

OUR PASTORAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICE

phasize both his union with the Father and the Son and also his nature of a gift from God to men. The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the accepted year of the Lord" (Lk 4,18,19).

The context of the gospel quotation is well known. In the liturgy on a feast-day, when the Word of God (in this case Is 61,1-2) with its message of messianic liberation, was ringing in the ears of his hearers, Jesus peremptorily declared, not without giving rise to some scandal (Lk 4,23), that this promise was realized in his mission (4,21). Every service offered by a christian to man follows in the wake of a service performed by Christ, and will inevitably meet with the same kind of obstacles.

What Jesus said in this passage has been called his 'manifesto'; it brought together the cause and deep force of his being and activity (the Spirit of the Lord), the authenticity and fertility of his mission (consecrated by anointing), and the contents of that same mission which are the innovations introduced in life by the Kingdom of God. As in the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5,2-12; Lk 6,20-26), to which these words are equivalent, the central point is the Gospel to the poor which implies liberation from every humanly impossible situation. Briefly, with Jesus the year of grace dawns, the jubilee of the redemption, the restoration of freedom to man, the son of God (cf. Lev 25,8-55).

We know that Christ's 'manifesto' became his constant mode of action, which he continues at the present day through the incomparable example of his life (cf. Acts 10,38). Everything that is for man's good from the standpoint of Christ, under the aspect of total development as it would be called nowadays, is willed by God and therefore by Christ's disciples, with the purity of his aims, the tender nature of his interventions, and his practical actions. There is an analogy with what Don Bosco said and did, and with what the Constitutions reformulate (in the section of chapter IV which begins with art. 31) as an educational and pastoral manifestation for us.

ART. 31 TOTAL DEVELOPMENT

*that our Congregation may never lose
the missionary trend of our beginnings,
and hasten on all Nations.*

Our mission is a sharing in that of the Church, which brings about the saving design of God, the coming of his Kingdom, by bringing to men the message of the Gospel, which is closely tied in with the development of the temporal order.¹

We educate and evangelize according to a plan for the total well-being of man directed to Christ, the perfect Man.² Faithful to the intentions of our Founder, our purpose is to form "upright citizens and good christians".³

¹ cf. EN 31

² cf. GS 41

³ *Plan of Regulations of the Oratory*, 1854 (MB II, 46; BM II, 36)

As well as being simple, the structure of this article is very clear. There are two 'nuclei' to be given further analysis: our mission is a sharing in that of the Church, and it carries with it the pastoral originality of our charismatic contribution.

Participation in the Church's mission

'Mission' is a term which is inexhaustible from a theological point of view. It is used to indicate the redemptive work of the Son of God carried out in loving and obedient union with the Father. Thus in the conciliar decree "Ad gentes" we read: "In order to establish peace or communion between sinful human beings and himself, as well as to fashion them into a fraternal community, God determined to intervene in human history in a way both new and definitive. He sent his Son ... For Jesus Christ was sent into the world as a real Mediator between God and men".¹

¹ AG 3

The Holy Spirit too is said to be 'sent', and this serves to emphasize both his union with the Father and the Son and also his nature of a gift from God to men. "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin".²

These references highlight the divine origin of the Church's mission. It is presented as being clearly directed to the salvation of mankind, which involves many different aspects and activities. Among the principal ones, which in a certain sense also include the others, we may list: the stirring up of faith in individuals and helping them to mature in it, so that "by believing in Jesus Christ they may attain salvation"; the formation of the Church, the community of believers, which is the sign and instrument of the Kingdom of God, already begun in this world; and the transformation by the power of the Gospel of the temporal order, because of the historical and all-embracing nature of salvation: it begins in this world and takes in the whole of man, nature and history: "The Church, at once 'a visible organization and a spiritual community', travels the same journey as all mankind and shares the same earthly lot with the world; it is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God".³

To this engrossing and complex objective is directed the threefold ministry of the Church, which is a participation in the redeeming power of Christ: proclamation of the Word (prophecy), sanctification, and service of government.

All members of the Church share in this mission in different ways, according to the charismata with which the Spirit constantly enriches the faithful.

Religious share in it by the quite exceptional nature of their life: between religious life and the Church, the mystery of communion of men with God and with each other, there is an eminent relationship

² AG 2; cf. LG 3-4

³ GS 40

of sign and witness. As the Constitution "Lumen gentium" expresses it: "By the charity to which they lead, the evangelical counsels join their followers to the Church and her mystery in a special way. Since this is so, the spiritual life of these followers should be devoted to the welfare of the whole Church. Thence arises their duty of working to implant and strengthen the Kingdom of Christ in souls and to extend that Kingdom to every land".⁴

It should be noticed that the sharing of religious in the mission of the Church takes on various forms according to the different individual charismata.

The Church is not an ensemble of perfectly equal cells with identical functions, but an organic communion with a diversity of components and a variety of ministries. It is not possible to assign limits to the variety of such components. Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all ages and all men, has limitless possibilities for manifesting himself, and the Spirit is infinite in his capacity for creativity and saving initiatives.

The Church needs many forms and channels for dialogue with all of man and men, and to reveal the overall plan of salvation. The decree "Perfectae caritatis" points out the origin and purpose of this variety: "In keeping with the divine purpose, a wonderful variety of religious communities came into existence. This has contributed considerably towards enabling the Church not merely to be equipped for every good work and to be prepared for the work of the ministry unto

⁴ IG 44. This general principle is confirmed in other conciliar documents which deal with specific pastoral areas and which make some particular reference to religious. In the decree "Ad gentes" the intervention and participation of religious is asked for in the first evangelization process and the formation of young Churches (cf. AG 40). In the decree "Inter mirifica" their collaboration is asked for in the apostolate by means of social communication. In the declaration "Gravissimum educationis" prominence is given to their work for the education of youth. Reference could also be made to points in "Evangelii nuntiandi" and "Catechesi tradendae", in which the participation of religious in the Church's action is invoked. "Who does not see the immense contribution that these religious have brought and continue to bring to evangelization? Thanks to their consecration they are eminently willing and free to leave everything and to go and proclaim the Gospel even to the ends of the earth. They are enterprising ... They are often found at the outposts of the mission and they take the greatest of risks for their health and their very lives. Truly the Church owes them much" (EN 69)

the building up of the Body of Christ, but also to appear adorned with the manifold gifts of her children like a bride adorned for her husband, and to manifest in herself the multiform wisdom of God".⁵

All this enables us to understand more deeply the significance of the first paragraph of the article, which makes more explicit what has already been referred to in art. 6 and in the formula of profession itself (cf. C 24).

Our charismatic contribution

In expressing the mission of the Church, in which we share, it is interesting to note that after an all-embracing statement that it "brings about the saving design of God, the coming of His Kingdom", the article specifies "by bringing to men the message of the Gospel which is closely tied in with the development of the temporal order". The force of the statement lies not in the two classical and undeniable pillars of the declaration but rather in the expression "*closely tied in*", which serves as the link with the pastoral option of the Salesians.

The text is evidently inspired by several passages from the documents of Vatican II, of which we quote just one: "The work of Christ's redemption concerns essentially the salvation of men; it takes in also, however, the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring to men the message and grace of Christ, but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal sphere with the spirit of the Gospel".⁶ Although the spiritual and temporal orders are distinct, "they are nevertheless so closely linked that God's plan is, in Christ, to take the whole world up again and make of it a new creation, in an initial way here on earth, in full realization at the end of time".⁷

⁵ GS 41. Worth recalling is the passage from *Gravissimum educationis* which sums up the task of education as follows: "Christian education (not only develops the maturity of the human

⁶ PC 1

⁷ AA 5

⁸ *ibid.*; cf. also GS 40, 42.

It is precisely from this statement that the description of the contribution made by the Salesians to the Church's mission stems, a contribution expressed by three parallel sets of ideas: *we educate and evangelize*, according to a plan for the *total well-being of man directed to Christ*; i.e. our purpose is to form *upright citizens and good christians*.

It is a question of a single objective with two aspects to it, constantly emphasized by Don Bosco and found throughout salesian history: one directed to human advancement and the other to education of the faith. These are part and parcel of the Church's whole missionary tradition, and belong moreover to the spiritual current of religious humanism of St Francis de Sales, translated into pedagogical terms. Don Bosco's words in which he expressed the purpose of his mission are well known: "To win souls for Jesus the Saviour, to do good to young people in danger, to prepare good christians for the Church and upright citizens for civil society, so that in this way all may one day succeed in reaching their home in heaven".⁸

But it should be noted that between these two aspects there is a real *distinction*. There are in fact people dedicated to education and human advancement, but without having in view the proclamation of Jesus Christ; and vice versa.

For the Salesians, however, the two aspects effectively compenetrate, which means that we cannot see how one can proclaim the Gospel without the latter throwing light on the problems of man's existence and providing encouragement and hope for their effective solution; nor how one can conceive of real "human advancement or development" without opening man to God and without proclaiming Christ.

Between the two aspects there is nevertheless an *order of priority*, even though both are christian. The first and most important aspect, which throws light on everything, is the Gospel. Ours is a religious mission. Don Bosco used to say of his Oratory that the playground

⁸ This formula, excellent in its simplicity, occurs at the end of the first *Regulations for Salesian Cooperators*, 12 July 1876 (To the Reader). Leo XIII in a memorable audience of 9 May 1884 said to Don Bosco: "It is your mission to make the world see that one can be a good Catholic and at the same time a good and upright citizen..." (MB XVII, 100)

and games were like "the acrobat's drum" which served to attract the boys, but the heart of the Oratory was catechism.

It is interesting to compare the binary expression of the single objective with other dual expressions of a similar kind scattered here and there in the Rule: we may recall, for instance, the double insertion which the communities try to promote, in the Church and in the world (environments, institutes, areas, etc. : cf. C 6-7); the double qualification for which Salesians are prepared: pastors and educators; the double figure of the member in the community: priest and layman (cf. C 45); the double basic kind of work: that in which the "educational" character predominates, and that which is formally and institutionally "pastoral" (cf. C 42).

The articles which follow will develop this assertion. The fundamental point here is to give prominence to the figure which dominates the whole of the christian humanistic project: Christ, the perfect Man. This is the fundamental thesis of "Gaudium et spes": Christ is the revelation of God, but also the revelation of man, who discovers in Him the true sense of his own existence and his own history. Of the wealth of conciliar texts which refer to this point, it is worth quoting at least one: "*Whoever follows Christ the perfect man becomes himself more a man*".⁹

The process of education and temporal development we propose draws its inspiration already from the event of Christ, understood in all its anthropological force: the Incarnation shows us the paths and content of our pastoral work. But the vertex is the proclamation of Christ which brings with it all the consequences of dignity and development which we do not think should be allowed to remain merely "implicit" or a secondary element, but intimately linked with man's growth.

⁹ GS 41. Worth recalling is the passage from *Gravissimum educationis* which sums up the task of education as follows: "(Christian education) not only develops the maturity of the human person ..., but is especially directed towards ensuring that those who have been baptized ... should be trained to live their own lives in the new self, justified and sanctified through the truth. Thus they should come to true manhood, which is proportioned to the completed growth of Christ" (GE 2)

This is true of every religious institute which shows an original quality in its interventions in the pastoral field. But organically planned pastoral work calls on religious not to do anything and everything of which there is need, but to be and to do precisely what they were raised up for by the Holy Spirit.

