
Through the eyes of Don Bosco

Metaphors and Colours of Salesian Formation

An eyeful of colour

The new Salesian *Ratio*, its full title being *The Formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco* or FSDB for short, echoes, at one point, the title of a 2004 letter from the then Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez ('*But who do you say that I am?*' (*Mk 8:28*). *Looking at Christ through the eyes of Don Bosco*. AGC 384, 3–41). Article 28 of the FSDB begins: 'To be Salesian is to see Christ through the eyes of Don Bosco', adding: 'Don Bosco's life itself is paradigmatic for our following of Jesus and for Salesian formation. Don Bosco is for us not merely someone we admire but our pattern of life, a luminous way of following Jesus, one who reveals to us the fatherhood of God and generates us in the *sequela Christi*.'

This evoking of the human eye, and we note also the deliberate use of 'luminous' here, is an invitation, a prompt, and one particularly productive exploration might be to seize upon the human eye's appreciation of light and colour, starting with the colour of the iris itself.

What colour are your eyes?



The human eye is an incredibly complex organ working tirelessly to help us navigate the world. It can distinguish approximately 10 million different colours. Its muscles are the most active muscles in the human body. It can process 36,000 bits of information every hour, or focus on 50 different objects every second. And did you know that the pupil of the eye expands as much as 45% when we look at someone we love?

If Don Bosco's life is paradigmatic not only for our following of Jesus, but also for Salesian formation, what if we were to pose the question for ourselves: what is the colour of Salesian formation?

The FSDB in colour

At first the question seems playful, perhaps even impossible. Yet colour has always helped us name realities that words alone fail to capture. We speak of seeing life through rose-coloured glasses, of feeling blue, of green shoots of hope, of golden opportunities. Colour evokes atmosphere, emotion, and meaning. Perhaps Salesian formation has its own palette – not one dominant hue, but a rich spectrum of the light of Christ. Each colour can reveal something essential. And together they can disclose the beauty of a vocation gradually transformed into the likeness of the Good Shepherd.

Of course, Salesian formation is not a single colour. We could think of it as white light passing through a prism. It appears to be one thing until it is refracted, revealing a spectrum. The FSDB is not a list of disconnected themes but a single light expressed in many colours. How we might describe those colours and their meaning for us would often be culturally bound, but that should not deter us from attempting this exercise.

Don Bosco rarely thought in abstract categories. We can be sure that colours, for him, would not be mere ideas, but ways of seeing, or ways of describing things. As a born storyteller, Don Bosco would often evoke colour. Once, in a sermon he gave on the Feast of St Cecilia, he described a scene as follows:

Cecilia kneeling in prayer and a resplendent angel standing at her side, filling the room with light. The beauty of his countenance, the splendor and wealth of his apparel, and his multicolored wings defied description. The upper part of his wings showed a marvelous, superhuman interlacing of plumes, while the lower part sparkled with colors like a rainbow.

— BM VI, 644

We can imagine Salesian formation as learning to see with more colours than before. At first, we might have seen things in terms of success or failure (black and white). But through prayer, community interaction, study, mission... we gain a vision of richer hues. We can see grace where once we saw difficulty, possibilities where once we saw only limitations, and Christ, where once all we saw was another person. We can look at the FSDB as a document which identifies the colours with which the gospel to the young paints the face of Christ, as reflected in Don Bosco. And we can consider formation as learning to reflect these colours ourselves.

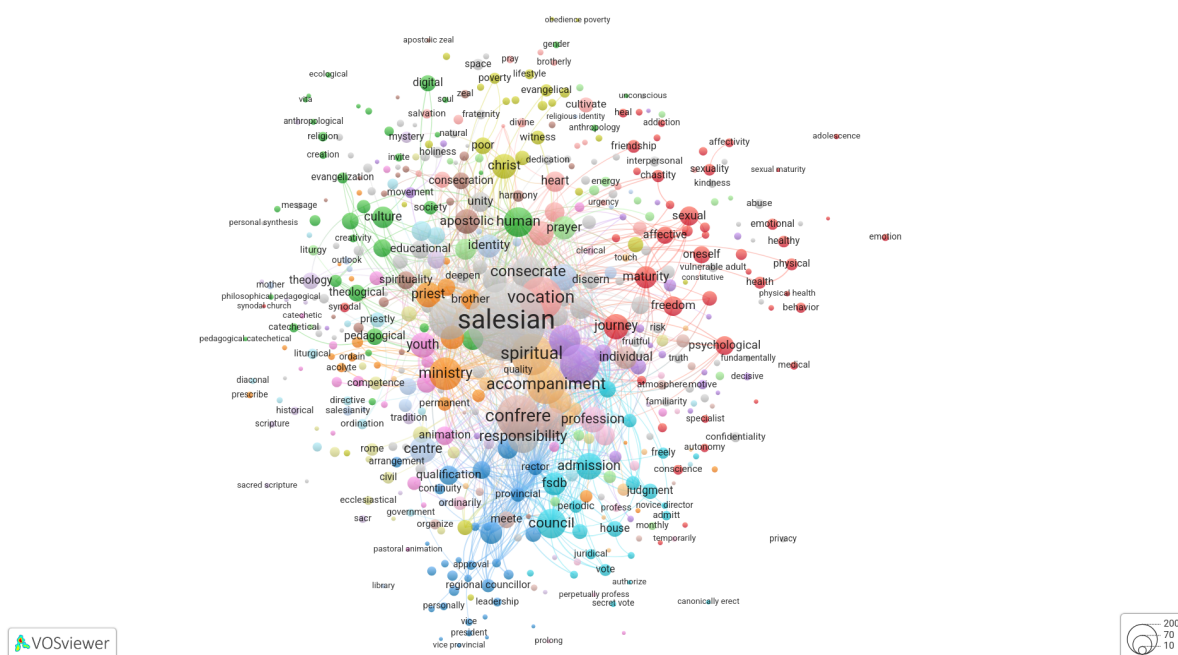
We do not merely *define* formation; we *imagine* it. The conceptual metaphors we discover in this text shape what we notice, what we value, and ultimately how we are formed.

The imagination delights in colour, but before we begin to paint, it is helpful to understand the palette. Conceptual analysis is not the enemy of imagination. It is rather the preparation of the canvas, the mixing of the pigments, the understanding of how colours interact. Only then can the imagination paint freely.

In all that follows we move between conceptual discussion, biblical reflection, poetry, prayer, and practical formation. They are not different projects but successive moments in a single pedagogical process. Before entering imaginatively into the *Ratio*, it is worth attending to the conceptual metaphors that quietly shape its language. We can use appropriate digital tools to do this. Once these conceptual metaphors are recognised, they become far more fruitful for contemplation, prayer, and ultimately for formation.

Seeing through Don Bosco's eyes

Imagine Don Bosco in his mind's eye, taking in the entire FSDB in a single 'blink':



Yes, this is a visual map of all co-occurring terms in the FSDB which, if we were to drill down into it further (and we will!) would enable us to grasp what the Holy Spirit (who is not restricted to the period from 1815-1888, nor to 10 million colours!) had in mind when he 'raised up Don Bosco' (C. 1). The colours in this map, by the way, are simply the choice of the software that has produced it. They have no significance other than to help separate and identify clusters of terms found in the FSDB.

An analysis of the FSDB using Google's analytical tools tells us, unsurprisingly, that the phrase 'Don Bosco' (which it calls a bigram or two-word phrase) is the most frequent co-occurrence in the FSDB. The tools express this in quite sophisticated ways, for example:

- a **PMI** of 0.87: PMI means *Pointwise Mutual Information* or how strongly two words associate compared to how they would by chance only. The closer this score is to '1', the stronger the association.
- a **Jaccard similarity score** of 0.32: this score measures the overlap between the contexts for two words. In this case, the contexts of the words making up the bigram 'Don Bosco' overlap in 32% of the entire text.

Or, to put it simply: Don Bosco is central to the FSDB!

All well and good, you say, but MY human eye can't read all that tiny writing on the above map. Can you make it clearer?

Yes, bit by bit. Let's focus on just a part of that map, and you can get an idea then of what we can see:

Topic 0	Topic 1	Topic2	Topic3	Topic 4	Topic 5
loving-kindness kindness	retreat annual retreat monthly recollection	conflict- management management conflict	digital media media	formation provincial community rector province confrere study interprovincial practical initial formation	spiritual guide freedom novice personal spiritual spiritual guide mutual external internal environment

Topic 6	Topic 7	Topic 8	Topic 9	Topic 10
involvement active active involvement	Salesian life pastoral mission ministry faith live human consecrate dialogue	sacred scripture scripture	vocational discernment growth indication journey maturity profession process sexual counter-indication	tendency homosexual

Topic 11	Topic 12	Topic 13
vulnerable adult adult	meaningful interpersonal meaningful relationship interpersonal relationship	achievement indicator indicator achievement

This is a machine at work, of course, and we need to bring our own knowledge of the Salesian formation ‘domain’ into play to see if these are topics we would like to work with. And because it is a computerised effort, we note immediately that there are 14 topics, the first being o! Computer languages like to start with o rather than 1.

To see if the above approach can be productive for us (you the reader will eventually make this decision), let’s simply take the very first topic ‘o’: *loving-kindness/kindness*.

Loving-kindness

Our tools have identified this first topic by pointing to key extracts from the document:

Article 62: ...Starting afresh from the Preventive System – summed up in the phrase ‘reason, religion and *loving kindness*’ – is not so much a strategy as a process of spiritual renewal. It is going back to our charismatic roots, especially to that most inspiring testament that Don Bosco left us in the letter from Rome of May 1884.... [*Plenty to think about here: kindness as more than just a strategy, and the invitation to re-read the letter from Rome*].

Article 66: ... It is not enough to be among young people with *kindness* and a philanthropic disposition, but to contemplate the presence of Christ acting in them and among them. (GC29 36).

[Helps reinforce what was said about kindness not just being a strategy, reminding us that it is because Christ is in every person we encounter. An invitation to re-read GC29].

Article 91: To live the Salesian vocation in a fraternal community and in an educative and pastoral relationship calls for sexual and affective maturity, which is not unrelated to the *loving kindness* and the family spirit of our charism. The Salesian is inspired by Don Bosco whose love was that of ‘a father, brother and friend, able to draw out friendship in return’ (C 15). *[We note that our sexual maturity is not unrelated to loving kindness. If we go back to the focused portion of the map we saw earlier on, we can see this connection mapped visually (the word ‘kindness’ is partly chopped off, but it is there with the terms chastity, sexual, affective)...].*

Article 113: ...Like Christ, we are able to give of ourselves joyfully, without reserve, in freedom of heart and with *loving kindness*... We integrate our need to love and to be loved into a capacity for friendship and fraternal sharing and into the *loving kindness* of the Preventive System... *[This is in the context of the chaste Christ, so helps reinforce what was said in both 66 and 91, but perhaps also 62 where it speaks of the Preventive System].*

Article 135: ...We encounter them ‘at their present stage of freedom’ (C 38) and help them open up to new horizons through suitable proposals, within relationships marked by *loving kindness*. *[‘Them’ is surely the young people we encounter, but not only. The reference in this number is to the more extensive term ‘individuals’].*

Article 367: ...He learns to listen, be well-mannered and treat everyone with *kindness*, avoiding prejudices and attempts to manipulate. *[This is a reference to the prenovice, so treating everyone with kindness now becomes a positive and identifying sign of a Salesian vocation from the very outset of the vocational journey].*

Article 405: ...He ‘must be a man of prudence with spiritual and Salesian experience and an up-to-date knowledge of practical psychology and youth problems. He should be able to relate easily to people, engage in dialogue, and inspire confidence in the novices by his *kindness*’ (C 112). *[Kindness is also an essential quality of the novice director. He models what we just saw as an important vocational sign in the candidate for Salesian life].*

Article 490: ...The cultivation of self-giving, *kindness* and patience allows one to grow, to form a solid personality, and to develop the ability to face the difficulties that come one’s way. *[This is in reference to the practical trainee, well along the path of formation and at a particular stage where life can throw up some curve balls, some problems. Kindness will be tested! Note how it is cleverly linked to self-giving, patience].*

Article 563: ...He therefore fosters in himself the human qualities that attract others to him and endow him with greater credibility, such as *kindness*, affability, loyalty, fidelity to his word, respect for persons, openness to the ideas of others, restraint, discretion and the joyful approach to life found in the optimistic humanism of St Francis de Sales (C 17). He develops the qualities that facilitate dialogue with others, such as humility, *kindness*, trust, a willingness to listen, empathy, understanding and charity in conversation. *[We are now talking about the future Salesian priest. Note how kindness is part of his credibility, on the one hand, and also a quality that facilitates dialogue, on the other].*

Article 758: ...It is important to ascertain that candidates have a clear sexual identification and the sexual and affective maturity necessary for living the Salesian vocation with serenity and coherence.

These are essential conditions for one who is called to live a chaste life in the educative mission and to express it in the style of the Preventive System, which is based on *loving kindness* and openness. [*Again reinforcing something that was mentioned earlier, in 91*].

Article 799: ... c) A growing *loving kindness* in one's lifestyle, giving to one's relationships the affability and gentleness characteristic of the Preventive System. [*The context here is important. Kindness is now linked to the grace of unity*].

Article 927 (Appendix 9): Attitudes: *kindness* [*Kindness is identified as an attitude to be on display during the postnovitiate phase*].

It would be obvious by now that if we take this as an example of how to approach each of the topics, working systematically through some of the key terms in each topic area, we will find not only plenty of stimulating thoughts to ponder and 'deepen', but, and this is important, we will also get a sense of how the FSDB works 'organically'. It has resulted from thousands (quite literally) of contributions from around the Salesian world, contributions that have been sifted through various processes and mechanisms over a number of years. We begin to realise how it all holds together, each concept or notion being constantly reinforced and elaborated.

But do these topics, as listed in the previous tables of 14 topics, cover all the essentials of the FSDB? No, not really. Take another look at the earlier focused map:



See the word 'heart' there up at the top? And note its colour... pink. There are other unlabelled pink circles below, increasing in size, heading for the large labelled one which is 'vocation'. Surely this will be a productive term to explore, one that did not appear as such in the list of topics. Let's do that one now, but not just as a topic, since it did not appear as such in our list, but as a powerful metaphor.

Heart



There are no fewer than 86 separate instances of ‘heart’ scattered throughout the FSDB (this includes hearts, -hearted, heartfelt). Most are metaphorical expressions. A simple search of ‘heart’ in the text will turn up at least the following:

- Sometimes the heart is thought of as a thing that can be ‘reached’, ‘touched’, ‘found’ (way to the heart) or can be ‘open’ or ‘undivided’ or ‘free’; or it has ‘transparency’.
- At other times it has certain qualities like ‘wisdom’, ‘desires’, or can be described adjectivally as ‘missionary’, ‘pastoral’, ‘Marian’.
- Occasionally the heart becomes a container where God’s seed can be placed, or from which we can draw resources.
- Or it becomes a place, especially the centre of something or someone: ‘at the heart of’, ‘in the heart of’.
- The heart is often conceived as a person in need of ‘conversion’, being ‘transformed’ or ‘formed’. Or it has an ‘attitude’. Or we can ‘know’ it. Or it is someone we can follow: ‘after the heart of’, ‘with the heart of’. It can sum up the person: ‘the whole of one’s being, heart, mind and soul’.
- And on yet other occasions, it is the real, physical heart that is being spoken of, as In Jesus’ ‘pure heart’, ‘a body and a heart like Jesus’, or Mary who ponders in her heart.

We could begin by noting that three of the important ‘incipit’ texts (by which we mean the Scriptural texts that introduce chapters of the FSDB), mention ‘heart’!

