the days we helped each other to prepare well for Holy Communion. I am sure we are still united in spirit.

Would you go to my desk in the study and get the “Imitation of Christ” by Thomas à Kempis which you will find there and some notes which are lying beside it? Please parcel them up and send them to me. I am tired of doing nothing, but the doctor won’t let me study. I sometimes walk up and down my room thinking, “Shall I ever get better? Shall I ever rejoin my companions at school? Is this my last illness?” God alone knows the answers. I think I am quite ready to do his holy will, whatever it may be.

Send me any advice you think will help me. Let me know how you are getting on and remember me in your prayers, especially when you receive Holy Communion. Let our friendship be sealed in the

Sacred Heart of Jesus, and if we are not destined to be united long in this life, please God we shall be together for ever in heaven.

Tell all the boys I was asking for them and remember me especially to those of the Company of Mary Immaculate. God be with you.

Your affectionate friend,  
John Massaglia.

Dominic sent John what he had asked him to get from his desk and together with it he sent the following letter:

Dear John,

You don't know how pleased I was to get your letter—at least it let me know that you were still alive. As no news had come since you left, we did not know quite, whether to say the "Glory be to the Father" or the "Out of the depths" for you. I am sending what you asked me to. I should like to say that Thomas à Kempis is a good friend, but he is dead. He needs to be made to come alive by your own efforts to understand what he says. Think it over, and see how it can be carried out in your own life.

You sigh for the wonderful chances we have here of spiritual things; so did I when I was at Mondonio. I tried to make up for them by a daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament and when going I tried to get as many others to come with me as possible.

Besides the "Imitation" I read "The Treasure Hidden in the Holy Mass" by St Leonard of Port Maurice. If you feel like it, read that also.

You say you don't know if you will ever come back to the Oratory. To tell you the truth I have a feeling that I am coming quickly to the end of my own life. At any rate we can pray for each other so that both of us may die happily in God's grace. The one who goes to heaven first can prepare a place for the other and when he arrives stretch out a helping hand to pull him in!

May God keep us always in his holy grace and help us to become saints, but quickly because there is little time left. All your friends look forward to your coming back and send their very best wishes. With theirs I send you my own best wishes and prayers.

Always,  
Your loving friend,  
Dominic Savio.

John Massaglia's illness at first seemed of little consequence. Several times he seemed completely recovered only to relapse again, and then suddenly he was at death's door, and passed peacefully away. His parish priest, who was also his spiritual father during holiday time, wrote: "There was time to give him the Last Sacraments and he received them with the greatest devotion. He died the death of the just man who leaves this world to go straight to heaven."

Dominic was deeply grieved for the loss of his friend and although he accepted it completely as God's will, he was in tears for several

days. It was the first time that I had seen that wonderful face of his sad and tearstained. His only comfort was to pray for his friend and get others to do likewise. He could be heard to say sometimes: "Dear John, you are dead, and I hope you are already with Camillo in heaven; when shall I be with you in that happy place?"

He never forgot John Massaglia in his prayers right up to the time of his own death. He never assisted at Holy Mass or at any exercise in church without remembering him before God. Dominic's sensitive heart suffered greatly from this loss and even his health was affected.

## CHAPTER 20

THERE is nothing extraordinary in what I have written about so far, although we might well call extraordinary Dominic's exemplary and innocent life, his spirit of penance. Extraordinary also might be called the liveliness of his faith, his constant hope, his tireless zeal in doing good and helping others which went on until his last breath.

I should like to give now some incidents and special graces which were out of the ordinary. I am conscious that these may give rise to some doubt in those who read about them. I should like to state categorically that anything recounted here which seems paralleled by incidents in the Scriptures or the lives of the saints, was seen with my own eyes and that the accounts written of them are written with a scrupulous care for the truth. I leave each one free to form his own opinions.

On a number of occasions when I have been in church when Dominic was making his thanksgiving after Holy Communion, or visiting the Blessed Sacrament exposed, I have seen him obviously quite oblivious to what was going on around him; he would continue in this state without noticing the time unless he was reminded it was time for something else.

One day he was missing from breakfast, morning lessons, the mid-day meal, and no one knew where he was; he was not in the study room, not even in bed! The matter was referred to the Rector, who suspected what might be the case. He went to the church and there in the little chapel behind the high altar he saw Dominic standing motionless like a statue. One foot was on top of the other, one hand resting on the reading lectern; his other hand was on his breast and his gaze was fixed immovably on the tabernacle. I called him but there was no response. I shook him, and he looked round at me saying:

"Oh, is Mass already over?"

"Look", said his Rector, showing him his watch, "it is two o'clock."

He asked pardon very contritely for having been absent without

permission, and I sent him to get some dinner, saying to him: "If anyone asks you where you have been, say you were doing something for me." I said this so that he might be spared the curious questions of his companions.

Another time, as I was going out of the sacristy after finishing my thanksgiving, I heard a voice which seemed to be engaged in argument. It came from the little chapel behind the high altar and when I went there I saw Dominic. He was speaking and then stopping as though waiting for someone else's reply. Among other things I heard quite clearly these words: "Yes, my God, I have already said it and I say it again: I love you and I wish to go on loving you till my last breath. If you see that I am going to offend you, let me die: I much prefer to die than to offend you by sin."

I asked him sometimes what went on at these times and he replied with great simplicity:

"It is silly of me; I get a distraction and lose the thread of my prayers and then I see such wonderful things that the hours pass by like minutes."

One day he came into my room saying: "Come quickly! There is some good work to be done."

"Where do you want to take me?"

"Come quickly! Come quickly!"

I hesitated, but on his renewed insistence, went with him: similar instances had happened before. We left the house and silently he led me through one street after another for quite a distance. Finally we arrived at a block of flats and he led me up to the third floor:

"Here you are. This is where you are wanted," he said as he rang the bell and immediately went away.

The door was opened: "Oh, come in, come in quickly before it is too late. My husband lapsed from the church and became a Protestant: now he is dying and begging for a priest."

I entered and there saw the dying man, overcome with anxiety to set his conscience in order. Speedily I set matters right with a good Confession, and as I was just finishing, the local parish priest arrived with the holy oils. As he was in the act of administering the last anointing the man died.

One day I asked Dominic how he could have known that there was a dying man there. He looked at me somewhat sadly and burst into tears. I did not question him any further.

The innocence of his life, his love of God and great desire for the things of God so developed Dominic's mind that he came to be habitually united with God.

Sometimes he would stop playing a game and withdrawing from his companions walk by himself. When asked why he did this he replied:

"These 'distractions' come to me suddenly, and sometimes I seem

to see heaven open above me and I have to go away from my companions so that I do not say things which could only seem ridiculous to them.”

One day during playtime the conversation turned to the great reward God has prepared in heaven for those who preserve their innocence. Among other things it was said that those who have kept their innocence are the nearest in heaven to the person of our Divine Saviour and that they sing a special hymn reserved to them for all eternity. This was enough to send Dominic’s spirit soaring towards God; he stood still completely motionless and then fell as though dead into the arms of his companions.

This being carried out of himself would happen sometimes during study of lesson time and even in the street on his way to and from school.

He often spoke of the Holy Father and how much he would like to see him before he died. Several times he said that he had something very important to tell him. I asked him what this very important thing was.

“If I could speak to the Holy Father, I would say that in spite of his many worries and cares he should not cease to give his special attention to England; God is preparing a great triumph for the faith in that country.”

“What makes you say that?”

“I will tell you, but please don’t tell anyone else, as I don’t want them to laugh at me. If you go to Rome perhaps you will tell the Holy Father about it . . . One morning as I was making my thanksgiving after Communion, a very strong distraction took hold of me. I thought I saw a great plain full of people enveloped in thick fog. They were walking about like people who had lost their way and did not know which way to turn. Someone near me said: “This is England.” I was just going to ask some questions, when I saw Pope Pius IX just like I have seen him in pictures. He was robed magnificently and carried in his hand a torch alive with flames. As he walked slowly towards that immense gathering of people, the leaping flames from the torch dispelled the fog, and the people stood in the splendour of the noonday sun. “That torch,” said the one beside me, “is the Catholic Faith, which is going to light up England.”

When I went to Rome in 1858, I told Pius IX about this, and he listened to it with great joy and pleasure and said to me:

“What you say strengthens me in my determination to do everything possible for England, already the object of my care and solicitude. The message you give me, if no more, is at least the advice of a privileged soul.”

There are many other similar incidents, but I do not give them here. I have, however, written them down and leave it to others to publish them when it will be for God’s greater glory.

## CHAPTER 21

THOSE who have read what I have written so far about Dominic will easily realize that his life was a continual preparation for death. For Dominic the Company of Mary Immaculate was a sure means of securing the protection of Our Lady at the hour of his death, which many now felt could not be far off. I cannot say whether he had had some revelation from God of the day and circumstances of his death or whether it was just a presentiment. He certainly spoke about his death long before it happened, and so clearly that he could not have described it more accurately after it did happen.

In view of his state of health everything was done to put a brake on his life of study and piety. However, by reason of his constitution, various physical weaknesses and the ardour of his spirit, each day saw his strength decreasing. He was aware of this himself and sometimes he would say: "I must hurry up or I will be overtaken by night, while I am on the way." By this he meant that he had not much longer to live and that he must do as much good as he could before death caught up with him.

It is the custom in this school for the boys to make the exercise for a Happy Death each month. Part of this exercise consists in making a Confession and Communion as though they were to be the last. Pope Pius IX in his goodness has enriched this exercise with many indulgences. Dominic used to make it with great earnestness. It is the custom at the end of the exercise to say one Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be to the Father for 'the one amongst us who will be the first to die.' One day he said smiling:

"It should not be for the one amongst us who will be the first to die, but for Dominic Savio who will be the first to die amongst us."

At the end of April he went to his Rector to ask him how he might keep in the best way possible Our Lady's month. He was told to fulfil all his duties as well as he could for Our Lady, to tell some story or fact about her every day and act in such a way that he could go worthily to Holy Communion every day.

"I will do that faithfully: what grace shall I ask for?"

"Ask Our Lady to obtain for you from God, health and the grace of living completely for God and the saving of souls."

"Yes, may she do this and also be with me when I am dying and lead me to heaven."

Dominic lived so fervently during this month that he seemed already to be living in the next world and all his thoughts, words and actions were for Mary. He always had his story about her ready each day and would tell it sometimes to one group of boys, sometimes to another.

One of his companions said one day: "But if you do everything this year what will be left for next year?"

"Let me do what I can this year; if I am here next year I'll let you know what my plans are."

In order to do everything possible for his health, I called in several doctors to consult together. All were taken by his brightness, his cheerfulness and his quick and ready replies. One of them, a very eminent physician, Doctor Vallauri by name, said to me with admiration: "What a wonderful boy!"

I asked this doctor to tell me plainly what was the underlying trouble which was steadily sapping his strength.

"There is no basic disease: but given his delicate constitution, the keenness of his mind and the intensity of the spirit continually at work in him are gradually wearing him away."

"What is the remedy?"

"To my mind the best remedy would be to let him go to heaven: he seems to me to be very ready for it. The only thing which is likely to preserve his life is to take him away from all study and keep him busy with manual work proportionate to his strength."

## CHAPTER 22

DOMINIC'S ill health was not such as to confine him to bed. He passed his time between some classes, some study and little jobs about the house. It gave him great joy to help in the school infirmary when there were any of his companions sick there. He said sometimes:

"I don't get any merit for working in the sick room or visiting the sick, because it is something I like doing very much."

While attending to their physical needs he would also with due prudence suggest things for their spiritual benefit.

One of his companions was finding it a bit hard to remain in bed. Dominic said to him:

"Our bodies are not made to last for ever; it is understandable that they gradually wear out until finally death comes. Think how wonderful it will be when our souls, freed from hindrances of the body, fly straight to God to begin an eternity of happiness and joy!"

Another boy refused to take his medicine because of its bitter taste. Dominic said to him:

"Medicines also come from God who has made them so that we can get better and stronger. When we take them we are doing what God wants us to do and if they do not taste very nice we get all the more merit. However unpleasant they are, it is nothing to what Jesus suffered on the cross for us."

These observations of Dominic were said so unaffectedly and with such sincerity that they always won the boys over.

Dominic's health was steadily deteriorating but he did not want to go home: he wanted at all costs to try to keep up his studies and his life for God at the school. A few months previously I had sent him home, but a few days afterwards he turned up at the Oratory again. I have to confess that the unwillingness was on both sides. I wanted to keep Dominic with me at all costs. My affection and esteem for him were those of a father for his special favourite son. But I felt that the doctor's recommendation should be carried out and this especially so as he had recently developed a bad cough. I wrote to Signor Savio and Dominic's departure was fixed for March 1st.

He accepted this decision and offered it as a sacrifice to God. "Why are you so unwilling to go home?" I asked him. "You should be glad to be going to your parents."

"I want to end my days here at the Oratory."

"All right; when you get better at home then you can come back."

"That is all very well . . . but I know that if I go home, I shall never come back."

The evening before his departure, he could hardly be persuaded to leave my side—there was always a new question to be answered or another assurance to be given. The following is some of the dialogue which took place between us:

"What is the best thing a sick person can do to gain merit before God?"

"Frequently to renew the offering of his sufferings to God."

"What else can he do?"

"Offer his life to Jesus."

"Can I be certain that my sins are forgiven?"

"I assure you in the name of God that all your sins are forgiven."

"Can I be certain that I will save my soul?"

"By the mercy of God which will never be wanting to you, you are certain of saving your soul"

"If the devil comes to tempt me what shall I say to him?"

"Tell him that you have sold your soul to Jesus and he has paid for it with his Precious Blood. If the devil continues to worry you, ask him what he has ever done for your soul, and remind him that Jesus shed his blood so that you might be free from his power."

"When I am in heaven, shall I be able to see my companions here and my family at home?"

"Yes, you will see everything from heaven—what is happening here, at home and lots of other things besides."

"Shall I be able to visit you here?"

"Yes, if it is according to God's will and for his greater glory."

From these and many other questions which he put to me it was easy to see that Dominic was already standing on the threshold of eternity, wondering greatly about the joys it had in store for him.

## CHAPTER 23

THE morning of his departure Dominic made the Exercise of a Happy Death with his companions. He showed such devotion in his Confession and Holy Communion as it is quite impossible to try to describe.

I must make this exercise very well, he said, because it will be indeed my preparation for death. If I were to die on the journey, I should already have received the Holy Viaticum.

He spent the rest of the morning putting his things in order: he packed his trunk with the care of one who is doing something for the last time. Then he went round saying goodbye to his companions, saying a little word of encouragement to one or trying to spur another on to greater efforts.

He owed a few pence to one of his companions and he took care to settle this little debt so that, as he said, his accounts would be all right with our Blessed Lord. He had a farewell meeting with the members of the Company of Mary and with great earnestness he exhorted them to persevere in keeping the promises they had made to Mary Immaculate, and to put no limit to their confidence in her.

About to depart, he came to me and spoke exactly as follows:—  
“You will have nothing of this body of mine so I have to take it with me to Mondonio. You would only have been troubled with me for a little time longer . . . but God’s holy will be done. If you go to Rome, don’t forget the message for the Holy Father about England. Please pray for me that I may die a holy death: and goodbye till we meet again in heaven.”

He kept a firm hold of my hand and when we got to the door he said to his friends who were waiting to wave goodbye to him:

“Goodbye, everyone, goodbye! You are all my friends, pray for me and we will all meet again once more where we will not be separated ever again.”

He had moved off a few paces when he turned and came back to me:

“Would you give me a keepsake to remember you by?”

“Certainly, with all my heart; what would you like, a nice book?”

“No, something better still.”

“What, money for your journey?”

“Yes, that’s it, money for my journey to heaven. You told us that you had got from the Holy Father some plenary indulgences at the hour of death that you could give to people. Will you give one to me?”

“Yes, my son, I will put your name on the list as soon as you have gone.”

Then he went off; he had been three years with us. It had been a time of great joy for him, and a great edification for his companions and superiors. Now he had gone never to return.

There was general surprise at his solemn farewell. It was known that his health was far from good, but as he generally managed to keep out of bed, his illness was never considered to be very serious. In addition as he was always bright and cheerful, no one guessed that he was suffering so much anguish of body and spirit. And so it was that although everyone was a bit shaken by the finality of his farewell, there was a general expectancy that he would soon be back again.

But it was not to be so: he was ripe for heaven. What he had done for God and the saving of souls in his few short years of life was as though he had lived to an advanced age. God wanted to take him to himself in the flower of his youth, also to free him from the perils and dangers in which even the best of souls can make shipwreck.

## CHAPTER 24

It was two o'clock on the afternoon of March 1st when Dominic left Turin. He had a pleasant journey, and the change of air and being with his parents seemed to be doing him good. The first four days at home, he went about as usual, but his lack of appetite and his increasing cough, made his parents send him to the doctor. He was quite alarmed when he examined Dominic and immediately sent him to bed.

The doctor diagnosed inflammation and had recourse to bleeding. Knowing how young people are afraid at the sight of blood, he told Dominic not to be afraid and to turn his head the other way, and he would not see anything. The boy smiled and said:

“What is this compared with the piercing of Jesus’ hands and feet with the nails?”

He then quite calmly watched the doctor at work, and showed no alarm at the sight of his blood streaming out. This was done several times and there seemed to be an improvement. The doctor felt quite certain there was and Dominic’s parents were quite reassured. Dominic, however, thought differently and being quite convinced that it was better to receive the sacraments too early rather than too late, he said to his father when the doctor had gone:

“Daddy, let us give the heavenly doctor a chance: I would like to go to Confession and receive Holy Communion.”

To please him his parents sent for the parish priest, although they felt it was unnecessary, as he was apparently getting better. The parish priest came and heard his Confession, and then to satisfy him brought the Holy Viaticum. It can easily be imagined with what devotion and love Dominic received Jesus in what he felt was his last Holy Communion. His heart overflowed with love and there

came spontaneously to his lips the promises he had made at his first Holy Communion:

"Yes, yes; Jesus and Mary, you are my greatest friends, now and for always. A thousand times, death rather than sin."

When he had finished his thanksgiving he said:

"Now I am happy; I have a long journey to eternity but with Jesus by my side I fear nothing. How I wish I could say it to the whole world, when Jesus is with us there is no fear of anything—not even of death itself."

He was patience itself in all his sufferings. He made great efforts to do everything for himself so that as little extra work and trouble as possible should be given to his mother. Unpleasant medicines he took without any sign that they were unpleasant, and he submitted to being bled ten times without showing any sign of resentment.

At his next visit the doctor congratulated Dominic on the big improvement and told his parents that the disease had been overcome and it was now only a question of a good convalescence. His parents were overjoyed to hear this, but Dominic smiled and said:

"The world has been overcome, it only remains to make a good appearance before God."

He then begged his father to get the parish priest so that this time he might receive the last anointing. The parish priest could not see in Dominic's serene and joyful face any sign of death, but perhaps inspired from on high he brought the Holy Oils. Before being anointed Dominic said aloud these words with great fervour:

"Dear Jesus, I love you and I wish to love you for all eternity—forgive me my sins. Let this sacrament wipe out all the sins I have ever committed by my eyes, my ears, my lips, my hands and my feet: may my soul and body be made holy by the merits of your Sacred Passion."

He then made all the responses in a strong clear voice, like the voice of one who is in perfect health.

It was March 9th, his sixth day in bed, his last on earth. He was very weak now on account of his sufferings and loss of blood, so he was given the papal blessing. He said the "*Confiteor*" himself and made the necessary responses. He was filled with consolation when he was told that with this blessing of the Holy Father he received a plenary indulgence.

