

PREVENTION, NOT REPRESSION

Don Bosco's Educational System

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PRESENTATION

Don Bosco's educational system or, more comprehensively, Don Bosco's preventive experience, is a project: it grew, gradually expanded and became more specific in the different and various institutions and undertakings carried out by his many collaborators and disciples. Understandably, its vitality can be guaranteed in time only by being faithful to the law which governs any authentic growth: renewal, in-depth study, adaptation in continuity.

The renewal is entrusted to the persistent on-going theoretical and practical commitment of individuals and communities. Renewal never ceases. Continuity, instead, can be assured only by a keen engagement with the origins.

The aim of our rapid summary is to provoke an enlivening contact with the primitive roots of Don Bosco's preventive experience as well as its features. Our summary has no intention of offering immediately applicable programs; we simply wish to describe essential original elements which despite their circumstances and limitations can inspire valid and credible projects now and in the future for very different contexts and settings. This is essential if the legitimate aspiration of working "with Don Bosco and with the times" is to happen without a break in continuity.

This third edition is significantly restructured and expanded; more care has been given to historical data, less space to certain flights of fancy, more light shed on things that might be useful for an inevitable revision and revitalisation, something hinted at by an updated bibliography.

September 12, 1998
Fr Pietro Braido



INTRODUCTION

It seems obvious enough that the term 'Preventive System' as interpreted through documents left by Don Bosco, especially in the light of his and his closest helpers' educational experience, is an adequate expression of everything he said and did as an educator. When it comes to how contemporaries of his saw it, it becomes another discussion altogether.

We need to note that the terms 'preventive' and 'repressive' are perhaps not the most appropriate ones for talking about education that implies direct, out-going activities intended to broaden the personality of the one being educated. It has happened sometimes that 'preventive' was understood, and still is in many places, as something that happens prior to education. As we will see further on, Antonio Rosmini and Felix Dupanloup understood 'preventing', 'prevention' as one part of the overall process of education, almost something which preconditions it. Worse still in certain literature is the understanding of the term 'repressive' as equivalent to being non-educational.

It will become more obvious as we proceed that the preventive and repressive systems are two real but relatively distinct educational systems. They have been practised throughout history, be it in families or institutions, in diverse ways. Both are based on plausible motives and can boast of their productive approaches and positive results. One is based on the child¹ and his or her limitations of age, so on a consistent, loving 'assistance' on the educator's part. The educator is present, advises, guides, supports in a paternal (or maternal) way. From this spring educational regimes with a family-style orientation. The other points more directly to the goal to be achieved and therefore tends to see the young person as the future adult. As a consequence the child is treated with this end in mind from the earliest years. From this spring more austere and demanding regimes, schools which strictly follow the rules with regard to law, relationships, or measures which stress responsibility; military-style schools and the like. In reality, for thousands of years of historical experience both theoretical and practical, the two systems have existed in profusely composite versions. Somewhere between them we find, for example, so-called 'correctional education', well-known in the penal world as well as the world of education and re-education. It has full legitimacy

¹ Certainly not in the more evolved sense of the contemporary pedocentric and activist pedagogy of the new schools, Montessori and the like.

in historical, theoretical and practical terms. The Councillor of State for the Kingdom of Sardinia, Count Carlo Ilarione Petitti di Roreto (1790-1850) spoke of it with passionate commitment just as Don Bosco was arriving in Turin. We find it in the second chapter of the broad-ranging essay *The current situation in prisons and ways of improving them* (1840), under the title *The history of correctional education and the current state of the art*.² He also played an active role, as we shall see further on, with young men released from the *Generala* after a time of correctional education.³

At the beginning of his 1877 booklet on the Preventive System, Don Bosco himself wrote: "There are two systems that have been used through all ages in the education of youth: the Preventive and the Repressive".⁴

It foreshadowed a similar distinction in his note to Francesco Crispi some months later: "There are two systems in use in the moral and civil education of youth: the repressive and the preventive. Both are applied within civil society and in houses of education".⁵

Don Bosco opted for the first hypothesis and for a tradition which, probably less generalised than the other, he found more in keeping with the times and the youth he was dealing with.

From this perspective he had certainly not developed a preventive pedagogical system in theoretical terms. However, he had knowingly tried out and reflectively adopted principles, methods, means, institutions which allowed him to give young people a relatively complete human and Christian education. He offered his collaborators a unified and systematic approach to education. In fact he never understood 'preventive' as something purely preparatory, protective, a condition for education properly so-called or simply limited to the area of discipline or government (*Regierung*) which for Herbart was one of the three pillars of the art of pedagogy.

In the same booklet on the *Preventive system in the education of the young*, 1877, the positive educational elements clearly outstrip disciplinary and protective measures in both quality and quantity. He speaks of educators who are "loving fathers", constantly "present" in their pupils' lives. They speak, guide, offer advice, "lovingly correct". The central pillars of his entire educational edifice are indicated as daily

² *Della condizione attuale delle carceri e dei mezzi di migliorarla. Trattato dle Conte D. Carlo Ilarione Petitti di Roreto Consigliere di Stato ordinario e Socio della Reale Accademia della Scienze*. Turin, G. Pomba & Comp. 1840, in C.I. Petitti di Roreto, *Opere Scelte*, ed. G.M. Bravo, Turin, Fondazione Luigi Einaudi 1969, pp 319-587, chap 2, pp 361-447. Cf. further on chap 2, §§ 2 and 3

³ Cf. further on, chap. 10, § 1.

⁴ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p. 44, OE XXVIII 422

⁵ *Il sistema preventivo* (1878), RSS 4 (1985) 300

Mass and the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist. "Reason, religion and loving-kindness" are considered to underpin content and method. His overall practice is inspired by the charity which St Paul praises (1 Cor. 13).

We should mention the happy intuition of the Austrian educator, Hubert Henz, who makes explicit reference to Don Bosco's Preventive System: "The preventive approach is a way to educate that prevents the moral ruin of the pupil and the need for punishments, and demands that the educator be constantly with the pupil; total dedication to the task of education, a dynamic, complete and fully youthful existence". The extra that he hopes for from the Preventive System is precisely what Don Bosco intended by his 'preventive': to make young people mature and responsible "upright citizens and good Christians". His Preventive System "looks to this objective and is not exhausted by simply protecting or watching over".⁶

On the other hand, the 1877 booklet is not the only one that speaks about the 'Preventive System' even if it is the first time the term was adopted. Don Bosco would return to it in word and writing during the decade that followed. But his clear 'preventive' mind-set on behalf of "poor and neglected [abandoned] youth", was inspired from the earliest years of his consecration by social work on behalf of poor and neglected youth who needed to be "protected", "saved", beginning with ways and resources for introducing them to and helping them grow in the world of grace as well as offering a constructive effort at the level of sustenance, instruction, profession, moral and social growth.⁷

In the final years the 'Preventive System' in his writing becomes "our Preventive System" and even "the Salesian spirit".⁸

This is the point of view from which this work presents Don Bosco's pedagogical experience in a systematic way: a practical educational experience constantly integrated by reflection and real experimentation.⁹

This reconstruction can be found in the ten chapters in the second part of the book.

Since we are dealing with an experience and not an abstract theory, it cannot be understood without explicit reference to Don Bosco's personality. This in turn, and the preventive concept itself, become comprehensible in the light of the context in

⁶ H. Heinz, *Lehrbuch der systematischen Pädagogik*. Freiburg, Herder 1964, p. 232.

⁷ On his first twenty years of work amongst the young and 'Preventive System' he followed throughout. cf. P. Braido, *Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco alle origini (1841-1862). Il cammino del 'preventivo' nella realtà e nei documenti*, RSS 14 (1995) 255-320.

⁸ Cf. P. Braido, *L'esperienza pedagogica di don Bosco nel suo 'divenire'*, in «*Orientamenti Pedagogici*» 36 (1989) 27-36

⁹ Cf. P. Braido, *Pedagogia perseverante tra sfide e scommesse*, in «*Orientamenti Pedagogici*» 38 (1991) 906-11

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which he worked and the long period of time over which the idea slowly matured. That is described in the eight chapters in the first part of the book.

For the sake of greater clarity the first of these is given over to a basic description of the times and places in which Don Bosco began his work and gradually developed his educational, pedagogical experience. Such a way of tackling the problem of locating Don Bosco the educator in both the short and long term comes from the belief that the 'Preventive System', however it might have been applied and understood in Christian tradition, does not exhaust all possible educational systems, nor does 'Don Bosco's Preventive System' exhaust all possible versions of the 'Preventive System' itself. It is not a solitary treasure. It has distant origins, primarily in the Gospel. Future developments are no less rich in promise and outlook, if they remain faithful to the principles and to history.

Chapter 1

DON BOSCO'S TIMES

Don Bosco lived between August 16, 1815, and January 31, 1888. His birth coincided with the date that marks Europe's definitive transition from the *ancien régime* (ancient regime) to modern times, helped on by the powerful effect on the course of history wrought by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire (1789-1814). This transition was restrained by decrees issued by the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815), and the Holy Alliance (September 26, 1815). The former gave temporary shape to Europe's political geography.

But the upper hand would come from historical events so profound that by the end of the century the face of Europe and, from many points of view, the whole world would end up being altered. Among the most outstanding of the historical events we can single out rapid social and cultural changes, the industrial revolution, the irrepressible aspirations for national unity which were initially overlooked and later carried through with resolute determination in Germany and Italy, Europe's colonial expansion and consequent economic, political and cultural imperialism.¹

What happened primarily was a gradual and diversified transition from the secular model of society based on status (Aristocracy, Clergy, The Third Estate), to a bourgeois society based on division of classes. This new society was characterised by growing tensions sharpened through the establishment of an industrial proletariat aware of its own poverty, existing injustices, and also aware of its own importance thanks especially to emerging socialist forces.

The Industrial Revolution is of enormous historical relevance. It was the most dramatic revolution since the Stone Age,² with unforeseeable repercussions at all levels of human existence: technical and scientific, economic and social, cultural and political. The industrial revolution, resulting from a capitalist background, claims England as its place of origin during the second half of the 18th century. By the middle of the 18th century it had taken firm hold, to varying degrees, in Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland, and in the United States of America. Italy had to wait until the beginning of the last twenty years of the 18th century. Prior to this some phenomena of pre-

¹ Cf. J. Godechot, *L'epoca delle rivoluzioni*. Turin, UTET 1981, p. 929

² Cf. C.M. Cipolla, *La rivoluzione industriale*, in *Storia delle idee politiche, economiche e sociali*, ed. L. Firpo, (Turin, UTET 1972), 5, 11.

industrialisation could have been spotted in places like Turin, but with local import only.

The aspirations towards national, political unity would gradually become clear, widespread and intense, thanks especially to the input of liberal and democratic forces. But they would find opposition from political conservatives, advocates of regionalism, self-interested viewpoints and in Italy as well as all of the above, from the special situation of the Papal States. We have to keep in mind that due to the Congress of Vienna Italy, which for centuries had never achieved national unity, was actually divided into the following political entities:

- the Lombard-Venetian Kingdom under the Austrian Empire (Trent, Trieste and part of Istria had become imperial estates);
- the Duchy of Parma and Piacenza given to Maria Louise of Hapsburg (1815 - 1847), former French empress (at her death it was transferred to the Bourbons of Parma);
- the Duchy of Modena and Reggio given to Francis IV of Hapsburg-Este (1815-1846);
- the Duchy of Massa and Carrara given to Maria Beatrice of Este, mother of Francis IV (when she died, the Duchy was transferred to her son in 1831);
- the Duchy of Lucca given to the Bourbons of Parma and Piacenza and later on joined to the grand Duchy of Tuscany at the death of Maria Louise (1847), when the Bourbons of Parma moved to the Duchy of Parma and Piacenza;
- the Grand Duchy of Tuscany given to Ferdinand III of Hapsburg-Lorain (1814-1824), brother of the Austrian Emperor Francis I of Hapsburg (1806-1832);
- the Papal State without Avignon, given back to Pius VII (1800 - 1823);
- the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies given to Ferdinand IV of Bourbon (1815 - 1825);
- the Kingdom of Sardinia given to Victor Emanuel of Savoy (1802 - 1825) including Savoy, Piedmont, Nice, Sardinia with the added territory of the former republic of Genoa.³

With the development of the stronger nations (England, France, Germany, Austria and Russia), Europe reached its zenith during the second half of the century. During the following thirty years the consolidation of capitalism, the intensity of the industrial

³ The Republic of San Marino retained its secular independence.

revolution would give rise to sharper economic competition and a swifter race to arms. At the same time the need to expand commercially, politically and culturally at a global level was more greatly felt. The first and more widespread manifestation of all this was the appearance of Colonialism, with the consequent overturning of the 'extra-European' areas.⁴ This is the time when two major powers come to the fore in world history: the USA and Japan.

We should not overlook the massive phenomenon of emigration which, from 1842 to 1914, led to some 30 to 35 million Europeans leaving the Old Continent for the rest of the world. A significant factor was strong demographic pressure: the population of Europe, including Russia, was 180 million around the 1800s. In 1850, the population reached 274 million, and in the 1900's, it reached 423 million.

Together with the growing complications created by economic life, new social and political orders, and by the admittedly slow-growing expansion of freedoms, inroads were also made by evidently pluralistic world views, political ideologies and new moral and religious ideas. New and different directions emerged both in ideas and activities regarding individual destiny and the way people associated.

Besides persistent conservative and at times reactionary forces, new ideologies arose: liberal ideologies which continued the substantially bourgeois aspect of the French Revolution; democratic and radical ideologies more closely connected with the Jacobean expressions of the French Revolution; national and, later on, nationalistic ideologies of Romantic origin; still later on, socialist ideologies on the one hand, and Christian social ideologies on the other.⁵

For an understanding of the Italian spiritual world, its pastoral structure, the nature of the initiatives related to social work and education and catechetical instruction it may be useful to take an historical look at the leading Italian region of Piedmont. The reason behind this is that Piedmont had been connected with decisive events and remarkable changes in the various fields of politics and religion in the socio-economic field as well as in educational and scholastic fields.

1. Elements contributing to political change

The main political event is the unification of Italy as a nation, and the end of the

⁴ On imperialism and colonialism in the 19th century cf. A. Desideri, *Storia e storiografia, .2 Dall'illuminismo all'età dell'imperialismo*, (Messina-Firenze: G. D'Anna 1997), 1337; R. Marx and R. Poidevin, *Dalla riunzione francese all'imperialismo*, (Milan: CDE 1990), 410; P. Cinanni, *Emigrazione e imperialismo*, (Rome, Editori Riuniti 1975), 258; F. Boiardi, *Storia delle dottrine politiche, . 5 Colonialismo e imperialismo (1875-1945)*, (Milan: Nuova CEI 1982), 911; G. Balandier et al., *Le religioni nell'età del colonialismo e del neocolonialismo*, (Bari-Rome, Laterza 1990, 24), 307.

⁵ R. Albrecht-Carrié, *Le riunioni nazionali*, (Turin, UTET 1981), 543.

temporal power of the Popes. This is also why the political history of Italy is inevitably bound up with religious history.⁶ At the end of this evolving process (1870 marked the occupation of Rome), the nine states into which the entire peninsula had been divided became one single political body.

It seems appropriate at this point to spell out the succession of Savoy kings:

- Victor Emanuel I (1802-1821);
- Charles Felix (1821-1831);
- Charles Albert (1831-1849);
- Victor Emanuel II (1849-1878);
- Humbert I (1878-1900).

These all took an active part in the national revolution. During the period 1815-1848 the climate of 'restoration' prevailed and had, at least partially, a reactionary feel to it. Liberal ideas came to the fore. Movements and societies, often secret societies spread: they were intent on fostering more radical but democratically inspired revolution in political and social fields: the *Carboneria*, the Federates, the Students League, Joseph Mazzini's *Giovine Italia*, *Giovine Europa*. From time to time there was an outburst of revolutionary movements over the periods 1820-1821, 1830-1831, 1834, 1843, 1845, and 1846. These were a prelude to the great political social and national upheavals which began in Paris and then reached the main capitals and cities of Europe during February-June 1848: Vienna, Budapest, Prague, Berlin, Milan, Venice, Palermo, Nola. 'Constitutions' were forcefully imposed or spontaneously accepted. These Constitutions would, later on, be withdrawn by repressive authorities. Charles Albert granted the Constitution on March 4, and led the first war of independence against Austria (1848-1849), but was defeated and forced to abdicate.

Compared with the previous order of things most Catholics were unexpectedly forced to confront near traumatic circumstances: freedom of the press and, therefore, freedom of religious propaganda; competition with secular and at times anticlerical forces; the removal of secular privileges by the Siccardi Law (1850) like the ecclesiastical forum, immunity; the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Kingdom of Sardinia, the expulsion of the Sacred Heart Sisters, the expulsion of the Archbishop of Turin, Louis Fransoni; suppression of religious orders and the appropriation of all their goods; then in 1855, the limitations set on schools by the Boncompagni Laws of 1848 and the Casati Laws of 1859.

⁶ On the one hand the existence of the Papal States was seen as an Italian political and territorial issue; on the other it was seen as an important theological issue of interest to the universal Church and involving international politics.

The decade 1852-1861 was dominated by the President of the Cabinet (Prime Minister), Camillo Benso di Cavour - he had already been a minister previously, in 1850. With the support of a coalition made up of old moderate Liberals and non-extremist Democrats at whose head was Urban Rattazzi, he conducted a vigorous style of politics aimed at secular liberalisation of the State, following the principle of a free Church in a free State. At the same time he carried on an intense and successful activity with the goal of internationalising the problem of Italian unity. This activity took place mostly during the years 1859-1860 with the second war of independence (1859), the expedition of the thousand (*I Mille* 1860), headed by Joseph Garibaldi, and a series of annexations. It came almost to a complete end with the third war of independence (the annexation of the Venetian territory, in 1866) and with the occupation of Rome (1870).

Already on March 17, 1861, Victor Emanuel II had been officially proclaimed King of Italy, and Rome had been officially declared as its capital: it actually would become so only in 1871 when the royal court and the government moved there. Prior to this event, the court and government had moved to Florence, the temporary capital of Italy, from 1865 to 1871.

The Holy See did not accept what had happened. It did not recognise *La legge delle garantigie*⁷ (the Guarantee Laws) and, in 1874, forbade all Italian Catholics to take part in the election of the Parliament of a "usurper-state" [*non expedit*].

The historical Left in Parliament and government, made up of old leftist liberals and supported by parties of various hues ('Transformism' it was called), prevailed over the historical Right (moderate liberals) in 1876. The historical Left, supported by various forces, gave rise to several cabinets headed by Augustine De Pretis, Benedict Cairoli, and Francesco Crispi. These cabinets demonstrated a somewhat secular and radical orientation.

2. Circumstances in the religious area

Even within life revolving around religion and faith one could quite clearly note the transition from a time when the covenant between 'throne and the altar' was stressed to one of growing separation of the two. This was partly brought about by political measures considered as harassment, largely brought on by the inability to respect the necessary distinctions between the religious and political spheres, at least in practical terms, and the final self-inflicted blow, the Papal decree *Non Expedit*, the consequence of which was to sideline the Church in political terms.

⁷ The law of 13 May 1871 by which the Italian State intended to legitimise the occupation of Rome on 20 September 1870, the annexation to the Kingdom of Italy of the former Papal States, and the regularising of relationships with the Vatican. The Holy See never recognised this.

However the presence of the Church and Catholics within religious and social fields was remarkable.

2.1 The situation in the Catholic Church

Christian reconquest of society was due to Papal leadership. The Popes had gained new prestige by withstanding persecution and revolution (Pius VI), including Napoleon's efforts (Pius VII). The names of these Popes are:

- Pius VII (1800-1823), elected in Venice after Pope Pius VI who died at Valence, France;
- Leo XII (1823-1829); Pius VIII (1829-1830);
- Gregory XVI (1831-1846);
- Pius IX (1846-1878), and
- Leo XIII (1878-1903).

Undoubtedly, from a worldwide perspective the Catholic Church was showing evident signs of rebirth. Its structures found new strength and better appreciation, as did its evangelical and pastoral activity. The setting up of Concordats meant new, broader relationships with States. There was a keen revival of missionary activity. Doctrinal positions of varying theological import and result were adopted: Pope Gregory's encyclical *Mirari Vos* which dealt with Catholic Liberalism (1832); the definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854); Pius IX's encyclical *Quanta Cura* and the *Syllabus*, which were published in 1864 in order "to dismantle the errors of the century"; Vatican Council I (1869 -1870) which promulgated the Constitution *De Fide Catholica*, and the Dogma of Papal Infallibility. There was a remarkable wave of conversions linked with orientation to Rome and the 'Oxford movement'. The Oxford movement began in 1833 and was made famous by the conversion of J. H. Newman (1801-1890) to the Catholic Church in 1845, and H.E. Manning's conversion in 1852.

The restoration of university studies began with Leo XII in 1824. The event marked the starting point of an upward movement of culture, and a more appropriate formation programme for the clergy which reached its peak with Leo XIII.

Catholic social involvement found its first official manifesto in Leo XIII's Letter *Rerum novarum* in 1891, adding to the faithful's commitment to charitable undertakings during the course of the century, particularly in Germany and Belgium. All this was preceded by a more explicit organisational restructuring of the apostolate of the laity.

Finally, another feature which characterised the 19th century was the proliferation of religious congregations for men and women directed to charitable deeds, social welfare, education and missionary activities.

The encounter with the new world seemed fundamentally positive when the Church was governed by Pope Pius VII, assisted by Cardinal Consalvi (1757-1824). This relationship faltered under Leo XII and Pope Gregory XVI. Initially, it looked like an enthusiastic encounter, but then, under Pope Pius IX and Cardinal Antonelli, it became ambiguous and finally turned into a politico-religious conflict. The amnesty granted by Pope Pius IX a month after his election (1846) was responsible for an exaggerated enthusiasm which grew with subsequent papal decisions: the resolution to build railways (the November 7 manifesto); the edict on the press, March 15, 1847; the setting up of a consultative body, April 19 and October 14; the creation of the Cabinet of Ministers, June 12; the formation of a civil guard, July 5; the setting up of the Municipal Council of Rome, October 3; the cautious introduction of lay people into the Cabinet, December 29.

All of these events were followed by an address delivered February 10, 1848: *O Great God, bless Italy!* and by the granting of the Constitution, March 14, 1848. Because of all this popular demonstrations by people manifesting their consent multiplied and the acclamation "Long Live Pius IX" was widely heard along with growing pressure from democratic circles.⁸

Pope Pius IX delivered an address April 29, 1848, viewing the cause of Italian national unity with clear delight but unequivocally declaring the impossibility of direct intervention against Austria. This created deeper ambiguities and misunderstandings. A fatal clash was inevitable: the President of the Cabinet, Pellegrino Rossi, was assassinated; the Roman revolution began (November 15-16, 1848) and died away with the creation of a provisional government after Pope Pius IX left for Gaeta (November 24) and with the proclamation of the Roman Republic (February 5, 1849).

Pope Pius IX returned to Rome (1850), which had been recaptured by French troops the previous year. With the help of Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli he followed an intransigent political programme which excluded all possible negotiations with the Italian government regarding a Papal Rome and a Papal State.

In reference to the various and keener layers of Catholic life there is justifiable reason for speaking of Catholics facing a real 'case of conscience': it was already difficult to reconcile the fact of being Catholic and a citizen of a secular state. And now another conflict had come to the fore: how to reconcile the passion for the national unity of Italy and the fidelity owed to the Pope, who was both the spiritual leader and the governing authority of a state, the existence of which was incompatible with such a national unity.

⁸ During a visit to Rome in 1846 Count Solaro della Margherita "observed that no one was shouting out 'Viva il Papa' but only 'Viva Pius IX'..." P. Pirri, 'Visita del Solaro della Margherita a Pio IX nel 1846', in: *«La Civiltà Cattolica»* 1928, III, 509 (letter to the King Sept. 5, 1846).

2.2 *The situation of the Church in Turin*

Piedmont was naturally no stranger to the complex religious problems affecting Catholics in Italy. On the contrary, because of its political position, its cultural and economic status (the region had the highest percentage of illiterates) and the abundance of charitable undertakings, Piedmont was often a paradigm.

Five archbishops directed the church of Turin during Don Bosco's lifetime:

- Colombaro Chiaverotti, Camaldolese (1818-1831);
- Louis of the Counts Fransoni, from a Genoese noble family, (1832-1862). He was expelled from the Kingdom of Sardinia in 1850 and died in Lyons, France, in 1862;
- Alexander of the Counts Riccardi of Nitro, from a Biellese noble family (1867-1870);
- Lawrence Gastaldi, from Turin (1871-1883) and
- Cardinal Cajetan Alimonda (1883-1891).

The archbishops who would have more of a lasting impact on the Turin Church, because of the historical context but also their temperament, were Chiavarotti, Fransoni and Gastaldi.

Archbishop Chiavarotti stood out because of his intense pastoral concern in a diocese which had been tested by the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods. He reopened the Bra seminary for the students of philosophy, gave a definite ecclesiastical orientation to the seminary at Giaveno and in the house of the Filippini in Chieri entrusted to him by the Holy See, and opened an adjunct to the seminary in Turin (1829) for philosophical and theological students. Don Bosco would do his six years of study of philosophy and theology in this adjunct seminary, from 1835 to 1841. It was during this time that the *Convitto Ecclesiastico di San Francesco di Sales* (a residential institution for clergy which we can call the Pastoral Institute, in English) opened up in the sub-alpine Capital. The one who started it, in 1817, was theology professor Father Guala. This was the time when confrontational disputes had arisen between the defenders of 'probabilism' and 'tutorism', in moral theology. The *Convitto Ecclesiastico* was approved by the Archbishop on February 23, 1821.⁹

Archbishop Fransoni's governance had more of an impact on the Turin Church and the other Italian churches because of his confrontation with the State. Archbishop Fransoni's main concern was the clergy and he dedicated himself to their renewal. Statistical data from 1839 offer us this picture: 623 diocesan priests, 325 religious

⁹ Cf. G. Tuninetti, *Lorenzo Gastaldi (1815-1871)*, (Casale Monferrato, Edizioni Piemme 1983), 35-37.

priests, 216 lay religious, 213 sisters. With the so-called 'Restoration' initiated by the Kingdom of Sardinia, the Church had reclaimed the rights and privileges of the *ancien régime*, thanks to a set of strictly confessional laws with a hint of Church-State openness about them. Ecclesiastical censure was influential and the school system was tinged with clericalism, based on the *Regolamento (Regulations)* of 1822, clearly of Jesuit origin. The prevailing tendencies were conservative and, at times, even reactionary. Liberal-leaning institutions or innovations, Protestantism, revolutionary spirit were looked upon with suspicion: philanthropic undertakings like *Il Ricovero di Mendicità* (a program to help the poor); kindergartens created by Aporti; courses on methodology (the clash that occurred between Archbishop Fransoni and Charles Albert on the occasion of the course run by Aporti from the end of August to the beginning of October 1844 was typical); evening and Sunday schools; railways, scientific Congresses. The situation grew worse, at the beginning of 1847, when the first reforms took place and Charles Albert fired the reactionary Count Solano della Margherita. The censure system was re-shaped together with the freedom of the press and worship, the abolition of the right of asylum and the ecclesiastical Forum. From this moment on, the religious history of Piedmont and the conflicts which characterised it were intertwined more and more with the history of Italy, and this echoed far and wide.

Important during this period was the meeting of all the bishops of the ecclesiastical province of Turin at Villanovetta, from July 25 to July 29, 1849. The bishops were concerned about creating a common front to face the new political and religious situation. Among other matters, the problem of the press was examined. The bishops of Mondovì (Ghilarli and Moreno), had been invited "to draw up an association plan for the press and the diffusion of better-written ecclesiastical books".

Particular attention should be given to prevailing moral and pastoral orientations. Some elements will be pointed out further on when we deal with the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*, the moral theology orientation offered by St Alphonus Liguori, and with youth spirituality, developed particularly by the reborn Society of Jesus.¹⁰

¹⁰ Cf. P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, 2, (Rome, LAS 1979/1981); and *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*, (Rome, LAS 1980). The following brief note is a guide: "We should not be surprised if both at the Shrine at Lanzo and at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* the Jesuit spirit prevailed and its characteristics marked those spiritual gatherings directed by Guala: Ignatian asceticism, a decisive struggle against Jansenism and Regalism, a sincere and tender devotion to the Sacred Heart, to the Madonna, to the Pope, frequency with the sacraments, moral theology according to the spirit of St Alphonus": F. Bauducco SJ, "San Giuseppe Cafasso e la Compagnia di Gesù", in *La Scuola Cattolica* 88 (1960): 289.

3. *Change in the socio-economic area*

During this period the Italian economic and social situation looked like a multi-coloured map scaled according to the various regions and political set-ups. The Italian population at the beginning of the century was 18 million; by 1850, it was 24 million; by the end of the century, it was 34 million. The country was based on agriculture and small business (local crafts). It would keep this structure, to a great extent, even after the first period of industrialisation at the end of the century.¹¹ The differences between one region and another and especially the difference between north and south, were markedly evident. This situation was responsible for aggravating the 'southern question' which was to follow. Poverty, in different degrees, was everywhere but more so in the country and mountains than in the cities, where the poor had migrated and together with them the inevitable accompaniment of diseases, physical and mental, and of starving or under-nourished people.¹²

Partial signs of a recovery process emerged around 1850. One of the centres where these signs were more evident was precisely the region of Piedmont and, more particularly, the city of Turin. During the 19th century, Turin, the capital of Savoy, recorded a remarkable expansion in population, economy and building programs. This city's population grew five-fold from 65,000 in 1802, to 320,000 in 1891. The rhythm of growth was particularly rapid during a thirty year period, 1835-1864: (the population grew from 117,000 to 218,000, and especially during the period between 1848-1864 (from 137,000 to 218,000).¹³

During the most active period of the beginnings of the Oratory, Turin's population increased by 80,000 and between 1858-1862 by 25,000. The reasons for this increase were not only social and political but economic: famine in the countryside and the mountains, the increased number of factories in the city, textile factories, arsenals, mills, food factories, arms factories, the coach business, tobacco manufacturing, increased bureaucratic procedures especially for employment, expansion in the construction area (making a lot of work available), improved communications systems

¹¹ Cf. the fundamental work in collaboration, ed. G. Mori, *L'industrializzazione in Italia (1861-1900)*, (Bologna: Il Mulino 1981), II, ed., 509.

¹² Cf. F. della Peruta, "Aspetti della società italiana nell'Italia della restaurazione", in *Studi storici* 17 (1976) n.2, 27-68; *Timore e carità. I poveri nell'Italia moderna*. Acts of the Convention on *Pauperismo e assistenza negli antichi stati italiani*, Cremona, March 28-30, 1980, ed. G. P. oliti, M. Rosa and F. della Peruta, (Cremona: Ediz. del Convegno 1982), ch 14, 500; A Monticone (ed.), *Poveri in cammino. Mobilità e assistenza tra Umbria e Roma in età moderna*, (Milan: F. Angeli 1993), Chap. 14, 417; F. della Peruta (ed.), *Malattia e medicina*, vol 7 of the Annals of *Storia d'Italia*, (Turin: Einaudi 1984, Chap. 20, 1293.

¹³ In the work by Fr Pietro Barico, for some years deputy mayor of the city, we find a precise picture of Turin: *Torino descritta* (Turin: G.B. Paravia e Comp. 1869), 972.

(in 1858, Piedmont owned 936 kilometres of railways, while the Kingdom of Naples had only 100 kilometres and the Papal State but 17), extraordinary legislative provisions, initiatives created by the civic administration to prevent the possible crises connected with the transfer of the Capital from Rome to Florence (1865).¹⁴

All of the above explain the typical phenomenon of migration within the area which became, explicitly, the first oratory apostolate of Don Bosco's - a phenomenon which grew in Italy and France and which was responsible for the setting up of several charitable undertakings in the 1870s.

4. *Changes in cultural, educational and scholastic areas*

The lull in the first decades of the century, especially after 1830, was followed by a gradual interest in culture and schools for the working class. Catechetical activity was placed within the context of remarkable expansion both pedagogical and scholastic, at a European level and also, to a certain extent, at an Italian and Piedmontese level.¹⁵

The blossoming of the Romantic movement goes back to the first part of the century; names such as Froebel, Pestalozzi, Fr Girardi and others belonging to the Herbart school of realism, spiritualist in orientation, and later on to positivist pedagogy and teaching. In Piedmont the disputed acceptance of Ferrante Aporti's kindergartens, begun in Cremona in November 1828, became remarkably evident from the 1930s onwards.

Later on we will mention real or hypothetical contacts between new 19th-century initiatives in the field of education and the youth institutions created by Don Bosco.¹⁶

Looking at school organisation, following the *Regolamento* (Regulations) of Charles Felix (1822), there is a decisive break from the past. This was provoked, in 1848, by the Boncompagni Law which gave its blessing to a state monopoly in education, thus placing all public education in the hands of the Minister, Secretary of State. The Casati Law of November 13, 1859, gave the final approval to the new general structure of public education.¹⁷ The breathing space granted to private, non-state schools, was curtailed by the executive board, year after year, in a way that was not legally admissible.

¹⁴ G.M. Bravo, *Torino operaia: mondo del lavoro e idee sociali nell'età di Carlo Alberto*, (Turin, Fondazione Luigi Einaudi 1968), 300.

¹⁵ Halfway through the century Italy's population, like that of most of Europe, was suffering from the curse of illiteracy. Don Bosco however, began his work in Piedmont, the region most literate and amongst the less poor.

¹⁶ Cf. A. Gambaro, "La pedagogia italiana nell'età del Risorgimento", in *Nuove questioni di storia della pedagogia*, 2, (Brescia: La Scuola 1977), 535-796; D. Bertoni Jovine, *Storia della scuola popolare in Italia*, (Turin, Einaudi 1954), 511.

¹⁷ Cf. V Sinistero, 'La legge Boncompagni del 4 ottobre 1848 e la libertà della scuola', in *Salesianum* 10 (1948): 369-423.

Don Bosco himself had experienced this while running his school. But even the progress of the Italian public school system turned out to be very slow and difficult particularly with regard to the elementary schools and schools for the working classes.¹⁸

¹⁸ CF. G. Gozzer et al., *Cenni di storia della scuola italiana dalle legge Casati al 198* (Rome, Armando 1982), 147; D. Ragazzini, *Storia della scuola e storia d'Italia dall'Unità ad oggi* (Bari: De Donato 1982), 276; D. Ragazzini, *Storia della scuola italiana. Linee generali e problemi di ricerca*, (Florence, Le Monnier 1983), 132. On the situation in the years immediately following the Casati Law, cf. meaningful documentation by G. Talamo, *La scuola dalla legge Casati alla inchiesta del 1864*, (Milan, Giuffrè 1960), Chap 7, 420; a special number of the journal *I Problemi della pedagogia* 5 (1959) n.1, Jan-Feb is dedicated to the Casati Law of Nov. 13, 1859, which became the law for Italian schools up to the Gentile reform of 1923.

Chapter 2

BETTER TO PREVENT THAN REPRESS

After the unforeseen and traumatic experience of the French Revolution followed by the more or less radical overthrow of the old order resulting from Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) Europe seemed obsessed with the idea of 'prevention' more than ever before. It was accompanied by variously nuanced 'Restoration' plans depending on one or other mind-set or culture.

Various classes of conservatives, reactionaries too, took restoration and prevention to be something based on fear, with more than a hint of repression. The fear was of new revolutionaries, sects, secret societies, liberalism, (standing for freedom of the press, association and worship). There was also an aura of mistrust regarding new educational experiences thought to be subversive. Even new methods of teaching, reciprocal teaching, schools for the working class, kindergartens connected with De Maistre, Monaldo Leopardi, Clement Solaro della Margherita, were looked upon as a threat to the principle of authority because they aimed at training people to use their reasoning power alone and be independent of family and Church. The accent was on strict vigilance, preventive censure, providing 'missions for the masses', in order to win them back and offer them moral standards through religion and prevention of idleness and licentiousness.

Among the moderates or the broad-minded, there was instead a tendency to reclaim what was considered valid from the old order such as instruction, religious practices, traditional moral values, but also a tendency to accept new contributions such as the spreading of the 'light' of knowledge, the gradual expansion of primary schools and technical schools for the working classes, the re-evaluation of work and social solidarity, the adoption of more just, more humane methods as part of the process of confronting the chronic social diseases of poverty and delinquency, the development of charitable undertakings and mutual social assistance, the spreading of good books, the creation of popular libraries and so forth.

In this context, we notice a more systematic affirmation of the 'preventive principle', to the point where it was translated explicitly into the term 'Preventive System' which would then become historical fact at a later stage.

This term bears the distinctive marks of the century. In fact, though with different emphasis, the term grew up within the climate of the Restoration, reflected its features and the variegated aspects of the different groups. It could be espoused by those who were nostalgic for the *ancien régime* and by the Legitimists, fully aware though they

may have been of the impossibility of a simple return to the past; it could likewise be espoused by moderates well-disposed to what was new and open, to some extent, to modernity, as also by those who had more courageous projects in mind. Laurentie, Pavoni, Champagnat, Aporti, Rosmini, Dupanloup, Don Bosco and many others might legitimately be associated, at least generically, with the 'Preventive System'. However, real circumstances, different mind-sets, different objectives or readiness gave different nuances to the same visions or basic experiences and offered some remarkably different features.

This is the same kind of ambiguity or ambivalence related to the 'restlessness for prevention' which seemed to pervade the entire century at different times and from different points of view. Don Bosco appeared to be in agreement with it on cultural, political, pastoral and educational levels, but in a more moderate form. He made this evident both in his *Storia ecclesiastica, 1845* (Church History) and *La Storia d'Italia 1855* (The History of Italy).

Q: Who began the French Revolution? **A:** The secret societies, some fanatics called the 'illuminati' or The Enlightened, who had joined some philosophers pretending to be able to reform the world by providing everyone with Equality and Liberty. These are the ones who are responsible for fomenting the persecution which began in 1790 and lasted 10 years and caused much bloodshed.¹

For a period of almost fifty years, peace reigned supreme in Italy, and almost throughout Europe. It was this peaceful atmosphere which allowed many worthy minds to enrich the sciences and the arts with useful contributions but it also granted secret societies an easy way to accomplish their plans.

These secret societies are generally known as *Carbonari* (the coal-people), *Franchi Tiratori* (Franchs Machons - Sharp Shooters), *Jacobites*, *Illuminati* (the Enlightened) and took on different names at different times, but they all had the same goals. They aimed at overturning the present society which they did not like, because they did not find the appropriate sustenance for their ambitions, nor enough freedom to unleash their passions. To destroy society they made every effort to knock down every religion and remove all moral sense from the hearts of men, to destroy all kinds of religious and civil authorities, meaning the Roman Pontificate and the [Kingly] Thrones ... Many were easily led to give their names to these societies because, in the early stages, there was no indication of the wickedness of their goals... The only things up for

¹ G. Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica ad uso delle scuole utile per ogni ceto di persone*, (Turin, Speirani e Ferrero 1845), 342-343. OE I 500-501

discussion were brotherhood, philanthropy and the like ... It was the middle-class, namely the bourgeoisie, which began the Revolution by using the lower class who, in turn, decided to continue it and make it general, as actually happened. It was then that hundreds of the middle-class who had condemned priests and nobles to death, were themselves thrown to the gallows. Because of this Revolution, what was on top in society was thrown down, and what was at the bottom came to the top of society: that's how the anarchy of the mob came to rule. The secret societies, which were responsible for the French Revolution, had already found their way into Italy, and, through them, the seductive ideas of liberty, equality and reform were spread all over".²

The answer to the question makes it evident that the 'enlightened century' was not entirely negative. As a matter of fact, the sound and relevant side of it "allowed many worthy minds to enrich the sciences and arts with useful understandings". As it turned out, this made an enormous contribution of new ideas which would find their ideal and effective place among the positive elements of the 'Preventive System', together with moderate requests for rationality (understood more as 'reasonableness') freedom, brotherhood and humanity which make up the content of philanthropy and humanitarianism attuned to Christian truth.

During the course of the 19th century, the global phenomenon of "restlessness for prevention" would be expressed at the following five levels: political, social, juridical and penal, welfare and finally, scholastic, educational and religious.

1. *Political prevention*

The 'preventive principle' was an inspiration for those taking part in the Congress of Vienna: they had gathered, yet again, to draw up the political map of Europe after the Napoleonic fire-storm. Their aim was to restore the old order, keeping however the positive or non-disposable elements that new ideas and new times had generated.

At any rate, generally speaking the following were reaffirmed, at least substantially: the religious and strictly paternal concept of authority at all levels, ecclesiastical, civil and domestic; the observance of law and obedience as an essential

² G. Bosco, *Storia d'Italia raccontata alla gioventù da' suoi primi abitatori sino ai nostri giorni*, (Turin, Paravia e Comp. 1855), 455-457, OE VII 455-457. The 'sectarian' plan, according to Don Bosco, carries on after the Congress of Vienna: "At the same time those secret societies that had thrown France into turmoil formed a new and strange plan to set up a single republic of all the kingdoms of Italy. To succeed, you can easily see, they had first to ruin all the Italian kingly thrones and religion itself. ... meanwhile they looked into ways to have the people turned against their kings, asking for a constitution the same as had been granted in Spain, thanks to which the Prince handed over some of his power to the people and all people were equal before the law" (G. Bosco, *Storia d'Italia*, 476, OE VII 476).

balancing element in interpersonal relationships; the well-being and happiness of the people looked after by a State administration expected to be solid, just and guaranteed by a strong centre; responsibilities and powers assigned according to the social, spiritual and economic prestige of the individuals called on to share them; and finally the social, regenerating power of Christianity.

