

**'Duc in Altum': [\[1\]](#) Put out into the high seas and cast your nets wide and deep.**

### *Introduction*

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As Salesians we have been pilgrims with the Church in the celebration of the Jubilee, with John Paul II as our guide.

With him we have retraced the great themes of faith and baptism, of confirmation and hope, of the Eucharist and reconciliation, of charity and the mission.

With him we have celebrated the great reconciliation, according to our particular circumstances: in our various encounters with the young and in the Missionary Days, in consecrated life, in deep study on the laity, education and humanism and in general on the presence of Christians in society and in the world.

We therefore welcome the suggestion the Pope makes to us for the process that follows, and we make our own his watchword: *Duc in altum*: put out into the high seas and cast your nets wide and deep!

The starting point is a passage from Luke's Gospel that we shall quote here in full for two reasons. The first is that it is a link with an invitation we frequently make to our young people and all the faithful to approach the Gospel through the method of the *lectio divina*. This page describes well a situation that constantly or frequently occurs in the Church: confused situations, fears of different kinds, a variety of activities, an apparently hidden God, the need for faith and reassurance, etc.

The second reason - closely connected with the first - is that we should make a mental note of this page as an effective key to the interpretation of the Christian life of our time, and to meditate on other pages of the Gospel in the same way. We do well to note, in this respect, that *Novo Millennio Ineunte* is an excellent text for meditative reading by both young and adult Christians. It is not a document addressed only to specialists and difficult for the ordinary faithful to understand. Young people will not only draw profit from it but will find in it an argument against the frequently repeated complaints about documents of the Church as obscure, difficult and unrelated to real life.

Let us read the text of St Luke:

*While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had ceased*

speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep (*Duc in altum*) and let down your nets for a catch. And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets". And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord". For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men". And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.[2]

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This Strenna came to birth in suffering because of my illness, since physical tiredness makes thinking difficult. But it has given me the opportunity of thinking of each of you as I write, of thanking you for your affection and for staying close to me, for your prayers and support, and of asking every grace for you, especially holiness.

#### *The profound sense of Duc in altum*

In these three words (*Duc in altum*) is condensed the reflection and exhortation of John Paul II, in the conclusion to this Letter[3] in which he gathers together and 'relaunches' the results and hopes of the jubilee celebrations.

The Pope himself provides us with a comprehensive interpretation of *Duc in altum*: 'A new millennium', he writes, 'is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ. The Son of God, who became incarnate two thousand years ago out of love for humanity, is at work even today: we need discerning eyes to see this and, above all, a generous heart to become the instruments of his work'.[4]

We have already seen both positive and negative seeds of some of the new situations, while others have been presented in the light of the jubilee as challenging the dignity and good of man.

**The high seas** can refer to the new spatial dimension in which we are called upon to work: the cosmos has become man's place of work, and Christ must give meaning to this enterprise, to the intentions that underlie it, to the aims which it arouses. That not everything is at present in conformity with his Kingdom is evident: one need think only of the bombs that rain down from the skies, of the enormous sums spent on hostile espionage, etc.

**The high seas** are also a cultural dimension of the planet: from the first contact to recognition of the right to existence and of the value of many cultures, which must be open to each other and in contact, not in the abstract or at a theoretical level, but among individuals and in human communities.

**The high seas** is also an apt description of the situation of religious multiplicity with which Christianity and evangelization must come to grips. In our Christian communities, in schools and local neighbourhoods, we meet the great diversity of religious affiliations and trends.

Dialogue, acceptance, tolerance and moderation of fundamentalist instincts form part of religious education and evangelization, together with clear-cut witness, zealous practice and effective proclamation of our faith in the risen Lord.

But the great variety of religious beliefs is found in ways very different from in earlier times. We must be convinced that religions are first and foremost for the benefit of man and his freedom, and are not just a yoke of precepts (even though these may be lawful), that can frequently become instruments of power and domination because of obligatory rituals, categorization of people, etc., even though in the name of truth they aim at taking the faith of the individual and giving it a social and cultural form.