"*Deo gratias,*" he whispered, "*semper Deo gratias.*"

Then fixing his eyes on the crucifix he murmured this little verse which he knew by heart:

"O Jesus, my liberty I give completely to you:  
My body with all its powers  
I give completely to you.  
Everything I have is yours, O God,  
And I abandon myself completely  
To your holy will."

## CHAPTER 25

It is a truth of faith that we gather at the hour of death the result of what we have done during life. As a man has sown so shall he reap. If during his life he has worked for God he will at his last moments be wonderfully consoled. It does sometimes happen nevertheless that good people are very afraid at the approach of death, in spite of the fact that they have led holy lives. This is part of God's providence which wishes to purify these souls of the results of their weaknesses in life, and so prepare them for a more glorious crown in heaven.

It was not like that with Dominic. I believe that God willed to give him that hundredfold which he reserves for his chosen souls before they enter the glory of heaven. Without any doubt, his so strong faith, his spirit of prayer and penance, his never having offended God grievously, his work for the saving of souls, had all merited for him peace and joy at the hour of death.

And so as death came to him he looked at it serenely and unafraid. Normally the body suffers considerable desolation and distress at the great stress of the soul separating itself from the body; but with Dominic it was not so; the phrase sometimes seen on tombs was very true of him—He fell asleep in the Lord.

It was the evening of March 9th; he had received all the helps that the Church has for us at the approach of death. Anyone who just heard him talking quietly and saw the peace and serenity on his face could only have thought that he was having a quiet rest in bed. If you add to this his complete mastery over himself and his happy spirit, it is little wonder that nobody imagined that his end was near.

About an hour and a half before he died the parish priest came to visit him and was quite amazed to hear the little ejaculations with which he so calmly and constantly recommended his soul to God. All the ejaculations expressed his great desire to go quickly to heaven.

In the circumstances the priest was somewhat perplexed as to what way he might help; he said some prayers with the boy and then as he was about to go Dominic said to him:

“Father, before going, leave me a parting thought to keep with me.”

“Really I don't know what to suggest.”

“Something that will strengthen and comfort me.”

“All right; try to keep in mind the Passion of Our Saviour.”

“*Deo gratias*”, replied Dominic, “May the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always in my mind and heart and on my lips. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, help me now when I am dying; Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I die at peace with you.”

After that he fell asleep for half an hour. When he woke up he looked round him and said:

“Daddy, are you there?”

"Here I am son, what do you want?"

"Daddy, it is time; get my Companion of Youth and read me the prayers for the Exercise of a Happy Death."

At these words his mother burst into tears and hurried from the room. His father's eyes filled with tears, but choking back his sobs, he got the book and read the prayers. As he went through them Dominic answered clearly.

"Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me . . ."

When his father reached the final part which runs:

"When for the first time my soul will see the wonderful majesty of God, do not drive it away, but take it to heaven to sing your praises for all eternity . . ." he said:

"Yes, Daddy—that is what I want so much, to sing the praises of Jesus for all eternity."

He dropped off to sleep again, but awoke after a short while. Then in a clear voice he said:

"Goodbye, Daddy, goodbye . . . what was it the parish priest suggested to me . . . I don't seem to remember . . . Oh, what wonderful things I see . . ."

And so saying, with a beautiful smile on his face, and his hands joined on his breast he gave up his soul to God without any struggle.

Return, pure soul, to your Creator; heaven is open to you, the angels and saints are waiting for you. Jesus, whom you loved so much, calls you with sweet words: "Come, good and faithful servant, you have fought the good fight and gained the victory; enter into the joy of your God."

## CHAPTER 26

WHEN Dominic's father heard him say these last words and saw his head bending forward as though in sleep, he really thought he had fallen asleep again. He waited a few moments and then suddenly filled with apprehension he called to the boy and as he looked again he saw that he was dead.

It can easily be realized how great was the sorrow of Dominic's parents at the death of their wonderful son, whose innocent life and appealing ways had spread such happiness in their home.

At the Oratory we were anxiously waiting for news of how he was getting on, when a letter came from his father which began as follows:

With my heart full of grief I send you this sad news. Dominic, my dear son and your child in God, gave his soul to God on March 9th after having received with the greatest devotion the Last Sacraments and the Papal Blessing.

His companions were stunned by the news and some wept at the loss of a great friend who never failed them when in need; others were sad at realizing that they would no longer be helped by his constant inspiration. Others got together to pray for the repose of his soul; but the majority said: "He was a saint, he is already in heaven."

Some began immediately to pray to him and there was great competition to try to get hold of something which had belonged to him.

When Don Picco, head of the school where Dominic went for special classes, heard the news, he was profoundly moved and gave the sad news to his boys in the following terms:

"Only a short time ago I was speaking to you of the uncertainty of life and how death does not spare even your young years. When I said that to you I was very far from imagining that one of those listening to me would very soon testify to the truth of my words. It is with great sorrow that I tell you that your companion Dominic Savio, so exemplary in his life, died a few days ago. You will remember how he was racked with a painful cough during his last days at the school, and it was no surprise to any of us that he had to stay away from school.

"I am not ashamed to say to you that my tears flowed freely when I read the letter describing his death, which his father wrote to Don Bosco. I am very sorry that he was not long at our school so that I might have come to know him better, and all of you have been helped more and more by his inspiring example.

"I shall never forget with what unaffected recollection he used to come into the class-room, take his place and start work immediately, showing none of the light-headedness and silliness which so easily manifests itself among boys. With what eagerness and attention he used to listen to what was being said, anxious to learn everything that he could. I never marvelled that he made such rapid progress so that in spite of his delicate health and periodic absences he was always among the first two or three places in the class positions. What joy it was seeing him join in the prayers we used to say before and after lessons. How earnest was his attempt to really pray, to have his mind and heart at one with God.

"God gives us life to love him and to gain merit for a blessed eternity; thinking of Dominic's life we can see how foolish the boy is who goes on day after day with never a thought for God and intent only on indulging himself in selfish pleasures. Set your life beside Dominic's and whatever difference you find between his and yours, make up your minds to conquer yourselves as he did, and thereby enjoy the same joy and peace that he had and which made him such a wonderful companion to you all. How happy he is in heaven now!

I recommend you all to him, and whatever improvement I notice in you I shall attribute to his intercession."

## CHAPTER 27

It will not come as a surprise to those who have read what I have written about Dominic that God soon showed in extraordinary ways how pleasing his life had been in His sight. While he was still alive many graces were obtained by people who got him to pray for them and their intentions. After his death confidence in his intercession grew rapidly and the majority of his companions quite spontaneously prayed to him instead of praying for him. As they said among themselves:

"If Dominic has not gone straight to heaven or is not there by this time who on earth is going to manage it?"

No day passed without favours being received for soul and body, not only in the school but also by people outside. I have received many accounts and testimonies from a great variety of people; and of these I give one here. It concerns a seminarian who had known Dominic personally. He became very ill and what with being in hospital for a long period of treatment and having to rest after it, he was not able to take the examination at the end of the school year. He thought he would at least manage it in the autumn and so avoid the loss of a school year, but when he started to study again his illness returned with renewed force and there was no hope that he would succeed as he wished. Inspired by what he heard, he turned to his erstwhile companion and begged him to help him, reminding him of how they had been companions at school and of how no one understood better than Dominic how necessary it was for him to get better and resume his studies.

He made a novena in Dominic's honour and on the fifth day his health improved remarkably and he was able to resume studying. With extraordinary ease he was able to make up his lost time and pass very successfully the necessary examination. The great improvement in his health continued and he had no further trouble.

I would also like to give here what Dominic's father wrote to me about the experience he had a month after his son's death.

"The death of my son caused me profound grief and as the days went past I wondered to myself what was his lot in the life after death. God in his goodness consoled me immediately. It was about one month after Dominic's death; I lay awake one night in bed unable to get to sleep, when suddenly the roof over my head seemed to open, the room was filled with light, and then I saw Dominic standing before me, his face radiant with joy, his whole appearance

majestic and splendid. Beside myself with surprise and emotion, I stammered out: "Dominic, Dominic, how are you? Where are you? Are you already in heaven?"

"Yes, Daddy," he replied, "I am already in heaven."

"Oh, then," I said, "if God in his goodness has already taken you to heaven, pray for your mother and me, for your brothers and sisters, so that one day we may all be together again in heaven."

"Yes, Daddy, I will pray", he replied, and disappeared; with that the room was plunged into darkness again.

Dominic's father is ready to testify to this on oath and says that never before or after did he have the wonderful consolation of seeing his son again.

With these facts I bring to an end this life of Dominic Savio. I would like to make the conclusion a very practical one, and that is that we should be moved to follow in his footsteps. There are none of us who cannot imitate him in his receiving the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion often and well. In so doing let us look sometimes at our past Confessions to see if they were well made and if it is necessary let us not hesitate to do whatever is needed to set them right.

It seems to me that through these sacraments received well and often we can live happily in the midst of the sorrows and trials of this life, and like Dominic, when our time comes, see death approach with peace and joy in our hearts. How happy we will be then to meet Jesus Our Saviour who will judge us according to his mercy, and in his goodness lead us to an eternity of happiness.

Here ends Dominic's life as told by St. John Bosco.

PART TWO

COMMENTARY AND EXPLANATION

by

TERENCE O'BRIEN, S.D.B.

## Note on Don Bosco's Preface

IN the Preface St. John Bosco immediately strikes the practical note which runs all through the biography. **He is not concerned with "edifying" or providing something suitable for pious reading, but with living for God in practical life.** He says quite plainly to the reader, don't simply get carried away, but be moved to try to do the same.

It is very important to approach the reading of the life with this realization. Don Bosco was not concerned with the phenomena of sanctity as such, but with how to live fully for God and for each other, in the very great difficulties of daily life. If this is consistently borne in mind, it will save many mistakes being made when reading this book.

The difficulties of life today are even greater than in Dominic's day, and are certainly not to be overcome by the external trappings of piety and the lip service to God of recited prayers. **The book does not aim at exciting devotion to Dominic as a saint, and getting young people to pray to him.** His life offers a complete way of life to the young people of today—a way that offers them the fullest development, self-realization and fulfilment also on the human level.

We are quite used to it now, but it may be remembered that even as recently as the early nineteen fifties, there were no coffee bars, no commercial T.V. stations, no juke boxes, no teenage singing stars. The young people of those years were much the same as they had been for generations previously. Their spare time was spent on sport, ballroom dancing, or on a visit to the cinema. Their idols were film, not record, stars, and these idols were adults.

Then, in 1955, a young actor, James Dean, was killed in a car accident in the States. He had a following before he died, but with his death an extraordinary fan fever developed among the teenagers, and a great legend started about him which soon had little relation to reality. He was the first of the young idols that young people could identify themselves with.

Then followed the famous film which brought the rock and roll, and introduced a new era, ushered in chiefly by Bill Haley and his "Comets". The words were no longer important, it was the movement and the infectious beat which so captivated the teenagers, because for them it was the beat of life.

Elvis Presley then came on the scene, and after some initial difficulties in a short space of time could, on one single T.V. network, capture 82% of the American audience, while Eisenhower on a combined three networks drew 78%; and so it has gone on ever since down to the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and the rest.

**The teenagers are now firmly anchored to their own contemporaries**

**and turn to them for their inspiration and stimulation. How completely their lives have been affected, a little reflection soon shows. The way of dressing, acting, speaking, the whole approach to life, has been conditioned for many of them in this way. The hysterical manifestations shown on occasion by teenage girls are some indication of the depth of the penetration which has been made.**

Today therefore, Dominic's life, that of a teenage saint, takes on the greatest significance. One can say that the ground has been prepared in a sense, and it should not be difficult to bring the youth of today in contact with him. The fact that his life is a direct contrast to that of the pop idols can be a challenge to them which many would gladly accept.

St. John Bosco also brings in from the beginning the ever-blessed Mother of God, who from an early age had guided his own footsteps, and who had, when he was a priest, given him the commission to make it known everywhere that it was her great desire and her mission to help God's children at every moment and in every place, would they but turn to her.

Don Bosco's style of writing is very simple and direct. He can pack into a sentence or paragraph depths of meaning which, because it is so simply stated, often remains unperceived. There are also references and allusions to his ideas and methods which were easily understood by his boys and Salesians, but whose meaning remains hidden to others. I have tried to make this book the very important and valuable aid that it can be for parents, teachers, priests and all those working with young people, by adding to each chapter of the original life an explanatory chapter. This aims at uncovering the hidden meaning and wisdom which is there, explaining whatever needs explaining of Salesian life, and also trying to link up with the difficulties experienced by priests, parents and teachers in the education and character formation of the young today.

I should like to emphasize that I am only drawing out what is already there: uncovering principles which lie underneath, explaining ideas expressed, and developing the meaning contained in them, for the benefit of those who are not immediately able to perceive them for themselves.

There has sometimes been considerable misunderstanding in reading Dominic's life, and this is, I think, because when we read we are unconsciously making comparisons with what we know from our own experience, and understand it in the light of this. Our experience is naturally incomplete and so, when we come across something new, we have nothing to understand it with, and we need, therefore, to understand it in itself. Sometimes there are new things which do not appear to be new, and we understand them falsely because we relate them to previous experience and knowledge which is inadequate or false in this connection.

This is something which has happened for many people with regard to Dominic's life. In reading some of the incidents they relate them unconsciously with what appear to be similar incidents and experiences, **but which are not**. For example, a virtuous act can be done hypocritically; that is, it can be a deliberately false representation of the person's real state and relationship with God. It can be done not hypocritically, but at the same time not be a reflection of the doer's real state, in so far as it is largely an external act to which there is very little corresponding inside. The relationship with God is there but not very real, without any depth. The bigger the gap between the external act and the interior state, the bigger can be the reaction against the person by those who witness or share in the acts.

The person's inner state may not be known, but it is felt instinctively that these acts are hollow or out of proportion to reality. Thus there are acts that are termed priggish, affected or precocious, and these more than any others get under the skin and make people squirm.

Lastly there is the virtuous act which comes from the depths of the human spirit, from a deep personal relationship with God, from one who is strong in Christ, a mature, stable personality. **These are wonderful acts, and these are what we are concerned with in Dominic's life.** We have an infallible guarantee that this is so by the Church's setting this boy among the Saints who she declares lived a total life on the heroic level.

However, it is not sufficient just to know this; we are immeasurably helped if we come to understand how this is so. Such acts are new to us and therefore have to be understood in themselves as new experiences and not be misunderstood by being falsely related to things which are quite different. This second part of the book is an attempt to help towards this understanding.

St John Bosco's life of his pupil and dearly loved son, St Dominic Savio, has been out of print for many years. During his lifetime Don Bosco wrote many books and pamphlets. None of these was more important than this biography: it may be said to be a little masterpiece. It not only gives Dominic's life as witnessed by Don Bosco himself and those who lived with him, but, for those who are willing to reflect a little and not only read, it opens up the way to an understanding of the spiritual and complete development of youth, and makes it possible for them both to help the young people of today, and to inspire them in the process. They will also learn a great deal about the educational methods or system of St. John Bosco. Here it can be seen in practice and, more important still, in its effects.

The whole situation is a new one: a schoolboy who died a natural death, and who was completely developed on the human and spiritual level. There is no Junior Section among the saints, and this boy

stands on the same level as any of the great saints in the history of the Church, including St. John Bosco, his father and friend.

**How this has come about must be of passionate interest to all of us, priests, parents, teachers, everyone. Dominic is not a rare and exotic flower; he is what the ordinary, decent boy is meant to be in God's Providence, if only we can play our part in his education, formation and development.**

If only . . . there is the rub . . . We can at any rate take a big step by coming to understand Dominic's life, and letting ourselves be heartened and encouraged by what we see there. Nothing less than setting ourselves to bring about a similar development in our children today will make it possible for them to sustain and overcome the onslaughts of contemporary life, and the increasingly difficult situations in which they find themselves. A pattern of external behaviour, if ever it was adequate, is totally inadequate today. Only a strong inner spirit can make it possible for them to triumph and transform their own environment, instead of being corrupted and deformed by it.

It is true that this demands the heroic level, but if we offer them only mediocrity instead, it will be a betrayal for which our children may never forgive us.

*These chapter numbers refer to the corresponding chapters in Part I.*

## CHAPTER 1

**THERE** are many books and pamphlets on "Grace": they are not easy to write, and they are not easy to understand. Here we see grace working in practice and we can thereby learn more easily than from the books. If it gets a chance, it can outstrip the child's natural growth. He can grow up inside much more quickly than he does physically and this is what happened to Dominic. He had a maturer approach to things. This helps us to understand how he could be attentive to the needs of others, trying not to give his parents trouble, anticipating their needs. **His mother was not blind; she was aware of the faults common to children of his age, as can be seen from her catalogue of them.** But he was also attentive to the things of God, and this shows us that it was also grace that was working. So by the time he is four he does not need to be reminded about saying his prayers: **he has some awareness that prayer is due to God and he wants to give it to Him in the same way as he wants to give his parents what will make them happy.** This is extremely valuable in the development of a child. God becomes a concrete reality—something personal, with whom a personal relationship can be established. Normally only the child's parents have this reality and the tremendousness of the reality of the parents is, without anyone wanting it to be so, a big obstacle to the child coming to love God. Dominic, however,

has come to realize God so well, as to make him feel it strange that anyone should not ask God to bless what he is going to eat. He knows animals don't do that, but this man is not an animal, though he acts like one!

Yet this does not alter him as a boy with all the captivating ways that a boy can have, which so much tug at the heart-strings, as his father confesses. How different to the bad-tempered, cross-grained child, whom nothing pleases and who no sooner gets something he wants, than he throws it away! Truly, grace perfects nature.

It may well be asked why it is that grace does not show itself equally in other children. The answer is because there is not the adequate preparation to receive it, nor the proper conditions in which it can operate. As a child grows exteriorly and physically it should also be developing interiorly. Normally this does not happen to any great extent: all the attention is given to the mechanics of correct behaviour both as regards politeness, conduct, etc., and also religion. These have their part to play in inward development, but they cannot accomplish it by themselves.

In the usual course of events the normal child does acquire the exterior behaviour and conduct proper to its age, but does not have the corresponding inner development and formation. Consequently it acts because of the exterior habits formed, and not in virtue of inner development; grace can only work in proportion to the inner capacity and readiness to receive it and let it develop.

Dominic was developing inwardly and not only outwardly and we see, in consequence, the effects of grace in him. He acted spontaneously according to the realization he had. He was not putting on an act; therefore it can be realized that he was not a precocious child. A precocious child normally produces uncomfortable feelings in adults because of what precociousness is—outward acts out of keeping with a child's years, to which there is nothing corresponding inside—no parallel inner development.

**It is obvious from this chapter and from what follows in the succeeding ones, that Dominic was a vivacious boy of spirit, not a temperamentally quiet boy who is glad to let life flow by without disturbing him.**

## CHAPTER 2

St. John Bosco makes no bones about the fact that there may be difficulty for some in believing some of the things he relates in this chapter. He himself gives us the real explanation in the previous chapter when he says that Dominic's love of God was older than his years: that is, his awareness and friendship for God were older than his years, and the parish priest expresses a similar idea when he remarks how grace was working in his soul so marvellously.

I would like to stress again that what we are dealing with here is not something purely spiritual and supernatural. Grace builds on nature and, if there is no real development on the natural level, there can be no real development on the supernatural one. The growth of the child has to proceed on two levels, exterior and interior. The former includes physical growth, and also behaviour, external habits etc.: the latter, the development of the qualities of the mind and heart, maturity, integrity and the like.

