

SOONER OR LATER, DON BOSCO PAYS UP
Sworn testimony of Giuseppe Rossi,¹ Salesian Brother
(Teresio Bosco)

I first met Don Bosco on 20 October 1859, the day I was accepted by him into the Oratory of Valdocco in Turin, and remained henceforth under his direction. This acceptance impressed me greatly, for Don Bosco's welcome was so fatherly and affable, and I felt the love of a son for him.

Teenagers idle and at risk

I remember that one day Don Bosco was returning to the Oratory from the city and came across a group of youngsters in the middle of the city square not far away. They were about eighteen years of age, idle drifters, and they began to ridicule Don Bosco. He approached them and in a kindly manner asked them about their home conditions and their work. They answered that they had no work, and that it was useless to go looking for it. Don Bosco then invited them to come to his house and he would give them work, board and lodging.

'Do you really want to take us into your Oratory?' they asked.

'Of course', answered Don Bosco, 'if you want to come.'

One of the lads asked his companion whether they should go or not. One after another they accepted the invitation, and Don Bosco took them to the Oratory and set them to work at various jobs. I kept a constant eye on them and I can give every assurance that they were truly grateful to Don Bosco. They vied with each other in offering themselves in turn for work; they behaved themselves well and carried out all that Don Bosco advised or bade them to do. Thanks to Don Bosco these lads received an upbringing that saved them from a life of crime and set them on the right path.

Parents in difficulties

¹ Giuseppe Rossi was born at Mezzana Bigli, Pavia, and was received into Don Bosco's Oratory in 1859. He became a Salesian in 1864 when he was twenty-nine years of age. Don Bosco, noting his administrative talents and utter trustworthiness, appointed him chief buyer for the Oratory. Certain extraordinary purchases demanded that he travelled both in Italy and abroad, representing Don Bosco and Don Rua. Don Bosco used to jokingly call him 'Count Rossi'; and indeed his manner and bearing seemed to confirm such a title. Don Bosco had him participate at two General Chapters of the Salesian Congregation to help with his business acumen. Rossi gave sworn testimony regarding Don Bosco in 1893, when he was fifty-nine years of age. This testimony is to be found in the *Positio-Summarium* on pages 14, 535 and 618.

Many times I experienced the charity of Don Bosco. Years ago my parents had asked me to return home to help them as they were in need. When Don Bosco was told of this, he said to me, 'Here is a note for 100 lire for your parents to help them in their trouble.'² Write to your father and tell him and your mother to come the Oratory. If your father is still able to do some job or other, he can stay here; if not, he can go wherever he wishes and live with you. If your mother is able to do some chores in the linen room, she will be welcome; if not, she will at least be able to go to the chapel and pray'.

My parents were very pleased to hear of this offer, and my father wrote to me saying that he would willingly stay with Don Bosco who was such a good man. When my mother became very ill Don Bosco sent me home to assist her, and gave me enough money to help her in her sickness, and eventually to pay for her funeral. What remained of this cash I brought back to him.

I would point out furthermore that Don Bosco opened a house in Mathi where mothers of Salesians could be cared for when in need or in poor health. Thus at the Oratory there were quite a few Salesians whose elderly fathers or brothers, being unable to work and having no means to provide for themselves, enjoyed the charity of Don Bosco.

Sooner or later Don Bosco pays up!

On account of my duties I had to go to various factories, workshops or wholesale establishments to make certain extraordinary purchases for the Oratory. On identifying myself, I never met with any refusal. It was sufficient for me to say that the merchandise was for Don Bosco's Oratory. The goods were supplied on credit, with the remark that it was a pleasure to supply goods to Don Bosco, since he was good and honest. With other customers they ran a risk; but sooner or later Don Bosco always paid up.

² This would be about \$1000 today.