

PART II

The Second

Decade 1835 to 1845

Chapter 17

Taking the Cassock

Clerical investiture • Rule of life

Having made up my mind to enter the seminary, I (took the prescribed examination. I prepared carefully for that most important day because I was convinced that one's eternal salvation or eternal perdition ordinarily depends on the choice of a state in life. I asked my friends to pray for me. I made a novena, and on the feast of St Michael (October 1834)¹ I approached the holy sacraments. Before the solemn high Mass Doctor Cinzano," the provost and vicar forane of my region, blessed my cassock and vested me as a cleric.

He instructed me to remove my lay clothing,³ praying: "May the Lord strip you of your old nature and its deeds." he did so, I thought, "Oh, how much old clothing there to cast off. *My God, destroy in me all my evil habits.*"

When he put the clerical collar round my neck, he said: "May the Lord clothe you with the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."⁴ Deeply moved, I thought to myself, "*Yes, O my God, rant that at this moment I may put on a new nature. May I henceforth lead a new life in complete conformity with your holy will. May justice' and holiness be the constant objects of my thoughts, words, and actions. Amen. O Mary, be my salvation.*" After the ceremonies in church, the provost wanted another, more worldly celebration. He brought me to the "Celebration of St Michael at Bardella (a district of Castelnuovo). He meant well, but I looked on it as a kindness misplaced. I felt like a newly dressed puppet on public display.

After my weeks of preparation for that long-awaited day, I now found myself sitting down to dinner amongst people of every sort, men and women, who were there to amuse themselves, to laugh and chatter, to eat and drink. These people, for the most part, spent their time in pleasure-seeking, sport, dancing, and amusements of every kind. Could such people, such society ever identify with one who that very morning had put on the robe of holiness to give himself entirely to the Lord?

The provost saw that I was ill at ease. When we got home he asked me why I was so thoughtful and reserved on a day of such public rejoicing. I replied quite frankly that the morning's ceremony at church contrasted in gender,

number, and case⁵ with the evening ceremony. "Moreover," I added, "seeing priests the worse for drinking and indulging in buffoonery with the guests, aroused in me almost a revulsion for my vocation. Should I ever turn out to be a priest like them, I would prefer to put this habit aside and live poorly as a layman but a good Christian."⁶

"That's the world as it is," answered the provost, "and you must take it as you find it. You must see evil if you are to recognise it and avoid it. No one becomes a battle-trying warrior without learning how to handle arms. So we too must do who are engaged in continual war against the enemy of souls."

I kept quiet then, but in my heart I said, "I will never again attend public festivals, unless obliged because of religious ceremonies."

After that day I had to pay attention to myself. The style of life I had lived up to then had to be radically reformed. My life in the past had not been wicked, but I had been proud and dissipated, given over to amusements, games, acrobatics, and other such things. These pursuits gave passing joy, but did not satisfy the heart.⁷

I drew up a fixed rule of life. To impress it more vividly on my memory, I wrote up the following resolutions:⁸

1. For the future I will never take part in public shows during fairs or at markets. Nor will I attend dances or the theatre,⁹ and as far as possible I will not partake of the dinners usual on such occasions.

2. I will no longer play games of dice or do conjuring tricks, acrobatics, sleight of hand, tightrope walking. I will give up my violin-playing¹⁰ and hunting. These things I hold totally contrary to ecclesiastical dignity and spirit.

3. I will love and practise a retiring life, temperance in eating and drinking. I will allow myself only those hours of rest strictly necessary for health.

4. In the past I have served the world by reading secular literature. Henceforth I will try to serve God by devoting myself to religious reading.

5. I will combat with all my strength everything, all reading, thoughts, conversations, words, and deeds contrary to the virtue of chastity. On the contrary, I will practise all those things, even the smallest, which contribute to preserving this virtue.

6. Besides the ordinary practices of piety, I will never neglect to make a little meditation daily and a little spiritual reading.

7. Every day I will relate some story or some maxim advantageous to the souls of others. I will do this with my companions, friends, relatives, and when I cannot do it with others, I will speak with my mother.

These are the resolutions which I drew up when I took the clerical habit. To fix them firmly on my mind, I went before an image of the Blessed Virgin and, having read them to her, I prayed and made a formal promise to my heavenly benefactress to observe them no matter what sacrifice it cost."

Notes:

1. Saint Michael's feast is September 29. There are two mistakes in Don Bosco's account. The day was October 25, the year 1835. The feast of Saint Raphael used to be October 24. The arch diocesan archives of Turin report October 25 as the day of John's investiture. It is quite likely that an event of such local importance as the clerical investiture of a native son would be celebrated on a Sunday, and it was customary to celebrate the feasts of important saints on the nearest Sunday. October 25, 1835, was a Sunday.

The second error concerns the feast at Bardella. If Don Bosco assumed that he was clothed in the cassock on the feast of Saint Michael, he would naturally write that the people of Bardella were celebrating Saint Michael. Bardella's patron is Saint Gabriel (Molineris, p. 234; Stella, letter, June 4, 1988), whose liturgical feast in the old calendar was March 24. Evidently, the people of Bardella were celebrating Saint Raphael's day on October 25, and Don Bosco is mistaken about its being their patronal feast. This is also the conclusion which Lemoyne reaches (BM I, 277).

Molineris also maintains (pp. 235—236) that Lemoyne created the dialog (BM I, 277-278) between John and Father Cinzano, largely because Lemoyne presupposes that Margaret and Joseph Bosco were still residing in Becchi (which was farther away than Sussambrino, where they in fact lived in 1835).

2. As mentioned in chapter 7, note 9, "doctor" refers to one's mastery of theology; in fact, Don Bosco often uses the term *teologo*, as he does here, rather than *dottore*.

The title was given not only to scholars who had earned a degree but also to those of particular learning or to holders of certain church offices; Father Cinzano was a diocesan consultor (*SouAut*, p. 94, n. 10). On vicars forane and provosts, see chapter 4, note 6, and chapter 10, note 15. Waldensian controversialists referred to Don Bosco himself as *teologo* (see chapter 60).

Lemoyne gives Father Cinzano's names as Michael Anthony (BM I, 376). Stella corrects Lemoyne and also furnishes Father Cinzano's dates, 1805-1870, on the basis of his death notice in the diocesan calendar. His name actually was Peter Anthony (*EcSo*, p. 627, and personal letter of June 4, 1988).

3. I.e., his coat and tie.

4. Don Bosco quotes the words of the clothing ceremony in Latin: *Exuat te Dominus veterem hominem cum actibus suis. Induat te Dominum novum hominem, qui secundum Deum creatus est in iusticia et sanctitate veritatis!* These words are almost a direct quotation from the Vulgate of Ephesians 4:22, 24). Don Bosco's youthful prayers are underlined in his manuscript.

5. This allusion to the intricacies of Latin grammar playfully points to the complete disharmony that John found in the day's activities. We should hesitate to ascribe all of these rather harsh sentiments to the mature Don Bosco; they reflect, instead, the prevailing moral rigorism of the 1830s.

6. These comments on the dignity of the priesthood certainly reflect Don Bosco's lifelong ideals and cannot be called Jansenistic.

7. Father Berto's copy of the manuscript uses the past tense ("did not satisfy"). Don Bosco let that stand even though his original text uses the present, "do not satisfy." The original seems to read better in that Don Bosco goes from his personal past experience, "gave passing joy," to a general principle, "do not satisfy."

8. This plan of life sealed John's preparation for his first year as a seminarian. It summarizes the insights of the recollection and prayer that went with his clothing ceremony. The learned Sisto Colombo, SDB, says that the resolutions are a program for a life "filled with God, lived in intimate conversation with him, austere, disciplined in word and thought, angelic in its purity" (*S. Giovanni Bosco, 1815-1888: Fondatore dei Sakstani e delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice* [Turin: SEI, 1934], p. 49).

9. John's resolutions reflect the clerical discipline of the time, which forbade those in holy orders to attend balls, the opera, etc., or to hunt (with horses and hounds, falcons, etc.)—in short, to take part in or watch any activity that was regarded as worldly, spectacular, or potentially scandalous. In the nineteenth century this discipline was scattered through various papal and conciliar decrees; the Canon Law of 1918 codified it in cc. 138 and 140.

10. He had begun to play the violin while staying with John Roberto at Castelnuovo (chapter 6).

11. "These resolutions indicated [John's] efforts to adapt to a clerical world which was quite strict, if not rigorous" (Desramaut, *SpLife*, p. 310, n. 2). As already noted, the clergy of Piedmont were under a strong Jansenist influence. John's resolutions and his outlook go beyond canon law, influenced by this rigorism (see also chapter 16, notes 3 and 7). He seems to have struggled his whole life to balance this ideal of the priest "retired from the world" with the pastoral needs of the industrial age.

On Don Bosco's mature asceticism, see Desramaut, *SpLife*, pp. 173-196.

Chapter 18

Mother's Farewell

Departure for the seminary

I had to be in the seminary on 30 October of that year, 1835.¹ My little wardrobe was ready.² My relatives were all pleased, and I even more than they. It was only my mother who was pensive. Her eyes followed me round as if she wanted to say something to me. On the evening before my departure she called me to her and spoke to me these unforgettable words:³

"My dear John, you have put on the priestly habit. I feel all the happiness that any mother could feel in her son's good fortune. Do remember this, however: it's not the habit that honours your state, but the practice of virtue. If you should ever begin to doubt your vocation, then —for heaven's sake!—do not dishonor this habit. Put it aside immediately. I would much rather have a poor farmer for a son, than a priest who neglects his duties."

"When you came into the world, I consecrated you to the Blessed Virgin. When you began your studies, I recommended to you devotion to this Mother of ours. Now I say to you, be completely hers; love those of your companions who have devotion to Mary; and if you become a priest, always preach and promote devotion to Mary."

My mother was deeply moved as she finished these words, and I cried. "Mother," I replied, "I thank you for all you have said and done for me. These words of yours will not prove vain; I will treasure them all my life."

The following morning I went off to Chieri, and on the evening of that same day I entered the seminary.⁴ After greeting my superiors, I made my bed, and then, with my friend Garigliano,⁵ strolled through the dormitories, the corridors, and finally into the courtyard. Glancing up at a sundial, I saw written, "The hours drag for the sad, fly for the happy."

"That's it," I said to my friend; "that's our program. Let's always be cheerful, and the time will pass quickly."

The following day I began a three-day retreat, and I did it out of my way to make it as well as I could. At the of the retreat I approached Dr Ternavasio of Bra, lecturer in philosophy.⁷ I asked him for some rule of life by which I might fulfill my duties and win the goodwill of my superiors.

"Just one thing," replied the stood priest, "the exact fulfillment of your duties."⁸

I made this advice my norm and applied myself with all my soul to the observance of the rules of the seminary. I made no distinction between the bells that called me to study, to church, to the refectory, to recreation, or to bed. This diligent observance won me the affection of my companions and the esteem of superiors. Consequently, my six years⁹ at the seminary were a very happy period.

Notes

1. Don Bosco continued to write 1834 in his notebook. Ceria corrected it to 1835 in his edition. On November 5, 1835, the annual lottery for the military draft from Castelnuovo was held. John Bosco was assigned the number 41, meaning that he was very likely to be called up. Because of his entrance into the seminary a week earlier, he was exempted. (T. Bosco, SP p. 69; Caselle, *Giavanni Bosco studente*. p. 145; cf. Stella, *EcSo*, p. 33, n. 13)

2. Father Cinzano and the people of Morialdo joined together to contribute: the various items of clothing that John needed. Fathers Cinzano and Cafasso jointly prevailed upon Father Louis Guala of Turin to use his weighty influence with Archbishop Fransoni to obtain for John an exemption from the seminary boarding and tuition fees at least for the first year.

3. Just as she had when John made his first communion and when he was weighing a possible religious vocation, on this third great occasion in her son's life Margaret Bosco put her motherly love and faith into sound, disinterested advice. She selflessly balances her deep respect for the priesthood against her son's success.

4. The seminary was located in the former residence of the Congregation of the Oratory, which dated from 1658, as did the adjacent Church of Saint Philip Neri. The Napoleonic government expelled the Oratorians and confiscated their convent. They received it back under the Restoration but soon had to withdraw from Chieri for lack of members. The convent became partly a school and partly a police barracks.

Archbishop Chiaveroti bought the building in 1828; a decree of the Holy See established the seminary on May 14, 1828, but it did not open till November 1829. The church had remained open during all that time and is still open today. (Caselle, *Giovanni Bosco students*, pp. 148, 150)

Don Bosco passes over a fundamental decision that he had to make upon enrolling in the seminary, viz. whether to live there as a boarding student or to lodge in the city and attend just the lectures and the main practices of piety at the seminary. Although bishops disliked having day students as seminarians — they thought that they were a worldly influence on the others—apparently there was little that they could do to change the practice. In the Turin archdiocese, for example, seminary enrollment in 1840 totaled 565, of whom 207 were day students. Stella concludes that John elected to shut himself in the spiritual cloister of the seminary (LW, pp. 39-40; see chapter 19, note 4 and comment).

5. William Garigliano was a friend of John's and a member of the Society for a Good Time in secondary school. During their six years in the seminary, he was one of John's inseparable companions; in the next chapter Don Bosco will mention John Baptist Giacomelli and Louis Comollo.

6. What was the seminary is now a public school. The sundial is still on the courtyard wall, and the Latin verse is still faintly legible: *Afflictis lentae, celeres gaudentibus horae.*

7. Father Francis Ternavasio (1806-1886) came from the town of Bra, about thirty miles south of Turin. He had earned a doctorate in philosophy and was a knight of the Order of¹ Saints Maurice and Lazarus (Stella, LW, p. 42, n. 20).

8. Of this interchange Stella writes (LW, pp. 40-41):

The bare words might well seem to come from an older Don Bosco, the experienced educator. More than once he raised the same sort of question to his own students: "You might ask me what you should do to please Don Bosco. My answer is: help him to save your soul" [BM XV, 573]. But we can see that the basic concern fits in well with Don Bosco's own temperament. He wanted to win the goodwill of others, to establish an atmosphere of mutual sympathy, harmony, and satisfaction. [Father Ternavasio's] reply is very much like the one that Don Bosco would later give to Dominic Savio. As a new seminarian, however, John Bosco probably did not associate the fulfillment of daily duties with 'holiness' in the compelling way that would be true later in the case of Savio. He probably just assumed that one had to carry out

one's duties as a seminarian properly in order to become a good priest. His later experience as an educator would prompt him to deduce certain pedagogical and spiritual principles and link them together more closely.

9. From October 30, 1835, till June 5, 1841.

Chapter 19

Seminary Life

As there is little variety in the daily round of seminary I shall give a brief sketch of the general background and then an account of some events in particular.

I will begin with a word about the superiors. I was greatly attached to them, and they always treated me with greatest kindness; but my heart was not satisfied. The rector² and the other superiors usually saw us only when returned after the holidays and when we were leaving them. The students never went to talk to them, except to receive corrections. The staff members took weekly to assist in the refectory and to take us on walks. That was all. How often I would have liked to talk to them, ask their advice, or resolve a doubt, and could not. In fact if a superior came on the scene, the seminarians, with no particular reason, would flee left and right as if he were a monster.³ This only served to inflame my heart to become as quickly as I could so that I could associate with good people, help them, and meet their every need.

And as for my companions, I stuck to my beloved mother's advice. That is, I fraternized only with companions who had a devotion to Mary and who loved study and piety. Here I must give a word of warning to seminarians. In the seminary there are many clerics of outstanding virtue, but there are others who are dangerous.⁴ Not a few young men, careless of their vocation, go to the seminary lacking either the spirit or the goodwill of a good seminarian. Indeed, I remember hearing some companions indulging in bad language. Once a search amongst some students' personal belongings unearthed impious and obscene books of every kind. It is true that these later left the seminary, either of their own accord or because they were expelled when their true character came to light. But as long as they stayed, they were a plague to good and bad alike.

To avoid such dangerous associates, I chose some who were well known as models of virtue. These were William Garigliano, John Giacomelli of Avigliana and, later, Louis Comollo. For me, these three friends were a treasure.⁵

The practices of piety were well conducted. Each morning we had Mass, meditation, and rosary; edifying books were read during meals. In those days Bercastel's *History of the Church* was read.⁶ We were expected to go to confession once a fortnight, but those who wished could go every Saturday.

We could only receive holy communion, however, on Sundays and on special feasts. We did receive communion sometimes on weekdays, but doing so meant that we had to act contrary to obedience.⁷ It was necessary to slip out, usually at breakfast time, to St Philip's Church⁸ next door, receive holy communion, and then join our companions as they were going into the study hall or to class. This infraction of the timetable was prohibited. But the superiors gave tacit consent to it since they knew it was going on and sometimes observed it without saying anything to the contrary. In this way, I was able to receive holy communion much more frequently, and I can rightly say it was the most efficacious support of my vocation. This defect of piety was corrected when, through an order of Archbishop Gastaldi,⁹ things were arranged so as to permit daily communion, provided one is prepared.

Amusements and recreation

The game known as *Bara rotta*¹⁰ was the most popular game we played. I used to play it in the beginning, but

since this game was very similar to those acrobatics which I had absolutely renounced, I wanted to give this up too.

There was another game called tarots which was permitted on certain days, and for a while I also played this game. Even here sweetness and bitterness intermingled. I was not a great player, but I was rather lucky and nearly always won. At the end of a game my hands would be full money, but seeing how distressed my companions were losing it made more me miserable than they. I should add that my mind would become so fixed during a game at afterwards I could neither pray nor study; the troubling pictures of the *King of Cups* and the Jack of Spades, the 13 and the fifteen of tarots filled my imagination.¹² I resolved to give up this game as I had given up the others. This was in 1836, mid-way through my second year of philosophy.¹³

In the longer recreation periods, the seminarians went walks to the many delightful places round Chieri. These walks were useful for learning too. We tried to improve our academic knowledge by quizzing one another as walked. If there was no organized walk, students could send the recreation time walking about the seminary with friends, discussing topics of common interest, or edifying and intellectual matters.

During the long recreations, we often gathered in the refectory for what we called the "study circle." At this session, one could ask questions about things he did not know had not grasped in our lectures or textbooks. I liked this exercise and found it very helpful for study, piety, and health. Comollo, who was a year behind me, made a name himself with his questions. A certain Dominic Peretti, now parish priest of Buttigliera,¹⁴ always had plenty to say and was always ready to venture an answer.

Garigliano was good listener and limited himself to an occasional interruption. I was president and judge of last appeal. Sometimes happened in our friendly discussions that certain questions were asked or problems of knowledge raised that nobody was able to answer adequately. In these cases we divided up the problems; each one was responsible for lookup the parts assigned to him before the next meeting. Comollo often interrupted my recreation time, leading me by the sleeve of my cassock and telling me to come along with him to the chapel; there we would make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament for the dying, saying the rosary: the Little Office of Our Lady for the souls in purgatory.

This marvelous companion was my fortune. He could, as the occasion demanded, advice me, correct me, or cheer me up, but all with such charm and charity that I even welcomed his admonitions and looked for them. I dealt familiarly with him, and I was naturally led to follow his example. Although I was a thousand miles behind him in virtue, if I was not ruined by dissipation but grew in my vocation, truly I remain in his debt above all.

In one thing alone I did not even try to emulate him, and that was in mortification. He was a young man of nineteen⁵ yet he fasted rigourously for the whole of Lent and at other times laid down by the Church. In honour of the B.V.,¹⁶ he fasted every Saturday. Often he went without breakfast, and sometimes his dinner consisted of bread and water. He put up with insults and affronts without the least sign of annoyance. When I saw how faithful he was in even the slightest demands of study and piety, I was filled with admiration. I regarded my companion as an ideal friend, a model of virtue for any seminarian.¹⁷

Notes

1. At the end of the notes is an extended comment on the seminaries of Turin at this period.

2. Father Sebastian Mottura (1795-1876) of Villafranca (about twenty-five miles south-southwest of Turin), doctor of theology. Stella briefly identifies several other faculty members (LW, p. 42, n. 20). Caselle gives a fuller list (*Giovanni Bosco studente*, p. 151). John Bosco was respected by his superiors but was not close to them.

3. The accepted principle in most educational establishments of the time was that any familiarity between teacher and pupil destroyed respect. Teachers and other staff were therefore encouraged to keep apart from the students. Don Bosco makes this point in his treatise on the Preventive System. He states that this concentration on the teacher's authority means that the only close contact between teacher and student is when special punishment is needed. This climate of fear finally generates antipathy.

4. The seminarian Bosco was, to some degree, isolated from the bulk of his fellow students and their mood. These seemed to be, and often were, too worldly when measured against his ideal of the priesthood. Don Bosco may have been referring primarily to the day seminarians, who were much more susceptible to what were considered secular, political, and other inappropriate influences. From the remarks that follow, it is obvious that these influences extended also to some of the boarders.

It is in this context that we must see Don Bosco's general reluctance to allow his pupils and his Salesians to spend much of the summer vacation at home, and to discourage other seminary superiors from letting their students vacation at home (e.g. BM XV, 288-289; Regulations of the Salesian Society [1966], no. 9).

5. John had a small circle of real friends with whom to share confidences. Garigliano was mentioned in chapters 9 and 18. John Baptist Giacomelli and Louis Comollo were a year behind him in school.

Giacomelli (1820-1901), from Avigliana (about ten miles west of Turin), always remained a friend dear to Don Bosco; eventually he became a chaplain at Saint Philomena's Hospital. He became Don Bosco's confessor after the death of Father Golzio in 1873. (See *Bollettino salesiano* XXV [1901], 295-296.)

6. The French priest Antoine Henri de Berault-Bercastel (1720-1794) wrote a twenty-four-volume *History of the Church* that went through various Italian editions. Its well-organized approach and sound principles made it useful for a long time. Don Bosco used it a great deal in his own church history textbook (Stella, LW, pp. 57-61).

7. The Jansenists (see comment below) discouraged frequent communion on the grounds that most people were unworthy of it.

8. The Church of Saint Philip Neri could be entered directly from the seminary without going out to the street. The sacristies of the seminary chapel and of the church were connected. The breakfast thus skipped consisted of a roll and a cup of milk or coffee.

9. Lawrence Gastaldi (1815-1883) was archbishop of Turin from 1871 till his death. As a young priest he was a staunch helper of the nascent Oratory, and his mother was one of the pious women who helped Mama Margaret with the cooking, washing, mending, etc. Father Gastaldi was a member of the Institute of Charity for a time and spent several years in England. Don Bosco was influential in his appointment as bishop of Saluzzo in 1867 and in his promotion to the see of Turin.

Archbishop Gastaldi found himself constantly in conflict with Don Bosco and the Salesians; the conflict concerned the scope of the Salesian Society, its internal discipline, the formation of its members, and external control of it. The worst stages of that conflict (the suspension of Father John Bonetti and grave accusations to the Holy See against Don Bosco and the Salesians) had not begun when Don Bosco was writing the *Memoirs*; but there is no reason to suppose that he would not have complimented the archbishop for his promotion of holy communion, regardless of their conflict. 10. A game in which two sides stage a kind of mock battle. The losers are those who are reached by their opponents before they manage to reenter a refuge (*bara*).

11. Cups (*coppe*) is one of the suits of the playing cards.

12. These cards bear images of death and of the devil.

13. The academic year 1836-1837. Not only did John give up card playing, but he continued to believe that it was not a suitable pastime for clerics. He considered it a waste of time, and furthermore, associated it with gambling. "Card playing is forbidden" remained in the Salesian Regulations until 1965.

Don Bosco's attitude toward cards did not prevent him from remaining a sharp player on occasion, e.g. when it might help him catch some boys for the Oratory.

14. Not Buttigliera d'Asti, near Castelnuovo, but Buttigliera Alta in the province of Turin. Don Bosco's friend was pastor there from 1850 to 1893.

15. Comollo, besides being two years younger than John Bosco, was very boyish in appearance.

16. Blessed Virgin (Mary).

17. We must presume that Don Bosco has idealized Comollo's general devotion and his will to act upon his beliefs. We may also presume that Don Bosco is speaking for what he thought and felt in the seminary. As Teresio Bosco points out (BN, p-88), Comollo's unmitigated rigor led to his death; a prudent spiritual director might have reined him in. Don Bosco himself would become a prudent spiritual director for the enthusiasm of young Dominic Savio (cf. *Life of Dominic Savio*, Aronica ed., pp. 89-90; O'Brien ed., pp. 24-25).

Stella treats the relationship between John and Louis at some length (LW, pp. 70-74). Don Bosco says repeatedly that he tried to imitate Louis's virtues; Stella finds that "the communion of life between the two friends [caused] ideas and expressions [to be] taken in by osmosis. Thus they took deep root in the mind and language of Don Bosco himself (p. 71). In Comollo's virtue Don Bosco came to see the essence of holiness for young people. Louis Comollo was one of Don Bosco's favorite examples, and the *Centa* dealing with his life was one of the texts used for spiritual reading at the Oratory. But the influence of Comollo may also have had something to do with Don Bosco's somewhat excessive turn to asceticism, rigidity, and diffidence in the seminary [p. 74).

Comment on the Turin Seminaries

Don Bosco's seminary life at Chieri must be put into context. Archbishop Columban Chiaveroti had opened the seminary at Chieri in 1829, only six years before John entered. Its capacity is about one hundred seminarians, a fairly large number for time. There were other archdiocesan seminaries at Bra and veno and attached to the University of Turin. Total seminary enrollment in 1834 was 180, of whom 70 were studying in Turin. 1840 enrollment in the four seminaries had tripled to 565. As Bosco indicates in his description, the seminarians appear to have been a mixed bunch.

The post-Napoleonic era in Piedmont was marked by political religious controversy. In the Church, the clash centered around two currents in moral theology. One took a very strict view of sin and the way moral norms were to be interpreted. This "rigorist" current and its strict requirements for salvation are usually associated with Jansenism — though it could more accurately be called probabiliorism (see chapter 27, note 8). The other, more "benign" attitude allowed probable opinions to be used more easily, after the teaching of Alphonsus Liguori (died 1787, canonized 39). The first group accused the second of

being laxists. The rigorists were, at least implicitly, proponents of the ideas of the French Revolution.

