



**THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM:**  
A SPIRITUAL AND EDUCATIONAL  
EXPERIENCE

CHAPTER

**IV**

*“I came that they may  
have life, and have it  
abundantly”*

*(Jn 10:10)*



« *Under the guidance of Mary his teacher, Don Bosco lived with the boys of the first Oratory a spiritual and educational experience which he called the “Preventive System”. For him this was a spontaneous expression of love inspired by the love of a God who provides in advance for all his creatures, is ever present at their side, and freely gives his life to save them. Don Bosco passes this on to us as a way of living and of handing on the gospel message, and of working with and through the young for their salvation. It permeates our approach to God, our personal relationships and our manner of living in community through the exercise of a charity that knows how to make itself loved”*

[C. 20]



« *The practice of this system is wholly based on the words of St Paul who says: ‘Love is patient and kind; love bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things’*

[The Preventive System in the Education of the Young]

**Don Bosco's** God-given vocation for the mission of salvation of the young, especially the poorest, involves many people and groups in a common spirituality and a shared educational and pastoral method which is the Preventive System. It is the source and inspiration of a concrete and original way of living and implementing the Salesian mission which we call Salesian Youth Ministry. In this fourth chapter, the educative and pastoral approach will gradually take shape, starting from its guiding principle which is pastoral charity. The centrality of pastoral charity offers a real prospect of renewal for the pastoral care of young people. It is therefore the criterion and pivot of pastoral planning at all levels. The Preventive System, in so far as it is a project of holistic education, comprises essentially two aspects. It is a project of Christian life (Salesian Youth Spirituality) and a practical pedagogical method.

## 1

# The Salesian mission is enlightened by Don Bosco's practice

## 1 1

## THE SALESIAN SPIRIT IS INSPIRED BY THE STYLE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Don Bosco saw the original purpose of his mission clearly: to reveal to poor young people the love of God for them (cf. C. 2, 14). He understood **the underlying principles of a pastoral style appropriate to this purpose – that of the Good Shepherd**. The biblical quotation that opened Chapter 1 of the text offers an eloquent icon of the experience of Valdocco: the lost and hungry crowd and the compassion of Jesus.

The Salesian spirit, inspired by the style of the Good Shepherd, is the hallmark of our spirituality and our educational and pastoral action. This spirit is embodied in the first place, in Don Bosco. *He and the mission derived from him are our historic and charismatic point of reference.*

Don Bosco gave his entire life for young people in a **closely-knit project of life**: his priestly life and his educative work, his multiple relationships and his profound interior life, were all oriented to the service of young people, a service that helped them to grow, making them the agents of their own life project:

*He took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young (C. 21).*

God continues to call *many others to continue this mission of Don Bosco for the young*. Among them are Salesian religious (SDB) consecrated by God, gathered and sent into the Church as signs and bearers of God's love to the young, especially the poor. We share the mission of Don Bosco with other groups of the Salesian Family, according to their specific vocations and their lifestyle. It is a vast movement of people and groups, men and women in different situations, who constitute the Salesian Movement. The Salesian mission finds its lasting

criterion for discernment in Don Bosco and his Valdocco experience (cf. C. 40). It has grown further, bringing together many individuals and groups in a common spirituality to share in the same educative-pastoral mission for the integral development of young people, especially the poorest.

1 2

## THE EMBODIMENT OF THE “SALESIAN SPIRIT” IS THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM

### A *The implementation of Don Bosco’s pastoral, spiritual and pedagogical programme*

Don Bosco’s mission and project of life are expressed in a style of life and action which we call the Salesian spirit. **The most characteristic embodiment of the Salesian spirit is the Preventive System.**

The Preventive System connects us to Don Bosco’s soul and to his attitudes and evangelical choices. Salesian practice has the implementation of **the pastoral, spiritual and pedagogical project of Don Bosco as its point of reference and the measure of its authenticity.** The originality of his spirit is linked to the implementation of the Preventive System. It is a successful system which serves as a model and inspiration for people today who are engaged in education in the different continents, in multicultural and multi-religious contexts, a model that demands of everyone a continuous reflection to encourage more and more the centrality of young people as beneficiaries and protagonists of the Salesian mission (cf. Fr Pascual Chávez, AGC 407, “Salesian Youth Ministry”).



*“I would like to give a sermon myself, or a conference, on the Salesian spirit that must animate and guide our actions and conversations. We must make the Preventive System really our own. There should be no severe punishments, no humiliating words, no stern reproaches in the presence of others. In the classroom, there should be only words of kindness, charity and patience. Use no biting words, and do not ever strike the pupils, even lightly. Make use of negative punishments, and always try to ensure that they are warned in advance so that they become our friends more than before, and do not ever leave on bad terms with us”*

[DON BOSCO’S LETTER TO FR JAMES COSTAMAGNA, AUGUST 10, 1885]

The word “system” suggests an integrated experience that is complete in itself, a well coordinated collection of activities that constitute a dynamic pedagogy. In the Preventive System, in fact, we can distinguish some expressions which are closely related to each other. The **guiding principle** is pastoral charity which creates a particular spiritual attitude in the person. It is made up of a threefold dynamic:

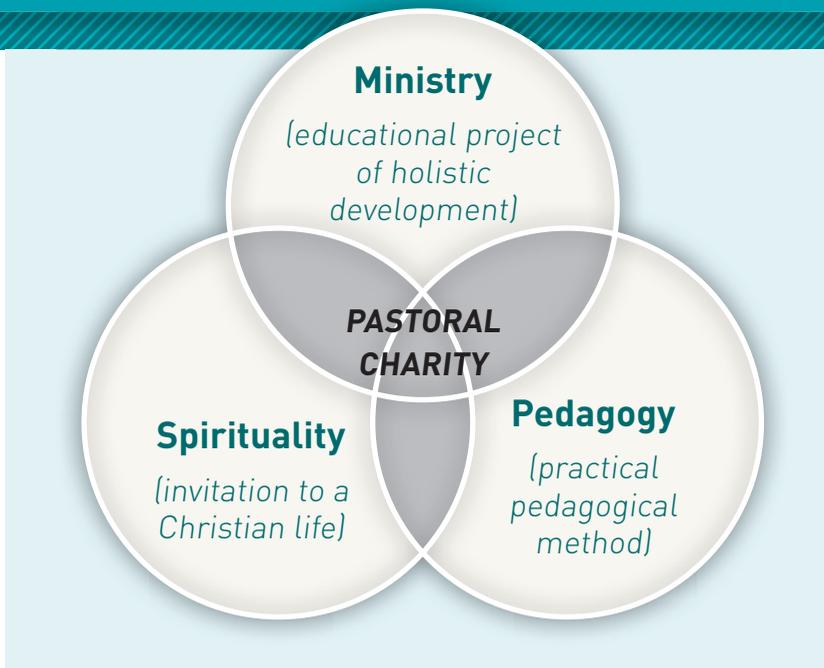
- **a pastoral thrust:** it inspires an educational project of holistic development (see Chapter 4, 2);
- **a spirituality** of Christian life – Salesian Youth Spirituality – (see Chapter 4, 3);
- **a practical pedagogical methodology** inspired by the “oratory criterion”, which guides the concrete choices and activities employed (see Chapter 5, 3).

## **B** *The guiding principle is pastoral charity*

Education, for Don Bosco, involves a special attitude of the educator and a set of interventions based on a strong belief in love, reason and faith. At the centre of his vision is “pastoral charity”. The aim is always to seek **the spiritual welfare and the salvation of the young, and their all-round well-being** (*Da mini animas*).

The Preventive System finds its source and its centre in the experience of the love of God who provides in advance for all his creatures, is ever present at their side, and freely gives his life to save them (cf. C. 20). Don Bosco had a deep faith in the *goodness and fatherly mercy of God*. His choice of St Francis of Sales as a model for his workers and as the protector of his congregation is proof of this.

This experience leads us to see *God in young people*: God gives us the grace of encountering him in the young and calls us to serve him in them. It is an experience that recognises their dignity, renews our faith in their capacity for doing good and educates them to the fullness of life (cf. GC23, no.95). In this approach, care is taken to train the young people to play an active role in the work of evangelisation.



Salesian Pastoral charity has another more precise characteristic that defines it even better – it is *educative charity*. It displays a passion for education, but also good judgement, common sense and balance, as well as affection and respect for adolescents and young people. This attitude is the result of the belief that every life, even the poorest, most complex and precarious, carries in itself the mysterious presence of the Spirit, the power of redemption and the seed of happiness (cf. GC23, no.92).

A synthetic expression, the “**primacy of educative charity,**” reflects the love which is able to create an *educational relationship*: it is expressed in a way that helps the adolescent or young person to open up, to discover the richness of life, and to grow. Because of a lack of education, adolescents are sometimes lacking in courage, and do not have the words and thoughts to express themselves. The charity and love of the educator becomes the way of communicating God’s love to them. This love of God extends even to the poorest and the least, the most humble, the ones who have most difficulties. It is the expression of a fatherly wisdom that prepares them to face life.

**C** *The Preventive System involves the educator and the community to which he or she belongs*

The Preventive System is an **experience that is both spiritual and educational, intimately united** to constitute the reference point and the face of the Salesian Family in the Church. It can be defined as the authentic

spirituality of our apostolic action. To separate the pedagogical method of Don Bosco from his pastoral concerns would destroy both of them.

*The Preventive System involves the whole person of the educator and the community to which he or she belongs together with the young people. It has its own way of thinking and feeling, a way of life and activity, that inspires and characterises its whole existence.*

The Preventive System in practice involves activity that is at the same time both pedagogical and spiritual, and always open to the Gospel of Christ. This is the “methodological criterion” of the Salesian mission for the accompaniment of young people in the delicate process of growth in their humanity and in faith. Salesian spirituality breathes and acts in the educational field as an original way of introduction to the Christian life. It is organised around experiences of faith, and choices based on gospel values and attitudes that make up *Salesian Youth Spirituality*.

Salesians find their identity in fidelity to this pedagogical heritage (the Preventive System) and its continuous updating. The goal of the project is summarised in the well-known formula “good Christians and upright citizens”, by which Don Bosco wanted to “form builders of the city, and men and women of faith.” In Don Bosco’s mind these two terms were to be taken together to form an indivisible whole.

## 2

# The Preventive System as pastoral zeal

## 2 1

### AN ALL-EMBRACING EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

**The Preventive System inspires an educational project** for the all-round development of young people in different contexts as part of the work of evangelisation. At the same time it highlights the human richness and the essentially religious heart of the system, based on *reason, religion and loving*

*kindness* (in Italian “*amorevolezza*”). The Preventive System becomes a method for action, characterised by reason, reasonableness of requests and rules, flexibility and persuasiveness. Religion is understood as the development of the sense of God present in every person and an effort to bring to the young the beauty of the good news. Loving kindness, which is at the heart of educational love, evokes a response from the young and helps them to grow.

## 2 2

## THE DUAL ROLE OF PREVENTIVE EDUCATION

The practice of the Preventive System comprises two inseparable activities, albeit with different nuances. It aims to meet *the basic needs of young people* (food, clothing, shelter, safety, labour, physical and mental development, social inclusion, a minimum of values) and to give life to a more *systematic educational activity for the social, moral and religious training of the individual*. In fact, Don Bosco’s intention in starting the Oratory was to provide a charitable and educational institution.

This dual purpose is still relevant. There is a strong commitment to **social welfare as part of the Salesian educational project**, as well as the promotion and growth of the **cognitive, emotional, ethical and spiritual aspects** of the individual.