The normal child develops physically at a regular pace, and, according to his family circumstances and school, develops good behaviour and the various exterior habits. All this is visible and the child's progress, or lack of it, is very evident. It is not so with the inner development. It does not follow on automatically, and because of the correct exterior behaviour it can be thought to be there when it is not. It is of course very much harder to bring about, and because of this, as well as the fact already mentioned, that exterior behaviour may seem to indicate that it is taking place when it is not so, there can oftentimes be very little inner development or even none at all. Normally speaking, if this is so there will be inner development in the wrong direction.

The great fact about Dominic is that he was not only developing exteriorly but also inwardly and **this made it possible for grace to achieve such great results in him.**

This brings us to the very fundamental question of deciding in what maturity consists. Normally it is equated with length of years and experience. There is undoubtedly a natural maturity which can come with years and experience, but that it does not consist in this is apparent from the numbers of adults who show little or no signs of maturity, and of the young people sometimes met with, on the other hand, who show surprising signs of it.

No one has any doubt of the maturity of Our Lady when she was a little girl. St. Thérèse of Lisieux showed such judgment that she was made mistress of novices although only twenty-one years old. St. John Bosco when a boy showed a realization of the spiritual needs of those round about him and of how they could best be helped, which was far beyond his age and experience.

Maturity as a human quality may be defined, I would suggest, as being grown up inside, or acting according to reason and not according to reaction. This is dependent mostly on inner development. Children normally react to situations: things that happen produce reactions in them and they act accordingly: reason is able to enter very little. A companion hits them; they hit back: something is said to them; they reply in the same manner: they do not get their own way and they are upset: they have set their heart on something; it does not come off, and they are inconsolable. They cannot bear to be ignored and not be the centre of the picture.

Children have to develop out of this; how quickly they do so does not depend, as already mentioned, on length of years but on inner development. This can be easily seen if one reflects that years can go by and people no longer children in age are still children inside, still living by reacting to situations, unable to see things objectively and do what is best according to reason and principle.

In the completest and Christian sense maturity might be said to be the triumph of grace in the soul. When the soul is ruled by God instead of by one's own self, then there is maturity. The whims, caprices, irrational behaviour, now wanting this, now that, not knowing what is wanted, the inability to be objective and so on, all come from the self—what St. Paul refers to as the "old man". When the "new man" is in possession and rules, then there is objectively rational behaviour, control of the whims and caprices, and on a new level and with a more complete mentality, the mind of Christ.

We have in this chapter other independent confirmations that what we are seeing in Dominic is not precociousness, but interior development. "I was struck by the serenity of his face and his unaffected piety." The precocious child is very affected in his manner and that is why he gets under people's skin so easily. He is also self-conscious, and that is the very opposite of serenity.

Mgr Radini-Tedeschi, to whom Pope John as a young priest was secretary and whom he so venerated, remarks: "These first five years were for Dominic the beginning of an early maturity."

We see here also that Dominic was not living in a glass case, sheltered from all that could be wrong. Some of the boys were rather rowdy and far from good. His actions were positive, springing from inner conviction; not negative, arising from fear. He not only refused to take part in wrongdoing, but stated very convincingly why he thought it was wrong to do so. This is also brought out by the parish priest's remark that, if there was someone else to serve, he would hear Mass from the benches. Most good altar boys are there if it is their turn to serve Mass, but if they have to wait for one of the priests or have no occasion to serve, they will hang around in the sacristy or go home.

And yet Dominic still remained essentially a boy—wanting to carry the missal over himself and not have the priest do it for him. The parish priest's testimony ranges over a number of years of Dominic's life—till he was eleven years old.

### CHAPTER 3

This is a very important chapter.

With regard to his first Holy Communion and also what follows when he later was with St. John Bosco, it must be remembered that this was many years before the reforms of St. Pius X. Not only was it at the age of eleven or twelve that children were admitted to First

Communion, but Communion was received comparatively rarely. Three or four times a year was the normal for a good Catholic. Nuns and Brothers did not normally receive Communion daily; Sundays, Thursdays and big feastsdays was the maximum.

It is clear that Dominic was not allowed to make his First Communion at this early age because he was a "nice" boy, but because of the interior development which had taken place . . . "he understood very well . . . and had a great desire."

That he was filled with joy and ran home trembling with excitement would be the natural reaction of any good boy: what follows helps us to understand what was the development which had taken place in his mind and heart.

Many thousands of books have been written on the Holy Eucharist: from one angle they might all be reduced to one simple statement—**If the Holy Eucharist is really received as it should be, so that it can bring about in us the corresponding effects, it should come out during the day in the way we live and act. It is as simple as that. Our life cannot remain the same if the Holy Eucharist succeeds in working its effects in us.**

Dominic had some realization of this and so he promises his mother that he is going to be more obedient, respectful, attentive. **It is his daily life that is going to be better, he is going to try to live better for God, and not just say more prayers.** How practical is his approach, how mature! This is what one finds so rarely . . . so many people can be devout at prayers and Holy Communion, but remain just as careless, bad-tempered, uncharitable in their ordinary daily life: there seems to be so little connection between the Sacraments and daily life. Today, frequent Communion is the custom both for children and adults, but little evidence can be seen, especially among the children, of its fruits in daily life. One can find many fifteen-year-old school-leavers to whom this great Sacrament means little or nothing.

If there were any doubt that Dominic was developing not only exteriorly but also interiorly, it would be dispelled by the resolutions or promises which he made on this occasion. The fourth one: "Death, but not sin", has resounded through the world ever since, calling on all boys and girls to follow him, in his declaration of war against evil and his total commitment to God. **There is all the difference in the world between the desire to resist temptation and not to sin, and a positive declaration of total war against the devil and sin in every shape or form.** The devil has declared war against us from the first moment of our existence: he is committed totally against us and against God. **There is no possibility of real spiritual development without this out and out declaration. Piety is possible, but not spiritual development in depth.** These four words: "Death, but not sin", are the formula which is required for the peace of the world. Peace will

only be possible when there is peace in the heart of every man, and a man's heart cannot be at peace till he is lined up with God, and against all that is against Him. All the summit meetings in the world will never find a formula for positive peace: the most they can ever achieve is an uneasy truce, with intense preparation for war always in the background.

Dominic knew what wrong-doing was: as mentioned in the previous chapter he would slip quietly away if a companion wanted to pick a quarrel, or stand his ground firmly if an attempt was made to involve him in actions that were wrong. At different stages of his life he was to be faced with serious sin . . . his determination was not just so many words but a total commitment to God and against whatever was opposed to Him.

The word 'love' does not mean very much to children, especially in our own age, as it can have a lot of false associations. Friendship, however, has a real meaning and they can understand deeply what having a friend means. Many children, especially from eleven and twelve upwards, could arrive at deep intimacy with Jesus and Mary, if only the approach was made on the level of friendship. Friendship means joy in each other's presence, thinking alike, being interested in the same things.

In Dominic's third promise—"My friends will be Jesus and Mary", we see how instinctively he is in touch with reality. He must have friends: Jesus and Mary are going to be his best ones.

The Sunday is profaned far and wide, and this has been named as one of the causes of the first World War. How much this resolution of Dominic points in the right direction! Without his realizing it, Dominic's first resolution was to prepare him for coming under St. John Bosco's direction, when he was to be led to daily Communion in an age when this was quite unknown. St. John Bosco concludes the chapter with a very profound and serious observation. He states definitely that the First Communion must be a turning point in the child's life, if his subsequent life is to be a life for God and not for himself. So much so is this, that Don Bosco goes so far as to say that it is even better not to make it at all, than to make it badly.

**He does not suggest for a moment that what happened in Dominic's case is not possible for any child—rather does he put it forward as the norm.**

Children are prepared for their First Holy Communion; they receive instruction, learn prayers . . . **One vital element is very often missing: they do not come to have a personal relationship with Our Blessed Lord and yet, without this, their First and subsequent Holy Communions cannot begin the work of transformation into Christ which they are meant to achieve.**

This should be the greatest preoccupation of parents and teachers in preparing children for this great event and first great turning-

point in their conscious lives, to lead the children to a personal relationship with Our Blessed Lord. We have to face up to the fact that today this is more difficult than ever, but that only makes it more necessary than ever.

#### CHAPTER 4

"I HAVE my guardian angel with me." This incident can help us to understand one of the great problems in the religious training and education of children—the difference between their simply learning about God and their having a conscious and inner awareness of him. It is so easy to imagine that this latter exists when in fact it does not. If we do not lead the children to it, they are stopped short on the road of any religious and spiritual development.

Dominic had not only learned from his catechism that he had a guardian angel; he really believed it—had an awareness of his presence. In consequence he felt just as safe as though there were his parents or other grown-ups with him on the road. Still less was he merely learning about God as a remote and abstract figure, he was living for Him. This is what spiritual development leads to. **The pious child or person does things for God; the one who is developing begins to live for Him. The merely pious person can do things for God and at the same time live for himself.** It is fatal to say that living for God will come later on. We make a great mistake if we do not try to develop the children to this from their earliest years. Dominic's walking to and from school in all weathers and at the cost of sacrifice was not for him something to be bemoaned; it was for Jesus and Mary, his friends, and there would also be a reward waiting for him in heaven.

In these days when we realize more clearly the need children have for security and stability, we can understand this incident better still. **Dominic felt quite secure; he was not overcome by imaginary and uncontrollable terrors.** How much we could help our children if we could only help them to an abiding awareness of the presence of God, their father who loves them! What fertile fields for fear the mind and heart of the child are! Can there be an equal security given to children in any other way? **Dominic in his replies simply said what was a matter of course for him.** He did not give the answer he had learned in the catechism.

The incident of the boys asking him to go swimming helps us to understand that Dominic was not living a life where he never encountered temptation and that the boys with whom he came into contact were not all angels! It also helps us to realize the reality of his "Death rather than sin". **If he was ready to die rather than offend God grievously, he had also to be prepared to do other things, among**

**them stand out against his school mates.** This for most boys is harder than death. The penalty for so doing is normally to be laughed and jeered at, called a 'sissy', 'a holy Joe', and so on. A boy has normally to bear this ridicule on his own and most boys are quite unable to do it; they have good intentions but generally no answer for this.

As boys of today write:

"The average boy has not the courage, unfortunately, to challenge openly the vulgar types, even more so if he has at one time been part of the gang, and has since tried to mend his ways."

"You get frightened at being laughed at and called a sissy, and you wonder if you are really doing good when the others make a worse mockery than ever of good things."

"Fear is the biggest difficulty: fear of being called names, especially of being called a coward."

The difficult situations have multiplied since Dominic's day. It is little realized how many of the improvements—better conditions, better schools—have created problems of their own. Houses where both parents are out working, for example, can provide an opportunity for a group of children to foregather, and the situation thus created can be a very difficult one. So too, the so-called 'teenage parties'; it requires much courage to stand out against the situations which can arise in these, and many other circumstances so possible today. As one boy puts it . . . "Quite often I have found myself in what was an impossible situation—not by design, purely in the normal course of things, especially when I am feeling most sociable or most natural. In the majority of these circumstances the Christian way out nearly always seems the most unnatural. As far as I can see for the ordinary society in which one has to move, the Christian way is the way of an imbecile." This is a boy who sincerely and generously wants to live a Christian life.

## CHAPTER 5

**THE choice of companions is of great importance in a boy's life.** Many boys are left to choose their companions without any help or guidance. Many also, in spite of help and guidance, are drawn into the wrong group. Here human respect also plays a large part. **Boys naturally follow a leader, and also naturally want to be with the leader. They can be completely isolated if they are not one of some group. Very often the less desirable boy seems to lead more than the good one.** A boy can know well enough that certain companions are not good for him and that he should break away, but he has not the courage to do so. He stays on uneasily for a time and then throws his uneasiness overboard; as often as not he will then go further than anyone else: and so the best boy in the group can become the worst one.

The difficulty today is not diminished: many a boy has said, "What can I do? If I don't go with these boys, I will not have any friends at all."

Dominic follows a very definite plan and a very wise one in practice, at this stage of his development. A boy has to make up his mind in this matter, and Dominic certainly made up his.

It is an interesting point that, although he was not physically strong, he never missed a day off school. Children who are tied to their mother's apron-strings, or who for some reason or other dislike school, who have no desire to learn or find conditions too difficult, easily develop various sicknesses and allied conditions which keep them away from school. This can also be the case when they are quite strong physically. This information about Dominic is an additional proof of his eagerness to learn and of his being a boy of independent character, not tied to his mother's apron-strings.

This brings to an end a stage in Dominic's life, a stage in which he has succeeded in beginning to live for God, and Don Bosco takes occasion to sum up in the words of Dominic's schoolmaster the achievement of his life so far, and to put it forward as something that was open to any boy to follow.

This testimony was sent to Don Bosco in August, 1857, that is, a few months after Dominic's death. It is an admirable, objective summary, and shows clearly the impression made on the priest. He mentions at the end how glad he was to hear that Dominic had been accepted at Don Bosco's school, although Don Bosco did not mention it. In fact he paid a visit to the school and saw Dominic there and was overjoyed to find that he was going steadily ahead.

## CHAPTER 6

NOTHING is to be gained by speculating as to the reasons for so many changes of address for Dominic and his family, but one certain point is that he was now much nearer to the village where St. John Bosco was born and spent his boyhood and to which he used to return every year for a little holiday with some of his boys. This was normally in early autumn.

Don Bosco was widely known throughout the countryside, and Dominic's new parish priest knew him very well, and, as we shall see later, instinctively turned to him, when it was a question of doing something about Dominic's higher studies.

Any major change in the lives of children can be sufficient to throw off or leave behind what they have only acquired in a superficial way. This is because the attention and imagination of children are easily seized by completely new surroundings, and they naturally tend to live

according to them and not according to those they have left. This is of course true also of those adults who have remained undeveloped and immature, and accounts largely for the falling away from the faith of those who leave their own country where the practising of the faith is part of normal life, and settle down in another country where this is not so.

While Dominic's new surroundings were as Catholic in external practice as his previous ones, his own private life of fervour for God was a personal thing and deeply rooted in him, and so he continued it. Had it been something superficial and childish it could very easily have been left aside.

This is further borne out by the testimony of Don Cugliero, his new teacher. It is only a short statement but contains a great deal to help us in understanding Dominic's inner development, a development possible for any child, if it is gone about in the right way. We get from another independent source the testimony that this growth is really going on, that he is steadily maturing.

"He was only a boy in age, but he had the sense and judgment of a fully mature man." This is testimony with regard to inner development and there follow on from this practical consequences.

He was sought after by the other boys and won their affection. **This is the most sure proof, because boys instinctively dislike and reject what appears outwardly but has nothing corresponding inside.** We are further helped to understand this in the one fact which Don Cugliero alludes to.

One day, while the teacher was absent from his class, the boys got up to mischief in various ways, as is so customary on such occasions. The two most mischievous brought in a lot of snow and rubbish and crammed it into the old iron stove which was heating the classroom. The resultant damage done and the mess made were very considerable, and the master was understandably very angry. The culprits, seeing the master's anger, and realizing they had gone too far this time, were very afraid, and put the responsibility for it all on Dominic. Dominic took the blame and the punishment without a word.

Reflection on this incident can help us to understand a number of things, which might go unrealized, if it is considered only superficially. These two boys were boys with whom he had nothing in common; they were not his friends. Yet, to save them, he is willing to suffer the loss of his own reputation with his teacher—so dear to a boy—to be told off and publicly humiliated—he was put kneeling in front of the class—he who up to this had never had anything but praise, honour and renown. This gives us a glimpse at the heroic spirit and love which were stirring in his depths.

"The man who loves his neighbour has done all that the law demands." (Romans XIII, 9)

**“This is the greatest love a man can show, that he should lay down his life for his friend.” (John XV, 13)**

To be thought badly of can be worse than physical death.

It is not known how the truth came out but it seems very likely that some of the other boys privately told the master who the real culprits were. Dominic’s genuine generosity and kindness, his heroic charity are brought out in what he says to Don Cugliero, especially in his final remark:

“I remembered that Jesus had been blamed unjustly and had not said anything, and I thought I should do the same . . .” This brings us back to the development taking place in him through the Holy Eucharist, which he received as often and as well as he could. In an earlier chapter I remarked that there is a very simple test as to whether the Holy Eucharist is really able to work its effects in us: that, if it is, those effects should come out during the day in the way we live and act—the mentality and acts of Christ gradually inform our own. Jesus is accused unjustly and does not say anything—Dominic is accused unjustly and does not say anything. It seems to him the natural thing to do.

We can see more and more that there was no priggishness in Dominic. Humanly speaking he would not be able to help seeing that there was a good deal of difference between himself and such boys as these. But he never judged that way; he never despised his companions for their failures. He could always find compassion.

## CHAPTER 7

THE first meeting between Dominic and Don Bosco has a fragrance all its own. Don Bosco sensed something of the importance of it, but could not be fully aware of how momentous the meeting was both for himself and for the whole Church.

He was struck by Dominic’s smiling expression, his charming but respectful manner. Grace has its own smile and appearance. The strong and healthy life of the body provides its own glow and appearance visible to all. No less does the life of God in the human being. When this is strong and pulsating it begets an interior peace and happiness which also shows itself outwardly in joy, serenity, radiance. The innocence of a little child and its complete trust in others shows itself in its face, as do also the bad temper, sulkiness and cross-grainedness of a child who is developing in the wrong direction.

It should be realized that this was evidence of positive strength. If it is difficult to attain goodness it is still more difficult to retain it. How easily what has been gained can begin to slip away! To retain and to preserve virtue requires not less but more effort. Each one can reflect on his own experience in this matter.

The wonder is that Dominic had not let himself be thoroughly spoiled. He was a clever boy, a nice boy, with a charming manner. How successful he had been in everything!—he was allowed to make his first Communion at seven years instead of eleven or twelve. How much praise and attention he must have had from those he came in contact with! There is nothing which can so easily go to a boy's head as this, and when he begins to lose his head, he is on the quick road to losing everything else.

Dominic had managed to cling on, to persevere; he had not let himself be carried away by the false image of his own perfection and so lose his head, or secretly consider himself better than anyone else. How easily he could have come to Don Bosco proclaiming silently but unmistakably: "Here I am. I, the one and only Dominic Savio, have arrived." Certainly no one would have been quicker to notice anything like this, had it been present, than Don Bosco. Instead, Don Bosco says: "We found common ground immediately and a relationship of trust and mutual confidence sprang up spontaneously." This was not just a nice thing; this was the indispensable basis of all that was to follow. Trust and mutual confidence are the indispensable basis of all education on the natural and supernatural levels. How often this basis does not exist! Its necessity may never even dawn on parents, teachers and others. The child's inferior position is taken for granted: it is there to receive and I am here to instruct and tell it what to do. That is all there is to it!

There is no inner growth and development possible in these circumstances: for such development, mutual acceptance and understanding are absolutely necessary; these make possible that inter-communication of spirit which distinguishes education from mere teaching and instruction; formation and development as distinct from the imposition of the exterior pattern. "Well, Father, what do you think?" Dominic is not so full of himself that he takes it for granted that Don Bosco will only be too willing to have him; at the same time he is not afraid to ask. He grasps immediately the meaning behind Don Bosco's symbolic reply, and his own reply shows that he has had no difficulty in seeing that he needs fashioning, shaping, cutting, to make him fit for his Lord and God.

Don Bosco's reply is a pointer to what is necessarily involved in any real, inner development, whether on the natural or spiritual level. If the cloth had any feelings, the process of being cut to shape and stitched—the needle weaving in and out, continually piercing—would be a very painful one and would call forth many protests. No one is the right shape; we all need cutting and stitching. Unlike the cloth we have feelings; we know this well enough as regards ourselves, but it can very easily be forgotten as regards children and young people. They do need cutting, shaping and stitching, but if we are conscious of the fact that they have feelings, we do it with

compassion and understanding, and so they are able to accept the suffering and privation which is entailed, and develop accordingly.

