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SALESIAN EVANGELIZATION

At the Threshold of the Bicentennial of Don Bosco's Birth
(Part 2)

by John Roche, SDB

A Grace & Necessity for the Moment: Accompaniment

At the risk of over-using a cliché, the here and the now of the North American continent, was forever altered by the events of 11 September, 2001. Above all, that event was an awakening to the inescapable reality that the United States was vulnerable. MaryJo Leddy claimed that this message is better translated to mean that “the empire is mortal.” Even before this catastrophic event, many artists and contemplatives had begun to notice a decline in the culture. This has been characterized by a loss of a “common social vision.” Sadly, somewhere between World War II and the present day, the social vision warped into a desire for material things and security. She suggested that this same period witnessed the devolution from a republic into an empire. The myth of progress so enshrined in American culture has not always dominated. There have been, she explained, alternatives with higher motives and callings. The surest sign of hope in this troubled moment has been the vision of youth. The young people of America have looked beyond all the market schemes targeting them and, for the most part, have remained above that influence. As Strauss and Howe have outlined, the Millennials of the North America have the potential for becoming the next Great Generation, dedicated to ideals and hopes bigger than the culture of the moment.

MaryJo Leddy explained that in her act of accompaniment with many of the young adults assisting in her ministry to the refugees, she found herself taking a lead from them. She has found a voice of conscience and concern in this generation. She is touched by their thirst and hunger for holiness and authenticity. She is challenged by their desire for models, not for words. In many ways, it is their act of accompaniment that has changed her.⁶⁸

68. Cf. MaryJo LEDDY, *Naming the Context, Naming the Context: Where Is Here? How Is Now?* in Ronald ROLHEISER, editor and author, *Secularity and the Gospel: Being*

Tasks and Characteristics of a New Salesian Accompaniment ⁶⁹

Giuseppina Del Core has also recognized the vast potential for goodness and the strong thirst for holiness in young people in the Western World. She does not speak from the culture of the United States or North America, but her insights regarding Salesian accompaniment are suited to that setting as well. By identifying a new moment in the culture and in the church, she offers a list of the tasks and characteristics of a Salesian accompaniment.

By way of introduction, Del Core offers various perspectives in the discussion of vocational accompaniment offered to the young. Because the Incarnation is the best model of the dynamic relationship between theology and science, she suggests a sound understanding between human knowledge and theology and between human psychology and faith. Knowledge of psychology, however, is at the service of spiritual understanding. Accompaniment is a spiritual reality, but it can benefit from the contributions of the human social sciences and rarely works in opposition to them. The act of accompaniment, also, is an art that is best understood in light of personal experience.

To accompany someone is to form and educate the person. This requires training and authenticity on the part of the person offering accompaniment. Yet, it requires also a sense of timing and an intuition as to the proper moment to invite, to accompany, and to evaluate the action for proper discernment. Del Core cautions that this field makes use of language that is still evolving and overlaps in fields of psychology and counseling. Because there is an obvious hunger manifesting itself in the youth culture today—a hunger for direction and spirituality, there is a need for the Salesian world to respond appropriately by offering an accompaniment that is wholesome, mature, and rooted in the Gospel.

Del Core offers a succinct definition of the act of accompaniment. It is an experience! It is someone who walks beside, that encourages a person

Missionaries to our Children, New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006, 146-150.

69. Guiseppina DEL CORE, *Lezioni, Discernimento-Accompagnamento 2006-2006 in Secondo Parte: L'Accompagnamento Vocazionale*, 60-107, text for "Il Corso monografico di Spiritualità giovanile" Università Pontificia Salesiana, Roma, 76. Cfr DEL CORE, *Accompagnare I giovani nel loro cammino*, in J. M. GARCIA (Ed.), *Accompagnare I giovani nello Spirito*, ROMA, LAS, 1998.

This entire section of this chapter will refer exclusively to Del Core's lecture notes, *Discernimento-Accompagnamento 2005-2006 in Secondo Parte: L'Accompagnamento Vocazionale*, 60-107. Above and below represent the translation of this author from these published notes.

on the same path taken by the other. For the Salesian it is much like the road to Emmaus found in Luke's Gospel sharing these elements: it begins by asking the other person about their reality, their problems, and their present situation. It is a sharing that points out, ultimately, a goal and a direction. In this way, it is above all a destination.

Accompaniment is a shared journey looking for direction from the Spirit of God. Yet, the identity of the one accompanied and the one offering accompaniment needs to be known before the offer can be made. Professionally it is difficult to define the profile of either the one accompanied or the one who chooses to accompany another person. Mutual terms are exchanged within psychology, counseling, spiritual consultation, accompanying, and facilitating. So, who is the one who does the accompanying? We can say that this person is a "type" of a parent, a friend, or—in psychological counseling and psychotherapy—it is a doctor, a counselor. In youth ministry and other ministries we might say this person is an animator or leader. But in the end, who accompanies?

It is not easy to establish these terms or confine or limit them separately in their various roles. This leads us to see that to accompany a young person, for instance, in their quest for identity is a complex issue! From a spiritual and Salesian perspective, then, accompaniment is a ministry of convergence between a person and many others with whom that person interacts. (Remember that Don Bosco was not accompanied only by one person, but by many diverse persons at many different levels according to his human, psychological and spiritual needs.)

"*The Spirit crosses from one to another*" this, offers Del Core, is the succinct definition given to spiritual accompaniment according to André Louf.⁷⁰ It is fundamental to consider the efficacious and real action of the Holy Spirit in the act of accompaniment. God acts in the person across the spectrum of their historical and psychological profile. Louf posited that God works within the person and the relationship of the person and the one who guides must be one of listening together to what God, as creator and liberator, springs forth inside both persons on the journey. In this, Del Core insists that accompaniment cannot be a neutral process. The process, depending upon the psychological health of those on the journey, can open or block an understanding of God's plan in the person's life.

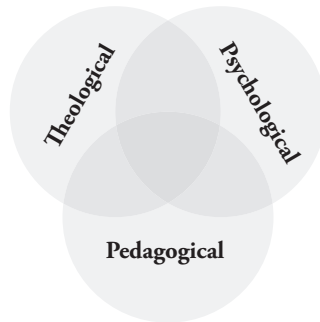
So, the task of spiritual accompaniment entails these essential components, considering that both parties are psychologically healthy. Psychologically, this

70. André LOUF, *Generati dallo Spirito*, Torino, Comunità di Bose, Edizioni Qiqajon, 1994, 165-166.

means that we listen. Listening is an art and goes far beyond the mere act of hearing. True listening is an emptying of the self to be filled with the reality of the other. Sacramentally, this means a relationship that transforms the other; a relationship is not optional! And the motive for the relationship is always formational! Accompaniment, then, is a *space of listening and discerning!* Each of these components Del Core explores in further detail, but that is another focus.

Towards a Definition of Spiritual Accompaniment

Three dimensions must be taken together in the effort to define an accompaniment as spiritual: theological, psychological, and pedagogical. Del Core begins by asking questions about the relationship from these three perspectives. What is the experience of relationships? What are the functions of relationship? She suggests that these dimensions are autonomous and overlapping.



From the perspective that is *theological*, accompanying must seek out help in this meeting to be clear about this intention. From the perspective that is *psychological*, it is walking with another and offering proper attention to their maturity. Transformation is a dynamic of this journey. Simultaneously, this is both spiritual and psychological. From a perspective that is *pedagogical*, accompaniment is intentional; a fundamental part of this relationship is to be intentional in the educative dimension. In fact, theological, spiritual, and psychological development follows only after the educational intention is in place.

Dimensions of Relationship

Perhaps the greatest attention in her study of accompaniment is dedicated to the relationships and their many levels. It is worth mentioning, at least briefly, some of these in outline fashion. To start with, in the act of spiritual accompaniment, Del Core insists there are always three dynamic relationships. There is the obvious relationship between the person in need of accompaniment and the one offering accompaniment. Yet, to be spiritual, to consider these relationships beyond a psychological or emotional plane, and to anchor the intention and motives in that prayerful and spiritual dimension, there is the third relationship of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the common relationship shared with both persons on the spiritual journey; one does not possess the Spirit more than the other.

There are many levels in these three relationships: there are the sacramental dimensions; there is the level of mediation--a truly a spiritual act of intervention; and the level of ministry--a ministry that is intentional. There are many levels of interaction as well: interpersonal, specific, intentional. These have various channels of communication: these levels transmit values and continuity, but relationship is never reducible simply to communication.

The paths of growth in these relationships evolve, enter courses of change and growth in these phases: the phase of *orientation and welcoming* – an interior orientation and welcoming of one's motives; *dependence*, which begins with trust – this phase is important and delicate because it must lead to a sense of independence. The dependence is meant to shift dependence upon God. But this begins with a profound confidence built between two companions. This leads to *counter-dependence* followed by *autonomy and reciprocity*; this means expecting limitations of a relationship as well as an understanding that growth is to be expected in both the accompanied and the one accompanying.

The dimensions of interpersonal relationship include reciprocity, interpersonal rapport, and a respect for the diversity of roles and the relationships appropriate to those roles. The relationship is a meaningful one because it offers a companion who helps with questions of meaning at the interior level, far beyond the superficial level. It is a relationship which is free and freeing, creating a space for dialogue throughout the many experiences of life. *This is a relationship of mediation*; which can be understood as an instrument of growth by mediating the experiences of life for the one growing; this mediation is for leading the other to the Other—to Christ, to the Holy Spirit; this leads to the transformation of the person.