### A *The Preventive System and disadvantaged young people and their rehabilitation*

The question of rehabilitating disadvantaged young people brings us back to Don Bosco, who visited the prisons and went on the streets and into the workplace to look for boys in need. Even after the opening of the Oratory, Don Bosco was helping boys infected with disease in the hovels and alleyways of Turin. He sent his Salesian missionaries to young people who did not have a safe place that allowed for their proper human and social growth.

Today, in an era of “educational emergency”, the preventive approach can achieve satisfactory results. Christian humanism, on which the Preventive System is based, is a response which is educational and pastoral and at the same time provides social assistance. “**Educational**



*“Therefore we have to move forward in the direction of an updated re-affirmation of the “socio-political-educational choice” made by Don Bosco. This [means] the forming of a social and political conscience that then leads to the making of one’s life a mission for the common good of society with a constant reference to the inalienable human and Christians values and rights”*

(FR PASCUAL CHÁVEZ, AGC 415, “LIKE DON BOSCO THE EDUCATOR”)

**charity” cannot fail to be “social charity”.** Evangelisation is always closely integrated with human development and Christian freedom. The commandment of love is a single commandment with two poles of reference, God and neighbour.

The profound transformations that have occurred in today’s complex society show a *more complex phenomenon of the “youth situation”*, and in particular that of young people whom Don Bosco called “poor, abandoned and at risk”. Many young people have

serious problems from the point of education and re-education. Many are affected by poverty and economic, social, cultural, emotional, moral and spiritual marginalisation. When all these forms of poverty come together, as frequently happens in developing countries, as well as in large cities in most developed countries, we can see the extent of the youth problems which urgently demand educational intervention. **Preventive education seeks to ensure that such conditions do not arise.**

Faced with serious situations of injustice and violations perpetrated against human rights in our societies, Don Bosco’s charism and his educational system urge us to get to work both personally and collectively. A renewed impetus in prevention must transform, by means of education, structures of poverty and marginalisation, especially where minors are concerned. We have the possibility of offering prevention which fosters their good: **educational interventions which strengthen the integrity of fundamental** civil, cultural, religious, economic, political and social **rights**.

We also need to set up communities which are capable of proposing basic values once more, values probably absent in the early years of life. “The liberating education” of the Preventive System seeks to accompany young people already affected by negative conditioning: situations which make them poor from a socio-cultural, economic, moral, spiritual and religious point of view (cf. GC20, no.61). Salesian prevention, then, is expressed

through many concrete choices: it responds to needs in any context. This practical pluralism on behalf of needy youngsters is an expression of the wealth of Salesian education, *where the experience or the recovery of affection is fruitfully combined with reason and religion.*

**Don Bosco's preventive experience becomes a system involving assistance, education and socialisation.** Educating means preventing, in all its possible meanings. Education is expressed through acceptance, giving back a voice, and understanding. To educate means helping individuals to rediscover themselves, and to patiently accompany them on their journey of recovering values and self-confidence. It means reconstructing reasons for living through discovery of the beauty of life. Educating also means a renewed capacity for dialogue but is also a proposal full of interests, firmly anchored in what is the most fundamental of approaches: involving young people in experiences that help them grasp the meaning of daily effort, offering them the basic tools for earning a living, making them capable of acting responsibly in every circumstance. Educating requires that we understand the juvenile social problems of our time (cf. Chapter 1).

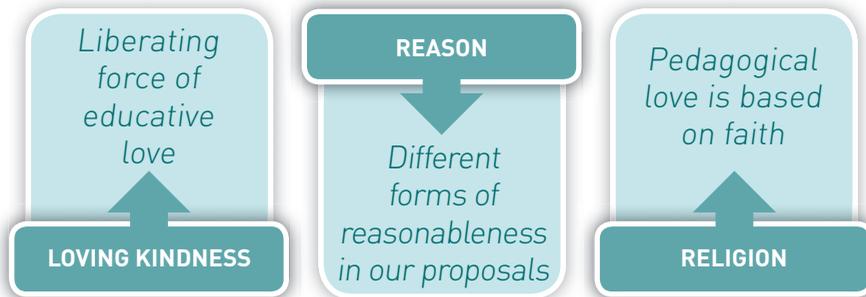
## **B** *The art of positive education*

The preventive approach is expressed positively in a formative educational project:

*The art of positive education by putting forward what is good through appropriate experiences which call for the involvement of the pupil and are attractive because of their splendour and lofty nature; the art of producing growth in the young persons 'from within' by appealing to their inner freedom to oppose external conditioning and formalism; the art of winning the heart of young people so as to inculcate in them a joyful and satisfied attraction to what is good, correcting deviations and preparing them for the future by means of a solid character formation* [JUVENUM PATRIS 8].

The formula 'reason, religion and loving kindness', which summaries Don Bosco's system, is understood as the **fundamental inspiration of an educational project for the all-round development of the person.** It

aims to provide a full answer to the question of the evangelisation of youth. Educative love, in Don Bosco's method, is divided into three attitudes: love and friendliness, love and reasonableness, love and faith. The Preventive System becomes a formative and educative project, a set of elements that together make up a single approach based on *loving kindness, reason and religion*.



### » *The liberating power of educative love*

Educative love is above all **a genuine human love**: the principle of the method is *loving-kindness*, expressed as a love that helps the person to grow and brings about a cordial relationship. Here we have the great insight of Don Bosco: the liberating power of educative love. In contact with educators who nurture deep passion and loving kindness, young people feel encouraged to express all that is good in them, and learn to make their own the religious and cultural experience that they encounter. Pastoral charity, the centre and soul of the Salesian spirit, recalls some basic attitudes. First of these is the importance of personal *relationships*. For Don Bosco, educative love is both spiritual and emotional. It is a love that flows from the will, which prompts the educator to search only for the good of the student, totally forgetting himself or herself. By virtue of this love, the educator is motivated strongly to action and the spirit of sacrifice. Thus, the spiritual dimension of educative love shows itself in warmth and affection. The cordial love consists mainly in truly wanting to love the other as a person. Mature love is at the same time characterised by desire and affection.

