

□ Reading time: 6 min.

It is distributed all over the world in dozens of different languages. Certainly it has changed appearance many times, but always in tune with the Founder's Salesian Bulletin: "the Salesian (educational) eye on the world and the world's eye on the Salesian world", as Rector Major Fr Juan Vecchi liked to say.

Starting from afar (1844)

Don Bosco understood very early the importance of communication and the related tools of social communication, even though at the time there was only the press. As soon as he left his studies (1844) he printed the *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo*. The following year, while in the service of the Marchioness Barolo, he published *Il divoto dell'Angelo Custode* and the voluminous *Storia Ecclesiastica*. In 1846, he published three more devotional booklets. In 1847, it was the turn of the *Storia sacra per uso delle scuole* (Bible History for use in schools) and *Il Giovane provveduto...* (The Companion of Youth), the latter with more than a hundred editions/reprints while the author was alive. With the promulgation of the freedom of the press in 1848 Don Bosco worried about the young, and he quickly devised the three-weekly newspaper *L'Amico della Gioventù*. He soon had to close this, but he was not discouraged.

In 1851, he published a pamphlet *La chiesa cattolica-apostolica-romana* (The Catholic-Apostolic-Roman Church) and, given the very favourable reception, he started his most successful publishing initiative: *Lettture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings), which would reach ten million copies by the time of his death (in an Italy of 30 million semi-illiterate people!). To the dozen issues bearing his name, in 1855 he added the highly successful *Storia d'Italia raccontata alla gioventù* (History of Italy told to the youth), with twenty editions while still living. In the five-year period 1856-1860, it was the turn of some twenty other titles. As a stand-alone in 1856 he marketed *La chiave del Paradiso in mano al cattolico* (an authentic bestseller of 800,000 copies with 44 editions while he was alive).

The printing press at Valdocco (1862)

In December 1861 Don Bosco obtained permission to open his own Printing House. It immediately became involved in the educational sector given the new programmes created after the unification of Italy: it published four series of selected Latin, Greek and Christian authors, as well as the *Library of Italian Youth*. Four dictionaries of Italian, Latin and Greek as well as grammars, school texts, aids. In 1876 DB founded a "branch" in Genoa Sampierdarena and in August 1877 he

started the Salesian Bulletin or *Catholic Bibliophile* (or Salesian Monthly Bulletin) for the first four months.

The timid beginnings of the Salesian Bulletin (1876-1877)

The idea of proceeding in 1877 with the publication of an information Bulletin for all those who were interested in the Salesian Work in various ways may have been suggested to Don Bosco by the presence on the market of similar publications by other Religious Orders. While these publications were sent to their Tertiaries, members and friends of the individual religious Families, Don Bosco could well do the same with his Cooperators who in those very years were formally taking root as an Association.

The Association's Regulations prescribed that "Every month a bulletin [or] printed leaflet will give the members an account of the things proposed, done or proposed to be done." The text was later amended to read: "Every three months and more frequently by means of a bulletin or printed leaflet (...)" In reality it was immediately a monthly bulletin.

In February 1877 Don Bosco communicated to his collaborators the decision to print a periodical Bulletin "as the magazine of the Congregation, because there are many things to be communicated to said Cooperators." In the summer he discussed the concrete problems of the project with Fr Barberis and to the objection about the liability that would result from sending it free, he pointed out that the readers, knowing it was free, would give more than the eventual sum requested, not counting subsequent offerings.

In September/December 1877 the Salesian Bulletin began under the name *Catholic Bibliophile* or *Salesian Monthly Bulletin*. The *Catholic Bibliophile* was a catalogue whose aim was to make known Salesian editions and other useful publications to the youth and clergy. In August 1877, it underwent a radical transformation. It indicated that it was printed in Sampierdarena to avoid the risk of the Turin curia denying it the imprimatur. It was 12 pages long and had the following headings: *Ai Cooperatori Salesiani, Dei Cooperatori, Lettere dei Missionari salesiani nell'America Meridionale, Cose diverse, Prime prove di alcuni Cooperatori, Indulgenze speciali pel mese di agosto*; followed and concluded by three well-filled pages of a book catalogue.

There were two editions for September. The first with the Turin address, the second with the Genoa address. In November, Fr Bonetti took over as editor-in-chief. From January 1878 the heading *Salesian Bulletin* was used exclusively. The pages varied from 8 to 20 until 1881. From 1882 continuous numbering was started up to 204

pages in 18821883 and 158 pages in 1888.