Dominic had a great desire to be a priest: from other sources it is clear that he had had this desire for some time, as also the desire to be accepted at the Oratory (Don Bosco's School). Don Bosco's name and fame were well known in the neighbourhood. Dominic did not know that he would never reach the priesthood, although his words show that he accepts the fact that it does not depend on him but on God. From the preceding chapters it is obvious that he was a clever boy, and this fact is shown again now in the rapidity with which he successfully does his little 'intelligence' test.

This whole encounter with Dominic has obviously moved Don Bosco profoundly, and the quick doing by Dominic of his test is only the final touch which moves him to accept Dominic there and then, not only into his school but as one of his special sons.

Dominic also has been profoundly moved; he realizes deep down that he has found the father of his soul, and that a tremendous road stretches in front of him. Don Bosco not only never had 'any reason to complain of him', but in Dominic was able to carry out to the full the conception he had of what the education of a boy should be, and to see his ideas completely vindicated. The Church in canonizing Dominic has set a divine and infallible seal on what Don Bosco set out to do, and has pointed it out as the way of life and development for all boys and girls.

This realization should help us to approach the succeeding chapters with a still greater interest; this applies not only to those who have to deal directly with the young, but to everybody, for the welfare and true development of youth is a primary concern of all those who live for God.

The date of this meeting was October 2nd, 1854.

## CHAPTER 8

"It is characteristic of youth to change suddenly . . ."

This might be said to be the psychology of the child in a nutshell: no one who deals with the young can have any doubt about it. Don Bosco goes on to say: "It was not so with Dominic". It should be realized that if it was not so, this was the result of very positive efforts previously made. It is quite clear from the previous chapters that Dominic was a boy of keen intelligence, lively and vivacious. These qualities lead a boy to be impulsive, mercurial, always discovering something new, keenly interested in everything about him, leaving what is just discovered for the next thing that presents itself; and these things in their turn can lead on to instability and the rest.

This is further borne out by what happened when Dominic, eager to make a start, betook himself to Don Bosco's room. His keen eyes saw the words of St. Francis de Sales on the wall, and his enquiring look at Don Bosco led the latter to give Dominic his first lesson in Latin and in Salesian spirituality. This first seed fell on ready ground and began to germinate almost immediately, as the boy's apt paraphrase clearly shows. If he had been passive and retiring by nature very great efforts would have been needed to bring about the positive growth and development that Don Bosco notes so definitely. The sea of life flows past the quiet, retiring boy and tends to leave him in his own secluded hollow on the shore.

The succeeding three paragraphs show us the steady continuance of his efforts; he neither knew everything nor imagined that he did. When a boy is full of his own importance, he tends to ignore largely or set little store by the ordinary masters, and be concerned chiefly with the head, and perhaps one or two others. It is clear how far this was from being so in Dominic's case.

In what the saint says about Dominic's choice of companions he indirectly helps us to realize that the boy did not find himself among a group of what one sometimes characterizes as 'choir boys'. He refers to boys who were rowdy, disobedient and who showed little respect for the things of God. Don Bosco's house was not a house of carefully selected plants. Many were boys whom he had taken away from difficult circumstances, boys off the streets, boys who early in life had to establish the right to live by their fists and by general aggressiveness.

Therefore, on the one hand, Dominic was not living in a rarefied atmosphere, and, on the other, was so conscious of his own basic weakness that he took deliberate care to avoid letting himself get entangled with boys who might draw him away from God.

"December the 8th, feast of the Immaculate Conception, was drawing near . . ."

Dominic came to Don Bosco's house on the 29th of October, 1854, and so, right at the beginning, he was brought into special contact with Our Lady. Mary Immaculate was the second of the two poles of the spiritual life for the young as conceived by St. John Bosco. He aimed at leading the boys to a very deep and intimate relationship with the Mother of God, resulting in a state of complete dependence on her and a readiness to turn to her at any and every moment.

The feast of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception was always kept with special solemnity, but this year there was special excitement and enthusiasm because the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was about to be solemnly proclaimed. The Salesian Father Cagliero, later to be the first Salesian cardinal, who was a contemporary of Dominic at the Oratory, testified regarding this at the process for

Dominic's beatification and canonization. "I remember the great joy and enthusiasm there was at the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. On the evening of the feast there were illuminations in the Oratory and in the town. Don Bosco let the boys go out to see them and Dominic was beside himself with joy at the great manifestations of devotion to Mary Most Holy."

Don Bosco himself never forgot the impression left on him either, and twenty-two years later, on 28th November, 1876, speaking to his boys to help them to begin the Novena well for the feast, he said: "I remember so well, as though it was only yesterday, the smiling but resolute face of Dominic Savio, so good and so docile. He came to me the first day of the Novena and we spoke together as I mention in his life. The talk we had together was much longer than would appear from the book. He said to me:

"I know that Our Lady gives special graces to those who try to make her Novena well . . ."

"What would you like to do for her in this Novena?"

"A lot of things."

"Such as?"

"First of all I would like to make a General Confession, so as to be really well prepared. Then I would like to carry out as perfectly as possible the special deed each day. I would also like to behave so well that I could go to Communion each morning."

"Is that the lot?"

"No, there is something else."

"What is that?"

"I would like to wage relentless war on serious sin."

"Does that complete everything?"

"I would like to ask Jesus and Mary with great fervour that they would let me die rather than that I should sin even venially against Holy Purity."

"He then gave me a sheet of paper on which he had written his determinations. He kept his promises . . . Mary Immaculate helped him to do so." (*Memorie Biografiche* XII. 572)

"So he took Mary . . ."

Don Bosco notes that this was a very definite stage in Dominic's spiritual development, and with such results that Don Bosco felt he had to make notes of different things that happened, and he actually began to do so. This confirms once again that the facts as given in the life are absolutely first hand and not just recollections of Don Bosco in later life.

Don Rua, one of Dominic's teachers and later to succeed Don Bosco in ruling the Congregation, testified at the process that he was aware at the time that the saint was writing Dominic's life while he was still alive.

## CHAPTER 9

“VERY SOON moved from the first into the second form . . .” This is of interest as it lets us know that Dominic was with boys somewhat older than himself and that, consequently, the influence he had over others was the more remarkable, as older boys do not easily take the lead from the younger members of their group. The qualities which Don Bonzanino mentions are very positive qualities. **To give one’s attention to anything over a period of time, and to do so regularly, is, even for an adult, quite a feat.** There are not many people who can really concentrate easily and spontaneously. There are quite a few who can concentrate under considerable pressure or force of circumstances, such as the near approach of an examination.

This is more true still of children. They do not easily concentrate on things which demand mental effort. Their interest can flow out spontaneously to what is capable of arousing it; lessons do not generally come into this category.

**Docility is a positive capacity to receive and assimilate. It is not timorousness or negative passivity.** It implies the possession of a number of other qualities, and not only their possession but their development and exercise.

Respect is also something very positive. It is an acknowledgement of other people’s individuality and dignity as persons. The instinct of a clever and successful boy in a new school is to show off and be patronizing, or to curry favour with those in authority. How far Dominic was from this and how positive his other qualities were, is shown from the ascendancy he gained over the other boys. He started from bed-rock, as he had no material family aids such as wealth or class status.

It is an axiom that inner strength and goodness spread themselves around. This is obvious in what was happening here, as is also exemplified by the improvement made in the more scatter-brained boys who were put beside him. Count B. di Ruffino, who was a boy with Dominic in this class, was among those who testified to this at the process of beatification and canonization.

“I remember well Dominic’s place in the classroom, and how, when my attention used to wander, I felt an impulse to renewed effort and attention whenever my wandering eyes would alight on him.”

The incident of the two boys and duel with stones, took place at the Oratory and not at Don Bonzanino’s school just referred to. It shows us again how tough some of the boys were with whom Dominic was living. This incident well repays a little analysis.

Dominic is genuinely concerned for the boys: this is his natural reaction instead of the normal, immature, schoolboy reaction to a fight, to watch excitedly and urge the combatants on to greater efforts. **He tries to set things right, but fails completely.** They have

gone beyond the stage where reason can restore the balance and, even if he reports them as he feels he should do in so serious a matter, Dominic realizes that so doing will not prevent but only defer. If he had been full of his own importance and ruled by pride he would have shrugged his shoulders after the first rebuff and probably said: "All right, go your own way. If one of you gets seriously hurt, it will teach you a lesson." **What is needed, if they are to be saved, is a situation capable of penetrating them deeper than their anger.** This is what Dominic instinctively works towards. He lets them go as far as they possibly can, till they are poised on the edge, and then his dynamic action and powerful reasoning shed a penetrating light through the storm-tossed brains of the two boys, making it possible for their anger to evaporate, so that they return to a state of normality. As one of the boys said afterwards: "At that moment I was shaken to the depths and began to shudder all over. I felt thoroughly ashamed . . ." Not only so, but the positive step was taken of setting their souls at peace with God.

This incident is of profound significance not only spiritually but psychologically, and helps us to understand how much is possible in the boy who is steadily developing to maturity, and in whom the Holy Spirit can freely work.

The rest of the chapter helps us to understand further some of the points already made. In addition it becomes clear that Dominic's progress and development were not because he was shut off from daily life and its experiences and did not encounter temptation, but because he lived for God in his daily life, meeting those temptations which are an inevitable part of different stages of life. In those days when there were no football matches, cinema, television, radio and so on, public shows, like a fair, were of quite tremendous importance and the annual visit to the town of the fair caused very great excitement. It is understandable that the boys passing by were very tempted to stay on and enjoy themselves, and that Dominic himself at first instinctively agreed to join in. He really could have enjoyed himself.

God gives grace, and the accepting and corresponding with one grace leads on to other and greater ones. This is the law of the spiritual life. There must be steady progression; there is no standing still. There must be a constant re-digging of the ground for a new sowing of the word of God. How true this is, is shown us in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 10

THE preacher was Don Bosco himself. Of the three points which he makes the first and third are the ordinary doctrine and the second is peculiarly his own. In explaining that it was easy to be a saint, he used to lay great stress on the fact that trying to be so involves great

happiness and cheerfulness of spirit and that this was not only the way to be really happy, but that in being really happy a boy was actually making himself a saint.

There is a great deal more in this than appears at first sight, and when it is understood, some idea can be had of Don Bosco's revolutionary approach to sanctity in the young. There is no true happiness without interior peace, and without a clear conscience. Therefore in trying to keep themselves happy and cheerful the children must, of necessity, be working at what is necessary for their salvation and sanctification.

We might be a bit puzzled at the effect of this talk on Dominic. Did he not know it all already? What about the 'cloth' and the 'tailor' mentioned in an earlier chapter, and also the '*Da mihi Animas*' in St. John Bosco's room? Here again we can arrive at an understanding of the process which goes on. What had happened before had now made possible a penetration in greater depth, a deeper understanding than had ever previously been arrived at. There is no doubt that Dominic had been penetrated, shaken to the depths. For a couple of days he went about quite out of his usual form; so much so that Don Bosco thought there was something wrong with him and questioned him accordingly.

From the depths of his being comes Dominic's cry—"I must be a saint". He could have said this before and probably had, like many other good boys; but it had only been a pious thought, a desire coming from the surface. Now his whole being was involved in it, and he realized he would have no peace until he was completely committed.

Up to this there was at the back of his mind, as there is at the back of the minds of all of us, that we shall be unhappy, never really able to enjoy ourselves, not always have what we want, if we commit ourselves totally to God. As Francis Thompson says in his 'Hound of Heaven':

"And though I knew his love who followed,  
Still was I sore afraid,  
Lest having him,  
I should have naught beside."

Dominic did not of course mean that he was going all out for canonization, when he said that he must be a saint. He meant, although he might not have been able to express it consciously in that way, that he must live completely for God instead of for himself. The saint is the person who does just that: working miracles and being canonized is all beside the point. The word 'saint' is a bad word in so far as it has so many false associations, and so can express a meaning which is quite false. We are all called to be what being a saint implies, but anyone would understandably feel very self-conscious about saying that he wanted to be a saint, whereas he

could genuinely and soberly think of his need to commit himself completely to living for God instead of for himself.

It is also possible to urge people to aim at doing this, with a definite sense of reality; whereas to urge them to aim at becoming saints always sounds unreal.

Dominic had asked Don Bosco with great earnestness to help him in this new stage of his life; the saint's first concern was to re-establish the balance which had been temporarily upset and so, for the time being, he directed the boy to resume this normal way of life. It may also be that Don Bosco was waiting to see if, after all, it might not be something which had resulted from a passing moment of great fervour, and nothing else.

The two other events which are related show that this was far from being the case, and that, instead, the boy was possessed of a supreme desire which was not to leave him till the day he died.

## CHAPTER 11

CHAPTER 11 of Don Bosco's book may be said to be the most important chapter in the book.

The last paragraph of the previous chapter tells us that Dominic tried to set off on the 'text-book' and, incidentally, quite wrong, road to sanctity, the way of severe penances, long hours in prayer, and so on. Don Bosco categorically forbade the boy anything of the kind and, in the first paragraph of this chapter, he makes clear to us the road Dominic was to follow.

"The first advice Dominic was given to help him to become a saint, was to set out to win souls for God."

In doing this St. John Bosco underlined something which had been lost sight of in the church and which, even today, in spite of some development, is not sufficiently understood, and that is, that **there is no sanctity without the apostolate. No one ever became a saint by merely trying to be good.** The apostolate is not the end but the beginning. It is not meant for those who are advanced in virtue but for those who are beginning.

What do we mean by the apostolate? It is necessary to understand what it is first of all on the human level. **The apostolate is having something outside ourselves which we consider supremely worthwhile, and which draws without any difficulty all our powers and energies in pursuit of it or in furtherance of it. This can be almost anything, but, when a person is dominated in this way, it makes him a new person, capable of twice as much as normally, thinking nothing of sacrifice or hardship.**

Those who have made their name in history were people of one idea. This domination gave to their personality and powers a unity

and integration which was not possible in any other way, with the consequent extraordinary results. There is no other way in which this unity and integration can be obtained so completely and easily.

**The apostolate is not just a good thing; it is a psychological necessity for man, an imperative need of his being, if he is to develop completely to maturity. That is why such things as Communism succeed: they offer an apostolate—even though a misguided one—and things quite out of proportion to their numbers can be accomplished by only a few people.**

Things which people will not do just for themselves or because authority, whether parental, state or religious, wants to impose it on them, they will do for the objective outside them to which they have surrendered. **This surrender begets an impulse from within: little impulse from without is needed.**

There are many different things which people can come to accept outside themselves as supremely worthwhile, and not everyone is affected in the same way. But there are some few, basic things which are essential for everyone, because without them men remain undeveloped and incomplete. **One of these is an awareness of the needs of others.**

Normally and naturally we are concerned about ourselves: occasionally we come to know of or realize some need of someone round about, and we may do something about it, or may not, according to how we feel at the time. Some people can be quite generous; some bother very little. It is quite extraordinary how little we can be aware of the needs of others living round about us, in our own family, in the same street, parish or office. This is due to blindness and to our preoccupation with ourselves and our own needs. It is possible to go right through life in this way and, more often than not, this is what happens.

**What a wonderful difference takes place, when a person breaks completely through his own encompassing shell and discovers the needs, not just of one or two round about, but of everyone! He links himself up with all mankind and, in doing so, sets himself free. This is the vitally important point; it is not simply that now he is going to do something for others, but he makes possible his own development to real maturity. The powers and qualities that were in the man for his own benefit, and therefore largely imprisoned inside him, can now flow out in all directions and, in the process, be transformed and developed beyond all imagination. Life now has a meaning. When he gets up in the morning, his mind is already running on what he can do during the day for the cause. Meal times, work, everything is an incident in a day which is unified and dominated by a single purpose. He is lifted up, renewed in strength, feels an interior joy and thrives on difficulties. Life indeed has a meaning.**

However, what is needed is not just a knowledge of the needs of

others, but an abiding awareness of them, and an acceptance of personal involvement.

What has been said is true, first of all, on the human level; it is the same mechanism, lifted on to the supernatural level, which becomes the apostolate in the Christian sense. God is, first of all, the one outside ourselves who is supremely worthwhile; but very often He is not understood or conceived in this way and, in consequence, is not the driving force in the Christian's life that He should be. For Dominic, God was already everything that mattered, in so far as he preferred to die rather than offend Him seriously, and life, as he conceived it, was to live for God. It might easily be imagined that, this being so, nothing else was required, and that it was only a question of being more fervent, trying harder to be good, praying more often.

This quite common conception is completely erroneous. We need not only to be aware of God and accept Him completely, but also to be completely aware of each other, with all our needs. The compelling faith of life, then, is not simply to live for God, but to live for God and for each other.

From what has been said above it may be clear that, in giving us this programme, God has not just arbitrarily imposed something on us, but rather uncovered what is the basic need of our lives, something supremely worthwhile which calls forth all that is best in us. However, we have to discover this, awaken to it. It cannot first be imposed on us as a programme at an arbitrary moment, or as part of an academic programme.

It may now be clear just what a tremendous moment in Dominic's life this was. He had come to Don Bosco a very good boy, but he was not on the road to sanctity: his soul had not awakened to the complete purpose of life and, with the best of intentions, he might have made serious errors in consequence. Now he was set on the straight, direct road; and how he shot forward!

From the incidents recounted in this chapter it can be seen how easily and completely Dominic grasped the idea.

"How happy I would be if only I could win all my companions for God."

That this did not simply remain a pious aspiration is shown very well in the following chapter. In this present chapter St. John Bosco shows how deep was the spirit which was moving in Dominic, and how deeply personal was his relationship with God. What went against God pained him in a personal way. Here is the mortification of a love which has become deep friendship.

It is quite amazing the way this boy instinctively finds the right approach to souls, arousing a willingness to accept and to follow. How easily he could have aroused the wrong reactions! His actual approach again shows how humble he was; there was no self-

righteousness in Dominic's manner. The elderly man was completely captivated by it, and accepted the boy's correction with readiness and goodwill.

The examples given by Don Bosco show how completely Dominic's life was dominated by the apostolate, both at school and at home, and how well he used his natural qualities, his time and his energies, to further it in every way. It is obvious also how much he enjoyed life in doing these things. This is not surprising; we enjoy whatever we are committed to totally, when every part of our being is involved.

The remark of St. John Bosco which concludes this chapter not only further helps our appreciation of Dominic, but also serves to show how severely practical was the saint's approach to the boy and how he did not let himself get carried away and lose his sense of proportion.

## CHAPTER 12

DOMINIC is now completely dominated by one idea, every moment of life has a meaning for him, not in relation to himself but in relation to God and all those round him.

He did not monopolize the conversation or keep butting in . . .

**This and similar things which Don Bosco mentions help us to see the difference between the domination by an idea which is outside the person and the domination by an idea which in effect is himself. In this latter case the person seeks to dominate others, impose himself on them. In Dominic's case we can see how there is no imposing of himself or his ideas, no effort to dominate, but on the contrary how he genuinely respects others, is ready to listen, and is out to help in any way possible. He was out for genuine dialogue with his companions and not a monologue!**

This is further clearly demonstrated when Don Bosco says:

"His cheerful smile and spirit of zest made him popular also with those who were not too fond of religious things. They were always glad to be in his company and whenever he gently chided them, it was taken in good part." This also reminds us again that Dominic was not living in the midst of boys who went into ecstasy at the mere mention of God's name.

The incidents in this chapter also show how the boy managed to choose the right way of doing things, e.g. not simply asking a boy about making the Confession which he needed to make, with the almost certain result of being refused, but enjoying a good game together, and thereby establishing the good will from which could come consent to do what was asked.

