



MICHAL VOJTÁŠ
**SALESIAN
PEDAGOGY
AFTER DON BOSCO**

FROM THE FIRST GENERATION
UP TO THE SYNOD ON YOUNG PEOPLE
(1888-2018)

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MICHAL VOJTÁŠ



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Preface

Some of the action guidelines for the six-year period from 2020-2026¹ offer the context for interpreting this work on Salesian pedagogy that connects the founding experience of the first Salesian generation with the various periods of time up until our own. Since the author, Michal Vojtáš, intends to deal with a range of pedagogical mindsets, with a view to current and future updating, let me point to the *virtue of hope* as the principle guide for interpretation. Only with hope can we tackle the future, confident that the Lord will bring our humble contributions of thought and action to fulfilment. Hope has a privileged relationship with time. In fact, on the one hand it allows us to look to the future with faith and with the attitude of entrustment to Providence so dear to Don Bosco, while on the other it is anchored in a view of the past that is filled with gratitude for the journey made. The history of Salesian pedagogy is part of this – it responds to the challenges and welcomes the stimuli of the different eras, gives continuity to some prophetic intuitions that were part of the experience of the Valdocco oratory. It brings thinking into practice, offering pointers to method that bring balance, order and system to the actual intuitions resulting from so many best practices around the Salesian world.

As the Pope said in his message addressed to the Salesians who had gathered at the 28th General Chapter: “Neither pessimist nor optimist, the Salesian of the 21st century is someone filled with hope because he knows that his centre is the Lord who can make all things new (cf. Rev 21:5). Only this will save us from living in an attitude of resignation and defensive survival. Only this will make our life fruitful.” The developments in Salesian pedagogical thinking teach us how “living the charism faithfully is something richer and more stimulating than simply abandoning, retreating or readjusting houses or activities; it involves a change of mentality in the face of the mission to be carried out.”²

This book demonstrates that statements about pedagogy are never definitive; indeed, when there have been attempts at completeness, definitiveness, or extreme rigour, usually the achievements or reception of such statements have been less satisfactory than expected.

The first action guideline for the next six years, *Growing in Salesian Identity*, reminds us of the need to take care of sufficiently solid roots to build a future with openness to

¹ Cf. “*What kind of Salesians for the youth of today?*” *Post-Chapter reflection of the Society of St Francis de Sales*, in “Acts of the General Council” 102 (2020) 433, 13-54.

² FRANCIS, Message to GC28, in “*What kind of Salesians for the youth of today?*”, 57-58.

dialogue. We are part of an absorbing and fascinating history, but one that is dramatic and not straightforward, with its highs and lows accompanying Salesian personalities who have dedicated their life to education and to educational thinking. Our identity, indeed, has its roots in a current of thought and action which has been able to combine concreteness with flexibility, soundness with creativity, methodology with a lifestyle, the logic of faith with reasoned planning. Salesian identity is not made up of concepts and pedagogical coordinates alone but, just like it is for believers, it is anchored in an encounter with Christ and this in an attitude of gratitude for the mission he entrusts to us. Salesian pedagogy is not just a human project, the invention of a clever individual, but it is the fruit of the initiative of God who sends us among the young to accompany them and to think about educational proposals that are consistent, sound yet flexible and creative.

The second action guideline, the one about *formation for being Salesian pastors today*, asks for commitment to “overcoming the gap between formation and mission by encouraging in the Congregation a renewed culture of formation in the mission today throughout the Salesian world, with measures and decisions of great significance”.³ In fact, our formation model can only be the Preventive System and Salesian pedagogy. The more we succeed in reflecting critically on how things have been formulated in the past, the more we will be able to appreciate the permanent cornerstones of Salesian education and avoid the short cuts in thinking and action bound up with stereotypes of the era and standardised, dualistic styles of thinking.

The formation of Salesian pastors is inextricably linked to the third action guideline, the one about mission and formation together with lay people. The road for overcoming the separation between study and mission lies not in adjustments within the old “studentate mentality” but in the setting up of radically different processes that link the new identity with newer approaches to ongoing formation that take place in the vital context of a community of faith, learning and educational practice.

Almost a quarter of a century ago, Fr Juan Vecchi prophetically traced out this route in a circular letter entitled “For you I study”. The features of the figure of the “new Salesian” he was thinking of correspond to the demands of the “new evangelisation” and “new education”. He was not dealing with some light retouches but with something much more radical. The Salesian is called to fit into a “new model of operation”, one of being pastoral guides, primarily responsible for the Salesian identity of initiatives

3 “*What kind of Salesians for the youth of today?*”, 34.

and works, animators, leaders of other educators within the animating nucleus.⁴ In accordance with the reflections of GC28, I am convinced that this model is the road to the future, and needs to be sustained, studied and made concrete.

I congratulate Michal Vojtáš for this broad pedagogical overview and I hope that this work becomes a tool for forming our ability to interpret culture creatively, animate a broad educational environment, accompany processes of maturation and growth, orient Salesian educators and interact in the social context. My wish for the reader is that they get used to contextualising educational thinking and projects in order to be able to recognise the different pedagogical directions included in them. This is a prerequisite for being able to be like the disciple of the Kingdom of Heaven who “brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Mt 13:52), forming the new mindset needed for the change of era we are going through. “In this way Salesianity, far from being lost in uniformity without nuance, will be expressed in a more beautiful and attractive way... it will be able to express itself ‘in dialect’.”⁵ The Salesian Family will thus speak the same language of the preventive system with variations, nuances, imagery and new and original practices.

FR ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, SDB

Rome, 8 December 2020, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception
161st anniversary of the foundation of the Salesian Congregation

⁴ Cf. J.E. Vecchi, “*For you I study...*” (C 14) *Satisfactory preparation of the confreres and the quality of our educative work*, in AGC 78 (1997) 361, 3-49.

⁵ FRANCIS, Message to GC28, 63.

Introduction

“What would Don Bosco do today?” is often the explicit or implicit refrain that goes with educational planning in Salesian houses. The question, beyond being almost cliché-like, reveals a very common way of proceeding when addressing the issue of updating, even in academic circles: first of all we need to *get to know the historical roots* and the original educational insights. Then we need to *understand the current context* with its challenges and opportunities. And finally, it becomes natural to *plan educational activity* so as to embody Don Bosco's ideal today.

This concept of updating has its roots in the period that followed the Second Vatican Council, when religious orders were invited to explore their charismatic roots more deeply and open themselves up to current challenges so they could then plan for updated pastoral activity. The three aforementioned phases of updating refer to specific scientific disciplines: historical science for critically understanding Don Bosco in his context; the humanities for staying in touch with today's society; the organisational sciences for planning education seriously, incisively and effectively.

Even if this scheme of post-Vatican II '*aggiornamento*' seems convincing at first sight, some serious difficulties emerge half a century or more later. The first comes from the practical insignificance of developments that took place in the periods between the founding of the Congregation and today. If we were to take this kind of reasoning to an extreme, we would not, for example, take into consideration the formative model of the beginnings, the missionary approach in Patagonia, the development of oratories in the early twentieth century or the events of the catechetical crusade during Fr Ricaldone's time. A wealth of experience, reasoning and experimentation would be lost and we would be doomed to repeat mistakes very similar to those of our predecessors. The second difficulty comes from the subdivision between different scientific fields that find it difficult to communicate among themselves given their different methods, assumptions, axioms, languages and scientific communities. A further problem connected with the previous one is the mental separation between “yesterday” and “today”, between “historians”, “educators” and “planners”, given the universal difficulty in passing “from paper to life.”

To illustrate, one could mention the recent and emblematic celebration of the bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth, prepared for by a three-year period according to specific approaches: history, educational reflection, decision making... The Salesian History Congress was organised in 2014, followed by pedagogical reflection on contemporary issues at the Salesian Pedagogy Congress in 2015. In the meantime the 27th General Chapter promulgated the third edition of the Youth Ministry Framework and provided strategic planning decisions for the future. It was precisely in the years around the bicentenary that the idea of this current work you are reading was born, with the intention of connecting Don Bosco with today through different eras with their different mentalities. These mindsets reinforce some new pedagogical ideas while omitting others, preferring certain modes of action, developing reflections. Some of these were prophetic and courageous, others were rather inclined to the current mentality or to emergency solutions, or even dictated by a degree of intellectual inertia. The alternating succession of changes inevitably leads to a pendulum effect, or as Vico put it, *corsi e ricorsi*, or as Toynbee put it: *withdrawals and returns* between different periods.

Since there is a broad spectrum of approaches to accessing historical data and pedagogical thinking of the past,¹ I think I need to clarify my methodology, which differs from a purely historical reconstruction in several ways. At the level of general historiographical reflection, I consider the positions of Henri Irénée Marrou to be both inspiring and balanced. He is a French historian who has been able to combine the identity of the historian, the philosopher of history and the Catholic believer within a stimulating, integral, anti-ideological and humble perspective. Also, and this should not be undervalued, his ideas are informed by a marked pedagogical awareness and an appreciation of education. In fact, his most important work tackles the history and evolution of ancient education in an original way, by going beyond various Enlightenment stereotypes linked above all to the transition between antiquity and the Middle Ages.² The historical and historiographical potential that emerges in the study

1 Cf. G. LOPARCO – S. ZIMNIAK (eds.), *La storiografia salesiana tra studi e documentazione nella stagione postconciliare*, LAS, Rome 2014, 9-142, especially contributions by: M. NICKEL, *Grundfragen und Tendenzen der Kirchengeschichte in der Gegenwart*, in *Ibid.*, 27-48 and G. ROCCA, *La storiografia delle congregazioni religiose in Europa. Orientamenti e proposte*, in *Ibid.* pp. 73-109. For the history of pedagogy cf. for example. G. CHIOSSO, *Novecento pedagogico*, La Scuola, Brescia 1997 and *Id.*, *Profilo storico della pedagogia cristiana in Italia (XIX e XX secolo)*, La scuola, Brescia 2001.

2 Cf. G. TOGNON, *Prefazione per rileggere Marrou*, in H.-I. MARROU, *Storia dell'educazione nell'antichità*, Studium, Rome 2016, 13-39.

of transitional periods was enhanced by this author in his *De la connaissance historique* and *Théologie de l'histoire*.³

His investigations into the relationship between historical research and philosophical reflection led him to transcend the tired and sceptical positivist historiography that he had learned as a young student at the Sorbonne. Along with the *Les Annales* school, he too identified the most immediate limitation of positivistic historiography to be its atomistic conception of historical fact. We focused too much on the importance of the “document”, thinking we could reconstruct the facts with evidence, assuming that each historical moment was complete in itself, extractable from the structure of complexity and continuity of historical reality.

But there are other more philosophical and theological concepts of history. Universal laws governing history are hypothesised, laws which often seem to be a distant echo of Hegelian ideas, sometimes in the guise of historiographical or sociological theories. In this current of thought, ideas, as the ideal-types, are transformed from provisional modes of representing history into crystallised laws that pretend to bring the particular into a unified design, turning into “great machines that prevent us from understanding” and which, with their “illusory clarity end up impairing the readiness of the historian to see reality in its authentic and disconcerting multiplicity.”⁴ Bernard Lonergan, taking up Marrou’s critique of idealistic conceptions of historiography, has this to say about the use of interpretative hypotheses in his most famous work on method:

Marrou approves the use of ideal-types in historical investigation, but he issues two warnings. First, they are just theoretical constructs: one must resist the temptation of the enthusiast that mistakes them for descriptions of reality [...] Secondly, there is the difficulty of working out appropriate ideal-types: the richer and more illuminating the construct, the greater the difficulty of applying it; the thinner and looser the construct, the less it is able to contribute much to history.⁵

Nevertheless, the critique of metaphysical theories of history is not exhausted by their examination, but opens the way to the understanding of the multifaceted nature of history itself and of the respective visions of it. The non-linear nature of history does not atomise historical knowledge in facts gained through documents, but argues for the

³ Cf H.-I. MARROU, *Conoscenza storica*, il Mulino, Bologna 1997, and ID., *Teologia della storia*, Jaca, Milan 2010.

⁴ MARROU, *Conoscenza storica*, 192

⁵ B. LONERGAN, *Method in Theology*, University of Toronto Press 1990, 228.

existence of links and interdependent relationships between various periods, mentalities, or historical sets. Institutions, mentalities, arts, educational styles are not realities that appear like meteors in the sky of history, but arise after a long period of incubation and can be perceived only in their evolution and continuous transformation.⁶

For Marrou, history is not a succession of measurable facts that must be reconstructed. It is always the knowledge of the complex past of a human reality that has “already been”. To put it as Heidegger put it, history, insofar as it is *dagewesenes Dasein*, influences our present and future Being-in-the-world.⁷ The cognitive claims of this discipline are therefore placed at a more modest level than the pride of the idealist (who possesses “the laws”) and the scrupulous myopia of the positivist (who possesses “the fact” and “the document”).⁸ Inspired by this balanced, humanistic and believing position, I would like to place Salesian pedagogical thinking within historical coordinates. By this operation I am not trying to relativise Salesian educational thinking by dissolving it within a given socio-cultural environment. On the contrary, I would like to understand the flow and evolution of ideas and educational applications over time.

History, understood as the human past reconstructed and interpreted by other human beings, implies a methodology that takes the position of “otherness” seriously: otherness in terms of temporal, mental or cultural distance. Marrou refers to the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl in suggesting the attitude of *epoché* as a fundamental paradigm so as not to fall into the “philosophical history of philosophy” which uncritically traces the past back to the present as the point of arrival.⁹ Our author writes: “the historian is someone who, through the *epoché*, succeeds in going out of himself to encounter others.”¹⁰ The experience of history, precisely because it involves encountering the other, puts the historian in an attitude of profound humility. If he or she genuinely puts themselves into relationship with the otherness of the past, then they experience a greatness that leaves us bewildered; in fact, the people of the past revealed by it were often superior to us. Marrou also insists on psychological affinity, the empathy

6 Cf. G. GUGLIELMI, *Critica alla storiografia positivista e alla filosofia della storia. Lonergan interprete di Marrou*, in E. CIBELLI – C. TADDEI FERRETTI (Eds.), *Ricerche lonergantiane offerte a Saturnino Muratore*, Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, Napoli 2016, 356.

7 Cf. MARROU, *Conoscenza storica*, 208.

8 Cf. MARROU, *Conoscenza storica*, 56.

9 The interpretative procedure of this philosophical historiography consists in considering historically relevant only what is echoed in one's own ideology. Cf. For example E. PIOVANI, *Filosofia e storia delle idee*, *Edizioni di Storia e di Letteratura*, Rome 2010², 200.

10 MARROU, *Conoscenza storica*, 99. Cf. also 89-92.

that the historian must necessarily have in view of achieving a knowledge of the past that he or she is reconstructing. Just as the history of art demands of the scholar a strong and subtle aesthetic sensitivity, the history of Christianity supposes that one has a sense of spiritual values and of the religious phenomenon.¹¹

Investigation in an attitude of phenomenological *epoché* accepts events and the succession of historical periods as they occur, without a fixed and predetermined pattern. At certain moments we find an influential educational theorist or a strong superior, while at other times the Church (Vatican Council II) or a socio-political event (totalitarian regimes) leads to reflection on education. Or there are the dynamics of personnel and generations that could be decisive (the first generation formed by Don Bosco or the generational conflict of the 1960s), etc.

In certain periods the Salesians based themselves on the direct evidence of the founder's educational way of doing things, while in others they were influenced by the pedagogical thinking of outside writers of their times, or in changed conditions or adverse situations they took greater care of their own traditions and identity. For pedagogical reflection, the influence of the experiential and daily context is decisive, linked as it is to the different interactions that are created in certain typical educational structures (boarding school, oratory, vocational school, sodalities, groups, universities, etc.). This latter influence is particularly relevant for Salesians as members of a Congregation of practical educators rather than scholars of education. In this way the challenges of the time, the thinking of some superiors, the organisational logic that was part of formation and educational structures, and the consequences of the previous periods all come together to create an "ideal-type", that is, the traits of the typical mentality of a generation. The alternation of generations and pedagogical paradigms over different historical eras will be summarised in the following six chapters:

1. *Statements on pedagogy by the first Salesian generation (1888-1917)* between the beginnings of Fr Michael Rua's terms of office as Rector Major and the death of Francesco Cerruti, the first General Councillor for Schools.
2. *A practical pedagogy of osmosis (1902-1931)* capable of adapting to modern society. This can be ideally located as beginning with the Congresses on the oratories, including the terms of office of Fr Paul Albera and Fr Philip Rinaldi.

¹¹ Cf. MARROU, *Conoscenza storica*, 104. In the context of Christian education, I consider the arguments to be important that are contained in the preface to J. RATZINGER BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Doubleday, New York 2007, 8-20.

3. *Discipline, fidelity, to a saint in difficult times (1929-1951)*, which characterises the period that begins ideally from Don Bosco's Beatification and includes pedagogical systematisation by Fr Peter Ricaldone.
4. *Before, during and after Vatican II (1952-1978)*, that is, the impact of the momentous ecclesial reflection on education and pedagogy, giving priority to the innovative stimuli of the respective General Chapters.
5. *Planning and animation (1978-1998)*, two core elements of pedagogical synthesis that developed during Fr Egidio Viganò's time as Rector Major with significant pedagogical contributions from Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi.
6. *New evangelisation and education for the third millennium (1998-2018)*. A period that begins with the systematisation of youth ministry frameworks and ideally ends with the Synod on Youth.

The understanding of Salesian pedagogy in this book is placed within the context of the phenomenological and historiographical principles presented and will be understood as a systematic and critical reflection on education inspired by the style and educational work of St John Bosco. By respecting Salesian history as it is presented, the concepts of a systematic and critical nature will be understood in a broad and inclusive sense, therefore also accepting approaches with different degrees of scientific value and influence on education. Because there is so much material available and because of the need to limit the field of research, the most significant items in terms of thought and dissemination will be chosen. Methodological choices are also reflected in how individual chapters in our text are structured, as follows:

- to begin with, we will look at the social, educational and pedagogical characteristics of an *historical period*, the corresponding church context and how *Salesian education* has responded by adapting its typical educational structures;
- then come the pedagogical guidelines, other governing guidelines in educational matters coming from *Congregational leadership* and that interpret fidelity to Don Bosco's educational model in a given period;
- a deeper exploration of reflections by some of the most significant *Salesian scholars in the pedagogical field* at the level of influence and spread. The contributions of the authors will be analysed synchronically (in their context) and diachronically (studying the continuities and discontinuities between pedagogical concepts);
- finally comes a proposal for an *anthology of texts and materials* from each period, available partly in print and largely online. Hundreds of documents, sources, research items and articles can be consulted in full-text on the *salesian.online* site.

These choices of method necessarily imply some limitations. Because we have taken into consideration the pedagogical guidelines issued by Congregational leadership, and have provided insights into the most influential authors, this entails the obvious non-exhaustiveness and incompleteness of the work. Some of these authors develop original or significant syntheses, but since they are not part of the Congregational mainstream, they have not been analysed in depth, and are just placed within currents of thought. Even pedagogical reflection by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians appears to be only hinted at in some parts of what I have written. Since there is a need to contextualise the FMA Institute's animation guidelines, their Superiors and their typical educational works for women's and children's education, I have preferred to leave this topic to FMA experts in the fields of history and pedagogy.

The choice of giving certain weight to the directives coming from Congregational leadership clearly implies an Italian-focused perspective for the first periods up to Fr Ricaldone, which opens up to other contexts only around the Second Vatican Council, especially Western Europe and Latin America. Thus it appears that only in the third millennium would the Salesian Congregation be truly worldwide at the pedagogical level, albeit at different speeds according to the contexts. In fact, as emerges from the reports on the state of the Congregation and from various studies, the ideas and operational guidelines of the various General Chapters were not dealt with by the provinces in a uniform way. It seems to me important to emphasise that my intention is primarily to study meaningful and typical pedagogical ideas in the context of their emergence and evolution, not to evaluate authors, governing styles, or the Congregation as a whole. I believe that the future of Salesian pedagogy does not lie in sector-specific syntheses aiming at perfection, but in the continuous and reciprocal enrichment between historical investigations, studies of theoretical-methodological systematisation, in-depth regional pedagogical studies and best practices, fruits of the Spirit acting in history and the practical wisdom of educators.

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Last, but not least in importance, I want to remember my Salesian pedagogy students who are continually stimulating me to delve into new aspects and adopt new perspectives in the pedagogical field. I wish the reader a stimulating read full of inspiration for educational engagement with today's youth.

Michal Vojtáš, sdb

Abbreviations

AAS	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i>
AGC	Acts of the General Council
ASC	Acts of the Superior Council
ASC	Salesian Central Archives
ASS	<i>Acta Sanctae Sedis</i>
EPC	Educative Pastoral Community
GC	General Chapter
SGC	Special General Chapter
FMA	<i>Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice</i> (Daughters of Mary Help of Christians)
FSE	<i>Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione dell'Università Pontificia Salesiana</i> (UPS Education Faculty)
ISP	<i>Istituto Superiore di Pedagogia del Pontificio Ateneo Salesiano</i> (PAS Higher Institute of Pedagogy)
PAS	<i>Pontificio Ateneo Salesiano</i> (Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum)
SEPP	Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project
YM	Youth Ministry
OPP	Overall Provincial Project
SDB	Salesians of Don Bosco
UPS	Pontifical Salesian University

Statements on pedagogy by the first Salesian generation (1888–1917)

Don Bosco's life and the development of his educational style initially find their place in the Piedmontese rural world of centuries-old Catholic traditions marked by the alliance between throne and altar reinterpreted in the light of the Napoleonic Restoration. The changes brought about during his life, and the educational choices he gradually made, such as the fundamental shift from oratories to boarding schools, nevertheless denote an adaptation to the development of the liberal and secular society of Italy during the process of unification.

The subsequent decades of the transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were different, characterised by great and profound changes at a global level. Especially in the Western world, these aroused in many the expectation of a new world heading for unlimited progress under the pressure of positivistic scientism (the view that science should be the basis for belief and decision-making in all areas of life). Many observers have shared the perception that the historical period they experienced in the years before the First World War was something more than a phase of development like any other. In one way or another, the shift from one century to the other seemed to anticipate the preparation of a world that would be intrinsically different from the past. This is the context which a Congregation expanding across continents found itself working in.¹

¹ Cf. E.J. HOBBSAWM, *L'età degli imperi: 1875-1914*, Laterza, 2005; G. MARTINA, *Storia della Chiesa. Da Lutero ai nostri giorni*, vol. 4: *L'età contemporanea*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1995, 13-107; F. TRANIELLO, *L'epoca di don Rua: lineamenti di uno scenario storico*, in F. MOTTO (ed.), *Don Michele Rua nella storia (1837-1910)*, *Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Studi su don Rua* (Rome, Salesianum, 29-31 October 2010), LAS, Rome 2011, 27-41.

The first generation of Salesians

The evolutions of positivist cultural sensitivity were not understood by the majority of the Salesians, who still lived in a context marked by Catholic traditions and with an attitude of opposition to secularism. This tendency was further reinforced by the intra-ecclesiastical argument against modernism at the beginning of the twentieth century. St John Bosco's *Preventive System*, a common term for the typical way of educating in a Salesian way, created a growing movement between the Congregation of St Francis de Sales, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and a network of charity and assistance that revolved, in organisational terms, around Salesian houses, the *Salesian Bulletin*, Salesian Cooperators and the Mary Help of Christians Association. Since Salesian education was addressed to poor, at risk and abandoned youngsters from low-income circumstances, not all the new cultural tendencies directly influenced Salesian education and pedagogical reflection. Since they did not dedicate themselves to the education of the elite, Salesians were not directly called to tackle positivism, new philosophies or new artistic expressions which gained strength at the beginning of the twentieth century.

It would seem that Salesian education adapted creatively at a practical and organisational level by reinventing some of its activities and structures for the new needs. It did so by following the strategic guidelines of the founder, despite the mainstream traditional mentality. In fact, only some challenges of the contemporary world influenced its educational approaches, perceived above all from an Italian perspective, along with some European or Latin American problems.

At the level of thought we note the comparison with liberal secularism – the affirmation of mass state schooling in how schools were organised had to be faced up to.

And finally, at the economic level it was necessary to deal with the consequences of the second industrial revolution which accentuated the contrasts of the social question, with growing socialism and the birth of the middle class.

The challenge of anticlerical “free thinking”

In the period that preceded the outbreak of the First World War, the European political scenario often displayed weak governments, with an all too frequent recurrence of parliamentary crises. Accusations that there were too many parliamentarians and too much corruption also increased.

Given this lack of strong and clear political direction, there are some common traits in the governments of the time that defined the parties' programs: nationalism, the social question, and their anticlerical orientation. The last-mentioned influenced Salesian education both for applications in the scholastic field and for the struggle against the Church. The anti-religious and above all anti-Catholic tendency hid beneath the label of "free thinking".

European anti-Catholic liberalism, as well its Masonic strain, manifested itself differently depending on the context. For example, strong opposition followed the unification process in Italy; there was a spread of the anti-clerical approach tied to the specific nature of *laïcité française* in France; in Germany, the *Kulturkampf*, even though already over, marked Church-State relationships across the change of century.² There was "a general atmosphere that seemed marked from France to Italy, from Belgium to Argentina – and this is how it was experienced – by the desire of Masonic propaganda to drag religious through the mud."³

Under the guidance of Fr Michael Rua, the Salesian Congregation experienced some of the effects of European anti-clericalism in tensions with school systems in different countries. This happened in the attempts to discredit the Congregation that have gone down in history as the "Varazze affair" in 1907, but especially in the closure of the houses in France in the first two decades of the twentieth century. According to French law in 1901, Salesians from the Province in the north of France had requested government authorisation to be able to continue their activities, and when they did not receive it, they were expelled and the houses in Paris and Lille confiscated. Instead, the Salesians in the country's south had chosen the secularisation and clandestine route, and some works were saved through patronage and management by Salesian Brothers.⁴ The Salesians in Ecuador had to face similar problems after the liberal revolution in 1895.⁵

² Cf. M. FLORES, *Il secolo mondo. Storia del Novecento*, vol.1: 1900-1945, Mulino, Bologna 2005; F. MOTTO (ed.), *L'Opera Salesiana dal 1880 al 1922. Significatività e portata sociale. Atti del 3° Convegno Internazionale di Storia dell'Opera Salesiana Roma 31 ottobre – 5 novembre 2000*, vol. 1: *Contesti, quadri generali, interpretazioni*, LAS, Rome 2001, 41–177.

³ J.M. PRELLEZO, *Le scuole professionali salesiane (1880-1922). Istanze e attuazioni viste da Valdocco*, in J.G. GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922. Istanze ed attuazioni in diversi contesti. Atti del 4° Convegno Internazionale di Storia dell'Opera salesiana Ciudad de México, 12-18 febbraio 2006*, vol. 1, LAS, Rome 2007, 97.

⁴ Cf. F. DESRAMAUT, *I Salesiani francesi al tempo del silenzio (1901-1925)*, in S. ZIMNIAK – G. LOPARCO (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana in Europa negli anni difficili del XX secolo. Atti del Seminario Europeo di Storia dell'Opera salesiana Cracovia 31 ottobre – 4 novembre 2007*, LAS, Rome 2008, 115–128.

⁵ Cf. A. GUERRIERO – P. CREAMER, *Un siglo de presencia salesiana en el Ecuador. El proceso histórico 1888-1988*, Don Bosco, Quito 1997.

In the Italian context, and in the context of freedom of teaching, it is useful to mention the efforts of Turin educationalist Giuseppe Allievo. His actions were important for the defence of Salesian schools in the period under consideration. His pedagogical theories influenced the first generation of Salesians such as Cerruti and Barberis, as did his ideas in defence of the free school against state centralism.⁶ In the process of designing the Italian school system, the ruling class, nominally liberal, was paradoxically conditioned by a certain “suspicion of freedom” which stemmed from the perception of an Italy profoundly divided from a linguistic, cultural, political and religious point of view. State centralism was opted for, fearing that a scenario where there was educational plurality would have harmed the country's unification.⁷ Allievo, opposed to liberal positivism and Hegelian idealism, affirmed the principle of personality, understanding the human being as a “living synthesis of a rational soul and an organic body, together with units of being.”⁸ His pedagogy affirmed spiritualism as a primary and irreducible condition for the defence of freedom:

The person is not just an accessory to the will of others, but is a sacred creature, with rights that must be respected by whatever social power or human authority: the right to exist, to truth, to happiness, to virtue, so that if, for example, the prosperity of an entire people were to mean the enslavement or destruction of even one human being, this would be enough for it to be detested as criminal. So then, in the case where the school is a function, a property, a possession of society subject to its absolute control, its pupils will no longer be educated as persons who belong to themselves, and who are ordered to an end from which they have the right not to be diverted. Instead they would just be the chattels of social will, things or tools in the service of society.⁹

Thanks to his struggle for the freedom of teaching and defence of Catholic schools through the *Unione pro schola libera* (founded in 1907), Allievo was also appreciated by the broader Catholic public, by *Civiltà Cattolica* and other Catholic scholars of neo-scholastic leanings.¹⁰

6 Cf. J.M. PRELLEZO, *Giuseppe Allievo negli scritti pedagogici salesiani*, in “Orientamenti Pedagogici” 45 (1998) 267, 393–419.

7 A. MARRONE, *Giuseppe Allievo e la libertà d'insegnamento*, in “History of Education & Children's Literature” 7 (2012) 2, 173–176.

8 G. ALLIEVO, *Appunti di Antropologia e Psicologia*, Carlo Clausen, Turin 1906, 3.

9 G. ALLIEVO, *La nuova scuola pedagogica ed i suoi pronunciamenti*, Carlo Clausen, Turin 1905, 23.

10 Cf. MARRONE, *Giuseppe Allievo e la libertà d'insegnamento*, 190–191.

The Church's reaction: new balances and conservatism

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, under the leadership of Leo XIII, the Church changed its position slightly towards the world of the *Belle Époque*. From the condemnations of liberal governments in the time of Pius IX there was a shift towards an awareness of new balances and the need for some openings and reforms.

Leo XIII gave concrete form to the effort to create convergence at the level of thought with his Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879), first of all by urging to “restore the golden wisdom of St. Thomas, and to spread it far and wide for the defence and beauty of the Catholic faith, for the good of society, and for the advantage of all the sciences.”¹¹ With *Immortale Dei* (1885) the Church made it clear that it allowed different opinions about political systems; in the Encyclical *Libertas* (1888), the Pope specified the concept of freedom in the legislative, social and political context, stating that “the growth of liberty ascribed to our age must be considered apart in its various details”,¹² mentioning liberty of worship as the first of them. Even divine authority is not opposed to human freedom: “And, so far from this most just authority of God over men diminishing, or even destroying their liberty, it protects and perfects it.”¹³ The Encyclical *Sapientiae Christianae* (1890), instead, asserted new balances and autonomy between State and Church that reflected the end of the Papal States. The encyclical appealed to education and strongly affirmed the right of parents to the education of their children. In his conclusion, Leo XIII connected the good of society, the importance of family education and the need for investment in Catholic schools:

Where the right education of youth is concerned, no amount of trouble or labour can be undertaken, how greatsoever, but that even greater still may not be called for. In this regard, indeed, there are to be found in many countries Catholics worthy of general admiration, who incur considerable outlay and bestow much zeal in founding schools for the education of youth. It is highly desirable that such noble example may be generously followed, where time and circumstances demand, yet all should be intimately persuaded that the minds of children are most influenced by the training they receive at home. If in their early years they find within the walls of their homes the rule of an upright life and the

¹¹ LEO XIII, Encyclical Letter *Aeterni Patris* (4 August 1879) in ASS 12 (1894) 97-115.

¹² LEO XIII, Encyclical Letter *Libertas* (20 June 1888), in ASS 20 (1887) 593-613.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 599.

discipline of Christian virtues, the future welfare of society will in great measure be guaranteed.¹⁴

Pius X changed the *focus* of attention, concentrating on the internal problems of the Church itself. A catechetical, liturgical and curial reform was promoted,¹⁵ while the controversy with the modernists resumed strongly, culminating in the strong and polarising tones of the Encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* in 1907. The Church's tension with the liberal world was also projected internally: "the partisans of error are to be sought not only among the Church's open enemies; they lie hid, a thing to be deeply deplored and feared, in her very bosom and heart."¹⁶ The consequence was an increase both in the besieged fortress mentality and in the processes of control within the Church.

The Church preferred not to take the field directly at the political level, and, while the political potential of Christian parties increased with the expansion of suffrage and could have been significant as European history has shown from 1945 onwards, the Church did not officially endorse the formation of Catholic political parties. Church representatives either supported conservative parties of various kinds, or maintained good relations with nationalist movements not infected by the virus of liberal secularism.¹⁷

The Salesians did not take part in the debate with science or the controversy with modernism, even if, in the writings of the first generation, there are some reflections of the cultural climate around the themes of the Catholic school. Generally, Don Bosco's strategy continued to be followed in a search for practical solutions for the management of boarding schools, oratories and vocational training centres. Rather than the mentality of a fortress under siege (which was partially present at the level of thought), the Salesians existentially and practically experienced a feat of world expansion, and at the level of central government what they really had to face were the problems of balance between numerical growth and the necessary and often poor formation of personnel.¹⁸

¹⁴ LEO XIII, Encyclical Letter *Sapientiae Christianae* (10 January 1890), in ASS 22 (1889-90) 385-404.

¹⁵ Cf. The Encyclical *Acerbo Nimis* for increasing catechetical activity, and the new catechism published in 1912 called the *Catechism of Pius X*.

¹⁶ PIUS X, *Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pope Pius X on modernist teachings*, in *Atti della Santa Sede circa le Dottrine Moderniste*, Augustae Taurinorum, Ex Officina Asceterii Salesiani, 1908, 140.

¹⁷ Cf. E.J. HOBBSAWM, *L'età degli imperi*, 133-134.

¹⁸ Cf. J.G. GONZÁLEZ, *Don Rua e i Capitoli Generali da lui presieduti*, in MOTTO (ed.), *Don Michele Rua nella storia*, 176-190.

Identity and evolution of the Salesian school

Straddling the two centuries, the developments of Salesian schools are connected with Fr Francesco Cerruti, the Congregation's Councillor for Schools from 1885 until 1917. He was described at the end of his service as “the real organiser of the schools and studies of the Pious Salesian Society.”¹⁹ The specific context in Italy led Fr Cerruti to the strengthening of the preferential choice for classical, humanistic education within Salesian institutes. It was a choice motivated above all by the wish to be faithful to the teachings of Don Bosco. Such an attitude is confirmed by this extract from the Fr Cerruti's *Ricordino educativo-didattico*:

Every day that passes, I am ever more convinced of the need, that for us is a duty, to remain very much attached, *mordicus*, to the teachings of Don Bosco, including in matters of instruction and education and we must never depart from these teachings, not even in a single point, *nec transversum quidem unguem*. Far be it from us to be innovators.²⁰

Another reason, no less important and in line with Allievo's pedagogy, was to see education in the school as religious and moral, scientific and literary formation, so as not to divide the human and the Christian aspects of education. Those who separate them, according to Fr Cerruti, do not educate, but ruin things; they do not build, but destroy; they do not practise, but betray his mission. He was attentive in his circular letters both to problems related to the quality of language teaching, and to the Christian and Salesian aspect of education.

The latter reason for this preferential humanistic choice was linked to the specific nature of the Italian tradition and “genius”, more in harmony with the classical school than with the vocational or technical school.

The polarisation between the modern technical world and the classic traditional world during Pius X's pontificate was highlighted precisely in debate over the technical school. This topic came into lively discussion at the 1907 General Chapter and the conclusion was: “The opening of boarding establishments is granted by way of exception – boarding for technical schools – but individual cases must be subjected to the Superior Chapter [understand “Council”] which will examine each in turn.”²¹ In 1911 there

¹⁹ A. LUCHELLI, *Don Francesco Cerruti consigliere scolastico generale della Pia Società Salesiana*, SAID Buona Stampa, Turin 1917, 22.

²⁰ F. CERRUTI, *Un ricordino educativo-didattico*, SAID Buona Stampa, Turin 1910, 7.

²¹ *Verbali* (11 November 1907), in ASC D270.

were already a dozen or so technical schools in Italy. By contrast with this development, the General Chapter then adopted a more rigid position that would have aroused opposition: “In compliance with the will of the Venerable Don Bosco and the late Fr Rua – opposed to the introduction of internal technical classes in our colleges – the current superiors confirm the principle and declare that they too do not intend to admit the internal technical classes.”²² The discussion continued and some exceptions were granted but generally, technical instruction was not considered proper to the Salesian charism. The school reform of the neo-idealist Giovanni Gentile in 1923 further strengthened this Salesian schools setup.²³

In Latin American countries the situation was different. Positivism appears to have more penetrated the ruling classes of society. The *científicos* were considered the new prophets of the progress of a backward society that revolved around the dynamics of agriculture. The first institute with “scientific” education was the Colegio Pío which came into existence in 1877 at Villa Colón in Uruguay under the direction of Fr Luigi Lasagna. In addition to the curriculum which integrated natural sciences with literature, morality and religion, Lasagna opened laboratories, biology and geology museums, a meteorological, astronomical, seismic and magnetic observatory within the institute, the first in the whole country.²⁴

In Brazil, too, the Salesians were able to meet the needs of society by building up a Republic that sought to be modern, orderly and “progressive”. Religious, moral, literary, scientific, artistic and civic education was offered within Salesian schools (integrated with military education). Their educational proposal was positively evaluated by the representatives of the Republic, and the Holy See also hoped for collaboration between the Government and the Congregation for the construction of a new Christianity in the Brazilian state.²⁵

²² *Verbali* (3 and 4 May 1911), in ASC D270.

²³ J.M. PRELLEZO, *Linee pedagogiche della Società Salesiana nel periodo 1880-1922. Approccio ai documenti*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 23 (2004) 44, 128–130.

²⁴ Cf. S. BOIX – F. LEZAMA, *Las ciencias en la propuesta educativa del Colegio Pío de Villa Colón (Uruguay) entre 1877 y 1895, en el marco del debate Iglesia-positivismo*, in J.G. GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 2, 361–384. It is interesting to note the clash of two “school cultures”. Lasagna writes that “the 11 or 12-year-olds have already advanced to equations, logarithms, etc., all of which none of us know how to explain or continue”, in A. DA SILVA FERREIRA (ed.), *Mons. Luis Lasagna. Epistolario*, vol. 1 (1873-1882), LAS, Rome 1995, 113.

²⁵ Cf. R. AZZI, *A educação salesiana na emergência da burguesia brasileira*, in J.G. GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 2, 121–143.

Cooperation with state authorities was obviously not without its risks. The Salesians in some Provinces managed to obtain grants for the running of schools. Salesian Belgium was the first country to benefit from this for its boarding schools in Liège, Tournai and Ghent starting from 1896. The recognition of qualifications and requirements for state grants, however, implied eventual inspection and meant a real influence of the state on the Salesian school. The Belgian Salesians, who were paid by the state, were trained in specific subjects but their typically Salesian formation was not organised systematically.²⁶

Second industrial revolution in the final decades of the 19th century

At the end of the nineteenth century, the economic system underwent profound transformations with social implications such that we can speak of a second industrial revolution. Thanks to technological inventions, new industry sectors were born, the relationship between state power and business management changed, giving the world economy a new configuration. In the second half of the nineteenth century science made many discoveries in the field of physics and chemistry which were the basis of the industrial development of the time. The real novelty, however, was a new type of relationship between science, technology and production. Engineers and scientists also took on the role of business owners by making their findings available. Names like Edison, Siemens, Bell, Dunlop and Bayer became the icons of the period.

The progress of medicine together with the successes of the food industry, which freed the most developed countries from the nightmare of famine, had the effect of a population boom. In Europe, the average age went from 35 years halfway through the century to 50 years by the end of the nineteenth century. The population of the old continent increased by 60% in the second half of the nineteenth century, not counting the 30 million emigrants who moved to America. At the same time, the demographic growth of non-industrialised nations, despite the high mortality rate, was between 20 and 30%.²⁷ Consequently, the number of metropolises also increased, but urbanisation showed up above all in the proliferation of large and medium-sized urban centres around industrial centres: “We can define the ‘advanced’ world as a world in the process of rapid

²⁶ Cf. H. DELACROIX, *Cent ans d'école salesienne en Belgique*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 9 (1990) 16, 23–24.

²⁷ Cf. G. SABATUCCI – V. VIDOTTO, *Il mondo contemporaneo. Dal 1848 a oggi*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2005, 107–116.

urbanisation, and even in extreme cases, as an unprecedented ‘city-oriented’ world.”²⁸ In this context, the preferential beneficiaries, concepts and methods of Salesian education “of the children of the people” also changed.

Relying on both humanitarian and utilitarian considerations, such as the maintenance of social peace, the state was concerned with implementing more widespread social services for everyone. Social services such as accident insurance, old-age pensions and benefits for the unemployed spread, starting from Bismarck’s Germany in the 1880s. Although not always effective, rules and controls were established for safety and hygiene in factories, to eliminate child labour, establish weekly rest and a working day with a duration of around ten working hours.²⁹

Latin America is the part of the world that endured most European influences, first from colonisation and then from massive immigration. Although most countries gained independence in the early nineteenth century, there remained a strong influence of the so-called First World. However, it can be said that the period between 1880 and 1914 represents one of the few periods of political stability in contemporary Latin American history, stability essentially due to the fact that the ruling oligarchy dominated unchallenged.³⁰

Rerum Novarum and the growing social sensitivity of Salesians

The self-awareness of the masses began to be felt in eighteenth-century Europe, grew throughout the following century and culminated in the explosive events of the twentieth century. Three strong interdependent elements contributed to the increase of this phenomenon: literacy, the industrial revolution, urbanisation. There were significant changes in the economic, social and political fields directly attributable to the increasingly marked presence of the masses on the scene of public life. The emergence of the “social question” was also considered in new light by the Church, therefore in *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, Leo XIII hoped that Christians would move from charitable action to a more incisive social commitment.³¹ Socialist parties had clearly different positions,

²⁸ HOBBSAWM, *L’età degli imperi*, 30.

²⁹ Cf. FLORES, *Il XX secolo*, 101.

³⁰ Cf. A. GUTIÉRREZ, *Contexto histórico de Latinoamérica (1880-1922)*, in MOTTO (ed.), *L’Opera Salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 1, 53–70; D. POMPEJANO, *Storia dell’America Latina*, Mondadori, Milan 2012.

³¹ Cf. G. CHIOSSO, *Profilo storico della pedagogia cristiana*, La Scuola, Brescia 2004, 89.

including the Italian Socialist Party, founded in Genoa in 1892, which is characterised in Italy as the first major organisation with the aim of representing the interests of the proletariat in the political field.

The changed context also gave the impetus to a number of Salesians to take an interest in social and economic issues.³² Importantly, we mention some writings by significant personalities who worked in the formation of young confreres and who thus contributed to creating a new mentality. The Councillor for Schools, Fr Francesco Cerruti, broadened his views by opening up to the consideration of social issues under the influence of Giuseppe Toniolo, Professor of Political Economy at the University of Pisa. In 1893 Cerruti published *De' principii pedagogico-sociali di S. Tommaso* and five years later a tome aimed at young Salesians entitled *Nozioni elementari di morale e d'economia politica*.³³ Around the turn of the century, Fr Carlo Maria Baratta, called to teach sociology to the young clerics at Foglizzo, published *La libertà dell'operaio* and the *Principii di sociologia cristiana*.³⁴ Baratta developed his thinking around the theories of agronomist Stanislao Solari, who hoped for a return to the fields through a new rational agriculture in a cycle of interactions between the social classes of farmers, artisans and landowners. A final exponent who influenced young Salesians through the teaching of morals was Fr Luigi Piscetta, with his four volumes of *Theologiae moralis elementa*. Especially in the third volume, which deals with questions of justice, the author relies not only on St Thomas, but reflects the arguments of *Rerum Novarum* on socialist positions, private property, a just salary and women's work.³⁵

Salesian publications, similar to the Catholic sociology of the time, were located within a context of reaction to positivists and socialists. There was an effort to identify intellectual, philosophical approaches able to offer answers different from those of a materialistic kind, similar in scientific credibility but alternative in terms of content. On the whole, a substantially normative deductive logic was adopted, characterised by a strongly preceptive attitude. Publications following on from *Rerum Novarum* sought to be a "science of 'what ought to be', whose interests were aimed primarily at the 'end',

32 Cf. J.M. PRELLEZO, *La risposta salesiana alla "Rerum Novarum". Approccio a documenti e iniziative (1891-1910)*, in A. MARTINELLI – G. CHERUBINI (eds.), *Educazione alla fede e dottrina sociale della Chiesa. Atti XV Settimana di Spiritualità per la Famiglia Salesiana, SDB*, Rome 1992, 39–91.

33 Cf. F. CERRUTI, *De' principii pedagogico-sociali di S. Tommaso*, Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1893; F. CERRUTI, *Nozioni elementari di morale e d'economia politica*, Tip. e Libreria Salesiana, Turin 1898.

34 Cf. M. BARATTA, *La libertà dell'operaio*, Fiacadori, Parma 1898; *Id.*, *Principii di sociologia cristiana*, Fiacadori, Parma 1902.

35 Cf. L. PISCETTA, *Theologiae moralis elementa*, vol. 3, Ex Officina Salesiana, Augustae Taurinorum 1902.

then at the ‘causes’ and only finally at the ‘facts’.”³⁶ As a whole, they were presented as discipline-based considerations on ethics from a teleological perspective (obviously ultra-worldly, unlike positivism) with applications that could be used in pastoral and exhortative terms. An example of a typical interpretation could be the address by Peter Ricaldone, the Councillor for Vocational Schools, entitled *Noi e la classe operaia* (The Working Class and us). His keys to interpretation, which would remain valid for interpreting his actions as Rector Major, revolve around the fundamental cause of all evils which is the estrangement of the masses from God. The remedy was educational effort to uplift the mind, general culture, professional technique and artistic sense.³⁷

The birth of Salesian vocational and agricultural schools

At the beginning of the 1880s, a significant shift began from arts and trades workshops to Salesian vocational schools. The reasons were substantially three: industrial development required competent workers and thus the vocational school category began to be part of the programs of political parties; the implications of the new laws on vocational education required changes (in Italy the law of 1878 and in France of 1880) and, finally, but not least in order of importance, the needs of the artisan (working boys) sections in different houses required restructuring.³⁸ Before the Second General Chapter in 1880, the heads of the artisans section at Valdocco sent Chapter members a project that spoke of the need for the opportunity to introduce classes for all tradesmen (artisans) regardless of age, ability, condition, together with the need to have teachers for the various subjects. In addition, a change in the lesson timetable was requested, because no profit was to be drawn from evening classes due to the tiredness resulting from a full day of manual work.³⁹

From 1893 onwards, the working class in Salesian institutes was entrusted to the Professional Councillor [understand this to mean the Councillor for Vocational

³⁶ M.M. BURGALASSI, *Itinerari di una scienza. La sociologia in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 1996, 122; In the passage quoted the sociologist Marco Buralassi also includes the Salesian Fr Baratta among the exponents of Catholic sociology. See similar ratings in *M. Wirth, Orientamenti e strategie di impegno sociale dei salesiani di don Bosco (1880-1922)*, in MOTTO (ed.), *L’Opera Salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 1, 83–84.

³⁷ Cf. P. RICARDONE, *Noi e la classe operaia*, Scuola tipografica salesiana, Bologna 1917, 24.

³⁸ Cf. J.M. PRELLEZO, *La «parte operaia» nelle case salesiane. Documenti e testimonianze sulla formazione professionale (1883-1886)*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 16 (1997) 31, 357.

³⁹ Cf. PRELLEZO, *Le scuole professionali salesiane*, 54–55.

Schools] who had to introduce the necessary improvements. Indeed, what was highlighted was the lack of educational benefit, the causes of which could be found in: a lack of trades teachers with Christian qualities, the scarcity of work to practise with, and then finally the lack of instruction and prudent assistants, insofar as the student section naturally attracted clerics while the working boys were left abandoned.

Important deliberations were reached during the 1886 Chapter, which defined a threefold orientation to be given to young apprentices: religious-moral, intellectual, and professional. The duration of the apprenticeship internship was set at five years, classifying the working boys into sections. The General Council was entrusted with the task of drawing up a school curriculum and, even though the Chapter made some decisions, the processes of change from workshops to vocational schools went ahead only slowly. Only in 1898 did the new General Councillor for Vocational Schools, Fr Giuseppe Bertello, take the first steps for the transformation from workshops (relating only to technical details) to vocational schools intended as places to educate and form good and competent workers. The basic document saw the light of day in 1903 and was titled *Programma scolastico per le scuole di artigiani della Pia Società Salesiana*.

To all this was added the influence of the *Cenacolo Parmense* formed around Fr Baratta, who, together with Stanislao Solari, and exploiting the possibilities opened up by donations of land to the Salesians in Europe and America, influenced the “agricultural turning point” in Fr Rua’s thinking in the early years of the twentieth century. Agricultural schools began to grow in number, and issues relating to agriculture became more frequent in the pages of the *Bollettino Salesiano*. Fr Rua saw agricultural schools as a way of countering the depopulation of the countryside, aimed at a return to farming life and the consequent re-Christianisation of society.⁴⁰

A significant impetus for the change of mentality was connected with the 1902 Carcano law on the work of women and minors in factories and industrial workshops. One fundamental rule was that for children under the age of fifteen, school time equal to or greater than that of work had to be provided in the daily timetable, a balance not yet practised within Salesian institutes.⁴¹ Another tool for the promotion of vocational schools occurred in 1901 in Valsalice with the first “Triennial exhibition of vocational and agricultural schools of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales.” The aim was to present a picture of what was being done in the many institutes for the

⁴⁰ Cf. *Lettera del R.mo D. Michele Rua ai Cooperatori ed alle Cooperatrici Salesiane*, in *Bollettino Salesiano* 26 (1902) 1, 6–7.

⁴¹ Cf. PRELLEZO, *Le scuole professionali salesiane*, 63–65; P. BAIKATI, *Cultura salesiana e società industriale*, in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare* SEI, Turin 1987, 343–344.

good of working youth and to show the products of the young tradesmen themselves. The second exhibition in 1904 and the subsequent one in 1910 testified to an even greater presence of Salesian vocational schools. The shift of tone in the evaluations of subsequent exhibitions is interesting: from a mainly celebratory outlook on the second exhibition to a more critical one with the aim of improvement by the new Councillor for Vocational Schools, Fr Peter Ricaldone in 1910.⁴²

Other social works: oratories, kindergartens, worker accommodation

Pietro Braido notes how the Salesian oratory in this period adapted to the Italian situation of a country “which shifted with growing acceleration from the rural sector towards industry, with the consequent urbanisation and the often traumatic displacement of young people, men and women, from fields to factories.”⁴³ The situation of low-income neighbourhoods, the worker question and encouragement from *Rerum Novarum* created attention to social issues in Salesian oratories with a number of implications. The broadening of the educational perspective of oratories was remarkable and a stronger convergence was created around the educational purpose of “preparing young people for life.” This expression meant not only religious and moral preparation but also social integration and assistance while working. The opening of the oratory to the social dimension was expressed through a wide range of proposals, involved the study of sociology, and finally contributed to an extension of the age range of beneficiaries to prevent their exodus from the oratory in the most important years for their future.

In addition to proposals of General Chapters and Fr Rua's pedagogical guidelines, which we will analyse in this and the next chapter, we can see an increase in general attention, a social commitment of Catholics and the focus of efforts towards a broadening of insights from the oratories.⁴⁴ Issues of the *Salesian Bulletin* [the Italian *Bollettino Salesiano*] in 1918-1919 are an interesting testimony to the developments of the oratory at a time of post-war recovery. A column on the oratories was introduced under the heading “For the education of the children of the people” that reported on

⁴² Cf. *Terza esposizione generale delle scuole professionali e agricole della Pia Società Salesiana*, Scuola tipografica salesiana, Torino 1912.

⁴³ P. BRAIDO, *Per una storia dell'educazione giovanile nell'oratorio dell'Italia contemporanea. L'esperienza salesian*, LAS, Roma 2018, 74.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 49–126.

experiences of the oratories. The *Bollettino* also presented the activities of the model oratory at Valdocco, which provided for initiation into active Christian life and the religious and social apostolate for older youngsters, making the oratory an “educational, religious, social training ground and [...] an experimental field for the early trials of life.”⁴⁵ In the context of the debate with other lines of thought, the *Bollettino* suggested activities with an economic, social and cultural bent to supplement the usual oratory activities, similar to those put in place by “Anti-Christian Groups and Institutions”:

Cultural groups; social conversations; vocational classes; work secretariats; registration office for Provident funds; workers insurance; conferences on hygiene in the workplace; instruction on work legislation; initiation into the St Vincent de Paul Conferences; preparation to fit into military circles; assistance to young migrant workers.⁴⁶

The FMA faced up to the changes resulting from industrialisation by evolving their typical work, the kindergarten. The transition from the rural patriarchal family to more modern forms linked rather to life in the city and the work of women in factories changed the educational dynamics in families. This is where childhood education works that go beyond simple kindergartens fit in. They were designed in the first half of the nineteenth century as “shelter” and care facilities for the children of the most needy families.⁴⁷ As the new century began, we move to them being called “infant schools”, which emphasises the educational dimension.

Pedagogical and practical guidance for daycare management was offered through the *Regolamento-Programma per gli Asili d'infanzia* written by the FMA, reviewed by Fr Francesco Cerruti and published in 1885.⁴⁸ The pedagogical guidelines giving direction to kindergarten teachers educational practice in the infant schools followed Aporti in dividing things into two large areas: the physical and intellectual, and the moral

⁴⁵ *Per l'educazione cristiana dei figli del popolo. L'anno catechistico 1917-18 nel l° Oratorio festivo di D. Bosco*, in *Bollettino Salesiano* 42 (1918) 12, 242.

⁴⁶ *Per le adunanze mensili. Sosteniamo e moltiplichiamo gli Oratori Festivi*, in *Bollettino Salesiano* 42 (1918) 2, 22.

⁴⁷ Cf. e.g. T. FALETTI DI BAROLO, *Sull'educazione della prima infanzia nella classe indigente. Brevi cenni dedicati alle persone caritatevoli*, Chirio e Mina, Turin 1832.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Regolamento-Programma per gli Asili d'infanzia delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Tip. e Libreria Salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1885. Cf. also P. CAVAGLIÀ, *Il primo regolamento degli Asili infantili istituiti dalle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice* (1885), in *Rivista di Scienze dell'Educazione* 35 (1997) 1, 23–25.

and religious. The *Regolamento* was introduced by an historical note on kindergartens in Italy written by Cerruti, which enhanced the contributions of Aporti and Fröbel, integrating them and giving greater importance to the religious part. It distances itself clearly, at least in theory, from any precociousness in the scholastic approach, recalling the nature of children unable to apply themselves to a task for a considerable length of time, and so it was hoped that the day's activities would alternate between gymnastic exercises, singing and prayer, taking the age and abilities of the children as their starting point. However, we see a tension in the text between the Salesian tradition and a scholastic approach that implies a degree of discipline-based inflexibility.⁴⁹

In the 1912 *Regolamento per i Giardini d'infanzia* instead, we see a greater emphasis given to the Fröbelian approach, also adopted in the course for kindergarten teachers at Nizza Monferrato beginning from 1906. The pedagogical developments in the thirty years that elapsed between the two regulations are reflected in an approach that accentuated the role of enjoyable entertainment and a more particularised division of educational roles: kindergarten director, teachers, assistant teachers and other helpers.⁵⁰

The process of gradual industrialisation also required female workers and drove young girls to move to large factories, thus finding themselves in risky situations. The FMA met the need of the young women who were often forced to live in unsafe environments both from the point of view of accident prevention and from a moral perspective. The first boarding establishment for young female workers was opened in 1897 near Cannero on Lake Maggiore and gradually their number grew, reaching nineteen houses in 1908 and increasing in the following years.⁵¹ The boarding arrangements presented itself to them as a family in which to find help, understanding and religious formation in a context where they were working for ten or more hours under rigid discipline and with a meagre wage. In some of these boarding arrangements annexed to large establishments with hundreds of boarders, the Sisters also had the task of assisting at work.⁵²

49 Cf. P. RUFFINATTO, *L'educazione dell'infanzia nell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice tra il 1885 e il 1922. Orientamenti generali a partire dai regolamenti*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 1, 149–153.

50 Cf. *Regolamenti e Programmi per gli Oratori festivi e per i giardini d'infanzia*, Tip. Silvestrelli e Cappelletto, Turin 1912; P. RUFFINATTO, *L'educazione dell'infanzia*, 156–159.

51 Cf. ROSANNA, *Estensione e tipologia delle opere delle FMA (1872-1922)*, 170.

52 Cf. G. LOPARCO, *L'apporto educativo delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice negli educandati tra ideali e realizzazioni (1878-1922)*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 1, 161–191.

The opening of these works was therefore supported by an educational and not just a welfare purpose, and was particularly appropriate for supporting, guiding and forming young women in this delicate social transition. In fact, in the *Regolamento per i Convitti* published in 1913 it was pointed out that the acceptance of these works must be subordinate to the real possibility of pursuing educational and not just welfare aims, that is. the religious and moral formation that meant preparing “excellent daughters of a family, upright and conscientious workers, worthy and honourable citizens.”⁵³

Superiors’ pedagogical guidelines at a time of expansion

For Don Bosco’s successor, the evolving context and the dynamics of the rapid development of the Salesian Congregation were three elements that strongly influenced the guidelines coming from Fr Michael Rua. His lengthy collaboration with Don Bosco as his vicar, the charm of the founder and educator of the first generation of Salesians, and the vividness of memories determined the main governance guideline of the Congregation and Salesian pedagogy: fidelity to Don Bosco. The challenges of the Mediterranean and Latin American context, the two centres of Salesian educational activity, took on secondary importance in the configuration of pedagogical ideas, even if the same cannot be said for practical educational choices in the period of transition between the nineteenth and the twentieth century.

Michael Rua: creative fidelity to Don Bosco’s preventive system

After Don Bosco’s death, the atmosphere among the Salesians of the first generation was well expressed by Cardinal Alimonda in his sermon at the month’s mind: “I will therefore look on him with more respect than before, but always with the same tender affection, always with the same heart in love.”⁵⁴ The strong relationship between Fr Rua and Don Bosco and their sharing of life in Valdocco for decades prepared Rua to strive to be another Don Bosco and to lead the Congregation hopefully in the same direction.

⁵³ *Regolamenti pei Convitti diretti dalle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Tip. Silvestrelli e Cappelletto, Turin 1913, 3–4.

⁵⁴ *Giovanni Bosco e il suo secolo. Ai funerali di trigesima nella chiesa di Maria Ausiliatrice in Torino il 1° marzo 1888. Discorso del cardinale arcivescovo Gaetano Alimonda*, Tipografia Salesiana, Turin 1888, 6.

For months he had the Superior Council gather in the same room where Don Bosco had spent his last moments, and among the first topics dealt with was the introduction of the cause for the beatification of the founder. In his first letter as Rector Major, Fr Rua spelt out his program:

We need to consider how fortunate we are to be the sons of such a Father. Therefore, our concern must be to sustain and in due course develop the works he started more and more, faithfully follow the methods he practised and taught, and in our way of speaking and acting endeavour to imitate the model that the Lord in his goodness has given us in him. This, my dear sons, will be the program I will follow in office; Let this also be the aim and study of each of the Salesians.⁵⁵

The fusion of pedagogical, educational and spiritual aspects was strongly evident in the first generations of Salesians, as it was transmitted and assimilated by experience and direct contact with Don Bosco through a “formation of osmosis”, albeit poorly developed at the level of thought.⁵⁶ The model of formation through life sharing had the advantage of not differentiating itself from the “Christian education of youth”⁵⁷ in many dimensions, areas or approaches that later tended to be separated or opposed. Education was a vital whole, transmitted through experience and communicated through a lively and optimistic narrative in the context of the exponential growth of the Congregation.

In addition to the advantage of the integral life experience shared with Don Bosco, there are various difficulties and traps inherent in this experiential approach to the Salesian educational tradition. They are easily imaginable and were also recognised by some of those who governed the first Salesian generation. The first limitation was the lack of a secure textual reference, both for the formation of new Salesians and for situations of unforeseen educational difficulty.

A second limitation was the tendency to uncritical repetition of traditions handed down by osmosis, without adequately distinguishing the fundamental elements from the secondary ones linked to the particularities of situations and temperaments. Calogero Gusmano, who accompanied the first Extraordinary Visitor, Paul Albera, to Latin America

55 M. RUA, *Prima lettera del Nuovo Rettor Maggiore. Circolare del 19 marzo 1888*, in *Lettere Circolari di don Michele Rua ai salesiani*, Scuola tipografica don Bosco, San Benigno Canavese 1940, 18.

56 Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 2: *Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità*, LAS, Roma 1981, 470–474; P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, vol. 2, LAS, Rome 2003, 233–271.

57 The term “Christian education of youth” comes from Don Bosco and is an integral concept that summarises catechesis, moral education, literary and professional preparation, voluntary work, artistic and expressive education, etc. in a traditional Christian vision of reality and society. Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco e l’utopia della società cristiana*, LAS, Rome 1982; A. GIRAUDO, *Educazione e religione nel sistema preventivo di don Bosco*, in A. BOZZOLO – R. CARELLI (eds.), *Evangelizzazione e educazione*, LAS, Rome 2011, 271–274.

in the early years of the twentieth century, sums up this mentality well by saying: “very often to decide even the slightest question, people say: ‘at the Oratory it is done like this’ and this is enough to cut off any further discussion.”⁵⁸

The limitations of the practice of imitating Valdocco were not yet felt for a number of reasons. There were many Salesians who remembered and could interpret their experience of life with Don Bosco from different points of view. And Fr Rua's various governance interventions attest that fidelity to Don Bosco was not a question of repetitiveness for him but one of fidelity to a model that he himself had seen evolve. The forty years of life in close contact with Don Bosco and the lack of a “definitive treatise” on Salesian pedagogy with particular provisions for each situation, were the coordinates that would urge that the choice of fidelity be integrated with the necessary pole of creativity. The choice of being faithful to a model which is innovative and flexible in itself, in a creative way – knowing the diversity of one's character, one's beliefs and the new and unforeseen situations to be faced – favoured the conditions for an important, though not easy to maintain, balance. In addition to some changes imposed by the Holy See,⁵⁹ the management of which meant that only obedience, not creative fidelity, was the essential attitude, he had to deal with the difficulties brought about by strong geographical growth and expansion of the Congregation.

In the 22 years of Fr Rua's term as Rector Major, the number of confreres increased from just under 800 to more than 4000, the number of houses multiplied six times over, with the consequent multiplication of the provinces, which went from 6 to 34. A period of such intense growth, with the debts left by Don Bosco and diminishing donations,⁶⁰ formation that gradually became less a case of osmosis as in the early days but still not

58 C. GUSMANO, *Lettera a D. Barberis* (20 settembre 1900), in P. ALBERA – C. GUSMANO, *Lettere a don Giulio Barberis durante la loro visita alle case d'America (1900-1903) Introduzione, testo critico e note a cura di Brenno Casali*, LAS, Rome 2000, 84.

59 Above all, it is a question of the prohibition of Salesian superiors from hearing the confessions of people dependent on them, in 1901, and of the legal and administrative separation of the FMA Institute from 1906 onwards. Cf. M. CANINO ZANOLETTY, *Las “pruebas” de D. Rua. La prohibición al superior salesiano de confesar a sus súbditos*, in G. LOPARCO – S. ZIMNIAK (eds.), *Don Michele Rua primo successore di don Bosco. Trattati di personalità, governo e opere. Atti del 5° Convegno Internazionale di Storia dell'Opera Salesiana Torino 28 ottobre – 1 novembre 2009*, LAS, Rome 2010, 103–137; G. LOPARCO, *L'autonomia delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice nel quadro delle nuove disposizioni canoniche*, in MOTTO (ed.), *Don Michele Rua nella storia (1837-1910)*, 409–444.

60 Cf. F. DESRAMAUT, *Vita di don Michele Rua, primo successore di don Bosco (1837-1910). Edizione a cura di Aldo Giraud*, LAS, Rome 2009, 164–165.

very regularised,⁶¹ ended up both contextualising and relativising Fr Rua's insistence on fidelity to the tradition in contrast to any "itch for reform". From the point of view of the novelty of the educational context that posed new questions, interesting is the opening of new presences: in the Middle East, connected to the fusion with Fr Belloni's Congregation;⁶² in Central Europe in the midst of the debate between Frs Rua and Markiewicz about true fidelity to Don Bosco;⁶³ in the United States with works focused almost exclusively on assistance to Italian emigrants;⁶⁴ and in the new and unfamiliar contexts of East Asia (India, Macau, China).

The huge growth of the works in Latin America also shows some interesting experiences of inculturation with the Shuar tribes in Ecuador, initially not very successful,⁶⁵ and with the Bororo in Mato Grosso, Brazil. The last-mentioned experience is important as it shows us Fr Rua's attitude of creative fidelity more clearly. When Luigi Lasagna opened the Mato Grosso mission, he had a real program of action, based on the knowledge he had acquired about the situation in the region. For his part, Fr Rua had outlined wise criteria for missionary activity in his letters to Fr Balzola. Starting from the experience of the *reducciones* in Tierra del Fuego, he gradually addressed various issues such as the role of the missionary, work, health, hygiene education, the nudity of the natives, the condition women were in, marriage, religious education etc. looking at the Amazonian context and adopting a fairly flexible and gradual logic.⁶⁶

Apparently, but for some rare exceptions, those running the reductions in Brazil ignored much of his advice, insofar as they wanted the *indios*, who were shifting from a nomadic to sedentary lifestyle, to learn how to earn what they needed for their own

61 The main emphasis was on the regularisation of novitiates, but the other stages of formation were still far from an ordinary pace, a situation that would require subsequent attention from Fr Rinaldi and Fr Ricaldone. Cf. *Deliberazioni del quinto Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Valsalice presso Torino nel settembre 1889*, Tipografia Salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1889, 25.

62 Cf. P. G. GIANAZZA, *Don Rua e la fondazione salesiana di Alessandria d'Egitto*, in LOPARCO – ZIMNIAK (eds.), *Don Michele Rua primo successore di don Bosco*, 805–878.

63 Cf. S. ZIMNIAK, *Salesiani nella Mitteleuropa. Preistoria e storia della provincia Austro-Ungarica della Società di S. Francesco di Sales (1868 ca.-1919)*, LAS, Rome 1997, 69–110.

64 Cf. F. MOTTO, "L'Italia degli Stati Uniti" chiama, *don Rua risponde*, in LOPARCO – ZIMNIAK (eds.), *Don Michele Rua primo successore di don Bosco*, 993–1011; M. MENDEL, *Don Michele Rua e il lavoro salesiano nell'Est degli Stati Uniti 1898-1910*, in *Ibid.*, 1013–1035.

65 J. BOTASSO, *Los salesianos y la educación de los Shuar 1893-1920. Mirando más allá de los fracasos y los éxitos*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 2, 237–249.

66 Cf. A. FERREIRA DA SILVA, *La missione salesiana tra gli indigeni del Mato Grosso nelle lettere di don Michele Rua (1892-1909)*, in "Ricerche Storiche Salesiane" 12 (1993) 22, 48–54.

subsistence. In terms of self-sufficiency, the rectors were pressured by the need to survive and in many cases the commitment to management and work replaced the concern for the evangelisation and Christian education of the population.⁶⁷

Kindness and zeal of the educator for deep and enduring education

Fidelity to Don Bosco was expressed by Fr Rua in some typical ways. A first emphasis was linked to the typically Salesian educational approach: kindness. Just as the previous matter of creative fidelity was located within a context of global expansion, so the matter of kindness was interpreted within a framework in which the Salesian boarding school predominated. As a structure it preferred a regulated and disciplinary approach to education.⁶⁸

There were often references to the application of the preventive system in the disciplinary context of Salesian boarding schools. In the letter on the spirit of Don Bosco we read: “So that the preventive system does not remain a dead letter, let [the rector] see that the golden pages that Don Bosco wrote about it be often read. See to it that punishments which are too long, painful and humiliating are banished, and that no Superior, teacher or assistant goes so far as to beat the young.”⁶⁹ Fr Rua comments on the results of the 8th General Chapter with a reminder of the “strict duty to possess the spirit of and live Salesian life. And this consists in working, especially for the benefit of youth, with the spirit and system of Don Bosco, all marked by gentleness and kindness.”⁷⁰

The application of the preventive system in terms of kindness was not only expressed in the anti-repressive context of disciplinary issues, but was also stressed by the use of

⁶⁷ A. DA SILVA FERREIRA, *La crisi della missione tra i Bororo e l'apertura al nuovo campo di apostolato nel sud del Mato Grosso (1918-1931)*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 11 (1992) 21, 177–185.

⁶⁸ Fr Rua is in tune with Don Bosco's latest calls to practice the Preventive System in a boarding school context. Cf. ISTITUTO STORICO SALESIANO, *Fonti Salesiane*. 1. *Don Bosco e la sua opera*, LAS, Rome 2014, 442–256.

⁶⁹ M. RUA, *Santificazione nostra e delle anime a noi affidate. Circolare del 24 agosto 1894*, in *Lettere di don Rua*, 119–120; Cf. also other references to the discipline issue: J.M. PRELLEZO, *Le scuole professionali salesiane (1880-1922). Istanze e attuazioni viste da Valdocco*, 76–80; W.J. DICKSON, *Prevention or repression. The reception of Don Bosco's educational approach in English Salesian Schools*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 1, 215–236; F. CASELLA, *Il contesto storico-socio-pedagogico e l'educazione salesiana nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia tra richieste e attuazioni (1880-1922)*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 1, 310–313.

⁷⁰ M. RUA, *Felice esito dell'VIII Capitolo Generale. Come apprezzano le opere nostre*. Circular in the Octave of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception 1898, in *Lettere di don Rua*, 195. For the development of the idea of the Preventive System in the period studied cf. PRELLEZO, *Linee pedagogiche della Società Salesiana*, 101–104.

two proactive educational principles: the zeal that animates educational activity and education of the heart. The zeal of Don Bosco's *da mihi animas caetera tolle* was evoked. He “took no step, said no word, nor put his hand to any undertaking that did not have the salvation of the young as its aim.”⁷¹ However, one must also bear in mind the numerical and geographical development of the Salesian Congregation:

With immense consolation I was able to assure myself that you are all animated by the best will to do good. Clear proof of this is also the ardour that I sometimes even felt it was my duty to restrain, with which you try to extend the circle of the Salesian apostolate [...] May the Lord hear my plea and always keep alive in our hearts that holy fire that was lit when we heard Don Bosco launch that powerful cry: *da mihi animas*, and we saw him consume his strength and his life in the practise of charity. But you, my dear sons, for your part, watch out that this good will is always combined with great purity of intention, is not open to any discouragement, and is always guided by obedience.⁷²

The zeal that animates Salesian activity was connected by Fr Rua with the prototype of Don Bosco's “good-natured character always radiant with charity and kindness” which is an imitation of the “divine model Jesus Christ.”⁷³ In Fr Rua's magisterium, the basis of loving and zealous educational activity is the virtuous person of the Salesian educator who puts himself in the situation of being the disciple of Christ inspired by Don Bosco as his model. Directors of oratories are often reminded to attract the young more through zeal and charity than the attractions of the modern oratory settings which offer an abundance of amusements.⁷⁴

Another typical theme of Fr Rua's, linked to zeal and charity, was the education of the heart. The first successor of Don Bosco used the term frequently in the vocabulary of the circulars and in the *Bollettino Salesiano*. The “heart” appears more than eight hundred times, surpassing other religious and educational terms such as God, Jesus, Mary, Help of Christians, oratory, missions, etc. In his letters he speaks more frequently only of Don Bosco and the Salesians. In continuity with Don Bosco, Rua does not intend “heart” to mean either a synonym of sentimentality or the education of emotions. Rather, the term refers to the core of personal identity, deep convictions,

⁷¹ RUA, *Santificazione nostra*, 110.

⁷² M. RUA, *Disastro Brasileno. Avvisi vari e consigli*. Circular, 29 January 1896, in *Lettere di don Rua*, 145–146.

⁷³ M. RUA, *Lo spirito di D. Bosco – Vocazioni*. Circular, 14 June 1905, in *Lettere di don Rua*, 524.

⁷⁴ Cf. M. RUA, *Vocazioni – Militari - Oratorii Festivi*. Circular, 29 January 1894, in *Lettere di don Rua*, 474–475; M. RUA, *Gli Oratorii Festivi*. Circular 29 January 1893, in *Ibid.*, 461.

motivations, moral action and therefore relational qualities.⁷⁵ Understood this way, the education of hearts characterises the educational method in the sense of kindness and patience without softening the teleological core of the Salesian proposal to educate good Christians and upright citizens:

Let us remember then that we would miss the most essential part of our task if we were limited only to imparting literary instruction, without combining it with the education of the heart. We must aim at this above all, to form our students as good Christians, upright citizens, while also cultivating the vocations we encounter among them.⁷⁶

In addition, education of the heart also has an aspect of depth and durability. Rua recommends educating the convictions rooted in the heart, which will bear fruit even when the pupils are no longer present in the Salesian houses. Through loving kindness “the truths sown in their hearts were deeply rooted and did not remain fruitless.”⁷⁷ Connected with this is devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, so dear to Fr Rua, presented in the emblematic letter of November 21, 1900, in which he recommends the consecration of all students and Cooperators to the Sacred Heart.⁷⁸ In the wake of the practical tools so dear to Don Bosco for preventive education of the heart, in addition to the sacraments and spiritual exercises,⁷⁹ he proposes seeing to good reading and the removal of books contrary to “morality or the sound principles of religion and piety, of which the hearts of our employees and students must be informed, if we are to be true educators of youth and good Christians.”⁸⁰

⁷⁵ For “the anthropology of the heart” in Don Bosco cf. the summary in P. STELLA, *Don Bosco*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2001, 59–62 which picks up P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia*, vol. 2: *Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità*, 37–50.

⁷⁶ M. RUA, *Studi letterarii*. Circular of 27 December 1889, in *Lettere di don Rua*, 45–46.

⁷⁷ RUA, *Vocazioni – Militari - Oratorii Festivi*, 473.

⁷⁸ Cf. M. RUA, *La consacrazione della nostra Pia Società al Sacro Cuore di Gesù*. Circular of 21 November 1900, in *Lettere di don Rua*, 231–279. For a better understanding of the context cf. A. GIRAUDO, *Linee portanti dell’animazione spirituale della congregazione salesiana da parte della direzione generale tra 1880 e 1921*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 23 (2004) 44, 85–89.

⁷⁹ Cf. M. RUA, *Il Sacramento della Penitenza. Norme e consigli*. Circular of 29 November 1899, in *Lettere di don Rua*, 198; M. RUA, *Norme per gli esercizi spirituali dei giovani*. Circular of 1 March 1893, in *Ibid.*, 97.

⁸⁰ M. RUA, *Convocazione del Capitolo Generale [5°] ed Avvisi*, in *Lettere di don Rua*, 34.

Guidelines for oratories and past pupils

For Rua, oratory education was one of the major areas of the application of the principle of creative fidelity. The 3rd General Chapter in 1883 recalled the oratory tradition, saying that “the first exercise of charity of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales is to gather poor and abandoned youngsters, to instruct them in the holy Catholic religion, particularly on Sundays and feast days.”⁸¹ In the period of the Congresses on the oratories, Fr Rua proved to be a key player in their development, and he loved and supported their foundation and growth, their prudent and creative management, tireless improvement and opening them up to older youth through religious groups and classes.⁸² During his term of office GC7 (1895) made some decisions and proposals of no small importance:

1. the choice of a member of the Superior Council in particular in charge of festive oratories;
2. the opening of oratories separate from Salesian houses, with daytime and evening classes;
3. organising a religion class in them;
4. the desirability of having oratories open for the whole day;
5. seeing to due assistance.⁸³

The insistence on this topic and, in particular, references and clarifications concerning certain aspects, leads us to believe that there was not always unanimous acceptance of the guidelines indicated. In 1896, giving a quick report on the last Chapter, Fr Rua took the opportunity to reveal sentiments he had long wanted to express: first of all his consolation “at seeing the development of festive oratories. In fact, since I encouraged you on several occasions in recent years to be ever more zealously involved in this regard, I have seen the number of said oratories increase considerably.”⁸⁴

⁸¹ *Deliberazioni del Terzo e Quarto Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana, tenuti in Valsalice nel settembre 1883-86*, Tip. e Libreria Salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1887, 22. Cf. also M. RUA, *Viaggio di D. Rua in Spagna. Antichi Allievi - Consigli*. Circular of 2 January 1900, in *Lettere di don Rua*, 500–501.

⁸² Cf. E. CERIA, *Annali della Società Salesiana*, vol. 3, Turin, SEI, 1946, 791–802. Fr Rua's insistence on the importance of the oratories also reflects the widespread marginalisation of the oratories and a certain mistrust of the conclusions of the congresses. Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Per una storia dell'educazione giovanile nell'oratorio*, 122–124.

⁸³ Cf. *Deliberazioni del Settimo Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana*, Tip. e Libreria Salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1896, 90–104.

⁸⁴ M. RUA, *Resoconto del VII Capitolo Generale. Disposizioni varie*. Circular of 2 July 1896, in *Lettere di don Rua*, 484.

On many occasions, Michael Rua underscored the priority of the catechism lesson: “According to Don Bosco’s mind, those oratories in which catechism was not taught would be nothing more than recreation centres; those institutes where religion was not properly taught, especially with catechism lessons, would cease to be Salesian.”⁸⁵ He also recommended the spread of best practices: the proposal for retreats with an explicit vocational emphasis, the formation of young oratory helpers in Salesian schools, catechetical competitions, making it easy to approach the sacraments, founding workers’ clubs and joining savings banks...⁸⁶

The success of the increased number of open oratories and the encouragement towards education in the oratories was often accompanied by a shortage of premises, resources, and personnel. In this context, the Rector Major pointed out the priority of love and zeal: “Elsewhere we would find huge rooms, large courtyards, beautiful gardens, games of all kinds: but we much prefer to come here where there is nothing, but we know that we love each other”; and he continued: “The zeal of the confreres has made up for the lack of these means.”⁸⁷

The oratory was also seen by Fr Rua as the environment for a solid formation: “Good principles, sown in their hearts, strike deep roots”⁸⁸ and help maintain Christian identity in settings adverse to faith. But it was more than this, since the youngsters were seen as people who carry out a real apostolate in their families.⁸⁹ At this point the Salesian oratory was considered to be a diffusion centre and was explicitly linked to the Past Pupils Association: “It is a short step from the oratories to the Past Pupils Association.”⁹⁰ Mentioned among the various educational purposes of the Association are: mutual support in the world, the maintenance of the zeal of Christian life, benefit to their families, creation of a support network including material aid, seeking work and help when sick.⁹¹

⁸⁵ RUA, *Lo spirito di D. Bosco*, 528.

⁸⁶ Cf. RUA, *Gli Oratorii Festivi*, 460–461; ID., *Vocazioni – Militari – Oratorii Festivi*, 473–474; ID., *Resoconto del VII CG*, 485.

⁸⁷ RUA, *Gli Oratorii Festivi*, 461.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ RUA, *Vocazioni – Militari – Oratorii Festivi*, 473.

⁹⁰ RUA, *Viaggio di D. Rua in Ispagna*, 501.

⁹¹ M. RUA, *Carità fraterna – Vari fatti consolanti*. Circular of 24 June 1893, in *Lettere di don Rua*, 494–495.

Applications of *Rerum Novarum*

In the Sixth General Chapter held in Valsalice in 1892, a year and a half after the publication of *Rerum Novarum*, there was an interesting expansion of the tasks of the oratories. The central question around which the proposed schemes revolved was: “How do we apply papal teaching on the worker question in our hospices and oratories, especially the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (*de conditione opificum*)?” Many proposals were put forward during the pre-Chapter process; we see from the official text of the deliberations that the following were approved:

1. “In order to protect the pupils of our hospices and festive oratories from modern errors, let them be given conferences from time to time on capital, labour, wages, holidays, strikes, savings, property, etc., while avoiding entering into politics. It would be very useful to propagate the following books: *Il lavoratore cristiano* [The Christian Worker], *Il portafoglio dell’Operaio* [The Worker’s Wallet] by Cesare Cantù. Take note! Common sense and a good heart;
2. it is advised to give savings bank booklets as prizes;
3. Where there are Catholic Worker Societies and other Catholic Societies, the young people who leave our houses or attend our oratories should be personally taken along to them or accompanied with a letter. The St Joseph’s Sodality would be preparation for these societies;
4. let these kinds of Catholic associations be encouraged and helped as far as we can, and a greater number of individuals sent in their direction thus conforming with the wishes expressed by Leo XIII in his Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and by Don Bosco.”⁹²

These deliberations were echoed in comments by the Rector Major and also in the following Chapter. In his 1896 letter, Fr Rua did not dwell on all the reasons but once more suggested associations as a way of social advancement:

I would like it to be studied whether having young people join some Catholic workers’ club, or starting up other sodalities and clubs in the same oratory, or promoting and facilitating the joining of a savings bank among them, or anything else, might be useful for this purpose. I have mentioned the savings

⁹² *Deliberazioni dei sei primi capitoli generali della Pia Società Salesiana precedute dalle Regole o Costituzioni della medesima*, Tip. e Libreria Salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1894, 313–314.

bank in particular, because it seems to be one of the most useful institutions for train the tradesman in economy and therefore in temperance, good morals and gaining him wealth and wellbeing, and because it is an institution beneficial to our times and recommended by the Holy Father Leo XIII and because it was already promoted by Don Bosco in some way in the primitive Oratory together with the mutual aid society, something that brought about great good at the time and that I hope will continue to do so.⁹³

The Rector Major did not speak so often on social issues and the worker question. In his preferring to act and involve others in cooperation we can nevertheless note an event that catalysed attention to society: the first International Congress of Salesian Cooperators in Bologna in 1895. This assembly, over which Fr Rua presided, was a sign of good will in working for the good of the workers especially in terms of religious education with the connected issue of Sunday rest, improvement in the workshop environment and promotion of workers' associations.⁹⁴ Describing the congress, Salesian historian Francis Desramaut evaluated the Salesian attitude on the social question: "There is nothing revolutionary in these motions and their moralising tenor. The word justice does not appear; what predominates is the idea of charity."⁹⁵ In fact, the Salesian response to the social question was above all educational, religious and practical, with the ability to mediate between the working world and the business world.

In addition to the development of Salesian vocational schools, social associations in the oratories and the foundation of boarding arrangements for female workers by the FMA, Fr Rua supported the creation of a Mutual Aid Society for Young Catholic Workers. By supporting Miss Cesarina Astesana, an enterprising laywoman, a work of alliance was born between the patronesses and the workers in a constant and solicitous effort addressed to the young workers for them to overcome their apathy, become aware that their condition of life was abnormal and therefore commit themselves to their social redemption. The patronesses had to be "there not to represent worldly philanthropy, which strives to make itself known and to have its name in print, but [...] to show progress in our current times, a fruit of the harmony between capital and work."⁹⁶ For Fr Rua, the peaceful and preventive path towards the social question was to be preferred in a turbulent environment in which Marxist ideology was making its way through the

⁹³ RUA, *Resoconto del VII CG*, 485.

⁹⁴ *Atti del primo Congresso Internazionale dei Cooperatori Salesiani*, Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1895, 186–188.

⁹⁵ DESRAMAUT, *Vita di don Michele Rua*, 350.

⁹⁶ "Lavoratrice" 1 (1902) 1, 2; For references to Astesana's Salesianity, cf. G. DRAGO, *La promozione della donna*, in R. SPIAZZI (ed.), *Enciclopedia del pensiero sociale cristiano*, Studio Domenicano, Bologna 1992, 843

socialist movement. A concrete case that can help us understand Fr Rua's mindset was his mediation in the lengthy workers strike at the Anselmo Poma plant in 1906, described by the newspaper *Momento* as "the triumph of the fatherly work of the venerable priest Fr Rua."⁹⁷

Initial statements on Salesian pedagogy by the first Salesians

An implementation of the principles we have indicated, principles of fidelity to Don Bosco, zeal and education of the heart to form good Christians and upright citizens, took place through the collaboration of the first generation of Salesians educated by Don Bosco. Among these, the first novice master Fr Giulio Barberis, the General Councillor for Schools, Fr Francesco Cerruti, and the General Councillor for Vocational Schools, Fr Giuseppe Bertello, stand out, all of whom left a strong imprint on the formulation of Salesian educational ideas and structures.

Interesting and important is the harmony of views in the pedagogical field and the effective collaboration in the government of the Congregation. Indicators of this are the exchange of views and feedback that took place between Barberis and Cerruti, Fr Rua's appreciation of them and his recommendations to read what Cerruti and Barberis had written, including the circulars that Cerruti and Bertello had written together.⁹⁸ The reasons for their common mode of thinking can easily be traced back both to the strong formative experience they had with Don Bosco in the oratory at Valdocco and their study of the same sources and same pedagogues.

⁹⁷ DESRAMAUT, *Vita di don Michele Rua*, 354.

⁹⁸ RUA, *Studi letterarii*, 38; M. RUA, *Spirito di povertà – Formazione religiosa*. Circular of 5 August 1900, in *Lettere di don Rua*, 221; F. CERRUTI – G. BERTELLO, Circular of 29 January 1899, in G. BERTELLO, *Scritti e documenti sull'educazione e sulle scuole professionali. Introduzione, premesse, testi critici e note a cura di José Manuel Prellezo*, LAS, Rome 2010, 131–133; *Appunti di pedagogia di Giulio Barberis (1847-1927)*. Introduction, critical text and notes by José Manuel Prellezo. Aftwerword by Dariusz Grządziel, LAS, Rome 2017, 30.

Giulio Barberis's *Pedagogia sacra* as a basic formation text

A school of sacred pedagogy was established in Valdocco in 1874, the purpose of which was to form future educators and not so much the systematisation of pedagogical thinking.⁹⁹ Giulio Barberis, the first director of novices and who was in charge of the pedagogy school, noted Don Bosco's instructions thus: "Regarding pedagogy, I really want it to be a study made especially for us. For example, it should be entitled: *The Salesian Teacher and the Salesian Assistant*. One section will say how the assistant should behave in the dormitory, another: the assistant on walks, the assistant in church, the assistant in school, etc. How the Salesian teacher should behave with regard to punctuality, being in class on time, with regard to discipline, rewards, punishments, etc. These things should be taught during the probationary year and they should also be in print so that they can serve as a textbook for us. Teach these things in the probationary year; and also have them printed to serve as a textbook for us."¹⁰⁰

In 1897 the Rector Major, Fr Rua, wanted these *Notes* [*Appunti*] to be printed, justifying this decision with the expansion of the Congregation which had also led to a decentralising of formation. Barberis wrote in his introduction: "However, they should be exclusively for our own use, and are not suitable for publication for others, since we are not aiming to make a complete treatise on pedagogy with them but to consider the young as they are in our various homes, and without lots of theories, to help our confreres in the difficult task of educating them well."¹⁰¹ Subsequently and importantly, the book of *Notes on Sacred Pedagogy* was widely diffused throughout the Salesian world in a number of translations, and this created a departure point for "doing" Salesian pedagogy.

In drafting the *Appunti*, Barberis chose a particular method for compiling them. Since he himself was not an education theorist but rather someone who formed vocations, he put himself in the position of being a significant witness: "Our great father left us a system of education only very partly in writing, mostly imprinted on the minds and hearts of those of us who had the good fortune to be with him for several decades."¹⁰² Given this procedure of compiling his ideas around an experience-based educational

⁹⁹ J.M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento tra reale ed ideale (1866-1889). Documenti e testimonianze*, LAS, Rome 1992, 193.

¹⁰⁰ Cronichetta, quaderno 11, 4 in *Appunti di pedagogia di Giulio Barberis*, 7. Cf. also M. FISSORE, *Il ruolo di don Giulio Barberis nell'organizzazione del primo noviziato salesiano*, in "Ricerche Storiche Salesiane" 34 (2015) 65, 189.

¹⁰¹ *Appunti di pedagogia di Giulio Barberis*, 31.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 33.

tradition, three points in his approach become quite interesting: 1. the choice of authors of reference, 2. how the topics were put together, and finally, 3. the image of Don Bosco that emerges from what he wrote.

The decisive basis for compiling these *Notes* are two works by pro-Rosminian Turin educationalists: *Della pedagogica* (About Pedagogy) by Giovanni Antonio Rayneri¹⁰³ and *Studi Pedagogici* (Pedagogical Studies) by Giuseppe Allievo.¹⁰⁴ Barberis followed the same structure of argument and subdivision of topics. G.A. Rayneri (1810-1867) was a priest educationalist, a lecturer at the University of Turin, who followed the approach of Antonio Rosmini and Ferrante Aporti. He was a dominant figure in the group that arose around the journal known as the *Educatore Primario* (Primary Educator) which kept in contact with the Salesian setting, recognising the value of the establishment of Don Bosco's Oratory (especially in the first period of its existence between 1847 and 1850) and the special quality of his educational skills. The meeting point between the priest of the Valdocco oratory and this group of pedagogues was the sensitivity they had for grassroots education, especially with regard to the importance of reason and kindness, thus affirming the principle of the heart that was the common thread joining St Philip Neri and St Francis de Sales with Rosmini. On a practical level they appreciated the pupil-oriented style school textbooks published by Don Bosco, (*Storia ecclesiastica, Storia sacra, Il sistema metrico decimale*) and shared his thinking on the educational value of play, music and theatre.¹⁰⁵ Giuseppe Allievo (1830-1913) was Rayneri's successor at the University of Turin and continued his master's approach, completing and finalising the last two books on *Della pedagogica*. From various testimonies and materials available to us, it can be said that Barberis was most likely his student in the seventies in pedagogy courses at the University of Turin.¹⁰⁶

As secondary sources followed, especially in certain parts of the Notes, are *L'educazione* by the Bishop of Orléans, Félix Dupanloup, and the writings of Antoine Monfat, a French religious and educationalist, both of whom were known at Valdocco.

103 Cf. G.A. RAYNERI, *Della pedagogica libri cinque*, Grato Scioldo, Turin²1877.

104 Cf. G. ALLIEVO, *Studi pedagogici in servizio degli studenti universitari delle scuole normali e degli istituti educativi*, Tipografia subalpina S. Marino, Turin 1893.

105 G. CHIOSSO, *Carità educatrice e istruzione in Piemonte. Aristocratici, filantropi e preti di fronte all'educazione del popolo nel primo '800*, SEI, Turin 2007, 194–195.

106 J.M. PRELLEZO, *Introduzione*, in *Appunti di pedagogia di Giulio Barberis*, 8–9.

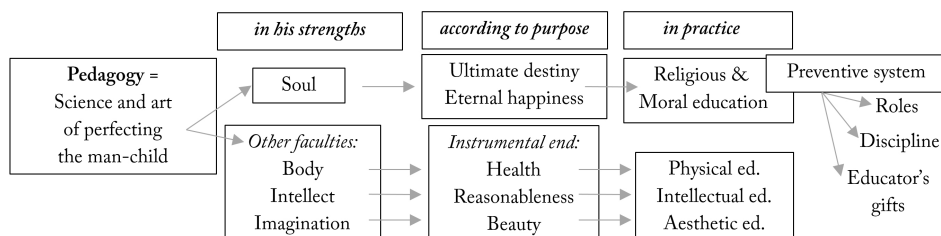


Figure A: Salesian Pedagogy in Barberis's *Appunti di pedagogia*

Barberis describes pedagogy and education by starting from the idea of perfection which is the mainstay of Rayneri and Allievo's approach:¹⁰⁷

The word pedagogy (from the Greek *παῖς*, child, and *άγω*, I lead, guide, direct), according to its etymology means leading/guiding the child; and it consists essentially in guiding the child to his (or her) perfection, developing the faculties as best as possible. In fact the usual definition is: The science and skill of perfecting the man-child through the harmonious and general development of his strengths. The word pedagogy, coming from the Greek, corresponds to the word education, coming from the Latin *educere*, which literally means to extract, to bring out, and indicates the operation whereby others bring out of the person a value, a quality, anything that is latent and not conspicuous within the individual.¹⁰⁸

Hence, pedagogy is a science, a system of knowledge dependent on a certain principle (perfectibility); but it is also an art, a skill, as a system of actions ordered to an end (to perfect the pupil). Immediately afterwards, it is specified that man consists of a soul and a body: the soul is seen as the principle, the cause and the source of man's actions, while the other human strengths or faculties are considered instrumental to it.¹⁰⁹ Then continuing, the treatise divides education by following the distinctions of the human faculties and also structuring the *Appunti* into four parts corresponding to physical, intellectual, aesthetic education and finally, the most important, religious and moral education. The last part also contains the Preventive System and most of the Salesian educational traditions.

¹⁰⁷ RAYNERI, *Della pedagogica*, 2ff; ALLIEVO, *Studi pedagogici*, 23ff.

¹⁰⁸ *Appunti di pedagogia di Giulio Barberis*, 35.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Appunti di pedagogia di Giulio Barberis*, 36ff.

Two unconvincing problem areas are noted in Barberis' setup and choice of arguments: the first deals with the individuality of the pupil and the other deals with the issue of freedom. In the part dealing with general concepts, Barberis takes up Allievo's argumentation regarding human nature and makes it the principle from which he deduces the foundations of his concept of pedagogy. Similarly, the different "kinds of education" derive from the faculties or strengths of man as man: physical, intellectual, aesthetic, moral and religious. The student's individuality is not constitutive of, but rather functional to a winning strategy, in the sense that education "attunes itself to the personal individuality of the student, not restricting his calling, but enhancing his particular innate aptitudes. The education is all the more perfect the more it suits the student's dispositions and the relationships that accompany him. Individuality is different in different pupils, and as a consequence, the way in which they are treated is different. When this is not done, then it is educational intent that fails."¹¹⁰ There is a fragile balance between attention to individuality and the basic axiom: "the foundation of educational skill is nature."¹¹¹ Allievo's spiritualism, in his argument with positivism from the earliest pages of his work,¹¹² is not found in Barberis' approach and, lacking the clarifications on the concept of nature, there is the risk, in Allievo's words, of falling into a "naturalistic determinism [...] so much so that the free activity of our person must give way to universal fatalism, and the work of the spirit is worth as much as the work of nature and nothing more."¹¹³

The second question, the one of freedom, is an even thornier one and would have powerful repercussions for the future of Salesian education. Barberis introduces the notion of freedom as deriving from the notion of perfectibility, which includes both the idea of development and that of freedom, without delving into the subtle balances of their relationships.¹¹⁴ Rayneri, faithful to the Rosminian approach, distinguishes two types of human perfection. The first is that of nature, which occurs when the strengths that it contains within itself are perfected. The second kind is the qualitatively different improvement that takes place when "the highest and noblest of human faculties, that

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 47; Cf. The deeper treatment in ALLIEVO, *Studi pedagogici*, 75–82.

¹¹² Cf. ALLIEVO, *Studi pedagogici*, 1–49.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹⁴ *Appunti di pedagogia di Giulio Barberis*, 37.

is, moral freedom, in the right exercise of which virtue consists, receives an increase.”¹¹⁵ Rayneri’s work is introduced by a ten-page mini-treatise on freedom and the role of authority in education, containing the definition of the latter as “the art of exercising authority in favour of human freedom.”¹¹⁶ Barberis reduces it by limiting the perspective and simplifying the argument.¹¹⁷ References to the value of freedom are lacking, while complaints about the lack of authority in educational practice and pedagogical science are stronger. Paradoxically in our authors, authority is not declared theoretically on the basis of a positive principle, but is instead derived “from the natural inequality of men in their faculties and their development and in their social relations.”¹¹⁸ Barberis therefore proposes harmony between authority and freedom in these terms:

Authority and freedom are by no means two irreconcilable and exclusive terms, as might seem at first glance, but rather correlative and concordant. What is certain is that authority, if abused, is irreconcilable with freedom and that freedom, if unrestrained, is contradictory to authority. But human reason recognises that above both there is a higher and more sublime principle founded on the intrinsic order of things and on the dignity of human nature, a principle in which they have their common foundation and from which they draw every virtue and efficiency. This principle is the *will of God*, the *holy law of God*; it moderates authority so that it does not transmute into despotism and regulates freedom so that it does not degenerate into licence. [...] The excellence of freedom is showing oneself to be *obedient* to this principle as to the urgent and solemn voice of *duty*. [...] However, it should be noted in practice that human dignity and happiness matter much more than the right to freedom and confers the ability to use it well.¹¹⁹

Rayneri’s and Allievo’s interest in pursuing a line of thinking that is in contrast to liberalism and Rousseau’s naturalism finds its place in their effort to promote the

¹¹⁵ RAYNERI, *Della pedagogica*, 5 referring to the fourth book on *Antropologia* by Rosmini. Cf. also G. GRANDIS, *La prospettiva personalistica dell’etica rosminiana*, in “*Studia Patavina*” 56 (2009) 3, 617–626; G. ALLIEVO, *Il ritorno al principio della personalità. Prolusione letta all’Università di Torino il 18 novembre 1903*, Tipografia degli Artigianelli, Turin 1904.

¹¹⁶ RAYNERI, *Della pedagogica*, XLV.

¹¹⁷ *Appunti di pedagogia di Giulio Barberis*, 48–50.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 48. Cf. The same idea in RAYNERI, *Della pedagogica*, XLII and instead a more balanced argument in ALLIEVO, *Studi pedagogici*, 86–89.

¹¹⁹ *Appunti di pedagogia di Giulio Barberis*, 49 [italics ours].

freedom of teaching from the time of the Boncompagni Law onwards.¹²⁰ Barberis, with his different mindset, is quite fascinated by Don Bosco's example (therefore he does not question the "home" traditions) and is looking for practical applications of the preventive system in the 'boarding school' context. The pedagogical concepts of these Turin authors are the intellectual context into which Don Bosco's examples are inserted. It has to be noted that Salesian traditions with abundant specific details on roles and assistance that Barberis often terms "surveillance" is not linked to Allievo's theory of physical, aesthetic and intellectual education.

Assistance is linked to the principle stated by Don Bosco in his *Trattatello* (Little Treatise) on the preventive system on the "impossibility of doing wrong",¹²¹ which presents the risk of being applied in a very restrictive manner to the pupil's freedom; this is a typical problem of boarding school education that would drag on through the decades of Salesian education up to the Second Vatican Council. The theoretical balances of educationalists such as Rayneri and Allievo were not valued by Barberis to their full potential and were replaced with references to Don Bosco's founding experience as the norm. As Dariusz Grządziel, a contemporary Salesian educationalist, rightly notes, in the *Appunti di pedagogia sacra* we are still a long way from the notion of pedagogy as a science that offers the educator criteria and tools for orientation but does not prescribe the applied course of concrete actions.¹²²

Locating "Salesian" writings in the part of the *Appunti* dealing with moral and religious pedagogy is understandable if we consider the Rosminian approach of the Turin authors mentioned. For Rosmini, the ordering principle of education is the Christian religion and the summit of the educational process is religious morality.¹²³ The section of the *Appunti* on religious and moral education is in fact the longest one, exceeding the sum of the remaining sections on physical, intellectual and aesthetic education. After the part on the general principles of moral education strongly inspired by Allievo and Rayneri, come Don Bosco's writings: the *Sistema preventivo nell'educazione della gioventù* (The Preventive System in the Education of Youth) and the *Articoli generali* (General Articles) which preface the *Regolamento delle Case* (Regulations for the Houses). Added then is some of Monfat's *La pratica della educazione cristiana* (The Practice of Christian Education) that deal with important

¹²⁰ Cf. MARRONE, *Giuseppe Allievo e la libertà d'insegnamento*.

¹²¹ G. BOSCO, *Il Sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, in ISTITUTO STORICO SALESIANO, *Fonti Salesiane*, 434.

¹²² D. GRZĄDZIEL, *Postfazione*, in *Appunti di pedagogia di Giulio Barberis*, 267–268.

¹²³ Cf. CHIOSSO, *Carità educatrice e istruzione*, 133.

issues in a boarding school, such as discipline, surveillance, punishments;¹²⁴ then the virtues of the good educator, taken from Dupanloup's *De l'éducation*.¹²⁵ On the centrality of practical religious education to the preventive system, Barberis says right from the outset of his work:

It should not be thought that Don Bosco's method consists of high-sounding theories, or lengthy arguments or lots of precepts. His whole secret lay solely in this: Jesus came to educate the world and founded the true principles and practice of all education: we follow the principles of the gospel; we try to do in our small way what Jesus did; nothing else is needed. All Don Bosco's teachings started from this fundamental point: his whole system is based on it. It is all easy, all natural; however it requires guidance; and it is expressly to facilitate the practice of this system that these *Notes* were written.¹²⁶

This approach of practical Christian education was also confirmed by the Rector Major, Fr Rua. When speaking of religious formation, he mentions the *Appunti*, stressing: "You can also offer a little lesson to end the explanation of sacred pedagogy, and especially the part that teaches how to do the various tasks of assistance well, teaching the boys catechism."¹²⁷ Even Albera's approach, albeit clearly spiritual and religious, can be fitted into this line of thinking, which was peacefully accepted by the early generations of Salesians.

It should be noted that Barberis, by inserting the Salesian part emphasising surveillance and the educator's qualities at the end of his *Appunti*, makes a choice of approach that distances him from Allievo's notion of pedagogy. Barberis omits practically all of the third part of the *Studi pedagogici* that had a very important purpose: creating the final synthesis, and this no longer in terms of general pedagogy and the "kinds of education" of individual "strengths", but in terms of a synthesis focused on the person. Allievo marks out the last part of his work as the formation of the character of the individual and introduces it this way:

¹²⁴ Cf. A. MONFAT, *La pratica della educazione cristiana*, Tipografia dei Fratelli Monaldi, Rome 1879.

¹²⁵ Cf. F. DUPANLOUP, *L'educazione, versione italiana di D. Clemente de Angelis*, vol. 2: *Dell'autorità e del rispetto nell'educazione*, P. Fiacadori, Parma 1869, 411–412.

¹²⁶ *Appunti di pedagogia di Giulio Barberis*, 33. For other confirmations about the fundamental religiosity of Don Bosco's education cf. pp. 29–30. 32. 63 and 203.

¹²⁷ RUA, *Spirito di povertà*, 221.

It brings together in final synthesis all the pedagogy that has been discussed and is, so to speak, the point to which it all gravitates, its highest point, since the general educational principles descend from the abstract reasoning of theory to take life and movement in the field of reality, explaining the fecundity of their applications in the service of the living person of the pupil [...] Thus the whole procedure of this part of pedagogy passes through these three points, one after the other: 1st, recognition of the pupil's own character; 2nd, cultivating it as it has been recognised, which is carried out by applying the general principles to it with wise discernment and with the intention of corroborating it through the social status proper to him; 3rd, choice of state in accordance with his personal vocation. However, these three points not only follow one another, but are in intimate continuity with each other and condition each other.¹²⁸

This final part of Allievo's treatise is his own (in Rayneri it remains unfinished) and it is very important, as we were saying, for the personalised imprint of the final synthesis. The difference in mindset is clear: where Barberis is most concerned about the practical problems of assistance that revolve around the boarding school structure, Allievo is focused on formulating his pedagogical synthesis around the concrete nature of the character and vocation of the individual young person. I believe that the lack of a serious discussion on the principles of personalisation, on discernment in the application of the principles and on vocational choice, influenced the Ricaldone period in the 1930s and '40s, when the memory of Don Bosco's creativity and resourcefulness had faded and an adverse environment pushed for clear, unified and strong measures.¹²⁹

In conclusion, we can see how the vivid memory of Don Bosco also plays a role in how Barberis established his approach between principles and applications. Don Bosco had applied the Preventive System in practical terms under the eyes of the first generation, supervised how it was carried out and gave it all necessary development. For the founder, the principles served rather as an introduction to any clarification of an educational perspective. They are explained and commented on later, subdividing topics or describing roles. Then finally, detailed applications (sometimes in minute detail) are proposed that need to be faithfully carried out. We are talking about a mindset that is

¹²⁸ ALLIEVO, *Studi pedagogici*, 322–323.

¹²⁹ It is interesting to read Allievo who also addresses the differences in education in different nations, cultures and historical periods, a logic that the Salesians took seriously much later. Cf. ALLIEVO, *Studi pedagogici*, 345–357.

applied both to how he narrated his dreams and how he published his regulations: first the principles, the accounts and then the applications.¹³⁰

Similarly, in Barberis’s “applicative” mentality, we can sense an echo of Don Bosco’s way of proceeding. It would seem that he is not so interested in all of Allievo’s theory: in fact, for the purposes of his work, Allievo’s text of the final “Summary” is decisive, summarising the entire treatise in thirty pages. The first consists of Allievo’s pedagogical theory; the second, more important, it is a vital context of the optimistic experience of the beginnings, of the grand horizon of an important mission for the world, of trust in education and of a relatively flexible organisational culture located as it is in a phase of exponential development.

Within these two contexts emerge the two “souls” of the work, one consisting of the pedagogical syntheses, the other formed around the conviction of possessing a method that makes the pedagogical principles concrete through applications of the Preventive System and in the practice of assistance. As long as memories remained fresh, optimism lasted and demographic growth continued, there was no need to invest in refinements of theoretical balances and it was still sustainable to be “educationalists-compilers” who combined writings of others in search of consensus.

Francesco Cerruti, first Councillor for Schools

Formation in Salesian institutes took place primarily in the school context. In the period we are looking at, the evolution of Salesian schools is linked to the person of Fr Francesco Cerruti, the Congregation’s Councillor for Schools from 1885 until 1917, already described at the end of his service as “the true organiser of the schools and studies of the Pious Salesian Society.” His classical, -humanistic approach and orientation was in fact generally followed in Salesian schools in the following period as well. Fr Arturo Conelli, called to the office of School Councillor in 1917, spoke of Fr Cerruti as a faithful interpreter of Don Bosco’s educational thinking, saying that he felt: “the duty to remind himself, and to invite confreres never to forget his directives and ideas on education and teaching, directives and ideas that are more those of our venerable Father Don Bosco.”¹³¹

¹³⁰ Cf. M. VOJTÁŠ, *L’uso educativo dei sogni da parte di don Bosco. Contesti, processi, intenzioni*, in A. BOZZOLO (ed.), *I sogni di don Bosco. Esperienza spirituale e sapienza educativa*, LAS, Rome 2017, 471–496.

¹³¹ *Capitolo Superiore Circolari* (17 September 1917), in ASC E212.

Indeed, Francesco Cerruti's program started above all from the concern to faithfully follow the teachings of Don Bosco. With this intention he wrote two letters to Fr Rua, then the Vicar, to submit his ideas to him and have his opinion on the matter. These letters were then published in an agenda-setting booklet *Le idee di D. Bosco sull'educazione e sull'insegnamento e la missione attuale della scuola*, (Don Bosco's thinking on education, teaching and the mission of the school today) that describes the fundamental approach of Cerruti's interpretation of Don Bosco. In his first circular letter as School Councillor addressed to Salesian provincials and rectors, Cerruti explained: "You will ensure that [...] the maxims contained therein are translated into practice everywhere, prudently and zealously, so that they become like the last will and testament for schools left us by our beloved Don Bosco."¹³² Sensing difficult times and dangers from without, Cerruti affirms a balance between fidelity and creativity in both the educational and teaching fields:

As for education, these ideas are essentially based on Christian charity, which wants evil to be prevented if possible, rather than having to be committed then repressing it, using in this so noble and delicate mission the vigilant and prudent assistance, gentleness of words and ways, patience and constancy of purpose which alone can conquer wills and soften hearts [...] It is not the desire for good, but self-love that would sometimes make us believe that the teachings contained in those few but sublime pages on the preventive system in education, the preface to the Regulations of the houses filled with so much pedagogical wisdom, are not always, nor everywhere translatable into practice, and that in any case yesterday's things no longer attach themselves to today's youth [...] It is true that dangers from the outside are on the increase; all kinds of seduction are on the increase; the principle of authority is diminishing every day unfortunately, far too effectively; but youth, let us not forget, is substantially the same in every time and in every place, just as substantially the same therefore is and must always be the method to be used in their education. For our part then, everything boils down to a growth in our techniques, doubling our vigilance, increasing our zeal.¹³³

The same principle of continuity, set out here in the educational field, also applies in the field of classical education, the mainstream of what Salesian schooling offers. Cerruti

¹³² F. CERRUTI, *Circular of 28 December 1885*, in F. CERRUTI, *Lettere circolari e programmi di Insegnamento (1885–1917)*. Introduction, critical text and notes by José Manuel Prelezo, LAS, Rome 2006, 57.

¹³³ F. CERRUTI, *Le idee di D. Bosco sull'educazione e sull'insegnamento e la missione attuale della scuola. Lettere due*, Tip. e Libreria Salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1886, 6–7.

supported the validity of Don Bosco's approach to the classical school, since the purpose of his teaching system "could not be more in keeping with the spirit of Christianity or more leading to religious, moral and intellectual advantage, the true, real, practical advantage of youth."¹³⁴

However, while proposing substantial continuity with the founder's approach, Cerruti did not lock himself into mere repetitiveness, but kept in contact with changing society. As for the intellectual climate, Cerruti noted a transition from a combative criticism of the Catholic religion to another, perhaps more fatal because more hypocritical, adopting an attitude of ironic indifference towards religious issues. They do not want to deny Christ, "however, they want him to be absolutely excluded from civil society. We secularise things, that is, we take Christ out of the laws, education, charity, government, marriage itself, in short, from everything."¹³⁵ In this situation, a "return to the ancient form of the early centuries by claiming the necessary relationship of Jesus Christ with all created things seems even more relevant."¹³⁶ In reading the situation one can perceive clear influences of the thinking and political polemics of Allievo in defence of the Catholic school.

If teaching the classics corresponds perfectly to the *end purpose* of integral education, in Cerruti's approach this is made concrete in the *contents* and *methods* proposed. In fact, with regard to the use of pagan and Christian authors, following a neo-scholastic logic,¹³⁷ a unification in distinction applies: the contents should favour "mixed teaching" in which "the profane classics, in what they have substantially of good, serve as a preparation or propaedeutic" and subsequently the study of the Christian classics makes "the natural beauty of the former draw new light of a higher nature, receive new divinely perfecting light from the supernatural beauty of the latter."¹³⁸ With too much expectation Cerruti then speculates that this kind of education "will restore the intimate bond between the natural order and the supernatural order, the necessary coherence even in literature and the arts, essentially distinct from each other, as if they were necessarily

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 16

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ For neo-scholastic references cf. CERRUTI, *De' principi pedagogico-sociali di S. Tommaso*, already mentioned and the second extended and updated edition published in Turin by SAID Buona Stampa in 1915.

¹³⁸ CERRUTI, *Le idee di D. Bosco sull'educazione*, 15. Cf. the series on Latin and Greek writers commented on for schools, by the SEI publishing house in Turin. The classics were published, omitting some parts considered immoral, creating a very widespread method of "censorship" and later also applied to cinema.

united, on which rests not only education alone, but the whole Christian edifice.”¹³⁹ The *method* of teaching that harmonises the end purpose with the contents should be the method known as the preventive system. Cerruti characterises this as follows:

It is necessary, therefore, to come down from the clouds once and for all; it is necessary to leave behind all that only grazes on vanity or is founded on lies, and to provide for the reality of life, not the disgusting or clumsily sentimental reality of the modern so-called *veristi* [realists, those who prefer contemporary subjects to classical ones] but rather the true reality of the Gospel. Our words, our works must always have a true, real, practical purpose, leading to the moral and material well-being of the human family.¹⁴⁰

The summary of Cerruti’s proposal is “to make school a mission”¹⁴¹ and is in tune with Fr Rua’s approach, when in 1894 he said, “the education and instruction of youth without a religious spirit, this is the plague of our century, God forbid that our schools should ever be infected by it!”¹⁴² The School Councillor, during the thirty years in which he held this position, was responsible for realising his vision through teaching programs, provisions for the formation of young Salesians and the implementation of the preventive system in its practical articulations.¹⁴³ Cerruti, with the seriousness of his proposal of integral education, was thus reacting not only to the ideological problems between positivism and spiritualism, but also to the internal situation of Salesian personnel, that is, to the “tendency, which is frighteningly growing and threatens to misrepresent the work of Don Bosco, to neglect the education of youth which is to be left in the hands of young Salesians and new priests, in order to give themselves to adults with social activities, parishes, preaching, etc.”¹⁴⁴

In his longest circular in 1910, that became the basis for his *Ricordino educativo-didattico*, he specified that “instruction is not education [...] therefore instruction is auxiliary to education.”¹⁴⁵ All the Salesians must strive “so that these students of ours, happily growing and praiseworthy in their studies, may grow no less

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁴¹ *Cons. Gen. Circ. Durando-Cerruti* (06 October 1886), in ASC E233.

¹⁴² RUA, *Santificazione nostra*, 119.

¹⁴³ Cf. CERRUTI, *Lettere circolari*, 13–56.

¹⁴⁴ *Cons. Gen. Circ. Durando-Cerruti* (16 March 1916), in ASC E233. Cf. The other circulars of 2 March 1914, 15 November 1914 and 24 December 1915.

¹⁴⁵ F. CERRUTI, Circular of 24 January 1910, in *F Cerruti, Lettere circolari*, 328.

praiseworthy in the full and complete knowledge of our holy religion and in the heartfelt, firm, and constant practice of the virtues and religious exercises that it requires, so that we may return them to their families equipped with good diplomas, yes, but also excellent citizens, sincere, frank, and industrious believers.”¹⁴⁶ The proposals and critiques are in tune with the pedagogical approaches of Rua, Barberis and logically, with Rayneri and Allievo. The last-named, who was teaching in senior classes (*liceo*) at Valsalice and collaborated with Don Bosco on various occasions, inspired the first generation of Salesians by developing the relationship between education and instruction in this way:

Instructing is not enough, it is also important to educate. In this case, education is opposed to instruction in that the latter is the cultivation of the heart and will and aims at working, at virtue, while the latter is the cultivation of intelligence and aims at thinking and knowing. Nature and the order of things would like to keep both in perfect harmony, contributing together to true and complete human perfection, since the intelligence that thinks, the heart that feels, the mind that knows and the will that works, come together in the unity of the human ego; but in fact it often goes to extremes.¹⁴⁷

As the years went on, Cerruti became more decisive and fought for his view of things. A passage from the *Ricordino educativo-didattico* illustrates this: “Every day that passes, I am ever more convinced of the need, that for us is a duty, to remain very much attached, *mordicus*, to the teachings of Don Bosco, including in matters of instruction and education and we must never depart from these teachings, not even in a single point, *nec transversum quidem unguem*. Let’s keep innovators far away from us.”¹⁴⁸ Whoever separates them, according to Fr Cerruti, does not educate, but ruins things; he does not build, but destroys; he does not practise but betrays his mission.

In order to achieve the ideal of an integral formation, the Schools Councillor recommends the educational principles of exemplariness, charity, assistance, discipline, gradualness and expediency in teaching; the use of classical literature, recalling Don Bosco’s zeal for the “cult” of Christian literature and art.¹⁴⁹ Enthusiastic about classical education, he speculates: “Language, Latin and Greek, in which Christian dogma and

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 329.

¹⁴⁷ ALLIEVO, *Studi pedagogici*, 65.

¹⁴⁸ CERRUTI, *Un ricordino educativo-didattico*, 7.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. J.M. PRELLEZO, *Premessa*, in Cerruti, *Lettere circolari*, 52–56; CERRUTI, *Circular of 24 January 1910*.

morals are accepted; the language slandered and hated for so many centuries by pagan humanists, is coming back here and there, in schools, even universities, albeit slowly; you will see, have no doubt, the era of its triumph.”¹⁵⁰ His didactic attentions are integrated with the formation of teachers in the preventive system, putting the accent on assistance, understood as continuous contact with the students which does not result in them losing their authority, their patient and benign charity. And indeed, in the wake of the *Letter from Rome*, the Schools Councillor writes:

Blessed were those times when priests and clerics, no one excepted, with Don Bosco at their head, were the life and soul of recreation, as rowdy as it was. This recreation at such a giddy speed that kept them so busy and preoccupied, strengthened the body, lifted the spirit, and made sin morally impossible!¹⁵¹

In conclusion, we can say that Fr Cerruti perceives how our “good father” made the “system understood and taught by the greatest educationalists”¹⁵² and in the final analysis by the Gospel, his own. With his position he aligned himself with the perception of Italian Catholics of the time of stark disagreement between two pedagogical schools. One was the traditional Italian classical and spiritualistic school with authors such as Parravicini, Rosmini, Aporti, Capponi, Tommaseo, Lambruschini, Rayneri, Ferrucci, Colombini; the other belonged to foreign, materialistic positivism.¹⁵³

Giuseppe Bertello: transformation of workshops into vocational schools

A similar effort of coordination at a time of great expansion was carried out by Fr Giuseppe Bertello in the area of vocational schools from 1898 to 1910. It is to him that we owe the progressive implementation of Fr Rua’s approach, motivated by the change in the social and legislative context: “I remind you that, both to avoid serious disturbances and to give them their true name, our workshops must be called vocational

¹⁵⁰ CERRUTI, *Circular of 24 January 1910*, 331.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 330.

¹⁵³ Cf. ALLIEVO, *Studi pedagogici*, 27–35; F. CERRUTI, *Una trilogia pedagogica ossia Quintiliano, Vittorino da Feltre e Don Bosco*, in J. GUIBERT, *L’educatore apostolo*, Scuola tipografica salesiana, Rome 1908, 279–293.

schools.”¹⁵⁴ In pointers he gave to trade teachers, Fr Bertello not only concretised the teaching method, but also gave practical indications on how to get young working boys to grow in religion and uprightness using the preventive system’s components of reason, religion and loving-kindness. When he spoke of loving-kindness in his circulars, Bertello often used the concepts of kindness, gentleness or benevolence proposing an educative approach “without harshness” but also “without being over-sentimental.”¹⁵⁵

The Councillor for Vocational Schools proposed a view of education very similar to Fr Cerruti’s, inspired by Turin’s spiritualist pedagogy in which religion plays a decisive role in the success of educational processes. A special emphasis in his anthropology is on efficiency and manual dexterity: man is called to “consecrate his mind, his heart, his arm to God.”¹⁵⁶ The “Bertello method”, in addition to the balance between instruction and education, aimed at a correct relationship between practical preparation for work and instruction in general culture: “The main point lies in this, that a larger part of the program should be given to theoretical instruction and to general culture [...] and people should be committed to this as a worthy work which eminently corresponds to our mission and to the needs of the times.”¹⁵⁷

Bertello’s commitment to the change of mentality from workshops in which the profession was learned and the students catechised, to vocational schools where he sought to achieve a harmony between practical and theoretical teaching, the introduction of general culture and the teaching of religion, was something he used various means to achieve and circular letters were just one of them. Among others, the 1903 *Programmi scolastici e professionali* (School and Vocational Curricula) held an important place. They outlined content for religion lessons, the national language, geography, arithmetic, geometry, etiquette, hygiene, drawing, history, natural sciences, French, business maths and sociology.¹⁵⁸ Significant too were the “world exhibitions” of the vocational schools understood by Bertello as a tool of animation, exchange and improvement:

154 M. RUA, *Ringraziamenti-Vicariato di Mendez. Profitto nostro e delle anime*. Circular of 27 December 1889, in *Lettere di don Rua*, 129. Cf. also PRELLEZO, *Le scuole professionali salesiane*, 58–84.

155 Cf. G. BERTELLO, *Alcuni avvertimenti di pedagogia per uso dei maestri d’arte della Pia Società Salesiana*, in BERTELLO, *Scritti e documenti sull’educazione*, 190–195.

156 G. BERTELLO, *Dio nell’educazione*, in BERTELLO, *Scritti e documenti sull’educazione*, 47.

157 G. BERTELLO, *Circolare del 1 ottobre 1907*, in BERTELLO, *Scritti e documenti sull’educazione*, 163.

158 Cf. *Programma scolastico per le scuole di artigiani della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, Tipografia Salesiana, Turin 1903.

Let us compare one house with another, one nation with another to take what is good everywhere and make a world school of mutual and fraternal teaching among us. We also leave here with our thoughts and investigations to see and compare what other institutes are doing, not disdaining even those who profess ideas and maxims that are contrary to ours in the field of religion; rather, making them the object of particular study.¹⁵⁹

The process of transformation of arts and trades workshops into vocational schools was slow and tortuous from the internal perspective of the Congregation. The image we gain from the circulars of the Vocational Schools Councillor is focused particularly on the solution to practical problems that emerged. To complete the overall picture of the development, however, it is necessary to gather some positive external resonances and evaluations. For example, describing the quality of education in Salesian vocational schools in Italy, an article in 1910 wrote: “[Generally] in other schools attention is paid almost exclusively to the technical education of the worker, while intellectual and moral education very often remains just at the level of intention. [...] And in the curricula of the Salesian vocational schools we see a well-understood and valid moral education track running parallel with technical training.”¹⁶⁰

Looking at the Salesian world as a whole at the time, it can be seen that in Brazil the Salesian vocational schools were awarded several times in the first two decades of the twentieth century in national and international exhibitions and were taken as a model for building new ones.¹⁶¹ In Bolivia they were the first in the state, much appreciated in society, and the textbooks used in them were later adopted for vocational teaching throughout the nation.¹⁶² In a context that presented various adverse situations such as in Shillong in India, where efforts were made to overcome problems of hygiene, organisation, finance (it is sufficient to know that 85% of the boys were admitted free of charge) and where it was necessary to face the partial hostility of the environment (Hindu religion and the presence of Protestant missionaries), one of the first Salesian vocational schools opened there received the compliments of the Minister of Finance who in 1930

159 *La prima Esposizione delle nostre scuole professionale*, in *Bollettino Salesiano* 25 (1901) 11, 306.

160 E. DE GIOVANNI, *Le scuole professionali salesiane*, in “Antologia per la scuola e per la famiglia. Rivista pedagogica – Lettere – Scienze ed Arti” 1 (1910) 194.

161 Cf. M. ISAÚ, *A educação salesiana no Brasil sudeste de 1880 a 1922: Dimensões e atuação em diversos contextos*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L’educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 2, 181–182.

