

I WAS DON BOSCO'S CONFESSOR
Sworn testimony of Fr Giovanni Giacomelli ⁹
(Teresio Bosco)

`I knew Don Bosco in 1836.¹⁰ We were both seminarians at Chieri: I was doing my first year of philosophy and he his second. We spent five years together in that seminary, and then another year at the Turin Ecclesiastical College. For thirty-eight years in Turin I was the spiritual director at the Barolo Institute, not far from Don Bosco's Oratory. I could certainly claim to have been always one of his close friends. I used to go to him for Confession, and from 1874 until his death [1888] he used to make his Confession to me.

When I knew him at the seminary I was greatly impressed by his piety and love of study. I never saw him take part in any leisurely pastimes, even those that were customary or authorised by the Superiors. He used these periods to study, to pray, or to walk and talk with his companions. I have pleasant memories of the fact that on days when there were no lectures he would often receive visits from various young people who used to be his fellow students in past years. He would willingly spend time with them, discussing and counselling. He had a way of creating in his friends a spirit of calmness and serenity.

Working with Father Cottolengo

As soon as he was granted the canonical 'faculties' for hearing the confessions of the faithful, Don Bosco went to help out at the Little House of Divine Providence that Canon Cottolengo had built some years before. There was much need of assistance there on account of the typhoid fever that was then raging in Turin. The Oblate Father Gastaldi (who wrote the life of Fr Cottolengo) once told me of the following incident related to him by Don Bosco. One day Fr Cottolengo took hold of Bosco's cassock and said to him 'This material is too light and thin; you should get a cassock made of thicker cloth, for the day will come when it will be pulled and clutched at by many people'.

⁹ Father Francesco Giacomelli was born in 1820, and was Don Bosco's friend and confessor for fourteen years. In the April and May of 1892, when he was seventy-two years of age, he gave his testimony under oath, and part of it is reproduced here. The complete testimony can be found in the *Positio-Summarium* on pages 2, 81, 359, 387, 605, 685, 732 and 905.

¹⁰ Don Bosco was then 21 years of age.

Don Bosco practised all the Christian virtues in a most remarkable manner - especially the virtue of fortitude.

He was endowed with a lively faith, and he defended it with courage and energy. About the year 1851, when the Protestants began their propaganda in Turin and Piedmont, Don Bosco was quick to defend the Catholic religion, and wrote several pamphlets called Catholic Readings.

As long as he was able, he instructed his young charges in religion, he preached, gave retreats, and in later years sent his missionaries to South America - all with the single aim of spreading the faith.

Don Bosco celebrated his Mass with great devotion, and insisted on maximum decorum and cleanliness in his Oratory chapels.

He encouraged his boys to receive Communion frequently, and when I once mentioned to him that perhaps he allowed this too often, he replied that the Council of Trent exhorted the faithful to receive Communion every time holy Mass was celebrated.

Mary, Mother of God

He had a tender and filial devotion to the Mother of God, and one of his favourite invocations was: Mary, mother of grace and mother of mercy, protect us from the enemy and be with us at the hour of our death. Whenever he finished a sermon he always had his boys sing the words, Praised forever be the names of Jesus and Mary.

He made much of Mass and Communion especially at Christmastide. As long as he had the strength, he never missed any opportunity for celebrating the holy sacrifice. One of his favourite functions was the washing of the feet during the Holy Saturday ceremonies; and he carried out this rite as long as he had the strength to do so. I remember that in 1850 he asked me to say a few words to the boys before this particular ceremony.

Money

He had a great respect and love for his mother and his family, but he never allowed any shadow of nepotism. He was not afraid to beg, but it was never for himself or for his relations; it was solely for his youngsters and his various works of charity. I know that many years before his death he made his will and bequeathed the few things he possessed in such a way that offerings and donations made to him would not find their way into the hands of relations.

Food

I ate at his table for some months, and there was never any sign of luxury; meals were frugal indeed, and the wine he drank was generously watered. In later years, when

conditions at the Oratory became much better, one of his community remarked that the changing times called for better meals. Don Bosco was greatly disappointed to hear this: he never wanted any show of affluence. I personally heard him make this remark.

He never aspired to any honours. He was once asked if he held the title of Monsignor or Sir, and he replied that his title was simply 'Father', and would always be so.

His last illness

During his last illness he frequently made use of the sacrament of Confession (he used to make his weekly Confession to me); and he would receive Communion almost every day and with profound faith and devotion. He bore his pains and sufferings with his usual patience and resignation. His last words to me were, 'Pray, pray'. His illness and death were in total conformity with his holy life. I never saw anything in him that would in any way lessen his fortitude and patience.