This is a criterion for efficacious results, a norm for participation, and a requirement for fidelity to the Institute or Congregation, which is called to contribute to the building of the Church according to its own charisma.

It is true for our own Society, which shares the mission of the Church with a specific task, in fidelity to Don Bosco. This is something which shapes the whole life of the salesian and his path to holiness. Here is applicable what was said in article 3 of the Rule and at n. 8 of the decree "Perfectae caritatis".

*Let us pray to God our Father,
who in the Risen Christ
gave the Church its foundation
to build it as the sign and instrument of salvation,
and who in the Holy Spirit
enriches it with ever new charismata.*

*You have made us depositaries of a specific mission,
which in communion of spirit and action with your people
reaches and gives life to the very roots
of people and cultures.*

*Make us docile to the indications of time and place
in detachment from ourselves
and unqualified adherence to the Gospel.*

*In Christ you have revealed to us your countenance,
and the image of the perfect man,
corresponding to your loving designs.*

*Make us able to cooperate with you
through our work of education and evangelization,
in human advancement according to your plan.*

the God
education
served to
process
to

*Through the example of Don Bosco
you have taught us to seek the overall good
of the young entrusted to our care.
Keep us faithful to his teachings
in forming them as good christians
and upright citizens.*

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and cultural areas
in
themselves a responsible freedom
then a conscious application of the values which will lead them to a life of dignity
interior qualities which contribute to the
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also, and more especially, they indicate a style of guiding presence
a method which shapes the whole of our pastoral activity, including
the proclamation of the Gospel.
Don Bosco stands before the world and the Church as a
Educator-20th, a man who achieved holiness through education
His pastoral concern was characterized by the theme of education
his special field of action and mode of apostolic activity, the right to
and it must be said of today's apostle too that he is not only an apostle
and shepherd of young people, but an educator as well — an
educator who is at the same time an apostle, prophet and witness to

E VIGANO, *The Italian Educational Project*, ASC 198 (1978), p. 10
ibid. p. 12

ART. 32 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

As educators we work together with our young people to bring all their talents and aptitudes to full maturity.

According to circumstances we share our food with them and further their trade skills and cultural advancement.

Always and in every case we help them to be open to truth and to develop in themselves a responsible freedom. To this end we commit ourselves to inculcating in them a convinced appreciation of true values which will lead them to a life of dialogue and service.

Educators

The first thing to note in this article is the opening expression: "*As educators*". Education, educators, educative, educational: these are terms which constantly occur and they indicate a real service option that we make, and one that is characteristic of the Congregation. They define an area of work, that of individual personal development; but also, and more especially, they indicate a style of guiding presence, a method which shapes the whole of our pastoral activity, including the proclamation of the Gospel.

"Don Bosco stands before the world and the Church as an '*Educator-Saint*', a man who achieved holiness through educating".¹ His pastoral concern "was characterized by the choice of education as his special field of action and mode of apostolic activity".²

It must be said of today's salesian too that he is not only an apostle and shepherd of young people, but an educator as well — an educator who is at the same time an apostle, prophet and witness to

¹ E. VIGANÒ, *The salesian educational project*, ASC 290 (1978), p. 30

² *ibid* p. 29

the Gospel. His distinguishing characteristic is that he offers his educating message in learning conditions known by experience to be suited to the recipients, he accompanies the individual in his laborious process of assimilating the values of what he is taught, and helps him to grow by enabling him to take advantage of all his potentialities.

The Rector Major writes: "Don Bosco's pastoral activity was never limited to mere catechesis or liturgy; it ranged over all the educational and cultural areas according to the needs of the youth situation. The setting he chose for his apostolate was the field of human development ... convinced that this was the soil for the gospel seed that would help the young take their proper place in the world".³ None of the interior qualities which contribute to the make-up of an individual is a matter of indifference to the educator. If education is to be a help to the development of personal resources so that they may all flourish and the individual may reach maturity, the educator must not select in the subject only those features which interest him personally, either to develop them or leave them aside. Education does not consist in getting the individual used to certain circumstances, nor is it only a matter of socialization or inculturation. The central point of interest in the educational process is the individual person.

The article adopts a personalized definition of education: "*We work together with our young people to bring all their talents and aptitudes to full maturity*". It is a definition inspired by the declaration "Gravissimum educationis" which says: "True education is directed towards the formation of the human person... Children and young people should be helped to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual qualities. They should be trained to acquire gradually a more perfect sense of responsibility in the proper development of their own lives by constant effort and in the pursuit of liberty".⁴ It is clear that a concept of education like this, which has as its principal subject the young person himself, with the educator as a help and his personal resources as the driving force, is far from the idea of

³ *ibid.* p. 30

⁴ GE 1

education as recruitment for some ideology, and even from the intention by the educator to mould the person according to his own personal view of life.

An educational process

For this development of the individual to maturity the Salesians follow a certain process. The first step is to help the youngsters to shake off negative conditioning elements like compelling needs for food, lodging and family. One speaks delicately of the "wretched state" of others and defines help as a "*sharing*" of bread rather than just giving it. The expression brings us back to those we work for by preference, the young who are poor, and to the threefold aspect of Don Bosco's work: relief, educational and pastoral activity all joined together in the supremely charitable intention and desire of the individual's salvation.⁵

To this first step is added a second constructive stage of *training in some kind of work*, by which the youngsters must be able to enter society, earn an honest living, and develop their own capabilities.

But the aim of education is not only to provide the young person with a means of livelihood or to prepare working man-power for society's needs. There is a third and important step to be taken, that of *cultural formation*, which enables the individual to develop all his own possibilities, to make contact with various communities and the whole of humanity, and to freely assess the significance, merits and manner of realization which constitute their true wealth and real riches. Culture means savoir faire, relationships with others, convictions, implicit and explicit norms of conduct, personal awareness, a sense of belonging, a commitment under various forms to the dignity of man. Rightly does the document of the Latin-American Bishops at Puebla declare: "The

⁵ In the text of the Constitutions Don Bosco expressed the triple aspect of activity carried out for the benefit of needy youth as follows: "They will be given clothing, food and lodging; and while they are being instructed in the truths of the Catholic faith, they will also be learning some art or trade" (cf. *Costituzioni* 1875, I, 4; F. MOTTO, p. 75)

word 'culture' indicates the particular way in which in a given people the members conceive and develop their relationships with nature, with each other, and with God".⁶ "Culture embraces everything in the life of a people".⁷

The educational process which begins in the liberation from conditioning elements, is extended in the preparation for some profession, is deepened in the acquisition of a cultural outlook, and leads eventually to an *"openness to truth and the building of a responsible freedom"*. These are not strictly successive steps, though they have a certain hierarchical order between them. In "cultural formation", in fact, we have the vertex of the development of the individual.

It is clear that education does not consist in simply acquiring ideas, assimilating norms, or conforming to accepted forms of behaviour: it is directed at the main nucleus of the person. The words have been carefully chosen. Truth is something to which one can only "open" oneself; it is not something ready-made and handed out, but is offered to a youngster who can attentively seek it and accept it. Freedom is something that has to be built: it is a conquest which becomes consolidated little by little, despite numerous setbacks, by control of one's life and actions and through a generous response to the calls of truth and love. Full maturity is reached when the subject adopts and sets in harmonious order a frame of values which enlarge his life. The GC21 expressed this ensemble of values as follows: "In terms of personal growth we want to help the boy to build a sound and balanced humanity, by fostering and promoting:

- a gradual maturing in freedom, in the assuming of his own personal and social responsibilities, in the clear perception of values;
- a carefree and positive relationship with persons and things that will nurture and stimulate his creativity and reduce conflict and tension;

⁶ Puebla, final document; n. 386

⁷ *ibid.* n. 387

- the capacity to maintain a dynamic and critical attitude in the face of events, to be faithful to the values of tradition and be open to the needs of history, so as to become capable of making consistent personal decisions;
- a prudently given education in sex and in love that will help him to understand the dynamics of growth, of giving and of encounter, within a plan of life;
- the quest and planning of his future in order to liberate and direct towards a precise vocational choice the immense potential hidden in the destiny of every boy, even in one less endowed as a human being".⁸

This lengthy quotation will serve to show how much analytical reflection lies beneath the selection of the few words of the constitutional text.

The educational method

The manner of putting all this process into practice belongs to the educational theme, as also do others that will be described in later articles. Education is not characterized by the enunciation of values that a young person or adult must assimilate (this is a fundamental contribution of faith and also of philosophy and theology which underlie it), but by their translation into structures of learning, proportioned to the learning ability of the subjects concerned. The art of education implies also a pedagogy.

The article emphasizes some aspects of great importance.

— *The young person is himself the chief agent* in his own development and in the processes which concern him. The educator "collaborates" or "helps". This attitude is dictated not only by educational expediency, but is rooted in faith in the face of a mystery which

⁸ GC21, 90

every individual carries within him, and in the conviction that between the individual and God there takes place a mysterious dialogue of salvation which cannot be interfered with from outside, a dialogue which covers not only "religious" themes but all life's decisions.

— Hence *the action of the educator*: it develops through motivations, the responsible growth of freedom, the attractive presentation of values and principles. This last expression recalls Don Bosco's maxim: "Let the beauty, grandeur and holiness of the Catholic religion be dwelt on".⁹ No conviction or principle takes root in a man unless it is seen in the perspective of a response to profound needs. To inculcate a taste for these things means raising questions, helping to formulate them, accompanying the search for a response, and starting valid experiences.

— But for education it is not enough to just say or repeat things. There is a current utopian idea in circulation that seems convinced that a good proposition repeated often enough with captivating phrases will automatically produce stable attitudes leading to deep-rooted convictions. But education knows very well that values and principles which are expounded or presented have got to be translated into *learning processes*. And so to the interior mobilization caused by the presentation must be added the patient work of building "convictions", and directing towards practical action. Education therefore is not only a case of accompaniment or following up, but is also the putting forward, on the basis of the adult experience of the educator, of the authoritative framework of values which he himself lives and which gives quality to the guidance he offers.

What sort of configuration must we give to this *educative ministry*? Are we merely concerned onlookers, or do we share with the youngsters a growth experience? Just professional educators or signs of the proximity of God? The educator is a communicator: he shares his own experience of humanity, which develops in the search for and adherence to values which he proposes to others: he is like a father who communicates life-giving energy.

⁹ D. BOSCO, *Short treatise on preventive system*, chap. II, cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 249-250.

*Let us ask God's help
that we may be able to correspond fully
with our mission as educators.*

*That in the awareness of our educational task
we may be able to offer to young people
with competence and generosity
the bread of body and spirit,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may be able to help young people
to open themselves to all truth
and build within themselves true freedom,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That by cultivating in ourselves a deep taste
for authentic human and christian values,
we may be able to pass them on to others,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That with our help
young people may come to understand
that freedom is realized
in the love and service of others,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

ART. 33 SOCIAL AND COLLECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

Don Bosco saw clearly the social implications of his work.

We labour in economically distressed areas and for poor youth. We collaborate with them, educating them to a sense of moral, professional and social responsibility. In this way we contribute to the development of both people and environment.

We share in a way appropriate to religious in the witness and commitment of the Church to justice and peace. While not getting involved in ideologies or party politics, we reject everything that encourages deprivation, injustice and violence. We cooperate with all who are trying to build a society more worthy of man's dignity.

The advancement to which we dedicate ourselves in the spirit of the Gospel makes tangible the love of Christ which makes men free, and is a sign that the Kingdom of God is among us.