Christ himself experienced this with the Jewish religion. This is the significance of his declarations against the authorities and the temple; this is also at the origin of his remarkable behaviour towards the poor, women, those known as public sinners, and exterior forms of devotion and precepts. Religion, bereft of prophecy, charisma, challenge and love, becomes a heavy burden. We are catechists, i.e. teachers of religion: we must first experience religion as a shared faith, and in this way we shall become specialists in communicating it to others as a source of joy and wisdom, of new horizons and new hope. We find ourselves in new family contexts in which convictions, tolerance and the ability to meet others and dialogue with them are the order of the day.

**The high seas** can also refer to questions and problems which over the past fifty years have become very worrying and have come to define a culture of their own. What are they? John Paul II declares that at the origin of a genuine human culture lies spirituality. It is a matter almost of a new educative program needed by humanity at the present day. Some of its headings are mentioned in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*: education to life; recovery of the sense and ethics of love; the environment and each one's responsibility in its regard; waste and the need for temperance; poverty and the production of goods; foreign debt and international justice; solidarity among peoples at the level of good will and institutional organization; the vigorous defence of the rights of those who are weaker (children, women, the poor); peace as a permanent state and a way for the resolving of conflicts; Awareness, sensitization, cooperation in finding a solution to today's great plagues, e.g. the homeless, refugees, those suffering from AIDS, etc.

We could say therefore that *the high seas* represents an ensemble of new realities and values which we have not yet lived and clarified sufficiently in the light of the redemption, and which we are called upon today to take up as our task and testimony: Christ is the fulfilment and meaning of all creation; the Father has made him the heart of the world; in the spirit of the incarnation, in him and through him everything will be directed to man's good something which is not happening at present. Jesus therefore must still redeem human reality and free it from the yoke of sin.

Summing up, the call to *put out into the high seas* is an encouragement to explore situations and values, and to incorporate them positively in our formation and our educative practice.

But it is not sufficient merely to point to new settings, new needs, new realities.

The new millennium appears as a crossroads between civilization and faith which means a meeting between humanity and grace, between human history and incarnation. Human reason has grown and been challenged. You need think only of problems of truth, of meaning, of ethics, etc. Nowadays when in education we speak of spirituality we include, without any lack of continuity, the search for a better and deeper meaning in our life, religious experience with its fundamental elements, contents and process, and the choice of a kind of existence. In this perspective spirituality takes on the fundamental criteria of an expression of culture and fundamental ethics. Hence the recommendation that a commitment should be authentic, enduring and effective.

We must contemplate the face of Jesus! Today he says to us once again: 'I am the truth'.<sup>[5]</sup> And he speaks at length of the influence of man's attitude to truth, not least in welcoming the gift of faith:

Every one who is of the truth hears my voice".<sup>[6]</sup> It was precisely this statement that provoked Pilate's doubt.

There you have the divine and human identity that emerges so strongly from the Gospels!

They provide us with a series of elements that enable us to enter to some extent into the 'frontier-zone' of the mystery represented by Christ's self-awareness. A number of catechetical aspects of Christ's mystery need to be explored: his absolute centrality as a point of reference in all forms of religious expression in line with the criteria of inclusive Christology; the human growth of Jesus self-awareness as the Son of God;<sup>[7]</sup> the mystery of his real presence in the face of the poor.

We shall never finish plumbing the depths of this mystery. Every believer will find in it unlimited depths for meditation in faith. For this reason John Paul II, in the jubilee year, recommended us to read the Gospel under the guidance of the Spirit, and the preparation for the jubilee was accompanied by the reading of the Gospels of Mark, Luke and Matthew.

And now to pass beyond corporeal features and even miraculous facts, and to come closer to the understanding and sentiments of Jesus alongside theological investigation an important help can come from the great legacy which is the 'lived theology' of the saints, but before that we have further indications for deeper analysis that come from the Gospel and from the history of Christian communities.

