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# Don Bosco's Writings

## A Theological Perspective & Means for Accompaniment

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by Emmanuel Camilleri, SDB

### Theological & Anthropological Perspective in Don Bosco's Writings

Don Bosco's writings are diverse, and yet they had one particular aim: educating the young to religion and life in general. Through the medium of writing, he managed to direct and accompany the young on a journey that would lead them to achieve Christian perfection and personal holiness.

Don Bosco did not write any systematic, theological treatises. However, it does not mean that he was not well prepared in theology; far from it. In fact, a careful analysis of this writings reveals that these were inspired by the theology of his time, in particular by the Liguorian theological thought and writings and by his perception of God. There existed in Don Bosco a "reciprocal relationship between theology and life. His ideas of God, human beings, and sin are rooted in his religious experience; and they reflect in his spiritual writings and his educational practice."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, much of his theology centered on these broad themes, and he used them as the foundation to instruct, accompany and educate the young to the faith.

The accompaniment offered to the young by Don Bosco, centered on his own theological and anthropological concepts. His first invitation to them was to come to know God as Creator, Father, and Lord. He did this with great ease and simplicity in writing, presenting theological concepts in a way that they could immediately grasp, without entering into the technicalities of the science. Therefore, his accompaniment method focused on God's love for humanity, and in particular God's predilection for the young. God's love manifests itself through creation, through grace

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1. Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. John Drury (New Rochelle (NY): Salesiana Publishers, 1996), 45.

and the gift of the soul and in particular through the redemptive power and action of his Son Jesus Christ. Don Bosco desired to instill in the young, the concept that their end is in and with God because he created all men for himself. In this accompaniment, Don Bosco is very careful in outlining those elements that might hinder such a journey towards God and what might assist and enhance it so that they can experience a personal holiness already from this world.

Don Bosco's theology was theocentric in concept, in approach, and in spirit. God was at the center of his every thought, word and action. God was always present in the saint's life since a very early age. Under the guidance of his mother, he approached and turned to God with humility and with a sense of awe and became resolute of not offending Him in any way. His personal experience of God became a communicative feature in his writings and desired that the young too will come to experience Him as he did, that is with a sense of reverence and wonder. He also presents God to the young as the almighty Creator who brought all creation *ex nihilo*: "Lift up your eyes, my children, and observe that which exists in the heaven and on earth. The sun, the moon, the stars, the air, water, and fire are all things that previously did not exist. There is a God, who by his power brought them into being and created them."<sup>2</sup>

For Don Bosco, creation and the cosmos were a theophany: God reveals himself through his creation. Don Bosco's perception of an omnipotent and omnipresent God, was already imprinted on his mind and his soul since childhood.

God is in heaven, on earth, in every place. God knows everything, sees everything and is present in everything. God is on your right, on your left, above you, and within you. We live in God, says the Apostle, we move in God, and our existence subsists in God. Go wherever you please, and you shall always be in the presence of God. ... God sees us,

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2. See Giovanni Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, in *Opere Edite*, Prima Serie: *Libri e opuscoli*, 37 vols. (Roma: LAS, 1976-1977), First Part, Article 1, vol. 2, 9-10 [189]-[190]. Henceforth, OE. The reference will include the original page numbers of Don Bosco's works, the volume number, and the page numbers found in the Opere indicated with [n]. "Alzate gli occhi, o figliuoli miei, ed osservate quanto esiste nel cielo e nella terra. Il sole, la luna, le stelle, l'aria, l'acqua, il fuoco sono tutte cose che un tempo non esistevano. Ma c'è un Dio, che colla sua onnipotenza le trasse dal niente e le creò." All translations are mine.

he sees all our past and present actions, he sees our deeds in our actions, in our words, and in our thoughts even within those most hidden and secret thoughts. Nothing can be hidden from Him.<sup>3</sup>

His world permeated by the presence of God, a presence he had felt through his mother and through the way she spoke to him about God. The name of God was revered in the Bosco household, and this imprinted this theocentric concept in his mind and soul.

Let us open our eyes, oh Christian, and let us contemplate the immensity of the things that exist in the universe. These did not exist. God created them out of nothingness, and that is why we call him Creator. ... There cannot be but one God. He has always been and will be forever. He is a pure spirit, and therefore he is bodiless; we cannot see him in this life. We only see his works. He sees everything; he is everywhere; he knows everything even our most secret thoughts. God is omnipotent, infinitely good, just, and holy. In other words, he possesses all perfection.<sup>4</sup>

Man, therefore, cannot see God if not through his works and creation. However, God sees all. Again, this idea was imprinted on his mind by his mother. It was his mother's approach to teaching him that one can

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3. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 71-72, in OE 10 [365]-[366]. "Dio è in cielo, in terra, in ogni luogo. Dio sa tutto, vede tutto, si trova presente a tutto. Alla tua destra sta Iddio, alla tua sinistra sta Iddio, sopra di te sta Iddio, dentro di te si trova Iddio. In Dio viviamo, dice l'Apostolo, in Dio ci moviamo, e in Dio abbiamo la nostra esistenza. Va dove vuoi, e sarai sempre alla presenza di Dio. ... Iddio ci vede; vede tutte le nostre azioni passate, vede quanto facciamo di presente, vede quanto noi operiamo in fatti, in parole e in pensieri anche nei luoghi più oscuri e segreti. Nulla può essere nascosto a Lui."

4. Bosco, *La chiave del paradiso in mano al cattolico che pratica i doveri di buon cristiano*, in OE 8, 5-6 [5]-[6]. "Apriamo gli occhi, o cristiano, e consideriamo l'immensità di cose che esistono nell'universo. Tutte queste cose una volta non esistevano. Iddio le trasse dal nulla, perciò lo chiamiamo Creatore. ... Non vi può essere che un Dio solo, Egli è sempre stato e sempre sarà. È un purissimo spirito, perciò non ha corpo alcuno; noi non lo possiamo vedere in questa vita, vediamo soltanto le opere sue. Egli però vede tutto, è dappertutto, consocce tutto anche i nostri più segreti pensieri. Dio è onnipotente, infinitamente buono, giusto, santo, in una parola egli possiede tutte le perfezioni." Stella states that in this way "God dominated the mind of Don Bosco as his noonday sun. Whether operating as apologist for the faith, catechist, or writer of ascetical theology or history, Don Bosco saw and felt God to be Creator and Lord, the ground and ultimate explanation of everything." Stella, *Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality*, 3.

fool other human beings, but one cannot fool God. He sees everything that concerns us, in the past, in the present and the future. By instilling this idea of an omnipresent God and the fact that he sees everything and everyone, Don Bosco adds a new perspective and motivation for his writings: God's primacy in the human person's life.

God sees us. He sees all our past actions, he sees all that we do in our present, and God knows what we do; God knows every word we utter, he knows our every thought even the most obscure and secretive ones. Nothing can be hidden from him. *Humilia respicit in caelo et in terra*. Let us encourage ourselves always to act well because God sees each little action of our life. Sometimes men forget those good deeds we do in their favor. God is not like them. He even observes and gives importance to a small glass of water given to someone in his honor and glory and for which he will show great mercy. Let us be encouraged then, because God sees and will reward us for all that we do for Him.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, Don Bosco believed that seeing this theophany in the creation and through their faculty of reasoning, the young readers would certainly conclude that the power and wisdom of God created all things.<sup>6</sup>

In honor of Mary stop for a few moments to contemplate the majesty of God the creator. If we open our eyes, oh Christian, and we give free leeway to our reflection, we cannot but recognize the existence, the power and the wisdom of God, by whom all things were created, all depend on, and are all preserved. He who gazes on an excellently constructed house would not dare say that it was built and placed in order by chance. Furthermore, he who affirms that a clock produced itself is nothing but a fool. The same can also be said that, on seeing

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5. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 72, in OE 10 [366]. "Iddio ci vede; vede tutte le nostre azioni passate, vede quanto facciamo di presente, vede quanto noi operiamo in fatti, in parole e in pensieri anche nei luoghi più oscuri e segreti. Nulla può essere nascosto a Lui. *Humilia respicit in caelo et in terra*. Facciamoci coraggio a operare il bene, perciocchè la più piccola azione di nostra vita è manifesta dinanzi agli occhi di Dio. Gli uomini spesso dimenticano quanto facciamo per loro; Dio non fa così. Egli vede un bicchier d'acqua fresca dato a suo onore e gloria, e ne prepara la mercede. Coraggio adunque che Iddio vede e prepara ricompensa a quanto facciamo per Lui."

6. Stella asserts that the "universe especially attracts Don Bosco's attention, suggesting the most varied illustrations of the argument leading from order to supreme orderer. He only touches upon the arguments that move from secondary causes to a first cause and from contingent beings to a necessary being." Stella, *Don Bosco: Religious outlook and Spirituality*, 5.

the order and of the marvelous harmony that reigns throughout the entire universe, one cannot doubt the existence of a God, who has created, set in motion and preserve all things.<sup>7</sup>

Human thought, reasoning, and will are not created by man either. These faculties, created and given to man by the Creator, in themselves are also proof enough of the existence of God.

F[ather]. The things that exist in the world, manifest in various ways the existence of a God-Creator, a truth which we can touch with our hands if we consider how we were created. The marvelous structure of the human body is the masterpiece of a creator of tremendous ability. The faculty to think, to judge, and to will, and which we all feel within us, are also another proof of the existence of God. Moreover, since I was not able to give these things to myself, I have to conclude that they come from God.<sup>8</sup>

God becomes the measure of all things. He is the unmoved Mover, and without him, nothing is in motion. Life flows from God, and he upholds all creation because it is “he who sustains and moves the formidable mass of immensity. It is he who gives motion and life to all living beings.”<sup>9</sup>

Creation in itself was an act of love by God towards humanity. The protological concept in Don Bosco is underlined when he asserts that

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7. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 19-20, in OE 10 [313]-[314]. “In onore di Maria fermati alcuni istanti a considerare la maestà di Dio Creatore. Se noi, o cristiano, apriamo gli occhi, e diamo libero corso al nostro pensiero, non possiamo a meno che riconoscere l'esistenza, la potenza e la sapienza di Dio, da cui ogni cosa fu creata, ogni cosa dipende e si conserva. Chi rimira una casa di eccellente costruzione non osa dire che sia il caso che abbia potuto costruirla e metterla in ordine. Che dicesse che un orologio fu fatto da se medesimo, noi lo disprezzeremmo come pazzo. Così alla vista dell'ordine e della meravigliosa armonia che regna in tutto l'universo non si può esitare un istante sopra la credenza di un Dio, che ha creato, ha dato movimento a tutte le cose e le conserva.”

8. Bosco, *Il Cattolico istruito nella sua religione*, 11, in OE 4 [205]. “P[adre]. Le cose, che esistono nel mondo, manifestano in molte maniere l'esistenza di un Dio Creatore, verità che noi tocchiamo con mano se per poco prendiamo a considerare noi stessi. La struttura meravigliosa del corpo umano ci si presenta qual capo d' opera di un artefice di abilità infinita. La facoltà di pensare, di giudicare, di volere che sentiamo in noi stessi, è un'altra prova dell'esistenza di Dio; imperciocchè non avendo io potuto dare queste facoltà a me stesso, debbo concludere, che esse vengono da Dio.”

9. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 20, in OE 10 [314]. “Egli è che sostiene e fa muovere il peso formidabile dell'immensità. Egli è che dà moto e vita a tutti gli esseri viventi.”

all of creation, the universe, and the cosmos were God's purpose for humankind and they were meant and thought to serve humanity.

However, here lies a truth that will increase our sense of wonder. God created all things for us: the sun that shines during the day, the moon that clears the darkness of night, the stars that adorn God created the skies, the air to breathe, the water for man's use, the fire that keeps us warm, and the fruits of the earth. All this he created for us.<sup>10</sup>

His words are reminiscent of the first knowledge and first experience of God as a young boy: the description above seems to be the surroundings of his home, his land, and the environment. Through such simple, yet theologically profound concepts, Don Bosco reached to the inner core of his young and captivated their imagination and addressing it to the belief in an all-loving God.

For Don Bosco, therefore, the first step in Christian formation was to come to know God. After such knowledge, man can come to appreciate more himself as a creation and the fact that he is at the center of God's attention. His anthropology, therefore, also leaned towards theocentric dimension because if God manifests himself through his creation, then this manifestation reaches its apex in the creation, that is, man.

This eternal God who created all things in heaven and on earth also created man who is perfect among all created things. ... Man is distinct from other animals because he possesses a soul that thinks, can reason and distinguishes between good and evil. This soul will not die with the body...it will start a new life, an eternal life.<sup>11</sup>

Man is a beautiful creation not because of the exterior image but more so because of the soul he possesses. He urged the young, to seek always that

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10. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 21, in OE 10 [315]. "Ma qui avvi una verità che accrescerà di certo la nostra meraviglia. Tutte le cose che miriamo nell'universo le ha create per noi. Il sole che risplende nel giorno, la luna che dirada le tenebre della notte, le stelle che abbelliscono il firmamento, l'aria che ci dà il respiro, l'acqua che serve agli usi dell'uomo, il fuoco che ci riscalda, la terra che ci dà i frutti, tutto fu fatto da Dio per noi."

11. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, First Part, Article 1, 9-10, in OE 2 [189]-[190]. "Questo Dio che sempre fu e sempre durerà dopo di aver creato tutte le cose che nel cielo e nella terra si contengono, diede quindi esistenza all'uomo, il quale di tutte le creature visibili è la più perfetta. ... L'uomo è distinto fra tutti gli animali specialmente perchè è fornito di un'anima, la quale pensa, ragiona, e conosce ciò che è bene e ciò

which is eternal rather than that which perishes by time: "God is not only the Creator of all things both in heaven and on earth, but he is also really our Creator. He created the body with beautiful qualities and which we can all admire in it; to this body, he joined a soul, which is more precious than the body and than all the other things, which we see around us."<sup>12</sup>

The body was given to us for a purpose, and it must be subordinated to the soul. The soul, however, is the essence of man's existence, because it can think, to reason and to judge good from evil.<sup>13</sup> This subordination of the body to the soul indicates that in Don Bosco's mind, the body should be subjected to strict control. At death, the body and soul separate and reward or punishment will be according to their co-existence. The body at the end of life has no more purpose; it is the conservation of one's soul which is important since death "is the separation of the soul from the body forsaking the things of this world completely. Consider then my son that your soul needs to be separated from your body."<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, he writes a description of what will happen to the body and how it will rot in a grave.<sup>15</sup> This eerie description the final judgment of the body was intended as an invitation to his readers to safeguard that which is permanent, rather

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che è male. Quest'anima non muore col corpo...quella andrà a cominciare un'altra vita che non finirà più."

12. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 23, in OE 10 [317]. "Dio non solo è Creatore di tutte le cose che nel cielo e nella terra si contengono, ma è eziandio Creatore di noi medesimi. Egli creò il corpo con quelle belle qualità che noi in esso rimiriamo; a questo corpo ha unito un'anima che è di gran lunga più preziosa del corpo e di tutte le altre cose che noi vediamo nel mondo."

13. Stella states that although for Don Bosco body and soul depend on each other "the body is properly the instrument of the soul. Like a garment or material thing, the body is something that belongs to us and serves us; but it does not deserve our greatest attachment or devotion. Compared to the soul and its worth, the body must always take a subordinate place." Stella, *Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality*, 22.

14. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, First Part, Seven Reflections for Each Day of the Week, Tuesday: On Death, nr. 1, 36, in OE 2 [216]. "La morte è una separazione dell'anima dal corpo con un totale abbandono delle cose di questo mondo. Considera per tanto, o figlio, che l'anima tua avrà da separarsi dal corpo."

15. See Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, First Part, Seven Reflections for Each Day of the Week, Tuesday: On Death, 36-38, nr. 2 and 3, in OE 2 [216]-[218].



than that which is temporary.<sup>16</sup> The body serves the soul, which is eternal as God himself is eternal.

Don Bosco considered man to be at the center of God's privileged attention precisely because man was gifted with a soul. Human intellect, which for Don Bosco flows from the soul, dictates that the soul is continually inclined to soar to its Creator since it has the desire to unify itself with Him forever

God gave us a soul; that is, he gave that supernatural being which we feel within us, and which is inclined continually to lift itself to God. An intelligent being which thinks and reflects and which cannot find its happiness in the world, and therefore in the midst of the worldly riches or pleasures it is always restless as long as it does not find rest in God since only in God it can find happiness.<sup>17</sup>

This eagerness in the writings of Don Bosco about the soul stems from his zeal to save souls, expressed in the maxim of *da mihi animas caetera tolle*. This specifically chosen motto as a direction in his life affirms that he already “knows God and senses his presence; that God is the Lord of his life and vocation.” It is precisely this knowledge of God that drove him to do everything in his power to save the souls of the young.

In accompanying the young on their journey, Don Bosco spoke and wrote profusely about the importance of safeguarding one's soul from any harm. His use of the term ‘reason’ was a reflection of the belief that young

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16. Don Bosco's teaching on the body and soul should not be confused to be some form of dualism. He knew perfectly that it was an accepted “fact that the body is the “matter” of which the soul is the “form”... he saw things and spoke about them in more concrete terms.” Francis Desramaut, *Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life*, trans. Roger M. Luna (New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications, 1979), 51-52. Furthermore, one needs to read Don Bosco's in the light of the religious context of his time. His words reflect the spirituality of the time where priests were encouraged to first save their souls and then the souls of those whom they lead. It is also a reflection of asceticism practiced during that time, very much centred on the salvation of one's soul through constant purging.

17. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 23-24, in OE 10 [317]-[318]. “Dio ci ha donato un'anima, cioè ci ha donato quell'essere invisibile che sentiamo in noi, e che tende continuamente ad elevarsi a Dio; quell'essere intelligente che pensa e ragiona, e che non può trovare la sua felicità sopra la terra, e che perciò in mezzo alle stesse ricchezze e in mezzo a qualsiasi piacere della terra ella è sempre inquieta finché non riposi in Dio, perciocché Dio solo può renderla felice.”

readers and listeners, were endowed with the ability to choose wisely and well. Therefore, the young reasonably knew that they should not wait until they are older to start living a healthy, moral life

The Lord will make it known that if you lead a genuine life in your younger years, you will remain a good person for the rest of your life, a life that will be crowned with the joy of glory. On the contrary, if during your adolescence you live an immoral life, it is easy that you will end up being bad until death, and this will lead you to hell. Therefore, if you see older men addicted to the bad habit of drinking, gambling and of blasphemy, you can rest assured that they started such bad habits during their adolescence.<sup>18</sup>

Reason helped the young to reflect and ponder seriously on their present life and eternal life. It dictated that, what one sowed in the present is what he will reap in the future. Similarly, if one leads the soul to be accustomed to an immoral life during the younger years, then it will be hard to get it back on the right path later on in life.<sup>19</sup>

With this in mind, he invites the young to have their eyes set on that which lasts. There is certain urgency in his words: the time is now, the present. If one postpones one's decision to start living a good Christian life, one might find that it is too late. Man should have his eyes set on the eschatological future, on eternity, already from the present world.<sup>20</sup> Besides,

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18. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, First Part, Article 3, 12, in OE 2 [192]. "Ma il Signore vi fa sapere che se voi comincerete ad esser buoni in gioventù, tali sarete nel resto della vita, la quale sarà coronata con una felicità di gloria. Al contrario la mala vita cominciata in gioventù troppo facilmente sarà tale fino alla morte, e vi condurrà inevitabilmente all'inferno. Perciò se voi vedete uomini avanzati negli anni dati al vizio dell'ubriachezza, del giuoco, della bestemmia, per lo più potete dire: questi vizi cominciarono in gioventù."

19. Desramaut states that reason "assumed a role of primary importance to his religious pedagogy and, for that matter, also in the whole of his spirituality". In fact, by reason he "meant, often in very inexact language, the human ability to judge and to reflect." Desramaut, *Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life*, 63.

20. Bosco, *La Chiave del Paradiso*, 24, in OE 8 [24]. "Ricordati, o Cristiano, che tu sei uomo di eternità. Ogni momento di tua vita è un passo verso l'eternità."

the only thing that one has in this world is time, and it is paramount to make an excellent use of it

The riches that God grants to the Christian are great. However, God has already fixed a time for man and of which he can make good use. The number of years, months, weeks, days, hours and minutes which spread from the moment of birth till death, is the time which God has placed at our disposition to make good use of his benefits and save our soul. This time is a priceless treasure. ... However, let us be aware of the fact that it is only in this life that we can make good use of time. If one goes to hell, he is there for all eternity. The wretched will cry over their past saying: *oh si daretur hora!* Oh! If only we were given one extra moment so that we could repair our soul. However, they will not have this moment. In heaven, there is no crying, but if the blessed can cry, they would cry over the time lost in this world and during which they could have obtained greater merits for Heaven.<sup>21</sup>

Don Bosco also affirms that God is merciful yet at the same time, he is also just. The soul, being immortal, will come to that moment when God will judge it accordingly.

God is infinitely just and merciful. Moreover, being a just God, he must reward virtue, which we often oppress in our present life, and he must punish vice, which seems to triumph amongst men. Also, God's reward has no place in this world. Therefore, there must be another life in which Divine justice deservedly rewards or punishes those who are evil.<sup>22</sup>

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21. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 65-66, in OE 10 [359]-[360]. "I beni concessi da Dio al Cristiano sono grandi; ma Iddio ha fissato un tempo all'uomo, onde potersene servire. Quel numero di anni, di mesi, di settimane, di giorni, di ore, di minuti, che passano dalla nascita alla morte, è il tempo che Iddio ha posto in nostro potere per servirci dei suoi benefizi e salvarci l'anima. Questo tempo è un tesoro prezioso. ... Stiamo però bene attenti che solamente in questa vita possiamo approfittarci del tempo. Nell' inferno vi è la sola eternità. I dannati piangono amaramente il tempo passato dicendo: *oh si daretur hora!* o se ci fosse dato un sol momento per aggiustare le cose dell'anima; ma questo momento non l'avranno più. Nel cielo poi non si piange, ma se i beati potessero piangere, piangerebbero solamente il tempo perduto in questa vita, in cui potevano acquistarsi maggior merito pel Paradiso."

22. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 24, in OE 10 [318]. "Dio è infinitamente giusto e infinitamente misericordioso; come giusto egli deve ricompensare la virtù soventi volte oppressa nella vita presente, e deve ugualmente punire il vizio spesso tra gli uomini portato in trionfo: la qual cosa non avendo luogo in questo mondo deve esserci un'altra vita, in cui la Divina giustizia doni ai buoni il premio meritato, e doni

If only compassion is attributed to God, there is the risk of dispossessing him from justice, and this will be a contradiction because God is just and is the essence of justice

The justice by which God will punish sin in the other world, causes fear in the hearts of those who persist in living in sin. How unfortunate are those who already are in those places of eternal torment. We are blessed because we avail ourselves of the mercy of God. Rejoice, oh Christian, and fill your heart with hope. Until the soul is present in the body, we have time to avail of this mercy and forgiveness.<sup>23</sup>

Although salvation is a God-given grace, man can never obtain it if he does not co-operate with such grace. Don Bosco highlights this by emphasizing on the right choices in life one has to make. He affirms that God gave each person freedom, which for Don Bosco is another quality that resides in the soul. Persons make choices in full freedom. However, all choices have a consequence of which the young should be aware.

God gave freedom to our soul, namely the faculty to choose either that which is good or that which is bad. He assures the soul of a reward if it chooses the former, and warns to punish it if it chooses the latter. Oh, Christian, you too have an immortal soul, and if you save it, you will save everything else with it; but if you lose it, all is lost. You have a single soul, and just a single sin can mean the perdition of your soul.<sup>24</sup>

Don Bosco invites his readers the young to contemplate this important factor. The soul should not be taken for granted and it is incomparable

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ai cattivi il debito castigo. Inoltre l'anima è fatta ad immagine e somiglianza di Dio.”

23. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 118, in OE 10 [413]. “La giustizia, con cui Dio punisce il peccato nell'altra vita, reca spavento ai cuori più ostinati nella colpa. Infelici quelli, che già si trovano in quei luoghi di eterni supplizi. Beati noi, che possiamo ancora servirci della misericordia di Dio. Rallegrati, o cristiano, ed apri il cuore a grandi speranze. Finchè l'anima è unita al corpo è tempo di misericordia e di perdono.”

24. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 24-26, in OE 10 [318]-[320]. “Dio diede all'anima nostra la libertà, cioè la facoltà di scegliere il bene o il male, assicurandole un premio se fa il bene, minacciando un castigo qualora scelga il male. ... O Cristiano, che pure hai un'anima immortale, pensa che se la salvi, tutto è salvato, ma se la perdi, tutto è perduto. Hai un'anima sola, un solo peccato te la può far perdere.”

with the riches of the world. The truth is that even if man gains all the wealth of the world and then he loses his soul will have lost everything.

If we possessed two souls, each one of us could say ‘I want to enjoy the earthly pleasures and so I would only lose one soul; then I will safeguard the other remaining soul.’ However, we have one soul. For this reason, Jesus Christ tells us that the salvation of our soul is the most necessary thing in this world. *Unum est necessarium*. ... The safeguarding of the soul is an important matter. However, it is unique, and at the same time, it is irreparable. If it goes wrong once, it will be lost forever.<sup>25</sup>

Sin separates man from God and committing it is like making a statement of refusal towards the Creator. Sin is also a manifestation of one’s ingratitude towards God who gave everything to us through grace and his goodness.

Oh son, if you only knew what you do when you commit a mortal sin! You turn your back to God, the God who created you and who granted you so many benefits. In fact, whoever sins is saying to the Lord: away from me, God. I do not want to obey and serve you anymore; I do not want to acknowledge you as my Lord anymore: *Non serviam*. Pleasure, revenge, anger, malicious conversation, and blasphemy have become my god. Can you imagine an ingratitude more appalling than this? My son, in offending your Lord, you did exactly this. On pondering on your sins, this ingratitude will increase when you make use of the same things given to you by God to sin against him. Ears, eyes, mouth, tongue, hands, and feet: God gave all these to you, and you used them to offend him.<sup>26</sup>

In a certain sense, this represents man’s refutation of his image, the refutation of the aim for which he was created. In refusing God through

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25. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 83, in OE 10 [377]. “Se noi avessimo due anime, taluno potrebbe dire: voglio godere i piaceri della terra, e così perderne una; e mi salverò poi quella che mi rimane. Ma abbiamo un’anima sola. Perciò Gesù Cristo ci dice, che la salvezza dell’anima è la cosa più necessaria in questo mondo. *Unum est necessarium*. ... La salute dell’anima è un affare importante, è unico; ma è irreparabile, cioè se si sbaglia una volta, è sbagliata per sempre.”

26. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, First Part, Seven Reflections for Each Day of the Week, Monday: On Mortal Sin, 34-35, in OE 2 [214]-[215]. “Oh se tu, o figlio, conoscessi che cosa fai quando commetti un peccato mortale! Tu volti le spalle a quel Dio, che ti creò ti fece tanti benefici: disprezzi la sua grazia e la sua amicizia. Chi

sin, man also refuses his unity with God. On this particular point, St. Francis de Sales writes:

Alas, my Creator, instead of uniting myself to you in love and service I have become a total rebel by my disorderly affections, separated myself from you, strayed far from you in order to embrace sin, and shown no more honor to your goodness than if you were not my Creator.<sup>27</sup>

Man, therefore, has to evaluate his present life so that the eternal one can be safeguarded. Don Bosco was guided by the notion of the 'now,' the immediate necessity that needed to be grasped in the present. Therefore, he invites the young make immediate remedy.

You should be thankful that till now he has waited for you. Therefore make a strong resolution by saying: Lord, I will not offend you further. I do not want to spend what is left of my life offending you; I want to spend it loving you and to grieve over my sins. I repent with all my heart, my Jesus; give me the strength to love you.<sup>28</sup>

These were the same sentiments expressed by St. Francis de Sales. On meditating our creation, the Savoyard invites Philothea to rebuke all those things that in the past separated her from God: "Detest your past life. Vain thoughts and useless plans, I renounce you. Hateful and foolish memories, I abjure you. False and treacherous friendships, wasted, wretched deeds,

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pecca dice col fatto al Signore: va, o Dio, lontano da me, io non ti voglio più obbedire, non ti voglio più servire, non ti voglio riconoscere più per mio Signore: *Non serviam*. Il mio Dio è quel piacere, quella vendetta, quella collera, quel discorso cattivo, quella bestemmia. Si può immaginare un'ingratitude più mostruosa di questa? Pure, o figliuol mio, questo facesti tu quando offendesti il tuo Signore. Cresce poi questa ingratitude al riflettere che tu peccando ti servi di quelle medesime cose che ti diede Iddio. Orecchie, occhi, bocca, lingua, mani, piedi, tutto fu deviato da Dio, e ti servisti di questi ad offenderlo."

27. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books Doubleday, 2003), First Part, Chapter 9:3, 42. Reference includes chapter and paragraph.

28. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, First Part, Seven Reflections for Each Day of the Week, Monday: On Mortal Sin, 36, in OE 2 [216]. "Ringrazialo che ti ha sinora aspettato, e fa in questo punto una ferma risoluzione dicendo: Signore, basta quanto vi offesi; la vita che mi rimane, non la voglio più spendere ad offendervi; la spenderò ad ansarvi, e a piangere i miei peccati. Me ne pento con tutto il cuore, Gesù mio; vi voglio amare, datemi forza."

useless self-indulgence, and onerous pleasures, I reject you.”<sup>29</sup> This detestation is followed by a promise of living a better Christian life when he writes about sin: “Resolve to live a better life. Nevermore Lord. With the help of your grace, no, nevermore will I abandon myself to sin. Alas, I have loved it too much. I detest it, and I embrace you, the Father of mercy. In you I wish to live and die.”<sup>30</sup>

Don Bosco sees God as a patient God; he awaits the sinner to turn back to Him. He was however also ‘fearful’ of death coming upon us unexpectedly. This fear of an unexpected death inspired him to keep on urging the young to be conscious of the present, of not postponing anything for the morrow; to act in the present, particularly when matters of the soul and morality were concerned. He urges the young to consider what “will become of our soul and us if at this very moment God calls us to appear before Him? While reading this, reflect on your soul, and I who am writing will reflect seriously on mine.”<sup>31</sup>

Don Bosco also perceived the soul as the symbol of God’s intelligence. Through the soul, we have the ability to form ideas, to actualise them and to create masterpieces. Human intelligence, therefore, resides within the soul. This intelligence flows from God’s breathing into the created man at creation.

When God created the soul, he breathed on man and gave him the spirit of life; the breath is simple, it is spiritual, made in the image and likeness of God, who is eternal and mortal. Therefore, our soul must also be immortal. Through the soul, we have the faculty to produce and fulfill ideas, to create masterpieces which raise man above all other creatures and which in fact prove that the soul is the symbol, or better still, it characterizes God’s intelligence.<sup>32</sup>

Don Bosco placed man at the center of God’s creation. His attitude stems from the knowledge that the human person was created in the

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29. Francis de Sales, *Introduction*, First Part, Chapter 10:2, 44.

30. Francis de Sales, *Introduction*, First Part, Chapter 12:3, 48.

31. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 26, in OE 10 [320]. “Che sarebbe di noi e dell’anima nostra se in questo momento Iddio ci chiamasse al suo Divin tribunale? Tu che leggi pensa per l’anima tua, ed io che iscrivo penserò seriamente per la mia.”

32. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 24-25, in OE 10 [318]-[319]. “Quando Iddio creò l’anima, soffiò sopra dell’uomo e diedegli lo spirito della vita; questo soffio è semplice,

image of God. It also flows from that same attitude practiced by St. Francis de Sales, who insisted more on the redemption that lifted human nature rather than on sin which corrupted this nature. This redemption was fulfilled in a particular time in history. Don Bosco saw in the history of humankind the presence of God and his saving power to free humanity from the grip of evil. In every historical event, Don Bosco read God's economy designed for man's salvation.

An unintelligible mystery which is obscure to the human mind and which demonstrates the preciousness of our soul and God's great goodness towards us is the redemption of all humankind. Our parents Adam and Eve disobeyed and consequently through their sin they closed the door to heaven both for themselves and for all future generations. With a stroke of infinite goodness, God promised to remedy man's eternal perdition through the Messiah whom he sent in the fullness of time. Moreover, so that faith in the Messiah, or rather in our Saviour, would remain alive, God announced this redemption repeatedly through the holy Patriarchs and the Prophets.<sup>33</sup>

Don Bosco illustrates the soteriological concept through God's desire to save man from sin and eternal damnation through the incarnation, death, passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Q.[uestion] What was the state of men before the coming of the Messiah? A.[nswer] After Adam's fall from a state of innocence in which God had created him, for many centuries he and all his descendants had to suffer under the bondage of the devil and which drew man towards eternal perdition. There were no other means of salvation for

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è spirituale, fatto ad immagine e somiglianza di Dio, che è eterno ed immortale; perciò deve essere immortale l'anima nostra. Per mezzo dell'anima noi abbiamo la facoltà di crearci delle idee, di combinarle, di produrre certi capolavori, che sollevano l'uomo sopra tutte le altre creature, e che provano, come è diffatti, che l'anima è il simbolo ovvero il contrassegno dell'intelligenza di Dio."

33. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 28, in OE 10 [322]. "Un mistero incomprensibile alla mente umana, che dimostra la preziosità dell'anima nostra e la grande bontà di Dio verso di noi è la redenzione del genere umano. I nostri genitori Adamo ed Eva peccarono e col loro peccato chiusero il Paradiso a se stessi e a tutta la loro posterità. Iddio con un tratto d'infinita bontà promette di riparare l'eterna perdizione degli uomini per mezzo del Messia che avrebbe mandato nella pienezza dei tempi. Affinchè poi la fede nel Messia ovvero nel Salvatore si mantenesse viva fra gli uomini, Dio la fece in tutti i tempi annunziare dai santi Patriarchi e dai Profeti."



man except the coming of the Liberator that God in his divine goodness had promised to send.<sup>34</sup>

Don Bosco saw Jesus Christ as the only way to humanity's salvation, which although wounded through sin, it was nevertheless created in the image and likeness of God and thus it was essentially good. He believed that the human person could recover his or her original image – tainted and lost by sin – through grace obtained and given through Jesus Christ. Don Bosco's anthropology stems from Christology. Christ becomes the paradigm of human nature. Don Bosco affirms that God's plan was fulfilled in Christ since “all the events of the Ancient Law, the hope of the Patriarchs, and the forecasts of the Prophets aimed towards the time of the coming of this universal Saviour.”<sup>35</sup> He writes:

Q.[uestion] Did God abandon man in this sad state? A.[nswer] God did not abandon man but promised our first parents a Saviour. Q.[uestion] In what way was this promise made? A.[answer] God promised that the woman would crush the serpent's head through one who would be born of her. Q.[uestion] What is the meaning of such a promise? A.[answer] This promise means that J.[esus] C.[hrist] having been born of the Blessed Virgin, will free men from the power of the devil, that is, from sin and death. Q.[uestion] Was the promise of a Saviour ever renewed? A.[nswer] Yes. It was renewed continually to the Patriarchs and the Prophets.<sup>36</sup>

The mystery of the Incarnation, therefore, becomes a focal point in Don Bosco's theology. It is through this Mystery that humanity was freed

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34. Bosco, *Storia Ecclesiastica*, in OE 1, 19-20 [177]-[178]. “D.[omanda] Quale era lo stato degli uomini prima della venuta del Messia? R.[isposta] Caduto il nostro primo genitore Adamo dallo stato d'innocenza in cui fu da Dio creato, egli e tutti i suoi posteri dovettero per molti secoli gemere sotto la dura schiavitù del demonio, il quale gran parte ne traeva seco ad eterna perdizione; nè vi era pell'uomo altro mezzo onde salvarsi, se non la venuta di quel Liberatore, che la bontà divina gli aveva promesso.” In his *Storia Ecclesiastica*, Don Bosco uses the “question and answer” style as a pedagogical-instrument-method. The style was diffused in his time. The catechism published by the diocese of Turin also used the same style.