162 Cf. T.A. CORONA CORTÉS, *La educación salesiana en Bolivia, La Paz y Sucre, 1896-1922. Análisis histórico de las instancias y acciones educativas*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L’educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 2, 115–117.

declared that he had “not seen a work of this perfection in Assam or Bengal.”¹⁶³ Again, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s first vocational school in Oświęcim, the commissions that came several times for examinations said that one could not have wished for better; and in fact in 1907 the Vienna Ministry of Industry and Commerce granted Salesian schools of arts and trades the right to issue qualifications equal to those of state schools.¹⁶⁴

Educationalist Giorgio Chiosso described the educational work of Don Bosco and the Salesians in this period as a combination of tradition and modernisation.¹⁶⁵ This mutual relationship that also characterises the concept of creative fidelity is seen in an exemplary way in the birth of the Salesian vocational schools, characterised by Fr Bertello’s programmatic motto “With the times and with Don Bosco.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ J. THEKKEDATH, *A history of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India (from the beginning up to 1851-52)*, vol. 1, Kristu Jyoti, Bengaluru 2005, 173.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. ZIMNIAK, *Salesiani nella Mitteleuropa*, 184.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. G. CHIOSSO, *Novecento pedagogico. Profilo delle teorie educative contemporanee*, La Scuola, Brescia 1997, 145.

¹⁶⁶ PIA SOCIETÀ SALESIANA DI D. BOSCO, *Le scuole professionali. Programmi didattici e professionali*, Scuola tipografica salesiana, Turin 1910, 1.

Tools and resources

Chronological table

<i>World history</i>	<i>Salesian history</i>	<i>Salesian pedagogy publications</i>
beginning of Catholic Congresses	1875	first presences outside Italy
Diaz coup d'etat in Mexico	1876	Valdocco, beginning of "School of Pedagogy"
Leo XIII elected Pope	1877	first GC at Lanzo
	1878	<i>Bollettino Salesiano</i> founded
	1879	beginning of the mission in Patagonia
Dostoevsky writes <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i>	1880	
	1881	death of Mary D. Mazzarello , co-foundress of the FMA
suffrage extended in Italy	1882	GC2 (theme: Regulations for Gen Council., provinces, common life, piety, studies, economy)
	1883	Don Bosco in Paris
unions legalised in France	1884	G. Cagliari bishop
Berlin Conference on Africa	1885	Bosco , <i>Letter from Rome</i> <i>Regulations for FMA kindergartens</i>
	1886	Don Bosco in Barcelona
	1887	Cerruti , <i>Idee di don Bosco sull'educazione</i> <i>Regulations for the festive oratories</i>
slavery abolished in Brazil	1888	Michael Rua becomes Rector Major of the death of John Bosco
World Expo in Paris	1889	Rua , <i>Studi letterarii</i>
encyclical <i>Sapientiae Christianae</i>	1890	Rua visits France, Spain, Belgium, England
encyclical <i>Rerum Novarum</i>	1891	presences in the Middle East
Italian Socialist Party founded	1892	
founding of Labor Party in England	1893	beginning of activities in Poland
Japan-China war	1894	Cerruti , <i>De' principii pedagogico-sociali di S. Tommaso</i> Rua , <i>Santificazione nostra e delle anime</i>
invention of cinema	1895	first Cooperators Congress
first Olympics in Athens	1896	
Juventus football club is founded	1897	first SDBs in North America
social upheavals in Italy	1898	record missionary expedition (>150)
FIAT comes into being in Turin	1899	
5th International Socialist Congress	1900	Congregation consecrated to the Sacred Heart; Bertello , <i>Educazione e formazione professionale</i>
anti-congregation laws in France	1901	rectors forbidden to hear confessions; three-year prac. training for clerics
Carcano law on child labour	1902	2 nd Congress of the Oratories
Pius X elected Pope	1903	Baratta , <i>Principii di sociologia cristiana</i> <i>Programma per le scuole di artigiani</i> , Simplicio , <i>The festive oratories</i>
	1904	10th General Chapter - reorganisation of earlier deliberations
Constitution in Russia	1905	Rua , <i>Lo spirito di D. Bosco</i>
	1906	presences in India, China, Central Africa: legal separation FMA-SDB
antimodernist encyclical <i>Pascendi</i>	1907	Varazze affair
Messina-Reggio earthquake	1908	Bertello , <i>Alcuni avvertimenti di pedagogia</i>
Jack London writes <i>Martin Eden</i>	1909	Past Pupils founded
Korea annexed to Japan	1910	Cerruti , <i>Una trilogia pedagogica</i>
	1911	Paul Albera elected Rector Major
	1912	first Past Pupils Congress
Gentile, <i>Sommario di pedagogia</i>	1913	3rd exhibition of Voc. schools.
	1914	Albera , <i>Sullo spirito di pietà; Programmi delle scuole professionali</i> <i>Regulations for FMA boarding houses</i>
Benedict XV elected Pope	1915	
Italy enters the First World War	1916	young Salesians called to arms
	1917	Albera writes letters to confreres on the battlefield
communist revolution in Russia	1918	Rinaldi brings the first VDB together
End of First World War	1918	Ricaldone , <i>Noi e la classe operaia</i> , Scaloni , <i>Le jeune éducateur chrétien</i>

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Online resources

Sources, documents, research, full-text publications, photographic materials, related to this chapter.¹⁶⁷



¹⁶⁷ Cf. salesian.online/pedagogia1

2

A practical pedagogy of osmosis (1902–1931)

After Salesian work was first established by the generation of Don Bosco's immediate collaborators, the Salesians and the FMA were faced with new challenges such as the dynamics of mass society, the First World War, totalitarian regimes and colonial nationalism. These events, and the expansion of the work across all continents, necessarily urged some adaptation, transformation and re-calibration, and this gave rise to a number of theoretical as well as practical challenges within the Salesian pedagogical tradition. What seems to have emerged over this period is an attitude of "healthy modernity" and the way forward seemed to be by way of practical and experience-based adaptation. This mentality can be identified above all in the development of oratories, the missions and in the birth of new works, congregations and associations, some of which became particularly iconic.

Oratory in mass society and missions during colonialism

The initial dynamics of mass society took hold at the beginning of the twentieth century in Europe. In addition to the political and economic dynamics of the second industrial revolution, there were important social and demographic implications for the Salesian oratory, which was configured as an open educational work "halfway" between society and the Church. Compulsory schooling, the related prohibition of child labour, more restricted working hours and growth of wages created the conditions for the emergence of leisure time, which subsequently paved the way for the many forms of mass entertainment.

Leisure time and its implications

Given the growth of literacy, there was a need for low-cost literature aimed at the cultural level of the majority. A new wave of daily newspapers came into being, addressed to the lower middle class. These dailies had little interest in high politics but instead told sensational stories, displayed many photos or other images, and were financed through advertising. Among them we could name the *Daily Mail* in England with 1.3 million copies sold daily, the *Petit Parisien* with a million copies and the *Berliner Morgenpost* selling two hundred thousand copies daily at the beginning of the century. As part of the same phenomenon, various low-cost entertainment works were sold at railway stations and by street vendors or printed as serial publications.¹

These serial publications captured the minds of the young at the beginning of the century, spreading the image of exotic locations, such as we find with Emilio Salgari, or focusing especially on the *wild west* of *Buffalo Bill* and *Nick Carter*. Jules Verne's works popularised the modern scientific mentality, Edgar R. Burroughs launched the fantasy genre for youngsters in the English-speaking world, represented in Italy by the accounts of Carlo Collodi at the end of the nineteenth century.² This literature was viewed with suspicion by religious, socialist and nationalist groups, which often tried to compete with it through their own productions. It wasn't just about leisure reading: in addition to the *café chantant*, the music halls, there were street theatre, dance halls and clubs, then came cinema, which quickly took on increasing importance. The early films were still being projected in music halls, but picture theatres soon came into being and already by 1911 there were some 3000 of them in Great Britain and 1500 in France.

Together with mass literature and cinema, the new exploding sector was sport in its many forms, practised both in stadiums and on the streets. Team games were added to traditional athletics. Among the latter, the first to achieve great success were rugby and soccer (football). In the beginning they had few rules at all, and were even banned for their violence. However, starting in the 1870s, they were organised with

¹ Cf. H-W. PRAHL, *Geschichte und Entwicklung der Freizeit*, in R. FREERICKS – D. BRINKMANN (eds), *Handbuch Freizeitsoziologie*, Springer VS, Wiesbaden 2015, 3-27; M. FLORES, *Il XX secolo*, Corriere della Sera, Milan 2004, 97.

² Cf. S. LERER, *Children's Literature. A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2008; A. NOBILE, *Letteratura giovanile. Da Pinocchio a Peppa Pig*, La Scuola, Brescia 2015.

official rules and structures, at first local and then international.³ Later, other typically modern sports linked to advances in engineering, such as cycling and motor racing were added. The Olympics became the most emblematic event of the growing importance of organised sports. Pierre de Coubertin, who organised the first of the modern Olympics in Athens in 1896, was convinced that the strong and virile physical and moral education imparted in the public schools had been the secret of the prodigious expansion of the British Empire.⁴ An important component of mass sport for the world and for youth imagination was organised support, and this broadened the ways of participating in sport. In addition, sports organisations were often used as a vehicle for ideology and political struggle by political movements and other associations, with an ever wider spectrum of social or religious references.

Mass society and the growth of interest in associations

The concept of the masses was debated throughout the nineteenth century, but it was only at the end of the century that a true mass society began to take shape. One of the most notable social changes introduced by the dynamics of mass society was the new social stratification. Some old trades disappeared and new ones emerged: mechanic, photographer, typist. The civil servant category broadened with the increasing competencies of the state in the fields of education, transport, services and public assistance, so as to become a new class. It would later be called the “white collar” class, to distinguish them from blue-collar workers.

This “middle” class, on the border between the workers and the upper middle class, found its own consistency and identity, based on the historical values of the bourgeoisie: individualism, private property, interest in savings, respect for hierarchy, and nationalism. Its typological connotation became a frequent theme in literature at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁵ The mass of workers did not remain unchanged either. In fact, it was slowly divided into general labour, skilled workers, and self-employed workers. Self-employed or at least skilled workers participated to a certain

³ The first is the *Rugby Football Union* which came into being in England in 1871 and among the most important in 1904 in Paris was the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA) for football.

⁴ Cf. M. FLORES, *Il XX secolo*, 99.

⁵ Cf. for example *Una vita* by I. Svevo, *Der Prozess* by F. Kafka, *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir* by G. Courteline or *Les Dimanches d'un bourgeois de Paris* by G. de Maupassant.

extent in the advantages of the economic system of the time and formed the middle class of society together with public employees.⁶

Another typical phenomenon of the era was mass political parties and trade unions. These found an important place in the organisation of public life. The new model of the party was proposed for the first time by the socialists (and to a lesser extent by Catholics), based on the framing of large strata of the population through a permanent structure, articulated through local organisations (sections, federations) and headed by a single executive centre. The identity of these parties was generally based on membership of a class (socialists), or a nation (nationalists), or a denomination (Catholics). The trade unions managed, at the end of the nineteenth century, to resist the pressure of entrepreneurs and fought for the rights of workers not only in Europe and the United States, but also in Latin America and Australia.

With regard to the theoretical guidelines for their activities, the trade unions identified themselves as socialists (with reference to the teachings of Marx and Engels), Catholics (who referred instead to the Leo XIII's Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*), liberals or conservatives. On the eve of the First World War there were four million union members in Great Britain, three million in Germany, two million in France and five hundred thousand in Italy.⁷

The adaptation of Salesian oratories in the early twentieth century

The Church showed its vitality in the strengthening of social and missionary activity and, not limiting itself to opposing the secular state, developed a strategy that was expressed through the work of religious congregations, school publishing, popular educational publications, ascetic literature, oratories and, last but not least, associations that responded to the questions of the new generations. Bishops, priests, religious and militant lay people were concerned with protecting the consciences of young people from the dangers of the liberal revolution, defending their mentality and customs.⁸

⁶ Cf. G. SABBATUCCI – V. VIDOTTO, *Il mondo contemporaneo. Dal 1848 a oggi*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2005, 167–171.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 173–175.

⁸ Cf. L. CAIMI, *Il contributo educativo degli oratori e dell'associazionismo giovanile dall'Unità nazionale alla prima guerra mondiale*, in L. PAZZAGLIA (ed.), *Cattolici, educazione e trasformazioni socio-culturali in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, La Scuola, Brescia 1999, 629–696.

In the 1880s it could be said that the Salesian oratory was set up as it was at the beginning: it was an oratory for Sundays and feast days (hence ‘festive’) defined by the classic combination of catechism and recreation. Education was imparted primarily through religious instruction and practice, and recreation in the courtyard was intended to create a joyful and friendly educational environment, performing the important function of attracting young people. It was in this context that the sodalities, music and theatre that gave life to the oratory were inserted. It was aimed mainly at young boys or teenagers from 8-16 years of age.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, while recreation centres of a secular and liberal or socialist hue were multiplying in number,⁹ Catholics saw in the oratory an important educational institution. It proposed an environment that mediated between the parish and society, first of all because of the possibility of engaging in preventive action for young people undermined from many sides, and also because of its greater flexibility compared to the school. If the traditional parish was the territorial and established form of church community, the oratory instead represented an innovative outreach locally as well as to the outskirts. It took the form of catechetical, educational and recreational activities. Its intermediate position guaranteed it a “sacredness” which was different from that of the parish, yet a “profane nature” different from the world of political movements, work and duties.¹⁰

After the decisive impetus of *Rerum Novarum*, attention to social issues grew in the life of the oratory and in tune with this, the purpose of “preparing for life” was also reinvigorated. This social emphasis, together with the inclusion of sport and the strengthening of the associative dimension organised into “sections”, influenced the nature of the Salesian oratory in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Given its broader educational offering, the oratory shifted from being a weekend affair to a daily one. The emphasis on preparation for life led to the launching of activities for those over 18 years of age, who found an approach addressed specifically to them. They were

⁹ The recreation centres, established by municipal administrations, had a preventive purpose with respect to the problem of vagrancy of young people (especially during holidays) developing entertainment for the students of the city’s popular schools with games, gymnastic exercises, singing and music lessons, readings, theatre, and possibly the tutoring on school subjects. Cf. D. PELA, *L’identità politica tra pubblico e privato*, in P. SORCINELLI (ed.), *Identikit del Novecento. Conflitti, trasformazioni sociali, stili di vita*, Donzelli, Rome 2004, 180–223.

¹⁰ Cf. G. TASSANI, *L’oratorio*, in M. ISNENGI (ed.), *I luoghi della memoria. Simboli e miti dell’Italia unita*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1996, 67–91.

offered religion classes linked to specific educational activities for integration into society and work. This was a step up from basic catechism classes.

In addition to the direct influences of the social context, advances in technology (such as the cinema) enriched the spectrum of recreational activities and catechesis. It can be said that a well-structured oratory at the end of the 1920s was no longer characterised just by catechism and recreation. The new approach to a more wholistic education meant there was a wide range of activities organised into “sections”. Only with the “Catechetical Crusade” of the 1940s would there be a return to insisting on the contrast between catechism and other recreational activities. It should be noted that despite the many developments, the oratory structure had its weaknesses, especially in terms of personnel and sustainability. We will take this up later.

Guidance from the centre: the Bollettino, congresses and regulations

At the beginning of the 1920s, Fr Barberis, Catechist General, wrote: “Allow me, however, to express a fear that sometimes disturbs me, thinking of a danger that could overwhelm our festive oratories. If we are not more careful there is fully the risk of transforming the festive oratory into a recreation centre of whatever kind, developing amusements and attractions in it that will constitute its movement and outer life rather than religious instruction.”¹¹ Obviously this was not a new question and was one that had earlier been debated in the congresses on the oratories, during the Fifth Cooperators Congress in 1906, and further highlighted in the *Bollettino Salesiano*. The balances between religious education and recreation, being a question of balance, involved an open and constant task to settle the two tendencies in practice.

Significant for the life and activities of the oratories was the series of congresses on the oratory in Italy, which brought the Philip Neri, Charles Borromeo and Don Bosco traditions into dialogue. The second congress in 1902, which took place at Valdocco, was felt most strongly at the Salesian level. Fr Stefano Trione, who drafted the subjects dealt with in a *Manuale Direttivo*, drew his inspiration from the *Regolamento* written by Don Bosco as a way of drafting the first three chapters:

1. Organisation and roles within the oratory: rector/director, prefect, catechist and other roles;
2. Religious education through catechism, sacraments and preaching;
3. Discipline, amusements, music and theatre.

¹¹ G. BARBERIS, *Il direttore spirituale*, in ACS 1 (1920) 2, 38.

The following chapters brought additions and innovations both at the associative and activity level: sodalities and clubs for young adults as well, mobile libraries, daily oratories, evening classes, religious classes, provident societies and job placement offices. The sporting part was more developed among the activities mentioned in the best practices section: walks/outings, gymnastics, athletics, running, football and dancing (the latter for female oratories).¹² A year later, the third Salesian Cooperators Congress, reconfirming and propagating the earlier-mentioned congress on the theme of festive and daily oratories, went beyond the pure combination of catechism and recreation, pointing out the importance of the general objective of preparation for social life and the method of assistance before and after school.¹³

The third and fifth congresses on the oratory (1907, 1911) and the subsequent catechetical congress in Brescia (1912) focused on catechetical teaching method. The third oratory congress suggested “light projections” applied to the teaching of catechism, not so much in terms of an actual religion class, but to attract those living in suburbs of the big cities where there was no other pastoral activity going on. It was said that these film projections offered free of charge, or almost free of charge, would succeed in being integrated within the catechetical mission, and ways were pointed out for making them fruitful as a teaching tool.¹⁴

Worthy of note are the developments in female catechesis promoted with extraordinary zeal and uncommon organisational ability and innovative approaches by Sr Maddalena Morano, the Provincial of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Sicily.¹⁵ The Provincial began to organise religion classes, different from catechism classes in that

12 Cf. *Manuale direttivo degli Oratorii Festivi e delle Scuole di Religione. Eco del Congresso di tali istituzioni tenutosi in Torino i giorni 21 e 22 maggio 1902*, Scuola tipografica salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1903. NB: It should be noted that the acceptance of sports and gymnastics in Catholic educational institutions was neither straightforward nor peaceful. In addition to the insights in the third chapter cf. L. DEMOFONTI, *Il movimento sportivo cattolico in Italia fra Ottocento e Novecento*, in “Studi Storici” 51 (2010) 651-689 and D. BARDELLI, *Cattolicesimo, ginnastica e sport. Un percorso storico nel rapporto fra religione e attività motorie*, EDUCat, Milan 2012.

13 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Per una storia dell’educazione giovanile nell’oratorio dell’Italia contemporanea. L’esperienza salesiana*, LAS, Rome 2018, 78–79.

14 P. BRAIDO, *L’oratorio salesiano in Italia, “luogo” propizio alla catechesi nella stagione dei Congressi (1888-1915)*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 46 (2005) 1, 62.

15 Cf. M.L. MAZZARELLO, *Sulle frontiere dell’educazione. Maddalena Morano in Sicilia (1881-1908)*, LAS, Rome 1995, 141–180. To contextualise the “scuole di religione” cf. “Annali di Storia dell’Educazione e delle Istituzioni scolastiche” 18 (2011) 11-202 and G. BIANCARDI – U. GIANETTO, *Storia della catechesi*, LAS, Rome 2016, vol. 4: *Il movimento catechistico*, 376-399.

they were addressed to older girls, the Children of Mary, who needed a more in-depth approach. These classes also spread beyond Sicily and during the social week of the *Donne Cattoliche d'Italia*, that was held in 1913 in Turin, the meaningfulness of the FMA religion classes was underscored by the didactic director of the Union: “A well-ordered profound work of apologetics, enlightened by historical criticism, sustained by rigorous logic, nourished by reading and commentary on the Sacred Texts, especially the Gospel.”¹⁶

A significant and authoritative contribution was offered by the *Bollettino Salesiano* from 1903 to 1907 by a certain “Don Semplicio”.¹⁷ Assuring the reader that he was developing his topics in accordance with Fr Rua’s wishes,¹⁸ the author disseminated his teachings, which were inspired by both Don Bosco and updating from the congresses. His stance in defence of social and sports activities was important. In his “Open Letters to those who loved the young” he demonstrated the usefulness of sport while at the same time suggesting various rules of practical importance to prevent the damaging consequences of taking things too far, recommending that sporting activities also have an instructive nature and that they should not stop people from attending religious services on Sundays or feast days.¹⁹ Don Semplicio did not hesitate to have recourse to contemporary educationalists, and defended gymnastics, a strong core of sports clubs in the oratories, stating:

an institution such as gymnastics... a powerful preventive and protective means of social hygiene, public economy and national prosperity, keeping people healthy and active and developing them in productive work, be it of brain or brawn. [...] its organisation is extremely vital.²⁰

¹⁶ M. MAGNOCAVALLO, *Quale istruzione religiosa e formazione morale deve avere la donna per essere buona maestra*, in J.G. GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L’educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922. Istanze ed attuazioni in diversi contesti*. Acts of the 4th International Convention of the History of Salesian Work Ciudad de México, 12-18 February 2006, vol. 1, LAS, Rome 2007, 360.

¹⁷ The pseudonym hides a prominent personality linked to the General Council, the work of the Congresses and the *Bollettino*. In all likelihood it could be Stefano Trione, key player in the work of the Congresses, or other personalities gravitating around Valdocco and the *Bollettino* such as Abbondio Anzini, Giovanni Minguzzi or Angelo Amadei. Cf. BRAIDO, *Per una storia dell’educazione giovanile nell’oratorio*, 80.

¹⁸ D. SIMPLICIO, *Gli oratori festivi. Lettera aperta agli amanti della gioventù*, in “*Bollettino Salesiano*” 27 (1903) 1, 12.

¹⁹ Cf. *La prima giornata (5 giugno). L’adunanza del mattino*, in “*Bollettino Salesiano*” 30 (1906) 7, 201.

²⁰ M. JERACE, *Gli sports nella scienza e nell’educazione*, in “*Bollettino Salesiano*” 30 (1906) 12, 364–365.

Don Simplicio developed a similar line of thought regarding civics. In his reflection on the oratory in his pages in the *Bollettino*, he specified that instruction in the oratory is split into two complementary branches: “*religious* and *civil*, although they can be imparted equally, and very well, together.” Further on he added: “Everything in the oratory must instruct. Anyone who pretends to restrict teaching to catechism, or to prohibit advice on good manners being given even in the chapel from time to time, perhaps after the services, or for example, encourage good behaviour on the streets, squares, in the workplace, family, with superiors, with companions, with friends, etc., would be making a great mistake.”²¹

The question of balance between religious education and other activities was not the only dialectic going on in the oratory. The new sporting, cultural and social activities were sometimes seen as “the new method” and there was a risk of forgetting the heart of the Salesian tradition by implementing an update that was just “too convenient.” For his part, Don Simplicio observed that “there are not a few who, despite being filled with enthusiasm and admiration for this providential work, then lack the necessary virtue in practice to sacrifice themselves – yes, that’s the word! – the necessary virtue, I say, to sacrifice themselves for this mission. We know that poor Don Bosco, while at the Oratory on the lonely fields at Valdocco, would, at the end of the day, return home so exhausted that he had no strength left to take a bit of nourishment.”²²

In discussions around the renewal of oratory life we can see two typical dynamics at play: the first related to rethinking the theoretical and practical elements in the new circumstances; while the second, in some contexts, simply tended to neglect the most demanding aspects of tradition, failing to provide a proper educational tension between the proposed ideal and the current situation.²³

A final aspect described within developments of Salesian education in the oratory is the tension between a rigid legalistic attitude when it came to updating the regulations of the oratories and a creative flexible practice in managing the abundant new activities of the oratories that filled the *Bollettino*’s columns. Braidò evaluates the two updates to the *Regolamento degli oratori* in 1906 and 1922 very clearly: “One gets the impression of a ‘law’ that has hardened into a fundamental immobility unable to keep pace with the

21 D. SIMPLICIO, *Gli oratori festivi. Lettera aperta agli amanti della gioventù*, in “*Bollettino Salesiano*” 27 (1903) 12, 355–356.

22 M. JERACE, *Gli sports nella scienza e nell’educazione*, 364–365.

23 For the description of change management balances cf. the inspiring interpretation by P.M. SENGE, *The Fifth Discipline. The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Doubleday, New York 2006, 103-112 and 391-395.

oratories in general as referred to in the News sections of the *Bollettino*.²⁴ He rightly notes that the text of the new regulations was still tenaciously anchored to the letter of Don Bosco's set of regulations and did not seem to respect the richness of living Salesian experience. The real oratories had gone beyond this point, however still in line with indications from superiors at the centre, headed by the Rector Major, always positive with regard to the openings of the congresses he presided over, and encouraging in his letters, be they circulars or monthly ones.

The concrete situation of the oratories

Despite the *grandeur* of the congresses, the innovative experiences and model oratories, the majority of oratories struggled to pursue their mission. The first problem stemmed from the precarious financial situation. The testimony of the *Bollettino Salesiano* in 1903 is an eloquent one: "The festive oratory is not an item of income but rather one of continuous expenditure: and this is why, in various places, when the Salesians were called to run an oratory and were then left to themselves, they saw themselves being forced to open hospices and boarding schools, just to make a living."²⁵ The financial problems were generally resolved through recourse to benefactors, with the material support of the institute or with fundraising and lotteries connected with special occasions of oratory life: feast days, theatrical recitals or concerts.

Financial difficulties were compounded by the lack of suitable premises for the oratory. The oratory needed well-defined spaces such as the church, the courtyard, the hall for the theatre and classrooms for catechism and various cultural and recreational activities. If it was only a festive oratory, then the premises would not be used for the rest of the week, so they often used spaces shared with boarding school activities; at times this resulted in tensions. This separation was also symbolised by the division of the courtyards in Valdocco between students, working boys and oratory boys.

Among so many practical difficulties, the most important, though not the most urgent challenge was the lack of trained personnel. Even though the problem of the lack of Salesian personnel was a general feature of the expansion of the Congregation, it was felt even more in the oratories, since the latter were placed in the background compared to the boarding schools. One sign of this was a partial absence of Salesians in the discussion about the oratories, be it the intermediate authorities (provincials and

²⁴ P. BRAIDO, *L'oratorio salesiano in Italia* (1888-1915), 56.

²⁵ D. SIMPLICIO, *Gli oratori festivi. Lettera aperta agli amanti della gioventù*, 108.

rectors) or those at ground level. The most widespread attitude was distrust of everything that went on in the congresses, summed up in the report on the fifth congress on festive oratories (1911): “So! The congresses leave a lot to be desired! They always repeat the usual things; so many promises that just remain a dead letter; so it is useless me getting involved.”²⁶ Despite the statement by the second congress on the oratories: “The choice of a suitable director is therefore of utmost importance. Indeed, it can be said that the success of a festive oratory depends on the ability of its director,”²⁷ while in the houses it happened that there was no oratory director, or unprepared people were given the job. We find an echo of this situation in the *Bollettino Salesiano* criticising the idea that “any priest is enough to get a festive oratory going.”²⁸

The different responses to the needs of the time increased the complexity of oratory management and also implied a growth in the number of people involved. Some Salesian opinion leaders focused on the formation of young Salesians with the aim of preparing them for the educational tasks of the oratory, using special manuals and practical training stints in well-organised “model” oratories. Others called into play the potential of the laity, who with their practical and vital experience could have been more fruitful than many pedagogical studies.²⁹ In this context we can also mention the reflections on the subject of personnel in the Salesian oratories dealt with during the Salesian Cooperator Congresses in the early decades of the twentieth century. All Cooperators were asked to take responsibility for establishing festive oratories and for their personal, material and moral support. Highlighted especially was the role of Cooperators in running sports, art and social groups:

In fact, the work of the Cooperator congresses was connected at various points with the reflection of the oratory congresses. In the sector for *assisting* young people they were called to take a leading role in the *festive oratories*, using many effective ways: culture groups, social conversations, vocational classes, Labour secretariats and employment offices, social security registration offices, education on work legislation, occupational hygiene conferences, popular

²⁶ A. ANZINI, *Gli Oratori Festivi*, in P. BRAIDO, *L'oratorio salesiano in Italia (1888-1915)*, 84.

²⁷ *Manuale direttivo degli Oratorii Festivi e delle Scuole di Religione*. Echo of the Congress of these institutions held in Turin on 21 and 22 May 1902, Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1903, 30.

²⁸ A. BRUGNOLI, *Per la salvezza della gioventù: Occorre un provvedimento radicale*, in “*Bollettino Salesiano*” 40 (1916) 6, 165.

²⁹ Cf. G. CHIOSSO, *Educazione e pedagogia nelle pagine del «Bollettino salesiano» d'inizio Novecento*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 1, 130.

workers' insurance, etc. Following was the list of attitudes and behaviours demanded by long tradition of Cooperators who wanted to promote the foundation of religion classes and festive oratories and work in them.³⁰

The diversity of religious and social contexts profoundly conditioned the real situation of the oratories. The presence or otherwise of a culturally consolidated “oratory tradition” in a given context significantly influenced the numbers involved, which in turn influenced the concrete choices and educational methods adopted. Some oratories had a small number of young people, while in others there were thousands enrolled. For example, in 1913, two thousand enrolments were recorded at the oratory at Valdocco, eight hundred of them regularly involved in the many activities.³¹ In other places in Italy, especially in the south, the number of youngsters was around the hundred mark.³²

The differences between a traditionally Christian cultural context and a mission *ad gentes* was even more of an influence, and so, for example, in La Paz, Bolivia, there were a thousand oratory members, while in Japan Fr Cimatti characterised the oratory situation in the 1930s as being similar to Don Bosco's first oratory, because it was the curious who came first, then there would be a stable group of youngsters and the oratory would run normally, all apparently very promising, until one fine day the oratory would be deserted.³³

Development and tensions around Salesian groups

The innovative effort to find ways to attract and keep young people in the oratory developed principally in the direction of new activities organised in “sections”, with a certain autonomy in the way they were managed. The old games of the mid-nineteenth century did not always attract, and already during Don Bosco's lifetime, the Salesians at Valdocco felt the need to look for new recreational approaches.³⁴ Some traditional

³⁰ P. BRAIDO, *L'oratorio salesiano vivo in un decennio drammatico (1913-1922)*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 47 (2005) 2, 258–259.

³¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 218.

³² Cf. F. CASELLA, *Il Mezzogiorno d'Italia e le istituzioni educative salesiane. Richieste e Fondazioni (1879-1922) Fonti per lo studio*, LAS, Rome 2000.

³³ Cf. V. CIMATTI, *Le difficoltà per l'azione missionaria in Giappone*, in “Bollettino Salesiano” 56 (1932) 7, 213–215;

³⁴ Cf. J.M. PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento tra reale ed ideale (1866-1889). Documenti e testimonianze*, LAS, Rome 1992, 254.

activities like theatre, music, evening classes and sodalities were further developed, and other new ones, like organised sport, scouting and social activities, sought their place in the life of the Salesian oratory of the time. In addition to seeing new activities, the way they were organised was interesting as it moved in the direction of new ways of coming together – a more modern, articulated, mass approach.

The wide range of activities and their animation within the Salesian oratory was already consolidated and traditionally linked with the sodality structure. In the early twentieth century, however, the preferred term was “association” or “youth group”. The scope of action and the number of associations expanded, and alongside the St Aloysius, St Joseph, Blessed Sacrament, Altar Boys, Immaculate Conception and Guardian Angel groups (sodalities), whose purpose was to enliven a section or aspect of oratory life, other groups were added concerned with the social, self-expression or sports dimensions. The typical group-sodality activities were connected to formation opportunities, which in practice were generally a regular conference from the person in charge of the oratory, the rector or some local authority. In some places the formative aspect of associative life was emphasised by the whole group attending Mass, preceded by confessions. An important part of the life of these groups was the yearly outing, discussions on various topics, the patronal feast, and occasionally even their own little magazine.

A particular category involved groups with no characteristic activity that arose as a response to the need to come together, sometimes reinforced by the British tradition of coming together in clubs. Past Pupils associations also arose during this period, important for accompanying members in their transition to social life with further educational impact. Individual Past Pupils associations, which came about spontaneously, were then organised into an international federation through the first set of statutes in 1911 under Philip Rinaldi’s coordination.

Sports sections began entering Salesian oratories at the beginning of the twentieth century. Athletics, gymnastics, cycling were the first sports to be practised on oratory soil. Already in 1905 the first Catholic Sports Conference was organised in Italy and the *Bollettino* spoke about it, developing the aspect of the link between sport and education of the spirit and of virtue. The address by Pope Pius X to participants was most eloquent, containing so many elements of convergence with Salesian education:

Looking at you I feel the need to tell you that I love you, and you should see me not just as a father, but as a brother and tender friend. And with these sentiments I not only approve of all your works in Catholic Action, but I heartily admire and bless all your games and pastimes, gymnastics, cycling, mountaineering, boating,

running, walking, competitions and academies to which you dedicate yourself; provided that the physical exercises of the body admirably influence the exercises of the spirit; because these entertainments, while requiring work, will take you away from idleness, which is the father of vices; and just so long as ultimately, these friendly competitions are an image in us of how we emulate each other in practising virtue.³⁵

In 1909, the fourth congress on the oratories gave consideration to the sections with special reference to the sports section. The congress expressed its satisfaction at the birth of the vast and flourishing Federation of Italian Catholic Sports Associations (FASCI). In the interventions that followed there was a clear effort by participants to connect the educational and recreational activities and to keep the direction of the oratory and the individual sections in harmony. Here we list some of the considerations of the congress:

1. Sections were not an end in themselves, but just an effective way to make *older youth* more fond of the oratory;
2. Let the *informative spirit* of the sections be the same as the oratory's;
3. The special aim of the sections should be *to form and strengthen* young people in Christian life, and not to abandon them at a time when they were in greater need of assistance;
4. The main effort of all the oratory activities should be aimed at making the youngsters ever more desirous of *living a Christian life*;
5. Let the fulfilment of all *religious duties* in the oratory be required, while easily granting exceptions for good reasons;
6. At least once a month see that young people in the sections can attend appropriate *conferences* and makes use of the sacraments on the main feast days *during the year*;
7. Absolutely everyone is expected to show outward good *behaviour* in moral and religious terms;
8. Emulation is a very strong impetus to the unity and progress that is each sections proper and particular aim; and that a *general and unique aim* is a powerful means of removing division, shadows and consequent debacles;
9. Let all sections be entirely and absolutely dependent on *those who run the oratory*, so that everyone's work is effective and in agreement;

³⁵ P. PERICOLI, *Il 1° Convegno Sportivo Cattolico Italiano*, in "Bollettino Salesiano" 29(1905) 11, 326–328.

10. Let the executive group of the individual sections (essential to their activities and development) in the person of their respective presidents, also be *council members of the management group*;
11. Let all sections have the *same set of regulations*, subject to special provisions for the life and development peculiar to each section.³⁶

Scouting began to have a particular place in Salesian oratories in the second decade of the twentieth century.³⁷ Italy was among the first of the countries to welcome this new educational method. But scouting in Italy was not exempt from some problematic interpretations: a tendency to militarism, a greater attention to the masses rather than to the individual and above all the inclination to a lack of a religious emphasis. The idea of a movement open to any religion was interpreted as the exclusion of specific religious education, and so in 1916 the Association of Italian Catholic Scouts (ASCI) came into being, aiming to give scouting a Catholic stamp of its own. A similar situation was faced in Argentina where Fr Giuseppe Vespignani very successfully founded the *Exploradores de don Bosco* in 1915.³⁸

Salesians and the First World War

The British Empire was still the military superpower in the political arena, dominating a quarter of the earth's surface and comprising a fifth of the world's population. But the Victorian age of colonial successes and the politics of isolation were over and another chapter of its history was beginning. Queen Victoria, whose reign began in 1838, died in 1901, and a year later the conservative Salisbury government that had led the country for long years without substantial opposition also came to an end. As a sign of the changing times, in 1906 a Labour Party entered the House of Commons for the first time, an expression of reformist socialism close to the trade union movement, while

³⁶ *Uffizio sotto-agenzia per gl'interessi giovanili economico-sociali*, in "Bollettino Salesiano" 33 (1909) 12, 365–366.

³⁷ Scouting had Sir Robert Baden-Powell (1857-1941) as its founder. Baden-Powell, a colonel in the British army, came up with the idea of using boys' innate tendency towards adventure for educational purposes. He wrote the publication *Aids to Scouting for Man*, which was very successful among boys. After the exciting experience of the experimental camp on Brownsea Island in August 1907, he wrote a second book entitled *Scouting for Boys*, an educational resource aimed at English youth.

³⁸ S. NEGROTTI, *Los exploradores argentinos de don Bosco: orígenes y pedagogía de una experiencia juvenil salesiana argentina*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 2, 27–50.

clearly distancing itself from the revolutionary socialism of the communists. And so, in the years that followed, a number of social reforms were put in place that diminished some exaggerated expressions of capitalism. Meanwhile, with the spread of the second industrial revolution, the British economy lost its position of supremacy, undergoing growing competition from the United States, Germany and France. In this situation of economic and political competition, Great Britain signed the *Entente Cordiale* with France in 1904 which really masked an alliance beneath the terms of their “warm agreement”, one that was later also extended to Russia.

Central Europe, the competing counterpart, was made up of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Wanting to build a new empire, Germany, which had only recently arrived at territorial unity once more, found itself necessarily in an antagonistic position compared to the other imperial powers that had already divided up the globe, and the main theme of its policy was known as *Weltpolitik*. In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, under the lengthy governance of Franz Josef, the scenario could be described as being *ad intra*. Economic and cultural development in the centres and the vitality of social democratic and Christian-socialist parties were at odds with the immobility of the political system and with the persistence of the traditional social structures of the peasant province. The main problem of the empire, however, was national conflicts. The Slavic peoples, sacrificed in the Austro-Hungarian equalisation, suffered respectively from increasing Germanisation (Austria) or Magyarisation (Hungary). The internal situation would lead to the emergence of various nationalist movements involving several areas of tension, particularly in the Balkans, where the spark of the First World War would be ignited in the summer of 1914.³⁹

At the beginning, the Great War was seen by the younger generations as the most popular war of all time. Young writers of the time were enthusiastic about it: Charles Péguy wrote that he couldn't wait to go to the Front, Ernst Jünger spoke of a sacred moment, Rupert Brook thought that war was a splendid emotion beyond compare. The war also engaged the enthusiasm of youth movements that had risen at the beginning of the century, like, for example, the scouts and the *Wandervögel* in Germany.⁴⁰ Later, Péguy would die during fighting in 1914, Brook in 1915 and slowly, young people's emotional attitude to the war changed. In the winter of the third year of the war, its end not yet in sight, the emotions changed radically and disappointed youth would then be the so-called “lost generation.” At the end of the war, after four years of violence and

³⁹ Cf. G. SABBATUCCI – V. VIDOTTO, *Il mondo contemporaneo. Dal 1848 a oggi*, 198–202.

⁴⁰ Youth organisation similar to Baden-Powell's scouts, founded in Germany in 1896.

states economically exhausted, there were nine million victims, almost all between the ages of twenty and thirty. In addition to these and the forty million deaths from the Spanish flu, general disillusionment and material damage undermined the credibility of the positivist idea of an automatic scientific and social progress.

Due mainly to the barbarism and moral degradation of the war, the image of Western powers as bearers of culture and civilisation around the world became highly problematic. Winston Churchill, who had had experience both on the battlefield and in government during the war, wrote: “The mighty *educated* states involved conceived, not without reason, that their very existence was at stake [...] Every outrage against humanity or international law was repaid by reprisals – often of a greater scale and of longer duration [...] The fighting strength of armies was limited only by the manhood of their countries.”⁴¹ There were those who, in this era, saw the end of the West, identifying themselves with the title of the famous book by Oswald Spengler published in 1918.

The First World War was a time of trial for the Salesians too. A little less than half of the Congregation was called up, many colleges were requisitioned for military or hospital needs, the need was pressing to assist a growing number of refugees, children of the military and orphans; at the same time, the flow of funding from benefactors decreased substantially. There was soon an awareness of painful cases in which some confreres had been forced to attack each other.⁴² Moved by a desire to be close to confreres and to encourage them, from 1916 the Rector Major, Fr Paul Albera, wrote a monthly letter to all Salesians under arms. After the war, in addition to material damage, the effects on military confreres were especially noticeable. After being in the barracks and trenches in a “life so opposite to the one which, by religious vocation [...] they were dedicated, it would be difficult for them to resume their past habits without further ado.”⁴³ Fr Ceria noted this in general terms in his *Annali della Società Salesiana* and presented some provisions of the General Council to address the situation. At the level of mentality, one can speculate on the repercussions not so much on pedagogical thinking as on organisation, discipline, assistance, and religious life.

41 P. JOHNSON, *Modern Times. The World from the Twenties to the Nineties*, Harper Collins, New York 1991, 13–14. Italics are ours to give importance to the expression “the mighty educated States”. Educated could mean ‘civilised’ here as well.

42 Cf. M. WIRTH, *Da Don Bosco ai nostri giorni. Tra storia e nuove sfide (1815-2000)*, LAS, Rome 2000, 312–313.

43 E. CERIA, *Annali della Società Salesiana*, vol. 4: *Il rettorato di don Paolo Albera 1910-1921*, SEL, Turin 1951, 71.

The post-war period and the advent of fascism

On a political and cultural level, the war had considerable consequences that would bring humanity into a different world from the previous one – a “short century” marked by modern ideologies.⁴⁴ The political order created at the Congress of Vienna, that had functioned for a century in complex arrangements, was destroyed. The catalyst effect, comparable in importance to the French Revolution, brought nationalism to extreme positions, thus destabilising the balance within the old monarchies, especially in Central Europe. This situation created space for utopian ideologies of a nationalistic and Marxist type which, in the postwar period, seemed to be the most plausible solutions to the problems of the moment.

The second consequence of the war, which favoured the rise of totalitarian regimes, was the expansion of the power of the state and thus its potential for control and repression. In times of war, with Germany in the lead as a paradigm, the state penetrated strongly into many areas of the economy, controlled banking activities, regulated prices. Furthermore, laws restricting personal liberty came into force. The new postwar nationalist regimes were often convinced that they did not have to be tolerant like the old monarchies. The combination of transcendental utopias and a strong state control apparatus brought the world to the threshold of a new era.

The growing use of political Manichaeism, with its clear marking between good and evil, was the third effect of the socio-cultural situation created after the war. Universal suffrage (especially for men after the war) combined with literacy allowed and made it necessary to pass political ideas to the masses, who could read and write but were far from understanding the complex balances of political life. For this reason, a Manichean political strategy became important. Through leaflets, posters and pamphlets this strategy adopted simplifications of the various social and political theories, indicating who the good and bad guys were. In electoral battles, politicians relied on simple slogans that summarised the discontent and desires of the disillusioned masses. Electoral convergences were generally achieved through a simple (but all-encompassing) political text interpreted by a charismatic personality who mobilised the masses.⁴⁵ The Italian

⁴⁴ Cf. E. J. HOBBSAWM, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*, Michael Joseph, London 1994

⁴⁵ Cf. JOHNSON, *Modern Times. The World from the Twenties to the Nineties*, 21–48; Z. BRZEZINSKI, *Out of Control. Global Turmoil on the Eve of the 21st Century*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1995.

political situation, which is important for its influences on Salesian education, can be located in this context.

Benito Mussolini came to power in 1922 and gradually suggested that the aim in the educational arena was to form *the new fascist man*. Ideals of heroism, derring-do and aestheticism were combined with an anti-bourgeois attitude which in concrete terms became a military type of man. In the early period when the totalitarian regime was being established, the new man identified in ideal terms with *Il Duce*, Italy's spiritual and political guide. Mussolini did everything to create the myth of his personality: he presented himself as the omnipotent guide, capable of moving from "big things", such as international affairs, to "little things" that worried poor people. Images of a tireless worker, an aviator or a racing driver merged into a sort of superman capable of excelling in all human and spiritual activities.⁴⁶

The fascist vision determined some of the choices of Giovanni Gentile's school reform of 1923. Although described by *Il Duce* as the "most fascist of reforms", which managed to strongly influence teaching, the fascists realised they needed a non-scholastic platform in which attitudes and new rules of behaviour could be practically tested. The solution was found in the fascist youth association called the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*, intended as "the most grandiose attempt at state education of youth that history can recall."⁴⁷ The Balilla groups grew rapidly, and after being around for four years, in the last year of Fr Philip Rinaldi's term of office they had more than two million members.

Obviously, very strong and growing tension arose between the Balilla, Catholic Action (AC) and traditional Salesian forms of association like the sodalities. Salesian general government developed a core of reflections addressing the practical problems of associations, implementing measures of non-conflict with other associations. Catholic Action was favoured by the enthusiastic interest of Pius XI, who emphasised the need for greater coordination between it and the youth associations that had flourished over a long period in many religious institutes with similar apostolic aims. The triangulation between the Balilla, Catholic Action and the Salesian sodalities was not easy to balance and took up part of the letters from the Rector Major, Philip Rinaldi. At the level of the congresses it was the topic at the meeting of directors of festive oratories in 1927, during

⁴⁶ Cf. S. ONI, *I salesiani e l'educazione dei giovani, in Piemonte, durante il periodo del fascismo*, in S. ZIMNIAK – G. LOPARCO (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana in Europa negli anni difficili del XX secolo*, Acts of the European Seminar on the History of the Salesian Work Krakow 31 October - 4 November 2007, LAS, Rome 2008, 147–148.

⁴⁷ V. MELETTI, *Civiltà fascista. Per le scuole complementari e di avviamento al lavoro, per i maestri e per il popolo (1929)*, La Nuova Italia, Venice 1941, 42.

the discussion on youth groups, which were meant to somehow implement the Statutes of Catholic Action.⁴⁸

The golden age of colonialism and Salesian missions

The political consciousness of the big countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was characterised by a mentality that might well be called “imperial”.⁴⁹ The phenomenon of colonialism that divided the world between powers and colonies was at its peak. Two great regions of the world were, in practice, totally divided up: Africa and the Pacific. Colonialism, however, was a complex and contradictory phenomenon, the fragility of which would manifest itself in the period around the Second World War. One of its most important effects stemmed from its links with growing nationalism: the whole colonial public imagination followed, with exhibitions, pompous audiences, exotic uniforms, expressions such as Poincaré’s “nation of 100 million”, Kipling’s British “imperial conscience” and, above all, the colourful maps.⁵⁰

The interests of the individual country were always at the heart of it, though it did not see itself as isolated from the rest of the world, but presented itself as the heart of an empire in growing competition with other empires. This created competition, developing economic relationships on an increasingly global scale and accentuating the gap between the empire and the periphery: “In 1880 we are therefore dealing not with a single world, but with two sectors combined together in a global system: developed and those lagging behind, dominant and dependent, rich and poor.”⁵¹

Inequality and interdependence grew especially in the first half of the twentieth century. In 1880 there were already rich and poor regions, but the gap did not seem unbridgeable: the difference, in terms of wealth, between the two worlds was 1 to 1.8, while in the years preceding the First World War it had already increased to a value of 1 to 3 and in the mid-twentieth century there was already a disproportion of 1 to 5. The main cause of the gap was the use of technology which, in addition to economic influences, also had a political impact. Weapons inferiority had tilted the odds in favour of the First

48 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *L'oratorio salesiano in Italia e la catechesi in un contesto socio-politico inedito (1922-1943)*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 48 (2006) 1, 53.

49 M. FLORES, *Il XX secolo*, 104.

50 Cf. JOHNSON, *Modern Times*, 138–175.

51 E.J. HOBBSBAWM, *L'età degli imperi: 1875-1914*, Corriere della Sera, Milan 2004, 23.

World.⁵² Obviously, the dynamics of colonialism and nationalism also influenced the development of the Salesian missions, especially during the pontificate of Pius XI, who cherished the missions entrusted to the promotional work of Cardinal Van Rossum, a capable organiser of *Propaganda Fide*.

Birth of the Salesian approach to the missions in Latin America

The Salesian approach to missions as a planned enterprise came into being at least a decade before missionary expeditions to Latin America. Don Bosco found himself very much in tune with Bishop Daniel Comboni, a missionary in Africa, who visited the Oratory in Valdocco in 1864 and made a deep impression, arousing admiration for his work.⁵³ The Comboni approach consisted in establishing many institutes for boys and girls, rightly located in areas not far from missionary regions yet still on the border of civilisation for security reasons. These institutes had to accept indigenous young people with the aim of educating them in the Catholic religion and in so-called “Christian civilisation”. These pupils were then to be bearers of faith and civilisation in distant mission regions. Don Bosco’s harmony with Daniel Comboni was based on the main role of education and mission to poor young people. It could be said that Don Bosco simply imitated the Comboni approach and made it his own. But in the manuscript *La Patagonia e le Terre Australi del Continente Americano [pel] Sac. Giovanni Bosco*, discovered only in 1983, Don Bosco spoke of a “new approach”, different from those used by other congregations.⁵⁴ In this text he says:

It consists in opening colleges, houses of education, shelters, orphanages on the borders of these countries and thus attracting young people, and through the education of the children opening up a way to talk about religion with their parents. This can happen in two ways: either it is the parents, because of the natural instinct that leads to being benevolent to those who treat their children with kindness, or, moreover, that little by little, growing up as well educated children, it is they themselves who go to bring the good news to those of

⁵² *Ibid.*, 22–23.

⁵³ Cf. G. B. LEMOYNE, *Memorie biografiche di san Giovanni Bosco*, vol. VII, Turin, SEI, 1948, 702–703.

⁵⁴ Cf. J. BORREGO, *La Patagonia e le terre australi del continente americano [pel] sac. Giovanni Bosco. Introducción por Jesús Borrego*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 13 (1988) 7, 255–442.

their own tribe, who willingly accept the word of God proclaimed by such preachers.⁵⁵

The novelty of Don Bosco's missionary approach is the use of education which is both direct ("opening up the way to talk about religion with the parents") and charismatic ("treating with kindness") and not just using education in an indirect way, expecting the fruits in the following decades.⁵⁶ Education in Salesian style, then, was the heart of Don Bosco's missionary approach, and paradoxically it was precisely "kindness" that was challenged in the first ten difficult years of the mission in Argentina. Fr Vespignani described that era thus: "The Salesians were few, new, inexperienced, and knew neither the language nor the customs of the country; unrest among the artisans grew, and in spite of the use of all the means of religion and piety, they drove us to take measures, sometimes separating them from the others, depriving them of food, and sometimes there were blows and slaps, and the pupils were shut up in isolation, etc."⁵⁷ Don Bosco insisted on the central features of the Salesian method, writing to Fr Costamagna:

So, I would like to give a sermon or better a conference on the Salesian spirit that should animate and guide our actions and everything we say. The preventive system is our own. Never harsh punishments; never humiliating words, no severe reprimands in the presence of others. But let the word kindness, charity, patience resound in classes. Never biting words, never hard or even slight blows. Make use of negative punishments, and always in such a way that those who are warned become our friends more than before, and never leave us disheartened [...] Gentleness in speaking, in acting, in warning wins over everything and everyone.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 413–414.

⁵⁶ In Fr Barberis' Chronicles we find several hints about the method of work in the missions. In some of them, Don Bosco expresses his perplexity about the effectiveness of the Comboni method: "Bishop Comboni is now trying to do the same for the centre of Africa, but he is on his own. Many times those who are entrusted with the task of educating young people for this purpose do not have the method, do not have the true spirit; at other times he is incapable, and yet he has to pass on his work to others", in *Cronachette di Barberis*. Quaderno 8, in ASC A0000108, 84.

⁵⁷ J. VESPIGNANI, *Memorandum de formación salesiana para los profesos temporáneos*, in *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 2, 82.

⁵⁸ G. BOSCO, *Tre lettere a salesiani in America*, in P. BRAIDO (ed.), *Don Bosco educatore. Scritti e testimonianze*, LAS, Rome 1992, 448–449.

According to witnesses, when Don Bosco's letter was read out during the retreat it had the desired effect. Some even took a fourth vow of fidelity to the Salesian pedagogical ideal and promised never to use corporal punishment, no matter how serious the fault might be.⁵⁹

Development of the missionary approach after the First World War

The period of the first postwar period can be considered the classic period of Salesian missionary expansion. This is based not only on the number of missionaries sent and the missions they took up, which grew especially between 1923-39, but the approach of evangelisation through education remains classic. Employing Auffray's felicitous expression, the missionaries, faithful to Salesian tradition "aimed straight at the young."⁶⁰ To connect with young people, missionaries strove to create friendly relationships using games, entertainment, and music. This was true of oratories as well as schools, hospices, parishes and mission stations. After a while the Salesian missionaries generally found themselves surrounded by a population that loved them and which gave rise to a nucleus of young Christians.⁶¹

The activities of evangelisation and catechesis in the Salesian missions were accompanied almost everywhere by school activities. Clearly, the contexts, needs and models were different. Summing things up, it could be said that the Salesians adopted three models of missionary approach: the model of the boarding houses, the model of the reductions and the model of missionary work in the villages.

The first model was of Comboni inspiration and reflected the typical Salesian work in the era when boarding schools were developing. In Patagonia, a typical region for this approach, the Salesians from the 1880s onwards created a network of schools in which indigenous youth were formed and who, upon returning to their villages, would go on to live their culture in a Christian sense.⁶² The choice was also motivated by the initial hostility of the indigenous people towards the settlers, as reported by Fr Giovanni Cagliari, who prevented another type of approach. The boarding schools in Patagonia aimed their educational attention at areas neglected by the state schools: students of the working class, *cilenos* and *indios*. The thirty or so Salesian schools (SDB and FMA) in Patagonia by 1917 had more enrolments than the state schools. This fact strengthened

⁵⁹ Cf. C. BRUNO, *Los Salesianos y las Hijas de María Auxiliadora en la Argentina*, vol. 1, Instituto Salesiano de Artes Gráficas, Buenos Aires 1981, 154–155.

⁶⁰ A. AUFRAY, *Les missions salésiennes, Oeuvres et Missions Don Bosco*, Lyon – Fontanières, 1936, 14.

⁶¹ Cf. WIRTH, *Da Don Bosco ai nostri giorni*, 378–379.

⁶² Cf. BORREGO, *La Patagonia e le terre australi del continente americano [pel] sac. Giovanni Bosco*, 413–414.

competitive tension with the Argentine state, which saw the work of the Salesians as a serious danger to the formation of a national consciousness in the territory annexed only in 1879.⁶³ A similar boarding school model was adopted in the Belgian Congo, and the Amazon, under the leadership of Pietro Massa, chose this model to approach the indigenous people.⁶⁴

The choice of mission education in the *reducciones*⁶⁵ was made for the first time by Salesian Giuseppe Fagnano in Tierra del Fuego, in the Candelaria mission and on Dawson Island, and was also adopted in the Mato Grosso in the missions among the Bororo which began in 1896. Education took place in two stages: first the indigenous people were drawn to civil and Christian life by means of their children, who were more easily educated, and then they were introduced to civilised life by means of productive work: arts, crafts, among which sheep-herding and other agricultural activities emerged. Later the missionaries thought about setting up Western-style villages and in each village they tried to establish an elementary school whose teachers were chosen from among the indigenous people themselves.⁶⁶

The third model for organising missionary activities was itinerant work in the villages. Typical regions for this missionary approach were North-east India and Thailand. Almost always the Salesians began their work by founding or restructuring village schools – these were elementary schools for day students and vocational/technical or agricultural centres with both boarders and day students. The motivation was clear: give adequate education to the Catholic youth of the mission. They did not have sufficient means to attend schools in the city because either they were too far away or the parents preferred their children to attend a Catholic school. From the very beginning it was common for non-Christian students to be admitted to Salesian schools.

63 Cf. M.A. NICOLETTI, *La polémica en torno a la educación salesiana y la educación estatal en la Patagonia (1880-1920)*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 2, 51–65.

64 Cf. A. FERREIRA DA SILVA, *La missione salesiana tra gli indigeni del Mato Grosso nelle lettere di don Michele Rua (1892-1909)*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 12 (1993) 22, 47–48.

65 The reductions, following the Jesuit model of the 17th century, were small nuclei of citizens created to induce the natives to abandon nomadic life and settle down in a stable way in a place. The small communities organised by missionaries and aimed at the material, social and spiritual promotion of indigenous peoples.

66 Cf. A. FERREIRA DA SILVA, *La missione salesiana tra gli indigeni del Mato Grosso*, 48.

Efforts at inculturation

An important element of the Salesian missionary approach developed in this period was the greater sensitivity to inculturation. This fact could be connected with the development of ethnological studies and with the growing intercultural experience at the level of the Congregation, which by now was operating in very diverse contexts: tribes in the Amazon, the Arab world, the Congo, India, China, Japan or Thailand.

A first step in the direction of inculturation was to learn the language, as speaking the local language was necessary for catechesis. In the early period, however, language was seen more as merely a tool, almost never accompanied by the effort to penetrate deeply into the local culture. A rare exception was Miguel Allioni's ethnographic work on the culture of the Shuar, which, however, soon ended due to his untimely death at only thirty years of age. The Shuar culture, based on freedom, independence, polygamy and revenge, was too different from the expectations of the missionaries, who until now had only encountered tribes in existential difficulties under the pressure of the migratory flows of settlers. The diversity and initial failures of the mission necessitated the study of such a diverse and resilient culture.⁶⁷

Ethnographic studies dating back to the first postwar period were carried out by Fr Antonio Colbacchini and Fr Cesare Albisetti on the Bororo and by Fr Luigi Cocco on the Yanomani.⁶⁸ The *Enciclopédia Bororo* by Fr Albisetti involves four volumes with an etymological dictionary, grammar, legends, proper names, songs and traditions. Thus also the tribes of the Rio Negro, especially the Tucano, were the subject of numerous Salesian publications.⁶⁹ Fr Giaccaria prepared the grammar of the Awen dialect of the Xavantes. Many efforts to understand the culture of the indigenous peoples arose precisely in this period, but the numerous publications were often printed in later periods.⁷⁰ Cultural effort by Salesians also took place in the field of natural sciences and technology: the construction of meteorological observatories, irrigation channels,

⁶⁷ Cf. J. BOTASSO, *Los salesianos y la educación de los Shuar 1893-1920. Mirando más allá de los fracasos y los éxitos*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 2, 237–249.

⁶⁸ Cf. C. ALBISETTI – O. M. RAVAGNAN, *Tradução/Translation a Aldeia Bororo*, in “Perspectivas” (1992), 145–157. The studies were also recognised and respected by Claude Lévi Strauss and Jacques Lizot, Cf. M. BONGIANNI, *Don Bosco nel mondo*, Direzione generale Opere Don Bosco, Rome 1988, vol. 2, 338–339.

⁶⁹ Cf. A. GIACONE, *Trentacinque anni fra le tribù del Rio Uapés. Diari e Memorie 1*, LAS, Rome 1976, 225–229.

⁷⁰ Cf. R. FARINA, *Contributi scientifici delle missioni salesiane del Brasile*, in C. SEMERARO (ed.), *Don Bosco e Brasilia. Profezia, realtà sociale e diritto*, Cedam, Padua 1990, 154–160.

agricultural machinery was accompanied by the production of geographical maps and numerous photographs of the mission territories.

The cultural sensitivity of the missionaries in the colonies (e.g. Congo and India) was directed more to improving their education than to studying local culture and consequent ethnographic and linguistic production. For example, Belgian missionaries in the Congo were trying to get into the mindset of Congolese children so they could educate them in the way that was most natural to them. Thus, education was characterised by the greater value placed on practical intelligence and trying instead to be more patient and understanding during theoretical exercises. The students had an innate tendency to freedom and family spirit, in contrast to a disciplinary system of distance between superiors and students that was typical of the boarding school. The missionaries sought to appreciate the values and sensibilities of the Congolese in education, such as the sense of the sacred and piety, the value of rituals, imagination, interest in stories, the profound wisdom of local proverbs and, last but not least, a very strong sense of solidarity and fellowship.⁷¹ In India it was precisely education that allowed the Salesians to overcome the divisions that existed in religion and in the caste system.

These years of Salesian presence have left an indelible imprint on the educational field. It is rather through the service of education than through direct evangelisation, that it has been possible to penetrate the barriers of caste and creed and implant Christian values. Through an effective application of Don Bosco's educational system, the Salesians were able to carry out the "conversion of hearts" rather than the "conversion of water".⁷²

In missionary work in north-east India the missionaries, under the guidance of Archbishop Mathias, managed to penetrate more into local culture. Speaking the local language, Fr Vendrame, whom Mathias called "our Francis Xavier", tried to be close to the people with house-to-house visits, founded women's apostolic groups (important in the matrilineal society of the Khasi), used the means of social communication – he brought a projector with him to show catechetical films – founded groups of catechists

⁷¹ Cf. M. VERHULST, *L'éducation des Salésiens au Congo Belge de 1912 à 1925. 13 ans de recherche et d'expérimentation*, in J. G. GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 1, LAS, Rome 2007, 447–466.

⁷² M. KAPPLIKUNNEL, *Their life for youth. History and Relevance of the Early Salesian Presence in India (Tanjore and Mylapore, 1906-1928)*, Kristu Jyoti Publications, Bangalore 1989, 99.

in the festive oratories of the villages, etc.⁷³ In East Asia, an exemplary commitment to inculturation was embodied in Fr Vincenzo Cimatti's efforts to approach the Japanese mentality. In a letter in 1931 he wrote:

the more we love them, the more we will make ourselves similar to them in every way, which in my opinion has not yet been achieved by past and present missionaries, nor by any of the foreign congregations, and if this is not done, I am certain that the conversion of Japan will be many centuries away [...] But it is certain that as long as our spirit is not Japanese, we will not succeed in converting Japan.⁷⁴

In concrete terms, living the Salesian method of education in Japan meant for him a personal and loving witness to the values proposed. This demonstrated an active attention to the poor made concrete through founding Salesian Conferences of St Vincent de Paul and later, the mission of the Sisters of Miyazaki, preferring one-on-one relationships when working with large numbers, and setting up flexible educational structures. The particular educational style was accompanied by real examples of insertion into popular culture through a translation of the Gospel into current language, something Fr Margiaria did as early as 1930, by a collection of six volumes of Catholic dramas in Japanese, and above all through music. More than a thousand concerts made Salesian work known, and music was the platform of inculturation typical of Fr Cimatti, who produced about four hundred musical compositions in Japanese.⁷⁵

New kinds of Salesian presence

During Don Bosco's lifetime, not a single *correctional* work was opened, but it is interesting to follow discussions on this topic. In 1885, the people in charge of a "house of correction" in Madrid offered the Salesians the opportunity to run the house. The proposal was discussed several times in the General Council and in the end the proposal to change the "correctional" identity, building a healthy environment and only then

⁷³ Cf. *A Journey with the young. A saga of Education, Evangelization and Empowerment. Don Bosco India Centenary 1906 – 2006*, Salesian Provincial Conference of South Asia, New Delhi 2006, 245.

⁷⁴ V. CIMATTI, *Lettere di un missionario*, ed. A. Crevacore, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1976, 84.

⁷⁵ Cf. G. FEDRIGOTTI, *Il Sistema preventivo di Don Bosco nell'interpretazione di Vincenzo Cimatti (1879-1965)*, LAS, Rome 2003, 135–152.

integrating boys who had already been sentenced, had no response from the Madrid side and the issue was closed.⁷⁶

Another step in the direction of “correctional” works was taken later in Patagonia. The President of Argentina, in agreement with Bishop Cagliero, issued a decree in 1894 in which he decided to entrust juvenile delinquents in southern Patagonia to the custody of the Salesians and the FMA in the absence of prisons or other suitable facilities in the territory. The FMA concluded this experience after a decade of work, for disciplinary reasons, rebellion and other setbacks.⁷⁷

Instead in Europe, in 1901 a correctional-style house was opened in Ljubljana. This first Salesian house in Slovenia was called the “Institute of St Francis de Sales” and offered a place to youngsters expelled from public schools due to their undisciplined behaviour or learning disadvantages.⁷⁸ In general, the acceptance of correctional institutions by the Salesians was the exception more than the rule, and for broader developments and adaptations of the preventive system in this direction it would be necessary to wait until 1955, when the Salesians accepted the management of the Arese work, which became a new paradigm.

Discussions on education of the sick and disabled, too, began in the final years of Don Bosco’s life.⁷⁹ In 1909 Fr Rua decided that the Salesians would accept the running of a house for deaf mutes in Tarsia, Naples.⁸⁰ The first transformation decided by Fr Crippa was the abolition of begging, which had two aims: training the deaf mutes not to beg and not to deceive the pity people showed them. This gesture led to the dismissal of begging friars, and a range of communications addressed to benefactors pointing out the change of management, modifications to activities and the possibility of contributing directly to the running of the institute.⁸¹ Once begging had been removed, the deaf mutes were able to give more time to school and workshop activities. Sign language was abolished and Abbot Giulio Tarra and Professor Antonio Hecker’s oral method

⁷⁶ Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere. Il sistema educativo di don Bosco*, LAS, Rome 1999, 221–226.

⁷⁷ Cf. E. GINOBILI – L. CARLONE, *La construcción de la educación integral de la mujer en la Patagonia por las FMA (1880-1922): núcleo multiplicador del evangelio*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L’educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 2, 24.

⁷⁸ Cf. S. ZIMNIAK, *Salesiani nella Mitteleuropa. Preistoria e storia della provincia Austro-Ungarica della Società di S. Francesco di Sales (1868 ca.-1919)*, LAS, Rome 1997, 119–120.

⁷⁹ *Verbali Capitolo Superiore* (27 December 1884), in ASC D869.

⁸⁰ Cf. *Verbali Capitolo Superiore* (17 September 1910), in ASC D870.

⁸¹ Cf. F. CASELLA, *I salesiani e la “Pia Casa Arcivescovile” per i sordomuti di Napoli (1909-1975)*, LAS, Rome 2002, 40–43.

adopted both in school and for catechesis. After the elementary school courses came five years of courses in painting and decoration, plastic art and sculpture, carving, tailoring, shoe-making and typography. Already at the canonical visitation in 1914 it was written that: “the deaf mutes institute has taken on the nature of a well-kept boarding school, unlike what it was before, that is, an ugly shelter for beggars.”⁸²

In another part of the world the Salesians were working successfully with lepers, after Fr Michael Unia founded a work on their behalf in 1891 at Agua de Dios in Colombia.⁸³ He was supported by Fr Rua in this difficult undertaking, who later wrote to “the dear lepers” in his own hand. The work included a kindergarten, large hospital and a restored church. In addition to the educational work of the kindergarten and ordinary catechesis, it meant considerable effort in organising feast days and music to alleviate the difficult situation of the leper colony. Fr Unia was exhausted by his feverish activity and died in 1895. His successors were Fr Crippa and Fr Variara, this latter founding a congregation of women among the lepers whose mission was to look after the sick. Another Salesian, Fr Rabagliati, began an impressive activity on behalf of lepers with the support of local authorities and was elected president of the government commission for building leprosariums.⁸⁴

The educational work of the Salesians and the FMA also expanded with the activities of some *new institutes and associations belonging to the Salesian Family*. The education of young adults, a typical expansion of this era, took shape in the associations of the Past Pupils of Don Bosco and the FMA Past Pupils, promoted by Fr Philip Rinaldi and formally established in 1908. Other institutes or congregations were created later, again with the aim of broadening the range of Salesian educational activity in local areas. With the exception of the Salesian Oblates of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who came into existence in Sicily in 1933, the other new female congregations were the result of the missionary work of the Salesians in accordance with the directives of Pius XI’s Encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* in 1928, addressed to the Apostolic Prefects of mission areas, which encouraged the founding of new religious congregations for native sisters.⁸⁵ It should also be noted that the establishment of some new religious communities was also seen as

⁸² Napoli – Tarsia, *Rendiconto di don Francesco Tomasetti al Rettor Maggiore (1 luglio 1914)*, in ASC F657.

⁸³ Cf. J.J. ORTEGA TORRES, *La Obra salesiana en los lazaretos*, Escuelas Gráficas Salesianas, Bogotá 1938.

⁸⁴ Cf. WIRTH, *Da Don Bosco ai nostri giorni*, 298.

⁸⁵ These are: The Sisters of Charity of Miyazaki (Japan 1937) now called the Caritas Sisters of Jesus; Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Thailand 1937); Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (India 1942); and the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate Help of Christians (India 1948).

a solution for overcoming the difficulties in collaboration between the Salesians and the FMA.⁸⁶

The Rectors Major on adapting to conditions

The development of the Salesian charism in the oratories is a very good illustration of two trends that were crystallising over time: practical adaptation to the social and youth situation on the one hand and conservative rigidity when it came to reformulating regulations and the preventive system on the other. In addition to Don Bosco's typical approach, oscillating between traditional doctrine and innovative practice, various contextual and ecclesial variables had a role in the development of trends, such as the anti-modernist struggle *ad intra* and the need for defence against anti-clerical policies in various countries *ad extra*. From an operational perspective, too, it is understandable how fidelity and stability were preferred in the boarding school, and why they then struggled to update roles, processes and regulations. In the oratory the situation was different: being an open system, with greater and faster fluctuations of young attendees, flexible adaptation to the immediate needs of the context was a necessity.

The typical way of educating was linked to the concept of “Salesian spirit”, interpreted as a lifestyle in which aspects of spirituality, pastoral care and education merged integrally. Thanks to the memories of a generation that had lived with Don Bosco, the Salesian spirit was seen as a concrete reality and was described in enthusiastic tones, linked to the confirmations of the beatification process which ended in 1929. Between the two Rectors Major we consider in this chapter, Fr Paul Albera gave greater emphasis to the aspect of Salesian spirituality, while Fr Philip Rinaldi embodied the ideal fatherliness in the youth apostolate and shared within the Salesian Family.

Paul Albera's balances around fidelity and piety in education

Don Bosco's second successor did not deviate from the fundamental line of fidelity to Don Bosco and Fr Rua, locating his interventions around the characteristics of his own

⁸⁶ Cf. e.g. M. KAPPLIKUNNEL, *The implantation of the salesian charism in the Region: ideals, challenges, answers and results*. Seminario ACSSA, Batulao (Manila, Philippines) 24-28 November 2008, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 52 (2008) 2, 421.

sensitivity and previous experience as Catechist General. In his first circular letter to the confreres, he quotes the words spoken to him by Pius X in the audience that followed the election: “All you have to do is follow in the footsteps of Fr Rua. He was a saint. In everything, do as he himself would have done. Do not depart from the customs and traditions introduced by Don Bosco and Fr Rua.”⁸⁷ One of Fr Albera’s deepest convictions was that Don Bosco was a saint, “truly a man of God, *homo Dei*, in the most expressive and comprehensive sense of the word.”⁸⁸ The argument that sees Don Bosco’s holiness as a motivation for faithfully living his educational and spiritual traditions is found in his circulars, together with the topic of exemplariness. This understanding would reach its peak as an argument in publications by Fr Peter Ricaldone, who would bring together the consensus and enthusiasm of the canonisation to propose detailed and concrete indications for action.⁸⁹

Being faithful in this setting practically meant living according to the preventive system and avoiding “every novelty in our religious practices, every change in the schedule of the day, every maxim, every saying, every way of doing things that Don Bosco and Fr Rua would not have approved of.”⁹⁰ Fr Albera often repeated the leitmotiv, *tene quod habes*, which refers to the immense and fruitful inheritance left by Fr Rua and Don Bosco. The adjective “our” with its variants recurs very often in Albera’s vocabulary: the preventive system is “our thing”, that is, “our way of educating and instructing young people”;⁹¹ expressions such as “our Congregation”; “our Constitutions”, “our spirit”, etc., characterise the precious legacy left by “our” Don Bosco.

In the context of fidelity, it is interesting how Albera does not reduce the work and exemplariness of the founder and his predecessor to the simple repetition of regulated traditions. In fact, he dedicates a whole circular to the subject of legalistic formalism, arguing that it is not enough to fulfil the strict duty of prescriptions, as this forms a

87 P. ALBERA, *L’XI Capitolo Generale - Elezione del nuovo Rettor Maggiore - In udienza dal Papa Pio X - Programma da lui tracciato - Notizie varie*, in *Lettere circolari di D. Paolo Albera ai Salesiani*, SEI, Turin 1922, 15.

88 P. ALBERA, *Don Bosco nostro modello nell’acquisto della perfezione religiosa, nell’educare e santificare la gioventù, nel trattare col prossimo e nel far del bene a tutti*. Circular of 18 October 1920, in *Lettere circolari di D. Paolo Albera*, 342. For the importance of Don Bosco’s holiness cf. J. BOENZI, *Paolo Albera’s Instructions. Early Efforts to Inculcate the Spirit of Don Bosco*, in “Journal of Salesian Studies” 13 (2005) 2, 106–111.

89 Cf. P. RICARDONE, *Strenna del Rettor Maggiore per il 1935. Fedeltà a Don Bosco Santo*, SEI, Turin 1936.

90 P. ALBERA, *L’XI Capitolo Generale*, 20–21.

91 *Ibid.*, 20.

mentality of “systematic mediocrity of conduct that some like to call legality.”⁹² Pointing to a logic of excellence, he proposes the principle of *duc in altum* for the Salesian, who

realises that he has laboured in vain in his mediocrity, Our Lord repeats: Push the boat out to sea, that is, hurl yourself with ardour into the vast field of perfection, do not limit your efforts to what is strictly necessary, be grandiose in your aspirations when it comes to the glory of God and the salvation of souls, move away from the beach that so narrows your horizons, and you will see how abundant the fishing of souls will be, and how much consolation your heart will end up experiencing.⁹³

The guiding principles for creative fidelity, according to Don Bosco’s example, are relationships and piety. Confirmation of these is found both in the circular letters and in the instructions at the retreats he preached during his tenure as Catechist General.⁹⁴ Relationships are mentioned by Albera as Don Bosco’s first typical trait, in his summary letter entitled *Don Bosco our model in acquiring religious perfection, in educating and sanctifying youth, in dealing with our neighbour and in doing good to all*. The Rector Major suggests reviving Don Bosco by evoking his kindly fatherly image, his tenderness, his charming and unforgettable smile. Using the anthropology of love, with frequent references to St Francis de Sales, he appreciates the nature of relationships bound up with the concept of the heart, stating that “one is formed, above all in the heart and through love.”⁹⁵ Although Albera moves easily within the panorama of the principles of spiritual theology,⁹⁶ his considerations on love and charity are not expounded through theological concepts, which would then have implications for formation, but are concepts drawn primarily from experience. The Rector Major starts his argument from the vivid memory of being loved in a way he had never experienced before,

singularly superior to any other affection: it enveloped us all and entirely almost in an atmosphere of contentment and happiness, from which pain, sadness, melancholy were banished. [...] Therefore, as soon as he had captured our hearts, he moulded them as he wished through his system (entirely his own in the way he practised it), that he wanted to call *preventive* as opposed to *repressive*. However, this system – as he himself declared in the last years of his mortal life – was none

⁹² P. ALBERA, *Contro una riprovevole “legalità”*. Circular of 25 June 1917, in *Lettere circolari di D. Paolo Albera*, 231.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁹⁴ Cf. BOENZI, *Paolo Albera’s Instructions*, 127–131.

⁹⁵ ALBERA, *Don Bosco nostro modello nell’acquisto della perfezione religiosa*, 340.

⁹⁶ Cf. J. BOENZI, *Reconstructing don Albera’s reading list*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 33 (2014) 63, 203–272.

other than the spirit of charity, that is, the love of God that expands to embrace all human creatures, especially the youngest and most inexperienced, to infuse in them the *holy fear of God*.⁹⁷

The Salesian style of relationship can be very strong, as it is aimed at eminently supernatural education which transforms the hearts of young people by instilling a “very strong desire to save one’s soul.”⁹⁸ Around these concepts of charity and piety, Albera then develops reasoning not too far from the notion of zeal so dear to his predecessor. In the letter that accompanied the publication of Fr Rua’s letters, zeal is highlighted as the first characteristic of educational work: “Among the virtues that shone very brightly in the life of our venerable father and teacher, the late Fr Rua said that none had struck him as much as the tireless zeal with which his heart seemed to be inflamed each time, and he seemed to suggest copying this zeal in himself in a special way.”⁹⁹ Zeal made concrete in the manifold activities of the Salesians is the starting point of his argument in his second agenda-setting letter on the spirit of piety, which goes beyond Fr Rua’s concept of it:

Which of us hasn’t heard a thousand times about the spirit of initiative and activity of the Salesians? [...] However, speaking to you with my heart in my hand, I confess that I cannot defend myself from the painful thought and fear that this vaunted activity of the Salesians, this zeal which hitherto has seemed inaccessible to any discouragement, this warm enthusiasm which was hitherto sustained by continuous happy successes, has to falter one day when not fertilised, purified and sanctified by true and solid piety.¹⁰⁰

Piety, however, is distinguished from mere religious duties: “It is by virtue of piety that we no longer feel indebted to that kind of worship, almost an official kind I would say, that religion imposes on us, but we feel the duty to serve God with that tender affection, that thoughtful delicacy, that deep devotion which is the essence of religion.”¹⁰¹ Piety, as the soul of true zeal, also has implications in the educational area.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 341–342.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 345.

⁹⁹ P. ALBERA, *Sullo spirito di pietà*. Letter of 15 May 1911, in *Lettere circolari di D. Paolo Albera*, 22.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 22–26. From the point of view of piety, and always in the circumstances of the Congregation’s expansion, Fr Albera also warns of an idea of “wrong zeal” that does not respect tradition, is not according to the vow of obedience or causes the formation of Salesian educators to be neglected. Cf. P. ALBERA, *Sulla disciplina religiosa*. Letter of 25 December 1911, in *Lettere circolari di D. Paolo Albera*, 69–74.

¹⁰¹ P. ALBERA, *Sullo spirito di pietà*, 27.

Not only the necessary care shown to practices of piety, which in any case must be those prescribed and not added to, but educators are also required to be deeply rooted in piety. Hence exemplariness as Albera's bottom line for a typically Salesian pedagogical methodology:

The whole system of education taught by Don Bosco is based on piety. If this were not duly practised, every ornament, every prestige of our institutes would be lacking, which would become much inferior to the lay institutes themselves. So then, we cannot instil piety in our pupils if we ourselves are not abundantly provided with it. The education that we would give to our students would be incomplete, since the slightest breath of impiety and immorality would erase in them those principles which we have tried to imprint on their hearts with so much sweat and long years of work. If the Salesian is not firmly pious, he will never be suitable for the role of educator. But the best method to teach piety is to give an example.¹⁰²

This perspective on piety would guide the Rector Major, towards the end of his term of office, to state that “Don Bosco’s educational system, for us who are convinced of divine intervention in the creation and development of his work, is a heavenly pedagogy.”¹⁰³ Although there is a shift in terminology, the basic approach outlined by Fr Rua had not changed significantly. The contents of the circular letters on education revolve around the main lines of fidelity to the preventive system: gentleness but also discipline, respect for educational roles in the Salesian house, the purposes expressed in the pair good Christians – upright (also integral) citizens, the promotion of classical studies but also of oratories and past pupils (called prodigies of modern pedagogy).

Philip Rinaldi and the practice of “healthy modernity”

Philip Rinaldi, third successor of Don Bosco, lived and taught the art of fatherliness as the essence of the preventive system. His perspective of fidelity to the origins shifts slightly from the previous one of *tene quod habes* to something which stressed what we should do now: “We should not so much ask ourselves what Don Bosco did, but

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰³ P. ALBERA, *Per l'inaugurazione del Monumento al Venerabile D. Bosco*. Letter of 6 April 1920, in *Lettere circolari di D. Paolo Albera*, 312.

rather what Don Bosco would do today.”¹⁰⁴ Referring to Don Bosco, Fr Rinaldi called for a balance between the decisive preservation of the spirit, and flexibility in secondary aspects: “He [Don Bosco] introduced a clever modernity that, while rigidly preserving the substantial spirit in his educational method, at the same time prevented it from becoming fossilised in secondary things that were subject to change over time.”¹⁰⁵ Applications of this equilibrium concerned not only religious discipline but also Salesian education. In fact, Fr Rinaldi distinguished the repressive system from the preventive system as applied also to relationships, with regulations that partly reflect Don Bosco’s experience. The former (repressive) prefers detailed and unyielding law while the other (preventive) speaks of the “vital content”, “intimate understanding, “true spirit” and “generous practice” of the rules.¹⁰⁶ It is in this sense that we can affirm the principle of healthy modernity:

Our Society had to know how to adapt, in carrying out its beneficial action, to the needs of the times, to the customs of places: it had to be progressively always new and modern, while retaining its particular character as educating youth through the preventive system based on gentleness and fatherly kindness.¹⁰⁷

Healthy modernity does not exclude caring about traditions, which in fact is a substantial part of Fr Rinaldi’s magisterium. Distinguishing different kinds of innovation, he specifies that “the natural attraction to everything that smacks of novelty can lead to the neglect of traditions, because one does not reflect that it is one thing to run after novelties and quite another to be always in the vanguard of progress, as Don Bosco did and wanted.”¹⁰⁸ Traditions here are not understood just as principles but also as small customs, schedules and practices. Just as the 1927 conference of festive oratory directors spoke of the wise use of football groups, scouts, games as an educational means,

¹⁰⁴ E. VALENTINI, *Don Rinaldi. Maestro di pedagogia e di spiritualità salesiana*, Crocetta – Istituto Internazionale D. Bosco, Turin 1959, 6. NB: Valentini’s work reproduces Philip Rinaldi’s lessons to the clerics, theology students at the international studentate of theology at Foglizzo from 1906 to 1914. Cf. also similar expressions applied to the missions: F. RINALDI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 3 (1923) 20, 105.

¹⁰⁵ F. RINALDI, *Giubilei d’oro della Pia Unione dei Cooperatori Salesiani e della Pia Opera di Maria Ausiliatrice*, in ACS 7 (1927) 33, 573. Cf. Similar expressions of Paul Albera: “to preserve for the Congregation that primacy of healthy modernity which is proper to it”, in ALBERA, *Don Bosco nostro modello nell’acquisto della perfezione religiosa*, 334.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. the letter written on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the constitutions in F. RINALDI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 5 (1924) 24, 254–255. and VALENTINI, *Don Rinaldi. Maestro di pedagogia*, 11–13.

¹⁰⁷ F. RINALDI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 5 (1924) 23, 187.

¹⁰⁸ F. RINALDI, *Conserviamo e pratichiamo le nostre tradizioni*, in ACS 12 (1931) 56, 937.

drama, cinema and other social-type activities,¹⁰⁹ there was also no lack of exhortation to caution, adopting a pedagogical view of dialogue with culture:

Our system of education, which bears the secret of modernity, accepts everything that is truly Christian, but vigorously excludes what deviates from it and corrupts it. We baptise the rest, or in other words make it our own, or we leave it to others: *caetera tolle!* Thus football, radio, cinema and similar other recreational and sports novelties, wherever they are harmful to the souls of young people, we must treat them in the same way with which our Lord commands us to treat the eye that is a scandal to us: *projice abs te.*¹¹⁰

A very interesting reflection by Philip Rinaldi concerns the relationship between modernity and Don Bosco's preventive system. In his lessons on pedagogy at Foglizzo he briefly explained that the "repressive system is based on liberalism! There is the law: whoever wants to practise it must do so freely; but he will be punished every time he fails."¹¹¹ The argument goes on to indicate how liberal-democratic modernity is linked to a concept of naive freedom that panders to passions and therefore ends up either in chaos or repression.

A concrete example of the link between modern anthropology and repression was to be found during this period in Salesian schools in England. In the British context, the boarding school tradition had not been influenced by Rousseau's "continental" pedagogy and English boarding schools were notorious for bullying and corporal punishment.¹¹² In the English pedagogical tradition it was preferred that the young person be left to his own initiative and conscience, so with great probability Salesian assistance was perceived as a limiting control that did not increase personal responsibility. The Salesians in England found it hard to overcome these initial difficulties, which arose from the liberal mentality and were further increased by linguistic ambiguities. In fact, the expression *preventive system* failed to convey the meaning of the Italian concept, since, referring to a semantic context of different kinds of repression and control, it referred to something negative that had to be prevented.¹¹³

109 Cf. F. RINALDI, *Resoconto del convegno tenutosi dai Direttori degli Oratori festivi d'Europa a Valsalice dal 27 al 30 Agosto 1927*, in ACS 8 (1927) 41, 609–611. Cf. also VALENTINI, *Don Rinaldi. Maestro di pedagogia*, 53–58.

110 F. RINALDI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 10 (1929) 50, 800.

111 VALENTINI, *Don Rinaldi. Maestro di pedagogia*, 20.

112 Cf. W.J. DICKSON, *Prevention or repression. The reception of don Bosco's educational approach in English Salesian Schools*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 1, 216.

113 Cf. *Ibid.*, 231–233.

In this context, we can understand Fr Rinaldi's emphasis on the "healthy" modernity that is rooted in the foundations of the Salesian spirit corroborated by the passage of time. Thanks to the security and consistency of its roots, Salesian education succeeds in adapting itself with "genius" in its forms, expressions, applications and organisation to the context and the young people of the present time. Rinaldi's attitude can therefore be summarised as being informed by a modernity of practical innovations that is independent of modern anthropology.

Pedagogical approach of the novelty of the preventive system

The preventive system for Rinaldi, in continuity with what we have seen previously, is not new in terms of ideas, but rather the novelty "is in the means and in the practical application that Don Bosco made of it."¹¹⁴ In his classes at Foglizzo, Rinaldi offered the basic preventive principle: putting the pupils into the situation of impossibility of doing wrong. To follow the principle, which is not new in itself, in order not to smother the boy, not to take away his freedom but to educate him, Don Bosco proposed a new hierarchy, a new environment, new premises and a series of new means (cf. Figure B).

The concept of the *new hierarchy* comes from the balance between the main roles of rector, prefect and catechist and from the new style of exercising authority by constantly being among the youngsters and sharing time and place of work, study and recreation with them. The *new environment* is created by the family spirit that sees the youngsters as cooperating in their education. This is not self-education, but rather making them responsible by "forming them through sharing in authority."¹¹⁵ A concrete example of this principle are the sodalities, a topic under discussion in the 1920s and also one dear to Rinaldi. The *new premises* are designed for Salesian education. They need to have plenty of room for both ease of care and the ability to be all together as a family. Rinaldi also proposed a "grandiose approach" to houses, feast days, and choreography that intentionally fosters "enthusiasm for great ideas, great ideals, great men, for things that are done in the house that appear extraordinary to their eyes."¹¹⁶ Then, in his lessons and in subsequent interventions, he delves into the educational and Salesian use of so many different mediations grouped together under the title of *new means*: gymnastics, music, recital, theatre, the goodnight, correction done charitably and finally, new approach to punishments.

¹¹⁴ VALENTINI, *Don Rinaldi. Maestro di pedagogia*, 21.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

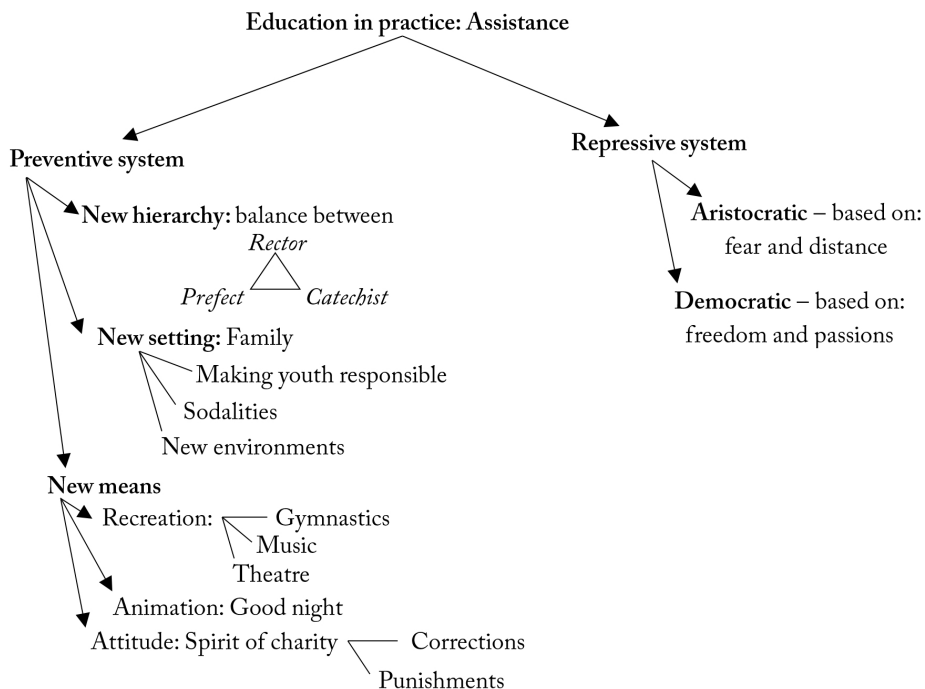


Figure B: The preventive system in Fr Rinaldi's lessons at Foglizzo

Fatherliness and union with God as the basis of Salesian education

Even though Rinaldi proposed his synthesis of the preventive system in the Foglizzo lectures, the basic keys for interpreting his pedagogical guidelines are to be found elsewhere, not in a theoretical approach. In his first circular letter as Rector Major he set out the characteristics of the spirit that Don Bosco instilled in the Congregation, summarising them in the statement: “In a word, everyone wanted to relive his attractive fatherliness, which never treated anyone brusquely, but knew how, gently, to help each one to make himself better and to set himself on the road to perfection.”¹¹⁷ For the Rector Major, fatherliness was a word that summed up all of Don Bosco’s

¹¹⁷ F. RINALDI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 3 (1922) 14, 6.

activity, connected with what we called “paternal” traditions lived and handed down to future generations through formation that was more practical and osmotic than it was intellectual.¹¹⁸ In this sense the first letter goes on to seek confirmation of “whether in the Houses all the paternal traditions are practised exactly with regard to study, the church, the refectory, the courtyard, walks, etc.; and whether above all we always live familiarly among the young, because in this way defects are corrected, disorders are remedied, and Christian characters are formed.”¹¹⁹

Consistent with his conviction of the importance of praxis, Fr Rinaldi does not outline a theory of fatherliness, but recommends the imitation of Don Bosco’s fatherliness, himself becoming an authentic and vivid image of him. Towards the end of his term of office, in his letter on Salesian traditions, he summarised the patrimony of the by then Blessed Don Bosco in the same category: “Another tradition, indeed the most important and vital for us, is fatherliness. Our founder was never other than a father in the noblest sense of that word.”¹²⁰ The content of applications that follow on from the Fr Rinaldi’s practical *forma mentis*, is not far removed from the implementations proposed around the concept of zeal typical of Fr Rua. Fatherliness that gives itself totally, and apostolic zeal refer above all to the figure of the Salesian rector:

The external exercise of this fatherliness is handed on by name to the rector of the House, not only to keep it, but to exercise it according to the teachings and examples of the Blessed [John Bosco]. Now Blessed John Bosco has passed on this tradition of the fatherliness of the rector to his rectors, which is almost united to the most sublime act and reality of spiritual regeneration in the exercise of the divine power to forgive sins.¹²¹

The almost direct link between the Salesian fatherliness of the rector and his service as a confessor finds an obstacle in the context of the prohibition to “hear the confessions of one’s subjects.” Fr Rinaldi says that “under the pretext of avoiding any problems, at first they went beyond the provisions of the decree: the rectors even withdrew from hearing the confessions of young people, something that is not at all forbidden to any

118 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, vol. 2, LAS, Rome 2003, 233–271. and P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 2: *Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità*, LAS, Rome 1981, 470–474.

119 F. RINALDI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 3 (1922) 14, 6.

120 F. RINALDI, *Conserviamo e pratichiamo le nostre tradizioni*, in ACS 12 (1931) 56, 939–940.

121 *Ibid.*, 940.

approved priest, whatever position he occupies in the institute.”¹²² He also points out, and wants changed, another misapplication of the rules on confession in oratories, namely oratory directors who do not hear the confessions of their young people.¹²³ Seeing a weakening of the tradition of fatherliness, the Rector Major asks:

Return again to the work which, according to the mind and heart of our blessed Father, must be the first and most important for the Father director. Be truly fathers of the souls of your young people. Do not abdicate your spiritual fatherliness, but exercise it, both by caring for your subjects with regular conferences to everyone, and in particular to the various religious sodalities; then finding a way to deal privately with each one, so that you can say that you possess their hearts: and by reserving for yourself the confessions of the oratory boys and outsiders...¹²⁴

An important concept that characterises Philip Rinaldi’s time as Rector Major in line with his predecessor is expressed in his second circular letter. In recounting his audience with Pius XI in June 1922, he proposes “union with God” as a summary concept that is in continuity with Albera’s guidelines on the foundations of zeal and industriousness. The Pope, who admired Don Bosco’s singular kindness and unalterable calm in the various trials as valuable signs of his perfect union with God, proposed to Rinaldi the joining of work and prayer as a program: “ora et labora is always the watchword of the saints who also in this have simply modelled themselves on the examples of Our Lord Jesus Christ. In order for industriousness to be advantageous, it must be combined with unceasing, intimate union with God...”¹²⁵

Union with God becomes one of the predominant perspectives for interpreting Don Bosco’s holiness and the secret of his huge amount of work. In fact, the final steps of the canonisation process took place during Fr Rinaldi’s term of office, and as part of it they had to tackle the classic and often suggested *animadversiones* about how (and whether) Don Bosco prayed amidst so many tasks.¹²⁶ The process, which culminated in his beatification in 1929, saw a Don Bosco who was so industrious *because* of his intimate union with God. Eugenio Ceria repeatedly stated how he had drawn inspiration from Fr

¹²² *Ibid.*, 941–942.

¹²³ RINALDI, *Resoconto del convegno tenutosi dai Direttori degli Oratori festivi*, 596.

¹²⁴ RINALDI, *Conserviamo e pratichiamo le nostre tradizioni*, 942.

¹²⁵ F. RINALDI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 3 (1922) 15, 17.

¹²⁶ Cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 3: *La canonizzazione (1888-1934)*, LAS, Rome 1988, 198–199.

Rinaldi for the drafting of the volume that summarises the synthesis between interiority and industriousness, becoming a classic of Salesian literature.¹²⁷

Union with God is the hermeneutic place for looking for the balance between the idea of “healthy modernity” and the need to “baptise” amusements and “rigidly” preserve the original spirit. In his second circular letter, union with God was linked with insistence on sanctification as the “primary aim of religious profession, the rest being just a means. The greatest and most praiseworthy works lose all warmth if we do not do them for our own sanctification.”¹²⁸ During the audience with Pius XI, Fr Rinaldi took an interesting line of argument in search of stimuli for living the synthesis between work (including educational work) and prayer:

I reminded the Holy Father how Don Bosco through word and example continually instilled the idea of work and prayer in his sons; how he was always united to God even in the midst of the most serious tasks; and I asked that he give the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, their pupils and past pupils, and the Cooperators, and effective encouragement that would help them to be more active every day and at the same time more united to the Lord. [...] I then told him that in my opinion, one very effective means to help them and to urge them all to do this would be to grant them a special Indulgence to be gained whenever they combined work, teaching, assistance, and so on with some devout invocation.¹²⁹

Fr Rinaldi also placed special emphasis on union with God in the guidelines he offered to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. The most original and fruitful indications are contained in the annual Strennas, in which the Rector Major offers a rich but simple journey of spiritual life.¹³⁰ He places himself within the perspective of Don Bosco’s union with God, which becomes the theme that runs through all his Strennas. In the Strenna of 1921, particularly significant because it precedes the jubilee of the FMA Institute, Fr Rinaldi presents Don Bosco as the father who knew how to unify the most active apostolate with the most profound union with God. Following this idea, the practice of union with God is offered to the FMA as a special badge for

¹²⁷ Cf. E. CERIA, *Don Bosco con Dio*, SDB, Rome 1988, 21–23. NB: The original edition of this work was published during the year of Don Bosco’s beatification (1929).

¹²⁸ F. RINALDI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 3 (1922) 15, 18.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹³⁰ Cf. L. DALCERRI, *Un maestro di vita interiore don Filippo Rinaldi*, Istituto FMA, Rome 1990.

the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Institute.¹³¹ These ideas of principle, expressed in the Strennas, can be interpreted in the light of his interventions in the three General Chapters of the FMA, in which he answered, simply and practically, questions about educational, disciplinary and organisational problems, intelligently translating the teachings and examples of the founder into female sensitivity and psychology.¹³² In the 1931 Strenna, for example, he speaks to the example of Don Bosco’s “active contemplation” in these terms:

The Blessed built up his interior life, which was simple, evangelical, practical, hard-working, solely intent on the fulfilment of the divine will; [...] an interior life of marvellous, extraordinary activity for the good of souls, nourished by his unshakeable faith, his hope which always shone in his unchanging paternal smile, and was inflamed by his ardent charity....¹³³

Education by osmosis and the importance of practical training

Another of Fr Rinaldi’s guidelines concerning Salesian education is the reinforcement of the conviction that science detached from virtue and practice can be dangerous. A certain distrust of study was not new in the Congregation, and was often linked to the figure of the proud “scholar” with external commitments that meant he neglected the education of poor youngsters and his tasks in the Salesian house. At the rectors conference in the summer of 1926, Rinaldi summarised his thoughts on this subject:

The Salesian is not a theorist of pedagogy but an educator. After the essential elements of theory, which can be given during philosophical studies, it is necessary to learn the art of educating through practice [...] There are chapters in Don Bosco’s life which give us norms of practical pedagogy. Our pedagogy, however, is written in Salesian life [...] Each of us should be concerned to study Don Bosco more, to practise our own life, our own traditions. If we follow the

¹³¹ F. RINALDI, *Le Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice, ricordando la pietà del venerando don Albera, si propongano la pratica della unione con Dio, per celebrare così degnamente il Giubileo della loro Fondazione*, in DALCERRI (ed.), *Un maestro di vita interiore*, 56–60.

¹³² Cf. Rinaldi’s interventions in the Acts of GC8, 9 and 10 of the FMA which took place in 1913, 1922, 1928 respectively.

¹³³ F. RINALDI, *Conoscere ed imitare di più la vita interiore del Beato don Bosco. Strenna per il 1931*, in DALCERRI (ed.), *Un maestro di vita interiore*, 126.

schedule of the Salesian day, we will find our whole program there [...] Our pedagogy is therefore studied in life with humility, resignation and obedience, a little at our own expense and a little at the expense of others; it is not learned from a *cathedra* that theoretically expounds the various systems in scientific terms. The real treatise is practical life, and its pages are the courtyard, the study, the refectory, the church, the dormitory, the walks. And the rector's solicitude must be aimed precisely at making these pages read well.¹³⁴

The union between study and educational practice is conceived of as an almost indivisible whole and linked to the virtue, exemplariness and holiness of the educator. St Francis de Sales is proposed as an illustrious example of the Salesian educator, recalled by both Fr Rinaldi and the Councillor for Schools, Fr Bartolomeo Fascie.¹³⁵ The implications of the unity between study and practice are spelt out in terms of greater importance given to practical training in the formation of Salesians and in greater attention to educational roles within the Salesian house.

In 1901, the 9th General Chapter established a three year practical training period, but in subsequent years there were various resistances and doubts about this, to the point of having to establish a commission in the following GC in 1904 to examine the decisions taken three years earlier.¹³⁶ A qualified member of the Chapter, Fr Giuseppe Vespignani, explained the long and animated discussion, on return to Argentina, as follows: "The Tenth General Chapter spoke the final word and was a real triumph, establishing three years of practical training among the philosophy and theology students. With this it gave a special character to the Salesian cleric, exercising him fully in his mission towards the youth, forming him practically in pedagogical science and in the admirable preventive system of Don Bosco, and thus enabling him to mature, along with the exercises of religious life, for the sublime vocation to priestly life."¹³⁷ Practical trainees were to be accompanied by the rector in the practical exercise of Salesian life with established study programs. Among the study texts were classics like: *Dell'educazione cristiana e politica de'figliuoli* by Silvio Antoniano (the original was from 1584), *Dei principii*

¹³⁴ F. RINALDI, *Resoconto dei Convegni dei Direttori*, in ACS 7 (1926) 36, 497–498.

¹³⁵ Cf. F. RINALDI, *Il giubileo d'oro delle Costituzioni*, in ACS 5 (1924) 23, 174–175; B. FASCIE, *Del metodo educativo di Don Bosco*, SEI, Turin 1927, 24; VALENTINI, *Don Rinaldi. Maestro di pedagogia*, 15.

¹³⁶ Cf. Capitolo Generale X (26 August 1904) in ASC D585

¹³⁷ G. VESPIGNANI, *Ai confratelli salesiani dell'America. Impressioni del viaggio sul X Capitolo Generale* in J.M. PRELEZZO, *Linee pedagogiche della Società Salesiana nel periodo 1880-1922. Approccio ai documenti*, in "Ricerche Storiche Salesiane" 23 (2004) 44, 139.

pedagogico-sociali di S. Tommaso by Fr Cerruti (1893), *I morali di Leone Magno a educazione del clero giovine* (1895) and a more recent work on *I concetti pedagogici di Leone XIII* (1902).¹³⁸

Practical training was enhanced to the point that in Fr Rinaldi's time, GC13 in 1929 indicated that clerics who had not fulfilled the provisions of formation in this stage should not be admitted to the study of theology. The trainees were to have been guided above all by the rector, who had the task of taking care of the consistency of their formation, which was carried out both through the practical educational assignments and with the study of Don Bosco and the aforementioned authors.¹³⁹ The Chapter then emphasised the role of study in the practical trainee's formation, also recalling the example of Fr Cerruti and Fr Bertello linked to the promotion of schools. Fr Rinaldi, however, made his interpretative key on the priorities in formation explicit: "Our studies must be ordered according to our work",¹⁴⁰ rejecting the mistaken idea of study leading to pride, laziness in ministry and preaching for vainglory.¹⁴¹

With a view to the importance of practical life, Fr Rinaldi pays particular attention to the roles within the Salesian house that balance the various aspects of education. Pedagogical principles are not just stimuli for theoretical insights, but given the Rector Major's practical mindset are immediately tied to a role, tasks and applications. We can draw a wealth of content from the conferences he gave from 1913 to 1916 to the clerics at Foglizzo, allowing us to reconstruct the context for interpretation of his governance guidelines.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Cf. PRELLEZO, *Linee pedagogiche della Società Salesiana nel periodo 1880-1922*, 140.

¹³⁹ Cf. *Temi trattati nel XIII Capitolo Generale*, in ACS 10 (1929) 50, 807. Cf. also the decision not to consider applications from clerics for dispensation from the three-year practical training in RINALDI, *Resoconto dei Convegni dei Direttori*, 499.

¹⁴⁰ F. RINALDI, *Pel XIII Capitolo Generale*, in ACS 10 (1929) 47, 712.

¹⁴¹ At this place in the argument Rinaldi mentions Don Bosco's dream about the gathering of demons – an emblematic tale about the danger of study detached from Salesian educational practice. Fr Lemoine, speaking of the episode, says that it consists in "persuading Salesians that being scholarly is what should be their principal glory, so they will study much for their own benefit and will disdain using what they have learned for the benefit of the humble: no more popular works, no more festive oratories: but pride, sloth in the sacred ministry, preaching for vain glory." Cf. G.B. LEMOINE, *La vita di D. Bosco*, in RINALDI, *Pel XIII Capitolo Generale*, 712.

¹⁴² Cf. *Conferenze di Don F. Rinaldi*, in ASC A3840137; VALENTINI, *Don Rinaldi. Maestro di pedagogia*, 4–5, 67–101. B. BORDIGNON, *I salesiani come religiosi-educatori. Figure e ruoli all'interno della casa salesiana*, in "Ricerche Storiche Salesiane" 31 (2012) 58, 65–121.

In addition to the characteristics which are a priority for the rector understood as father and confessor, the dimension of governing the work, being the representative before ecclesiastical superiors and civil society is also developed. Although Fr Rinaldi proposed the concept of healthy modernity at the level of the Congregation, it is interesting to note that at the local level he emphasised the importance of fidelity that creates continuity of government, stating that “the rector is an executor of the rule, not a transformer; he must preside over and direct what he finds, not change it [...] Otherwise the house would change according to the rectors’ tastes, with serious detriment to the house and the Congregation.”¹⁴³ The prefect, with his responsibilities for managing discipline, material things, helpers and domestics; the catechist, who takes care of the religious and moral education of the young people, church functions, sodalities and academies; the prefect of studies and technical studies person, who look after regular classes and technical classes respectively, all collaborate in the success of an integral education. A fundamental need for the success of education is seen by Fr Rinaldi in the principle of working and talking together, each having their own role. He expressed himself in this regard at the rectors meeting in 1926:

Some have asked for a word on the relationship between the rector and the prefect. Here too – let it be said for effect – lies another feature of our pedagogy. Rector and prefect complement one another. They need to be in agreement, speak together often: many things go wrong without this harmony.¹⁴⁴

Salesian sodalities, Catholic Action, other youth organisations

In 1919, in the context of the re-evaluation of traditional works in the immediate post-war period, Fr Albera felt the need to reaffirm the “Salesian nature” of the choice of the oratory: “All those who are seriously interested in festive oratories and in the education of the youth who flock to them have the full and entire approval of our Rector Major. There is much talk these days about post-war works: well, the first and fundamental work of the venerable founder seems to have been created especially for the present circumstances: let us therefore attend to it with zeal and love.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ *Conferenze di Don F. Rinaldi*, 108.

¹⁴⁴ RINALDI, *Resoconto dei Convegni dei Direttori*, 498.

¹⁴⁵ *Cons. Gen. Circ.* (24 February 1919), in ASC E277.

Fr Albera is in continuity with the fundamental direction of this idea of the oratory dating back to the times before the world conflict. In the letter of May 1913 he describes the oratory as the first side of what he considered the cornerstone of Salesian work, consisting of festive oratories, missions and the formation of ecclesiastical vocations, the three “primary and most noble” goals set by Don Bosco. The festive oratory is characterised as an institution in its own right, differentiating itself from any other similar one both because of what it aims at, and the means it uses. First of all, the wide range of its beneficiaries qualifies it. According to Don Bosco, Albera explains, the oratory is not for a given category of young people in preference to others, but for everyone indiscriminately from the age of seven onwards. Family status was not required, and liveliness of character, the occasional insubordination, lack of good manners, state of abandonment or poverty were not to be taken into consideration. He excluded only systematic and contagious insubordination from participation in the life of the oratory, as well as blasphemy, filthy talk, scandal. The superior’s tolerance was to be unlimited. Therefore, while reproducing itself in a thousand different places and times, the oratory, unique in its nature, was the soul of the Pious Society.¹⁴⁶

Subsequently, Fr Philip Rinaldi endeavoured to combine his sensitivity to the new social situation as the Italian totalitarian state grew stronger. His firm desire to safeguard continuity with the Salesian tradition was just as strong. Faced with the boost given by Pius XI to the apostolate of the laity, also as a way of counteracting the influence of fascist organisations, he insisted on believing that everything the Pope desired was already to “prepare and form the future members of Catholic Action”,¹⁴⁷ but without formal aggregation to it. Once an opening to collaboration with Catholic Action had been stated, the need for fidelity to the traditional idea of sodalities was then reaffirmed, as Don Bosco had conceived of them.¹⁴⁸

The Rector Major’s thinking was also that “sodalities in our oratories are the basis and centre of the religious and spiritual life which informs all the work of education and Christian formation for which they were founded by Don Bosco.”¹⁴⁹ The guideline

¹⁴⁶ Cf. ALBERA, *Gli Oratori festivi - Le Missioni - Le vocazioni*, 121–146.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 915.

¹⁴⁸ For the relationship between Salesians sodalities and CA cf. G. BIANCARDI, *La dimensione apostolica della spiritualità laicale salesiana*, in ISTITUTO STORICO SALESIANO – CENTRO STUDI FIGLIE DI MARIA AUSILIATRICE (eds.), *Sviluppo del carisma di Don Bosco fino alla metà del secolo XX*. Acts of the International Congress of Salesian History, Rome 19-23 November 2014 edited by Aldo Giraudo et al., LAS, Rome 2016, vol. 2: *Comunicazioni*, 504-518.

¹⁴⁹ RINALDI, *Resoconto del convegno tenutosi dai Direttori degli Oratori festivi*, 604.

expressed at the meeting of festive oratory directors was therefore applied: “It is very much possible”, Fr Rinaldi observed “to comply with the provisions of the Holy See [regarding CA groups] as is our duty, without renouncing our traditions: therefore, let us keep the Salesian spirit in our associations.”¹⁵⁰ It was not just a question of preserving traditions, but also of “restoring the effectiveness and flourishing” of our oratories under the guidance of rectors and provincials. In addition, provincial congresses and days for the sodalities were established.¹⁵¹ As room for action outside Salesian houses became more and more limited, the apostolate among sodalities as an important means of education found a natural extension in the missionary impulse in a context of strong development *ad gentes*:

Continue to cultivate this missionary spirit in the hospices, colleges, festive oratories; the results obtained are excellent.... Cultivation of this spirit is mainly for the benefit of the students themselves, since it is one of the most effective means to form their hearts to elevated and holy affections, a means that distracts them from the morbid sentimentalism so common at that age, a means that reminds them of the reality of life and the miseries of this world, makes them appreciate the benefit of being born in a Catholic country, in the light and civilisation of the Gospel, and thus animates them to correspond to this special grace of the Lord by a truly Christian life.¹⁵²

Once the guidelines concerning Salesian associations were spelt out, these were then on display. The *Bollettino Salesiano*, especially in summer 1931, carried news of Salesian sodality congresses held in Salesian provinces.¹⁵³ Sodalities expressed a “perennial fruitfulness of the initiative of Blessed Don Bosco, as timely and useful yesterday as today.”¹⁵⁴ Reasons for their effectiveness were listed in four points: “1) The effective encouragement they gave to developing piety; 2) The ingrained habit in young people of practising the duties of Christian life; 3) Emulating good example in

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 608. Cf. also FF. RINALDI, *Le Compagnie Religiose e l’Azione Cattolica. Pensiero del S. Padre Pio XI*, in ACS 11 (1930) 55, 55.

¹⁵¹ Cf. RINALDI, *Motivi di apostolato e di perfezionamento per il 1931*, 917–918. F. Rinaldi, *Norme e programma per le Giornate e i Congressi delle Compagnie Religiose, che avranno luogo nelle Case e Ispettorie Salesiane durante l’anno 1931*, in ACS 11 (1930) 55bis, 2–4.

¹⁵² RINALDI, *Giubilei d’oro della Pia Unione dei Cooperatori Salesiani*, 428–429.

¹⁵³ Cf. *I Congressi delle Compagnie religiose*, in “*Bollettino Salesiano*” 55 (1931) 8, 230–232.

¹⁵⁴ *Il tema di “Compagnie Religiose”*, in “*Bollettino Salesiano*” 55 (1931) 6, 186.

the exercise of virtue and fulfilment of daily duties; 4) Love of apostolate that will always be remembered for the joys it brings.”¹⁵⁵

Writers on Salesian pedagogy in the 1920s

Fr Rinaldi’s thinking was interpreted and completed through application by his Councillors, among whom the Schools Councillor, Fr Bartolomeo Fascie emerged, in tune with the Rector Major in proposing an experience-based Salesian pedagogy. Different, but complementary, was the setting of the 1925 publication of *Don Bosco Educatore* by Vincenzo Cimatti. This aspired to a scientific and rigorous approach in handling sources in view of a comparison with pedagogical positivism. Finally, we will briefly analyse the writings of some French-speaking authors for their dissemination and impact on the Salesian mentality. Fr Scaloni, for many years in leadership positions in Northern Europe, and Fr Auffray, a publicist, tackled the topics of Salesian pedagogy in a way that is both practical (for the topics chosen) and popular (in language).

Fascie and experience-based Salesian pedagogy

Bartolomeo Fascie, Councillor for Schools from 1920 to 1937, offered a new understanding of Salesian pedagogy regarding the importance of reviving Don Bosco in a more systematic way and establishing an approach to pedagogy based on experience. His *Del metodo educativo di Don Bosco*¹⁵⁶ had considerable influence on Salesians since it was recommended for reading during practical training; it also spread beyond narrow Salesian circles, since it was adopted as a textbook in teacher training in Italy from the 1930s to the 1950s. The idea of the practicality of the Salesian method can also be seen in how the book is arranged: a brief pedagogical introduction by the author, the first part of the sources on the “guiding principles” of about twenty pages and, finally, the second most important and lengthy one on “practical applications”, divided into meetings, letters, testimonies and disciplinary, didactic and rhetorical suggestions.

The publication reflected and made concrete Fr Rinaldi’s idea of the union between study and experience in the formation of Salesian educators. Fr Fascie reacted in the book to certain triumphalistic presentations of Don Bosco which were frequent, and not only in Salesian circles. He wrote: “When people speak of the preventive system, they speak of it as if it were a novelty that had sprung from his brain [...] an invention, a

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. B. FASCIE, *Del metodo educativo di Don Bosco. Fonti e commenti*, SEI, Turin 1927.

discovery and almost a creation of Don Bosco's."¹⁵⁷ The Councillor suggested instead: "We should not think of Don Bosco as a theorist of pedagogy, or a scholar of school or teaching issues."¹⁵⁸ Don Bosco accepted the preventive method as it was offered to him by human and Christian tradition. The true greatness and originality of the founder of the Salesian Society is found "in the practical field of the art of education and the work of the educator."¹⁵⁹ and in the ability to have "brought the preventive method back to life and into action."¹⁶⁰

The most original idea in this introduction by Fascie is the notion of "common sense" that is Don Bosco's mindset "substantiated by practicality and common sense, alien to abstractions, theorising and pure intellectuality."¹⁶¹ It is the concrete form of the principle of "reason" in the preventive system, the reason for appreciation of the educative traditions preceding Don Bosco. And together with charity it is the principle by which the method "is all found in a systematic and ordered form, [...] in a clear and attractive form so that one not only understands and admires it, but also learns, enjoys it and is attracted to imitate it."¹⁶² And again, combined with charity, common sense creates the basis for the value of the exemplariness of educators. It acquires its value in the vital systematic nature of Salesian education:

From what has been said so far, it seems we can say that anyone who wants to approach Don Bosco's educational method with the desire to subject it to an exasperating analysis, dissect it, reduce it into parts, divisions, rigid schemes, would not be following a good path, while, on the other hand, one must look at it as a living form in its integrity by studying the principles from which it draws life, the organs of its vitality and the functions that develop from them. And precisely because it is alive, it cannot be subjected to anatomical sections as is done on corpses to study anatomy, without running the obvious risk of seeing it die in our hands [...] In a word, we would run the risk of reducing to a dead thing a method that is valid insofar as it is a living thing, and that, strictly speaking, in order to be studied well, should be studied while it is in action and in full efficiency.¹⁶³

Fascie's approach, involving simple pedagogical principles and the practical art of education illustrated by recourse to successful episodes, can be seen as in continuity with

¹⁵⁷ FASCIE, *Del metodo educativo di Don Bosco*, 24.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 30–31.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 32–33.

Don Bosco's actions at a time of enthusiasm around the Saint's beatification and while witnesses from the first generations were still alive. The aim of demonstrating that Don Bosco was guided by God yet knew how to adapt to situations seems clear. Once the two complementary aspects of "inspirations" and "circumstances" have been clarified, the conclusion follows that it is necessary to do as Don Bosco did. The limitations of this publication are also quite evident. The biographical notes on Don Bosco focus on the first thirty years of his life and end with the foundation of the Oratory which is "the living book of his method, school and model."¹⁶⁴ The figure of Don Bosco seems to be both idealised and self-congratulatory: he presumes for example that during the seminary years Don Bosco already had a clear idea of his whole life's program.¹⁶⁵ The practical episodes from Don Bosco's life reported by Fascie tend to illustrate the success of his educational activity more than to analyse its method, motivations and tools.

The Councillor for Schools picks up many of the issues dear to the Rector Major, Fr Rinaldi, when he follows the small traditions or the practicality of the educational method, but some others are missing. In particular, some of Fr Rinaldi's main balancing elements are absent, such as fatherliness and union with God. It seems that Fr Fascie does not aspire to a complete analysis but rather tries to reinforce the leitmotif of the writing: "that one must ultimately feel alive and continue in one's responsibility so as to be able to say with Don Bosco: I have always gone ahead as the Lord inspired me and circumstances demanded."¹⁶⁶

Bartolomeo Fascie drew up a number of guidelines in his Circulars, following Cerruti, for the Salesian school called to form good Christians as well as prepare for life: "The school for us is part of the program of Salesian life as summed up in Don Bosco's motto: *Da mihi animas caetera tolle* [...] The school's roots lie in the practice of the Christian and religious life [...] Whoever ceases to be Salesian when teaching, just to be a teacher of merit, would be a bone out of place and we would feel uncomfortable."¹⁶⁷

Practical training, which is the strong point of the Schools Councillor's approach, is seen as "the course of study of our pedagogy", which cannot be learned from books but in practical life, "the Church, the school, the study, the refectory, the dormitory, the courtyard, the theatre, the infirmary, the walks, etc. are all from the book of life and the Salesian tradition and the pages of this book... and it is from these pages that we must draw, draw and study, living them with affection, a spirit of sacrifice and a humble and courageous will."¹⁶⁸ To reinforce his view of the importance of practical formation

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁶⁷ B. FASCIE, *Lettera del Consigliere Scolastico*, in ACS 5 (1924) 26, 319.

¹⁶⁸ *Corsi di filosofia e triennio di esercizio pratico*, in ACS 5 (1924) 26, 327. Cf. Also the same line of thinking in FASCIE, *Del metodo educativo di Don Bosco*, 23–24.

against those who were seeking to shorten the period of practical training, he imagines the case where practical training might be suppressed:

Our clerics would go directly from the Novitiate to Studentate of Philosophy and Theology, that is, they would spend seven whole years without any contact with actual Salesian life and with young people. Then after seven years between the Novitiate and study they would face what for them would be a completely new life, no longer having the readiness and the ductility necessary to bend and adapt to the needs of assistance, the patience of teaching and coexistence with the students, the often mortifying failures, all the small but necessary precautions, etc. These things can be learned in the ardour and exuberant enthusiasm of youth but they are too mortifying later and would overcome the courage and patience even of those equipped with sufficient good will and a spirit of sacrifice.¹⁶⁹

Cimatti and *Don Bosco educatore* compared with positivism

Vincenzo Cimatti's *Don Bosco educatore*, 1925, is of a very different kind,¹⁷⁰ aspiring to a scientific and rigorous approach to the handling of sources in view of a comparison with positivistic pedagogy.¹⁷¹ In addition to traditional topics of Salesian education, Cimatti does not avoid topics considered unusual or problematic in the Salesian world such as women's education and sex education. The publication, being a synthesis that the author had developed over more than ten years, is a mature reflection. In terms of method it goes beyond Barberis and Fascie, who created collages of different texts, and Cerruti, who was more focused on formation and the application of principles. Those works were published in view of the religious and humanistic formation of Salesians as teachers.

Together with Pietro Braido it can be said that Cimatti's publication is the first study that goes in the direction of a systematic, critical and scientific reflection on Don Bosco's Preventive System.¹⁷² Cimatti addressed the implementation of the preventive system in Italian school regulations through his lessons on pedagogy for teachers, published in

¹⁶⁹ B. FASCIE, *Lettera del Consigliere Scolastico*, in ACS 8 (1927) 41, 618.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. V. CIMATTI, *Don Bosco educatore. Contributo alla storia del pensiero e delle istituzioni pedagogiche*, SEI, Turin 1925.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Also contextualised considerations on Cimatti's work in G. FEDRIGOTTI, *Il Sistema preventivo di Don Bosco nell'interpretazione di Vincenzo Cimatti (1879-1965)*, LAS, Rome 2003, 77-95.

¹⁷² Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo di don Bosco*, PAS Verlag, Zürich ²1964, 33-34.

three volumes in 1911, and then developed his reflection by tackling a large number of works, such as published and unpublished ones by Don Bosco, chronicles, biographies, historical profiles, the *Positio* for the beatification process and the *Bollettino Salesiano*.¹⁷³ From the study of the sources and from the in-depth studies related to teaching at the teacher preparation course at Valsalice, Turin, a synthesis emerges with a structure that goes beyond just the opposition between the repressive and preventive systems. It is therefore not just a gloss or commentary on Don Bosco's treatise: Cimatti breaks down the sources, creating a structure of his own in his work:

1. The review of literature (bibliography)
2. The *life* of John Bosco
3. The *concept* of education;
4. The educational *factors* (family, school, civil and religious society, educator, the one educated, setting);
5. The *means* of education:
 - a. physical (gymnastics but this is also where aesthetic education, music, theatre come in),
 - b. intellectual (religious instruction, preaching, oratory, day schools, vocational and agricultural schools)
 - c. morality
6. The *methodical guiding principles* contained in the small treatise on the preventive system
 - a. the reason-religion-kindness trio as a basis,
 - b. means for Christian education,
 - c. means of winning respect and confidence,
 - d. recreation means to keep students busy;
7. Educational *discipline*;
8. *Restorative* and corrective education (disciplinary punishments)
9. Further *explorations*: sexual pedagogy and the education of women
10. The *results* of Don Bosco's educational system
11. Appendices: detailed *bibliography* (of interest is the chronological list of more than a hundred of Don Bosco's publications)

For Cimatti, Don Bosco “in the Christian concept of charity that prevents, and in the cordial fusion of the educator's reasonable authority and the student's reasonable freedom, brings together earlier good educational theories and practices in a blissful

¹⁷³ Cf. CIMATTI, *Don Bosco educatore*, 11–27.

kind of eclecticism.”¹⁷⁴ In the introduction, the work contextualises the discussion by speaking of two schools of pedagogy. The first is a spiritualist pedagogy, which is in continuity with the classical tradition and conceives of man as a being endowed with soul and body harmoniously united. The second school is positivistic, which considers man as matter unfolding in a complex of chemical and physiological phenomena and proposes an agnostic, physical education ultimately subject to the political regime.¹⁷⁵ The author, fully part of the first group of those who graduated in philosophy and pedagogy from the University of Turin is, however, also a scholar of the natural sciences and author of many publications in the field of agriculture,¹⁷⁶ aiming to reconnect

the culture and tradition of our glorious past with the beautiful positive achievements of the present. How many more balanced forms of civilisation, more consonant with the needs of the life of individuals and peoples can come from study and past educational practices, from the reconciliation of faith with science, capital with work, culture with professional practice, from a more heartfelt love of country!¹⁷⁷

The same tendency to meld differences to provide a better synthesis is found in his interpretation of Don Bosco’s life, where he notes “that this man and his work reflect the material, spiritual and social events of the time on the one hand, and the work of Providence on the other that is allowed to benefit individuals and the community through wisdom and love.”¹⁷⁸ His attention to the positivistic climate is a key to understanding the setting of the work. This can be seen in his analysis of the family and social environment in which Don Bosco was formed; in his attention to Italian legislation and Salesian regulations; in the precise consideration he gives to bibliographical sources, in Don Bosco’s relationships with historical figures and, above all, in the concluding part that deals with the “results” of the Salesian educational system.