An immediate consideration of the social significance of our service is inevitable. This is not only because every pastoral intervention, even of a purely religious nature, has reference to the human community in which it takes place, necessarily taking on a social aspect, but also for quite special reasons related to our charism. In fact one cannot speak of a "sign and presence in the area of poverty" without considering its social and collective implications. We cannot work effectively for the young who are poor and for people of the working classes without coming to realize that their individual development is inevitably linked to their collective development. What has changed with regard to certain situations of the last century is the fact that at the present day we are faced not only with poor people, but with a poverty which has become a structural phenomenon of worldwide proportions.

Furthermore our place in the field of education means that we cannot fail to take into account the function of education as regards the social system and its preservation or transformation.

The article gives us four points to think about.

— The reference to Don Bosco (first paragraph).

- The principal aspects of our participation in the transformation of society (second and third paragraphs).
- The fundamental sources from which our interventions take their inspiration (second and third paragraphs).
- The sense of the interventions in the unity of the mission.

Don Bosco

The reference to Don Bosco is both rich and opportune. About his social sense a great deal has been written.¹ On the ability to place his own intervention in the wider vision of the transformation of society we read: "The society Don Bosco had in mind and of which his boys would be active citizens was to be an ideal christian society, built on the new ideals of relative equality, of peace and justice, ensured by sound morality and religion. Just as the individual should be a good christian and upright citizen, so the society constructed by his efforts should be an environment of peace and well-being, and at the same time a stimulus to faith and salvation".²

An indication of Don Bosco's determination to intervene in the "public" area were the numerous visits he made to government ministers in support of the education of youth, and his appraisal of the prevailing social phenomena in conformity with the mentality of the time. He wanted all his work to be a process of social reformation through the education of the young, whom he considered to be the real "secret" and key for the improvement of the whole of society.

¹ Cf. G. SPALLA, *Don Bosco e il suo ambiente socio-politico*, LDC Turin 1975;

F. DESRAMAUT, *L'azione sociale dei cattolici nel sec. XIX e quella di Don Bosco in "L'impegno della Famiglia salesiana per la giustizia"*. Colloqui di vita salesiana, LDC Turin 1976, p. 21-87; P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*, LAS Rome 1980

² "Progetto educativo pastorale", ed. J. VECCHI and J.M. PRELLEZO, LAS Rome 1974, p. 81; cf. also *Esperienze di pedagogia cristiana nella storia*, ed. P. BRAIDO, LAS Rome 1981, p. 344-350; P. BRAIDO, *Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco e l'utopia della società cristiana*, LAS Rome 1982, p. 10. 21. 22-24

On the other hand he always let it be known that he kept out of politics, in the sense that being fully occupied in working for the good of poor people, he took sides neither with those in power nor against them. The "politics of the Our Father", which he advocated, meant giving people through the Word of God, education and places where they could come together, as well as reasons, means and motives for living and for pursuing their aspirations by peaceful means.

Aspects of our social commitment

The second and third paragraphs of the article highlight two aspects of the part we play in the transformation of society.

The first is linked with our task as educators: in an unequal society we have care of environments in need of development, overcoming the concept of education as a personal advantage and favouring movements of change: *"we educate to a sense of moral, professional and social responsibility"*.

This statement contains an implicit reference to Don Bosco, who was always so concerned to make "upright citizens" of his boys. But the expression in the article does not immediately reveal all its content; it could be interpreted in an individualistic sense, particularly as regards its reference to moral and professional aspects. One has to ask what meaning attaches at the present day to "upright citizens", in societies where they are often subjected to injustice, or in others beset by moral problems, or still others where human rights are publicly set at nought with impunity. It means taking sides in a peaceful and courageous struggle for justice, for the creation of a real spirit of brotherhood, to draw attention to those in greatest need, and to raise the level of public morality. The need becomes evident to look into the general perspective of the education we provide (which is never individualistic), and to revise the particular section of social formation, so much recommended by the Church's magisterium.

The second aspect is connected with our status as religious: we are called to *bear radical witness to justice and peace*. We read in the Acts of the SGC: "Our educative work for justice in the world becomes

credible to the extent that the individual salesian and the community at all levels are authentic witnesses to justice".³ We must emphasize the particular perspective of this task of ours: our witness is a sharing in the mission of the Church herself in favour of justice and peace. In this connection we may recall the extent to which Papal Encyclicals and documents of the Magisterium have repeatedly urged Christians to play an active and convinced part in the social sector.⁴

Certainly on our part we must avoid all equivocation and accept the hard demands of this task: we must offer the world concrete proofs. We shall find some indications in this regard in the articles concerning our works, their collocation, and the services they provide.

To our pastoral educational task and the witness we have to give is added the action expressed in two verbs: we "reject" everything that encourages deprivation, and we "cooperate" with all who are trying to build a society more worthy of man's dignity. The second is more direct. In art. 7 it was said that by our pastoral activity we want to "bring about a more just world and one of greater brotherhood in Christ". With this the SGC links the first aspect — education: "One educates more through what one is than through what one says. Our mission for young people, and above all for the poorest of them, requires from our communities a type of presence and global attitude towards the poor themselves and towards the movement (more or less organized) with which they attempt to achieve their rights to a more human life".⁵

³ SGC, 70

⁴ V. in detail the doctrine of the Church on social questions in the teaching of recent Popes: JOHN XXIII, Encyclicals *Mater et Magistra* (15.05.1961) and *Pacem in terris* (AAS 55, 1963, 257-304); PAUL VI, Encyclical *Populorum progressio* (AAS 59, 1967, 257-299) and Apostolic Letter *Octogesima adveniens* (AAS 63, 1971, 401-404); JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Laborem exercens* (AAS 73, 1981, 577-647). Cf. also the Synod of Bishops (1977) on commitment for justice and peace, and the two Instructions of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Instructions on certain aspects of the 'Theology of liberation'* (AAS 76, 1984, 876-877) and *Instruction on christian freedom and liberation* (1986)

⁵ SGC, 70

Principles underlying these interventions

Whence arises our social commitment and how is it regulated?

In the first place, as has been said already, it arises from *our status as religious and apostles*.⁶ By working for justice in the world we do not distance ourselves from our religious mission. From the latter come the spirit and intentions which go into our efforts, and also the practical attitudes studied by the SGC. It is required therefore that our words and interventions shall have as their living *source* and soul the love of Christ the Saviour, and as their *motivation* the demands of the Gospel and the will to come to the aid of Christ himself in those who suffer injustice; as their *purpose* there must be our cooperation in affirming the Kingdom by animating the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel, and as their *style* that of Don Bosco, an easy approachability through kindly dialogue based on love.⁷ Our text speaks of the "spirit of the Gospel": this is an indication which must make us very demanding in our love for justice and for the poor, and at the same time rules out any attitude not inspired by Christ's teaching. We need to keep in mind the strong words of St Paul: "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor 13,3).

Secondly, our commitment is based on *ecclesial communion*. In this field, as indeed in others, we cannot act only in accordance with our own ideas nor only when the spirit of generosity spontaneously moves us; we are inserted in the local Church, and we take part in its activity in a timely and consistent manner. From this derive certain practical indications which we can do no more than enumerate: move with the local Church without lagging behind or sniping at it; compare our own criteria for intervention with those put forward by the Church; agree on our interventions with those who guide the Church, especially in extraordinary circumstances or in a society where there

⁶ On the social obligations of religious, cf. in particular *Religious profession and human development*, CRIS 1980.

⁷ Cf. SGC, 77: *Salesians and political responsibility*, ASC 284 (1976), p. 287.

is a high level of conflict. This is important because social and political situations vary considerably with time and place; it is up to the local Church, and especially its Pastors, to decide on the most opportune mode of action.⁸

From these principles a third criterion derives: *our independence from party politics and current ideologies*. The Church's experience has enabled her to distinguish between the possibilities open to a layman, a religious or a pastor as regards interventions in the political sector.

This experience has in fact been expressed in canon law: Clerics and religious "are not to play an active role in political parties or in directing trade unions..."⁹ A clear distinction between what is pre-political, political in a wide sense, and political in its specific sense can be of great use in defining the particular field of intervention of each one.

The indication of art. 33 goes beyond the minimum laid down by the Code, and calls on us Salesians to be aware that the values of the Kingdom contain and express in universal and efficacious form the energy and strength required for the building of a society much more than does any political structure, and therefore to be faithful to our profession as witnesses to the love and power of Christ.

We can sum up all this by saying that it corresponds to a *salesian overall criterion*, an expression of the particular character of our charism. Don Bosco would have liked to formulate this in an article which he tried three times to insert in the Constitutions, as he tells us himself: "Convinced as I was of the importance (of this argument), I once more

⁸ On the importance of ecclesial communion in the commitment for justice and peace, cf. the Instruction on *Christian Freedom and Liberation*: "The Church's social teaching is born of the encounter of the Gospel message and of its demands summarized in the supreme commandment of love of God and neighbour in justice with the problems emanating from the life of society... As an 'expert in humanity', the Church offers by her social doctrine a set of principles for reflection and criteria for judgement and also directives for action so that the profound changes demanded by situations of poverty and injustice may be brought about, and this in a way which serves the true good of humanity" (n. 72)

⁹ CIC, can 287 §2

inserted it in 1874 when the Constitutions had to be approved article by article by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. They struck it out a third time".¹⁰ But times have changed; the present day consultors of the Apostolic See gave particular praise to art. 33 of our text!

The salesian overall criterion comprises the three aspects already indicated ("religious" mission, ecclesial "communion", political and ideological independence), and brings them harmoniously together in an *approach so deeply pastoral in tone* as to avoid everything that could distance us from young people and their integral education, and at the same time lead to constructive dialogue with all those responsible for the common good, without regard to their religious faith.

The Rector Major, Fr Luigi Ricceri, in the letter he wrote on "The Salesians and political responsibility", recalls that "our activity must always start out from the perspective of the salesian vocation... We cannot lose our identity, we cannot take on a type of activity that, even though it be christian, is characteristic of other vocations... There may even be among the confreres a distinct mentality, a different way of looking at events; but the criterion that guides our pastoral decisions and our particular attitudes, community ones above all, will be the pastoral perspectives of Don Bosco's apostolic plan: 'to be in a salesian way the signs and bearers of God's love for young people, especially the poorest of them'".¹¹

The sense of our interventions

The last paragraph of the article takes up once again the theme of the unity of our mission and shows how all this task, which might seem profane in nature, is in fact closely linked with the work of education of the faith. Unity is ensured by the conscience of the salesian,

¹⁰ BM XIII, 195

¹¹ L. RICCERI, *Salesians and political responsibility*, ASC 284 (1976), p. 53

guided and enlightened by fundamental reference to the liberating love of Christ, effected through a variety of activities. In whatever the salesian does therefore, even through human elements, he intends to be a "sign and bearer of the love of God for the young". There are two further elucidations which are interesting: the first declares in discreet fashion that for those in situations of unjust dependence or want, the work of "development" necessarily takes on the form of liberation willed by Christ the Saviour; the second says that such work, from a human point of view, is "tangible", i.e. a sign through which the Kingdom can be shown and expressed. The service of development is a "preparation for the faith" for those who do not yet have it, and a stimulus and support of the faith for those who already possess it: both are able to recognize in the dedication of which they are the beneficiaries, a sign of Christ's truth, made known to them through good works.