The relationship is an interactive process, an encounter between persons. What is beautiful here is the vision that spans the years and the distance of

this relationship; this is not easy work; it requires sensitivity and sensibility, caution, clarity, respect for differences, recognition of roles, intentionality of spirituality, integration of experiences into a healthy wholeness.

Parameters are important for understanding and evaluating the process of relationship. The parameters examine continuity of interaction, the variety of that interaction, the quality of interaction, and the frequencies and modalities of the interaction. The parameters are *mutuality, other-centeredness, and reciprocity*. These dimensions define the necessary characteristics of a healthy accompaniment and offer points for evaluation.

Pathways to a New Evangelization

Reference has already been made to the work of Robert Schreiter of Chicago. His specialty is “missiology” and he is known worldwide as a theoretician and mentor in this field.⁷¹ He has made three succinct points regarding the task of missiology, which he explains is the study of how people might or might not hear the Gospel. These three points offer three proposed pathways to new evangelization in the first world. Having considered the definitions of accompaniment described by Del Core, we return to these proposals. Schreiter has suggested that *Evangelii Nuntiandi*,⁷² the Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI (1975) remains the “signature text for evangelization within the Roman Catholic Church.”⁷³ Building upon this text, Saint John Paul II called for a new evangelization in 1992 which outlined three elements for a true evangelization.

The first element is conversion, turning to God. The Word of God renders the hearer and receiver a new person, changed from the past by the reception of that Word. The second element goes beyond the individual hearer or receiver and impacts all of society. Saint John Paul II referred to “a civilization of love” and a “culture of life” as concepts for this societal impact. The third element is an element of remembering. It is the Gospel and God’s Spirit which has brought about these conversions in the hearts of individuals and the changes in society. This is an important element in the task of accompaniment. It is a humbling acceptance that accompaniment is an invitation to lead others to

71. Cf. Ronald ROLHEISER, editor and author, *Secularity and the Gospel: Being Missionaries to our Children*, New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006, 236.

72. Pope PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8 dec. 1975, in AAS 66 (1976) 1-82.

73. Robert SCHREITER, “Pathways to Evangelization in the First World,” in Ron ROLHEISER, *Secularity and the Gospel: Being Missionaries to our Children*, New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006, 103.

God; the one who offers spiritual accompaniment is merely an agent of God's invitation.⁷⁴

Saint John Paul II developed these ideas further by suggesting that a new evangelization takes place at three levels. The first level is conversion of the evangelizers themselves. The second level is a call to those who have heard the Gospel but in whom it has not taken root. The third level is evangelizing those who have never heard the Gospel. In the mission to secularity, for the context of North America, albeit the "West," the first two levels are our preoccupation. Schreiter made the claim that the world was caught by the imagination of Saint John Paul II in his encyclical of 1991 *Redemptoris Missio*,⁷⁵ especially paragraph 37. There, Saint John Paul II recalled St. Paul's experience as detailed in Acts 19. John Paul II suggested that, like Paul, a new evangelization has the task of going where people converge, not waiting for those who come to church. The Gospel must be brought out to the people, not circulated among the converted.⁷⁶ To this task, primarily, Schreiter offered three pathways.

It is interesting to note that some of these pathways, according to Schreiter, are not born of institutions. Many come from movements that have captured the imagination of the young. Such movements have three characteristics: an intense sense of community, a clear path or form to living, and a call for action. These movements with these characteristics Schreiter described as the first pathway to a new evangelization.⁷⁷

Apologetics and Flight to Conservatism

Another pathway to new evangelization is apologetics. Schreiter explained that this is an attempt to interpret the current world and the Christian worldview by means of apologetics, the aligning of magisterial teachings, Fathers of the Church, Scriptures, and the new Catechism. This effort, he claimed, is more in line with a Dutch Reform approach and he notes that a Dominican Study Center has tried to imitate this pathway in the publication of booklets interpreting the world in this fashion.

More in line with a Catholic worldview and approach to new evangelization, Schreiter identifies a third pathway: recasting Church teaching in languages more approachable and intelligible for various audiences. The US

74. Cf. SCHREITER, *Pathways to New Evangelization*, 104.

75. JOANNES PAULUS II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 7 dec. 1991, in AAS 83 (1991), 37.

76. Cf. SCHREITER, *Pathways to New Evangelization*, 104.

77. Cf. SCHREITER, *Pathways to New Evangelization*, 113.

Bishops supported this idea stressing that a Catholic view of reality needed to be more sacramental by perceiving God as acting in the world and not over against it. At the center of this reality must be Jesus Christ. And that reality is borne away in narrative, that tool which builds the identity of the community. Here we reconnect with the idea of “the larger narratives” once more.

One of the last points of focus for Don Juan Vecchi, in fact, had been the Salesian Youth Movement. Much of his writing was directed personally to the young encouraging them in their identity, fostering their sense of community, encouraging their instinct to act in the world. By way of apologetics, Don Vecchi called for an educative accompaniment. Relationships needed to be based not merely upon human affectivity or need, as important as these are, but also upon the call of Baptism for each young person to know who they are and come to know what God is calling them to do in the establishing of his Kingdom and in the salvation of their souls. The larger narrative, for the Salesian world, for the youth of Don Bosco, is the story of Valdocco.

An act of Salesian spiritual accompaniment, then, is an invitation into a wider community that has a clear identity, a strong way of life, a clear path of holiness. It intrinsically weaves knowledge and skills for living and for faith. This learning and weaving is a shared and mutual experience that enriches the one accompanied and the one who leads. It is the story of Valdocco, the story of Don Bosco capturing hearts so that those hearts may be caught up in the heart of God. And that story has spread and continues to spread wherever and whenever the invitation is made for an accompanied journey.

From Robert Schreier we turn now to Gilles Routheir of Quebec. Also invited to the symposia on evangelizing a secular first world, this professor of Religious Science at Laval University in Quebec City brought his abilities for synthesizing a vision for engaging secularity from the particular standpoint of the church in North America. His insights, though not taken in any consciously Salesian context, speak much to the task of accompaniment as it is interpreted in this new moment. This new moment is characterized by the shift of authority from clerical to lay, from institution to movement, from religious to secular. Routheir has written at the outset of this task:

Rather than consider the future of the church, I prefer to propose another vision of the place and role of the church in society. The church is, first, at the service of the Gospel and the reign of God. This is where we must devote the bulk of our efforts and resources. With this in mind, I will propose three complementary paths.⁷⁸

78. Gilles ROUTHIER, *From a Project of Adaptation to Refounding*, in ROLHEISER, *Secularity and the Gospel*, 161.

As we will see, these paths resonate deeply with the rising vision of Salesian youth ministry as it takes on the specifically Salesian task of reaching out to the young for the present day.

The Arenas of Science and Culture, Family Life, Social & Political Activity

Routhier has written about the danger of Christian faith being marginalized in society. Like a human body, unless the blood is carried to the extremities by the capillaries, the extremities grow cold and eventually die. Using this metaphor, the Quebecois professor proposes a diffusing of the Gospel as leaven to the whole of society. But how is this to be accomplished in this highly secular, even hostile environment? He turned his attention to all of the baptized, not just to the ordained ministers or the armies of religious. Guided by Vatican II, he identified these “arenas” into which the Gospel must be carried by the baptized: science and culture; family life; economic, social, and political activity; promotion of solidarity among peoples and nations; and safeguarding peace.

What this requires, Routhier explained, is training. In fact, he uses the term “accompany” and is worth quoting here:

My first priority for building would be to accompany and train Christian men and women in being the capillary network that carries the Gospel through society. After showing their engagement and enthusiasm, Christians will then again take to heart the appeal of John XXIII, who began all of his encyclicals with the statement, ‘With all people of goodwill...’⁷⁹

The author decried what he saw as the disappearance of “significant Christian presence” in society. To remedy this, he suggested developing a model of support for the Christian laity in the North American context. The challenge he issued was for such men and women to begin a dialogue from religious conviction within common practices of society and by that means transform the world. These dialogues, or as many ministry planners say today, “conversations,”⁸⁰ would offer opportunities for people to gather and cull their resources and their faith. Routhier continued:

We must develop and support opportunities that would make it possible for Christians to gather, giving them means of acting in the name of their faith as

79. ROUTHIER, *From a Project of Adaptation to Refounding*, 163.

80. CMD, The Center for Ministry Development in the United States is an organization that works in conjunction with the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry to provide educational and evangelical resources for Catholic youth ministry programs and youth ministers. In much of their groundbreaking work over the last 35 years, they have developed systematic structures for building youth

agents of transformation and giving them opportunities for prayer, witness, and good works.⁸¹

It would be beneficial to draw out all the parallel points made in General Chapters (GC) Twenty Four and Twenty Five of the Salesian Society. Both GC24 and GC25 encourage ongoing formation of the laity within and with the Salesian Family. The entire GC24 was aimed at collaboration between Salesian religious (SDBs) and Salesian laity. The primary structure set up to facilitate this was named as the Educative Pastoral Community (EPC) and the collaborative work of creating a common plan for ministering to the young, known as the Salesian Educative Pastoral Plan (SEPP).