Nevertheless, along with absolutist orientations and repressive realities, innovation also made a strong showing. England, France, followed by Norway, the Netherlands and some German states, made their importance felt in this matter.

The restoration of all the legitimate powers did not mean a return to a pure and simple old order. This was the suggestion made by Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, the intelligent French representative at the Congress of Vienna. Making his point, the French representative said: "Universal opinion today (unlikely to falter), is that governments exist only for the people... and that a legitimate power is the best power suited to guarantee their happiness and peace... And it is no less advantageous to the sovereign than to his subjects to set up the government in such a way as to avoid all possible motives for fear".³ Pope Pius VII held the same belief in 1816 in his re-organisation of the administration of the Provinces of the Papal State which had been recently 'reclaimed':

A return to the old order of things in these provinces turns out to be impossible. New customs have replaced old ones; new opinions have crept in and are almost universally shared in various areas of the administration and public economy; new 'lights' have been accepted following the example of other European nations and these 'lights' demand the necessary adoption, by the aforementioned provinces, of a new system more suited to the present circumstances of the population, circumstances so different from the previous one.⁴

A greater guarantee of order and balance for the future was sought after by some of the protagonists in Vienna through the Holy Alliance, drawn up on September 26, 1815 by the sovereigns of Prussia, Austria and Russia.

The Holy Alliance was guided by Christian principles as expressed by three confessions: Orthodox, Catholic, and Lutheran. It aimed at providing firm bonds of

³ C. Talleyrand, *Relazione al Re durante il suo viaggio da Grand a Parigi* (June 1815), in *Mémoires*, 3, 197ff, cited by C. Barbargallo, *Storia Universale*, . 5V, Part 2: *Dall'età napoleonica alla fine della prima guerra mondiale* (1799-1919), (Turin: UTET 1946), 1089. Guizot, Cousin, Royer-Collard etc., are along the same lines.

⁴ *Moto proprio della Santità di Nostro Signore Pap Pio settimo in data delli 6 luglio 1816 sulla organizzazione dell'Amministrazione Pubblica esibito negli atti del Nardi Segretario di Camera nel dì 15 del mese ed anno suddetto*. (Rome, Presso V. Poggioli Stampatore della Rev. Cam. Apost. 1816), 5.

fraternity among those who signed it, and paternal bonds between them and their respective peoples so as to ensure stability and peace for Europe.

The first two articles stand out as a synthesis of the 'Preventive System' to be used on a political-religious level.

Article 1. In conformity with the words of the Sacred Scriptures which command human beings to deal with one another as brothers, the three contracting monarchs will remain united with bonds of true and indissoluble brotherhood and, considering themselves as compatriots on any occasion and in any place, they will provide mutual assistance, help and relief; while considering themselves as fathers of a family towards their subjects and armies, they will guide them with the same spirit of brotherhood, by which they are moved to protect religion, peace and justice.

Article 2. Consequently the only prevailing principle, both among the aforementioned governments and among their subjects, will be that of being of service to one another: the principle of manifesting, with unalterable benevolence, that mutual affection which should animate them; the principle of considering everyone as a member of the same Christian nation; the principle of looking upon the allied princes themselves as delegated by divine Providence to rule over the three branches of the same family, namely, Austria, Prussia and Russia. By so doing it will be declared that the Christian nation of which the sovereigns and their people form part, has really no sovereign other than the one to whom alone all power belongs as his own, because it is in him that the treasures of love, knowledge and infinite wisdom can be found, namely God Our Divine Saviour, Jesus Christ, the Word of the Most High, the Word of life.⁵

A political debate on the alternatives of repression-prevention was held at a European level during the second half of the century, due to the birth of the International Socialist party (London, 1864). But at this time the cultural and social conditions were profoundly altered.

Two rather mobile fronts were formed: one had liberal tendencies and prevailed in England, Austria and Italy; the other was more rigid and prevailed in France, Spain, Prussia and Russia.

The Italian foreign minister, Visconti Venosa, was convinced that to fight against the Socialist International party members, "It was sufficient for the government to be vigilant in order to frustrate the manoeuvres of the agitators, ward off their plots and strongly secure the country against such serious dangers. Preventive measures could

⁵ Almost all sovereigns adhered to the Holy Alliance. Outside it and opposed to it were the Pope and England: A. Desideri, *Storia e storiografia*, Vol 2 "Dall'Iluminismo all'età dell'Imperialismo", 415-416

eventually be used against the spreading of those destructive doctrines which threatened Europe with a new kind of barbarity". But such measures had "to be compatible with our institutions and customs". Instead Spain's minister Praxedes Mateo Sagasta, though a liberal, outlawed the Socialist International party. France followed suit with a law on March 13-14, 1872.

The French Foreign Minister, Francois Remusat, thought that "preventive measures were appropriate; namely, it was appropriate to consider the very fact of belonging to the Socialist International Party a crime". France's stand, then, was more repressive than that of the Italian government.

Once again, the Roman government showed, substantially, an inclination towards accepting the English *laissez faire* approach and not towards necessarily preventive and general measures. First, the Minister for the Interior, Lanza, and later, the Keeper of the Seals, De Falco, let it be known to their colleague the Foreign Minister that it was impossible to agree with the Spanish and French stand... The mind-set of the Roman politicians was closer to the attitude of Granville and Gladstone which was clearly profoundly liberal, all imbued with the principle which, in terms of internal politics, was considered the informing principle of English liberalism and the principle of European liberalism as well, namely, the principle of repression and not the principle of prevention. Later on, two representatives of the Left, Cairoli and especially Zanardelli, openly proclaimed the aforementioned principle. This stand contradicted Crispi who was one of the champions of strong government and who supported the principle of prevention. But, at least in those days, in 1871-1873, the repressive principle was also supported by people on the right.⁶

Minister B. Cairoli, in a speech delivered at Pavia on October 15, 1878 put it this way: "Government authority should make sure that public order is not disturbed; it should be inexorable in repressing and not arbitrary in preventing".⁷ Joseph Zanardelli shared the very same political stance.⁸

Francesco Crispi, on December 5, 1878, declared that:

political authority has the right to prevent crimes just as the judiciary has the right to repress them". He clarified his statement by emphasising the need of a certain authoritarian discretion to be used by the government in the exercise of

⁶ F. Chabod, *Storia della politica estera italiana dal 1870 al 1896*, (Bari: Laterza 1962), 435-436. On the whole problem, cf. 392-454 (*La libertà e la legge*).

⁷ B. Cairoli, *Discorso pronunciato in Pavia... il 15 ottobre 1878*, (Rome 1878), 6, cited by F. Chabod, *Storia della politica estera* 435, n.1.

⁸ G. Zanardelli, electoral speech at Iseo, Nov. 3, 1878, and speeches in Chamber on Dec. 5-6, 1878, cited by F. Chabod, *Storia della politica estera*...

acts of prevention. This discretionary prevention consists in using a complex of prudential acts, cautions, secure and moral provisions thanks to which the government can keep the public peace without falling into arbitrariness. It is certainly hard to carry it out. The one who carries it out should not only have foresight but also be guided by a great sense of justice, and by a profound sense of morality.⁹

It is rather interesting that in February 1878, Don Bosco had sent minister Crispi a sketch outline of his *Il sistema preventivo nell'educazione* (The Preventive System in education), while he had promised to send the same to his successor, the Minister for the Interior, Zanardelli, in July 1878.¹⁰ One can imagine the impact that the educational use of the terms 'preventive' and 'repressive' might have made on those two men, accustomed to use them in an opposite political sense.¹¹

Following the preparatory work done by two committees, one German the other Austrian, from November 7 to November 29, 1872, a conference was held in Berlin which concluded by favouring repressive measures for social crimes. There were no measures issued for preventive interventions against the danger of subversive socialism.¹²

2. *Social prevention: paupers and beggars*

The idea of prevention, foreshadowed in some sectors of society during the 17th and 18th centuries, was positively supported with new vigour more in the social than the political arena, especially in Spain, France and England, and particularly in connection with the widespread phenomenon of 'pauperism and beggary', criminality,

⁹ *Discorsi parlamentari* II 313 (Dec. 5, 1878), cited by F. Chabod, *Storia della politica estera*. 436, n.3. Apart from liberal ideas, F. Crispi was, in political action, decisively authoritarian. "The theory of repression beloved by Zanardelli and Cairoli was put aside and replaced by prevention; and even in prevention, Crispi's manner was quite brusque

¹⁰ Letters, Feb. 21 and July 23, 1878, E III 298-299 and 366-367

¹¹ However, whether in pedagogy or politics, theory or practice, the boundaries between the two systems were never strictly defined. Declarations of intent, certainty, was always accompanied by fears and apprehensions followed by authoritarian and to some extent 'repressive' interventions. Even Don Bosco's Preventive System had "a word on punishments".

¹² Cf. F. Chabod, *Storia della politica estera* 445. Count Edward de Lounay, Savoird, Italy's minister in Berlin and an authoritarian, pessimistically commented: "we have come to realise once again how irksome it can be for these high civil servants and jurists to plan something practical and productive with regard to the measures to be taken either for prevention or repression... One could also hope that governments will distance themselves from their traditional routine and openly fight against an association which only has the ruin of society by every revolutionary means as its aim, along with the family", (cited by F. Chabod, *Storia della politica estera*. 450, n.2.)

the required help for children, and education. Particular attention is given to neglected youngsters, runaways, vagrants and beggars.¹³

Italy faced the same problems also during the 19th century, with pre-industrialisation and industrialisation, along with the problem of urbanisation, when farmers and mountain dwellers were looking for less precarious work and life conditions.

This phenomenon of urbanisation was a real disorder, a scandal for aristocrats and moderates, and remedies were sought in the guidelines projected by Luis Vives in his work, *De subventionem pauperum* (On how to meet the needs of the poor) 1526. These remedies offered welfare assistance, education, and work in the French *Hopitaux Generaux* and in the English 'Work houses'.

The problem was also up for debate in the Kingdom of Sardinia during the 19th century. However things leaned decisively towards 'prevention'.¹⁴

According to a Roman priest and future Cardinal, C. L. Morichini (1805 - 1879), the term 'preventive' includes the entire gamut of charitable undertakings on behalf of the poor of Rome: hospitals, institutions for foundlings, orphans, the elderly, widows; alms-collecting and first-aid organizations, schools. Ideally these charitable undertakings took care of a poor person from birth, throughout his education, in moments of difficulty and unemployment and finally, in old age and sickness. "All the efforts made by people motivated by an intelligent kind of charity are directed toward separating the really poor from the pretender, toward preventing the onset of misery rather than going to its aid, and toward instilling people's thinking with the need to have a spirit of foresight, economy, the acquisition of virtue".¹⁵

¹³ Cf. J.P. Gutton, *La société et les Pauvres. L'exemple de la généralité de Lyon, 1534-1789*, (Paris, Les Belles Lettres 1971); G. Huton, *The Poor of eighteenth-century France, 1750-1789*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1974); J.P. Gutton, *L'état et la mendicité dans la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle, Auvergne Beaujolais Forez Lyonnais [Feurs], Centre d'Etudes Forèziennes sur l'Histoire de la Pauvreté, sous la direction de M. Mollat*, (Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne 1974); A. Monticon, ed., *La storia dei poveri. Pauperismo e assistenza nell'età moderna.*, (Rome: Edizioni Studium 1985), 12, 300 pages. (with a well thought-out bibliography)

¹⁴ Cf. D. Maldini, "Classi dirigenti governo e pauperismo 1800-1850", in A. Agosti and G. M. Bravo, eds. *Storia del movimento operaio del socialismo e delle lotte sociali in Piemonte, 1. Dall'età preindustriale alla fine dell'ottocento*, (Bari, De donato 1979), 185-217.

¹⁵ *Degl'Istituti di pubblica carità e d'istruzione primaria in Roma. Saggio storico e statistico* by Mons. D. Carlo Luigi Morichini, (Rome, Stamperia dell'Ospizio Apostolico at Pietro Aurelj 1835), 1st Edition, 10-11. The work would be expanded and published in a further two editions with a slightly modified title: *Degl'Istituti...primaria delle prigioni in Roma...* New edition, (Rome, Tip. Marini and Co. 1942), 2.; *Degli istituti di carità per la susstinenza e l'educazione dei poveri e dei prigionieri in Roma. Libri tre del Cardinale Carlo Luigi Morichini....* latest Edition. (Rome, Chamber printing press establishment 1870) 816 pages. Cited from the 1835 edition.

Count Charles Hilarion Petitti di Roreto (1790-1850), a Piedmontese and enlightened conservative, among the provisions more suited to remove the general causes of beggary, indicated some which were openly preventive:

Promote and favour the elementary instruction of the people of the lower classes by directing them especially toward true religious and moral principles which convey to a human being the clear conviction that he has an obligation to work for his own livelihood, and which make him realise the profit he gets from following them. Promote, favour and encourage the opening of 'savings banks'... These 'savings banks' familiarise a person with the idea that he needs an insurance for the future and that he also needs to economise; they keep him away from vices, and they guarantee reserve funds which can help him, should he be pressed by some need, without being forced to rely on public or private charity.

Likewise promote, protect and encourage 'mutual aid societies' among the workers.¹⁶ Following these indirect suggestions..., an enlightened, attentive and paternal government is able to provide good morals, tranquillity, strength and comforts, for the entire population .¹⁷

By examining the repressive and directive laws issued on beggary actually in place in most European states, the Count also highlighted some indications in line with 'prevention' and which have a positive dimension.

If the causes of evil are not removed, repressive and coercive laws cannot always achieve their goal... Therefore, any government which aims at making true prosperity and morality accessible to everyone, should establish its own civil set-up, with all kinds of study and diligent care, so that once the causes of beggary have been removed through indirect methods, methods more direct and suited to the situation provided by the time and place might be employed to prevent and obstruct the onset of this deadly social plague.¹⁸

19th century philanthropists were familiar with the theme of 'redeeming the needy' using education as prevention. Coincidentally, the same theme as Morichini's is developed by the Frenchman, Baron Joseph-Marie Degerando (or De Gérando or De Gerando 1772-1842)¹⁹ in his monumental work *Della Pubblica Beneficenza*

¹⁶ *Saggio sul buon governo della mendacità, degli istituti di beneficenza e delle carceri*, by Count D. Carlo Hilarione Petitti di Roreto, I. (Turin, Bocca 1837), 40-42.

¹⁷ C.I. Petitti di Roreto, *Saggio sul buon governo*, I. 45

¹⁸ C.I. Petitti di Roreto, *Saggio* I, 111-112; on the inadequacies of existing repressive legislation in various European States, cf. pp. 90-112

¹⁹ Cf. S. Moravio on him, *La scienza dell'uomo nel Settecento.*, (Bari, Laterza 1970), 223-238.

(Concerning public charity): Part two, dedicated to the *Istituzioni destinate a prevenire l'indigenza* (Institutions aimed at preventing poverty).²⁰

Of all the ways of performing charity, the one which prevents the onset of misery at its roots is the most fruitful and healthy. Now, there certainly could be no preventive charity more useful than the education of the poor. Here in fact, the two main features of preventive charity come together. This type of charity responds to the present needs and provides for the future... Education will provide the poor with the moral, intellectual and physical strength they need, and this constitutes the wealth of a human being; in turn it provides the poor with what is indispensable in life and will grant them the strength to fight against unforeseen misfortunes.²¹

The more we study the causes which produce poverty, the more we shall come to realize that lack of education is one which produces the greatest number of poor and delinquent individuals. One of the greatest services we can render to the poor is that of keeping the children, at least, from such a deadly influence. A good education will guarantee that one day these children will take care of their old parents and comfort them.²²

The education process begins with kindergarten for children below seven. It continues with primary school, and with Night and Sunday schools for those who were not able to take advantage of previous instructional programs.

The rounding-off of their education comes from advice, moral and legal assistance in their choice of profession, work contracts drawn up during the apprenticeship period ensuring that their protection is guaranteed by employers who could happen to be exploitive.²³

²⁰ *Della pubblica beneficenza*. Treatise by Baron de Gérando... Florence, C. Torti 1842-1846 in 4 parts, divided into 7 volumes: I. *L'indigenza considerata ne' suoi rapporti coll'economia sociale*; II. *Delle istituzioni relative all'educazione de' poveri*; III. *De' pubblici soccorsi*; IV. *Delle regole generali della pubblica beneficenza considerate nel di loro regime*; French edition, *De la bienfaisance publique*. Paris 1839, 4.

²¹ J.M. De Gerando, *Della pubblica beneficenza*, 2, (Florence, C. Torti 1843), 249-250.

²² *Il visitatore del povero* by Baron De Gerando, (Florence, C. Torti 1846), 103.

²³ J.-M. De Gerando, *Il visitatore del povero* 105-117. The solution is also tied to preventive measures at the financial level: cf. work cited, *Della pubblica beneficenza*, part 2, book 3, 5, (Florence, C. Torti 1844). *De' mezzi generali atti a migliorare la condizione delle classi disagiate*, Chap 1. *De' mezzi generali di prevenir l'indigenza che ottener si ponno da alcune modificazioni sul sistema della sociale economica*; Chap 2. *Della organizzazione del lavoro*; Chap 3. *Del miglioramento de' costumi nella classe de' lavoratori* [especially item 5 *Del contentarsi delle classi laboriose*; and item 8 *Del lavoro considerato come mezzo di educazione*]; Chap. 6. *Influenza della religione sulla morale e sul benessere della classe laboriosa*.

The educational initiative of Ferrante Aporti stems from a similar belief: education begins right from kindergarten. Writing to Giacomo Savarese, from Naples, Aporti says:

The poverty of people, as you yourself have pointed out with supportive proof, stems from the lack of education which renders a human being 'lazy' and 'imprudent'. Poverty will be removed by means of a public and well-organised education program offered people from childhood onwards within institutions created for this purpose. Beggary which is the source of so many other vices for both sexes, is a shameful vice stemming from poverty, and it was completely got rid of through the efficient means of schools for children, repeating principles such as these day after day. A human being is born to work; every person should provide for his own livelihood, with his own work, and should not live off the fruit of someone else's work. This is what is demanded by the principles of natural justice and religion.²⁴

Finally, C. Cattaneo, a moderate Progressive, offers a synthesis which contains political, social and educational features, all seen from a perspective which is positively 'preventive' and social welfare-minded. Cattaneo analyses the different positions held by theorists and legislators about the causes of and possible remedies for misery and beggary. His personal option is for foresight, prevention and social welfare.

In the midst of all these discordant debates, some clearer truths arise. The following truths undoubtedly seem useful: the education of the poor; the removal of all kinds of beggary; the foundation of 'savings banks' and of 'mutual aid societies'; deductions from employees' salaries which would be given back later on in pension form, and other societies of similar nature. All of this helps a private person to provide for himself, saving the means needed for an honourable retirement.²⁵

REMARK: In reference to problems of the poor, we might recall the terms 'repressive' and 'preventive' as used by the Anglican ecclesiastic, Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834). These terms are found in his famous work "Essay on the principle of population as it affects the future improvement of society".²⁶

According to Malthus, poverty is destined to grow because the production of subsistence means is slower than population growth. The only possible way for us to

²⁴ Letter, April 5, 1842, in A. Gambaro, *Ferrante Aporti e gli asili del Risorgimento*, 2, (Turin, Grafica Piemontese 1937), 479-480

²⁵ C. Cattaneo, *Della beneficenza pubblica*, in *Opere edite ed inedite* by Carlo Cattaneo, . 5 *Scritti di economia pubblica*, . 2, (Florence, Le Monnier 1988), 305

²⁶ The first edition is 1798, but the following are authoritative, beginning from an edition in 1803, completely re-worked, followed by other editions as far as the sixth in 1826.

improve upon the condition of the poor is “to lower the population to the level of the poor”.²⁷ Now, the obstacles which constantly react more or less forcefully with every society and keep the population at the subsistence level can be reduced to two main categories: some are preventive, others are repressive.²⁸ Repressive obstacles are wars, famine, plagues and the many effects of misery and vice. The main obstacle or preventive means is “moral restraint, which is to say postponing marriage, abandoning the idea of marriage if someone is not sure that he can support his offspring, or sexual voluntary continence and keeping the virtue of chastity”.²⁹

3. *Prevention in the penal field*

It is within the penal field, perhaps, in the world of prisons and penitentiaries, that the words ‘repression’, ‘prevention’ and ‘correction’ find their way into the 18th and 19th centuries more frequently than before. The already mentioned Petitti of Roreto, who was writing and actively involved in Turin during the years of Don Bosco’s formation and the first oratory experiences, provides us with rich information on the use of the words just quoted.³⁰

In a memorandum with a broad historical and theoretical vision dealing with the various methods to provide assistance to people charged with crimes and those found guilty both during and after the judiciary and penal procedures, Petitti distinguishes three forms of ‘detention’: preventive, for those who have been charged; repressive, for those who have been found guilty and condemned to a short-term punishment; corrective, for those who have been condemned to a longer-term punishment. The terms are seen in reference to the different goals to be achieved, together with the treatments and corrective punishment to be used. The first type of detention, preventive, has to do with “people who were imprudent and were arrested but are far from being truly inclined to do harm”. The second type of detention, repressive, is reserved for quite a few young people who are *bindoli* (swindlers, cheats), or scatter-brained but not yet corrupt and for other younger people “guilty of minor crimes”, or “condemned to light correctional punishments, or even guilty of very small crimes, but not yet truly evil”. The third type of detention, corrective, is reserved for people who have been

²⁷ Th. R. Malthus, *Saggio sul principio di popolazione*, (Turin,, UTET 1949), Book 4, Chap. 3, 464.

²⁸ Th. R. Malthus, *Saggio sul principio di popolazione*, (Turin, UTET 1949), Book I. Chap. 2, 9

²⁹ Cf. Th R. Malthus, *Saggio sul principio di popolazione*, 9-11, 452, 454, 460. Chapters I and 2 of Book 4 tend to show the possibility, reasonableness and religious value of moral restraint: *Della restrizione morale e del nostro dovere di praticare questa virtù* (445-452) and *Effetti della restrizione morale sulla società*. 453-459).

³⁰ Later, Chapter 10 section 1, we will speak of the involvement with Don Bosco in a charitable and educational initiative supported by the Count in 1846-1849.

condemned for crimes calling for long-term punishment and offers a twofold advantage: it prevents the increase of corruption and its spread to others who belong to the previous categories, but above all it helps achieve the main goal for which punishments are given, namely, their 'correction'.³¹

Naturally, for each type of detention, a corresponding separate type of prison had to be created: a preventive prison, a repressive prison, a corrective prison and some other special prisons.³²

The theme of prevention has its own specific value, however, when it is a question of anticipating the occurrence of a crime, of dealing with whatever happens after preventive detention, judiciary and penal intervention and its respective 'correction'. In this case the term 'prevention' assumes a double meaning: first of all it means completely preventing the occurrence of crime; when crimes have been committed it means bringing about 'corrective action' through a re-education program and consequent renewal, in order to prevent any re-offending. Along these lines both the aristocrat from Milan, Caesar Beccaria (1738-1794), and the English philanthropist, John Howard (1726-1790), were famous.

The break-through work by Caesar Beccaria *Dei Delitti e delle Pene* (On crimes and punishments), published in 1764, has a chapter which deals with *Come si prevengono i delitti* (How to prevent crimes). It is better to prevent crimes than to punish them. This is the main goal of any good legislation which is the art of leading men to achieve the maximum of happiness and minimum of unhappiness possible".³³ Then he indicated some of the means of prevention: "The nation's efforts should be fully concentrated on the keeping of clear and simple laws, making sure the citizens are only afraid of the laws and not of men, fighting against ignorance, rewarding virtue."³⁴ He finally concluded by pointing out the most secure means of all, education. "Finally, the most secure yet most difficult means for preventing crimes is the improvement of education, much too vast an objective and one which goes beyond the limits I have set for myself. But I dare to say that this objective is intrinsically linked with the nature of government which should not end up by being something cultivated only here and there and only by a few wise people, or else it becomes sterile, right up to the most remote centuries, as far as the attainment of public happiness is concerned."³⁵

³¹ C.I. Petitti di Roreto, *Della condizione attuale delle carceri in Opere scelte*, I, 487-489.

³² *ibid*, I, 499, 507-510..

³³ C. Beccaria, *Dei delitti e delle pene*, ed. G. Frnacioni with *Le edizioni italiane del "Dei delitti e delle pene"* by Luigi Firpo, (Milan, Mediobanca 1984), #41, 121.

³⁴ C. Beccaria, paras 41-44, 121-126.

³⁵ C. Beccaria, paras 45, 126-127.

This work was followed by several broad-ranging publications spurred on by Degerando, Petitti di Roreto, and Charles Cattaneo. (1801-1869). The preventive theme is intertwined with other themes widely dealt with in publications which had to do with prisons and correction houses: punishments, forced labour, a more or less strict isolation.

People finally came to understand the following: that the application of legal punishments is not simply a defensive and vindictive weapon used by society; that its objective is not only that of preventing the delinquent from causing more harm and deterring others from imitating him; but that it should aim at bringing about the correction of the guilty party...³⁶

Work should certainly play an essential role, but especially because work is a natural means by which a human being can improve...³⁷ Isolation is only a safeguard for a prisoner... because the first condition attached to punishment is that a person be 'exiled'... Never allow him to be approached by anyone who might deter him from being sorry for what he did or stir up in others the vices he is affected by, or let others be corrupted. Here, however, in our opinion, lies the limit of punishment: there is a type of communication which cannot be denied, not even to the most wicked individual: communicating with good people. He has nothing to lose and everything to gain ... and it will not be enough to grant this type of communication-right only to a minister of religion, a prison inspector... Why should his friends and relatives, endowed with an honourable character and who may share the same views, not be admitted nor allowed to actively make sure that their views are followed, adding the influence of their personal affection to the power of exhortation?³⁸

Petitti di Roreto pays particular attention to those condemned to 'life imprisonment', 'work-houses', where young people or even adults are locked up: these are the ones who had lived a shameful life and are hopefully preventively prepared to shun the danger of causing harm.³⁹ They are classified according to the level of crime that they have committed. However, the author has as his starting point his fundamental trust in human potential and therefore he favours the use of both protective and positive 'preventive measures' in reference to individuals "for whom there is a greater reason to believe that the instinct of doing good is not entirely extinct." "If, for some reason coercive measures at times seem to be more rigorous, substantially the

³⁶ J.-M. De Gerando, *Della pubblica beneficenza*, . 5, 202

³⁷ *Ibid*, 5, 208

³⁸ *Ibid*, 5, 215-218

³⁹ C.I. Petitti di Roreto, *Saggio*, .2, 482.

ruling authority in those institutions should be more fatherly and therefore more inclined to combine the gentleness of good advice to the rigour of command."⁴⁰

A similar direction was taken by Charles Cattaneo who stressed the need to scientifically study "the criminal bent" evidenced at times by delinquents, as well as neutralising forces and chances of recovery.

A great part of the reverse push will still be delegated to criminal law, the prison ward and, perhaps, also to the executioner. But a major part will be delegated to indirect cures and other branches of civil authority, especially in what regards behaviour and education. Lastly, another part will be entirely delegated to the physician. Perhaps preventive imprisonment, without any punishment, may appear to be the only way to protect society from certain crimes which may be considered more like acts coming from a natural dishonourable condition than acts of calculated wickedness.⁴¹

4. *Education as prevention*

Historically, the idea of education as prevention stands out as clearly connected with preventive education, without considering how it is achieved, whether by repressive or preventive methods. The authors who insisted on this view were already mentioned earlier: Morichini, Aporti, Degerando and Petitti di Roreto.

As Romagnosi perceptively remarks it is up to civil authority, namely it is the absolute right of those who govern to demand that all individuals be given an elementary education, for this is the best means to guarantee a peaceful state to society. It would be foolish to say that civil authority may use punishments, even severe and terrible punishments for crimes committed while it is unable to prevent them. Now there is no wise man who would deny that public instruction is one of the most powerful means of prevention.⁴²

Even Charles Cattaneo referred to John Dominic Romagnosi at the conclusion of his essay on the ineffectiveness, or rather the damage produced by penal deportation. "The study of the penal system shows ever more clearly how deep and wise was the statement made by Romagnosi that 'a good government is a great safeguard, when accompanied by a great educational program'"⁴³

⁴⁰ C.I. Petitti di Roreto, *Saggio*, 2, 483-484.

⁴¹ C. Cattaneo, *Scritti politici ed epistolario*, published by G.Rosa and J.White Mario. (Florence, Barbera 1892), 88-89: a fragment on *Atavismo delittuoso*.

⁴² C.L. Morichini, *Degli istituti di pubblica carità*, 33.

⁴³ C.Cattaneo, *Della riforma penale*, 2. "Della deportazione", in *Opere di Giandomenico Romagnosi*, Carlo Cattaneo, Giuseppe Ferrari, ed. Ernesto Sestan, (Milan-Naples, R. Ricciardi 1957), 505 (note, the exact expression used by Romagnosi in two different works).

Ferrante Aporti considered his kindergarten to be a preventive institution aiming at eliminating the deformation encountered by children who grow up in families unable to provide the right education or which cannot do it all.⁴⁴ In a word, these families are unable to effectively defend the innocent childhood of the poor from vices and errors.⁴⁵

With the kindergarten Aporti had intended to commence the creation of a vast network of new institutions destined to prevent immorality from childhood on; "for once this period is contaminated by immorality, there can hardly be any healing for it".⁴⁶ In the preface to the *Manuale di educazione ed ammaestramento* (Manual of Education and Instruction), written in 1833,⁴⁷ Aporti speaks about the child's extraordinary receptiveness and about the need to respond to this with preventive, educative care. Kindergartens were the offshoot of a "charity directed to prevent rather than allowing evils to be suffered, then provided medical care".⁴⁸ While he was expressing his gratitude to the Commission for Kindergartens in the city of Venice, Aporti stated:

All in all, in Venice anything to do with this twofold act of charity directed at prevention rather than permission for evils to be suffered and then cured, is and will always be for me and for those who aim at doing good, constant cause of due admiration. Therefore may this honourable commission accept the most sincere expression of the congratulations I have the honour to convey. For up to now, the commission has carried out the difficult undertaking of reforming and re-organizing the education of the poor wonderfully. This action is the only means good enough to redeem the poor from the abjection of ignorance, from sloth and from the vices necessarily connected with them. This is the way they can provide an inestimable good for the Catholic Church and for the state.⁴⁹

This idea was fully shared by Petitti di Roreto:

Those who are involved in the education of children, with the so-called kindergarten, and in the education of adolescents, in orphanages both temporary

⁴⁴ Cf. the rich historical essay with copious bibliographical references, by L. Pazzaglia, "Asili, Chiesa e mondo cattolico nell'Italia dell'800", in *Pedagogia e vita*, 56, 1998: 4, 63-78.

⁴⁵ Letter to C. Boncompagni, June 30, 1838, in A. Gambaro, *Ferrante Aporti e gli asili nel Risorgimento*, . 2. *Documenti Memorie Carteggi*, (Turin, 1937), 397.

⁴⁶ Letter to G. Petrucci, Aug. 6, 1842, in A. Gambaro, *Ferrante Aporti e gli asili*, . 2, 470-471.

⁴⁷ F. Aporti, *Scritti pedagogici*, collected and illustrated by A. Gambari.I. (Turin: Chinatore 1944), 8-14.

⁴⁸ F. Aporti, *Elementi di pedagogia*, in *Scritti pedagogici*, collected and illustrated by A. Gambaro, 2. (Turin: Chinatore 1945), 114.

⁴⁹ Letter July-August 1842, in A. Gambaro, as cited. 2, 378-379. "Once I saw the universal deficiency of education at home, the great source of vices defiling and debasing us, and I saw that nobody was doing anything about it, I set out to provide a remedy" (Letter to Giovanni Rebasti di Piacenza, March 21, 1841, *ibid.*, p. 445).

and permanent ... are the ones who safeguard them in their tenderest age and protect them from many physical and moral dangers; they are the ones who provide them with the opportunity to learn a skill which will guarantee their future existence...

The shelter- houses provided for young people ... can successfully lead these young people by a means of persuasion, firmness and paternal exhortations to again follow good principles and thus prevent society from being harmed by some of them.

The houses for workshops and shelter ... provide the means to earn an honourable livelihood.⁵⁰

The idea of prevention is again used in reference to the rules for the *Educatori della prima infanzia e dell'adolescenza* (educational institutions for early childhood and adolescence). Furthermore it is appropriate that poor children receive a religious and moral, literary and artistic education. The reason for this is the ignorance and the lack of far-sightedness that their parents have, the lack of suitable means, at times even the parents ill will, which will perhaps, allow children and adolescents to be completely uneducated and bent towards immoral and bad behaviour and worse which might follow.⁵¹

The proposal to educate the masses in order to properly meet their needs, and prevent criminality, takes up more space in the already cited publication, *Della condizione attuale delle carceri: Educarlo, assuefarlo ad essere previdente, e soccorrerlo quando e 'nel bisogno* (Regarding jails at the moment: you must educate the prisoner, get him used to looking ahead and help him when he needs it).

The kindergarten program, the primary and elementary schools, the agricultural school, arts and crafts schools, can reach their goal and all governments should truly have the intention of promoting them, fostering them, protecting them, if they really want the improvement of the population entrusted to their care.

However, instruction alone is not enough to reach this goal: it must be accompanied by a religious and moral education. That is how the hearts of the young are trained to good behaviour and to keep away from the dangers to which they are exposed by human passions.

The people's work often produces abundant revenues, far above their present needs. If there is no incentive to save what is superfluous by putting it into

⁵⁰ C.I: Petitti di Roreto, *Saggio*, I, 139-140.

⁵¹ *ibid*, I, 225.

'savings banks', in view of future needs, these extra revenues are uselessly wasted in debauchery, excessive vices or at least in useless expenses.

'Savings banks', Life insurances, stocks in mutual aid societies or in productive industrial enterprises are so many useful ways to save extra revenues. They should be promoted, fostered and protected, because they guarantee that the already mentioned revenues not be uselessly wasted or harmfully used. It must however be remarked that it is necessary for the government to intervene in such speculations in order to protect the private interests of those who put their revenues in such institutions...⁵²

The magazine *L'educatore primario* (The primary school teacher) was a definite propaganda tool for popular culture from a similar perspective.

The instruction of the masses, though not necessary as some people think, should be considered inevitable in our times. The instruction should be given according to the needs of those who receive it, and according to the needs of the country in which it is given; the government should direct it according to these needs; children should be prepared to become adults; in the schools there should be a training period for a civic way of living. All of these are truths which leave no room for doubt.⁵³

5. *Religion as prevention*

Religion is universally recognized as an irreplaceable ingredient of personal and social prevention, a guarantee of order and prosperity. Naturally, Morichini is convinced of this as he underscores that only religion can establish the required link between scholastic instruction and an authentic education: to reach moral perfection it is essential that instruction should be joined to education.

Now religion is the basis of education, since it provides light for the mind and trains the heart to pursue virtue: and this is the most important feature of all. It stands to reason then, that the most important subject to be taught in the schools should be catechism and next to it, reading and writing. In many schools, the four arithmetic operations should also be included; and finally, in some schools Italian, Latin, French, Church and civil history, geography and drafting should be included.⁵⁴

De Gerando, too, is a convinced supporter of this idea when he states that "religion offers the most sublime and valid influence which is particularly evident in

⁵² C. Petitti di Roreto, *Della condizione attuale delle carceri*, in *Opere scelte*, . I, 562-563.

⁵³ V. Troya, "Proposta di alcuni mezzi onde la pubblica istruzione compia il suo ufficio", in *L'Educatore primario*, 1 (1845): n. 2, Jan. 25-26.

⁵⁴ C.L. Morichini, *Degl'Istituti di pubblica carità*, 34.

Christianity, which in turn is the highest expression of religion.”⁵⁵ “Bright minds have produced great havoc. Today’s minds seem more open to reflection, and religious morality is, almost generally, recognised as one of the most outstanding goods of humanity.”⁵⁶

Petitti, in particular, is at pains to underscore the importance of the religious element in the corrective process for prison detainees who are to be re-educated and given back the chance to have personal dignity. Petitti denounces the many inconveniences which are a cause of the immorality and impiety which obstruct the success of the religious and moral instruction imparted to detainees, as required by law, in all the prisons. He emphasises the absolute necessity and pressing need of a prison reform.⁵⁷

He lists “the basic subjects” which are called on to regulate life in a truly corrective penal institution. He concludes with the No. 15: “Finally there is no doubt that the moral and religious instruction, if continuously provided, will revive the sentiments instilled in them at an early age, sentiments about any good principle, long forgotten, and at last turn those perverted souls towards what is good”.⁵⁸ Then he deals, in detail, with every type of prison.

In a ‘preventive prison’, moral instruction will either not exist or be inadequate without the contribution of religious instruction. Religious instruction would be imperfect if it were not accompanied by a strict observance of all the practices of worship which every good Christian should attend to. The quantity and quality of these worship practices are relevant. In the ‘repressive prison’, the anticipated demands are similar and even greater. Intensive and personalised care is championed for “correctional or penitentiary institutions, with the addition of a carefully chosen, prudent, and perceptive chaplain”.⁵⁹ He had also called attention, once again, to some ways which might make religious practices more attractive.

Religious materials should be distributed in such a way as to make them suitable to the age and condition of detainees. So, while we want to avoid the danger of alienating the minds of young people from religious sentiment by making religious

⁵⁵ J.-M. De Gerando, *Della pubblica beneficenza...*, . 5, 245-249 *Potere speciale del cristianesimo sul miglioramento de' popolari costumi.*

⁵⁶ J.-M. De Gerando, *Della pubblica beneficenza*, 5. 273.

⁵⁷ C.I. Petitti di Roreto, *Della condizione attuale delle carceri in Opere scelte*, vol. I, 349-351, 358-359-

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, vol I, 491; cf. 489-493. He points to three advantages of corrective education: “1. impossibility of further corruption of the detainees, 2. greater possibility that they will contract habits of obedience and work, and becoming peaceful, useful citizens, and 3. probability, though minor, of radical reform (*Ibid*, 493).

⁵⁹ C.I. Petitti di Roreto, vol I, 519-526, 536-537.

services too long and therefore boring or a cause of distraction; we should also try to make these worthy practices of worship, something palatable for these inexperienced hearts. And, therefore, we should call upon ecclesiastics, who are intelligent, with a high prestige, and the greatest amount of gentleness, mixed with a necessary firmness.⁶⁰

Don Bosco has an intensely religious section in his 1877 'Preventive System' booklet. He first proposed some fundamental expressions of Catholic worship, and then remarked: "never force the boys to frequent the Sacraments... let the beauty, grandeur and holiness of the Catholic religion be dwelt on."⁶¹

Petitti, furthermore, related the effectiveness of religious education to the personality of the chaplain and dedicated a paragraph of his work to the 'qualities and duties of the chaplain':

The chaplain's task is a very important one, much like the one of the Director. As a matter of fact the initial thrust for any drive to keep the rules and correct oneself really starts from the chaplain...

The ecclesiastical superior should be wise enough to be cautious in proposing (as a chaplain) only a person endowed with intelligent zeal, with evangelical charity, with a firm and yet free and easy character, with much ability to work, with deep knowledge, of mature age, with a dignified look and capable of winning over the confidence and respect of others.

The chaplain, however, should have nothing at all to do with the carrying out of disciplinary rules. Therefore, he should keep out of any act of repression and reward. His job is to provide advice and comfort ... His main concern should be that of awakening faith, hope and charity within the detainees. Faith is needed to convince them about religious truths; hope is needed to trust that a better destiny can be merited; charity is needed to lead them to decide to be no longer harmful to society. The whole of religious activity is bound up with these elements. Religious activity, however, is only effective when there is the intervention of grace, sincerely asked for. This grace alone can turn the minds of the detainees towards a sincere or radical emendation. In conclusion we would like to stress again that the chaplain must be the confidante, the counsellor and consoler of the detainees, but in an intelligent sense, in a fatherly and shrewd way.⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid 2,485.

⁶¹ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), 54, OE XXVIII 432.

⁶² C.I. Petitti di Roreto, *Della condizione delle carceri*, in *Opere scelte*, 553-555.

Petitti di Roretto's statements are in tune with those attributed to Don Bosco by whoever reported on the conversation he had with Urban Rattazzi in 1854. Those statements made precise reference to the possibility of introducing the 'Preventive System' within the penal institutions, and being actually incarnated in the person, words, captivating attitude of God's minister.⁶³

The actions of the Popes and the Church after the 'Revolution' aimed at following the same direction: to create an energetic restoration of unity and authority within the Church and regenerate consciences and society by means of a general religious reawakening.

It was meant to be an activity of recovery, defence and prevention; negatively, it was directed at fighting indifference and widespread libertarian spirit. Positively such activity had to rely on the missionary movement which was developing extensively, new forms of apostolate and education and re-education of the young.⁶⁴ And "really a lot of people feel the troublesome necessity to take the new times into account, the changed mentality of the young, not to be too heavy, by going back to the past, and opening up to new possibilities".⁶⁵

The actions of all the Popes of the 18th century followed this perspective:

- Pius VII's encyclical *Diu Satis*, May 15, 1800;
- Leo XII's encyclical *Ubi Primum* May 3, 1823;
- Pius VIII's encyclical *Traditi Humilitati Nostrae* May 24, 1829;
- Gregory XVI's encyclical *Mirari Vos* August 15, 1832;
- Pius IX's encyclical *Nostis et Nobiscum* December 8, 1849, for the bishops of Italy and then his letter to the bishops of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, January 20, 1858, and, finally the encyclical *Quanta Cura*, December 8, 1865.

