

THE SALESIAN PRIEST

Source:

DESRAMAUT, Francis, *Spiritualità Salesiana, Cento parole chiave*, Roma, LAS, 2001, pp. 484-490.

THE TEACHINGS OF DON ALBERA

Don Albera wrote a long circular letter entitled, "Don Bosco, Model of the Salesian Priest." According to him the Salesian priest should be in everything and always another Don Bosco. He also asserts that it is only the Salesian priest who can re-live in himself Don Bosco in the fullness of his personality because only the priest can copy in his entirety another priest.

Don Albera's image of the Salesian priest is that of "Minister of the Sacrifice and of Purification". In developing this image, he relies on the teachings of the Council of Trent. He begins by saying that ordination gives to the priest a sacred character that is "enduring, indelible, perpetual, and incorruptible. It makes of him 'another man'". This character gives him the right to celebrate the Eucharist and to hear confessions.

He reminds the Salesians priests that Don Bosco wanted his son-priests to understand well the greatness and sublimity of the priestly character and of the functions connected to it. Thus, regarding the Eucharist he writes:

- "The true action of the priest is the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass".
- "All the most holy and seraphic prayers not only of the Church militant, but also of the Church triumphant, all these things taken together do not equal even one Mass."
- Between God and the priests the Eucharistic sacrifice establishes "a union that I would say is one of a kind, and which is comparable to the hypostatic union and to that of Mary and the Word incarnate".

Regarding the Sacrament of Penance and of the purifying power of the priest, he writes "...the infinite goodness and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ in giving to men this marvelous font of every holiness, and in communicating to us priests the same authority of forgiving sins, associating us so intimately to his work of redemption."

Don Albera does not stop at the function of the Salesian priest. He also touches on his spiritual life. According to him the spiritual life of the Salesian priest should be founded first of all and above all on the firm foundation of "Christian virtues". These are faith, hope, love of God and neighbor, religion, humility, mortification, poverty, chastity, obedience, justice etc.

THE TEACHINGS OF DON VIGANO

Don Vigano developed his ideas on the priesthood with reference to the Rectors.

He states that ordination empowers the priest to act in the person of Jesus Christ. It also places on his shoulders the responsibility of carrying out the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ which is to guide his people to salvation. According to him this pastoral dimension constitutes the originality of the New Testament priesthood. Thus the priest of the New Covenant is a pastor.

Regarding ministry, Don Viganò enumerates three services that the Rector-pastor renders. They are: the service of the Word, the service of sanctification and the service of directing the community. He places these three services squarely within the context of the Church. This is what he means when he says that the pastor should have a sense of the Church.

The service of the Word makes the Rector a prophet. His task is to translate the Word into God's Word today for the youth and for his confreres. To do this he takes into consideration the situation of the youth and of his confreres today. And because he does this service as a Salesian within the Church community, he also sees to it that he is in consonance with the magisterium of the Church and with the Salesian charism. What he brings finally to the youth and to the confreres is the fruit of meditation, contemplation and prayer.

The service of sanctification is linked to the sacraments. In keeping with Salesian tradition he highlights the importance of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation. The celebration of the Eucharist, according to him, should not be an isolated event but must flow in community life. Penance, on the other hand, should also be viewed within the context of the community. Its celebration would be enriched by community self-criticism ('scrutinium') and by the Rector leading them to an understanding of the sense of sin and the meaning of its existence .

The service of directing the community is exercised in three interdependent areas: pastoral coordination, communion and government. However, he highlights two specific tasks that need special attention: insertion into the local church and animation of the Salesian Family.

THE PRIEST IN THE ACTION AND WRITINGS OF DON BOSCO

Source:

BRAIDO Pietro, *Don bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo della liberta'. I*, Roma, LAS, 2003, pp. 337-344.

DON BOSCO ACCORDING TO BRAIDO

Braido describes Don Bosco as a priest-educator and a philanthropist who dedicated himself on behalf of youth who were abandoned and in danger. He describes Don Bosco's work for the young as preventive, personal, charitable and social. It is preventive because it seeks to keep them from becoming delinquents. Nevertheless, if they ever fall into it, he would help them recover.

Don Bosco can not be counted among educators, scholars and philanthropists of the 18th and 19th centuries who were involved in the study and research regarding the causes and remedies of the abandonment of youth and the dangers in which they find themselves. But he equals and perhaps, even surpasses them in the acute perception of the needs of abandoned youth and in his involvement in answering those needs. Generally Don Bosco stops at establishing and describing the problematic aspects of the youth situation. And then he goes deeper by identifying the religious and moral causes and above all, by proposing on a vast scale the means, institutions and methods of resolving the problem.

DON BOSCO ACCORDING TO OTHERS

Canon Ottavio Moreno calls him a new priest of social charity. He writes: "For some years he has worked to instruct and gather abandoned youth or street urchins who wander here and there along the streets and boulevards of the capital.... He has done everything he could, even without sufficient means; therefore, he relies on Christian charity and likewise on the charity of the government, that is no less concerned with the problem."

L'Armonia (1851) praises his tireless zeal and calls him a very good director and a very good priest. "Everyone knows with what zeal and with what charity the priest John Bosco sacrifices himself for the instruction and education of the youth of the lowest classes of society, who in general are abandoned to themselves as regards education. How many crimes the charity of this pious priest prevents!"

