



# EVANGELISING AND EDUCATING: OUR APOSTOLIC IDENTITY

CHAPTER



*“Give me this water,  
that I may not thirst”*

*(Jn 4:15)*



*Our mission is a sharing in that of the Church, which brings about the saving design of God, the coming of His Kingdom, by bringing to men the message of the Gospel, which is closely tied in with the development of the temporal order. We educate and evangelise according to a plan for the total well-being of man directed to Christ, the perfect Man. Faithful to the intentions of our Founder, our purpose is to form ‘upright citizens and good Christians’”*

[C. 31]



*This system is based entirely on reason, religion and [above all] on kindness”*

[The Preventive System in the Education of the young]

## Fullness of life

and the happiness of human beings is the ultimate purpose of the plan of God. The Gospel of Christ shows great trust in humanity. It demands that we pay attention to the unique reality of every person and their willingness to accept their vocation and destiny in Christ, the perfect man. The Gospel proposes the good news (the person of Christ) who invites everyone to share in Christ's sonship, the foundation of the freedom and dignity of every person. Don Bosco educated and evangelised by carrying out a project of holistic development. He saw education as the growth of the person, with all the means necessary to assist the person. Evangelisation inspires people to the fullness of life offered in Jesus and enlightens them in its pursuit, always respecting the developing conscience of each person. Finally, regarding the choice of field of ministry, we are sent to the poor, especially the poorest, and to ordinary class environments, where we seek to humanise and evangelise the culture.

## 1

# Fullness of Life and the Happiness of every Human Being

Developing as a person is a daily task linked to the joy and struggle of existence. At times it can be a *particularly difficult undertaking*. We have the sense of having to invent a path not yet mapped out for ourselves (and by ourselves). The journey is never in a straight line but is marked by ups and downs, by times of satisfaction and times of frustration, and by hopes and disappointments. This task often remains a web of situations and experiences without ideal points of reference or much concern for consistence and unity.

In this sense the present context causes a new unease, not a passing one but ongoing. Together with the **constant change that characterises society and culture** there is also the **weakness of the institutions** that accompany young people in this situation. A responsible attitude on the part of the Salesian educator and a well-planned project are therefore urgent and important.

The words of Pope Paul VI when he said that the rupture between faith and culture is the drama of the present time, have not lost any of their relevance (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 20). Present-day culture, no longer homogeneous, influences young people in its complexity and fragmentation. With its many enticements and its virtual nature it leads to a consumerist understanding even

in the emotional area. It leaves young people amidst a jungle of desires, in the face of the harsh realities of economic and existential crisis.

Alongside these hard realities there is **incredibly precious capacity and potential in everyone's heart** that can lead them to do great things. Each man and woman can discover their precise direction in life if they



*“We believe that God is awaiting us in the young to offer us the grace of meeting with him and to dispose us to serve him in them, recognising their dignity and educating them to the fullness of life”*

[GC23, NO.95]

reflect on their lives and ask themselves about the meaning of life. Where do I come from? Where am I going? How do I want to get there? Who do I want to go with? In our deepest humanity we discover the *fullness of life, in the young person and in the educator*, for it involves both of them.

In interpreting people's life experience we see the need to be loved, the sense of gratuity, and the desire to be valued and appreciated as one is, not depending on the achievement of objectives or results. We see that a wrong direction in life is a problem of meaning, a *problem with one's life plan*. This means that it is incumbent upon us as educators to identify what is worth spending one's life on and giving one's life for others. We need to see young people not as containers to be filled but as individuals to be accompanied. We help them to be themselves and to discover the beauty of their own vocation.

In our way of thinking as Christians we regard the project of life as a response to a vocation, a call from God who arouses, sustains and strengthens the freedom of the young, making them capable of corresponding with freedom and joy to their own identity and mission.

The fullness of life in the Gospel not only opens the young to the dignity of the human person, but also makes them free and sustains their ability to give a responsible and mature response to God. **Human life is to be seen in terms of vocation.** This calls for great openness to the Spirit, and a sense of responsibility in taking on the duty of a faithful response. "Responsibility" means literally accepting the beauty of "responding".