35. Bosco, *Storia Sacra per l'uso delle scuole utile ad ogni stato di persone*, 158, in OE 3 [158]. “Perciò tutti gli avvenimenti della Legge antica, la speranza de' Patriarchi, le predizioni dei Profeti miravano al tempo avventuroso di questo universale Salvatore.”

36. Bosco, *Maniera facile per imparare la storia sacra ad uso del popolo cristiano*, 13, in OE 6 [61]. “D.[omanda] Iddio abbandonò l'uomo in questo stato infelice?”

from the enslaving grip of sin; it was brought to fulfillment when Christ offered himself on the Cross and became the ultimate sacrifice.

God showed mercy towards humankind. The Son of God, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, saw it fit to become a man like us in the Virgin's womb through the power of the Holy Spirit and assume a body and a soul like we possess. He became one of us so that he could save us from the devil's slavery and obtain for us eternal life. He became a man without ceasing to be God.<sup>37</sup>

Don Bosco summarizes the thought of St. Alphonse de Liguori who states that God, not only wanted to give us the beauty of the nature that surrounds us but he also wanted to provide us with a further, more significant gift: his only begotten Son. The Father's decision to send his Son into the world stemmed from the fact that our humanity was affected by sin and consequently we fell out of grace. It was out of the great love that God has for humankind that he had decided to send Jesus Christ into the world. Through him, Grace was restored, and heaven regained.<sup>38</sup>

In his writings, Don Bosco, kept a simple line of thought, one that could be followed by his young readers. His anthropology was a simple one. Much of his perception of God and man he had acquired as a young boy, during catechism lessons. With his young readers, he wanted to

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R.[isposta] Iddio non abbandonò l'uomo ma promise ai nostri primi genitori un Salvatore. D.[omanda] Come fu fatta questa promessa? R.[isposta] Dio promise, che la donna, per mezzo di uno che nascerebbe da Lei, avrebbe schiacciato il capo del serpente. D.[omanda]. Che cosa significa questa promessa? R.[isposta] Questa promessa significa che G.[esù] C.[risto] nascendo dalla Beata Vergine, libererebbe gli uomini dalla potenza del demonio, cioè dal peccato e dalla morte. D.[omanda] La promessa del Salvatore fu ancora rinnovata? R.[isposta] Sì; fu più volte rinnovata ai Patriarchi ed ai Profeti.”

37. Bosco, *La chiave del paradiso*, 7-8, in OE 8 [7]-[8]. “Dio ebbe pietà del genere umano e per liberarci dalla schiavitù del demonio ed acquistarci la vita eterna, la seconda persona della SS. Trinità, cioè il Figliuol di Dio, si degnò di farsi uomo, prendere un corpo ed un'anima, come abbiamo noi, nel seno di Maria Vergine per opera dello Spirito Santo. Il figliuol di Dio fatto uomo si chiama Gesù Cristo. Egli si è fatto uomo senza lasciare di essere Dio.”

38. See Alphonse Maria de Liguori, *Pratica di amar Gesù Cristo*, ed. Franco Desideri (Roma: Città Nuova, 2012), 36-37.

keep the same format, saying that which is necessary without using many technical words or phrases.<sup>39</sup>

### **Man's Destiny in God's Plan**

Don Bosco was a man of his century. His catechesis, with which he accompanied the young to understand their particular call to holiness, was imbued by the teaching of his time. He was a staunch defender of the Church, of its hierarchy and its institutions and it is understandable why his writings also reflect the catholic catechism, which was diffused in his diocese. His apologia reflects this. He was highly critical of the Protestants and their teaching and he had great concern towards the young who were lured by these 'heretics' – as he called them – to follow a different teaching from that of the Catholic Church. However, his catechesis, always simple, sharp and definite, helped the young to understand the great truths of the faith. One such truth was man's destiny in God. God created man for himself, and this concept was intrinsic to Don Bosco's writings, a concept also widely diffused in the Catechism of his own time.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, all that God created should serve man as a means to lead him to Heaven, which was his final resting place. Creation should not serve as a distraction from that which is of importance: one's salvation.

All that which exists, both in heaven and on earth, were made to serve man. *Omnia subicisti sub pedibus eius*. So what about you, oh man:

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39. Desramaut writes that Don Bosco "had very simple ideas about human nature which he never attempted to develop, since he was not a gifted theologian." In his later life, "his reading and more still his audience of boys and working people did not encourage him to develop his ideas in any special way, at the risk of complicating them. These ideas, however, more or less consciously guided his spiritual and pedagogical decisions." Desramaut, *Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life*, 51.

40. "Q.[uestion] 1. Who created you? A.[nswer] God created me. Q.[uestion] 2. For which end did God create you? A.[nswer] God created me to come to know him, to love and to serve him in this life after which I will relish him forever in the heavenly home." Lorenzo Gastaldi, *Dono del parroco ai giovani parrocchiani*, 16. "D.[omanda] 1 Chi mi ha creato? R.[isposta] Mi ha creato Dio. D.[omanda] 2. Per qual fine vi ha creato? R.[isposta] Dio mi ha creato per conoscerlo, amarlo e servirlo in questa vita, e poi andarlo a godere per sempre nella celeste Patria." See also *Compendio della Dottrina Cristiana ad uso dell'Arcidiocesi di Torino il quale contiene il catechismo piccolo per apparecchiarsi alla prima comunione ed il catechismo grande coll'aggiunta delle orazioni da recitarsi il mattino e la sera e il modo di servire la messa* (Torino: Cav. Pietro Marietti Tipografo Pontificio ed Arcivescovile, 1874).

for which end did God create you? Your answer will be: God has created me so that I may come to know, love, and serve him in this life and through this means, I will one day go to relish him in Paradise. What a beautiful answer!<sup>41</sup>

This 'knowledge' or this 'coming to know' God, serves to avoid all that hinders man's desire to serve and love God. If man truly sets his eyes on this two-fold aim, then he must also come to know God's will and the end to which he is attracted.

Therefore, if you were born to come to know God so too, you must employ all the strengths of your soul and your body to come to know this beneficent Creator. Men's knowledge is nothing if there is no knowledge of God. *Vani sunt omnes homines quibus non subest scientia Dei.* ... If in the past, you neglected the knowledge of the things of God and you would not like to betray your end, promise yourself to be more diligent in the future. See to it that you read good literature, to choose good company and friends, to be more diligent during sermons, during the explanation of the Gospel and catechism lessons. Also, if somebody invites you to participate in worthless activities, which can be harmful to your soul, you should promptly reply: God created me to come to know him, and I have to make every effort to procure this knowledge.<sup>42</sup>

Don Bosco reaffirms that man was created to the glory of God. Therefore, man has to move gradually towards his end, and while doing so,

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41. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 75, in OE 10 [369]. "Tutte le cose che esistono nel cielo e nella terra furono fatte per servire all'uomo. *Omnia subiecasti sub pedibus eius.* Ma tu, o uomo, per qual fine Iddio ti ha creato? Tu mi rispondi: sono stato creato da Dio, affinché io lo conosca, lo ami, lo serva in questa vita, e con questo mezzo vada un giorno a goderlo in Paradiso. Bellissima risposta!"

42. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 75, in OE 10 [369]. "Dunque tu sei nato per conoscere Iddio; perciò tu devi impiegare tutte le potenze dell'anima tua, tutte le sollecitudini del tuo corpo per conoscere questo benefico Creatore. Tutta la scienza degli uomini è un nulla se non c'è la scienza di Dio. *Vani sunt omnes homines quibus non subest scientia Dei.* ... Se per lo passato fosti trascurato nella scienza delle cose di Dio. se non vuoi tradire il tuo fine, fa di essere più diligente per l'avvenire, procura di far buone letture, di frequentare buone compagnie, di essere più assiduo alle prediche, alle spiegazioni del Vangelo, ai catechismi. Che se taluno ti invita a prendere parte a cose che siano inutili o dannose al bene dell'anima, tosto rispondi: Dio mi ha creato per conoscerlo, ed io debbo fare ogni sforzo per procacciarmi questa conoscenza di Lui."

he must reflect the image that he has been given at creation, an image that he must protect from any moral harm. Earthly riches, like knowledge, are considered null when compared to heavenly joy.

Consider this, my son. God gave your body and your soul to you without merit, and he created you in his image. He made you his son through holy Baptism. He loved you and still loves you like a gentle father and the end for which he created you was that he should be loved and served in this life so that then he would reward you with the joy of Paradise.<sup>43</sup>

Don Bosco seems to share the same thought of St. Francis de Sales. In his second meditation in the Introduction and which concerns the end to which humans are created, the Savoyard states:

God has placed you in this world not because he needs you in any way – you are altogether useless to him – but only to exercise his goodness in you by giving you his grace and glory. For this purpose, he has given you intellect to know him, memory to be mindful of him, will to love him, imagination so that you yourself can picture his benefits, eyes to see his wonderful works, tongue to praise him, and so on with the other faculties.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, man was placed in the world for a particular purpose, and thus all actions and thoughts must be addressed to enhance this plan rather than to reject it or discard it:

Therefore, you are not in this world only to thrive, to become wealthy, to eat, drink and sleep, like the rest of the animals; you are here to love your God and to save your soul. If you do thus, you will find abundant consolations on your deathbed. On the contrary, if you do not serve God, you will find yourself filled with remorse at the end of your days, when you will then understand that riches and pleasures only helped

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43. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, First Part, Seven Reflections for Each Day of the Week. First Reflection, Sunday: On Man's End, 32, in OE 2 [212]. "Considera, o figliuolo, che questo tuo corpo, quest'anima tua ti furono dati da Dio senza alcun tuo merito creandoti a sua immagine. Egli ti fece suo figlio col santo Battesimo. Ti amò e ti ama qual tenero padre, e l'unico fine per cui ti creò si è per essere amato e servito in questa vita, per renderti poi felice in Paradiso."

44. Francis de Sales, *Introduction*, First Part, Chapter 10:3, 43.

to make your heart grieve. You will regret the fact that you have wasted much time without any advantage for your soul.<sup>45</sup>

Once again, the Salesian concept reflects in the words of Don Bosco. St. Francis de Sales eagerly urges Philothea to safeguard the purpose for which she was created.

Since you have been placed in this world for this purpose, all actions contrary to it must be rejected and avoided and those not serving this end should be despised as empty and useless. Consider the unhappiness of worldly people who never think of all this but live as if they believe themselves created only to build houses, plant trees, pile up wealth, and do frivolous things.<sup>46</sup>

There is an intrinsic intimacy between the 'regret' which Don Bosco invites the young to ponder upon, a disappointment that is the result of the strong attachment to worldly possessions, and the 'unhappiness' to be considered by Philothea. St. Francis de Sales warns Philothea on the naivety of those who only think of the things of this world, rather than the things that last, such as eternity. For both saints, eternity is man's end and objective.

The authentic Christian should not lose sight of eternity. There is implied within his soul – which is eternal as God is eternal – this inclination towards the things that last.

Oh Christian, remember, that you are created for eternity. Every moment of your life is a step further towards eternity. *Ibit homo in domum aeternitatis suae. ...* The day will come for me, as well as for everybody else when I have to enter in my eternal home. Wealthy and poor, the righteous and the sinners of every state and condition, all shall die. ... We will die when we least expect it and the moment of

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45. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, First Part, Seven Reflections for Each Day of the Week. First Reflection, Sunday: On Man's End, 32, in OE 2 [212]. "Sicché non sei al mondo solamente per godere, per farti ricco, per mangiare, bere e dormire, come fanno le bestie; ma il tuo fine si è di amare il tuo Dio e salvar l'anima tua. Se farai così, quante consolazioni proverai in punto di morte! Al contrario se non attendi a servire Dio, quanti rimorsi proverai alla fine de'tuoi dì, quando conoscerai che le ricchezze, i piaceri non fecero che addolorare il tuo cuore! Ti rincrescerà di aver perduto tanto tempo, senza alcun vantaggio dell'anima tua."

46. Francis de Sales, *Introduction*, First Part, Chapter 10:2 and 3, 43.

death will decide our eternity. Can anyone consider us prudent if we are not prepared when we should always be so?<sup>47</sup>

In Don Bosco's mind, eternity was defined by the state of the soul at the time of death. He was explicit in making a distinction between eternal life and eternal damnation. Both are eternal states; the choice of where one chooses to go, stems from one's liberty and life choices where the wrong choices are, sometimes, the result of foolishness.

While we Christians tread this earth, we are suspended between two eternities, and either one of these has to be my inheritance forever. As long as God is God, I will glorify either his mercy together with all the blessed in heaven, or his justice in conjunction with the damned in the consuming fires of hell, where there is wailing and grinding of teeth. What a remarkable folly it would be to lose God and a happy eternity for a mean and vile pleasure! What extraordinary foolishness it is to remain indifferent towards such a loss! How miserable is that person who does not recognize this significant loss and only becomes aware of it when all is irreparable!<sup>48</sup>

Speaking of death, Don Bosco underlines the reality of such an event; life cannot be taken for granted and preparation is of utmost importance. It was not an invitation for the young to think only of the 'last things' but

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47. Bosco, *La chiave del paradiso*, 24-25, in OE 8, [24]-[25]. "Ricordati, o Cristiano, che tu sei uomo di eternità. Ogni momento di tua vita è un passo verso l'eternità. *Ibit homo in domum aeternitatis suae*. Verrà per me, siccome verrà per tutti gli uomini il momento fatale in cui dovrò entrare nella casa della mia eternità. Ricchi e poveri, giusti e peccatori di qualsiasi stato e condizione, tutti morremo. ... Noi morremo quando meno ci penseremo, e il momento di nostra morte deciderà della nostra eternità. Possiamo noi forse aver nome di prudenti se non ci teniamo preparati, e sempre preparati?"

48. Bosco, *La chiave del paradiso*, 26, in OE 8, [26]. "Noi cristiani camminiamo in questo mondo e siamo in ogni istante sospesi tra due eternità, cuna e l'altra dee essere mia eredità per sempre. Finchè Dio sarà Dio, io glorificherò o la sua misericordia co' beati in cielo, o la sua giustizia co' dannati negli stagni di fuoco e di zolfo ardente, dove non vi è che pianto e stridor di denti. Perdere un Dio, perdere una eternità felice per un vil piacere, che gran pazzia! Essere insensibile a questa perdita, che grande stupidità! Infelice colui che non comprende la grandezza di questa perdita, se non quando l'avrà fatta, e che sarà per lui irreparabile!"

rather to make them aware of the preciousness of their life and especially of their soul. Prayer, in this case, becomes a gateway to eternal life:

Let us, therefore, be vigilant, let us pray continuously, and let us not forget death, which is our door to heaven; let us think about the judgment that will decide for all eternity. Paradise is the sojourn of our happy eternity; hell is the sojourn of a sad eternity. All this will come to be at death and judgment day.<sup>49</sup>

Eternal life can only be obtained through Divine grace, and in turn, this can be reinforced through prayer that should become a constant in the life of the young and of Christians in general.

Let us remember, oh Christians, that we are created to love and to serve God in this life, and it is through serving Him that we shall arrive in heaven to eternally delight in his presence. However, to obtain this sublime end, the assistance of divine grace, is necessary. God will certainly give us such aid, but he wishes us to request such grace through prayer. We should continually pray during our lifetime.<sup>50</sup>

Don Bosco advises on this incessant type of prayer because no one knows the hour and the day of death. He was constantly aware of this. Besides, his personal experience of losing his father at a young age, in all probability when it was least expected, and the experience of the premature death of his friend Louis Comollo, he was personally attacked several times and his life was in danger. The thought of this reality that we call death has to be continuously present; it was a way to 'prevent' damnation and gain eternal life.

If only we knew the place and the hour of our death; but no, says the Lord, it will come when we least expect it. It may be that death will

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49. Bosco, *La chiave del paradiso*, 26, in OE 8, [26]. "Siamo adunque ognor vigilianti, preghiamo senza interruzione, non dimentichiamo la morte, che è la porta dell'eternità: pensiamo al giudizio che deciderà dell'eternità. Il paradiso che è il soggiorno della eternità felice; l'inferno che è il soggiorno dell'eternità infelice, ecco ciò che terrà dietro alla morte e al giudizio."

50. Bosco, *La chiave del paradiso*, 29, in OE 8, [29]. "Ricordiamoci, o cristiani, che noi siamo creati per amare e servire Iddio in questa vita, e con questo mezzo andarlo a godere eternamente in cielo. Ma per conseguire questo fine sublime è assolutamente necessario l'aiuto della grazia divina. Tale aiuto Iddio ce lo darà certamente, ma vuole che lo dimandiamo colla preghiera. La nostra vita dovrebbe essere continuamente occupata a pregare."



surprise me in my bed, on the place of work, while walking or some other place. Illness, fever, an accident, something that falls on top of me, struck by an assassin, a lightning bolt, are all things which can take away my life. All this can happen within a year, a month, a week, a day, an hour or even after having read the present consideration. Christian, if death would strike you now, what will become of your soul? What will become of my soul? Woe to us if we are not prepared. He, who today is not well prepared to die, is risking of making a wicked death.<sup>51</sup>

Don Bosco, once again, seems to share the same sentiments expressed by St. Francis de Sales.

Consider how uncertain the day of your death is. My soul, one day you will leave this body. When will it be? In winter or in summer? In the city or in the country? By day or by night? Suddenly or after due preparation? From sickness or by accident? Will you have time to make your confession or not? Will you be assisted by your confessor and spiritual director? Unfortunately, we know nothing whatsoever about all this. Only one thing is certain: we will die and sooner than we think.<sup>52</sup>

For Don Bosco it was a question of instincts, it was about the choices one makes. Through his reasoning, man can understand the three essential pillars of his relation with God, that is, to come to know, love and serve Him. If he understands this, then stemming from the same reason, he will discover that it would be better for him to follow the nature of his soul,

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51. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 91-92, in OE 10 [385]-[386]. "Almeno sapessimo il luogo e l'ora di nostra morte; ma no, dice il Salvatore, ella verrà quando meno ce lo pensiamo. Può essere che la morte mi sorprenda nel mio letto, sul lavoro, per istrada od altrove. Una malattia, una febbre, un accidente, qualche cosa che mi cada addosso, un colpo di un assassino, un fulmine, sono tutte cose che possono togliermi di vita. Ciò può essere da qui ad un anno, da qui ad un mese, ad una settimana, ad un giorno, ad un'ora, e forse può essere appena finita la lettura della presente considerazione. Cristiano, se la morte ci colpisse in questo momento, che sarebbe dell'anima tua? che sarebbe dell'anima mia? Guai a noi, se non ci teniamo preparati; chi oggi non è preparato a morir bene, corre grave pericolo di morir male."

52. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, First Part, Chapter 13: 1, 49.

rather than the attraction of the body and the senses. A change of heart and a change of direction are necessary to achieve eternal life.

Let us imitate the traveler who, on becoming aware that he had mistaken his way, turns around, and he takes the right road that will get him definitely to the place where he had planned to go. Nevertheless, let us remember that serving God in this world is the only means through which we can one day go to and delight in him in our heavenly home.<sup>53</sup>

Don Bosco's concern for the salvation of souls stems from his belief and faith. His faith also stemmed from the life, actions and redemptive power of Jesus Christ. Jesus suffered so that all could be saved. He believed that this suffering of the Obedient Servant should be contemplated and in doing so, he gave due importance in the salvation of one's soul.

Let us stop for a moment and filled with gratitude consider God's infinite goodness. Place your attention on two important thoughts. Firstly, consider your soul, a treasure you carry within yourself and for which God decided to become human. Secondly, consider what a great evil sin is and to repair the consequences caused by it, the Son of God had to leave the delights of Heaven, subjecting himself to all the miseries of our life and died on a cross for our salvation.<sup>54</sup>

In other words, Christ had to pay for our sins, and thus the consideration of his action is important to remember since he gave all for us through his complete obedience. Furthermore, we became coheirs with Christ since he made us brothers in him and "as a brother I belong to Him, I belong to

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53. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 79, in OE 10 [373]. "Facciamo come fa un viaggiatore, che accortosi di avere sbagliata la strada, ritorna indietro, e si mette sulla retta via che lo può sicuramente condurre al luogo, ove aveva divisato di andare. Ma ricordiamoci che il servire a Dio in questa vita è l'unico mezzo per andarlo a godere un giorno nella celeste patria."

54. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 30, in OE 10 [324]. "Fermiamoci qui, o cristiano, e mentre pieni di gratitudine andiamo considerando l'immensa bontà di Dio, ti prego a trattenere l'animo tuo sopra due pensieri; cioè considerare il tesoro prezioso che porti teco, che è l'anima tua, per cui Dio si è fatto uomo, e considerare eziandio che gran male sia il peccato poichè por riparare le conseguenze di esso, il Figlio di Dio ha dovuto lasciare le delizie del cielo, assoggettarsi a tutte le miserie della nostra vita e finire colla morte in croce."

his merits, to his passion, to his death, to his glory, and his dignity.”<sup>55</sup> It is this Christ-like dignity that Don Bosco wanted to safeguard in the young, a dignity which if preserved will bring them to eternal life.

### **The Objective & the Diverse Typologies of Don Bosco’s Writings**

Don Bosco had a very specific objective that he wanted to reach through his writings: the salvation of the souls of the young. Naturally, this was complimented by other intentions, like for instance the Christian education of the young, to help and assist students in their academic formation through his pedagogical and educational writings such as those concerning mathematics and history. Other writings were meant to present role models to the young. Still, other writings were intended to be informative about the Salesian Society or rules addressed to the various Salesian environments and others were apologetic, defending the papacy, the Church and its tradition and teaching. However, the first and most important objective were his accompaniment offered to the young through the medium of writing to help them value their spiritual dimension and to obtain personal holiness.

One also needs to remember also that Don Bosco started his writing activity in a historical context that was rapidly changing. His century was influenced by the writings and ideas of Romanticism and the liberal reforms brought about by the secularization of society initiated by the French Revolution.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, his writings were in response to the social

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55. Bosco, *Il mese di Maggio*, 61, in OE 10 [355]. “E come fratello io appartengo a Lui, a’ suoi meriti, alla sua passione, alla sua morte, alla sua gloria, alla sua dignità.”

56. Arthur Lenti states that Don Bosco’s writing activity in the 1850s “took on the aspect of a proper “apostolate of the press.” It was felt and undertaken as a “vocation.” The reasons for this development in Don Bosco’s work must be sought in the changed socio-religious situation brought about by the liberal revolution and its liberal reforms.” Lenti continues that this change was in relation to three particular areas. The first area concerned the “expansion of mass education brought about by school reforms resulted in greater literacy, increased need to read.” The second area concerned the “liberal reforms brought about a secularization of society by diminishing or neutralizing the influence of the Church in society.” The third area concerned the “freedoms acquired by non-Catholic religious groups, especially the Waldenses (“Protestants”) (freedom of worship, freedom of expression and of the press, etc.) resulted in an increased proselytizing activity. This needed to be counteracted from the Catholic side.” Arthur Lenti, *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*,

and historical reforms and as a response to the spreading of Protestantism in Piedmont and the threat, to Don Bosco's mind, which it presented.

In all his writings, Don Bosco himself states the objective of each publication. The objective varies according to the typology of the writing. Undoubtedly, to help the young in their accompaniment, Don Bosco show a keen interest in the lives of young, saintly models so that he could attract the young readers to imitate their virtuous lives and seriously consider the desire to become saints themselves. Don Bosco through these biographies, desired to help, improve, enhance and transform the young persons' minds and to help them develop their characters. They aimed at building the character of the young readers.

The edifying biographies present a synthesis of the life of the models that Don Bosco wanted to offer.<sup>57</sup> Don Bosco intended to bring to his young readers the beauty of a virtuous life, how this will favor their personal salvation and holiness. In presenting the simplicity of life of these models, his objective was also to encourage his readers not to hesitate to make the same decisions and to make the same steps that these saintly figures have taken. If these young persons were able to achieve such Christian perfection, nothing could stop his young readers from achieving the same aim.

In the meantime start by profiting from that which I will describe here; ask yourselves in your heart that which St. Augustine used to say: *Si ille, cur non ego?* If one of my companions, who is my same age, and having been in the same place as I am now, was exposed to the same or maybe to more grievous risks than I, and nevertheless

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7 vols. (Rome: LAS, 2007-2010), 3:216. The reference includes the volume number followed by [:], and page number.

57. Stella states that Don Bosco delves more in these writings on the "episodes of virtue in action, the virtues themselves being based on scholastic, moral, or hagiographical categories: the spirit of prayer, innocence, or repentance; practice of the sacraments; devotion to the blessed Mary; death as the crowning event of a life that responded to God's graces and favors." Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. John Drury (New Rochelle NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1985), 266.

he found the time and the way to remain a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, why can't I achieve the same? <sup>58</sup>

To prove this point, Don Bosco presents Michael Magone, not only as having been impressed by reading the life of Dominic Savio but also of imitating him in some of his virtues, even if he had only read a few pages.

Among those of you, dear young people, who were anxiously awaiting the publication of the life of Dominic Savio, was the young Michael Magone. Having heard that Savio was a model of Christian perfection, he strove to get information from all those who knew him and who recounted episodes from his life; and he then endeavored to imitate this model. <sup>59</sup>

Magone becomes the model for the young because of the transformation that occurred within him

In Magone's life presented here we have a young person who when left to his own devices and was in danger of treading on the wrong path which would have led to perdition, was invited by the Lord to follow him. He answered to this loving call and answering to divine grace, managed to attract the admiration of all those who knew him. In this way manifesting how marvelous the effects of God's grace are towards those who strive to answer his call. <sup>60</sup>

The invitation is for the young to be open to the possibility of transformation. There seems also to be a subtle message that no matter

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58. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*, 9-10, in OE 11 [159]-[160]. "Intanto cominciate a trar profitto di quanto qui vi verrò descrivendo; e dite in cuor vostro quanto diceva S. Agostino: *Si ille, cur non ego?* Se un mio compagno, della stessa mia età, nel medesimo luogo, esposto ai medesimi e forse maggiori pericoli, tuttavia trovò tempo e modo di mantenersi fedele seguace di Gesù Cristo, perchè non posso fare anche io lo stesso?"

59. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele*, 3, in OE 13 [157]. "Tra quelli di voi, giovani carissimi, che ansiosi aspettavano la pubblicazione della vita di Savio Domenico eravi il giovanetto Magone Michele. Esso in modo industrioso ora dall'uno ora dall'altro raccoglieva i tratti speciali delle azioni che di quel modello di vita cristiana si raccontavano; adoperandosi poi con tutte le sue forze per imitarlo."

60. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele*, 5, in OE 13 [159]. "In questa di Magone noi abbiamo un giovanetto che abbandonato a se stesso era in pericolo di cominciare a battere il tristo sentiero del male; ma che il Signore invito a seguirlo. Ascoltò egli l'amorosa chiamata e costantemente corrispondendo alla grazia divina giunse a trarre in ammirazione quanti lo conobbero, palesandosi così quanto

what background one comes from, one can always have a spiritual transformation. Don Bosco invites the young to imitate Magone for his actions after this transformation occurred.

Don Bosco's objectives in the case of Francis Besucco's biography remain the same: imitating and look upon the pious young man as a model. However, Don Bosco also makes a direct reference to himself: he presents himself as a father who loves his children dearly. It was a strategic move, perhaps, which would also serve another objective: to help the young readers not to lack trust in those who are looking after their souls.

There is one thing you need to note about myself. Maybe I was too complacent in expounding the discussions that took place between us. This is true, and for this, I ask your sympathy. You might wish to recognize in me a father who speaks about a beloved son; a father who gives space to fatherly affections, who speaks to his beloved sons. He completely opens his heart to fulfill them and to instruct them in the practice of the virtues of which Besucco became a model. Read on then, dear young people, and if while reading you feel moved to avoid any vice or moved to practice any virtue, then be thankful to God who is the only Giver of true riches.<sup>61</sup>

We see in these edifying biographies Don Bosco's concern with the salvation of the young. His objective was to accompany the young through this medium, and he did not deviate from this purpose. In fact, although he presents 'historical' facts about the lives of these three young Oratorians, Don Bosco stays clear from mentioning the social, historical and political changes that were taking place in the Turin of the eighteen fifties. Our Founder concentrated more on the person of these young protagonists. His work centers on their commitment, their progress

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siano meravigliosi gli effetti della grazia di Dio verso di coloro che si adoperano per corrispondervi.”

61. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d'Argentera*, 5-6, in OE 15 [247]-[248]. “Una cosa poi dovete notare riguardo a me stesso. Forse troppa compiacenza nello esporre le relazioni che passarono tra me e lui. Questo è vero e ne chiedo benevolo compatimento: vogliate qui ravvisare in me un padre che parla di un figlio teneramente amato; un padre, che dà campo ai paterni affetti, che parla a' suoi amati figli; loro apre tutto il suo cuore per appagarli, ed anche instruirli nella pratica delle virtù, di cui il Besucco si rese modello. Leggete adunque, o giovani carissimi, e se nel leggere vi sentirete mossi a fuggire qualche vizio, o a praticare qualche virtù rendetene gloria a Dio, solo Datore di veri beni.”

and their passion towards a spiritual life. They become the models of authentic and warm friendships, models of how to overcome a crisis and how to develop inner joy. They were models of the cordial, collaborative relationship that educators should cultivate with the young. Don Bosco, either intentionally or otherwise, wanted to ‘tune down,’ if not completely shut, the ‘noises’ that were forthcoming from the ‘outside’ world of the oratory. In this manner, he could concentrate more on the formative and spiritual accompaniment of the young.<sup>62</sup>

Alongside these edifying biographies, Don Bosco also published other works that would serve as effective aid and support to accompany the young and readers in general in their Christian formation. Don Bosco’s *Il giovane provveduto* is probably his masterpiece when it comes to the Christian formation and spiritual accompaniment of the young. Giraudo says that it was probably the publication most loved and edited by Don Bosco.<sup>63</sup>

*Il giovane provveduto* reflects Don Bosco’s way of understanding spiritual development. It also reflects his thoughts on how to safeguard one’s spiritual progress, enhancing it with various acts of piety and devotion. His main objective in this work was to place in the hands of his young, not a simple prayer book but an actual booklet that would become a way of life. Don Bosco himself specifies this most important objective in his introduction, underlying the fact that those who strive to live a good Christian life discover true joy. At the beginning of the book, Don Bosco addresses his young readers with these words:

I would like to teach you a way to Christian life which is at the same time joyful and cheerful, by exposing to you the true pastimes and delights so that you can exclaim with the prophet David: let us serve the Lord with gladness: *servite Domino in laetitia*. Serving the Lord

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62. See, Giovanni Bosco, *Vite di giovani. Le biografie di Domenico Savio, Michele Magone e Francesco Besucco. Saggio introduttivo e note storiche*, ed. Aldo Giraudo (Roma: LAS, 2012), 11-13.

63. See, Giovanni Bosco, *Insegnamenti di vita spirituale: un’antologia*, ed. Aldo Giraudo (Roma: LAS, 2013), 7. In the category of works concerning the Christian formation, besides *Il giovane provveduto* we also find *La chiave del paradiso; Il mese di maggio; Il cattolico istruito nella sua religione; Porta teco Cristiano; and Esercizio di devozione alla misericordia di Dio*.

is precisely the aim of this booklet; to serve Him while being always joyful.<sup>64</sup>

Don Bosco wanted to break the notion and the false impression that those who care enough to lead a good Christian life, were always sad, or had long faces or whose lives were miserable because of the penance and devotions involved. Don Bosco shunned this idea and considered it as preposterous. In fact, he considered this idea as one of the 'principle deceits' of the devil who tries in many ways to distance them from a life of virtue.

Don Bosco's accompaniment was holistic in nature.<sup>65</sup> To become authentic Christians, the young have to be responsible not only in that which is moral and spiritual but also responsible for their other duties as sons or daughters as well as citizens. They have to cultivate both a moral and a responsible life while they are still young:

*Adolescens iuxta viam suam etiam cum senuerit non recedet ab ea.* The meaning of this phrase is that if we start living a genuine life while we are still young, we will remain good persons even in an advanced age, we will have a holy death, which is the beginning of eternal happiness. On the contrary, if during adolescence we let vices take control of us, they will largely remain with us throughout our life until our death. It will be like making a fatal deposit on a miserable eternity. So that such

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64. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, To Young People, 5-6, in OE 2 [185]-[186]. "Io voglio insegnarvi un metodo di vita cristiano, che sia nel tempo stesso allegro e contento, additandovi quali siano i veri divertimenti e i, veri piaceri, talchè voi possiate dire col santo profeta Davide: serviamo al Signore in san, ta allegria: *servite Domino in lætitia*. Tale appunto è lo scopo di questo libretto, servire al Signore e stare sempre allegri." This particular objective and aim were not changed in subsequent editions of *Il giovane provveduto*. See OE 14 where one can find the new amplified edition, and OE 26 where one can find the reproduction of the 42<sup>nd</sup> edition.

65. Although the notion and the concept of 'holistic spirituality' came much later after Don Bosco, we believe that, although not using the right terminology, the model of accompaniment he actually proposed to the young, and all of his educational system, for that matter, was holistic. In fact, holistic spirituality "finds every human concern relevant. God's Spirit can be encountered in all aspects of life and not merely in such explicitly religious activities as prayer and worship. Understanding spirituality holistically involves linking it with every aspect of human development – psychological and spiritual, interpersonal and political. All aspects of a person's life must be subjected to the transforming influence of the Spirit." See *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, s.v. "Holistic Spirituality."



a misfortune will not befall you, I am presenting you with a short and simple, and yet sufficient, way to live. It is a way through which you may learn to become the comfort to your relatives, the honor of your country, become good citizens in this world so that one day you may be fortunate inhabitants of heaven.<sup>66</sup>

Here we see a synthesis of his spiritual accompaniment: preventing all that could harm one's soul, one's moral or physical life. This prevention can only become possible if one starts at an early age. We have already seen in the previous chapter why Don Bosco chose to work with young people of a particular age: their soul, their character, and their personalities were still malleable and receptive and he believed he could work wonders with them. Compared with other writings of the same genre, *Il giovane provveduto* held a special place within all of Don Bosco's writings. It reflects Don Bosco's spiritual method of accompaniment for the young's spiritual formation.

A look at the other writings belonging, so to speak, to the 'family' of *Il giovane provveduto*, we find that they have the same objective. Don Bosco desired not only to educate the young to the faith but also to educate adults and Christians in general. In his *La chiave del paradiso* Don Bosco states that this booklet was precisely called so because "any Christian faithful who will come to know, believe and practice what is contained here can rest assured of his eternal salvation."<sup>67</sup> In a way, this special booklet, although it is intended to educate towards the faith, also has an apologetic approach to it. This approach is understandable since Don Bosco was

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66. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, To Young People, 6-7, in OE 2 [186]-[187]. "Adolescens iuxta viam suam etiam cum senuerit non recedet ab ea. E vuol dire: se noi cominciamo una buona vita' ora che siamo giovani, buoni saremo negli anni avanzati, buona la nostra morte e principio di una eterna felicità. Al contrario se i vizi prenderanno possesso di noi in gioventù, per lo più continueranno in ogni età nostra fino alla morte. Caparra troppo funesta di una infelicissima eternità. Acciocchè tale disgrazia a voi non accada vi presento un metodo di vivere breve e facile, ma sufficiente perchè possiate diventare la consolazione dei vostri parenti, l' onore della patria, buoni cittadini in terra per essere poi un giorno fortunati abitatori del cielo."

67. Bosco, *La chiave del paradiso*, 3, in OE 8 [3]. "Perchè qualsiasi fedel cristiano che sappia, creda e pratici quanto ivi si contiene può essere sicuro di sua eterna salvezza."

writing at a time when the diffusion of writing and propaganda material by the Waldensians was increasing.

