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A Prophecy's Journey

THE HISTORY OF THE SALESIAN COOPERATORS
FROM THEIR ORIGINS TO THE THRESHOLD OF VATICAN COUNCIL II

ROME 2015

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Presentation

Noemi Bertola, (SC), World Coordinator of the Salesian Cooperators

When sitting down to write a presentation to this small volume which was born of the initiative of a group of Salesian Cooperators and aided by two generous SDB “experts”, an expression of Cicero came to mind, which defined history thus: "History is a witness to the times, a light to truth, the life of a memory, and the messenger of antiquity." Indeed, Cicero is still on target today!

In fact, I believe that this slim and easy-to-digest volume can help us know the origins of our Association a little bit better: from Don Bosco's "grand idea" to so many Pontiffs' appreciation of it; from the figures of the first benefactors and Cooperators up until the realization of Don Bosco's prophetic idea concerning the importance of the laity, as sanctioned by Vatican Council II and *Christifideles Laici*.

In this year in which the Church, together with the entire Salesian world, has the joy of honoring the Saint of Youth, the gift that this small volume is, is a sign of the affection which the Salesian Cooperators of the Italy-Middle East-Malta Region nurture for Don Bosco and of the interest they have in knowing and "re-knowing" their own roots so as to live the present in fullness and to construct the future with enthusiasm.

The Salesian Family has always carefully and passionately preserved the documents of their origins because they are the font of inspiration and of certainty for responding to a charism desired by the Holy Spirit. The Salesian Cooperators keep archives, plans, and reports on their activities in their individual Centers and in the Provinces which testify throughout time to their generosity and their dedication to their service *with and for* the young and to the conviction that through their apostolate they were following the path of sanctity which Don Bosco prophesied.

I hope that this first research to deepen our knowledge will be followed by others so that the spiritual richness and witness which we can find in the service carried out by so many Salesian Cooperators who have preceded us will not only serve as an impetus to have us work more and better with our young people, but will also give us pride in belonging to an Association made up of simple and coherent people, who were faithful to this "dream" which has become a tangible reality in history - notwithstanding the many vicissitudes overcome.

This is the time in which we Salesian Cooperators of the Third Millennium, drawing from this precious heritage, are called upon to write new pages while remaining faithful to Salesian Spirituality, both in prayer and in action, as we: move with today's Church along the way of sanctity traced out by Don Bosco; remain consistent with our mission of charity towards the least and weakest of our brethren; and are capable of finding in each of them the true face of Christ.

With fraternal affection, I wish you, therefore, an enjoyable reading and a holy bicentennial year of our beloved Founder.

Noemi Bertola

Introduction

Paolo Santoni, Salesian Cooperator (SC)

The Journey of a Grand Idea. This is the title which Don Guido Favini, precisely on the threshold of Vatican Council II, more than half a century ago, gave to his booklet which narrated the story and the life of the Association of Salesian Cooperators.

Today, in the light of *Christifideles Laici* and the conclusions of the Council, the road which Don Bosco envisioned and mapped out appears to us more and more as an authentic prophecy: *laity and clergy together for the salvation of youth at risk...* This is the motivation which urges us on to trace out, in the light of a renewed sensitivity and on the occasion of the bicentenary of the birth of our Founder, a new history of the Salesian Cooperators.

This idea, born in June 2011, developed gradually. The original plan was to have a *team* of laity write the history of the Salesian Cooperators, above all, as the region of Italy was concerned, in collaboration with the *Central Salesian Archives* in Rome. They put themselves immediately to the task, but after a certainly useful and fruitful time spent consulting the *sources*, the need to respect some deadlines constrained these first four "Cyrenes," turned researchers overnight, to throw in the towel. Still, their work remains a point of reference and offered them a period of growth which is anything but useless!

The original idea, then, was modified and they had recourse to two "experts" in Salesian history and spirituality, even "disturbing" Don Bosco personally by revisiting some of his conferences given to the first Cooperators. Thus, the text which we give you here was born.

If we look for the significance and the objectives of this small publication, before all else, we need to consider it a gift which the *Consulta of the Italy-Middle East-Malta Region* of our Association gave to the Salesian Family on the occasion of the bicentenary of the birth of our Founder. Another objective is to make our own story known to the Salesian Cooperators themselves – as they are the ones for whom this easily legible literary work is primarily intended – for it will certainly help them understand their origins as an Association and, above all, plan the future towards which to head.

Other intended recipients are the Local Churches, and, in particular, the Diocesan Bishops and their Auxiliaries in Italy. The idea could be to present them with our story within the context of an audience with the Bishop, as requested by the Association's Local Councils present within a particular diocese. This is one way to make ourselves known and to put ourselves at the service of our Pastors.

Finally, this text is also intended for all those who wish to know our Association and its historical development along a century a little better – and, in a particular way, for the Salesians of Don Bosco and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to whom is entrusted the possibility to bring to fruition our Founder's extraordinary prophecy.

In developing this work, we wanted to make available an approachable and legible text that was not weighed down by notes while still being documented and rigorously historical (see the

bibliography). Whoever wishes to deepen his/her knowledge should consult the works listed there to gain a vaster and well-documented version of our history.

As regards the general structure of the text, it is divided into five chapters. The first, titled "The Origins," deals with the first steps and the historical beginnings of the involvement and the commitment of the laity in some Religions Congregations, starting with the very first ideas of some Churchmen of the early 1800s. Then it explains how Don Bosco made this plan of involving the laity in society his own by surrounding himself with persons who, beyond giving monetary aid, took on, above all, the commitment to help in the running of some of his first Works.

Chapter 2, "An Idea's Journey", traces the development of Don Bosco's first and prophetic vision in founding a Congregation, or a *Society*, comprised of Consecrated and laity. It presents all the vicissitudes and renunciations in the discussions with the ecclesiastical authorities that Don Bosco had to accept concerning these matters up until the definitive approval of the *Society of St. Francis de Sales* in 1874 and of the *Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators* in 1876. His idea, in fact, appeared too innovative for the ecclesial milieu of his time.

The third and fourth chapters, "The Strengthening of the Association Through 1888" and "The Salesian Cooperators from 1888 to 1965", develop the historical journey of our Association up until Don Bosco's death and then up until the close of Vatican Council II, respectively, by developing along general lines, the quantitative and qualitative growth from the Rectorate of Don Rua to that of Don Zaggiotti.

Chapter 5, "Don Bosco's Words," presents some excerpts of his reflections on the Salesian Cooperators: his thoughts, his words, and his inspiring and moving style at the annual gatherings, at which were present both members and those not yet affiliated, whom Don Bosco sensitized to the urgent needs of the young in difficulty.

Finally, in the *Appendix*, we placed the first *Rule* of the Salesian Cooperators written by Don Bosco himself – that of 1876 – because we could not exempt ourselves from publishing the historical text which constitutes the "basal document" of our Association.

At this point, it is necessary for us to thank, besides the authors, everyone who had a part in whatever way in making this work come to life. In particular, we thank Don Luigi Cei, SDB, Director of the *Central Salesian Archives*, and the four "Cyrenes" – Filippo Gugliara, Ettore Talarico, Mario Tollot e Daniele Tuzzolo – those Salesian Cooperators who opened the way for this work to begin with their initial, precious collaboration.

We fervently hope that this small text, in the midst of the wonderful climate of the bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth (1815 - 2015), may contribute to make known to those who are "not proficient in this area" this *Prophecy's Journey* and our ever-vital Salesian and lay spirit.

Paolo Santoni (SC)
Rome, January 31, 2015

1. The Origins

Don Giuseppe Buccellato, SDB

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)

2. An Idea's Journey

Don Giuseppe Buccellato, SDB

In every age, the union of good people has been deemed necessary so as to help each other in doing good and in keeping far from evil (FROM THE RULE OF 1876).

Pius IX's *Brief* of May 9, 1876, would mark both the point of arrival and that of beginning anew in the history of the Salesian Cooperators; but by what paths and what intermediate stages did the awareness of giving life to a separate Association (which had been thought of as a living and active part of the *Society of St. Francis de Sales*) mature in Don Bosco?

Actually, we can state that the birth of the idea of an association of laity is antecedent in Don Bosco to the idea of founding a Religious Congregation.

The first plan, which the Chronicles record under the name of the "Provisory Pious Union of St. Francis de Sales", dates back, in fact, to 1850. It is not surprising that an element of mystery surrounded this first plan for a lay association, given that it was the time of the *secret societies*. The objective, in perfect harmony with the purposes of Diessbach's and Lanteri's lay associations, was that of "keeping impiety from progressing further." (*Biographical Memoirs*, vol. IV, p. 120) This concerned the abuse on the part of the press in religious matters. In fact, in 1848, Charles Albert, King of Sardegna, had issued an edict on "Religious Liberty," which was seen as a threat in many Catholic environments.

The tone of this *fundamental document* is rather bellicose; Don Bosco's name does not even appear, probably for reasons of prudence. The Salesian Fr. Morand Wirth does not hesitate in defining this "Pious Union," composed of seven men, "a type of Catholic masonry." The document wishes:

May the Provisory Pious Society be the start of a huge consortium, which, with the contribution of all its members and by all other licit, legal, and morally correct means which can be found and may it attend to all those works of moral, material, and instructional beneficence which shall be judged the most apt and expeditious in impeding impiety from making further progress and, if possible, in uprooting it from there where it has already planted itself.

In this "Provisory Pious Union", one of the first historians of the *Society*, Don Eugenio Ceria, foresees the *remote preparation* for the future *Union of Cooperators*.

From the "Pious Union" to the Chapter on the "Extern Members"

In the 1850s, the future Salesian Society began to take shape. In Don Bosco's mind, the origins of the *Society of St. Francis de Sales* are understood as a gradual evolution whose beginning coincides, practically, with some decisive events of his life and, in particular, as we know, with the catechesis begun in a place adjacent to the sacristy of the Church of St. Francis of Assisi which is connected to the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Torino.