Young people are involved in measuring up to this responsibility. This means allowing themselves to be challenged by new experiences, going beyond themselves to meet new situations where they will rediscover themselves at a deeper level. It is in this context also that they will meet the invitation to the faith and reply to their life project. Young people are the object of God's call. They play an active role in listening to it and responding, and in this sense they are "responsible".

Awareness of vocation is the way to understand life and freedom truthfully. It is only when freedom takes on this task, and goes beyond one's own ego, that it enters the sphere of love, and begins to do good also for others. In a word, **vocation is loving**, self-giving, making of oneself a gift which witnesses to a new culture. Vocation is a response in love. Any life project which is born from a vocation is a gift to be given that transcends one's own ego.

## 2

## Directed to Christ, the perfect man

## 2 1

### ENCOUNTERING JESUS CHRIST AND INTEGRATING LOVE FOR LIFE

Faith shows us that our life-project and the transcendence of the person recall us to Christ, in his historical condition as the one true New Man. We Salesians are a community of the baptised and we are present in the Church and in the world with a task, a vocation and a particular *raison d'être*: **to invite everyone to live life as Jesus lived it** and to show that following Christ leads to the fullness of life. We ask ourselves how can we proclaim the Gospel in a way that it will challenge people to maturity and the fullness of life? In what way can human desires be compatible with Jesus Christ?

Jesus, an expert in humanity, interacts via his message with all our human desires. Jesus shows a great trust in humanity and sees signs of goodness and the presence of God there. Jesus takes human needs seriously and the need to be happy in mind and body, in the vast world of relationships and the experience of love. He knows what is in the human heart, the desire to be reconciled with one's deepest being, often shattered, and that this does not have to be merited but is given out of goodness and love. It leads to a radical empathy, in the etymological sense of the world, as evoked by *Gaudium et Spes*:

*The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts* (GAUDIUM ET SPES 1).

Jesus' Gospel is laden with humanity, made up of gestures and words of welcome, of mutuality and listening. In terms of Christian anthropology this implies an awareness of the intimate correlation between the

richness of the humanity of every person and the human experience of Jesus. It is founded on the Incarnation of Christ. Human life, even in the poorest and most wretched conditions, becomes worthy of the divine, in imitation of Christ, the place where God becomes present. It is a call to grow into full communion with God through the gift of self. Through the Incarnation, **Jesus of Nazareth is the only way available to us to know the mystery of God and of the human person.** The world of God and that of mankind are not far apart and incommunicable. God and man are in full dialogue, beginning with Jesus Christ, the best interpreter of the truth of the human person.



*“Without God man neither knows which way to go, nor even understands who he is”*

[CARITAS IN VERITATE 78]

The mission of Jesus is manifested in the context of incarnation and inculturation. The Incarnation, as the greatest expression of inculturation, is not a secondary fact, but the way chosen by God to make himself known. God’s revelation is transmitted through the Incarnation. The Church’s mission, guided and sustained by the mission of the Holy Spirit, has been fulfilled and is fulfilled in categories of time and space, by inculturation in the lives of people. The **New Evangelisation is accomplished by inculturation of the faith.** This implies the choice of three strategies: new evangelisation through catechesis and liturgy (evangelising by catechesis); new evangelisation through the integral promotion of peoples, by the poor and for the poor, at the service of life and of the family (evangelising by promotion); an evangelisation committed to penetrating the environments of urban and non-urban culture (evangelising by inculturation). In this age of New Evangelisation our youth ministry must seek at the same time to catechise, promote and inculturate (cf. Fr Pascual Chávez, AGC 407, “Salesian Youth Ministry”). If New Evangelisation is not translated into human promotion and inculturation it will not be authentic and will not cause the energy of faith to mature in history.

The mystery of Christ in his Incarnation, Death and Resurrection is the full revelation of humanity and of the immense greatness of every human person. For this reason **the Church can be the interpreter of human nature** and can be an expert in humanity. It need have no fear of entering into the terrain of human life. In Christian anthropology, the centrality of the human person does not conflict with the primacy of God and is

understood in the light of God's initiative. The awareness that we live immersed in God's gift of salvation and that we are "new creatures" (Rom. 8) is what gives unity to our existence.

