

Art. 1. The Founder: A Man Sent by God

To contribute to the salvation of youth, “the most delicate and most precious portion of human society,”¹ the Holy Spirit, through the maternal intervention of Mary, raised up St. John Bosco, who founded the Society of St. Francis de Sales (1859) and, together with Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1872). He extended the apostolic energy of the Salesian charism by officially setting up the “Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators,” the third branch of the Family (1876), united to the Society of St. Francis de Sales (also called the Salesian Society of St. John Bosco or the Salesian Congregation).

The Holy Spirit formed the heart of a Father and teacher in St. John Bosco, one capable of total dedication, inspiring him with an educational method permeated by the charity of the Good Shepherd.

CONSIDERATIONS

Core Themes

1. Don Bosco: A Man of God, Founder, Guided by the Holy Spirit
2. Charismatic Reality of the Association of the Cooperators in the Church

Keys to Understanding

A. The name of “Founder” was conferred upon Don Bosco by the Church in reference to the three Groups of the apostolic Family created by him. In ecclesial documents, the title of the “Founder of an Ecclesial Institute” has different meanings. Up until Vatican Council II, there were two predominant ones:

- *historical-juridic (or canonical)*: one who conceived the idea of a Religious or Apostolic Movement, identified its purposes, and delineated the norms of life and of governance for it (at least the essential ones) was declared a Founder in a *historical-juridic sense*.
- *historical-theological*: one who felt called by God to create an Ecclesial Institute, and who defined its goals, type of life and spirit was recognized as its Founder in a *theological-historical sense*.

In the documents of Vatican II, a third significance emerges:

- *theological-charismatic*: a Founder in this sense is one who was called by God, not simply to create a new institute, but to give life to it and to live *personally* the experience of the Spirit which characterizes said institute.

Don Bosco is the Founder of the Salesian Family in all senses – historical, juridic, theological, and charismatic:

in the historical-juridic sense: he gave origin to the three institutes by indicating their purpose and norms;

⁶ Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, SDB. *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*. Diego Borgatello, SDB, ed. Vol. II. (New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 1966) 467-468. Print.
Ibid. Vol. VII. 171.

in the theological sense: he felt he was “called by God” to give life to a spiritual Family; and

in the charismatic sense: he gave life to and personally lived the Gospel experience of the apostolic Family created by him.

B. In order to recognize Don Bosco as an instrument in God’s Hands, the Church relied upon the criteria of its Christian wisdom: the authenticity of his virtues and of his actions. He, himself, in the midst of his developing experience, was certain that he was being guided by Providence. To John Bosco, a young Priest in Torino in 1841, the Holy Spirit gave a special sensitivity for perceiving, through different experiences, the difficulties in which the young found themselves for, having been uprooted from their country life, they flooded this city which was in full social, political, and religious upheaval. He was thus called to consecrate his life to help them become honest, upright citizens and good Christians and to create, to this end, a series of works which met their corporal and spiritual needs.

C. The Holy Spirit brought Don Bosco to discover gradually that his mission to the young “had to spread out in space and time for the benefit of different peoples and of numerous generations.” But to do this he needed “men capable of working with Don Bosco and appropriate Institutes to assure continuity in dynamic fidelity.” From 1844 on, he surrounded himself with Priests and laity, men and women, who formed a type of “Congregation of St. Francis de Sales”: these were his first collaborators. Later, at the urging of the Holy Spirit, Don Bosco understood that his complex and important mission would have a greater probability of perduring in a stable way if he were able to count on persons who were entirely dedicated to it. This same Holy Spirit raised up the call to apostolic consecration in the hearts of the first disciples of the Saint. Thus, beginning in 1859, the date of the founding of the Salesian Society, the first manner of the “Congregation of St. Francis de Sales” neither disappeared nor was absorbed, but, as the Founder tells us: “was divided into two categories, or, rather, two families.” Those who were free to, and felt they had the vocation, gathered together in common life, living in that edifice (the Oratory/Hospice of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco) which has always been recognized as the Mother House and the center of the “Pious Association”, which the Holy Father, the Pontifex Maximus, advised him to call “the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales” and which it is still called today. The others, or “the externs,” continued living in the world, in their own families, while continuing to promote the work of the oratories, still keeping the name of the “Union” or the “Congregation of St. Francis de Sales” and of “promoters,” or “Cooperators.”

