

# Joseph Boenzi

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## Don Bosco and the conditions of pre-industrial youth in his times

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Ks. JOSEPH BOENZI SDB  
Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, Berkeley

## DON BOSCO AND THE CONDITIONS OF PRE-INDUSTRIAL YOUTH IN HIS TIMES

### 1. INTRODUCTION

John Bosco was born on 16 August 1815, in the year of Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo. Just months before the birth of our saint, Europe's leaders at Congress of Vienna had cheerfully if cryptically redrawn the map of Europe to favor international security through a balance of power – the phrase coined by the English diplomat Robert Stewart, Viscount of Castlereagh (1769-1822). Although representatives from every nation in Europe were invited to Vienna by the Austrian Emperor to negotiate the terms of a post-Napoleonic peace treaty, one delay after another meant that no general assembly ever took place. Diplomats and national delegates met in small groups. Their voice was filtered by the major powers – the so-called Big Four: Austria, Russia, Prussia and Great Britain. The representatives of these superpowers were anxious to assure that no people of nation could threaten their dominance. They would have succeeded had not France, under the able diplomat Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord (1754-1838), moved in to make the claims of the smaller nations heard, thereby transforming the inside group into the Big Five, that included France<sup>1</sup>.

Naturally, the redistribution of royal houses and re-drawing of boundaries, did not sit well with many of the secondary powers, nor especially with a growing Middle Class that Napoleon had called upon during the years of his expanding empire. However, there was much to do at the beginning of the Restoration, and it would take several years before those who did not believe in the convenient solutions of Metternich and his cohort at the Congress would finally be in a position to speak up.

Thus we can safely say, John Bosco was born at the beginning of the Restoration, but the first forty years of his life would represent a period of noticeable change in his native Piedmont (heart of the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Duchy of Savoy), as well as throughout the whole of Italy. And although Italy was merely a geographical expression, according to Prince Metternich, the region would quickly have

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<sup>1</sup> For a full description of the Congress of Vienna, its deliberations and side-shows, see: D. King, *Vienna 1814: How the Conquerors of Napoleon Made Love, War, and Peace at the Congress of Vienna*, Three Rivers Press 2008.

a different opinion of itself. Within a generation Italian nationhood would become a tangible goal, and the movement for unification would be spearheaded by the Piedmontese – more specifically from Turin.

## 2. SOCIAL SCENE OF DON BOSCO'S TURIN

Turin had long considered itself a world-class capital, although few others in Europe would do more than snort at such a statement in 1815. The city had welcomed the return of the king a few months previously with decorum more than pomp. When Victor Emmanuel I set foot on Piedmontese soil after the defeat of Napoleon, his first act was to give thanks to God and to the Virgin Mother, and then to process with the clergy and the people, not to the royal palace, but to the cathedral to sing the *Te Deum* and to pray for guidance for the rebuilding of the realm. And well he should! The country faced grave economic difficulties, caused by over two decades of war and heightened by the country's political divisions.

### 2.1. Napoleonic occupation and aftermath

The dukes of Savoy had built up Turin as their fortress-capital. Although Napoleon had given orders for the walls of the city to be demolished, very little of the promised Napoleonic changes to the infrastructure had ever been put into place in over a decade of French occupation. Instead of ten bridges, the New Order had managed to construct one stone bridge across the Po to replace a very sturdy wooden one. What the Napoleonic officials did accomplish was the reordering of the administrative organization of the city and province. They abolished the old city plan that divided Turin into 145 neighborhoods and established four administrative districts based on the main traffic arteries in and out of the city: Po, Dora, Moncenisio and Monviso.

In conjunction with the new civic master plan, Turin saw the dissolution of all royal entities for governance, education and law enforcement. The French re-configured all ecclesiastical structures. The number of parishes was reduced from seventeen to eight in Turin, and properties belonging to the former parishes, as well as all those belonging to monastic orders and lay confraternities, were seized and auctioned to the highest bidders to fill the imperial treasuries. Napoleon, however, was not opposed to religious practice. In fact, he published a new catechism where loyalty to the Emperor was presented as a religious obligation<sup>2</sup>. He also introduced a new feast day in the liturgical calendar – that of Saint Napoleon<sup>3</sup>.