Christian belief in life and in the human person, in reason and the capacity for love, is not the result of naive optimism but comes from that "trustworthy hope" (*Spe Salvi* 1) that is given to us by our *sonship in Christ*. It gives foundation to human dignity and liberty and the ability to love and be loved. It allows the person to live in an authentically human way in conformity with human nature and vocation. Christ occupies the most intimate space in humanity. "By the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, [Christ] fully reveals man to man himself" (*Gaudium et Spes* 22), and makes him aware of his highest vocation.

Youth Ministry enables young people to discover the depth of their own experience and to grasp the religious appeal to full communion with Jesus Christ. Gradually *Jesus Christ becomes the central person to whom reference is made in all life's decisions, attitudes, choices, actions and behaviour*. Today we encounter different pedagogical models permeated by positive values that make no reference to Jesus Christ and, consequently, lack a complete perspective of the human person to guide the individual towards the goal of salvation as new life and full maturity as a human being.

Salesian ministry, wherever it takes place, always includes the proclamation of Christ and solicitude for the salvation of the young. Our predilection for the young "gives meaning to our whole life" (C. 14). This solicitude is always our primary intention and desire in every educational and pastoral initiative. It is gradually made explicit according to the capacity of the young people to receive it. This is Don Bosco's apostolic project: "to be... signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor" (C. 2).

**We want them to hear the voice of God the Father, and come to know Jesus Christ.** We are convinced that the offer of the Gospel brings unexpected power to the building of one's personality and to the integral development that every young person deserves. It is a pedagogical process that takes into consideration all human forces. It offers young people the conditions that make every response an act of freedom. A sense of realism and patience are attitudes that respect the personal situation of each young person, from the weakest to the strongest, from those who are furthest from faith and the Church to the closest.

2 2

## ORIGINALITY AND BOLDNESS IN DON BOSCO'S APPROACH TO EDUCATION

Don Bosco's pedagogy explicitly insists on the authentic religious purpose of life in an educational process positively oriented towards Christ and enlightened by his message. It integrates faith and life which is nourished by the power of faith. It is fundamental to recognise that Don Bosco's pastoral concern is always part of the process of humanisation which promotes the integral development of the young person. It includes the discovery of one's life-project and a commitment to transforming the world in accordance with God's plan for each young person.

**The originality and boldness of the call to youthful holiness is an intrinsic part of Don Bosco's educative approach.** It is a holiness that meets the profound aspirations of young people (their need for life, expansion, joy, freedom, a future, etc.). It is a way of holiness which the young people experience gradually and realistically as a life of grace and of friendship with Christ. It means the fulfilment of their most authentic ideals. "Here we make holiness consist in being always cheerful" (St Dominic Savio).

3

## Evangelise and educate through a project of holistic development

3 1

### THE UNDERSTANDING OF EVANGELISATION

Evangelisation in practice becomes a vehicle and expression of the **clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus**. It communicates his message, his way of life and the salvation wrought by God, for all, through the power of the Spirit. The Church's reflection on evangelisation persuades every believer to become an evangeliser who can proclaim the richness, depth, unity and diverse expression of that message. From this perspective evangelisation, in its broadest sense, implies:



*“Evangelisation means not only teaching a doctrine but proclaiming the Lord Jesus by word and action, in other words, becoming an instrument of God’s presence and action in the world”*

[DOCTRINAL NOTE ON SOME ASPECTS OF EVANGELISATION, 2]

▶ working for the *extension of the kingdom and its values* among all people. This, in turn, involves action and service of people for social justice and human rights, the reform of unjust structures, social progress, the fight against poverty and the structures that give rise to it.

▶ *bringing people gradually to share gospel values and ideals:*

the rejection of violence and war, respect for every person, the desire for freedom, justice and fraternity, overcoming racism and nationalism, affirming the dignity and value of woman.

▶ *an effective participation in the forums of the modern world and in the great areas of human suffering:* among exiles, refugees, migrants, the new generations, emerging peoples, minorities, areas of oppression, of misery and disaster, the development of women and children, safeguarding the environment, international relations and the world of social communications.