In the encyclical *Diu Satis*, Pius VII recommended that the bishops should tend the Christian sheepfold but also devote vigilance, solicitude, inventiveness, and preferential love toward children and adolescents, for it is these who, like soft wax, can be moulded for good or evil more than the adults.⁶⁶ The Pope quoted the scripture passage, repeated over the centuries by Christians: "*adulescens juxta viam suam*

⁶³ Cf. A Ferreira da Silva, *Conversazione con Urbano Rattazzi* (1854), in P. Braido, ed. *Don Bosco Educatore*, (Rome, LAS 1997), 85-87.

⁶⁴ Cf. S. Fontana, *La controrivoluzione cattolica in Italia* (1820-1830) (Brescia, Morcelliana 1968), 65-124.

⁶⁵ M. Petrocchi, *La Restaurazione, il cardinal Consalvi e la riforma del 1816* (Florence, Le Monnier 1941), 4.

⁶⁶ Enc. *Diu Satis* 15 May 1800, Bill. Rom. Cont. 11 23.

etiam cum senuerit, non recedet ab ea" (an adolescent even when he becomes old, will never deviate from his original way of living).⁶⁷

Pius IX exhorted the bishops to take stock of the many "criminal ways" evidenced by the sad times they lived in, and being used by the enemies of God and of humanity to try to pervert and corrupt innocent youths in particular. "The bishops", the Pope adds, "should direct all of their efforts towards the proper education of youth, for it is mostly on youth that the prosperity of Christian and civil society depends." Only a Christian education, as a matter of fact, was capable of offering words and means of grace, suitable for the Christian restoration of individuals and of society.⁶⁸

Many welfare and educational experiences of the 19th century, including Don Bosco's, would be inspired by these very definitely Catholic roots, and would draw impulses and means from them directed more broadly toward the improvement of all human beings and society according to the needs of the times.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Prov. 22:6

⁶⁸ Apostolic Letter *Cum Nuper* to bishops in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Jan. 20, 1858, *Acta Pii IX*, III, p. 12.

⁶⁹ Naturally we can only indicate some of these, keeping in mind geographic and ideal proximity.

Chapter 3

PREVENTION EXISTED BEFORE THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM

Real experience comes before particular ways of expressing it. Although not the result of a particular work of historical research, the statement with which Don Bosco begins his exposition of the 'Preventive System' responds to a thousand year tradition and longer, one which we still see in evidence today. The distinction between 'preventive' and 'repressive', whether noticed or not, has always been part of the many ways of raising and educating children. As far as Don Bosco was concerned, it was an answer to the personal experiences he had had in his family, school and the seminary he attended.

These broadened as his cultural experience expanded: from teaching catechism to preaching, from school-based learning to out-of-school learning.

1. *Preventive themes related to post-Tridentine family education*

The young John Bosco might have come to know, from the pages of the diocesan catechism dealing with marriage, that the duties of married people also included duties towards their children:

They should think seriously about responding to their needs; they should give them a good and pious education; they should allow them to feel free to choose the state of life to which God may have called them.¹

Bellarmino, in his *An abundant explanation of Christian doctrine*, was convinced that "fathers' love for their children is so natural and ordinary that there was no need of another written law to remind them of their duties towards their children". However, in the explanation of the fourth commandment, after pointing out children's duties towards their fathers, he did not fail to remind fathers that they are also "obliged to provide for the needs of their children with food and clothing but also with the right direction and instruction".²

¹ *Compendio della dottrina cristiana as uso della diocesi di Torino*, (Turin,; the Eredi Avondo 1876), 126. The text is cited unchanged in Fransoni.

² *Copiosa dichiarazione della Dottrina Cristiana*. In Venice, Giovanni Battista Ciotti Scenese [from Siena] 1601. 137-138.

Charles Borromeo was more than convinced of what we have just mentioned. Borromeo is the great post-Tridentine Council reformer who saw that children's Christian education was a very serious obligation both for the family and the parish, especially in reference to teaching Christian doctrine. In an impressive address to the parishioners of Cannobbio on the occasion of his pastoral visit, Charles Borromeo insisted on the educational responsibilities of parents: "It is their task, their duty to lead the children they have received from God to Christ", and "it is a useless, stupid and false kind of prudence to provide children with temporal goods and wealth when their first concern as parents should be to entrust their children to Jesus Christ, the Church, Christian doctrine classes".³ One of the main goals of marriage is the well-planned education of children namely, that of leading their children to Christ.

Just a year before he died, an ecclesiastical friend of his was writing a magnificent treatise at his request, which he read chapter by chapter as it was handed to him. It was a neat summary of the humanist and Christian pedagogy of Silvio Antoniano, a member of the Curia, a future Cardinal, connected with the spiritual circle of Philip Neri (1540-1603): *On the Christian Education of Children*.⁴

It is significant that the second of the three books was entirely dedicated to religious instruction and education and followed, content wise, the subject matter offered by the *Catechismus ad parochos*....

Don Bosco almost certainly did not read Antoniano's work, but thanks to his Christian and priestly formation, ended up being perfectly in tune with post-Tridentine praxis and the notion of family education reflected in Antoniano's book which contributed to its continued existence.

The text mirrors and displays a well-outlined Christian and theological basis for human, religious and moral educational praxis. "The very first goal of this book and what makes it different from some other similar publications, is the fact that it deals with education as Christian education, which could never take place without the knowledge and observance of God's laws, and thanks to his holy grace".⁵ This is what Antoniano focused on, at the end of the second book entirely dedicated to "Christian doctrine". But the learned bishop did not forget that Christian education necessarily includes a human and civic dimension.

³ Sermon on June 17, 1583, in J.A. Saxus, *Homiliae*, vol I., 247: cited by A. Deroo, *S. Carlo Corromeo il cardinale riformatore* (Milan, Ancora 1965), 369.

⁴ *Tre libri Dell'educazione christiana dei figliuoli. Scritti da M. Silvio Antoniano ad istanza di Monsig. Illustriss. Cardinale di S. Prassede, Arcivescovo di Milano*. In Verona 1558, by Sebastiano dalle Donne et Girolamo Stringari, Capmpagni [184 ff.].

⁵ *ibid*, *Dell'educazione*, Book II, Ch. 140, sheet 122v.

Therefore it is the fathers' task to raise their children civilly and in a Christian fashion;⁶ to make sure that the children grow up to be honest people, namely good citizens, children really good in the intimacy of their heart, out of love for God and virtue...It is their task to urge them not to yield to greed, which is the most cruel of tyrants, but to serve God 's will.⁷... Right reason and faith are the means to contribute to the formation of children in becoming upright people and good citizens from their early infancy.⁸

This formation can be accomplished when private 'paternal' education, and 'common' education under State authority work together, are integrated and are in harmony: "Private education should be linked with public education which, in turn, should perfect private education". "There is nothing more healthy for a Republic than to have private education oriented in such a way that the good discipline learned by a child through family education is continued in public education, and even be improved on, since it stands to reason that the public good is greater and more perfect than the private good". It is also right that such cooperation should take place both on the moral and Christian levels, mainly because "any study of moral education turns out to be weak and imperfect if it is not connected with Christian education which is the highest and most excellent of any other form of education and its highest goal". Therefore, "while the ecclesiastical rector makes sure to bring out the good Christian, with the spiritual authority and means his goal demands, at the same time, he does his best to bring out the good citizen... Consequently, those who separate what should be joined make a great mistake. They think they can have good citizens by other rules and through different means than those which contribute to making a good Christian".⁹

Summing up, once duties related to care of the body, natural life, moral and rational education have been responded to, the proper task of the Christian and of all the faithful is that of raising children according to the rules of Christ so that, by living and dying well and in a holy way, they may become God's instruments on earth for the benefit and help of human society and, later on, heirs of the Kingdom of God itself.¹⁰

Antoniano prefaces his thoughts on family education with two brief points of clarification. First of all, family education should only take limited account of gender and age differences of the children being educated. As for social and economic levels of the family, education at home will "deal with a middle-of-the-road type of education,

⁶ *ibid*, book 2, Ch. 124, sheet 108v.

⁷ *ibid*, book 2, Ch. 128, sheet 111r-v.

⁸ *ibid*, book 1, Ch. 7, sheet 4r-54; book I, Chap. 37, sheet 21v-22v; book II, Chaps. 126-127, sheet 116v-117v.

⁹ *ibid*, book 1, Ch. 43, sheet 25v-26r.

¹⁰ *ibid*, *Dell'educazione*, Book I, Ch. 4, sheet 2v.

considering that the majority of people will live in the city and belong to the middle class".¹¹

Secondly, concerning the exercise of responsibility in education, which is like a second birth and should be shared by father and mother who, in turn, should be in perfect agreement on it, the author adds the following suggestions: "Generally speaking, the mother more appropriately takes care of the girls, since they share the same gender. As for the boys in their early infancy and early childhood, mothers should take care of them, most of all in their home education. However, when the boys get bigger and more capable of handling orders, are more mature and ready to get out of the house more often, it should be the father's role to instruct them and watch over them".¹²

Chronologically, the mother is the chief one involved in the early stages of the child's education, which by nature is preventive and which belongs to the family.¹³ As a woman she seems to incarnate all the best ingredients for such an education: "she is inclined to be pious and religious; add to that her tenderness, her gentle ways of correcting, her greater perseverance and patience, which perhaps are not ordinarily the features of a father".¹⁴

Beyond the levels and conditions of Christian education, its goal is an essential point of reference: all people, no matter what circumstances they are in, are obliged to know and love God and obey his holy Commandments".¹⁵ "I am a Christian: at my Baptism, I have vowed and assumed the noble profession of fighting under the banner of Christ crucified and being faithful, with his holy grace, to the observance of his most holy law".¹⁶ Therefore the first task of a good Christian father is "to instil, impress on the child's mind a great reverence for the law of God, and a holy fear of God together with the resolution never to transgress".¹⁷

The method to be used is the method of love and fear. "Just like a good father, sometimes with love and reward as the carrot, sometimes with fear and punishment as the stick, will motivate the child's tender mind and thus form him and impress on him some very useful Christian principles for all his life, both for avoiding evil and

¹¹ *ibid*, book I, Ch. 44, sheet 26v-27r.

¹² *ibid*, book I, Ch. 45, sheet 27r-v.

¹³ See further on in reference to infancy and childhood

¹⁴ *ibid*, book I, Ch. 46, sheet 122v

¹⁵ *ibid*, book I, Ch. 44, sheet 27r.

¹⁶ *ibid*, book I, Ch. 3, sheet 2r.

¹⁷ *ibid*, book 2, Ch. 29, sheet 49r. "it is necessary to rein in these wild horses with the reins of reason and the yoke of fear of God, and the loving, perfect Christian law" (*ibid*. book II, CH. 78, sheet 78r-v).

being encouraged to do good".¹⁸ The terms 'love-fear', 'strictness and gentleness' are also repeated in reference to obeying human laws, being submissive to one's parents, as do the terms 'virtue-idleness'.

A child should get used to respecting and keeping human laws, not so much out of fear of being punished but out of love for virtue, convinced that Princes and the Superiors here on earth are representatives of God and that all authority is from God.¹⁹

Later on, as a child's talent and the light of reason grow, a father should demonstrate the beauty of virtue and the ugliness of vice.²⁰

Stress should be put on a right balance between the two aspects. They should be in harmony with a common attitude of championing the principle of authority. "A father should be careful, therefore, not to be over-indulgent towards his son and never grant him too much familiarity, especially when he is older. At the same time, he should not be over-severe and rigid, while maintaining a certain seriousness seasoned with and tempered by gentleness and kindness, so his son may join fear to love in his regard. This is what we mean by reverence".²¹

An important role in educative prevention is given to chastity. Antoniano, dealing with *Vane et inhoneste pitture* (Vain and shameful pictures) says, "that much work should be done to safeguard the purity of a boy and girl, so as not to allow the devil to steal it away".²² He forcefully underscores the danger of the "vice of the flesh",

¹⁸ *ibid*, book 2, Ch. 29, sheet 49v; cf. book I, Ch. 50: *Che nell'istruire I fanciulli conviene accommodarsi alla capacità loro di tempo in tempo*; book 2, Ch. I, *Che i fanciulli devono essere ammaestrati delle cose della santa fede*; Ch. 2. *Delle scuole della dottrina cristiana, et della predicatione*; Ch. 11 *Della Santa Chiesa Catholica Romana*; Ch. 12 *Come il padre deve ammaestrare il figliuolo ad essere obediante a santa Chiesa*; Ch.. 14 *Delle quattro cose ultime*; Ch. 22 *Della santissima Eucharistia, et come il padre deve procurare che il figliuolo ne sia devoto*; Ch. 23 *Di alcuni che non approvano il comunicarsi spesso*; Ch 24 *Della penitenza overo confessione*; Ch 25 *Come i fanciulli si devono avvezzare all'abborrimento del peccato, et alla confessione*; Ch 26 *Di quanto importanza sia un buon confessore, et padre spirituale*; Ch. 28 *Del Decalogo, ovvero de i dieci precetti della legge*; Ch. 29 *Come si devono avvezzar i fanciulli ad essere osservatori della divina legge*; Ch 31. *Del primo precetto. Non avrai Dei alieni*: "it is up to a good father, then, to remind his child at all times of the holy fear and love of God" (sheet 50r).

¹⁹ S. Antoniano, book II, Ch. 30, sheet 49v.

²⁰ *ibid*, book II, Ch. 51, sheet 60v. Della virtù della verità.

²¹ *ibid*, book II, Ch. 70, sheet 74r.

²² *ibid*, book II, Ch. 42, sheet 56r. Chapters 85 to 98 of Book II deal with the sixth commandment: Ch. 85 *Del sesto precetto, non commettere adulterio*; Ch. 86 *Della cura paterna circa la castità del figliuolo*; 87 *Dell'errore di alcuni indulgenti alla giovinezza*; Ch 88 *Della cautela che si deve usare nel ragionar della castità*; Ch. 89 *Alcune cristiane ragioni da persuadere la castità*; Ch. 90 *De i danni che temporalmente apporta la vita*

because “this domestic enemy ordinarily attacks youth when the blood flow is greater and passions are stronger. What are needed are diligence, study and work.”²³ “We should not be indulgent in this matter and so, as the saints say, there is no other vice which darkens the mind of a child, casts it more deeply into the mud and renders it more obtuse and inept for anything, than the vice of dishonesty.”²⁴

The suggested strategy is the traditional one, further strengthened by protective elements in view of the future. Its development has three directions: removing and avoiding the occasions of sin, a clarifying and positive approach to life, and recourse to means provided by grace. First of all, “a victory against the vice of the flesh, as the saints say, can be recorded when there is a running away from it; and there is no better way to fight it than not having to fight it at all”.²⁵

This is neither the first nor the main means, however constructive and positive it may seem to be, at the level of reason and grace. “At times, the father should talk with his son about chastity, so he may fall perfectly in love with this most beautiful virtue and learn how to hate and loathe the vice of lust, especially when the time comes for the young man to bind himself in marriage. He will also urge him to be faithful in his marriage”.²⁶ “I have given final place to the remedy which no doubt should be and is the first remedy, and that is to make sure that the love of God is enkindled in the tender and pure heart of a young person... For this reason, then, let this be the main concern of a good father in the family, that his young boy may fall in love with God and with the glory prepared for us in Paradise and with the beauty of virtue... Therefore a good father, through all kinds of good and holy practices of piety and religion, by giving frequent and gentle instructions and by means of prayer, should provide the right weapons for his son to fight the devil’s arrows, but especially by frequent use of the holy sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist”.²⁷

Similar methods are suggested for fighting against the vice of stealing which considerably fouls up the established order. “When a child has reached the age of reason and is ready to understand the beauty of virtue and the ugliness of vice, a father should present him with the act of stealing as something detestable and to

contd. 22

impudica; Ch. 95 *Dell'offitio, et cura particolare della madre di famiglia circa gli adornamenti delle figliuole*; Ch. 96 *Del rimuovere l'occasioni*; Ch. 97 *Come sia molto da avvertire alle conversazioni di fuori*; Ch. 98 *Della frequenza de i sacramenti, et dell'amore di Dio*.

²³ *ibid*, book 2, Ch. 86, sheet 85r-v.

²⁴ *ibid*, book 2, Ch. 87, sheet 85v-86r, *Dell'errore di alcuni indulgenti alla giovenezza*.

²⁵ *ibid*, book 2, Ch. 96, sheet 91v.

²⁶ *ibid*, book 2, Ch. 88, sheet 86V. *Della cautela che si deve usare nel ragionar della castità*.

²⁷ *ibid*, book 2, Ch. 98, sheet 92v.

achieve this it would be enough for him to say that this vice is directly contrary to the queen of virtues namely, justice".²⁸ The means are first and foremost positive still, rather than negative: "The constant and living example" of the father; "his advice and the effectiveness of his reasoning, showing the beauty of virtue and the ugliness of vice, will see that his son falls in love with virtue and hates vice". "He should do this by removing all kinds of allurements to evil and by getting the child accustomed to doing good".²⁹

Corrections and Punishments, during childhood, should be balanced by the use of reason, fear and love.³⁰ The basic rule is "the middle-of-the-road, the golden mean".

Fathers and teachers should remember that beatings are like a medicine. And, since they are like a medicine, they should be given at the right time and in the right measure. The reason for this is that beatings should not create more damage than help. A father and teachers should use beatings with discretion and judgement, in order to really provide a cure for the soul of the child who ordinarily commits a sin out of ignorance and weakness... A father's concern should be that his son becomes good from within, so he will run away from sin more out of love for virtue than out of fear of punishments. However, the fear of God, the knowledge of the beauty of virtue and of the ugliness of vice should be the most effective means... The respect for a Father should act as a restraint and an incentive, holding back a child or urging on a child as the occasion calls for. And in short, I would expect that our well-educated son should be so well accustomed to respecting his father, that just seeing his face upset or showing displeasure for an action would be equivalent to a very serious punishment.... Meanwhile, a father should act towards his son in such a way that he is both loved and feared. Being only feared will not win over the heart of the child and the child does not become virtuous from within. At any rate, something done out of fear will not last long. Therefore he should blend love with fear; let him keep a gentle severity so that he may be both loved and feared but the fear we are talking about is a filial fear, not the fear of a servant, the fear of a slave who fears the stick; on the contrary, a son who loves his father is afraid to do something which may displease his dear father. In short, whenever a good father has the intention of beating his son, let him first of all have as his guide discreet reason and not blind wrath.³¹

²⁸ S. Antoniano, book 2, Ch. 102, sheet 95v.

²⁹ *ibid*, book 2, Ch. 101, sheet 94r-95r. cf also Ch. 102, sheet 95r-v.

³⁰ *ibid*, book 3, Ch. 5, *Del batter i fanciulli*; Ch. 6 *Della troppa indulgenza et tenerezza d'alcuni padri*, sheet 126v-127v.

³¹ *ibid*, book 3, Ch. 7, sheet 127v-128v. *Della mediocrità nel battere I figliuoli, et dell'amore et timor filiale*; cf also book 3, Ch. 8 *De i vari modi della correptione et castighi puerili*, sheet 128v-129r.

Didactic and educational methods should take the fatherly approach as their exemplar, and should be followed both by a private instructor (tutor) and by a school teacher. "A teacher takes the place of a father and his job is not only purely that of teaching literature but of forming the tender mind of a child to achieve virtue through his good example and useful advice, no less than a father. Even more so, father and teacher have to be so well attuned to each other that the child recognises at home what he has been taught by his teacher at school, and in school, what he has been taught by his father at home. In short, much of good Christian education depends on the diligence of the teachers... "let the teacher", Antoniano concludes, "lead a blameless, exemplary life and behave himself in such a way that children may recognise the very image of true Christian goodness in him. And citizens should deservedly esteem him and recognise him as the common father of their children".³² The fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom, holds primacy over grammar;³³ besides, devotion to our Lady, mother of purity, will make sure that children are intelligent and docile, and endowed with memory, so that they may learn well".³⁴

Finally, extra special attention should be given to adolescence, that is to the period between 14-21. According to secular and traditional canons handed down to us by Aristotle's *Rhetoric*,

Adolescence is the most dangerous period of life: in fact, adolescents are full of whims and passions, bold enough to try to get whatever they want; they so much want to go hunting and horseback riding; they don't think much about useful and necessary things; they are not careful in managing their money; they do not like being reprimanded, or given advice; they are easily deceived and just like soft wax, easily moulded to follow vice; they love hanging out with people of the same age; they easily strike up friendships for the sake of pursuing pleasures and amusements since they love to laugh and play. Much more is said and might be said about the nature of adolescents but their greatest enemy, as the philosopher has already pointed out, is incontinence of the flesh, namely lust. It is this which plagues them most.³⁵

A preventive education during infancy and childhood is more decisive than ever. "And certainly, if adolescence is not preceded by a good education, and if the fear of God and the love of virtue have not yet taken root in the youngster's soul, it is

³² S. Antoniano, book 3, Ch. 34, sheet 146r-v. *Dell'offitio del maestro, circa i buoni et christiani costumi.*

³³ *ibid*, book 3, Ch. 35, sheet 146v-147r. *Come i maestri debbiano esercitar cotidiamente i fanciulli nella pietà cristiana.*

³⁴ *ibid*; cf book 2, Ch. 35, sheet 52r-v, *Della particolar divotione verso la Santissima Madre di Dio.*

³⁵ *ibid*, book 3, Ch. 53, sheet 158r-v. *De i pericoli della adolescenza.*

extremely difficult, if not impossible for him to win out... If infancy has not been accustomed to carrying the yoke of discipline when the spirit is less daring, nothing much can be expected when older, when the spirit is more robust and stimulated by more powerful interests such as licentiousness and dissolute living".³⁶ At any rate, the norms previously given for religious and moral education should be followed and strengthened: frequent reception of the sacraments; following the advice and the encouragement provided by a wise confessor, including outside of confession; obedience to one's father. "The father of the family should be aware of the fact that he has the duty to hold on to his authority with his son and the respect due to him, to the point that his own son should not be able to realise, in a certain sense, that he has left his childhood. But a father should not deal with his son as though he were still a little child. This demands that he should have much prudence, so he should take a middle-of-the-road approach, not treating the young man too harshly so that love may not be in question, but not treating him too indulgently either, so that fear may not disappear. Instead he should be serious and moderate".³⁷

Still, a pedagogy of restraint, preservation and vigilance would be needed: an adolescent should be warned ahead of time to be on guard as far as "bad and corrupt companions, bad company" are concerned. Consequently, the father of a family should take the greatest care and be vigilant lest his son be caught up with "suspicious associations, dangerous friends".³⁸ He should encourage him to "strike up friendships with those who are good, with deeply virtuous types and not at all with friendships leading to vice, cemented by the bond of charity, sincere love, and not by interest or brief and passing pleasure; he should strike up friendships especially with his father's friends;³⁹ with people of his own age too, if the diligent eyes of the father are keeping an eye on him;⁴⁰ he should avoid idleness and lazy, good for nothing types".⁴¹

Female pedagogy is for the most part traditional, as we see from the title of the chapter dedicated to it: *Safeguarding young girls and how they are to avoid idleness*. The preventive measures a father and a mother should use in dealing with their daughters are as follows: safeguard chastity; avoid idleness; proper use of time;

³⁶ *ibid*, book 31, Ch. 53, sheet 18v.

³⁷ *ibid*, book 3, Ch. 54, sheet 158v-159v. *Della continuatione degli esercitij christiani, et della riverenza verso del padre*.

³⁸ *ibid*, book 3, Ch. 55, sheet 159v-160v. *Quanto spetialmente nella adolescenza siano pericolose le male pratiche*.

³⁹ S. Antoniano, book 3, Ch. 56, sheet 160v-161r. *Della utilità delle buone pratiche, et amicitie*; cf. Ch. 57 sheet 161r-v, *Della conversatione del figliuolo di famiglia con gli amici paterni*.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, book 3, Ch. 58, sheet 161v-162r. *Della conversatione con i giovani eguali*; cf. Ch 59, sheet 162v-163r, *Della conditione de gli amici, et offitij dell'amicitia*.

⁴¹ *ibid*, book 3, Ch. 60, sheet 163r-164r. *Del fuggir la vita otiosa, e scioperata*.

avoiding “the habit of being familiar with males”, for this is a danger to modesty. A mother should especially “keep her daughters busy, away from idleness”. Even if they should they be “born of a noble and rich father, they should not feel ashamed to use the needle, the spindle and the other activities proper to their gender”.

[In conclusion] the mother and father of the family should be vigilant over their daughters. Let them make themselves first of all feared, because the feminine sex is ‘slippery’, naturally light-minded and that age is not given much consideration. For the rest, one can hope that the education provided, the fear of God, and the holy example of the mother will keep her daughter in such a condition, that by living in a holy way in her father’s house, she will turn out to be a worthy and happy mother of many good sons and daughters whom she will educate for the glory of God and with the very same kind of chaste and Christian education”.⁴²

2. Charles Borromeo, first champion of oratorian pedagogy

Whenever there is a question of discipline in (boarding) schools, diocesan schools and seminaries as well as oratories, more often than not people go back to St Charles Borromeo and the rules he offered.

Boarding institutions seem to have somewhat repressive rules. Schools where Christian doctrine is taught seem to have more preventive elements. They are not so different from the beginnings and development of the oratories.⁴³

“Christian doctrine, a most divine subject” demands good and qualified instructors, namely, “they should first of all be to some extent the light of the world”; second: “They must be outstanding in their love for God and aflame with it”; third “They must have great zeal for the salvation of souls redeemed by the precious Blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ”; fourth: “They must have a heartfelt charity towards all of their neighbours”; fifth: “They should do their best to draw those who do not attend their schools with the same charity with which they receive and instruct those who do attend in order to learn”; sixth: “They have to know very well and understand what

⁴² *ibid.*, book 3, Ch. 61, sheet 164r-165r.

⁴³ Cf. *Constitutioni et Regole della Compagnia et scuole della Dottrina christiana fatte dal cardinale di santa Prassese, arcivescovo, in esecuzione del concilio secondo provinciale [1569], per uso della provincia di Milano*, in *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis*, vol. 3, book 2, col. 149-261 (G. Fontana edition, Milan 1585). The rules are divided into three parts: the first part deals with *Delle parti et conditioni, che havere devono gli operaii et fratelli della Compagnia et scuole della dottrina christiana* (col. 149-192); the second *Dell'istituzione, et ordine della Compagnia della dottrina christiana* (col. 193-242); the third *La qual contiene alcune regole particolari pertinenti alle scuole, et congregazioni diocesane* (col. 243-261).

they are trying to teach to others”; seventh: “Their patience is absolutely necessary”; eighth: “They should be very prudent and good enough to be able to adapt themselves to each one’s ability”; ninth: “They should use all possible care and diligence in maintaining and increasing a work of such importance”.⁴⁴

To achieve all of the above, “catechists should prepare themselves properly to receive God’s graces and make every effort to work at their abilities and look for ways to keep them up”.⁴⁵ Six ways are suggested: the purification of one’s conscience through the Sacrament of Penance, beginning with a general confession; frequent reception of the most holy Sacrament of the Eucharist; mental and vocal prayer; performance of works of mercy; obedience towards all superiors, those of the entire company and all the superiors of each particular school; and finally, good example”.⁴⁶

Every school should have at least one priest as its spiritual father, who ordinarily should be the parish priest. The parish priest, besides having the specific qualities of the priest, namely knowledge, purity of life, honesty in habits, exemplariness, should also show great love and affection to the entire company, and in particular towards school members, since he is the spiritual father of the entire school. He should do this by knowing them personally, hearing their confession, showing interest in their spiritual and physical needs, promoting harmony, visiting the classrooms, nurturing them with the word of God”.⁴⁷

These instructions are followed by some chapters dealing with the main offices: the prior, assistant prior, the councillors, the monitor or the one in charge of fraternal correction, the chancellor or secretary, the pacifiers, the headmasters, the teachers, the one in charge of safeguarding silence and his assistants, the infirmarian and the doorkeeper.⁴⁸ We can find ideas, terms, intuitions sprinkled throughout which rightly belong to the preventive pedagogy of apostolic zeal and loving kindness.

The prior “should make every effort to bring back the one who has given up or has got lost; he should encourage the weak with exhortations; he should spur on the negligent with kindly force; he should correct the wayward with loving severity so that acknowledging his mistake he will correct himself”.⁴⁹ “Above all, the prior should make sure and diligently see that the children learn how to live as Christians through the Christian doctrine they are taught, for this is the reason they come to these schools; and, if any of them have been soiled by vice, the school administration should see that

⁴⁴ *Constitutioni*, col. 149-151.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, col. 152.

⁴⁶ *ibid*, col. 152-162.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, Ch. 3 *Dell’officio del sacerdote*, col. 162-165..

⁴⁸ *ibid*, Chs. 4-16, col. 165-190.

⁴⁹ *ibid*, col. 166.

they be washed and be made clean”.⁵⁰ “Once all this has been done, if an undisciplined student were to be presented to him or a student who may have committed some wrong in need of correction, it would be good if the culprit were to receive public punishment according to the degree of the wrong done, and depending on the circumstances of the student. This however, should be done with charity, accompanied by prudence and discretion”.⁵¹

The role of Teachers and Headmasters is decisive “because all the duties and rules are geared to having the students taught well, properly instructed in Christian doctrine and properly directed toward virtue and good moral behaviour”.⁵² It is for these principles more than for any other that terms inspired by charity and loving kindness are used, terms to do with relationships.

Teachers should be urged to be in school on time. It is much better that the teachers wait for their students, rather than the students wait for their teachers. . . . Once the headmasters have assigned the students to the care of the teacher, then the teacher should receive them with charity, loving-kindness and meekness. The teacher should show them the affection and the love of a father. . . . The concern of the teacher should not only be that of teaching the lesson found in the book, but more than anything else instructing the students on how to acquire virtue and good morals. The teacher should make sure that what he teaches is not only retained in their minds but actually put into practice. . . . He should aim at making “good and perfect Christians out of them, giving them all the advice, reminders and means which the Lord thinks best to suggest to him”.⁵³

This is an explicit Gospel pedagogy, eminently preventive and proposed in word and deed by Jesus, the Master:

They should hold this office in high esteem; they should always keep in mind the example of Jesus Christ who welcomed the child before him with so much charity and loving kindness and rebuked those who wanted to prevent him from doing this. And how much Jesus loved children was shown when he said that it was better for the one who gave scandal to a child to hang a rock around his neck and to throw himself into the sea, rather than give scandal to one of the least of those children: let them often consider how much good they will be able to do on behalf of their souls, redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, when they have not committed any sin and have no bad habits. It can

⁵⁰ *ibid*, col. 167.

⁵¹ *ibid*, col. 168.

⁵² *ibid*, col. 179.

⁵³ *Constitutioni*, col. 181-182.

really be said that to teach children is to reform the world and lead the world to live a true Christian life.⁵⁴

The method is blended with the system. All this requires the teacher to have a clear vision of his goals, knowledge of his pupils, love that prevails over fear, and an ability to give witness. A catechism class, in fact, does not only call for the teacher to teach the elements of Christian doctrine but especially to have the students acquire the art of living as good Christians...

Since the schools of Christian doctrine are set up to achieve their goal, one must first learn how to truly live like a Christian.

Pupils should be exhorted to revere their elders, to obey their superiors, to be modest, when they walk in the streets and through public places, to show reverence and devotion in church, especially when Mass is being celebrated, when they should be devoutly kneeling on both knees; they should let go of games and especially card games and dice; they should avoid the use of filthy and offensive words.

Finally, let the pupils be taught all those other things which are suited to Christian folk and to the profession they are following. The pupils should be prepared to live a truly Christian life, to always remain in God's grace and live as God's adopted children. Let them be taught in a decent manner, making sure that offensive words and especially shameful or coarse words are not used; not only because such words do not belong in such a school, but also because they should not be learned and allowed to be used with others. And even though, at times, the students should be reprimanded with severe words, nevertheless it is more appropriate that this law and doctrine of love be taught more through love than fear. It is better that the students be led to learn with promises of rewards than with threats, with gifts rather than with punishments. A teacher should have an adequate knowledge of his students. He should not only see to it that they learn while they are in school, but he should also see to it, at times, that they study their lesson at home. He should know their parents, where they live, and find out how they behave themselves, as far as their morals, lifestyle is concerned. And if at times the students are absent, he should visit with them, and ask people in the house why they skip school. But he should do all this with shrewdness, so that his action may not appear to be done out of curiosity but out of fatherly love for them, and out of fervent desire for their good.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *ibid*, col. 184.

⁵⁵ *Constitutioni*, col. 182-183.

3. *The fear-love alternative in governing a religious community*

New forms of consecrated life had appeared such as The Clerics Regular, the Congregations of common life, Religious Institutions that differed from the monk or mendicant lifestyle, and which responded to new historical and cultural conditions.

It is likely that these new forms, or so it seems, might have once again raised the problem of how to govern and how to obey. It is no mere coincidence that among the authors who wrote about this, were two Jesuits, Etienne Binet (1569-1639) and Nikolaus Leczynchi (Lancicius) (1574-1652). The Company of Jesus was the greatest innovator amongst all the Institutes of Consecrated Life. The two previously named Jesuits wrote two publications which have made history in the field of religious spirituality and ascetic life:

What is the better form of government: the strict or the gentle? For the superiors of Religious houses of both genders and for those headmasters who have 'large' families' to exercise their authority over. A very useful book written by a religious in order to provide unity and peace to communities and families.⁵⁶

The other publication is: *On the conditions required of a good superior to be loved by his subjects and to have his orders obeyed willingly and also to have his subjects open up their consciences to him and many other things, and also to live in a way productive of spiritual benefits and spiritual enjoyment in a Religious Community or Congregation.*⁵⁷

Binet presents contrasting opinions and their respective reasons for the way authority should be exercised and makes a decisive option for kindness as a method. "Some hold that the exercise of authority should be rigorous and effective", while others support the idea that such an exercise of authority can be more successful if it is "gentle, cordial and full of fatherly tenderness". "Those with a greater amount of wisdom feel that there should be a blending of these two extreme positions. The roses should be joined to the thorns and there should be a way of exercising authority which is gently effective".⁵⁸

The author approaches the above solution by degrees, following the view agreed and shared by most, to begin with. "The most perfect way to exercise authority (govern) is the one which is effectively gentle or, to put it more correctly, the one in which strictness and gentleness are used appropriately and keep each other in check".⁵⁹

⁵⁶ The first edition was 1636. There is also an 1847 edition: É. Binet, *Quel est le meilleur gouvernement: le rigoureux, ou le doux? Pour les Supérieurs et les Supérieures des maisons religieuses*, (Lyon-Paris, Nouvelle Maison 1847), 175 pages.

⁵⁷ First edition 1640. Here we cite the Turin, Marietti edition of 1901.

⁵⁸ É. Binet, *Quel est*, 4

⁵⁹ É. Binet, *Quel est*. 6.

However, the author adds, “the doubt still lingers, namely, whether it would be better to lean towards the gentle or the rigorous side, to share love or to create fear; whether it would be more advantageous to use kindness more than severity”.⁶⁰

The author favours the first hypothesis. This is precisely the one defined by Don Bosco when he repeatedly says “make yourself loved more than feared”. Binet shows the superiority of his opinion by having recourse to abundant scriptural quotations and historical references, confirmed by a century’s worth of positive experience. Gentleness is the style to learn, employed by God, Jesus, the holy Founders of religious institutions and in particular by St Francis de Sales and by St Ignatius. (Binet was St Francis’ classmate at the Jesuit school of Clermont, in Paris).⁶¹ To support his own thesis further, Binet, in two separate chapters, draws up the profile of “a man who governs with rigour” and “the traits of a man who governs with gentleness”.⁶²

The conclusion is obvious: the system which relies on a greater gentleness is, undoubtedly, more fruitful for the one who is governed and more meritorious for the one who governs.⁶³ “Would you like to know”, Binet underscores as he asks, “what is the main feature of an authority exercised with effective gentleness? It is when the superior takes upon himself whatever is most painful and leaves to others whatever is most agreeable. This lesson in life is given by St Ignatius and St Francis de Sales.⁶⁴ Their teaching is spelled out in a series of twenty maxims followed by the saints, in order to have an effectively gentle kind of government. Among these maxims we find the following: “Make yourself loved by loving with the heart and like a father, with the absolute certainty that, based on this, nothing will appear difficult.”⁶⁵ The last chapter of the book is dedicated to St Francis de Sales: *The notion of a good superior, as exemplified by St Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva*.⁶⁶

The work by Lancicius is more explicitly dedicated to the Superior seen as the spiritual father of his subjects, especially during the “manifestation of their consciences”.⁶⁷ Relying on repeated references to early Jesuit literature on the subject

⁶⁰ É. Binet, *Quel est...*, p. 7.

⁶¹ *ibid* 12-58.

⁶² *ibid*, 59-69 and 69-90

⁶³ Don Bosco would also say this in reference to the Preventive System, “easier, more satisfying, more advantageous” for the pupils; more difficult, but taken up with good ability by the zealous educator completely ‘consecrated’ to their good (*Il sistema preventivo* 1877, 60 OE XXVIII 438).

⁶⁴ É. Binet, *Quel est...*, 79, 81-82.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 85.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 152-175. Pp 161-162 are particularly “affective”.

⁶⁷ In Chap. 15 we will see that in Don Bosco’s teaching and practice, the Rector of the religious and educative community is ordinarily the confessor and spiritual guide for educators and those being educated.

(writings of St Ignatius, Acquaviva, Mercuriano) and on sacred and profane writers such as Cicero, St Augustine, and St Bernard, Lawrence Giustiniani, Lancicius decisively leans towards benevolence and benignity as the essential elements in the continuous exercise of "spiritual fatherliness".⁶⁸ The Superior is expected to be a father and physician and nurse for his subjects (*Et Pater et Medicos, et Nutri subditis*).⁶⁹ He recalls what Ribadeneira had written of St Ignatius: *He joined love with benevolence for his subjects and this naturally gave birth to love.*⁷⁰

The theme of kindness is taken up again and with emphasis in the chapter *On how to govern and instruct the religious novices and beginners in their spiritual life.*⁷¹ Fervent exhortations on this subject matter and private chats, never harsh but always seasoned with love, will directly contribute to spiritual formation.⁷² One's actions should never be harsh but always seasoned with love; even punishments and reprimands should be given with a mild attitude and never with harsh words.⁷³

4. Jansenistic pedagogy: Port Royal (1637-1657)

It is not our intention to tackle the many problems created by the brief and contrasting existence of the *Petites Ecoles* of Port Royal, problems like: their champion, Jean Duvergier de Hauranne, the Abbott of St-Cyran, one of the leaders of the Jansenist movement; the nature and aims, which place these schools at a much higher and more demanding level than the popular, humble little schools (*Petites Ecoles*) spread out through the French parishes and suburbs; the modest number of pupils of both genders entrusted, in small groups, to their respective male or female instructor.⁷⁴

What needs to be underlined is the close connection that the style of education practised in the 'little schools' of Port Royal has with the Preventive System in general, and in particular with the Don Bosco's educational experience. Even though the

⁶⁸ Five chapters are given over to the theme of spiritual paternity: cf. *De condicionibus*. 55-132.

⁶⁹ N. Lancicius, *De condicionibus*, 10.

⁷⁰ *ibid*, 13.

⁷¹ *ibid*, 257-299.

⁷² N. Lancicius, *De condicionibus*, 262.

⁷³ *ibid*, 273 and 285.

⁷⁴ For the 'Little schools' of Port-Royal, cf. *Les Pédagogues de Port Royal... Histoire des Petites Écoles. Notices, extraits et analyses avec des notes*, par. I (Carré, Paris: Delagrave 1887), p. 287-337 *Règlement pour les enfants de Port-Royal* by Jacqueline Pascal; L. Cavallone, *I maestri e le 'piccole scuole' di Port-Royal*, (Turin, Paravia 1942); F. Delforge, *Les petites écoles de Port-Royal 1637-1660*, (Paris, Éditions du Cerf 1985), 438 pages.; an excellent contribution, attentive to the connections between theology, pedagogy and didactic theory is offered by M. Ferrari, "Le piccole scuole di Port Royal: una didattica teoricamente fondata", in «*Scuola e città*» 37 (1986): 522-531.

Piedmontese educator does not venture into the theological elaborations of the Port Royalists, he does present, in his educational praxis, not a few similarities with the ones used by the Port Royalists.⁷⁵ But these similarities have to do with the style, seasoning the attitudes of the educators towards their pupils. As far as the contents and contexts are concerned, however, the life experience of the young Port Royalists is much more austere than the one lived by the young people who flocked to Don Bosco's oratories and schools.

Evidently the promoters and administrators of the 'little schools' support the absolute primacy of grace in reference to salvation and therefore also in reference to the educational process. This, however, does not exclude personal responsibility and commitment, rather it highlights them.

For several reasons, a child is a defenceless creature, exposed to the attacks of the Tempter, undermined like everyone by original sin; a fragile creature because of his age, because of his psycho-physical structure, because of the pressures of the environment. The work of an educator is absolutely necessary for the following reasons: to protect the child's innocence; to preserve the child from evil, a wound which will render salvation even more difficult to attain; to restore his fallen nature; to discipline his passions; to strengthen his spirit and his will and to render his heart good.