When Napoleon met his defeat, the entire civil service that his supporters had put in place collapsed in Piedmont, as it did throughout the former Napoleonic Empire. This collapse caused some friction among the people of Turin, for

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Catéchisme a l'usage de toutes les églises de l'Empire Français*, De l'imprimerie d'Ignace Soffietti 1808, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. L. Cardoza, G. W. Symcox, *A History of Turin*, Giulio Einaudi Editore 2006, p. 152-153.

some had found the reforms, particularly the administrative reforms of Napoleon to be quite reasonable and workable. Others were determined to turn the clock backwards to 1789 and looked forward to the return of the absolute monarchy, and the alliance between the throne and the altar<sup>4</sup>. Conflict was not immediate, however, for everyone was happy to see the French leave the region; everyone, no matter what their opinion of the Napoleonic regime, wanted to have their country back.

## 2.2. Industry and enterprise

While it is common to speak of the Industrial Revolution as beginning in the early nineteenth century, this terminology belongs to phenomena in the United Kingdom and the northern United States of that era. This was not the case in Italy. Rather than a revolution, “at most one might speak of an industrial awakening or an incipient industrial development”<sup>5</sup>.

In Turin at the start of the Restoration the term *industries* mainly referred to the manufacturing of textiles. These were akin to cottage industries, with the spinning of thread on hand-turned spinning wheels and weaving of cloth on foot-pedal looms. More workers were employed as the demand for cotton, wool and silk fabrics increased. Hand crafting, artisan and family businesses flourished with a minimum of technology. These small, home-centered enterprises created new opportunities for commerce as Turin reorganized itself as the capital city of the Kingdom of Sardinia made it a place for new opportunities<sup>6</sup>.

In the same period, new fortifications were built, as the old, damaged structures were demolished. Small factories to produce weapons and munitions went into operation. A new population of builders and soldiers needed to be housed, and so new jobs in construction attracted a growing number of youth and young adults to the city to rebuild the city and the Kingdom. New jobs called for a larger workforce, but instead of new prosperity, the population of Turin, especially the young, experienced new hardships<sup>7</sup>.

## 2.3. Migrant trends

The shift in demographics was not due, therefore, to an industrial revolution. People were not so much attracted to the cities as they were forced to flee the

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. Pillepich, *Napoleone e gli italiani*, trans. R. Riccardi, ed. V. Criscuolo, Il Mulino 2005, p. 169-172.

<sup>5</sup> A. J. Lenti, *Don Bosco, History and Spirit*, vol. 2: *Birth and Early Development of Don Bosco's Oratory*, LAS 2007, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Lenti offers a very complete picture of the social conditions of Turin in the above-cited second volume of his seven-volume opus, relying on first-hand testimony and city archives to describe the critical situation of Turin during the middle nineteenth century. I will present data from other sources as well.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. G. Milanese, *I giovani oggi e possibilità educative nello stile di Don Bosco*, in: *Il sistema educativo di Don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova*, Atti del Convegno Europeo Salesiano sul Sistema Educativo di Don Bosco, Elledici 1974, p. 144.

countryside. The lot of the peasant populations had been in radical decline since the beginning of the French invasions in the 1790s. The family farm had all but phased out as agrarian reforms redistributed property in to large estates. Once independent farmers were reduced to share cropping; share croppers were reduced to becoming day laborers. Fertile lands had become battlefields, and harsh storms reduced production even further. Hunger became the constant companion of an increasingly impoverished rural population.

The people who flocked to the city in a desperate move for survival [were those] who were largely responsible for urban growth. Most of these immigrants remained in the city, for they had nothing better to go back to. They settled wherever they could, but especially in the existing poorer districts along the rivers Dora and Po to the north and northeast [of Turin]. This is the area that saw the most significant and quickest urban expansion. It was also the area where some small industries were meanwhile being located, because of available waterpower from the rivers. Urban development in these areas was in the form of tenement houses built to lodge immigrant families and individuals. Soon these northern districts turned into overcrowded slums<sup>8</sup>.