Don Bosco's repeated allusions to 1841's being the year in which the Society takes its beginning makes us understand that, in his mind, the *movement* to which he gave life, and which brings together both clergy and laity, has its own autonomous life and its own clear identity, even before being "institutionalized" and regulated by a Constitutional statement.

When, around 1858, Don Bosco wrote in his first draft of the *Constitutions* that "the purpose of this Congregation is to unite its members together – Priests, Clerics, and even laity – for the purpose of perfecting themselves by imitating, as much as possible, the virtues of our Divine Savior", he did not make any effort to come up with some theoretical project, but limited himself to "painting a picture" of what already existed, of the reality which was already being lived for seventeen years - both inside and around him.

The fact remains, however, that those years marked, in an obvious way, the beginning of that *process of institutionalization* which would give life to the Salesian Congregation and the Cooperator Association, through a fecund, if not always easy, dialogue with the ecclesiastical authorities. On the evening of December 18, 1859, in Don Bosco's room at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, a few of his "boys" gathered together for the purpose of "promoting and preserving the spirit of true charity which is necessary for the work of the Oratories for the abandoned and at-risk youth". In reality, in the history of the origins, this date was not celebrated as the beginning of the Work and of the founding of the Salesians for Don Bosco loved to date it to the year of that first *catechism*.

When Don Bosco, in the following year, prepared a draft of the *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales* to submit to the Archbishop of Torino, Luigi Fransoni, a chapter of four articles was dedicated to the laity who were, in all effects, part of the Society even while living in their own home and not being tied by vows. The chapter on these "externs" would be enhanced four years later by a fifth article. This text would obtain a first seal of approval with the *Decretum Laudis*. (*Decree of Praise* - Pontifical decree whereby a Diocesan Congregation is considered to have reached a point of development where it is granted to become a Congregation of Pontifical Right)

On account of the great historical interest and importance, we place here these articles in their entirety, as written in the 1864 edition of the *Constitutions*:

1. Whatever person, even while living in the world, in his own home, in the heart of his own family, can belong to our Society.
2. He does not make any vow but will seek to put into practice that part of the *Rule* which is compatible with his age, state, and condition as is

possible or to promote catechism for poor children, and see to the spread of good literature; and to work so that tridua, novenas, spiritual exercises and other such works of charity that will be especially directed to the spiritual good of the young and of common folk.

3. In order to participate in the spiritual benefits of the Society, it is necessary that he make at least a promise to the Rector to employ himself in those things which he will deem as giving greater glory to God.

4. Said promise, however, will not bind him under any pain of sin, not even venial.

5. Any member of the Society, who for a reasonable motive, should leave from it, shall be considered an "extern member" and can still participate in the spiritual benefits of the entire Society, provided he practice that part of the *Rule* prescribed for the externs.

Something analogous can be found in Pio Brunone Lanteri's *Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary*, as we have already stated, as well as in the figures of the "affiliates" and of the "enrolled," as described in the *Constitutions of the Institute of Charity* of Antonio Rosmini.

The Oppositions of the Congregation for Religious

The text of the *Constitutions* which Don Bosco presented in Rome in 1864 would not be approved by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, one reason being precisely because of the presence of this chapter on "extern members."

In fact, in his report dated April 6, 1864, the Consultor of the Congregation would write the following in its regard: "I think it would be a good thing to strike all those articles... which present a novelty in the affiliation of 'external persons' to the Institute, and a true danger, given the times we live in and those places which are little secure." The observations of Pro-secretary Svegliati are along the same lines: "You cannot permit persons extraneous to the Pious Institute to be enrolled by affiliation."

Don Bosco defended himself. He tried to save "his" idea. In his response to the Consultors, he made reference to the history of other ancient Orders and to the *tertiaries* who would promote the life of their Institute in the world. "If this chapter cannot be annexed to the *Constitutions*," he stated, "may it at least be placed at the end and approved as an appendix to the corrected text of the *Constitutions*." He made some changes, returning, in substance, to the 1860 text and submitted it all again to the Roman authorities in 1873, placing the chapter on the *externs* in an appendix to the corrected text.

But it was useless. In order to obtain a definitive approval of the *Constitutions* in 1874, he had to resign himself to suppress the contested articles.

Here begins the road which will bring him, two years later, to the founding of the Association of the Salesian Cooperators which, because of all that has been said, was born precisely due to the *failure* of the Founder's original plan. The Church of Rome was not ready to understand or to

approve that which today, in the light of the victories made by Vatican Council II, has become a true and recognized reality in the Statutes of some new Religious Institutes.

Laity and clergy together for the salvation of the young...

Towards a Definitive Plan for an Association of Lay Salesians

After the definitive suppression of the chapter on the "externs," Don Bosco compiled, date unknown, a text entitled *Associates of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales*. This text repeats, in substance, the contents of the suppressed chapter, notably developing them. For the first time one spoke of a Union, or distinct Association, even if it had strict ties to the *Society*.

An excerpt from the original manuscript reveals to us the *purposes* of this first try at an Association:

How many would withdraw themselves most willingly from the world to avoid the perils of perdition and to enjoy peace of heart and, thus, spend their life in solitude, in the charity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. But not all are called to that state of life. Many, because of age, or condition, or health, and very many for the lack of a vocation, are absolutely impeded from it. It is to satisfy this general desire that the Pious Association of St. Francis de Sales is proposed.

Its purpose is two-fold:

1° To propose a means of perfection to all those who are reasonably impeded from entering into the cloister of some Religious Institute.

2° To participate in the works of piety and of Religion which the members of the Salesian Congregation accomplish in public and in private, in whatever way for the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls.

These two benefits can easily be obtained by observing the rules of this Congregation, in those parts which are compatible with each person's state in life.

3° Another motive, perhaps more essential than the others, is added here: the need to unite in doing good. It is a fact that secular individuals form associations for their temporal affairs; they get together to spread bad literature and, in order to spread evil maxims in the world, they form an association to propagate erroneous teachings and to put forth false principles to unwary youth. And they succeed marvelously! Shall the Catholics remain idle or separate from one another in such a way that their works be paralyzed by the bad? May it never be so! Let us all unite under the Rules of the Salesian Congregation; let us become one heart and one soul with the "extern members" and be true brothers (*confreres*). Let the good of one be the good of all and the evil of one pushed away as evil to all.

To propose a way of perfection... to participate in works of piety... Let it not surprise us that the spiritual and ascetical purposes behind this first plan are the same as those clearly proposed to the entire *spiritual movement* which drew its origin from Don Bosco. We are speaking of building a *radical* Christian life and, in more immediate and explicit terms, of becoming saints by sharing *God's concerns for His People*.

These texts show us the heart and the mind of the Founder.

Three printed documents, published, respectively, in 1874, 1875, and 1876, will follow this first manuscript:

*The first bears the title of *Christian Union* and precedes the official approval of the Salesian Congregation of April 3, 1874. Inserted for the first time is a formula for acceptance. (*Biographical Memoirs*, vol. X, pp. 565-567 – application and pledge omitted in the English edition)

**The second appears under the new title of *Association for Good Works*. Therein it is affirmed:

This [Association] can be considered as a kind of Third Order like those of ancient Orders, with the difference that, in those older ones, Christian perfection was based on the exercise of piety; here, the principal purpose is the exercise of charity towards one's neighbor, and, especially, towards at-risk youth. This constitutes the particular purpose of the Association. [*Memorie Biografiche*, vol. XI, pp. 536-540 (omitted in the English edition)]

This is an interesting text because *apostolic charity* emerges here with greater clarity as the essential slant of one's own personal *path to perfection*.

***The third document comes to light in 1876, with a title destined to last: *Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way of Contributing to Public Morality and to the Good of Civil Society*. In this year, another two amplified volumes appeared which also included, besides an introduction by Don Bosco, Pius IX's Brief, dated May 9, 1876, approving the Association. [*Memorie Biografiche*, vol. XI, pp. 540-545 (omitted in the English edition)]

The Rule of 1876

A booklet of sixteen pages, therefore, was printed in 1876 in the Salesian print shop in Torino. [This was a review copy for Archbishop Gastaldi; copies for distribution were actually printed in Liguria in 1876. – translator's note] It constitutes the first true *Rule* of the Association. It has eight "titles" or paragraphs and a word of advice and concludes with a formula for the Promise.

"Weak forces, when united, become strong and if a little cord taken by itself is easily broken, a three-ply one is rather difficult to break. This is what secular people are wont to do in their worldly affairs. Ought the children of the light be less prudent than the children of darkness?"

The Association is a sign of the times, the reflection of an idea constantly present in the first plans, which mark the rise of the "Catholic Movement" in Italy. After the apparent failure of the Church of Rome on the path which ended in the unification of Italy, Don Bosco understood the importance of uniting Catholics to confront the forces of anticlerical liberalism.

The second paragraph confirms the fact that the Salesian Congregation is the bond of union for the Association. In the third, the *principal purpose* of the Salesian Cooperators is articulated. Don Bosco writes:

It is to do good to one's self through a tenor of life, as much as is possible, similar to that which is lived in the common life [in Religious Communities]. Many would enter willingly into a cloister but due to age, health, or condition cannot – and very many others due to the lack of opportunity are absolutely impeded from doing so. These, even in the midst of their ordinary occupations, while living in their family, can live 'as if in truth they were living in a Congregation.'

In the fourth paragraph are listed: practical means, apostolic characteristics, and the *mission*. The ones proposed for the Association are the same which Don Bosco specified as those of the Congregation "to which it is intended to associate." The fact that the first *task* which is assigned to the Members is to "foster and promote novenas, tridua, spiritual exercises, and catechism" can be surprising. In reality, here, as elsewhere, Don Bosco puts the commitment to evangelization in first place and considers it of primary importance - to the point of identifying it with the very nature of the Congregation. "Our society," he wrote elsewhere, "was a simple catechism at its beginning."

The *second mandate* which he gave to the Cooperators was to care for vocations to the ecclesiastical state; the third was to *spread good literature*; and, finally, "charity to at-risk children, by gathering them, instructing them in the Faith, steering them to the sacred functions, counseling them in dangers, and bringing them where they can be instructed in Religion." *Prayer* and making available one's personal material goods, as the first Christians did, are also ways to cooperate.

