

Salesian Pedagogy of Choice and Vocation: Evolution, Revision and Proposals

Michal Vojtáš, Salesian Pontifical University (Rome, Italy)



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Abstract: This article approaches the theme of Salesian pedagogy of life choice and vocation on three levels of argumentation. The first level synthesizes some fundamental modifications in Salesian pedagogy of vocation that originate from the post Vatican II youth ministry model. The Salesian Congregation switched from a traditional “state of life” choice education to an approach spinning around unconditional acceptance and personalized planning of life. The consequences of these choices will be interpreted within a changed postmodern context where we point out the need of a new approach suitable for the needs of millennials and digital natives. The second level of the study outlines a set of permanent inspirational pedagogical principles. These are referring to the experience of Don Bosco that constitutes a base for every further update of salesian education theory. The third level offers strategic proposals for the actual education of life choices and vocation is linked to the challenges of the postmodern fluid societies; to the Salesian pedagogical principles of the past and to a transformational model of education, ministry and vocation.

1. Vocation: a problematic “outsider” in the post Vatican II Youth Ministry

The Salesian pedagogy of vocation is the area where one can perceive in an exemplar way the Vatican II change of paradigm. From a traditional education that offered instruments for the choice of everyone’s “state of life” (secular or consecrated), the Salesian Congregation passed to a model that emphasized personal freedom, unconditional acceptance and personalized plan of life. This change was situated in a context of crisis of the old vocational logic that reinforced the radicalism of the new adopted logic. Therefore, we start with the depiction of the 1960s context from a vocational point of view.

1.1. Vocational crisis as a context for interpretation

Rereading the considerations on vocation in the Salesian world around the Second Vatican Council, one immediately realizes that the context of a crisis of consecrated vocations in the Salesian Congregation is decisive for elaborating arguments and educational proposals. We find ourselves in a problematic context connected with the beginnings of a real demographic crisis of Salesian personnel dating back to 1963.¹ The reading of the crisis extent and causes evolves with history and also depends on personal views. The Rector Major Renato Ziggiotti expresses his concern in this way:

¹ About the alarming number of the abandonments see R. ZIGGIOTTI, *Lettera del Rettor Maggiore*, in «Atti del Consiglio Superiore» 44 (1963) 233, 13 and *Lettera del Direttore Spirituale*, in «Atti del Consiglio Superiore» 44 (1963) 234, 16-20.

The loss of vocations is alarming and it seems to me right to cry out the warning to all of you in the Houses, so that you commit yourselves to apply this first vital apostolate: that is, to put all the Houses in condition that our young Brothers are cared for and defended from mundane contamination, find an environment of piety, of loving kindness, of fraternal union, of sincere zeal in all the Brothers.²

At the beginning of the 1960s this theme had already become a topic of discussion, but the causes were sought within a framework of traditional values: the worldliness that infects the religious, the personal weakness and the lack of familiarity in Salesian houses.³ Around the end of the 1970s, the number of Salesians was reduced of about a quarter and the vocational crisis in the Salesian context had spread in different ways: the rapid drop of the new entries; the abandonment of Salesian life during formation and, finally, the growing requests for priests' secularization.⁴ The questions are obviously to be asked with more insistence and the causes must be sought with more radicality. The Rector Major Luigi Ricceri states:

There is a thought disturbing my soul - allow me this confidence - and that has long since resurfaced. I am surprised by these questions: why do so many Brothers - it is hard to ascertain - have taken the vows and have walked along the path of the priesthood until they have reached their goal, without having been called by the Lord and without having the required qualities? Why did others, whose vocation was not legitimate to doubt, have subsequently lost their way and left the narrow path of religious life? Why very gifted Brothers, who are not lacking and cannot miss in a Congregation so rich in grace, have lost their enthusiasm, have become like extinct volcanoes, or - attracted by other mirages - have passed to the life of local churches?⁵

A good summary of vocational crisis's causes, although contextualized above all in Europe, was made during the Salesian Talks of 1981 in Barcelona. The introduction of Francis Desramaut reveals a choice of the symptomatic theme: «The vocational crisis was a reason enough to discuss the problem of Salesian vocations in the contemporary world».⁶ Subsequently, the author makes a list of the sociological and cultural elements that underlie the "new values" which imply a crisis of vocational identity: the egalitarian tendencies that question hierarchies and obedience; the consumerist flooding with material goods that casts doubt on poverty and contemplation; the fascination for sex that calls into question consecrated virginity; a deterministic universe that excludes the action of God-Providence.⁷ Desramaut concludes his analysis with a pertinent and evocative quote from the Dominican Jean-Marie Tillard:

For the secularized world, which the religious theoretically tries to oppose, but which in reality has allowed to enter his soul (to open up "to the present century"), the sacred bond with God makes no sense. When one goes to negotiate with this world, the holy compass of religious life is thrown into the sea. The ivy of material values is eaten by the tree of spiritual values. The norms and the structures destined to serve the latter, and which zealous reformers establish, hang on the void. Today more than ever it is appropriate to speak of "crisis of vocations".⁸

² *Ibidem.*

³ The pre-conciliar model of vocational pedagogy was linked to the structure of the aspirantate who, above all in Rinaldi's times, tried to reproduce the original environment of Valdocco: the familiarity between superiors and boys and the ideal tension towards the Salesian youth mission. The aspirantate model succeeded in its mission as long as they held together ideal motivations, family spirit, variety of engaging initiatives, spaces of free protagonism (such as the Companies, missionary and other groups), animation involvement among the companions, together with community work and personalized educational, formative and spiritual accompaniment.

⁴ The number of Salesians in 1968 was 21,492 while in 1978 it reached 16,439. The average number of novices in the decade 1958-67 was 1218 while in the decade 1968-77 it reached 625. See M. WIRTH, *Da Don Bosco ai nostri giorni. Tra storia e nuove sfide (1815-2000)*, LAS, Roma 2000, pp. 531-532.

⁵ L. RICCERI, *Abbiamo bisogno di esperti di Dio. La direzione spirituale personale*, in «Atti del Consiglio Superiore» 57 (1976) 281, 894.

⁶ F. DESRAMAUT, *Introduzione*, in ID – M. MIDALI, *La vocazione Salesiana*. Colloqui sulla vita salesiana Barcelona (Spagna) 23-28 agosto 1981, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1982, p. 6.

⁷ See F. DESRAMAUT, *Problemi di identità salesiana*, in ID. – MIDALI, *La vocazione Salesiana*, pp. 55-56.

⁸ *Idem.*, p. 57 which incorporates the arguments of J.M.R. TILLARD, *Devant Dieu et pour le monde. Le projet des religieux*, Cerf, Paris 1974 and J. ROVIRA, *L'impegno definitivo nella vita religiosa. Il perché di una crisi*, in «Vita Religiosa»

The following two paragraphs analyze some basic tendencies which constitute paradigms guiding the development of Salesian Youth Ministry coordinated by Juan Edmundo Vecchi from 1978 onwards. The major trend of reflection, on which the authors agree, is the change of perspective from the tradition of the past to an open future to be planned. On the operational level, on the other hand, we move from attitudes of fidelity and discipline to the creative and authentic actions of a (finally) free subject.

1.2. *From universal values of tradition to personalized plans towards the future*

Salesian pre-council education, especially in the twenty years of Pietro Ricaldone's rule, was guided by the idea of "fidelity to Saint Don Bosco",⁹ which was translated into many rules and hundreds of concrete prescriptions that explained "what Don Bosco would do today". The task of the educators was to implement Salesian values faithfully with standardized procedures and activities. Furthermore, values are universally valid and, at least in principle, do not decline according to contexts, cultures and people.¹⁰ Pre-conciliar vocational pedagogy also moved to this direction and was substantially perceived around the choice between two stages of life: consecration and the world.¹¹ The decision between the two alternatives was consistent with the concept of St. Thomas of the *electio* which is «*nihil aliud quam duobus propositis alterum alteri praeoptare*».¹²

With the Council, the vision of vocational pedagogy is reversed in different ways. In pre-conciliar times, the fact of privileging the faithful reproduction of culture, values and procedures tended to almost automatically marginalize the critical attitude with respect to the past and the present. In a broader sense, it is possible to say that in the 1960s there was a change of emphasis from a faithful and often repetitive education to a critical approach to pedagogy facing the future. Juan Edmundo Vecchi expresses it in a brief summary: «Over the last 40 years we must notice a substantial change: education as a projection towards the future. A dimension that was less important at the beginning».¹³ Egidio Viganò in the context of the new evangelization elaborates the same perception in this sense:

The mentality being inculcated by the developing signs of the times is prevalently directed to the future. [...] In projecting towards the future is expressed the deep truth of man; his natural task is to work for the transformation of the world. [...] It could be said that the concept of "history" that appeals at the present day refers more to the future than to the past: more than memory (which will always be useful as guidance), history is being considered as a project to be drawn up and realized; we want to feel ourselves to be active agents bringing about a better and more humane future. [...] The feeling is growing that there is need for continual renewal. Much importance is given to concrete commitment and practical ability; analysis and development go ahead, and so a new relationship comes into being between theory and practice. In fact, the primacy of the future is linked with this centrality of the practical. A novel perspective of this kind is not to be considered as something superficial.¹⁴

The vocational pedagogy thus passes from considerations around the concepts of choice between the defined states of life implying a list of indications and contraindications for each of them, to the *ability to plan the future*. In spite of Viganò's theologically rigorous equilibrium and of

1979, pp. 57-124.

⁹ *Fidelity to Saint Don Bosco* is a title of Ricaldone's famous programmatic stenna for the year 1935.

¹⁰ See e.g. the application letter that exceeds two hundred pages of applications and regulations: P. RICARDONE, *La visita canonica alle case salesiane*, in «Atti del Consiglio Superiore» 20 (1939) 94, 3-220.

¹¹ For a more in-depth look at the pre-conciliar period see M. VOJTÁŠ, *Sviluppi delle linee pedagogiche della Congregazione Salesiana*, in A. GIRAUDDO et al (Eds.), *Sviluppo del carisma di Don Bosco fino alla metà del secolo XX*. Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Storia Salesiana Roma, 19-23 novembre 2014. Relazioni, LAS, Roma, 2016, pp. 221-24.