If for *putting out into the high seas* with confidence some directives be necessary (truth, meaning, solidarity, policy), *casting our nets wide and deep* calls for some priorities. John Paul II lists the following:

a) **starting again from Christ.** It is not therefore a matter of inventing a new program, specifies the Pope. The program already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a program which does not change with shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication. This program for all times is our program for the Third Millennium.<sup>[8]</sup>

b) **take holiness as the daily ideal and aim.** This has been the trump-card of the Gospel for many saintly figures: pastors, charismatics, educators, men and women saints of charity. This is perhaps one of the most important truths we are forgetting in recent times, despite figures like Padre Pio, Mother Teresa and John XXIII who gave it effective re-expression;

c) **learn about prayer,** practise it, grow in it, learning ever more new things about it from the lips of Jesus. From this in turn depend many other themes and items, e.g. the thirst for spirituality which seems to be a sign of our times; the 'schools of prayer', and consecrated life itself;

d) **Live the liturgy,** with the greatest zeal and diligence, in particular the community eucharistic celebration on Sundays. Pride of place should always be given to the liturgy, "the summit towards which the Church's action tends and at the same time the source from which comes all her strength".<sup>[9]</sup> In the twentieth century, especially after Vatican II, the Christian community has made great strides in the way it celebrates the Sacraments, and especially the Eucharist. We must continue along the same line, giving particular importance to the Sunday Eucharist, and to Sunday itself, felt as a special day of faith, the day of the risen Lord and of the gift of the Spirit, the true Paschal event of the week. For two thousand years Christian time has been measured from the memory of that

'first day of the week',[\[10\]](#) on which the risen Christ brought to the apostles the gift of peace and of the Spirit[\[11\]](#);

e) **accept the truth of Christ's resurrection as the fundamental fact** on which the Christian faith is based.[\[12\]](#) It is the central event of the mystery of time and prefigures the last day, when Christ will return in glory. We do not know what the millennium just beginning has in store for us, but we are quite certain that it will remain firmly in the hands of Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords,[\[13\]](#) and that by celebrating his death and resurrection, not only once a year but every Sunday, the Church will continue to point out to every generation "the true fulcrum of history, to which the mystery of the world's origin and its final destiny leads";[\[14\]](#)

f) the capacity, spirit and sacrament of **reconciliation**.

But *to cast our nets wide and deep*, some other convictions are equally necessary, and as pastors and followers of a pastoral spirituality we do well to emphasize them:

a) first there is **the primacy of grace**. If in the planning that awaits us we commit ourselves more confidently to a pastoral activity that gives personal and communal prayer its proper place, we shall be observing an essential principle of the Christian view of life: *the primacy of grace*. There is a temptation which perennially besets every spiritual journey and pastoral work: that of thinking that the results depend on our ability to act and to plan. God, of course, asks us really to cooperate with his grace, and therefore invites us to invest all our resources of intelligence and energy in serving the cause of the Kingdom. But it is fatal to forget that "without Christ we can do nothing" (cf. *Jn* 15:5);[\[15\]](#)

b) **the force of holiness**. Once the Jubilee is over, we resume our normal path, but knowing that stressing holiness remains more than ever an urgent pastoral task;[\[16\]](#)

c) **a spirituality of communion**. The Church, the home and school of communion, must try to welcome each brother and sister in the light of the Trinity, the faithful member of the mystical body, the various vocations; it must reject all selfish temptations; it must strive for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Before making practical plans, we need *to promote a spirituality of communion*, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up. A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as those who are a part of me. This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a gift for me. A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to make room for our brothers and sisters, bearing each other's burdens (*Gal* 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy. Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, masks of communion rather than its means of expression and growth;[\[17\]](#)

d) **aim always at charity option for the poor, Christian style of action preponderant role of the laity**. Clearly, all this must be done in a specifically Christian way: the laity especially must be

present in these areas in fulfilment of their lay vocation, without ever yielding to the temptation to turn Christian communities into mere social agencies. In particular, the Church's relationship with civil society should respect the latter's autonomy and areas of competence, in accordance with the teachings of the Church's social doctrine.[\[18\]](#)

And so we have explored two directions in which we must head: *towards the high seas and wide and deep*.