**Evangelisation involves many aspects:** presence, witness, preaching (as an explicit proclamation), call to personal conversion, formation of the Church, catechesis – but also inculturation, inter-religious dialogue, education, preferential option for the poor, transformation of society. This complexity and diversity of expression is authoritatively stated in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (no.17) and very well described in *Redemptoris Missio* (nos.41-60):

*Evangelisation, as we have said, is a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative. These elements may appear to be contradictory, indeed mutually exclusive. In fact they are complementary and mutually enriching* (EVANGELII NUNTIANDI 24).

This broad vision of evangelisation confirms the first task of the Salesian mission: *the total well-being of the person, according to the needs of the many concrete situations* (cf. C. 31). Working in this field, inspired by the love of God and for the sake of the Kingdom, is evangelisation. The Salesian understanding of evangelisation is motivated by a holistic concern. It is followed by an educative concern for the growth of the person in all aspects. Education is the human activity where we present the Gospel and where it acquires its typical shape. This anthropological approach leads us to understand better how the different areas of Salesian education are happily marked by a wholesome humanism and transcendent dimension.

3 2

## THE RELATION BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY AND EVANGELISING ACTIVITY

The goal of Salesian Youth Ministry is to help every young person to construct his or her personality with Christ as the fundamental reference point. As this reference to Christ becomes progressively more explicit and is better internalised, it helps the young person to see all history in Christ, to judge his or her own life in the light of Christ, to decide and to love like Christ, to hope in accordance with Christ's teaching, to live in Christ in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit (cf. GC23, nos.112-115). A true and real missionary conversion demands that Salesian Youth Ministry discover and live **this profound and unbreakable relation between educational activity and evangelising activity**.

### A *The educational implications of Christian anthropology*

Beginning with education does not mean that we follow the anthropological approach as if in a kind of 'secularisation' of the evangelising mission. Neither does it mean that we move away from the theological aspect and basis. We think of *education in the light of the history of salvation*. Post-conciliar theological reflection looks at faith in the approach to education, for example, when treating of the primacy of the Kingdom of God or the process of salvation in the context of the Church and its pastoral activity. It recognises situations in people's lives as theological places, and urges that they be read in the light of faith.

The centrality of the person in Christian anthropology has educational implications. Education is taken in its widest and most comprehensive sense *as the growth of the person and a collection of interventions* that help to make the person aware of his or her identity, to embrace everything good that the Creator has put in it, and to be open to meaning and to mystery. Examining the question of education is a matter for everyone, not just Christians. The decision to consider education as part of pastoral ministry is becoming ever more urgent because of the **centrality of education as a privileged means of service to people.**

Education releases all a young person's potential, intellectual ability, emotional capacity and will power. By taking care of young people the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan is to accompany and educate them in the widest sense, helping them to discover their reasons for living and to grow in every way.

The inescapable starting point is meeting the young people "where they are", in the conditions in which they are living, listening attentively to their questions and aspirations, and recognising the potential for growth that is in each one.

Seen this way, education of the young is not an optional manifestation of charity or just one sector of our mission. It is the way we must go. **The educational concern which is part of our youth ministry** seeks to begin with the story of the young person's life and recognise the action of God there through our ministry.

From all this it follows that **cultural and pedagogical interventions in the service of the young are necessary.** If education puts young people at the centre, looking after the different aspects, then structures and institutions are a response to the needs of the young people to whom we are sent (cf. C. 26). We recognise the valuable contribution of all educational activity in educating to the faith. Their task is to sustain and mediate the process of salvation.

Not all educational models offer this valuable contribution to the process of evangelisation. We depend on an education that is in keeping with the practice of the Kingdom, seeking to give the fullness of life to all, within the perspective of the fullest possible humanisation. We recognise ourselves in a way of doing things that never becomes an absolute, nor does it



make absolutes out of the strategies, content or tools it employs. It manages the educational process in an open way, with an outcome that cannot be foreseen and cannot be manipulated, because it deals with the freedom of the person and the action of God in the life of every person and in the life of the community and its institutions.

Education to human and Christian maturity evokes the pedagogical perspective more immediately. It is a help in promoting the Gospel *with a realism that is educative and pedagogical*.

### **B** *The Gospel, radical inspiration*

The purpose of educative action is different from that of evangelisation. Each has its own aim, methods and contents. We should be able to distinguish them and also join them together harmoniously. Both work for the unity of the young person.

