

CHAPTER II

THE SALESIAN SPIRIT

"What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil. 4,9).

When Paul wrote to his Christians he liked to talk about himself: it is a graceful sign of a loving interpersonal relationship (fatherhood) and at the same time a vigilant awareness of the need for concrete and credible models for Christians who are a prey to confusion and misunderstanding (cf. 1 Thess 4,1; 1 Cor 4,16).

In the case of the Philippian community this happened because opposing groups were upsetting the community by spreading a Gospel and a spirit which were not those of Paul, the authentic apostle of Christ. Hence his forceful denunciation (3,15-21) made in the first person which includes a polemical note and a serious warning. With a few well chosen words and in positive and practical terms, Paul points out on the one hand the authoritative nature of his testimony and teaching, and on the other the vital and close experience of it made by the disciples; he then goes on to emphasize the indispensable need to accept the "Tradition" of which he is the mediator, so as to follow after the God of Jesus Christ. Only in this way will God's peace and the fullness of messianic blessings surround the community (cf. Rom 15,33; 1 Cor 14,33).

We recall that the letter to the Philippians is quoted in the Constitutions no less than five times,¹ two of them on the lips of Don Bosco himself.

It is evident that we have here a reminder, at once affectionate but deeply felt, of fidelity to Don Bosco as the primary and authentic source of the salesian spirit, in so far as he himself, like Paul, was a first genuine imitator of the Gospel of Christ and hence our authoritative and indispensable model. For this reason, in every article but one of this chapter (10-21), the figure of Don Bosco is always to the fore, as the one who passes on to us the various aspects of his spirit.

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¹ Cf. chap. VI, chap. IX and C 17, 71, 100

In presenting the general principles of the renewal of religious life, the decree "Perfectae caritatis" asserts: "It is for the good of the Church that institutes have their own proper characters and functions. Therefore the spirit and aims of each founder should be faithfully accepted and retained..."²

It is no easy matter to define the "spirit" of a religious institute. All those baptized in Christ have the same Gospel and are led by the same Spirit, but there are different paths for following the same Lord, and stress can be laid in different ways on the evangelical aspects of the way of perfect charity. To speak of the "spirit" of a religious institute means in fact to refer to the complexus of qualities and of gospel and ecclesial aspects to which members of the institute, following the example of their Founder and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are particularly sensitive, in both their interior attitude and their external activity.

The SGC, whose analysis gave rise to a first constitutional description of our spirit, defined it as "our own style of thought and feeling, of life and activity, in putting into operation the specific vocation and the mission which the Holy Spirit does not cease to give us".³ It is well to remember that the SGC based its statement on a wealth of experience. In 16 splendid pages of the "Annals of the Society"⁴ Fr Ceria had already condensed the main features of the spirit lived in Don Bosco's houses; the SGC was able to draw too on the ample testimony of confrères of every province: the unanimous feeling of so many Salesians of different ages, environments, nationalities and cultures is certainly a very significant indication of the Society's unity of spirit. Subsequent General Chapters, the GC21 and especially the GC22, further enriched the synthesis made by the SGC, and helped to produce a more organic presentation of what is without doubt the most characteristic element of our "salesianity": salesians, in fact, are recognized not only from what they do (there are others who concern themselves with youth), but from the way they do it!

² PC 2; cf. also MR 11

³ SGC, 86

⁴ E. CERIA, *Annali della Società Salesiana* I, pp. 720-735

When it introduced the discussion on the "salesian spirit", the SGC made it clear that the primary reference was to its foundation and source, which is the "spirit of Don Bosco" (his vocation, life, work and teaching); but it included also the spirit as shared and lived since then in his Family, i.e. the way in which the spirit of Don Bosco is realized in practice in the history and life of the Congregation and the Salesian Family (the life and sanctity of the Salesians).⁵

It should be noted that the Constitutions speak of salesian "spirit" rather than salesian "spirituality": while the latter refers more properly to an overall consideration of the relationship between the Salesian and God, the spirit involves the complexus of his style of life and action, as a living evangelical dynamism lived and passed on as a mode of daily life. Rather than a conceptual analysis of the qualities of Don Bosco's spiritual experience, it is a question of identifying the characteristic features of his physiognomy which his sons have imitated and made their own.⁶ The "spirit" is life, i.e. it belongs to the existential order.

Considered in its widest significance, the salesian spirit:

- is the soul of the interior and exterior life of the salesian;
- is the vital and proper "forma mentis et cordis" which characterizes the style of sanctification, common life and apostolate;
- is the foundation of our unity and renewal, and that of all the groups of the Salesian Family;⁷
- pervades and animates the whole life of the salesian: the virtues of the covenant with God (faith, hope and charity), apostolic con-

⁵ Cf. SGC, 87

⁶ In the letter to the Cooperators the Rector Major wrote: "When the Regulations speak of 'salesian spirit' they are describing the characteristic features of the gospel experience tested in the school of Don Bosco as an original style of life, a synthesis of criteria of judgement and of methodology of action. It is not a conceptual analysis of relationships with God and one's neighbour, and neither is it the doctrinal presentation of the spirituality of a state or ministry, but the description of the spiritual features which identify the salesian vocation". cf. AGC 318, 1986, p. 28

⁷ Cf. SGC, 86-87

secration, activities of the mission, life of communion, practice of the evangelical counsels, formation, animation and government; — and is, in brief, "a fundamental feature of our salesian identity".⁸

It should not be forgotten that the salesian spirit is a treasury of spiritual wisdom received not only for the Salesians but to be widely deployed for the benefit of youth in general. We Salesians of Don Bosco, as is said in art. 5 of the Constitutions, have particular responsibility for "preserving unity of spirit" in the Family. Don Bosco says: "We must have friends, benefactors, people who while fully practising the spirit of the Salesians live in their own families, as do the Salesian Cooperators".⁹ The present General Regulations refer to this in connection with the service we must render to the Salesian Family (R 36-40). The purpose of the Salesian Bulletin is to "spread knowledge of salesian spirit and activity" (R 41)

Coming now to the organization of the contents of chapter II, we see that they are grouped around certain key ideas:¹⁰

1. Some basic attitudes which animate the Salesian

— Starting from the *most fundamental level*, it is stated that "the salesian spirit is summed up and centred in *pastoral charity* drawn from the heart of Christ, apostle of the Father, and from his Gospel: this is the source of our spirit and its justification (*art. 10, 11*).

— At the *level of personal experience* the secret of growth in pastoral charity and in fidelity to the salesian spirit is to be found in personal "*union with God*", in being able to convert work into "prayer", with the powerful support of the sacraments.

⁸ GC21, 97

⁹ *Progetto di "deliberato" per il Capitolo generale I, 1877*, manuscript of Don Bosco

¹⁰ The guiding concepts here presented are taken from the "*Sussidi alle Costituzioni e Regolamenti*", prepared by the GC22, p. 27-28

The constant cultivation of a vision of faith facilitates a permanent commitment of hope in daily life (*art. 12*).

— At the *ecclesial level* the identity of our spirit and pastoral charity are expressed in a renewed "*sense of the Church*"; of fidelity to the Pope, of communion with the Bishops and of commitment to the building of the Church wherever we are working (*art. 13*).

2. The salesian spirit marks our style of relationships

The style which imbues our pastoral relationships with "salesianity" is shown particularly:

— in a *love of predilection for the young*, which is the expression of a gift of God (*art. 14*);

— in *loving kindness*, an expression of "spiritual fatherhood" and the bearer of a message of purity, which is born of our chastity, as a practical and objective concern for the formation of young people for love (*art. 15*);

— in the "*homely, family atmosphere*", which helps in sharing and forgiving (*art. 16*).

— in a victorious *optimism* and contagious *joy* (*art. 17*).

3. The salesian spirit permeates our pastoral work of education

At the level of apostolic activity the salesian spirit is expressed:

— in *work*, i.e. in untiring industry combined with *ascetic realism* proper to educator-apostles, who collaborate in the construction of the Kingdom of God: the coupled concept characteristic of Don Bosco "*work and temperance*" is the austere and well balanced incarnation of the salesian spirit in daily practice (*art. 18*);

— in the *creative and flexible readiness* to respond to urgent local needs (*art. 19*);

The synthesis of this kind of commitment is the *preventive system*, in which coalesce the virtues which give a characteristic and original physiognomy to the salesian who works among young people for the Kingdom: it is a self-donating love inspired by the love of God (art. 19, 20).

4. Don Bosco the model

To sum up: *Don Bosco is presented as the concrete model* of the salesian spirit and of the pastoral charity which animates us (art. 21).

It should be noted that other elements of the salesian spirit are scattered here and there in the text of the Constitutions, especially as regards sacramental piety, trust in Mary and some characteristic features of our pedagogy; these aspects should be kept in mind for a comprehensive knowledge of our spirit.

This internal driving force of love for youth was expressed in a manner which has passed on to us as an original style of life and action, in which, in the light of his mysterious dreams, he was able to transform into wonderfully flexible pedagogical norms, into prayer and contemplation. As we have already said, to understand the 'original' nature of the salesian spirit and subsequently apply it to salesian life and activity,

¹ BM I, 176

² Cf. BM XIII, 87-88. The quotation from St Paul is found in Don Bosco's small treatise on "The preventive system in the education of the young" cf. Appendix to Constitutions, 1906

ART. 10 PASTORAL CHARITY THE CENTRE OF OUR SPIRIT

Under the inspiration of God, Don Bosco lived and handed on to us an original style of life and action: the salesian spirit.

It is summed up and centred in pastoral charity, characterized by that youthful dynamism which was revealed so strongly in our Founder and at the beginnings of our Society. It is an apostolic impetus that makes us seek souls and serve God alone.

The whole chapter deals with the characteristics of the salesian spirit, but already in this first article we find its soul or central element, because the "spirit" is a living and organic reality which explains all the other elements of the salesian life, animates them and renders them deeply consistent. Here we are given an indication of the "organizing inspiration",¹ the animating nucleus, which is "pastoral charity".

The Constitutions refer to charity in many articles.² Charity is the name of the love of God (cf. 1 Jn 4,8) and the distinguishing mark of Jesus' disciples (Jn 13,35): it is the centre of all christian life, and therefore of all apostolic life. Art. 10 speaks in particular of salesian "pastoral charity", and helps to reveal the specifications of charity as lived in the life of the salesian.

Don Bosco has passed on to us an original style of life and activity centred on charity

As we have already said, to understand the "original" nature of the salesian spirit and subsequently apply it to salesian life and activity,

¹ SGC, 88

² Cf. C 3. 14. 15. 20. 25. 29. 41. 50. 92. 95

it is essential to refer back to Don Bosco who lived it so intensively that he has become a true model (C 21). To make this spirit properly understood, he himself taught it to the first Salesians, a handful of young men who became fired by his zeal and worked wonders amongst boys.

It is in the context of Don Bosco and the first Salesians that the Constitutions tell us that the heart of his spirit, and hence of the spirit which animates his sons, is charity. Our Father said the same thing in a conference of 11 March 1869 when, in reply to the question: "What spirit must animate this body?", he replied: "Charity, my sons; charity". He was speaking of the charity which had already attracted him when he was a boy, in the face of the reserved attitude of priests of the time; he had then said to his mother: "If I were a priest I would act differently. I would look for boys and get them around me. I would want them to know that I care for them and desire their friendship. I would speak kindly to them, give them good advice and dedicate myself entirely to their spiritual welfare".³ In 1877, very much later, when Don Bosco was explaining his educational system at Nizza, he spoke again of charity, referring back to the hymn of praise to it sung by the apostle Paul: "Love is patient and kind ... hopes all things, endures all things".⁴

In the famous letter from Rome of 10 May 1884, a real "hymn to salesian charity", Don Bosco spoke of the Oratory of the early days quoting it as an example which serves as inspiration for an educational system, and spiritual testimony in which the salesian spirit is shown forth in all its brilliance.

This internal driving force of love for youth was expressed in a ready intuition of youngsters' needs and in the characteristic experience which, in the light of his mysterious dreams, he was able to translate into wonderfully flexible pedagogical norms, into continual prayer for

³ BM I, 170

⁴ Cf. BM XIII, 87-88. The quotation from St Paul is found in Don Bosco's small treatise on "The preventive system in the education of the young": cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 248

his boys, and into an ever creative and dynamic dedication of himself for their benefit.

In other words, to pass on his spirit to every confrere Don Bosco says: "Watch how I do things: all you have to do is imitate me".

Pastoral charity, the centre and synthesis of the salesian spirit

The centre of salesian spirit, says the Rule, is "pastoral charity, characterized by that youthful dynamism which was revealed so strongly in our Founder and at the beginnings of our Society. It is an apostolic impetus ...". These expressions depict a charity on the move, one which needs to be active and find realization in a practical and vehement way: a true "apostolic passion, lit up by youthful ardour", as the SGC put it.⁵

All religious institutes dedicated to the apostolate have apostolic charity as a basic element. With us this charity has a special tone: it is a burning ardour, a "fire", an irrepressible zeal; it is a fervent, generous, joyful and dynamic charity; a charity which has all the best characteristics of our youngsters to whom it is chiefly directed. We may recall that Don Bosco's charity led a lot of people to think him utopian, puzzling, and not a little mad!⁶

Pastoral charity, a sharing in the mission of Jesus the Good Shepherd, finds expression in its two essential dimensions: love of the Father whose Kingdom we want to serve, and love of our fellow men to whom we want to bring the good news of salvation. Well does the collect of the Mass in honour of St John Bosco sum up charity in the definition: an apostolic impulse which makes us "*seek souls and serve God alone*".

It is important to have a proper understanding of the internal dynamism of these two poles of pastoral charity: God (Jesus Christ)

⁵ SGC, 89

⁶ Cf. J. AUBRY, *Lo spirito salesiano*, Edizione Cooperatori salesiani 1972, p. 33

and our neighbour (the young). We have two principles which sustain the whole of our spirit. The first principle is that the love of God is always the cause and source of our love of our neighbour. The second is that from a methodological standpoint, i.e. in our daily activities, charity is practised towards our neighbour: apostolic service of our fellow men is the way that leads to God's love. This is how Jesus himself loved us!

It may be well at this point to call to mind the Congregation's coat of arms which carries the bust of St Francis de Sales and a heart from which flames are bursting forth: an indication of the zeal of St Francis de Sales which was recalled in art. 4. Apostolic charity, which is at the centre of our spirit, corresponds exactly to what our Patron called (in the language of the time) "devotion". In the "Introduction to the Devout Life" we read: "Devotion adds to charity only the flame which renders it ready, active and diligent, not only in the observance of the divine commandments but also in the practice of the counsels and heavenly inspirations".

To live the salesian spirit means allowing oneself to be inspired always and at every moment by the Spirit of Pentecost, and to be moved by its powerful wind and tongues of fire. Mediocrity and weakness are quite incompatible with such a spirit. It is a case of giving absolutely everything in a joyful outpouring, because "God loves a cheerful giver".

From the active presence of the Holy Spirit we draw strength and support to enable us to do all this (cf. C 1).

*Lord Jesus,
you have loved us
even to the extent of giving yourself completely for us;
you animate our life
with the same burning pastoral charity
with which you filled Don Bosco and his first disciples.*

*Help us to grow in apostolic fervour
so that we may live authentically our salesian vocation
to seek souls and serve you alone.*

ART. 11 CHRIST OF THE GOSPEL THE SOURCE OF OUR SPIRIT

The salesian spirit finds its model and source in the very heart of Christ, apostle of the Father.¹

Reading the Gospel we become more aware of certain aspects of the figure of the Lord: gratitude to the Father for the gift of a divine vocation offered to all men; predilection for the little ones and the poor; zeal in preaching, healing and saving because of the urgency of the coming of the Kingdom; the preoccupation of the Good Shepherd who wins hearts by gentleness and self-giving; the desire to gather his disciples into the unity of brotherly communion.