This General Chapter, under the strong direction of Don Vecchi, spelled out the need for new initiatives in strengthening collaboration. Don Vecchi emphasized that social, the particular of the times Openness to dialogue and to what is new, and having a keen awareness to the rich qualities and talents of our collaborators will increase the ability to respond well to this secular age. The Chapter asserted that in order to intensify collaboration, Salesian religious and laity ought to make it a point to come together and truly share in each other's lives: for both important moments, as well as informal meetings. This approach cultivates a spirit of family, fosters reciprocity, and enables the lay person to take on real responsibilities with respect to the Salesian mission. A requisite to such a style is the development of a process of formation in common, which is another main thrust of GC24 and GC25.

Mission, inculturation, dialogue, and communication, all demand a new style of formation for facing present circumstances, for responding to the young and for sharing responsibility with lay people in the mission. The laity need a clear plan of formation for their spiritual and charismatic preparation, and the Chapters note that this sort of formation is not one-way, but that formation to communion and sharing should be realized by both parties together. Such collaboration is what's required in order to face up to the changes of the new secular youth condition; together we have to address the vast plurireligious and pluricultural contexts; together we must live the

ministry projects, most especially in various parish models. In their manuals for beginning parish youth ministry, *Celebrate Youth*, and in those for strengthening it, *YouthWorks*, the Center uses the term "conversations" to describe multi-leveled efforts for gathering various segments of the parish for an educative dialogue that might assist participation and collaboration from those segments of the parish for the ownership and development of a plan of youth formation and ministry.

81. ROUTHIER, *From a Project of Adaptation to Refounding*, 163-164.

fruitfulness of the EPC and the efficacy of the SEPP; together we have to find new initiatives like the volunteer movement or other significant experiences.

The conviction is also increasing that the field of daily commitment is the place for authentic growth: the web of relationships created by a lively and efficient EPC becomes a setting for intense ongoing formation, touching on human, pedagogical and Salesian aspects. These relationships are a vehicle for messages, they prepare us to use new languages, they foster a more attentive listening to what the world and youth culture are saying, especially when the EPC promotes youthful protagonism.⁸²

Into the Social Network

An alarming effect of globalization and secularization has been the privatization of religion. Such an effect relegates religious conviction to the realm of political opinion, not allowing those convictions to interact with situations and decisions of life at the public level. Routhier urged that this was the task of the “capillary network” to bring life beyond the doorways of the churches to move into society itself. In fact, he wrote that this called upon Christians to move into the most blatantly secular parts of their societies bringing the Gospel without shame or apology. He called this an institutional presence and promoted the movement of believers into the fabric of all that operates in society. This goes beyond an effort to evangelize individuals and demands a Gospel presence within social networks.⁸³

In Don Vecchi’s time of leadership, from his post on the General Council as head of the Youth Pastoral Department, to his time as Vicar General, and in his last years as Rector Major, the idea had grown progressively stronger that the Salesian Family is called beyond the confines of its various works as defined by one apostolate or location and, instead, move into the public sector to impact the territory. The nurturing of the concept of the EPC and its SEPP had this in view. To develop merely a local plan of action, to focus only upon the local youth while ignoring the youth of an entire region and all those invested in their care, even beyond the Salesian doorway, is to reject the new pastoral mentality and the new style of Salesian presence to which the

82. Documents of the 24th General Chapter of the Society of St Francis de Sales, “Salesians and Lay People: Communion and Sharing in the Spirit and Mission of Don Bosco,” *Acts of the General Council of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco*, no. 356 (1996) : §54-56.

83. Cf. ROUTHIER, *From a Project of Adaptation to Refounding*, 164-165.

Spirit of God has led the Salesian Family. Here is just one of many directives of GC 24 in this regard:

The Province not only gathers local communities into one which is broader but, as the subject of the mission in a much wider territory, can take on initiatives and activities to be carried out by lay people, properly formed and followed up. It is up to the Province to discern, applying the criterion of quality and to the extent that this makes it possible, how to distribute Salesian resources in line with the importance attaching to each initiative and its involvement in the work.⁸⁴

Even the language found within the Salesian Youth Ministry Manual of 1998 contains this idea of a particular region or territory and the role of the Salesian presence to work with the elements of that particular area. A Salesian parish is not defined, it explains, but the presence of the SDBs within a given parish, but primarily by the region or territory it represents. The Salesian presence has purpose within that territory to help animate and direct its priorities for the care of the young. In fulfilling that task, the parish can be identified as “Salesian.”

New Styles of Flexible and Immediate Church

Don Bosco proposed models of pastoral communities and collaborative efforts for his young people that pushed far beyond the boundaries common to his time and culture. Much of that vast vision would eventually be tempered by the cautions of the Holy See, by distrusting contemporaries who perceived Don Bosco as a political or social threat, and even, at one point, by his own local ordinary, Bishop Gastaldi. For example, the idea of lay men and woman forming communities to dedicate themselves to the care of the young people had, as yet, no container in the vision of the Church of that period. This idea would evolve into the family of Salesian Cooperators. Even the founding of a religious order was a matter of necessity more than a long developed and premeditated course of action.

Routhier has made proposals for new styles of faith communities and ministerial presences that allow both those communities and presences a much more immediate impact than might exist simply by institutional structure. Here are some of his ideas. Routhier’s model retains a measure of institution by network, but it is flexible by local proximity and availability. He referred to these as “district houses.”⁸⁵ This is the model of presence that

84. GC 24: §238.

85. ROUTHIER, *From a Project of Adaptation to Refounding*, 165.

goes out to where people gather the alternative to building structures within an established faith or parish community. Routhier insists:

The church must be obvious and easily locatable in the weave of neighborhoods and cities; it must have a place on the street and be easily visible...

Parishes cannot do everything, and I imagine that soon some parishes will not be able to fulfill the range of requirements, not for lack of resources, finances, or priests, but for lack of the faithful. There should still be a tangible presence of the church, supported by Christians in a particular location in each neighborhood or area of a city. This is what I call a “district house”; multifunctional in nature, it is often a house of charity and culture, and serves as a gathering place.⁸⁶

Such places, he maintains, would not merely offer structure, but also a space for first contact and the earliest proclamation of the Gospel. These spaces might offer safe harbor for those alienated from institution or distanced from tradition. By nature, these houses would be multifunctional offering many styles of learning and formation, houses that practice charity and outreach, places where sharing is practiced and learned, houses where networks are made to better the lives of the poor and broken.

As places of culture, such houses would offer other forms of education through the arts, sacred and secular. Workshops and debates, conferences and bookshops could offer other forms of lively engagement and encourage intellectual and spiritual formation. At some level, such outlets could become known for their focus on spiritual accompaniment. Those wishing to move deeper into their spiritual life would find mentors and guides, trained and ready to lead. This would offer deeper immersion and reflection upon the Word of God by all manner of possible methods and would, hopefully, lead to the discernment of one’s personal calling by God.

What Routhier might claim to be innovative and bold, is in fact, the very model Don Bosco offered his young people. It is the model Don Vecchi recast for a world in the grip of a chaotic and depersonalizing globalization. A simple reading of the three General Chapters, GC23, GC24, and GC25, leads to the same ideas and similar innovation. Yet often the danger of familiarity and repetition encroaches upon the prophetic power of innovation and change. Perhaps these joined voices from so many diverse points of departure and experience may become, for the Salesian world, an affirmation that the Spirit

86. ROUTHIER, *From a Project of Adaptation to Refounding*, 165.

of God is pushing and pulling, creating out of chaos, renewing out of the ashes of the familiar.

New Models of Spirituality in a Time of Purification

There is a “belief that what is most needed right now to inspire us as missionaries within secularity is a re-inflaming of the romantic imagination within religion.”⁸⁷ Ron Rolheiser’s words are apt to describe a problem felt throughout the world of faith, and particularly among ministers, religious, and the faithful living, worshipping and ministering in what is known as the “Western World.” It is the conviction of many similar authors and prophetic voices on the current scene that God is purifying the church of the West and calling for a self-emptying and a living contemplation of the kenotic gift of God in his Son, Jesus. Such voices claim that the world of faith “is lacking fire, romance, aesthetics, as these pertain to our faith and ecclesial lives. What needs to be inflamed today inside of religion is its romantic imagination, and this is not so much the job of the theologian as it is the job of the artist and the saint.”⁸⁸

This present moment, this new moment for the Church and for the world, both as a challenge and as an opportunity, is met by the Gospels and the Spirit of God. Both are up to the task of forging meaning and direction in this age called secular in the Western World. The act of mediation offered by Don Bosco and renewed with long-reaching vision by Don Vecchi in the very recent past, serve as a compass for those both inside and outside of the Salesian Family looking for meaning and those offering guidance toward such meaning by the spiritual act of accompaniment. Mediation is specifically Salesian when it conveys through authentic, everyday experiences of life, the authentic presence of God. This mediation and this meeting are transformative for those on the journey, because the journey is propelled from start to finish by the Spirit of God.

The trademark of this mediation is its invitation to participation. The model of ministry is one of reciprocity and co-involvement. It involves the participation of the whole person in all of his and her physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual make-up.

The Spirit of God is blowing across the height and breadth of the vast human landscape in these days, raising the same awareness and sounding the same call to invitation from many points of direction. The richness of the

87. Ron ROLHEISER, *Secularity and the Gospel: Being Missionaries to our Children*, author and editor, New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006, 19-20.

88. ROLHEISER, *Secularity and the Gospel*, 20.

vision is overwhelming at this time and for this moment. As many are folding up the deck chairs and preparing for a massive descent as the ship sinks out of sight, others across many generations are preparing for Pentecost!