By the late 1840s, new migration trends were fully visible. Youth began to flood into Turin and other large cities in Piedmont in search of employment opportunities. These young people came from rural areas where recurring agricultural crises made it impossible to support a family. Just as the farms were beginning to fail, the cities were expanding trade and, as we have seen, Turin experienced a construction boom. Trade and construction provided abundant opportunities for unskilled labor.

Turin's new arrivals came from the rural areas of Piedmont, particularly the Monferrato region, but also from the newly annexed Liguria and the outskirts of Genoa. More would-be workers arrived from the border areas and even from Lombardy. Among the young workers there was also a fringe population of political refugees from France and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. These latter were often not among the working class, but mixed freely among the higher classes, exchanging ideas and experiences in conversations that would eventually prompt new thinking among Turin's leading citizens<sup>9</sup>.

#### 2.4. Economic levels and labor conditions

Private enterprise was generally scarce in this period. There was not yet a working class as we know it, mainly because laborers did not perceive themselves to be part of a general group within society. We can say, however, that laborers included those working in home-style cottage industries (mainly women) and

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. A. J. Lenti, *Don Bosco, History and Spirit*, vol. 2, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Among the refugees were such figures as Gabriele Rosa (1812-1897) and Silvio Pellico (1789-1854), whose book *Le mie prigioni* (published 1831) told the story of his imprisonment in the Spielberg fortress. The book greatly influenced public opinion in Italy to oppose Austrian, Spanish and French occupation of the peninsula.

in small industries for armaments. Others in the same conditions of dependence might include young farm hands and tenant farmers. Harsh conditions in those years had reduced many to extreme poverty.

Labor conditions inside factories were precarious. Workers endured extended work hours that pushed them to their physical limits. There was a total absence of safety standards, while workers received hunger wages exasperated by the glut of cheap labor. Labor contracts were inexistent, and employers did not think twice about exploiting women and children to meet their production goals. Meanwhile, crowded living conditions in Turin's slums, where the majority of the workers lived, linked with the bad sanitary conditions set the stage for frequent epidemics, high infant and child mortality, and a lowering of life expectancy (35 years, in Turin)<sup>10</sup>.

Who protected the workers? How did they assert their rights? No one advocated for workers and, young as most of them were, they had no understanding of their rights. There would be no labor movement as such until the 1870s, and so there was no such thing as collective bargaining whereby workers could seek to better their lot. Socialism was little more than a utopian theory promoted by French philosophers (e.g. François-Noël Babeuf, Claude Saint-Simon, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Charles Fourier). A more scientific approach, typical of German theorists, had yet to be proposed (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels would only publish *Das Kapital* in 1867, and it would not appear in Italian until 1886). Such social theory did not resonate in Italy.

However, having said that there were no advocates for workers' rights in the mid-nineteenth century Piedmont, it is fair to say that worker unrest was non-existent. Social philosophers had little impact on the working people of Turin. In the whole of Italy, furthermore, we can ascertain no consistent influence on the part of social theorists. No grass-roots political party existed and, in fact, there was no popular interest in political power. The masses are called to shed their blood in time of war and to fulfill the political designs of the free-market middle class, but most accepted this as their fate without so much as a protest<sup>11</sup>.

## 2.5. Political and religious tensions

Policy-making was in the hands of a very elite group of Turin's professionals and semi-professionals. They proved to be somewhat more competent than the traditional ruling class, although they were much less tactful. To effect political and administrative reform, they often engaged in bullying their colleagues, employees and the lower social classes. Many became increasingly anti-clerical as they embraced the possibility of Italian unification.

Anti-clericalism, in fact, became a qualifying element in the drive towards a unified Italy. Many members of Turin's new elite perceived the papacy as standing

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. A. J. Lenti, *Don Bosco, History and Spirit*, vol. 2, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. G. Milanese, *I giovani oggi e possibilità educative nello stile di Don Bosco*, p. 145.

in the way of a united kingdom under the royal House of Savoy. This induced them to legislate against the local church. With time the differences between the anti-clerical liberals and the Catholic party became extreme. The rising political class saw the interests of temporal power for the Holy See as interfering with Italian yearnings of national unity. What would become known as the Roman Question after the 1860s was only remotely considered in the 1840s, but eventually the break between faith and culture would pose a grave problem of conscience for Catholics in later decades.

