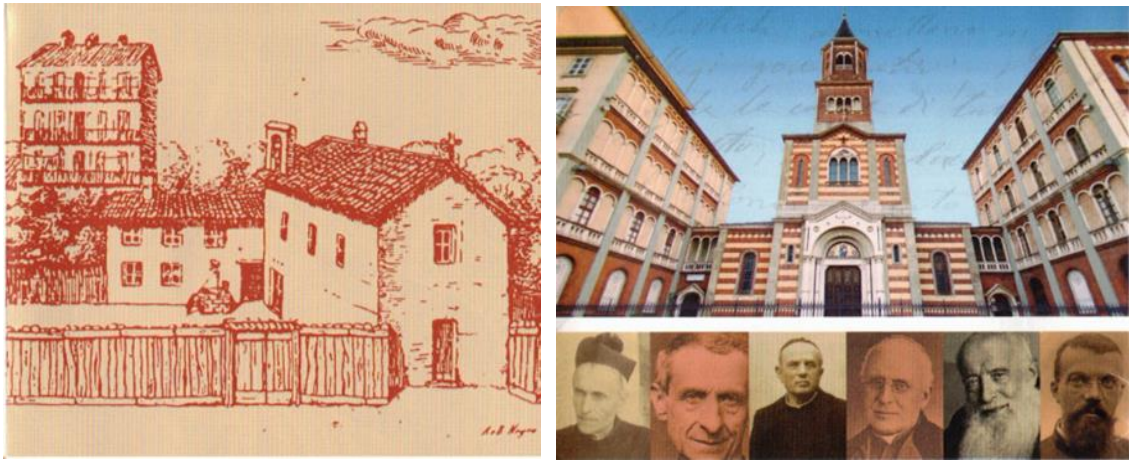


The Church of San Giovanni Evangelista (San Giovannino)



Corso Vittorio Emanuele, formerly known as **Viale del Re**, is one of the main tree-lined avenues of Turin. Walking from Porta Nuova station towards the hill, at the corner with Via Madama Cristina, you come across **the majestic church of St. John the Evangelist**, popularly called San Giovannino to distinguish it from the Cathedral dedicated to St. John the Baptist. Its entrance, though set back from the sidewalk and the churchyard, stands dominantly over this stretch of the avenue, thanks to the towering tower on the façade and the 45-meter-high bell tower, characteristic of the architectural trend of the era that favored tall structures, making it visible from various parts of the city.

We are in the heart of the historic **Borgo San Salvario**, one of the urban areas that emerged during the rapid expansion of the city in the 19th century, in zones previously occupied by the countryside. Urban expansion went hand in hand with the development of industrial and entrepreneurial activities, but it also brought a considerable burden of social discomfort and new poverty. This situation persists today, with the Borgo having become one of the centers of Turin's "movida" yet still characterized by significant social issues, largely resulting from substantial migratory flows from poor countries.

In this context, **Don Bosco's work**, already heavily engaged in Turin with his efforts in educating and training young people, takes place. As early as 1841, Don Bosco had begun his educational work by teaching catechism to a boy, **Bartolomeo Garelli**, in the sacristy of the **Church of St. Francis of Assisi**: within a few months, hundreds of boys were running to him every Sunday to hear his word, to feel a sign of affection from his heart, or to receive help.

That first oratory found a stable location only **in April 1846, in Valdocco at the Pinardi house**. But that little Pinardi house couldn't accommodate the multitudes of boys flocking to it. Thus, Don Bosco conceived of a second oratory.

He understood the potential and the issues of Borgo San Salvario, so he rented a small house with a courtyard, located where the presbytery of the church stands today; the necessary works were carried out to make the environment suitable for new needs. **On December 8, 1847** – a date still celebrated in all Salesian oratories worldwide – a multitude of boys, led by theologian Borel, under thick and swirling snowfall, left Valdocco to start the new **Oratory of San Luigi**.

Over time, this place became a gathering spot for all the boys in the area, and so Don Bosco bought the land around the house, to build a large church and a complex capable of accommodating the boys, offering them places for study and training, spaces not only for prayer but also workshops where they could learn a trade, and recreational areas, annexed to the church and the oratory. Unlike a traditional parish, this project allowed for **a meeting point between the religious institute and the city's population.**

Don Bosco entrusted the work for the architectural complex to **Edoardo Arborio Mella** (1808-1884), a noble-born architect from Vercelli, who had created a school for training construction workers in his hometown. Don Bosco's project found many points of contact with the ideas of the architect, a fervent Catholic.

On August 14, 1878, the cornerstone was laid, with an inscription that read: *"A church, an oratory, and a school were put into construction so that everyone could conveniently fulfill their religious duties and the boys could be instructed in religion and science."* Notably, the church was built solely with the offerings of the faithful, who responded generously to Don Bosco's appeal, and it is dedicated to the **Apocalypse**, as evidenced by many of the decorative works housed there. **In 1882, the construction was completed.** At noon on October 28, the bells rang out to celebrate the beginning of the first Mass celebrated by don Bosco in front of an immense crowd.