The most difficult point in this examination remains the details of creating an openness to God. Despite careful analysis of all the details of this present moment from every angle, regardless of the sociological and anthropological data, the task becomes narrowed to one basic challenge: to ready hearts to receive the Word of God in order that the Spirit of God might transform and inflame those hearts in whatever context in which God comes to breathe new Life. Even with a keen awareness of the characteristics and tendencies of particular generations within various settings, this one task looms larger than all the information. Certainly the data and the awareness is necessary at every turn so that the Gospel might be sown in every age and context and that the soil might receive that Gospel in all its timeless richness. Crossing the bridge from a barren land into this fertile valley is a difficult journey requiring all the tools at hand for the work of evangelization, but ultimately, it is the work of the Spirit of God.

There are, in this discussion, many ideas and creative strategies which continually rise. We have placed most of these ideas in the container of Spiritual Accompaniment. We have seen that it is not a simple idea but one that seeks to address the complexity of the task of evangelization for our time. But it has at its core *the intention of making the experience of God a lived one that welcomes, mediates, and invites participation*. Translating this idea into religious curricula, ministry objectives, and pastoral praxis of all shapes and dimensions is not the work of any one cookbook for evangelization. Instead, there is the initial call of Baptism which reminds us that our own place in this plan of God is to bear witness to the new persons we have become in the death and resurrection of Christ. Such a notion goes beyond an attitudinal shift or a change in ministerial style. As von Balthasar mused, it is all about man's love becoming divine. It is an immersion into the Incarnational mystery. A flexible and immediate experience of Church, then, is wrapped up in this mystery that continually unwinds in every human encounter. "Distance and proximity coincide. The servant is a friend because he is a servant, and the friend is a servant because he is a friend. And nothing is confused or abolished, nor is any boundary violated by the vertigo of such infinities." In our striving to sow the Good News in hearts hungering and opening for that Word, we do not bring ourselves and our message. We do not stand as ciphers for that

Word, but conduits of the Spirit. We do not violate the boundaries any one time or culture presents, but we invite into mystery.

Invitation is a messy business because it can only be offered through the vehicle of our own experience. And yet, this is the mystery at its depth! God chooses us, in this time, in this place, with all of our deficiencies and deficits, with all of our prejudice, lack of understanding or awareness and while we remain sinners. God chooses us to be those conduits. What God requires is openness and trust in that call. God depends upon our study, our creative energies, our synergies, our wrestling with the details of the given task in order that God's continuing presence may be authentically human and accessible. The Incarnation is very often hidden and surprising.

The great Abbot of Mont-des-Cats in Flanders, André Louf, reflects on this as he meditates on the Nativity.

Indeed, in this helpless little child, who cries in his cradle or, bunched up on his young mother's lap, finds comfort at her breast, God's look becomes visible, marvelously surprising, beyond expectation, totally unforeseen. He is, in the first place, *a miracle of truth*, for this child is not an angel of God, or a prophet, one specially sent by God, but the Son of God, who gave his own Son. His is a *miracle of nearness*, too, because the Son of God is now squarely among us, in a body like ours, a body we can see, meet, touch, caress, a body which will one day be delivered up to our blows and scorn by a traitor's kiss. Finally, he is *a divine surprise of God's love* which always culminates in the fulfillment of everything that surpasses expectation.⁸⁹

The wise abbot goes on to reflect that there is a great chasm between the talk of God's grace present and available to us and "the concrete experience of that love."⁹⁰ The Abbot asserts simply that it is not easy to observe this Grace which has made its appearance on the earth. In fact, he suggests that God posted the brilliant star in the sky over Bethlehem fully aware that we might not see the appearance of Grace and that we might pass it by all together. Abbot Louf muses that this demonstrates to us and reminds us that this Grace is both visible and hidden. "It does not glitter, nor blind anyone's eyes. It seems even to wrap itself in unthought-of forms and to hide itself where it is not expected."⁹¹ So it is, therefore, that we are to be watchful because this Grace will be found in the least expected places. So it is that Jesus turned

89. André LOUF, *Mercy in Weakness: Meditations on the Word*, Cistercian Studies Series No. 174, translation by John Vriend, Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1998, p. 5.

90. LOUF, *Mercy in Weakness: Meditations on the Word*, p. 7.

91. LOUF, *Mercy in Weakness: Meditations on the Word*, p. 8.

the expectations of his listeners upside down by announcing the coming of the Kingdom among the poorest and most outcast, among the discarded children, among sinners and tax-collectors, and most dramatically in his own betrayal and murder. Abbot Louf lures us deeper into this meditation upon the mystery of Incarnation exclaiming that the Christ-child remains deep within us—each and every one of us. He prompts us to examine the deepest part of ourselves “where the birth of Jesus, the Word of God, ceaselessly repeats itself.”⁹²

As evangelizers, our first task is to awaken to this hidden grace. The Abbot advises:

Usually this happens without our being conscious of it, without our feeling it, down in the humblest and deepest layers of what we carry with ourselves: the poor, tiny child which determines our most basic identity and which we can only recover and accept by grace, the same child we will be for all eternity, dwelling together with Jesus in the heart of his Father.⁹³

Rediscovering Our Early Love

In the Book of Revelations, the Risen and Glorified Christ speaks a message to the Seven Churches of the first century. In his words to the Church at Ephesus, Jesus recognizes their work, their patient endurance of evil men who have appeared as false apostles, and all that they had to endure because of these troubles, but he adds, “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first.”⁹⁴

Perhaps the first act we must undertake as evangelizers—and an act that we must return to as often as needed—is to fall in love again. We best communicate that which we love. If, in fact, we are in love with God and are aware of how radically in love God is with us, this is both the motivation and the goal of what we proclaim in the Good News. We can become too self-absorbed even in our roles as followers of Christ. We run the risk of forgetting why we want to follow Christ in the first place. We easily forget the Love that

92. LOUF, *Mercy in Weakness: Meditations on the Word*, p. 9.

93. LOUF, *Mercy in Weakness: Meditations on the Word*, p. 9.

94. Revelations 2: 4,5 in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, Expanded Edition of the Revised Standard Version, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977.

first drew us. In the end, this is the whole purpose of evangelization: to make available to a waiting world the amazing and transformative love of God.

Returning to the images conjured by the sower of seed and the fields of soil diverse in their readiness to receive that seed, perhaps it is our own soil that becomes the primary focus for our task of evangelization. Herein lies the mystery of evangelization as the source of our own salvation—a notion at the heart of Don Bosco's pedagogy. To love and serve the young is to love and serve Christ. To love and serve Christ is to find one's salvation. How attentive, then, are our hearts? How purposefully do we prepare our own soil that we might join the sower in the task of spreading the seed?

Abbot Louf issues this warning:

The miracles he wants to accomplish by his Word can be negated and perhaps come to nothing on account of a person's inattention. The same human being who was above all destined, called and chosen by God to become his instrument is perhaps no more than an obstacle standing in God's way, preventing the completion of the miracle. For God has once-and-for-all decided to honor human freedom and not to work a single miracle against a person's will. If necessary, he is prepared to sow his Word on hardened soil, soil that is incapable of bringing forth fruit.⁹⁵

Abbot Louf assures us that the sower goes out daily with a generous swing of the seeds, hoping that one day the seed will catch and that our inattention and frustration may give way to trust and cooperation. With great hope, the Abbot reminds us that a complete and total change is possible with the slightest openness to that seed. The gardener will continue to hoe and weed no matter our response.

In the act of returning to the Love which captured our imagination, then, we not only become ourselves regenerated and re-energized, we become better conduits of that same Love for others. What is called for at many stations in our lives is an awareness of our inattentiveness and repentance for the reception of the Word of God. It is a Word that will not return to God empty.

I Call You Friends: the Kenotic Gift of God in Christ

We have already mentioned that Ron Rolheiser and the Symposia hosted by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in North America underlined the only biblical image which can stand in these times as a beacon for our renewal: the kenotic gift of God in Christ. After all the scandal and abuse, with all the negative press, the only authentic voice is one of self-less love and service. It is not even a voice of new ideas or new initiatives. It is neither a voice of

95. LOUF, *Mercy in Weakness: Meditations on the Word*, p. 2.

insistent apology nor pleas for new forgiveness. It is simply the voiceless voice of the Sheep led to slaughter; ready to lay down life itself for the renewal of a people.

This is not the ready response of most of us. There is a longing to return to a time of security and authority. No such time may return. There is a longing for a sense of God's presence which might dissuade secular eyes from harsh and unfair scrutiny. No such presence is offered. The only presence is the hidden Grace, the quiet Incarnation that is born into the messy stables of our lives. It is authentic in its silence. It doesn't seek to prove anything to anyone, but merely to accompany the human experience and transform it by that participation. This is authentic mediation. It is difficult to imitate and to emulate because it is completely devoid of self-advancement and even the slightest level of acknowledgement from any corner. But it is a silent act that provokes response that is deeper than culture or the posturing of any age.

The act of Incarnation that is here – so silent, so untraceable, is the act of extending a hand to share broken bread – to share life and a moment of life. It is the invitation to become friends and to enter into a spirit of trust. It is a terribly unequal invitation because it comes without pressure or persuasion and is known, too often, only in hindsight. Even the demand for reciprocity is not evident. It is an open invitation in the truest sense. And it is terribly risky because such an invitation can always be missed by inattention or deliberately rejected.

When we are invited into authentic friendship, however, there is the seed of something wonderfully new: a covenant unlike no other. It is the invitation into a private room that no one else may enter and disturb—where friends are safe with secrets and open to the shared strength only an experienced trust can bring forth.