Friendliness is well described by Don Bosco in the *Letter from Rome* in 1884, in relation to a situation of crisis that had arisen in his institutes.

He expounds what he considers essential in the educational relationship. Based on his own experience, he tries to make us understand that the love of will with the total commitment of the educator is certainly something good and valuable. But it is insufficient. It does not produce results if the young people do not feel loved or if love does not become the language that blossoms into friendship and cordiality. Teachers who give themselves entirely for the good of young people but fail to let them feel that what interests them is the good of the young, will bear no fruit in the lives of these young people. What matters most in love is not what one does but the attention one gives to the young person. **A spontaneous encounter, freely engaged in, has real meaning and gives meaning to all other values.**

### » *The different forms of reasonableness*

Don Bosco's educative love is also a reasonable love. Don Bosco attached a lot of importance to this. **Educative love must be reasonable**, and this is to be seen in many different forms: the reasonableness of the demands and the rules, not based on sentimental or emotional motives; flexibility and common sense; understanding, dialogue and patience, starting from the concrete world of young people; realism and a spirit of initiative, naturalness and spontaneity; sensitivity to what is feasible in practice; an appeal to personal conviction.

His is an educational activity that on one hand helps young people to develop their talents and to be active and enterprising at work, and on the other hand teaches them not to rely on themselves alone and to avoid intellectual ambition and pride. Reasonableness allows the educator to offer the young people values that are good in the present situation and allows the young to be real individuals. A rapidly changing society where judgement and critical sense are essential, presents a magnificent terrain for education based on reasonableness.



It helps young people to evaluate things with critical sense and discover the true value of earthly reality, respecting the autonomy and dignity of the things of this world.

### » **Educative love is based on faith**

Educative love is illuminated by *faith*, **developing the sense of God that is inherent in every person and in the effort of Christian evangelisation.** For Don Bosco, reasonable love is nourished from a deep root. Young people are individuals called to the fullness of life, communion with God and neighbour. Don Bosco believed that without this perspective the educative proposal loses its force and meaning. The educative love of the Salesian is a *symbol of God's love for the young.*

Don Bosco, religious founder, father of orphans, mature educator, dreamer and daring entrepreneur, intuitive promoter of educative pastoral initiatives is understood in the light of the two dynamic nuclei of his vocation: on the one hand a natural warm and affectionate attitude towards young people; and, on the other, the unconditional gift of self to God in response to a mission.

Religion in the Preventive System is that of the Good News, the Gospel, the Beatitudes, of Jesus who considered his disciples as friends, not servants, the same Jesus who calls upon everyone to seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness. He is with us and works with us every day until the end of the world. The religion of the Preventive System is that of the ordinary people. It is simple and goes straight to the essential: "love of God and love of neighbour."

More concretely, it is *the religion St Francis of Sales' humanism.* He had learned from God to be loving, kind, capable of patience and forgiveness. In the Incarnation of the Lord we are all called by the Son to holiness: that is, to live according to the Gospel in every condition of life, in every moment, in every situation, in every age.

More profoundly, it is religion lived in the Spirit that helps to discern in time the signs of *his presence and the will of God.* He is the source of optimism; it does not allow us to fall into pessimism or feel defeated by our own difficulties.

*In secularised contexts* where the culture seems incapable of speaking about God, the Father of Jesus Christ, we need to educate to a sense of transcendence and the big questions of meaning posed by life and death, pain and love, without hiding the light that comes to us from our faith (cf. GC23, nos.76, 77, 83).

In the contexts of *the great monotheistic religions and traditional religions*, the first educational dialogue will be with the laity who are close to us to identify, together with them, the grace present in these religions. We seek to encourage prayer and an appreciation of the fragments of the Gospel and educative wisdom to be found in the culture and in the life and experience of young people (cf. GC23, nos.72-74, 86).

## 3

## The Preventive System as a proposal of spirituality

The formula “reason, religion and loving kindness,” sums up pastoral charity and is the soul of the Preventive System. It spells out the educational plan of integral formation and is the only practical method that the educator needs to use. It also reveals the essential features of a spirituality to be continuously rediscovered, experienced, and renewed (cf. Fr Egidio Viganò, AGC 334, “Salesian Spirituality for the new evangelisation”). Salesian Youth Ministry is rooted in a living spirituality that nourishes the faith of the educator and prompts him or her to seek God by serving the young.

Spirituality is a re-reading of the Gospel, capable of unifying the gestures and attitudes that characterise Christian living. **At the root of Salesian Youth Ministry we find a spirituality suited to our time.** It is based on the experience of God in the context of everyday life. It is a journey of holiness, a specific project of life in the Spirit.

There is a basic Christian spirituality that flows from the message of the Gospel, but there are also different types of Christian spirituality that respond to different historical situations. These are especially charismatic



*“Our educational ministry must “point out to everyone this ‘high standard’ of ordinary Christian living”*

[NOVO MILLENNIO INEUNTE 31]

and come from an experience of the Triune God on a personal or community level. In the Church’s history, some gospel values have been particularly emphasised by various Founders, always faithful to the Word of God, and enlightened and guided by his Spirit.

Consequently, we can speak of a Salesian spirituality: a **charismatic spirituality** that enriches the whole Church with a model of Christian life characterised by a concrete path to holiness. It is an **apostolic spirituality** because, led by the Spirit, we are sent to collaborate in the mission of the

Father who gives redeeming efficacy to our educational and evangelising activity among the young and at the same time unifies our entire existence as its central inspiration. Finally, it is a spirituality that makes young people the evangelisers of other young people.