There is no lack of criticism of positivism, in which Cimatti declares: “The falsely scientific pedagogy, which proclaims purely experimental, positive, rational secular education, independent of and extraneous to all religious beliefs, will be capable of admiring the evidence of the results obtained with Don Bosco’s educational system,

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Cimatti’s bibliography in G. FEDRIGOTTI, *Il Sistema preventivo di Don Bosco nell’interpretazione di Vincenzo Cimatti*, 188–189 mentioning 436 articles by Cimatti in “Rivista dell’agricoltura”, three volumes of *Lezioni di Agraria* and six volumes of the *Libro dell’agricoltore* all published between 1907 and 1922.

¹⁷⁷ CIMATTI, *Don Bosco educatore*, 9.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

but it will be unable to penetrate and understand its innermost foundation.”¹⁷⁹ Even in the parts that report the “results of the system,” where the comparison with positivism is clear, it does not fall into the trap (à la du Boÿs)¹⁸⁰ of merely listing growth and numbers tied to the Congregation’s global expansion, stating that “the figures we could mention would only freeze the current stage of the work in a dry, vulgar kind of way.”¹⁸¹ According to him, however, the best result in line with Don Bosco’s parameters is the existence and growth of the Salesian past pupils association: “The pupil who feels the need to remember his educator, to follow his teachings in everyday life, is certainly the most beautiful proof of the result in educational terms.”¹⁸²

In terms of content, in addition to the rich use of Salesian sources,¹⁸³ Cimatti’s work offers interesting reflections that reveal a wide horizon of thought, meaningful insights and a constant attention to educational practice. We will list at least some of them. At the beginning of his book, Cimatti defines the concept of education for Don Bosco as “preparation of the pupil for the fullest expression of all the intellectual, moral and social activity of which he is capable.”¹⁸⁴ This departs from Barberis’s *Notes (Appunti)* in several points. In addition to a different setting of anthropological coordinates, Cimatti stresses the role of the exploration of potential, which is more student-centred. Barberis, in line with Rayneri and Allievo, stresses perfection, instead, as a basic concept that implies a growth of individual faculties more dependent on the educator’s instructions.¹⁸⁵ Cimatti’s emphasis on the active enhancement of the pupil is confirmed further on by positioning the pupil as the subject of education, the greatest factor in education, and affirming the need for his full cooperation, when, after the period of childhood, he becomes capable of discernment.¹⁸⁶

179 *Ibid.*, 63.

180 Cf. The structure of A. du Boÿs’ work, *Don Bosco e la Pia Società Salesiana*, Tip. e Libreria Salesiana, S. Benigno Canavese 1884 which interprets Don Bosco’s life and educational method through the development of works and institutions.

181 *Ibid.*, 137.

182 *Ibid.*, 138.

183 Besides the careful bibliography that introduces and concludes the volume, one must note a neglect of a critical apparatus of notes. Quotations often appear without any indication of the source, as for example the long quotation on pages 67-73 which indicates Don Bosco as the author but not the work (it is a passage taken from: J. BOSCO, *Biographie du jeune Louis Fleury Antoine Colle*, Imprimerie Salésienne, Turin 1882, 22-31).

184 CIMATTI, *Don Bosco educatore*, 54.

185 “pedagogy [...] consists essentially in directing the child to his perfection, developing his faculties as best as possible”, in *Appunti di pedagogia di Giulio Barberis (1847-1927)*. Introduction, critical text and notes by José Manuel Prelezo. Afterword by Dariusz Grządziel, LAS, Rome 2017, 35.

186 Cf. CIMATTI, *Don Bosco educatore*, 67.

We see here a shift away from the figure of the Salesian as the only educator and teacher. Salesian Cooperators are valued, considered as educators who “are involved in this sublime mission in Salesian Houses among priests, clerics and brothers.”¹⁸⁷ Interesting is the note on the effectiveness of Salesian vocational training, which is based on the “identity of circumstances between the educator and the youngster, who learns from the Christian worker and trade teacher how he will be able to live as a worker and as a Christian.”¹⁸⁸ Cimatti is in line with the educational, instructional, religious approach of Salesian schools offered by Cerruti, providing some insights in this regard: “So on the one hand Don Bosco’s basic problem – souls to be saved – and on the other hand a technical, didactic, economic and social problem.”¹⁸⁹ According to Cimatti, the connection between the two areas takes place at the didactic level: “Religion must be the soul that gives life to the curriculum. Therefore, the teacher must derive concepts, moral and religious maxims from every subject of study which educate the heart while instructing the mind. (The following are suitable for this purpose: propositions, exercises, outlines, composition topics, oral or written exercises, etc.; comparing deeds of fortitude, prudence, etc.).”¹⁹⁰ In addition to various educational and didactic means, Cimatti deals in part with recreation and, an innovative item, with ways of earning the respect and trust of students.¹⁹¹

With regard to “system”, Cimatti interprets it as the educator’s “way of behaving” with the young person.¹⁹² This way, the preventive system is not a teaching method or a study arrangement similar to the Jesuit *Ratio* or De la Salle’s *Condotta*, and the most systematic part is to be found in the “regulations of the houses in which, in the form of advice, educational norms are determined which have points of contact with the works indicated, and which, especially for the disciplinary part, would lend themselves to an

187 *Ibid.*, 64. Cimatti’s experience in the St Aloysius Oratory in Turin from 1912 to 1917 was more open to educational collaboration with the laity. Cf. FEDRIGOTTI, *Il Sistema preventivo di Don Bosco nell’interpretazione di Vincenzo Cimatti*, 50–64.

188 CIMATTI, *Don Bosco educatore*, 66.

189 *Ibid.*, 93.

190 *Ibid.*, 95.

191 Cf. *Ibid.*, 117–123.

192 Cimatti refers to Don Bosco’s statements about the non-systematic nature of his thought and importance of concrete circumstances and inner inspirations: “You want me to explain my system? But even I don’t know what it is! I have always gone ahead *without systems*, as the Lord inspired me and circumstances demanded.” NB: Italics are ours and an addition to *Don Bosco Educatore* not found in the *Memorie Biografiche*, vol 18, 126.

interesting comparative study with Franckian instructions.”¹⁹³ Finally, in the concluding summary that answers the questions posed at the beginning of the work, Cimatti affirms Don Bosco’s greatness in terms of healthy eclecticism in the light of prevenient Christian charity:

Can it be said that Don Bosco is a leader in the field of education and deserves to occupy an honourable place in the history of education? I answer: Don Bosco is a great leader and founder, and he lives on in his sons and his students. He occupies an honourable place among the eminent group of nineteenth century Italian educationalists our country is honoured by; he is a continuer of the glorious traditional spiritualistic school, and with admirable and healthy eclecticism he synthesises previous educational theories and practices in his concept of *prevenient Christian charity*, in the cordial and intimate fusion of the educator’s reasonable authority and the student’s reasonable freedom on the basis of the Catholic religion.¹⁹⁴

Francophone reflections: Scaloni and Auffray

We discover two significant French-speaking Salesian writers with a pedagogical interest.¹⁹⁵ Francesco Scaloni (1861-1926),¹⁹⁶ Provincial in Belgium for a number of years and also in England, published *Le Jeune éducateur chrétien. Manuel pédagogique selon la pensée du Ven. don Bosco*, a pedagogical handbook for young confreres which is of interest due to its innovative and systematic approach. The book was recommended by the Schools Councillor, Francesco Cerruti, hoping it would become better known and

¹⁹³ Cf. CIMATTI, *Don Bosco educatore*, 114–115. By “Franckian instruction” Cimatti is probably referring to August Hermann Francke, a German Protestant educationalist who lived between 1663 and 1727. His *Franckesche Stiftungen* institutions included an orphanage, an apothecary’s shop, a printing house, schools for girls and boys from the poorest classes and various institutions for theological students. Cf. M. BRECHT (ed.), *August Hermann Francke und der Hallische Pietismus, in Geschichte des Pietismus*, vol. 1, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1993, 439–539.

¹⁹⁴ CIMATTI, *Don Bosco educatore*, 138–139.

¹⁹⁵ Salesian historian José Manuel Prellezo considers the French-speaking environment more stimulating at the pedagogical level. In fact, many direct and indirect influences on Don Bosco’s educational thinking came from France. We can note, for example, the concept of “system”; Bishop Doupanloup’s ideas on the “preventive system”; the Lasallian influences, especially those of Brothers Agathon and Théoger; comparison with the naturalist pedagogy of Rousseau or with Jansenism pedagogy. Cf. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, 63-119 and J.M. PRELLEZO, *Studio e riflessione pedagogica nella Congregazione Salesiana 1874-1941. Note per la storia*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 7 (1988) 1, 75.

¹⁹⁶ Scaloni also influenced the *Programma scolastico per le scuole di artigiani della Pia Società Salesiana* in 1903 which took into account the programs he saw to for vocational schools in Belgium.

disseminated.¹⁹⁷ *Une méthode d'éducation*, written by Augustin Auffray, editor of the French Salesian Bulletin, is significant for its impact and widespread dissemination.

Francesco Scaloni completes and in some sense inverts Barberis' manual in his handbook. His reflection on the different features of the "nature of youth", that Barberis had omitted in his *Appunti*, was used by Scaloni instead as a point of departure in continuity with Allievo's thought on the matter. The discussion of character, "which is a typical imprint, resulting from a combination of natural tendencies, hereditary defects, passions, and habits",¹⁹⁸ develops a diversified scenario of educational problems that serves as a concrete introduction to the proposals of the second part, more specifically Salesian pedagogy.

In the first part, with a certain "child-centric" sensitivity,¹⁹⁹ Scaloni bases himself on Redemptorist Paulin Lejeune's treatment of passions,²⁰⁰ and on character studies by Jean Guilbert²⁰¹ and especially on the substantial work on psychology from a neo-Thomist perspective by Cardinal Désiré Mercier, primate of Belgium.²⁰² References to Quintilian, Doupanloup, Bossuet and other authors also appear. The choice of the first part on philosophical psychology allows Scaloni to develop a diversified approach towards young people with different temperaments (sanguine, melancholic, choleric and phlegmatic).²⁰³ As well as differences according to temperament, Scaloni lists more than 150 *character attributes* divided into three subgroups of good, ordinary and difficult. His anthropological model is enriched by eleven passions to be watched over, guided, moderated, encouraged through various educational means. The psychological part ends with the chapter on weaknesses and their correction through self-knowledge and education to form a well-disposed, good and strong will.

The second part reports on Don Bosco's treatise on the Preventive System and expresses it through advice for young confreres on education in general, the teaching

197 Cf. Durando Cerruti (29 January 1910), in F. CERRUTI, *Lettere circolari e programmi di Insegnamento (1885-1917)*. Introduction, critical texts and notes by José Manuel Pallezo, LAS, Rome 2006, 55.

198 F. SCALONI, *Le jeune éducateur chrétien. Manuel pédagogique selon la pensée du Ven. don Bosco*, Société Industrielle d'Arts et Métiers, Liège 1917, 30.

199 Cf. G. CHIOSSO, *Educazione e pedagogia nel primo Novecento*, in ISTITUTO STORICO SALESIANO – CENTRO STUDI FIGLIE DI MARIA AUSILIATRICE (eds.), *Sviluppo del carisma di Don Bosco fino alla metà del secolo XX*, vol. 1: *Relazioni*, 164.

200 Cf. P. LEJEUNE, *Les Passions. Traité pratique*, Desclée de Brouwer, Lille 1905.

201 Cf. J. GUILBERT, *Le caractère. Définition, importance, idéal, origine, classification, formation*, J. de Gigord, Paris 1914.

202 Cf. D. J. MERCIER, *Psychologie*, Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, Louvain 1908.

203 Cf. SCALONI, *Le jeune éducateur chrétien*, 7–9.

of the catechism, teaching method and assistance. Scaloni offers a good summary of Salesian documents based above all on the *Regolamenti per le case della Società di S. F. di Sales*, the Constitutions, Don Bosco and Fr Rua's circular letters, illustrated with various quotes from the *Memorie Biografiche*.

Scaloni's true innovative contribution, it seems to us, lies in the first part that rearranges the traditional Salesian perspective by seriously considering the psychological differences of the young. The extent of perspective appears above all in the paragraphs that deal with applications, that is, the corrections of weaknesses, emphasising the advantages and the farsightedness of Don Bosco's educational choices. The diversity of temperaments establishes a starting point for the necessity of different educational approaches and the important distinction between natural and moral weakness helps the educator to go beyond an exclusively ethical-moral logic.²⁰⁴ Scaloni surpasses the moralistic severity, but his discourse does not stop here; the author also insists on the need to go beyond the disciplinary rigidity of the boarding school environment that "enormously" weakens the responsibility of students. Here are some considerations that represent an important bridge between the psychological part and the second Salesian part of the handbook:

In a boarding school, the young person is formed outside of the realities of life; he is not accustomed to finding himself prey to the thousands of difficulties he will encounter on the threshold of boarding school. Salesian education to a great extent eliminates the disadvantages produced by closed schools in view of the formation of strong characters. This system, as familiar as possible, does not suppress the children's will, does not destroy their individual initiative; it supports the natural weakness of the child, but does not bind him despite himself to the fulfilment of duty. In the Salesian system, well understood and well applied, the child becomes virtuous because he wants to be. But as soon as the young person's will acts freely, he acquires new energy every day. [...] Let us convince ourselves that we have done nothing lasting if we have not succeeded in forming young people of character, endowed with a strong, energetic, generous will. With such a will, and aided by the grace of God, our young people will be able to make good use of their temperament, form a happy and pleasing character, govern their passions, correct their faults, be the consolation and support of their parents, the adornment of society and the defenders of the Church.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 134–135.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 145–148.

In the 1920s, Augustin Auffray (1881-1955) brought together his articles on Salesian education that had first appeared in the *Bollettino Salesiano*. *Une méthode d'éducation* takes up the subjects of freedom, authority, joy and piety in education, around which it groups the characteristics of Salesian education. Its more discursive and persuasive style does not highlight systematisation, comparisons, or raise issues that would require further clarification. For Auffray, the preventive system is the middle way, “a monument of noble unity in which heart and reason, authority and freedom are balanced in constant harmony.”²⁰⁶ The balance of Salesian education is contextualised in anthropological terms in the chapter on original sin, between the Jansenism of Pascal and the naturalism of Rousseau. The book concludes by stating the principle *nihil novi sub sole*, fitting Salesian education into the current of Catholic pedagogy. Auffray quotes from St Benedict, St Anselm, St Francis de Sales, Fénelon, Newman, and Doupanloup. Also included are several excerpts from *L'Enfant et la Vie* by Henri Brémond, who makes educational applications starting from biblical episodes. The work concludes finally with General de Castelnau's advice to young soldiers (omitted in the Italian translation).

In addition to the diversity of style and cultural climate, in the above-mentioned publications some linguistic emphases emerge that are linked to problems of translation. For example, the concept of loving-kindness is rendered by Auffray with the expression “Christian tenderness”,²⁰⁷ while Scaloni uses the simple term *bontà*, which is kind and fatherly but also persuasive.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Cf. A. AUFRAY, *Une méthode d'éducation*, Procure des Oeuvres et Missions du Vénérable don Bosco, Paris 1924, 101.

²⁰⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁰⁸ Cf. SCALONI, *Le jeune éducateur chrétien*, 166–168.

Tools and resources

Chronological table

<i>World history</i>	<i>Salesian history</i>	<i>Salesian pedagogy publications</i>
5th International Socialist Congress	1900	Congreg. consecrated to the Sacred Heart; Bertello , <i>Educazione e formazione professionale</i>
anti-congregation laws in France	1901	rectors forbidden to hear confessions; 3-year practical training for clerics
Carcano law on child labour	1902	2 nd Congress of the Oratories
Pius X elected Pope	1903	Baratta , <i>Principii di sociologia cristiana</i>
	1904	<i>Programma per le scuole di artigiani</i> , Simplicio
Constitution in Russia	1905	10th General Chapter - reorganisation of earlier deliberations <i>The festive oratories</i>
	1906	Rua , <i>Lo spirito di D. Bosco</i>
	1907	presences in India, China, Central Africa; legal separation FMA-SDB
antimodernist encyclical <i>Pascendi</i>	1907	Varazze affair Bertello , <i>Alcuni avvertimenti di pedagogia</i>
Messina-Reggio earthquake	1908	Past Pupils founded Cerruti , <i>Una trilogia pedagogica</i>
Jack London writes <i>Martin Eden</i>	1909	
Korea annexed to Japan	1910	Paul Albera elected Rector Major Cerruti , <i>Un ricordino educativo-didattico</i>
	1911	first Past Pupils Congress Albera , <i>Sulla spirito di pietà: Programmi delle scuole professionali</i>
Gentile, <i>Summaria di pedagogia</i>	1912	3rd exhibition of Voc. schools. <i>Regulations for FMA boarding houses</i>
	1913	
Benedict XV elected Pope	1914	
Italy enters the First World War	1915	young Salesians called to arms
	1916	Albera writes letters to confreres on the battlefield
communist revolution in Russia	1917	Rinaldi brings the first VDB together Ricaldone , <i>Noi e la classe operaia</i> , Scaloni , <i>Le jeune éducateur chrétien</i>
End of First World War	1918	
Spanish Flu epidemic	1919	
USA, women's right to vote	1920	monument to Don Bosco at Valdocco Albera , <i>Don Bosco nostro modello</i>
	1921	beginning of the mission in North-East India
Pius XI elected Pope; Mussolini rises to power	1922	Philip Rinaldi elected Rector Major <i>Regulations of the oratories updated</i>
Gentile's school reform (Italy)	1923	large missionary expeditions (>3500 SDBs leave over next 15 months)
	1924	Auffray , <i>Une méthode d'éducation</i>
Dewey, <i>Experience and Nature</i>	1925	mission in Japan begins Cimatti , <i>Don Bosco educatore</i>
failure of general strike in Great Britain	1926	50 th of Cooperators - congress in Turin
	1927	Meeting of directors of oratories Rinaldi , <i>European Oratories Congress</i> Fascie , <i>Del metodo educativo di Don Bosco</i>
Pius XI, <i>Rerum Ecclesiae</i> (missions)	1928	
Great Depression, Church-Italy conciliation	1929	Don Bosco's beatification, Caviglia Ceria , <i>Don Bosco con Dio</i>
Pius XI, <i>Divini Illius Magistri</i> (education)	1930	beginning of series <i>Scritti di DB</i> Rinaldi , <i>Motivi di apostolato e di perfezionamento</i>
Catholic Action, only young Caths. org. in IT	1931	Rinaldi , <i>Conserviamo e pratichiamo le nostre tradizioni</i>
	1932	Peter Ricaldone elected Rector Major

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Online resources

Sources, documents, research, full-text publications, photographic materials, related to this chapter.²⁰⁹



²⁰⁹ Cf. salesian.online/pedagogia2

3

Adverse times call for disciplined fidelity (1929–1951)

Various internal and external elements contributed to the evolution of the Salesian mentality during the period that ideally began in 1929 with Don Bosco's beatification. In addition to the enthusiasm for the event, new factors came into play. The Concordat between Italy and the Holy See was drawn up that year, bringing the "Roman question" to a conclusion, while the Fascist Government progressed in its military expansion, and in the State, education was standardised around the idea of a "new youth". If, in the previous period, concern about adaptation in practical matters seemed to predominate in the mentality of the superiors (things like Salesian groups or the development of missions), the central concern during Fr Peter Ricaldone's term of office as Rector Major was to safeguard Salesian works in Italy from excessive interference by the now consolidated and increasingly totalitarian fascist regime.¹ The price that had to be paid was to limit educational activities to the fields of religion and catechetics, abandoning the marked social emphasis of the previous three decades and helping to create a more closed and defensive mentality.

And it wasn't just Italy that was going through times of adversity. The first difficult experiences began with the secularist persecutions of the early twentieth century in Ecuador, France, Mexico, and Spain during the Second Republic. Then followed the years of armed conflicts (the two World Wars, the Spanish civil war), confrontation with totalitarian governments of different types in Italy, Germany and China, and coexistence with authoritarian regimes.² Central Europe at the time shifted from the authoritarian

¹ The term originates with Giovanni Amendola, who used it in reference to Italian fascism in 1923 in "Il Mondo".

² Cf. S. ZIMNIAK – G. LOPARCO (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana in Europa negli anni difficili del XX secolo*. Acts of the European Seminar on the History of the Salesian Work Krakow, 31 October - 4 November 2007, LAS, Rome 2008.

politics of the 1930s to the different totalitarian governments of the 1940s, influencing the history of the region up to the present day. In 1951, at the end of his term of office, Fr Peter Ricaldone recalled the price paid by the Salesian Congregation with 1900 confreres “overwhelmed by the storm”: deported, exiled, incarcerated or locked up in concentration camps.³

The boarding school “as an island of prevention”

The mindset created by these “difficult times” had many cultural, pedagogical, educational and organisational facets to it. Confrontation with an opposing force generally played out through a combination of opposition, compromise and explicit or implicit agreement.⁴ When interaction with adversity and operating modes occurs over an extended period of time and is internalised, we can already speak of a change of mindset. The equilibrium created during Fr Rinaldi’s time, in the direction of healthy modernity, experience, fatherliness, adaptation and narrative pedagogy, seems not to have been enough, and Peter Ricaldone opted from the outset, from his first letter,⁵ for a more decisive, well-motivated, concrete and militant approach to governing. An exemplary project along these lines was the “catechetical crusade” launched during the Second World War on the occasion of the centenary of the first Salesian oratory. Before analysing the Salesian mentality, however, it is appropriate to record some of the characteristics of totalitarian regimes in the field of education and pedagogy and the general reactions to these at the ecclesiastical level.

Authoritarian and totalitarian regimes educating the “new man”

The aftermath of World War I dealt a first major blow to the political credibility of Western liberal democracy. In addition, the great economic depression that began in

³ Cf. P. RICALDONE, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 30 (1950) 161, 10 and Id., *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 31 (1951) 165, 5-6.

⁴ Some more radical historical cases do not fit into the proposed scheme because fierce persecution did not allow any co-existence, and the presence of the Salesians disappeared (Soviet Union and China). Cf. ZIMNIAK – LOPARCO (eds.), *L’educazione salesiana in Europa negli anni difficili* and M. WIRTH, *Da Don Bosco ai nostri giorni. Tra storia e nuove sfide (1815–2000)*, LAS, Rome 2000, 283-296; 381-393.

⁵ Cf. P. RICALDONE, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 13 (1932) 58, 2-5.

1929 and the subsequent slow recovery of market-fuelled doubts about the efficiency of the current economic model. Add to this the sense of oppression and anonymity within mass society, and the fascination exercised by authoritarian models of government is understandable. The working classes reluctantly bowed to authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, but society's middle class adhered to authoritarianism much more willingly.

To young people in search of adventure, and intellectuals in need of certainty, and the petty bourgeois disillusioned by democracy and a free market economy, the authoritarian regime seemed a new and exciting prospect. The identity of the regime was inspired either by a glorious past (the Roman Empire, the first German Empire interpreted through the Niebelungen myth) or by an ideal future (egalitarian communist society). Generally, a public enemy was found to serve as justification and an outlet for aggression, and the techniques and tools of mass society, such as the new social communications media (radio, cinema) and associations, especially those of young people, were effectively exploited.⁶ It should also be noted that while there was at least a formal respect for religion and its manifestations in fascism, in nazism the system was attributable to forms of neo-pagan religiosity, while in communism the ideology was explicitly atheistic and materialistic.

Totalitarianism in Russia, Italy, Germany and later in Central Europe had considerable consequences for school and youth policies. Both right- and left-wing totalitarian governments aspired to create the *new man*, a prerequisite and consequence of the new social and political order. The underlying ideology was obviously different: naturalistic and nationalistic vitalism on the one hand, or materialistic communism on the other, but the operational and practical methods were similar and could be traced back to totalitarianism.⁷ Gianni Oliva, summarising research by Hannah Arendt, Raymond Aron and Zbigniew Brzezinski, lists the common characteristics of a totalitarian state: 1. Concentration of power in the hands of an unbending and politically irresponsible oligarchy; 2. The imposition of an official ideology; 3. Presence of a single mass party; 4. Control of police forces operating in the state and use of terror; 5. Control of communication and information.⁸

From the point of view of Salesian education, the major difference in different regimes consisted in the degree of totalisation they implemented and in the type of

⁶ Cf. G. SABATUCCI – V. VIDOTTO, *Il mondo contemporaneo. Dal 1848 a oggi*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2005, 347-360.

⁷ Although the ideologies adopted were different, the mechanisms, processes, and structures of power were very similar. The most telling sign is the mutual inspiration among totalitarian leaders. Cf. P. JOHNSON, *Modern Times. The World from the Twenties to the Nineties*, Harper Collins, New York 1991, 49-103.

⁸ Cf. G. OLIVA, *Le tre Italie del 1943*, Mondadori, Milan 2004.

relationship they had with ecclesiastical institutions, not so much in the kind of ideology they adopted. In this regard, the greatest influence was determined by the coexistence with the Mussolini regime because of the obvious “Italian-ness” of the Congregation of the first generations and because of its strategy of conciliation with the Holy See. The education of youth was an area of natural friction between the Church and totalitarian regimes, and in fact, what stood out in the totalitarian regimes was the interest in education of a “*new youth*” to be shaped not only thanks to the school as a function of the totalitarian State, but also to be included in youth organisations with formation proposals for leisure time. The ideal of fascist education was a young person full of energy with heroic moral qualities in view of a bright national future. The “*new spirit*” lay “in the passion for action, the mystical sense of duty, dedication to the cause to the point of supreme sacrifice, the cult of power, the unlimited confidence in the possibility of man to make an indelible mark on history.”⁹

Already in 1923, the Minister of Education in the Mussolini government, Giovanni Gentile, had introduced a reform of the school system. Education was subject to the state and was inspired by Italian idealism and the identification of continuity between Mussolini’s state and Rome’s ancient history. The curriculum almost exclusively involved the humanities, while the natural sciences were classified as being of little use. Private and Catholic schools continued, but were subject to strict controls. In accordance with the Concordat between Italy and the Vatican State, an hour of religion was also included in the elementary school curriculum as a compulsory subject. In middle school, teachers had freedom to choose textbooks, which still had to be faithful to the principles of the regime. The schools and universities were under the control of the fascist student organisations that watched over the political loyalty of teachers.

Education was integrated with the activities of fascist youth organisations, especially the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*. In the second half of the ‘20s, the range of activity of other organisations was drastically reduced or they were shut down by the State. The only Catholic youth organisation to survive from 1931 onwards was Catholic Action, even if at the cost of renouncing political, social and trade union commitments and carrying out only religious and spiritual formation activities.¹⁰

⁹ L. LA ROVERE, *Rifare gli Italiani: l’esperimento di creazione dell’“uomo nuovo” nel regime fascista*, in ISTITUTO STORICO SALESIANO – CENTRO STUDI FIGLIE DI MARIA AUSILIATRICE, *Sviluppo del carisma di Don Bosco fino alla metà del secolo XX*. Acts of the International Congress of Salesian History Rome, November 19-23, 2014 edited by A. Giraud et al., vol. 1: *Relazioni*, LAS, Rome, 2016, 169.

¹⁰ Cf. G. CHIOSSO, *Educazione e pedagogia nel primo Novecento*, in *Sviluppo del carisma di Don Bosco fino alla metà del secolo XX*, vol. 1, 168-170.

The Church's educational mission and *Divini Illius Magistri*

The Church reacted to these totalitarian pressures by the state, including through interventions by the Magisterium. A milestone in the field of education was Pius XI's Encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri* published in 1929, which was in continuity with the teaching of his predecessors. Already in *Rerum Novarum*, Leo XIII had urged that a Catholic school system be built up in response to the secularisation of the public school. Pope Benedict XV, in his Apostolic Letter *Communes Litteras* and in the Code of Canon Law, defined the norms of religious education and the education of children, pointed out the fundamental rights and duties of the Church and the family in Christian education, emphasised the importance of catechetics in elementary schools and explained the Church's right to establish its own schools of every order and grade.

Pope Pius XI's encyclical offered a basic document for Catholic education in the period between the two World Wars, rejecting secular pedagogical naturalism and affirming the right to education of both the family and the Church, against the centralising tendencies of the State. The encyclical provided a starting point for its proposals:

Indeed never has there been so much discussion about education as nowadays; never have exponents of new pedagogical theories been so numerous, or so many methods and means devised, proposed and debated, not merely to facilitate education, but to create a new system infallibly efficacious, and capable of preparing the present generations for that earthly happiness which they so ardently desire [...] It is therefore as important to make no mistake in education, as it is to make no mistake in the pursuit of the last end, with which the whole work of education is intimately and necessarily connected.¹¹

The encyclical proposed a neo-Thomistic structure with many references to Leo XIII, expounding the principle that true education goes beyond the natural order and is entirely ordered to the ultimate goal positioned in the order of grace: "since God has revealed Himself to us in the Person of His Only Begotten Son, who alone is 'the way, the truth and the life,' there can be no ideally perfect education which is not Christian education."¹² In the debate against totalitarianism, it is interesting to note Pius XI's reference to the educational system of the United States of America, praised for its respect for the role of the family.¹³

¹¹ Cf. Pius XI, *Divini Illius Magistri*, in AAS 22 (1930) 49-86.

¹² *Ibid.*, 51

¹³ Cf. U.S. Supreme Court Decision in the Oregon School Cases, in *Ibid.*, 61.

Although the encyclical spoke out against activism, naturalism, liberalism, militarism, athleticism, sex education, and coeducation, it did not merely lock itself into the order of grace, sacraments, and catechetics. Referring to Catholic schools, Catholic Action and other associations, Pius XI stated that

This educational environment of the Church embraces the Sacraments, divinely efficacious means of grace, the sacred ritual, so wonderfully instructive, and the material fabric of her churches, whose liturgy and art have an immense educational value; but it also includes the great number and variety of schools, associations and institutions of all kinds, established for the training of youth in Christian piety, together with literature and the sciences, not omitting recreation and physical culture.¹⁴

Following the encyclical, in the 1930s we can see an increase in the reflections on Catholic pedagogy by authors such as Maritain, De Hovre and Dévaud, while Mario Casotti of the Catholic University and Jesuit Mario Barbera were especially important in Italy. In Casotti's approach, the role of Don Bosco's kindness and preventive method also appears alongside St Francis of Assisi's tribute to nature. The central role of boarding schools run by religious orders was presented as one of the pillars of the activist inspiration of the Catholic educational tradition.¹⁵ From his perspective it was not only possible to go "against"; it was also necessary to go "forward", and the Salesians, too, did not have to "lag behind". In fact, that same year Casotti criticised the Salesians for not having viewed Don Bosco's work within the framework of the history of education and pedagogy and for not having related it to the problems of contemporary teaching.¹⁶

This Catholic University educationalist did not just stop at criticism. He wrote a full-bodied introduction to the *Metodo Preventivo*,¹⁷ locating Don Bosco within the history of pedagogy. Basing himself on the arguments of Förster and Lambruschini, and in opposition to Rousseau's naturalism, he presented Don Bosco as being in tune with Catholic pedagogy that was in partial harmony with Locke, Kant and Fröbel.¹⁸ Casotti

¹⁴ Pius XI, *Divini Illius Magistri*, 75-76.

¹⁵ Cf. M. CASOTTI, *Educazione "nuova"*, in "Supplemento pedagogico a Scuola Italiana Moderna" 43 (1933) 10, 2-5.

¹⁶ Cf. M. CASOTTI, *Il metodo educativo di don Bosco*, in CHIOSSO, *Educazione e pedagogia nel primo Novecento*, 167.

¹⁷ Cf. M. CASOTTI, *La pedagogia di S. Giovanni Bosco*, in G. Bosco, *Il metodo preventivo con testimonianze e altri scritti educativi inediti*, La Scuola, Brescia² 1938, 5-94.

¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 44.

re-interpreted Don Bosco especially from the point of view of the balance between freedom and authority achieved through the “method of love”. The author noted an error of the repressive system in its view of man and of real psychological processes and instead supported Don Bosco’s Catholic anthropology:

He recalled certain words of St Thomas in his *Contra Gentes*, where it is said that Christianity itself did not spread “*amorum violentia*”, or “*voluptatum promissione*”: not with the external violence of weapons, nor with internal ‘violence’ of enticements, but it was the “*manifestum divinae inspirationis opus*.” [...] It seemed to him that the gratitude inspired by the immense love of God for man that culminates in the Cross, was precisely the psychological reason that removed any semblance of arbitrary constraint, however distant.¹⁹

His use of the expression “pedagogy of the Gospel” is interesting²⁰ insofar as it seems that Casotti’s thinking had influenced Ricaldone’s *Don Bosco educatore* both in terminology and in the theoretical approach that proposed Don Bosco as an educationalist, a precursor to active schools within a current of “Catholic pedagogy” inspired by the Gospel. The most eloquent work of Salesian pedagogy was considered to be the oratory, like that of St Philip Neri, representing the brilliant contribution to pedagogy which is neither ancient nor modern but is the only rational and reasonable pedagogy of all times and places.²¹ In a paragraph on the soul of the preventive method, Casotti says with Förster:

“Christianity has also been the greatest of pedagogical events, because for the first time and in the most universal way it has related every service, every work, every discipline of man to the innermost life of the personality, and has exalted as a means for the increase of freedom what before seemed nothing but slavery and oppression.” Precisely for this reason, if on the one hand pedagogy must rely as much as possible on the keen “interests” of the pupil, on the other hand, it has a way of making the pupil discover, even in the most oppressive and unwelcome actions, a value of genius, by “affecting” the innermost part of the human soul through obedience and self-work, taken as exercises in which our moral person is exalted and strengthened.²²

¹⁹ CASOTTI, *La pedagogia di S. Giovanni Bosco*, 26-27.

²⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 52.

²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 79.

²² *Ibid.*, 56-57.

Salesian compromise and balance: Don Bosco's canonisation

The Salesians interpreted Pius XI's encyclical on education from a strong assumption about being guardians of an original educational model that they needed to remain faithful to. This model outlined by Don Bosco is aimed at forming "good Christians" and "upright citizens". Education to citizenship was conceived of as quality vocational training in preparation for orderly and industrious inclusion in society, rather than through political participation. Salesian education, both for its supernatural justification and its Catholic content, was seen as irreducibly alternative to naturalistic pedagogies as well as to the educational objectives of the new man of a totalitarian stamp.

In the period described above, there is a certain withdrawal into the religious dimension and catechetics in line with the overall attitude of the Catholic world. The *Bollettino Salesiano* was certainly along those lines, pursuing major topics like the celebration of Don Bosco's holiness, being close to ordinary folk, the effort to strengthen the organisation of works, the Cooperators and missionary undertakings. All references not only to politics, but also to social issues as well disappeared.²³

In the early years of the regime, until 1929, the behaviour of the Congregation was marked by reserve and prudence, all in the name of the clear expression by the superiors of "not letting others give orders or run our house." The educational principles outlined by Don Bosco remained intact, and external compromises did not pollute the substance of Salesian pedagogy. Indicative of the common feeling about this was the approach expressed by Fr Antonio Cojazzi in the *Rivista dei giovani*,²⁴ fully focused on the formation of Christian fortitude as an alternative to fascist celebration of militarism and heroism. The essential aspects of this virtue needed to be shaped through the exercise of will, sacramental life, the apostolate, sensitivity for the missions, and purity. The magazine, therefore, had shifted far away from any celebration of military heroism, offering concrete pathways instead through youth groups, gospel groups and also the successful biography of the exemplary (now Blessed) Pier Giorgio Frassati, a pupil of Cojazzi's who died in 1925.²⁵

After 1929, filled with events of fundamental importance (the Concordat between State and Church on 11 February, Don Bosco's beatification on 2 June, and on the

²³ Cf. CHIOSSO, *Educazione e pedagogia nel primo Novecento*, 169-172.

²⁴ The *Rivista dei giovani* or Youth Magazine was started in 1920 with a clear apologetic intention by a group of Salesians from the house at Valsalice: Antonio Cojazzi, Vincenzo Cimatti, Sisto Colombo and others.

²⁵ Cf. A. COJAZZI, *Pier Giorgio Frassati. Testimonianze*, SEI, Turin 1928.

last day of the year, the promulgation of the Encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri*), we witnessed attempts by fascism to make Don Bosco “an Italian saint [...] and the most Italian of saints”²⁶ and the involvement by young people from the oratories and boarding schools in the most significant patriotic and fascist anniversaries, but also some real yielding to certain aspects of school policy that were useful in view of the recognition of Salesian institutes.²⁷ A partial approach of compromise, conciliation with fascism was followed by the Salesian *Gymnasium* magazine, especially in articles by Gian Luigi Zuretti. The attempt to “Christianise the new fascist man”²⁸ went more in the direction of finding common ground between two diametrically opposed notions. In an article on the doctrinal foundations of fascism, Zuretti tried to demonstrate its Christianity by relying on the fact that no other ideology such as socialism, communism and liberalism was as respectful of the Church as fascism. The point of contact was found in the conception of duty: “Duty, elevation, conquest: life must be high and full, lived for oneself, especially for others near and far, present and future.”²⁹

In the context of diplomatic and managerial balances, the alliance of the Salesians in Italy with the business world should be recalled, especially between vocational schools and FIAT in Turin.³⁰ Summing up the concluding thoughts in the earlier-mentioned contributions of Giorgio Chiosso and Pietro Stella, we could offer a number of points regarding diplomatic, educational, managerial balances of the Salesians in the years of fascism, extending them partly to other situations of adversity:

- The strenuous defence of the *originality of Don Bosco’s educative method* which is not called into question even in the face of sometimes very strong pressures. In the most compromising situations there is a sort of parallel coexistence that appears contradictory today, but which presumably was the maximum possible so as “not to lose everything.”
- The efforts at *consolidation of the works*, not only in Italy, by building up ever broader and more extensive consensus as past pupil involvement gradually grew, both in the

²⁶ This was said in an address by Cesare Maria de Vecchi at the Campidoglio on the day of Don Bosco’s canonisation. Cf. *Gli onori del Campidoglio*, in “Bollettino Salesiano” 58 (1934) 6, 185.

²⁷ Cf. CHIOSSO, *Educazione e pedagogia nel primo Novecento*, 170-172 and S. ONI, *I Salesiani e l’educazione dei giovani in Piemonte, durante il periodo del fascismo*, in ZIMNIAK – LOPARCO (eds.), *L’educazione salesiana in Europa negli anni difficili*, 158-159.

²⁸ Cf. *Il decennale della Conciliazione*, in “Gymnasium” 7 (1938-9) 9, 205.

²⁹ G.L. ZURETTI, *Le basi dottrinali del fascismo*, in “Gymnasium” 5 (1936-7) 1, 8.

³⁰ Cf. P. STELLA, *La canonizzazione di don Bosco tra fascismo e universalismo*, in F. TRANIELLO (ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare*, SEI, Turin 1987, 365-379.

public apparatus and among professionals, entrepreneurs, workers in the social and economic system of the time.

- Persistent belief in the *popularity of Salesian education* in the twofold sense of response to the expectations of the working class and of preferred educational choices such as the centrality of vocational training and investment proposals by the oratories, despite the limitations imposed by attempts to subject youth education to the influence of the State.
- The *legal and social flexibility* with which the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians were able to make efforts not only to preserve their material assets, but also to continue to carry out their educational mission. We note the tendency to create, and not just in Italy, some degree of bond with the dominant system, as partial, temporary and hypothetical though it may have been.³¹

The Salesian boarding school – dominant educational paradigm

The oratory, finding it difficult to make proposals for social formation and preparation for politics, limited itself in the 1930s and 40s to strictly catechetical and recreational activities and programs. The need for this shift was presented by Fr Ricaldone in his writings as an “opportunity” to return to the original identity of the oratory – the catechism lesson. The launching of the *Catechetical Crusade* (1941) and the founding of the *Libreria Dottrina Cristiana* Publishing House created an ideal framework for opposition to atheism and investment of resources based on the “necessity” of the catechetical strategy. Other dynamics were underway, however, in the “Salesian boarding school”, the most widespread and most suitable institution for times of difficulty.

The boarding school, in the structural integration between school and boarding, provided for the creation of a “complete” institution, also described by Braido as “total”,³² which managed times and spaces for the young boarders and involved the alternating of activities: scholastic, religious, sports and recreation, groups, artistic expression, etc. Since “prevention” within the boarding school setup was interpreted

31 It should be noted that in other totalitarian political systems the attitude of legal, political and social flexibility did not come about mainly because of the lack of a compatible attitude on the part of the State. The works were closed and the Salesians continued under persecution, by going into hiding or by becoming part of parish structures. Cf. the majority of the Salesian experiences studied in ZIMNIAK – LOPARCO (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana in Europa negli anni difficili*.

32 Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere. Il sistema educativo di don Bosco*, LAS, Rome 2006, 351ff.

with a strong attitude of closure where the outside world was concerned, the fascist regime context merely reinforced a tendency that was already there. We only need to think of the numerous reminders by the superiors already in the first twenty years of the twentieth century about the danger of relationships with the “outside world”.

The boarding school, a paradigmatic educational structure already in the last twenty years of Don Bosco’s lifetime, was continued by Salesians in the following years. The “successful” educational and formative structure that it was, implied a replication of the past rather than envisaging any qualitative improvement. From the point of view of numbers, too, we can see how from 1925 to 1955 the number of boarding schools in the Congregation grew more slowly in percentage than other educational facilities. The number of boarding schools increased by 81%, while other schools increased by 138%, oratories by 155% and parishes by 260%. The only category in decline in the thirty years mentioned were agricultural schools which dropped from 27 in 1925 to 16 in 1955.³³ The internal structure of the boarding school and its regulation remained basically the same as in the previous period. Pietro Stella, in the interpretative context of the crisis of the post-Vatican II boarding schools, notes the limitations of the boarding school structure:

The boarding schools, as is understandable, along with the guarantees of greater solidity, also bore the risks inherent in stabilisation: such as, for example, stagnation of forces, becoming too inward focused, killing off any pressing concern that stimulated creativity of works and methods, a certain dullness.³⁴

Some changes in the actual life of the boarding schools

The way an educational structure is set up is mainly influenced by general pedagogical, legal or economic factors but also by the “small traditions” that can be studied phenomenologically, starting from actual everyday life, spaces and times, activities, attempts at change, perceptions of success and recurrent practical problems. Without

³³ Cf. M. BAY – F. MOTTO, *Opere, personale e attività della Società di San Francesco di Sales. Dati quantitativi descrittivi negli anni 1888, 1895, 1910, 1925, 1940, 1955*, in *Sviluppo del Carisma di don Bosco fino alla metà del secolo XX*, 54. NB. Under the boarding school category, we have summed up the following categories in *Elenchi generali della Società di San Francesco di Sales*: “collegio convitto” (boarding), “orfanoatrofio” (orphanage) and “ospizio” (hospice).

³⁴ P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 1: *Vita e opere*, LAS, Rome 1979, 126.

pretending to be exhaustive, below we draw from just some episodes that illustrate the dynamics at play in the boarding schools.

In the *organisation of spaces* there was much variety as dictated by various factors, such as whether the institute was located outside of or within the city, or the frequent reuse of already structured buildings. If the structure was the result of a building planned by the Salesians then the oratory at Valdocco, which had grown and developed, and the Nizza Monferrato house for the FMA, were generally followed as a model. The idea of spacious and imposing settings was motivated by the efficiency of organisation: lowering per capita expenses and making better use of the not always large number of assistants.

In some cases outside Europe, the *timetable* inspired by the houses in Piedmont created difficulties due to the difference in climate and custom. A representative episode was the decision-making process put in place around the change of timetable in the first schools in Brazil. In some houses they followed the Italian timetable, and in others there were variations dictated by local needs. Fr Lasagna pressed for a return to the old Valdocco timetable, but the final word was left up to the doctors in the houses. A year later, in a letter to the Rector Major, Lasagna spoke of his belief in the need to adjust to local customs, since the experts were universally asking for a change, pointing to the Italian timetable as the reason for most illnesses within the boarding schools. Due to the heat, lunchtime was brought forward much earlier (to 10:30 am) and supper also (to 5 pm). In addition, an attempt was made to distribute times by alternating moments of school, study and recreation to prevent tiredness and boredom.³⁵

For *spiritual formation* they used translations of Don Bosco's *Il Giovane provveduto* and the *Figlia cristiana*, a female version of Don Bosco's well-known work.³⁶ Prayers, practices of piety and attendance at the sacraments generally did not undergo much variation. Daily Mass and the two Masses on Sunday for all boarders was a fixed part of the boarding school timetable. The things that underwent most change was the practice of confession, following the Holy See's decree in 1901 prohibiting rectors from hearing the confessions of those who lived in their own house. In this context, the proposals sent to the General Chapters observed how the focus of the rector's attention was shifting

35 Cf. M. ISAÚ SOUZA PONCIANO DOS SANTOS, *Luz e sombras. Internatos no Brasil*, Ed. Salesiana Dom Bosco, São Paulo 2000, 208-210 and L. LASAGNA, *Epistolario*. Introduction, notes and critical text edited by A. da Silva Ferreira, LAS, Rome 1997, vol. 2, 432-433.483.

36 Cf. G. LOPARCO, *L'apporto educativo delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice negli educandati tra ideali e realizzazioni (1878-1922)*, in J.G. GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922. Istanze ed attuazioni in diversi contesti*. Acts of the 4th International Conference on the History of the Salesian Work Mexico City, 12-18 February 2006, vol. 1, LAS, Rome 2007, 176-177.

from spiritual fatherliness to organisational, disciplinary, economic issues, or the search for apostolic commitments outside the Salesian house. Chapter members complained about the loss of the fatherly atmosphere typical of Salesian houses, and reported on the early difficulties in finding prepared confessors, so much so that in some houses outside priests were given the role of confessor. The matter was discussed but the General Chapters made no decision about this.³⁷

Summarising the contributions of historical conferences on the period studied, the Salesian tradition in the context of *cultural activities* appeared to have been preserved, updated in part and even enriched by new elements. The main and festive events of the institutes were accompanied by bands, and liturgical chant whose repertoire, after the Cecilian reform, was enriched by the polyphonic production of Salesian composers such as Giovanni Pagella, Alessandro de Bonis and the recovery of the Gregorian promoted by Fr Giovanni Battista Grosso. *Theatre*, to be found in the boarding school curriculum and in “academies” (entertainment programs), was seen as an excellent pedagogical tool, emphasising its influence on the individuality of the child, the exercise of memory, but also as a means of proposing models of behaviour. Among the recurring themes in the theatrical texts produced in the Salesian context were faith as the primary reason for choices, even at the cost of other topics like serious suffering, obedience to parents, kindness, humility and apostolic-missionary commitment.

Later, added to theatrical activity, came *film projections* already in place by the early years of the twentieth century. Up until the 1920s, acceptance of cinema was more or less peaceful when it came to screenings with catechetical themes a few times a year. Difficulties and negative judgements revolved around the lighter genre of films, as some critics speculated that cinema was the cause of visual disturbances, violent headaches, and nervous excitement especially in those who were frequent viewers. Beginning with the 1930s, interpretations of cinema as problematic, an instrument of moral corruption, became more prevalent. The regulations of the houses or of the Provincial Chapters established rules for its use (film genre, frequency of screenings, the responsibility of censorship) and there were also cases of absolute prohibition in some historical periods and in some provinces.

Traditional *recreational activities* were maintained, but gymnastics and organised sport had entered Salesian playgrounds by the beginning of the twentieth century.

³⁷ Cf. J.G. GONZÁLES, *Aspectos de la educación salesiana a la luz de las propuestas enviadas a los Capítulos generales (1877-1922)*, in GONZÁLES et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 1, 35-38.

Despite a lot of reluctance in some places, new activities were added: athletics, skating, swimming, tennis, volleyball, basketball, table tennis, cycling, but also board games and, almost as a separate category, soccer. The introduction of football was symbolic in that its acceptance was widely discussed and not everybody was on the same page in every context. Some superiors were wary of the sport because it impeded traditional mass games by requiring a large area for a small number of players, meaning the others were just passive onlookers. In addition, there were reasons related to the “moral dangers” that it involved in the games, given the physical contact with external opponents. A further problem was its unbecoming attire. Therefore, where the game was allowed, clerics played it in cassocks and boys in long pants and long sleeves.

Starting from the 1930s, the emphasis on formation and catechetics went hand in hand with the distrust of certain kinds of “entertainment”, especially cinema and football. In some provinces there was no shortage of prohibition of games on the grounds that “soccer ruins clerics and is even worse than cinema.”³⁸ Nevertheless, over and beyond the moral perspective, the shift from “traditional Salesian games” to *sport* contributed to the regulation of recreation, since every sport has an intrinsic need of discipline, fixed rules, competition and an established schedule of games.

In the period studied, *gymnastics* and *scouting* were an alternative to team sports. The benefits of motor activities were offered within the closed environment of the boarding school or on excursions in scout troops. The problematic aspect of these two types of recreation lay in their relationship to the “disciplinary” approach in boarding schools which, along with the era’s sensitivity to how large groups were to be organised, ran counter to the healthy disorganisation of traditional Salesian recreation. Gymnastics was often compulsory and connected with the ritual of parading in uniform, which in some places had a disciplinary value and served as a means of military preparation for young people. For example, in Mussolini’s Italy, the regime made parades of young men a formal expression of adherence to Balilla activities,³⁹ while in other contexts, occasions for promoting Salesian institutes took on the semblance of military education. One example was the success in Argentina of the *Exploradores de don Bosco*, that set up various connections with military institutions. The first Past Pupils of the Explorers were well-primed for the army and security forces; later, the Scouts were considered by the Argentine authorities as “educated soldiers” partially or totally exempt from the obligation of military service.⁴⁰

38 ISAÚ, *Luz e sombras. Internatos no Brasil*, 384.

39 Cf. ONI, *I Salesiani e l’educazione dei giovani in Piemonte, durante il periodo del fascismo*, 158-159.

40 Cf. S. NEGROTTI, *Los exploradores argentinos de don Bosco: orígenes y pedagogía de una experiencia juvenil salesiana argentina*, in González et al. (eds.), *L’educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 2, 41-43.

Instead, the program for the Salesian *sodalities* envisaged a weekly conference, their own specific activities (liturgical animation, fostering spiritual life and discipline etc.) and special initiatives such as the registration of new members, feast of the Patron Saint, outings. Sodalities had their own banner, set of rules and a president who assisted the Catechist in animation. To be a member of a sodality was considered an honour, symbolised in some institutes by some mark of distinction, a way of encouraging discipline and good behaviour.

In summary, it can be said that compared to Don Bosco's times the core of recreational and associative activities had moved slowly, without radical changes. From the interpretation of recreation as a time for spontaneity, the personalisation of education, mutual knowledge and the release of physical energies, the Salesians had moved on to a more organised and regulated concept of it. Recreation had an established place with scheduled activities, in accordance with the concept of an integral education of the youngster in the boarding school setting.

Consequences – a more military than family style discipline

The problem of discipline and punishments had been part of the boarding school mentality already from the beginnings of Salesian educational institutions. The risk of replacing regular and family style educational assistance with a system of control that was easier for the assistant had already been signalled in Don Bosco's *Trattatello* or brief treatise. The two letters from Rome (1884) pointed out the paths to follow, recalling the genuine oratory experience. In 1885, in a letter to James Costamagna, Don Bosco, referring to the process of inculturation of the preventive system in the Argentine institutes through the introduction of "stronger" methods, wrote: "Never harsh punishments; never humiliating words, no severe reprimands in the presence of others. But let the words kindness, charity, patience resound in classes." Again, in 1910, the Provincial of Buenos Aires, Fr Vespignani, noted: "With regard to the lessening of punishments we continually insist on it: much has been gained; but on the part of some confreres there is still the lack of a clear idea and practice of our system" and he added, "prefects of studies and assistants have too much to do."⁴¹ Fr Rua and Fr Cerruti, too, spoke in these terms. Fr Rua repeatedly insisted on banning violent, lengthy and

⁴¹ J.M. PRELLEZO, *Le scuole professionali salesiane (1880-1922). Istanze e attuazioni viste da Valdocco*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 1, 78.

humiliating punishments.⁴² Fr Cerruti explored the concept of discipline in a circular in 1908:

Observe that without order and regularity there can be no discipline, and without discipline there is no morality. But note also that educational discipline is not military discipline, and that order and regularity are not synonymous with militarisation. Let us therefore follow what Don Bosco taught, everywhere, and as well as him the best educationalists, eliminating excesses and misrepresentations... This will be effectively helped by reading and explaining a little more frequently the points of the Rules of the Houses concerning the preventive system in education and the role of the teacher and assistant.⁴³

Already elderly, Fr Cerruti urged people to “avoid like the plague” the belief that “continuous and constant contact with the young means losing one’s authority; that priests above all should exempt themselves from assistance because of their priestly dignity. No, my dear confreres, this is not the preventive system; it is not what Don Bosco taught us.”⁴⁴ In spite of the exhortations and arguments from the leaders of the Congregation, many of the reports drawn up at the conclusion of visits to the institutes confirmed the problem of poor assistance and the excessive use of punishment even corporal punishment.⁴⁵

This disciplinary approach was reinforced over the years of the First World War that involved more than half of the confreres. The powerful experiences of war and the military system shifted the emphasis in education towards more of a military style than a family style of discipline.⁴⁶ Another influential element was the requirements of

⁴² Cf. *Lettere Circolari di don Michele Rua ai salesiani*, Direzione generale delle opere salesiane, Turin 1965, 43-44, 120, 327-329, 393 and 399.

⁴³ F. CERRUTI, *Lettera agli ispettori e ai direttori (24 novembre 1908)*, in F. CERRUTI, *Lettere circolari e programmi di Insegnamento (1885-1917)*. Introduction, critical texts and notes by José Manuel Prellezo, LAS, Rome 2006, 309.

⁴⁴ F. CERRUTI, *Un ricordino educativo-didattico*, SAID Buona Stampa, Turin 1910, 35.

⁴⁵ Cf. PRELLEZO, *Le scuole professionali salesiane*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 1, 76-80; W.J. DICKSON, *Prevention or repression*, in *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 213-236; F. CASELLA, *Il contesto storico-socio-pedagogico e l'educazione salesiana nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia tra richieste e attuazioni (1880-1922)*, in *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 310-313; M.G. VANZINI, *El sistema preventivo en los internados de Viedma y Rawson (Patagonia Argentina)*, in *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 90.

⁴⁶ Cf. J.M. PRELLEZO, *Linee pedagogiche della Società Salesiana nel periodo 1880-1922. Approccio ai documenti*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 23 (2004) 44, 149-150.

the school system in some states that mandated the introduction of civic and military education, thus spreading aspects of repressive thinking in the boarding schools.

The era of Fr Peter Ricaldone's term of office, which we will look at more closely further on, became iconic for questions bound up with discipline and a uniform approach to interpretations of the Preventive system. Obviously, the sources were the same, and the Rector Major quoted Don Bosco's and his successors' pronouncements regarding punishments. In an era of tensions with the outside world, inwardly-focused thinking, struggles and the belief in centralism as a principle of unity, lacking was a governing principle that could balance these tendencies, such as the approach of piety advocated by Fr Albera or the paradigm of fatherliness combined with the mindset of creative adaptation to be found in Fr Rinaldi's magisterium. Discipline, fidelity, uniformity: these were the topics at the heart of Fr Ricaldone's approach. He published a surprising number of texts containing decisions, rules, programs on just about every aspect of Salesian life.

Ricaldone's guidelines – fidelity, catechesis and study

Fr Peter Ricaldone became Don Bosco's successor in 1932, after lengthy experience on the General Council, which included the roles of Councillor for Vocational Schools since 1911 and Vicar of Fr Rinaldi. He made a strong impact on many areas of the Congregation. He was a man of government who had to deal with concrete situations connected with the growth of the Congregation and adversity resulting from authoritarian regimes and the devastating world war.

Some of the features of his style of governing were already recognisable in his service as provincial in southern Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century. The organisation of schools in low-income areas demonstrated his clarity of thinking combined with strong organisational ability and an insistence on teacher training.⁴⁷ He also promoted a scientific study of education focusing especially on the problems of the agricultural schools.⁴⁸ The effectiveness of his approach reinforced the tendency to centralisation at a time when the worldwide coordination of vocational schools became

⁴⁷ Cf. J. BORREGO, *Las escuelas populares salesianas en España. Realizaciones en la Inspectoría Bética*, in GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922*, vol. 1, 418-428.

⁴⁸ Cf. Ricaldone's works in the "Biblioteca Agraria Solariana" series published by the *Escuelas profesionales de artes y oficios di Sevilla: El clero, la agricultura y la cuestión social; Los labradores, la agricultura y la cuestión social*, both in 1903; *Las leguminosas y los cereales. Estudio critico científico* in 1904 and the 7 volumes of *El problema forrajero* issued between 1905 and 1910.

necessary. In fact, from the beginning of his mandate as the Councillor for Vocational Schools, he had requested provincials and rectors to send in three-monthly reports on what was being done in the schools, the number of pupils, the curriculum, and the formation of staff. His repeated insistence in his circulars on this matter of sending in reports made it clear how important he thought this tool of governance was. Another frequent topic was the preparation of personnel – at the beginning of the academic year, provincials had to send him a list of confreres enrolled in university or higher education courses in engineering, mechanics, agriculture, economics, social sciences, etc.⁴⁹

His approach to governing, especially in the educational and pedagogical fields, which we will address in the coming paragraphs, illustrate the mentality of Peter Ricaldone which was in tune with the context of the opportunities and threats of the 1930s and 1940s.

Unity, formation and research in the Higher Institute of Pedagogy

In his first letter as Rector Major, Fr Ricaldone exhorted the confreres, in continuity with the last five years of Fr Rinaldi's term of office, not to expand the works but to consolidate the existing ones and invest in formation, proclaiming the principle: "the future of our Society lies above all in the houses where the personnel are formed."⁵⁰ Considering the record number of novices, more than a thousand each year, Fr Ricaldone noted a risk for "our Society, whose rapid development could even become a serious risk should it be infiltrated by harmful elements", reinforcing the formation approach of need and little tolerance implied in the basic principle announced at the beginning of his letter, setting out his agenda: "*Unity of minds and hearts.*"⁵¹

Despite the decision not to open new houses and the difficulties that had arisen due to authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, the period was one of even greater growth. From 1925 to 1955 the number of houses in the Americas, the continent with the least growth, doubled, while Asia saw growth more than triple in Salesian presences.⁵² It cannot be said, however, that because of this progress there was no effort to invest in

⁴⁹ Cf. PRELLEZO, *Le scuole professionali salesiane*, vol. 1, 84-88.

⁵⁰ P. RICALDONE, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 13 (1932) 58, 4.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵² During the Ricaldone period, the Congregation had its demographic and operational centre of gravity in Europe and America, but it is interesting to note that, even if the numbers are small, the greatest growth in the number of houses and confreres was in the "missionary" continents: Asia was first, followed by Africa. The composition of the communities was also different: the number of confreres

Salesian formation. Centralism under Fr Ricaldone's governance gave him tools that had a strong impact also on formation processes. The *Formazione salesiana* series of 13 solid volumes are testimony to his conscious use of the power of decision-making. From the questions of procedures to be observed, to the organisation of archives and libraries up to the application of the principles of Salesian formation and education, Ricaldone's term of office was a paradigm that we could call "formation through obedient execution."

A particularly interesting fact for our study is the greater emphasis placed on the study of pedagogy in the formation of Salesians. After the death of the Councillor for Schools, Fr Bartolomeo Fascie, who supported the osmotic and practical line of formation, the Rector Major expressed his thoughts on Salesian pedagogy more clearly in the 1938 General Chapter:

Enormous stress is to be placed on Don Bosco's statement: "They ask me about my system! But not even I know what it is!" An act of humility should not become a weapon against him, much less a banner. It is true that Don Bosco was first and foremost an educator, a pedagogue, but he was also a great pedagogist. The admirable pages of the preventive system would be enough to declare it as such! [...] I recommended to the General Councillor for Schools that Salesians be sent to attend university courses at the most renowned pedagogical schools.⁵³

The insistence on the systematic study of pedagogy was intensified in the post-war period by investing energies and resources especially in the *Istituto Superiore di Pedagogia* (ISP) of the Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum in Rebaudengo, Turin. During the 1947 General Chapter, provincials were asked to ensure that they sent at least one cleric to the PAS for specialisation in pedagogy.⁵⁴ The aim was explained this way: "In order to carry out their educational mission with greater perfection, the Salesians need to equip themselves more and better in pedagogy."⁵⁵

per house in Asia and Africa remained around an average of 7 confreres per house throughout the Ricaldone period. In Europe and America, on the other hand, the average community was made up of twice as many confreres. Cf. BAY – MOTTO, *Opere personale e attività*, 44-49.

53 P. RICALDONE, *Parlate del Rev.mo Rettor Maggiore durante il XV Capitolo Generale*, in ACS 19 (1938) 87, 4-5. General Councillor for Schools at that time was Renato Ziggotti who held the position from 1937 to 1951.

54 *Breve cronistoria, deliberazioni e raccomandazioni del XVI Capitolo generale*, in ACS 27 (1947) 143, 80.

55 P. RICALDONE, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 30 (1950) 159, 8.

The positive attitude toward pedagogical studies, however, was not nurtured by naive confidence. There was a need for teachers of pedagogy in the studentates and for Salesians with qualifications for teaching in the schools; and there was a far-sighted motivation as well: “If we think of the erroneous doctrines and pedagogical currents spreading everywhere with incalculable damage to the youth, we will realise more accurately the pressing need for men prepared for the teaching of pedagogy.”⁵⁶ In this context, Salesian pedagogy was seen as a “new” science based on

the rock-solid foundations of perennial Catholic philosophy and theology, and at the same time on the data offered to us by the other sciences, such as psychology, biology, sociology, and so on: but at the same time we want the temple of pedagogical science, as well as being graceful and vigorous, to also be free from erroneous or extraneous superstructures which, under the pretence of wanting to strengthen or embellish it, end up suffocating or disfiguring it in practical terms, depriving it of its characteristic appearance and the spirit that gives it life and distinguishes it for its practicality of purpose, impetus of initiatives and fruitful productivity.⁵⁷

The scientific developments of Salesian pedagogy were linked to the concepts of Carlos Leôncio da Silva, a Brazilian Salesian called by Fr Ricaldone to direct the Higher Institute of Pedagogy at Rebaudengo, Turin, in the early 1940s. During this early period of its existence, which deserves separate discussion, Fr Ricaldone’s ideas already appear to be firmly rooted in the Salesian tradition of classical and vocational schools and developed above all around the teaching of religion. Following Prof. Casotti’s line of thought, Ricaldone’s “catechetical” approach saw the value of some of the didactic contributions coming from the “active school current of thought, such as: activity in schools, the inductive method, student involvement, understanding the psychology of the student, a serene and happy school, exclusion of punishments, freedom of the student, the student’s personal work, the use of central, summary ideas, involvement of student interests.”⁵⁸

The currents of positivist and naturalist pedagogy were instead seen as expressions of an “atheist pedagogy”, of which Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Dewey were the

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ P. RICALDONE, *Don Bosco educatore, Libreria Dottrina Cristiana*, Colle Don Bosco (Asti) 1951, vol. 1, 56.

⁵⁸ Cf. P. RICALDONE, *Oratorio festivo catechismo formazione religiosa*. Strenna of the Rector Major 1940, SEI, Turin 1940, 195-205.

greatest exponents. Even statistical studies did not win much respect from Fr Ricaldone. In the context of the Catholic Action Congress in 1938 he appealed “against the fever of the statistical movement: rather than numbers, which could become tumours, let us nourish ourselves with true zeal [...] let us not reduce Catholic Action to theory, academic jousting, where at times vanity feeds and triumphs.”⁵⁹ Within this framework, it is understandable why the function of PAS pedagogical studies was also expressed in these terms:

We consider the threat of materialistic and atheist pedagogy, even if masked by the name scientific, so serious that we think there is currently none other more menacing to the fate of humanity. [...] So that we may all take sides [...] to fight this great battle with a resolute spirit and adequate means, we have decided to establish, within the Salesian Pontifical Athenaeum, the *Higher Institute of Pedagogy*.⁶⁰

Even though, compared to the previous term of office, there was more talk of a scientific study of pedagogy, practical training was not overlooked and the Rector Major encouraged rectors to develop a sense of warm fatherliness and gentle charity in accompanying the clerics.⁶¹ In this formative phase, in addition to readings on Christian and classical culture, they were to study Bartolomeo Fascie’s work, *Del metodo educativo di don Bosco*.⁶² Even though Fr Ricaldone was less intense than his predecessor in relationships with the FMA, he offered them his own typical emphases, pointing to the need to found houses of formation with a view to preparing the newly professed in pedagogical and professional terms by deepening their understanding of Don Bosco’s educational method.⁶³

Love as inspiration and discipline as a general means of education

Peter Ricaldone, at least at the level of principle, pursued Fr Rinaldi’s line of thought. In his first systematic letter, commenting on the 1933 Strenna, he presented charity as

⁵⁹ *Breve cronistoria, deliberazioni e raccomandazioni del XVI Capitolo generale*, 17

⁶⁰ RICALDONE, *Don Bosco educatore*, vol. 1, 58-59.

⁶¹ *Breve cronistoria, deliberazioni e raccomandazioni del XVI Capitolo generale*, 18.

⁶² R. ZIGGIOTTI, *Lettera del consigliere scolastico*, in ACS 18 (1937) 79, 395.

⁶³ Cf. *Atti del Capitolo Generale XI dell’Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice tenutosi in Torino – Casa Generalizia dal 16 al 24 luglio 1947*, Istituto FMA, Turin 1947, 25.

the first principle of Christian life and the family setting that, shaped by charity, is the context of Salesian education.⁶⁴ The model of such charity is St Francis de Sales:

The saint of charity, gentleness, love. He was not satisfied with outward behaviour but wanted virtue that is strength, effort; indeed, he wanted the queen of all virtues, about which it is said that it is as *strong as death*. He was convinced that everything was possible for a soul that was inflamed with the purest ardour of love. It is precisely this that explains the tireless industriousness and prodigious effectiveness of Blessed Don Bosco who wanted charity to be the constant standard of his work, the basis of his pedagogical system, the soul of his apostolate.⁶⁵

In *Don Bosco educatore*, which concluded Ricaldone's term of office at the level of ideas, this approach of love was maintained as the "informing principle" of the Preventive System. But the strong point of the direction taken by Fr Ricaldone consists in the description of applications of the system that were pointed, definitive and detailed. His synthesis connected the concept of love with the ideal of perfection *à la* Barberis, but with a particular slant to it: "Now, if the inclination of the soul to want the good of a person is already love, there are all the more reasons to say education be a work of love: in fact, education wants and actually strives and sacrifices itself to procure the only true good of the person being educated, that is, the perfection of his life as a man."⁶⁶ Love is seen as a generous outburst of inner energies to accomplish the work of the one good, "perfection" that is not only ideal but concrete, tangible and regulated.

The paradox in his basic choices was the dissonance between the underlying principle of love and the methodological choice of education. In *Don Bosco educatore* he proposed discipline, bound up with authority, as the general means of education. In the text he said:

It is not enough to have good principles, clear ideas, well-developed concepts about things to be done: in addition to the possibility of translating all this into practice, it takes the technique, or rather the special tactic, and spirit that gives life and value to the so-called method. At times, excellent principles were

⁶⁴ Cf. P. RICALDONE, *Strenna del 1933. Pensar bene di tutti – Parlar bene di tutti – Far del bene a tutti*, in ACS 14 (1933) 61bis, 43. Cf. the same approach to the foundation of love within the Preventive System in RICALDONE, *Don Bosco educatore*, vol. 1, 148-228.

⁶⁵ RICALDONE, *Strenna del 1933*, 45.

⁶⁶ RICALDONE, *Don Bosco educatore*, vol. 1, 149.

compromised, and means of non-questionable efficacy were frustrated, because people did not know how to apply them or predict the right way to put them into practice [...] It is precisely in this light that it is good to see and examine the Salesian educational methodology, grasping, so to speak, its entire soul: and precisely in this light, according to Don Bosco's thinking and practice, it is necessary to interpret first of all the principle of authority, which in the educational environment keeps discipline flourishing.⁶⁷

From what has been said about discipline and "the unity of minds and hearts," it seems that the true essential thread and the centre of gravity of Fr Ricaldone's pedagogical approach was the emphasis on uniform and disciplined organisation. In the context of Don Bosco's canonisation he developed these ideas in the three hundred pages of the 1935 *Strenna on Fidelity to Don Bosco the saint*.⁶⁸ The straightforward nature of his argument proceeds in a stepwise manner: 1. He explains fidelity as being linked to an act of faith in God hence connected with the attitude of trust; 2. As a consequence, this translates into the promise to follow Don Bosco; 3. Who was sent by God and is a saint confirmed as such by the Church; and finally 4. He specifies how we follow him through observance of the Regulations. Ultimately he arrives at radical and reductive statements: "Just as the Regulations were the supreme purpose of Don Bosco's founding aspirations, so it continues to be his thought and entire heart now. [...] To love Don Bosco is to love the Regulations."⁶⁹

He explains in this *Strenna* that love as the basic principle does not seek to exclude firmness and reasonable severity: "The superior is the doctor who proposes to free the sick he is treating from their ills: he must therefore know and apply the appropriate and necessary remedies, even if at times they may be ungrateful and distasteful to the patients. Woe to the house where, out of unwitting kindness, religious do as they please; it will very soon come to ruin."⁷⁰ Although, at the level of concept, love is confirmed as a characteristic of Salesian governance, in fact, it is interventions on the topics like fidelity, rules, regulations, traditions, authority, governance, obedience, discipline, and perfection that prevail.

⁶⁷ RICALDONE, *Don Bosco educatore*, vol. 1, 286-287.

⁶⁸ Cf. P. RICALDONE, *Strenna del Rettor Maggiore per il 1935. Fedeltà a Don Bosco Santo*, SEI, Turin 1936.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

In the context of the canonisation, everything that Don Bosco said acquired the aura of the sanctity confirmed by the Church, and aimed more strongly at perfection and, thanks to an increased number of documents, with greater concreteness. In regard to Barberis' principle of education as a work of perfecting, here we see "perfection perfected" at play, in the sense of translating the ideal into thousands of objective examples of Don Bosco's life then translated into an equally large number of applications and regulations in the daily life of a Salesian house. The *Biographical Memoirs* played an important role in realising educational guidelines, the last volumes in 1939 coming out precisely at the strong insistence of the Rector Major.

Without sensitivity to the variety of applications in the very varied contexts in which Salesians of the time found themselves operating, there could be no "application of the brakes" to uniform regulation. The Church's siege mentality was aligned with *Divini Illius Magistri*, a sense of responsibility in governance, moral emphasis on the ideal of perfection and, not least, with the Rector Major's own firm and energetic temperament. Illustrative of this approach to governance was his letter on the canonical visitation by provincials to Salesian houses.⁷¹ An avalanche of prescriptions whose centre of gravity were decrees in the liturgical area⁷² were developed over more than two hundred pages. Concern for the educational aspect was guaranteed by obedience to rules. The dozen occurrences of the concept of education focused only on the observance of liturgical prescriptions, the content of reading material, and subjects dealt with in the theatre.

⁷¹ Cf. P. RICALDONE, *La visita canonica nelle case salesiane*, in ACS 20 (1939) 94, 1-213.

⁷² Cf. *Ibid.*, 16-159. By way of example, we list the liturgical subjects treated in the letter: visitation to the church; the tabernacle; matter, form, door, key, ornamentation, accessories of the tabernacle; the cover; altar of the Blessed Sacrament; lamp; altars in general; altar cloths and altar pallium; cross; candlesticks; altar; lectern, bell, cruets, etc., small table for the cruets; the high altar; the altar for exposition of the Blessed Sacrament; the sacred vessels; chalice and paten; monstrance; pyx and communion plate; wine for Holy Mass; hosts and particles; jars of sacred oils; relics and reliquaries; sacred vestments; sacred linen; the thurible, incense boat, incense, candles; for Holy Week; other sacred furnishings and sacred objects; decorations, drapes, festoons; flowers in the church and on the altar; lighting; votive candles, pictures, and other votive objects; canonical provisions concerning sacred images; general liturgical provisions concerning sacred images; special provisions concerning images of the Lord; provisions concerning images of Our Lady; regarding images of angels and saints; the stations of the cross; confessionals; the baptistery; holy water and related stacks; the sacarium; the pulpit; pews, seats, kneelers; choir and presbyter; organ and musical instruments; for funeral services; for various functions; alms boxes and bags; plans and drawings; crib; ordinary sacristy; sacristy of public churches and parishes; sacristy of major churches; clergy and altar boys; the church and sacred places; bells and bell tower; cemeteries and burial chapels; sacred functions and feasts; principal failures in ceremonies and in the celebration of feasts; other mistakes; liturgical movement.

The Crusade: developments in catechetics

The development in the teaching of catechism as part of the Salesian educational proposal prior to Vatican II had two substantial influences: the catechetical congresses from 1895 to 1912 connected with Fr Rua's guidelines and the "catechetical crusade" proclaimed by Fr Ricaldone from 1941 onwards. The period in between was not characterised by systematic development of ideas on catechetics for various reasons: the First World War and confrontation with totalitarian regimes or others hostile to religion in Italy, Germany, Spain and Mexico; the death of Fr Rua who had been the key player in the Congresses; the shift of emphases during Fr Albera's and Fr Rinaldi's terms of office; the internal development of organisational development that needed time for practical realisation of ideas that had emerged during the congresses to mature. And finally, an important reason was lack of continuity at the level of personnel. The reflection by the congresses did not have continuity through the years also because Fr Amadei, who was the longest living editor of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, was besieged by all his historical work, while Fr Trione and Fr Anzini, the main organisers of the congresses, were already in a period of decline.⁷³

In the 1930s, given that the ecclesial and intra-congregational context had changed considerably, catechetics took on connotations that went far beyond the perspective of the congresses on the oratory. The catechetical crusade promoted by Fr Ricaldone was not aimed only at the oratory, but was entirely aimed at renewing the quality of catechetics in the broadest areas. The reaffirmation of the importance of catechism went hand in hand with a new emphasis on pedagogical, didactic and organisational problems. The catechetical crusade already reflected the progress that had taken place thanks to the achievements that began with the Brescia congress in 1912, the enrichment from the encounter with the activist movement and the implementations that took place within Catholic Action groups.⁷⁴ The centenary of Salesian work in 1941 provided ample opportunity for specifying the guidelines for oratories but also for catechetical teaching and religious formation in general. Already, GC15 in 1938 prepared for the centenary with a calendar of competitions and congresses aimed at "studying the best way to impart catechetical teaching and to spread, strengthen, deepen religious instruction."⁷⁵

⁷³ Cf. P. BRAIDO, *L'oratorio salesiano in Italia e la catechesi in un contesto socio-politico inedito (1922-1943)*, in "Ricerche Storiche Salesiane" 25 (2006) 48, 59.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 77.

⁷⁵ RICALDONE, *Parlate del Rev.mo Rettor Maggiore*, 3.

Instead, the commentary on the 1940 Strenna, entitled *Catechism, festive oratory, religious formation* developed over several hundred pages, provided ample opportunity for recognising the major pedagogical directions interpreted within the difficult context of war, persecution, moral decline of the family, the de-Christianisation of the school in a demoralised and secularised culture.⁷⁶ The Rector Major urged, in quite strident rhetorical terms, that the catechetical crusade be taken up,⁷⁷ seeing religious instruction as the best response for the salvation of the young in the discouraging situation painted in bleak colours:

It is true, we are few and unequal to the pressing and immense needs; besides, our apostolate is of yesterday [...] The essential thing is that not even one remains deaf to the divine call and that all, in the immense and manifold field of action, lend their work with enthusiasm and always. And since Divine Providence has willed that the poor sons of Don Bosco should pitch their tents on every shore, it is our duty, on this auspicious occasion of the centenary celebrations, to give breath to the trumpets and to make the voice of God and the Church echo under all the heavens with a mighty roar, inviting all to the holy crusade.⁷⁸

Communication of the “heavenly wisdom necessary for eternal salvation, through the teaching of catechism”⁷⁹ was made explicit through recourse to the Salesian tradition, in defining the purpose and methods of catechetical instruction, developing a large part of the text of the Strenna by focusing on personnel and roles within the oratory, then continuing to deal with the educational means for education, teaching, pleasant and upright recreation, ending with particular plans and approaches to architectural projects for the oratories and classrooms, school curricula and teaching aids.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Cf. RICALDONE, *Oratorio festivo*, 20-29. In reading the situation, the Rector Major supports his argument with several references to 20th century papal encyclicals.

⁷⁷ Cf. Also Pius XII's references to the rhetoric of the Crusades in his encyclicals and official speeches; cf. PIUS XII, *Lettera enciclica Saeculo exeunte octavo*, in AAS 32 (1940) 249-260; *Id.*, *Lettera enciclica Anni sacri*, in AAS 42 (1950) 217-222; *Scritti e Discorsi di S.S. Pio XII nel 1940*, Cantagalli, Siena 1941, 284-286; *Discorso di sua santità Pio XII alle Pontificie Opere Missionarie*, in *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi di Sua Santità Pio XII*, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, Vatican City 1945, vol. 6, 47-52.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 34-35. NB: Ricaldone contextualises the crusade by bringing back 16th century examples similar to the counter-reformation: Robert Bellarmine, Charles Borromeo, and the *Sodalizio delle Scuole della Dottrina cristiana* in Rome which arose during the pontificate of Pius IV.

⁷⁹ SACRA CONGREGAZIONE DEL CONCILIO, PROVIDO SANE CONSILIO, in RICALDONE, *Oratorio festivo*, 31.

⁸⁰ Cf. also E. CERIA (ed.), *Il contributo della Congregazione salesiana alla crociata catechistica nelle realizzazioni di don Pietro Ricaldone, IV successore di San Giovanni Bosco*, Libreria Dottrina Cristiana, Colle don Bosco (Asti) 1952.

Fr Ricaldone's typical approach begins by taking up Don Bosco's *Regolamento dell'Oratorio Festivo* once more, a "small book, modest in size and appearance, [which] contains the seed of all Salesian work with its spirit, system, and possibilities for many kinds of development."⁸¹ Taking up Fr Rua's approach, he restates the catechetical aim of the oratory in contrast to the "tragic illusion" of reducing it to "a meeting place for games"⁸² and sets up catechetics as a school divided into classes.⁸³ An important part of catechetical instruction as a whole is the initial and ongoing formation of catechists.⁸⁴

The Rector Major suggested revising the title of "person in charge of the oratory" returning it to "director of the oratory", corresponding to Don Bosco's original wording, also applying to him (the director) some of the indications in the *Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori* (Confidential reminders) and in Fr Albera's *Manuale del direttore*.⁸⁵ The reasoning for these choices follows the line of fidelity to the history of the development of Don Bosco's oratory: first there was the oratory with its roles and only later came the Congregation.⁸⁶ The roles within the oratory expanded and created a structure parallel to that of the Salesian boarding school: rector, prefect, catechist, and prefect of studies who form the oratory council.⁸⁷ It appears that this richer articulation of roles had not been implemented in a consistent and sustained way.

In dealing with method, the Rector Major began by explaining that "*forms, modes, procedures* are not *methods*. Hence neither a *cyclical* program nor a determined and albeit praiseworthy school *activity*, nor a collection of *things* or intuitive *aids*, nor the *dialogical* or *Socratic* approach can be called *method*."⁸⁸ Fr Ricaldone pronounced himself in favour of the general deductive-inductive method explicitly inspired by St Thomas Aquinas. His emphasis is placed on the inductive method which he calls the "Catechetical method of the Gospel":

And here it is well to emphasise in particular that not only the truths taught by Jesus Christ, but also the method he followed to impress them on the minds of those who came to hear him, are indicated, sometimes in the most minute detail,

⁸¹ RICALDONE, *Oratorio festivo*, 38.

⁸² Cf. *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 41-46.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 124-127.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 74-75.

⁸⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 74-85.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

in the holy Gospel, where it is described by what means and aids the Saviour made his doctrine accessible. [...] And since this method is clearly indicated and faithfully described in the Gospel, we could and should rightly call it: *the catechetical method of the Gospel*.”⁸⁹

The example of Don Bosco the catechist, faithful follower of Jesus, is presented in its use of similes, images and activities in more than twenty pages.⁹⁰ Speaking of method, the comparison between the “active school” and the Catholic school desired by Don Bosco is interesting. According to Fr Ricaldone, many similarities could be found that would put the alleged novelty of the activist movement into perspective. The common and at the same time fundamental principles were:

1. school must be active;
2. use of the inductive method;
3. wholehearted involvement of pupils in the work of their instruction and formation;
4. psychological understanding of the pupils;
5. school must be serene and joyful;
6. the exclusion of punishments;
7. giving freedom to the pupil;
8. the personal work of the pupil in perfecting and governing himself;
9. the use of central or unifying ideas;
10. use of the pupil’s interests;

The “method of the Gospel”, then, coincides, in Fr Ricaldone’s argument, with the inductive method that employs imagination, figures, images, examples, real objects “from the physical, social, religious, historical environment where people live.”⁹¹ Some instances of the active school movement are also recovered here, which stimulate the participation of pupils and develop “centres of interest” by leading young people to reach heroic levels of virtue following spiritual interests

that overpower the earthly interests just as heaven is above the earth. On the other hand, only the goods pointed out by the Catholic religion are capable of satisfying our loving soul. Whoever wants to limit the aims of life to the interests of this world, encourages selfishness and sensualism, educates superficially and

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

⁹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 168-192.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

without any uplifting of initiative, makes the human heart empty and unhappy [...] Therefore, without ignoring earthly things, we want to spiritualise them, infusing them with faith and converting them into instruments of perfection and sanctification...⁹²

The discussions on method are completed, in a paradigmatic way for Ricaldone, with concrete indications that are essentially oriented to the Salesian oratory. “How to do oratory” consists in keeping in mind: the regulations, where it is (with an appendix also on maps and plans of the oratory), the project, staff, catechists, formation of catechists, the Congregation of Christian Doctrine, ways of attracting young people to the oratory, the method, the example of Don Bosco the catechist, teaching aids and books, keeping them active, exams, competitions, feast days, the Word of God, recreation, the theatre. The level of application is surprising, sometimes going down to the smallest details. When he describes catechetics as a school, his reflection is meant to be practical; for example he spares no effort in solving the problem of classrooms. He asked engineers and architects to ensure their orientation, good natural and artificial lighting, ventilation and placement in the building within the oratory complex.⁹³

In the same year, 1939, he established the *Ufficio Catechistico Centrale Salesiano*, the group of young Salesians dedicated full-time to animating the great crusade. In 1947 it was named the *Centro Catechistico Salesiano*.⁹⁴ One part of the project of renewed catechesis was the *Libreria Dottrina Cristiana* in 1941, a publisher that is still in the mission with more than 3000 publications.

Extremes in the question of entertainment

Affirming the importance of catechetics also influenced certain aspects of recreation within the oratory. Fr Ricaldone strongly affirmed the idea of recreation which, according to Don Bosco, should be time for mental repose, not something that stirs up passions. It was to be time unfettered by sorrow at having offended God and neighbour. He also asked himself if football met Don Bosco’s educational criteria. The answer, albeit with some reluctance, was in the negative, which he justified by denouncing the physical, psychological and moral evils it gave rise to. Playing football was allowed only on sporadic

⁹² Ibid., 204.

⁹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 52-58.

⁹⁴ Cf. BRAIDO, *L’oratorio salesiano in Italia e la catechesi in un contesto socio-politico inedito*, 83.

occasions and in well-defined forms.⁹⁵ Similarly, cinema and radio were seen in negative terms and, given the impossibility of absolutely banning them, a moderate use of them was recommended along with every possible caution.⁹⁶ Theatre was at the forefront, along with good press.

In his approach to “amusements”, Ricaldone differed perceptibly from the position taken by his predecessor, though more at the level of actual decisions, rules, practices and daily life than principle, especially if we consider that both positions drew their inspiration from the same source. In Ricaldone’s understanding of the oratory we are quite some distance from Rinaldi’s belief that he saw in Don Bosco the “healthy modernity of doing good even with the use of things that in themselves were not bad, but which were also used by others for very different purposes. For him everything had to attract, in terms of his mission, and could serve to recreate, instruct, educate, ennoble and elevate the souls of his young people.”⁹⁷ Just the same, if the end result was that amusements were “harmful to souls”, even Rinaldi thought it necessary to vigorously exclude them, but to leave the task of discernment to provincials and rectors, avoiding making a decision on behalf of the entire Congregation.⁹⁸

On some issues – cinema is illustrative of this – we can see Ricaldone’s radical approach if we compare his positions with the papal Magisterium or opinions expressed by General Chapters. In his Encyclical *Vigilanti Cura*, Pope Pius XI addresses the question of cinema saying that “recreation, in its manifold varieties, has become a necessity for people who work under the fatiguing conditions of modern industry, but it must be worthy of the rational nature of man and therefore must be morally healthy. It must be elevated to the rank of a positive factor for good and must seek to arouse noble sentiments.”⁹⁹ The encyclical is partly based on the American experience of the “Legion of Decency”, intended as a crusade for public morality, starting with issues such as the importance, power, impact, and popularity of cinema and proposing some practical consequences such as oversight, production standards, film classifications, national offices for review, and international cooperation on the matter.

Ricaldone, for his part, dealt with the cinema in 1938 in the context of a proposal for the confreres’ retreat on the theme: “Following the example and spirit of Saint John Bosco, let us propose to sanctify joy, recreation and entertainment.” In his commentary

⁹⁵ Cf. RICALDONE, *Oratorio festivo*, 266-274.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 289-298.

⁹⁷ RINALDI, *La lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 10 (1929) 50, 799.

⁹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 800.

⁹⁹ PIUS XI, *Vigilanti cura*. Encyclical Letter on cinema (29 June 1936) in AAS 38 (1936) 254.

he noted how in too many circumstances amusements, recreation and false happiness could become instruments of corruption and estrangement from God.¹⁰⁰ After the war there were strong reminders about this from GC16, during which Ricaldone stressed his own thinking as follows:

In every post-war period we witness a real frenzy of entertainment: one could say that the poor wretches who spent long years among the deprivations and dangers of the battlefields, feel an unbridled need to dive into entertainment. It is true madness! [...] Like me, you are convinced of the satanically evil influence of the cinema: the ravages it builds up everywhere are such that we fear for the moral and Christian life of future generations.¹⁰¹

After a somewhat lengthy discussion, Chapter members agreed on a balanced solution: there was a need not only to limit cinema, since “according to the Salesian spirit it is always preferable and praiseworthy to do without cinema,”¹⁰² but to take into account the need not to lessen the number of young people, also bearing in mind what was pointed out in the Encyclical *Vigilanti Cura*. So the recommendation was to prepare personnel to evaluate films from a Salesian point of view, to draft Salesian stories so as to make films of them, and to be in contact with producers, including for technical assistance for the houses.¹⁰³

The topic directly connected with this was education to chastity, seen somewhat within the perspective of “holy intransigence”. The Rector Major spelt it out in his letter on purity: “In a reminder Don Bosco wrote for his sons, among other things he said: ‘You can never be too severe in matters that preserve morality’. Our most gentle Father, who never wanted to hear about being strict, was recommending severity.”¹⁰⁴ Also, quoting Tommaso di Villanova, he said: “*Si non est castus nihil est* is a notion to be applied especially to amusements: cinema, theatre, uniforms worn by footballers (including guest teams), reading material, newspapers, etc.” In reference to the Encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri* and decreed from the Holy Office that followed, the Rector Major offered a negative judgement on sex education, due to human frailty.¹⁰⁵

100 Cf. P. RICARDONE, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 19 (1938) 86, 447

101 *Breve cronistoria, deliberazioni e raccomandazioni del XVI Capitolo generale*, in ACS 27 (1947) 143, 64.

102 *Ibid.*, 57.

103 Cf. *Ibid.*, 57-62.

104 P. RICARDONE, *Strenna del 1934. Santità e purezza*. In memory of the canonisation of St John Bosco our founder and father, in ACS 16 (1935) 69bis, 69.

105 Cf. RICARDONE, *Strenna del 1934*, 75-78.

It is interesting to note that even Salesians who were in a position to positively evaluate the educational potential of sport and recreational activities, made the same connection between purity and strength. In addition to the emphases in the *Rivista dei Giovani* around Fr Cojazzi's group and required anti-fascist and anti-militaristic positioning, Don Giulivo's position in the *Bollettino Salesiano* in the 1930s, which we have mentioned previously, can be noted. With clear reference to the Rector Major's Strenna but not following all its emphases, the author suggested a sports apostolate stating:

Dear friends, I don't believe the title of this letter will be any surprise to you. You are all intelligent and understand very well that sport too can be elevated to the apostolate. Indeed, a good Catholic should never think of sport as pure and simple recreation nor as a profession that belongs to youth. Instead, it should be considered as an effective means of developing and strengthening that body which is the temple of the soul, and which, the more robust and valid it is, the more precious it is for the soul itself to carry out every good mission in the world. This is why Don Bosco made so much room for it in the curriculum in his oratories and institutes. Therefore, understood and valued with a Christian spirit, while it promotes the greatest triumphs of grace and heroic ascents in virtue through the flourishing of natural strengths, sport also rises to a true and proper apologetic mission of apostolate, wiping out the vicious anticlerical jibes that have slandered the church for atrophying the physical education of young people, and raising generations of mouldy bigots. [...] And, while during the holidays you will be restoring your physical strength, remember that sport can and must also be a gymnasium of the noblest religious, civil and patriotic virtues. In this way you will grow up strong and pure as the Holy Father wishes you to be, who in his last audience granted to the leaders and presidents of Catholic Action, last 29 May, rejoiced at the resolutions they had made to grow strong and pure. Strong and pure – he added – *strong in purity, pure in order to be strong, strength through purity and purity through strength*. Purity and strength because one gives strength to the other: what wonderful sublimity!¹⁰⁶

106 *Lettera di Don Giulivo ai giovani. L'apostolato dello sport*, in "Bollettino Salesiano" 61 (1937) 7, 167.

Summary: the paradigm of the “boarding school under siege”

It seems that Fr Ricaldone gave the definitive imprint to the “paradigm of the Salesian boarding school” with various emphases whose effects would be strongly felt, especially in the period around the Second Vatican Council. Let’s summarise some points covered above:

- Image of a boarding school besieged by adverse political forces and anti-Catholic ideologies that reinforced reverting to the anti-modernist rhetoric of confrontation, combat or crusade;
- The self-referential nature of boarding school life and little contact with the surrounding social reality which implied a “monopoly of education.” The boys were practically removed from their families and only returned to them during the summer holidays;
- Classical teaching that did not require comparison with contemporary authors, “the classics are enough” especially if the Gentile education reform was also in the direction of classicism;
- Self-sufficiency and self-reproduction of the boarding school structure that took advantage of a period of population growth with formation model based on replication;
- References to the supernatural origin of the preventive system supported by the canonisation of Don Bosco which implied an attitude of fidelity;
- Strengthening of the disciplinary component both at the level of thought and at the organisational level with traits of uniformity, repetition and excessive regulation.

Concluding this overview of pedagogical approaches during a difficult twenty years, it can be said that Peter Ricaldone, under the influence of the enthusiasm surrounding Don Bosco’s canonisation, continued the line of fidelity to his predecessors, but with such a high tendency towards perfection that was so counter-cultural and with such detailed indications as to make it probably unsustainable in the decades that followed, from which very different coordinates and cultural movements emerged.

Writers on Salesian pedagogy

The fact of having included Don Bosco in the compulsory readings of teacher training institutions from 1925, and the subsequent distribution of Fascie’s book *Del metodo educativo di Don Bosco*, attracted the interest of pedagogists, especially Catholics, to

his figure. The scene of pedagogical reflection on Don Bosco, reinforced thanks to his beatification and canonisation, was dominated by the general question of whether he had been just a great educator or could be considered an educational theorist. The starting positions were along the lines of Fascie, who interpreted Don Bosco in the context of the art of education, giving relative importance to the “absolute novelty” of the Preventive System. Some, also influenced by previous theoretical or ideological choices, saw Don Bosco in terms of Gentile’s criticism that he was a great educator but had not left behind works of theoretical reflection such that they could be included in the teacher training college curriculum.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, there were positions in favour of *Don Bosco pedagoga*,¹⁰⁸ decisively affirming “the existence in Don Bosco of a pedagogy, a systematic and coherent theoretical formulation of the problem of education”¹⁰⁹ and they went so far as to say that “Don Bosco’s doctrine and practice were organised in a completely autonomous and independent way from the Italian educational movement of his time.”¹¹⁰

The middle way was represented instead by those who saw in Don Bosco both an educator and an educational theorist belonging to the current of Catholic pedagogy that had regained momentum after *Divini Illius Magistri* (1929). Don Bosco was often described as an educationalist who was *sui generis*, a precursor of activism in line with the aforementioned Casotti’s “pedagogy of the Gospel”,¹¹¹ or as a proponent of integral pedagogy in line with the Jesuit Mario Barbera, who stated:

Don Bosco’s method encompasses in the most systematic, harmonious, gentle and powerful way the “subject of Christian education” – as the Holy Father’s Encyclical teaches – that is, “man whole and entire, soul united to body in unity of nature, with all his faculties natural and supernatural, such as right reason and revelation show him to be.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Cf. G. GENTILE, *Gli allarmi della “Civiltà Cattolica” e i pericoli della scuola Italiana*, in “Giornale Critico della Filosofia Italiana” 7 (1926) 5, 394-395.

¹⁰⁸ Title of an article used by Flores d’Arcais in the republication of *G. Bosco, Il metodo educativo*, ed. G. Flores d’Arcais, CEDAM, Padua 1941, XXI-XL. Cf. also G. FLORES D’ARCAIS, *La pedagogia di Don Bosco*, in *Studi pedagogici*, Liviana, Padua 1951, 59-73.

¹⁰⁹ FLORES D’ARCAIS, *La pedagogia di Don Bosco*, in BOSCO, *Il metodo educativo*, XXI.

¹¹⁰ FLORES D’ARCAIS, *Avvertenza*, in BOSCO, *Il metodo educativo*, V.

¹¹¹ To broaden the interpretations, it is interesting to compare with the reflections in P. BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo di don Bosco*, PAS Verlag, Zürich 21964, 39-41.

¹¹² M. BARBERA, *La pedagogia di san Giovanni Bosco*, in “La Civiltà Cattolica” 85 (1934) 2, 478-479.

Leônio da Silva and the neo-Thomist inspiration of the Higher Institute of Pedagogy

Major attempts at theorising by Salesians revolved around the Higher Institute of Pedagogy at Rebaudengo, Turin. The efforts of Carlos Leônio da Silva, a Brazilian Salesian called by the Rector Major to found the Institute of Pedagogy in 1939, were directed towards the perspective of pedagogy as a science of education. He came to Italy at the age of 51, with considerable teaching experience, condensed in his *Pedagogia: Manual teórico-prático para uso dos educadores, I: O educando e sua educação* in 1938.¹¹³ After his arrival in Europe, he undertook to update himself in various European pedagogical study centres. Noteworthy, for its implications, was his attempt to obtain a doctorate in pedagogy in Freiburg at the Eugène Dévaud and De Munnyck school. After the initial enthusiasm of the Freiburg educationalists for doctoral research on Don Bosco's pedagogical system, Leônio's work raised a fundamental problem for them: could a thesis containing theological and supernatural elements be accepted in a Faculty of Philosophy?¹¹⁴ In a letter to the Rector Major, Leônio commented as follows:

I was surprised by the observation that the thesis goes beyond the limits of philosophy, in so far as this is precisely my merit, that is, of giving a complete arrangement of the pedagogical work of a given author who wished to educate in a Christian way, and Christian pedagogy will always surpass and must surpass the limits of philosophy, making extensive use of supernatural principles and Revelation. [...] The fault was therefore not the thesis, but the subject or rather, the fault lies with the University, which has not yet separated the Pedagogy Faculty from the Philosophy Faculty.¹¹⁵

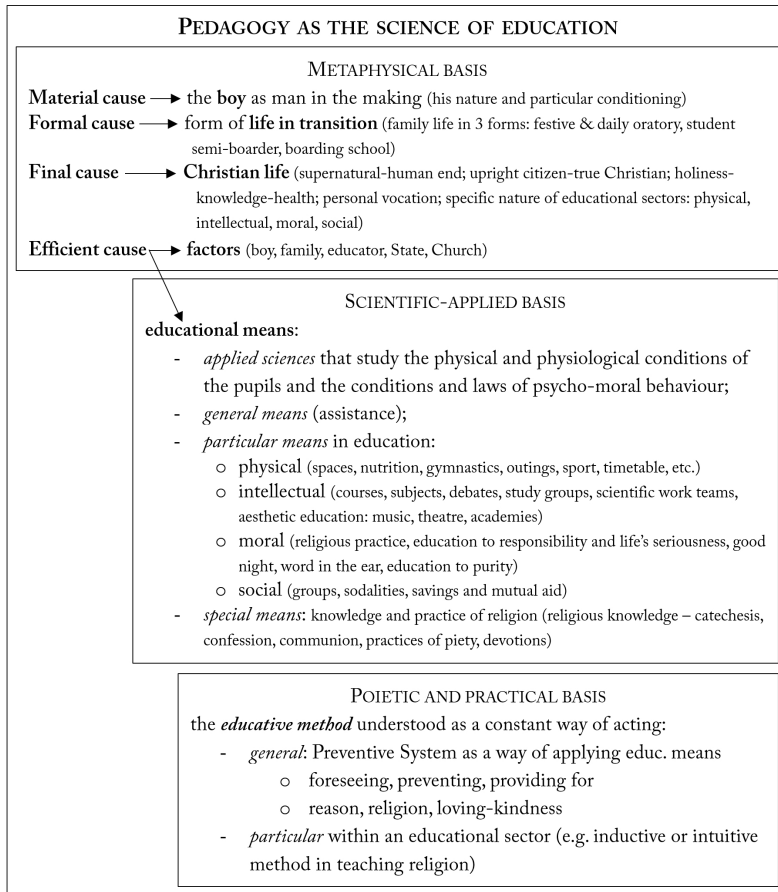
Leônio's thesis in Freiburg was unsuccessful, and Fr Ricaldone called him back to Turin to the Chair of Pedagogy in the Philosophy Faculty at the Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum. The experience in Freiburg had implications for the future of Salesian pedagogy, both at the level of teaching, since Leônio's research on Don Bosco was published only in the form of handouts for students, and at the level of organisational mentality that shaped the setting of the institute of pedagogy, (relatively) independent from the Philosophy

113 Cf. C. LEÔNIO DA SILVA, *Pedagogia. Manual teórico-prático para uso dos educadores, vol. 1: O educando e sua educação*, Livr. Salesiana, São Paulo 1938.

114 Cf. The judgement of Munnyck and Dévaud in J.M. PRELLEZO, *Carlos Leônio da Silva, educador y pedagogo. En el centenario del nacimiento (1887-1987)*, in "Orientamenti Pedagogici" 35 (1988) 1, 106-107.

115 C. LEÔNIO DA SILVA, *Lettera a don Ricaldone* (26 May 1940), in ASC 275.

Faculty. In the following pages we summarise Leôncio’s work in terms of its original and innovative structure. In *Il sistema pedagogico di don Bosco* he expresses his concept of “pedagogy understood as exact, complete, distinct science of education.”¹¹⁶ In *Figure C* we explain his pedagogical epistemology that attempts an “internal accommodation”, the basic scheme of the Aristotelian four causes with areas of experimental and practical pedagogy.¹¹⁷



*Figure C: Don Bosco’s pedagogical system according to Leôncio da Silva*¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ C. LEÔNÇIO DA SILVA, *Il sistema pedagogico di don Bosco*. Notes for the use of students at the Seminar on Pedagogy. Academic Year 1939-1940 XVIII, Eugenio Gili, Turin [1940], 4.

¹¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 4-5.

¹¹⁸ The Figure shows a summary of Leôncio da Silva’s, *Il sistema pedagogico di don Bosco*, made up of the systematic part (pp. 8-18) enriched with elements of Don Bosco’s pedagogical system (pp. 30-104).

Leôncio da Silva's attention to system, which was in tune with Fr Ricaldone's similar approach, was reflected both in his pedagogical production and in the organisation of ISP studies. For Leôncio, Barberis's *Appunti di pedagogia sacra* contained "a lot of good", and were mentioned in his works, but he felt that the subject matter in the book "was put together a bit haphazardly."¹¹⁹ He therefore took the liberty of disregarding Allievo's structure, adopted by Barberis, and arranging pedagogy within a neo-Thomist, experimental and practical framework. In addition to a change in how topics were organised, we note the absence of the notion of perfecting, which happened to be a very important one for the spiritualist current of pedagogy in Turin. Within the different sectors of education, compared to Barberis, Leôncio brought the aesthetic and the intellectual together and added a new section on social education. The need for gradual arrangement was applied to the teaching of Don Bosco's Pedagogical System as we see from the handouts mentioned earlier. The ordering of his argumentation and topics was only partially accomplished and he regarded the handouts to be merely an outline of a broader synthesis¹²⁰ projected around work that Leôncio did not complete and which ultimately resulted in Fr Ricaldone's two volumes in 1951.

There are some other specific emphases of Leôncio's synthesis that are worthy of mention. First of all, there is his strong belief in a *Catholic and religious pedagogy*, for which Leôncio was ready to sacrifice, as in fact happened, his doctorate in Freiburg. The "Catholicity" of his approach was reflected above all in the "final causality" that proposes Christian lifestyle as the general objective of education. Despite the insistence on Catholicity, his synthesis did not have the characteristics of the intransigence typical of the era, developing the concept of Christian life as being opposed to life "in the world". In fact, this section integrates natural goals with supernatural ones, the Don Bosco citizen-Christian pair and the threefold *santità-scienza-sanità* (holiness-knowledge-health). Attention to goals is then developed not only in the religious sphere but for the various sectors of education, starting with the physical, continuing with the intellectual and moral, and ending with the social goals of education. In harmony with the ideal of the "Christian life", seen as the final cause, reasoning is then focused on the "efficient cause" which sees the Church as one of the factors in education, and introduces the practice of religion as the first of the means of

119 Cf. J.M. PRELLEZO, *Introduzione*, in *Appunti di pedagogia di Giulio Barberis (1847-1927)*. Introduction, critical text and notes by José Manuel Prellezo. Afterword by Dariusz Grządziel, LAS, Rome 2017, 13.

120 Cf. LEÔNCIO DA SILVA, *Il sistema pedagogico di don Bosco*, 104.

moral education and proposes a “special means” which integrates catechetics with the practice of religion.¹²¹

By contrast with the later synthesis by Ricaldone, Leôncio proposed assistance as the “heart of Don Bosco’s system”, describing it as a general means of education “in the sense that it extends to the whole work of education and penetrates the different contingencies of the student’s life. [...] Without it, there is no work of education; there is only disorder and lack of education.”¹²² The breadth of this concept is also revealed in the arguments in favour of assistance. Beginning with the observation of the fundamental need for socialisation, he notes the situation of abandoned youth (= lack of assistance), and examines the nature of “youthful fickleness” as the source of most of the defects of youth. Assistance in this sense includes the themes of the educational relationship, care, the relationship of friendship, the interaction between different caregivers-educators, stating succinctly that “it is essentially life with young people.”¹²³ For the author, the importance of assistance implied a strong condemnation of forms of self government by the youngsters, though this was a pedagogical trend that had drawn the attention of his contemporaries.¹²⁴ The synthesis we find in this work is in line with Catholic pedagogy based on the educational relationship, placing loving-kindness at the top of the fundamental trilogy and affirming that for Don Bosco “education is first and foremost a work of love.”¹²⁵

The concept of pedagogy understood as the science of education and its tripartite division is also reflected in the proposals for the curriculum of the Turin Higher Institute of Pedagogy. The first sketch of the pedagogical curriculum reflected the thinking of the Rector Major, who made it clear: “Up to now our pedagogical studies have been carried out as best they could; continuing the tradition of Don Bosco, our [young Salesians] received their formation in practice. It’s time to fix this, to organise these studies better.”¹²⁶ A robust body of basic subjects was to guarantee the seriousness of pedagogical specialisation. In addition to teaching, Fr Leôncio emphasised the need for applications to educational practice, that is, reflection on experiences, exercises and practical training of an educational nature in the concrete setting of schools and

¹²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 13 and 43-49.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 75-76.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹²⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 78. In fact also Fr Ricaldone dedicated a part to it in his *Don Bosco educatore*. Cf. RICALDONE, *Don Bosco educatore*, vol. 1, 330-345.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹²⁶ *Cronaca dell’Istituto da 1940 a 1946*, in *Archivio FSE*.

other institutions dedicated to education.¹²⁷ Later, in 1945, the Statutes subdivided the formation curriculum at the ISP into:

1. *Main disciplines*: General philosophical pedagogy, Special practical pedagogy, General and special didactics, History of education and pedagogy;
2. *Auxiliary disciplines*: Biology, General experimental psychology, Special psychology of the age of development, Introduction to philosophy, Philosophy of education, theology of education, School policy, Sociology;
3. *Special disciplines*: Biotypology, Hygiene, Characterology, Developmental psychopathology, School architecture; Catechetics, Don Bosco's Preventive System.

Don Bosco educatore: 'magisterial' pronouncement and paradox

Peter Ricaldone's term of office concluded in pedagogical terms with the publication of *Don Bosco educatore*.¹²⁸ Even though the book takes up the title of Fr Cimatti's work, the approach, the sources, the argument and the emphases are different. Peter Ricaldone declares his intentions in the preface "to frame the true treasure of educational wisdom in an orderly fashion" and "to present Don Bosco as an educator above all in action, that is, objectively and not speculatively."¹²⁹ Aligned with this aim is also Ricaldone's plan to use the wealth of material contained in the nineteen volumes of the *Biographical Memoirs*, in fact the 1500 pages of his two volumes resort to at least 1300 quotes from the *Memoirs*. In reality the two volumes go beyond the declared intentions, and Ricaldone is proposing a magisterial document, part of the *Formazione Salesiana* series, more favourable to the thesis of Don Bosco than to Don Bosco the (mere) educator.¹³⁰

From an analysis of the materials found in the Salesian Central Archives, it seems that the process of elaboration of *Don Bosco educatore* can be reconstructed in four stages:

1. Gathering of material from the *Biographical Memoirs* and the *Bollettino Salesiano* as the work of Fr Leôncio da Silva who was coordinating the work of a group of

¹²⁷ Cf. G. MALIZIA – E. ALBERICH (eds.), *A servizio dell'educazione. La Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione dell'Università Pontificia Salesiana*, LAS, Rome 1984, 14-17; PRELLEZO, *Studio e riflessione pedagogica nella Congregazione salesiana*, 72.

¹²⁸ Cf. P. RICALDONE, *Don Bosco educatore*, Libreria Dottrina Cristiana, Colle Don Bosco (Asti) 1951.

¹²⁹ RICALDONE, *Don Bosco educatore*, V and VII.

¹³⁰ In fact, one of the drafts of the publication also includes the title "Don Bosco educatore e pedagoga". Cf. ASC B0950101.

Salesian students at the ISP in Rebaudengo. The quotations of pedagogical interest were annotated on five thousand cards organised according to the scheme adopted in his handouts on *Don Bosco's pedagogical system*. At the beginning of 1945, Leôncio foresaw a possible publication within two years at most, on the occasion of the centenary of the foundation of the Oratory at Valdocco. In order to arrive at the volume provisionally entitled *Don Bosco pedagogista e educatore*, the author used a compilation approach which involved the massive contribution of the final year students of pedagogy. The methodological proposal was set forth by Leôncio in the following manner:

Having ordered the cards according to a scientific pedagogical plan, which is the one we follow in school, we distributed all the cards according to the topics and we came up with a provisional scheme. This could be filled in with Don Bosco's own words, and it would be up to the compiler to present the topic and link it with a few words.¹³¹

This first draft envisaged an introductory chapter on *don Bosco pedagogista*, followed by five sets of reflections: Salesian education in general, the pupil (material cause), the purpose of education (final cause), educational action (efficient cause), the fruits of education (formal cause). Finally, the volume would conclude with a chapter on “Don Bosco the educator”.¹³² In the notebook with the quotations from the *Biographical Memoirs* we note a strong emphasis on loving-kindness which, as a topic, takes up almost of third of the quotations.¹³³

2. Change of scheme and first draft. Leôncio's material was reorganised in a way similar to Barberis, subdivided into sectors of education and into some additional parts in which topics dear to Fr Ricaldone were developed.¹³⁴ A first concise draft of the pedagogical argument, in just 47 pages, was added to the scheme. This unsigned document, entitled *Il Sistema educativo di don Bosco*, was the valuable extract of pedagogical core topics by the ultimate author, who in all probability can be identified as being Peter Ricaldone, given that he says in the text that he is the “successor of St John Bosco. But I also feel the tremendous responsibility of this office that demands, among my other duties, that I preserve and pass on the entire pedagogical thinking of

¹³¹ LEÔNCIO DA SILVA, *Lettera a Pietro Ricaldone* (31 January 1945) in ASC B0950205.

¹³² Cf. *Don Bosco pedagogista ed educatore*. Attached to the letter to Peter Ricaldone (31 January 1945), 1-13 in ASC B0950205.

¹³³ Cf. *Appunti di pedagogia pratica secondo gli insegnamenti e gli esempi di S. Giovanni Bosco estratti dalle Memorie Biografiche, Parte I: Insegnamenti. Parla S. Giovanni Bosco*, 7-18 in ASC B0950202.

¹³⁴ Cf. *Il Sistema educativo di don Bosco*, in ASC B0950101.

Don Bosco to future generations.”¹³⁵ This is a valuable document of synthesis that does not yet contain the quotations from the *Biographical Memoirs* but lets us glimpse the nuts and bolts of Ricaldone’s reasoning.

3. Development of the final preface and introduction by the Rector Major.¹³⁶

The Archives contain the first manuscript¹³⁷ and further corrections of drafts.¹³⁸ The central topic is the question of Don Bosco the educator and/or educationalist, a topic that Ricaldone had already tackled over 20 years during the classes he had given on pedagogy at the studentate at the Crocetta.¹³⁹ Don Bosco’s declarations to the insistent questions of the rector of the seminary at Montpellier that he did not know much about his method are interpreted as an act of humility and restricted to the ascetic field of spiritual discernment, and not related to his educational method.¹⁴⁰ Against interpretations that went back to Fascie’s work, Ricaldone insists on the topics to do with Don Bosco’s pedagogical science and presents the founder as a writer on pedagogical subjects in strong final tones:

From what we have said, the true meaning of Don Bosco’s words is finally clear and unexceptionable, and we hope that from now on they will not be violated by interpretations that distort their true meaning while at the same time being an offence to the great educator.¹⁴¹

4. Reception of feedback on drafts of the book, still in typewritten form but already containing many of the bits and pieces drawn from the *Biographical Memoirs*.¹⁴² Reviewers, who had replied between June and October 1951, pointed to some

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³⁶ Cf. RICALDONE, *Don Bosco educatore*, V-IX and 1-59.

¹³⁷ Cf. *Don Bosco educatore. Introduzione*, in ASC B0950101.

¹³⁸ Cf. *Don Bosco educatore. Prefazione*, in ASC B0950101.

¹³⁹ Cf. *Lezioni di pedagogia pratica salesiana impartite dal Rev.mo don Peter Ricaldone nello studentato teologico internazionale della Crocetta in Torino durante l'anno scolastico ... e raccolto dagli uditori*, in ASC B0950202. Interesting are the two definitions of pedagogy, one speculative which “constitutes that complex of certain and evident knowledge concerning education” and the other practical “which deals with the application of theoretical principles.” In this framework, Don Bosco’s pedagogy is seen “as a system of activities concerning the work of education and precisely in order to establish and determine these activities, Don Bosco wrote admirable pages”, therefore a rather practical pedagogy. Cf. *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *Don Bosco educatore. Introduzione*, in ASC B0950101, 6-9.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁴² Cf. *Osservazioni di alcuni confratelli ai quali fu inviata la conferenza su Don Bosco educatore per averne un parere*, in ASC B0950104. Among the eight reviews in the archives, six are signed by the following Salesians: Andrea Gennaro (who also writes on behalf of Nazareno Camilleri, dean of the PAS), Carlos Leôncio da Silva, Giacomo Lorenzini, A. Mancini, Evaristo Marcoaldi and Paolo Scelsi.

inaccuracies, offered their thoughts, and agreed almost unanimously on the frequent repetitions, prolixity of style, lack of continuity in drafts and the lack of proportion between sections and chapters. Carlos Leôncio, for example, made a general summary observation:

A certain freedom of exposition in which the arguments or the subject matter is not presented according to rigour, development and logical concatenation, but according to more practical, almost occasional affinities and associations, demonstrating rather a concern not to leave practical and contingent aspects of the question in oblivion. A very irregular and disproportionate structure in many parts.¹⁴³

5. Final draft of the work published in November 1951.¹⁴⁴ It seems that a number of the detailed observations had been accepted and that the overall structure, an approximation of which we find in Andrea Gennaro's letter,¹⁴⁵ had been radically modified. In particular, it seems that the indications of an anonymous reviewer (identifiable, however, as Fr Eugenio Ceria both by his handwriting and by the fact that he was mentioned in the list of reviewers) had a strong impact on the rewriting of the text in the strategic part on "educational means". The reviewer suggested including some "theoretical notions about the nature and necessity of the educator's authority: even though Don Bosco did not speak of this *ex professo*."¹⁴⁶ At the same time, in the handwritten notes he pointed out the overabundance of content on assistance and suggested abandoning Leôncio's division of the risks linked to kindness between "loving too much" and "loving too little". This anonymous reviewer is one of the few who did not accuse the work of being excessive in its use of quotations, and its heterogeneous nature. Since it is probably Fr Ceria, compiler of the last volumes of the Biographical Memoirs, the choice is justified as follows: "Perhaps it is better to foresee a difficulty. There will seem to be too many quotes and too many biographical memories. But it must be pointed out that this work presents Don Bosco the educator in action, that is, objectively not speculatively; therefore it is natural that there are so many of Don Bosco's sayings and deeds."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Cf. LEÔNCIO DA SILVA, *Osservazioni Generali*, in ASC B0950104, 1.

¹⁴⁴ It seems that Peter Ricaldone saw to the final changes and proofread them for himself. Cf. *La morte del IV Successore di S. Giovanni Bosco don Pietro Ricaldone*, in "Bollettino Salesiano" 76 (1952) 1, 2.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. A. GENNARO, *Lettera a Pietro Ricaldone* (30 July 1951), in ASC B0950104, 3-10.

¹⁴⁶ [E. CERIA] *Don Bosco educatore. Aggiunta*, in ASC B0950104, 1

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

It is understandable that the drafting process had greatly influenced the content, which was not easy to read and demonstrated the characteristics and paradoxes already reported by the reviewers. The insistence on completeness and objectivity that had to be guaranteed by the multiple references to the *Memoirs* was a choice that ended up being to the disadvantage of a logical and simple scheme for organising the content. Ricaldone's intention of publishing a "final draft"¹⁴⁸ of Salesian pedagogy could not therefore allow omissions, since completeness was one of the basic criteria. Here we also find the greatest paradox of the two volumes, the gap between Ricaldone's insistence on Don Bosco the educationalist and the more doctrinal than scientific and pedagogical approach involving so many pages without apparent systematic organisation. *Don Bosco educatore* is more the case of a collection of testimonials drawn from the *Memoirs* without a critical approach nor a theoretically justified order.¹⁴⁹

One very interesting and central question, which follows the evolutionary trajectory of the work, is the treatment of the "means of education". In fact, in the different versions there are significant variations with respect to the final text that reveal the inner tension around the concept of assistance, which is played out in an almost dialectical relationship between loving kindness and discipline.

Starting with the material collected by Leôncio and the students at Rebaudengo, in the first draft Ricaldone develops a concept of assistance seen as a general means of education with the predominant connotation of loving-kindness.¹⁵⁰ Later, under the influence of the comments provided by the reviewers, and consistent with his strong and applied lines of government, Ricaldone changes the text by foregrounding discipline as a general means of education. The end result, probably also under the contingencies of the final weeks of the author's life, remains ambiguous, with a dialectical solution between discipline and loving-kindness. The majority of the arguments are in favour of loving-kindness but nominally, the authority-discipline pair seems superior to this. A comparison of the two versions illustrates well the interpretive difficulties of the final text:

¹⁴⁸ *Don Bosco educatore. Prefazione*, in ASC B0950101, 1.

¹⁴⁹ In *Don Bosco educatore* the *Appunti di Pedagogia Sacra* or other more systematic writings on Salesian education are only mentioned a few times. Quotes from the BM make up more than three quarters of the bibliographical references of the work.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. *Il Sistema educativo di don Bosco*, in ASC B0950101, 34 and 41-42.

<p><i>Il Sistema educativo di don Bosco</i>, in ASC B0950101, 34. 41-42</p>	<p>RICALDONE, <i>Don Bosco educatore</i>, vol. 1, 285-287</p>
<p>It is well known that it is not enough to have good principles, good ideas, good concepts of the things to be done; in addition to the means to execute them, one needs mainly the tactics, the practical technique in applying them. In other words, it always takes method. Many times the best principles are compromised, the best means are frustrated because people have not been able to apply them. They have not had the <i>savoir faire</i>, have not intuited the technique of application.</p>	<p>It is not enough to have good principles, clear ideas, well-developed concepts about things to be done: in addition to the possibility of translating all this into practice, it takes the technique, or rather the special tactic and spirit that gives life and value to the so-called method. At times principles were compromised, and means of undoubted effectiveness frustrated because people did not know how to apply them or did not intuit the right way to implement them practically.</p>
<p>Now, if this happens for all human endeavours, all enterprises of art and industry, it is even more so in this enterprise of education, this true art of arts in which no material thing is at stake, but the very human person. The educator does not work in wood, marble or iron: the educator works with the minds, hearts, wills, souls of his students. You must therefore have your hands covered with velvet.</p>	<p>Now if this happens in all human endeavours, in the enterprises of industry and art, it is all the more true in this sublime mission of the educator, in this art of the arts, on which depends, not a material or artistic interest, however important that may be, but the perfecting of the human person himself. The educator does not work with wood, marble, or iron, but rather with the minds and hearts, the will and the soul of his students: and for such a high and delicate task it is necessary to cover his hands with velvet.</p>

<p>Since education is the art most closely related to the human person, and directed especially to the intelligence and will, its methodology must be marked, must be dominated by the very needs of this mind and will. In a word, the means of education must always be understood and desired by the students.</p>	<p>Since education is the art most closely related to the human person, and directed especially to the intelligence and will, its methodology must be based on and inspired by the very needs of these minds and wills. In a word, the means of education must always be understood and accepted by the students themselves.</p>
<p>It is in this light that we want to view the entire Salesian educational methodology. We want to grasp its entire soul. Now if we consider Don Bosco's entire educational system, his teachings, his writings, his entire pedagogical action, in the light of charity as we have seen, we are left with nothing to assign as the soul and the immediate, dominant principle of all his educational action other than this very charity which he himself made into loving-kindness.</p>	<p>It is precisely in this light that it is good to view and examine the Salesian educational methodology, grasping, so to speak, its entire soul: and precisely in this light, according to Don Bosco's thought and practice, it is necessary to interpret first of all the principle of authority, which in the educational environment keeps discipline flourishing.</p>

Figure D: Variants of the text of Fr Ricaldone's Don Bosco Educatore

Don Bosco educatore is a work that clearly documents the mindset stemming from the so-called 'collegialisation' of Salesian education – in other words, based on the boarding school approach. This was further reinforced by the limitations imposed by twenty years of fascism. It is paradigmatic that the habitat for social education, a new sector compared to Barberis, is seen only through family life within the boarding school, and that things such as Don Bosco's fatherliness, companionship, the social value of boarding school life and play, good and bad companions, etc. be explored, arriving at applications only in relation to the spirit of economy and savings, the Mutual Aid Society and etiquette. A demonstration of the effectiveness of social education in the boarding school would be the Past Pupils and their sense of gratitude.¹⁵¹ The intention

¹⁵¹ Cf. RICALDONE, *Don Bosco educatore*, vol. 2, 191-244.

to faithfully and completely preserve Don Bosco's educational system led the author to not making any reference to the social doctrine of the Church, to the oratory congresses and to the wealth of activities from the first twenty years of the twentieth century. In this context, it is clear why Fr Ricaldone argued with the only contemporary experience he spoke about: self-government by young people in the cities as an emblematic issue for interpreting assistance and discipline.¹⁵² Dedicating fifteen pages to it, he concluded that self-government is in contrast with nature, civil traditions, with the laws of God and the Church.¹⁵³

Some typically Ricaldonian emphases and other summaries characteristic of an era influenced by *Divini Illius Magistri* are noteworthy. There are clear influences of Mario Casotti's approach on the basic structure that proposes "Christian education as Don Bosco intended it, that is, deeply, completely, exquisitely Christian and Catholic."¹⁵⁴ Also following the Casotti line is the re-evaluation of activist pedagogy that sees Don Bosco as a precursor to the active schools in his Gospel method.

It seems to us that his work responded more to the needs of the 1930s than to the 1950s. *Don Bosco educatore* was published as Fr Ricaldone's swan song, a document of "educational magisterium" added to Fr Barberis's *Appunti* for study in the novitiate. Later, pedagogical reflection at the PAS during the 1950s went in a different direction and in less than four years Pietro Braido had published his *Sistema preventivo di don Bosco* that marked the beginning of another era and a turning point in Salesian pedagogical studies, advancing beyond the crusade mentality against atheistic pedagogy.

Albert Caviglia – a dissenting voice with future potential

Albert Caviglia, born in 1868 and who entered the Oratory in 1881, was part of the generation of Salesians who had known Don Bosco when they were boys. Having Don Bosco as his confessor for three years was, for Caviglia, a decisive experience for his view of Don Bosco and the Salesian rector in general. At first self-taught in history and literature, at 37 he began to study literature at the University of Turin, a respected pupil and later friend of Pietro Fedele, Minister of Education from 1924, who included Don Bosco in the teacher training curriculum in Italy.

¹⁵² Cf. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 330-345.

¹⁵³ Cf. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 344.

¹⁵⁴ RICALDONE, *Don Bosco educatore*, vol. 1, 35.