Jesus told his disciples that he would call them friends because he wanted to reveal to them all that the Father had revealed to him. He promised them a friendship that he knew would be tested and rejected, but he did not change the conditions of that friendship. His intention remained the same before and after his crucifixion: that “they may be one as we are one.” (John 17:11) He wished that no one person might be lost—left outside of this friendship. And the sign of this great covenant would be Jesus, himself, hung between heaven and earth in the throes of death, denial, and rejection. Jesus would hang in despair and never denounce his friends but call upon his Father to forgive even his murderers and betrayers. What greater love can there be?

So as we ready the seed sack and plough to enter the field of evangelization, we prepare best by returning to this unspeakable love. We prepare to be

friends as we were befriended. We enter the field knowing that we do not make the seed grow, nor are the seeds of our own making. We participate in the task with the one who desires that none be lost. We strive to conquer our inattention and we pray to make possible the perception of this love in every heart that crosses our path.

Friendship as the Call to Communal Witness and Action

Gregorian chant remains the official style of liturgical music for the Roman Catholic Liturgy even in our own times. This would come as a shock to most North American Catholics since its application remains the exception in most parish liturgies. This is a curious stamp upon a style of music which has never been lifted since its confirmation by Pope Paul VI. There are those who might possibly suggest that this seal of approval is extended to preserve the official style of prayer in the contemplative communities throughout the world—many whose rhythm of life are punctuated by prayer and chant as it has been for centuries. Yet, this would be a misunderstanding. Certainly, the contemplative life is upheld as a special vocation in the Church and its centuries old manner of praying in chant is a living link to the earliest traditions of the Church. Yet, there is a deeper and more significant purpose for the placement of Gregorian style of music and chant at the center of the Liturgy—it is expressly to underline a style of communal contemplation.

The method of prayer employed in chant is communal by definition. The chant continues unbroken by the voice of the community. As one takes a breath, another carries the prayer and keeps the note unbroken. As one becomes weary or loses one's place, the other voices support, lift, and sustain. This process exchanges and flows as the notes flow to their conclusion.

Friendship and communal witness is similar to this tradition. Spiritual friendship is a special gift of grace to carry those in relationships to the arms of God. When one suffers setbacks or hindrance along the path of ministry or personal spiritual growth, the other carries his friend and the reverse is true. Action is a communal decision that respects the gifts of each person in relationship. It is the community which sends out in mission. This is a radical departure from the individualism of many projects and plans for social action. Egos are not obstacles. God speaks to the union between willing hearts. The bridal imagery employed in the Old Testament and highlighted by Jesus in his public ministry takes on relevance. The union of hearts and wills in communal friendship is the fertile ground of God's call, the ideal place of response, and the breeding ground of true fellowship.

Capturing the Love of God

One of the gifts of any exile is the longing for a homecoming. Inside of that longing might be found newer expressions of some very familiar ideas. These ideas may spark new life where apathy or fear may have come to inhabit the heart. There is a small, but powerful text that, for this work, has offered great insight while provoking a keen recognition of some old familiar friends in its presentation. Perhaps this is because this small text dwells upon the call of the priest for a secular world. It is a loving outreach to many presbyters who have found themselves in that new territory without the roadmap, who have awakened to a new world with a growing sense of isolation and uselessness. This text is called, *New Hearts, New Models* and is written by Irish theologian and teacher, Daniel J. O’Leary. This is a recent text that offers hope and insight to priests, especially diocesan sacramental priests, who look upon this moment in the history of the church as one that threatens them to the very core. This is a time of ministerial exile!

What O’Leary offers are some “new models” of priesthood for these changing times. Yet, what he offers fits very well into the heart of Don Bosco. These models, then, do not apply simply or exclusively to ministerial priests. Their application easily translates into a Salesian spirituality for any Salesian educator because at their core, they are models of an educative and pastoral project, a plan of life, and a spiritual accompaniment. These models, then, are offered here as new containers of old ideas, new models of a tried-and-true Salesian spirituality.

Capturing Hearts

Along the journey of this entire work, from the beginning of its research to these concluding insights, the subject of the heart has never left its place at center stage! We began with the heart of Don Bosco as he fell in love with God, sought father figures to guide him, gave his heart to companions to find friendship and holiness, and as he took on the loving tasking of winning hearts to himself to be captured by the heart of God. We looked at those elements that became his pedagogy and spirituality, one that he would call a method of the heart. We recounted the ripple effect of this love reaching down through many generations, still intriguing and inspiring Salesian leadership and charisma to our present day. We journeyed into the heart of Don Vecchi, so taken by the power of Don Bosco’s outreach and so compelled to bring that embrace in ever-newer ways to young people on the margins of

the world. It is little wonder, then, that this first model offered by Daniel J. O'Leary rings out clear tones of a Salesian spirituality.⁹⁶

O'Leary suggests that is it not merely the job of the minister to capture hearts, the minister is called to be "a farmer of hearts." Cultivating what is in the soil of the human heart to allow it to grow on its own, to sink its own roots, and find its own nourishment: what an apt description of Don Bosco! The weariness so many experiences in this secular world, he suggests, comes from a "blindness to the secret divinity of our hearts."⁹⁷ Beautifully, he explains:

The counter-attraction is not between the church and the world; it is between authentic and inauthentic ways of being human. Jesus, the church, the sacraments, the priest, are all there, not to draw people out of a neutral or even threatening world into a safer, sacred institution, but to enable people, and all creation, to become aware of their inherent holiness and divine destiny.⁹⁸

Ministry of Beauty

Let us recall that Leonard Sweet wrote of the "Passion of Beauty" as mentioned above (see section 1.1.4.2 The Passion of Beauty). There he suggested the important task of growing a soul into its own beauty. Daniel O'Leary, on the other hand, holds up a model of ministry he calls the "prophet of beauty."⁹⁹ Similar to the first model, this minister is given the task of revealing the other person's inner beauty—to discover the image of God the other bears uniquely. What a succinct and powerful summary of spiritual accompaniment! O'Leary suggests that much of Western tradition has been turned toward the exultation of goodness and truth to the exclusion of beauty. Because the minister believes the Word of God is the most beautiful expression of God's presence, leading another into that Word empowers the other to know "their own creativity, their dignity, and their glory."

Writing to inspire priests, O'Leary's reflections inspire an adaptation that is completely Salesian and outside of a strict clerical reference. He explains that the work of design of a minister for Christ today is a privileged place for bringing to birth the Savior in a pilgrim's heart, but not just for the masses

96. Cf. Daniel J. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, Dublin, The Columba Press, 1997.

97. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 40.

98. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 41-42.

99. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 44-50.

in general, but for each and every soul who comes across the path of the minister. He continues:

...to make those he serves more aware and proud of their uniqueness as co-creators with God of the loveliness and holiness of human affection, reconciliation, and trust. They are lovely because they are God's human ways of becoming incarnate in our world of time and space. And we know this to be true, because it happened first in Jesus.¹⁰⁰

The ability to be this prophet of beauty is rooted in the minister's complete awareness of God's view of him/herself. The minister knows about the sin in life, about failures, about brokenness. Such ministers realize that their own beauty has been carved out of the messiness of their own lives. With such awareness, they are empowered to invite others into the same awareness. *This is a ministry of transparency that journeys alongside, not from above. This is a ministry that is vibrantly aware of the sacramental nature of life!* It comes from a humble place that acknowledges calmly and quietly that it is in the little everyday moments and personal encounters that God is met and known.¹⁰¹

Transcending and Transforming Fear

Fear, claimed O'Leary, has been used as an instrument of control throughout the history of man and even in the story of the church. However, we believe that Jesus came to dismantle that fear holding so many lives hostage. Constantly Jesus is telling his listeners to not be afraid. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God, have faith also in me."¹⁰² Jesus came to set free hearts imprisoned by fear and to remove the power fear holds over so many lives.

One who accompanies, then, is a "healer of fear."¹⁰³ By listening to the other, by teaching by word and example, by contemplative prayer, the minister builds a reserve that is capable of holding the broken and messy pieces of another's life. Like the stranger who would turn out to be Jesus, himself, walking alongside the frightened disciples fleeing on the road to Emmaus, the minister is called to walk alongside the mystery and pain of another and help that person to understand the meaning of that moment. Echoing a familiar theme of the great spiritual author, Henri Nouwen, O'Leary is confident that this privileged place of healing comes from having been wounded. We are,

100. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 46.

101. Cf. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 48-50.

102. John 14:1, NAB translation.

103. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 50-51.

in fact, wounded healers. This shared journey from fear to faith returns the confidence and trust to their proper place.