Political developments in Turin after 1845 would see the transfer of leadership from the aristocracy to the well-to-do of the middle class. This entrepreneurial class would prepare for a new economic turning point in the city that would help to carry the country to unity. In so doing, they would create the context for Don Bosco's activity.

## 2.6. Economic shift

The shift that took place between 1845 and 1870 was from pre-industrialization (artisans' crafts, cottage industries) to the first mid-sized businesses in the textiles sector and the mechanical sector. This created new jobs and new opportunities, particularly in home-building, public works, as well as a more scientific approach to farming.

Commerce expanded from contained regional trading to the beginnings of a national network. This was made possible through the first railway promoted by the government of Turin in 1843. The project followed a three-year study that proposed to link the port at Genoa with the capital Turin and the royal residence of Moncalieri, with strategies to continue the line on to connect with Milan, the capital of Lombardy. Construction on the Turin-Moncalieri line began in 1845 and was complete in 1848, creating great enthusiasm on the part of the public. With this feat, the spread of the railway system was assured. The line between Turin and Genoa was completed in 1854, and inaugurated by King Victor Emmanuel II. The railway system facilitated the transport of goods and enhanced trade, but also brought a notable increase in bureaucracy that had an impact on how government itself functioned in Turin. Planning, implementation, evaluation, analysis and time-management were the new virtues learned from railway development. Whatever the benefits and the drawbacks, the railway dramatically demonstrated the will of Turin to modernize.

Turin was on the rise. From the beginning of the Restoration, Turin's importance as a political and administrative center was always on the rise. The proportion of employees engaged in public administration rose dramatically, doubling in number between 1802 and 1815. Their number continued to grow throughout the Restoration even as the population of the city mushroomed<sup>12</sup>. From a population of 84,230 inhabitants in 1814, the city increased to 122,424 in 1830, and again to

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. A. L. Cardoza, G. W. Symcox, *A History of Turin*, p. 167.

136,849 in 1848<sup>13</sup>. Beginning in 1848, Turin took the lead in the movement to unify Italy as a monarchy under the House of Savoy. At the time of unification in 1861, Turin's population was tallied at 204,715 inhabitants<sup>14</sup>.

The city was no longer able to sustain such a population or support its growth. At the center of a new State, civic and national leaders (often the same men dealing with both realities) were forced to face what they considered a dramatic backwardness in many newly annexed regions of the kingdom. The debt incurred after a decade of war, linked with repeated agricultural crises, hampered government at every turn. The new Kingdom of Italy (and therefore Turin the capital) must sustain new public works and foster private enterprise, but this soon became overwhelming. Turin, proudly the center of the new nation, had arrived at a precarious development.

The cost of living rose dramatically, as did taxes on such things as the milling of wheat. The job market dried up as Turin faced the loss of many places of work even as the population continued to increase. Instead of attracting skilled workers, Turin in the 1860s began to repel them. At the beginning of the next decade many left for France and for America, while only those too poor to emigrate remained<sup>15</sup>.

It was only at this point that we can trace the emergence of class consciousness. Workers now understood as never before that they were literally blocked from participation in politics. They began to organize to seek better conditions. The content of their claims were clear and concrete: better jobs; more humane working conditions; a greater say in the direction of industry. From all sides there were responses on the workers behalf. The first Catholic trade union was formed in 1871, and mutual aid societies sprung up throughout the city. University faculties, with state support, began to promote the sciences and technology, and the faculty of engineering at Turin became one of the most important in the country. Even so, the workers' challenges startled the Turin's leadership, and when they were not heard, the workers did united in very dramatic and sometimes violent protests that became typical at the end of the century<sup>16</sup>.

### 3. THE YOUNG IN DON BOSCO'S TIMES

Between 1841 and 1860 young people in Turin fell into several different social classes and categories. Young people of this era were not known to organize, although they did congregate most spontaneously. It may even be doubtful whether they would have ever referred to themselves as belonging to these categories, but it may be helpful for us if we subdivide them so as to understand who were the young people of those times.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. A. J. Lenti, *Don Bosco, History and Spirit*, vol. 2, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. A. L. Cardoza, G. W. Symcox, *A History of Turin*, p. 174 (Table I).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. G. Milanese, *I giovani oggi e possibilità educative nello stile di Don Bosco*, p. 146.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. A. L. Cardoza, G. W. Symcox, *A History of Turin*, p. 195-196; G. Milanese, *I giovani oggi e possibilità educative nello stile di Don Bosco*, p. 146.