Caviglia began his commitment to Salesian studies in 1915 as a member of the Commission for the publication of Don Bosco's works, invited by the Councillor for Schools, Francesco Cerruti.¹⁵⁵ Eleven years later, Philip Rinaldi reconfirmed him in the role, appointing him as the editor of Don Bosco's writings. Fr Caviglia went to work and the series of eight volumes of *Scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco* began to be published from 1929 ending with two posthumous volumes.¹⁵⁶

In his efforts as editor he demonstrated a "wise, balanced, and from many points of view, a forward-looking critical ability for critical evaluation."¹⁵⁷ Despite the limitations of being close in time to Don Bosco which did not allow for freedom of expression, and the lack of complete documentation, Caviglia's production on Don Bosco became a classic with the following characteristics: responsibility in accessing documents; a gaze that went beyond aspects tied to the reconstruction of sources; a calm and elegant interpretation; spiritual attention to interpreting the preventive system.¹⁵⁸

To understand the relationship between education and spirituality in Caviglia's interpretation, the exchange of letters with Eugenio Ceria, who questioned him on how to proceed in his work on Don Bosco's life of prayer, is indicative. Caviglia expresses his fundamental opinion: "Everything that refers to Don Bosco's spiritual personality must be deduced from the biographical elements and from the imprint left and impressed on his educational practice [...] not from his books. [...] Because we are sure that Don Bosco never instilled anything other than what he himself did."¹⁵⁹ This observation is valid not only for Don Bosco's spirituality but also his educational practice. Caviglia also states another symmetrical criterion: the preventive system in education can only be fully understood by taking into account the importance of religious motivations, the

155 Cf. *Lettera di F. Cerruti ad A. Caviglia (19 marzo 1915)*, in C. SEMERARO, *Alberto Caviglia 1859-1943. I documenti e i libri del primo editore di don Bosco tra erudizione storica e spiritualità pedagogica*, SEL, Torino 1994, 110.

156 The series *Opere e scritti editi ed inediti di "Don Bosco" nuovamente pubblicati e riveduti secondo le edizioni originali e manoscritti superstiti* contains the following works with notes and introductory studies of significant extent: *Storia sacra*, *Storia ecclesiastica*, *Le vite dei papi*, *Storia d'Italia*, *La vita di Savio Domenico*, *Il "Magone Michele"*, *La vita di Besucco Francesco*. Cf. The complete bibliography in SEMERARO, *Alberto Caviglia*, 169-182.

157 SEMERARO, *Alberto Caviglia*, 43.

158 Cf. G.B. BORINO, *Don Bosco. Sei scritti e un modo di vederlo*, Extra-commercial edition, Rome 1940, 15-16. NB: Borino's writing deserves attention for its historical-critical awareness that goes beyond the traditional celebratory rhetoric of the writings on Don Bosco of the 1930s.

159 *Lettera di A. Caviglia a E. Ceria (30 marzo 1929)*, in SEMERARO, *Alberto Caviglia*, 130-131.

desire for the salvation for souls. Don Bosco's spiritual form lies precisely in animating daily life with a spiritual sense, not applying a logic of duty.¹⁶⁰

However, needing to suggest to Fr Ceria some of Don Bosco's writings, Caviglia mentions the biographical narratives of the young people formed by the Saint as the most original. In fact, Caviglia builds up an approach to interpreting Don Bosco seen as a "narrative educationalist", implemented through the 'Lives' of his youngsters that Don Bosco wrote, and partially taken up again in the 1950s by Pietro Braido and recently by Aldo Giraudò.¹⁶¹ Caviglia states in his final monumental work of over 600 pages that in the 'Life' of Dominic Savio "one finds reflected all of Don Bosco's spiritual and holy self, and all the spirit he poured into his work."¹⁶² In fact, from Dominic's biography, Caviglia reconstructs all the points of Don Bosco's Salesian education within a "pedagogy of holiness" that is an intimately spiritual pedagogy: prayer, union with God, Marian devotion, Eucharistic life, life of ecstasy, charism, heroism, apostolic commitment, companionship, friendship, sacrifice, suffering, the last things.¹⁶³

Caviglia's work on the *Life of Dominic Savio* also received negative reactions that were crucial to the success of the work. On the one hand, in Ceria's opinion, the study was too long and dense, so it would not have been read or circulated among the Salesians;¹⁶⁴ on the other hand, there were the reservations expressed by the Rector Major. Peter Ricaldone, who had been in contact with Caviglia since the time of his appointment as Councillor for Vocational Schools, appreciated some of his writings as "conscientious, profound, firmly balanced works, pervaded by the purest Salesian spirit."¹⁶⁵ In the work on Dominic Savio, however, he touched on a nerve: the importance of confession as part of the rector's service. For Caviglia it was a fundamental aspect, also because of his direct experience with Don Bosco; for Ricaldone, instead, the

¹⁶⁰ Cf. A. CAVIGLIA, *Don Bosco. Profilo storico*, SEI, Torino, 21934, 25.

¹⁶¹ Cf. A. GIRAUDO, *Maestri e discepoli in azione*, in *G. Bosco, Vite di giovani. Le biografie di Domenico Savio, Michele Magone e Francesco Besucco*. Introductory essay and historical notes by Aldo Giraudò, LAS, Rome 2012, 5-35. Cf. also A. GIRAUDO, *Direzione spirituale in san Giovanni Bosco. Contenuti e percorsi dell'accompagnamento spirituale dei giovani nella prassi di don Bosco*, in F. ATTARD – M.A. GARCÍA (eds.), *L'accompagnamento spirituale. Itinerario pedagogico spirituale in chiave salesiana al servizio dei giovani*, LDC, Turin 2014, 161-172.

¹⁶² [A. CAVIGLIA (ed.),] *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di "Don Bosco" nuovamente pubblicati e riveduti secondo le edizioni originali e manoscritti superstiti*, vol. 4: *La vita di Savio Domenico*, SEI, Torino 1942, 590.

¹⁶³ Cf. *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di "Don Bosco"*, vol. 4: *La vita di Savio Domenico*, 237-589.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *Lettera di E. Ceria ad A. Caviglia* (7 June 1943), in SEMERARO, *Alberto Caviglia*, 145-146.

¹⁶⁵ *Lettera di P. Ricaldone ad A. Caviglia* (9 December 1922), in SEMERARO, *Alberto Caviglia*, 118.

emphasis on the rector as confessor would have produced “very serious consequences” in the circumstances of the 1940’s when the rector could no longer hear confessions, weakening the role of the rector who was seen predominantly as the “official guardian of the religious spirit”: “Fr Caviglia’s statements [...] could serve as a pretext for cracks and perhaps for cracks of an irreparable nature in the great edifice of the Salesian Society.”¹⁶⁶ Thus, not even two months before his death, sent off to Bagnolo Piemonte with the Crocetta students because of Turin was being bombed, Albert Caviglia wrote the Rector Major of his sorrow at the reactions to a work that he intended as “the definitive catechism of Salesianity”,¹⁶⁷ but that had neither been recommended nor valued as he would have expected. In fact, Ricaldone’s *Don Bosco educatore* made no mention of it and it had to wait for Pietro Braido’s first study in 1955 for it to be appreciated.

¹⁶⁶ Lettera di P. Ricaldone ad A. Caviglia (10 September 1943), in SEMERARO, *Alberto Caviglia*, 154.

¹⁶⁷ Lettera di A. Caviglia a P. Ricaldone (14 September 1943), in SEMERARO, *Alberto Caviglia*, 157.

Tools and resources

Chronological table

	<i>World history</i>	<i>Salesian history</i>	<i>Salesian pedagogy publications</i>
	communist revolution in Russia	1917	Rinaldi brings the first VDB together
	End of first World War	1918	
	Spanish Flu epidemic	1919	
	USA, women's right to vote	1920	monument to Don Bosco (Valdocco)
		1921	beginning of the mission in North-East India
Pius XI elected Pope; Mussolini rises to power		1922	Philip Rinaldi elected Rector Major
Gentile's school reform (Italy)		1923	large missionary expeditions (>3500 SDBs leave over next 15 months)
		1924	Auffray , <i>Une méthode d'éducation</i>
Dewey, <i>Experience and Nature</i>		1925	mission in Japan begins
failure of general strike in Great Britain		1926	50 th of Cooperators - congress in Turin
		1927	Meeting of directors of oratories
Pius XI, <i>Rerum Ecclesiae</i> (missions)		1928	
Great Depression, Church-Italy conciliation		1929	Don Bosco's beatification, Caviglia
Pius XI, <i>Divini Illius Magistri</i> (education)		1930	beginning of series <i>Scritti di DB</i>
Catholic Action, only young Caths. org. in IT		1931	
		1932	Peter Ricaldone elected Rector Major
Hitler becomes German Chancellor		1933	founding of Salesian Oblates SOSC
		1934	Don Bosco's canonisation
end of Mao Tse-Tung's "long march"		1935	
beginning of civil war in Spain		1936	
		1937	Asian foundations: Sisters of Charity, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
Night of Broken Glass (Germany)		1938	GC15 (theme: formation houses)
beginning 2nd W. War.; Pius XII elected Pope		1939	Leôncio da Silva , <i>Il sistema pedagogico di don Bosco</i>
Defeat of France		1940	Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum erected
invasion of Soviet Union		1941	beginning of the "Catechetical Crusade", LDC publications, Istituto Superiore di Pedagogia PAS
Battle of Midway		1942	founding of Missionaries of MHC
Maritain writes <i>Education at the Crossroads</i>		1943	
Normandy invasion		1944	
end of 2nd W. War, atomic bomb		1945	Leôncio works on "DB pedagogista"
		1946	
Marshall Plan - reconstruction of Europe		1947	GC16 (pedagogy PAS, cinema...)
Mahatma Gandhi assassinated		1948	Sisters of the Immaculate founded
George Orwell writes "1984"		1949	
"beatniks" in California		1950	communist persecutions (13% of SDBs)
European integration begins		1951	canonisation of M.D. Mazzarello
		1952	Renato Ziggliotti elected Rector Major

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Online resources

Sources, documents, research, full-text publications, photographic materials, related to this chapter.¹⁶⁸



Full bibliography, index of authors, index of topics for the entire publication.¹⁶⁹



¹⁶⁸ Cf. salesian.online/pedagogia3

¹⁶⁹ Cf. salesian.online/pedagogia-dopo-db

4

Vatican II: Before, during, after (1952–1978)

The 1950s were characterised by hope and renewed energy tied to post-war growth both in civil society and in the Church. In the so-called years of the “burning bush” there was convergence on trajectories for the future in search of a just society far from every form of violence, the memory of which was still very much alive. In the ecclesiastical field too, despite the centralist style of government of Pius XII, openings of a more European than Roman nature were noted. Within youth organisations there was a growth in traditional associations, but some events, such as the resignation of the president of Catholic Action youth, Mario Rossi, highlighted the internal tensions and the growing desire of young people for more resolute change. It was a trend that would become the driving force of the changes and tumult of the subsequent 1960s, in which the novelty of the Second Vatican Council, the return to the sources, idealism and some socialist utopias with radicalism typical of the younger generations would be mixed.¹

Social, educational and ecclesial context around Vatican Council II

The reconstruction of new social, economic and political balances after the tragic world conflict was certainly the fundamental reason for the history of the 1950s. The “three worlds” model can be used to represent the framework of international politics. It

¹ Cf. G. MARTINA, *Storia della Chiesa. Da Lutero ai nostri giorni*, vol. 4: *L'età contemporanea*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1995, 249-284 and the part on “la crisi della cultura intransigente (1958-2013)” in D. MENOZZI, *Storia della Chiesa*, vol. 4: *L'età contemporanea*, EDB, Bologna 2019.

remained valid throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Within it, the Cold War was the fundamental dynamic that characterised the relationship between the “first democratic world”, with a liberal and increasingly globalised economy, and the “second socialist world” of the Soviet Union with its satellites and allies. In third world countries, however, there was a demographic boom in the midst of the dynamics of achieving political independence, and prospects for the future were still painted in bright colours.

Post-war reconstruction and growing world consciousness

Soviet-American polarisation diminished the role of post-war Europe in the world, which moved decisively, following the principle of self-determination of colonised peoples. The “great” colonialism ended and the new “third world”, which emerged more strongly at the Bandung conference in 1955, had to deal with the consequences of the different national approaches to decolonisation. A first effort was carried out by Great Britain, which adopted the approach of preparation for independence in its colonies, aiming at the Commonwealth understood as a community of sovereign nations. France, on the other hand, opposed decolonisation until the last moment with a policy of assimilation and economic dependence that eventually ended up in conflicts (Indochina and Algeria), resulting in a very problematic relationship in the future with the former colonies. Some of the newly emerging Third World states became part of the Communist International (Cominterm), while others were moving along the trajectories of an organisation that was formally democratic but authoritarian in reality.²

The post-war period saw the consolidation of US hegemony in the First World and the spread of the “American myth”, which then influenced culture, music, fiction and film worldwide. An American imprint could also be seen in the creation of global coordination bodies such as the United Nations Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. American coordination, including through the Marshall Plan, contributed to the economic stability of the First World and the reconstruction of Western Europe. Already in 1951, Western Europe’s economic production was 30% greater than the pre-war level. From a Catholic perspective, not only reconstruction and economic growth, but above all the strength of the Christian-Democratic parties in European politics created a context that gave hope for the building of a better world. In Latin America, the economic supremacy of the United

² B. DROZ, *Storia della decolonizzazione nel XX secolo*, Mondadori, Milan 2007.

States was strongly felt and, also for this reason, the 1950s and 1960s were a rather unstable political period that oscillated between authoritarianism, often of a military nature, populism and liberalism.

In the Salesian Congregation, the 1950s were generally characterised by the stability of Ricaldone's teaching and organisational structure and by the growth of personnel and activities of the youth apostolate. It is enough to follow the Salesian sodalities magazines, encouraged in their activity by the canonisation of Dominic Savio in 1954, or the curricula of the FMA Salesian Active School to realise the industrious growth of those years. At the level of the First and Third World, the growth of the Congregation manifested itself above all in Asia, and Fr Renato Ziggiotti's term of office as Rector Major was characterised by his travels and the growing worldwide sense of the Salesian charism.³ The generally optimistic picture was not far from triumphalist positions that looked at the future through the lens of perpetual growth, large institutes, world expansion, new causes of canonisation introduced, etc. The symbol of this mentality could be identified in the construction of Colle Don Bosco or the Cinecittà Institute in Rome with its modern Temple of Don Bosco in tune with the functionalist architecture of the neighbourhood that had arisen around the famous film studios. Even the grandiose buildings of the Roman headquarters of the Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum, designed in the second half of the 1950s, were affected by the mentality of a numerical and organisational grandeur that trusted in continuous growth.

The situation in the "Second World" was, however, completely different. The Stalinist communism of the 1950s, very harsh in its treatment of the Catholic Church, marked the history of several Salesian provinces: the China provinces closed, the Salesian houses in China, Vietnam, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia were requisitioned and expropriated. The strategies for dealing with the regime could be simplified into three models. Under the harshest persecution, as in the Soviet Union (see the houses in Lithuania) and China, the only solution was to flee, as there was nothing left: the houses were confiscated and the remaining confreres would be expelled, deported or killed. In other contexts, such as in Czechoslovakia where being a member of a religious order was legally judged a crime, the confreres had to go underground: apparently they were workers, engineers, teachers and carried out their apostolic mission in secret. In other Central European countries such as Yugoslavia, Poland and Hungary

³ Cf. R. ZIGGIOTTI, *Ho visto don Bosco in tutti i continenti*, in "Bollettino Salesiano" 79 (1955) 17, 333-342.

the works were lost, but the Salesians could exercise their ministry to some extent in diocesan parishes.⁴

Developments in Catholic pedagogy until the mid-1960s

Catholic pedagogy developed after the war, inspired by the thinking of well-known writers such as Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier or Romano Guardini. Their reflections, coming chiefly from the 1930s, can be placed, as Giorgio Chiosso rightly does, in the context of the response to the perception of a crisis of civilisation. Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* gave the first signal by describing the decline of old Europe. His perception of the crisis, other than the inadequacy of the scientific model,⁵ could also be seen in the dilemma between the capitalist “individualistic bourgeois man” and the “collectivist totalitarian man”, a dilemma that was very much current in the “iron curtain” era. We need to note that Catholic pedagogy in Italy was not fully part of the current of personalistic thinking mentioned, still tied as it was to developments and experimentation of the active school.⁶

The first personalistic stimuli of *Esprit* magazine, which came into existence around Emmanuel Mounier, moved decidedly in the direction of criticism of bourgeois individualism, describing it as a metaphysics of loneliness. But the magazine also strongly criticised the totalitarian systems that enslaved man to the masses by rejecting the fundamental category of “person”. Western Christianity, feudal or bourgeois in its forms, was in crisis and, according to *Esprit's* writers, what was needed was the re-emergence of a Christianity that saw the person as the centre and driving force of the universe. For Mounier, the person was not to be thought of according to traditional rational criteria, but had to be conceived of as an expression of the open, dynamic, and mysterious “presence in me” of the human being, which calls for the overcoming,

⁴ Cf. Summaries in S. ZIMNIAK – G. LOPARCO (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana in Europa negli anni difficili del XX secolo*. Acts of the European Seminar on the History of the Salesian Work Krakow, 31 October - 4 November 2007, LAS, Rome 2008; WIRTH, *Da don Bosco ai giorni nostri*, 389-393.

⁵ Among the most authoritative contributions cf. E. HUSSERL, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, in “*Philosophia*” 1 (1936) 1, 77-176. for a contextualisation and re-evaluation of Husserl's contribution cf. H. SEIDL, *Kritische Bemerkungen zu Husserls Schrift “Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie”*, in “*Studia Philosophiae Christianae*” 36 (2000) 2, 317-339.

⁶ Cf. G. CHIOSSO, *Novecento pedagogico. Profilo delle teorie educative contemporanee*, La Scuola, Brescia 1997, 223-239.

convergence, and unification of all his actions. Mounier took up many elements of the Platonic-Augustinian tradition seen through the new understanding of phenomenology and existentialism. The school in those years was considered too centralised by the State at the organisational level, too rationalistic and notional at the didactic level and too tied to a morality of Kantian duty in ethical terms. Mounierian personalism instead proposed education as the maturation of a personal vocation that takes place in a community context (family, school, environment), configuring itself as a journey to self-discovery and the commitment of responsibility towards others.⁷

Jacques Maritain, in his *Humanisme intégral*, harking back to the second half of the 1930s, integrated neo-Thomist reflection with reflections on secularism, promoting democratic government strategies, a combination of rather happy choices for the development of the West in the 1950s. The work that had the greatest influence, however, was *Education at the Crossroads*, which is a collection of lessons he gave at Yale University during the war in 1943. The title expresses the work's central idea: there are two possible paths to take in education: one looks at the individual formed by natural evolution and social influences, while the other thinks of the human being as a person who comes into self-possession through intelligence and freedom.

In the first part of *Education at the Crossroads*, Maritain denounces the errors of the education of his time: disregard of and false ideas concerning the ends, pragmatism, sociology, intellectualism, voluntarism and, finally, the notion that everything can be taught.⁸ The errors mentioned express the inadequacy of the empiricist-technocratic model of education. Instead, the author proposes an education that harmonises the classical and Christian tradition with scientific knowledge and modern attention to freedom, then suggesting educational pathways that consider human beings in their entirety, body and soul, nature and super-nature, knowledge and action, freedom and grace. Maritain hopes that once humanity has overcome the dehumanising tragedies of totalitarianism and war, it will thirst for a “new humanism” which can be achieved through integral education. To ensure this integrity, the philosopher's project provides fundamental rules guiding work in education:

1. Foster those fundamental dispositions which enable the young person to grow in the life of the spirit;
2. Focus attention on the intimate depth of the personality and the internalisation of educational guidance;

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 228-234.

⁸ J. MARITAIN, *Education at the Crossroads*, Yale University Press, 1943, 10-28.

3. All education and teaching must tend to unify and not fragment, must constantly strive to ensure and nurture the inner unity of man;
4. Teaching should achieve the inner liberation of the spirit through the dominion of reason over the learned contents.⁹

Romano Guardini, instead, was more influenced by German phenomenology. Keeping up his relationships with Max Scheler and Martin Buber, he developed his view of education around the Catholic *Weltanschauung* that he found “in the continuous so to speak methodical encounter between faith and the world. And not only the world in general, just as theology also does when various problems arise, but concretely, as in the case of culture and its manifestations, of history, of social life.”¹⁰ More than the formation of the character and individual dimensions of the person, his proposal focused on the impact of the educator-pupil encounter. The authentic encounter represents the moment in which individuals encounter and accept reality, allowing themselves to be struck by its peculiarity and taking a position in it through their actions. From the intensity of the encounter with reality, with people, with the Absolute, comes the illumination of the depth of experience.¹¹

The authors named did not initially have much resonance in Salesian pedagogical reflection, and also Pietro Braido, the fundamental figure for Salesian pedagogy in the 1950s, dealt rather with the need to detach pedagogy from philosophy and to dialogue with empirical methodologies, seeking his own epistemological and methodological solutions.

The Higher Institute of Pedagogy

The *Istituto Superiore di Pedagogia* (ISP) came into existence in 1940 in Turin at the express wish of Fr Ricaldone, who saw the need to erect this new “Faculty” in view of its function for the Salesian Society, a religious society of educators. The ISP had the task of arranging and better organising the pedagogical preparation studies of the Salesians.¹² Announcing this to the Congregation, the Rector Major clarified:

⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 63-84.

¹⁰ R. GUARDINI, “Europa” und “Christliche Weltanschauung”, in *Stationen und Rückblicke*, Werkbund, Würzburg 1965, 20.

¹¹ R. GUARDINI *Die Begegnung. Aus einer Ethikvorlesung*, Werkbund, Würzburg 1965.

¹² Cf. *Cronaca dell'Ist. dal 1940 a 1946*, in Archivio FSE.

In order to prepare Salesian members ever better for the high mission of educators according to the preventive system left to us as a precious inheritance by our holy founder, we were finally able to implement a long cherished aspiration, that is, by opening a Higher Institute of Pedagogy in the coming school year, within the Salesian Pontifical Athenaeum, alongside the three Faculties of Theology, Law and Philosophy [...] In the above institute we want first of all to form teachers of pedagogy for our houses of formation, so that exemplary Salesians and educators equipped and updated in pedagogy and teaching can emerge from them.¹³

For his part, Fr Carlos Leôncio, who collaborated strictly with Fr Ricaldone in founding the ISP and was its first Dean, wrote in the chronicle: “It is a somewhat different institution from those that have already been organised in other athenaeums and universities, due knowledge of which has been taken and due consideration given, and if duly approved by the Holy See it would be the first Pontifical Faculty of Pedagogy.”¹⁴ Keeping in mind the wish expressed by Fr Ricaldone, in 1945 the authorities of the PAS began procedures for legal recognition. It is interesting to follow the approval process, as it hints at some paradigm shifts made in recent years. The first attempts received a negative judgement from the pontifical authorities for three reasons:

1. the epistemological novelty, pedagogy was considered an art or at most a part of philosophical psychology;
2. the numerical inconsistency of the Institute;
3. the lack of professors with adequate qualifications.¹⁵

After various efforts and the necessary preparation of some professors at Louvain and in the United States, in 1952 the organisational structure at the level of the Congregation also changed. After Fr Ricaldone passed away, the new Councillor for Schools, Fr Secondo Manione, took the situation in hand by supporting a change of

¹³ P. RICALDONE, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 21 (1941) 106, 142.

¹⁴ *Cronaca di don Carlos Leôncio (1941)*, in J.M. PRELLEZO, *Studio della pedagogia e pratica educativa nei programmi formativi dei Salesiani*, in A. GIRAUDDO et al (eds.), *Sviluppo del carisma di Don Bosco fino alla metà del secolo XX*. Acts of the International Congress of Salesian History Rome, November 19-23, 2014, vol.1: *Relazioni*, LAS, Rome 2016, 217.

¹⁵ Prelezzo locates the words of Fr Ricaldone in this context: “If the good Fr Fascie had listened to me when I told him to send two clerics to Belgium, two to France, two to Switzerland, and two to the United States to specialise in Pedagogy..., we would now have prepared personnel with modern degrees for our Faculty of Pedagogy.” Cf. J.M. PRELLEZO, *Facoltà di Scienze dell’Educazione. Origini e primi sviluppi (1941-1965)*, in G. MALIZIA – E. ALBERICH, *A servizio dell’educazione. La Facoltà di Scienze dell’Educazione dell’Università Pontificia Salesiana*, LAS, Rome 1984, 25.

strategy. In the Rebaudengo Institute, having to deal with the illness of Fr Leôncio who had returned to Brazil, the leadership of the ISP passed to the young pro-Dean Fr Pietro Braido. From Leôncio's positions, who preferred the reasoning of philosophical epistemology, there was a shift to the "politics of facts", which according to Braido consisted in responding to the needs of the time:

At the level of the analysis of reality, it was necessary to underscore the enormous social and Christian impact of the problems of young people in a world of overwhelming social, economic and cultural transformations; the insufficiency of the traditional preparation of religious and social workers; the progressive advancement of the human sciences. On the organisational level, new initiatives were urgently needed: preparation of personnel in specialised institutes; a wide-ranging confrontation with the contemporary pedagogical world, including that inspired by different ideologies; intensification of scientific production.¹⁶

The responses to the socio-educational and organisational challenges were expressed at the beginning in the journal *Salesianum*, with articles that showed an interest aimed especially towards experimental pedagogy, analytical practice in the education of "difficult" children, the use of tests. During the presidency of Fr Gino Corallo, author of a ponderous survey on Deweyan pedagogy, in 1954 another journal, *Orientamenti Pedagogici* came into being under Braido's direction. In addition to the journal's articles, some works were published that were well received in Italy: empirical youth research *Gioventù di metà secolo* by Pier Giovanni Grasso, pedagogical studies *Il Sistema Preventivo di Don Bosco* and *Introduzione alla pedagogia* by Braido.¹⁷ Academic publications, the repercussions of which came to the knowledge of the Holy See, created favourable conditions for the approval of the IPS qualifications by Vatican authorities in 1956. A few months later, Enzo Giammancheri, professor of pedagogy from Brescia, published an article with the emblematic title: "The first Faculty of Pedagogy has arisen in Italy in the name of Don Bosco."¹⁸

In the same year, the FMA International Higher Institute of Pedagogy and Religious Sciences was approved. It had opened in Turin just two years earlier. The institute, founded as a result of Ricaldone's encouragement regarding the importance

¹⁶ PRELLEZO, *Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione (1941-1965)*, 29.

¹⁷ Cf. P.G. GRASSO, *Gioventù di metà secolo. Risultati di un'inchiesta sugli orientamenti morali e civili di 2000 studenti italiani*, Ave, Roma 1954; P. BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo di don Bosco*, PAS Verlag, Zürich 1955; *Id.*, *Introduzione alla pedagogia. Saggio di epistemologia pedagogica*, PAS, Turin 1956.

¹⁸ E. GIAMMACHERI, *La prima Facoltà di Pedagogia è sorta in Italia nel nome di don Bosco*, in "Scuola Italiana Moderna" 66 (1957) 17, 7-8.

of catechetical preparation, initially proposed a two-year course which was subsequently extended to a four-year course with the specialisations of pedagogical consultant, catechetical movement leader and school psychologist. The institute would later evolve into the Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences, the *Auxilium*.¹⁹

With the changes in operational strategy and the growing importance of the experimental method in pedagogy, taken partly by Luigi Calonghi and Pier Giovanni Grasso from Professor Raymond de Buyse of the University of Louvain,²⁰ one could also perceive a change in the balance in the ISP setting. Compared to Ricaldone's thinking, which envisaged the "rock-solid foundations of perennial philosophy and Catholic theology, and together with the data offered to us by the other sciences, such as psychology, biology, sociology",²¹ there was a shift of emphasis towards the human sciences and the experimental scientific method. Raymond de Buyse's scientific pedagogy responded to the need to remove educational and teaching methodologies from dogmatism, intuitionism and impressionism, which gave more importance to the experience of the individual educator than the study of quantitatively significant samples. In this setting, the ISP preferred the "quantitative psychology" of tests over the more spiritualistic "qualitative psychology" of Father Gemelli, founder of the Catholic University.²² Experimental psychology, introduced into the Salesian world through the new schools movement, found significant applications in the processes of professional orientation, being appreciated (and therefore legitimised) also by Ricaldone in his *Don Bosco educatore*.²³ The Salesians' openness to psychology was also testified to in the *Bollettino Salesiano*, which in the 1950s reserved space for psychological issues in education. For example, the April 1954 issue expressed the idea of integration between Salesian education and psychology with the title: "Love is not enough: psychology is also needed."²⁴

19 Cf. L. DALCERRI, *Istituto internazionale superiore di pedagogia e di scienze religiose*, in "Rivista di pedagogia e scienze religiose" 1 (1963) 1, 3-7 and *Pontificia facoltà di scienze dell'educazione Auxilium 1970-2020. Contributi per la storia*, publication for the 50th, ed. Hiang-Chu Ausilia Chang, Grazia Loparco, Piera Ruffinatto, Palumbi, Rome 2020.

20 Cf. The work by L. CALONGHI, *Testi ed esperimenti*, PAS, Turin 1956.

21 P. RICALDONE, *Don Bosco Educatore*, Libreria Dottrina Cristiana, Colle Don Bosco (Asti) 1951, vol. 1, 56.

22 Cf. *PAS-Pedagogia*, in ASC 247.

23 Cf. RICALDONE, *Don Bosco Educatore*, vol. 2, 452 which refers to G. Lorenzini's report to the first National Congress of Professional Orientation in Turin in 1948 with the title *L'orientamento professionale nella prassi educativa salesiana*.

24 *Gli educatori sbagliano?*, in "Bollettino Salesiano" 78 (1954) 7, 122. It also publicised the series "Psicologia e vita" of psychology applied to educational problems, edited by Fr Lorenzini.

The new orientation of the ISP was also manifested through the increased importance of the criterion of “distinction”: in fact, since 1953, the course of studies had provided for different specialisations and the Institute was divided into smaller units called “institutes”, “schools” or “centres”: School of Theoretical Pedagogy, Centre for Historical-Pedagogical Studies, Didactic Centre, Centre for Studies and Research on Vocational Education, Institute of Psychology, Institute of Theology of Education and Catechetics. A degree in pedagogy was conferred with the addition of a specialisation related to one of these schools.²⁵

A further step in this direction was when the institute moved its headquarters to via Marsala in Rome. Different changes emerged from the process of the revision of the Statutes of 1959, definitively approved in 1965. José Manuel Prellezo noted the deletion of references to Don Bosco and the Preventive System and the opening to lay students who, in addition to the previous possibilities of study for non-Salesian religious students, could be a solution to the small number of Salesian students. The institutes within the ISP acquired more autonomy, becoming teaching and research centres.²⁶ The most obvious feature of the 1959 project was the “methodological emphasis”, meaning that teaching is the methodology of intellectual education; catechetics is the methodology of religious education, etc.²⁷ The solution of wanting to balance a solid general education with the particular requisites of specialisations had created a practical problem of teaching a robust body of common pedagogical subjects along with many specific and professionalising subjects. Fr Braido’s solution in 1959 suffered from a certain nominalism when he stated that specialisation is:

preparation of the pedagogue with specific aims, within the sphere of function of education; it does not aim at the formation of the pure psychologist or the pure historian, but of the methodologist, the historian, the psychologist, the teacher and the catechist in an educational “mission”.²⁸

Braido’s ideas, expressed in his 1956 *Introduzione alla pedagogia*, are enlightening, especially in the chapter on “Ideas for a faculty of pedagogy”.²⁹ His approach starts from the concept of an “Institute of Educational Sciences” proposed by Édouard

²⁵ Cf. PRELLEZO, *Facoltà di Scienze dell’Educazione (1941-1965)*, 29-30.

²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 41 and *Pontificium Athenaeum Salesianum MCMXL – MCMLXV*, [s.e.], Romae 1966, 28-67. The emphasis on empirical science can be seen in other PAS faculties as well. E.g. the faculty of philosophy, in addition to the social science seminar, also had an institute of biology and the institute of physical-mathematical sciences. Cf. *Ibid.*, 24-27.

²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 39-43.

²⁸ *Altri documenti*, in PRELLEZO, *Facoltà di Scienze dell’Educazione (1941-1965)*, 43.

²⁹ Cf. BRAIDO, *Introduzione alla pedagogia. Saggio di epistemologia pedagogica*, 169-181.

Claparède, who was the major European representative of functionalism developed at the University of Chicago since the 1920s.³⁰ Braido proposed a faculty organised in a way that reflected his pedagogical epistemology, basically traceable to the Herbartian synthesis: the pedagogical problem is essentially a problem of means to achieve educational ends or purposes. Therefore, for Herbart, and thus for Braido, psychology (means) and ethics (ends) are inextricably linked in the constitution of a pedagogical science.³¹ We can see some of the strong points in Braido's way of arguing: defence of the value of experimental pedagogy against philosophical idealism; the need to overcome the superficiality of empiricism and experimentalism; genericism, the *ignorantia elenchi* or the illegitimate transitions from one order of ideas to another; the need to overcome uncritical and textbook solutions by promoting critical thinking.³² Braido also envisaged the existence of an experimental educational work alongside the Faculty in order to consistently and systematically apply pedagogical principles and methods, a desire that had not been realised within the ISP.

In addition to the merits of a balanced relationship between the speculative and the experimental, there were some limitations attributable to the context of the 1950s in this approach. There was a "modern" confidence in both the positive and speculative sciences, both presenting attributes of certainty, realism, and objectivity, and thus the author expected to find "truly universal and necessary utterances, within each cognitive level."³³ The wholeness of pedagogical science for Braido lay in its totality, that is, in embracing "with its principles and laws the totality of the phenomenon studied."³⁴ There was less concern about the relationships between disciplines, as there was a strong place given to "the objective unity of purpose, educating."³⁵ Braido's approach was understandable if we take into account the dynamics of the post-Ricaldone context which saw the risk that strong unity of the magisterium could smother the reasonable plurality of points of view and that a strong, centralised government would extinguish

³⁰ The influences of Belgian and American approaches can also be seen in the bibliography that refers to Joseph Nuttin from Leuven, Timothy O'Leary from Washington, and the proceedings of the first conference on university teaching of pedagogical sciences organised by Richard Verbist in Ghent in 1953.

³¹ Cf. the defence of Herbart's pedagogy in the face of Gentile's criticism in BRAIDO, *Introduzione alla pedagogia. Saggio di epistemologia pedagogica*, 50-51.

³² Cf. *Ibid.*, 162-179.

³³ *Ibid.*, 171. Cf. Also *Ibid.*, 173 and 177.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 171.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

the creativity of individuals. With the events of the Second Vatican Council, the balance was fundamentally changed, breaking down the rock-solid foundation of the *philosophia perennis* and partly loosening the grip of the hierarchically centralised government.

***Gravissimum Educationis*: Vatican II's turning point in education**

1959 was the year of the centenary of the Salesian Congregation and also the year of the announcement of the convocation of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. For Salesians, the coincidence of these two events strengthened the persuasion of a new period for the Congregation at an historical turning point. The Rector Major, Renato Zaggiotti, was chosen by Pope John XXIII to be part of the Council as a member of the commission of religious. He participated in the first two sessions and evaluated this experience as a wonderful school and an impulse for empowerment in the commitment to correspond better to the vocation of all those called to the apostolate.³⁶

In addition to the spirit of dialogue, the Second Vatican Council recognised the autonomy of and the necessary openness to earthly realities and consequently to the human sciences, and condensed its educational message in *Gravissimum Educationis*, published towards the end of the Council's work.³⁷ The document's introduction sums up its concerns and its concept of education very well, and offered a number of perspectives, some highlights of which we report here:

The Sacred Ecumenical Council has considered with care how extremely important education is in the life of man and how its influence ever grows in the social progress of this age. Indeed, the circumstances of our time have made it easier and at once more urgent to educate young people and, what is more, to continue the education of adults. Men are more aware of their own dignity and position; more and more they want to take an active part in social and especially in economic and political life. Enjoying more leisure, as they sometimes do, men find that the remarkable development of technology and scientific investigation and the new means of communication offer them an opportunity of attaining more easily their cultural and spiritual inheritance and of fulfilling one another in the closer ties between groups and even between peoples ... To fulfil the mandate she has received from her divine founder of proclaiming the mystery

³⁶ Cf. R. ZIGGIOTTI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 44 (1963) 229, 5-6.

³⁷ Cf. *Dichiarazione sull'educazione cristiana Gravissimum educationis*, in AAS 58 (1966) 728-739.

of salvation to all men and of restoring all things in Christ, Holy Mother the Church must be concerned with the whole of man's life, even the secular part of it insofar as it has a bearing on his heavenly calling. Therefore she has a role in the progress and development of education.³⁸

Already from the introduction we can sense the residue of a certain *duplex ordo* that in the years of the Council and afterwards could also be found in the majority of Salesian pedagogical reflections. Human growth and growth in faith were often seen as distinct from one another. This meant two different processes, often opposing things like reason and faith, education and evangelisation, church and society, gospel and civil rights, etc. The documents often try to keep the two poles together using linguistic techniques like “both... and...”, “while”, “in the meantime” and the like. The discussion starts from the declaration of the “inalienable right to an education” and then goes back to Pius XI’s *Divini Illius Magistri* specifying that education must be “in keeping with their ultimate goal.”³⁹

This tension between distinguishing but still trying to combine the human pole with that of faith, combining references to the fresh documents of the Council with Pius XI’s encyclical, appears several times: true education aims at the formation of the human person [*both*, although this word is implied in the English translation] in pursuit of his ultimate end, *and* of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member; Christians are called to testify *not only* to the hope that is within them, *but also* to help in the Christian formation of the world; the Catholic school, *while* it is open... to the situation of the contemporary world, *also* prepares them for service in the spread of the kingdom of God; the Church is bound as a mother to give to these children of hers an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ *and at the same time* do all she can to promote for all peoples the complete perfection of the human person; it talks about schools for preparing teachers for religious instruction *and* other types of education; the task of faculties of theology is *both* to explore the legacy of Christian wisdom, *and* dialogue with our separated brethren and with non-Christians; and finally, the conclusion hopes *not merely* to advance the internal renewal of the Church, *but* preserve and enhance its beneficent influence upon today’s world.⁴⁰

The shift that *Gravissimum Educationis* represents compared to *Divini Illius Magistri* is obvious, inasmuch as there is a shift from an apologetic style and defence

³⁸ *Gravissimum educationis*, Introduction.

³⁹ Cf. *Gravissimum educationis*, no. 1.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 1.2.3.8.11 and the conclusion.

of the rights of the Church in a hostile world to a style of dialogue with a world characterised by rapid scientific and social progress. The paths of synthesis offered by the Council declaration are to be interpreted by seeing a “magic season”, with the optimism of the economic growth of the 1960s. The need to get out of the “besieged fortress” mentality and the need for *aggiornamento* was driven in part by an inferiority complex with respect to the progress of the human sciences.⁴¹ In this context, it was considered easy to start from natural values, framing them in the complete consideration of man redeemed by Christ, with the aim of contributing to the good of the whole society.⁴²

The problem with this *duplex ordo* logic, in addition to the theological shortcomings analysed by Hans Urs von Balthasar,⁴³ can be traced back to the somewhat concrete difficulties of the hoped-for dialogue between the human sciences and theology. GE supported the idea of a deeper harmony but did not give the keys to interpretation, did not indicate viable paths, recommending that

individual subjects be pursued according to their own principles, method, and liberty of scientific inquiry, in such a way that an ever deeper understanding in these fields may be obtained and that, as questions that are new and current are raised and investigations carefully made according to the example of the doctors of the Church and especially of St. Thomas Aquinas, there may be a deeper realisation of the harmony of faith and science.⁴⁴

Similarly, the school described in no. 5 of GE would be a “human institution” where intellectual faculties can grow, where there is contact with the cultural legacy acquired

⁴¹ Cf. CHIOSSO, *Novecento pedagogico*, 240-242.

⁴² Cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, no. 2.

⁴³ Von Balthasar, in the first phase of his thinking that dates back to the 1952 work entitled *Tearing down the ramparts* states the need for the Church to abandon its entrenchment. In the second phase of his thinking, von Balthasar instead argues with the concepts of an optimistic and easy anthropocentrism fashionable around Vatican Council II. In *Love Alone is Credible* in 1963, he argues against the naive openings to cosmological religions by sustaining the necessity of the gratuitous revelation of God in the Church and in Scripture. But the revelatory place par excellence remains the crucifix, the central theme of his 1966 writing, *Cordula oder der Ernstfall*, in which von Balthasar emphasises Christian identity in its irreducible otherness with respect to the world. The “serious case” (*Ernstfall*) of Christianity is just one, Christ’s cross, which manifests the glory of God, which is revealed in Christ’s death as the Love that sacrificed his own Son for mankind. Cf. H.U VON BALTHASAR, *Schleifung der Bastionen. Von der Kirche in dieser Zeit*. Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1952; *Id.*, *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe*, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1963; *Id.*, *Cordula oder der Ernstfall*, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1965.

⁴⁴ *Gravissimum Educationis*, no. 10.

from past generations, where a sense of values is promoted and pupils are prepared for work. The school also generates a relationship of friendship among pupils, becomes a centre of encounters with cultural, civic and religious aims. The Catholic school has all the above tasks and in addition should “help youth grow according to the new creatures they were made through baptism as they develop their own personalities [...] so that the knowledge the students gradually acquire of the world, life and man is illumined by faith.”⁴⁵

Vatican II and the dialogue approach of the General Chapters

In addition to content from the Magisterium, an important influence was also exercised by the “form” of the Council’s work as reflected in GC19. This changed the Salesian Chapter paradigm in terms of duration, dialogue, the depth of the issues dealt with and openness to the human sciences. GC19 was moved to April 1965 to insert it between the third and fourth sessions of the Council. The Chapter, which took place in Rome in the new Salesian University buildings, lasted for 53 days, a record compared to the previous General Chapters, which lasted on average about ten days. This abundance of time made room for more open discussion in an atmosphere of freedom that brought out the differences present in the assembly. In fact, the new Rector Major, Aloysius (Luigi) Ricceri, sensing the atmosphere of tension between the various opposing positions either for adaptation to the times or for fidelity to the charism, intervened by saying:

Dear confreres, ours must be an atmosphere of charity [...]. We must realise this union of charity at all costs. I have said already, union together in charity. Such union presupposes understanding. [...] Understanding means understanding and knowing my “opponent” in the order of ideas to understand the man who thinks other than I do, to know him as my brother, in our common father Don Bosco. Wherefore we have to be convinced, by reason of that same deep understanding of yet another thing in our houses and communities there are today psychological situations existing and malaise which cannot be ignored. They are the result of our living and suffering in the life of Society and the Church at this present time.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, no 8. Here the text refers explicitly to *Divini Illius Magistri*.

⁴⁶ *Interventi del Rettor Maggiore al Capitolo Generale XIX*, in CG19 (1965), 315-316. Cf. Also the circular letter on dialogue: L. RICCERI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 48 (1967) 247, 3-33.

The build up of tension and the necessary change will be understood better once we consider the previous Chapter methodology. Until GC18, the assemblies were conducted without an in-depth analysis of the transformations that had taken place in society and Church. With a mentality of fidelity to the origins, Chapter members focused on practical decisions of a regulatory nature. For boarders particularly, to a lesser extent for festive oratories and the use of social media and entertainment, “one heard interventions almost identical to what was heard previously, which in turn echoed the resolutions and regulatory provisions of the 1920s and beyond.”⁴⁷

Scholars from the Higher Institute of Pedagogy moved from a relatively marginal role to a strategic position for the future of the Congregation. Following the example of the Council, just under twenty experts were invited to the Chapter, the majority of whom were ISP scholars. Particularly significant were the presence of Braido in the commission on the structures of the Congregation, the contributions of Grasso in the commission for the youth apostolate, Calonghi for work on the non-youth apostolate and the media, Gianola and Sinistrero for vocational schools, Corallo and Csonka for the formation of young people and, finally, Fr Dho for Salesian formation. The only commission without the involvement of ISP members was the seventh that dealt with Constitutions, Regulations and missions.⁴⁸

Since the Salesians were not an active part of the biblical, catechetical or liturgical movement, they saw the Council’s new openness to the world as being as radical in this new direction as the previously closed mentality had been in the other. A factor in this openness, too, was the unlimited access to news: newspapers, radio and scientific journals, and this clearly showed up the differences in the two mindsets: the traditional world of the *dull, cyclical and demanding life in the Salesian boarding school* under Ricaldone-style regulation and the more *vibrantly painted picture of an outgoing Church* with the marginalised and entering into dialogue with the scientific, social and political progress in the world beyond it.

The change of approach to General Chapters was one way of dealing with the turning point that the Council had been.⁴⁹ The way earlier Chapters had been held was determined by the *logic of continuity* in Salesian tradition and by practical decisions;

⁴⁷ BRAIDO, *Le metamorfosi dell’Oratorio salesiano*, 319.

⁴⁸ Cf. GC19 (1965), 362-366.

⁴⁹ For a more detailed view Cf. M. VOJTÁŠ, *Progettare e discernere. Progettazione educativo-pastorale salesiana tra storia, teorie e proposte innovative*, LAS, Roma 2015, 13-110 and M. BORSI – *Ambito PG, L’animazione della Pastorale giovanile nell’Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (1962-2008). Elementi di sintesi e linee di futuro*, LAS, Rome 2010.

the approach now adopted was a more *dialogue-based logic* but affected by a context of polarisation, rejection of the past and the insecure nature of the future. In addition to leading to the feeling of discontinuity, the approach indirectly, but significantly influenced the content of the Chapters, making them vast containers of different positions, balanced in principle but lacking in practical and procedural concreteness, inasmuch as concrete implementation was handed off to other decentralised bodies. Symbolic of this was the highly developed process of preparation for the Special General Chapter, which involved extensive consultation “from below” in order to listen to the opinions and feelings of the various contexts and provinces. We will use the dynamics surrounding the 1969 Provincial Chapter in the Salesian University in Rome in preparation for the SGC as an example.

As a practical way of putting the principle of dialogue and democracy into practice, the method adopted was consultation around core sets of proposals that would be then voted on. As well as the number of texts and consultation meetings, it is worth dwelling on the shortcuts and risks of this voting method as a way of embodying shared responsibility. In general terms we could say that the proposals that received more than half the votes were statements of *principle* opposed to clearly *negative phenomena* and did *not point to concrete applications*. An example:

It is considered possible and desirable to introduce the democratic method into religious life gradually and more intensely. [...] Without shared responsibility and the creative spirit exercised in different forms according to different situations, religious obedience would not be a true sign of the kingdom but a form of lazy, comfortable and selfish passivity.⁵⁰

Pio Scilligo's remarks on method are enlightening, highlighting his background in the field of psychology and his intercultural experience. In addition to difficulties related to different cultures, the Italy-based focus and the translations of complex sentences, he says that in the end we do not really know what the confreres voted for, since no one wants to be “infantile,” “paternalistic,” “passive,” “repetitive,” etc. “The problem is not in voting for words but in voting for their content, and therefore it would be necessary to express propositions in more tangible ways as much as possible.”⁵¹ Voting could be

⁵⁰ ISPETTORIA SALESIANA PAS, *Atti del 1° Capitolo Ispettoriale Speciale* (13-19 April 1969), [s.e.] Rome 1969, 105-106

⁵¹ P. SCILLIGO, *Alcune osservazioni sulle votazioni fatta in vista del Capitolo Ispettoriale e alcune proposte per le votazioni*, in *Archivio di Pietro Stella*, 6.

exploited in an antagonistic atmosphere, and the more important decisions then taken by secretaries. Starting with the example of a single article on Salesian education, he suggests splitting it, reformulating it and various other methodological possibilities:

To avoid these very serious errors I believe the only solution is voting on proposals that are *precise*, without being too wordy; that they not be made *emotional* through adjectives, and that they be as *unidimensional* as possible, in other words that they contain a single fundamental idea and it be made clear that it is this they are voting on or, if the proposal is still a complex one, it be voted on *in parts* then as *a whole*.⁵²

We wanted to refer to Scilligo's reflections on Chapter methodology before analysing the contents of General Chapters. In order to interpret the documents that belong to Chapter magisterium it would be helpful to bear in mind the relationship between method and formulations in a context of decentralisation and opposing views. We could also note how the "democratic" method encouraged compromise between theoretical principles and often did not help find either points of agreement (that are more than compromises), or pointers for educational practice. The documents were not just a single systematic *corpus* but a cobbling together of the work of different commissions often influenced by contextual, drafting and other idiosyncratic factors.

The Congregation after the Council

The period towards the end of the 1960s could not be described as a tranquil one for the Congregation. Instead, the landscape of thought and activity was filled with decentralised experimentation and opposed traditions. Youth protests in 1968 reacted to situations of unease such as colonialism, the oppression of the poor, racial discrimination, wars for world domination and the subordination of educational and cultural systems to economic powers. In the intellectual world, Marxist ideology, the Frankfurt School's criticism of mass society and critical pedagogy resurfaced with renewed strength. The ideal world to be built was seen through the lens of participation, decentralisation, dialogue, social justice, freedom and new morality.

There was many a paradox between the proclamation of the principle of dialogue and peace, and the actual lack of dialogue in some protests where the preferred mindset was one of a clash between classes and ideologies. Reflections and novelties were interpreted within the positive framework of post-war economic, technological and

⁵² *Ibid.*, 5-6.

mass media progress. The financial crisis in the 1970s, the empty rhetoric of protest with minimal tangible results would undermine such positive perspectives. What would remain, then, was a sense of unease at the radical change of paradigm and it is in this sense that the period following the Second Vatican Council could be called one of true crisis.⁵³

The crisis in the Salesian context was felt above all through the rapid decline in vocations, the abandonment of Salesian life that occurred throughout the 1960s, both during the period of formation and with the increased demands for the laicisation of priests. The number of Salesians from 1968-77 decreased by about a quarter.⁵⁴ This demographic crisis, signalled by the Rector Major,⁵⁵ was only the most conspicuous effect of a religious order that was in a process of strong change. The *accomodata renovatio* of religious orders, beginning with Pius XII in 1950,⁵⁶ took a radical turn not only with prospects of hope, purification and a return to the sources, but by giving rise to utopian tendencies in some, while for others there was the anguish connected with all the uncertainty. Worldwide, the number of male religious fell by a third. The Jesuits, following the pope's personal blocking of the conclusions of their "General Congregation" held in the 1974-75, were subsequently placed under supervision of a Papal delegate for two years during the early years of John Paul II.⁵⁷

Aloysius Ricceri guided the Salesian Congregation in the years following the Council, having been elected at GC19 while Council sessions were still taking place.⁵⁸ In the previous twelve years he had held the position of General Councillor for Cooperators and the press. He was an innovator who modernised the Salesian Bulletin, founded

⁵³ Cf. WIRTH, *Da don Bosco ai giorni nostri*, 447-449; G. VIALE, *Il sessantotto. Tra rivoluzione e restaurazione*, Gabriele Mazzotta, Milan 1978; G. SABATUCCI – V. VIDOTTO, *Storia contemporanea. Il Novecento*, Laterza, Bari 2003, 281-287; M. TOLOMELLI, *Il Sessantotto. Una breve storia*, Carocci, Rome 2008 and A. BERNHARD – W. KEIM (eds.), *1968 und die neue Restauration*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main 2009.

⁵⁴ In 1968 there were 21,492 Salesians, while in 1978 the number had dropped to 16,439; The average number of novices in the decade from 1958-67 was 1218, while for the decade from 1968-77 it had halved to an average of 625. Cf. WIRTH, *Da don Bosco ai giorni nostri*, 531-532.

⁵⁵ For the alarming number of departures Cf. R. ZIGGIOTTI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 44 (1963) 233, 13 and the *Lettera del Direttore Spirituale*, in ACS 44 (1963) 234, 16-20.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Acta et documenta Congressus generalis de statibus perfectionis*, 4 vols., Rome 1952-3; *Acta et documenta congressus internationalis superiorissarum generalium*, Rome 1953. In continuity with renewal activities, in 1957 the Union of Superiors General was established for male orders and 1965 for female orders.

⁵⁷ Cf. MARTINA, *Storia della Chiesa*, vol. 4: *L'età contemporanea*, 362-365.

⁵⁸ Cf. L. RICCERI, *Così mi prese Don Bosco. Storie vere di vita salesiana*, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1986 and WIRTH, *Da don Bosco ai giorni nostri*, 436-438.

the Salesian News Agency in Turin, set up the organisation of the press office at Headquarters, and launched the monthly magazine *Meridiano 12*, which was intended to be a continuation of Don Bosco's *Letture Cattoliche*. The twelve years of his term of office between 1965 and 1977 fell in Pope Paul VI's pontificate and he followed the papal line in his pronouncements.

On the one hand, Fr Ricceri reaped the harvest of work carried out by his predecessors, but on the other hand he had to deal with a twofold crisis: one came from the continued and not always controlled expansion of the Salesian Society, while the other, taking place in the wider Church, was concomitant with the Second Vatican Council. Gradually but inexorably, the new situation became more evident in Europe and America. On the one hand there was the founding of new presences, a substantial number of new initiatives in the pastoral field, especially in the area of openness to the world, justice and broad dialogue.⁵⁹ On the other, there were lively discussions and disagreements between “progressives” and “traditionalists” and in the so-called field of youth apostolate, between the *pastorally-minded* (*‘pastoralisti’* in Italian, a new watchword of uncertain content) and *pedagogists* (holding the Ricaldone line of *Don Bosco educatore*).

“Starting with 1968 among young Salesians, the ferment of dissent reached its peak in 1969-70 and the Salesian Athenaeum became an extraordinary sounding box for what was happening in certain countries, especially in Latin America.”⁶⁰ Riccardo Tonelli, editor of the *Note di Pastorale Giovanile* magazine, spoke of “heated years”: “In fact, a very original model of culture, reflection and social and political planning was beginning to take shape and consolidate. [...] Of course, given the urgency of the problems... it is not always easy to proceed with the necessary calm and balance.”⁶¹

In this complex framework Aloysius Ricceri defended and upheld his right and duty to “direct, orient, animate, and therefore to indicate the right path, correct deviations in good time, denounce abuses, at certain times define the right positions so that at any given moment everyone can know with the necessary clarity the way to follow in

⁵⁹ Cf. F. DESRAMAUT – M. MIDALI, *L'impegno della Famiglia salesiana per la giustizia*. Conversations on Salesian life 7, Jünkerath 24-28 August 1975, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1976; WIRTH, *Da don Bosco ai giorni nostri*, 527.

⁶⁰ R. ALBERDI – C. SEMERARO, *Società salesiana di San Giovanni Bosco*, in G. PELLICCIA – G. ROCCA (eds.), *Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione*, vol. 8, San Paolo, Rome 1988, 1691.

⁶¹ R. TONELLI, *Ripensando quarant'anni di servizio alla pastorale giovanile*, interview by Giancarlo De Nicolò, in “Note di Pastorale Giovanile” 43 (2009) 5, 14-15.

the Congregation.”⁶² In his first six years as Rector Major attention was given almost predominantly to the pretty much impossible task of carrying out the conclusions of GC19. Among these was the effort to balance the two principles of decentralisation and unity. Efforts were made to reinforce unity in things that were lacking, not only through the Rector Major’s magisterium, but also through his numerous trips, by studying local situations and holding intercontinental conferences which he personally presided at.⁶³

The Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum’s new headquarters in Rome

In 1965, PAS moved to its new headquarters in Rome. The report describing the first five years mentions the sense of being “a great seaport, lost in the anonymity created by the unusual mass of people, confreres or otherwise, who circulated through the buildings.”⁶⁴ At the level of studies there was a notable shift of sensitivities and interests on the part of Salesian students:

After 1960 there was a generation of young confreres who were more absorbed, more focused on their studies, more attentive to the guidelines of the Church in the pre-Council period and during the Council. It was a new generation of confreres who, on the other hand and by impartial comparison with the previous one, had [...] a less systematic formation that was less supported by texts that accompanied their formation from the novitiate to the studentate of theology. [...] Around 1960 they had inherited an extremely centralised system from the praiseworthy and brilliant Fr Ricaldone. But it was a system that had also led to a certain vacuum in creating formation texts suited to the new times.⁶⁵

In addition to the difficulties in updating studies, concrete issues of discipline were voiced and pressure was put on superiors to drop their interventions regarding formation, considered as antiquated forms of control. Groups of confreres sprang up spontaneously in an attempt to break down anonymity and mass-approach. So, under

⁶² L. RICCERI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 54 (1973) 269, 1767. Cf. Also pp. 1767-1771 and *ID.*, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 54 (1973) 270, 1865.

⁶³ Decentralisation dynamics are complex non-linear operations. It is useful to recall the organisational studies on the subject that mention the crucial importance of hierarchy in the implementation of decentralisation, the paradox of decentralisation guided by the centre with already predetermined limits, or polarisation between decentralised leadership and decisions made by the centre. Cf. S. KÜHL, *Sisyphos im Management. Die vergebliche Suche nach der optimalen Organisationsstruktur*, Wiley, Weinheim 2002, 36-39, 65-88 and 131-166.

⁶⁴ *Rapporto sull’Ispettorica del P.A.S. 1965-1970*, in *Archivio di Pietro Stella*, 2.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

the heading of some kind of spiritual affinity, these groups were allowed to organise their own concelebration of Mass, their meetings of friends, their own debates and programs. Some groups later became “pressure groups” that carried out their innovation program. Considerable influence was exerted by a group of young teachers called the “Group of 20”.⁶⁶ Cracks that were just the tip of the iceberg formed around cases, taken up by the media like Frs Giulio Girardi and Gérard Lutte who were removed from the PAS, dissent by students who confronted the Rector Major on the opening day of the 1969-70 Academic Year and the many lecturers and students who left the Congregation.⁶⁷

Several issues that reflected this climate were discussed at the Special Provincial Chapter of the PAS in April 1969 in preparation for the SGC. Among the most interesting we can note: the proposal of worker Salesians, mobile communities and spontaneous aggregation, experiments in the organisation of the Congregation, rectors and provincials to be elected, the elimination of all forms of direct dependence on the superior. This last proposal was supported by the observation that each confrere is capable of making his own decisions, without the charism of authority, and because the confrere is to be seen in his relationship with the group and not with the superior.⁶⁸ Generally it can be seen that it was proposals of a generic nature without concrete applications that were approved. This was the case regarding consultation for superiors, the more intense and gradual introduction of the democratic method into religious life, or of the possibility of the apostolate among mixed youth groups. Proposals formulated in ways that were too concrete (or radical) using more absolute terms like “everything”, “always”, “never” aroused opposition and did not reach the necessary *quorum*.

Pietro Stella’s thoughts about Salesian identity in this context are significant. The superiors called on him to intervene in the case of Gérard Lutte, a Belgian Salesian and lecturer in Developmental Psychology at the Athenaeum.⁶⁹ Lutte advocated for the

⁶⁶ Cf. *La Congregazione Salesiana di fronte al compito del rinnovamento conciliare. Considerazioni generali e proposte per il Capitolo Generale Speciale* signed 15 February 1969 by 19 professors at the PAS, in *Archivio di Pietro Stella*.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Rapporto sull’Ispettorica del P.A.S. 1965-1970*, 2-5; M. MIDALI, *Frammenti di vita salesiana tra il 1941 e il 2010. Semplici ricordi e sobrie considerazioni*, [s.e.], Rome 2014, 154-161.

⁶⁸ Cf. Especially motions on the “Structures and government of the Congregation” in ISPETTORIA SALESIANA PAS, *Atti del 1° Capitolo Ispettoriale Speciale (13-19 aprile 1969)*, Rome 1968, 213-229.

⁶⁹ Cf. The reconstruction of the debate in *Informazione e controinformazione su Lutte e Prato Rotondo*, in “il Regno. Documentazione” 16 (1971) 6, 156-164 which contains press releases, statements and articles in “la Stampa”, “Osservatore Romano”, “il Nostro Tempo”. Cf. also H. HERLES, *Zwischen Barrikade und Altar. Der Fall Don Gerardo Lutte – Ein Priester und der Klassenkampf am Rande von Rom*, in “Publik” n. 11 (12 March 1971), 3.

youth protests in 1968 considering them “the most significant events of recent decades and richer in hope for the future of humanity.”⁷⁰ His proposal for understanding the mental framework of the time is interesting. He sought a radical reform of the university, inspired by the student movement in the French-speaking scene. His proposal envisaged abolishing the position of full professor and the classical examinations, seen as control through “the memorisation of knowledge transmitted in an authoritarian way from the podium,”⁷¹ preferring ongoing education, active learning instead and understanding professors as counsellors. Lutte had fully adopted the critique of society developed by the Frankfurt School, speaking of the alienation of man, the oppression of the ruling class, trust in the democratisation of the university and student involvement in its government.⁷²

Even more controversial was Lutte’s social involvement in the Prato Rotondo community. This involved incitement to class struggle and the social and economic redemption of the poor. Pietro Stella, who supported the idea of a critical rethinking, as demonstrated in his *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*,⁷³ but adopted a critical stance regarding Lutte’s activities, began a reflection on a Salesian way of being involved in social issues. He formulated the basic question as follows: “Was it a consistent reinterpretation of Don Bosco’s way to incite to class struggle, take over schools by force, and lead some groups to occupy vacant buildings?”⁷⁴ The answer was in line both with Don Bosco’s solutions and the Pope John XXIII’s approach to the Council: a dialogue that seeks “what unites us” and not one that emphasises “what separates us” as an instrument of struggle. Here are his reflections:

The Salesians have inherited from their founder Don Bosco a praxis and a range of formulas that might seem curious and evasive. My politics? They are those of the Our Father. Recent theological reflection allows us to reformulate Don Bosco’s way of acting and understand its deeper meaning which is not

⁷⁰ G. LUTTE, *Per una università critica*, in “Orientamenti Pedagogici” 16 (1969) 2, 336.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 334.

⁷² For the “pedagogies of crisis” Cf. CHIOSSO, *Novecento pedagogico*, 245-248. Note how the authors of the “great refusal” combined Freudian psychoanalysis with the Marxist idealisation of a new man. The aims of the anti-pedagogical project were pursued in ways more socio-political than academic, ending up marginalising pedagogy as inherently authoritarian and violent.

⁷³ Stella’s work, which came out in 1968, was, together with the earlier one by Desramaut, one of the milestones of the historical-critical turn in Salesian studies. The text was often interpreted in support of the radical change in charism as, for example, in the bibliography of the “Document of the 20” containing proposals for the SGC by professors at the PAS. Stella’s volumes were then translated as *Don Bosco: Life and Work*; *Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality*.

⁷⁴ P. STELLA, *Il dramma di don Gerardo Lutte, il prete classista dei baraccati*, in *Archivio di Pietro Stella*.

disengagement as it may naively seem to be, “fuga” or “contemptus mundi”, alienation. On the contrary, Salesians have found themselves, perhaps without having reflected on it much beforehand, fully on the programmatic trajectory of *Gaudium et Spes* and *Populorum Progressio*. [...] The ways they do so are the ways set out by Vat. II: no anonymity, but make yourself known for who you are: not hostile but respectful of everyone, ready to promote whatever value in others that appears to be positive, fully respectful of the other’s conscience. But at the same time let others see us as witnesses of the Gospel we have heard and that has struck root in our lives.

It could seem like an easy plan: so easy that we do not want to struggle for it! In reality, and today especially, it is not easy to find as many young people as we would like capable of making their ideal coincide with an activity that renounces coming to blows; that plans to take note of everything, especially wounds, in order to help raise the level of society without causing fractions. It is also difficult in concrete terms to set up works. Poverty in many countries means living on the outskirts of urban areas. And the suburbs often mean industrial areas. In many cities there is no alternative: one can either buy or accept donations or rent a place: to set up a social work, a school or a vocational school means adding value to the area and entering into the dynamics of the construction market.⁷⁵

With the years of strong dissent mostly by now in the past, in the six years from 1972–78 we note the involvement of the Councillor for Formation, Fr Egidio Viganò, who turned his attention to both academic organisation and reform. The direction he encouraged was an interdisciplinary one inasmuch as he saw the risks of watertight compartments, closures and false autonomy. For Fr Viganò “being pastorally minded” was the specifically Salesian dimension and one well suited to driving the interdisciplinary approach at the PAS, which in 1973 became the Pontifical Salesian University.⁷⁶

It seems that in practice the effects of Viganò’s interdisciplinary thinking were somewhat modest ones. Pietro Braido, Dean of the ISP from 1972–74 and Rector

⁷⁵ P. STELLA, *Due punti chiave nel caso Lutte*, in *Archivio di P. Stella*. NB: The question of “large” structures for poor youngsters was the object of criticism during the years of protest. In addition, the ambiguity of the relationship between the Salesians and Count Gerini was rightly criticised, the consequences of which would have ethical, economic and judicial implications until recent times.

⁷⁶ Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *Lettera a don Luigi Ricceri Gran Cancelliere del P.A.S. (24 agosto 1972)*, in R. GIANATELLI (ed.), *Don Egidio Viganò all’Università Salesiana. Discorsi, linee operative, testimonianze del VII Successore di don Bosco*, UPS, Roma 1996, 24–44.

of the UPS from 1974–77, assessed the post-1968 situation as lying between the two extremes of a utopian rush forward and overcautious stagnation.⁷⁷ In the *Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione* (FSE) or Faculty of Education Sciences, interdisciplinarity was generally accepted, but not everyone shared the same definition or methodology. The days of interdisciplinary collaboration around the handbook *Educare* came to an end⁷⁸ and after Vatican II it was more appropriate to be talking about multidisciplinary, insofar as the context of disagreements, Salesians leaving the Congregation and attempts to get the difficult democratic organisational model at the UPS to work, did not allow for much more.⁷⁹

Roberto Giannatelli, Dean from 1974 to 1980, described the initiatives of those years as being more “inter-ideological” than “interdisciplinary”. This category includes conferences on the teaching of religion in state schools, political education, and on cultural pluralism which, in the Dean's opinion, were affected by “the conflictive climate of the time.”⁸⁰ Even the structure of the *Orientamenti Pedagogici* in those years did not suggest works of interdisciplinary synthesis. The curricula of the FSE in the 1970 reform reveal concern for the scientific nature and autonomy of each discipline, although Braido insisted on calling it “articulation tending to unification open to pluralism.”⁸¹ Likewise, the adoption of a *strategy of common disciplines* for all curricula was more a sign of multidisciplinary than a demonstration of interdisciplinary logic.⁸² Finally, among the courses there was not even one on the preventive system or Salesian pedagogy, and Braido

77 Cf. BRAIDO, *Per una storia dell'educazione giovanile*, 288-306.

78 Cf. P. BRAIDO (ed.), *Educare. Sommario di scienze pedagogiche*, 3. vols., PAS Verlag, Zürich ¹1956 ²1962-64.

79 With regard to those who left, it should be noted that two ISP deans left the Congregation: Fr. Ladislao Csonka in 1969 and Manuel Gutiérrez in 1971. In this context, the expression “a marked mobility of personnel” used by Giannatelli is somewhat euphemistic. Cf. R. GIANNATELLI, *La FSE nel periodo 1965-1980*, in G. MALIZIA – E. ALBERICH (eds.), *A servizio dell'educazione. La Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione dell'Università Pontificia Salesiana*, LAS, Rome 1984, 54. Cf. also *Ibid.*, 50-55; MIDALI, *Frammenti di vita salesiana*, 158-161; C. NANNI, *Pietro Braido, Decano della FSE e Rettore dell'UPS*, in NANNI et al. (eds.), *Pietro Braido*, 96-102.

80 GIANNATELLI, *La FSE nel periodo 1965-1980*, in MALIZIA – ALBERICH (eds.), *A servizio dell'educazione*, 52; B. BELLERATE – G.C. MILANESI (eds.), *Educazione e politica*, SEI, Turin 1976; B. BELLERATE (ed.), *Pluralismo culturale ed educazione*. Acts of the 3rd inter-ideological colloquium under the auspices of “Orientamenti Pedagogici” held in Rome on 8-9 December 1978, “Orientamenti Pedagogici”, Rome 1979.

81 [P. BRAIDO,] *Rimozione di una Facoltà di scienze dell'educazione*, in “Orientamenti Pedagogici” 17 (1970) 4, 1044.

82 Cf. *Ibid.*, 1046. Common disciplines were Philosophy of Education, Theology of Education, General and Dynamic Psychology, Human Developmental Psychology, History of Pedagogy and Education, General Pedagogical Methodology, Politics of Education, Sociology of Education.

himself, after the three years of his service as rector of UPS, no longer dedicated himself either to interdisciplinary issues or to the teaching of the philosophy of education, gradually pouring all his energies into the study of Don Bosco's history and catechetics.⁸³

Salesian pedagogical guidelines around the time of Vatican II

Renato Ziggotti's letters and the globalisation of the charism

Renato Ziggotti, Peter Ricaldone's successor, who led the Congregation from 1952 to 1965, was a humble, courageous individual, a realist who was open to the breath of fresh air from the Council. He was faithful to Don Bosco and sincerely concerned with the growth of his work in these new times. Fr Ricceri summed him up as having a "friendly simplicity" in the footsteps of Rua, Rinaldi and Cimatti, whose disciple he was.⁸⁴ Because of the restrictions imposed by the fascist regime and the World War, the previous Rector Major had not been able to make many visits to the provinces. Ziggotti, instead, led the Congregation in the 1950s to an awareness of the worldwide nature of Salesian education. His resolution, "I will do everything possible to visit even the most distant provinces"⁸⁵ took the form of a sequence of visits to Salesian houses in every continent, with particular focus on the houses of formation. The aim of the visits was both to create a sense of unity around the Rector Major as well as to get to know the specific nature of the different cultural and educational contexts.

This sense of belonging to the charism was also found in his circular letters. As with Albera, we note the frequent use of the possessive adjective "our", attached to so many terms like family, houses, confreres, life, pupils, prayers, vocations, rules, schools, brothers, apostolate, Congregation, youth, just to mention the most frequent ones.⁸⁶ The first circular letter that the Rector Major sent out contained a summary

⁸³ Cf. NANNI, *Pietro Braido, Decano della FSE*, in NANNI et al. (eds.), *Pietro Braido*, 102 and the updated bibliography on Pietro Braido (1919-2014), in bit.ly/csdb-unisal-it-braido.

⁸⁴ Cf. R. ZIGGIOTTI, *Tenaci, audaci e amorevoli. Lettere circolari ai Salesiani di don Renato Ziggotti*. Introduction, key words, indexes and statistical appendices, ed. Marco Bay, LAS, Rome 2015, 13-17.

⁸⁵ R. ZIGGIOTTI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in "Atti del Consiglio Superiore" 33 (1953) 176, 4.

⁸⁶ Cf. ZIGGIOTTI, *Tenaci, audaci e amorevoli*, 26.

of educational activity over the years: care of formation and spiritual life and above all the strategic importance of the sodalities seen as “the direct way to cultivate the religious spirit, frequent reception of the Holy Sacraments, family spirit, cheerfulness, the preventive system, the friendly understanding among the boys and the love for study, work and discipline.”⁸⁷ The atmosphere of reconstruction and growth in the 1950s also made itself felt in the tone of his letters. For Ziggiotti this was the time for action, Don Bosco’s apostolic boldness, large buildings, increasing the number of vocations to consecrated life to respond to so many needs in the world. Some expressions are testimony to the era and educational style:

We must be bold in doing good, with the holy boldness of Saint John Bosco. Young people don’t like half-measures: either they are educated in the heroism of doing good or they slump into stagnant mediocrity and become sceptical. Educators who believe they are up-to-date when they indulge pupils’ bad tastes will be scorned and derided tomorrow; the esteem of young people goes to those who demand effort, sacrifice, renunciation, to those who point out noble and generous goals and wisely help them to reach them. Let us not be concerned with making the life of our students easy and pleasant, but rather with arousing enthusiasm for the enrichment of the soul in the life of grace, in the acquisition of the necessary virtues in life: justice, fortitude, charity, self-mastery, emulation in good. [...] Now where do we find the training ground for such moral gymnastics if not in flourishing religious sodalities?⁸⁸

Despite the changes that had taken place in society and the Church in the 1950s and a growing awareness of the diversity of contexts, the Congregation’s leadership continued to follow the traditional, centralist direction of Ricaldone up until the 19th General Chapter in 1965, held at the new headquarters of PAS during the Second Vatican Council. In the earlier 1958 Chapter, in fact, the “old style” was still in evidence, both in how it was run, and for the topics it dealt with.⁸⁹ Even if it mentioned “healthy

⁸⁷ R. ZIGGIOTTI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in “Atti del Consiglio Superiore” 32 (1952) 169, 8.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁹ Braido comments: “General Chapter 18 in 1958 does not reflect in depth the recent transformations that have taken place in society. With regard to festive oratories and the means of social communication and even more so to education in the internees one hears speeches almost identical to those of previous Chapters, in turn echoing the normative resolutions of the 1920s and later.” Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Le metamorfosi dell’Oratorio salesiano tra il secondo dopoguerra e il Postconcilio Vaticano II* (1944-1984), in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 49 (2006) 319.

modernity”, the Chapter described itself as a “manifestation of intense Salesianity and of total and unconditional adherence to the teachings and directives of our holy founder and father. In fact, Chapter members were moved by just one desire: absolute fidelity to the spirit of our constitutions and regulations, our traditions.”⁹⁰

In addition to provisions concerning the usual matters regarding the Salesian boarding school, such as holidays, the presence of the rector, the question of the second Sunday Mass, cinema and entertainment or daily prayers standardised throughout the world, some emphases appeared that appreciated youthful holiness under the impulse of the canonisation of Dominic Savio. Particularly highlighted were the wealth of activities in Salesian sodalities and their organisational structure: the International Sodality Centre, dependent on and coordinated by the General Spiritual Director, with abundant materials for animating activities through magazines and publications; the Provincial Federations, an organisation centre for sodalities at the level of the individual provinces under the guidance of a provincial delegate; the International Confederation of Sodalities, etc.⁹¹ In this sense one could also see the potential development of the PAS: as a University that professionalised the work of Salesian education. The opening of the Faculty of Classical Literature (responding to the needs of the classical high schools) was envisaged in GC18, and another novelty would be the Faculty of Music as a tangible way of dealing with a typical aspect of Salesian education. The Rector Major spoke about this at the Chapter:

It seems to us more opportune than ever that alongside the Higher Institute of Pedagogy, which we already have, there should be an Institute of Christian Literature to train the teaching staff in our schools according to Don Bosco’s thinking, and to integrate theological studies, and an Institute of Music, at least for the lower grades, in order to maintain those characteristics proper to our spirit.⁹²

⁹⁰ *Il XVIII Capitolo Generale della nostra Società*, in ACS 39 (1958) 203, 20.

⁹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 33-34. For the wealth of formative offerings Cf. “Le Compagnie” magazine then subdivided into “Le Compagnie. Edizione soci - nuova serie” and “Le Compagnie. Edizione assistenti” that continued as “Compagnie Dirigenti”. In addition there was the “Quaderni delle Compagnie” series; the four volumes of *Cantiere Compagnie*, Centro Internazionale Compagnie, Turin, 1958-1961; or in works republished by the Centro Internazionale Compagnie di Torino in 1954 by P.G. GRASSO, *Le compagnie come risposta alla psicologia giovanile*, A.M. STICKLER, *Le compagnie alla luce degli ultimi documenti pontifici*; E. VALENTINI, *Attualità ed efficacia pedagogica delle Compagnie*.

⁹² Cf. *Il XVIII Capitolo Generale della nostra Società*, in ACS 39 (1958) 203, 83

The last point the Rector Major recalled was “the bloat of culture. Let us keep ourselves within the humility of knowing, researching and communicating our own science. *Deus superbis resistit*; and this is the worst kind of pride: intellectual pride.”⁹³ In view of this there was his insistence on the choice of personnel for the PAS, “our greatest institute of religious culture”:

They must excel not only for their intellectual abilities and didactic attitudes, but especially for their moral endowments, their religious virtues, their Salesian spirit, their balance and common sense. The future of our Society depends to a considerable extent on this choice. In fact, a wrong choice could have very serious consequences for the delicate position of privilege, as well as of responsibility, in which these people would find themselves when they assigned to formation houses.⁹⁴

The 1950s were characterised by growth in Salesian personnel, houses and presences by virtue of the stable organisational approach of previous times. And even if it seemed that the block of solid and unquestionable Salesian traditions was based around the *Biographical Memoirs* and Fr Ricaldone’s *Formazione salesiana*, this was not the case. Openings to the rethinking by the Council had cast doubt on the Ricaldonian approach, and even before the Council, it was noted that the new generation of Salesians with historical-critical awareness was beginning to question the traditional interpretation of history, education and the Salesian charism.

The first historical-critical reflection group was formed in Lyon, where Francis Desramaut began studying Salesian sources with the historical-critical method, leading the *Groupe lyonnais de recherches salésiennes*. The first publication on the development of regulations in the Congregation dates back to 1953. The translations of Don Bosco’s biographies of young people followed. But the most important volume, which had a profound impact on Salesian studies, was his doctoral thesis on the first volume of the *Biographical Memoirs* entitled *Les Memorie I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne. Étude d’un ouvrage fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint Jean Bosco*, published in 1962.⁹⁵ Later, Desramaut became known in 1967 with the publication of *Don Bosco et la vie spirituelle*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹⁵ Cf. F. DESRAMAUT, *Les Memorie I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne. Étude d’un ouvrage fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint Jean Bosco. Thèse de doctorat en théologie présentée à la Faculté de Théologie de Lyon, Maison d’Études Saint-Jean-Bosco, Lyon 1962.*

in the Library of Spirituality collection by the Beauchesne Publishing House.⁹⁶ It was then translated into Italian, Spanish, English, German and Polish. Gradually, critical thinking made its presence felt and through recourse to the contributions of expert scholars, influenced discussion in General Chapters focused on rethinking the charism.

The partial, unimplemented breakthrough of GC19

As we have said, following the example of the Council, the 1965 Chapter was sent some twenty or so experts, two of them Brothers. We should note that among them, eleven were experts in the educational field. Almost all of the experts were academic scholars and only a few were “full-time” educators.⁹⁷ The role of the expert as facilitator was proposed by the classic *Dizionario di Pastorale* in 1972 edited by Karl Rahner. In reflection on the post-Council climate he said: “What concerns everyone must also be decided by everyone. In accordance with this legal basis, in principle everyone is competent where the pastoral plan is concerned. [...] The task of experts and leaders is to enable these people to plan the necessary changes themselves and to implement them.”⁹⁸ The identity of the expert as scholar in the Congregation was later reinforced in the 1980s in the collaboration between the Youth Ministry Department and the Education Faculty at the Pontifical Salesian University, as will be seen in the next chapter.

The emphasis given to the importance of scholarly experts was in tune with the Council’s openness, in *Gaudium et Spes*, to scientific discoveries, with a special role recognised for pedagogy, sociology, political science, and social planning.⁹⁹ The aforementioned *Dizionario di Pastorale* spoke very clearly about the use of planning in the entry on the pastoral plan:

By means of technology and science, man today is able to design his environment and society, to manipulate them, change them [...] These means are also available to the Church, so that she can consciously plan for the future and develop her own strategy.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Cf. F. DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco et la vie spirituelle*, Beauchesne, Paris 1967.

⁹⁷ Cf. CG19 (1965), 362-366.

⁹⁸ N. HEPP, *Piano pastorale*, in K. RAHNER et al. (eds.), *Dizionario di Pastorale*, Queriniana, Brescia 1979, 567-568.

⁹⁹ Cf. R. TONELLI, *Ripensando quarant’anni di servizio alla pastorale giovanile*, interview by Giancarlo De Nicolò, in “Note di Pastorale Giovanile” 43 (2009) 5, 14, 33-35 and P. SCABINI, *Creatività nello Spirito e programmazione pastorale*, in “Orientamenti Pastoralisti” 46 (1998) 5, 22.

¹⁰⁰ HEPP, *Piano pastorale*, 567. Noteworthy is the fact that the author offers as a bibliography only two volumes on community social work (*Gemeinwesenarbeit*) without any references to pastoral theology.

The means available for carrying out the plan are media, finance and institutions. Theology comes in later, only in the position of “theory of praxis”.¹⁰¹ The use of planning is motivated by criticism of the use “of partial emergency solutions, but instead requires a concept of overall pastoral care.”¹⁰² In the almost mechanical adoption of social planning in the Church’s pastoral care, one can perceive the enthusiasm of the time, the confidence in science and the emphasis on practical changes that were waiting to be realised. The decentralisation after GC19 brought immediate effects, especially in the field of youth ministry, which was gaining in importance:

The traditional attention given to individual institutions, which had previously been the responsibility of the members of the Superior Council, was “decentralised” and distributed among several persons in charge, both at the centre and on the periphery: the new Youth Ministry Department, dependent or supplementary offices, provincial conferences, the individual provinces and their technical and animation bodies. The centralised “Crusade” was over or took on a new appearance.¹⁰³

GC19 regarding education and pastoral activity

The Council influenced the Chapter’s work, including its predominantly pastoral orientation. Among the documents that had already been promulgated, the ones most used were the Constitution *Sacrosantum Concilium*, the Decree *Inter Mirifica* and the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*.¹⁰⁴ The Rector Major, Fr Aloysius Ricceri, recalled the atmosphere of those days thus: “During the work of the Chapter one always felt that all those present were anxiously watching the Vatican Ecumenical Council II. The atmosphere in Rome clearly encouraged this spring climate of prospect so full of promise.”¹⁰⁵

GC19 is the first Chapter to have voiced an awareness of the turning points that took place in post-war youth and the cultural world. The reflection did not stop at acknowledging the fact, but also attempted to reformulate educational and pastoral

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 568.

¹⁰² MÄHNER, *Pianificazione del territorio*, in RAHNER et al. (eds.), *Dizionario di Pastorale*, 565.

¹⁰³ P. BRAIDO, *Le metamorfosi dell’Oratorio salesiano*, 2006, 337.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. M. WIRTH, *Da Don Bosco ai nostri giorni. Tra storia e nuove sfide (1815-2000)*, LAS, Rome 2000, 438.

¹⁰⁵ GC19 (1965), 5-6.

practice. The attempts can be summarised in five areas: reorganisation of central government structures, downsizing of works, updating of formation, adult apostolate and concrete applications in education.

At the level of the General Council, the Councillor for Youth and Parish Ministry was established [in fact, in the English translation of the Acts quoted ahead one can see that he was called a ‘Consultor’] *ad experimentum*, who merged the areas of responsibility of the previous Councillor for Schools, Councillor for Vocational Schools, and Councillor for Oratories and Parishes under his responsibility. Another six new Councillors were entrusted with animating a group of provinces in a geographical region, something needed due to decentralisation in the educative and pastoral area as well.

The General Chapter thought it opportune to entrust to a single Consultor the care of our parishes and the apostolate of the young because of their close interdependence [...] As far as the boys are concerned this Consultor will have care of their general religious, moral, and intellectual in every kind of Salesian house, oratories, hostels, day schools, boarding houses, youth centres, groups, sodalities and other youth organisations; due regard being paid to the authority of provincials, and with the collaboration of the Consultor in charge of the group of provinces concerned when there is a question of specific local requirements in technical, scholastic or professional matters...¹⁰⁶

With the changes at the level of the General Council there was a tendency to value issues specific to the regions, to decentralise the government of the Congregation at the world level and, at the same time, to keep the various educative and pastoral dimensions and structures together. At the province level, delegates for the various areas, and commissions of experts were added to the council structure. Only at the local level did the traditional council structure remain obligatory: *de jure* it included the rector, the prefect, the parish priest, the catechist, the principal and no more than three councillors, one of whom could be the director of the festive oratory.¹⁰⁷ Only the Special General Chapter in 1971-72 would later give the provinces the responsibility of establishing such roles as they deemed appropriate at the local level.¹⁰⁸

The Chapter decided to establish a Centre for Salesian Historical Studies in order to throw better light on Don Bosco’s educational work, and a Youth Pastoral Ministry

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 37-38.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. SGC (1972), no. 708.

Centre to apply GC19's decisions, to work together with the Institute of Pedagogy at the Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum, coordinate the various pastoral activities of young people, and draw up a *Treatise on Salesian education for our times*.¹⁰⁹

The second area of reflection concerned “reshaping”, a concept that was popular in GC19 because it responded to a widespread desire in the Congregation. The general principle was the simplification of houses that were too large and the reduction in the number of works that were too small. With regard to the type of work, the Salesian boarding school seemed to have entered a crisis both in the perception of the Salesians and in the perception of the students.¹¹⁰ The Chapter therefore stressed the value of the oratory above all: “Special attention should be given to the ‘original’ work of the oratory, fittingly brought up to date and reshaped [...] so that it may attract and serve as many boys as possible, with a variety of subsidiaries (youth centres, clubs, various associations, courses, night schools...)”.¹¹¹ The chapter on the oratory stated that “the oratory should not limit itself to the crowd of boys who just come there, but it must become a pastoral instrument of approach to all young people. Opening out in this spirit of missionary dialogue, to all the youth of the parish, area, city – to include those of no faith at all.”¹¹² It had to have a precise educational programme responding to the changed psychology of young people and adhering to developmental psychology.¹¹³ To some degree the parish was also revalued, in which it was possible to work pastorally in a Salesian spirit, fitting into the broad horizons of the Church apostolate, but with special attention to the evangelisation of youth.¹¹⁴ As interest in the working world grew, boarding schools for young workers and vocational schools were also encouraged. The Acts speak of “schools of every kind, not only for classical education, but and especially for professional and technical training.”¹¹⁵ Provincials were asked to “formulate a precise

¹⁰⁹ Cf. GC19 (1965), 201.

¹¹⁰ 72% of the past pupils of the houses throughout Italy preferred education in the family by good and normally gifted parents to a boarding school education, even a well-organised one with good educators. Among the most negative aspects of Salesian education were mentioned: unrealistic preparation for life, repression of the personality, exaggerated compulsory religious practices, excessive discipline and unpreparedness for relations between the sexes. Cf. P.G. GRASSO, *La Società Salesiana tra il passato e l'avvenire. Risultati di un'inchiesta tra ex allievi salesiani*, Extra-commercial edition [s.e.], Rome 1964, 45-152.

¹¹¹ GC19 (1965), 103.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 137.

¹¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 137.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 130-132.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

programme for reshaping the work in hand, taking into account the numbers of the confreres, the particular condition of time and place, the possibilities of the future, the needs of the hierarchy and the present worth of the work now being done.”¹¹⁶

A third issue felt by Chapter members related to the area of formation and was summed up in the key word “qualification” of Salesians. Qualification meant primarily acquiring the skills necessary for the mission in today’s world. In his presentation of the documents of the Chapter, the Rector Major was not afraid to call the claim that a bit of good will was enough to meet the needs of the works a “sweet illusion.”¹¹⁷ Following the Council’s approach, the Congregation, too, opened up to the scientific world. Aloysius Ricceri made his appeal, saying: “From now on every manifestation of our activity calls for personnel qualified in theology, liturgy, philosophy, pedagogy, science, technical knowledge, teaching, art, recreation, administration.”¹¹⁸ It seems that the attention to qualification was an expression of the Council’s “anthropological shift” underlying which was also the notion of reshaping works to fit the circumstances of the people involved.¹¹⁹

Alongside educative and pastoral matters still referred to as “the youth apostolate”, reflection on the Christian and pro-social formation of adults was added, which forms the fourth focus of GC19. Six new areas were introduced among traditional areas such as assistance to the FMA, Cooperators, Past Pupils and the missions ad gentes: parish, catechesis for adults, family apostolate, formation of lay teachers, ministry to workers, and social communication. These echoed themes in encyclicals such as *Mater et Magistra*, *Pacem in Terris* and the Council’s Decree *Inter Mirifica*.¹²⁰ All these areas were entrusted to a Councillor on the Superior Council. This enlargement of the field of action was not a secondary matter, because it increased the possibilities and also the pastoral commitments of the Congregation. In 1991, Fr Juan Vecchi assessed the changes that had taken place since the 1960s as follows: “The adult world is no longer on the margins of our involvement and their religious care, whether at the request of the Churches or for economic reasons, occupies us as much as the education of youth.”¹²¹

Some of the more concrete educational issues still reflected the dominance of the boarding school paradigm and its lack of compatibility with the lively sense of freedom of young people in the 1960s. The boarding school was still the underlying frame of

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹²⁰ Cf. JOHN XXIII, *Mater et magistra* (1961), in CG19 (1965), 151; *Id.*, *Pacem in terris* (1963), in *Ibid.*, 151 and *Inter Mirifica* (1963), nos. 1-3, 9-10, 13-22 in *Ibid.*, 170-177.

¹²¹ J.E. VECCHI, *Pastorale, educazione, pedagogia nella prassi salesiana*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000*, SDB, Rome 1991, 12.

reference for the problems of the youth apostolate. This can be seen, for example, in the presentation of the Acts of GC19 by the Rector Major, in the omission of the boarding school when dealing with the reorganisation of the works of the youth apostolate,¹²² and in the mixed nature structure of documents IX-XIX concerning the various educative and pastoral works, where schools with hostels and semi-boarding schools are indicated as the only works of the youth apostolate.¹²³ In addition, the issues concerning the formation of young people were linked almost exclusively to boarding school life: the lively discussion on the compulsory nature of daily Mass and the relative intervention of the Rector Major resulted in reconfirmation of the traditional practice of daily Mass for boarders with a sensitivity to particular situations that had to be managed by the Provincial Conferences.¹²⁴ Delicate or problematic areas included education to love and purity, co-education, management of leisure time and holidays for boarders.¹²⁵

GC19's application in the educative and pastoral area

Undoubtedly, GC19 was the beginning of a new journey for the Congregation. In 1982 Egidio Viganò spoke of quite a few of the Chapter's "forward-looking directives"¹²⁶ and Pascual Chávez in 2010 evaluated GC19 thus: "[It] represents the first collective stock-taking by the communities in the Congregation with regard to the changes taking place in the areas of youth and the need to reformulate the traditional educative-pastoral praxis."¹²⁷ Given the importance of the Chapter and the content of the five new areas it initiated, it therefore becomes useful to also study the history of the effects connected with the ideas it introduced, not just their timely proclamation.¹²⁸ Therefore, we will spend some time initially looking at the criteria for applying the conclusions of GC19,

¹²² Cf. GC19 (1965), 9-13.

¹²³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 101-201.

¹²⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 188-189 and 338-341.

¹²⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 194-199.

¹²⁶ E. VIGANÒ, *The 22nd General Chapter*, in ACS 63 (1982) 305, 10.

¹²⁷ Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, "And he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length" (Mk 6:4). *Salesian Youth Ministry*, in AGC 91 (2010) 407, 7.

¹²⁸ "The history of effects" (German *Wirkungsgeschichte*) is a key concept of Hans-Georg Gadamer introduced in his work *Truth and Method*. Here we will use it as an interpretative concept to grasp the sequence of semantic nuances of key concepts such as education, pastoral, project, reorganisation, qualification, significance, etc., which are closely connected with the context in which they arose, with the subsequent interpretations given in the various GCs and in the letters of the Rectors Major,

so that we can then note the very manner and effect of the concepts introduced and the decisions made.

When presenting the Acts of the Chapter, the Rector Major, Aloysius Ricceri, highlighted some of the criteria for applying its conclusions. These can be summed up in three key expressions: personalising its teachings, collaborating and advising one another, reshaping works to a human scale. The first criterion consists in “mould[ing] in ourselves a mentality rather than set up an inventory of injunctions to be carried out.”¹²⁹ The tools for personalising that were indicated were in-depth personal and community reading of the Acts, so as to encourage the study of the basic ideas that inspire the documents.

The second criterion was intended above all for superiors, who should use prudent gradualness in applying the Chapter. Gradualness should not be improvised, but guided by the norms issued to avoid the danger of arbitrary interpretations and fragmentation. Here the attempt was to apply the value of dialogue recommended by the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*.¹³⁰ Dialogue was emphasised as the first quality of the superior in order to foster collaboration at various levels: in particular sectors of activity, in Salesian houses, in provinces, in groups of provinces and in the Congregation.¹³¹

Reshaping, for which there was a felt need, was the third criterion for applying GC19. The primary motivation urging the reorganisation of educational works was not a concern for the activity itself but for the attention to be given to the “real good of the confrere.”¹³² The Rector Major wrote: “Before moving on to increase already existing activities in number and size we should all of us feel a preoccupation for the man, the religious, the Salesian, the one who plays the leading part in this whirlwind drama. [...] The apostolate is a delicate spiritual work. It cannot be effective if one's soul is tired out.”¹³³

The demands of downsizing and decentralisation were intended to lighten the organisational structure of the Congregation, aimed at the good of the confreres and the mission of the Congregation in today's world, for which it needed to be qualified. Paradoxically, however, it seems that the transformation following the Council meant committing a great deal of human resources, and this occurred precisely during the

and finally with the way they are applied in practice. Cf. H.-G. GADAMER, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge der philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Mohr, Tübingen 1960 and its English translation *Id., Truth and Method*, Crossroad, New York 1982.

¹²⁹ GC19 (1965), 6.

¹³⁰ Cf. PAUL VI, *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964), in *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 7-9.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

period of the first serious demographic crisis of Salesian personnel, signs of which went back to 1963.¹³⁴ Pietro Braido noted that after GC19 just at global level “there were almost thirty items between manuals and directories to be put together, permanent Commissions to be established, Centres and Offices to be organised at headquarters, bodies to be set up and studies on particular problems to be treated.”¹³⁵ Many resources were involved to achieve some degree of decentralisation, aimed at setting up a more structured organisation. Provincial Conferences had to be configured and set up. Aloysius Ricceri evaluated the situation of the personnel in the SGC six years later, speaking of “the truly serious and sometimes almost chronic haemorrhage suffered by various provinces, simultaneously with the ageing of personnel and the inability to cope any longer with tasks previously carried out.”¹³⁶ Given the new tasks and structures he estimated that “for every two to three Salesians one should be a leader.”¹³⁷

In the youth ministry sector, too, the challenge of making the oratory more Salesian was addressed through decentralisation that started from the centre. GC19 used instruments of promotion at the world level, through Provincial Conferences, Provinces and Houses. A Centre for Oratories and a central consultative team were asked for and “such bodies will make an accurate study of the real condition of our oratories, the possibility of their development, the demands of the Church and of the state, the insertion of the oratory in the pastoral life of the parish, They will also have the duty to set out general regulations of the oratory, the care of printed matter, organisation, the exchange of studies and experience in the field of youth work and life in the oratory.”¹³⁸

The most immediate consequence in the educative and pastoral area at central level was the figure of the Youth Ministry Councillor (Consultor) and the establishment of the Youth Ministry Centre. The first Councillor elected for YM was Gaetano Scrivo, former superior of the Italy-Rome province. The Youth Ministry Centre was set up after the Chapter, in 1965, with its delegate Michel Mouillard, from the Paris province. *Note di Pastorale Giovanile* was begun as a journal of animation, the first number coming out in 1967. In addition, at the Chapter’s request the *Centro Studi don Bosco* came into being at the UPS (1973) under Pietro Stella’s direction, as well as the *Centro Studi*

¹³⁴ For the alarming number of departures cf. R. ZIGGIOTTI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 44 (1963) 233, 13 and *Id.*, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in ACS 44 (1963) 234, 16.

¹³⁵ P. BRAIDO, *Le metamorfosi dell’Oratorio salesiano*, 2006, 336.

¹³⁶ L. RICCERI, *Presentation by the Rector Major on the “General State of the Congregation”*, in SGC (1972), 615.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 619.

¹³⁸ GC19 (1965), 139.

Missioni Salesiane (1973), in view of preparation for the centenary of the first missionary expedition. However, the focus on education in the Centres' historical publications was not mainstream and the *Treatise on Salesian education for our times* that GC19 thought of producing remained just an idea. This outcome was probably also attributable to the diminishing number of experts in the pedagogical field and to the major and growing pastoral sensitivity (not explicitly educational).¹³⁹ From what we have seen so far it would seem that the idea of reshaping things connected with the qualification of the confreres remained a pious wish, and instead what was implemented was a degree of decentralisation of central structures, introducing the YM Sector into the organisation.

The concept of “youth ministry” was introduced by the Chapter and was applied at the level of governing structure, but the term most used in the documents of GC19 was still “youth apostolate”.¹⁴⁰ In this sense we can still see a substantial welding of the Congregation to the pre-Council identity of the so-called Christian education of young people.¹⁴¹ GC19 talked about the inspirational principles and the more practical content of youth ministry in the document on the *Formation of the young*, which was still implicitly bound up with the boarding school structure.¹⁴² “After all, in a formally Christian vision of society that was still prevalent at the time, educational activity was lived out and practised in terms of apostolic activity. The expression ‘integral Christian and human formation’, which could have given rise to some discussion, was mentioned as being obvious and not at all problematic.”¹⁴³ The change of mentality and the personalisation requested by Ricceri required more time to mature. In 1982, the Rector Major, Egidio Viganò, spoke of the combination of pre-Council and Council factors in GC19 this way: “Due to the general historical situation, the perception of the demands of the Council was rather limited; in fact, not everyone had yet had the opportunity to grasp the profound ecclesiological renewal of Vatican II. Nonetheless, the Chapter assembly breathed in the atmosphere.”¹⁴⁴ GC19 had introduced the concept of youth

¹³⁹ Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Le metamorfosi dell’Oratorio salesiano*, 2006, 333.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. The names given to educative and pastoral activities in documents IX – XIX in GC19 (1965), 101-201: youth apostolate, apostolate of the laity, social apostolate, Salesian apostolate, care, education, formation of the young, Christian and professional preparation for life.

¹⁴¹ Cf. S. FRIGATO, *Educazione ed evangelizzazione. La riflessione della Congregazione salesiana nel Postconcilio*, in A. BOZZOLO – R. CARELLI (eds.), *Evangelizzazione e educazione*, LAS, Rome 2011, 70-72.

¹⁴² Cf. GC19 (1965), 182-201.

¹⁴³ FRIGATO, *Educazione ed evangelizzazione*, in BOZZOLO – CARELLI (eds.), *Evangelizzazione e educazione*, 72.

¹⁴⁴ VIGANÒ, *Il Capitolo Generale XXII*, 9.

ministry and some principles such as knowledge of and respect for the young person, sense of freedom, social sense, sense of belonging to today's world, gradualness. But actually defining the youth ministry area, its methods, tools and educative and pastoral mindset for all kinds of works would have to wait for the era after GC21 in 1978, marked by Viganò's term of office and Vecchi's coordination of youth ministry.

The application of GC19's most ambitious conclusions almost immediately came to a halt as an effect of the Apostolic Letter *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, which came out a year after the closure of the Chapter, announcing a Special General Chapter for all religious institutes.¹⁴⁵ Actually the SCG observed six years later: "Much of GC19 remained a dead letter."¹⁴⁶ Reflection and creative effort then shifted to the preparation of the Special General Chapter, distracting it from the concrete implementation of GC19. Twenty-five years later, Vecchi wrote: "GC19's reflection did not have a satisfactory translation into practice [...]; the interpretation of reality and praxis did not experience significant changes at the grassroots of the Congregation."¹⁴⁷ The cause could also be seen in the lack of change in local structures (house council) and the way of understanding the Chapter's conclusions: a "codex" for everyone with the obligation of application.¹⁴⁸

So the greatest effects of GC19 were: the change of paradigm for Salesian Chapters; first adoption of the Council's ideas and mindset; establishment of a structure of government allowing for more dialogue and involvement and which, in the years to follow, facilitated many of the meetings in preparation for the SGC; and finally, appreciation of scholarly experts in various areas of Salesian life. In tune with the Council, GC19 highlighted issues that, not without risk, would later be dealt with through the instrument of educative and pastoral planning: the option for educational structures that were open to the local neighbourhood and the world (oratory, parish, catechesis for adults, the family apostolate, pastoral work and social communication), the greater role of reflection, seeing the worth of the human sciences, the more decentralised model of communication and organisation. Unity and continuity at the various levels of the Congregation would be thought of, starting with GC19, more within the framework of the common project that is the result of dialogue than in one of fidelity to tradition connected with the boarding school paradigm. In what follows we

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴⁶ SGC (1972), no. 393.

¹⁴⁷ VECCHI, *Pastorale, educazione, pedagogia*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000*, 1991, 10.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 16-18.

will study the disruption of the years following GC19 in connection with the reinforced need for unifying elements in Salesian educative and pastoral praxis.

The Special General Chapter's rethinking process

The Council's opening to the human sciences, seen as relatively autonomous from theology,¹⁴⁹ and the need to rethink the Salesian charism, could be placed within a general attitude of confidence in scientific solutions. The so-called *Radiografie* drawn up in preparation for the Special General Chapter, summing up the way Salesians were thinking, "speak constantly of the 'integration', 'coordination', 'programming', 'planning', of Salesian pastoral activity within and beyond our houses, in their relationships with the local Church's pastoral ministry. Their hope is that the problem will be tackled in its totality and resolved in a timely manner."¹⁵⁰ The decentralisation of government as a response to the diversity of contexts would be implemented by setting up institutions, departments, teams, groups and commissions of experts, following the path already opened by GC19 in 1965. Reflecting the context of general optimism at the end of the 1960s, the Salesians trusted almost naively in the success of the design, dialogue and study. In this way, the discourse on methodology was strongly connected with the question of planning: the idea was thus to avoid the extensive post-Ricaldonian regulation and to respect the diversity of educational contexts.

Some initiatives for the study of educative and pastoral issues also came from the Congregation's leadership. In 1967, the Councillor for Youth Ministry asked for a study on the situation of the oratories, with inquiries in houses and provinces in order to draw up directives that were to "serve as a norm for the Provincial Conferences for the reorganisation of this very important sector of the Salesian apostolate."¹⁵¹ In 1968, under Fr Ricceri's presidency, three conferences were held to study the educational and pastoral situation. The Bangalore conference focused mainly on oratory youth ministry, the one in Caracas on pastoral care in general terms and the one in Como especially on the structure of the youth centre as a response to the needs of the times, along

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no 36; *Gravissimus Educationis*, no. 10 and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no.7.

¹⁵⁰ CGS – COMMISSIONI PRECAPITOLARI CENTRALI, *Ecco ciò che pensano i salesiani della loro congregazione oggi*. "Radiografia" delle relazioni dei Capitoli Ispettoriali speciali tenuti in gennaio- maggio 1969, Istituto Salesiano Arti Grafiche, Castelnuovo D. Bosco (AT) 1969, vol. 1, 108.

¹⁵¹ Cf. L. RICCERI, *Letter of the Rector Major*, in ACS 48 (1967) 247, 47.

with various other proposals.¹⁵² The research and also the discussions at the conferences showed the breadth of thought, which contrasted, however, with the weakness of the practical indications. The Rector Major, in 1969, pointed out the lack of a precise educational program for the different ages of young people and the need to improve the proposals in the field of catechetics, liturgy, youth apostolic leadership, oratory members' involvement in society and Church, including through the work of the various types of associations.¹⁵³

In his Letter of October 1968, the Rector Major described the preparation for the SGC through a complex fifteen-step process, which was expected to be completed within the first months of 1971.¹⁵⁴ In order to understand the atmosphere in which the educative and pastoral reflection by the Congregation was taking place in those years, we refer to the proposals sent in by the Provincial Chapters held in 1969, collected by the pre-Chapter commissions in four volumes.¹⁵⁵ The first theme dealt with was the request for serious studies on the spirit, tradition and charism of the Congregation to rediscover the genuine spirit of Don Bosco and to overcome divisions on fundamental questions. A large proportion of the confreres had expressed themselves in favour of rethinking,¹⁵⁶ but the actual proposals for doing so varied in almost every province with regard to the aim, method and tools for carrying out such a study.¹⁵⁷ The proposals received revealed two opposing trends in the ongoing paradigm shift: one of continuous development and one of disruption between the old and the new model.

In the educative and pastoral area, the proposals were still organised according to the old scheme by type of work, with a strong emphasis on a general rethinking of structures.

¹⁵² Cf. L. RICCERI, *Letter of the Rector Major*, in ACS 49 (1968) 252, 9-25 and 31-86.

¹⁵³ L. RICCERI, *Letter of the Rector Major*, in ACS 50 (1969) 258, 32-34.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. L. RICCERI, *Letter of the Rector Major*, in ACS 49 (1968) 254, 10-13.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. CGS – COMMISSIONI PRECAPITOLARI CENTRALI, *Ecco ciò che pensano i salesiani della loro congregazione oggi*. “Radiografia” delle relazioni dei Capitoli Ispettoriali speciali tenuti in gennaio-maggio 1969, 4 vols, Istituto Salesiano Arti Grafiche, Castelnuovo D. Bosco (AT) 1969.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *Ecco ciò che pensano i salesiani*, vol. 1, 1969, 46-47. The numerical value of 94% of the confreres from twenty Provincial Chapters in favour of rethinking is one of the major consensus reached by the Provincial Chapters, since there were very few questions that drew explicit interest of more than 15 Provinces. Strictly speaking, we must assert that the data is not statistically significant because of the methodological difficulties of the analysis of heterogeneous materials. Cf. *Ecco ciò che pensano i salesiani*, vol. 1, VI-XI.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. *Ecco ciò che pensano i salesiani*, vol. 1, 1969, 47-67.

There was almost unanimous agreement on the Salesian nature of parish activities,¹⁵⁸ and just as strongly felt was the need to give “serious consideration to the primacy of the oratory.”¹⁵⁹ The validity of the school as responding to the needs of contemporary society was confirmed by only eight provinces, but on condition that they fostered deep human growth in maturity.¹⁶⁰ The relevance of the vocational school was insisted on by eleven provinces, but they offered no further specific indications. The number and style of the proposals showed the intent of the confreres to overcome the stagnation and isolation of Salesian boarding schools by shifting attention to another type of work. The road to general rethinking of the school and of the Salesian boarding school was less travelled. With regard to the way in which change was to be managed, the preferred path was one of flexible and experimental restructuring, inventiveness, openness and creativity.¹⁶¹ Twenty years later, Vecchi summed up the tendencies of the area studied: “Some of the provinces in Europe have seen in the parishes an escape from the closed school mindset.”¹⁶²

The concrete content in educative and pastoral care was almost totally ignored. This was paradoxical, because at a time when the Congregation was shifting in the pastoral direction, most energy was spent in discussions on structures. This can be interpreted by taking certain elements into account: the widespread belief that the change of structures and the introduction of rational planning would have improved the quality of educative and pastoral activity; the prevailing “dissent dynamic” during those crisis years, which tended to deal with the great issues of the world but partly ignored the collaborative and slow processes necessary for sustainable change.

The lack of educative and pastoral content that would emerge from the *Radiografie* confirmed the openness to topics that converged around the pastoral themes, without dwelling too much on the application of principles. Above all, what emerged were the topics of systematic youth studies, dialogue and collaboration in the educative community, integral development of the young, social and political openness, animation of leisure time, catechesis and adult education.¹⁶³ In the part that spoke

158 94% of the confreres from 27 Provincial Chapters were in agreements that the “parish is not an exceptional work of our Salesian activities.” Cf. *Ecco ciò che pensano i salesiani*, vol. 1, 1969, 176.

159 97% of confreres from 16 Provincial Chapters were in agreement with the mentioned wording. Cf. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 190.

160 Cf. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 194-198.

161 Cf. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 142-144 e vol. 2, 55-58.

162 VECCHI, *Pastorale, educazione, pedagogia*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000*, 13.

163 Cf. *Ecco ciò che pensano i salesiani*, vol. 1, 214-233.

of the Constitutions, only three provinces in Asia suggested including an article on the preventive system.¹⁶⁴ The two points that provoked greatest interest were the emblematic question of free participation in daily Mass¹⁶⁵ and opening up Salesian works to co-education.¹⁶⁶ Following the data from the *Radiografie* we can conclude that the Special Provincial Chapters in preparation for the SGC focused above all on structural change in the Congregation, overlooking specifically educative and pastoral issues.

The Special General Chapter on educative and pastoral issues

The more than two hundred days of intense work from June 1971 to January 1972, in the new headquarters of the Generalate in Rome, made the Special General Chapter the longest Chapter in Salesian history. The SGC, according to the indications of the previous Chapter, began with the General Report on the State of the Congregation presented by the Rector Major. In the educative and pastoral area, still referred to as “Salesian action”, Ricceri praised the heroic, humble and simple commitment of many confreres to poor youth, but he also dwelt at length on the poor results of the application of GC19. The redefinition and relaunching of the oratory and youth centre had “not produced much”¹⁶⁷ and the results of reshaping “were not really brilliant.”¹⁶⁸ He saw that there was an almost complete blocking of the opening of new houses, but opposed to that was a multiplication of works and a growing “disproportion between personnel and tasks.”¹⁶⁹ The specific aim of the SGC was to formulate a new text of the Constitutions and Regulations following the directives of Vatican II. Given that the redefinition of identity was a priority of the SGC, it is understandable that aspects of application and practice remained secondary.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 167

¹⁶⁵ 83% of confreres expressed themselves in favour of free attendance at daily Mass, Cf. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 225.

¹⁶⁶ 82% of Chapter members were in favour of integrating co-education into Salesian works, Cf. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 230-232.

¹⁶⁷ L. RICCERI, *Presentation of the “General Report on the State of the Congregation”*, in SGC (1972), 618

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 620.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. J.E. VECCHI, *Verso una nuova tappa di Pastorale Giovanile Salesiana*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000*, Documenti PG 13, SDB, Rome 1991, 73.

The departure point for all of the SGC's effort was to "rediscover in-depth our own identity" in the light of today's situation.¹⁷¹ The identity of the Salesians linked to educative-pastoral activity was expressed in the term "mission" leaving out the word "end" in order to underline the dimension of the vocation received from God within the Church, rather than seeing it as simply posed as an end to be reached.¹⁷² Mission referred primarily to the salvation of poor and abandoned youth without reference to activities and structures, to emphasise the integral nature of the mission. The relationship between mission and pastoral activity was described thus: "Pastoral work is a practical realisation of the mission under the guidance of the 'pastors'."¹⁷³ Salesian youth ministry is expressed in the Christ- and Church-centred perspective of the Council with a single objective: the salvation of the young. In pursuit of this goal we are able to "communicate divine life, making the family of man and its history more human."¹⁷⁴

From this unified perspective, then, comes the "absolute priority of pastoral work for youth"¹⁷⁵ with the need to apply the pastoral criterion to apostolic activity, the reshaping of works (especially the classic boarding schools) and updating of the community according to the new mentality.¹⁷⁶ Courageous formulations like the following were finally arrived at: "To continue a purely mechanical and pastorally inefficacious form of activity which merely wears out the confreres is inadmissible."¹⁷⁷ Pastoral ministry thus became an integral key connecting human development and evangelisation. To express the uniqueness of the complex Salesian mission, two complementary expressions were chosen: "integral Christian promotion" and "liberating Christian education."¹⁷⁸ If there was the risk in GC19 that pastoral ministry would become too generic a term, the SGC wanted to prevent this tendency and explored some of the concrete ramifications of pastoral activity.

As a first specification, the Chapter felt the need to provide a criterion for renewal, regulate the relationship between the return to the sources and the adapting to the new

¹⁷¹ Cf. SGC (1972), VIII.

¹⁷² Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 23.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, no. 30.

¹⁷⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 40, *Ibid.*, no. 60. Cf. no. 24.

¹⁷⁵ SGC (1972), n.o 180.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 344-348.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 398. Cf. also FRIGATO, *Educazione ed evangelizzazione*, in BOZZOLO – CARELLI (eds.), *Evangelizzazione e educazione*, 2011, 73.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. SGC (1972), no. 61.

times,¹⁷⁹ and it found it in the words: “Don Bosco in the Oratory”. It entailed reference not to the concept of oratory, but to the person of Don Bosco who had carried out his “pastoral action” in the well-defined Oratory of Valdocco, first as a simple festive oratory, then as “the Oratory” in its entirety, i.e. including the boarding school, with the classical and vocational schools, and the attached places for leisure, cultural and recreational activities.¹⁸⁰ The criterion could not have been simply the spirit, too subjective, nor the works, which ran the risk of them being idealised and fossilised.¹⁸¹ The ideal criterion was Don Bosco in the Oratory understood as the “the synthesis, the sum total of all the genial apostolic creations of our founder”,¹⁸² “faithful and dynamic, docile and creative, firm but at the same time flexible”,¹⁸³ who “stands out as a model of behaviour for all his sons.”¹⁸⁴

In a more concrete rethinking of Salesian educative and pastoral activity, the SGC identified the following areas subdivided into their respective documents: evangelisation and catechetics, pastoral renewal of Salesian activity among the young, parish ministry, social communication and missions.¹⁸⁵ In the structuring of the Acts, it is clear that the starting point is the single Salesian mission applied at the level of the works with the same pastoral criterion, so that the areas of action are dealt with only later. Interesting is the change of perspective that shifts from the traditional division by type of work to the specific areas of mission, formulated with a more systematic logic that prepares for the four dimensions of the pastoral plans developed in the 1980s.

The SCG defined Salesian pastoral ministry not only by the areas of mission, but also by describing the characteristics and the necessary Salesian pastoral attitudes. Pastoral care was seen as a service offered to young people characterised by its practicality, its all-embracing, communitarian and ecclesial approach.¹⁸⁶ Salesians were called to be pastors with the attitude of being on the lookout for young people outside our works

¹⁷⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 192-194.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. The rewording of the oratory criterion that followed, in C 40: “Don Bosco lived a pastoral experience in his first Oratory which serves as a model: it was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves.”

¹⁸¹ Cf. SGC (1972), no. 194.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, no. 195.

¹⁸³ SGC (1972), no. 197.

¹⁸⁴ MB, vol. 7, 457, in *Ibid.*, no. 197.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 175-306.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, nos. 350-359.

as well, the attitude of encounter, presence, understanding and dialogue.¹⁸⁷ Only later would come the part describing structures for carrying out this pastoral approach.

The effort to rethink Salesian activity from a pastoral point of view, following the Council, and the emphasis on social commitment led to the marginalisation of the concept of education, which is, according to GC19, the specific activity of the Congregation.¹⁸⁸ This could be noticed in the minor importance given to education in the *Radiografie* in preparation for the Chapter.¹⁸⁹ One could be in agreement with Vecchi's assessment later, saying that "there are educational ideas and many inspirations scattered here and there. But it still needs much to complement them, many mediations, much reorganisation to make it something people can apply and that our beneficiaries can assimilate."¹⁹⁰ The spirit of our pedagogy, the use of the preventive system and the method in general are reaffirmed, with the risk of repetition of already known formulations. We should also note the use of the word "education", which takes on different meanings according to the context – evangelisation, assistance, education or socialisation, that in the end it means any type of intervention that requires any type of competence.¹⁹¹ Despite the decreased importance of the educative dimension, we need to recognise the importance of the concept of the "educative community", which was introduced by the SGC and had further developments. The educative community needed to be made up of Salesians and laity, young people and their parents, all sharing responsibility in a family atmosphere and regularly planning and reviewing its activity.¹⁹²

The effects of the SGC in practice

At the end of almost every SGC document there was a chapter entitled "Practical directives". The section dealing with the Salesian mission alone contained over fifty specific indications concerning study and qualification tasks, decisions for structural

¹⁸⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 360-365.

¹⁸⁸ GC19 opened the document on youth apostolate in these words: "The Salesian Congregation participates in the Church's mission especially through its educative work among the young." Cf. GC19 (1965), 101.

¹⁸⁹ The *radiografie* focus in works was on consecrated life, formation, government and the specific part on education took up less than 3% of the four volumes. For the part on education Cf. *Ecco ciò che pensano i salesiani*, vol. 1, 213-233.

¹⁹⁰ VECCHI, *Pastorale, educazione, pedagogia*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000*, 18.

¹⁹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p.16.

¹⁹² Cf. SGC (1972), no. 395.

change to pastoral activity, criteria for the reshaping of works, the establishment of study centres, the establishing of teams and the convening of conferences. By means of these practical directives, the use of planning and the introduction of the educative community,¹⁹³ the SGC created the conditions for a more systematic formulation of the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project understood as a “strategic tool” in the subsequent 1978 General Chapter.

The diverse nature of the contents and style of the various documents did not give the impression of an easy translation of the Chapter into practice. The Rector Major saw this risk, and in his letter presenting the documents he argued against their exploitation, writing that

The Chapter, together with its documents is one indivisible, harmonious, organic whole. Not all of it will have the same normative value. Of necessity the documents and, the *Orientamenti*, will have different styles and, its own way of presenting the problems; the editing will vary from one to another and, sometimes there may appear a lack of homogeneity. This in no way lessens their validity for there is always a global oneness between the individual documents.¹⁹⁴

The execution of the large number of tasks was also complicated in practical terms due to the principle of decentralisation that left a “ample scope for the creativity and initiatives of the individual provinces.”¹⁹⁵ The SGC decided that the Provincial Chapter was the focal point of renewal. This was to be called no longer than a year after the closure of the SGC.¹⁹⁶ Few provinces were in a position to follow the rhythm of this amount of work, given the lack of preparation of personnel, the decrease in the number of confreres and the decentralised and dissenting climate also at the level of the provinces.¹⁹⁷ The need to renew the provincial directory, to bring it into line with the new Constitutions, forced the provinces to find quick regulatory ways to implement the new pastoral paradigm, setting aside the ambitious processes of change of mentality and reshaping.

At the halfway point between the two Chapters in 1975, the Rector Major in his letter outlined the three priority tasks of youth ministry, which give us a glimpse of the sore points in the application of the SGC: bring about a *change of mentality* and radically

¹⁹³ Cf. also nos. 340 and 480.

¹⁹⁴ SGC (1972), X-XI.

¹⁹⁵ SGC (1972), no 759.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. SGC (1972), nos. 759-761.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. VECCHI, *Pastorale, educazione, pedagogia*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000*, 19 and WIRTH, *Da don Bosco ai giorni nostri*, 452-454.

reset the parameters of pastoral activity; adopt a *new style of community thought and action* so that catechetical teaching would find a confirmation and consolidation in the witness of the entire Salesian educative community; *be present in the world in a new way*, implementing a close relationship between evangelising commitment and an attitude of service to the world.¹⁹⁸

Another picture of the SGC comes from an analysis of the *Report on the State of the Congregation* in 1977 and reports of the Provincial Chapters. They spoke of the risks of fragmentation and the juxtaposition of initiatives, given the complexity of the youth phenomenon and the pluralism of approaches. Meetings were organised in various contexts on global educative and pastoral questions and a number of pastoral coordinating groups and commissions came into existence. Worthy of mention are the European Conference on “Don Bosco’s educational system between ancient and new pedagogy” held at the end of 1973 and beginning of 1974 with around three hundred participants, some also from America and Asia, and the “European Youth Week” held at the General House in April 1976, dealing with various experiences of education and youth ministry.¹⁹⁹ Not all initiatives had defined goals and tasks, so the effects are not easily tracked. The emerging picture is that of a journey with multiple activities, in which, however, only individuals or small groups acted as key players keeping the majority of the communities uninvolved.

The most concrete indicator of changes in the pastoral and educational scene, insisted on by both GC19 and the SGC, could be the reshaping of works. Vecchi, basing himself on reports on the state of the Congregation, spoke in quite strong terms in 1991: “The failed experience of ‘general reshaping’ seems to lead the provinces towards a long-term gradual criterion which consists of partial reductions, developments, community changes, the establishment of some new service or the deployment of human resources.”²⁰⁰ Hence it seems that new proposals and initiatives which required new forces were simply added to the existing activities, sometimes producing only an apparent change of facade. Later, in GC23, the discussion of reshaping would resume, addressing it from a perspective of “significance”. But it must be noted that in the

198 Cf. L. RICCERI, *Letter of the Rector Major*, in ACS 56 (1975) 279, 6-44.

199 Cf. *Il sistema educativo di don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova*. Acts of the Salesian European Conference on Don Bosco's Preventive System, held in Rome from 31 December 1973 to 5 January 1974, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1974 and *A servizio dell'educazione. La Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione dell'Università Pontificia Salesiana*, ed. G. Malizia ed E. Alberich, LAS, Rome 1984.

200 VECCHI, *Verso una nuova tappa di PG Salesiana*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000*, 79.

long term the inability to reshape the works led to the weakening of communities and overloading the confreres who worked in the educative and pastoral area.²⁰¹

A collateral effect of the complex process of *renovatio* connected with study, social involvement and reorganisation was less emphasis on the dimension of spiritual life. The Rector Major described a situation regarding faith that was “rather shallow, superficial, just information, an external fact, a phrase uttered, but it does not explode from within to transform in vitality.”²⁰² In the *Report on the state of the Congregation* in 1971 we find a notable decrease and very real lowering of the spiritual level of the confreres and proposals offered the young.²⁰³ The SCG, aware of the situation and partly of the risk of superficial activism, declared:

Our first duty, therefore, is our spiritual conversion: to recognise our own insufficiency and to turn towards the Holy Spirit without whom we can do nothing worthwhile for the kingdom of God, and put ourselves in an attitude of supplication, of listening and of docility. In order to work out this necessary discernment and renewal, historians are not sufficient, nor theologians nor politicians, nor organisers, we need spiritual men [...] as was our founder.²⁰⁴

In conclusion, it can be said along with Viganò that “our SGC was an [...] intense work of mental development for the confreres. It was certainly one of the most powerful moments of Salesian community reflection in the history of the Congregation [...] It did enormous and substantially successful work, judged positively also by non-Salesians scholars and experts.”²⁰⁵ The SGC highlighted the identity of the Salesians in reference to the Council’s renewal, more in pastoral formulations than in practical educational answers to the needs of the youth.

²⁰¹ Cf. *Ibid.*

²⁰² Cf. L. RICCERI, *Letter of the Rector Major*, in AGC 51 (1970) 260, 14.

²⁰³ Cf. *General Report on the State of the Congregation*, SDB, Rome 1971, 27-32. Cf. Also the more detailed analysis by A. GIRAUDO, *Interrogativi e spinte della Chiesa del postconcilio sulla spiritualità salesiana*, in SEMERARO C. (ed.), *La spiritualità salesiana in un mondo che cambia*, Salvatore Sciascia, Caltanissetta 2003, 138-141.

²⁰⁴ SGC (1972), no. 18.

²⁰⁵ VIGANÒ, *The 22nd General Chapter, 1982*, 10-11.