*Let us pray to the Lord
that he may broaden our intelligence
and remove all limits from our love and charity.*

*That we may work with complete dedication
for the good of those entrusted to our care,
inculcate in them a sense of the common good,
and form them for their personal and social responsibilities,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That in our mission as religious
we may commit ourselves with constant fidelity
to collaborate with the Church
in working for justice and peace,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That at the basis of every plan and effort
we may always place our faith in Christ's resurrection,
the source of life and energy
for its full development,
and may not give way to the lure*

of ideologies or party divisions,
Lord, hear our prayer.

That in the spirit of the Gospel,
and in the strength of the liberating love of Christ,
we may reject all injustice and violence
and be able to collaborate
with all who work for justice and peace,
Lord, hear our prayer.

The expressions used in this article to stress the evangelizing and catechetical dimension indicate our role both to those who have never known Christ, those to whom he has not been sufficiently presented or who have forgotten him, and of "returnees" among those who are

By calling this dimension "evangelizing" we mean that in the catechetical project there is a central aspect which sheds light on and gives color to the whole plan; essentially we have much at heart: it is the proclamation of Christ and his invitation to his mercy. As the various aspects presented in this chapter follow one another, we find that there is a hierarchy among them, and the dimension we call "fundamental" is that of evangelization and catechesis. In this dimension God most loves that charity which orders toward him a total and joyful commitment, a charity which orders evangelization as the announcement of the Kingdom of God, which extends to all people, and which is the basis of the Christian community which gives rise to questions, to insertion in the Christian community and active involvement in its mission. In it, as the word itself in-

ART. 34 EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS

"This Society had its beginning in a simple catechism lesson".¹ For us too evangelization and catechizing are the fundamental characteristics of our mission.

Like Don Bosco, we are all called to be educators to the faith at every opportunity. Our highest knowledge therefore is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery.²

We walk side by side with the young so as to lead them to the risen Lord, and so discover in him and in his Gospel the deepest meaning of their own existence, and thus grow into new men.

The Virgin Mary is present in this process as a mother. We make her known and loved as the one who believed,³ who helps and who infuses hope.

¹ MB, IX, 61; BM IX, 35

² cf. Eph 3,8-19

³ cf. Lk 1,45

The fundamental dimension of the salesian mission

In the salesian educational project there is a central aspect which sheds light on and gives colour to the whole plan; existentially we have it much at heart: it is the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the introduction to his mystery. As the various aspects presented in this chapter follow one another, we find that there is a hierarchy among them, and the dimension we call "fundamental" is that of evangelization and catechesis.

Evangelization is understood as the announcement or proclamation of Jesus and comprises every method from a simple silent witness which gives rise to questions, to insertion in the christian community and active involvement in its mission.¹ In it, as the word itself in-

¹ Cf. EN 41-47

dicates, is included the intention to arouse faith and the way in which Christ is made known as offering salvation.

Catechesis on the other hand means an organic presentation of the christian mystery to those who have given a positive response to the proclamation and have reached the stage of making a first choice of faith. Catechesis provides a complete and systematic introduction to the christian community. It represents an aspect or particular phase of the overall process of evangelization.²

The fact that the term "evangelization" has come to be used at the present day not only for the first proclamation but for the whole process of the vital acceptance of the message of Christ and the conversion of mind and heart, reveals a certain spirit: that of the apostle, aware that he is proclaiming something new. It also indicates a method and style for all the other phases: the proclamation of Christ is to be made and renewed in christian initiation and at every moment in life.

The expressions used in this article to stress the evangelizing and catechetical dimension indicate our role both of "*missionaries*" to those who have never known Christ, those to whom he has not been sufficiently presented or who have forgotten him, and of "*catechists*" among those who are growing in the faith.

By calling this dimension "*fundamental*" the text is not emphasizing only the quantitative aspect of the commitment, but rather the inspiration underlying the whole process of education: a process positively directed to Christ, in whose Gospel it finds its motivation and inspiration.³ The same human formation described in the previous article is inspired by motives stemming from faith, on account of which the sense of duty is "religious" and social relationships have their roots in the charity that comes from God; morality is based on the natural order which is a manifestation of the divine law, but to a much greater extent on the teachings of faith. The educational synthesis of Don Bosco is characterized by religious and christian animation. In the whole

² Cf. CT 18

³ E. VIGANÒ, *The salesian educational project*, ASC 290 (1978), p. 35

ensemble therefore, there is something which comes "first" in importance, a fundamental dimension: the religious heart of the youngster that awaits the good news of Jesus, which the educator should not delay in providing.

This is confirmed in the article by a phrase of Don Bosco culled from a brief history of the Society sent by our Founder to the Bishop of Casale, from whom he was seeking commendatory letters in favour of his Congregation. In connection with the purpose which had led to the foundation Don Bosco wrote: "*This Society's origins* are found in the simple catechetical instructions conducted by Fr John Bosco in a hall adjacent to the Church of St Francis of Assisi".⁴ The statement is amply borne out in the Constitutions themselves and in other writings and declarations of our Father.⁵

Educators to the faith

What does it imply for us that we make evangelization and catechesis the fundamental dimension of our mission? The expression which defines us, "*educators to the faith*", gives the right slant to what is said in the first paragraph.

Negatively it means that we are not only "preachers", nor are we only "catechists" in the strict sense. Positively it emphasizes the ability to open up youngsters to the faith by various ways and means. Educa-

⁴ BM IX, 35

⁵ In art. 3 of the Constitutions of 1875 we read: "The first exercise of charity shall be to gather together poor and neglected boys, in order to instruct them in the holy Catholic religion, and this more especially on Festivals" (cf. F. MOTTO, p. 75). The following expression of Don Bosco's biographer is significant: "*With Don Bosco the study of religion always ranked first*" (BM III, 146; cf. BM XIV, 362). Don Bosco's concern about catechism is also clearly evident from the books he wrote for the catechesis of the young and the masses: they number more than thirty (cf. G.C. ISOARDI, *L'azione catechetica di san Giovanni Bosco nella pastorale giovanile*, LDC Turin 1974; P. BRAIDO, *L'inedito "Breve catechismo pei fanciulli ad uso della Diocesi di Torino" di Don Bosco*, LAS Rome 1979; N. CERRATO, *La catechesi di Don Bosco nella sua Storia Sacra*, LAS Rome 1979).

tion means using objective means to make the subject's latent possibilities flourish, to open him to a world of values and salvation events from which he can make his own choice because motives and the desire of the faith have been made active in him.

While the direct teaching of catechism is given its proper value in the article, it is also said that this is a task in which we are all involved without exception, whatever kind of activity we may be assigned to.

"We are all called ... at every opportunity" is a very expressive phrase. There is no difference of purpose between the task of those who are directly teaching catechism, and those who teach other subjects of a non-religious nature, or who are engaged in other work. Our life is not divided up between profane occupations without directly christian links, and pastoral work. By means of every relationship, every activity, be it cultural, recreational or specifically religious, we try to centre life on faith.

Education to faith implies a *vital communication process*. We look first, therefore, not to content or methodology but to the Person of Jesus Christ, the Communicator par excellence; the text expresses this in a manner which clearly recalls St Paul's words: "*our highest knowledge therefore is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal the unfathomable riches of his mystery*" (cf. Eph 3,8-19).

What precisely is this knowledge of Christ? It means the features of a deep personal daily relationship with Christ; frequent attention to his word and mystery; seeing problems of personal and social life through his eyes; the careful study of all that is needed to be able to communicate him to "little ones". It is a combination of personal experience with pastoral concern! Knowledge and science! Evangelization and catechesis means revealing his "unsearchable riches"; educating to the faith means introducing others to the mystery of Christ, man's salvation. Rather than a simple task to be performed, it is a joy; rather than an obligation imposed by the Constitutions, it is an attraction we cannot resist.

The text reflects a wonderful page from the Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii nuntiandi": "Let us preserve the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow. May it mean for us — as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul,

for the other Apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelizers all through the Church's history — an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench. May it be *the great joy of our consecrated lives*. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world".⁶

Walking side by side with the young towards the Lord, accompanied by Mary

After looking at the person of the educator to the faith, the article goes on to describe his ministry in educative terms.

Walking side by side with the young does not mean inculcating a belief. It implies at least two things. In the first place it requires that the educator himself must advance in his faith, urged on by the challenges and stimulus he receives from the youth situation in the face of the Good News: by communicating the faith, he develops his own.

On the other hand the phrase means accepting the youngsters' point of departure, their rate of progress, and being open to the fact that not everyone's path will be the same. It is not at all the same thing as following a previously defined programme. St Paul likens the communication of faith to the process of generation.⁷ Anyone who does not accept this can go on repeating formulas, but it is doubtful whether he will kindle faith in the midst of life's dynamism.

⁶ EN 80

⁷ Cf. Gal 4,19

ART The objective of evangelization is the *personal encounter with the Lord*. At the centre of faith there is the relationship with the Person of Jesus. Through this encounter the youngster should discover the unifying sense of his existence, establish a constant coalescence between faith and life, and build a new personality modelled on Christ.

There are three expressions that call for meditation: "to lead them to the risen Lord", "to discover the meaning of their own existence", "to grow as new men". The declaration "Gravissimum educationis" expresses the purpose of Catholic education in a similar way: "It enables young people, while developing their own personality, to grow at the same time in that new life which has been given them in baptism".⁸

In our presentation of the faith, at the side of Jesus and forming part of his mystery there is always *his Mother*. The youthful holiness which flourished in the first Oratory has provided us with a formula which illustrates the union of these two figures: "My friends will be Jesus and Mary".⁹ From the many aspects of Mary that could have been referred to, the article chooses three which have a particular relationship with the young: *motherly presence, model of faith, source of hope*.

The motherhood of Mary is recalled in the general sense of the Constitution "Lumen gentium": "By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth; ... in the birth and development of the brethren of her Son she cooperates with a Mother's love".¹⁰ For young people this reference to Mary as Mother has a unique touch about it. In the first place it suggests that she is alongside them in their far from easy growth in grace; secondly it gives the sense of a feeling presence in a phase of life prone to loneliness, discouragement and trials; and finally it offers a model of life open to God on which they can model their own existence.

In this way Mary is seen to be the Helper of the young in their pilgrimage towards the Lord: *She "who believed, who helps and who infuses hope"*.

⁸ GE 8

⁹ D. BOSCO, *Life of Dominic Savio* (cf. OE XI, p. 170)

¹⁰ LG 62-63

*God the Father sent his Son
to evangelize the poor.
Let us ask him to keep us faithful
in continuing Christ's work.*

*That we may always consider
evangelization and catechesis
as the central aspect of our mission,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That our members, always and in every circumstance,
may be able
to open the minds of young people to the faith
and lead them to the person of the Risen Lord,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That our highest knowledge
may be to know Jesus Christ,
and our deepest joy to communicate to all
the unsearchable riches of his mystery,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may be able to help the young
to discover in Christ and in the Gospel
the true sense of their existence
and to grow as new men,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we may point out to our young people
the Mother of God
as the first believer and support of the Church,
the model of all faith and service,
and that we may be able to lead them
to know and love her,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

ART. 35 INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIAL LIFE

We introduce the young to the experience of ecclesial life by bringing them into a faith community and helping them to take part in it.