Following a paragraph dedicated to the governance of the Association, where the authority of the Rector Major is confirmed, in the sixth paragraph, reference is made to the relationships with the members of the *Society of St. Francis de Sales*. "These ought to consider the Salesian Cooperators as so many brothers [and sisters] in Jesus Christ and direct themselves to them every time their work can help in things which are for the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls." This article, in reality, should have been placed in the Salesian *Constitutions*, more than in the *Rule* of the Salesian Cooperators, given that it was an exhortation made to the Confreres.

After having listed the *spiritual benefits* which the members of the Association share in, Don Bosco concluded with a paragraph on the *religious practices* and the style of life which must characterize the Cooperators. "So that their life can be in some way similar to that of one who lives

in a Religious Community,” Don Bosco courageously states, “modesty in dress, frugality in eating, simplicity in decorating one's home, reserve in discourse, and the exact fulfillment of the duties proper to one's state in life are recommended to them.” The annual practice of the *spiritual exercises*, frequenting the Sacraments, and the recitation of the rosary represent a sure way to nourish the flame of one's own vocation.

Journeying Forward

The development of the Association in those first years is difficult to evaluate in numerical terms. Don Eugenio Ceria writes about this in 1952 in his *The Salesian Cooperators: A Bit of History*:

The Salesian tree, having sprouted from humble roots, grew and became a ‘robust trunk’ bearing three large branches: the *Society of St. Francis de Sales*, the *Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, and the *Pious Union of the Salesian Cooperators*. The Salesians and the Sisters carry on a parallel action, which is shared, systematic, public, and progressive and, therefore, everyone sees or can see them. This is not so with the Salesian Cooperators. They act individually and rarely in common, so much so that outside their own offices, which keep the general and particular statistics up-to-date, no one would know how to say how many there are or what they are and what the Associates really do.

The *Rule* of 1876, which gathered the fruits of the previous experiences and of the chapter on the externs proposes an ideal of courageous and radical life which flanks that of Religious life. To the Salesian Cooperators, in fact, a way of “Christian perfection” is proposed through the “exercise of charity to one’s neighbor and especially to youth at-risk.”

The material aspect and that of making donations, which are also listed among the ways to cooperate, are not absent, but are considered and take their meaning from the Biblical reference to the *Acts of the Apostles*. It is possible that, in some way after the Founder’s death, the confusion between *benefactor* and *Cooperator* harmed the identity of the Association; but we can state that this certainly was not Don Bosco’s thought, which he continued to express throughout his entire life when presenting to the Cooperators the characteristic traits of an ideal Christian with a clear identity in all the many meetings and Conferences held in Italy and elsewhere.

3. *The Strengthening of the Association through 1888*

Fr. Morand Wirth, SDB

The Salesian Cooperators ought not only gather alms for our hospices but must also avail themselves of every means possible so as to cooperate in the salvation of their brothers and, in a particular way, of the young (DON BOSCO, "Conference to the Cooperators at Lyons", 1882).

Immediately following its approval, Don Bosco got to work – speaking, traveling, and recruiting. He had foreseen that it would take two years to get the Association off the ground. His timeline would be respected.

The method varied, but the results were eloquent: often, when it was certain there would be no resistance, Don Bosco limited himself to sending the future Cooperator the *Rule* along with his certificate of membership. For persons of high rank, he added a personal letter. It was important to him to have “big names” who would give “luster” to his list of members, beginning with Pope Pius IX, who told Don Bosco that he not only wanted to be a Cooperator but he wanted to be the first of the Cooperators. With all simplicity he made the same proposal to Pope Leo XIII who declared that he wanted to be not only a Cooperator but a “worker.” [A play on the Italian words “*cooperatore*” and “*operatore*” – translator’s note]

When traveling and moving about in Italy, France, and Spain, he added a notable number of Associates. In Rome, he won many great families and numerous prelates to his cause. Genoa and Liguria furnished him huge contingents. In France, Nice became an important center due to the cosmopolitan character of the city. In Marseilles, the Cooperators were so fervent that Don Bosco had the impression of being among family. In 1880, in a conference to the Cooperators of San Benigno Canavese, he announced that both the number of men and women Cooperators had grown to 30,000 and that this was increasing every day. In Spain, the name of the great lady of Barcelona, Dorotea de Chopitea, must be mentioned for she was a “true mother of the Salesian Works” around whom the initiatives and the members multiplied.

The Annual Conferences and the Salesian Bulletin

One means to preserve the unity in spirit and to increase the number of the Cooperators was the *Conferences* (a term which can be considered synonymous with “meeting”), which were normally held on the Feasts of St. Francis de Sales and of Mary Help of Christians. The very first of these was held in Rome on January 27, 1878. After reading a chapter on the love that our Patron Saint had for the poor, Don Bosco gave his talk on the works being carried out to help youth – “works which cannot but be respected, and even desired, by any government or political leaning whatsoever.” (*Biographical Memoirs*, vol. XIII, p. 480) The meeting concluded with song and prayers. The *Biographical Memoirs* record for us the chronicles of about 50 such conferences held by Don Bosco in various cities in Italy and France, as well as in Barcelona in Spain.

Don Bosco also wanted to give the Cooperators an instrument of communication which would serve to keep them all united to the center of the Congregation and among themselves without forgetting its other purposes: publicity and fundraising. In January 1878, the *Catholic Book Lover (Il Bibliofilo Cattolico)*, a periodical written, in the first place, to make the publications of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales known was changed into the *Salesian Bulletin*, a monthly publication, which was sent free of charge to Salesian Cooperators and to all who were interested in it, whether near or far. The distribution of this periodical increased from year to year, until finally reaching 40,000 subscriptions in 1887. A French edition appeared in 1879, an Argentinian one in 1880, and a Spanish one in 1886.

When a group of Cooperators was formed somewhere, "Decurions" were sought – generally speaking, a Diocesan Priest who undertook the care of ten or more Cooperators. ["Decurio, plural *decuriones*, in ancient Rome, the head of a group of 10. The title had two applications, one civil, the other military. In the first usage *decurio* was applied to a member of the local council or senate of a *colonia* or a *municipium*... Qualifications were numerous, and the position was regarded as an honor. The *decuriones* had wide powers in local administration, finance, and judiciary proceedings. In the army a *decurio* was an officer in command of a squadron of cavalry. He was also the officer in charge of the headquarters' troops." *from Encyclopaedia Britannica online*] A list of "general norms" was prepared for them to help them in their task. Coordination of the groups within a diocese took a Priest who was willing to accept the title of Diocesan Director. On the flip side, Don Bosco did not cease to encourage the Salesians, especially the Directors, to take care of the Association.

Don Bosco's Spiritual Testament

Before dying, in his "Spiritual Testament," Don Bosco compiled a list of Cooperators and "Eminent Benefactors" towards whom "the Salesians always had to have 'perpetual gratitude before God and men'." Listed there are the names of those persons who had supported the birth and development of the Salesian Work in a most extraordinary way. They included: the Savoyard Family de Maistre; the Piedmontese Families of Fassati, Callori, and Corsi; the Princess Odescalchi of Rome; the Genoese Families of Ghigliani, Cataldi, and Dufour; the Visconti, Héraud, Levrot, and Daprotis of Nice; de La Fléchière of Hyères; Colle of Tolone; Prat, Jacques, Broquier, and Pastré of Marseilles; Quisard, de La Réserve, and Desvernay of Lyons; de Saint-Seine and Parque of Dijon; de Cessac of Paris; and Clara Louvet of Aire-sur-la-Lys. But this prestigious list of elites did not obscure the mass of humble "grass roots" Cooperators.

At Don Bosco's death in 1888, one thing is evident: the apostolic strength of the modest Salesian Congregation had been increased ten-fold thanks to the "fraternal" help of their Cooperators. Perhaps significant in this regard is the fact that at least once from Don Bosco's pen, the expression appeared as "*i Salesiani Cooperatori*" [written this way in Italian, with "*Salesiani*" being the noun and "*Cooperatori*" in apposition with it, as a modifier, places the emphasis on the Cooperator's being a Salesian, on the same par as the Salesian Priests, Brothers, and, later, Sisters, but the difference can only be noted in the Italian version (*Memorie Biografiche*, vol. XI, pp. 82 and 83)- translator's note]. Many of these, indeed, could truly have been considered in fact, if not canonically, true "Salesians in the world". [the entire chapter 4, vol. XI is on the Salesian Cooperators]

4. *The Salesian Cooperators from 1888 to 1965*

Fr. Morand Wirth, SDB

The Work of the Cooperators and of the Pope have combined to shake many Christians from the languor in which they lie and to spread the energy of charity... a work which, in these days, appears exceptionally timely... it will spread to all lands, throughout all of Christendom. There will come a time in which the name "Cooperator" will be synonymous with "true Christian." The Hand of God upholds it. The Cooperators will be those who will help promote the Catholic spirit. (Biographical Memoirs, vol. XVIII, p. 125)

In the Testament addressed to the Salesian Cooperators, and attributed to Don Bosco, we read this appeal: "If you have helped me with such great goodness and perseverance, now I pray you to continue to help my successor after my death. The Works that I have begun with your support no longer have need of me but they continue to have need of you and of all those who, like you, love to promote good on this earth."

This last message, entrusted to his "good" Cooperators did not remain a dead letter: Don Ceria was certain of it and proved it simply by telling the story of the Rectorates which followed. In effect, this "Salesian Third Order," which, already in 1876, Don Bosco realized was called to great development, didn't cease to confirm it through its very organization and influence – even if, in the 90 years that followed, it knew periods of less vitality.

