

**Assistance**

**The essence of Don Bosco's  
Preventive System**

**In the period 1876-1884**

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## Foreword

One of the characteristics of the Salesian education is the presence of the educators among the young. It is a presence that speaks volumes. Many former students frequently recall how this aspect of Salesian education has marked their experience.

Here in the following pages we have an in-depth study of the what constitutes the essence of Don Bosco's preventive system: assistance. In his *Letter from Rome*, written in 1884, Don Bosco laments how this aspect was not being taken seriously. The famous words "Where are our Salesians?" still contain for us today the same urgency with which Don Bosco himself wrote them.

The present study with its well-documented research is a valid tool for all of us who are called to deepen this very essential dimension of our charism. Recovering the meaning of the term 'assistance' is not limited at being solely an intellectual exercise. It is rather an opportunity to capture the wider context, both the historical one within the Salesian Society in its initial stages of development, and also within the larger social context with which Don Bosco was constantly and seriously engaged. "Assistance' for Don Bosco, as we see it well documented in these pages, was not a question of making sure that there is order within his educational houses. It was rather an essential dimension that had the power to facilitate consistent processes for integral growth.

Don Bosco's 'assistance' is not simply focused about avoiding evil. His attention is rather in making sure that all the necessary conditions are there for goodness to flourish, only in this way negative processes can be avoided which can easily crush the seed of goodness within the young people's heart.

In relation to what we are witnessing today, we as Salesians of Don Bosco have a social and charismatic responsibility in relation to this fundamental aspect of our educational system. If the Preventive System is a gift, it is also a responsibility. We are called to enjoy the gift, but we are also called to share it. To share with the young that frequent our houses and those whom we meet in our wider ministry. Also to share it in a pastorally reflective manner with all those lay people who are journeying with us on this educational experience.

We can only do this if we ourselves are rooted in our charismatic story. It is not simply about knowing the historical process, essential though that may be. It is about making sure that our roots are not dry, that our memory is not faded, that our personal experience is not void and empty. Our Father and Teacher Don Bosco communicates to each one of us in a personal manner as he communicated with the young of his time.

If ever there was a time when it was so beautiful and urgent to be a Salesian, this is it. We are living in a society that champions personal freedom, yet we are witnessing solitude and loneliness more than ever before. We are living in a society where the whole discourse of God is rendered irrelevant, if not even ridiculous. Yet, never have we witnessed so many young people looking for something and someone who is authentic, prophetically meaningful, and spiritually deep.

Let us hope and pray that this present work will ignite in many hearts the passion for the young that 'assistance' is meant to express. In this way we can witness what Don Bosco in his same *Letter from Rome* has written in such a personal manner: **"One who knows he is loved loves in return, and one who loves can obtain anything, especially from the young."**

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## Introduction

Very important features of the period October 1876 to May 1884 in Don Bosco's life are the specification of his educational and pastoral objectives and the consolidation of his "educational style"<sup>1</sup> On the latter we want to focus in this contribution.

Instead of the term "educational style" the Salesians and their co-workers generally use in their writings the terms "Don Bosco's method of education", "the preventive system" or "the educational system" of Don Bosco. [Eventual shades of meaning or real differences in meaning will become visible in the course of this study].

It is obvious that the privileged term 'preventive system' goes back to the short treatise Don Bosco published in the autumn of 1877 under the title *"The Preventive System in the Education of Youth."*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Consolidate" is indeed the word used by G. Barberis in his notes on t April 21 1877 (BARBERIS, G., Cronichetta 12, XII according to BRAIDO, P., (a cura di), *Don Bosco Educatore, Scritti e Testimonianze*, Rome, LAS 1992, 212/footnote 3. Cf BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, PB 5, Rome, LAS 1985,9-10/footnote 7.

<sup>2</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo ...*, 66; 92/566. OE XXVIII, 422-446.

## **I. The official name of a "pedagogical system" practised already for many years**

As far as careful research was able to define up until now, Don Bosco named his way of educating 'the preventive system' for the first time in the treatise bearing that same name. No doubt he had been obliged already before to talk about the quintessence of his way of educating to people who questioned him. But in all those years in such conversations he apparently did not use the technical term 'preventive'.<sup>3</sup>

### **1.1. Probable influences**

Yet it must not be overlooked that he heard about the term through the use of it in the context of the fight against poverty and mendicancy, in the framework of legislation concerning the treatment of prisoners and even in the context of preventive action in education.<sup>4</sup>

As far as the last aspect is concerned, he may have come to know the book Mgr Dupanloup had written and of which an Italian translation was published in Parma in 1868-69. In fact others too may have known of it, for it was available in the library of the Oratory in Valdocco. According to Mgr Dupanloup "the kernel of the whole accompanying process lies in disciplinary education, because the latter purposely focuses on the will and the character". It must effectively achieve three basic tasks : "maintaining, preventing and correcting". Hence the division into "directing, preventive and repressive discipline".<sup>5</sup> So there we see the terms preventive and repressive that about ten years later, Don Bosco will consider as opposite systems in order to characterize his way of educating. In any case, he does not seem to need the 'directive' aspect to explain his views and experiences.

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<sup>3</sup> BRAIDO, P., - it is true - refers to an interview of Don Bosco with minister U. Ratazzi in 1854, but at the same time he accentuates the fact that the contents of that conversation as presented there, presupposes a preliminary knowledge of his booklet of 1877 (BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 67-69; ID., *L'Esperienza pedagogica di Don Bosco*, Rome, LAS 1988, 63; ID., *Don Bosco's pedagogical experience*, Rome, LAS 1989, 66-67).

<sup>4</sup> BRAIDO, P., *L'Esperienza pedagogica...*, 20-25. ID., *Don Bosco's pedagogical experience*, 22-27. Cf BRAIDO, P., *Breve storia del "Sistema Preventivo"*, PB 13, Rome, LAS 1993, 60-67.

<sup>5</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Breve storia ...*, 74-75; ID., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 234-235; ID., *Prevenire non reprimere, Il sistema educativo di Don Bosco*, Rome, LAS 1999, 80-83. Cf BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo ...*, 39-41.

## 1.2. The defining moment

What was the decisive moment for Don Bosco? A meeting, some suggestion or other he received, or simply some reading during his visit to the patronage (Oratory) at Nice in 1877? Or did the spark already spring up at the end of February, when, on his way back from Nice to Turin, he stayed with the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Marseille and conversed with them about his 'method'? E. Ceria wonders about this as well.<sup>6</sup> And quite rightly, for on April 6th 1877, Don Bosco himself talked to G. Barberis about his stay in Marseille. Then he told him what follows: "They (the staff) asked me how I could so quickly gain the good will and love of youngsters wherever I went (...). I gave them some explanations on our preventive system, on loving kindness, etc., whereas in boarding schools in general only the repressive system is used, the superiors being serious and stern..."<sup>7</sup>

We may point out too that, according to the notes taken by G. Barberis, Don Bosco in this conversation, quite sure of himself, called the preventive system "our preventive system". He does so as if it were the most evident thing in the world. At the same time he sharply confronts the two systems named above. And he considers the crux of the contrast to lie in the educators' attitude towards the youngsters: those who are affable, kind, good-hearted, easy to relate to, as opposed to those who are distant, reserved, aloof.

Yet it remains rather strange under this hypothesis that Don Bosco did not broach this new and unexpected but striking elaboration of his way of educating in his speech on March 12th in Nice. To be more precise, in France, where, in his own words "new things are much more readily accepted and where he thought it necessary that they should get to know him better".<sup>8</sup>

Another possibility, of course, is the context of the preparation of the First General Chapter. In that same month of April, Don Bosco was intensely preoccupied with it. According to E. Ceria he mentioned it for the first time on April 21st 1877. Don Bosco's first thought is obvious: "I want this chapter to make history in our Congre-

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<sup>6</sup> MB XIII, 101/2 and 102/footnote; EBM XIII, 77-78.

<sup>7</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo ...*, 13/2. Cf BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 211/footnote 1 and NANNI, C., *Don Bosco e la sua esperienza pedagogica*, Rome, LAS 1989, 29. The word "amorevolezza" has been translated here as "loving kindness". MB XIII, 101/2 (EBM XIII, 77-78 does not quote G. Barberis's notes literally).

<sup>8</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo ...*, 13/3. Cf BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 216/2.

gation. When I die all our affairs will have been settled and organized".<sup>9</sup> Indeed, in those months he wants to write things out precisely and, in a sense, definitively.

On that same 21st April G. Barberis wrote down in his '*Cronichetta*': "And so he (Don Bosco) gave a description of the whole feast (that had taken place in Nice March 12th), elaborated the speech (he had made there) and added to all this a summary of the ideas he believed in as to the educational system we advocate and that is called the preventive system".<sup>10</sup> Not the slightest astonishment is to be heard as G. Barberis uses the terms 'system' and 'preventive'. On the contrary, just as he noted down from Don Bosco's mouth 'our system' a good fortnight before, so he uses 'we' himself as if it had never been otherwise for years.

This shouldn't astonish us in the least, as he and Michael Rua were collaborating closely with Don Bosco for weeks and months at that time. Don Bosco divides the work and insists with both of them that they should make it a priority. "As soon as I arrive in Turin, you must give me the Regulations of the House and I will read them through at once", he writes to Michael Rua on March 24th 1877 from Sampierdarena. And in the same letter he inquisitively and urgently asks: "Has Don Barberis got his part ready?"<sup>11</sup>

As for Don Bosco himself, he made heavy weather of drafting his thoughts. "The work took him several days. He wrote and rewrote it three times. And he complained that his writing was not to his own liking. Once he threw everything on the table ... "Yet he didn't give up. His expectations were too high: "I believe that this booklet will do a lot of good in France; there they are not so hard-headed as here. They are more spontaneous, they are easily excited, they accept new things more readily. Besides, we need to be better known there". And almost prophetically he added: "The Preventive System especially will be accepted and picked up in the press. It will cause a stir".<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Consolidation of the name or term

To what extent in fact did papers and periodicals recognize that Don Bosco had really seized the quintessence of his method with that official name? And did they in any way contribute to making that name stick to signify his pedagogical and pas-

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<sup>9</sup> MB XIII, 243; EBM XIII, 177/3.

<sup>10</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo* ..., 13/2. Cf BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore* ..., 215-216.

<sup>11</sup> E III, 160/8°. Also see BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore* ..., 212/footnote 3.

<sup>12</sup> For the whole paragraph BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo* ..., 13/3. Cf BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore* ..., 215-216; ID., *L'Esperienza pedagogica* ..., 62/footnote 41; ID., *Don Bosco's pedagogical experience*, 65-66/footnote 41.

toral work among the young? Those remain unanswered questions. Yet, a journalist of the Journal de Rome in April 1884 seems to have shown sufficient insight. In one of his questions to Don Bosco he uses the latter's favourite term 'system' (not "method") connected with the suggestive 'your'. "Would you, please, tell me what your educational system is?"<sup>13</sup> With a reporter's eye, he was convinced he had spotted something quite specific in that system.

## 2.1. Don Bosco himself propagates his radical choice

Just as Don Bosco took the lead in spreading the motto "educate to make good Christians and citizens worthy of respect", in the same way he took the initiative when propounding the "preventive system". For instance to his Salesians, in the course of the 26th session of the First General Chapter (5th October 1877), speaking about a treatise on Sacred Eloquence, he said: "Our preventive system of education should be an integral part of it".<sup>14</sup>

It's not only among his Salesians but also in speaking with outsiders that he propagates the name. Thus G. Bonetti asserts: "Don Bosco often gave ample conferences in order that all might well understand and follow his fatherly system (paterno sistema). Several Turin priests took part, among them the late Mgr Eugenio Galetti, bishop of Alba."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> MB XVII, 85/4; EMB XVII, 64. Later still the Director of the Major Seminary in Montpellier will regret that he could not have a personal interview with Don Bosco. He would have liked to ask him about "all those little secrets of his to lead souls to love Our Dear Lord". Yet he may have been able already to ask him: "What is your secret in governing and guiding such a great number of children with so few assistants?" To which Don Bosco must have answered that he "instilled fear of God into their hearts". On this Director Dupuy reacts in his letter of 2nd July 1886: "But that is only the beginning of wisdom. What I need to know is how you manage to guide souls to the summit of wisdom, which is to love for God". Then he tells Don Bosco that at the monthly recollection with the priests he had spoken about the method that St Vincent de Paul and St Francis of Sales used to take souls to perfection. And he explains to him wherein, in his opinion, the difference between the two consists. Finally he asks Don Bosco: "It would be most kind of you if, dear father, you who have carefully studied those two great saints, were to let me know if our conclusions were right" (MB XVIII, 656/Doc. 20; EBM XVIII, 592) It can hardly be doubted that the director of the seminary meant Don Bosco's method of spiritual guidance. When they read that letter to Don Bosco, he seems to have called out: "They want me to state what my method is! Really... I would not know what it is myself. I have always gone along as our Lord inspired me and as the circumstances demanded" (MB XVIII, 126-127; EBM XVIII, 96). In this way Don Bosco took the word 'method' over from that letter. But did he at that very moment quite realize what the author actually meant? Later some Salesians certainly interpreted Dupuy's question differently. For them "method" meant "pedagogical system" both with Dupuy and with Don Bosco. Cf MB XVIII, 127/1 and footnote; EBM XVIII, 96. But that is not quite evident.

<sup>14</sup> MB XIII, 292/5; EBM XIII, 218/2. VERHULST, M., *I Verballi del primo capitolo generale salesiano (1877)*, Rome, 1980, 300/46-50.

<sup>15</sup> BRAIDO, P., *L'Esperienza pedagogica ...*, 63/3; ID., *Don Bosco's pedagogical experience*, 67/2.

When the provincial government in Turin - around 1878 - started negotiations concerning taking over the direction of Turin's youth-prison and for the re-education of young offenders, Don Bosco seems to have remarked not without a touch of irony: "I repeat that my system of education will not be quite to the government's liking". But he is wrong. The prefect really wants to take Don Bosco on board. Then Don Bosco feels obliged to make conditions, among which he lists "utter freedom in imparting religious education" and "total independence in management".<sup>16</sup> Which means among other things "no state interference in its direction". This is indispensable to guarantee him the free and total application of "his system". All this was no problem for his negotiator. But for the latter's superior, the minister, it was. That's why the project came to nothing.

One might object that Don Bosco took such a firm stand because he actually did not want to take over that public institution. That may indeed have been one of the reasons. But we will hear before long that his closest collaborators also were unrelenting when the question was about the free and integral application of Don Bosco's system, "our system", even where they truly wanted to start a new work.

In the course of the transactions concerning the taking over of St. Michael's Hospice in Rome, on the contrary, he shows himself ready for compromise, to a certain extent at least. He is willing to keep "the domestic staff and the subject masters in so far as the administration recognizes their merits and aptitudes. In this way the administration would get all the financial profits desired, maintain the institute's aim intact and exercise full authority, whereas the Salesian Society in its turn would be able to use all means indispensable to achieve its end. For in our houses we use a disciplinary system that is really very special and which we call "the preventive system".<sup>17</sup> The similarity between Don Bosco's formula, namely "disciplinary system", and the one used by Mgr Dupanloup, is striking here.<sup>18</sup> That system, which he calls "our educational system", he wants to apply freely. That is something fundamental, a condition sine qua non, as he informs the negotiator Gabrielli in July that same year.<sup>19</sup> It could hardly be expressed in a more self-assured and more intransigent way.

Nor does he mince matters before Canon Clement Guiol in Marseille in September (?) 1879: "But your letter (...) is coming up with other conditions. They turn our

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<sup>16</sup> MB XIII, 558/2 and 6; EBM XIII, 431-432.

<sup>17</sup> MB XIV, 321/10. The letter to Prince Gabrielli has not been inserted in EBM XIV, 244. One may read E. Ceria's note preceding this letter in E III, 481.

<sup>18</sup> See footnote 5.

<sup>19</sup> MB XIV, 322/8. Cf E III, 499/1: in Italian: "il nostro sistema di educazione". As to EBM XIV see footnote 17.

educational system upside down. With us all repressive means are excluded and to guarantee discipline and morality we need an absolute authority over our pupils with autonomy in education."<sup>20</sup> We don't find here a less trenchant "they might turn our system upside down". No, Don Bosco doesn't leave the Canon the slightest room for or the least glimmer of hope of a compromise. "Our system" has to be fully preserved.

## 2.2. His co-workers corroborate his terminology

During meetings of the staff G. Lazzero continues employing the well-known booklet of the Barnabite Teppa and also A. Monfat's work that became available some time later.<sup>21</sup> This, however, does not alter the fact that he thought it necessary and useful in October 1883, when teachers, assistants, priests and superiors were present, to freshen up the contents of the little treatise by reading a chapter and adding analogous and appropriate remarks to it.<sup>22</sup> At any rate, in this he is conscious of the fact that he is co-responsible for keeping up a specific spirit ("nostro spirito"). Or, worded a little more accurately "at least of the spirit of Don Bosco".<sup>23</sup> For, from this remark it appears that around that time G. Lazzero found not everyone in Valdocco was still working in the spirit of Don Bosco.

For his closest co-workers the guarantee to be able to educate in that spirit and in accordance with the preventive system counted in these years as an important condition before beginning a work elsewhere. When Count Cays is to negotiate with the Rev. Roussel in Paris, he is ordered to make two demands. One of them stipulated "that the preventive system was to be in no way hindered in its full application".<sup>24</sup> Also in 1878 P. Guidazio is sent scouting to Montefiasconi. Only four months later he wants to leave. Although he is appreciated by the superiors there, he cannot exercise any influence in matters concerning studies and education. He is not allowed "to break through a disciplinary tradition which has held for two centuries and has driven this school into the ground. Thus he cannot even "do one tenth

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<sup>20</sup> E III, 520/point 6. Cf. the practically identical wording used by E. Ceria in a summary: "We have a special educational system, known as the 'Preventive System of Education' and it is impossible to apply if the pupils are not totally under our control and remain independent. We never use repressive methods, relying all times on supervision, reason and religion " (MB XIV, 22; EBM XIV, 9-10)

<sup>21</sup> PRELLEZO, J.-M., *Valdocco nell'Ottocento tra reale e ideale, documenti e testimonianze*, Rome, LAS 1992, 257/663-665; 677-680 and 254/603-604.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 258/708-709. Unfortunately "those analogous considerations" are missing in the account. G. Lazzero also uses the expression "educational system" for a given aspect in the general way of handling the problem. Thus on 24th October 1883 (Ibidem. 259/711-716). Cf for consultation of the little treatise see a former assembly, namely on 8.2.1881 (Ibid., 246/360) and 9.3.1883 (Ibid. 258/ 688-690).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 258/685-686.

<sup>24</sup> MB XIII, 737/3; EBM XIII, 565/2.

of the good I should be doing there".<sup>25</sup> They should be allowed to take everything in hand themselves. According to "their own educational system" of course.

If, on the contrary, the Salesians are given a free hand, success is sure to come. G. Marengo has to start up an Oratory in Lucca in very difficult circumstances. But he is successful. "At first we were told that we would never keep the work up because we did not know the boys". They were "shirtless, shoeless, dirty, uncouth lads". Some time later, proud and happy, he writes to Don Bosco: "Now these same people (i.e. these same sceptics) watch them devoutly attending services, catechism sessions and classes and sermons, and now they remark: 'Really, the Salesians have a different method!'"<sup>26</sup> The exclamation mark is meaningful. Which concrete aspect of the method or the preventive system is meant here, will further be explained in another context.

The fact that the young Marengo (only 25 at the time) speaks to Don Bosco himself about "method" and not about "our" or "the preventive system", should not astonish us too much. Even G. Barberis uses the two words interchangeably in his lessons. This can be seen already in the high-sounding introduction to the important chapter of his "Appunti" in which he copies the title of Don Bosco's little treatise: "On the Preventive System in the Education of the Young" However, in the first paragraph he writes of "the necessity of a good system to educate successfully". He greatly regrets that even people who are concerned about education "don't sufficiently study the right method for succeeding and often act blindly and unsystematically". His students should be on their guard against this. That's why he tackles the question consistently: "Let us not delude ourselves. Supposing that all our life should be devoted to the education of youth, let us try with all our might to learn how to succeed. By 'this way' he does not think of an existing, traditional method. He of course knows that "every religious family that sought to educate youngsters, made intense efforts to develop an appropriate method". And he ascertains that "thousands and thousands of youngsters in this way received a good education from the Benedictines (...) and the Jesuits". But no, he has "our" system" in mind. By reminding us of these great orders, he wants us to understand that "our system" can be put alongside these generally recognized methods. His "own method" is by no means secondary or inferior.

G. Barberis proves this with a solid argument which, however, he does not elaborate. Just like his illustrious predecessors, he says, "our unforgettable father John Bosco has exerted himself all his life to give us a method". It is not the result of a

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<sup>25</sup> MB XIII, 693-694; EBM, 533/2

<sup>26</sup> G. Marengo's letter on August 27 according to MB XIII, 683/1-2; EBM XIII, 524-525.

fortuitous and hasty scrambling together of opinions and experiences. Far from it! With great certainty he affirms: "During the whole of his life, he (Don Bosco) explained how to practise his system". Sometimes by simply putting it into practice himself no doubt. But this is not the same as the deliberate, detailed description of a systematic pedagogical handling of the method. It's of course quite clear that Don Bosco's way of acting as described by G. Barberis must guarantee the purposeful shaping and the specific character of the method. Besides, the results of the education in the houses prove the distinctiveness of the method. The latter will also be experienced by the young Salesians: "If we apply this method, we shall be able, in accordance with changing times, circumstances and general procedures, to give such an education that we shall, without any doubt whatsoever, reach the proposed objective".