¹² The election is "nothing but prefer one of the two alternatives". See T. DE AQUINO, *Quaestiones disputate de veritate*, q. 22, a. 15, c. 1. See the use of this concept in vocational pedagogy: H. THOMAE, *Dinamica della decisione umana*, PAS Verlag, Zürich 1964 e M.O. LLANOS, *Servire le vocazioni nella Chiesa. Pastorale vocazionale e pedagogia della vocazione*, LAS, Roma 2005, 278-29.

¹³ J.E. VECCHI, *I guardiani dei sogni con il dito sul mouse. Educatori nell'era informatica*, Rettore Maggiore dei Salesiani di Don Bosco intervistato da Carlo di Cicco, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1999, p. 21.

¹⁴ E. VIGANÒ, *The New Evangelization*, in «Acts of the General Council» 70 (1989) 331, 8-9.

Vecchi's careful and realistic approach to methodological realizations, the widespread mentality was moving through simplified schemes and with a logic of discontinuity between the pre- and post-council period, as well as between the pre-conciliar tradition and post-conciliar planning. The Pastoral Theology Lexicon of 1972, edited by Karl Rahner, clearly reflects the post-conciliar atmosphere and explains the use of planning: «Through technology and science today man is able to plan the environment and society, he can manipulate and change them [...] These means are also available to the Church, so that it can consciously exercise a plan of the future and develop its own strategy».¹⁵ With the adoption of social planning in the Church Youth Ministry, one can perceive the enthusiasm of the age, the confidence in science and the accentuation of the necessary practical changes that waited too long to be realized because of the pre-conciliar attitude of closure towards modernity.¹⁶

Moreover, the Salesian identity of the past has been questioned both for the needs of an *accommodata renovatio* of the Council and for the historical-critical studies promoted by the young generation of Salesians who considered the traditional Salesian narratives too triumphalist, full of historical inaccuracies and no longer suited to a changing world. Even if one wanted to go back to the old logic of the state of life choice, that past "state" was no more present. Desramaut also reveals this by talking about Salesian identity problems:

Authority is no longer seen as an intermediary between God and oneself. Resounding or not, a change of mentality in the religious world has occurred. This change was more or less integrated into the new structures established after Second Vatican Council. "Are we still religious?" This is what enlightened Salesians surprised by the current forms of obedience ask themselves.¹⁷

If we consider the change of perspective towards the future simultaneously with the global rethinking of Salesian identity and the adoption of planning, the reason of the "personal life project" becomes understandable as the preferred way of thinking about vocational pedagogy. Starting from the GC19, which took place during the Council and introduced the concepts of decentralization and structures on a human scale, personalization has assumed ever greater force both theoretically and practically.

Later, in the 1990s, the personal programmes of education to the faith were introduced. As an example of thought in this line, it is useful to consider Jacques Schepens's reflection which considers individualization the key to post Vatican II update of Salesian education. His pedagogical proposal revolves around the emotional, rational, and moral-existential individualization of young people's life. In the last dimension that revolves around faith and the meaning of life, the author arises a fundamental question: "How can the 'I' in the utterance 'I believe' grow and become a personal self?" It is revealing that the accent spins mostly around the concept of individualization. We doubt that the author's proposal, leaving faith in a horizon of self-transcendence, mystery and symbolism without a personal call from God, will help the young to become a full-fledged personality.¹⁸

1.3. *From the virtue of disciplined fidelity to the attitude of creative authenticity*

In addition to the change in perspective mentioned above, which passes from the universal tradition to a personal life project facing the future, there is a profound change in life attitude. From the priority of fidelity and religious discipline seen in a rational-voluntarist point of view, we pass to

¹⁵ N. HEPP, *Piano pastorale*, in RAHNER et al. (Eds.), *Dizionario di Pastorale*, Queriniana, Brescia 1979, p. 567. Noteworthy is the fact that in the bibliography the author offers only two volumes on "community work" (*Gemeinwesenarbeit*) lacking references in pastoral theology.

¹⁶ See the abundant data collected during the preparation of the Special General Chapter in GCS – COMMISSIONI PRECAPITOLARI CENTRALI, *Ecco ciò che pensano i salesiani della loro congregazione oggi*. "Radiografia" delle relazioni dei Capitoli Ispettoriali speciali tenuti in gennaio-maggio 1969, 4 vols., Istituto Salesiano Arti Grafiche, Castelnuovo D. Bosco (AT) 1969.

¹⁷ DESRAMAUT, *Problemi di identità salesiana*, in ID. – MIDALI, *La vocazione Salesiana*, p. 55.

¹⁸ See J. SCHEPENS, *Die Pastoral in der Spannung: Zwischen der christlichen Botschaft und dem Menschen von heute*, Don Bosco, München 1994 and ID. – R. BURGGRÆVE, *Emotionalität, Rationalität und Sinngebung als Faktoren christlicher Werterziehung. Eine Interpretation des pädagogischen Erbes Don Boscos für heute*, Don Bosco, München 1999.

an attitude of creativity in the search for personal authenticity perceived in an emotional-sentimental key.

The change of attitude goes with the crisis of the traditional Salesian boarding schools (and aspirantates as well) that led to openness to other educational environments such as oratories and parishes. In the 1960s the Salesian boarding school seemed to have entered a crisis both in the perception of the Salesians and the students.¹⁹ The General Chapter 19 has therefore upgraded the oratory in an opening key: «Special attention must be given to the original work of the “festive oratory”, fittingly brought up to date and reshaped in name and structure, so that it may attract and serve as many young people as possible, with a variety of subsidiaries (youth centers, clubs, various associations, courses, night-schools)».²⁰

In the next paragraphs, it is affirmed that: «The oratory should not limit itself to the crowd of young people who just come there, but it must become a pastoral instrument of approach to all young people opening out in this spirit of missionary dialogue, to all the youth of the parish, area, city – to include those of no faith at all».²¹

For a century the boarding school was the natural context of Preventive System’s formulations in its schedules, contents and roles. The crisis of the paradigmatic environment made the logic of the underlying discipline also fall into crisis.²² The opening to new environments and especially to the oratory, in an atmosphere that emphasized youth groups and movements, has instead favored the logic of creativity and authenticity. The consequences in the vocational field were immediate because no one thought of a vocational pedagogy outside the boarding school, the natural habitat of the aspirants, novitiates, students and also of the traditional educational activity. Stella states about the importance of the boarding school model:

It was responsible in no small measure for the consolidation of Don Bosco’s institution. His boarding high schools ensured a population of students less transient and more organizable than the population of the oratories. His schools took their place among the educational institutions specializing in private high-school education just as those institutions were being demanded by the milieu. This ensured greater growth, a larger range of action, and more solid support. There were less creative demands on these schools than on the Festive Oratories; but they served as so many seedbeds from which to draw new recruits into the family of his educators.²³

In addition to the implications of the cultural change and the restructuring of the works, there are important reflections from the Special General Chapter (SGC) which deal with the binomial fidelity-creativity. The Chapter felt the need to give a criterion for renewal, to regulate the relationship between the return to sources and adaptation to the changed conditions of times. This is well described in the formula: “dynamic fidelity” lived by Don Bosco «faithful and dynamic, docile and creative, firm but at the same time flexible».²⁴

Despite the bipolarity of the expression “dynamic fidelity”, which could at first sight be interpreted as a balance of two poles: tradition and progress, the SGC document clearly expresses its preference for dynamism and not for fidelity. With a clear intention to leave the boarding schools and the limitations of the Salesian tradition, still perceived in a Ricaldonian key, the Chapter defines fidelity in a unique way that blends willingness to change with a still traditional mentality: «The true

¹⁹ 72% of the ex-students of the Houses of all Italy preferred the education in the family from good parents and normally gifted with respect to collegial education also well-organized with good educators. Among the most negative aspects of Salesian education in the boarding schools the most mentioned one are: unrealistic preparation for life, repression of the personality, exaggerated compulsory religious practices, excessive discipline and unpreparedness for the relations between the sexes. See P.G. GRASSO, *La Società Salesiana tra il passato e l'avvenire. Risultati di un'inchiesta tra ex allievi salesiani*, Edizione extra-commerciale riservata, [s.e.], Roma 1964, pp. 45-152.

²⁰ GC19 (1965), p. 103.

²¹ GC19 (1965), p. 137.

²² For the different logics of Salesian educational environments see the chapter on “educational institutions” in P. BRAIDO, *Prevention, not Repression. Don Bosco’s Educational System*, Kristu Jyoti, Bengaluru 2013, pp. 335-359.

²³ P. STELLA, *Don Bosco. Life and Work*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle NY, 2005, p. 127.

²⁴ SGC (1972), n. 197.

Salesian attitude will therefore be one of fidelity to the pastors of the Church [*traditional mindset*] so that while retaining our Salesian identity we can even sacrifice some of our cherished family traditions [*anti-traditional mindset*].²⁵ At the end of the paragraph on loyalty the concept is reconfirmed by the following:

No unnecessary limitation need be feared in the true apostolic dynamism already in action. On the contrary, fidelity to the work of Don Bosco to undertake works as yet untried to bring out his burning zeal which forced him to choose the most advanced posts whenever it was a case of the good of the young and to take risks with courage even to the point of appearing rash.²⁶

The creativity that was perceived in the 60s and 70s in terms of openness of structures and pastoral mentality has subsequently taken a less institutional, more subjective and emotional direction. From the obligations of a pre-conciliar “religion” perceived as moralizing and heavy, we move on to the concept of “spirituality” that is more universalistic but also more general. The task of the educator is above all to “incarnate” the message and to accept unconditionally the young person. In the educational-pastoral proposals linked to the theory of animation, we can find an “integral anthropology” which encompasses the religious-spiritual dimension of man in the coordinates between mysticism, subjectivism and science.