Therefore, this spirituality is *not reduced to a set of psychological or therapeutic practices* aimed at ensuring the well-being of the person. In these practices ‘spiritual life’ is no more than a subjective, inward feeling. It is something completely private and personal. We can see the influence of many philosophies and ideologies that deny the revealed contents of Christian faith and are presented as an alternative to it. They deny the transcendence of God as a personal being. They do not confront the reality of sin or consider the necessity of grace and salvation by Christ. They believe that “salvation” is achieved by man by his own efforts, and Jesus Christ is just one of many manifestations of the divine that have passed in human history under different names.

By contrast, Salesian Youth Ministry offers a spirituality that facilitates and promotes a **unified vision of life**, indicating the close link between the freely given gift of God, the joy of Christ and the freedom of life in the Spirit.

## 3 1

## SPIRITUALITY IS FIRST OF ALL LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

**A** *The primacy of God's freely given gift*

Spirituality is first of all life in the Spirit. The initiative comes from him alone. Everything begins with God – his freely given gift, the initiative of his love and the encounter with Jesus Christ.

**The spiritual life has its source, its centre and its goal in God, the Mystery of Love.** We can understand the spiritual life as tasting the love of God, living an experience of friendship and intimacy with Him and recognising that we are sent by him on a mission to young people. The same dynamic discovery of love and the call to witness to it are at work in the young people.

God is the unifying centre of our life, the source of our fraternal communion and the inspiration of our action. Living *in the presence of God* means cultivating a deep and constant relationship with God, being filled with his love and sent to the young. It means accepting the signs of His mysterious presence in the demands and expectations of the men and women of our time.

**B** *The encounter with Christ*

The centre of the spiritual life is the experience of the Christian faith, **the encounter with Jesus Christ, the Gospel of God.** Being rooted in Christ and conformed to Him is a gift and, at the same time, the goal of Salesian Youth Ministry. Listening to the Word, the liturgy, the life of the sacraments and the gift of self in service to others are all important in the Christian life and in pastoral action.



*«Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction»*

[DEUS CARITAS EST 1]

### C *Life in the Holy Spirit*

The spiritual life consists in accepting that our existence is formed by the Spirit through the action of grace. **In this relationship of love** we can assert **the primacy of grace, and at the same time, the free and conscious contribution of man.** The human being cooperates by listening and being available and docile. His desire is to meet with the Lord. He prays for this meeting to take place, and contributes, in his life, to the mission.

The spiritual life is a dynamic that develops over time, involving all the dimensions of the human being, with its own rhythm and its own moments of growth and trial.

3 2

## AN ORIGINAL WAY OF LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: SALESIAN YOUTH SPIRITUALITY

### A *Salesian spirituality, a concrete expression of pastoral charity*

Pastoral and educative charity is the heart of the Salesian spirit. The Preventive System is truly **a spirituality for everyone – for Salesians and lay people involved in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco and for families and young people.** In his own pastoral and teaching experience, Don Bosco has shown us the path of holiness for young people, and demonstrated its validity with admirable results.

Don Bosco's secret of success as an educator is his intense pastoral charity which united inseparably in him the inner force of *love of God and love of neighbour*, making it capable of joining his work of evangelisation and his educational activity together as one. Salesian spirituality is the concrete expression of pastoral charity and therefore constitutes a fundamental element of pastoral ministry. Salesian spirituality is the source of evangelical vitality and the soul of pastoral charity. It is the principle of inspiration and identity, and the criterion that guides all our work. We need to be convinced and become present-day promoters of his pastoral wisdom. A lived spirituality is precisely the attitude of committed believers. It is not an escape from reality, but a frontier spirituality that demands research, initiative and courage. In a word, it is a spirituality of realism.

**All this is called the “oratorian heart” in Don Bosco.** It implies fervour, apostolic zeal, the use of all our personal resources, searching for new ways of intervening, ability to resist in times of trial, the willingness to start over after failure, and far-reaching optimism. It implies concern that comes from faith and charity, and it finds in Mary a shining example of self-giving (cf. *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family*, no.29).

## **B** *Salesian Youth Spirituality in practice*

**It is a spirituality suited to young people, lived with young people and for them, designed and built upon the experience of the young.** Its aim is to generate a Christian way of living that is feasible for people of our time, living in today’s situation. It is suited to all young people, especially the poorest among them, but it is capable at the same time of pointing to higher goals for those who have made more progress. It encourages young people to be active among their companions and in the place where they live.

This spirituality is linked to the Preventive System. It is *the fruit of the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan* offered to all who are involved in the *Educative and Pastoral Community*, and leads them to a journey of greater commitment. The following elements penetrate one another. Each of them represents an aspect of what is contained in the all others: life, Christ, the Beatitudes, the Church, Mary, and service of others. They are points of reference to be reflected upon and they form a unity in the whole of Christian living.

### » *Daily life as the place of encounter with God*

Salesian Youth Spirituality considers daily life as the place of encounter with God (cf. C. 18; *GC23* nos.162-164; *GC24* nos.97-98 ; *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family*, nos.27-28, 34). At the basis of **this understanding of everyday life and the positive evaluation of life** is our faith and continued understanding of the Incarnation. In Salesian spirituality we allow ourselves to be guided by the mystery of God who by his Incarnation, Death and Resurrection, affirms his saving presence in all human reality.

The daily life of the young person is made up of duty, relationships, leisure, the tension of growing up, family life, developing skills, prospects for

the future, requests for assistance and aspirations. It is this reality that needs to be taken, *understood, deepened and lived in the light of God*. According to Don Bosco to become a saint you must do everything you have to do well. He considers fidelity to duty in everyday life as a guide to progress in virtue and as a sign of spiritual maturity. This is practical realism centred on daily life. It implies a religious sense of duty at all the different moments of the day.

For everyday life to be lived as spirituality we need the *grace of unity* that helps to harmonise the different dimensions of life around a heart where the Spirit of Love dwells. The grace of unity opens the individual to conversion and purification, especially through the power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is a privileged means. It ensures that through work and contemplation the heart is kept free, open to God and given to others, especially the young and the poor.