These Cooperators, called “extern members”, were expressly foreseen in the various drafts of the Salesian *Constitutions* from 1860 to 1874, the year in which they had to be sacrificed (Chapter VII of volume X of the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco* is dedicated entirely to the approval of the *Constitutions* of the Salesian Society and many of the difficulties encountered by Don Bosco to do so.) In 1872, he founded the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, which he wanted aggregated, or closely affiliated, to the Salesian Society so that they might care for the education of girls. Don Bosco, therefore, did not renounce his firm conviction that the greatest number of Christians possible must unite their forces for the good of souls, above all of poor youth. From 1874 to 1876, he wrote various drafts of the *Rule* in which his project was eventually clarified and he found a different juridic configuration: The Salesian Society had to be as life-giving leaven to a vast charitable movement in which men and women would be participants in his mission and in his spirit – each one according to his or her own state of life: thus, the Association of Salesian Cooperators was born – the third institute and bearer of his charism.

D. The first chapter of the Cooperators' *Rule* written by Don Bosco states: "It is necessary that Christians unite in doing good." ("Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way..." Par. I) It lists some general points which, without a doubt, still have relevance for us today despite its having been written in the style of the 1800s and, therefore, reflect the cultural climate of his times. The fact that it is important for Christians to work in a united manner is witnessed to by the experience of *the Early Apostolic Church*. The advantages gained from working in this way of solidarity are indicated by the *Gospel* message. This united front of Catholics is necessary if they are *to face up to* other social, cultural, and political forces.

E. The Divine inspiration for founding the Salesian Society and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was simply accepted by many without any fuss while the origin of the Cooperators was ascribed to an initiative that was purely human and suggested to Don Bosco by historical circumstances. But it was Don Bosco himself who said:

It is not Don Bosco, it is the *Hand of God* who makes use of the Cooperators! Listen! You have said that... the work of the Cooperators is loved by many. And I add that it will spread into all nations, into all Christianity... The *Hand of God* upholds it! The Cooperators will be those who will help promote the Catholic spirit. This may seem like a utopia of mine, but still I stand by this conviction. (*Biographical Memoirs* Vol. XVIII 125)

For Don Bosco, becoming a Cooperator was a concrete way of being a Catholic and, in the final analysis, a way of living the Gospel in one's historical reality. This article of the *Project of Apostolic Life* harkens back to the approval of the Association, as contained in Pius IX's Papal Brief of 1876. It is a pronouncement of the highest authority of the Church and the guarantor of the authenticity of the Gospel inspiration for the apostolic project carried out by the Cooperators.

References

Atti del Capitolo Generale Speciale 9s; 12, 153, 729.

Auffray A., *Con Don Bosco e con i tempi. I Cooperatori salesiani* (Torino, SEI 1955).

Ceria E., *I Cooperatori salesiani, un po' di storia* (Torino, SEI 1952).

ChavezVillanueva P., *Conoscere e imitare Don Bosco*. Strenna 2012, Tipografia Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2012.

Desramaut F., "La storia primitiva della Famiglia salesiana secondo tre esposti di Don Bosco", in Desramaut F., Midali M. (a cura), *La Famiglia salesiana* (Collana Colloqui sulla vita salesiana 5) (Torino-Leumann, Elle Di Ci 1974) 17-44.

Francesco, [*Evangeliu Gaudium: Esortazione Apostolica sull'annuncio del Vangelo nel mondo attuale \(24 novembre 2013\)*](#).

Francesco, [MisericordiaeVultus, Bolla di indizione del Giubileo Straordinario della Misericordia \(11 aprile 2015\)](#).

Memorie Biografiche X 597; XVIII 161; XVIII 258.

Midali M., "Identità carismatico-spirituale della Famiglia salesiana", in MIDALI Mario (a cura), *Costruire insieme la Famiglia salesiana* (LAS Roma 1983) 166-168.

Midali M., *Madre Mazzarello. Il significato del titolo di confondatrice* (LAS Roma 1982) 15-30, 123s.

Stella P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica I* (Zurich, Pas-Verlag 1968) 209-227.

Viganò E., "La Famiglia salesiana", in *Atti del Capitolo Superiore*, 304 (aprile-giugno 1982) 8-27.

from The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco

Volume II, p. 35. On November 3, 1841, before setting out for Turin, Don Bosco celebrated Mass in the church at Castelnuovo. We have an indication of what may have been his thoughts at this time from a document found in his handwriting and dated a little later that year.

The words of the Holy Gospel, "that he might gather into one the children of God who were scattered abroad," [John 11, 52] seem to apply literally to the situation of youth in this our present day. This most precious segment of human society, upon whom all hopes of a happy future are founded, is not of itself of a bad disposition. Take away their parents' neglect, their idleness and bad companions, and it becomes very easy to instill into their tender hearts principles of order, good habits, respect and religion. If at times these youngsters are already infected with evil, it is more often through thoughtlessness than through deliberate malice. These youngsters truly need a helping hand to take care of them, and to lead them away from evil to the practice of virtue.