To this end we promote and animate groups and movements for formation and apostolic and social action. In these the young people grow in the awareness of their own responsibilities and learn to give their irreplaceable contribution to the transformation of the world and to the life of the Church, and so become themselves the "first apostles of the young, in direct contact with them".¹

¹ AA 12

Introduction to ecclesial experience: groups and movements

The life of the Church is a life of deep communion in faith, hope and charity. It is also the life of a visible community, in love and brotherly communication, in celebrations and in activity, under the direction of those who have been called to preside over it. It is primarily a spiritual (communion with God in Christ), personal and community fact: a sharing in the building of the Kingdom. But it is also an *experience* which one gets and learns from by personally living it while knowledge and awareness of it is developed through communication and deeper analysis.

This is why the text of the Rule emphasizes that among the objectives the Salesians have in mind is that of *introducing the young to an experience of Church*. This means that they must be gradually introduced into the christian community so that eventually they become involved in it and share its life in what belongs to it more specifically, i.e. witnessing to the gospel spirit of love. It has already been said (cf. C 6, 13, 31), and will be explained later at greater length (cf. C 44, 48), that our mission, and therefore the educational and pastoral plan which sustains it, is an ecclesial mission and tends to the building of an authentic christian community.

The proposal offered by the Salesians to the young as an educational process for gaining a personal experience of Church consists in *groups and movements*. These are one of the characterizing elements of salesian education and evangelization, and are indispensable to the salesian plan.¹ Their history goes all the way back to Don Bosco and his Oratory. In a circular on "Youth Groups, Movements and Communities" the Rector Major wrote: "The tendency to live and work in groups and the desire for community life was almost a spontaneous experience in the life of our Founder Don Bosco. He had a natural inclination to be sociable and to make friends... He was industrious and creative in his dealings with the boys from the hamlet of the Becchi and the nearby villages; the *Società dell'Allegria* which he organized at the school in Chieri, the experience of community life and friendship at the seminary, indicate already in embryo his high opinion and concern for group activity which would later find concrete expression in the salesian sodalities".² Don Bosco the educator clearly expressed his ideas in a circular letter to the confreres on 12 January 1876: "In each house let everyone take a great interest in fostering youth associations ... Do not be afraid to talk about them, to encourage them, and to explain their purpose... *It is my firm belief that these groups can be called the key to prayer life, the safeguard of morality, and the support of religious and priestly vocations*".³

Don Bosco's intuitive idea has been followed up in the Congregation's practice, which has kept pace with the evolution of the same theme in the Church and which has been referred to in every one of the recent General Chapters.⁴

At the level of ecclesial communion it is not difficult to understand the significance of these groups, given that the universal Church is made concrete and rendered visible in the particular Churches, and that these in turn are visible in smaller communities. In this way the

¹ E. VIGANÒ, *Youth groups, movements and communities*, ASC 294 (1979), p. 10-11

² Cf. ASC 294 (1979), p. 7

³ *Collected letters*, III, p. 7-8

⁴ For a deeper analysis of this theme cf. "*The salesian plan for group activity*", Department for Youth Pastoral Work, Rome 1985

communion of life and love which has its source in Christ flows in a double sense under the guidance of the Spirit: from the universal Church to the particular Churches, and from these to the smaller communities; and in the other direction from the minor communities to the particular Churches and from these to the universal Church. Communion too at the present day is not expressed only in local structures, but overcomes territorial boundaries and becomes concrete in associations united by christian ideals which are shared and celebrated together.

For young people entry into the larger ecclesial communities would give rise to the risk of losing one's individual personality, of ritualism, of a clash between external aspects and constitutive elements. The experience of group life provides an important intermediate stage between the individual (with his risk of loneliness and self-interest) and the large mass (with its risk of anonymity), and little by little helps to develop the sense of belonging.

For this reason recent General Chapters have opted for groups, "so that communities may become truly apostolic and each individual can be integrated into the christian community".⁵ A glance through Chapter documents and the subsequent indications of Superiors reveals some significant observations on the role of the group in educational environments:

- For a youngster the group is the best environment for efficacious self-development: the place where he can grow at a personal, affective and relational level and find solutions to his problems.
- The group provides the most immediate space for responding to questions on the sense and meaning of life, which among youth are the things most sought after.
- The group offers room for creativity, and makes possible an opening to the neighbourhood and society and the first opportunity for a commitment to service, sharing and participation.
- The group is fundamentally the best environment for providing the young person with an experience of Church and community

⁵ SGC, 321

where the gospel values of "come and see" (cf. Jn 1,39) can be tried out.

— On this account the group becomes the best place for seeking and developing vocations (cf. C 37).

Part of our general plan therefore is the intention to animate and foster youth groups and movements, and offer this experience to the greatest possible number of youngsters. The Rector Major spoke of this in the circular already quoted:⁶ the reactivation of the preventive system today is linked in practice with the fostering of group initiatives among the young. Today this can be one of the best expressions of our "new presence" in harmony with the "Oratory" concept, which is at the very foundation of our charisma (cf. C 40).

It is encouraging to recall what Pope John Paul II said on 5 May 1979 to a big crowd of young people who had come to Rome to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the canonization of St Dominic Savio, founder of the Sodality of the Immaculate Conception: "You are expecting from the Pope a word of guidance and encouragement... My suggestion for you and for all those in charge of your human and christian education concerns the urgent need felt nearly everywhere of the revival of sound models of Catholic youth associations.

"It is not a question of creating militant expressions deprived of the impetus of ideals and based on the force of numbers, but of animating real communities, instilled with the spirit of kindness, mutual respect and service, and above all made compact by the same faith and the one unique hope.

"In belonging to a group, in the spontaneity of a homogeneous circle of friends, in constructive comparison of ideas and initiatives, in mutual support, the vitality of that social renewal to which you all aspire can be established and preserved...

"This is a *pressing invitation that I address to all those responsible for the christian education of youth*".⁷

E. VIGANO, *Youth groups, movements and communities*, ASC 294 (1979), p. 10-11

⁶ Cf. ASC 294 (1979), p. 7

⁶ Cf. ASC 294 (1979), p. 10 ff

⁷ Cf. ASC 294 (1979), p. 4-5

What kind of youth groups and movements?

In the constitutional text there are two implications which must not be overlooked: the educational character of our groups, and in consequence the multiplicity of expressions to which they give rise, with objectives ranging from those of a general educational nature to those specifically ecclesial.

Because of their educational character and the fact that they are composed for the most part of youngsters in the maturing period of their lives, the groups which we animate take advantage of their wide-ranging interests. Starting from an interest in a particular sector, they try to reach the overall objective which is characteristic of our plan, aiming especially at personal formation. The SGC gave the following indication: "Our service should be offered to the young in the context of their natural groupings in life and work. We should seek to develop all their potentialities from the inside, starting from their own interests".⁸

In every case salesian groups are logically organized from an educational point of view: they give first place to the person of the youngster; everything else (organization, structures, instruments and programmes, causes or aims of interest to the educator for a personal choice of life) are proportioned and directed to his personal growth. Groups make the youngster responsible for his own development, flanking him in his efforts and his search. Our own activity is fully expressed in the phrase "*we animate*", which means that we follow closely the progress of the youngsters, making suggestions, providing motivations, helping them to grow and picking up from them incentives for a common process.

From the whole context it is clear that the central hub of all the experience is the group, in which it is possible to live its life, pick up questions, and suggest programmes and plans adapted to the situation of the members. But the article of the Constitutions speaks also

of "movements". These represent a mobilization of members on a bigger scale, the union of several groups with common interests as regards values or persons, certain assemblages or combinations for mutual support and unity. It is certainly easier to gain an experience of Church in the warmer atmosphere of a smaller group, but the result would be too restricted and inward looking were it not capable of comparison with something on a much wider scale. In our environments in recent years we have come to see more clearly the need for a "salesian youth movement", which can bring together the many groups inspired by the same "youth spirituality".⁹

Finally, as a continuation of the preceding topic, the text of the Constitutions hints at the *multiplicity of groups* present in the salesian environments with gradually increasing objectives. Among them can be distinguished three main categories: formation groups, groups for social activity, and groups for apostolic action.

For us every group is important in which interests can be developed and entry to social life learned. Greater commitment is shown in those in which the members grow in the awareness of their personal responsibilities and learn to give their irreplaceable contribution to the transformation of the world. At the vertex are the apostolic movements where the members become "the first apostles of the young, in direct contact with them": in these we are once again directly linked with the living insertion of each youngster into the christian community and the development of his own individual vocation.

*Let us ask of God our Father
to grant us in the Holy Spirit
a profound esteem for Christ's Church,
the column and foundation of truth,
and to pour out in us the same love
that Christ himself had for his Church,
sacrificing himself for her.*

⁹ Cf. "The salesian plan for group activity", p. 32, 33, 42 ff.

*That we may be able to lead young people
to a knowledge and love of holy Church,
and to offer them the exhilarating experience
of participating in her life,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That following the example of Don Bosco,
we may be able to lead our young people
through groups, associations and movements,
to give to the Church their irreplaceable contribution
for the transformation of the world and history,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That freely accepting Christ's invitation
our young people may become
the first and direct apostles
among other youngsters,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

ART. 36 INTRODUCTION TO LITURGICAL LIFE

We introduce the young to a conscious and active participation in the Church's liturgy, the summit and source of all christian life.¹

With them we celebrate the encounter with Christ in word, prayer and sacraments.

The Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, celebrated with care, are means of exceptional value for education to christian liberty, to conversion of heart and to a spirit of sharing and service in the ecclesial community.

Finally, as a continuation of the preceding two tasks, the

¹ cf. SC 10

Another aspect of education to the faith is the introduction of the young to liturgical life. Ordinary doctrinal and pastoral logic would have led us to expect the usual order of the three ecclesial tasks: to teach, to sanctify, to govern; catechesis, celebration, common life. The reasons for the change are not explicitly stated in the text, but it is not difficult to discern them in a particular sensitivity to the process of maturing in faith which is much emphasized at the present day. Liturgical action is considered the vertex of the Church's activity and demands that access to the sacraments, as a sign of faith, be prepared by a process of conversion and understanding to avoid the danger of formalism: "Before reaching the sacraments it is essential to have first undergone conversion and accepted the faith", said the SGC.¹

The article displays a gradual development which passes from liturgical life in general to its heart, which is the Eucharist.

*the column and foundation of truth
and to pour out in us the same love
that Christ himself had for his Church,
sacrificing himself for her.*

¹ Cf. SGC, 308

Introduction to liturgical life

Liturgical life is considered here in all its amplitude: listening to the Word, celebrations, prayer and sacraments. Its importance in an authentic christian experience is explained at length in the Constitution "Sacrosanctum Concilium". The liturgy makes active the mystery of Christ, priest and mediator; "it involves the presentation of man's sanctification under the guise of signs perceptible by the senses and its accomplishment in ways appropriate to each of these signs. In its full public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, i.e. by the Head and his members".² Consequently the liturgy continues the work of salvation: "It is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows. For the goal of apostolic endeavour is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in the Sacrifice and to eat the Lord's Supper".³

The liturgy is a pedagogical world of spiritual reality expressed in sacred 'signs'; one must therefore go into the structure of a sign to understand its language; especially is it necessary to go into what the sign signifies and brings about so as to approach it with "faith", according to the words of "Sacrosanctum Concilium": "In order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds be attuned to their voices, and that they cooperate with heavenly grace lest they receive it in vain".⁴

The Rule calls upon us to "introduce" young people to participation in the Church's liturgy. It is not therefore a matter of an institutionalized ritualistic practice which calls for the fulfilment of certain obligations, nor of simply creating an habitual response to "psychological needs", but rather a conscious introduction to the world of the signs

² SC 7

³ SC 10, *Short treatise on preventive system*, chap. II, cf. Appendix to Constitution 1984.