The rigorists dominated the University of Turin, with which archdiocesan seminary was associated. The principal proponents of the benign current were the Jesuits, the Oblates of the Mary (founded by Father Pius Bruno Lanteri), and the faculty of the Convitto Ecclesiastico, and they were associated with the *ancien regime*. Not only moral theology but also personalities were involved in the controversy, which eventually led to street demonstrations and faculty dismissals. Given the alliance of throne and altar in Restoration Italy, overtones of secular politics colored the controversy, and King Charles Felix felt compelled to intervene on at least one occasion. The bad climate that all this created and the disturbing effect it had on the seminarians in Turin convinced Archbishop Chiaverotti of the need to open a seminary away from some of the capital's turmoil. Himself a monk, he also felt the need to train a more spiritually minded clergy (cf. chapter 16, note 6). The new seminary at Chieri was the result (Stella, LW, pp. 35-40).

By post-Vatican II standards both the rigorist and the benign currents would probably appear fairly strict. They were dominated by a heavy preoccupation with salvation and damnation, and all this in a strong atmosphere of predestination (cf. chapter 16). All their emotional and moral effort was to rouse the sinner and stir up deep anxiety so that he could seriously get to work at saving his soul. Stella (LW, pp. 45-70) speculates that this period of John Bosco's life was probably *a* very introspective one and, to some degree, at odds with his natural character and attitude toward living his faith.

Given the climate of the times and the need to remind the seminarians of their priestly commitment, there was a good deal of regimentation. There was a strong stress on salvation and more strongly on damnation as far as the priest was concerned. (In this context the death of Comollo and the circumstances surrounding it are worth remembering; see chapter 22.) A typical book of that time, Giambattista Compain's *Della santità e dei doveri de' sacerdoti* [The Holiness and the Duties of Priests] (Bergamo, 1824), has as one of its meditations: "Very few priests will be saved."

The effect of a climate of this kind on John Bosco, when he was on the first step of a life consecrated to his ideal of the priesthood and all its responsibilities, can easily be guessed. Also, after the very active years of his youth, for the first time he was not dashing between study and work; he actually had time on his hands to reflect and worry. As we have already observed in treating of his vocation, he had a soul that was very sensitive to searching out the will of God and to reining back his own strong character. He now saw some of his very human and friendly relationships and the ways of his youth as worldly and dangerous. Some of his resolutions of this period show a scrupulous strictness and a need to chain human nature in a way that is a little out of tune with the more mature later spirit that he learned from Saint Francis de Sales. (This saint himself went through a period of deep anxiety when he was a student and before he reached the strong, gentle calm of his later life).

In this period John seems to have been below normal, even physically, at least for a time. His seminary friend Father Giacomelli gave the following testimony concerning his first encounter with John (November 1837): "I saw a seminarian in front of me [in class] who was pale and thin and looked unwell. In my opinion, he would hardly last till the end of the school year." (BM I, 300)

John's seminary years were a mixed experience. Don Bosco was later to show a certain anxiety about sending his own clerics to study in the diocesan seminary at Turin.

Chapter 20

Summer Activities

Vacations

Holidays were dangerous times for clerical students. In those days our summer break ran to four and a half months.¹ I spent a lot of time reading and writing; but not knowing how to organise myself properly, I got little out of it. I tried different kinds of handicrafts as well. On the lathe I turned spindles, pegs, spinning tops, and wooden balls. I made clothes and shoes and I worked wood and iron. To this very day there are in my house at Murialdo a writing desk, a dinner table, and some chairs, masterpieces to remind me of my summer holiday activities.² I worked in the fields, too, harvesting hay and wheat. I trimmed the vines, harvested the grapes, and made the wine, and so on.

I also found time for my youngsters, as I used to, but this was possible only on feast days. It was a great consolation for me to catechise many of my companions who were sixteen or seventeen years old but were deprived of the truths of the faith. I also taught some of them quite successfully to read and write. They were so anxious to learn that many youngsters of a variety of ages surrounded me. I charged no tuition, but I insisted on *diligence*, *concentration*, and *monthly confession*. At first some were not inclined to accept these conditions. They went their own way, but their departure served to inspire and spur on those who stayed.

I also began to preach and to lecture with the permission of my parish priest, and with his help. In Alfiano I preached on the Holy Rosary in the holidays after my year of physics.³ In Castelnuovo d'Asti, at the end of my first year of theology, I spoke on St Bartholomew the Apostle.⁴ In Capriglio I preached about the nativity of Mary.⁵ But I do not know how much fruit this bore. Everywhere I got high praise. In fact vainglory somewhat carried me away, till I was brought down to earth as follows:

One day, after my sermon on the birth of Mary, I asked someone who seemed to be one of the more intelligent what he thought of it. He was full of praise for it but spoiled it by saying, "Your sermon was on the souls in purgatory." And I had preached on the glories of Mary! The parish priest of Alfiano, Joseph Peleto, was a learned and holy man. I also asked for his opinion of my sermon there.

"Your sermon," he said, "was very good. It was well put together, well delivered, and embellished with scriptural quotations. Go on like that and you will be a success as a preacher."

"Did the people understand it?" I asked him.

"Hardly," he replied. "Only my brother priest and I, and perhaps a few others, knew what it was about."

"How is it," I wanted to know, "that such simple concepts were not understood?"

"To you they are simple," he explained, "but to ordinary people they appear difficult. Allusions to the Bible,⁶ philosophizing on one or another aspect of church history, are things the people do not understand."

"What do you suggest I do?"

"Give up your high-sounding language and stick to dialect where possible, and when you use Italian, speak the language of the people, the people, the people. Instead of speculations, use examples, analogies, and simple, practical illustrations. Bear in mind always that the common people understand hardly anything you have to say because the truths of the faith are never sufficiently explained to them."⁷

This fatherly advice has served as a guiding principle for the rest of my life. I still have copies of those early sermons in which, to my shame, I can now see nothing but affectation and vanity.⁸ But God, in his goodness, saw to it that I should have that kind of correction. It was a lesson for me which henceforth bore fruit in my sermons, catechism classes, instructions, and in the writing in which I began to engage.⁹

Notes

1. The summer holidays lasted from the feast of Saint John the Baptist (June 24) to All Saints' Day (November 1).
2. Don Bosco is, of course, joking when he calls these samples of his carpentry "masterpieces." Since they were kept at the family home in Becchi (which Don Bosco always called "my house"), his Salesian readers would have seen them many times. They are kept as relics in the house that belonged to his brother Joseph, built across the courtyard from the house where they lived as children.
3. During John's second year of philosophy (1836-1837), metaphysics was one of the main courses. We do not know why he calls it "physics."

The feast of the Holy Rosary, commemorating the Christian victory over the Turks at Lepanto in 1571, is celebrated on October 7. Since at that time big feasts were kept on the nearest Sunday, these sermons of which Don Bosco speaks would have been delivered on Sundays.

In the early years of the Oratory hospice, the feast of the Rosary became the focal point for the yearly outings for the best boys. Don Bosco set up in Joseph's house a small chapel in honor of the Holy Rosary; there he would solemnize the feast with his boys and the people of the neighborhood. See the comment on the fall outings following chapter 48.

4. The summer of 1838. The feast of Saint Bartholomew falls on August 24.

5. The nativity of our Lady is celebrated on September 8.

6. It is not biblical preaching as such that is discouraged here, but casual references to persons and events that uneducated people would not understand. Much preaching, even at Mass, was moral or dogmatic rather than biblical.

7. The Salesian archives possess two of Don Bosco's sermons written in Piedmontese, one on Mary's assumption into heaven, the other on her birth. Until the end of the last century it was still common enough for even bishops to preach in dialect. (See also chapter 4, note 13.)

Don Bosco's Italian is constantly flavored by "Piedmontisms." Several traces of dialect color his agricultural vocabulary at the beginning of this chapter, for example; for repeated instances, the reader may consult Ceria's notes in the Italian edition.

As regards preaching, Don Bosco was, of course, writing for the edification of his sons. The principles of effective preaching were a constant theme with him (e.g. BM II, 179-181, 265-266; III, 45-53; IX, 14-16). The same lessons that Don Bosco began to learn during these vacations were reinforced by Father Cafasso at the Convitto Ecclesiastico (BM II, 65-67).

8. The archives also preserve two of his sermons in rather sophisticated Italian, one on the rosary and the second on the birth of Mary. These may be the ones he speaks of. The language is polished with rather long, well-structured sentences. There is good continuity and the style is not overly rhetorical. They show a literary style not found in his later work because he consciously changed it (see the dialog with the Waldensians in chapter 60).

9. Probably an allusion to writings which John used to read in the seminary study circles at recreation time (see the previous chapter). He and a dozen or so seminary friends also used to get together during vacations for the same purpose. One's prose and poetry were read out and then subjected to comment. These meetings were started by a seminarian named James Bosco (BM I, 331; VII, 13), but John was their soul and spirit. He was so exact in his comments that he became known as the "grand master of grammar" among his friends.

Caviglia evaluates Don Bosco's style as a writer:

His writing is simple, clear, and well ordered, with a slow, measured style. He is objective and uses concrete imagery. . . . He cultivated a style intended to communicate easily with the young and the ordinary people. Words and style had to be as easy to understand as possible, in the simplest kind of language that the young and unschooled working people used. He sought to be in tune with the character and spirit of the "ordinary person," in the best and complete sense of this phrase. (*Don Bosco: profile storico* [Turin: SEI, 1920], pp. 97, 99)

Chapter 21

Days in the Country

A feast day in the country • The violin • Hunting

When I said that holidays in the country were a time of danger, I was speaking for myself. A poor cleric will often find himself in grave danger without realising it. I learned this through experience.

One year I was invited to celebrate a feast day at the home of some relatives of mine. I did not want to go, but discovering that there was no cleric to serve in church, I yielded to the insistent invitations of one of my uncles and went.

When the sacred ceremonies, at which I served and sang, were over, we went to dinner. All went well till the wine began to go to the heads of some of the party. Then they began to use language which should not be tolerated by a cleric. I tried to protest but could not get the words out. Not knowing what to do, I decided to leave. I got up from the table, got my hat, and was ready to go; my uncle stopped me. At that moment, there was an outburst of even more objectionable language as someone began to insult all the others at table. In a flash, all was pandemonium. There were angry shouts and threats, backed up by horrible racket of glasses, bottles, plates, spoons, forks, and then knives. In this extremity, I beat a hasty retreat. When I got home, from the bottom of my heart I renewed the resolution so often made before to remain withdrawn if I wanted to avoid falling into sin.

A different kind of experience, none the less unpleasant, befell me at Crovaglia, a district of Buttigliera. It was the feast of St Bartholomew. I was invited by another uncle to assist at the church services, to sing, and even to play the violin which I had given up, though it was my favorite instrument.¹

The church services went very well. My uncle was in of the celebrations, and the dinner was at his house. So far, so good. Dinner over, the guests asked me to play something of a light nature for them. I refused.²

"At least," one of the musicians said, "play along with me I'll take the lead and you play the accompaniment."

I felt awful! I did not know how to get out of it. Taking up the violin, I played for a while. Then I heard the murmur of voices and the sound of a lot of dancing feet. I went to the window, and out in the courtyard was a crowd dancing happily to the sound of my violin. Words could not describe the anger that welled up in me at that moment.³ Turning on the dinner guests, I addressed them vehemently: "How is it, after I have so often spoken against public shows, that I should have become their promoter? It will never happen again."⁴ I smashed the violin into a thousand pieces. I never wanted to use it again, though opportunities for doing so were not lacking at sacred ceremonies.⁵

Another incident happened to me while I was hunting. During the summer, I used to go bird-nesting; in the autumn, I'd catch the birds with birdlime, use traps,⁶ or even shoot them.

One morning, I found myself running after a hare. From field to field, from vineyard to vineyard, up hill and down dale, I chased my quarry for several hours. Eventually I got near enough to take a shot at him. The poor

animal, its ribs broken by the shot, rolled over, leaving me deeply upset at the sight of the poor creature in its death throes.

The gunshot brought some of my companions on the scene. While they were admiring the dead hare, I took a long look at myself. There I was in my shirt-sleeves, my cassock discarded, wearing an old straw hat that made me look like a smuggler. I realised I was more than two miles⁷ home. I was quite mortified. I apologised to my companions for the bad example I had given them by throwing my cassock. I went straight home, once more making a resolution to be done with every kind of hunting. This time, with the Lord's help I was able to live up to my word. May God forgive me for that scandal.⁸

These three incidents taught me a terrible lesson. Henceforward I resolved to be more reserved. I was convinced that he who would give himself entirely to the Lord's service must cut himself off from worldly amusements. It is true that often they are not sinful; but it is certain that on account of conversation, of the manner of dressing, of speaking, and of acting, there is always some risk to virtue, especially to the most delicate virtue of chastity.

Louis Comollo's friendship

As long as God preserved the life of this incomparable companion, we were always very close to each other. During the holidays, we often corresponded⁹ and visited back and forth. In him I saw a holy youth, and I loved him for his rare virtue. He loved me for the help I gave him with his studies. When I was with him, I modeled myself on his conduct.

Once during the holidays, he came to spend a day with me.¹⁰ Just then, my relatives were in the fields for harvest. He asked me to check over a sermon he was to preach on the feast of the Assumption.¹¹ Afterwards, he practised his delivery, accompanied by gestures. We talked with delight for hours. Suddenly we realised it was nearly dinner time. There was nobody in the house but us. What were we to do? "Just a minute," said Comollo, "I'll light the fire. You get a pot ready and we'll cook something."

"Right you are," I replied, "but first let's catch a chicken in the yard. It'll provide us with soup and dinner. That's what mother would like us to do."

In no time we had our chicken. But which of us felt up to killing it? Neither of us. So as to come to the conclusion that we wanted, we decided that Comollo was to hold the bird down on a block, and I was to cut off its head with a sickle. The blow was struck, and the head dropped from the body. The two of us got squeamish and took off screaming.

"We're just childish," Comollo said after a while. "The Lord gave us the beasts of the earth for our use. Why should we be so squeamish?" Without further difficulty we picked up the chicken, plucked it, cooked it, and had our dinner.

I would have gone to Cinzano to hear Comollo's Assumption sermon, but I myself had to preach on the same theme at another venue.¹² When I went the next day, I heard praise of his sermon from all sides. That day (16 August) was the feast of St Roch.¹³ It was popularly known as "the Feast of the Kitchen" because relatives and friends took occasion to invite their loved ones to enjoy some public entertainment.

Here something happened which showed the extent of my audacity. They waited for the preacher for that solemn

occasion right up till the moment when he was to go to the pulpit, and he had not turned up. In an effort to help the provost of Cinzano out of his embarrassment, I did the rounds of the many priests present, begging and insisting that someone say a few words to the numerous people assembled in the church. There were no takers. Some even got annoyed by my repeated pleading and turned harshly on me: "You're a fool, you know! It's no joke to preach off the cuff on St Roch. Instead of pestering others, why don't you do it yourself?"

Those words brought applause from everyone. I was humiliated, my pride wounded. "I certainly wasn't looking for this," I said, "but as everyone else has refused, I accept."

The people in church sang a hymn to give me time to collect my thoughts. I had read the life of the saint. I recalled his story as I mounted the pulpit. I have always been told that the sermon I preached that day was the best I have ever given.

It was on this vacation and on this same occasion (1838)¹⁴ that my friend and I went walking together to the top of a hill¹⁵ where we had a wonderful view of the meadows, fields, and vineyards below.

"Look, Louis," I began to say to him, "what a lean harvest there will be this year! The poor farmers! So much work for such poor returns."

"The hand of the Lord weighs heavily upon us," he replied. "Believe me, our sins have brought this on us."

"I hope the Lord will give us better crops next year."

"So do I. I hope there will be good times for those who are here to enjoy them."

"Come on, away with such gloomy thoughts. Let's be patient for this year. Next year we'll have a bumper grape harvest and we'll make better wine."

"You'll drink it."

"Perhaps you mean to keep drinking water as usual."

"I'm looking forward to a much better wine."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Never mind, never mind. The Lord knows what he's doing."

"That's not what I asked. I want to know what you mean by *I'm looking forward to better wine*. Do you mean you'll be in paradise?"

"Though I have no guarantee of going to heaven when I die, yet I have a well-grounded hope of it. For some time I've had such a burning desire to taste the happiness of the blessed that it seems impossible for my life to last much longer."

As Comollo spoke these words, his face glowed with cheer. He was bubbling with good health and looking forward to returning to the seminary.

Notes

1. Molineris identifies the district as Crivelle and the uncle as Matthew Bosco (p. 242).

2. According to Lemoyne's account of the incident (BM I, 312), one of his excuses was that he did not have his violin with him. But someone offered to lend him one.

3. We have already seen several instances of John's anger (chapters 5 and 10).

4. We have already alluded to the natural modesty of the Piedmontese. Even up to the middle of this century, in southern Europe the moral attitude toward dancing was generally much stricter than in the Anglo-Saxon countries. Attendance of men and women at public dances was often condemned from the pulpit as a danger to chastity. Certainly in Don Bosco's time, the idea of a cleric playing the violin at a dance would have been scandalous. In Britain, Ireland, and the United States, a strong moral strain (often called puritanical) likewise discouraged dancing. For example, see Joseph E. Marks III, *The Mathers on Dancing* (Brooklyn: Dance Horizons, 1975), which includes a thirteen-page bibliography of English-language books on the morality of dancing published between 1685 and 1963.

5. It would have been his own violin that he smashed after getting home, not the borrowed one he held in his hand at that moment. Lemoyne puts the following words in Don Bosco's mouth:

I then got up and went home. Then I took my violin, trampled on it, and smashed it into a thousand pieces. Never again did I play such an instrument, not even at church services. I had made a solemn promise and I kept it. Later I taught others how to play it, but without ever handling it. (BM I, 312)

It is more than likely that Lemoyne filled out what is missing in Don Bosco's *Memoirs* with details that he heard in his frequent chats with the saint.

6. The traps were such as to take the birds unharmed, like lobster pots.

7. More than three miles in the English measure.

8. This is another example of the exalted ideal of the priestly state. We also recall that he had forsworn hunting when he donned the clerical habit.

9. Don Bosco quotes three of these letters in Comollo's biography.

10. After John's first year of theology (1838).

11. In his biography of Comollo Don Bosco writes: "I have this sermon with me. Even though he uses well-known authors, the form and expression is obviously his own, and his strong love for the Mother of God comes through clearly."

12. This was the sermon at Alfiano that he mentioned in the previous chapter.

13. Saint Roch (ca. 1350-03. 1378) came from Montpellier, France, and was especially known for his care of the sick. As San Rocco he is widely venerated in Italy because the plague has spared cities through his intercession.

14. According to his biography of Comollo, the following anecdote actually occurred just before the beginning of the school year, i.e. in late October. Apparently Don Bosco hurried through his writing of this part and did not check it against the earlier work, as he usually did.

15. From these words, the rest of the chapter is copied in Father Berto's hand straight from Comollo's biography (pp. 61-63) Don Bosco's first draft contains his instructions to do so.

Chapter 22

Louis Comollo's Death

The memorable events surrounding the edifying death of this dear friend have already been described in another place. Whoever wishes can read them at his pleasure. But here I would like to mention something that caused a lot of talk, something hardly touched upon in the memoirs already published.¹ Given our friendship and the unlimited trust between Comollo and me, we often spoke about the separation that death could possibly bring upon us at any time.

One day, after we had read a long passage from the lives of the saints, we talked, half in jest and half in earnest, of what a consolation it would be if the one of us who died first were to return with news about his condition. We talked of this so often that we drew up this contract: "Whichever of us is the first to die will, if God permits it, bring back word of his salvation to his surviving companion."

I did not realise the gravity of such an undertaking; and frankly, I treated it lightly enough. I would never advise others to do the like. We did it, however, and ratified it repeatedly, especially during Comollo's last illness. In fact, his last words and his last look at me sealed his promise. Many of our companions knew what had been arranged between us.

Comollo died on 2 April 1839. Next evening he was solemnly buried in Saint Philip's Church.² Those who knew about our bargain waited anxiously to see what would happen. I was even more anxious because I hoped for a great comfort to lighten my desolation. That night, after I went to bed in the big dormitory which I shared with twenty other seminarians, I was restless. I was convinced that this was to be the night when our promise would be fulfilled.

About 11:30 a deep rumble was heard in the corridor. It sounded as if a heavy wagon drawn by many horses were coming up to the dormitory door. It got louder and louder like thunder, and the whole dormitory shook. The clerics tumbled out of bed in terror and huddled together for comfort. Then, above the violent and thundering noise, the voice of Comollo was heard clearly. Three times he repeated very distinctly: "Bosco, I am saved."³

All heard the noise; some recognised the voice without understanding the meaning; others understood it as well as I did, as is proved by the length of time the event was talked about in the seminary. It was the first time in my life I remember being afraid. The fear and terror were so bad that I fell ill and was at death's door.⁴

I would never recommend anyone to enter into such a contract. God is omnipotent; God is merciful. As a rule he does not take heed of such pacts. Sometimes, however, in his infinite mercy he does allow things to come to fulfillment as he did in the case I have just described.⁵

Notes

1. In the first editions (1844 and 1854) of his biography of Comollo, Don Bosco wrote:

It seems good to note here why Comollo's death affected me so deeply. What caused this were two apparitions of his after he died. One of these was witnessed by a dormitory full of people. . . . Even though the details remain sharply etched in my memory, I believe that, at least for the present, it is better to omit them.

The first apparition is described in BM I, 350-351. In the 1884 edition of Comollo's biography, Don Bosco included the details of the second apparition, calling it "an event that caused something of a sensation both inside and outside the seminary."

2. Comollo had a frail constitution, which he wracked with severe penances and the somewhat gloomy theology of salvation that prevailed in the seminary (Stella, LW, pp. 45-74; cf. Molineris, pp. 216-217; BM I, 298-300). His last days are described in BM I, 340-348.

In Comollo's biography Don Bosco wrote,

The rector of the seminary was deeply impressed by the unusual circumstances of his death. Unhappy at the idea of the body being buried in the public cemetery, that very morning he hurried to Turin to see the civil and church authorities. He obtained permission from them to bury Comollo in the Church of St. Philip attached to the seminary.

Caselle located the grave under the sanctuary floor on the right-hand side (archdiocesan paper of Turin, November 30, 1986; Caselle, *Giovanni Bosco studente*, pp. 154-155, 198).

3. In the former seminary, a plaque on a corridor wall marks

where the dormitory was and briefly mentions these events. In the 1884 edition, Don Bosco gives a fuller description which varies in a few details (pp. 106-107):

On the stroke of midnight, a deep rumble was heard at the end of the corridor. The rumble became deeper and louder as it drew nearer. It was like the sound of a large cart, or a railway train, or even artillery fire. I do not know how to describe the sound adequately except to say that it was such a mixture of throbbing and rather violent sounds as to leave the hearer utterly terrified and too frightened for words.

As the rumble drew nearer it made the ceiling, walls, and floor of the hallway vibrate like sheets of metal struck by the hand of some mighty giant. Yet the sound approached so that it was very difficult to pinpoint how close it was, the way one is uncertain where a locomotive is on the track just from the jet of steam.

All the seminarians in the dormitory woke up, but no one spoke. I was frozen with fear. The noise came nearer and nearer and grew more frightening. It reached the dormitory; of itself the door slammed open. The roar grew louder, but there was nothing to see except a ghostly multicolored light that seemed to control the sound. Suddenly there was silence, the light intensified, and Comollo's voice was distinctly heard. It called out his companion's name ["Bosco"] three straight times and then said, "I am saved."

At that moment the dormitory grew even brighter. The noise erupted again, much longer and louder than before. It was like

under, so violent that the house seemed about to collapse; then suddenly it stopped and the light vanished. My companions leapt from their beds and ran in all directions. Some huddled in one corner of the room while others gathered round the prefect of dormitory, Father Joseph Fiorito from Rivoli. Everyone passed that night waiting anxiously for daylight. All this deeply affected me; I was so scared that I would have preferred to die.

Don Bosco went on to note that, though many years had passed, some witnesses were still alive. Father Fiorito, the priest mentioned in this account, described the apparition several times to the superiors at the Oratory (BM I, 351-352). His sister

Genevieve and Father Michael Chiantore one of the seminarian-witnesses, both testified to the event in writing (Salesian Central Archives, 8123 Comollo; cf. Desramaut, *LesMem*, p. 74, n. 21).

4. Stella writes,

Conscious of the holiness that was specifically demanded of one approaching the altar, John Bosco was driven to detach himself from habits and attitudes that seemed to him to be incompatible with the priestly state. All of this took place in a general atmosphere of ascetic tension, of ongoing control and inhibition. His was an ongoing ascetic effort that drove him to fasts and abstinences, and to fits of anger with himself when he found himself indulging his old worldly abilities such as feats of agility or violin-playing. This ascetic tension helped to drive his friend Comollo to his death, and John Bosco himself to the very limits of his strength. (LW, p. 66)

This grave illness apparently lasted from April 1839 until early 1840; he had to have recovered by the time he was approved for minor orders, which he received in March 1840. The sickness seems to have been a combination of depression and nervous breakdown. It was induced by a number of factors: an extremely exalted ideal of the priesthood that magnified his sense of inadequacy; the permanent commitment entailed in ordination to the subdiaconate (see chapter 25); his asceticism; the shock of his friend's death and the frightening encounter with the supernatural.

As John grew sicker, food nauseated him and he could not sleep. Finally a doctor ordered complete rest; Mama Margaret brought John some good wine and millet bread. These two prescriptions somehow had the right effect. (BM I, 357)

5. After the account of the apparition in the biography of his friend, Don Bosco continues: "When it is a case of establishing a link between the natural and the supernatural, a poor human being can suffer serious effects. This is more particularly the case when it is a question of things not necessary for our eternal salvation."