Then G. Barberis prepares his audience for the fact that Don Bosco has left only an partially-elaborated script: "He wrote only the most important traits". "But", he continues at once, "In conferences to all the confreres, in chapters with the superiors and through the direction of general practice he saw to its application". No doubt, the concrete, detailed application is meant here. And he repeats: "Don Bosco has written only the main ideas of the system. But before our eyes he applied it completely". And he closes his introduction with the highest appreciation of the concise treatise of Don Bosco and with a penetrating appeal: "As a sign of appreciation for the work I quote Don Bosco's words without any further commentary (...) except for a few little notes. These are his words: let us listen to them attentively, meditate them profoundly and put them into practice most faithfully and perseveringly".<sup>27</sup>

Elsewhere in the preparation of his lessons, G. Barberis habitually uses the expressions "Don Bosco's system" and "the system of our colleges".<sup>28</sup> The latter, however, is a rather unfortunate limitation, probably caused by the context wherein a given task in "our colleges" is compared with a similar one in many other non-Salesian colleges. In all this no thought is given to technical schools.

With no less appreciation or enthusiasm the Salesian Francesco Cerruti writes in 1883: "The few pages on the preventive system in education, an unpretentious

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<sup>27</sup> For the whole passage BARBERIS, G., *Appunti di Pedagogia sacra, esposti agli ascritti della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, Litografia Salesiana, 1897, 275-278.

<sup>28</sup> BARBERIS, G., *Appunti...*, 292/footnote and 298/footnote 1. It is quite possible that some Salesians preferred the word 'method' to the term 'preventive system'. Extracts from a letter of don Guidazio to M. Rua about the beginning of the work in Randazzo (Sicily) in 1879 are introduced by E. Ceria with the summarizing sentence: "... which were also in Sicily the salutary results of Don Bosco's method". (Cf MB XIV, 353/2; EBM XIV, 268/2.) E. Ceria himself uses "educational system" with the same ease. See for instance MB XIV, 358/1; EBM XIV, 272/2.

booklet, wherein however, more and better sound pedagogical basic rules are to be found than in so many other voluminous writings".<sup>29</sup>

### **2.3 Acknowledgement by people outside the congregation**

But even outside their own circle Don Bosco's particular method was known and recognized. Proof of this is an article in the periodical *'Revista di discipline carcerarie'* from 1888. But the personal experiences of the author Dr Giulio Benelli, director of the prison in Turin, that underlie the article, go back among other things, to the visits to the Salesian institutes, among which was one to the college of Lanzo, in the year 1879. This is how he formulates it: "The disciplinary system (il sistema disciplinare) in Don Bosco's institutions is not based on fear (intimidation)".<sup>30</sup> Because of his personal task G. Benelli has above all an eye for the disciplinary aspect, where by the word 'intimidation' he probably means threatening with punishment and thus inspiring fear. For he remained persuaded that for a successful re-education of his young prisoners a strict discipline excluding every compromise was in principle necessary. Yet, he was now convinced that this uncompromising discipline should go together with "that gentle care (concern)" which one finds in a well-run, upright family."<sup>31</sup>

As far away as Sicily his treatise and the distinction between the repressive and preventive systems is known. When Prior Giochino Leone Zappia, director of a college in Bronte, wants to convince Don Bosco in 1880 to send him Salesian personnel, he writes: "For the past hundred years this school has been run by the 'coercive' system and here on the spot I cannot find teachers who know any other way". That is the reason why the number of pupils has dropped dramatically. Therefore he now asks for a few assistants, priests or clerics who could introduce "the excellent system inspired in him (Don Bosco) by the Holy Spirit with his seven gifts".<sup>32</sup> Even if we suppose that the rather bombastic-sounding phrase should be ascribed to the southern temperament and the clerical, diplomatic attempt to attract somebody, it ought nevertheless to be admitted that this man too knew something more about Don Bosco's system and its much talked-of results. Instead

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<sup>29</sup> According to BRAIDO, P., *L'Esperienza pedagogica ...*, 64/1; ID., *Don Bosco's pedagogical experience*, 67/2. F. Cerruti will later constitute himself the champion of the preventive system and of "vigilant and cautious assistance". (CERRUTI, F., *Le idee di Don Bosco sull'educazione e sull'insegnamento e la missione attuale della scuola*, S. Benigno Canavese, 1886, 6)

<sup>30</sup> MB XIV, 359-360; EBM XIV, 274.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>32</sup> MB XV, 297/2; EBM XV, 248/3. In the issue of 25th April 1884 the interviewer of *'Journal de Rome'* will qualify the preventive system in the same manner: "Your educational system is really excellent" (MB XVII, 86/2; EBM XVII, 64.)

of repressive, however, he uses the term "coercitivo". But the latter is undoubtedly a first cousin of "repressivo".

In France too, the word "system" is respected. The writer of an article in the *Pèlerin* of 12th May 1883 confirms the contents of an account with the communication: "We have seen this system in action". Namely in Turin itself.<sup>33</sup> A number of observations by the author and answers by Don Bosco during table-talk of which he gives an account, point very distinctly to the preventive character of "this system", even if they don't elucidate it systematically and though no publicity is made for the little treatise itself.

The specific name that Don Bosco himself has chosen, has really become a solid, distinctive mark, a well-known flag. The question now is what cargo this flag covers.

### **3. About the meaning of the word "preventive" in the title "preventive system"**

However decisive the publication of that "unpretentious" booklet may have been, it has never been considered as the only true gospel to make out what the term "preventive system" actually contains. We have, indeed, only to recall how a man like G. Barberis thought it absolutely necessary, as proved above, to get "the conferences to all the confreres" and "the chapters with the superiors" explicitly involved in it. Furthermore it should not be forgotten that G. Lazzero continued consulting the books of A.M. Teppa and A. Monfat.

Moreover, both of them probably chose not to consider a 'pro memoria' composed by Don Bosco in February 1878 for Francesco Crispi, the Minister of the Interior. That piece of writing, however, has an extraordinary importance for a complete understanding of what Don Bosco meant by "preventive system". Neither do they mention the "General Articles" that Don Bosco published in 1877 together with the "Regulations for the Houses of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales". Those too are very important. For in his opinion and practice, prevention has not only to do with the manner, the style used by the teachers/educators in their contact with youngsters: it also has to do with the manner in which they try to influence the social situation itself in which the problem-youths live.

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<sup>33</sup> MB XVI, 168; EBM XVI, 131.

### **3.1. Prevention as a social intervention through which Don Bosco wants to prevent children and young people from getting into deep waters materially and morally and from ending up in prison.**

When Don Bosco stayed in Rome in February 1878, he had, according to the *Memorie Biografiche*, an interview with Minister Fr. Crispi. In the course of the conversation the topics "riots in youth prisons" and "educational systems" must have cropped up. Thereupon the minister must have asked him for a "programme" or written exposition of his system. Basing himself on this, he would be able to form a good idea of it for himself.<sup>34</sup> In actual fact, on 21st February Don Bosco addressed a letter to the Minister of the Interior. It begins with the following communication: "I have the honour of presenting to you the basic principles through which the preventive system can be applied to vulnerable youths on public roads or in educational institutes."<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, he says he is willing to co-operate by accepting those youths provided the government helps materially and financially.

#### **3.1.1. A fundamental document**

Don Bosco proposes the basic principles in his accompanying note with the same title as the short exposition of 1877: "*The Preventive System in the Education of Youth*". However, from the first two paragraphs it becomes clear that he adapts his original text to the circumstances. What the Minister needs is not in the first place a good pedagogical management in schools and boarding establishments but a humane acceptance and an efficient guidance of youngsters in prisons for young offenders. Yet in his note Don Bosco remains true to his experiences and opinions. He pays less attention or no attention at all to young convicts. And that is true then for Rome and elsewhere in Italy. In his explanation he shows another priority and conceives the idea of "preventive system" in a different way, at any rate not in a pedagogical, methodological way. His starting-point here is: "Although the laws (the law-makers) have the culprits in mind, they should make serious efforts to reduce their number".<sup>36</sup> This may sound as covert criticism of society, but it is in

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<sup>34</sup> MB XIII,483/3; EBM XIII, 375-376. Also see BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 259/4. ID., *Prevenire non reprimere ...*, 29; 227-228. Cf E III, 366-367/Lettera 1794.

<sup>35</sup> E III, 298-299. "Giovanetti pericolanti", translated here as "vulnerable youths" means literally "boys in danger", running the risk of ending up on the margin of society, problem-youths indeed. For the following quotations we use the text-critical edition BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 302-305. The importance of that note is so great for Don Bosco that he is willing to give a new copy to G. Zanardelli, who succeeded minister Crispi in March of that same year, should the original one have been lost (E III, 366/Lettera 1794).

<sup>36</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 302/16-17. Cf G.BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio ...*, 120/756-761; ID., *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales*, New Rochelle, 2007, 101-102. In those autobiographical notes he takes the same stand. He considers it as his life's work.

no way obscure. His standpoint is: prevent them from getting into prison, prevent rather than cure. This is evident in his proposals. He is thinking especially of the number of youngsters that according to law should be in jail. The main thing in his view is "(...) to look after those who are in danger" or - and that again is a version of Don Bosco's - "take care of those who are abandoned or in danger".<sup>37</sup>

Only those remarks, added by him to the original text, render comprehensible and admissible the sub-title found above the following little paragraph of his definitive considerations: "Which young people can be said to be at risk?"

### 3.1.2. The type of youth concerned

Don Bosco himself distinguishes four categories. The first group consists of boys who leave towns and villages in search of work in other towns or villages. They usually have a small amount of money that is soon spent. "If they do not find a job then," says Don Bosco, "they run the real risk of starting to steal and take on a way of life that leads to ruin".<sup>38</sup> At the same time he suggests that the best prevention consists in getting a job for such boys.

A second group is formed by orphans who have nobody to look after them. Left to their fate, they become vagrants and fall into the hands of real criminals. But he is convinced that "A friendly hand or an affectionate word could have set them back on the right way of a citizen worthy of respect and esteem".<sup>39</sup> Here Don Bosco's suggestion sounds less concrete, unless one hears it against the background of his years-long interest in youngsters and orphans.

The third group - according to Don Bosco - consists of children whose parents are unable or unwilling to take their offspring's education to heart. They either put them on the streets or leave them to fend for themselves. Unfortunately, the number of such negligent parents is considerable.<sup>40</sup> Here he does not yet indicate any preventive measures.

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<sup>37</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 302/note to line 17.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 303/21-25. Concerning the meaning of "find employment" in those days, see e.g. Mia DOORNAERT, "Jospin wants money for jobs, but not for relief" (*De Standaard*, 22nd January 1998, 6). Likewise Mgr M. MUSKENS, bishop of Breda: "People want to be reckoned with materially and socially. They must work, work, otherwise they are not regarded socially" (*Eindhovens Dagblad*, 21st March 1998, W 19).

<sup>39</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 303/26-29. Cf the wording in: BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell' Oratorio ...*, 122-123; ID., *Memoirs of the Oratory...*, 104.

<sup>40</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 303/30-33.

The fourth group is composed - according to him - of vagabonds who fall into the hands of the police, but who are not yet real villains or criminals. If these fellows could be given a home where they could receive instruction and some training for work, it would certainly not be necessary to shut them up; they would be kept out of prison and restored to society.<sup>41</sup> Don Bosco quite obviously prefers preventing, providing for and accompanying to re-educating in a youth-prison.

### **3.1.3. What he thinks can or must be done in a preventive approach: provide recreation, lodging, training, jobs, human and religious education**

Following the rules of a well-balanced exposition, there was no need, in listing the four categories, to announce anything about the manner of preventive action appropriate for each group. All this could well be kept for the following brief paragraph on "Measures". Indeed, he introduces that short part in the following way: "Experience has shown that efficient help can be given in each of the four categories". And then he briefly outlines the components of his strategy.

For a large number of those boys Don Bosco simply thinks of opportunities for recreation and a little formation on Sundays and feast-days. From his own experience he knows that they can fairly easily be brought together for "pleasant recreation, music, gymnastics, running and jumping games, recital and theatre". Such sound recreation naturally keeps them away from dubious bars, gambling and moral decadence. Besides recreation he also offers them formation "by means of evening lessons, instruction on Sundays and catechizing." Through this those boys not only get "what is strictly indispensable", but also "appropriate moral nourishment" (let us say education in value judgement) that will help them to spend the week decently. Quite a number of those who are helped in this way will have some accommodation and work as well.

However, not all are so fortunate. That's why, when there are opportunities to meet them, one must try to identify those who are unemployed. For this last group recreation and a little formation will not be sufficient. They need more.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 303/34-37. That means: integration or re-integration into society. Don Bosco's enumeration is based on simple practical experiences. It can without any difficulty be re-worded in a more scientific and stricter way according to the three categories of G.Milanesi. The latter distinguishes three levels: the primary, secondary and tertiary preventions. The primary level concerns "une population non sélectionnée de sujets, pour lesquels il existe un risque général de déviance, de marginalisation ou de pathologie sociale". The secondary: "des sujets qui manifestent déjà des symptômes d'adhésion, quoique non définitive et non encore structurée, aux modèles de comportement déviant (...)" and the third level: "des sujets qui ont déjà structuré un comportement socialement inacceptable (...)" (MILANESI, G., *Prévention et marginalisation chez Don Bosco et dans la pédagogie contemporaine* in AVANZINI, G., *Education et Pédagogie chez Don Bosco*, Paris, Editions Fleurus 1989, 225/footnotes 68; 69; 70). For the whole context NANNI, C., (a cura di), *Don Bosco e la sua esperienza pedagogica*, Rome, LAS 1989, 148-165.

Employment must be sought for them and assistance (material, psychological and moral) during the week.

Even this assistance would be insufficient for boys "who are poor and abandoned, who lack food and clothing, and have nowhere to sleep at night. They can be truly helped only by being accepted in a boarding institution, a foster-home or a farming settlement, where they can learn a trade or a skill".<sup>42</sup> Only in this way can they become protagonists of their personal and social emancipation and advancement. Don Bosco has had the great joy of seeing this many times. He rather euphorically reminds Minister Crispi of no less than a hundred thousand youngsters "who, thanks to his initiative, thanks to his preventive social action, have gone a long way in life".<sup>43</sup>

The prevention Don Bosco advocates shows two facets. A sort of negative aspect seeks to protect children and youths from bodily and moral harm, keep them away from or, if necessary, remove them from zones of moral and physical danger.<sup>44</sup> Seen from a positive aspect, prevention seeks to give them opportunities for personal development and prepare them to build up their future independently and with a sense of responsibility.<sup>45</sup> When these youths are given a good training and a good education, they won't become miscreants or criminals that must be punished and put into prison.

On the other hand it seems that Don Bosco expected little or nothing from efforts to reform adults, the parents of such abandoned and neglected children and youngsters. In his little talk to alumni-priests in 1880 he expressed this in a parti-

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<sup>42</sup> For the whole passage BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 303-304.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 305/83-91. This is by far more detailed and graphic than in the original treatise. Cf. therefore BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo ...*, 90/518-522. Concerning the meaning of such preventive work according to Don Bosco see BIESMANS, R., *Doelstellingen van opvoeding en opleiding gevat in een kernachtig motto*, *Don Bosco Studies* 11, 1998, 191-199.

<sup>44</sup> For "remove from" Don Bosco frequently uses "togliere" (MB XV, 791/4; no translation in EBM). Cf. BIESMANS, R., *Doelstellingen van opvoeding en opleiding ...*, 217-218; E III, 166/Lettera 1581. "Tolti alle prigionii" in the petition to minister Crispi in BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 303/37. "Shielding them from danger" is found in a table-talk to past pupils-priests in 1880 as "alontaniamoli dai pericoli" (MB XIV, 513/1; EBM XIV, 402/4).

<sup>45</sup> Looking back on his life's work during a speech in Paris (1883) Don Bosco himself distinguishes a double result: "Notre oeuvre obtenait alors un double résultat de préserver du mal des vagabonds que nous recueillions, et de réhabiliter, de raffermir après leur chute les jeunes libérés, à leur sortie de prison" (MB XVI, 527/8; not translated in EMB). That is to say: "(Our work thus took a double benefit: we shielded from evil those vagrant lads whom we had taken in, and we rehabilitated and set back on their feet those who, after having fallen, gained their freedom from prison".) This very sentence, however, is put in brackets in the Italian version and in the English translation (MB XVI, 236/6; EBM XVI, 184/2). In *the regulations for the houses* (1877) he sticks to the preference for youths belonging to the middle classes and the poor, because they need most help and assistance (helping presence) (OE XXIX, 155/2; literally "soccorso e assistenza").

cular context in the following way: "You certainly should not neglect adults, but these, with few exceptions, as you well know, are hardly responsive to our efforts".<sup>46</sup> And this was meant to be very general. Also with respect to the possibility of saving or successfully rehabilitating youths who have already become acquainted with prison life, he seems to be very reserved. In this respect he leaves Minister Crispi out in the cold.<sup>47</sup> And this may have been a reason why Don Bosco's letter failed to win over either Minister Fr. Crispi himself or his successor, G. Zanardelli.

In order to prevent young people from going the same way as some adults, including certain parents, and so many other children and youths, prevention through training, moral and ethical formation and providing employment is all the more important. But Don Bosco has gone through so many things that he knows perfectly well such work does not only require innumerable efforts, but also no end of money. So he dares to propose to the Minister a collaboration between the state and private initiative. This means that the state provides material and financial support: infrastructure and equipment on the one hand, and daily and monthly subsidies on the other. And he calculates for the Minister that it will cost him per boy only one third of what he is spending now for those who stay in state-run re-education centres.<sup>48</sup> His preventive system, considered as individual development, social integration and advancement of neglected children and youths is, at any rate preferable by far to repressively controlling, punishing and incarcerating.

Therefore, in the struggle against marginalisation and menacing moral decadence it is not only vocational training that plays an important role, but also the bringing up of boys as "honest, decent citizens" who deserve respect and esteem. This is clearly shown by Don Bosco's own words to Minister Crispi.<sup>49</sup>

During the second General Chapter Don Bosco again highlighted the need for faithful action with an anecdote and its application.

First he relates a meeting with the Pope: "I still remember what the great Pope Pius IX, of blessed memory, said to me one day: "We are living in a materialistic period. The efforts of good people in prayers, practices of piety and sacraments have no value at all for unbelievers. Outgoing activities are necessary as well. Alongside

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<sup>46</sup> MB XIV, 513/1; EBM XIV, 402/4.

<sup>47</sup> Something similar seems to have happened in Turin. There too discussions about taking over the education of young prisoners broke down (MB XIII, 557-559; EBM XIII, 431-432).

<sup>48</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 304/54-73. According to E. Ceria Don Bosco one day (about the same time?) proposed to the government in Turin "to pay eighty centesimi a day for every juvenile offender" (MB XIII, 558/6; EBM XIII, 432/2).

<sup>49</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 305/82.

their philanthropic works we must put our works of charity such as: accommodating boys, visiting prisoners and the like. Thus we won't only be pleasing to God but even to non-believers, who therefore will leave us alone or even help us with our charitable works". Then he goes on with the application: "I often have to do with front-rank liberals myself. Sometimes they don't know me, and the conversation being about us, they say: O yes, Don Bosco is a worker, the Salesians are workers. They take poor boys from the street; they are benefactors of civil society. They are doing good things. May priests of that sort live long for the welfare of their fellowmen. We cannot measure up to the challenge of a godless world with 'Our Fathers', or even with miracles. This world wants to see actions: we must take in lots of boys".<sup>50</sup> His words mean this: "We must take lots of boys off the streets and give them a good education and training".

From a previous research it became obvious that Don Bosco in his exposition for the minister brought only the purely secular packet of his educational targets to the forefront. The reason why he did so was also explained there. Within the select cadre of a General Chapter we hear him put a similar emphasis in the statement mentioned above. Nevertheless, it remains irrefutably true that educating boys to be good Christians was as important for him, even more important in order to achieve the full development of young people.<sup>51</sup>

What has been treated up till now concerns a first facet of prevention. Don Bosco's closest collaborators, especially those favourably disposed towards youths in vocational training, fully agree to this. By taking problem-youths into their institutes and through training activities keeping pace with continually developing social insights, they successfully take preventive action. This indeed is generally appreciated in the years 1876-1884.<sup>52</sup>

The second and usually better-known facet of his "preventive system" is in fact omnipresent in the contact with the youths admitted into his training institutes. It is the so-called 'intra-educative' facet.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> From the accounts of the Second General Chapter according to ROCHOWIAK, J., *Il capitolo generale 2° della società salesiana (1880) Problemi di educazione e di vita salesiana*, Benediktbeuern, 1993, 120/2. Don Bosco is so convinced of this that in an after-dinner speech to past pupils in 1883 he says: "The goal we aim for is well thought of by people, including those who in matters of religion do not see eye to eye with us" (MB XVI, 290/3; EBM XVI, 226-227).

<sup>51</sup> BIESMANS, R., *Doelstellingen van opvoeding en opleiding ...*, 83-84.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-214.

<sup>53</sup> Indeed G. Milanesi uses in this context the term "aspetto intra-educativo" (côté intra-éducatif). Cf. NANNI, C., *Don Bosco e la sua esperienza*, 161/4 resp. AVANZINI, G., *Education et Pédagogie chez Don Bosco*, 207/3.

### 3.2. Prevention as the pedagogical approach and method in the education process itself

The question then is no longer whether you tackle the phenomenon of neglected youths threatened with marginalization and criminalization in a repressive or preventive way; picking them up and punishing them or accompanying them and assisting them. The question is: how to deal with youngsters in a situation of training and education. Indeed by showing the preventive value and efficacy of accepting, training and educating them, and by pointing to the intentional pursuing of this influence and its significance, the notion of "preventive" is far from being completely understood. According to Don Bosco and his followers the educational process itself must also and even above all follow a preventive way.