In a Salesian context, Don Vecchi not only preached or taught this particular virtue. He lived it. He lived it especially in his sickness and dying. He became a healer of fear by looking squarely into the face of his own mortal fears and coming out on the other side of trust and hope. How blessed we are to have his words and the richness of his faith:

Illness caught me unexpectedly in the midst of the Ministry assigned to me by Providence. I had planned many things for my time in office, but this took me by surprise. God's grace and your prayers have helped me to face this vocational turning point at which the Lord called me to serve him in a new way.¹⁰⁴

"How do you respond to life?" Life comes to meet us. It is a matter of understanding that it is an absolutely free gift, the fruit of an inconceivable love. It is not just something temporary, but eternal in both duration and quality; it finds its meaning in Jesus Christ, with whom we share our human experience; it implies commitment, and at the same time joy and risk. In this perspective the dominant feeling is that of trust in the faithfulness of God hymned in the psalms: You, O Lord, are my life, my strength, my hope, my light. "If I should walk in the valley of darkness, no evil would I fear. You are there with your crook and your staff; with these you give me comfort" (Ps 22, 4). The good man is defined especially as a "thankful man", while the unbeliever is fundamentally ungrateful.¹⁰⁵

The Salesian educator has the task of leading the young to that question, "How do you respond to life?" After recent campus shootings and violence, the Coordinators of Youth Ministry in many places of North America shared resources among themselves and their collaborators for dealing with this tragedy as it struck out at the young people of America. The response of these ministers was immediate, and many offered safe places for the young to gather for many days as they processed their fears. In good Salesian tradition, these ministers were present, ready with resources, opening a safe door of

104. VECCHI, ACG 377, Rome, Direzione Generale Opere don Bosco, 2001, introduction.

105. VECCHI, ACG 377, 3.

welcome in the midst of fear.¹⁰⁶ This is the ministry of Salesian presence at its finest.

The ministry of presence at its best releases what is best, as O'Leary concludes:

All experienced priests, spiritual directors, prayer-guides, teachers, and parents instinctively know, they do not heal people; they do not give to their visitors, children, pupils something they already lack; they do not pour out from their own fullness something to fill the empty spaces of those around them: rather, do they draw out from hearts and souls of those they are privileged to serve, the innate wisdom and beauty and healing already waiting to be released.¹⁰⁷

Ministers of Mystery

A captivating idea from Salesian youth ministry involves the process of discovering the plan of God in the mystery of life. GC23 quoted the Salesian Constitutions in this regard:

Vocational guidance constitutes the vertex and “crown of all our educational and pastoral activity.”¹⁰⁸ But it is not the terminus of the faith-journey; it is an element always present, and one that must characterize every stage and every area of intervention.¹⁰⁹

This ever-present element can also be understood as holding in respect the mystery of the other person in the faith that God truly has a specific plan and purpose for his/her life.

The vocation of the one who accompanies, as O'Leary suggested in this model, is to enable the other to see mystery and infinity in every small thing. This vision requires discipline and calls the pilgrim to be educated and purified. In this purifying, the pilgrim is invited to see in every in moment

106. Cf. Lane PALMER, Virginia Tech: A Pastoral Response to an Unspeakable Tragedy, in “Youth Ministry.com, providing many links to resources for Youth Ministry, including this one at <http://www.dare2share.org>, Group Magazine, April 2007. One Salesian Past Pupil serves as the CYM of his home parish youth ministry in Lakewood, California. This college junior opened the doors to the youth center every evening after school for the next week with other adults and counselors at hand to help the teens process their fear .

107. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 56.

108. Society of Saint Francis de Sales. *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales*. Roma: Esse Gi Esse, 1984: §37

109. Documents of the 23rd General Chapter of the Society of St Francis de Sales. “Educating Young People to the Faith,” *Acts of the General Council of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco*, no. 333 (1990): 247.

from “the agony and ecstasy; the boredom and excitement; the failures and successes of their lives” as Jesus perceives them.

The present moment is a difficult one for the perception and survival of mystery. It requires a compass, of sorts. The one who accompanies is to offer this compass in a confused time. Leading others to see the mystery and the plan of God in the midst of the secular confusion is not an easy task and demands discipline of the guide. This calls to memory the ascetical priorities of Don Bosco. His chastity practiced to liberate love from its selfish conditions, his poverty to make ready all of his resources for the service of the poor and the young, and his obedience to the plan of God as filtered painfully and incrementally into the details of his life, all served to keep Don Bosco rooted in mystery and to point out to the young the supernatural quality within every moment. By the indwelling of God’s Spirit in the heart of the Salesian minister, they make available this unfolding plan of God. St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians echoes this:

Out of this infinite glory, may he give you the power of his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, you will, with all the saints, have strength to grasp the breadth and length, the height and the depth until, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God.¹¹⁰

O’Leary ended his reflection on this model of the minister to Mystery with this caution. In a world so given to production and measuring things in terms of pragmatism, the work of revealing mystery is quiet and unnoticed. It does not concern itself with results, unlike the world. The caretaker must be careful in order to stay clear of the obsession to find measurable results in the business of soul-tending. Even an accidental leaning in this direction can throw both the minister and the one to be guided onto a treacherous path away from God’s plan.¹¹¹ Instead, the one who guides is to become the friend of the soul. Linked to this is the conviction that on our own, we cannot progress easily toward wholeness.

Don Bosco’s insistence upon a consistent confessor reflects this model very closely. O’Leary also highlights the special call of priesthood to walk in the role of confessor along this journey. As a soul friend, this person becomes

110. Ephesians 3:16-19.

111. Cf. O’LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 60-61.

the one to gently prod the other to move beyond the lies and manipulations one often tells one's self to avoid the truth.

Weavers of Wholeness, Integration, and Organic Unity

The soul friend described above also has another important duty to connect the pilgrim to the wider community. This is not an easy task. O'Leary claims that this task demands that a person helps another to accept the illusions and brokenness of their own heart before they can begin to tolerate, accept, and forgive the illusions and brokenness in those hearts of the community around them. This is an inner process that has effect upon the outward signs of living in community. The obstacles to this inner process are many. Very often wholeness is postponed as a person remains resistant to and reluctant to explore his or her own spiritual integrity. It is a frightening journey to look at one's own brokenness and lack of integration. For most people, so many layers have covered over the effort to be accepted that this is no longer a conscious device in the person performing the masquerade. This is the reason for a soul friend: to lead one back to personal integrity, toward wholeness that fosters community.

Ironically, the absence of this highly individual pursuit of inner wholeness renders community impossible! Very often, this inward glance can degenerate into a selfish individualism. Hence, there is always a need on this spiritual journey for a bold spiritual friend. Buried inside of that individualism, suggested O'Leary, is a seed of growth wanting to reach out its roots far and wide. It is just too afraid and too buried by the illusions it has upheld for so long. Thus, the spiritual friend can lead this person into a self-acceptance and a challenge for inner growth that, in the end, will make the effort for community healthy.¹¹²

The one who accompanies must have a great knowledge of the human heart. However, this knowledge comes at a great price. Quite often, a person does not feel at home in his or her own community, and this applies to both the spiritual guide and the one seeking guidance. There is a word of caution here. It can happen that the one who serves as minister and guide might subtly replace their need for true community and a sense of acceptance in the felt-need offered by the one seeking guidance. This masks a very subtle selfishness and must be avoided. The one who offers accompaniment must be on a similar journey toward wholeness. The community that welcomes, that is mature, that tries despite its weaknesses to welcome, is the best place for one to offer accompaniment. Where one feels at home, one can offer guidance to others. The place of community can offer this guide a place that is safe, that

112. Cf. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 69-79.

allows self-acceptance and understanding of the guide's own woundedness. From this safe place, the act of accompaniment avoids becoming an act of compensation.¹¹³

When the guide is at home, the guide has the fullest capacity to be a weaver or wholeness. With the help of the community that accepts this guide, wholeness is offered not merely to an individual, but to the whole of society. This notion of O'Leary so closely resembles the idea of Don Vecchi that it is worth highlighting. Don Vecchi urged the community of the Salesians to be mature and loving. As true disciples of Christ, their choice for wholeness is not intended for self-service, but to become a school of holiness for others.

Catching the Love of God

"The love of God is caught, not taught! Only fire begets fire. Enthusiasm is contagious."¹¹⁴ With these powerful words, O'Leary makes the case for the silent witness of the extraordinary in the ordinary. The people of God, he maintains, are not looking for super human beings they cannot emulate, but flawed human beings who demonstrate an extraordinary trust in God.¹¹⁵ So it is that the minister is called to look into the silent places of their own hearts to enable them to resonate with the hearts of others. To inspire, one has to experience inspiration. To motivate, one has to be motivated. O'Leary encourages the one who offers accompaniment to trust their experience remembering that there is something sacred in the human experience. Jesus became flesh and elevated every human experience as a door to the sacred. At the heart of this reflection upon Jesus is a theology of the Incarnation remembering that God chose to become a defenseless and dependent child. Therefore, "something of God's true nature could only be captured in the defenselessness of childhood."¹¹⁶

This reflection, however, goes far beyond a romantic glance at the helplessness of children and opens a window onto God's *anawim*, the little and forgotten people of the world. The minister of the young is called to become the voice of these forgotten. They are the silent ones whom society shuns. The *anawim* remind us that God cannot be understood completely.

113. Cf. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 74-79.

114. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 79.

115. Cf. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 79.

116. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 82-83.

If he has created these outcasts, there must be something of God's image and significance to be found in them.