Organization and Expansion under Don Rua

At the beginning of Don Rua's Rectorate, and due to his personal interest, "A Theory and Practice Manual" appeared – which was reprinted many times and improved upon – whose purpose was to furnish the local leaders of the Pious Union with a "Guide on How to Cooperate in Salesian Works". The first part specified the tasks of: the Decurions (the head of a local group); the Diocesan Director (a Priest, the "center" of the diocesan Salesian Movement); the Vice Director (in the larger, more important cities); the Salesian Committee; the Sub-Committee of the Salesian Cooperators; and the Promoters of the Association. Following this was advice on the manner in which to hold the Salesian Conferences. The second part of the little volume, entirely dedicated to zealous works, contains the following chapters: action and prayer; catechetical work ("every Cooperator should be a catechist"); vocations to the Priesthood (in families and in schools); the Press (to spread good literature among the people, in schools, in catechism classes, in Oratories, in offices, in hospitals,...); abandoned youth (to cooperate in the work for youth and to flank the Salesian works); and, finally, a great source of power (money) and the obligation to put it to good use.

In Italy, Don Rua succeeded in putting this plan into action. Every time that a group of Salesian Cooperators was established in a diocese (an important enough group), he asked the Bishop to name a Diocesan Director. This director, generally a parish Priest or a vicar general, was supposed to propose to the Superior his nominations for *Decurions*. In 1893, it was decided to gather them at Valsalice, around Don Bosco's tomb. It was an initiative that held great promise since representatives from 27 dioceses of Italy responded to the invitation. It was a fruitful encounter,

also, because, from this kind of "General Chapter of the Diocesan Directors of the Pious Union", as the minutes curiously called it, arose the idea of holding the first International Congress of Cooperators.

From that time forward, the Association made rapid progress and, at the gathering in Torino in 1898, forty dioceses were already represented. Being extremely close to the Salesians of Don Bosco, the Salesian Cooperators became most effective agents of Salesian expansion. They were often to be found involved in the beginning of new foundations, which they supported through material and personal contributions and spreading knowledge of the work of the Religious. During his travels, Don Rua showed, through his own personal example, what importance he attributed to the Salesian "cooperation".

Besides this, Don Rua was concerned with convincing his own Religious of their responsibility to the *Pious Union*. During the General Chapter of 1895, at his explicit requests, a special committee was formed to study the relationships between the Cooperators and the Salesian houses, and relationships with the individual houses and Torino. In the 1901 and 1904 chapters, he himself proposed: the nomination, in every Province, of a "Provincial Correspondent" who would concern himself with the Movement and "someone responsible for the Cooperators" in every House. The eleven articles which are found at the end of the Regulations of the Salesian Society and which bear the significant title of "Norms for the Salesians of Don Bosco Concerning the Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators" come from deliberations made at this time, if only in substance and not in form. Also found here is another innovation of Don Rua's Rectorate: the creation of a Central Office for the Salesian Cooperators, composed of a president, (the Prefect General of the Society), of three Councilors (the chief editor of the *Salesian Bulletin*, someone in charge of publicity, and the Head of Correspondence), and of one or more secretaries. Don Rua also knew how to find the right man to make the various projects become a reality. In giving the responsibility for "publicity" to Don Stefano Trione and in naming him the first Secretary-General of the Union, a fecund and active period of "cooperation" began.

The First Great Congresses (1895-1909)

The International Congresses have occupied an important place in the life of this vast organization. They answered the need for unity, which was so often underlined by Don Bosco and which held first place in the Cooperators' *Rule*. When speaking of the first Congresses held under Don Rua, Don Ceria hurried to respond to not-so-imaginary objections: "These great Congresses were not begun for the purpose of 'making publicity' for the Salesian Society but sought to spread Don Bosco's spirit in the world, in conformity with the plan for and by means of the Cooperators, who were to increase in number as much as possible."

These huge gatherings were organized according to a well-tried plan. Framed by solemn opening and closing ceremonies, the "serious" part of the Congress was dedicated to the study, under the form of talks or discussions, of some important topics: the nature of cooperation; personal formation; the young and education; vocations; social action; the Press; the Missions... It should be added that the presence of and/or talks given by some big-name religious and civic personalities; the presence and testimonies of foreign delegations; the reading of the names of numerous persons enrolled; and, above all, of the message from the Holy Father, contributed to create in the participants an atmosphere of fervor which ultimately found expression in vows or resolutions.

In the month of April of 1895, the first Cooperator Congress was held in Bologna. Called by the local archbishop, Cardinal Svampa, a great admirer of Don Bosco, this gathering, which took on international proportions, was organized by Don Trione, the Secretary-General of the Association. Around 2000 participated, among whom were a good 30 Prelates, Bishops, and Cardinals. Don Rua was present as the actual president. His ascetic leanness, his modesty, and his affability left an impression on the crowd. Imposing religious ceremonies, spiritual concerts, and talks were held. For three days, Don Bosco's work in the fields of education, social action, the Missions, and the printed press received every kind of praise. It was a success and one that had repercussions in many countries due to the presence of representatives from fifty-eight Italian and foreign newspapers. Five days after the close of the Congress, in a letter filled with enthusiasm, Don Rua reminded the Salesians of one of Don Bosco's predictions concerning the future of the Congregation: "Around 1895, a great triumph!"

In the wake of this first congress at Bologna, other great congresses were celebrated, before the war, on significant dates for the entire Salesian Family - like the one that took place in 1900 in Buenos Aires for the 25th anniversary of the opening of the first House in Latin America. Those who planned the Congress had two purposes in mind: to spread knowledge of Don Bosco's Work and to make Cooperators aware of all that their beneficence had been able to realize in twenty-five years. The office of president at the meeting was filled by the ex-Member of Parliament Santiago O'Farrell, while Don Albera, as Don Rua's representative, presided over the directive committee composed of the Provincials and those in charge of Works. Cooperators from Brazil, Chile, and Bolivia were also present. Attorney Emilio Lamarca, when speaking of Don Bosco, used the following expression: "The life of Don Bosco impresses us as being the Gospel put into practice and his work a page out of the *Acts of the Apostles*; his profile is in the *Letter to the Corinthians* because he was patient and kind." Following him, the Provincial Don Giuseppe Vespignani developed his topic of "The Two Secrets of Salesian Cooperation: Piety and Charity". The more demanding topics concerned: the education of working-class youth, the usefulness of agricultural and technical schools, the Missions, immigrants, and the Press.

The Third International Congress coincided with the coronation of the image of Mary Help of Christians in Torino in 1903. Cardinal Agostino Richelmy, the Archbishop of Torino, presided as honorary president, with Don Rua the actual president. Don Albera gave an enthusiastic talk about his visit to South America. Also invited to speak was Giovanni Grosoli, president of "The Work of the Congresses and of the Catholic Committees of Italy". He spoke of the return of the Faith in the family and of the Christian restoration of society, built on the strengths of the common people as its base. The Congress concluded with a series of deliberation and vows, almost a practical interpretation of the Cooperator *Rule*. The solemn coronation of Mary Help of Christians took place on May 17, the last day of the Congress.

A fourth and fifth Congress were also held in 1906, the first in Lima and the second in Milano. The one in Lima was more modest and took place on the occasion of the anniversary of the holy Bishop Turibio and distinguished itself with an exposition organized by the Salesian Houses of Peru and Bolivia, with essays on the different jobs, products, and samples from the agricultural schools, as well as the texts and scholastic programs compiled by the Salesians. Don Bosco's Work was presented as a work of foresight and of true social benefit: patriotic, for the people, and democratic. The Cooperators were encouraged to put themselves forward for the education of the young and to

support the Salesians generously in their work. On the last day, the cornerstone of a huge church in honor of Mary Help of Christians was placed. The other Congress in Milan, held contemporaneously with the International Expo, opened with the blessing of the nave of the huge church dedicated to St. Augustine. In "the City of Labor," the merits of the Salesian technical schools were proclaimed. Among the principal topics, the following need to be mentioned: assistance to immigrants, Catholic sports associations, and women's Salesian action organizations.

There was one more Congress in Santiago, Chile, in 1909, as a homage to Don Rua on the Golden Jubilee of his Ordination to the Priesthood. Four study committees got to work in four different cities: Santiago, Concepción, Valparaiso, and Talca. The Congress served to give an impetus to the Cooperators' work in that country.

World War I and the Post-War Period

After Don Rua, the Rectorate of Don Albera coincided with an era of upheavals that were unfavorable to this type of organization. The gatherings planned for the centenary of Don Bosco's birth couldn't take place because Europe was in flames. Instead, important meetings were held in South America, among which was the Seventh International Congress at São Paulo in Brazil in 1915 – honoring both the Centennial of Don Bosco's birth and the institution of the Feast of Mary Help of Christians. It took place from October 28 to 31 in the Salesian school and Church of the Sacred Heart. The building of a new work named for Don Bosco and of a parish church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians were decided upon.

Beginning in 1915, a series of articles which tended to correct some errors concerning the purpose of the Union were presented in the *Salesian Bulletin*. According to the introductory article, it was necessary to acknowledge "frankly" that many didn't know what the purpose was. Original truths were recalled along with the statement that the Cooperators were not merely the natural support of Salesian Works. Thus, Don Rinaldi made the practice of the monthly retreat thrive again – given that they had flourished in the past – and insisted that the Cooperators carry out their mission right where they lived and worked.

After World War I, official manifestations once again took place. Organized and animated by Don Rinaldi, a large Congress of Cooperators was held in Torino in 1920, contemporaneously with that of the Past Pupils. They ended with the inauguration of the monument to Don Bosco which stands in front of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. This was a sign that things were picking up after the storm of war and was a testimony to the authentic brotherly friendship among the people who came from countries who formerly had been enemies. The fruit of the Congress was a series of *Directive Norms* which constituted almost a new *Rule* for the Salesian Cooperators. From an organizational point of view, the Association took a step forward by instituting a Central Office, National Directors, and committees of Salesian action. The final General Assembly brought together a good 3000 persons. Don Rinaldi's Rectorate has been considered the "Golden Age" of the Cooperators. Aware of the issue for a long time and very knowledgeable of Don Bosco's feelings, the new Rector Major showed great interest in their regard. He made many personal contacts with those who were in charge. In an era in which the Missions were the order of the day in the Church, he put the accent on missionary cooperation, in keeping with the directives of Pius XI. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary celebration of the Salesian Missions, the Cooperators organized Congresses and gatherings of every size so as to exalt and support the apostolate of the Missions.