⁴ SC 11

and realities which the celebrations offer. To "introduce" or initiate means to show and explain to young people, to bring them in as active subjects, to teach them to celebrate, to take an active part in a celebrating community, to live the reality of which the signs are a reminder. "Pastors of souls must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the mere observance of the laws governing valid and lawful celebration. It is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, and are actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it".⁵

For this reason n. 19 of the same conciliar Constitution gives pastors precise indications as to how to ensure a proper initiation, "their active participation, both internal and external, taking into account their age, condition, way of life and standard of religious culture".⁶ It would indeed be harmful if those who are both pastors and educators should trivialize the delicate part played by the signs (and among the latter one should not forget the liturgical garments themselves), thus depriving the signs of their dignity and replacing them with a banality incapable of recalling anything transcendent.

The GC21 indicated a practical way by which salesians could provide for this initiation of young people: "An aspect which it is important to recall is the educational value of the liturgical year. The full and conscious sharing in the work of redemption is organized, in Don Bosco's thought, around the celebration of the liturgical year; this sets the pace for the life of the youthful community, showing the road to spiritual growth and the gradual commitment which one assumes in answering God's call. It is a concrete way of structuring an educational plan on the mystery of Christ".⁷ The initiation for Don Bosco involved, in addition to catechetical aspects, the complex experience of a "feast" lived in the spontaneous expression of a youthful community against a devotional background.

⁵ SC 11

⁶ SC 19

⁷ GC21, 93

The Eucharist and Reconciliation

The sacraments are the heart of liturgical life, and the Eucharist is the heart of sacramental life. The Constitutions bring well together not only the mind of the Church but also the spirit of all our tradition, in which the Eucharist and Penance have a "special" place in the education to the faith of both young people and adults: "Frequent confession and communion ... are the *pillars which must support the edifice of education*".⁸ In the sacraments is realized in an altogether exceptional way the encounter with Christ which art. 34 presented as being "fundamental" to the educational process.

It is of interest in the first place to draw attention to the phrase "*celebrated with care*". We know that proper dispositions and growth in awareness are required, and that Don Bosco never favoured mere ritualism or formalism but attached more value to the personal effects of the reception of the sacraments on daily life, but nevertheless this phrase is an invitation to be generous in approaching the sacraments, and always with proper motivations.

Secondly, it should be noticed that the expressions used in the article reflect salesian tradition which has always considered these two sacraments as "mysteries" of salvation, but also as first-class educational resources, in so far as they stir up the deepest parts of the conscience and bring it into contact with grace, which builds a youngster's personality. The article stresses three fruits or aims of the sacraments:

— the "*building of christian liberty*": in christianity freedom is simply the ability to love: to encounter Christ in the supreme act of his freedom, expressed in the gift of his Body and Blood, means in very truth to find the model and motives for liberty;

— "*conversion of heart*": this does not mean a short-lived act of good will but a serious effort to persevere. Frequent contact with the grace of the risen Christ and his patient mercy is evidently a guarantee

⁸ D. BOSCO, *Short treatise on preventive system*, chap. II; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 249

of perseverance because it wipes out passing falls and weaknesses and sustains efforts to rise again;

— the "*spirit of sharing and service in the ecclesial community*": rightly is the community dimension of the two sacraments emphasized at the present day. To communicate with Christ's eucharistic Body is to communicate also with his mystical Body, to eat the Bread which has been broken at the fraternal table. Christ's pardon is received, and at the same time the forgiveness of the Church, which has been wounded by our sins. In this way a double reconciliation is brought about — with the Father, and consequently with our brothers.

The close relationship between the two above-mentioned aspects, i.e. the signs of salvation and educational resources, makes evident the continuity between the celebration of the sacraments and the educational relationship and environment.

Speaking of the sacrament of Reconciliation, the GC21 expressed itself as follows: "For the pedagogy of Penance the continuity between the style of bringing the boy closer to the educational process and that which he succeeds in establishing at the sacramental moment is characteristic of Don Bosco. It is the same fatherliness, friendship and trust which awaken in the youth an awareness of the movements of grace and a commitment to overcome sin.

"The sacramental encounter usually requires a prior educational understanding, Don Bosco rightly used to say that confession was the 'key to education', because by personally involving the boy it invited him to surpass himself. The regular frequency of the penitential encounter, the frank and serene dialogue, the resolution which promotes constancy, provide an opportunity of exceptional educational value".⁹

And then as regards the importance Don Bosco attributed to the Eucharist in the education of youngsters and their progress to sanctity, the thought of the Saint is well known. In his biography of Francis Besucco he wrote: "the second support of young people (following on confession) is holy communion. Blessed are those boys who begin ear-

⁹ GC21, 93

ly in life to approach this sacrament with the proper dispositions!"¹⁰ Don Bosco never tired of encouraging his boys to receive Jesus in communion and to visit him in churches: the holy table and the tabernacle are the best places for a real, living and vital encounter with the risen Saviour, the perfect Friend and Model.

*The Church's liturgy
is the most efficacious manifestation
of the life-giving power of Christ's grace.
Let us pray that we may bring to share in it
all those the Lord has confided to us.*

*That together with our young people
we may celebrate with joy and gratitude
the encounter with Jesus,
in listening to his Word,
in fervent prayer
and in sacramental life,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That our youngsters may learn from us
the indispensable importance
of a living and committed participation
in the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That like Don Bosco
we too may always be consistent
in placing the sacramental life
at the foundation of all educational activity,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

¹⁰ Cf. D. BOSCO, *Vita di Besucco Francesco*, OE XV, p. 347

ART. 37 VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

We educate the young to develop their own human and baptismal vocation by a daily life progressively inspired and unified by the Gospel.

The family atmosphere of welcome and of faith, created by the witness of a community which gives of itself with joy, is the most efficacious setting for the discovery and guidance of vocations.

This work of collaboration with God's design, the crown of all our educational and pastoral activity, is sustained by prayer and personal contact, above all in spiritual direction.

The succession of aspects which make up the totality of our educational service for the young (human development, the proclamation of Christ, insertion in the Church, group experience, liturgical and sacramental life) ends with the summit of vocational guidance.

There are in the article three nuclei around which the commentary can be developed: the commitment of salesians in this regard, the two levels at which our vocational guidance is provided, and the factors involved in vocational maturing and guidance.

The crown of educational pastoral work

Vocational guidance is inseparable from youth pastoral work properly understood, and this to such an extent that pastoral work for the young is inconceivable without progressively developing their ability to make life options which conform to the Gospel; and on the other hand pastoral work for vocations cannot be thought of in separation from a more general maturing of the youngster in faith and his more intensive participation in ecclesial communion, on which such work is built as on an essential solid foundation. Confirmation of this is provided by the Second International Congress on Vocations, held at Rome:

"Pastoral work for youth and for vocations are complementary to each other. Work that is specifically vocational finds its vital working space in the wider youth work, while the latter becomes efficacious and complete when the vocational dimension is included".¹

The same conclusion was confirmed by our GC21: "In the salesian perspective all educational and pastoral activity contains, as an essential objective, a vocational dimension. As a matter of fact, the discovery of one's calling, the well thought out free choice of a programme of life, constitutes the crowning goal of any process of human and christian growth".² Preparation for life choices, with appropriate advice and encouragement, is intrinsic to the processes of education and evangelization.

But it is interesting to note how this idea, which is so clearly expressed in modern pastoral work, forms part of the patrimony left by Don Bosco to the Congregation. For a fuller treatment of this point we must refer the reader to other sources,³ but here we can at least recall the following traits of our Father: his confidence in young people's ability to respond to God's call; the place occupied by the theme of vocation in his educational plan, in which he always presented the choice of a state in life as a fundamental point and the principal task of the period of youth; his skill in guidance through personal interviews and involvement of youngsters in an attractive life; his preoccupation for priestly and religious vocations; his suggestions concerning attitudes, factors and experiences which favour the birth and development of vocations; and the results with which the Lord rewarded his trust, prayers and dedication to the cause of vocations.

Salesian activity in this field, therefore, in addition to motives forming part and parcel of the very concept of education and of pastoral work, is influenced by an example and tradition which make of this point not merely an aspect but the "crown" of all salesian work. For

¹ 2nd International Congress for Vocations, concluding document, Rome 1981, n. 42

² GC21, 106

³ Cf. for example: *Le vocazioni nella Famiglia salesiana*, 7th Spirituality Week, LDC Turin 1982; *La vocazione salesiana*, Colloqui di vita salesiana, LDC Turin 1982; P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, PAS Turin 1955, p. 371-385

a better understanding of this assertion it is well to link this article with what was said in art. 6 about the general commitment of salesians in the Church: "We pay special attention to apostolic vocations". But it is of still greater interest to read the article in the light of art. 22 which speaks of the salesian's personal experience of the Lord's call.

Vocational guidance

How are we to put into practice this characteristic of our educational activity? We do so by attending to the guidance of the young in a double direction: towards the maturing of their human and christian vocation, and more specifically towards the realization of the particular vocation of each one. They are two levels which develop together, but there is nevertheless a progression between them as regards objectives and experiences.

The first objective is expressed in the constitutional article in the words: "*We educate the young to develop their own human and baptismal vocation by a daily life progressively inspired and unified by the Gospel*". Hence we help youngsters to understand that each one's existence is a vocation, because he is called to live according to the image and likeness of God. Life understood as a vocation clarifies the relationship between man and the world, the common destiny he has with other men, and especially God's invitation to an ever more explicit dialogue with Him and to a free and conscious response of collaboration, so as eventually to live in communion with Him.

The acceptance of life as a task, gift and mission, and the acceptance in it of the divine presence, is the first and most important decision for an individual to make, and the starting point for any further process of self-definition.

This human vocation acquires a new sense when man becomes aware that he has been called to become a son of God and a member of his people by following Jesus Christ.

It is within this baptismal vocation that *specific ecclesial vocations* find their place.

"All those, who in faith look towards Jesus, the author of salvation and the principle of unity and peace, God has gathered together and established as the Church".⁴ The Church is presented as the people of God and the Body of Christ with a variety of charisms and ministries. Through these charisms the faithful participate in various ways in the mission of Christ which is also that of the Church: to proclaim the Gospel, worship God and transform humanity into man's true image.

Specific vocations therefore do not add to the baptismal vocation, but are particular ways of living it.

One of the first tasks of pastoral work for vocations is that of making people aware of the interior and exterior following of Christ as the principal feature of being a christian, awakening a knowledge of the function of 'ministry', through which the whole Church is at the service of man and every vocation is a sharing in the mission of the Church.⁵

It will be noticed that when referring to the human and baptismal vocation, the article does not present them as two separate periods or realities, but in line with the twin characteristics of salesian activity (education and evangelization) emphasizes a point without which vocational guidance would be impossible: the close union between faith and life.

If pastoral work is given this general tone, the presentation of the various kinds of vocation (lay, priestly, religious and missionary) will find the ground already prepared and the youngsters can be steered towards the discovery of their own vocation. The educators will be able to help them to develop it through appropriate experiences.

It will be well to note that the word "guidance" (Italian "orientamento") as a specific form of accompaniment and encouragement is not just fortuitous: it is a precise term used in the pastoral context, which supposes in the guide a certain criteria and attitude, and a clear knowledge of the vocational development of the individual.