- **Don Bosco's definition of the notion (pedagogical) prevention**

What he meant by this was clearly indicated in the first concise chapter of his little treatise in 1877: "Quite different from this and I might even say opposed to it, is *the preventive system*. It consists in making laws and regulations of an institute known, and then watching carefully so that the pupils at all times be under the vigilant eye of the Rector or the assistants, who like loving fathers can converse with them, take the lead in every movement and in a kindly way give good advice and correction; in other words, this system places the pupils in the impossibility of committing faults".<sup>54</sup>

This paraphrase or elucidation comprises a few essential elements. One gets a better insight by comparing them with the elements in the description of the repressive system. "The repressive system", so Don Bosco writes, "consists in making the law known to the subjects, and afterwards watching them to discover the transgressors of these laws, and inflicting, when necessary, the punishments deserved".<sup>55</sup>

First of all the word "law" as opposed to "prescriptions and regulations": both systems have in common that the "subjects", respectively "the pupils", are informed previously. But the term "law" evokes something distant, chilly, coercive and menacing. The lawgiver remains anonymous and distant. When saying "prescriptions and regulations", especially in Don Bosco's institutes, we mean rather self-evident arrangements, arising from daily life. They directly concern that very life, especially in view of reaching the common and personal object of education and training,

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<sup>54</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo ...*, 83/389-394. *Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of St Francis de Sales*, Rome Aurelio, 1997, 247.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 82/380-381.

which indeed stands first in the regulations. The regulations constitute a sort of supportive vade mecum with advice from someone who has the best of intentions towards every single young person. In the *Regulations for the Houses* Don Bosco time and again addresses the youths directly and confidentially: "Mind, dear boys ...", "The church-building, dear boys ...", "Man, my dear boys ..." In the prescriptions themselves the educator is very near, he is personally present. Besides, every week certain directives have to be read out<sup>56</sup> which can promote the knowledge, understanding and acceptance ('interiorization') of them and enhance the preventive action. Finally, the assistant/educator does not punish immediately. First he corrects in a friendly, amicable manner. By doing so, he hopes to prevent truly punishable "faults", to "make them almost impossible".

Further, in both systems, they speak about "watching over", in Italian the same verb "sorvegliare". But how different is the character of watching over. The repressive method, says Don Bosco when explaining the two opposite systems, only intends to discover and punish the transgressors. So it does not seek to positively stimulate good actions, worthy of a human being. Those, on the contrary, who choose the preventive system, seek friendly, loving contact, go to the youngsters, converse with them, assist them, give good advice and admonish them before punishing. And even the latter is done in a gentle manner.

Precisely this assistance, this aid, this supporting presence of the educator or teacher/educator is the quintessence, the soul of the preventive system. Don Bosco rejects the term "surveillant" which is often used in boarding institutes and schools, if not radically, at least in most of his utterances. He knowingly prefers the term "assistant" and often also "assistance". Those are the words so dear to him from his work in the Sunday and holiday Oratory.<sup>57</sup>

#### **4. The key-concept or the key-attitude of the preventive system in education is assistance"**

The ten articles preceding the publication of the little treatise have been given by Don Bosco the title *"General rules for those who have to guide or assist our*

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<sup>56</sup> OE XXIX,155/1. To give only a few examples:159/1; 160/Capo IV; 164/Capo V; then 171/point 10. Reading it repeatedly may cause boredom of course or degenerate into formalism. On the other hand, reading (it) only once e.g. in the beginning of the new school year (cf. PRELLEZO, J. M., *Valdocco nell'Ottocento ...*, 258/704-705) might have too little effect.

<sup>57</sup> MB XIII, 421/2; EMB XIII, 330/3: 'assistenti' has become "superiors" in this translation. BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 289/11. Cf. OE XXIX, 34 and also BARZAGHI, G., *Alle radici del sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, Milano, L.E.S., 1989, 116-117.

boys".<sup>58</sup> Mindful of the given characterization of the preventive system where he gives the [di-]rector the first place, we should not be astonished that here too he mentions first those "who hold the direction". That title above the ten directives was left out in the first edition of 1877. But this omission is compensated by the first article in which he (Don Bosco) addresses himself to "those who hold an office or assist the boys". The fact that he addresses himself to both categories of educators at the same time is very important in itself. And article eight also pushes "teachers and assistants positively to the foreground. The idea and the conviction that "assistance" in the meaning of "being with the boys" is indispensable and absolutely necessary in his educational system never leaves him. In the *Regulations for the houses* he describes in detail the assistants' tasks in classes and study-rooms, in workshops and dormitories. The same is true for the assistants, the 'peacemakers' (those who settle disputes) and the games masters in the *Regulations for the day-boys*.<sup>59</sup> Already from the special attention alone appears the pivotal function of assistance in the whole of his educational system.

In order to better focus on Don Bosco's preference and vision it may be useful to compare his emphasis with A.M. Teppa's. The latter concludes his first chapter with a view on the repartition of his work. He thinks that the twofold aim of education ("promoting the good and preventing evil") must be realised through a twofold approach: "*directly* through a correct use of authority and *indirectly* through good role-models".<sup>60</sup> It is obvious: with him the correct use of authority stands central. The object pursued is unquestionably identical. But the way he maps out how to achieve it shows a different angle of incidence. Yet Don Bosco's way will more than once cross Teppa's or run parallel with it. With the discussion of the draft text in the first General Chapter and the publication of the definitive version in 1877 Don Bosco consolidates the central role of assistance. Indeed most elements of both regulations go back to earlier versions of them.

#### **4.1 The central place of "assistance" according to Don Bosco's writings and statements in the period 1876-1884**

No wonder that he feels very concerned about the proper emphasis he wants to see in the course of pedagogy for the confreres' formation. He insisted that this course should be given in a way that was in keeping with their tasks as Salesians. He would even have liked greater attention be given to an exposition about "The

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<sup>58</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 288/1-2.

<sup>59</sup> OE XXIX, 132-137; 38-39. In the Sunday Oratory some youngsters act as "surveillants", "peacemakers" or reconcilers and "games masters" specific assistance tasks (*ibid.*, 43-44; 50-51; 53-55).

<sup>60</sup> TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti ...*, 13/3. The first part contains pages 14-54, the second one the pages 54-69.

Salesian teacher and assistant". "Such lessons would be given during the noviciate and then printed to serve as textbook for our use".<sup>61</sup> A kind of guide, we can say. Again we see that very special attention given to assistance, which had already appeared in the late sixties or early seventies. At that time he rewrote the pieces of advice he had given to Don Rua in 1863 in order to pass them on to other rectors as well. An insertion that he would keep till the 1886 edition testifies to this: "Their most important duty (i.e. the assistants' task) is punctuality at their posts: dormitory, classroom or workshop, playground etc."<sup>62</sup> Being with the boys and being with them from the very beginning of an activity is really essential for him.

With this assistance the system stands or falls. During an interview with the "*Pèlerin*" in May 1883 he coins the following aphorism: "But instead of punishment we have assistance and games" ("For punishment we substitute friendly and informal supervision and recreation."). With this, he puts "his system" on a par with assistance and games, although organising games and participating in them are only a part of true assistance. It sounds all the more strange in this context that in his further explanation he does not so much emphasize playing with the boys but rather watching over them (*sorveglianza*), and thus lets the "assistance" so to speak change into "surveillance", i.e. vigilance, supervision: "Infractions of discipline mostly take place because of lack of supervision. Vigilance cuts wrongdoing sufficiently to eliminate punishments."<sup>63</sup> In other words, if we are watchful, we sufficiently prevent evil and so we are not obliged to repress (*reprimere*) or, expressed differently, to intervene authoritatively.

Also in France in 1879 when speaking to Canon Guiol, he had used the term "*sorveglianza*" (surveillance, keeping watch, supervising): "We have a special educational method, known as the 'Preventive System of Education'. (...) We never use repressive means; relying at all times on supervision, (*sorveglianza*), reason and religion."<sup>64</sup> There surveillance, and consequently - in the context of the discussion with the Canon - the physical presence of the Salesians has pre-eminence. This presence is so indispensable that the Salesians may not take up tasks that would

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<sup>61</sup> MB XII, 397/2; EBM XII, 287/1.

<sup>62</sup> MOTTO, Fr., *I "Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori" di Don Bosco* in: RSS (4), 153/53-55 and annotations to the lines 53-54. EMB X, 448.

<sup>63</sup> MB XVI, 168; EBM XVI, 131. The opposition of "*si previene*" and "*reprimere*" got lost in the official English translation. In any case Don Bosco abides by his favourite terms "assistance" and "assistant". That preference dates back to years before. See also BRAIDO, P., *Il sistema educativo di Don Bosco*, Torino, SEI, 1972, 39/2 and BARZAGHI, G., *Alle radici del sistema preventivo...*, 116-118; 136-142. This utterance by Don Bosco tallies fairly well with an idea of A.M. Teppa's: "The frequency of punishment always betrays either negligence or inexperience in the educator. Negligence in watching over the pupils, in teaching, stimulating, warning, admonishing and cleverly eliminating occasions wrongdoing" (TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti ...*, 41/2).

<sup>64</sup> MB XIV, 22; EBM XIV, 9-10.

prevent them from being actually present among the boys, even though it were to satisfy some pastoral desires of Canon Guiol's.

In the course of this study it will be further demonstrated that 'watching over' is certainly an aspect of assistance. But it is much more than that. In a letter to Gabrielli Don Bosco himself leaves little doubt about this: "Friendliness (i modi benevoli), reason, gentleness (loving kindness) and a very special surveillance are the only means (...) as you have been able to gather yourself from the *Regulations of our House* in Turin which is the same for all houses in Italy, France and America".<sup>65</sup> Of course the term "very special" (with the word surveillance) is open to interpretation. It can indeed stand both for a special intensity and for a special character (kind). Don Bosco gives his correspondent a tip by referring to the Regulations. But this does not directly give the distinction wanted. In any case through this special mention at the end of the enumeration the notion "watching over" gets a very specific and heavy accent. Let this emphasis be sufficient here.

#### **4.2 Assistance, the heart of the "system" also in the pedagogical lessons of G. Barberis**

The systematic elaboration of the theme wanted by Don Bosco above all "the Salesian teacher and Assistant", that came up for discussion and that could have given an unequivocal insight into the very specificity of assistance, has, however never come off. Yet, it is worthwhile to check how G. Barberis has treated the subject in the preparatory notes for his lessons in pedagogy. In the third chapter of the fourth part he proposes to talk about the "accomplishers" or protagonists of "moral education". That means about "the director, the prefect, the catechist, the director of studies, the teachers and the assistants". They are there, all of them, it seems. But in his exposition he restricts himself to "copying" the articles in question of the *Regulations for the Houses* and to adding only a couple of explanatory footnotes. Yet the very fact that he chooses exactly those passages of the Regulations is most significant. Besides, one of the notes is no less so. In the latter don Barberis admonishes his young listeners to learn by heart the articles concerning teachers and assistants.<sup>66</sup> Through this he undeniably underscores the value of assistance in the educational system, and also of assistance quite in general. They should prepare them-

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<sup>65</sup> E III, 482. Cf also MB XIV, 321/10; EBM XIV, 243-244. Don Bosco's letter itself, however, has not been inserted in the official English translation.

<sup>66</sup> BARBERIS, G., *Appunti ...*, 306(1). With this he contributes to the carrying out of a decision of the first General Chapter in 1877. The latter determined: "In the course of Sacred pedagogy, which is prescribed with us for all first year students in philosophy, the rules that teachers and assistants must observe are to be read out several times and explained as well". (OE XXIX, 392/item 7).

selves most thoroughly for this crucial task. It is an essential element of their identity as educators.

As he had announced, in the introduction to the third chapter by copying a few little chapters from the Regulations, he throws more light on the role of the assistant and of assistance itself in a part of the following chapter about "means to assure discipline".<sup>67</sup>

By moving the exposition about assistance and assistants within the frame of discipline he obviously runs the risk of treating only one side of assistance as Don Bosco had wanted it and meant it in the well-known little treatise. This risk grew bigger as he almost exclusively made use of three chapters from P.A. Monfat's book for the treatment of this theme. Indeed this author used only the notion "sorveglianza", surveillance. One may, however, accept that G. Barberis, a few pages before, had tried to cover himself with the question: "Don't we get the impression that we are hearing our Don Bosco himself speaking in these different statements?"<sup>68</sup> It remains ambiguous, all the same, even if it must be said that he consistently replaces Monfat's term "prefetto" by "assistant", the term so familiar and proper to Don Bosco's houses, and less consistently sometimes the term "sorveglianza" by "assistance".<sup>69</sup> By doing so he remains in Don Bosco's track. Because of the many quotations from Monfat and the chosen angle of view, however, the whole does not leave the formal impression of going back to Don Bosco and the practice at Valdocco.

Nevertheless, in those few pages the central position of assistance in the educational process is clearly visible. Especially assistance as a form of surveillance in order to obtain order and discipline. That position becomes clearer yet if one notices that for G. Barberis a good education is impossible without a solid discipline and that for Monfat "discipline is the very essence of education".<sup>70</sup> In order to guarantee this essence assistance in the sense of "surveillance" is absolutely necessary.

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<sup>67</sup> BARBERIS, G., *Appunti...*, respectively 291/2; 315 and 335-347.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 321/2. Yet another form of one-sidedness comes up with him by the fact that he uses only the word "colleges" and not also "evening schools" nor "Oratories". Certain paragraphs from the *"Regulations for the Oratory of St Francis de Sales ..."*, would, however, have been relevant as well.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 336/4; 337/2; 338/5; 345/1. Cf. Don Bosco himself via footnote 10. Yet the importance of this substitute must be somewhat reduced, for in a footnote G. Barberis puts the notions "prefetto" and "assistente" on a level without the slightest reserve. "According to the system in our colleges the prefect is so to speak a vice-rector. He has nothing to do with the task that in many non-Salesian colleges is connected with that name (prefect) and that has no other meaning than assistant" (298/1). For a better understanding of that note one should read MONFAT, P.A., *La pratica della educazione cristiana*, Rome 1879, 151-154. The term "that has no other meaning (than assistant)" shows to which degree G. Barberis recognizes the Salesian theory and practice in Monfat's writing.

<sup>70</sup> BARBERIS, G., *Appunti ...*, 315/1; MONFAT, P.A., *La Pratica ...*, 42/1.

### **4.3. Assistance the core of the "system" in the practice of G. Lazzero in the period 1876-1884**

If the young Salesians receive the theoretical basics from G. Barberis, G. Lazzero gives them both confirmation of the theory and supplementary practical guidance. Like his predecessor Michael Rua G. Lazzero, after his appointment as vice-rector, devotes the first meetings of the house council to the assigning of specific assistance-related tasks. But on the 11th November 1876 he goes further. He avails himself of the prescribed monthly meeting of the educational staff of the college, to dot his i's and cross his t's, in particular as far as assistance in the dormitories is concerned. He is not only anxious to hammer home the directives that accurately describe what assistants must do and not do in order to act preventively. He also takes time to describe and recommend fundamental attitudes which justify pedagogically, in the spirit of Don Bosco, the way they must conduct themselves: in other words their assistance, their presence among the boys both in the dormitories and in the playgrounds.<sup>71</sup>

He finds the themes of that meeting and the way they were dealt with so valuable that he comes back to it at the beginning of the school-year, not only in the presence of the assistants of the college, but also of the teachers and those who are responsible for the trade school. The prefect of the house, the vice-prefect, the director of studies and the catechist are also present.<sup>72</sup> Since the system - as has already been said above - stands or falls by this assistance, he, as the one mainly responsible, devotes much attention and occasionally much time to it. (He even makes particular mention of the duration of an assembly.)<sup>73</sup> In the final analysis his insistence would seem to imply that more than once the practical carrying out of assistance, was not without fault.

That supposition is reinforced by the praise he gave Leveratto one day, because during a long walk "he (Leveratto) was always in the midst of the boys".<sup>74</sup> This is not just forced praise but the expression of high appreciation for a way of behaving, namely his continual presence among the boys, something which was very dear to Lazzero's heart, because it is so essential in the system and because he does not find that consistency in others.

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<sup>71</sup> PRELLEZO, J. M., *Valdocco nell' Ottocento ...*, 217/32-33 (cf 209-212 and further 233-237); 266-267.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 267-268.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 255/622; 258/682.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 84/1214.

It is lacking for instance to such a degree in November of the school year 1882-1883 that he convokes several meetings in the course of that month. Once, he limits himself to a diplomatic "in church the teachers should, if possible, assist their own classes in order to give good example". But some ten days later only, he says and writes without any frills: "During recreation time the boys have no assistance". That is why the decision is taken that "the following day all young confreres and the priests as well will be called together - all those who have to deal with the boys - in order to give them a few directives".<sup>75</sup>

He calls that meeting the next day "the great assembly". It lasted from half past five until quarter past six. Thirty-five Salesians were present. The first question that was treated sounds significant: "Who is an assistant?" Which in reality means: "Who should assist?" The answer is short and to the point: "All of us". A further clarification follows: "We must spend the recreation time with the boys not with one another". And G. Lazzero notes very specifically that Don Bosco himself came in at a quarter to seven and approved and confirmed everything".<sup>76</sup> What else could be expected? For during a meeting of the yearly assembly of rectors on the occasion of the Feast of Francis of Sales in February 1877, Don Bosco had already said: "Assistance must be a concerted effort. No one is to consider himself excused when it comes to prevent an offence to God Almighty."<sup>77</sup> Everyone individually and all

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 253/5576-557; 253-254. It is, however, surprising that one should learn that the situation is so bad. For in April the diocesan priest Orioli still spoke highly of what he had experienced at Valdocco. Because of special circumstances his bishop had sent him to Turin to spend some time with Don Bosco. He affirmed: "And how your surprise grows when you see them (the directors) in the midst of their young students or poor artisans showing themselves to be more friends than superiors. In Don Bosco's House you do not find the oppressive aura of discipline (authority) that pervades other boarding schools (...) It does your heart good to see these degreed professors so modest in manner, unconcerned about their genuine talents. (MB XV, 563; EBM XV, 469/1.

<sup>76</sup> For the whole paragraph PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, 254/590-601. Cf. Don Bosco himself MB XIII, 85; EMB XIII, 65 and PRELLEZO, J.M., *Il sistema preventivo riletto dai primi salesiani*, Quaderni pedagogici, (36), n. 1, 1989, 46.

<sup>77</sup> MB XIII, 85; EBM XIII, 65/1. This he seems to have said also in former years: "All young confreres (chierici) and priests have the duty to spend recreation time together with the boys. They must animate the games". (MB XIV, 840 Riconoscimento; Document VII has not been translated in EMB XIV.). The same spirit is revealed in an idea in an occasional sermon in August 1878: "Let us keep busy even during recreation and, if we are assistants, let us watch our pupils, leading them in their games and participating in them and keeping them together in the playground. Even if you are not assistants, you must do your share too, and let recreation time really give you an uplift to dispel gloom, worries, and disturbing and dangerous thoughts" (MB XIII, 801-802; EBM XIII, 619/2-3) Yet the question may be put whether the expression "do your share too as much as possible" did not open a back door to escape all assistance. Which is more: does the expression "if you are not assistants" taken literally not lead to the idea that after all there is a difference between the duty of the official assistants and that of the non-official ones? (Cf also VERHULST, M., *I Verballi ...*, 202/159-171 and MB XIII, 272-273; EBM XIII, 201 Years later F. Cerruti will still strongly attack the idea: "For heaven's sake do not listen to the slogan of some people, a slogan that indeed betrays love of ease and tickles our self-love and that proclaims that the continuous, never-failing contact with the youths is detrimental to authority and that especially priests should abstain from doing assistance because of their priestly dignity. (CERRUTI, F., *Un ricordino educativo-didattico*, Turin, SAID, 1910, 35).

collectively are responsible for what, in his eyes, is this all-important preventive influence of assistance.

#### **4.4 Assistance: a constant presence; accompaniment: a demanding method**

Identifying causes of the rather conspicuous failures to observe such an essential task is far from simple. Things that happen almost a year later may throw some light on this affair. The members of the house council notice at that time that things are again not running smoothly at Valdocco. On 24th October 1883, during one of a rapid succession of assemblies, they appear to be questioning their organisational structure. They speak about "the educational system introduced into the Oratory a few years before" which at that time consisted "in putting the whole education or the whole weight of it on the shoulders of the Director of Studies. Now they want to go back to the old system, by which the greater part, not to say the whole responsibility lies with the teacher. The assistant should be his support and form as it were a unity with the teacher". Possible consequences were considered, and it was decided to start the experiment.<sup>78</sup> The use of the term "educational system" in this context is, to say the least, surprising, since it addresses only a partial aspect of it, namely the general and shared responsibility. The emphasis on the unity between teacher and assistant, however, undoubtedly touches the main nerve: assistance is a matter for each and every confrere.

What the members of the council meant by the words "introduced a few years before" and combined with "educational system" is still unclear. Maybe they are hinting at a decision of the first General Chapter which had determined in 1877 that "discipline in class, at recreation and everything that has to do with good order, the walks and suchlike activities depend on the Director of Studies".<sup>79</sup> Maybe the application of this decision in the course of years degenerated from a planned co-ordinating and stimulating action into a form of absolute power, so that the others felt less and less responsible and held back. The reshuffling of responsibilities in the way the house council envisaged it according to the report, makes us suppose this at any rate.

A week later, however, it would become clear that the council had not hit the mark. Had they not evaluated "the possible consequences?" Or did the staff feel rebuffed because the decision had been taken without their collaboration whilst they were merely informed of it? This too is suggested by the report. Or did some fail to understand that the cause and the remedy of the malaise in (their) education were to

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<sup>78</sup> PRELLEZO, J.M., *Valdocco nell' Ottocento ...*, 259/711-716.

<sup>79</sup> OE XXIX, 393/item 12.

be found in themselves. In any case only after eliminating some objections was the decision for the change taken unanimously, both by the teachers and the assistants.<sup>80</sup> That doesn't imply that after this, all remained serene. If that were the case, "the so-called circular of 10th May 1884" would not have been necessary.

Perhaps there were causes even more deep-seated to explain this irritating malaise that Don Bosco had already put his finger on. It was surely not just an off-the-cuff remark when, in the little treatise, he put in parenthesis the incisive phrase: "The assistant (...) whom we suppose to be present (...)" Then, in an even more realistic way, he went on to write: "Some may say that this system is difficult in practice (...) To the educators it certainly does present some difficulties (...) He (the educator) should always be ready to face every difficulty and fatigue (...)".<sup>81</sup> Indeed, "every difficulty and fatigue" because it concerns assistance, the core of the system.

It is a pity again that Don Bosco does not enlarge upon the difficulties, which, in his experience are, for the educator, part and parcel of the application of the preventive system and especially in the area of assistance. It is also a pity that he does not give a short enumeration of the specific problems he was thinking of at that moment.<sup>82</sup> The next exposition, in a separate article, of what assistance entails will show that quite a number of elements may have been in his mind.