The objective

In the first issue of September 1877 Don Bosco indicated to the Salesian Cooperators that the Salesian Bulletin would give them “an account of things done or to be done to achieve the end we have set ourselves” that is “the glory of God, the good of Civil Society.” In concrete terms, he intended the periodical to be the normal means of maintaining the identity of thought and action between the Cooperators and the Salesians, of promoting good press, opposing Protestant proselytism, the corruption of customs and the irreligious and immoral press to the detriment above all of the young, and especially for doing good to the readers and their families.

In the first issues of the *Salesian Bulletin* (1877...) the intriguing episodes of the history of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales and Don Bosco’s January letter to the Cooperators were privileged, in which he described the works accomplished in the past year and planned for the current year. Ample space was devoted to the “American letters” from missionaries, with appetising reports of situations, customs and traditions of vast areas of Latin America totally unknown to readers.

Why different from others?

Don Bosco wrote on 28 November 1885 to Fr Emanuele Morossi, who had sent him an offer for his works: “As for the sending of the Salesian Bulletin, Your Lordship and the Parish Priest will allow me to continue it. Do not bother them about payment, because it is not a magazine like the others, nor is it made with a view to profit [gain]... Do not refuse it and I beg both of you to believe that by having it read by as many as possible you are doing a work of great charity, without having to think about any offerings to send in future years, as long as you can do so without serious inconvenience.”

In Italy, but everywhere in the world, Bulletins of all kinds were published, but Don Bosco’s sought to be different from the others: for its “original”, “unique”, “Salesian”, “missionary” content, which we have just mentioned, for its simple style, comprehensible to all kinds of people, for the fact that it was sent free of charge “to those who wanted it and to those who did not want it.” On the occasion of the Third General Chapter of the Salesians (1883) he stated that “It is not important to us to receive 10 lire more or less, but to achieve the greater glory of God. If the governments do not put us to shame, the Bulletin will become a power, not for itself, but for the people it will bring together.”

According to Don Bosco’s intuition, the Salesian Bulletin is not a simple chronicle of

events, but divulges the spirit of the Congregation through the narration of facts and works, rather than through the dissemination of speculative ideas. It offers a reading of contemporary reality from a Salesian point of view and welcomes the provocations of the world of youth and the Church in view of a more global educational and pastoral project.

“The Salesian Bulletin had as its objective to maintain among the members of the pious union the greatest possible identity of thought and harmony of action for the attainment of the common goal” (Biographical Memoirs XIII, 603).

The Editor

At first Don Bosco looked after it personally to give it the direction he intended; then he entrusted it to one of his close collaborators, Fr John Bonetti. The latter, an excellent writer but also a born polemicist, sometimes allowed himself a bit too much licence, developing certain news items and ending up offending certain civil and ecclesiastical sensibilities. Don Bosco called him to adopt calmer approach: he preferred to make Salesian works known in a simple tone, rather than engage in polemics in print. Don Bosco's first living successor, Fr Giovani Battista Lemoyne, the well-known writer of the monumental *Biographical Memoirs* of Don Bosco, collaborated with him.

Other languages

The presence of Salesian works in France since 1875 and also the need to reach an ever larger number of well-to-do benefactors in Europe, presumably able to read French (Belgians, Poles...), led Don Bosco to publish an edition of the Bulletin in that language. The French *Bulletin salésien* started in Genoa-Sampierdarena in April 1879. While Don Bosco was still alive two editions in Spanish were also published: the first in Argentina and the second for Spain, but published in Turin. The Salesian Bulletin reached the homes of rich and poor, nobles and ordinary citizens, civil and religious authorities, scholars and simple people, Catholic or not, in Italy and abroad. Don Bosco did not hesitate to have some issues bound and give them as a gift to the imperial family of Vienna and other royal houses. With a circulation that rapidly increased from a few thousand to tens of thousands of copies at Don Bosco's death, the Salesian Bulletin, in the absence of modern means of social communication (radio, TV, social...) contributed greatly to the “fortune” of the Salesian Family: in terms of vocations of Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Salesian works, and, why not, economic support.

Always unique

After so many years of life, the Salesian Bulletin, conceived and produced with

enormous success by Don Bosco, has gone from black and white to colour, has continually updated its graphics, diversified its columns, multiplied its circulation, and is online. Today it is printed in 63 editions, in 31 different languages and reaches over 134 nations. Each one is different, each one has its own needs and readership, but each one seeks to be faithful to Don Bosco's original inspiration. This one, which you are reading, is accessible from all countries; translated, it brings the word of the Rector Major to every part of the world every month.