An International Congress was held again in Buenos Aires in 1924, under the presidency of Don Vespignani. Favored by a very numerous enrollment, this huge meeting grew into regional assemblies held in Tucumán, Córdoba, Rosario, Mendoza, La Plata, Santa Rosa, and other Argentinian cities. Spectacular was the parade of 12,000 students coming from all the Salesian Houses in the country. Among the new topics, social action and the role of the woman were of note. A fruit of the Congress was a new Salesian Institute for orphans in the capital.

The Congress held in Torino in 1926, which coincided with the Pious Union's 50th anniversary, gathered 1500 participants, among whom were numerous *International* delegations. The dominant theme was that of the Missions, enhanced also by a huge Salesian missionary Expo. The President of the Executive Committee of the Congress was Count Rebaudengo who financed the construction of the Missionary Institute destined for the formation of master craftsmen for the Missions.

Unflagging, Don Rinaldi ingeniously found the way to multiply the number of members. Another statistic of the era informs us that, in less than two years, they were able to gather about 300 Diocesan Directors and over 4500 Decurions in various meetings. He did not hesitate to write to a Provincial in the Americas: "I am happy that you are working to give life to Salesian cooperation. They are the third work of Don Bosco and we must make it prosper everywhere. Don Bosco used to say that the 'Cooperator' is synonymous with 'good Christian'; therefore, may all the good Christians of the world become Cooperators". He also gave the Past Pupils the task at the beginning of 1927 to "spread the idea of Salesian cooperation." Fulfilling his wish, the *Salesian Bulletin* carried out an active campaign along the same lines.

In 1930, the Eleventh International Congress was held in Bogotá, Colombia, one year after Don Bosco's beatification. Members from the Salesian Houses of Ibagué, Agua de Dios, Medellín, Tunja, Mosquera, Contratación, and Barranquilla attended the event. The hope was that this event would help to develop the Association in various South American countries. Cardinal Gasparri wrote in the name of the Holy Father: "An International Congress of Salesian Cooperators is always an event of first order, not only in the field of Salesian action, but also of Catholic action, inasmuch as it is especially involved in the apostolate to the young, the press for schools and for the people, and the Missions." The Bogotá Congress was the last of the series; twenty-two years would go by before another International Congress would be organized.

Before and After World War II

During Don Ricaldone's first years as Rector Major, the Association continued to prosper and the number of Cooperators and of benefactors multiplied, above all, after Don Bosco's canonization in 1934. In 1938, e.g., in Poland, 20,000 made a pilgrimage to our Lady of Czestochowa. In the same year, for the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the Salesians in England, the celebrations were crowned by the inauguration of a church dedicated to St. John Bosco at Shrigley.

World War II impeded large meetings. In 1941, the centenary of the birth of the Salesian Work could not be celebrated as they wanted. They were turbid times and other concerns assailed Don Ricaldone. Added to this was the death of Don Trione in 1935. "Salesian cooperation" suffered everywhere. Still, there were some significant gatherings, like the one in Aia in Holland in 1940 and that of Calcutta in the same year.

After years of general upheaval, the reawakening happened in 1947, fostered by the first postwar General Chapter. On this occasion, Don Ricaldone wanted an additional Councilor on the Superior Chapter (SDB General Council) who would be entrusted with the direction of the Union. In 1950, picking up again one of Don Rua's projects, he asked each Provincial to name a Provincial Delegate for the Cooperators and Local Delegates in every House. In 1950, he named a new Secretary General, Don Guido Favini, to whom he gave this simple assignment: "You must do what Don Trione used to do."

Received at an audience with Pius XII, on June 23, 1951, Don Favini awakened the Holy Father's interest in the third Salesian Order and put himself to work to prepare a huge Congress on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of its foundation. The "solemn gathering" in Rome, held from September 11-13, 1952, marked the revival of the large International Congress and was honored by a very much-awaited discourse from Pius XII at Castelgandolfo. The Cooperators were defined by the Pope as most efficacious auxiliaries of Catholic Action. He reminded them that, if the Association of Salesian Cooperators had been "grafted onto the prolific trunk of St. John Bosco's Religious Family," its immediate purpose was to put itself at the disposal of the hierarchy. Piety and fervor for the apostolate had to characterize the Cooperator. Under such title, the Church expected much from this "new Providential Movement of the Catholic laity."

In 1953, the new Rector Major, Don Ziggotti named Don Luigi Ricceri as the Director General of the Salesian Cooperators; up until that moment, he had been the Provincial of the Lombardy Province. He had published in the *Acts of the Superior Chapter* of September/October 1955, some guidelines which were, at the same time, an appeal to all the Salesians of Don Bosco in favor of the Union of Cooperators. In an important document of 1955, Don Ziggotti stated that the "proper mission of the Cooperators is the apostolate according to the Salesian Spirit." And he reminded all of the definition which Pius XI had given to their movement: "notable first draft of Catholic Action." In fact, they had been called "to participate fully in the apostolate of the laity." Don Ricceri, for his part, promoted annual meetings with those in charge for whom he created a special Bulletin (which came out on the 15th of each month), provided an adapted manual, and reorganized the Salesian Cooperators' Central Office. Don Ceria was given the task of composing a prayer book for them.

Among the manifestations of the pre-conciliar period, we cite the pilgrimages to Lourdes in 1958, to Monaco di Baviera in 1960, and that of Rome and Pompeii in 1962. The International Congresses began again, in Brussels on the occasion of the 1958 Expo, in Rome in 1959, in Madrid in 1960, and in Barcelona in 1961. The apostolic and ecclesial orientation of the movement appeared ever more explicit in the various talks. The Salesian Cooperators were invited, at the dawn of Vatican Council II to "live Church".

The Response of the Cooperators

The response of the Salesian Cooperators can be guessed from the phenomenon of the expansion of the Salesian Work in the world, which characterized the period from 1888 to 1965. We can state with certainty that without the material and moral support of the Salesian Cooperators and the benefactors, big and small, very little could have been accomplished. It suffices to recall the exemplary figure of Dorotea de Chopitea of Barcelona.

Even if the beneficence for the good of the Salesian Works didn't constitute an absolute criterion, the gifts and offerings were already enough *per se* as signs of a responsible participation in the Salesian mission. But there are also other forms of cooperation: the life of the Portuguese Cooperator, Alexandrina da Costa (deceased 1955), is extraordinary for her apostolate of prayer and suffering, in spiritual communion with the Novices of the Salesians of Don Bosco.

From a quantitative point of view, in 1962 Don Favini was able to count 1000 Cooperator Centers which gravitated around Salesian Houses. On the other hand, the spread of the *Salesian Bulletin*, the official publication for the Salesian Cooperators, represented another external criterion that cannot be overlooked. After Don Bosco's death, the additions multiplied. To the Italian, French, and Spanish editions, the Rectorate of Don Rua added English (1892), German (1895), Polish (1897), Portuguese (1901), Hungarian (1903), and Slovenian (1907) editions. The printing and shipping was done from the technical schools of the Oratory until the huge number of copies suggested the creation of an "action" Society set up purposely to oversee this. The "International Society for the Spread of Good Literature" was established in Torino in 1908, with branches in Maritime Nice, Barcelona, Liège, London, and Vienna. New editions were added after 1910. A statistic from 1964 listed 30 official additions. From among most recent in time, we cite those of India (Madras), Thailand, China (Hong Kong), Lithuania, Malta, Burma, and Peru. While Don Rua had announced that 300,000 people received the *Bulletin*, when calculating the number of editions, in 1964, it wasn't very far from 1 million.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, and thanks to the fact that their movement had been confirmed by the Church, the Salesian Cooperators deepened ever more the apostolic demands of their Association. In 1951 and 1957, they were even invited to send a delegation to the World Congress of the Apostolate of the Laity. A new impetus will come from Vatican Council II and from its teachings on the identity and the mission of the laity in the Church.

5. Don Bosco's Words

Paolo Santoni, Salesian Cooperator (SC)

The following excerpts are almost all drawn from the reflections of Don Bosco made to the Salesian Cooperators on the occasion of the annual Conferences (gatherings). It is a little anthology which gives us, in a more immediate and direct way, the Founder's words and journey made by the plans which accompanied the birth and the development of the Association. They should be read and meditated upon as a precious heritage handed down to the Salesian Cooperators for their own sanctification, the salvation of the young, and the good of the Church.

1. *The first document in this little anthology is drawn from the first issue of the Salesian Bulletin, published in August 1877. It is a concise and efficacious description of the identity and apostolic mission of the Association.*

They are called Cooperators who wish to be involved in charitable works, not in a general way, but in a specific one – in harmony with and according to the spirit of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. One Cooperator can do good by himself, but the fruit shall remain rather limited, and, moreover, of short duration. On the contrary, when united to others, he finds support, counsel, encouragement, and, often with less labor, obtains more because even weak forces become strong when they are joined together. Thus says the well-known adage: “in unity is strength”... And so, our Cooperators, following the goal of the Salesian Congregation, work according to their strength to gather together youth abandoned on the streets and in the piazze who are at risk, bringing them to catechetical instruction, entertaining them on non-work days, helping them find an upright boss, guiding them, counseling them, and helping them as much is possible to become good Christians and honest citizens. The norms to be followed in these works which we propose to the Salesian Cooperators will be the material of the *Salesian Bulletin*.

2. *The following year saw the publication of the documents from the First General Chapter, which had been held in Lanzo in 1877. These were the first to list the conditions of membership, setting the minimum age at 16. The Acts present another concise description of the identity of the Salesian Cooperator.*

The Salesian Cooperators are but good Christians, who, while living at home in their families, maintain in the midst of the world the spirit of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales and help with moral and material means to foster and promote, most especially, the Christian education of the young. They form a sort of Third Order and they propose the exercise of works of charity towards one's neighbor, and, above all, towards youth who are at risk.