Now we have to **get our boats together to put out into the deep and cast our nets**.

Our boats are the educative institutions and pastoral works, the Salesian Youth Movement, the salesian lay associations and the consecrated communities.

#### *The educative institutions and pastoral works*

These are the most numerous of the salesian activities, and the first in which the Congregation was committed as it approached the world. The schools and professional training centres provide an opportunity for communicating a culture, for forming minds and consciences, for offering a synthesis between humanism and the Gospel.

Salesian schools must make crystal clear their character and formative purposes, such as *paideia* and *humanitas*, i.e. education to a better humanism, education of conscience, the putting forward of truth against policies of indifference, emphasis on the ethical dimension, deepening of the faith and of reason, and cultural zeal which promotes positive initiatives.

It is true that much has to be left to freedom, but what concerns us is to be able to make a suggestion; so that young people do not see us as merely involved in so many things to be done, timetables to prepare, meals to serve, but that they see us as involving ourselves in the careful fostering of those who are thirsting for truth and hungering for justice. The formation of collaborators, animators, willing youngsters and volunteers must have a leading place in our educative and pastoral project. We are at a turning point, and nothing is more dangerous than a superficial approach. One of the ancient doctors was of the opinion that corruption of the mind led to the corruption of good habits. That he was correct is shown clearly enough by today's world with its individual choices about what is truth.

Even in our pastoral and missionary works, together with our dedication to the spreading of the Word of God or its first proclamation, we must foster an overall formation of those who can influence the community: catechists, animators, members of parish councils, and similar people.

Even at the present day the salesian school exists primarily for the education of reason through a critical culture, as required by all the individual disciplines. For his part the Pope, in St Peter's Square during the first national congress of the Catholic school in 1991, recalled that 'the first obligation of the Catholic school is to be a *school*, i.e. a place of culture and education, of culture for the purpose of education'.[\[19\]](#)

And so today's problem of the salesian charism in the school is the commitment we all have to see that salesianity passes from an animating spirit of individuals to a principle and criterion for producing a new and particular culture for and in the school. Paraphrasing a well known saying of Don Bosco, we can say that a school is salesian through the salesian cultural content it passes on.

A second strong element in our scholastic educative tradition can be found in the National Assembly of the Catholic School of 27-30 October 1999, which singled out in the renewal of the scholastic formative system, already in progress for some time, 'the passing from a substantially State school to a school of civil society'.[\[20\]](#)

This formulation was reached because the conviction has matured that the right to education belongs to the human person as such, before any particular relationship, and hence the natural subject of education is the human person. Church and State, congregations and institutions, are complementary and must provide a service appropriate to the personal capacity of each one, so that the individual becomes capable of fulfilling his irreplaceable task.

Today it would be a case of enabling civil society to have its own schools. In our educative and scholastic tradition we have shown this through two characteristic expressions: a people's school and the family spirit, indicating a priority given to a particular group (the working classes), and the educative primacy of loving kindness.

Nowadays this popular characteristic of the school has the task of building culture and managing structures.

For Salesians today, the family spirit would be expressed especially in the preparation in parents of a professional approach to schools, i.e. the fostering among parents of a competent involvement in the schools affairs.

#### *The Salesian Youth Movement*

Its roots go back to the beginnings: the sodalities. But the present form began twenty years ago with the including of young adults in our program of youth pastoral work and with their desire to commit themselves to Don Bosco's service. The meetings of 1988, 1992, 1994 and 2000 have emphasized its worldwide dimension, which has passed from simple slogans to programs of values which have become ever more explicit in their aspects of inspiration and daily practice.

It has been provided with Salesian Youth Spirituality (SYS) as a common element. The jubilee messages of the Rector Major have brought about a living unity among the various groups around the world, marked by a strong common point of reference and sense of belonging. Within the SYM animators emerge and are formed, pastoral workers and volunteers who want to take their inspiration from the pastoral charity of Don Bosco and become a fertile field for vocations.