Fr Ricceri and the handling of conflict

Fr Aloysius Ricceri, in tune with Paul VI's magisterium, suggested an attitude of balanced renewal in his very many circular letters. He introduced new themes and subjects in line with "the authentic Council, I mean as it is revealed in Documents," not in the iconoclasm of the past.²⁰⁶ The courageous opening of the Council should not lead one to think that change can be achieved in the space of months, a few years. In fact, Ricceri's strategy was to encourage reflection of individual confreres, communities, provinces, in an attitude of authentic dialogue. The regional meetings for Europe, Asia and Latin America were organised in 1968-69 to facilitate interprovincial discussion. In his first letter, laying out his agenda, the Rector Major used the image of the vine and branches to describe the process of renewal:

The Congregation (and even more so the Church) is a sturdy old vine which at times can have some dead branches; evidently the vinedresser who wished to preserve these at all costs would jeopardise the fruitfulness of the vine; but it would be quite foolish to uproot the vine completely just because there were some dead branches on it. [...] Every Salesian therefore (and here we extend the vision of our work) in this historic – and as many say – decisive moment and with that sense of responsibility and intelligent balance which ought to distinguish him in the eyes of the Church and of the Congregation, ought to avoid two extremes equally reprehensible and dangerous: the irrational attitude of one who would renew everything at once in a feverish rush towards what is new, discounting the past simply because it is the past; and the opposite attitude of one who would cling tenaciously to a collection of things which examined in the light of present day needs neither justify their existence nor fulfil that purpose nowadays for which they were once desirable and of value.²⁰⁷

The guidelines for renewal were then summarised in a few fundamental ideas that would map out Ricceri's work over years that were filled with conflict, radicalism, entrenchment and, not least, influenced by the effects of the personnel crisis that caused practical difficulties in the management of daily life. The Rector Major offered a summary that would also guide interventions and his letters to follow:

²⁰⁶ Cf. L. RICCERI, *Letter of the Rector Major*, in "ASC" 47 (1966) 245, 6.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

1. *The person of the Salesian* in his entirety as a man, as a religious, as a priest and as an educator, is the centre on which the Congregation's attention converges, in order to qualify him in all his aspects according to today's needs. For this reason his formation must be structured in depth, so that his vocation may develop and grow in a climate of healthy and courageous openness, which is absolutely necessary today in order to temper and mature the authentic Salesian;
2. *Authority is a service* motivated only by concern for the good of all and of individuals. Within the logic of the Good Shepherd, authority is not synonymous with imposition of the kind that suppresses the initiatives, responsibilities and personal resources of the confreres.
3. *Even in religious life there is a place for dialogue*, now necessary to make our entire mission efficient. The ideal superior, for the Church and for the Congregation, is the one who, experiencing the problems and interests of his confreres in a charitable way, helps them to solve them for the good of their souls and for the realisation of their vocation.
4. *The community shares responsibility* for the work of education in boarding schools, oratories, parishes; For this reason it must be systematically involved and made to share in initiatives, programs and orientations. This collaboration is one of the great guidelines that emerged from the Council and is continually found in the spirit and deliberations of GC19.
5. *The educational work* of the Salesian has to adjust to the needs of today's generation, so that it can really achieve the aims it has set for itself. It is necessary to examine sincerely to what extent each of the works has an educational and Christian formative vitality and what needs to be done, methodically and courageously, in order to truly achieve the goals marked out by Don Bosco and by the Church of our times.²⁰⁸

Two subsequent letters are especially valuable for educational issues: the first explored dialogue in the Congregation more deeply, making the idea of shared responsibility more concrete. In the second, the figure of Saint Francis de Sales was proposed as a model of the educator in an atmosphere of freedom. Fr Ricceri denounced the abuse of the concept of "dialogue" which would interpret the Council in a radical way, like the abolition of religious obedience, prayer, the breviary, the rosary, etc. The privileged theme should be: "Reshaping: our grand dialogue" that demands a broader,

²⁰⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 8-11.

bolder and more distributed discussion.²⁰⁹ Referring to Paul VI, the Rector Major proposed four virtues for effective and fruitful dialogue: clarity, meekness, trust and prudence.²¹⁰ St Francis de Sales was evoked as the model of the educator who gets young people to grow “from within”, not by constraint, in an atmosphere of freedom and dialogue. The privileged attitudes are respectful kindness to all, charity that conquers everyone and education as a “work of the heart” in a climate of loving-kindness.²¹¹

Summing it all up, we can say that Aloysius Ricceri tackled the period of crisis in a very balanced way, in line with Paul VI’s magisterium. Having taken part in the last session of the Council and in two Synods of Bishops and as a councillor for the Union of Superiors General, we see his understanding of the period of grace inaugurated by the Council. On the other hand, there is an evident commitment to mediate in the conflict, to denounce the abuses and ideological deformations of some of the Council’s principles. In spite of Ricceri’s traditional formation, his anchorage in Salesian traditions and a certain paternalism (speaking of “sons” or “subjects”) to be found in his letters, Braido evaluates Ricceri’s term of office as one of “considerable openness both to the problems of the Church and to those of civil society, proving to be the least ‘clerical’ of the Salesian leadership of the time.”²¹² Although he was unable to see the fruits of his work of mediation and moderation, the positive effects of his non-extremist attitude were collected in the subsequent period of the leadership of Viganò and Vecchi.

Salesian writers and pedagogical movements around Vatican II

Loving-kindness as the key to “early Braido’s” interpretation of Don Bosco

At the same time as the first publications on the preventive system, Pietro Braido developed his pedagogical reflections in exchanges with the team at the Higher Institute

²⁰⁹ Cf. L. RICCERI, *Letter of the Rector Major* in “ASC” 48 (1967) 247, 10.

²¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 20-23.

²¹¹ Cf. L. RICCERI, *Letter of the Rector Major*, in “ASC” 48 (1967) 249, 5-16.

²¹² BRAIDO, *Per una storia dell’educazione giovanile*, 297. Cf. M. WIRTH, *Da don Bosco ai nostri giorni*, 449-456.

of Pedagogy in Turin. The result of this collaboration were both the articles in *Orientamenti Pedagogici* (from 1954 onwards) and the three editions of *Educare. Un sommario di scienze pedagogiche*, summing up his approach.²¹³ The interests of the “early” Braido, philosopher of education, were quite broad. From the initial study of Johann Friedrich Herbart’s pedagogy in the 1940s, Braido moved on to in-depth studies on Soviet educator Anton Semenovič Makarenko, a key figure in the Italian pedagogical debate of the 1950s.²¹⁴ In addition to collaborative work in the Salesian ISP circle, Braido participated from 1954 in the first meetings of the “Scholé” group, gathered around La Scuola Publishers, which brought together Catholic-inspired educationalists in a period of confrontation with secular-liberal and socialist education. His interests vary in these collaborations: Christian education, pedagogical methodology, teaching, aesthetic, sexual, family, social and political education.

Braido introduced his first work on the *Sistema Preventivo di don Bosco* in 1955 by tackling the question of the “systematic nature” of the Preventive System, seeking to interpret Don Bosco’s famous words commenting on the letter of the Rector of the Seminary at Montpellier: “You want me to explain my system. But... Not even I know what it is! I have always gone ahead as the Lord inspired me and as circumstances demanded.”²¹⁵ Braido, even though influenced by the approach of Peter Ricaldone’s *Don Bosco educatore*, takes a certain distance from the overly strong statements on Don Bosco’s systematic spirit. His positions are closer to Bartolomeo Fascie, who maintained that he had to get out of the “field of theoretical pedagogy” and wander “instead in the practical field of the art of education and the work of the educator where Don Bosco was truly a master.”²¹⁶

²¹³ Cf. Various editions of *Educare. Sommario di scienze pedagogiche*. Ed. Pietro Braido, Turin, PAS 1956 up until the final volumes of the third edition published by PAS-Verlag in Zürich in 1964.

²¹⁴ Cf. P. BRAIDO, *A.S. Makarenko*, La Scuola, Brescia 1959.

²¹⁵ *Biographical Memoirs*, vol. 18, 127 quoted in BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*,¹1955, 25.

²¹⁶ B. FASCIE, *Del metodo educativo di don Bosco*, quoted in BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*,¹1955, 35. Cf. also pp. 27, 29, 34 and 46. It is necessary to place the question of Don Bosco’s systematic nature in the context of the controversy between Fascist and Catholic education. Catholic educationalists, like Casotti, tried to see in Don Bosco the figure not only of the educator but also of the Catholic educationalist par excellence. Cf. GIORGIO CHIOSSO, *Educazione e pedagogia salesiana nel primo Novecento (dal punto di vista dell’Italia)*, in ALDO GIRAUDO et al. (eds.), *Sviluppo del carisma di Don Bosco fino alla metà del secolo XX*. Acts of the International Congress of Salesian History (In the Bicentennial of the Birth of Don Bosco, Rome November 19-23, 2014). *Relazioni*, Rome, LAS, 2016, 155-186.

The arguments that support this solution range from acknowledging Don Bosco's spontaneous and unsystematic reflection to statements about his true artistic intuitions and brilliant inspirations in the educational field.²¹⁷ It should be noted that in the same pages Braido specifies his idea of a "pedagogical system" as being a systematic and unified vision of the educational reality that includes the contributions of scientific investigation, critical reflection and empirical evidence. His serious and demanding idea of a "system" even leads him to speculate on a systematic pedagogy deduced from the purpose of education or from some other principle.²¹⁸ A second strand of reflection on the non-systematic nature of the Preventive System shows the incompleteness of Don Bosco's educational reflection that does not include women's education, childhood education, aesthetic education, political and social preparation or didactics. Instead of reconstructing Don Bosco by framing him within the schemes of scientific and learned pedagogy, as a method of study, Braido suggests the effort to

portray him (almost "photograph him") synthetically, to grasp him in his individuality and in his activity. Precisely because his activity was not random, based on unbridled and disconnected intuitions, but was anchored in meditation and conclusions, steeped in wisdom and Christian and human common sense (nourished also by knowledge and contact with publications, with learned and competent men and a rich Christian educational tradition), it is possible to grasp the dominant and emerging ideas in this flow of life and intense wealth of activity.²¹⁹

He proposes a portrait almost in the Hegelian sense of the term, through "concepts with hands and feet" in an effort that also aims at making his message relevant by bringing it into life, assimilating it

almost "visually" (not simply seeing it, sensations without concepts are blind!), not only "intuiting" it, but "feeling" it, "enabling" it, reliving it. We should grasp it in the "facts", the episodes, with the ability to penetrate the spirit. And perhaps the best exposition of Don Bosco the "pedagogue" would be a biography of Don Bosco the "educator", captured in the most salient and characteristic facts...²²⁰

²¹⁷ Cf. R.G. ZITAROSA, *La Pedagogia di S. Giovanni Bosco*, quoted in BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ¹1955, 29.

²¹⁸ Cf. BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ¹1955, 29.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

It seems that the basic structure of Braido's *Sistema Preventivo* is Don Bosco's small treatise on the Preventive System. Braido confirms this in his introduction to the third part, called "The preventive system in action": "Even in his booklet on the preventive system, which in a certain sense he wanted to be a draft of a systematic pedagogical treatment, after the question of the *quid* and the *cur* (what does the preventive system consist of and why should we prefer it) in the second chapter (Application of the Preventive System) he poses the practical problem of the *quomodo*, or in other words, the methods and educational procedures."²²¹

In the paragraphs that follow, I would like to explore the basic paradigms of the various editions of the handbook on the preventive system that probably reflect author's socio-cultural context and personal development. In this regard it is helpful to consider as a starting point the boarding school model from the perspective of Peter Ricaldone's "fidelity to Don Bosco the saint".²²² The boarding school and the problems connected with it also determined the themes of the General Chapters, within a substantially traditional mental framework based on neo-Scholastic philosophy and theology. The specific educational and spiritual proposals can be traced back to Don Bosco.²²³

In this context we can understand the choice of loving-kindness (and the heart) as the "pedagogical principle" guiding the first edition of the work. The space given to the chapter on loving-kindness is more than the total number of pages in the chapters on religion and reason.²²⁴ Very interesting is the placement of the topic of punishments that reflects a typical problem of the growth in boarding schools in Salesian houses in the last two decades of Don Bosco's life.²²⁵ Punishments are dealt with in paragraphs headed "Demanding love. Discipline, correction, punishments" and "The pedagogy of the heart and correction." Even when Braido is searching for the Preventive System's sources of inspiration or dependence, he equally privileges loving-kindness and heart over prevention (in his last publication, *Prevenire non reprimere*, the balance shifts more

²²¹ BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ¹1955, 251.

²²² The quoted sentence is the programmatic title in P. RICARDONE, *Strenna del Rettor Maggiore per il 1935. Fedeltà a Don Bosco Santo*, SEI, Turin 1936.

²²³ Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Le metamorfosi dell'Oratorio salesiano tra il secondo dopoguerra e il Postconcilio Vaticano II (1944-1984)*, in "Ricerche Storiche Salesiane" 25 (2006) 49, 295-323.

²²⁴ Cf. BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ¹1955, 135-205.

²²⁵ On "collegialisation" cf. P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. vol. 1: *Vita e opere*, LAS, Rome 1979, 121-123 and for the concreteness of the discipline problem Cf. JOSÉ MANUEL PRELLEZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento tra reale ed ideale (1866-1889). Documenti e testimonianze*, LAS, Rome 1992.

towards the preventive). He sees it in comparison to the La Sallian tradition, Ferrante Aporti or Giuseppe Allievo.²²⁶ Because of the affinities with the de La Salle Brothers he says for example, that “over and above any technique of distance and silences, for Don Bosco there is the triumph of familiarity, loving kindness, the heart, in an environment of simplicity and spontaneity which is the characteristic of his education.”²²⁷ In seeking convergence with Prof. Allievo he says: “We were able to find only one significant page on the ‘heart’ in education and another regarding the question of rewards and punishments and the concept of ‘preventing’. Here we are decidedly with Don Bosco.”²²⁸

The guiding theme of loving-kindness is even more explicit in his summary work entitled *Don Bosco*, published in 1957 by La Scuola Publishers. Loving-kindness is the backbone of the book as he works from the centre out to the applications:

1. The soul of Don Bosco’s educative “style”: loving-kindness;
2. The “expressions” of loving-kindness;
3. From the centre outwards in the light of loving-kindness;
4. The happy educational message of religion (theological pedagogy; loving-kindness in religion);
5. Don Bosco’s “school of work”.²²⁹

The context of the Salesian boarding school as the predominant educational structure obviously does not end with the subject of loving-kindness, but it is implicit in the treatment of various educational questions: the importance of the inner moral conscience regarding duty with respect to the external motivation of discipline; the problem of daily mass and holidays; the treatment of aspirants and the importance given to sodalities. In this early production of Braido’s there is no noticeable emphasis on the question of the educational environment. Aside from a single reference to the interesting work of Henri Bouquier,²³⁰ the author refers to Albert Caviglia in his key passages of argumentation and in the conclusions of various chapters. Caviglia, who seems to be the preferred author for the “early” Braido in his reflections on the biographies of exemplary students written by Don Bosco, states the importance of religious pedagogy, of the family

²²⁶ Cf. BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ¹1955, 105-129.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

²²⁹ Cf. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco*, 1957, 7-8.

²³⁰ Cf. the first chapter titled “education, problem of the environment” in H. BOQUIER, *Don Bosco educateur*, Téqui, Paris 21950, 1-12.

atmosphere and of loving-kindness with respect to the disciplinary logic inherent in the boarding school structure.²³¹

Braido's certain predilection for the oratory as a balancing element shows the dominance of boarding schools and their problems at that moment in history. The oratory is defined as the all-inclusive environment, aimed at integral human formation, characterised by joy and freedom with the main bond of loving-kindness.²³² By contrast with the boarding school, the Salesian oratory is "a Work that is of itself 'precarious', being based on free attendance. It is this freedom that makes the action of the leaders much more mobile, flexible, dynamic and full of initiatives, since they do not limit themselves to waiting, welcoming, but like Don Bosco organise 'raids' of conquest, real peaceful 'roundups' (squares, streets, taverns, blocks of flats, etc.)."²³³

Braido's second edition and greater historical-critical sensitivity

The second edition of the handbook on the *Sistema Preventivo* in 1964 seems to come in the wake of the search for reliable sources under the noticeable influence of the historical-critical studies of Pietro Stella and Francis Desramaut. In the introduction, Braido describes himself as being more cautious and uncertain, putting forward the need of having sources that are "accessible [...] in critical-scientific form permitting reassuring [...] usefulness." In addition to the question of the certainty of the sources, he mentions two other fronts needing study: placing Don Bosco within the entire history of the nineteenth century and the problem of relationships and dependencies of Don Bosco's writings from other authors.²³⁴ Following this path of thought the first edition of 1955 is re-written with a critical evaluation of the first part about Don Bosco in the history of education as "not empirical" but only "open to discussion." Therefore the first part is replaced by five new chapters.

²³¹ Later on, Braido distances himself from Caviglia criticising his approach, speaking of his rhetoric, apologetic concerns, lack of knowledge of sources, and continuing danger of unfounded projections. Cf. Braido's handwritten notes on the frontispiece of [CAVIGLIA (ed.),] *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di "Don Bosco"*, vol. 4: *La vita di Savio Domenico* found in the collection at the Centro Studi Don Bosco in the Biblioteca don Bosco, UPS.

²³² Cf. BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ¹1955, 349-354.

²³³ BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ¹1955, 352.

²³⁴ Cf. the preface in BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ²1964, 7.

The need for scientific rigour also shifts the balance with regard to the systematic nature of Don Bosco's approach to educational problems. Fascie's solutions are no longer mentioned and Braido is led to consider Don Bosco clearly as an educator rather than a pedagogue or educationalist. "The term 'pedagogue' is clearly distinct from the 'educator', both logically and in real terms. *Per se*, neither interferes with the other in either a positive or negative sense. One does not need to be a pedagogue to be a brilliant educator, nor is being a pedagogue, however rigorous, rigid, or systematic a one, in itself an obstacle to being a keen, brilliant, efficient educator."²³⁵ This distinction is also applied to Don Bosco, who is no longer described, as he was in the first edition, as a narrative-style "writer on pedagogical matters", legislative texts, letters or dialogues.²³⁶ Don Bosco's beliefs are now described as non-scientific knowledge, "at the level of the people" and not rigorously demonstrated.²³⁷

It seems that in studying the Preventive System, Braido gives more space, methodologically speaking, to the intuition he expressed in 1955 of presenting Don Bosco the "pedagogue" through a biography of Don Bosco the "educator" grasped through his most characteristic activities. Braido had to face up to several difficulties, in addition to the danger of reducing the problem of "Salesian pedagogy" to the scientific and certain history of Don Bosco as a person. The first difficulty was the search for a (certain) criterion to distinguish his characteristic traits from those that were not.

The second edition, published during the "magical season of Vatican II"²³⁸ and before GC19, could be considered a transitional work, both in terms of methodology and in content and sources. The first part is reformulated with more historiographical caution and the second part is left substantially unchanged. The cautious historical contextualisation of Don Bosco's preventive system provides the structure for the first part of the work published in 1964, entitled: "Introductory explorations: Don Bosco's times, work and personality". Braido makes greater use of Don Bosco's letters in his re-elaboration of sources. The part on "personality and style" is developed almost exclusively by resorting to Ceria's *Epistolario*, the *Memoirs of the Oratory* and Caviglia's *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di "don Bosco"*, potentially leaving aside the criticised *Biographical Memoirs*.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

²³⁶ Cf. BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ¹1955, 28.

²³⁷ Cf. BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ²1964, 6

²³⁸ BRAIDO, *Le metamorfosi dell'Oratorio salesiano*, 296.

As far as content is concerned, the first part is obviously added to with chapters on the interpretations of Don Bosco the educator, his educational art, the political, religious, socio-economic and cultural context, the works, Don Bosco's heart and style. The part on the dual identity as priest-educator, which supported the theoretical argument in the first edition, is reduced. It seems that Don Bosco as "educator-artist" has acquired more importance for Braido, moving away from the ideal of the educational theorist.²³⁹

The second edition can be considered a work of transition also for the twofold attention to the historical data and to rethinking in terms of relevance for today. Braido speculates that only "the historian re-presents and reconstructs the system on the basis of the materials offered by the author and tries to offer reasons of a formal scientific nature to justify his reconstruction. But in this case the theorist, the pedagogue, the systematic thinker would be the historian himself, the one doing the reconstruction."²⁴⁰ This set of roles reveals his personal ideal but is also the expression of the epistemological approach in the first volume of the interdisciplinary series *Educare*.²⁴¹ The interdisciplinary approach also shines through in the following complex proposal: "The most faithful reproduction of the educative method should be a biography of Don Bosco the educator, captured not only through episodes and fragmentary facts, but also in typical behaviours, and in underlying motivations, with a continuous movement from ideas to facts, from intentions to actions, from things written to things realised, from reflections to exemplifications, from principles to situations, from directions taken to the 'episodes' that embody them..."²⁴²

Braido and the dual educational method of "love-discipline"

Braido seems to have been influenced by Peter Ricaldone, for whom he had much appreciation, in some of his syntheses. As the one who promoted the Higher Institute of Pedagogy, Ricaldone was respected for his visionary and organisational leadership

²³⁹ The idea of the educator-artist found an authoritative interpreter in Egidio Viganò, Rector Major from 1978 to 1995. Cf. e.g. EGIDIO VIGANÒ, *New Education*, in ACG 72 (1991) 337, 3-43.

²⁴⁰ BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, 1964, 68.

²⁴¹ Cf. *Educare*, vol. 1: *Introduzione alle scienze dell'educazione*, PAS Verlag, Zürich 31963.

²⁴² BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, 1964, 73.

skills.²⁴³ But it was not just agreement at an organisational level. Braido shared Ricaldone's basic view of the preventive system understood as science based on the "rock-solid foundations of perennial Catholic philosophy and theology, as well as on data offered us by other sciences such psychology, biology, sociology and so on."²⁴⁴ Without these neo-Thomistic foundations, one would not be able to understand either the argument or structure of topics in the first edition of *Sistema Preventivo di don Bosco*. As a philosopher convinced of the need for metaphysics, Braido concluded the first edition in 1955 by saying: "Don Bosco is an educator and educationalist who believes in objective and absolute values. Precisely in the century in which, even among Catholics, the metaphysical sense, sense of truth and objective reality was at times weak and the modernist crisis was looming, along with Rosmini (in opposition to Lambruschini, Capponi and others), he was the frank and loyal 'knight' of the most genuine dogmatic and pedagogical Catholic tradition."²⁴⁵

It is in this framework that he pursues the discourse on educational methodology. Reason, religion, loving-kindness are given priority: "Content prevails over method in Don Bosco, the goal over the way to the goal, the end over the means. The primacy belongs to the ends, to the 'eternal' truths, to the 'fear of God'. First, religion and reason, revealing content, and then 'loving-kindness' as a method."²⁴⁶

For Braido, however, loving-kindness is not the only essential component of educational methodology. Just as important are the so-called pedagogies of duty and of holiness. The "ethical-religious concept of life made of duty, serious and personal commitment and moral responsibility, which is the starting point of his [Don Bosco's] activity as educator."²⁴⁷ And continuing, he states "holiness and duty [...] are synonymous for him."²⁴⁸ Holiness is not only the goal of Salesian education but, for Braido, it also becomes the main condition and means that precedes any

²⁴³ Cf. JOSÉ MANUEL PRELLEZO, *Studio della pedagogia e pratica educativa nei programmi formativi dei salesiani*, in GIRAUDO et al. (eds.), *Sviluppo del carisma di Don Bosco fino alla metà del secolo XX*, vol. 1: *Relazioni*, 205-220.

²⁴⁴ PIETRO RICARDONE, *Don Bosco Educatore*, Libreria Dottrina Cristiana, Colle Don Bosco (Asti) 1951, vol. 1, 56. Cf. Also a more in-depth view in MICHAL VOJTÁŠ, *Sviluppi delle linee pedagogiche della Congregazione Salesiana*, in GIRAUDO et al. (eds.), *Sviluppo del carisma di Don Bosco fino alla metà del secolo XX. Relazioni*, 221-244.

²⁴⁵ BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ¹1955, 432.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 253.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 256.

other methodology.²⁴⁹ In fact, in the first edition in 1955, the methodological part entitled "Preventive System in Action" is structured as a synthesis of holiness and duties, including personal responsibility, moral education (especially in the virtue of purity), religious pedagogy of prayer, Eucharist, confession and Marian devotion.

Loving-kindness, although presented as the "methodological foundation",²⁵⁰ is not developed as a method of educative action, but is left as part of the "grand horizons of the preventive system." For Braido, as for Ricaldone's *Don Bosco educatore*, loving-kindness is more of an underlying principle that must be balanced with the principle of discipline to create a theoretical framework of educational methodology. Discipline through loving-kindness was the basis for overcoming the tension between authority and freedom in practical terms. Similarly, for Ricaldone, loving-kindness has the function of shaping the educational environment and making it family-like, but the more practical and methodological aspect is permeated above all by the principles of duty, personal responsibility, discipline and authority.²⁵¹

In the subsequent reformulations, despite the cultural shift after 1968 that altered the semantic categories of authority, discipline, power and freedom, Braido maintains the fundamental logic that revolves around the loving-kindness and discipline pair as a way of overcoming the tension between freedom and authority.

We see, however, his dissatisfaction with the formulations of the "methodological" part of the preventive system, as if he did not want to circumscribe Don Bosco's practical genius within the limits of an overly technical methodology. In the introduction to his *Don Bosco*, published by La Scuola in Brescia, he had this to say: "The combination of a brilliant and holy man, a style and, at least in part, a technique, became what everyone calls the 'preventive method' of Don Bosco."²⁵² Further on, he draws attention to the artistic component with titles such as: "From Art to Experience" or "The Pedagogical Poem of Don Bosco."

Conferences on updating Salesian pedagogy

Interesting ideas on the updating of Salesian pedagogy come from two conferences: the first organised in Rome by the ISP during the work of preparation for the Second Vatican

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 435.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

²⁵¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 194-199, 253-265; RICALDONE, *Don Bosco educatore*, vol. 1, 148-228, 286-287 and P. RICALDONE, *Strenna del Rettor Maggiore per il 1935. Fedeltà a Don Bosco Santo*, Turin SEI 1936.

²⁵² P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco*, La Scuola, Brescia 1957, 9.

Council under the post-Ricaldonian title *Don Bosco educatore oggi*;²⁵³ the second, fourteen years later at the time of the Special General Chapter, focused instead on *Il sistema educativo di don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova*.²⁵⁴ The idea of the necessary updating of Salesian pedagogy clearly emerges in the reflections, titles and structuring of the contributions. It is perceived as a polarity between a new “today” and an old “yesterday”.

Don Bosco as the educator for today (1960)

At the 1960 conference on updating Salesian education, the reflections were very interesting, since at the time of the conference the atmosphere of the Council was already widespread. In fact, the Acts begin by making explicit the full “harmony with the current anxiety of renewal.”²⁵⁵ But since the contributions were not as yet able to be influenced by Council documents, they tended to draw on ideas that were circulating in the ISP, some courageous, others at odds with the typical clichés associated with Vatican II in the second half of the 1960s. There was still a strong implicit and explicit reference to the “boarding school mindset”, its Salesian educators, and fostering a “distinctly Christian” school culture (Gian Carlo Negri). The re-invigoration of educational institutions was envisaged under the banner of a Salesian pedagogy that captures the living spirit of Don Bosco (Pietro Braido) in opposition to an oppressive Ricaldonian regulation and the conforming atmosphere of the boarding school (Pietro Gianola). The proposal focused on the practical preparation of educators, especially during practical training (Vincenzo Sinistrero), on the active life, preceded and prepared for through innovative insights into a sociological understanding of society (Pier Giovanni Grasso) and knowledge of the psychology of the young (Luigi Calonghi).

But the more interesting contribution, in our view, was from Pietro Braido, who offered fundamental guidelines based on Don Bosco’s Preventive System that were in tune with what he had produced in the 1950s, though with some new openings and in a more succinct and narrative style than found in the handbook we analysed earlier. Don Bosco had two fundamental characteristics in his view: “his brilliance and his

²⁵³ Cf. P. BRAIDO et al. (eds.), *Don Bosco educatore oggi*. Second revised and expanded edition, PAS Verlag, Zürich ²1963.

²⁵⁴ Cf. *Il sistema educativo di don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova*. Acts of the European Salesian Conference on Don Bosco’s Educational System, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1974.

²⁵⁵ BRAIDO et al. (eds.), *Don Bosco educatore oggi*, 9.

holiness.”²⁵⁶ Don Bosco’s holiness was spelt out in the moral and religious ideal he implemented thanks to his identity as the “young people’s priest” seeing everything *sub specie aeternitatis*. The religious ideal was clearly recognisable in Don Bosco’s formation, in the works he founded and in the methods he introduced.²⁵⁷ For Braido what was needed was a renewed youth ministry in which there would be

the return to a more supernatural and essential Christianity, one broadly felt, backed by theory, reacting not only to the various forms of naturalism and enlightenment inherited from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also in opposition to manifestations of formal pietism and excessive devotionism characteristic of a certain nineteenth century Italian spirituality. Youth ministry needs a vigorous return to a purely supernatural pedagogy with precise profiles and dogmatic foundations, and a true “theology of education”.²⁵⁸

There is a clear intention in Braido’s work to rediscover a lively, essential, functional Christianity, not in any compromise with contemporary pedagogy but by rediscovering the profoundly Christian character of Don Bosco’s educational system that demands a priestly soul and heart before psychology, pedagogy and didactics. The latter are essential and very important aspects but always *subordinate* to the Christian character of Salesian pedagogy.²⁵⁹ Before the beginning of the Council, Braido evoked a return to the sources of Revelation and to a piety that was less focused on devotions and more unified, essential and positive, and to a religiosity that was more community-based and therefore less individualistic, more committed to real life than to abstract moral terms. And finally, a more authentically inward piety with far less outward demonstration. In similar vein to Rinaldi, Braido spoke of a Don Bosco who rethought traditional pastoral works according to the needs of the new times with “ingenious adaptation”, thus criticising the widespread tendency towards a radical ideological and practical revolution. Instead, Braido recognised in Don Bosco fidelity to the tradition of an essential Catholicism and the adaptation of external forms to the new times.²⁶⁰ From these basic positions, and taking up the educational emphases of Caviglia, came the proposal for rectors to be more

²⁵⁶ P. BRAIDO, *Contemporaneità di don Bosco nella pedagogia di ieri e di oggi*, in BRAIDO et al. (eds.), *Don Bosco educatore oggi*, 75.

²⁵⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 61-63.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 65-66.

²⁶⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 67.

confessors than bureaucrats, and for Salesians to be more pastors than professors.²⁶¹ Don Bosco was the “young persons’ priest” totally dedicated to the mission of education. Braido also had some interesting advice for Salesian educators:

Clericalism, no; a clearly Catholic spirit, yes. For the Salesian, the result is the need for a solid ecclesiastical culture and an authentic apostolic spirituality, as well as a scientific and didactic one. [...] Here it is not a question of “points of view” or “good advice”, but coherence, and obedience to Don Bosco [...]; to the Church [...]; to the needs of the souls of young people, in our time...²⁶²

The second part, which spoke of the inimitable genius of Don Bosco’s youth apostolate, delved into one characteristic above all: the family style of Salesian education. For Braido, Don Bosco’s Preventive System was not a scientific system, but a precise “educational style,” a new and original variation of perennial Christian pedagogy. “Don Bosco, while thinking mainly of the supernatural salvation of the young (though not overlooking intermediate earthly ends), felt that it could not be achieved other than through human and divine ways of understanding, trust, the things that please them or are useful to them.”²⁶³ “Family style” is the fundamental and decisive element, the soul and essence that differentiates the educational methodology of the preventive system from other systems: “It is the *natural method of the family*, with all that this word includes of the structural and the spiritual, of outward organisation and inward behaviour, of relationships, of subordination and coordination. It is a precise ‘institutional’ formula, but at the same time an elastic and inclusive one.”²⁶⁴ Picking up on ideas Bartolomeo Fascie had anticipated, the idea of family Braido was offering was one of an “open”, not “closed” system, a living organism that accepts variations and transformations without destroying the fundamental characteristics tied to religion, described in the first part. Other principles of the family system are to be found in “family understanding”, characterised by *reason* and *loving-kindness*.²⁶⁵

Braido’s intervention was followed by Don Bosco’s *Letter from Rome* entitled “The poem of educational love”, the precious manifesto of a pedagogy “that is at the same time an appeal to knowledge and fulfilling abilities, lively and creative imagination,

²⁶¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 63-64.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁶⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 69-70.

faith and loving will, fervour and personal dedication and a living relationship with real and sustained activity.”²⁶⁶ We note how, in the circumstances of the 1950s influenced by secularism, rationalism, materialism and relativism, the perception of Christian pedagogy had changed, so that “it is necessary to reconsider Don Bosco not only historically, but also theoretically, systematically [...] in a general theological, philosophical and scientific perspective with a broad scope.”²⁶⁷ Going beyond just the academic sphere, Braido postulated practical cooperation between scholars, individual educators, family groups (parents and children) and educative families (teachers and other educators).²⁶⁸

Don Bosco's system: both ancient and new (1974)

The conference of educators belonging to the Salesian Family, held in the General House on the via della Pisana, was organised with the intention of exchanging studies, reflections and experiences of the three hundred participants coming from all over the world. Braido described the aim of the conference by referring to a “vital and challenging reflection” on the current educational and pastoral effectiveness of the “system”. The method of work involved the presentation of some topical educational issues expressed in reports prepared largely by experts from the Faculty of Education at the UPS, which were then discussed in group work and, finally, the assembly approved a summation of convergences in a document called “concluding remarks”.²⁶⁹

The assignment of the first intervention to Bruno Bellerate was an interesting choice. Aiming to stimulate and provoke discussion, he spoke of the historical significance and adaptability of Don Bosco's educational system. His starting point was the idealisation of the founder “which subsequently translates into an ideologising of him: everything was good and perfect, everything was and still is justifiable, it is the best that can be done.”²⁷⁰ What was clear was the intention of going beyond the fossilisation of detailed Ricaldone-style applications and the “retrospective illusion” of Salesian triumphalism, but in our view Bellerate went too far, relativising Don Bosco's significance for today.

²⁶⁶ *Il poema dell'amore educativo*, in BRAIDO et al. (eds.), *Don Bosco educatore oggi*, 79.

²⁶⁷ BRAIDO, *Contemporaneità di don Bosco*, in BRAIDO et al. (eds.), *Don Bosco educatore oggi*, 72-73.

²⁶⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 73-74.

²⁶⁹ Cf. *Don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova*, 7-12.

²⁷⁰ B. BELLERATE, *Il significato storico del sistema educativo di don Bosco nel sec. XIX e in prospettiva futura*, in *Don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova*, 19.

Analysing the ideological influences on Don Bosco at the level of faith, pedagogy, visions of life and entrepreneurial and organisational mentality, etc., at the end of his intervention he ended up by saying, albeit cautiously, that “the same ideological principles can be abandoned when their validity depends on components that lose their importance and even acquire a negative connotation with the changing times.”²⁷¹ Bellerate adopted the historical hermeneutics of Paul Veyne²⁷² stating that there was no lack of studies and sufficient data on Don Bosc’s education:

it is only a matter of prudent and courageous application of the adaptability “grid” and the consequent adaptation. This grid comes from [...] the analytical interweaving of historical data and contemporary instances, that is to say through the coordination of the work of the historian with that of the sociologist, as far as the main links are concerned, on which the contributions of the psychologist, the methodologists, theoreticians and so on can be overlaid from time to time.²⁷³

In conclusion, Bellerate quoted Don Bosco at the 1877 General Chapter as saying, “We must try to know and adapt to our times, that is, respect people.”²⁷⁴ Taking his cue from *knowing our times* he said there was then a need to shift from research to application, *adapting* with the criterion of *respect for people* which in the end is what makes history and determines historical changes. By envisioning the method this way, however, Bellerate noted how it was always difficult to identify what attitude Don Bosco might have taken in contexts and circumstances different from his own.²⁷⁵ This approach of mixing the uncertainty of potential adaptations, the generic considerations of method and the lack of concrete indications would be recognisable in the subsequent theoretical and historical research after the Vatican II and would mark the directions taken by Bellerate, Milanesi, Braido and other authors.²⁷⁶

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁷² Bellerate often refers to P. VEYNE, *Comment on écrit l’histoire. Essai d’épistémologie*, Seuil, Paris 1970.

²⁷³ BELLERATE, *Il significato storico*, in *Don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova*, 21-22.

²⁷⁴ MB vol. 14, 416 in *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁷⁵ Cf. BELLERATE, *Il significato storico*, in *Don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova*, 33

²⁷⁶ In our opinion, the lack of a theological perspective, influences from Marxist and/or pragmatic educationalists and epistemologists, paralysed the updating of Salesian education after the Council. For a more in-depth look at Bellerate’s approach and sources we refer to the two parts of the founding article: B. BELLERATE, *La storia tra le scienze dell’educazione*, in “Orientamenti Pedagogici” 17 (1970) 4, 927-957 and second part in *Ibid.*, 19 (1972) 3, 722-731. For his retrospective assessment of the Marxist

Pietro Braido, probably influenced both by Bellerate²⁷⁷ and the historical criticism of traditional sources carried out by Desramaut and Stella, offered the conference just a succinct summary of the methodology of Don Bosco's Preventive System, referring to his previous writings without an updated rethink. The other contributions then delved into dimensions of Salesian education: catechesis, loving-kindness, educative community, assistance, young people of today and settings (school, family, groups, youth centres and media). In the closing address from the Rector Major, Aloysius Ricceri, it is interesting to note some corrections of Bellerate's ideas regarding both Don Bosco's ideology and the methodological part of the preventive system, aiming at fostering the need to know and understand the *total Don Bosco*:

Underlying Don Bosco's educational work is *not an ideology* or any kind of methodological technique, but a *vision of faith*. From it Don Bosco was enlightened to act, and by it his whole life and his choices were judged. It explains and resolves the so-called tensions between Don Bosco's life and sayings (bread/paradise; sin/optimism; humanism/evangelisation, etc.). [...] If we put ourselves in profound harmony with his spirit – which, it is worth repeating, is essentially *one of faith and supernatural charity* and therefore profoundly human – the preventive system will become the necessary logical expression of our life and we will not allow ourselves to be influenced by mirages that do not bear the imprint of God and therefore cannot be in line with the Salesian mission.²⁷⁸

The Salesian Colloquiums

In the European scene we find an ongoing experience of conferences based on discussion around Salesian themes, called *Colloquiums on Salesian life*. Fr Francis Desramaut, for

background and the futile effort to reform the Salesian Congregation from within, cf. B. BELLERATE, *Un itinerario aperto: l'educare*, in M. BORRELLI (ed.), *La pedagogia italiana contemporanea*, vol. 2, Pellegrini, Cosenza 1995, 16-18.

²⁷⁷ For Bellerate's influence on Braido in the 1970s cf. *Rinnovamento di una Facoltà di scienze dell'educazione*, in "Orientamenti Pedagogici" 17 (1970) 4, 1044. We can also note that Braido's famous concept of the "Memoirs of the future", applied to the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, appeared first in BELLERATE, *La storia tra le scienze dell'educazione II*, in "Orientamenti Pedagogici" 19 (1972) 3, 731.

²⁷⁸ L. RICCERI, *Discorso di chiusura del convegno europeo salesiano sul sistema educativo di don Bosco*, in *Don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova*, 311.

years the animator of these Colloquiums, recounts the origin of these fruitful meetings, linked to the meeting of Salesian formators from the French-speaking provinces that took place in the summer of 1967 in Rheims. Fr Ricceri had agreed to be present for a few hours and two teachers from the Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum, Mario Midali and Giuseppe Abbà, had participated as observers. At the end of the event, given the good level of discussion, Fr Abbà asked if it would be possible to organise similar meetings on a wider scale, given the positive experience. Desramaut had his doubts: “I couldn’t imagine that the Italians, starting with the superiors at the Generalate in Turin and the professors from the Salesian Athenaeum in Rome, would look kindly on an assembly engaged in discussing their problems independently of them.”²⁷⁹ After the consultation with Roman experts, first of all Pietro Stella, surprisingly, a positive opinion arrived and planning for the first of the Colloquiums began. The theme of Salesian prayer life was chosen, not such a hot topic at the time, and the provincial of the Athenaeum, Fr Luigi Chiandotto, was unanimously chosen as president of the 1968 Colloquiums.²⁸⁰

The first Colloquium on Salesian life took place in Lyon during the month of September in the eventful year 1968. In the difficult atmosphere of protest, criticism and generational clashes, the Colloquiums set themselves two basic objectives: the first determined by the need to conduct serious studies on Don Bosco, his work and charism; the second expressed by the desire to give answers to the questions of the young confreres who, because of their modern mentality, demanded indications based on historical documentation. The first president, reflecting Desramaut’s approach,²⁸¹ described the nature of the Colloquiums as follows:

It is a ground-roots initiative; not something official. Our *international Colloquiums* are simply this: a meeting of confreres who love Don Bosco and the Congregation, have a good scientific preparation and have studied and still study Don Bosco and Salesian life in such a way that they can speak and write about it competently.²⁸²

²⁷⁹ F. DESRAMAUT, *All’origine dei Colloqui sulla vita salesiana*, in C. SEMERARO (ed.), *La festa nell’esperienza giovanile del mondo salesiano*, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1988, 239.

²⁸⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 239-240.

²⁸¹ The organisational qualities, precision and constancy of the secretary and coordinator of the Colloquiums, Fr Francis Desramaut, were highlighted already from the first meeting. In addition to the work of coordination, we see him involved as a key figure in the topics dealing with updating the charism, through papers offered at almost every Colloquium.

²⁸² L. CHIANDOTTO, *Presentazione*, in *La vita di preghiera del religioso salesiano*. Lyon 10-11 September 1968, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1969, 5.

In addition to the criterion of scientific competence, the internationality of the group as a whole was also mentioned. Other methodological attentions completed the gradual development of the Colloquium project: scientific seriousness in the study, a high level of disclosure in the presentation of the results, and attention to the desire to include in the proceedings the reactions and discussions provoked by the papers. At the level of objectives, the aim was to study Salesian themes, leaving in the background the need to influence practical issues. Seen from a distance, two methodological modes of study can be traced in the organisation of the contents of the Colloquiums. One, more widespread in the first Colloquium, started from “Salesian history”, tackling current problems in order to arrive at the goals of a future commitment. The other started from the questions of the present context that challenged Salesian tradition in order to find answers and pointers for future direction.²⁸³

From the second Colloquium onwards they sought to go beyond the almost exclusive dialogue between current events and history and the group expanded with thinkers from the areas of sociology, anthropology, epistemology, psychology, and pastoral care.²⁸⁴ For the latter, several people began to participate from 1970: two members of the new International Centre for Youth Ministry in Turin, Michel Mouillard and Vittorio Gambino, replaced in 1975 onwards by Riccardo Tonelli. There was also the presence and collaboration of Mario Midali who moved, over those years, from ecclesiology to pastoral-practical theology. There was also the presence of Salesians who not only reflected. They were directly involved in pastoral work as delegates for Youth Ministry in the provinces or were operating in pilot pastoral projects. After some time, Midali positively evaluated the work among thinkers in different areas: “I was able to see the concrete benefits of the interdisciplinary dialogue among those competent in various disciplines, workers in the field and superiors. It had been much advocated in principle, but had proved to be extremely difficult to implement in the academic setting.”²⁸⁵

The five colloquiums that were explicitly dedicated to the Salesian Family from 1973 to 1978 had already involved the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Salesian Cooperators and the Volunteers of Don Bosco. The enlargement of the group

²⁸³ Cf. M. MIDALI, *Aspetto pastorale dei venti anni di “Colloqui”*, in SEMERARO (ed.), *La festa nell’esperienza giovanile*, 244.

²⁸⁴ F. DESRAMAUT, *Introduzione*, in *La missione dei salesiani nella Chiesa*. Benediktbeuern (Germany) 9-11 September 1969, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1970, 5.

²⁸⁵ M. MIDALI, *Frammenti della vita salesiana tra 1941 e 2010. Memorie semplici e considerazioni sobrie*, s.e., Rome 2014, 178.

of participants was also reflected in the composition of the organising committee. From 1974 on there was Sister Maria Luisa Petrazzini, then professor at the Pedagogicum in Turin, followed by other FMAs who were part of the coordination of the Colloquiums.

The choice of topics for the Colloquiums did not proceed according to the initial plan but opted, from time to time, for a topic by following two criteria: relevance for Salesian life and scientific competence available in the Salesian Family. The first criterion tied the topics to reflections of General Chapters after the Council, in particular those involved with rethinking the charism from 1971 until the renewed *Constitutions* in 1984. Summarising the path of the Colloquiums in the second half of the twentieth century, the topics addressed could be divided substantially into three groups:²⁸⁶

- reflections on the general context, including topics like injustice, the expectations of young people, education for peace, youth unemployment, popular religiosity, celebration and coeducation;
- topics that touched on the Salesian Family *ad intra*: prayer life of the religious, Salesian community, Salesian family, the Cooperators in society, relationship between religious and laity, Salesian vocation, communication, spiritual direction and ageing;
- considerations on the Salesian mission *ad extra* to the world: mission of the Salesians in the Church, service to young people, commitment to justice, indifference and new forms of religiosity, culture of life and death, commitment of the Salesian Family in the contexts of life of young people studied in general.

The Colloquiums were well received in the Salesian world and influenced the maturing of thinking on several current issues in the '70s and '80s.²⁸⁷ In addition to contributions on the various topics, the Colloquiums brought innovations in the form and method of dialogue on Salesian issues, balancing some of the dynamics of the Roman academic world that tended toward a certain self-sufficiency.

²⁸⁶ Cf. C. SEMERARO, *Domande di fine millennio: "Colloqui, si? Colloqui, no? Discussione sul futuro dei Colloqui"*, in C. SEMERARO (ed.), *Mondo salesiano e povertà alla soglia del III millennio*, Salvatore Sciascia, Caltanissetta 2001, 207-208 picking up MIDALI, *Aspetto pastorale*, in SEMERARO (ed.), *La festa nell'esperienza giovanile*, 242.

²⁸⁷ Up until 1987 LDC Publishers sold 12,200 copies of the Proceedings of the 12 Colloquiums. Cf. N. SUFFI, *La collana "Colloqui" e la sua incidenza nei contenuti dell'editoria salesiana*, in SEMERARO (ed.), *La festa nell'esperienza giovanile*, 251.

Gino Corallo – thinking outside the box

An interesting and well-founded reflection that did not share Braidò's approach to the “sciences of education” was proposed by the Salesian educationalist Gino Corallo. He was the first author to take an interest in John Dewey's pedagogy in Italy.²⁸⁸ At the beginning of the 1950s, he had gone to the United States to study the results of active didactics and had set out his proposal as a pedagogy of freedom. Even if his voice was not dominant in Salesian post Vatican II reflections (from 1965 he would teach at the University of Bari), his ideas help us to understand the directions and approaches of those years with their strong points but also with the intrinsic weaknesses that every approach entails. Corallo foresaw the risk that pedagogy might be weakened if it were not to rely on a strong philosophy, as happened in fact with the notion of the “sciences of education”.²⁸⁹

Speaking of Don Bosco, Corallo did not dwell on the systematic nature of his thinking, but interpreted his way of proceeding from within the systematic logic of a living organism. Referring to the famous statement of “not knowing,” the author says that for Don Bosco there would be no uniform answers to different types of educational questions and situations. Taking the example of the treatment of punishments, Corallo declares that

a “treatise-like” response would not have been of its time. (I believe that this is the fundamental reason why Don Bosco never wrote the “brief” pedagogical work he hinted at, at the beginning of his Preventive System). A vital question is given a vital answer: it is a question of fitting punishment into a style of the complex, but unified relationships (as are those of all living organisms) which give it meaning: the same material act then takes on a different meaning and educational value according to the interpersonal context it fits into.²⁹⁰

According to Corallo, by excessively pursuing the need for a scientific approach to Salesian pedagogy one runs two risks: regulating contingent aspects or consigning Don

²⁸⁸ Cf. G. CORALLO, *La pedagogia di Giovanni Dewey*, SEI, Turin 1950.

²⁸⁹ Cf. G. CORALLO, *Educare la libertà*. Selected anthology by Maria Teresa Moscato, Clueb, Bologna 2009; C. NANNI – M.T. MOSCATO (eds.), *La pedagogia della libertà. La lezione di Gino Corallo*, LAS, Rome 2012; L. LAFRANCESCHINA, *La Pedagogia Italiana del Secondo Dopoguerra e la Proposta Pedagogica di Don Gino Corallo*, Arti Grafiche Cortese, Bitonto 2014.

²⁹⁰ G. CORALLO, *Il metodo educativo salesiano. L'eredità di Don Bosco*, Tip. Scuola Salesiana del Libro, Catania 1979, 11-12.

Bosco to history. It is not difficult to connect the first risk with Fr Ricaldone's efforts to regulate things, and the second with the post-Vatican II tendency of an historical critique of Salesian sources. The rethinking of the Preventive System in its present form also runs the risk of forgetting some of its permanent roots, especially in the context of strong secularisation and pseudo-dialogue with the world:

It is no accident that the denial, including theoretical but above all practical denial of this perennial dimension (given that today many have a certain difficulty in thinking), is currently accompanied by the frequent practical obliteration of some perennial values of Christianity. And despite the touching efforts of those who advocate complete secularisation, it shows itself terribly reluctant to be "historicised" in some of its fundamental dimensions. And Don Bosco, I don't need to remind you, posed a by no means precarious relationship between being a Christian (seriously so) and being an educator (also seriously so).²⁹¹

According to Corallo, the core of the Preventive System lies in Don Bosco's spirit, style and typical personal way of creating an educational synthesis. "This *educative soul* of Don Bosco lies in a *fundamental attitude* that the educator must take on as his *lifestyle* and not just as a pure professional ability."²⁹² In the second part of his brief work entitled *Dalla parte del ragazzo* (On the child's side), Corallo goes into some concrete aspects of the Preventive System dividing the discussion into two parts: how the child is (starting point) and how the child should be (axiology and purpose). The two parts are connected, psychological knowledge of the child and moral values are intertwined: "Pedagogical discourse is not a discourse of psychological techniques, but neither is it a moral sermon: it is that very singular discourse in which personal morality becomes the technique of education and in which didactic psychological technique must be transfigured into moral commitment."²⁹³

Putting oneself totally and loyally on the side of the child does not mean naive pedocentrism, but it is a fundamental attitude of acceptance that recognises the whole child, that recognises who the child is and should be, what the child can and should become – in other words, the whole child. Assistance, in this light, would be the

²⁹¹ CORALLO, *Il metodo educativo salesiano*, 10.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 16

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

existential knowledge of the child in an educational relationship marked by consecration and total dedication.

I would venture to say that Don Bosco brought about a revolution in education similar [...] to that which Christianity wrought in the Old Testament. In the face of the detailed and multiplying rigidity of the law, Christianity raised up the greatness of the spirit and the principle that the Sabbath is made for man. It is not wrong, therefore, to say that with his system Don Bosco brought about a true Copernican revolution in the field of education: he followed the direction that went from the boy to his gradual achievement of maturity, and not the opposite direction commonly used in his day, which went from programs and precepts to the boy.²⁹⁴

If assistance is the fundamental attitude of placing oneself on the side of the young person, “youthfulness” is the consequential characteristic of an education that begins with being with the young. Assistance is the typical Salesian attitude that avoids two fundamental errors: abandoning young people to themselves and imposing oneself on young people without caring for them. For Corallo, assistance and charity are the field in which Don Bosco’s statement that “only the Christian can successfully apply the preventive system” should be applied.²⁹⁵

The most difficult part of the work of education is aimed at the successful future of the young, “as they ought to be.” The educator and assistant who is dedicated to the good of the young uses the levers of reason and example to educate to the moral aspects that are not as instinctive as primary and relational needs. Religious and moral education is verified if educators are really dedicated to the good of the students. Do they they transmit life as a whole or merely indoctrinate or teach in an autocratic way? According to Corallo, it is the former that is the heart and soul of Don Bosco’s method and the educator, as a consequence, is “the Christian who has made the good of another person their life’s goal. In Jesus’ words, they are the one who gave their life for their friend.”²⁹⁶ Corallo’s pedagogical perspective on Don Bosco is a personalistic and Catholic one that overshadows historical criticism and the application techniques of individual sciences. It becomes an interesting, though not so well-developed alternative to the proposals of Pietro Braido that have influenced epistemological choices at the Education Faculty at the UPS.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁹⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 28-29.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

Tools and resources

Chronological table

<i>World history</i>	<i>Salesian history</i>	<i>Salesian pedagogy publications</i>
European integration begins	1951	canonisation of M.D. Mazzarello Ricaldone , <i>Don Bosco educatore</i>
	1952	Renato Ziggio elected Rector Major
end of Korean War	1953	
racial segregation made illegal in USA	1954	canonisation of Dominic Savio; Grasso , <i>Gioventù di metà secolo</i>
	1955	FMA Pedagogicum opens Braido , <i>Il Sistema Preventivo di don Bosco</i> (1st. ed.)
Bloom publishes <i>Taxonomy of Edu. Objectives</i> ;	1956	approval of Istituto Superiore di Pedagogia; Braido (ed.), <i>Educare</i>
Sputnik launched into space	1957	<i>Summario di scienze pedagogiche</i>
John XXIII elected Pope	1958	GC18 (theme: religious observance)
	1959	
Congo independence, protests against apartheid	1960	International Cooperators Congresses, Braido et al. (eds.), <i>Don Bosco educatore oggi</i>
end of "great leap forward" in China	1961	Madrid, Barcelona Braido , <i>Religiosi nuovi per il mondo del lavoro</i>
beginning of Vat II	1962	
Paul VI elected Pope; J.F.Kennedy assassinated	1963	1,285 SDB novices (greatest no. in history)
USA sends troops to Vietnam	1964	Braido , <i>Il Sistema Preventivo di don Bosco</i> (2nd. ed.)
end of Vatican II; <i>Gravissimum educationis</i>	1965	Aloysius Ricceri elected RM at GC19 ; PAS transferred to Rome
	1966	
Israel wins 6-day war	1967	beginning of SDB demographic decline; Desramaut , <i>Don Bosco et la vie spirituelle</i>
student riots, CELAM Medellín	1968	Colloquiums on Salesian life begin Stella , <i>Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica</i>
man on the Moon	1969	
Küng writes, <i>Infallible? A Question</i>	1970	Braido , <i>Faculty of Education renewed</i>
	1971	beginning of SGC - Special General Chapter (<i>Congregation's new Constitutions</i>)
Nixon visits China	1972	Generalate transferred to Rome
First computer with GUI	1973	PAS becomes Sal. Pont. Uni. Braido , <i>La missione salesiana oggi</i>
	1974	<i>Il sistema educativo di DB tra pedagogia antica e nuova</i>
Angola and Mozambique independent	1975	Congress on the Salesian Brother
	1976	World Cooperators Congress Bellerate - Milanesi (eds.), <i>Educazione e politica</i>
Deng Xiaoping's Beijing spring	1977	Egidio Viganò elected Rector Major at GC21, Juan Vecchi YM Councillor
John Paul II elected Pope	1978	development of SEPP through YM Dept. : Booklet 1. methodology, 2. elements

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Online resources

Sources, documents, research, full-text publications, photographic material dealing with this chapter.²⁹⁷



²⁹⁷ Cf. salesian.online/pedagogia4

5

Planning and animation (1978–1998)

While the impression of the extraordinary nature of Vatican II seemed to fade, the dynamics of ecclesial life in the 1970s were still strongly conditioned by the events of the previous decade. It was a time of feverish pastoral activity, but also of demographic and identity crisis for the various religious congregations. Because of all this complexity, the Congregation's General Council met eight hundred times over the six years from 1972-77 with the overall objective of "promoting the momentum of renewal desired by the Special General Chapter, distinguishing the gold from the dross, and at the same time directing it in such a way as to avoid the creation and stabilisation of disorder."¹ Further meetings of animation in the various regions, often conditioned by crisis situations, were added to the ordinary work. In 1972 the Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum based in Rome became the Pontifical Salesian University, and within the sphere of Salesian studies the Don Bosco Study Centre was born with the aim of promoting scientific studies of the saintly educator. Between 1976 and 1977 the Centre, under the direction of Pietro Stella, published a facsimile edition of Don Bosco's printed works in thirty-seven volumes, allowing scholars of the Salesian charism access to a much richer corpus than the previous editions.

Consolidation guided by Viganò and Vecchi

The 21st General Chapter, held from the end of October 1977 until February the following year, could only but verify the journey made and bring to maturity some of the many guidelines indicated by the Special General Chapter. The Rector Major, Aloysius Ricceri, indicated in his report that all the reshaping, the qualification of the

¹ L. RICCERI, *21st General Chapter of the Salesian Society. General Report on the State of the Congregation*, [s.e.], Rome 1977, no. 15.

confreres and the formation of lay collaborators still had to be done, since there were few achievements due to the lack of a concrete vision and a realistic mindset.²

With these criteria in mind, the Chapter elected Fr Egidio Viganò as Don Bosco's successor, appreciating his leadership skills and experience in Salesian and ecclesial life on several continents. He had spent most of his life in Chile, where, in addition to his service as provincial in the turbulent years between 1968 and 1972, he had participated intensely in ecclesial life. As an expert theologian of the Chilean episcopate, he had spoken at the Second Vatican Council and later at the meeting of the Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellín (1968). Between 1972 and 1978 he held the position of General Councillor for formation, establishing courses of ongoing formation, initiating the Salesian Family Spirituality Days and promoting various study centres of the Congregation.³ He served as Rector Major for three six-year terms, from 1978 until his death, consolidating the renewal of the Council in the Salesian Congregation in the context of the last quarter of the twentieth century marked by the growing dynamics of globalisation and consumerism, a consequence of the gradual affirmation of the capitalist economic model.

Increasing globalisation

Compared to the enthusiasm and revolutionary willingness of 1968, the atmosphere in the late 1970s in the West had already changed. The oil crisis cast doubt on the idea of permanent growth of the economic system, expressing uncertainty also about the idea of a “welfare society”. The left-wing ideological orientation widespread in the post-1968 period, suffered considerable credibility setbacks linked both to the increasingly widespread news of oppression in communist countries (Gulags, Cambodian massacres, the regime in Vietnam, terrorism inspired by radical Marxists) and the failures of “real socialism”: the unsuccessful invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, the economic failures of “second world” countries and the lack of concrete responses by left-wing parties to the real needs of the people in the industrialised countries.

The long liberal right-wing governments in the 1980s (Reagan in the USA, Thatcher in the UK and Kohl in Germany) accentuated the perception of the failure of socialism

² Cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 38-42.

³ Cf. A. VIGANÒ – F. VIGANÒ, *Don Egidio Viganò, settimo successore di Don Bosco. Frammenti di vita*, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1996; WIRTH, *Da don Bosco ai giorni nostri*, 465-466.

that was made more evident by the reforms of Michail Gorbachov. The inevitable implosion of the regimes in Eastern Europe, which passed into history in an iconic way as *the fall of the Berlin wall*, was one concrete consequence of this. Salesian provinces in Central and Eastern Europe, around the time of the centenary of Don Bosco's death, had to contend with a rethinking of their presences and works, as well as a gradual change of mentality from opposition to the regime to pastoral ministry in a new, open and uncertain world.

In the western part of the continent, the original core group of the European Union expanded first to include States around the Mediterranean who had returned to democracy in the 1980s (Spain, Portugal and Greece), followed by the reunification of Germany, and finally, countries in Central and Eastern Europe began to enter the EU as well. The European Zeitgeist in the 1990s was determined by the victory of the liberal-capitalist model over the socialist model, accompanied by a perspective favourable to integration among European nations, despite the fact that political, economic and cultural distances between the various member states were already emerging. Against this background we can place the historical and political viewpoints of Zbigniew Brzezinski or Paul Johnson⁴ or the theological and economic ones of Michael Novak, former Jesuit and Reagan adviser, who proposed reconciliation between Catholic thinking and the dynamics of the free market in *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*.⁵

We witnessed a softening of restrictive policies in Latin America, a prelude to the transition from the military dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s to democratic elections, starting in the mid-1980s (Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Uruguay and Bolivia). However, the consolidation of democracy had to contend with serious economic obstacles (inflation and foreign debt), political obstacles (guerilla warfare during the military period) and social obstacles (widespread poverty and marked social differences).

Asia and the Middle East presented a very different situation. The Islamic world was going through a shift from a relatively secular postcolonial leadership to a stronger presence of Islamic right-wingers who found a point of reference in Iran, which very soon became an Islamic Republic led by Ayatollah Khomeini. While China, after

4 Cf. P. JOHNSON, *Modern Times. The World from the Twenties to the Nineties*, Harper Collins, New York 1991; Z. BRZEZINSKI, *Out of Control. Global Turmoil on the Eve of the 21st Century*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1995.

5 Cf. M. NOVAK, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1982. Cf. Also other publications of his to follow: ID., *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Free Press, New York 1993; ID., *Business as a Calling: Work and the Examined Life*, Free Press, New York 1996; ID. – P. ADAMS, *Social Justice Isn't What You Think It Is*, Encounter Books, New York 2015.

Mao Tse-tung, was going through a process of reform under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, other socialist countries in Asia, promoting free market dynamics, found themselves in conflict. After the departure of American troops, Vietnam carried out a harsh collectivisation then invaded Cambodia, which was in a chaotic situation after the Pol Pot massacres, and finally found itself at war with China. Japan and Korea became part of the global economy thanks to a season of technological development which the West looked upon with a mixture of admiration and concern. India in this period placed its hopes in reforms by Rajiv, son of the assassinated Indira Gandhi. Investments in the scientific, technological and computer fields sustained slow development in the country, caught up in social difficulties and episodes of violence between Hindus and Muslims.

Africa and in 1980s and 90s was going through a difficult period following decolonisation. The last countries to achieve independence were the former Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique who very soon fell into civil war. Chronically weak governments were struggling to counter dramatic economic, health, social, and legal situations. Various *coups d'état* and world Powers made it impossible for these young countries to achieve political stability. Despite some positive episodes, such as the end of *apartheid* in South Africa, the end of the millennium in the continent was marked by massacres among the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda and the Congo crisis, impacting the situation in nearby countries.⁶

Church and youth ministry with John Paul II's imprint

The Church's journey after the Council, accompanied by Paul VI, continued with reforms already begun through the newly instituted Synod of Bishops. These looked at reception of the Council, focusing on episcopal collegiality, justice in the world, evangelisation and catechesis in the modern world. Subsequently, the ecclesiology of Vatican II was given practical substance with the promulgation of the new *Code of Canon Law*. The work, already planned by John XXIII and carried out by Cardinal Felici, provided a translation of the Vatican II mindset and teachings into juridical language. The new CIC was configured as a new work, not a mere update of the 1917 Code which was structured on the ecclesiology of the First Vatican Council.⁷

⁶ Cf. G. SABATUCCI – V. VIDOTTO, *Storia contemporanea. Il Novecento*, Laterza, Bari 2003, 305-392.

⁷ Cf. J. BEYER, *Dal Concilio al codice*, EDB, Bologna 1984 and G. GHIRLANDA, *Il diritto nella Chiesa mistero di comunione*, Pontificia Università Gregoriana – San Paolo, Rome – Milan 1990.

Catechesis after the Council moved in the direction of decentralisation, with the production of various national catechisms adapted to the needs of different age groups. The results were texts of varying doctrinal, didactic and methodological quality. *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), by John Paul II, prepared the way for a universal catechism, resulting in the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in 1992.⁸ Consolidation of the Church's structures after the Council were accompanied by John Paul II during his long pontificate, including nine consistories and the appointment of more than 230 cardinals. The adjustment to structures did not lead the Pope to close himself within the walls of the Vatican. On the contrary. In addition to vibrant ecumenical and diplomatic contacts, he carried out more than a hundred journeys abroad, resulting in a huge confluence of people.

At the political level, Pope Wojtyła was a harsh critic of communism and contributed to the fall of the Iron Curtain through his diplomatic activities. Despite the potential influence of Novak on some of the positions taken by *Centesimus Annus*, his positions on war, capital punishment, poverty, and the cancellation of the debts of developing countries, indicate a rather balanced synthesis. John Paul II's Catholicism was in continuity with the values of the past, but politically he valued freedom and was open to the logic of human rights. The Pope knew how to make the best of his various experiences with totalitarian regimes without falling into liberalism. Symbolic of this was his address in 1990 to the diplomatic corps at the Holy See:

The irrepressible thirst for freedom [...] has accelerated the process of evolution; it has brought down walls and opened doors. All this has the appearance of a veritable overthrow. And you will no doubt have noted that the point of departure or rallying point has often been a church. Little by little candles were lit, forming, as it were, a pathway of light, as if to say to those who for many years claimed to limit human horizons to this earth that one cannot live in chains indefinitely. [...] What is admirable in the events that we have witnessed is the fact that whole peoples have spoken up: women, young people and men have overcome their fear. The human person has shown the inexhaustible resources of dignity, courage and freedom concealed within itself. In countries where for years a party has told people what to believe and the meaning to be given to history, these brothers and sisters have shown that it is not possible to stifle the

⁸ For developments in catechesis in the 1970s cf. E. ALBERICH, *Natura e compiti di una catechesi moderna*, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1974 and C. CAPRILE, *Il sinodo dei vescovi 1977. IV Assemblea generale, Civiltà Cattolica*, Rome 1978.

fundamental freedoms that give meaning to human life: freedom of thought, conscience, religion expression, and political and cultural pluralism.⁹

A strong point of John Paul II's pontificate was the marked attention to the young, immediately revealed in the first Angelus of his pontificate when he said: "You are the future of the world, the hope of the Church. You are my hope."¹⁰ Speaking of the preferential place the young have in the Church, the Pope recognised in them the youthful face of the Church, firmly convinced that it had need of their enthusiasm and freshness. The concrete expression of his attitude of care and predilection for the young was the organisation of the World Youth Days (WYD) starting in 1985, "The International Year of Youth" announced by the UN. The WYD promoted the active role of young people through dialogue, creating privileged places for personal and community encounter with Jesus Christ. In a historical period that privileged the individual, they were an effective sign of ecclesial communion, bringing together young people from all over the world and gathering different groups, movements, associations and communities around the pope. They embodied the dynamics of pilgrimage from both a spiritual and practical point of view.¹¹

For their part, the reflection topics proposed by the WYD and then further explored through catechesis during the days of encounter, became a true formation curriculum developing the main topics of the faith: Christ the Way, the Truth and the Life; God is Love; faith and Mary's listening attitude; the Church; divine sonship in the Holy Spirit; witness.¹² The World Youth Days, therefore, became times and spaces of the Church lived with young people and for young people, manifesting in this way their character as both a "subject" working in youth ministry and a welcoming "space" for

⁹ John Paul II's address to the members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, in bit.ly/vatican-va-1990-01-13.

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II (with V. MESSORI), *Varcare la soglia della speranza*, Mondadori, Milan 1994, 140. Cf. also U.C. MIYIGBENA (ed.), *Giovanni Paolo II parla ai giovani*. Complete collection of all addresses to the young in his pontificate in the original languages, 3 vols., LEV, Vatican City.

¹¹ Cf. J. CLEMENS, *L'impegno della Chiesa per i giovani: da Giovanni Paolo II a Papa Francesco, International Meeting on the WYD in Rio 2013 – Krakow 2016*, in bit.ly/laici-va-2014-04-12, 3-7; PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY (ed.), *Giornata Mondiale della Gioventù. Memorandum per gli organizzatori*, Vatican City 2005, 7.

¹² Cf. A. NAPOLIONI, *La strada dei giovani. Prospettive di pastorale giovanile*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1994, 122.

youth ministry.¹³ Despite the successes of these days, we need to highlight the real risk, especially in contexts that have not developed their own pastoral model, of reducing youth ministry to a “ministry of large events”.

The WYDs were the context in which the Salesian Youth Movement was born, made visible in the international meeting of young people at the *Confronto DB 88* on the occasion of the centenary of Don Bosco’s death and in the subsequent *Confronto ‘93*.¹⁴ The 23rd General Chapter on the education of the young to the faith said: “Youth groups and associations which, while maintaining their organisational autonomy, share the same Salesian spirituality and pedagogical principles, form explicitly or implicitly the Salesian Youth Movement (SYM).”¹⁵ It would be interesting to analyse the evolutionary path of the mindset of Salesian Associations, which went from practical organisation of sodalities with their rhythm of local meetings and related provincial and world congresses, through spontaneous groups aimed at social change in the post-Vatican II period, up to the much more fluid SYM, with an “implicit” or explicit sense of belonging. The SYM emerged especially during celebrations and (inter)provincial meetings, with guidelines of a rather idealistic nature at world level, such as the ones from GC23 that said:

The circulation of messages and values in the SYM has no need of a rigid and centralised organisation. It is based on free communication between the groups, and needs only a minimum structure for the coordination of common initiatives. On this basis those meetings are preferred which become meaningful occasions for dialogue, comparison, Christian formation, and youthful expression.¹⁶

Organisational consolidation of the Congregation (1978–2000)

The six years from 1972-78, in addition to promising, but less than coordinated, pastoral experiments, were swept up in the continuing demographic crisis, especially the drop in

¹³ Cf. D. DI GIOSIA, *La Pastorale dei giovani. Uno studio sul magistero di John Paul II*, LEV, Rome 2011, 108-118.

¹⁴ Cf. YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT, *Il Movimento Giovanile Salesiano come espressione della spiritualità giovanile salesiana*. Acts of the European Conference, Sanlucar la Mayor, 22-25 October 1992, SDB, Rome 1993.

¹⁵ GC23 (1990), no. 275.

¹⁶ GC23 (1990), no. 277.

vocations to consecrated life, abuse of *absentiae a domo* and requests for laicisation by priests, particularly in the first five years after ordination.¹⁷ GC21, held from the end of October 1977 until February the following year, continued in the direction pursued by the Special General Chapter, with the intention of implementing some of its many guidelines. Among the aspects that had not been significantly set in motion were some that were very important but at the same time difficult to implement, such as the reshaping of structures, the qualification of confreres, the formation of lay collaborators and the updating of the Preventive System.¹⁸

Halfway through the work of the 21st General Chapter came the election of the seventh successor of Don Bosco, and seeing the needs of the Congregation, Egidio Viganò was chosen. He stood out for his personality, characterised by Braido as a “multifaceted figure, a personality of lucid, penetrating intelligence, strong disciplined passion, a far-sighted ruler, both enlightened – and imaginative! – and firm.”¹⁹ The new Rector Major highlighted the particular approach of his style of government in one of his first letters: “Would that I had the calm and penetrating style of Don Bosco and the facility of communication shown by his successors. I hope to be able to make up for the lack of this charm and simplicity at least by sincerity and solidity.”²⁰ In his letters he denounced spiritual superficiality, proposing an apostolic inner conviction that is the fruit of the grace of unity. Already in his closing address to the GC21 he proposed the concept of the “Oratorian heart”,²¹ linking it to the newness of Salesian presence that is the spirit of initiative and pastoral inventiveness.²² Thanks to his governing and coordinating skills, combined with the dynamics of historical, social, and ecclesial

17 The reasons for leaving, indicated by both the individuals and their provincials vary in the regions of the Congregation, but generally almost half of the departures are attributable to affective-sexual difficulties and, secondarily, about a quarter of the reasons revolve around personal, psychological and character immaturities. Cf. The analysis in G. DHO (ed.), *Capitolo Generale XXI della Società Salesiana. La riduzione allo stato laicale dei sacerdoti nella Congregazione Salesiana. Presentazione analitica del fatto e delle motivazioni*, [s.e.], Rome 1977, 40-44.

18 Cf. RICCERI, *Capitolo Generale XXI. Relazione generale sullo stato della Congregazione*, nos. 38-42.

19 BRAIDO, *Le metamorfosi dell’Oratorio salesiano tra il secondo dopoguerra e il Postconcilio Vaticano II (1944-1984)*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 25 (2006) 49, 350.

20 Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *Maria rinnova la Famiglia Salesiana di don Bosco*, in ACS 59 (1978) 289, 3.

21 Cf. CG21 (1978), nos. 565-568. Braido noted that the Rector Major Egidio Viganò proposed “the formula ‘oratorian heart’ [...] until the end of his life. Almost as a synthesis of the Salesian’s being and action: not only in the Oratory-structure but in all works as well, of which the Oratory for many years was considered the exemplar”, in BRAIDO, *Le metamorfosi dell’Oratorio salesiano*, 348.

22 Cf. CG21 (1978), nos. 156-159.

development, the Congregation was more serene and united in thought and action during the years of his term of office than in the previous fifteen years.²³

Final approval of the Constitutions (1984) and systematic organisation of formation (1981–85)

At the end of 1984 the Holy See approved the text of the Congregation's Constitutions that were then subsequently promulgated by the Rector Major, thus bringing to a close the lengthy process of reformulation of the charism after the Council. The work of the 22nd General Chapter on the Constitutions had been prepared for through studies and consultation in the provinces.²⁴ The text, that had to be adapted to the new *Code of Canon Law*, had undergone many changes, and was ultimately structured in four parts, the first of which was on identity, the role and spirit of the Congregation in the Church. A complex second part embraced three inseparable elements of the Salesian vocation, mission, community life and consecration, and concluded with the chapter on prayer. The third part was dedicated to formation. The last part looked at the service of authority. In his closing address to the Chapter, Fr Viganò expressed the shared perception of a job well done and the value of the new Constitutions:

It is an organic, profound, improved text, permeated by the Gospel, rich in the genuineness of its origins, open to universality and looking to the future, sober and dignified, dense with balanced realism and assimilation of Council's principles. It is a text rethought in terms of community, fidelity to Don Bosco and in response to the challenges of the times.²⁵

Following the promulgation of the Constitutions came the drafting of the second edition of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis et Studiorum*, a further point of arrival in the rethinking of the Congregation following the Council, now in tune with the CIC and the Constitutions.²⁶ The *Ratio* had already been requested by GC21, which wanted a complete document that also included general guidelines and standards for intellectual

²³ Cf. WIRTH, *Da don Bosco ai giorni nostri*, 466.

²⁴ Cf. *Capitolo Generale 22, Sussidi. Contributi di studio su Costituzioni e Regolamenti SDB*, 2. vols., SDB, Rome 1982 and *Capitolo Generale 22, Schemi precapitolari*, 2. vols., SDB, Rome 1983.

²⁵ 22ND GENERAL CHAPTER, *Documents*, SDB, Rome 1984, 139.

²⁶ Cf. *The formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco. Principles and norms. Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis et Studiorum*, SDB, Rome ¹1981 and ²1985.

formation. The 1981 edition was an immediate and well-received response, being a text that was “mature and relevant, although still open to improvement.”²⁷ Following the legislative changes, four years later the second edition brought improvements at various levels.²⁸ The document drew its makeup from the basic motivation of forming to the Salesian vocational identity reflected in the Constitutions, expressed above all in the harmony between mission, community life and consecration. In addition to the indications of the formative ideal, contributions from the sciences of education were incorporated, both in terms of study content, especially in the post-novitiate, and attention to method.²⁹

The approach to formation was less directive than previously and was an *animating form of accompaniment* in Salesian style, “fruit of the ‘reasonableness’ and ‘loving-kindness’ of the Preventive System. In fact, the style of this System is such that in authenticity, freedom and mutual trust it allows each person and the community to realise Don Bosco’s project in the search and exchange of values and services.”³⁰ The preventive system emerges in the document as a unified project in the life of the individual, and it is linked to the Salesian mission and to the needs of educators for psychological balance. At the level of experience and study, the Preventive System should be explored especially in the novitiate, the post-novitiate and practical training.³¹

One can note a typical mindset, in the *Ratio*, of this historical period that declares the necessity of a unified planned approach in formation, but then splits things up into sectors at the organisational level. Some marked differences appear when describing who intervenes at various levels in the formation of young Salesians: *formators*, who live in the formation community and work especially by means of the friendly chat and spiritual direction, *professors*, who do the academic work in the various study centres, and *provincial authorities*, organised by means of a provincial formation commission and the provincial council. The latter are decisive for verification and admissions, working more at the level of leadership, legislation and government.³² The *Ratio* as a whole was a rich and well-developed text with plenty of ideas, criteria or methodological principles that were not always easy to implement in real terms.

²⁷ *The formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco*,¹1981, 9.

²⁸ Cf. GC21 (1978), nos. 258-259.

²⁹ Cf. *The formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco*,²1985, nos. 130-136.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 135.

³¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 27, 31, 62-66, 323, 332, 351.

³² Cf. *Ibid.*, chap. 4 (nos.141-163); chap. 5 and 6 (nos. 240-285); chap. 7 (nos. 295-306).

Project Africa and the dynamics of development

In addition to stabilising things at the world level in legislative and formation terms, in 1975, the centenary of the Salesian missions, the idea of a greater Salesian presence on the African continent began to be reinforced. Three years later the General Chapter offered the first practical guidelines for revitalisation in the mission scene, requesting provinces to get involved in noticeably increasing their presence in Africa.³³ Following the Chapter, a commission was established that analysed some 30 requests coming from Africa for new foundations, ultimately suggesting the strategy of entrusting them “nation by nation or zone by zone to the various regions the Congregation is divided into. [...] A homogeneous composition (ethnic and linguistic) of the first communities is useful to start the project. But no border must be a *hortus conclusus*.”³⁴

Later, Egidio Viganò’s 1980 Letter, “Our African Commitment” spelt out guidelines for this commitment and gave official form to the courageous Project Africa, presenting it as a veritable grace from God and “the fruit of that perennial youth and that great-hearted courage which God bestows from age to age on his Church through his passionate and creative love.”³⁵ The Rector Major’s desire to reawaken the missionary spirit was in line with the thinking of Paul VI who said: “Today we see so many individuals and institutions in the Catholic Church tragically floundering about in a kind of spiritual vacuum. Perhaps the reason is that there has been a prolonged absence of the missionary spirit.”³⁶

The founding of new presences in Africa was particularly noteworthy in the first three years of the 1980s, to the extent of works in twenty-six countries, organised in a Central African province and in six delegations divided again by province of origin.³⁷ After the era of the early foundations, the strategy of consolidating works, and work on formation was chosen with a view to accompanying local vocations. After twenty-five years of Project Africa, in 2004 there were already 671 African confreres, about a quarter of whom came from the Congo and a tenth from Ethiopia, followed by Kenya, Madagascar and Nigeria with between 45 and 30 local confreres. The educational work

³³ Cf. GC21 (1978), no. 147.

³⁴ Cf. G. GONZÁLEZ, *Storia del Progetto-Africa. L’origine e i primi passi*, in *Progetto Africa 1980-2005*, SDB, Rome 2006, 27.

³⁵ E. VIGANÒ, *Our African Commitment*, in “Acts of the Superior Council” 61 (1980) 297, 25.

³⁶ PAUL VI, *Message for the 1972 Mission Day*, in *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁷ Cf. *La Società di San Francesco di Sales nel sessennio 1978-1983. Relazione del Rector Major Egidio Viganò*, SDB, Rome 1983, 15 and GONZÁLEZ, *Storia del Progetto-Africa*, 32-33.

on the young continent was based on a variety of works: about two hundred schools, ranging from primary education to three university centres, one hundred and twenty oratories and about one hundred parishes.³⁸

Looking back on the quarter-century of Project Africa, the Rector Major, Pascual Chávez Villanueva, recognised that “It took a farsighted approach and a prophetic voice, like that of Egidio Viganò, to make Don Bosco’s dream come true and make Africa a choice of the Congregation translated into a Project.”³⁹ Seeing the robust Salesian presence in the Americas implanted a century beforehand, and the fruitful growth of the charism in Asia fifty years earlier, Viganò proposed spreading the Salesian vocation with humility and fidelity, so that it would also become “vigorously African”.⁴⁰

Personnel and works: a case of numbers and rhetoric

After analysing the statistical data of the Congregation’s personnel and works, one can see that the falling numbers of Salesian personnel slowed down in the last quarter of the twentieth century and the number of confreres in the provinces remained more or less stable, although the Congregation as a whole was ageing.⁴¹ While for 1978 there was an overall decrease of 11% in the number of Salesians compared to the time of the Special General Chapter, with the exception of the four provinces of India which, on the contrary, showed an average growth of 14%, for the twelve years between 1978 and 1990 the number of confreres remained stable at around 17,500.⁴² Added to India in 1990 were other countries in demographic growth such as Poland, Africa as a whole and some provinces in Latin America (Mexico, Chile and Colombia). Over the next two six-year periods, however, ageing began to be felt, with a slight decline in the overall number of confreres.

Towards the change of millennium we note a further fall in numbers of confreres in the houses. Some provinces in Latin America (e.g. Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and

³⁸ Cf. GONZÁLEZ, *Storia del Progetto-Africa*, 46-47.

³⁹ P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *our African commitment*, in *Project Africa 1980-2005*, SDB, Rome 2006, 9.

⁴⁰ VIGANÒ, *Our African Commitment*, 16.

⁴¹ Ageing was felt especially in Europe. Cf. C. SEMERARO (ed.), *Invecchiamento e vita salesiana in Europa. Dati – prospettive – soluzioni*, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1990.

⁴² Cf. L. RICCERI, *General Report on the State of the Congregation. 21st General Chapter of the Salesian Society*, SDB, Rome 1977, 217-274; THE SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES, *Statistical data. 23rd General Chapter. Appendix to the Report of the Rector Major*, SDB, Rome 1990, 19-40.

Ecuador) presented an average of 6 confreres per house. There were also some provinces with a certain numerical consistency in the composition of the communities, compared with the previous period, such as Italy, Poland, Germany and Congo, with an average of 12 Salesians per house. Exceptionally, there were some provinces such as Vietnam and Slovakia with more than 12 confreres per house.

A new trend in the Congregation would seem to be the growing demographic of provinces in India and Africa, investing in the opening of new houses, but keeping a low average number of confreres per house, only slightly higher than the aforementioned provinces of Latin America.⁴³ One interesting indicator is the evolution of the number of confreres with a fixed commitment (full-time and part-time) in the different types of works.⁴⁴

Work type	1977	1990	2001
oratory/youth centre	2.9 sdb, lay people in 74% of oratories	2.6 sdb, 13 lay people	2.1 sdb, 17 lay people
schools (primary, secondary)	n.d.	5.5 sdb, 38 lay people	3.7 sdb, 49 lay people
technical formation	n.d.	4.7 sdb, 16 lay people	2.6 sdb, 21 lay people
boarding establishments	n.d.	3.6 sdb, 4 lay people	2.4 sdb, 3 lay people
parishes	3.9 sdb, lay people in 40% of parishes	3.9 sdb, 35 lay people	3.5 sdb, 59 lay people
social works	n.d.	1.6 sdb, 6 lay people	1.5 sdb, 12 lay people

A higher number of Salesians working full-time in parishes emerged compared to the number of Salesians who worked in oratories, including partial collaborations and clerics. In 1977 more than 40% of the parishes were located in small villages and were characterised by sacramental and pastoral care of ordinary people.⁴⁵ The trend continued, already noted by the SGC, of an increase in parish activities: in fact, until 2001 only a slight decrease in Salesian personnel in the parish had been noted. It would seem that GC19's encouragement on appreciation and updating of the Salesian oratory was not sufficiently translated into practice: it was easier to accept parishes,

⁴³ Cf. THE SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES, *Statistical data. 25th General Chapter. Appendix to the Report of the Rector Major*, SDB, Rome 2002, 40-42. The number of confreres per house is the proportion of the total number of Salesians divided by the number of houses erected.

⁴⁴ Cf. S. SARTI (ed.), *Dati statistici sulle opere della Congregazione. Capitolo Generale XXI della Società Salesiana*, SDB, Rome 1977; THE SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES, *Statistical data. 23rd General Chapter* and Id., *Statistical data. 25th General Chapter*.

⁴⁵ Cf. SARTI (ed.), *Dati statistici. Capitolo Generale XXI*, 55, 73-77.

with a more standardised pastoral and financial management that required less creative investments.⁴⁶

In the statistics we have mentioned, there was a significant decrease in the number of Salesian personnel employed in schools, a trend reported as early as 1977:⁴⁷ from 5,800 full-time Salesians in schools at the time of the SGC, the number fell to 4,300 in 1990 and at the end of the twentieth century the number dropped further to 3,372. Even if in decrease, however, schools still remained the work engaging the greatest number of Salesians. Yet the increase in the number of lay people working in Salesian schools was noteworthy: in 2001 it reached 47,000, a figure that implied a serious need for investment in their professional and Salesian formation.

The involvement of the laity was greater in the South Cone region of America, with 330 Salesians and 15,000 lay people working in about 200 schools, reaching an average presence of more or less one Salesian with 75 lay people per institute. The smallest number of lay people in schools was reported in the Italy-Middle East region, with an average of 5 Salesians and 5 lay people per school.⁴⁸ It is interesting to note how explanations of the collaboration with lay people in the two regions did not seem to mirror the real situation, but were rather a sign of the different cultures and practical mindsets at play. In the America-South Cone Region it was said simply that “all provinces have developed a lay project with their involvement; the preventive system in schools has been further studied and put into practice,”⁴⁹ with an indication of the various formation plans that had been carried out and the difficulties encountered.

The same section, part of the Report on the State of the Congregation, for the Italy-Middle East region was instead described at much greater length and in more elaborate rhetoric regarding the need for an ecclesiology of communion. The explanations were more expansive, exhortative and vague, but without mentioning the projects carried out.⁵⁰ In addition to regional differences, this was an example of the effects of cultural decentralisation at the level of communication and operational project management, a phenomenon that would seem to grow in the period that followed as well.

46 Cf. the similar dynamic of “easier standardisation” developed in the boarding school and the “difficult creativity” in the oratory at a time when the former was on the increase, described in the first chapter.

47 Cf. SARTI (ed.), *Dati statistici. Capitolo Generale XXI*, 146.

48 Cf. THE SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES, *Statistical data. 25th General Chapter*, 58-65.

49 *The Society of St Francis de Sales in the six-year period 1996-2002. Report of the Vicar of the Rector Major, Fr Luc Van Looy, SDB*, Rome 2002, 41.

50 Cf. *Ibid.*, 114-118.

Consolidation of the Salesian Family was part of this collaboration with the laity, seen in terms of “a vast movement of people”. The 1980s was a period of renewal of legislative documents and official recognition of belonging to the Salesian Family.⁵¹ Starting with the Centenary celebrations in 1988, the idea of a movement around the common charism was gaining ground. Egidio Viganò expressed this idea in 1995 outlining the basic elements of unity in the spirit of Don Bosco in the *Carta di Comunione* (often somewhat incorrectly translated into English as the “Common Identity Card” rather than the Charter of Communion) of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco. The Rector Major wanted to start out from the very soul of the Family, because it was the vitality of the common spirit, rather than any external set of rules that would nourish a sense of belonging to it.⁵² The logic of the movement and of an “open” mentality around the Salesian spirit could also be found in youth ministry with the recognition, beginning with *Confronto '88*, of the Salesian Youth Movement, formed implicitly and explicitly of groups which, “while maintaining their organisational autonomy, share the same Salesian spirituality and pedagogical principles.”⁵³

We also note the birth of Institutions of Higher Education in this period (still with modest numbers) and the rise and multiplication of social works especially for young people in difficulty or “at risk”, and for migrants. On the other hand, the commitment in the health sector (leprosariums and medical dispensaries) decreased. Social works, in spite of their lower number of presences, occupied the attention of scholars (because of their novelty)⁵⁴ and the public (for their advertising potential). It is enough to see how schools, a typical sector of Salesian activity, were given just a few paragraphs in the reports on the state of the Congregation in the period studied. The general perception was expressed very clearly by Fr. Viganò in 1990:

Judging things at the world level, we can say that “the youth area” has been the object of general encouragement, but not of innovative, decisive and operational structural thrusts, with the application of persons, means and obligatory orientations. Perhaps each province has thought that it is already dedicated to

51 Cf. WIRTH, *Da don Bosco ai nostri giorni*, 473-478.

52 Cf. DEPARTMENT FOR THE SALESIAN FAMILY SDB, *The Common Identity Card in the Salesian Family of Don Bosco*, [s.e.], Rome 1995.

53 GC23 (1990), no. 275.

54 Cf. e.g. G. MILANESI, *L'utilizzo delle scienze dell'educazione nell'impegno dei salesiani per i giovani “poveri, abbandonati, pericolanti”*, in J.E. VECCHI – J.M. PRELLEZO (eds.), *Prassi educativa pastorale e scienze dell'educazione*, SDB, Rome 1988, 87-120.

young people and only needs to “improve”. Dedication to youth is taken for granted and is sufficient. Pastoral ministry is considered an object of “animation” but not of governmental action, not even with regard to the elements that can ensure constitutional goals.⁵⁵

From pedagogy to the sciences of education: was an interdisciplinary pursuit possible?

Since the end of the 1960s, with the appearance of the first faculties of educational sciences in France and Belgium, a new frame of reference was created that extended study in the field of education to many other disciplines (psychology, sociology, biology, hygiene, anthropology, general methodology, statistics, etc.), all capable of standing alongside or competing with traditional philosophical pedagogy.⁵⁶ As we have already mentioned in the previous chapters, the Higher Institute of Pedagogy at Rebaudengo, when it first opened prior to the Council, managed epistemological questions by giving priority to pedagogy seen in the light of philosophy, which created, with due distinctions, a framework within which the “other” sciences were positioned, from biology to psychometrics. The picture became more complicated with the disappearance of the predominance of the *philosophia perennis* and the new approach of the critical pedagogies of the ‘60s and ‘70s, which began with the autonomy of the human sciences, and then recommended an interdisciplinary approach.

So, discussing the educational sciences in the 1980s was quite a different matter than it had been in the 1950s, which had seen the birth of Braido’s approach and the *Educare* series. Giorgio Chiosso pointed to an undesirable trend when it came to educationalists pursuing an interdisciplinary approach to the educational sciences: the gradual but substantial simplification of the educational and formative processes within the prevailing psychological, sociological and methodological perspective.⁵⁷ It seems that even within the Salesian context, the epistemological approach of the educational sciences, together with organisational dynamics stressing autonomy and decentralisation after the Council, influenced the compartmentalisation of pedagogical

⁵⁵ *The Society of St Francis de Sales in the six-year period 1984-1990. Report of the Rector Major Fr Egidio Viganò*, SDB, Rome 1990, no. 180.

⁵⁶ Cf. G. CHIOSSO, *Novecento pedagogico*, La Scuola, Brescia 1997, 281.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*

knowledge. Once the disciplined spiritualism of Ricaldone and the pedagogies during the crisis-ridden immediate post-Council period had been overcome, it seems that three tendencies described by Chiosso could be found in Salesian theoretical approaches and applications: the empirical and practical perspective, focus on personal subjectivity and the importance of dialogue between individuals and cultures.⁵⁸ Furthermore, under the coordination of Pietro Braido, a strong historical-critical reflection was developed around Salesian education, a reflection that developed at the time of the rethinking of the charism after the Council, but which was, at the time, a field of knowledge promoted almost exclusively by the Salesian Historical Institute (ISS).

The first of the currents mentioned above envisaged the future of pedagogy as an empirical science, with an inductive-experimental framework at the service of learning, school organisation and teacher training. In the next section we will see the development of this pedagogical model around the theme of *educational planning*, involving curricular theories coming from the Anglo-Saxon world.

The second, personal subjectivity, was expressed in a number of fields and with different sensitivities, but all leading back to a common theoretical principle, *the importance of the "person"*. On the one hand, there were philosophical approaches in the Catholic field that referred to Maritain, Mounier, Pieper and other personalists. On the other hand, there was an attention to the concept of personality in the current of American humanist psychologists such as Allport, Maslow, Carkhuff and Rogers. In some reflections, the importance of the person was connected with some principles of critical anti-institutional pedagogy, emphasising the importance of the expressiveness, authenticity and autonomy of the person against old-fashioned authoritarianism or capitalist-consumerist alienation.

Interpersonal and intercultural dialogue was the common denominator in the third current of pedagogical thinking. Human consciousness was considered as such only in openness to the other, in an exchange which offered the opportunity to discover the universal dimension of human experience. A positive outlook on multiculturalism, combined with the stress on human rights, envisaged the overcoming of divisions, misunderstandings and prejudices in a society which was increasingly diverse in its ethnic and cultural patterns. In the Salesian context this current was often reflected in the term "inculturation of the charism", linked to the logic of decentralisation and the dynamics of the demographic growth of the Congregation in its non-Western Regions.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 283-284.

The paradigm of the sciences of education obviously found confirmation, consensus and development in the reflections of the Faculty of the same name at the UPS, but it should be noted that its realisation at the level of the University itself took place through a departmental style of organisation dear to Fr Egidio Viganò. When he presented the GC21 document to the UPS in May 1978, the Rector Major leaned on the Chapter's decision: "The principle of interdisciplinary and inter-departmental organisation should be made effective also on the structural and statutory level. While the Faculties will remain the academic organisms for programming and administration, a more comprehensive control will guarantee the unity of formation."⁵⁹ As was his custom, Viganò did not leave this just as an exhortation, but a year later he gave the rector provisions for the creation of "an inter-faculty structure for a unified and systematic approach to youth ministry and catechetics. It should be ensured that this structure represents the point of convergence of the highest level of collaboration between the two Faculties of Theology and Educational Sciences."⁶⁰ Insistence on the importance of the departmental structure was a constant of his interventions at the UPS, one that also hints at the actual difficulties they had making both interdisciplinarity and the Department work.⁶¹

Educational planning and its supporting theories

Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi, the most influential author of planning on the Salesian scene, made explicit reference to the sciences of education in the first paragraph of the module on the Educative and Pastoral Project in his encyclopaedic production, the *Progetto Educativo Pastorale: Elementi modulari*: "The terms 'project' and 'planning' have only entered pedagogical language in recent times [...] More than being due to particular reasons, this seems to be due to a general development in the area of educational sciences in which the organic connection of the needs of the complex process of growth of the personality in the evolutionary phase has emerged with more clarity. The decisive thrust was given by didactics that introduced the concept of curriculum."⁶² This is followed by a definition of the term "curriculum" given by British educational thinker Lawrence

⁵⁹ GC21, no. 360 in R. GIANNATELLI (ed.), *Don Egidio Viganò all'Università Salesiana*, UPS, Rome 1996, 59.

⁶⁰ GIANNATELLI (ed.), *Don Egidio Viganò all'Università Salesiana*, 77.

⁶¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 104, 129, 134-135, 145-146 and 187-188.

⁶² J.E. VECCHI, *Progetto educativo pastorale*, in J.E. VECCHI – J.M. PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale. Elementi modulari*, LAS, Rome 1984, 15. Cf. also J.E. VECCHI, *Per riattualizzare il Sistema Preventivo, Ispettorato Salesiano Lombardo-Emiliano, Convegno sul Sistema Preventivo*, Milan-Bologna 3-4 November 1978, 4.

Stenhouse: the curriculum is “an attempt to communicate the principles and essential characteristics of an educational proposal in such a way that it remains open to any critical revision and susceptible to efficient conversion into practice.”⁶³

Salesian scholar Michele Pellerey described educational planning in the 1960s and 70s as aiming at “overcoming both the doldrums of bureaucratism and the inconclusiveness and wishful thinking of spontaneism. And here we have the invasion of curricular theories and clinging to the indications of didactic technology.”⁶⁴ But the roots of the instructional curriculum design movement begin with Ralph W. Tyler and his fundamental work in 1949 *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*.⁶⁵ Tyler, and his students Benjamin Bloom, Robert F. Mager and Hilda Taba,⁶⁶ intended to reaffirm the importance of the educational and teaching process against the encroachment of psychometrics. The design theories that have developed since then can be divided into three streams depending on whether the curriculum is considered through the paradigm of product, process or research.

The first group of educationalists focused attention on the construction of the *curriculum seen as the product* of design, which gives applications and means to be implemented in education. In spite of the intention to avoid the influence of psychometrics of a Skinnerian behaviourist mould, the influence of another “technocratic” current, that of management by objectives by Peter Drucker, was felt here, especially in the “decade of education” in the United States (1957-68).⁶⁷ Management by objectives analysed the educational situation, proposed objectives to be achieved and then planned interventions and activities in view of achieving the objective. Tyler’s students and their many followers were successful, and a few years later curriculum theory spread to Europe. In the area of Salesian planning, besides the

⁶³ L. STENHOUSE, *Dal programma al curricolo. Politica, burocrazia e professionalità*, in VECCHI, *Progetto educativo pastorale*, in VECCHI – PELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale. Elementi modulari*, 15.

⁶⁴ PELLEREY, *Progettazione didattica*, SEI, Turin 1979, 10.

⁶⁵ R.W. TYLER, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1949.

⁶⁶ Cf. B.S. BLOOM (ed.), *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook 1: Cognitive domain*, David McKay, New York 1956 and D.R. KRATHWOHL – B.S. BLOOM – B.B. MASIA, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook 2: Affective domain*, David McKay, New York 1964; R.F. MAGER, *Preparing Instructional Objectives*, Fearon, Palo Alto CA 1962; H. TABA, *Curriculum development: theory and practice*, Burlingham: Harcourt, Brace & World, New York 1962.

⁶⁷ Cf. See a deeper analysis in M. VOJTÁŠ, *Progettare e discernere: Progettazione educativo-pastorale salesiana tra storia, teorie e proposte innovative*, LAS, Rome 2015, 116-128.

Americans, the Belgian authors Erik de Corte and Gilbert de Landsheere were a good influence through their publications in the second half of the 1970s.⁶⁸

The paradigm of the *curriculum as process* should be considered as the second current in curricular theory, going beyond the linear logic of “situation-objective-activities”. British educationalist Richard S. Peters described his procedural logic with an appreciation of the models of excellence found in activities that “can be appraised more for the standards immanent in them than because of what they lead on to.”⁶⁹ American James D. Raths offered an interesting list of criteria for identifying educational activities that have inherent merit in themselves regardless of content or goals, shifting the focus of the entire educational process from teaching to learning.⁷⁰

We can consider Lawrence Stenhouse as the representative of the third current that saw the *curriculum as a process of research*. He attempted to overcome the rigid and absolute forms of the curriculum as product, including numerous objectives, sub-objectives, activities and mandatory standards, and at the same time tried to escape the vague and not very applicable process theories.⁷¹ This British thinker saw the curriculum as the interaction between the teacher and the students and understood it as a process of research and verification of educational hypotheses. The difference from the technologically described product paradigm becomes clear. The decentralising emphasis is more on the side of the teacher as the one who constructs the curriculum, respecting the British tradition of the autonomy of individual schools and teachers. The curriculum is more of a problem solving tool concerning a classroom or school, implemented by stakeholders, and not a methodological and technological conceptualisation of the preferred pedagogical or ideological perspective.⁷² In this sense Stenhouse came close, though not explicitly, to the action-research positions of Kurt Lewin.⁷³

Juan Vecchi drew his inspiration explicitly from Stenhouse’s ideas and in his proposal he made the balanced positions between the two paradigms of product and process his own, but he also inherited some of the difficulties of the Stenhouse model

68 G. AND V. DE LANDSHEERE, *Definire gli obiettivi dell’educazione*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1977; L. STENHOUSE, *Dal programma al curricolo*, 1977; E. DE CORTE et al., *Les fondaments de l’action didactique*, De Boeck, Bruxelles 1979.

69 R.S. PETERS, *Ethics and Education*, George Allen and Unwin, London 1966, 155.

70 Cf. J.D. RATHS, *Teaching without specific objectives*, in “Educational Leadership” 28 (1971) 714-720.

71 For a critique of the three currents of curricular theory cf. VOJTÁŠ, *Progettare e discernere*, 126-137.

72 Cf. ELLIOTT, *Education in the Shadow*, in RUDDUCK, *An Education that Empowers*, 1995, 54-56 and PELLERAY, *Progettazione didattica*, 21994, 27-29.

73 Cf. KEMMIS, *Some Ambiguities in Stenhouse*, in RUDDUCK, *An Education that Empowers*, 77.

that placed too many expectations on the educator, who needs to be researcher, designer, teacher, executor, facilitator and evaluator all at once. Certainly, Vecchi's preparation, experience and personality were able to meet the needs of this type of curriculum design, but the same cannot be said of the "designers and planners" in the provinces, who were more influenced by the technocratic enthusiasm of management by objectives than by the model of patient accompaniment of research processes.

Pedagogical guidelines of Salesian magisterium

GC21's work, in addition to the work on the Constitutions that were then reviewed and confirmed as valid *ad experimentum* until 1984, focused above all on the question of Salesian education and pastoral care. The GC21 document *Salesians, evangelisers of the young* could be considered as a kind of post-Council treatise on education and Salesian pastoral care. In fact, the subjects addressed by this Chapter were a continuation of what the Councillors for Youth Ministry, Fr Giovenale Dho and Fr Gaetano Scivo, were beginning to develop, and they would become the topics of priority at Chapters over the next thirty years: the close relationship between education and evangelisation,⁷⁴ the Salesian community understood as the animating nucleus⁷⁵ of the educative and pastoral community (EPC)⁷⁶ and the question of the criterion or "oratorian heart", developed especially by Viganò in terms of predilection for the young, in accordance with the motto *da mihi animas, cetera tolle*.⁷⁷

Concepts of educative and pastoral planning in GC21 (1978)

The Chapter, sensing the risk of the ongoing "educational disaffection" linked to the crisis in the Salesian boarding school, and seeing that pastoral activities had often a

⁷⁴ Cf. Theme and contents of GC23 (1990): *Educating the young to the faith*.

⁷⁵ Cf. Theme and contents of GC25 (2002): *The Salesian community today*.

⁷⁶ Cf. GC21 (1978), nos. 63-79 that speaks of the Salesian community animating the EPC. Cf. also the theme and contents of GC24 (1996): *Salesians and the laity: communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco*.

⁷⁷ Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The Salesian Family*, in ACS 63 (1982) 304, 11-12; ID., *Don Bosco santo*, in ACS 64 (1983) 310, 10 echoed in the contents and theme of GC26 (2008): *The apostolic passion of the Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*.

low formational impact,⁷⁸ sought to confirm the strict link between education and evangelisation, referring to Don Bosco, Salesian tradition, the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and the Synod on Catechesis. A strong connection was established between the two on a practical level of commitment to the salvation of the whole young person:

As sharers in the evangelising activity of the Church, we believe in Don Bosco's charism and hence in our own particular way of evangelising the young. This we do in a realistic way by means of the Salesian educational project, the Preventive System, rethought and reactivated.⁷⁹

The updated rethinking of Salesian education was focused in the part of the Acts of GC21 that talks about the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project (SEPP) and it seems to us that we should interpret this from two complementary perspectives: The *linear-analytic-operative paradigm* of its content (situation, objectives, means) and the *wholistic-synthetic-procedural approach* to educative and pastoral style (attitudes of the educators and characteristics of the setting). It is not an arbitrary distinction inasmuch as the two had different results and development over the years following the Chapter.

Linear planning: situation-objective-means

CG21's proposal is contextualised within four paragraphs dealing with the positive aspects of educative and pastoral practice, its shortcomings, the main causes for the shortcomings listed and finally a frame of reference offered in the light of how the real situation was evaluated.⁸⁰ We will not dwell on the specific content of the situation since these were bound up with the period from 1972-78, and have already been recalled. It becomes interesting, however, for the subsequent influences on the methodology of planning, to note the Chapter's way of proceeding. As well as the analytical description of the situation, it provided an educative and pastoral interpretation of the situation, evaluating the causes and providing a comparison with the ideal references of the

⁷⁸ J. VECCHI, *Pastorale, educazione, pedagogia nella prassi salesiana*, in J. VECCHI – J.M. PRELLEZO (eds.), *Prassi educativa pastorale e scienze dell'educazione*, SDB, Rome 1988, 128-129 and S. FRIGATO, *Educazione ed evangelizzazione*, in A. BOZZOLO – R. CARELLI (eds.), *Evangelizzazione e educazione*, LAS, Rome 2011, 77.

⁷⁹ GC21 (1978), no. 14. Cf. also nos. 4, 81 and 569.

⁸⁰ Cf. GC21 (1978), no. 87.

Salesian magisterium. This attention to seeing and interpreting would later appear in the planning process offered by Juan Vecchi.⁸¹

In formulating the educational objectives, the Chapter used a logic flowing from levels involving different kinds of growth (personal, social, religious...), set out in quite disparate ways. The first of these, briefly described with a list of objectives, affirmed the unity of a project oriented towards Christ, followed by a description of the objectives of the “Christian religious” level set out discursively. In order to reinforce the importance of “vocational” orientation, there was a special section offering a rather more detailed way of putting all this into practice than we find in the other growth levels. It is very likely that this division into different growth levels was decisive in the subsequent choice of dividing the SEPP into four dimensions.⁸² The summary list of objectives, provided below, was done in a concise and clear manner, in order to be able to compare the subdivisions and contents.

- On the level of a young person’s *personal growth* the objectives are: a gradual maturing in freedom, which involves the perception of values and taking on one’s responsibilities; serene and positive relationships with people and things; a dynamic critical attitude in the face of events in order to be able to make coherent personal decisions; maturing sexually so as to understand the dynamics of growth, encounter and gift of self; finally, planning one’s future in order to make a precise vocational choice.⁸³
- On the level of *social growth* it insisted on: a pro-social attitude of availability, solidarity, dialogue, involvement and shared responsibility; community integration and commitment to justice and building a more just and human society.⁸⁴
- On the *religious level* Salesian activity aims at growth in Christ and in the Church in order to acquire: a conscious and active faith; a reawakening of hope and optimism; a

81 Cf. DICASTERO PER LA PASTORALE GIOVANILE, *Progetto Educativo Pastorale. Metodologia, Sussidio 1*, [s.e.], Rome 1978 and ID., *Elementi e linee per un Progetto Educativo Pastorale Salesiano, Sussidio 2*, [s.e.], Rome 1979.

82 Cf. *Figure H* in Chapter Six offering a diachronic look at the various levels and dimensions within Salesian YM.

83 Cf. CG21 (1978), no. 90.

84 Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 90.

life of grace and charity; a discovery of the Church as an effective sign of communion and service in a bond of unity with the pope.⁸⁵

- On the level of *vocational growth* there are only two objectives: discovery of one's specific call; the free and reflected on choice of a project of life.⁸⁶

After spelling out these main objectives, GC21 did not offer a systematic explanation of other content of educative and pastoral practice to be translated into an actual plan. We see a strong emphasis on experiences in the area of religious growth, considered to be traditionally Salesian and reviewed in pastoral terms in the light of the Council,⁸⁷ failing, however, to make explicit the properly educational means in the area of personal and social growth. We note in this list of educational means:

- group life and experience (still mentioning sodalities)⁸⁸
- lively catechesis and preaching
- joyful and youthful liturgical celebrations
- strong, filial devotion to Our Lady, who is a model of the life of faith and serene purity
- a genuine prayer life with forms close to youth and popular piety
- the sacrament of penance prepared for by community celebrations⁸⁹
- bringing out the personal call that God addresses to each young person
- cultivating the vocation of young people called to priestly and religious life
- actively collaborating with the Holy Spirit in raising up Salesian vocations, both consecrated and lay.⁹⁰

Wholistic planning: educators' attitudes and the educational setting

The GC21 documents described the style of Salesian education and pastoral care by detailing the attitudes of educators and describing the educational setting. Certain attitudes and dispositions in educators, individuals and communities acquire fundamental importance:

⁸⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 92.

⁸⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 106.

⁸⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 92-95.

⁸⁸ cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 90, 102.

⁸⁹ cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 92-95.

⁹⁰ cf. *Ibid.*, no. 110.

- attention to real young people, and their interests and tasks in life
- empathy with the world of young people
- the ability to welcome and dialogue
- the right consideration and esteem for the values of which young people are the bearers
- attention to the dynamics of their growth; the reasonableness of demands and regulations; creativity and flexibility of proposals
- a commitment to encourage adherence to values through persuasion and love, not through forced imposition
- an effort to encourage the point that is accessible to good in each young person
- the frankness of an integral Christian proposal that is attentive to the degree of development of the young person.⁹¹

An “animating” sensitivity clearly emerges from these attitudes, through a welcoming, flexible and gradual educational style. On the other hand, what is neglected are attitudes relating to the educators’ spiritual and inner life, and there is little clarity regarding the ultimate goal and aspects of government or discipline.

The characteristics of the educational setting or environment are worded in such a way that they are in harmony with the attitudes of the educator, by providing for “an intense and bright environment of participation and of since friendly and brotherly relations”⁹² as a framework for educative and pastoral activity. Chapter members were convinced that the Salesian evangelises more by what he does than by what he says, and that he gives witness more by his sound, balanced and successful humanity than by gestures or words.⁹³ The characteristics explicitly mentioned by GC21 are:

- family spirit, simplicity and frankness which fosters friendly and fraternal relationships
- a climate of optimism and joy as a reflection of God’s grace and inner serenity
- the community style of human and Christian growth
- the loving, supportive, animating and activating presence of educators
- constructive forms of group life; the need for the apostolic commitment of young people who then become evangelisers of their companions
- the collaboration with young people, families and all available constructive forces.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 101.

⁹² *Ibid.*, no. 102.

⁹³ Cf. PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 30ff, in *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.* On the EPC cf. nos. 63-68. NB. The use of adjectives like “practical” and “constructive” without specifying the object brings to mind Scilligo’s critical remarks about the generic nature and implicit emotive wording of the Chapters in the post-Council era.

The Project as an operational tool

In his closing address to GC21, Viganò presented the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project as a re-understanding of Don Bosco's Preventive System. But he did not see it as any kind of theoretical pedagogical way of merely rethinking and reorganising its content: "If anyone thought this was a theoretical or secondary proposal, I would venture to say that he would be demonstrating that he had not understood either Don Bosco's heart or the present delicate 'moment' of the Congregation."⁹⁵ The Rector Major saw the SEPP as the programme for the coming six years and proposed studying, deepening, comparing, and implementing Don Bosco's educational legacy and translating it in practical terms in all the settings of Salesian evangelisation.⁹⁶ Here he was in tune with GC21 which emphasised decentralisation and attention to the particular situations of each context:

Each province (or group of provinces) will draw up an educational project adapted to the local reality as a basis for programming and verification for its various works, in line with the basic options made by the Congregation: oratories, youth centres, schools, boarding establishments, parishes, missions, etc. In order to promote unity in decentralisation, the Youth Ministry Department, in the light of Salesian experience and reflection, should indicate the fundamental lines of this project (objectives, contents, method, characteristics...) while taking into account the diversity of geographical and cultural situations.⁹⁷

The sequence of implementation and the flow of indications were therefore conceived as going "from the centre to the periphery", beginning with the decision of the General Chapter to plan, then continuing with the indications of the YM Department, the subsequent development of the provincial projects and finally concluding the series with the work of the SEPP at local level.

Applying this methodology in the provinces then resulted to some degree in the paradox of "centralisation through decentralisation",⁹⁸ with a number of practical implications that are still part of the effects of the history of Salesian planning. The fact of having proposed the sequence for bringing these projects about as going from

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 569.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 571.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 105.

⁹⁸ Cf. S. KÜHL, *Sisyphos im Management. Die vergebliche Suche nach der optimalen Organisations-struktur*, Wiley, Weinheim 2002, 131-166.

the “biggest” to the “smallest” structure has influenced the Salesian planning mentality inasmuch as provincial projects/plans have often imitated the documents of the General Chapters, indications from the Department or the plans of the other provinces, and local ones have tended to copy the contents of the provincial plan, needing to be in tune with it.⁹⁹

Project, a term whose semantic field is (too) broad

A further problem is a linguistic one, since the semantic field of the Italian word “*progetto*” is more extensive than the same term in other languages.¹⁰⁰ GC21 does not define the term “Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project” in a univocal way. It uses it with alternating theoretical and operational emphases and sometimes replaces it with the simple term “planning”. Among the various names and levels of planning spoken of by GC21 that refer directly or indirectly to the SEPP we note: project of the year, educational and pastoral project, project of the oratory and youth centre, provincial educational project for the school sector, projects of the individual schools, apostolic project of the “new presences”, systematic project for evangelisation at provincial and local levels.¹⁰¹ It is interesting that in the part on Practical Directives for the Salesian parish, there is no explicit call for a SEPP for the parish. GC21 did not clarify the number of projects nor the degree of interdependence among them and this remained an issue to be addressed in the future.

The various studies, manuals and aids produced over recent years have generally reflected the ambiguity of the broad semantic field of the Italian *progetto* with its two different emphases: one more precise, when the term refers to an orderly and detailed work plan to accomplish something; the other more indeterminate, because “project” in Italian also means a future-oriented idea, a purpose, including one that is vague and

⁹⁹ The mentality, methodologies, and risks would certainly have been different had the proposed planning process started out by following a “grassroots” logic, from local to provincial SEPP, to arrive at influencing a framework at the Congregational level, gathering experiences and developing content found in provincial projects.

¹⁰⁰ The topic of semantics will be returned to later in chapter two. For the ambivalence and background of the term “*progetto*”, cf. G. MORANTE, *Progetto educativo*, in Z. TRENTI et al. (eds.), *Religio. Enciclopedia tematica dell'educazione religiosa*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1998, 752-753. For the importance of cultural diversity in planning, cf. A deeper analysis in R.D. LEWIS, *When Cultures Collide. Leading across cultures*, Nicholas Brealey International, Boston³2006, 3-80.

¹⁰¹ Cf. GC21 (1978), nos. 30, 104, 127, 132, 134 and 161.

difficult to implement. The word “project” retains a certain ambiguity even in the more technical and operational area, since it can refer to a “general project” which indicates a non-detailed solution, with a summary analysis of costs, and to an “executive project”, which implies instead a complete picture of all calculations, drawings and technical details, estimates and specifications.¹⁰²

In other Latinate languages the term *progetto* preserves these two meanings, even though in some cases it might be translated with synonymous terms like “plan” or “design”.¹⁰³ The semantic relationship between *progetto* and *ideario* in Salesian settings was not always clear, especially in Spanish-speaking countries.¹⁰⁴

A greater problem is felt in English where the terms *project* and *project management* almost exclusively have the sense of a structured work plan laid out to research, to produce or improve something. The term *progetto* is also translated as *mission*, *mission statement*, *plan*, *design*, *layout*, *scheme*. For something that is a vague *progetto* for the future, English employs *plan* not *project*. Also used, in the educational sciences, are *educational planning*, *instructional design*. In the Salesian context there is the *Salesian Educational and Pastoral Project* (alternatively worded as *Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan*. For all practical purposes, “educative” and “educational” are seen as the same thing). In German the word *Projekt* is used as in English, hence *progetto* is translated as *Projekt*, *Plan*, *Entwurf*.¹⁰⁵ Salesians in German-speaking countries adopted a linguistically more pertinent solution and do not translate the term PEPS with *Projekt* but rather *Pastoralkonzept* (a draft of a pastoral approach) or *Leitlinien* (guidelines), which better expresses the nature of the documents produced in the Salesian context under the title *progetto*.

102 Cf. *Progetto* in N. ZINGARELLI, *Lo Zingarelli 2000. Vocabolario della lingua Italiana*, Zanichelli, Bologna 121997, 1391.

103 Cf. e.g. the translation of the term *progettazione educativa* as *planificación educativa* in M. PELLERÉY, *Progettazione educativa/scolastica*, in J.M. PRELLEZO – G. MALIZIA – C. NANNI (eds.), *Dizionario di Scienze dell'Educazione*, LAS, Rome 2008, 923-926 and IDD., *Planificación educativa*, in *Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación UPS, Diccionario de ciencias de la educación*, CCS, Alcalá 2009, 918-921.

104 Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Progetto Educativo Pastorale. Metodologia*, 30-35 and ID., *Elementi e linee per un progetto educativo pastorale salesiano*, 6.

105 Cf. *Project*, in S. WEHMEIER (ed.), *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000, 1012; *Progetto*, in GARZANTI. *Il nuovo dizionario Hazon inglese italiano, italiano inglese*, Garzanti, Cernusco (Milano) 1999, 2187; *Progettare*, in B. KLAUSMANN-MOLTER (ed.), *Das Pons Wörterbuch. Dizionario tedesco italiano, italiano tedesco*, Zanichelli/Klett, Bologna 1996, 1396.

This use of the word *progetto* in Salesian contexts highlights a number of aspects. GC21 (1978), emphasised the theoretical aspect, hence the Salesian educative project understood as a reinterpretation of the preventive system, a systematic understanding of Salesian pedagogy¹⁰⁶ while also highlighting the operational, practical and applicative aspect that considers planning in different environments, the objectives, processes, means and checks involved in the process.¹⁰⁷ The meaning of planning and the SEPP has been enriched given the many texts produced on the subject and the various contexts of reference, risking, however, becoming a conceptual container in which the breadth of content is inversely proportional to how precise its meaning is.¹⁰⁸

Egidio Viganò: planning and new education and evangelisation

Six months after the closure of GC21, the Rector Major sent out a circular entitled *The Salesian educational and pastoral plan*, in which he presented a summary of the results of the Chapter regarding educative and pastoral planning and restated that “to rewrite in synthesis the ideas and practices of the preventive system [...] is one of the obligations for the six-year period”¹⁰⁹ and that it needed to involve every confrere and every community. Some methodologically innovative ideas, compared to the text of the GC21, are found in the last part of the letter. It speaks of the need “to think ‘salesianly’; educational sciences are not enough, not faith alone, and not even one’s experience which has become more or less uncritical with the passing of years and has now been called to be renewed by the Council and two General Chapters.”¹¹⁰ The “Salesian” drafting of the plan means: “to call together individuals for study and reflection, to focus attention on the social and ecclesial phase of our work, to search with creativity ways and solutions of situations. It means to unite the community with a unified criterion to which all members can aspire

¹⁰⁶ Cf. GC21 (1978), nos. 14, 4 and 81.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 105 and 127-161.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. As an example see E. Viganò’s, *Replanning our holiness together*, in ACS 63 (1982) 303, 3-28, using expressions like “c’è da riprogettare insieme la nostra santità, sia personale che comunitaria”, “progetto-uomo voluto da Dio”, “riprogettare in noi la capacità di conversione, di espiazione e di prevenzione”, “un progetto più ampio in cui interviene Iddio come Padre: è un vasto progetto di amore e di vittoria”, “progetto del Padre”, “progetto divino di redenzione” etc. Cf. Also the awareness of the semantic ambiguity indicated in YM DEPARTMENT, *Elements and guidelines for a Salesian educative and pastoral project*, 6

¹⁰⁹ VIGANÒ, *The Salesian educational project*, 38-39.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

and by which each can recognise one another. It means to assure integrity and to free ourselves from sectionalism and improvisation.”¹¹¹

Given the lack of regulation and practical indicators¹¹² that needed to be drawn up subsequently by the YM Department, and the need to approach the planning process from “the centre to the periphery”, we should not wonder that individuals and communities were relying on the initiative of the provinces, while the majority of provinces went ahead only when indications were published by the Department. Vecchi assessed the period after GC21 by saying that “Beginning from 1978, a domestic literature of motivation, providing aids and practical models flourished. Initially, it involved those responsible for animation at the provincial level, while the local communities struggled to take it up.”¹¹³

It is clear that the intention of Chapter members at GC21 was to integrate earlier terminology into the “Salesian educational project” formula: “integral Salesian humanism” from GC19, “integral Christian promotion” and “liberating Christian education” from the SGC. The different formulations and the insistence on unity make one think of the cultural fracture between the Church and the world and of the general mentality in the post-Vatican II of being more concerned with the autonomy of the dimensions than with seeing to the profound unity of the anthropological model.¹¹⁴

During the Viganò and Vecchi era, the insistence on human promotion and liberation was no longer as strong, and reflection focused rather on the relationship between education and evangelisation. Various things influenced the context of this reflection: the crisis of the Salesian boarding school seen still as the traditional educational work; excessive pursuit of teaching activities and less passion for pastoral activity in some provinces, but also the other phenomenon of the rush to take up parishes with so much “pastoral activity” yet without structured educational processes; excessive

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹¹² The Constitutions and Regulations revised at GC21 did not yet contemplate planning, but this changed with GC22 (1984), which included educative and pastoral planning in the General Regulations, inserting it into articles 4, 5, 6 and 7.

¹¹³ Cf. VECCHI, *Pastorale, educazione, pedagogia*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000*, 1991, 26. A similar planning situation was also found in the broader Church setting. Cf. e.g. G. ANGELINI, *Pastorale giovanile e prassi complessiva della Chiesa*, in *Facoltà Teologica dell’Italia Settentrionale, Condizione giovanile e annuncio della fede*, La Scuola, Brescia 1979, 81. Cf. also A. DEL MONTE, *Una Chiesa giovane per annunciare il vangelo ai giovani*, in “Il Regno- documenti” 3 (1979) 63-76 and G. COSTA, *Pastorale giovanile in Italia. Un dossier*, La Rocca, Rome 1981.

¹¹⁴ Cf. The analysis by G. BIANCARDI, *L’educazione tra evangelizzazione e promozione umana*, in BOZZOLO – CARELLI, *Evangelizzazione ed educazione*, 19-24.

professionalism in school education; the oratory that had not succeeded in opening up to youngsters who were unchurched, etc.¹¹⁵

Egidio Viganò offered his reflection on the *Salesian educational project* in 1978, developing an epistemological and methodological axiom for the following years: “We are well aware that education and evangelisation are specifically distinct activities of their class, but nevertheless there is a strict connection between them on the practical plane of existence.”¹¹⁶ In what followed he specified that education and evangelisation “do not, in themselves, follow one another chronologically, and still less are they divergent; they bear on two essential aspects of man’s unique vocation as outlined in God’s plan.”¹¹⁷ The confirmation of the risk, unfortunately implemented in some contexts, of perceiving education and evangelisation as a “before and after” is also testified to by Riccardo Tonelli.¹¹⁸

Viganò took up the formulations of GC21, which unfortunately stressed the distinction and autonomy of education and evangelisation by describing their contents in separate paragraphs. The solution of uniting the two dimensions on the practical level of life was hindered by the disparate nature of the contexts in which the Congregation carries out its mission,¹¹⁹ rather than the lack of absorption of the mentality of renewal after the Council and the consequent employment “of the few Salesians involved” in “organisational and administrative tasks.”¹²⁰

The harmonic unity among the various dimensions of the Salesian educational project was recalled through the unity of vocation, motivations, fundamental option for Christ, concrete action, in proposing a practical possibility of “Christian education”.¹²¹ The Rector Major based himself on Albert Caviglia to affirm the unity to be found in the originality of the preventive system and the Don Bosco’s creativity. His creativity did not set up separate elements, but was more of a creative synthesis, which is the mark of works of genius. Creative synthesis means that “originality, its beauty, its greatness does

115 Cf. J. VECCHI, *Pastorale, educazione, pedagogia nella prassi salesiana*, in J. VECCHI – J.M. PRELLEZO (eds.), *Prassi educativa pastorale e scienze dell’educazione*, SDB, Rome 1988, 128-129.