The difficulty is to find a way of gathering them together for moral instruction. This was the mission of the Son of God; and this can be achieved only through the Holy Church He founded, by nature eternal and unchanging. This Church has been and always will be the teacher of men, and its law is so perfect that it can adapt itself to the vicissitudes of the times and to the temperaments of all men. Oratories are, in my opinion, a suitable means for teaching moral principles to uneducated and underprivileged boys. When I chose this particular work in the sacred ministry, it was my intention to consecrate all my efforts to the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. My purpose was to make of them good citizens here on earth and, one day, worthy inhabitants of heaven. May God help me to continue this task until my dying breath.

From these words it becomes apparent that the idea which was first manifested to him in a dream was that of one flock under one shepherd, the selfsame mission of Our Lord. He yearned to gather about him not only all the boys of Turin and its environs, but the boys of all nations: Christians and pagans, Catholics and non-Catholics, schismatics and heretics, civilized and uncivilized, in order to bring to all the knowledge of the true God and His Son Jesus Christ. Such charity was to be boundless. "A sincere love

of one's neighbor," wrote St. Francis de Sales, "is one of the greatest and most excellent gifts which Divine Goodness can give to man." This is why Don Bosco unhesitatingly tells us: "Let us save youth!"

Volume VII, pp. 171-172 The Ruffino chronicle has this entry under October 28 [1862]: "Don Bosco said: 'The Lord sent me to look after boys. I must therefore cut down on other work and keep myself fit for them.' But how could he do that when, directly or indirectly, he saw his boys in everything he did?" For their use, too, he published *Letture Cattoliche*. To the November issue, entitled *Germaine, a Cabinetmaker*—a story centered on the happiness of the Christian family—he added an *Appendix* for the spiritual guidance of boys exposed to moral dangers:

Tips for Boys

1. Don't fancy that your age can make you look forward to a long life. It is too uncertain, my dear boys. Rather, it is quite certain that some day you shall die and that a bad death brings eternal misery. Therefore, be more concerned with keeping yourselves in the state of grace in order to meet death than with anything else.
2. If you happen to be doing some good, the devil and your own sense of self-satisfaction will tell you that you've probably done more than enough already; maybe people will even tag you as fanatic and overscrupulous. At death, though, the good you have done will seem so slight that you will realize you have been deceived. Strive to be aware of this now.
3. A good thing for boys to think of seriously is the choice of a vocation. Unfortunately, most youngsters hardly give it a thought and end up choosing the wrong state of life, with present and future unhappiness. Therefore, consider it and ask God to enlighten you. Then you will make the right choice.
4. Two enemies we can never fully overcome: our flesh and our fear of what others may think of us. You will be fortunate indeed if you get used to fighting and subduing them while you are still young.
5. Amusements are not necessarily bad, but it is not easy to choose and use them moderately. Always ask your confessor's advice and use them sparingly. If you can sometimes do without them to exercise self-control, you will have achieved a victory and a reward.
6. Don't consider yourself truly spiritual-minded until you go to confession and Communion gladly and can really enjoy spiritual books and devout companions.
7. The boy who cannot put up with offenses, but must entertain revengeful feelings, or who cannot accept a reprimand, even undeserved, from his superiors or parents, is still far behind in virtue.
8. No poison is more fatal to youth than bad literature. More than ever today, books are to be feared because of their abundance and disguise. If you value your faith and your soul, do not read them unless you have your confessor's approval or the advice of other learned, pious persons. I repeat—learned and pious.
9. As long as you do not fear and avoid bad companions, consider yourself to be in serious danger. In fact, fear you are bad yourself.

10. Choose your friends and companions among people who are known to be good; in fact, choose the best among them. As you associate with them, imitate the best in them and avoid their shortcomings. We all have those.

11. Be neither stubborn nor fickle. I have always noticed that fickle-minded people usually fail in all they do.

The worst folly of a Christian is to keep putting off his conversion, as though he were sure of the future and felt that it mattered little to play safe. Be truly smart. Put your conscience in order as if it were your last chance. Go to confession at least every two weeks; make some meditation and do some spiritual reading daily; examine your conscience every evening; pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady; attend Sunday congregation; make the Exercise for a Happy Death. Above all, be deeply, sincerely, and constantly devoted to the Blessed Virgin. If you could only understand how important this is, you would not trade it for all the gold in the world! Therefore, cherish this devotion. I hope and pray that you may one day say, "All good things come to me together with it." [Wis. 7, 11]

from The Identity of the Salesian Cooperator

“Things are always better at the start,” said French philosopher Pascal. To understand the identity of the Cooperator and to be able to situate it with certainty in the Salesian Family and the Church today, it is necessary to return to its historical birth. Identity is not a static reality. Inside of it is an ever-evolving dynamism. It is born from the knowledge of its roots, bringing it to read and to live the present in an active way and always to look to the future with a creative eye and heart. This was Don Bosco. In essence, the Salesian Cooperators have the great fortune of having been founded directly by a saint – and a saint of great stature.