The SYM is found and acts like leaven in our educative and pastoral institutions. Where it does not yet exist I would like it to be started up and integrated. I have seen the results it has brought about in schools, oratories and parishes, and wherever there is a Salesian who gives it animation. But the SYM can go much further; it can be started up in parishes, dioceses, non-salesian schools and local neighbourhoods. It is a network of groups rather than a single entity. Priority must always be ensured for human and Christian formation; any person wanting to be a member must be at least willing to engage in a formative process. If this is lacking we shall have caught nothing, even though we have laboured all night. To be successful we must commit ourselves seriously to the formation of the directive personnel, of the animators, the coaches and similar people. And this even in the so-called civilly recognized movements, in which we represent a liberal identity consistent with our condition as religious.

In the *SYM Forum 2000* at Colle Don Bosco, in conjunction with World Youth Day, I summed up the present state of the SYM which I want to bring to the knowledge of everyone because it constitutes a sure landfall and new starting-place.

The last phase of development of the SYM has centred chiefly on three points:

a) **A growing awareness of the SYM itself.** In formulating its key-elements, in examining it more closely, and in trying to give it concrete expression in daily life, young people have been finding an answer to their quest for a way of living the Christian life inspired by the salesian charism in a world that is pluralistic and globalized, confused and restless, beset by conflicting models and ideas, by serious problems of conscience and the search for meaning.

b) **Better and more frequent communication,** and the establishment of points of reference and wide-ranging coordination at various levels. At the national level, there are organs of linkage and meeting schedules as well as increased space for young people themselves to run the Movement. At world level too this mutually beneficial communication has grown. In the year 1988, the centenary of Don Boscos death, the SYM displayed a tremendous vitality and grew in the awareness of its identity. Subsequently Europe hosted the 1992 and the 1999 Meetings, while similar Meetings were also held in Latin America and Asia. And now this international Forum is taking place. I mentioned better communication because, if we started off in a festive mood and this should never be missing because it is a part of our spirituality we have now come down to a dialogue and exchange of views on important themes of our spirituality, letting ourselves be challenged by the times in our role of educators and animators.

c) **The formation of animators.** Animators are extremely important for communication within the SYM, for promoting a step-by-step approach to growth, and for linkage at local, national and international levels. This is why the transition from a rapid and sporadic preparation of animators to one that is sustained, systematic and well thought out is a positive sign. In different parts of the world, I have enjoyed sitting in on meetings for planning the formation of animators with the help of programs extending over several years and having clear objectives, contents and experiences.

From all that has been said so far, we can conclude that the SYM is not just a desire or a dream; it is a reality! I have seen it in my visits to the different continents where I have come across a full range of expressions of the SYM; at other times I have met with those who have made a conscious and explicit choice of the salesian brand of spirituality and have formed an animating nucleus just like yourselves here at this Forum where you represent so many of your friends.

a) This is truly a **youth** Movement, made up for the most part of young people, who however are not averse to or dismissive of the presence and friendship of lay and consecrated adults walking side by side with them. It is a youth Movement too because of its style and modality of animation and involvement. In many places there is a Consulting body of young people that meets regularly and even has a voice in the local Church.

b) It is a uniquely **educative** Movement. In other words, there are different levels of identifying with it or belonging to it, and a varying intensity of participation and involvement. All take part in it children, boys, young men and even adults and their education and formation takes place together. For many persons the SYM has become the place where they recharge their batteries, drawing from the sources of spirituality and zeroing in on certain fundamental values that they want to translate into concrete life-choices.

c) It is a **world** Movement. Here at the Forum, the international aspect is clearly in evidence. But the reality is far more widespread than what is represented here. All this means that there is a golden opportunity for networking, that is, for working in support of those causes that are concerned with the dignity of the person, the advancement of the young, solidarity with the poor, and the new evangelization. This world dimension can also provide opportunities for twinning arrangements between groups and countries, associations and salesian works; it also makes it possible to identify possible synergies and forms of collaboration with the local Churches and civil institutions.[\[21\]](#)

#### *Salesian lay associations*

We have reflected, and with good reason, on John Paul II's appraisal of the importance of the laity in the new millennium.