They are **two complementary ways of caring for the young. They come together in their intention to “generate” the new person.** They collaborate fully in the all-round growth of the young person. Ministry works on the human aspect and at the same time in the area of faith.

### » *Evangelisation in dialogue with education*

Evangelisation takes place on the human terrain it occupies and it regenerates the daily life of the young people and their need to make sense of all that happens in their world. By releasing all the educative potential of the message of Christ, evangelisation leads to maturation in



*“Their (Salesian) charism places them in the privileged position of being able to give due weight to the role of education in the field of the evangelisation of the young. Without education, in fact, there is no deep and lasting evangelisation; there is no growth or process of maturity; there is no change of mentality or of culture. Young people have within them a deep desire for a full life, for genuine love, for constructive freedom; but often, sadly, they are betrayed in their expectations which are not fulfilled. It is essential to help young people to make good use of the qualities they have within them, such as energy and positive desires; to give them projects full of humanity and gospel values; to encourage them to take their place in society actively, through their work, their involvement and their commitment to the common good”*

(LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI TO FR PASCUAL CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, RECTOR MAJOR S.D.B. ON THE OCCASION OF THE 26TH GENERAL CHAPTER)

human life and growth in freedom. By helping people to reach the fullness of life, education is fundamental in the development of the person and is of interest to all who care about the good of the human person. The Christian message is part of the work of education and offers a way of thinking that favours true and integral growth. **Evangelisation interacts with education.** It allows the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be heard, which is a necessary condition if the truth is to be accepted.

We bring an educational focus to the task by endeavouring to make the Gospel message meaningful *in real life terms*, by getting it to measure up to, interact with the real problems a young person has and, more generally, with the whole question of meaning. Since education is a process and is called to constantly adapt to changes in the individual and in culture, it has to let people feel that it is a gradual thing and helps in how courses and approaches are planned. It also has to play a positive and critical role with regard to certain approaches to evangelisation which can be naive and too abstract. And it ought to encourage a pedagogical awareness which is essential to good pastoral planning, that human values are fundamentally positive ones, even though impaired by sin. Ministry allows itself to be questioned by young peoples' experience; by recognising the deeper questions in their heart, it permits faith and Gospel proclamation to enter into fruitful dialogue with them.

### » *The Gospel as radical inspiration*

On the other hand, the key point is the Gospel, its guiding function and its radical inspiration. **It is a message that interprets life in greater depth than any other.** Evangelisation has a power that challenges. It is not something added on. The Gospel becomes part of the way of thinking of the structural unity of one's personality. Its operating and evaluating criteria refer to Jesus Christ. A service of education that aims intelligently at the holistic formation of the young is not afraid of being challenged continually on the meaning and the reasons for evangelisation.

Educational activity is rooted in Jesus Christ. *It does not just take him as a model, but prolongs his presence in history.* It finds its total meaning and reason in the message of Jesus Christ. Moreover, it finds in the Gospel help for maturation in freedom and responsibility. The Gospel is its guide in the search for identity and meaning. It enlightens the formation of conscience and presents itself as a sublime model for the authenticity of love. It offers the clearest guideline for engagement in the social dimension

of the person. The Gospel inspires the criteria for judgement, guides the basic choices in life, sheds light on ethical conduct in private and in public, governs interpersonal relationships, and gives direction for working and living. The dignity of the person is enhanced by interaction with faith. In meeting the good news, the human person reaches the highest point as the image of God, which reveals the transcendent destiny of life and sheds new light on all human rights.

**This is a holistic proposal:** education is enriched if it is inspired by the Gospel from the very beginning. From the outset, evangelisation recognises the importance of adapting to the evolving situation young people find themselves in. Educational activity is ultimately geared towards enabling in each young person a personal encounter with God, guiding this process towards being open to God and conforming to Christ, the perfect man. This perspective overcomes the problem, which is mainly methodological, of *when and how to proclaim the Gospel*, and how to integrate all the dimensions of the Educative and Pastoral Project with concrete situations and the process of education.