1. Don Bosco, Founder (Statutes, *Project of Apostolic Life – Project of Apostolic Life*, Statutes 1)

The story of the Salesian Family begins not with the founding of the Salesian Religious, but with that of the Cooperators, even if the juridical form dates only to 1876.

Don Bosco himself affirms this in various writings² about the history of the Cooperators: “*The history of the Cooperators goes back to 1841 when we began gathering poor boys...*” [Memorie Biografiche (MB) XI, p. 84]. During his years of pastoral work in the three Oratories, of Valdocco, Porta Nuova, and Vanchiglia – 18 years before the founding of the Salesians – Don Bosco seeks and finds collaborators: Diocesan Priests, the nobility, or simple people who will teach catechism and night classes, will provide for the material needs and seek work for the boys in the city, and women who will do the sewing, mending, and cleaning.

Juridical Existence of this “Congregation”

² Three are of particular importance: 1, the historical introduction to the first SDB Constitutions; 2, an autograph by Don Bosco from 1876, sent to Bishop Gastaldi; 3, a manuscript of Don Berto, corrected by Don Bosco, entitled *The History of the Salesian Cooperators*

From very early on, “*from the year 1844, in order to preserve the unity of spirit and of discipline,*” Don Bosco gives thought to gathering these collaborators together into a structured association, giving them the significant name of “*promoters or Salesian Cooperators, established as in a true Congregation (as a lay group) under the title of St. Francis de Sales*” (MB XI, p. 85) Around 1850, he has the group officially recognized by Archbishop Frasoni, and asks for spiritual favors for them from the Pope himself (MB IV, p. 93). In 1852 he obtains its canonical establishment (decree of March 31, 1852), which names him the “*Spiritual Director-Head*” of the three Oratories with “*all the faculties necessary and opportune*” for his pastoral work (MB IV, p. 378; XI, p. 85). These collaborators follow the Regulations of the Oratory (MB III, pp. 90-108).

The Enrichment and Splitting of this “Congregation”

Beginning around 1852, Don Bosco formulates two convictions, the fruit of his dreams: 1. for his work to continue, he needs people who will be totally available to him and 2. he will find them from among his own boys. And so, the “Congregation of Promoters” was enriched little by little with young members: from among the older boys, whether externs from the Oratory or student boarders, and in particular, from the members of the Immaculate Conception Sodality (founded in 1856). From this group the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales (Salesian Society) will be born on December 18, 1859. Nevertheless, the “ordinary” members never leave Don Bosco’s mind for a minute. Don Bosco himself, in one famous text, presented the Salesian Society as the fruit of a break-up of the first group – that of the Cooperators. The two groups, existing contemporaneously, were working under different conditions; some as Religious, the others as laity, but both “*united in working for poor youth*” (MB XI, pp. 85-86).

The plans for one, elaborate Society

Don Bosco had understood that his Congregation would have a new character: completely apostolic, adapted to the service of the young, and in no way monastic³ so much so that its “founding members” were not men of particular religious experience, but the young who had grown up in the lively atmosphere of Valdocco.

For this reason Don Bosco conceives of the idea that his Society could officially aggregate to itself the lay members from whom it arose: they, too, would dedicate themselves in a Salesian way to the young and could do so not only in the Salesian Oratories, but also in their parishes and neighborhoods (here appears a new, amplified, type of Cooperator). This revolutionary plan is presented in the text of the Constitutions sent to Archbishop Frasoni in 1860, and in the text sent to Rome in 1864: chapter 16 “The Externs” (MB VII, p. 885)⁴:

1. *Anyone, even someone living in his own home, in his own family, can belong to our Society.*

³ Cf. The typical excerpt of a letter from Don Bosco to Canon Guiol of Marsiglia, cited by F. Desramaut in *Costruire insieme la F.S.*, 85: “*Noi non siamo religiosi...In faccia alla Chiesa ed al governo noi non siamo considerati. se non Pia Società di beneficenza*”. (“We are not Religious... we are not considered as anything other than a Pious Society of charity by the Church and by the government.”)

