

The origins

“The vocational training activity qualifying the Salesian schools becomes the distinctive feature of Salesians and their works”

(Fr. Egidio Viganò, Rector Major of Salesians, 1978).

The Salesian experience in the field of vocational training is based on and follows the pedagogical methodology of St. John Bosco, recognized by the Italian society as the “Patron of apprentices” and the “Father and Teacher of youth”. Since 1842 he looked after young apprentices working in artisan workshops in Turin and founded many schools for them which could be attended during the day, evening and even on Saturdays or holidays. In 1853 he first developed training workshops addressed to shoemakers, tailors, tiers and then to carpenters, printers and blacksmiths.

Some rare documents are stored into the archive of the Salesian Congregation, such as the original contract of apprenticeship, dated November 1851, and a second contract of apprenticeship, the so called “**contratto di apprendizzaggio**”, drafted on stamped paper (40 cents value), dated February 8, 1852 together with other well-structured documents dating back to 1855. They are all signed by St. John Bosco, the apprentice and the employer.

The Salesian historian Teresio Bosco comments the contracts: in these documents St. John Bosco forces the employers to employ young apprentices only in their craft and not as their servants. He requires that the corrections be made only in words and not through beatings. He cares about health, Sunday rest and annual leave demanding a “progressive” salary since the third year of apprenticeship was actually a year of real work. The contracts show the intuition of St. John Bosco who fostered youth education as one of the main pillars for social development.

Since then, Salesian vocational training acquired over time a fundamental role, proven by the most diverse and challenging situations and enriched by a wide cultural and pedagogical heritage.

One hundred years of history of “Salesian Vocational Training” have been summarized in a booklet by the Salesian historian Fr. José Manuel Prellezo. The essay entitled **Le scuole professionali salesiane: tappe rilevanti nel primo centenario (1853 – 1953)** (“The Salesian vocational schools: milestones in the first centenary (1853 – 1953)”), furnishes proof of all the fundamental landmarks in St. John Bosco and Salesian work and the various means designed to ease the progress in this field until 1953: educational and vocational programmes, rules for the organization of occupational exposures, methods to value the work of young artisans, rules to be followed in the examinations of promotion of young artisans, pedagogical-didactic orientations for the masters of art, reflections on vocational training and education.