Could there have been another reason for the terrifying circumstances that accompanied the apparition? Perhaps some consciences needed a sharp shock. Comollo two days before his death had said of his fellow seminarians, "Some of them are bad" (biography, p. 86.) Don Bosco said the same thing in chapter 19. The events did, in fact, produce some good. In the first editions of Comollo's life, Don Bosco wrote: "The rector of the seminary spoke to me only a short while ago. He assured me that the good effect produced in the seminarians by Comollo's death persists to this day."

Chapter 23

Father John Borel

*A prize • The sacristy • Dr John Borrelli*¹

In the seminary I was quite fortunate in that I always enjoyed the affection of my companions and of all my superiors. At the mid-year examinations it was customary to give a 60-franc prize, for each of the different years, to the person who obtained top marks for study and conduct. God truly blessed me; for the six years I spent at the seminary, I won this prize. In the second year of theology² I was made sacristan. It was not a post that carried much weight, but it showed one was appreciated by the superiors and it did carry with it another sixty francs. All this meant that I could provide for half my fees, while good Fr. Caffasso provided the rest.³ The sacristan has the job of seeing to the cleanliness of the church, the sacristy, and the altar; he also has to look after the lamps, candles, and all the other objects needed for divine services.

This was the year in which I had the good fortune of making the acquaintance of a man who was really zealous in the sacred ministry. He had come to preach our seminary retreat. He appeared in the sacristy with a smiling face and a joking manner of speaking, but always seasoned with moral thoughts. When I saw the way he celebrated Mass, his bearing, his preparation, and his thanksgiving, I realized at once that here was a worthy priest. He turned out to be Dr John Borrelli of Turin.⁴ When he began to preach, I noted the simplicity, liveliness, clarity, and fire of charity that filled all his words; we were unanimous in rating him a man of real holiness.

In fact we all raced to go to confession to him in order to speak of our vocations and receive some advice. I too wanted to discuss the affairs of my soul with him. When, at the end, I asked him for some advice on how best to preserve the spirit of my vocation⁵ during the year and particularly during the holidays, he left these memorable words with me: "A vocation is perfected and preserved, and a real priestly spirit is formed, by a climate of recollection and by frequent communion."

The retreat preached by Dr Borrelli was a landmark in the life of the seminary. Even after many years had passed, the holy points he had made in his preaching, or given in personal advice, were remembered and repeated to others.

Notes

1. Don Bosco always spells the name this way. He seems to have considered "Borel" as a kind of dialect abbreviation of the more Italian-sounding "Borrelli."

2. This was 1838-1839.

3. We saw in chapter 18, note 2, that Father Guala had arranged for John to be excused from tuition and fees for his first year at the seminary (1835-1836). Presumably Father Caffasso covered these expenses in 1836-1838, less John's academic prize money.

4. Father Borel (1801-1873) was a Salesian before the Salesians existed. As we shall see, he played an indispensable role in the founding of the Oratory. Only Father Cafasso and Father Borel stuck with Don Bosco during the critical phase of 1845-1846. It was Father Borel who kept the Oratory running during Don Bosco's near-fatal illness in the summer and fall of 1846. Giraudi wrote of him (p. 65):

This man, small in stature, worked in the Refuge [see chapter 30], the state prisons, and in many other parts of the city. This large-hearted, generous priest still found time to come and work in the Oratory. He stole hours from his normal sleep to come and hear confessions. Though tired from many activities, he denied his body rest it needed so that he could give the evening sermon to the youngsters on feast days and so relieve Don Bosco of this burden at least. [See chapter 53.]

Recalling his merits in the *Biographical Memoirs*, Lemoyne exclaims, "Eternal praise to that incomparable priest!"

A bronze plaque set along the portico of the Oratory outside the so-called Pinardi chapel testifies perpetually to his zeal.

Father Borel's character and activity are amply described in BM I-X.

5. Note that John wanted to preserve "the spirit" of his vocation, not just the vocation. To be a priest was not enough; he had to be a worthy one, as he described Father Borel, as his seminary textbooks constantly repeated, as Margaret Bosco would very pointedly tell him after his ordination (chapter 25, note 18). Stella's observation that many sought ordination only to make comfortable careers for themselves (LW, p. 39) comes again to mind.

Chapter 24

Studies

I had some mistaken notions about my studies that could have had sad consequences had I not been saved by a truly providential event. Accustomed to reading the classics all during my school days, I had grown so familiar with the outstanding characters of mythology and pagan fables that I found little satisfaction in anything ascetical.¹ I had reached the point where I could convince myself that fine language and eloquence could not be reconciled with religion.² The very works of the holy Fathers³ appeared to me as the products of limited intellects, excepting always the principles of religion which they expounded with force and clarity.

At the beginning of my second year of philosophy, I paid a visit to the Blessed Sacrament one day. I had no prayer book with me, so I began to read *The Imitation of Christ*.⁴ I went through some chapters dealing with the Blessed Sacrament. I was so struck by the profound thoughts expressed, and the clear and orderly way these great truths were clothed in fine language that I began to say to myself: "The author of this book was a learned man." Again and again, I went back to that golden little work. It was gradually borne in on me that even one verse from it contained volumes of ancient classics. To this book I owe my decision to lay aside profane literature.

Subsequently I went on to read Calmet's *History of the Old and New Testaments*.⁵ Next I tackled the *Jewish Antiquities* and *The Jewish War* of Flavius Josephus;⁶ Bishop Marchetti's *Discussions on Religion*⁷ followed; then Frayssinous,⁸ Balmes,⁹ Zucconi,¹⁰ and many other religious writers I even enjoyed Fleury's *Church History*, unaware that it was a book to avoid.¹¹ With yet more profit I read the works of Cavalca,¹² Passavanti,¹³ and Segneri,¹⁴ and all of Henrion's *History of the Church*.¹⁵

Perhaps you will say that with so much time given to extraneous reading I must not have been studying the treatises. This was not the case. My memory continued to be a blessing to me. Paying attention at lectures and just reading the treatises were sufficient for me to perform my duties. Thus I was able to spend the hours of study reading different books. The superiors knew all about this and left me free to do it.

One subject close to my heart was Greek. In my secondary classical studies I had already mastered its basic elements. With the help of a dictionary, I had worked my way through the first translations after I had studied the grammar. A good opportunity soon arose for me to deepen my knowledge of it.

When cholera threatened Turin in 1836, the Jesuits had to send the boarders from Our Lady of Mount Carmel College away to Montaldo.¹⁶ This move meant that they had to double their teaching staff because they had to cover the classes for the day students who continued to come to school. Fr Caffasso, who was consulted, proposed me for a Greek class. This spurred me to get down to the serious study of the language to make myself capable of teaching it. Besides that, I was lucky enough to meet a priest of the Society, named Bini, who had a profound knowledge of Greek. I learned a lot from him. In only four months he pushed me to translate almost the whole New Testament, the first two books of Homer, and a selection of the odes of Pindar and Anacreon.¹⁷ That worthy priest, admiring my goodwill, continued to help me.¹⁸ For four years, each week he corrected a Greek composition or translation which I sent him, and he returned it promptly with suitable comments. By this means I managed to be able to translate Greek almost as well as I could Latin.

At this time, too, I studied French and the principles of Hebrew. ¹⁹These three languages, Hebrew, Greek, and French, always remained my favourites after Latin and Italian.

Notes

1. His error reflected the inclinations of the period, even in church circles. Classical studies were the core of all education.
2. John's attitude was not unlike young Augustine's: *Confessions*, III, v, 9.
3. The Fathers of the Church are writers of the first centuries of Christianity esteemed for their sound doctrine and holy lives, e.g. Saint Justin Martyr, Origen, Saint Cyprian, and Saint Augustine.
4. John began his second year of philosophical studies in November 1836. The *Imitation* always remained one of his favorite books. When he did not find time for spiritual reading during the day, he would kneel before going to bed and read or reflect on a few verses from this book (BM IV, 318). He would sometimes pull it from his pocket, open it at random, then ask the person to whom he presented it to read the top lines (BM III, 432; VIII, 323). He recommended it to youngsters in the life of Dominic Savio (Aronica ed., pp. Hi-112; O'Brien ed., pp. 34-35; cf. *Il Giovane provveduto* [Turin, 1885], p. 18) and to adults in *The Key to Heaven (La Chiave del Paradiso* [Turin, 1857], p. 38).
5. Augustin Calmet (1672-1757), a French Benedictine, published *A Literal Commentary on the Old and New Testaments (Commentaire litteral sur tous les livres de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament*, 26 vols., 1707-1716). An Italian translation came out in Turin in 1830-1831. "Calmet was one of the best Catholic exegetes of the 18th century" (NCE II, 1084).

Evidently John Bosco read most, if not all, of these works in Italian translations. A number of them were being published in Turin in the Select Economical Library of Religious works during the 1830s (Stella, LW, p. 56, n. 55). Stella has thoroughly dissected their influence, as well as others', on Don Bosco's spirituality and theology in *ReCa*. He touches more briefly on these authors in LW, pp. 54-65. BM I, 284, mentions that John also read works by Antonio Cesari and Daniele Bartoli in the seminary.

6. Flavius Josephus (ca. 37-ca. 101) is virtually our only source for Jewish history between the end of the biblical period and the end of the first century, though not always a reliable one. After taking part in the rebellion against Rome (66-70), he turned coat and thus lived to tell the story in *The Jewish War*. He followed that work with the *Antiquities*, which tell the history of the Jews from creation up to the revolt; to it he appended an apologetic autobiography. Though he finally settled in Rome and enjoyed imperial patronage, he wrote in Greek.

7. Giovanni Marchetti (1753-1829), titular archbishop of Ancyra (Ankara), was a theologian of the Apostolic Dataria of the Roman Curia. He wrote *Family Tracts on the History of Religion (Trattenimenti di famiglia sulla storia della religione*, 2 vols., Turin: Bianco, 1823), which may be the work that Don Bosco had in mind. By the title *Discussions on Religion* there was a work by Father Alfonso Nicolai (*Ragionamenti sopra la religione*, 8 vols., Venice and Genoa, 1770).

8. Bishop Denis Antoine Luc de Frayssinous (1765-1841) was a celebrated French preacher, member of the French Academy, and court official. A moderate Gallican and a firm royalist, he "was the outstanding Catholic apologist during the early Restoration period" (NCE VI, 82). Don Bosco must have read some of his apologetics.

Gallicanism is an ecclesiological theory which holds that the Church in each nation should be administratively independent of the Holy See. It tends toward doctrinal independence as well, as France's long Jansenist controversy shows; and even more

does it invite the interference of the civil government.

9. Jaime Luciano Balmes (1810-1848) was a Spanish apologist and philosopher. After ordination Don Bosco would have read his *Protestantism, Catholicism, and European Culture (Il Protestantismo comparado con el Catolicismo en sus relaciones con la civilizacion europea*, 4 vols., Barcelona, 1842-1844) in translation (Carmagnola, 1852). In the nineteenth century it was regarded as classic. Pope Leo XIII, who had known Balmes, described him as "the foremost political talent of the 19th century and one of the greatest in the history of political writers" (cited in NCE II, 32).

The only one of his works to appear in Italian while Don Bosco was in the seminary was a treatise on matrimony (1839), which does not fit this context. Don Bosco has slipped here, either citing the wrong author or on the time at which he read him. See Stella, LW, p. 55, n. 54.

10. Ferdinando Zucconi (1647-1732), a Jesuit, authored *Theological Lectures on Sacred Scripture (Lezioni sacre sopra la divina Scrittura*, 5 vols., Rome, 1729).

11. Claude Fleury (1640-1723), a protegee of Bossuet, was a member of the French Academy, a renowned educator, and confessor to King Louis XV. His *Histoire ecclesiastique* (20 vols., 1691-1720) covered the period up to 1414. Its Gallicanism led to its condemnation by the Index, which is undoubtedly why Don Bosco disapproved of it. Implied here is a criticism of the seminary superiors, who did not give suitable guidance to their students. John probably enjoyed the literary qualities of Fleury's work, and its otherwise edifying character. One may wonder how he could have read it without becoming aware of its Gallican leaning.

12. Domenico Cavalca (1270-1342) was a Dominican from Tuscany, the author of many ascetical tracts and reflections. One of the earliest Italian writers, he used a clear and direct style. His best known works were *The Pattern of the Cross* and *Lives of the Holy Fathers*; the former is his most original and mystical work. (Angelo Mercati and Augusto Pelzer, *Dizionario Ecclesiastico*, I [Turin: Unione Tipografica, 1953], 556)

13. Jacopo Passavanti (1302-1357) was a Florentine Dominican, famous as a preacher, teacher, and ascetical writer. His major work, *The Pattern of True Repentance (Specchio di vera penitenza*, Turin, 1831), is a series of Lenten sermons and some additional material. He is frank and energetic in fighting every form of vice and has an attractive Italian style. (*Dizionario Ecclesiastico*, III [Turin, 1958], 96)

14. Paolo Segneri (1624-1694) was a Jesuit preacher, ascetical writer, and theologian of the Curia's Sacred Penitentiary. Don Bosco certainly read his *Lenten Sermons (Quaresimale*, Florence, 1679, often reprinted), *The Well-trained Christian*, and perhaps *Food for the Soul*. He "manifests a tremendous command of figures and imagery, indomitable vigor and zeal, and a multiplicity of converging proofs and arguments. . . .

His style was in the best classical tradition ..." (NCE XIII, 48-49).

15. Matthew Richard Auguste Henrion (1805-1862) was a lawyer and church historian of Gallican tendency. His *Histoire generale de l'eglise* (12 vols., 1835-1836) was published in Italian translation in 1839.

16. Our Lady of Mount Carmel College was a Turin boarding school for the nobility. It took its name from a former Carmelite convent and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church on via del Carmine. Though well regarded, it was suppressed and confiscated in the anti-Jesuit fever of 1848. The college owned a magnificent country residence at Montaldo, a village about four miles north-northeast of Chieri. The cleric Bosco taught Greek there and looked after a dormitory from July 1 to October 17; we learn this from a certificate given him by the college rector, Father P. Dassi, which is preserved in the seminary record. The rector expresses his personal satisfaction because of his *honestate morum, pietate in Deum et Sacramentorum frequentia* [sound morals, piety, and frequent reception of the sacraments].

17. Pindar (5227-443 B.C.) and Anacreon (5729-9488 B.C.) were lyric poets.

18. Once more the exalted ideal of the "worthy priest" appears— this time in connection with helping an inexperienced youth.

19. Don Bosco's working knowledge of French served him well during his life, first enabling him to minister to French troops in Turin during the war of 1859, and especially assisting him on his many trips to France to establish the Salesians there and to beg for funds for his works and the building of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome.

While in Rome in 1884, Don Bosco was speaking to Monsignor Menghini, a learned professor of Hebrew. The discussion came around to a controversial passage in the book of Proverbs (30:18-19). Don Bosco cited it in Hebrew and the professor did the same. Lemoyne, who was present, recorded the passage in Latin, mistakenly attributing it to Ecclesiasticus (MB XVII, 122).

Chapter 25

Priestly Ordination

Sacred ordinations • Priesthood

The year Comollo died (1839) I received the tonsure and the four minor orders,¹ the third year of theology. When the school year ended, I got the idea of attempting something almost impossible — to cover the course of a year's theology during my holidays. With this in mind and without telling anyone, I presented myself to Archbishop Fransoni² to ask permission to study the fourth-year texts³ during the holidays. In the following school year (1840-1) I would complete the quinquennium. I quoted my advanced age — I was 24 — as the reason for my request.⁴

That holy bishop made me very welcome and, after verifying the results of the exams I had taken till then in the seminary, granted the favour I was asking on condition that I take all the treatises in the course I wanted to take. My vicar forane, Dr Cinzano, was charged with carrying out the wishes of our superior. After two months of study, I finished the prescribed treatises, and for the autumn ordinations⁵ I was admitted to the subdiaconate.

When I think now of the virtues required for that most important step, I am convinced that I was not sufficiently prepared for it.⁶ But since I had no one to care directly for my vocation, I turned to Fr Caffasso. He advised me to go and trust in his advice.

I made a ten-day retreat at the House of the Mission in Turin.⁷ During it I made a general confession so that my confessor would have a clear picture of my conscience and would be able to give me suitable advice. Though I wanted to complete my studies, I quaked at the thought of binding myself for life. Before I took the final step I wanted receive the full approbation of my confessor.⁸

Henceforward I took the greatest care to practice Doctor Borrelli's advice: a vocation is preserved and perfected by recollection and frequent communion.

On my return to the seminary I was put into the fifth year and made a prefect. This is the highest responsibility open to a seminarian.⁹

Sitientes day¹⁰ of 1841 saw my ordination as deacon; in the summer I would be ordained a priest. I found the day I had to leave the seminary for the last time very difficult. My superiors loved me and showed continual marks of benevolence. My companions were very affectionate towards me. You could say that I lived for them and they lived for me."

If anyone wanted a shave or his tonsure renewed, he ran to Bosco; if he wanted someone to make a biretta for him, to sew or patch his clothes, Bosco was the man he turned to. So you can imagine how sad was the parting from that place where I had lived for six years, where I received education, knowledge, an ecclesiastical spirit, and all the tokens of kindness and affection one could desire.

My ordination day was the vigil of the feast of the Blessed Trinity.¹² I said my first Mass in the church of St Francis of Assisi¹³ where Fr. Caffasso was dean of the conferences.¹⁴ Though a priest had not said his first Mass in my home place for many a day, and my neighbours were anxiously waiting for me to say mine there, I preferred to say it without fuss in Turin. That day was the most wonderful day of my life.

At the *Memento* in that unforgettable Mass I remembered devoutly all my teachers, my benefactors spiritual and temporal, and especially the ever-lamented Fr Calosso, whom I have always remembered as my greatest benefactor.

On Monday I said Mass in the Church of Our Lady of Consolation¹⁵ to thank the great Virgin Mary for the innumerable graces she had obtained for me from her divine Son Jesus.

On Tuesday I went to say Mass in St Dominic's Church in Chieri, where my old professor Fr Giusiana was still living.¹⁶ With fatherly affection he assisted me. I spent the whole day with him, one I can call a day in paradise.

Thursday was the solemnity of Corpus Christi. I went and sang Mass in the local church and took part in the procession of the Blessed Sacrament.¹⁷ The parish priest invited to dinner my relatives, the clergy, and the people of standing in the vicinity. They were all happy to be a part of it because my compatriots loved me very much and they were all glad everything had turned out well for me. I went home that evening to be with my family.¹⁸ As I drew near the house and saw the place of the dream¹⁹ I had when I was about nine, I could not hold back the tears I said: "How wonderful are the ways of Divine Providence! God has truly raised a poor child from the earth to place him amongst the princes of his people."²⁰

Notes

1. Comollo died in April 1839. Caselle (*Giovanni Bosco studente*) has found documentation for these ordinations and John's diaconal and presbyteral ones (pp. 203, 207). According to this, John received the tonsure and minor orders on Saturday, March 28, 1840, the day before the fifth Sunday of Lent.

The rite and the subsequent ordinations took place in the Church of the Immaculate Conception, the private chapel of the archbishops of Turin (corner of via Arsenale and via Lascais).

Tonsure was the cutting or shaving of a patch of hair from the crown of the head; it marked one's canonical entrance to the clerical state before both Church and State. The four minor orders were acolyte, reader, exorcist, and doorkeeper. In the 1973 reforms of the Latin liturgy, these rites were suppressed and replaced by admission to candidacy for ordination (for diocesan seminarians) and installation to the ministries of acolyte and reader (no longer exclusively clerical).

2. This is Don Bosco's first mention of his great patron Louis Fransoni (1789-1862), archbishop of Turin from 1832. On his promotion to the see of Turin from Fossano, he actively encouraged the work of Father Guala and the Convitto Ecclesiastico in clerical formation. In the political and social storms of 1840's and 50's, he was one of the "intransigents" who feared that any concession to popular government or the separation of Church and State would lead to downfall of religion and the monarchy. After the government exiled him in 1850, he governed the archdiocese from Lyons and became for the conservative elements of Piedmontese society a symbolic martyr to the cause of the rights of the Church. See Stella, *EcSo*, various references to Fransoni; Denis Mack Smith, *Cavour* (NY: Knopf, 1985), pp. 26, 4C; William Roscoe Thayer, *The Life and Times of Cavour* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), I, 124, 288-293. See also chapter 55, note 7.

Don Bosco enjoyed excellent relations with Archbishop Fransoni. As we shall see, the archbishop actively encouraged his work, defended it against public opposition, and appointed him head of all the oratories in the city. He also approved the beginning stages of the Salesian Society. See BM II- VI.

3. The texts were Alasia's *De poenitentia* [Penance] and Gazzaniga's *De Eucharistia* [The Eucharist]. On these authors, see Stella, LW, pp. 49-50.

4. The quinquennium was the five-year period of theological study prior to ordination. John turned 25 in August 1840.

5. Customary times for ordinations were near the ember days, special days of fast and abstinence. They were observed on the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday preceding the first Sunday of Lent and following Pentecost, the feast of the Holy Cross (September 14), and the feast of Saint Lucy (December 13). In Turin the spring ordinations were usually on the day before the fifth Sunday in Lent (Caselle, *Giovanni Bosco studente*, pp. 203, 207).

6. The subdiaconate was the definitive step by which one permanently committed himself to the clerical life, to celibacy, to praying the breviary, etc. Teresio Bosco says of the solemn vow of chastity, "From this vow the Church dispensed no one for any reason" (BN, p. 99). Even apart from the exalted priestly ideal that John fostered, it is natural to hesitate before taking such an irrevocable step, as anyone who has been ordained or married knows.

The subdiaconate was suppressed in the 1973 liturgical reforms. The ordinand now makes his definitive commitment in conjunction with the diaconate.

John was ordained subdeacon on Saturday, September 19, 1840. In those days admission to the subdiaconate required that one have an ecclesiastical patrimony of five thousand lire. Since John's share of the inheritance from his father was insufficient, Joseph made up the difference by giving him another field, which consequently became known as the field of Don Bosco's patrimony.

A cleric was expected to be able to maintain himself in a 'table manner. He should not have to depend on his

Bishop for his livelihood or be forced to undertake some worldly profession; still less should he be reduced to begging. The property required as such assurance was his ecclesiastical patrimony. The salaries and stipends of most priests were not nearly adequate to support them. Nowadays most diocesan priests are salaried either by their dioceses or, in some countries, by the government. Religious priests are provided for by their communities, of course, as they always were. See *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (NY: Appleton, 1907), I, 312.

7. Archbishop Chiaverotti had especially entrusted to Saint Vincent de Paul's Congregation of the Mission the formation of the clergy of Turin. For this purpose they ran a retreat house in Turin at what is now 23 via XX Settembre. The church is called the Church of the Visitation because Saint Jane Frances de Chantal founded a convent of the Visitation there; it and their church were confiscated during the Napoleonic regime. It passed first to the diocesan clergy and then to the Vincentians, led by Father Mark Anthony Durando (1801-1880). Thus the Vincentians brought to Turin the beneficent spirituality of Berulle and Saint Francis de Sales. All the preordination retreats were made here. See Molineris, pp. 248-249; Giraud and Biancardi, pp. 123-124.

8. When Don Bosco insisted on frequent confession as a key to a sound education and to a solid religious life, the forgiveness of sin was only one aspect. The other was prudent spiritual direction, especially when it was a matter of deciding on one's state of life. In chapter 16, he lamented the lack of such guidance in his own case.

9. As prefect he exercised authority over his fellow students and was responsible for their conduct (BM I, 374).

10. Saturday of the fourth week of Lent, March 27 in 1841. The name comes from the opening word of the introit of the day's Latin Mass. At his preordination examination on February 17, one of the examiners was Father Lawrence Gastaldi, who gave him a grade of only *fere optime* (A-).

Roman Catholic deacons assist bishops or presbyters during the sacred liturgy. In particular, they proclaim the gospel and distribute communion; they may also preach, baptize and witness marriages.

11. His peers also were sad to see him go. Lemoyne gathers some of their testimony in BM I, 383-384. The curial records of Turin contain a list of the seminarians of 1840-1841 John Bosco is described therein as "zealous and promising." At his final exam on May 15, he obtained the grade *plus quam optime* (A+).

12. Archbishop Fransoni ordained John and his fifteen classmates presbyters on Saturday, June 5. They made their preordination retreat from May 26 to June 4. At the end of the retreat John made nine resolutions, which he wrote in an exercise book. See the comment following the notes.

With his ordination as a presbyter (a "priest," in common usage), John was empowered to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, hear confessions (for which further authorization was required), and anoint the sick. He also took the title "Don" (from the Latin *dominus*) by which Italian priests are commonly called and by which he has been known ever since.

13. At this first Mass he was assisted by his benefactor and spiritual director Father Cafasso. Newly ordained priests had to be assisted for some time through the complicated rubrics of the Mass. Don Bosco used the altar of the Guardian Angel (the side altar closest to the main altar, on the left). The Church of Saint Francis of Assisi, at the corner of via S. Francesco d'Assisi and via Barbaroux, belonged to the Franciscans until 1801, when Napoleon suppressed religious orders and turned the monastery into a barracks. Father Guala became rector of the church in 1808, and in 1818 he set up the Convitto Ecclesiastico in the former monastery.

14. Father Cafasso was in charge of the faculties of moral theology and preaching at the Convitto, where instruction was given in two daily lectures. Father Cafasso's were renowned (see chapter 6, comment, and chapter 27).

15. Our Lady of Consolation (*La Consolata*) is the principal patroness of Turin; her church is a favorite of the faithful. It is located on via della Consolata, a block south of corso Regina Margherita. The church is actually two baroque churches joined, built by Guarini (1679) and decorated by Juvara (1714). The campanile may date from the tenth century. Saint Joseph Cafasso's body is preserved there.

16. The Church of Saint Dominic dates from the fourteenth century and is entrusted to the Dominicans, Father Guisiana order. The miraculous cincture of Saint Thomas Aquinas is still as a relic there. Don Bosco celebrated Mass at the altar of Our Lady of the Rosary, about midway down the right side of the church.