Contributions to all this are provided by the supernatural means offered by Faith and the constant, vigilant and affectionate work of the educator who accompanies, encourages and urges the child on, acting in cooperation with God as an indispensable "useless servant" who, more than being the "orator" (*oratore*), is first of all the "prayerer" (*orante*). "The devil attacks children and they do not fight back. Hence the need to fight for them... Separation from the world, good example are the best help other than prayer, that one can give them".⁷⁶

Jacqueline Pascal, in her book *Rules for children* writes: "I believe that in order to usefully serve children, we should never speak to them and not even work for their good without looking at God, and without begging him for his grace, with the desire to draw from him all that is needed to train children in the fear of God."⁷⁷

Therefore the educational space is especially an area separated from the world and its dangers, in the countryside or within the confines of a house or a boarding

⁷⁵ P. Stella offers some interesting observations, and clarifications of comparison, dependencies, similarities, in his *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol 2, pp. 232-236, 260, 317, 451-452.

⁷⁶ *Entretien de Saint Cyrano et de M. Le Maître sur les enfants*, cited by M. Ferrari, *Le piccole scuole*, e 528; F. Delforge, *Les petites écoles*, pp. 269-276.

⁷⁷ *Règlement pour les enfants*, part 2, n. 1, 393. Quoted from the edition contained in the work by V. Cousin, *Jacqueline Pascal, Premières études sur les femmes illustres et la société du XVIIIe siècle*, (Paris, Didier et Cie 1856) Ed. 1844, 358-425.

institution. It is its own little supervised universe, that is, the pupils are constantly supervised — the first imperative for an organisation — and under the direction of the educators. The small family, like groups of five or six pupils, are entrusted to educators who share the life of their pupils day and night. The main goal is not only to preserve the children's innocence, but also to foster their active growth by teaching everything that can help them grow in virtue and knowledge and in love of things eternal. This is dictated by infinite zeal, suggested by faith and charity which, in turn, is both a sincere and a warm-hearted affection.⁷⁸ The educators have a friendly relationship with the children; they have to try to win over their trust and thus advise them. Punishments are the last resort and an unpleasant one. The first concern should be one of preventing a child from doing something wrong through strict supervision and by fostering imitation.⁷⁹

Similar suggestions for the education of girls are to be found in *The Rules for the children of Port Royal*.⁸⁰ Serious issues are certainly not omitted: there should be a painstaking, visible assistance, a dignified reserve, silence all over, an accent on mortification, on always keeping busy. But just the same, the manifestations of loving-kindness are relevant although with notable *restraint*.

The goal assigned to the care of girls — which should start from the age of four or five — is to point them to a deep awareness of Christian life.⁸¹ According to the founder's, St-Cyr's 'Salesian dimension', Christian life must be inspired by love which holds absolute primacy,⁸² yet a love never separated from fear and always based on a twofold feeling: the ugliness of vice and the beauty of virtue.⁸³

The sublimity and purity of the goals of such an education do not exempt the author of the *Règlement* from prefacing it with a warning to recommend the educators to employ moderation in the implementation of the rules. "Not all the girls are capable of keeping such a prolonged silence or of living such an intense kind of life without losing heart and feeling tired. For this reason, the teacher, while safeguarding discipline, should make efforts to win over their affection and their heart, something which is fully necessary to succeed in their education".⁸⁴

What follows are a series of invitations to keep a watchful presence among the girls, with an attitude of both love and reserve.

⁷⁸ F. Delforge, *Les petites écoles*, 277-285.

⁷⁹ *ibid*, 157-171

⁸⁰ The text of the *Règlement pour les enfants de Port-Royal* can also be found in the work *Les pédagogues de Port Royal* 287-337.

⁸¹ Cf. *Règlement*, part II, I, n. 23, 400.

⁸² On the 'Salesian dimension' of Saint-Cyran, cf. J. Orcibal, cf. *La spiritualité de Saint-Cyran avec ses écrits de piété inédits*, (Paris, Librairie J. Vrin 1962), 35-79.

⁸³ *Règlement*, part I, du travail, 8, 364; part 2,2, nos. 1-3, 401-402.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, *Avertissement*, 358..

We have to use a lot of charity and tenderness with the girls, never neglecting anything that has to do with their life, both their inner and external life, making them realise, at every opportunity, that there are no limits to our dedication to them, and that what we do we do with affection and with all our heart because they are daughters of God and we feel obliged not to spare anything to make them worthy of this.⁸⁵ ... Furthermore, living among the girls, we have to behave ourselves so they do not notice our change of humour when we deal with them, sometimes too indulgently, sometimes with severity; We should not become too familiar with them, neither should we give them too much confidence, even if they are older. We should, however, show them charity and a great amount of gentleness in everything they need; we should even anticipate them in their needs. They need to be treated with great politeness and we should speak to them respectfully, doing all we can for them. It would be good at times to be condescending in things which are not important, if this helps us to win over their heart. When they do something wrong, we should speak with much gentleness and offer them good reasons to convince them of what they did wrong.⁸⁶

Other suggestions follow: "educate the girls to live a simple life; use discretion in supervision; punish them without much fuss, without wasting a word; get them accustomed to being sincere; keep them busy alternating reading, playing and working".⁸⁷ In reference to assistance, there is a fine observation: "I believe that our continuous vigilance should be carried out with gentleness and such trust as to make the girls understand that we love them and not that we are with them only to guard them".⁸⁸

The guidance given for the moral and religious education of young girls is characterised by an extraordinary wisdom, respect and finesse, while keeping seriousness as the basis. But what stands out more than the idea of duties is the theme of gift-giving. "We have to make the girls understand that a religious life is not a burden at all, but one of the greatest of God's gifts, a helping means and a comfort for those who want to live according to their Baptismal vows".⁸⁹

The same kind of reasoning qualifies the spirituality to be displayed by the girls' educators.

It is good, at times, to let them know that we love them in the Lord, and that it is precisely this tenderness which makes us so sensitive to any of their faults and experience much pain to bear with them. We should make them understand

⁸⁵ *Règlement...*, part 2, I, n. 2, 393-394.

⁸⁶ *ibid*, part 2, I, nos. 13-16, 397-398.

⁸⁷ *ibid*, part 2, I, nos. 17-23, 398-400.

⁸⁸ *ibid*, part 2, I, n. 18, p. 399.

⁸⁹ *ibid*, part 2, 2, n. 11, p. 404; cf. nos 1-10, 401-404.

that it is exactly the flame of this love that at times drives us to use such harsh words in reprimanding them. We have to assure them that, independently of the way we act, we are always drawn to act the way we do by the affection we have for them and by the desire to make them as God wants to them to be and that our heart still, and always abides by gentleness towards them, that our firmness is directed towards their faults and that is why we do violence to ourselves, since we are naturally more inclined to employ gentleness than force.⁹⁰

Naturally, the modest dimensions of the communities of 'little schools' of Port Royal, subdivided into tiny groups, offered broad opportunities for *entretiens particuliers* (particular encounters) with the girls, in order to provide them with a more personalized support: comfort in their suffering, correction in their vices, control of their passions, growth in their virtues. Charity, reserve, avoidance of familiarity, discretion, invocation to God for light and grace, sincerity in one's relationships and charitable warnings,⁹¹ the granting of forgiveness, the imposition of penances, all worked together.⁹²

Before concluding with a paragraph with a human touch *Les Malades et leurs besoins corporals* (Concerning sick girls and their bodily needs),⁹³ the book offers different titles dealing with the fundamental resources of the life of grace: Confession, Communion, Confirmation, Prayer and Spiritual Reading.⁹⁴ The rigorist theology peculiar to Jansenism inevitably prevailed in the educational method of the 'little schools'. Those pages are certainly not to be considered part of what we habitually refer to as 'Preventive System'. Exceptionally, only a few sections dedicated to prayer and wholly geared to instilling within the girls a refined inner type of Christianity might somehow be considered as part of the Preventive System.

Let every effort be made to instil in the girls a great desire to have recourse to God in all their needs, particularly in their weaknesses and temptations. We should make them understand that only looking to God with trust, humility and perseverance will give them more support than all the great resolutions they might make. These resolutions would, in turn, be useless if the goodness of God were not to be their source, through the power of his grace. We should also make them understand that the only thing we can do is to lose ourselves in God, knowing that He alone can save us.

⁹⁰ *ibid*, part 2, 2, n. 12, p. 404.

⁹¹ *ibid*, part 2, 31, nos. 1-9, 405-408.

⁹² *Règlement...*, part 2,4, nos. 1-7, 408-409.

⁹³ *ibid*, part 2, 10, nos. 1-11, 421-425.

⁹⁴ *ibid*, part 2, parts 5-9, 410-421.

Secondly, we should not overburden them with a huge number of vocal or mental prayers, but instead should make efforts to impress on their hearts a true feeling of God's holy presence, so that they may be able to see him everywhere, in all their occupations, and worship him and praise him everywhere.⁹⁵

5. *Preventive repression in school education*

Recalling the days when he attended school in Chieri (1831-1835), Don Bosco describes a faithful outline of the discipline regime used in those days. It had been imposed by the *Regulations for the Schools outside the University*, promulgated with the *Rules with Royal Prerogatives by Which His Majesty (Charles Felix) Approves the Added Rules Both for Common and Public Schools – As Well as for the Royal Schools. Dated July 23, 1822.*⁹⁶

The regulations were unequivocally Restoration in style.⁹⁷ However, in the memory of the older Don Bosco, they were perfectly in tune with the basic dimensions of his Preventive System of education because of the strong religious principles, and principles of morality and discipline which were part of the entire life of the school.

It is appropriate to recall that in those days religion was a basic part of the educational system. A teacher was faced with immediate dismissal should he make any unbecoming or irreligious statement. If this was the way teachers were treated, you can imagine how severely pupils were dealt with for any unruly conduct or scandal!

We went to holy Mass every morning; classes began with the devout praying of the *Actiones* and the *Ave Maria*. They ended with the *Agimus* and *Ave Maria*. On feast days, all the students attended the college church. Before Mass we had spiritual reading followed by the chanting of the Little Office of Our Lady. Then came Mass and the explanation of the Gospel.

In the evening we had further catechetical instruction, Vespers and another sermon. Everyone was expected to approach the holy sacraments; to prevent the neglect of this important obligation, once a month the students had to present a card to prove that they had gone to confession. If one failed to do on this he

⁹⁵ *ibid*, part 2, 8, nos. 1-2, 417-418.

⁹⁶ (Turin: Royal Press 1822), p.

⁹⁷ "The *Regolamento per le scuole fuori dell'università*.... were prepared by the Jesuits from Novara. No wonder, then, that the Regulations of July 23, 1822, used for Piedmontese schools until 1848, seemed as if they were made for novices in a convent rather than students in public schools" (A. Lizier, *Nel primo centenario del Regio Convitto Nazionale di Novara 1808-1908. Le scuole di Novara ed il Liceo-Convitto*. Novara, Stabilimento G. Parzini 1908, p. 194; cf. Chap VIII *Il «Reale Collegio di Novara» e le «Regie Scuole» dai moti del 1821 alla cacciata dei Gesuiti (1821-1848)*, pp. 191-238.

was barred from end-of-year examinations, no matter how good he was as at studies. This strict training produced marvellous results. Many years went by without any swearing or unbecoming words being heard. The students were as docile and respectful at school as they would have been at home. And it often happened that in very large classes everyone got promoted at the end of the year.⁹⁸

I would like to note something about the college at Chieri that certainly exemplifies the spirit of piety that flourished there. During my four years as a student in the college I do not remember ever hearing any talk, not even a word, that could be considered impolite or irreligious. At the end of rhetoric course, of the 25 students, 21 embraced the clerical state, three became doctors and one became a merchant.⁹⁹

The titles of the third and fourth chapters of the *Regulations for Public Schools, Royal Schools, Community Schools; Teaching and Examinations in Both Public and Royal Schools* are certainly repressive, in the sense that they imply total and inflexible control.

But the champions of the Preventive System, and among them Don Bosco, do not reject their contents, even though they carry them out in modified form. What allows them to be considered preventive are especially the mentality behind them, the spirit and the style, which in the *Regolamento*, instead, undoubtedly have a repressive tone.

The students are subjected to following rigid duties: in the classroom, they had to take assigned seats; they had to approach the Sacrament of penance every month, and the confessor had to give them a card to prove it; they had to fulfil their Easter duty and have a document to prove it; they had to attend daily Mass, go to Mass every Sunday with the student community and perform the added practices of piety in the morning, such as spiritual reading, The Little Office of Our Lady and the Litanies, besides religious instruction; in the afternoon they had spiritual reading, singing, recitation of prayers, and catechism; there was a *triduum* in preparation for Christmas, and the annual retreat; books not authorised by the prefect of studies were forbidden.¹⁰⁰ No less severe was the control exercised over the student's life outside school.

All students are strictly forbidden to: go swimming, go to the theatre, engage in games of tricks, wear masks, respond to dance invitations, engage in any kind of games in suburbs, bars, cafés and other public places, go out for dinner, eat

⁹⁸ MO(1991) 72.

⁹⁹ MO(1989) 111-112

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Regolament*, art. 34-41

and drink in hotels or restaurants, gather in clubs or set up a club, or have conversations in cafés, act in local theatres, without the permission of the prefect of studies.¹⁰¹

The commitment taken by the 'congregation' (school community), which to a certain extent was a model for the Oratory, was far different from the free and joyful sharing of life in the Oratory, as much as that was inspired by serious religious ideas.¹⁰²

Spiritual directors wielded unlimited power, a power to intervene decisively in the very activity of the school.¹⁰³

They have the right, within the congregation to punish, to dismiss all those who are irreligious, who do not know their catechism and who are disobedient. Whoever is expelled from the congregation is also expelled from the school, through a notice handed out by the spiritual director to the prefect of studies. They have the right to withhold the promotion of students from a lower to a higher grade, and to submit students to an additional catechism exam on All Saints Day. Students will be denied promotion if they continue to demonstrate ignorance.¹⁰⁴

No less authoritarian were the demands in reference to teachers, obliged to always have a certificate of good moral and religious conduct issued by the bishop. They were obliged to provide supervision at exact times,¹⁰⁵ an assistance which had to be extremely attentive and demanding for its possible consequences.

The student who, on account of his obstinate disobedience or serious lack of respect towards his teacher or spiritual director is to be suspended from school will be readmitted only after three days and after first begging for forgiveness from the school. Students lacking religious spirit, with corrupt morals, who are incorrigible, guilty of obstinate and scandalous resistance to the orders of superiors or guilty of some crime, will be expelled from the school as an example to others.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Ibid., art. 42.

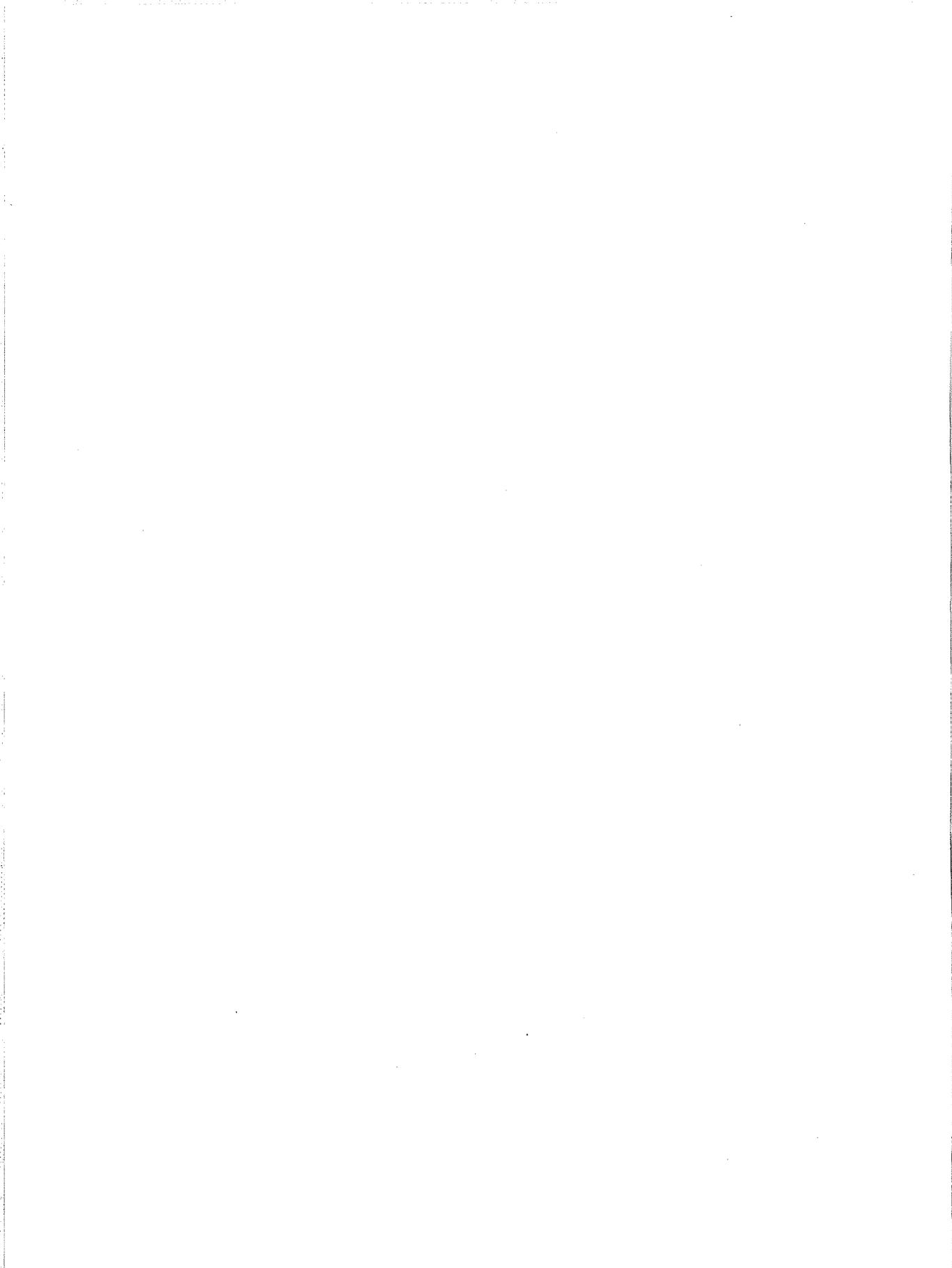
¹⁰² Cf. *Regolamento*, book 4, Ch. 1, par. 1. *Della congregazione*, art. 134-143.

¹⁰³ Ibid., book 4, Ch. 1, par. 2. *Dei direttori spirituali*, art. 144-167.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., art. 146.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., art. 48-52, 54-55.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., book 3, Ch. 1, par. 2 *Dei doveri degli studenti in generale*, art.41 and 46.



Chapter 4

BIRTH OF A FORMULA: PREVENTIVE SYSTEM, REPRESSIVE SYSTEM

The terms 'repress', 'prevent', 'prevention' and the like, were certainly not new to the 18th century. Until we have better research results we will continue to say that the terms, 'Preventive System', 'repressive system', 'preventive education' and 'repressive education' came into existence in the 18th century. They seem to have been first used in France in various debates in two contexts and with radically different meanings: school policy on the one hand and family education-boarding school (schools and boarding schools directed by the State, by lay people and by Catholics) on the other.

[Trans note: wherever the term *collegio* is used, this will normally be translated as *boarding school*, unless already made clear in a sentence, where it will be referred to simply as *school*]

1. *Prevention and repression in school policy*

In French school policy in the first part of the century the two terms, 'Preventive System' and 'repressive system' surfaced in connection with a very keen debate on the freedom of the school.¹

Article 17 of the Belgian Constitution of 1831 had accepted the principle of freedom and thus given rise to a consistently liberal school system. "Teaching is free. Any kind of preventive measure is prohibited. Only the law regulates the repression of crimes".

In France, the 'Preventive System' was supported by people, most of them secularists, who promoted state monopoly over schooling, as sanctioned by the Napoleonic university system. This prevented any chance of a liberal school, namely a school not controlled by the State, or in other words it made any preventive authorisation impossible. In reality it was a preventive-oppressive system. The repressive system was championed by those who opted for freedom of teaching with different claims sanctioned in principle by the Constitutional 'Charta' promulgated by Louis

¹ For a concise presentation of the problem and some of the main people involved, cf. B. Ferrari, "*La politica scolastica del Cavour*", (Milan: Vita e Pensiero 1982), 52-63.

Philip I of Orleans on August 14, 1830. The system was called 'repressive' because the Guizot Law of June 28, 1833, applying the constitutional decree, foresaw various ways of controlling private institutions, to the point of eventually suppressing them in cases where there was serious non-compliance of a legal, moral or didactic nature. The conditions, however, were such that they appeared to be doubly repressive. The first of these conditions was their dependence on the university. This was a more telling reason why they should have given a better solution to the problem by issuing a new law which might have also included the secondary schools in its liberalisation.

The one who would insist on this issue in the debates reopened in 1844 was Alexis Charles de Tocqueville (1805-1859), a great moderate liberal, in his intervention on January 17, 1844, and in various articles which appeared in the newspaper *Le Commerce*.² The Report made on July 13, 1844 by Adolphe Thiers, president of the parliamentary commission, would have a decisive importance in the debate. The report definitely disposed of any attempt to modify the current Law of 1833. In his report on the work of the Commission, Thiers introduced the terms *système préventif* and *système répressif* which were neither mentioned nor found in any previous intervention. They refer directly or indirectly to the solutions proposed for the first two problems: the conditions for opening an institution of public instruction, with the exclusion of the 'Preventive System', and the supervision, as demanded by the 'repressive system', to which they ought be subjected.³

While respecting the legitimate independence of family education, Thiers argued, the State was claiming the rightful responsibility of issuing laws on the education of its citizens. With the university system, the State was trying to make a unified type of formation effective in all institutions, common for all.⁴ As for the existence of institutions, in order to guarantee the freedom of teaching the commission had bluntly announced the abolition of the previously required authorisation, even though still holding on to certain conditions required for the opening of institutions.⁵ In a word, the commission was against the Preventive System. But, as Thiers immediately clarified, it was self-evident that any departure from the Preventive System meant immediate entry into the repressive system. When freedom is granted, the need for supervision follows.

² These can be found in the interesting study by A.M. Battista, *Lo spirito liberale e lo spirito religioso. Tocqueville nel dibattito sulla scuola*, (Milano: Jaca Book 1975), 129-201.

³ Cf. Rapport de M. Thiers sur la loi d'instruction secondaire fait au nom de la Commission de la Chambre de Députés dans le séance du 13 juillet 1844, (Paris, Paulin Éditeur 1844), 27-39 and 39-49.

⁴ 46 Royal schools and 312 communal colleges were tied to the University. A further 1,016 private educational houses were subject to supervision. Pupils receiving secondary education numbered 19,000, 27,000, 36,000 respectively.

⁵ A. Thiers, *Rapport*, 27-35.

This supervision was needed to safeguard the quality of instruction, morality and the respect for the institution.⁶

University inspectors would have carried out the legitimate task of “examining, surveying, issuing warnings and using a simple disciplinary censure”. This might have proven to be a beneficial stimulus for both teachers and students and would have been a way of distinguishing good institutions from those not up to par. However, institutions faced with a decree of suppression always had the opportunity for recourse to judicial authority.⁷

2. *Public repressive and private preventive education*

The meaning of the two terms is inverted when they are transferred from a political debate to a pedagogical issue.

This counter position is first of all made evident in France as the aftermath of the debate on the discipline to be used in schools. According to Philip Aries: “right from the beginning of the 19th century, school discipline had abandoned its liberal tradition and had adopted a barracks-like style”. This was not only due to the impact of the Napoleonic period, but to two more important factors: the pedagogical tradition of the military schools of the *ancien régime* and the emerging sensitivity to adolescence, taken as the age which lets go of the circumstances of childhood and commences its decisive course towards the adult state. This requires educational measures strongly seasoned with responsibility.⁸

It is in this climate that the idea of the *college* (boarding school) was imposed, in order to create a more precise framework for the time of growing up.⁹

In the 1840s some people in connection with the different regimes used in state boarding schools on one hand and by the family and private Catholic boarding schools on the other, proposed the antithesis between the two pedagogies, the repressive and the preventive, though not without some debate.

This is why the liberal Duke de Broglie, during a debate in the Chambers of Equals, on the law regarding secondary schools already mentioned in the preceding paragraph and dated April 22, 1844, declared:

Education in the home context is essentially preventive. This is its incomparable merit. Its main drawback is that it does not always form either talented people

⁶ Ibid., 39.

⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁸ Cf. Ph. Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1973), 294-295.

⁹ Ibid., 313-317.

or strong characters. In an atmosphere which is rather artificial and so to say, to all appearances like a hothouse, it cultivates tender plants which later on can barely withstand the storms coming from the outside world. . . . public education is somewhat repressive and, to a certain extent, deals with boys as though they were grown-ups. It makes them feel the weight of the inflexibility of the law, the powerful impact of competition, the wounds inflicted on their self-love. But it also renders them well trained to confront evil and dangers. However it does not succeed in training them adequately, except by somehow exposing them to dangers and, at times, allowing them to fall and then it waits for them to get up again".¹⁰

Thiers emphasised, once again, the same opposing set of ideas in his *Rapport* of July 13, 1844 when he introduced his own report admitting the legitimacy of the two types of education: paternal education which is good enough to reproduce a family, while State education is good enough to form the citizen. Each could follow different ways, according to different goals. "For example, one father might like the strict, inflexible type of education used by the great public institutions, but another father might prefer the gentler, more intelligent type of education used by the private institutions". Besides, a father will guide his son toward the profession that he prefers: but all "will aim at guiding their sons along the lines of tenderness and even the weakness proper to a father". At this point the state comes into the picture, namely the political entity, society, the nation. And its legitimate commitment is that of making a citizen out of the young man imbued with the spirit of the constitutions and who loves the laws and his country, and is able to contribute to the greatness and prosperity of the nation".¹¹

Later on, Thiers confronted the problem of evaluating the two systems and entered into a debate with those who claimed that only the clergy were able to educate and instil a moral and religious spirit in the young, something that could not have been done by a secular boarding school.¹² Each had its own style and a different educational value. The "character of royal colleges (boarding schools) is marked by their discipline: the rule prevails in everything". "There is no indulgence towards the parents' weakness; all pupils are equal whether they are from rich or from poor families, whether they are from high or ordinary families: the same law is imposed on everyone". "When a serious fault has been committed, the school must expel the culprit without any weakness and the institution will receive an immediate benefit from it. The idea of the

¹⁰ In 'Moniteur Universe', April 13, 1844, n. 106, 931. The extract was written by Camillo Cavour in one of his many exercise books; cf. C. Cavour, *Tutti gli scritti*, edited by C. Pischcedda and G. Talamo, vol 1 (Turin, Centro Studi Piemontesi 1976), 326.

¹¹ A. Thiers *Rapport*. 9-10.

¹² *ibid.* 56-57.

rule, of equality, stands above everything else. And we should also add: the idea of frankness in dealing with everyone, the exclusion of all spying. Loyalty is both respected and encouraged". "This is the way men are fashioned into citizens and into honest men".¹³ "We have to make upright citizens out of young men, good Christians too but also good Frenchmen".¹⁴

In private and secular boarding schools instead, the "care provided is more on an individual basis", children are followed up a lot more, people are more pleasantly inclined to accept their parents' influence. Even in Catholic boarding schools, the "regime is less strict", less capable of preparing a youngster to face his entrance into the world; even the religious formation itself, more intense yet more forced, is not necessarily the most suitable for creating more personal and lasting convictions in the area of freedom.¹⁵

3. *Pierre Antoine Poulet's Preventive System (1810-1846)*

The director of the Institute St Vincent of Senlis, Pierre Antoine Poulet (1810-1846)¹⁶ argues against Thiers on these points: the superficial judgements on the religious education provided by the public schools, his comparison between the quality and results of such an education in Catholic boarding schools¹⁷ and the educational method used in such schools. Finally he elaborated on the features of a system of education which is not formally defined as preventive, but contains all of its features. First of all, the system of education used at the Senlis School is based on foundations shared by any authentic system of education. It entails commitment, discipline, responsibility; it is not permissive; it does not allow for uncalled-for family interventions; it demands the exact observance of the rules, quiet, silence, orderliness, punctuality and obedience.¹⁸

¹³ *ibid.* 57-58.

¹⁴ *ibid.* 62..

¹⁵ A. Thiers *Rapport*, pp. 59-62.

¹⁶ On Poulet, cf. E. Valentini, "L'abate Poulet (1810-1846)", in *Rivista di Pedagogia e di Scienze Religiose* 2 (1964): 34-52; *ibid.*, "Il sistema preventivo di Poulet", *ibid.* 7 (1969): 147-192. Poulet's pedagogical thinking can be found in *Discours sur l'éducation prononcés aux distributions des prix de son établissement, suivis de quelques autres écrits du même auteur*, (Paris: Pringuet 1851), 16. 427 pages.

¹⁷ Cf. *Lettre à M. Thiers à l'occasion de son Rapport sur le projet de loim relatif à l'instruction secondaire*, in P.-A. Poulet, *Discours*, 233-264. To be able to speak of the quality and results of 'religion' in different institutes, he objects, "one needs to know first of all what is meant by *religious and moral education*, or rather what is religion, what is moral, where does one find the complete and pure truth which are the duties imposed by God." (*ibid.*, p.235).

¹⁸ P.-A. Poulet, *Discours*. 246-248.

Secondly, it excludes the “military regime” of the State schools even though it does require of those who hold responsibility in the school that they have the following features: dedication, conscientious vigilance, zeal mixed with moderate indulgence and fatherly flexibility.¹⁹ The immediate goal of educational activity is, in fact, the protection of the pupils’ innocence. This is achieved through constant assistance which means an uninterrupted presence among them.²⁰ But this assistance is expected to be “intelligent, prudent, tolerant, i.e., charitable”. This type of assistance aims not only at protecting innocence and preventing anything contrary to it, but at being solicitous about it and fostering it. This can actually happen when the following three means are used: vigilance exercised; principles instilled; being kept busy.²¹

The last goal of this system of education is to form the human and Christian character of the young, to develop intelligence by means of classical and scientific culture. The religious principle stands out and above, and entails fulfilment of one’s duties towards God, application to study taken as prayer and as a religious and saintly duty.”²²

Education is carried out in a true family-like atmosphere and in a twofold sense: first of all, collaboration and integration between family and school education are sincerely fostered. No teacher will ever claim for himself the gratitude, trust and love which bind children to their parents. At the same time, the school carries out its education, thanks to an authority which is like the extension of a father’s and mother’s authority. “If the school is not a family, then it is nothing at all”.²³

Added to all this is the theme of love as a pedagogical principle and the theme of indulgence as a method.²⁴

Love should take first place in educational activity. ‘The Heart’.. yes! It is above all, and first of all, through the heart, with a loving heart, with a tender and generous heart that the teacher should carry out his important ministry”.²⁵ No, the heart is not only expected to pour the oil which facilitates the heart’s movement; the heart itself must be the first mover... It is not enough to call upon the heart as an auxiliary tool, it must be the dominant principle: in a word, education is not the work of the spirit directed by the heart, it is actually the work of the heart directed by the spirit”.²⁶

¹⁹ *ibid.* 248-249.

²⁰ “Our first rule is to constantly keep the boy with us, near us, under our eyes” (*Discours.* 25).

²¹ P.-A. Pouillet, *Discours.* 28-33.

²² P.-A. Pouillet, *Discours.* 33-38, 107, 120.

²³ *Ibid.*, 46-51, 63-70.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, respectively, 137-157 and 81-101.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 140-141.

Indulgence is the expression of the heart and is made evident all along the various stages of education. Pouillet excludes the kind of indulgence which stands for weakness or flattery. "Indulgence implies an attitude of waiting, tolerating, closing an eye to, forgiving. It is an educative dimension which needs to be joined to all others: to zeal which is always on the alert for action; to vigilance which lets nothing escape the eye; to authority which commands, and to justice which punishes".²⁷

Indulgence is something required by a boy's nature, by the limits of his availability to co-operate with his educator. A boy is a "human being weak in soul, body, will, reason. A boy is a human being who is frivolous, inconstant, ruled by a thousand ideas, a thousand feelings which happen to be contradictory; he is a human being subject to all kinds of impressions coming from inside and from without". "Boys are boys. Freedom, movement, noise are irresistible needs at a boy's age. When a guilty young man innocently says I didn't think about it, we can always believe him".²⁸ However, indulgence should be balanced and prudent. "Let us be indulgent when confronted with weakness but let there be no weakness in our indulgence".²⁹

In particular, indulgence should be measured according to the different stages of education: less is needed when it is a question of disciplinary rules to be observed; more is needed in reference to moral and religious education: "a man cannot be reformed except by means of the heart and we cannot reach the heart except through love."³⁰

Only in an atmosphere of gentleness can a healthy fear, the beginning of wisdom, come to the fore in particular circumstances, and with great effectiveness. Fear is the beginning of wisdom, and nothing more, as we remember that we are called to be the "friends and fathers of our pupils".³¹

The final and overall outcome will be the spirit of a place of education.³² "This spirit is constituted by the prudence, moderation, zeal and heart of the educators but above all, and essentially, by the spirit of the pupils which creates an atmosphere of sincerity, modesty, good behaviour, openness and affection".³³ "Moreover, this spirit brings true piety towards God, complete loyalty and a cordial benevolence in the pupils' relationships with their teachers and classmates and the scrupulous observance of the sacred laws of modesty".³⁴ This is why it is indispensable that a system of

²⁷ Ibid., 87.

²⁸ Ibid. 88-92.

²⁹ Ibid., 92.

³⁰ P.-A. Pouillet, *Discours*. 94-95.

³¹ Ibid., 99-100.

³² Ibid., 158-185. *Du bon esprit dans les maisons d'éducation*.

³³ Ibid., 162-164, 170.

³⁴ Ibid., 174-175.

freedom, love and trust, of a love regulated and a trust moderated by a just authority, should be preferred to a repressive system".³⁵

It is not enough to stop evil; we have to develop what is good".³⁶

This sum total of principles and orientations, Poulet concluded, does not constitute a great theory or complex system or an art reserved only for the initiated. "What is simply needed is to assist constantly and loyally, to instruct solidly, to use frequent reminders, to encourage with kindness, to reward with joy, to punish with due motivation and in moderation, and especially to put up with everything with tireless constancy, and to love with an unalterable tenderness. All of this may require some virtues, but a very small amount of skill; it may require experience but no deep research; it may require the quick glance of a practical observation, but not the genius needed for high speculation. All of the above can and must be done with simplicity".³⁷

4. *A comparison between two types of college-boarding school and two systems of education*

In contrasting two types of boarding school, the one seclar and the other catholic, in the artificial way in which Thiers does it, the Frenchman Pierre Sebastien Laurentie (1793-1876) sees two different educational systems pitted against each other: one based on strictness, the other on love.³⁸

This contrast obstructs a correct view of the legitimate differences between the two systems. And it leads to the Manichean, sketchy kind of presentation to be expected of an intransigent monarchist Catholic, a Legitimist. It gives the impression of being guided by not so hidden views belonging to the Restoration.³⁹

Laurentie tells us of the strong accusations brought by some people against the public boarding schools: intelligence degraded, creativity squashed, a boy's personality lost amongst the mob, the climate of fear, hypocrisy, malice and squalor.⁴⁰ He gives us, for his part, an entirely negative description which he claims to have been the result of a just and considered observation.

³⁵ Ibid., 176-177. Cf. again 180-182.

³⁶ Ibid., 179.

³⁷ Ibid., 191-192.

³⁸ Laurentie was the author of three brilliant pedagogical writings, amongst others: *Lettres à un père sur l'éducation de son fils* (1834); *Lettres à une mère sur l'éducation du son fils* (1836); *Lettres à un curé sur l'éducation du peuple*. The Italian edition: *Lettere sulla educazione del popolo* comes from a second edition (1850) by Laurentie, the former inspector general of studies, (Genoa: Gio. Fassicomo Press 1856), 200 pages.

³⁹ Cf. E Valentini, "Il sistema preventivo di M. Laurentie (1793-1876)", in *Palestra del Clero* 61 (1982): 209-231.

⁴⁰ P.S. Laurentie, *Lettres à un père*, 38-40.

The public boarding school looks like a prison, like the Spielberg which Silvio Pellico wrote about in his *Mie prigioni* (My prisons) The public boarding school is a place full of sadness and grief. Young people grow old ahead of time, under the authority of gloomy teachers.... What prevails in a public boarding school is rigid organisation as far as studies and recreational activities are concerned, distinctively marked by bell or drum. The teacher does not get close to the pupil; the tone of his command is sharp and inspires fear. The pupil does not get close to the teacher; obedience is loaded with fear and mistrust. It is a mechanised kind of world where nothing is forgotten. There is neither trust nor love. No gentle words can be heard which might reach the heart. Even God has his place, but God is absent from the youngster's inner thoughts. The end result of this exterior orderliness is that the vices are kept hidden and they are the ones which devour and poison the heart. Even the boys' ages are deceiving. They show a childhood grown prematurely old, a woebegone adolescence... The consequences of this situation are the advent of destructive passions, hidden rebellious attitudes, sterile studies....and this is only the foreshadowing of a life without hope and without élan.⁴¹

By contrast we have the enticing image of the Catholic boarding school.

The Christian boarding school is a family. The prevailing authority is the father's authority, transferred to another father, who substitutes the natural fathers: the teachers who share their zeal and their love. Religion presides over this holy unity. It renders commands acceptable and obedience lovable. There is orderliness in this school, but we are not dealing with that dark discipline which hides deep suffering and hatreds. There is an orderliness which goes deep into the souls of the pupils and sets their innermost thoughts in order. Advice is given with gentleness and is always available. The teaching is variable, flexible, accessible to all kinds of intellect. Piety is not something imposed as a duty to be carried out at given times and on certain days. It is more like an inspired habit which nicely fills one's entire life. In this school, pupils are like brothers and teachers are like friends. The boarding school forms a man for society, because this young man has been provided in timely fashion with all the weapons needed to face society, thanks also to the solid and lasting friendships made. The boarding school is a small world, with its little passions but these passions are held in check by means of a vigilant authority. But what I love the most in a boarding school is the perfection achieved. This 'becoming a civilized person', as Montaigne says, this being accustomed to community living, is the beginning of social life, it marks the beginning of the first development of human virtues....The boarding school does not create a precocious maturity but allows the boys to act as boys as long as possible. What a fine combination

⁴¹ Ibid., 40-43.

is this blending of graces and ingenuity of early age with the strong virtues, constant work and the severe constraint of studies! The Christian boarding school offers this kind of blending, and adds beautiful harmony, the ornament of the arts. This is why studies are agreeable, discipline is elegant, and instruction is both brilliant and attractive”⁴²

The author, however, staunch conservative that he is, also sees some dangers in the kind of friendship and brotherhood in some Catholic boarding school open to new ideas, ideas such as the proclamation of political equality. He sees this as a fantasy which causes conflicts which destroy the harmony of the old order with its various levels according to nature’s own immutable order”⁴³

5. *Felix Dupanloup (1800-1878)*

Felix Dupanloup, a great educator, an active catechist, Bishop of Orleans, has handed down to us a rich literary pedagogical output. His *Concerning Education* is remarkable, and was available in its Italian translation in Don Bosco’s Oratory library. It was known to Don Bosco, either directly or indirectly.⁴⁴ In the third book in particular, first and second volumes, dedicated respectively to discipline and the instructor, we find clear indications preventive touch both in language and content.⁴⁵

According to Dupanloup, the antithesis between repressive and Preventive Systems is expressed practically in the opposition between the civil and penal courts as seen in society and in the Board of education.

The art of governing implies the use of force and repression. The art of education implies and requires prevention. “The Ministry of education stands for fatherliness and the constituted authority of the Board at one and the same time and, I would almost say, a kind of priesthood. And this is how it does it. In all civilised societies the need was always felt not only to repress evil by controlling human passions through punishments but also to prevent it by training men to acquire virtue through education.

⁴² P.S. Laurentie, *Lettres à un père*, pp. 44-49.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 49-56. (*Un péril au collège*)

⁴⁴ *L’educazione*, by Bishop Felix Dupanloup, bishop of Orleans, member of the French Academy- Italian version by D. Clemente De Angelis, 3 vols. Parma, Fiacadori 1868-1869; *De l’éducation par Mgr Dupanloup*, book 1. *De l’éducation en général*; book 2 *De l’autorité et su respect dans l’éducation*; book 3 *Les hommes d’éducation* (1st ed. Paris 1850-1862). Paris, J. Gervais 1887 (11th ed). The French text is kept in mind but the quotes are from the Italian edition which Don Bosco may have had in hand.

⁴⁵ *L’educazione per monsignor Felice Dupanloup* vol.1 *Dell’educazione in generale*, book 3 *Dei mezzi d’educazione*, 143-256, and vol 2 *Dell’autorità e del rispetto nell’educazione*, book 3 *L’istitutore*, 377-600.