Devout reader, you will find within these pages a compendium of Catholic truths and methods of how to practice the various exercises of Christian piety with a selection of Sacred Lauds. In the meantime, let us unite and pray to the merciful God so that he may lead all men to the knowledge of the Catholic religion, the one and only religion of Jesus Christ and outside of which no one can be saved.<sup>68</sup>

It is interesting to note that while St. Francis de Sales had his own Chablais, Valdocco, and its environs became Don Bosco's own Chablais. While the Savoyard preached in an untiring manner while he was in that region, Don Bosco used the medium of the diffusion of good books and literature to counteract the dissemination of new propaganda. In his work *Il cattolico istruito nella sua religione*, Don Bosco uses the form of a dialogue between a father and his sons to highlight the importance of being diligent in one's Catholic faith. The fundamental idea of this book was to encourage parents, especially fathers, to be well equipped and well prepared so that they could confute any error disseminated by protestant literature. Young people of all ages tend to explore other ideas and notions, especially about religion. It is, therefore, imperative for a 'father' to be well-prepared and learned in arguments of faith so that he can avoid his 'sons' to fall in the erroneous trap.

F.[ather] Your respect and your obedience, which you have showed towards me and towards my commitment to strive for your education, increase my hope in you. ... However, after my death. S.[on] May the Lord preserve for a long time so that you can of assistance to us; if you pass away, your good counsels will always remain imprinted on our heart. F.[ather] This is precisely why I desire to make such provisions as to make the main points of our religion more clearly to you. I do

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68. Bosco, *La chiave del paradiso*, 3-4, in OE 8 [3]-[4]. "Quivi troverai, o lettore devoto, un compendio delle verità della fede cattolica, e il modo di praticare vari esercizi di cristiana pietà, con una scelta di Laudi Sacre. Ogni cosa fu ricavata dai più accreditati autori: io feci solamente quelle aggiunte e variazioni, che parvero necessarie od opportune per l'intelligenza popolare e secondo il bisogno dei tempi. Intanto uniamoci tutti a pregare Iddio misericordioso affinché conduca tutti gli uomini del mondo alla conoscenza della cattolica religione, sola ed unica religione di Gesù Cristo, fuori di cui niuno può salvarsi."

this willingly because the study I had undertaken, the books which I read, my participation in the discussions held within various academies to which I am pleased to be a member, and my long years of experience all enable me to teach you duly.<sup>69</sup>

This popular booklet also turns out to be an essay on the education to the faith-cum-apologetic arguments.

In these our times, you will encounter individuals who lay battle in various ways against Religion. We shall prove that, 1. Man must have both an external and an internal reverence towards a God. 2. That revelation was a necessity. God revealed himself to me, and the promised Messiah uselessly promised and expected by the Hebrews, since he already came one thousand, eight hundred and fifty-three years ago, and who is Jesus Christ, true God and true Man. 3. That Jesus Christ founded the Church and to which he entrusted all his teaching. That this same Church is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, and which has the Roman Pontiff as its Head. Therefore, all those who are not part of it, neither hold the true Religion, nor can they obtain eternal salvation.<sup>70</sup>

This line of thought of educating to the faith continues in another work: *Porta teco Cristiano*. The objective was to help the faithful to reach

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69. Bosco, *Il cattolico istruito nella sua religione*, 4, in OE 4 [198]. "P.[adre] Il rispetto e l'ubbidienza che finora mi avete prestato, l'impegno ch'ebbi sempre per la vostra buona educazione fa sperar bene di voi; ma dopo la mia morte. ... F.[iglio] Il Signore vi conservi lungamente per la nostra assistenza; che se ci veniste a mancare, noi porteremo nel cuore sempre impressi i vostri ricordi. P.[adre] Appunto per questo desiderio di premunirvi intorno ad alcuni pericoli del giorno col dilucidarvi i punti principali di nostra religione in alcuni trattenimenti. Questo faccio di buon grado, perchè lo studio da me fatto, i libri letti, le discussioni udite in parecchie accademie, di cui ho il piacere di essere membro, l'esperienza di lunga serie d'anni mi mettono in grado di potervi debitamente istruire.

70. Bosco, *Il cattolico istruito nella sua religione*, 5-6, in OE 4 [199]-[200]. "In questi tempi avrete a fare con persone, che in varie guise combattono la Religione; e contro di esse noi proveremo: 1. Che vi è Dio, cui l'uomo dee un culto sì interno che esterno; 2. Che era necessaria una rivelazione; che questa rivelazione Dio l'ha fatta agli uomini, e che il Messia in essa promesso invano è aspettato dagli Ebrei, perchè egli è già venuto da mille ottocento cinquanta tre anni, ed è Gesù Cristo vero Dio e vero Uomo; 3. Che Gesù Cristo ha fondato la Chiesa, a cui affidò tutta la sua dottrina; che questa Chiesa è Una, Santa, Cattolica ed Apostolica, ed ha per Capo il Romano

salvation in whatever state they live. Through the use of writings from the Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church and particular saints, including St. Francis de Sales, he presents various situations in life in which one can obtain personal holiness and salvation. In this particular work, those to whom Don Bosco addresses himself are those who should be the educators and carers of the young.

I recommend this booklet to fathers, mothers, parish priests and to all those who have the salvation of souls at heart; I recommend to them not only to read them to encourage those under their care to read them also. If these pages are introduced within Christian families they will certainly be of help and advantage both in spiritual as well as in temporal things; I would even go far as to declare that those families who read and practice such advice, are very fortunate indeed.<sup>71</sup>

This small, short work by Don Bosco, seems to have a synthetic structure of Philothea by St. Francis de Sales. Our Founder's booklet does not contain articulate arguments and propositions towards a better, authentic Christian living. As was his style, Don Bosco keeps it simple in both content and expression but still offers foundation principles of how to be true Christians.

Don Bosco starts his exhortations firstly towards the Christian faithful and then moving from the 'heads of the families', male and female adolescents, and the servants. The dynamic is always the same: the individual and his or her attitude and respect towards others. It is within this 'behavioural dynamic' that one's holiness and salvation can be achieved.

An important work among Don Bosco's writings is *Il mese di maggio*. As the name implies, it was intended as a Marian devotion booklet. However,

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Pontefice; che perciò tutti quelli i quali sono fuori di lei, non hanno la vera Religione, nè possono conseguire l'eterna salute."

71. *Bosco, Porta teco cristiano ovvero avvisi importanti intorno ai doveri del cristiano, acciocchè ciascuno possa conseguire la propria salvezza nello stato in cui si trova*, 4, in OE 11 [4]. "Io li raccomando ai padri, alle madri, ai parroci e a tutti quelli cui sta a cuore la salute delle anime, non solo di leggerli, ma di farli leggere ai loro dipendenti. Se questi avvisi verranno introdotti nelle famiglie cristiane sarà per certo non mediocre il vantaggio tanto nelle cose spirituali quanto nelle temporali; che anzi giudico si potranno chiamare fortunate quelle famiglie in cui questi ricordi saranno letti e praticati."

interestingly enough, its contents are more concerned with Christian living, rather than with the person of the Virgin Mary. The booklet has the structure of a popular catechism. He does place all the contents within Marian devotion, and while doing so, he invites his readers to meditate and ponder on other important aspects, like creation, the virtues, and the Christian's eschatological destination.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, as we have already seen, Don Bosco's main concern for spreading 'good books' was to belie the Protestant teaching. Once again, therefore, he gives an apologetic tone to this booklet. He affirms his belief in the Catholic Church.

Since there are one God, one faith, and one baptism, there is also one true Church, out of which nobody can be saved. Oh Christian, consider and tremble on reflecting the significant number of those who are not within the Catholic Church's embrace and thus they are not on the right path that leads to heaven. Reflect on this, and let your heart rejoice because God created you within the Church, which holds so many means through which you can be saved. Be grateful towards

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72. The objective of this devotional booklet is implied in the introduction to the work. Mary is particularly remembered during the month of May because it is the month in which nature manifests its beauty and all around one can see this beauty. It is also during this month that man toils and cultivates the earth giving him hope for abundant fruit. However, man is also wary of the dangers that his labor faces: inclement weather or a drought can erase the hopes of his hard work. Our Founder says that one makes recourse to the Virgin Mary not only when spiritual needs arise, but also in temporal needs, especially protection from that which can harm one's soul. This booklet can also be considered as a statement of how Don Bosco conceived the idea of Christian living and how one could best lead a good, spiritual life. As Arthur Lenti states "It is a presentation of the spiritual, ascetical program he had been developing for himself and for his educational purposes, and he takes advantage of the month of May to set it forth in simple language for simple folk. Salvation in the full sense of victory over evil and over death...is what the book is all about". Lenti, *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*, 3:231. Pietro Braidò, on the other hand, says that *Il mese di maggio* is undoubtedly "the best doctrinal synthesis of an enlightened Christian existence proposed by Don Bosco during this period [referring to the period of Don Bosco's writing activity 1853-1859], and maybe also in all his life (this work) has a catechetical, dogmatic soteriological and sacramental characteristic." Pietro Braidò, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, 2 vols. (Roma: LAS, 2009), 1: 292-294. The reference includes the volume followed by [:] and page numbers.

God and do so by observing the precepts, which the Church, in the name of God, proposes to its children.<sup>73</sup>

This particular work is important since it deals with a sacrament so close to Don Bosco's heart and we know that much of his spiritual accompaniment took place within this sacrament. Don Bosco was elicited to write this book because of the unfolding saga of a former Catholic priest, Luigi De Sanctis who had apostatized and because of the intensified proselytizing by the Protestants.<sup>74</sup> Don Bosco sets his clear objective at the beginning of this dialogical-form booklet.

There is no doubt that in these dismal days in which we live, faith is being attacked continuously and assiduously. However, the attempts

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73. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio*, 35, in OE 11 [329]. "E poichè avvi un solo Dio, una sola fede, un solo battesimo, avvi anche una sola vera Chiesa, fuori di cui niuno può salvarsi. Considera, o cristiano, e trema riflettendo al gran numero di quelli che non sono in grembo della Chiesa cattolica e perciò tutti fuori della strada che conduce al cielo. Considera, e rallegrati in cuor tuo, perchè Dio ti ha creato in questa sua Chiesa, in cui sono tanti mezzi di salvezza. Sii a Dio riconoscente, e per ringraziarlo procura di osservare i precetti che la Chiesa a nome di Dio propone a' suoi figli."

74. Luigi De Sanctis (1808-1869) was a former religious priest, member of the Congregation of the Ministers of the Sick of Saint Camillus de Lellis. In 1847 he adhered to Protestant ideas and beliefs and abandoned the Catholic Church. Encouraged by another apostate, the ex-Dominican Giacinto Achilli, De Sanctis escaped to Malta where he officially apostatized at the hands of the Bishop of Gibraltar. While staying in Malta, he collaborated with Achilli and carried out an intense evangelization and questionable activity against the Catholic Church. In 1849 he contracted marriage, and in 1850 he moved to Geneva. He became a member of the *Église évangélique libre* and gradually moved towards his adherence to the more structured Waldensian church in which in 1852 he was appointed pastor and given the mandate to go to Turin and become the collaborator of Jean-Pierre Meille (1817-1884). In Turin, De Sanctis had severe differences with Meille and suffered a tormented and troubled crisis. In 1854 he presented and eventually withdrew his resignation and adhered to the Italian Evangelical Society of Turin as a freelance evangelizer. These were times of deep interior lacerations and heated confrontations. He returned to the Waldensian denomination in 1864 in Florence. See Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, 1:279. See also, *Enciclopedia Cattolica* s.v. "De Sanctis, Luigi". Don Bosco tried, genuinely, through various correspondences to try to convince De Sanctis to return to the Catholic fold. However, it seems that De Sanctis had already made up his mind. When De Sanctis' booklet against the Catholic understanding of the Sacrament of confession was distributed, Don Bosco attacked the author towards whom only recently he had tried to offer sincere friendship. The sacrament of confession was so important and sensitive subject that it was difficult for Don Bosco not to react in an apologetic form. He considered the Sacrament of confession

of the enemies will be all in vain if first they do not try and try to distance Catholics from the Sacrament of Confession. These attempts are the reason why they aim all their weapons against this advantageous practice. To try to destroy from its foundations the concept of Confession, the Protestants print and throw in the face of Catholics, material that states that Confession was not instituted by God and therefore it should be reprehended.<sup>75</sup>

Aware of the grave responsibilities he had as a priest and as an educator, Don Bosco, although very adamantly denounces the Protestants avoids mentioning the name of the authors of the Protestant propaganda booklets. In this way, he wanted firstly to avoid causing deep afflictions to Catholics who had the sacrament of Confession at heart, and secondly by not publishing the authors' names will discourage his readers who out of curiosity might have been tempted to get hold of the booklets themselves.<sup>76</sup> One must admire Don Bosco's tenacity here: as a priest, he did not want to judge others, even if they were apostate Catholics; at the same time, as an educator, he did not want to give free publicity to the same Protestant authors. What was of the utmost importance was the message he wanted to convey.

I have limited myself to present clearly the doctrine of the Catholic Church on the establishment of Confession, by demonstrating the truth and by confuting the error itself without almost the need of

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as one of the pillars of his educational and pastoral system, and he could not remain silent on the matter. See Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, 1:280. For the letters sent by Don Bosco to De Sanctis, see Giovanni Bosco, *Epistolario: Introduzione, testi critici e note [1835-1879]*, ed. Francesco Motto, 6 vol. (Roma: LAS, 1991-2014), vol. 1, Letter dated 17<sup>th</sup> November 1854, 237; Letter dated 30<sup>th</sup> November 1854, 239; and Letter dated 26<sup>th</sup> May 1855. Henceforth, E[M]. Reference contains the volume, letter number, and page number.

75. Bosco, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato ed un curato di campagna sul sacramento della confessione*, 3, in OE 6 [147]. "Non c'è alcun dubbio che nei calamitosi tempi in cui viviamo la fede sia accanitamente combattuta. Riescon però vani gli sforzi dei nemici se prima essi non cercano di allontanare i cattolici dal Sacramento della Confessione. Ecco il motivo per cui essi volgono tutte le loro armi contro a questa pratica salutare. ... Per distruggere dalle fondamenta l'idea della Confessione i protestanti stampano e gettano di continuo in faccia ai cattolici, che la Confessione non è stata istituita da Dio, epperiò doversi riprovare."

76. See Bosco, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato ed un curato*, 5, in OE 6 [149].

mentioning it. However, in my opinion, I have replied with certainty to that which is being said and is being written against Confession.<sup>77</sup>

The conclusive tone of the small introduction clearly shows Don Bosco's eagerness to defend the Catholic Church and its teaching. It is understandable since it concerned a very important and essential argument for Don Bosco.

Yes then, courage, oh Catholics. Let us be closely united to that religion which was established by Jesus Christ, which has the Roman Pontiff as its visible leader and His vicar on earth; a religion which throughout the centuries has always been challenged and yet has always triumphed. This religion of Jesus Christ can be found solely in the Catholic Church, and nobody is a Catholic without the Pope. Woe to that person who separates himself from the supreme leader! He is outside of such a religion, which is the only one that can lead to salvation. He, who does not have the Church as a mother, cannot have God as a father.<sup>78</sup>

He was very explicit here about one's separation from the Church and implicitly referring to the ex-Catholic religious De Sanctis. Don Bosco considered the Church as an "institutionalized society," centred around the person of the Roman Pontiff and "strictly circumscribed to Catholicism."<sup>79</sup> These same sentiments were expressed again in his work *Avvisi ai cattolici*.<sup>80</sup>

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77. Bosco, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato ed un curato*, 5, in OE 6 [149]. "Mi sono limitato a rendere chiara la dottrina della Chiesa Cattolica intorno all'instituzione della Confessione, mostrando la verità, e combattendo l'errore senza quasi nemmeno nominarlo. Mi pare però di aver con certezza risposto a quanto si dice e si scrive contro alla Confessione."

78. Bosco, *Conversazioni tra un avvocato ed un curato*, 5-6, in OE 6 [149]-[150]. "Sì, Cattolici, coraggio: teniamoci strettamente uniti a quella religione che fu stabilita da Gesù Cristo, che ha per capo visibile il Romano Pontefice suo Vicario in terra; che in mezzo alle vicende dei secoli fu sempre combattuta, ma che ha sempre trionfato. Questa religione di Gesù Cristo trovasi solamente nella Chiesa cattolica; niuno è cattolico senza il Papa; guai a chi separasi da questo capo supremo! egli è fuori di quella religione, che unica può condurre a salvamento: chi non ha la Chiesa per madre non può avere Iddio per padre."

79. Francis Desramaut, *Spiritualità Salesiana. Cento parole chiave*, Spirito e Vita 31(Roma: LAS, 2001), 145.

80. Bosco, *Avvisi ai cattolici*, 5, in OE 4 [167]. "Popoli Cattolici, aprite gli occhi, si tendono a voi moltissime insidie col tentare di allontanarvi da quell'unica vera,



Don Bosco also wrote books that belonged to the human and civil education genre. *La forza della buona educazione* aims precisely to highlight the importance of the parents' role in their children's upbringing.<sup>81</sup> It is interesting to note that our Founder was not only concerned in accompanying the young but also desired to accompany and direct adults. Don Bosco affirms that good education and upbringing start from the family environment. It also centers on the responsibilities that such educational welfare places not only on parents but also on children themselves.

The role of the mother presented by Don Bosco in this booklet is to become the pillar of resistance against any adversity to impede her son from having a good education. She is a "mother who amidst many difficulties manages to give the best education to her son and manages to

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unica Santa Religione, che solamente conservasi nella Chiesa di Gesù Cristo. Questo pericolo fu già in più guise proclamato dai nostri legittimi Pastori, e dai Vescovi posti da Dio a difenderci dall'errore ed insegnarci la verità. La stessa infallibile voce del Vicario di Gesù Cristo ci avvisò di questo insidioso laccio teso ai Cattolici, cioè che molti malevoli vorrebbero sradicare dai vostri cuori la Religione di Gesù Cristo. Costoro ingannano se stessi, e ingannano gli altri; non credeteli." Don Bosco's view of the Church, undoubtedly, directed and inspired his way of perceiving spirituality and spiritual life, and conceived the spiritual accompaniment of the young as taking place within the Catholic community. Those who excluded themselves from this communion separated themselves from Jesus Christ and therefore even from God. It is evident, therefore, why he insisted so much with the young about the importance of preserving their Catholic faith. It is through this faith that he desired to accompany them and lead them to salvation. Stella states that the "reading public addressed by Don Bosco was not made up of Waldensians or anticlericals. ... His works were not primarily polemical, attempting to refute, confound, and decimate some adversary. His intended readers were the young people, artisans, peasants, and commoners of Piedmont. For them he depicted the insecurity and hence unhappiness of those who were not Catholics, and the security of Catholics, who could easily win eternal salvation for themselves by practicing their religion." Stella, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 268-269. For a survey and description of Don Bosco's writing activity, see Lenti, *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*, Chapters 6 and 7, 3:215-280 and Pietro Braidò, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, 2 vols. (Roma: LAS, 2009), 1:265-298. The reference includes the volume number followed by [:], and page number.