17. We know from other sources that on the Wednesday Don Bosco celebrated Mass in the Chieri cathedral at the altar of Our Lady of Grace, where he had often prayed as a youth. His Mass "at home" was at Saint Andrew's in Castelnuovo, where Father Cinzano was still the pastor. Corpus Christi is still a holy day of obligation in Italy, and it was also a public holiday then. The procession was a major part of the religious festivities.

18. In 1839 Joseph had built himself a house a few yards away from the old family home, and he, his family, and Margaret moved back to Becchi. Don Bosco spoke frequently and emotionally of that evening with his mother. Lemoyne has recorded what she told him:

You are now a priest, and you celebrate Mass. You are, therefore, closer to Jesus Christ. But remember that to begin to say Mass is to begin to suffer. You will not become aware of this immediately, but little by little you will realize that your mother was right. I am sure that you

will pray for me every day, whether I be still living or dead, and that is enough for me. From now on you must think only of saving souls; never worry about me. (BM I, 388)

We see, then, that Mama Margaret had special advice for the four most solemn moments of her son's life: first communion, choice of vocation, clothing ceremony, and priesthood.

19. The "place of the dream" is the field where he saw himself in the landmark dream at age nine. Today a monument marks the place near his home. 20. An allusion to Psalm 113:7-8.

Comment on Don Bosco 's Ordination Resolutions

In his notebook John wrote:

Souvenir of the spiritual retreat prior to the celebration of my first Mass. The priest does not go for heaven or hell alone. If he does God's work he will go to heaven with the souls he has saved by his good example. If he has been a cause of scandal, he will go to perdition along with the souls that were damned through his scandal. Therefore I pledge myself to keep the following resolutions:

1. Never to go for a stroll unless for grave reasons like visiting the sick, etc.
2. To be very rigorous in the use of my time.
3. To suffer, work, humble myself in all things whenever it is question of saving souls.
4. The charity and gentleness of Saint Francis de Sales are to be my guide.
5. I will always be satisfied with whatever food is presented to me if not harmful to my health.
6. I shall drink my wine mixed with water, and then only to the extent that it will benefit my health.
7. Work is a powerful weapon against the enemies of the soul Hence I shall not take more than five or six hours of sleep. I shall take no rest during the day, particularly after lunch. Only in case of illness shall I make an exception to this rule.
8. I shall set aside some time every day for meditation and spiritual reading. During the day I shall pay a brief visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or at least raise my heart in prayer. I shall spend at least a quarter of an hour in preparation for Mass and another quarter of an hour in thanksgiving.
9. I shall never indulge in conversations with women, except to hear their confession or when it is necessary for their spiritual welfare. (BM I, 385)

The fourth resolution is Don Bosco's first definite reference to Saint Francis de Sales. An incident at the seminary gives an earlier hint. According to Father Giacomelli's testimony,

John was called *Bosco of Castelnuovo* to distinguish him from another seminarian by the same surname. ... In this connection I remember a little incident which, though unimportant, impressed me. The two Boscos were joking about their names and wondering whether they should use some nickname for clarity's sake.

The other Bosco said: "Bosco means wood. I like *nespolo* wood [medlar, hard and knotty], so call me *Nespolo*."

"I, instead, like *sales* [willow, in Piedmontese] wood which is soft and flexible, so call me *Sales*."

Was he perhaps already thinking about the future Society of Saint Francis de Sales while he tried to imitate the benignity of this saint. Sensitive as he was even in minor things, he would easily have been carried away by anger if he had been less virtuous. No other seminarian (and there were many) was so prone to flare up. It was evident, nevertheless, that John fought earnestly and steadily to keep temper under control. (BM I, 302)

Several of these ordination pledges would eventually turn in the Salesian rule in one form or another; perhaps the third is the most noteworthy. In the first draft of the Constitutions it becomes: "Let everyone be ready to suffer, if necessary, heat cold thirst, hunger, hardships, and contempt whenever these may cost tribute to the greater glory of God, the welfare of souls, and the salvation of one's own soul" (BM V, 644, no. 12). This article remained exactly the same until 1972 (cf. article 42), when it was slightly modified. In the 1984 Constitutions, the last paragraph of article 18 reads: "[The Salesian] does not look for unusual penances but accepts the daily demands and renunciations of the apostolic life. He is ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain whenever God's glory and the salvation of souls require it."

The best studies of Saint Francis de Sales available in English are two translations from French: Maurice Henry-Couliannier, *Saint Francis de Sales and His Friends*, trans. Veronica Morrow (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1973), and Andre Ravier, S.J., *Francis de Sales: Sage and Saint* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988).

Chapter 26

First Priestly Ministry

Priestly work begins • Sermon at Lavriano • John Brina

In that year (1841) my parish priest was looking for a curate. I helped him out for five months.¹ I found the work a great pleasure. I preached every Sunday. I visited the sick and administered the holy sacraments to them, except penance since I had not yet taken the exam.² I buried the dead, kept the parish records, wrote out certificates of poverty,³ and so on. My delight was to make contact with the children and teach them catechism. They used to come from Murialdo to see me, and on my visits home they crowded round me. Whenever I left the presbytery there was a group of boys, and everywhere I went my little friends gave me a warm welcome.

As I had a certain facility in expounding the word of God, I was in much demand as a preacher, to give festal homilies in the nearby villages. At the end of October that year I was invited to preach on St Benignus at Lavriano.⁴ I was happy to accept because that was the birthplace of my friend Fr. John Grassino, now parish priest in Scalenghe.⁵ I was anxious to do justice to the occasion and

so prepared and wrote out my address carefully, trying to make it popular and at the same time polished. I studied it well, determined to win glory from it.

But God wanted to teach a terrible lesson to my pride, it was a feast day, and I had to say holy Mass for the people before setting off. To get there in time for the sermon I had to go on horseback..⁶ Sometimes trotting, sometimes galloping I was about halfway along and had reached valley of Casalborgone between Cinzano and Bersano.

As I passed a millet field, a flock of sparrows took sudden flight. The noise of their flight frightened the horse, and he bolted down the road and across the fields and meadows. Somehow I managed to stay in the saddle, but then I realised that it was slipping under the horse's belly. I tried an equestrian maneuver, but the saddle was out of place and forced me upwards, and I fell head first onto a heap of broken stones. From a hill close by, a man could see this regrettable accident; he ran to my assistance with one of his workers and, finding me unconscious, carried me to his house and laid me on his best bed. They gave me the most loving care, and after an hour I came to and realised that I was in a strange house.

"Don't let that worry you," my host said, "and don't be upset that you're in a strange house. Here you'll want for nothing. I've sent for the doctor, and someone has gone to catch your horse. I'm a farmer, but I have everything I need. Do you feel any pain?"

"God reward you for your charity, my good friend," I said. "I don't think I've done much damage. A broken collar bone, maybe. I can't move it. Where am I?"

"You're on Bersano Hill in the house of John Calosso, better known as *Brina*.⁷ I'm at your service. I, too, have got round a bit and know what it is to need help. Many a spill I've had going to fairs and markets!"

"While we're waiting for the doctor, tell me some of your stories."

"Oh," he said, "I have lots of things I could tell you. Like this one. One autumn a few years ago, I was going to Asti on my donkey to collect winter provisions. On my way home, when I got to the valley of Murialdo, my poor beast, quite overloaded, fell in a mud hole and lay there in the middle of the road unable to move. Every effort to get her up again proved useless. It was midnight, dark and wet. Not knowing what else to do, I shouted for help. In a few minutes someone answered from a little house nearby. They came, a seminarian and his brother, and two other men with a lamp to light their way. They got her out of the muck, having first unloaded her. They took me and all my baggage to their house. I was half dead and covered with mud. They cleaned me up and put new life into me with a magnificent supper. Then they gave me a nice, soft bed. In the morning before I left I wanted to pay them for all they had done for me, but the seminarian turned everything down flat, saying, "Who knows? Someday we may need your help."

I was moved to tears by his words. When he saw my reaction, he asked me if I were ill.

"No," I replied, "your story gives me great pleasure, and that's what moves me."

"How happy I would be," he went on, "if I knew what I could do for that good family! What fine people!"

"What was their name?"

"Bosco," he said, "popularly known as Boschetti.⁸ But why are you so moved? You know them, maybe? How is that seminarian?"

"That seminarian, my good friend, is this priest whom you have repaid a thousand times for what he did for you. The very one whom you've carried to your home and put into this bed. Divine Providence wants to teach us through this incident that one good turn deserves another."

You can imagine the wonder, the pleasure, that good Christian and I both felt, that in my hour of need God had let me fall into the hands of such a friend. His wife, his sister, his other relatives,

and his friends were delighted to know that the one who had so many times featured in their conversation was actually in their house.

The doctor arrived a short time later. He found no bones broken. After a few days I could head home on the recaptured horse. John Brina came the whole way home with me. For as long as he lived we remained fast friends.

After this warning, I firmly resolved that in the future I would prepare my sermons for the greater glory of God, and not to appear learned and erudite.⁹

Notes

1. From June 10 to November 2. These five months were an internship of sorts, his first ministerial experience except for teaching catechism and the few sermons he preached as a seminarian. Nowadays seminarians gain a great deal of experience during the time of their studies, including a mandatory year of internship between ordinations to the diaconate and to the presbyterate. In the next chapter Don Bosco will speak of the decision which he had to make during the summer concerning his future.

2. Before a priest is permitted to hear confessions, he must demonstrate competence and be granted canonical faculties by his bishop or his religious superior to do so. Don Bosco was granted temporary faculties on November 30, 1842, and permanent ones on June 10, 1843.

3. Entitling a person or family to public assistance.

4. He was to preach there on the last Sunday in October. The feast of Saint Benignus is November 1; he was martyred at Dijon, France, late in the second century. Lavriano (or Lauriano) is a village about ten miles north of Castelnuovo.

5. Father Grassino (1820-1902) entered the seminary in the fall of 1840 (Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 412-413). He helped Don Bosco in his early work as director of the oratory in Borgo Vanchiglia (Turin) and vice director at Valdocco; later he was rector of the Giaveno minor seminary while it was under Don Bosco's direction (Molineris, p. 269; BM VI). He never became a Salesian, and in fact he and Don Bosco had a falling out in 1861 over control of the Giaveno seminary.

6. John learned to ride in the summer of 1832. During the previous school year he had shot through three classes at Chieri. Feeling the need for some review, he took some summer lessons with the assistant pastor at Castelnuovo. He spent the day at the rectory. As a bit of compensation, Father Dassano, the pastor at that time, asked John to look after his horse. While exercising the horse, John not only learned to ride it, but even played the acrobat by learning to stand on its back while it was at a gallop. (BM I, 204-205) Such feats and his gifted memory did not guarantee that he would remember all that goes into mastering a horse, including such fundamentals as properly cinching the saddle.

7. Molineris (p. 270) gives the man's name as Cafasso, not Calosso. He also reports that the nickname "Brina" came from the farmstead.

In 1875 Don Bosco had a dream in the course of which two of the stalwarts from the early days of the Oratory, Gastini and Buzzetti, tried to get him to mount a horse. Don Bosco objected that he had done that once before and fallen off. Eventually he yielded, and the dream proceeded. (BM XI, 240)

8. "Little Boscos," a nickname probably given them because, like Don Bosco, most of the family were of small stature.

9. John several times made resolutions and had difficulty keeping them, e.g. in giving up his "worldly" ways like hunting and violin-playing (chapters 17 and 21) and in preaching for the good of God's people (chapter 20 and here). Saints do not drop straight down from heaven but have to work at overcoming their faults like everyone else.

Chapter 27

Learning to Be a Priest

The Convitto Ecclesiastico

At the end of the holidays, I had three situations to choose from. I could have taken a post as tutor in the house of a Genoese gentleman with a salary of a thousand francs a year.¹ The good people of Murialdo were so anxious to have me as their chaplain that they were prepared to double the salary paid to chaplains up to then. Last, I could have become a curate in my native parish.²

Before I made a final choice, I sought out Fr Caffasso in Turin to ask his advice. For several years now he had been my guide in matters both spiritual and temporal. That holy priest listened to everything, the good money offers, the pressures from relatives and friends, my own goodwill to work.

Without a moment's hesitation, this is what he said: "You need to study moral theology and homiletics. For the present, forget all these offers and come to the Convitto."³

I willingly followed his wise advice; on 3 November 1841, I enrolled at the Convitto.⁴

The Convitto Ecclesiastico completed, you might say, the study of theology. In the seminary we studied only dogma, and that speculative; and in moral theology only controversial issues. Here one learnt to be a priest. Meditation, spiritual reading, two conferences a day, lessons in preaching, a secluded life, every convenience for study, reading good authors — these were the areas of learning to which we had to apply ourselves.⁵

At that time, two prominent men were in charge of this most useful institution: Doctor Louis Guala and Fr Joseph Caffasso. Doctor Guala was the work's founder.⁶ An unselfish man, rich in knowledge, prudent, and fearless, he was everyone's friend in the days of the regime of Napoleon I. He founded that extraordinary seedbed where young priests fresh from their seminary courses could learn the practical aspects of their sacred ministry. This proved very valuable to the Church, especially as a means of eradicating the vestiges of Jansenism that still persisted in our midst.⁷

Amongst other topics the most controversial was the question of Probabilism and Probabiliorism.⁸ Chief amongst the former's advocates were Alasia and Antoine,⁹ along with other rigorist authors. The practice of this doctrine can lead to Jansenism. The Probabilists followed the teaching of St Alphonsus, who has now been proclaimed a Doctor of the Church.¹⁰ His authority can be called the theology of the Pope since the Church has proclaimed that his works can be taught, preached, and practised, as they contain nothing worthy of censure.

Dr. Guala took a strong stance between the two parties; starting from the principle that the charity of O.L.J.C." should be the inspiration of all systems, he was able to bring the two extremes together. Things came together so well that, thanks to Doctor Guala, St Alphonsus become our theological patron. This was a salutary step, long desired, and now we are reaping its benefit. Fr Caffasso was Guala's right-hand man. His virtue, which withstood all tests, his amazing calm, his shrewd insight, and his prudence enabled him to overcome the acrimony that was still

alive in some probabiliorists against the Liguorians.¹²

Dr. Felix Golzio, a hidden gold mine amongst the Turinese clergy, was also at the Convitto.¹³ In his modest lifestyle he was hardly noticeable. But he was a tireless worker, humble and knowledgeable; he was a real support, or better, Guala and Caffasso's right-hand man.

The prisons, hospitals, pulpits, charitable institutes¹⁴ the sick in their homes, the cities, the villages, and we might add, the mansions of the rich and the hovels of the poor felt the salutary effects of the zeal of these three luminaries of the Turinese clergy. These were the three models placed in my path by Divine Providence. It was just up to me to follow their example, their teaching, their virtues.

Caffasso, who for six years had been my guide, was especially my spiritual director. If I have been able to do any good, I owe it to this worthy priest in whose hands I placed every decision I made, all my study, and every activity of my life.¹⁵ It was he who first took me into the prisons, where I soon learned how great was the malice and misery of mankind. I saw large numbers of young lads aged from 12 to 18, fine healthy youngsters, alert of mind, but seeing them idle there, infested with lice, lacking food for body and soul, horrified me. Public disgrace, family dishonour, and personal shame were personified in those unfortunates. What shocked me most was to see that many of them were released full of good resolutions to go straight, and yet in a short time they landed back in prison, within a few days of their release.

On such occasions I found out how quite a few were brought back to that place; it was because they were abandoned to their own resources. "Who knows?" I thought to myself, "if these youngsters had a friend outside who would take care of them, help them, teach them religion on feast days . . . Who knows but they could be steered away from ruin, or at least the number of those who return to prison could be lessened?"

I talked this idea over with Fr Caffasso. With his encouragement and inspiration I began to work out in my mind how to put the idea into practice, leaving to the Lord's grace what the outcome would be. Without God's grace, all human effort is vain.¹⁶

Notes

1. This was a substantial sum of money. John's room, board, and tuition at the seminary had been 240 lire per year. As late as 1858, elementary school teachers in Piedmont were making only 300 lire per year (Mack Smith, p. 132).

2. Two of the offers emphasized salary. Margaret, instead, took this attitude: "My son in the house of a rich gentleman? What would these 1,000 lire profit him, or me, or his brother Joseph, if John were to lose his soul?" (BM II, 30). See also her advice on his vocation (chapter 16, note 8).

3. Seminary training in Chieri was primarily intellectual, emphasizing dogma. But there is more than a little likelihood that Father Caffasso understood his younger friend's spiritual intensity and saw a need to temper it not only with pastoral practice under guidance ("field training") but also with a more moderate spirituality and moral theology. On the Convitto, theology in Piedmont, and Don Bosco's maturation, see Stella, LW, pp. 78-100. On Saint Joseph Caffasso's spirituality, see his *The Priest, the Man of God: His Dignity and His Duties*, trans. Patrick O'Connell (Rockford, Illinois: TAN, 1971).

We may also wonder whether Father Cafasso, knowing John's commitment to young people and the crying need for someone to begin to care for the hordes of youngsters in the great city, did not see an opportunity to bring the two together: Don Bosco and poor, abandoned youth.

4. The term *convitto* means a residence hall. Room and board at the Convitto amounted to 30 lire a month. Don Bosco was excused from a total of 341 lire during his three school years there. No doubt he was able to pay some of the fees from his own priestly stipends. His register of Mass intentions from those years is in the Salesian archives (AS 132 Quaderni, 7; Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 414-416). How he paid the rest is unknown, but we may guess that Fathers Guala and Cafasso had a hand in it, as before.

5. The program normally lasted two years; sometimes an exceptional priest might take another year. The daily schedule is given in Giraud and Biancardi, pp. 131-132. There were at least forty students in residence while Don Bosco was there.

6. To say that Father Guala (1775-1848) was the founder of the Convitto is only partly correct. The man really responsible was the Servant of God Father Pius Bruno Lanteri, founder of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary and of Saint Ignatius Retreat House at Lanzo. Imbued with the spirituality of Saint Ignatius Loyola and of Saint Alphonsus Liguori, he was intent on fostering a more benign outlook in the Turinese clergy. See NCE VIII, 379; Leon Cristiani, *A Cross for Napoleon: The Life of Father Bruno Lanteri (1759-1840)*, trans. Keith Mayes and Madeleine Soudee (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1981).

Father Guala had been trained in Genoa, where society was under Italian rather than French influences, the clergy more Alphonsian than Jansenist. In Turin he became Path Lanteri's most outstanding disciple, earning credit for financing and directing the Convitto for the renewal of the clergy. It was he who established the institute at Saint Francis of Assisi Church (1818). See Stella, *EcSo*, pp. 43-54; Bonetti, p. 6. Archbishop Frasoni, a native Genoan, had likewise been trained in a moderate moral and pastoral theological approach. He opposed the theologians of the University of Turin, very actively supported the Convitto, and promoted priests who had been trained there.

7. Jansenism was a complex of very rigid doctrines dealing with grace and free will, as well as the conditions needed for receiving the sacraments. It was based on the *Augustinus*, a posthumous work of Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638), bishop of Ypres in Flanders, which expounded the theology of Saint Augustine. The Popes condemned the book's doctrine of grace repeatedly, most solemnly in the bull *Unigenitus* (1713). A century and a half of turmoil over Jansenism disturbed both Church and State in France. Gallicanism, the influence of the Jesuits, royal authority, and other points were at issue. See NCE VII, 820-826; more briefly, *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Crossroad, 1986), pp. 727-730.

Since Piedmont was so closely linked to French culture, it was affected by these currents. When Don Bosco speaks of the "vestiges" of Jansenism, it is something of an understatement. See Stella, LW, pp. 78-91; Cristiani, pp. 11-16.

8. Probabilism, a system in moral theology, taught that an action may be presumed lawful if it is backed by a solidly probable opinion, i.e. if it is based on reasons sufficient to win a prudent assent. See NCE XI, 814-815. It was much favored by the Jesuits, mortal enemies of the Jansenists; Saint Alphonsus promoted a similar system, called equi-probabilism.

Probabiliorism was another moral theory. It held that it is never lawful to hold a probable opinion if there is another opinion which is more probable. Those with a Jansenist outlook held to this theory. These rigorists maintained that the recently canonized Saint Alphonsus was responsible for lamentable laxity among the clergy. See NCE XI, 814.

9. He means, "the latter's," i.e. the probabiliorists. Giusepp⁶ Antonio Alasia (1731-1812) was strict in practical matters, but that he had Jansenist tendencies is anything but clear. In fact both Fathers Guala and Cafasso used his *Penance* text at the Convitto (Stella, LW, pp. 49-50).

Paul Gabriel Antoine (1678-1743) was a French Jesuit. His *General Moral Theology* (1726) was widely acclaimed, though

Saint Alphonsus thought it too severe. (NCE I, 641)

10. Saint Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787), founder of the Redemptorists and prolific writer in moral theology, had been canonized only in 1839. He was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius IX in 1871, shortly before the composition of the *Memoirs*. Don Bosco took his thoughts on the importance of following one's vocation from Saint Alphonsus: see Introduction to the *Constitutions of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales* (Paterson, New Jersey, 1957), pp. 4-16; 1966 *Constitutions* (Madras, 1967), pp. 8-22. On Saint Alphonsus, see NCE I, 336-341; Butler's Lives, III, 242-249; D.F. Miller and L.X. Aubin, *Saint Alphonsus Liguori* (Rockford, Illinois: TAN, 1987).

11. Our Lord Jesus Christ.

12. The conferences and lessons at the Convitto, says Stella, did not teach a particular theological system or theory of the apostolate. Instead, they posed practical cases and the art of caring for souls. "Situations from everyday life were presented, and then put to the test in such priestly activities as preaching, giving catechism lessons, and so forth" (LW, p. 98). Among Stella's resources for studying the Convitto is at least one notebook made by a student from Father Cafasso's lectures (conversation, June 6, 1986).

13. After Father Cafasso died in 1860, Don Bosco chose Father Golzio (1808?-1873) as his confessor and spiritual director. Like Father Cafasso, Father Golzio was convinced that God was leading his penitent by extraordinary means. He presided over the Convitto from 1867 until his death.

14. At a time of tremendous social upheaval (see chapter 28, note 1 and comment), Turin was remarkable for its public and private associations and institutions to care for the poor, the sick, and the ignorant. This extensive network of charity, as well as the broad mingling of social classes through housing patterns in the city center, receives much credit for sparing Turin, alone among major Italian cities, an uprising in 1848 (Woolf, pp. 291-292, 326).

15. Don Bosco means what he says quite literally, as will be evident in chapter 30. As his confessor and director of soul, Father Cafasso guided his spiritual development and every major decision (cf. Stella, LW, pp. 97-98). This docile attitude goes back, at least in part, to that searing adolescent experience of Father Calosso's death and the dream that followed (chapter 6).

16. Is it accidental that the chapter dealing with Jansenism should end on a note of grace? At the least, here is a reminder to Salesians and all apostles that all their genius, all their hard work, all their initiative cannot guarantee a healthy spiritual response; God's grace still must touch the human heart, and the apostle is only a medium which may facilitate that. Moreover, the apostle must be a person of prayer, not just a doer of deeds, because only prayer gives access to divine grace.

Chapter 28

Bartholomew Garelli

The feast of the Immaculate Conception and the beginning of the festive oratory

Hardly had I registered at the Convitto of St Francis, when I met at once a crowd of boys¹ who followed me in the streets and the squares and even into the sacristy of the church attached to the institute. But I could not take direct care of them since I had no premises. A humorous incident² opened the way to put into action my project³ for the hoys who roamed the streets of the city, especially those released from prison.

On the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (8 December 1841), I was vesting to celebrate holy Mass at the appointed time. Joseph Comotti, the sacristan, seeing a hoy in a corner, asked him to come and serve my Mass.

"I don't know how," he answered, completely embarrassed.

"Come on," repeated the sacristan, "I want you to serve Mass."

"I don't know how," the boy repeated. "I've never served Mass."

"You little brat," said the sacristan, quite furious, "if you don't know how to serve Mass, what are you doing in the sacristy?" With that he grabbed a feather duster and hit the poor boy about the head and shoulders.

As the boy beat a hasty retreat, I cried loudly, "What are you doing? Why are you beating him like that? What's he done?"

"Why is he hanging round the sacristy if he doesn't know how to serve Mass?"

"But you've done wrong."

"What does it matter to you?"

"It matters plenty. He's a friend of mine. Call him back at once. I need to speak with him."

"*Tuder! Tuder!*"⁴ he began to shout, as he ran after him. Promising him better treatment, he brought the lad back to me. He came over trembling and tearful because of the blows he had received.⁵

"Have you attended Mass yet?" I asked him with as much loving kindness⁶ as I could.

"No," he answered.

"Well, come to Mass now. Afterwards I'd like to talk to you about something that will please you."

He promised to do as I said. I wanted to calm down the poor fellow's spirit and not leave him with that sad impression towards the people in charge of that sacristy. Once I had celebrated my Mass and made due thanksgiving,⁷ I took my candidate into a side chapel. Trying to allay any fear he might have of another beating, I started questioning him cheerfully:

"My good friend, what's your name?"

"My name's Bartholomew Garelli."

"Where are you from?"

"Asti."

"Is your father alive?"

"No, my father's dead."

"And your mother?"

"My mother's dead too."

"How old are you?"

"I'm sixteen."

"Can you read and write?"⁸

"I don't know anything."⁹

"Have you made your first communion?"

"Not yet."¹⁰

"Have you ever been to confession?"

"Yes, when I was small."

"Are you going to catechism classes now?"

"I don't dare."

"Why?"

"Because the other boys are smaller than I am, and they know their catechism. As big as I am, I don't know anything, so I'm ashamed to go."

"If I were to teach you catechism on your own, would you come?"

"I'd come very willingly."

"Would you come willingly to this little room?"

"I'd come willingly enough, provided they don't beat me."

"Relax. No one will harm you. On the contrary, you'll be my friend and you'll be dealing with me and no one else. When would you like us to begin our catechism?"

"Whenever you wish."

"This evening?"

"Okay."

"Are you willing right now?"

"Yes, right now, with great pleasure."