3. In a letter dated January 25, 1878, Don Bosco convoked the first "Conference" (gathering) of the Salesian Cooperators of Rome. "With the authorization and the talk given by his Excellency the most Rev. Cardinal Monaco La Valletta, Vicar of his Holiness, the first Conference of Salesian Cooperators will be held, as is prescribed in Chapter 4, Article 4 of the Rule." (Biographical Memoirs, vol. XIII, pp. 477-478.) After having narrated the history of the Salesian Cooperators from the beginning up until that day, in his talk, Don Bosco, warmly exhorted everyone to help the Salesians in their work for the salvation of at-risk youth.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the Protestants, the unbelievers, and sects of every kind leave nothing untried to the ruination of unsuspecting youth and, like hungry wolves, roam around to make a slaughter of the lambs of Christ. Publications, photographs, grammar schools, kindergartens, high schools, aid, promises, threats, and calumnies – they use them all to pervert tender souls, to rip them out of the maternal womb of the Church, to lure and draw them to themselves and to throw them into the arms of Satan. What is most painful is that teachers, founders, and even certain parents lend a hand in this work of desolation. Now, before this very heartbreaking spectacle, can we remain cold and indifferent? May it never be so, oh most courteous souls; let it never happen that the sons of darkness should be more astute, more audacious in doing evil than the sons of light in doing good. Let each one of us become a guide, a teacher, a savior of children. Let us counter deceitful acts of evil with loving actions of our charity: publications for publications, schools for schools, high schools for high schools. Let us watch attentively over the little ones in our families, parishes, and institutes. And since the huge crowd of poor boys and girls find themselves everywhere exposed to the greatest dangers of perversion, whether through lack of care on the part of their relatives and parents or due to extreme misery, let us, according to our strengths and position, become their fathers and protectors, bringing them to a safe place, far from the attractions of vice and of scandalous attacks. In order to spur ourselves on and to encourage each other ever more to such wonderful works, let us often recall to mind the care and the loving kindness poured

out upon the little ones by the Son of God during His mortal life. Let us also remember the great gift promised by Him, to those who, by their example, their words, and with their own hands, will do good for a child. He assured us one hundredfold in this life and an eternal crown in the next. (*Biographical Memoirs*, vol. XIII, p. 479)

The five excerpts here following are drawn from a lengthy conference made to the Cooperators of Torino on May 16, 1878. (Biographical Memoirs, vol. XIII, pp. 483-490)

4. *In the letter of convocation, Don Bosco wrote:*

According to the prescriptions of our Rule (chapter VI, Article 4), every year two Conferences must be held wherever the number Cooperators demands. With a lively desire that the Conference which is held in Torino should take place under the auspices of Mary Help of Christians, the 16th of this month has been chosen – the second day of the novena in preparation for the Solemnity of the Holy Virgin Auxilium Christianorum, which will be celebrated on the 24th with special pomp. Therefore, I pray all the Salesian Cooperators will do everything possible to be in attendance.

Thus began Don Bosco's conference:

I don't know, most meritorious Cooperators, whether I should thank you first, or, together with me, invite you to thank the Lord first – for having gathered us in one body of compact unity and having put us in a position to do great good and to have brought us here tonight for this first Conference held for the Salesian Cooperators in Torino.

First, however, I must tell you what I desire, I want to tell you a little history which will help us know what the Salesian Cooperators have already done here in Torino, even before they had the name, and what their task is in these times. Listen.

Thirty-five years ago, the area which is presently occupied by this church served as a place for gathering many unruly youth who had come to fight, make a commotion, and blaspheme. Nearby there were two houses in which there were many offenses made against the Lord: one was a house of prostitution to which drunkards and all sorts of bad people came; the other place – here where the pulpit is now and extending to my left – was

a house of ill repute and immorality. In 1846, a poor Priest arrived and rented at a very high price two rooms in the second house. That Priest was accompanied by his mother. His goal was to see how he could do a little good for the poor neighborhood people. Their entire patrimony consisted of a basket carried in their arms, in which were various objects. Well, this Priest saw the young who were gathering here to do evil; he was able to approach them; and the Lord made it happen that his word was listened to and understood. (pp.484-485)

5. From the very beginning of the work of the Oratory, some Priests helped out, but the work of these good Priests was not enough...

Little by little, some meritorious Priests came to help this poor Priest in his work: some heard confessions, some preached, and others taught catechism. There were not enough, though. Since the need even for night and Sunday schools was increasing, a handful of Priests just did not suffice. And so, various men and women also came to carry on the work. 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 of them leave aside every 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.

And so the need to help these boys even materially made itself felt all the more. There were those whose socks and jackets were all in tatters and hung from every part of their body, even to the point of lacking modesty. There were those among them who couldn't even change that rag of a shirt which they had on. 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 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.

And so this is how, with the aid of so many persons – men and women Cooperators – they were able to do things which separately no one of us would ever have been able to accomplish alone. (pp. 485-486)

6. The work of the Oratories expands even beyond Torino and into Piedmont, thanks to the material and spiritual means put at disposition by the Salesian Cooperators...

The needs felt in Torino began to make themselves felt strongly even in other cities and towns. Going forward always with the help of the Cooperators, we were able to give an orderly structure to the Works founded and extend them outside Torino.

The Cooperators needed to make up for the great lack of clergy, which was lamented throughout all Piedmont and the other provinces of Italy. But how? The Catholic Religion doesn't pay attention to the place, city, or people; it is universal and wants the good to be done everywhere and where there is greater need, and so necessitates greater forces for charity. And behold, we opened the house in Mirabello, then in Lanzo, and then others and others still... and now there are more than 100 between churches and houses opened, and beyond 25,000 boarding and day students who receive religious instruction in our houses.

Who did all these things? One Priest? No! Two, ten, fifty? No! Not even a greater number could have done so much! It was the Cooperators who, everywhere, in every town and city, united themselves to help these few Priests. Yes! They are the ones! But not only they! Ah! We must, we must recognize the hand of God who wanted to raise up to so great a work from nothing. Yes, it is Divine Providence who sent so many means whereby we could save souls. If it hadn't been that the Lord wanted this, I would repute it to be impossible for anyone to be able to do so much. But the need was real and great and the Lord sends great help where there is great need. These needs become more pressing every day. Will the Lord perhaps abandon us? (pp.486-487)

7. A task awaits the Cooperators – that of continuing the work already begun.

Now here is what must be most directly the goal of the Salesian

Cooperators: this is what they need to do. They need to continue the work begun, about which I have spoken to you; indeed, these Works need to multiply a hundred-fold. To this end, people and means are necessary. We sacrifice our persons; the Lord sends us personnel every day who are ready for any sacrifice whatever, even to giving their life for the salvation of souls. But people are not enough: material means are also needed. It is up to you to furnish them, o meritorious Salesian Cooperators. I charge you with providing these material means; let it be your responsibility not to let them lack. Note well how great is the grace of God for putting into your hands a way to cooperate in the salvation of souls. Yes! In your hands rests the eternal salvation of many souls. By the facts that I have just told you, we have seen how many, through the cooperation of good people, found the way to Heaven that they had lost. (pp. 489-490)

8. *Bringing the lengthy conference to a close, Don Bosco made one of his more noted and efficacious exhortations, a true spiritual legacy for the spiritual family that took its origins from him.*

Do you want to do something good? Educate the young! Do you want to do something holy? Educate the young! Do you want to do something divine? Educate the young! Indeed, among divine things, this is the most divine. The Holy Fathers all agree in repeating the dictum of St. Dionysus: *Divinorum divinissimum est cooperari Deo in salutem animarum*. [The most divine of all divine things is to cooperate with God in saving souls.] And, in explaining this passage, St. Augustine said that this divine work is an absolute hinge for one's own salvation: *Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti*. [By saving a soul, you have predestined your own.] Oh! Therefore, you, by giving your help to do these great things which I mentioned, can be sure that you are saving your soul. For this reason, I will put aside making special thanks to you. But know that in the Church of Mary Help of Christians both morning and night – indeed, I can say all day long – special prayers are made for you so that the Lord might Himself thank you with those words which he will speak to you on the day of final judgment: *Euge, serve bone et fidelis, quia in pauca fuisti fidelis, super multa te constituam. Intra in gaudium Domini tui*. [Well done, good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small things, I will put you over many. Enter into the joy of Your Lord.] You make sacrifices, but remember that Jesus Christ himself made the greatest sacrifice and we can never draw near enough to the Sacrifice that He made for us. Let us rejoice! Those who try hard to imitate Him, to do all they can to save souls, should be tranquil concerning their own eternal fate. (p. 490)

9. *Don Bosco recounts the origins of the Pious Union. This excerpt and the following ones are drawn from the first Conference to the Salesian Cooperators of San Benigno Canavese, held on June 4, 1880. [sic] This rather long discourse of Don Bosco is found in the Biographical Memoirs, vol. XIV, pp. 429-430.*

Right from 1841, when this poor Priest began to gather boys on Sundays and holy days, picking them up from the streets and the piazzas, to entertain them with honest and wholesome amusements and to instruct them in our holy Religion, he felt the need to have Cooperators, who would give him a hand. Therefore, right from that time, many Priests and laity of the city and then, later, pious ladies, having answered his invitation, came to join him in order to help him – some guided the little ones, some assisted them, and some catechized them. The ladies, then, and Religious Communities helped him mend clothes, do laundry, and provide sheets for the neediest and most abandoned. With God's help and the charity of these benevolent persons, what this Priest was able to do and what the Salesians are doing now, you have already learned from reading the *Salesian Bulletin* so there is no need to repeat it.