**This right approach is the result of (a) the integration and development on the human level which has taken place, and (b) the free action which the spirit of God has in Dominic. We too easily assume that the**

right or psychological approach comes simply from reading appropriate books or being taught. It is too little realized what can be accomplished by the setting free and unifying of the forces within the human being, and how if such a person surrenders to God, how completely suitable a medium the Holy Spirit finds him to work in and through. It is very enlightening to bear this in mind when reading the remaining chapters.

Don Bosco says that these incidents were of great benefit to his companions and that boys who were insensible to sermons and exhortations in church would often yield to his gentle and persistent persuasion. This can help us to understand how the success which often escapes us in the education of the young is not always due to various reasons which we know about, but to one which probably has never dawned on us, or if it has, we have been unwilling or unable to recognize, that is, **the part which the boys themselves have to play in the education and development of each other. It is obvious enough that young people can corrupt and destroy each other; it is equally true that they can help and bring about each other's true development and that this is an integral part of the educative process which we have to make possible more. I hope to expand this in a later chapter. (v. chs. 18. 19).**

St. John Bosco also says these incidents were by no means uncommon; this was also testified under oath by different witnesses at the canonical process for Dominic's canonization. There was quite a bit of proselytizing going on by the Waldensians at that time and they used to try to ensnare unsuspecting boys. Don Francesca, one of the early Salesians, also mentions a very interesting fact which throws additional light on Dominic's strength of character.

"One day," he relates, "I happened to be near to Don Bosco and Dominic who were talking together; I was quite amazed to see how resolute the boy was in his attitude and with what energy he was saying such things should not be tolerated in the school . . . Don Bosco replied: "I know, Dominic, I know, but we must go carefully, we must have patience . . .", but the boy would have none of it and kept on insisting: "This is really a scandal, it must not be tolerated . . ."

Don Bosco makes a remark of profound psychological significance when in speaking about the percentage of boys who in a school of any size are left on their own by their companions, he says: "What they need is to experience real friendship, and as this is what they do not find, they suffer accordingly." In the same canonical process, another Salesian, Francis Cerruti, testified how he was a boy at the Oratory at the same time as Dominic. "Being a new-comer I was very homesick and my activity consisted chiefly in moping around. This particular day, as I was leaning up against one of the pillars of the covered way feeling very sorry for myself, a boy came up to me and in a very friendly way started talking, asking me my name,

where I came from, and so on. I asked him his name and he replied: 'Dominic Savio.' He joked about my day-dreaming and finished our conversation by saying: 'Shall we be friends?' My answer was a very definite 'Yes'. We did become firm friends and I came to realize how wonderful a boy he was."

Many other boys had a similar experience so that, as Don Bosco says when he finishes the chapter: "Those who were discouraged and in trouble would go to him and pour their troubles into his ear. Thus the way was opened to him to do good to those around him at all times."

## CHAPTER 13

IF one remembers all that has gone before, there is no surprise occasioned by what St. John Bosco says about Dominic's spirit of prayer and the fervour which characterized it. He says: "As a result of his efforts . . ." The boy was not born that way; he had tried hard to correspond with grace and give himself to God, and God in His turn gave Himself to Dominic. There was no mistaking that he turned to God gladly and willingly, and that all of him was in it. This is remarked upon again and again by different witnesses at the canonical process . . . 'I saw him many times completely absorbed in praying, and my going about the altar in my duties as sacristan did not distract him in the slightest.'"

"How many times I saw him in church and how much I and my companions were helped by his recollection and manner of praying. One could see other boys inspired by his example trying to imitate his fervour and recollectedness."

The two poles of the boys' piety as inculcated by St. John Bosco in his school were devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to Mary Immaculate. (Later on, at Our Lady's insistence, he shifted the emphasis to Our Lady as the Help of Christians). As will be apparent also from Chapter 17, Dominic responded to this encouragement to a surrender to the Mother of God, with an open heart and great joy. In this present chapter there are mentioned some of the practical expressions of it and once again they are not only in relation to himself but also to his companions. He wants to share with them what he himself has experienced, and seeks to draw them with him to Our Lady's altar where at her feet they might speak to her and bask for a little in the radiance of her smile.

The true position of Our Blessed Lady in the life of the Church and the plan of the redemption has never been completely understood in any age of the Church. It has at times been clearer, at others more obscure, and today there would seem to be a danger for many, of her true place being obscured. In some ages of the Church the

relationship of the faithful to Our Lady was maintained strongly, even though there was not complete understanding of why this should be so. This was possible on account of strong tradition and children growing up in this tradition, with nothing to divert them from it.

Thus they gained immeasurably in their spiritual lives from this deep, personal relationship with the Mother of God, which is necessary for a mature and balanced Christian life, as a similar relationship for the child with its own mother is necessary for a mature and stable life on the human level.

Dominic was fortunate in being helped by St. John Bosco to have a true understanding of Our Lady's position and also having his help to let his spirit soar to her and expand under her mother's care.

It has an eminently practical issue in his love for holy Purity, and a humble prayer to Our Lady for his continual growth in it which was often on his lips. He was vivacious by nature; how much effort it cost him to gain the control of his eyes which Don Bosco remarks upon. It displeased some of his companions, but Dominic knew only too well that you cannot hope to be strong for God without displeasing someone sooner or later. It should be realized that this sprang from a wonderful but so rare quality—a pure spirit. This is much rarer than is imagined, as Purity is something quite distinct from Chastity. There are many who try to be chaste, there are few in comparison who are able to develop a pure spirit. Yet his piety and spiritual life were not hidden away as something for himself only, but were shared with his companions.

## CHAPTER 14

FROM time to time in the life, St. John Bosco makes some short but very definite and positive statements about the education of the young, and in the first two paragraphs of this chapter we have such a statement. I should like to dwell a little on what is behind this statement of St. John Bosco. It needs understanding, as experience today might well be said at first sight to contradict it: frequent reception of the sacraments can be said to be the pattern of the ordinary good Catholic's life today, children and adults, but it cannot be said normally that their lives are an inspiration to all who know them. And yet Don Bosco is emphatic that this should follow.

If people are undernourished, overworked, seriously ill, it shows itself in their physical appearance, and in their inability to do what a normally healthy person can do. They have no zest for life, for work; they easily get depressed; their response to the demands made on them is normally variable and uncertain. With great efforts they can

do otherwise, but it takes great effort, where an ordinary effort should suffice.

If people are well nourished and in excellent health, the picture is very different. They are bursting with life, full of vitality, have a zest for life, do their work with ordinary effort, seek out further interests in life, respond to the demands made on them without difficulty.

We might ask ourselves which of the two pictures is true of the ordinary good Catholic, who receives the sacraments regularly today. **By and large they manifest in religious and spiritual things the symptoms of the undernourished or sick person. There may be a pattern of religious behaviour and practice but there is little or no spontaneity, vitality, or zest for the things of God; no dynamic outpouring of the richness of personal life for God.**

Yet the Eucharist is meant to produce this, for it is food, energy, everything that is needed for a life for God full of energy, vitality and zest. If we are not well spiritually it is also medicine and healing power. It is protection from harm, from temptation and the assaults of the evil one. These are the ways the Church describes it in the prayers of the liturgy regarding Holy Communion especially the prayer after Holy Communion, the Post-Communion.

But the Eucharist is supremely the means whereby we are changed into Christ, whereby in daily life we begin to look at things in his way, react to situations as he would, feel towards others as he would, be able to see through and beyond the ordinary things of life to the real life beyond. If this sacrament is able to work in us as it should, it must come out during the day in the way we live and act; it is as simple as that. And yet people can go regularly to Mass and Holy Communion and never seem to be much better, any more developed as human beings, and still less, completely Christ-like in the things of everyday life.

How does this come about then? If we reflect on what St. John Bosco says about Dominic and the Holy Eucharist in this chapter we can arrive at some understanding how the failure comes about in our children and in ourselves.

As was the custom at the time, Dominic did not go to Holy Communion more than once a month before he came to Don Bosco's school. It will not help us just to say that after Dominic came to the Oratory he gradually increased his frequency until he was going every day. We must see that what Don Bosco helped him to realize was an absolutely essential part of that.

In the first place regular Confession, which is much more than certain prayers before and after and a more or less mechanical accusation of faults. It is to the same priest so that the priest can really come to know him and as a further aid to this a complete opening of his heart to begin with, by a General Confession, and a continuation of this opening of his heart in subsequent confessions.

Not only so, but Dominic has the most complete Confidence in his confessor and would speak to him with the greatest simplicity about himself whenever he felt the need to, also outside the confessional.

Confession therefore becomes for Dominic a personal, vital act in which he is concerned with his own state of soul and development and not just with the acts he has done during the week. In other words, he is not just living on the surface, he is in touch with his own depths and the way is opened up for the holy Eucharist to touch him in depth and work the wonderful things it can do in the soul and in daily life.

In the second place, his preparation was most thorough. Here again he comes to realize that **the necessary preparation is not simply a matter of devotion and prayers, but of life.** St John Bosco tells us that he was fully aware what sort of life it was necessary to lead for anyone to go to daily Communion and therefore he was concerned not to do anything during the day which would displease God. From his life it is obvious that he did this not simply by not doing what was wrong but by positively trying to live for God in everything. St. John Bosco brings the testimony of Dominic's companions to show how completely true this was. It may be noted in passing that these are the conditions laid down by the Council of Trent for daily Communion.

In addition to this his thoughts were turned specifically from the previous evening towards the receiving of Holy Communion, and in the morning on awakening this was continued. In like manner his thanksgiving was of the same nature. In this way holy Mass and Holy Communion were the centre of Dominic's day.

This being so, the divine life flowed increasingly more and more into his soul, begetting a vitality and energy, peace and happiness which were obvious to all.

"Filled with this spirit, Dominic's days were full of happiness: this was the source of that wonderful cheerful spirit which was the soul of all his actions."

From what has been said above it is clear that **holy Mass and Communion were intensely personal acts for Dominic, not just religious practice or acts of religious conformity.**

So it must be not only for our children but for every one. It will be said, "If I had to do that, it would need tremendous effort". This implies that Dominic did not have to make tremendous efforts—he had indeed; the fact that he has been canonized proves it to us. This is a solemn declaration by the Church that he has made not only ordinary efforts but heroic ones. Mgr Ballesio, a former companion of Dominic at the Oratory, who gave evidence at the canonical process, said to another witness while he was waiting to appear before the tribunal: "They simply will not believe us when we tell

them about Dominic's fervour and whole approach to the Eucharist: but the fact remains that it was quite extraordinary."

If we want to see like results in our children and people we must lead them to realize that the sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion must become **vital personal acts** and that these sacraments cannot act in them just by being received, but only in so far as the obstacles are removed which exist beneath the surface. To put it in another way, it is not only necessary to receive the sacraments regularly but also well; "well" meaning all that has been explained above. For too long we have just spoken about going to the sacraments regularly. We have ample proof today that this by itself means nothing at all.

Dominic was so conscious of the peace, happiness and vitality which the sacraments brought him that he could say: "What more do I need to make me happy? Nothing in the wide world." What a contrast to the young people of today, so many of whom cannot find peace and happiness in anything and whom the things of God bore to tears. They could be as happy as Dominic was, if only we can inspire them to go the same way.

## CHAPTER 15

THIS chapter is of great interest, not only for letting us see Don Bosco's direction of Dominic in this matter, but it also lets us see what big mistakes the boy would have made in this respect, with the best of intentions, and it can easily be inferred what harm both physical and spiritual would have resulted also.

Pope John once said:

"Without discipline a human being is not a human being; and without penance a Christian is not a Christian."

This love of and desire for penance can be a stumbling block for many, and may seem to be something which is not natural and even unhealthy. To many modern psychologists it is only a symptom of guilt and deep disturbance in the psyche. St. John Bosco, in a chapter of the life of another of his boys which he wrote, says:

"When a person is penetrated deeply by the love of God, no suffering can hurt; on the contrary, it does just the opposite by bringing gladness and consolation. This is because there is the conviction that the suffering is for someone very worth-while, and that a wonderful reward is waiting for them in the life to come."

(Life of Michael Besucco, Ch. 23).

I quote Don Bosco here because he is referring to young people. This is the degree of development that can come about in them.

This of course exists first of all on the human level. A true mother will suffer gladly and willingly for her child; will work herself to a

standstill in the endeavour to provide opportunities for him. Men can suffer grievous torture rather than betray a friend or their country. Also of course a man can endure great hardships and pain to achieve what is for his own glorification.

What then is not possible when there is a real awareness of God in the soul and a personal relationship greater than any other which exists? There is an impulse from within to do what the one loved did and expects, and so we see in Dominic this great desire to do penance, to suffer in some way or other.

From what Don Bosco relates we can see that he instinctively tried to do big things after the style of what he had read in the lives of the saints. It is possible that there may have been unconsciously some movement of pride and certainly if he had been allowed to go on with these mortifications the devil would have used them to try to destroy him.

But St. John Bosco would not have it at any cost and was completely inflexible in opposing Dominic's attempts in this direction, ending up with an absolute prohibition. There was a trap here that Don Bosco himself might have fallen into. Dominic was well advanced in virtue he knew, he could easily have imagined that he had a special call to do at least some extraordinary acts, and there might have been the subtle personal temptation, of how wonderful that one of his boys had reached such an advanced state, and to have let him go in this direction, without realizing how much he himself was involved in it.

From this chapter it is obvious that Dominic understood very clearly the need for penance and mortification, but **did not understand the nature of it and its true place in the spiritual life. He did not understand how much more valuable interior mortification is and the mortification of the will.** At the same time, what he did try to do brings out his great courage and strength of spirit.

## CHAPTER 16

THIS chapter was not in the first edition of Dominic's life, but was added by Don Bosco later on. In it we see how the boy did come to understand fully what mortification and penance really are and how he integrated them fully into his life.

It would help here I think to say a word or two about mortification and penance in the Christian life, as it is something which is so very much neglected and so little understood today, also in relation to the young.

The basic point to start off from is that **we are not perfect or complete human beings and that we cannot become so just by intending it or even just by praying about it.** There is not only the way to God,

there is also the road in the exactly opposite direction. We intend to travel on the road to God, but we get pulled off it and pushed in the opposite direction. Our nature craves to go the other way and it operates inside us to accomplish this. It is helped and encouraged from outside by so many things which exist today.

When people find that they are not succeeding as they should in their piety and life for God they make good resolutions and pray to do better. So also if they are giving way to sin they make good resolutions and pray to overcome temptation. Very often they find they succeed very little or do not succeed at all. The result generally is that people are discouraged, sometimes give up trying very much, sometimes give up trying completely. They may blame God for their lack of success—after all, they may say, I did try and I did pray . . .!

Lack of success can also lead people to change slowly their whole way of looking at things so that in the end it is God who is wrong and not man. This is especially so in the matter of sex, but it is equally true of other things.

The trouble has been lack of realization that something else is necessary besides good resolutions and prayer, and that is mortification. It is a necessity, not just a good and pious act which it is meritorious to do and which if you don't do, well . . . If you are driving a car and the steering is out of alignment, you can have the intention of keeping straight on the road and hold the wheel straight, but the car will move irrevocably to one side off the straight. You have to allow for the steering being out of alignment, and hold the wheel at an angle if you want to go straight. This is not just a good thing to do—it is absolutely necessary, if you do not want to end up in the ditch or on the pavement.

So it is with ourselves; we are basically out of alignment and we tend to go off the straight in spite of good intentions and keeping our eyes on the road—it is absolutely essential to apply the necessary correction of the wheel, and this is mortification. **It must therefore have a definite and regular place in our lives, and not just be something which is done in a moment of fervour or as a result of a feeling of guilt during Lent.**

It would be a mistake to regard mortification as a necessity only of the Christian life; it is a necessity for every human being who wants to be really such, a person of maturity and integrity. On the human level it is known as self-discipline and it is with this idea that it is much better to begin, because it saves us making the big mistake with regard to mortification which is generally made, and that is, that we must do extra things, big and extraordinary things, never or hardly ever allowing oneself any enjoyment or fun, and so on.

A mature human being approaches life in a spirit of self-discipline; he is aware of his limitations and aware of the forces within him which, left to go their own way and make indiscriminate use of what con-

temporary life presents, will give him a make-believe satisfaction and pleasure, but at the same time create bigger problems and make life in general much more difficult, because they make the ordinary and everyday things of life more difficult. This is so at any age and in consequence self-discipline is needed at every age.

In childhood a framework of discipline has to be maintained for us, but at the same time we must be led forward to develop gradually self-discipline. This is not done if those dealing with the young are only concerned to "maintain" discipline, that is in effect to maintain their own authority. If this is so the children instead of taking discipline to themselves and accepting it into their lives as a necessary thing, react against it and throw it off, or have a quite unbalanced approach to it, swaying from one extreme to another.

Needless to say if no framework at all of discipline is maintained in the child's life, he becomes a completely undisciplined adult, and one who normally makes great demands on all those around him.

It is the same mechanism lifted on to the supernatural level, willingly disciplining oneself for the love of God, that becomes the virtue of mortification. So much so is this, that the great Benedictine mystic Blosius says that "the best form of mortification is to accept with all our heart, in spite of our repugnance, all that God sends or permits, good and evil, joy and suffering." It is the best form of mortification because in effect it means to say that our whole day is pervaded with a spirit of mortification and this is so much better than individual acts of mortification of our own choosing, which leave us so much time in between to go our own way.

In other words, self-discipline which has become part of the Christian's basic life makes possible the perfection of a virtue and his corresponding advance in maturity and depth of spiritual life.

If this chapter is read in the light of these considerations, it becomes apparent how great was the development which had taken place in Dominic in this way. St. John Bosco assures us that he knew and understood the position, and if there is any doubt about it let any of those who read this ask themselves, for example, whether they have brought their eyes under the complete control that Dominic had brought his under, at the cost of great effort. From what he says it is clear that this was not just a blind rigidity bereft of understanding.

"The eyes are two windows. Through those windows there passes what you let pass. You can let an angel in or you can let a devil in, and whichever you let in can get possession of your heart."

If this is related to the state of things today when there are far more avenues into the mind, especially through the eyes, than at any time in the history of mankind, it becomes clear how much we need to help our children to develop in this way as Dominic did.

The rest of the chapter shows us how completely Dominic found

his self-discipline and mortification in the round of his daily life. Until as Don Bosco says:

“To eat things he did not like; easily leave alone those he did like; not let his eyes roam ceaselessly around; accept unpleasant smells; surrender his own way; accept willingly anything which went against him in body or soul; these are the things which were a normal part of his daily life.”

It is obvious also that all these only served to make him more happy and cheerful and not less so.

## CHAPTER 17

I WOULD suggest that this is the second most important chapter in the book. It certainly can give us great enlightenment with regard to St. John Bosco and his method, Dominic's development, and the education of the young.

Don Bosco had set Dominic in the way of total development when he awakened his soul to the needs of his companions and to the realization that his own development was inseparably bound up with his response to the needs of others. This was a vital living thing and as such led on to ever new developments. One of these was undoubtedly the Company of Mary Immaculate. St. John Bosco says quite simply:

“Pushed on by his ever present desire to help his companions, he asked some of those whom he knew well and relied upon, to join with him in forming the Company of Mary Immaculate.”

There was already one Company in existence, the Company of St. Aloysius. This had been started by St. John Bosco a few years previously. **As with his whole way of life for youth, it grew out of their needs and problems.** As he encountered them he thought and prayed and then went ahead with what seemed to him best and most likely to help. If there was already something he had he used that, if there was not he devised something new.