### 3.1. Privileged youth

Young people that we could call *privileged youth* came from the elite middle-class and noble families of Turin. The number of young people belonging to this category was very small.

These youths did have opportunities for extensive education at levels that today we could describe as primary, secondary and tertiary. For the most part their families oversaw their education directly, entrusting them to the care of private teachers and tutors, at least until they might enter the university (and with royal support, the University of Turin at that time was introducing new faculties and expanding its offerings for the first time in decades).

In terms of career opportunities, *privileged youth* could look forward to a good future as officers in the military forces of the Kingdom of Sardinia, and to positions of trust in public administration, in directing new industries and in the professions.

### 3.2. Sons of the People

The vast majority of citizens of Turin had what we would call today urban and working-class origins. They came from families that in the past had worked hand in hand with the nobility for the good administration and security of society. In the nineteenth century a growing distance developed between the privileged and urban classes however.

The young people who came from the popular class had less opportunity for study than their counterparts in the bourgeois or noble classes. Often they had limited instruction, having learned the rudiments of reading and figure, quite below elementary standards.

For generations the city dwellers of Turin were hardworking and industrious, and the youth of the nineteenth century were formed in a strong work ethic by their elders. Yet, opportunities for employment (or semi-employment) became increasingly limited as the city experienced a shift from a traditional economy. Youth in this category might find positions working in the trades and or as artisans if they had had the opportunity to serve as apprentices through a family network of training and formation during their early years. Otherwise, they might find employment in the growing service sector, in small and middle industries where working conditions were often inhuman and put them at risk.

### 3.3. Immigrant youth

The number of young people arriving in the city in search of job opportunities became a steady feature of Turin in the middle of the century. These immigrant youths came from rural farm villages and market towns across Piedmont, as well as from mountain villages in Aosta. Many, as we have seen, came from outside of the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Young immigrants arrived in Turin looking for immediate job placement. Many were no older than 11 or 12 years of age. Opportunities for schooling in the rural regions from which they came had been extremely limited. If there had been a farsighted parish priest, town children might have had the opportunity for something beyond rudimentary instruction<sup>17</sup>, or where more organized municipalities were able to adhere to Piedmontese legislation, local instructors may have been able to provide schooling for children up to the third grade<sup>18</sup>. The vast majority, however, were the children of peasant farmers or tenant farmers, and would have had little or no schooling at all. Life in the farming hamlets and villages had followed age-old traditional rhythms, but life in the city was very different. These young immigrants were culturally uprooted and linguistically isolated.

Immigrant youth came to the city in search of their first employment (or to *seek their fortune* as the saying went in those days). What concrete opportunities for employment existed for them? They found themselves inserted in a productive machine, in the meanest and dirtiest jobs that everyone else was anxious to avoid at all costs. Immigrant youth took the most difficult and least compensated jobs, often in the construction industry (public buildings, factories, markets, housing in the expanding city of Turin). Those who were fortunate enough to have some skill found employment with artisans in crafts and small trades, while others found placement in commerce (perhaps starting as shop boys and later possibly moving up to retail).

Immigrant youth, therefore, formed the working class, or better, the underclass of Turin's labor force. More than any others, these young people were destined to certain marginalization. They were deprived of material and moral support, deprived of visible assistance, and made prey to the ups and down of a weak economy and a volatile market.

On the other hand, many immigrant youth had an inner strength that others did not. These young, displaced farmers came from traditional religious families. They mostly maintained that spiritual awareness that they had learned from their families. They had a strong sense of devotion, and this in turn made them gave them an ethical sensitivity that they did not easily surrender. As immigrants, these young people did not lose the religious heritage of their native environments. Even if they found themselves in new cultural circumstances, Turin itself was a city that honored religiosity. The city was not as secularized in the early 1840s as it would become in later decades<sup>19</sup>.