81. This narrative reflects the French environment to which the original writing belongs and utilised profusely by Don Bosco himself. See Braidò, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, 1: 283.

lead back on the right path her strayed husband.”<sup>82</sup> In Don Bosco’s time, mothers were usually those seen as keeping the family together, they were perceived as women of faith and of being coherent. The dynamic, however, becomes functional when there is a response from the son’s part. Don Bosco underlines this factor since he is also addressing the young and thus showing them how important it is to be obedient to their parents when these seek their spiritual well-being. In this narrative, the son “responds to his loving mother’s maternal concerns, a son who one can say becomes the means through which Divine Providence use to lead back the father to religion.”<sup>83</sup> In this way, together with the mother, the young son becomes the eponymous character of the narrative. Furthermore, he “becomes the support of the family, a model for his companions, an example of fortitude and resignation to every Christian faithful.”<sup>84</sup> This last part of the paragraph contains in itself the requirements that a young person needs to be an honest citizen and a good Christian.

*In Valentino o la vocazione impedita*, Don Bosco immediately starts by presenting this very, essential notion: one cannot be an honest citizen without being also a good Christian and vice-versa. Don Bosco presents the mother as a good Christian who knew her duties well as a mother, and who was concerned with giving her son a good, Christian upbringing and spiritual well-being.

Since early childhood, she taught him prayers, the little catechism and the elementary foundations of reading and writing. Having been well educated, both from knowledge and from experience, she exhorted her son to avoid laziness and the unruly. “Dear Valentine, she used to tell him, never forget that sloth is the father of all vices and that wrong

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82. Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione*, 4, in OE 6 [278]. “Una madre che in mezzo a mille difficoltà riesce a dare la migliore educazione al figlio, e ricondurre il marito traviato al buon sentiero.”

83. Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione*, 4, in OE 6 [278]. “Un figlio che corrisponde alle materne sollecitudini di un’affezionata genitrice; figlio che si può dire l’istrumento di cui si servì la Divina Provvidenza a condurre il padre alla religione.”

84. Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione*, 4, in OE 6 [278]. “E che in pari tempo diviene il sostegno della famiglia; modello dei compagni, esempio di fermezza e di rassegnazione ad ogni fedel cristiano.”

companions will lead to ruin both themselves and those who follow them: woe to you if you let these two fatal enemies overcome you.”<sup>85</sup>

On the other hand, the father, although he is presented as courteous, honest and one who would not harm anyone, is attributed to a significant error.

He imagined that he could limit his son to be a good and honest citizen without first turning him in a good Christian. “Dear Valentine, he sometimes told him, be good, and you will always be loved and honored by all. Honour, esteem, and reputation should never be forgotten in this world.”<sup>86</sup>

The above brings out the contrast between both parents. Don Bosco avoids judging the father, yet he strongly brings out his weakness. In doing so, he is underlining the importance of the adults’ responsibility towards the formation of the young. Eventually, this will also be a strong point in his addresses to the Salesians. While being an honest citizen is virtuous in itself, it is devoid of that Christian aspect which gives citizenship a certain moral and ethical orientation. In Don Bosco’s mind, only Christianity could guarantee such a moral compass. Undoubtedly, a baptized, Catholic person can be an honest citizen. However, in Don Bosco’s perception, a faithful Christian is an honest citizen precisely because he is primarily a good Christian.

Don Bosco presents as the main character in *Severino*, a young Catholic who used to attend the Oratory in Turin. This booklet, published in 1868, is an authentic story of accompaniment, a personal accompaniment of a young man who found himself within the Salesian environment. In it,

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85. Bosco, *Valentino o la vocazione impedita: episodio contemporaneo*, 3- 4, in OE 17 [181-182]. “Ella stessa gli fece da maestro molti anni. Fin da fanciullino gl’insegnò le preghiere, il piccolo catechismo coi primi elementi di lettura e scrittura. Ben istruita dalla scienza e dall’esperienza poneva le più vive sollecitudini a tener il figlio lontano dall’ozio e dai discoli. «Caro Valentino, soleva dirgli, non mai dimenticarti che l’ozio è il padre di tutti i vizi, e che i cattivi compagni conducono se stessi e chi li segue alla rovina: guai a te se ti lasciassi dominare da questi due nemici fatali.»”

86. Bosco, *Valentino*, 4, in OE 17 [182]. “Ma un errore non leggero gli dominava il capo. S’immaginava di poter ridurre suo figlio ad essere virtuoso ed onesto cittadino senza farlo prima buon cristiano. «Caro Valentino, gli diceva talvolta, sii buono e sarai sempre amato ed onorato da tutti. L’onore, la stima, il buon nome, non devono mai essere dimenticati in questo mondo.»”

once again, there is a huge contrast between the parents of this young man. However, unlike the previous two narratives, in the present account, the father is the first educator of Severino's spiritual life. The mother is portrayed as somewhat mundane, detached from the education and upbringing of her children

Since my mother was not that much involved in the upbringing of her children, my father had to make up for this shortcoming. He was already taking me to the church functions when I was almost seven years old. I remember that I was too short to reach for the holy water font and so he used to lift me up so that I could reach it. My father then guided my hand to do the sign of the cross and then made me kneel next to him, and lovingly took care of me. A month before my first Holy Communion, he wanted to prepare me personally for this occasion. Before that memorable day, he made read each morning and evening a chapter from the book Jesus speaking to the heart of the young person and while doing so added any observation that he deemed could be adapted to me. On the morning of the first Holy Communion, my father remained with me for four hours in Church. He assisted me to make a good confession, to prepare myself well, to receive Communion and to make an act of devout thanksgiving together with my friends.<sup>87</sup>

The description offered by Severino here is once again reminiscent of Don Bosco's personal experience with his mother. The day of the first Holy Communion features strongly in Don Bosco's writing. It was a spiritual experience for him as a young boy, and he wanted the young to look at it also in this way. However, the underlying factor was that of accompaniment. In each narrative where he highlights this important

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87. Bosco, *Severino*, 8, in OE 20 [8]. "Siccome mia madre non si occupava gran fatto dell'educazione de' suoi figliuoli, vi suppliva mio padre. Io toccava appena i sette anni, e già soleva condurmi seco alle sacre funzioni parochiali. Mi ricordo che per la piccola statura non potendo bagnare le dita nell'acquasantino, egli mi alzava affinché ci potessi giungere, guidavami la mano nel fare il segno della santa croce, poi facevami mettere in ginocchio accanto a lui assistendomi nel modo più amorevole. All'epoca della mia prima comunione volle egli medesimo prepararmi, e tutto il mese che precedette a quel memorando giorno soleva mattino e sera farmi leggere un capo del libretto Gesù al cuor del giovane aggiungendovi quelle osservazioni che egli giudicava per me adattate. Nel mattino fissato pella comunione stette meco quattro ore in chiesa. Mi assistè nel confessarmi, nel prepararmi, nel comunicarmi e fare co' miei compagni il dovuto ringraziamento."

event in someone's life, he also makes it a point that the role of adults features well as an essential element of this accompaniment process.<sup>88</sup>

There are themes that Don Bosco wanted to highlight, and which became part of the objective of this particular narrative. Choosing good companions and getting hold of good literature, for example, were two such themes in the narrative. In fact, Severino seems to have made the wrong choices in both. The preventive method is highlighted explicitly through the presentation of the different mishaps in Severino's life. Finally, there was a stark contrast between the Protestant environment that Severino eventually chose for some time and the Salesian environment. Don Bosco's objective here was to explain and expose his spiritual pedagogy and its efficacy in the life of young people, especially within an environment that he saw threatened by sectarian proselytizing.<sup>89</sup>

### **Don Bosco's Theological Vision of Christian Education & "Salvation of the Young"**

What surfaces from Don Bosco's writings and which becomes evident, is his particular interest – which will eventually evolve into his life program – in poor and abandoned youth of his time. He was concerned in a special way for those whom he considered being 'strangers' or 'foreigners' in a city to which they came to seek a better life. These were at a very high level of vulnerability because they were away from their homes and their families and thus were in a more precarious situation. Furthermore, the young and abandoned youth of Turin were those with a high risk of populating the prisons of Turin. Don Bosco wanted to prevent this. He knew that in their

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88. Don Bosco presents Severino as the narrator of his life's experiences. Don Bosco's desire was to help the young to understand the message more, since it was coming from one of them, one who was amongst them, rather than from him. Severino's own life experience was not that different from the experience of the targeted young readership that Don Bosco desired to reach. This booklet can also be seen as part of that apologetic genre found within Don Bosco's writings. This can be concluded from the fact that at one point Severino leaves the oratory and joins the Protestants. All this was due to his hunger for books and for the wrong choices made in befriending certain individuals. In reality, the booklet brings out and highlights the differences that existed between Catholics and Protestants, especially about the Sacraments.

89. For an in depth study on Don Bosco's booklet *Severino*, see Bart Decancq, "«Severino»: Studio dell'opuscolo con particolare attenzione al «primo oratorio»," in *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* (1992) 11, 212-318.

vast majority, these young people ended up in jail, not because they were malicious, but because “they were abandoned to their own resources.”<sup>90</sup>

This socio-cultural scenario offered Don Bosco an ideal fertile land where he could put into action his ideas and his vision. It is true that his visionary work and his Oratorian and educational structures for young people, were not original; there were other initiatives already in place and working hard within the city of Turin for poor young people, including the sterling work carried out by the Christian Brothers and by the Marchioness Barolo herself.<sup>91</sup>

When it came to educating these poor and abandoned young people, Don Bosco sought not only to educate them, something which the State and others could have done but to give his educational system and approach. He envisioned a new dimension which would enhance what was already in place in the educative system offered in Piedmont and in Turin in particular.<sup>92</sup> When it came to the education of the young, Don Bosco was not a theorist, but rather an effective educator. He was at the forefront of all that he perceived as ‘educational’ and as a means from which the young could gain to better their human and intellectual development. However, for Don Bosco ‘education’ meant ‘Christian education’ and could not see it in any other way. Being a priest-educator, he saw Christianity as the way to form and educate the young for life. Religion – a term often used by him to mean Catholicism – was inseparable from education.

The theological vision of education which pertains to Don Bosco is the vision based on the virtues and the sacraments. Remembering with hindsight the primordial inception of the Salesian Society, he places ‘catechism’ at the forefront, confirming that the poor and abandoned

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90. *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855. The Autobiography of St. John Bosco*, trans. Daniel Lyons, with notes and commentary by Eugenio Ceria, Lawrence Castelveccchi, and Michael Mendl (New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications, 1989), 182. Henceforth, MO.

91. Pietro Braido, *Prevenire non reprimere: il sistema educativo di Don Bosco* (Roma: LAS, 2006), 189-190.

92. For an outlook of the social and educational reforms in Piedmont in the eighteen hundreds, see Lenti, *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*, 3: 59-76.

young people were in need of a Christian education.<sup>93</sup> In the first General Chapter of the neo Congregation, this aim is repeated with a certain emphasis: “The Salesian Congregation began in Turin in the year 1841 with the activity of Catechism for young boys who were most abandoned.”<sup>94</sup>

His theological vision of Christian education molded his concept of his spiritual accompaniment. This vision had an ultimate aim, that is, to help the accompanied person to arrive at an intimate relation with God. In spiritual accompaniment, this relationship with God implies that the individual discovers the Divine image imprinted on him or her. In doing so, one not only arrives at personal holiness and Christian perfection but also at achieving salvation. The historical context, in which Don Bosco lived, was permeated by the zeal for the salvation of souls; it was at the center of the apostolic action of the Church and of the Catholic education of his time.<sup>95</sup>

This zeal for the salvation not only became for Don Bosco the ideal of the Congregation founded by him, but it became the one and necessary thing, which guided all his pastoral activity. There is an intimate connection between Don Bosco’s spiritual accompaniment and the salvation of the young. In his accompanying, the young, Don Bosco saw a journey that would lead to his salvation and that of the young under his care. What did Don Bosco perceive and meant when he desired the salvation of the young? When he came to Turin, Don Bosco saw the adverse effects that

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93. Bosco, *Breve notizia sullo scopo della Pia Società Salesiana*, 1, in OE 32 [1]. The same aim is repeated in his *Breve notizia sullo scopo della Pia Società Salesiana e dei suoi cooperatori*, 1, in OE 36 [1].

94. Bosco, *Deliberazioni del Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1877*, 6, in OE 29 [382]. “La Congregazione Salesiana ebbe il suo primo cominciamento in Torino l’anno 1841 coll’opera del Catechismo ai fanciulli più abbandonati.”

95. As Braido states, it was the “great affair” which reflected an apostolic spirituality which saw salvation as precisely a Christian spiritual success, as it were, in the present and for all eternity. See Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani*, 1:92.

a huge, industrious city like the capital of Piedmont, could have on the young, especially those who spiritually unaccompanied.<sup>96</sup>

It was in this distressing particular situation of young people that were poor and abandoned, that he saw a vulnerability that many times led them astray and away from their Catholic roots.<sup>97</sup> In all his pastoral activity and ministry, in all his writings and intentions, the salvation of the young remained the main, underlying factor. In his exposition on the Oratory founded by him, Don Bosco states that what led him to found the Oratory was precisely the 'poor and abandoned young' of Turin.

Also, those most vulnerable amongst them, many of whom were strangers, to the city, if shown paternal assistance, would have easily avoided any wrongdoing. Keeping this aim in mind, in 1841 I started the Oratories, that is, open spaces for recreation where, especially on festive days, the poor and abandoned young boys could gather.<sup>98</sup>

Don Bosco's perception of poor and abandoned young people essentially urged him to make their salvation as his major endeavor. This perception also reflected in the intent of the Congregation founded by him.

The aim of the Salesian Society is the Christian perfection of its members and its charitable, spiritual and material endeavors towards the young, especially those who are poor. It also endeavors in the educa-

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96. Braido further states that Don Bosco, on coming to the city of Turin for his studies at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*, could observe the distressing situation in which the young, especially the poor and the abandoned, lived in. See Braido, *Prevenire non reprimere*, 186.

97. His choice for the 'poor abandoned' young people was a fundamental choice. In his conflict with Marchioness Barolo when she presented him with an 'ultimatum', Don Bosco was very explicit and very clear: "Therefore, while I will continue to do what I can for the Refuge, I will resign from any regular responsibility and devote myself seriously to the care of abandoned youngsters." He had chosen the 'vagabonds', those whom perceived as being in very serious moral danger. To his mind, if he had to abandon his work with those boys, they would go to ruin and will lose their soul. See MO, 251-252.

98. Bosco, *L'oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales: ospizio di beneficenza*, 3-4, in OE 31 [259]-[260]. "Si potè pure convincere che tali giovanetti, se all'epoca della loro liberazione incontravano un animo benevolo che li avesse sorretti, non ricadevano più negli espiati delitti; e molti pericolanti, per lo più forestieri, mercè assistenza paterna, con molta facilità potevano tenersi lontani dal mal fare. Con questo fine nel 1841 ho cominciato l'opera degli Oratorii, ossia dei giardini di ricreazione, dove specialmente nei giorni festivi si radunano fanciulli poveri ed abbandonati."



tion of the young Clergy. ... The first act of charity would be to gather the poor and abandoned young boys to teach them the Catholic religion, especially on festive days.<sup>99</sup>

To be able to do this, Don Bosco also thought of the material aspect that the young might need. The establishing of his homes in the city of Turin would prove to be a haven for those young who were living a precarious and vulnerable life

Frequently we come across completely abandoned young boys for whom any care is useless unless they are within a sheltered environment. Therefore, as far as it is possible, within the new found houses, through means that the Divine Providence places at our disposition, they can be given shelter, lodging, and clothes. Moreover, while they are taught the truths of the Catholic Faith, they would eventually be addressed towards the arts or artisanship.<sup>100</sup>

We shall not enter into the merits of Don Bosco's endeavor towards priestly vocation; it needs to be reminded that he did show particular interest in those young people who were attracted to embrace ecclesiastical or religious state. He also perceived his Congregation as striving for such vocations, and he recommended the particular attention to his Salesians to this aim.

Furthermore, since the young people who aspire to the ecclesial state, continuously face a significant number of grave dangers, this society will offer maximum care to them by nurturing in piety those who show a particular disposition towards study and are of good moral standards. When it comes to accepting young people for studies, those

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99. Bosco, *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales secondo il decreto di approvazione del 3 aprile 1874*, 53-54, in OE 29 [251]-[252]. "Lo scopo della Società Salesiana si è la cristiana perfezione de' suoi membri, ogni opera di carità spirituale e corporale verso dei giovani, specialmente poveri, ed anche l'educazione del giovane Clero. ... Il primo esercizio di carità sarà di raccogliere giovanetti poveri ed abbandonati per istruirli nella santa Cattolica religione, particolarmente ne' giorni festivi."