**Don Bosco had become very much aware that good intentions and good advice oftentimes did not get any further, because of a powerful obstacle to good which can exist among any group; this is the fear of what the others will say or even think; the fear of being laughed at or ridiculed; the sense of being isolated which the criticism of his companions can instil in a child or young person.** This is a very big problem, no less today than at any time, and Don Bosco started the Company of St. Aloysius to provide a bond of union for the better boys, to help them to encourage each other by their good example, and by their being conscious of their numbers, to be helped also to overcome this human respect.

It may be remarked here that while the problem itself remains more

than ever, the term "human respect" is no longer understood as such by youth today.

Later Don Bosco was to start other companies but the second one was the Company of Mary Immaculate: this was Dominic's own idea and the rules were drawn up by him and not by St. John Bosco and it was in the event to be the principal and most select of these associations.

There is nothing which so kills the spirit of a school and renders null the good work and effort of the staff as the little groups who hang together to talk evil and do evil, **in the widest sense of the word**; who promote grumbling and selfishness and by other talk destroy confidence in the staff; who are not only unwilling to co-operate themselves, but are concerned to stop others co-operating.

**This is a disorder from within and the only real remedy must come from within also.** It cannot simply be opposed from without by the staff. What is needed is a comparable group of boys whose spirit is equally strong in the other direction and who freely, spontaneously and energetically work among their companions to beget the right spirit, encourage confidence in the staff, reject evil with confidence, withstand the evil-doers and grumblers without hesitation and by their happy and cheerful spirit, in contrast to the furtive and secretive ways of the others, give eloquent testimony and proof that their life brings joy and contentment.

**A little reflection will show that this is a wonderful extension of the real educational process at a level where the staff are unable to carry it on personally.** This is the real partnership between the young and those responsible for them, whether parents, teachers or priests, which makes real development and formation possible and without which this can never really take place, because without it the human and psychological needs of the young are not catered for.

An examination of the structure and rules as Dominic conceived them shows us how wonderful was his understanding of the whole situation and how practically he was able to express it. How far he is removed from artificial, superficial, sentimental expressions of piety which are so often completely divorced from the real needs of the young on the human level and which try to get them to express themselves to God as though they were not human beings at all! This does not mean to say that Dominic is not ready to demand the heroic, if necessary, **but the heroic is also a human need.**

Dominic speaks of helping and encouraging, doing first themselves and supporting the efforts of others. There is no talk of laying down the law in a spirit of self-righteousness. He speaks of being united among themselves in genuine friendship and of trying to make this same relationship with their companions the basis of what they try to do to help them. How long will it take us to realize that the young cannot develop without true friendship? By this of course I do not

mean just having a particular friend, but that real state of friendship both with those responsible for them and their contemporaries.

How accurately he pinpoints also the necessary qualities needed in the parent, teacher and priest, who are dealing with the young, in asking his companions to try hard to be even-tempered and good humoured, patient with each other and with those who are awkward and troublesome!

Dominic in effect draws up a little rule of life to make it possible for himself and his friends to achieve what they had so much at heart. Into it he also incorporates the basis of their friendship with Jesus and Mary, the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Rosary. In this and in "C", the third basic point he makes initially and afterwards elaborates, Dominic shows how completely he had absorbed the teaching and ideas of St. John Bosco. The Eucharist and Our Lady are dealt with in other parts of this book; here I will say a word about clause C—"We bind ourselves to be always busy about something useful". The importance of this cannot be overstressed.

Writing of St. Joseph Cafasso, who was his spiritual director and confessor, Don Bosco says: "In the space of more than thirty years I have never know him spend an idle moment. He no sooner finished one thing than he began another. He never took a moment of recreation that was only for himself. He gave himself relief only by changing occupation." In describing St. John Cafasso, Don Bosco describes himself. When away from home he always had some work to do in his pocket or his bag: printers' proofs to correct, or the writing of his many books and pamphlets, and when night came on and he could neither read nor write, he would get up on the stage-coach beside the driver and get to work on him. If he had to wait at a station, he would be as calm and composed as if he was in his own room and get on with his work.

It is not easy to estimate just how valuable such understanding of how necessary it is to keep themselves busy, is for the young. Times out of number the beginning of a bad series of mistakes has happened in moments of doing nothing and moping around. It is also the greatest help in preventing 'day-dreaming', one of the greatest time-wasters, not to mention dangerous occasions for the young.

Anyone then who goes through these rules for a better way of life that Dominic drew up, is once again brought face to face with how mature he is while still retaining all the wonderful characteristics of a boy. Those who deal with the young will also realize how he reached through to the heart of the educational problem, and fashioned a wonderful instrument to make its true realization in depth possible.

It should be clearly understood that the C.M.I. (Company of Mary Immaculate) was a private and almost secret group. Many of the

staff did not know of its existence, although they were often aware of its effects and were at a loss to account for them.

We are fortunate in having contemporary testimony apart from Don Bosco as to the tremendous efficacy of the C.M.I., of how Dominic, about to leave the Oratory for the last time, gathered together his friends of the group and with burning words urged them to renew their promises of unswerving fidelity to the rules and ideals of the C.M.I. Never was a promise more loyally kept. Don Bosco's biographers unanimously assert that these years are to be reckoned the Golden Age of the Oratory. The school was filled with boys outstanding in good conduct and piety. Many were the imitators of Dominic showing forth in their lives the words of their friend.

"It would be impossible", writes Canon Ballesio, himself a boy of that period, "to give an adequate idea of the life of the Oratory in those memorable years. Hundreds of young students fulfilled their duties with ardour and exactness. There were boys who would not have committed a voluntary venial sin for all the world. How often did not one of the noblemen of Turin bring their children to the school that they might see the boys at prayer and at work and be thereby spurred on to higher things. There they saw the truest and greatest nobility, souls transformed by grace and the love of God. At the Oratory there flourished indeed, innocence, simplicity and Christian joy. One might be tempted to label this as legendary, but it is sober historical truth." For this outpouring of heavenly graces which made the school what Pius XI called a 'Famiglia Prodigiosa'—a family productive of extraordinary things—the members of the C.M.I. were largely responsible. There was no school activity or game in which they did not take the lead and this always with the fixed purpose of leading their companions to higher things.

## CHAPTER 18

THIS chapter and the following one bring us in a special way to the consideration of something which is very basic in the life of the young and that is, friendship. This is not something which is optional in their lives or simply a good thing, it is a necessity. It is so because the new relationship and experience it brings into their lives, draws them out through the autonomous shell which surrounds them to make vital contact outside themselves, thus helping on their real development to maturity. As long as the human being remains shut up inside himself, he remains immature.

True friendship is a wonderful thing, but unfortunately there are other relationships which pass for friendship but which are far from

being so; in speaking of friendship I refer to this in the true sense of the word.

Friendship has certain qualities which are proper to it; these are not just exterior adornments, they come from within the person and the great point of friendship is that it makes possible the further development of these qualities.

Such for example are regard for and confidence in each other; genuine concern for each other's needs; joy in each other's company; a genuine sharing of interests and possessions; a union of heart and mind which persists in spite of difficulties, and enables mutual confidence to be respected and maintained even in difficult circumstances.

A little reflection will soon show how admirably these qualities prepare for a mature adulthood and not least for the greatest experience of adult life—true love, both on the natural and supernatural level. **One of the essential qualities of friendship is that sex does not enter into it, and this is of great value in the development of the young, that they can have a human relationship in some depth, without sex entering into it.** One of the great evils of today is that true friendship for the young is more and more difficult because of the entry of sex into almost everything.

As a result of this, children are having an awareness of sex at an increasingly early age, their imaginations get to work on the more than abundant material presented to them by contemporary life, and situations of their own lives, which should be able to be lived through on the level of friendship, break down through the entry of sex into them.

If a child never experiences true friendship there is a great gap in its life, which is not easy to fill, and its development can be considerably hindered. It should also be realized that this relationship of friendship should be the basic relationship with everyone. This is a necessity both on the human level and on that of the Christian life.

On the human level—man is a social animal and he needs contacts with other human beings—to be wanted by others as well as to want others. That is why loneliness works such havoc in the human spirit. On the Christian level—we are all members of one body, Christ, and in a living body the members or different parts have an awareness of each other and a living unity with each other. If they have not they wither away and cease to be able to fulfil their function.

It will not be difficult to see the harm that can be caused by the rejection of friendship or its betrayal. In the one case when there is an offer or desire for friendship on one side and none on the other; in the other case when mutual friendship exists and one of the friends acts in a way which seems to indicate to the other that there cannot be real friendship existing after all.

If we consider this chapter in the light of what has been said above, we can understand just how tremendous was the contribution Dominic was making to the human and religious development of his companions. **He brought genuine friendship to them, and for many it was their first taste of it.**

His aim was not to impose himself on others but to win them: to do this he had to work hard, as Don Bosco tells us, making use of his free time, games, conversation and so on. He did succeed with these difficult boys; he could never have succeeded if he had been trying to impose himself or 'goodness' on them.

Don Bosco remarks that his 'best friends' were the boys of the Company of Mary Immaculate. There are obviously degrees of friendship, and greater depth of friendship is possible where there is complete identity of interests and common purpose. This was so with Dominic and the boys of the C.M.I. It is good to realize this; these boys were not a group of 'superior' boys, a group of 'dogooders', united by an artificial bond even though it was a religious one. **They were boys united in genuine friendship among themselves and genuine friendship with God.** Their aim was not to impose observance on the others but to win them over, to draw them towards God, and they were able to employ the necessary human means to do this because they had experienced among themselves the depth of a human relationship with their co-equals.

St. John Bosco refers to the weekly meeting of the C.M.I. and says quite clearly that Dominic was the soul of the meeting, its guide and mentor. From the testimony of Cardinal Cagliero, who was one of the original group, it is clear that this does not mean that Dominic dominated it like a dictator. He says: Dominic was so averse to pushing himself forward, that sometimes you would hardly know he was there, but if some matter came up for the greater glory of God, he would come out of himself and urge the matter with great fervour, speaking so convincingly that the others were carried away.

Another priest, also one of the original group, mentions a particular instance. Don Bosco had obtained the privilege of having midnight Mass in the school chapel, with permission to give Holy Communion at it. In those days of very infrequent Holy Communion it was very rare that there was any Mass at which everyone went to Holy Communion. Knowing what joy it would give to St. John Bosco, Dominic got the idea of trying to get everyone without exception to Confession and Communion. Various lists were made out embracing all the boys and they were distributed among the group, each one being responsible for seeing that those on his list made a promise of Confession and Communion. Dominic himself worked hardest of all and the plan succeeded, to the great joy of everyone.

## CHAPTER 19

IN this chapter I would like to deal with the two friendships of Dominic which St. John Bosco records in some detail, Camillo Cavio in the last chapter and John Massaglia in this one.

Those who work with the young know only too well how a friendship between two boys in particular can sometimes take a wrong turning, and end up in disaster. The basic reason is because it is exclusive. It is not only a positive relationship between them, but it is a positive exclusion of all others shutting the door against them. In doing this, it leaves them a prey to their own selfishness, and so anything can happen.

As mentioned in the last chapter, there are obviously degrees of friendship and we see from these two chapters the special relationship Dominic had with those two boys. We see also the conditions which made this special relationship possible and able to operate for good and that is, that there existed first of all a basic friendship or friendly spirit with all the other boys. Thus it is an extension of something which already exists, an experience at a deeper level, a flowing outward, and not an imprisoning more deeply within the selfish shell of something which can only survive in that way.

In the account of Dominic's first meeting with Camillo Cavio, it can be seen how Dominic's approach is that of friendship right from the start; he is concerned with the total boy as a person and not with some particular physical quality; he quickly comes to understand him and to realize that he is a more than ordinary boy.

How quickly he outlines the plan of living that he had absorbed from St. John Bosco. If understood rightly, the maintaining of true happiness and a cheerful spirit is a complete programme in itself as the different elements involved take in the basic human spiritual qualities. To be such it is necessary first of all to be unselfish, ready to help others, trying to resist evil (there is nothing which so leads to sadness and depression as a guilty conscience), constantly and usefully occupied (idleness with its consequent boredom leads to unhappiness), optimistic and able easily to see the bright side of things, and so on.

This approach of Dominic was obviously not only a matter of words but an intercommunication of spirit, and a real friendship was begun which blossomed quickly in the short time Camillo had yet to live.

Even more intimate still was Dominic's friendship with John Massaglia, and it is a wonderful example of the basic elements of true friendship and of how far it can go. There was no self-consciousness of inhibitions between them; they could speak with each other simply and unaffectedly about God and themselves and make a bargain to help each other not simply with regard to sport or lessons

but with regard to the greatest thing in life, the saving of their immortal souls.

There is no gainsaying the obvious sincerity of this which again comes out in the letters they exchanged when John had to go home through illness. He is frankly lonely without his friend, even though he is at home from school, but this loneliness on the human level has not captured him completely and unsettled him. He is able to face up to the possibility of death being near at hand and accept it willingly in advance. Dominic in his reply mentions his own intuition that death for him is not so far off either. This calm facing up to death of both the boys shows how mature they were. How many adults are afraid of death and even in serious illness persist in shutting their eyes to the obvious.

How deeply human their friendship was in the right sense is finally shown by Dominic's grief at John's death. He was in tears for several days and Don Bosco remarks, "It was the first time I had seen that wonderful face of his sad and tear-stained . . . his sensitive heart suffered greatly from this loss." In these days when there is so much talk of homosexuality on the one hand and the need of co-education on the other, these two chapters showing what true friendship is in all its charm and depth, and the contribution it can make to natural and spiritual development, without any shadow of sex entering in, can certainly make us realize that the single-sex school can make possible a development and education second to none.

It is worthwhile recording that such was the esteem in which John Massaglia was held locally, that the little room where he died was kept in its original state and became a place of pilgrimage.

## CHAPTER 20

In the first paragraph we have again a rapid sketch of Dominic's life, or to put it better, his daily living for God. Is not the sketch here given what we hope and desire might be said of our Catholic youth—what should in actual fact be their daily lives, if our Catholic education was able to achieve what it could and should?

It will be remembered that earlier on Dominic in the endeavour to satisfy his need to do penance had tried to do some of the extraordinary penances such as can be read about in the lives of the saints. Don Bosco categorically forbade him and Dominic obeyed completely and without hesitation. Now we see incidents out of the ordinary which he does not set out to bring about, but which flow spontaneously from his life. We have Don Bosco's definite assurance of the complete truth of the incidents as narrated.

I would like to suggest that while they can be regarded as extraordinary they are not really so, but the logical consequence of the

development which had taken place in the boy on the natural and spiritual level. We should try to approach them as such and not as extra things attributed to him.

St. John Bosco refers to Dominic's absorption in God after Holy Communion and at other times. In particular his spending all the morning before the Blessed Sacrament without realizing that he had done so. I think it is important to realize that this is not quite out of this world as it would seem at first sight and that the basic mechanism involved is a human one.

St. John Bosco speaks of Dominic's mind having reached such a degree of development that he came to be habitually united with God. It is not often adverted to that development of the mind is needed for this, and not simply grace. We cannot be habitually united with God just by making a good resolution about it. This does not mean to say that being united with God is part of being clever. There is a lot more to the mind than intelligence, and in any case, intelligent people can have undeveloped minds. It does underline for us the importance of helping on the development of the child's mind to the extent of its capacity.

There is hardly anything which so permits a human being to be absorbed in something as interest. When people are really interested in a thing, they lose all sense of time; an hour passes like minutes, and when compelled by necessary circumstances to leave what they are interested in, they do so with reluctance and very often leave part of themselves behind. This applies to both children and adults. There are many things which human beings can be tremendously interested in; one common to many is the television. How the hours can slip away seated before the T.V.! How the children have to be chased up to bed! Another is love. When two people love each other, they are supremely interested in each other; the time passes by in each other's company, the hours seem like minutes.

Dominic was supremely interested in our Blessed Lord; he loved him, and in his presence the hours became minutes; it is as simple as that and as natural as that.

The incidents St. John Bosco mentions where Dominic is aware in a mysterious way of the needs of others, are, I would like to suggest, a wonderful illustration of a great but little understood or reflected on doctrine, that of the Mystical Body of Christ.

We refer to God as Our Father, not just because it is a nice title to give him, but because he has made us not only his creatures, but also his children. Again, not simply because he has chosen to call us his children, but because he has made us so by putting his own divine life into us. Being members of the family of God gives us a natural oneness with each other; the unity of the family is the basic unity of society, and this membership of the family of God is no less real than that of our own family.

Our Divine Saviour would have us believe that it is even more real when He insists that we form one body with Him, He being the head, we the different parts. The unity which binds us together then, is not only that of a family, but that of a body. The unity of our body is perhaps the most complete unity which exists. We have an instantaneous awareness of the impact of exterior forces on any part of the body and the whole body responds to the needs of any particular part.

This is what being Christians should mean, an awareness of each other and of each other's needs, and an automatic willingness to help in whatever way it is possible to do so.

In the light of the above, Dominic's mysterious knowledge of the needs of others, becomes much more understandable and indeed very wonderful. He was so completely integrated into the Body of Christ that he was able to be aware, or easily made aware, by God, of the needs of other members, so that the help they so greatly needed could be obtained for them. Understandable too, are the 'distractions' which came to him, such as the one St. John Bosco mentions about England. To his contemporaries, England was a geographical name; to Dominic, it was peopled by members of Christ's Body to whom it was natural for his mind to turn, because they were known to him in Christ and through Christ.

A similar incident not mentioned by Don Bosco in the life, but told by him to several Salesians at the time was as follows:

Dominic and several of his companions were acting as volunteer helpers for the sick in the cholera epidemic which had Turin in its grip. One day, as they were going round the town on their mission of mercy, he suddenly stopped, went to a house and knocked on the door. When the owner came, he asked if there was anyone sick in the house. The man replied that there was not. Dominic respectfully but insistently asked him to search through the house, because he said there was someone sick there. The man did so and in the attic they found a woman dying. She used to come to the house very day to work and had the use of the attic for her things. The owner thought she had gone home as usual the previous evening, but stricken by the cholera she had fallen down, and was not even able to cry for help, and by this time was very near the end. A priest was immediately sent for and arrived in time to give her the Last Sacraments.

Dominic was never known to speak of these occurrences to anyone—only Don Bosco knew of them. There were a number of others about which he had written an account, as is attested by contemporary Salesians such as Don (afterwards Cardinal) Cagliero, but unfortunately this could never be found after his death.

The sister of the apostate mentioned in this chapter, testified at the Process that St. John Bosco had said to her that apart from anything else, he could not understand how Dominic was able to lead him unerringly to the dying man through the dark streets of a quarter

of Turin, quite unknown to him; and he concluded, she said, by saying, "Without doubt Dominic was very close to God, and was aware of many, many things".

A fact not given by Don Bosco in the life is that narrated under oath by one of Dominic's sisters. One day he came to Don Bosco and asked:

"May I have the day off?"

"Where do you want to go?"

"I want to go home because Mother is very ill and Our Lady wants to cure her."

"How do you know she is ill? Have you received a letter?"

"No, but I know it is so."

Dominic's mother was expecting a baby; she was in a very dangerous condition and in great pain. Experienced women neighbours did everything they could to help, but in vain. His father then decided to go to Buttigliera d'Asti to call a doctor. When he arrived at the outskirts, to his great surprise and consternation, he saw Dominic coming along the road.

The last thing on earth he wanted was for Dominic to be at home with his mother in that condition and so he told him to go first to his grandmother's at Ranello, a little village nearby, and then hurried on to find the doctor.

Dominic, however, acting under the same inspiration he had set out on, went home, and arriving there went straight to his mother. She likewise was filled with consternation at seeing him and said, "Go to the neighbour's for the time being, afterwards you can come back."