I stood up and made the sign of the cross to begin but my pupil made no response because he did not know how

to do it. In that first catechism lesson I taught him to make the sign of the cross. I also taught him to know God the Creator and why he created us. Though Bartholomew's memory was poor, with attentive diligence in a few feast days¹¹ he learned enough to make a good confession and soon after, his holy communion.

To this first pupil some others were added.¹² During that winter, I concentrated my efforts in helping grown-ups who needed special catechism, above all those who were just out of prison. I was beginning to learn from experience that if young lads just released from their place of punishment could find someone to befriend them, to look after them, to assist them on feast days, to help them get work with good employers, to visit them occasionally during the week, these young men soon forgot the past and began to mend their ways. They became good Christians and honest citizens.¹³ This was the beginning of our Oratory.¹⁴ It was to be blessed by the Lord with growth beyond my imagining at that time.

Notes

1. Seasonal migration from country to city had been a regular part of European life for ages, dependent on the cycles of weather, economic prosperity, family size, and other factors (Woolf, p. 281). After Charles Albert came to the throne in 1831, the capital became the locus of economic development as government, the army, public works, and public transport expanded, and factories and housing went up. In 1839 the king approved construction of a rail line from Turin to Genoa.

The employment opportunities in construction, machine operation, and common labor contrasted more sharply with the realities of rural life, where there were repeated poor harvests. A typical field worker earned about one hundred lire a year, plus some produce, against a cost of living three times as much. Many migrants, therefore, chose to stay in the city.

At the same time, the Austrian masters of Venetia a Lombardy became increasingly repressive, causing additional migration of labor and capital to (and additional political unrest in) independent Piedmont. Advances in medicine and hygiene contributed to a sudden and dramatic increase in the population of northern Italy, as was happening over most of western Europe.

For a longer discussion Turin's urbanization and industrialization, see the comment at the end of the notes.

2. Not as funny as it was providential.

3. In the last chapter he mentioned that he had already begun to discuss some ideas with Father Cafasso. The manuscript shows that Don Bosco struggled with his phrasing, making two attempts before finally settling on "put into action my project," quite possibly aiming at simplicity of style.

4. A Piedmontese term used in jest or scorn for a German; cf. "Kraut."

5. After his first reception in the sacristy, why did the boy come back at all? Perhaps Don Bosco had shouted loudly enough at Comotti that the boy overheard even as he fled; perhaps once or twice he had been among the "crowd of boys" that followed Don Bosco through the streets and "even into the sacristy." He must have had an inkling of Don Bosco's sympathy.

6. *Amorevolezza*, one of the three key words of the Preventive System (together with "reason" and "religion").

7. Cf. his ordination resolution number 8. No doubt a "due thanksgiving" in this case was not one that would have kept the boy waiting for fifteen minutes.

8. According to the 1848 census of the Kingdom of Sardinia, half the population of Piedmont, a third of Liguria's, and a tenth of Sardinia's were literate — this all within a State where an education reform law in 1822 had mandated free primary schools in every commune (chapter I, note 15). Piedmont was the most literate region in the Italian peninsula (Clark, p. 36). The whole of united Italy was but 26% literate in 1861. Ten years later only 33% of the persons marrying could sign the parish register themselves; in contrast, 77% in England and Wales could do so (Clark p.35).

The Turinese were the most literate of the Piedmontese. The 1848 census revealed that 50.7% of them could read and Write. The majority of those who could not were women: 33,119 of them (49.3% of the female poulace, 60% of the illiterates). Only 31.5% (22,856) of men and boys were illiterate. Of all those unable to read or write, 29,364 were under the age of twenty — well over half the illiterates. Of course, many of these were not yet of school age. The under-twenty group of illiterates divides almost evenly between boys (47.7%) and girls (52.3%). That near-equality partly reflects the inclusion of the preschoolers; in 1840-1841 there were 519 girls attending nine elementary schools for the poor compared to 927 boys in ten schools (T. Bosco, BN, p. 109).

9. At this point Lemoyne inserts two further questions which he must have heard from Don Bosco. These questions shed light on Don Bosco's psychological and pedagogical approach to the young:

"Can you sing?"

Wiping his eyes, the boy stared in surprise at Don Bosco answered: "No."

"Can you whistle?"

The boy's face broke into a smile, which was what Don Bosco wanted, because it showed that the boy felt at ease. (BM II, 58)

The first thing was to win the boy's confidence, both in himself and in his would-be teacher.

10. This was not unusual (cf. chapter 4, note i).

11. When Don Bosco speaks of "feast days" and calls his work the "festive" Oratory, he means any day on which Mass was an obligation, the numerous holy days and Sundays alike; these days were also public holidays, meaning that young workers without families were left idle. The Siccardi Laws of 1850 reduced the holy days to six per year as regards civil observance.

12. Garelli continued to come to catechism for a time and brought some friends with him. Then he disappeared. All we know about him is that he visited the Oratory even after 1855 (BM II, 59).

13. Don Bosco's classic definition of the objectives of the Salesian work.

14. Don Bosco always dated not only his work but even the founding of the Salesian Society from this historic catechism lesson. When he was seeking letters of recommendation from various bishops in order to seek the Holy See's approval of the

Salesian Society, he introduced its history thus: "This Society's origins are found in the simple catechetical instructions conducted by Father John Bosco in a hall adjacent to St. Francis of Assisi Church ..." (BM IX, 35). Echoing this, the Salesian Constitutions today announce: "This Society had its beginning in a simple catechism lesson" (article 34). This is Don Bosco's first use of the word "Oratory" since the second sentence of chapter 3.

In this account, Don Bosco omitted one detail of great interest. After the sign of the cross, "he recited a Hail Mary, asking our Lady to give him the grace to save that boy's soul" (BM II, 59). He recalled this in 1885 during a conference for the Salesians: "All the blessings and graces showered upon us by heaven are the fruit of that first Hail Mary said with fervor and a right intention, together with young Bartholomew Garelli there in the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi" (MB XVII, 510).

Comment on Turin in the 1840s

The period 1830-1860 was a critical one in Turin's development into a great industrial center, surpassed in Italy only by Milan. The city, founded as a Roman colony, is well situated on the fertile plain where the Dora River joins the Po. The Alps form mighty ramparts on three sides of this plain.

By the late Middle Ages Turin had become the seat of the House of Savoy, one of Europe's oldest dynasties. The dukes not only played their powerful French and Austrian neighbors off against each other but managed generally to prosper in the process. As part of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), Victor Amadeus II assumed the title of king, which made Turin a royal capital. After the acquisition of Sardinia in 1720, the State was known as the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Census figures reveal the capital city's growth:

	1838	1848	Growth
Inhabitants	117,072	136,849	+16.9%
Families	26,351	33,040	+25.4%
Individuals per family	4.44	4.14	
Dwellings	2,615	3,289	+25.8%
Families per dwelling	10.08	10.05	

These figures represent only the stable population. The 1838 census also counted 1521 soldiers and 4787 students. Besides these there were uncounted migrant workers, convicts, and people, especially youngsters, living in the streets.

The figures for persons per family, of course, do not tell the story of the numbers of single individuals, especially young males, living and working (or looking for work) in the city; nor the size of actual families. Nor do the figures for families per dwelling reveal that there was a great disproportion between center-city mansions, which often took in tenants for their upper stories, and working-zone tenements.

The northern industrial areas of the city soon turned into slums, of which Borgo Dora was the worst. Its 1838 population of 11,579 grew to 20,000 by 1851; already in 1838 its average of 19.8 families per dwelling was far higher than the 15.3 of the whole northern zone. (See Woolf, p. 291.) All the characteristics of the urban slum were present here: crowding; unemployment and underemployment; hordes of youngsters; lack of hygiene, schooling, recreational opportunity, and city services; and virtually no pastoral care. (Cf. the description of Vanchiglia in chapter 50, note 20.)

The urban population continued to burgeon as Piedmont took the lead in Italian national affairs and liberal statesmen like Cavour pushed education and economic expansion. By 1858 Turin's population had grown another 31.4% to 179,835, and only three years later, when the first census of new Kingdom of Italy was taken, it was 204,715. This was roughly equal to the population of Leeds, Edinburgh, and Baltimore. It surpassed Sheffield's, Belfast's, and Boston's. London (over 3,000,000), Birmingham, Dublin, Glasgow, New York (814,000), Brooklyn, and Philadelphia were larger.

Of the other cities in the Italian peninsula, only Milan was growing comparably: a 27% increase in population from 1847 to 1861, to 240,000. Rome's population was slowly climbing; it reached 184,000 in 1860 (up 22.7% in twenty-five years). Italy's largest city since early modern times was Naples, whose population was holding steady around 450,000. Genoa's likewise was steady (less than 120,000 in 1861). Two other great cities were in demographic decline: Venice, down 10.9% to 122,000 between 1797 and 1845; and Palermo, down 7.6% to 194,000 between 1815 and 1861. (Woolf, pp. 283-284)

The transfer of the national capital to Florence in 1865 drastically slowed Turin's economic and demographic growth; a slow recovery during the 1870s was followed by a dynamic expansion in the 1880s, the last decade of Don Bosco's life.

The city's industrial expansion was concentrated in the northern sectors, where a system of canals connecting to the Dora River offered the necessary water power. These sectors, from west to east, were Martinetto, Valdocco, Borgo Dora, Pallone (or Balon), and Vanchiglia. Between 1830 and 1850 zoning laws required all industrial operations to relocate to these areas; they had been scattered throughout the city, including the residential city center.

The manufacture of heavy machinery, boilers, and similar products was concentrated in Borgo Dora. Martinetto specialized in textiles (cotton and silk), tanning and leatherwork, brickmaking, and tile kilns. Textiles and leather goods were also prominent in the Pallone district, where the public flour mills were located as well. Valdocco, on the other hand, remained mostly open fields, with a few taverns and brothels that gave it an unsavory reputation coexisting with two establishments that helped Turin earn fame as a center of religious and social charity, viz. the Cottolengo Institute and the works of Marchioness Barolo.

Women and children were a high percentage of the factory workers. Factory conditions, like those in Britain and the United States in the 1840s, were miserable. A worker earned a pittance of a wage (which was, nonetheless, more than a farm laborer earned) for fourteen-hour days (seventeen in peak silk season), five and a half or six days a week. In Turin in 1845, cotton spinners and weavers earned 188 lire per year, dyers 322, and bricklayers 500. White-collar workers took in anywhere from 500 to 2400 lire per year in 1850. (T. Bosco, SP, p. 76; Hearder, p. 63)

Further information on the socio-economic background in which Don Bosco began his labors may be gathered from Stella, *EcSo*; Stella, LW, pp. 101-107; Woolf, *History of Italy, 1700-1860*; Dicastero per la Formazione, *Sittsidi I per lo studio di Don Bosco e della sua opera: H tempo di Don Bosco*; Giuseppe Melano, *La popolazione di Torino e del Piemonte nel secolo XIX* (Turin, 1961); T. Bosco, BN, pp. 104-109.

Chapter 29

The First Days of the Oratory

The Oratory in 1842

All my efforts that winter' were concentrated on getting the little Oratory established. My aim was to bring together only those children who were in greatest danger, ex-prisoners by preference. Nevertheless, as a foundation on which to build discipline and morality, I invited some other boys of good character who had already been taught.² These helped me maintain order, and they read and sang hymns. From the very beginning I realised that without songbooks and suitable reading matter, these festive gatherings would have been like a body without a soul.³ In those days, the feast of the Purification (2 February)⁴ was still a holy day of obligation. On that day in 1842, I already had about twenty children with whom we were able to sing for the first time "Sing Praises to Mary, O Tongues of the Faithful."⁵

By the feast of the Annunciation to the Virgin,⁶ our numbers had risen to thirty. On that day we had a small celebration. In the morning, the pupils⁷ went to the holy sacraments. In the evening we sang a hymn, and after catechism we had a story by way of a sermon. Because the side chapel we had been meeting in could no longer contain our numbers, we moved into the sacristy chapel, which was nearby.

Our Oratory programme ran along these lines. On every feast day, the boys were given a chance to receive the holy sacraments of confession⁸ and communion. But one Saturday and Sunday each month was set aside for fulfilling this religious duty. We came together in the evening at a fixed time sang a hymn, had a catechism lesson followed by a story and then the distribution of something, sometimes to all, sometimes by lot.

Amongst the boys who came to the Oratory in its earliest days I would like to single out Joseph Buzzetti, who came regularly and gave good example. He had such an affection for Don Bosco and that feast day gathering that he refused to go home to his family (at Caroline Ghiringhello), which the others, his brothers and friends, used to do.⁹ His three brothers, Charles,¹⁰ Angelo, and Joshua, were also outstanding. John Gariboldi and his brother were then only lads, and now they are master bricklayers.

As a rule the Oratory boys included stonecutters, bricklayers, stuccoers, road pavers, plasterers, and others who came from distant villages.¹¹ They were not church-goers, and had few friends; so they were exposed to the dangers of perversion, especially on feast days.

Good Doctor Guala and Fr Caffasso enjoyed these assemblies of the children. They gladly supplied me with holy pictures, leaflets, pamphlets, medals, small crucifixes to give as gifts. At times they provided me with the means to clothe some of those in greater need, and to feed others for weeks at a time until they were able to support themselves by their work. Moreover, as the boys' numbers grew they sometimes gave me permission to gather my little army in the adjoining courtyard for recreation. If space had allowed, we would have been a hundred; but we had to restrict ourselves to about eighty.¹²

When the boys were preparing for the holy sacraments, Dr Guala or Pr Caffasso would always come along for a visit and tell some edifying story. Dr Guala wanted to make a special feast in honour of St Anne,³ the feast

of the bricklayers; after the morning ceremonies he invited all of them to breakfast with him. Almost a hundred gathered in the big conference hall. There all were provided with ample provisions of coffee, milk, chocolate, pastries, cakes, semolina, and other sweet dainties much loved by children. The noisy excitement of that feast can be imagined, and the numbers that could have come if we had had the room!

On feast days, I gave all my time to my youngsters. During the week I would go to visit them at their work in factories or workshops.¹⁴ Not only the youngsters were happy to see a friend taking care of them; their employers were pleased, gladly retaining youngsters who were helped during the week, and even more on feast days, when they are in greater danger.

On Saturdays, my pockets stuffed sometimes with tobacco, sometimes with fruit, sometimes with rolls, I used to go to the prisons. My object always was to meet the youngsters who had the misfortune to find themselves behind bars, help them, make friends with them, and thus encourage them to come to the Oratory when they had the good fortune of leaving that place of punishment.

Notes

1. The winter of 1841-1842.
2. Don Bosco realized from the first the value of peer ministry. "Those who had been taught" could catechize small groups of boys, especially younger ones, or at least read to them from the catechism. We should not imagine Don Bosco lecturing to eighty or a hundred boys, ranging in age from seven to twenty and having various degrees of previous instruction.
3. "An oratory without music is a body without a soul" became one of Don Bosco's favorite aphorisms (cf. BM XV, 41).
4. Today called the feast of the Presentation of the Lord.
5. The hymn *Lodate Maria, O lingue fedeli* was a favorite among the Salesians. It figures in Don Bosco's dream of the raft (BM VIII, 143-150, at 146-147).
6. March 25, also a holy day at that time.
7. Don Bosco calls them *allievi*, a word that he will use repeatedly and apparently casually. It reminds Salesians that their past pupils include youths from their clubs and parishes as well as from their schools.
8. Don Bosco himself did not yet have faculties to hear confessions. He would have relied upon others, including Fathers Guala and Cafasso, for this ministry.
9. Buzzetti (1832-1891) became a distinguished member of the Salesian Society as a coadjutor brother. He had taken the cassock, intending to become a priest, but he lost a finger in an accident and had to lay aside that hope (see chapter 55, note 24). He stayed with Don Bosco anyway, serving as a much valued administrative aide. Almost every volume of the BM mentions him. A brief biography is presented in the *Dizionario Biografico dei Salesiani*, ed. Eugenio Valentini et al. (Turin: Ufficio Stampa Salesiano, 1969), p. 61, and a longer one in Eugenio Ceria, *Profili di 33 coadiutori salesiani* (Colle Don Bosco: LDC, 1952); in

English, see Enzo Bianco, *Don Bosco's Lay Religious*, trans. Peter Swain (New Rochelle: Don Bosco Publications, 1984), I, 48-51 (Indian ed., *Religious for Modern Times*, pp. 50-53). For longer biographies, see Stella, *EcSo*, p. 159, n. 4.

Construction work was seasonal, usually from April to December. During the winter layoffs, most apprentices and migrant workers returned to their families. Caronno Ghiringhello, now called Caronno Varesino, is a town in the province of Varese in Lombardy, about thirty miles north-northwest of Milan.

If Don Bosco's memory is accurate, Joseph came to Turin to work with his brothers (there were seven in all) when he was ten.

10. Charles Buzzetti (1829-1891) eventually became a contractor and built a number of buildings for Don Bosco at the Oratory, including the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. His death was noted in the *Bollettino salesiano* XV (1891), 112, as Joshua's (1841-1902) was later: XXVI (1902), 22.
11. Don Bosco emphasizes those who worked in the booming construction trades of the expanding city. Data on occupations for the 1840's are lacking, but in 1861 there were in Turin 1481 bricklayers, 81 plasterers and whitewashes, 61 pavers, 38 roofers, and 23 building painters (Stella, LW, p. 102, n. 5). It is unlikely that these figures include all the apprentices.

Regardless of their work, those who came from out of town, then as now, were naturally those most at risk in the city: uncomfortable with strange customs and dialect, most likely to be preyed upon by unscrupulous bosses, by landlords, or by gangs, least likely to have friends or family close by or to feel comfortable in church or catechism class. (Cf. John's feelings on first arriving in Chieri, chapter 7.)

On the kinds of boys who frequented the Oratory, see the comment below.

12. The courtyard is so small that one wonders how Don Bosco could have gotten half that many boys into it, at least for recreation.
13. July 26.
14. Don Bosco pioneered the apostolate of going to workers in their shops and factories rather than waiting for them to come to the church or approach the clergy.

Comment on the Oratory Boys of the 1840s

The boys and young men whom Don Bosco drew to himself in the first ten years of the Oratory can be divided into three classes:

1. Those who came from the country, even from other regions (the Val d'Aosta, Lombardy, Liguria, and as far away as Venetia and Savoy), to find seasonal work and opportunity in the city. After 1850 these became fewer in number; as the city grew, permanent residents made them unnecessary.

2. Those who lived in the tenements of the industrial zones where there were no schools and few parishes: they were often dirty, smelly, ill, and unsupervised. Even if they lived with responsible parents, these might be working ninety hours a week during peak times.

3. Those who attended tiny Catholic elementary schools for the poor, run by the Christian Brothers. In attendance they were the most consistent element of the Oratory, the best instructed, and generally the most easily guided.

The youngsters in the first two categories were those "poor and abandoned youths" who were Don Bosco's first concern. When they could not find jobs or were idle on Sundays and holy days, they tended to form gangs {"bad companions"} and get into trouble: legal, moral, or both. Their attendance at the Oratory fluctuated a great deal, depending on the season, work, and other factors. The boys in the third group were 10 "leaven" the mass; of course, since most of them lived in the same neighborhoods as the others, Don Bosco was also using prevention in their case.

The 1861 census counted 885 poor males (all ages) without a profession, 13,603 other males without a profession, 1222 day laborers without a specific trade, and 10,098 male students (Stella, LW, p. 102. n. 4). These figures add up to almost 25% of Turin's stable male population.

The youths who frequented the Oratory were generally not young boys but adolescents and young men. About three-quarters were between eleven and fifteen; many were in their late teens, and a few in their early twenties. After the establishment of the Oratory hospice in the 1850s, the average age came down. See Stella, *EsCo*, pp. 159-162.

Chapter 30

Move to Valdocco¹

The sacred ministry • Taking a post at the Refuge (Sept. 1844)

At that time I began to preach publicly in some of the churches in Turin, in the Hospital of Charity, in the Hospice of Virtue,² in the prisons,³ and in the College of St Francis of Paola. I preached triduums,⁴ novenas, and retreats. After two years of moral theology I did my examination for faculties to hear confessions.⁵ This put me in a better position to cultivate discipline, morality, and the good of the souls of my youngsters in the prisons, at the Oratory, or at work..

It was consoling for me to see forty or fifty youngsters outside my confessional during the week and especially on feast days, waiting hours and hours for their turns for confession. This is how things normally ran at the Oratory for nearly three years, up to the end of October 1844.⁶

Meanwhile, new things, changes, and even tribulations were being prepared by Divine Providence.⁷

When I had completed three years of moral theology,⁸ I had to undertake some specific sacred ministry. Comollo's uncle Fr Joseph Comollo, parish priest of Cinzano, was now advanced in years and sick. He was advised by the archbishop to ask me to help him administer his parish, which he was too old and infirm to handle any longer.⁹ Dr Guala himself dictated my letter of thanks to Archbishop Fransoni; he was preparing me for something else.¹⁰

One day, Father Caffasso took me aside and said, "Now that you've finished your studies, you must get to work. These days the harvest is abundant enough." What is your particular bent?"

"Whatever you would like to point me towards." "There are three posts open: curate at Buttigliera d'Asti, tutor in moral theology here at the Convitto, and director¹² the little hospital beside the Refuge.¹³ Which would you choose?"

"Whatever you judge best."

"Don't you feel any preference for one thing rather than for another?"

"My inclination is to work for young people.¹⁴ So do with me whatever you want.¹⁵ I shall know the Lord's will in whatever you advise."

"At the moment what's the wish nearest your heart? What's on your mind?"

"At this moment I see myself in the midst of a multitude of boys appealing to me for help."

"Then go away for a few weeks' holiday. When you come back I'll tell you your destination." I came back from the holiday,¹⁶ but for several weeks Fr Caffasso never said a word. And I asked him nothing.

One day he said to me, "Why don't you ask me about your destination?"

"Because I want to see the will of God in your choice, and I don't want my desires in it at all."¹⁷

"Pack your bag and go with Dr Borrelli. You'll be director at the Little Hospital of St Philomena, and you'll also work in the Refuge."¹⁸ Meanwhile God will show you what you have to do for the young."

At first this advice seemed to cut across my inclinations. With a hospital to take care of, preaching and confessions in an institute for more than four hundred girls, there would be no time for anything else. Nevertheless this was the will of heaven, as I was soon assured.

From the first moment that I met Dr Borrelli, I always judged him to be a holy priest, a model worthy of admiration and imitation. Every time I was able to be with him, he always gave me lessons in priestly zeal, always good advice, encouraging me in doing good. During my three years at the Convitto, he often invited me to help at the sacred ceremonies, hear confessions, or preach for him.

Thus I already knew and was somewhat familiar with my field of work. We often had long discussions about procedures to be followed in order to help each other in visiting the prisons, fulfilling the duties entrusted to us, and at the same time helping the youngsters whose moral condition and neglect made increasing demands on priests. But what could I do? Where could I bring these youngsters together?

Dr Borrelli said, "For the time being you can bring the boys who are coming to St Francis of Assisi to the room set aside for you."¹⁹ When we move to the building provided for the priests beside the little hospital, we can scout around for a better place."

Notes

1. The Valdocco district is located between the remains of the ancient city wall and the Dora River, northwest of the piazza della Repubblica (the huge public square formerly called piazza Emanuele Filiberto, popularly known as Porta Palazzo). It may take its name (Latin, *vallis + occisorum*) from the tradition that three Roman soldiers of the Theban legion (Saints Octavius, Solutor, and Adventor) were slain there for their Christian faith, ca. 300 A.D. (see chapter 31, note 9). There was no parish church in Valdocco; it was part of Saints Simon and Jude parish in Borgo Dora.

2. This hospice sheltered about a hundred youngsters.

3. There were four prisons in Turin: in the towers near Porta Palazzo, in via San Domenico, near the Church of the Holy Martyrs, and in the cellars under the Senate (Palazzo Madama).

4. Three-day programs of sermons or other devotions.

5. Archbishop Fransoni had already instructed Fathers Guala and Cafasso to examine Don Bosco's suitability for hearing confessions so that he might be granted provisional faculties (letter of November 30, 1842; BM II, 100). The final examination was given when the young priest completed the two-year program in pastoral and moral theology. The document granting Don Bosco permanent faculties is dated June 10, 1843.

On Don Bosco's qualities as a confessor, see Stella, LW, pp. 90-91; BM II, 67-68, 116-117, 119-122; BM III, 329-333.

6. That is, until just before the new school year began at the Convitto and he moved to the Refuge, as he will recount.

7. In this chapter, especially in his relationship with Father Cafasso, we see how completely Don Bosco wishes to subordinate himself to God's will. The lesson of his dream after Father Calosso's death (chapter 6) has been learned well.

8. The Convitto program lasted two years, but the students most outstanding for academics and piety could do a third year. Father Guala granted such a third year to Don Bosco. He was given a post as a special tutor, and some students who found the courses rather heavy going were put into his special care.

9. Father Comollo died February 1, 1843, aged eighty-six. At this point in his draft, Don Bosco left a note for Father Berto: "Cf. the letter." This is the above-mentioned letter of November 30, 1842, in which the archbishop asks Don Bosco to go to Cinzano and instructs him to see Father Guala about faculties for confession, which he would need in that ministry.

10. Fathers Guala and Cafasso had something else in mind for Don Bosco and wanted to prevent the archbishop from moving him permanently away from the city.

11. An allusion to Matthew 9:37.

12. That is, chaplain.

13. Marchioness Barolo had founded two institutions in Valdocco along via Cottolengo near the Little House of Divine Providence (the Cottolengo Institute). The first of these was a halfway house for prostitutes trying to reform. From its patroness, Mary Refuge of Sinners, it was known as the Refuge. The Little Magdalen House was for abandoned and runaway girls less than fourteen years old; Father Mark Anthony Durando was its religious superior for thirty-three years. In 1844 the marchioness began construction on a third charitable enterprise, a small hospital for girls, dedicated to Saint Philomena. Father Borel was the chaplain of these works, and he asked for an assistant. He and Don Bosco had rooms in the Refuge. The Oratory met in the priests' quarters of the unfinished hospital in 1844-1845.