- Chapter 1 (The Ratio): *‘I will run the way of your commands; you will give freedom to my heart.’* (Ps 119:32)
- Chapter 5 (Discernment and accompaniment): *‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?’* (Lk 24:32)
- Chapter 12 (Admissions): *‘Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen...”* (Acts 1:24)

This is already a useful insight, and one that should motivate us to spend a little time meditating on those three texts, especially as they are placed at the beginning, middle and end of the FSDB.

We could also consider what are called the ‘collocates’ of heart in the FSDB, or the other words that are consistently closely linked with ‘heart’. It is usually considered that any word within 5 to the right or 5 to the left of a term can be considered a collocate. If we list the collocates of ‘heart’ we find the following. The number in parentheses is the count (either to the right or left of the word ‘heart’):

- young (7)
- Salesian (7)
- God (5)
- Don Bosco (4)
- open (4)
- mind (4)
- way (3)
- vocation (3)

- self (3)
- religious (3)
- poverty (3)
- people (3)
- mission (3)
- Jesus Christ (3)

There are many others at lower levels of count: 2, and 1, but let's just stay with the stronger collocations at 3 and above. From the above list, the following observations might be made:

1. "Heart" as centre of the Salesian pastoral and spiritual identity

Collocates: Salesian (7), Don Bosco (4), young (7), people (3), mission (3)

In the *Ratio*, the heart is often used to describe:

- the pastoral heart, shaped by the charism of Don Bosco (Preventive System, art. 62; educative and pastoral dimension, art. 465)
- the educator's heart for the young (Predilection for the young, art. 131)
- the apostolic heart formed for mission (The unifying power of love, art. 137)

This matches the highest-frequency collocates.

The *Ratio* emphasises formation along the following lines:

- 'after the heart of Don Bosco' e.g. for the specific formation of the Brother (art. 532)
- 'a heart that is free' (Vocation, mission, formation, art. 74)
- 'our founder's missionary heart' (The missionary dimension, art. 70)

The collocates strongly reflect these emphases.

2. Christological–theological configuration of the heart

Collocates: God (5), Jesus Christ (3), open (4), mind (4)

The *Ratio* speaks of:

- transforming the heart of the Salesian into the image of the heart of Christ (The formative power of the grace of unity, art. 139)
- transparency of heart (in other words 'open') (Evangelical counsels, art. 496)
- transformation of mind and heart (Spiritual discernment, art. 566; the obedient Christ, art. 111)
- the whole of one's being, heart, mind and soul (Formation is lifelong, art. 45)

Thus, the collocates point to themes central to initial and ongoing formation:

- spiritual life (Personal spiritual accompaniment, art. 199)
- interiority (Formative power of the grace of unity, art. 139)
- openness to God's initiative (Formation is lifelong, art. 45)
- affective maturity, after the model of the chaste Christ (The chaste Christ, art. 113)

3. Heart as locus of vocational growth and religious identity

Collocates: vocation (3), religious (3), poverty (3), self (3)

These terms correspond closely to core formation goals in the *Ratio*:

- a formation that reaches the heart (Keys to reading the *Ratio*, art. 7)

- configuration to Christ (Keys to reading the *Ratio*, art. 7)
- formation in the evangelical counsels, especially poverty (which often has strong ‘heart’ language: detachment of heart, freedom of heart) (The poor Christ, art. 112)
- growth in self-knowledge, self-donation, undivided heart and inner freedom (Purification of motives, art. 790; vocation and formation, art. 58; educative and pastoral dimension, art. 572)

The *Ratio*’s anthropology emphasises the unity of:

- identity
- vocation
- affectivity

Hence, ‘heart’ frequently appears in contexts of interior formation.

4. Pastoral charity as the unifying core (winning hearts)

Across the *Ratio*, ‘pastoral charity’ is defined as:

- the centre of the Salesian spirit (Our reading of the gospel, art. 28)
- rooted in the heart of Christ (Spiritual dimension, art. 537; the formative power of the grace of unity, art. 139)
- expressed in educational love for the young (Educative and pastoral dimension, art. 456; winning hearts, art. 31)

The collocates cluster around precisely this triad:

- Christological (God, Jesus)
- Charismatic (Don Bosco, Salesian)
- Pastoral/educational (young, people, mission)

5. Affective–educational dynamic: openness, relationship, integration

Collocates: open (4), mind (4), self (3), way (3)

These usage contexts fit well with the *Ratio*’s formation priorities:

- forming an open and welcoming heart in the educator (An animating style, art. 135)
- integrating heart and mind in discernment (Spiritual discernment, art. 566)
- arriving at “wisdom of the heart” (Intellectual dimension, art. 567)
- affective maturity as a prerequisite for vocational commitment (Our apostolic consecration, art. 91)

The *Ratio* also stresses that Salesian educators are:

- ‘passionate people who know how to love’ – heart by implication (Formation to affective and sexual maturity, art. 92)
- capable of relationships (Human and fraternal dimension, art. 410)
- open to ongoing formation (Formation is lifelong, art. 45)

Overall conclusion

The collocates point to:

1. The centrality of pastoral charity
— the ‘heart’ as the seat of Salesian apostolic love.
2. Configuration to Christ

— the heart formed in the image of Christ the Good Shepherd.

3. Charismatic identity

— the heart shaped according to Don Bosco, Salesian history, and the mission to youth.

4. Vocational and religious growth

— the heart as locus of discernment, interior freedom, and evangelical poverty.

5. Affective and relational maturity

— openness, integration of heart and mind, self-knowledge.

Metaphor is obviously a productive approach to the FSDB. Let's take an entire chapter and analyse it in terms of metaphor. We might be able to gain some very rich insights from this kind of exercise.

Metaphor

What follows is just one example of how we might analyse the metaphorical structure of a chapter of the FSDB.

We are choosing Chapter two: *Our identity in the Church*. From Chapter three onwards we seem to have a major metaphor anyway, the journey. So by choosing Chapter two, we can start without any presuppositions and see what happens.

CHAPTER TWO: OUR IDENTITY IN THE CHURCH

1. Overall metaphorical logic of the chapter

Chapter 2 is not metaphorically random. It is built around a small number of governing **metaphor systems** that recur, overlap, and reinforce one another. These metaphors are not decorative; they are **identity-constituting**.

At the highest level, the chapter constructs Salesian identity through:

FORMATION AS CONFORMATION IN RELATIONAL SPACE

Everything else serves this.

2. Primary metaphor clusters

A. Organic / bodily metaphors

(Identity as life, growth, unity, embodiment)

These are foundational and largely biblical.

Key expressions:

- until Christ be formed in you
- living members of his Body
- living Rule
- living memorials
- our hearts are unified by grace
- inner fire
- seeds of goodness sown in the hearts of the young
- humus from which formation arises

A conceptual metaphor can be derived from the above:

SALESIAN LIFE IS A LIVING ORGANISM

Implications of this:

- Identity is received, not fabricated.
- Growth is gradual, organic, vulnerable.
- Unity is physiological (heart, body), not merely juridical.
- Formation is cultivation, not training.

This aligns strongly with:

- Pauline ecclesiology (Body of Christ)
- Don Bosco's affective and relational pedagogy

- The Salesian emphasis on heart over structure

B. Relational / familial metaphors

(Identity as belonging, generation, accompaniment)

Key expressions:

- family spirit
- fatherhood
- mother and teacher
- brothers
- sons and daughters
- being generated in the *sequela Christi* or following of Christ
- fathers, pastors and guides
- Marian heart of the Church

A conceptual metaphor can be derived from the above:

FORMATION IS GENERATION WITHIN A FAMILY

Implications of this:

- Authority is parental, not managerial.
- Formation happens through presence and relationship.
- Community is not instrumental but constitutive.
- Mary functions as archetypal relational mediator.

Notably:

- Mary is not framed juridically or doctrinally but maternal-formative.
- The Salesian brother is explicitly an icon of communion.

C. Journey / movement metaphors

(Vocation as dynamic, responsive, even risky)

Key expressions:

- following Christ
- paths
- footsteps
- frontiers
- outposts
- peripheries
- missionary wave
- lifelong journey
- initial enthusiasm → gradual conformation

A conceptual metaphor can be derived from the above:

VOCATION IS A JOURNEY SHARED WITH OTHERS

Implications of this:

- Stability comes from direction, not immobility.
- Risk and change are normal, even necessary.

- Formation is never ‘completed’.
- History and biography matter.

This allows the text to:

- Legitimate adaptation and inculturation
- Address rapid cultural change without identity loss
- Frame obedience as movement rather than submission

D. Light / vision metaphors

(Discernment as seeing rightly)

Key expressions:

- seeing with the eyes of Don Bosco
- look attentively
- discern pathways
- recognize potential
- luminous way
- epiphany and revelation
- reading the gospel

A conceptual metaphor can be derived from the above:

FORMATION IS LEARNING HOW TO SEE

Implications of this:

- Formation is perceptual before it is operational.
- The founder provides a hermeneutical lens.
- Discernment precedes strategy.
- Young people are revelatory subjects, not objects.

This metaphor cluster is crucial for:

- Justifying shared formation
- Grounding synodality
- Framing youth as ‘holy ground’

E. Fire- ardour-passion metaphors

(Interior motivation and authenticity)

Key expressions:

- inner fire
- ardour of charity
- zeal
- inflame
- passionate about Jesus
- ecstasy of action

A conceptual metaphor can be derived from the above:

AUTHENTIC FORMATION IS IGNITED FROM WITHIN

Implications of this:

- Motivation is affective and spiritual, not merely ethical.
- Activity is evaluated by interior source.
- Contemplation and action are fused, not balanced.

This is deeply Salesian and explicitly tied to:

- *Da mihi animas*
- Francis de Sales
- ‘ecstasy of action’

3. *Secondary but important metaphors*

A. Building / space

- build community
- walls vs pathways
- spaces where the Gospel can thrive
- alternate spaces

Community as inhabited space, not structure.

B. Mission as gift / entrustment

- mission is given
- entrusted
- initiative is God’s

Guards against functionalism.

C. Formation as shaping

- conformed
- shaped
- model lives
- assimilate
- configured

Classic formational language, but softened by organic imagery.

4. *What is striking by its absence*

Equally important is what the chapter does **not** foreground metaphorically:

- Very little military imagery (despite ‘frontiers’)... so not Ignatian in that sense!
- Minimal bureaucratic/juridical metaphor... this has been deliberately avoided.
- Limited economic/managerial framing... likewise avoided
- Technology appears only as context, not a governing metaphor, though this may change as we move on to other chapters.

This preserves:

- A theological rather than institutional self-understanding
- Continuity with Don Bosco’s affective pedagogy
- Resistance to technocratic formation models

The aim of this kind of conceptual analysis is not to close down meaning but to open the imagination. By understanding the metaphors through which the *Ratio* speaks, we become more capable of praying them, inhabiting them, and allowing them to shape our lives.

Praying and inhabiting our metaphors

Scripture abounds with imagery and metaphor: ‘The Lord is my shepherd...’; ‘I am the Bread of life’; ‘Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a member of it.’

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* uses a metaphor to define prayer, by writing, ‘Prayer is the life of the new heart’ (§2697). Therefore, we need to understand how prayer is ‘life’ and a ‘new heart’. The *Ratio* takes up this challenge when it writes: ‘Formation is not, therefore, a phase or a part of Salesian life, but rather a dimension that embraces the whole of life in such a way that prayer, fraternal life, apostolic commitment and the living out of the evangelical counsels all become formative, a response to the Lord who calls us every day and always’ (art. 74). The first *Lectio* (for Chapter 1) speaks to us of newness of heart: ‘the concept of the heart being freed actually reflects a deep desire for spiritual transformation and a willingness to be changed by God, for the heart in biblical language represents the innermost being of a person, including his thoughts, emotions, and will.’

Metaphors shape our thinking. We build our worldview through them. Hence the importance of ‘pastoral discernment, which is the ability to read situations in the light of faith through prolonged interaction with the challenges presented by the many worldviews of our time, the natural and human sciences and technology, and contemporary globalized culture. Teachers will not, therefore, be pure academics but people capable of pastoral discernment, with the ability to “make philosophy come alive” by allowing it to “light up” the experience of their students’ (art. 448).

‘Configuration to Christ the Good Shepherd’ (cf. art. 564) and ‘identification with the Church, the Body of Christ’ (cf. art. 565), require us to be drawn into the Lord and into the Church via these two metaphors. Scripture has created those metaphors, but as we inhabit them over time, these same metaphors create us.

Metaphors are capable of expressing the inexpressible. When we reach out to God in prayer, especially through meditation, what is our prayer like at that moment? Perhaps it is more like poetry than prose, since it is the Spirit praying within us ‘with groans that words cannot express’ (Rom 8:26). Metaphor becomes our form of intimate prayer: ‘Salesian meditation, rooted in an understanding of prayer as friendship with Christ, encourages us to focus on the person of Jesus, especially his passion’ (art. 411).

Metaphor cultivates prayer as personal relationship with God. Scripture is rich in metaphors. The Church has a treasury of metaphors. Don Bosco was a master of metaphor, clearly appreciating the value of Aristotle’s comment that ‘to learn easily is naturally pleasant to all people, and words signify something, so whatever words create knowledge in us are the pleasantest... Metaphor most brings about learning’ (*Rhetoric*, 1410b). That very much describes Don Bosco the educator. And then there are his dreams, and his *Memoirs*. Pietro Braido, speaking of these, says that ‘the parable and the message’ come first and ‘above the history’ (‘“Memorie” del futuro’, in *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 11, pp. 97-127).

Prayer as a Prism: Reading the Ratio

Introduction

Was Don Bosco a Romantic? We can leave the answer to scholars and connoisseurs of the ‘literary’ Don Bosco! What we can say with certainty is that he was born in or about the year that is usually defined as the beginning of Italian Romanticism, represented by poets and novelists such as Giacomo Leopardi, Alessandro Manzoni and Silvio Pellico. We know, too, that he personally knew Silvio Pellico and was occasionally advised by him on matters of language. Pellico, like all the Romantics of his era, and not only in Italy, liked to use light and colour as symbols of love and guidance. Consider the following brief excerpt (in translation) from his ‘Canzone’, written in prison:

Thou sun! thou fount divine
Of light! the gift is thine!
O, how, beyond the gloom
That wraps my living tomb,
Through forest, garden, mead, and grove,
All nature drinks the ray
Of glorious day, –
Inebriate with love!

Two English Romantic poets of the same era who were, in their own way, also in love with Italy and Italian Romanticism, were William Blake and John Keats. ‘That God is colouring Newton does show’, Blake once wrote in a poem he called ‘On Art and Artists. To Venetian Artists XXIII’, going on to say, ‘And the Devil is a black outline, all of us know.’

Yet a little further on in that poem he adds,

Outline! There’s no outline, there’s no such thing:
All is chiaroscuro, poco-pen – it’s all colouring!’

Indeed an interesting way of dispatching the devil, or was he really suggesting that the devil is still there, but more subtly... no hard outlines, but still there in the murky shades. And the reference to Newton? In 1666 Isaac Newton was the first to ‘trap’ the rainbow by sending light through a prism. John Keats (who, incidentally, died in Rome) reacted negatively to this idea, feeling that Newton was unweaving the rainbow, destroying its poetry.

Let us side with Blake’s belief that ‘God is colouring’ and suggest a response to this colouring God, in prayer, especially as we read the renewed Salesian *Ratio*, which reflects on prayer at every turn. But we can also side with Keats inasmuch as we can and should use the possibilities of poetic language to explore the beauty of the rainbow and everything else ‘that God is colouring’, our lives especially.