⁴ Cf. the different drafts of this famous chapter in G.BOSCO, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Fr. di Sales*. Critical text by F.MOTTO, LAS-Roma 1982,210-211

2. *He does not make any vow; but will seek to put into practice that part of the present Regulations which is compatible with his age, state of life, and condition... works of charity, especially those directed towards the spiritual good of youth and the people.*
3. *Let him at least make a promise to the Rector to use both his material goods and abilities in such a way that he deems will be for the greater glory of God.*

The Significant Struggle Between Rome and Don Bosco over this Plan (1864-1874)

On June 23, 1864, the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Religious puts out the Decree of Praise that recognizes the “ecclesial” existence of this new Society, and on March 1, 1869, they put out the Decree of Approval. Don Bosco interprets this as an official recognition of the two groups and of their joint unity. But the Roman examiners do not intend it in this manner. For 10 years – up until the penultimate version of the Constitutions, in January of 1874, Don Bosco will try to make them understand and accept his idea, but without success. He immediately thinks of how to adapt this new situation to their still valid juridical existence. After two years of reflection and three successive rough drafts of the Regulations, he definitively establishes them in a “pious association” under the name: “*Union of Salesian Cooperators.*” This, after they had been recognized by Pius IX in a pontifical brief of May 5, 1876. Don Bosco writes their definitive Regulations and publishes it in Torino, with the date of July 12, 1876, under the title: “*Salesian Cooperators, or a Practical Way to Be Useful for Good Mores and a Civil Society.*”

Considerations

1. An attentive reading of these Regulations (one of the fundamental texts written by Don Bosco) with its 8 little chapters and its preface “*to the Reader*” leaves no doubt about the exact nature of this *Union*, for they present a picture of the Cooperator and leave them open, even beyond Salesian works, to ample Salesian action in their parishes and in “civil society”.
2. Its members are brothers and descendants, without interruption, of the 1850 “Salesian Promoters” (cf. MB XI, p. 86);
3. They count among their number women Cooperators (Reg. IV, 4) and Cooperators who have not been officially “aggregated” to the Salesian Society (cf. MB XI, pp. 73-74);
4. They are “in association” with the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, whose members serve as their “*sure and stable link*”. To them are proposed “*the same harvest,*” they have the same Major Superior, and “*the members of the Congregation consider them all as other brothers in Jesus Christ*” or “*confreres*” (Pref.; ch. II; ch. IV intro; ch. V 3; ch. VI 1-2; ch. VII 4-5);
5. The Regulations, also called “Rules”, are closely inspired by the Salesian Constitutions and put forth the “lay” Salesian vocation: “*the tenor of life*” is the same as that of the Salesian Religious (III); “*the principal aim is an active life in the exercise of charity towards one’s neighbor, especially to youth at risk*” (III), whether in Salesian works or in their parishes (V, 2), with the same spirit and method, “*the spirit*” of chastity, poverty, and obedience (VIII, 1); the same fundamental practices of piety (VIII, 2 and 4), and even the same indulgences as the Salesians themselves (VII, 1-3).

This group of facts let us see that Don Bosco, our Founder, never had in mind that either the pastoral work of the Salesians or the pastoral Salesian work in the world would ever be without the active presence of the Cooperators, who would always be seen as brothers in spirit and in work.

When a Founder “ruminates” over his plan for 14 years and defends it for 10 before a Roman Congregation, it means it is something significant and important. Don Bosco views the Cooperators through an “apostolic” lens: they are “lay” Salesians, “brothers” of the Salesian Religious. They follow, in substance, the same Rule based on a promise, and dedicated, in their own way, to the good of youth. This ought to make us understand how closely bound the relationship between Salesian Religious and Salesian externs was in Don Bosco’s mind. At the first General Chapter (1877), Don Bosco thus explains why he refused to “decentralize” the organization of the Cooperators, as the Franciscans do with their Third Order: *“The greatest effort that I have made for these Cooperators, something which I studied for many years... was exactly this: to find the way in which to make all united to the same head and that this head might be able to have his thoughts reach everyone”* (MB XIII, p. 263). Don Bosco’s concern is for unity of spirit and of action.

from A Prophecy’s Journey

Whatever person, even while living in the world, in his own home, in the heart of his own family, can belong to our Society (FROM THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES OF 1860).

Right from the very start of his work in favor of the Christian education of the young, Don Bosco knew how to create around himself a spiritual and apostolic movement which, to his mind, was already the *Society of St. Francis de Sales*, if only in a germinal way.

This reality, which acquired huge proportions in a very short time, involved the young, clerics, Priests, and laity in one single *spiritual movement*. It was a complex reality and seemingly undifferentiated, thus raising up perplexities in some external observers while being, in many ways, *prophetic*.

Twenty-two years after Don Bosco's having established himself at Valdocco, in a letter written in 1868 to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Religious, the then Archbishop of Torino, Alessandro Riccardi, expressed thus his perplexity concerning the work which certainly didn't follow the "canons" of other Religious Orders of the time. He writes:

It is impossible to understand just what a Congregation composed of so many disparate elements can hope to achieve, for they cannot possibly have the same goal. The school in Torino has been a place of chaos up until now - what with the artisans, students, laity, clerics, and Priests all mixed together. It will become even more so by expanding its sphere of action.

This unique mix of *laity* and *clergy* seems to represent, therefore, a characteristic element of its originality right from the very start of the Salesian work.