Architecture



The church is characterized by **Neo-Romanesque architecture**, following a "revivalist" model that initially spread in England in the 1820s, aiming for a return to the spiritual aspects of the High Medieval church. In Turin during the 19th century, numerous religious buildings in Neo-Romanesque or Neo-Gothic style were erected, such as the church of San Secondo (1882), that of Sant'Antonio da Padova (1883), the Israelite Temple (1884), all near Viale del Re, and the church of Santa Giulia (1860-1866), commissioned by Marchesa Giulia di Barolo in the Vanchiglia district.

The church is designed with a basilica plan, featuring three naves, extending 60 meters in length: the polylobed pillars of the central nave, 19 meters high, follow one another marking the bays and creating

a perspective alignment that ends in the cylinder of the apse, topped by a frescoed dome. The side naves, on the contrary, seem to gather around the apse, curving into a ring, forming a majestic ambulatory.

In the central nave, the openings allow light to filter from above and focus on the presbytery and the altar; in the side naves, the architect instead uses light penetrating through the windows to illuminate the lower part of the church. The light thus bathes the mass of the faithful, all called to holiness according to the principles expressed by don Bosco.

Decoration

Decoration is a fundamental element of the building: the church façade is enriched by two mosaics, the first above the entrance portal, depicting the **Redeemer on the throne**, and the second crowning the three-light window, depicting the **Apotheosis of St. John**, both created from designs by architect Mella by the Società Musiva of Venice. To work on the furnishings and create the side altars, many workers were recruited directly from the artisan workshops of the Salesian oratory initiated by don Bosco in the Valdocco district, responsible for, among other things, the doors, confessionals, and numerous other wooden works.

Next to the main portal, just inside to the right, stands a **sumptuous statue dedicated to Pope Pius IX**, created by sculptor Francesco Confalonieri, which don Bosco wanted as a monument of gratitude for the great benefits he received. It is noteworthy that in 1854 the pope had proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, explaining the **special attention in the decorations to the figure of the Virgin**, highlighting her spiritual motherhood of all believers.

The paintings decorating the church are inspired by the life and works of St. John the Evangelist. In the apse at the end of the central nave, you can admire an exquisite painting by Turin painter **Enrico Reffo**, depicting the scene of **Calvary with the Crucified Christ, the Madonna, and the holy women on the left, St. John and Magdalene on the right, and angels**. Beside the cross are two inscriptions: "Mulier ecce Filius Tuus" on the left; "Ecce Mater tua" on the right. The figures stand out against a golden background worked with rhomboid elements reminiscent of the effect of an ancient and shimmering mosaic. In the five medallions below the painting, **St. Peter, St. James, St. John, and St. Andrew** are represented.

Of the same author are also the six medallions on the side walls and the seventh under the organ depicting the **seven Bishops of Asia Minor described in the Apocalypse** by St. John, and, on the side walls of the presbytery, the two episodes representing **the charity of St. John the Evangelist** that allude to Don Bosco's apostolic work, primarily aimed at young people.

Giuseppe Rollini, a student at Don Bosco's Salesian school, is the author of the groups of angels depicted in the presbytery and the scene with Jesus breaking the seals of the book containing the destinies of the Church while the angelic choirs sing a hymn to the Lamb.

The organ



Don Bosco also wanted the church to be equipped with a grand organ, which was built by Cav. Giuseppe Bernasconi of Varese, featuring three keyboards and over 3,600 pipes, making it one of the finest. For its inauguration in July 1882, a week of concerts was organized with the best organists from all over Italy, attracting a crowd of over 50,000 people. Over time, the organ has been restored many times. On the occasion of don Bosco's bicentenary, it was expanded and refurbished. Today, it remains the third-largest organ in Turin and has an electrical system similar to that of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris.

The St. John the Evangelist Institute

The Salesian work expanded, and in 1884 an Institute was founded, annexed to the church, which initially housed young adults aspiring to the priesthood. In 1894, it was converted into a college with elementary and middle schools, functioning until 1994 when it closed due to changing social conditions.

Thus, **a new phase began**: today, the Institute is, as in Don Bosco's time, a reference point for the entire San Salvario neighborhood; it currently houses the **Salesian community** that manages all of Don Bosco's centers in San Salvario and is home to **a college for university students** and the **chaplaincy for Filipino faithful**.

Since 2012, responding to a request from the Archbishop, the Salesian Community has accepted responsibility for the **parish of SS. Apostles Peter and Paul** in the San Salvario area, which includes the two oratories, the San Luigi Oratory and the parish oratory heir to the St. Joseph Oratory also founded by Don Bosco in 1859, along with various pastoral and educational activities, including the care of a **community of unaccompanied foreign minors**.

Valiant priests and true saints, assisted by some people, true apostles, overcame all the difficulties of those humble beginnings and laid the foundations for what would become the Salesian Work of St. John the Evangelist.

Notable figures who worked at San Giovannino include:

- **Blessed Michael Rua**, who directed the oratory from 1855-57
- **St. Leonard Murialdo**, director of the oratory from 1857 to 1865

- **St. Luigi Guanella**, director of the oratory from 1875 to 1877
- **Blessed Philip Rinaldi**, the first director of the institute from 1884 to 1889
- **Venerable Don Vincenzo Cimatti**, director of the oratory from 1913 to 1919
- **St. Callistus Caravario, martyr**, a student at the school (1912-1914) and a young Salesian from 1920.