100. Bosco, *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales*, 54, in OE 29 [252]. "Avvenendo spesso che s'incontrino giovani talmente abbandonati, che per loro riesce inutile ogni cura, se non sono ricoverati, perciò per quanto è possibile si apriranno case, nelle quali coi mezzi, che la divina Provvidenza ci porrà tra le mani, verrà loro somministrato ricovero, vitto e vestito; e mentre s'istruiranno nelle verità della cattolica Fede, saranno eziandio avviati a qualche arte o mestiere."

who are poorer should be given preference, provided they manifest hope in an Ecclesial vocation, precisely because they cannot accomplish their education elsewhere.<sup>101</sup>

He outlines the general aim of the Salesian Society in his *Cenno isotrico*. This document underlines the origins of the Society. In Don Bosco's mind, his Congregation had to address two significant problems, and it had to do this urgently, precisely because of the precocity in which the young found themselves.<sup>102</sup> The concept behind the founding of the Congregation was

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101. Bosco, *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales*, 54, in OE 29 [252]. "Essendo poi molti e gravi i pericoli che corre la gioventù, che aspira allo stato ecclesiastico, questa società si darà massima cura di coltivare nella pietà quelli che mostrassero speciale attitudine allo studio, e fossero commendevoli per buoni costumi. Trattandosi poi di ricevere giovani per gli studi, si accolgano di preferenza i più poveri, perché appunto non potrebbero compiere i loro studi altrove, purché diario qualche speranza di vocazione allo stato Ecclesiastico." Braido says that these young people were not in a precarious or abandoned situation. On the contrary, many of them came from very good families and living a modestly economic life. The danger they faced was not coming from the streets or from abandonment itself, but rather that of losing their vocation because of lack of means. Don Bosco thus makes this too a primary aim of the new Salesian society. See Braido, *Prevenire non reprimere*, 193. However, in our opinion, when Don Bosco says "serious dangers," he was also referring to those risks, moral threats, that surrounded such young people. From his experience at Chieri, he could observe the lack of will in some of the seminarians of his time and the permissiveness by which they led their life. Don Bosco could also observe that some of the young seminarians of his day were attracted more towards the priesthood because they saw in it a career, rather than a mission and a ministry. So apart from the lack of means that the young of his time faced being able to join the seminary, he was also quite aware of other dangers and risks.

102. Don Bosco writes: "Dal 1841 al 1848 si praticavano già alcune regole secondo lo spirito di questa Congregazione, ma non vi era vita comune. In quell'anno (1848) uno spirito di vertigine si levò contro agli ordini religiosi, e contro alle Congregazioni Ecclesiastiche; di poi in generale contro al clero e a tutte le autorità della Chiesa. Questo grido di furore e di disprezzo per la religione traeva seco la conseguenza di allontanare la gioventù dalla moralità, dalla pietà; quindi dalla vocazione allo stato ecclesiastico. Perciò niuna vocazione religiosa e quasi nissuna per lo stato ecclesiastico. ... Quelli che maneggiavano la zappa od il martello dovevano essere scelti a prendere posto glorioso tra quelli da avviarsi allo stato sacerdotale. Ma dove trovar mezzi per gli opportuni locali, per lo studio, pel vestito, vitto, titolo ecclesiastico e più tardi pel riscatto dalla leva militare? L'uomo è misero istrumento della Divina Provvidenza, che nelle mani di Dio, e col suo santo aiuto fa quello che a lui piace. Ho pertanto cominciato a raccogliere alcuni contadini dalle campagne: a questi associai alcuni artigianelli dell' Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales, commendevoli per moralità ed attitudine allo studio. A fine poi di risparmiare qualche spesa e ricordare ognora ai

to form young people who could then, as clerics and religious, assist the young to achieve Christian perfection and eternal salvation.

The salvation of the young was important to Don Bosco because he believed that God had a predilection for the young. God expressed his love by sending his only begotten Son into the world. God loves everyone equally, yet Don Bosco desired to show God's predilection for the young to arouse in them the understanding of human nature before the fall; he urges them to remain in that pre-fall state of grace. The knowledge of God's love for them should prevent them from committing any mortal sin and thus secure their salvation.

Since we are convinced, dear children, that Heaven is our home, we need to address every our action towards this aim. Concerning this, you should be encouraged by the special, particular love that God has for you. Although he loves all men since they are the work of his hands, nevertheless he shows a particular affection towards the young forming in them his delights: *Deliciae meae esse cum filiis hominum*. Therefore, you are the delight and the love of that God who created you.<sup>103</sup>

Moreover, the young are especially loved by God because their soul is much more receptive than the souls of adults, and their hearts are

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novelli allievi la loro bassa condizione, mentre frequentavano le scuole, prestavano assistenza ai loro compagni, facevano scuola serale e catechismi ne' varii oratorii festivi già aperti nella città di Torino. A questi primi se ne aggiunsero altri e poi altri. Difficilmente si possono capire le fatiche, gli stenti, e le altre difficoltà che si dovettero allora sostenere in faccia a tutte le autorità civili e scolastiche. Tuttavia, benedicendo Iddio l' opera sua, nel 1852 si era già riuscito a formare un nucleo di parecchi giovanetti, che in pubblico ed in privato prestandosi a molte opere di carità erano ben veduti da ogni classe di persone." Bosco, *Cenno storico sulla congregazione di San Francesco di Sales e relativi schiarimenti*, 3-4, in OE 25 [233]-[234].

103. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, First Part, Article 2, 10-11, in OE 2 [190]-[191]. "Persuasi, cari figliuoli, che noi siamo tutti creati pel Paradiso, dobbiamo indirizzare ogni nostra azione a questo fine. A questo vi deve muovere specialmente il grande amore che Iddio vi porta. Imperciocchè quantunque egli ami tutti gli uomini; come opera delle sue mani, tuttavia porta una particolare affezione per li giovanetti, formando in essi le sue delizie: *Deliciae meae esse cum filiis hominum*. Dunque voi siete la delizia e l'amore di quel Dio che vi creò."

malleable. The soul of the young has not yet been corrupted, and thus God finds delight in it

He loves you because you are still in time to accomplish good deeds; he loves you because you are still at a simple, humble, innocent age and in general, you have not yet become the sad prey of the infernal enemy. Our Saviour showed similar signs of kindness towards the little children. He claims that whatever is done to the little ones, it is also done unto him.<sup>104</sup>

This particular love of God towards the young should be a sufficient reason so that the young should love him back. Consequently, they had to avoid all that might taint this Divine love. Thus he writes that “if we have established that the Lord loves you so much while you are at this age, how much more then should you match such love with firm intention, and try to do what pleases him by avoiding all that he abhors?”<sup>105</sup> The knowledge that God especially loved young people was enough for Don Bosco to strive harder for their salvation. Salvation was the main endeavor of his spiritual accompaniment. Education, schools, workshops and all the activities surrounding the Oratory were only a means to this end; these complimented his spiritual accompaniment.<sup>106</sup>

### **The Fundamental Dynamics of Spiritual Life Brought Forward by Don Bosco and the Role of the Pastor-Educator**

Don Bosco wrote profusely. However, he did not leave behind any personal documentation that would have given us a glimpse of his

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104. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, Article 2, 11, in OE 2 [191]. “Egli vi ama perchè siete ancora in tempo a fare molte opere buone; vi ama perchè siete in un’età semplice, umile, innocente, ed in generale non ancora divenuti preda infelice del nemico infernale. Simili segni di speciale benevolenza diede altresì il Salvatore per li fanciulli. Dice egli che tutti i benefizi fatti a’fanciulli si considerano fatti a lui medesimo.”

105. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, Article 2, 11, in OE 2 [191]. “Posto che il Signore tanto vi ami nell’età in cui vi trovate, qua le non del e essere il vostro fermo proposito per corrispondergli, procurando di far tutte quelle cose che gli possono piacere, evitando quelle che lo potrebbero disgustare?”

106. Indeed, Father Michael Rua, Don Bosco’s first successor, surmises this thought very clearly. Writing to the Salesians in 1894, Father Rua states that: “Le parole che si leggono nelle armi della nostra Pia Società richiamano alla memoria d’ogni Salesiano lo zelo infaticabile del non mai abbastanza compianto Don Bosco, e le innumerevoli industrie che egli adoperò durante tutta la sua carriera mortale, per attirare anime a Dio. Non diede un passo, non pronunziò parola, non mise mano ad impresa che non

spiritual interiority. Neither did he leave behind a well-organised and well-structured spirituality. However, it is through his writings that we can actually glimpse into and deduct his spiritual traits.

Don Bosco's writings can give us a picture of the fundamental dynamics of spiritual life promoted by him. It bears repeating here that these underlying dynamics can be found especially in the edifying biographies of young personalities that Don Bosco proposed to the young as models.<sup>107</sup> Don Bosco does not hold a place amongst the great spiritual authors. He wrote nothing that could be compared to the two great masterpieces by St. Francis de Sales, for example. One can still find and trace in his writings the salient principles of an ascetical vade mecum that can be compared with those seen in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*.

The fundamental dynamics of spiritual life brought forward by Don Bosco were based on the simplicity of Christian living itself. In Don Bosco's mind, a spiritual itinerary had its beginning in prayer. To be able to live to the full our baptism and be predisposed towards the sanctifying power of grace, prayer is the medium proposed by him to the young. Prayer makes out of a young person a good son and a good Christian. Indeed, "as soon as he wakes up, a good son should make the sign of the Holy Cross, and in doing so, he offers his heart to God."<sup>108</sup> This offering of the heart

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avesse di mira la salvezza della gioventù. Lascio che altri accumulasse tesori, che altri cercasse piaceri, e corresse dietro agli onori; Don Bosco realmente non ebbe a cuore altro che le anime; disse col fatto, non solo colla parola: Da miti animas, caetera tolle." Michele Rua, "Santificazione nostra e delle anime a noi affidate" Letter dated August 24, 1894 in *Lettere circolari di Don Michele Rua ai Salesiani* (Torino: Tip. S.A.I.D. Buona Stampa, 1910), 108-109.

107. Giraudó states that in such biographies, one can retrace the interior itineraries undertaken by these young protagonists and observe the way they were launched on a spiritual journey and entering into an ascetical dimension of their spirituality as they went along – a dimension that introduced them to a profound, intimate relationship with God. Indeed, Giraudó asserts, in these biographies and narratives, one discovers the basic and essential characteristics of the model of holiness proposed to the young by Don Bosco. See Giraudó, *San Giovanni Bosco: Insegnamenti di vita spirituale*, 5.

108. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, Second Part, Particular Excercises of Christian Piety, 76, in OE 2 [256]. "Un buon figliuolo appena svegliato deve fare il segno della s. Croce, indi offerire il suo cuore a Dio."

places the young person in a predisposed position that will open him up to supernatural.

Don Bosco emphasized daily prayers, and he proposed to the young, simple prayers. Prayers were introduced as a spiritual-educative experience that will lead the young to practice other acts of piety. For Don Bosco, there was more value in attitude towards prayer, rather than its length. What was important for him was the way one recited such prayers: heart and mind had to be synchronized so that true devotion could be experienced. He knew that it was not an easy task for young people, especially the ones he worked with, to adapt to prayer and make it an integral part of their lives.

It is quite difficult to make young people savor prayer. Being in an unstable age, they find it hard to concentrate seriously on something; it makes it look as nauseating or as a heavy burden. It is fortunate for that person who from a young age is instructed in prayer and is encouraged to come to like it. The source of divine blessings is always flowing to such young persons.<sup>109</sup>

Prayer, to his mind, needed serious preparation if it intended to reach its aim that is, for it to bear the desired fruit: "To pray fruitfully, one need to prepare oneself, gather one's spirit, imagination, and affections at the feet of our loving Saviour, Jesus Christ. One needs to be inflamed with love for him and to speak to him with faith and hoping for his goodness."<sup>110</sup> One can observe an important aspect in this line of thought immediately, that is, the inclination towards the ascetical. The composure, the predisposition, and affections are an indication of the interiority towards which Don Bosco desired to lead the young. This interior predisposition is highlighted more strongly with the 'inflaming' of one's heart with love towards the

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109. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d'Argenterà*, 113-114, in OE 15 [355]-[366]. "È cosa assai difficile il far prender gusto alla preghiera ai giovanetti. La volubile età loro fa sembrare nauseante ed anche enorme peso qualunque cosa richieda seria attenzione di mente. Ed è una grande ventura per chi da giovanetto è ammaestrato nella preghiera, e ci prende gusto. Per essa è sempre aperta la sorgente delle divine benedizioni."

110. Bosco, *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio*, 13, in OE 2 [83]. "Per pregare con frutto, bisogna prepararsi, bisogna raccogliere lo spirito, l'immaginazione, gli affetti ai piedi del nostro adorabile Salvatore Gesù Cristo, bisogna accendersi d'amore per lui e parlargli con viva fede, tutto sperando dalla sua bontà."

Lord. Prayer is the foundation of spiritual life and is the unifying factor. Furthermore, it inclines the soul of the person towards holiness, and this is what Don Bosco observed in the young Dominic Savio.

The Lord enriched him with various gifts among which the zeal for prayer stood out. His spirit was so accustomed to converse with God that in every place even in the middle of a noisy hustle, he managed to gather his thoughts and lift his heart to God with much affection. Moreover, when he prayed with others, his resemblance was truly that of an angel.<sup>111</sup>

When prayer is effective, it transcends the soul, which in turn yearns to be united with God. Michael Magone seems to have had this transcendent experience. After confession and Holy Communion, he was

so attentive, absorbed and calmed within himself that he seemed insensitive to any external object. His friends, sometimes, on exiting the church and passing close to him, would bump into him; frequently they would even stumble and step on his feet. For him, it was as nothing happened and he would serenely continue his prayer and meditation.<sup>112</sup>

Magone's experience reflects Don Bosco's perception of spiritual life; it was as an ascetical experience. However, it was not a separate, detached-from-the-world sort of asceticism. It was being in the world and yet at the same united with God. There is a movement therefore from the common Christian prayer to a faithful, more efficient prayer.

Prayer becomes effective if it is sustained and enlightened by the Word of God. The Word nurtures the soul and becomes its spiritual nourishment and sustenance. After exhorting them to read some edifying spiritual works, Don Bosco encourages them to read the Word of God.

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111. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*, 62-63, in OE 11 [212]-[213]. "Fra i doni, di cui Dio lo arricchì, era eminente quello del fervore nella preghiera. Il suo spirito era così abituato a conversare con Dio che in qualsiasi luogo, anche in mezzo ai più clamorosi trambusti, raccoglieva i suoi pensieri e con pii affetti sollevava il cuore a Dio. Quando poi si metteva a pregare in comune pareva veramente un angioletto."

112. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele*, 31, in OE 13 [18]. "Talmente attento, raccolto e composto nella persona che pareva insensibile ad ogni cosa esterna. Talvolta i compagni uscendo di chiesa e passandogli vicino lo urtavano; spesso inciampavano ne' suoi piedi ed anche glieli calpestavano. Ma egli come se nulla avvenisse proseguiva tranquillo la sua preghiera o meditazione."

This 'reading' was more of a 'listening' to our Founder's mind. He saw in the sermons, in the elaboration of the Gospel and simple catechism, a way for the young to 'read' the Word of God as explained to them by the pastor-educators.

Given that our body without its food and nourishment becomes ill and will eventually die, the same will occur to our soul if we do not give to our soul its nourishment. The Word of God is the nourishment and the food of our soul, a nourishment which comes to us through sermons, the explanation of the Gospel and catechism. Therefore, see to it that you are on time in Church, to be attentive and to adapt to your state of life that which you deem fit.<sup>113</sup>

In accompanying the young to a prayerful life and a listening life, Don Bosco introduced them to another spiritual dimension: the sacramental

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113. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, First Part, Article 6, 18-19, in OE [198]-[199]. "Siccome poi il nostro corpo senza' cibo diviene infermo e muore, lo stesso avviene dell'anima nostra se non le diamo il suo cibo. Nutrimento e cibo dell'anima nostra è la parola cioè le prediche, la spiegazione del Vangelo e il catechismo. Fatevi pertanto grande premura di portarvi a tempo debito alla Chiesa, standovi colla massima attenzione, e procurate di applicare per voi quelle cose che fanno pel vostro stato." In the *Regolamento* for the Oratory, Don Bosco gives various indications and ideas about the themes to be chosen for the preaching of sermons that would be delivered to the young. "1. La materia delle Prediche e delle Istruzioni morali deve essere scelta e adattata alla gioventù, e per quanto si può, essere mischiata di esempi, di similitudini, di apologhi. 2. Gli esempi si ricavano dalla Storia Sacra, dalla Storia Ecclesiastica, dai santi Padri, o da altri accreditati autori. Ma si fuggano i racconti che possono eccitare il ridicolo sulle verità della fede. Le similitudini poi piacciono assai, ma bisogna che siano di cose conosciute, o facili a conoscersi dagli uditori; che siano bene studiate, ed abbiano un' applicazione chiara ed adattata agli individui. 3. Si badi che gli esempi devono solamente servire a confermare la verità della fede, le quali devono già essere provate prima. Le similitudini poi devono solamente servire di mezzo per dilucidare una verità provata o da provarsi. Le Prediche si facciano in lingua italiana, ma nel modo più semplice e popolare che sia possibile, e dove ne sia mestieri si usi anche il dialetto della provincia. Non importa che ci siano giovani, ed altri uditori, che comprendano l' italiano elegante; chi capisce un discorso elegante, capisce assai più il popolare, ed anche il piemontese. 4. Le Prediche non devono mai oltrepassare la mezz'ora, perchè il nostro s. Francesco di Sales dice essere meglio che il predicatore lasci desiderio di essere udito e non mai noia. E la gioventù particolarmente ha bisogno, e desidera anche di ascoltare, ma sia usata grande industria perchè non resti mai nè oppressa nè annoiata. 5. Quelli che si degneranno di venire in quest' Oratorio a spiegare la parola di Dio sono caldamente pregati di essere chiari e popolari quanto è possibile; facciano cioè in modo, che in qualsiasi punto del discorso gli uditori capiscano quale virtù sia inculcata, o quale vizio sia biasimato." Bosco, *Regolamento*



life. This life was an important aspect of his spirituality and for the accompaniment of the young. In fact, a sacramental life was the fruit of a devout life. The sacrament of Confession is the excellent means by which both the heart and the mind are purified. The Eucharist, on the other hand, is the means towards Christian perfection. Practicing and participation in a sacramental life, for Don Bosco was fundamental for a spiritual life. This central concept stems from his personal experience as recounted in his Memoirs. Therefore, one's relationship with God through prayer and the sacraments is fundamental to live an authentic spiritual experience.

For the dynamics of spiritual life to be efficient and instill in the young the benefits of such a life, the role of the educator is of the utmost importance. In his spiritual-pedagogical system, Don Bosco saw the role of the priest as an integral part of this process and this accompaniment. In the dynamical relationship between the educator and the young lies the key to a fulfilled, authentic spiritual life.