## **5. The assistance Don Bosco wanted is preventive in two ways**

In the course of the exposition so far it often appeared that one of the objectives of assistance doubtless consists in preventing evil, disorders, and especially what Don Bosco summarily calls "offending God". Through constant presence and influence he wants to prevent the boys' positive development from suffering or being damaged. He wants to safeguard every chance for the better.

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<sup>80</sup> PRELLEZO, J. M., *Valdocco nell' Ottocento ...*, 283/718-721. The centralising directive of the first General Chapter (1877) was cancelled in the second (1880). See for the matter OE XXIX, 393/art. 12 and OE XXXIII, 80.

<sup>81</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo ...*, 90/526, which, according to the textual variant, happened after some reflection; and also 90/503-506. *Constitutions...*, 252 and 251.

<sup>82</sup> This was probably not necessary for his closest co-workers. They must have known it. This is proved by their decision during an assembly on the occasion of the Feast of St Francis of Sales in February 1877: "Sacrifices are to be made when necessary, in order to be with the boys and watch over them" (MB XIII, 84/item 2°; EBM XIII, 64/point 2).

## 5.1. The protective aspect of assistance

That is why in this context we may speak of a protective or rather "forestalling" function of assistance. (Indeed, the Italian word "impedire" means to prevent, *to impede*.) The term protective prevention was coined neither by Don Bosco nor by his co-workers, but it typifies a specific target that is aimed at by the constant presence of the educators. It is obvious to consider this aspect as a kind of negative side of prevention. It aims literally at restraining the pupils from committing faults. "The impossibility of committing faults" comes from outside, be it in a gentle, friendly way. The second function that appears more clearly from his detailed description in the well-known little treatise, may rightly be called the promotional, constructive or positive one.<sup>83</sup> It consists in good advice, support, orienting, i.e. in assistance in the broadest sense of the word which is intended to help the youngsters to become autonomous and responsible persons, who themselves choose what is good. Then the force comes from within.

### 5.1.1. The presence of the educators should avert disorders

In both versions of the *Regulations* "impedire" (to prevent, avert, stop from occurring in a rather physical way) is, as it were, the only topic, though sometimes in related verbs or phrases. In the Sunday and feast day Oratory, this is precisely the peacemakers' (reconcilers'), games-masters' and protectors' task. The peacemakers must prevent "scuffles, quarrels, cursing and all sorts of foul talk". "The chief leader", just like the assistant at church services in fact, "must see to the prevention of disorders". Normally those responsible in the Sunday [and feast day Oratory] are somewhat older and more reliable. The protectors for their part have the most important task of placing the poorest and most abandoned boys with an employer. Moreover, they have to "take care that boys with an apprenticeship and those frequenting the Oratory don't land up with a boss who is a danger to their eternal salvation". Moreover "whenever they find out that a boy has been put in a dangerous situation, they must assist him so that he does not go astray"<sup>84</sup> and in so doing

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<sup>83</sup> For this, see among others BRAIDO, P., *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, Zürich, Pas, 1964, 208/a e 210/b). ID., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 238/2. ID., *L'Esperienza pedagogica...*, 134/4. ID., *Don Bosco's pedagogical experience*, 139/3. ID., *Breve Storia del "sistema preventivo"*, Rome, LAS, 1993, 75. ID., *Prevenire non reprimere...*, 80-83. Cf. also footnote 5 at the beginning of this study. BELLERATE, B., *Ragione, religione, amorevolezza* in NANNI C., (a cura di), *Don Bosco e la sua esperienza pedagogica*, 70/3. The qualification "impeditiva" would define better the already treated aspect of "assistance" in Don Bosco's practice. However, due to practical reasons the term "protective" will be used.

<sup>84</sup> Respectively: OE XXIX, 50/item 1; 54/item 7; 38/items 1 and 2; 56/1, 57. This intensive care to prevent shortcomings before children can commit them, had been shared for some time already by Don Bosco with many contemporaries. See STELLA, P., *Don Bosco nella storia... II.*, 453-459; BRAIDO, P., *Breve storia...*, 68-105.

compromise his present development and his future happiness.

For "all those" who are in one way or another active in the Oratory, it is true that "supplying an illiterate with some articles of faith or preventing a single sin is a real bliss". The latter idea is in complete agreement with the principal concern in the first of the ten *General Articles*. It also fits in well with the opinion of A.M. Teppa, who impresses on educators and teachers that "their first and principal concern should be to carefully preserve the youngsters' innocence, (...), to keep them away from vice, to bridle their passions and to keep them from present dangers (...)." <sup>85</sup> The educators ought to prevent the boys at all costs from acquiring bad habits. Indeed, the latter obscure the intellect and the formation of a correct conscience. Teachers in day- and evening-schools can provide a special preventive contribution. Indeed, by being punctual, they can "impede disorders before and after lessons." <sup>86</sup> Such disorders can undoubtedly be pernicious.

The directives in the *Regulations for the Houses* are often almost literal repetitions of the *Regulations for the dayboys* frequenting the Oratory. Thus, the prefect, in dialogue with the prefect of studies and the catechist, has to take care that "teachers, workshop-masters and assistants are at their places when the boys enter the church, the study room, the classrooms, the workshops and the dormitories. In this way they must avert the disorders that usually take place at these moments. In addition, the catechist "should often confer with the prefect so as to be able to prevent any kind of disorder." <sup>87</sup> With no less insistence the teachers, crafts masters and assistants at Valdocco are reminded once more individually of the necessity of punctuality." <sup>88</sup> In the little treatise this leads up to the norm: "As far as possible the assistants ought to precede the boys to the place where they assemble. The expression "as far as possible" may sound a little attenuating. Yet, probably it is not meant that way, because, in the context, it concerns only the presence of the specific assistants and because the principal objective remains: "Care should be taken that the pupils are never alone." <sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> OE XXIX, 58/3; BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 289/5-6. TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, 8/2.

<sup>86</sup> OE XXIX, 58/3; 81/Capo IV, art. 1. As to the first General Article see BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 289/5.

<sup>87</sup> OE XXIX, 120/item 18; 122/item 8.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 129/item 1; 131-132; 134/item 2. Also see *ibid.* 133/item 3. Cf. for the formation of assistants and teachers MB XII, 397/2; EMB XII, 286-287.

<sup>89</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, 85/442-444. Cf. *ibid.* 83/391. *Constitutions...*, 249 and 247: "at all times

### 5.1.2. Assistance will forestall harmful influences

In this way teachers, crafts masters and educators can also prevent "fights, indecent or foul conversations, offensive language, improper actions and immoral reading."<sup>90</sup> All these are negative and destructive elements Don Bosco fears like the plague. Thus, it is quite normal that the echo of this important concern is to be found in the treatise: "Let the greatest vigilance be exercised so as to prevent bad books, bad companions or persons who indulge in improper talk from entering the college."<sup>91</sup> They are all forms of shielding the young from evil, of protecting them against harmful influences. Thus, an essential kind of assistance, of rendering help consists in preventing wrong where it starts.

During the first General Chapter, the third and fourth sessions were devoted to the theme 'teaching and reading-matter'. Once more, they recalled the necessity of doing one's best to prevent boys from obtaining bad or potentially bad books. The same care had to be taken regarding prize books. These must "preferably be selected from our own publications."<sup>92</sup> In this way of preventing, the door-keeper is assigned a particularly important role in both regulations. In his treatise, Don Bosco describes this role in such a particular way that his wording could become a catch phrase: "A good door-keeper is a treasure for a house of education."<sup>93</sup>

The same can be said of the people responsible for the theatre, music and academic sessions; during both rehearsals and the performance.<sup>94</sup>

Special attention is given to the delicate point of possible thefts. For this reason the game-masters at the Sunday and feast day Oratory "should check that nothing is missing after the game, put away all equipment, close the room and take the key to

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<sup>90</sup> OE XXIX, 131/item 11; 132/ item 7; 133/ item 4; 134/ item 4; 137/ item 5.

<sup>91</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, 87/477-478. *Constitutions...*, 250/5. Cf the advice, which may date from the seventies, in MB XIV, 840/Ricreazione 2; not translated in EMB XIV. Also see OE XXVIII, 319/3; OE XXIX, 395/art. 8 and 9; and OE XXXIII, 23/art. 8; 66/art. 9; 81/art. 5; 82/art. 6.

<sup>92</sup> VERHULST, M., *I Verballi...*, 127-128 and 118-119. Cf OE XXVIII, 318/4; OE XXIX, 396/art. 11; OE XXXIII 82/art. 8. This solicitude obtains a formal ratification in a circular dated March 1885 (E IV, 318-321). However, apparently in 1883 Don Bosco was already thinking about this project and wrote a first letter to the houses on this subject. (MB XVII, 197-200; EMB XVII, 173-177) See hereafter also footnote 101 about a goodnight (address) on the partial theme "bad books". In this respect G. Barberis also impressed on the prospective educators that they should be very watchful according to Don Bosco's directives (BARBERIS, G., *Appunti...*, 228-229).

<sup>93</sup> OE XXIX, 79-80; 143-145 and BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, 87/478-479. *Constitutions...*, 250/5.

<sup>94</sup> See BIESMANS, R., *Doelstellingen van opvoeding en opleiding...*, 54-72. For example: OE XXIX, 81/3; 432-437. VERHULST, M., *I verballi...*, 348/302-303

the prefect". The assistant of the workshops "is to put valuable things under lock and key to preserve them from being stolen."<sup>95</sup> Preventing thefts through such measures is certainly not the most pleasant of ways. Yet, experience has taught Don Bosco that this is the only efficient way because of the presence of various categories of boys. Everybody, eventually, must be concerned about doing good to a wide variety of characters, in other words to "all" but "without creating the opportunity for anyone to do harm to the others."<sup>96</sup> According to the concise treatise itself this means that "good boys" could not be harmed by the presence of "boys who have already contracted bad habits". The latter "could not have a bad influence on their companions, nor would the good boys suffer any harm from association with them, since there is neither time, place, nor opportunity, because the assistant, whom we presume to be present, would speedily intervene", states the educator Don Bosco.<sup>97</sup>

The emphasis on preventing evil or harmful influences through the presence and the appropriate intervention of the educators may have increased in the course of the years. In a letter to G. Bologna, dated March 21, 1880, Don Bosco insists on "assigning duties in such a way that nothing and nobody, not a single boy or place is left without being entrusted to a responsible person."<sup>98</sup> After all, this is only a repetition of the norm in the concise treatise (1877) that has been quoted above and that prescribes never to leave the boys alone.<sup>99</sup> In a dream he would tell three years later, a deceased confrere inspires him with a kind of a *strenna* (a yearly motto): "For your boys I recommend work and vigilance". This is still reinforced by Don Bosco's question "What else?" and don Provera's next answer: "Further: vigilance and work, work and vigilance."<sup>100</sup>

Yet, one should be prudent when supposing that the emphasis on the preventive or protective function increases with the years. For in April 1877 for example, Don Bosco in a goodnight already encouraged constant vigilance in his confreres to prevent the boys from reading certain books. In this respect the educators were considered as unwelcome controllers by a number of boys who voiced their displeasure. When Don Bosco hears about this displeasure, he reacts sharply. "How thoughtless they are!" he exclaims. Nevertheless, he does not lose his composure and justifies

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<sup>95</sup> OE XXIX, 55/item 12; 135/item 9.

<sup>96</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 290/17-18.

<sup>97</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, 90/525. *Constitutions...*, 251-252.

<sup>98</sup> E III, 553/4. See also MB XIV, 444; EMB XIV, 343/footnote 7. The letter has not been translated.

<sup>99</sup> See footnote 89.

<sup>100</sup> MB XVI, 16; EMB XVI, 4.

his educators' attitude: "They (the assistants) act as they do in order to prevent evil, and this is for your own good. The superiors, furthermore, will have to account to God if they neglect their pupils and consequently allow them to fall into sin". Imperturbably he concludes: "I say this only for those who need to hear it."<sup>101</sup> However, this very statement again means that he does not denounce the guilty ones publicly despite his resoluteness and severity. He undoubtedly wants to give them another chance. On the other hand, the whole affair may also hint at a certain shortcoming in his evaluation. At that moment Don Bosco was probably unaware that certain forms of impeding, preventing, anticipating assistance and paternalism might have become an oppressive presence having just the opposite effect and going unnoticed.

### **5.1.3. A constant presence, that averts transgressions, and precludes the necessity of punishments**

General confrontation with rash behaviour should itself be a sufficient punishment. In fact, the avoidance of real punishments is one of the most important objectives of the preventive system in the sense of protective assistance. His "system excludes all violent punishment, and tries to do without even the slightest chastisement". It is precisely through such an approach that a boy may recognise the assistant as a friend and benefactor who "wishes to spare him vexation, punishment, and perhaps dishonour."<sup>102</sup> This will be seen still more clearly in the following paragraph.

At the end of the third General Chapter (September 1883) Don Bosco urges: "As concerns punishments, whether it is convenient or inconvenient (2 Tim. 4:2) (*opportune et importune*) insist that the preventive system be practised."<sup>103</sup> In its context, this statement means in the first place that the educator-teacher may reprimand and admonish, but that corporal punishments are absolutely excluded. However, it also and above all means that appropriate intervening with a word of warning or a piece of good advice may and must prevent punishment. Exactly in this respect, the first part of his statement remains true: "We have assistance and games."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> MB XIII, 421/2; EMB XIII, 330/3. "Superiors" is in the Italian version "gli assistenti". Cf MB XIII, 420/6 respectively EMB, 330/2: "The culprits who now hear me will know I mean them".

<sup>102</sup> Both quotations in BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, 83/396-397; 84/419-420. *Constitutions...*, 247 and 248.

<sup>103</sup> MB XVI, 417/5°; EMB XVI, 331/5°. The theme 'punishments' remains a worry. Precisely in 1883 in Valdocco they start drafting a circular letter, which however will lie in the drawer for years. See further footnote 193.

<sup>104</sup> See footnotes 63; 109; 160.

## ***Conclusion***

Good is achieved through timely, constant and assiduous presence and through adequate action forestalling eventual evil and cutting off menacing disorders; through omnipresent vigilance preventing transgressions and consequently unpleasant punishments; through a committed presence, preserving the boys from negative, harmful and unpleasant experiences. All this, however, is just one dimension of the assistance that Don Bosco conceived and lived.

### **5.2. The constructive, equipping or promotional function of assistance**

In Don Bosco's day-to-day practice the protective role of the educator is a very important dimension. Yet, when he describes the preventive system in the concise treatise, he doesn't breathe a word about that dimension. At any rate, he does not refer directly to the role of the educator as one who must prevent faults, shortcomings and sins through his punctual and caring presence. On the contrary, he does draw attention there to that other essential function of a constant presence: the constructive, promotional function. It consists in supporting, assisting and actively promoting the many-sided development of the youngsters. "The director or the assistants" should not only diligently look out to forestall evil; they also and above all should promote good. It is their task to help and equip the young in order that they themselves may choose and do what is good. For that purpose, "they must converse with their boys like loving fathers; to that end they must be their guides under all circumstances, give them good advice and kindly correct them". Then he concludes that precisely this kind of assistance "places the pupils in the impossibility of committing faults."<sup>105</sup>

### **Constructive assistance is the main aspect**

In the whole of Don Bosco's statements and practice, however, this conclusion is one-sided and certainly too negatively formulated. His practice is on a par with A.M. Teppa's who typifies both aspects in a more concise and more balanced way. According to him, education has two tasks: "Promoting good and preventing

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<sup>105</sup> See footnote 54.

evil."<sup>106</sup> Promoting is "promuovere" in Italian. Hence the possibility of calling positive constructive assistance also "promotional" assistance. It is the latter that Don Bosco means. The point is to enable the boys to live their lives as Christians and citizens in an independent way and with a sense of responsibility.<sup>107</sup>

In spite of this verbal similarity, there is an enormous difference between Don Bosco's concrete way of working it out and that of A.M. Teppa. The latter wants to accomplish this double educational task in two ways: "*directly*, i.e. through a correct use of moral authority, and also *indirectly*, through good example". He devotes four of the nine chapters (IV-VII) of his book to that correct use. That moral authority should play a part in "commanding, instructing, stimulating, admonishing, reprimanding, punishing, praising and rewarding."<sup>108</sup> With Don Bosco it is not authority that takes first place but assistance. There are obviously two different angles. If Don Bosco's above-mentioned statement "we have assistance and games" fits in somewhere, it must be here.<sup>109</sup>

With regard to this, an article that Don Bosco added to his recommendations to the rectors in 1876 is certainly as relevant as the paragraph on the precise nature of his method in the concise treatise about the preventive system. In this insertion he writes: "When you succeed in discovering a grave transgression, summon the guilty one or the suspect to your room, and in the most charitable way try to get him to admit his fault and the wrong he has committed. Then admonish him and invite him to set his conscience at peace. In this way and by giving constant and kindly assistance to the pupil wonderful results are obtained and improvements that one would never have thought possible."<sup>110</sup> The end of this recommendation refers again to his extremely positive pedagogical experiences. But more important here is that the latter are due to a persevering, helpful, available, constructive assistance, which gua-

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<sup>106</sup> TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, 13/2. Cf. with the Brothers of the Christian Schools more than a century earlier: "Vous ne devez pas vous contenter d'empêcher les enfants qui sont confiés à vos soins, de faire le mal, il faut aussi que vous les engagiez à faire le bien et les bonnes actions dont ils sont capables » (BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 231/footnote 35).

<sup>107</sup> In this sense the title of Don Bosco's meditation and prayer book: "*Il giovane provveduto per la pratica de' suoi doveri, degli esercizi di cristiana pietà...*", i.e. "The well-equipped youth" may be symbolic. (The official English title is: "*The Companion of Youth*".)

<sup>108</sup> TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, 13/3 and 28/2. Cf. the very conveniently arranged table of contents in his book.

<sup>109</sup> See footnote 104.

<sup>110</sup> BRAIDO, P. *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 164/137-143. For the dating see MOTTO, Fr, *I "Recordi confidenziali ai direttori" di Don Bosco*, RSS (4), 140-141. Cf EMB X, 450/footnote 11. Teachers and assistants, on the contrary, were forbidden to receive pupils in their rooms. This was decided during the first General Chapter (1877) and confirmed in the second (1880) (respectively OE XXIX, 428/art. 13; VERHULST, M., *I Verballi...*, 344/199-200 and OE XXXIII, 63/art.13). Therefore, the lessons and recreation times were more important for them for personal contact in order to warn and give advice (OE XXIX, 130/art. 7).

rantees personal conversation, dialogue. The latter must not be ignored and in no case be given up. One should always and everywhere continue being present and assisting in word and deed.

We shall now try to describe the elements that form the content of assistance through which it can help the young to grow up into good Christians and honest citizens.

### **5.2.1. Positive assistance means admonishing the youngsters in time**

Both in the course of the short treatise and in the well-known ten articles, as well as in the regulations, Don Bosco puts the task "avvisare" foremost. This "avvisare" means in the first place "to warn". Nevertheless, it also comprises "advising, giving a hint or a directive, drawing attention to, suggesting". Whoever warns or gives directives or advice, often also wants of course to prevent transgressions or shortcomings. Yet, there is a difference with the protective-preventive component. Indeed, it is no longer the adult who directly prevents the youth from doing something negative; it is no longer the adult who by means of his vigilance and attentive approach directly creates a quasi-impossibility of making deplorable, harmful and practically irreparable errors. On the contrary it is the warned, advised, attentive youth himself who eventually decides and acts.

According to Don Bosco the youngster will "doubtless" or "certainly" choose what is good if "a friendly voice" [("if a friend's word")] warns or admonishes him in good time. He sticks to his "doubtless" or "certainly" in his definitive text, even when his secretary wants to weaken the term and substitute "probably" for it.<sup>111</sup> The sentence as a whole is quite clear: "A youth indeed often becomes culpable and deserving of punishment, which he had not even thought about, and which he had quite forgotten, when heedlessly committing the fault he would certainly have avoided, had a friendly voice warned him."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, 83, 408-409 and don G. Berto's version for line 409. The first French translation is as decided as Don Bosco with the expression: "qui ne lui seraient point arrivées" (OE XXVIII, 427/II). Also see BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, 122/457-458). But in the French translation the idea that the youngster himself acts, is lost. Indeed, in the Italian version it reads, "that he (the boy himself) would have avoided". Still in 1880 the French are more prudent in their periodical "*Bulletin Salésien*": "et l'on peut assurer qu'il aurait agi différemment" (BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, 153/II.). For the use with the Salesians themselves however it remains: "il aurait certainement évité cette faute" (ibid., 148/2).

<sup>112</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, 83/408-409. *Constitutions...*, 247-248. Also see footnote 110.

In the same little treatise Don Bosco expresses his conviction that "the pupil who has been forewarned (informed or made aware) preventively, does not remain humiliated (belittled or offended) in his sense of honour on account of the faults he has committed". And he adds, "nor does he resent the correction he receives or the punishment threatened or inflicted, because it is always accompanied by a friendly preventive warning, which appeals to reason, and generally enlists his accord, so that he sees the necessity of the chastisement and almost desires it."<sup>113</sup> This conviction, based on experience over many years, highlights at the same time the positive outcome of an active and constructive assistance with youths. As he continues, Don Bosco explicitly takes up that correlative aspect again: "The pupil becomes a friend, and the assistant a benefactor who advises him, has his good at heart, and wishes to spare him vexation, punishment and perhaps dishonour."<sup>114</sup> No wonder then that, years later, the educator may still talk to him, "counsel him, advise and even correct him." In these quotations the use of the same suggestive words strikes us. The past pupil indeed "will always be a friend of his educator and will ever remember with pleasure the guidance he received. He will always look upon his educators as fathers and brothers."<sup>115</sup> Through this comforting experience, Don Bosco summarizes all the "talking, guiding, advising and admonishing" in the word "guidance"; guidance given and received.

This does not preclude that, in the course of a study, the elements in his definition of the preventive system may be treated separately. Provided one does not forget that in practice they complete and interact with each other or are used even at the same time; and provided one does not forget that conversation, dialogue and chatting with the young are so important.