Dominic smiled, put his arms round his mother, kissed her and said, "I am going straight back to school, but first I just wanted to put my arms round you." He then went off.

He had hardly left the house, when his mother felt herself completely better and all her pains gone. When the doctor arrived a little later, he found there was nothing for him to do. There was great wonder that from the moment Dominic put his arms round his mother, the improvement set in. It was found that when he did so he had fastened a piece of ribbon with a medal of Our Lady on it round her neck.

When he arrived back at school he went straight to Don Bosco to thank him for letting him go home and he said to him, "Mother is quite all right now: Our Lady cured her. I put her medal round mother's neck."

Some months later when he was on his own death-bed, he said to his mother, "Don't lose that medal I gave you when you were ill. Keep it carefully and lend it to other women who become ill like you—it will cure them as it cured you. Lend it out generously."

In fact it did go the rounds of the countryside until the moment

came when Dominic's sister, by this time married and living in Turin, was reduced to the same state as her mother had been. Her sister came to help her in her need and seeing her state she wrote to her brother for the medal. He searched the countryside until he found it. When it reached Turin his sister, whose condition was now considered hopeless, fastened it round her neck and from that time made a rapid recovery.

It is noteworthy in the history of the saints that their intercession after their death is particularly efficacious with regard to special things with which they were associated in life. This is certainly so with regard to Dominic. His intercession has brought extraordinary help to mothers in pregnancy; to childless married couples who longed to have children; and to babies grievously afflicted in different ways. His own medal, worn by those who seek his intercession, has taken the place of the original unknown medal of Our Blessed Lady.

## CHAPTER 21

THE interview with Doctor Vallauri, and the remarks of the other doctors which St. John Bosco gives at the end of this chapter, are very valuable and prevent any misunderstanding of what he says about Dominic. Dr Vallauri was one of the leading physicians in northern Italy and his spontaneous testimony to Dominic's quality and character emphasizes once again how normal the boy was and that the great developments which had taken place in him had not led to any unbalance, and still less to any neurotic manifestations. All the doctors, says Don Bosco, were taken by his brightness and cheerfulness, his quick and ready replies.

There was obviously then no 'solemnity' about him, no air of self-importance, no melancholy, no poetic dreaminess. His approach to life is eminently practical, living in the present, out to do whatever he can now with all the energy he has, and not to waste it, thinking of the future and planning what could be done then instead of getting on with what could be done now. Characteristic then, his reply to his companion: "Let me do what I can this year. If I am here next year, I'll let you know what my plans are."

It is also clear that his realization that death might not be far off had not resulted in a morbid spirit. The nearness of death, or the abiding thought of it, is one of the most devastating and disrupting things to the human spirit. Dominic was not upset or afraid, but only anxious to make full use of every moment that might be left to him. He could smile and make a pleasantry about himself to his companions—genuinely smile, not a nervous sickly smile resulting from fear, because for the mature Christian soul death is a golden key that

opens the door to freedom and happiness, not a spectre with a scythe that comes to mow down.

The Exercise for a Happy Death was a regular part of the life of piety of the school: not only so, but it was a very important exercise; Don Bosco used to refer to it as the key to everything else. It was not an occasion for long faces—the boys used to have something extra at table—but it was the occasion for a short serious pause at the end of one month and the beginning of another. This was one of the ways in which Don Bosco was able to help his boys to become mature, to learn to face up to themselves, and not to go through the school year in a headlong rush without pausing for serious reflection. It was also his idea that all important events to be successful need well-rehearsing beforehand and that death being the most important event of our lives could be rehearsed with profit also, and if so it would be much easier and much more successful. The wonderful deaths that some of his boys had at his school showed how right he was. Death was divested of its fear and terrors and became for them a going home.

Once again also, his deep personal love of the Mother of God shines forth and how it was translated in practice for daily living. It was through Dominic's initiative that a little altar in honour of Our Lady was put up in every classroom and also in the dormitory, decorated with flowers and with a lamp burning before it day and night. The oil for the lamps was provided by the boys themselves.

In the direction which St. John Bosco gave him is once more evident the linking of Our Blessed Lady and the Holy Eucharist, and also his abiding concern that daily Communion presupposes a real endeavour to live for God during the day.

## CHAPTER 22

If the true education of the young is to proceed as it should, the formation of the mind should proceed at the same time. One of the ways that this is accomplished is by enlightening the minds of the young. This can be done formally by instruction on official occasions, at school, at home and elsewhere. It is normally done by those responsible for the children and these are adults. Very often the child has an imperfect relationship with the adult in question, and as a result the efficacy of what is said is impaired, and indeed can be blocked altogether; in consequence, no forming of the mind takes place.

The best time for the forming process to take place is in relation to actual things which happen in daily life. These can be things that the children themselves are involved in, events which they witness,

situations which develop around them. A valuable opportunity is also when they make mistakes and do wrong. It may happen, however, that those responsible are only concerned with punishing or reprimanding.

It is not so often reflected on that children's minds are also in great measure formed by each other. They are very susceptible to this, but unfortunately it more often happens that it operates in a negative and adverse way. Therefore to have one of themselves who is able to feed their minds with the right ideas, especially in relation to the situations of daily life in which they find themselves, is an invaluable means of helping on the formation of their minds.

It may be clear therefore, how great and valuable was Dominic's contribution in this way to his companions' development, and how developed he was himself that his efforts in this way were able to succeed and not be blocked by his own self getting in the way. What is true of the reasons for adults failing in their formative endeavours is equally true of the efforts of the children amongst themselves.

There is also brought before us in this chapter the wonderful relationship between Dominic and Don Bosco. This had made possible the boy's rapid journey along the road to sanctity and it is well worth-while dwelling a little on it.

Quite a difference can be noted at times in the progress a child makes in a subject at school; at one time its performance may have been quite poor, and then in a subsequent year it has improved immensely. The reverse can also happen. This very often takes place through a change of teacher; the child 'got on' with one teacher but did not with the other. The nature of the relationship with the teacher was the basis of acquiring knowledge or not. If it was good, he did learn; if it was not, he did not learn. The same is true of liking or love for a subject. It can safely be said of most children that their having a love for a subject depends on their having had at one time a teacher who communicated his own love of it to them.

It can equally be said with regard to life that no human being can develop into a mature or stable personality without a deep, personal and balanced relationship with at least one other human being who is a mature personality, and this not just for a short time, but all during the formative years of life. Development to maturity is not possible by precept, pressure, good habits and so on, alone.

Still more is this true with regard to developing for God in depth. Without such a relationship, which in this instance must be with a mature Christian, there can be, in the ordinary Providence of God, no progress beyond goodness and piety. Spiritual depth will be lacking; total commitment for God and the saving of souls, in daily life will be absent.

It is obvious that such a relationship existed between Dominic and Don Bosco, and this chapter helps us to see how really and intimately

personal it was. It also helps us to understand one of the elements which constitute such a relationship.

Due proportion being observed, contact must be on the same level. There can be no looking down by one on the other from a higher point. There must be a partnership to achieve the common end which is the development of the child for God. This opens up the way into the depths of the child; otherwise it is blocked. It will be remembered from the first meeting of Dominic with Don Bosco how this partnership was entered into quite explicitly by them. This also implies a recognition that the child has not only obligations and duties but also rights which must be respected. He does not exist just to do what he is told.

## CHAPTER 23

IN spite of his sorrow at leaving, Dominic is still thinking about others and anxious for them. He carries them all in his heart. He has not forgotten his vision of England and reminds St. John Bosco of the message he was to carry to Pius IX.

And so there came to an end Dominic's stay at the school of St. John Bosco. At the talk he had with the saint on his first arrival, the boy had expressed the realization which had come to him in the words: "Here I see you do business in souls." He had thought only at the time of what was to be done to himself, he had not realized how an essential part of the process was that he himself was to begin almost immediately to do business in souls; to be involved deeply and personally in the '*admirabile commercium*' of the redemption.

He had come to be prepared for the future and St. John Bosco had entered him deeply into the present, setting him to work in the transforming of his own environment and thereby bringing about Dominic's own transformation at a level which had not been possible before.

As he says himself in the previous chapter, Don Bosco was as anxious to keep Dominic with him as Dominic was to stay with him. But he felt he was in duty bound to follow the doctor's advice and send the boy home, at least for a while.

They were both two mature human beings developed in depth; they both had a capacity for friendship and to feel deeply. If anyone has the idea that the saints are emasculated, dried up people, this chapter and the previous one should surely convince them this is not so.

Dominic cannot bring himself to leave his father and friend, keeps on coming back to him, keeps on asking questions. He is the only one who sees the whole situation clearly—not his companions or the staff—"There was general surprise at his solemn farewell . . . although everyone was a bit shaken by the finality of his farewell,

there was a general expectancy that he would soon be back again." Not even Don Bosco, who had so often foretold to his boys that one of them was going to die, realized that Dominic's death was so near, otherwise it is very unlikely that he would have let him go. He was the only one to realize that Dominic was suffering "so much anguish of body and spirit".

What has been said should not leave any doubt in our minds of the heroic level on which Dominic was operating. **His heart was being torn in two; as he saw farther than anyone else, he had to face the situation to that extent alone, and yet he was able to smile and maintain a cheerful disposition.**

Cardinal Cagliero, then nineteen years old, testified in the process of beatification and canonization, how he had seen Dominic that morning very soon after he got up. "The boy was pale but smiling and seemed to be completely at one with God. I was strangely moved inside myself and thought surely this boy is a saint." Cardinal Cagliero was in no sense a sentimental type, but rather the exact opposite.

The natural thing in the circumstances would have been for Dominic to be looking for comfort and consolation from others, but he uses what little time there is left to go to one boy after another trying to do or say something to help, thinking of them and not of himself.

In the words with which he ends the chapter Don Bosco seems to have overlooked what the boy's real mission in the church was to be. He could not show forth to youth what their lives could and should be if he did not die while still a boy, **and thereby show most clearly that sanctity, living for God and mankind, is not for adulthood but for the earliest years in which the child is capable of grasping what life is really for, and of being awakened to God and his fellow men.**

## CHAPTERS 24 & 25

It is to be expected that Don Bosco should remember the date of Dominic's departure and mention it, but the very moment of his leaving had engraved itself on his mind and so he begins the chapter, "It was two o'clock in the afternoon of March 1st when our Dominic left Turin". In the north of England when the members of the family refer to one of the others, they do not just mention the name as John or Mary, but always say "our John" or "our Mary", thereby instinctively distinguishing them from any others who bear the name. So Dominic having departed, Don Bosco, his heart overflowing with tenderness, refers to him as "our Dominic". This is the first time he has expressed himself in this way, and in Italian it would be even stronger than in English.

These two chapters are in effect a diary of the last ten days of Dominic's life. St John Bosco had the details from letters and personal accounts which he had received, especially from the parish priest and Dominic's own father. Don Rua testifies to this in the canonical process. He was Don Bosco's second in command and succeeded him as Superior General. He also mentions that Dominic's father came to see Don Bosco a week or so after his son's death. The parish priest had great esteem for the boy and several times wrote to the saint describing Dominic's last days.

We have to try to rise up to the level on which Dominic was living if we are to understand what follows, or at least to realize that he was living on that level. It is one which ordinary people only catch glimpses of from time to time although it is the level on which we are meant to be living ourselves. For this reason then it can be that certain things appear unreal to us.

I have used the word "mature" at different points in this book, and have spoken about the development of Dominic to maturity. Here at the supreme moment of his life we see how completely mature he is. In moments of any difficulty the child needs reassuring, encouraging, to be gently led forward, and he needs to find a point of stability and security outside himself in his parents or others, as his own resources are unable to cope with the difficulty or stress. This is equally true of physical situations such as sickness, pain, going to the dentist . . . as of human situations; lack of success, personal unhappiness, family troubles, failure to measure up with the expectations of parents, teachers . . . This is obviously not so with regard to Dominic.

The doctor naturally expects the boy to be afraid and so he speaks to him reassuringly and suggests to him to look the other way. But Dominic is long past the stage where what happens to himself is the most important thing; he has long since ceased to be the centre of his own world, and so he calmly watches the doctor at work and shows no alarm at the sight of his own blood. So also he does not need or manoeuvre that as many people as possible are dancing attendance on him, but makes great efforts to do everything himself: his care for his mother is greater than his self-importance.

But the supreme proof of his complete development and maturity is in the way he faces death. Here above all is where reassurance is needed for human beings, young or old. How much deception to conceal from people the fact that they are dying! How many reassurances that the turn for the better is just round the corner! Don Bosco tells us that Dominic faced death serenely and unafraid. From the other details that are given we can see how he even took command of the situation. Far from needing to be reassured, he does the reassuring . . . trying to dispose his parents and prepare them for what they shrank from considering possible.

He gently but firmly has them bring the priest and so succeeds in

turn in having Confession, Communion and the last Anointing, none of which he would have had if it had been left to those who were there, so sure was everyone that he must recover, so reluctant were they to consider losing him from this life.

Finally he has to ask his father to bring his "Companion of Youth", the prayer-book that Don Bosco had written for Dominic and his companions, and to read through the Exercise for a Happy Death with its wonderfully expressive Litany.

The maturity which Dominic had reached was not simply that of the developed human being, but the complete maturity of the Christian and child of God. This St. Paul reminds us is proportionate to the completed growth of Christ in us. (Ephes. IV, 13). We are no longer to be children, he says; no longer to be like storm-tossed sailors driven before the wind of each new doctrine that human subtlety, human skill in fabricating lies, may propound. We are to grow up in everything into a due proportion with Christ who is our head. (Ephes. IV, 14-16).

So we are grown up, mature, when we are one with Christ and our lives touch His at every point; on Him all the body depends; it is organized and unified by each contact with the source which supplies it. Thus each limb, receiving the active power it needs, achieves its natural growth.

So a mind is formed, a mentality, a way of looking at things. "When I was a child," says St Paul, "I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man (in Christ), I put away the things of a child." (I Cor. XIII, 11).

We can understand then, how what happens to Dominic is naturally and effortlessly related to Christ's life, since his life is touching Our Blessed Lord's at every point. That he should be bled and see his own blood was small and insignificant compared with the piercing of the hands and feet of Jesus.

Having received Holy Communion—"Now I am happy . . . with Jesus with me I fear nothing. How I wish I could say it to the whole world, when Jesus is with us there is no fear of anything—not even of death itself." Pious phrases can be on anybody's lips, but here is a testimony from the depths of a human spirit face to face with death, when all pretence and falsehood cease.

The boy is so completely and naturally united with God that the parish priest is perplexed as to what he can say to help that does not appear superfluous. Maturity is not self-sufficiency; it contains within it a childlike simplicity, and so Dominic asks with simplicity for a thought to help him, a word of encouragement. The priest suggests the Passion of Christ and the boy accepts this willingly.—"May the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always in my mind and heart and on my lips."

It is hardly surprising then, that being so completely "conformed

to Christ", and "wanting so much to sing the praises of Jesus for all eternity", he sees the open gates of heaven and the wonderful things beyond while still alive, and hastens to them with a beautiful smile on his face.

No one can read these chapters without being profoundly moved; may they also inspire all those who are working with the young to aim at helping on a similar development!

## CHAPTERS 26 & 27

It is certainly easy to imagine the sorrow of Dominic's parents at his death, as also the effect on his companions. Once again, in an apt phrase, St. John Bosco sums up so much.

"To whose life for God were added the qualities and winning ways most capable of endearing him to human beings."

This is what Dominic had succeeded so marvellously well in doing, making himself acceptable not only to God but to men. When he died there was not only admiration for what he had accomplished in himself, but also a sense of personal loss, with the great regret that resulted from that. His companions wept for the loss of a great friend.

What Don Picco said was afterwards written down by him and given to Don Bosco. The latter told Don Picco that he was going to write a life of Dominic and would be glad to have the substance of what he had said so spontaneously to his boys. The words and phrases which he uses with regard to Dominic, once again delineate the boy's character and the extent of his development. "Unaffected recollection"; "eagerness and attention"; "anxious to learn everything he could"; "how earnest his attempt to really pray, to have his mind and heart at one with God."

He says to his boys, "Set your life beside Dominic's and whatever difference you find between his and yours, make up your minds to conquer yourselves as he did and thereby enjoy the same joy and peace that he had and which made him such a wonderful companion for you all." Adults who read this book might well do also what the good priest suggests and set their lives beside that of Dominic to see what they find in comparison. This will surely, more than anything else, help them to understand what he accomplished. Are there any who will not find that this boy is streets ahead of them in maturity, integrity, dedication and commitment, spirit of service, spirit of prayer, love of Jesus and Mary? Shall we not have to say, as one of the Cardinals in Rome said at the time of his canonization—"This boy puts us grown-ups to shame."?

As Don Bosco suggests, it is no surprise to us that God speedily showed in wonderful ways how pleasing the boy's life was in his sight. That has gone on up to the present day especially in favour of

children of all ages, mothers in pregnancy, and the conversion of sinners. How many instances there have been of difficult pregnancies which have in the end presented no difficulties; of childless couples who have been blessed with children; of children causing anxiety who have changed for the better; of good children who have not just remained 'good', but been transformed and set on fire.

In memory of March 9th, the day of Dominic's death, or rather of his birthday, as the Church refers to this day for the saints, there is a novena each month from the 1st to the 9th of the month, and many people make this and turn to him to ask his intercession with God, for intentions such as those mentioned above, and also for needs of every conceivable kind.

No certainty is claimed for Dominic's appearing to his father after death as a supernatural event. We can be certain that the account was not a fabrication by his father. God in his Providence does sometimes allow the blessed in heaven to appear to those here on earth and it may well be that everything happened just as given in the father's sober and factual statement.

What can be certainly taken as true is that Dominic appeared to St. John Bosco twenty years later on December 6th, 1876. This dream is given in an appendix and will amply repay a careful and attentive reading of it.

St. John Bosco alludes specifically to the sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion and to the very great part they should play in the Christian life: he does not hesitate to say that through these sacraments well and often received, we can live happily in the midst of the sorrows and trials of this life . . .

This can only be so when these sacraments are a personal encounter with Christ; they have largely ceased to be so. They have become religious practices and as such cannot possibly achieve the needed results in the human spirit and the Christian. As religious practices only, they will gradually lessen in frequency; this is already happening with regard to Confession, with many people falling over each other to explain that it is neither necessary nor good to go to Confession frequently. The same will happen with regard to the Holy Eucharist, unless a re-discovery of these sacraments takes place and they once again become personal encounters with Christ.

In concluding, St. John Bosco returns to where he began; he has not written Dominic's life just to edify, or as interesting phenomena of sanctity, or even to demonstrate his own methods of education and direction—his supreme concern is that we should be moved to do the same as Dominic did; not just to try to be good, but to live for God and for each other.

Having read the book it can now be accepted that there is nothing in the boy's life which is not possible for us and for our children. We are living in very difficult times—no one knows it better than

God our Father, who loves us. He is not satisfied just to give us a blue-print of how we must develop and journey through this life to eternity, but He has given us the concrete life and example of His only-begotten Son become man for us, completely one of us in everything except sin. Lest we should still feel that this was beyond us, He has in every age raised up men and women of every condition and circumstance of life to show that the following of Christ is really possible and what in practice it means.

And now to finally convince us, He has raised up this boy, and He says to us, "Can you any longer find excuses? See this boy in whom by the time he was 15 years old there was the fullness of the life of Christ, and this in and through the things of everyday life."