Juliet Frances Colbert de Maulevrier (1785-1864), the childless widow of Marquis Charles Tancred Falletti of Barolo (1782-1838), was a highly cultured and wealthy woman, much esteemed at court. A polished writer and a connoisseuse of art, she kept a salon whose guests included Balbo, Balzac, Cavour, d'Azeglio, Lamartine, Maistre, Pellico, Sclopis, and others.

She was a truly pious person whose spiritual guides included Fathers Lanteri and Cafasso. Fathers Borel and Cafasso both warned Don Bosco that she tended to be domineering, but she was truly struggling to overcome that fault.

In addition to her regular devotions, she did penance, visited the women's prison, nursed the sick, sponsored numerous schools and other works of charity, founded two congregations of sisters, and planned to found a congregation of priests under the patronage of Saint Francis de Sales. Her religious and educational ministry in the women's prison induced her to found works to keep girls from getting into trouble and to help young women who wished to reform, and so her works in Valdocco were born. (BM II, 182-185; T. Bosco, BN, pp. 125-126)

14. This is one of the rare instances when Don Bosco uses the generic *gioventu* rather than a strictly masculine form. It is fair to say that he saw the need for an apostolate among girls and young women. In fact, he spent nearly two years (November 1844 to July 1846) working directly with girls in the Barolo institutions. But he concluded that his own direct calling—in a culture that strictly separated boys and girls in social settings—was to work with boys and young men.

15. An echo of Luke 1:38.

16. During his "Vacation" Don Bosco preached a ten-day retreat at the town of Canelli, about forty miles southwest of Turin, about midway between Alba and Acqui. He followed this by preaching the novena for the feast of the Rosary at Castelnuovo, during which he visited his mother and brother at Becchi. (BM II 178-179)

17. There almost seems to be a game of cat and mouse in this dialog between the two saints, which must have exasperated Father Cafasso. Knowing the thoughts, feelings, and inclinations of one's client is an essential part of giving spiritual direction, as Don Bosco did not seem to realize fully at this point. He realized it when he wrote the Introduction to the Salesian Constitutions (see ed. 1957, pp. 45-50; ed. 1967, pp. 52-58).

18. Father Borel introduced Don Bosco to the marchioness, who was at once impressed by his attitude of recollection and simplicity; to her these marked him as a holy person (BM II, 360). She was so eager to secure his services for her institutions that she not only assigned him a stipend of six hundred lire per year but also granted him permission to continue his work with boys and young men. Don Bosco, in turn, "detected a great humility under her majestic demeanor, and sensed that her reserve and noble bearing were blended with the affability and kindness of a mother ..." (BM II 185).

The Refuge is located at 26 via Cottolengo: the Little Hospital is next door at no. 24.

19. At the Refuge, as a temporary expedient until new quarters adjacent to the hospital were completed. In fact, Don Bosco never moved into the hospital, but the Oratory did meet there, as mentioned in note 13, above.

Chapter 31

Another Dream

In the second Sunday in October 1844, I had to tell my boys that the Oratory would be moving to Valdocco. But the uncertainty of place, means, and personnel had me really worried. The previous evening I had gone to bed with an uneasy heart. That night I had another dream,¹ which seems to be an appendix to the one I had at Becchi when I was nine years old. I think it advisable to relate it literally.

I dreamt that I was standing in the middle of a multitude of wolves, goats and kids, lambs, ewes, rams, dogs, even birds. All together they made a din, a racket, or better, a bedlam to frighten the stoutest heart. I wanted to run away, when a lady dressed as a shepherdess signaled me to follow her and accompany that strange flock while she went ahead. We wandered from place to place, making three stations or stops. Each time we stopped, many of the animals were turned into lambs, and their number continually grew. After we had walked a long way, I found myself in a field where all the animals grazed and gambled together and none made attacks on the others.

Worn out, I wanted to sit down beside a nearby road, but the shepherdess invited me to continue the trip. After another short journey, I found myself in a large courtyard with porticoes all round. At one end was a church.² I then saw that four-fifths of the animals had been changed into lambs and their number greatly increased. Just then, several shepherds came along to take care of the flock; but they stayed only a very short time and promptly went away.³

Then something wonderful happened. Many of the lambs were transformed into shepherds, who as they grew took care of the others. As the number of shepherds became great, they split up and went to other places to gather other strange animals and guide them into other folds.⁴

I wanted to be off because it seemed to me time to celebrate Mass; but the shepherdess invited me to look to the south. I looked and saw a field sown with maize, potatoes, cabbages, beetroot, lettuce, and many other vegetables.

"Look again," she said to me.

I looked again and saw a wondrously big church.⁵ An orchestra and music, both instrumental and vocal, were inviting me to sing Mass. Inside the church hung a white banner on which was written in huge letters, *Hic domus mea, inde gloria mea.*⁶

As my dream continued, I wanted to ask the shepherdess where I was. And I wanted to know the meaning of that journey with its halts, the house,⁷ the church, then the other church.

"You will understand everything when you see in fact with your bodily eyes what you are looking at now with the eyes of your mind."

Thinking that I was awake, I said, "I see clearly, and I see with my bodily eyes. I know where I'm going and what I'm doing." But at that moment the bell of the Church of St Francis sounded the *Ave Maria*,⁸ and I woke up.

This dream lasted most of the night. I saw it all in great detail. But at the time I understood little of its meaning since I put little faith in it. But I understood little by little as the dream began to come true. Later, together with another dream,⁹ it served as a blueprint for my decisions.¹⁰

Notes

1. On Don Bosco's dreams, see chapter 2, comment.

Lemoyne and Ceria reconstruct that Don Bosco had six dreams between 1830 and 1845 that gradually clarified the one which he experienced at the age of nine or ten. Each succeeding dream explained the previous one and added something to it. Two have been mentioned already: when he was about fifteen, he was reproached for not sufficiently trusting in God (chapter 6), and when he was nineteen, he was instructed to take care of young people (chapter 16, note 2).

He does not mention two other dreams in the *Memoirs*. From one that came when he was twenty-one he learned what type of boys he should work with (BM I, 285). The next year he learned that he was to work in Turin (BM I, 315-316).

The fifth and sixth dreams —the one narrated here and the one recounted in note 9, below—tell of the rise of a great work in the fields of Valdocco and of his helpers' origins. They announce the Salesian Oratory of Turin, the founding of the Salesian Society, and its spread.⁸ There are considerable problems with this six-dream reconstruction, including Lemoyne's identification of the 1830 dream with the one described to him by Joseph Turco. See Desramaut, *LesMem*, pp. 250-257.

2. The courtyard and porticoes are the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales; the church is the Church of Saint Francis de Sales, built in 1852 (chapter 55).

3. A number of priests and seminarians helped Don Bosco for a while, then left him. Father Borel alone stayed through thick and thin. (See chapters 38, 52, and 53.)

4. With the exception of Father Victor Alasonatti (1812-1865), the seventeen men who joined Don Bosco in formally establishing the Salesian Society in December 1859 had all been youngsters at the Oratory.

5. The Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, constructed between 1863 and 1868. The field where it was to be built became known as "the field of the dreams" on account of this and the next dream (note 9).

6. Latin: "This is my house; from it my glory will go forth."

7. The building with the porticoes, i.e. the Pinardi house and its annex.

8. The morning Angelas bell at Saint Francis of Assisi Church; Don Bosco had not yet moved from the Convitto. The Angelus includes three Hail Mary's. g. On February 2, 1875, Don Bosco related this dream to Fathers Barberis and Lemoyne (BM II, 232—233):

I seemed to be in a vast meadow with a huge crowd of boys who were fighting, swearing, stealing, and doing other blamable things. The air was thick with flying stones, hurled by youngsters who were fighting. They were all abandoned boys, devoid of moral principles. I was about to turn away when I saw a Lady beside me. "Go among those boys," she said, "and work."

I approached them, but what could I do? I had no place to gather them, but I wanted to help them. I kept turning to some people who were watching from a distance, and who could have come to my aid, but no one paid attention or gave me any assistance. I then turned to the Lady. "Here is a place," she said, and pointed to a meadow.

"That's only a meadow," I said.

She replied: "My Son and His Apostles did not even have a place to lay their heads" [Cf. Matt. 8:20]. I began to work in that meadow, counseling, preaching, hearing confessions, but I saw *that* almost all my efforts were in vain. I had to have some building where I could gather and house those abandoned by their parents and those despised and rejected by society. Then the Lady led me a little further to the north and said: "Look!"

I did so and saw a small church with a low roof, a small courtyard, and a great number of boys. I resumed my work, but since the church was becoming too small, I again appealed to the Lady and she pointed out another church, much larger, and a house adjacent to it. Then she took me closer, to a field that was tilled and that lay almost opposite the facade of this new church. "In this place," she added, "where the glorious martyrs of Turin, Adventor and Octavius, suffered martyrdom, on these clods soaked and sanctified by their blood, I wish that God be honored in a very special manner." So saying, she put out her foot and pointed to the exact spot where the martyrs had fallen. I wanted to leave a marker there so as to find the place again when I returned, but I could not see a single stick or stone. Nevertheless, I kept the place clearly in mind. It coincides exactly with . . . the front left corner as one faces the main altar of the Church of Mary Help of Christians.

In the meantime, I found myself being surrounded by a very vast and ever increasing number of boys, but, as I kept looking to the Lady, the premises and the means were also growing accordingly. I saw then a very grand church on the very spot she had pointed out as the place where the soldiers of the Theban legion had been martyred. There were a great many buildings all around, and in the center stood a beautiful monument,

While these things were taking place and I was still dreaming, I saw that priests and clerics were helping me, but after a while, they left. I tried everything to get others to stay, but after a while they too left me alone. Then I turned once more to the Lady for help. "Do you want to know what to do to keep them?" she asked. "Take this ribbon and bind their foreheads with it." Reverently I took the white ribbon from her hand and noticed the word *Obedience* written on it. I immediately gave it a try and began to bind the foreheads of these volunteers. The ribbon worked wonders, as I went ahead with the mission entrusted to me. All my helpers gave up the idea of leaving me, and stayed on. Thus was our Congregation born.

The ribbon symbolizes religious profession, whose key in the Salesian tradition is the vow of obedience.

The first church mentioned in this dream is the chapel in the Pinaridi shed (chapter 39); the second, the Church of Saint Francis de Sales, next to the Pinaridi house (chapter 55); and the last, large one, the basilica. The spot indicated by our Lady is at the entrance of the Chapel of the Relics in the basement, marked by a golden tile.

Since this dream explains the one narrated in the *Memoirs*, it must have occurred subsequently. The meadow appears to be the field belonging to the Filippi brothers (chapters 36 and 39); so the dream must have occurred between the Oratory's move from the Refuge (August 1845: chapter 33) and the end of its stay at the Moretta house (February 1846: chapter 36). The eight-month period of the "wandering Oratory" (August 1845 to April 1846) was one of the greatest strain and anxiety for Don Bosco; the dream evidently was to strengthen and encourage him. (An excellent chronology of the Oratory's wanderings, consolidation, and expansion from 1841 to 1851 is presented in Giraud and Biancardi, pp. 118-119.)

When Don Bosco was building the basilica, he asked his learned friend Canon Lawrence Gastaldi (the future archbishop) to research where the martyrs had shed their blood. The canon concluded that they had died outside the city walls near the Dora Gate in the general area where the Oratory was located. He published his findings in the January 1866 issue of *Catholic Readings* under the title *Biography of Saints Solutor, Adventor, and Octavius*. In the dream, our Lady mentioned only the last two since the first escaped from Turin and was captured and executed at Ivrea, some twenty-seven miles north-northwest of Turin.

10. In his transcription of the dream (BM II, 190-191), Lemoyne misread Father Berto's manuscript as amended by Don Bosco. Lemoyne added "at the Refuge" after "for my decisions"; but "at the Refuge" is actually part of the title of the next chapter. See illustrations.

Chapter 32

The Oratory at the Refuge

On the second Sunday of October,¹ feast of the maternity of Mary, I broke the news to my youngsters that the Oratory would be moving to the Refuge. At first they were somewhat upset; but when I told them of the spacious grounds waiting just for us to sing, run, jump and enjoy ourselves, they were pleased. They eagerly looked forward to the next Sunday, to see the new situation which seized their imaginations.

The third Sunday of October was dedicated to the purity of the Virgin Mary. A little after noon a mob of youngsters of all ages and conditions descended on Valdocco looking for the new Oratory. "Where's the Oratory? Where's Don Bosco?" they shouted to all and sundry.

No one knew what they were talking about. No one in that neighbourhood had heard of either Don Bosco or the Oratory. The questioners, believing that they were being teased, raised their voices more insistently. The locals, believing that they were being insulted, shouted indignant threats. Matters were getting serious when Dr Borrelli and I heard the commotion and came out of the house. At sight of us, the noise died down and calm was restored. The boys crowded round us asking where the Oratory was.

We had to tell them that the real Oratory was not ready yet, but meantime they could come to my room. It was quite big and would serve us well enough. In fact things went quite well that Sunday. But on the following Sunday, many pupils from the locality came in addition to the ones that I no longer knew where to gather them. My room, the corridor, the stairs were all thronged with children.

On the feast of All Saints, Dr Borrelli and I prepared to hear confessions. But everybody wanted to go; what could we do? There were more than two hundred children but only two confessors. One boy was trying to light the fire; another decided to put it out. The one brought wood, the other water. Buckets, tongs, shovel, jug, basin, chairs, shoes, books—everything was turned topsy-turvy while they were trying to tidy things up!

"We can't go on like this," said the dear Doctor. "We really must find a more suitable place."

Yet we spent six feast days in that restricted space, which was the room above the main entrance hall of the Refuge. Meantime, we went to speak to Archbishop Fransoni. He understood how important our project was.

"Go," he told us, "and do what you think best for souls. I give you all the faculties you may need. Speak with Marchioness Barolo. She may be able to provide better accommodations for you. But tell me, couldn't these hoys be taken care of in their own parishes?"

"For the most part," [I replied,] "these youngsters are foreigners² who spend only a part of the year in Turin. They don't have any idea what parishes they belong to. Many of them are badly off, speaking dialects hard to understand, so that they understand little and are little understood by others. Some are already grown up and don't

like associating in classes with little boys."

"That means," continued the archbishop, "they need a place of their own, adapted to their own needs. Go ahead, therefore. I bless you and your project. If I can be of service to you, come by all means, and I will always help in any way I can."

I went in fact to speak with Marchioness Barolo. As the little hospital was not to be opened till August of the following year, that charitable lady was happy to put at our disposal for use as a chapel two large rooms intended for the recreation of the priests of the Refuge when they should transfer their residence there. Access to the new Oratory, therefore, was through where the door of the hospital is now, along an alley running between the Cottolengo Institute and the aforementioned building, to what is now the priests' residence, and inside up to the 3rd floor.³

That was the site Divine Providence chose for the first Oratory church.⁴ We began to call it after St Francis de Sales for two reasons: 1st, because Marchioness Barolo had in mind to found a congregation of priests, under his patronage, and with this intention she had a painting of this saint done, which can still be seen at the entrance to this area;⁵ 2nd, because we had put our own ministry, which called for great calm and meekness, under the protection of this saint in the hope that he might obtain for us from God the grace of being able to imitate him in his extraordinary meekness and in winning souls.⁶

We had a further reason for placing ourselves under the protection of this saint: that from heaven he might help us to imitate him in combating errors against religion, especially Protestantism, which was beginning to gain ground in our provinces, and more especially in the city of Turin.⁷

On 8 December 1844, a day dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the long-awaited chapel was blessed, with the archbishop's permission.⁸ It was a bitterly cold day. There was deep snow, and it was still snowing heavily. Holy Mass was celebrated, and many youngsters went to confession and communion. I finished that sacred liturgy with a few tears, tears of joy, because in a certain way I saw that the work of the Oratory was now established, with the object of entertaining the more abandoned and endangered youths after they had fulfilled their religious duties in church.

Notes

1. October 13, 1844.

2. Don Bosco's use of "foreigners" rather than "visitors" or "migrants" added weight to his point Turin counted fourteen parishes within the old city and just two in the swarming industrial zones. The pastors and their curates were no more prepared to cope with an exploding immigrant population than were their American counterparts at the end of the nineteenth century.

In a similar situation at Milan, the local clergy had long since organized festive oratories to meet the needs of the displaced young. Some of Turin's young priests were available and interested in tackling the problem. There certainly were enough priests around: 851 of them in Turin in 1838, i.e. one for every 137 permanent residents. In 1840 Father John Cocchi (1813-1895) established the first oratory for poor and abandoned boys in Annunciation parish in the filthiest section of Turin, called *Moschino* (Gnat). He named it the Guardian Angel Oratory. The next year he moved it to Vanchiglia. (Stella. *LIV*. pp. 106-107; cf- PP- 86-8?)

3. In American terms, the fourth floor. The alley is the viale delle Maddalene, which opens into 22 via Cottolengo.

4. What Don Bosco calls a "church" is more properly called a "chapel." While the Oratory was associated with Saint Francis of Assisi Church, it had no particular patron. At an unspecified time Don Bosco began to think of this lack: he and Father Cafasso independently arrived at the choice of Saint Francis de Sales (BM II, 196), but apparently the name was adopted only after the move to Saint Philomena's Hospital. Stella has published an essay on the relationship between Don Bosco and Saint Francis: "Don Bosco e S. Francesco di Sales: Incontro fortuito o identità spirituale?" in Picca and Strus, *San Francesco di Sales*, pp. 139-159 (a rough translation of this article is available in photocopy from Don Bosco Publications). For further investigation, see Pedrini, *St. Francis de Sales, Don Bosco's Patron*, and the whole of Picca and Strus.

5. Time and weather have since obliterated the mural.

6. In defining the scope of the festive oratories in their Regulations (published around 1852), Don Bosco wrote:

This oratory is placed under the patronage of Saint Francis de Sales, because those who intend to dedicate themselves to this kind of work should adopt this saint as a model of charity and affability. These sources will produce the fruits that we expect from the oratories. (BM III. 68)

This tallies with the fourth resolution he made at his ordination.

7. The nineteenth century was not an ecumenical age, and Don Bosco's relations with Protestants, generally, were anything but friendly.

Protestantism, technically, was illegal in the Kingdom of Sardinia. But for centuries isolated communities of Waldensians (see chapter 48) had dwelt in the Val d'Aosta. In the great migrations to the cities, they and their ministers came too. Pressures for legal toleration grew (to be granted in 1848), and they began to proselytize, especially in the pastorally neglected areas of town. Missionary societies, particularly in Great Britain, eagerly subsidized their works. This chapel was the first of the three stopping places shown to Don Bosco in his dreams. The second would be at the Dora Mills, and the third, at Father Moretta's house.

Chapter 33

The Oratory out of the Refine

The Oratory at St Martin of the Mills • Difficulties • The hand of the Lord

Our chapel beside St Philomena's Hospital was coming along nicely. On feast days, youngsters came in big numbers to make their confessions and go to communion. After Mass there was a short explanation of the gospel. In the afternoon we had catechism lessons, hymn singing, a short instruction, the litany of our Lady, and benediction.¹ Various intervals were filled with games and amusements, which took place in the alley which still runs between the convent of the Little Magdalens and the public road. We spent seven months there. We thought that we had found heaven on earth; then we had to leave our beloved asylum and go look for another.

Marchioness Barolo, though she cast a kindly eye on every charitable work, still, as the opening of her little hospital approached (it opened 10 August 1845), wanted our Oratory far away before then. It is true that the area we had been using had no internal communication with what was to be the chapel, the school, or the recreation center. Even the shutters were fixed in place and turned upwards.² None the less we had to obey.

We positively pestered the municipal government of Turin.³ Through the kind offices of Archbishop Fransoni, we were allowed to move our oratory to the church of St Martin of the Mills, or rather, to the public mills. ⁴

Imagine us then, on a July Sunday⁵ in 1845, making our way laden with benches, kneelers, candlesticks, some chairs, crucifixes, and pictures large and small. Everyone carried some object suited to his strength. We must have looked like emigrants on the move; with laughter and din and misgivings we marched out to establish our headquarters in the place just indicated.

Dr Borrelli gave an appropriate talk before we set out and another when we arrived at our new church. That worthy minister of the sanctuary, who enjoyed a popularity more unique than rare, spoke these thoughts:

"My dear boys, cabbages never form a big, beautiful head unless they are transplanted. The same is true of our Oratory. So far it has been moved from one place to another many times,⁶ but in the different places where it has stopped it has always grown bigger, with no little advantage to the boys involved. We started at St Francis of Assisi with catechism and a little singing. That was as much as we could do there. At the Refuge we made just a whistle stop, as train travelers say, so that our boys might receive spiritual help by way of confession, catechism classes, sermons, and games during the months we were there.

"There, beside the little hospital a real Oratory began, and we thought we had found true peace, a place suitable for us. But Divine Providence ordained that we had to move again and come here to St Martin's. How long will we stay here? We don't know. We hope we'll be here a long time; but however long our stay, we believe that like transplanted cabbages, our Oratory will grow in the number of boys who love virtue, will increase their desire for music, singing, evening classes, and even day courses.

"Will we be here long, then? We mustn't let this thought worry us. Let's throw all our worries into the Lord's

hands: he'll take care of us. It's certain that he blesses us, helps us, and provides for us. He'll show us a good place for contributing to his glory and the good of our souls.

"Now the Lord's graces form a kind of chain with each link locked into the next; so if we turn to good account the graces he gives us, we are sure that God will grant us bigger graces. And if we fall in with the aims of the Oratory, we will progress from virtue to virtue, till we reach that blessed homeland where the infinite mercy of O.L.J.C. will reward each of us as his good works deserve."⁷

An immense crowd of youngsters attended that solemn ceremony, and a *Te Deum*⁸ of thanksgiving was sung with the greatest emotion.

We carried out our religious devotions as we had at the Refuge, though we could not celebrate Mass or give benediction in the evening.⁹ This meant that the boys could not receive communion, which is the fundamental element to our institution.¹⁰ Even our recreations were often disturbed, broken up because the lads were forced to play in the street and in the little square in front of the church where a constant stream of people on foot, carts, horses, and carriages passed by. Since we had nothing better, we thanked heaven for what we had been given and hoped for some better spot.

But fresh problems fell upon us. The millers, their apprentices, and other employees could not put up with¹¹ the jumping, the singing, and the occasional shouting of our pupils. They grew alarmed and agreed to lodge a complaint with the municipal government. It was then that people began to say that such meetings of youngsters were dangerous, that at any moment they could erupt in riots and revolution.¹² This fear was founded on the prompt obedience with which the boys responded to every little order of the superior. Without any foundation, it was added that the kids were doing untold damage in the church, outside the church, on the pavement. It seemed that if we continued meeting there Turin must be ruined.

Our troubles came to a head when a secretary at the mills wrote a letter to the mayor of Turin. In it he included all the vague rumours and amplified the imagined damages.* He said that the families connected with those businesses could not go about their duties in peace. He added, finally, that the Oratory was a hotbed of immorality.¹⁴

Though the mayor was convinced that these charges were unfounded, he wrote a stiff letter ordering us to take our Oratory elsewhere at once.¹⁵ General disappointment, useless sighing! We had to go.

It is worth noting, however, that the secretary, whose name is (never to be published),¹⁶ author of that famous letter, never wrote anything else. He was suddenly stricken by an uncontrollable shake in his right hand. Within three years he was dead. God permitted his son to be abandoned, thrown out into the street and obliged to seek food and lodging at the hospice which was open at that time in Valdocco.¹⁷

Notes

1. Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is a service of worship before the Holy Eucharist exposed on the altar; at its conclusion the priest blesses the worshippers with the Sacrament.

2. Their slats turned upwards.

3. Father Cafasso asked Countess Bosco of Ruffino, wife of one of the city council, to use her influence when Don Bosco's application was submitted. The application was rejected. But Don Bosco obtained a permit from city hall when he brought a recommendation from the archbishop, along with a petition from Father Borel. The permit was required because the site which he had in mind was municipal property.

4. The public mills stood at the northeastern corner of Porta Palazzo (piazza Emanuele Filiberto), where a canal provided the water power for grinding grain, pressing olives, and retting hemp. The site is now piazza Don Albera. A chapel dedicated to Saint Martin served the millers and their families and in Piedmontese gave its name to the general site: *San Martino dei Molassi* (Saint Martin of the Mills). In Italian the mills took their name, the Dora Mills, from the nearby river.

5. It was July 13.

6. The phrasing does not seem to suit the Oratory's situation if it has moved but twice, from Saint Francis Church to the Refuge to the mills. In fact, it was the third move, for events that will be described in the next chapter preceded the move to Saint Martin's.

7. Despite Don Bosco's categorical statement, omitted in his draft but added with the complete narration in Father Berto's copy, some have tried to attribute this sermon on the cabbages to Don Bosco himself rather than to Father Borel.

Giraudi clarified the matter (p. 44 n.):

In the part of the *History of the Oratory* which appeared in the May 1879 *Salesian Bulletin*, Father Bonetti quoted word for word from Don Bosco's memoirs. But in *St. John Bosco's Early Apostolate* [p. 22], which was published a few months after his death on June 5, 1891, he attributed this pep talk to Don Bosco instead of Father Borel. Ten years later Lemoyne repeated what *Early Apostolate* said [BM II, 239]. But Don Bosco's clarity, precision, and repetition leave no doubt.

Don Bosco viewed the galley proofs of the *History of the Oratory* and saw no need to alter what he had written about this detail of the move to the Dora Mills. The Salesian Central Archives, moreover, possess a copy of the sermon in Father Borel's hand (see reproduction in Ceria, MO, facing p. 148).

8. A liturgical hymn of praise traditionally used on major occasions of public thanksgiving; it ordinarily concludes the Office of Readings on Sundays and feast days as well.

9. Saint Martin's chaplain reserved these privileges to himself. Since the faithful who assisted at his Mass filled the chapel, Don Bosco had to take his boys to some other church in Turin for Mass and the sacraments.