116 Cf. GC21 (1978), no. 14.

117 Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 91.

118 Cf. R. TONELLI, *Ripensando quarant’anni di servizio alla pastorale giovanile*, interview by Giancarlo De Nicolò, in “Note di Pastorale Giovanile” 43 (2009) 5, 41-42.

119 Cf. GC21 (1978), nos. 82-83 and 86.

120 *Ibid.*, no. 85.

121 Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The Salesian educational project*, in ACS 59 (1978) 290, 26-35.

not reside so much in its novelty of particulars but in the discovery of the *idea* which brings them together in something new and results in a whole.”¹²²

The integral connection of the various elements does not consist in cancelling out differences, nor in getting rid of the opposite pole, but occurs, according to Viganò, in a harmonic and creative tension. In the conclusion of the same letter he writes about the need to acquire “the ability to maintain a harmonious and creative tension between two poles of the Preventive System; namely, the one of the ‘pastoral’ thrust of our activity; the other a well selected ‘pedagogy’ and ‘educational’ competence.”¹²³ Two formulas appear in Viganò’s letter that became almost stereotypical slogans for the future: *evangelise by educating* and *educate by evangelising*, but, as was typical of Viganò’s style which was both magisterial and open to application, the areas and instruments of the relationship between the dynamics of education and evangelisation were also specified, displayed in the following diagram.¹²⁴

¹²² Cf. A. CAVIGLIA, *La pedagogia di Don Bosco*, in VIGANÒ, *The Salesian educational project*, 9.

¹²³ VIGANÒ, *The Salesian educational project*, 41.

¹²⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 26-35.

EVANGELISING BY “EDUCATING”	EDUCATING BY “EVANGELISING”
<p>Don Bosco’s pastoral concern is characterised, with consistent seriousness, by his choice of education as the area and way of his pastoral activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The driving force that stimulates educative action</i>: the reason for which the Salesian (as a person and as a community) immerses himself in education has its origins outside the cultural area; it comes from pastoral charity • <i>Positive solicitude for cultural values and institutions</i>: the intention to evangelise leads the Salesian (as a person and as a community) to appreciate and take on educational commitment in its human values. • <i>Deeply linking the Gospel with culture</i>: In the educational practice of the Preventive System, the Gospel is proposed in such a way that it is closely linked to real life. • <i>The realistic sense of gradualness</i> creating a pedagogical process that takes into account all human dynamics and creates in children and youth the conditions of acceptance in a free response 	<p>Our educative art is “pastoral”, in the sense that the entire educational process, with its content and its methodology, is oriented to the Christian goal of salvation, permeated by its light and grace:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Clear presence of the ultimate end</i>: Don Bosco’s pedagogy insists explicitly on the true religious purpose of life; the ultimate end is the final appeal of education • <i>An educative process positively oriented to Christ</i>: Salesian educational practise comes from and is nourished by pastoral charity and tends explicitly and faithfully toward the salvation (themes: Church; Confession, Eucharist, Marian climate, catechesis, vocation, holiness). • <i>Critical awareness and sense of duty in the light of the Gospel</i>: enabling young people to have a critical awareness that can perceive authentic values by promoting a healthy lifestyle • <i>By its nature the Word of God reveals and challenges</i>: the pedagogical concern to adapt to the condition of youth must not ignore or go against the pastoral commitment as a “prophet” of the Gospel.

Figure E: Relationship between education and evangelisation in Fr Viganò’s Salesian educational project

It is important to note how Viganò adds to the two poles of education and pastoral activity the goodness of heart, that is, loving-kindness, which is typical of the Salesian

lifestyle.¹²⁵ The integrity conceived by Viganò is reconfirmed and enriched by new nuances in the letter on the *New Education* in 1991, written some months after the letter on *New Evangelisation*. A long extract from the former is quoted here for the importance of the connection between the two:

Education and evangelisation mutually interact in an intimate and harmonious manner. We find the explanation for this in the intuition that in practice Don Bosco's method is a "*pedagogical and pastoral art*" [...] Art, as we have said earlier, needs to touch directly the objective reality if it is to have any effect on it in the search for sense, for beauty, for a loftier approach. It is a form of activity seen in a genial man; it exalts his inventive talents and the expression of his creativity; because of it the artist modifies even himself while he is carrying out his work. What prompts him in his activity is an interior fire, an inspirational ideal, a passion in his heart enlightened by his genial impulses. Rightly has John Paul II called Don Bosco the Educator a "genius of the heart." We have seen that this interior fire is called "pastoral charity": an apostolic love marked by predilection for the young; a love which incites "pedagogical intelligence" to translate itself into practical educational projects [...] The presently prevailing secular climate, in which also the development of the educational sciences is frequently deflected along a path infected by ideological incrustations, is a deep provocation to our apostolic consecration. Since methodological principles are of quite exceptional importance in art, pedagogical intelligence has to give a special tone, impress a particular physiognomy on pastoral charity. For Don Bosco the basic principle of this kind for action as an "artist" in education was "loving kindness": the building of trust, confidence and friendship through the ascetical demands of "make yourself loved." The Preventive System involves the "mystique" of pastoral charity and the "asceticism" of loving kindness." [...] The creativity of the "artist" is therefore rooted in a lived Salesian spirituality!¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Cf. VIGANÒ, *The Salesian educational project* 41. Goodness, loving-kindness and "loving each other" is a typical trait of the grace of unity as conceived of by Viganò and finds its place even in academic applications. Talking about the departmental principle in the organisation of the UPS, Viganò says that interdisciplinary dialogue is impossible without a concrete love for each other and a communion of affections, competences, services and initiatives. Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *Presentazione del Documento del CG21 sull'UPS*, in GIANNATELLI (ed.), *Don Egidio Viganò all'Università Salesiana*, 60.

¹²⁶ E. VIGANÒ, *The New education*, in ACG 72 (1991) 337, 27-30.

Summing up Viganò's thinking on the integration between education and evangelisation, what emerges is the reference to art, beauty and creativity which starts from objective reality in order to transform it, at the same time transforming the artist as well. The methodological principles are lived spirituality and, above all, loving-kindness, which builds trust, confidence and friendship.

Juan Edmundo Vecchi, a leader in how the SEPP should be conceptualised (1978–80)

Following the indications of GC21, at the end of the 1970s the Youth Ministry Department published a series of aids for drawing up the SEPP.¹²⁷ Guidelines from Juan Edmundo Vecchi, who was the Councillor for this Sector, substantially influenced the structure and content of these aids, addressed to provincials and YM delegates to encourage the process of Salesian educational planning. The first edition of these booklets was widely disseminated especially in Spanish-speaking settings where the collection was called "Vector"; subsequently, in the second half of the 1980s the Department published a second edition, called *Documenti PG*, even more widely diffused.

Methodology of Salesian planning (1978)

The first booklet came out in December 1978, ten months after the closure of GC21 (1978), and sought to be a preparatory tool for further studies as a way of accompanying the "first steps towards a project."¹²⁸ The text, twenty-five cyclostyled pages in A5, was succinct but substantial for its content regarding programming/planning. Given the need to be brief and practical, the text did not tackle epistemological questions and did not go into detail on the thorny balances between various principles. However, the omission of some innovative parts of the GC21, as will be seen below, could be the cause (or the symptom of a mindset) of some methodological gaps in subsequent publications.

¹²⁷ DEPARTMENT FOR YOUTH MINISTRY, *Progetto Educativo Pastorale. Metodologia, Sussidio 1*, [s.e.], Rome 1978 and ID., *Elementi e linee per un Progetto Educativo Pastorale Salesiano, Sussidio 2*, [s.e.], Rome 1979

¹²⁸ Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Metodologia, Sussidio 1*, 3.

The first part of the booklet had pointers for the individual leading the planning process at the provincial level; the second dealt with the reference framework of the elements constantly present in “Salesian memory”; the third, finally, presented some practical suggestions for drawing up the project. The various parts of the handbook referred almost exclusively to Salesian documents that came after the Council and to the Rector Major’s 1978 letter on the pastoral and educational plan.

Even though the declared recipients were provincials and YM delegates, the indications for the provincial level animator, contained in the first part of the text, were a clear reference to the planning activity of the local communities. Comparing it with Vecchi’s report to the conference on the preventive system in the Lombardy-Emilia province, which took place only a few weeks before the publication of the booklet, one can glimpse the mindset stressing a “bottom-up” procedure for communities.¹²⁹ This was highlighted by a series of concrete questions to help enter into the process of planning the EPC; also attached were two sample pages for the formulation of some pastoral educational objectives and six pages of the general *Ideario* (a set of fundamental ideas or principles) for a Salesian educational centre, approved by the Spanish Provincial Conference.¹³⁰

According to indications in the first part, the provincial animator was called upon to set up an animating group at province level with the following tasks: to involve, enlighten, motivate, indicate methodologies and facilitate learning, and not to formulate conclusions to be sent to the confreres.¹³¹ There was a healthy realism in suggesting a project of a temporary nature, one that evolves dynamically, rather than regulating how it should work, thus following the purpose of the kind of planning that is meant “to help groups to work ‘with awareness’, attentively, sharing responsibility.”¹³²

The second part of the booklet, instead, spoke of elements of “Salesian memory”¹³³ that are a frame of reference for the SEPP. There is a return to Don Bosco and his

¹²⁹ Cf. the approach of the intervention that speaks only of the context of the local educative community, in J.E. VECCHI, *per riattualizzare il Sistema Preventivo*, in ISPETTORIA SALESIANA LOMBARDO-EMILIANA, *Convegno sul Sistema Preventivo*, Milan-Bologna 3-4 November 1978, and A. VIGANÒ, *Alcuni punti fondamentali riaffermati dal convegno sul Sistema Preventivo*, in the Acts of that Conference.

¹³⁰ Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Metodologia, Sussidio 1*, 28-35.

¹³¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³³ “Memory”, a term dear to Fr Vecchi, is defined as “the positive experience of a people or a congregation, which is passed on.” Cf. *Le principali difficoltà emerse dal dibattito sulla relazione di don G.E. Vecchi*, in ILE, *Convegno sul Sistema Preventivo*.

educational and pastoral legacy that shapes the Salesian identity. A very brief summary of the rethinking of YM at the SGC (1972) and in GC21 (1978) was proposed in nine points.¹³⁴

The third part with practical suggestions made up the methodological core of the booklet. The practicality of these pages consisted not only in proposing thought-provoking questions, although these took up a good percentage of the text. Elements such as the brevity of the explanation and the logical nature of the planning process divided into three moments also revealed the practical intention of the authors. In the following paragraphs we will explore the three moments of planning: situation analysis, operational planning and evaluation:

The *situation analysis* stage involved the process of knowing the condition of young people, which is not just a statistical and objective description of the context, but also includes the experiences of young people, trends, judgements, aspirations, common reactions and, as a counterpart, the responses that the EPC gives to these challenges. In addition to knowledge of the situation, there was also interpretation from a faith perspective: “one must therefore evaluate the facts in their ability ‘to make it easier or more difficult for young people to grow in their humanity while growing in faith’.”¹³⁵ On the other hand, no analysis of the human, social and material resources available in the work is suggested, which can be interpreted, as a logical implication of an anthropology looking towards the future and not the past.¹³⁶ It is only with hindsight that we have come to the conviction that without a clear awareness of resources it is not possible to plan realistically, especially at a time of restructuring and crisis in the Salesian workforce.¹³⁷

The *practical planning stage* involved the formulation of objectives, spelling out the method and studying the educational style. The general objectives were taken from the previous Chapter.¹³⁸ In order to specify objectives, the desired results at the end of the intervention must be established, their urgency must be determined both on the basis of fundamental values and on the basis of the concrete situation, the specific objectives

¹³⁴ Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Metodologia, Sussidio 1*, 9-13.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14. Cf. also CG21 (1978), no. 13 mentioned by the booklet, in reference to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 19.

¹³⁶ Cf. J.E. VECCHI, *Per riattualizzare il Sistema Preventivo*, in ILE, *Convegno sul Sistema Preventivo*, 3.

¹³⁷ Cf. The “gap between the number of proposals and the possibility of implementing them” that Vecchi notes in J.E. VECCHI, *Verso una nuova tappa di Pastorale Giovanile Salesiana*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000*, SDB, Rome 1991, 88.

¹³⁸ Cf. GC21 (1978), nos. 90-92.

must be formulated in a clear and communicable form, and the evaluation criteria must be decided on. Objectives set in this way tend to increase the clarity and measurability that is typical of management by objectives.¹³⁹ They determine the “method”, which translates into the organisation of related educational activities and the identification of interventions, roles and functions. The study of the educational style, which was supposed to be part of the practical planning stage was, however, insufficiently dealt with, as the reader was referred to the Chapter proceedings to be able to answer four questions about the setting and the educational relationship.¹⁴⁰ The focus on systemic planning was marginalised in the SEPP methodology. The second booklet would then attempt to explore the educational style in greater depth,¹⁴¹ but this was just a later addition that did not fit into the linear logic of situation – planning – evaluation.

The third and final stage of planning was *evaluation*. The latter should be carried out from two mutually enriching perspectives: the comparison of all parts of the project with Salesian practice, which examines fidelity to tradition; and examination of the results obtained, which demonstrates the practical effectiveness of the project.

This booklet that was to accompany the first steps of Salesian planning is a small jewel that summarises the first ideas on Salesian educative and pastoral planning. The slimness of the document, the succinct interpretation it had of GC21 (1978) and the practically-oriented way it was put together are to be appreciated. The methodological aspect of the proposed planning process, summarised in the linear scheme of situation – planning – evaluation, has remained unchanged, with minor additions, until today.¹⁴² The logic of a systemic process, even if absent from the methodological part, is reiterated within the topics, seeking a balance between the formation of persons and the tasks of planning, the animating group and the accompaniment of communities. In the aids that followed, attention would be paid to community integration, since the EPC would be the first of the five areas (dimensions) of the SEPP,¹⁴³ but later the topics would

139 Cf. The emphasis on clarity and measurability of objectives in the framework of Management By Objectives (MBO), e.g. in the pioneering studies of Edwin A. Locke who influenced management in the 1970s, in E.A. LOCKE, *Toward a theory of task motivation and incentives*, in “Organizational Behavior & Human Performance” 3 (1968) 157-189. Later, in the 1980s, the theory developed by talking about SMART objectives, which have five characteristics: specific, measurable, assignable, realistic and time-related.

140 Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Metodologia, Sussidio 1*, 25-26.

141 *Sussidio 2* would later try to propose an in-depth study of the educational style, but this was only a later addition which, although testifying to Vecchi’s integral focus, would not be part of the linear methodological approach. Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Elementi e linee per un PEPS, Sussidio 2*, 13-14.

142 Cf. The planning stages in the three editions of the *Frame of Reference for Salesian Youth Ministry*

143 Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Elementi e linee per un PEPS, Sussidio 2*, 14-15.

be tackled separately.¹⁴⁴ The focus on systemic unity was expressed by Vecchi in the following succinct terms:

Often when we speak of the preventive system we do not go beyond individual consideration: it is easy to think of an educator [...] It is more difficult for us to grasp and implement what the word system means, that is, the convergence and mutual reference, the organic nature of various elements.... [...] *The educative community draws up a project [...] A project creates community.*¹⁴⁵

Insights and applications of planning in different educational settings (1979–1981)

The second booklet, entitled *Elements and guidelines for a Salesian educative and pastoral plan*, came out in October 1979, just ten months after the publication of the first. In many respects it completed and clarified the topics in continuity with the previous one, but the basic paradigm shifted from Stenhouse's design-research process towards a well-structured project-product in the style of Bloom or d'Hainaut. The Department introduced the discussion by noting that since the SEPP had "been successful, the word is in danger of being used in multiple and generic senses and of no longer serving, therefore, to understand a precise issue."¹⁴⁶ For this reason, three often confused terms were explained: *frame of reference*, understood as a set of ideal guidelines; *educative project*, that is the general plan of intervention that points to practical objectives, suggests concrete directions and the means to obtain them, sets up roles and functions; *plan*, defined as the step for distributing tasks, requiring the project to be broken down into personnel, times, places.¹⁴⁷

The central part of this second booklet specified five areas of intervention: the EPC, the educative-cultural dimension, the dimension of evangelisation and catechesis, vocational orientation and the group experience. For each area the orientations, the general and specific objectives, the criteria and intervention choices were described. The

¹⁴⁴ The division of the four dimensions of the SEPP and the separate chapter on the EPC in DICASTERO PER LA PG, *Quadro di riferimento*, 1998, 45-55 reflecting the conclusions of GC24 (1996) *Salesians and the laity: communion and spirit in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco* and GC25 (2002) *The Salesian Community Today*. The focus of the reflection on the ECP was not only its reference to the SEPP, but rather the relationships between the ECP and the Salesian community are emphasised.

¹⁴⁵ VECCHI, *Per riattualizzare il Sistema Preventivo*, in ILE, *Convegno sul Sistema Preventivo*, 1.5-7.

¹⁴⁶ DICASTERO PG, *Elementi e linee per un PEPS*, *Sussidio 2*, 6.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 6-7.

roles and functions would be developed in the following aids, since they vary according to the educational structure. With the division into five areas one loses sight of the global priorities of a Salesian work, which are not dealt with, and one runs the risk of dividing the interventions and activities by areas, with a consequent fragmentation of the educative and pastoral mission in terms of dimensions, as is pointed out by organisational studies.¹⁴⁸

The primary aim of the project, to unite the educative and pastoral community in terms of mentality and action,¹⁴⁹ in fact got lost in the division of the project into areas, guidelines, objectives, criteria and choices of action, which in summary amounted to two hundred and fifty interconnected elements at various levels. This already high number could still grow, since it was expected that the communities would further specify the individual elements with roles, functions and interventions. Even the idea in the first booklet of a provincial animating group was no longer mentioned, and the suggestions were no longer so easily applicable in the local EPC. It seems clear that the new aids coming from the YM Department moved towards a more analytical and theoretical approach, a direction that would be confirmed by the guidelines of the third series of these tools, which would further spell out and specify the SEPP in the individual settings: parish, oratory and school.¹⁵⁰

Therefore, in the third series, the five areas of the SEPP are quite disparate because the texts are not structured by areas. The EPC is treated in each booklet in a separate chapter; the educational, evangelisation and groups and associations areas, instead, are sometimes found explicitly as a separate chapter, or are to be found in various elements scattered across different parts of the three booklets. The vocations area, reduced to a few sentences, is marginalised for all intents and purposes. The next booklet, which came out in September 1981 as number four, dealt with the *Essential Guidelines for a Provincial Vocations Promotion Plan* which filled this gap, but from the perspective of

¹⁴⁸ Cf. The art of systemic management described in P. SENGE, *The Fifth Discipline. The art and practice of the learning organization*, Doubleday, New York ²2006 *La quinta disciplina. L'arte e la pratica dell'apprendimento organizzativo*, Sperling & Kupfer, Milan, ²2006, 65-105 and in the area of pastoral planning by G. ANGELINI, *Il vincolo ecclesiale, la pratica religiosa, la fede cristiana*, in G. AMBROSIO et al., *Progetto pastorale e cura della fede*, Glossa, Milan 1996, 38-39.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Elementi e linee per un PEPS, Sussidio 2*, 7-8.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. DICASTERO PER LA PASTORALE GIOVANILE, *Elementi e linee per un Progetto Educativo-Pastorale nelle parrocchie affidate ai Salesiani, Sussidio 3a*, [s.e.], Rome 1980; ID., *Elementi e linee per un Progetto Educativo-Pastorale negli oratori e centri giovanili salesiani, Sussidio 3b*, [s.e.], Rome 1980; ID., *Elementi e linee per un Progetto Educativo-Pastorale nelle scuole salesiane, Sussidio no. 3c*, [s.e.], Rome 1980.

a separate dimension which was to be organised separately and planned centrally by the province.¹⁵¹

The practical nature of planning in the Eighties

Fr Vecchi's period of coordination was characterised by the study, practice and accompaniment of planning, which contributed to greater stability and clarity regarding the final goals of education and facilitated a global approach to the different settings.¹⁵² Mention should also be made of the efforts of the Department, which assisted some regions in the second half of the 1980s, and the proposal of a course for province youth ministry delegates held at the Generalate from November 1986 until January 1987.¹⁵³ Beyond the progress and brighter moments at the animation level, one can also see shadows, especially at the local operational level and at the level of mentality. One can also note, especially "a gap between what is proposed and the possibility of implementing it."¹⁵⁴ Aspects of the lack of translating things into practice include:

- the implementation stages were too short: the constant succession of new proposals prevented real assimilation. The Rector Major's motto "from paper to life"¹⁵⁵ indicated the necessary but lacking internalising of things, the danger of spiritual mediocrity and the weakening of identity. It would seem that in some regions the planning only produced a change of some titles, leaving the previous pastoral model and mentality untouched;
- different involvement of the provincial and local levels: the educative and pastoral planning initially involved those responsible for animation at the provincial level, while the local communities found it difficult to take it on;¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Cf. DICASTERO PER LA PASTORALE GIOVANILE, *Lineamenti essenziali per un Piano Ispettorale di Pastorale Vocazionale, Sussidio 4*, [s.e.], Rome 1981.

¹⁵² Cf. VECCHI, *Verso una nuova tappa di PG*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000*, 83.

¹⁵³ Cf. DICASTERO PER LA PASTORALE GIOVANILE, *Programma per il sessennio 1984-1989*, in *La società di san Francesco di Sales nel sessennio 1984-1990. Report of the Rector Major Fr Egidio Viganò*, SDB, Rome, 1990, 148 and the accompaniment materials e.g. for the National Youth Delegation of Spain cf. CENTRO INTERNAZIONALE SALESIANO DE PASTORAL JUVENIL/ROMA, *Comunidad educativa en formación. Guiones para educadores*, 5 vols, CCS, Madrid 1985-86.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. VECCHI, *Verso una nuova tappa di PG*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000*, 88.

¹⁵⁵ E. VIGANÒ, *Opening address of the Rector Major*, in GC22 (1984), no. 19.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. J.E. VECCHI, *Pastorale, educazione, pedagogia nella prassi salesiana*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000*, SDB, Rome 1991, 26.

- pastoral activity as an object of animation but not of governance: the indications in the pastoral area were only general encouragements, but not innovative, decisive and operational structural thrusts involving individuals, means and obligatory guidelines;
- too many expectations and demands: the communities had to accelerate the pace of learning in times that already demanded already an acquisition of a new mentality, a problem connected with the difficult but necessary preparation of personnel;
- too little coordination: the work of the Department, YM Centres and the provincial teams created autonomous and not always coordinated proposals. Among the factors noted were: more concern for drawing up proposals than implementing guidelines; the communication channels between the Department and the provinces was often problematic; the lack of personnel in animation structures;
- the ambiguity and multiplicity of the recommendations: the drafting, implementation and verification of the SEPP required unifying criteria, while taking account of the multiplicity of contexts, which at the same time made a uniform proposal problematic.¹⁵⁷

Another issue, important at the pedagogical level, was the sector-based approach of planning in five areas with the subsequent subdivisions by works. The loss of the integrity of the SEPP was pointed out both explicitly, in criticism of the sector approach, and implicitly, with insistence on the integrity and harmony of the educative and pastoral proposal. The observations on the division between evangelisation and education are clearly expressed by Viganò in his letter *The New Education*. Analysing contemporary culture, he noted that “the education of the young, so fundamental and indispensable in every society, is not only no longer linked in practice with evangelization but is in fact deliberately separated from because it is considered a cultural sector with an autonomous field of development.”¹⁵⁸ The insistence on the grace of unity makes it clear that the tendency to separate the two areas is not only virtually possible, but it is a problem found in Salesian YM. Tonelli confirmed this when speaking of the pastoral work of recent years: “One of the limitations of the work of these years has been... the ‘before’

¹⁵⁷ Cf. *The Society of St Francis de Sales in the six years from 1984-1990*, 1990, 151-159; VECCHI, *Verso una nuova tappa di PG*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000*, 88-89; P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, “And he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length” (Mk 6:4). *Salesian Youth Ministry*, in AGC 91 (2010) 407, 9-10

¹⁵⁸ E. VIGANÒ, *The New Education*, in AGC 72 (1991) 337, 5.

and ‘after’ game. Some used to say: education first and evangelisation afterwards. Some others preferred to reverse them.”¹⁵⁹

In his analysis of the relationship between education and evangelisation in the Congregation, Frigato notes that “despite the multiplicity of definitions, the role of faith is substantially ‘extrinsic’ to the educational process. Moreover, faith and education are considered ‘distinct’ dimensions, ‘mutually autonomous’ and ‘poles in tension.’”¹⁶⁰ A separation between the youth ministry of these years and the vocational dimension, connected with a lack of attention to the latter, is recognisable both in the structure of the GC21 document,¹⁶¹ and in the organisation of topics in the YM Department’s booklets, which detached the vocations area from the pastoral work planned in the various settings. The lack of attention paid to the vocations area in these years was also testified to by GC23¹⁶² and by Tonelli.¹⁶³

The trap of distinctions and areas, the contents of which were specified with so many things to do, implied setting up very long lists of elements but without the connections between them always being specified. This was a risk that the paradigm of autonomy, sectorial analysis and linear execution found difficult to deal with. In the meantime, the only way to bring things together succinctly in Salesian YM seems to have been the work entitled *Salesian Youth Ministry*,¹⁶⁴ which brought together the various issues in the form of symbolic images, gave an explanation and then referred the reader to a more extensive bibliography on the subject. The way of presenting the content of disparate elements with a picture avoided the problem of explaining the relationships between the elements and gave the impression of unity. Rather than “attempting a synthesis of the Salesian pedagogical heritage and their current project”,¹⁶⁵ the book was presented in attractive terms as “pleasant and easy reading”¹⁶⁶ on pastoral issues. Given that it was the final publication before GC23, it can be regarded as an icon of the contents and aspirations of youth ministry between 1978 and 1990.

¹⁵⁹ TONELLI, *Ripensando quarant’anni*, 41-42.

¹⁶⁰ FRIGATO, *Educazione ed evangelizzazione*, in BOZZOLO – CARELLI (eds.), *Evangelizzazione e educazione*, 89.

¹⁶¹ Cf. parts of the document on Salesians evangelising young people: *Il progetto educativo e la fecondità vocazionale*, in GC21 (1978), nos. 80-119 and *Evangelizing: Settings and Methods*, in GC21 (1978), nos. 120-165.

¹⁶² Cf. GC23 (1990), nos. 251-253.

¹⁶³ Cf. TONELLI, *Ripensando quarant’anni*, 48-49.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. DEPARTMENT FOR YOUTH MINISTRY, *Salesian Youth Ministry*, SDB, Rome 1990.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

The Nineties: education to the faith and Salesian spirituality

In his analysis of the evolution of Salesian spirituality in the post-Vatican II period, Aldo Giraudo notes a detachment of spirituality from the educative and pastoral dimension, denouncing “prayer that oscillates between intellectualism and the emotional, often incapable of being transferred into life.” He points out youth ministry experiences that tend “to be resolved or closed in on themselves, of a gratifying and anaesthetic nature, without real consistency and inner quality. Should this really be the case [...] educative and pastoral projects would be in danger of becoming wasted effort, a practice without soul and without backbone.”¹⁶⁷ In addition, matters of Salesian spirituality were linked more to the sphere of formation, and were not matched by pastoral reflections, which were more focused on planning and methodological issues to be animated.

The 23rd General Chapter held in 1990 had the clear intention of filling this gap, encouraged also as it was by the Church’s reflection on new evangelisation. The Rector Major, in the introduction to the Acts of GC23, specifies how new evangelisation requires a new education on the part of the Salesians, saying that the Salesian approach to educating to the faith “is based on two characteristic and complementary columns: ‘spirituality’ and ‘pedagogy’. These are two dynamic elements on which converges the preventive system converges.”¹⁶⁸ Hence the development of issues of pedagogical spirituality going beyond the superficiality of the generic educational proposals. Father Viganò concluded his presentation of the Acts with an essential summary in which the basic balances of his magisterium emerge once again:

The secret of success lies in the witness of apostolic interior conviction which, through its grace of unity, makes us “shepherds” and “educators”: educators, because shepherds of the young; and shepherds, because Christian educators. I closed my Report on the period 1984-1990 “emphasising the fundamental condition which is most urgent for our Salesian activity; it can be expressed – I said – in a word that becomes an appeal: spirituality!”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ A. GIRAUDO, *Interrogativi e spinte della Chiesa del postconcilio sulla spiritualità salesiana*, in C. SEMERARO (ed.), *La spiritualità salesiana in un mondo che cambia*, Salvatore Sciascia, Caltanissetta 2003, 154. Cf. also pp. 158-159 for the urgent and pressing need for interdisciplinary studies to unify the organisational, the spiritual and the cultural.

¹⁶⁸ E. VIGANÒ, *Presentation*, in GC23 (1990), 13.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

Spirituality is also a cohesive factor in the Salesian Youth Movement, which for the first time was recognised as a category in Chapter thinking. All the groups in the movement live the values of Salesian youth spirituality at different levels that can be seen as a series of concentric circles: “from those farthest away, for whom the spirituality is something only dimly perceived through an environment in which they feel welcome, to those who consciously and explicitly make their own the Salesian ethic. These latter constitute the animating nucleus of the whole movement, which is therefore an original educative movement.”¹⁷⁰

In the Acts of GC23, spirituality is described with a few important adjectives: it is Salesian, youthful and therefore educational. Subsequently, the Rector Major would write a letter on new education, insisting on the need to “sanctify ourselves by educating”, hoping that educators would relaunch “interior apostolic conviction that is at the root of our particular character in the Church. Here we must add that Salesian spirituality represents for us also the force of the sanctifying synthesis of the ‘new education’.”¹⁷¹ Commenting on the documents of GC23 he has the following summary remark:

Education is “the pre-eminent context in which we meet God.” This implies a special apostolic spirituality which is simultaneously both spiritual and educational, “always attentive to the world context and the challenges of youth; it calls for flexibility, creativity and balance, and seeks seriously the appropriate pedagogical qualifications. The same Salesian consecration which inwardly ‘thirsts for souls’, assumes the pedagogical values and lives them as a concrete expression of spirituality.” It is not only a spirituality for education in general, but a true spirituality of education to the faith!¹⁷²

Viganò invited Salesian educators to form a spirituality that does not detach the person’s being from action and that always connects the intention to evangelise with the intention to educate. The secret of the “brilliance of the artist” in the Christian educator lies in educative spirituality and the “grace of unity” that ensures the vital inseparability between union with God and dedication to our neighbour, between evangelical inner conviction and apostolic action, between the praying heart and busy hands, forestalling the extremes of “activism” and “intimism”.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ GC23 (1990), no. 276.

¹⁷¹ VIGANÒ, *New Education*, 37.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 39 and references to GC23 (1990), no. 332.

During the years of his term of office (1996-2002), Fr Juan Vecchi positioned himself in line with the legacy left him by Viganò, writing much more in his circulars on the subject of spirituality than in the previous period. The adjectives he preferred to describe it with were “Salesian” and “youthful”, thus placing it in a vital, community, relational, pastoral-educational-pedagogical, vocational and communicative context. Specific topics linked to spirituality were developed only in the background, such as charity, action, experience, work, the project, practice, animation, daily life, friendship, prayer and the sacraments.¹⁷⁴

An interesting summary of the path of reflection on Salesian spirituality was offered by Vecchi during the *Salesian Family Spirituality Days* in 1995.¹⁷⁵ He offered a positive assessment of the ascetic and mystical aspect of the encounter with God through two types of mediations included in a single sacramental universe: the celebratory and ritual ones (prayer) and the practical and technical ones (work). In a word, “work and prayer merged in the total sacrament of a life oriented towards God and moved by charity.”¹⁷⁶ To update Salesian spirituality in the context of the 1990s, he proposed three convictions:

That there is a spiritual experience, almost hidden in daily educational life, known only in fragmentary form by those who live it; that it is possible to create communion on the basis of this experience at the level of the Salesian Family; that young people can perceive it and find in it a path of life in the Spirit. The effort to formulate a path of Salesian youth spirituality responds to this last point.¹⁷⁷

Finally, however, a certain discrepancy should be noted: on the one hand, the Rectors Major spoke of Salesian spirituality being linked to the grace of unity, but on the other hand, the formulations found in GC23 and in the first two editions of the *Frame of Reference* are tied to the logic of the subdivisions into various dimensions. Of itself,

¹⁷⁴ Cf. The semantic context of the use of the key terms “spirituality”, “Salesian youth spirituality” and “Salesian spirituality” in CD attached to J.E. VECCHI, *Educatori appassionati esperti e consacrati per i giovani. Lettere circolari ai Salesiani di don Juan E. Vecchi*. Introduction, key words and indexing by Marco Bay, LAS, Rome 2013.

¹⁷⁵ J.E. VECCHI, *Il sistema preventivo esperienza di spiritualità* in A. MARTINELLI – G. CHERUBIN (eds.), *Il sistema preventivo verso il terzo millennio*. Acts of the 18th Week of Spirituality of the Salesian Family. Rome, Salesianum 26-29 January 1995, SDB, Rome 1995, 221-243.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 242. In his succinct formulation, Vecchi refers to the Preventive System lived as a journey of holiness. *Week of Spirituality of the Salesian Family*. Rome 1980, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1981.

¹⁷⁷ VECCHI, *Il sistema preventivo esperienza di spiritualità* in MARTINELLI – CHERUBIN (eds.), *Il sistema preventivo verso il terzo millennio*, 221.

GC23 proposed educating young people in the faith by making them aware of an original project of Christian life: “The youngster learns a new way of being a believer in the world, and arranges his life around certain perceptions of faith, choices of values and gospel attitudes: he lives a spirituality.”¹⁷⁸ The latter is expressed, however, in different core themes that are not always related to the dimensions of the SEPP. From the comparison between the dimensions, the areas and the core themes one can see the effort of the period we are examining to express the unity of the Salesian educative proposal. It seems that the Viganò-Vecchi period characterised by a rich pastoral and pedagogical production ended with the two editions of the *Frame of Reference* written according to the mentality of the project-product divided into dimensions and areas, and focusing on the coordination structures and methodological steps. This meant the lack of a unifying anthropologically-based perspective. This would be the challenge facing the next era.

Revision of provincial plans and shared responsibility with the laity

The revision of provincial plans had been decided on by GC23, but despite the Chapter’s emphasis on practicality and translation into something concrete,¹⁷⁹ it only wanted to examine the formal quality of what the provinces had put in writing; “for now, it has not entered into the verification of the actual implementation of these projects in the works.”¹⁸⁰ The study of the Provincial SEPPs put “much focus on principles”¹⁸¹ in writing and the completeness of the topics dealt with in the project itself, several times repeating the choice of not wanting to enter into the merits of the project in practice. One can perceive the difference in perspective with respect to what Viganò expected. In his letter of convocation of the Chapter he had spoken of the need to “verify the effectiveness of Salesian education in relation to the life of faith of the young people with whom we work, in order to then review more incisively the educative and pastoral projects of each province and of the individual houses.”¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ GC23 (1990), no. 158.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. GC23 (1990), no. 230.

¹⁸⁰ L. VAN LOOY, *The Educative and Pastoral Plan in the Provinces*, in AGC 75 (1994) 349, 36.

¹⁸¹ DICASTERO PER LA PASTORALE GIOVANILE, *Il Progetto Educativo-pastorale salesiano. Rilettura dei progetti ispettoriali*. Results of the survey sent to the Provincial delegates for YM and their teams on the “Educative and Pastoral Project”, SDB, Rome 1995, 6. Cf. also VAN LOOY, *Il PEP nelle Ispettorie*, 34-38.

¹⁸² VIGANÒ, *Convocation of the 23rd General Chapter*, 7.

The discrepancy between the operational emphasis of GC23 and the revision that was carried out can also be seen when we compare some of the requirements of the Chapter with the revision method of the provincial projects. The attention of the Chapter was directed towards the active insertion of individual works within the local Church and neighbourhood, the review of educational quality, significance and potential relocation of the works themselves.¹⁸³ The survey and the analysis that followed, instead, only involved provincial delegates and their teams, studying in particular the completeness of the written projects.

The questionnaire, made of up 45 questions, used a scheme based on the following question: How does the Province SEPP deal with (indicate, describe, define, consider, analyse, be attentive to, make explicit) a specific issue (dimension, objective, aspect, educational means, process, choice, concept)? The possible responses were: *a lot, sufficient, little, absent*. The emphasis of the study was on the completeness and up-to-date nature of the project's texts, and in this area it revealed substantial satisfaction. But among the 45 questions in the questionnaire only three, and even these in a generic way, dealt with how the project was implemented in practice. The conclusions of the survey can be presented by referring to the statistical data in the orientation document *The Educative and Pastoral Project in the Provinces* (1994) drawn up by van Looy. The Councillor for Youth Ministry brought out the following problems of the project:

1. The lack of planning methodology. 38% of the houses do not have a written plan. 17% of the provinces do not have a Provincial SEPP approved by the Provincial Chapter. Of those provinces that do have the project, in 76% of the cases it was drawn up by only some Salesians without the shared involvement of others.
2. There is not much of a mindset of shared responsibility with the laity in the educative and pastoral community. In 36% of the houses the EPC was not established. 78% do not know how the EPC should guarantee the Salesian charism and 67% state that they do not understand very well how to entrust responsibility to the laity. 78% of the communities are not very clear about the function of the Salesian community as formator of the laity.
3. The lack of integration within the ecclesial and social environment. Only 3% consider relationships with social and political bodies important and only 4% relationships with cultural bodies. Insertion in the local Church is important for 19% of the respondents; relationships with the families of the recipients is important for 11% and 14% want to have relationships with other educational organisations.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Cf. GC23 (1990), no. 230.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. VAN LOOY, *Il PEP nelle Ispettorie*, 36-40.

Some results were thought to be alarming, especially collaboration with lay people in the EPC and neighbourhood. Three quarters of Salesian communities did not give serious thought to collaboration with lay people and, logically, the same proportion was true for projects drawn up by a handful of Salesians without involving others. So we can understand the Congregation's choice for the General Chapter to follow, on the theme of communion and sharing between Salesians and the laity.¹⁸⁵

The 24th General Chapter was an important milestone in the twenty years of reflection led by Viganò and Vecchi. The theme of communion and sharing between lay people and Salesians, in addition to the already mentioned Salesian Family, EPC and the Salesian Youth Movement,¹⁸⁶ developed around the concept of "*shared responsibility*" expressing the need for a new relationship between Salesians and lay people: "A change of mentality is needed: *grow together, form together.*"¹⁸⁷ Shared responsibility becomes a central term in the document, used almost fifty times, much more than simple communion, sharing or collaboration between Salesians and lay people. Number 22 of the Acts introduces the concept in this perspective:

Participation in the Salesian mission also appears as a gradual and progressive variegated reality: from the simple obligatory *presence* of one who does paid work, offering skill and nothing more or one who is a member of a Salesian parish, to *collaboration* for motives of work or free choice and to the *shared responsibility* of one who takes on with us the common mission. The process of *involvement* leads to communion in the spirit; to *shared responsibility*, and then to sharing of the Salesian mission. *Communion* and *sharing, involvement* and *shared responsibility*: these are the two faces of the same medal.¹⁸⁸

The concept of shared responsibility is not defined in the Chapter document. Even though most of the occurrences are exhortative, it is possible to trace other important core ideas: the shared responsibility of the laity is placed within the single mission and is exercised as a process of the entire educative and pastoral community, which puts the

¹⁸⁵ Cf. The theme and content of GC24 (1996): Salesians and laity: communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco. Cf. also a more in-depth analysis of some provincial projects in VOJTÁŠ, *Progettare e discernere*, 81-88.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. GC24 (1996), nos. 39-51.

¹⁸⁷ GC24 (1996), no. 101. On the level of attitudes and methodologies of shared formation see no. 103, for practical aspects cf. nos. 106-148.

¹⁸⁸ GC24 (1996), no. 22. [italics highlighting the concepts used to describe the Salesian-lay relationship are ours]

young and their needs at the centre by drawing up a Salesian educative and pastoral project.¹⁸⁹ The working model, “shared more or less everywhere, recognised as valid and the only one practicable in present conditions, is the following: ‘the Salesians as the animating nucleus [of the EPC], the involvement and shared-responsibility of the laity, the drawing up of a possible plan, adapted to the needs of those for whom we are working, to the forces available and to the local context’.”¹⁹⁰ The central body animating and coordinating shared responsibility is the EPC or Council of the Work, which fulfils its role both through reflection, dialogue, planning and review of educational and pastoral action, and through the clear allocation of the roles and functions of Salesians and lay people.¹⁹¹

The ambitious introduction of the category of shared responsibility should have repercussions especially for the mentality of the Salesians. In his letter convening the Chapter, Fr Viganò expresses an important aspect: “A religious community more attentive to the requirements and shared responsibility of the laity cannot fail to involve, from the standpoint of identity, the primacy of spirituality.”¹⁹² After GC24, the new Rector Major, Juan Edmundo Vecchi, proposed a reflection consistent with the ideals traced out by the Chapter, with such far-sightedness as to make them relevant at least for a quarter of a century until GC28, which in 2020 took up the reflection on shared responsibility between Salesians and lay people in mission and formation.

In addition to the meanings mentioned earlier, Vecchi often expressed a concept in his circular letters of shared responsibility with the laity that is both spiritual and operational,¹⁹³ while extending the application of the principle to young people who share responsibility for accompaniment on their own journey, but youth communities also share responsibility,¹⁹⁴ as well as institutions and families, such as in social initiatives.¹⁹⁵ Shared responsibility also applies to the life of religious communities and in relationships among provinces.¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 119-120.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 39.

¹⁹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 121, 171.

¹⁹² E. VIGANÒ, *Convocation of General Chapter 24*, in AGC 75 (1994) 350, 22-23.

¹⁹³ Cf. J.E. VECCHI, *The Salesian Family is twenty-five years old*, in AGC 78 (1997) 358, 14.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. J.E. VECCHI, *Sanctity and Martyrdom at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, in AGC 80 (1999) 368, 31; ID., *Towards the 25th General Chapter*, in AGC 81 (2000) 372, 25.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. J.E. VECCHI, *He had compassion on them (Mk 6:34). New forms of poverty, Salesian mission and effectiveness*, in AGC 78 (1997) 359, 29 and ID., *Church and Family events*, in AGC 79 (1998) 364, 18.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. J.E. VECCHI, *“The Father consecrates us and sends us”*, in AGC 79 (1998) 365, 42; ID., *Towards the 25th General Chapter*, 29; ID., *Sickness and old age in the Salesian experience*, in AGC 82 (2001) 377, 25.

The most far-sighted letter, rooted in twenty years of pastoral animation, outlining the implications for the future of his thinking, including the principle of shared responsibility, is entitled “For you I study.”¹⁹⁷ Within the circular, in addition to the theme of intellectual formation, Juan Vecchi outlines the figure of the “new Salesian” who corresponds to the demands of the “new evangelisation” and “new education”. It is not a question of a slight modification, but of something more radical. The Salesian is part of a “new operational model”, a model of pastoral guides who are primarily responsible for the Salesian identity of initiatives and works, animators of other educators within a core group that is the driving force. It becomes necessary to become and remain capable of creatively interpreting culture, animating a broad educational environment, and together with other educators, accompanying processes of maturation and growth, giving direction to people, interacting in the social context.¹⁹⁸ The new Salesian is a multifaceted figure: formator, witness, accompanier, disciple, animator of the community, leader and manager of projects and organisations. Summarising Vecchi’s indications, we discover a series of characteristics required of the Salesian educator in the new millennium:

1. an *identity as a believer*, a spiritual strength that makes him capable of convinced dialogue with others in a climate of freedom. This requires that the faith and the reasons for its hope be understood and lived with foundation and transparency;
2. a clear *Salesian identity* insofar as he is the first one responsible for the Salesian identity of initiatives and works. To this end, he must have a greater theoretical and practical knowledge of youth and education issues and be able to authoritatively propose educational goals and pathways;
3. a capacity for an *open, intelligent and pro-active* way of tackling new phenomena and cultural, social and youth trends, enabling him to attempt to proclaim in the midst of life, interpreting the new languages and codes of meaning;
4. a competence running through everything of giving pastoral *guidance, animating* educators within the “animating nucleus” or central driving force and *forming adults* who share responsibility in the work of education, going beyond simple friendship.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ J.E. VECCHI, “For you I study...” (C 14) *Satisfactory preparation of the confreres and the quality of our educative work*, in AGC 78 (1997) 361, 3-47.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 17-18.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*

In a certain sense the theme of qualification of the confreres launched by the 19th General Chapter during the Second Vatican Council had returned. Previously it was thought that qualification would take Salesians out of the boarding schools, which were no longer suited to the needs of the time. Around the turn of the millennium the new demand for qualification asked Salesians not only to change the “place” and the “structure” of education, but to abandon the logic of fixed roles and environments and to think of themselves in a new community-based and procedural way, accompanying the young and adults who shared responsibility with them.

Pedagogical guidelines from major Salesian writers

The later Braido, founder of the Salesian Historical Institute

Stating things simply, it could be said that the effort to study Salesian pedagogy was carried out by Pietro Braido in two phases, the first characterised by a broad and systematic approach to the philosophy of education and the second marked by attempts at historical reconstruction of ‘Don Bosco the educator’.²⁰⁰ His publications between the mid-1950s and the late 1970s were characterised by a paradigm of interdisciplinarity and by his collaboration with colleagues in the Faculty of Educational Sciences at UPS. From the 1980s onwards, however, his greatest and main study effort was linked to the activities of the Salesian Historical Institute, founded in 1981, the year of publication of the two volumes of the *Esperienze di pedagogia cristiana nella storia*.²⁰¹ His new work focused on the aim of “making available in scientifically valid forms the documents of the rich spiritual heritage left by Don Bosco and developed by those who followed him”²⁰² through “critical editions of significant sources, starting with the writings of Don Bosco.”²⁰³ Critical editions of the various documents regarding Don Bosco’s educative

²⁰⁰ Cf. the division of periods, attention and bibliographical references in the contributions by Chiosso, Lafranchi, Biancardi and Motto in C. NANNI et al. (eds.), PIETRO BRAIDO. *Una vita per lo studio, i giovani e l’educazione*, LAS, Rome 2018, 19-89.

²⁰¹ Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Esperienze di pedagogia cristiana nella storia*, 2 vols., LAS, Rome 1981

²⁰² *Statuto dell’Istituto Storico Salesiano, art. 1*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 1 (1982) 1, 5.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, art 2.

experience were published from 1984 onwards in the *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* journal, then brought together in his *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali*.²⁰⁴

In the subsequent period, Braido commented on the development of critical research on Don Bosco, around the time of the Centenary in 1988, in an article significantly entitled “A turning point in studies on Don Bosco”,²⁰⁵ in which he analysed the outcome of the Acts of the 1st International Congress of Studies on Don Bosco.²⁰⁶ His convictions on the usefulness of proceeding in a historical-critical manner distanced themselves markedly from the *Biographical Memoirs*, which he called the “golden legend”,²⁰⁷ and also a more critical judgement on the classic essay by Desramaut on the *Memoirs*, which we mentioned when speaking of the earlier period.²⁰⁸ Braido took a stance against the “traditionalism, conservatism, ‘celebration mindset’, ‘intra-Salesian’ attention that had appeared, even during the recent Centenary; advocating for a much more realistic Don Bosco who was ‘embedded’ into history”.²⁰⁹ Thus through a demythologising process he critiqued the “arbitrary over-evaluations”, noted the limitations and “lacunae of the more traditional Salesian historiography tending to exalt the ‘heroes’”.²¹⁰

²⁰⁴ Cf. G. Bosco, *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali*, eds. Jesús Borrego, Pietro Braido, Antonio Ferreira da Silva, Francesco Motto and José Manuel Prellezo, (= Istituto Storico Salesiano-Fonti: Serie prima 3), LAS, Rome 1987 and the subsequent publication P. BRAIDO (ed.), *Don Bosco educatore. Scritti e testimonianze*, (=Istituto Storico Salesiano-Fonti: Serie Prima 9), LAS, Rome 1992.

²⁰⁵ Cf. PIETRO BRAIDO, *Una svolta negli studi su don Bosco*, in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 10 (1991) 355-375.

²⁰⁶ Cf. *Don Bosco nella storia*. Acts of the 1st International Congress of Studies on Don Bosco edited by Mario Midali, LAS, Rome 1990; *Don Bosco en la historia. Actas del Primer Congreso Internacional de Estudios sobre San Juan Bosco. Edición en castellano dirigida por José Manuel Prellezo Garcia*, LAS/CCS, Rome/Madrid 1990; *Saint Jean Bosco. Recherches sur la vie et l'oeuvre d'un prêtre éducateur italien du dix-neuvième siècle. Editées et présentées par Francis Desramaut*, LAS, Rome 1990.

²⁰⁷ BRAIDO, *Una svolta negli studi su don Bosco*, 356.

²⁰⁸ “Desramaut is less convincing when, in his concluding remarks, he almost seems to assume a double interpretation of the *Memorie Biografiche*: ‘edifying’, always valid; ‘scientific’, insufficient for the purposes of a dignified historical work. It seems more correct to think that even a ‘spiritual’ interpretation should be done with a critical spirit, which helps to distinguish, precisely for the purposes of ‘edification’, the truth about Don Bosco from arbitrary and distorting superstructures”, in BRAIDO, *Una svolta negli studi su don Bosco*, 358.

²⁰⁹ BRAIDO, *Una svolta negli studi su don Bosco*, 356.

²¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 361-362.

A summary of Prevenire non reprimere (Prevention not Repression)

The final volume on Don Bosco's preventive system, which he wrote at the end of his career when already an emeritus professor for ten years, integrates the historical-critical approach as a whole. Braido completely reformulated the more systematic part basing himself on more trustworthy sources than the *Biographical Memoirs*. He had made more than a thousand references to these as a source of bibliographical reference in the first and second editions of his *Sistema Preventivo*. Preference was now given to critical editions of major educational documents, archival documents, the *Opere Edite*, the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, and collections of Don Bosco's letters. The *Biographical Memoirs* and the *Bollettino Salesiano* were quoted only as secondary sources. Documents like the *Brief treatise on the Preventive System in the education of the young*, the *Letter from Rome* and the *Confidential Reminders*, that were included earlier as appendices, were no longer to be found in *Prevenire non reprimere*, so any reading of this work would need to be accompanied by the anthology published earlier.

If compared with the earlier editions of the handbook on the *Sistema Preventivo* (1955, 1964), *Prevenire non reprimere* should be read as more of an historical than a systematic reconstruction of Don Bosco as an educator. With regard to the method of study, we note the fragmentation inherent in the historical-critical method, linked to many sources of different value and studies adopting different approaches. This was a difficulty expressed by Braido earlier, stating that “first of all, there seems to be a lack of a concept, an intuition, a fact that can serve as a unified, indisputable and unquestionable point of connection.”²¹¹

Over time, Braido developed an awareness of the concept of “prevention” as the key to the overall perspective applied to all of Don Bosco's educational activities.²¹² In *Prevenire non reprimere*, Braido makes his choice in saying that “the formula ‘preventive system’ [...] is suitable for expressing everything he said and did as an educator.”²¹³ As well as determining the choice of title, prevention guides the structuring of the chapters. In fact, the work could be considered a treatise on prevention in Don Bosco, historically contextualised in the first eight chapters and synthesised around core themes in the following eight chapters. The way of proceeding is “cautious” and, in some ways, “non-systematic”, in order to respond to the demands of the rigorousness of the

²¹¹ BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo di don Bosco*, PAS Verlag, Zürich ²1964, 19

²¹² Cf. *Ibid.*, 65.

²¹³ BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere. Il sistema educativo di don Bosco*, LAS, Rome 2006, 7.

historical method. And the judgements are very well thought out so as not to lead the reader into arbitrary interpretations. The wealth of historical references and his knowledge of so many interpretations of the figure of Don Bosco is surprising.²¹⁴

Consistent with the choice of the preventive principle, the part dealing with the historical contextualisation, already found in his 1964 handbook, is enriched and developed by including as chapters: “Better to prevent than repress”; “Prevention existed before the preventive system”; “Birth of a formula: preventive system and repressive system”; “Figures of the preventive system close to Don Bosco.”²¹⁵ In the light of the extensive research carried out by the Salesian Historical Institute, the questions on Don Bosco’s influences and dependencies on other authors were re-calibrated, placing him within the history of post-Tridentine catechesis and Catholic education.²¹⁶

With the quantity of sources available, it was much more difficult to weave the connections within the content and systematic reflection in Chapters 10-18 of *Prevenire non reprimere*. It seems that the correctness and exactness of the historical reconstruction is preferred to the overall view of the different topics. This overview was illuminating and full of applications in the first two books on the Preventive System. A concrete case, which can serve as an example, is the separation of the topics of “pedagogy of the heart” and “pedagogy of correction”, first presented in a single paragraph and then separated in the last book. Similarly, the theme of familiarity, linked with the pedagogy of cheerfulness that creates an educative environment, was a theoretically evocative perspective which was then lost in the distinctions of the last publication.

The unifying idea of “prevention” risks being a (relatively) empty vessel also for contextual reasons independent of the author. With the loss of a shared *philosophia-theologia perennis*, which held the Ricaldonian approach together around mid-century, after the Council there was a shift to the logic of disciplines and dimensions which should be interdependent, but are often merely autonomous.²¹⁷ Braido’s substantially neo-Scholastic mindset guided him in the first edition, proceeding by way of argument from the primacy of the “religious-supernatural”, to consequently develop “the natural”

²¹⁴ Cf. bibliography in BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, 405-415.

²¹⁵ In the above chapters, Braido integrated several parts of his previous study *Breve storia del “Sistema preventivo”*, LAS, Rome 1993.

²¹⁶ This is a line of thought proposed by Fascie in the 1930s to dismantle the exaggerated triumphalism about Don Bosco’s originality. Cf. B. FASCIE, *Del metodo educativo di Don Bosco. Fonti e commenti*, SEI, Turin 1927.

²¹⁷ Cf. M. VOJTÁŠ, *Implicazioni metodologiche del principio religioso nell’educazione salesiana*, in “Orientamenti Pedagogici” 64 (2017) 1, 11-36.

with the dimension of reason, understood as applying and organising religious ideals and values in a concrete way. In the same way, other topics developed in the part on the theology of education disappeared: the supernatural *ex opere operato* effectiveness other than a purely “psychological” support (comfort, joy, emotion, etc.); the real increase in grace and divine life; the growth in supernatural stature; the natural-supernatural pair; prayer as an “ontological” means of education, as well as a psychological and moral one.²¹⁸

Other contextual variables, such as the crisis of the Salesian boarding school, the multiplication of diverse educational contexts worldwide and the changed world of youth in the 1990s, seem to have induced Braido to abandon, quite understandably, various notions in the first two editions which could have seemed exaggerated or out of place. Against the tendencies of the post-68 anti-authoritarian pedagogies, Braido affirmed instead in *Prevenire non reprimere* the centrality of the educator in the Preventive System, abandoning the previous hypothesis of a

pedolatry, pedocentrism, when one thinks that, in Don Bosco’s understanding, as in Christian understanding, the educator of the “preventive system” is the one who really “serves” the pupil. Without becoming the “mayor” of Don Bosco’s “city”, the boy is, in his educational family, the little king and, as in every family, he enjoys all the privileges and attention of the “elders”, must be able to speak and act with confident freedom and express himself and manifest himself as a “boy”. For him it is the noisy joy of life in the playground, of singing, theatre, excursions; and even his “overlords” and “teachers” are obliged to share in this, take part in it, renouncing their demands as “adults”.²¹⁹

In *Prevenire non reprimere*, Braido insists (echoing Ricaldone) that “the absolute key player is the educator who holds all power: the executive, the judiciary and punitive. The pupil, instead, is called to an essentially cooperative execution, a subordinate, shared role.”²²⁰ The education system either works or doesn’t depending on whether the educators are totally dedicated to the pupils, carry the burden of education and guarantee its fruitfulness. In this sense, Braido’s reformulation, half a century later, is more an adaptation to a radically changed era than a change of main concepts.

²¹⁸ Cf. BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ¹1955, 269-293.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 434.

²²⁰ BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, 290.

Scientific rigour and the problem of dependencies

The intention to adopt a precise and safe scientific method was evolving, as we have seen, but ever present for Pietro Braido. Consistency and straightforwardness are categories that Braido also recognised in Don Bosco when he assessed him as being “direct, straightforward, sincere.” For him, Don Bosco is “sincere” through loving-kindness, reason, in disciplinary matters and in attitudes towards religion and piety.²²¹ Some light could be thrown on his attitude by Salesian Cardinal Antonio Maria Javierre Ortas in the latter’s concluding message at the International Conference in 1989. It was an invitation to “unconditional service of the truth”, or in practical terms, service of the “real” Don Bosco: “seeing him as he is, not as someone would like him to be.” Braido chose this text as the concluding summary of the article on the turning point in studies on Don Bosco.²²² In addition to the increasing use of the historical-critical method already mentioned, Braido also liked the semantic precision of terms, seen in the use of inverted commas to always indicate technical or historical terms. Already from the first edition there are expressions or titles such as: “preventive system”, “foundation” of pedagogy, “salvation of souls”, “fear of God”, “good education”, “*sensus Ecclesiae*”, “loving-kindness” as a pedagogical “principle”, methodological “foundation”, “pedagogy of the heart”, “family” and “joy”, the “guardians” of family life: the “assistants” and the “director/rector”, pedagogy of “piety”, “preventive pedagogy”, “family” discipline, elements of “didactics” etc. In some passages of his publications, the technical use of terms is so high that it paradoxically seems more confusing than clarifying.

The problem of the certainty of the sources and the search for dependencies becomes more acute in the second edition in 1964 and would guide him in including Don Bosco the educator within the history of the nineteenth century.²²³ Later, time and contextualisation are extended in *Breve storia del sistema preventivo*, embracing the entire range of Christian education over two millennia. Typical of this is the relationship between Don Bosco and the Oratory tradition in Italy.

In the first 1955 edition, Braido finds “expressions, positions, attitudes characteristic of Don Bosco the educator” in Bacci’s biography of St Philip Neri published in Rome during the last years of Don Bosco’s theological training. There are many affinities and

²²¹ Cf. BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ¹1955, 143.

²²² *Una svolta negli studi su don Bosco*, 375.

²²³ Cf. BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ²1964, 7.

expressions such as education to “the beauty of virtue and the ugliness of vice”, which the two saints have in common.²²⁴ Similarly, he evaluates the closeness between Don Bosco and the tradition of the Lombard oratories.

While recognising a certain originality on Don Bosco’s part, Braido notes that “with regard to the organisational aspect both Don Bosco and the biographer affirm an explicit dependence on the Lombard oratories.”²²⁵ The importance given to individual documents would diminish in Braido’s works that followed, and an attempt would be made to place Don Bosco in a broader historical flow, that of post-Tridentine catechesis.²²⁶

A final field where the attitude of scientific rigour is applied are the so-called dreams of Don Bosco. From the first edition onwards, Braido does not use them as a source and, with the exception of the dream at nine years of age, inserted in the vocational journey, places them in the area of education to chastity, interpreting them symbolically: “His ‘dreams’, so full of struggles and battles, victories and defeats, are but the symbolic translation of a realistic and concrete vision that Don Bosco had, through experience and a very keen natural and supernatural intuition of the hearts and souls of young people, the innumerable difficulties in which their virtue risks being shipwrecked at every moment.”²²⁷ His personal aversion to the dreams as a symbol of supernatural triumphalism remained until the end of his research career, when he introduced his last great work with a passage from Don Bosco’s letter to Cagliero on distrust of dreams.²²⁸

²²⁴ Cf. BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ¹1955, 76-80.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

²²⁶ A clear expression of this attitude can be found in the evaluation of the publications of Gioachino Barzagli, a Salesian who supports the thesis of Don Bosco’s dependence on the Ambrosian model. In his review in 2004 Braido said: “The intention, in a justifiably frank way, was to highlight the groundlessness of a completely untenable thesis, which ignores and falsifies Don Bosco. A reader who wants to know something serious about him – a man, a priest, an evangelical worker in the charitable and social field – will find nothing to enlighten him, indeed he will be misled. Nevertheless, the work is enormous and contains much material of great interest. Perhaps it would be better employed if, instead of being twisted to prove a thesis, a disservice to historical research, it were aimed at reconstructing an objective and critical history of the oratories from St Philip Neri to Don Bosco or, better, beyond.” Cf. BRAIDO, *Recensione di Barzagli Gioachino, Don Bosco e la chiesa lombarda. L’origine di un progetto*. Glossa 2004, 937 p., in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane” 23 (2004) 45, 492-493 and G. BARZAGHI, *Alle radici del Sistema preventivo di don Bosco*, Libreria Editrice Salesiana, Milan 1990.

²²⁷ BRAIDO, *Il Sistema Preventivo*, ¹1955, 312-313.

²²⁸ Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, vol. 1, LAS, Rome ²2003, 3.

Updating the Preventive System

It seems that the later Braido, who developed increasing awareness and competence in the historical field, had developed a dialectical relationship between the “historical-critical” method and the “interdisciplinary” one applied by the educational sciences. The question of the updating of Don Bosco’s educational approach, found in the two editions of Braido’s *Sistema preventivo*, is gradually abandoned for an increasing insistence on the problem of the sources, which implies the use of the historical-critical method. Leaving aside the breadth of his interdisciplinary interests, Braido no longer took part in the Scholé meetings, no longer developed theories of interdisciplinarity, was no longer involved in the Salesian Colloquiums, and focused purely on historical research. The work around the *Educare* encyclopaedia did not continue, and it would seem that interdisciplinarity was something Braido applied more to the organisation of the Education Faculty than as a way to rethink or update the Preventive System.

His discussion of the relationship between the Preventive System and scientific pedagogy seems not to have gone beyond the time of the Council.²²⁹ In fact, in *Prevenire non reprimere* he still referred to Herbart and Makarenko when speaking of “contemporary, pedocentric and activist pedagogy, new schools, the Montessori approach”,²³⁰ current positions up to the middle of the last century. It would seem that Braido distrusted the currents of the so-called “institutional pedagogy” that promoted self-management of education by young people themselves.²³¹ Nor were there any references to the appreciation of critical, project-oriented, constructionist or structuralist pedagogy. Braido was no longer the one pushing interdisciplinary work in the modules of the *Progetto Educativo Pastorale* in the 1980s, one that could have been a continuation of work done on *Educare*.²³²

Braido’s reserved positions on innovation following the Council should be studied in more depth, but some insights can already be gleaned from his final article published

²²⁹ Cf. S.S. MACCHIETTI, *Ricerca storica e coscienza pedagogica. Riflessione sugli studi di storia dell’educazione di P. Braido*, in J.M. PRELLEZO (ed.), *L’impegno dell’educare*, Studies in honour of Pietro Braido promoted by the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the Pontifical Salesian University, LAS, Rome 1991, 17-27; B. BELLERATE, *A.S. Makarenko tra ideologia e educazione. Dalla biografia alle interpretazioni*, in PRELLEZO (ed.), *L’impegno dell’educare*, 29-40.

²³⁰ BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, 2006, 7.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 387-390.

²³² Cf. J.E. VECCHI – J.M. PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto Educativo Pastorale. Elementi modulari*, LAS, Roma 1984.

in “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane”. He was not enthusiastic about this period’s division between pastoralists and pedagogues and said that “along the lines of Vatican Council II, the intention was to give an innovative pastoral imprint to traditional Salesian educational activity, forcefully and permanently introducing a term into Salesian literature that was hitherto foreign to it”,²³³ meaning “pastoral ministry”. His remarks on the Special General Chapter, entitled “Fidelity and Utopias”, suggest a distancing from certain positions on the updating approach following the Council.²³⁴ However, the later Braido also revealed a degree of nostalgia about rethinking the Preventive System. Hence his comment on the development of the 19th General Chapter, which envisaged

A treatise on Salesian education in our time, to which the Superior Council could give its official approval. It was the concluding document, a summation, in which, with the help of experts in the field of educational sciences, a kind of synthesis of “innovative” Salesian youth pedagogical pastoral work for a “new education” and an updated version of the preventive system was outlined. But it probably did not have much impact, far removed as it was from the habits and overall culture of the Congregation and from the lack of prepared personnel especially on the periphery.²³⁵

It would seem that the nineteenth chapter of *Prevenire non Reprimere* is the manifesto of the updated Preventive System. Braido had shifted from the model of rethinking done by a team of experts or by the systematic historian, to proposing “renewal [...] entrusted to the persistent on-going theoretical and practical commitment of individuals and communities.”²³⁶ He concludes in this connection that Don Bosco’s system was “fundamentally dogmatic”, but also “a pedagogy which is, to some extent experimental, practised, evaluated, improved upon tirelessly in the pedagogical laboratory which we know as the Oratory in Valdocco.”²³⁷ Braido thus leaves the task of updating to others, but draws up some approaches, re-evaluating the contributions of classic educationalists like Komenský, Locke, Rousseau and appreciating the

²³³ BRAIDO, *Le metamorfosi dell’Oratorio salesiano*, 330.

²³⁴ This is also where Vigand’s evaluations come in, which show the distance between the two: “Even if [in Vigand] the sympathy for scientific historical research was less visible, he based continuous and intense reference to the founder on a considerable knowledge of experience [...] moreover assisted by a penetrating intuition of the figure of Don Bosco.”

²³⁵ BRAIDO, *Le metamorfosi dell’Oratorio salesiano*, 333.

²³⁶ BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, 5.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 404.

contributions of some colleagues such as Franta, Thévenot, Milanese, Castellazzi, Lutte, Grasso, Groppo and Pellerey.

In his research into the area of education, Braido had always been ‘Herbartian’, a rigorous, even severe scholar,²³⁸ distrustful of a range of facile, simplistic solutions, that is to say, the solutions offered by the simple triumphalist popularisers of the Preventive System, including the “Catholic” approach of Casotti, and the “pastoral” solutions after Vatican II that were sometimes hasty and dependent on the intellectual fashions of the period. This is a rigour that allowed him to give undeniable value to his historical reconstructions and scientific analyses, but did not allow him to formulate a “valid preventive project updated for now and for the future” or a “new preventive system”.²³⁹ Considering the two key principles of multiplicity and unity within the educational sciences that sum up his life’s reflection,²⁴⁰ we see the paradox of nominally evoking unity but thinking in the categories and subdivisions of disciplines. In this way, in the absence of an integrating principle, we end up by reducing interdisciplinarity to multidisciplinary, within which the different approaches are placed side by side without interacting significantly. The mere concept of “education”, in the case of the educational sciences, and of “prevention”, within Salesian education, are not enough, as they are concepts subject to very different and wide interpretations.

In conclusion, and going beyond the simple division between the ‘early’ and the ‘later’ Braido, one could suggest an approach that is both harmonious and respectful of the evolution of his thought, translated into a reading plan: starting with the first edition of *Sistema Preventivo* in 1955, which best expresses his syntheses and movement between parts. Then going on to *Don Bosco educatore: Scritti e testimonianze* in 1992, which contains documentation on Don Bosco’s educational experience in chronological order. And ending with *Prevenire non reprimere* in 1999, which gives focus to the core ideas of the preventive system by locating them within the history of nineteenth century education.

²³⁸ Cf. R. LAFRANCHI, *Pietro Braido e la sua teoria dell’educazione*, in NANNI et al. (eds.), *Pietro Braido. Una vita per lo studio, i giovani e l’educazione*, LAS, Rome 2018, 22-23.

²³⁹ Cf. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, 377, 391.

²⁴⁰ Cf. Braido’s address on the occasion of the book published in his honour on 3 May 1991, later published as P. BRAIDO, *Pedagogia perseverante tra sfide e scommesse*, in “Orientamenti Pedagogici” 38 (1991) 899-914.

Collaboration between the YM Department and the UPS

The collaboration between the Youth Ministry Department and the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the Pontifical Salesian University began with a series of meetings and publications, starting in January 1979, in which a common interest emerged in examining some points of the Preventive System in relation to the SEPP, something that been attempted with greater precision following GC21.²⁴¹ With regard to this collaborative effort and on the subject of planning, we will spend some time looking at the Seminar on *Progettare l'educazione oggi con Don Bosco* (Planning education today with Don Bosco) in 1980,²⁴² the publication of the *Progetto Educativo Salesiano. Elementi modulari* in 1984²⁴³ and the conference on *Prassi educativa pastorale e scienze dell'educazione* in 1987.²⁴⁴

The Seminar on Planning education today with Don Bosco (1980)

The first joint seminar, held in Rome, involving scholars and pastoral care practitioners in Europe, had to deal with three planning difficulties which were clearly summed up by Vecchi in his presentation. The first difficulty was the *ambiguous nature of the concept* and practice of a “project”: “Sometimes they are brief treatises, declarations of principles, lectures on a pedagogical aspect with practical indications, exhortations to take certain directions.”²⁴⁵ The second problem was “*lack of cultural preparation* [...] There is difficulty in approaching the essential core of the Preventive System, with an insufficient understanding of the historical elements in which it was offered.”²⁴⁶ The approach developed in the Seminar for the solution of this problem went in the direction of a systematic and scientific exploration of the Preventive System as a guarantee of pastoral creativity and fidelity. The seminar moved in the direction of rethinking, offering new

²⁴¹ Cf. J.E. VECCHI, *Presentazione*, in R. GIANATELLI (ed.), *Progettare l'educazione oggi con Don Bosco*, Seminar promoted by the Youth Ministry Department at Headquarters of the “Opere Don Bosco” in collaboration with the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the Pontifical Salesian University Rome 1-7 June 1980, LAS, Rome 1981, 9.

²⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*

²⁴³ Cf. VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto Educativo Pastorale*.

²⁴⁴ Cf. J.E. VECCHI – J.M. PRELLEZO (eds.), *Prassi educativa pastorale e scienze dell'educazione*, SDB, Rome 1988.

²⁴⁵ J.E. VECCHI, *Presentazione*, in GIANATELLI (ed.), *Progettare l'educazione oggi*, 14.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

insights into the following themes: loving-kindness in the educational relationship; setting up the EPC; education to freedom, sexuality, socio-political commitment; evangelisation; liturgy; sense of the Church and vocational orientation. The third difficulty encountered, which was only marginally treated, was the preference for individual educational interventions and not *a convergence at community level*.²⁴⁷ In fact, as noted above, the theme of the relationship between community and project would only emerge more strongly in the 1990s.

The in-depth studies, although aimed at practicality, were of a general nature, proposing theoretical models of interpretation, documents to be taken into account, dimensions to be followed, levels to be studied in depth and structures to be implemented. It seems that the explicit choice of the Seminar, to be a help to the confreres in search of pointers at a practical level,²⁴⁸ failed to shape the interventions as a whole. The more than 300 pages of the Acts were divided into sectors, but without them being thought through in any overall systematic way, or with concrete methodological indications. Although it was a “partial and incomplete effort”,²⁴⁹ the seminar was part of a process of rethinking the Preventive System. Among the interesting and innovative contents, we would like to dwell on the contributions of Herbert Franta on loving-kindness and Riccardo Tonelli on the Educative and Pastoral Community. The two speakers applied two different approaches with respect to the updating of Salesian pedagogy: the first was by connecting specific, carefully selected scientific models, updating Salesian tradition this way; the second was of a theoretical and exhortative nature and referred to current or successful issues of the time and making comparisons between Don Bosco’s time and today.

In his contribution, Franta rethought the Salesian concept of loving-kindness, broadening the horizons to include the relational, formative, organisational and recreational conditions that support the typical attitudes of loving-kindness as a relational mode of the educator. As a humanistic psychologist, Franta suggested that loving-kindness be

the complex of feelings (joy, happiness, etc.) and pleasant emotional states (current significant experiences) of the members (educators and young people in the educative community); feelings and emotional states that arise from their own life experience, in a family-type community which fits into its environmental context, in which everyone experiences being able to be themselves

²⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 14-15.

²⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

and form their personality in genuine contact with others, considered as persons of value, in a relationship of respect and genuine friendship.²⁵⁰

Drawing on pedagogical and communicative studies on school climate, he developed loving-kindness as an interdependent system of relationships at three levels: among educators, among pupils and in the interaction between educators and pupils.²⁵¹ Pastoral charity was then considered in terms of its emotional dimension; responsibility as the embodiment of the dimension of control; and assistance understood as “relationally active presence.” Franta’s contribution connected Salesianity, in the interpretations of Viganò, Stella and Braidò, with contemporary pedagogy and in an unbroken line, offering a *new harmonious frame of reference* with different practical and organisational implications.

An example of a different approach more generally followed by those taking part in the Seminar was the reflection on the Educative and Pastoral Community by Riccardo Tonelli. Remaining at the level of theoretical principles, he structured his address in the following steps: the situation, Salesian tradition, updating insights and operational guidelines. The focus, even in terms of method, was more on the inspiring principles than on how they were to be translated into action and approach. This is how he put it:

Each community creates its own structures for discussion and dialogue. Having stated the need for this, we can therefore give only a few examples, using fairly widespread educational traditions: councils at different levels, assemblies, ways of planning and defining objectives and for verification, coordinating and decision-making bodies... It is helpful to recall that making proper use of these participatory structures requires technical competence, to be acquired through the study of specialised disciplines (group dynamics, for example, and socio-cultural animation). This trust in and respect for the technical apparatus is a precise Salesian requirement, as a logical consequence of the awareness that there is a close relationship between education (and the related educational sciences) and evangelisation.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ H. FRANTA, *Relazioni interpersonali e amorevolezza nella comunità educativa salesiana*, in GIANATELLI (ed.), *Progettare l'educazione oggi*, 21.

²⁵¹ Cf. e.g. W. KLAFKI, *Studien zur Bildungstheorie und Didaktik*, Beltz, Weinheim 1964; H. FEND, *Schulklima. Soziale Einflussprozesse in der Schule*, Beltz, Weinheim-Basel 1977; K. MOLLENHAUER, *Theorien zum Erziehungsprozessen*, Juventa, Munich 1972. Also appreciated were Pestalozzi, Buber and Lewin.

²⁵² R. TONELLI, *Impostazione della comunità educativa in un contesto pluralista*, in GIANATELLI (ed.), *Progettare l'educazione oggi*, 83.

Methodological questions, therefore, were considered technical, and trust in this technical apparatus was required in the name of an epistemological axiom. Unfortunately, the article did not go into the differences between the various models of participation. There are considerable differences, as the variety of theories in organisational and management sciences shows. The general nature of the exhortation could produce both an indiscriminate use of various methodologies, which in turn could also be contradictory, as well as breaking the connection between the principles that inspire Salesian educative and pastoral activity and the somewhat technical approach to planning in the 1970s.

The other papers in the seminar also include sections devoted to addressing operational needs,²⁵³ but it is interesting to note that this was mainly about detailed advice that contrasted with the old “boarding school mentality” or quoting guidelines from Salesian or ecclesial magisterium.²⁵⁴ Practical pointers, following the General Chapters style and various Youth Ministry aids, came in a list of things to be done, without any further exploration of their interdependence. In conclusion, it can be seen that the Seminar preferred the theoretical approach and further relegated the meaning of the term “project” to the realm of expert scholars reporting on new trends in their field of study without recreating a preventive system as an “organic whole of convictions, attitudes and methodological interventions.”²⁵⁵

The Progetto Educativo Salesiano. Elementi modulari (1984)

Updating Salesian pedagogy by area or dimension is a direction that was reinforced in the other milestone of collaboration between the Department and the FSE at the UPS, in its *Progetto Educativo Pastorale. Elementi modulari* in 1984. This book, almost five hundred pages worth, tried to respond to the difficulties of planning, as Vecchi pointed out: “once you understand the dynamics and learn the techniques you realise that the real difficulties are more at the basic level. They originate in the fundamental understanding

²⁵³ Cf. TONELLI, *Impostazione della comunità educativa*, in GIANATELLI (ed.), *Progettare l'educazione oggi*, 72-86; C. NANNI, *Educazione alla libertà responsabile*, in *Ibid.*, 110-118; J. ALDABAL, *Liturgia, preghiera personale, devozione mariana*, in *Ibid.*, 226-229, 234-238, 243-246 and P. GIANOLA, *Orientamento vocazionale*, in *Ibid.*, 318-324.

²⁵⁴ In the application parts, the renewed Constitutions, GC21 (1978), SGC (1972), the letters of Viganò and the documents of the Second Vatican Council are cited in particular.

²⁵⁵ VECCHI, *Presentazione*, in GIANATELLI (ed.), *Progettare l'educazione oggi*, 14.

of certain key points concerning education and pastoral ministry.”²⁵⁶ Thirty-four topics were chosen and organised in the form of a module divided into four parts: the definition of each item, with conceptual or historical references; emphasis on the importance of the item; essential content; bibliography. The intention was not to give recipes to be applied, but to broaden awareness and form a mentality by offering “a secure and substantially complete reference framework”²⁵⁷ on key issues in the SEPP.

The focus of the authors was on describing developments in the sciences of education and pastoral activity across the board, without basing the treatises on Salesian experiences or traditions, with the exception of the specific modules written by Vecchi. A sign of this is the general approach of the modules, which almost always begins with recent developments in a scientific discipline. This approach was a double-edged sword, since it encouraged use of this book outside Salesian circles too, and lost the specific nature of Salesian education and approach or made it implicit. The question of the Salesian identity of the Educative and Pastoral Project, of the historical development of the Preventive System and comparison with current experiences of Salesian educative and pastoral activity were to be found almost exclusively in the module on the preventive system prepared by Vecchi.²⁵⁸ This module was an excellent summary of the updating of the Preventive System, but it was a stand-alone unit which did not permeate the rest of the publication as an underlying paradigm.²⁵⁹

This book turned out to be an excellent mini-dictionary of educational and pastoral sciences for scholars of planning design. The topics followed the fundamental references of a project: general aspects, objectives, methodologies, people involved and settings, and covered the whole area of planning, offering a wide range of pastoral, theological, philosophical, psychological, sociological and teaching points of view. The elements of methodology, dealt with in the modules on the educative and pastoral project, objectives, educational programmes and evaluation²⁶⁰ were all linked but mostly in terms of education in a school context, leaving aside any details concern oratory, parish, vocations, missions. This was confirmed by Vecchi as well when he said that

²⁵⁶ J.E. VECCHI, *Presentazione*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 5.

²⁵⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁵⁸ Cf. J.E. VECCHI, *Sistema Preventivo*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 72-89.

²⁵⁹ Note “the difficulty of achieving unity of perspective” reported in VECCHI, *Presentazione*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 7-8.

²⁶⁰ Cf. M. PELLERREY, *Itinerario*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 188-196; ID., *Obiettivi*, in *Ibid.*, 93-100; S. SARTI, *Valutazione*, in *Ibid.*, 310-321 and VECCHI, *Progetto educativo pastorale*, in *Ibid.*, 15-25.

terms like project and planning have not entered pedagogical language until relatively recent times [...] This seems to be due more to overall development in the area of educational sciences than to particular reasons, in which the systematic connection of the needs of the complex process of personality growth in the developmental phase has emerged with greater clarity. The decisive impetus came from the science of teaching, which introduced the concept of the curriculum.²⁶¹

For aspects that directly concerned planning methodology, it can be noted that in the module on planning, Vecchi confirmed what was found in the YM Department's booklets. He mentioned the four aspects of project content already found in them: ideal guidelines (frame of reference), analysis of the situation, operational choices and, finally, assessment. The part dealing with the ideal guidelines was strengthened, in tune with the emphasis placed on the study of the same publication, thus making it a level of the project in its own right.²⁶² Another feature of Vecchi's proposal was the emphasis on harmonising the various elements of the project, which reflected the fragmented situation of youth and society. The project should propose: a unified and coherent framework of values, an overall vision, operational guidelines that bring together roles, interventions and services.²⁶³ In spite of his insistence on being systematic, Vecchi struggled to break out of the scientific-technical paradigm of linear rather than systemic planning.²⁶⁴

If we analyse this book from the perspective of the relationship between education and evangelisation, we notice a clear preference for educational themes. The founding module of Giuseppe Groppo entitled "Evangelisation and education" is structured around the paradigm of evangelisation that requires education and human promotion, and not the opposite. The development of the theme is explicitly under the influence of

²⁶¹ J.E. VECCHI, *Progetto educativo pastorale*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 15.

²⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*, 22-23.

²⁶³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 16-19.

²⁶⁴ Cf. VECCHI, *Presentazione*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 5-6. For the "technical nature" of planning, which was understandable at the time of the 1970s and early 1980s, see the type of examples Vecchi gives to clarify planning concepts: the transition from carriage to car, the difference between an engineering treatise and designing a building, project understood as a map with a compass in VECCHI, *Per riattualizzare il Sistema Preventivo*, in ILE, *Convegno sul Sistema Preventivo*, 2-3 and VECCHI, *Progetto educativo pastorale*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 16 and 19.

the anthropological turn, referring to Gustavo Gutiérrez and Johann Baptist Metz for the theoretical aspect.²⁶⁵ The operational aspects, on the other hand, were influenced by what was happening in grassroots ecclesial communities. In keeping with the Nanni's and Alberich's modules, it proposed, in the first instance, a liberating and humanising education, making use of the limitations of the pre-Vatican II model, the phenomenon of secularisation and the increased sensitivity to dialogue, collaboration and spontaneous groups. Evangelisation was described in less than concrete tones, giving it the role of providing inspiration and meaning to educational activity. Emilio Alberich interpreted evangelisation in this sense as the generic "proclamation of and witness to the Gospel by the Church, through all that she says, does and is."²⁶⁶ By restricting methodology to the educational sphere, it outlined "education to the faith that is only indirect. The faith choices of Christians, as individuals and as a community, will become increasingly free and responsible and more and more mature, the more humanly mature are the Christians who make them and the communities in which they live their faith experience."²⁶⁷ One perceives a clear concern to get out of the Ricaldone-style "fortress of pre-Vatican II faith" and open up to "human" realities. Paradigmatic in this sense is the conclusion of Nanni's module:

On the other hand, it is evident that education is specific as a "secular" work. [...] Education is in fact significant in itself insofar as it is a radically human work, directed towards the promotion of the reality which has the dignity of an end: man. For this reason, individuals and Christian communities can find a point of encounter in educational activity with "all people of good will", believers and non-believers, in view of the search for a different quality of life, individual and collective human promotion, the construction of societies on a human scale.

Besides some imbalances in the part already mentioned dealing with the "general aspects", there were several modules bringing innovations or important stimuli for Salesian pedagogy. Vecchi's two contributions on the Educative and Pastoral Project and the Preventive System functioned as introduction and conclusion respectively to the systematic part on general aspects. In addition, Juan Vecchi's third module

²⁶⁵ Cf. G. GROppo, *Evangelizzazione e educazione*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 38-39.

²⁶⁶ E. ALBERICH, *Catechesi*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 62.

²⁶⁷ GROppo, *Evangelizzazione e educazione*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 41.

on orientation and vocation ministry was very interesting for the methodological distinctions between orientation of a psychological kind and a broader approach to vocation ministry. The two contributions by Herbert Franta on assistance, understood as the active presence of the educator, and on the educative relationship, completed his proposal to rethink the typical categories of loving-kindness, assistance and the family educative setting. Facets of the theory of animation emerged in the modules by Aldo Ellena, Mario Pollo and Riccardo Tonelli. We will dedicate space to these later. The sections on aims and pathways, by Michele Pellerrey, provided a glimpse into the synthesis and background of planning in the 1980s. The considerations on leadership theories proposed by Pio Scilligo in the module on the group are interesting, as they demonstrated his mastery of the subject and his up-to-date knowledge of planning and design.

Despite the fact that the text emphasised the first aim of planning being a unified and overall perspective on education, reconfirming what GC21 had said, Fr Vecchi noted the difficulty in achieving unity of perspective and continuity of style.²⁶⁸ The need for interdisciplinarity and convergence tools and interventions was noted, but the implicit message of the book was determined more by its division into modules and the consequent fragmentation of themes, terms, tools, linguistic and research areas of the various sciences. The convergence tools and interventions are not clearly legible and even the module on “integral promotion”, which could be the unifying factor par excellence, had so many distinctions and subsections.²⁶⁹ Surely this fragmentation was not intentional, but it was the effect of science tending towards specialisation and this is fragmentary by nature.

In terms of my overall aim for this work, it can be said, by way of summary, that this 1984 encyclopaedic publication is a very rich source for the study of the theoretical background of Salesian education and for perspectives in the methodological field. The strictly pastoral perspective, which could develop its own methodology, identifying an approach to evangelisation especially within the spiritual and vocational dimension, gained little attention and was restricted to some limited insights.

²⁶⁸ Cf. VECCHI, *Presentazione*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 8.

²⁶⁹ The module was made up of the three tasks of Christian communities, three different processes of humanisation, four aspects of Christian salvation, five characteristics of specifically Christian education, two types of dispositions of human maturity (the first integrates five human aspirations, the second three positive traits), four dimensions of personal integration, two descriptions of Christian maturity, the second of which is divided into four characteristics, etc. Cf. GROPPPO, *Promozione integrale*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 113-131.

The conference on Educative and Pastoral Praxis and the Sciences of Education (1987)

The trend towards fragmentation of approaches and the gap between the sciences and educative and pastoral practice were addressed during the Centenary of Don Bosco's death in the seminar on "Educative and pastoral practice and the sciences of education."²⁷⁰ The seminar brought together Salesian Family members from about thirty different backgrounds and, unlike the previous initiatives, sought to encourage the "dialectical convergence between theory and practice",²⁷¹ between the sensitivity of scholars and that of those working in the educational scene. The interventions were structured in four parts: historical perspective, current situation, new questions, orientations and proposals.

The first part, after dealing with the figure of Don Bosco the educator in the historical memory and study of pedagogy in the Congregation, then presented the use of the sciences of education in three significant recent Salesian pedagogical experiences: Rome's *sciuscìa* in Borgo Don Bosco, the re-education house at Arese and the Bosconia-la Florida experience in Colombia. Giancarlo Milanese noted the substantially eclectic and functional use of the sciences of education, even in the originality of the Salesian approach which, depending on the case, is placed alongside psychologism and selects only some techniques or methods, remaining critical of the anthropological assumptions of the individual sciences. As far as educative and pastoral planning is concerned, in the first two experiences one could see the lesser influence of the sciences of education in how the project was formulated, and at the same time a post factum application of the sciences in order to justify already established educational choices.²⁷² The planning process at Bosconia-la Florida, assessed as being the one most explicitly linked to an articulated framework of educational sciences, was described as paying attention to the people involved in the programme, its conceptual framework, objectives, strategies and evaluation. Eclecticism is noted, however, but unlike the other works it was presented as intentional and justified.²⁷³

The question of educative and pastoral planning was only directly treated in Vecchi's intervention. He saw it as an educational tool in an era of complexity. One could see the

²⁷⁰ Cf. J.E. VECCHI – J.M. PRELLEZO (eds.), *Prassi educativa pastorale e scienze dell'educazione*, SDB, Rome 1988.

²⁷¹ J.E. VECCHI – J.M. PRELLEZO, *Introduzione*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO, *Prassi educativa*, 6.

²⁷² Cf. G. MILANESI, *L'utilizzo delle scienze dell'educazione nell'impegno dei salesiani per i giovani "poveri, abbandonati, pericolanti"*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO, *Prassi educativa*, 89-90 and 97-99.

²⁷³ Cf. MILANESI, *L'utilizzo delle scienze dell'educazione*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO, *Prassi educativa*, 108-115.

early results in provinces that were implementing planning: greater convergence between evangelisation and education, attention to how settings approached matters, attention to the needs of beneficiaries and innovation in content and method. Starting from the assessments from the Team Visits²⁷⁴ and his Report on the state of the Congregation, Vecchi assessed the journey travelled by provinces over the previous decade as being still in its initial stages, not lacking in problems, and saw that planning was almost absent in the local communities.²⁷⁵

The other interventions dealt with the diversity of theological and educational perspectives and their lack of any systematic epistemological approach, the need for practical details which would entail thoughtful and clear choices, the need for a new pastoral care in situations influenced by secularism, the cultural changes taking place, marginalisation, the crisis of Salesian associations and the spread of the mass media. At the level of proposals a new pastoral approach was evoked in generic terms, characterised by a deeper pedagogical formation etc.

The discussions also contained concrete suggestions for the use of the sciences of education in Salesian practice. Among the instruments indicated were the SEPP as something to be valued and further understood, the creation of study centres or the use of the contributions from existing consultancy centres, the establishment of teams for educational animation at provincial level, new magazines, a “scrutinium educationis”, the application of institutional analysis and educational evaluation.²⁷⁶ At the end of the 1980s there was a felt need to continue along the line of collaboration between the FSE and the various Departments of the Congregation to promote both awareness of the need for pedagogical competence and the study and acquisition of educational competence, especially in the ongoing formation phase. The proposals were, however, more along the lines of aspirations and brainstorming than systematic planning of animation and governance to establish priorities, envisage ways of achieving goals, distribute resources and plan time-frames.

A gap emerged in the various interventions of the conference between criticism of the “pragmatic eclecticism” of the Salesians in the use of science, and generic

²⁷⁴ Team visits are one of the Rector Major’s and the General Council’s animation tools. Through them the leaders of the Congregation verify the journey underway in the different regional Salesian situations and, while respecting specific differences, ensure convergence and unity.

²⁷⁵ Cf. J.E. VECCHI, *Pastorale, educazione, pedagogia nella prassi salesiana*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO, *Prassi educativa*, 140-142. Cf. also E. VIGANÒ, *La Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel sessennio 1978-83*, SDB, Rome 1983, no. 170.

²⁷⁶ Cf. *Sintesi dei lavori e conclusioni*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO, *Prassi educativa*, 324-326.

vagueness of the educational proposals for Salesians as educator-pastors. It is probable that the deliberate exactness of the methods used in the sciences of education, lack of continuity with traditional Salesian education, and the difficult integration of the different disciplines made the most concrete steps in the line of the seminar conclusions unfeasible. Connected with this was the fact of having only a small elite of educational thinkers prepared at Congregational level. Educative and pastoral planning, as a concrete expression of the applicability of the sciences of education to educative and pastoral praxis, was mentioned as “valuing and deepening the SEPP; [...] supporting the validity and centrality of educational evaluation at all levels; applying institutional analysis to our contexts.”²⁷⁷

The conference, which concluded a decade of close collaboration between the FSE at the UPS and the YM Department, revealed that there were two existential and mental “worlds” involved. The first, composed mainly of scholars and experts who were critical in their evaluation of educative and pastoral practice, strongly and radically expressed “the need for educational qualification of Salesian activity at every level, starting with individuals and then extending to general orientations, specific projects of each sector of intervention, and to the individual educative and pastoral activities.”²⁷⁸ In the second and larger “world”, connected mainly with daily life in Salesian works, “at a time of expanding and accelerating educational change such as the present, there is a lack of capacity to take on board the renewal of content brought about by the evolution of culture and the reform of structures, and to know how to competently make appropriate choices.”²⁷⁹ The future development of the 1990s seems to indicate a gradual distancing between these two “worlds”, which would also imply a gradual decrease in the intensity of collaboration between the UPS and the various Departments.

Pedagogical reflection by the FMA

The “new evangelisation” approaches proposed by the Church to bring the young generations closer to the vital encounter with the Christian message, challenged the Salesian Family to reconsider the relationship between education and evangelisation by developing specific “new” perspectives. Besides the perspectives of Frs Viganò

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 326.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 327.

²⁷⁹ E. VIGANÒ, *La Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel sessennio 1978-83*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO, *Prassi educativa*, 148.

and Vecchi, who offered more general lines of approach, some of the core ideas of pedagogical reflection by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are interesting and original. Similarly to the dynamics of collaboration between the UPS and the central government of the SDB, the 80s and 90s for the FMA Institute were the time for disseminating reflections that had started in the Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences, the *Auxilium*, that had shifted to Rome in 1978 and was experiencing a period of consolidation.

Mother Marinella Castagno, Superior General from 1984 to 1996, summarised the commitment of the FMA, highlighting in particular the two main sets of ideas. In the wake of Viganò and Vecchi, she reaffirmed the harmonisation between education and evangelisation, stating that “the education of the young is the way of evangelisation or rather it is a single path, because there is no meaning to any educational work that does not lead to Christ and there is no evangelisation that does not encompass the whole of culture.”²⁸⁰ Mother Castagno encouraged her sisters to further explore their mission of education on behalf of the young, bearing in mind the “feminine specificity” that had characterised the Institute since its origins, but which was valued as being even more important in the particular historical moment around the centenary in 1988.

The FMA were continuing reflection on Vatican II. With regard to the question of women, the Council had shifted from a practical introduction to the role of motherhood to educating to being a woman, or in other words, from education to a single function to the formation of the whole person.²⁸¹ The Council’s perspective on the education of women was therefore open to new promotional and social demands that the FMA accepted, placing them in dialogue with the Preventive System. If previously, the participation of women in political and social life was seen almost as a “concession”, after the Council it was understood as a right of the “woman as an individual”. She is aware that she is an individual in her own right and demands to be considered as such. The formation courses offered to young women were therefore more respectful of their autonomy, in order to encourage them to make a free choice as regards the realisation of their identity in a social perspective.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ M. CASTAGNO, *Lettera circolare* (28 March 1987) no. 690, in E. Rosso (ed.), *Parole che giungono al cuore con il sapore di Mornese. Circolari di Madre Marinella Castagno 1984-1996*, Istituto FMA, Rome 2008, 132.

²⁸¹ Cf. DAU NOVELLI, *L'educazione femminile*, in GALLI (ed.), *L'educazione cristiana negli insegnamenti degli ultimi pontefici. Da Pio XI a John Paul II*, Vita e pensiero, Milan 1992, 221.

²⁸² Cf. new emphases already since the *Atti del Capitolo Generale XIV dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice tenutosi a Torino – Casa Generalizia dal 26 agosto al 17 settembre 1964*, Turin, Istituto FMA 1965.

The emphasis given to the feminine question and its educational implications for the FMA and the documents they drew up, emerged in particular during the Conference “Towards the education of women today”, one that the Superior General Mother Marinella Castagno had wanted and announced for the centenary of Don Bosco’s death. Organised by the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the *Auxilium*, the Conference aimed at an in-depth exploration of the FMA’s educational charism, rethinking ways of implementing it in order to offer a proposal for the integral education of young women in the diversity of various socio-cultural contexts.²⁸³

Since the second half of the 1980s, in conjunction with the reinterpretation of the identity of women and their vocation by the ecclesial magisterium,²⁸⁴ there was a greater awareness of the condition of women, and the changed social conditions had made it clear that co-education of the young was the preferred way to improve the family and society. The core themes around which the FMA gathered the different instances of updating the preventive system concerned the relational, community and social dimension of Don Bosco’s method. The relational dimension of Don Bosco’s preventive system finds its most eloquent expression in loving-kindness. This was chosen as the most appropriate methodological path for developing a pedagogy that promotes life and collaborates within the Church in the humanisation of culture.²⁸⁵

The previously mentioned conference in 1988 saw the rediscovery of the category of reciprocity as a criterion for interpreting personal identity and the relationship between people and cultures. It proposed developing and sharing the wealth of diversity involved in being a man or a woman. The educational pathways proposed by the FMA, therefore, were enriched with new objectives such as formation in realistic self-awareness in accepting one’s particular identity, mature interpersonal relationships, balanced management of conflicts, strengthening the sense of collaboration and solidarity between the sexes and wider social relations, planning one’s existence along the lines of acceptance of cultural diversity and reciprocity.²⁸⁶

283 Cf. CASTAGNO, *Lettera circolare* (28 March 1987), 131-132 and A. COLOMBO (ed.), *Verso l’educazione della donna oggi*. Acts of the International Conference promoted by the Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences “Auxilium”, Frascati 1 - 15 August 1988, LAS, Rome 1989.

284 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, in AAS 80 (1988)1653-1729. The themes of the letter were already developed earlier in the catechesis dedicated by John Paul II to the theme of human love, and in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. Cf. ID., *Uomo e donna li creò*, LEV, Rome 1985.

285 Cf. “*A te le affido*” di generazione in generazione. *Atti del Capitolo Generale XX delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice* (Rome 18 September-15 November 1996), Istituto FMA, Rome 1997, 6-7.

286 Cf. *Documento-Sintesi*, in COLOMBO, *Verso l’educazione della donna oggi*, 406-407 and ISTITUTO FIGLIE DI MARIA AUSILIATRICE, *Atti del Capitolo generale XIX*, Rome 19 September – 17 November 1990, Istituto FMA, Rome 1991, 60-61.

A decisive factor in reciprocity as a line of thought was Antonia Colombo, first dean of the *Auxilium* and then Superior General of the FMA Institute from 1996 to 2008. Her particular sensitivity to women's issues led her to promote numerous initiatives, specific publications of her own, to establish relationships of study and friendship with religious and lay people interested in women and specifically with the exponents of the Italian Women's Centre, 'Progetto Donna', the Catholic feminist movement. There was a decisive and continuous orientation in her magisterium towards the need to develop a "uni-dual" model of the person at an anthropological and pedagogical level: a humanism of reciprocity in Trinitarian terms.²⁸⁷ Her proposal strongly affirmed reciprocity as the anthropological foundation of Salesian education as lived by women.²⁸⁸ The Superior General spelt out the anthropological and theological reference framework of the FMA's educational choices, stating:

The mutual relationship of love and gift that unites them is the basis of all human relationships. Being the *image of God* is the foundation of a person's relational being, of his or her existence in relation to the other self. We resemble God to the extent that we establish relationships that promote life under the banner of reciprocity, the exchange of gifts. *Reciprocity* is nourished by the ability to expand one's own experience to include that of the other. It is not pure philanthropy, nor mere altruism, because reciprocity is not a unilateral action that makes us submissive, dependent, but a willingness to receive, as well as to give, a capacity to put the other person in a position to reciprocate, to correspond, to feel that he or she has something to communicate, to offer.²⁸⁹

Reciprocity implicitly refers to an anthropology proposed in different ways by Martin Buber, Emmanuel Lévinas and Emmanuel Mounier, which has as its fixed point the idea that the human being is "a relationship" and not simply "in relationship". In pedagogical reflection this means the need to differentiate the relationship of reciprocity from that of exchange. In relationships of reciprocity there is bi-directionality as in the relationship of exchange, but reciprocity differs from the latter because the one who gives

²⁸⁷ Cf. A. COLOMBO, *Educazione all'amore come coeducazione*, in *Educare all'amore*. Acts of the XVI Week of Spirituality for the Salesian Family, SDB, Rome 1993, 125-126.

²⁸⁸ Cf. A. COLOMBO, *La profecía a la que está llamada la educación salesiana hoy*, in C. ARANGO – T. FERNÁNDEZ – E. GARAY (eds.), *Escuela salesiana: memoria y profecía. 100 años de presencia en Colombia de las Hijas de María Auxiliadora (Santa Fe de Bogotá 17-20 septiembre 1997)*, Editorial Carrera, Santa Fe de Bogotá 1998, 222-226.

²⁸⁹ COLOMBO, *Lettera Circolare del 24 settembre 2000*, no. 823.

something first must put the one receiving in a situation where they can reciprocate. Reciprocity in the FMA reflection concerns interpersonal relationships, the best icon of which is the relationship between man and woman. This implies that in order to build an authentic culture of reciprocity it is essential to start from an understanding of the fundamental specific nature of man and woman.²⁹⁰ In addition to the emphases on the specifics and conditions of reciprocity, there are also reflections that emphasise gratuitousness and gratitude.²⁹¹

In contexts where discrimination against women still persists, it is important first of all to redeem female values that are traditionally considered “weak” and promote a culture that recognises the dignity that women deserve in law and in reality. Sister Piera Ruffinatto, in her book on the evolution of the educative relationship in the history of the FMA, summarises the path taken up to 1990, specifying the methodology of co-education:

Considering the process of re-elaboration of the female “self” is intimately linked to the male one, at a pedagogical level the relationship is considered from the point of view of co-education. The discriminating element of the difference between men and women must therefore be translated into educational paths that enable us to move from the simple presence of boys and girls to an interpersonal relationship between the sexes, oriented by dialogue and confrontation that favours the integral maturation of the person and opens him or her up to the gift of self in love. Co-education therefore becomes both the goal of the educational process and the content of the relationship itself, since it tends to form love as a way of life.²⁹²

The methodological translation of the principle of reciprocity into the method of co-education has had various developments. Going beyond the specific sphere of co-education of boys and girls, Sister Maria Marchi said that at the pedagogical level education is by its very nature co-education, in that there is no education if there is no interpersonal relationship between the individuals concerned, thus widening the semantic field of co-education to the category of relationality that is constitutive of the human being. For Marchi, the law of reciprocity is permanently interactive, so

²⁹⁰ Cf. The section “*Sistema Preventivo e reciprocità*” in M. BORSI – P. RUFFINATTO (eds.), *Sistema Preventivo e situazione di disagio. L’animazione di un processo per la vita e la speranza delle nuove generazioni*, LAS, Rome 2008, 165-167.

²⁹¹ Cf. A. MENEGHETTI – M. SPÓLNİK (eds.), *Gratitudine ed educazione. Un approccio interdisciplinare*, LAS, Rome 2012.

²⁹² P. RUFFINATTO, *La relazione educativa. Orientamenti ed esperienze nell’Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, LAS, Rome 2003, 483-484.

that the consistency of a person's identity depends on the intensity and quality of their relationships; and at the same time the quality of the relationship depends on the consistency and quality of personal identity: "So education is always co-education because there are two people educating each other. There are in fact two protagonists required for the educational process to take place."²⁹³ In the statements quoted we can see a general tendency of post-Vatican II rethinking, already mentioned, which tended to rethink the basic principles by creating criteriological pairs, such as education-evangelisation, education-animation, education-co-education, etc. These pairs usually did not translate into concretely integrated educational pathways.

Sister Piera Ruffinatto's conclusion seems more concrete, linking the new female self-awareness, implemented in a context of co-education and thus oriented towards the promotion of reciprocal relationships, to education to values of solidarity, participation and active citizenship.²⁹⁴ Subsequently, the reinterpretation of Salesian education from the perspective of reciprocity would lead to a focus on the theme of family spirit.²⁹⁵ The Preventive System is essentially reciprocity in the relationships that spring from family spirit, from the educative potential of Salesian kindness and are expressed in the simplicity of interpersonal and community traits. Moreover, the presence of educators in educational settings encourages the witness of a positive and respectful relationship between men and women beyond cultural stereotypes. Reciprocity in the educational mission thus encourages the expression of personal gifts through participation and shared responsibility.²⁹⁶

It would seem that the paradigm of reciprocity shared a similar fate with the concept of "integral education": both are concepts of synthesis but their semantic field is too broad to be used in any context as a solution to any problem, with very uncertain and different practical implications according to the various situations. Just as the integrity of the dimensions was initially affirmed in the educative and pastoral project, but then the contents of the single dimensions were almost exclusively studied in depth, similarly the anthropological principle of reciprocity was declared through the methodology of co-education, but then only the education of women was studied in depth.

²⁹³ M. MARCHI, *Verso l'educazione della donna. Alcune indicazioni metodologiche*, in COLOMBO (ed.), *Verso l'educazione della donna oggi*, 355.

²⁹⁴ Cf. P. RUFFINATTO, *Educare "buoni cristiani e onesti cittadini" nello stile del Sistema preventivo. Il contributo delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, in G. LOPARCO – M.T. SPIGA (eds.), *Le Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice in Italia (1872-2010). Donne nell'educazione*. Documentation and essays, LAS, Rome 2011, 64.

²⁹⁵ Cf. COMISIÓN ESCUELA SALESIANA AMÉRICA, *II Encuentro continental de Educación Salesiana. Hacia una cultura de solidaridad*, Editorial Don Bosco, Cuenca (Ecuador) 2001, 153.

²⁹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 152.

It is not only lack of planning, weak governance, or insufficient resources that make it difficult to “move from paper to life.” In our opinion, the paradoxes in a paradigm of general and summary anthropological solutions (especially in linguistic terms) with indeterminate implications for educational processes, is something that needs to be taken note of and dealt with.²⁹⁷ Another example of the same dynamics of paradoxes are the different currents of animation, which we will explore in more detail in the following section.

Social-cultural animation as seen by Tonelli, Pollo and Ellena

“Animation”, a very successful concept among Salesians in the 1980s, is tied to the context in the second half of the 1960s at a time when the traditional school was in crisis, expressed in Italy in the *Lettera a una professoressa* by Lorenzo Milani.²⁹⁸ In these years, some teachers and theatre people started theatrical experiments in compulsory schools and the first experiences of animation in working-class neighbourhoods also appeared. The period when animation took off was 1968 and the years immediately following, when animation embodied a large part of the political tension of the time. In the 80s, animation moved more in an educational direction, collaborating with institutional agencies of education and socialisation.²⁹⁹

The term “animation” was successful especially in romance (Latinate) language countries.³⁰⁰ In each of them, however, it took on a different definition, ranging from informal education to community development and a holistic educational method. In France it seems that animation defined itself in continuity with the proposals of informal or non-formal education of the past, going back to nineteenth century working-class education which responded to the needs of industrial society and which required

²⁹⁷ For co-education, see the uncertainty about whether it can be implemented and if so, in what form and with what pedagogical criteria, since some currents of feminism prefer accompaniment between women and consider co-education as a possible factor of oppression, in C. BARBIERI, *Natura, finalità e criteri della coeducazione, oggi*, in C. SEMERARO (ed.), *Coeducazione e presenza salesiana. Problemi e prospettive*, LDC, Leumann (Turin) 1993, 192-194 and J. SCHEPENS, *Studio introduttivo*, in *Ibid.*, 13-14.

²⁹⁸ Cf. SCUOLA DI BARBIANA (ed.), *Lettera a una professoressa*. Special edition “forty years later”, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, Firenze 2007.

²⁹⁹ Cf. M. POLLO, *L'animazione culturale: teoria e metodo*, LAS, Rome 2002, 13-15.

³⁰⁰ The authors of the entries on animation in the *Educative and Pastoral Project. Modular Elements* compared, besides the Italian authors, with A. Valle from Spain, P. Griéger from France, J. Limbos from French-speaking Belgium and A. Beauchamp, R. Graveline, C. Quiviger from French-speaking Canada. Cf. M. POLLO – R. TONELLI, *Animazione*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 309 and A. ELLENA, *Animatori*, in *Ibid.*, 362-363.

this type of approach, also providing the necessary resources.³⁰¹ If we move to the Anglo-Saxon context, according to at least one group of writers the term corresponding to “animation” would be *community development*, restricting the meaning to the area of animation of city districts.³⁰²

Finally, in Italy we can distinguish three main strands of animation, for two of which the action and contribution of the Salesians was fundamental.³⁰³ The first strand, also in chronological terms, referred to expressive theatre and theatrical animation, which arose as a means of releasing expressiveness and imagination through celebration and play.³⁰⁴ The second strand was one of cultural animation, and its main authors were Mario Pollo and Riccardo Tonelli, Salesian and editor of *Note di Pastorale Giovanile*. The third strand, with more social emphasis, developed around Aldo Ellena, also a Salesian, the editor of the *Animazione sociale* magazine. We will dwell on the last two strands because they have had the greatest impact on the concept of animation in the Salesian sphere and have contributed to the development of some aspects of planning and the educative and pastoral community.

Mario Pollo’s cultural animation

In this way of conceiving things, “cultural animation is an overall approach to formation that aims at a harmonious growth and evolution of the individual considered as an indivisible unit and not as a sum of parts or functions. This growth or maturation passes through the awareness that the individual and social groups live in a symbolic world and therefore, first of all, they must develop their ability to learn, create and make concrete

³⁰¹ We can note the activities of the *Association Catholique de la Jeunesse française* founded in 1886. The beginnings of organised animation date back to the beginning of the 20th century with the founding of the Catholic *Union Nationale des Colonies de Vacances* in 1909 and the secular *Fédération Nationale des Colonies de Vacances* in 1912. The activities of Protestant, Socialist and Scout organisations etc. are also mentioned among animation activities. Cf. J.P. AUGUSTIN – J.C. GILLET, *L’animation professionnelle. Histoire, acteurs, enjeux*, Harmattan, Paris-Montréal 2000, 23-40.

³⁰² J.M. BARRADO GARCÍA, *La animación sociocultural, un esfuerzo de aclaración*, in “Documentación Social” 26 (1982) 49, 12. Of course, in English there is also the difficulty with the widely spread understanding of “animation” as the art or process of making movies with drawings or computer graphics.

³⁰³ Cf. POLLO, *L’animazione culturale*, 12. Mario Pollo also adds two other strands of animation: animation within tourist villages and animation intended only as the use of techniques proper to animation, but they would be considered only secondary and as derivatives of the first three strands.

³⁰⁴ Cf. the collection of theatre animation experiences in schools in Piedmont and Lombardy in F. PASSATORE et al., *Io ero l’albero (tu il cavallo)*, Guaraldi, Rimini 1972.

use of symbolic systems.”³⁰⁵ The definition offers us some elements that make up the core reflection found in Mario Pollo’s fundamental publication, *L’animazione culturale: teoria e metodo*, which partially influenced the anthropology of animation including within Salesian circles through the mediation of Riccardo Tonelli: the wholeness of the person inserted in a symbolic world, animation as an integral formative methodology, interaction between individuals in social groups, communication as creation and use of symbolic systems, and finally a specific research methodology.

The human being, the subject and object of animation, is conceived, according to Ernst Cassirer’s conception, as *animal symbolicum*. This ties in with Bernard Kaplan’s communication theory and Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s systems theory, implying its own concept of symbol, then applied to James Miller’s “living systems”.³⁰⁶ This rather eclectic anthropology was expected to produce meaningful results: “It is the conviction of many scholars that the only real outlet for the human sciences, if they wish to emerge from the insignificance of many of their results, is to tackle the study of the human being as *homo symbolicus*. At this level, in the unifying territory of culture, it is then possible to set up a proper interdisciplinary perspective.”³⁰⁷ The space devoted to theoretical-philosophical versus practical-procedural issues shows that Pollo’s primary interest is to construct a theoretical basis.³⁰⁸ According to Pollo, animation offers an overall approach to formative methodology:

It is undoubtedly a very crude typology to see in man one sphere of affective life, one of intellectual life and finally one of social life. Cultural animation tends to overcome this whole series of dichotomies which for a long time have characterised human choices, such as rationality - emotionality, mind - body, thought - instinct. [... Man’s] unity is guaranteed by the fact that he builds and inhabits symbolic worlds.³⁰⁹

A holistic notion of the human being also includes the religious dimension, which is, however, developed within the coordinates of mysticism and science. It starts with Ludwig Wittgenstein stating the limits of knowledge: “There is indeed the inexpressible.

³⁰⁵ M. POLLO, *L’animazione culturale: teoria e metodo. Una proposta*, LDC, Leumann (Turin) 1980, 33.

³⁰⁶ Cf. The works mentioned in the text: E. CASSIRER, *Essay on man*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1944; B. KAPLAN, *An approach to the problem of symbolic representation: nonverbal and verbal*, in “Journal of communication” 2 (1961) 52-62 and J.G. MILLER, *Living systems*, McGraw-Hill, New York 1978.

³⁰⁷ POLLO, *L’animazione culturale*, 13. Cf. also TONELLI, *Comunità educativa*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 405-406 and POLLO – TONELLI, *Animazione*, in *Ibid.*, 288-293.

³⁰⁸ Cf. POLLO, *L’animazione culturale*, 15-31.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

This shows itself; it is the mystical... What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.”³¹⁰ Subsequently, Pollo understands the religious dimension as the inexpressible, as symbolism of a non-linguistic nature, and animation would be an existential communication, considered as an instrument that “succeeds in this difficult, impossible operation”³¹¹ of expressing the inexpressible. The conclusion in which he states that in practice “I do not know how it happens, so accepting Wittgenstein’s invitation [...], I have already tried to say too much about what cannot be spoken of, let me be silent” is symptomatic.³¹² Relegating the religious dimension to the area of mysticism was one of the reasons for practically removing direct evangelisation from the scene, seeing it as problematic, akin to proselytism. On the other hand, a generic religiosity, a spirituality of the search for meaning, a hermeneutics of spiritual experience or a psychological and existential analysis of deep motivations, etc. would be more acceptable.

Pollo also devoted a section to educational planning in his publications, following a general principle: “Planning is the link between any educational theoretical principle and its translation into a concrete educational activity within a given social system.”³¹³ This is a difficult operation and in order “not to contradict a real practice of liberation, it is essential that planning not be carried out around the table by the organisers or animators, but that it be done by the organiser together with the group that is both the subject and object of animation.”³¹⁴ To avoid things being simple, a question of mechanics, while at the same time grasping for straws somehow, he points to the fact that systematic planning models exist, but makes no reference to who or what. Pollo seeks to justify educational planning as compatible with the concept of cultural animation, but does not offer procedures, models or concrete methodologies, deliberately remaining at the level of principles and the generic.³¹⁵

³¹⁰ L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, in POLLO, *L’animazione culturale*, 67.

³¹¹ POLLO, *L’animazione culturale*, 73.

³¹² *Ibid.* Cf. the influence of Pollo’s approach on the anthropological model underlying the description of the religious dimension of man in POLLO – TONELLI, *Animazione*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 297-298.

³¹³ POLLO, *L’animazione culturale*, 51.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

Educational implications of Riccardo Tonelli's animation

Some methodological indications for planning came from Riccardo Tonelli, who used the concepts of programming and planning in youth ministry as early as 1968.³¹⁶ The author focused mainly on the general approach of youth ministry and not on the methodology, which he considered a technical issue that

requires technical competence, to be acquired through the study of specialised disciplines. [...] This trust in and respect for the technical apparatus is a specific Salesian requirement, as a logical consequence of the awareness that there is a close relationship between education (and the related educational sciences) and evangelisation.³¹⁷

Despite the theoretical emphasis of his approach, he offers an interesting elaboration of the planning steps in his aforementioned article *Per fare un progetto educativo* in 1980. Speaking of education to the faith, he takes up the two planning schemes mentioned by Michele Pellerey,³¹⁸ but altering the departure point.³¹⁹ Cf. Figure F for a comparison of the two models.

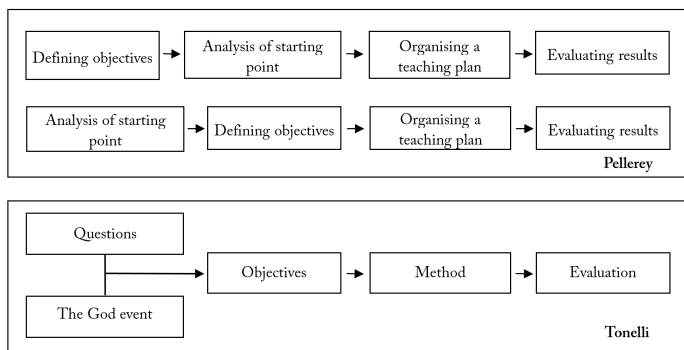


Figure F: Organising a plan in Pellerey and Tonelli

³¹⁶ Cf. the monograph that attempted to outline some of the issues related to programming already in the second year of the journal in R. Tonelli, *Riunioni di verifica*, in “Note di Pastorale Giovanile” 2 (1968) 8-9, 60-65 and ID., *Punti fermi per una programmazione valida*, in “Note di Pastorale Giovanile” 3 (1969) 8-9, 43-59. For planning, see ID., *Un progetto di pastorale giovanile per i giovani d’oggi*, in “Note di Pastorale Giovanile” 13 (1979) 1, 3-21 and ID., *Per fare un progetto educativo*, in “Note di Pastorale Giovanile” 14 (1980) 6, 57-66.

³¹⁷ Cf. R. TONELLI, *Impostazione della comunità educativa in un contesto pluralista*, in R. GIANATELLI (ed.), *Progettare l’educazione*, 83; POLLO – TONELLI, *Animazione*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo pastorale*, 309 and TONELLI, *Comunità educativa*, in *Ibid.*, 415.

³¹⁸ Cf. PELLEREY, *Progettazione didattica*, SEI, Turin 1979, 38.

³¹⁹ Cf. TONELLI, *Per fare un progetto educativo*, 60.

Tonelli rejected Pellerey's two schemes for epistemological reasons that are debatable, stating the first planning scheme prefers "objectivity", not considering the situation, and the second is overly subjective. He therefore proposed a further "hermeneutic model". The objectives and questions that arise from the analysis of the situation must be read in the light of the "God event". Tonelli said: "We must use faith as the key to interpretation. It cannot replace the descriptive sciences. But the descriptive sciences cannot do without faith when they want to tell us what man needs in the depths of his existence."³²⁰ Interpretation in the light of the "God event" is important both for understanding the youth condition and for formulating the objectives, which are understood by the author to be in close relationship with the truths of faith, "to prevent the reinvention of objectives from ending up hollowly and reducing the God event in anthropological terms."³²¹ As with other contributions from Tonelli, pastoral theorising stays at the level of enunciating principles without going down to the methodological level of how to realise this interpretation in the light of the God event.

In his four-decade involvement as editor of *Note di Pastorale Giovanile*, Tonelli produced many reflections on many fields related to youth ministry. Since he was not a typical author of Salesian pedagogy, but rather a pastoral theologian in general, we do not intend to offer a synthesis of his thinking, but focus on the fundamental theme for the period we are considering: the relationship between education and evangelisation, which for him should be thought in the context of animation.³²² As he himself said when evaluating his forty-year commitment, the early reflections after 1968 started from the negative and the problematic and then moved on to the positive and the proactive. In contrast to the models inspired by Ricaldone, Tonelli insisted on the power of the Incarnation – God becomes man in Jesus – which is subsequently translated into two fundamental criteria for a renewal of youth ministry following Vatican II:

The first concerns the theological significance of *daily life*, the great sacrament of presence and encounter with God, in Jesus. On the side of life, it was possible to reformulate a serious project of spirituality and to rewrite, at least in broad strokes, the sacramental and celebratory path. The second strongly calls for the

³²⁰ TONELLI, *Per fare un progetto educativo*, 61.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² Cf. e.g. the emblematic synthesis of Tonelli's thinking on the relationship between education and evangelisation in the 7th *Quaderno dell'animatore* (Animator's Notebook), which summarises all the main themes, in R. TONELLI, *La scelta dell'animazione nell'educazione alla fede*, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1983, 1-32.

urgency of education, precisely in what we can even call its theological dimension. Life is a sacrament of the encounter with God when it is authentic, constructed and expressed according to God's plan, encountered in Jesus. Education is the privileged means by which we can restore the quality of life to each person.³²³

From a pre-Vatican II moralistic, voluntaristic, sacramentally-based and hierarchical model, an inclusive, egalitarian, gradual, humanistic and educational model developed as a reaction. The choice of education was perceived by Tonelli as “a concrete expression of our love for life and our service to the maturation of the lives of young people.”³²⁴ It is interesting to analyse the definition of education that derives from these assumptions: “to educate means, from the perspective of life, to establish a relationship through which different individuals, happy to be different, exchange experiences and reasons for hope, in order to reciprocally return to each other the joy of living, the freedom to hope and the capacity to be protagonists of their own existence, things which we are very often violently robbed of by dominant cultural models.”³²⁵

In continuity with Mario Pollo's approach, the dimension of evangelisation is seen from the perspective of the “mystery” which cannot be spoken about too much and cannot be translated concretely: “Faith comes from the experience of the mystery.” In Tonelli's epistemology, education has the strength of concreteness trusting in its transforming power. Evangelisation, on the other hand, has its hands tied by the inexpressible, the mystical, the necessary pre-evangelisation, respect for the concrete growth of the young person and the danger of being proselytising in the old way. And so it is realised through “sacramentality diffused in daily life” brought about only through educational processes.

Although Tonelli states that one of the limitations is the “before” and “after” game in the relationship between education and evangelisation, he nevertheless predicts that: “usually, education precedes evangelisation. It always accompanies it. It often returns strongly after the first experiences of immersion in the mystery.”³²⁶ For Tonelli, animation is positioned here as an inspiration that is not just an instrumental technique, but an overall wager on the human being and a complex project for human maturation. Within the relationship between education and evangelisation,

323 R. TONELLI, *Ripensando quarant'anni di servizio alla pastorale giovanile, intervista a cura di Giancarlo De Nicolò*, in “Note di Pastorale Giovanile” 43 (2009) 5, 18.

324 *Ibid.*, 28.

325 *Ibid.*

326 *Ibid.*, 42.

animation, as a holistic way of carrying out education, becomes the place where the problems, the perspectives and the choices typical of education to the faith are rethought and made concrete. And, at the same time, through dialogue with the inalienable demands of the processes that concern the transmission of faith, animation can understand itself better and reformulate itself in more adequate terms, while remaining an autonomous process, oriented towards other goals and other dimensions of human life.³²⁷

Given this approach, Tonelli very honestly recognises the most serious limitation of the work done in recent years: the youth ministry project has often remained only at the premises (epistemological and relatively generic).³²⁸ The fruits of his proposal are, in our opinion, linked to the historical moment that favoured young people forming their own groups spontaneously, the educational appreciation of the group and its dynamics, the desire for commitment to the transformation of the world that was translated into the commitment of volunteer work. Last but not least, the pathways of education to the faith, also promoted by Tonelli, led various provinces to develop an educational proposal that respected the various age groups with their relative developmental tasks.

In conclusion, it can be said that, especially in the oratory scene, the proposal of group animation could succeed, on condition that it be combined with the systematic formation of the animators seen as educators, within a functioning EPC encouraging shared responsibility and governed with the criterion of continuity. In the school setting, which was very strong in various regions of the Congregation, animation did not develop as a worldwide educational method, generally being reduced to the animation of individual events and celebrations that marked the pastoral year. Hence GC25's criticism of the "event-centered pastoral" and the need for a more process-oriented logic.³²⁹

Aldo Ellena's social animation

A third type of proposal revolved around the activities of Aldo Ellena, Salesian and graduate in philosophy from Turin and in theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University, a teacher and cultural animator in Turin in the 1950s and 1960s, founder of the *Animazione sociale* magazine in Milan in 1971 and author of the module on

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

³²⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 44-45.

³²⁹ Cf. CG25 (2002) nos. 37, 44 and 47.

animators in the *Educative and Pastoral Project. Modular elements*. His reflections on animation are closely linked to experiences of animation and formation of animators³³⁰ that then became the object of study in the early *Quaderni di animazione sociale*. Ellena had previously addressed sociological, political and anthropological issues with the translation and editing of Harroux and Praet's Psychology of leaders, the *Enciclopedia Sociale*, the *Dizionario di Sociologia* and two volumes on *Presenza educativa*.³³¹

Looking more closely at the first three *Quaderni di animazione sociale*, we see the interest in animation understood as a social practice that “aims to raise awareness and develop the latent, repressed or suppressed potential of an individual, group or community.”³³² Moreover, animation is not proposed as a new specific profession, nor as an external way of doing things, but as a “new way of assuming a professional profile in a changing society.”³³³

Animation activities are described in physical, social, expressive and creative areas. The question of animation in the *Quaderni* is connected with the volunteer movement, leisure time, values, local involvement, participation, the group and the masses. Ellena pays particular attention to the formation of animators, summarised in the module he edited in the encyclopaedic *Progetto Educativo Pastorale* published by Vecchi and Prellezo.