¹ cf. LG 3; AG 3

The spirit of Don Bosco, *"through a special divine disposition, draws its nature and strength from the Gospel"*.¹

To understand the central element of our spirit, we must go beyond the person of Don Bosco and reach the Source from which he himself drew; the very person of Christ, and especially his "Heart", i.e. Christ in his capacity as the full revelation of divine charity.

Reflection on the life of Don Bosco allows us to verify to what point our Founder drew conscious inspiration from the charity of Christ. Already in his dream at the age of nine he was told of his mission by Christ the Good Shepherd; at the end of his life he spent his last strength and efforts in building a basilica in Rome dedicated to the Heart of Christ. In the first article of the Constitutions of 1858 he had written: "The object and aim of this Society is to gather its members together ... for the purpose of perfecting themselves by imitating the virtues of our Divine Saviour, especially in works of charity for those

¹ PAUL VI, Motu proprio *"Magisterium vitae"*, 24 May 1973, raising the Salesian Atheneum to the rank of a University: cf. ASC 272 (1973), p. 70

who are young and poor".² The letter from Rome of 10 May 1884 makes insistent reference to Christ "master of the familiar approach ... your model".³

This article of the Rule helps us to penetrate more deeply into this fundamental truth.

Christ, the model and source of pastoral charity

In an effort to present our spirit in its relationship with the Saviour, the Constitutions speak of Christ under two complementary aspects: as a "model" and as a "source".

As a "model" we seek and study him in his life on earth as we find it presented in the New Testament. But the mystery of Christ is unfathomable (Eph 3,18) and the fertile riches of his Gospel are inexhaustible. Consequently we can penetrate only some aspects of his mystery: we study his life to draw from it some indication for a particular service in the Church. Nevertheless we are not imitating just a virtue (obedience, poverty, chastity) nor an activity (education, the missions etc.); we are following a Person whom we want to imitate in all his fullness, and a Gospel that we want to live in all its implications.

To look on Christ as a model means to have in mind that the path to sanctification to which we are called (cf. C 25) means that we have to "put on Christ" (Eph 4,19 ff). As Paul expresses it: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2,20).

As a "source", we must go back to his Risen life as Head of the Church, which he animates by sending to it his Spirit of love. Christ is called the "apostle of the Father", because here he is seen as the Master who teaches "apostolic" charity (cf. Heb 3,1) in the Joannine perspective of the "One sent" by the Father.

² MB V, 933

³ MB XVII, 111

The Spirit consecrates us in Christ, conforms our life to Christ's, helps us to penetrate his mystery, opens us to an experience of communion with him, leads us to immerse ourselves in him, the "Good Shepherd", who desires the salvation of the young.

In this way we are first led to a total overall experience of Christ and full adherence to his Gospel, before considering his particular features in the second paragraph.

Aspects of the Lord's figure to which the salesian tries to conform

The gospel insights⁴ relived in the salesian spirit are here listed; they represent particular aspects from which we read the mystery of Christ.

We know that the Gospel is one and the same for everyone, but it is also true that it can be "*read through salesian spectacles*", from which derives a salesian manner of living it. Don Bosco looked at Christ so as to try to copy in himself those features which corresponded more closely to his own providential mission and to the spirit which must animate it.

Art. 11 sets out what may be called the aspects or gospel insights, or better still the gospel roots or components, of the salesian spirit. The elements here presented by the Rule are certainly lived also by other religious institutes, but what we have in mind is the characteristic way in which we Salesians incarnate them in our own lives; living the salesian spirit is our way of living the Gospel, in line with the vocation we have received.

The person of Jesus is proposed to us in respect of some attitudes to which Don Bosco was very sensitive and which therefore are a particular stimulus to our imitation. There is no question of a complete list, but just of some traits of the figure of Christ the prophet, priest

⁴ Cf. SGC, 90-95

and shepherd, which we read in the light of the Founder's experience. The strict linkage between them and the person of Christ with regard to the "charity" of the Good Shepherd, should be noted.

Here then are the features of the Lord's figure which, according to the Rule, we find more outstanding in our spirit.

— *Gratitude*, trust and praise of the infinite goodness of the Father, who calls us to himself, looks on each youngster as a son, and gives to all men a divine calling: "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little ones" (Lk 10,21).

The figure is of *Christ the "Priest"*, the model of perfect consecration and capacity for "eucaristia", i.e. of thanksgiving towards the Father; it is the source of a deep and sincere filial piety, full of trust in the merciful kindness of God.

This gives rise to the joy of the salesian in feeling himself to be a son of God, and the optimism which is able to discern the good to be found in creation and history. The salesian's zeal too and his way of approaching young people take their inspiration from this sense of the fatherly love of God.

— *Solicitude in preaching, in proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom, in healing and in saving*: "He saw a great throng", says the Gospel, "and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mk 6,34). Concern of this kind Don Bosco called "zeal".

Here we discern the figure of *Christ the "Prophet"*, which arouses so much enthusiasm among youth, of Christ the "Missionary" of the Father, who travelled the roads of Palestine preaching the good news of the Kingdom, "teaching and healing" (Mt 4,23). Don Bosco's interior life is an imitation and prolongation, especially for the benefit of the young, of the apostolic zeal displayed by Christ in his public life. In the words of his first Successor: "He took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young and the good of souls: 'da mihi animas'" (cf. C 21). And he

himself declared: "If I were as anxious to save my own soul as I am in trying to save the souls of others, I would be sure of my salvation".⁵

— "*Predilection for the little ones and the poor*", for young people in need and for the working classes: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (Mk 9,37); "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them" (Mk 10,14).

Here we have the figure of *Christ the "Shepherd"*, sent for all men but who goes especially in search of the abandoned and those given least consideration, and who allows himself to be drawn by preference to the 'little ones' and to the 'poor'.

Don Bosco, like Jesus, felt himself called to the poor and little ones, towards the most needy of the young. "That you are young", he used to say, "is enough to make me love you very much". And he urged his sons to see Jesus in their youngsters: "Let us treat the boys as we would treat Jesus Christ himself, if he were a boy in our college".⁶ It is "pure and patient charity which fights against our two most common and fearsome passions: concupiscence and irascibility":⁷ these are the two obstacles to our life and apostolate which the preventive system helps to overcome, drawing its inspiration from the charity of Christ.

— The preoccupation of the Good Shepherd who *wins hearts by gentleness* (salesian kindness) and *self-giving* (the daily carrying of the cross): "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn 10,11); "Learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Mt 11,29).

This is a reminder of the kindness and gentleness characteristic of our spirit, even at the cost of self-denial.

From the time of his dream at the age of nine Don Bosco had learned from Christ the Good Shepherd the secret of educational success: "Not by blows but by love and gentleness must you win friends

⁵ BM VII, 153

⁶ MB XIV, 846-847

⁷ D. VESPIGNANI, *Circulars*, part III, p. 124

...".⁸ Fr Ceria recalls the beautiful testimony of one person who said, after meeting Don Bosco: "I thought to myself: Don Bosco is the living image of Jesus of Nazareth: amiable, meek, kind, humble, modest. So must Jesus have impressed others!"⁹

Salesian self-denial is expressed in self-giving, which implies renunciation and mortification. "The thorns on the ground (in the pergola of roses) stand for sensible affections, human likes and dislikes which distract the educator from his true goal, weaken and halt him in his mission, and hinder his progress and heavenly harvest".¹⁰

— *The desire to gather his disciples into the unity of brotherly communion* and to gather all men into the one fold: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13,34).

This is the new commandment which Jesus gave to his disciples, the fruit of his redeeming sacrifice: that men should learn to love one another, to build a single family, in the unity of the Father and the Son: "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be in us" (Jn 17,21).

The words of Jesus are echoed in those of Don Bosco: "Let us be charitable to one another, bearing with faults patiently and being mutually indulgent. Let us encourage each other to do good, to love and respect each other like brothers. Let us pray that we may all form one heart and one soul to love and serve God".¹¹ Concern for communion, as we shall see later, is a trait which must distinguish the salesian superior in particular.¹²

— For the salesian, living the Gospel means in practice living these attitudes which we have enumerated. By following Christ in this kind

⁸ MO, p. 23

⁹ BM XIV, 373

¹⁰ BM III, 27

¹¹ BM IX, 168. The words of Don Bosco quoted here are taken from an instruction he preached in a retreat at Trofarello in 1868; v. also "*Souvenir to Missionaries*", n. 13, Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 266

¹² Cf. C 121, 126, 161, 176

of life the confrere finds the "precious pearl" which enables him to discover in young people Christ himself, to be served, to be assisted, and to be loved.

In this way we come to understand how our vocation is a continuation of Christ's mission, in preaching, education and service. By continually drawing on this fundamental evangelical inspiration, i.e. the person of Christ, we go back to the source of pastoral charity and reach the centre of the salesian spirit.

We note in conclusion that the gospel qualities which inspire our personal, community and apostolic life, are not only a statement of our own identity, but they also distinguish us from other religious institutes; and this not in any sense of opposition between ourselves and others, but rather in living correlation so that with our different gifts we may be able to form together the one mystical Body of Christ.

*Lord Jesus Christ,
you are the source and model
of our pastoral charity.*

*Grant that in our own lives
we may imitate your own unconditional dedication
to the saving will of the Father,
your loving concern as the Good Shepherd
for the good of mankind,
especially the poor and the little ones,
and your desire to gather your disciples
into the unity of fraternal communion.*

*Through the grace of your Spirit
grant that these evangelical qualities
may invigorate our spiritual life
and our apostolic commitment.*

ART. 12 UNION WITH GOD

As he works for the salvation of the young, the salesian experiences the fatherhood of God and continually reminds himself of the divine dimension of his work: "Apart from me you can do nothing".

He cultivates union with God, aware of the need to pray without ceasing in a simple heart-to-heart colloquy with the living Christ and with the Father, whom he feels close at hand. Attentive to the presence of the Spirit and doing everything for God's love he becomes like Don Bosco a contemplative in action.

Jn 15.5

Don Rinaldi's definition of our spirit has become well known among us: "tireless industry made holy by prayer and union with God" (cf. C 95). It means that the salesian acts with a true "apostolic sense", in the awareness of "the divine dimension of his work". It is a case of living his baptismal priesthood so as to make of his whole life an oblation to God, offering him spiritual veneration, and celebrating in the trials of daily living the great "liturgy of life" (C 95).

From the article we can discern the action of the three divine Persons in the life of the salesian:

- the Father, the Creator, whose fatherhood and mercy to man the salesian experiences day by day;
- the Son, the Saviour, with whom he converses from the heart concerning the salvation of the young, and listens to his Word;
- the Spirit, the Sanctifier, always present in the Church's life and in the vicissitudes of history; from him he draws the strength to be faithful, support for his hope (cf. C 1), and grace for his sanctification (cf. C 25).

The text emphasizes three aspects of the salesian's union with God:

- our absolute need of Christ in our apostolic work;

- the simple and continuous dialogue that we maintain in Christ with the Father;
- the importance of living in the Spirit's presence, doing everything for the love of God.

The reference here is to the "contemplative dimension", which must be so deeply rooted in the salesian as to permeate and imbue his every activity.

To plumb the depths of this kind of union with God, we must hark back to that "grace of unity", of which we spoke in connection with our vocation.¹ It is not found primarily in activity, nor even in the "practices of piety", but in the interior of a person of whom it pervades the whole being; before finding expression in activity or in praying, it is a kind of "spiritual dynamism", in so far as it is a conscious participation in the very love of God through self-donation in practical availability for the work of salvation. It is an interior attitude of charity directed towards apostolic activity, in which it becomes concrete, is made manifest, grows and becomes perfected. In this sense apostolic industry is an expression of interior spirituality!

We must keep in mind what is said in the document on "*The contemplative dimension of religious life*": "The very nature of apostolic and charitable activity contains its own riches which nourish union with God. It is necessary to cultivate every day an awareness and deepening of it. Being conscious of this, religious will so sanctify their activities as to transform them into sources of union with God, to whose service they are dedicated by a new and special title".² The same document later emphasizes that "the religious community is itself a theological reality, an object of contemplation; of its nature it is the place where the experience of God should be able in a special way to reach its fullness and be communicated to others".³

¹ V. commentary on general structure of the text (p. 67-69) and arts. 2 & 3 (p. 97 ff.); cf. also SGC, 127

² "*The contemplative dimension of religious life*", CRIS, 1980, n. 6

³ *ibid.* n. 15

In this way the salesian, sustained by the spirit of Don Bosco and the evangelical richness of his community, can express in every circumstance the contemplative dimension of his life and grow in it. In his 'Treatise on the love of God', St Francis de Sales has well explained the "ecstasy of life and activity" as an authentic expression of the pastoral charity of one who puts all he has into his daily commitments, even "exceeding himself and his natural inclinations".⁴

Art. 12 sets out to explain some aspects of this important fact.

The salesian, while engaged in work for the salvation of the young, feels his need of God

The salesian is shown a way for savouring the "depths of God" (1 Cor 2,10) in every circumstance of his life, from youth to maturity, in activity and lack of it, from dawn to dusk; it is a concrete compenetration of action and contemplation in the spirit of "da mihi animas".

He is invited to discover and reinvigorate the "divine dimension" of his activity.

It should be noted that it is not simply a question of material or professional work detached from the mission confided to the community, but of the daily work done in accordance with God's will. In our educational, charitable and pastoral activity, we are sent by God and guided by his Spirit: we are his collaborators (cf. 1 Cor 3,9); it is God we serve in the poor and the little ones; it is for his glory and Kingdom that we work.

And when we become aware of this presence of God, we recognize our absolute need to remain in him. "Apart from me you can do nothing!" — a peremptory statement that comes from Jesus himself (Jn 15,5). Launched as we are into a life of pastoral activity among youth,

⁴ Cf. St FRANCIS DE SALES, *Treatise on the Love of God*, book 7, chap.7 *Opera omnia* V,

with a keen desire to be of use to them and to the world, we cannot fail to reflect on this stark assertion, which finds frequent endorsement in other parts of Scripture: "If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labour ... In vain is your earlier rising, your going later to rest, you who toil for the bread you eat: when he pours gifts on his beloved while they slumber" (Ps 126/127). All toil is in vain if the Lord is not present. "Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. For we are God's field, God's building" (cf. 1 Cor 3,7,9).

The Rule invites us to "experience" God, i.e. not only to live an interior and spiritual life but to have a conscious awareness that we are in relationship with God in our daily life.

The salesian way of living in the intimate presence of God is the way Don Bosco lived it. His "experience" of God was extraordinarily fervent and is still an example for us even at the present day. Evidently such experience does not have to be the same for everyone: it will be felt in a different way in the life of each salesian, be he priest or brother, or member of the Salesian Family.

All this calls for a continual reminder of the "divine dimension of our activity".

The salesian dialogues with God continuously and with simplicity

The manner in which the salesian dialogues with God is described in the text by two typical terms: it is *simple and continuous*.

He is not a monk but an apostle of tireless industry, as has been already said, an apostle among the poor and the little ones; his prayer is simple, without exaggerations, made up of essential elements, based on the Word of God and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation; he continues it in generous and joyful dynamism in a youthful and trusting style which is pleasing alike to God and young people (cf. C 86).

The first draft of the Constitutions of 1858 carried a statement which remained in the official text until 1972. It said: "The active life,

towards which the Society more especially tends, renders its members unable to perform many exercises of piety in common. They shall therefore supply for these by giving one another good example, and by fulfilling perfectly the general duties of a good christian",⁵ where the word "perfectly" should be noted.

Nevertheless the Rule, echoing the words of Jesus (cf. Lk 18,1), says that the salesian feels the need to pray "without ceasing". This coincides with Fr Piccolo's testimony concerning Don Bosco: "He always prayed. In him, union with God was uninterrupted".⁶ How was it possible in a life so crammed with activity?