The birth and the development of the vast spiritual movement which drew its origins from Don Bosco, however, presents itself in continuity with the formation he received at the Convitto Ecclesiastico, the school for young Priests which was opened in Torino through the inspiration of venerable Pio Brunone Lanteri in an old monastery, annexed to the Church of St. Francis of Assisi.

Don Bosco would remain at the Convitto for three years, under the guidance of his spiritual director, St. Joseph Cafasso. When, in the summer of 1844, he leaves this precious ecclesiastical institution, his human and spiritual formation will have had an indelible imprint placed on it.

The one who had come up with the idea of the Convitto, Fr. Pio Brunone Lanteri (1759-1830), Founder of the *Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary*, had been a disciple of the Swiss Jesuit Nikolaus von Diessbach, who held in esteem and diffused throughout Europe the work of St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori. In his battle against a rigid and "rigoristic" vision of Christianity, Diessbach had given life to a new form of apostolate wherein the laity played a fundamental role. The spread of "good literature," was, in fact entrusted to this "secret" union of men of goodwill who were gathered into associations which bore the name "Christian Friendships." (*le Amicizie Cattoliche*)

The "Extern Members" of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary

Lanteri was an enthusiastic past pupil and collaborator of von Diessbach, who, in his turn, was someone who understood the importance and the characteristics of the cultural clash which was in motion between the Catholics and the enemies of Religion. He understood that the French Revolution was a consequence of a long cultural movement, reaching back throughout the entire 1700s - the Enlightenment movement - which had changed the tendencies and the ideas of a large part of the population. In France, the revolution had found a Church weakened by divisions and doubts following the spread of the Jansenist heresy, with its moral and sacramental rigorism.

Following in the footsteps of Diessbach, Brunone sought to involve the laity in his movement to "re-conquer society's culture," by employing as its privileged apostolic instrument the spread of books in every place and among the different social classes - for reading, study, and an examination of individual works. When, in 1816, he founded the *Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary*, he foresaw in its *Constitutions* the presence of "extern members." This concept and this terminology from the *Constitutions* of the Oblates will be picked up by Don Bosco who will use it amply when drafting his *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales* - a labor he began in 1858. In 1850, barely four years after having taken up residence in Valdocco, he himself will seek to give life to a sort of "secret association of the laity", the "Provisional Pious Union of St. Francis de Sales." This represents his first and timid attempt to give continuity to his educational work through the contribution of his first collaborators. We will return to this "Pious Union" in a future paragraph. First, though, let us stop to get to know some of these original lay collaborators.

In Don Bosco's mind, the fecund presence of the laity and their involvement in the educational work in his Oratories began in 1841, even before settling at Valdocco (which would take place five years later). "We began gathering poor and abandoned boys in the city of Torino," he himself writes in a memoir from the 1870s, citing the events of 1841, the year of his Priestly ordination.

They were gathered in specific locales and churches, were entertained with pleasant and wholesome recreation, instructed, and guided to receive worthily the holy Sacraments of Confirmation, Confession, and Communion. To help with the many and varied tasks, a number of gentlemen united with us and, through their personal work and their charity, they supported our work, called ‘the Festive Oratories’. These gentlemen were named after the task that they were assigned to do, but, in general, they were called ‘benefactors,’ ‘promoters,’ and even ‘Cooperators’ of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. (*Biographical Memoirs*, vol. XI, p. 73)

Around 1858, the thought of giving continuity to his educative work matured in Don Bosco; probably in that year, he wrote the first draft of the *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales*. He himself continues, in that memoir (p.74) already cited above:

From 1852 until 1858 various spiritual favors and graces were granted; but in that year the Congregation was divided into two categories, or, rather, into two families. Those who were at liberty to do so and felt they had the vocation, gathered together to live common life, residing in the building which has always been the Mother House, or the center, of our Pious Association - which the Holy Father advised us to call ‘the Pious *Society of St. Francis de Sales*’ and as it is still called today. The others, i.e., the externs, remain living in the world, at home in the bosom of their own families, while continuing to promote the work of the Oratories.

The first texts of the *Constitutions* are witnesses to this unity of spirit and of intent between laity and ecclesiastics, as we will see. The laity and the clergy, in Don Bosco's mind, are both part – juridically – of one *Society*.

We will now try to get to know some of these first collaborators of Don Bosco.

Chevalier Marco Gonella

Friend of theologian Luigi Guala, the Founder and first Rector of the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Torino, Chevalier Gonella was denounced by the French police along with Fr. Guala for his correspondence and his support of Pope Pius VII, who was a prisoner in Savona. He was introduced to Don Bosco by Don Borel, another of Don Bosco's collaborators from the very first Sunday gatherings. The Chevalier was probably his first benefactor.