### **C** *The Good News in the variety of cultures and religious traditions*

**The Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project has shown itself to be of great relevance in the most diverse contexts.** It has already shown its value in diverse religious traditions, in multicultural contexts and in secularised environments. Today however, in societies that are extremely pluralist from a cultural and religious point of view, it is evident that the Christian elements of the Preventive System cannot always be explicitly displayed. These need to be interpreted and adapted, emphasising a wholesome humanism as the basis of all education. A fully-integrated humanism of this kind is open to the religious and ethical dimension which gives due importance to the knowledge and esteem of the cultures and spiritual values of the different civilisations.

What is needed today is to have a good knowledge of the treasure we possess and be able to apply it in different contexts in harmony with modern sensitivities. The need for education challenges us to offer an all-round education which aims at *forming the whole person and every person*.

Religious freedom helps the exercise of the human faculties by creating the necessary pre-conditions for a holistic development of the person in every dimension (cf. *Caritas in Veritate* 11).

Because of their missionary vocation to universality, Salesian works are encouraged by the presence of different faiths and religions to engage in greater dialogue with other spiritual and religious traditions. It is not a question of renouncing our own identity and our missionary mandate, and even less of assuming a fundamentalist mentality. Religious pluralism presents an opportunity for a better understanding of our Christian identity. Indeed, in this sense, *an awareness of one's own identity is an essential premise for any serious dialogue*. A purely secularist understanding is to be avoided, and likewise any kind of rigidity that is not open to other religions. These two attitudes hinder the true testimony of believers in civil and political life.

## 4

## Choice of a field of apostolate

## 4 1

### THE YOUNG, ESPECIALLY THE POOREST, ARE OUR DECISIVE DETERMINING OPTION

#### A *A strong, constant love for the poorest*

Don Bosco directed his work decisively towards youth. He decided consciously to make himself available to welcome boys and young people at risk. This choice became the **criterion for his work of evangelisation for their complete liberation**. His priority for "*the young, especially the poorest among them*" - these are Don Bosco's words - is also our decisive choice (C. 6, 26-29, 41; R. 1,3,11,14,15, 25,26; GC20, nos.45-57).

Don Bosco made a gospel choice to become poor with the poor. He took on the poverty, including the material poverty, of the Son of God, in order to reach out to those who were most in need. The streets and squares became his workplace, the field or playground his meeting place and the place where he proclaimed the Gospel. He welcomed young people without exception and

without prejudice, recognising and valuing what was in their hearts (their dreams, their difficulties and their challenges). He walked with them, adapting himself to their pace. **For him, every meeting with a boy was a time for dialogue, leading eventually to an encounter with faith.** That, quite simply, is the terrain where the invitation to faith is revealed as a resource of life with the potential for the fullness of life.

The poorest young people wait to be welcomed and have their aspirations taken seriously, to know that their deepest desires will find an outlet. Don Bosco's attitude is of someone who accompanies and does not substitute or invade, has no prejudices and does not feign trust, one who walks with the young, supporting and animating them.

Don Bosco regarded poverty that was a cause of corruption and debasement as being the very opposite of the liberating poverty of the Son of God. In his mission of caring for souls, he was willing to pay the price and to leave all (*Da mihi animas cetera tolle*). He abandoned himself and his own comforts in order to be totally committed to his boys, to be close to them, to be poor with the poor. This is why **he built his life-plan to meet the needs of the young**, especially the poorest and those in most danger, to help them to gather the richness of life and its values, and to equip them to live with dignity in this world, and make them more aware of their eternal destiny (cf. C. 26).

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Don Bosco was acutely aware that he was called by God to a unique mission in favour of young people. *Without them Don Bosco would be unrecognisable.* "For you I study, for you I work, for you I live, for you I am ready even to give my life" (C. 14). Signs from above, his natural aptitude, the advice of prudent people, personal discernment, circumstances that happened providentially, all combined to convince him that God, who had enriched him with outstanding gifts, was asking him to devote himself totally to the young:

*I have promised to give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys* (C. 1).



*"I was horrified at seeing crowds of young men, between the ages of 12 and 18, all healthy, robust, and intelligent, but idle, flea-ridden, and in need of spiritual and material food"*

(MEMOIRS OF THE ORATORY,  
SECOND DECADE 1835-1845, NO.11)

The present urgency of the *New Evangelisation* calls for the same missionary spirit that Don Bosco had in his pastoral ministry, a missionary spirit that leads us wherever the needs and demands of young people are not being cared for.