10. The "institution" may be taken to be the Oratory, or perhaps the whole Salesian Family with its aims and its works.

Up to this time, no one in Piedmont had promoted frequent communion as Don Bosco did. It was and remains "the fundamental element" of his institutions, without which, he said, it is impossible to help a boy improve. See "Treatise on the Preventive System" (*Constitutions of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales*, ed. 1957, regulation 94; ed. 1985, p. 249 and article 36).

As our references to theological rigorism have indicated, not everyone approved of this. In the late 1850s a prominent Turinese priest reproved Don Bosco for encouraging his boys to approach the sacraments so often. He said it would be enough to go on the big

feasts. Don Bosco tried to convince him of the good effects deriving from frequent reception of the sacraments; when he did not succeed, he advised the priest to speak with Father Cafasso. It does not seem that he did so. Don Bosco later told the story to seminarian John Baptist Anfossi, who eventually became a canon of the cathedral and repeated it to Lemoyne in a letter (July 9, 1903; BM VI, 184-186).

11. Starting at "could not put up with," the rest of this chapter and the next one in the original manuscript are in Father Berto's hand. So is a marginal note at the beginning of the preceding paragraph. Later we shall come across a second passage in his script. Don Bosco's handwriting indicates that he made some modifications in them, so he obviously saw the two passages in the original and in the copy. Don Bosco probably instructed that a copy be made from something which he had already written, or possibly he dictated the text at these points.

12. Revolution was a touchy subject and not just rhetoric. Much of Europe had experienced revolution in 1820-1831 and again in 1830-1831. The military garrison at Alessandria had revolted in 1821, and King Victor Emmanuel I had felt obliged to abdicate before order was fully restored. Republicans like Mazzini were a constant source of worry to the absolutist Sardinian government. As if revolution by the masses were not enough of a concern, the Austrian army in Lombardy was ready to intervene if the Piedmontese should get any ideas about popular government or Italian nationalism. Under the surface of society were running the currents that would carry Europe, including Piedmont, to the epic events of 1848.

No doubt many of the complainants were also well aware of what kinds of boys gathered around Don Bosco: a few young schoolboys and a lot of delinquents, runaways, unemployed—potential troublemakers.

13. The footnote, too, is in Father Berto's handwriting.

14. The complaint may mean immorality in the broad sense, encompassing such activities as vandalism, theft, gambling. Don Bosco cast as *Oliver Twist's* Fagin! It may also be narrowly construed as a complaint that some of the kids were urinating into the canal (T. Bosco, SP, p. 115). "At once" in the sense of "without appeal." The city council's letter is dated November 18, 1845. It canceled Don Bosco's permit for Saint Martin's as of January 1, 1846.

In an unpublished foreword (entitled "A Brief History of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1841 to 1854") to an early manuscript of the Regulations of the Oratory. Don Bosco wrote:

We spent two tranquil months there, even though the place had many drawbacks. We could not celebrate Mass, give benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, or recreate freely. This calm heralded a storm to come. It was to strain the Oratory severely. The rumor went around that such boys' gatherings were dangerous, that in one moment they could pass from recreation to rebellion. A fine rebellion ignorant boys could stage without money or arms, lads who came together only to learn catechism, and who would have been frightened by a single crow flapping its wings. ... I tried my best to show that the rumors were baseless, all in vain. The clear-cut order was issued commanding us to leave at once the area that we had enjoyed.

This archival document is in Don BOSCO's own hand.

On the following Sundays, the Oratory used the church courtyard only as an assembly point and then went elsewhere (see chapter 35).

In September 1845, Don Bosco met Mickey Rua (1837-1910), who lived near the Dora Mills. His father had died in August, and Mickey and his brothers needed a new father. Thus the loving designs of Providence brought together Don Bosco and the boy who would become his right-hand man and first successor. (Cf. BM II, 248] Pope Paul VI beatified Michael Rua in 1972.

16. Don Bosco wrote the unfortunate secretary's name, but his wishes that it never be published have been rejected. This is an example of the saint's delicate charity.

17. The hospice, of course, was at the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales.

*The mayor sent an inspector, who found the walls, the outside pavement, the floor, everything about the church in good order. The only damage consisted of a little scratch on one wall, which a lad might have made with the end of a nail.¹³

Chapter 34

One Day at Saint Peter in Chains

Tiiechaplain's housekeeper • A letter • A sad event

Since the mayor and the city council in general were persuaded that the charges brought against us had no foundation, it was an easy matter for us, especially since we had the backing of the archbishop, to get permission to hold our meetings in the church and courtyard of the Cemetery of Christ Crucified, popularly known as St Peter in Chains.¹ So, after a two-month stay at St Martin's, we had to move to a new place.² Though we felt a bitter sadness about moving, the new place was more convenient for us. The long portico, the spacious yard, and the church for our sacred functions all so aroused the youngsters' enthusiasm that they were overcome with joy.

But in that place we came up against a formidable and unsuspected rival. This was not the ghost of one of the great numbers of the dead who slept peacefully in the nearby tombs. This was a living person, the chaplain's housekeeper. No sooner had she heard the pupils singing and talking, and, let us admit, their shouting too, than she rushed out of the house. In a furious rage, with her bonnet askew and her arms akimbo, she launched into tongue-lashing the crowd of merrymakers. Joining in her assault upon us were a small girl, a dog, a cat, all the hens, so that it seemed that a European war was about to break out. I tried to approach her to calm her down, pointing out to her that the kids meant no harm, that they were just playing innocently. Then she turned and gave it to me.

At that point I decided to end the recreation. I gave a short catechism lesson, and after we recited the rosary in church, we broke up hoping to come back the next Sunday to a better reception. Quite the contrary! When the chaplain came home that evening, the good housekeeper denounced Don Bosco and his sons as revolutionaries and desecrators of holy places. An undisciplined rabble, she said. She prevailed upon the good priest to write a letter to the civil authorities. He wrote while the servant dictated, but with so much venom that a warrant was issued immediately for the arrest of any of us who should return there.³

Sad to say, that was the last letter written by Fr Tesio, the chaplain. He wrote it on Monday, and within a few hours he suffered a stroke from which he died very soon afterwards.⁴ Two days later a similar fate befell the housekeeper.⁵ News of these events spread like wildfire and deeply impressed the souls of the boys and of everyone who heard it. Everyone had a mad desire to come and hear about these sorry cases.⁶

But since we were forbidden to meet at St Peter in Chains, and the time was so short to make alternative arrangements, no one, not even I, had any idea where our next meeting would take place.⁷

Notes

1. This was a shrine which the Valdocco vegetable sellers had built in 1746. It was a solid structure, with a porch, a spacious yard, and porticoes all around, located a block north of the Cottolengo Institute on via San Pietro in Vincoli. Beside it was a cemetery no longer used for burials. The proper name of the place was the Cemetery of Christ Crucified. The chapel was demolished in 1934, but a mausoleum remains.

The Italian *San Pietro in Vincoti* was caricatured in Piedmontese: *Sail Pe' d'ij Coj*, "Saint Peter of the Cabbages," probably because of the vegetable growers who built it. When we realize that the Oratory's brief relationship with this site preceded the move to the Dora Mills, we see where Father Borel picked up the idea for his famous sermon on the cabbages.

2. The events narrated in this chapter happened *before* the stay at the Dora Mills. Salcsian historian Francesco Motto has researched the episode, correcting not only Don Bosco's memory but also Lemoyne's findings ("L'Oratorio di don Bosco presso il cimitero di S. Pietro in Vincoli." in *Ricerche storiche salesiane*, July-December 1986, pp. 199-219).

Another group had been holding catechism at Saint Peter's. But a city council decree of May 23, 1845, forbade catechetical assemblies at the chapel, presumably judging these not to be duly respectful of the dead. Apparently Father Joseph Tesio, the chaplain, was not informed of the ordinance. Lemoyne may be correct in supposing that he had no idea what kind of an invasion of street urchins was to descend upon his cemetery on Sunday, May 25, as a result of his having granted Don Bosco permission to bring his troops to Saint Peter's. The chaplain himself was away, and he may have been delighted that Don Bosco would hear confessions and celebrate Mass for whoever usually came, as well as for his boys. . By the following Sunday, June 1, a copy of the ordinance was posted on the church door.

4. According to the death certificate. Father Tesio died on Wednesday, May 28, at 12:30 a.m., at the age of sixty-eight. This was two months before the sojourn at the Dora Mills, which began on July 13. From June 1 to July 6, Don Bosco assembled the boys at the Refuge each Sunday and feast day and then took them to various churches outside the city.

5. The death of the housekeeper, Margaret Sussolino, cannot be confirmed. She remained at the chaplain's quarters for a few days after his death and then disappeared from the history of Turin, probably returning to her native town.

6. One circumstance not mentioned here rendered these unexpected deaths still more impressive. Father Michael Rua testified to it during the gathering of information in view of Don Bosco's beatification (*SummanttiH*, p. 312):

A certain boy named Melanotte, who came from Lanzo, witnessed the scene with the irate housekeeper. He told me many years later that Don Bosco showed neither anger nor annoyance at the insults hurled at him. Turning to his boys, he said with a sigh: "Poor thing! She tells us not to set foot here again! If only she knew that next Sunday she will be in her grave!"

Melanotte also heard Don Bosco make a similar remark to Father Tesio. The chaplain came home before Don Bosco and the last few boys left, and after hearing the housekeeper's story, he angrily forbade Don Bosco ever to return (BM II, 225-226).

Saint Peter in Chains is not reckoned as one of the recognized Oratory sites of Don Bosco's dreams (see chapter 31) because it was only a one-day stopover.

7. After Father Tesio's death Father Cafasso took steps to have the city council appoint Don Bosco the new chaplain, of Saint Peter's. The city council had this power in view of the cemetery's status as a national monument (Molineris, p. 279). Another's application, however, was accepted on June 18. A subsequent petition for reconsideration of the prohibition to use Saint Peter's was denied (July 3). It was at that point that permission to use Saint Martin's was granted. (BM II, 227-229)

Chapter 35

More Problems

The Oratory at the Moretta house¹

On the Sunday following that prohibition, a large number of youngsters went to St Peter in Chains because it had not been possible to send them word of the ban. When they found everything locked up, they came in a body to my room beside the little hospital. What was I to do? I had a pile of equipment for church and for recreation; a mob of children trailing me wherever I went; but not an inch of ground on which to assemble them.

Trying to conceal my dismay, I put on a cheerful face for everyone and tried to keep their hopes up by telling them a thousand wonderful things about the future Oratory, which at that moment existed only in my own mind and in the decrees of the Lord.²

To entertain them on feast days, I took them sometimes to Sassi³ sometimes to Our Lady of the Pillar.¹ to Our Lady of the Fields,⁵ to the Mount of the Capuchins,⁶ and even as far as Superga.⁷ In these churches I arranged to celebrate Mass for them in the morning and explain the gospel. In the afternoon we had a little catechism, hymn-singing, and some stories. Then we toured or hiked till it was time to head for home. It seemed that this critical state of things would have to bring any thought of an Oratory to nothing, but instead the number of boys coming increased extraordinarily.

In the meantime, we had moved into November (1845), not a very practical season for outings or walks to places outside the city. In agreement with Dr Borrelli, we rented three rooms in the house belonging to Fr Moretta,⁸ which the one near, almost in front of, the Church of Mary Help [of Christians] today. Now the house is practically a new one because of renovations.⁹ We spent four months there, anxious about the location, yet happy at least to be able to collect our pupils in those rooms and give them instructions and especially an opportunity to go to confession. That same winter we began night classes.¹⁰ It was the first time that this kind of school was spoken of in our area,¹¹ Consequently it was much discussed: some favored it; others were against it.¹²

At that time, also, some strange rumours began to get round. Some called Don Bosco a revolutionary; others called him a madman, or even a heretic.¹³ This was their reasoning: "This Oratory alienates youngsters from their parishes. As a result, the parish priests will find their churches empty and will no longer know the children, for whom they must render an account before the tribunal of the Lord. Therefore Don Bosco should send the children to their own parishes and stop gathering them in other places." This is what two respectable parish priests, of this city told me when they called on me, also on behalf of their colleagues.

"The young men whom I gather," I told them, "are not regular members of parishes. For the most part they know neither parish nor pastor."

"Why?"

"Because almost all of them are visitors who have been abandoned by their relatives in this city; or they have come here looking for work and failed to get it. Boys from Savoy, Switzerland, the Val d'Aosta, Biella, Novara, Lombardy are the ones who most frequently come to my activities."

"Couldn't you send these youngsters to their various parishes?"

"They don't know where their parishes are."

"Why not teach them?"

"It isn't possible. They're far from home, they speak diverse dialects, they have no fixed places to stay, and they don't know the city. These considerations make it difficult,¹⁴ if not impossible, for them to belong to any parishes. Besides, many of them are grown men already: 18, 20, even 25 years old. And they are completely ignorant in matters of religion. Who could ever expect them to mix with kids of 8 or 10 who are much better instructed?"

"Couldn't you go with them yourself and teach them catechism in their parish churches?"

"At most I could go to one parish, but not to all. It could be done if every parish priest would come himself, or send someone to fetch these children and accompany them to their respective parishes. Even that would be difficult because many of these boys are dissipated, even dissolute. These, attracted by the games and outings which we organise,¹⁵ decide to attend the catechism classes and the other practices of piety too. Therefore it would be necessary for every parish to establish a fixed place where these youngsters could be assembled and entertained in pleasant recreation."

"Those things are impossible. There aren't any places, nor do we have priests free on feast days for these activities."

"What then?" I asked.

"Then do as you think best. In the meantime, we'll decide amongst ourselves what it's best to do."

The problem then became a talking point amongst the parish priests of Turin. Should the oratories be promoted or opposed? Some were for, some against. The parish priest of Borgo Dora, Fr Augustine Gattino,¹⁶ and Dr Ponzati, parish priest of St Augustine,¹⁷ brought me their decision: "The parish priests of Turin, meeting in their regular conference, discussed the advisability of the oratories.¹⁸ After weighing the fears and the hopes, the pros and the cons, they concluded that each parish priest could not provide an oratory in his own parish and that they would encourage the priest Bosco to continue until some other decision should be reached."¹⁹

While these things were going on, the spring of 1846 arrived. The tenants at the Moretta house were upset by the shouting and the din of the constant coming and going of the youngsters. They complained to the landlord, all threatening to withhold their rent if these noisy meetings did not stop. So the good priest Moretta had to tell us to look immediately for another place to gather our young men if we wished to keep our Oratory going.²⁰

Notes

1. At this point the original manuscript is again in Don Bosco's hand.
2. After the Oratory had been expelled successively from the Refuge, Saint Peter's, and the Dora Mills in about six months' time, Don Bosco's frustration was, understandable. He was confident that God would provide a solution: fortunately, he was not aware of the difficulties that still lay between him and the solution.
3. What was then the village of Sassi is now part of Turin. It is about three miles from Valdocco, on the other side of the Po, opposite its junction with the Dora; the mount of Superga rises behind Sassi.
4. Our Lady of the Pillar (*Madonna del Pinole*) is a shrine dedicated to the Annunciation. It is across the Po, between Sassi and the Regina Margherita Bridge. The seventeenth-century church at 195 corso Casale replaced a simpler shrine, a pillar on which was an image of the Virgin (hence the name). The boys had to ferry across the river (see BM II, 106, 305).
5. A Capuchin monastery about a mile and a half north-north-east of Valdocco down the road toward Lanzo (north of the Dora). The church, built in the fourteenth century, is at 98 via Massaia. Don Bosco brought the boys there on a pilgrimage after the Filippi brothers told him that they were canceling his lease to their field (chapter 39).
6. A wooded hill about 165 feet high on the right bank of the Po, a strategically important site in earlier centuries. Its location between the church of the Great Mother of God and the Umberto I Bridge, directly opposite the heart of the city, presents an excellent panorama. The church and Capuchin monastery at the top date from 1583. The friars always gave Don Bosco's urchins a warm welcome.
7. Superga is a 2200-foot mountain northeast of Turin, crowned by a majestic baroque basilica, about two miles from Sassi. Designed by the renowned Filippo Juvara (1685-1735), the church was built between 1717 and 1731 to fulfill a vow, which King Victor Amadeus II made in 1706, praying that Turin might withstand a French siege. The dome towers 245 feet; the crypt contains the tombs of the House of Savoy from the time of the church's construction until the transfer of the national capital in 1865. One room in the attached monastery contains portraits of all the Popes, from Saint Peter to John Paul II. The mountaintop offers a spectacular view of the entire city below (nowadays often obstructed by smog) and of the Alps beyond.
8. From the Dora Mills in the crowded Borgo Dora slum, Don Bosco and Father Borel turned again to the still-rural Valdocco district. They found a two-story house a block west of the Barolo institutions, between what is now via Maria Ausiliatrice and corso Regina Margherita. Its owner, Father John Baptist Anthony Moretta (1777-1847), rented out some of the rooms. The ground floor had a cellar, a stable, and nine rooms; the top floor had nine more, rooms fronted by a long balcony, accessible by two wooden staircases. Apparently Don Bosco and Father Borel decided to set up there in November, even though they technically had a permit for Saint Martin's through December.
9. Part of the Moretta house stood where the church of the Salesian Sisters' oratory for girls was built in 1889 (now the parish church of Mary Help of Christians). Another part of the house survived until 1934, when it was demolished to make room for the courtyard of the Salesian publishing house Societa Editrice Internazionale.
10. Don Bosco began to offer evening classes at the Refuge late in 1845. Many boys came to his and Father Borel's rooms every evening except Saturday and the vigils of holy days of obligation. Their rooms became classrooms, and the two priests taught reading, writing, and arithmetic. One can imagine how tiring this work was in view of the lateness of the hour and the number and quality of the pupils.

In the Moretta house, where there was more room, Don Bosco improved the facilities somewhat. Two hundred boys came every evening—still making' for very crowded rooms. Don Bosco was assisted by at least three of his fellow priests (see his footnote to chapter 44).

Uneducated workers of all ages were eager for basic schooling; demand far outstripped the opportunity. For example, in 1846 Charles Ignatius Giullio had 150 places in his school, but 700 adults applied. The following year classrooms were added to accommodate 800; 1500 tried to register. (Stella, LW. p. 104)

11. Don Bosco will repeat in chapter 42 that his night courses were the first to be set up. In 1934 the Christian Brothers contested his claim. The question is discussed in MB XVII, 850-852, where the conclusion is:

If one is speaking of night schools in the strict sense, the Brothers were ahead of Don Bosco by a matter of months. Having technical teachers at their disposal, they opened their school -in January 1846 with a full program. If, however, one is speaking of evening courses plain and simple, that is, classes given in the evening to workers who had labored all day in shop, yard, or field, Eton Bosco led the way, though only by a few months (November 1845).

12. Advocates of popular education, who were promoting night courses at this time, aroused suspicion among the important leaders of Church, State, and society. Conservatives saw in education a threat to the foundations of the regime, imputing liberal political motives to anyone who wanted to teach the masses. (The *Communist Manifesto* would be published within three years.) Archbishop Fransoni was one those who was concerned. See BM II, 165-175; Woolf, pp. 326-328.

Don Bosco argued that the question was whether the works were good in themselves and worthy of promotion rather than what inspired them or who helped them. Worthy projects ought to be given Christian direction, forestalling any irreligious spirit that might misdirect them. With this purpose, he set to work (BM II, 199, 272).

Because they were too close to the events, it is easy to understand how even devout people might look on Don Bosco's activities with a disapproving eye. Reputable authors hold that if the ideas of Don Bosco and others had been acted upon, perhaps a lot of evils would have been avoided. Many institutions which arose at this period would have had less irreligious leanings, and it would have been less trouble later trying to put things right. See Tommaso Chiuso, *La Chiesa in Piemonte dal 1797 ai giorni nostri* {Turin: Speirani, 1888), III, 197.

13. Many of these suspicions were brought to Father Cafasso, who was recognized as an intimate of Don Bosco. Since Father Cafasso was most highly regarded, he was able to temper some of the objections just by saying, "Leave him alone." (BM H, 274-275)

14. With the words "make it difficult," Father Berto's script again takes over the first draft, up to the end of chapter 37. The spelling is Don Bosco's; for example, we find words like *parocho*, *parochia*, and *parochiale* with only one *r*, which is how they would have been pronounced in Piedmontese.

15. Undoubtedly, Don Bosco's interest in them and his kindness toward them were as attractive as the recreational opportunities that he offered them.

16. Father Gattino was the pastor of Saints Simon and Jude parish, whose territorial boundaries included Valdocco. On his dealings with the Oratory over the years, consult MB XX.

17. Father Vincent Ponzati (1800-1874) was one of the priests who not long after tried to pack Don Bosco off to the insane asylum (BM II, 323-325). He continued to have a testy relationship with the Oratory (cf. BM III, 132-133). Stella spells his name "Ponsati" (*EcSo*, pp. 581, 639). His parish church was a block east of Our Lady of Consolation Church, on via San

Agostino, just off the southwest corner of Porta Palazzo.

18. Presumably, Father Cocchi's Guardian Angel Oratory also came into the discussion.

19. Undoubtedly it is the duty of the pastor to impart religious instruction to his flock. The pastors of Turin, seeing that such instruction was given at the Oratory, solved the question in a wise and praise worthy manner, rather than put up unreasonable opposition.

20. Don Bosco received notice to quit on March 2, 1846. He had already paid the month's rent of fifteen lire.

Although he does not mention it, Don Bosco's health had begun to fail noticeably during this winter, which was particularly bitter. Overwork and endless worry had run him down, and quite possibly his constitution had not fully recovered from the rigors of his seminary days. Several people, including Father Borel, tried to get him to ease up.

Chapter 36

The Oratory Outdoors

*The Oratory in a field * An outing to Superga*

With deep regret and no little inconvenience to our assemblies in March of 1846, we had to leave the Moretta house and rent a field from the Filippi brothers.¹ Today an iron foundry or smelting works occupies this ground.² There I was, under the open sky, in the middle of the field bounded by a broken-down hedge, which gave free admission to all and sundry. The youngsters, between three and four hundred of them, looked upon their Oratory as heaven on earth, even though its ceiling and walls were the sky.

But in a place like this, how could one hold religious vices? Doing the best we could, we held catechism classes, sang hymns, sang vespers.³ Then Dr Borrelli or I would stand on a hillock or on a chair and give a short sermon to the youths, who came up close to hear it.

For confessions, this is how we managed: I would be in the field early on feast day mornings, where many would already be waiting for me. I would sit on a hillock hearing one's confession while others were preparing or making their thanksgiving. Afterwards many went back to their games.

At a fixed time of the morning, all the boys assembled in answer to a bugle call. A second blast on the bugle brought them to silence, giving me a chance to speak and tell them where we were going for Mass and holy communion. Sometimes, as I said, we went to Our Lady of the Fields, the Church of Our Lady of Consolation, to Stupinigi,⁴ or the places mentioned earlier. Since we often trudged to centres a good distance away, I will describe one hike we took to Superga, which was typical of the others.

When the boys had collected in the field, we let them play bocce, piastrelle,⁵ stilt-walking, etc., for a while. A drum was sounded, then a bugle call, to call them together and signal that we were ready to move out. We usually arranged that all of them should have heard Mass beforehand. Soon after 9:00 we set out for Superga. Some carried baskets of bread, some cheese, salami, fruit, or other provisions for the day. They kept quiet till we were outside the populated parts of the city, but from then on they began yelling, singing, and shouting, though they kept ranks.⁶

On reaching the foot of the hill, where the path climbs to the basilica. I found a lovely little pony, already saddled up, which Fr [Joseph] Anselmetti, pastor of the church, had put at my disposal. There was also a note from Dr Borrelli, who had gone on ahead. It read: "Come along with our dear boys, and don't worry. The soup, the dinner, and the wine are ready."

I mounted the horse and read the letter aloud. They all crowded round the horse, and after hearing the message, broke into applause and cheers, shouting and singing. Some pulled the horse by his ears, others by the muzzle or the tail, bumping sometimes into the poor beast, sometimes into his rider. The gentle animal took it all with more patience than his rider would have shown. Amid that uproar the music struck up, provided by a tambourine, a

bugle, and a guitar. It was absolute discord, but it served as a backing for the noisy voices of the boys. The result was wonderfully harmonious.

Worn out with all the laughing, joking, singing, and I would say, the yelling, we reached our destination. The perspiring youngsters gathered in the courtyard of the shrine and were soon given food enough to satisfy their voracious appetites. When they had a while to rest, I called them all round me and told them all the details of the wonderful history of the basilica, with its royal tombs in the crypt, and the Ecclesiastical Academy which Charles Albert had established there and the bishops of the Kingdom of Sardinia supported.⁷

Dr William Audisio,⁸ the president, generously provided the soup and main course for all the guests. The parish priest donated the wine and the fruit. We took a couple of hours for a tour of the area and later assembled in the church, where many people had already taken their places. At 3:00 p.m. I gave a short discourse from the pulpit, after which some of the best choir boys sang a *Tantum ergo*.⁹ Their clear voices and the novelty of it won everyone's admiration.

At six we sent up some balloons to signal our departure. With renewed and lively thanks to our benefactors we struck out again for Turin, singing, laughing, running, and sometimes praying on our way.

When we got to the city, the boys dropped out of our procession a few at a time at points along the route closest to their homes and returned to their families. When I got back to the Refuge, I still had with me 7 or 8 of the strongest lads, who had carried the equipment used during the day.

Notes

1. The field was across the lane on the east end of Father Moretta's property. An old shed on it provided a place for storage of the Oratory's recreation equipment. The Filippi brothers were John, Anthony, and Charles (Giraud and Biancardi, p. 156).

2. This foundry was at the corner of via Cottolengo and via Cigna across from the SEI publishing house. Today a huge building occupies the property, including a gasoline station on corso Regina Margherita.

3. Evening prayer was commonly sung by the people as a Sunday evening devotion.

4. Stupinigi, six miles southwest of Turin, was the royal hunting lodge (another of Juarra's architectural genius); a large park surrounds it.