What an amazing link to the Salesian Credo! Salesian spirituality is above all focused on a primary group among the *anawim*: the poor and abandoned young of the world. The voiceless young people will be heard in as much as the Salesian offers them a place in the journey and at their table. O'Leary raised the voice of an American prophet, Franciscan priest and activist, Richard Rohr. He offered Rohr's words on this call to journey with the *anawim*, and not leave their situation merely to theological discourse:

The church has mostly tried to resolve all theological dilemmas with analysis and academic thinking. It just does not work. It produces a faith that is not real, that has no passion in it, no reality, no power to compel—just endless theological distinctions and books and articles, while the world goes by and asks 'Who cares?' This would not have happened if we'd kept Jesus' counsel to stay close to the poor. The poor kept us close to the Gospels, to the important questions and issues, to the Christ-child within and without.¹¹⁷

Finally, as a voice of the silent, the one who accompanies must observe two important aspects of that role: first, to recognize the poverty within the caregiver when reaching out to the poor; secondly, to recognize the two-way nature of the gift of grace, offered to the one ministering and the one receiving the ministry. These are safeguards which remind the one offering accompaniment that their place is to be kept beside the *anawim*, for in God's eyes, all are little and all are broken. *Moving away from this reality into a safer and more rewarding ministry can lose touch with the very call God has given.*¹¹⁸

Sacraments of Compassion

The last model offered in the vision of O'Leary is one that looks to the compassionate heart of Christ. It is here that the evangelizers of the young rediscover that their positions are intrinsically part of the painful reality of humanity. From this position, the evangelizer becomes "the embodiment of divine mercy, the prophet of God's unconditional love."¹¹⁹ This embodiment guarantees a destruction of suffering by the act of suffering, in the manner of Jesus' self-sacrifice. As O'Leary has stated, "this is no soft option." It requires a complete outpouring of the person who offers compassion. "We are called

117. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 85. Here O'Leary cites Richard Rohr from a published work: Richard ROHR, *Near Occasions of Grace*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1993, 109.

118. Cf. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 85-87.

119. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 88-89.

to be with people, to rejoice with them, to walk with them, to stay with them, to suffer with them, to be the embodiment of God's compassion for them."¹²⁰ Because we believe that God suffers with us in his compassion, we as ministers to the young are called to nothing less. This is a "God in communion" with us.¹²¹

It is apropos that this reflection is the last offered by O'Leary. When making a comparison to Don Bosco or Don Vecchi, this is most suitable. Why? Because the Salesian mission of accompaniment, in the end, is the call to a special union with God. Experiencing this union with God, as Don Bosco did nearly at every moment in his life, one has to be moved by the little and the forgotten, the lost and the young, the voiceless and the homeless. It is no small wonder, nor a coincidence, then, that Don Vecchi's concern for the most vulnerable and exploited youth of the world, those on the streets and those consigned into military action, was the one thing that seemed to never leave his thoughts and the one direction to which he pointed the Salesian family. As Don Vecchi suffered his final illness, he became the compassion of Jesus, suffering for these young and compelling others to extend their hands and hearts in complete service to these little voiceless ones in God's Kingdom.

Conclusion: Holiness, Authentic Experience, and the Return to Don Bosco

This present moment, a new moment both for the church and for the world, and seen as a challenge and as an opportunity, is met by the Gospels and the Spirit of God. Both are up to the task of forging meaning and direction in this age called secular in the Western World. The act of mediation offered by Don Bosco and renewed with long-reaching vision by Don Vecchi in the very recent past, serve as a compass for those looking for meaning and those offering guidance toward such meaning by the spiritual act of accompaniment. Mediation is specifically Salesian when it conveys through authentic, everyday experiences of life, and the authentic presence of God. This mediation and this meeting are transformative for those on the journey, because the journey is propelled from start to finish by the Spirit of God.

The trademark of this mediation is its invitation to participation. The model of ministry is one of reciprocity and co-involvement. It involves the participation of the whole person in all of his and her physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual make-up.

The Spirit of God is blowing across the height and breadth of the vast human landscape in these days, raising the same awareness and sounding the

120. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 92.

121. Cf. O'LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 96.

same call to invitation from many points of direction. The richness of the vision is overwhelming at this time and for this moment. As many are folding up the deck chairs and preparing for a massive descent as the ship sinks out of sight, others across many generations are preparing for Pentecost!

Don Vecchi's successor, Don Pascual Chavez, invited the Salesian to "return to Don Bosco". has set in motion another General Chapter. As the world prepares for the gift of the Spirit in the next moment, the Salesian Family may remain confident that the Salesian path to holiness remains an effective, authentic experience of God. It offers a unique spirituality of accompaniment that meets at a moment of recognition in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread and sends the Salesian educator and evangelizer with hearts ablaze into the vast and hungry world of the young!

From the Emmaus Journey to our own day, we are a hungry people, too often fleeing the pressing realities and looking for any avenue of escape. Escape is a big business dominating the global culture in so many ensnaring and deadly ways in these times. Yet, as the disciples fled from their community in fear, expecting death to follow them, their lives took a radical turn by the act of accompaniment. This accompaniment was not a diversion or a counterfeit for truth and meaning. It was the person of Jesus, Himself. Jesus set their hearts on fire with the truth, not with lies, quick fixes, material gain, or promises of any kind. The truth he revealed was so powerful, his presence so tangible, that these disciples plunged back into danger and returned to the community ready to accompany and inflame those still lost in doubt and denial.

An act of spiritual accompaniment, then, is an accompaniment with the person of God who is, by definition and by experience Accompaniment himself. Don Bosco Haus in Vienna, Austria is a living example of the kind of community Don Bosco envisioned and one that follows carefully the inspirations and models of a new style of presence suggested by Don Vecchi. Salesian Sister and educator Johanna Götsch describes this effort in terms of inviting and welcoming the young in a climate of true friendship that involves making them collaborators in the mission. This involvement pays careful attention to all of the dimensions of their lives from the social, to the educative and prayerful while empowering their own call of baptism within authentic experiences of animation. This involvement, ultimately leads them to an internal and external colloquy with Jesus. All the while, the Salesian lay,

religious, and young person, accompanies, prays and loves, in an act of self-emptying service that transforms lives.¹²²

To offer such service is to give witness to the heart of God and to make that heart accessible to those in our care. This is an act of faith, an act of profession, and an act of instruction. Let this work conclude with the lilting, inspiring words of the late German theologian and Catholic priest, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, words which capture, somehow, the act of accompaniment and the very nature of God:

Such an undivided Heart is just as much God's love become human as it is man's love become divine. It is the perfect demonstration of the triune life of God and the perfect living out before God of a single minded conviction. Distance and proximity coincide. The servant is a friend because he is a servant, and the friend is a servant because he is a friend. And nothing is confused or abolished, nor is any boundary violated by the vertigo of such infinities...

For it is not ecstasy that redeems, but rather obedience. And it is not freedom that enlarges, but rather our bonds. And so it was that God's Word came into the world bound by the compulsion to love. As the Father's Servant and as the true Atlas, he took the world upon his shoulders. Through his own deeds he joined together two hostile wills, and, by binding them, he undid the inextricable knot. He cared to exact everything from his Heart. Indeed, by over exacting he wrenched his Heart up to wholly impossible tasks. It was through such overburdening that the Heart recognized its divine Lord, recognized happiness and love, and opened itself up to obedience.¹²³

At a Threshold: Globalization without Marginalization

Sister Maria Cimperman, an Ursuline religious and moral theologian from Cleveland, addressed a gathering of religious vocation directors at the National Religious Vocation Conference in Louisville, Kentucky in October of 2008. In her keynote address Sister Cimperman suggested that the Church, and therefore religious life, is at a "threshold moment." She insisted that this is a sacred and significant moment that will bring transformation and change never before imagined. The Mission of the Church would take on dimensions and initiatives not known before and any retreat to the past would fail to respond to the "signs of the times" so dramatically that the action of the

122. Cf. Johanna Götsch, *Vita spirituale nel quotidiano: Proposte di vita Cristiana in un mondo secolarizzato*, (Intervista a suor Johanna Götsch, FMA), in "Quaderni di Spiritualità Salesiana: La vita spirituale come impegno," Nuova serie – 3, Roma, Pubblicazione dell'istituto di Spiritualità Facoltà di Teologia, UPS, LAS, 2004, 103-115.

123. Hans Urs VON BALTHASAR, *Heart of the World*, translation by Erasmus S. Leiva, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 21979, 54-55.

Spirit would be evident only in the act of facing into the unsettling questions provoked by the “invitations from the many.”¹²⁴

She explained:

“I find ‘threshold’ to be an apt description of our times, and particularly of our time in religious life. This is a threshold time. Religious life is at a threshold moment. In the quiet we sense this; and the invitation to be attentive, reverent, and responsive to these moments is real. Something is shifting in ‘the life’ and while I think we were at impasses some time ago, something is moving again.”¹²⁵

While her address was designed to speak to the realities and the ministries of religious men and women engaged in the ministry of vocation promotion and discernment, her rich ideas flow easily into a meditation on the present moment for the Church—the wider context for each religious community. As the focus of each vocation minister is specifically one of assisting others to read the call of God in their own lives, it is a more precise form of evangelization. The mentoring and interpreting ministries of vocation personnel mirror the accompaniment of discipleship describe thus far in these pages. It is not a wild stretch, then, to apply the movements toward and across a threshold moment perceived in religious life to all of the life of the Church. We echo again the exhortations of Paul VI and Saint II that the grace and identity of the Church in all of its parts is to be found in the commission of Jesus to bring the Good News to all people. It is a commission to provoke and promote conversion in the hearts of all people and an invitation into the living of an authentic witness in following Jesus in every walk of life and situation to which the Gospel is revealed.

Cimperman began her reflections with a defining of the word and concept of “threshold.” She warned her listeners to be aware that defining threshold can seem to be deceptively simple and to narrow its definition can be detrimental to its ability to awaken conversion.