The Liturgy of the Hours can also give us a lead:

When early cock begins to crow
And everything from sleep awakes,
New life and hope spring up again
While out of darkness, colour breaks.
(A morning hymn in the Liturgy of the Hours)

A little rhyme from an American children's book classic helps us realise what colour might offer us:

The colors live between black and white
In a land we know best by sight.
But knowing best isn't everything,
For colors dance and colors sing,
And colors laugh and colors cry –
Turn off the light and colors die.
Each has a taste, each has a smell
And each has a wonderful story to tell.

(Mary O'Neill, Author, Leonard Weisgar, Illustrator, *Hailstones and Halibut Bones: Adventures in Poetry and Color*, Doubleday 1961.)

There are times when we want to dance and sing and laugh – and cry. And the time will come, too, when we must die. Prayer belongs to all these times and moods, just as colour does. We might even find ourselves at a time and place of darkness, but just as night becomes day, we can look upon dark times as wanting to give way to the God who colours. Whatever place we are in, it can help to see it as a prism that opens up to other possibilities. Life is a prism and so many 'wavelengths' of society are focused through this prism. So much art and creativity for starters: painters, sculptors, potters, wood-burners, writers, poets, street philosophers, and Salesians... people who pay attention to life in all its manifestations. Surely people like this can be good pray-ers, since prayer is about life, including about us and God talking to one another about life – ours, and that of others.

In other words, as we read the *Ratio*, we can only but see the importance that prayer plays in it. So what if we were to regard prayer as a prism refracting the light that shines through and from this wonderful document? We can ask ourselves how prayer refracts (yes, refracts, not reflects) the many themes so central to Salesian formation. And we can allow each colour, through poetry and image, to serve as a point of entry into various prayer traditions or emphases.

Beige

Finding God in the ordinary

Beige: attention to daily fidelity, noticing, gratitude, details...

We gladly employ the ordinary moments of formation laid down by the Constitutions and Regulations: meditation, listening to the Word, personal and community prayer, the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, Marian devotion, the monthly recollection, the friendly talk with the rector, personal spiritual accompaniment, faith sharing, personal reading, the personal plan of life and the community day, together with all the initiatives promoted by the province, the region, the Church and society.

— Ratio, no. 78

Beige is often regarded as dull, ordinary, and yet it is the colour of what is sometimes overlooked. Sand, bread, clay, parchment, unbleached linen, all things we take for granted... we can think of them all as beige. So too with personal, even community daily prayer. Any daily activity can end up 'beige'!

BEIGE

Beige is the colour that nobody sees,
Yet beige fills the world with remarkable ease.
It's biscuit and barley, dry grasses and hay,
The dust on the road at the close of the day.

Beige is old parchment, a weathered stone wall,
The pages of books that have outlived us all.
It's oatmeal and bread crust, a well-worn shoe,
The quiet little prayer that carries you through.

Beige is the driftwood cast up by the sea,
The shell on the shoreline, the bark of a tree.
It's linen and canvas, unbleached and plain,
The scent of the earth after soft autumn rain.

While beige lacks the splendour of ruby or gold,
It shelters the stories that quietly unfold.
The grand and the glorious may dazzle the eye,
But beige keeps the hearth warm when bright colours die.

For beige knows of waiting, of patience and care,
Of tending to house chores and saying a prayer.
Of hands that keep working though no one may praise,
Of lives that bring goodness through ordinary days.

So bless all that's humble, unnoticed and true,
The commonplace moments around me and you.
And grant us the grace, when bright seasons have fled,
To find you in beige as in purple or red.

LET THE ARTIST TEACH US TO PRAY

The Bishop said that we ought imitate painters and sculptors, who produce their works by dint of many a stroke of the pencil or chisel; if we would form a deep impression in our hearts we must repeat the same thing many times.

— Jean-Pierre Camus, *The Spirit of St Francis de Sales*

It seems that Saint Francis de Sales was not alone in conceiving of spiritual life in artistic terms. Someone much closer to us in time said,

He is, in a sense, at the point of my pen, my pick, my paintbrush, my needle – and my heart and my thought. It is by carrying to its natural completion the stroke, the line, the stitch I am working on that I shall lay hold on that ultimate end towards which my will at its deepest level tends.

— Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*

Think of prayer as a way of seeing things, and we can borrow from the artist's special way of seeing things. This way of seeing involves at least five components, five perceptual skills:

1. edges (including emotional ones)
2. spaces (including negative ones)
3. relationships (human and divine)
4. light and shade (joy and sorrow)
5. everything together (which is more than the sum of its parts).

What I am before the Creator, that is my prayer. The light-giving gaze of God penetrates to where no other glance can reach. He sees me and teaches me to see myself as I am. To pray, therefore, is to feel and welcome this paternal gaze of God, without obstructing it in a vain effort to do everything by myself. (J.E. Vecchi, AGC 374 19)

— Ratio, callout in the section on the 'Spiritual dimension' (no. 411 or thereabouts.)

SOME PRAYER PROMPTS

The Spirit does not usually follow extraordinary ways but speaks through the attitudes and aspirations, intentions and motivations that are perceived in the daily rhythm of life, in interaction with people, in dealing with reality, in the ordinary course of events and in the ability to face and overcome difficulties, in fraternal life and participation in the shared mission, and in the daily experience of prayer.

— Ratio, no. 691

- Starting point: place yourself in God's presence: 'O God, come to my assistance, O Lord make haste to help me' (4th century prayer, but we know it best from the Liturgy of the Hours).
- Develop the inner eye.
- Where was God in the ordinary events of today?
- What have I overlooked as being too familiar, so not really recognised?
- What humble task lies before me in the present?
- Can I receive this ordinary moment as a gift?
- Keep it simple: the publican had one sentence: 'God, have pity on me, a sinner.' (Lk 18:13)
- We all have a mother. Jesus had one too. Her name was Mary. Her cousin Elizabeth (also a mother-to-be) gave us a prayer: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. (Lk 1:42)
- Long tradition has added to Elizabeth's prayer: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.
- Prayer grows out of life, experience – and flows back into it.

Purple

Prayer from the centre of our lives

Purple: from the centre to the heights

Don Bosco lived a simple, practical and profound relationship with God. He gives us the example of a constantly prayerful attitude, the ability to live and work in the presence of God and to direct all things to his glory... Going beyond occasional dialogue, our prayer strives to become unitive love: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal 2:20; AGC 338 16).

— Ratio, no. 115

Purple tends towards the mystical, but it also has its roots in solid reality. We can think of it as a unitive factor: born of the marriage of red and of blue. A colour of balance, composed and secure.

PURPLE

Purple's a colour that creeps in at night –
A lavender moment of spiritual light.
A regal shade in dusk's embrace,
Whispers of night in velvet lace.

There's imperial purple; it's mystical too.
The way to get purple is red mixed with blue.
There's purple plums and quartz amethyst.
There's a purple bruise when struck with a fist.

Jesus wore purple when Pilate said,
'Here is the man! Do you want this one dead?'
The purple feeling is hard to explain,
For purple speaks both of glory and pain.

Mauve and magenta, even puce can pose
As purple dye, or as purple prose.
Advent is purple, so too is Lent –
Liturgical times to be abstinent.

Yet the timbre of purple's a wondrous thing:
Where the fire and the calm together sing,
A colour that gathers what life rends apart,
Bringing peace to the mind and strength to the heart.

Purple is wisdom grown patient with years,
Tempered by joy and acquainted with tears,
Rooted in earth yet aspiring above,
A kingdom of balance established in love.

THE JESUS PRAYER

Don Bosco's life itself is paradigmatic for our following of Jesus and for Salesian formation. Don Bosco is for us not merely someone we admire but our pattern of life, a luminous way of following Jesus, one who reveals to us the fatherhood of God and generates us in the sequela Christi. We cannot be satisfied with knowing his history and activities, but we need to rediscover the secret of his continuous union with God, the spiritual path that led him to live the grace of unity.

— Ratio, no. 28

The Christian Church is said to breathe with two lungs, one most of us know as 'Western Christianity', while the other we may not know so well: Eastern Christianity, largely Orthodox.

From the East, and going back to the Desert Fathers and Mothers comes a simple prayer, the 'Jesus Prayer'.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.

Those who practise this prayer recognise it in many passages of the Gospel where men and women call on Jesus for mercy. For example, the Canaanite woman's 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon' (Mt 15:22), or the ten lepers who said, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' (Lk 17:11-19), or Bartimaeus, the blind man, who said, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' (Mk 10:46-48), or the man who said 'Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water.' (Mt 17:14-15).

This is a prayer from the heart. It is a prayer of belief – Jesus is Lord, the Christ. It can be repeated over and over again to discipline the wandering mind and fill it with joy. It makes God present to us, helps us see the world the way Jesus saw it (as deserving of great mercy or long-suffering love). And imagine the power of the prayer if we occasionally replace 'me' with someone else!

SOME PRAYER PROMPTS

‘Meeting the Lord gets us moving, urges us to leave aside self-absorption. A relationship with the Lord is not static, nor is it focussed on self. “Because when we put Christ at the centre of our life, we ourselves don’t become the centre! The more that you unite yourself to Christ and he becomes the centre of your life, the more he leads you out of yourself, leads you from making yourself the centre and opens you to others”’ (Pope Francis)

— Ratio no. 94

- Father, into your hands I place my spirit.
- Purify intentions: My God, I offer you this day, now, all the good that I shall do, and promise to accept, for love of you, all the difficulties that I shall meet. Help me to conduct myself this day in a manner pleasing to you.
- Here is the man! A parish priest found an old peasant just sitting in the church each day in front of the crucifix. When asked what he did he replied: ‘I just look at him. He looks at me and we are both happy.’
- Grace has its times and seasons. Advent (4 weeks before Christmas) and Lent (4 weeks before Easter), are special times of grace.
- Feast and Fast: feast when something good happens? Of course! Let fast be preparation. We need both in life; it cannot be all feast or all fast.
- Jesus prayer for his disciples (Jn 17) so let him pray for you.
- There is a seeing which comes before word and which in a sense is wordless. That too can be prayer.
- God loves the people I don’t love, can’t bring myself to love. Just accept it.
- 1. Inhale your own pain and confusion. Fill it with love and compassion and exhale the energy deep within you. 2. Inhale the pain and confusion of others. Replace it with warmth and compassion. Exhale this energy. 3. Move your focus now to your community and the young people you are working for and do the same as above. 4. Finally, shift your focus to the wider world. Inhale... Exhale...

Red

Prayer involving head, heart and hands

Red: blood, fire, passion, courage, prophetic prayer, the gifts of the Spirit...

Our prayer is woven from the recognition of the primacy of grace and is rooted in a personal relationship of friendship with Jesus (leiturgia), from the desire to make it apostolic (kerygma) and at the service of charity (diakonia) through the witness of one's faith (martyria) (AGC 394 25). It draws us out of ourselves towards the Father and towards our brothers and sisters in a single movement of love.

— Ratio, no. 116

Red is easily associated with blood, fire, passion. In liturgical terms it is associated with the fire of the Holy Spirit, the passion of Christ and the martyrdom of those who have given their lives for the faith. In moments of trial, red reminds us of bravery and witness.

RED

'You predict the weather', so Jesus said,
'By sunrise or sunset whenever they're red.'
But they could not interpret the subtle warning,
That he was the sign, not the eve or the morning.

Red are the tongues of Pentecost fire.
Red is the hellish funeral pyre.
Red is a symbol of hearts in love.
Red is the planet Mars up above.

Red is the colour martyrs wear,
Not cloth alone but witness rare;
Their blood, once spilled by fear and hate,
Sows seeds no evil can frustrate.

Love is like a red, red rose,
Its colour and fragrance everyone knows.
The boldest political colour is red:
On flags and maps as empires spread.

Red fights with blue on electoral maps,
Cardinals wear it, and paupers perhaps
Are 'in the red', 'broke', we could say,
When fortune and money have slipped away.

Christ's body was broken, his blood for us shed,
Hung on the cross until he was dead.
Made present still in bread and wine,
the crimson gift of love divine.

THE EUCHARIST

The celebration of the Eucharist is the central act of our day. In it we give thanks to the Father, remember the salvation accomplished by the Son, commune with the Body and Blood of Christ and receive the Spirit that makes us capable of fraternal communion and renews us in our apostolic commitment... Through Eucharistic adoration and visits to the Blessed Sacrament we nourish 'our union with God and revive friendship with the Lord' (GC29 16). The Liturgy of the Hours extends the grace of the Eucharist to the various hours of the day (C 89).

— Ratio, no. 116

The Eucharist, 'the central act of our day': do we fully appreciate the richness of this central prayer act of our Catholic Faith? Here is a breakdown of its richness:

■	Opening Dialogue (we all share the Eucharistic Prayer)
■	Preface (praise and thanks for God's wondrous deeds)
■	Sanctus (<i>Holy Holy</i>) (joining the praise of heaven)
■	Praise and Thanks (continued by the priest, briefly or at some length)
■	Holy Spirit (invoked over the gifts of bread and wine)
■	Institution Narrative (the powerful words of Christ)
■	Memorial (Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension)
■	Offering (participation in the offering of Christ on the cross)
■	Holy Spirit (who gathers the Church as one)
■	Intercessions (for the Church, living and dead, local and universal)
■	Praise (to end the Eucharistic Prayer and in the concluding formula)

Sometimes people focus entirely on the central words of Jesus (the 'institution narrative') as the most important 'words of consecration', disregarding the rest as mere context. In fact, the consecration of the bread and wine occurs as a result of the whole Eucharistic Prayer because the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the link to the Paschal Mystery of the cross and resurrection are likewise key elements.

In addition, the prayer begins and ends with praise and thanksgiving to God – at the beginning, it encompasses the Preface, the *Holy Holy*... and the first part of what follows; at the end, the praise is centred on the final doxology and Amen. The invocation of the Holy Spirit is in two parts – first, the prayer asks that the bread and wine will be changed and, second, that the community will be united with Christ as his Body. Joined to the Lord's Supper narrative is the memorial of Jesus' death and resurrection which begins with the Eucharistic Acclamation. The offering which follows the memorial speaks of our participation in Christ's saving act. Finally there are prayers of intercession (for the pope, the bishops, etc.). This structure is outlined and explained in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 79. (cf: <https://nlc.catholic.org.au/blog-posts/the-eucharistic-prayer> for more on this.)

SOME PRAYER PROMPTS

Devotion to Mary is for us a strong invitation to recognize her as ‘model of prayer and pastoral love, the teacher of wisdom and the guide of our Family’, and to contemplate and imitate ‘her faith, her concern for the needy, her fidelity at the hour of the cross and her joy at the wonders wrought by the Father’ (C 92).

— Ratio, no. 117

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

If the head reminds us of intellect, mind, will, and the heart of love, passion, compassion, then the hands remind us of action, service, practicality. These are all ingredients of prayer. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, Mother of God, is our model of prayer in all these ways.

To begin to pray, we need to make ourselves aware that we stand (or sit, kneel, lie down, walk...) in God’s presence and give God our full attention. This almost certainly involves our head. We may even be seeking enlightenment for our minds.

The moment we feel moved, drawn into a conversation with God, the heart is involved, as it is in all person-to-person, heart-to-heart dialogue.

And if we are praying in Jesus’ name or as he taught us to pray (Our Father...) we are being drawn into heart-to-heart relationship with the Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

But the only way to gauge the value and importance of prayer is through observing its results: how do we act as a result of our prayer? Are we more charitable? More at peace? Do we deal better with the people with whom we live and work, day by day?

It follows that a certain amount of discipline is involved – head, heart and hands have their own kind of distinctive discipline and it also requires discipline to hold all three together.

That discipline may involve time, place, even posture. It will involve certain attitudes (e.g. perseverance, humility) and decisions.

Spend some time thinking about this.