In the basic volume on cultural animation, Mario Pollo argues from the minimalist conception of Ludwig Wittgenstein on the limits of knowledge: «There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical [...] Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent».²⁷ The religious dimension is understood according to Pollo as the inexpressible, as a symbolism of non-linguistic nature and animation would be that “existential communication”, considered as an instrument that «succeeds in this difficult, impossible operation»²⁸, that is to express the inexpressible. However, in concrete terms, the author states: «I do not know how it happens so by accepting Wittgenstein’s invitation [...], I, of what you cannot talk about, I have already tried to talk too much, so now I am silent».²⁹

In the Salesian field, Riccardo Tonelli includes a hermeneutic logic in animation, stating that the objectives and questions, which arise from the analysis of the real situation, must be read in the light of God’s event: «We must use faith as interpretation. It cannot replace the descriptive sciences, although these cannot be effective without faith, when they want to tell us what man needs in the depths of his existence».³⁰

The principle of faith being affirmed, there are not many applications and the lack of proposals in the vocational field is one of the missing pieces. In 1981, during the “Colloqui Salesiani” on the Salesian vocation, Tonelli deals with the symbolic anthropology using the Wittgensteinian³¹ non argumentative attitude of silence, proposing an experiential logic of unconditional acceptance that creates the conditions to narrate the story of Jesus.³² At the end of the intervention, he describes again a concept of Christian vocation and ends emblematically:

Therefore, acceptance is the place where the liberating education process develops and gives back to each young person his own life, frees him from alienation and makes him the protagonist of his own and others’ liberation. Acceptance is the place where one works for salvation. The community

²⁵ *Ibid.*, n. 238.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 246.

²⁷ L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, in M. POLLO, *L’animazione culturale: teoria e metodo. Una proposta*, LDC, Leumann (TO) 1980, p. 67. See the influence of Pollo’s works on the Tonelli’s anthropologic model in M. POLLO – R. TONELLI, *Animazione*, in J.E. VECCHI – J.M. PRELLEZO (Eds.), *Progetto Educativo Pastorale. Elementi modulari*, LAS, Roma 1984, pp. 297-298.

²⁸ POLLO, *L’animazione culturale*, p. 73.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ R. TONELLI, *Per fare un progetto educativo*, in «Note di Pastorale Giovanile» 14 (1980) 6, 61.

³¹ See R. TONELLI, *Accoglienza e formazione dei giovani nella comunità*, in DESRAMAUT – MIDALI, *La vocazione Salesiana*, pp. 203-204 e 207. Noteworthy are the immediate feedbacks on Tonelli’s intervention reacting to the generic nature of the proposal. See *Ibid.* p. 217.

³² See *Ibid.*, pp. 207-212.

unconditionally accepts everyone to testify with the facts the radical dignity of every person, and urges, through acceptance, to live the dignity regained as responsibility towards self, others and history. Acceptance is the place of and the condition for formation: the place of an intense, fascinating, vocational experience, up to its eventual radicalization in the consecration and in the ordained ministry.³³

1.4. *The consequences: vocational Youth Ministry as an “outsider”*

If we accept the statement of the General Chapter 21: «the discovery of one’s call, the free and reflected option of a life project, constitutes the goal and the crowning of every process of human and Christian maturity»,³⁴ we can interpret it (at least) in two ways. The first is rather cognitive and announces the importance of vocation which is linked to the maturation process. The second is more educational-practical: if the discovery of the call is a crowning achievement, it is not convenient for the educator to immediately begin to put in place vocational strategies, since there are some previous steps to be respected. These antecedents are at least the two mentioned: growth in freedom and reflective-cultural criteria on the project of life.

In the second interpretation, we enter into a logic of operative postponement and in the game of an education that comes “before” and of other dimensions coming “after”. Tonelli confirms this talking about youth pastoral in those years: «One of the limits of the work of these years was ... the game of “before” and “after”. Someone said: first education and then announcement». ³⁵ If postponement is valid for the announcement, it is even more valid for vocational pedagogy that was to be the crowning of it. The logic of the “phases” is also present in the Youth Ministry Department Training Aid. When addressing the theme of explicit vocational guidance, first comes the phase of availability, then a phase of examination and finally the vocational choice.³⁶

In fact, the poorly integrated position of the vocational dimension within the Salesian Educational-Pastoral Project (SEPP) can be seen in several official and study publications of the last twenty years of the twentieth century. In the third series of the Youth Ministry Department Handouts dealing with the SEPP in oratories, schools and Salesian parishes, the vocational area, reduced to a few sentences, is practically marginalized. The next Handout, published in 1981, deals with *the essential features for a Provincial Plan for Vocational Pastoral Care*, fills this gap, but with a mindset of a separate pastoral category organized centrally by the Province not within the local schools, oratories or parishes.³⁷ The responsibility of the vocational animation is mainly entrusted to the provincial and the director; concretely to a vocation animator at the provincial and local level. It is to be noted that in most local contexts the figure of the local vocation animator did not have a significant implementation.

In addition to acting in a “first” and a “then” mindset, the logic of the four SEPP dimensions can reinforce an analytical thinking and a disconnected education practice. The needs of young people are analyzed in separated dimensions, then objectives, activities and interventions are always planned in terms of dimensions. It is a way of proceeding that multiplies the objectives and activities and can paralyze the whole ministry. A “pastoral manager”, rather than a youth minister, is therefore forced to put in place a large number of interventions and activities that cannot be managed in an intertwined way and must make selection choices based on the priorities of the structure within which he/she educates. In the oratory the fundamental dynamic revolves around the associative dimension (groups, clubs, etc.); in the school, which has lost the “boarding” part, the activities are structured starting from the educational-cultural dimension (teaching, skill training, etc.). The only structure that

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

³⁴ GC21 (1978), n. 106.

³⁵ R. TONELLI, *Ripensando quarant’anni di servizio alla pastorale giovanile*, intervista a cura di Giancarlo De Nicolò, in «Note di Pastorale Giovanile» 43 (2009) 5, 41-42.

³⁶ See DICASTERO PER LA PASTORALE GIOVANILE, *Elementi e linee per un Progetto Educativo Pastorale Salesiano*, Sussidio 2, [s.e.], Roma 1979, pp. 48-49.

³⁷ See DICASTERO PER LA PASTORALE GIOVANILE, *Lineamenti essenziali per un Piano Ispettoriale di Pastorale Vocazionale*, Sussidio 4, [s.e.], Roma 1981.

primarily implemented a vocational logic was the aspirantate, generally in crisis for the same reasons that led to the crisis of the boarding schools.³⁸

In the years around the GC23, focused on the topic of faith education, there is a shift of meanings around the vocational dimension. From a vocation conceived as a choice of the state of life, we move on to the vocation as a personalization of the faith. In the synthesis of Salesian Youth Ministry in 1990, we speak of the vocation on four levels: human, baptismal, Salesian and personal, which includes the choice of a concrete life project.³⁹ Vocation is an extended concept and expresses different levels of personalization of life and faith. The preferred educational and vocational methodology seems to be volunteer work and commitment to the transformation of the world. In this direction the GC23 moves on when it talks about “the commitment and vocation in the line of the transformation of the world” as one of the four areas of Christian maturity.⁴⁰ In the same chapter, the core themes of Salesian Youth Ministry are mentioned. Since there is no explicitly “vocational” nucleus, both the personal “friendship with the Lord Jesus” and the social “responsible service” are proposed.⁴¹ Finally, in the second edition of the Frame of Reference for Salesian Youth Ministry, it is generically affirmed that “the vocational option is an ever present dimension, in all the moments, activities and phases of our educational and pastoral action”.⁴²

The vocation with the influence of the mentioned logics of *before-after*, *dimensions*, *specialized environments* and *personalization* has been treated as a “special” category and not “central” even in specialized academic journals. The indexes of the “Note di Pastorale Giovanile” (NPG) can be analyzed in the period from 1967 to 1997 for the field of Youth Ministry and Pedagogical Guidelines (“Orientamenti Pedagogici”, OP) between 1954 and 1988 for the more explicitly educational area. In the indexes of the first three decades of the NPG the vocational proposal falls neither in the category of basic terms nor in that of concrete projects. Towards the end of the list of entries, we find a mention of “vocation” within the category “attention to special categories of recipients”. The special category is structured in the logic of personalization between guidance, profession and vocation.⁴³ In OP, the vocation does not fall within the index of subjects or sectors. The few articles that deal with the theme mainly refer to it as an ecclesiastical, religious or priestly vocation and adopt a medical, psychological or pedagogical perspective, studying personality traits, motivational aspects, process of discernment and training methodologies.⁴⁴

2. Some constant features of Don Bosco’s vocational pedagogy

In the previous paragraphs we have analyzed the concept of pastoral vocation in the post-council and the paradigm changes that have occurred. In order to continue with a proposal for the various current situations, it is necessary to return to the founding experience of “Don Bosco in the Oratory”, which is the criterion of every actualization. I would like to extend the list of inspirational elements referring to the works of Don Bosco and to the synthesis of Pietro Stella, Pietro Braido, Aldo Girardo.

2.1. *Being welcomed and donate oneself for a mission as an anthropological base*

The process of vocational education in Don Bosco’s mentality revolves around two nuclei. The first is a set of relational attitudes: the *welcoming attitude* that creates an emotional bond and the

³⁸ In the 80s and 90s some structures at Province level progressively grew, such as the live-in community experiences or vocational discernment centres that replaced the old aspirantates. See DICASTERO PER LA PASTORALE GIOVANILE SALESIANA, *Pastorale giovanile salesiana*, SDB, Roma 1990, pp. 86-87 e ID., *La Pastorale Giovanile Salesiana. Quadro di riferimento fondamentale*, SDB, 2000, p. 111.

³⁹ See DICASTERO PER LA PG, *Pastorale giovanile salesiana*, pp. 72-73.

⁴⁰ See GC23 (1990), no. 116ss.

⁴¹ See. *Ibid.* no. 161ss.

⁴² DICASTERO PER LA PG, *Quadro di riferimento*, 1998, p. 33.