## **B** *Poverty compromises the education and growth of young people.*

This Salesian field of ministry gives us a way of looking at the situation and interpreting it from the point of view of young people. We are sensitive to

the conditions that favour their education and evangelisation, and also those that place them at risk. We are attentive to their positive aspects, their new values and their capacity for change. **All forms of poverty block or destroy the educative resources of the person and compromise the growth of young people as children of God.**

Every young person carries in himself or herself signs of the love of God in their desire for life, their intelligence and their heart. Believers are called upon to be concerned about all the forms of poverty, new and old, and to find new ways of responding, in solidarity and sharing, to overcome them.

In this context, evangelisation and education mean *welcoming, letting young people speak, helping them to find themselves and accompanying them with patience* on a journey to recover values and trust. This decisive choice is an essential part of Salesian spirituality which claims to be the redeeming power of pastoral charity, and declares its desire and



*“The youth are particularly dear to us, because they, who are a significant part of humanity and the Church today, are also their future ... We want to support them in their search and we encourage our communities to listen to, dialogue with and respond boldly and without reservation to the difficult condition of the youth. We want our communities to harness, not to suppress, the power of their enthusiasm; to struggle for them against the fallacies and selfish ventures of worldly powers which, to their own advantage, dissipate the energies and waste the passion of the young, taking from them every grateful memory of the past and every profound vision of the future. The world of the young is a demanding but also particularly promising field of the New Evangelisation ... Young people’s active role in evangelising first and foremost their world is to be recognised”*

(MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD 9, 13<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL ORDINARY ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, 7-28 OCTOBER 2012)

determination to “save” those who are abandoned by all. It is a love that finds ways of responding quickly and immediately to the pain of young people and pledges to give them life and hope. This basic task of the Church and of the Congregation is the nucleus of the proclamation of Christ’s Gospel (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 32).



*“Now is the time for a new “creativity” in charity”*

(NOVO MILLENNIO INEUNTE 50)

Proclaiming salvation to the poor is the sign *par excellence* of the Kingdom of Christ, and is the most profound component of our educative and pastoral mission. A relationship with Jesus and his Gospel is a gift to be offered to all. It is the source that satisfies their thirst and search for meaning. **Christ is given to the poor and needy. We cannot delay the gift of their meeting with Him.**

Our preferential option for the young, especially the poorest of them, leads us to poorer areas where they live (cf. C. 29). In poor areas we are called to bring a family spirit of understandings and daily contact in our apostolic work.

4 2

## HUMANISATION AND EVANGELISATION OF CULTURE

### A *Fidelity to the Gospel and fidelity to culture*

The proper purpose of education and of any true cultural activity is to liberate young people, making them conscious of their own rights and duties, aware of the vicissitudes of their time, and capable of self-determination and collaboration for a more human society. In this way, education produces culture, opens it up and enriches it. This process becomes a reality not only by bringing new ideas, impulses and energy to society, but especially by forming **courageous people, capable of critical reflection and a wholesome way of life.**

Evangelisation is not just conformity to the values of the Gospel, transmitted by the Founder; it is also an encounter with culture. The



*“For the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind’s criteria of judgement, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation”*

[EVANGELII NUNTIANDI 19]

*“The word ‘culture’ in its general sense indicates everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labour, to bring the world itself under his control. He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the course of time he expresses, communicates and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences and desires, that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family”*

[GAUDIUM ET SPES 53]

indispensable cultural commitment implies *meeting the new demands of life that culture generates*, demands that test the realism of our Christian proposal and confirm our capacity for dialogue. It requires, therefore, an adequate knowledge of the complexity of the cultural and socio-political situation. Discernment must be exercised in reformulating our Christian experience in relation to the concrete historical situations in which it is to be practised. In fact, evangelisation of culture represents the most profound and most global form of evangelisation in any society.