Blue

Quiet prayer

Blue: depth, horizons, silence, trust, the prayer of quiet...

During a time of quiet, for example the monthly recollection or the annual retreat, open your heart to the Lord, asking for light and strength. In the presence of the Lord ask yourself what he wants of you. To make it practical, examine different aspects of your life as a consecrated Salesian apostle as they are described in the Constitutions.

— Ratio, no. 877

Blue seems to invite us into open spaces and to new horizons; even the universe beckons. It may invite a prayer of praise, but may also remind us that we are nothing beside this vastness. At times blue may provoke thoughts of coldness and death. Prayer can embrace any or all of the above and more besides.

BLUE

Blue is the colour of sea and sky,
A sapphire throne for the Lord on high,
The priceless choice of Renaissance blues
For the Virgin's mantle lends prayer pure hues.

Blue is the rare Lapis Lazuli
And the iris of some, while others agree
That as they grow older and dimmer of sight,
It's the inner eye piercing the indigo night.

Blue is the background colour of day.
Blue is sadness, life gone astray.
Blue is an iceberg in (Ant)arctic cold.
Blue is the corpse for whom the bell told.

You can hear blue in jokes, in blue murder too.
You can smell blue in cheese veined through and through.
The earth seen from space is a brilliant blue ball,
A vision so splendid it can't but enthrall.

Blue is the stillness before God's face,
The indigo depth of unearned grace,
Where words fall away and the will comes to rest,
Held in the silence where love knows it best.

Blue is the twilight of inward prayer,
A depth where the heart knows God is there,
No striving of mind, no fervent plea,
Just with him in silence, attentive and free.

PRAYER'S PERSONAL NAME

Following the example of Jesus and Don Bosco, the Salesian is solicitous about personal prayer, from which he draws nourishment for his life and ministry. This personal dialogue with the Lord gives authenticity, depth and quality to community prayer: 'We can form praying communities only if individually we become men of prayer'.

— Ratio, no. 116

Jesus is not just another prophet and miracle worker. He alone has seen God face to face. Which means that he alone can reveal heavenly things. John's Gospel particularly emphasised this knowledge of God right from the beginning: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God... No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known' (Jn 1:1-3, 18).

Why doesn't Jesus tell us more about God? What does God look like? What was it like when God speaks? What does heaven look like? He doesn't tell us more because this reality is beyond every category we know. Its breadth and depth is wider and deeper and more wondrous than the earthly mind can even begin to take in – something like trying to explain to a two-year-old what it's like to have a child; you simply let the child experience your love. You can't explain it. So Jesus says things like, 'As the Father loves me, so do I love you.'

And this way I get a hint of what God is like, because Jesus is the Son of God and he loves me. Spend some quiet time with Jesus.

SOME PRAYER PROMPTS

We learn to attend to our experiences – to dwell before the mystery of life, the beauty of nature, the mystery of the other, whether it is a young person or a confrere or one who shares the mission with us. We need the ‘pastoral look’ and ‘serene attentiveness’ (EG 51; LS 225–226)

— Ratio, no. 78

- ‘Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter’ (John Keats).
- You are prayer, a sacred word made flesh.
- Today’s time with the Lord may well be a time of thank-yous. It is a beautiful, easy (and sometimes much overlooked) way to pray.
- Go deep, but keep it simple. Life is ultimately good and now, this moment, is part of God’s love for you.
- Prayer is the simplest and most essential of all religious acts.
- If all you hear are curses, try quietly blessing something, someone. Blessings are for more than sneezes!
- Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.
- Somehow, I am a bond between persons, a link in the chain. Let me be your messenger of peace.
- Wherever you are – you are on hallowed ground.
- God needs a proper name for us to sense his personal presence. He has one – Jesus!
- What is contemplative prayer? St. Teresa answers: “Contemplative prayer [*oracion mental*] in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 2709)

Green

Simple, heart-to-heart colloquy

Green: growth, healing, seasons, God in all things

Don Bosco lived a simple, practical and profound relationship with God. He gives us the example of a constantly prayerful attitude, the ability to live and work in the presence of God and to direct all things to his glory. Following the example of our founder, we cultivate union with God, aware of the need to pray without ceasing in a simple heart-to-heart colloquy with the living Christ and with the Father, whom we feel close at hand (C 12).

— Ratio, no. 115

Green is a colour with strong positive symbolism, especially in the Scriptures, but we should be realistic enough to acknowledge some other, more secular applications as well: envy and jealousy ('green with envy'), inexperience ('green' meaning naïve or immature), decay and corruption (mould, stagnant water, rot). In other words, we can let green guide our 'simple, practical and profound relationship with God', which must take into account both the positives and negatives of our daily life.

GREEN

Green is the world just after the rain,
Blessed, bathed and budding again and again.
In bud and blade, in branch and tree,
Creation sings its constancy.

Green marks the season's growing grace,
God's patient work in time and place;
Not all at once does goodness flower,
But gathers strength from hour to hour.

The sound of green is the trickling stream
Of water on rocks. There's the sunlit gleam
Of the grasshopper's green: a yellowish jade.
There's refreshing green of lime lemonade.

Yet green may be found where mould has spread,
On things neglected, left for dead;
But God can bring from such decay
New life to bloom from where it lay.

Green is the novice, unprepared,
The fruit not ripe, the branch still spared;
Yet patient years and sun and rain
Can turn such greenness into gain.

Green is the colour healers know,
Of herbs and leaves that thrive and grow;
The wounded earth, the troubled mind,
Seek peace among the green to find.

HABITATS FOR PRAYER

Docile to the Spirit, we live an experience of humble, trusting and apostolic prayer in which praying and living are united. In personal and community prayer we cultivate, nourish and celebrate the ability to find God in life. From Don Bosco we learn to recognize and give thanks for the action of grace in the lives of the young; we pray for them that the Father's design may be fulfilled in them; we pray with them, becoming thus witnesses of faith and hope, and of that union with God that should be the characteristic of the sons of Don Bosco (C 95).

— Ratio, no. 114

Habitat: the place where plants, living beings naturally live or grow. The *Ratio* mentions this word in the context of the digital world. We might ask ourselves if there can be habitats for other things too – prayer, for instance.

Here are seven prayer habitats worth thinking about:

1. **Routine and ritual**: routines are comfortable, even comforting acts. They are also a way of exercising a modicum of control over the chaos of our surroundings. Perhaps we can see some of them as freeing us up for other things, like prayer. Or we can attach a brief prayer or ritual to a daily routine like getting dressed, or eating: a word of thanks (grace), the sign of the cross...
2. **Your room**: 'Listen! I stand at the door and knock: if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into his house and rest.' (Rev 3:20) Invite the Lord in and talk to him.
3. **Silence and solitude**: Silence is a great habitat for prayer. So is solitude, which is a kind of intimacy with myself. In one of his cartoons called "Sitting on the fence", Michael Leunig writes: 'Come sit down beside me I said to myself, and although it doesn't make sense, I held my own hand as a small sign of trust, and together I sat on the fence.'
4. **Time and seasons**: Time seems to have negative overtones for some, be it 'killing time', 'doing time'. But there is always time for prayer. The past has already gone, and the future is unknown, but there is always now. Let's use it. Seasons are more than spring, summer, winter, autumn. The Church gives us Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Ordinary Time.
5. **The core of our being**: the hub of calm. God within.
6. **Wherever we feel 'locked in'**: Make your 'walled city' into a new Jerusalem, a place where God's glory can shine out. (Rev 21)
7. **In the courtyard, on the playground**: the most natural habitat of all for the Salesian! Brief one-liners of intercession for this boy, that girl...

SOME PRAYER PROMPTS

Honesty and transparency in quiet prayer and in dialogue with one's guides are always helpful, growth-enabling, and even vital.

— Ratio, no. 92

- Listen! My sheep hear my voice. Can I distinguish his voice amid the confusion of voices?
- In the high country, as winter approaches, cattlemen teach cattle to hear the word SALT, and they come running.
- The shepherd carries the injured lamb on his shoulders, close to his soothing voice and beating heart.
- Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength (St Francis de Sales).
- What we need is a cup of understanding, a barrel of love and an ocean of patience.
- Whatever the situation, it is the little virtues that count: patience, humility, gentleness, simplicity, honesty, hospitality...
- 'So then, as the Holy Spirit says, "If you hear God's voice today, do not be stubborn..."'
- Give us this day our daily bread.
- Cover me, Lord, with the cloak of innocence and the robe of love. My God, do not let me appear before you stripped of good works.
- No words needed for true, deep communion. It is communion in spirit, one present to the other.

Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness.
In your compassion blot out my offence.
O wash me more and more from my guilt,
and cleanse me from my sin (Ps 51).

Yellow

Our prayer is joyful, bound up with the young

Yellow: praise, gratitude, joyful participation in life...

Salesian prayer bears the mark of apostles dedicated to the good of the young. It is rooted in life: it precedes, accompanies and follows apostolic activity; it is bound up with the young, for whom and with whom we pray. It is a prayer that is 'joyful and creative, simple and profound. It lends itself to community participation, is drawn from life experience and flows back into it' (C 86).

— Lectio, Chapter 4

Think of yellow as a prayer of delight in creation, of imagination and joy, as something youthful in its expression. And yet, like any colour, it has its 'darker' shades, so don't be put off by the somewhat raw images it might occasionally evoke... yellow fever and the like!

YELLOW

Yellow is topaz beyond compare –
Except for wisdom, and that's only fair.
Yellow's found everywhere, of course,
Like sun on the stubble or desert sands coarse.

It's the taste of custard, the feeling of fun.
Yellow's the colour of the noonday sun.
Yellow is flaxen, tawny or mellow;
The buzz of the honeybee's definitely yellow.

While yellow brings pleasure – the primrose path,
The touch of yellow brings bad aftermath:
Purulent discharges, jaundice and pee,
Febrile diseases, leprosy.

Yellow is prayer that dances and sings;
Yellow gives thanks for ordinary things.
Yellow is blessing the gifts of the day,
Finding delight along life's winding way.

So let's raise our thoughts to canary song,
Hearts of gold, the call of the gong,
Or the flash of the firefly on hot summer nights,
The soft glow of candles, of votive lights.

Yellow is prayer that rejoices and plays,
Finding small wonders in commonplace days.
It kindles the spirit, creative and free,
Recalls all the dreams of the person-to-be.

FINDING THE CENTRE

Our apostolic consecration embraces the whole of our life. It includes not only the vows but all our being and action, in a relationship to God that marks our deepest personal experience as well as all that we are called to do as pastors and educators. It is a personal experience that begins already before profession when the Lord becomes the centre of our thoughts and affections, and continues up to death, becoming more total and profound as it permeates our whole life.

— Ratio, no. 137

From the 4th century deserts comes a gift: men and women who found out how to live from the centre of their lives without strong images or ideas to guide their prayer (though we might regard the desert harshness as strong). They rid themselves, though, of all the usual thoughts of locality and place in the emptiness of the desert. They looked for and found God in themselves, deep within.

Here are some simple ‘rules’ they followed:

- RULE 1: Centring prayer began by focusing on God, on receiving God’s goodness. They would use a line or two of Scripture, or anything else to help with this. It was as effortless as possible, and lasted just until one felt a simple desire to ‘be’, to ‘stay there’.
- RULE 2: Of course, distractions seem to enter at this point, so the pray-er chooses a word, something to recall him or her to the task at hand. If we need an image, think of a river with all its surface activity, and the deep current flowing beneath. Distractions are the surface, so we can use a ‘word’, any word we choose for the purpose, to sink back into the river current below, flowing into the ocean of infinite love that is God within us.
- RULE 3: It is God, not peace or tranquillity we truly seek. We have found God within. Let’s just stay there (using the ‘word’ if needs be). We let ourselves be moved – heart, affections.
- RULE 4: Conclude the experience with a prayer such as the Our Father. We need to come out of ourselves, ground ourselves.

SOME PRAYER PROMPTS

- Pray as you can, not as you can't.

To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
and eternity in an hour
(‘Auguries of Innocence’, William Blake)

- Time only needs a fraction to move into eternity.
- Start where you are, and deepen what you have.
- Be surprised by joy!
- Choose a quiet place. Vibrations take their toll (a room full of loud music carries its charge long after).

There've been times when I've turned from his presence,
And I've walked other paths, other ways,
But I've called on his name, in the dark of my shame
And his mercy was gentle as silence.

- Let Prayer, the Spirit of Prayer, pray within us.
- ‘Lord, you have examined me and you know me.’ (Psalm 139:1)
- Think of the bee extracting nectar from a flower, or the work of preparing a meal. Attention to detail. Rest in this moment, not in the past or the future.

Orange

Prayer of mission, intercession

Orange: zeal for the mission, enthusiasm...

The spirit that reigns is one of zeal and enthusiasm for the Salesian mission and is based on motivations of faith and love for Christ rather than on external factors. The moments of prayer and community reflection lead one to consider the world with a discerning mind, see it with the eyes of God, and commit oneself to its transformation.

— Ratio, no. 461

Theologically, orange feels less like yellow's gratitude and more like a calling – the prayer that says, 'Here I am; send me.' That gives it a distinct place in a sequence of prayer-colours. We can let orange be the colour of mission. But it is also a prayer of intercession, especially for the young.

ORANGE

Orange is amber, Ezekiel's flame,
Refining fire of prophetic fame.
There's the citrus tones of a sunny goodbye –
The tangerine sunset stunning the sky.

Orange is prayer that awakens the ear,
To hear the Voice calling distinctly and clear.
Like Samuel answering, eager and young,
We offer our hearts and loosen our tongue.

Orange is prayer when the heart is aflame,
Called into service, yet freed from self-fame.
Orange is zeal that refuses to tire,
Fed by the breath of the Spirit's own fire.

An orange is orange; there's the taste of a mango.
Orange is music of Argentine tango.
Most carrots, some parrots, late autumn leaves,
Soft wet pine needles in the eaves

Are orange. But then there is rust,
And the fierce north wind smell of thick orange dust.
The saffron-clad monks outside Buddhist pagodas
Remind us at once of exotic spice odours.

Yet the English word 'orange' has no rhyming mate,
So the only way out is to change the debate –
By thinking 'I eat', which in French is 'je mange'
And there is our rhyme: 'Je mange une orange'!

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

We become attentive to what God is doing in the lives of the young and in our own lives, and we respond with wonder, praise, thanks, petition and intercession (C 95). Going beyond the externals, we touch the inner resources from which we live, accessing the level of our convictions, attitudes and motivations. In the openness of personal sharing, motivations, conflicts, illusions and disappointments and knowledge of one's needs come to light. An effort is made to process our reactions, understand what God is telling us and renew our response (C 119; GC29 39b).

— Ratio, no. 67

Somewhere in the world at this very moment, individuals and entire communities are at prayer.

Just as our beautiful world is wrapped in a protective atmosphere, and despite our damage to it, this atmosphere tries to heal itself, so, too, is the world wrapped in a protective healing layer of prayer. Some of this prayer may be of the 'little faith' kind (Lord, give me X, I want it now!), but that's okay too. A father will listen to his child's poor words and will try to meet the real needs. Many prayers, however, are ones of adoration, praise, confession, thanksgiving and intercession, especially intercession for less selfish needs.

Just as someone, somewhere, is praying for us at this moment, we too can INTERCEDE (pray for, or ask Jesus to beg his Father, ask Jesus' Mother to ask Jesus to beg his Father!...) on behalf of others. Consider the following three elements of intercession:

1. The world with its needs is dependent on and waiting to be helped by intercession (whether knowingly or not).
2. God is an all-sufficient supplier for those needs. The prayer Jesus taught us acknowledges that.
3. The Church, body of Christ with its divine calling and promise, is waiting to be stirred to a sense of its responsibility and power – by its members.