Seeing the good that so many persons united together did for the good of poor youth, he thought to institute a formal Association under the title of the *Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators* and to have it approved by the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Many Bishops, after having recognized it in their dioceses, recommended it to the Holy See. Among those who most warmly promoted it, I have the joy of naming his Excellency, the most Rev. Bishop Peter Maria Ferré, our most venerable shepherd. Holy Father Pius IX of holy memory, looked over the plan and approved it – no, even more – desiring that the Pious Union should have even greater increase, he opened the Treasuries of the Sacred Indulgences. From the year of its approval in 1876 until today, the Cooperators have grown to 30,000 strong, and are increasing more and more each day; little-by-little the *Pious Society* comes to be known among the faithful.

10. *What are the conditions of membership in the Pious Union? Don Bosco, in the same Conference, clarifies the relationship that ties the Association to the Society of St. Francis de Sales, and the vast field of apostolate offered to the Salesian Cooperators.*

And what must one do to belong? First of all, you need to be enrolled by the Superior of the Salesian Congregation, or by the person he delegates and not to be excluded from it after that. One usually becomes a Member of the Association when the certificate and the *Rule* are sent.

Besides this, you need to do works of charity that are in accord with the spirit and purpose of the Pious Union.

But someone may ask: is it necessary to do each and every one of the works of charity listed in the *Rule*? No, it is not necessary, nor is it necessary to do one or more within a certain timeframe; but it is necessary and sufficient to do one when the occasion presents itself. I said that at least one must be done. The purpose of the Pious Union is to give helpers to the Salesian Congregation, who take upon themselves, above all, special care of the young. And thus, everyone sees that the Cooperators must be busy in carrying out some work of charity which achieves this noble purpose; otherwise, the pious intention of the Church, which opened these Treasures to them, would be let down. Once upon a time, it might have been enough to be united in prayer; but today with all the means used to pervert the people, above all, to the detriment of the young of both sexes, there is need to be united in the field of action, too. I also added that to be a good Cooperator it is enough to do some charitable work when the occasion presents itself. And doing this shouldn't be difficult for a good Christian. How many beautiful occasions present themselves! One can give a good word, some counsel or advice, to a boy or girl to put them on the road of virtue and distance them from vice; a suggestion can be made to the parents about some good means to raise their children in a Christian manner, to guide them to church, or when they need to send them to school or to work, to choose good schools, virtuous teachers, and honest masters; a way can be found to provide good teachers for schools; one can lend a hand teaching catechism in one's own parish; a good book or a Catholic paper can be given or lent or a bad one can be taken away; or one can contribute in the carrying out of a work; or provide clothing; or seek out a job or pay the rent or the tuition for a poor or abandoned boy or girl; one can make a sacrifice by not buying something and put aside some money for alms; promote some work which gives glory to God, honor to the Church, and benefits souls; at the very least, one can encourage others to do so. Occasions to do good or to impede evil never lack. Let us not be lacking in the goodwill, the courage, the love of God and of neighbor and we will be true Cooperators while hardly realizing it – as fathers and as mothers, as teachers, Priests, and laity, rich and poor. We will impede great evil and do great good.

11. One final excerpt from the long Conference given to the Salesian Cooperators at San Benigno Canavese represents an exhortation to contribute, as one can, even to the material realization of works in favor of the young, each one according to his possibilities. The image evoked is that of the widow of the Gospel...

Someone may say to me: as long as we're talking about doing good with our words, I'm in; but as far as money is concerned, I can't because I am poor. Let whoever is poor do what a poor person can do. But no matter how poor one may be, a Cooperator, if you will, will always have the possibility to assist even materially with a charitable work. That widow of which the Gospel speaks was among the very poor – she had only one farthing (*quattrino*), *duo minuta* (two mites); and still she too wanted to help with the adornment of the Temple together with the rich donors and for this she receives praises from Jesus Christ. As to the rest, I can say that there are many who cry poverty when they are invited to do some good deed, such as clothing a poor orphan, helping an indigent family, or providing for the adornment of a church, but when it comes to buying themselves clothes or some fancy outfits; or lunch; or go to a game, or on a vacation; or a dance; or some purchase; oh! Then there's no more poverty! Then, if the money is not there, they find a way to make it appear; then they find the means to cut a good figure and show off, even with some luxury beyond their means.

The goal that we had aimed for in this little volume was to reconstruct, along essential lines, the story of the relationship between Don Bosco and some of his lay collaborators; his idea and his practice of involving the laity in the apostolate; and the different plans concerning the Association which matured over time, following the "rough draft" in the chapter on the "extern members" of the *Society of St. Francis de Sales* – ultimately the beginning of the *Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators*.

At the end of the *Circular Letter* which is appended to the document commonly known as his *Spiritual Testament*, Don Bosco wrote:

Adieu, my dear Benefactors, my Salesian Cooperators, adieu. Many of you I have not been able to get to know in person in this life, but this isn't important: in the next world we will all know each other, and in eternity we will rejoice together over the good which, by the grace of God, we did on this earth, especially to the advantage of poor youth.

To this movement of laity and clergy, which took its origin from Don Bosco, he pointed out, right from the start, and idea of sanctity which can only be understood by beginning with their apostolic mission, but which has its roots in *the love of God*. "The goal of this Congregation," he wrote in the 1860 *Constitutions*, "is to unite together its members – Priests, clerics, and also laity – for the purpose of perfecting themselves by imitating, as best as is possible, the virtues of our Divine Savior." "The principal purpose of the Salesian Cooperators," he wrote in the *Rule* of 1876, "is to do good to one's self through a tenor of life, as far as is possible, similar to that which is lived in the common life [Religious Community]."

This conviction about the *universal call to sanctity*, which Don Bosco learned thanks to Cafasso's teaching, and under the reassuring perspective of St. Alphonsus di Liguori, was incarnated in a praxis which we can consider prophetic, in the light of the conclusions of the *Constitution on the Church (Gaudium et Spes)* of Vatican Council II.

We can also hypothesize that, in the light of the new *Code of Canon Law*, Don Bosco would have given a different juridical nature to the one *Society* composed of laity and clergy; certainly, we cannot know this for sure, but in these not-so-easy times, such a hypothesis might encourage us to walk the path of renewal.

In any case, the study of the original *sources*, has restituted to us not only the content of a theological idea, but also the testimony of a coherent and efficacious *praxis* which involves laity and consecrated in one and the same mission, with different and complementary roles.

This precious heritage, this extraordinary *prophecy*, is handed on still today to this spiritual movement which took its origin from Don Bosco.

Here following is the text of the *Rule* written for the Cooperators by Don Bosco himself.

It is transcribed in its original and definitive state on purpose: with the same chapter and paragraph divisions as in the original text found in the Archives of the Congregation 133 – Cooperators, 2 (5).

Despite its “antiquated language” (in reference to the Italian original) and the changes made by the Church as regard Indulgences, the *Rule* (for this is how Don Bosco referred to it) preserves all its timeliness and has lost nothing of its freshness and clarity even at the distance of a century. Therefore, we Salesians, both Religious and Cooperators, must always refer to it, for it, best of all, expresses the genuine thought of our Founder.

Furthermore, it will serve as a witness of the fidelity of the *Project of Apostolic Life* to “Don Bosco’s project,” even if they have been renewed in response to the signs of the times and to the directives of Vatican Council II, of the General Chapters of the Salesians of Don Bosco, and of the new *Code of Canon Law*.

TO THE READER

From the very beginning of the work of the Oratories in 1841, there were enthusiastic and keen Priests and laymen who came forward to help - for there was a great harvest to be reaped among boys in danger of losing both faith and morals. These co-helpers, or Cooperators, were to be found throughout our history to support and sustain the works God gave us to do. All endeavored to work and fit into our way of life and customs, but there was a general request for a set of Regulations that would serve as a basis and a bond to help preserve uniformity and the spirit that prevailed in our institutes. We hope that this desire will now be satisfied by the present booklet. These are not Rules for the Festive Oratories or for educational institutes (which can be found elsewhere): they are a bond by which Catholics who so wish may join the Salesians and work according to a uniform and stable pattern (thus preserving these qualities in the scope and traditional practice of their work).

In this booklet you will find:

1. *The petition to the Holy Father and the Brief granting the special indulgences to the Salesian Cooperators.*

2. *A list of these indulgences.*

3. *The Regulations for the Cooperators.*

Thus those who wish to practice charity in working for the salvation of souls will have the great reward promised by St. Augustine, “By saving a soul you have predestined your own”; they are also assured of a great spiritual treasure in these holy indulgences. May God, so rich in grace and blessings grant many favors to all those who help to win souls for our Divine Savior, doing good to young people so much in danger, preparing good Catholics for his Church and good citizens for society, so that all may one day find themselves eternally happy in heaven. Amen.

Turin, 12 July 1876.

JOHN BOSCO.

Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way of Contributing to Public Morality and to the Good of Civil Society

1. Christian Union for the Work of Charity

Good [Christians] have at all times seen the necessity of uniting in order to help one another in doing good and in avoiding evil. This is the example that the faithful of the early Church left us. Faced with impending dangers every day, they did not give up. United as one heart and one soul, they encouraged one another to be steadfast in the faith and to stand ready to overcome the assaults that relentlessly threatened them. This is also what the Lord taught us when he said: “Feeble forces that unite become strong. A single strand may be easily broken, but a three-ply cord is hard to break: *Vis unita fortior; funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur*.¹ This is exactly what secular people do to further their temporal interests. Should then the children of light be less farsighted than the children of darkness? Certainly not! We who live as Christians in these turbulent times must likewise unite in a spirit of prayer, charity and zeal, using all possible means that our religion makes available to us. We must strive to stamp out, or at least diminish, the evil that puts at risk the moral life, without which civil society itself collapses

2. The Salesian Congregation

The Salesian Congregation, having been definitively approved by the Church, may provide a sure and stable bond uniting the Salesian Cooperators. Its primary purpose is to work for the good of young people, on whom society’s happy or evil future of society depends. We make no claim that what are proposing is the only means to achieve that end. There are a thousand other ways, and therefore we urge everyone to freely use the means that seem most conducive to that great goal. The way we are proposing, one of the many, is the *Work of the Salesian Cooperators*. We are inviting good Catholics living in the world to join their efforts to those of the members of this our Congregation. True, the number of Salesians has grown considerably, but it is unequal by far to the numerous requests for help that are receiving every day from various parts of Italy and of Europe, from China, Australia and the Americas, from the Argentine Republic in particular. These insistent requests are for sacred ministers [and for Salesians] who would undertake the care of young people at risk, who would open houses and schools and who would initiate or sustain missionary activity in places where evangelical workers are greatly needed and desired. It is in order to respond to all these needs that we are looking for Cooperators.