At the end of the first General Chapter, he will express this once more and explicitly. On that last day, G. Bonetti is asked to write a treatise on sacred eloquence for theology students. Don Bosco agrees but finds it necessary that the little treatise

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 83/399-402. (...) *Constitutions...*, 247. The Italian text: "L'allievo preventivamente avvisato", "in esso vi è sempre un avviso amichevole e preventivo". The fourteenth volume of the *Memorie Biografiche* contains a document "Avvisi di Don Bosco in confessione". These are hints or pieces of advice that Don Bosco had given in the period 1879-1883 on the occasion of his pastoral work in confession (MB XIV, 712-714; EMB XIV, 586-588). A.M. Teppa devotes a whole chapter to "Warnings (avvisi), corrections (correzioni) and reprimands (repressioni)" and he makes a gradation from "incentives" and "simple warnings or counsels" through "more serious and friendly admonitions" to "a rather strong and severe rebuke" (TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, 31-40). Through this quotation we can evaluate even better Don Bosco's concepts and insights.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 84/418-420. *Constitutions...*, 248. Also see footnote 102.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 90/511-513. *Constitutions...*, 251/1. Guidance is "direzione" in Italian.

"should embody our preventive system of education and emphasize that education should entirely be based on it. Youngsters should be drawn by love to do what is right through constant supervision (sorveglianza) and guidance (direzione), not by systematic punishment for transgressions after they have been committed. Experience proves that this latter method of education more often than not arouses life-long hatred in young people toward their educators."<sup>116</sup> Here he again uses the word "supervision" or "vigilance" (watchfulness). This seems to point to the preventive or protective function of the teacher-educator's presence. It is typical for him that this watchfulness is also a manifestation of love and should be felt as an expression of love. Just as typical is that the second function, the positive guidance or accompaniment, which has various aspects, is mentioned in the same breath.

In contrast with A.M. Teppa Don Bosco in his little treatise does not make a clear distinction between all these ways of talking. He does not distinguish between warnings, exhortations, directives or reprimands and admonitions. This may be ascribed to Don Bosco's predilection for simple, direct, uncomplicated expressions. However, here it seems to be more fundamentally connected with his choice for prevention. Warnings, directives, advice and hints precede acting. They should prevent shortcomings. Protective and constructive assistance together should place pupils in the impossibility of committing faults, as he formulated himself. Of course, by admonishing and reprimanding, educators also want to avert shortcomings. But the point there is to avoid or counteract relapsing. That is secondary prevention, prevention in the second instance, which Don Bosco also knows and wants. It is partially comprised in the directive to the so-called catechists: "Carefully observe the boys' defects so that you can opportunely correct them within your line of duty."<sup>117</sup> Nevertheless, the first, the positive prevention is and remains his proper and main objective.

True to Don Bosco, F. Cerruti will express it in his own way in 1886: "(Christian love) requires us to prevent evil as much as possible instead of being obliged to repress (reprimere) the evil committed."<sup>118</sup> If the first is neglected, one readily follows the way of the repressive system as the word "reprimere" itself suggests. Nevertheless, Cerruti highlights too one-sidedly the prevention of evil. The principal

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<sup>116</sup> VERHULST, M., *I verballi...*, 300/45-54. This last idea, by the way, also occurs in the little treatise on the preventive system. See *Constitutions...*, 248. Cf. MB XIII, 292/5; EMB XIII, 218.

<sup>117</sup> OE XXIX, 122/art. 4.

<sup>118</sup> CERRUTI, F., *Le Idee...*, 6. This completely coincides with the interpreting French translation in 1877 of a paragraph from Don Bosco's short treatise: "sa surveillance est dirigée à empêcher préalablement les transgressions plutôt qu'à les punir" (OE XXVIII 425/3).

element, namely the promotion of good deeds, stays completely in the shade.

Warning is not at all a once-only happening. The boys in the Sunday and feast day Oratory know that there is a second time, a second chance. When, in spite of all, they fall short in one way or another, they read and hear in the regulations that they can in any case for a first time count on a "fatherly admonition" or remark;<sup>119</sup> in practice even more than once.

A man like G. Barberis manifests in his lessons a greater attention for nuances in certain measures. In his chapter on "checking and punishing" he again consults P.A. Monfat. Still, he too states that before proceeding to punishments "the important means of advice and warnings ought to be exhausted". Here again he explicitly appeals to Don Bosco.<sup>120</sup>

### **5.2.2. To assist also means to give good advice**

Real assistance, however, is not limited to warning. In the first of the ten articles Don Bosco explicitly connects "warning" or "making aware" with "giving advice": "All those who hold an office or assist the boys are responsible for admonishing and counselling any of them whenever need arises. In addition, in the sixth article he reminds us that "youngsters of ordinary character and disposition need brief but often repeated urging, admonitions and advice."<sup>121</sup> Don Bosco remembers only too well his own years of formation. He knows what the lack of a guide meant in those years. But he also knows what it means to have a good counsellor. When he was fourteen he experienced in the parish priest Don Calosso what it means "to have a regular spiritual director, a faithful friend of one's soul. I had not had one until then. Soon he forbade me a penance I used to practise; he deemed it unsuited to my age and circumstances. He encouraged frequent confession and communion. He also taught me to make a short daily meditation, or more accurately, a spiritual reading." What a contrast with his seminary years: "My heart yearned for more. The rector and the other superiors usually saw us only when we returned after the

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<sup>119</sup> OE XXIX, 60/art. 6.

<sup>120</sup> BARBERIS, G., *Appunti...*, 348/2 (referring to Don Bosco); 350/2 and 351/3. He emphasizes the idea of "exhausting" by using the verb no less than three times in a couple of paragraphs. Cf. MONFAT, P.A., *La pratica...*, 165/3.

<sup>121</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 289/2-5; 290/22-24. 290/32-33. In this respect too Don Bosco couldn't agree more with A.M. Teppa who instructs his readers that "they should not bore and trouble the pupils with lengthy and inconvenient incentives" and that "a teacher should never get tired of warning his pupils. He should briefly and kindly remind them of their duties, resolutions and promises made" (TEPPA. A.M., *Avvertimenti ...*, 32-33; 33/3).

holidays and when we were leaving for them. The students never went to talk to them, except to receive corrections. The staff members took weekly turns to assist in the refectory and to take us on walks. That was all. How often I would have liked to talk to them, ask their advice, or resolve a doubt and could not."<sup>122</sup>

This does not mean in the least that he wanted to converse for hours. On the contrary, he clearly dislikes long, endless moralising "sermons". This is true in all cases and to a greater degree still for a third category of youngsters, namely for the few difficult "cases". For them the brief talks of any superior should consist of "short examples, maxims, anecdotes and the like."<sup>123</sup> They ought to strike home and sink in. They must be a real help.

### **5.2.3. Assistance consists in encouraging and stimulating**

Along with, and certainly of equal importance to admonishing, making aware and advising, the superiors should be intent on encouraging and rewarding the youngsters. This is the affirmative aspect of their continuous presence. This is already impressed upon them in the sixth general article;<sup>124</sup> and more strongly in the Regulations. Priests and Salesians in training as well as the older boys themselves engaged in catechizing, "must always use encouraging and never disparaging words when admonishing and advising (or warning)." The young peace-makers should urge their companions in the course of the week to continue frequenting the Oratory. Moreover, during a novena or when a solemn feast-day is drawing near the teachers should say some encouraging words in class.<sup>125</sup> Words, we may suppose, that not only recall to mind the meaning of the feast but also stimulate the practice of some virtue that a young Christian needs in order to live as a good Christian and an honest citizen. Still more: "Every evening after night prayers before the boys go to rest, the Rector or someone in his stead shall address them in a friendly way, giving them advice or counsel concerning what is to be done or what is to be avoided. Let him try to draw some striking ideas from events that have happened during the day in the house or outside. That 'goodnight'", Don Bosco says, "is the key to good behaviour, to the smooth running of the house and to success in

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<sup>122</sup> For the whole passage: BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell'Oratorio...*, 47/397-402; 91/126-132; 109/555-557; 116/696-704; also 56-57. ID., *Memoirs...*, 44; 80. It is about confidences that G. Bonetti had not yet spread through his publications in the "*Bollettino Salesiano*" (from 1880 onward). Neither had he in his book *Cinque lustri di storia dell'Oratorio Salesiano*, Turin, 1892.

<sup>123</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 290/27-33.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 290/25.

<sup>125</sup> OE XXIX, 48/art. 16; 51/art. 6; 131/art. 13. Cf BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 160/46-47.

education."<sup>126</sup>

Don Bosco himself set the example in this for his co-workers. During the novena in preparation for the feast of St Francis of Sales in 1876 for instance, he stimulated the boys in a somewhat longer goodnight in the following way: "Now what shall I suggest to honour our patron saint? As you know St. Francis de Sales is the saint of meekness and patience. I would like all of you to strive to imitate these virtues. During the novena store up a great amount of meekness in your heart so that you will always be inclined to love your companions without getting angry with them and without using an insulting or sarcastic tone of voice. Always be good to them whenever you can (...) On this score I would really like you to resolve to show your love for your companions by giving each other good advice and never - as happens sadly in the world - leading each other into evil (through improper suggestions) (...). On the contrary - and this is true - a companion can do a lot of good with timely, friendly, wholesome advice". (...) How much good you can do for yourselves and for your companions if, in this novena, you start to follow my advice and continue to do so for the rest of your life."<sup>127</sup> Thus, the youngsters are encouraged to actively engage in their turn in the educational process.

#### 5.2.4. Assistance implies that the educator knows how to reward

An efficacious means of encouraging and confirming is no doubt rewarding. That is why "one should praise those who deserve it" and not readily have recourse to admonitions.<sup>128</sup> In his basic pamphlet Don Bosco formulates the following norm: "Praise of work well done, and blame in the case of carelessness are already a reward or punishment."<sup>129</sup> It is rather strange that he does not devote a separate and

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<sup>126</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, 87/481-486. *Constitutions...*, 250. Also see VERHULST, M., *I Verballi...*, 344/209-211; OE XXIX 429/art. 20; OE XXXIII 64/art. 22. One of the seven secrets of his way of educating according to a declaration in June 1875 consisted in "addressing a few kind words every evening after prayers" (MB XI, 222/6°; EMB XI, 203-204). The Salesian tradition has come to consider the few words of Mamma Margherita in May 1847 as the starting-point of Don Bosco's goodnight talks. (BONETTI, G., *Cinque lustri...*, 149. Also see E. CERIA, *Annali della società salesiana III*, Turin, SEI 1946, 856-857.)

Other influences, however, may not be excluded. Mgr Dupanloup for example dwelt on the eventual meaning of "the evening address". "The evening address should be given a quarter of an hour before bedtime. It is a paternal address, in which everything is communicated just as in a family. (...). The educator expresses (...) all he has on his mind, be it for or against his boys" (According to MONFAT, P.A., *La pratica...*, 91/1). Mgr Dupanloup's work, however, was published in Italian in 1868-1869 only. At that time Don Bosco had already been holding his goodnight talks for years. Cf. BONETTI, G., *Cinque lustri...*, 199-200. See also footnote 196.

<sup>127</sup> MB XII, 32/2; EMB XII, 20/2.

<sup>128</sup> OE XXIX, 48/art. 17.

<sup>129</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo...*, 91/537-538. *Constitutions...*, 252/1.

elaborate chapter to this topic as A.M. Teppa does. This may be the consequence of the observation that praise and congratulations may sometimes have undesired effects. Don Bosco seems to have explicitly warned against it: "Do not single out a boy for special praise. Praise can ruin the most brilliant talents - Someone who sings well and another who recites fluently are at once highly spoken of. They have many admirers and are considered as very important people: the main reason of the deterioration of order and discipline in our college is to be found in the theatre. - The Oratory is a continuous proof of this truth."<sup>130</sup> A.M. Teppa, in fact, was no less aware of this danger. He writes in a well-balanced way about this topic. He wants praise and prize-giving to be "discreet and prudent". For it might happen that what is meant to be a stimulus to virtue becomes a hidden breeding ground of vice."<sup>131</sup>

Yet Don Bosco's statements about the possible negative side of praising and rewarding have to be taken with a grain of salt. For in the sixth of the *ten articles* he writes that boys should be encouraged "even by means of small rewards".<sup>132</sup> In actual practice he, too, was and remained an advocate of encouraging, confirming and rewarding. The solid tradition of the preparation and carrying-out of prize giving at the end of the school year and the autumnal outings confirm this. In this respect G. Lazzero resolutely followed in Don Bosco's footsteps.<sup>133</sup> G. Barberis for his part, taught the young Salesians that a good educator should always be kind and inclined "to be content, look pleased and encourage: consequently he is pleased when he can praise". In some cases, "one may even suppose that the boys are good and praise them for some good point. This behaviour makes them grow in their self-esteem, (and) urges them on to deserve the appreciation that is shown; convinces those who have the impression of being less worthy (...) and gives them the courage to become good. Benevolence is the stone of the wise that changes lead into gold". But G. Barberis too is on his guard, because praise and congratulations may turn "their heads (...)" and, if it's always the same ones who are praised, "arouse the jealousy of the others."<sup>134</sup>

If the quotations about warning and admonishing in time could create the impress-

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<sup>130</sup> MB XIV, 847/ item 7. Not translated in EMB.

<sup>131</sup> TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, 52/2.

<sup>132</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 290/25. Cf. footnote 124.

<sup>133</sup> For this see among others BIESMANS, R., *Doelstellingen van opvoeding en opleiding...*, 46-54; especially 48 with the notice about the clash in this matter between G. Lazzero and Don Bosco. Cf. also PRELLEZO, J.-M., *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, 47/153; 83-85; 109/176-177; 247/397; 251/499-507.

<sup>134</sup> BARBERIS, G., *Appunti...*, 328/4-5. The author however does not quote Don Bosco. But he does copy literally without any scruples from MONFAT, P. A., *La pratica...*, 124-126/15.° a). He means of course that boys may think too much of themselves in that case. Also see BARBERIS, G., *Appunti...*, 357/3.

sion that even formative assistance aimed above all at the prevention of transgressions of the regulations, this is certainly no longer the case for the quotations and examples that illustrate encouragement, confirmation and reward. For these aim precisely at the boys' development and formation. Through an alert, stimulating assistance which knows how to encourage and reward in good time, Don Bosco seeks to promote in a pleasant and respectful way the practice of virtue or good behaviour, religious practice, study and progress in mastering manual skills.

All these elements of assistance treated up till now are to be found in a concise, meaningful paragraph from a conversation of Don Bosco with minister U. Ratazzi. This conversation may have taken place in the eighteen-fifties, but was drafted, refined and published only in 1882. That is why the report of that interview bears the marks of later insights and wordings, especially from the period we are considering here. This is obvious from the following quotations. "The former (the repressive system) sets itself to educate people by force, repression and punishment when they break the law and commit a crime. The latter (the preventive one) seeks to educate them with kindness, and gently helps them to observe the law, and provides them with the most suitable and efficacious means for the purpose. This is precisely the system we use."

These paraphrases and the well-known definitions of the two systems in his short treatise are like peas in a pod. In this conversation, the same angle is chosen: both systems essentially aim to ensure that people obey the existing laws. According to the spirit of the age, only this observance makes a just, humane and stable society possible. Furthermore, the aspect of aid, assistance and "providing the most suitable and efficacious means", i.e. the constructive, stimulating, promotional aspect is again emphasised even more strongly. Then a digression follows on the proper and characteristic procedure in the second system: "We direct them on the path of good and sustain them with appropriate and kindly counsel, and especially with the life of prayer and religion. Over and above this we surround them, as far as possible, with kindly assistance in recreation, classroom and work place. We encourage them with gentle words, and at the first sign that they are neglecting their duties we remind them in a courteous and friendly way and recall them to a good way of behaving. In a word, we do all the things Christian charity suggests so that they might do good and avoid evil ruled by an enlightened conscience and supported by Religion."<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 77-78; MB V, 52-53; EMB V, 36-37. About the date and editorship of the encounter and the conversation, see BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 67-69.; ID., *L'Esperienza pedagogica...*

In this study as a whole, it is very important to explicitly mention "the classroom" and "the work place" as well as "the playground". Assistance implies presence and help at any time and anywhere. Moreover, the text seems to indicate that this presence, this assistance is meant as "gently encouraging", "reminding in a friendly way of their duties" and "proffering a good way of behaving."

In order to accompany the youngsters as positively as possible, the teacher-educator must make an effort to know them well. Don Bosco regularly reminds his Rectors of the need for this knowledge. From 1876 onward we find it in the well-known formula: "Let the pupils get to know you and get to know them by spending all the time possible with them."<sup>136</sup> A striking element in this piece of advice is without doubt the reciprocity. In the *Regulations for the Houses*, too he states "it is extremely important to get to know the boys' characters to some extent before definitively accepting them in a house."<sup>137</sup> In connection with the nature or character of the youngsters, he impresses on all teachers and educators the usefulness of dividing the boys into groups of characters. This division should not remain an interesting theoretical piece of information. No, it is the basis of day-to-day efficient acting: "It is our stringent duty to study the means that are appropriate to make these diverse characters agree to do good to all without leaving any possibility that they could harm each other."<sup>138</sup> It may be even more correct to understand "conciliare" (reconcile, reach agreement) as "favorire", i.e. "be helpful", "promote development or favour it".

To express it in Don Bosco's words from an interview in April 1884, the point in his educational system is in fact "to discover the germs of their talents and provide

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63/2. ID., *Don Bosco's pedagogical experience*, 66.

<sup>136</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 163/105-106. See especially RSS (1984), 4, 155/variant in the lines 90-91. According to an announcement by G. B. Lemoyne, Don Bosco once gave his young co-workers the advice to start a notebook with the title "Experience", wherein they should "jot down all the irregularities, breaches of discipline, and boners [blunders] occurring in classrooms or dormitories, on weekly walks, in the relations of boys among themselves, of superiors and their pupils, or superiors and superiors, or superiors and parents, outsiders, and civil and ecclesiastical authorities (...)" "He urged that they review such notes from time to time, especially if the same trouble were to arise so as not to repeat past errors" (MB VII 523/2; EMB VII 316/1).

<sup>137</sup> OE XXIX 157/art. 5.

<sup>138</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 290/15-18. A.M. TEPPA also is convinced that an attentive observation of the boys can be the best help to get to know everybody's tendencies and consequently also the most efficacious means to direct them correctly" (TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, 11). P. A. Monfat in his turn will make a list with finer shades conscious as he is that there are a thousand other nuances" (MONFAT, P.A., *La pratica...*, 80-82). Once more Don Bosco is less complicated and of a more practical disposition. In his general introductory notes G.Barberis emphasizes in his turn that it is truly necessary for an educator "to get to know the pupils. And this not only as human beings but also as individual persons" (BARBERIS, G., *Appunti...*, 32/2; 215).

for their development."<sup>139</sup> In the second part of this statement, it cannot be over-emphasised that the boys finally are the true protagonists of their own development. The assistants, i.e. the adults who are involved in the educational process have to launch this self-activity and ensure its continuity.

In order to accomplish this task it is obviously necessary that they (the educators) “discover the germs of their talents”, i.e. they must get to know the boys as well as possible. They must also be able to evaluate the boys’ capacity for education and training according to where they belong in the three categories that Don Bosco distinguishes in the ten well-known general rules. To that end, patient observation and consequently continuous presence are needed.

### **5.2.5. Assistance as actual help**

Whoever wants to be among the boys in a positive, stimulating way should not limit himself, however, to assisting through words alone. Quite the contrary. That is why Don Bosco declares: "He (a good educator) will show in his words and more so in his actions that his only concern is the spiritual and temporal good of his pupils." He does not consider it as superfluous to insist once more in the third general rule: "assisting: few words, many deeds."<sup>140</sup>

#### **5.2.5.1. Efficacious help while teaching**

In the chapter about prevention as a social involvement, in the preceding article, it became clear that in the context of social development a good education and an appropriate training are very important. Thus, it is quite normal that Don Bosco points out precisely to teachers their task of effectively helping and giving assistance (lending a hand). How heavily the preparation for life lies in their hands! How much time they spend with their pupils! In this way, not only can they get to know every pupil well but also follow him up individually, advise, warn and admo-

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<sup>139</sup> Cf MB XVII, 85/5; EMB XVII, 64. See also TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti ...*, 12-13.

<sup>140</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 289/7- 11. A. M. Teppa is more prolific in words: “But all the proposed educational means would have little effect if the educator’s words were not confirmed and strengthened by his *example*. In addition, he adds: “If actions do not tally with words”. In this last sentence, he uses, just like Don Bosco after him “fatti” for “acts (deeds) (TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti ...*, 54-55). See also Mgr Dupanloup in STELLA, P., *Don Bosco nella storia ...II*, 458/5. A catchword of Don Bosco’s seems to have been “A hundred nice speeches without a living example are worthless” (MB XIV 849/6). We know the maxim ‘*example is better than precept*’. See also the phrase in the letter with confidential recommendations to the Rectors ( BRAIDO, *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 162/82-83 and 165/ 188; EMB X, 449.) Cf a maxim of St Ignatius of Loyola.

nish him. Nevertheless, those forms of positive assistance are not sufficient. In situations of teaching, training and educating, those various forms will only be successful if the teacher is also good at teaching and training and gives the example of a qualitatively high virtuous life.

Therefore, both *the Regulations for boarders* and *the Regulations for the Houses* prescribe in almost identical terms that the teachers should carefully prepare their lessons. "Such preparation will efficaciously contribute to help the pupils understand the more difficult aspects of the subjects."<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, "they should often test each and every pupil and show great esteem and affection for all, especially for the slow learners. They should avoid the pernicious habit of some teachers who leave less-talented pupils to their own resources". That would be a sin against the principle of assistance, of effectively rendering service. That principle, indeed, requires rather that "the less-talented ones in a class be cared for first. One ought to encourage them. One should never humiliate them."<sup>142</sup> This presupposes in the teacher-educator sufficient empathy to enter into the boy's situation. Such positive procedure will forestall revolt, dropping-out and embitterment.