God seeks intercessors, works through them, honours them, waits for them. Can we accept this invitation?

Glory be to the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as we humbly pray: Lord, be with your people.

SOME PRAYER PROMPTS

The Holy Spirit who raised up Don Bosco continues to work in our hearts, assisting us not only to imitate Jesus but to be gradually transfigured into his likeness (C 1; 2 Cor 3:18). On our part we give thanks and respond with daily fidelity to this work of the Spirit. We are also attentive to the ways in which the Spirit works in the hearts of the young and we pray for and cultivate the gifts of the Spirit that our work might bear lasting fruit (C 99).

— Ratio, no. 105

- In terms of the universe, the survival of any species, the statistics are overwhelming: you should not be born or you are dead. But here you are, alive! What a gift to be thankful for.
- Pray as a caretaker, not a proprietor:
 - Quieten yourself with your prayer ‘word’.
 - Bring to mind anything you can offer God and ask, ‘Where did it come from? Is it mine to keep? What would separate me from it?’
 - Release the idea of ‘mine’. One less piece of baggage to carry on the journey.
- ‘Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us’: a brave prayer indeed!
- The Easter Vigil begins in darkness. But then a fire is enkindled, a candle lit. Set fire to my heart, O Lord.
- ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’ Romans 10:15.
- We pray for our young people, but do we also pray for our missionaries?

Lord Jesus Christ, watch over your missionaries, especially those in the Salesian Family – priests, consecrated men and women, and lay people – who leave everything to give testimony to your word and your love. In difficult moments, sustain their energies, comfort their hearts, and crown their work with spiritual achievements. Let the adorable image of you crucified on the Cross, which accompanies them throughout life, speak to them of heroism, generosity, love and peace. Amen

Turquoise

Jesus, Lord, bringing it all together

Turquoise:

The different dimensions of formation, in turn, are all aimed at transforming the heart of the Salesian into the image of the heart of Christ. The entire process of formation aims at helping Salesians 'to enter into communion with the charity of Christ the good shepherd' (PDV 57; Gift 89). But human authenticity is never some pure and secure possession. It is a constant withdrawal from inauthenticity to the wholeness and harmony to which we are called, and every successful withdrawal only brings to light the need for further withdrawals. So, in the dynamic of grace and freedom, we experience the slow redemption of our whole being, as all the dimensions of our growth come together and we become a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17–19), not only as individuals but also as members of one Body and 'members of one another' (Eph 4:25).

— Ratio, no. 139

Turquoise sits between blue and green, sea and sky, depth and growth. It can gather the qualities of the other colours without becoming merely a summary. For prayer, it suggests wholeness, reconciliation, harmony, and the weaving together of life's disparate strands.

TURQUOISE

Turquoise is kingfisher, dragonfly wing,
Clear mountain tarns in the thaw of the spring.
It's glacier melt under midsummer sky,
And distant horizons where sea breezes sigh.

Turquoise is peacock and beetle-shell sheen,
The marriage of oceanic blue and leafy green.
It's the flash of a gem in a silversmith's tray,
And the colour of shallows on a tropical bay.

Turquoise is coral reefs teeming with life,
A meeting of currents, not conflict and strife.
It mingles and balances, blends and unites,
Finding one pattern in disparate sights.

Yet turquoise may fade when exposed to the sun,
Its brilliance diminished, its lustre undone.
And tropical waters conceal rocks below,
While fair winds may shift where uncertain tides flow.

Turquoise is prayer when the fragments belong,
When discord is woven again into song.
It gathers the colours we've scattered apart,
And fashions a whole from the pieces of heart.

Turquoise is prayer of the sea and the sky,
Where questions and answers together may lie.
It welcomes each colour, each shadow, each hue,
And finds them completed in one larger view.

A TURQUOISE EXAMEN

Just as interiority is nourished by moments of silence, reflection, personal prayer and meditation on the Word of God, so the discerning attitude is fostered by personal and community spiritual accompaniment, and likewise the contemplative attitude is fostered by the daily examination of consciousness that focuses first of all on the grace that precedes and envelops us. We slowly thus become contemplatives in action.

— Ratio, no. 116

Let's use the colour turquoise and its various images of reconciliation and integration as a way to conduct an examination of conscience/consciousness, by asking reflecting for a moment on some integrating aspects of our lives, and asking ourselves some questions:

1. *Presence*: God, where were you with me today – especially in the in-between moments I almost missed?
2. *Gratitude*: What is one clear moment of life, colour, or connection I can thank you for right now?
3. *Integration*: Where did I feel divided or pulled apart today – and what would it look like to see those parts as belonging to one whole story?
4. *Release*: What am I still carrying that I don't need to hold overnight? I place it back into your care.
5. *Wholeness*: Where did I glimpse wholeness, even briefly? What contradictions in me might be part of a larger harmony?

God, hold all my colours together – make my life turquoise: integrated, alive, and held in you.

SOME PRAYER PROMPTS

Reflecting on my life in faith, I realize that my life is not a series of coincidences but that it is linked to God's providence. God wants to manifest himself in my life so that it becomes part of the history of salvation. The gateway of the mystery is Christ: freely I am called to accept Christ and build my life on him who is already its foundation. I realize that, with my free and ongoing response, it is the Spirit who conforms my life to Christ. Thus it is that God gradually becomes the ordering centre of my life. In my journey of healing and of growth, all the aspects of my life find integration in Christ.

— Ratio, no. 874

Turquoise as calm waters

God, let Your peace move through me like turquoise waters – steady, clear, and deep.

Wash over my restless thoughts and still what's been stirred up inside me.

Teach me to rest in you the way waters holds the sky without strain.

Turquoise as healing and wholeness

Heal what is frayed in me, even the parts I can't name yet.

Bring wholeness where I've been split between fear and hope.

Restore me gently, layer by layer, without rushing what needs time.

Turquoise as truth and expression

Give me courage to speak with clarity and kindness.

Let my words reflect truth without sharpness, honesty without harm.

Free what I've been holding back so it can be expressed with grace.

Turquoise as presence and balance

Centre me in your presence like the horizon where sky meets sea.

Hold me in balance when I swing between overwhelm and numbness.

Teach me to breathe in rhythm with your steadiness.

Conclusion

Prayer is a whisper, a sigh or a shout,
A journey within and a venturing out.
Prayer is a question that won't go away,
The night-watcher's vigil awaiting the day.

Prayer is the hush before birdsong takes wing,
The pause in the heart before we can sing.
It rides on the incense that drifts through the air,
Yet finds the lone traveller and settles there.

Prayer is a candle that flickers and bends,
A silence that deepens, a listening that mends.
It's woven through tears and the laughter of friends,
Through roads that seem broken and roads without ends.

Prayer is as common as bread on a plate,
As sudden as love or the knock at a gate.
It lingers in hospitals, prisons and schools,
Among saints and sinners and self-proclaimed fools.

Prayer may be joyful, prayer may be numb,
We pray with the tongue, or we pray struck dumb.
Sometimes we are searching, sometimes we are found,
Sometimes we hear music, sometimes no sound.

Prayer is the bee at its labour all day,
Gathering nectar to carry away.
Prayer is the seed in the dark of the loam,
Reaching for light while still hidden from home.

Prayer is the tide that returns to the shore,
The opening hand that need clutch no more.
Prayer is the Spirit's mysterious art,
The Triune God in the depths of the heart.

So when shadows lengthen and daylight grows thin,
May prayer be the doorway through which we step in;
And when morning awakens the sky overhead,
May prayer be the path upon which we are led.

Jesus in Context

Christ in the Warp and Weft of Formation

Introduction

Do you remember the context for the following brief exchange?

“Well, what do you think? Will you take me to Turin to study?”

“I think there is good material in you.”

“Good material for what?”

“To make a beautiful garment for Our Blessed Lord.”

“Wonderful! I am the cloth and you are the tailor. You will work on me to make something beautiful for the Lord.”

— Life of the Young Dominic Savio

‘Do you remember the context...?’ Yes, Don Bosco’s first encounter with Dominic Savio at the Becchi. The latter had just come with his father from Mondonio. It is a formation narrative. And Don Bosco already knew that Dominic’s mother was a seamstress, so he immediately drew on an image that the youngster would find familiar, and, of course, received the response that has become part of Salesian lore: I am the cloth and you are the tailor...

The renewed Salesian *Ratio* can readily borrow this image of tailor and cloth, but perhaps it invites us to take the metaphor one step further. Don Bosco’s task with Dominic was that of a master tailor: discerning good material and fashioning it into a beautiful garment for the Lord. The *Ratio*, however, is not the work of a single tailor. This document, perhaps more than any other document in the history of the Congregation, is the fruit of countless conversations, reflections, experiences and contributions gathered from Salesians young and old, members of the Salesian Family, lay collaborators, consecrated persons, and many friends of Don Bosco. If the image of the tailor helps us understand personal accompaniment, the image of the tapestry helps us understand the communal wisdom embodied in this document. The many threads have been woven together into a single design. Indeed, the word *contextus*, from which we get the word ‘context’, comes from *contexere* — “to weave together” — making the tapestry not merely an illustration but a fitting symbol of the *Ratio* itself.

Tapestries tell a story. Perhaps the most famous and best-known such tapestry is the *Bayeux Tapestry*. A little over 50 centimetres high and nearly 70 metres long, the tapestry was created in the 11th century and depicts the story of William the Conqueror’s conquest of England in 1066 during the Battle of Hastings. The tapestry is presumed to have been commissioned by Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, William the Conqueror’s half-brother.

And then there are the magnificent 500-year-old *Acts of the Apostles Tapestries*. Their creation began in 1515 when Leo X commissioned Raphael to create a series of paintings (known as cartoons) that would serve as models for the tapestries. As the first step in a tapestry’s production, a painted cartoon would be placed behind the warp and visible between threads. Remarkably, the Acts of the Apostles’ cartoons still exist today, unheard of for other surviving tapestry sets. Leo X’s tapestries were woven between 1516 and 1521 in Brussels. The tapestries were designed for the Sistine Chapel’s lower walls. They are a perfect example of religious imagery in a tapestry set.

Imagining our *Ratio* as a tapestry places it in a rich ‘context’ indeed! It can tell a story. It can help us move through the document without being constrained by its formal structure. Like any tapestry,

there are two sides: the front, which presents a visual image, while the reverse is full of knots and crossings, threads that disappear and reappear again. So while the front shows us an image, the back reveals the tapestry's construction, its strength.

We can take hold of a single thread and trace where it appears and disappears, and in a tapestry, no thread is isolated.

Let us take one thread, then. We can call it the 'Jesus' thread. We might also say that while the front reveals the image of the Jesus 'we are called to be living memorials of', the reverse reveals us, who we are, with all our knots and crossings, the Jesus thread appearing and disappearing at times. By switching back and forth between the front and reverse, we can ask ourselves more than one question: of the front we can ask '*What colours are woven together whenever Jesus appears?*', while of the reverse we can ask '*Where does the Jesus thread disappear from view for me, and what other threads dominate those moments?*', or '*Where is the thread still present but pulled so tightly that it distorts the pattern?*', or even, '*Where is there entanglement rather than harmony, and how does that entanglement affect the appearance of the Jesus thread?*' Over to you, the reader, for further questions this image might suggest to you.

Colours galore!

A tapestry without colours would be boring! Our lives without colour would be 'monotonous' (= monotone)! Jesus was a 'colourful' figure, and representing him would need a broad palette. We have to make choices.

It would not be widely known, but the initial drafts of the revised Salesian *Ratio* were colour-coded. There was no profound significance to these colours, just a useful way to organise the material, establish heading levels; just as there is no deep significance to the colours we will choose. They are just ways of thinking about our subject, and are not an attempt to 'type' Jesus, or ourselves for that matter. Since Jesus represents the fullness of humanity, as well as the divine, our chosen colours should attempt to cover that fullness to the extent possible.

Here is our selection of threads:



1. Beige: From buttery creams to sandy browns, beige is a basic, body colour (or think camel, desert sand, tan, buff, parchment...). We will let it represent the very physical side of the person who was Jesus, from foetus to limp, pierced form on the cross.

Beige expresses the full physical reality of Jesus: conceived, born, living, suffering, and dying in human flesh. It holds together growth and vulnerability, from foetus to crucified body.

Key themes: incarnation, corporeality, vulnerability, human condition, hidden life



2. Purple: Often associated with majesty and mystery, purple is naturally found in many flowers and has become nearly synonymous with various royal families. Jesus was arrayed in purple at his trial. So think of mysterious power, spirit...

Purple evokes majesty revealed through paradox: the mocked kingship of Christ, the mystery of divine authority made visible in suffering and trial.

Key themes: kingship, trial, paradox, hidden glory, mystery of revelation



3. Red: Red shades are often associated with love, passion, and strong emotions. The passionate side of Jesus.

Red signifies the intensity of Christ's love, desire, suffering, and self-gift. It expresses the emotional and sacrificial depth of divine-human love.

Key themes: passion, love, sacrifice, suffering, affectivity



4. Blue: As timeless as the sky and sea, blue has a rich and storied past. From the ancient Egyptians who treasured it for its heavenly representation, to its role in Renaissance art as a symbol of divinity. The divine side of Jesus.

Blue symbolises the eternal and divine identity of Christ, echoing sky, sea, and iconographic tradition. It expresses who Christ is in his divine nature.

Key themes: divinity, transcendence, eternity, contemplation, Marian resonance



5. Orange: Orange is often about warmth, success, bounty, abundance: Jesus' 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.' We will include missionary fecundity.

Orange expresses vitality, fruitfulness, and outward-flowing life. It reflects Christ's mission and the abundance he offers to humanity.

Key themes: mission, abundance, fruitfulness, vitality, evangelising dynamism



6. Green: Green suggests healing, balance, renewal. Green pastures and still waters. But think too of Jesus' relationships here on earth, his humane side, his respect, his accompaniment of his disciples...

Green symbolises growth, healing, accompaniment, and relational maturity. It reflects Jesus' human relationships and pastoral presence.

Key themes: growth, healing, accompaniment, discipleship, pastoral care



7. Yellow: Yellow often symbolises joy, clarity, energy. But we will let it represent Jesus as paschal light / transfigured unity, the risen and glorified Christ. Christ as light after passage through death.

Yellow expresses the light of the Risen Christ and the unifying clarity of the Paschal Mystery. It integrates the full spectrum of Christological meaning into a single radiant coherence.

Key themes: resurrection, integration, light, unity, transfiguration



8. Turquoise: Turquoise holds profound spiritual significance across a number of cultures. We will let it represent communion, the Church and the Congregation, and all that we hold most dear about the person of Jesus and his importance for our spiritual life.

Turquoise represents communion in the Spirit: the Church, the Salesian Congregation, and the lived unity of all who share in Christ's mission.

Key themes: communion, Church, community, shared charism, spiritual unity.

Another way of interpreting our colours

Think of them as follows:

Incarnation axis (beige → red): bodily Jesus, affective/emotional Jesus, suffering Jesus.

Transcendence axis (blue → purple → yellow): divinity, mystery, glory.

Relational/ethical axis (green, orange): life, growth, abundance, human flourishing.

Ecclesial/communion synthesis (turquoise): integration beyond the individual Jesus.

Right now our colour range is thematic. We could make it also formationally dynamic. And indeed, rather than thinking of formation as some kind of linear process (phases, stages...) we can mix these colours around, maybe even think of them as a spiral and blended process (which formation really is).