Beginning with 1848, as Director of the “*Pia Opera della MendicITÀ istruita*,” and after having come to know Don Bosco's educational method, he sought to introduce it in the institute entrusted to him. [This “Pious Work of Instruction of the Poor” was begun in 1783 in the Kingdom of Savoy. Its title referred to

a group of persons united to give alms and to teach catechism to fight pauperism in Torino; later, the members began to open their own, and to support others', schools founded for both poor boys and poor girls. Don Bosco would be one of the recipients of their charity – both monetarily – and, at least on the part of Sig. Gonella himself, with his presence in person to teach and catechize his Oratory boys. – translator's note] Many times he went to the Oratory where he did assistance in the playground and distributed pastries and drinks to the boys on the occasion of feasts. In 1855, during a ceremony which was presided by the Bishop of Biella, he was the godfather of the Waldensian youth, Avandetto, who had converted to Catholicism. His name is often found listed on the committees running the *lotteries* – fundraisers to benefit the boys who were living at the Oratory. He made his spiritual exercises at the Shrine of St. Ignatius of Loyola above Lanzo, at the same retreat house where Don Bosco made his for thirty-two years. More than once he had Don Bosco and his boys as guests at his house in Chieri. (A letter addressed by Don Bosco to him on May 20, 1867, concluded in this way: "With great esteem and gratitude, believe me in the Lord, a most obliged servant of your most dear lordship, John Bosco, Priest".) His brother Eustace, who became Cardinal in 1868, was also in correspondence with Don Bosco.

Count Carlo Cays of Giletta

In a conference Don Bosco gave to the Cooperators in 1878, he purposely recounted about the benefactors at the beginning of the Oratory:

‘It was truly Divine Providence who sent them and through them the good multiplied itself more and more. These first Salesian Cooperators, whether clergy or laity, didn't pay attention to discomforts and weariness but seeing how many undisciplined young people were brought back to the path of virtue, sacrificed themselves for the salvation of others. I saw many who left behind every kind of comfort of their homes not only on Sundays, but even every day of Lent, and that at an hour very inconvenient for them - but convenient for the boys - to teach catechism. I even saw them come to Valdocco every night during the winter – by muddy and dangerous roads and paths, covered with snow and ice – to substitute in classes where the teachers were missing, taking up so much of their time.’ Among these, we must list Count Cays of Giletta, the Marquis Fassati, Count Callori of Vignale, and also Count Scarampi of Pruney, who, in 1900, at the age of 80, while speaking with Prof. Don Celestine Durando, cried tears of consolation and tenderness when recalling Don Bosco and these ‘long ago’ days. (*Biographical Memoirs*, vol. III, p. 177)

Count Cays of Giletta, who was also a Member of Parliament until 1860, must be listed among the most generous of Don Bosco's benefactors; his contributions to the story of the origins are not limited, however, only to economic support. Right from the earliest days, he assiduously gave himself to his work as catechist and as treasurer and promoter of the lotteries. As the *Memorie Biografiche* recount:

He was always among the first whenever it came to doing some good act or impeding some evil. He saw to beginning and presiding over the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul, both in the city and outside it; visited

the infirm, both in their homes and in the hospitals; came to the aid of the most derelict poor; and catechized the little ones." [vol. VII, p. 96 (omitted in the English edition)]

This is his profile as traced out in volume XIII of the *Biographical Memoirs*:

Carlo Alberto Cays, Count of Giletta and of Casalette, descended from a family of most ancient nobility, from Nice. Having completed his first studies at the Carmel High School of Torino, under the direction of the Jesuits, he pursued a degree in jurisprudence. In 1837, he married but eight years later became a widower with a son. Then he became father of the poor. With particular love, he cared for abandoned youth, teaching Christian doctrine at the Oratories of St. Francis de Sales, of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, and of the Guardian Angel. He was one of the noble citizens of Torino who, 'captured' by our blessed Don Bosco, cooperated with him and under his orders did good both morally and materially to the sons of the people. Just like his elders, he enjoyed the benevolence of the King and the Royal Family, who, during the cholera of 1854, lived for three months in his castle at Casalette, which was situated in a most salubrious place at the foot of the Alps. He was also a Member of the sub-Alpine Parliament during the sixth Legislature, from 1857-1860; it was his voice that resounded eloquently in Parliament Hall in defense of sound principles and of the revindication of the rights of the Church. When, however, he saw that politics was taking a turn very contrary to Catholic sentiment, he retreated to private life, dedicating himself solely to works of charity and of Religion... A long-standing desire to withdraw from the world and to embrace the Religious state returned ever more strongly in his heart around 1877. (vol. XIII, p. 157)

That same year, Count Cays received the cassock on September 18 from Don Bosco's hands.