An exchange of views during the first General Chapter preceded the definitive wording of those articles. Strong emphasis was put on the "need for friendly assisting of the pupils in their various classes (...)" Help given to all and to each one in particular; assistance that gives of the best for everybody is the main concern. "Teachers in particular, should bear in mind that they should take the greatest care of the boys who are the furthest behind in class". The reporter leaves no shadow of doubt about it: "The aspect that was most insisted on during this (third) session was the search for a method to ensure that the more backward pupils of a class were not abandoned. They had already at their disposal what the *Regulations for the Boarding schools* had stipulated concerning the teachers and they intended to draft a new, similar article. "Besides this Don Bosco ordered that the prefect of studies should be urged to bear this in mind, to go and visit the classes from time to time and to get private information as well. In any case "the prefect of studies has to remove this evil."<sup>143</sup> The evil of course is not caring about boys who have problems

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<sup>141</sup> OE XXIX, 129/art. 2 and 82/art. 2

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 129-130 and 82/art. 5. Cf *ibid.* 82/art. 4 and 129/art. 4 (The Italian word 'idioti' has been translated by 'less-talented'). It is a prescription that is not yet found in the school regulations of the sixties (See MB VII, 866-867). Cf OE XXIX 392 art. 4; OE XXXIII 79/art. 45 and especially MB XI, 217-218; EMB, XI 200. Apparently Don Bosco never forgot the kind behaviour of his teachers in Chieri, namely E. Valimberti and T. Pugnetti (BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell' Oratorio...*, 56-57; *ID., Memoirs...*, 51).

<sup>143</sup> VERHULST, M., *I Verballi...*, 114-115; 119/132-139. Also, see *ibid.* 119-120. Cf OE XXIX, 392/art. 4. In the seventies already Don Bosco insisted: "When a boy who before was lazy or badly behaved, begins to improve but

with their studies.

This strong privileged tradition in Salesian schools is consolidated by G. Barberis with a quotation from the non-Salesian world: "There will be no injustice if for the weekly or monthly marks one favours the weaker ones a little. Of course this little partiality should not be entirely undeserved and the occasions or motives for such behaviour should be truly disinterested."<sup>144</sup> Quoting an outsider evidently has the advantage that he can better resist the objection that in this way they are lowering the standards in their own schools. The results of the pupils of the Oratory in August 1877 must have been a real comfort for G. Lazzero. When they sat for the examinations together with boys from other colleges, they were able to distinguish themselves. This appears from the results registered in the *Memorie Biografiche*.<sup>145</sup>

### 5.2.5.2. Helping sick boys

The same spirit is shown in the attention for sick youngsters and the caring presence they experience, especially in a boarding-school: "Care will be taken that the sick do not lack anything of a spiritual or a temporal nature."<sup>146</sup> Certainly not, when the boy is in a terminal phase. Don Bosco has described this assistance at length in "*The little Shepherd from the Alps*" or "*The Life of the young Francesco Besucco*". One of the things that have struck lieutenant Eysautier is precisely the "assistance" that the boy obtained from Don Bosco during the last moments of his life.<sup>147</sup>

### 5.2.5.3. Rendering services in many ways

A truly assisting presence is expressed in the interest shown in the young at all levels and in appropriate help. This is expressed in some detail for assistants in the

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doesn't manage to finish his work or to behave well for the entire lesson, teachers should be tolerant, encourage and help the boy". (MB XIV, 841/ item 8). The second General Chapter (1880) confirmed those prescriptions of the regulations and sometimes slightly retouched them. Thus the phrase "those who are furthest behind" for example has been changed into "less-talented pupils" (OE XXXIII, 79/art.5). Don Bosco gave his constant attention to this, as appears from a fascinating report by G. Barberis (MB XI, 217-218; EMB XI, 200). It is a preference that G. Bonetti already stresses in Don Bosco during his years of study at Chieri: "He was the defender of the weak, he was the teacher and tutor of the less-talented, he was the aid of the needy". (BONETTI, G., *Cinque lustri ...*, 10-11).

<sup>144</sup> BARBERIS, G., *Appunti ...*, 329/2. Here too he literally quotes MONFAT, P.A., *La pratica ...*, 126/2. The value Don Bosco attached to weekly marks even made him write about them in Fr. Besucco's biography (OE XV, 337/3).

<sup>145</sup> PRELLEZO, J.-M., *Valdocco nell'Ottocento ...*, 59/479-480. Cf MB XI, 220/3-4; EMB XI, 202.

<sup>146</sup> OE XXIX, 122/art. 7. Cf MONFAT, P.A., *La pratica ...*, 98/3.

<sup>147</sup> OE XV, 399-414, especially 410. The story was published again in 1878. Cf the end of M. Magone's life in DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Saint Jean Bosco*, Namur, 1958, 125-130.

dormitories in a meeting of the staff in November 1876. They can show "their interest for the boys and their wellbeing by showing them how to make their beds, how to arrange their clothes and their linen and how to keep everything in good order."<sup>148</sup> This shows that the educator should have an eye for the needs - even the commonest - of those who have been entrusted to him and that he should actually cater for them. It is almost an insignificant example hardly worth mentioning. However, the positive living together often consists in doing small services. Without hesitation, we may assume that the active help adults can give to youngsters in Don Bosco's eyes often replicates what he admired and accentuated in D. Savio and M. Magone. "What Savio said (literally: "expressed in words") he confirmed with deeds". The same combination of words is striking indeed. Savio is concerned about the situation of less fortunate fellow-pupils. He is the valued nursing auxiliary.<sup>149</sup> M. Magone in his turn "offered to write letters for those who wanted this. He was very fond of rendering services such as cleaning other people's clothes, fetching water, making the beds, sweeping, serving at table, handing over games, teaching catechism or songs, explaining difficult problems in the lessons."<sup>150</sup> The point is to actually love by being aware of needs, even small ones, and by finding solutions for them.

### 5.2.6. Assistance as "sharing life", especially during recreation

If one thing is clear and important, it must be this: an assisting presence cannot be aloof. Nor can it be exclusively physical. On the contrary, interested contact, spontaneous empathizing and the simple, but constructive sharing in all the aspects of ordinary, day-to-day life must characterize it. Has this ever been better typified than by a certain Professor Fabre? In June 1884 he took the floor at a past pupils assembly and declared: "I recall the former years when Don Bosco was in the flower of his life. When we boys used to press around him and he shared all our joys, our sorrows."<sup>151</sup> The scene the man recalls is evidently not inspired by one unforgettable action of Don Bosco's but by daily occurrences. Without the slightest doubt, it refers especially to his presence among the youngsters at that little breakfast handout or at the short recreation before night prayers, during recreation in the playground or on a shorter or longer walk. This recreation of pupils together with

<sup>148</sup> PRELLEZO, J.-M., *Valdocco nell'Ottocento ...*, 266/157-158

<sup>149</sup> OE XI, 205/1; 211-212; 212/2

<sup>150</sup> «Mortifications of the senses" in the life of Domenico Savio ( BOSCO, G., *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*, Turin, 1880, 71).

<sup>151</sup> MB XVII, 170-171; EMB XVII, 146. Already in 1877 the French translator of don Bosco's little treatise understood rightly: "Ceux-ci vivent toujours au milieu d'eux sont comme des véritables pères" (OE XXVIII, 47/3. Also see BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo ...*, 122/438-439).

teachers and educators was in itself also a source of a beneficent pedagogical ambience full of the joy of life.

Following his example, every rector "should spend as much time as possible with the pupils", especially "during the moments of recreation. His presence and participation in the games gave him the opportunity repeatedly to say a personal, individual word of encouragement, approval, advice or a brief admonition. Not only the rector but every educator as well should take the initiative to do the same."<sup>152</sup> In order to further this Don Bosco inserts a couple of models in his circular to the rectors. Therein he shows how they - and other Salesians as well - can manage to start a conversation and develop it.<sup>153</sup>

His biographies for the young also bring out his practice. This, for instance, is the case with "Severino" or "*The Adventures of a boy from the Alps*". Severino testifies: "When the rector of the Oratory noticed this he made several proposals and offered a variety of invitations."<sup>154</sup> Several pages reveal just what those ways or manners consisted of. A model may doubtless also be a conversation with Michele Magone. The boy has just arrived at Valdocco. At recreation time, he runs up to Don Bosco. A short conversation begins in which Don Bosco asks him what he would like to do: to study or learn a trade. Thus, Don Bosco clearly lets us know that he wants to take into account the boys' preferences, desires, dreams. To this then Michele replies: "If I may choose, I would prefer to study."<sup>155</sup> Such passages indicate how an individualized approach and personal hints, admonitions and directives pave the way of getting on with the young through familiar dialogue.

A. Caviglia has described this aspect of assistance very correctly: "In Don Bosco's tradition, life in the playground, as he realized and impressed on others, is an essential and indispensable factor for the complete education of the young. It is also

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<sup>152</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 163/105-106 and annotation.

<sup>153</sup> Ibidem, 163/105-107; 163/110-122. Cf TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti...*, 26/2. As for the filling out of a conversation, it concerns an addition of Don Bosco's from the seventies (RSS (1984), 4, 155/note on lines 94-104) and microfiche 1362 (11-12). Cf with the examples in MONFAT, P.A., *La pratica ...*, 98/1 and 3. See also Don Bosco's personal testimony in BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell' Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, LAS Rome 1991, 160/600-607; ID., *Memoirs...*, 136.

<sup>154</sup> OE XX 52. See DECANCO, B., "*Severino*": *studio dell'opuscolo con particolare attenzione al "primo Oratorio"*, RSS (21), 1992, 253-254.

<sup>155</sup> OE XIII, 162-164; DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Michel Magon in Saint Jean Bosco*, Namur 1958, 60-61. That conversation seems to be a forerunner of the interview with Bartolomeo Garelli, that Don Bosco will describe later in his Memoirs (BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell'Oratorio ...*, 121-122; ID., *Memoirs...*, 103-104. BONETTI, G., *Cinque lustri ...*, 21-22 and which J.B. Lemoyne will complete with striking detail (MB II, 73-74; EMB II, 57-58: "Can you sing? - Can you whistle"). Cf the conversation with Fr. Besucco (OE XV 329-330).

a basis of his system. So we understand why he insisted so much on it for the Salesians in his writings and sayings (...) Take away the life in the playground from Don Bosco's life and from the life in a House and there remains only a figure without any character. And in the House appears a big void that cannot be filled and wherein a big part, a really big part of the typical educational edifice irremediably collapses; namely the part of personal contact, which is the most necessary of all". The author appreciates the pedagogical help during recreation so highly that he does not hesitate to declare: "From his youthful years with the Salesians a pupil of Don Bosco does not remember the lessons or sermons so much as the wise way in which his educators in the freedom of life in the open air of the playground or under the gallery (...) spoke to him with words that stayed in his mind, because they were said casually, kindly and for him alone."<sup>156</sup>

Yet, in contrast with the preceding years, there cannot be found much in this period of that "insisting on writings and sayings" (according to A. Caviglia's expression). In any case, not in the most important texts. Still, there is Don Bosco's sermon in which he asks his Salesians to beware of staying idle (passive) at recreation time: "Let us keep busy even during recreation and, if it is our duty, let us watch our pupils, leading them in their games and keeping them together in the playground. Even if it is not your task, join in (...)."<sup>157</sup> A true assistance, a real presence among the boys implies that the teacher-educator joins with them and is actively interested in what the boys like and empathizes with them. In this spirit of Don Bosco's sermon a decision had been taken by February 1877 at the annual assembly of the rectors. At the end of the assembly, Don Bosco approved eight points drawn up by the confreres. The seventh of them reads: "Recreations were to be enlivened with games appealing to the boys."<sup>158</sup> That speaks volumes. The boys' well-being stands at the centre. The educator can contribute to it by his organizing and participating.

No less relevant are the very important meetings of the staff on Nov 15 and 16,

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<sup>156</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Il sistema preventivo*, footnote 35. Also see ID., *L'Esperienza pedagogica...*, 146/footnote 15; ID., *Don Bosco's pedagogical experience*, 151/footnote 15. In order to find out more accurately what is proper to Don Bosco, one ought to compare his directives and his practice with A.M. Teppa's and A. Monfat's in greater detail (TEPPA, A.M., *Avvertimenti ...*, 26/2; MONFAT, P.A., *La pratica ...*, 82/1). De Damas is even opposed to the teachers/educators' playing together with the young: "Ne point jouer, ne point s'environner de monde dans les récréations, de sorte qu'on ne puisse observer ce qui se passe »; and also « Dans les récréations, ils se mêleront avec les enfants, prenant part à leurs conversations, mais sans perdre de vue leur surveillance ». These directives are somewhat toned down maybe by the remark: "Ils se font tour à tour, enfants avec les enfants, sans pourtant se dépouiller de cette dignité qui attire le respect ni descendre à cette imprudente familiarité que suit ordinairement le mépris» (DE DAMAS, A., *Le surveillant dans un collège catholique*, Paris 1857, 297/4 and 300/1 ; 288/3). He clearly points up surveillance and aloofness.

<sup>157</sup> MB XIII, 801-802; EMB XIII, 619/2, where a significant detail is left out: "e prendere parte" = taking part in them (the games). Also see footnote 77.

<sup>158</sup> MB XIII, 85; EMB XIII, 64.

1882 at Valdocco. G. Lazzero notes with his characteristic conciseness: "1[°] Recreation time. The boys are not assisted". Therefore, the decision is taken to hold an assembly the next day. Meanwhile the superiors want to give an immediate instruction: "To look out for new games."<sup>159</sup> A physical presence in the playground is not sufficient. Neither is looking on watchfully. On the contrary. An important part of their duty of assisting consists in animating the games. As a point of interest, this agrees well with the above-mentioned decision of February 1877.

This specific attention to being among and taking part with the boys during recreation cannot be thought of separately without Don Bosco's inspiring example or his conviction quoted several times already: "We have assistance and games" and other similar declarations.<sup>160</sup>

Don Bosco is not afraid that, because of this, the educator will be less respected or lose his authority. "On the contrary," P. Stella concludes, "he wants the educator to take part in the games in an active manner and to be as interested in them as the pupils themselves."<sup>161</sup> This is a very proper characteristic of Don Bosco and his followers.

But in the Salesian tradition this idiosyncrasy has led to a quasi-identification of active presence among the young in the playground with assistance tout court. Thus, it may have led to a rather one-sided, exaggerated emphasis on it. Don Bosco himself, however, in spite of an unmistakable preference for games, kept going on about the preventive and constructive meaning of being present everywhere: "The most important aspect of the duties" of teachers and assistants and people in charge of dormitories is: "to arrive punctually where the boys gather to rest, attend lessons, work, recreate or the like."<sup>162</sup> Thus, Don Bosco sums up practically all the activities of the young wherein the educators should take part in a stimulating and purposeful way. Under certain circumstances, an enthusiastic participation could also lead to neglecting or losing the opportunity of the pedagogical supporting and correcting "little word". That too was an unpardonable shortcoming. For in Don Bosco's eye the personal little "word in the ear" was a very powerful means in education. Assistance means: to be present in a qualitatively rich and enriching manner.

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<sup>159</sup> PRELLEZO, J.-M., *Valdocco nell'Ottocento ...*, 253-254. Also see footnotes 75 and 76.

<sup>160</sup> Also see footnotes 63 and 77; in addition footnote 104.

<sup>161</sup> STELLA, P., *Don Bosco nella storia ...II*, 461/3 ; 465/3. Cf footnote 157.

<sup>162</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 161/64-65. Cf. the same idea in the interview with minister Ratazzi (*ibid.*, 77/148-149).

### **5.2.7. Assistance as personal and collective guidance**

For our research into the constitutive elements of assistance, we have been guided by Don Bosco's description of the "preventive system" in his short treatise. In order to penetrate still further into his ideas and practice it is advisable to approach it from another angle: namely, to take into account that assistance has both an individual and a collective component.

#### **5.2.7.1. Personal accompaniment**

Since this personal guidance in education meant so much for him, he recommended Don Rua and later all the rectors to spend as much time as possible with the boys and to use this time freely "to whisper a kind word in their ears". Though this is often only a brief contact, especially at very active moments in recreation, the word that is said must be relevant. This requires pedagogical skill. To promote this skill he does not however give any theoretical directives to his personnel. Yet, from 1871 onward approximately, he does give very practical examples, to which we have already referred. This 'making contact and addressing personally', Don Bosco writes, "is the great secret that will make you master of their (the pupils') hearts."<sup>163</sup> For it is a token of the educator's interest in them, of his love for them and of the fact that they really mean something to him.

##### **5.2.7.1.1 Brief, but efficacious contacts, instigated by the educator**

The way in which Don Bosco himself set about it is shown to best advantage in the books he wrote for the young and re-published in the period 1876-1884. He often took the initiative himself to make a brief but decisive contact in the playground. One day, when he was standing among his boys (who were playing) he saw a medium-sized, sandy-haired boy with a freckled face and dressed like a mountaineer. He was looking wide-eyed at his playmates. When his gaze met Don Bosco's, he smiled timidly. With a smile Don Bosco asked him: "Who are you?" - "I'm Francesco Besucco from Argentera". - "How old are you?" - "Nearly fourteen". - "Have you

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<sup>163</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 163/105-109. See footnote 153. Cf MOTTO, Fr., *I "Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori" di Don Bosco*, (RSS 4, 136/3; 155-156). Cf EMB X, 449.

come to study or learn a trade?" - "I should very, very much like to study". - "What studies have you done already?" - "The primary school at my village". - "Why would you like to study and not to learn a trade?" - "Well, I have a strong desire to become a priest". - "Who has advised you about this?" - "I have always had this desire and I have prayed the Lord to help me realize this desire". Then Don Bosco goes still further into the subject and later he tells of the impression that this conversation made on him.<sup>164</sup>

When he remarks that Valentino, a boy who has come from another college, doesn't receive the sacraments, he calls him in the evening to come and see him. "My dear Valentino, do you know what we commemorate tomorrow?" - "Surely, " the boy answers, "tomorrow is the anniversary of my dear mother's death. If I could, just once, see her again or hear her voice once more!" - "Would you like to do something tomorrow that would afford great pleasure to her and do a lot of good to you?" - "Of course, I would, at any cost". Don Bosco knows that Valentino's mother was a very pious person. So was the boy before. That is why he proposes that he should receive Holy Communion the next day. Valentino at once knows what Don Bosco is aiming at and he doesn't hesitate to unburden his soul in confession.<sup>165</sup>

#### **5.2.7.1.2. Contacts through the initiative of the boy himself.**

Once the ice is broken, the youngsters often take the initiative themselves. They accost Don Bosco themselves or try to find him. In this way a personal accompaniment of life can begin. Some days after the first interview with Besucco the boy comes to see Don Bosco with a rather depressed face. "What is wrong, my dear Besucco?" - "I am living here among so many good companions. - I would like to be as good as they are, but I don't know what to do. You must help me". "I will help you by all means. If you want to be a good boy, you have to do only three things". - "And what are these three things?" - "Be joyful, study and be pious. That is the whole programme. If you put that into practice, you will be happy and do a lot of good to your soul". - "Being glad ... being glad.... I am only too glad. If being glad is sufficient to be good, I will play from morning till night". - "No, not from

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<sup>164</sup> OE XV, 328-332. Cf the conversation with M. Magone through footnote 155. He frequently starts speaking to Pietro as well. See BOSCO, G., *Pietro ossia la forza della buona educazione. Curioso episodio contemporaneo*, Turin, 1881, 65/1, 66-67; 69-70. For this last interview, Don Bosco accosts him in the street in the evening.

<sup>165</sup> BOSCO, G., *Valentino o la vocazione impedita* (a cura di PULINGATHIL Mathew), PB 6, Rome. LAS 1987, 70-71.

morning till night, but only when recreation is permitted".<sup>166</sup> Another day Francesco calls on Don Bosco in his room. Just like Dominic Savio he sees a motto there. This time it is the motto: "Every moment is worth a treasure". In his turn Besucco wants to know what this means. His question is an opportunity for Don Bosco to explain in brief: "We can acquire scientific or religious knowledge at any moment, practise some virtue or perform an act of love for God. For God they are all worthy things that can benefit us now and for eternity".<sup>167</sup>

It is most interesting to learn that the boy at that moment keeps silent, takes out a slip of paper and writes down the motto in order to use it later as a reminder.

It is possible, not to say certain, that in his writings Don Bosco streamlines the so-called "words in the ear". Even so, they give an insight into his normal way of acting and into what he means by the directive that an educator "should converse with the youngsters like a loving father."<sup>168</sup>

Reciprocal confidence and regular contact, however, cannot prevent Besucco, who has a tendency for taking things too literally or for exaggerating, from taking decisions on his own. When Don Bosco discovers that, like Dominic Savio, he is exaggerating, he obliges him to keep within bounds: "Have you no winter-wear?" - "Yes, I have. In the dormitory." - "Why don't you put them on?" - "Uh... for a reason you know well. In winter we must suffer the cold out of love for God". - "Go and put on your winter-wear at once. Take care to protect yourself against wind and weather. If you need anything, ask for it and you will get it."<sup>169</sup>

Once again it must have been a little word 'en passant' but to the point.

That is what Don Bosco preferred. Besides, he must not have had enough time for longer conversations. No wonder Dominic Savio wrote home one day: "Dear Daddy, I have some very special news... The news is that I have been able to spend a whole hour alone with Don Bosco. Before that I could never be alone with Don

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<sup>166</sup> OE XV, 332-335.

<sup>167</sup> OE XV, 337.

<sup>168</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo ...*, 83/392. *Constitutions...*, 247. About his first months of work as a priest Don Bosco declared: "But the greatest pleasure I found in teaching catechism to the children, in being with them and conversing with them" (BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell' Oratorio...*, 112/612-618; ID., *Memoirs...*, 97.). Relevant is the passage in the same *Memorie*, 160/600-604; *Memoirs*, 136). Concerning the use of that pedagogical means outside Don Bosco's houses consult a quotation from Jouvençy's work in: MONFAT, P.A., *La pratica ...*, 97-98.

<sup>169</sup> For the different passages from the biography of Fr. Besucco: OE XV, 332-333; 336; 365-366. For D. Savio see OE XI, 188/1; 251; 258. About the way Don Bosco accosts the boys see BIESMANS, R., *Op weg naar de 'brieven' van 10 mei 1884*, Don Bosco Studies 8, 52 (footnote 1).