In the constitutional text of 1864 Don Bosco had already said that the salesian prevented from making mental prayer by some urgent call of the sacred ministry "will make up for the deficiency by more frequent ejaculations, and by directing to God with fervour and devotion those particular labours which are thus hindering him from the ordinary exercises of piety".⁷

On closer examination it will be found that in the life of the salesian, as was the case in that of the Founder, prayer and activity form part of a single movement of the heart; prayer leads naturally to action and becomes a "spirit of prayer", with the result that the activity becomes permeated by prayer. For the salesian, God the Father, Christ and the Spirit are the great "presences" in his life: despite appearances he feels their presence and sees and meets them always and everywhere. And so what happens is that during the work itself, spontaneous and informal prayer fills his heart and also rises to his lips, especially in the form of ejaculations specifically recommended by Don Bosco, following the teaching of St Francis de Sales.⁸ These humble invocations springing to the lips constitute the "simple heart-to-heart colloquy with the living Christ and with the Father, whom he feels close at hand" and with the Spirit of whose presence he is aware.

⁵ BM V, 644

⁶ BM XII, 266

⁷ MB VII, 884

⁸ Cf. SGC, 550

The apostolic activity itself, as has been already said, provokes and nourishes this dialogue: it leads the salesian to thank God for the good and fine things he sees, to call for help in time of suffering, to seek his pardon at once should he fall into sin, and to ask for his support and for success for the efforts he makes. Since charity is the soul of every apostolate, it follows that the apostolate becomes the soul of the salesian's prayer.

And so union with God keeps us united with our Source; it maintains our heart and spirit at the level of "mystery" in which we are committed, and obviates the danger of activity degenerating into mere activism.

Doing everything for the love of God, the salesian becomes a contemplative in action

The expression "contemplative in action" may evoke the concept of a spirituality which is not salesian in origin; the phrase "in action" too may seem to limit the field of contemplation to those who are actually working, excluding the sick and handicapped etc.; but the addition of the words "like Don Bosco" helps us to arrive at the correct interpretation of the article from a salesian standpoint.

The dynamics of contemplation in Don Bosco, so intense that he was defined as "*union with God*", are to be found in the motto "*da mihi animas, cetera tolle*" lived out in complete consistency: it is something within the possibilities of all Salesians and other members of the Salesian Family. Don Bosco was defined as "union with God" not only because he was united with God at the explicit moments of prayer, which was that of a consecrated apostle, but because he was accustomed to fill every moment and every aspect of daily life with thanksgiving to God, with filial trust in Providence, and with conversation with Mary Help of Christians, Mother of the Church and of youth.

The salesian also "does everything for God's love", i.e. he adopts the method of a vigorous apostolic integrity which rejects any temptation to work for himself and his own interests, or to gain esteem:

"everything for the love of God and for souls!" And so his activity becomes a real means of sanctification.

The Rule invites us to make of our existence an attitude of faith which fixes our mind and heart on God, to adore and participate in his saving love. This is the supreme expression of our vocation: to seek constantly our union with God, imitating Don Bosco who "had no interest in his heart other than souls".⁹ We can understand why it is that the Church teaches, when addressing apostolic religious: "In these days of renewal of the apostolate — as at any time in any missionary engagement — a privileged place must be given to the contemplation of God".¹⁰ Contemplation, a theological act of faith, hope and charity, becomes for us "the highest and fullest act of the spirit, an act which at the present day can still arrange the immense pyramid of human activity in hierarchical order".¹¹

Lord, you said to your apostles:

"Apart from me you can do nothing".

Render all our activity fruitful,

by a constant and living union

with you and with your Father,

so that, becoming like Don Bosco

"contemplatives in action",

we may find in trusting and cordial dialogue

the strength to do everything for your love,

and to persevere until death

in our total self-donation for your Kingdom.

⁹ Cf. D. RUA, Letter of 24.8.1894, cf. *Circular letters* p. 130

¹⁰ MR 16

¹¹ PAUL VI, Address at concluding session of Council. 7 December 1965

ART. 13 SENSE OF THE CHURCH

Our love for Christ necessarily gives rise to our love for his Church, the People of God, the centre of unity and communion of all the forces working for the Kingdom.

We feel ourselves a living part of her, and we cultivate in ourselves and in our communities a renewed ecclesial awareness. This we express in an attitude of filial loyalty to Peter's successor and to his teaching, and in our efforts to live in communion and collaboration with the bishops, clergy, religious and laity.

We educate young christians to an authentic understanding of the Church and we work assiduously for its growth. Don Bosco tells us: "No effort should be spared when the Church and the Papacy are at stake".¹

¹ MB V, 577; BM V, 383

Actively present in the mystery of the Church is the mystery too of God the Father who loves all his children, of the Son the Redeemer, and of the Spirit the Sanctifier. From the heart of the Church comes forth a pastoral dynamism which makes it the sacrament of unity: "It pleased God to call men to share in his life, and not merely singly, without any bond between them, but he formed them into a people, in which his children who had been scattered were gathered together";¹ he also made it "the universal sacrament of salvation, at once manifesting and actualizing the mystery of God's love for men".²

This is true without any doubt of the universal Church, both in respect of its sacramental nature, as a sign and efficacious means of salvation, as also of its ministry of communion between the various vocations, charismata and ministries, and as regards the mission it carries out in the world; but it is true as well of the particular Churches, i.e. the local Churches in which we find ourselves inserted in practice.

¹ AG 2

² GS 45; cf. LG 48

One of the characteristics of the salesian spirit is precisely its *ecclesial aspect*, which the Mother of the Church and its Helper committed to Don Bosco and his Institute for a specialist service.

The article we are now studying says that the salesian loves the Church, works for its growth, and educates youngsters to the same kind of love. Many of these attitudes are true of everyone who is baptized; but the Rule insists on a special propensity of the salesian in his love for the Church: he is particularly attentive to its unity and growth ("centre of unity", "communion of forces", "efforts to live in communion"); today more than ever the problem of unity is of great importance.

This article should be linked with art. 6 which speaks of the "Salesian Society in the Church" and described our commitments in the Church, whereas the present article is concerned with the style and spirit with which the salesian works in the Church and for the Church.

The salesian loves the Church because he loves Christ

We have inherited from our Founder a particular sensitivity in respect of that aspect of the Church which is its ability to build "unity and communion of all the forces working for the Kingdom".

The Church is seen as the People of God, the mystery of the "communion" of all its members, an active communion and dynamic centre for the service of unity among all the forces (the men of good will) which work silently in the world for the good of their fellow men. This is the vision of faith which sustains the salesian in his love for the Church, and is in fact the doctrine of Vatican II on the Church as the sacrament of salvation: "The messianic people, although it does not actually include all men, ... is however a most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race. Established by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth, it is taken up by him also as the instrument for the salvation of all. ... All those who in faith look

⁸ BM V, 380; cf. BM V, 371

⁹ Cf. BM V, 383

¹⁰ *Riassunto della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel 23 gennaio 1874*

vol XXV p. 380

towards Jesus God has gathered together and established as the Church, that it may be for each and everyone the visible sacrament of this saving unity".³

But the fundamental reason for which we love the Church is that it is willed and loved by Christ the Saviour: he, the Man-God, gathers all creatures to himself and reunites them to the Father (cf. Rom 8,21). To save man Christ incorporated him to Himself making him the Church, and in this way the latter becomes a "communion both human and divine" and at the same time the "sacrament of salvation" for humanity.

The whole of the first paragraph of this article is an echo of the appeal made to religious by Pope John Paul II: "Through everything that you do, and especially through everything that you are, may the truth be proclaimed and reconfirmed that 'Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her': the truth that is at the basis of the whole economy of the Redemption. *From Christ, the Redeemer of the world, may the inexhaustible source of your love for the Church pour forth!*"⁴

The salesian expresses his love for the Church in "filial loyalty to Peter's successor" and in collaboration and communion with the "bishops, clergy, religious and laity".

We feel ourselves a living part of the Church: we are, in fact, a concrete response to its needs; it is for the enrichment of the Church that from time to time God raises up men and women who follow Christ and imitate him more closely.⁵

The Church itself has discerned and recognized our charism as a response to some precise and urgent needs of the present day, as a

³ LG 9

⁴ RD 15

⁵ Cf. PC 1

remedy to certain evils and to a void that had appeared, and this as a new gift made to the entire People of God.

This is the reason why the Constitutions, harking back to the Council, say that we need to "cultivate in ourselves and in our communities a renewed ecclesial awareness".⁶

The concrete expression of this ecclesial awareness and of our love for the Church (for the universal Church as for the particular Church in Turin, or in London, or Sydney, or New York, or Delhi, or Nairobi etc.) is made clear in the article's second paragraph: it implies two things: fidelity to the Pope and collaboration with the particular Churches.

a. *"Filial loyalty to Peter's successor and to his teaching".*

This is one of our characteristics, witnessed to by Don Bosco's whole life and by our tradition. One need only think of the numerous sayings of Don Bosco in this connection:⁷ "The Pope's wishes must be a command for us".⁸ "I am indignant", he said on one occasion, "when I see the little attention that some writers give to the Pope and to what he says ... we must close ranks around him ...".⁹

In presenting his new Society he had said that "the fundamental purpose of the Congregation from its beginnings was to constantly sustain and defend the authority of the supreme Head of the Church among the poorer classes in society, and especially among young people in danger".¹⁰

The salesian is convinced that the Pope and the Bishops have received from Christ the mandate to lead his Church and maintain the cohe-

⁶ Cf. PC 2, 5; MR 14b; RD 14

Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *Our fidelity to Peter's successor*, AGC 315, 1985

⁸ BM V, 380; cf. BM V, 571

⁹ Cf. BM V, 383

¹⁰ "Riassunto della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel 23 gennaio 1874" in OE vol XXV p. 380

sion of all its forces.¹¹ Peter's successor is the visible sign and efficacious instrument of the unity of the episcopal college and of the whole Church, and therefore we nourish for him in our heart and activity a "filial loyalty". For the Popes he knew, Don Bosco was a most attentive and devoted servant, and the Popes reciprocated this attitude.

The salesian loves the Pope and does not conceal such love. He is able to instil this same love in the young and make them attentive to papal teaching, knowing that in this way he is giving them a sure and certain reference point in the search for truth.

Art. 125 will express in more precise terms our attitude to Peter's successor when it says that we Salesians are filially submissive to his authority.

b. *"Communion and collaboration with the bishops, clergy, religious and laity"*.

Solidarity with the bishops and clergy of the local Churches is dealt with at greater length in art. 48, which explains how our mission is made part of the pastoral plan of the particular Church. What is emphasized at this point is our efficacious intention to live in a spirit of real communion and collaboration with the local bishop and his group of priests.

The reference to "religious" corresponds to the attitude and teaching of Don Bosco. Here we need do no more than quote the tenth of the recommendations he gave to the first missionaries: "Love, reverence and respect other religious Orders, and always speak well of them."¹² Our solidarity with them stems also from our conviction that religious families are living forces in the Church, and that we must work with them in unity and charity, rejecting any jealousy or superiority complex.

¹¹ Cf. LG 18

¹² BM XI, 364

As far as the "laity" are concerned and our communion and collaboration with them, we note that the attention of the salesian world is broadening in line with the reflections the Church has been making concerning the values and significance of the "lay state".¹³ Many lay people are associated with our work (cf. C 29), but in any case the salesian is immersed in a reality in which concern about the Mystical Body must increase; he is called to be an animator in the educative and pastoral community, even to the extent of rendering it "a living experience of Church and a revelation of God's plan for us" (C 47). As specialists in communion and collaboration (which is what we should be!), our contact with the laity can have a prophetic significance if we become legible and credible signs of God, professionally competent and capable of bridging differences, but especially if we are bearers of the characteristic "salesian spirit".¹⁴

The salesian works for the Church's growth and educates young people to do likewise

We are men of the Church, apostles who foster a living "sensus ecclesiae", engaged in works that have been entrusted to us by the Church and which we animate in the Church's name.¹⁵

The Congregation is not closed in on itself but creates new linkages in the Church, and is concerned about making them grow in charity. "We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, jointed and knit together, ... grows and upbuilds itself in love" (Eph 4,16).

In particular we feel ourselves called, in the Church, to foster communion between forces working for the salvation of youth.

¹³ Cf. E. VIGANO, *The advancement of the lay person in the Salesian Family*, AGC 317, 1986

¹⁴ V. commentary on art. 47, p. 431-435

¹⁵ Cf. PC 8

The Rule reminds us of an important commitment in our work as educators: *"we educate young christians to an authentic understanding of the Church"*; i.e. we educate them to see in the Church the "Body of Christ" and the "People of God", the communion of all the forces working for salvation and their centre of unity and animation. On this account we sustain the baptismal vocation of the laity and all specific vocations; hence the effort we make to bring about a living experience of Church in the pastoral and educative communities: art. 35 sets out this responsibility more clearly, and art. 125 will deal specifically with the education of youth to accept the teaching of the Pope.

This is not an easy task: any plan to intensify dialogue between youth and the Church would seem in some places to be particularly difficult; and yet the Church is suffering a great deal because of the fact that many young people are indifferent or uninterested in the problem of God, or are atheists, non-believers, or even actively opposed to the Church. Others would like the Church to adapt itself to their own ideas and spirit, broadening its outlook and becoming less demanding, without giving any heed to the fact that it is bound by the Word of God. Still others declare their adherence to Christ but not to the Church. And it is these conditions that we, through the witness of our love, have to proclaim the mystery of the Church and make it loved.

With non-christian youngsters our attitude will always be careful to show respect for cultures and for other religions, but love of Christ's Church and of truth does not admit of compromise; in non-christian countries too we must be able to testify to the fact that the Church is a Mother, full of kindness towards everyone, and possessing the greatest of all treasures and the supreme truth, Jesus the Lord.

Don Bosco's phrase, which winds up the article, is a splendid synthetic expression of the intensity of our endeavour to build the Church and put ourselves at the service of Peter's successor: "No effort should be spared when the Church and the Papacy are at stake".¹⁶

*God our Father,
you willed to make your Church
the People of the new Covenant,
the centre of unity and communion
of all the forces working for salvation in Christ.*

*Your Son, who became man, loved the Church
and sacrificed himself for her;
grant that we too, as living members,
in loyal unity with the Pope and the Bishops
and fully docile to their teaching and directives,
may express our fidelity to their magisterium.*

*Teach us how to educate our young people
to an authentic sense of Church,
and how to lead towards her
those who are still in search of the truth.*

Through Christ our Lord.

ART. 14 PREDILECTION FOR THE YOUNG

Our vocation is graced by a special gift of God: predilection for the young: "That you are young is enough to make me love you very much".¹ This love is an expression of pastoral charity and gives meaning to our whole life.

For their welfare we give generously of our time, talents and health: "For you I study, for you I work, for you I live, for you I am ready even to give my life".²

¹ DON BOSCO, *Il giovane provveduto*, Turin 1847, p. 7 (OE II, 187)

² DON RUFFINO, *Cronaca dell'Oratorio*, ASC 110, quaderno 5, p. 10

The salesian vocation is distinguished by a special gift of God which leads to predilection for the young. This love of predilection, which permeates all of a salesian's thinking and acting, impresses on him a characteristic mark which is not only the result of natural gifts and inclinations, but also an expression of pastoral charity. Entirely taken up by zeal for the good of young people, the salesian never ceases throughout his life to foster within himself an attitude of sympathy for youth, the desire to meet and be with them, a continual concern to get to know them and help them to reach a full personal development.

The salesian derives his predilection for the young from the love shown by Christ himself for children and young people:

— "Let the children come to me" (Mt 19,14), said Jesus to the apostles, who were too quick to defend him from the disturbance they were causing him;

— and in the conversation with the young man who had asked what he must do to gain eternal life, the evangelist notes: "And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him and said to him ..." (Mk 10,21);

— of interest too is what happened in the case of the three he raised from dead to life: the daughter of Jairus (Lk 8,49-56), the son of the widow of Naim (Lk 7,11-17); and Lazarus (Jn 11); the emotion

shown by Jesus and his miraculous interventions are signs of his love for those concerned.