**Don Bosco was inspired by St Francis of Sales.** His spirituality was simple because it concentrated on the essential, popular because it was open to all, attractive because of its human values and for all these reasons, particularly helpful in educational ministry.

Among the **attitudes and practices** of everyday life to be lived profoundly under the guiding action of the Spirit we could mention:

- ▶ life in one's own family;
- ▶ love for work or study, cultural growth and educational experience;
- ▶ being able to relate moments of strong experience with the ordinary events of life;
- ▶ a positive critical vision of the time we live in;
- ▶ accepting responsibility for one's life and a plan for a spiritual path of growth in the efforts of everyday life;
- ▶ discovering one's vocation in life and being able to pursue it.

### » ***A paschal spirituality of joy and optimism***

The most important truth of the Christian faith is that the Lord Jesus is risen. Eternal glory is our ultimate goal, but even now it has become a reality in the body of Jesus Christ. *Salesian Youth Spirituality is paschal and eschatological.*

**The most deeply rooted desire in the heart of the human person is the pursuit of happiness.** Joy is the noblest expression of happiness and, together with celebration and hope, is characteristic of Salesian spirituality. The Christian faith is, by vocation, a call to radical happiness, and a promise of the gift of eternal life. It knows no boundaries of space or time, and there are no limits to the aspirations of joy. The discovery of the Kingdom and the encounter with Christ become *the happiness of the human person*. These things, however, are not an achievement, but a gift: God is the source of true joy and hope. Joy certainly has a real pedagogical value but it is, first and foremost, a theological value. Don Bosco sees it as a sure sign of the life of grace.

Don Bosco understood that commitment and joy go together, that **holiness and happiness go hand in hand** and he made this clear to young people. Don Bosco is the saint of joy and his young people learned this lesson well. It is summed up perfectly in an expression that was typical of the oratory, “sanctity consists in being always cheerful.” (cf. GC23, 165). Salesian Youth Ministry proposes a path of holiness that is simple, cheerful and serene (cf. C. 17; GC23, nos.165-166; *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family*, no.33).

Seeing joy as an act of the Spirit, the source and fruit of commitment, involves fostering certain **attitudes and practices** in young people:

- in an atmosphere of sincere, friendly, fraternal relations where the young experience the joy of being loved and are encouraged to participate;
- being able to express themselves freely in youthful celebrations and in youth group meetings;
- admiring and enjoying the good things the Creator has placed in our way - nature, silence, achievements attained through sacrifice and solidarity;
- the grace of accepting suffering and the cross, as a sharing in the Cross of Christ.

### » ***A spirituality of friendship and personal relationship with the Lord Jesus***

Salesian Youth Spirituality brings the young into an encounter with Jesus Christ and enables them to form a relationship of friendship with Him. It is nourished

on trust, in a living bond, and in faithful adherence. **Many young people have a sincere desire to know Jesus** and seek an answer to questions about the meaning of life that only God can give.

Friend, Teacher and Saviour in Salesian Spirituality are the names that describe the central role of the person of Jesus Christ in the spiritual life of young people (cf. C. 11; GC23, nos.167-168; GC24, 61; *Charismatic Identity of the Family Salesian* nos.24, 36). It is interesting to remember that Jesus is presented by Don Bosco as *friend* of the young – “Young people are the delight of Jesus,” he used to say. He also presented Jesus as a *teacher* of life and wisdom, a *model* for every Christian, the *Redeemer* who gave his life even to the point of death, out of love and a passion for our salvation. Don Bosco saw Jesus in the little ones and the poor. He often used to quote the Gospel passage: “I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” (Mt 25:40).

Here, by way of example, are some of the **attitudes and practices** that can help young people to become more like Christ:

- sharing in the faith of the community that lives in the memory and the presence of the Lord and celebrates it in the sacraments of Christian initiation;
- the pedagogy of holiness that Don Bosco taught through reconciliation with God and with our brothers and sisters in the sacrament of Penance;
- learning personal and community prayer, and meditation designed to help the young to grow in love and personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Salesian Prayer is simple and suited to all. It is deeply rooted in everyday life;
- a systematic study of faith, enlightened by reading and meditating on the Word of God.

### » **An ecclesial and Marian spirituality**

**A good experience of Church and an adequate understanding of it are distinctive marks of Christian spirituality.** The Church is a spiritual



*“We need to help young people to gain confidence and familiarity with sacred Scripture so it can become a compass pointing out the path to follow”*

(VERBUM DOMINI 104)

communion and community that becomes visible through gestures and agreed ways of acting and working. It is a service to mankind. It is not like a sect that cuts itself off from people, and sees good only in its own works. It is the place chosen and offered by Christ, in time and space in our history, for us to encounter him. To the Church he has entrusted the Word, Baptism, his Body and Blood, the grace of forgiveness of sins and the other Sacraments, the experience of communion and the power of the Spirit that move us to love our brethren. We need a more responsible and courageous sense of belonging to the particular and universal Church. In fact, one of the treasures of the rich tradition of the Family of Don Bosco is precisely filial fidelity to the Successor of Peter, and of communion and collaboration with the local Church (cf. C. 13; *GC21*, nos.96, 102; *GC23*, nos.169-170; *GC24*, nos.62-64, 91-93; *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family*, no.26 ).

The **attitudes and practices** to be fostered are therefore:

- ▮ the concrete environment of the Salesian house as a place where one experiences a fresh, friendly, active, image of the Church capable of meeting the expectations of young people;
- ▮ groups and, above all, the Educative and Pastoral Community, which unites young people and educators in a family environment around a project of holistic education of young people;
- ▮ participation in the local church that unites all the efforts of fidelity of Christians in a visible communion and in service that can be seen and experienced in a concrete territory;
- ▮ respect for and trust in the universal Church, practised in the relationship of love for the Pope, awareness of situations in which the people of God are limited in their desire to practise their faith, and in awareness of the thought and achievements in the various fields of the saints and other significant Christian personalities.