3. Purpose of the Salesian Cooperators

The principal purpose of the Salesian Cooperators is the spiritual good of the members themselves through their embracing a way of life in so far as possible similar to that of religious living in community. Many people would willingly embrace the cloistered life, but cannot do so because of age, health, state in life, but mostly for lack of opportunity. They may, however, while continuing in their daily occupations and living with their family, become Cooperators and so live in effect as members of the [Salesian] Congregation.

Because of this, the Supreme Pontiff regards this Association as a kind of traditional Third

¹ “*Funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur*,” “A three-ply cord is not easily broken” is from Ecclesiastes 4:12 (Latin Vulgate). “*Vis Unita fortior*,” “Forces that unite become stronger” is a proverb from the classics. But in equivalently it appears in the passage of Ecclesiastes. By “the Lord” Don Bosco here means “God or the Bible” generally.

Order, but with a difference. While in those [third orders] Christian perfection was made to consist in exercises of piety, in this Association the principal purpose is the active life engaged in the exercise of charity toward neighbor, especially toward young people at risk.

4. Ways of Cooperation

The Salesian Cooperators share the same [apostolic] harvest as the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, to which they wish to be associated.

1. The associates shall promote novenas, tridua, spiritual retreats and catechetical instruction, especially in places where material and moral means are lacking.

2. The scarcity of Priestly vocations in these times of ours is felt in all its severity. Hence, those associates who are in a position to help shall take special care of youngsters, and adults as well, who have the necessary moral qualities and an aptitude for study, and show signs of a vocation. They can help them with timely advice, and by directing them toward those schools and boarding establishments where they may receive nurture and guidance [in their vocation].

3. [There's an urgent need to] counter the irreligious press by the good press. Hence [associates can help] by spreading good books, leaflets and all kinds of printed matter, in those places and among those families in which acceptance may prudently be expected.

4. Finally there is the exercise of charity in behalf of children at risk. [This includes] taking them in, instructing them in the faith, introducing them to church services, counseling them when in moral danger and taking them where they may receive religious instruction. These activities are another field for Salesian Cooperators [to exercise their zeal]. Those who cannot personally be engaged in such activities might do so through others, e.g. by involving a relative or friend. Then one may cooperate by prayer, or by helping financially if needs be. The early Christians used to bring their goods to the Apostles, to be used to help widows and orphans, and for other [charitable] purposes.²

5. Constitution and Governance of the Association

1. Anyone who has completed 16 years of age may be enrolled as a Cooperator, provided he or she is ready and willing to abide by the Rules submitted here.

2. The Association is humbly commended to the kindness and protection of the Supreme Pontiff, bishops, and parish Priests. To them it shall defer *without reservation* in everything that pertains to religion.³

3. The Superior of the Salesian Congregation is also the Superior of the Association.

4. The Director of every local Salesian house is authorized to enroll associates. He shall then send the forms with the [member's] first and last name and place of residence to the [central] Superior, who will record the enrollment in the common register.

5. In cities and towns where no Salesian house is established, and where the associates have reached ten in number, the Superior shall appoint a head with the title of "Group Leader". The Group Leader, preferably a Priest or some exemplary layperson, corresponds with the Superior or with the Director of the nearest [Salesian] house.

6. Any Cooperator is free to report to the [central] Superior any matter that, in his/her judgment, may need attention.

² Acts 4:32-37.

³ Italics by Don Bosco

7. Every three months, or even more frequently, through a printed *Bulletin* or sheet, the members shall be given a report on things done, in progress or proposed for future action. At the end of each year they shall be notified of projects that should be given priority during the up-coming year. Information about those members who may have been called into eternity that year shall also be provided, and prayers solicited.⁴

8. On the feasts of St. Francis de Sales and of Mary Help of Christians, each Group Leader shall call together the members of his own group for the purpose of providing mutual encouragement to strengthen and devotion to these heavenly patrons. Invoking their help is needed for perseverance in the activities undertaken in accordance with the purpose of the Association.

6. Special Obligations

1. The members of the Salesian Congregation regard all Cooperators as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. They shall call on them for collaboration in things that may redound to the greater glory of God and the good of souls. In like manner the Cooperators should feel free to call on the members of the Salesian Congregation.

2. The members shall do all in their power to promote and support the works of the Association whether with their own financial contributions or with offerings collected from charitable people.

3. The members have no financial obligation but they will make, on a monthly or yearly basis, such offering as the charity of their heart may prompt. These offerings shall be sent to the [central] Superior for the promotion and support of the works of the Association.

4. A collection shall regularly be taken up on the occasion of the *Conferences* held on the feasts of Mary Help of Christians and of St. Francis de Sales. When members are not numerous enough to form a group or are unable to attend such *Conference*, they should find some easy and safe way of forwarding their offering [to the Superior].

7. Advantages

1. His Holiness, the reigning Pius IX, by Decree of July 30, 1875, granted to all promoters of this Work [members of this Association] all the spiritual favors, graces and indulgences enjoyed by the Salesian religious, with the exception of those that have to do with life in community. A list of these will be made available to the members separately.

2. The members will share in the spiritual benefit of all the Masses, prayers, novenas, tridua, spiritual retreats, sermons, catechetical instruction, and of works of charity in which Salesians are engaged in their sacred ministry throughout the world.

3. They will likewise share in the spiritual benefit of the Masses and prayers that are offered each day in the Church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin for the purpose of calling down heaven's blessings on all benefactors and their families, especially on those who help our Congregation morally or materially.

4. On the day following the feast of St. Francis de Sales all the Priests of the [Salesian] Congregation and the Priests who are Cooperators shall offer holy Mass for deceased members. Those who are not Priests shall endeavor to receive Holy Communion and recite the third part of the Rosary [for the same intention].

⁴ The provision of this article was complied with by the founding of the *Salesian Bulletin* (see below).

5. Whenever an associate becomes ill, the Superior shall be notified without delay, so that special prayers may be offered to God. The same shall be done in the event of the death of any Cooperator.

8. Religious Exercises

1. Salesian associates [Cooperators] are not bound to any [special] external practice. On the other hand, if their life is to be in some way modeled on that of religious living in community, they are encouraged to cultivate modesty in dress, frugality in eating and drinking, simplicity in household furnishings, moral restraint in speech and the exact fulfillment of the duties of their state in life. They should also see to it that their dependents observe Sundays and holy days.

2. Associates are encouraged to set aside at least a few days for a yearly spiritual retreat. On the last day of each month or on some other convenient day, they shall make their Exercise for a Happy Death, and make their confession and communion as if it was really their last.

3. Each day, they shall recite one Our Father and one Hail Mary in honor of St. Francis de Sales for the intention of the Supreme Pontiff. Priests and those who recite the canonical hours or the Office of the Blessed Virgin need not say those prayers. They should just pray the divine office for the same intention.

4. Members shall endeavor to receive the Sacraments of Confession and Communion with the greatest possible frequency.

Notice: Everyone is strongly urged to observe these Rules for the many advantages that may be gained. But to remove any qualms of conscience that may arise, it should be understood that their observance is not binding under penalty of either mortal or venial sin, except when it is a question of things either prescribed or forbidden by God's commandments or by precepts of holy Mother Church.

Translation of the original *Rule* above from: Arthur J. Lenti, Salesians of Don Bosco. *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*. Vol. VI. (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 2009) 237-244. Print.

APPENDIX TO DON BOSCO'S ORIGINAL RULE

Plenary Indulgences

The Plenary Indulgences granted to the Association of Salesian Cooperators, after the revision made by the Holy See by the decree of 31 January 1968, are the following:

1. On the day of becoming a member
2. Feast of St. Francis de Sales: 24 January
3. Feast of St. John Bosco: 31 January
4. Feast of St. Joseph: 19 March
5. Feast of St. Dominic Savio: 6 May
6. Feast of St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello: 13 May
7. Feast of Mary Help of Christian: 24 May
8. Feast of the Immaculate Conception: 8 December

Condition for gaining the Plenary Indulgence:

- a) Confession, Communion and prayers for the Pope's intentions.
- b) Renewal, at least privately, of the promise to observe faithfully the Regulations.

N.B. If the above feasts are celebrated externally on some other day, the Cooperators may gain the Indulgence either on the day of the liturgical feast or on the day of the external solemnity.

Cooperators can naturally gain other Plenary Indulgences granted to all the faithful by fulfilling only the first of the two conditions, i.e. without renewing the promise to observe the Regulations.

Partial Indulgences

The numerous partial indulgences expressly granted in the past to the Pious Union have not been renewed; but Cooperators should try to gain those which are extended to all the faithful. It should be remembered in this connection that partial indulgences are no longer specified as so many days, months or years as in the past. When it is stated that to some action a partial indulgence is attached, this means:

"Properly disposed faithful who perform an action to which a partial indulgence is attached obtain, in addition to the remission of temporal punishment acquired by the action itself, an equal remission of punishment through the intervention of the Church."

In addition to the partial indulgences attached to pious practices, three general concessions should be mentioned which relate to acts of piety, charity and penance.

1. A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful who with some kind of prayer raise their minds to God with humble confidence, while carrying out their duties and bearing the difficulties of everyday life.

2. A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful who, motivated by the spirit of faith and compassion, give of themselves or their goods for the service of persons in need.

3. A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful who, in a spirit of penance, spontaneously refrain from the enjoyment of things which are lawful and pleasing to them.

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N.B. – The translations of the excerpts from the original sources quoted in the Italian version of this booklet were done directly from the originals contained herein. No former English translation was consulted when working on this text. The content is the same even if the translations differ.