To achieve this, peoples better schooled in wisdom have thought it best to make out of a magistrate, and a magistrate of the highest degree out of the teacher.⁴⁶

But the difference between repressive and preventive interventions is evident in the educational area itself. They represent two of the three stages of the disciplinary action involved in the formation of the will and the forging of character. All of these stages are called for by the nature of the child we are helping in his growth. The word 'discipline' comes from the verb *discere*, to learn and the word does not stand only for an external type of discipline but also for a type of teaching which reaches the inner part of a child. It also stands for virtue. For this reason discipline stands for orderliness without which education is not possible.⁴⁷

The good qualities and defects of the child require orderliness.⁴⁸

The child is curious, mobile, restless, eager to play games, hostile to submission... Childhood is affected by frivolity; it loathes application, is presumptuous, violent, stubborn. Childhood is the age of recklessness, of heated passions, and pleasures. All of these defects come from the nature of a child. But at least, children have not yet acquired defects... In children, everything is flexible and new. It is quite easy to straighten up those tender plants and have them turn towards heaven... This is why, even with all their defects, nothing is as delightful as when we come to notice how reason and virtue are born in them... Notwithstanding the appearances of frivolity and passionate urge for amusements, a child may be wise, reasonable and sensitive to virtue... I have no difficulty recognising that a child, even without excluding that he be lucky enough to be born with a happier character, is nothing but a voluble, frivolous human being who jumps from one wish to another, is at the mercy of his own instability. But all pious instructors should know well that the very task and glory of education lie in the ability to overcome such frivolity and know how to turn this inconstancy into stability.⁴⁹

Those responsible for the educative community should provide for this kind of growth. They are to operate on three fronts: 1) They should keep constant, practical

⁴⁶ F. Dupanloup, *L'educazione*, vol. 2, book 3, 379. The highlighting is ours. In the distinction between the two courts we find an echo in the opening of a note in 1878 by Don Bosco to Francesco Crispi: the repressive and the Preventive Systems "are applicable in the midst of civil society and in educational places"; "while laws look at the culprits, we need to take greater care to decrease the number of them" (*Il sistema preventivo* 1878, 300-301).

⁴⁷ F. Dupanloup, *L'educazione*, vol 1, book 3, ch. 3 *La Disciplina*, 126-127.

⁴⁸ Cf. F. Dupanloup, *L'educazione*, vol 1, book 2, *Del fanciullo e del rispetto dovuto alla dignità della sua natura*, ch. 1 *Il fanciullo, sue qualità, suoi difetti; quanto si presti all'uopo dell'Educazione*, 67-68.

⁴⁹ F. Dupanloup, *L'educazione*, vol 1, book 2, 70-74.

observance of the rules with steadfast exactness. 2) They should prevent the violation of the rules through zealous assistance. 3) They should repress transgressions of the rules with timely justice, in order to correct the disorder as soon as it appears. Discipline, therefore, has been assigned three tasks, the same ones assigned to education: to conserve, to prevent, to repress. Discipline is precisely directed towards the training of the will and the formation of the character, along with both intellectual and physical education and crowned by religious education.

The two terms 'discipline', 'education', strictly understood, and distinct from the various stages of formation (physical, intellectual and religious) find their expression in a threefold function which is 'repressive', 'preventive' and 'directive'. The task of 'repressive discipline' is to avoid leaving whatever is at fault uncorrected. The task of 'preventive discipline' is to eagerly keep dangerous occasions at a distance. The task of 'directive discipline' is to show the right path to be followed always and everywhere.

One can easily understand, without any need for comparisons, that it is better to prevent than to repress. But exactness in maintaining what is good and vigilance in preventing what is evil make the need to repress less urgent. Consequently, the greater importance lies with directive discipline which maintains what is good. Preventive discipline is of secondary importance. It prevents the onset of evil. The least important, though necessary, is repressive discipline which punishes.⁵⁰

6. *The preventive suggestions of Henri Lacordaire (1802-1861)*

Henri Dominique Lacordaire, a French Dominican, brilliant orator and reformer of the Dominicans, spent the last years of his life (1854-1861) after his six year term as Provincial, entirely dedicated to an educational institution located within the Benedictine Abbey of Soreze, in the Toulouse area. The Soreze institute had been entrusted to the Dominican Third Order founded by Fr Lacordaire, who was its director and its competent, passionate leader.⁵¹

In the title of the opening chapter clearly profiling Fr Lacordaire, Apostle and Director of youth, Fr Noble clearly indicates his basic character: *Il les aime* (He

⁵⁰ Ibid., vol 1, book 3, ch. 3 *La Disciplina*, 177-178.

⁵¹ Cf. C.-G. Montserret OP, *Enseignant parce que prêcheur: Henri-Dominique Lacordaire*, in 'Memorie Dominicane', N. 3, Automne 1993, *Ecoles et collèges*, 37-48; J. Angelico de Metz OP, *La fondation des dominicains enseignants par le Père Lacordaire*, ibid., 49-50. B. Cocharne is an authoritative witness to Lacordaire's Christian educational vision. He was his collaborator and confidante. Cf. *Le R.P. Lacordaire, sa vie intime et religieuse*, 2 vol. (Paris, Poussielgue 1866).

loved them).⁵² This feature of Lacordaire had been indicated earlier on in the preface: His deep and unflinching love of the young.⁵³

In the direction of youthful souls, Lacordaire preferred to use a system which might be called a spontaneous system instead of an authoritarian system, the latter characterised by a fixed program and by forced conformity.⁵⁴ This system implied all of the following:

Faith in the soul of the young...providing them with the opportunity to be great while keeping control over them; appealing to their latent energies, their good dispositions, their readiness of heart, their generosity and power to commit themselves; removing the dross from their exuberance and enthusiasm; favouring their spontaneity; bringing forth living souls where goodness flows out from within, where virtues are the natural outcome of their personal effort, the outcome of needs which are felt, wanted and loved; rendering duty attractive and liberating, instead of making it look like something boring or tyrannical; generating the optimism which brings serenity and fire; removing the pessimism which turns everything cold and runs the risk of turning into lethal scepticism; taking the side of hope rather than the side of dim prophecies; dressing wounds rather than aggravating them; discovering a platform for God; loosening the knots which allow evil to be intertwined with the good; collecting all the natural goodness which may spring from it and a render it ready to serve a higher ideal". All this seems to have been the main general features of the directional method followed by Fr Lacordaire in dealing with youth.⁵⁵...It is essential to jump the present and cross over to dream of the future. Humanity always looks to the future even if it is far off, and looks to greener pastures because it needs more foresight and faith...⁵⁶ Live in the future, then: this is the great present, the great calling cry! It is the norm for a demanding and joyful programme of life".⁵⁷

⁵² H.-D. Noble OP., *Le P. Lacordaire Apôtre et Directeur de Jeunes Gens*. Edition revue et augmentée, (Paris, Lethielleux 1910) 1st ed. 1908, 1-21. In Chapter 2, *Pourquoi il les aime et pourquoi il en fut aimé* (22-39), he points to the reasons for harmony between educator and youngsters: "the youthfulness of spirit", or "enthusiasm for big things, generosity of noble sentiments, passion for heroic action, constancy in work undertaken, optimistic trust in people and things" (24)

⁵³ H.-D. Noble OP., *Le P. Lacordaire*, pp. 7-13.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 42-46.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 50-51. Importantly documented in *Lettres du P. Lacordaire à les jeunes gens*, éditées par l'abbé H. Perreye, (Paris: Douniol 1884) 1st ed. 1863. We have in mind the 15th edition, (Paris, P. Téqui 1910), 35-471.

⁵⁶ *Lettres du P. Lacordaire*, 354.

⁵⁷ *Lettres du P. Lacordaire*, 86-88; cf. advice to a past pupil from Sorèze going to Paris, 361-363; to others with strong passions, 392-396, 397-399, 431-434, 435-437; and again to a past

The core supporting idea for this process is proposed in strong terms: form human and Christian characters shaped through obedience, ready to enter the world with personal and well defined ideas; virtue and intelligence requires character: *esto vir!* (be a man!) as their foundation. Character is made up of two sets of values: natural virtues which are its foundation; and religion at the top. Religion is of the greatest importance since it implies knowledge of God, the soul and its destiny. Religion is the most brilliant light for men, the decisive power against sensual and spiritual passions.⁵⁸

These two motives are explained in a speech delivered on August 7, 1856, to the young and their families who were taking part in an award ceremony. Don Bosco may have read an outline of it in the New Year's *Galantuomo* of 1865, which was also the *strenna* (souvenir gift) in *Catholic Readings*. The text from Lacordaire's talk had been inserted in an article entitled *Il clero e l'educazione della gioventù* (The clergy and the education of the young).⁵⁹ The first three short pages are dedicated to recalling the dedication shown to the young by St Jerome Miani, wrongly thought to be a priest, and by St Philip Neri. All the rest deals with Fr Lacordaire and his boarding school at Sorèze.

Particularly interesting is Fr Lacordaire's insistence on what he means by educational growth, in the first part of the speech: "the fact of being able to see the living marks of the work of the spirit on their foreheads, the signs of reason which holds primacy in their life, the gradual appearance of the beauty which comes from the heart". The educators, in the evaluation of their students, were not only guided "by justice, but also by tenderness, by the fatherly tenderness which follows on from their parents' tenderness".⁶⁰

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pupil on bad companions, 425-426, and on the essential practices of Christian life, 427-428, 446-448; finally, strong and disturbing words to someone who is weak and shifts between good and evil, 441-445.

⁵⁸ G.-G. Montserret, *Enseignant*, 45-46.

⁵⁹ *Il Galantuomo e le sue avventure, Almanaco nazionale per l'anno 1865. Strenna offerta ai cattolici italiani*. Anno XII, (Turin: Oratory Press, St Francis de Sales 1864), 14-21. Anyone familiar with Don Bosco's style could only believe with great difficulty that this was written by him.

⁶⁰ *Discours prononcé à la distribution solennelle des prix de l'école de Sorèze le 7 août 1856*, in *Ouvres du R.P. Henri-Dominique Lacordaire*, book 5, (Paris, Poussielgue-Rusand 1861), 316-317. Concerning *tenderness* and *firmness* in education he writes to a father asking for advice: "Education requires both tenderness and firmness. You have to avoid the idolatry that forgives everything and smooths over everything, and inflexible severity that closes hearts and distances them"; he concludes: "I think we have to avoid keeping a child too long in the shadow of the home" (*Lettres du P. Lacordaire*, 335).

This reference leads inevitably to an examination of conscience as far as the identity of the teacher is concerned. This identity draws its value and power from the world of thought: "it comes from where truth resides, together with beauty, justice, order, greatness and all that contributes to the making of a man, a divine being, and of a child, a being who has the vocation to become a man. And this happens, when we recognise that the soul is the country of true freedom and that this freedom is acquired through knowledge and virtue".⁶¹ Teachers live with their pupils to have them start their journey toward this Kingdom with all of their dedication. "They continue God's work and their families' work, they are the trailblazers of the world".⁶²

The teacher's first task is to:

hold on to faith and make it grow to the point of opening up the minds of the young to the understanding of the invisible world; to hold on to the hope which strengthens the heart with a view to well-deserved happiness; to hold on to love which makes the young feel God's presence in life's cold shadows and, in spite of them, still feel the warm temperature of eternity... Therefore religion has reclaimed, through the school, a command which will be never taken away from it; religion reigns not through constraint or just with the prop of worship, but thanks to a unanimous sincere conviction, to duties secretly carried out, to aspirations known only to God, and thanks to the peace which comes from doing good and from remorse for the wrong which has been done... Where there is no God you may, at most, have a ray of light on rubble. Whenever God is present, even the rubble comes back to life and in time even the rubble will be built up again from the foundations.⁶³

"Love, which extends the work of a family together with affection, is inseparable from God's presence... It is God's will". Lacordaire insists:

that no good may be accomplished on behalf of man unless he is loved. God has infused that love into the parents and the educators cannot but be clothed in something of the affection shown by parents: this is the second love created by God... Should the contrary take place, then, the school will be cold, sad, alienated, like a prison. It entails a total involvement in the life of the pupils and this involvement is summed up in this single expression: *We Love them*. In fact, from the moment God became incarnate among us, the care of souls, which was already so great, has become a love which is far superior to any other love and a fatherliness which has no rivals. The skilled teacher is no more a skilled

⁶¹ H.-D. Lacordaire, *Discours prononcé*, 319-320.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 320-321.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 322-323.

teacher but a father. The scholar is no more a scholar but a priest. Therefore it is not difficult to love the pupils. It is enough to believe in their souls, in God, who created them and redeemed them, in their origin and in their destiny".⁶⁴

Religion and affection are the two columns of the educative structure.

Lacordaire does not fail to mention the third element. "It is essential for justice to have a stern demeanour. Affection without justice is weakness and without justice even religion would veil the more harmful, the more outstanding corruption of the heart. By rewarding the good and by striking the evil done, human society can be safeguarded". Without this element, "the child who has not yet come to know what it is and in a way suited to his weakness, will inevitably have neither the fear of what is evil nor the understanding of what life is. One needs to experience the weight of justice to learn how to bend one's will to accept the laws of duty: one must taste the joy of a reward well-deserved to acquire a feeling for honour". "Here, on the very threshold of the school, a child finds justice. But he does not find it alone, separated from religion and affection; he will find it by getting accustomed to the law of the world in which he is going to live, according to which any crime calls for atonement, every fault calls for a reprimand, every failure calls for being ashamed of it, and every weakness calls for dishonour".⁶⁵

The text published in the *Galantuomo* referred only to the sections which dealt with religion and love. It remains improbable, as it has been pointed out, for the article to have been penned by Don Bosco himself: it is not his style. However, the fact that many of Don Bosco's ideas coincide with Lacordaire's and that some of these are related to ideas of religion and affection widely diffused in the world of Catholic education before and after the Restoration, does not permit us to speak about Don Bosco's dependence on Lacordaire's.

That religion is the basis of all moral and social life and therefore of every educational action, is a conviction which Don Bosco made abundantly evident throughout his priestly ministry. The same may be said for the method of charity expressed in affection, loving kindness practised, proclaimed and recognised from the outset of his commitment to caring for young people.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid., 323-326.

⁶⁵ H.-D. Lacordaire, *Discours prononcé*, pp. 326-327.

⁶⁶ Conclusions drawn by F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco en son temps (1815-1888)*, (Turin: SEI 1996), 656-658, seem at least a bit loose. Don Bosco had no need to take note of the "seductive formulae of Lacordaire" to know what had been for decades the pillars of his activity and beliefs as an educator, religion and affection. (696): cf Braido, "Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco alle origini (1841-1862). Il cammino del 'preventivo' nella realtà e nei documenti", *RSS* 14(1995): 255-320.

7. Antoine Monfat, educator and pedagogue (1820-1898)

With exceptional educators and animators like Pouillet and Magne, the St Vincent de Senlis College enjoyed a prosperous development followed by years of decline during which the number of students decreased considerably. The school was handed over to the Fathers of the Society of Mary. Its first director was Antoine Monfat (1820-1898), Provincial, from Lyons, and a man of great culture and prestige. Monfat was open to the ideas of the school. He had come to know and understand its methods during the years 1857-1867 at the Minor Seminary of Maximieux where he taught Latin and rhetoric before he professed his vows as a member of the Society of Mary in 1867.

In the first speech delivered at Senlis, Antoine Monfat declared he was willing to follow its founder Pouillet's programme, and also retain his style. One could really have more reasonably said of him what was written later about one of his confreres, Fr Terrade: "His direction was a combination of gentleness and strictness. One could easily have applied to him the motto of St Vincent de Senlis College: *Suaviter et fortiter* (gently, but strictly).⁶⁷

His activity as St Vincent's was limited, however, because of the occupation of the school by the German troops in 1870 and because of his short term in office. In 1872 he left the school and during the following years was taken up with assignments which required his commitment to the direction of his own religious society. However, this did not prevent him from putting the richness of his experience and of his vast readings into numerous and various writings, some of a pedagogical nature. They found echoes abroad, including in Italy. *Les vrais principes de l'éducation chrétienne* (*The true principles of Christian education*);⁶⁸ *Pratique de l'éducation chrétienne; pratique de l'enseignement chrétien* (*Christian education in practice; Christian teaching in practice*) in two volumes.

⁶⁷ *Le révérend Père Terrade de la Société de Marie*, (Paris: Imprimerie de J. Demoulin 1910), 23. Indicates not only a personal trait but something of the entire Society of Mary. The following features of Monfat's physical and spiritual characteristics are highlighted: "his height, calm seriousness and recollectedness, a certain austerity softened by his exquisite kindness, natural dignity of bearing, simplicity, tact, the appropriateness and measuredness of his speech, his modest approachability" [A. S.-B.], *Le Rév. Monfat ancien supérieur de l'institution Saint-Vincent à Senlis* (Oise). (Senlis: Institution Saint-Vincent 1898), 4.

⁶⁸ *Les vrais principes de l'éducation chrétienne rappelés aux maîtres et aux familles. Dispositions requises pour en faire une heureuse application et devoirs qui en découlent* par le P.A. Monfat de la Société de Marie. (Paris: Bray et Retaux 1875), 8-366.

The first volume was entitled *Grammaire et Literature*, the second *Histoire et Philosophie*.⁶⁹ The first two were translated into Italian⁷⁰ and *The Practice of Christian Education* even found an echo at the Valdocco Oratory, the Mother House of all of Don Bosco's Institutions. In the minutes of the conference held November 16, 1882 with all the Salesians involved in youth work, we find recorded what dealt with the duties of educators. "A paragraph from Antoine Mofat was then read out which gave rise to several remarks, especially that of being united and to be of one accord, which should be made evident to the young being educated by us".⁷¹

The general structure dealing specifically with the education carried out in a boarding school is clearly inspired by and directed towards a Christian view of life. Against the danger of secularism it is strongly stated that without any exception, it is absolutely essential that faith should hold the most prominent and sovereign place in education, "that the young man be turned into a Christian first of all";⁷² "the first duty is that of directing the entire school's discipline towards faith, subjecting and referring all that is being taught to faith".⁷³ "It is on this solid base that the two essential dimensions of an integral human formation depend: *the formation of the heart and will, the formation of the mind are the main objectives of all teaching*."⁷⁴

⁶⁹ "La réputation des ouvrages du P. Monfat a passé la frontière: chez les étrangers que la forme du langage préoccupe moins que le fond des idées, ils font autorité" *Le R.P. Antoine Monfat religieux de la Société de Marie*. (Bar-le-duc, Imprimerie C. Laguerre 1898), 15.

⁷⁰ *I veri principii della educazione* del P.A. Monfat translated and annotated by the priest Francesco Bricolo former Director of the Male Mazza Institute in Verona and Corretta, (Turin: Libreria Salesiana 1892), 479 pages.; *La pratica della educazione cristiana del P.A. Monfat della Società di Maria*, (Rome: Tipografia dei Fratelli Monaldi 1879), 208 pages.; F. Bricolo, *La pratica dell'educazione cristiana del P.A. Monfat marista*. A notably larger free version. (Ala: Tipografia Editrice dei Figli di Maria 1891), 205 pages. "Free version of the recent work: *La pratica della educazione cristiana del padre A. Monfat Marista*, who authorised me not only to translate it but to shorten it so as to make it more accessible to a greater number of readers". (pp 5-6). This second edition also has the second part of the original work *L'educazione propriamente detta*, i.e. religious and moral.

⁷¹ J.M. Prellezo, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento tra reale e ideale (1866-1889). Documenti e testimonianze*, (Rome, LAS 1992), 254-255. It is possible that not only this time he does not recall a book that was somewhat familiar.

⁷² A. Monfat, *Les vrais principes*, 8.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 6. The pivot for "theology of education" by Monfat, illustrated in two basic considerations from the first part of the work: "1st *L'educazione ha come scopo di formare la fanciullezza secondo il vangelo. Grandezza dell'infanzia cristiana (19-52)*; 2nd *L'educazione si propone come risultato di attuare le speranze della Chiesa circa l'avvenire dei fanciulli. Sollecitudine che la Chiesa prodiga oggi in loro favore (53-67)*."

⁷⁴ A. Monfat, *La pratica della educazione cristiana (1879)*, 7-23 (*Considerazione I*) and 24-41 (*Considerazione II*).

The prime mover is discipline, understood as education, namely instruction, and the proper direction of morals, and as the set of means needed to achieve both.⁷⁵

Preventive and constructive educational action is the meeting of two positive conditions. The first condition is provided by the marvellous resources found within the natural dispositions of the soul of a child, a soul that is new, simple, open to confidence, tender and easily moulded. The child, once the hazards and obstacles of the child's age are overcome successfully, will move along the path already undertaken: *Adolescens juxta viam suam etiam cum senuerit non recedet ab ea* (a child will never leave the path he has undertaken in his youth even when he grows old).⁷⁶ This is what the author adds as the Christian, optimist and humanist that he was.

The second condition is the educator's authority. He presents himself to his pupils with the prestige of a father, teacher and priest who always refers to reason and to the heart with unlimited patience. Authority comes from the verb *augere* which means *to increase, to protect* the vitality already possessed by the body, mind, family, society and country.⁷⁷ Monfat attributed a definite methodological function to the exercise of authority, to the point of placing it ahead of virtue and the knowledge of the educator. For this reason: "with a prestige that rules without compelling, and leads a soul to heartily accept the yoke of submission, a tiny bit of good teaching and good example will elicit more fruit for souls which will allow themselves to be entered into more easily than with a great amount of knowledge and a high degree of sanctity, which might be imposed upon their trust and which might find them impenetrable".⁷⁸

Besides indicating the religious sources of authority,⁷⁹ the author also points the educator to the natural means he should have recourse to. He reduces them to three: "Making oneself feared, respected and esteemed, and loved".⁸⁰ The third resource is particularly stressed: making oneself loved! In fact, "fear should not be servile but filial, reverential, affectionate, the end result of zeal mixed with strictness and gentleness: *Suaviter et Fortiter*, a happy blend where strictness remains hidden and allows itself to be hinted at "in ready support of gentleness".⁸¹ However, this does not exclude, but rather demands the restraint and seriousness which combines respect, silence and attention.⁸²

⁷⁵ Ibid., 41-42.

⁷⁶ A. Monfat, *Les vrais principes*, 68-79.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 79-80, 83, 85.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 201.

⁷⁹ They are humility, prayer, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, respect for ones superiors: *Les vrais principes*, 202-207.

⁸⁰ A. Monfat, *Les vrais principes*, 207-209.

⁸¹ Ibid., 207-209.

⁸² Ibid., 209-212.

The counter position leads to three duties educators have towards their pupils. These duties are taken from the Constitutions of the Society of Mary: love, patience, respect.⁸³

Therefore, along with the idea of fatherliness, the concept of love is dominant: a love that is sincere, unselfish, supernatural, ready to grow, ready to forgive, ready to be generous, full of benevolence and encouragement.⁸⁴ This is a preventive love which calls the prefect or assistant to task in particular. "As far as the Prefect is concerned, it is true to say that he is expected to be the first to love and prevent, at all times; he is entrusted with the mission not so much of disposing of ignorance, but preventing vice from being born or being diffused... What solicitude is needed to prevent the onslaught of so many dangers! How much vigilance and delicacy are needed to have one accept the removal of dangerous occasions...! In short, uninterrupted prevention is absolutely necessary, during study periods, recreation, walks, day and night. The great goal is that of leading the pupils to freely obey. The success of an educator depends on the attainment of this free obedience which distinguishes *free men* from *slaves*".⁸⁵ However, any familiarity or intimacy which may detract from authority and prestige should be avoided.⁸⁶

Patience, which holds second place, will help. Patience should take into account the impetuosity of a youngster, his changing moods and patience will be necessary, most of all, at the critical point of repression, in moments of fear, inflexibility and when medicinal chastisements (not punishments) must be administered.⁸⁷

Repression is the third stage. It is the stage of emergency, relationships between pupils and educators. Repression is preceded by two factors more authentically preventive and constructive. The first factor is an inner discipline or discipline of the will directed toward love of duty in particular, by appealing to reason, the heart and the sense of honour.⁸⁸ The second factor is that of vigilance which implies a kind of

⁸³ Ibid., 292-350.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 293; developments, 293-310.

⁸⁵ A. Monfat, *Les vrais principes*, 303-304. Prevention as a method is framed in a wider perspective, theological in its roots, in the prior dilexit of God (359; cf. 299, 301, 303); therefore, also giving the child "the certainty that he is loved" (305). In *Pratica dell'educazione cristiana*, Monfat returns to the "careful supervision" as a specific competence of the prefect.

⁸⁶ A. Monfat, *Les vrais principes*, 329.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 320-330. (*Doveri particolareggiati del rispetto verso gli alunni*) and 338-341 (*Repression with profit*).

⁸⁸ A. Monfat, *La pratica dell'educazione cristiana*, (1879), 58-138. Monfat recalls the practice of short familiar conversations by the Director with the pupils, held in the evening before they go to bed: it is the "evening conference" which Dupanloup writes of and which Don Bosco called the Good Night or Good Evening (91-92).

continuous, discreet and loyal prevention.⁸⁹ "All educators know that it is incomparably better to prevent evil rather than to have to fight against it and punish it".⁹⁰ Repression is involved when the two more noble ways of reasoning prove momentarily inadequate, that is when motives of duty and honour fail, along with supervision.⁹¹ For educational activity to be kept open and allowed to continue, according to Monfat the norms should be as follows:

1. Do not use (repression) until all other means have been exhausted.
 2. Know how to choose the appropriate time.
 3. Exclude anything which might arouse suspicion that you are acting out of emotion.
 4. Act in such a way as to leave the door open for hope, forgiveness.⁹²
- On this last, Monfat suggests that punishment be just, moderate, proportionate to the fault and useful for improvement.⁹³

⁸⁹ Ibid., 138-155.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 144.

⁹¹ Ibid., 156-193.

⁹² Ibid., 157. Developments, 157-173. On the influence of these pages on the letter on punishments attributed to Don Bosco, J. Prelezo has written, *Dei castighi da infliggersi delle Case Salesiane. Una lettera circolare attribuita a Don Bosco*, RSS 5 (1986) 263-308.

⁹³ A. Monfat, *La pratica dell'educazione cristiana*, (1879), 173-193.



Chapter 5

PREVENTIVE SYSTEM PERSONALITIES KNOWN DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY TO DON BOSCO

Don Bosco was no isolated historical personality and much less so in the 19th century. The Preventive System he employed, of which he spoke and eventually wrote, came to the fore in a historical context where similar directions were being followed, codified and proposed by others. There were educators of both genders, often neighbours in geographical terms who in certain instances had an impact or might have had an impact on him. This was due either to the fact that he had read some of their writings or that he somehow came to know about them.

We are dealing here with people and institutions sharing the same anxious concern for young people in times that were both new and difficult. These were people who undertook similar kinds of initiatives on behalf of young people with a mind-set and language revealing a definite meeting of minds in reference to an educational style which we can legitimately call 'preventive'.

We will also keep in mind institutions which, though linked with earlier centuries, were still operating in Don Bosco's times and with which Don Bosco had direct contact. We mean, in particular, the Institutions of the De La Salle Brothers and the Barnabites.

1. *The Cavanis brothers*

Venice, which belonged to the Lombard-Venetian kingdom from 1797 to 1866 and was assigned to the Hapsburgs of Vienna, was the place where two brothers were at work, both priests and members of the noble class during the first decade of the 19th century. They were Antonio Angelo Cavanis (1772-1858) and Marco Antonio Cavanis (1774-1853).¹

The two were the founders of a Marian Congregation (1802) which developed out of an oratory and in "charity schools" for poor and abandoned youth. The first

¹ Cf. A.A. and M.A. Cavanis, *Epistolario e memorie 1779-1853*, ed. A. Servini, 5 vols. (Rome, Postulazione Generale 1985-1988); F.S. Zanon, *I servi di Dio P. Anton'Angelo e P. Marcantonio fratelli conti Cavanis. Storia documentata della loro vita*, 2 vols. (Venice, 1925); and by the same author, *Padri Educatori. La pedagogia dei Servi di Dio P. Anton'Angelo e P. Marcantonio fratelli conti Cavanis*, (Venice 1950); V. Biloni, "Le libere scuole dei Fratelli Cavanis", in *Pedagogia e Vita* 1952-1953: 397-408; G. De Rosa, "I fratelli Cavanis e la società religiosa veneziana nel clima della Restaurazione" in *Ricerche di Storia sociale e religiosa* 4, July-December 1973: 165-186.

school went back to 1804. Later on, the two brothers extended their work to Possignano (near Treviso) and to Lendinara (near Rovigo).

To guarantee the continuity of the schools the Cavanis Brothers founded the *Congregation of the Clerics Secular of the Schools of Charity*, which were approved by the Patriarch of Venice in 1819 and canonically approved by Pope Gregory XVI in 1836. The Schools of Charity offered free elementary and secondary school instruction with religious formation, social assistance and recreational activities as well as prevention from physical and moral dangers.

Fatherly familiarity may be considered the core of their educational method. It was characterised by constant vigilance, continuous loving supervision and kindly discipline, aimed at creating a vital educational blend of religion and human values. Some fundamental rules taken from the Constitutions of this religious society fit in nicely with the above and lead to an authentic educational spirituality.

The institution wholeheartedly welcomes children and adolescents with fatherly love; it educates them *gratis*; it defends them from being contaminated by the world, and spares no sacrifices and no hardships to make up, as much as possible, for the harm and almost universal deficiency of family education.² Teachers should commit themselves to carrying out this task among the children not so much as teachers but as fathers. Meanwhile, teachers should assume the task of caring for the children, with the greatest of charity. The teachers should teach nothing unless it is seasoned with the salt of piety. Let teachers make sure that the children are inwardly disposed to follow Christian morals. Let the children be kept away from the contamination of the world, through paternal vigilance. Let teachers draw the children to themselves with much love, through oratories, spiritual meetings, daily catechism classes, schools and innocent games.³

Don Bosco himself, on several occasions, acknowledged that he used the Cavanis brothers' Constitutions while drawing up the Salesian Constitutions.

As I was drawing up each and every chapter and article (of the Constitutions), in many things I have followed other Societies already approved by the Church and with a goal similar to ours. For example, the rules of the Cavanis Institute, Venice, the rules of the Institute of Charity; the rules of the Somaschi Fathers Institute and of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.⁴

² *Constitutiones Congregationis Sacerdotum Saecularium Scholarum Charitatis. Venetiis*, ex typ. F. Andreola MDCCCXXXVII, art. 3

³ *Constitutiones*, art. 94.

⁴ Letter to the Vicar of Turin diocese, March 30, 1863 Em I 562.

As for what constitutes the rules I have consulted and, to the extent that it was suitable, followed the Statutes of the Cavanis Institute of Venice, the Constitutions of the Rosminians, the Statutes of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, all bodies or religious societies approved by the Holy See.⁵

2. *Lodovico Pavoni*

The activity, institution and writings⁶ of Lodovico Pavoni from Brescia (1784-1849),⁷ take on importance in terms of the development of preventive ideas and preventive undertakings. They also offer some analogies on different levels with what would be Don Bosco's experience some decades later.⁸

⁵ *Cose da notarsi intorno alle Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, 1864, Const SDB 229; cf. F. Motto, *Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii. Fonti letterarie dei capitoli "Scopo, forma, voto di obbedienza, povertà e castità"*, RSS 2 (1983): 342-343

⁶ Cf. Congregation of the Sons of Mary Immaculate, *Raccolta ufficiale di documenti e memorie d'archivio*, (Brescia: Opera Pavoniana 1947). Contains the following documents amongst others: *Organizzazione e Regolamento dei Giovani sotto la protezione di S Luigi Gonzaga eretta nell'Oratorio di S. M. di Passione ed aggregata alla Prima Primaria del Collegio Romano*; the *Regolamento del Pio Istituto eretto in Brescia da Canonico Lodovico Pavoni a ricovera ed educazione de' Figli Poveri ed Abbandonati*. (Brescia, The Institute's press in S. Barnaba 1831); the *Regole dei Fratelli consacrati all'assistenza ed educazione dei Figli orfani ed abbandonati nel Pio Istituto eretto in S- Barnaba di Brescia dal Can. Pavoni*; the *Regole Fondamentali della Religiosa Congregazione dei Figli di Maria, eretta in Brescia nell'anno 1847 con superiore Approvazione*, (Brescia, episcopal press in S. Barnaba 1847); *Costituzioni della Congregazione Religiosa dei Figli di Maria, Brescia*, episcopal press 1847 [the texts will be cited from the version faithfully republished in 1970]. Besides these: *Lettere inedite del Servo di Dio Lodovico Pavoni*, ed. P. Guerrini, (Pavia: Artigianelli 1921); *Lettere del Servo di Dio P. Lodovico Pavoni fondatore della Congregazione dei Figli di Maria Immacolata di Brescia*, (Brescia: Opera Pavoniana 1945); *Ansie e fatiche d'un Fondatore. Il Ven Lodovico Pavoni e l'Istituto di S. Barnaba in Brescia. Documenti epistolari*, (Brescia, Opera Pavoniana 1956).

⁷ G. Gaggia, *Lodovico Pavoni nel primo centenario della fondazione dell'Istituto*, (Monza: Artigianelli 1921); L. Traverso, *Lodovico Pavoni Fondatore dei Figli di Maria Immacolata (1784-1849) Apostolo della gioventù pioniera dell'educazione professionale*, (Milan, Ancora 1948) 3rd edition; same author, "Amore e lavoro nell'opera pedagogica di Lodovico Pavoni", in *Orientamenti Pedagogici* 4 (1957): 44-60; G. Garioni Bertolotti, *Verso il mondo del lavoro. Venerabile Lodovico Pavoni*, (Milan: Ancora 1963); R. Bertoldi, *Il fratello coadiutore secondo il Ven. Lodovico Pavoni. Documentazione per un profilo apotolico del coadiutore pavoniano*, (Pavia, Artigianelli Press 1966); G. Bertoldi, *L'esperienza apostolica di Lodovico Pavoni*. Tradate, Congregation of the Sons of Mary Immaculate 1997, especially, *Il metodo educativo pavoniano* (192-220).

⁸ In the decree of the Congregation of Rites on the heroiness of Pavoni's virtues, June 5, 1947, we find: "Porro Servus Dei stupendorum operum, quae paulo post S. Joannes Bosco amplissime protuli, praecursor merito est habendus" AAS 39 (1947): 642.

In fact the *festive congregation* or *oratory* and the arts and crafts technical school created by Pavoni anticipated Don Bosco's initiatives by several decades, with echoes far and wide.⁹ Don Bosco might have also had to hand some of the Regulations drawn up by the educator from Brescia. Rosmini himself, in a letter dated December 1853, brought Don Bosco's attention to the printing establishment created by Pavoni and suggested a similar initiative.¹⁰

Lodovico Pavoni remarks: "Brescia was provident and had not failed by then to create congregations and oratories for young people to receive their Christian education in. Only one class of child was left out, the class most in need of such a charitable Institute. These were the children who were ostracised and in bad shape, children who hardly dared to join the established groups of civilised and learned youngsters".¹¹

This is how the congregation-oratory of St Louis came about in 1812. In 1819, Lodovico Pavoni was asked to run the rectory of the church of St Barnabas and he annexed an oratory to it, then later in 1821, a home for orphaned or abandoned artisans.¹²

In 1840 Lodovico Pavoni opened up a section for deaf and mute artisans next to the home. Finally, in 1843, to guarantee on-going support for the various educational initiatives, he brought all of his co-helpers, priests and lay people (he called them *coadjutor workshop supervisors*), together in the Congregation of the Children of Mary Immaculate, encouraged by the *Decretum Laudis* of 1843 and canonical approved in 1847.

The goal of the new religious institution was to provide "an education for the lowest class which, neglected as it is, becomes a hothouse sprouting an ungodly mob creating political and moral havoc, that is, poor children who feel compelled by their circumstances and needs to drop out of school and abandon the vigilant care of wise teachers who would like them to learn a skill".¹³ The home in particular was expected to be "a school of good morals for abandoned and unskilled youths, in order to make

⁹ Cf. *Lodovico Pavoni e il suo tempo*. Acts of the Study Congress, (Brescia, March 30, 1985. Milan, Ancora 1986), 307 pages. On 'Brescian Don Bosco, F. Molinari writes *Rigore critico e agiografia: il venerabile Lodovico Pavoni* (. 13-28); on the basic educational institution, R. Cantù, *L'Istituto di S. Barnaba, fondato in Brescia nel 1821 dal venerabile L. Pavoni* (125-174).

¹⁰ Cf. *Epistolario completo di A. Rosmini Serbati*, vol 12, 140; Don Bosco answered on Dec. 29, 1853, Em 1211

¹¹ *Organizzazione e Regolamento*, in *Raccolta*, 9.

¹² *Nel Prospetto delle Arti e de' Lavori attualmente in corso nel Pio Istituto a profitto ed educazione de' giovani ricoverati*, appendix to *Regolamento del Pio Istituto*, in *Raccolta*, pp. 57-58, the following are listed: Printing and copper-plate engraving arts, Bookbinding, stationery, Silversmithing arts, Ironworks, Carpentry arts, Wood and metal turning, Shoemaking.

¹³ *Regolamento del Pio Istituto*, in *Raccolta*, 40.

them useful to the Church and society".¹⁴ The sacred family of religious educators aimed at committing themselves "tirelessly to the welfare of abandoned youth, wholeheartedly doing their best to provide young people with a Christian, religious and professional education".¹⁵ The holistic aspects are emphasised repeatedly: personal and social, temporal and eternal, for children who need everything. The goal is that of providing "poor orphans or abandoned children with religious education and the acquisition of skills without which they grow up in the midst of misery and licentiousness as a disgrace to Christianity and the scum of society".

The Institute's goal, then, is to be "influential, as much as possible, in reforming a rotten and depraved world and therefore giving back to the Church some excellent Christians and to the State, good artisans as well as virtuous and loyal citizens".¹⁶ The formula "good Christian and upright citizen" (the *subject*, in an absolutist regime) was particularly apt in the social and political context in which Pavoni was operating: the Hapsburg Empire.

Let this turn out to be your glory: the fact that you sacrifice your talent and dedicate your work to give back well-behaved children, faithful subjects, and useful citizens to the Church, to the country, to the state.¹⁷

(The rector) will give all of his mind and heart to making sure that the sheltered youngsters be properly instructed and firmly trained in their religion and in civility, so that they may turn out to be excellent Christians, good family fathers, faithful subjects, in a word, children dear to religion and useful to society.¹⁸

To achieve the successful religious and civil education of youth, methods and means proper to preventive pedagogy are adopted: religion and reason, love and gentleness, vigilance and assistance within a family-like milieu dedicated to an intensive commitment to work. The lifestyle and the activity of every educator must conform to a family-like structure according to the specific responsibilities entrusted to them: such as the prefect of the congregation, choir members inspector, regulator, the workshop supervisor.

The Prefect is invited to remember that "his zeal should in no way alter the exercise of humility, charity and gentleness which are to be his distinctive virtues.

¹⁴ *Regole dei Fratelli consacrati*, in *Raccolta*, 61

¹⁵ *Regole dei Fratelli consacrati*, in *Raccolta*, 62. There is a striking insistence on "religious Brothers tirelessly busy on behalf of poor, abandoned youth"; "...to be concerned about perfecting oneself and working tirelessly for the good of one's neighbour" (*Regole fondamentali*, in *Raccolta*, 63-64)

¹⁶ *Regole fondamentali*, in *Raccolta*, 64.

¹⁷ *Regolamento del Pio Istituto*, in *Raccolta*, 43.

¹⁸ *Costituzioni della Congregazione religiosa dei Figli di Maria*. Brescia episcopal press 1847, part 7, chap. 5, art. 224, 88.

When he is dutifully called on to admonish some of the youngsters for some of their defects he should try his best to do it in a kindly way. And when he knows that there is need for an authoritative reproach he has no other choice than to let the rector be told about it".¹⁹

The Choir Members' Inspector. Since he is dealing with an elite group of youngsters he should keep in mind that he has been entrusted with a job requiring great caution, vigilance and tact. It is his task, then, to direct them through persuasion and first of all gentleness, to fulfil their duties, using his good example as the most effective means to achieve his goal.²⁰

The Regulator is the one Don Bosco called the "prefect of studies". The regulator was expected to be always with the boys. Therefore, the first duty of the regulator is to exercise continuous supervision over the young people entrusted to him both in the oratory and outside. He should try his best to keep in touch with their parents or guardians, inform them about their school attendance or truancy, and let them know about their behaviour. The regulator "should gently urge them to receive the sacraments frequently... He should correct their defects with loving kindness. The regulator should also try to instil the love of piety and hatred of vice in them by word and example."²¹

Regulations for the *workshop supervisors* are particularly full of educational and innovative ideas which have, to a great extent, being included in the Constitutions. The shop supervisors should see to it that the young entrusted to their care apply themselves diligently to their assignments and are charitably assisted so they may progress in knowledge of their technical skill according to their talents and abilities".²² A kind of mini *summa pedagogica* is offered them by their Constitutions, where there is a chapter dedicated to them.²³ Don Bosco could have accepted it without reservation.

257. They will safeguard the young entrusted to them like a precious and holy deposit. They are to love them as the apple of their eye. They will use civil and respectful manners in their regard; they will never show disrespect towards anyone, either in deed or in word; they will make themselves feared and respectfully loved in a healthy manner.

258. They will lead them to love their work. They will get them used to working more out of love than fear. They shall never yield to their unreasonable pretences,

¹⁹ *Organizzazione e Regolamento*, in *Raccolta*, 19.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

²¹ *Organizzazione e Regolamento*, in *Raccolta*, 2-23.

²² *Regolamento del Pio Istituto*, in *Raccolta*, 45.