**Salesian Youth Spirituality is a Marian spirituality.** Mary was called by God the Father, by the grace of the Spirit, to be the Mother of the Word and to give Him to the world. The Church looks to Mary as an example of faith. Don Bosco certainly looked to Mary and we are called to imitate him in communion with the Church (cf. C. 34, 92; *GC23*, 177; *GC24*, nos.68, 188; *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family*, nos.11, 37).

We believe that, through the motherly intervention of Mary, the Holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco to begin the Salesian work (cf. C. 1). She showed

Don Bosco his field of action among young people, guided and supported him constantly and is present among us, continuing her mission as Mother of the Church and Help of Christians (cf. C. 8). Mary was a living presence in the Oratory of Valdocco, as inspiration, guide and teacher. Dominic Savio, Michael Magone and many other young people did not contemplate Mary as an abstract ideal or a simple object of worship and devotion, but as a *living active* person. Her presence filled the house and made them feel and experience the closeness of the love of God. Salesian Youth Spirituality encourages a simple, confident reliance on the maternal care of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

She is also recognised as the *Mother of God and our Mother* and as the Immaculate one, full of grace, totally available to God. We see in her a holiness which is Christian life lived with consistency and integrity. She is the *Help of Christians* in the great battle of faith and in building the Kingdom of God, the one who protects and guides the Church. She sustains and supports Christians in the faith, and was considered by Don Bosco as “the Madonna for difficult times.”

In Mary Help of Christians we have a *model and a guide* for our educational and apostolic action. We speak of her with love and admiration and propose her as a model for our imitation. We join in celebrations in her honour and in memory of her messages. She is our Mother and teacher in all our formation. We call upon her in prayer in a special way, meditating on her actions and words in the Gospel (cf. C. 84, 87, 92; *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family*, no.37).

### » **A spirituality of responsible service**

Life is lived as an encounter with God, a journey of identification with Christ, and commitment to the kingdom. The Church is perceived as communion and service where everyone has a place and where the gifts of all are needed. This leads to a conviction that **life is lived as a vocation of service** (cf. C. 7, 19, GC23, nos.178-180; GC24, nos.94-96; *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family*, no.35).

This is widely reflected in the experience of Don Bosco as a young apostle. Starting from the dream at the age of nine, he understood and lived his life as a vocation. *He heard and responded with a generous heart to an invitation: go among the young to save them.* Don Bosco invited his young people to a practical exercise of love of neighbour. Salesian Youth

Spirituality is apostolic: we are convinced that we are called to collaborate with God in His mission with dedication, loyalty, trust and total availability. We are called to a real commitment to doing good, depending on our own social responsibilities and the material and spiritual needs of others.

Responsible service implies certain **attitudes and practices** which can be grouped around four areas:

- ▶ openness to reality and human contact: Don Bosco wanted his boys to become “good Christians and upright citizens.” For a young person today, being an upright citizen entails promoting the dignity and rights of the individual in all contexts, living with generosity in the family and preparing for family life on the basis of mutual self-giving that fosters solidarity, especially with the poorest. It means developing work skills with honesty and professional competence, promoting justice, peace and the common good in politics, respecting creation and promoting culture (cf. *GC23*, 178);
- ▶ serious commitment to discovering one’s life plan;
- ▶ gradual growth in maturity, progressive choices and consistent service to the Church and all people. This responsible service is developed through witness of life and is expressed in many areas: educative and pastoral and cultural animation, voluntary and missionary service;
- ▶ promptness in dealing with new situations and ability to sacrifice less important things for the sake of higher values.

Salesian Youth Spirituality aims to help all young people in their vocational journey to discover the meaning of their lives, in truth and in dialogue with God.

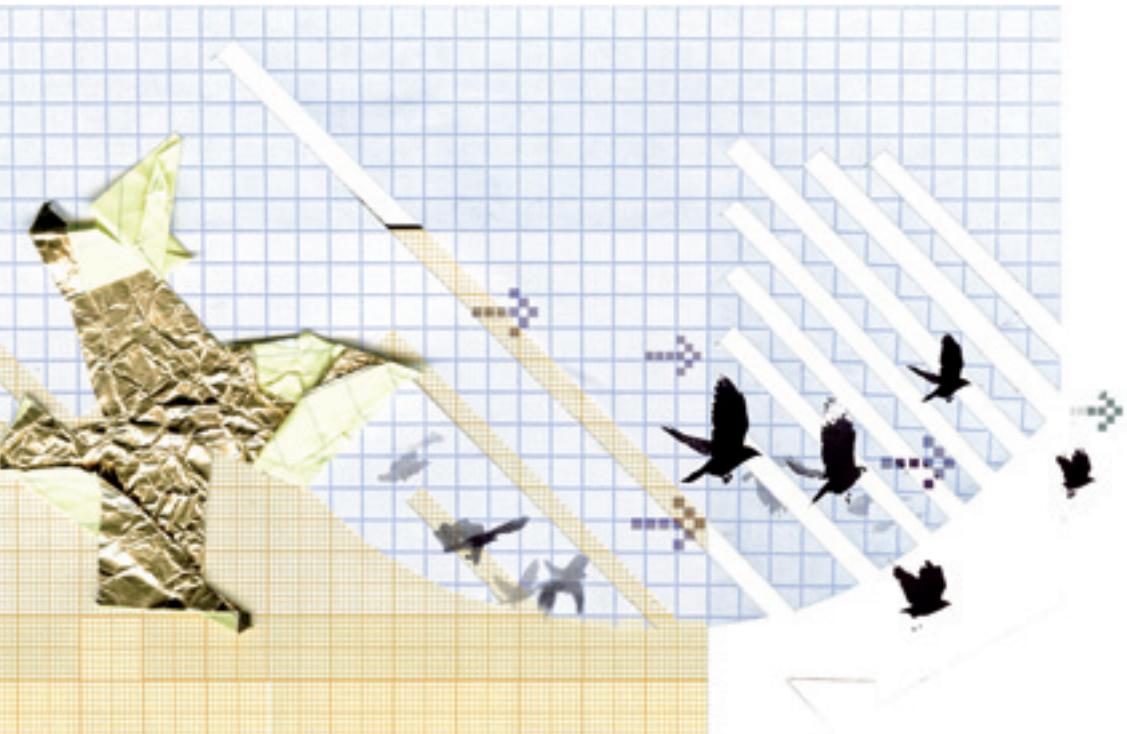
### **C** *Planning programmes of education to the faith*