For them, more than other young people, the balance had shifted. They

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. G. Bosco, *Vite di Giovani: Le biografie di Domenico Savio, Michele Magone e Francesco Besucco*, ed. A. Giraud, LAS 2012, p. 51-53.

<sup>18</sup> On 4 October 1848, with the passage of Law #759, the so-called *Legge Boncompagni*, the Kingdom of Sardinia put education under the control of the state. The bill's author, Carlo Boncompagni, organized the Superior Council of Public Instruction, and made schooling obligatory up to third grade, but also offered provisions for elementary, middle and secondary instruction. Cf. *Compact Storia d'Italia: Cronologia 1815-1990*, ed. V. Ceppellini, P. Boroli, Istituto Geografico DeAgostini 1991, p. 101; G. Bosco, *Vite di Giovani*, p. 116 (footnote 9).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. G. Milanese, *I giovani oggi e possibilità educative nello stile di Don Bosco*, p. 147.

were confronted with changing values. Their “crisis” was not religious but one of uprooting. This would bring about a slow, deep transformation of convictions, of practices and of religious sentiment unless they found someone who could help them make sense of their new situation. They were in need of a new evangelization and catechesis – something that Don Bosco made a priority in his outreach to them.

Before moving on, we should include refugees among the young immigrants. In 1849 the Milanese priest Nicolò Oliveri (1792-1864) arrived in Genoa with a number of young Africans whom he had ransomed from slavery in Alexandria in Egypt. Don Oliveri had exhausted all his funds in paying for the ransom and the transport of the youngsters, and while he looked for charitable sponsors, his friend Don Biagio Verri (1819-1884) put him in contact with Don Bosco. Don Bosco found a place for the girls with a number of Sisters’ institutes in the city, and welcomed the boys at the Oratory hospice to see to their education. This is how the first young black African by the name of Alessandro Bachit arrived at the Oratory on 24 October 1849. Other young Africans arrived soon afterward<sup>20</sup>.

### 3.4. Young offenders

Turin in the 1840s to 1860s had a small minority of young people who had run afoul of the law. These young offenders were those who may have served time in Turin’s inhuman prisons, which did not reform them but hardened them further. The citizens of Turin referred to such young people by various nicknames such as *the destroyers, the strays, thieves, the wasters*, or most commonly, *the Barabbases*. The phenomenon of lawlessness among criminal youth became known as *la barabberia*.

The young who were caught in this situation banded together in roving and ferocious gangs. They were clever mobsters and could be seen around the town squares and plazas that served as the outdoor markets (such as *Porta Palazzo*, which was a huge agricultural and craft market that opened on a daily basis on the north side of the city). The gangs made efforts to remain unseen by the general population, but they were, in fact, quite powerful and dangerous.

Gang members were more than simply troubled. They were practiced in intimidation and violence. Still, only a minority of Turinese young people lived in this condition. They were true juvenile delinquents who existed on the margins, often in and out of prison.

Don Bosco himself approached many of these young people. Encouraged by Don Giuseppe Cafasso (1811-1860, canonized 1947), he dedicated his early

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<sup>20</sup> Blessed Michele Rua (1837-1910), a contemporary of Alessandro Bachit and Don Bosco’s successor, affirmed the presence of African boys at the Oratory. Don Bosco was one of his many supporters of Don Oliveri, who freed a total of 810 African children from slavery over a period of 19 years. See: G. B. Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco*, Suola Tipografica e Libreria Salesiana 1901, vol. 3, p. 568-571; A. Pedrini, *Don Bosco e i fondatori suoi contemporanei*, Opera Salesiana 1990, p. 51-55; G. Pizzorusso, *Olivieri Nicolò Giovanni Battista*, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Treccani 2013, p. 79.

apostolic efforts to troubled youth, including those in the prisons of the capital city<sup>21</sup>. Their sad plight convinced him of the importance of intervening in the life of young people *before* they became at risk<sup>22</sup>.

### 3.5. Youth as protagonists

Young people in nineteenth-century Turin did not normally affiliate with groups. Nor did they organize in any political sense. Political or religious groups were reserved for adults and few young people gave much thought to them. There were no collective behaviors, no group projects, and no sense of belonging to a class (as in a school group), much less any type of youth movement. While young people did join enthusiastically in the service of the patriotic ideals in that moment in history, they remained absent, as young people, in the first attempts to socially or politically organize the working class<sup>23</sup>.