⁴³ See *Indice NPG 50 anni: Voci tematiche – Autori – Dossier*, in bit.ly/2JspX6g (accessed November 20, 2018).

⁴⁴ See the analytical indexes related to the theme: *Vocazione*, in «Orientamenti Pedagogici» 10 (1963) 6, 1165; *Vocazione*, in «Orientamenti Pedagogici» 25 (1978) 1313 e *Vocazioni*, in «Orientamenti Pedagogici» 35 (1988) 6, 1092.

trust of the young to Don Bosco. The proximity experienced then creates an identity of belonging to the “community” of the Oratory of Valdocco that shares a high ideal of Christian life and a vast horizon of mission. The desire to remain forever with Don Bosco at the Oratory is a strong reason for being among the Salesians and becoming like them. A characteristic type of family cohesion qualifies the first generation of Salesians, a typical feature desired by Don Bosco that distinguished the Congregation he created.⁴⁵

The other vocational nucleus consists of the elements of faith with a significant focus between temporal realities and the very latest. “*Giving oneself to God*” is announced to all young people since the beginning of the educational work in the Companion of Youth, and constitutes the fundamental and typical perspective of Don Bosco. Later the same principle becomes vocationally explicit, as e.g. in the Spiritual Testament: «Hold the great principle firmly: it is necessary to give oneself to God either sooner or later and God calls blessed the one who begins to consecrate himself to the Lord in his youth».⁴⁶ Stella states that «giving oneself to God in time in young people who feel attracted to be with Don Bosco gradually translates into attraction towards the ecclesiastical and religious state; or it also happens that a tendency to the priesthood already felt before knowing Don Bosco at the oratory translates into possibilities and willingness to become a Salesian».⁴⁷

Despite the possible risks of this approach,⁴⁸ the two elements of welcome and donation lived within a personal and community context represent a constant feature of Salesian vocational pedagogy. There is a third nucleus of vocational pedagogy, not developed explicitly by Stella, which gives a concrete perspective to vocational pedagogy – a *strong awareness of a mission*. From an educational point of view, the first Salesians are aware of the responsibility of spreading an educational system that is typical of “ours” and is innovative. Obviously, the discourse on the vocation took on wider horizons both with the rapid development of the Congregation and with the promising and imagined missionary project on a world scale. The mission, however, is not only a vision of the future that promises and proposes something; it is also a concrete dynamic of vocational pedagogy. The practice of co-responsibility of young people in a *peer education* of the Oratory was, in fact, one of the vocational signs that combined the “proof of good works” and “the testimony of others”.⁴⁹

2.2. *The Salesian isomorphism of the credible disciple-educator*

The fact that the first generation of Salesians is made up exclusively of Don Bosco’s students is not only an historical fact desired by the founder to guarantee the homogeneity of the new Congregation.⁵⁰ It has also strong implications for vocational pedagogy when combined with the method of familiarity. The educator according to the Preventive System is called to enter into a close, even if asymmetric, relationship to share daily life, to gain the pupil’s heart and to communicate with him in a language that presupposes understanding, acceptance and gratitude. In this relational setting, the educator cannot have multiple identities, and the method is based on what one lives, witnesses and practices. The importance of this fact is confirmed both by the “family” shares in the Memoirs of the Oratory and by the fact of having set up its formation (including the novitiate) in the Oratory of Valdocco.⁵¹

⁴⁵ See P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 2: *Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità*, LAS, Roma 1981, pp. 377-379 and 392-394.

⁴⁶ G. BOSCO, *Testamento spirituale*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 974.

⁴⁷ STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia*, vol. 2, p. 393.

⁴⁸ About the risk of vocational unauthenticity of certain “shelter vocations”, see S. DE PIERI, *Aspetti psicologici della vocazione salesiana*, in DESRAMAUT – MIDALI, *La vocazione Salesiana*, pp. 123-126.

⁴⁹ See BRAIDO, *Prevention, not Repression*, pp. 259-261.

⁵⁰ See G. BARBERIS, *Cronachetta*, in STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia*, vol. 2, p. 377.

⁵¹ «But I must say at the outset that I am writing these for my beloved Salesian sons; I forbid that these things he made public during my lifetime or after my death. Now, what purpose can this chronicle serve? It will be a record to help people overcome problems that may come in the future by learning from the past. It will serve to make known how God himself has always been our guide. [...] A father delights in speaking of his exploits to his dear children. It is always to be hoped that the sons will draw from these adventures, small and great, some spiritual and temporal advantage» in G.

The lifestyle of family sharing has assumed with time, especially in the times of the Rector Major Pietro Ricaldone, the physiognomy of the educator's exemplarity and fidelity to the Salesian tradition. On the other hand, there is the dimension of a permanent formation that takes place in the natural *Lebensraum* of the Oratory, which together and synergistically is an environment for life, work, education for young people and their own formation.⁵² The Salesian educator is a disciple educator who lives his life "iso-morphically", that is, he lives with the same "form" both his formation and the formation of others. Salesian isomorphism has not only personal but also institutional implications. Salesians and young people share the same timetables, hear the same conferences, sermons and "good nights" and do the same recreation. In fact there were no regulations for the boys and another for the Salesians, the life in the community was inspired and punctuated by the "Regulations for the Houses of the Society of St. Francis of Sales" preceded and printed in a single volume with the "System Estimate in the education of youth".⁵³

In this sense, it is important to recall the identity of Don Bosco as a disciple who seeks ways of living his vocation through intuitions, desires, dreams, the practice of peer education, etc. It is interesting to focus on his mode of discernment which, from childhood to decisions around the foundation of the Salesians, has a strong component of discipleship, accentuated by his companions (Calosso, Comollo's uncle, Cafasso, etc.). Discipleship goes beyond the definitive decisions of the state of life and is configured as a constant search for concrete ways of its basic vocation. In 1886, that is, in the period of the full maturity of his personal experience, to the repeated requests of the Rector of the Seminary of Montpellier who asked him to explain his educational method, Don Bosco exclaimed in the presence of the members of the Superior Council of the Salesian Society: «You want me to explain my method, but I do not even know it! I have always gone on according to what the Lord inspired me and what the circumstances required». ⁵⁴ This does not mean that Don Bosco would go without knowing where, instead, he didn't want to imprison himself in a rigid scheme. The mode of Don Bosco's progress seems clear enough and has the characteristics of spiritual discernment, that is, of the search for God's will in inspirations (more subjective) and in circumstances (more objective).⁵⁵

2.3. *The steps of the accompaniment process*⁵⁶

One of Don Bosco's most frequent advices for vocational choice was to hear the confessor's opinion that he should have a more stable relationship with the young person, and not just limited to moral aspects. Confession was the privileged moment of personal accompaniment, but Don Bosco's vision is broader. Developing Aldo Giraudo's narrative analysis of Don Bosco's exemplary biographies, we can summarize the paradigmatic process of salesian accompaniment in seven steps.⁵⁷ According to Don Bosco, the narration is a preferred way to pass on the ideals and to grasp its progressive methodology on a personal, group and whole level of the Salesian House.

2.3.1. *The first meeting (welcome, challenge, entrustment)*

The educator's full and cordial *welcome* of the young person, as first step in the educational relationship, is a consistent promise with a possible and positive future. In full confidence a "language of the heart"⁵⁸ is created. With great lucidity, Pietro Stella describes the concept of "heart" in Don

BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1172.

⁵² See the updated references to the first experience of Valdocco in Á. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, *Quali salesiani per i giovani di oggi? Lettera di convocazione del Capitolo Generale 28°*, in AGC 99 (2018) 427, 10.

⁵³ See *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, Tipografia Salesiana, Torino 1877 (OE XXIX, 97-196).

⁵⁴ E. CERIA, *Memorie Biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 18, Torino, SEI, 1937, p. 127.

⁵⁵ For a deeper development of the topic, see M. VOJTÁŠ, *L'arte educativa dell'accompagnamento in chiave salesiana*, in «Orientamenti Pedagogici» 65 (2018) 2, 313-317.

⁵⁶ See. *Ibid*, pp. 303-313.

⁵⁷ See A. GIRAUDDO, *Maestri e discepoli in azione*, in G. BOSCO, *Vite di giovani. Le biografie di Domenico Savio, Michele Magone e Francesco Besuccho*. Introductory essay and historical notes by Aldo Giraudo, Roma, LAS, 2012, pp. 28-30.

⁵⁸ According to Pope Francis, it deals with an "ability of the heart to make proximity possible". See FRANCESCO,

Bosco as «what in man is the capacity for intellectual intuition and intense and instinctive love, capacity for understanding and love that springs from the most intimate of psychological unity of man». ⁵⁹

In the second step, the educator intentionally raises expectation, desire, and curiosity that bring the young out of his narrow horizons. The moment of *challenge* is important because the educator offers hope in a way of possible realization and in a horizon of faith. It is equally important the diagnostic element of the challenge in order to understand if the young person is suitable for the educational environment of the Salesian House and if so, how to include him.

The third step of accompaniment is respect for the free choice that Don Bosco leaves to the young. The correspondence to the challenge launched the good will and commitment of the young come to the formulation of a “promise”. The *entrustment* of oneself to the educator starts from the affective relationship and the sense of gratitude starting an educational relationship. In this moment we understand if the educator has succeeded in enhancing the point accessible to the good. ⁶⁰

2.3.2. *Accompaniment in the environment (insertion, crisis, decision, path)*

At this point the accompaniment enters a new phase of insertion into the *formative environment* of the Salesian House. From interpersonal dialogue we move on to the systemic logic of many interventions and relationships, from the centrality of personalization to a certain standardization of educational itineraries. In the Salesian House, the young person experiences proposals rich in values, human relationships, activities and educational stimuli. In the rhythms of life, we balance the fun duties and times, the study proposals with the spiritual proposals.

After some time spent in an educational environment, the accompanying tales describe a moment of severe *crisis*. Crises are different realities, linked to character, temperament, past experiences and level of maturation of individual young people. The common element the melancholy and sadness that establish the root of crisis: the distance between the ideal and the current situation and capabilities.