⁴ LG 9 Among the more personal mediations referred to are personal con-

⁵ *Outlines for Provincial Vocation Plan*, Youth Pastoral Department, Rome 1981

This, in fact, was one of the educational options made by the GC21: "All young people, whom the Lord in one way or another places in our path, have the right to our help in forming their personality and life 'according to the Gospel'. We must help them at every age in their efforts to discover and develop their vocation: in boyhood, preadolescence, adolescence and beyond, because each of these stages of life has its own phase of growth and entails proportionate decisions which every young man must learn and carry out in a responsible manner".⁶

The guidance, as a criterion and method of help towards the maturing of a vocation and life-plan, is to be understood in two senses:

- in the boy it is the interior process by which he progressively discovers his own identity and gets his bearings in life; its fundamental aspects are interior reflection, freedom and responsibility;
- on the part of the educator it consists in the help and assistance given to the youngster as the latter seeks his personal identity.

The guidance itself:

- more than a certain period or phase, even though specific and intensive, is a 'process' which accompanies the unified and harmonious development of personality;
- depends on the chief part being played by the boy who takes a serious look at what he can do, according to the possibilities at his age and in accordance with the signs given him by God;
- helps the boy to formulate his plan of life and structure his personality through:
 - an adequate and realistic relationship with himself;
 - a serene and generous rapport with others and with reality;
 - a deeply felt relationship with God.

⁶ GC21, 111; cf. also *ibid.* 113, 117

In the guidance process the educator or vocations promoter has a facilitating role to play, which he carries out through personal encounter and formative dialogue.

The factors involved in vocational guidance

Help in the maturing process, vocational guidance and discovery all come under the heading of the "*work of collaboration with God's design*". Our interventions are mediations between God's action on the one hand and on the other the freedom with which the individual is able to become aware of God's presence and accept his call. They are however necessary mediations in the concrete situation of youth and of the christian community at the present day.

Not every suggestion or proposal will be a meaningful mediation for the youngster. The springing up and development of the vocation, in the more specifically christian sense, is linked to kinds of mediation which can provide introductions to valid human and ecclesial experiences, develop personalities with a sense of generous self-giving, reveal the providential signs which indicate God's plans, inculcate correspondence with the movements of grace felt as the presence of love in the individual's life, and transmit God's call to those who show the right dispositions and attitudes.

Some mediations will be personal, others will be of a community nature. The constitutional article takes into account the double aspect, and also the educational and pastoral nature of our action.

As a first element, which embraces many others, the importance is affirmed of the propitious *environment* created by the family atmosphere of welcome and of faith, in which a determining factor is the "witness of a community that gives of itself with joy". This atmosphere was already fully presented in art. 16 of the Constitutions which ended with the words: "This is a witness that enkindles in the young the desire to get to know and to follow the salesian vocation".

Among the more personal mediations referred to are *personal contact* and *spiritual direction*. The list is very much condensed and does

no more than provide examples, but they indicate a synthesis (education and pastoral work, the person and the environment, faith and active intervention) and some preferences. Others could be added, linked to the same synthesis and the same preferences.

The whole is inspired, sustained and we might say enveloped in the essential mediation of *prayer* according to Christ's precept: "Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest" (Mt 9,38). "The prayer of the community leads to the community's action... Prayer is not just 'a' means for receiving the gift of the divine call, but is 'the' essential means commanded by the Lord".⁷

*Don Bosco has taught us
that God sows in the heart of many young people
the germ of a vocation to an apostolic life.*

*Let us pray that we may be delicate
but efficacious instruments
for the discovery and development
of these gifts of the Spirit.*

*That by fostering the family atmosphere of welcome,
in faith and love,
we may help young people
to discover in themselves the divine call,
and that they may be drawn to follow it with generosity,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That your loving plan for the young you have called
may find confirmation in the witness
of our personal and community life,
in unreserved and joyful self-giving,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

⁷ 2nd International Congress for Vocations, concluding document, Rome 1981, n. 23

That we may accompany young people
who are groping to discover what they should do in life,
and guide them with delicacy and respect
through our educational commitment
and our personal contact with them,
Lord, hear our prayer.

The fundamental inspiration of the preventive system is

The three words which occur in the now famous expression —
reason, religion and loving kindness — need separate analysis, in their

mutual relationship and overall significance. They are a synthetic ex-
pression of the educational project. They suggest also for educators the

attitudes from which flows the practical application of the method:

faith, reason, and educational charity, shown by close presence and

interest. For a deeper analysis of this article, two lines of thought which

are present in the Constitutions must be kept in mind. On the one

hand, the article is in perfect continuity with what has gone before,

in fact, since setting out the main points in our plan for youth the

text describes the pedagogical and pastoral method in its principles

and past history. On the other hand, since the preventive system

is the same, the article is a pastoral methodology and a pedagogical

methodology. The article is connected with those which describe the

salvific spirit in particular art. 50 referred to the preventive system

as a "spiritual and educational experience," it declared that "it belongs

our approach to God, our personal relationships, and our manner of

living in community through the exercise of a charity that knows how

of the youngster when making suggestions to him or demands of him.

These are just examples.

• "Religion" implies believing in the creative and educational

force of the proclamation of the Gospel and of contact with the Lord,

of not neglecting its reminder of conscience and salvific message.

ART. 38 THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM IN OUR MISSION

Don Bosco has handed on to us his Preventive System as a means for carrying out our educational and pastoral service.

"This system is based entirely on reason, religion and loving kindness".¹ Instead of constraint, it appeals to the resources of intelligence, love and the desire for God, which everyone has in the depths of his being.

It brings together educators and youngsters in a family experience of trust and dialogue.

Imitating God's patience, we encounter the young at their present stage of freedom. We then accompany them, so that they may develop solid convictions and gradually assume the responsibility for the delicate process of their growth as human beings and as men of faith.

¹ MB XIII, 919

For a deeper analysis of this article two lines of thought which are present in the Constitutions must be kept in mind. On the one hand the article is in perfect continuity with what has gone before. In fact, after setting out the main points in our plan for youth the text describes the pedagogical and pastoral method in its principles and basic inspirations. On the other hand, since the preventive system is at the same time a spirituality, a pastoral criteriology and a pedagogical methodology,¹ the article is connected with those which describe the salesian spirit. In particular art. 20 referred to the preventive system as a "spiritual and educational experience": it declared that "it permeates our approach to God, our personal relationships, and our manner of living in community through the exercise of a charity that knows how to make itself loved".

¹ Cf. GC21, 96; cf. also ASC 290 (1978), p. 12-14 (The preventive system, essential element of our charism)

Taking for granted its spiritual roots, the preventive system is set out in art. 38 as an educational and pastoral method in three stages:

- its fundamental inspiration;
- its characteristic elements;
- the educational relationship it creates.

The fundamental inspiration

The fundamental inspiration of the preventive system is a particular understanding of the individual, the fruit of a long historical process of christian humanism, translated by Don Bosco into simple practical terms.

The three words which occur in the now famous expression — *reason, religion and loving kindness* — need separate analysis, in their mutual relationship and overall significance. They are a synthetic expression of the educational project. They suggest also for educators the attitudes from which flows the practical application of the method: faith, reason, and educational charity shown by close presence and real interest. But above all they indicate three internal personal resources which, when aroused, stimulated and developed, not only ensure good results for particular educational experiences but also create a personal structure enabling life to be confronted.

The method appeals to resources of the intelligence, the heart and the desire for God, rather than depending on external conditioning.

- "*Reason*", from the methodological point of view, asks the educator to follow the path of motivations, to take the events of the life and development of youngsters and help them to make a balanced judgement about them, to make good use of what is known about education, to stimulate responsibility, to keep in mind the possibilities of the youngster when making suggestions to him or demands on him. These are just examples.

- "*Religion*" implies believing in the creative and educational force of the proclamation of the Gospel and of contact with the Lord, of not neglecting its reminder of conscience and salvation; it means

making known the beauty of faith and its manifestations, and promoting in the life of the community religious events and motivations through feasts and other celebrations, and even through the very arrangement of the premises.

• But method requires that reason and religion must converge in "*loving kindness*". This represents the supreme principle of the preventive system.² Its foundation and source must be sought in the charity communicated to us by God, as a result of which the educator loves young people with the same love with which the Lord loves them, not only in the intensity of his self-giving but also with the human warmth shown by Christ in the Incarnation, i.e. supernatural charity, but clothed in flesh. This loving kindness is a love which is shown in a way that a youngster, especially if he is very poor, can come to understand without formal expression; it is a pleasing approach which leads to a familiar relationship, affection shown through gestures which foster confidence and create an educational relationship. It is an attitude which gives rise to an interior security in the boy, which suggests ideals to him and sustains his efforts to overcome his weaknesses. It is a pedagogical charity which "creates" the youngster as an individual and is perceived by him as a providential help to his own growth.

The operative elements

The article presents two of these, of which the first is the creation of an "*educational environment*" rich in joy, humanity and commitment, which is already in itself a means for expressing values and proposals. Don Bosco discovered the value of the environment very early in his apostolate and it became a first requirement for the rest of his life.

Don Bosco was the friend and educator of many boys whom he got to know individually in a wide variety of places and circumstances, but he was also the animator of a community of youngsters, character-

² Cf. ASC 290 (1978), p. 8-9

ized by certain specific features and with a programme to carry out. Psychological and sociological reasons, as well as those of faith, confirmed his conviction that an educational setting was needed where religion and application could find a natural place, and where roles, relationships and the very atmosphere spoke of love and charity.

And so Don Bosco not only chose a setting which would give stability to his Oratory and drew up a little set of regulations for it, but he also adopted the principle which he explained to his boys as follows: "Your number alone makes your games more joyful, chases melancholy from your hearts, encourages many of you to bear the burden of schoolwork, and arouses competition and the sharing of knowledge. The good example of many helps us also spiritually without our even being aware of it".³

The setting is not something generic; it has characterizing features. It is not a specific place where one goes in search of personal recreation, but a community, a programme, a process in which the participants mature and develop.

Among the many characteristics of the environment which could be mentioned in connection with the three elements already referred to, the article picks out the union between youngsters and educators, the family atmosphere, trust and dialogue.

The preference is not fortuitous, even though the list is incomplete. These are the aspects which more nearly touch the "heart", which relate more closely to "loving kindness". They reflect Don Bosco's assertion that "education is a thing of the heart"; that is where all the work starts, and if the heart is not in it the work becomes difficult and its outcome uncertain.⁴ At the same time such characteristics highlight the eminently affective concept of education which is proper to the preventive system.

But the setting or environment is not sufficient by itself. It might never reach the individual. A second element is required: *personal en-*

³ BM VII, 366

⁴ Cf. MB XVI, 447; cf. also *Collected letters* IV, p. 209

counter. If it is to respond to different needs and interests, the bigger group must be split into smaller units in which are possible participation, recognition of the original nature of the individual, and the best use of the contributions he can make.

"Loving kindness" reaches the individual through the personal relationship which makes possible an enlightened view of the present, past and future of each one.

The importance must not be forgotten of personal contacts, even though brief, in the educational and pastoral experience of Don Bosco.

Some of these short contacts of our Father with his boys have gone down in history as fundamental turning points. The meeting with Bartholomew Garelli in the sacristy of the Church of St Francis of Assisi laid the foundations of the Oratory. In the biographies he wrote of various boys, Don Bosco recalls with pleasure the contacts he had with them, and goes into details about their conversations. In the biography of Dominic Savio he gives a detailed account of their talks at the parish house at Murialdo and in his own office at the Oratory. In his *Life of Michael Magone*, there is even a chapter entitled: "A curious encounter".