Speaking of youth, Pope John Paul II refers to it as a period of singular value experienced by man: the treasure of discovering and at the same time of organizing, choosing, foreseeing and making the first personal decisions, decisions that will subsequently be of great personal and social importance. Youth is a delicate and important age "on which depends the end of this millennium and the beginning of the next".¹

Greatly interested in youth is the Evil One and all his minions, in order to ruin their lives. But young people are dear to the heart of the Church as they were dear to Christ. They are dear to the heart of Mary, who was herself a young girl, who lived and worked among the young, and who now continues to understand from heaven their urgent needs, and to respond when they call upon her. In his dream at the age of nine, his guide (Jesus the 'Good Shepherd) said to John: "I will give you a Teacher...".²

To get in touch with youngsters you have to love them. We may recall once again what John said to his mother while still a boy: "If I were a priest ... I would look for boys and gather them around me. I would want them to know that I care for them and want their friendship. I would speak kindly to them, give them good advice and dedicate myself entirely to their spiritual welfare".³

This "predilection" had already enlarged his heart and made him "everything for the young", as Don Bosco well expressed it in the Foreword he wrote for the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales.⁴

¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to the youth of the world*, 1985, cf. n. 3, 16.

² Cf. BM I, 95.

³ BM I, 170.

⁴ Cf. "Costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales" 1858-1875, ed. F. MOTTO,

The salesian receives from God the gift of predilection for youth

A youngster needs someone "to whom he can turn with confidence: someone to whom he can entrust his essential questions: someone from whom he can expect a true response".⁵

Jesus Christ, the perfect model, shows us how to be available, open, kind and accessible.

He is the root and source of the pastoral charity which for the salesian is expressed in the love of "predilection" for the young. In Don Bosco this love "can only be explained through his love of Jesus Christ ... it was God's gift. It is the first charism of the salesian, his vocation par excellence".⁶

Speaking about the same topic, Don Albera asserted: "It is not enough to feel for them a certain natural attraction, a love is needed that is more than normal. Such predilection is, in its beginnings, a gift of God" ... "*This predilection is the salesian vocation itself*".⁷

The Rector Major, Fr E. Viganò adds: "The Salesian Family came into being because Don Bosco loved the young. His was a love of predilection that permeated his every inclination and talent; but basically it was a special gift from God, a 'salvation strategy' for modern times".⁸

After fixing our gaze on Jesus, we can understand Don Bosco, in whom pastoral predilection towards boys and young people seemed like a kind of passion. He felt that he had to be a sign of love: "The Lord sent me to look after boys";⁹ "my life is dedicated to the good of the young";¹⁰ "I have no other goal than your physical, mental and moral welfare; I am here only for your benefit";¹¹ "you are the objec-

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Priests*, Holy Thursday 1985, 4

⁶ Cf. E. VIGANO, *The salesian educational project*, ASC 290, 1978, pp. 18-19

⁷ P. ALBERA, Letter of 18.10.1920, *Circular letters*, p. 372

⁸ ASC 290, 1978, p. 16

⁹ BM VII, 171

¹⁰ MO, p. 163 (Don Bosco to the Marchesa Barolo)

¹¹ BM VII, 302

tives of my thoughts and concerns";¹² "I feel at home with you; this is really where I belong";¹³ "My dear boys, you are very dear to me. It is enough for me to know that you are young to become interested in your welfare... it would be difficult to find anyone who has a greater love for you in Jesus Christ, or a greater desire for your true happiness";¹⁴ "you are the masters of my heart";¹⁵ "I hope you will not be offended if I tell you that you are all thieves; I say it again, you have all stolen me; your letter signed by 200 of my dear friends has stolen my whole heart, of which nothing remains to me except a lively desire to love you in the Lord, to do good to you, to save the souls of all of you";¹⁶ "my dear sons in Jesus Christ, whether I am at home or away I am always thinking of you. I have only one wish, to see you happy both in this world and in the next";¹⁷ "these words come from someone who loves you very dearly in Christ Jesus".¹⁸

These and many other similar expressions reveal the love which moved Don Bosco in giving himself to the young, a love which found its source in the imitation of that gesture of the Lord: "And Jesus, looking upon him, loved him" (Mk 10,21).

It could be said that the whole salesian movement is centred in an "oratorian heart", or in other words a priest of the local Church of Turin possessed of an overwhelming apostolic passion for poor and abandoned youngsters. "We must find the unifying force of our Family in that kind of priestly love characterized in Don Bosco by an overwhelming apostolic passion to help the young...".¹⁹

This love of predilection, an "expression of pastoral charity", of which the Constitutions speak, is not something superficial but a reality which characterizes all the salesian is and does; it endorses it with a

¹² *Collected letters* II, p. 361

¹³ BM IV, 455

¹⁴ D. BOSCO, "Companion of Youth", Introduction (OE II, 187)

¹⁵ *Collected letters* II, p. 361

¹⁶ *Collected letters* III, p. 5

¹⁷ *Letter from Rome*, 10 May 1884; cf. Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 254

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The Salesian Family* ASC 304, 1982, pp. 13. 23

seal which is like a "new character", rendering him a friend "accessible" to the young.

John Paul II, writing to priests, speaks of such a quality as follows: "Accessibility to young people means not only ease of contact with them, both inside and outside church, wherever young people feel drawn in harmony with the healthy characteristics of their age (I am thinking for example of tourism, sport and in general the sphere of cultural interests). The accessibility of which Christ gives us an example consists in something more. The priest, not only through his training for the ministry but also through the skill he has gained in the educational sciences, ought to evoke in young people trust as the confidant of their problems of a fundamental nature, questions regarding their spiritual life and questions of conscience".²⁰

This is true for every salesian.

We must intensify this love of predilection for the young, which does not mean that others are excluded, because charity has no frontiers: "This love flows from a particular concern for what being young means in human life... The future of a person depends to a great extent upon the nature of that person's youth".²¹

The salesian offers his time, talents and health for the benefit of the young

The second paragraph of the article tells us how this predilection for youth is manifested in practice. The salesian, deeply moved by a passion for the welfare of youth, generously gives for them his time, talents and health, and maintains a permanent attitude of sympathy in their regard, a constant presence (assistance) and a continual interest in getting to know them and win their affection.

²⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to priests*, op. cit. 4

²¹ *Ibid.* 6

Here too the example comes from Don Bosco, according to those words which the Constitutions put before us in the very first article: "I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys".²²

Don Bosco had formulated this promise very much earlier, but he endorsed it at the time of his wonderful cure from a serious illness: "I am convinced that God granted me an extension of life in answer to your prayers. Therefore gratitude demands that I spend it all for your temporal and spiritual welfare. This I promise to do as long as the Lord will permit me to remain in this world".²³

He used often to repeat: "Remember that, whatever my worth, I am here every moment of the day and night for you".²⁴

In his last years he spoke of "this poor old man who has spent his whole life for his dear boys".²⁵

Starting from this fatherly example, the article of the Rule speaks of interior and exterior attitudes which the salesian must develop.

"The Lord sent me to look after boys. I must therefore cut down on other work and keep myself fit for them ... Our primary goal is the care of youth, and consequently every concern which draws us away from that objective cannot be good".²⁶ As Fr Luigi Ricceri wrote: Don Bosco fulfilled his vocation for the young by "bypassing every obstacle and leaving behind all things, even good ones, that could in any way hinder its accomplishment".²⁷ And Fr Viganò adds: "Our presence among the young is in obedience to God. ... It is amongst youth in need that our mission feels truly at home".²⁸

Finally this love of predilection leads to a permanent and deep interest in getting to know individual youngsters, and also in being

²² MB XVIII, 258

²³ BM II, 386

²⁴ BM VII, 302

²⁵ *Letter from Rome*, 10 May 1884; Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 254

²⁶ BM XIV, 216

²⁷ Cf. ASC 284 (1976) p. 33

²⁸ Cf. ASC 295 (1980) p. 25

aware of the cultural phenomenon called nowadays the "youth condition". "We must lend a willing ear to the voice of the world of the young and keep it in mind in the educative and pastoral dialogue of evangelization".²⁹

*We thank you, Father,
for having filled the heart of Don Bosco
with predilection for the young:
"That you are young", he said to them,
"is enough to make me love you very much".*

*Enrich the heart of every salesian
with the same gift of loving kindness,
and help us to discover in all young people
the presence of Jesus,
so that we may be ready to offer for them
our time, talents and health,
and even the total donation of our whole life,
in imitation of our Founder, who said:
"For you I am ready even to give my life".*

²⁹ Cf. ASC 290 (1978) p. 24

ART. 15 SALESIAN LOVING KINDNESS

Sent to young people by the God who is 'all charity',¹ the salesian is open and cordial, ready to make the first approach and to welcome others with unfailing kindness, respect and patience.

His love is that of a father, brother and friend, able to draw out friendship in return; this is the loving-kindness so much recommended by Don Bosco.

His chastity and well-balanced attitude open his heart to spiritual fatherhood and give transparent witness to God's anticipating love.

¹ DON BOSCO, *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio*, Turin 1847, p. 81; (OE II, 151)

Art. 15 is closely linked with those immediately preceding ("Predilection for the young") and following it ("Family spirit"), and is an explanation of how we are to be "signs and bearers of the love of God for young people" (C 2). It presents "*salesian loving-kindness*", which is born of "spiritual fatherhood" and of the characteristic message of purity and chastity, and is aimed at the formation of young people for love.

Introducing this topic, the Acts of SGC say: "(The salesian) asks the Holy Spirit for the gift of "sympathy", modelled on the meekness of Christ".¹

The article emphasizes that the initiative of sending the salesian to the young comes from God, who is "all charity".

The underlying reason is that if a youngster does not experience love at that stage of his life, if he does not live in an environment in

¹ SGC, 100

which love is present, his growth becomes compromised.² The transforming power of love passes through the loving kindness of the educators, and the Salesians manifest it with the purity recommended by Don Bosco, i.e. with a love that is transparent, deep, strong and well balanced.

To be signs of the love of God for the young requires in us this transparency (asceticism) and the mystical presence of God within us.

The salesian is welcoming

After emphasizing the divine source of all kindness, the text begins by presenting some basic attitudes of the salesian who is "sent to the young".

The salesian is "open ... and ready to welcome others": he is not closed in on himself but able to relate to others; since it would be difficult for an apostle to live at the same time a hermit's life, he adopts attitudes which favour contacts: openness and cordiality, respect and patience, a willingness to make the first approach and show welcome; in other words he is able to create sympathy and friendship.

Don Bosco recommended to his sons: "Try to make yourselves loved".³ "Try to act in such a way that all those to whom you speak will become your friends", he said to Don Bonetti.⁴ And writing to Don Cagliero, he declared: "The salesian spirit we want to introduce in the houses of America is ... charity, patience, gentleness, with no humiliating reprimands, no punishments, doing good to all and evil

² On the need for an experience of love for growth in faith, cf. the testimony of Agostino, a boy who after many negative experiences came into contact with the Salesians at Arese (Milan), and subsequently died at the age of only 16. He wrote the following, in the form of a prayer: "They say that love is a proof of your existence; may be that is why I have never met you: I have never been loved so that I could feel your presence. Lord, let me find a love that will bring me to you, a love that is sincere, disinterested, faithful and generous, a love that would be a bit like your image". (From *Il Vangelo secondo Barabba*, Arese 1974. p. 79)

³ BM X, 453

⁴ *Collected letters* II, 434

to no one. This holds for the salesians among themselves, with the pupils, and with others, whether living with us or externs".⁵

"Open and cordial", the salesian is "ready to make the first approach" towards the shy and the timid, towards those whom an exaggerated sense of respect keeps silent and at a distance; he is ready to bridge the gap, to approach in a sympathetic manner, to "come down from the pulpit", to make himself little with the little ones. Don Bosco always recommended this kind of attitude. And when it is the other person who makes the approach, he must be welcomed without fail, the door and heart must be opened to him, he must be listened to and his interests shared: "Let the superior be everything to everyone, always ready to listen to every doubt or complaint of the youngsters ... all heart to seek the temporal and spiritual good of those whom Providence confides to him".⁶

And all this is to be done especially by the adoption of three basic attitudes or qualities: "kindness", which seeks the good of the other person; "respect", which avoids cornering or exploiting him and recognizes his unique personal dignity behind his defects; and "patience", which is nothing else than the expression of constant and persevering love: "Love is patient and kind", says St Paul.⁷

This complexus of exterior qualities which ensure a good salesian reception and characterize the relationship of the salesian with everyone and especially with the young, corresponds to what Don Bosco called "familiarita", which might be best rendered in English by "informality". This has not yet reached "amorevolezza" (loving kindness), which indicates rather an interior attitude, a movement of the heart. But it is evident that the two realities are closely linked and correspond. Don Bosco himself wrote: "You cannot have affection without this familiarity (a friendly informal relationship)".⁸

⁵ Cf. Letter of Don Bosco to Don Cagliero, 6.8.1885, *Collected letters* IV, 328

⁶ MB XVII, 112

⁷ Cf. 1 Cor 13,4; cf. also D. BOSCO, *The preventive system in the education of the young*, chap. 2, in Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 248

⁸ *Letter from Rome*, cf. MB XVII, 107: Appendix to Constitutions, pp. 254-264

The salesian shows loving kindness as a father, brother and friend

The loving kindness of the salesian is made specific in this paragraph which draws its inspiration from the Letter from Rome of 10 May 1884. "*Amorevolezza*" is a word characteristic of Don Bosco's terminology, with which he expresses the affection full of fatherly and brotherly kindness that he nourishes towards youth. The text indicates three nuances of this kindness.

— *True and personal "affection"*, given substance by human warmth and supernatural delicacy. Like Don Bosco, every salesian is a "man of heart". It is enough to read the above mentioned Letter from Rome: "My dear sons in Jesus Christ ... not being able to see or hear you upsets me more than you can imagine ... These words come from someone who loves you very dearly in Christ Jesus...".⁹ The terminology used by the Saint is striking: affection, cordiality, familiarity, charity, heart, love etc. And towards the end of the letter his secretary notes: "At this point Don Bosco broke off the dictation; his eyes filled with tears ... because of the ineffable tenderness that was evident from his face and voice".¹⁰

A great salesian, Don Berruti, has written: "Heartfelt love is a characteristic of salesian charity. Don Bosco was not satisfied with the austere kind of charity, born of the will and of grace, which forms part and parcel of the educational systems of other Orders".¹¹ His is a charity of the style of St Francis de Sales or, better, after the heart of Christ who wept over his friend Lazarus and over the grief of his sisters Martha and Mary.

— *The affection of "fathers, brothers and friends"*: the expression comes literally from the Letter of May 1884.

Salesian affection resembles that which binds the members of a family together or a group of friends. It means that the "superior", the

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ On the splendour of salesian charity in Don Berruti, v. *Don Pietro Berruti, luminosa figura di salesiano*, Testimonianze raccolte da P. ZERBINO, SEI 1964, chap. XXVI, p. 564 ff.

"master" or even the "priest", preacher or celebrant, does not close himself off within his own particular function, and this without loss to his authority; the latter does not give rise to fear because it is exercised within a deeper relationship which unites one person to another, father to son, brother to brother, friend to friend.

— *"Able to draw out friendship in return".*

Once again this is the explicit doctrine of Don Bosco. The salesian speaks the "language of the heart", a language which includes both words and actions: he shows that he loves, and seeks explicitly to gain the love of others, to "win over and conquer" their hearts, so as to create a communion within which to establish a dialogue of the heart. "An educator should seek to win the love of his pupils if he wishes to inspire fear in them", says the little treatise on the Preventive system apropos of punishments.¹² And again in the Letter from Rome: "The youngsters should not only be loved, but they themselves should know that they are loved ... One who knows he is loved loves in return, and one who loves can obtain anything, especially from the young".¹³ This John Bosco had learned already in his dream at the age of nine: "You will have to win over these friends of yours not with blows, but with gentleness and kindness".¹⁴

And evidently this must also be the attitude of the salesian towards his own confreres.