Compared to Tonelli and Pollo, the practical purpose of animation, seen as a formative and socially transformative methodology, is evident in Ellena's theory of social animation. The experiences of the teams that gathered around him in planning, carrying out and evaluating both the formation of animators and interventions in his local area, make his proposals practical and methodologically more stimulating. The missing aspect is the absence of a broader anthropological reference framework inspired by Christianity. In Ellena's proposal, animation seems to be too linked to the transformation of society

³³⁰ Cf. G. CONTESSA – A. ELLENA – R. SALVI, *Animatori del tempo libero*, Società Editrice Napoletana, Naples 1979; G. CONTESSA – A. ELLENA, *Animatori di quartiere*, Società Editrice Napoletana, Naples 1980 and P.G. BRANCA – G. CONTESSA – A. ELLENA, *Animare la città*, Istituto di Scienze Amministrative e di promozione sociale, Milan 1982.

³³¹ Cf. H. HARROUX – J. PRAET, *Psicologia dei leaders*, SEI, Turin 1957; A. ELLENA (ed.), *Enciclopedia sociale*, vol. 1: *Introduzione ai problemi sociali*, Paoline, Rome 1958; F. DEMARCHI – A. ELLENA (eds.), *Dizionario di Sociologia*, Paoline, Rome 1976 and A. ELLENA (ed.), *Presenza educativa*, 2 vols., LDC, Leumann (TO) 1976-77.

³³² CONTESSA – ELLENA – SALVI, *Animatori del tempo libero*, 132.

³³³ CONTESSA – ELLENA, *Animatori di quartiere*, 91. Cf. also ELLENA, *Animatori*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo*, 355 and 357.

and lacks a more far-sighted vision that could make it relevant even outside the context of the interesting years following Vatican II.

In spite of the limitations mentioned, observing the concrete application of the animation that took place in working class neighbourhoods in Ellena's case and in youth groups in Tonelli's case, one can grasp a relevant methodological novelty. It is about *group dynamics*. Even if experienced in the particular Italian context of the 1960s and 70s following the Council, these were the most significant indirect contribution to the SEPP methodology³³⁴ which balances the implicit *individualism* of Stenhouse's proposal and that of other curriculum designers who focus on the individual teacher and not on the educational community.

In addition to the stress on the role of the group and the community in the educational and planning process, one can accept Tonelli's invitation (but not as expressed in practice) regarding the importance of a hermeneutical stage in planning. The *interpretation of the situation* and of the objectives through the eyes of faith is, for obvious reasons, an attention that is missing in curricular theories, but it is required by the basic link between education and evangelisation within SEPP.³³⁵

The methodological split between religion and education

Before Vatican II, the holistic and foundational perspective of the *philosophia perennis* and related neo-Scholastic theology held Ricaldone's and the early Braidò's approach together, especially the latter in its openness to different pedagogies and their methodologies. After Vatican II, the human sciences were seen as being relatively autonomous from theology,³³⁶ bringing different approaches and rationales into the methodological sphere. This was especially evident in the planning area, within which priority was given to finding workable answers to concrete needs sought through the technical method of planning and design, while "theory" appeared later merely as "theory of practice" or a "framework" that often did not hold together systematically.

In this regard, it is obvious that in the period following Vatican II there could not be "one" Salesian educational methodology, so other rationales, education by dimensions, each with its own preferred contents and methods, had to be introduced.³³⁷ The *post factum* statements on the need to integrate these dimensions often only

³³⁴ Cf. The emphasis on the community principle in TONELLI, *Comunità educativa*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Progetto educativo*, 399-417.

³³⁵ Cf. GC21 (1978), no. 13.

³³⁶ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 36; *Gravissimus Educationis*, no. 10 and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 7.

³³⁷ Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Elementi e linee, Sussidio 2* and subsequent publications by the Department.

served as an impossible remedy for a non-integrated mentality. Even within the reflection on education at the UPS, pedagogy was set aside and educational sciences preferred as a multidisciplinary concept that often had interdisciplinarity only as an ideal reference.³³⁸ It is understandable that in the crisis years people spoke of interdisciplinarity while meaning autonomy, so that epistemological discussions were influenced by the organisational issues in the Faculty of Education. The cultural horizons of the *Educare* trilogy in the 1950s completely disappeared and attempts at reflection in the 1980s, such as the *Progetto Educativo Pastorale*, revealed the skills of individuals rather than a jointly developed vision.

The application of this autonomy became paradigmatic in Ricaldone's preferred field, which was catechesis. Cesare Bissoli, a biblical and catechetical scholar as well, explains his approach, followed for several decades, in this typical way:

From the Word of God (the Bible) we can derive a pedagogy, but not as a set of specific indications that are the same for everyone (in other words, ready-made recipes), but as an overall approach, or rather a spirit, the founding motivations, the profound reasons with which to think and do education. This also applies to the so-called 'terrestrial realities', such as political power, the polis and its government, the economy, bioethics, etc. *Not how we educate, but why we educate, lies at the heart of biblical revelation.*³³⁹

He is rightly reacting to a reductive perception of the Gospel as a recipe book, but denies the possibility of deriving methodological indications from Christian revelation. The nominalism of Ricaldone's Gospel method, his term for activist methodology, seems to be revealed, and opens the way to all the scientific, didactic and educational methodologies of the moment. The ordering force of the principle of religion in Ricaldone's system, with so many meticulous applications, was then shattered by the Salesian boarding school crisis both in the perception of the Salesians and in the perception of the pupils.³⁴⁰ The model of the Salesian boarding school

³³⁸ Interesting and revealing are the endless discussions of the lecturers at the Higher Institute of Pedagogy (since 1973 the Faculty of Educational Sciences at UPS) on the principle of interdisciplinarity. Cf. e.g. *Verballi Collegio di Facoltà 1971-75 in Archivio FSE*.

³³⁹ C. BISSOLI, *Bibbia e Pastorale Giovanile*. Interview with Cesare Bissoli by Giancarlo De Nicolò, in "Note di Pastorale Giovanile" 42 (2008) 7, 20. For a more in-depth analysis cf. C. BISSOLI, *Bibbia e educazione. Contributo storico-critico ad una teologia dell'educazione*, LAS, Rome 1981.

³⁴⁰ Cf. P.G. GRASSO, *La Società Salesiana tra il passato e l'avvenire. Risultati di un'inchiesta tra ex allievi salesiani*, Reserved extra-commercial edition, PAS, Rome 1964, 45-152.

as a total institution which allowed for the integration of different dimensions and methodologies, was no longer considered suitable to the needs of the times, while the structure and style of the oratory as a more fluid combination of different institutions was revalued: “Very special care should be taken with the ‘original’ work of the oratory [...] so that it succeeds in attracting and serving the greatest number of young people, with a variety of institutions (youth centres, clubs, various associations, courses, evening schools...)”³⁴¹ The updating of the educational methodology in the oratory went successively in the direction of animation, understood as a gradual, respectful educational methodology, but also as a distributed and participatory method of governance.

The most methodologically concrete aspects of education fell within the container of planning, which was, however, influenced by a reductive underlying anthropology. From the study of the authors who inspired the SEPP model, an image emerges of the human being linked to educational planning by objectives, which in turn demonstrates strong dependence on management by objectives.³⁴² Peter Drucker, the most significant author of management by objectives at the time, defines his philosophy of action as one that transforms needs into objectives of action. The human being is viewed simply as a free and rational being who decides to implement an objective that is not imposed by others but reflects a real need. The subsequent realisation of the goal takes place mainly through the instrument of self-control.³⁴³ The concept of planning by objectives sought to involve the actors in the decision-making process of formulating objectives as a team, going beyond the traditional fidelity to the tasks undertaken and obedience to hierarchies. This tendency, particularly felt in secular organisations, was in tune with the Salesian world, which was moving away from a boarding school perspective, leaving religion and evangelisation in the harmless container of a dimension.

The image of the “modern” human being who thinks rationally, and translates needs into objectives and acts through the effort of the will and self-control, passed into Salesian planning through the notion of rational action that follows a linear process (situation, objectives, means, assessment) and the division of growth into dimensions that must be planned autonomously (education, evangelisation, group interest, vocation). This anthropology brought a reactive system (to situations) and

³⁴¹ GC19 (1965), 103.

³⁴² Cf. A more in-depth analysis in VOJTÁŠ, *Progettare e discernere*, 113-149.

³⁴³ Cf. P.F. DRUCKER, *Management. Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices*, Truman Talley Books, New York 1986 which takes up many instances from his previous major publication *The Practice of Management*, Harper&Row, New York 1954.

an indifferent one (to individuals) into Salesian education under different guises. In principle it is not the individuals that matter, but the grand coordinates, demographic needs and the achievement of the objectives arising from them.

Vocational pedagogy is another field within which the uneasy relationship between educational methodology and religion became evident. Vocation was understood as a “life project”, shifting the emphasis from following a vocation to creating a project, from fidelity to the coordinates of the call to the authentic living out of a life project. Interesting in this sense is what GC21 had to say about vocational pedagogy: “the discovery of one’s calling, the well-thought-out free choice of a program of life, constitutes the crowning goal of any process of human and Christian growth”,³⁴⁴ that can be interpreted in (at least) two ways. The first is somewhat cognitive and proclaims the importance of a calling within the processes of growth. The second is more educative and practical: if the discovery of the calling is a crowning moment, it is not, obviously, the starting point. It is not appropriate for the educator to begin immediately to implement vocational strategies, because there are prior steps to be respected. These antecedents are at least the two that are mentioned: growth in freedom and the reflective and cultural criteria of the life project.

The second way of interpreting things is to defer matters, and joins the game where education comes “first” and the other dimensions come “later”. We also find this in terms of phases as presented in the Youth Ministry booklets. When the topic of explicit vocational orientation is addressed, first comes the phase of availability, then a phase of discernment and finally, a choice of vocation.³⁴⁵ In fact, the poorly integrated positioning of the vocational dimension within the educative and pastoral project can be seen in various publications, official ones and studies, over the last twenty years of the twentieth century. In the third series of the booklets, dealing with the SEPP in Salesian oratories, schools and parishes, the vocational area, reduced to a few sentences, is for all intents and purposes marginalised. The next booklet, which came out in 1981, instead dealt with *Essential Guidelines for a Provincial Plan for the Vocations Ministry*, filling this gap, but within the perspective of a separate pastoral category, organised separately and planned centrally by the province.³⁴⁶ The responsibility for vocations promotion was entrusted in principle to the provincial and the rector; in concrete terms to a vocations promoter at the provincial level and also at the local level, a figure that was never implemented in

³⁴⁴ GC21 (1978), no. 106.

³⁴⁵ Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Elementi e linee, Sussidio 2*, 48-49.

³⁴⁶ Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Lineamenti essenziali per un Piano Ispettoriale di Pastorale Vocazionale, Sussidio 4*.

the majority of local contexts. At the level of works, the only structure whose primary interest was vocations was the aspirantate, which was generally in crisis for the same reasons that had led to the boarding school crisis.³⁴⁷

In the years around GC23, which took up the theme of education to the faith, we can see a shift in meaning around the vocational dimension. From vocation understood as the choice of a state of life we move to vocation as the personalisation of faith. In the overview which was the 1990 *Salesian Youth Ministry* booklet, vocation is spoken about on four levels: human, baptismal, Salesian and personal, including the choice of a real life project.³⁴⁸ The preferred educational and vocational methodology seems to be volunteering and commitment to transforming the world. GC23 moved in this direction when it named “commitment and vocation in what concerns the transformation of the world” as one of the four areas of Christian growth.³⁴⁹ The same Chapter mentioned the main core themes of Salesian Youth Spirituality. Since there was not an explicitly “vocational” one, personal “friendship with the Lord Jesus” and “responsible service” were the terms used.³⁵⁰

The concept of personal itineraries or programmes of education in the faith was also introduced following CG23, in the 1990s. One example of thinking along these lines was the reflection by Jacques Schepens making individualisation the key to the rethinking of Salesian education after Vatican II. His pedagogical proposal revolved around how young people individualise things in an emotional, rational, moral way in search for the ultimate meaning of life. In this last dimension, focused on the meaning of life, the question is asked: “How can the ‘I’ in the statement ‘I believe’ grow and become a personal ‘I’?”³⁵¹ which leaves faith and vocation within the context of self-transcendence, mystery, symbolism, without a personal call from God.

The whole question of vocation, given the influence of earlier-mentioned approaches such as *gradualism*, *dimensions*, *specialised settings* and *personalisation* was treated as a special and not central category even in the specialised journals. One can analyse the

³⁴⁷ Where the aspirantate structure was used, the Salesians within generally adopted more an approach of recruitment and not a precise vocational discernment and methodology.

³⁴⁸ Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Pastorale giovanile salesiana*, 72-73.

³⁴⁹ Cf. GC23 (1990), nos. 116ff.

³⁵⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 161ff.

³⁵¹ Cf. J. SCHEPENS, *Die Pastoral in der Spannung: Zwischen der christlichen Botschaft und dem Menschen von heute*, Don Bosco, Munich 1994 and then developed in ID. – R. BURGGRAEVE, *Emotionalität, Rationalität und Sinngebung als Faktoren christlicher Werterziehung. Eine Interpretation des pädagogischen Erbes Don Boscos für heute*, Don Bosco, Munich 1999.

indexes of *Note di Pastorale Giovanile* in the period from 1967 to 1997 for the field of youth ministry and of *Orientamenti Pedagogici* between 1954 and 1988 for the more explicitly educational field. In the case of the first-mentioned, the indexes of the first thirty years do not include the vocational proposal among either basic choices or in the concrete project. We do find the concept towards the end of the list of entries, in the category “Attention to special categories of those to whom we are sent”, seen in terms of personalisation between orientation, profession and vocation.³⁵² In the other journal, vocation does not even feature in the subject or sector index. The few articles that do deal with the subject understand it mainly as an ecclesiastical-religious-priestly vocation and adopt a medical, psychological or pedagogical perspective, delving into personality characteristics, motivational aspects, the process of discernment and the ways religious form people.³⁵³

The concept of vocation is not one of the strong points within Tonelli’s cultural animation. From the obligations of pre-Vatican II “religion” perceived as moralising and burdensome he moved on to the more universal but also more generic concept of “spirituality”. The task of the educator would be above all to “embody” himself, accept the young person unconditionally. Above all in the educative and pastoral proposals linked to the theory of animation, a holistic idea of the human being is proposed, but it incorporates the human being’s religious and spiritual dimension as lying somewhere between mysticism, subjectivism and science. In 1981, during the *Colloquiums* on the Salesian vocation, Tonelli took up symbolic anthropology and the Wittgensteinian approach of non-argumentative silence,³⁵⁴ proposing an experiential logic of unconditional acceptance that creates the conditions for telling the story of Jesus.³⁵⁵ At the end of his talk he once more offered a concept of Christian vocation, saying, typically:

Welcome is therefore the place where the process of liberating education develops that gives each young people their own life back, frees them from

³⁵² Cf. *Indice NPG 50 anni: Voci tematiche – Autori – Dossier*, in bit.ly/npg-it-indice.

³⁵³ Cf. Analytical indexes relating to the topic: *Vocazione*, in “Orientamenti Pedagogici” 10 (1963) 6, 1165; *Vocazione*, in “Orientamenti Pedagogici” 25 (1978) 1313 and *Vocazione*, in “Orientamenti Pedagogici” 35 (1988) 6, 1092.

³⁵⁴ Cf. R. TONELLI, *Accoglienza e formazione dei giovani nella comunità*, in F. DESRAMAUT – M. MIDALI, *La vocazione Salesiana*. Colloquium on Salesian Life Barcelona (Spain) 23-28 August 1981, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1982, 203-204 and 207. Of interest is the immediate feedback on Tonelli’s address reacting to the generic nature of his proposal. Cf. *Ibid.* 217.

³⁵⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 207-212.

alienation and makes them the protagonists of their own and other people's liberation. Acceptance is the place where salvation is worked out. The community accepts them unconditionally in order to bear witness to the radical dignity of every person. In welcoming, it urges people to live their regained dignity as responsibility for themselves, others and history. Acceptance is the place of and the condition for formation: the place of an intense, fascinating vocational experience, until its eventual radicalisation in consecration and the ordained ministry.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

Tools and resources

Chronological table

<i>World history</i>	<i>Salesian history</i>	<i>Salesian pedagogy publications</i>
Deng Xiaoping's Beijing spring	1977	Egidio Viganò elected Rector Major at GC21. Juan Vecchi YM Councillor
John Paul II elected Pope	1978	development of SEPP through YM Dept. : Booklet 1. methodology, 2. elements,
<i>Catechesi tradendae</i> by John Paul II	1979	3. settings, 4. voc. ministry Corallo , <i>Il metodo edu.sal.</i> ; Pellerey , <i>Progettazione...</i>
Solidarność in Poland, Madrid movement	1980	Viganò, <i>Our African commitment</i> Gianatelli (ed.), <i>Progettare l'educazione oggi con DB</i>
	1981	establishment of the Istituto Storico Pollo , <i>L'animazione culturale: teoria e metodo</i>
	1982	approval of FMA Constitutions Braido , <i>Breve storia del "Sistema preventivo"</i>
promulgation of new <i>Code of Canon Law</i>	1983	Tonelli , <i>Scelta dell'animazione nell'educazione alla fede</i>
Jubilee of Youth - WYDs begin	1984	promulgation of SDB Constitutions Vecchi-Prellezo (eds.), <i>Progetto Educativo Pastorale</i>
Perestroika in Soviet Union	1985	<i>Formation of SDBs. Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis et Studiorum</i>
Cernobyl nuclear disaster	1986	approval of Cooperator Regulations Vecchi , <i>The educative and pastoral project</i>
world population more than 5 billion	1987	Vecchi-Prellezo , <i>Prassi edu.past. e scienze dell'edu.</i>
	1988	Centenario: nascita MGS; congresses: <i>Don Bosco nella storia: Verso l'edu. della donna oggi</i>
fall of Berlin Wall	1989	DB "father and teacher of youth" Tonelli , <i>Itinerari per l'educazione dei giovani alla fede</i>
Iraq invades Kuwait	1990	GC23 (theme: education of the young to faith), YM Dept. , <i>Salesian Youth Ministry</i>
first world wide web page	1991	Viganò , <i>New evangelisation</i> , Vecchi , <i>Pastorale, educazione, pedagogia</i>
<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> published	1992	Viganò , <i>New education</i> Braido (ed.), <i>Don Bosco educatore. Scritti e testimonianze</i>
	1993	East Europe Circumscription erected Colombo , <i>Educazione all'amore come coeducazione</i>
N. Mandela wins elections - end of apartheid	1994	Van Looy , <i>EPP. in the provinces</i>
end of war in former Yugoslavia	1995	first presences in 7 new countries Vecchi , <i>Preventive system experience of spirituality</i>
end of civil war in Rwanda	1996	Juan Vecchi elected Rector Major at GC24 (theme: Salesians and laity)
1st volume of <i>Harry Potter</i> published	1997	IUS network founded (higher ed.) Vecchi , <i>For you I study. Preparation of confreres</i>
Google founded	1998	SDB-FMA, <i>Per un cammino di collaborazione</i> ; <i>Salesian YM. Frame of Reference</i> (1st. ed.)
	1999	province of Vietnam erected Braido , <i>Prevention not repression</i>
Putin president of Russia	2000	canonisation Versiglia-Caravario <i>Salesian YM Frame of Reference</i> (2nd. ed.)
Twin Towers attack (New York)	2001	
The € begins circulation	2002	Pascual Chávez elected Rector Major at GC25 (theme: Salesian community today)

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³⁵⁷ Cf. salesian.online/pedagogia5

6

New evangelisation and education for the third millennium (1998–2018)

Postmodernity and the Salesian Congregation

From what we have explored in the previous chapters one could draw an approximate view of the post-Vatican II period in the Salesian context as one that took up various currents of modern thought in mental contrast to the traditionalism of the Ricaldonian period. Analytical science, division by disciplines, anthropocentrism, democratic-bureaucratic models of management of the Congregation, reliance on science and technology in planning or in communication are strong signs of the modern imprint of this era. With the advent of the third millennium, the effects of the new vital context marked by changing post-modernity was felt within the Salesian Congregation in terms of the economic, value and vocational crisis of the West, the demographic growth of non-Western Regions and as a result of ageing in various provinces followed by the necessary downsizing of works.

The precariousness and fluidity of the third millennium

The end of the bipolar world and the associated perception of victory of the free world over the communist world, which fuelled the politics and predictions of the future in the 1990s, faded and became insignificant around the turn of the millennium. The loss of the Cold War coordinates gave way to the outbreak of various local conflicts and led to new and no less fearsome global struggles: between the rich North and the

poor South, and the West and aggressive Islam following the wars of the United States of America in the Middle East. After a chaotic decade under President Boris Yeltsin, Russia is emerging as a strategic state internationally, especially after the annexation of Crimea and interventions abroad, such as during the Syrian civil war. Vladimir Putin's iron leadership combined with the economic growth of China, India and the other BRICS countries has created a strong counterbalance to a liberal democracy marked by an internal crisis in the first decade of the new millennium. In the second decade, China's economic growth, with investments of hundreds of billions in developing countries, stands out.¹

The 2008 financial crisis, also brought about by the deregulation of financial markets, the entry of new monetary instruments and the use of dark pools algorithms, dealt a severe blow to the myth of infinite economic growth and the "dogma" of capitalist success. The ephemeral pro-democratic enthusiasm of the Arab Spring after 2010, with its massive and idealised use of social media, faded away after a few years, leaving the region in an unstable situation and mobilising masses of people to emigrate. In addition, the rise of populist parties and leaders in the West has taken further credit away from the democratic system. The year 2020, with the final implementation of Brexit and internal tensions within the European Union, Donald Trump's presidency in the US, the Sino-American economic and cyberwar, algorithmically disseminated fake news, uncertain global economic development and the diminishing role of international bodies such as the UN, creates a radically different image of the world from the previous era, very fluid and insecure, without guarantees and much hope for the future.²

Latin America has seen a series of high-risk elections in the new millennium, with the rise and fall of some socialist regimes. Venezuela's economic collapse caused the most severe migrant crisis in the region's history and required the intervention of the International Monetary Fund with the largest bailout package ever. Bolivia experienced the rise of Evo Morales with a policy of indigenous socialism and his fall in 2019. Unpredictability has many faces: radical changes in political agendas, financial experiments and economic crises, the impact of drug cartels on insecurity especially in Central America, migration towards the United States, environmental destruction

¹ Cf. G. SABATUCCI G. – V. VIDOTTO, *Storia contemporanea. Dalla Grande Guerra a oggi*, Laterza, Bari 2019; W.J. DUIKER, *Contemporary World History*, Cengage Learning, Stamford, CT 2014; J. MARR – R. CHERRY, *Investing in Emerging Markets. The BRIC Economies and Beyond*, Wiley, Chicester 2010; J. STANISZKIS, *Post-Communism. The Emerging Enigma*, Institute of Political Studies, Warsaw 1999.

² Cf. A. BAYAT, *Revolution without Revolutionaries. Making Sense of the Arab Spring* (= Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Cultures), Stanford University Press, Stanford CA 2017.

especially in Brazil that called for the convening of a Special Synod for the Panamanian region in 2019.³

On the eve of independence revolutions, Africa was the continent of hope and great expectations. By the third decade after independence, the clear optimism was replaced by the darker hues of ethno-political conflicts, military governments, civil wars, Islamic movements, poverty and disease. With the rise of re-democratisation in the 1990s and pan-Africanism resulting from the formation of the African Union, Africa seemed destined to reclaim its vaunted destiny. In the third millennium, however, the crisis is continuing with the absence of good governance, the personalisation of state power, the spread of disease, political failure in education as well as in the economy and infrastructural development. Although endowed with abundant human and natural resources, Africa remains an underdeveloped continent, ruled by outside capital, especially from China.⁴

In summary, the world of the third millennium would seem to be well characterised by the English acronym VUCA: *Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity*. Changes occur very quickly and are of a different nature, so it is very difficult to predict the course of events. Models based on linear causality no longer work because of the complexity and interconnectedness of phenomena. Finally, the ambiguity of interpretations, caused by the end of the great narratives of modernity, also makes concepts and theories more fluid.

The Salesian Congregation shifting to non-Western interculturality

As we have seen in the previous chapters, global changes do not always immediately affect the Salesian world and, if they do, they do not affect it in the same way in the different regions. In the third millennium it seems that two “worlds” can be distinguished in the Salesian world: the old Euro-American regions and the new and growing regions of Asia and Africa. Globally, from 2002 to 2020, the number of Salesians has decreased by 10%, but the distribution in the different age groups at the end of the second decade holds

³ Cf. BBVA – OPENMIND, *The age of perplexity. Rethinking the World we Knew*, Penguin Random House, Madrid 2018; WORLD BANK, *World Development Report*, World Bank, Washington DC 2017; sinodoamazonico.va.

⁴ Cf. R.A. OLANIYAN – E.A. IFIDON, *Contemporary Issues in Africa's Development. Whither the African Renaissance*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2018; UNDP, *Human Development Report*, UNDP, New York 2015, 208-211.

some promise: Salesians in their thirties and forties outnumber those in their fifties and sixties by a thousand, who in turn slightly outnumber the confreres over seventy.⁵

However, demographic differentiation is taking place in the regions and implies a dynamic of inter-regional migration. Obviously, the situation is not limited to the Salesians alone: very similar dynamics can be observed in other religious orders and diocesan clergy. It is enough to see the data on the mobility of diocesan clergy with a change especially in the second decade of the new millennium. For example, in 2017 we notice more than 6,500 African and Asian priests moving to Europe and America, compared to those moving in the opposite direction.⁶ The ageing of Salesian personnel is strongest in the Mediterranean region of Europe with an average age of 66 years, and more than 1,500 confreres over seventy. The youngest regions are Africa and South Asia (India) with an average age between 41 and 43 years. More than 58% of the confreres under the age of thirty come from Africa or South Asia. This fact also influences the shift in the cultural-linguistic centre of gravity: more than half of the confreres in formation (including the quinquennium) speak English.⁷ In 2002 the majority of newly professed were still from America and Europe, but in 2020 already three quarters of the newly professed are from Asia and Africa.⁸

The average number of Salesians in the communities over the last thirty years has remained unchanged in Asia and Africa at 7.3 religious per presence. In America and Europe, however, the number has dropped from 9.6 in 1990 to 7.6 in 2020.⁹ Moreover, almost 40% of these confreres are already over 70 years of age (in the Mediterranean region, the percentage of those over 70 is even higher, at 52%).¹⁰ The division of responsibilities is a more complex phenomenon when it comes to the numerical consistency of communities. We merely note that the statistics show that there are 13,849 Salesians dedicated full-time to educative and pastoral works and 13,063 part-time in one of them.¹¹ To be added to this is the work of almost 2,000 rectors and economers

5 Cf. SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES, *Data and Statistics. 28th General Chapter*; Salesian headquarters, Rome 2020, 27.

6 Cf. *I flussi migratori dei sacerdoti tra i continenti. Nota dell'Ufficio centrale di Statistica della Chiesa* (05 July 2019), in osservatoreromano.va/it/news/i-flussi-migratori-dei-sacerdoti-tra-i-continenti.

7 Cf. M. BAY, *Giovani Salesiani e accompagnamento. Risultati di una ricerca internazionale*, LAS, Rome 2018, 35.

8 Cf. *Data and statistics, 28th General Chapter*, 18.

9 Cf. *Ibid.*, 83.

10 Cf. *Ibid.*, 26.

11 Cf. *Ibid.*, 95.

(bursars, treasurers...) of communities and commitments outside the community that are not reported. In addition, the confreres who do not dedicate themselves fully to educational work because of age, health or because they are still in initial formation should not be taken into consideration. If we add up the numbers, we find that confreres with multiple roles is a widespread phenomenon. The consequence is that people are overloaded with work and that relative importance is given to institutional and educational roles, following the principle of the “possible” rather than the “ideal”.

The trend of multiple roles is visible in the growth of works at a time of decrease and ageing of Salesian personnel. In the period from 2002 to 2020, the number of work categories increased. Schools have been growing worldwide by about one fifth, both in terms of structures and number of young people attending them. While the number of Salesian and lay staff in vocational schools remains constant, new courses of study are being opened and even more young people are being accepted (around 35%) without taking into account the new services of continuing vocational training and adult education. There was an increase of 600 parishes in the 18 years studied: the number of ad personam parishes has decreased, while the number of parishes in mission territories has increased. Services for marginalised young people have increased both in terms of the presence of Salesians (full and part-time) and in terms of structures. The number of festive and daily oratories has doubled, while the number of youth centres has remained the same. The number of those attending youth centres has dropped by almost half.¹²

¹² Cf. *Statistical Data, 28th General Chapter*, 97-226

Salesians in different works and activities

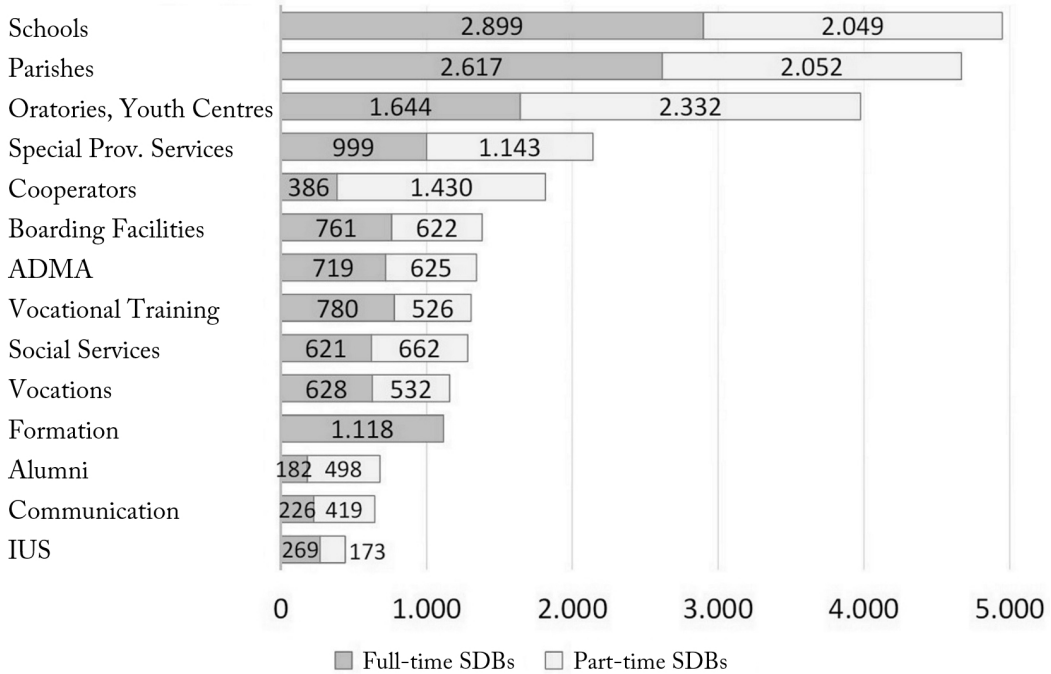


Figure G: Salesians involved in various educative and pastoral works

As we can see from Figure G, the greatest number of Salesians in 2019 were engaged in schools, which would seem to confirm a “traditional” choice of valuing school environments. However, if one frames the situation of personnel by adding the members of the Salesian Family, it would seem that the work par excellence on the basis of numbers must be the parish, where more than 15,000 of them are engaged. In second place are the oratories/youth centres with 9,000 and in third place are schools, with a total number approaching 8,000. Rather than being a charismatic force, parishes seem to be the weakest work from the point of view of Salesian identity. They are not represented by a person dedicated to them at the level of the Youth Ministry Sector and are more linked to the “diocesan” mentality that varies from one context to another. The Rector Major points out the deficit of Salesian charismatic identity, mentioning phenomena such as “the frequent abandonment of religious life in favour of parish priestly life, the

easy take-over of parishes by Institutes, which are considered by them as places of refuge and recycling rather than real mission centres.”¹³

The essential strengthening of Salesian identity indicated in the Report on the State of the Congregation in 2020 is not only bound up with the decentralising effects following Vatican II and do-it-yourself style postmodern individualism. There is also the need, already strongly pointed out by Fr Vecchi in his magisterium,¹⁴ to accompany and form ourselves together with the lay people who are increasingly involved full-time in our works. The challenge applies especially to schools, where on average one full-time Salesian needs to accompany 18 lay people, most of them with an employment contract, and follow around 340 young people on a daily basis. The proportion of young people per Salesian is also similar for the oratory/youth centre, but the difference lies in the more limited collaboration in amount of work and cost involved in employing lay people, whose number is almost double that of the schools. Thanks to smaller institutions, vocational training, on the other hand, seems to be able to offer a more personalised approach, reporting the proportion of 13 lay people and 200 students for every full-time Salesian.¹⁵ Obviously, the numbers are overall averages, so they are approximations that should be further investigated.

In 2020, about 90,000 lay people who do not belong to the Salesian Family are involved in Salesian houses with a contract, two thirds of them as teachers or professors. The remainder are service employees, administrative staff or consultants in works or provinces. The existence of various formation programmes for the laity at the regional, national or provincial level has been developed and consolidated especially in the two regions of the Americas. It is surprising that, despite the strong impetus given by GC24, shared mission and the joint formation of Salesians and laity did not appear among the areas and objectives of the three six-year plans at the Congregational level after 2002. The sharing of mission is an awareness that is slowly maturing in the Congregation, marking an important change in the model of the ecclesiology of communion and the theology of the laity of Vatican II.¹⁶

13 A. MONTAN, *Il religioso presbitero nella Chiesa oggi: attualità, contenuti, prospettiva di un qualificato seminario della CISM*, in Á. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, *Report of the Rector Major to the 28th General Chapter*, 16.

14 Cf. J.E. VECCHI, “For you I study.” (C 14). *The satisfactory preparation of confreres and the quality of our educational work*, in AGC 78 (1997) 361, 3-47.

15 Cf. *Data and statistics, 28th General Chapter*, 97-226.

16 Cf. Á.F. ARTIME, *Report of the Rector Major to the 28th General Chapter. Formation*, [s.e.], [s.l.] 2020, 4.

Benedict XVI and Francis – different but complementary emphases on education

The different intellectual and pastoral backgrounds that characterise the two most recent pontificates are also reflected in their emphasis on education. Benedict XVI, pontiff from 2005 until his resignation in 2013, made the concept of “educational emergency” resonate strongly in his concise and very lucid address to the diocese of Rome on the tasks of education. His brilliant analysis starts by identifying a fracture in the mentality and relations between generations within a culture that paralyses the educational intentions of adults:

There is certainly a strong temptation among both parents and teachers as well as educators in general to give up, since they run the risk of not even understanding what their role or rather the mission entrusted to them is. In fact, it is not only the personal responsibilities of adults or young people, which nonetheless exist and must not be concealed, that are called into question but also a widespread atmosphere, a mindset and form of culture which induce one to have doubt about the value of the human person, about the very meaning of truth and good, and ultimately about the goodness of life. It then becomes difficult to pass on from one generation to the next something that is valid and certain, rules of conduct, credible objectives around which to build life itself.¹⁷

Benedict XVI often described and reflected on the postmodern cultural climate, especially in the West, in his speeches, speaking of shaken foundations and a lack of essential certainties, but he did not close himself off from criticism: the difficulties are interpreted within the framework of an adventure of freedom for which each generation must make its own decisions. Unlike culture and science,¹⁸ in education there is no accumulation of content and knowledge: “Not even the greatest values of the past can be simply inherited; they must be claimed by us and renewed through an often anguishing personal option.”¹⁹ In its delicate balance with educational discipline, gradual growth

¹⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *Letter to the diocese and city of Rome on the urgent task of education* (21 January 2008), in bit.ly/vatican-va-2008-01-21.

¹⁸ Benedict XVI makes a profound interpretation of the transformation of the Christian faith-hope pair into the modern synthesis of reason-freedom in a journey from Bacon to Marx in the Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, nos. 16-23.

¹⁹ BENEDICT XVI, *Letter to the diocese and city of Rome*.

in freedom is placed in a relational context of educational authority for Pope Benedict. It is the fruit of experience and competence that is acquired above all through the consistency of one's own life and personal involvement, an expression of true love. Authentic Christian education is placed between two theological virtues: it starts with *charity*, which by giving closeness and trust creates the conditions for authoritative education, and it is nourished by reliable hope, the soul of education that overcomes the crisis of confidence in life. The Pope brought his synthesis to a conclusion with references to the Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, stating that God

... alone is the hope that withstands every disappointment; his love alone cannot be destroyed by death; his justice and mercy alone can heal injustices and recompense the suffering experienced. Hope that is addressed to God is never hope for oneself alone, it is always also hope for others; it does not isolate us but renders us supportive in goodness and encourages us to educate one another in truth and in love.²⁰

While Benedict XVI focused more on the theological foundations of Christian hope, Pope Francis takes up the theme from a more pastoral point of view, saying “Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope”,²¹ encouraging the men and women of our time to face social change positively, immersing themselves in reality with the light radiating from the promise of Christian salvation. Emphasis on the merciful face of God is Pope Francis' typical paradigm in education, with a special emphasis on sensitivity to the suffering and marginalised.²² He then develops themes such as the concrete commitment to creation in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the invitation to the young to *no balconear*, that is, to be involved in life, the path of education in conjugal love in *Amoris Laetitia*, and finally an educational and vocational path around the Youth Synod that continues with the Global Educational Pact.

From his criticism of pseudo-education that calms young people down and turns them into domesticated and inoffensive beings, Pope Francis proposes an education that teaches them to think critically and that offers a path to maturity in values, in which young people are called upon to be the protagonists of their own path to growth.²³ While

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), in AAS 105 (2013) 1019-1137, no. 86.

²² Cf. FRANCIS, *Misericordiae Vultus*. Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (11 April 2015), in AAS 107 (2015) 399-420, no. 15.

²³ Cf. FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 60, 64, 106.

Benedict develops the theme of faith-based reasons for education, Francis, bringing his pastoral logic into play, criticises above all “making education something for the elite” that produces an educational divide.²⁴ His proposals start from a Church as a “field hospital” that brings into play the logic of closeness and mercy with rejected and excluded young people, going on to rethink Catholic universities in their mission to evangelise different cultures in the contemporary multicultural scene:

Ecclesiastical studies cannot be limited to passing on knowledge, professional competence and experience to the men and women of our time who desire to grow as Christians, but must also take up the urgent task of developing intellectual tools that can serve as paradigms for action and thought, useful for preaching in a world marked by ethical and religious pluralism. To do so calls not only for profound theological knowledge, but also the ability to conceive, design and achieve ways of presenting the Christian religion capable of a profound engagement with different cultural systems.²⁵

There is, of course, no shortage of readings that interpret the pontificates of John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis in terms of discontinuity, reinforcing the opposition between conservatives and progressives. The interpretations of the recent pontificates, with the associated ideas about Vatican II, are the tip of the iceberg of very complex postmodern dynamics. More than the actual differences between the pontificates, the research indicates that opposition is largely the result of the communication dynamics of the third millennium – the intertwining of the post-truth paradigm, social media and the algorithmic processing of search engines.²⁶ This and the educational effects of new media are briefly addressed in the next section.

²⁴ Cf. J. BERGOGLIO, *Scegliere la vita*, Bompiani, Milan 2013, 94-95 and POPE FRANCIS, *La mia scuola*, ed. F. De Giorgi, La Scuola, Brescia 2014.

²⁵ FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* on ecclesiastical universities and faculties (27 December 2017), in AAS 110 (2018) 1-41, no. 5.

²⁶ Cf. e.g. B.B. HAWKS – S. UZUNOĞLU, *Polarization, Populism and the New Politics. Media and Communication in a Changing World*, Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle upon Tyne 2019; S. FLAXMAN – S. GOEL – J.M. RAO, *Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption*, in “Public Opinion Quarterly” 80 (2016) S1, 298–320; M.X. DELLI CARPINI – F.L. COOK – L.R. JACOBS, *Public Deliberation, Discursive Participation, and Citizen Engagement. A Review of the Empirical Literature*, in “Annual Review of Political Science” 7 (2004) 1, 315–344.

Digital as tool, space and symbol of a generation

The late or postmodern notion of the human being further emphasises the basic tendencies of the previous era: extreme freedom of choice, cognitive empiricism and ethical pragmatism. In the third millennium, the human being would be an indefinite potentiality that is self-created through his or her own choices to the point of complete self-determination. Starting from the most common small choices in experiences of leisure, expression, relationships, one arrives at the logic of choice of competences that an individual implements in the course of education or formation. This can happen to the extent of wanting to change the culture to which one belongs, one's gender identity, or, *in extremis*, even choose non-existence if reality does not correspond to one's expectations.

The postmodern cultural context is thus imbued with philosophical *nihilism* (there is nothing stable, true and valid), ethical *relativism* (the individual is beyond good and evil) and anthropological *genderism* (oscillating between gender choice and unisex procedures). In addition to the potential multiplicity of choices, there is the paralysing effect of an avalanche of empirical studies and the methodologies derived from them on the small aspects of life. The fragmentary nature of this pragmatic empiricism eventually leads the majority of people to adopt a paradoxical standardisation of lifestyles, sweetened with apparent trivial personalisations: I can choose the background image of the screen but not the data that the system collects and shares about me with third parties and for profit. With the conditioning of the digital world, there is a risk of closing in on a cognitive bubble based on preferences, creating algorithmic consumers.²⁷ Obviously, the effects of new media are strongest on the new generation of young people, called *iGen* as opposed to the *xGen* who grew up with the television of the 1980s and 1990s. Psychology researcher Jean Marie Twenge outlines ten interesting characteristics of the young people of the third millennium:

- *immaturity* (childhood prolonged beyond adolescence);
- *internet* (online activity as a universal pastime);
- *incorporeity* (decline in personal social interactions);
- *insecurity* (crisis of mental health);
- *irreligiosity* (the loss of religious and spiritual reference points);
- *insulation* (emphasis on security and not on community involvement);
- *income insecurity* (the precarious nature of work models);

²⁷ Cf. The interesting study by M.S. GAL – N. ELKIN-KOREN, *Algorithmic Consumers*, in “Harvard Journal of Law & Technology” 30 (2017) 2, 1-45 which shows how algorithms not only affect cognition but also have important economic and social implications.

- *indefiniteness* (fluid identity in sexuality, marriage and procreation);
- *inclusivity* (the tendency to accept differences and minorities);
- *independence* (at the level of political convictions).²⁸

Salesian Fabio Pasqualetti offers an interesting reading of the dynamics of continuity among the latest generations of young people. What lies at the heart of today's society is the importance of spectacle. The aspects of beauty, harmony, truthfulness, ethics or coherence are secondary or not considered; what is important is the impact: "The pragmatism and hedonism found in many adult behaviours reveals a renunciation of taking responsibility. All this before the advent of the use of the net."²⁹ I think it is legitimate to see the current communications revolution in the light of other communications revolutions in history: from oral to written, from written to Gutenberg's printing. Each change does not cancel out the previous one, but integrates it into a new synthesis that will have to manage the flow of information, conversations and 'texts'. Before, there were management systems such as libraries, private collections, scientific communities with their journals, indexes of banned books, *samizdat*, and a whole economic and management system around publishing houses. Now, in the digital era there are algorithmic indexing (e.g. Google), robot censorship, digital collections, collections of user ratings, collaborative projects like Wikipedia, fake news misinformation, hidden or illegal content on the dark web...

The parallels pointed out twenty years ago by international economist James Dewar are interesting: the changes in the digital age may be as dramatic as those in Gutenberg's printing press, which contributed significantly to the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern era. The digital future will be dominated by unintended consequences, as in the printing age; it will take decades before the full effects of the digital age are seen. While events happen faster nowadays and information is almost immediate, the deep dynamics of network development will last decades, because they are linked to human and (inter)generational learning rhythms. Despite the rhetoric of rapid change, significant and permanent cultural change happens at its own non-rapid pace, as emerges from an interesting study on parallels in communication revolutions in history.³⁰

²⁸ Cf. J.M. TWENGE, *iGen. Why Today's Super-Connected Kids are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood and What That Means for the Rest of Us*, Atria Books, New York 2017.

²⁹ Cf. F. PASQUALETTI, *Dietro le quinte della rete*, in M. VOJTÁŠ – P. RUFFINATTO (eds.), *Giovani e scelte di vita: Prospettive educative*. Acts of the International Congress organised by the Pontifical Salesian University and the Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences at the *Auxilium* Rome, 20-23 September 2018, LAS, Rome 2019, 84.

³⁰ Cf. J.A. DEWAR, *The information age and the printing press: Looking backward to see ahead*, Rand, Santa Monica CA 1998.

As Salesians we had the experience of the first generation growing up around the middle of the nineteenth century, and of the transition from an oral communication culture in rural life to a city culture of the printed word. Teaching literacy was the driving force of Salesian schools, adapting a classical high school model with attention to modernity, and Salesian publishers found management models that combined the dissemination of books to low-income populations with the preparation of skilled typographers and bookbinders. Similar attention will be needed for the transition from the culture of the printed word to the visual and interactive culture of digital expression. For now it would seem that Salesians are present in the digital world (with mixed fortunes), but not yet with a model that successfully combines education and digital media production.

There is no lack of documents in the Salesian Congregation referring to the mission of social communication, some of them already at the beginning of the third millennium, such as the “Social Communication Handbook” that came out under Fr Martinelli’s coordination.³¹ The first document to take digital culture seriously was the Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez’s Letter in 2005 entitled *With the courage of Don Bosco on the new frontiers of social communication*.³² The letter takes up some of the previous suggestions and proposes a change of mentality (which has not yet taken place) by reintroducing Fr Viganò’s 1981 proposal, which envisaged formation in social communication for Salesians on three levels: a *general basic* level, another for *animators*, educative and pastoral workers, and one for preparation of *specialist* preparation. Twenty years after Viganò’s suggestion, Fr Vecchi had insisted on the need for preparation, writing about its urgency: “The only useful road ahead is through formation. The new literacy, that is, the ability to read and write in the culture of the media affects everyone, and in so far as it concerns the faith it affects all believers. How much more then should it be of interest to educators and evangelisers!”³³

It seems that the interventions on communication over the last forty years have followed a typical Salesian double approach: one of general exhortation on principles, and then concrete but partial steps in response to problematic situations which require

31 Cf. DICASTERO PER LA COMUNICAZIONE SOCIALE, *Manuale per la comunicazione sociale*, SDB, Roma 2005. See also DIREZIONE GENERALE OPERE DON BOSCO - SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT, *Salesian Social Communication System: Guidelines for the Salesian Congregation*, SDB, Rome 2011.

32 Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *With the courage of Don Bosco on the new frontiers of social communication*, in AGC 86 (2005) 390, 3-46.

33 J.E. VECCHI, *Communication in the Salesian mission* “They were astonished beyond measure. He has done all things well”, in CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *With the courage of Don Bosco*, 43.

immediate attention. A further need for formation seems to concern the use of social media by Salesians. In 2014, the Social Communications Department published the document on *Advice for the use of social media*, taking its inspiration from the documents of the German Episcopal Conference, offering prudent and transparent guidelines for use of the Internet and social networks at an individual, community and institutional level.³⁴

Young adults and IUS as a new field of action

Over the last thirty years there has been a strong growth in Salesian Institutions of Higher Education (IUS). There are several factors behind the Salesian investment in tertiary education. There is the general growth of university institutions in the world, driven by the needs of post-industrial society, and there is the sensitivity of the Salesian Family in accompanying the growth of young people, who need longer rhythms of maturation than in previous eras. Given the history of the development of the IUS network, it seems appropriate to outline two sets of motivations.³⁵ The first one comes from the educative and pastoral needs of young people; the second responds to the needs of Salesian education. As a consequence, both are inspired by reflections with different emphases.

The final decades of the last century were characterised in the West by the possibility for young people from low-income family backgrounds to access higher education. The university was no longer seen as an area for a privileged few, but as an environment for a large proportion of young people. In addition, “youth” was being extended in terms of age range and the term “young adult” (in the 18-28 age group) was introduced to refer to people recognised legally as adults who were still in the process of maturing and being educated.³⁶ Particularly in the European context, the Salesians of Don Bosco were developing reflections on the pastoral care of young university students from the 1980s onwards, while towards the end of the millennium, attention began to be paid to Salesian Institutions of Higher Education that had emerged in other contexts. In this process we

³⁴ Cf. F. GONZÁLEZ, *Presence in social networks* in AGC 97 (2016) 423, 33-42.

³⁵ Cf. M. OLMOS, *Origen y desarrollo de las Instituciones Salesianas de Educación Superior. Visión crítica del proceso histórico de las IUS*, in M. FARFÁN (ed.), *Carisma salesiano y educación superior*, Editorial Universitaria Abya-Yala, Quito 2019, 21-44.

³⁶ CG22 (1984) states in no. 71 that “it is important not to stop at adolescence... but to go beyond it, towards youth, where interesting cultural and religious phenomena are taking place at this time.”

can recognise a typical Salesian way of proceeding: first the needs of the young are met, then different programmes and projects are experimented with and finally institutional solutions are clarified.

Juan Edmundo Vecchi, in his role as Councillor for Youth Ministry and later as Rector Major, is one of the central figures in the animation and thinking of Salesian higher education. In 1988 he tackled the theme “Salesians and pastoral work among university students” for the first time in a non-systematic way, organising a meeting at European level.³⁷ It was noted that “the focus for now is almost entirely on pastoral care for university students. This pastoral action is carried out in university hostels/residences (over twenty), in some chaplaincies, and less so in university clubs or circles. No importance seems to be given to the university world in overall youth ministry.”³⁸ The concluding remarks of the meeting provide some summaries and motivations for Salesian pastoral work in the “university world”:

- the age of youth has been prolonged;
- university studies have become accessible to young people from the working classes;
- university students are increasingly dropping out and at risk;
- the education of university students is required by the principle of continuity;
- the university is the privileged place for the formation of leaders.

Among the forms of unease or new forms of poverty among university students, there are essentially two sets of problems. The first is relational: being left to themselves, individualism, being uprooted, the anonymity of university environments, the crisis of participatory bodies. The second set revolves around the problematic aspects of the university as such: the economic-instrumental reduction of culture, strong competitiveness which induces fear of failure, an uncertain employment future....³⁹ As responses to the situation, the organisers of the meeting pointed to the promotion of a pedagogy of the environment and a pedagogy of personal accompaniment. This is also the context for the psychologically-based orientation project developed by Umberto Fontana in the early 1990s,⁴⁰ whereas Carlo Nanni’s proposal went beyond a purely

³⁷ Cf. J.E. VECCHI, *Presentazione*, in C. NANNI (ed.), *Salesiani e pastorale tra gli universitari*, SDB, Rome 1988, 5-7.

³⁸ *Sintesi conclusiva*, in NANNI (ed.), *Salesiani e pastorale tra gli universitari*, 162-163.

³⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 40-41.

⁴⁰ Cf. U. FONTANA – G. PICCOLBONI (eds.), *Costruiamo un professionista. L’esperienza di Costagrande*, Mazziana, Verona 1993 and U. FONTANA, *L’orientamento universitario*, in “Rassegna CNOS” 10 (1994) 1, 57-61.

reactive mentality with respect to needs. He proactively envisaged pastoral care among university students as a privileged field for vocational pastoral activity.⁴¹

Just as the model of pastoral activity among university students seemed to prevail in Europe for sociological and cultural reasons, so did the Universities or Salesian Institutions of Higher Education develop in Latin America. Context, legislation and opportunities favoured the emergence of universities that met the general population's demand for greater professionalisation. Juan Vecchi says of the IUS that "in the beginning, the main focus was on organising the service to create opportunities for higher education in the popular sector and to occupy available cultural spaces."⁴² Having started out with an academic proposal structured at the level of the environment, Vecchi now pointed out the challenge of forming professionally, pastorally and 'Salesianly' qualified teams capable of creating alternative proposals to those of the dominant mentality: "Having made the initial organisational effort that such initiatives require, it is now time to tackle cultural and pastoral qualification, decisively and communally, starting with the preparation of confreres and lay people."⁴³ The recent development of colleges in South Asia (India), conceived of as higher education structures dedicated to the professionalisation of young people from rural and low-income sectors, has moved along similar lines of proposal and attention.

Another type of higher education has emerged around the formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco, at the level of ideas but also at the level of mentality, which then structures projects, curricula and implicit educational models. This is particularly evident in the IUS, developing with more or less continuity from a philosophical or theological study centre aimed at the formation of Salesians. The evolution of the need to qualify Salesians with higher studies culminated in the aforementioned letter by Fr Vecchi, *For you I study* in 1997, in which he makes reference to the establishment of the IUS network.⁴⁴ These are explicitly placed in the context of the formation of a "new type of Salesian" who corresponds to the demands of the "new evangelisation" and the "new education." Fr Vecchi asked for close cooperation between the IUS and the provinces, in view of a

⁴¹ Cf. C. NANNI, *Offerte salesiane agli universitari*, in NANNI (ed.), *Salesiani e pastorale tra gli universitari*, 45.

⁴² J.E VECCHI, "For you I study" (C 14). *The satisfactory preparation of confreres and the quality of our educational work*, in AGC 78 (1997) 361, 43.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

⁴⁴ Cf. J.E VECCHI, *A service for Salesian university institutions*, in AGC 79 (1998) 362, 97-99.

new educational model of culturally prepared Salesians capable of discerning, animating, guiding and accompanying.⁴⁵

Starting from these ideal references, the IUS institutes, not conceived exclusively for the formation of Salesian religious but also at the service of the younger generations, have a vast potential for disseminating thought and action and “must define their orientation in line with their Catholic character and educative philosophy in harmony with Salesian criteria, making themselves centres for the formation of persons and the elaboration of culture of Christian inspiration”, overcoming the temptation to yield to the dominant mentality. Hence the need and urgency to “confront decisively and at community level, the cultural and pastoral qualification beginning with the preparation of confreres and lay people.”⁴⁶

Post-industrial education and transformational leadership

The postmodern context has obviously also influenced the pedagogical concepts of the third millennium. There is a need, in the uncertain and ever-changing VUCA world, to form personalities that are flexible, capable of adapting, rethinking things, and who have a set of differentiated skills at their disposal. There is also a need for adults to have a clear identity based on ethical and virtuous attitudes and expressed through a personal vision-mission. The linear and technical planning proposals of the 1980s (including Salesian ones) inspired by management by objectives no longer seem to correspond to the context and the vital world of the new generations.⁴⁷

Differentiated competences are expressed in different ways where pedagogy is concerned. One of the most popular theories is the theory of ‘multiple intelligences’ developed by Howard Gardner, who proposes an education that revolves around the triad of the true, beautiful and good. There are different types of intelligence with the potential to develop a flexibility that can be used in the study of very specific subjects as well as in the study of general human issues.⁴⁸ Then there is Edgar Morin’s perspective of “complex thinking” that interconnects individual pieces of knowledge in a reasoned stance with respect to

⁴⁵ Cf. VECCHI, “*For you I study*”, 17-18.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 40 and 44.

⁴⁷ Cf. M. VOJTÁŠ, *Pedagogia salesiana della scelta e della vocazione. Evoluzioni, riletture, proposte*, in M. VOJTÁŠ – P. RUFFINATTO (eds.), *Giovani e scelte di vita: Prospettive educative*. Acts of the International Congress organised by the Pontifical Salesian University and the Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences, *Auxilium* Rome, 20-23 September 2018, LAS, Rome 2019, 347-382.

⁴⁸ Cf. H. GARDNER, *Truth, Beauty, and Goodness Reframed: Educating for the Virtues in the Age of Truthiness and Twitter*, Basic Books, New York 2011 and ID., *Sapere per comprendere. Discipline di studio e discipline della mente*, Feltrinelli, Milan 2009.

the totality of reality. This unfinished thought moves within the boundaries between scientific knowledge, beliefs, practical knowledge and evidence of not-knowing, thus escaping both the exemplifications of functionalist positivism and the tragic paralysis of the search for an impossible synthesis.⁴⁹

The positions of Gardner and Morin revolve around the problematic nature of knowledge in the postmodern era. Other authors differ from them by moving along procedural rather than gnoseological paths, proposing new ways of learning. Donald Schön develops a concept of ‘reflection in action’, which is especially evocative in complex professions such as the educator, teacher, consultant or psychologist. Educational activity is not seen as a mechanical sequence of programmed activities but as a constant dialogue of negotiation between people, and a mediation between ultimate aims, implicit and explicit projects and intuitions. Schön’s focus on process is further developed in the 1990s by Jack Mezirow, who proposes a transformative model of learning. The educational relationship is theorised as counselling or mentoring about deep questions that require a critical examination of underlying social, psychological and epistemological assumptions.⁵⁰ Transformation theory also influences the organisational field, where Noel Tichy and Mary Devanna propose transformational leadership, with further developments proposed by Otto Scharmer who develops the concept of spiritually profound transformation.⁵¹

Reacting to modern individualism, some educationalists advance theories that value social and community variables in learning. Salesian Mario Comoglio, an acknowledged expert in cooperative learning in Italy, follows in the wake of the thinking developed by Kurt Lewin and Morton Deutsch, offering a model of pro-positive interdependence relationships in group learning. His proposal develops the themes of sharing the learning objective as a driving factor, the potential of the group, proactive social competences, the analysis of inner motivations, self-esteem or mental health by addressing fears and anxieties in learning.⁵² Étienne Wenger’s proposal of the “community of practice”, moves in a similar direction, valuing shared social practices that, in addition to fostering

49 Cf. E. MORIN, *Educare per l’era planetaria. Il pensiero complesso come metodo di apprendimento nella condizione umana di errore e incertezza*, Armando, Rome 2004.

50 Cf. J. MEZIROU et al., *Fostering Critical reflection in adulthood. A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco 1990 and Id., *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco 1991.

51 Cf. C.O. SCHARMER, *Theory U. Leading from the Future as it Emerges. The Social Technology of Presencing*, SoL, Cambridge MA 2007

52 Cf. G. CHIOSSO, *I significati dell’educazione. Teorie pedagogiche e della formazione contemporanee*, Mondadori, Milan 2009, 169-172 appreciating the work of M. COMOGLIO – M.A. CARDOSO, *Insegnare e apprendere in gruppo. Il Cooperative Learning*, LAS, Rome 1996.

the learning of knowledge and skills, build the identity of a community of practice that goes beyond the simple project team united only around the task.⁵³

Alasdair MacIntyre initiated another current of pedagogical thinking with an emphasis on ethical character education. For example, David Carr's proposal shows that liberal perspectives are not sufficient to ground the morality of social and democratic life. His virtue ethics goes beyond the logic of rights alone, proposing both particular and general principles independent of community-based and constructivist perspectives.⁵⁴ The study of virtues and habits also extends to the field of educational planning, balancing the technicality of the previous era with ethical, community and servant leadership.⁵⁵

What kind of youth emerges from the 2018 Synod

Third millennium trends among young people and related ecclesial reflection emerged at the Synod of Bishops on "Young people, the faith and vocational discernment." We want to explore, in this section, the image of young people and the Salesian Family as it emerged around the event of the Synod, rather than the complex evolution of thought that went on between the Preparatory Document, the *Instrumentum laboris*, the Final Document of the pre-synodal meeting, the Final Document of the General Assembly of Bishops and the Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*.

A significant novelty of the synod was dialogue through an online questionnaire sent out to young people from all over the world during the preparatory phase of the work. The aim was to "give virtually every person between the ages of 16 and 29, wherever they are in the world, the chance to tell their story and make their own contribution to the Synod's journey."⁵⁶ In fact, the questionnaire allowed opinions and states of mind to be freely expressed through open questions, with the possibility of making requests and proposals in view of the preparation of the *Instrumentum laboris*. The second

⁵³ Cf. E. WENGER, *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998; E. WENGER – R. McDERMOTT – W.M. SNYDER, *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, Harvard Business School, Boston MA 2002.

⁵⁴ D. CARR, *The moral roots of citizenship. Reconciling principle and character in citizenship education*, in "Journal of Moral Education" 35 (2006) 4, 443-456.

⁵⁵ Cf. VOJTÁŠ, *Progettare e discernere*, 152-161.

⁵⁶ Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Il mondo delle nuove generazioni attraverso il questionario online. The world of new generations according to the online questionnaire*, ed. Osservatorio Giovani dell'Istituto Toniolo, LEV, Città del Vaticano 2018, 4.

motivation of the questionnaire, that of providing a portrait of the reality of young people in the various areas of the world, was only partially achieved due to the digital divide and only partial participation by entire areas, such as North America.⁵⁷

The majority (over 70%) of the young people taking part in the survey saw themselves as responsible, able to relate positively to others, and at a cognitive level saw themselves as empathetic, capable of critical thinking and with dreams to be realised. The competences that appeared to be less developed were conflict management, positive self-perception and leadership. Leaving aside differences by continent or gender, the image of the future is linked to professional fulfilment (a stable job in accordance with one's aptitudes), then comes the family (having one's own family and children). Towards the end comes a commitment to social transformation combined with distrust of institutions.⁵⁸ At the religious level, following God is associated with the concepts of 'life', 'truth', 'salvation' and 'father' with very close percentages. It is interesting to note that the term 'happiness' is highest in Latin America and lowest in Europe, where the concept of 'doubt' appears more frequently.⁵⁹ In the responses on associations/groups with the central concept of "vocation", indications of continuity and discontinuity with the previous era emerge. Although personal fulfilment through a life project, which includes a dimension of service, is still important, the discontinuity with the post-Vatican II period can be seen in the increased importance of faith, the gift of self and a lesser importance of anti-authoritarian issues linked to fear or constraint.⁶⁰

Interesting insights into self-perception were subsequently offered by the final pre-synodal youth document. Clearly, like the online questionnaire, this was a representation of young people in contact with the Church, not of the whole world of youth. Nevertheless, it is stimulating to read the pre-synodal document as it unfolds in terms of thematic cornerstones: 1. The need for a supportive, edifying, authentic and accessible *community* as a place for growth; 2. Joy and the sacred responsibility of *accompanying* the young in their journey of faith in Jesus and in vocational discernment; 3. The request for an *authentic* Church that promotes the active involvement of the young; 4. *Concretisation*: places, initiatives and tools.⁶¹

57 Cf. *Ibid.*, 7.

58 Cf. *Ibid.*, 9-19.

59 Cf. *Ibid.*, 36-40.

60 *Ibid.*, 43.

61 SYNOD OF BISHOPS XV ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY "Young people, the faith and vocational discernment", Pre-synodal meeting. Final document, Rome 19-24 March 2018, in bit.ly/synod-va-2018.

At the Salesian level, the conference on “Young people and life choices” was significant. It was held a few weeks before the General Assembly of Bishops. The addresses on the specific details of the different worlds of youth in the various continents made it possible to become aware of their characteristics. Here are some of the most stimulating:

- a digital selfish, individualistic and consumerist culture;
- an emphasis on vocational education in Africa and Latin America;
- the need for empowerment of young people in Asia, characterised by “hope and despair”;
- the dilemmas between the slavery of fashion and a home-made religiosity in Europe or a Latin American “Catholicism in my own way”;
- the need to overcome a socially disengaged false non-confrontation.⁶²

Franco Garelli’s interpretation of the research among Salesian pastoral workers proposes a range of pairs characterising the ambivalence of the worlds of youth:

young people are described as: more *cheerful* than *optimistic*, more *sociable* than *willing*, more *curious* than *interested*, more *active* than *confident*; and parallel to this, they appear more *courageous* than *strong* (able to react to difficulties), more *open* than *profound* (and “believing”), more *generous* than *reflective*; the last place assigned to coherence seems to be the clearest sign of an ambivalent condition, typical of individuals who struggle to put their choices and life agenda in order.⁶³

Reading the interviews helps us understand how we speak about young people (communicatively), but how we “read” the Salesian soul (meta-communicatively).⁶⁴ In spite of all the limitations of selective research, which however does not weaken the most authentic aspect, the tendency of Salesians (men and women) is to look at the young people of today in overall positive terms while noting many tensions and contradictions in them. This is not so much a “bleeding heart” or “naive” view of the condition of young people as it is a “mature” reading of the younger generations that seems to be supported by experience and educational practice. The image that emerges in this comprehensive work is not that of an “abstract” and “generalised” subject, but of young people “in

⁶² Cf. M. VOJTÁŠ – P. RUFFINATTO (eds.), *Giovani e scelte di vita: Prospettive educative*. Acts of the International Congress organised by the Pontifical Salesian University and the Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences, *Auxilium* Rome, 20-23 September 2018, LAS, Rome 2019, 31-201.

⁶³ Cf. F. GARELLI, *Presentazione della ricerca “Giovani e scelte di vita” e conclusioni*, in VOJTÁŠ – RUFFINATTO (eds.), *Giovani e scelte di vita*, 190.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 199.

the flesh” who meet in Salesian houses. Garelli confirms the typical trait of Salesian discernment, which is not located in objective sociological readings, but is rather the fruit “of a daily verification, the object of continuous and lasting verification in the ordinary dynamics of life and the educational relationship.”⁶⁵

Pedagogical guidelines from Rome at the turn of the millennium

Domènec and the syntheses of the Frame of Reference (1998 and 2000)

The Rector Major, Pascual Chávez Villanueva, summarises the situation in the educative and pastoral field at the beginning of the 1990s, with the subsequent emergence of the *Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference*, as follows: “there was an extraordinarily rich and sound heritage of reflection and practice on Salesian pastoral action, and the need was felt to have a complete overall view, and to bring together, in a structured and shared synthesis, the fundamental guidelines so as to facilitate their personal assimilation and provide directives for the praxis. The Youth Ministry Department tried to respond to this need by offering the Provinces and the communities a guidance manual, and in these years providing a systematic process of pastoral formation, in particular for those confreres with responsibilities for animation and government, insisting on certain key issues to be borne in mind.”⁶⁶

In fact, after GC24 (1996), which deepened reflection on communion and shared responsibility with lay people, closely linked to the theme of the EPCP, the new Rector Major, Juan Vecchi, expressed the need for “a spiritual frame of reference which, with the ‘grace of unity’ accompanying Salesian apostolic consecration helps to translate the exertions of knowledge and action into an experience of life in the Spirit. We have often said that spirituality, pastoral work and pedagogy must be united in the mind and in life: the road to sanctity, pastoral commitment, and the education of the young and of people

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁶⁶ P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, “*And he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length*” (Mk 6:4). *Salesian Youth Ministry*, in AGC 91 (2010) 407, 20.

in general.”⁶⁷ The two terms of office (1996-2008) of Antonio Domènech’s leadership were marked by the commitment to make the Salesian model of youth ministry a new mentality through special formation meetings for provincial leaders in this sector, and the effort to organise the contents in the two editions of *Salesian Youth Ministry. Basic Frame of Reference*. The Councillor’s way of animating the two action guidelines is to be appreciated, as the second edition of the *Frame of Reference* also reflected the feedback from province teams received during these formation meetings.⁶⁸ The publication is an important step for youth ministry and enables us to grasp some basic choices that have influenced Salesian pedagogy in recent years.

The first edition of the Frame of Reference (1998)

The overview produced by the Youth Ministry Department two years after the 24th General Chapter sought to respond to the need felt by various provinces, communities and individual Salesians to have an overall pastoral vision. There was, therefore, an aspiration to offer a systematic collection of existing proposals. In fact the *Frame of Reference* listed about fifty documents from the last quarter of a century.⁶⁹ The aim was to propose a unified reference framework and some operational criteria to guide pastoral animation.⁷⁰ This was not an easy task, given the amount of material produced over a long period of time and the different purposes for which these items were written. Knowing the background of the document, it is necessary to approach it without expecting that it offers an easy systematisation, follows a straight line of argument or arrives at practical solutions of immediate use.

The publication followed a subdivision into six chapters, aiming to be practical in nature, moving from the most general to the most applied: the fundamental elements of Salesian youth ministry, the SEPP in its dimensions, the EPC and its animation, the different works and services, the animation structures and the methodological guidelines for constructing and verifying the plan. The material produced over the last decades had been brought together in summary form in the various chapters, “offering a synthesis of

⁶⁷ J.E. VECCHI, “For you I study...” (C 14). *The satisfactory preparation of confreres and the quality of our educational work*, in AGC 78 (1997) 361, 37.

⁶⁸ Cf. DICASTERO PER LA PASTORALE GIOVANILE, *La pastorale giovanile salesiana. Quadro di riferimento fondamentale*, SDB, Rome 2000, 7.

⁶⁹ Cf. the list of inspirational documents in YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*, 1998, 11-12.

⁷⁰ Cf. YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*, 1998, 10. The *Frame of Reference* is considered by the Rector Major Pasqual Chávez as an “organic collection” that responds to the “need to have a complete overview and to collect the fundamental guidelines in an organic and shared synthesis”, in CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *Salesian Youth Ministry*, 20.

the fundamental guidelines of Salesian youth ministry, in view of a better assimilation and concrete application in the SEPP.⁷¹ In the following paragraphs we focus on some interesting themes for Salesian pedagogy, such as the dimensions considered in planning, the idea of community and the planning methodology.⁷²

The dilemma of a unified whole and the SEPP's division into dimensions

The second chapter of the Framework, focusing on the foundations of the educative and pastoral project, is structured according to the four dimensions of the division of the second booklet produced on the SEPP published in 1979, but removing the community area, since the identity and animation of the EPC which was the content of that area, was now a separate chapter. In order to see the development and the articulation of the Salesian educative and pastoral proposal in the twenty years from 1979 to 1998 it seems useful to make a comparison of the different types of division into areas introduced in the various Salesian documents.

⁷¹ YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*¹1998, 5.

⁷² We leave aside the analysis of the part on general principles, as they refer to the contents dealt with in Chapter 5, and the part on works because of the particular nature of the elements involved, which in any case refer to aids produced in the early 1980s.

SEPP areas	Oratory criterion	Educative and pastoral service	SEPP areas	Areas of Christian growth	Youth spirituality core themes	SEPP dimensions
<i>Sussidio 2</i> (1979)	<i>Constitutions</i> (1984)	<i>Regulations</i> (1984)	<i>Salesian Youth Ministry</i> (1990)	<i>General Chapter 23</i> (1990)	<i>General Chapter 23</i> (1990)	<i>Frame of Reference</i> (1998-2000)
educative-cultural area	school that prepares for life	participation, education, formation, communication	education and culture	human growth		educative-cultural dimension
evangelisation & catechesis area	parish that evangelises	plan for education to faith	evangelisation	encounter with Jesus Christ	friendship with the Lord Jesus	evangelisation & catechesis dimension
associative area	home that welcomes playground to meet	groups and associations	social growth	involvement in community of believers	ecclesial communion	group experience dimension
vocational area		vocational guidance	vocational guidance	commitment and vocation to transform the world		vocational dimension
			social growth		responsible service	
community area		formation of EPC	EPC			
		preparation of personnel				
					daily life	
	playground to enjoy oneself				joy and optimism	

Figure H: Dimensions, criteria, areas and core concepts of Salesian education

The following are compared in chronological order in Figure H: the five areas of the SEPP proposed in *Sussidio 2* (1979);⁷³ the four features of the oratory criterion established by the *Constitutions* (1984) and the division of articles in the *General Regulations* concerning the SEPP (1984);⁷⁴ the areas of the educative and pastoral project in the book *Salesian Youth Ministry* (1990);⁷⁵ the areas of Christian growth as defined by GC23 (1990) and used in drawing up pathways for education to the faith;⁷⁶ the basic

⁷³ Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Elementi e linee per un progetto, Sussidio 2*, 15.

⁷⁴ Cf. C. 40 and R. 5-10.

⁷⁵ Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Pastorale giovanile salesiana*, SDB, Rome 1990, 63-73.

⁷⁶ Cf. GC23 (1990), nos. 116-118.

core concepts of Salesian youth spirituality, defined by the same Chapter;⁷⁷ and finally, the areas of the Project in *Salesian Youth Ministry. Basic Frame of Reference* (1998).⁷⁸

The four dimensions (education-culture, evangelisation-catechesis, groups and associations, vocation) are found in every document that deals directly with the SEPP. The choice of the *Frame of Reference* to deal with the EPC in a separate chapter brings with it both advantages and disadvantages. The benefit of the choice is the widening of the space and implicit importance given to the EPC, understandable after GC24 which had explored and emphasised the theme of communion in spirit and mission between Salesians and lay people. On the other hand, the collateral risk of the division into two chapters is the mental separation of the project from the community. This leads to the practical and very common consequence, if we consider the projects of the 1990s, of not paying attention to the formation of the EPC within educative and pastoral planning. Another emphasis which appears around 1990, is not reinforced: it is about the service and commitment of young people for the transformation of the world, which GC23 had highlighted both as an area of Christian maturity and as a core concept of Salesian spirituality. The theme of division into dimensions is automatically linked to the need to emphasise integral growth and the systematic unity of all the elements of the Project. The text expresses itself in this regard:

The SEPP, as a mediation of Salesian youth ministry, must express the overall unity of the different objectives, interventions and actions that are mutually intertwined and all oriented towards the same goal, manifesting their concrete complementarity and forming a global unity. This comprehensive, systematic nature of the whole is expressed in the four dimensions of the SEPP.⁷⁹

Unfortunately, the exhortation to ensure the SEPP hangs together as a whole is not accompanied by methodological suggestions that could answer the question of how to achieve this, and the most we find are general expressions such as: bringing about a positive development of the cultural situation of the human group in achieving a synthesis of faith and life; educating to a unified and harmonious personality where the dimensions and aspirations are placed in a hierarchy according to their value; the vocational option is an ever-present dimension, in all the moments, activities and phases of our educative and pastoral activity; the youth group should see how it can be involved

⁷⁷ Cf. GC23 (1990), nos. 158-161. Cf. also FMA-SDB YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENTS, *Salesian Youth Spirituality. A gift of the Spirit to the Salesian Family for the life and hope of all*, [s.e.], Rome 1996.

⁷⁸ Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Quadro di riferimento*, ¹1998, 26-39.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

in Church and society according to its vocational option; educating by socialising can be added to the helpful formula of educating by evangelising etc.⁸⁰

The logic and composition of the second chapter of the SEPP is characterised by the division into four dimensions. Even elements such as the preventive approach to youth at risk, Salesian youth spirituality, the educative style of animation and the Salesian youth movement are, as a consequence, placed in the various dimensions and their multidimensional potential for integration has not been highlighted. The text reveals the paradox of wanting to make the proposal more concrete within the dimensions while at the same time emphasising the need to integrate these dimensions.

The educative and pastoral community in the service of the project

The predominance of a planning approach can be seen both by where the chapter on the EPC is placed and by how its roles are described in terms of their function in the project: “The first fundamental element in the implementation of Salesian youth ministry is the community. A community that involves young people and adults, parents and educators in a family atmosphere, until it can become an experience of Church revealing God’s plan.”⁸¹ Strengthening this argument, it says that “convergence of intentions and beliefs of all those involved” in order to draw up and carry out the project. The problem of analytical division of the project into dimensions, as seen in the previous paragraph, is passed on as a task to be solved at the level of practical convergence of interventions in the community.⁸²

GC24’s emphasis on communion and sharing with lay people is evident in the first two editions of the *Frame of Reference*. Often stated are the active involvement of young people, the participation and formation of parents, and of lay people involved at various levels of responsibility and collaboration. The authors value the contribution of each vocation, the experiential dimension of community life and commitment within the Church and local area, both as a point of aggregation and as a centre of diffusion and agent of transformation.⁸³ In spite of the insistence on a broader and more effective EPC, at times we sense a theoretical background that gives priority to technical planning that needs the community in order to achieve effectiveness. The community, in this sense,

⁸⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 27-38.

⁸¹ DICASTERO PG, *Quadro di riferimento*, ¹1998, 45.

⁸² An inversion of the importance of project vis-a-vis community is only developed in the third edition of the Framework, which describes community life as a characteristic of ecclesial life which is then translated into a community project seen as the realisation of the mission. Cf. YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*, ³2014, 136-137.

⁸³ Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Quadro di riferimento*, ¹1998, 45-48.

is only a “need of the Church”; a “necessary condition for educative activity” which “is a social fact”; it is a consequence of the choices of the “preventive system [...] which requires an environment of participation”; finally, the community is a decisive element of evangelisation seen as “a task” which is realised through the witness and service of the community.⁸⁴

Methodology for drawing up and verifying the SEPP

The last chapter, on methodological guidelines for drawing up and verifying the SEPP, brings the work to conclusion and should be the translation of the previous chapters into a working model. The title itself does not express the aspiration to deal with the planning methodology; it merely offers guidelines and the fact that it is just over five pages worth bears witness to this. The lack of an in-depth examination of the methodological aspect is confirmed on the last page of the book, where it is recommended that “a methodology be devised that favours the participation of all the groups and bodies in the EPC according to their responsibilities and possibilities.”⁸⁵ This leaves the freedom to choose different methodologies, but there is a risk of the EPC going forward without a unifying approach, and falling into the trap of becoming too bureaucratic, or too efficiency-driven depending on the adopted methods. Summing up its content, it can be said that the publication offers planning elements and guidelines summing up the proposals contained in the two booklets from 1978-79.⁸⁶ Further specifications involve:

- planning levels (frame of reference, project, planning, yearly plan, program);
- planning steps (situation analysis, planning, evaluation);
- planning criteria (involvement of everyone, participation by everyone, clarity of points of reference, clarity on levels of participation, constant evaluation);
- the EPC as the subject of the process.⁸⁷

Even when it points out the importance of a methodological approach, for example, when it says that “the journey we embark on together and the methodology adopted are much more important than what is eventually put in writing”,⁸⁸ the *Frame of Reference*

⁸⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 45-46.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁸⁶ Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Progetto Educativo Pastorale. Metodologia, Sussidio 1* and *Id.*, *Elementi e linee, Sussidio 2*.

⁸⁷ Cf. DICASTERO PG, *Quadro di riferimento*, ¹1998, 117-122.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

devotes only a few lines to it, leaving open many other questions that could paralyse the entire pastoral proposal. Let us list some of them. How do we formulate an objective properly so that it adequately expresses a concept and is achievable? Should objectives, action guidelines, criteria, roles, functions be divided by dimensions or not? How is a comprehensive, unified whole created? Which groups within the EPC should participate and intervene at the different levels of the project (house, section, group, person)? Is it always necessary to start “from the top”, i.e. from the reference framework, and work down to the most concrete levels, or is it also advisable to work “from the bottom”, from pilot experiences, best practices? What is the relationship between a program and the project? Is the participation of everyone in Salesian planning a necessary requirement or a point of arrival? What logic is there between the various elements of the project so that appropriate choices can be made in real situations of lack of personnel, motivation, time and other resources? These methodological questions are a sign of the typical impasse between paper and life.⁸⁹

Methodological additions to the second edition of the Framework

Antonio Domènech and his team took some concrete steps to promote a more comprehensive and unified Salesian proposal, ensuring the translation of the *Frame of Reference* in various languages and organising regional courses to help provincial teams to understand it. “Partly as a result of this effort and the experience of the regional courses, the department has put together a set of suggestions to make the text clearer and more precise”⁹⁰ and published the second edition in July 2000. One of the major changes was the moving of the third chapter on the EPC from the section on the “operative model” to the one on “basic elements”. Thus, the community dimension was at least partially affirmed as a fundamental reality, not just a pragmatic and operational one, although it was still seen to come after the SEPP as in the first edition. In the present section we go into the most interesting improvements concerning planning methodology. The proposals are the outcome of the contributions from the provinces, but one can recognise the influences of José Raúl Rojas and his notions of “research and

⁸⁹ For possible answers to these planning dilemmas, see the analysis of the theoretical background of the methods in VOJTÁŠ, *Progettare e discernere*, 113-173.

⁹⁰ YM DEPARTMENT, *Salesian Youth Ministry: A Basic Frame of Reference*, SDB, Rome ²2000, 7

participatory action in and within the community”, as well as those of Jerome Vallabaraj, a scholar of catechetics but also of transformative organisational models.⁹¹

The first interesting operational refinement concerns the framework of the project, which is linked not only with a “statement of principles that define a philosophy of education”,⁹² but with the response “to the questions: Who are we and what are we doing? What do we want to achieve and where do we want to get to?”⁹³ What becomes clear in this regard is the relationship with the concepts of mission, vision and educative proposal that did not appear in the first edition. The publication also offers the desired content within the vision-mission: beneficiaries (those to whom we are sent), convictions and values of the province, the presentation of the concrete mission as a response to their needs, the fundamental criteria for the process and the final goals.⁹⁴

A second improvement concerns the more logical subdivision of the planning phases. The most general phase is the creation of the frame of reference. The second more concrete phase is the educative and pastoral project, and at a more specific level are the annual pastoral plan, overall planning and path to be followed. In the previous edition this specification was missing and there was a risk of confusing the three qualitatively different concrete forms of the annual plan, the programming and the path to be followed.⁹⁵ At the level of the planning stages (situation analysis, working plan and its evaluation) there was not a great deal of further understanding or clarification. There is a tendency towards more precision in management terms, replacing the term “educative and pastoral choices” with the more appropriate and common term “general objectives” in the operational planning stage. At the evaluation stage, the overly precise indications of the first edition are simplified by adding an important focus on process: to verify “whether a genuine educative process has evolved through the different activities (continuity, interaction, new possibilities and resources generated, the involvement of people concerned, etc.).”⁹⁶

91 Cf. J. VALLABARAJ, *Empowering the Young Towards Fullness of Life*, Kristu Jyoti, Bangalore 2003 and E. ALBERICH - J. VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith That Transforms. A Handbook of Fundamental Catechetics*, Kristu Jyoti, Bangalore 2004.

92 DICASTERO PG, *Quadro di riferimento*, ¹1998, 117.

93 YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*, ²2000, 129.

94 Cf. *Ibid.*, 129-130.

95 Cf. *Ibid.*, 131

96 *Ibid.*, 136.

The emblematic task of the EPC as indicated on the final page of the publication, “Think up a method to encourage the participation all the groups and organisations...”,⁹⁷ remains unchanged in concluding the section on methodological approaches. This is referred to in the evaluation of the Rector Major Pascual Chávez Villanueva in 2010, where he affirms the existence of compartmentalisation and raises the methodological question: “More care needs to be given to [...] the model of Salesian Youth Ministry which fosters a more unified and integrated view of the apostolate [...] development of ways of operating which are geared to facing in a positive manner the complexity of the apostolate and to rising above compartmentalisation.”⁹⁸

Holiness, spirituality, evangelisation in Pascual Chávez Villanueva’s magisterium

Picking up the wording of GC25 once more, “God must be our first ‘concern’”,⁹⁹ the Rector Major, Pascual Chávez Villanueva, just elected by the Chapter, expressed his choice of agenda for the next six years through the concept of “holiness”. The concept of holiness was not only a synthesis, but understood comprehensively, was a programme of life, a choice of government and an educative proposal that is translated into the urgency of evangelisation.¹⁰⁰ With this choice, Pascual Chávez concluded a period of thinking since Vatican II. This had started from the reform of the *Congregation* as a whole, in its founding texts as well as in its coordinating structures, and had continued with the reflection on the importance of both the religious and the educative and pastoral *community* during Fr Vecchi’s term of office, to arrive at the importance of the conversion of each person in the Salesian Family.¹⁰¹ It is clearly stated in Fr Chávez’s magisterium that the person, the individual, in his “essential task” of journeying towards

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁹⁸ CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *Salesian Youth Ministry* 2010, 24.

⁹⁹ GC25 (2002), no. 191.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *My dear Salesians, be Saints!*, in AGC 83 (2002) 374, 3-37 and Id, “You are my God, my happiness lies in you alone”, in AGC 84 (2003) 382, 7.

¹⁰¹ In order to reconstruct the hermeneutic context of Fr Chávez’s proposal, it is important to consider the letters of his predecessors, to whom he is connected in his work. CHÁVEZ, *My dear Salesians, be Saints!*, 6.

“the highest goal”, is the subject of the desired change of mentality following Vatican II that is so often evoked and hoped for and so little to be found in the grassroots.¹⁰²

In his agenda-setting letter, Pascual Chávez links up with John Paul II’s *Novo millennio ineunte*, placing at the centre of his reflection the priority and “essential task” of sanctification, which is none other than “the high standard of ordinary Christian living.”¹⁰³ Against the tendency to spiritual superficiality, already denounced by Fr Viganò, the Rector Major asserts a parallelism between charity and holiness: “If we attain this, we shall have attained everything; if we fail to do so, all is lost, as is said of charity [...], the very essence of holiness.”¹⁰⁴ Specifically, the letter presents the individual saints in the Salesian Family as so many “in-depth monographs” of the founder, drawing from them a synthesis of Salesian spirituality which stems from pastoral charity lived in a family spirit and with joy, and then expresses itself through the humility of daily work and the balanced synthesis of work and temperance, taking on the dimension of sacrifice and harmonising contemplation with activity.¹⁰⁵

The priority of holiness casts a different light on some of the key concepts of the post-Vatican II period such as planning, incarnation and *aggiornamento*. Again with reference to the Pope’s programmatic document for the new millennium, he notes that sanctification is primarily a gift of God and his saving initiative, so thinking that the results in this field depend on our ability to do and plan is seen as a temptation. Of course, real collaboration with the divine initiative is necessary but not sufficient, and therefore we are invited to invest all our intelligence and practical resources in our service to the cause of the Kingdom, but we must never forget that “without Christ we can do nothing.”¹⁰⁶

The implications for education seem to echo Paul Albera’s approach when Fr Chávez says (quoting John Paul II) that “holiness is the best guarantee of an efficacious evangelisation, because in it is to be found the most important testimony to offer to young people, the ones for whom you carry out your various activities.”¹⁰⁷ As educators of the young to holiness,¹⁰⁸ Salesians are called upon to update both their educational proposals and their style of presence among young people. In fact, the need to enhance

102 Cf. CHÁVEZ, *My dear Salesians, be Saints!*, 5 and 11.

103 *John Paul II, Novo Millennio Ineunte*, in CHÁVEZ, *My dear Salesians, be Saints!*, 12.

104 CHÁVEZ, *My dear Salesians, be Saints!*, 12.

105 Cf. *Ibid.*, 8-10.

106 JOHN PAUL II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, in CHÁVEZ, *My dear Salesians, be Saints!*, 12.

107 JOHN PAUL II, *Address to participants in the General Chapter*, in GC25 (2002), no. 170.

108 Cf. GC25 (2002), no. 143.

the proposals for a high quality of life which develop a yearning inherent in all young people, is combined with the importance of the educational presence that accompanies the paths followed by individuals, because the paths to holiness are personal.¹⁰⁹ The entire proposal of Salesian youth spirituality found in GC23 is, therefore, re-read in the context of education to holiness, proposed to all. Everyday life, joy, friendship with the Lord, belonging to the Church, apostolic commitment and the presence of Mary Help of Christians are proposed as stages of the unique path to holiness.¹¹⁰

The basic ideas in this important first letter were then once again proposed in a letter a year later “You are my God. My happiness lies in you alone”, which more strongly links the consecration of the Salesians to the educative and pastoral mission. Referring to the last biography of Don Bosco written by Pietro Braido, the Rector Major notes how it was the mission that required the birth of a group of consecrated persons and therefore Salesian religious life was born at the service of the Salesian mission.¹¹¹ However he broadens the link between consecration and mission with a second reverse movement that envisages a *mission that is determined* by Don Bosco’s choice to have educators who are consecrated persons. The Salesian educative and pastoral mission becomes intertwined with the mission of consecrated life to bear witness to the primacy of God and to keep alive the awareness of the fundamental values of the Gospel.¹¹²

Fr Pascual Chávez develops his reflections starting from the central theme of his term of office, the identity of consecrated life after Vatican II,¹¹³ and then outlining a revision of some important concepts for pastoral ministry and education. Analysing the malaise of consecrated life and criticising the liberal model of the same, he denounces a reductive theological interpretation of the principle of the incarnation, which relegates to second place or entirely omits the newness that comes to us from God through the incarnation itself. Wanting to overcome the rigid structures of the past, the liberal idea of religious life held that “renewal must consist in its adaptation to modern times by incorporating what is best in enlightenment, emancipation and human rights. In this way the person came to take centre stage with his awareness, dignity and personal project.”¹¹⁴ The Rector Major

109 Cf. *John Paul II, Novo Millennio Ineunte*, in CHÁVEZ, *My dear Salesians, be Saints!*, 21.

110 Cf. CHÁVEZ, *My dear Salesians, be Saints!*, 22-25.

111 Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, “*You are my God, my happiness lies in you alone*”, in AGC 84 (2003) 382, 6-8.

112 Cf. *Ibid.*, 19 and 26.

113 Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *Testimoni del Dio vivente. Natura e futuro della vita consacrata una visione salesiana*, LEV, Rome 2012.

114 CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, “*You are my God, my happiness lies in you alone*”, 20.

denounces the greatest problem of the “liberal” model, currently in deep crisis, which claims to evangelise modern culture, but instead simply embraces it to the detriment of evangelical choices and values. The consequence is that secularised consecrated persons are transformed by the logic of the world, instead of becoming evangelisers of culture.¹¹⁵

Clearly, these observations have implications for Salesian education and youth ministry. A clear synthesis of them can be found in his 2010 letter on Salesian youth ministry, which takes up the documents of the 26th General Chapter in terms of the educational and evangelising mission.¹¹⁶ The prospects for the future outlined by Pascual Chávez express both a concern for evangelising pastoral ministry, clearly oriented towards the proclamation of Christ and education in the faith, and a focus on the full insertion of evangelisation into the field of education, pursuing the “consistency between the material being transmitted or the methods employed and the values of the Christian faith, in such a way that this informs in an effective manner peoples’ personal, professional and social lives.”¹¹⁷ The area that reveals this faith-culture-life synthesis is vocational growth. Fr Chávez takes up the invitation of GC26: “Today we feel more strongly than ever the challenge of creating a vocational culture in every setting, such that young people may discover life as a call and that all Salesian ministry may be truly vocational”¹¹⁸ and adds that the best youth ministry does not awaken apostolic and consecrated vocations without giving specific attention to an explicit vocational call, to a decisive personal proposal, to constant spiritual accompaniment.¹¹⁹

The spiritual reminders of the urgency of evangelisation, the principle of modelling and the drive towards holiness would seem to be distant echoes of Fr Albera’s “heavenly pedagogy”. There are, however, other aspects of Fr Chávez’s magisterium that demonstrate his attention to contemporary issues, including attention to new forms of poverty and human rights. The integration of the two poles of his magisterium (consecration - mission) also emerges in the letter of convocation of the GC26. Fr Chávez reads the traces of a spiritual theology and an active consecration in Don Bosco: “His hard work was a consequence of his interpretation of a particular aspect of asceticism: it was an apostolic activity from start to finish. [...] He preferred not to hold rigidly to certain

115 Cf. *Ibid.*, 24.

116 Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, “*And he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length*” *Salesian Youth Ministry*, in AGC 91 (2010) 407, 3-59.

117 *Ibid.*, 50.

118 GC26 (2008), no. 53.

119 Cf. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *Salesian Youth Ministry*, 51.

schemes; he found a practical, pastoral and spiritual approach better than one that was theological and speculative.”¹²⁰

In this sense the motto “Da mihi animas coetera tolle”, especially its first part, “Da mihi animas”, expresses the zeal for the salvation of souls which, overcoming the liberal and secularised model of a faith that is only subjective, takes concrete form in the urgency of evangelisation and in the need to raise up vocations to Salesian consecrated life. The second complementary part of the motto, “cetera tolle”, signifies the ascetic detachment from all that can distance us from God and the young. This is the place for reflections both on evangelical poverty and on the preferential option for the “poorest, most abandoned and at risk” young people, rethinking it in terms of the “new forms of poverty” and the “new frontiers”.¹²¹

Chávez: focus on new forms of poverty and human rights

In his concluding address to the International Congress on *The Preventive System and Human Rights*, the Rector Major presented the quality of Don Bosco’s educational experience as the ability to see social reality, to grasp its meaning and to draw practical consequences from it that needed to be addressed. From compassion for youngsters at risk comes a choice of consecrated life that draws from the merciful fatherhood of God and develops educational, preventive and social projects. Fr Chávez recalled Pope Benedict XVI’s observation on the educational emergency, declaring it both a denial of the right to education in developing countries and a betrayal of the educational mission in advanced and excessively competitive societies.¹²² He offered a similar religious and social interpretation in his letter on youth ministry:

In many of the societies and cultures in which we carry out our educative and pastoral services, a culture is developing which puts religion, and particularly Christianity, to one side, a style of life which fosters the growth of the material and spiritual poverty of many and which multiplies the factors leading to social

¹²⁰ P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, “Da mihi animas, cetera tolle” *Charismatic identity and apostolic passion. Starting again from Don Bosco to reawaken the heart of every Salesian*, in AGC 87 (20063) 394, 39.

¹²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 37-42.

¹²² Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *The Salesian mission and human rights, especially children’s rights*, in YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT OF THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION, *The Preventive System and Human Rights*. Acts of the International Congress. 2-6 January 2009 Rome, International Volunteering for Development, Rome 2009, 78-79.

exclusion ... In this climate, religious values and the motivations of believers which in other times were obvious and recognised in the service of education and human development often become insignificant and irrelevant.¹²³

The perspectives of an integral educational project – of the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the development of human, cultural and social values – are present both in the above-mentioned congress on human rights and in Father Chávez's speeches at the Universities of Genoa and Bari in 2007.¹²⁴ “The educator, according to the heart of Don Bosco [...] seeks to awaken or deepen in young people an openness to the religious meaning of life, to develop the capacity to discover in everyday reality the signs of God's presence and action, to communicate a conviction of the profound coherence between faith and the human values of solidarity, freedom, truth, justice and peace.”¹²⁵

Quoting Benedict XVI's address to the Latin American Episcopal Conference's Assembly, the Rector Major agrees with the fact that that in a godless society one does not find the necessary consensus on moral values and the strength to live according to the model of these values. There are subtle balances to be maintained, both theoretical and practical. In the language of human rights it is useful to dialogue and insert Salesian pedagogy into the different cultures of the world, and at the same time one cannot forget the orientation of the young towards Christ in their vocation as children of God. But the coexistence of the different approaches is even more delicate. It is necessary to offer young people the necessary elements for an adequate, holistic and full development in physical, mental, cultural, spiritual, moral, social and political aspects. From a practical perspective the young and the marginalised should be actively involved in any proposed project, and Salesian educators are invited to develop a network mentality involving others working to the same end.¹²⁶

We find similar directions in Fr Pascual Chávez's two addresses to Italian universities in 2007. He pointed out the drama of today's humanity in the fracture between education and society, which is exacerbated by the ever-growing gap between school and

¹²³ CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *Salesian Youth Ministry*, 49.

¹²⁴ Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *Educazione e Cittadinanza. Formare “salesianamente” il cittadino*, *Lectio* on the occasion of the conferral of the doctorate *honoris causa* at the University of Genoa on 23 April 2007, in bit.ly/unige-it-2007-04-23; P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *Cristianità e prevenzione*, in UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI BARI, *L'educatore, oggi. Tratti per un profilo di san Giovanni Bosco*. Study seminar 26 April 2006, Servizio Editoriale Universitario, Bari 2007, 11-28.

¹²⁵ CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *The Salesian mission and human rights*, 81.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 82-84.

citizenship. A new school and a new social logic is proposed, starting from the ideal of the classic *paideia*. In continuity with the two-thousand-year-old tradition of classical and Christian education, there is the ever-valid thread of formation of a spirit capable of judging with freedom and fitting into society with responsibility. Without denying the practical objectives of education, its aims are of a higher humanistic order. In this sense the Salesian school must go beyond the pedagogical contradiction of a school as a simple means of ideological reproduction, or military type formation, or simply aimed at the technical formation required by the economic system.¹²⁷

The idea of the “salvation of the soul” resounds in the updating of Salesian pedagogy as the ultimate aim of Don Bosco’s preventive education, defined today as a fulfilled individual, social and religious human existence.¹²⁸ The Rector Major’s proposal offers meaningful insights, taking into account the postmodern and multicultural context. However, he also speaks honestly of the incompleteness of attempts to update, of the need to go beyond the questions in order to refound, rethink and update concrete educational models. Referring implicitly to Braido’s thinking, he states that the historical roots are solid, “the sources clear, and from them can once more come the Rector Major Fr Egidio Viganò’s much hoped for ‘new preventive system’, in forms rich in their future but not yet brought together as a whole.”¹²⁹

New projects and the method of discernment

Fr Pascual Chávez did not only insist on spiritual and theoretical dimensions in his magisterium, but pointed to a number of practical challenges associated with a “planning mentality.” The connection between inspirational *ideas* and educative and pastoral *methods* was picked up once again in the proposal of an updated reinterpretation of the preventive system on the theoretical and practical level, involving both the great basic ideas and methodological guidelines.¹³⁰ Even in his reflection on human rights their connection in a context of virtue emerges. The Rector Major says that an effective human rights approach in Salesian setting will be developed if there is acceptance of an undeniable relationship between education and evangelisation at different levels of inspiration, personal and social virtues:

We need to recall that evangelisation develops along with human development and authentic Christian freedom. Love of God and love of neighbour have

¹²⁷ Cf. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *Educazione e Cittadinanza*, 2.

¹²⁸ Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *Cristianità e prevenzione*, 20.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God (Cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 15). For the same reason social catechesis and adequate formation in the church's social teaching will also be needed. Christian life is not expressed only through personal virtues, but also in social and political virtues.¹³¹

There are other requirements of an operational nature at a concrete level: the necessary and continuous effort to assimilate and put into practice the Salesian youth ministry model; the redefinition of our presences in order to make them more significant; the increasingly connected and coordinated animation of the Salesian "Departments of the mission" (youth ministry, social communication and missions).¹³² Overcoming past structures is also necessary. In the Magisterium on the consecrated life, too, attention emerges to practical models of participation and new models of life. In earlier times we ran the risk of enclosing ourselves in a network of precepts and regulations which did not always help people to mature and live according to the freedom of God's children. Even more so, forms of religious life such as community life or modes of prayer, even those renewed after Vatican II, do not always correspond to the new situations in which life and mission must be carried out today. These forms and structures that oscillate between the traditional and the post-Vatican II renewal fail to express new values such as the sense of dialogue and participation. There is a feeling that the direction in which we need to move is well known, but in reality we have not yet found a model of life and action that facilitates and supports this journey.¹³³

Meanwhile, under the pressure of operational problems in communities and in restructuring of the provinces, facing new problems and demanding new results, the "old" planning tool given "new" names was opted for. The ideal of Salesian holiness and the balance between education and evangelisation had to be put into practice through the method of discernment in personal, community and provincial level.¹³⁴

The discernment method was suggested for the study of the fundamental aspects of the first two General Chapters in the third millennium and subsequently also for developing the personal project of Salesian life and the project of Salesian community

131 BENEDICT XVI, *Opening address* at the 5th CELAM conference (13 May 2007), no. 3 quoted in CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *The Salesian mission and human rights* 81.

132 Cf. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *Salesian youth ministry*, 47ff.

133 Cf. CHÁVEZ, "You are my God, my happiness lies in you alone", 14.

134 Cf. CHÁVEZ, *My dear Salesians, be Saints!*, 26-28 and 33-34.

life.¹³⁵ Antonio Domènech's instructions for the Overall Provincial Plan made no mention of the "discernment method", but did contain a new three-step planning scheme: call, situation, putting into practice.¹³⁶ It differs from Vecchi's method for drawing up educative and pastoral projects, which started from the situation, then practical suggestions and finally moved on to evaluation.

The departure point for the discernment method is identifying God's call which enables a grasp of urgent appeals and priorities. The province, the community and the individual ask themselves what God is calling them to be and to do in order to guarantee the significance of their lives and their actions. The key question for the God's call is to distinguish what is fundamental from what is secondary, so that one only dwells on priority needs and the basic choices. An innovation with respect to educative and pastoral planning could be proactivity and a greater breadth of questioning about the call, not narrowing horizons through often reductive descriptions of the situation.

The second stage of discernment is analysing the situation, which should make it possible to grasp the resources underpinning hope, the limitations and the challenges, but always with reference to the fundamental choices identified and described in first stage of God's call. A SWOT analysis of internal strengths, weaknesses and external opportunities or threats is introduced into the discernment method.

The third stage of the discernment method is identifying the guidelines for action. At the outset, the processes that need to be activated in order to move on from the challenges to a better configuration in terms of mentality and structures are identified. Once the processes have been identified, an attempt is made to make the path more concrete by indicating concrete steps and specific interventions.

Francesco Cereda, Councillor for Formation since 2002, summarises the discernment method as follows: "The three stages of discernment could then be expressed through expectations, appeals, desires in the first step, which presents God's call; resources, difficulties and above all challenges in the second step, which describes the situation of

¹³⁵ Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *Presentation*, in GC25 (2002), 15-16; ID., *Presentation*, in GC26 (2008), 11-12; F. CEREDA, *The Salesian Community Project. Process of discernment and sharing*. Letter to Provincials and Provincial Councils Provincial Formation Delegates and the Provincial Formation Commission (13 December 2002); ID., *Ongoing Formation, the Personal Project of Life. A journey of creative fidelity towards holiness*. Letter to Provincials and Provincial Councils Provincial Formation Delegates and the Provincial Formation Commission (21 June 2003); ID., *Initial Formation. The Personal Project Of Life. A journey of identification with the Salesian vocation*. Letter to Provincials and Provincial Councils Provincial Formation Delegates and the Provincial Formation Commission (5 July 2003).

¹³⁶ Cf. A. DOMÈNECH, *The Overall Provincial Plan*, in AGC 84 (2003) 381, 35-42;

the community; objectives, strategies or processes and interventions in the third step, which identifies the action guidelines.”¹³⁷

Compared to the SEPP logic, the perspective of changing mentality has been added, so the model could be less linear and mechanical. There are measurable and concrete objectives to be pursued, but the aim is not just to achieve them. It is a matter of following a call and changing one’s mentality, not merely achieving an improvement in a concrete aspect of the educative and pastoral process. The method of discernment, therefore, would lead to more streamlined and integral planning,¹³⁸ creating a perspective¹³⁹ enabling a change of mentality, and also including spiritual¹⁴⁰ and motivational resources.¹⁴¹ These aspects seem to be convincing and important in personal and community projects, whereas they appear more difficult to initiate at the province or world level. In fact, it would be useful to explore the methodological differences for the various planning levels: in all probability no method can be suitable for the personal and world planning levels. If we are facing the choice of a single method, it will necessarily be only a nominal or generic one.

The greatest difficulty in the discernment method, however, is placing the God’s call stage at the beginning of the project, leading to an understanding of vocation as a disembodied reality and reducing it, operationally, to citations of documents that “challenge” us. It would seem that the situation analysis stage only comes later and that its only purpose is to arrive at practical solutions.¹⁴² In fact, later on, around the reflection of GC27 and GC28, we return to the previous order of steps, talking about: 1. Listening, 2. Interpretation, 3. Way ahead.¹⁴³

¹³⁷ CEREDA, *The Salesian Community Project*.

¹³⁸ GC25 (2002) hoped that the result of discernment would be a shift from “a pastoral approach built around activities and needs to an approach centred on processes” Cf. GC25 (2002), no. 44.

¹³⁹ The construction of shared and personal vision is one of the outcomes of discernment. Cf. Address of the Rector Major Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva at the closure of GC25, in CG25 (2002), no. 185 and CEREDA, *Initial Formation. The Personal Project of Life*, 2003.

¹⁴⁰ The method of discernment starts with the Word of God through *Lectio Divina* and discernment of the signs of the times. Cf. CHÁVEZ, *Presentation*, in GC25 (2002), 15-16 and GC25 (2002), no. 81.

¹⁴¹ Cereda gives some indications: “In developing it we do not absolutise methodological refinement; instead we try to reach the confreres in depth, starting from their experience and the experience of the community itself.” In addition, “one must reach the point where the confreres are open, if not exactly enthusiastic, to embarking on this path. The community does the project, not because it is forced to but because it feels the need, not because it has to but because it wants to.” Cf. CEREDA, *The Salesian Community Project*, 2002. Cf. Also GC25 (2002), no. 73.

¹⁴² Another difficulty is the absence of theoretical references concerning the discernment, method which implies the impossibility of reconstructing the theoretical background of the method. Some epistemological and methodological analyses are proposed in VOJTÁŠ, *Reviving Don Bosco’s Oratory*, 74-125; 208-217.

¹⁴³ Cf. The structuring of the GC27 document (2014).

A further problem lies in the multiplication of the number of projects (using different methods), which are becoming increasingly difficult to coordinate and synchronise. Interaction at the various levels is envisaged both by Domènech, based on the proposal of the Overall Provincial Plan, and by Fabio Attard's team in the third edition of the youth ministry *Frame of Reference*.¹⁴⁴ It is not surprising that the Provinces often followed a simpler path, investing in a single comprehensive project, approved by the Provincial Chapters and sent to the Generalate, leaving aside the educative and pastoral project.¹⁴⁵ Attention at central level was directed more towards reinforcing the basic theological and charismatic approach in order to reformulate the Frame of Reference, as we shall see in the next section.

Attard and the third edition of the Frame of Reference

Receiving the mandate from GC26 to adapt the *Frame of Reference*, the General Councillor for Youth Ministry, Fabio Attard, with his team, coordinated a broad consultation on the requested “deeper understanding of the relationship between evangelisation and education, in order to put the preventive system into practice and adapt the frame of reference for youth ministry.”¹⁴⁶ In the interview at the end of his twelve-year term he retrospectively described two risks within the relationship between education and evangelisation:

a certain functional efficiency of education at the expense of the fundamental call to be “signs and bearers of God’s love to the young”, and secondly a certain insistence on evangelisation which loses its educational dynamic, capacity for processes and gradual growth. In this case the evangelising process is reduced to a process detached from history, from living reality in all its complexity.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Cf. DOMÈNECH, *The Overall Provincial Project*, 42 and YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*, 2014, 280.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *The Society of St Francis de Sales 2008-2014*, SDB, Rome 2014, 42-57 and Á. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, *The Society of St Francis de Sales 2014-2020*, document as part of GC28 (2020), first part “The Congregation in its sectors of animation”, Chap. 3 “Youth Ministry Sector”.

¹⁴⁶ GC26 (2008), no. 45.

¹⁴⁷ *Dodici anni di PG/1: Il passato, una storia di Congregazione*. Interview with Fr. Fabio Attard, outgoing General Councillor for Salesian YM by Renato Cursi, Giancarlo De Nicolò and Jesús Rojano, in “Note di Pastorale Giovanile” 54 (2020) 1, 43.

Fr Attard mentioned other challenges considered when revising the *Frame of Reference*: fear of evangelising, being trapped in a purely human horizon, the difficulty of admitting the change of era, the failure of the institution, the “it has always been done this way” mentality and, finally, the underestimation of young people’s desire to seek answers.¹⁴⁸ Some of them relate to the post-Vatican II period and concern above all the generations that grew up in that era, while others are more characteristic of the context of the third millennium, young people, youth workers and educators.

The third edition of the *Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference* is intended to be in continuity with the previous editions, enriching them with a more accentuated theological, spiritual and charismatic reflection. Within the new or very much revised chapters we find elements found in the reflection of the Congregation in the early years of the third millennium. Some themes emerge more strongly, making a valuable contribution to the internal balance of Salesian pastoral ministry and education:

- the need to be open to the life and culture of the young (Chapter 1);
- the importance of inspiration from Christ the Good Shepherd and inclusion in the evangelising Church (Chapter 2);
- the insistence on the relationship between evangelisation and education (Chapter 3);
- the idea of the preventive system understood “as a proposal of Christian life (Salesian youth spirituality) and as a practical pedagogical methodology”¹⁴⁹ [rewritten Chapter 4];
- the methodological importance of the discernment process throughout the whole framework.

The magisterium of Pope Benedict XVI, the challenges mentioned by Pascual Chávez and the obvious further challenge of an “internal” secularisation of religious orders after Vatican II help reinforce the role of evangelisation. A greater presence of theological language in the first four chapters is evident and the desire to update youth ministry is declared. The reasoning develops in three stages: Jesus Christ is the evangeliser who announces communion with God-Love; the Church is the “mystery of communion and mission” animated and sustained by the Holy Spirit; the Salesian Congregation is part of the Church’s evangelisation through its specific choice of the mission to the young.¹⁵⁰ Consistently, the chapter on the Educative and Pastoral Community is moved

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 44-46

¹⁴⁹ YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*, ³2014, 77.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*, ³2014, 41.

before the chapter on the SEPP and the educative and cultural dimension is preceded by education in faith, reversing the order of the second edition.

Despite the strengthened theological aspect, the model of “integral development” remains. It appears more than 80 times in the text, and is a concept connecting Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in Veritate*, through its understanding of the integral nature of the person in every dimension, to what the preventive system says about the “good Christian and upright citizen”, finally affirming the integral nature of the Salesian educative and pastoral project in all its dimensions for the full growth of the young person.¹⁵¹ The concept then broadens out to the integral development of peoples, integral humanism, becoming an adjectival form that characterises vision, reflection, development, growth, promotion, formation, liberation, maturation, and including the integral nature of the rights of the person and of institutional life (in the new part on Salesian Institutes of Higher Education). The integration between the dimensions of the project is also reinforced through the many animating choices of youth ministry running through them all: vocational, missionary, volunteering, social communication and Salesian youth movement.

Bearing in mind all the things the text is intended to respond to, it is understandable that the third edition of the *Frame of Reference* is not easy reading, containing several layers of thought and drafting, and being twice the length of the previous edition. Given that the magisterium of the Congregation has been expanding with each six-year period, the criteria, the different rationales, the mentalities to be changed have increased in number, but so have the fields of mission and the structures of animation and planning. Therefore, in the 2014-2020 period, the Department introduced a school for provincial delegates for youth ministry, taking up and studying the text. I believe that in addition to the essential attention given to the study of a complex text, it would be useful to develop and simplify the methodological aspects of the educative and pastoral proposal. It is easy to list the criteria for judging projects, programs and activities, but it would also be useful to indicate the steps and a focus on “how to do it” and how to shift “from paper to life.” Fabio Attard, too, mentioned this in the interview we have referred to, stating the urgent need for planning so as not to fall into the extremes of improvisation or fixation on doing things the way we have always done them.¹⁵²

The methodological issue emerges around the paradigmatic theme of projects and pathways. It is an area addressed more in the last part of the last chapter. The provincial and local SEPP are included in a set of documents that guide action at different levels. An important place is occupied by the Overall Province Plan, the Province Directory and

¹⁵¹ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Dodici anni di PG*. Interview with Fabio Attard, 49.

annual planning, for which further specifications are offered. By way of illustration we refer to Figure I on the interrelationships mentioned in the *Frame of Reference*. Annual planning becomes a “mini-project” that focuses on one main objective for the year, breaking it down into specific objectives (processes, interventions, tasks and distribution of personnel), which are to be evaluated at the end of the year. The planning should also include the organisational chart of the province or work, and the timetable.¹⁵³

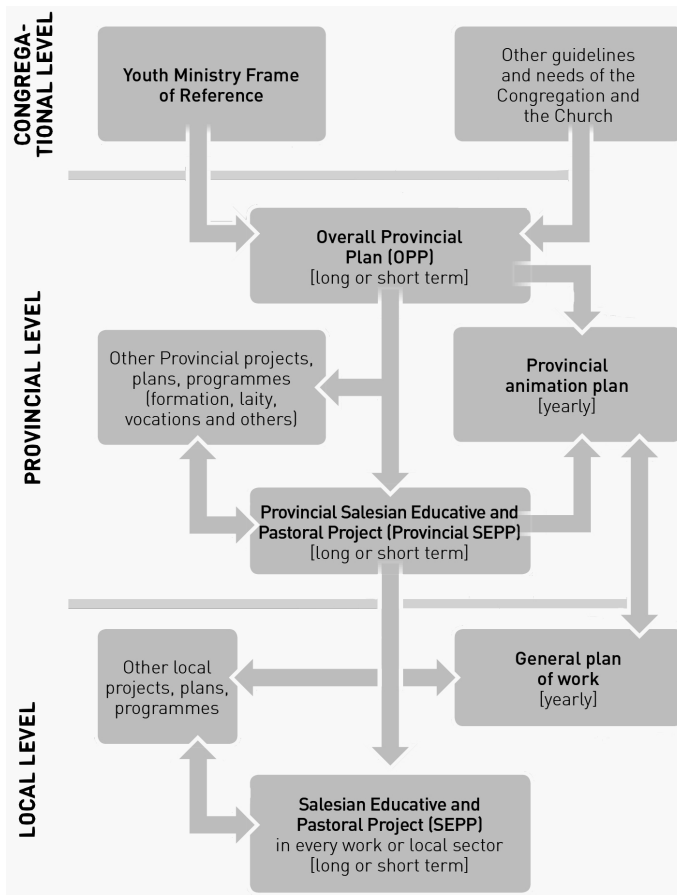


Figure I: Interdependence between various projects¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Cf. YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*,³2014, 282-283 and 285-288.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 280.

The idea of planning set out this way does not seem to have been substantially affected by the theological change of perspective in the first three chapters. At a nominal level, the role of discernment is emphasised, understood as an attitude of being attentive to God’s plan in everything,¹⁵⁵ but the planning stages (situation analysis, practical planning, verification) remain unchanged in their logic of planning by objectives. Discernment is not integrated into the planning stages, but is conceived of as an overall focus that accompanies the whole process in order to prevent extremes of technical, commercial, economic, political planning on the one hand or spiritualism on the other. The static, rigid and anonymous nature of planning should be put into perspective through the introduction of discernment, which has the task of keeping “the educative and pastoral spirit of the SEPP, its evangelical nature of offering salvation to the young person in Christ” at the centre.¹⁵⁶

Compared to the second edition’s generic suggestion that “a methodology be devised that favours the participation of all”,¹⁵⁷ the third edition names three discernment methodologies to be chosen according to circumstances and contexts: see-judge-act; God’s call-situation-action plans; review of life.¹⁵⁸ A similar type of approach is repeated in the question of planning programmes for education to the faith as part of the chapter on the preventive system. The programmes are thought of as being projects that will develop over time: “We need to translate the theory into practical programmes of structured learning, in gradual stages, suited to the condition of the young people who are to implement them (objectives, attitudes, knowledge, concrete commitments and experiences) with some clearly-defined content.”¹⁵⁹ Instead of a method, four areas of human and Christian growth are proposed (which are not directly aligned with the four dimensions of the SEPP) and two sets of criteria to be considered.¹⁶⁰

A number of lessons can be drawn from the evolution of the three editions of the *Frame of Reference*. One concerns the core idea of creating complete and up-to-date syntheses. It would seem that after the next Synod or some new magisterial document,

¹⁵⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 27-28 and 290-292.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 292

¹⁵⁷ YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*, ²2000, 139.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*, ³2014, 281-282.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁶⁰ The *Frame of Reference* offers operational criteria (flexibility, continuity, orientation, comprehensiveness) and methodological criteria (concreteness, symbol, narrative, internalisation, experience, protagonism and participation, personalisation and socialisation) in YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*, ³2014, 99-103.

the *Frame of Reference* will once more need to be rewritten. Yet the symbolic and essential approach taken in the 1990 book *Salesian Youth Ministry* seems to be less subject to ageing: the fundamental ideas and their relationships expressed in a design that leaves room for interpretation is a more stable, simple one and more capable of changing mentality. Another lesson is the need to attend to the delicate relationship between the anthropological approach and methodologies. In the first two editions, it was the methodology that was given emphasis, implying an anthropology that could be improved. In the third edition, it was the anthropological approach that was reinforced, obscuring the earlier methodological clarity. The search remains open, but it can be said that we have many elements that will guide us in any future construction of a more evolved and balanced methodology between discernment and practice, allowing ourselves to be guided by the stimulating and beautiful bottom line: “The pedagogical approach of the method, closely linked to the contents and dynamics, is important [...] In this sense, the method is also the message.”¹⁶¹

The bicentenary and first years of Fr Fernández Artime’s term of office

The preparation for the celebrations of the second centenary of Don Bosco’s birth was outlined by Fr Pascual Chávez well in advance, setting out a three-year period marked by three successive proposals: knowledge of the historical Don Bosco (Strenna 2012),¹⁶² rediscovering his Preventive System (Strenna 2013)¹⁶³ and insights into Salesian spirituality revolving around pastoral charity (Strenna 2014).¹⁶⁴ The final theme of the spirituality of evangelisation was already explicitly inspired by Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium* that “offers a view of how the Church should be: unafraid of the

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁶² Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, “Let us make the young our life’s mission by coming to know and imitate Don Bosco” *First year of preparation for the Bicentenary of his birth*, in AGC 93 (2012) 412, 3-39.

¹⁶³ Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, “Like Don Bosco the educator, we offer young people the Gospel of joy through a pedagogy of kindness.” *Second year of preparation for the bicentenary of his birth*, in AGC 94 (2013) 415, 3-29.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, “Da mihi animas, cetera tolle”, *Let us draw upon the spiritual experience of Don Bosco, in order to walk in holiness according to our specific vocation “The glory of God and the salvation of souls.” Third year of preparation for the Bicentenary of his birth*, in AGC 95 (2014) 417, 3-46.

modern world, that seeks new ways of preaching the Gospel, more missionary, more merciful, more courageous in making all the changes necessary.”¹⁶⁵ The subdivision of the years of preparation became a paradigm of the threefold division that was also reflected in the layout of the first volume of Salesian Sources between the historical, educational and spirituality sections, and partially conditioned the way the scientific congresses for the bicentennial were managed: partially because a historical congress was held in 2014 and a pedagogical one in 2015, but an event of in-depth scientific study on Salesian spirituality was missing.

The ecclesial Zeitgeist at the time of the bicentenary revolved around the practical pastoral focus of Pope Francis, with some reinforcements concerning attitudes of closeness to the little ones, outreach to the peripheries and a synodal approach. In fact, his magisterium is enhanced if it is read more from a pastoral-relational perspective than from one of dogmatic reform or theoretical redefinition. Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, elected at GC27 in 2014, has placed himself very much in tune with the pope, developing a style of animation that follows in the footsteps of Renato Ziggotti, visiting the individual provinces of the Congregation and animating the processes around the Rector Major by listening to concrete situations.

Picking up the wealth of post-Vatican II reflection, this seems to be the time for implementation, for integral pastoral models and for accompaniment of decentralised and necessarily slow processes, with rhythms linked to the changed demography of the Congregation. It will be a work of decades, in search of models for a consistent, profound and intercultural community life involving “new Salesians” who know how to live the balance between spiritual depth, accompaniment of young people and adult educators, and who can discern and plan formation programmes and manage the coordination of the educative and pastoral communities in concentric circles. The lessons of history regarding the “regularisation” of studentates during Fr Rinaldi’s time, or the slow and partial restructuring in the post-Vatican II period, are examples of the time needed for profound change. The alternation of times for innovative rethinking and vital practical assimilation is to be accepted with humility so as not to fall into a cultural war between those who exalt the glory of the distant past and those who have internalised liberal-progressive secularisation with the “arm” of polarisation of history, thought and, not least, the recent two pontificates. As emerges from the report on the state of the Congregation in 2020, we are not immune to the populist, clerical or secularised solutions that signal a deficit in Salesian charismatic identity.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Á. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, *The Society of St Francis de Sales in the six-year period 2014-2020*, 1-2, 15-17 and 25-26.

The last two General Chapters have made us see how the potential of the post-Vatican II model of “magisterial rethinking” that implies a shift “from paper to life”, has run its course. The 2014 and 2020 Chapters further reinforced the process component of discernment linked to the world situation of the Congregation. GC27’s synthesis between the mysticism of the interior life, the prophecy of communion and the educative and pastoral service to the young is not, in itself, theoretically innovative, it is only reversing the order of the Constitutions’ scheme: “Sent to the young-in communities-following Christ.”¹⁶⁷ In addition to pointing out the topicality of some post-Vatican II approaches, such as going out to the peripheries and towards the poor or the need to plan together with the laity, practical issues such as the protection of minors, the consistency of communities or transparency in the management of goods and works are made concrete.¹⁶⁸

In his letter on the “five fruits of the bicentenary”,¹⁶⁹ Fr Fernández Artime summarises the vision for the future around the “dream” of a Congregation of happy Salesians who are men of faith filled with God, passionate about the poorest young people and therefore missionaries, evangelisers and educators in the faith. Again we find the scheme of “double fidelity” in this approach, one of listening to the young and listening to the Church, one of the balances of the first chapters of the new *Frame of Reference*.¹⁷⁰ In the more educational part, about being present with the poorest young people, Fr Ángel reinterprets the post-Vatican II magisterium on the preferential option for the least, applying it to the Salesian way of life. Taking up the argumentation of Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium* on the globalisation of indifference and the “throwaway culture”,¹⁷¹ the Rector Major affirms, in the last General Chapters, the intrinsic link between the choice of poor young people and a consequent sober, transparent and service-oriented lifestyle.

“Don’t be closed in on yourselves” the pope says “don’t be stifled by petty squabbles, don’t remain a hostage to your own problems... A whole world awaits us: men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly sick and abandoned, those

¹⁶⁷ Cf. The second part of the SDB Constitutions, articles 6-95.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. GC27 (2014), nos. 35, 52ffs, 60, 71, 73ff.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Á. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, “So that they may have life and have it to the full” (*Jn. 10:10*) *Five fruits of the bicentenary*, in AGC 96 (2015) 421, 3-26.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*, ³2014, 35.

¹⁷¹ Cf. FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 53-58 in ARTIME, *Five fruits of the bicentenary*, 16-17.

who are rich in the world's goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine.¹⁷²

Thus, in the Salesian Magisterium in the third millennium, we pass from the approach of education in itself to the importance of the link between the identity, the lifestyle of educators and the planning choices of education. In the third millennium, the demography of the educators has changed between the dynamics of shared responsibility with lay educators in an ageing West and the growth of consecrated vocations in other contexts with the risks of self-referentiality and clericalism.

The Rector Major takes up some issues that need a more concrete translation through his various Strennas. The typical example is accompaniment, chosen as the Strenna for 2018. At the beginning of the commentary, Fr Fernández Artime asks himself, and it is not a rhetorical question: “What are we waiting for? Why do we not decide to be much more available to accompany all our young people in what is most important for their lives? What is holding us back? Why ‘being busy’ or ‘spending time’ on other things when this is a real priority for education and evangelisation?”¹⁷³ It would seem that the disparity between the increasing amount of theoretical, ideal stimuli and the decreasing number of forces has reached a point of no return. This is the “gap between the number of proposals and the possibility of implementing them”¹⁷⁴ pointed out by Fr Vecchi already at the beginning of the 1990s and now being further reinforced.