Accompaniment enters a delicate phase of *decision* that does not address the superficial symptom, but goes deep to make an inner transformation. The decision is not a voluntary act or a fruit of effective problem solving - it is precisely the self-giving to God - a metanoia, a way of thinking, of seeing ourselves, the future and reality as a whole.

The solution to the crisis follows, as a last narrative step, the descriptions of the *educational programs* undertaken by the young protagonists under the guidance of the educator. One can easily see the unitary structure of the formative program outlined by Don Bosco that balances the pedagogy of duty with the joy of the festivals and the taste of identification with the ideal. The young person becomes the protagonist, not only of his own growth, but of many forms of service within a peer education that finds in the “sodalities” a typical accompaniment modality for their unmistakable character of familiarity, solidarity, emulation and free participation.

3. **Proposals for a Salesian vocational pedagogy in the third millennium**

In the framework of the proposals, the reflection moves in a proactive logic, taking into consideration some needs of the current post-modern context. It will refer to the constants features of Don Bosco’s vocational educational activity. It also considers a critical approach to the ideas and logics that have proved to be adequate only to certain contexts and eras. In fact, as it happens in every age, the people of a generation are rooted in a given context that constitutes for them an explicit, but also hidden, interpretative horizon. Their reflections and activities are critically and proactively linked to the context in which they were born, and formed according to an “explicit” and “hidden”

Esortazione Apostolica Evangelii Gaudium, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013, n. 171.

⁵⁹ P. STELLA, *Don Bosco*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2001, p. 60.

⁶⁰ See G.B. LEMOYNE, *Memorie Biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 5, S. Benigno Canavese, Scuola tipografica e libreria salesiana, 1905, p. 367.

curriculum.

In this sense, with the risk to propose a generalization, one could see the generation of the Second Vatican Council, mainly grown in Salesian boarding schools with a strict Ricaldonian organizational mentality, which sought to: open horizons; to go beyond an anti-modernist mental closure; to personalize and live the Salesian vocation authentically; to go beyond the collegial standardization; to act creatively in the educational-pastoral field to go beyond the roles, traditions and operational routines that were too detailed.⁶¹ Desiring to open up to the world and to adopt more functional, serious and responding to the needs of reality, the Congregation has opened up to scientific theories and methodologies, enhancing the figure of the scientific expert and adopting more or less balanced solutions (such as it happens in every age).

The proposals mentioned here are an attempt both to value the richness of the history of our charism and go beyond some logic and operational strategies in the vocational area that reflect the influences of a late- or post-modern anthropology:

1. *Beyond the logic of dimensions* that fragments the approach to a person. Dimensional logic implies a methodology of “first” and “then” which translates into an operational progressiveness that often does not reach the then-moment for real lack of personnel, time and resources. In this sense, vocation is not just a dimension or a crowning of all activities.

2. *Beyond the generic logic in which the different levels of vocations are multiplied*: to life, faith, holiness, the mission in the world, education, the Salesian charism, special consecration, marriage, the concrete ways of living the consecration, etc. The risk is a methodology of “empty vocational rhetoric”: if everything is a vocation then nothing really is.⁶²

3. *Beyond the logic of the choice between a few defined and clear “states of life”* that is connected only with a postmodern revival of the traditional methodology of confession, moralistic approach and a polarized worldview of Church-world antagonism.

4. *Beyond the logic of a personal choice in search of authenticity* which implies a methodology of mainly psychological guidance and self-referential life project.

Going beyond means to put oneself in the line of thinkers (Salesian or not) that go beyond modern anthropology and listen to the challenges and desires of today’s young people. The common element is the overcoming of a “flat life” examined by the analytical-empirical sciences and manipulated by a technological project of life management. The proposal is in the direction of a faith-based “profound life” that takes into account the insights outlined in the Edmund Husserl’s critics of the western science.⁶³ When a person is inserted in a faith-based community, leaves aside a reactive problem solving and accepts himself/herself as a whole that goes beyond divisions, then a direction, a challenge, a *call* emerges that demands creative responses to unify life and make it generative.

In order to answer the call according to a *transactional method*, it is necessary to use a heuristic about needs, ideals, desires and potentialities, choosing objectives and routes of execution, although the person remains fundamentally the same. In *profound transformational change*, however, the call becomes a form of being and interprets the world that sets off and directs the course of actions in their development. Therefore, discernment is a transformative, unifying and constant disposition in the phase of the response, of the planning and in that of the path.⁶⁴ Juan Edmundo Vecchi states in this direction an interesting line of thought:

⁶¹ See VOJTÁŠ, *Sviluppi delle linee pedagogiche della Congregazione Salesiana*, in GIRAUDDO ET AL (Eds.), *Sviluppo del carisma di Don Bosco*, pp. 221-244.

⁶² See e.g. P. GIANOLA, *L’orientamento vocazionale*, in R. GIANATELLI (Ed.), *Progettare l’educazione oggi con Don Bosco*, Seminario promosso dal Dicastero per la Pastorale Giovanile della Direzione Generale “Opere Don Bosco” in collaborazione con la Facoltà di Scienze dell’Educazione dell’Università Pontificia Salesiana Roma 1-7 giugno 1980, LAS, Roma 1981, pp. 282-283.

⁶³ See the inspirations of E. HUSSERL, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie* (= Edmund Husserl Gesammelte Werke 6), Martinus Nijhoff, Haag 1954, p. 120ss.

⁶⁴ See the insight on the deep change from a philosophical, cognitive, psychological, pedagogical and organizational point of view in P.M. SENGE – C.O. SCHARMER – J. JAWORSKI – B.S. FLOWERS, *Presence. Esplorare il cambiamento profondo nelle persone, nelle organizzazioni e nella società*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2013 e C.O. SCHARMER, *Theory U. Leading From the Future as it Emerges. The Social Technology of Presencing*, Berrett-Koehler, Oakland CA 2016.

Vocation supposedly mysterious reality, divine in its origin, is deeply rooted in personality, in its unconscious preferences, in its dynamisms and in its free choices once the totality is moved by faith. More than a gift given once and for all, it is a trajectory; more than a predicted future, it is the guidance of the whole being. More than a certain thing to do, it is a process of unification in Christ.⁶⁵

3.1. *Sharing life in a community inhabited by different vocations*

Young people in the pre-Synodal meeting from March 19-24, 2018 began their reflections by saying: «Young people look for a sense of self by seeking communities that are supportive, uplifting, authentic and accessible: communities that empower them».⁶⁶ Taking seriously the challenge of individualism that makes the insignificant faith or a private affair the principle that faith, values and vocation must be contextualized and lived in a community that embodies them, takes them seriously. Given that many communities, and even families, are living a crisis of consistency, young people say: «We need inclusion, welcome, mercy and tenderness from the Church – both as an institution and as a community of faith».⁶⁷

The context of young people's identity construction is not a guidance interview with an expert in an aseptic office. If we take the original inspiration from Don Bosco, the logic of the family environment was fundamental. It is necessary to make a mental operation to pass from the boarding school that stimulated the birth of vocations of Salesians consecrated to the wider community inhabited by all vocations. The idea of an Educational-Pastoral Community that is only functional to the activities of the project is not enough. It must be a vital world that embodies the values and virtues of faith and, in this sense; it must be an "alternative" community to the surrounding shattered world that lives both the reception and its identity. The environment is so open but also structured, it accompanies growth but can also lead questions and put "in crisis", as in the case of the biographies of the young people of Valdocco written by Don Bosco.

A useful starting point comes from the models of character education. Following the arguments of Carr and MacIntyre, Dariusz Grządziel offers a perspective for an education not only to values, which would be a universalistic and rationalistic ethical vision, but to the virtues that embody a value in a community life. The author affirms that «the initiation to the moral life and better guaranteed in the families and the communities of belonging, where concrete forms of moral life are practiced».⁶⁸ Grządziel proposes three basic principles for character education: community, praxis and the narrative principle. The same logic, taken in due proportion, could be valid also for vocational pedagogy.

Life in community that goes beyond mere "living together" tending towards the synergy of different vocations requires a systemic attention expressed by Vecchi: «When we talk about the Preventive System we do not go beyond individual consideration: it is easy to rethink an educator [...] It is more difficult to understand and implement what the word "System" means, that is, convergence and mutual reference, the organicity of various elements».⁶⁹ Later on, Vecchi calls the fundamental intuition between project (SEPP) and community with two slogan titles: «The

⁶⁵ J.E. VECCHI, *Orientamento e pastorale vocazionale*, in J.E. VECCHI – J.M. PRELLEZO (Eds.), *Progetto Educativo Pastorale. Elementi modulari*, LAS, Roma 1984, p. 243.

⁶⁶ SYNOD OF BISHOPS XV ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY, "Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment". Final document of the pre-Synodal meeting held in Rome on March 19-24 2018, art. 1, in bit.ly/2GyROEi (accessed November 20, 2018).

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*. The *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Synod (IL) also affirms the importance of the dynamic of belonging, quoting Pope Francis: «This first journey is about meeting the young people, but not in isolation from their lives – I would rather meet them within their social context, in society. Because when we isolate the young, we do them an injustice; we take away their "belonging". The young do belong, they belong to a family, to a homeland, to a culture, to a faith». See *Apostolic Journey to Rio de Janeiro on the occasion of the 28th World Youth Day*. Meeting of the Holy Father Francis with the journalists during the flight to Brazil, 22 July 2013 in *Instrumentum Laboris for the Synod 2018. Young People, The Faith and Vocational Discernment*, in bit.ly/2zZSkpv (accessed November 20, 2018).

⁶⁸ D. GRZĄDZIEL, *L'educazione del carattere e l'educazione salesiana alla cittadinanza*, in «Salesianum» 77 (2015) 92-126.