This seems to contradict the agenda of the leaders of the *Risorgimento*, such as Giuseppe Mazzini, who early in the movement organized a political society that he dubbed *Giovane Italia* – Young Italy. He believed that Italy would become a unified republic through a popular uprising, whereby Italians would realize their mission (and therefore their duty) to unite for the good of Western Civilization. For years he sought to instill revolutionary patriotism through his political journals, public lectures, and a network of secret societies. His influence on the young Italians that flooded Turin in the middle of the century was negligible<sup>24</sup>.

Were young people politically active? The sons and daughters of Turin's upper-middle class at the beginning of the *Risorgimento* took little interest in politics. The few young men who did enter into politics were touched by patriotic reforms, much as their fathers were. However, they had no sense of belonging to a new generation. The sons of the common people, instead, were far from politicized. Those who might have had some inclinations in this line were, in fact, barred of political participation. In many ways, they were just as culturally marginalized as their immigrant counterparts.

## 4. CONCLUSION: DON BOSCO'S YOUNG PEOPLE

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. G. Bosco, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, saggio introduttivo e note storiche a cura di A. Giraud, LAS 2011, p. 126-127. For a description of Don Bosco's dealings with armed gangs in the depressed Borgo Vanchiglia district, see: B. Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. 3, p. 561-567.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. G. Milanese, *I giovani oggi e possibilità educative nello stile di Don Bosco*, p. 147; A. J. Lenti, *Don Bosco, History and Spirit*, vol. 2, p. 34-35, 41.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. G. Milanese, *I giovani oggi e possibilità educative nello stile di Don Bosco*, p. 148.

<sup>24</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini founded *Giovane Italia*, not on Italian soil but in Marseilles in 1831; he attempted to revitalize it in London. He wanted it to be a public reality, not a clandestine sect. However, as a society, *Giovane Italia* was more expressive than practical, and never grew into the popular uprising that Mazzini envisioned. Cf. L. Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero*, Yale University Press 2007, p. 29-31, 34-36; E. E. Y. Hales, *Mazzini and the Secret Societies: The Making of a Myth*, P. J. Kennedy & Sons 1956, p. 62, 66-67. G. Belardelli, *Mazzini*, Il Mulino 2010, p. 31-60.

Don Bosco made great efforts to mobilize his contemporaries, both as members of the Church and as members of a changing society, to work on behalf of the young people of his times – that “portion of human society that is the most delicate and the most precious, on which so many hopes for a happy future are placed” are often the most at risk and therefore, the most “in need of a helping hand that can take care of them, and therefore cultivate in them a love for virtue so that they may keep far away from vice”<sup>25</sup>. He spoke often of *poor and abandoned youth*, and he dedicated his life and work to them, just as he invited others to do the same, so that the young might become *honest citizens and good Christians*.

It was obvious to him that the State could not attend to the needs of the people, much less to the needs of the young, for in that crucial period the government was most concerned with survival. And although many of Turin’s priests made pastoral outreach their priority, suppressions of religious orders and the exile of the archbishop made it difficult for the Church to respond to the pressing needs of the rising generation.

Under these circumstances, Don Bosco felt the need to give a response that included social assistance and the promotion of youth in addition to his ministerial duties as a priest. To his consolation, he found the young to be responsive. They were poor but hope-filled. For his part, Don Bosco worked to provide the young with more opportunities along a continuum from basic training to professional education, from spiritual guidance to daily bread, from work to leisure, from social and political formation to emotional and affective security.