Spirituality is not just a formula but an experience of life. **We need to translate the theory into practical programmes of structured learning, in gradual stages**, suited to the condition of the young people who are to implement them (objectives, attitudes, knowledge, concrete commitments and experiences) with some clearly defined content. The Salesian Congregation has indicated *four areas of human and Christian maturity*: human identity, the encounter with Christ, a commitment to the Kingdom and membership of the Church (cf. *GC23*, nos.120-157).

Don Bosco was the originator of an “easy” way of holiness for young people with his educational and pastoral system. He created an environment suitable for their growth as human beings and as Christians. He was able to *personalise and customise the educative plan for each young individual*. It is enough to look at the biographies of Dominic Savio, Francis Besucco and Michael Magone and it will be clear how the path to holiness was the same for all three as far as the educational programme was concerned, but wisely adapted to the different circumstances of each of them.

What do we mean by drawing up practical programmes? Here are some **practical criteria** for the faith journey:

- *flexibility* that overcomes all forms of rigidity in structures. The programme must be suited to children who live in different personal and environmental situations even though the goal is always kept in view. It means devising programmes that are open, presenting the full message in a manner and form appropriate to the various ages and cultural conditions and the specific spiritual needs of the young people;
- *continuity* (the opposite of improvisation) and a *gradual approach* (the opposite of a mentality that wants everything



here and now). This implies prudence and patience. In this way the programme takes on the character of an introductory path which encourages the young and involves their freedom in accomplishing the steps and taking on the responsibilities that all education requires. The content is proposed and gradually internalised. The essential and fundamental goals of human and Christian growth must be presented at each stage;

- orientation towards* the achievement of formative outcomes: journeying towards the goal of “good Christian and honest citizen”, trying to consolidate lasting values, attitudes and basic skills. This means being *practical and specific*, that is, adherence to reality in order to discern the adequacy of the proposals and interventions through demonstrable results;
- overall unity* for the holistic development of the personality of each individual by harmonising human development and Christian faith. It means unifying three mutually enriching factors that lead to a rich personal Christian unity. Educating good Christians and upright citizens demands therefore that the entire educational programme and each individual stage are geared to developing all aspects of the young person.

*The pedagogical approach of the method, closely linked to the content and dynamics, is important.* The focus on interpersonal and communication styles is subject to the objective and content. Priority must be given to the forms most suitable to young people, flexible forms that give ample space to a systematic study and creativity. There are some very important “points of no return”, based on reality. Salesian educators cannot ignore the main features that characterise contemporary young people and deeply affect their lives and their experience of religion. Otherwise there is a danger that our proposals become inadequate and ineffective. Youth Ministry is authentic if it is characterised by flexibility and creativity.

In this sense, the method is also the message. Young people require a style of Christian proclamation that is proactive, able to establish proper communication and to give space for creativity and the linguistic nuances of today. The real situation of young people and the quality of objectives and content to be communicated, demand that the following **methodological criteria** be taken into consideration:

**Concreteness**

Young people appreciate and welcome concrete steps, and effective action. Everything that is done must be seen, remembered, appreciated, evaluated and verified in practice in daily life.

**Symbol**

The young people's capacity for symbolism must be developed, and the ability to communicate and enter into communion with ideas that cannot be expressed in a single concept. This requires sensitivity and creativity. Some experiences cannot be expressed in words but only in ritual and gesture (greetings, holiday, the sign of peace ...) The symbolic dimension is needed to enter into communion with the Mystery of God already present in everyday reality. In this sense, liturgical, catechetical and experiential language, must be used harmoniously.

**Narrative**

Rather than argument, proof, justification or belief, young people prefer a story, especially a real life story. It encourages them to get involved in the narrative. Use of the techniques of the gospel, like the parable, is essential, and more credible. We need to be able to tell our own story and the story of our faith journey. We have to convey "what we have seen and heard."

**Internalisation**

For the journey of faith to be effective, the experiences and activities must be internalised and valued by the young person (in head, heart and hand). They must be able to put words on their experiences by sharing and communicating, so that it leads to choices and change.

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**Experience**

Start from experience, encourage experience, return to the experience, try to understand the experience. The experience of one's own life is the main educational resource, completed and stimulated further by new experiences during the educative process. Experience is also about consolidating or overcoming whatever is encountered in life. It must be accompanied, reflected upon and understood if it is to become part of the personal fabric of life, and not just a simple accumulation of events.

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**Participation  
and taking  
responsibility**

Young people need to take responsibility for their own life. They must learn to believe in their own capacity to grow and change. They want to be considered and consulted. We must be prepared to take risks and give them responsibility, according to their situation and their capabilities. There is no growth in maturity without responsibility, no trust if they do not feel trusted. They are not the object of our interventions but the subject of their own lives.

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**Personalisation  
and social  
development**

We must take into account the level of freedom the young person has reached and employ a legitimate educational pluralism that respects the different situations in which young people live. We must be flexible, think about each one as an individual, and try to help his or her personal growth. This personal development takes place in relation to others, it happens with others (in a group) and through others. Each one gets to know himself or herself in relation to others, in relation to history and to the world. Growth takes place through relationships.

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