Through his gift of chastity and well balanced attitude, the salesian is a sign of God's anticipating love

It needed all the daring of a Saint to let loose an army of educators with a method like this for education and the attainment of sanctity.

¹² *The preventive system in the education of the young*, in Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, pp. 246-253

¹³ Cf. *Letter from Rome*, 10 May 1884; Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, p. 259

¹⁴ BM I, 95

The objections of opponents are well known: does not that kind of love "from the heart" expose both educator and pupil to danger? No, replies the Rule, because Don Bosco knew that he could count on the salesian being chaste in his affections.

The Constitutions place in their proper place Don Bosco's insistent words about chastity: he puts it in immediate relationship with this loving kindness. If Don Bosco demands of the salesian a clear and strong purity, consciously assumed and lived, it is precisely because he also demands of him a deep and true affection: purity preserves the authenticity of love. The characteristic therefore of the salesian spirit is not a chastity which is simply austere, but the chastity which is a guarantee of true affection and rules out any deviation.

Don Bosco, as we have seen, exhorts us to love "in such a way that the youngsters know they are loved", but at the same time he demands from his sons a great detachment from themselves in showing affection, the rejection of any sentimental sensitivity, the avoidance of any word or gesture which could be badly interpreted or prove disturbing, of any intimacy which would narrow the heart and prevent it from being open to all.

In this way chastity makes possible the valid expressions and positive fruits of love. As we shall see when speaking of consecrated chastity, it is an evangelical way of loving: the salesian gives up physical fatherhood, but does so to make himself more capable of spiritual fatherhood: chastity disposes the heart for this great task.

The salesian therefore has a heart which is spontaneous but delicate, a heart which is tender but not weak or effeminate, a real sensitivity but one which does not weaken his self-control. "Balance" of this kind is a gift made possible by God's grace, through the Spirit of charity. Thanks to this presence the loving kindness of the salesian has the joyful unembarrassed quality which belongs to the sons of God and reveals the Father's love.

*God our Father, source of all love,
through your Spirit you bring to birth in us*

the living force of true friendship.

*Make us open and cordial in welcoming our fellow men
and especially the young.*

*Make us generous and impartial
in our love for each and all,
with a sincere and chaste affection,
so that it may prove to be for those we meet
a reflection and foretaste
of your own anticipating fatherly love.*

Through Christ our Lord.

The family atmosphere makes us feel accepted and that we share
responsibility together

The model for the salesian "family spirit" is in the first place the
life of the Oratory at Valdocco, where Don Bosco lived as a father among
every religious community finds as its source God himself who
calls the members to live together united by the bond of charity (cf.
C 20). It is called to be in the Church, a true family gathered together
in the Lord's name and rejoicing in his presence; we shall see later
how the religious vows help in this project of communion (cf. C 41).
Charity, among us more available to love each other as brothers in the
spirit, poverty makes it easy to give and receive, and obedience prompts
us to seek together the will of God.

The Rule tells us that we Salesians, if we are faithful to the spirit
of Don Bosco, establish within our communities (which in familiar terms
we call "houses") that unmistakable style of relationships which, in
our living tradition, we are accustomed to call "family spirit." From
the description given in art. 16 of the "salesian house" we can glean
the extent to which the spirit of Don Bosco penetrates our communities
at different levels: local, provincial, world, and the entire Salesian Family,
where the very term "family" signifies the spirit which unites the
members.

² BM III, 250

³ BM IV, 474

⁴ BM IV, 338-339

ART. 16 FAMILY SPIRIT

Don Bosco wanted everyone to feel at home in his establishments. The salesian house becomes a family when affection is mutual and when all, both confreres and young people, feel welcome and responsible for the common good.

In an atmosphere of mutual trust and daily forgiveness, the need and joy of sharing everything is experienced, and relationships are governed not so much by recourse to rules as by faith and the promptings of the heart.¹

This is a witness that enkindles in the young the desire to get to know and to follow the salesian vocation.

¹ cf. MB XVII, 110

Every religious community finds at its source God himself who calls the members to live together united by the bond of charity (cf. C 50). It is called to be in the Church "a true family gathered together in the Lord's name and rejoicing in his presence";¹ we shall see later how the religious vows help in this project of communion (cf. C 61): chastity renders us more available to love each other as brothers in the Spirit, poverty makes it easy to give and receive, and obedience prompts us to seek together the will of God.

The Rule tells us that we Salesians, if we are faithful to the spirit of Don Bosco, establish within our communities (which in familiar terms we call "houses") that unmistakable style of relationships which, in our living tradition, we are accustomed to call "*family spirit*". From the description given in art. 16 of the "salesian house" we can glean the extent to which the spirit of Don Bosco penetrates our communities at different levels: local, provincial, world, and the entire Salesian Family, where the very term 'Family' signifies the spirit which unites the members.

¹ PC 15

But it is not a question of a style which exists only within the 'house': the Salesians, wherever they are, in the educative and pastoral communities or in contact with other groups, in all their relationships in fact, tend spontaneously to establish a kind of "family", to give life to a "family spirit", which makes each one feel at home and at ease, which means that he also feels responsible for the common good.

In this way the article follows naturally on the two previous ones and completes the description of the style of salesian relationships, inspired by charity.

The family atmosphere makes us feel accepted and that we share responsibility together

The model for the salesian "family spirit" is in the first place the life of the Oratory at Valdocco, where Don Bosco lived as a father among his boys and collaborators. The description given by the author of the Biographical Memoirs is interesting: "In those days the Oratory was truly a family".² "Don Bosco ran the Oratory as a large family, and the boys really felt as if they had never left their homes".³ "Peaceful joy, unmarred by worry, ruled the Oratory, and family spirit brightened its life. The boys were given all the freedom compatible with discipline and good conduct."⁴ It was on this family style that Don Bosco set up all his houses, and even the religious community as well.

Here too the principle extends to every kind of community in which salesians are involved, because it is a feature of the spirit which they practise always and everywhere. The source of the principle is always the Letter from Rome, in which Don Bosco's commitment is the cry of anguish which is very significant.

In the old days of the Oratory

² BM III, 250

³ BM IV, 474

⁴ BM IV, 338-339; 10 May 1884; cf. Appendix

We shall find the theme returning at various points of the constitutional text.⁵ The purpose of the present article is to emphasize some of its characteristic aspects.

The first paragraph speaks of "mutual affection", of "feeling welcome", of "responsibility for the common good", i.e. of a deeply felt intercommunication which is at the foundation of an authentic "family spirit".

"The need and joy of sharing everything is experienced", as in a true family. Whatever goods a member possesses are made available to the others; each one enriches the others and is enriched by them in return. This giving and receiving brings about a growth in joy and unites the members by solid and unbreakable bonds. But the most important exchange is not of material goods, but rather of life itself and of good things more deeply personal, like thoughts and feelings, plans and interests, joys and sorrows, etc.: this is the "opening of the heart" that Don Bosco used to speak of.

This is true for the educative community, but the article applies it also to the religious community; it is not sufficient that the relations between members of the same house be correct, bureaucratic and formal: they must also be "personal". The Constitutions will tell us that the family spirit inspires every moment of the community's life, and that "in an atmosphere of brotherly friendship we share our joys and sorrows and are partners in our apostolic plans and experiences" (cf. C 51-52).

The same is true also of relationships involving authority and obedience, of which the Rule speaks later. "In salesian tradition (these) are practised in a family spirit of love which inspires relationships of mutual esteem and trust" (C 65); to a discreet and respectful exercise of authority will correspond a practice of "filial" obedience that is spon-

⁵ The family spirit invades every aspect of salesian life and mission:

- in the educative community: cf. C 37. 38. 47
- in the religious community: cf. C 49. 51. 53. 56
- is fostered by the evangelical counsels: cf. C 61
- in authority and in obedience: cf. C 65
- as regards chastity: cf. C 83
- in the formation community: cf. C 103

aneous and generous. Those who have a keen "family sense" do not need orders to do those things which will be advantageous to the community. For us who "live and work together" (C 49), for us who believe that our apostolic mandate "is taken up and put into effect in the first place by the provincial and local communities, whose members have complementary functions" (C 44), the family spirit is the great secret for strengthening our cohesion and responsibility.

The family atmosphere is governed not so much by recourse to rules as by faith and the promptings of the heart

The text qualifies this atmosphere, saying that it is based on "mutual trust" and "daily forgiveness". The Letter from Rome is a sufficient endorsement of this. The first Oratory at Valdocco is described as follows: "The greatest cordiality and confidence reigned between youngsters and superiors ... closeness led to affection and affection brought confidence. It is this that opens hearts and the youngsters express everything without fear to their superiors". And then, when things had changed at the Oratory: "The reason for the present change is that many of the boys no longer have confidence in their superiors ..., who are now thought of precisely as superiors and no longer as fathers, brothers and friends... If you want everyone to be of one heart and soul again, for the love of Jesus you must break down this fatal barrier of mistrust and replace it with a happy spirit of confidence".⁶

Brotherly relationships and mutual trust, says the article, make recourse to laws, regulations, norms and authority less necessary; instead appeal is made to interior qualities of the individual, to faith and the "promptings of the heart".

Here too the principle extends to every kind of community in which salesians are involved, because it is a feature of the spirit which they practise always and everywhere. The source of the principle is always the Letter from Rome, in which Don Bosco comes out with a kind of cry of anguish which is very significant: "In the old days at the Oratory

⁶ *Letter from Rome*, 10 May 1884; cf. Appendix to 1984 Constitutions, pp. 254-264.

... boys would do anything they were asked by one who they knew loved them. We had no secrets from you", Valfré told Don Bosco. "Why do people want to replace love with cold rules?"⁷ In salesian houses things are not done "because you have to", but rather because the underlying reason is understood, because love and willingness are present, and all this in the light of faith.⁸

One of the surest signs of the salesian spirit is the untroubled air of freedom and creative joy, which is common among the sons of Don Bosco. There is no constraint or fear, each one can say what he thinks, each one can make his own generous personal contribution and make suggestions... Don Bosco himself used to say: "God does not like things done by force. As a loving God, he wants things done for love's sake".⁹ Again we become aware that the salesian spirit leads us to the very depths of the Gospel. Later we shall see some further applications of the salesian spirit to the life of the community and the practice of obedience.

The family atmosphere gives rise to vocations

One of the finest fruits of the family spirit is vocations. The history of the Congregation amply demonstrates the truth of this in the case of both Don Bosco and the first salesians. Inserted as they were in the heart of a salesian community made warm by family affection, many boys learned to model their own lives on those of their educators; they became progressively aware of the germ of a salesian vocation that God had placed in their heart, and the family atmosphere led them little by little to identify with the ideals and the style of life of their teachers; slowly their sense of belonging to the Congregation matured together with the desire to take part in its pastoral activity.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ V. Don Caviglia's description of the fatherly authority of Don Bosco: A. CAVIGLIA, *Don Bosco*, pp. 168-169

⁹ BM VI, 637

This is the dynamic growth process which is characteristic of the salesian way of life; the atmosphere is one in which vocations naturally appear and grow; they then mature in the family spirit and a gradual insertion into apostolic work follows almost automatically.

A precise task of our communities is to involve our youngsters in our family life, to enable them to experience for themselves how wonderful is the salesian mission and be attracted to follow the Lord Jesus and work for his Kingdom: "Come and see" (cf. Jn 1,39).

But it should be kept in mind that this will be possible only if the family spirit shines forth in our communities, and especially in formation communities; it is possible only if all the members "form a family founded on faith and enthusiasm for Christ, united in mutual esteem and common endeavour" (C 103).

*Grant, O Lord, to our communities
a true family spirit
in mutual trust and reciprocal forgiveness,
and in the joyful sharing of all we have
in obedience to the supreme law of love.*

*Grant also that many young people
may find themselves at ease with us,
and so be encouraged to get to know and to follow
the same vocation.*

ART. 17 OPTIMISM AND JOY

The salesian does not give way to discouragement in face of difficulties, because he has complete trust in the Father. "Let nothing upset you", Don Bosco used to say.¹

Inspired by the optimistic humanism of St Francis de Sales, he believes in man's natural and supernatural resources without losing sight of his weakness.

He is able to make his own what is good in the world and does not bewail his own times; he accepts all that is good,² especially if it appeals to the young.

Because he is a herald of the Good News he is always cheerful.³ He radiates this joy and is able to educate to a christian and festive way of life: "Let us serve the Lord in holy joy".⁴

¹ MB VII, 524; BM VII, 317

² cf. 1 Thess 5,21

³ cf. Phil 3,1

⁴ D. BOSCO, *Il giovane Provveduto*, Turin 1847, p. 6: (OE II, 186)

The article expresses the components of a typical christian and salesian humanism. The new style of pastoral relationships presented in the preceding articles (C 14-16), is completed by a reference to salesian joy and optimism, which draws its inspiration from the principles of "complete trust in the Father", and trust also in "man's natural and supernatural resources". This double trust opens the salesian to other elements too, so that he "makes his own what is good in the world", "does not bewail his own times", and "accepts all that is good, especially if it appeals to the young".

In this way loving kindness and the family spirit are lived in an atmosphere of undisturbed satisfaction. Optimism, joy and happiness are necessary realities in the world of youth, and must therefore be concretely experienced in salesian environments. The text speaks of "joy" and "cheerfulness". One does not exclude the other: there is no authentic cheerfulness that is not born of a deep joy, from a heart at peace with God and men; nevertheless joy is not always expressed in gaiety and cheerfulness, but among us the latter forms part of our youthful spirit.

Don Bosco knew that a boy's life rotated around freedom, games and happiness; he knew that any normal and efficacious educational efforts must respect the boy's natural state, which excludes oppression, force or violence; for this reason he wanted joy and cheerfulness to pervade the oratory environment in which the boy lived. That is why in his educational system the relationships between the youngsters and their educators, and between the educators themselves, are marked by a friendship and family spirit which helps the boy to grow in joy.¹

It should be remembered that the whole article is inspired by the text of St Paul which the liturgy uses for the feast of St John Bosco, part of which is placed at the head of the present chapter: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. The Lord is at hand... Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil 4,4-9).

The salesian has trust and courage

The first paragraph of the article emphasizes the salesian's attitude of courageous trust during the trials that accompany his apostolic work, as also at times when he must remain inactive through sickness or old age.

It is an attitude inculcated by Don Bosco by word and example. His biographers describe him as remaining always calm, even in moments of difficulty; the advice he gave Don Rua who had been appointed the first Rector at Mirabello is well known: "Let nothing upset you!"; this and other valuable pieces of advice were later inserted in the "Confidential reminders for Rectors"², but it forms part of the spirit which animates every salesian.

¹ Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, Turin 1955, p. 214 ff.

² Cf. BM X, 447

The source of the trust and the apostolic courage of the salesian is to be found on high. If he is able to preserve his deep inner peace and not give way to discouragement in the face of trials, it is because he believes in God's fatherhood; God's work cannot fail, and the trial is a "providential" path to a better result. Here there is in fact a certain appeal to the salesian's supernatural spirit: he has the right to count on God in the measure that he remains God's servant, seeking nothing else but his glory and his Kingdom.

The salesian is optimistic and believes in the capabilities of every youngster

This optimism is born of hope, of a deep sense of the Father's Providence and of the certainty that Christ is risen; but it is also supported by man's trust. The Constitutions recall that in our case it is "inspired by the optimistic humanism of St Francis de Sales", founded on a double conviction: the goodness of God ("I am not a God who condemns; my name is Jesus the Saviour") and the possibilities given to man ("Our human heart can give rise naturally to the beginnings of the love of God").³ God is so good that he has put into man's heart "natural and supernatural resources" in which the educator or man of action can always find reasons for hope. "The practice of the preventive system", wrote Don Bosco, "is wholly based on the words of St Paul: 'Love is patient and kind; love bears all things ... but hopes all things and endures all things'"⁴ In the Biographical Memoirs we find these words of our Father: "Just as there is no barren or sterile land which cannot be made fertile through patient effort, so it is with a man's heart. No matter how barren and restive at first, it will sooner or later bring forth good fruit. It will begin by loving what is naturally good and ultimately advance to what is supernaturally good, provided that a zealous spiritual director will cooperate with God's grace by prayer

³ Cf. St FRANCIS DE SALES, *Treatise on the love of God*, book I, chap. 7.