We have the **Cooperators**, who have been moving systematically to autonomy and communion. They are the prototype of the lay Salesian in the world. The model of the Cooperator is neither so limited nor so inflexible that other categories need to be invented to cover all types: there can be volunteer cooperators, those who devote themselves to study, those seeking greater contemplation, those who are parents of Salesians (whom Don Bosco considered his first and main cooperators). They can appear in various guises and engage in different programs. What should be avoided is a fragmentation which is only apparent. This is why the reference to communion is relevant.

All told, the jubilee year has been fruitful also for the **Salesian Family**. To the Common Identity Card, which urged and motivated the groups to make themselves autonomous as regards their own existence and open to bilateral and multilateral communion with the entire Family, has been added the Common Mission Statement, studied by all the General Councils of the various branches of the Salesian Family. As has been stated authoritatively on several occasions, the Family is not primarily and principally a kind of macro-organization. We do not want to tie ourselves down too strictly. It is a matter of fostering and maturing a ready attitude, a motivated approach, a culture, in virtue of which on the basis of the groups and forces existing in a practical context of activity those same groups and forces build up synergy, ad hoc structures and the like, in line with the principles of flexibility and functionality: no red-tape, unnecessary complications, etc. And it is surely time we got the Missionary Statement working in some specific initiatives as examples.

We have also the extensive ranks of affectionate **past-pupils**, who take Christian and educative salesian values into society. Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and lay people capable of thoughtful guidance are called upon to prepare those who animate these associations and their initiatives. We want them to be prophetic, eloquent, and available in particular for the benefit of the young and the poor. We want them to be up-to-date, leaders in ongoing formation, and pioneers in culture.

#### *Consecrated communities*

It is now quite clear and free of all historical doubt that for the animation of his Family Don Bosco wanted consecrated persons, living in clearly visible communities, like that of Valdocco. In such communities religious priests and brothers live in close contact with each other, communicating the rich qualities of their particular identity. The salesian brother, as distinct from the friar or lay-brother of other congregations, was born and moulded in a close relationship of mutual communication and collaboration with the priest. Don Bosco wanted priestly characteristics in the direction of the community. It is not only in ceremonial moments that these are exercised and communicated. It is a question of the priestly grace of Christ, which establishes a permanent bond

with himself, the head and foundation of the community, as stated in art. 55 of our Constitutions: The rector represents Christ who unites his followers in the service of the Father. He is at the centre of the community, a brother among brothers, who recognize his responsibility and authority.<sup>[22]</sup> A ceremony covers a limited period, and it clearly communicates grace. The sacrament invests the entire life: it is like a continuous celebration of grace through grace.

Our service of education provides for the Brothers many opportunities, which today are more numerous than ever in the fields of education, administration, technical matters and maintenance. The fundamental point is that of professional training, but still more of the religious spirit, the desire for holiness and service to the confreres and to the young. On these depend the flourishing of a pastoral vocation capable of attracting candidates to the religious life.

**The places for casting our nets wide and deep**, the places where successful fishing is possible not only helped but indeed guaranteed by the risen Christ those which raise the hope and trust provoked by the contemplation of his countenance, and which lead to the realization of a concrete program of life, witness and proclamation, are especially:

a) **holiness.** First of all, says the Pope once again in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, I have no hesitation in saying that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to *holiness*. It is necessary therefore to rediscover the full practical significance of Chapter 5 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, dedicated to the universal call to holiness. The Council Fathers laid much stress on this point, not just to embellish ecclesiology with a kind of spiritual veneer, but to make the call to holiness an intrinsic and essential aspect of their teaching on the Church. The rediscovery of the Church as mystery, or as a people gathered together by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, was bound to bring with it a rediscovery of the Church's holiness, understood in the basic sense of belonging to him who is in essence the Holy One, the thrice Holy (cf. *Is* 6:3). In fact, to place pastoral planning under the heading of holiness is a choice filled with consequences. It implies the conviction that, since Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity. To ask catechumens: "Do you wish to receive Baptism?" means at the same time to ask them: "Do you wish to become holy?" It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (*Mt* 5:48).<sup>[23]</sup>