5. *Bocce* is similar to lawn bowls, played on a dirt court. *Piastrelle* is a throwing game played with flat, puck-like pebbles.

6. Father Ascanio Savio (see chapter 50) testified that he had seen the youngsters going in groups or in procession singing hymns.

7. The Academy, founded by royal decree in 1833, provided advanced religious and academic formation for select clerics of Piedmont. To qualify for admission, they had to have degrees in theology and canon law. The four-year program specialized in canon law, homiletics, and moral theology. When they returned to their dioceses, the graduates were often given important appointments. The Academy was suppressed in 1855. In fact there had not been any students there since 1848, when Father Audisio was dismissed for political reasons.

8. Father William Audisio (1802-1883), a native of Bra, wrote on canon law, Church history, and homiletics. He spent the last years of his life in Rome, where he was widely consulted as an expert canonist.

9. The final two stanzas of the hymn *Pange lingua*, composed by Saint Thomas Aquinas. The *Tantum ergo* was always sung at benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, often to elaborate music (which is what Don Bosco implies here).

Chapter 37

Vicar Cavour's Opposition

Threats from Marquis Cavour • The Oratory in trouble again

Words cannot describe the enthusiasm these expeditions aroused in the youngsters. They thoroughly enjoyed the mixture of devotions, games, and outings, and they became so attached to me that they not only obeyed my every command, but they were eager that I should give them some task to do. One day, a carabinieri¹ saw me bring four hundred chattering and playful boys to silence in the field by raising my hand; he exclaimed, "If this priest were an army general, he could take on the most powerful army in the world." Really, the obedience and affection of my pupils bordered on foolishness.²

This very thing gave renewed credence of the rumour that Don Bosco and his sons could start a revolution at a moment's notice. It was a ridiculous claim, but local authorities swallowed it again, especially Marquis Cavour, father of the famous Camillo and Gustavo.³ At that time he was vicar of the city, which means he was in charge of the civil power.⁴ He therefore summoned me to city hall and reasoned with me at length about the silly stories about me which were then doing the rounds. He ended up by saying, "My good priest, take my advice: let these scoundrels⁵ go their own way. They will bring only trouble on you and the public authorities. I have been assured that these meetings are dangerous, and therefore I cannot permit them."

I replied, "Lord Marquis, I have no other aim but the betterment of these poor sons of the people.⁶ I do not ask for financial assistance but only for a place where I can bring them together. In this way I hope to reduce the number of loafers and those headed for prison."

"You're fooling yourself, my good priest. You're labouring in vain. Because I regard such meetings as dangerous, I cannot give you any place for such assemblies. And where will you get the money you need to pay rent and to meet the expenses that care of these vagabonds entails? Let me say again: I cannot allow you to hold these meetings."

"My Lord Marquis, the results so far convince me that I am not working in vain. Many totally abandoned youngsters have been gathered, freed from dangers, apprenticed to some trade, and are no longer dwelling in the prisons. So far, material support has not been lacking to me. This matter is in God's hands, who sometimes uses worthless instruments to accomplish his sublime designs."

"Have patience, and do as I say. I cannot allow such meetings."

"My Lord Marquis, don't grant this concession for my sake, but for the good of so many abandoned youngsters who would, most likely, come to a sad end."

"Quiet! I'm not here to argue. This is a disorder, and I wish to and must put a stop to it. Don't you know that every meeting is banned, unless held with lawful permission?"

"My meetings have no political scope.⁷ I teach catechism to poor boys, and I do so with the archbishop's permission."

"Does the archbishop know what is going on?"

"He is fully informed. I have never taken a step without his consent."

"But I cannot allow these gatherings."

"I cannot believe, Lord Marquis, that you want to forbid me to teach catechism when my archbishop permits it."

"And supposing the archbishop were to tell you to drop this ridiculous undertaking of yours, would you put difficulties in the way?"

"None whatsoever. I undertook this work on the advice of my ecclesiastical superior, and I have continued with it. At the least sign from him I would be ready to do his bidding."

"Go. I shall speak with the archbishop. But don't be obstinate in accepting his orders,⁸ or I shall be forced to take severe measures which I would prefer not to use."⁹

At this stage of the proceedings, I believed that we would be left in peace for at least a while. Imagine my disappointment, therefore, when I arrived home to find a letter from the Filippi brothers, ordering me out of the place leased to me!

"Your boys," they told me, "with their continuous trampling in our field have killed the grass down to the very roots. We are prepared to forgo the rent owing if you are out of the field in two weeks. There can be no extension beyond that."¹⁰

When my friends got wind of these latest difficulties, many came to advise me to quit. Others, noting my preoccupation and seeing me always surrounded by boys, began to say I had gone mad.

One day, in the presence of Fr Sebastian Pacchiotti" and others, Doctor Borrelli suggested to me: "Let's cut our losses now and salvage what we can. Let's send away all the youngsters except for about twenty of the youngest. While we continue to teach catechism to them, God will open the way and opportunity of doing more."¹²

"There's no need to wait for further opportunity," I told them. "The site's ready: a spacious courtyard, a house with many children, a portico, a church, priests, clerics, all at our disposal."

"But where are these things?" Dr Borrelli broke in.

"I don't know where they are, but they do exist, and they are ours."

At this Dr Borrelli burst into tears. "Poor Don Bosco!" he exclaimed. "He's losing his mind."

He took me by the hand, embraced me, and went off with Fr Pacchiotti, leaving me alone in my room.

Notes

1. A member of the most elite military corps; today, the Italian national police force.

2. Don Bosco is not really exaggerating, as will be evident when he falls ill (chapter 43).

3. Camillo Cavour was the great statesman who united Italy; on him and his brother, see chapter 45. Their father, Michele Benso (1781-1850), marquis of Cavour, was an important figure in Turin. After collaborating with the French to some extent during the Napoleonic occupation, Cavour fell from favor during the Restoration. He tied his fortunes to Charles Albert while that prince was likewise persona non grata (1821-1831), and when Charles Albert became king, the Cavour fortunes rose. In the intervening years both king and marquis had become thorough conservatives. The marquis became vicar of police for Turin in 1835, and in that capacity he was concerned about Don Bosco's little army of potential revolutionaries.

The first time that Cavour encountered Don Bosco may have been the Sunday when he and a friend were walking near the Citadel, at the southwest edge of the city. They came upon a priest and a horde of boys playing in the meadows. On learning the priest's identity, the vicar is supposed to have remarked to his companion, "He's either a lunatic or a candidate for the Senate," the latter being one of the city jails. (BM II, 313) As we shall see, more than one person drew the former conclusion.

4. Piedmont was an absolute monarchy till 1848. As vicar of police, Cavour exercised authority in the king's name over both criminal and civil matters in Turin.

5. While the vicar was probably sincerely afraid of some kind of an uprising, and at the least had citizen pressure on him, his fundamental attitude is indicated by his terminology.

6. Don Bosco politely and compassionately tries to correct Cavour's attitude, as he will also correct Marchioness Barolo (next chapter).

7. It was a fundamental principle of operation with Don Bosco to steer clear of all politics so that no one could fault the good done for society. He was fond of saying, "My politics is the politics of the Our Father." As events showed repeatedly, especially in 1848-1849 and the early 1860s, being entirely apolitical, perceived as such, and allowed to be such was easier said than done. See also chapter 51.

8. Don Bosco always obeyed religious and civil authorities wholeheartedly, even in indifferent matters. More than once he had to swallow his pride to do so. But when it came to protecting his boys or, later, the Salesian Society, he was uncompromising. Some would have called him obstinate.

9. Cavour did not stop at words. He was sending policemen to keep an eye on the Oratory's doings (cf. the carabinieri, and chapter 41).

10. These events are hard to date precisely. Don Bosco seems to have rented the Filippi field around March 1 (the first Sunday in Lent), and apparently the brothers canceled the lease in mid-month. Don Bosco first tried to get the owners to change their minds, and then he appealed to their mother. Those tactics having failed, he searched for another field to rent. All in vain. (Giraud and Biancardi, pp. 154-155; cf. T. Bosco, SP, pp. 125-126).

11. Father Pacchiotti (1806-1884) was another of the chaplains at the Refuge and a regular helper at the Oratory catechism lessons. He later became a canon at Giaveno.

12. Even Father Borel has gotten discouraged enough to doubt Don Bosco's charism!

Chapter 38

An Ultimatum from the Marchioness

Good-bye to the Refuge • Fresh imputation of insanity

Marchioness Barolo became alarmed by all that was being said about Don Bosco, especially because the city council of Turin were opposed to my projects. One day she came to my room to speak to me. She began, "I am very pleased with the care you take of my institutions. Thank you for all you have done to introduce in them hymn-singing, plainchant, music, arithmetic, and even the metric system."¹

"No thanks necessary. These are duties which priests must perform. God will repay everything. No need to mention it further."

"I wanted to say that I regret very much how your multiple occupations have undermined your health. You cannot possibly continue to direct my works and that of your abandoned boys, especially now when their number has increased beyond counting. I propose to you that from now on you concentrate just on your obligations, that is, the direction of my little hospital. You should stop visiting the prisons and the Cottolengo² and give up all your care for the youngsters. What do you say to that?"

"My Lady Marchioness, God has helped me up to now and will not fail me in the future. Don't worry about what should be done. Fr Pacchiotti, Dr Borrelli, and I will do everything."

"But I cannot allow you to kill yourself. Whether you like it or not, so many diverse activities are detrimental to your health and my institutions. And then there are the gossip about your mental health and the opposition of the local authorities, which oblige me to advise you..."

"Advise me to do what, My Lady Marchioness?"

"Give up either the work for boys or the work at the Refuge. Think about it and let me know."

"I can tell you right now. You have money and will have no trouble in finding as many priests as you want for your institutes. It's not the same with the poor youngsters. If I turn my back on them at his time, all I've been doing for them now will go up in smoke. Therefore, while I will continue to do what I can for the Refuge, I will resign from any regular responsibility and devote myself seriously to the care of abandoned youngsters."

"But how will you be able to live?"

"God has always helped me, and he'll help me also in the future."

"But your health is ruined; you're no longer thinking straight. You'll be engulfed in debt, You'll come to me, and I

tell you here and now that I'll never give you a soldo for your boys.³ Now take my motherly advice. I'll continue to pay your salary, and I'll increase it if you wish. Go away and rest somewhere for a year, three years, five years. When you're back to health, come back to the Refuge and you'll be most welcome. Otherwise you put me in the unpleasant position of having to dismiss you from my institutes. Think it over seriously."

"I've thought it over already, My Lady Marchioness. My life is consecrated to the good of young people. I thank you for the offers you're making me, but I can't turn back from the path which Divine Providence has traced out for me."

"So you prefer your vagabonds¹ to my institutes? In that case, you are dismissed from this moment. This very day I shall arrange for somebody to take your place."

I pointed out to her that such a sudden dismissal would give rise to conjectures that would do neither of us credit. It would be better to act calmly and preserve between us that charity about which we should both have to answer before the Lord's tribunal.

"In that case," she concluded, "I give you three months' notice. After that you will leave the direction of my little hospital to others."

I accepted my dismissal, abandoning myself to whatever God's plan for me might be.⁵

Meanwhile, the reports that Don Bosco had gone mad were gaining strength. My friends were grieved; others were amused. But they all kept far away from me. The archbishop did not interfere. Fr Caffasso advised me to bide my time;⁶ Dr Borrelli kept quiet.⁷ Thus all my helpers left me alone in the midst of about four hundred boys.⁸

At that time some respectable persons wanted to take care of my health. "This Don Bosco," they said amongst themselves, "has some fixations which will inevitably end up in madness. Perhaps he would benefit by treatment. Let's take him to the asylum⁹ and leave it to them to do whatever they think best."

Two of them were appointed to come with a carriage to pick me up and escort me to the asylum. The two emissaries¹⁰ greeted me politely and then inquired about my health, the Oratory, the future building and church; they sighed deeply and exclaimed aloud, "It's true."

After that they invited me to go for a drive with them. "A little air will do you good. We have a carriage at hand. We'll go together and have time to converse."

At this point I understood their game, and without letting on that I had them figured out, I walked with them to the carriage, insisting that they get in first and take their places. But instead of getting in there myself, I slammed the door shut and called out to the coachman, "Straight to the asylum with all speed. They're expecting these two priests there."

Notes

1. See chapter 42, notes 25-26.

2. The Little House of Divine Providence, better known as the Cottolengo Institute, is a massive complex of hospitals, homes, and other care units for the most abandoned members of society: the deaf, dumb, blind, crippled, insane, aged, and others. It takes up several city blocks to the east of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians and the Barolo Institutes and shelters some five thousand persons at any given time.

Saint Joseph Benedict Cottolengo (1786-1842), a native of Bra and canon of the ancient cathedral of Chieri, was a wealthy priest moved by the plight of the sick poor. After founding his work in Turin in 1827, he was compelled to relocate outside the city center during the cholera epidemic of 1831; so he set up in Valdocco. Eventually he founded several religious congregations to provide various services for the Little House, such as nursing, training for those who care for the inmates, and contemplative prayer. He absolutely refused any kind of endowment for his institution, and to this day the Little House depends entirely on voluntary alms. Cottolengo was canonized in 1934 (the same year as Don Bosco); his feast day is April 30. See Butler's *Lives*, II, 191-192.

3. Not only did she not carry out her threat, but she remained a benefactress of Don Bosco's work (BM II, 424, 430). The full dialog reveals both her headstrong nature and her great generosity.

4. The marchioness used expressions similar to Cavour's. Don Bosco's priestly heart preferred to call them "poor children" or "poor and abandoned youth."

5. This short sentence summarizes a whole tragedy. The one who was devoting himself totally to the most abandoned was now totally abandoned (recall the pathetic ending of the preceding chapter).

The marchioness wrote to Father Borel about Don Bosco's health on May 18 (BM II, 360-361). Her confrontation with Don Bosco probably came at the end of that month; his service at Saint Philomena's Hospital terminated at the end of August (BM II, 364; Giraudo and Biancardi, p. 164), three months after she served him notice of dismissal.

6. In a moment of weakness Father Cafasso, too, was proposing a suspension of operations. This would surely have gravely damaged the Oratory.

7. Father Borel had already suggested reducing the number of boys (preceding chapter), which Don Bosco could never consider. Fearing for Don Bosco's sanity, perhaps, Father Borel thought it better not to say anything.

8. It was a tragic situation. Marquis Filippo Crispolti summed up Don Bosco's position magnificently in a commemorative lecture (*Questioni vUati* [Rome: Pustet, 1908], p. 343):

The weakness of human judgment, in Don Bosco's case, was not confined to adversaries or shortsighted people. Even upright people and experts were afflicted... Those who should have been able to read the depths of his soul and discern there his steady ascent toward God and God's reaching down toward him — such people were not lacking among simple folks — should have rejoiced from the start at the great things that would arise from his efforts, for their seeds were already evident.

9. The asylum was along corso San Massimo (now corso Regina Margherita) one block south of the Refuge, between the Rondo and

the Church of Our Lady of Consolation.

10. The two were Father Vincent Ponzati, pastor of Saint Augustine parish, and Father Louis Nasi of Corpus Domini parish. Both were learned men inspired by charity. Father Nasi (1821-1896) was always on the best of terms with Don Bosco and continued to help him with catechism lessons, preaching, and music. He later became a canon of the cathedral.

Chapter 39

Palm Sunday 1846

Transfer to the present Oratory of St Francis de Saks at Valdocco

While all this was going on,¹ we came to the last Sunday on which I was allowed to keep the Oratory in the field (5 April 1846).² I said nothing at all, but everybody knew how troubled and worried I was. On that evening as I ran my eyes over the crowd of children playing, I thought of the rich harvest awaiting my priestly ministry. With no one to help me, my energy gone, my health undermined, with no idea where I could gather my boys in the future, I was very disturbed.

I withdrew to one side, and as I walked alone I began to cry, perhaps for the first time. As I walked I looked up to heaven and cried out, "My God, why don't you show me where you want me to gather these children? Oh, let me know! Oh, show me what I must do!"

When I had finished saying this, a man called Pancrazio Soave came up. He stammered as he asked me, "Is it true that you're looking for a site for a laboratory?"

"Not a laboratory, but an oratory."

"I don't know the difference between an oratory and a laboratory, but there's a site available. Come and have a look at it. Mr Joseph Pinardi,³ the owner, is an honest man. Come and you'll get a real bargain."

At that very moment my faithful colleague from the seminary, Fr Peter Merla, showed up. He was the founder of a pious work named the *Family of St Peter*.⁴ Filled with zeal for life sacred ministry, he had begun his institute because so many single girls and disgraced women, after suffering imprisonment, found themselves sadly abandoned. For the most part, honest society abhorred them, and they could find neither bread nor employment. When he had a little free time, that worthy priest hastened eagerly to help his friend. Usually he found me alone amongst a mob of boys.

"What's wrong?" he asked as soon as he saw me. "I've never seen you so down. Has something bad happened?"

"Misfortune, no. But I'm in a real predicament. Today is the last day on which I'm allowed to use this field. It's evening already, two [hours] to nightfall.⁵ I have to tell my sons where to assemble next Sunday, and I don't know where. This friend here says he knows of a place that might do. Can you keep an eye on the recreation for a while? I'll go take a look, and I'll be back before long."

When I reached the place indicated, I saw a shabby little two-storey house with a worm-eaten wooden stairway and balcony. All round were gardens, pastures, and fields.⁶ I was about to climb the stairs, but Pinardi and Pancrazio stopped me.

"No," they told me. "The place we have in mind for you is here in back.."

There was a long shed; one side of its roof leaned against the wall of the house, and the other ended about three feet above the ground.⁷ If it were necessary, it could be used as a woodshed, but not much else. To get into it I had to bend my head so as not to bump against the ceiling.

"I can't use it," I said. "It's too low."

"I'll fix it to suit your needs," Pinardi graciously suggested. "I'll dig it out, I'll make steps, I'll put in a new floor. I really would like you to establish your laboratory here."

"Not a laboratory, but an oratory, a little church where I can bring together some youngsters."

"Better still. I'll gladly help with the work myself. Let's draw up a contract. I can sing too, so I'll come along and give a hand. I'll bring two chairs, one for me and one for my wife. And I have a lamp at home, too; I'll bring that as well."

The good man seemed to be beside himself with joy at having a church in his house.

"Thank you, my good friend," I said, "for your kindness and goodwill. I accept these generous offers. If you can lower the floor at least a foot (20 in.),⁸ I'll take it. But what's your price?"

"Three hundred francs. I have better offers but I prefer yours because you're going to use the place for the public good and religious purposes."

"I'll give you three hundred and twenty if you'll throw in the strip of ground round the house as a playground for the boys,⁹ and if I can bring my kids here as soon as next Sunday."

"I understand. It's a deal.¹⁰ Come, by all means. Everything will be ready."

I made no more demands. I ran right back to my boys. I gathered them round me and began to shout in a loud voice, "Great news, my sons! We've got a place for our Oratory, a more reliable one than we've had till now. We'll have a church, a sacristy, classrooms, and a place to play. Sunday, next Sunday, we'll go to our new Oratory, which is over there in Pinardi's house." And I pointed the place out to them."

Wild enthusiasm greeted this announcement. Some ran around shouting and jumping for joy; some stood stock still; some raised their voices, I would say, to yelling and screaming. They were moved like people who feel so in-

tensely happy that they cannot express their feelings. Overcome with deep gratitude, we thanked the holy Virgin for hearing and answering the prayers which we had made to her that very morning at Our Lady of the Fields.¹² Now we knelt for the last time in that field and said the holy rosary. After that, everyone went home. Thus we said good-bye to that place which each of us had loved out of necessity, but which each of us, hoping for something better, left behind without regret.

On the following Sunday, 13 April, which was Easter Sunday, all the church furniture and the equipment for recreation were brought there, and we went to take possession of our new place.

Notes

1. On May 10, 1864, Don Bosco gave a conference to the Salesians. John Bonetti, who was then a deacon, made a summary of it immediately after, which is in the Salesian archives. Don Bosco narrated some of the events concerning the founding of the Oratory. In a dream he was shown a house not far from the Refuge, where he still lived; the house was destined for him and his young men. The next morning he told Father Borel right away, "Now we have a house!" Don Bosco went to look for it and discovered that it was a brothel! He exclaimed, "These are illusions from the devil," and blushed at his own credulity. He said nothing about it and continued with the wandering Oratory.

However, Don Bosco recalled, the very same house was shown to him in a dream a second time. The next day he returned to the neighborhood and wept. How could he accept that he was supposed to go into such a place? He told himself, "It's time to ask the Lord for enlightenment, for delivery from these troubles."

Yet a third time he saw the same house in a dream. This time he heard a voice saying, "Have no fear of going to this place. Don't you know that God can enrich his people with the spoils of the Egyptians?" [cf. Exodus 3:21-22; 12:35-36]

This set his mind at rest. He was trying to find a way to buy the house when the Oratory was expelled by the Filippi brothers and the Pinardi offer came. The house in question was owned by Mrs. Teresa Bellezza. See chapters 40 and 54; BM n, 421-423.

2. Don Bosco wrote "March 15." In Father Berto's copy, Father Bonetti's easily recognized handwriting has changed it to "April 5." Further on in this account, as well as in his brief history of the Oratory up to 1854, Don Bosco asserts that the following Sunday was Easter Sunday, April 12.

Giraudi discovered and published the Pinardi contract (p. 68), which is dated April 1. It is possible that the deed was drawn up shortly after April 5 and dated retroactively to the beginning of the month. It is more likely that Don Bosco has telescoped the events of several weeks and his personal distress: he received notice from the Filippis on March 8 (T. Bosco, SP, pp. 125-126) or March 15 (Giraud and Biancardi, pp. 154-155); he met Soave and Pinardi on March 15 and reached an oral agreement about the shed; the lease was signed April 1, but the chapel was, not ready till the 12th.

There is quite a discrepancy between Don Bosco's description of the barren shed and the contract's ample description of the spaces to be leased, which indicates either that Don Bosco's memory has romanticized a bit, or that a lot of work was done before occupancy. Perhaps the Oratory used the grounds about the house to play in on April 5 (and one or two earlier Sundays?), but the boys had to attend Mass elsewhere as they had done since August 1845; perhaps they used these Sundays (March 22 and 29, April 5) for hikes.

3. Pinardi's first name was Francis. He came from Arcisate in the province of Varese in Lombardy. Soave had come to Turin from Verolengo (a nearby town); he was trying to start a starch factory (T. Bosco, SP, p. 126).

4. Father Merla (1815-1855) was a teacher from Rivara Torinese. During the summer of 1850, Don Bosco arranged for him to teach Latin to three of his most promising boys, one of whom was Michael Rua (BM IV, 97-98). Father Merla's charitable work still survives; under the direction of the Vincentian Sisters of the Cottolengo Institute, it cares for men in need, as well as women. Ever since Don Bosco's day the Salesians have rendered spiritual assistance to Father Merla's work out of gratitude to Don Bosco's good friend.

5. The word "hours" was omitted, in error, from a long addition to Father Berto's copy of the manuscript.

6. Pinardi bought the house and land (one acre) for fourteen thousand lire in July 1845 from the Filippi brothers. The whole property was enclosed by a wall. The house, which ran lengthwise from west to east, had six rooms on the ground floor and five on the second. There were a stable and a woodshed at the east end. In November Pinardi rented the house to Pancrazio Soave.

A new shed was under construction along the north, or back, wall of the house and was not included in the lease to Soave. Pinardi rented it separately, first to a hatmaker—the irrigation ditch which ran along the northern edge of the property made it a convenient site for any artisan who needed a little water—and then to some washerwomen, who also used a small laundry shed standing in the north-east corner of the yard.

Fields, crisscrossed by irrigation ditches, lay all around the house. Pinardi's property fronted on via della Giardiniera.

7. Documents which Giraudi found in the building department of the Turin municipal archives show that "about three feet" exaggerates its lowness. The outside wall of the shed was; more than three feet high, but some earth piled against the wall made it appear lower than it was.

During the reconstruction done between Don Bosco's oral agreement with Pinardi and the Oratory's transfer to its new home, the wall did have to be raised, presumably leveling off the roof. The contract specifies that the shed-turned-chapel had nine windows and three small doors (Giraudi, p. 68). Nevertheless, the ceiling was still quite low, as will appear in chapter 45.

The shed ran the length of the house (not counting the woodshed), about sixty-six feet, and was twenty feet wide (Giraudi, p. 70).

8. As already mentioned, measurements in Piedmont varied; the Turinese foot was about fourteen inches. For some reason Don Bosco specifies parenthetically that he wanted at least twenty inches dug out.

9. The plot of ground in question was the backyard, between the house and the ditch, and the west yard, between the house and the wall along the Bellezza land. The backyard, measuring about 230 feet by 26 feet, became the Oratory's first courtyard. The west yard, which faced the main entrance to the new chapel, was about 102 feet by 66 feet; it became the main playground.

10. The contract ran from April 1, 1846, to April 30, 1849. Although Don Bosco says that they agreed upon an annual rent of 320 lire (francs), the contract spelled out "three hundred ten," and the "ten" was crossed out, perhaps as a further act of kindness on Pinardi's part. The contract was actually made between Father Borel and Pinardi, either because Pinardi knew him but not Don Bosco (Ceria, MO, p. 168), or because Father Borel had money and Don Bosco did not.

11. Via della Giardiniera ran diagonally to the northwest from via Cottolengo, starting at the northern end of the Filippi field. Pinardi's property was some six hundred feet up the road.

12. This pilgrimage to attend Mass and ask our Lady's help in finding a place for the Oratory was the occasion of a strange happening. Along the way the boys prayed the rosary, chanted the Litany of Our Lady, and sang hymns.

As they left the road and started up the lane to the monastery, the church bells began to peal a welcome for them. They noticed that immediately, for they had never heard the bells before, though they had been there a number of times. It was rumored that the bells had rung of their own accord; in any case, neither the Capuchin superior nor anyone else ever learned who had rung them.

The friars treated the boys to breakfast, and then the boys returned to town for their last day of using the Filippi field, still unsure of their future. (BM II, 327-328)