Let everyone who can, take the practical step of making Dominic known to young and old. From personal experience over a long period, I can assure everyone that Dominic is a revelation to the young. There is an unconscious equation in their minds that sanctity has something to do with being an adult. This is not surprising, since all the statues and pictures of saints they see are adults. When they come to know Dominic and understand something about him, it bursts upon them with the force of a revelation that there can be something undreamt of before also in their lives, a fullness and a totality which they both hope for and seek, while feeling that it is all impossible.

APPENDIX

THE AMBASSADOR OF GOD

A DREAM ST. JOHN BOSCO HAD  
IN 1876  
TWENTY YEARS AFTER DOMINIC'S DEATH

ON the night of December 6th I dreamed as follows:

It seemed to me that I was standing on a hill, looking down on an immense plain that stretched away into the invisible distance. It was as blue as the sea in perfect calm, but what I was looking at was not water; it seemed like crystal, unblemished and sparkling.

Long and broad avenues divided the plain up into very large gardens of indescribable beauty, in which were lawns, groves of ornamental trees and flowering shrubs, flower-beds with an amazing variety of ornamental flowers. What you have seen in gardens can give you little idea of how wonderful all this was. There were trees whose leaves seemed to be of gold, the branches and trunks of precious stones.

Scattered here and there in the gardens were buildings whose appearance and magnificence rivalled the setting in which they stood. I could not estimate what immense sums of money even one of these would have cost to build. The thought ran through my head—if I could have only one of these buildings for my boys how happy they would be.

As I stood there wrapt in wonder, the sound of sweet and entrancing music filled the air; all possible instruments seemed to be combining in wonderful harmony and together with them, choirs of singers.

I then saw great numbers of people in the garden, some walking, some sitting, all radiantly happy. Some were singing, some playing instruments, and it was obvious that they derived equal pleasure from hearing the others as they did from the music they were making themselves. They were singing in Latin these words . . . "All honour and glory to God the Almighty Father—Creator of the ages who was, who is, and who will come to judge the living and the dead through all ages".

There now suddenly appeared a great army of boys. Many of them I knew, boys who had been with me at the Oratory or in other of our schools; but the majority I did not know. This endless line began moving towards me; at its head was Dominic Savio, after him several priests, and many other priests and brothers, each at the head of a group of boys.

I did not know whether I was awake or dreaming; I clapped my hands together and felt my arms and chest in the endeavour to see how real was what I was seeing.

An intense brilliant light now shone all around. All the boys were radiant with happiness; it shone from their eyes, and their faces had

a look of ineffable peace and contentment. They smiled at me and they looked as though they were going to say something, but no word was uttered.

Dominic now walked forward on his own until he stood close beside me. He stood there silently for a moment, smiling and looking at me. How wonderful he looked, how exquisitely he was clothed! The white tunic which reached to his feet was interwoven with golden threads and sparkling jewels; around his waist he had a broad red sash also interwoven with precious stones of every colour, which sparkled and glittered in a thousand lights. Around his neck there was a necklace of wild flowers, but the flowers were made of precious stones and the light they reflected lit up further still the beauty and dignity of Dominic's face. His hair, which was crowned with roses, hung down to his shoulders and completed the quite indescribable effect of his total appearance.

The others were dressed in varying degrees of splendour, all of which had their own symbolic meaning you would not understand. One thing they all had in common was the broad red sash round their waists.

I thought to myself 'What does all this mean?—Where on earth am I?—and I stood there silently, not daring to say a word.

Dominic then spoke:

"Why are you standing there as though you were dumb? Are you not the one I knew who was always so fearless, able to sustain persecutions, calumnies, and dangers of every kind? Have you lost your courage? Why do you not speak?"

Half stammering I replied:

"I don't know what to say. Are you really Dominic Savio?"

"Yes indeed. Don't you recognize me?"

"How is it that you are here?"

"I have come to talk with you," Dominic replied affectionately. "We spoke together so often when I was alive; you were always so kind and generous to me, and I responded to your love with my complete confidence and affection. Ask me anything you wish."

"Where am I?" I asked.

"You are in a place of happiness," he replied, "where all that is beautiful can be enjoyed."

"Is this heaven, then?"

"No. Whatever is here is of the earth, although improved beyond conception by the power of God. No living person can ever see or imagine the wonders of eternity."

"Would it be possible to have a natural light more brilliant than this?"

"Yes, quite possible . . . look there in the distance."

I looked, and a ray of light suddenly appeared, so penetrating and of such brilliance that I had to close my eyes, and I cried out in

alarm so loudly that I woke the priest who was sleeping in the room nearby. I opened my eyes after a moment and said:

"But that is surely a ray of the divine light . . ."

"No, and even that does not give you any idea. In heaven we enjoy God, and that is everything."

I had by now recovered from my initial amazement and was looking at Dominic as he stood before me. I said:

"Why are you wearing that dazzling white tunic?"

Dominic did not answer, but the choirs of voices beautifully sustained by the many instruments sang in Latin:

"They had their loins girt and have washed their tunics in the blood of the Lamb."

"What does the red sash you wear mean?" I then asked.

Again Dominic did not reply, and a solo voice sang the words:

"They are virgins and they follow the Lamb wherever he goes."

I then realized that the blood-red sash was symbolic of the great efforts and sacrifices made, the quasi-martyrdom suffered to live a completely pure life. It symbolized also the spirit of penance which cleanses the soul of its faults. The dazzling white of the tunic represented a life from baptism to death without any serious rejection of God.

My eyes were drawn to the serried ranks of boys behind Dominic and I asked him:

"Who are all these boys and why are they all so radiant and resplendent?"

The answer came from the boys themselves, who began to sing in wonderful harmony:

"These are like the angels of God in heaven . . ."

Dominic although the youngest was obviously the leader, standing out well ahead of them. I therefore asked him:

"Why is it that you take precedence over the others?"

"I am the oldest . . ."

"But you are not," I replied; "there are many here much older than you."

"I am God's ambassador."

The meaning of what it was all about suddenly dawned on me and I hastened to say:

"Let us talk about what concerns me and my work. Perhaps you have something important to tell me . . . speak to me of the past, present and future of our work and of my dear sons . . ."

"With regard to the past, your Congregation has clearly done much good. Look over there at the great gathering of boys."

I looked and said to him:

"How many they are, and how happy!"

"Look at what is written over the entrance to that garden," said Dominic. I looked and saw written:

## SALESIAN GARDEN

"All those there are Salesians or those who have been educated by you and your sons, or who in some way or other have been sent on the way to God and their salvation made really possible. Count them if you can! But they would be many, many more still if only you had greater faith and confidence in God. . . ."

I heaved a great sigh on hearing this admonition and determined to set no limit to my trust in God for the future.

Dominic then held before me a magnificent bunch of flowers; there were roses, violets, sunflowers, lilies, sprigs of evergreen and, most unusual for a bouquet, ears of wheat. He offered it to me and said:

"Look!"

"I am looking," I replied, "but I don't understand a thing."

"Make sure that all your boys have it and that they defend it fearlessly against anyone who would try to take it from them. With these flowers secure in their possession they can never fail to be happy."

"I still don't understand; please explain . . ."

"These flowers represent the virtues and qualities which your boys need in order to be able to live for God instead of for themselves. The rose is the symbol of love, the violet of humility, the sunflower of obedience, the gentian of penance and self-discipline, the ears of corn of frequent communion, the lily of purity, the sprigs of evergreen, of constancy and perseverance."

"No one was adorned with these flowers better than yourself," I said to him. "Tell me what was your greatest consolation when you came to die."

"What do you think?" he answered.

I had several shots at trying to say what I thought it might be, such as having lived such a pure life, having heaped up so much treasure in heaven by all his good works, and so on, but to all he shook his head with a smile.

"Tell me, then," I said, quite crestfallen at my failure; "What was it?"

"What helped me most and gave me greatest joy when I was dying," replied Dominic, "was the loving care and help of the great Mother of God. Tell your sons not to fail to keep close to her while they are alive. But hurry—the time is almost up."

"What about the future?" I asked.

"In this coming year you will have great sorrow to bear. All together eight of your sons will die. But be of good heart—they will leave this life for heaven. God is always with you and will give you other sons equally worthy."

"What about the Salesian Congregation?"

“God has great things in store for it. This coming year something will begin which will stretch out to the whole world, from north to south, from west to east. This is only one of many great developments of the future. However, this can only be so on condition that your sons keep to God’s way and plan and not their own. If your priests can be faithful to the mission and way of life God has shown you, the future of the Salesian Congregation will be an extraordinary one, and there will be no counting the number of those brought to God through it. There is one further very important condition, however, and that is that you all remain ever close to the great Mother of God, and ever proclaim fearlessly by your example the dignity of a pure and chaste life, which is so pleasing to God.”

“What about the Church in general?” I then asked.

“What is in store for the Church God alone knows. These are things He reserves to Himself and they cannot be communicated beforehand to any created being.”

“And Pius IX?” I asked.

“This much I can say. He will not have to endure on earth much longer. God will reward him for his faithful service. The Church will not be submerged by present difficulties.”

“What about myself?” I asked.

“You have many sorrows and difficulties ahead of you yet . . . but hurry, as my time is almost up.”

I stretched out my hands to detain him if I could, but they grasped only the air. Dominic smiled and said:

“What are you trying to do?”

“I don’t want to let you go,” I said; “but are you bodily here?—are you really my son Dominic?”

“This is how things are. If in God’s providence someone who is dead has to appear to someone still alive, he is seen in his normal bodily appearance and distinguishing characteristics. He cannot, however, be bodily touched, since he is a pure spirit. He retains this bodily appearance until he is reunited with his body at the resurrection.”

“One last thing,” I now said. “Are all my boys living as children of God? Tell me something that will make it possible for me to help them more.”

“You can divide your boys into three groups,” Dominic replied, “and these three sheets of paper indicate how.”

He handed me the first one. On it was written in large characters:

## UNCONQUERED

The sheet contained the names of those who had never been overcome by evil. They were very numerous. I saw them all before me. Many of them I knew, many I saw for the first time. I saw how they

lived their lives for God fearlessly and unflinchingly in spite of the enormous difficulties and dangers they encountered. It was as though they were travelling along a road and were being continually ambushed; they were greatly hindered and molested by the barrage but never brought down or wounded.

Dominic then gave me the second sheet on which was written in large characters:

### CASUALTIES

On this sheet there were the names of those who had seriously offended God, been badly wounded on the journey, but they had regained their balance and healed their wounds with a good Confession and Communion, and were trying to press on again, although some showed signs of being discouraged by their experience. They were more in number than on the first sheet. I saw them all and once again recognized many of them.

I held out my hand for the third sheet on which I could see written the words:

### OVERCOME BY EVIL

On the sheet were the names of those who had rejected God by serious sins and were continuing to do so, content to remain deprived of his friendship. I was very anxious to know who they might be and made to take the sheet from Dominic . . .

"Wait a moment," he said to me earnestly. "When you open this sheet a terrible stench will be given off which neither you nor I could possibly bear. It is likewise intolerable to the angels of God, and God himself."

"How can this be," I said, "the angels and God being pure spirits?"

"It means this," he replied, "that just as you seek to put the greatest distance possible between yourself and what nauseates you, so those who reject God by serious sin are separated from him more and more."

He then gave me the sheet, saying:

"Look at it and try to make good use of it for your sons. Never forget the bunch of flowers and try hard to make sure that all have one and never let it go." So saying, he receded from me into the others who were grouped behind him.

I unfolded the sheet . . . I did not see any names, but in a flash I saw before me all those whose names were written. I looked at them with a heavy heart. The majority of them I knew; they belonged to the Oratory or other of our schools. Many of them were normally regarded as good boys and some even of being among the best . . . such they were far from being!

When the paper was unfolded, there arose from it such a horrible

stench that I was completely overcome. My head throbbed agonizingly, and I began to vomit so violently that I thought I must die.

Everything became dark, and the vision was no more. A piercing flash of lightning tore across the sky, and as its frightening crash of thunder reverberated in my ear I awoke trembling with fear.

The stench was still present in my room clinging to the walls and furniture, and remained there for several days. Thus repugnant to God is the very name of those who reject him and surrender themselves to the horrors of self-indulgence.

Whenever the memory of that stench comes back to me, I am seized anew with pain and nausea, and I can with difficulty prevent myself from vomiting.

I have spoken with some of the boys whose names I saw written on the lists, and I know for certain that what I saw in the dream is only too true . . .

### A BRIEF COMMENTARY ON THE DREAM

I DO not know of any other saint whose life was punctuated by a series of dreams as St. John Bosco's was. They began when he was nine years old and continued till his death. By means of them the Saint was instructed, inspired and also admonished on occasion. He was also made aware of present and future events—such as what his boys had been up to, the state of their consciences, and the impending death of some of them. He also was made aware of future events in Church and state. In his dreams he travelled over a good deal of the world and described in detail things which he saw, geographical details of regions in S. America at that time unknown, and even objects unintelligible at the time, such as what were afterwards identified as oil refineries and a town which only recently came into existence—Brazilia. Very fittingly there is a large statue of St. John Bosco in the new capital of Brazilia and the first church to be built there was dedicated to him.

These dreams were tremendous experiences for St. John Bosco and often shook him to the depths, so that next day he was exhausted and weary. He naturally hesitated about paying any attention to them but he would have been very stupid if he had not realized that there was more to them than ordinary dreams. He had ample confirmation when he quietly spoke to a boy and found what he had seen about the boy in his dreams was perfectly true.

He used to tell the dreams to his boys specially in the little talk he gave to them every night just before they went to bed. The content of the dreams was usually vivid and dramatic, and with the rapport already existing between the Saint and his boys and his ability to speak to them from the heart, it can be imagined how tremendous the effect on them was.

He always prefaced his telling of a dream by some remarks such as the following:

“As you know well, dreams happen while we are asleep . . . You are my sons and I have no secrets from you. I tell you all that I know, and sometimes some of the things I don’t know! I am going to tell you a dream I had, but I don’t want you to go shouting all over the place about it, and not even to repeat it to your parents in your weekly letter. If it helps you, well and good. If it does not, don’t bother; it is at least a curiosity. It may help you later on when you understand things a bit better . . .”

Today in the era of Freud, Adler and Jung, we can approach the dreams in a more objective way in one sense, although it should not be forgotten that mankind has been preoccupied with dreams from the earliest civilizations onwards; dreams appear also frequently in holy scripture.

However that may be, we can look very briefly at this dream in the spirit of St. John Bosco’s recounting it to his boys.

The dream is epic in its proportion, and conveys in no small measure something of the grandeur and magnificence of the scene as Don Bosco witnessed it. It is a complete echo of his life of Dominic. It is not just an elaborate show to cause gasps of wonder. Everything in the dream is geared to a practical end. St. John Bosco is inspired, instructed and admonished; he also suffers, all for one purpose—the true Christian education of his children, their development and fulfilment in their life for God.

Dominic comes as the “Ambassador of God” and he is now the master, Don Bosco, the pupil. Consolation and encouragement are given him in his seeing something of the enormous harvest of souls to be reaped by his Congregation, and of the phenomenal growth of the two Congregations he founded, priests and nuns now numbering 25,000 and 17,000 respectively.

The symbolism of the bunch of flowers is tremendously significant. The flower with its individual beauty and perfume has through the ages been used to transform the drabness of man’s environment and provide settings where people can go to find peace and relaxation and in so doing be brought closer to nature and to God. To every important occasion, public or private, they give grace and splendour, and even the sorrows of death are lessened by their presence.

Man has made an effort to capture permanently the fragrance of the flower through the perfumes he has made, seeking at the same time to remind himself of his true dignity and that he is not simply of the earth, earthy.

Through the ages we have spoken of the odour of sanctity, the perfume of virtue, and the great Mother of God who “draws us after her with the rare perfume of her virtues”, is designated with exquisite simplicity as the mystical rose.

This idea of the bunch or bouquet of flowers then is one which is full of strength and beauty and inspiration. The qualities and virtues symbolized by the different flowers take in the total person in himself and in relation to God and mankind.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that there is no question here of anything added, of pious acts detached and complete in themselves. We are here concerned with the total person. What is represented by the flowers are acts of the total person, living his life each day totally in what he does. They are not exterior acts to which nothing inside corresponds.

Dominic insists that this total way of living must be clung to with tenacity and persevered in with constancy.

As can be verified from the records of the Oratory, six boys and two Brothers (young Salesians preparing for the priesthood) died the following year.

The reference by Dominic to the beginning the following year of something very important refers most likely to the Salesian Bulletin which began in 1877. It has spread right across the world and is today published in 15 different languages. The combined total of the copies for one issue is almost one million. It is the organ of formation and information for the third family, the Salesian Co-operators, and has made its own very valuable contribution to Christian family life in many countries of the world. It had its honoured place in the family of Pope John, and he recounts how he read it eagerly through his formative years and cut a picture of Our Lady Help of Christians out of it, which he mounted and kept for many years and before which he poured out his aspirations, sighs and tears.

In a few short words Dominic managed to convey the supreme importance of the Church, the Body of Christ, in God's providence: it is totally in God's immediate care and it will endure ageless and triumphant through the difficulties it was then experiencing. These although different in nature were just as severe and disturbing as those we are experiencing at the present time. Pius IX was a very close friend of Don Bosco and helped him in many ways. He died fourteen months later.

Don Bosco had eleven more years to live. He had suffered all his life, and the phenomenal amount of work he had got through had been in spite of enormous difficulties of every kind. Dominic does not offer him any relief for the remaining years of his life. Don Bosco utters no word of complaint.

He cannot let Dominic go, however, without getting some help for his boys, for whom the twenty-four hours of the day are not enough to spend himself. The Saint was sixty-one years old; he had a vast and unrivalled personal experience of the young. He had been made the repository of endless confidences from them. He was tremendously intuitive by nature and to this was added the flowering

of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to a remarkable degree, so that he had only to look at a boy or an adult to see them through and through just as they were.

The many additional works which he had undertaken, and others which were thrust upon him, made it impossible for him now to have that first-hand personal contact with those at the Oratory where he lived, let alone in the other schools he had opened.

Here he is shown exactly how they are living. Once again he is made aware of the enormous difficulties which beset the young and which in a few words he graphically describes. If only we today could take it in adequately . . . Don Bosco saw them as beset on all sides . . . what about today, when the abandonment of Christian standards and values on such a massive scale by contemporary life has broken into the children's world through the television, cinema, radio, pictorial magazines, captured their imagination and distorted what should be normal situations into a gross caricature of life. How long will it take us to realize that it is no longer sufficient for our children to be good—heroism is needed for them to bear witness to Christ among their own companions in daily life. Protection and prevention are necessary, but they are not the totality, they are only elements in helping towards a positive foundation and development, the building up of an inner unbreakable spirit.

This is the whole meaning of the flowers; they are all positive qualities which must exist in an inner spirit before they can express themselves in act. The perfection of education was taken to be when children obeyed and did well academically and otherwise. The trouble is that in the majority of cases there was no obedience but only conformity, and conformity is an exterior act which leaves the inner life and development untouched.

Even Don Bosco is surprised and shaken at the extent of those "overcome by evil". How completely destructive are the results of this on the human and spiritual levels is represented by the unbearable stench which reduces Don Bosco to such dire straits physically, and polluted the air all around.

Dominic's very last words were an exhortation to Don Bosco on the most positive level . . . to do everything in his power that this positive human and spiritual development symbolized by the flowers, should be brought about in all his sons and that they should be so conscious of its value, that they would never willingly let it be destroyed in them.

But for all that, Don Bosco is left at the end violently sick! It may be that if so few of our children have this inner spirit and positive development without which they cannot possibly survive today, it is because there are too few parents, priests and teachers willing to suffer in the process.

Private guidance and counselling for young people is given through the St. Dominic Savio Guild, 30 Orbel Street, London, S.W. 11.

For further details or for anything in connection with St. Dominic Savio write to this address.