⁴ Cf. D. BOSCO, *Treatise on preventive system*, App. Const. 1984, p. 248.

and effort. Even the most callous boys have a soft spot. The first duty of the educator is to locate that sensitive spot, that responsive chord in the boy's heart, and take advantage of it".⁵

The whole preventive system consists in the progressive development of these "living sources which every man carries deep within himself"; and because salesians do not lose sight of the frailty of youth, they lend their brotherly presence "so that their weakness may not be overcome by evil" (C 39), and help them to gradually overcome this fragility. The whole skill of the educator rests in the ability to find a resonant chord in the depths of a heart and get it to vibrate. Don Bosco was convinced that the grace of God and human effort can make of every adolescent a genuine saint.

Optimism is always therefore a salesian characteristic at every age and situation of life.

The salesian makes his own what is good in the world, especially if it appeals to the young

The salesian spirit makes us reject any unilateral judgement on the world. It is true that there is a world which "is in the power of the evil one", as St John says (1 Jn 5,19); but the reference is to worldly elements opposed to God's designs. The world, in the sense understood by the conciliar Constitution "Gaudium et Spes", is the object of the Father's love, even though it be a complex reality in which sin and redemption are mixed.⁶ The salesian is not blind to sin and evil, but insists spontaneously on the redemption aspect. He is conscious of being "deeply united with the world and its history" (C 7); he resists the natural tendency of many adults to praise the past and bewail the present, because he is able to seek, discern and accept "what is good" in today's world, and fight strenuously against evil, but without bitterness.

⁵ *Opere e scritti di Don Bosco*, ed. A. CAVIGLIA, V, 173

⁶ BM V, 222

⁷ BM X, 294

⁸ BM V, 236-7

⁹ Cf. GS 2

Like Jesus who came "not to judge but to save" (Jn 12,47), Don Bosco did not take up rigid and provocative attitudes in dealing with his adversaries: he always hoped to change them by prudence and patience.

Among the good things of the earth, the salesian makes his own especially those which "appeal to the young"; and also things of which the young are themselves bearers and promoters. Anyone, on the other hand, who rejects the present and is closed to the future, shows by that very fact that he is not suitable as an educator of youth.

The salesian is cheerful, radiates joy, and lives in festive fashion

The final paragraph concentrates our reflection on the joy and cheerfulness which is part of the salesian spirit.

The deep root of this joy is the Gospel of Christ, the Lord's "Good News" which the salesian proclaims: "... that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be full" (Jn 15,11); "your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (Jn 16,22).

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and arises from the conviction that God loves us.⁷

From this deep and solid root is born a serene and enthusiastic christianity tinged with the kind of cheerfulness that was seen in Dominic Savio: "Here we make holiness consist in being very cheerful" (a new kind of definition in the history of sanctity, but deeply evangelical nonetheless); the kind that Don Bosco gave to his boys as a programme of life in the slogan: "Cheerfulness, study and piety". Don Caviglia goes so far as to speak of cheerfulness as the salesian's eleventh commandment! On the other hand, everyone knows the famous saying attributed to St Francis de Sales: "If a saint were sad, he would be a sad saint!"

⁷ Cf. St FRANCIS DE SALES, *Treatise on the Love of God*, book 1, chap. 7, n. 235. V MI
7 On christian joy, v. Paul VI, Encyclical "*Gaudete in Domino*"

It is not a question of an alienating frame of mind leading to a life where ignorance is bliss, but a true sanctification of the joy of living. The salesian environment must be such that those in it can detect and experience a joyful atmosphere that opens hearts to optimism and trust in life, that leads to the quiet acceptance of the hard things we meet and even enlightens with holy joy the difficult moment of death.

The Rule emphasizes that not only is the salesian cheerful himself, but he is a *communicator of festive joy*: "We're a festive people, we're a joyful lot", in the words of a modern song composed by some young salesians in Italy.

Joy is self-propagating, it is contagious, it needs to expand, to explode in festive happiness; it must have space therefore, something like a playground (which Don Caviglia defined as "Don Bosco amidst the young";⁸) it must have music and singing, because "an oratory without music is like a body without a soul";⁹ it needs a theatre and outings; it needs periodic celebrations which the youngsters can see and in which they can take part, to serve as highlights in the daily rhythm of their lives.

The salesian knows that genuine and authentic cheerfulness is not possible for anyone whose heart is not at peace, and at the same time it becomes an efficacious call to those who are not in that state. "The devil fears cheerful people", Don Bosco used to say.¹⁰ The salesian educator is well aware that this is the way to make youngsters experience the liberating efficacy of the grace of Christ. But he knows too that there is a price to be paid: in the dream or vision of the pergola of roses¹¹ anyone seeing the salesian joyful, enthusiastic and optimistic might get the impression that he was walking on a carpet of roses; but the piercing pain caused by the thorns show that the salesian spirit may find in this attitude of cheerfulness a very real opportunity for asceticism: it is a happiness fed by sacrifice, sometimes of a severe kind, but accepted with a smile, with simplicity and without fuss, as

⁸ *Opere e scritti di Don Bosco*, ed. A. CAVIGLIA, V, 173

⁹ BM V, 222

¹⁰ BM X, 294

¹¹ Cf. MB III, 25-27. The dream was repeated three times in Don Bosco's life: in 1847, 1848 and 1856

something quite normal without playing the martyr or the hero. In the unavoidable trials of life the salesian repeats with Don Bosco: "A piece of paradise will make up for everything".¹²

The reflection concludes with Don Bosco's exhortation to his boys, which enshrines a programme for holiness: "*Let us serve the Lord in holy joy!*"¹³

*That following the example of St Francis de Sales
and the teaching of Don Bosco,
we may always believe
in the natural and supernatural resources of man,
and while not ignoring his weakness,
be able to discover the germs of goodness
which you place in the heart of every youngster,*

— Lord, hear our prayer.

*That in spite of the thorns strewn on our path,
we may never lose sight of the goal which awaits us,
but remain optimistic,
full of trust in our Father,*

— Lord, hear our prayer.

*That we may be able to discern the values of creation
and be able to accept what is good,
especially if it appeals to the young,*

— Lord, hear our prayer.

*That as we proclaim the Good News of Jesus,
we may be bearers of joy,
and be able to educate young people
to a holiness based on christian happiness,*

— Lord, hear our prayer.

¹² BM VIII, 200

¹³ D. BOSCO, *Companion of Youth*, Turin 1847, OE II, p. 186

ART. 18 WORK AND TEMPERANCE

"Work and temperance will make the Congregation flourish",¹ whereas the seeking of an easy and comfortable life will instead bring about its death.²

The salesian gives himself to his mission with tireless energy, taking care to do everything with simplicity and moderation. He knows that by his work he is participating in the creative action of God and cooperating with Christ in building the Kingdom.

Temperance gives him the strength to control his heart, to master himself and remain even-tempered.

He does not look for unusual penances but accepts the daily demands and renunciations of the apostolic life. He is ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain whenever God's glory and the salvation of souls require it.³

¹ MB XII, 466; BM XII, 338

² cf. MB XVII, 272

³ cf. C 1875, XIII, 13

In this article and the one which follows we turn our attention to some characteristics given by pastoral charity to our salesian apostolic activity. According to the Constitutions the salesian apostle is distinguished by his tireless industry which remains at the same time well balanced (the inseparable "work and temperance"), by daily self-sacrifice, by creativity and flexibility in the face of urgent requirements, and by a spirit of initiative in response to needs arising in the course of time.

The precious chapter of Don Ceria in the Annals of the Congregation cited earlier¹, presents three elements which give to the religious spirit the unmistakable mark of the "salesian spirit": they are "piety",

¹ BM XII, 338

² *ibid.*

³ Cf. E. VIGANO, *Un progetto evangelico di vita*, LDC 1987, p. 934

⁴ Cf. E. CERIA, *Annali della Società salesiana*, I, p. 722 ff.

which means the ability to transform work into prayer, with the support of the sacraments; our "family life"; but above all a "prodigious activity" both individually and collectively.

The article we are now examining presents, as its title implies, the double concept of "*work and temperance*", which is the "*badge and password of the salesian*".²

"Work and temperance", two inseparable salesian concepts

The text of the Rule first highlights the role that work and temperance have in the Congregation's life and mission. For Don Bosco they were a programme of life (a motto to be put alongside "*da mihi animas, cetera tolle*"), and a guarantee for the future: "Work and temperance will make the Congregation flourish".³

"Salesian life, considered in its activity", says Don Rinaldi, "is work and temperance, enlivened by the charity of the heart".⁴

In our tradition the two elements are inseparably linked. In the dream of the ten diamonds, the diamonds of work and temperance, on the two shoulders, seem to support the mantle of the personage.⁵ In the physiognomy of the salesian and in his apostolic life, work and temperance cannot be separated one from the other; they have complementary functions of incentive and support. The reality of life calls on the one hand for enthusiasm and on the other for renunciation, on this side for commitment and on that for mortification.

It should be noted that from a salesian point of view work and temperance represent a positive reality. Work gets an individual mov-

² BM XII, 338

³ *ibid.*

⁴ ACS 56, 26 April 1931, p. 934

⁵ MB XV, 183

ing, stimulates his creativity, prompts him to a certain self-affirmation and sends him into the world; the qualities of salesian work, for example, are alacrity, spontaneity, generosity, initiative, constant updating and, naturally, union with one's fellows and with God. Temperance, as a virtue which leads to self-control, is a 'hinge' around which various moderating virtues turn: self-restraint, humility, meekness, clemency, modesty, sobriety and abstinence, economy and simplicity, and also austerity; this complexus adds up to an overall attitude of self-control. In this way temperance becomes a preparation for the acceptance of many difficult or unpleasant requirements of daily work... For us salesians, wrote the Rector Major, "temperance is not the sum total of what we have given up, but a growth in the practice of pastoral and pedagogical charity".⁶

It can be said that work and temperance, the "badge and password of the salesian", are for us a testimony to a charity which loves "not in word or speech but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3,18).

The work of the salesian

The Rule says of the salesian that he "gives himself to his mission with tireless energy"; the reference is to an assiduous and particular kind of work, which becomes a means of sanctification.

The emphasis placed on the "professional" quality of the salesian's work should be noted⁷: it is work which is linked to the implementing of the mission, and hence is pedagogical, educational and pastoral in character, and prepared with indispensable qualifications in the human sciences and theological disciplines; a work lived according to the typical salesian style expressed in the words "taking care to do everything with simplicity and moderation", and echoed in Don Bosco's words: "He

⁶ Cf. E. VIGANO, *Un progetto evangelico di vita*, LDC 1982, p. 118 ff.

⁷ Cf. GC22 RRM, 293

does much who, though doing little, does what he must; he does nothing who does much, but not what he should do".⁸

The source of the doctrine here set out is clearly Don Bosco himself, his own example as a formidable worker and his encouragement to commitment to work for souls. Considerable significance attaches to what Don Caviglia once said in an introduction to a discussion on salesian work: "It seems almost a scandal in a saint, but he said 'let us work' much more than 'let us pray'".⁹

Speaking to the Superior Council in the evening of 10 December 1875, Don Bosco said "As for the Congregation, I see that although we keep repeating that we must consolidate what we have, things go better when we work hardest: ... as long as we are intensely active and do plenty of work, everything goes on wonderfully. There is really a very great desire to work among the members of our Congregation".¹⁰

On another occasion in a conference he said: "If you join the Congregation you will want for nothing, but you must work ... No one should enter if he intends to sit around twiddling his thumbs...".¹¹ Our novitiates are no places for idlers. And the motto: "*bread, work and heaven*" is a slogan which does not admit of compromise!

Our Father came back constantly on the same point: "Don't remain idle; if you don't work, the devil will".¹² Pius XI, who had known and admired our Founder, condensed the thought of the Saint into a few words: "Anyone who doesn't know how to work is out of place in the Salesian Society".

Such a declaration is much to the point at the present day. The seventh successor of Don Bosco has written: "We are on the threshold of a new culture prompted by the civilization of work: we are living in a technical and industrial age, in which work occupies a central place.

⁸ BM I, 298

⁹ A. CAVIGLIA, *Conferenze sullo spirito salesiano*, Turin 1985, p. 99

¹⁰ BM XI, 363-4

¹¹ BM XIII, 333

¹² BM XIII, 341

Well then, in our work we want to feel that we are 'prophets' and not just being 'ascetical.'¹³ All work is productive and socializing; it causes cultural growth, but it requires a professional approach; it calls for competence, organization, formation, study and updating.

The Constitutions emphasize the *divine greatness* of work, which makes us "co-workers" with God for the coming of his Kingdom.

The salesian is aware that by his work he is participating in the ongoing creative action of God in the world:¹⁴ creation is seen as a fundamental act in the history of salvation, directed not to the bringing into existence of galaxies, but to rendering the world human, to transforming it in history, to the growth and domination of the earth".¹⁵ Here there is also the root of a fundamental and creatural lay status from which can arise a real "mystique" of human work, a sound secularity and a proper appraisal of professionalism.

By his work the salesian feels especially the joy of collaborating with Christ in the work of the "redemption"; in the activity of mankind, wounded by sin and immersed in structures which bear sin's consequences, the mystery of Christ the Saviour is inserted: his example at Nazareth is conclusive. The feeling of being a "co-redeemer" gives eloquent value to work: fatigue, patience, dedication, commitment all "take on redemptive significance which gives to the heart of the worker a touch of divine nobility".¹⁶

The salesian worker does not identify only with his "profession" (educator, instructor, engineer, communicator, agriculturist, cook, etc.) but more especially with his "vocation", which transforms his activity into witness, which makes of work a message for the present day, nourished at the sources of faith, hope and charity, which are the historical dynamic forces which change society and human existence.

¹³ E. VIGANÒ, op. cit., p. 107

¹⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, 1981

¹⁵ E. VIGANÒ, op. cit., p. 112

¹⁶ E. VIGANÒ, op. cit., p. 113

One can understand from all this that "tireless activity" does not mean either agitation or activism, but the activity proper to the salesian, permeated by practical charity and an apostolic sense: what he is doing is "*working for souls*" with the Lord.

The salesian's temperance

Temperance, one of the cardinal virtues, is presented by the Constitutions as self-control and the custody of the heart: i.e. the moderation of the inclinations and passions, a constant effort to be balanced and reasonable, and a break with earthly attractions — not by fleeing to the desert but by staying among men with the heart under control. "More than a virtue on its own, temperance is an existential basic attitude implying many other virtues which lead to self-control and mastery of the heart... It accustoms us to inconvenience by rationalizing our desires and feelings, by the domination of our passions, by composure in our common life, by a proper reserve, by a healthy shrewdness (as an expression of intelligent common sense); and all this in the light and under the guidance of reason. Yes; temperance controls everything in accordance with reason".¹⁷

"It is a like temperance that crowns the salesian smile; it is a similar temperance, joined to work, that traces the outlines of the salesian physiognomy".¹⁸

Temperance leads to a healthy balance in everything, and not only to the control of concupiscence. Don Bosco wanted temperance and common sense to be present even in work. On 3 January 1879 he said to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians: "As for work, yes, go ahead and work, but don't overdo it. Don't shorten your life by privations or excessive toil or depression or such other nuisances".¹⁹ To us sale-

¹⁷ E. VIGANO op. cit., p. 119-120

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ BM XIV, 191

sians he said the same thing: "Work as much as your health will allow, but be on your guard against idleness".²⁰ And he told the departing missionaries: "Take care of your health. Work, but only as much as your strength allows".²¹

It is true to say that our temperance can be measured by the effort we make to love by making ourselves loved! And experience teaches that that is no easy task. To be "temperate" for us means to be controlled, balanced, with common sense, not given to exaggeration, reasonable in behaviour, self-controlled and pleasant in manner; but also sensitive to so many real needs, to what is pleasing or otherwise to the young, to the signs of the times, to all the vast sectors of the Church's renewal, not permanently ready to slam on the brakes when changes are taking place, but at the same time being watchful against excesses and deviations.