Bosco more than ten minutes. I have talked to him about many things (...)."<sup>170</sup> That has probably no other meaning than that he had been able to unburden himself. At the same time, this shows that Don Bosco knew how to keep his distance. He does not let himself be taken in, neither does he make others dependent in an unpedagogical way.

#### **5.2.7.1.3. Written personal advice**

Don Bosco knew how to provide other means for personal contact and guidance. He would jot down an admonition on a slip of paper or he would write a short letter "with considerations I judged necessary."<sup>171</sup> Available documents give us insufficient evidence to conclude whether, to what extent, or how often he explicitly advised his co-workers to follow him in this as well. However, were such stories not a kind of vade mecum too or a mirror for his educators and teachers?

#### **5.2.7.1.4. Personal guidance in the sacrament of penance**

Then there was also the sacrament of penance. In the introduction to the nineteenth chapter of the biography of Francis Besucco Don Bosco apparently addresses himself to more mature young readers and over their shoulders to adult readers: "One may say whatever one likes about the different systems of education, but I do not find any solid basis except frequent confession and communion. And I do not think that I exaggerate when I say that where these two are neglected, a good moral behaviour cannot be expected."<sup>172</sup> In his memoirs he expresses, in almost identical words, his expectations and his later experience after taking the exam for confession: "This put me in a better position to cultivate discipline, morality and the good of the souls of my youngsters in the prisons, at the Oratory and wherever it was necessary."<sup>173</sup> On the occasion of a feast of our Lady Francis Besucco walks up to Don Bosco (the boy again takes the initiative) and asks if he may make a general confession. "Since I want to place my soul in your hands", he says, I want to open my conscience completely to you. In this way you will get to know me better and give me advice with greater certainty. This will help me to save my soul". Don

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<sup>170</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco*, Zürich, PAS-Verlag, 1964, 226/footnote 79.

<sup>171</sup> That is the expression in BOSCO, G., *Pietro ...*, 97/1. Brief letters from that period in E III, 287; 347.517; 539; 558. In fact, all are replies to cards or letters from the addressees. Examples of personal recommendations in MB VII, 6-10; EMB VII, 5-9.

<sup>172</sup> OE XV, 342/1.

<sup>173</sup> BOSCO, G., *Memorie dell' Oratorio...*, 126/912-915 ID., *Memoirs...*, 107.

Bosco gives him the permission and praises him, because he wants to choose "a regular confessor."<sup>174</sup>

Such choice and fidelity have the greatest importance for him as an educator. They give him the opportunity to guide boys personally and to follow and assist them especially on a religious and moral level. That is why he inserted this article in his Regulations: "Though it is not a sin to change your confessor, I advise you to choose a regular confessor, because for the soul you can do what a gardener does for a plant and a doctor for a patient."<sup>175</sup> In this way he also emphasizes for confessors the 'father and doctor' approach more than that of 'teacher and judge'.<sup>176</sup>

In the sixth chapter of the fourteenth volume of the *Memorie Biografiche* E. Ceria declares: "A ministry at the Oratory which Don Bosco never relinquished was that of hearing confessions. (...). Don Bosco regularly heard a large number of penitents in a relatively short time because his advice was brief and forthright". Ceria illustrates this with a few examples.<sup>177</sup> These recommendations constitute a very important part of confession.<sup>178</sup> They were directly related to or contained the core of the good and firm resolution of the penitent concerned. The wording and above all the carrying out of a resolution were essential for Don Bosco.<sup>179</sup>

Moreover, when the penitent had the habit of writing down the main idea of those brief recommendations - the so-called good resolutions - in order to use it more conscientiously, the integrating and formative influence of the sacrament of confession in the pedagogical process could but increase.<sup>180</sup> This appears from the considerations he inserts in Michael Magone's biography: "Go often to see your con-

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<sup>174</sup> The nineteenth chapter in OE XV, 342-343.

<sup>175</sup> OE XXIX, 68/art. 6. Also see *ibid.*, 159/art. 4. Cf among other things the biography of M. Magone: OE XIII, 180-181; DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Saint Jean Bosco*, 75/2.

<sup>176</sup> DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Don Bosco et la vie spirituelle*, Paris, Beauchesne 1967, 129/2.

<sup>177</sup> MB XIV, 121/2 and 712-714; EMB XIV, 86/2 and 586-588. A striking example also in MB XVI, 31-32; EMB XVI, 16-17. Cf STELLA, P., *Don Bosco nella storia ...*, II, 311/2 and DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Don Bosco et la vie spirituelle*, 134/1.

<sup>178</sup> OE XXXV, 98/item 6. Also see the dream tale in January 1883 in MB XVI, 16; EMB XVI, 4: "firm resolutions in confession". Cf SCHEPENS, J., *Pénitence et eucharistie dans la méthode éducative et pastorale de don Bosco III*, Rome, 1986, N 199/foot note (330).

<sup>179</sup> See OE XXXV, 226; 232/1. Also BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire non reprimere. Il sistema educativo di don Bosco*, Rome, LAS 1999, 264-265.

<sup>180</sup> About the meaning of noted 'words of advice' in general, see Fr. Besucco (footnote 167). A goodnight talk given on 31 August 1877 is also very significant: "Now I ask you all to do me a favour: write down my suggestions for a happy vacation to remember and keep" (MB XIII, 433/5; EMB XIII, 341/5). Cf also MB XII, 150/3; EMB XII, 121/2.

fessor and follow his advice."<sup>181</sup> With the help of his advice, they would remain on the right path and make good progress.

According to the theological language of that period we can speak here of the priority of the "ex opere operantis" over the "ex opere operato". This means that the beneficent effect of the sacrament of confession actually depends more on the contributions of the penitent and the confessor than on the inner force of the sacrament "received".<sup>182</sup> This human contribution consists in the completeness of the avowal, the sincerity of the contrition and above all in the solidity of the resolution and the perseverance in carrying it out. "Only then will progress in some virtue be noticed" each time.<sup>183</sup> On the other hand it is beyond doubt that Don Bosco counted both on the influence of divine grace and on the effect of human effort.

Trustfulness and brief but appropriate reception of the sacrament often have an effect beyond confession. Indeed Don Bosco concludes the account of his conversation with Francis Besucco with the observation: "After making his choice he kept to it all the time he was with us. He put his full trust in him (Don Bosco), asked him for advice outside confession as well, prayed for him and was very glad whenever he received from him some good advice for his life."<sup>184</sup>

With this high appreciation of the sacrament of penance and personal guidance in mind, one understands the more easily that Don Bosco asks the rectors to "let them see that you willingly hear anyone's confession."<sup>185</sup> Constructive assistance means repeatedly being present and disposed to listen to the boys and then helping them to the best of one's own ability with their human, religious and moral development. Most certainly through the sacrament of confession.

On the other hand it is also remarkable that he clearly restricts this important service to the rector. Only in the second instance does he want to entrust it to 'other priests': "But give them (the boys) full freedom to go also to confession to someone

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<sup>181</sup> *La vie de Michel Magon* in: DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Saint Jean Bosco*, 75/2; OE XIII, 180-181.

<sup>182</sup> Also see STELLA, P., *Don Bosco nella storia ...II*, 317/2; 323-324 and BRAIDO, P., *Prevenire non reprimere...*, 264/2. Cf DESRAMAUT, Fr., *Don Bosco et la vie spirituelle*, 134-135.

<sup>183</sup> E III, 436/3.

<sup>184</sup> OE XV, 343-344.

<sup>185</sup> MOTTO, Fr., I "Ricordi confidenziali...", RSS (4), 149/87-88: 156/105-107; BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 163/124, 164/146-147.

else if they wish to do so."<sup>186</sup> In the Regulations for dayboys in 1877, the 'others' ("someone else") are officially "the spiritual director and the prefect. And on great occasions priests (from outside the institute) who are specially invited."<sup>187</sup> Such sporadic contact between confessor and penitent of course does not promote true guidance. The investigation into the reasons for this behaviour would exceed the scope of this study. Nevertheless, whatever those reasons may have been, it was a directive that could reduce the effect of confession in two ways. Firstly, through this practice the regular guidance normally given was dropped. Secondly, in this way a number of educators, teachers and assistants were deprived of an excellent opportunity - according to Don Bosco's teaching and practice - for a sustaining accompaniment and behavioral guidance. This seems to have been the blind spot in Don Bosco's way of evaluating and providing educational opportunities and responsibilities.

#### 5.2.7.1.5. Personal approach when punishing

In cases where boys do not respond as requested by assistants or teachers, and there is a need to remedy or punish, the advice to all is the same: as educators they should act kindly and in almost every case start a personal conversation. The latter point he strongly emphasizes in his little treatise: "Except in very rare cases, corrections and punishments should never be given publicly, but always privately and in the absence of companions; and the greatest prudence and patience should be used to bring the pupil to see his fault, with the aid of reason and religion."<sup>188</sup> The same emphasis he puts on one of the ten preceding *General Articles*: "Should it become necessary to reprimand, correct or admonish them, it should never be done in the presence of their companions."<sup>189</sup> And when in 1884, he struggles through a period of serious illness and painfully writes down a few memories that often contain a suggestion or a directive for his closest co-workers, the idea again appears: "In

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<sup>186</sup> Ibidem. Also see the minutes of the assembly of rectors on the occasion of the feast of St Francis of Sales in February 1879 in MB XIV, 45-46; EMB XIV, 28/4. Besides it is a pity that G. Lazzeri in his notes limits himself to the sentence: "Afterwards Don Bosco gave various norms for confessors in our houses" (PRELLEZO, J.-M., *Valdocco nell'Ottocento ...*, 75/929) The reports of the first General Chapter also remain vague: VERHULST, M., *I Verballi...*, 197/25-26; 203/182-184.

<sup>187</sup> OE XXIX, 67-68; Cf The first General Chapter in VERHULST, M., *I Verballi ...* 190/86-93; In some notes to prepare a pontifical audience in 1880 he regretted however that "most of the priests did not hear confessions" (E III, 561/Lettera 2026). The question may be asked whether this concerned only diocesan priests. Cf SCHEPENS, J., *Pénitence et eucharistie ... II*, 388-389. G. Barzagli concludes that "there was no problem: all the priests in the institutes were also confessors" (BARZAGHI, G., *Alle radici del sistema preventivo di don Bosco*, Milano, L.E.S. 1989, 159/6). However, that conclusion is a typical *latius hoc* reasoning.

<sup>189</sup> BRAIDO, *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 290-291/art. 9.

order to correct efficaciously one should not scold someone in the presence of others."<sup>190</sup>

His enduring concerns about this delicate matter are less surprising when one remembers that during the General Chapter in 1883 he intervenes with the following consideration: "Some want to punish etc. etc. The rector may admonish, but never publicly, never in the presence of other boys. In private ("a tu per tu ") one easily obtains compliance with the will of the superior and conformity with the preventive system."<sup>191</sup> And this contribution during the Chapter may have been influenced by the fact that several confreres were drafting a document under the title "Punishments to be administered in Salesian houses" - a document that was not published until 1935. This proves once more how difficult it is to reconcile real punishments with the preventive system as Don Bosco promoted it and wanted it to be applied. In this draft document Don Francesca also wrote: "And so I ask all rectors to admonish our dear boys first in a fatherly way and in private, or as we usually say *in camera caritatis* (face to face)."<sup>192</sup> This norm conforms fully with Don Bosco's directives.

However, don Bosco knows that the psychological approach and the humane behaviour of the educator are not sufficient to preserve good relations. The positive attitude and well-intentioned behaviour of the boys are equally important. Therefore, the educator - according to the draft of the circular in 1883 in a literal quotation from P.A. Monfat - must give time to the boy "to reflect, to return to his senses, to become aware of his wrong and of the justice and need of punishment."<sup>193</sup> Indeed, he also appeals to the active collaboration of the boys: "Be convinced that your superiors feel intensely their heavy responsibility to do their best to ensure your welfare". In that case they realize the superiors "are only concerned for your good when they warn, insist and admonish". Hence the instruction: "'Gratefully listen to their admonitions, accept the punishment for your faults with simplicity and without showing aversion or disapproval". Doubtless they will attain this attitude only if they are disposed to lay a foundation of trust. That is why Don Bosco also gives them the very positive order: "Freely open your hearts to them with the knowledge that they are fathers who most ardently wish to see you all happy."<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 402/78.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 426/footnote with lines 638-640.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 309/1; 327/48-50. The same solicitude again in the same writing 337/271 and 340/345. Cf EMB XVI, 369/4; 374/2 and 375/5.

<sup>193</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore...*, 331/126-128; EMB XVI, 371/2.

<sup>194</sup> OE XXIX, 171/art. 3. 172/art. 8 and 7. The analogy between a family and an educational community that is

These are three articles from the *Regulations for the Houses*. As we already know, extracts from these regulations are regularly read and commented on in the houses, which shows the real desire to touch and influence every boy personally. However, it seems practically impossible that every boy would have had a copy. Therefore, the specific use of the regulations lies somewhere in the link between personal and common or collective guidance and assistance.

### **5.2.7.2 Collective accompaniment or guidance of the group as a whole**

#### **5.2.7.2.1. Collective guidance through "short goodnight talks"**

In the field of collective guiding assistance of the boys, especially in boarding schools, there is a pre-eminent means: the "good night talk". It is so important that even in his treatise on the preventive system Don Bosco devotes a whole paragraph to it. Through this short address the responsible educator must "in public give a directive or a short piece of advice concerning the things that the boarders and those Salesians present, must 'do or omit' in order to have a happy life personally and as a group. As a conclusion, he calls that short address "the key to good behaviour, to the smooth running of affairs and to success in education."<sup>195</sup> Not every educator, however, could make a direct use of this means. In the day-to-day practice in fact that key-moment was the privilege of Don Bosco or his immediate substitute, among whom there was first of all the local Rector. The fellow-educators and the youngsters thus often received the same instructions to make efforts personally and together "to become really good Christians and honest citizens."<sup>196</sup>

Don Bosco's own 'good nights' in 1877 show how for this short talk one can start from an approaching feast, the beginning of a week of retreat, the imminent holiday period, or the example of a boy who gives back a coin he has just found. A good opportunity may also be found in arriving home after a journey, a change of personnel, the expulsion of a boy, the beginning of a new school year, the announ-

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intimated here is characteristic of Don Bosco's vision. Cf BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo ...*, 83/392. *Constitutions...*, 247.

<sup>195</sup> See footnote 126. Cf OE XXIX, 429/art. 20; 430/1. A little more than a month after his return from Rome in 1884, he says during a meeting: "The short goodnight talk is the master key of the house. A great deal, if not everything hinges on it (MB XVII, 190/6; EMB XVI, 166.)

<sup>196</sup> See for instance concerning the catechist of the technical students OE XXIX, 125-126. Even when he is away Don Bosco still tries to be present by giving the rectors subjects for goodnights (MB XV, 469-470; EMB XV, 392.

cement of the strena for the year, the departure of a group of missionaries. The subjects he can broach on such occasions are: devotion to Mary Help of Christians, guidance for the holidays, morals and confession, always being prepared for death. His style is entertaining, at once exhilarating and serious, and often very direct.

In the case of a lost object, he knows how to provide some light entertainment: "What have we here? A banknote? No, it's a five cent gold piece. (*Laughter*). Since you 're not allowed to keep money, no one will come to claim it, and so (*putting the coin in his pocket*) we'll use it to pay the Oratory's debts (*laughter*) and to keep you all happy on the feast of Mary, Help of Christians."<sup>197</sup> The latter is certainly an allusion to the expected little extra at table on that day. But at the same time he has prepared the ground for his subject.

In one particular circumstance he boldly declares: "The reasons for my displeasure are: ill conduct, foul talk, reading and passing around bad books". All these are diametrically opposed to the objectives he and "all the other superiors" have in mind. By saying this, he identifies himself with his co-workers, placing them on a par with himself, which is of no little importance. He continues: "Also there are a few - very few - who are chronic gripers, stirring discontent in the student body with their moaning. (...) How thoughtless they are!"<sup>198</sup> It is clear enough for those concerned. At the same time, they can all hear that Don Bosco is not naïve, not blind, not deaf. He is well informed but he does not hurt by denouncing boys by name. The most important thing is to give them all insight in his objectives, to invite them to make a good retreat and to make some of them immediately aware of the need for conversion.

These goodnight talks doubtless gain strength and impact when he relates "dreams", often full of imagery. Occasionally they were announced in advance, and sometimes spread over several evenings. In both cases the suspense was inevitably heightened.<sup>199</sup> This is certainly not the ideal place to dwell on Don Bosco's dreams in general, but it doesn't seem inappropriate to quote some of his own words on

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<sup>197</sup> MB XIII, 409/2; EMB XIII, 320/2. Also see the somewhat lengthy introduction on 10 April 1877 in MB XIII, 124; EMB XIII, 94 and for the prayer to St. Bernard in MB XIII, 411/4; EMB XIII, 322/2.

<sup>198</sup> MB XIII, 420-421; EMB XIII, 329-330. Literally: «When Don Bosco - and by Don Bosco I mean all superiors - enrolls a lad (...)" (MB XIII, 420/6; EMB XIII, 330/2). Cf MB XIII, 753/5; EMB XIII, 578/4. Cf footnotes 92 and 101.

<sup>199</sup> MB XII, 582/2; EMB XII, 428/4. E. Ceria excellently evokes the atmosphere (MB XIII, 585 and 450/3; EMB XIII, 431 and 324-325; and also MB XII, 48/3; EMB XII, 35/3). Also see BIESMANS, R., *Doelstellingen van opvoeding en opleiding*..., 106-107.

them. "It has been said that we are to pay no heed to dreams, and I assure you that most of the time I, too, agree. Nevertheless, though dreams may not reveal future events to us, they can at times help us to see our way through intricate problems and to act wisely in different matters. Therefore we may accept what they have to offer us that is good."<sup>200</sup> However, he does not always relate his dreams in such a non-committal, neutral way. More than once "heavenly" personages enter on the scene with some important message. That is how these stories claim supernatural force from time to time. In other cases he himself suggests or formulates concrete applications that are valuable for all.

#### **5.2.7.2.2. Influence on the whole community by means of a "nosegay"**

This can be a short idea, a kind of motto intended as a guide for the boys' religious and moral behaviour the next day. A goodnight during the Christmas novena concludes as follows: "For tomorrow's nosegay tell the Infant Jesus from your hearts, I promise to love You and serve You with all my heart by striving for purity in my glances and my speech."<sup>201</sup> He often deliberately uses spiritual nosegays, especially on great feasts.<sup>202</sup> In order to make them more efficacious G. Lazzeri prescribed "to post them up in a little frame at the church door for the whole day"<sup>203</sup> to catch the eye and recall to mind at regular intervals.

#### **5.2.7.2.3. Strennas**

With his yearly-mottoes or strennas he is practically on the same wavelength. He sends them to all the houses in this period. Even when he stays in Rome in 1877 and is faced with unpleasant problems, he remembers to ask Don Rua for 1878 "Greet them all for me. Here are the family practices for the coming year: 1. Break up the habit of smoking and grumbling. 2. Exactness in the duties of one's state of life from Father Rua to Julius. 3<sup>o</sup> Holy communion and prayers for those houses recently opened and others that are being set up in mission territories, where God has prepared a wonderful harvest for us."<sup>204</sup> Such topics also show that nothing

<sup>200</sup> MB XII, 463; EMB XII, 335/2. Cf MB XIII, 761/5; EMB XIII, 585/1 and MB XII, 41/6; EMB XII, 29.

<sup>201</sup> For a sermon too he sometimes uses a "dream". "Now rather than give you a sermon I will tell you a story. Call it what you will: fable, dream, tale and give it any importance you wish. In any case we can always learn something". (MB XIII, 302/2; EMB XIII, 225/4 and *ibidem* 303, respectively 226).

<sup>202</sup> MB XII, 585/6; EMB XII, 431. For the notion "little flower" or "nosegay" see MB VI, 319/1; EMB VI, 170/2.

<sup>203</sup> MB XIV, 382-383; EMB XIV, 292. This concerns the preparation for Christmas 1879. For the feast of Mary Immaculate nosegays are given, meant for all the houses. See MB XV, 469-470; EMB XV, 392.

<sup>204</sup> PRELLEZO, J.-M., *Valdocco nell'Ottocento ...*, 108-109.

<sup>204</sup> MB XIII, 392; EMB XIII, 304. E III, 254. Julius was one of the janitors at Valdocco. Don Bosco consequently intended this point for all, youngsters and adults, religious and lay people.

human was alien to the Salesian communities. They show at the same time that Don Bosco continues to directly stimulate and invite everyone, the youngsters and the adults.

For the year 1879, he is brief: "Unity", i.e. "unity of the boys among themselves; similarly, unity among the superiors and unity of the boys with the assistants and the superiors". This also means searching for means "to achieve this unity" and "shunning whatever might disrupt it, such as quarrelling, backbiting, intimate friendships and the like."<sup>205</sup> Thus, everyone in the house is set to work and all receive a task that will benefit the whole community.

With 1880 in view he specifies still more:

1° *To all without distinction*: Give good example in word and deed. Be on guard against forming habits in unnecessary things even when they are neither good nor bad.

2° *To the rectors*: The patience of Job.

3° *To the superiors*: The kindness of St. Francis de Sales in dealing with others.

4° *To All pupils*: use your time well: *nullum temporis pretium (time is priceless)*.

5° *To All Salesians*: Strict observance of our rules.

In addition, most pedagogically he adds: "*Superiors are asked to read and explain the above repeatedly if needed.*"<sup>206</sup> They may not remain just words or a wish list that would be replaced at New Year. No, one must utilize them in a positive, preventive sense, so that they become valuable for formation, for a better and stronger development of the man and the Christian in all of them. It is a pity that further information is missing about recalling or confirming the strenna in the course of the year, because without this, it could simply go in one ear and out of the other. As far as the topic of the good use of one's time is concerned, there is no problem at all. He repeats it in any case.<sup>207</sup>

#### **5.2.7.2.4. Actual items of attention concerning the smooth running of things and formation in general**

On another occasion a relevant strenna is used to address a burning issue. In October 1876, don Bosco judges that his boys should concentrate on the study of Italian

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<sup>205</sup> MB XIII, 766-767; EMB XIII, 589/3.