²³ *Costituzioni*, part 7, ch. 8, 96-98.

neither will they allow their whims to have their way. They should never demand too much but nor should they ever seem weak.

259. They will study their pupils' character and strength well to guide them on the right path; since not all the young want to be guided in the same way, they will not expect the same response from everyone but one suited to their ability and the gifts they have received from God.

260. They will treat their pupils with much politeness and gentleness, instilling in them good behaviour, the required respect and confidence for and in their superiors. They will never leave them alone in the classroom in the workshop, and when they need to absent themselves for some interest or necessity, there should always be someone to assist in their place. They will not allow secret conferences or conversations, especially between boarders and outside students. Woe to supervisors who might be negligent in this.²⁴

Supervision is given several guidelines, particularly in reference to the *prefect of supervision* and the *vice rector*.²⁵

The vice-rector should conduct himself with much caution and exquisite prudence rather than showing the boarders his abundant good faith in them... Recreations especially should get his attention: he will never allow the younger ones to be without supervision, but he will do so in such a way as to leave them a certain amount of freedom, thus allowing them to better demonstrate who they are. This will help him more easily come to know their character and inclinations and provide easy access to forming them and handling them successfully... Let him see everything but pretend not to see everything; and let him correct with prudence and use few punishments which, however, should be beneficial and effective. Let him be slow to punish defects which are the result of youthful exuberance, fickleness or thoughtlessness. But let him be inexorable in punishing defects which spring from ill will coming from heartfelt obstinacy.²⁶

The Spiritual Director's "instructions should try to present their religious duties as a sweet yoke, a light burden which turns out to be easy and comforting once experienced."²⁷ In boarding institutions, in fact, "special care should be taken to achieve good formation of young hearts, to instruct them correctly according to faith and religion, to provide a foundation of true piety which honours God, sanctifies the souls, edifies one's neighbour, brings happiness to the family; piety which is solid, robust,

²⁴ *Costituzioni*, part 7, ch. 8, 96-97.

²⁵ *Organizzazione e Regolamento*, in *Raccolta*, 45-46.

²⁶ *Costituzioni*, part 7, chap. 6, art. 238 and 242., 91-92.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, part 7, chap. 7, art. 245, 93-94.

freely performed, well understood and aimed at the exact observance of one's duties".²⁸ This is the first focal point of the educational process which sees how "someone can be made industrious, and capable of earning what he needs for an honest living in society through his own work".²⁹

Reason and Love are also the means which are expected to guide the method of correcting. "Instead of having recourse to severity which is often used to lead small children to act out of fear and hypocrisy instead of feeling and love, we should use the method of imitation and honour. If these are not abused we can do anything with the sensitive heart of the young".³⁰

3. Marcellin Champagnat (1789-1840) and the Marist Brothers

Marcellin Champagnat (1789-1840) ordained priest in 1816, founded the religious society of The Little Brothers of Mary or the Marist Brothers at La Valla, (Loire, France) in 1817. The Society was canonically recognised in 1824 and approved by the Holy See in 1863.³¹ Marcellin Champagnat is one of the most representative of those working to 'recover' children and the positive prevention championed in France by some ten or more teaching Congregations especially at the elementary school level.³²

In fact, the common aim of these Congregations was to "guarantee a future for the younger generations who were the main victims of the French Revolution and strengthen them beforehand against the disintegrating spirit of the 18th century by providing children with a truly religious education".³³ "Children are the Church's

²⁸ Ibid., part 5, chap. 1, art. 124, 62.

²⁹ Ibid., part 5, chap. 1, art 124, 62.8.

³⁰ *Regolamento del Pio Istituto*, in *Raccolta*, 54.

³¹ Other than largely pedagogical indications in the Constitutions, Regulations and Circulars, the contents of three specific documents are fundamental: *Guide des Écoles à l'usage des petits Frères de Marie, rédigé d'après les instructions du Vénérable Champagnat* (1853); *Avis leçons, sentences et instructions du Vén. P. Champagnat expliqués et développés par un des premiers disciples* (1869); *Le bon Supérieur ou les qualités d'un bon Frère Directeur d'après l'esprit du vénéré P. Champagnat, Fondateur de l'Institut des Petits Frères de Marie* (1869). Biographical indications on M. Champagnat and the Little Brothers of Mary can be found in the work by P. Zind, *Les Nouvelles Congrégations des Frères enseignants en France de 1800 à 1830* 3 vols., (Saint-Genis-Laval: Montet 69, 1969), vol 2 Sources. *Bibliographie. Chronologie. Index.*, 591-597 (various monographs on pedagogical and catechetical topics are listed).

³² On the original pedagogical significance of M. Champagnat's activity and that of the Marist Brothers, cf. P. Zind, *Les Nouvelles Congrégations*, vol 1, 121-128, 200-222, 312-327, 384-390.

³³ P. Zind, *Les nouvelles Congrégations*, vol 1, 110.

nurseries. It is thanks to children that the Church is renewed and faith and piety are kept alive".³⁴

The aim of the new Society, emerging out of a rural context, is defined in the following promise:

We commit ourselves to teaching all needy children given us by the parish priest, *gratis*, teaching them and all children entrusted to us catechism, prayers, reading, writing and all the other subject matter proper to elementary school, according to need.³⁵

Christian education and catechism have first place, but all the various elements of a human and cultural formation are brought together. The initial instructional framework is largely inspired by the method used by the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the 'little schools'. As far as catechesis is concerned, we can detect the impact of the method used at St Sulpice. But the orientation as a whole ends up taking on distinctive features which characterise the Christian preventive pedagogy of the 19th century from within. The main objectives are:

To see to the salvation of souls, religious instruction as a means of wresting children from vice, and forming their heart, conscience and will. Devotion to Mary — the Brothers take the blessed Virgin Mary who served and educated the child Jesus, as their exemplar; the method of love is to be used for discipline, which has as its goal not to hold back the pupils by means of force and fear of punishments, but to keep them away from what is evil, correct their defects, form their will. Educators are expected to be fathers and not slave-masters; there must be a family spirit with feelings of respect and love, mutual trust and not fear".³⁶ ... The brother is a perfect model to be imitated by fathers and mothers, showing tender charity towards his pupils, patience in putting up with their faults, zeal in forming them to achieve virtue and useful knowledge, vigilance concerned with keeping far away from them all that can be harmful, steadfast dedication to their spiritual and temporal interests; he is an on-going lesson showing them what they should do and be in order to give their children a true Christian education".³⁷ ... He does good to everyone: the children whom he educates and helps improve by means of instruction, Christian instruction; families whose place he takes; parishes which he helps build up, preserve, improve; the entire country by preparing children to be good citizens; the church, by helping

³⁴ *Avis leçons, sentences et instructions du Vén. P. Champagna*, (Lyon: Vitte 1914), 19.

³⁵ Cited by P. Zind, *Les Nouvelles Congregations*, vol 1., 201.

³⁶ Cf. P. Braido, "Marcellino Champagnat e la perenne "restaurazione" pedagogica cristiana", in *Orientamenti Pedagogici* 2 (1955): 721-735.

³⁷ *Avis leçons, sentences*, 26.

pastors to instruct the most interesting section of their flock; by tirelessly forming new generations of learned, convinced and faithful Christians for the Church. The brother is entirely dedicated to the service of religion and the community, and offers his energies and life to promote the glory of God and the sanctification of his neighbour".³⁸

The tasks assigned to the director of the community of religious educators contain much wisdom, undoubtedly close to the features of the effective and gentle manner of governing proposed by Binet.³⁹ The director's qualities are abundantly explained: common sense, reasonableness, a good disposition, piety, observance, sanctity or solid virtue, charity, humility, gentleness, firmness and constancy, vigilance and ability to correct.⁴⁰ The pedagogical life-project presented for the Brothers in "lessons and instructions" appears no less clear and complete. The project starts off from the notion of education, its objectives and its requirements, namely: catechesis, respect towards the child, discipline and the personality of the teacher-educator. This is a systematic vision which leaves no reason at all to envy the lived and reflective experience of Don Bosco the educator.⁴¹

Education has to reach and grasp all the dimensions of a child's life: to enlighten his intelligence including by correcting his deviations and prejudices; to mould his heart; to form his conscience; to create the habit of being pious; to form his will, his judgement, his character; to inspire him to love, to work; to make whatever needs to be known available to the child; to maintain and develop a child's physical strength; to provide a child with the means needed to develop who he is.⁴²

According to the canons of current pedagogy, stress is placed on the need for education to be decisively life-oriented. As for catechetical instruction method, brevity and clarity are especially recommended.⁴³

Some pages are particularly impressive — those dedicated to the celebration of the child as a being endowed with infinite potential, unlimited hope, worthy of the most delicate and religious respect, the "masterpiece issued from God's hands", "king of the universe", "son of God", "our brother".⁴⁴ Genuinely preventive ideas can be

³⁸ Ibid., 28.

³⁹ Cf. E. Binet, *Quel est le meilleur gouvernement*, already cited nel ch. 3, par. 3., (Lyon, J. Nicolle 1869).

⁴⁰ Cf. *Le bom Supérieur ou les qualités d'un bom frere directeur d'après l'esprit du vénéré père Champagnat*, (Lyon, J. Nicolle 1869).

⁴¹ The last chapters, 35-41 are dedicated to this in *Avis leçons, sentence et instructions*, 399-495.

⁴² *Avis leçons, sentences*, pp. 399-411.

⁴³ Ibid., 412-432.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 433-445.

found later in two chapters dedicated to preventive and formative discipline based on an authority which is to be both paternal and moral and on supervision which is to be continuous, active and universal".⁴⁵ Consequently, the teacher-educator is held in very high esteem. His task is to act as a magistrate, father and apostle, as later on Dupanloup too would write.

A civil magistrate uses verdicts and assigns punishments, often without providing corrections; the teacher-educator is a father who is free and disinterested as he teaches and corrects and as he shares somehow the very spiritual fatherhood of God; the teacher-educator is an apostle, almost a priest, and ever present in the life of a child who, in turn, feels touched to the core of his spirit and heart, whenever there is reproach or praise, whenever there is shame or honour, real joy in learning and working and having a positive outcome".⁴⁶

4. *Teresa Eustochio Verzeri and the Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*

Teresa Eustochio Verzeri was a noble woman from Bergamo, foundress of the Congregation of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus dedicated to the instruction and education of girls of all classes of society. It was canonically approved in 1847.

This woman, endowed with keen intelligence, made an important theoretical contribution to education. She left us relevant writings, result of a remarkable cultural formation she had received at home; they were written during her first time at the monastery at age 16 and, later on, from 1821 to 1823, then 1828 to 1831. They were the result of her personal intensive reading.

We can easily detect the impact of the writings of St Ignatius of Loyola, St Theresa of Avila, and St Francis de Sales. Theresa Verzeri was also well acquainted with the classic by Etienne Binet: *Quel est le mailer gouvernement: Le rigoureux ou le doux? (Which is the better form of government: strict or gentle?)*.⁴⁷ To fully understand Verzeri's spiritual and educational orientation, one has to read her huge work divided into five parts: *Dei doveri delle Figlie del Sacro Cuore e dello spirito della loro religiosa istituzione (Concerning the Duties of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart and the Spirit of Their Religious Institute)*, and especially the chapter:

⁴⁵ Ibid., 446-469.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 470-495.

⁴⁷ Cf. T.E. Verzeri, *Dei doveri delle Figle del Sacro Cuore e dello spirito della loro religiosa istituzione* (Brescia, Episcopal Press from the Pio Istituto 1844), vol 1, 412-414, 433.

Cura delle giovani e modo di educarle (The care of young girls and how to educate them).⁴⁸

The refined pedagogical spirituality and explicit preventive arrangements in her experience have been rightly emphasised.⁴⁹ Two central statements define their protective, constructive value.

Cultivate and safeguard the mind and heart of young girls well and attentively while they are still tender, so as to prevent evil's influence as much as possible, for it is better to forewarn them with advice than to liberate them with corrections. Keep young girls away from anything which might spoil their mind and their hearts, even minimally corrupt their moral behaviour in any form. Make sure to achieve this zealously and effectively, using exquisite prudence, however, for this is delicate especially when we are dealing with young girls who, knowing what is evil, might find an incentive in that knowledge to desire it and get it for themselves. In this matter the greatest of caution and reserve should be used, and no one should ever fear that this caution and reserve are too much.⁵⁰

The significant features of Verzeri's education system centre on these principles. The religious element has primacy. "You should be extremely discrete in managing young girls. Keep the objective firmly in mind, namely to educate them to acquire virtue and to lead them to God. As for as the choice of means for successfully achieving this objective, you should be mindful of adapting yourself to their temperament, inclinations and to each one's circumstances...Some may want to be treated seriously,

⁴⁸ (Brescia, Episcopal Press of the Pio Istituto 1844) [2 Vols], Vol 1, part 4, ch. 6, 410-444. The *Lettere*, 7 vols, are also rich in spiritual and pedagogical content. *Lettere*. (Brescia, Pavoni Institute Press 1874-1878).

⁴⁹ Always basic for Verzeri is the *Vita della Serva di Dio Teresa Eustocchio Nob. Verzeri Fondatrice e Superiora Generale delle Figlie del S. Cuore*, Giacinto Dott. Arcangeli, 2 vols. (Brescia, Pavoni Institute Press 1881, in 1946 the second edition was reprinted, reviewed and corrected by the Author); *Annali delle Figlie del Sacro Cuore di Gesù*, 6 vols. (Rome, Artigianelli di S. Giuseppe Press 1899); *Nel primo Centenario della nascita della Ven Verzeri*. (Bergamo: Istituto Italiano Arti Grafiche 1901); L. Dentella, *Il conte canonico Giuseppe Benaglio e un secolo di storia bergamasca*, (Bergamo, Secomandi 1930); *Una donna forte. La beata Teresa Eustocchio Verzeri Fondatrice delle Figlie del Sacro Cuore di Gesù di Bergamo*, ed. a religious from the Institute, (Bergamo, Institute of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart 1946); C. Boccazzi, *La spiritualità della B. Teresa Eustocchio Nob. Verzeri.*, (Cremona: Pizzorni 1947); E. Valentini, "Il sistema preventivo della Beata Verzeri", in *Salesianum* 14 (1952): 248-316; A. Saba, *Una pedagogia dell'Ottocento: Teresa Verzeri*, Master's dissertation presented at the Istituto Universitario Pareggiato di Magistero Maria Assunta, Rome, academic year 1954-1955; R. Sani, *Indirizzi spirituali e proposte educative dei nuovi istituti religiosi dell'Ottocento in area lombarda*, in *Chiesa, educazione e società nella Lombardia del primo Ottocento*, ed. R. Sani. Milan, *Vita e Pensiero* 1966, 77-137.

⁵⁰ T.E. Verzeri, *Dei doveri* vol 1, 434.

others amiably, some rigidly and still others gently, some with reserve, others in an easy, confidential way".⁵¹ "Instil the holy fear of God in your girls and a feeling of confidence in him. If your girls have the fear of God they will also fear of sin which is opposed to God's holiness".⁵² "Suggest only a few practices of piety to them, but good, substantial ones... Help the girls to develop a strong devotion to the Blessed Sacrament in their heart... and nurture in them love and confidence in Mary Most Holy".⁵³

But everything should be done with much discretion and reasonableness, "in order not to pretend to be able to lead others along the path that you yourselves walk on". Do not expect too much from your girls and do not hope to harvest immature fruits from them... Keep the following principle in mind: follow grace and try not to go ahead of it. Since the Lord is right and gentle, in much the same way you should be very gentle when you demand anything or invite the girls to do anything, and absolutely right in the exercise of authority and in asserting your position".⁵⁴

The methodological primacy of love is expressed both in human relationships and in achieving moral and religious formation. "Generally, employ gentleness, kindness, vigilance, discretion and zeal";⁵⁵ "do not present them with denial as sad and bitter, as it appears, but as reasonable, softened by delight and grace and rendered light by the hand of the Lord".⁵⁶ "Be kind and gentle. With gentleness and a spirit of sacrifice you will obtain twice as much as you would by using severity and fear".⁵⁷ "Show that you love them with tenderness: this will win over their love and you will have their esteem and a powerful access to their souls and thus a wide open room to persuade them to improve their conduct".⁵⁸

There is also sincere concern for keeping the girls away from idleness and warning them against dangers. "Keep the young girls away from idleness and have them love work... The young boarders should be forewarned and instructed about the future which awaits them but with extreme delicacy and prudence".⁵⁹ Remarkable consideration is given to the girls' youthful age. "Give no weight to small things of no importance: some small defects which are offshoots of a bubbly youthful age, lively

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 416.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 436.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 423.

⁵⁴ T.E. Verzeri, *Dei doveri* vol 1, 418-419.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 421.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 422.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 425.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 426.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 424-425.

temperament and buoyant spirit should not be taken too seriously: allow nature to open up and display its tendencies and all this will turn out for the better".⁶⁰

Therefore *assistance* assumes a prominent and decisive role as it is directed to actively promoting balanced and wise self-knowledge and self-control in young girls. "Do not invent new sins: there are too many already. Rather do your best to decrease their number by forming a good conscience, right mind and pure heart in your young girls".⁶¹ "Do not allow songs, shows, dances, readings and similar things which might somehow prove to be a stumbling block for your pupils' virtue... The shows performed during carnival time or any other amusement of the kind should have as their main objective to instruct as well as to entertain: everything should help form the girls to achieve virtue and raise them to accepting God".⁶²

The right kind of physical development is also promoted and looked upon as the condition for a sound spiritual freedom. "Young girls need an outlet, a free outlet through their amusements. Let them choose the kind of amusements they want: free relief develops their physical character and disposes them to willingly accept the instructions provided for their spirit and the advice provided for their hearts and all with better results. Have no scruples in letting them jump around: girls long for this kind of relaxation which proves to be useful for their health and physical development".⁶³ "Always within the limits of authority and obedience, the girls should be allowed to enjoy holy freedom so they may come to know that the yoke of the Lord is gentle and that his servants are free". Otherwise "in your way of doing things you make slaves out of your girls who act because of the stick and not as children of God going ahead in love".⁶⁴

5. *The Preventive System in infant schools*

Ferrante Aporti (1791-1858) does not only think of education as prevention but explicitly uses the 'Preventive System' in his education. "The ability of an educator", he declares, "does not consist so much in being able to prudently punish children's mistakes as in being able to prevent them from happening. There is no comparison between the merit of an educator who knows only how to provide a remedy for the harm being done and the merit of one who knows how to prevent the harm from being done".⁶⁵

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 426; cf. 429-430 (and 438-439 on the value of recreation, also for working some things out about the girls)

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 429; cf 426-431.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 435.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 437.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 413-414.

⁶⁵ *Elementi di pedagogia*, in F. Aporti, *Scritti pedagogici*, vol 2, 114.

Angiolo Gambaro adds the following comment to the above:

In a few words, Aporti highlights the great superiority of the Preventive System over the repressive. This superiority is recognized by educators and pedagogues who are carefully concerned that love be the very foundation of education. These educators and pedagogues are concerned about creating a peaceful atmosphere, one of goodness, persuasive activity around the child, to naturally lead him to what is good and avoid everything that distances him or makes him a victim of some offence or rebellious or discourages him". The practical development of the preventive method revealed its marvellous effectiveness in Don Bosco's educational practice.⁶⁶

It is actually possible to discover the essential features of a complete Preventive System in Aporti's educational and teaching method. In fact, "provided it is possible it is better to stay healthy than to allow oneself to get sick just to be healed. The reason is that health resulting from being healed always has the tendency to fall ill again".⁶⁷ We find the well-known constitutive elements of education: assistance, affection, charity, and loving kindness, reasonableness, joy, singing, recreation, movement. Even for an intellectual education to be successful the recourse to strongly affective elements was needed. This was the first among the many maxims dedicated to teaching: "Win over the affection and trust of children first of all".

There is no doubt that an objective is more easily and securely achieved by kindness. The educator, once he has the affection of his pupils, will succeed in having the pupils try their best to please him in attention and behaviour; they will not be bored or turned off, but will find satisfaction and delight in the learning process. However, the educator should be careful enough not to confuse gentleness, loving kindness, affability in dealing with children with the familiarity which might lower the value of authority. He should be a kind and loving father but still always graciously authoritative".⁶⁸ Elsewhere Aporti added "strong persuasion and affection",⁶⁹ "loving kindness" and reasonable behaviour".⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ibid., 114-115, n. 1.

⁶⁷ Letter to C. Boncompagni on June 30, 1838, in A. Gambaro, *Ferrante Aporti e gli asili*, vol 2, 397.

⁶⁸ *Elementi di pedagogia*, in F. Aporti, *Scritti pedagogici*, vol 2, 85.

⁶⁹ *Lezioni di metodica* in the Turin course 1844, in F. Aporti, *Scritti pedagogici*, vol 2, 442. According to Lemoyne, Don Bosco, given the task by the archbishop, would have been at Aporti's lessons (MB 2, 212-214): the judgements Fr Cerutti attributed to Don Bosco concerning the pedagogue appear to be completely unfounded and unjust.

⁷⁰ *Manuale di educazione ed ammaestramento*, in F. Aporti, *Scritti pedagogici*, vol 1, 36.

The *lectures on method*, given in Turin, are full of references to affectivity.

The two principles which create good method are: 1. Take into account the nature, character and development of the child's faculties, 2. One's own experience and the experiences of others, drawn from the implementation of pre-established rules... Among the principles drawn from consideration of the nature of the child and from experience, first place should be given to the importance of *winning over the affection of children*. We should bear in mind that the means most suitable for achieving kindness is kindness. Contempt breeds contempt. We love those who treat us with loving kindness, not those who treat us with contempt... To whom do children show affection? To the ones who welcome them, show that they love them and do well to them. Jesus Christ gives all of us a great example of this. The Apostles, not yet enlightened by the Holy Spirit, wanted to keep children away from Jesus and Jesus prevented them from doing this – to the contrary, he welcomed them with kind words... Now, realising that children love those who love them, the educator should be concerned about showing them kindness and showing them, at every opportunity, a sincere eagerness to care for their moral and physical good... This will be the end result: a child who recognises his teacher's affection in order to please his teacher will be well behaved and will study. This did not ordinarily happen when severe punishments were used together with the stick, in place of human, conciliatory and kind means. The former method humiliated and hurt without correcting. While recommending that the teacher should win his pupils' love and confidence through his ways of dealing with them we should also let the teacher know that he should not exaggerate to the point where affection and confidence may turn into familiarity. The teacher should welcome every child with kindness but never joke with them, never lower himself to their level, never place himself in a situation where the students might lack respect for him and he might lose authority over them.⁷¹

This is a new way of acting as a teacher. "And what should the teachers of such a tender age be like? To anyone who would like to take on such a very important and unenviable role, I say: let him be completely fatherly towards his pupils. If he does not do this, if he is unable to do it he will never succeed in educating them reasonably. The reason is that to be successful in such a noble undertaking, it is essential to have a father's patience, become a child once again in order to meet them at the level of their intelligence, to provide lively and cheerful instruction, respond with kindness to all their questions, to caress them from time to time in order to soften the difficulties they have with their work. Summing up, an educator should live with them like a wise

⁷¹ *Lezioni di metodica*, in F. Aporti, *Scritti pedagogici*, Vol 2, 440-441.

friend, like a counsellor and director and should love them as he loves his own children”⁷²

The theme of love is considered so essential that Aporti stresses it even when he explains the method of teaching arithmetic:

Furthermore, what concerns me even more, according to my inner convictions, is that the teacher should try his best to also direct his teaching towards education of the heart. As long as a teacher restricts himself to giving knowledge and developing the intellectual faculties of his pupil, he will be admired for his precision, for all the life he has been able to put into his work, but I will be never be happy with him. I would also say that I feel sorry for him because I would have only found a teacher who can teach language or the ABC while I, society and religion expect and have the right to expect him to be an educator who is able to warm the hearts of his pupils by enlightening their minds and while sharing instruction is able to improve his pupils’ lives”⁷³.

The Infant school thus becomes the school for children without a family or with an inept family. It becomes a “domestic” world where they feel enveloped by the light of knowledge and the warmth of love....”Since they have no family, which is a powerful means of doing good and restraining from evil, it is essential to create a family for them which, through wise guidance, fervent and sincere kindness, may arouse a moral sense in them and strengthen it. The purpose of this activity is to reconcile them and create strong ties with society using the sublime and generous principles of natural and religious charity”⁷⁴. Inserted into this dynamic is the intuitive, objective and demonstrative method which fosters “the gradual development of the powers of the mind and heart”⁷⁵. This development takes place within an educational context where “the studies are dealt with as though they were amusements and games”, where “occasional moderate movement”⁷⁶ is favoured and “where singing is promoted, also

⁷² *Elementi di pedagogia*, in F. Aporti, *Scritti pedagogici*, Vol 2, 50-51. Fear, “rigour, lack of loving kindness” are, for Aporti, “sufficient reason for destroying the children’s desire to go to school” (*Lezioni di metodica*, in F. Aporti, *Scritti pedagogici*, Vol 2, 442).

⁷³ *Lezioni di metodica*, in F. Aporti, *Scritti pedagogici*, vol 2, 450.

⁷⁴ *Statistica degli asili e delle scuole di infanzia 1849*, in F. Aporti, *Scritti pedagogici*, vol 1, 376-377.

⁷⁵ F. Aporti, *Rapporto sull’esito degli esami sostenuti dopo il 2° semestre 1830 dagli alunni dell’Asilo a pagamento*, Sept. 24, 1830, in A. Gambaro, *Ferrante Aporti e gli asili*, vol 2, 21.

⁷⁶ F. Aporti, *Piano di educazione ed ammaestramento pei fanciulli dall’età dei 2 ½ ai 6 anni*, June 15, 1830, in A. Gambaro, *Ferrante Aporti e gli asili*, vol 2, 11.

to train the vocal chords and the hearing ability of children, because children love to hum tunes".⁷⁷

Aporti describes the results of this method in a report which first came out on September 24, 1830. "Satisfaction increases when one considers that the children enrolled in this school are more cheerful, well-behaved, content and sociable: their schooling leads them to recognise an initial step to the practice of a kind way of behaving".⁷⁸

6. *Antonio Rosmini and his positive, preventive pedagogy*

Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855), just like Don Bosco, Dupanloup and others, did not ignore the pedagogical language of the time related to education and its different stages. But his language differed from Don Bosco's and Dupanloup's in his understanding of the verb 'prevent'. For Dupanloup, 'prevent' is only one of the three fundamental tasks of discipline-education. For Don Bosco, the entire educational activity can be understood and carried out as a kind of 'preventing'. Rosmini instead, takes it simply as a condition which precedes educational activity. 'Educating' for Rosmini, is a much higher and more difficult kind of activity. Rosmini wrote to a priest from Rovereto (Trent, Italy) who had raised the following question⁷⁹: "How can one make sure that the virtues of boarding school youngsters are lasting virtues?" In his response, Rosmini forewarned the priest about relying too heavily on 'external', preventive and preparatory means which have two objectives: 1. To remove the occasions of evil; 2. To dispose the spirit to doing good. These means "prepare" the young man to be educated, to receive what is good but they do not convey what is good, namely, "virtue and grace". By themselves, preventive means can cause a lot of harm since they might produce a kind of goodness which is only apparent, a sham which could be easily defined as 'goodness of the boarding school kind'. This is a goodness which evaporates once the pupil is "no longer enclosed within the sacred walls".

Pure and simple preparatory means may lead a pupil astray. Such means are the educator's gentle manners, caresses, activity like imitation etc. These might create "misguided intention in the pupils", and "intention is the eye of the soul giving light to the whole body, as the Divine Master says. Misguided direction does not produce real love of virtue for its own sake at the core of a young man's spirit, virtue loved for its

⁷⁷ Ibid., Vol 2, 11; cf., *Rapporto sull'esito degli esami subiti dalla Scuola dei piccoli fanciulli di Cremona dopo il primo semestre del 1830*, in A. Gambaro, *Ferrante Aporti e gli asili*, vol 2, 18

⁷⁸ F. Aporti, *Rapporto*, Sept. 24, 1830, in A. Gambaro, *Ferrante Aporti e gli asili*, vol 2, 21.

⁷⁹ Letter to Fr Paolo Orsi, 6 May 1836, in A. Rosmini.Srbati, *Epistolario completo*, vol 5 617-619.

ineffable beauty and intrinsic justice”.⁸⁰ These preventive and preparatory means are dangerous when they may lead one to believe that “everything depends on them”; “that they are the core of education or the main features of education or that education starts only by using them”.

But they are necessary and valuable and should be taken into great account “when they are considered only as preparatory steps or preludes to the great work needed to make a young man good”. This work starts, continues and ends only:

1. When the child’s mind is led to know how beneficial truth is if strengthened by grace;
2. When the child is led to contemplate the beauty of the truth he already knows;
3. When the child is led to fall in love with the beauty of the truth that he contemplates;
4. When one succeeds in having the child act in conformity with the beauty of that truth that he fell in love with”. To achieve all this, only one thing is needed, namely, to place right before the child’s intelligence a clear vision of what the moral truth that is we are talking about. After this, the “omnipotent light of this truth can only come from divine grace”. According to the great Christian educator this demands that moral truth be explained to the pupils with “simplicity and coherence” and not in devious or artificial ways”. Jesus Christ, “the great and only master”, is the “exemplar” to be followed and at the same time the source of grace without which the human commitment to education would come to nothing”.⁸¹

Notwithstanding the difference of both language and mentality, Don Bosco would have put his signature to all of the above.⁸²

7. *Correctional education: somewhere between preventive and repressive*

Don Bosco might have had an understanding of the antithesis between prevention and repression and also of the need that they be combined in an institution destined to provide correctional education, when he was in touch with the *Generala*, a prison for minors. Count Carlo Ilarione Petitti of Roreto had vigorously fought to have the young men detained there separated from the adults. He had done this in a work already

⁸⁰ A. Rosmini-Serbatì, *Epistolario*, vol 5 618-619.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 619-621.

⁸² “L’uomo dal “grande cuore” all’uomo che “pensa in grande”: appears to be the inspiration behind a wise comment by R. Lanfranchi, “Rosmini-Don Bosco: istanze pedagogico-educative di un rapporto”, in «*Rivista di scienze dell’Educazione*» 35 (1997): 277-293

cited: *Della condizione attuale delle carceri e dei mezzi per migliorarla*. This suggestion began to find fulfilment with R. Patenti when Charles Albert gave his approval, on February 9, 1839. According to the royal brief of April 12, 1845, modified activities in the prisons had their beginning.

The Brothers of the Congregation of St Peter in Chains, from Marseille, a Congregation founded by Canon Charles Fissiaux (1806-1867) for the apostolate among the juvenile offenders, were called upon to act as educators at the *Generala*. The chaplain of the *Generala* was a diocesan priest mostly in charge of the religious and moral education of the detainees.⁸³

Don Bosco had definite contacts with the *Generala*, even though not all of them can be documented, as will be clearly indicated in Chapter 10 of this book. The *Generala* hosted young men condemned to correctional punishment because they had committed some thoughtless crime and also young men detained because they needed fatherly correction.⁸⁴ The correctional method used with them was to get them to work together and in silence and at night they were segregated into cells. The system of correctional education called for the blending of different ways of dealing with the detainees: preventive, coercive and corrective. This was demonstrated not only in the practical activity of the Brothers, but also in theory formulated by their founder who was occasionally there with the local director.

Pettiti of Roreto had figured this out ahead of time when he wrote of prisons for young rascals both "for detainees sent to prison at the request of their parents to be paternally corrected" and for "young people unwilling to work and vagabonds arrested by the police and condemned to prison by penal courts". "The basic general principle", Pettiti wrote, "is to use a new, firm, severe educational method but with a touch of fatherly indulgence, especially for those detained at the request of their parents and needing correction. The educational method to be used on these young people should be more civil. The others instead need a more severe approach and they should also be directed towards learning a trade."⁸⁵

The ideas inspiring this approach can be drawn from the *Rapport* given by Fissiaux at the end of the first and second years of activity at the *Generala*. Especially

⁸³ On the *Generala*, cf. A. Lonni, "Il penitenziario industriale-agricolo della 'Generala'. Trattamento del minor deviante nel Piemonte preunitario", in *Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino* 82 (1984) 391-424; R. Audisio, *La 'Generala' di Torino, Esposte, discoli, minori corrigendi (1845-1850)*, Santena, Fondazione Camillo Cavour 1987, 236 pages; C. Felloni and R. Audisio, *I giovani discoli*, in *Torino e Don Bosco*, ed. Giuseppe Bracco, vol 1 Saggi. (Turin, City Archives, 1989) 99-119.

⁸⁴ *Società Reale per patrocinio dei giovani liberati dalla Casa d'educazione correzionale*. (Turin, Boscco 1847). Don Bosco was amongst the first members of the society: cf. R. Audisio, *L 'Generala' di Torino*, 210.

⁸⁵ C. I. Pettiti di Roreto, *Della condizione*, in *Opere Scelte*, vol 1, 546.

relevant are those in the report on the first year of activity. "The house of correctional education" in regard to the young delinquents has the task of preparing them for a better future, saving them from shipwreck, punishing them, for sure, but also and above all correcting them".⁸⁶

The beginnings were very difficult and, as the reporter confesses "against our will we had to use maximum severity and temporarily relinquish gentle approaches which were then interpreted as weakness.. But in the end we were able to use with our youngsters the correctional educational method followed by our Society in other correctional houses entrusted to our care".⁸⁷

After offering an idea of the system adopted by the Society of St Peter in Chains, Fissiaux dwells on the topic of 'discipline' with all its connotation of the repressive system. "The discipline of the establishment is severe and must be so. It is necessary that everything should remind the detainees that the place they are in is a place of punishment and correction. Starting from this principle, we let no fault go unpunished. At the same time, no virtuous act is left unrewarded".⁸⁸ However, also the typical positive educative elements peculiar to the Preventive System are highlighted: imitation, work, school, music, religious and moral potential.⁸⁹

There are abundant tones of moderation and understanding in reference to youthful fragility. The young men to be corrected are referred to as "poor kids, more unfortunate than guilty. As human beings we are accustomed to thinking of them as incorrigible criminals. We have unjust prejudices about them and undeserved contempt for them as "kids who have become victims of the fragility of their age, and the misfortune of their birth".⁹⁰

In the second *Rapport* on the second year of activity we can spot the emergence of some elements which show how close the repressive system is to the Preventive System. The director, in fact, intends to show that "Our Society has already obtained, at least partially, the good results you have the right to expect from its zeal and dedication by giving true correctional education to those boys who need to be corrected but with gentleness rather than punishing them or through being harsh". He also insists on the

⁸⁶ *Rapport sur les premiers résultats obtenus dans la Maison d'éducation correctionnelle pour les jeunes détenus du Royaume de Sardaigne présenté à la réunion qui eut lieu le 7 juin 1846 pour la distribution des prix par monsieur l'abbé Fissiaux.*, (Turin, Imprimerie Royale 1846) 6-7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 10, 13-14.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 21. In a 'Rendiconto' (report) from 1854 (the Brothers of the Congregation of St Peter in Chains were licensed the year before), given to the chaplain Fr Giuseppe Giuliano, the "Establishment" is presented as an "Institute for punishing and improving them at the same time" (*Calendario generale del Regno pel 1855, anno XXXII*), (Turin, Stamperia dell'Unione Tipografica-Editrice 1855): 137

⁸⁹ Ch. Fissiaux, *Rapport*, 14-21, 27-30.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

fact that the majority of the detainees are more unfortunate than guilty and that they have reacted positively to the educational system in use.⁹¹

8. *De La Salle's preventive pedagogy*

Don Bosco had several contacts with the Brothers of the Christian Schools, especially during the 1840's. The Brothers, from 1829 on, were running the schools supported by the *Mendacità Istruita* (Poor Schools Program) and from 1833 the municipal schools.⁹²

It might seem problematic that Don Bosco may have had direct knowledge of the pedagogical-spiritual writings of St John Baptist de La Salle (1651): *La conduite des écoles chrétiennes* and *Méditations pour le temps de la retraite* and *Méditations sur toutes les dimanches et les principales fêtes de l'année*.⁹³ However, Don Bosco knew that these religious educators were dedicated, like "guardian angels", to the care of children coming from the world of artisans and humble workers "constantly busy earning a livelihood for themselves and their children", and therefore unable to follow them up during the course of the day".⁹⁴ The Brothers were committed to "teaching them how to read and write and making good Christians and useful citizens for the state of them at the same time".⁹⁵

The Brothers' pedagogical spirituality is often expressed in terms which Don Bosco would never cease to live by: vigilance, guidance, ardent zeal, warding-off evil, inspiring horror for impurity, exhorting and urging them to do good now and for eternity: "Give me souls and take away the rest"; "charity, love, correction, gentleness, patience, prudence, reasonableness".⁹⁶ "The teacher, besides teaching ability, should also and first of all have the ability to "win over the hearts of his pupils".⁹⁷

⁹¹ *Second Rapport sur les résultats obtenus dans la Maison d'éducation correctionnelle pour les jeunes détenus du Royaume de Sardaigne présenté à la réunion qui eut lieu le 26 septembre 1847 pour la distribution des prix par monsieur l'abbé Fissiaux*, (Turin, Imprimerie Royale 1847) 13.

⁹² Cf. G. B. Lemoyne, *Vita del venerabile servo di Dio Giovanni Bosco*, vol 1, (Turin, Libreria Editrice Internazionale 'Buona Stampa' 1914) reprinted from 1st edition 1911, 239.

⁹³ The first complete translation of the *Méditations* of de la Salle is by Serafino Barbaglia FSC, (Rome-Turin, Fratelli dells Scuole Cristiane 1989).

⁹⁴ *Méditations pour le temps de la retraite. A l'usage de toutes Personnes que s'employent à l'éducation de la Jeunesse*, Par Jean-Baptiste de al Salle, a Rouen, Chez Antoine le Prevost [1730?] 9, 11-12.

⁹⁵ *Méditations sur tous les dimanches et les principales fêtes de l'année*, Par Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, A rouen, Chez Jean-Baptiste Marchal [1730?] 138-139.

⁹⁶ J.-B. de la Salle, *Méditations sur tous les dimanches*, 184-188; *Méditations pour le temps de la retraite*, 32, 444-45, 54-56, 58-63.

⁹⁷ J.-B. de la Salle, *Conduite des écoles chrétiennes*, (Avignon, Chastanier 1720), 185-186.

The privileged references from an educational perspective, are those to St Anselm of Aosta and to St Francis de Sales. St Anselm “did his very best to lead his religious with so much gentleness and charity that he was able to win over their hearts”.⁹⁸ Then, the meditation on the modern patron saint of gentleness and tenderness ends up with an examination of conscience as follows:

Do you have those feelings of charity and tenderness for the poor boys you are expected to educate? Do you take advantage of the affection they have for you to direct them towards God? If you have the firmness of a father with them to draw them back and keep them away from disorder, you should also have the tenderness of a mother to gather them together and do all the good to them which depends on you”.⁹⁹

It is likewise probable that Don Bosco may have been led to read pamphlets by two De La Salle Brothers chronologically and geographically closer to him: Brother Agathon (1731-1798), Superior General of the Congregation up to the end of the 18th century and author of a summary on *Les douze vertus d'un bon Maître* (Melun, 1785/87); and Brother Théoger who was working in Turin.

Don Bosco may easily have read Brother Agathon's booklet edited in Italian by Marietti of Turin in 1835. *The twelve virtues of the good teacher as laid out by Brother De la Salle, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and Explained by Fr Agathon, Superior General of the Same Institute.*

As for *seriousness*, the term with which the book opens, this is what it says of the teacher:

He has a kindly aspect, uses few words and a moderate tone; he does not use harsh words; he is not biting or haughty; he is not boorish; he is not ill mannered with anyone. Well persuaded and convinced that seriousness, modesty and moderation cannot exclude goodness or tender affection, he tries his best with all his kindly qualities to win over the loving kindness of his students... Far from trying to make himself only feared, his main task is to win his students' confidence... Besides, he wants to be esteemed and respected by them”.¹⁰⁰

The statements about *humility* are consistent with what was said above. “Humility is not ambitious”, “humility is not jealous”, “humility allows a good teacher to deal with his equals and subjects with the esteem, cordiality, friendship and kindness due to them”. “The humility of a good teacher is charitable. It makes lovable, obliging,

⁹⁸ J.-B. de la Salle, *Méditations sur tous les dimanches, Sur saint Anselme*, 3rd point, 45.

⁹⁹ J.-B. de la Salle, *Méditations sur tous les dimanches, Sur la vie de S. François de Sales*, 3rd point, 19.