⁶⁹ J.E. VECCHI, *Per riattualizzare il Sistema Preventivo*, in ISPETTORIA SALESIANA LOMBARDO-EMILIANA, *Convegno sul Sistema Preventivo*, Milano-Bologna, 3-4 Novembre 1978, [s.e.], p. 1.

educational community develops the project [...] A project creates community».⁷⁰

Community planning in a transformative logic can be conceived above all as a formative tool of the educative-pastoral community and only secondarily as an organizational instrument. During the planning process, comparison should be accompanied on aspects that are not only symptomatic but descend to levels of life's depth: the inner identity of the members of the community, the virtues necessary for a convergence and synergy in education, the paradigms, expectations, fears, hopes and calls within each one's vocations. Genuine levels of community discernment can be achieved at these levels.⁷¹

The third edition of the Frame of Reference for Salesian Youth Ministry promotes experimentation in community and vocational logic: «In an effort to find new approaches to vocation ministry, new experiences and services of animation and vocational guidance have come into use (welcoming communities, live-in community experiences, and vocational discernment centers). These offer the young opportunities for a concrete experience of the Salesian life and mission for a fixed period of time, where they receive accompaniment and care as they explore their calling in a more systematic way».⁷² If pedagogy and pastoral care of vocations are an integral part of all our activities, these experiences could be extended to every House, rediscovering the educational potential of "interiors" and structuring discernment training courses for young adults.

3.2. *A vision of faith changing the paradigm from personal choice to vocation*

As we have seen before, there is a concept of man (actually very common) that emphasizes freedom of choice to the extreme. A human being would be an undefined potential that self-creates itself with his/her own choices up to a complete self-determination. A person following the logic of authentic free choices starts from the options of experiences in free time, hobbies, relationship preferences. Going further, the person wants to pick up an original skill-set, that has to be learned through personalized educational procedures and trainings. In the far end, the total freedom mindset wants to determine the culture of belonging, of gender or, *in extremis*, the choice between existence and non-existence.

As a consequence, the postmodern cultural context is permeated with philosophical nihilism (there is nothing stable, true and valid); ethical relativism (individual is beyond the good of evil) and anthropological genderism (oscillating between gender selection and unisex procedures). Besides the philosophical potential multiplicity of choices, there is a paralyzing effect of an avalanche of empirical studies that imply concrete methodologies on the small aspects of life. The fragmentary nature of this pragmatic empiricism ultimately leads to the "original standardization" paradox where most people adopt standardized lifestyles softened by the appearance of banal personalization. With the influences of the digital world, we risk ending up in a cognitive bubble based on our preferences, creating algorithmic consumers that follow the suggestions of bots.⁷³ Today's culture thus proves to be a cynical aspect that does not offer young people a map or a guide in a liquid sea of possibilities that hide very concrete empirical icebergs. As if it would be saying to the young "you are all original, full of talents and potential. Be worried, because if you fail it will be your fault!"

In this context there are also challenges and implications for the concept of vocation. We do not stray far from the general culture, if we perceive the vocation as a series of multiple choices at different levels of "vocations" in a paradigm of progressive personalization: life, faith, holiness, mission, education, Salesian charism, special consecration, secularism, marriage, mission ad gentes,

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7.

⁷¹ See the virtuous and profound project management model in M. VOJTÁŠ, *Reviving Don Bosco's Oratory: Salesian Youth Ministry, Leadership and Innovative Project Management*, STS Publications, Jerusalem 2017. For the discernment processes in multicultural and multireligious communities with a vocational dynamic, see C.O. SCHARMER ET AL, *Presence*.

⁷² SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT, *Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference*, SDB, Roma, ³2014, p. 256.

⁷³ See e.g. D. CARDON, *Che cosa sognano gli algoritmi. Le nostre vite al tempo dei big data*, Mondadori, Milano 2016 and M.S. GAL – N. ELKIN-KOREN, *Algorithmic Consumers*, in «Harvard Journal of Law & Technology» 30 (2017) 2, 1-45.

etc. If we then enter into a pseudo-spiritualism that plays the game of choice between the absolute freedom of man and the (almost) incomprehensible initiative of a silent wittgensteinian God, acting within the private sphere of man, we do not get far. In addition to the paralysis of decision-making,⁷⁴ we witness in the Church a trend not to care for the vocations, leaving everything to the grace of God and the intervention of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁵

Another basic paradigm is, instead, that of faith which implies a progressive existential acceptance of a concrete and unitary “self” positioned in a defining relationship with God and with his concrete plan. The choice is essentially an individual concept, the vocation, on the other hand, is always dialogic. If we think of Don Bosco who recounts in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* and his vocational choices, we perceive it in a unitary perspective of life. In fact for him the purpose of the narrative is to “make known how God has himself guided everything in every time” perceived together with the responsibility of being “called by God to account for my actions”.⁷⁶ Following the illuminating considerations of Romano Guardini, it’s plausible to place the beginning of a vocational pedagogy in an acceptance of a concrete self, as created by God:

At the beginning of my existence - meaning the “beginning” not only in the temporal sense, but also essential, as root and reason of it - it is not a decision to be taken by myself. [...] But at the beginning of my existence there is an initiative, a Someone, who gave me to myself. In any case I was given, and given as this determined individual. Not simply as a man, but as this man [...]. In this way, however, a task is also set. It is very large; one can perhaps say: what underlies all the individual tasks. I have a duty to want to be what I am; I really want to be me and me alone. I must place myself in my own self, as it is, and assume the task assigned to me in the world. It is the fundamental form of all that is called “vocation” (*Beruf*); because from this I turn to things, and within that I welcome them. [...] At the root of everything lies the act by which I accept myself. I must consent to be what I am. [...] And the clarity and courage of this acceptance constitute the basis of all existence. It is not possible for me to fulfill this need purely on an ethical basis. It is possible only starting from something higher: and with this we enter the field of faith. Faith means that I understand my finitude by starting from the supreme instance, from the will of God.⁷⁷

In a fundamental uniqueness of vocation, individual choices are inserted in order to concretize the realized person in the perspective of a relationship with God. With Don Bosco we can say that this attitude is “giving oneself to God in time”, exercising courageous reliance vocation and mission that characterized (not only) the first generation of Salesians. Here we could insert the vision of the *Instrumentum Laboris* which sees youth as «a time of experimentation, of ups and downs, of alternation between hope and fear and of the necessary tension between positive and negative aspects, through which we learn to articulate and integrate the affective, sexual, intellectual, spiritual, physical, relational, social dimensions. This journey, which unfolds between small daily choices and decisions of greater significance, allows everyone to discover their singularity and the originality of their vocation »⁷⁸.

The vision of faith is obviously not just an acceptance of certain notions, but transforms the whole mode of being, of knowing and acting. Therefore, it has educational-methodological implications. Egidio Viganò states in this sense:

The Word of God, by its nature, reveals and questions: finally, an indispensable option to be ensured in the educational process is that of respecting the specific nature of Gospel and Faith. The Word of God is not properly human maturation or an explicit response to a problematic situation; it is, instead, an initiative of God, gift, interpellation, vocation, and question. Before answering, the Gospel

⁷⁴ See IL 61-62.

⁷⁵ F. DESRAMAUT, *Introduzione*, in ID – MIDALI, *La vocazione Salesiana*, p. 7

⁷⁶ BOSCO, *Memorie dell’Oratorio*, in *Fonti*, p. 1172.

⁷⁷ R. GUARDINI, *Accettare se stessi*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2007⁴, 13-14.16-19. See also the vocational implications of Guardini’s position in P. ZINI, *Parla, o Signore, che il tuo servo ti ascolta. Note sull’animazione e la pedagogia vocazionale*, in «Vita Consacrata» 47 (2011) 2, 113-124.

⁷⁸ IL 18.

questions.⁷⁹

A vocational pedagogy, in order to enter into the specific discernment and guidance of vocational choice, requires the introduction of young people in contexts and practices that favor typical knowledge of faith such as meditation, contemplation and discernment by proposing environments that favor silence, introspection, contact with creation, sense of community, profound generative dialogue and detachment from the insistence and omnipresence of the digital world. It is interesting and useful to dialogue with innovative educational methods that rediscover the “old” practices and adapt them for new contexts and needs.⁸⁰

3.3. *Accompaniment as a differentiated and isomorphic educational style*

The recent emphasis on the term of accompaniment is not only a recent fashion, but also a critical feedback on post Vatican II emphasis on personal freedom. In an experiential context of fighting the standardization of a “Ricaldonian” boarding school, the authors tended to stress out the absoluteness of the principle of freedom. As a logical conclusion all the attempts of interference with authentic personal freedom were marginalized at the level of pedagogical thought and educational practice.

In this context we understand the post-conciliar resistance to a conception of traditional spiritual direction linked to confession (moral perspective) and to the Salesian *rendiconto* - reporting to the director (legal perspective). This moral-legal perspective can be seen e.g. in the letter of Luigi Ricceri of 1976 which reacts to the crisis,⁸¹ in the assessments of Guido Gatti which places the spiritual direction in a context of old and new moral paradigms and in the readings of Albert Druart that conceives the Salesian tradition of spiritual direction until 1965 linked to the practice of the *rendiconto*.⁸² The perspective he proposed was a “guidance” intended as a helping relationship in the wake of the humanistic psychology of Rogers and Carkhuff.⁸³ Juan Edmundo Vecchi, in the encyclopedic volume on the educative-pastoral project of the mid-eighties, recognizing the importance of the concept of guidance but also realizing the possible limits, states:

Although there are close links and common areas between vocational guidance [career oriented] and vocational maturation [vocation oriented], the two realities are fundamentally different for the theoretical assumptions from which they start and for the reflection they need. [...] The vocational guidance belongs to the pastoral care, and this starts from a theological reflection even if it assumes pedagogical criteria and admits instruments of psychological investigation, highlighting its conclusions. [...] To assume and follow a vocation is to be attentive to the Lord who calls. [...] A vocational guidance that would diminish or nullify this reality would lose its roots and its biblical-Christian specificity.⁸⁴

In later passages Vecchi affirms the irreplaceable nature of personal accompaniment by the educator and proposes a concept of “educational-pastoral dialogue” that should overcome the mentality of guidance and carry out the following tasks:

- create a relationship in which the young person can become more free and able to perceive himself,

⁷⁹ E. VIGANÒ, *Il progetto educativo salesiano*, in «Atti del Consiglio Superiore» 59 (1978) 290, 35.