Marquis Domenico Fassati

On a page of the *Biographical Memoirs* concerning 1855 we read:

The Marquis Dominic Fassati, for many years on feast days and every day of Lent, regularly came to the Oratory to teach catechism to a numerous class of poor artisans, even putting off his dinner hour to an inconvenient time... Singular was his zeal, wonderful all the means he invented to keep the boys attentive and assiduous, and to help them progress in their religious knowledge. Accustomed to order, he, as a good soldier, placed boys in such a way as to have them all in sight, now questioning this one, now that one, a

few at a time, and with pop questions so that the fear of being called upon kept them from daydreaming. On a sheet of paper, he kept a list of the first and last names of each of his pupils, marked their absences and their, more-or-less, good conduct. Every now and again he handed out holy pictures, medals, booklets, and the like, to the most diligent. Even when he assumed a serious, military mien, they still loved him very much. When they saw him arrive in class, they gave him lively signs of joy and only unwillingly missed his class. In short, Marquis Fassati kept his boys in such good order and discipline and taught them so well as to be proposed as a model for others. Desirous of perfecting even more his art of teaching the little ones, this nobleman didn't balk at sitting in on the conferences which Don Bosco gave from time to time to his catechists. (vol. V, pp. 129-130)

He always looked for the chance to meet with Don Bosco and chat with him, inviting him to lunch as a kind of a "prize" every now and again; but when he realized how many commitments Don Bosco had, he continued to contribute generously to his many initiatives without asking for the desired hospitality.

Small Businessman Giuseppe Gagliardi

Not all of Don Bosco's first helpers were noblemen or of high rank in the city of Torino; many were of the humblest circumstances, like the shopkeeper Joseph Gagliardi. The *Biographical Memoirs* narrate:

Don Bosco's mere presence was enough to keep that crowd of hooligans, who were not used to discipline, in order but he was not able to be with them always and everywhere, especially in public churches, at the time of the sacred functions; therefore, he always needed 'lieutenants' to do assistance and other persons who provided for the expenses – which were not light – to entice and reward the boys. These helpers did not lack. 'Right from the start,' Don Bosco wrote, 'among our benefactors was a certain Gagliardi – a shopkeeper who had a store in front of the Basilica of St. Maurice – who, not having enough money to give alms, came to the Oratory to assist the boys and sought to interest others in our favor: Signor Montuardi, who, for about two years gave Don Borel a monthly offering of thirty *lire*, and the generous and rich banker Commendatore Cotta. These and others like them even committed themselves to find good patrons for those boys who didn't know where to go to find work.' (vol. II, p. 271)

Gagliardi also promoted the lotteries and, as an assistant at the Oratory from its very first years, especially on Sundays, was often mentioned by Don Bosco in some letters of greeting on the occasion of some of his absences from the Oratory.

Feminine Presence

The number and the generosity of the first women benefactors of Don Bosco is incalculable. Many of them, however, did not limit themselves to economic support of the work of the Oratories. Together with the men helpers, women helpers also appeared at the Oratory – about whom Don Bosco also spoke in a conference. We read in the *Biographical Memoirs*:

‘The need to help our poor boys materially made itself felt more and more. Some of the boys had socks and jackets in tatters, hanging in pieces on all sides, even to the point of lacking modesty. There were those who could never change that rag of a shirt which they had on; these were so dirty that no boss would want to hire them to work in his office. It was here that the goodness and usefulness of these women Cooperators began to make itself seen. To the glory of these ladies of Torino, I would now like to recount everywhere how many of them, even if they came from such prominent and noble families, would, nonetheless, take those jackets and those revolting socks, and fix them with their own hands; or would personally, I say, take those shirts, so ripped and torn and that maybe had never before passed through water, take them to wash and mend and then give them back renewed to the poor boys, who, attracted by this perfume of Christian charity, persevered at the Oratory and in the practice of virtue. Various ones of these meritorious ladies sent linen, new clothes, money, food, and whatever else they could. Some are here present listening to me while many others have already been called by the Lord to receive the reward for their labors and works of charity.’ These holy women gathered around Mamma Margaret, the first of them all, and around her good sister [Marianne]: Mrs. Margaret Gastaldi, mother of Canon Lawrence Gastaldi, and, with her, the Marchesa Fassati; then another illustrious Dame of the Court and others still – and they did not balk at associating themselves with the humble farm woman from Becchi to mend these rags in her poor little room. And when Don Bosco began to take in those little orphans, with maternal abnegation, they took care of them as though as they would their own children. Every Saturday they brought the students shirts and handkerchiefs. Every month they handed out sheets which had been washed and sometimes mended with diligence. It was Mrs. Gastaldi who took care of the laundry. On Sunday, she would pass all the beds in review, and then, like an Army general, would line up the boys, and one-by-one observe if they had changed their shirt, and if they had washed their hands and neck. (vol. III, pp. 177-178)