Besides prayer, charity and patience were two strong foundations of the Salesian spiritual accompaniment. For Don Bosco, these two aspects served as a direction throughout his life as a priest. They are reminiscent of the promise he made to himself, before his priestly ordination.<sup>114</sup> Thus, the educator must be well disposed of in these two characteristics if he desires to accompany the young on their spiritual journey.

Alongside the role of the Director-Superior, Don Bosco places other figures which all become educators who help the young advance in their spiritual endeavors. An interesting characteristic of Salesian spiritual accompaniment is the attentiveness that the pastor-educator needs to possess to identify the young person in most need of accompaniment. The presence of the educator in the midst of the young is essential for their spiritual life. Don Bosco saw this presence as a fundamental dynamic of the spiritual accompaniment of the young. He perceived in it a spiritual

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*dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales per gli esterni*, Second Part, Chapter 8, Themes for Sermons and for Religious Instruction, 39-41, in OE 29 [69]-[71].

114. See MO, 171-172.

and human growth both for the Salesian accompanists and for the young under their care.

Within the Salesian ethos, spiritual accompaniment needs to reflect a paternal, charitable approach on the part of the pastor-educator. Thus, spiritual accompaniment as perceived by Don Bosco needs to arrive at the core, at the heart of the young person who in turn is welcomed, loved, accepted, respected and valued.

### **The Centrality of Charity as Love for God and for Others and as “Loving-Kindness”**

Charity is central to Salesian spirituality. When St. Francis de Sales writes about “genuine, living devotion” he also states that such devotion “presupposes love of God, and hence it is simply true love of God.”<sup>115</sup> However, love for God is not experienced only on a personal level; it must also be practiced towards one’s neighbor. In other words, a person cannot manifest devotion only outwardly; he must also practice and live true devotion interiorly. The Savoyard thus affirms that “a man who does not observe all God’s commandments cannot be held to be either good or devout. To be good he must have charity, and to be devout, in addition to charity he must have great ardour and readiness in performing charitable actions.”<sup>116</sup>

For Don Bosco, charity was at basis of all his actions and of all his spirituality. He believed in the transformative power of charity. Guided by this value Don Bosco urges his own Salesians to practice charity. Only after fraternal charity is practiced, it can then be expressed towards the young. He gives charity a prominent status in the Constitutions published in 1877. He writes that “One cannot love God without also loving one’s neighbour. The precept which obliges us to love God requires of us to love

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115. Francis de Sales, *Introduction*, First Part, Chapter 1: 28.

116. Francis de Sales, *Introduction*, First Part, Chapter 1: 29.

our brothers also.”<sup>117</sup> He instructs his Salesians to avoid any contentions or elements that can divide a community rather than uniting it.

Furthermore, if you love charity, see that you are amiable and meek with various categories of persons. Meekness is the virtue cherished most by Jesus Christ: *discite a me quia mitis sum*. In both your talking to and treating of others, practice kindness, not only with your superiors, but also with everyone and especially with those who in the past have offended you or who at present hold you in contempt. *Charitas omnia sustinet*, charity bears all; hence he who does not want to bear others' faults, will never have true charity.<sup>118</sup>

Each member of the community has the moral obligation to help the other members to obtain salvation. This can be only done through the practice of charity.

Never say ‘his is not my responsibility and I do not want to have anything to do with it.’ This approach was Cain’s reply: *Num custos fratris mei sum ego?* Each one is obliged to save one’s neighbor from ruin. God himself ordered that each one must take care of his akin. *Commendavit unicuique Deus de proximo suo*. Therefore, seek to help all when you can, both in words and in deeds, and especially with prayer. From what has been said, you can see how the virtue of charity is necessary! So practice it, and you will receive abundant heavenly blessings.<sup>119</sup>

There seems to be a build-up in Don Bosco’s words, moving from the core of his Salesian community towards the ministry among the

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117. Bosco, *Regole o costituzioni della società di s. Francesco di sales*, 33, in OE 29, [231]. “Non si può amare Dio senza amare il prossimo. Lo stesso precetto che c’ impone l’ amore verso Dio c’ impone ancora l’ amore verso i nostri fratelli.”

118. Bosco, *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, 35, in OE 29 [233]. “Di più se amate la carità, procurate di essere affabili e mansueti con ogni genere di persone. La mansuetudine è la virtù diletta da Gesù Cristo: *discite a me quia mitis sum*. Nel parlare e nel trattare usate dolcezza non solo coi superiori, ma con tutti, e massimamente con coloro, che per lo passato vi hanno offeso, o che al presente vi mirano di mal occhio. *Charitas omnia sustinet*, la carità sopporta tutto; ond’ è che non avrà mai vera carità, chi non vuol sopportar i difetti altrui.”

119. Bosco, *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, 36, in OE 29 [234]. “Non dite mai, questo non è uffizio mio, non me ne voglio impacciare; questa è la risposta di Caino; il quale disse: *Num custos fratris mei sum ego?* Ciascuno è obbligato, potendo, a salvare il prossimo dalla rovina. Dio comandò che ciascuno debba aver cura del suo simile. *Commendavit unicuique Deus de proximo suo*. Cercate

young. Don Bosco's spiritual accompaniment initiated with his Salesians; subsequently, it moved towards the young.

Don Bosco's exhortation to practice charity to the young is, therefore, on a par with that addressed to his Salesians. In his regulations for the houses, Don Bosco invites the young to practice a virtuous life. He cautions them to be diligent in living the virtues while they were still young. He proposes to them four virtues that they should practice well and among these was charity.<sup>120</sup> The young are exhorted to practice charity towards their companions. True and authentic charity always focuses on the other person and his needs. It is also the basis of a true, genuine friendship, one that envisages the importance of the spiritual well-being of the other person. Therefore, an authentic charity must be devoid of any scandal.

Honour and love your companions as your brothers, and learn to edify each other by setting a good example. Love all mutually, as our Lord tells us, but look out for scandal. He, who through words and conversations, and actions give scandal, is not a friend, but a murderer of the soul.<sup>121</sup>

Don Bosco invites the young to recognize God's love for them. In doing so, they can be able to love others in the same way. Charity guides the young to do good deeds and works.<sup>122</sup>

What was the movement from charity towards loving-kindness? Charity, for Don Bosco, was that theological virtue, revealed by God in the mystery of the Incarnation: God's love incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ through whom all are saved, and all become co-heirs of the Kingdom. Loving-kindness was a reflection of this divine charity,

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pertanto di aiutar tutti quanto potete colle parole e colle opere e specialmente ancora colle orazioni. Da tutto ciò che si è detto ben vedete quanto è necessaria la virtù della carità! Praticatela adunque e ne avrete copiose benedizioni dal cielo.”

120. See Bosco, *Regolamento per le case della Società di s. Francesco di Sales*, Second Part, nr. 7, 64, in OE 29 [160].

121. Bosco, *Regolamento per le case della Società di s. Francesco di Sales*, Chapter 9, articles 1 and 2, 77, in OE 29 [173]. “Onorate ed amate i vostri compagni come altrettanti fratelli, e studiate di edificarvi gli uni gli altri col buon esempi. Amatevi tutti scambievolmente, come dice il Signore, ma guardatevi dallo scandalo. Colui che con parole, discorsi, azioni, desse scandalo, non è un amico, è un assassino dell'anima.”

122. See Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, First Part, Article 2, 11, in OE 2 [191].

embodied in Jesus Christ through his words and actions. Therefore, for Don Bosco charity becomes loving-kindness when translated into a Christ-like attitude and approach.

Don Bosco could still recall the words of the ‘man’ in the dream he had when he was nine years old: “you will win these friends of yours not by blows but by gentleness and love.”<sup>123</sup> He had made this a life program, especially for his life as a priest. In his pre-ordination resolutions, he had written that he would be guided by the “charity and gentleness of St. Francis de Sales.”<sup>124</sup>

Loving-kindness is practiced primarily in one’s duties. We can see how one’s duties interplay with those of another, depending on one’s role within the educational structure. The educator must strive to be respected and loved by the students. It is this transformative love, which will earn him the respect of those in his care. He should do this both in words and in deeds especially in demonstrating that these are “exclusively directed towards the spiritual and temporal well-being of his students.”<sup>125</sup>

The young, on their part, can show their loving-kindness through deeds and duties, rather than through words. In no way did he try to instill in his young people a fear of their pastor-educators-superiors; on the contrary, he urged them to understand that the closer they are to them, the more benefits they will gain for their well-being. Thus, Don Bosco invites the young to look on their superiors with benevolence and loving-kindness. He invites them to keep in mind that whenever they admonish, correct or advise them, they do it for their spiritual and temporal well-

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123. MO, 18.

124. *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, 16 volumes, edited by Diego Borgatello (New Rochelle, NY: Salesiana Publishers, 1965-1988). Vol.1, 385. Henceforth BM followed by volume and page number separated by [:].

125. Bosco, *Regolamento per le case della Società di s. Francesco di Sales*, Preliminary Articles, nr. 2, 15, in OE 29 [111]. “Ognuno procuri di farsi amare se vuole farsi temere. Egli conseguirà questo grande fine se colle parole, e più ancora coi fatti, farà conoscere che le sue sollecitudini sono dirette esclusivamente al vantaggio spirituale e temporale de’ suoi allievi.”

being. The young should demonstrate outwardly respect towards the superiors and their obedience to them should be prompt and joyful.<sup>126</sup>

One further manner through which the young can show loving-kindness towards their superiors or accompanists is by opening their heart to them. Don Bosco urges them to this with a sense of freedom, since in those who care about them and their spiritual well-being would surely find a father who desires nothing but their happiness.<sup>127</sup> Loving-kindness also becomes the acceptance of the person of the educator and his appeals aimed at the education of the young.

Don Bosco also instilled in his young people the sense of great responsibility towards each other. The young were urged to avoid any companions who have no respect towards their pastor-educators. In his accompaniment of the young, Don Bosco saw the importance to educate them towards respecting each other. Exterior deeds and actions compliment an authentic spiritual life. Furthermore, our Founder helped the young to grasp the notion that loving-kindness and charity are not separated from each other; the former is a reflection of the latter and verified in the respect they show towards their companions.

Guard yourselves against taunting your companions about their physical or spiritual defects. It might happen that what you taunt today in others, tomorrow the Lord might permit that the same thing will happen to you. True charity dictates that we should patiently bear other people's defects and to easily forgive when someone offends us, but we must never offend others, especially those who are inferior to us.<sup>128</sup>

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126. See Bosco, *Regolamento per le case della Società di s. Francesco di Sales*, Second Part, Chapter 8, articles 5 and 6, 76, in OE 29 [172].

127. See Bosco, *Regolamento per le case della Società di s. Francesco di Sales*, Second Part, Chapter 8, articles 7 and 8, 76, in OE 29 [172].

128. See Bosco, *Regolamento per le case della Società di s. Francesco di Sales*, Second Part, Chapter 9, articles 4-5, 77-78, in OE 29 [173]-[174]. "Perciò guardatevi dal deridere i vostri compagni pei loro difetti corporali o spirituali. Ciò che oggi deridete negli altri, può darsi che domani permetta il Signore che avvenga a voi. La vera carità comanda di sopportare con pazienza i difetti altrui e perdonare facilmente quando taluno ci offende, ma non dobbiamo mai oltraggiare gli altri, specialmente quelli che sono a noi inferiori."

## The Approaches Towards a Formative Journey

The formative journey as proposed by Don Bosco was not meant to be undertaken by the educators on one side and the students on the other. It was a formative journey undertaken together, in collaboration with each other. The formation of the young was as important as the formation of the educators. This dual importance was essential since the main aim of the spiritual journey aimed at the salvation of the soul. Therefore, the right attitudes and dispositions both by the educators and by the students were essential to open up to this formative journey.

This formative journey was primarily founded on those contents that Don Bosco saw as the basis for the character building and development in both the educator and the student. To his mind, Don Bosco saw this development taking place and progressing, only if one is ready to obey. Obedience for our Founder was a prerequisite of all that will follow; without obedience, one cannot immerse oneself in the Lord's work, in this case, the education of the young. Therefore, for the adult, obedience is also the way towards personal Christian maturity. It is in the personal maturity that the Salesian imitates Christ in his self-offering to the Father and "who practiced obedience in everything, even in difficult situations, until death; and since we are seeking the glory of God, then we too must obey to the point of giving our life."<sup>129</sup>

Obedience was also an important characteristic of the formation of the young. Submission towards the superiors is not submissiveness in a negative sense, but rather openness towards them on the part of young who see adults those who have at heart their spiritual well-being. Obedience leads the young to the fulfillment of their duties and obligations.<sup>130</sup>

In the Salesian spiritual accompaniment, morality was of fundamental importance since it reflected the intentions of both the accompanist and

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129. Bosco, *Regole o costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales*, 21, in OE 29 [219]. "Che la praticò nelle cose, anche più difficili, fino alla morte; e qualora tanto volesse la gloria di Dio, dobbiamo noi pure obbedire fino a dar la vita. See also Bosco, *Regole o costituzioni della Società di San Francesco di Sales*, Chapter 3, articles 1 and 2, 57, in OE 29 [255].

130. We shall elaborate on the necessity of obedience on the part of the young and on the fulfillment of duties, further on in our work.

the accompanied. The approach towards morality was a favorable one that facilitated the formative journey, firstly for the Salesian and secondly for the student. One of the aims, after all, of his spiritual accompaniment, was precisely to lead to a good moral life. It bears repeating here, that the accompanist must possess what he would like to pass on to the accompanied. He must, therefore, be of good morals before accompanying the young to help them achieve the same goal.

If therefore we would like to promote morality and virtues among our students, we should first possess and practice morality ourselves and be sure that it reflects in our works, in our words and conversations. We should not expect from those who are dependent on us to practice any virtuous deed if this is neglected by us.<sup>131</sup>

The practice of acts of piety, were, according to Don Bosco, the main sustenance for sound and good morals among the members of the Congregation.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, in many ways, if not directly, Don Bosco associated good morals with chastity or with purity. The Salesian-accompanier had to be strong in conserving himself in such a virtue on which good morals were founded. Don Bosco advises those who would like to join the Salesian congregation to be prudent in their decision, particularly when chastity was concerned.<sup>133</sup> To safeguard his chastity and

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131. E[M] 4, Letter 1903, 216. "Se pertanto noi vogliamo promuovere la moralità e la virtù ne' nostri allievi, dobbiamo possederla noi, praticarla noi, e farla risplendere nelle nostre opere, ne' nostri discorsi, ne mai pretendere dai nostri dipendenti, che esercitino un atto di virtù da noi trascurato."

132. See Bosco, *Deliberazioni del Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana 1877*, Specification 3, Chapter 2, 48, in OE 29 [424].

133. See Bosco, *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, To Salesian Members, Chastity, 31, in OE 29 [229]. Concerning 'particular friendships' Don Bosco urged the Salesians to avoid such friendships since they had to love all, without any distinction. With reference to chastity, Don Bosco affirms in the Constitutions that he who wishes to involve himself with the young and with their education, must excel in virtues especially in the virtue of chastity. In fact, he who has serious doubts about keeping intact this virtue, in words, actions and even in thought, should desist from applying to enter in the Salesian congregation. See Bosco, *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, Chapter 5, On the vow of Chastity, nr. 1-2, 60, in OE 29 [258]. Thus, the first and foremost responsibility stands firmly with the Salesian educator. The Salesian should safeguard this virtue through frequent confession and communion; faithfully adhering to the advices and counsels of his confessor; avoiding idleness and through the mortification of the senses; frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament and through constant prayer.



his morality, the Salesian should refrain from having personal friendships, especially with the young.<sup>134</sup> The only friendship that they should uphold is a spiritual friendship aimed at helping the young to obtain personal holiness.

Concerning the morality among the students, Don Bosco says that its success is a reflection of the progress it has among the Salesians. He argues that the young receive that which one offers to them.<sup>135</sup> He encourages the young to practice modesty and to take it as a serious factor in their formative journey, especially if they desired to obtain Christian perfection. Modesty led the young to live a virtuous life. It also served the purpose to keep the young always alert against the entrapments of evil. These indications all aimed at preserving the young from any harm that they may incur on themselves or others and especially spiritual or moral harm. In the Salesian spiritual accompaniment of the young, these indications or rules could be seen as a means of educating, body, mind and soul.

In this formation itinerary, Don Bosco saw the importance of the collaboration between educators and students. Each part had moral obligations and duties and observing one's tasks, and responsibilities towards one's state of life and others were the crux of this itinerary, even where it concerned the personal morality and that of others. This otherness became a foundation of his spiritual accompaniment. When one part

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See Bosco, *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, Chapter 5, On the vow of Chastity, nr. 6, 61, in OE 29 [259]. As to morality, Don Bosco urged the members of the Congregation to be very cautious in accepting anyone who desired to join the Congregation. The delicate work among the young was of the utmost importance. Don Bosco could not put his young at risk neither was he going to permit that the Congregation would be tarnished by some ill-reputed member. See Bosco, *Deliberazioni del Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana 1877*, Specification 3, Chapter 1, 44, in OE 29 [420].

134. See Bosco, *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, To Salesian Members, Chastity, 31, in OE 29 [229].

135. See Bosco, *Deliberazioni del Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana 1877*, Specification 3, Chapter 3, Morality among the Students, 50, in OE 29 [426]. In a circular letter to the Salesians, Don Bosco insists on this crucial point. He writes that if the person who is leading others does not observe rules and regulations, he should not pretend that his dependents will observe that which he himself neglects or disregards. See E [C], 2, Letter 1127, 319-321. "Se chi presiede agli altri non è osservante, non può pretendere che i suoi dipendenti facciano quello che egli trascura; altrimenti gli si risponderrebbe: *medice, cura te ipsum*." See also E[M] 4, Letter 1867, 177-180.

eliminates the other from the equation, then there is a breakdown in the aim of the Salesian educational system. This breakdown, especially if self-inflicted, will sever the communication and the relationship dimensions which are essential in a Salesian environment. The spiritual and formative accompaniment of the young progresses in a togetherness in which the otherness of the educator and the student remains unique.