Beige → embodied identity (who I am)

Green → relational growth (how I live)

Red → affective depth (how I love/suffer)

Orange → outward mission (what flows from me)

Blue/Purple → contemplation of Christ (who he is in mystery)

Yellow → paschal integration (what unifies everything)

Turquoise → ecclesial communion (where all is held together)

Choices, and more choices

Our choice of threads, while not entirely random, is at best subjective. Anyone else might have chosen different colours or given them different meanings. The graphic artists who provided the layout for the print edition of the new *Ratio*, for example, worked with more or less similar colours but used them for organisational purposes.

Likewise subjective will be the reflections that follow and their alignment with a particular colour. Which is where you, the reader, come in. So here is a brief test for you. The first reflection, entitled ‘Bachelor’, looks at a very human choice Jesus made, and a very human choice the Salesian SDB also makes. So what colour would it come under for you?

First of all, read the following reflection.

Bachelor

Jesus’ choice to remain unmarried (LG 42; PC 14) is a sign of the life of the resurrection, where there will be neither marrying nor giving in marriage (Mt 22:30). Jesus is the Pure of Heart (Mt 5:8) who constantly beholds the Face of the Father (Mt 18:10). In his presence everyone feels safe.

— Ratio no. 113

Most rabbis and Jewish leaders were expected to be married, to demonstrate obedience to Genesis 1:28 to ‘be fruitful and multiply’. As an observant Jew, Jesus would have faced strong cultural pressure to follow this norm. However, the Gospels portray Jesus as single throughout his ministry. None of the four Gospel accounts mention Jesus being married or refer to a wife. In other words he was a bachelor, at a time when bachelorhood was uncommon for a young man. In addition to that he actually affirmed this state as an option: When the disciples said it would be better not to marry, Jesus agreed in Matthew 19:12, saying ‘there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.’

And that is our choice. The Salesian SDB is a bachelor! But an eye to the history of this word in English might be helpful. The term ‘bachelor’ which comes from the old French word ‘bacheler’ and entered the English language as far back as 1297 [Oxford English Dictionary], originally held the meaning of a young man or a knight in training, often someone who had not yet attained the full status of a knight. That might be a useful insight for the young Salesian, who is indeed a ‘knight in training’. However, the meaning of the word has evolved over time, as happens to words generally, and today the ‘bachelor’ is perceived to be a free and independent being, and while freedom and independence are good things, we can also recognise modern individualistic trends underlying this shift in meaning. Once we begin to add certain adjectives to the term, there are warnings, too, for the older Salesian, not to become a ‘crusty old bachelor’, or not even ‘a confirmed bachelor’ set in his ways, resistant to expectations of companionship.

We need to turn to Jesus to appreciate his approach to bachelorhood. First, though unmarried himself, he spoke positively of marriage, marriage feasts (Cana in particular), children... And he had no favourites, despite ‘the beloved disciple’. Jesus was and is there for all. We are all his favourites. The beloved disciple is never actually named, and that may be deliberate, so we can fully accept that ‘those who seek him with all their heart’ [Lectio, Chap 7] are his favourites. Jesus was a loving friend, and many of his friends are named in the Gospels, including women. He also made a point, in his final

discourse to his disciples, of telling them that they were not servants but friends. Friends, friendship, so essential to everything Salesian. See no. 185 on Don Bosco's praxis of accompaniment.

Which colour?

What do you think?

Beige represents the human, embodied, earthy reality of Jesus – his humanity, his Jewishness, his life in a particular culture. The opening paragraph certainly belongs there:

- Jesus as an observant Jew.
- The cultural expectation of marriage.
- His unusual bachelorhood.
- The historical and social context of first-century Judaism.

That is all very much the 'sand, clay, flesh-and-blood' Jesus.

But the reflection does not stop there. It moves from a historical fact about Jesus to a formative challenge for the Salesian:

And that is our choice. The Salesian SDB is a bachelor!

Then it explores the meaning of bachelorhood as:

- a deliberate vocation,
- a form of training,
- a path of growth,
- a warning against stagnation,
- an invitation to remain open, companionable, and available.

That feels less like Beige and more like **Orange** — the colour of apprenticeship, development, formation, quest, and transformation. Our etymological insight about the bachelor as a 'knight in training' is especially Orange. It evokes the young Salesian as someone on a journey, not yet finished, still becoming. And Orange, like any other colour, could also be thought to have its shadow side, in this case the warning not to become a crusty, confirmed old bachelor.

There is also a small hint of **Green** lurking there. The danger of becoming a 'confirmed bachelor' is really the danger of losing relationality, companionship, community, and affective maturity. If Green in our system carries themes of communion, fraternity, accompaniment, and relationships, then the warning is ultimately a Green warning.

As you can see, tug on one thread and you inevitably tug on many others!

Beige

The Human Jesus

Following the Beige Thread

Salesian identity, which characterizes our formation, defining 'its tasks and fundamental requirements', 'is the basis of unity and belonging to the Congregation, the fundamental criterion of discernment, the constant point of reference and the goal towards which everything tends.' This identity is achieved by identifying in a Salesian way with Christ Jesus, namely, 'spending ourselves for the young as Don Bosco did.'

— Lectio, Chapter 2

Questions of identity are at the heart of the 'Beige' reflections. Who was Jesus? Who am I?

Foetus

... 'until Christ is formed in you.' It is Christ who aspires to be allowed to make himself present in the person being formed, any Salesian, whether temporarily or perpetually professed.

— Meditatio, Chapter 2

The Incarnation did not begin with the birth accounts relayed in the Gospels; it began at the moment the divine Son was conceived in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit. Jesus' first moments on this earth were not in the manger, but in Mary. Jesus' body, his muscles and bones, formed in the cavity of her body.

Our devotion to the human person of Jesus seems to avoid this reality, perhaps regarding 'foetus' as an undignified term for Jesus, other than to borrow Elizabeth's words, describing him as 'the fruit of thy womb'. But if we lose the essential truths bound up in the Incarnation, then we lose the gospel. The Apostles Creed states that Jesus was 'conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary'. The Apostle Paul is happy to identify himself as a mother suffering the pains of childbirth 'until Christ is formed in you'. We can consider that much of this forming takes place in the womb, before actual childbirth.

Our Salesian formation, too, begins somewhat earlier than we might imagine, since it is the Spirit who 'conceives' the idea of a vocation within us, though we do not usually use that kind of language about it. The word 'vocation' refers to a call. But the Church's Magisterium does not limit itself just to call: 'The Holy Spirit...writes into the heart and life of every baptized person a project of love and grace, which is the only way to give full meaning to existence' (St John Paul II).

The *Ratio* takes it back to the Trinity itself: *Our life is rooted and founded in the Blessed Trinity. In this is love, that God has first loved us (1 Jn 4:10). From this prevenient love flow all the vocations in the Church, including our own Salesian consecrated vocation (VC 14)* [no. 58]. 'Rooted', 'founded' are words that take us back to the very beginnings.

Worth pondering on.

A young man reaches manhood

As she [Mary] taught Jesus, we ask her to teach us to walk always before the luminous cloud of the Father's will.

— Ratio, no. 79

The Bible records twenty as the age of majority, but in rabbinic times it became twelve plus one day for girls and thirteen plus one day for boys. It was not until at least the 13th century, however, that this became the synagogue ceremony known as the *Bar Mitzvah* (for boys; *Bat Mitzvah* for girls). Once Jewish children reach that age, they are said to ‘become’ *b’nai mitzvah*, at which point they begin to be held accountable for their own actions.

What do we make of the event, then, that the Jerusalem Bible sandwiches between two headings describing ‘The hidden life of Jesus at Nazareth’ and ‘The hidden life at Nazareth resumed’? The intervening heading reads: ‘Jesus among the teachers of the Law’. Luke quite deliberately tells us Jesus was twelve years old at this point, so we can begin to appreciate what is the likely context here... preparation for Jewish manhood, accepting accountability for one’s actions, reading and discussing the Torah in public, which is clearly what the now about-to-be ‘young man’ Jesus explicitly does.

In the ‘hidden life at Nazareth’ scenes, Jesus ‘grew, became strong, filled with wisdom’, and when he resumed this life with his parents back in Nazareth he ‘lived under their authority’. The *Ratio* sums all this up briefly in a reference to Mary, who ‘taught Jesus’.

But that intervening scene at the Temple in Jerusalem? A young man asserting his independence! First of all remaining behind without telling his parents. Then a realisation of what is emerging as his vocation in life (‘I must be in my Father’s house’). At no point in this brief exchange with mum and dad do we get the sense that Jesus actually acknowledges the anguish they had been feeling, though he does submit readily to their authority in the years that follow. Yet Mary, by then, would have become certain of one thing: he will leave us again, and this time for good. We will have to just let him go.

The *Ratio* is alert to moments like these, warning of so-called counter-indications: *Lack of openness and a willingness to learn, a habit of non-conformity, a constant attitude of confrontation, a ‘contradictory spirit’, an excessive tendency to independence; or else, an excessive dependence on the surroundings, family, group, or on other people* [no. 755.d]. But it also speaks of the *Ability to make free choices in the light of motives that are genuine and coherent with one’s state of life*, and this assumes, among other things, *The ability to take initiatives that are thought out and coherent, making good use of freedom and accepting responsibility for the choices made* [no. 751].

Mary’s (and for that matter, also Joseph’s) teaching role might seem to have been easy, with such a ‘docile’ recipient who accepted parental authority, but by now there were things ‘they did not understand’, and Mary felt the need to ‘store up all these things in her heart’. There are lessons for formators and formees alike in this brief incident.

Purple

The Mysterious, Majestic Jesus

Following the Purple Thread

... 'our highest knowledge... is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery' (C 34).

— Ratio, no. 42

The contemplation of who Jesus is, and what that means for us, is at the heart of our 'purple' reflections.

God's story and our story

The mission is given by God. The initiative is always God's and comes to us through Jesus, epiphany and revelation of the mystery of the triune God. Jesus' mission is to reveal the Father (Jn 1:18) and to gather into one the scattered children of God (Jn 11:52).

— Ratio no. 23

'Jesus, epiphany and revelation of the mystery of the triune God'. If God had an autobiography, then it is Jesus thus described. Fortunately for us, the *Ratio* then brings this statement of mystery and majesty down to earth a little by then explaining Jesus' mission: to 'reveal' the Father and to 'gather' the scattered children of God into one.

It is John's Gospel that is being quoted here. Let's look at a passage from that Gospel that is not directly quoted in the *Ratio* but referred to indirectly, when it lists, among the many titles suggested for further reading, the Letter the then Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime wrote to Salesians in 2018: "Lord, give me this water' (John 4:15). Let us cultivate the art of listening and of accompaniment'[AGC 426]. This is about Jesus' longest conversation by far (there is a longer monologue) in the Gospels, with a woman at a well in Sychar, Samaria.

We have heard it many times but we need to go back, be present, appreciate the shock power of this conversation, listen, look at how Jesus engaged with the woman, gradually overcoming any apprehensions, being honest and direct, encouraging trust and then revealing who he was. This conversation can still serve as a template for personal evangelisation by communicating. An excellent case of Jesus revealing the Father and gathering his scattered children (including women, Gentiles) into one.

There is a request, shock at the request, an initial communication, the woman now alert, then a promise (the woman likes this promise), then a challenge (the woman is disconcerted by this), then the revelation: worship, the 'Hour', the spirit and truth, the Messiah, and then 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.' God's powerful autobiographical moment, but one that the disciples (who were also shocked, if not indeed scandalised) needed an explanation of: 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.'

The conversation at the well is not simply an episode of evangelisation. It is also a moment of revelation. Jesus gradually discloses who he is, and in doing so reveals the Father who sent him. One might even call it a moment in God's autobiography: God telling his own story in human words and gestures. Yet the story does not end with Jesus. The Samaritan woman herself becomes part of that

story. Having encountered Christ, she leaves her water jar behind and becomes a witness to her own people. God's autobiography now includes her story as well.

This may help explain why the *Ratio* places such value on autobiography. To write one's life story in faith is not merely an exercise in self-analysis or recollection. It is an attempt to recognise how one's own story has become intertwined with God's story. The Samaritan woman could have written her autobiography beginning with a chance encounter at a well; faith would have taught her to see it instead as a moment of grace within the history of salvation. The *Ratio* invites us to make the same discovery in our own lives:

Writing one's autobiography is almost essential if one wants to draw up a serious personal plan of life, making the effort to pass from the anecdotal to a grasp of the meaning of one's life, identifying the most relevant and significant points in three areas: 'this is how I am' (a new knowledge and acceptance of oneself); 'this is what I am made for' (a new awareness of one's vocation and mission); 'these are my relationships' (a new awareness of my relationship with myself, with others, with God). Reflecting on my life in faith, I realize that my life is not a series of coincidences but that it is linked to God's providence. God wants to manifest himself in my life so that it becomes part of the history of salvation. The gateway of the mystery is Christ: freely I am called to accept Christ and build my life on him who is already its foundation [no. 874]

There's an AI for that!

Young people, Salesians included, encounter AI not only as a technological tool but also as a cultural force, an assistant or a companion that influences how they study, communicate, think and relate to others. The Salesian Congregation invites 'conscious involvement by everyone in the advent of artificial intelligence (AI)' as something that 'offers us new possibilities to carry out our ministry, communicating and fostering authentic human relationships which are close and real, inspired by the Preventive System.'

— Ratio no. 103

At first glance, the thread of Jesus and the thread of artificial intelligence seem woven from different looms. Yet Pope Leo's reflection on the promise and peril of AI reminds us that every new thread in the human story must ultimately be judged by the image it helps to reveal. For Christians, that image is disclosed most clearly in Jesus of Nazareth – the human face in whom we glimpse both God's future and our own.

Jesus as criterion for AI use also raises critical questions. Does our use of AI encourage genuine encounter, or does it isolate us from one another? Does it foster responsibility, or tempt us to delegate judgement and conscience to machines? Does it deepen our attentiveness to the vulnerable, or render people into data points and statistical categories? Does it nurture wisdom, or merely multiply information? These questions are not technical but profoundly human.

The Gospels are striking in this regard. Jesus never treats people as problems to be solved or resources to be managed. He encounters them as persons. He notices the individual in the crowd, the excluded at the margins, the one whose voice is easily overlooked. An AI-driven world risks valuing

what is measurable, predictable, and optimisable. Jesus continually draws attention to what is unique, personal, and irreducible. His example cautions us against allowing technological logic to become the dominant logic of human life.

For formation, the implications are significant. AI can assist learning, reflection, and administration. It can even serve as a conversation partner for exploring ideas. But it cannot accompany a young person as a mentor does. It cannot offer friendship, witness, forgiveness, or authentic self-gift. These belong to the realm of human relationships. The goal is not to create more intelligent systems, but more mature disciples.

The renewed *Ratio* needed to deal with AI and the questions it poses to Salesian formation today. And while it does not explicitly link its AI approach to the person of Jesus, its underlying anthropology makes it possible for us to see this connection:

From an anthropological perspective, AI, however sophisticated, is only an imitation of human intelligence. It lacks interiority and the ability to introspect, it has no conscience and is incapable of relating to the other, all of which characterize human persons created in the image of God. It cannot replace accompaniment, interpersonal relationships and dialogue that are essential for Salesian formation. We could say that 'the lights are on', but there is 'no body at home'!... AI is to be judged through the lenses of human dignity, freedom, grace and the Salesian mission. In practice, this means asking whether AI promotes or undermines the values at the heart of the Preventive System. [no. 103]

Red

The Passionate Jesus

Following the Red Thread

By our religious profession we follow Jesus Christ who, 'chaste and poor, redeemed and sanctified men through his obedience,' and we 'share more closely in his paschal mystery, his self-emptying and his life in the Spirit' (C 60).