b) **prayer.** It may be that many Christians, and even consecrated persons, have lost the sense and value of prayer and also the habit of praying. Perhaps they no longer dwell on our Lord's words in this connection, nor on the Holy Spirit who is the inspiration of authentic prayer. We frequently see Moslems kneeling in prayer, and we even bewail their presence and their mosques. In times past, says the Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, the spirituality of religious was able to foster and communicate, in an easy form to simple people, systems and schools of prayer which led to the establishing of an authentic popular spirituality. The same Exhortation expresses the hope that religious pastors of the present day may be teachers and guides in education to prayer and in the spreading of simple forms of devotion.

### *Contemplation*

At the miraculous draught of fishes Mary was neither on the shore nor in the boat.

But certainly and more than any other believer, she welcomed Christ's invitation: *Duc in altum!* She accepted it in spirit, without detriment to her place in history. This is shown by her prayer of the *Magnificat*, which embraces the whole of history, past, present and future: "*My soul magnifies the*

*Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.  
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;  
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
And his mercy is on those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm,  
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,  
he has put down the mighty from their thrones,  
and exalted those of low degree;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent empty away.  
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,  
as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his posterity  
for ever".[\[24\]](#)*

The *Magnificat* expresses the trust that drives away all fear: the Lord is kind and powerful to those who trust in him.

But it is especially in the event of the birth of Jesus that Mary appears as the model for the disciples, called to put out into the high seas and cast their nets wide and deep. In his account of Christ's birth Luke emphasizes the different levels of knowledge which the various people have of the incarnation and its significance; they serve as a key for the living in faith of all the other events of personal and social life.

The **shepherds** had to go to the place where the incarnation happened, and where they could become direct witnesses of it. They stayed for a while and listened to Mary. Then they went back home and told others what had been said to them about the child. They had no personal knowledge of previous events, like the annunciation and the virginal birth, and had not even been present when Jesus first appeared.

The **people** who heard the shepherds story were amazed at what they heard. They did not yet express any faith but were just taken by that initial interest and curiosity about wonderful events in which faith can begin.

**Mary**, for her part, remembered all these things, meditating on them in her heart.[\[25\]](#) Mary did not have to come, as the shepherds did, to the place where the incarnation took place. She was already there, she was part of the event. She did not have to hear from others what had happened and what its significance was. She remembered all the promises that had been made to humanity, as the *Magnificat* shows, and was aware that the one who had grown in her womb came from the Holy Spirit.

Mary did not leave the place of the event, as the shepherds did, after seeing the child. She stayed there. She could not go away. Wherever Jesus is incarnate her presence is indispensable. She did not yet understand the significance of all that had happened, nor could she yet foresee all the energy that would flow from the incarnation. These things would be gradually revealed throughout the life of Christ and the centuries that would follow. But Mary preserved in her heart the memory of all the

events; she kept them in loving remembrance, meditated on them, and by careful attention to them was able on occasion to draw fresh consequences from them.

In all this she is the figure of the Church and of its relationship with the birth and growth of Christ in the world and in every people. The Church too is part of the event of the incarnation and dwelling of Christ, wherever he is introduced and becomes good news. She too does not yet know all that will be revealed about Christ in the course of time. But she has in her heart and memory an event which sheds light: Jesus, the Word of God, has become man. Of this some things she sees clearly, and of others she gets a glimpse; some things she understands and others remain obscure because they have not yet been revealed. This enables her to be internally joyful, to remain serene, to work, and to see her way forward. And in the meantime she does not leave Christ; she refers everything to him, bears witness to him and proclaims him.

This is Lukes meditation, and it can perhaps suggest some points for our pastoral spirituality.