A temperance which helps to "remain even tempered" is not made up of a collection of renunciations, but springs rather from growth in faith, hope and charity, from adherence to the Constitutions, from love of the community, from cheerfulness and from the heroicity attached to the daily round.

The salesian's penance

The salesian's asceticism is based on work in its stern requirements (the sacrifice of the daily duty) and on temperance, which certainly calls for renunciations to develop the necessary self-control. And here enters the theme of the cross, which links up well with the faithful and self-sacrificing discharge of his duty, and with the exertions involved.

The final paragraph reproduces almost to the letter some words which go back to Don Bosco himself: "Let each one be ready, when

²⁰ BM XIV, 511

²¹ BM XI, 364

necessity requires it, to suffer heat and cold, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain, whenever this will redound to the greater glory of God, the spiritual good to others, and the salvation of his own soul".²²

Also pointed out is the *mystery of the cross in the life of the salesian apostle*, as a characteristic trait inherited from the Founder: it is a salesian style of mortification, which anticipates or strengthens a penitential practice suited to our times and so much recommended at the present day: "a joyful well-balanced austerity".²³ "A great deal of present-day penance," says a document from the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, "is already present in the circumstances of life, and must be accepted there".²⁴

At a time of great cultural changes, far different from the circumstances in the lifetime of the Founder, it is well to reaffirm explicitly, with the Constitutions, that self-renunciation and the taking up of one's cross are integral elements of the style of life and activity of Don Bosco, who "in order to clothe his holiness with attractive pedagogical and pastoral characteristics, made ceaseless and enormous efforts in the way of asceticism".²⁵

Our own ascetic realism as apostles and educators is founded on St. Paul's declaration: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil 1,21). Anyone entering our Society does so to follow the Saviour, consciously sharing his cross by self-renunciation, in trials and difficulties, in his passion and even in his death.

This ascetical side of the salesian is well expressed by the Rule which speaks not of extraordinary penances but of the daily acceptance of the unforeseen elements of the apostolic life: "cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain...", which constitute a "martyrdom of love and self-sacrifice for the welfare of others".²⁶

²² *Costituzioni 1875*, XIII, 13 (cf. F. MOTTO p. 191)

²³ ET 30

²⁴ *Elementi essenziali della vita consacrata*, CRIS 1983, n. 31

²⁵ E. VIGANÒ, ASC 310 (1983), p. 14

²⁶ BM XIII, 236

But Don Bosco repeats to us the words of St Paul: "The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom 8,18).

*That in imitation of Don Bosco
who was concerned only with the salvation of youth,
we may respond generously to your call
and dedicate ourselves with tireless energy
to the mission you entrust to us,*

— Lord; hear our prayer.

*That we may understand the greatness and beauty
of our apostolic work,
which makes us participants in your creative activity,
and collaborators of your Son
in the construction of the Kingdom,*

— Lord, hear our prayer.

*That we may be always able to unite our work
with salesian temperance,
and be convinced that in "work and temperance"
lies the secret of the apostolic success
and fruitfulness of the Congregation,*

— Lord, hear our prayer.

*That without seeking extraordinary penances
we may accept the daily demands
and renunciations of apostolic life,
and make of them an instrument
for your greater glory
and the salvation of the young,*

— Lord, hear our prayer.

ART. 19 INITIATIVE AND FLEXIBILITY

The salesian is called to be a realist and to be attentive to the signs of the times, convinced that the Lord manifests his will also through the demands of time and place.

Hence his spirit of initiative and apostolic creativity: "In those things which are for the benefit of young people in danger or which serve to win souls for God, I push ahead even to the extent of recklessness".¹

Timely response to these needs requires him to keep abreast of new trends and meet them with the well-balanced creativity of the Founder; periodically he evaluates his work.

¹ MB XIV, 662; BM XIV, 536

If our generous and self-sacrificing style of work is to attain the pastoral efficacy required by the Kingdom of God, it must exhibit a number of aspects, which are also attitudes of the person of the salesian: practical responses to the needs of those to whom we are sent, a spirit of creative initiative, and a balanced flexibility in following the vicissitudes of history.

The changes of our time overwhelm us with innovations and tensions, which make it easier for us to yield to extreme ideas between conservatism and progressivism, excessive concern about efficiency and spiritualism, evangelization and human advancement, emphasis on pastoral work and attention to teaching etc.

To be alert to the signs of the times, to have a practical mentality and spirit of initiative, to make choices with level-headed creativity, all this means keeping one's feet firmly on the ground, being aware of the fact that circumstances are continually changing (but without totally ignoring tradition), acting with moderation ("temperance"), watching for deviations and "periodically evaluating his work".

² GC21, 31

³ GC21, 80

⁴ GC21, 155

⁵ E. VALENTINI, *D. Rinaldi maestro di pedagogia e spiritualità salesiana*, Turin 1965, p. 32

The salesian makes a practical response to the signs of the times

The salesian wants to live in the present, taking cognizance of all the needs of cultural realities and historical situations, looking eagerly for what today's youth needs in a society which is pluralistic, fragmented, strongly socialized, and technically oriented; and in a Church which through the Vatican Council has renewed its pastoral physiognomy.

In a situation far different from ours, but full nevertheless of innovations and unknown quantities, Don Bosco had said: "In these days, when all monastic orders are being suppressed by the state, when nuns can no longer feel safe in their cloisters and monks have disappeared, we get together and, despite all our enemies, grow in numbers, open houses and do whatever good can still be done. ... Monks have been exiled and we respond by changing garb. We carry on dressed as priests, and should this too be forbidden we shall use civilian garb and continue to do good. We shall even grow beards if we must; these things can never keep us from doing good".¹

To keep up with the progress of science and truth, to provide a valid response to the changes in culture in which both we and our youngsters are immersed, the salesian will be attentive not only to the development of ideas but also to the concrete reality of persons and events.

This reality calls for shrewd observance so as to detect in it the "signs of the times",² to discern urgent local needs and, through them, to hear the Lord's voice calling us to a commitment for the Kingdom. This was Don Bosco's attitude: his works came into being in accordance with a prearranged general plan, but they were all started to meet needs of particular times and places: "I have always gone ahead as the Lord inspired me and circumstances required".³ An adequate and generous

¹ BM X, 462

² "The signs of the times are facts and events which display a historical and sociological sense, and also a theological sense of the times. ... They characterize an era, explain the needs and aspirations of the people of humanity in that period ... and reveal the roads that God is providing for the Church to follow" (*Linee di rinnovamento*, LDC 1971, pp. 15-17)

³ MB XVIII, 127

response to the needs of people and places is one of the criteria which the Constitutions will later lay down for checking the validity of our work and the activities of our communities (cf. C 41). This was also the attitude of the Church of Vatican II: the Church has the "duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask".⁴

The salesian maintains a spirit of initiative

In a world in continual and rapid transformation, no one is more sensitive to changes than young people. Educators must therefore be particularly attentive to this fact and able to meet its consequences.

The desire to provide timely answers to individual needs leads necessarily to the two qualities of initiative and flexibility, words which provide the heading for this article.

The text makes use of typical terms to express the sense of the creativity required in the salesian:

- "*Spirit of initiative*" means that the salesian begins as soon as possible to do what seems to need doing, without waiting for ideal conditions; he gets on with the job spontaneously without waiting to be asked or told. It is an attitude which calls for courage. To Fr Achilles Ratti, the future Pope Pius XI, Don Bosco confided: "When it comes to progress, I want to be in the vanguard".⁵ His zeal continually suggested some new project to him or some new means of doing good to youth.

- "*Apostolic creativity*" means that the salesian uses his pastoral imagination to use and exploit everything good that exists, and to create new things as well where the need is felt: innovations in the work itself

⁴ GS 4; cf. also GS 11

⁵ MB XVI, 323

or in ways of doing it. Those extraordinary words of Don Bosco cited in the article: "I push ahead even to the extent of recklessness" show us that in certain circumstances the salesian will have to take risks and go ahead with *apostolic boldness*, driven on by his love for the salvation of the young and the certainty that this is what God is asking of him: it is an attitude in line with St Paul's words: "God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power" (2 Tim 1,7).

The salesian is flexible and level-headed in following the events of history

Fidelity to life and its changes, rather than to laws and structures: this is the final characteristic feature of the salesian's realistic and flexible approach to the urgent needs of youth. A realistic mentality reveals that people and environments evolve, especially nowadays and especially among young people, the group most sensitive to what the future may bring.

From this follows the need for the "periodic verification of his work", to check whether it is efficacious in the relevant circumstances of life, and to keep it so. In this regard we have a valuable statement of Don Rinaldi: "Don Bosco believed in bending to meet the needs of the times. This elasticity, which makes possible adaptation to all kinds of good that are continually arising ... is the real spirit of our Constitutions; and on the day when this spirit changes, it will be all up with our Pious Society".⁶

Vatican II notes that the task of the educator requires, among other human qualities, "a constant readiness to accept new ideas and to adapt old ones".⁷

All this also supposes a certain flexibility in the means and structures of pastoral activity; if these are cumbersome they may hold up the necessary transformations.

⁶ ACS 17, 6 January 1923, p. 41; cf. SGC, 135

⁷ GE 5

For this reason it should cause no surprise if with the Salesians certain things evolve and change. It would rather be surprising if they did not: it would indicate an anti-salesian manner of having recourse to traditions, and one contrary to genuine tradition and to our spirit. Don Bosco once confided to Don Barberis: "I see that from the moment we stand still, the Congregation will begin to decay".⁸

*Bestow on us, O Lord,
as you did on our Founder and Father
"a heart great as the shores of the sea",
able to read the signs of your presence
and the designs of your will.*

*Help us to be courageous in initiatives,
ready to respond to the needs of people and places,
forgetful of ourselves and our own tastes and interests,
and prompted only by the desire for your glory
and the salvation of our fellow men.*

⁸ From the *Cronaca di Don Barberis*

ART. 20 THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM AND SALESIAN SPIRIT

Under the guidance of Mary his teacher, Don Bosco lived with the boys of the first Oratory a spiritual and educational experience which he called the "Preventive System". For him this was a spontaneous expression of love inspired by the love of a God who provides in advance for all his creatures, is ever present at their side, and freely gives his life to save them.

Don Bosco passes this on to us as a way of living and of handing on the gospel message, and of working with and through the young for their salvation. 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.

There is a strict linkage between the salesian spirit and the preventive system. One may say that *the salesian spirit is expressed and becomes incarnate in a particular way in the preventive system*; it is Don Bosco's most original creation in the pedagogical field, but it is also a characteristic general way of being and acting at both individual and community level which is so evident in the life of the salesians. The preventive system is our way of "prophesying", our practical way of living the Gospel as educators and of tending to the fullness of charity. It involves the person of the salesian in a manner of thinking and feeling, of life and activity, which inspires and characterizes his whole existence.¹

¹ Cf. E. VIGANO, *The Salesian Educational Project*, ASC 290 (1978), p. 13. It may be of interest to note that although the preventive system is not quoted explicitly in the Constitutions written by Don Bosco, the latter contain all the essential elements of the salesian educational method: we find there the charity, which is the centre of the preventive system and from which the mission of the Society of St Francis de Sales draws its inspiration ("every spiritual and corporal work of charity": chap. I, art. 1); we find "the young, and especially those who are poor" as agents in the educational activity (chap. I, art. 1-5); we find the figure of the salesian who is both religious and educator, "entirely dedicated" to God and to the youngsters (called "to do and to teach") and the community which is at the same time a family; we find the superior described as a father and friend to the young etc. For all this cf. P. BRAIDO, *"Il sistema preventivo nelle Costituzioni salesiane di Don Bosco"*, in *"Fedeltà e rinnovamento"*, LAS 1974, pp. 103-118

The preventive system embraces a complexus of principles, which the Constitutions present in different places:

- it is the guide to our educational and pastoral activity, and at the same time a style of sanctification which takes its rise from a heart steeped in the mystery of Christ the Saviour;
- it is the plan which characterizes the pastoral brilliance of Don Bosco, able to translate spirit into life in a correct and practical way;
- it is the measure of our authenticity and of our vocation as evangelizers and educators of youth;
- for us it is a vital synthesis of pedagogy, pastoral work and spirituality; through it "we publicly profess our love for the Father who calls us and unites us in communities to make us evangelizers of the young, in the shared responsibility for an educational plan inspired by the charisma of Don Bosco";²
- finally, for the Salesian Family the preventive system is one of the foundations of unity in the face of plurality of ideas and of decentralization; when cultural differences might lead us astray, it helps the members to preserve "the vital bond with their Founder and unity of spirit".³

In this way a salesian community can verify its life and vocational growth by daily examining its practice of the preventive system.

Reflection on this article becomes all the more important and necessary if we heed the warning of the GC21: "With young people of today, the preventive system means that a new kind of presence is needed".⁴ Don Rinaldi declared: "The salesian is either a salesian or he is nothing; he is either of Don Bosco or of no one. If we study Don Bosco, if we follow his system, we shall truly be his sons; otherwise we shall be nothing, we shall be beating the air and getting nowhere".⁵

² GC21, 31

³ GC21, 80

⁴ GC21, 155

⁵ E. VALENTINI, *D. Rinaldi maestro di pedagogia e spiritualità salesiana*, Turin 1965, p. 32

The preventive system, a true spiritual and educational experience, is a gratuitous love, which forestalls, accompanies and saves

This fundamental element of our spirit⁶ matured in the life of Don Bosco as a "spiritual and educational experience", "an experience of the Spirit",⁷ which from its beginning had seen the motherly presence of Mary as "teacher and guide". This kind of experience, lived among the "boys of the first Oratory" in simplicity, joy, family style and a concrete form of education, has been passed on to us as a precious personal and community legacy, and we receive it as a method of pastoral action and a path to sanctity.

The text of the Constitutions emphasizes that this creative synthesis of Don Bosco is catalyzed by the "pastoral charity" which is at the centre of the salesian spirit (cf. C 10): Don Rinaldi and Don Caviglia, speaking of "bontà" (our 'fourth vow', linked with the very name of 'salesian'!), say that it is nothing else than the practice of the preventive system, lived among youth: it is not only a "system of kindness", but "kindness erected into a system".⁸

Later we shall see the preventive system as a method of educational and pastoral activity which, through educational presence and the force of persuasion and love, makes youngsters grow up as "upright citizens and good christians" (cf. Const. chap. IV, and especially C 38, 39).

Here the Rule is drawing special attention to the fact that the preventive system, as an experience of the Spirit, *is for us a way of sanctification*: it is "a love freely given, inspired by the love of God which forestalls every creature by his divine providence, accompanies him by his constant presence and saves him by giving his life for him".⁹ It is translated therefore into the constant practice of charity which is without limits, and which makes of the salesian a sign and witness of love (cf. C 2).