In this connection, the dynamics of the alternation between periods of greater reflection and implementation, the exhaustion of the post-Vatican II Chapter model and, not least, the demographic dynamics of contemporary consecrated life are to be considered fundamental. There are also other events, such as the move of the Generalate, the unfinished GC28 due to the global pandemic, to be considered as “events symbolic” of a change of era. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic not only interrupted the work of the General Chapter, but has also cast doubt on various pastoral models and urges us to rethink Salesian “presence” and the educational relationship with new balances.

¹⁷² Cf. FRANCIS, *Apostolic Letter to all consecrated persons on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, in ARTIME, *Five fruits of the bicentenary*, 17.

¹⁷³ Á. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, Strenna 2018 “*Lord, give me this water*” (*Jn 4:15*). *Let us cultivate the art of listening and of accompaniment*, in AGC 99 (2018) 426, 4-5.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. VECCHI, *Verso una nuova tappa di PG*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000*, 88.

Salesian currents of pedagogical thinking in the third millennium

The historical-critical approach to Salesian education

Shortly after the centenary in 1988, Father Pietro Braido became an emeritus professor, but this did not prevent him from continuing his work at the Historical Institute and gathering the fruits of his life's work in two concluding volumes, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà* (Don Bosco, the young people's priest in the century of freedoms) and in four substantial articles on the history of the oratory in contemporary Italy. His typical systematic and precise approach were just as decisive for the form of his final publications. In his preface to the work on the history of the oratory Paolo Alfieri clearly expresses the key to interpreting Braido's contribution in "determining the exact relationship of each experience to the historical context as a whole" as a "fundamental condition for an objective assessment and the surest means for a courageous and innovative comparison, beyond irrational inflexibility and eclectic and transformist solutions."¹⁷⁵ Statements of the kind can be found in the introduction to the volume on Christian pedagogical experiences in history of the early 1980s and are the expression of the "later Braido", the historian of education.¹⁷⁶

The image of Don Bosco the educator is outlined in the two substantial volumes of 2002 in a continuous meticulous alternation between his personality and the presentation of individual experiences. Braido avoids both an analysis of "mental frameworks", a method typical of Pietro Stella, and the narrative style of Desramaut, although these authors are used as points of reference. The biography by Pietro Braido (also his scientific "testament") needed to be "the summa vitae of Don Bosco, substantiated by situations and events that overlap and that would be inadequately represented by general statements."¹⁷⁷ The critique of the sources is central, within which Don Bosco also becomes a "problematic self-witness", and the priority is given by

¹⁷⁵ P. ALFIERI, *Per una storia dell'educazione giovanile nell'oratorio dell'Italia contemporanea. Il contributo di Pietro Braido sull'esperienza salesiana*, in BRAIDO, *Per una storia dell'educazione giovanile nell'oratorio*, 15.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Presentazione*, in ID., *Esperienze di pedagogia cristiana nella storia*, LAS, Rome 1981, vol. 1, 6.

¹⁷⁷ P. BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, LAS, Rome 22003, 17.

the author to the “multiplicity of things he did.”¹⁷⁸ The typical historical-critical method of Braido’s two volumes actually incorporates two worlds belonging to the past: Don Bosco’s world of a Piedmont in transition from rural to industrial, and the “modern” world of the critical, precise and meticulous Braido, as opposed to the triumphalism symbolised by the Biographical Memoirs fuelled by the dialectic between freedom and tradition.

The perspectives of Braido’s pedagogical rethinking still move in a post-Ricaldonian universe between the coordinates of discipline and the activism of the “new schools”, with solutions balancing neo-Thomism, modernity and the humanities. The updating envisaged in the famous Chapter XIX of his *Prevenire non reprimere* is set within these coordinates of overcoming the “classic opposition between authority and freedom”, re-proposing the centrality of the child and its natural and spontaneous activity, referring both to the founding fathers Komenský, Locke and Rousseau and to more recent currents of personalisation, self-management or youthful protagonism.¹⁷⁹ Braido envisages a path that is impossible to follow, as it combines the appreciation of the “immeasurable progress” of the educational sciences, the more radical contributions of Lutte, Milanese or Grasso in the post-Vatican II era¹⁸⁰ with specialised insights by Pellerey, Castellazzi, Thévenot and others.¹⁸¹

If we place Braido’s proposals in the context of the third millennium they seem to be unconvincing, since we are direct witnesses (at least in the West) to the problematic nature of modern, anthropocentric solutions. The modern hubris is wearing off and one perceives the fragmentation of society, the fragility of the human condition, the limits of science that does not touch the quality of life experience. Moreover, in the ecclesial sphere there has been a rising awareness of the limits of the historical-critical method summed up excellently in the preface to Benedict XVI’s *Jesus of Nazareth*.¹⁸² At the same time there is also a division of the educational sciences in to separate sectors

178 Cf. *Ibid.*, 15-17.

179 Cf. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*, 362-367 and 377-379.

180 Cf. *Ibid.*, 381-383.

181 Cf. *Ibid.*, 377, 380 and 384. In the bibliographical guidelines Braido also points to other contributions to innovation that include contributions from psychology, sociology, history, conference proceedings, social and intercultural educational practice proposed by Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Cf. *Ibid.*, 396-398.

182 Cf. J. RATZINGER BENEDICT XVI, *Gesù di Nazaret*, Rizzoli, Milan 2007, 7-20. (also in English as *Jesus of Nazareth*, Penguin Random House, 2007)

which are held together more by diplomatic practical than epistemological dynamics.¹⁸³ An implicit acknowledgement of dissatisfaction with de facto interdisciplinarity is, for example, the insistence on the need for the principle of transdisciplinarity found in Pope Francis' *Veritatis Gaudium*.¹⁸⁴ Pietro Stella, too, noted in his later years that “unfortunately the Salesian University did not serve as a transmission belt for a renewed education system: I have the impression that this renewal was being done only in fragments.”¹⁸⁵

Following Braido and the paradoxical outlook of the last chapter of *Prevenire non reprimere*, it has become fashionable to talk about rethinking with an ever longer list of challenges to be considered, but without offering a more concrete and integral way of implementing it all. More and more “challenges” are being added that are not then addressed or solved with the same seriousness and meticulousness with which the problematic part is taken care of. In the meantime it seems that the triumphalism of the Biographical Memoirs is not the biggest problem, but rather the poor knowledge of Don Bosco and Salesian history. Fr Pascual Chávez, who with the sensitivity of the biblical scholar knew how to appreciate the importance of a balanced historical interpretation, valued the contributions of Braido and the Salesian Historical Institute especially in the preparation of the Bicentennial celebrations:

On the other hand, the events of these years – the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation, the centenary of Don Rua's death, the 150th of Italian unification - have increased in us a historical mentality, which must however be re-appropriated. [...] It is an opportunity for all of us to get in touch with the great work done over the years. Finally, point 7 motivates the need to have a current image of Don Bosco.¹⁸⁶

The valuable work of the scholars of the Salesian Historical Institute is continually enriching the Salesian world with contributions that also reconstruct Salesian education up to the middle of the 20th century. Since 1996, the *Associazione Cultori di*

¹⁸³ The unifying centrality of the philosophy of education or metaphysics within the sciences of education as envisaged by the “early Braido” has not been established.. Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Umanesimo e pedagogia*, PAS, Turin 1957, 15-46; ID., *Introduzione alle Scienze dell'educazione*, in P. BRAIDO et al., *Educare. Sommario di scienze pedagogiche*, PAS Verlag, Zurich 31962, vol. 1, 19-20; ID., *La teoria dell'educazione e i suoi problemi*, PAS Verlag, Zurich 1968, 10-13; 131-133.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution “*Veritatis Gaudium*” on ecclesiastical universities and faculties, no. 4c, in bit.ly/vatican-va-2018-01-29.

¹⁸⁵ *Pietro Stella racconta il suo percorso come studioso di don Bosco* (14 December 2006), in M. LUPI – A. GIRAUDDO, *Pietro Stella. La lezione di uno storico*, LAS, Rome 2011, 123.

¹⁸⁶ P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, “*Let us make the young our life's mission by coming to know and imitate Don Bosco*”. *First year of preparation for the Bicentenary of his birth*, in AGC 93 (2012) 412, 10.

Storia Salesiana (ACSSA) or the Salesian History Association, has also been active. Its “aim is to promote studies on Salesian history, encouraging research, updating and collaboration among its members, and animating the Salesian Family from an historiographical point of view.”¹⁸⁷ Among the most significant contributions are the two volumes on Salesian education between 1888 and 1922, the volume on Salesian education in difficult times, or the contributions to the historical conference on the Salesian charism on the occasion of the bicentenary.¹⁸⁸ Important for the dissemination of historical knowledge was the publication and subsequent translations of the *Salesian Sources*, commissioned by GC26 and drawn up by the Salesian Historical Institute.¹⁸⁹

Many sources, historical reconstructions of individual houses, provinces, regions, research on persons and various themes and other publications contained in the series produced by the ISS, ACSSA and the Don Bosco Study Centre at the UPS are available to readers, but they seem to be few. The scenario of Salesian historiography is quite complex and differentiated and it is not easy to move within it without a professional background. In several countries there is a frequent disproportion between the relevance of Salesian activity and the scarcity of historiography.¹⁹⁰ There is an increasing need for a selection of essential materials, comprehensive studies and meaningful syntheses that can illuminate the reflections of educationalists, scholars of pastoral ministry, theologians or philosophers of education. Without this type of publication we will move, as often happens, on parallel tracks with rationales that are difficult to reconcile and, in the end, with results that are not always relevant to the educational, formative and planning experience of the members of the Salesian Family in the different contexts. An intelligent use of the computer and digital tools will be strategic for the meaningful development of

¹⁸⁷ *Statuto dell'Associazione Cultori di Storia Salesiana* (ACSSA) updated on 24 May 2016, art. 1, in iss.sdb.org/?page_id=142

¹⁸⁸ Cf. J.G. GONZÁLEZ et al. (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana dal 1880 al 1922. Istanze ed attuazioni in diversi contesti*. Acts of the 4th International Conference on the History of the Salesian Work Mexico City, 12-18 February 2006, 2 vols.; S. ZIMNIAK – G. LOPARCO (eds.), *L'educazione salesiana in Europa negli anni difficili del XX secolo*. Acts of the European Seminar on the History of the Salesian Work Krakow, 31 October - 4 November 2007, LAS, Rome 2008 and A. GIRAUO et al (eds.), *Sviluppo del carisma di Don Bosco fino alla metà del secolo XX*. Acts of the International Congress of Salesian History Rome, 19-23 November 2014. Reports, LAS, Rome, 2016.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. ISTITUTO STORICO SALESIANO, *Fonti Salesiane. 1. Don Bosco e la sua opera. Raccolta antologica*, LAS, Rome 2014. Translated in English as SALESIAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE, *Salesian Sources 1: Don Bosco and his work. Collected Works*, LAS – Kristu Jyoti, Rome – Bangalore, 2017.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. G. LOPARCO – S. ZIMNIAK (eds.), *La storiografia salesiana tra studi e documentazione nella stagione postconciliare*, LAS, Rome 2014, 14 and 20.

Salesian historiography, to create databases in order to carry out multi-criteria research using textual and semantic analysis algorithms.¹⁹¹

Youth ministry and the priority of evangelisation

As we have seen in the section on the third edition of the *Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference*, some of the simplifications of the 1980s and 1990s that revolved around the education-evangelisation pair proved to be insufficient and reductive. Different conceptions often implicitly or explicitly reduced Viganò's synthesis simply to a set of equal dimensions, planning parallel educational programmes or even just a slogan. The approaches developed on this "dimensions" basis generally present the religious dimension in a way that is relatively autonomous from the others, expressing it through topics of a generic spirituality focused on the search for meaning and the practice of certain human values.

For example, around the turn of the millennium Roger Burggraeve and Jacques Schepens developed a modernised version of the reason, religion and loving kindness triplet seen in terms of the young person individually coming to maturity in the areas of affectivity, rationality and the meaning of life.¹⁹² Each area of growth is refocused with relevant and interesting reflections on the age of youth as a time of personal appropriation of values and attitudes. The risk of their approach, however, is to see these areas as relatively and practically independent and to reduce "religion" to a generic spirituality, by working with the concepts of motivation, the meaning of life and values in general. Christianity comes "after" as a "further concretisation".¹⁹³

A similar approach was presented by Michele Pellerey during the Salesian Pedagogy Congress in 2015, proposing a reinterpretation of the classic triplet as a system of relationships that is based on reasonableness, is oriented towards a youthful spirituality

¹⁹¹ Cf. classification, taxonomies and indexing of Salesian resources in salesian.online and sangiovannibosco.net and the rich bibliography on the topic of semantic research in A. MEROÑO-PEÑUELA et al., *Semantic technologies for historical research: A survey*, in "Semantic Web" 6 (2015) 6, 539-564.

¹⁹² Cf. R. BURGGRÆVE – J. SCHEPENS, *Emotionalität, Rationalität und Sinngebung als Faktoren christlicher Werterziehung. Eine Interpretation des pädagogischen Erbes Don Boscos für heute*, Don Bosco, Munich 1999 a summary of which was published in French as J. SCHEPENS, *Affectivité rationalité sens de la vie. Le trinôme salésien: raison, religion, affection, réactualisé dans le langage contemporain*, Don Bosco, Paris 2001.

¹⁹³ Cf. SCHEPENS, *Affectivité rationalité sens de la vie*, 24.

and is animated by self-giving and affective reciprocity.¹⁹⁴ His systematic approach to the three is interesting, combining and interconnecting them. Also interesting is the attention paid to the rediscovery of practical wisdom, educational intuition, the principle of gift of self or youth spirituality. The following is a summary passage that illustrates well the insistence and importance of a spiritual approach in education:

An authentic development of the very religious dimension of human life does not seem possible without radical existential experiences that urge us to go beyond the superficiality of the everyday, the temporariness of the immediate, the materialist nature of consumption. Not only that, but there is probably a need for an apprenticeship that also initiates a persistent search in the cultural field for a more incisive truth about human, personal and social reality, and about the reality of the universe that surrounds us. It is necessary that educational pathways, including school ones, be a place and time for ethical, aesthetic and authentic truthful experiences, existential experiences that prompt an awakening of the inner self, and for accompaniment on the journey. There needs to be a spiritual adventure towards the ultimate meaning of life, the fundamental purposes of existence, towards a profound personal encounter with the Absolute.¹⁹⁵

Without detracting from the value of some of the interesting and meaningful applications of the approaches mentioned, we should also point out the weaknesses of a generic spirituality. In fact at the centre of the Congregation there was a greater resonance of approaches linked more explicitly to the themes of evangelisation, discernment, accompaniment and vocation. Simplifying, I think that it is not a question of a shift from the sciences of education to theology, as it is often interpreted, but rather a shift from the simplification of Rahner's fundamental theology (which sees religiosity as transcendence inherent in human life linked to the mystery that is beyond our control),¹⁹⁶ to the theology inspired by von Balthasar, within which the cross of Christ, which manifests the glory and love of God, is the central event of human history and the gaze of faith is present from the beginning of all reflection onwards. Below we

¹⁹⁴ M. PELLERÉY, *La professionalità educativa e la competenza pedagogica. Attenzioni irrinunciabili dell'offerta formativa della famiglia salesiana oggi*, in V. ORLANDO (ed.), *Con Don Bosco educatori dei giovani del nostro tempo*. Acts of the International Conference on Salesian Pedagogy 19-21 March 2015 Rome Salesianum/Ups, LAS, Rome 2015, 190-206.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 193-194.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. K. RAHNER, *L'esperienza di Dio oggi*, in PELLERÉY, *La professionalità educativa*, 194.

illustrate some of the steps in the theological reformulation of the relationship between evangelisation and education that originated in northern Italy.¹⁹⁷

To summarise, we can start from the analysis by Paolo Zini, who takes up the historical and cultural premises of the processes of secularisation that today contribute most to making the peaceful integration between educational practice and the proclamation of the Gospel difficult. Looking back at the thought of Voltaire, Locke and Hume, one can see the first break between speculative and practical thinking. Faith is perceived as belonging to the subjective sphere and it is practical reason instead that balances social relations around the founding idea of tolerance that can be rationally and publicly shared.¹⁹⁸ The faith-reason split is also reflected in other contrasts between the outward nature of public law and the inward nature of subjective awareness; between the knowledge of means and the knowledge of ends, right up to the separation between verifiable rationality and merely subjective, mystical and inexpressible faith, typical of some exponents of the Vienna Circle. Following Charles Taylor's fundamental work *The Secular Age*, Zini then sets out the effects of dissociation at the level of social and cultural processes that defined modernity. From the context of religious intolerance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries come the processes of considering the "Name of God" as a civil danger, the social obfuscation of believing practice, the secularisation of educational concern and the "enjoyable weakness" of freedom.¹⁹⁹

The theological proposal of Andrea Bozzolo, Roberto Carelli and the subsequent developments of Rossano Sala's youth ministry are situated within von Balthasar's understanding of fundamental theology, with references to Pierangelo Sequeri's notion of the "believing conscience", Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology of self-gift or Klaus Hemmerle's and Piero Coda's Trinitarian anthropologies.²⁰⁰ Andrea Bozzolo offers some fundamental reflections and the essential elements of the concept of evangelisation, going beyond the division between faith seen as the goal and education

¹⁹⁷ Cf. A. BOZZOLO – R. CARELLI (eds.), *Evangelizzazione ed educazione*, LAS, Rome 2011 and the summary of his theoretical approach in R. SALA, *Evangelizzazione ed educazione dei giovani. Un percorso teorico-pratico*, LAS, Rome 2017, 47-168.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. P. ZINI, *Il divorzio tra fede e cultura. Alle origini della questione educativa*, in BOZZOLO – CARELLI (eds.), *Evangelizzazione ed educazione*, 293-299.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. P. ZINI, *Il destino dell'educazione tra i lumi della ragione e l'oscuramento della fede*, in SALA, *Evangelizzazione ed educazione dei giovani*, 48-79.

²⁰⁰ Cf. The rich bibliographical references in SALA, *Evangelizzazione ed educazione dei giovani*, 203-207. Of fundamental importance to the proposal is P. SEQUERI, *Il Dio affidabile. Saggio di teologia fondamentale*, Queriniana, Brescia 1996 and J.-L. MARION, *Dato che. Saggio per una fenomenologia della donazione*, SEI, Turin 2001.

as the means to get there. Evangelisation is not just the spreading of a message, but should be understood in greater depth as the radiating of the event of revelation through the lives of those who have accepted its transforming power and can thus become a mediation for others. *Evangelii Gaudium* is read in this courageous and stimulating sense, “in which Pope Francis shows how evangelisation can only be achieved within a dynamic dialogue and process.”²⁰¹ Going beyond the modern divide between believing subjectivity and objectivity of the Gospel message, the author proposes a view of tradition as a living, dynamic process of continuous dialogue with God who speaks in human history. Consistently, priority is given to the action of the Spirit, to the proclamation of the kerygma of Jesus crucified and risen, and not to systematised content or methodologies. By outlining evangelisation, revelation and tradition in this way, the basis of the argument is the person of Jesus who unites the view of the divine and the human, thus going beyond the modern divides of private devotion and the affairs of the world, between doctrine and “animation”, between mystery and the everyday. This implies that

the link between evangelisation and education should not be understood as the coordination of two extrinsic instances, but as the declination of a polarity internal to the very fact of revelation. We say that it is an internal polarity because God reveals himself precisely while he “educates” his people, shows his face while he liberates them, presents himself as the absolute Lord while he leads them as a caring shepherd.²⁰²

Bozzolo, in continuity with the proposed view, points out the need to rediscover the intrinsic educational value of Christianity also through the formation of conscience and behaviour during all phases of life. In this way we recover a fundamental element present in Salesian education, unfortunately lost due to the post-Vatican II criticism of the problematic and rigid positions of Peter Ricaldone’s “Gospel method”. From the animation of youth groups typical of the previous period, the wider ecclesiological dimension of education is reinforced. The context of education and evangelisation is not given by sociological groups with their dynamics but by an ecclesial community, “the living memory of Christ and the privileged space for access to the encounter

201 A. BOZZOLO, *L'evangelizzazione: le dimensioni costitutive della missione ecclesiale*, in SALA, *Evangelizzazione ed educazione dei giovani*, 91.

202 *Ibid.*, 104.

with Him.”²⁰³ Obviously, the Church is seen as *semper reformanda* in Pope Francis’ perspective, less clerical, more pastoral, missionary, evangelising, on the part of all the baptised called to holiness.

In correlation is the theological approach to education proposed by Roberto Carelli. In the first part of his contribution he more radically retraces the scenarios of thought already proposed by Zini and Bozzolo, emphasising the asymmetry, the dramatic nature, the total gratuitousness of God’s plan, human life as fascinating and unbearable transcendence, ending up saying that “education coincides with the education of faith, and that pedagogy is basically mystagogy.”²⁰⁴ In our opinion, what emerges in his intervention is the *pars destruens* of twentieth-century pedagogy and not the “logic of an alliance” that is declared but not pursued with valid arguments.²⁰⁵

Rossano Sala then develops a theological-pastoral approach to Jesus’ gift of self, as a central idea for understanding the history of salvation. The anthropology of self-gift then gives direction to the seven criteria of youth ministry and the forms of pastoral activity. The other pastoral criteria revolve around the paradigm of the gift of self: the closeness of life as a combination of God’s incarnation, the attitude of Salesian assistance combined with the *Evangelii Gaudium*, involving a style of sympathy, compassion, friendliness and sharing of life with young people. The educative and pastoral commitment is proposed within the process of Christian discipleship, understood as broad and articulated, unified by the reference of friendship, sonship and marriage with Jesus Christ, made concrete in the call-vocation. “The ultimate goal of everything can only be ‘communion’. It becomes clear that incarnation-closeness is in view of the gift of self-cross and that it is in view of communion-community. The direction of the theological-pastoral path is therefore clear: incarnation (closeness) → cross (self-gift) → communion (community).”²⁰⁶ Communion, seen as a winning ecclesial style, is lived in terms of the alternative strategy of the beatitudes, not rights, in order to propose the shared and unifying point of holiness for all, which is typically Salesian.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 110.

²⁰⁴ R. CARELLI, *L’educazione e le sue articolazioni*, in SALA, *Evangelizzazione ed educazione dei giovani*, 138.

²⁰⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 141-142. The author articulates the four theses of his contribution in opposition to modern pedagogy, which in turn becomes a meta-message of incompatibility between pedagogy and theology of education.

²⁰⁶ SALA, *Evangelizzazione ed educazione dei giovani*, 217. For the part on his criteria for youth ministry cf. pp. 209-241.

In order to understand the proposal of the authors presented, one must consider their particular and debatable perspective, called “intradisciplinary”, that is, the appreciation of the contribution of the human sciences only within theology.²⁰⁷ The greatest contribution to overcoming the dimension- based, compartmentalised and compromised relationship between education and evangelisation is to be found in the field of fundamental theology applied to youth ministry. This current of thought, even if it is not explicitly in the field of Salesian pedagogy, should be considered for its contributions and influences on the formulation of the third edition of the *Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference*. I think there is further room for dialogue and alliance between the insights, criteria and proposals set out with other contributions of thought, experience and planning from around the world, so as not to remain anchored in the framework of an overly specific fundamental theology. While anthropological reflections may be meaningful in some Western contexts that have experienced the effects of the “overly incarnated” model of youth ministry post-Vatican II, this is not the case for the majority of Salesian contexts that experience other cultural, social, educational, inter-religious and institutional dynamics. It will be necessary and stimulating to initiate the perspective of patient and humble “missionary synodality”, which takes care of both identity and processes, both thinking and planning.

Accompaniment, the new paradigm for postmodern education

As is often the case when there is a change of era, it would seem that the recent insistence on accompaniment is not only a trend responding to the new needs of young people, but also a critical feedback on the approach of the previous era. In fact, what was in the foreground in the post-Vatican II era was the concept of personal freedom (in an experiential context of struggling against the standardisation of a “Ricaldonian” boarding school). If freedom is conceived as an ordering principle, then it logically follows that pedagogical thinking and educational practice should diminish any interference with personal choices. In this context, one can understand the post-Council resistance towards a concept of traditional spiritual direction linked to confession (moral perspective) and to accountability to the rector (juridical perspective), as can be seen for

²⁰⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 257-258 which evaluates the contribution of S. LANZA, *Teologia pastorale*, in G. CANOBBIO - P. CODA (eds.), *La teologia del XX secolo. Un bilancio. 3. Prospettive pratiche*, Città Nuova, Rome 2003, 393-475. It should be noted that the “intradisciplinary” perspective does not take into account the instances of “transdisciplinary” thinking proposed in Pope Francis’ *Veritatis Gaudium*.

example in Aloysius Ricceri's letter in 1976 which reacts to the crisis situation,²⁰⁸ or in the assessment of Guido Gatti who situates spiritual direction in a context of old and new moral paradigms, and in the interpretation of Albert Druart, who sees the Salesian tradition of spiritual direction up to 1965 as linked to the practice of accountability.²⁰⁹

The perspective followed was one of "orientation", understood as a helping relationship in the wake of the humanistic psychology of Rogers and Carkhuff.²¹⁰ Juan Edmundo Vecchi's encyclopaedic volume on the educative and pastoral project of the mid-1980s recognises the importance of the concept of orientation, but also realises its possible limitations:

Even if there are close links and common areas between professional vocational orientation and growth to maturity of the Christian vocation, the two are fundamentally different in terms of the theoretical presuppositions from which they depart and the reflection that serves them. [...] Vocational ministry belongs to pastoral care and this starts from a theological reflection even if it assumes pedagogical criteria and admits instruments of psychological enquiry, making the most of their conclusions. [...] To assume and follow a vocation is to be attentive to the Lord who calls. [...] A vocational orientation which belittles or nullifies this reality would lose its roots and its biblical-Christian specificity.²¹¹

In later passages, affirming the irreplaceable nature of personal accompaniment by the educator, Vecchi proposes the concept of the "educative and pastoral conversation", which should go beyond the mentality of orientation and perform the following tasks:

- create a relationship in which the young person can become freer and more capable of perceiving himself, reality and signs from God;
- offer elements for an enlightened vision of one's inner self and the motivations for behaviour;

²⁰⁸ L. RICCERI, *We need men of God to guide us. Personal spiritual direction*, in ASC 57 (1976) 281, 894.

²⁰⁹ Cf. G. GATTI, *Direzione spirituale e nuova morale*, in DESRAMAUT – MIDALI, *La direzione spirituale*, 151-164 and A. DRUART, *La direzione spirituale nei documenti ufficiali salesiani del ventesimo secolo*, in DESRAMAUT – MIDALI, *La direzione spirituale*, 128-141.

²¹⁰ Cf. L. CIAN, *Le critiche mosse alla direzione spirituale salesiana dalla psicologia contemporanea. Contestazioni e orientamenti*, in Desramaut – Midali, *La direzione spirituale*, 181-210. and one of the different models used in the Salesian setting in A. ARTO, *Metodologia per impostare un processo di autoaiuto. Il modello di R. Carkhuff*, in "Animazione Sociale" 8-9 (1994), 26-33.

²¹¹ J.E. VECCHI, *Orientamento e pastorale vocazionale*, in J.E. VECCHI – J.M. PRELLEZO (Eds.), *Progetto Educativo Pastorale. Elementi modulari*, LAS, Rome 1984, 242-243.

- prepare to welcome and understand the Spirit’s promptings;
- help to synthesise the various experiences and direct them towards a life project in God;
- accompany and support God’s work in the young person in order to develop a secure Christian spirituality;
- balance dynamics that are not appropriate for Christian growth in an educational way.²¹²

Vecchi then lists the (many) qualities required to be an accompanier. He enriches the typical traits found in the Salesian tradition, such as being capable of responsible assistance, testifying to a joyful maturity and accompanying on non-formal occasions by sharing life with the essential theological and psychological preparation and specific formation in the field of vocations. It should be noted how Vecchi himself struggles to indicate a Salesian bibliography on the subject and how, subsequently, the category of the “educative and pastoral conversation” has not had much success. Not being included in the first two editions of the Frame of Reference, a proposal remained that could refer to the image of a “gap between the number of proposals and the possibility of implementing them”²¹³ pointed to so honestly by Fr Vecchi himself.

The topic of accompaniment, which has been central to youth ministry since GC26, has been the subject of reconsideration, studies and research. The book *L’accompagnamento spirituale. Itinerario pedagogico spirituale in chiave salesiana al servizio dei giovani*,²¹⁴ summarises the results of the four seminars organised since 2010 for the multidisciplinary approach and the wealth of contributions. These delve into both the Salesian tradition of accompaniment in Francis de Sales and Don Bosco and contemporary pastoral challenges, especially those related to postmodernity, multiculturalism and the formation of accompaniers.²¹⁵ In the following paragraphs we look at some stimulating passages for Salesian pedagogy.

²¹² Cf. *Ibid.*, 254-255.

²¹³ Cf. J.E. VECCHI, *Verso una nuova tappa di Pastorale Giovanile Salesiana*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000* (= Documenti PG 13), SDB, Rome 1991, 88. For other aspects of the operation of the 1980s proposals, see VOJTÁŠ, *Reviving Don Bosco’s Oratory*, 53-56.

²¹⁴ Cf. F. ATTARD – M. A. GARCÍA (eds.), *L’accompagnamento spirituale. Itinerario pedagogico spirituale in chiave salesiana al servizio dei giovani*, LDC, Turin 2014.

²¹⁵ Cf. The publication by Louis Grech is also interesting for its richness of content and integrated approach in L. GRECH, *Salesian Spiritual Companionship with young people today inspired by the praxis and thought of St John Bosco*, Horizons, Qormi 2018.

Features of Salesian accompaniment

As a spiritual accompanier, Francis de Sales develops a pedagogy starting from the dialectic of desires and the tension towards unification with God. Salesian accompaniment assists the person to become aware of and perfect their desire for union with God, which involves subordinating everything to the desire for God and strengthening resistance to contrary desires.²¹⁶ This common thread of Christian spirituality is specified with the particularities of the Salesian approach: personalised and proactive attention to the whole person; the centrality of love; gradualness and respect for the rhythms, conditions and particularities of each person. The latter also shape the form of accompaniment defined as the “[spiritual] direction of friendship”, enhancing the climate of confidence, mutual trust, freedom and also father-son-type relationships. The contribution of Józef Struś highlights the characteristics of the St Francis de Sales the accompanier: a man of charity, knowledge and prudence, with respect for the uniqueness of each individual, attitudes of gentleness, humility, respect and the necessary prudence and balance.²¹⁷

By getting these different approaches to interact, some more practical methodological attentions emerge that revolve around the personal and relational Salesian style of accompaniment. The decentralising attitudes of loving-kindness (preference for the good of the other) and humility (knowledge of one’s limits and appreciation of smallness and ordinariness) help to create a context that favours constant attention to the presence of God in the ordinary daily life of the person accompanied. Even though the authors agree that there is no Salesian method of accompaniment in the technical-modern sense of the term, they do offer some methodological elements regarding this process.²¹⁸

Some common traits in Francis de Sales and Don Bosco which could become criteria for Salesian accompaniment are: the importance of the relational dimension, attention to the everyday, a spirituality of action and the anthropology of the heart, which works in accompaniment with the deepest desires, tendencies, attractions and inspirations. The differences between the style of the bishop of Annecy and the priest of the young people of Valdocco are linked to the choice of those accompanied (noble adults or young

²¹⁶ Cf. E. ALBURQUERQUE, *San Francesco di Sales come direttore spirituale. Prassi pastorale della direzione spirituale del Vescovo di Ginevra*, in ATTARD – GARCÍA (eds.), *L’accompagnamento spirituale*, 23-25.

²¹⁷ Cf. J. STRUŚ, *La persona del direttore spirituale secondo san Francesco di Sales*, in *Ibid.*, 53-64.

²¹⁸ We find McDonnell, Alburquerque, Struś and Finnegan in agreement, who speak more of a Salesian profile, characteristics, model, spirit or style and not of methodology. Cf. *Ibid.*, 23, 77-80, 99-100, 198-199.

people from among the common folk), the options of the context within which the accompaniment takes place (personal or community) and, not least, the preference of the sources used (personal letters or biographical narratives).

Don Bosco's preventive choice and accompaniment, directed also to pre-adolescents, sets the beginning of the *educational relationship* with the young person in informal situations linked to educational or pastoral activities not directly related to accompaniment. Once the interpersonal communication channel has been established and mutual *trust* has been achieved in an "unstructured" context, personalised accompaniment can begin. The start of the conversations is linked to the needs of the young person, who is looking for *practical advice* on concrete situations or tasks for growth. A lot of empathy and *flexibility* is required of the Salesian educator in the first and still partially "fluid" phase.²¹⁹ When the conversation enters a more habitual phase, *regular accompaniment* meetings may be planned.²²⁰ Another focus is on accompaniment through the care of the educational environment by means of the figure of the catechist. Aldo Girauo notes that:

All this has been handed down in the Salesian tradition until relatively recent times. For more than a hundred years the spiritual accompaniment of pre-adolescents and adolescents was a priority, to the point that every Salesian work had a confrere especially dedicated to this, the "catechist" (who was not simply a "pastoral animator"). He was chosen with great care, on the basis of specific human and apostolic qualities. He had the task of assisting the rector in the community's spiritual management and in personalised formative work. He had to watch over the morality of the environment, see to the quality of Christian formation: catechesis, prayer life, the sacraments, the preparation of feasts, monthly recollections and annual retreats. He had to encourage religious sodalities (associations) and ensure their formative scope. He was invited to seek

219 Cf. the summary of procedural elements in the biographical narratives of Don Bosco in A. GIRAUO, *Maestri e discepoli in azione*, in G. Bosco, *Vite di giovani. Le biografie di Domenico Savio, Michele Magone e Francesco Besucco*. Introductory essay and historical notes by Aldo Girauo, LAS, Rome 2012, 28-30.

220 Cf. E. McDONNELL, *La direzione spirituale in san Francesco di Sales. Linee fondamentali del metodo spirituale e pedagogico nella prospettiva salesiana*, in ATTARD – GARCÍA (eds.), *L'accompagnamento spirituale*, 69.

opportunities for personal dialogue with each individual, to suggest texts for meditation and spiritual reading, take special care of vocations.²²¹

Giraud also observes that from the years of Vatican II onwards, community accompaniment through care of the environment has entered a crisis, especially because it is not linked to an educational role with concrete tasks, thus dissolving into the generic concept of animation. Don Bosco's pedagogy of community accompaniment is instead integrated with regular personal accompaniment during confession and with informal accompaniment in the context of recreation or other activities of the day. The dialogue of explicit accompaniment is emphasised more clearly by Don Bosco during periods of crisis in the growth of his young people,²²² and in moments of vocational discernment. It should be noted that from the very beginning of the reflection on accompaniment, the volume on spiritual accompaniment is implicitly or explicitly linked to vocational pedagogy and to the formation journeys in consecrated life.²²³

Contemporary challenges and responses

Jack Finnegan's reflection is enlightening as he places accompaniment in the current postmodern and post-secular context and points to the importance of the West, which translates, especially after the 1968 protest, into attitudes of emancipation from any power or influence in a context of rejection of metanarratives. It seems paradoxical to speak of the human person as "central" and then to place him or her in a fragmented, disconnected, complex and pluralistic world which, as a result, has no centre, no logic or common past. Narcissistic and individualistic consumerism obviously also affects the relationship with spirituality and spiritual accompaniment. This prefers a subjective spirituality unrelated to institutionalised religions, a taste for the exotic and exciting, the division between the sacred and the secular. It relies on sentiment and an irrational mysticism with an evasive and subjectively liberating experience from metaphysical or pragmatic laws, etc.²²⁴ Although Finnegan offers more questions than answers, he points out, as one of the most important tasks of accompaniment and the new evangelisation,

²²¹ Cf. A. GIRAUDO, *Direzione spirituale in san Giovanni Bosco. Connotazioni peculiari della direzione spirituale offerta da don Bosco ai giovani*, in *Ibid.*, 151.

²²² Giraud speaks in terms of a mystical, ethical and emotional crisis in GIRAUDO, *Maestri e discepoli in azione*, in em Bosco, *Vite di giovani*, 29-30.

²²³ Cf. quotations and references in the introduction to the book in ATTARD – GARCÍA (eds.), *L'accompagnamento spirituale*, 5-13.

²²⁴ Cf. J. FINNEGAN, *L'accompagnamento spirituale. Le sfide del postmoderno e post-secolare nell'Occidente contemporaneo*, in *Ibid.*, 195-198.

the “redefinition of rationality”, moving from secularised thinking with worldly criteria to Christian thinking that “means the direct or indirect acceptance of all things in relation to our eternal destiny as sons and daughters of the King.”²²⁵

The focus on Western issues is partly counterbalanced by Joe Mannath’s contribution on multi-religious contexts, which only really delves into the Indian Salesian context (excluding the provinces of the north-east). It is clear from the approach to the subject that the use of terms such as “multi-religiousness” and “multiculturalism” is often ambiguous and implicitly refers to a counterpart, shifting the semantics towards the non-western or simply “different”. There are multiple multi-religious and multicultural models, especially in Asia, that should be studied in their specificity, and one should not forget the multi-religious Western contexts such as the United States of America or other countries with strong immigration and diverse ethnic communities within them.²²⁶

Miguel Ángel García Morcuende concludes the work by reaffirming the importance of personal accompaniment in Salesian youth ministry. Starting from the characteristics of the world of youth and from the subdivision of the *Frame of Reference* into accompaniment through the environment, groups and through the personal accompaniment,²²⁷ he finally emphasises two important aspects in the acquisition of the “grammar of faith”: personalisation and evangelical discernment. The discourse on personal accompaniment also has implications for the Salesian educational environment:

Although the group and the environment in the Salesian tradition already provide a certain level of support, all young people need personal space for discussion. In the context of a Salesian house one breathes values, attitudes and habits, but to anchor and consolidate a Christian identity it is necessary to personalise it. [...] If we do not offer this personalised environment of “face to face”, personal growth in the personal universe will be left at the mercy of other contexts of influence in which young people are immersed: social networks, the peer group or the street.²²⁸

²²⁵ Cf. D.N. ENTWISTLE, *Integrative Approaches to Psychology and Christianity. An Introduction to Worldview Issues, Philosophical Foundations and Models of Integration*, in *Ibid.*, 206.

²²⁶ Cf. J. MANNATH, *L’accompagnamento spirituale dei giovani in scenari multireligiosi: contesti, possibilità, limiti, prospettive*, in *Ibid.*, 211-213.

²²⁷ Cf. YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*,³2014, 114-117. NB the concept of accompaniment is found 140 times in the third edition of the *Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference* and is a key to its interpretation.

²²⁸ M.A. GARCÍA MORCUENDE, *L’accompagnamento personale nella proposta educativo-pastorale salesiana*, in ATTARD – GARCÍA (eds.), *L’accompagnamento spirituale*, 271.

The Salesian accompanier should not be a dazed manager living under the pressure of time and business. Considering accompaniment as an art and a science and as an apostolate in its own right requires a lot of attitudes, attention and maturity on the part of the accompanying individuals, who should be trained through specific courses.²²⁹ The requirements multiply, since “it is not enough to offer formative processes suitable for all ages; it is necessary to offer differentiated personalised processes, concrete and appropriate programmes, coherent, intelligent and bold pastoral projects to differentiate personal attention, to seek new formative paths.”²³⁰ Logically, this leads to the conclusion that it is important to encourage educators to accompany adolescents and young people. Not an easy task given the requirements.

This comprehensive work on accompaniment seems to conclude a journey of over half a century. From an accompaniment through *environment* in Ricaldone's time, focused on uniform compliance through regulations, attention shifts, after Vatican II to accompaniment through group work often carried out from a generic humanist perspective without attention to evangelisation. The pre-Vatican II practices of spiritual direction through confession and dialogue with the rector, seen as unifying factors, were left aside. The trajectory continues in the third millennium, partly copying Western sensitivities, moving from generic group animation and event-based pastoral activity to personal spiritual accompaniment with an explicit “grammar of faith”, which also includes vocational proposals.

Even if we are speaking in very generalised terms, it seems that pastoral practice also shows signs of obvious risks in the current approach: 1. A pastoral model in which there are a few chosen ones around a spiritual “guru”; 2. The lack of spiritual accompaniers who meet all the requirements and criteria. In the next section we would therefore like to delve further into the overview of Salesian accompaniment emerging from recent research and publications.

A global and realistic look at accompaniment

At present, accompaniment in the Salesian world, whether by religious or lay people, is becoming a necessity. If before, in the late 60s, personalisation was carried out in a spirit of criticism and breaking the usual patterns, now the general situation has changed. At the level of references, the horizon of meaning has been liquidated and shattered.

²²⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 267-276

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 276. The quote refers to YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*, ³2014, 99-103, 285.

On a psychological level, the phenomenon of performance anxiety is increasing. On a professional level, global competition has made the requirements for success in life tougher. Unlike previous generations, today's young people need to personalise their lives by relying on a helping relationship and growing within a credible community context.

However, it should be noted that despite the appeals and rhetoric, in fact it seems that personal accompaniment in Salesian environments is quite neglected. More than 72% of the Salesian pre-novices report that they only discovered spiritual accompaniment in the pre-novitiate.²³¹ If three quarters of those who entered Salesian formation made an important decision without being accompanied, we can only speculate what the percentage would be for the vast majority of young people in Salesian houses.²³² Even the accompanying persons in Salesian formation who carry out this service, and who have such a task as part of their role description, say that it is only a relatively intense commitment. Almost half of them accompany five or fewer individuals and another 30% between 6 and 15 individuals. In terms of time, almost three quarters of the accompanying individuals range from a few hours dedicated to this to a couple of days a week, up to one meeting every 2-3 months.²³³

While realising there are differences in contexts, which emerged in the above-mentioned research by Marco Bay,²³⁴ I would like to offer a twofold perspective on differentiated and isomorphic accompaniment. We can accept the reflection of the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Synod on young people, which is linked to the whole tradition of spirituality that insists on how fundamental accompaniment is in a broad perspective:

Those who accompany the young might be men and women, religious and lay persons, couples; the community also plays a decisive role. Therefore, the accompaniment of young people by the Church takes on many different direct and indirect forms, weaves together a multiplicity of dimensions and makes use of manifold instruments, depending on the context where it takes place and the degree of ecclesial and faith involvement of those who are being accompanied.²³⁵

²³¹ Cf. M. BAY, *Young Salesians and accompaniment. Results of an international survey* LAS, Rome 2018, 47.

²³² Cf. also Á. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, Strenna 2018 “Lord, give me this water” (Jn 4:15). *Let us cultivate the art of listening and of accompaniment*, in AGC 99 (2018) 426, 4-5.

²³³ Cf. BAY, *Young Salesians and accompaniment*, 420-421.

²³⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 455-493.

²³⁵ “*Instrumentum laboris*” of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in bit.ly/vatican-va-2018-06-19, 122.

The *diversification* of accompaniment realistically envisages different types of accompaniment, already described by Fr Vecchi. The Salesians who accompany are characterised by different styles of accompaniment according to the geographical and cultural areas. The data must be interpreted with caution, inasmuch as the preferences may be influenced not only by style, culture and language, but also by the number of those accompanied/formees, which may be lower or higher. In the Central & North Europe region, spiritual accompaniment is preferred, favouring a style of discernment and personalised orientation with patient and proactive dialogue, without impositions. In America, a coaching approach is preferred, focusing on problem solving and/or psychological counselling, together with a strong Salesian identification of the partners in accompaniment. In the East Asia-Oceania and the Mediterranean regions, situational coaching is more sporadic and spontaneous, with some references to problem solving. In the Africa-Madagascar and South Asia regions, where the number of vocations to consecrated life is the highest, there is a more standardised and normative style of direction, with the risks of little connection between inward conviction and outward behaviour, little personalisation and little self-formation through study by the companions.²³⁶

Another issue of differentiation concerns the three experiences most present in Salesian environments: spiritual accompaniment, confession and the friendly talk with the rector. What emerges from the research is a general tendency to keep the three distinct by referring to three distinct individuals (spiritual director, confessor, rector). There is also an image of the rector as relational, fatherly and always at home. The ideal confessor is seen in terms of mercy and confidentiality. “Salesianity” is often interpreted in relational terms as trust, sincerity and the fatherly approach of the one accompanying. If we go beyond the research carried out in the context of the initial formation of consecrated persons, the principle of differentiation presupposes going beyond the image of the “professional” companion. Attention to the care of all vocations obviously makes it necessary for mothers and fathers of families, competent lay people and young people themselves to be involved in the mission of accompaniment through the various models of peer education.

Among the difficulties to be noted, in some formation phases and in some regions, is the lack of systematic accompaniment, which results in an insufficient number of

²³⁶ Cf. BAY, *Young Salesians and accompaniment*, 386-398. Some dynamics that emerged in the research can be found in MANNATH, *L'accompagnamento spirituale dei giovani in scenari multi-religiosi: contesti, possibilità, limiti, prospettive*, in ATTARD – GARCÍA (eds.), *L'accompagnamento spirituale*, 211-228.

meetings. Despite the perceived absolute importance of confidentiality, “many of our interviewees have the impression that what is shared with a guide is often revealed to others.”²³⁷ There are also some sets of questions missing from the questionnaires: the themes and “content” of accompaniment in the dimensions of growth and formation are not addressed (health, consecration, study, apostolate, community, spiritual life, affective and relational life, etc.).

Although about 80% of the respondents perceive the usefulness of personal planning tools (“life project” and “personal verification”),²³⁸ there is a low formative impact of community educative and pastoral planning, which is seen more as a management task than a spiritually charged formative area. The potential accompaniers and rectors of Salesian houses are few and busy, above all, with management tasks. Numerous studies on accompaniment in the organisational sector and also some Salesian experiences confirm, however, a potential close connection between management responsibility and accompaniment. Obviously, it is necessary to move away from the narrow confines of technocratic management towards holistic horizons that see management as an area in which participation, formation, community discernment and profound personal and community transformations take place. In this mentality, *accompaniment is not one more thing to do but the way of doing it*, becoming a “form” of the organised culture in Salesian houses which structures the management of educational processes and environments at different levels. The educators who also accompany should agree on some basic criteria (ethical, pedagogical, Salesian) for all levels and types of accompaniment, in order to be able to speak of an *isomorphic style*: there are different particular ways of doing this but there is a form of Salesian accompaniment recognisable in them all. Various forms of accompaniment can be carried out by teams or individuals with specific preparation, such as the case with confession, spiritual accompaniment, psychological counselling or pastoral counselling. The generative potential of young people should not be underestimated: from accompanied “recipients” they become “apostles” in line with the Salesian tradition of the “guardian angel”. More informal and contextual modes of accompaniment such as mentoring, tutoring, peer coaching, can be included here.²³⁹ Other aspects of the evolution of Salesian pedagogy in the field of organisation and planning will be explored in the following section.

²³⁷ FORMATION DEPARTMENT – YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT, *Young Salesians and Accompaniment. Orientations and Guidelines*, Salesian Headquarters, Rome 2019, 56.

²³⁸ Cf. BAY, *Young Salesians and accompaniment*, 407.

²³⁹ Cf. M. VOJTÁŠ, *L'arte dell'accompagnamento in chiave salesiana*, in “Orientamenti Pedagogici” 65 (2018) 2, 303-322.

Transformative and virtuous pedagogy that goes beyond planning by objectives

The image of the rational human being who translates needs into objectives and acts through the effort of self-control, has passed into Salesian educative and pastoral planning through the idea of rational planning that follows a linear approach (objective – situation – means – evaluation) and the division of growth into dimensions planned with relative autonomy (education, evangelisation, groups, vocation). In the contemporary debate, however, the model of the rational modern human being has collapsed, affirming the growing importance of:

- systemic-integral and not just linear thinking (Deming, Senge);
- transformational and not only transactional change (Tichy, Devanna, Mezirow, Scharmer);
- participative and community leadership (Schein, de Geuss, Wenger);
- excellence instead of effectiveness (de Pree, Bennis, Covey, Gardner);
- multiple “intelligences” (Polanyi, Agor, Mintzberg, Argyris, Gardner)
- spirituality in planning (Giacalone, Jurkiewicz, Benefiel).²⁴⁰

These authors of organisational science, not incorporated into Salesian planning until recently,²⁴¹ realise that the methodology of planning by objectives leads to ephemeral results if it is not accompanied by certain deeply rooted attitudes (virtues) of the educators, who are the operators of the project through concrete educational interventions. The nature of the planning and implementation of the project in practice also has an ethical dimension and methodologically demands some virtues for its operation, especially in the educational and pastoral field. In this sense the process of planning can and should also be a path of formation of virtues and cognitive and operational skills within a “community of practice” which in the Salesian context is realised in the educative and pastoral community.²⁴² Many planning scholars, especially in the educational field, share the notion of the inseparability of who one is and how

²⁴⁰ Cf. References in VOJTÁŠ, *Reviving Don Bosco's Oratory*, 110-125.

²⁴¹ The same inertia was perceptible in the wider ecclesiastical sphere e.g. around the see-judge-act model. Pope Francis states how this method “suffered this temptation in the form of ‘asepsis’. The method of ‘see, judge, act’ was used, and it is fine. The temptation lay in opting for a totally aseptic ‘seeing’, a neutral ‘seeing’, which is unrealisable”, in *Incontro con i vescovi responsabili del CELAM. Discorso del Santo Padre Francesco*, in bit.ly/vatican-va-2013-07-28.

²⁴² Cf. the contribution that replaces the ethics of rights with the ethics of virtues in DARIUS GRZĄDZIEL, *L'educazione del carattere e l'educazione salesiana alla cittadinanza*, in “Salesianum” 77 (2015) 92-126.

one acts concretely as a participant in an educational project. In this sense, *identity determines methodology*. Educational transformation occurs first and foremost in the interaction of educators and not only in organisational or educational systems and processes. The theme of the ethical and operational virtues of the members of the community, which are a *sine qua non* of a successful project, makes explicit the paradigm of authentic educational leadership: “having to be the change you want to create.”²⁴³

In my proposal of transformative planning outlined in *Reviving Don Bosco’s Oratory*, Fr Viganò’s intuition regarding the “new education” is further developed. It is an art that transforms any artist-educator as they create their work. If we see education and youth ministry as similar to a masterpiece of visual art, it becomes important to be clear about the desired “product” of the creative effort: what is to be represented, how will the characters be arranged, what emotions are to be awakened, in what environment will the scene be set... So far, however, there is nothing new, the answers to these questions are the objectives for what you want to produce (*product paradigm*). For a work to be a masterpiece, the artist’s style, technique, method and artistic processes that guide the entire journey leading to the work’s completion are equally important (*process paradigm*). Last but not least – in fact, first and foremost – it is essential to form and accompany the person of the artist-educator. They find themselves in front of the blank canvas, their inner worlds, their past, the traditions that have influenced them, their motivation, the spirituality that fuses values, their dilemmas, weaknesses, questions and, above all, the roots of their vocation as an artist (*identity paradigm*). When a work of art is a masterpiece, there is not only harmony between parts and the whole, but there is a profound unity between the artist, the process and the product. Each part is not only in its place, but its placement reinforces both the logic of the whole and the sense of placement of the other parts.

An educative and pastoral project should be “designed” and “carried out” with a method that reflects the specific educational nature of the activity, vision and values it embodies. The *Frame of Reference* says: “The pedagogical approach of the method, closely linked to the contents and dynamic, is important. [...] In this sense, the method is also the message.”²⁴⁴ If you want to create an educative project that goes beyond a simple transmission of content from the handbook to the head (*transmission*) or a linear behavioural conditioning through pre-programmed activities (*transaction*), but rather

²⁴³ P.M. SENGE – C.O. SCHARMER et al., *Presence. Exploring Profound Change in People, Organizations, and Society*, Currency Doubleday, New York 2004, 147.

²⁴⁴ YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*, ³2014, 101.

aim to form the virtues of educators and students, embody values, create a dynamic of communion and personalisation (*transformation*), then there is a need to review both the operational-planning virtues and the planning steps (cf. Figure J).²⁴⁵

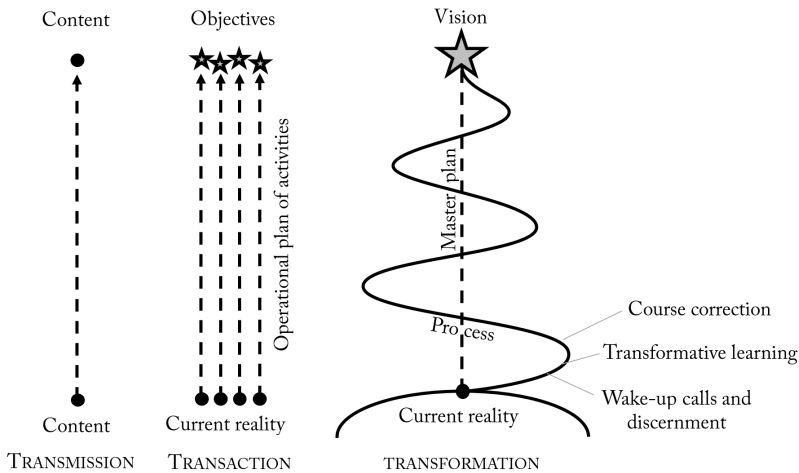


Figure J: models of educational planning: transmission, transaction and transformation

The formation of the “planner” is connected with the process of planning at various levels: the mentality, i.e. the deep convictions about reality, the quality of the cognitive-emotional character which guides the research process, and finally, operational and organisational skills. In this sense we propose “planning virtues” that characterise human action at different levels of depth, going beyond the limited rationalistic-voluntaristic anthropology of design by objectives. In addition to the already well-known virtues of creative fidelity, which emerged with updating post-Vatican II, and of operational coherence implicitly contained in Fr Vecchi’s model of planning, importance is given, in the transformative model, to the virtues of discernment and of personal and community accompaniment. The strategic moment of planning is the acceptance of the “call” to educational change linked to the transformation of identity. This overcomes the technical understanding of planning and the exaggerated emphasis on the precise formulation of objectives and related activities.

²⁴⁵ For the integration of the concepts of transformative education in the Salesian pedagogical proposals, see e.g.: J. VALLABARAJ, *Empowering the Young Towards Fullness of Life*, Kristu Jyoti Publications, Bangalore 2003 and E. ALBERICH – J. VALLABARAJ, *Communicating a Faith That Transforms. A Handbook of Fundamental Catechetics*, Kristu Jyoti Publications, Bangalore 2004.

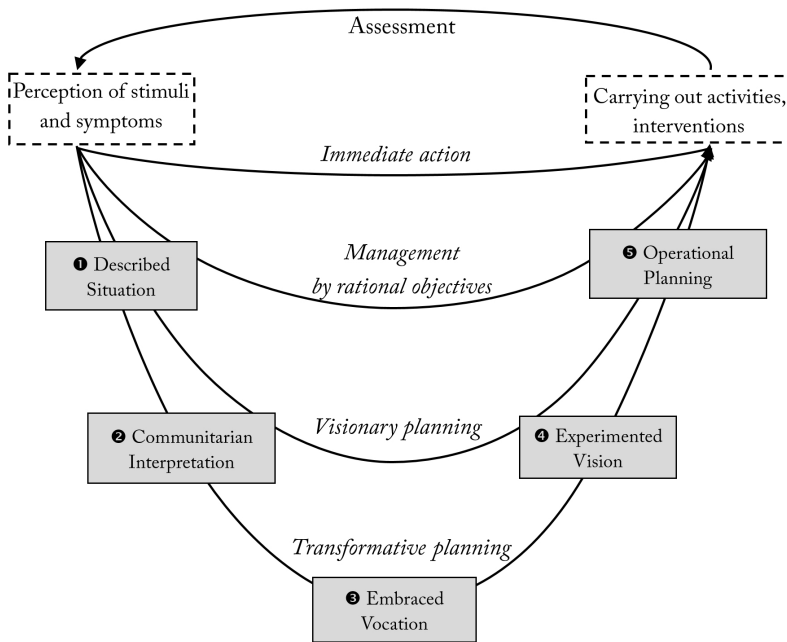


Figure K: Steps and levels of transformative planning

Integral and in-depth planning requires a process model that accompanies the educative community through the different levels of dialogue. (cf. Figure K).²⁴⁶ There is a more rational conversation that describes the *situation* in as objective a way as possible. A second, more empathetic level of dialogue comes down to sharing more personal aspects of paradigms of *interpretation* of reality, expectations, fears, hopes. This requires a greater degree of trust within the planning group.²⁴⁷ Finally, the third level of a profound dialogue linked to a more passive and contemplative discernment. This listens to the call/voice of reality and in conversation tends to connect the more

²⁴⁶ Cf. VOJTÁŠ, *Progettare e discernere*, 217-314 taking advantage of SCHARMER, *Theory U. Leading from the Future as it Emerges*; D. BOHM, *Thought as a System*, Routledge, London 1994 and D. BOHM, *On dialogue*, (ed) Lee Nichol, Routledge, New York 1996.

²⁴⁷ Here one can mention the contribution on the expansion of modern rationality by M. PELLERREY, *La professionalità educativa e la competenza pedagogica. Attenzioni irrinunciabili dell'offerta formativa della famiglia salesiana oggi*, in V. ORLANDO (ed.), *Con don Bosco educatori dei giovani del nostro tempo*. Acts of the International Conference on Salesian Pedagogy 19-21 March Rome Salesianum/UPS, LAS, Rome 2015, 190-198.

rational elements with the more emotional elements of the interpretative paradigms into a spiritually and motivationally meaningful *vocation*. Only afterwards does the dialogue go back to the second level and the call is made narratively explicit in a *vision statement* in the fourth planning moment. In this moment it is also advisable to test the vision in small prototypes, in order to get the first feedback from praxis. Finally, we come to the fifth moment of *operational planning*, which brings the vision into reality, sets goals and strategies in an effort to align everyone in the direction of the vision.

Community, narrative and praxis are the principles that emerge both in the Salesian model of educational planning and in the education of virtues and character as proposed by Dariusz Grządziel, who takes up several instances of MacIntyre, Carr, Pellerey and Abbà. Grządziel sees the “community of tradition” as the natural milieu of character development, as the life story of each person, as well as the history of each human practice, are always embedded in a social context and in the broader histories of traditions. Character education takes place primarily in the family environment, where the young person, by entering into relationships with other members of the community, is a participant in their moral life, first learning exemplary skills and moral behaviour and then learning to recognise respected ideals. Participation in virtuous practices and the narrative forms that embody values and virtues are the most incisive forms of ethical formation recognisable both in Don Bosco’s Preventive System and in some contemporary currents of study. The individual actions and educational activities derive their meaning if they are inserted into a narrative that places them within the history and tradition of a community to which they belong. Narrative and belonging are elements that give unity to life, which can be conceived as a “whole”.²⁴⁸ Planning and virtue formation can thus ideally flow into a process of community participation in discerning and creating a new version (project) of the community narrative (tradition) that actively moves members to act with a new and transformed awareness (praxis).

Going beyond the historical critique, by integrating transformational pedagogy we can also positively re-evaluate the link and the subtle balances between narrative pedagogy and project pedagogy in Don Bosco’s educational proposal. This had not been considered in the linear project model. The vision narrated in the form of the story or dream is completed by the concrete nature of regulations, division of roles and tasks, and the process is regulated through accompaniment of individuals and with constant

²⁴⁸ Cf. GRZĄDZIEL, *L’educazione del carattere e l’educazione salesiana*, 102-118 and M. PELLEREY, *Processi formativi e dimensione spirituale e morale della persona. Dare senso e prospettiva al proprio impegno nell’apprendere lungo tutto l’arco della vita*, CNOS-FAP, Rome 2007, 128-129.

attention to discernment. The vision formulated, therefore, is not only a declaration of objectives, but a whole symbolic educational environment built from narratives, stories, symbols and theories that implies an organisational culture, management style, the division of roles and tasks.²⁴⁹

Salesian formation of adult educators

The importance of a transformative and virtuous approach becomes very important in the formation of Salesian educators who not only need pedagogical skills but also accompaniment in their Salesian identity. Already at the end of the last century, Fr Vecchi suggested that one of the roles of the Salesian of the future, besides being a “guarantor of the charism”, would be that of forming and accompanying adult educators. This is a necessity which logically derives from the model of collaboration/shared responsibility between consecrated individuals and lay people, but which has been stressed more strongly in the concrete pastoral experience of various provinces. It seems interesting to us to mention some more developed formative models, oriented towards the theme of the Salesian identity of educators.

Provincials in the Interamerica Region were already aware of this need for formation at the time of the Special General Chapter and to respond to it they founded the Regional Salesian Centre for Ongoing Formation in Quito in 1974, entrusting its direction to Fr Fernando Peraza Leal. The experience of the centre was facilitated by the innovative energy generated in the Americas after Vatican II, as well as by the use of a single language, the popular diffusion of the image of Don Bosco and, last but not least, by the coordination of Fr Peraza, who gave continuity to the project with a friendly and fatherly style in an atmosphere of “oratorian” familiarity.²⁵⁰ The most solid element of the experiential and vital formation method proposed in Quito is not an explicit pedagogical theory of reference,²⁵¹ but a “methodology” based on identification

²⁴⁹ Cf. A. GIRAUDDO, *L'importanza storica e pedagogica – spirituale delle Memorie dell'Oratorio*, in G. BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*. Introductory essay and historical notes by Aldo Giraud, LAS, Rome 2011, 5-49; BRAIDO, *Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco*, 6-7.

²⁵⁰ Cf. R.D. JARAMILLO, *Il Centro Salesiano Regionale di Formazione Permanente (Quito – Ecuador)*, in ORLANDO (ed.), *Con don Bosco educatori dei giovani*, 184-189.

²⁵¹ Cf. CINAJ, *Evaluación y proyección del Centro Salesiano de Formación Permanente: Elementos para la planificación institucional de servicios y programas*, in JARAMILLO, *Il Centro Salesiano Regionale*, in ORLANDO (ed.), *Con don Bosco educatori dei giovani*, 188.

with Don Bosco, encouraging the emergence of attitudes, motivations, mentalities, life options and decisions. The criterion of forming by teaching and teaching by forming is realised in the balance between the brain and the heart, knowledge of and love for Don Bosco, historical knowledge and the stimulus to present practices.²⁵²

In his approach to the study of Don Bosco, Fr Peraza followed the criterion of the “absence of dogmatism and prejudice”, which placed him in a dialectical relationship between both valuing yet distancing himself from contemporary Salesian studies: “In the transmission of novelties, it is important to bear in mind that the last word has never been said. Many things in the interpretation of Don Bosco are still hypotheses and what is being investigated we cannot present as categorical statements.”²⁵³ In spite of this, the basic four-year course at the Quito Centre has so far revolved strongly around the gradual gaining of knowledge of Don Bosco’s life, starting from the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, and without formally entering into matters of updating Salesian pedagogy. The peculiarity of the course is the formation of the Salesian identity of lay and consecrated participants, which is achieved through a skilful alternation between moments of exposition, study and active participation in group work or in assembly discussions.

Carlo Loots and Colette Schaumont, who are linked to the experience of the Oud-Heverlee Centre in Belgium, offer an approach to Salesian education that is not too distant in methodological terms but more rooted theoretically.²⁵⁴ Their model for the formation sees the Salesian identity as a dynamic and process-oriented reality. Referring to the inspirations of Charles Leget,²⁵⁵ they envisage the interaction between three elements to create an institutional identity: the link with tradition and with future prospects, the network of internal and external relations and the identity of key collaborators.

The *history of an institution* in its relationship with tradition is important, in that the choices made in the past largely determine its identity. It “resembles the identity of an individual: everyone has his or her own life story, which is rewritten when important events occur. In the same way, an institution writes and rewrites its own history. It

²⁵² Cf. F. PERAZA LEAL, *Iniciación al estudio de don Bosco*, Centro Salesiano Regional, Quito 2003, 1-4.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁵⁴ C. SCHAUMONT – C. LOOTS, *La formazione dei collaboratori laici: integrare la pedagogia salesiana nella propria persona e nel lavoro educativo*, in ORLANDO (ed.), *Con don Bosco educatori dei giovani*, 150-161.

²⁵⁵ Cf. C. LEGET, *Geloven in wat je doet. Zorginstelling en katholieke traditie*, Damon, Budel 2004 cited as a reference model in *Ibid.*, 153, 155, 158.

is an ongoing process.”²⁵⁶ The network of relationships both within and without can increase the Salesian dimension through the internal structuring of the institution and through the way communication and collaboration between all its sections takes place. The way in which the organisational chart is implemented, the division of roles and tasks reveals and shapes identity at the same time. The network of external collaborations, the relationship with the founding Salesians and with the various civil and ecclesiastical bodies is also part of the identity dynamic. Finally, the identity of individuals, especially key people, gives a face to the institution or at least to a part of it. This has a great impact internally and externally on management and the educational environment and radiates inspiration and motivational power, implicitly or explicitly.

The innovation and significance of Loots and Schaumont’s model is that it simultaneously considers identity processes on a personal and institutional level. Valuing the principles of adult learning, they envisage interesting procedural focuses for an intentional formation of identity that actively invests in processes of development, change and learning. Some examples of application are the initiation programs for new co-workers who have to learn to integrate the Salesian identity into their attitudes, ways of thinking and acting. For staff who have been in service for many years, formation is needed to revive and deepen the fundamental principles which will help them to check their practice against the basic guidelines. The management staff, on the other hand, must have the opportunity to learn how to safeguard and give substance to the Salesian identity of the work through processes of critical evaluation of their management in the light of the criteria of the Salesian mission. These are key persons for the Salesian identity to be visible and recognisable in language, management, practice and mentality.²⁵⁷

The proposal of Loots and Schaumont, aiming to “take totally seriously” the message on the shared responsibility of the laity “which must be pushed to the point where the laity feel responsible for the responsibility of the Salesians”,²⁵⁸ would seem to go beyond Fr Vecchi’s vision and not consider the different forms of gradual accompaniment in the Salesian formation of the laity and their involvement in educational responsibilities. Being concerned not to see the Salesian charism as a “ready-made package”, in the end they only arrive at hermeneutical, critical and

²⁵⁶ SCHAUMONT – LOOTS, *La formazione dei collaboratori laici*, in ORLANDO (ed.), *Con don Bosco educatori dei giovani*, 158.

²⁵⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 158-161.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 152. As a background of these ideas there is a particular interpretation of Don Bosco’s relationship with the laity that emphasises the importance of the concept of the “extern(al) Salesian” planned for the first Salesian constitutions. Cf. *Ibid.*, 150-153.

methodological processes in the form of questions that sketch the outlines of a working document.²⁵⁹ The logic of the “process” practically smothers the charismatic “contents”, which thus lose the power to question the identity of the educators. This is especially evident in the field of pedagogy of the faith, which becomes a “challenge” and it is enough for the educator to be willing to grow in the questions of faith or to have “a certain affinity with educational spirituality.”²⁶⁰ Salesian pedagogy thus becomes a process-oriented pedagogy based on the concepts of alliance, trust, growth, play, joy and hope.²⁶¹ In terms of the relationship between content, process and identity, the Quito model seems to us to be more balanced, even if it is less rooted in pedagogical theories.

Many provinces around the world adopt models of Salesian formation of educators and lay collaborators. Among the most developed, given the strong presence in the scholastic sphere, one can name the courses run by the Spanish and Brazilian provinces, developed in collaboration between the Salesians of Don Bosco and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Adopting physical attendance, online and blended learning models, they have put in place a strategic collaboration of Salesian higher education institutions with the Salesian schools network. In the Spanish model, the courses are aimed at staff in leadership roles and pastoral coordinators. Those for teachers, due to the large number of people involved, are only offered online. In addition to the contents, the methodological choice is interesting: “Salesianity is not intended as a ‘module’ separate from the others, but as a common thread and the focus that illuminates the rest of the content.”²⁶² The themes of Salesian pedagogy, the educative and pastoral proposal, charismatic origins and Salesian magisterium run across all the modules on leadership, management of educational projects, quality, innovation and, finally, legal and economic issues. Another interesting methodological feature is the creation of small groups within the online courses and the assignment of a tutor to each group, thus preventing the feeling of anonymity and favouring the personalisation of learning.²⁶³

²⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 163-165.

²⁶⁰ C. SCHAUMONT – C. LOOTS, *Preparare un futuro per la pedagogia salesiana. La formazione come leva. L'esperienza belga*, in “Orientamenti Pedagogici” 54 (2007) 5, 899. The formative model is influenced by Schepens and Burggraeve’s concept already presented which combines religion with the search for meaning in life.

²⁶¹ Cf. SCHAUMONT – LOOTS, *La formazione dei collaboratori laici*, in ORLANDO (ed.), *Con don Bosco educatori dei giovani*, 169-171.

²⁶² O. GONZÁLEZ, *Proyecto formativo de directivos y educadores de las Escuelas Salesianas en España*, in ORLANDO (ed.), *Con don Bosco educatori dei giovani*, 179.

²⁶³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 178-181.

Already with a relatively long experience there is the online course in Salesianity offered by the Universidade Católica Dom Bosco, in Campo Grande, Brazil. The well-structured course combines knowledge about Don Bosco and Francis de Sales with the identity elements of Salesian pedagogy and pastoral care, the dynamics of the world of youth, women's perspectives and psychological-social aspects.²⁶⁴ Regarding online courses, there is no shortage of doubts and debate about the effectiveness of merely distance Salesian formation. It would seem that the majority of online proposals are intended as an “umbrella” guaranteed at the national or provincial level to be integrated with physical attendance formation guaranteed locally or at province level. In reality, therefore, the formation would be a mixed course between online and in-person elements. The tutors who accompany formation at virtual and also local level are important.²⁶⁵ The experience of the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to change the approach and balance around online education, as almost all educators worldwide have had experiences with online learning and raised awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of different models.

Variations and innovations in different areas

A number of updates, insights and best practices in the field of social pedagogy emerged at the international conference on Salesian pedagogy held on the occasion of the bicentenary in 2015,²⁶⁶ It partly took up the most significant reflections from the Congress on the *Preventive System and human rights* in 2009. The focus on social aspects was reflected in the preferential choice for the peripheries, the frequent mention of the throwaway culture and in Pope Francis' option for the least.²⁶⁷ The format of the Congress, with a large involvement of scholars and professionals, has also influenced the methodology of the study of Salesian pedagogy, preferring the rationale of a “partial specialist updating” that starts from the central concepts of the author's field of competence and then creates links with Don Bosco's preventive system or presumes they

²⁶⁴ Cf. virtual.ucdb.br/salesianidade

²⁶⁵ Cf. GONZÁLEZ, *Proyecto formativo de directivos y educadores*, in ORLANDO (ed.), *Con don Bosco educatori dei giovani*, 180-181 and the formation course for tutors of IUS Europa.

²⁶⁶ Cf. V. ORLANDO (ed.), *Con don Bosco educatori dei giovani del nostro tempo*. Acts of the International Conference on Salesian Pedagogy 19-21 March Rome Salesianum/UPS, LAS, Rome 2015.

²⁶⁷ Cf. References to *Evangelii Gaudium* in Á. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, *Apertura del Convegno*, in *Ibid.*, 13-14.

are implicit. The advantage of this type of approach is related to the breadth of references and the practicality of the pedagogical tools of each specialist area. The disadvantage is the danger of linking Salesian pedagogy to (almost) any contemporary pedagogical theory, neglecting the connection with the roots and balances of Don Bosco's founding experience.

In Jean-Marie Petitclerc's perspective, the concept of the educational relationship is as an *alliance* which is built on trust and envisages the role of the educator as mediator. The educational postulate of trust is expressed in the deep conviction of the educator that every young person, however wounded by life, has a zone of freedom worthy of trust, which makes it possible to form an alliance with him or her. It is essential that young people see that we believe and hope in them, whatever happens. Salesian pedagogy would thus be an education in fellowship, which is found in the interweaving of the ideal of the good Christian and the upright citizen, and which grows through communication, prevention and the regulation of conflicts.²⁶⁸ Petitclerc's proposal is set in the context of "human rights", but goes beyond it in terms of its methodological focus.²⁶⁹

The practice of education to human rights is another focus promoted during this period. In a survey of GC26 participants, interesting insights were found in terms of sensitivity to new forms of poverty and needs. In general there is agreement that the promotion of rights is an effective way to create a more just society, but there is more scepticism as to whether the "educational way of human rights" is useful for updating the preventive system. This distrust is found especially among European and American Salesians.²⁷⁰ The connection between the logic of rights and evangelisation is even more problematic,²⁷¹ in line with the principles outlined by MacIntyre, Carr and Grządziel regarding the fact that moral education cannot be reduced to the logic of rights alone. The presentation of best practices in the congresses in 2009 and 2015 also seems to confirm the tendency that education for rights, connected with the field of social

²⁶⁸ Cf. J.M. PETITCLERC, *Le système préventif repensé dans l'horizon actuel*, in *Ibid.*, 83-85 inspired by X. THÉVENOT (ed.), *Éduquer à la suite de Don Bosco*, DDB/Cerf, Paris 1996.

²⁶⁹ Cf. J.M. PETITCLERC, *La pédagogie de Don Bosco en douze mots-clés*, Éditions Don Bosco, Paris 2012.

²⁷⁰ Cf. V. ORLANDO, *La via dei diritti umani e la missione educativa pastorale salesiana oggi*, Results of an investigation among GC26 Chapter members and operational perspectives, LAS, Rome 2008, 108-114.

²⁷¹ Cf. V. ORLANDO, *I diritti umani come via efficace della missione educativa salesiana. Risultati della ricerca*, in *Dicastero Della Pastorale Giovanile Della Congregazione Salesiana, Congresso Internazionale Sistema Preventivo e Diritti Umani*. 2-6 January 2009 Rome, [s.e.], Rome 2009, 34-36.

pedagogy, has a well-established presence in Salesian provinces, but it is a limited sector and it is not included in the main activities of schools.

From a social perspective, there are also some significant concepts and insights related to service learning, resilience, empowerment and the principle of reciprocity. The process of in-depth study carried out by the FMA on the *Sistema preventivo e situazioni di disagio* (Preventive system and situations of hardship) from 1999 to 2007 helped to focus on some aspects of the Salesian method.²⁷² Mara Borsi finds some common ground between resilience and the Preventive System: preventiveness, environmental pedagogy, an anthropological concept open to transcendence and mystery. The quality of the Preventive System is linked to healthy and positive relational experiences in a favourable environment.²⁷³ The concept of resilience was echoed by several authors at the 2015 congress, in addition to Sr Borsi: Carlo Loots, Colette Schaumont and Thierry Le Goaziou spoke about it with regard to the educator and his necessary formation in it; Thomas Koshy links the concept with the paradigm of “expressive” education,²⁷⁴ which seeks to discover and express the resilient quality within each young person; Rafael Bejarano emphasises its transformative potential.²⁷⁵

Another typical aspect highlighted in the reflection of the FMA Institute is reciprocity as an expression of relational anthropology, based on the view of life as a gift and, at the same time, a project of freedom and ethical responsibility: “Being created in the image of the Triune God, according to the duality of man and woman is the foundation of the relational being of the person who exists in relation to others and matures in a continuous dynamic of reciprocity.”²⁷⁶ Within the framework of the paradigm of reciprocity, the relationship is understood and expressed through the category of “mutual accompaniment” and empowerment, understanding the accompanier as the person who does not precede or follow the other, but walks alongside the other on the same road, pointing out obstacles and teaching how to avoid them, and helping to reach the goal.²⁷⁷ The principle of reciprocity correlates with the relational

²⁷² Cf. M. BORSI – P. RUFFINATTO (eds.), *Sistema preventivo e situazioni di disagio. L’animazione di un processo per la vita e la speranza delle nuove generazioni*, LAS, Rome 2008.

²⁷³ Cf. M. BORSI, *Sistema preventivo e resilienza. Un possibile e fecondo dialogo*, in “Salesianum” 73 (2011) 2, 309-332.

²⁷⁴ Cf. The theory of “Expressive System” which replaces the “Preventive System” in P. GONSALVES, *Don Bosco’s Peace Culture. A theory-based study of his response to conflicts* (= Pubblicazioni del Centro Studi Don Bosco - Studi e Strumenti, 6), LAS, Roma 2022.

²⁷⁵ Cf. ORLANDO (ed.), *Con don Bosco educatori dei giovani*, 168, 217-221, 258-272 and 341.

²⁷⁶ *Nei solchi dell’alleanza. Progetto formativo delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Turin (Leumann), LDC 2000, 28.

²⁷⁷ Cf. References to the approach by J.M. GARCÍA, *Accompagnamento spirituale dei giovani: quadro di riferimento*, in ID. (ed.), *Accompagnare i giovani nello Spirito*, LAS, Rome 1998, 99-101.

model based on asymmetry and complementarity, insofar as the educators give credit and space to the initiative and decision-making of the young men and women who feel valued and accepted, and open themselves up to them with trust by offering them the riches of their personality. Furthermore, the reinterpretation of the Preventive System from the point of view of reciprocity leads to a focus on the theme of familiarity.²⁷⁸ Reciprocity is seen as the guiding principle that promotes communion by overcoming barriers, fragmentation and dissonance even within the Salesian Family and its mission.²⁷⁹

A further trend in the pedagogical field is the rethinking of voluntary work in the context of *service learning*. The intention to transform the world, linked to the image of volunteering in the 1970s and 1980s, is enriched with a focus on the integration of the life project, the service performed and the formative learning process. By preventing the difficulty of “doing without learning”, the service learning approach pursues a win-win combination of the benefits of young people, educational institutions and local communities.²⁸⁰ Some ideas in the Salesian context, at the level of reflections, can be found in the guidelines on *Voluntary Service – Salesian Mission* and in the *Frame of Reference* in 2014 valuing the integrating potential of volunteering in a young person’s growth.²⁸¹ More specific, on the theme of service learning, is the publication edited by several FMA entitled *Didattica della solidarietà, service learning e pedagogia salesiana* (Didactics of solidarity, service learning and Salesian pedagogy) which combines the principles of the Salesian pedagogical tradition with a tool that makes it possible to methodologically bring some of the typical features of the charism into ordinary school teaching, planning and evaluation.²⁸²

In the field of innovation in formal education there are also other updates that range from constructivist didactics to inclusive community management and empowerment.

278 Cf. COMISIÓN ESCUELA SALESIANA AMÉRICA, *II Encuentro continental de Educación Salesiana. Hacia una cultura de solidaridad*, Cuenca - Ecuador, Editorial Don Bosco 2001, 153.

279 Cf. M. BORSI, *Sistema preventivo, “sistema aperto”*, in ORLANDO (ed.), *Con don Bosco educatori dei giovani*, 120-131 and the founding inspirations in A. COLOMBO, *Educazione all’amore come coeducazione*, in AA.VV., *Educare all’amore. Atti della XVI Settimana di spiritualità per la Famiglia Salesiana*, SDB Rome 1993, 97-127.

280 Cf. M. GUARDIANI, *Educazione alla prosocialità: impatto sulla maturazione dei giovani, problemi aperti e potenziali soluzioni*, in “Orientamenti Pedagogici” 65 (2018) 1, 133-144.

281 Cf. YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*,³2014, 157-161; YOUTH MINISTRY AND MISSIONS DEPARTMENTS *Voluntary Service – Salesian Mission. Handbook and Guidelines*, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, Rome 2008.

282 Cf. CIOFS SCUOLA FMA, *Didattica della solidarietà. Service learning e pedagogia salesiana*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2019.

A typical example of a specialist update is the publication by Jorge Álvarez Medrano on the constructivist approach to didactics, which is linked to Don Bosco's Preventive System.²⁸³ Following in the footsteps of Casotti and then Ricaldone, who saw in Don Bosco a precursor of the active schools, the author proposes the constructivist didactic approach as being a Salesian one, since some principles are similar or connected, without, however, creating a framework between all the important elements. The distance-learning course promoted by the Latin American IUS has moved in a similar way, strongly emphasising co-operative learning as the concrete way to update Salesian education in a university context.²⁸⁴

The theme of social inclusion from the point of view of Salesian pedagogy saw significant development in the context of the Salesian Institutions of Higher Education (IUS) around the bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth. The Salesian presence in higher education is proposed as a response to the challenge of building a more just and inclusive society, permeating the organisational and formative culture of Christian humanism that forms the new leaders of generations of university students. The seminars dealt with the political, economic and educational aspects of the proposal of a Salesian pedagogy that prefers both interventions to prevent marginalisation or social exclusion, and an educational methodology that builds pluralistic and diverse educational environments.²⁸⁵

An open conclusion between the Synod and Covid-19

There was a multitude of activities and publications around the 2018 Synod on Young People, as is typical for a global ecclesial event of this kind. Some factors have diminished the impact of this important theme for the future of the Church, such as the fast pace of the succession of different Synods during Pope Francis' pontificate, the circumstances that questioned the credibility of the Catholic Church's approach to young people, the traditionalist-progressive oppositions or the multiplicity of official documents around

²⁸³ Cf. J.Á. MEDRANO, *Constructivismo y sistema preventivo. Una relectura cualitativa de la obra maestra de Don Bosco*, CCS, Madrid 2010.

²⁸⁴ For an assessment of the course cf. F.U. BOTELHO – R.M. VICARI, *Evaluation of Distance Course Effectiveness. Exploring the Quality of Interactive Processes*, in "Informática na Educação" 12 (2009) 1, 39-46.

²⁸⁵ Cf. M.S. VILLAGÓMEZ – R. SOFFNER – A. ROCCHI – L. MARQUES (eds.), *Desafíos de la educación salesiana. Experiencias y reflexiones desde las IUS*, Abya-Yala, Quito 2020, 379-521.

the Synod. It seems that even at the Salesian level the reception has been rather modest.²⁸⁶ Some reflections were offered during the “Young people and life choices” Conference held in Rome shortly before the Synod, others were to be given concrete form during GC28 by answering the question “What kind of Salesians for the youth of today?”

The international congress in September 2018 was organised in collaboration between the UPS and the Auxilium, a significant step in the collaboration of the two institutions. The theme of the Synod on young people, faith and vocational discernment was extended to the category of life choices, to allow for a broader educational perspective in the dialogue between different sciences. The congress program was marked by plenary sessions modelled on the three actions: recognise, interpret, choose.²⁸⁷

In the first session, *Listening to the young*, it was possible to perceive the international and intercultural breadth guaranteed by the several hundred participants, the reflections of the sociological panel, which offered (only) some interpretative keys to understanding models, styles, values and life choices in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa, and by the results of the research among the youth ministry teams of the Salesian provinces of Don Bosco and the FMA around the world.

The second session, *In dialogue in order to discern*, was devoted to exploring the relationship between young people and life choices from the point of view of anthropological, philosophical, pedagogical and pastoral reflection, in order to accompany young people in the task of transition to adult life and the construction of their identity.

The third session, *Educational perspectives from an Ecclesial and Salesian point of view*, was given the task of taking up the challenges that emerged in the congress’s reflection and reinterpreting them starting from the original contribution of the Salesian educational charism. The hermeneutics of some Salesian sources, by Wim Collin and Eliane Petri, offered the opportunity to compare the educational and formative experience of St John Bosco and St Mary Domenica Mazzarello, in order to bring out from the writings of the two founders the attitudes and values, the models and strategies that help young men and women to mature in their human and Christian vocation and to describe the characteristics that qualify those who accompany them in their life choices.

²⁸⁶ Cf. a similar process with the previous Synod on the Family, which was reflected in the Salesian Youth Ministry Conference in Madrid.

²⁸⁷ Cf. M. VOJTÁŠ – P. RUFFINATTO (eds.), *Giovani e scelte di vita, Prospettive educative*. Acts of the International Congress organised by the Salesian Pontifical University and the Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences Auxilium Rome, 20-23 September 2018, LAS, Rome 2019.

In a second phase, through a pedagogical reflection carried out by Piera Ruffinatto, it was highlighted how education to choice is an essential dimension of the preventive method, aimed by its very nature at forming young people as good Christians and upright citizens, and a privileged methodological way of educating beliefs, systems of meaning and secure frames of reference for life. Finally, my contribution offered some insights into the updating of the pedagogy of choice and vocation. The pre- and post-Vatican II models were compared with today's needs, re-interpreting and proposing a framework and some tools for vocational pedagogy today. Other interventions, indicated in the programme as “communications” and “best practices”, subsequently proposed an updating of processes of accompaniment to choice in the various spheres of life: in school and university pastoral ministry, oratory and animation, voluntary work and social commitment, courses of preparation and accompaniment for marriage, specific vocation ministry and, finally, in the sphere of the new media.

The events and reflections surrounding the Synod on young people were an opportunity to perceive the intertwining and complexity of the different worlds of youth, of the educational practices in place and of the pedagogical, anthropological, theological and charismatic criteria, in a process that revived “integral formation” as it is described in the Final Document of the same Synod:

The contemporary situation is marked by growing complexity of social phenomena and individual experience. In daily life, the changes that are taking place have an impact on one another and cannot be addressed selectively. In real life, everything is interconnected: family life and professional engagement, the use of technologies and the way of experiencing community, defence of the embryo and defence of the migrant. Concreteness presents us with an anthropological vision of the person as a whole and a way of knowing that does not separate but grasps connections, learns from experience, re-reads it in the light of the Word, and draws inspiration from exemplary testimonies rather than from abstract models. This requires a new type of formation which aims to integrate perspectives, makes them capable of grasping the interconnectedness of problems and knows how to unify the various dimensions of the person. This approach is in profound harmony with the Christian vision which contemplates, in the incarnation of the Son, the inseparable encounter between the divine and the human, between earth and heaven.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ SYNOD OF BISHOPS, XV ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY, *Young people, the faith and vocational discernment. Final document. The results of the Synod Assembly*, no. 157.

A meta-message of the pontificate of Pope Francis, which goes beyond the topics dealt with, concerns the basic attitude and the style of action of Christians, to build a Church that is ever closer to people, more missionary, more open and, finally, more synodal.²⁸⁹ We have been reminded by the synodal processes of the fact that this is neither a foregone conclusion nor an easy path. The processes also brought to light disagreements and resistance. We have also been challenged by the events linked to the pandemic, which paralysed traditional pastoral activity and education for a certain time. The pandemic brought to light both the fragility of systems, people and convictions and the resilience found in the willingness to rethink, to be creatively faithful. It was a stark reminder that an education that goes “from paper to life” cannot work. Adding further criteria and abstract or disembodied slogans to the lists, already too full of requirements for an ideal Salesian education, would only increase the frustration of educators. Or it would increase the corrosion of the educational objectives with empty rhetoric, the pursuit of undeclared secondary goals leading to an unsustainable increase in the distance between the ideal and the actual situation.

“What kind of Salesians for the youth of today?” was GC28’s question. But since it was interrupted by the health emergency, it could not fully respond. It seems, however, that the convergences go more in the direction of process than content: “Salesians who walk with the youth of today.” In the period of crisis with a change of era it is not possible to come up with too much radical rethinking, but we can see to a process of updating the Salesian educative charism through a grateful, faithful, creative, synodal, transformative, virtuous and patient approach.

If we enter into the paradigm of processes, we can imagine that educationalists and educators who have planned communally, starting with Fr Vecchi’s proposals will, in all probability, be able today to involve the laity by sharing responsibility with them in and for the mission, and in the near future will know how to walk synodally as a Salesian Family. I think that, beyond the different terms and themes, there are some typical balances that characterise Salesian education and are like a gold thread running through the periods we have covered, though with different emphases. These interconnected principles could be developed in a threefold way: a *basic theory* intertwined with a *process methodology* and a *formation of identity* in view of an updating of Salesian pedagogy... but this will be the subject of another publication.

²⁸⁹ Cf. S. CURRÒ – M. SCARPA (eds.), *Giovani, vocazione e sinodalità missionaria. La pastorale giovanile nel processo sinodale*, LAS, Rome 2019.

Tools and resources

Chronological table

<i>World history</i>		<i>Salesian history</i>	<i>Salesian pedagogy publications</i>
end of civil war in Rwanda	1996	Juan Vecchi elected Rector Major at GC24 (theme: Salesians and laity)	
publication 1st volume of <i>Harry Potter</i>	1997	IUS network founded (higher ed.)	Vecchi , <i>For you I study. Preparation of confreres</i>
Google founded	1998	SDB-FMA, <i>Per un cammino di collaborazione</i> ; <i>Salesian YM: Frame of Reference</i> (1st.ed.)	
	1999	province of Vietnam erected	Braido , <i>Prevention not repression</i>
Putin president of Russia	2000	canonisation Versiglia-Caravario	<i>Salesian YM Frame of Reference</i> (2nd. ed.)
Twin Towers attack (New York)	2001		
The UE € begins circulation	2002	Pascual Chávez elected Rector Major at GC25 (theme: Salesian community today)	
	2003	Chávez , <i>Dear Salesians, be saints!</i>	Ruffinatto , <i>La relazione educativa</i>
Facebook founded	2004		Prellezo , <i>Linee pedagogiche della Società Salesiana</i>
Benedict XVI elected Pope	2005		Chávez , <i>With the courage of DB in social com.</i>
Saddam Hussein condemned to death	2006	doc. on formation to Soc. Com.	Braido , <i>Storia dell'oratorio salesiano in Italia</i>
iPhone launched	2007		ACSSA Salesian education conferences (2006-7)
world financial crisis; Benedict XVI writes <i>Letter on urgent task of education</i>	2008	GC26 (theme: charismatic identity and apostolic passion)	
	2009	SDB "Project Europe" launched	Chávez , <i>The Salesian mission and human rights</i>
	2010		Chávez , <i>Salesian Youth Ministry</i>
end of Berlusconi government	2011	missionary aspirantates in India.	Bozzolo-Carelli (eds.), <i>Evangelizzazione ed educazione</i>
Higgs boson discovered at CERN	2012		<i>Charter of Charismatic and Spiritual Identity of the Salesian Family</i>
Francis elected pope, <i>Evangelii Gaudium</i>	2013	World Cooperators Congress	Attard-García (eds.), <i>Spiritual accompaniment</i>
	2014	Ángel F. Artime elected Rector Major at GC27 ; <i>Sal YM. Frame of Reference</i> (3rd. ed.)	
radical Islamic attacks in Paris	2015	Bicentenary of DB's birthday	Orlando (ed.), <i>Con DB educatori dei giovani...</i>
"Brexit" wins vote, Cameron resigns	2016	fourth ed. of the <i>Ratio studiorum</i>	Vojtáš , <i>Progettare e discernere</i>
Trump succeeds Obama as USA president	2017	Family ministry Congress (Madrid)	Sala , <i>Evangelizzazione ed educazione dei giovani</i>
Synod on Youth	2018	birth of <i>Don Bosco Green Alliance</i>	Bay , <i>Young Salesians and accompaniment</i>
Exhortation <i>Christus Vivit</i>	2019	presences in 134 countries	Vojtáš-Ruffinatto (eds.), <i>Giovani e scelte di vita</i>
Covid-19 pandemic, <i>Global educ. Pact</i>	2020	GC28 (theme: What kind of Salesians for the youth of today?)	

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Online resources

Sources, documents, research, full-text publications, photographic material, related to this chapter.²⁹⁰



Full bibliography, index of authors, index of topics for the entire publication.²⁹¹



²⁹⁰ Cf. salesian.online/pedagogia6

²⁹¹ Cf. salesian.online/pedagogia-dopo-db

Afterword

I gladly accepted Fr Michal Vojtáš' invitation to write an afterword to his valuable work on *The evolution of Salesian pedagogy*. I had the privilege of having the draft of his work in hand and, from the first reading, I was very pleased with its seriousness, scientific nature and his ability to follow the path taken in the Congregation from the time of Don Bosco's experience until today; from the time of his "pedagogical treatise" on the preventive system, where, after many requests, he sought to put in writing what lay behind his educational art. From this point of view, his research and exposition is very complete and up-to-date.

Right from the start, Fr Vojtáš has made it clear what he intends to do and his consequent approach to the work. This helped him to be rigorous in dealing with the different "moments" of educational experience and pedagogical reflection. I have really appreciated the historical framework of each of these periods, also because he has tried to outline the social, political and cultural framework in the different regions of the world.

Fr Peter Ricaldone's attempt¹ to "define" Salesian education, even though before him there was all the work carried out by the Congregation's essayists like Fr Cerruti and Fr Caviglia, means that he became a constant point of reference for the evolution of Salesian pedagogy. All the more so, since it was his "last will and testament" written or brought together at the end of his long and fruitful term of office. The author rightly considers him to be the first attempt to do "pedagogy".

Nevertheless, it would be Fr Pietro Braido, especially Braido the philosopher of education, the historian of pedagogy, and finally himself an educationalist before delving into history to write his two-volume masterpiece *Don Bosco, prete per i giovani, nel secolo della libertà*, who was the first true "Salesian pedagogue".² He went through several stages until he concluded that *the proper nature of "Salesian pedagogy" would depend on a fundamental core that makes it what it is, and this is Don Bosco's Preventive System*, then adding, *one other, meaning, the need to "update and inculturate"* its constitutive elements from time to time, to avoid falling into the trap of repeating slogans devoid of content:

¹ Cf. P. RICALDONE, *Don Bosco educatore*, Libreria Dottrina Cristiana, Colle Don Bosco (Asti) 1951.

² Cf. P. BRAIDO, *Il sistema educativo di Don Bosco*, SEI, Turin 1971.

what reason – religion – loving-kindness means today; what it means today to be father – friend – brother; what good Christian – upright citizen means today and so on.

There is no doubt that it was the SGC, the Chapter of profound change for the Congregation in every sense, that responded to the call of the Second Vatican Council at a time of great social, cultural and ecclesial change. That Chapter, together with GC21, took the updating process seriously, although it was not a conference of scholars, nor a mere assembly of confreres, but a real Chapter assembly backed by experts in the field of educational sciences, starting with Braido, and with confreres fully immersed in the fields of formal, non-formal and informal education.

Fr Egidio Viganò's letter³ is therefore of great value precisely because it presented the fruits of the work of GC21, which would later be the starting point for Fr Vecchi as Councillor for Youth Ministry, after the experience of Frs Giovenale Dho, Rosalio Castillo, and Gaetano Scrivo. Just to make it clear that it is not as if his thinking sprang up overnight like a mushroom.

From then on it would be *Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi*,⁴ along with his department, who would not so much develop a theory as translate into practice the change of approach to our presence in the educational scene that led to a different configuration of the General Council. Suffice it to say that it was Fr Antonio Domènech who set out what had been done so far in the first *Frame of Reference*.

Fr Vojtáš defines the different periods of the Congregation in his work, from the perspective of his field of work, namely the evolution of “Salesian pedagogy”. This means that, although making reference to history, hence the citations from Morand Wirth’s book (*Don Bosco nel tempo*), he is not pretending to offer an assessment of the various Rectors Major and their terms of office, a much more complex task, but of the life of the Congregation in the diversity of its contexts, circumstances, types of works and activities, and the speed at which it has moved. In fact, when we met with the preparatory Commission for the *Fonti Salesiane* (Salesian Sources), they did not want to go beyond Fr Ricaldone due to the lack of historical distance. And I asked that in the historical congress in November 2015, there be a conference by the RM on the evolution of the Congregation since Vatican Council II, because it seemed to me that while admitting what was written before, we would run the risk of presenting a Congregation that no longer exists today.

³ Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *Il progetto educativo salesiano*, in ACS 59 (1978) 290, 3-42.

⁴ Cf. J. Vecchi, *Pastorale, educazione, pedagogia nella prassi salesiana*, in VECCHI – PRELLEZO (eds.), *Prassi educativa pastorale e scienze dell’educazione*, SDB, Rome 1988, 123-150.

Indeed, social and ecclesial environments and contexts have been profoundly transformed. Young people have new values and new criteria for living which constitute a genuine new culture; the traditional links of cultural and religious transmission (family, school, Church, etc.) have been weakened and often broken. *The situation in which educative and pastoral commitment must be implemented is diverse and constantly changing.* It is not possible, therefore, to limit oneself to small adjustments to traditional practice, nor to think of a scheme of action that is the same for everyone.

That is why for some time now, with this increasingly explicit awareness, we began to *plan a “new” Salesian presence among the young*,⁵ a *“new evangelisation”*,⁶ a *“new education”*,⁷ even a *“new preventive system”*.⁸ These statements were intended to express the *need to rethink and further explore the contents and approach of Salesian education and pastoral ministry*, in response to the new situation of the young.

Rediscovering the preventive system

I would like to recall that in preparation for the bicentenary of Don Bosco’s birth, I dedicated the second year of this preparation precisely to his pedagogy.⁹ The aim was to more closely examine his educative proposal: what Don Bosco intended to offer the young and the method he used to open the doors of their heart, to win their confidence, shape strong personalities from a human and Christian point of view. So, it was a case of *a deeper understanding and updating of the preventive system.*

Since our programme was aimed at the members of the Salesian Family, our approach could not be purely intellectual. There is certainly a need for an in-depth study of Salesian pedagogy in order to update it according to the sensitivity and needs of our time. The social, economic, cultural, political and religious contexts in which we find ourselves living our vocation and carrying out the Salesian mission today have changed profoundly. And, for charismatic fidelity to our Father, it is equally necessary to make our own the content and method of what he offered in educative and pastoral terms. In

5 Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *Together for the young people of Europe*. Final address of the Rector Major at the meeting of European Provincials, 5 December 2004, in AGC 86 (2005) 388, 113-115.

6 Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *The New Evangelisation*, in ASC 70 (1989) 331, 3-43.

7 Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *New Education*, in AGC 72 (1991) 337, 3-43.

8 Cf. E. Viganò, *Called to freedom. Let us rediscover the preventive system by educating the young to values. Commentary on the Strenna for 1995*, Istituto FMA, Rome 2014, 9-12.

9 Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *“Like Don Bosco the educator, we offer young people the Gospel of joy through the pedagogy of kindness”*, in AGC 94 (2012) 415, 3-29.

the context of today's society we are called to be holy educators like him, giving our lives like him, working with and for the young.

Thinking back over Don Bosco's educational experience, we are called to relive it faithfully today. Certainly we are all convinced that, because of certain particular expressions and interpretations, his Preventive System appears decidedly dated, in that it is linked to a world that no longer exists. In fact, there have been so many revolutions at the pedagogical, psychological, religious, political, cultural, philosophical, technological and demographic levels during the twentieth century. The world has become a global village. It is permeated by continuous globalising media innovations which influence all the cultures on the planet. The way of thinking appears to be marked by new cultural criteria of productivity, efficiency, calculation and scientific rationality. Therefore, within this framework of reading social phenomena, many old interpretative categories now appear to be outdated.

Now, for any correct updating of the preventive system, rather than immediately thinking of programmes, formulas, or repeating generic slogans for all seasons, our effort today – I wrote – will be that of an historical understanding of Don Bosco's method, knowing that particular contextual considerations gave rise to his approaches of principle, the theological, anthropological, pastoral, pedagogical formulations he thought appropriate for the young people of his time. This historical understanding should help us not to isolate his experience, but apply it, along with its principles, in new ways. In concrete terms, it is a question of analysing how different his work was for the young, the people, the Church, for society and religious life, and also how different was his way of educating young people in the first festive Oratory, the minor seminary at Valdocco, his Salesian and non-Salesian clerics, his missionaries. This does not detract from the fact that already in the first Oratory which was the Pinardi house, there were some important intuitions that would later be acquired in their deeper value of a complex humanistic-Christian synthesis:

- a. a *flexible structure* (the way Don Bosco thought of the Oratory) as a work of mediation between Church, urban society and its youthful working-class strata;
- b. respect and *appreciation for this working-class setting*;
- c. *religion as the basis of education* according to the teaching of the Catholic pedagogy he absorbed at the *Convitto* or Pastoral Institute;
- d. the *dynamic intertwining of religious formation and human development*, catechism and education. In other words, the convergence between education and education to the faith (integration of faith and life);

- e. the conviction that education is an essential tool for enlightening the mind;
- f. education, as also catechesis, developing in all expressions compatible with the constraints of time and resources: literacy for those who have never been able to benefit from any form of schooling, job placement, week-long assistance, development of group and mutual benefit activities, etc.
- g. keeping busy and appreciation of leisure time;
- h. loving-kindness as an educative style and, more generally, as a Christian lifestyle.

From the dynamics of his particular experience this method, later to be called the “Preventive System”, became a “system” that was publicised and presented as a universal method. Don Bosco proposed it and wanted to be adopted for the education and re-education of young people belonging to the most different kinds of groups.

As is known, and as we find written in the *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family*, the Preventive System “represents to some extent the quintessence of Don Bosco’s pedagogical wisdom and is the prophetic message he has left to his followers and to the whole Church. It is a spiritual and educative experience founded entirely on reason, religion and loving-kindness.

“Reason emphasises the values of Christian humanism, such as the search for meaning, work, study, friendship, cheerfulness, piety, freedom with responsibility, harmony between human wisdom and Christian wisdom.

Religion means making room for the Grace that saves, cultivating the desire for God, fostering an encounter with Christ the Lord insofar as he offers full meaning to life and a response to the thirst for happiness, progressively becoming part of the life and mission of the Church.

Loving-kindness expresses the need for young people not only to be loved, but also to know that they are loved, in order to initiate an effective educational relationship; it is a particular style of relationships and it is a willingness to love that awakens the energies of the young heart and matures them to the point of self-giving.

Today, more than in the past, reason, religion and loving-kindness are indispensable elements in education and valuable leaven for creating a more humane society in response to the expectations of the new generations.”¹⁰

Once we know correctly what has been passed on to us from the past, it is necessary to translate the great intuitions and virtues of the preventive system into today. It is necessary to modernise the principles, concepts and primary orientations, reinterpreting

¹⁰ *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco*, Rome 2012, art. 21.

on the theoretical and practical plane both the *major ideas underpinning it* that everyone knows (“the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls”; “living faith, steady hope, theological and pastoral charity”; “good Christian and upright citizen”; “cheerfulness, study and piety”; “health, study and holiness; “piety, morality, culture, civilisation”; “evangelisation and civilisation”...), and the *major approaches of the method* (“make yourself loved before being feared”; “reason, religion, loving-kindness”; “father, brother, friend”; “familiarity, especially in recreation”; “win over the heart”; “the educator “consecrated” to the good of his pupils”; “ample freedom to jump, run, make noise at will”...). And all this to the advantage of the formation of “new” young people in the twenty-first century, called to experience and tackle a vast and unprecedented range of situations and problems in decidedly changed times, in which the human sciences themselves are undergoing critical reflection. In particular, I would like to suggest three perspectives, analysing the first one in greater depth.

1. Relaunching the “upright citizen” and “good Christian”

In a world that has changed so profoundly from the nineteenth century world, it would be a serious shortcoming of a sociological and even theological order to practise charity according to narrow, local, pragmatic criteria (and here we must recognise that Don Bosco was certainly not in a position to do more than he did), overlooking the wider dimensions of the common national and global good. The ethical development of the contemporary conscience has in fact revealed the limits of the sort of welfare aid that overlooks the political dimension of underdevelopment and fails to have any positive influence on the causes of poverty, the structures of sin that give rise to the social condition condemned by all. Thinking of charity just as alms-giving, emergency aid, means running the risk of acting within the ambit of a “false Samaritanism”. The intentions might be good but sometimes it ends up becoming a poor expression of solidarity because it is beholden to models of development that aim at the wellbeing of some while sugar-coating the bitter pill for others.

Let us remember that in the period following Vatican II, the terms “a poor Church” and “Church of the poor” had many faces, even contradictory ones, and yet we must also remember that we did not invent the Gospel, just as we did not invent its enormous impact on politics and economics. Faith touches history, although it is not reduced to it. Although love of neighbour is not the whole Christian message, can we deny that it is central and essential?

It has been said and written that given that the modern State that has taken over the protection and social assistance of citizens, the Church no longer has the room to intervene on the level of charity and welfare that it had in the past. The reality we are experiencing today belies this hypothesis that has nourished secularist and state-sponsored ideologies. The Church very often returns to being a point of reference even within the Welfare state. For many years we have heard it said that charity and welfare are old and useless tools, that they could no longer be used in modern society and in the democratic state. Today, even in secular circles, there is recognition of the social function of Christian voluntary work, of the so-called third sector – non-profit – initiatives that start from parishes, associations, institutions, local churches...

Can the fact that billions of people are now living in conditions far removed from the “civilisation of love” advocated by Pope Paul VI and reiterated by his successors up to Pope Francis and his Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, find a specific response by going back to Don Bosco’s formula, the “*upright citizen and good Christian*”?

In reference to the “*upright citizen*”, deep reflection is called for, and the Rector Major’s Strenna 2020 has helped in this regard. “*Good Christians, upright citizens.*” First of all, at the speculative level, it must extend its consideration to all the contents relating to the theme of human, youth and popular promotion, while paying attention to the various qualified philosophical-anthropological, theological, scientific, historical and methodological considerations involved.

This reflection then needs to be made concrete at *the level of experience and practical reflection by individuals and communities*. I would like to recall here that, for the Salesians of Don Bosco a very important General Chapter, GC23, had indicated the “social dimension of charity” and “setting young people on the road to commitment and participation in public life”, “a sector we have somewhat overlooked or disowned” as important places and objectives of education (cf. GC23, nos 203; 210; 212; 214).

If we understand Don Bosco’s choice not to do anything other than “*the politics of the Our Father*” included, however, in the Gospel words he himself quoted “*your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” (Mt 6:10), then we must also ask ourselves how much his initial choice of education in the strict sense, and the consequent practice of his educators to exclude “politics” from their lives, did not condition and limit the important socio-political dimension in the formation of the students. Apart from the objective difficulties created by the different political regimes Don Bosco had to coexist with, was it not perhaps the case, too, that educators inclined to conformism and isolationism, with insufficient learning and a poor knowledge of the historical-social context also contributed to this?

We should, therefore, move in the direction of an updated reconfirmation of Don Bosco's "socio-political and educative choice." This means not promoting ideological activism linked to particular party political choices, but forming a social and political sensitivity, which in any case leads to investing one's life as a mission for the good of the social community, with constant reference to inalienable human and Christian values. It is therefore a question of working towards a more consistent *practical implementation* in the specific area. In other words, the reconsideration of the *social quality of education* – already immanent, even if imperfectly realised, in the fundamental option for youth, even from the point of view of statements and formulas – should encourage the creation of explicit experiences of social commitment in the broadest sense. But this also presupposes a specific theoretical and vital commitment, inspired by a broader vision of education itself together with realism and concreteness. Proclamations and manifestos are not enough. We also need theoretical concepts and concrete operational projects to be translated into well-defined and articulated programmes. This is precisely what Pope Francis has sought to call us to with the *Global Educational Pact* and *The economy of Francis*.

Those who are truly concerned about the educational dimension try to use political means to influence it so that it is taken into account in all areas: from urbanisation and tourism to sport and the broadcasting system, where market criteria are often preferred. And the same should be said of the revival of the "good Christian". When Don Bosco was "burnt out" by his zeal for souls, he understood the ambiguity and danger of the situation, challenged its assumptions, found new ways of opposing evil with the scarce resources (cultural, economic...) at his disposal.

It is a matter of revealing to people and helping them to consciously live what is the human being's calling, the truth of the person. It is precisely in this that believers can make their most valuable contribution.

For they know that a person's being and relationships are defined by his or her condition as a creature, which does not indicate inferiority or dependence, but gratuitous and creative love on the part of God. Human beings owe their existence to a gift. They are placed in a relationship with God that must be reciprocated. Their life finds no meaning outside of this relationship. The "beyond", which they vaguely perceive and desire, is the Absolute, not a foreign and abstract absolute, but the source of their life that calls them to themselves.

The truth of the person, which reason initially grasps, finds its total illumination in Christ. By his words but above all by virtue of his human-divine existence in which the

consciousness of being the Son of God is manifested, Jesus Christ opens people to the full understanding of themselves and their destiny.

In Him we are made children and called to live as such in history. It is a reality and a gift, the meaning of which human beings must gradually penetrate. The vocation of being children of God is not a luxury, an extrinsic addition to human fulfilment. On the contrary, it is their total fulfilment, the essential condition of authenticity and fullness, the fulfilment of their most radical needs, those which are part of their very structure as creatures.

But how can Don Bosco's "good Christian" be updated? How can the human-Christian totality of the project be safeguarded today, in initiatives that are formally or predominantly religious and pastoral, against the dangers of old and new forms of integralism and exclusivism? How can we transform traditional education, the context of which was "a mono-religious society", into an open and at the same time critical education in the face of contemporary pluralism? How do we educate people to live autonomously and at the same time participate in a multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic world? In the light of the current obsolescence of the traditional pedagogy of obedience, adapted to a certain type of ecclesiology, how can we promote a pedagogy of freedom and responsibility aimed at building responsible persons, capable of free and mature decisions, open to interpersonal communication, actively involved in social structures, in a non-conformist but constructively critical attitude?

2. A return to young people with more qualification

It was among the young that Don Bosco developed his way of life, his pastoral and pedagogical legacy, his system, his spirituality. The uniqueness of the youth mission in Don Bosco was always and in every case real, even when for particular reasons he was not materially in contact with the young, even when his activity was not directly at the service of the young, even when he tenaciously defended his charism as founder for all the young people of the world in the face of pressure from clerics who were not always well enlightened. Salesian mission is consecration, it is "predilection" for the young, and this predilection, in its initial state, we know, is a gift from God, but it is up to our intelligence and our heart to develop and perfect it.

The true Salesian does not desert the youth scene. A Salesian is someone who has a vital knowledge of young people: his heart beats where the young people's heart beats. The Salesian lives and works for them, committing himself to respond to their needs and problems; they are the meaning of his life: work, school, emotions, free time. A Salesian

is someone who also has a theoretical and existential knowledge of young people, which enables him to discover their real needs, to create a youth ministry appropriate to the needs of the times.

Fidelity to our mission, in order to be incisive, must be brought into contact with the “issues” of today’s culture, with the underlying reasons for today’s mentality and behaviour. We are faced with truly great challenges, which require serious analysis, relevant critical observations, in-depth cultural comparison, and the ability to share the situation psychologically.

Presenting a commentary on the *Letter from Rome of 10 May 1884* to GC28 Chapter members, I said that it seemed to me enlightening and stimulating to address the theme of the Chapter: “*What kind of Salesians for the youth of today?*”, because with this theme, in the mind of the Rector Major, we wanted to bring out the willingness to give a charismatic response to the youth of today, especially the poorest and the excluded. This requires Salesians who are prepared and ready to work with Don Bosco’s mind, heart and hands in the Church and society, and who accompany young people in the world of work, in the digital world, in the defence of creation, etc.¹¹ And all this calls us back to our origins.

And I went on to say: The danger today, as yesterday, for which Don Bosco wrote that famous letter is the loss of the physical presence of the Salesians among the boys, of the almost inherent ability to understand their culture, and the transparent, familiar, good love that reveals God and wins them over to God. It is his spiritual testament, so vibrant and heartfelt are its tones. And he does so in order to recommend precisely the presence among young people (*rediscovering Salesian assistance*), the familiarity of the past (*accompaniment*), something that must absolutely be recovered, something that is nurtured especially through recreation, leisure time, in open structures, being in the midst of the young, sharing their lives and taking their dreams seriously, day after day (*a rejuvenated youth and vocations ministry*). These elements are all amply developed both in the Final Document of the Synod on Young people and in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Letter *Christus vivit*.¹² All this requires a Salesian in a state of ongoing formation, on mission, shared with lay people.

11 Cf. A. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, *What kind of Salesians for the youth of today? Letter of convocation of the 28th General Chapter*, in AGC 99 (2018) 427, 3-33.

12 Cf. R. SALA, *Entrevista a don Rossano Sala. Secretario especial del Sínodo*, in “Mision Joven” (2019) 510-511, 5-16.

And the *letter* – as Fr Caviglia notes¹³ – is concerned with nothing other than the life of the Salesians in recreation. Hence the value of the “playground” understood as a category that includes all the activities that place young people in an atmosphere of spontaneity, encouraging their active involvement and free expression: because it is there that they show themselves for what they are, thus opening the door of their inner being, available then to welcome the stimuli that are offered to them; always on condition that there is the educator who is just as actively involved and spontaneous, and opens up their inner being, letting the vital goods flow that make them adults, believers, educators. It is at this point that educational communication is triggered, from the educator to the young person and from the young person to the educator, realising the miracle which is an enrichment of humanity for both.

Yesterday’s and today’s playground: it is there that Salesian pedagogy stands or falls, and with it the mission; from there emerges one of the greatest challenges for educating today: in the family, in the school, and in every other institution of formal, non-formal, and informal education.

I therefore focused my commentary on six passages from the letter:

1. knowing how to use the language of the heart
2. understanding young people
3. having happiness at heart
4. being there
5. overcoming formal approaches
6. sharing activity

I would like to spend time here on the first two of these.

Knowing how to use the language of the heart: The language of love is always the object of “assiduous study” in the sense that Don Bosco gave to this term: *concern, commitment, passion*. And our culture is also characterised by a lack of attention to the language of love, even worse, by a distortion of the natural languages of love, the sexual, affective and friendship languages; so that a profound distrust creeps in among young people: love is impossible, love is a fairy tale, love is a rarity that only the privileged few can afford.

¹³ A. CAVIGLIA, *Conferenze sullo spirito salesiano* (Conferences on the Salesian spirit), edition edited by Fr Aldo Giraudo, Centro Mariano Salesiano, Turin 1985, 60.

The Salesian must be a passionate student of the language of love; a lesson he learns not only by listening to himself but also by listening to others: their needs, their sensitivities, their possibilities of expression and their capacity to receive. This, today – it seems to me – is *the fundamental challenge for the educator*: to make it understood that he really does love, loves forever, that he loves everything about the human being who appears before him and who reveals him or herself and changes with the passing of time. The challenge is to show that he loves even despite rejection, forgetfulness, distortion or profiteering; and thus convince the other to love, that is to say give birth to the inner conviction that one is worthy of love. There is more – to show that one is capable of love (and this is the perception of one's own inalienable value, the foundation of one's dignity, the root of every authentic hope). The challenge is to make people understand (but this is also grace) that there is a Source, which is always open and available for me and for you, never depleted of its inexhaustible richness.

Understanding young people: There is, therefore, *an element of rationality that must intervene*, or rather a need for knowledge that must take hold of and guide the Salesian educator: this is to *know the young, understand their circumstances, questions, needs, in order to know how to deal with them*. A wide range of scientific and technical knowledge is required to interpret the set of values concretely available and that young people can assimilate for appropriate growth now and in the future. Too many educators insist on the negative, the problematic, the irrational, the morally unacceptable, so as to focus on the “no's” to be firmly insisted on (often alternating with a *laissez faire* approach) rather than on the “yes's” to be offered them intelligently (reason), intuitively (love) and courageously combined with prudence. Hence there is enmity, keeping at a safe distance, not listening, and the natural generation gap simply gets wider. The relationship becomes functional and institutional (when it still exists) or is openly or subtly rejected along with all the legacy of values that the Salesian has within him and that he would like to (as well as should) transmit, if he wants to be an educator and sees himself as one.

Understanding youth culture is the basis of a commitment to ongoing formation which enables us to bridge the inevitable gap between us and young people. It is the pedagogical competence which, when combined with empathy and regularly being there, makes it possible to live in harmony with young people, finding ways to penetrate their hearts and win them over to life and joy. It seems to me that this is an aspect that is rather lacking in certain Salesian circles. It is enough to note the superficial way in which the conduct of young people is commented on: the desire to *intus legere*, to

read within and beyond the data. Or it is enough to see the difficulty we experience in outlining goals and planning paths that are as close as possible to the concrete difficulties and possibilities, not of “the” young people, but of “these” young people. Because it is still true that if we don’t know “*what young people like*”, that is, their inner interest, attraction, desire, dream, it will be difficult for them to see the value of the educational goals that we propose that ask for commitment, hard work, dedication (all ingredients of true love!), precisely the kind that Don Bosco suggests when he talks about study, discipline, mortification... “*so they will learn to do these things lovingly.*”

3. Education of the heart

Over recent decades, perhaps the new Salesian generations have felt a sense of bewilderment at old formulations of the Preventive System, either because they do not know how to apply it today, or because unconsciously they imagine it to be a “paternalistic relationship” with the young. On the contrary, when we look at Don Bosco in the very reality he experienced, we discover his instinctive and ingenious surpassing of the educational paternalism inculcated by much of the pedagogy of the centuries preceding him (1600s to 1700s). At that time, pedagogical discourse reflected European society, which was structured paternalistically even at a political level. Yet Don Bosco’s life is a fabric of interpersonal relationships with young people and adults, from which his personal enrichment also stems. Think of the thousand episodes and sayings, such as “Let me tell you and let no one be offended: you are all thieves; I say it and I repeat it: you have taken everything from me [...] I still had this poor heart left, whose affections you had already stolen from me completely [...] they have taken possession of all this heart, nothing of which is left except a keen desire to love you in the Lord.”¹⁴ These indicate the symbiosis, modernity, and relevance over and above the labels: prevention, loving-kindness, charity. For Don Bosco, to take possession of the heart is an analogical and symbolic expression. The boys entered Don Bosco’s heart, found themselves there, were enriched by it, enjoyed it. Today, of course, the modes of interpersonal relationship are different: pluralistic society, global forms of knowledge, internet, travel, etc.

And here, I would like to insert a note on the *Preventive System and Human Rights*, because the Congregation has no reason to exist except for the integral salvation of young people. Like Don Bosco in his time, we cannot be spectators; we must be actively

¹⁴ G. BOSCO, *Lettera ai ragazzi di Lanzo*. Letter to the boys at Lanzo (3 January 1876), in *Epistolario*, ed. Francesco Motto, LAS, Rome 2012, vol. 5, 38.

involved in their salvation. The *Letter from Rome in 1884* also asks us today to put “the young person at the centre” as a daily commitment in all our actions and as a permanent choice of life in each of our communities. For this reason, for the integral salvation of young people, the Gospel and our charism today also ask us to follow the path of human rights. We must leave no stone unturned for the salvation of young people. Today it would not be possible for us to look into the eyes of a child if we did not also promote their rights.

It is true that ever since the Congregation felt challenged by Card. Giovanni Battista Montini, in 1954, to take on the juvenile prison at Arese and to see ourselves as dealing not with “good” boys, but with those who had been victims of negative experiences, the Salesians accepted the challenge and this gave rise to a series of new presences on behalf of street youth, such as the Fr Javier De Nicolò’s work in Colombia and from there throughout Latin America, Asia and then Africa for young soldiers, boys exploited in sex tourism. The turning point was the widening of the concept of “prevention” or “preventiveness”, understood not only as making it morally impossible for young people to sin, but as the ability to stem these negative experiences so as to rebuild healthy, robust personalities who fitted into society and the world of work with a guarantee of success. This led to a *generous and creative openness to new youth frontiers*, especially to new as well as older forms of poverty (street kids, drop-outs, migrants...).

However, this work among the poorest youngsters, those in need and those at psycho-social risk, was only seen as a type of welfare work within the preventive system, but without having anything to do with human rights other than to denounce violations. On the contrary, the preventive system and human rights interact, enriching each other. The Preventive System offers human rights a unique and innovative educational approach compared to the movement for the promotion and protection of human rights hitherto characterised by the perspective of denunciation *post factum*, the denunciation of violations already committed. The Preventive System offers human rights, preventive education *ante factum*, i.e. action and proposal before the fact.

As believers we can say that the Preventive System offers human rights an anthropology that is inspired by evangelical spirituality and sees the ontic datum of the dignity of every person as the foundation of human rights, dignity “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, wealth, birth or other status.”¹⁵

15 As found in Art 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In the same way, human rights offer the Preventive System new frontiers and opportunities for dialogue and networking with other agents, in order to identify and remove the causes of injustice, inequity and violence. Human rights also offer the Preventive System new frontiers and opportunities for social and cultural impact as an effective response to the “drama of modern humanity of the gap between education and society, the gap between school and citizenship.”¹⁶

In the new globalised context, human rights become a tool that can transcend narrow national boundaries to set common limits and goals, create alliances and strategies and mobilise human and economic resources.

By way of conclusion

I would like to conclude this afterword to Fr Michal Vojtáš’s book by congratulating him on this valuable treasure that he brings not only to the UPS, but to the whole Congregation. It will give us the opportunity to better see the path taken by Salesian pedagogy, current challenges and what is expected of us today. I thank you for the opportunity you have given me to read your book, which I have really enjoyed reading and which has done me much good, as I am sure it will do to all those who will have it in hand, and my opinion of it could not be better: excellent! I hope that the book will be very well received and arouse the desire to continue reflecting on Salesian pedagogy, the priceless legacy left to us by Don Bosco for the effectiveness of our educative and pastoral presence among the young.

Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva, SDB

¹⁶ Cf. P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, *Education and citizenship*. Lectio Magistralis for the Doctorate Honoris Causa, Genoa, 23 April 2007.

Bibliography, indexes and further online materials

On the salesian.online site¹⁷ you can find the following resources related to Salesian pedagogy:

1. Complete biography of this volume
2. Author index
3. Subject index
4. Index of illustrations
5. Reference library of full text works
6. Videos of Salesian pedagogy conferences
7. Multimedia materials and online courses



¹⁷ Cf. salesian.online/pedagogia-dopo-db. The salesian.online project came about as a result of collaboration between the Don Bosco Study Centre (Salesian Pontifical University, Rome) and the Study Centre of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences "Auxilium", Rome). On the site you can find original documents in a reliable and citable form: sources, studies, research and digital resources on Salesian history, pedagogy and spirituality. The downloadable materials are organised by categories, themes, authors, entities, temporal and geographical coordinates.

Can an educational experience change a thread in the pattern of history? It seems there are some significant examples of a positive answer to the question - and the story of Don Bosco, founder of the Salesians, is one of them. The research published in this volume studies the pedagogical formulations of successive Salesian generations and, in terms of method, attempts to overcome the sterility of purely documentary reconstructions.

The intention to connect John Bosco with today's educational challenges passes through different time periods with their various ways of thinking. These mentalities reinforce some new pedagogical ideas while neglecting others, prefer certain modes of action, develop reflections, some prophetic and courageous, others rather leaning towards the current mentality or to certain crisis management solutions. These changes move pendulum-style between pedagogical viewpoints and are addressed in six chapters:

- I. Statements on pedagogy by the first Salesian generation
- II. A practical pedagogy of osmosis
- III. Adverse times call for disciplined fidelity
- IV. Vatican II: Before, during, after
- V. Planning and animation
- VI. New evangelisation and education for the third millennium

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