¹⁰⁰ Fr Agatone, *Le dodici virtù*, 5-6.

courteous and easily approachable". "Therefore, he never takes on an arrogant, distant or spiteful demeanour toward his students".¹⁰¹ The teacher is given some significant warnings in reference to *self-restraint*, (reserve, self-control), as far as his behaviour toward his young students is concerned. "He scrupulously shuns friendship, dangerous familiarity with them. Self-restraint forbids touching their face, caressing them, laughing with them, and receiving a hug from them. The teacher should often remember that among the children there may be some so full of malice that they might give a malicious interpretation to some words and actions which only a malicious and already corrupt heart detects as having the appearance of evil, even though in fact they are not so".¹⁰²

Meekness is a typical theme, namely the theme of *gentleness*¹⁰³ and even St Francis de Sales is quoted accurately. Meekness is a virtue which inspires and produces "goodness, sensitivity, tenderness". Brother Agathon writes:

It is a general principle that love is gained through love. A teacher therefore, first of all and most of all should have a father's feeling for them and always think of himself as someone who takes the place of those who have entrusted them to him; namely, he should have heartfelt goodness and tenderness like their very fathers for them. Now these qualities will be inspired by his gentleness and gentleness in turn will provide for them the affection, sensitivity and kindness, the very same obliging and persuasive manners. Gentleness removes whatever seems harsh and painful from authority and smooths out all difficulties".¹⁰⁴

The problem of how to reconcile *authority and freedom* is practically solved by having recourse to gentleness:

This authority does not depend on age, height, stature, tone of voice, threats, but on the character which displays and features a steady spirit always firm, moderate, and with reason as its guide. A spirit which does not act on whim or impulse. The same result can be obtained by blending gentleness with firmness and love with fear. Love must win over the hearts of children without making them effeminate, and fear must control them without frightening them off".¹⁰⁵

In the middle of the 19th century, Brother Théoger wrote a short work in which he added to the twelve virtues. He added constancy, firmness, and good example.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 14-17

¹⁰² Ibid., 35.

¹⁰³ The longest chapter in this brief work is dedicated to it.

¹⁰⁴ Fr Agatone, *Le dodici virtù*, 38-39.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 38.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Virtù e doveri di un buon maestro*. Short work published with Brother Vittorio Théoger of the Christian Schools as editor, (Turin, G.B. Paravia and l'Unione Tipografica-editrice, 1836), 64 pages.

The usual pointers are brought up and they all focus on charity: love, gentleness, benevolence, fatherliness, besides prevention and vigilance, which entail order, discipline and firmness. "Firmness in itself is nothing but the power and constancy used to oppose what is evil, to forestall and repress disorders. A teacher cannot operate without it. And the reason for this is that children are naturally inclined towards evil and it is quite appropriate to instill a reverential fear in them which may control them, without irritating them. "However, the teacher should be concerned about not having a wrong idea of firmness".

"*Firmness* is not rigour or harshness or inflexibility, but a spiritual strength of reason in order to have children walk steadily on the path of what is good". "Since its main objective is to incline the students to keep far away from what is evil out of fear, firmness cannot be truly useful if it is not accompanied by gentleness, which alone cannot succeed in having the students want what is good, out of love".¹⁰⁷

"*Gentleness* is the exterior guise of charity, goodness. But it should not be an end point: it is extremely valuable for the teacher to love his pupils and love them for supernatural reasons; it is valuable that the teacher's ways of doing things, all his words, his vigilance, in a word, all his actions, be inspired by such love, otherwise the teacher will not be able to captivate his students' affection and provide stability to his authority without which it would be impossible for a teacher to be a successful educator in their regard".¹⁰⁸

"*Piety* itself and, in particular the use of the sacraments, should be surrounded by gentleness and joy. One must do one's very best to make sure the children find a certain delight in religious exercises. The piety which the students should be inspired by, should not be austere, under the spell of fear but a gentle piety, based mainly on love".¹⁰⁹

In an atmosphere of charity a vigilant presence is also justified. "The teacher's steadfast attention to what the students are doing... produces very good results, not only because it represses the disorders which might show up and thus prevents their growing worse, but also and especially because it forestalls them".¹¹⁰

Within this context the problem of punishments is also resolved. "Gentleness requires the teacher to follow these guidelines: 1. Punish rarely..; 2. Punish only out of charity... 5. Never strike children, never push them; never force them or treat them harshly... 15. The teacher should, as far as possible, make himself easily accessible

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 42-43; for love of the teacher of love of good?

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 46-47.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 26 and 27.

¹¹⁰ Fr V. Théoger, *Virtù e doveri*, 50.

and show kindness and warmth... 20. The teacher should win over the hearts of his students with moderation, since strictness irritates them and discourages them".¹¹¹

Finally, an appeal to reason is made: "Always speak rightly to your students, with reasonableness, no matter what age they are and make sure that they act the same way, whenever any opportunity is given them".¹¹²

9. *The Barnabites' preventive style*

It is a well-known fact that the Barnabites, a Congregation which came into being during the first half of the 16th century, dedicated themselves to the care of colleges (boarding schools) at the beginning of the 17th century. The Barnabites were always praised for their discipline. This is the reason why St Francis de Sales wanted them to be teachers in the boarding institutions in Annecy. St Francis de Sales thought of them as "excellent people", "gentle and condescending", "humble and kind"; as people of "solid piety, gentle and incomparably friendly".¹¹³

The preventive aspect of their educational system seems to have been formulated more explicitly during the 19th century. "We beg all those who take an active part in educating youth, in instructing youth, to be slow to punish, to try with all possible means suggested by charity to prevent the onset of evil rather than having to correct it".¹¹⁴ "The supervision of younger boarders should be as constant and diligent as it is gentle and fatherly. It is better to prevent defects from showing up than to have the sad task of punishing them. Punishment should be used rarely and only as a medicine".¹¹⁵ "If the rule is not kept, then it is dead. For this reason the superiors should do their utmost to keep the rule alive and able to produce salutary effects in the young. Should gentleness and persuasion be good enough to keep the rule alive, then that would be the most desirable way to follow, because it is more along the lines of the human heart, and produces more secure and lasting effects".¹¹⁶

But the best summary is in a work entitled: *Avvertimenti agli educatori ecclesiastici della gioventù (Advice for ecclesiastical youth educators)* written by Fr Alexander Teppa (1806-1871, the former rector of the Royal College of Moncalieri near Turin (1856-1867) and finally, Superior General of the Order from 1867 until his

¹¹¹ Ibid., 47 and 49.

¹¹² Ibid., 27; cf. also 8,10,21,43.

¹¹³ A. M. Erba, *Le scuole e la tradizione pedagogica dei barnabiti*, in P. Braido, ed., *Esperienze di pedagogia cristiana nella storia*, vol 1, (Rome, LAS, 1981) 180-181. We cite the documents proper to the Order of the essay by A.M. Erba.

¹¹⁴ *Saggio di Regolamento per que' Collegi dei PP. Barnabiti che hanno annesso il Convitto o il Ginnasio*, (Rome, 1850), 4.

¹¹⁵ *Programma of the Duke's College Maria Luisa* (Parma, 1832).

¹¹⁶ *Regolamento pei convittori del Real Collegio Carlo Alberto in Moncalieri*, (Turin, Collegio degli Artignaelli-Tip. E Libr. S. Giuseppe, 1874), 32.

death. Don Bosco read it and had his collaborators read it too. Don Bosco found ideas in it that he shared, put into practice¹¹⁷ and, later on, transferred into the pages of his 'Preventive System'. Fr Teppa wrote:

Education has two main tasks or essential roles: one is positive and consists in providing young people with the most effective means for the natural and free development of their faculties; the other is negative and is called on to help the first. It consists in removing the obstacles which might obstruct or spoil that very development. In short, this is the twofold task of education: to promote what is good, to prevent what is evil, backing up nature in whatever good point it possesses and correcting whatever may be bad. This twofold task must be carried out either directly with the right use of authority or indirectly by means of good example".¹¹⁸

The solidness of the content of prevention is not ignored. Without doubt "to prevent" means "to safeguard from.. to correct.. to keep far away from.. to put the brakes on.. to protect from present dangers and to forewarn them against future dangers". However, at the same time, "to prevent" means "to provide foundations to strengthen the young with the truths of Christian faith". It means "to guide them along the way of virtue, to help them achieve their eternal salvation".¹¹⁹ Individual and social human and Christian objectives must be well attended to, namely: to gradually form men who are truly wise, upright, virtuous, and good Christians and also good citizens".¹²⁰

To achieve such objectives two things are essential: the knowledge of every individual's inclinations and a correct use of authority.¹²¹ Material Authority which is "acquired by firmness of will and severity of manners, makes us feared and obeyed at all costs". But this kind of authority is not enough, even though it can be useful, "when

¹¹⁷ Letter from Rome to Don Rua, Jan. 14, 1869, E II 4; cf. J. M. PELLEZZO, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento tra reale e ideale*. The usage was resumed again at Valdocco years afterwards: "Everyone would be issued with a small booklet: *Avvertimenti per gli educatori ecclesiastici*, by Alessandro Teppa Barnabita" (Conference 16°, 7-3-1883, *ibid.*, 235). "Find out the reason why the youngsters fear us more than love us". "There was discussion on this important point for over two hours, without however finding the real cause. Then they had the idea of some small booklet to serve as a guide; and they decided to give everyone the 'avvertimenti' by Alessandro Teppa Barnabite". (Conference 18a, March 9, 1883, *ibid.*, 258).

¹¹⁸ A. M. Teppa, *Avvertimenti per gli educatori ecclesiastici della gioventù*, (Rome/Turin, tip. E libr. Poliglotta de Propaganda Fide/tip. E lbr. Pontificia di Pietro di G. Marietti, 1868), 13.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

the voice of reason is not listened to and even necessary to keep discipline among the pupils, especially when a lot of youngsters are gathered together". "Material Authority may have external force but it will never conquer or govern the minds of youth who surrender only to the voice of persuasion and allow themselves to be governed only by moral authority".

Not even purely juridical or legal authority is enough to achieve the objectives of education. What is needed is moral authority which we cannot possess unless we earn it; and "it is not earned except by making ourselves esteemed, respected and loved".¹²² In other words, moral authority is based on reason and love. "Whoever wants to be esteemed by the young should first of all show that he esteems them. Therefore he should never speak scornfully of anyone".¹²³ "Whoever wants to be respected by his pupils should always be calm, self-controlled and show that he is guided by reason alone in dealing with them".¹²⁴ "But should anyone want to hold sway over the hearts of the young he should most of all make himself loved. Whoever is loved is also willingly listened to and obeyed. There is no other manner by which to make oneself loved than to love. *'Si vis amari, ama'*".¹²⁵ "And so, whoever wants to make himself loved by his pupils should be the first one to love them with a sincere heart and with the affection of a father and friend. Let this be his main concern, to care for all that they may need and be of advantage to them both spiritually and physically. For honour, let him try to please them and satisfy their honest wishes as much as possible, let him share their pleasures and their and displeasures".¹²⁶

According to Teppa the exercise of authority should be commensurate with the different temperaments and dispositions of the young: "The simple voice of reason for the young who are docile and submissive, the authority of the command for the young who are hard-headed and stubborn".¹²⁷ But at the same time, it is pointed out, every one without discrimination should never lose sight of the objective: "a sincere and lasting love of virtue, sense of duty, desire for what is truly good; and the method to be used – the way of gentleness and persuasion". "There is no doubt that this is the way most suited to human nature and consequently the way which produces more lasting results, even though at times they are less readily available and visible. Let this way be always regarded as the main tool for education".¹²⁸

¹²² Ibid., 14-16.

¹²³ Ibid., 17.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 18-19.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 21.

¹²⁶ A. M. Teppa, *Avvertimenti per gli educatori ecclesiastici della gioventù* 22.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 25-26.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 27-28.

This kind of authority will suggest all the main ways required of educational intervention: "when we have to command, instruct and exhort,¹²⁹ when we have to warn, correct and reproach,¹³⁰ when we have to punish,¹³¹ praise and reward".¹³² "Orders should be used in moderation and always be issued with dignity, gently, seriously and firmly".¹³³ "Instruction and exhortation are to be preferred, and they should neither be too long nor inappropriate".¹³⁴ "Instruction and exhortation should later be followed up with warnings and kindly corrections because the young are naturally unstable, inconsiderate and absent-minded, so it is necessary to remind them with brief, kind words about their duties, their resolutions, the promises they have made so that they may not be found at fault through forgetfulness or absent-mindedness or instability".¹³⁵

"The teacher should be convinced that the more he does this, the less need will there be for him to have recourse to punishments. This is why the teacher should always be attentive and vigilant and be imbued at the same time with much zeal and charity".¹³⁶ "If simple warnings are not enough, then the teacher should use admonitions, being careful however to be ready to speak with the loving kindness and effective reasoning good enough to persuade and move the minds of the pupils".¹³⁷ "But when the teacher gives a reprimand or an admonition he should make sure not to offend or do anything which might discourage the guilty one. Instead he should let him know that he will not stop loving him and esteeming him as a person even though he corrects him and that he does this precisely because he loves him and esteems him and really wants what is good for him".¹³⁸ The reprimand comes to the fore "when it can be clearly seen that warnings and kindly corrections prove useless".¹³⁹ Finally, once the desired results are obtained, as occasion demands, the severity of the corrections should be softened, urging the young man to correct himself".¹⁴⁰

Teppa devotes a longer chapter to the subject of punishments,¹⁴¹ but not because they are considered the most important part of education. He holds the opinion rather

¹²⁹ Ibid., ch. 4, 29-33.

¹³⁰ Ibid., ch. 5, 33-34.

¹³¹ Ibid., ch. 6, 41-51.

¹³² Ibid., ch. 7, 51-54.

¹³³ Ibid., 29-31.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 31-33.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 33.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 34.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 35.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 37.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 38.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 40.

¹⁴¹ A. M. Teppa, *Avvertimenti per gli educatori ecclesiastici della gioventù* ch. 6, *Dei castighi*, 41-51.

that their frequency is due to the carelessness or inexperience of the educator. Punishments "should be given only out of necessity and as a medicine. The necessity and usefulness of punishment should also be the norm for determining the quality and quantity of punishments and the way of using them".¹⁴² As for the way to use punishments, love is presented as the basic way to be followed:

First of all, the best kind of punishment given by a teacher who is truly loved and respected by his pupils will be by showing how sorry he is about the fault committed, either by reprimanding them openly but seriously, or with a quieter, more serious and reserved approach, and not giving them signs of kindness and familiarity he normally has given them in the past. But the teacher must make sure that the humiliation is not of such a nature as to discourage the person¹⁴³ ... Let a punishment be given with dignity and at the same time with loving kindness. As much as possible, the culprit should be persuaded that the punishment was just and necessary, and that his fault was being punished because we love him as a person".¹⁴⁴

Besides using punishments, the author adds, it is also just and proper that at the right time and place the teacher should bestow the praise due to the pupil who acts the way he should and encourage him with rewards".¹⁴⁵

The last two chapters deal with the educator as a whole. What is emphasised is individual good example and harmony in the community of those educating.¹⁴⁶ "Let them be compassionate and bear with one another with holy charity and, whenever it may be needed, let there be mutual correction".¹⁴⁷ Finally the charity which St Paul writes to the Corinthians about is taken and formulated as the supreme principle of any educational activity.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² Ibid., 43.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 43-45.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 49 and 51.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 51.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., Chap. 8, *Del buon esempio e della concordia tra gli educatori*, 54-61-7

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 60.

¹⁴⁸ 1 Cor. 13:4-7; A. M. Teppa, *Avvertimenti*, Chap. 9, *Condizioni della carità che dee avere un educatore ecclesiastico*, 61-69.

Chapter 6

DON BOSCO'S PEDAGOGICAL ORIGINALITY

With some degree of emphasis and not without reason, a priest from the Fermo diocese wrote the following in 1886:

Don Bosco has already been sacrificing his life for the education and instruction of the young for fifty years. The results of his work are so gratifying and so widespread that Don Bosco has become the most famous educator of his times, both in the old and in the new world. What has contributed to his fame is his Preventive System.¹

It makes no sense to indulge in rhetoric, but the fact is obvious enough that Don Bosco appeared to many of his contemporaries and even later, as an exceptional educator, the emerging representative of the Preventive System in the education of youth. However, this does not mean ignoring the fine and original contributions of past educators and those of his time as well.²

C. Danna had a keen intuition, from the outset, of the originality of Don Bosco's educational experience. A professor of literature at the University of Turin, Danna,

¹D. Giordani, *La gioventù Don Bosco di Torino*, (S. Benigno di Canavese, Tip. E Libreria Salesiana, 1886), 63. At approximately the same time, by the same author, *La carità nell'educare ed il sistema preventivo del più grande educatore vivente il venerando D. Giovanni Bosco*, with the addition of *Idee di D. Bosco sull'educazione e sull'insegnamento*, by F. Cerutti, (S. Benigno di Canavese, Tip e Libreria Salesiana, 1886).

²A brief but very good focus on Don Bosco's merits regarding the Preventive System was provided by E. Valentini, "Don Bosco restauratore del sistema preventivo", in *Rivista di Pedagogia e Scienze religiose* 7 (1969): 285-301. Rather enthusiastic, instead, is A. Caviglia's one-sided exuberance. Otherwise a keen scholar of Don Bosco, he said in a lecture given in August 1934: "Don Bosco and Christian education equate to unity. This is the conceptual and historical greatness of Don Bosco in the Church's life: that he offered the definitive formula for Christian pedagogy, for the pedagogy that the Church desires... Sainly educators all began from the principle of charity, and almost all from charity towards the poor. But none had widespread and dominant potential like Don Bosco's. These saints may have known how to bring everything that religion, charity and wisdom taught together into a system, but there is only one true creator or 'diviniser' of a Christian system of education and that was Don Bosco. (A. Caviglia, *La pedagogia di Don Bosco*, in *Il soprannaturale nell'educazione*, (Rome, An. Tip. Editrice Laziale, 1934), 105 and 108). The tone explains in part his declared intention to "speak of Don Bosco...as I see and feel him to be, not as a scholar but as a Christian and a priest and as a Salesian formed by Don Bosco himself". 102.

already in 1849, had written two passionate pages on the Oratory, *on Don Bosco's Sunday school*. Those two pages underlined the religious and civic nature as well as the holistic educational and cheerful features of the Oratory.

On Sundays and feast days Don Bosco gathers some four or five hundred youngsters over the age of 8 in an out-of-the-way compound, to keep them from danger and just hanging around, and to teach them the principles of Christian morality. He does this by entertaining them with delightful and honest amusements after they have attended pious and religious practices. He also teaches them social and ecclesiastical history, catechism and the principles of arithmetic. He trains them to use the metric system and those who do not know how to read and write are taught these skills. All this is done to provide the youngsters with a moral and civic education. But he does not fail to provide them with a physical education as well: a fenced-off playground next to the Oratory allows the young to get involved in gymnastics, play with stilts, swings, skittles or quoits. And this is done to help them grow and strengthen their physical capacities. Besides prizes of some holy pictures, lotteries and at times a light breakfast, the bait used to draw the huge crowd of youngsters is Don Bosco's own calm approach, always vigilant over the young souls, ready to shed the light of truth on them and show them how to love one another. Thinking about the harm he avoids, the vices forestalled, the seeds of virtue sown, the good which is so fruitful, it seems incredible that Don Bosco's work might have met with obstacles and even opposition. But what most of all grants Don Bosco the right to the gratitude of all citizens is the *home* next to the Oratory which is open to the *most needy and destitute children*. When Don Bosco knows of or meets some child who is a victim of poverty, squalid conditions, he never loses sight of him, takes him into his home, restores him, asks him to take off his filthy clothes and gives him new ones to put on. He provides food for him day and night until he finds some employment and some work for him to do, so he may earn a decent livelihood in the future and can take better care of educating his mind and heart.³

On the day of the celebration of Don Bosco's month 's mind, the Archbishop of Turin, Cardinal Cajetan Alimonda, gave considerable room to Don Bosco's educational system in his eulogy on that occasion. "Education", he said, was "the first area where Don Bosco *brought the divine to the 19th century*", as well as his "concern for the working class" and "for work", the spirit of association, civilisation of underdeveloped

³ In the *Cronichetta* in the *Journal of the Society for instruction and education*, Year 1, vol 1 1849, 459-460. There are expressions emphasised here which give evidence of the important aspects of Don Bosco's educational and pedagogical experience.

peoples. "Don Bosco did not put aside anything which might be useful in educational discoveries but went one better. He did not have a problem with the method, because he had solutions stemming from principles. He introduced the religious dimension as a guide to natural affection, in the science of charity. This is why Don Bosco gives pedagogy a divine touch".⁴ Don Bosco's pedagogy is "intensely religious and therefore not gloomy". "Everything happened in an atmosphere of freedom and cheerfulness".⁵ "All this came together with involvement and clever initiatives in an atmosphere of peace, dignity and trust".⁶

The general style characterising his various undertakings was the Preventive System. For Don Bosco the Preventive System was the absolute, well-defined rule compared with the repressive method, often linked inevitably with civil strife. "The best and most miraculous power required for control, according to Don Bosco's recommendations, was moral power. Don Bosco knew and understood that unless we win over the pupils' affection, we are building on sand, educating bodies and not spirits".⁷

1. A biographical outline

Don Bosco's life may be divided into three periods:

The period of preparation (1815-1844); the period where the fundamental features of his educational activity are outlined (1844-1869); the period when his institutions receive both organisational and theoretical substance (1870-1888).

Here we single out the more important moments of his life's work and educational activity.

- 1815 (August 16) Don Bosco is born in the Becchi in the Municipality of Castelnuovo.
- 1817 Death of his father.
- 1824 A priest, Fr Joseph Lacqua, introduces John Bosco to reading and writing.
- 1827 First Communion, around Easter time.
- 1828 (February) Farmhand at the Moglia farm (until late autumn 1829).
- 1829 Study of Italian and Latin resumed with Fr John Calosso (who died November 21, 1829).

⁴ *Giovanni Bosco e il suo secolo*. At the month's mind in the Church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, March 1, 1888. Homily by Cardinal Archbishop Gaetano Alimonda (Turin, Tipografia Salesiana, 1888), 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 13-15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 21-24.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

- 1830 John Bosco attends Castelnuovo Public school (Christmas 1830-summer 1831)
- 1831 From November onwards John Bosco attends the public school in Chieri to study grammar, the humanities and rhetoric.
- 1835 John Bosco enters the seminary in Chieri and begins his philosophy and theology courses.
- 1841 June 5, the Vigil of the feast of the Holy Trinity, Don Bosco is ordained priest.
- 1841 (November) Don Bosco is enrolled in the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* (Ecclesiastical College) in Turin for the practical study of moral theology and homiletics; he begins to gather young people and adults and teach them catechism.
- 1844 (October) Don Bosco is appointed chaplain to one of the works of Marchioness Giulia di Barolo.
- 1845 (May)-1846 (March) The Wandering Oratory begins at St Peter in Chains Church to the Dora Mills, to the Moretta house, to the Filippi meadows.
- 1846 (April 12) The Oratory finds its definitive location in the Pinardi Shed in the suburb of Valdocco. It is here that Don Bosco and his mother come to live. The evening schools begin during the winter of 1846-1847.
- 1847 The opening of the first home; the St Aloysius Oratory is opened in the area of Porta Nuova; the St Aloysius Sodality begins.
- 1848 (October 21) Beginning of the publication *L'amico della Gioventù* (*The Friend of Youth*), a religious, moral and political Newspaper (which would last only eight months and later merge into the *Istruttore del Popolo* (*The People's Instructor*)).
- 1849 Don Bosco takes on the management of the Guardian Angels Oratory from Fr Cocchi, in the area of Vanchiglia in Turin; he founds the *workers society* or the *mutual aid society* for which he would draw up a constitution in 1850
- 1852 (March 31) Archbishop Fransoni is exiled to Lyons (France). He appoints Don Bosco the director and spiritual head of the Turin Oratory of St Francis de Sales, with the oratories of St Aloysius and the Guardian Angel dependent on it.
- 1853 Don Bosco begins the publication of the *Catholic readings* and also opens a modest shoemaker's workshop in the Oratory.
- 1854 The book-binding shop is opened. As an experiment, the seminal beginnings of the Salesian Society, Don Bosco proposes an associative, apostolic form of life to two clerics (Bl. Michael Rua is one and would become Don Bosco's first successor), and two other young men, one of whom becomes the future

- Cardinal John Cagliero. Don Bosco has his first encounter with Minister Urban Rattazzi. Dominic Savio enrolls as a pupil in the Valdocco Oratory (1842 - 1857).
- 1855 The third high school grade is introduced at the Oratory (up till now the students attended schools run by private individuals).
- 1856 The first carpentry shop is opened at the Oratory; the first two high school grades are introduced. The beginning of the Immaculate Conception Sodality.
- 1857 Beginning of the Blessed Sacrament Sodality; the creation of the Altar Boys Sodality; the St Vincent de Paul Conference for young people commences.
- 1858 Don Bosco's first trip to Rome to present Pope Pius IX with the plan for his Religious Society dedicated to working for youth. The first outline of the Salesian Constitutions.
- 1859 The high school curriculum is completed (5 grades); beginning of the St Joseph's sodality; the Salesian Society comes to the fore but as a private religious association in practice.
- 1860 The first lay helpers (Coadjutors) are admitted into the privately constituted Society.
- 1861 (December 31) Authorisation is given to open the printing shop.
- 1862 The blacksmith's shop is introduced; first profession of religious vows (May 14).
- 1863 The first school outside Turin is inaugurated under the direction of Fr Michael Rua. On this occasion Don Bosco writes a letter to Fr Rua. It would become the original core of the future *Confidential Memo to Rectors* (the school would move to Borgo San Martino in 1870). The beginning of the construction of the Church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin.
- 1864 The Lanzo Torinese College (boarding school) becomes operative. The *Decretum Laudis* on behalf of the Salesian Society is issued.
- 1865 Don Bosco's new project: *Bibliotheca degli scittori latini* (*The Library of Christian Authors*). It actually began in 1866 with the title: *Selecta ex latinis scriptoribus in usum scholarum* (*Selections from Latin Authors for the Use of schools*).
- 1868 Consecration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians.
- 1869 (Feb. 19) The Holy See definitively approves the Salesian Society; the school at Cherasco is opened; the first volume of the *Biblioteca della gioventù italiana* (*Library for Italian youth*) is published (It would come to an end in 1885, the last publication would be No. 204).

- 1870 The college at Alassio is founded.
- 1871 The college at Varazze and the technical school in Marassi are opened (The latter would transfer to Sampierdarena near Genoa the following year).
- 1872 The Valsalice College for young noblemen is accepted. The foundation takes place of the religious female branch of the Salesian Society with the title of Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.
- 1874 Final, definitive approval of the Salesian Constitutions by the Holy See.
- 1875-1887 The Salesian effort spreads throughout Europe (France, Spain, England) and South America (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, etc.) with undertakings related to emigrants, schools and other educational Institutions and missionary activities.
- 1876 Pope Pius IX approves the Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators.
- 1877 The first General Chapter of the Salesian Society of St Francis de Sales is held. Three others would follow in Don Bosco's lifetime: 1880, 1883, and 1886. In 1877, the pages written by Don Bosco on *The Preventive system* are published as well as the *Il Regolamento per le case (Rules for the Houses)*. In August, *Il bibliofilo cattolico (The Catholic book lover. The Salesian Bulletin)* begins.
- 1880 Don Bosco accepts responsibility for building the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome. The Basilica would be consecrated on May 14, 1887.
- 1881 (February) The Utrera College (Spain) is opened.
- 1883 Don Bosco's triumphant trip to Paris.
- 1884 Next-to-last trip to Rome (the 19th). The so called *Privileges* are finally granted in June 1884.
- 1886 April 8-May 6: extraordinary welcoming reception given to Don Bosco in Spain, Don Bosco's stay in Spain at Sarria and Barcelona.
- 1887 (May) Don Bosco's last trip to Rome on the occasion of the consecration of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart.
- 1888 (Tuesday, January 31, at 4:45 a.m. Don Bosco dies.

2. Reconstructing Don Bosco's Preventive System: sources

To reconstruct Don Bosco's educational praxis and theory it seems we should employ some basic methodological criteria which in turn should take the following into account:

1. The complexity of Don Bosco's activity and his vision of the young;
2. The constant interaction between action, writings and life experiences, both personal and institutional;

3. The constantly changing historical context.

All of these should be kept in mind as well as the complex reality of the historical context, oscillating between rigid patterns and efforts to adapt.

2.1. *Don Bosco, Christian Apostle of the young*

Don Bosco is not only an educator in the strict and formal sense of the term. His *educative activity*,⁸ properly so called, is part of a wider gamut of interests related to youth and ordinary people at all levels.

Practically speaking, the peculiarities of Don Bosco's educational activity should be seen in the context of a threefold concern interconnected yet formally distinct:

- 1) The welfare and charitable activity directed to providing basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and work.
- 2) The pastoral ministry carried out for the salvation of souls, for living and dying in God's grace, with all the specific interventions required by that.
- 3) The spiritual animation of the educational and religious communities he founded, in order to help support the various undertakings on behalf of the young.

This complex activity finds adequate expression in complementary statements which clearly evidence their double dimension: Action and Religious Consecration.

For twenty years I have been carrying out my priestly ministry to prisons, hospitals, all along the streets and city squares in Turin; I gave shelter to abandoned boys, to direct them to good morals, work, according to their talents and abilities without asking for or actually receiving any sort of compensation for it. I actually used my own money to build a house and provide a livelihood for poor boys. I would do the same thing today.⁹

This is the objective of our Society: our personal sanctification, and, through the practice of charity, the salvation of souls. To achieve this, we have to be extremely careful, in assigning to leadership positions on behalf of others only those who are outstanding in virtue and in the knowledge of what they try to teach others. It is better to be without a teacher than to have one who is incapable of teaching.¹⁰

⁸“Educative” strictly speaking is what impacts positively on the development and formation of human faculties, so as to make each person capable of habitual free decisions, generous life commitment both as an individual and in society, morally and religiously.

⁹ Letter to the minister for Internal Affairs, Carlo Farini, June 12, 1860, Em I 407.

¹⁰ First of a series of marginal notes in Latin to the recently approved Constitutions 1874. MB X 994-996.

At least two considerations can be drawn from the above for any reconstruction of the Preventive System:

First of all the presentation of the proper pedagogical element of the Preventive System does not cover its entire range. In fact, it also includes a clear pastoral and spiritual dimension both in reference to educators and those to be educated.

Secondly, to adequately use Don Bosco's writings which are the expression and dimension of its entire lived experience, we should interpret their explicitly pedagogical contents when necessary. These, in turn, should be connected with other appropriate elements: theological, juridical, hagiographical, spiritual, ascetic and organisational.¹¹

2.2 *Life's integrating role in any reconstruction of the Preventive System*

There is a huge number of Don Bosco's writings which owe their existence to his radical aim of championing the improvement of the young and the masses. They end up being incomprehensible or even misleading, even theoretically, if not connected with his personality and with the real life of the institutions he created and governed.

This does not mean the Preventive System is to be precisely equated with Don Bosco himself. Undoubtedly, Don Bosco's outstanding personality as a clever and holy educator gives the system a particular tone of its own, but the system takes on its own structure and validity. It even becomes a *doctrine* to be handed on, and it was actively handed on firstly to his own immediate co-workers and to the various groups working in the field of youth assistance. Don Bosco and his followers ended up clearly setting the Preventive System, with its structure and effectiveness, against another doctrine and educational praxis, the repressive system.

It does not exclude, but implies rather that the best interpreter of Don Bosco for theorising and writing about the Preventive System is Don Bosco himself. It is he who creates and moulds his educational experience and enflashes it in his own institutions together with all his co-workers and young people who are the first and most active beneficiaries of the system. Bartholomew Fascie wrote: "One who approaches Don Bosco's education system with the idea of subjecting it to painstaking analysis, dissecting it, dividing it into many parts, rigid patterns, is following the wrong lead. Don Bosco's method of education should be looked at as a living form in its entirety, by studying the principles which gave origin to its life, its bodies, its vitality, and the functions developed from them".¹²

¹¹ R. Farina provides valid criteria for reading Don Bosco's literary production in *Leggere Don Bosco oggi. Note e suggestioni metodologiche*, in *La formazione permanente interpella gli Istituti religiosi*, ed. P. Broccardo, (Leumann-Turin, Elle Di Ci 1976), 349-404.

¹² B. Fascie, *Del metodo educativo di Don Bosco. Fonti e commenti*, (Turin, SEI, 1927), 32. On the relationship between writings and personal and institutional experience as a criterion

2.3 Relationship between stability and innovation in the Preventive System

The attention given to the historical, contextual and vital nature of the Preventive System should help remove the possibility of its reconstruction being too rigid and uniform. In fact Don Bosco's educational experience and the theoretical reflection accompanying it occurred at a considerably different time and in a different social, environmental and institutional context.

The years prior to 1848 and the birth of Italian national unity (1860), as well as the Piedmontese period of expansion of Don Bosco's undertakings (up to 1870), are not easily identifiable either in themselves or in the years and periods that immediately followed. The psychological climate, cultural impulses, social conditions and political and religious contexts appear to have been radically different. Besides, even within these periods there cannot be any comparison with the experiences Don Bosco had at the *festive oratory*, the *homes* for apprentices, for student-seminarians, in the *boarding colleges* for students and artisans, for boys of middle and upper classes (like those at Alassio, Turin-Valsalice and Este), in the *Patronages* of Southern France and in similar institutions in Argentina and Uruguay.

It is quite natural to find the essential elements and basic inspirations everywhere but with quite different accents and elements as well. And at the same time it is also natural that similar differences might be noticed in written documents which are different because of the reality they refer to, or because of the situations at the time they were written or because of the literary genre. We have already hinted at the hypothesis of a *Preventive System* carried out with a variety of preventive methods and firstly the reference to the different "open" institutions, an "open" institution like the oratory, and comprehensive schools like the colleges or boarding schools.¹³

3. Don Bosco, educator and author of pedagogical literature

Even though Don Bosco had published many things, in none of them had he provided a systematic explanation of his ideas on pedagogy or provided basic directions

contd. 12

for understanding Don Bosco's educational system, cf., P. Braido, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*; and "Los escritos en la experiencia pedagógica de don Bosco" in: *San Juan Bosco, Obras fundamentales*, edición dirigida por Juan Canals Pujol y Antonio Martínez Azcona, (Madrid: BAC 1978), 14-32.

¹³ Cf. P. Braido, "L'esperienza pedagogica di Don Bosco nel suo divenire", in *Orientamenti Pedagogici* 36 (1989): 11-39; L. Pazzaglia, *La scelta dei giovani e la proposta educativa di Don Bosco*, in *Don Bosco nella storia*, Atti del 1 Congresso Internazionale di Studi su Don Bosco (UPS - Roma, Jan. 16-20, 1989), ed. M. Midali, (Rome, LAS 1990), 259-288; in particular, 273-282.

for his educational praxis. However, there was little he wrote which did not have some connection with the education of young people and the masses, whether he was writing history, apologetics, didactic material, catechetics, religious content, hagiography, biography or normative texts.¹⁴

For this reason, any faithful reconstruction of Don Bosco's ideas on education should not leave out any of his writings, published or unpublished, even though a privileged place should be given to the more explicitly pedagogical writings. Added to these should also be the abundant endorsements by his co-workers and contemporaries: books, chronicles, memoirs, biographical profiles, the history of institutions, minutes of general and particular meetings or conferences, General Chapter and Superior Chapter meetings. The collected letters are particularly important.¹⁵ We shall limit ourselves to singling out writings and endorsements of an obvious pedagogical nature and intent, both theoretical and practical.

"A cheerful and happy way of living as a Christian" is what Don Bosco wanted to teach young people with his *Companion of Youth* written in 1847.¹⁶ The first essays on the pedagogical thinking of the Oratory are: *An introduction to the regulated plan of life*; the *Historical outline of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales 1852-54* and the *Historical outlines of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, 1862*.¹⁷

Linked to the structure of the college-seminary are some well-known biographical outlines published during the decade 1859-1868: *On the life of Dominic Savio (1854)*;¹⁸ *A biographical sketch of the young Michael Magone (1861)*;¹⁹ *The little shepherd of the Alps, namely the life of Besucco Francesco from Argentera (1864)*.²⁰ Similar to these are some stories with instructional and biographical background: *The Power*

¹⁴ A complete summary of Don Bosco's vast literary output including writings of other genres, (such as hagiography, history, juridical etc) and offered by P. Stella, *Gli scritti a stampa di S. Giovanni Bosco*, (Rome: LAS 1977). We find a grouping by literary genre in P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol 1, 230-237.

¹⁵ Four volume edition ed. Eugenio Ceria, (Turin: SEI 1955-59). A more complete critical edition is under way: *G. Bosco, Epistolario. Introduzione, testi critici e note*, ed. F. Motto, 2 vols, (Rome: LAS 1991/1996: vol I (1835-63); II (1864-68).

¹⁶ Cf. P. Stella, *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane provveduto" di San Giovanni Bosco*, (Rome, PAS 1960), 131 pages.

¹⁷ Cf. P. Braido, *Don Bosco per la gioventù povera e abbandonata in due inediti del 1854 e del 1862*, in P. Braido, ed., *Don Bosco nella Chiesa al servizio dell'umanità*, (Rome: LAS, 1987), 13-81.

¹⁸ Cf. *La vita di Savio Domenico e "Savio Domenico e don Bosco"*. Study by A. Caviglia, (Turin, SEI, 1942-43), 43-92. 609 pages.

¹⁹ Cf. A. Caviglia, *Il "Magone Michele". Una classica esperienza educativa*, in *Il primo libro di Don Bosco. Il "Magone Michele"*. (Turin, SEI, 1965), 129-202.

²⁰ Cf. A. Caviglia, *La "Vita di Besucco Francesco" scritta da don Bosco e il suo contenuto spirituale*, in *La vita di Besucco Francesco*, (Turin: SEI, 1965), 107-262.

of a Good Education (1855),²¹ *Valentine or the story of an obstructed vocation* (1866);²² *Severino or the adventures of a young man from the Alps* (1868);²³

Confidential Memo for Rectors is full of solid pedagogical meaning. These *Reminders*, as mentioned earlier, are a letter addressed to Fr Michael Rua who had just been appointed rector of the college at Mirabello Monferrato (Italy).²⁴

The Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales is an exceptional document of lived pedagogy in reference to the years 1815-1854 and in particular to the first initiatives *vis-a-vis* the festive oratory in Turin and the start of the home or Annex. These Memoirs edited by Don Bosco between 1873 and 1879, were published for the first time in 1846.²⁵ *The Preventive System in the education of youth* is the best known work written by Don Bosco in 1877.²⁶ A memo sent to the Italian minister for the interior, Francesco Crispi in February 1878, has the same title but different content.²⁷

Don Bosco compiled various regulations for his educational institutions. Wide-ranging and important are: *Rules of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales for day students* (1877)²⁸ and *The Regulations for the Society of St Francis de Sales*. In these latter regulations the introductory articles are the most important, pedagogically speaking.²⁹

Even though relegated to later writings (1881-1882) Don Bosco's two positions on his system of education, in two different conversations in 1854 and 1864 should be considered reliable: the first is the one Don Bosco took with Urban Rattazzi, a

²¹ Cf. J. Schepens, "La forza della buona educazione". *Étude d'un écrit de don Bosco*, in *L'impegno dell'educare*, ed. J. M. Prellezio, (Rome, LAS, 1991), 417-433.

²² Cf. G. Bosco, *Valentino o la vocazione impedita. Introduction and critical text*, ed. M. Pulingathil, (Rome, LAS, 1987) 111 pages.

²³ B. Decanq, "Severino". *Studio dell'opuscolo con particolare attenzione al "primo oratorio"*, RSS 11 (1992): 221-318.

²⁴ Cf. F. Motto, *I "Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori" di don Bosco*, RSS 3 (1984): 125-166.

²⁵ Only two editions exist of these, one with a twofold structure, variants, and history, the other with only historical apparatus, ed. A. Ferreira da Silva, (Rome: LAS, 1991). The first of these is used in this book. On the particular pedagogical value of the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, cf. P. Braido, "Memorie" *del futuro*, RSS 11 (1992): 97-127.

²⁶ Cf. G. Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù. Introduction and critical text* ed. by P. Braido, RSS (1985) 171-321.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 300-304.

²⁸ Cf. OE XXIX 31-94 and 97-196.

²⁹ Cf. P. Braido, *Il "sistema preventivo" in un "decalogo" per educatori*, RSS 4 (1985): 131-148.

government minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia.³⁰ The other was in conversation with an elementary school teacher, Francis Bodrato.³¹

We also have an exceptional letter on punishments very close to Don Bosco's way of thinking and with interesting references to the Preventive System. It has definite connection with the experience at the very heart of Don Bosco's undertakings, namely the Valdocco Oratory in Turin.³² There are also two significant letters dated May 10, 1884: the first, a short one, was sent to community of youngsters at Valdocco; the second contains material for the Salesians working at the Oratory. Both letters were inspired by Don Bosco and edited by Fr John Baptist Lemoyne.³³

Ideally connected with *The Confidential Reminders for Rectors* are two letters written by Don Bosco in August 1885 to the Salesians in Argentina and Uruguay.³⁴

Of particular interest for catechetical and religious formation of the young are his *Church history (1845)*; *Bible history (1847)*; *Warnings for Catholics: Fundamental truths of the Catholic religion (1850 and 1853)*; *A Practical way of knowing Bible history (1855)*.

Other writings of a scholastic nature deserve our attention: *The Metric System simply Explained (1849)*; *The History of Italy Explained to the Young (1855)*. Among writings of a recreational nature we should include the following: *A Theatrical Presentation of the Metric Decimal System in Dialogue (1849)*; *A Debate Between a Lawyer and a Protestant Minister (1853)*; *The House of Fortune: Drama (1865)*; *The Delightful Story of an Old Soldier of Napoleon I (1862)*; *Pleasant Stories about Pius IX (1871)*.

³⁰ BS 6 (1882) n. 10-11, Oct.-Nov., 171-172 and 179-180, speak of it for the first time. Cf. *Conversazione con Urbano Rattazzi (1854)*, ed. By Antonio Ferreira da Silva, in P. Braido, (ed.), *Don Bosco educatore. Scritti e testimonianze*, (Rome, LAS, 1997), 75-87.