When facing youth problems, Don Bosco’s interventions were comprehensive. He educated and advocated on behalf of the young of the common people – particularly those who were the poorest and most abandoned. They were the center of his concern, and every one of his educative interventions incorporated religious goals, social aims and political dimensions so that Don Bosco’s young people could develop in the most wholesome way into *honest citizens and good Christians!*

## DON BOSCO AND THE CONDITIONS OF PRE-INDUSTRIAL YOUTH IN HIS TIMES

### Summary

The year 2015 marks the bicentenary of the birth of Saint John Bosco, whom Pope John Paul II designated as the *father and teacher of youth*. As members of the Salesian Family worldwide commemorate this event, they do so with the intention of starting afresh in the spirit of this saint to promote and foster the education of young people in our times – especially the poorest and most in need. But who are the young people that Don Bosco would most try to educate today? What was the situation of adolescents and young adults in his lifetime? – those the he actually encountered? This paper attempts to survey the social, political, cultural and religious context of the young of Don Bosco’s city

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<sup>25</sup> From a page written by the newly ordained Don Bosco in late autumn of 1841, quoted in B. Lemoyne, *Memorie biografiche*, vol. 2, p. 45.

of Turin in the middle nineteenth century. My hope is to present reflections that can help us to reflect or study or even share in groups on Don Bosco's young people *and* our own. For, according to Don Bosco, the young are that *portion of human society that is the most delicate and the most precious, on which so many hopes for a happy future are placed.*

**Keywords:** adolescents, education, family values, immigrants, John Bosco, nineteenth century Italy, religiosity, Turin, young adults, urbanization, youth

**Nota o Autorze:** Fr. Joseph Boenzi SDB, a member of the California province of the Salesian Society, is qualified in education and theology. He completed doctoral studies at the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome (1996: *Summa cum laude*) and became Professor of Theology at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, which is a member school of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California (USA). Since 2005 he is also Visiting Professor of Spiritual Theology at the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome. Fr. Boenzi offers retreats and conferences on Salesian topics during the summer months, and pursues research in areas of Salesian Studies (charism, Francis de Sales, John Bosco), Youth Spirituality, the Theology and History of the Church (Ecclesial movements, modern and contemporary Church, Consecrated Life).

## KSIĄDZ BOSKO I WARUNKI PRZEDINDUSTRIALNEJ MŁODZIEŻY W JEGO CZASACH

### Abstrakt

W roku 2015 przypada 200-lecie urodzin św. Jana Bosko, którego papież Jan Paweł II określił jako „ojca i nauczyciela młodzieży”. Członkowie Rodziny Salezjańskiej na całym świecie świętują ten jubileusz z intencją odnowienia ducha swego świętego Patrona i promocji wychowania młodzieży, którą ksiądz Bosko próbowałby wychowywać dzisiaj. Jaka była sytuacja młodych ludzi w czasie jego życia – tych, których on spotykał? Ten artykuł jest próbą zbadania społecznego, politycznego, kulturowego i religijnego tła, w jakim żyła młodzież księdza Bosko w Turynie w połowie XIX w. Autor wyraża nadzieję, że opracowanie to pomoże zreflektować, przebadać poruszane tu zagadnienia, a nawet podzielić się nimi z młodzieżą identyfikującą się z Księdzem Bosko. Według świętego Wychowawcy z Turynu, młodzież jest bowiem „częścią ludzkiej społeczności najbardziej wrażliwą i najbardziej drogową, w której pokłada się tak wiele nadziei na szczęśliwą przyszłość”.

**Nota o Autorze:** ks. Joseph Boenzi SDB jest salezjaninem przynależnym do Salezjańskiej Prowincji Kalifornijskiej, specjalizuje się w badaniach na temat wychowania i teologii. Doktorat z teologii uzyskał na Papieskim Uniwersytecie Salezjańskim (UPS) w Rzymie w roku 1996 (*Summa cum laude*) i rozpoczął pracę na stanowisku profesora teologii w Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, która jest częścią Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley w Kalifornii. Od roku 2005 jest także profesorem wizytującym, prowadzącym zajęcia z teologii duchowości na UPS. Ks. Joseph Boenzi realizuje badania naukowe z zakresu studiów salezjańskich (charyzmat, św. Franciszek Salezy, św. Jan Bosko), duchowości młodzieżowej, teologii i historii Kościoła (ruchy kościelne, Kościół w czasach nowożytnych i współczesnych, życie konsekrowane), a w okresie wakacyjnym prowadzi rekolekcje i głosi konferencje na temat zagadnień salezjańskich

**Słowa kluczowe:** nastolatki, wychowanie, wartości rodzinne, imigranci, Jan Bosko, Włochy w XIX w., religijność, Turyn, młodzi dorośli, urbanizacja, młodzież