We cannot remain just visitors, tourists of the word and mystery of Christ. We must be like Mary who gathered all the truth of Christ, kept it in her mind, and meditated on it continually. Church history includes many figures of first-class evangelizers. All of them were patient meditators on the Word. The deeper things they learned in prayer and study they expressed in their preaching and writing, in the guidance of the Christian community and in the directing of souls.

The communication of the event of Christ is our profession and the objective of our vocation. In this we must be specialists, not so much through the use of technical means, but because we approach the task with calm and patience, we derive light for our personal life, and we assess as a community what we observe around us in our neighbourhood: This is what is meant by internal life.

The incarnation, i.e. the saving presence of God in the life of men through Jesus, as well as being an object of meditation, will be for us also our highest pastoral criterion.

This in turn implies three things:

our readiness to accept the situation we have to evangelize, involving ourselves with the people to whom we are sent and understanding their culture in faith;

the conviction that in everything that grows from a human point of view there is the mysterious presence and action of God, and that every revelation of God produces growth in humanity; the effort to single out the expectations and requirements of persons and peoples (and in our case especially of the young) who long for the coming of the Redeemer.<sup>[26]</sup> Another image that helps us to discover her exemplary role is that of Mary at the foot of the cross. Mary at the foot of the cross reminds us of the salvation of which we want to be signs and bearers: it is the salvation which flows from the Redemption of Christ who opens us up to God to receive from him the fulfilment of our own existence. We start up many initiatives for the benefit of the young and of adults, but they all have a single aim inspired by our motto *Da mihi animas*: salvation in God, which is at the centre of all the work of Jesus. With Mary beside the cross, we discover the sources of energy for the transformation God wants to bring about in ourselves and our communities: water and blood, reconciliation and the Eucharist. The liturgy we live is thoroughly permeated by sacramental pedagogy. The gospel pages and the liturgical year present it in a thousand and one different ways. Mary, at the foot of the cross, reveals to us the value of the community in which our service will be realized, of the community which is present at Christ's sacrifice in a unique way, different from that of other spectators. She is the bearer of that memory, and she alone fully understands its meaning. The community is more than just a group. It is the setting in which God reveals his salvation. We can think of the educative

communities we animate, of the Salesian Family and Movement, of the local churches. We foster in them the reference to Christ, together with unity in love and activity. With them we invoke and await the intervention of the Spirit, we make ourselves attentive to his signs and then go confidently ahead into the future.<sup>[27]</sup> Mary heads for the depths of the mystery and from it draws inspiration for her private life and public faith. In this she is our icon and model.

#### *Footnotes*

[1] Lk 5,4.

[2] Lk 5,1-11.

[3] NMI 58-59.

[4] NMI 58.

[5] Jn 14,6.

[6] Jn 18,37.

[7] Cf. NMI 24.

[8] NMI 29.

[9] Sacrosanctum Concilium 10, quoted in NMI 35.

[10] Mk 16,2.9; Lk 24,1; Jn 20,1.

[11] Cf. Jn 20,19-23.

[12] Cf. 1 Cor 15,14.

[13] Rev 19,16.

[14] John Paul II, Dies Domini 2, quoted in NMI 35.

[15] NMI 38.

[16] NMI 30.

[17] NMI 43.

[18] NMI 52.

[19] CEI, La presenza della scuola cattolica in Italia, La Scuola, Brescia 1992, p. 13.

[20] Centro Studi per la Scuola Cattolica, Per un progetto di scuola alle soglie del XXI secolo. Scuola cattolica in Italia. Secondo rapporto, La Scuola, Brescia 2000, p. 61.

[21] Cf.. Forum SYM 2000, Colle Don Bosco

[22] C. 55.

[23] NMI 30-31.

[24] Lk 1,46-55.

[25] Lk 2,51.

[26] Cf. J. Vecchi, Spiritualit salesiana. Temi fondamentali, Elledici, Leumann (Torino) 2001, pp. 207-210.

[27] Ibid, p. 217.