Don Bosco not only relived these events but he also put them forward as an educational norm: it seems that he wanted to show us his art of getting into the life of a boy. The encounter always began with some sign of esteem, of affection, of understanding, and then he passed on at once to touch in a simple manner on the important factors in the life of his young companion, like his health, whether he had a home to go to or anyone to look after him. The conversations were serious as regards content, even though carried out in a happy and joyful manner; they often became a quite moving experience, because they concerned points of vital concern to the youngsters. Michael Magonè was deeply moved; Francis Besucco shed tears of emotion; Dominic Savio "did not know how to express his joy and gratitude: he seized my hand, squeezed it and kissed it several times".⁵

⁵ D. BOSCO, *Life of Dominic Savio* (OE XI, p. 187)

If these encounters remained so vivid in the mind of the saintly educator, if he dwelt on them at such length in the biographies of his boys to the extent of making them the chief items he narrated, it means that he was convinced that the quality of an educator and pastor is shown in personal contacts, and it was to this that the atmosphere and programme of the house were designed to lead.

When a Cardinal in Rome once challenged his ability as an educator, Don Bosco gave him a spectacular demonstration by means of a personal encounter and conversation with some boys in the Piazza del Popolo. When we read the account of the episode we find the narrative structure typical of all his other contacts: the first friendly approach, the immediate inclination of the boys to run away, followed by the overcoming of their fears and shyness, a cheerful conversation with serious undertones, and the emotional nature of the conclusion.⁶

All of this, and much more as well, can perhaps be read into the expression: *"we encounter the young at their present stage of freedom"*.

The educational relationship

But all we have said still fails to give a complete idea of the method. The setting, initiatives and encounters are organized and find expression in an educational relationship with particular characteristics. The same elements could evidently be used to produce a relationship which would create dependence on the educator, tend to moral subjugation on the part of the boys, and to their exploitation for the furtherance of adult interests.

The key is found in the way the relationship between pupils and educator is built up, and how it fits in with the body of educators as a whole and with the educational institution. The text mentions some guiding ideas.

in open and constructive dialogue.

⁶ Cf. BM V, 600-601

In the first place it calls for the subject to be seen as responsible for his own growth and development. The task of the educator is not to take this responsibility on himself, but to awaken it, enlighten it and get it functioning, by fostering and making it possible for the individual to make free choices based on motives and values.

The second principle is found in the educator's role of accompaniment or encouragement. It is a question of an influential presence rather than an authoritarian one. The educator plays a valid part to the extent that he is able by his adult presence to offer light and experience, and to be seen by the youngsters as a "model" to whom they can refer.

From these fundamental considerations (the youngster is the one responsible, the educator accompanies him in his efforts) arises an essential characteristic of every educational relationship: the total acceptance of the person just as he is, the greatest sign of affective maturity. Some youngsters have been favoured more than others, but they are all sons of God. The point at which we find them is the point God has chosen from which to invite them to start a pilgrimage. In this connection there come to mind some expressions from the Letter of 1884, in which Don Bosco points out the difference between those who initiate a personal relationship for selfish motives and those who really accept the youngster as a person.

An educational relationship cannot fail to give rise to suggestions and proposals, but these should be proportioned to the possibilities of the boy and to the stage he is at in his maturing process, this precisely as an expression of the fact that he is accepted as a person and of the central role that he himself has to play in his own formation.

The reference should not be overlooked to God's patience, which we want to imitate; this is not the same thing as tolerance or forbearance, but refers to the long and persevering work, in dialogue with the freedom of the individual concerned, through which the Lord, by offering his own love, calls man to communion with Him and opens to him horizons of happiness which reason by itself could never even imagine.

God's patience is more a progressive action than a gloomy forbearance; it savours more of the opening up of new possibilities than

the counting up of failures or offences. His patience is an invitation to loftiness of spirit in the relationship with the youngster, because of the freedom from any personal interest that the latter must find in us, because of our need to be tireless in making positive suggestions, and out of consideration for the youngster's ability to respond.

*Let us pray to the God of all patience
that in imitation of the charity of Christ with his disciples,
and following the example of Don Bosco,
we may be able to follow the generous and difficult way
of the "preventive system",
and provide efficacious help to our young people
as they develop in themselves
the seeds of goodness and grace
with which the Creator has endowed them.*

*That we may penetrate
the treasures of christian wisdom
which inspire the preventive system,
and be faithful in continuing
the educational work of Don Bosco,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That with watchful delicacy
we may be able to awaken
the resources of intelligence,
desire for God and generosity of heart,
that young people carry within them,
and help them to make them bear fruit,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That we ourselves,
with inexhaustible patience and adaptability,
may be able to collaborate generously
with the young and with their families
in open and constructive dialogue,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

ART. 39 ASSISTANCE AS AN ATTITUDE AND METHOD

The practice of the preventive system demands a fundamental disposition on our part: an empathy with the young and a willingness to be with them: "Here in your midst I feel completely at home; for me, living means being here with you".¹

We are actively present among youth in brotherly friendship, helping them in their efforts to grow in what is good, and encouraging them to cast off every form of slavery, so that their weakness may not be overcome by evil.

This presence affords us a true understanding of the world of the young and unites us with them in all the healthy aspects of their restless energy.

¹ MB IV, 654; BM IV, 455

The preventive system, described in its inspiration in art. 20 and presented in its educational and pastoral principles in art. 38, is now clarified as regards its daily practice.

Assistance

The preventive system requires as a fundamental point the daily educational presence among youth: what we call according to our tradition "*assistance*". This does not mean the charity of a benefactor who provides means and resources from a distance, but the love of one who is willing to accompany young people, to live in their midst, with them and for them, following Don Bosco's example.¹ This implies that if one day it should happen that the Salesians possessed many works managed indirectly, but they themselves were cut off from the youngsters, the preventive system, which was born of direct contact with

¹ Cf. SGC, 188

youth, would no longer have any means of expression, and still less of new developments.

But what are the characteristics of assistance, which is presented as the preventive system in practice?

In the first place it means *physical* presence among young people, and hence a real sharing in their life and interests: loving what the youngsters love.

It is a presence of "*brotherly friendship*", not institutional or authoritarian. Some expressions of Don Bosco come to mind: "I need your help... I don't want you to look upon me as your superior but rather as your friend. Trust me fully. That is what I want, what I expect from you as my friends".² And in the Letter from Rome he wrote: "Let the superior be all things to all... all heart to seek the spiritual and temporal good of those Divine Providence has entrusted to him".³ The effect on the minds of the young should be that they look upon their teachers and superiors as "fathers, brothers and friends".

It is an *active* presence, full of initiatives and plans as regards both individuals and environment, but with an activity which is "preventive" in the double sense of protecting from untimely negative experiences, and developing the potentiality of individuals for reaching goals to which they are attracted by their goodness and beauty.

It is an *animating* presence: it tends to awaken and foster the creativity of the young, to give them responsibility for their own growth and development, accompanying them in the process. It develops motivations based on reason and faith, and at the same time strengthens in the youngsters their ability to give an autonomous response to the demands of values and principles. It does not therefore cut out youthful expression in word or action, but rather favours it. Don Bosco wrote: "Every superior should try to get to know them, to show himself their

² BM VII, 302

³ Letter from Rome, cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 260

friend; he should let them chatter away, but he should not say much himself..."⁴

It is a *witnessing* presence: the values professed by the educator, which become evident through his actions and behaviour, cannot fail to impress youngsters, making them think and opening new horizons before their minds.⁵

Attitudes of the educator apostle

Assistance implies a basic attitude: *empathy with the young and the desire to be with them*. The expression of Don Bosco quoted in the article to explain this attitude is a very happy one. It takes us back to the example of his own life. The inference is that it is not a matter of a burdensome obligation, even though it may cost sacrifice at times, but of a contact that is desired and sought for. In it we find the joyful sense of our life which we have given to God: "*Here in your midst I feel completely at home!*"

This empathy is described by the GC21 as a "harmonious relationship with the young, liking what they like but without abandoning our adult role of educators".⁶ It means "tuning in to their wavelength when discussing their problems, and getting into educative dialogue with them",⁷ being solid with them, utilizing their positive contributions, and at a faith level "recognizing in them the other source of our inspiration in spreading the Gospel".⁸

This desire for contact and presence introduces us to the realities of the world of youth. To provide efficacious help for the young and

⁴ *Regulations for the Houses*, General Articles, 7; (OE XXIX, p. 112); cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, PAS Turin 1955, p. 230 ff.

⁵ On the theme of assistance in general, v. SGC, 188, 363; GC21, 102; ASC 290 (1978), p. 21-23

⁶ GC21, 13

⁷ GC21, 12

⁸ GC21, 12

the poor one must first know and understand them: the Good Shepherd knows his sheep (cf. Jn 10,14). The study of psychology and the social sciences, information and reflection, are certainly important, but in the last analysis nothing less than being immersed in their world through a natural presence and friendly contacts can open us to a deeper knowledge. And such knowledge alone will enable us to find the right sort of language and methods for evangelization.

This sort of sympathetic knowledge leads also to an attitude of solidarity. The world of youth experiences a very rapid succession of changes and is extremely dynamic. In the face of this fact three kinds of reaction are possible:

— A reaction of indifference.

— A negative reaction which emphasizes defects and limitations, or easily attributes to young people as a whole the attitudes and behaviour of some of them; often this is combined with complete ignorance of youth phenomena. Because people of this kind find it impossible to follow the rhythm of youth, they prefer to show no interest in the problem, and still less to do anything about it.

— Finally there is the positive reaction of educational understanding and pastoral love: this is the spontaneous reaction of the salesian. Under this aspect too he stays with the young and especially the poor and "empathizes" with them, even to the extent of himself adopting their simple, sincere and dynamic style of life.

Evidently all this calls for a critical sense, and this is what is referred to in the conclusion of the article. Not everything in the ideas and behaviour of the young and the poor can be approved of; there are errors to be found there, excesses and sometimes disorders.

But the salesian tries to understand the deep underlying aspirations; he too rejects whatever in present-day society is not christian, nor evangelical, and often not even human. Retaining "all that is good" according to the dictate of St Paul (cf. 1 Thess 5,21), he adheres to the world of the young and poor "in all the healthy aspects of their restless energy". And he is well aware that this is a choice which may at times lead to painful consequences.

Summing up then, we could use the substance of article 39 to compose an introduction to a salesian "*Gaudium et Spes*": "The joys and hopes, the griefs and anguish of the youth of our time, especially of those who are poor and of all who are afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anguish of the Salesians as well. Nothing that affects the young and the poor fails to find an echo in their heart".

*Let us beg the Lord to open our hearts
to a true sympathy and understanding
towards those to whom he has sent us,
so as to be cordially at their service.*

*That with Don Bosco
we may be able to say sincerely to the young:
"Here in your midst I feel completely at home",
and for them make a generous offering
of our whole life,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*That our presence among youth
may be that of brothers and friends,
open to an authentic knowledge
of the world of the young and the poor,
and that we may be able to sustain them
in their growth to freedom from all slavery,
Lord, hear our prayer.*

*Lord our God, grant that we may share,
in profound truth and cordial participation,
the life of our young people
and all their lawful interests and aspirations,
just as your Son, in becoming man,
shared with us everything except sin.
Through Christ our Lord.*