<sup>206</sup> MB XIV, 383; EMB XIV, 293. "*Nullum temporis pretium*" we understand as "Time is priceless", so costly is it. Cf the comment for 1883 in MB XV, 683; EMB XV, 572-573. The strenna for 1884 might perhaps indicate the necessity to combat a few abuses: "Do not steal the possessions, time, innocence, or soul of anyone *by word or deed*" (MB XVI, 316; EMB XVI, 248-249). For "deeds" and "examples" also see footnotes 140; 149.

<sup>207</sup> See for example MB XII, 556; EMB XII, 406; MB XIII, 430/3; EMB XIII, 338/3. Also see in the biography of Fr. Besucco (OE XV 336).

from the very beginning of the new school year. And he tackles the problem like this: "Then, if during this novena (of All Saints' Day), you would like a practice or suitable nosegay which can serve for the entire month or even for the whole year, I suggest this one: "Don't say a single word in Piedmontese dialect. You may think that this is a seemingly useless suggestion, but it will help you greatly in learning to speak proper Italian. So away with dialect, and not a word of Piedmontese! Talk, play, work, eat, drink and sleep - but all in Italian. (*General laughter*). And if anyone starts to snore tonight, then let him snore in Italian (*more laughter*). This nosegay does not call for any painful penance or sacrifice. All it requires is self-control."<sup>208</sup>

#### **5.2.7.2.5. Formation through sermons**

In order to guide boys as a group Don Bosco doesn't only make use of goodnights, nosegays and yearly-mottoes but also of sermons, talks during retreats and all sorts of addresses, as for instance at the end of academic sessions, theatrical performances and meetings of past pupils. They are opportunities every confrere can make regular use of.<sup>209</sup>

#### **5.2.7.2.6. Influence through the spread of good books**

A very important extra means to give the boys guidance and assistance according to don Bosco is the promotion of good books. Just as he put a lot of energy into combating bad books through protective assistance, he also recommended with no less energy the reading of good books. In both his regulations, he impressed on the teachers the need "to mention and recommend authors who can be read and remembered without endangering religion or morals."<sup>210</sup> Very typical is a goodnight on 24 August 1877; the holidays are drawing near and he says: "I wish I were your age! If I just had tiny fractions of the time which I spent, I won't say uselessly, but which I could have spent better! I'd read loads of good (useful) books and put my hand to many tasks. I had time once, but not any longer, and I won't ever have it. So I tell you: Use your time well now while you have it! (...) Remember, to learn you must read. Read useful books; something you cannot often do during the school year."<sup>211</sup> Mind, he speaks about "useful books" (*libri utili*). Here he manifests a profound conviction about the influence of reading and a high esteem for good, useful books.

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<sup>208</sup> MB XII, 556/4; EMB XII, 406-407.

<sup>209</sup> OE XXIX, 430/1. Here again it is about a decision of the first General Chapter.

<sup>210</sup> OE XXIX, 83/art. 11 and 131/art. 11. Also see *ibid.*, 397/Capo IV and OE XXXIII, 83/Capo V.

<sup>211</sup> MB XIII, 430/4 and 3; EMB XIII, 338/4 and 3.

Even in the stories he writes for the young, he draws their attention to the existence of other biographies and their good influence on the reader.<sup>212</sup> In Don Bosco's opinion it is not only the physical presence of the educator that has value, but also his moral, psychological influence.

Convinced that don Bosco was right in this matter, G. Barberis consequently taught his audience that the "overwhelming spread of printed matter in our days obliges us to insist on good reading matter and the avoidance of what is harmful."<sup>213</sup> Thereby he places the positive, constructive aspect quite rightly to the fore.

#### **5.2.7.2.7. Education through membership of youth movements**

The educator could find a mixture of collective and personal guidance and a stimulant in the "*compagnie*" - youth associations, or sodalities. In the spirit of former declarations and of Don Bosco's practice, the following was decided in the first General Chapter: "By religious usage we mean: practices of piety not prescribed by the Church, but which (...) powerfully contribute to the pupils' piety and the protection of good moral standards. Practices of that sort are: the goodnights, (...) reading at table, triduums, novenas and retreats, the solemn feasts, associations of altar servers, of St. Aloysius, the Blessed Sacrament, St. Joseph and the like. These practices must be warmly recommended."<sup>214</sup> This last sentence means that all must believe in them, speak approvingly of them, even though the direct responsibility has been entrusted to a few confreres only - first to the "catechists", both for the dayboys and for the students and artisans, then, also to their young helpers. The latter were absolutely necessary, for especially from 1875 onwards the various youth associations flourished greatly.<sup>215</sup>

Through their presence and their guidance of these associations, Don Bosco and his co-workers did not only want to intensify the boys' spiritual life. They also aimed at strengthening them in their youthful endeavour to behave dutifully and to devote themselves lovingly and in solidarity to the welfare of others. This can be gathered from the writings about the principal members of the St. Aloysius group, to which indeed many boys belonged. "The objective that the members try to attain" Don Bosco writes, "consists in the imitation of the youthful saint's virtues that suit their

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<sup>212</sup> Fr. Besucco does not only read the booklets about M. Magone and D. Savio. He also imitates both youngsters, though sometimes not judiciously. (OE XV, 338/2. 390/3). Don Bosco encouraged this reading and earnestly wished his boys to imitate D. Savio, Magone, Besucco and other youngsters (MB XII, 557; 572; 574-575; 586-595; EMB XII, 407/3; 419; 422; 432-441; MB XIII, 417/3; EMB XIII, 326-327).

<sup>213</sup> BARBERIS, G., *Appunti ...*, 217/1. Also see footnotes 91; 92.

<sup>214</sup> OE XXIX, 429-430. Thus, the General Chapter confirmed a circular of January 1876 (E III, 69).

<sup>215</sup> *Ibidem*, 38/art. 6; 123/art. 11; 126/art. 7. About their flourishing see MB XI, 225/2; EMB XI, 206/4.

own life and the assurance of his protection in this life and at the hour of death."<sup>216</sup> Therefore, it is obvious that the members are asked to be assiduous in their religious practice. But along with this they must be very diligent at their work and the accomplishment of their duties". And "when a member falls ill", everyone must not only pray for him but also help him in temporal affairs in a way according to his own ability."<sup>217</sup> The last phrase is a hint at the association for mutual assistance ("mutuo soccorso").<sup>218</sup>

Even in a group where one might expect that only religious matters be aimed at, as in that of "Mary Immaculate" similar non-religious "practices" are to be found. "The accomplishment of their duties (of state) must be the primary and special care for the members. A basic expectation is "to use one's time to the full" and further, that "reciprocal charity will unite our spirits and make us love our brothers without exception. We will admonish them gently when a word of warning seems appropriate."<sup>219</sup>

In this way the core groups are for those boys who wish to join. They are a training ground towards personal, [and] responsible decisions and action that directly prepare for their future lives and little by little render the presence and direct assistance of teachers/educators superfluous in the years of formation. Therefore, Don Bosco urges the rectors to recommend and promote "the altar servers, the core-groups of St. Aloysius, the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Immaculate". Moreover, he asks them to demonstrate "benevolence and satisfaction towards those who are enrolled". "But", he continues "you will only be a promoter, and not their director. Consider those groups as the responsibility of the boys. They are entrusted to the catechist to run."<sup>220</sup> P. Stella has correctly summarized the place of these groups: "The *compagnie* play an integrating role in the educational system. They make up for any lack of personnel, necessary assistance and subtle penetration of (pedagogical and pastoral) influence. But this does not exhaust their function. They also contribute to the strengthening of religious values on the collective and intimately personal level of those who are active members of them."<sup>221</sup> Of course, the activity of the group gives the adults directly involved with them the opportunity to get to

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<sup>216</sup> OE XXIX, 75/art. 1. The regulations of this sodality were published in 1878: BOSCO, G., *Le sei domeniche e la novena di S. Luigi Gonzaga colle regole della compagnia in onore del medesimo santo e con alcune lode sacre*, S. Pier d' Arena, 1878.

<sup>217</sup> STELLA, P., *Don Bosco nella storia ...II*, 348.

<sup>218</sup> Cf BIESMANS, R., *Doelstellingen van opvoeding en opleiding ...*, 1997, 155.

<sup>219</sup> OE XI, 227/art. 3; 229/N. 2 and N. 3. For the association of St. Joseph see BRAIDO, P., *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, Zürich, PAS-Verlag 1964, 384/4.

<sup>220</sup> BRAIDO, P., *Don Bosco Educatore ...*, 163-164. In his letters Don Bosco further insists. See E III, 135/L. 1541; 164/L. 1578; 466/L. 1920. Also see *ibid.*, 324/L. 1748.

<sup>221</sup> STELLA, P., *Don Bosco nella storia ... II*, 351-352. Also see *ibid.*, 356/3.

know the boys better and give them personal guidance.

### **5.2.7.3. Reciprocal supplementing of collective and personal formation**

*Collective support or assistance* is indeed important, nay indispensable. In the final analysis, however, it remains subordinate to *individual guidance*. It is a supplement and sometimes a preparation for individual personal formation. Hence, in Don Bosco's own talks the invitation to go and see him in his room is frequently found. When in April 1877 after his return from France he addresses his boys again for the first time, he expresses his desire in this way: "On my part, I wish to speak privately with each of you either during the retreat or before or after. I'll do all I can to help you. I enjoy talking with you, and you seem to feel the same way, especially when your spiritual well-being is at stake."<sup>222</sup> The word "especially" calls up a preference for a topic but does not exclude at all other subjects of discussion, provided the little talk benefits a boy's "temporal and/or eternal well-being".

### **5.2.8. Assistance through on-going formation**

In such cases, the personal interview may be the confirmation or individualisation of what he has said in public. Thus at the beginning of the vacation period in 1877: "The next two days are the last days you will be with us, and I'd like all of you to come and see me because I have something to say to each one."<sup>223</sup>

One of the available channels to pursue this guidance personally and certainly collectively is that of the *past pupils' assemblies*. He speaks with great satisfaction about them: "Everyone speaks of these meetings of ours because it is the best way to recall to mind the advice and council I gave you when you were boys."<sup>224</sup> In an address to priest past pupils in 1880 he goes back to their youthful experiences and explicitly confirms for them, as they are now educators themselves, the basic underlying principle in education: "In order to succeed with youngsters, take great pains to be kind to them; win their love, not their fear. This demands a particular way of intervening: "Be patient and gentle in correcting them, and, do not strike them. In a word, act in such a way that once they see you, they will run over to you rather than dash off, as so often happens". Just like Don Bosco they should not lose heart if all does not run as smoothly as they would wish it, for "your good advice, welcome or unwelcome at the moment, and your kindness will leave an impression on their minds and hearts. The time will come when the good seed will sprout,

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<sup>222</sup> XIII, 125/5-6; EMB XIII, 95/2. Cf MB XI, 224/1; EMB XI, 205-206.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 433/5; 341/5.

<sup>224</sup> MB XVII, 173/2; EMB XVII, 148/3. This concerns a speech on July 13 1884.

bloom and bear fruit."<sup>225</sup> This sounds like his positive assistance programme in a nutshell.

It must have happened more than once that a past pupil could not exactly put into words the good done to him in his youthful years. However, others could. One such past pupil wrote: "There is something special about the Oratory, a totally unique system of educating young people not to be found anywhere but in Don Bosco's schools."<sup>226</sup> In order to give weight to his words during the past pupils assembly Don Bosco relates an incident. One day a military man who long ago had not exactly been a little angel at the Oratory, came to see him. For thirty years, he had not come back to Don Bosco or Valdocco, so he had a lot to tell. At the end, he wanted to make his confession, after which Don Bosco asked him how he had come to that decision. Then the captain answered: "Seeing you again reminded me of all the tricks you used to keep me on the right path: the words you used to whisper in my ear and your exhortations to go to confession. These things prompted me to do it."<sup>227</sup> Central are the words in the ear and the exhortations. Both are aspects of constructive, formative assistance.

Such positive experiences must underlie the following paragraph in his little treatise: "The pupil will always remain friendly towards his educators and will ever remember with pleasure the guidance he received. He will continue to consider his teachers and other superiors as fathers and brothers". We find this conviction again in the same text: "The preventive system makes the pupils so affectionate that the educator can always speak to them in the language of the heart, not only during the time of their education but even afterwards."<sup>228</sup>

In the same month of July 1880 the lay past pupils came together as well. Don Bosco sent them home with the order: "My dear sons, one thing I recommend to you above all else: wherever you may be, always conduct yourselves as good Christians and upright citizens. Love, respect and practise our holy faith, in which I have brought you up and shielded you from the dangers and corruption of the world; the faith which aids us in our earthly afflictions, comforts us at the point of death and opens us the gates of everlasting happiness."<sup>229</sup> Thus, he links up with the past and bridges the gap because he can still speak to them as a father.

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<sup>225</sup> MB XIV, 513/2. EMB XIV, 403/2. For the principle "Fatti amare, non temere" (Make yourself loved, not feared) see BIESMANS, R., *Fatti amare ... Zorg ervoor dat ze van je houden*, Sint-Pieters-Woluwe, 1994. ID., *Studia di fatti amare*, Quaderni di spiritualità 8, Rome, UPS 1996.

<sup>226</sup> MB XIV, 139/2; EMB XIV, 103/2 and footnote 18 there.

<sup>227</sup> Ibidem., 514 respectively 404/3. Cf an episode from 1880 in MB XIV, 424/2; EMB XIV, 327-328.

<sup>228</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo ...*, 90/I and 84/IV; *Constitutions...*, 251 and 248.

<sup>229</sup> MB XIV, 511/2; EMB XIV, 401/2.

Three years later, in an address to the representatives of the past pupils, both laymen and priests, he tries to explain why he keeps out of politics and which policy he does champion. And he concludes: "Religion and wise counsel teach us: Live as good Christians, busy yourself with the moral training of your children, instruct the pupils of your schools or your parishes in their catechism, - that is everything."<sup>230</sup>

He does not miss a single chance to confirm and corroborate the good of the past. But he sometimes wants to draw his past pupils' attention to what is new and really good in society. He even wants to encourage them to integrate those new aspects: "Just now I am all taken up with a project which I would like to see started this year: being of mutual assistance to each other. People talk about credit unions and mutual aid societies nowadays. We have to set one up for ourselves. So far this is just an idea, a project I have not yet investigated in detail, but I think it is a very feasible idea. All of you manage to set some savings aside, some more, some less, so that you can face emergencies like illness or unemployment. I suggest that you don't benefit yourselves alone but reach out in emergencies to some fine students who graduate from the Oratory or to you former schoolmates, to everyone here present. (...) Such an organisation set up by you could be most helpful."<sup>231</sup> In this way, he is still guiding and stimulating them - to use his own words - after their period of education and training.

### *Final reflections*

Anyone who looks at all these elements of *protective* and constructive, *promotional* assistance side by side cannot help wondering about a conclusion of Don Bosco in his short treatise. In his words, this entire endeavour, all these efforts of the teachers/educators result in "the impossibility of pupils committing faults."<sup>232</sup> It is indeed a negative way of expressing pedagogical aims. It is, however, not untypical of Don Bosco. In 1883 he still describes the purpose of his activities in this way: "The goal of our work is the secular instruction and moral education of youngsters, either abandoned or at risk, to safeguard them from idleness, from disgrace and per-

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<sup>230</sup> MB XVI, 291/3; EMB XVI, 227-228. Concerning Don Bosco and party politics see BIESMANS, R., *Doelstellingen van opvoeding en opleiding ...*, 234-237.

<sup>231</sup> MB XIII, 758-759; EMB XIII, 582/3-5. Also see BIESMANS, R., *Doelstellingen van opvoeding en opleiding ...*, 215-216.

<sup>232</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo ...*, 83/393-394; *Constitutions...*, 247aa . We could also translate it: "to make it impossible for pupils to make mistakes

haps even prison."<sup>233</sup> There too, *negatively formulated purposes* predominate. This is the more remarkable in the period 1876-1884 because the latter is characterized by the frequent mentioning of the pre-eminence of the motto: educating and bringing up youngsters "to be good Christians and upright citizens."<sup>234</sup> *This certainly comprises and opens up a very positive programme.*

Initially some co-workers must not entirely have agreed in this respect with that very strong statement in the treatise itself. The first French translations of the little treatise in any case try to formulate it in another, unequivocal way. The one that is published together with the first Italian version, re-formulates: "(all this) is properly speaking the true means to prevent children from committing mistakes easily". "Easily" is far less absolute. The second version writes in a relativizing way: "That means to place children in a sort of impossibility to commit faults."<sup>235</sup> It has become "only" a sort of impossibility. However, it isn't long before the French editions are aligned with the others. It then becomes even in the French texts "placed in the impossibility" tout court.<sup>236</sup>

Yet a man like G. B. Lemoyne will write later that Don Bosco wanted his assistants to be constantly vigilant with the boys, "so as to make it just about impossible for them to do wrong."<sup>237</sup> By using the word "just about" ("quasi") he expresses that "to make it impossible" tout court is asking too much. Still more surprising is that he attributes this statement to Don Bosco himself.

With the best intentions in the world and with the greatest efforts one cannot prevent all that is negative or not talk every boy into choosing and doing what is good. Don Bosco and his co-workers had to experience this more than once, for in education, many factors play a part. Don Bosco must have realized this. In an interview with a reporter of the *Pèlerin* in France he declares: "Infractions of discipline mostly take place because of lack of supervision."<sup>238</sup> "Mostly" of course leaves room for other causes. The latter exist though Don Bosco himself cannot always exactly name them. "The novena of All Saints is in progress", he says to his youngsters in the evening of October 27 1876, shortly after the lessons had started again, "But I still fail to see that you have become especially good. Not that there hasn't been any

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<sup>233</sup> MB XVI, 290/3; EMB XVI, 227/1.

<sup>234</sup> For this see BIESMANS, R., *Doelstellingen van opvoeding en opleiding ...*, 73-96.

<sup>235</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo ...*, 122/441-442 (also see OE XXVIII, 427/1; 104/428-429. respectively "ce qui est à proprement dire le véritable moyen d'éloigner des enfants la facilité de commettre des fautes.» and «c'est-à-dire mettre les enfants dans une sorte d'impossibilité de commettre des fautes.»

<sup>236</sup> See from 1880 onward in BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo ...*, 147; 153/1.

<sup>237</sup> MB VI, 390/3; EMB VI, 216/2.

<sup>238</sup> MB XVI, 168; EMB XVI, 131.

improvement at all, but I see no miracles happening. (...) What has caused this change? Could it be that this poor Don Bosco no longer talks to his boys or can no longer make himself understood as in the past? Could it be that you do not understand him or no longer want to understand him, as the boys of old did? I do not wish to know where the fault lies."<sup>239</sup> In a further study about rationality in pedagogical contact, we hope to take a closer look at this statement that contains more than rhetorical questions.

Less than half a year later, he confronts the boys with shortcomings that hurt him a lot: "Also, there are a few among you - very few - who are chronic gripers, stirring discontent in the student body by moaning: "We can't read the books we want without having someone dash up and snatch them away. Everyplace we go, the superiors have their eye on us!"<sup>240</sup> That evening then he takes the part of these superiors who only do their duty of assistance. Thereby he overlooks the fact that the boys are actually complaining about a lack of freedom. In his short treatise a year later again, he clearly shows that he is well aware that a punctual and firmly protective assistance is not sufficient in itself to attain the educational goal he had formulated. Teachers-educators may be present among the boys with the best intentions, give them advice, encourage reward and warn them, give them all sorts of aid, personally and collectively, and still don't succeed completely or not at all. Don Bosco has experienced that as much, not to say more, depends on *the manner of practising this assistance*.

About the way in which all this should be done, he writes in his well-known treatise: "That system is entirely based on reason and religion and above all on 'amorevolezza' (hearty affection; friendly, kind contact; kindness)."<sup>241</sup> This means that the contacts of educators with youths and vice versa must be characterized by reasonableness, a religious environment and gentleness. These characteristics are so essential that the preventive educational system of Don Bosco has often been and still is identified with this triad. Thereby the proper content or the quintessence of assistance is greatly ignored and is sometimes reduced to a more or less interested presence in the playground. On close examination however, the triad draws attention to three indispensable conditions the educators must fulfil to make the whole assistance system a true success. It may be more accurate still to state that it concerns three qualities that must be found both in the teachers-educators and in the

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<sup>239</sup> MB XII, 557/2; EMB XII, 407/3. A bit of the pedagogical richness of the original text got lost. Indeed, the original continues: "whether it is caused by this or the other side or perhaps a little by both sides". Don Bosco held this goodnight about the time Don Lazzero succeeded Don Rua.

<sup>240</sup> MB XIII, 421/2; EMB XIII, 330/3. Cf footnote 199.

<sup>241</sup> BOSCO, G., *Il sistema preventivo ...*, 83/395-396; *Constitutions...*, Amorevolezza may certainly be understood as "kindly, friendly contact".

boys themselves.

All this will be the content of the next issue in the series "Don Bosco Studies".

## Questions for a better assimilation of this study

1. Social prevention meant for Don Bosco gathering from the street youngsters who were running the risk of going astray, and giving them an appropriate training and a good education. Nowadays one also tries to find out the causes of this unfortunate situation and to find a remedy. One wants to shelter and assist them in various ways: juridically, financially, educationally, ethically, religiously, culturally, etc. In the neighbourhood, in the family circle...

A question for all those who are active in Don Bosco's track could be: in which way can we preventively act in our days in favour of the young job seekers? In which way in favour of the youngsters who run the risk to slide down into marginality or criminality?

Worth reading in this field is the concise article by Giancarlo MILANESI, "*Educazione e prevenzione*" in *Orientamenti pedagogici* (35), 1988, 1, 716.

2. What's your attitude about 'protective assistance' or acting to prevent evil in education?  
What aspects of it do I (we) still find sensible? How do I set about it to realize them?
3. How do I conceive stimulating, positively influencing assistance? Which elements appeal to us? How do I (we) try to realize them in our day-to-day educational practice?
4. How do we try to gain the collaboration of the youngsters?

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