The definitions of threshold include a doorway, an entrance from which you can enter or leave, a doorsill, a brink, a region making a boundary, and similar passage points. Yet Cimperman pressed on to a richer metaphor by stating that a threshold can also be the starting point for something new—a new experience, a new state of being, and a new awareness. This new place is a place from which one cannot return because the person is changed in the

124. Maria CIMPERMAN, *Inviting Thresholds: how communities might respond to shifting times*, in “Horizons: The Journal of the National Religious Vocation Conference,” Volume 34, Number 2, Winter 2009, published by the NRVC, Chicago, (2009), pp. 26-41.

125. Cf. CIMPERMAN, 26.

arrival and the crossing. She explains that most often such new states of being or shifts in direction are noticed after the fact. And in the noticing, the one who has crossed usually discovers that there is a loss of something familiar in the past. Because the crossing over is a point of change, most who cross never return even to that which was familiar, enjoyable, or safe—even if they wanted to. A threshold of this type is similar to losing or gaining a trust. Once a trust is broken, a relationship is changed forever. In the same way, once a trust is won, a confidence begins which invites a change in the relationship not possible before.

For those in religious life, Cimperman suggests that a threshold moment is linked to the tradition of sacred spaces. This space is made sacred not by the coming of God or by the discovering of God's presence in that space. Instead, a space is sacred because God is already in that space and invites the believer to see God in all places and situations. The awareness does not bring God nor control God's influence. The role of the believer is to become attentive to God already present and at work. Being attentive, the believer is transformed continually by that growing perception and inspires transformation in others, in the world, and in the deepest recesses of the heart. This is a description of an inner journey for uncovering God already present and transforming!

Transformation is provoked by the asking of certain questions. These are usually questions of meaning. It is interesting to note that Sister Cimperman suggests that threshold moments are recognizable when questions arise and they are questions that cannot be ignored. They leave us uncomfortable and come to us either by crises or by attentive reflection upon life. Sometimes the question will wait outside of our awareness or our willingness to address it. But it will wait. It will not go away. Often, the question is really many questions about many things. These are the questions that won't go away because they are attached to frightening requests we cannot ignore.

Gifts at the Threshold

A threshold moment is not a phase in someone's life. It is not a passage that is linked merely to a stage of development or an event in life, though such passages and stages can make us aware of the questions that haunt us and demand our attention. These questions push us to a threshold. Yet, the pace of that response is completely individual. No process of recognition, no invitation to cross is perceived the same way from believer to believer, from situation to situation. When the heart can no longer remain where it has been, when the same tactics fail to bring about movement or growth, when the realities from within and without demand a response, a threshold moment arrives. Cimperman asserts that a threshold moment is not only

challenging and daunting, it is also rich in its gifts. She identifies four specific gifts at threshold moments: 1) Invitations from the many; 2) Communal Discernment; 3) “Disponibilidad”; 4) Tests and temptations.

The deep hungers for meaning and the cries of so many voices calling for justice, peace, and the possibilities of making a real difference in the world are actually gifts of invitation. The swell of voices reveals that what was enough once before is no longer enough. These voices push the waiting believers to new places of consideration, contemplation, and action—and these cries are so huge that it is immediately evident that a communal response is the only possible response. There is no illusion that any one believer or person of faith can respond to the voices of the many.

Discernment, then, is also communal. It has to be. The cries around us push us to reconnect with our identities as communities of believers having specific roles to play in the unfolding of God’s plan as God always seeks to save what is lost. With a communal prism, believers realize that choices will have to be made from one community to another. Some communities will refine their mission according to their strength or the strength of the group’s insight. This refining will demand that specific choices be made, that certain thresholds are crossed while others are left aside. These choices usually entail suffering and sacrifice, as a set of alternate choices and outcomes must be surrendered even as the present choices remain ambiguous in their outcome. Communal discernment is not an accidental response to bigger realities. They are the fruit of shared prayer, shared commitments and they will demand time, prayer, and the awakening of creativity.

Creativity is the act of considering what is possible and is demonstrated in the making of choices which are open to different realities. Cimperman calls this activity “possibilitizing.” Possibilitizing changes our priorities because they are not harnessed to inevitable outcomes. In fact, the act of possibilitizing certain choices liberates the decision making process. The process for engaging possibilitizing involves sharing the deepest values, hopes, and priorities held by a community. A community hearing the clamor of cries for meaning and looking for new possibilities strips away those values, priorities, and parts of its identity which are no longer essential. There is a great power in such threshold moments because they are so transformational that the group often holds onto only that which is essential for all involved.

In fact, the faith community’s articulation of its place in the world and its affirmation of the particular gift it makes to the Church, empowers movement forward in hope. This hope makes no compromise because it will bring into high relief those areas of individual and collective lives that require change. Resistance to change will be immediately perceived as blocking the infusion

of God's reign. The group sees and hears the Spirit calling in new ways as resistance melts away. From resistance, the heart moves into a new place of availability. This availability is nothing less than radical and makes of the individuals and the community available agents for God's mission and God's call. This radical openness actually prepares the faith community to cross the threshold because there new-found awareness.

Disponibilidad is a free response that tests the inclinations of individuals and groups. "Something new calls us forth, a new energy emerges. So does fear. So does a desire for security."¹²⁶ Sister Cimperman suggests that standing at a threshold necessarily raises doubts that the community must wrestle with together. The hope that is envisioned carries fear as well. The community returns to its collective memories and to the "dangerous memories of Scripture."

We remember the dangerous memories of Scripture. To this we bring our narratives, our communal stories...in our histories we have dangerous narratives to share with one another, not as a way of going back, but as a way of sensing the communion of saints with whom we travel.¹²⁷

Processing through our communal and traditional memories, turning again to Scripture, the community is in movement, whether or not all the members are travelling at the same pace. The community carries the members according to their various gifts and inclinations and the thrust is always towards hope as a communal experience. In this dynamic are encouragement and assistance, mediation, participation, and sustaining presence.

Gifts Across the Threshold

Just as the believer and the faith community are met by gifts at a threshold moment, the crossing offers "promises and possibilities." Cimperman refers to four gifts across the threshold: a greater sense of belonging and identity, creativity and imagination, community and communion, and globalizing solidarity.

Belonging and identity are the bi-product of the communal discernment—the facing into the questions and fears that come with the new possibilities. The discernment brings an articulation of the faith community's special gift to the Church as that community embraces who they are and where they are in the journey. The act of remembering and linking to the greater narratives not only give courage and clarity of purpose, it deepens the communal identity.

126. CIMPERMAN, 35.

127. CIMPERMAN, 36.

This bolsters public witness because it “invites us to a transparency that our society struggles against.”

Imagination and creativity are found across the threshold. The power of religious imagination, the act of possibilitizing “engages persons, structures, and systems.” Sister Cimperman considers this imagination and creativity to be one of the gifts of our times. This gift invites the faith community into a vision broader than any one individual and taps into the vision of God’s mission that permeates every event and every encounter with possibility.

The wonder of these divinely saturated possibilities increases the desire for community and communion. There surfaces a communal desire for spirituality that is “necessary to establish the dialogue of charity needed in today’s world.” Communion is balanced by contemplation that are both complementary aspects of communal response nourishing each other. This gift is perceived as new experiences and understandings of community arising out of prayer and the longing for the spiritual.

The last gift we find is one which Saint John Paul II called for in *Redemptio Misio*. He called the world of believers to a new solidarity that stands against all that is inhumane and all that desecrates creation. Across the threshold, we encounter a world rich in gifts from all corners of the globe. Communities and individuals reach beyond boundaries and discover their connectedness in the mission of God. We are called to engage the rush of globalization and “create solidarity in the midst of it.” Every time the faith community fights marginalization and gives authentic witness to the Gospel of hospitality and healing, solidarity is fostered. This witness is an act of “walking alongside another, taking the other’s cause as our own.” Sister Cimperman boldly declares this accompaniment as our calling. This is the calling of all those commissioned to bring Good News to the world. This is the only Christian response to globalization and secularization. Solidarity, authentic witness, listening and responding to the gift of many voices, responding with a radical openness that only a community can offer are all the marks of an interactive evangelization. This is engagement, participation, mediation, and celebration. This is a solidarity which does not flinch in the face of the cost of discipleship but embraces these realities because they are saturated with the possibilities.

Simply put, an interactive evangelization enters into life fully aware of the challenges of any time, sensitive to the signs of that time, soberly aware of the limitations of evil, selfishness, and sin. Evangelization is an act of self-emptying which prepares a radical openness to the God who raised Jesus from the dead. This same God, moving and breathing the Spirit in our rapidly changing and complicated world offers new life. The Word of God goes out and will not return empty. The seeds are thrown and the soil is prepared

by laborers in the vineyard, individually and collectively. With the harvest Master, they employ all their gifts to the task of hoeing and cultivating that soil knowing that it is not their work, but the work of the Spirit that makes growth—hidden, but very real, possible. That same hidden reality is nurtured in the heart of every worker and draws them deeper and deeper into the heart of God. Contemplation and community merge. “Distance and proximity coincide. The servant is a friend because he is a servant, and the friend is a servant because he is a friend. And nothing is confused or abolished, nor is any boundary violated by the vertigo of such infinities.”¹²⁸

Evangelization is always an act of radical spiritual accompaniment. It engages the world. It seeks encounter. It desires a sharing of stories and visions so that the vision Jesus brought in his journey among us will transform every journey and every life. We are invited and we must invite. Our hearts are inflamed and we are called to ignite other hearts in every time using all the means at our disposal.

128. VON BALTHASAR, 54-55.