⁶ Cf. GC21, 97

⁷ Cf. MR 11

⁸ A. CAVIGLIA, *La pedagogia di Don Bosco*, Rome 1935, p. 14-15; cf. ASC 290 (1978), p. 9-10

⁹ Cf. GC21, 17

The preventive system is a way of living and working to offer to youth the Gospel and salvation

The Rector Major has written: "The SGC reminded us that between salesian "mission" (one and the same for everyone everywhere) and the actual "apostolate" (which varies according to different situations) there is an important difference, and they need to be harmonized. The preventive system lies between the two as a pedagogical and pastoral signpost, lighting the way and pointing out what initiatives we should develop and how we should set about them in the various situations that the times and places present".¹⁰

"The first and foremost essential of the preventive system for us today is 'not to desert the difficult field of our youth commitment'".¹¹

The salesian, as the Constitutions put it, is invited by the preventive system to *live among the young*; this is a practice stemming from the heart rather than the pedagogical sciences, which stimulates the salesian to learn the art and sacrifice of staying with youngsters, especially the most needy ones, of loving them, of getting to know them individually together with the problems arising from the situation in which they live.¹²

We recall the testimony given in the Letter from Rome: "In the old days at the Oratory, were you not always among the boys, especially during recreation?" Don Bosco himself used to say: "*I feel at home with you: this is really where I belong*".¹³ On this phrase the Rector Major makes the following comment: "The salesian not only works for the young; he lives with them and is always in their midst. For him the preventive system is a matter of the heart... He must master the art of being physically present and accept the sacrifice it may entail".¹⁴

¹⁰ ASC 290 (1978), p. 13; cf. SGC, 30

¹¹ Cf. ASC 290 (1978), p. 21; cf. also GC22, 6

¹² Cf. GC21, 13

¹³ BM IV, 455

¹⁴ Cf. ASC 290 (1978), p. 22

Again the salesian receives from the preventive system the incentive to *work with the young and for the young*, involving them in the realization of their plan of life. The Constitutions expressly indicate the ultimate purpose of this task with and for youngsters: to hand on to them the Gospel of Christ and to bring them his salvation. The preventive system intimately links evangelization with education (cf. C 31); it does not reduce pastoral work to catechesis alone or to the liturgy alone, but covers all aspects of the youth condition by linking the Gospel with culture and life.

The article ends with a fundamental statement: the preventive system "*permeates our approach to God, our personal relationships and our manner of living in community*", impressing on all our activity, the orientation to its supreme end, which is what Don Bosco wanted: "the only purpose of the Oratory is the salvation of souls". In this way it gives life to an educational process oriented to Christ, with special attention to the sacramental and Marian life; it presents youthful holiness in a bold and original fashion and in ways which appeal to the young, because it passes through a charity "which knows how to win the love of others".

With regard to the way in which the preventive system is realized in practice, more will be said in the context of the apostolic mission (cf. C 38, 39). Here it will be enough to recall a letter written by Don Bosco on 10 August 1885 to Don G. Costamagna, provincial of Argentina: "I would like to have with me all my sons and our Sisters of America... I would like to give them all a conference on the salesian spirit which must animate all we say and do. The preventive system must be our characteristic: ... in the classrooms let there be only kind words, charity and patience... Let every salesian make himself the friend of all; let him never try to get his own back on anyone; let him be always ready to forgive, and never hark back to incidents that have been forgiven... Gentleness in what we say and do, and in the advice we give, will win over everyone and enable us to attain all our objectives".¹⁵ And we know that to this letter is attributed the subsequent spiritual

¹⁵ *Collected letters* IV, Turin 1959, p. 332

and temporal prosperity of the Argentine province. Not only the provincial, but others too made copies of it and wrote to the Saint to thank him for it. Some there were who felt that the letter highlighted their own defects, or who found it particularly difficult to be patient and charitable; they bound themselves by vow to observe Don Bosco's advice, and renewed the pledge every month at the Exercise for a Happy Death".¹⁶

Fr Duvallet, who had collaborated for twenty years with Abbé Pierre in the apostolate for the re-education of delinquent youngsters, makes a kind of significant appeal to us: "You have works, colleges and oratories for young people, but your real treasure is one and only: the pedagogy of Don Bosco. In a world in which youngsters are betrayed, drained, ground down and exploited, the Lord has entrusted to you a pedagogy in which the paramount aspect is respect for the boy, for his greatness and frailty, for his dignity as a son of God.

"Preserve it, renew it, rejuvenate it, enrich it with all modern discoveries; adapt it to all the developments of the twentieth century and their ramifications that Don Bosco could not be aware of. But I beg you to keep it safe! Change everything, let your houses go if necessary, but keep this treasure and build up in thousands of hearts this way of loving and saving the souls of boys which you have inherited from Don Bosco".¹⁷

*Lord our God,
in the preventive system*

*Don Bosco found a sure method
for spreading your love among youth.*

¹⁶ ASC 290 (1978), p. 13; cf. SGC, 30

¹⁷ Cf. ASC 290 (1978), p. 21; cf. also GC22, 6

¹⁸ ¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 33 note

¹⁹ ¹⁷ *Various Authors: "Il sistema educativo di Don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova"*, Acts of

²⁰ Cf. European Salesian Congress on the educational system of Don Bosco, LDC Turin 1974, p. 314

Grant that we too may assimilate and live
 this form of total dedication
 to the education of the young
 left us by our Father as a precious heritage,
 and may be able to transmit it
 faithfully and intact
 to those who will come after us.

In this way Don Bosco "comes back amongst us" as an appeal to us. Although the historical perspective of his time has changed and cannot be identified with our own, he nevertheless remains in our regard a prophet, one who inspires us and is a sign indicating the path we should follow.

We know, finally, that through the communion of saints he is still present in the Church, the Congregation, and his sanctity in this concluding article provides a very solid basis for the chapter. It declares that the salesian spirit is found incarnate in the founder, and that to live this spirit one must go back to his example: Don Bosco is the "father" and "teacher," the Lord has given us; he is our "model."² Every founder is a result of the life and holiness of the Church, and is shaped by the spirit of the Church. Don Bosco is our model as an image of Christ himself. The use of models in contemporary culture, as has always been the case in ecclesial tradition, is a real need. Icons are communicated ever more by examples, which mean through concepts.

² SGC, 195.

³ Cf. SGC document: *Don Bosco at the Onstony, enduring criterion for the renewal of salesian action*, SGC, 192 ff.

ART. 21 DON BOSCO OUR MODEL

The Lord has given us Don Bosco as father and teacher.

We study and imitate him, admiring in him a splendid blending of nature and grace. He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the realities of this earth; and he was just as deeply the man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living "as seeing him who is invisible".¹

These two aspects combined to create a closely-knit life project, the service of the young. He realized his aim with firmness, constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart, in the midst of difficulties and fatigue. "He took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young... Truly the only concern of his heart was for souls".²

¹ Heb. 11,27

² DON RUA, 24 Aug. 1894

This concluding article provides a vertex and synthesis for the whole chapter: it declares that the salesian spirit is found incarnate in the Founder, and that to live this spirit one must go back to his example: Don Bosco is the "father" and "teacher" the Lord has given us; he is our "model".

Every founder is a result of the life and holiness of the Church,¹ and is shaped by the Spirit as an example to other brothers to whom he repeats with the Apostle: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11,1). Don Bosco is our model in so far as he is for us a living image of Christ himself.

The use of models in contemporary culture, as has always been the case in ecclesial tradition, is a felt need. Ideals are communicated ever more by examples, rather than through concepts.

¹ Cf. IG 45, 46

Don Bosco, as a model of salesian spirit, stems from the mystery of God, and to Him refers back: he functions therefore in a living, connected and mysterious way, and has great pedagogical value. The way he lived his life expressed much better than our words something that is in fact incapable of expression. Any description we can give of salesian spirit calls for understanding, while his exemplary life calls for imitation. His example is continually present to the soul of the salesian and to the community, so that little by little its features, physiognomy and style of life can be assimilated by those who imitate him. Don Bosco continues to exercise this attraction in our regard; when developed by study and research it results in love, transformation and renewal.

In this way Don Bosco "comes back amongst us": his life is still an appeal to us. Although the historical perspective of his time has changed and cannot be identified with our own, he nevertheless remains in our regard a prophet, one who inspires us and is a sign indicating the path we should follow.

We know, finally, that through the communion of saints he is still present in the Church and the Congregation, and his sanctity and intercession remain no less efficacious with the passage of time.

The Lord has given us Don Bosco as a father and teacher

Coming as it does at the end of the chapter, this statement helps us to see in Don Bosco a vital synthesis of the salesian spirit. We note, with the SGC, that it is not a question of an abstract Don Bosco, remote from reality, but of a Don Bosco "alive and at work in the midst of his boys, throughout the period of his apostolic life".² This is the Don Bosco who becomes the "permanent criterion" of the "dynamic fidelity" of the salesian the perennial source of inspiration and reflection.

² SGC, 195

³ Cf. SGC document: *Don Bosco at the Oratory, enduring criterion for the renewal of salesian action*, SGC, 192 ff.

Let us consider for a moment this figure of Father and Teacher, which becomes ever greater the farther away we get from him in time.

— The image of "*Father*" derives from the mysterious divine fatherhood, which is revealed in the gift of life and of divine sonship in Baptism, but is modelled too on the simple and human qualities of a father of a family; both evoke in the salesian and in the community the idea of kindness, attention, availability and forgiveness.

All his life Don Bosco displayed a father's heart. He said to his salesians: "No matter in what remote part of the world you may be, never forget that here in Italy you have a father who loves you in the Lord".⁴ And we recall the heart-rending appeal in the Letter from Rome of 1884: "Do you know what this poor old man who has spent his whole life for his dear boys wants from you? ... that we should go back to the days of affection and christian confidence between boys and superiors; the days when we accepted and put up with difficulties for the love of Jesus Christ; the days when hearts were open with a simple candour; days of love and real joy for everyone".⁵

The salesian can never forget that the particular "experience of the Spirit",⁶ which is the gift of the salesian vocation, has been passed on to him, by disposition of divine providence, precisely through his Founder, as a new gospel communication, a particular kind of ecclesial commitment. The Founder introduced and, as it were, gave life to this new way of following Christ, and accompanied the early days of the newly born Congregation with tremendous sacrifices. Don Bosco is indeed the Father of our vocation!

— The image of "*Master*" or "*Teacher*" recalls his ability to reproduce some features of the "divine Master", who had been his guide from the first dream at the age of nine, and also some characteristics of our Blessed Lady who had been given to him as a "*Teacher*".⁷ from

⁴ BM XI, 362

⁵ Cf. MB XVII, pp. 107-114; Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 263

⁶ MR 11

⁷ Cf. BM I, 95

them Don Bosco learned kindness and the art of showing youngsters the way to salvation, making them see how much God loves them.

One cannot forget Don Bosco's ability to communicate as a teacher; he was able to speak in simple terms, to make himself understood, to pass on incisively the Word of the Lord, but especially to win affection, which means his ability to speak and teach with the language of the heart.

We invoke him as "Father and Master", together with all our young people, and especially the street-boys, the apprentices and young workers, the pupils of the trade schools, the jugglers and acrobats, the youngsters called to follow him so as to save other youngsters; but as well as these, with parents, teachers, educators and pastors too.

But let us not forget that in his spiritual testament Don Bosco repeats that our real Superior is Jesus Christ: *"He will always be our Master, our guide, our model"*.⁸

We study him, admiring in him a splendid blending of nature and grace

It has been said that Don Bosco is one of the most 'complete' Saints in christian history, in the sense that in him were accumulated gifts of nature and grace to a quite remarkable extent. The text emphasizes this fact, and highlights in particular the "splendid blending of nature and grace".

In Don Bosco human qualities were not suppressed, but permeated by the divine; they kept all their force. He was *"deeply human*, rich in the qualities of his people", "open to the realities of this earth"; able to inspire esteem, confidence and affection because he was able to love; he was a formative educator, "an idealist and realist who would try anything but at the same time show prudence" (Daniel-Rops); a "giant with massive arms with which he has managed to draw the whole

⁸ Cf. MB XVII, 257-273.

universe to himself" (Card. Nina to Leo XIII); a dreamer (how many "dreams" he had during his life...) but very much down to earth in what he achieved.

On the other hand he showed himself to be "*deeply the man of God*", filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit"; he lived, in fact, "as seeing him who is invisible", i.e. he was able to read with an eye of extraordinary faith the historical events in which he was immersed.

Don Bosco gave to others the impression of being a man of this earth but also of heaven, open to his fellow men but immersed in God. This made him genial with others, and for us is an invitation to develop all our own resources the better to fulfil our vocation.⁹

We must make use of this interpretation of the unique spiritual figure of Don Bosco to discern the foundational and unifying aspect of salesian spirituality, which is both deeply incarnated in history and deeply immersed in God.

The Rule reminds the salesian of the importance of "studying" Don Bosco, of feeling that he is close at hand, of comparing himself with him; only a constant daily comparison with the Founder can preserve and renew his burning love and ardent zeal for the good of young people.

We "imitate" him as a model in the service of youth

All Don Bosco's rich gifts of nature and grace placed him at the service of a unique mission in "*a closely-knit life project*". In him the human and divine aspects were intimately united in the single mission for the salvation of youth.

This is another surprising feature of his personality both as a founder and as an educator: he is a man with a fixed idea always in

⁴ BM XI, 362

⁵ Cf. MB XVII, pp. 107-114; Appendix to Constitutions 1984, p. 263

⁹ On the human and divine aspects of the sanctity of Don Bosco, cf. P. BROCARDO, "*Don Bosco, profondamente uomo, profondamente santo*", LAS Rome, 1985

mind, which becomes ever broader in detail but remains essentially that of the dream at the age of nine, and will do so until his dying breath: save the young, and especially the poorest of them.

This service to youth prompted him to undertake courageous enterprises. He realized them "with firmness, constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart, in the midst of difficulties and fatigue". As his first successor testified, "he took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young. Truly the only concern of his heart was for souls".¹⁰

His example is an invitation to us to be resolute in our commitment, to unify all our thoughts, strength and all we are in one and the same direction, a stimulus to fidelity until death.

Finally the text specifies that Don Bosco gave himself to his work with firmness, making use of all his resources with *constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart*. Firmness and constancy to realize a vocation and work beset by so many difficulties; firmness to undertake initiatives that called for a lot of courage, sometimes flying in the face of traditional ideas and ways of doing things; firmness to accept the hard work and toil of his ministry, even to the extent of dying of bodily exhaustion.

For a man driven on by such holy zeal, he nevertheless had a great and *delicate tenderness*; it sprang from a heart deeply touched by the wretchedness of the young and the injustices suffered by the lowly; the tenderness of the heart of a father which made him attentive to each one of his children, anxious for their good, sad when he had to be away from them; the tenderness finally of the heart of a child which gave him trust and joy before the infinitely good God, and before the Virgin Mary, the Mother of his family.

In this way Don Bosco remains still the guide who can enlighten our choices at the present day, the model against whom we can measure our fidelity, the animator of our educational and pastoral plans, our intercessor before God for the graces of which we stand in need.

¹⁰ D. RUA, *Circular letters*, p. 130, Letter of 24.8.1894

May you be blessed, O Lord,
 for having given us Don Bosco as our father and teacher,
 and for filling him with extraordinary gifts
 of nature and of grace;
 he showed himself perfectly human
 among his contemporaries,
 and completely dedicated to you
 in docility to the Holy Spirit.
 Grant, we pray you,
 that following his teaching and example
 we may bring him to life again in ourselves,
 in dedicating ourselves to you and to our fellow men,
 in faithful service given to the young
 with constancy, courage and perseverance
 and with the warmth and sensitivity of a generous heart.

For a man driven on by such holy zeal, he nevertheless had a great and delicate tenderness; it sprang from a heart deeply touched by the wretchedness of the young and the injustices suffered by the lowly; the tenderness of the heart of a Father which made him sensitive to each one of his children, anxious for their good, sad when he had to be away from them, the tenderness (hall) of the heart of a child which gave him trust and joy before the infinitely good God, and before the Virgin Mary the Mother of his humanity.

In this way Don Bosco remains still the guide who can enlighten our choices and the paradigm of the model regimes which we can realize. Our fidelity, the animating of our educational and pastoral plans, our incessant before God for the graces of which we stand in need.

* On the human and divine aspects of the sanctity of Don Bosco, cf. P. BROCARDO, *Don Bosco, profondamente uomo*, ...