⁸⁰ See e.g. J. JAWORSKI – A. KAHANE – C.O. SCHARMER, *Presence workbook. A companion guide of capacity-building practices, practical tips, and suggestions for further reading from seasoned practitioners* in bit.ly/2LtlbqU (accessed November 20, 2018).

⁸¹ L. RICCERI, *Abbiamo bisogno di esperti di Dio. La direzione spirituale personale*, in «Atti del Consiglio Superiore» 57 (1976) 281, 894.

⁸² See G. GATTI, *Direzione spirituale e nuova morale*, in DESRAMAUT – MIDALI, *La direzione spirituale*, pp. 151-164 and A. DRUART, *La direzione spirituale nei documenti ufficiali salesiani del ventesimo secolo*, in DESRAMAUT – MIDALI, *La direzione spirituale*, pp. 128-141.

⁸³ See L. CIAN, *Le critiche mosse alla direzione spirituale salesiana dalla psicologia contemporanea. Contestazioni e orientamenti*, in DESRAMAUT – MIDALI, *La direzione spirituale*, pp. 181-210. Also, you can find one of the different models used in the Salesian context in A. ARTO, *Metodologia per impostare un processo di autoaiuto. Il modello di R. Carkhuff*, in «Animazione Sociale» 8-9 (1994), 26-33.

⁸⁴ J.E. VECCHI, *Orientamento e pastorale vocazionale*, in J.E. VECCHI – J.M. PRELLEZO (Eds.), *Progetto Educativo Pastorale. Elementi modulari*, LAS, Roma 1984, pp. 242-243.

the reality and the signs of God;

- offer elements for an enlightened vision of one's inner self and the motivations of behavior;
- arrange to welcome and understand the motions of the Spirit;
- help make a synthesis of the various experiences and to direct them towards a project of life in God;
- accompany and support the work of God in the young to develop a secure Christian spirituality;
- balance educational dynamics that are not appropriate for Christian growth.⁸⁵

Vecchi then lists the qualities required (not a few) to be a companion. It enriches the typical Salesian tradition's traits, as being capable of responsible assistance, witnessing a joyful maturity and accompanying on non-formal occasions sharing life, with a request for theological and psychological preparation and specific formation in the vocational field. It is noteworthy that Vecchi himself struggled to point out a Salesian bibliography on the subject and how, later, the category of the "educational-pastoral dialogue" did not have much success. The educational-pastoral dialogue did not enter in the first two editions of the Frame of Reference, remaining an unheard proposal until the resumption of the theme of accompaniment by Fabio Attard and Miguel Angel García a quarter of a century later.⁸⁶ The proposal of the educational-pastoral dialogue could be part of the image of a «disproportion between the quantity of proposals and the few possibilities to implement them»,⁸⁷ reported with great honesty by Vecchi himself.

Currently, accompaniment in the Salesian, ecclesiastical or secular world is becoming a necessity. A generation ago, personalization was carried out "against the others", with a critical mindset that was breaking the traditional patterns, now the general situation has changed. At the level of references, the meaning horizon is liquidated and fragmented. On the psychological level, the phenomenon of performance anxiety is increasing. On a professional level, global competition has made the requirements of a successful life harder. Unlike previous generations, today's young person personalizes his life by relying and growing up in a helping relationship placed in a context of a trustworthy community.

The need for accompaniment is a general fact and the models that widen the same category of accompaniment are growing. It should be noted that despite the appeals and the rhetoric, in fact it seems that the personal accompaniment is quite neglected in Salesian education. More than 72% of Salesian pre-novices report that they discovered spiritual accompaniment only in the pre-noviciate.⁸⁸ If three quarters of those who have entered Salesian formation have made the decision without being accompanied, we can only speculate what the percentage will be for the vast majority of young people who have not made this choice. The Rector Major Ángel Fernández Arttime points out the same fact in the *Strenna* for 2018: «What are we waiting for? Why do we not decide to be much more available to accompany all our young people in what is most important to their lives? What is holding us back? Why "being busy" or "spending time" in other things when this is a real priority for education and evangelization?»⁸⁹

Realizing the differences in the contexts and the concept of accompaniment, we would like to offer a threefold perspective on vocational accompaniment that should be differentiated and isomorphic. Given the differences in the contexts that have emerged in the already mentioned research by Marco Bay,⁹⁰ we can accept the proposal of the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Synod is connected in the entire tradition of spirituality that insists on how fundamental accompaniment is, especially during the process of vocational discernment, and maintains a broad perspective by declaring:

⁸⁵ See. *Ibid.*, pp. 254-255.

⁸⁶ See F. ATTARD – M.A. GARCÍA (Eds.), *Spiritual Accompaniment: An Educational and Spiritual Journey with Young People in the Way of Don Bosco*, Don Bosco Publications, Bolton 2018. NB: the notion of accompaniment is mentioned 140 times in the third edition of the Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference.

⁸⁷ See J.E. VECCHI, *Verso una nuova tappa di Pastorale Giovanile Salesiana*, in *Il cammino e la prospettiva 2000* (= Documenti PG 13), SDB, Roma 1991, p. 88.

⁸⁸ See M. BAY, *Giovani Salesiani e accompagnamento. Risultati di una ricerca internazionale*, LAS, Roma 2018, p. 47.

⁸⁹ Á. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, *Strenna 2018 "Signore, dammi di quest'acqua" (Gv 4,15). Coltiviamo l'arte di ascoltare e di accompagnare*, in AGC 99 (2018) 426, 4-5.

⁹⁰ See BAY, *Giovani Salesiani e accompagnamento*, pp. 455-493.

Those who accompany the young might be men and women, religious and lay persons, couples; the community also plays a decisive role. Therefore, the accompaniment of young people by the Church takes on many different direct and indirect forms, weaves together a multiplicity of dimensions and makes use of manifold instruments, depending on the context where it takes place and the degree of ecclesial and faith involvement of those who are being accompanied.⁹¹

Accompaniment *diversification* realistically provides different types of walking with the young, some of them already listed by Vecchi. The Salesians report some interesting accents about the different styles of accompaniment for cultural geographic areas.⁹² In central and northern Europe, the spiritual accompaniment is preferred, which favors a style of discernment and personalized guidance with a patient and purposeful dialogue without impositions. In America, the emphasis is on a coaching approach with a focus on problem solving and/or psychological counseling combined with a strong “Salesian” identification of the interlocutors. In East Asia and in the Mediterranean it is rather a more sporadic and spontaneous situational accompaniment with references to problem solving. In the region of Africa and India, where the number of vocations to consecrated life is the highest, there is a presence of a more standardized and normative leadership style that undermines the connection between interior and exterior behavioral patterns, influences negatively the personalization and life-long learning attitude.⁹³

Another question of differentiation concerns the three most present forms of Salesian accompaniment: spiritual companionship, confession and dialogue with the director. From the research, a general preference of keeping these three moments distinct by referring to three different persons (companion, confessor, director). With the care of all vocations, it is obvious that there should be mothers and fathers, competent lay ministers and peers to participate in the mission of accompaniment.

The proposal of an *isomorphic* accompaniment, on the other hand, wants to face the greatest challenge of the last decades. The potential companions (Salesian of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians) are few and more occupied by positions deriving from organizational management positions. The experience, but also numerous studies of accompaniment in the organizational setting, confirms that the organizational responsibilities are not an obstacle but an opportunity for accompaniment if the organization is understood as a field of participation, formation, community discernment and deep personal transformation. In this mentality, *accompaniment is not the extra thing to do, but it is the form of doing* that spreads with geometric progression (not just arithmetic) if everyone is a leader/follower or master/disciple. It is necessary that accompaniment becomes a “form” of the organizational culture of Salesian Houses establishing educational processes and environments at different levels. Educators should agree on some basic criteria (ethical, pedagogical, Salesian) for all types of accompaniment. Then there will be different concretizations and styles of accompaniment. This is why we can speak of an isomorphic organizational style – there are different styles, but there is a “form” a “spirit” of accompaniment that is common for everyone.

The necessary supervision between different organizational levels is also an occasion for the educators’ accompaniment in terms of Salesian leadership and discipleship.⁹⁴ Other ways of accompaniment can be carried out by teams or individuals with a specific preparation for psychological, pastoral counseling, confessions or spiritual accompaniment, etc. It is not to underestimate the generative potential of young people who if accompanied well can become “apostles” of their peers in line with the Salesian tradition of the “guardian angel”.⁹⁵ In this context the most informal and contextual accompaniment methods such as mentoring, tutoring, peer coaching

⁹¹ IL 122.

⁹² The data are to be interpreted with caution as the preferences can interfere with cultural and linguistic variables. Another important influence on the different points of view is the lower or higher number of accompanied persons in a single formation structure.

⁹³ See BAY, *Giovani Salesiani e accompagnamento*, pp. 386-398.

⁹⁴ See e.g. A. RODRÍGUEZ, *Educating from the Heart: Salesian Leadership in the University*, Navarra & Universidad Salesiana, Mexico 2018.

⁹⁵ See BRAIDO, *Prevention, not Repression*, pp. 293-295.

can be adapted. A consequence of isomorphic accompaniment is the need to establish *standards* and prepare *training courses* at different levels.

3.4. **“Travelogue” as a spiritual-narrative-operative tool of accompaniment**

The Instrumentum Laboris warns of the possible risks of «the planning mindset which, if it becomes extreme, leads to narcissism and withdrawal».⁹⁶ By evoking the meeting between Jesus and the rich young man, the young people are invited to enter into a discipleship logic, preceded and accompanied by an intense Jesus’ look of love. Jesus, being the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6) asks the young man to follow him on his way, risking, trusting and abandoning their apparent certainties.