— Ratio, no. 110

Passion understood as suffering is something active (or better, where we take agency, as Jesus did with suffering). It can also be passive, where we suffer through loss of agency, inactivity, the negative side of 'red' as understood within our scheme of things. But the meaning of 'passion' has also shifted today. If you were to look up the word in a modern dictionary, you would likely find these as the top three definitions: (1) 'any kind of feeling or emotion'; (2) 'passionate, sexual love'; (3) 'someone who is the object of such feelings.' A good dictionary may then have a separate entry explaining the Christian use of the term. These are the kinds of things we associate with the word passion in our society. Our reflections explore these aspects.

Blood-red passion

Salesian meditation, rooted in an understanding of prayer as friendship with Christ, encourages us to focus on the person of Jesus, especially his passion. The fruits are seen in daily life and in the ministry.

— Ratio, no. 411

If you were asked to provide evidence from the Gospels of Jesus' spilling of blood, where might you start? With the scene in Gethsemane maybe? Certainly with the scourging at the pillar (especially if you have ever watched Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*), and then the Crucifixion. But let's not forget the implicit spilling of blood at the Presentation in the Temple (rite of circumcision). Jesus and blood are inextricably linked, including his blood-line, which runs like a scarlet thread from Genesis to Revelation.

Yet, interestingly, the single mention of 'Jesus' passion' in the *Ratio*, in the blood-spilling sense we have considered above, is in the quote above from no. 411. In all other respects, the *Ratio* would seem to be bloodless! We should not be misled by this thought. The history of the Salesians of Don Bosco includes the precious blood of many martyrs.

What we might consider, instead, is the far more prolific use of 'passion' in its 'blood-red' metaphorical sense in the *Ratio*. We are to become *passionate about Jesus* [no. 19] and *learn to respond passionately to the love with which we have been loved and to be transfigured into his likeness* (2 Cor 3:18) *so as to become, like Jesus, the merciful face of the Father to young people* [no. 23].

This kind of 'passion' implies sacrifice. When we decide to take up our cross and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23), we have the opportunity to suffer in partnership with him and his mission. To live *passionately*, in the truest sense of the word, is to follow the way of our Lord and accept the cost, whatever it may be. As we consider the joy set before us and follow Jesus obediently, we should expect

to suffer – not least in the death of worldly habits and the cost of hard choices that come into conflict with the world's value systems.

Salesian life and mission require good health and physical resistance, as well as a capacity for sacrifice and for a demanding life [no. 365] and *'An ability to make sacrifices, even great ones, when one's own responsibilities, the needs of others, or educative and pastoral service are at stake, without giving way to frustration* [no. 751], is an important criterion for vocational discernment.

GC29 told us that 'We need to reach out to, almost touch, the inner fire of the *Da mihi animas*, in which prayer and work are united in sharing the pastoral charity of the Risen Lord. This is being passionate about the Lord!'

'My God, my God, why?'

Salesian educators and pastors are passionate people who know how to love because we experience what it means to be loved by God and by others. Our model is God himself and his passionate love for his people.

— Ratio no. 92

What was Jesus' experience of God? What kind of a model was his God? This is not some abstract, theological question, but something real, if Jesus was fully human, and that is fundamental to our Christian faith. Jesus of Nazareth is, like us, truly a member of the human race, 'one who in every respect has been tested as we are' (Hebrews 4:15). That means, like you and me, except, in his case, 'without sin'. It means the whole gamut of human experience, from the uplifting and transcendent joy of feeling I am the most important person in the world so deeply am I loved, to the profound and abysmal inner 'scream' of abandonment when God seems no longer to exist for me: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

Jesus did feel and know he was loved, and had a word for it, 'Abba', 'dear Father'. He also knew his Psalms, something he called on in his moment of forsakenness, but we can assume he also knew the Psalms that speak of God in nature. When Jesus gazed at the fields, the woods, and the lake, he would have been at home with Israel's creed and with the psalmist's prayer: 'I am filled with awe at your presence' (Psalm 5:7).

We know of Jesus' God through what he taught and did. God, for him, was a farmer who never gives up, keeps on sowing (Matthew 13:3-32); a shepherd who goes looking for and brings home the stray (Luke 15:3-7); a woman with enough yeast and the desire to use it, to feed far more than her hungry family (Matthew 13:13); someone who wants us to live life to the full (John 10:10).

And Jesus' God **was** present on Calvary, not willing the innocent Jesus to be killed, but lovingly sustaining Jesus and loving people through him. God as revealed by Jesus is present wherever there is love.

The *Ratio* takes this for granted but the Salesian in formation... meaning every Salesian from first profession to his final breath (a span of life otherwise known as ongoing formation) cannot take it for granted. Coming to 'know' God is a journey that never ends, and requires us to be open to everything, open in love. And there will be those moments of sheer anguish, for God's love does not protect us *from* all suffering. But it will protect us *in* all suffering.

We take to heart what the *Ratio* says at one point: *The experience of God that we live in the Salesian Congregation through our consecration is a principle of identity and a formative criterion* [no. 25].

Blue

The Divine Jesus

Following the Blue Thread

The service we offer to young people is education and evangelization 'according to a plan for total human wellbeing directed to Christ, the perfect Man' (C 31).

— Ratio, no. 132

Jesus of Nazareth lived the divine paradigm from the inside, showing us what it is to be fully human. The perfect Man. Yet, he revealed a God who is spacious enough to hold our failures, our fears and our unfinished selves. *Don Bosco's vocation matured in the bosom of his far from perfect family*, the *Ratio* tells us [no. 29]. Our ideal, in following Christ, is perfection, a divine ideal sought after by the imperfect beings that we are. How to keep all this in balance lies at the heart of our 'blue' reflections. Blue is the colour of horizon and depth.

Being (imperfectly) perfect

'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.' (Rom 12:2)

— Ratio, Chapter 11

What is divine perfection? Is it a matter of precision, never making mistakes, Father, Son and Spirit in lockstep all marching in the same direction? We can only know what it is from Jesus, who reveals the Father and the Spirit to us. And the God revealed by Jesus of Nazareth is nothing like that. The ancient Hebrew names, *Hesed* and *Emet* (steadfast love and faithfulness) became Jesus' own divine command to his disciples: 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another' (John 13:34-35). This takes us well beyond any thoughts about perfection as rigidity and control.

And yet, to many in today's world, loving like this does look like imperfection, because it is open, unregulated, unpredictable and imprecise.

The Lectio for Chapter 11 looks closely at St Paul's words on discernment – of 'what is good, and acceptable and perfect', but it should also be seen in close connection with the Scripture quote that opens Chapter 3, 'Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus.' (Philippians 2:5), or rather, with the continuation of that quote, which would have added, 'who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself...' There is the key, *kenosis* (κένωσις), which conveys the way God loves, each Person of the Trinity uninhibited in self-giving and trusting that the other Person does the same.

And that is the way the *Ratio* frames the effort of each Salesian to be perfect, even in his imperfect ways: *Going beyond externals, we touch the inner resources from which we live, accessing the level of our convictions, attitudes and motivations. We become aware of our faith or lack of it, the many voices that play in the depths of our being, the quality of our relationships and our responses, our lights and our shadows. We are thus helped to discern the love with which we have been loved, the voice of the Spirit inviting us to grow in our vocation of self-giving for the benefit of the young* [no. 890].

Dwelling in mystery

We learn to attend to our experiences – to dwell before the mystery of life, the beauty of nature, the mystery of the other, whether it is a young person or a confrere or one who shares the mission with us. We need the ‘pastoral look’ and ‘serene attentiveness’ (EG 51; LS 225–226)

— Ratio, no. 78

We learn to attend to our experiences – to dwell before the mystery of life, the beauty of nature, and the mystery of the other. This is not a technique but a way of being in the world, one that we see perfectly realised in Jesus of Nazareth. The Gospels reveal a man who moved through life with a remarkable capacity for attentive presence. He noticed what others overlooked: birds in the sky, lilies in the field, a widow placing two small coins in the treasury, children pushed to the margins, a blind beggar calling from the roadside, a woman silently touching the hem of his cloak. Nothing was too small, too ordinary, or too insignificant for his gaze. His attention was neither hurried nor distracted; it was marked by wonder, compassion, and openness to the Father’s action in every circumstance.

Jesus lived with a contemplative gaze. He read the book of nature, drawing wisdom from seeds, vineyards, weather, shepherds, and harvests. He stood before the mystery of others without reducing them to labels or roles. Fishermen became apostles, a Samaritan woman became a witness, a tax collector became a disciple. Where others saw categories, Jesus saw persons. His attentiveness allowed him to discern grace already at work in the lives of those he encountered. His eyes were always fixed on a horizon larger than immediate demands, yet he was wholly present to the person before him. He lived beneath open skies, attentive to the Father’s presence. In him, wonder became wisdom, and contemplation became mission. Attentive seeing is not an escape from mission but one of its deepest sources.

The *Ratio* reminds us that this is part of the process of discernment ‘enlightened by the person of Christ and by his gospel, lived according to Don Bosco’s spirit’ (C 98), that attending to our experiences, we learn from them – even when they are negative [no. 78]. It also applies this attentiveness to prayer, since *through personal, group and community accompaniment, the confreres are helped to attend to their experience of prayer in its personal and communitarian, liturgical and sacramental dimensions, so as to ‘learn by experience’ the meaning of Salesian prayer* [no. 161].

Fr Vecchi, quoted in a ‘callout’ in one section of the *Ratio* dealing with the spiritual dimension, anchors our prayerful dwelling in mystery, saying, *What I am before the Creator, that is my prayer. The light-giving gaze of God penetrates to where no other glance can reach. He sees me and teaches me to see myself as I am. To pray, therefore, is to feel and welcome this paternal gaze of God, without obstructing it in a vain effort to do everything by myself.*

Orange

The Vital, Abundant Jesus

Following the Orange Thread

Growing in our following of Christ, our lives become an educational message addressed especially to the young, proclaiming 'that God exists, that his love can fill a life completely; and that the need to love, the urge to possess, and the freedom to control one's whole existence, find their fullest meaning in Christ the Saviour' (C 62).

— Ratio, no. 110

Orange, in our particular scheme of colour choices, is very much a **formation** colour: apprenticeship (to Jesus), development, quest, and transformation... and outward mission, what flows from me.

Leaning into life, wholeheartedly

'I will run the way of your commands; you will give freedom to my heart .' (Psalm 119:32)...The heart is often considered the seat of emotions and desires, and in this context, the psalmist is asking God to transform his innermost being so that he can live in docile obedience to God wholeheartedly.

— Lectio, Chapter 1

Jesus was completely free of heart, and as a result he leaned into life – wholeheartedly. Because that is how God loves us, and Jesus wished to show that through his way of life. We can describe this 'way of life' in quite contemporary terms: wholehearted living starts with awareness, self-awareness. He understood his inner world, and so could engage with clarity. He also practised intentionality, deciding in each instance how he wanted to show up with the people he met. And he was clearly an active listener, consistently sending the message that the other person mattered.

Or we can describe this 'way of life' in biblical terms.

A key word in the Greek of the Christian Scriptures is *kardia* (καρδιά), used more than two hundred times, and referring to more than the physical heart. We use words such as 'cardio' and 'cardiologist' to refer to the physical heart only, but *kardia* is used in Scripture as an integrated, non-specific 'location' within a human being – a way in which one meets and relates to all things that exist. Obviously, it is not a place, but more a way in which Being itself – a flow of life and love – is present within and around us. That, too, fits a description of the wholehearted Jesus leaning into life.

Or we can describe it in Salesian terms.

When the *Ratio* talks about formation in mission, while it does not make specific reference to the biblical concept of *kardia* it does 'name' it in a very Salesian way: pastoral charity. *The love of God that we call 'pastoral charity' overflows into apostolic activity, and the lives and faces of our youth enter our prayer and our lives.* It then goes on to say, *Properly understood, [formation in mission] indicates that the mission entrusted to us 'sets the tenor' (C 3.) for the entire formation programme, which is aimed at forming an educator and pastor of young people, and that in our encounters with young people we are called to learn in a concrete way the exercise of pastoral charity and the grace of unity that allows us to encounter God in them and through them [no. 66].*

Leaning into life the Salesian way!

The life of a Mediterranean Jewish vagrant

The beginning of the disciple's journey is the work of Jesus' initiative, first addressing them with the words, 'What are you looking for?' The question prompts a response. It is an invitation to the disciple to clarify for himself what he is really looking for in life. With this simple question, Jesus probes the heart of the future disciple so that he may clarify the ultimate meaning of life, his inner journey.

— Lectio, Chapter 7

Consider, for a moment, the following description:

He looks like a beggar, yet his eyes lack the proper cringe, his voice the proper whine, his walk the proper shuffle. He speaks about the rule of God, and they listen as much from curiosity as anything else. They know all about rule and power, about kingdom and empire, but they know it in terms of tax and debt, malnutrition and sickness, agrarian oppression and demonic possession. What, they really want to know, can this kingdom of God do for a lame child, a blind parent, a demented soul screaming its tortured isolation among the graves that mark the edges of the village?

— John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*

Now imagine that this is the man the two disciples, who had just left John the Baptist, were now intrigued by and followed to what can only have been a temporary residence, since he was always on the move. And imagine that this is the man who puts the 'What are you looking for?' question to you. Imagine, too, that after following him for a while, you hear things mainly like 'Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, nor two tunics. Whatever house you enter, eat what is set before you; heal the sick in it and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come upon you"', or 'If you follow me, you carry a cross', or 'Blessed are the hungry.'

The historical Jesus might well have been a scruffy vagrant, a man of no fixed abode. A Nazareth boy who had left that behind... or was 'driven out of town', as Luke reminds us! Mark 1:16–38 describes an inaugural day in Capernaum, where finally the whole city and all its sick are gathered together at Peter's door once the Sabbath has ended. Anyone with some business clout would recognize what should happen or is already happening. Peter's house is becoming a brokerage for Jesus' healing, and Peter will broker between Jesus and those seeking help. We know what happens, though. Jesus leaves for a lonely place to pray. And when Simon and the others find him, he simply says, 'Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out.'

Mission can sound glorious, but by following this man we know we will be always on the move, and not always equipped for it. We will be dependent on others. The alternative, if we stay still, settle down, is pretty much the opposite of what Jesus did and taught. That would be a temptation to act as brokers for the kingdom, set up hierarchies, maybe even a little side hustle for extra income.

Under the heading of 'Formation in mission', the *Ratio* tells us: '*In the variety of contexts and forms that the Salesian mission is assuming, new possibilities of formation are also taking shape, in search of a more intense and fruitful dialogue with the realities in which one is called to live and work, and with the many people with whom one interacts and collaborates*' [no. 268] This suggests some experimentation. What if that were to follow a Jesus Tradition stripped of the layers of doctrinal redaction? Formation in itinerant radicalism!

Green

The Humane, Respectful Jesus

Following the Green Thread

‘Meeting the Lord gets us moving, urges us to leave aside self-absorption. A relationship with the Lord is not static, nor is it focused on self. “Because when we put Christ at the centre of our life, we ourselves don’t become the centre! The more that you unite yourself to Christ and he becomes the centre of your life, the more he leads you out of yourself, leads you from making yourself the centre and opens you to others”’ [Francis, Address to the Participants at the International Congress on Catechesis, Rome, 27 September 2013] (CICLSAL, Rejoice, LEV, Vatican 2014, 5)

— Ratio, no. 94

The Green thread, which is part of the Jesus image on the front of our tapestry, asks us questions on the reverse side: How do I live? How do I relate to others? Who do I take care of? What is community for me?

Care of the carers

Called to a delicate service for the benefit of confreres in initial formation, formators, aware of their own fragility, learn to take care of their own formation and all-round growth.