**The world of the young is the place *par excellence* where the typical cultural trends of our society are first seen.** This calls for attentive discernment and the ability to grasp deeply the problems posed by the changes that are occurring. It is urgent to understand their cultural situation, with its values and limits, its experiences, language and symbols. These are the elements that form their mentality and sensitivities. The challenges are not a problem or an obstacle, but positive ones which call for a courageous intervention. The activity of the Congregation in the field of culture is complex,

as said earlier. It can no longer be understood as a single homogeneous cultural world but needs to be seen in a perspective determined by a plurality of situations. Numerous factors come together to result in a

cultural approach that is ever more fragmented and in continuous rapid evolution. We list a few of them:

- ▶ the different situations of poverty and social exclusion: poverty and exclusion lead more and more often to dependence on drugs, deviancy and violence;
- ▶ the situation and the understanding of the family, with consequent human and ethical problems;
- ▶ questions regarding life and its capacity to transmit values;
- ▶ the affective and emotional sphere, and the area of feelings, as well as questions relating to the body, are greatly influenced by the cultural climate;
- ▶ educational systems and the quality and integrity of formation they offer;
- ▶ the digital culture which favours and sometimes causes constant rapid changes of mentality, customs and behaviour;
- ▶ one of the most complex and fascinating aspects of contemporary society: the multi-cultural and multi-religious identity of peoples;
- ▶ the anthropological premises underlying sociological and educational decisions;
- ▶ currents of thought that insist on denying the transcendent, and misconceptions of the relational structure of the human person and of the relation founded on God.

### **B** *Cultural challenges cut across all pastoral experiences*

*The priority attention given to culture cuts across all pastoral experiences, and reveals challenges for all – for believers and non-believers, for people who belong to the Church and for those who do not belong, for young people and adults. These are challenges that are part of life itself, in its poverty and riches, in its dignity, in its gifts and appeals, which affect everybody and hold promise for everybody.*

The Salesian educator engages seriously with this culture, sees the signs of the presence of God in it, and the call to renew our approach to pastoral ministry, and to renew its language and attitudes. From this perspective, evangelisation is sensitive in responding to dialogue. Positive **concern for cultural values and institutions becomes a priority, and the anthropological sciences are seen as having a specific contribution to offer.** This dialogue is enriching because it has the capacity to blend into one the specific contributions of the various disciplines. This is a vast field that needs to be known. There are many rich values and also some

counter-values in it. Taken in its entirety it profoundly influences our way of thinking and acting and the way of life of individual people, families and social institutions.



*“We were given a sign that on the threshold of the new millennium, in these new times, these new conditions of life, the Gospel is again being proclaimed. A new evangelisation has begun, as if it were a new proclamation, even if in reality it is the same as ever”*

[JOHN PAUL II, HOMILY DURING MASS AT THE SHRINE OF THE HOLY CROSS, MOGILA, POLAND, 9 JUNE 1979]

*“Through the Church, the Lord Jesus is calling us to a new evangelisation: new in ardour, methods and expression”*

[JOHN PAUL II, ASSEMBLY OF CELAM, PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI, 9 MARCH 1983]

Like Don Bosco, **we show a particular interest in the world of work** (cf. C. 27). He had a far-reaching concern to give the younger generation adequate professional and technical competence. It is worth noting how concerned he was to lay ever more emphasis on education to civic responsibility and growth in personal dignity. He was interested in social education which not only receives its legitimacy from Christian faith but is reinforced and strengthened by it to an incalculable extent. Through work and a proper use of resources, the “upright

citizen” is fulfilled as a person and contributes to the common good. This is an approach that is rooted in a gospel vision of the human person committed for the good of all.

Our educational establishments are called to be *centres that radiate the culture of life* to families, to different groups, to the surrounding area and to society. The New Evangelisation will express its newness in a renewed

zeal for the witness of charity, in finding new ways of proclaiming Christ joyfully, in convinced forms of intelligent dialogue on issues of culture with young people and all those who are waiting in different ways for the good news – *euanghèlion* (cf. C. 30).



*“In fact, the call to the new evangelisation is first of all a call to conversion. Indeed, through the testimony of a Church ever more true to its identity and more alive in all its manifestations, people and nations around the world, will continue to meet Jesus Christ”*

(JOHN PAUL II, ASSEMBLY OF CELAM, SANTO DOMINGO, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, 12 OCTOBER 1992)