THE PRIEST IN THE WRITINGS OF DON BOSCO

In the introduction to the "Piano di Regolamento" of 1854, Don Bosco described the image of the new priest as a father, a brother and a friend to the young. He models this new image in his account of his meeting with Bartholomew Garelli in the sacristy of the Church of St. Francis de Sales. Garelli himself represents the kind of youth Don Bosco intended to reach out to: an orphan, 16 years old, illiterate, has not yet made his first communion, ashamed to go to catechism. In his account of that providential meeting, Don Bosco assures Garelli, "You shall be my friend."

Don Paolo Francesco Rossi was a director of the Oratory of San Luigi. Upon his death, Don Bosco gave a eulogy in which he described the new priest of charity. He was not only zealous in preaching, catechism, instruction, confession, in giving advice and correction. He also went about in search of employers for unemployed boys and counseled employers to be patient with the boys. He procured bread, clothing and shoes for the boys.

When Don Cafasso died he delivered two eulogies: "Vita sacerdotale pubblica" and "Vita sacerdotale private". In those eulogies he painted Don Cafasso as a man of God and a man of charity, a great benefactor of humanity.

In the 1850's DB did his best to tell stories of priests, real or idealized, close to all, youth and adults, who reproduced the Salesian and Vincentian ideal of affective and effective love. In "Fatti contemporanei

esposti in forma di dialogo” Felix who had been freed from the clutches of Protestantism by a Catholic priest said that he was persuasive. He easily, clearly, affably and calmly took away his doubts.

In “La buona accoglienza” Luigi turned bad at 18 years old. Touched by the kindness of his parish priest, he admitted his evil ways and promised to change. In “La forza della buona educazione” the parish priest went out of his way to get Peter to have presentable clothes for first communion.

Don Bosco advised confessors to show loving kindness in welcoming penitents. He tells them to correct their penitents with kindness and to have great prudence and discretion when asking questions regarding the virtue of modesty. We find this kind of confessors in “Fatti contemporanei esposti in forma di dialogo” and in “Valentino o la vocazione impedita”. In the former an anonymous sick person speaks about his confessor as having always wished him well, as having given good advice and as being prudent and skillful in setting aright matters of the soul. In the latter Valentino ended in jail on account of his father. But fortunately he saw the light. He wrote to his confessor telling him that his advice would become the norm of his life.

REFLECTION

Speaking of the Rector, Don Viganò asserts that the Rector being a priest is pastor of the Salesian community and of the youth entrusted to its care.

One of his ministries is that of the service of the Word. His task is to translate the Word into God’s Word today for the youth and for his confreres. The opportunities to preach the Word in the school setting are principally the Eucharist, the Religion class and the morning talk (the Philippine version of the ‘buona notte’). To do this he must be in contact with the realities of youth and of the world. He must be actively present among them. He must keep abreast with the times through personal reading and by reading the newspaper and watching the news on TV. He must take time to think, to reflect and to meditate on God’s Word. It would not hurt if he also makes the effort to develop skills in homiletics tailored to the youth as audience. He must learn to use a language that speaks to the minds and hearts of the young. Otherwise, the opportunity to do some spiritual good to the young is lost and wasted.

Braido describes Don Bosco as a priest-educator and a philanthropist who dedicated himself on behalf of youth who were abandoned and in danger. To read Don Bosco being called a philanthropist is rather strange to my ears. I would normally associate a philanthropist with a millionaire (not a priest) who uses his money to do good to people. But in a way Don Bosco may be called a philanthropist for he did collect much money from people to do good to the young.

Don Bosco seemed to be gifted in the art of getting people involved in his work either by personally helping out or through financial contribution. And by getting them involved, the work on behalf of young people grew. This means that Don Bosco was able to reach out to more young people. We need to learn the same skills if we are able to do more good even today to more young people, especially the poor and abandoned.

Let me focus on raising money for our work for the poor and abandoned. Someone observed that there is plenty of money around waiting to be given for a worthwhile cause. We just have to know where to look and how to ask for them. Some like Don Bosco seemed to have knack for this kind of thing. They

were born with the gift of convincing people to give. Some do not have this gift. But the theory of Multiple Intelligences (Howard Gardner of Harvard) asserts that with a good teacher and plenty of intelligent effort on our part, we can learn any skill to an acceptable degree. This means that we can learn fund-raising skills. There are fund-raising schools or institutes that teach these skills. We just have to enroll in them.

Don Bosco can not be counted among educators, scholars and philanthropists of the 18th and 19th centuries who were involved in the study and research regarding the causes and remedies of the abandonment of youth and the dangers in which they find themselves. But he equals and perhaps, even surpasses them in the acute perception of the needs of abandoned youth and in his involvement in answering those needs.

Don Bosco was not a scholar. That is why we do not have a treatise on the preventive system. And that is why perhaps he can not be declared a Doctor of the Church. Instead, Don Bosco was a man of action. He was a doer. He gets things done. But this does not mean he was not a thinker. I think we can assert that he engaged in what is called in education 'reflective practice'. The revisions of the Rules for Salesian Houses are sufficient proof of this.

Reflective practice means that he studied the youth situation, not only the present situation but trends as well and then he looked for ways to respond effectively to them. Examining the effectiveness of one's response was also part of his reflective practice. For instance, the phenomenon of "collegializzazione" that was started by Don Bosco himself was a result of reflective practice. He perceived in the action of the liberal anti-clericals the trend to send away the clergy out of the schools. This means that they would be in the position to shape the minds and hearts of the young. That was dangerous. To respond to this danger Don Bosco opened colleges and schools.

We are in a fast-changing world. And with the changes come new youth situations and fresh challenges. By engaging in reflective practice we may like Don Bosco, be able to respond effectively to the needs of poor and abandoned youth.