— Ratio, fn 13, Chapter 4

We all have our favourite healing stories in the Gospels, and it is natural that we focus on the healer and the one being healed. But in doing so, we might just miss something else, that on several occasions there is another person involved – the carer, the one who pleads with Jesus (or perhaps just acts in a way that pleads) to ‘take care’ of a situation. Jesus cared for them, too.

Perhaps the best remembered carer is the good Samaritan, except that it is a story rather than a real person. But think of those who came to plead with Jesus. Two fathers distraught at the illness of their children: Jairus’ daughter and the official’s son. In healing these children, Jesus was also responding to their parents’ deep distress. Or the Centurion, worried about his servant. He is deferential to Jesus, not wanting to put Jesus out, no need to come. We know the words off by heart because we say a variant of them daily at Mass: ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed.’ (Matthew 8:8). Jesus had not found faith like that in Israel!

There is the wordless caring of a group of friends who simply strip back a roof and lower their sick companion down for Jesus to heal: sins forgiven and paralysis gone. We know how he felt since ‘he went home glorifying God.’ We can presume the carers did the same!

In Saelsian formation it is the formators, including rectors, who are the carers, ‘taking care’ (this phrase appears dozens of times in the *Ratio*) of people and situations. The following words are Fr Vecchi’s: *Formators must possess ‘skills and a determination to exert an influence, to engage in dialogue with the candidates, to interact in a genuinely evangelical way with the challenges they bring up, without being defensive or resigned. In a word, they are not to be guides who helplessly watch from the sidelines as [the candidates] form their convictions and attitudes. They are not to be silent and detached ‘examples’, but educators who make suggestions and persuade.’* [fn 8, Chapter 6]

Knock before entering

The individual himself is 'a necessary and irreplaceable agent in his own formation' (PDV 69). The response to God's call is made by the individual who is called, and no one can replace him in that response. Like God, the formator learns to respect the freedom of those entrusted to his care.

— Ratio, no.60

'Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me' (Revelation 3:20).

Jesus' call, the 'call of the friend' as Pope Francis termed it, is more likely a gentle tap at the door of our soul, than a thunderous clap coming down from the heavens. Jesus even used the image directly when encouraging his disciples at a moment when he and they were being harassed by 'the crowd gathered in thousands' (Luke 12:1). He tells his 'little flock': 'be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks' (Luke 12:36).

If we reflect on Jesus in action, as he deals with people, we sense his courtesy (except, maybe when he overthrew the tables in the 'marketplace' that his Father's House had become!), determining whether to wait for the invitation or take the first step, wanting to put on his apron and serve, taking his time before eating, cleaning up the crumbs, addressing individuals by name. "Our courteous Christ," as an early 15th-century poem calls Jesus, shows his courtesy every time he meets the lost sheep he has come to seek and to save. It particularly graces his encounters with women: the Samaritan woman, the widow of Nain, Mary and Martha of Bethany. The God-Man is a gentle-man.

Or, as the *Ratio* sums it up so beautifully, alluding to the Emmaus story: *The risen Christ walking with his two disciples on the way to Emmaus stands before us as a shining and inspiring example of the way God deals with us (Lk 24:13–35). Jesus does not wait for them to approach him (Lk 24:15); he takes an interest in their affairs and listens to them attentively (24:17); he does not silence or dismiss them (24:19); he allows himself to be questioned, but he also knows how to ask questions and explain patiently (24:25–27); he respects their journey without imposing his own (24:28); he is available, willing to stop and share with them (24:29–30); he is able to open their eyes and make their hearts burn (24:31–32); and finally, he lets them take the initiative for a new journey when they freely choose to return to Jerusalem and recount what they have experienced (24:33–35) [no. 61].*

Respect is a key word in the *Ratio* starting with our Patron: *'With profound respect for the person and their freedom, [St Francis de Sales] never wished to impose his own will but preferred to motivate his directees in such a way that they would arrive at and take the necessary decisions themselves. In this he was imitating God himself' [no. 63]. Formation to sexual and affective maturity involves 'openness to others, the ability to communicate and enter into healthy and meaningful relationships, mutual respect, non-possessiveness, and responsibility for one's actions and respect for boundaries' [no. 92]. 'Relationship is, therefore, "at the heart of every educative approach," the driving force behind the effectiveness of the EPC (GC24 92), and the foundation of community life. The ability to relate involves communication skills, assertiveness, empathy, active listening, reliability, respect for boundaries, management of cultural differences, flexibility, collaboration, teamwork, fraternal correction and the ability to handle disagreements in a constructive way' [no. 92].*

Yellow

The Risen and Glorified Christ

Following the Yellow Thread

‘And all of us ... are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord the Spirit.’ (2 Corinthians 3:18)

— Ratio, Chapter 4

The unifying clarity of the Paschal Mystery, and in Salesian terms, ‘the grace of unity’.

A different tapestry?

With their eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, focusing on his person and work through faith, believers see the glory of God revealed in them. Thus, they are compared to mirrors that reflect the image of what they contemplate. By contemplating the glory of the Lord, they reflect it.

— Lectio, Chapter 4

What if our tapestry’s main thread (Jesus) was based only on what the Apostle Paul said about him, and had nothing of what the Gospels say about him. Would it look any different? After all, before his call-conversion he had only met (persecuted!) followers of ‘the Way’, not yet called Christians, and had not met Jesus of Nazareth. His encounter on the road to Damascus was with the Risen Christ.

We are not even sure what Paul actually knew of the Jesus Tradition, other than that he was ‘born of a woman’ (but no mention of Mary), or ‘of the seed of David according to the flesh’ (Romans 1:3). He seems to refer to ‘the Lord’s brother’ in Galatians 1:19, when he stayed a fortnight with Peter (whom he calls Cephas) in Jerusalem. Some of his teachings ‘echo’ Jesus’ messages in the Gospels, though not word for word, and on one occasion he gives us a saying of Jesus that does not appear in any of the canonical Gospels: ‘In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”’ (Acts 20:35)

So the chances are that our tapestry might look different. According to our chosen colour scheme there would be more yellow thread!

But of course it is more complex than this. The *Meditatio* that follows the opening quote (see above) to Chapter 4 of the *Ratio*, reminds us of another thread we must take into account – the Holy Spirit: *The Salesian formation process is a process of transformation. It is a process of being transformed, leaving behind the old self to become a new person who reflects the image of Christ imprinted in us by the action of the Holy Spirit. This transformation takes place in all dimensions of formation, whether human and fraternal, spiritual and intellectual, educational and pastoral, or charismatic. This is the challenge of Saint Paul in this passage from 2 Corinthians 3:18. The transformation is not instantaneous, but one of progression, ‘from glory to glory’, and this is the work of the Holy Spirit, not our effort: The power of the Holy Spirit imprints in every Salesian the image we contemplate, and this same Spirit enables us to radiate and make visible what we contemplate in faith.*

It is at least a reminder of the need to keep ‘our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ’, be it the Pauline Christ, the Gospel Jesus, or the image of God in the other, especially the young other, who is worthy of our love and compassion.

Weavers of hope

Religious profession marks for each one the beginning of Salesian life and the identity of the consecrated person in the Church. 'The offering of his freedom through obedience, the spirit of evangelical poverty and the love which becomes a gift in chastity, make the Salesian a sign of the power of the resurrection... they transform him into an educator who proclaims to the young "a new heaven and a new earth," awakening in them hope and the dedication and joy to which it gives rise' (C 63).

— Ratio, no. 780

‘Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life’ (Romans 6:4). Another yellow thread from St Paul! But we don’t need to rely just on St Paul: ‘I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies’ (John 11:25-26).

‘Newness of life’ carries an eschatological dimension, pointing to the ultimate renewal of all creation. In Romans 8:21, Paul speaks of the creation itself being set free from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. This future hope inspires believers to live in the present with the assurance that their new life in Christ is a foretaste of the eternal life to come.

Grasping what walking in newness of life actually means in practice is the great challenge. The *Ratio* responds to this in a number of ways. *As a consecrated person the brother is a sign of the life of the resurrection offered by Jesus to everyone. His affective maturity, human warmth and tangible joy become manifestations of his consecrated chastity. He is an eschatological sign, a reminder that all human beings are called to share in the life of the resurrection and communion with God the father of all* [no. 545]. This is repeated in more or less similar terms a little later, regarding the Salesian priest: *As a consecrated person, the Salesian priest is an eschatological sign. In his celibacy, he is a sign of the life of the resurrection that Jesus offers everyone. His affective maturity is a limpid expression of his celibacy, and his passion for the Lord translates into a joy that is visible and contagious 'as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ* [no. 580].

Living in the present with the assurance that the new life in Christ is a foretaste of the eternal life to come is another way of expressing a familiar Salesian phrase, the ‘grace of unity’. *We are called to deepen the grace of unity 'by which our Salesian life is at once religious and apostolic'. Don Bosco 'wanted the active and contemplative life... to go hand in hand through the ardour of charity' (GC22 20)* [no. 22].

This is walking in newness of life for the Salesian: *The grace of unity, which is the unifying power of divine love in us, harmonizes the different dimensions of Salesian formation. We see this in Don Bosco. 'He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the realities of this earth; and he was just as deeply the man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living 'as though he saw him who is invisible.' These two aspects combined to create a closely-knit life project: the service of the young' (C 21)* [no. 139].

Pope Leo’s conclusion to his first encyclical (*Magnifica Humanitas*) also breathes this sense of newness of life: ‘With the same faith as Mary, let us become “weavers of hope” in our world, sharing who we are and what we have, so that the presence of Jesus may grow among us and his Kingdom take shape.’

Turquoise

Jesus, Lord, bringing it all together

Following the Turquoise Thread

Paul, the witness and pastor, outlines some inspiring principles for a simple pedagogy of formation in the life of Christ. It should be noted first of all that in his writing he intends to accompany an entire Christian community.

— Meditatio, Chapter 3

Jesus' life continues in the Church, and in the communion of those who share in and continue his mission. Ecclesial communion, where it is all held together.

Bringing the scattered mob back together

Don Bosco bequeathed an ecclesial form of life to us that involves creating bonds of communion between Salesians, members of the Salesian Family, lay people, and young people, within a shared charism and mission. This is a direct participation in the mission of Christ who came to bring together the scattered children of God (Jn 11:52); it is sustained by the Spirit and celebrated joyfully in the Eucharist.

— Ratio, no. 21

Paul had it easy, in one sense – he encountered the Risen Christ and was immediately blinded, bowled over by it! But the chosen disciples of Jesus, in their most unapostolic moments (heading out of town, or locking themselves up in a room, or reverting to their old fishing habits) struggled to find ways to describe this strange experience.

John's Gospel, written so long after the others, does it through Mary Magdalene and her story in the garden, thinking he was the gardener, but then hearing her name, clinging to the Lord. He shook her off: 'Do not hold onto me', but commissioned her to tell the others, which she did: 'I have seen the Lord'.

Luke relied on the Road to Emmaus story which may have drawn on the celebration of the Eucharist in the communities: an acknowledgement of doubts and failures, Scripture texts and explanations, a meal, the breaking of bread, and the impulsive 'Go, the meal is over, tell everyone!'

But then there is the 'breakfast' story. People usually invite you to dinner. Jesus invited his wary, scattered mob to breakfast! Jesus there, waiting for and waiting on his friends, fish cooking, a breakfast on the shore as a welcoming, a righting of some serious wrongs (Peter's!), and a new commissioning: 'Feed my sheep', and 'Follow me!' (once more).

Do we find community difficult? We would be lying if said we didn't, at least sometimes! But it is so comforting to realise that Jesus' immediate followers needed his presence to bring them back together. And we need that too.

We accept our confreres as a gift from God, love them as Christ taught and make the faith-sharing experience of listening to the Word and celebrating the Eucharist the basis of community life, which thus becomes a 'sign' and 'school' of faith (GC23 216–218). 'Before being the fruit of our efforts, fraternal life in community is a gift of God and a fruit of the Eucharist that we celebrate: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17) [no. 109].

Where the threads meet: the challenge of communion

...the communion made possible by the Eucharist infinitely exceeds our best natural dispositions, and at the same time warns us that we cannot delude ourselves that we are united to Christ if we are divided from our brothers (GC29 23). The ideal community does not exist, of course. Every Christian reality is built on human frailty. Communities have to learn to build unity through dialogue and reconciliation, forgiveness and prayer.

— Ratio, no. 109

Meals are a significant theme in the Gospels, particularly in Luke, where Jesus is often depicted as either going to, at, or coming from a meal. Luke's Gospel indicates that the evangelist may have particularly appreciated good food – at least it shows clearly that he noticed and commented on food more than any other Gospel writer!

But what is of most interest is the kinds of people Jesus dined with and the lessons we can draw from these moments. Jesus dined with the despised (tax collectors), dealt with horrible hosts (Simon the Pharisee) or hassled hostesses (Martha), welcomed unexpected guests (the sinful woman). He would invite himself on occasions (Zaccheus), cooked on another occasion (breakfast on the shore), and was prepared to share a morsel with the man who would betray him (Judas). Salesian Scripture scholar, Fr Frank Moloney (recently returned to the Father's Home), summed up Jesus' meals with so many different groups and individuals in the title of his bestseller on the Eucharist: *A Body Broken for a Broken People*.

The *Ratio* deals with the reality of Salesian formation, a reality that acknowledges the brokenness of all involved, formators as well as formees. Human frailty and fragility are a reality in any community, and consecrated men are no exception. The choice of a fragment from article 109 (above) is deliberate, because to only list all the positive statements in the *Ratio* about fraternal communion (and there are many) would be to ignore a central teaching of the gospel, as it focuses on Jesus' table fellowship.

According to the Gospels, Jesus' contemporaries were staggered by his preparedness to share his own table with sinners (Mark 2:15; Luke 15:1-2), to deliberately visit the tables of tax collectors (Luke 19:5), and to allow a prostitute to attend to him at a table where he was an invited guest (Luke 7:36-38). In these situations, his table-fellowship was most unsuitable for a religious leader or a Rabbi. He was active in sharing his table with the irreligious.

— Francis J. Moloney SDB, *A Body Broken for a Broken People*

And now, in every Salesian community, which celebrates Eucharist as the 'central act of our day' [no. 116] he is active in sharing it with Religious who are also ready to admit their frailty!

Conclusion

A tapestry is made to be contemplated, not merely analysed. The *Ratio* is not asking us to locate every mention of Jesus. It invites us to stand back and contemplate the whole tapestry. Only then do we see that Jesus is not one thread among many, but the pattern that gives meaning to the whole weave.

And then what? Contemplative prayer, where we seek to be in union with the prayer of Jesus, insofar as it helps us participate in his mystery.

But we have been working with colour, have we not? Attempting to explore the image of Jesus that emerges from the *Ratio* (and ourselves in the light of that). We could let the ‘colours’ of Jesus be woven into our prayer. For example, Blue is the colour of transcendence in our scheme – the colour of what draws the eye beyond itself. In that case Jesus is not simply one item in a list of blue things; he is the one who inhabits every blue image, from Galilee to Gethsemane and then eternal Glory:

- the blue of Galilee (his ministry),
- the blue of Mary’s mantle (his incarnation),
- the blue of Friday twilight (his passion),
- the blue of the Easter dawn (his resurrection),
- the blue planet seen from space (his cosmic lordship).

Blue is the lake of Galilee.
Blue is the robe of humility.
Blue is the distance Jesus could see
Beyond every border of tribe and decree.
Blue is the shadow of Gethsemane.
Blue is the grief of Calvary.
Blue is the dawn on the Galilean shore
Where the risen Christ called his friends once more.
Blue is the earth from the heavens viewed,
Floating in darkness, serene and renewed.
Blue is our home in the vast mystery,
Gathered in Christ through eternity.
Amen.