Giving value to the Salesian reflection around the “project of life”, but also taking into account the risks of a reductive planning, we would like to propose the instrument of the “travelogue”. It is a journal describing the spiritual inner journey with Jesus who is the “way”. It is not primarily oriented to the planning of the future, but it is rather a concrete tool for accompaniment in its entirety: narration and memory of the *past*, insights and choices to be made in the *present* and imagination of *future* scenarios. In literature, travelogue often covers the journeying of a poetic aura and gives it a nuance of existential research. It is a spiritual journey that narrates the past and interprets it, listens to the Spirit in the events of life, sees the horizons, analyzes the possible ways and, finally, is an operative tool, jotting down the decisions, checking the path and adjusting the direction. The motivations and the methods of use of the travelogue are the following:

- The “project of life” is already a traditional concept in Salesian writings. In the formation process, 84% of Salesians in formation use it as a preferred tool.⁹⁷
- The Frame of Reference of Salesian Youth Ministry says: «In our way of thinking as Christians we regard the project of life as a response to a vocation, a call from God who arouses, sustains and strengthens the freedom of the young, making them capable of corresponding with freedom and joy to their own identity and mission. [...] It is in this context also that they will meet the invitation to the faith and reply to their life project».⁹⁸
- In the current cultural environment there is a need for a concrete tool: to verbalize the contents of the inner experience in a culture of image and emotion; to have lines of action in a time of procrastination and situational logic; to create a temporal horizons of the past and of the possible future in times of instant gratification.
- There are motivations coming from the educational practice in different pastoral contexts. There is a blossoming of tools and practices for accompaniment in Salesian, ecclesial and also secular settings, such as: self-authoring journals, reflective writing tools, different project or life methods, personal mission statements, personal planners and journals, etc.

Given the postmodern context without strong and shared references, it is not enough to appeal to “values”, “virtues” or “duties”. Maybe before it could be possible, because the majority of the population was educated by Christian narratives and values. The companion has to take all the time necessary to walking together with the young person in order to make emerge the vision, values and personalized operational strategies. The travelogue has a function of creating a memory, remembering important events and stimuli. Moreover, it is an instrument by which the young person can explain values, truths of faith and goals during the accompanying process and then re-read and re-define the path in the future.

The projection of the future, as a part of the travelogue, can be built by analyzing the goals together with the young person, asking the reason, the why, for that particular goal, whether it is a real purpose in itself or just a means to reach another goal. The purpose of the chain of why-questions is to reach the ultimate intrinsic desire that can be a part of the vision-vocation. Another strategy could be the visualization of the future. The young person can imagine different anniversaries of life,

⁹⁶ See IL 84.

⁹⁷ See BAY, *Giovani Salesiani e accompagnamento*, p. 407.

⁹⁸ YM DEPARTMENT, *Frame of Reference*, ³2014, p. 61.

retirement or funeral, in a sort of purposeful “exercise of good death”. Then comes the description of the imagination telling the story, the point of contact with the reality and the desired goals for the roles one has in the current life.⁹⁹

To prevent the risk of a too intimate and/or spiritualistic accompaniment without the practice of charity and without feedback from reality, we will outline two themes linked with the accompaniment: volunteering and discipline. Both are elements of a rich Salesian tradition with great potential for vocational pedagogy.

3.4.1. *Volunteering as a concretization of charity and a context of discernment*

The act of volunteer work, understood in the sense of exercising the virtue of charity the mission of a Christian who has experienced the joy of love and wants to share it with the needy, is the healthiest context of vocational discernment. The commitment to the transformation of the world is, in this sense, only a second attention. Exercising charity in the context of discernment and vocational accompaniment is also important for the following reasons:

- The context of volunteer work neutralizes the danger of a self-referential and narcissistic life project mentioned earlier;
- Appreciation of young people themselves of the voluntary experiences as potentially meaningful for the vocational discernment;¹⁰⁰
- The concreteness of getting busy in the real world is an opportunity to receive a real feedback that facilitates a process of discernment;
- The specific vocation is a concrete form of love-charity and therefore it is logical that the exercise of charity inspired by faith and hope is the natural context of discernment;
- volunteer work in the context of the accompaniment and vocational discernment prevents the risk of “doing” without learning, a classic problem of volunteer work that induced education experts to develop the methods of *service learning*;
- The motivations for the Salesian vocation linked to the mission were traditionally the main engine of consecrated vocations. In fact, the originality of the Salesian vocation lies in the specific educative mission.¹⁰¹

If we take a cue from Don Bosco’s experiences, we can say that the Salesian way of carrying out volunteer work is common - linked to the companies and their vocational potential. Don Bosco recommends in the confidential recollections to the directors: «The Altar Boys, the St. Aloysius, Blessed Sacrament, Immaculate Conception Sodalties should be encouraged and promoted. Show good will and satisfaction towards those who are enrolled, but you should only be a promoter and not their director. Consider such things as being for the boys».¹⁰² In a letter dated 1876, he defines the Companies as «the key to piety, conservatory morality, support of ecclesiastical and religious vocations».¹⁰³

In addition, there are some Don Bosco’s intuitions about the enormous spiritual tension and the extraordinary apostolic strength that the missionary ideal would have stimulated in his followers. The demonstration of the fact is the impact of the missionary dreams told in Good night talks.¹⁰⁴ He

⁹⁹ See VOJTÁŠ, *Reviving Don Bosco’s Oratory*, pp. 228-232.

¹⁰⁰ See IL 27, 32, 113, 159, 167, 195.

¹⁰¹ The motivations around the Salesian apostolic project, response to emerging needs, the missionary ad gentes ideal are the basis of half of the candidates for the consecrated and / or priestly life mentioned in DE PIERI, *Aspetti psicologici della vocazione salesiana*, in DESRAMAUT – MIDALI, *La vocazione Salesiana*, pp. 121-122 e J. ESPINOSA, *El examen psicologico de la motivación en los candidatos a la vida religiosa y sacerdotal. Estudio descriptivo e investigación experimental*, in *Ibidem*.

¹⁰² G. BOSCO, *Ricordi confidenziali al direttore della casa di...*, in ISTITUTO STORICO SALESIANO, *Fonti Salesiane. I. Don Bosco e la sua opera. Raccolta antologica*, LAS, Roma 2014, p. 428.

¹⁰³ G. BOSCO, *Circolare ai salesiani* (Torino, 12 gennaio 1876), in G. BOSCO, *Epistolario*. Introduzione, testi critici e note a cura di F. Motto, vol. 5, LAS, Roma 2012, p. 41.

¹⁰⁴ See the importance of mission dreams in M. FERRERO, *La forza ispiratrice dei sogni missionari di don Bosco. Riflessioni ed esperienze di un salesiano in Cina*, in A. BOZZOLO (Ed.), *I sogni di don Bosco. Esperienza spirituale e sapienza educativa*, LAS, Roma 2017, pp. 559-582.

spoke to the boys about the missions and missionaries, kept them informed of their activities, their needs, made them pray, encouraged them to participate in the “missionary dream”. Missionary animation and voluntary work today lead us to assume a vocational vision of life: a gift that is freely received has to be shared in the service of life for all.

3.4.2. *Virtuous and personalized discipline as a basic requirement for a journey*

If there is one approach that has to be rediscovered in the Salesian vocation, it is the “pedagogy of duties”. Without it, decisions remain pious intentions, the options are only rhetorical and the plan of life’s objectives remain on paper, increasing only the sense of failure. Clearly by duties and discipline we do not want to return to the old boarding school, it is more a logic that proposes lifestyles and paths (which are always partially standardized) that are then personalized by the young together with the companion.

In the Western world, the absence of discipline is a sign of the crisis of adulthood – there are no shared criteria for being an adult and this produces generations of irresponsible adolescent-like adults. The *Instrumentum Laboris* states with an emphasis: «Not only there is a lack of adults in the faith. There is a lack of adults “period”». ¹⁰⁵ The research by Marco Bay shows an image of the Salesian Congregation which in various regions sees a difficulty in setting up a formation for the responsibility of young Salesians. The data confirm the oscillation between the model of the “studentate” set on external discipline and homologation on one hand and the unaccompanied personalization in *do-it-yourself* style during the non-studentate phases (practical training and the first years of priesthood) on the other. ¹⁰⁶

Pope Francis warns in front of an external discipline that is worried about dominating the spaces: «Obsession, however, is not education. We cannot control every situation that a child may experience. Here it remains true that “time is greater than space”». ¹⁰⁷ True discipline education does not start with questions «where our children are physically, or whom they are with at any given time, but rather where they are existentially, where they stand in terms of their convictions, goals, desires and dreams». ¹⁰⁸

Personal discipline is based on the concept of discipleship, which does not preach values, does not follow behavior, does not imitate attitudes, but exercises itself in virtues. Bernhard Bueb, a Christian education theorist and practitioner, reacts to the effects of the late sixties liberal and permissivist paradigm in education, stating that «discipline is a prerequisite for young people to gain confidence in their own creative abilities. [...] Young people have the right to discipline». ¹⁰⁹ The demanding and loving accompaniment along the path of the progressive discovery of vocation, with its accomplishments and failures, is the best place to learn a vocational pedagogy that could start from childhood. In fact, the concepts of discipline and learning that are closely linked by the etymological meaning of the word discipline from the Latin *discere*: learning or gaining knowledge. The discipline concerns the way of thinking and acting intentionally and how to learn from each other.

Discipline is an operative virtue, understood as an enactment of the vocation in everyday life and therefore it is inserted in the tension between vision and current reality. It is more related to the idea of an inner order of the young person’s life than to the idea of a precise execution of a plan. In this sense, the main area of exercise of the vocational discipline is time-management. The travelogue and the accompaniment may very well start in continuity with the statement of Albert Caviglia: «two fundamental principles stand out: the scrupulous use of time and diligence in performance of one’s duties, according to don Bosco are the head of all spiritual effort». ¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ IL 14.

¹⁰⁶ See BAY, *Giovani Salesiani e accompagnamento*, pp. 423-493.

¹⁰⁷ EG 222 in AL 261.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁹ B. BUEB, *L’elogio della disciplina*, Rizzoli, Milano 2007, pp. 68-69.

¹¹⁰ A. CAVIGLIA, *Il “Magone Michele” una classica esperienza educativa*, in BRAIDO, *Prevention, not Repression*, p. 236.

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