³¹ The first reconstruction can be found in a biography of Salesian Francesco Bodrato, in draft form, written 1881: cf. *Il dialogo tra don Bosco e il maestro Francesco Bodrato (1864)*, ed. by Antonio Ferreira da Silva in P. Braido (ed.), *Don Bosco educatore*, 187-198.

³² J. M. Prellezso, *Dei castighi da infliggersi nelle case salesiane. Una lettera circolare attribuita a don Bosco*, RSS 5 (1986): 263-308.

³³ Cf. *Due lettere datate da Roma 10 maggio 1884*, ed. by P. Braido, in P. Braido (ed.), *Don Bosco educatore*, 344-308.

³⁴ For some principles, cf. F. Motto, *Tre lettere a salesiani in America*, in P. Braido, *Don Bosco educatore*, 439-452; also, to don G. Fagnano, Aug. 10, 1885, E IV 334-335; to don G.B. Allavena, Sept. 24, 1885, E IV, 339-340; to don L. Lasagna and to don Lorenzo Girodano, Sept. 30, 1885, E IV 340-341. 341-342.

Chapter 7

DON BOSCO'S PEDAGOGICAL FORMATION

We can easily recognise the influence of a number of significant life experiences in the educational synthesis developed by Don Bosco. This synthesis is linked, to a great extent, to the same kind of general formation, both personal and cultural, during the early part of his life. The schooling provided by his family and the Church was evident during his infancy-childhood period. His work: in the fields and early schooling formed him during his adolescent period. The Latin school at Chieri, the Seminary and the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* were the significant factors during his mature youth period, up to the priesthood and beyond.

Don Bosco's future personality, as a priest, a friend of the young, a pastor and as an educator is clearly rooted in these essential features. In fact, the nucleus of Don Bosco's educative vocation is born and develops with the growing and maturing of his Catholic and priestly formation.¹

Don Bosco's mentality will also have been formed by contact with a network of significant personalities in the Catholic world of his time. There were the saints who were renowned for their works of charity, theologians, people involved in social work, and of course the books he read and his experience of life. All of this would improve and enrich Don Bosco's personality, already extraordinarily gifted with exceptional emotional, intellectual and moral qualities.

1. *Family and Church*

The family was Don Bosco's first school, his mother his first teacher. Don Bosco's family came from a small, rural, Catholic community, rich in religious symbolism. The first and the fundamental religious sign was the Sacrament of Baptism, followed in due time by the religious practices laid down by ecclesiastical discipline and blessed

¹ In Don Bosco there is evidence of the priority, chronologically and psychologically, of his priestly vocation vis-à-vis his vocation as an educator. Various aspects of this issue are offered by J. Klein – E. Valentini, "Una rettificazione cronologica delle 'Memorie di San Giovanni Bosco'", in *Salesianum* 17 (1955): 581-610; F. Desramaut, *Les Mémoires I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Étude d'un ouvrage fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint Jean Bosco*, (Lyon, 1962), 186; P. Braido, *Il sistema preventivo di San Giovanni Bosco*, (Turin: PAS, 1955), 49-59.

by a century-old tradition: daily prayers, Sunday Mass, sermons, catechism, and a host of religious practices.²

The early years of Don Bosco's family life are marked by the earlier than expected absence of his father, who died when he was hardly two years old; by the presence of the stepbrother seven years older than him; by the presence of his paternal grandmother, and especially by the significant influential presence of a mother, who was gifted with sound humanity and a rich spirituality. She was in reality a fatherly mother.³

Margaret Occhiena (1788-1856) was Don Bosco's mother. She was the first one to provide Don Bosco with his education: she was Don Bosco's first teacher.

Writing about her, at a distance of about 60 years, Don Bosco says:

Her greatest concern was to teach her children religion, training them to be obedient, and keeping them busy, doing what was appropriate at their age.⁴

It is within his family that Don Bosco, thanks to his mother's guidance, acquired the habit of prayer, of performing his religious duties, of making sacrifices and, in due time, by the time he reached the age of reason, the habit of regularly going to confession. He was also encouraged to read and write. Don Bosco had to wait until he was eleven years old to be admitted to First Communion (Easter 1827).⁵

Don Bosco's personality was strongly influenced and moulded by religion, and by hard work in the family fields and in his neighbours' fields. While he carried out this work with great determination and out of obedience to his mother, he remained determined to dedicate himself to reading and writing.⁶

As recorded in *The Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales* Don Bosco attributed great importance to his meeting with Fr John Calosso who, for less than two years, worked as a priest in the Village of Murialdo (1829-1830). Many

² On primary education and religious instruction and, then, on the catechism marking Don Bosco's mentality as an educator, cf MO (1991) 33-34, 42-44 and P. Braidò, *L'inedito "Breve catechismo pei fanciulli ad uso della diocesi di Torino" di don Bosco*, (Rome: LAS, 1979), *Introduzione*, 7-8, 22.

³ There were, however, no lack of male figures who influenced the makeup of his personality, enriching it with traits already given him by a strong and forward looking mother: cf. G. Stickler, "Dall perdita del padre a un progetto di paternità. Studio sulla evoluzione psicologica della personalità di don Bosco", in «*Rivista di Scienze dell'Educazione*» 25 (1987):337-375.

⁴ MO (1991): 33-34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 34, 42-44.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 48-50. A substantially credible reconstruction can be found in the Life compiled by G.B. Lemoyne, *Scene morali di famiglie esposte nell vita di Margherita Bosco. Racconto edificante ed ameno*, (Turin: tip. E libreria Salesiana, 1886), 7-188 pages, and in the essay by E. Valentini, *Il sistema preventivo nella vita di Mamma Margherita*, (Turin, LDC, 1957), 146.

years later, Don Bosco refers with great clarity to the feelings he had at the age of fifteen.⁷

However Don Bosco's recreational activities naturally played a significant part in his formation. His mother encouraged his involvement in games and outdoor pursuits. His interest in games, in looking for bird's nests and his attempts to be an acrobat all prepared him for his involvement in *La società dell'allegria* (The Happy Company) of later years, during Don Bosco's studies at Chieri. His heavy involvement in recreational activities as a young man also accounts for the wide range of activities he assigned to free time in his preventive educative system.⁸

2. *Early schooling*

Don Bosco's first regular elementary education took place at Castelnuovo: from Christmas 1830 to the summer of 1831, and at Chieri, where he attended the classes of grammar, of the humanities and of rhetoric, from 1831 to 1835.

As a preparation for his future, this period is important. The young farmer met the new and exhilarating world of Latin culture in the context of a classical education. The effect of this on Don Bosco was to open his mind to an appreciation of culture, which will prove invaluable in his future work as an educator and as a promoter of vocations.

But the most influential feature in the life of Don Bosco, as he was growing up, was the reality of finding himself deeply immersed into a holistic, formative structure, which is at the same time cultural, ethical and religious. We referred earlier to Don Bosco's preventive repressive kind of soul: it left a deep mark on Don Bosco's mentality. Evidently, this mentality was compensated for by later experiences, which in turn leave indelible marks in the organisation of his future educational undertakings for students and especially within schools and boarding institutions.⁹ This becomes evident not only from the analysis of the text, but also from the clear recollections of his religious experiences as recorded in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*.¹⁰

Don Bosco reflects these same religious and moral foundations in his Preventive System. They can be identified in the value he placed on religious instruction and the

⁷ MO (1991), 45-51. "I put myself in Don Calosso's hands...Every word, thought, action I promptly showed him...I knew then what it means to have a stable guide, a faithful soul friend, which I had lacked up until then". (47)

⁸ Ibid., 38-42, 76-82.

⁹ This is a notable element, though not the only one, of the specific Jesuit influence, since its members and pedagogy go back to the Regulations of Charles Felix, July 23, 1822, as said, which shaped the school of the Sardinian Kingdom, including the Sunday gatherings of students, which the festive oratory of Don Bosco is partly connected with.

¹⁰ MO (1991), 56-58, 63-64.

practice of religion: the concern he showed for order, discipline and morality, a responsibility he enshrined in the post of the Prefect of Studies and supported by the concept of assistance and the constant reference to an inner formation to be nurtured by the Congregation through spiritual direction and Sacramental praxis.

To everything we have mentioned above we should also add that Don Bosco had a keen interest in literature which gave him, as he himself says, an insatiable thirst for classical authors, both Latin and Italian. He almost became infatuated with them.¹¹

Several years later, Don Bosco makes reference to this period by referring to two of his teachers, two priests, as models to be imitated. The first one he singles out with some emphasis is Father Peter Banaudi, whom he describes as a model teacher, one who had successfully made himself feared and loved by all his pupils, without ever using punishments. He loved his pupils as though they were his children and they in turn loved him as a tender father.¹² Don Bosco also considered himself as blessed to have chosen, as his regular confessor a theologian, Father Maloria. This thirty-year-old priest welcomed him with great kindness. He remained Don Bosco's confessor during the entire course of his theological studies.¹³

3. *Seminary life in Chieri*

The studies in philosophy and theology at the seminary in Chieri (1835-1841) do not seem to have had a great impact on Don Bosco's culture and mentality, since by temperament he was not inclined to indulge in theoretical speculations. At any rate, these studies anchored him to the basic dogmatic and moral theology of those times. They were not as significant as the Neo-Thomism that followed.

After having spoken positively about the discovery of the *Imitation of Christ*, the following is what Don Bosco wrote, without much enthusiasm, about the study of theology at Chieri:

We only study speculative dogmatic theology in our Seminary. As for moral theology, we only consider issues of controversy.¹⁴

It seems that Don Bosco was not influenced in any permanent way by the probabiliorists' teachings, from anti-infallibility theses, the widespread rigorist approach to pastoral ministry, Gallican-sympathising ideas which characterised the theology taught in the seminaries in the Turin Diocese during the first decade of the 19th century.

¹¹ Ibid., 82-84.

¹² Ibid., 71-72.

¹³ Ibid., 64-65, 84.

¹⁴ MO (1991), 116.

However the disciplinary and spiritual set-up of the seminary seems, with some reservations, to have had a remarkably positive influence on Don Bosco.¹⁵

This seminary regime provided a firm basis for his basic spiritual and moral principles, and provided him with a clear framework to support the structure of his teaching on duty, love and joy. He was later to stress exactness in the performance of one's duties, such as the following: morning prayers, with Mass and meditation, the rosary, reading during the meals (Don Bosco quoted specifically Bercastel's *Church history*), and Confession, every fortnight, Holy Communion on feast days, the study of philosophical and theological treatises, while offering options in other disciplines but with a clear preference for historical and apologetic studies. It was to be these latter studies, which would give Don Bosco his impetus to popularise whatever had to do with history and Catechesis.¹⁶

Don Bosco received a scientific and university type of formation at Chieri. The culture he warmed to was not so pretentious; it was free of speculation and theological dogmatic disputations. Together with the emphasis given to moral and applied theology, especially at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin, this kind of culture would not fail to give Don Bosco his fundamental orientation towards the creation of a pedagogy which would be religious and moral, essential and practical. On the other hand, the religious and pastoral spirituality of two saints, St Philip Neri and St Francis de Sales were to have a deep influence on his preventive educative style. In this way the cleric Bosco, probably at the seminary, rounded up his own theological formation.

We will deal with these two saints later when we write about the years which followed Don Bosco's three-year stay at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in Turin and we will also add Don Bosco's encounter with another saint, St Vincent de Paul, whose life he may have glimpsed in his seminary days.

Don Bosco's culture was not only nurtured by what was on offer in the seminary regime. He owed much to his own taste in reading; books on sacred and church history, on apologetics, and certain formative authors.¹⁷ It is probably true to say that Don Bosco made no distinction between the authors and books he read in later years

¹⁵ As for the teaching in the theological faculty and in Turin's seminaries in the first decades of the 19th century, it has been written: "As far as moral theology was concerned, probabiliorism was taught; for ecclesiology (out of spite for the official neutrality) there were anti-infallibility texts and criticism of primacy. In pastoral practice there was rigourism; amongst the clergy, especially learned ones from whom bishops were mostly selected, *Francophile thinking was common*", that is, *jurisdictional material*. G. Tuninetti, L. Gastaldi 1815-1883, vol 1 *Teologo, pubblicista, rosminiano, vescovo di Saluzzo: 1815-1871*, (Turin, Edizioni Piemme 1983), 33.

¹⁶ MO (1991), 91-93, 106-108.

¹⁷ MO (1991), 107.

and those read during his days at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*, and during the period when he wrote on religious history, on apologetics and on the type of piety suited for young people.

However, it is evident that Don Bosco preferred authors, like Bossuet, who interpreted history in a theological, providential, hagiographical and moralistic way and were loyal to the Church. Don Bosco would never depart from the road followed by Berault-Bercastel:

This is my intention, to make people recognize the unfailing protection of God over his people, the sanctity as well as the infallibility of the church, its beauty and its splendour even during the times of the greatest darkness.¹⁸

This intention resounds throughout Don Bosco's education system. He himself stresses this very point in *The Memoirs of the Oratory* when the features of the Preventive System which he put into practice during a thirty year period, were already defined. The seminary education system had been evidently modelled on the *institutiones ad universum seminarii regimen pertinentes* (*The educational system to be used by seminaries*) issued by Charles Borromeo, and with objectives and methods definitely leaning towards austerity.¹⁹ On the whole it was a repressive system.

The rector and the other superiors came to see us when we got back from our vacation and when we were leaving for our vacation. No one ever went to speak with them, except in cases when someone had to be reprimanded. The superiors took turns, each week in supervising us in the dining room and during the walks. And that was all.

How often I would have liked to talk to them, to ask them for their advice or for the solution of some problem, and I could not. Besides, whenever a superior happened to pass by through the seminary, without knowing why everyone would hurry away as if they were avoiding a black cat.²⁰

¹⁸ A. H. Bérault-Bercastel, *Storia del cristianesimo dell'anate Bérault-Bercastel* translated in Italian with notes and essays by Abbot Giambattista Zugno, vol 1, (Turin, tip. Cassone, Marzorati and Vercellone, 1831), 30.

¹⁹ Cf. *Institutiones ad universum seminarii regimen pertinentes*, in *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolensis*, ed. A. Ratti, (Milan: 1982), vol 3, col. 93-146.

²⁰ MO (1991), 91. Many impressions at the moment of his departure, MO (1991), 110. In a book by priest F. Falcone, *Per la riforma dei seminari in Italia* (Rome, F. Pustet, 1906), Don Bosco's Preventive System is also proposed for "seminaries, especially for Middle and High schools", although combined substantially for the particular aims of ecclesiastical formation, with the "substance of the S. Charles educational system". (ibid., 56-66).

4. *At the Convitto Ecclesiastico*

Several times when Don Bosco referred to the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*, the residential college for seminarians from the Diocese of Turin, he also stressed its friendly, practical, pastoral character, in harmony with the mission of a priest, understood as the art of dealing with souls, (*ars animarum*), a pedagogy of spirituality.²¹

In his *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Don Bosco presents the *Convitto* as an institution founded:

So that young priests, after their seminary courses, might learn the practical side of their sacred ministry. These were the things to which we had to give all our attention: meditation, reading, two walks a day, lessons on preaching, a retreat kind of life, devoting all our time to study and reading good authors. This was a marvellous time of preparation, providing so much that was good for the Church; it especially helped to root out some Jansenistic tendencies still latent among us.²²

This is how Don Bosco remembered an institution to which he was constantly, even emotionally, so attached, particularly during the time when Fr Louis Guala and Fr Joseph Cafasso were teaching there.

The *Regolamento* or Rules issued by the *Convitto's* founder, Fr Louis Guala, contained this advice:

Study-time should be divided up so that some of it will be devoted to practical moral theology; the rest shall be devoted to the practical teaching of sacred preaching and liturgy, according to the manner prescribed.²³

The guidance contained in the original manuscript written by Fr Guala, referring to the subject matter of sermons, was more detailed and accurate:

The starting point will be the writing of meditations for retreats. This subject matter is to be preferred, because it is more natural, more useful to the one who writes it. It can also be used in any sermon delivered from the pulpit.

²¹ Cf. G. Usseglio, "Il teologo Guala e il Convitto ecclesiastico di Torino", in «Salesinaum» 10(1948): 453-502.

²² MO (1991) 116-117. Ideals and impressions highlighted by Don Bosco in *Ragionamento funebre esposto il giorno XXX agosto nella Chiesa di San Francesco d'Assisi (1860)*: "The aim of this Convitto is to teach new priests practical matters in their sacred ministry, especially for the administration of the sacrament of Penance and preaching the Word of God..." (*Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri dal sacerdote Bosco Giovanni*, (Turin, Paravia, 1860), 73-74, OE 12, 423-424).

²³ *Regolamento del convitto ecclesiastico* compiled by Luigi Guala, in G. Colombero, *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Caffasso, con cenni storici Sul Convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*, (Turin: Fratelli Canonica 1895), 361 (*Pietà e Studio*).

Besides, it is particularly useful in the Confessional. Later on, after the written meditations, comes the writing of sermons on the Gospels, and sermons for instructional purposes.²⁴

Actually, we still have a dozen such compositions written by Don Bosco when he was studying at the *Convitto*. They all stress the themes of meditations and instructions which ordinarily, as a century-old tradition, were delivered to the faithful in parish missions or spiritual retreats.

Fr Joseph Cafasso, besides being a guide in the study of moral theology, also taught Don Bosco spirituality and life. It was Fr Joseph Cafasso who encouraged Don Bosco to follow an educational activity such as priestly ministry among prisoners and Lenten catechism classes with particular concern for the young who had migrated from the countryside into Turin.²⁵ Don Bosco, in later years, would often go to Fr Cafasso, his benefactor and confessor, both for advice and help.²⁶

At the school of Fr Cafasso, Don Bosco strengthened and refined his spirituality: Christian hope; preference given to trusting God rather than to the fear of God; the sense of duty as a coherent Christian lifestyle; the fundamental importance to be given to the practice of the sacraments, an effective pastoral ministry; loyalty towards the Church and the Pope; the apostolic orientation towards abandoned youth; the meditation on the 'last things' and the exercise for a happy death.²⁷

As far as moral direction was concerned, which would have such a great role to play in Don Bosco's educative and pastoral practice, the *Convitto* was the ideal preparation. It was the *Convitto* which passed on to Don Bosco the essential aspects of St Alphonse Liguori's theological and spiritual vision of both of whom Frs. Guala and Cafasso considered to be the ideal authors capable of mediating between the

²⁴ Cf. *Regolamento*, original draft, reported by A. Giraud, *Clero, seminario e società. Aspetti della Restaurazione religiosa a Torino*, (Rome, LAS, 1993), 395.

²⁵ Commitments were offered to all the residents who were licensed for specific pastoral activity: catechesis, preaching, administering the sacrament of penance: cf. L. Nicolis di Robilant, *Vita del Ven. Giuseppe Caffasso, fondatore del Convitto ecclesiastico di Torino*, (Turin, Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, 1912), 2 vols; especially vol 2, 1-16 and 208-230.

²⁶ Lemoyne writes of the frequent visits of Don Bosco to the *Convitto* where a room remained available to him, where he could go to prepare his publications: cf. MB 2, 257-258; L. Nicolis di Robilant, *Vita del Ven. Giuseppe Caffasso*, vol 2, 222-223; the author devotes the entire chapter 7 of volume 2 to the theme of relationships between Don Bosco and Caffasso (208-230).

²⁷ For a more detailed reference to emerging features of Caffasso's spirituality there is a useful summary by F. Accornero, *La dottrina spirituale di San Giuseppe Caffasso*, (Turin, LDC, 1958); especially characteristic are the sanctification of duty (39-61), confidence (107-130) and the exercise for a Happy Death (217-219).

rigidity of a radical Jansenism and a superficial, easy-going reaction to it.²⁸ Don Bosco would later have recourse to St Alphonsus Liguori, when as a founder he would have to come to terms with the basic tenets of religious life: vocation, vows, community life, observance and fidelity.

5. *Congenial saints*

The priests at the Oratory kept the spiritual tradition of St Philip Neri alive, both in Turin and in Piedmont. He was widely known through a biography written during the 17th century by one of his confreres, Pier Giacomo Bacci (1575 circa-1856): *The life of St Philip Neri, the apostle of Rome and the founder of the Congregation of the Oratory*²⁹ and by a collection of *Thoughts for Youth*.

In the seminary in Chieri, the feast of St Philip Neri was one of three great feasts of the year: The Immaculate Conception, which the *Rules* considered to be the greatest of all solemnities of the seminary,³⁰ the feast days of St Francis de Sales and St Aloysius Gonzaga. The seminary chapel was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception; two chapels in the public church nearby were dedicated to St Francis de Sales and to St Philip Neri. May 26, the feast of St Philip, was celebrated solemnly with a Mass, sermon and, in the evening, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.³¹

Don Bosco, the student-seminarian, became familiar with the Founder of the Oratory and his special pastoral ministry involving cheerful piety, serene chastity and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, all to be shared with young people. Don Bosco made it so clearly evident in a well-known sermon, delivered at Alba on May 26, 1868³² and in the pages on the Preventive System in 1877. In a pamphlet written in 1858, *A Vade Mecum for Christians*, Don Bosco included a short series of *words of advice for youth written by St Philip Neri*.³³ In his *Church History*, Don Bosco clearly indicated many similarities between his own preventive style and the one used by another Piedmontese, a member of the Oratory of St Philip, Blessed Sebastian

²⁸ Cf. P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 1 85-95; E. Valentini, *Don Bosco e S. Alfonso*, (Pagani (Salerno): Casa Editrice Sant'Alfonso, 1972), 83. 85 pages.

²⁹ Rome 1622, with other Roman editions from 1745 and 1837.

³⁰ A. Giraud, *Clero, seminario e società*, 264.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 444-445.

³² The manuscript signed by Don Bosco is preserved and a copy by Don Berto with author's corrections. The text is reproduced with variations in MB IX 214-221. Di Filippo had already drawn up a short profile in *Storia ecclesiastica* of 1845 and 1848 (315-316, OE I 315-316) (added to in the third edition 1870 highlighting the coincidences between the two systems of education).

³³ *Porta teco cristiano ovvero Avvisi importanti intorno ai doveri del cristiano acciocché ciascuno possa conseguire la propria salvezza nello stato in cui si trova*, (Turin, tip. G. B. Paravia, 1858), 34-36, OE XI 34-36.

Valfrè: "It is hard to express the extent of the zeal that he showed for the salvation of souls.³⁴ In his *Practical guide for Christians* Don Bosco also introduced Bl. Valfrè's *General Advice for a Father of a Family* by Bl. Valfrè, and *Advice Given by Bl. Sebastian Valfrè in Two Letters to Two Mothers*.³⁵

The other saint Don Bosco came to know during his days at the seminary was St Francis de Sales from Savoy. (1567-1622). He came into contact with this saint, once again, through the influence of the Marchioness di Barolo and at the beginning of the Oratory. In Piedmont there was a biography of the Bishop of Savoy which was widely circulated. It had been written by the chaplain to the Monastery of the Visitation in Turin, Father Piergiacinto Gallizia, and it was published in Venice in 1720 and reprinted several times.

St Francis de Sales was better known in the urban areas than in the countryside and mainly through his book *The Introduction to the Devout Life* and *The Treatise on the Love of God*. Don Bosco probably read the first of these books at some time in his life; it is unlikely that he read the latter one. During the 19th century in Piedmont, Don Bosco, and before him Lanteri, the Marchioness di Barolo, Father J. Cafasso, knew the saint from Savoy as a "model of gentleness and pastoral zeal"; more so for Don Bosco, for those who worked for young people and for the poor.³⁶ This, was the most likely impression that St Francis de Sales had made on Don Bosco during his seminary studies.

The following was the schedule for the feast of St Francis de Sales:

In the morning, at a convenient hour, there will be a solemn Mass; a panegyric delivered by the vice rector of the chapel; the day will then go on as usual, with study and tutorial review of lessons.³⁷

During the 1870s, while writing his *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Don Bosco justified the dedication of the first small chapel, the Pinardi shed, to St Francis de Sales, for these reasons:

³⁴ G. Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica*, 331, OE I 489; cf. 330-352. OE I 488-490.

³⁵ G. Bosco, *Porta teco cristiano*, 8-22, 48-55, OE XI 8-22, 48-55; cf- A. Dordoni, *Un maestro di spirito nel Piemonte tra Sei e Settecento. Il padre Sebastiano Valfrè dell'Oratorio di Torino*, (Milan, Vita e Pensiero, 1952), 210 pages.

³⁶ Cf. P. Stella, *Don Bosco e San Francesco di Sales: incontro fortuito o identità spirituale?* In J. Picca and J. Struœ (eds), *San Francesco di Sales e i Salesiani di Don Bosco*, (Rome, LAS, 1986), 139-159.

³⁷ *Costituzioni pel Seminario Metropolitano di Torino (1819)*, part 1, ch. 2, art. 9, cited by A. Giraud, *Clero, seminario e società*, 351.

1. Because the Marchioness di Barolo had the intention of founding a Congregation of priests under that title, and because of that she commissioned a painting of St Francis de Sales.
2. Since our pastoral ministry demands calmness and meekness we had to place ourselves under the protection of this saint, that he might obtain for us from God the grace to be able to imitate him in his extraordinary meekness and in his zeal for souls.
3. The third reason was that of placing ourselves under the protection of this saint, so that from heaven he might help us imitate him in his fight against the errors leveled at our religion, especially Protestantism which tries to infiltrate our towns and especially the city of Turin.³⁸

During the same period Don Bosco was able to acquire a particular knowledge of St Vincent de Paul (1581-1660). The Vincentians and the Sisters of Charity were well known in Piedmont. The former were known especially because of the Parish Missions they preached, for their retreats and for the formation of the clergy, The latter were known for the care they had for the poor, for the sick and for the soldiers located in military hospitals.

The House of Divine Providence had been founded by Father John Baptist Cottolengo, under the protection of St Vincent de Paul and was inspired by St Paul's words: *Caritas Christi urgent nos* (The Love of God urges us on.) His message, according to a scholar who had studied his life, could be summed up in this formula: *The spirit and mystery of charity*.³⁹ Don Bosco made his retreat, prior to his priestly ordination, in the house of the Priests of the Mission in Turin, from March 26 to July 4, 1841.⁴⁰ Here is what Don Bosco wrote about St Vincent de Paul in his *Church History*:

Animated by a true spirit of Charity there was no calamity of any kind that he did not attend to. Everyone felt the effects of St Vincent's fatherly Charity.⁴¹

The proof for the existence of the perfect harmony between Don Bosco and the saint of the effective and affective love, is given in the book, *The Christian Guided toward Virtue and Civility According to the Spirit of St Vincent de Paul*.

³⁸ MO (1991), 132-133.

³⁹ A. Dodin, *St Vincent et la charité*, (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1960), 72-75, 127-133.

⁴⁰ Don Bosco records this in the *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6*, reporting the resolutions taken, amongst which "may the charity of kindness of St Francis de Sales guide me in everything". (F. Motto, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 pel sac. Gio. Bosco a' suoi figli salesiani*, RSS 4 (1958): 88-89).

⁴¹ G. Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica*, 328, OE I 486.

This book was prepared by Don Bosco himself and edited by the French Benedictine Joseph Ansart (1723-1790).⁴²

6. *The oratory experience*

The basis of Don Bosco's entire formation as a priest was pastoral priestly ministry and purpose. This purpose reflected the spirit which animated the reform of seminary studies undertaken by Archbishop Colombano Chiaverotti.

The seminary studies were directed toward the formation of the priest, who would be spiritually and culturally well equipped to act as a teacher and as a guide of his people, as a shepherd, as a *Victim of Charity* entirely dedicated to promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls. He would be a priest entirely dedicated to liturgical worship, preaching, teaching catechism, the administration of the sacraments. This priest, so Aldo Girauda writes, seems to be the accepted model of the priest who, during the second half of the 19th century become a priest committed to social ministry.⁴³

At the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* the pastoral qualifications of a priest were to be enriched by other charitable and social dimensions, thanks to his encounter with the poverty of those who lived on the margins of society, a poverty which afflicted especially the young who had come to Turin from the countryside as well as from the mountainside. St Joseph Cafasso in particular had the intention of forming newly ordained priests as men who would seek the salvation of the poor as their ultimate responsibility in life.⁴⁴ The priest, as shepherd and catechist, was expected to be a person intent on doing good: this is how Cafasso, in his meditations and instructions given to the clergy, had consistently described the priest.⁴⁵

For Don Bosco this came as second nature. His involvement with the spiritual and material needs of the young, especially those separated from their families, of young people who seemed lost in a city they did not know,⁴⁶ was evidently a priority. He did have someone who was, somehow, a trailblazer and a model in this: it was

⁴² (Turin: tip. G. B. Paravi, a 1848), 288 pages OE III 215-502. Cf. D. Malfait—J. Schepens, *Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù ed alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo de' Paoli*, RSS 15 (1996), 317-381; on St Vincent de Paoli, cf. G. Bosco, *Storia ecclesiastica*, 328-329, OE I 486-487.

⁴³ A. Girauda, *Clero, seminario e società*, 288; cf. 277-288 (*L'ideale sacerdotale del Chiaverotti*).

⁴⁴ L. Nicolis di Robilant, *Vita del Ven Giuseppe Caffasso*, vol 2, 1-16, 208-230.

⁴⁵ Cf. G. Caffasso, *Meditazioni per esercizi spirituali al clero*, published under the editorship of Can. Giuseppe Allamano, (Turin: Fratelli Canonica, 1893), 325 pages; *Istruzioni per esercizi spirituali al clero*, published under editorship of Can. Giuseppe Allamano, (Turin, Fratelli Canonica, 1893), 312 pages.

⁴⁶ Cf. L. Nicolis di Robilant, *Vita del Ven. Giuseppe Caffasso*, vol. 2, 1-3, 213-215; P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 1, 95-97.

Fr John Cocchi, a curate at the Assumption Church who, in 1840, had founded the Oratory of the Guardian Angels in a suburban area, poor and somewhat notorious, called Moschino, in the Vanchiglia district of Turin.⁴⁷

From this complex spiritual and cultural formation, as well as from the significant experiences he had with the young and with the clergy, Don Bosco moved on toward his own creation: *The Oratory*. Don Bosco's Oratory took various forms: oratory for boarders and day boys, open and comprehensive institutions in missionary enterprises of all kinds, within Italy and abroad.

By doing this, Don Bosco was playing the role of one who ideally continued the initiatives connected with the Catholic Reformation of the 16th century and, in particular, with Charles Borromeo and the *Sodality of Christian Doctrine*. It is evident, however, that the effective experience of Don Bosco predates any kind of evident literary dependence. *The Regulations* are only an expression of experience and an already formed mind-set. The very same thing can be said for the knowledge of constitutions and rules that preceded him. And, besides, even in cases of an evident dependence, what makes the difference is Don Bosco's understanding, Don Bosco's language and style.⁴⁸

7. *Don Bosco and pedagogues who contributed to "The Primary School Teacher"*

"The primary school teacher" was a magazine with a group of educators and

⁴⁷ On G. Cocchi, there is a useful biography by E. Refro, *Don Cocchi e I suoi artigianelli*, (Turin: tip. S. Giuseppe dei Artiginaelli, 1896); *Vita del T. Leonardo Murialdo*, (Turin, tip. S. Giuseppe degli Artiginaelli, 1905), 4, 340 pages; A. Castellani, *Il beato Leonardo Murialdo, vol 1 Tappe della formazione. Prime attività apostoliche (1828-1966)*, (Rome: Tip S. Pio X 1966), 156-157).

⁴⁸ The basic documents inspiring all the regulations are clearly the *Constituzioni et Regole della Compagnia et Scuole della Dottrina Christiana fatte dal Cardinale di Santo Prassede, Arcivescovo, in esecuzione del Concilio secondo provinciale, per uso della Provincia di Milano*, in *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolensis ab eius initiis usque ad nostram aetatem opera et studio Presb. Achillis Ratti, vol tertium*, Mediolani 1892, col. 149-270. Later Don Bosco used (cutting and rewriting), the *Regole dell'Oratorio eretto in Milano il giorno 19 maggio 1842 in contrada di S. Cristiana n. 2135*; title of the cover, altered to the frontispiece in this other work: *Regolamento Organico, Disciplinare e Practico dell'Oratorio Festivo di S. Luigi G. eretto in P. Comasina, Contrada S. Cristina 2135D; Regole per I Figliuoli dell'oratorio sotto il Patrocinio della Sacra Famiglia* (Milan, 1766). In the Salesian Central Archives there is also a manuscript of the *Statuti antichi della veneranda confraternita del SS. Nome di Gesù eretta nella chiesa parrocchiale dei SS. Porcesso e Martiniano nella città di Torino* (Turin, 1664), which as regards religious practices for the young oratorians and recreation find notable echo in the *Regolamento per gli esterni* by Don Bosco.

pedagogues as editors. Later the title was changed to *The Educator*. It was aimed primarily at helping teachers involved in primary and secondary schools.⁴⁹

Don Bosco was surprisingly in sympathy with this group of teachers, psychologically, mentally and practically. What all of them had in common was a passionate interest in the education of the masses in all its forms: from basic instruction given in evening schools and technical schools, to more sophisticated works associated with popular publications (Readings, Libraries etc.) in an atmosphere of solidarity, affectionate and family-like participation.⁵⁰

A certain connection at a literary level between Don Bosco and "The Educator" from which Don Bosco draws some intuition or which support some of his intuitions, can be easily documented. The first important books written by Don Bosco, are: *Church History* (1845), *Bible History* (1847). "The Educator" reviews these works quite positively. The first book was reviewed by a Fr Ramello, and defined as "a new and very useful book" written by "a learned and good priest" who was convinced of the need to have, as a great educative principle, the enlightening of the mind in order to make good the heart.⁵¹ M.G. a priest (Michael Garelli of Mondovi?) offers a more in-depth review of the second book in an article entitled: "School Teacher's Letter on Bible History Written for Schools by Don Bosco". He speaks of:

the experiential origin of the book, its moral objectives, the conversational but clear Italian employed and the spirit which gently moves and leans towards what is good.⁵²

An echo of the review of the first book is clearly heard in Don Bosco's preface to the *Bible History* book. Don Bosco quotes almost verbatim the positive expressions used by the reviewer:

In every page I had clearly in mind this principle: to enlighten the mind to render the heart good.⁵³

On the same page, Don Bosco draws from the first number of *The Primary School Teacher* the idea of "popularising knowledge"⁵⁴ and from a contribution by

⁴⁹ *L'Educatore Primario. Giornale d'educazione ed istruzione elementare* (1845-1846); *L'Educatore. Giornale d'educazione ed istruzione* (1847-1848), published in Turin by Paravia and edited by Fr Agostino Fecia.

⁵⁰ Cf. P. Braido, *Stili di educazione popolare cristiana alle soglie del 1848*, in *Pedagogia fra tradizione e innovazione*, (Milan, Vita e Pensiero, 1979), 383-404.

⁵¹ *L'Educatore Primario*, n. 34, Dec. 10, 1845, 576.

⁵² *L'Educatore*, n. 17, July 1, 1848, 542-543.

⁵³ G. Bosco, *Storia sacra per uso delle scuole utile ad ogni stato di persone*, (Turin: tipografi-editori, 1847), 7, OE III 7.

⁵⁴ A. Fecia, "Introduzione", *L'Educatore Primario*, n. 1, Jan. 10, 1845, 1-2

Vincent Garelli Aporti's idea of the usefulness of images in teaching Bible History.⁵⁵ It is hard to define more exactly the connection Don Bosco might have had, in terms of ideals, methods and organization.⁵⁶

Even though Don Bosco had cordial and friendly relationships with some contemporary theorists in pedagogy like Antonio Rosmini, Gian Antonio Rayneri, Giuseppe Allievo (the last two held the chair of science at the University of Turin during the years 1847-1867 and 1868-1911 respectively), he never had or at least it cannot be proved that he had, an obvious involvement in pedagogical science of the official and academic kind.⁵⁷

8. *Books about the spiritual guidance of youth*

While studying the sources of the successful religious handbook Don Bosco wrote, *The Companion of Youth*, 1847, Pietro Stella discovered a distinctive style of writing for the Christian education of young people. This literature carries the distinctive marks of what would become Don Bosco's formation program, practical, accompanied by rules and proposed by him both verbally and in writing. There is no doubt that the book was inspired and enriched by this literature and that it had no small impact on the Christian formation of not a few generations.⁵⁸

An outstanding figure in the field of spiritual guidance for youth is Charles Gobinet (1613-1690): a priest from Paris; he was the author of a popular book *l'instruction de la jeunesse en la pieté chretienne, tirée de le écriture sainte et de Ss. Péres, Divisée en cinq parties*. (*The instruction of youth in Christian piety, drawn from Sacred Scripture and from the Fathers of the Church divided into*

⁵⁵ "L'Educatore Primario", n. 24, Aug. 30, 1845, 404-407 (*Dell'insegamento della storia sacra col mezzo di tavole*). Don Bosco cites it with indication V. Varelli; in the second edition (Turin: Speirani e Tortone, 1853), the first generic indication is substituted by the following citation: "V. F. Aporti Educato. Prim. Vol I 406"; in the article of Garelli some illustrations are included on the theme from a text by F. Aporti beginning with the words used by Don Bosco: "Sacred History is taught to children with the help of pictures representing the facts which refer to them" 406.

⁵⁶ As an exception, perhaps, a short essay unpublished until 1929, with the title, "Avvertenza intorno all'uso da farsi nelle scuole delle storie sacre tradotte da lingua straniera", which shows elements similar to one written by Fr Cristoforo Bonavino which appeared in *L'Educatore*, March 1847, 140-148, with the title "Esame critico su parecchi compendi di Storia Sacra".

⁵⁷ Fr Gian Anotnio Rayneri and layman Giuseppe Allievo, notable exponents of Christian spiritual pedagogy, exercise an obvious direct influence on two well-known Salesians, Fr Francesco Cerruti and Fr Giulio Barberis. The unpublished *Appunti di Pedagogia Sacra* by Barberis reveals huge dependence on their writings. Cf. J. M. Prellezzo, "G. A. Rayneri negli scritti pedagogici salesiani", in «*Orientamenti Pedagogici*» 40 (1993): 1039-1063

⁵⁸ P. Stella, *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane provveduto"*, 22.

five parts).⁵⁹ Many others who offer similar educational schemes, usually spiritual in content and all exclusively directed to the youth of a certain social and cultural level, follow Gobinet.

The following are worth mentioning: Francesco Avondo's *Theotimus, namely, family-like instruction on the Christian duties of young people and especially young students. A booklet suited to all classes of people*.⁶⁰ Cardinal De La Luzerne's *A Booklet on the duties of the young*;⁶¹ Claudio Arvisenet's *An Address to Youth*;⁶² *A bouquet of flowers for boys and girls, namely a Christian antidote in defence of innocence*.⁶³

The basic themes are found more explicitly expressed in the model described by Charles Gobinet in *The Instruction of Youth*.⁶⁴ The first volume describes, in five parts, the fundamental aspects of youth, a help towards their Christian salvation and the journey leading to the attainment of virtue, that is holiness:

- 1) *On the reasons and motives which justify a man's duty to pursue virtue from his early years.*
- 2) *On the means needed to acquire virtue during youth.*
- 3) *On the obstacles which turn the young away from virtue.*
- 4) *On the virtues needed by the young.*
- 5) *On choosing one vocation in life.*⁶⁵

⁵⁹ *Istruzione della Gioventù nella pietà cristiana*, (Turin, Association Librai Maspero e Serra, 1831), "Scelta biblioteca economica d'opere di religione", vol. 23. There were some Italian editions amongst which Venics, 1708, 1765, 1831, and at Lodi 1815.

⁶⁰ Turin, in the press of Giacomo Giuseppe Avondo, 1768, 440 pages. Fr Francesco Avondo was a son of the printer's; Doctor in theology, inclined to Jansenism, he died in 1776.

⁶¹ Genoa, tip. Como 1842, 71 pages.

⁶² Milan, tip e libr. Pirotta e Comp., 1842, 240 pages. Fr Verrà then published also in *Letture Cattoliche*, year 7, number 7, September 1859, under the title "La Guida della Gioventù nelle vie della salute", (Turin: Paravia, 1858).

⁶³ Turin, from the Paravia Press 1836, 252 pages. The second edition came out the same year, printed by Giacinto Marietti, "riveduta e migliorata aggiuntovi un breve esercizio per la confessione, comunione e messa. Del sac. S.B.A.", 304 pages, an extract from *Antiveleño*, the *Memoriale cristiano ossia indirizzo pratico di vita cristiana con un brevissimo esercizio per la S. Confessione, Comunione e Messa tratto dal Mazzolin di fiori ai fanciulli ed alle fanciulle*, (Turin, Giacinto Marietti Tipografo Librajo), 36 pages.

⁶⁴ Quoted from the Venice edition of 1708 in two works: *Istruzione della gioventù nella Pietà Cristiana, cavata dalla Sacra Scrittura, e da' Santi Padri. Opera del signor Carlo Gobinet Teologo della Sorbona*, and *Primicerio del Collegio Plessis-Sorbona*, (Venice, Paolo Baglioni, 1708).

⁶⁵ C. Gobinet, *Istruzione*, 1, 1-563.

The crowning point is provided by a *Treatise on meditation, namely, on mental prayer* regarded as possible and necessary for the young also.⁶⁶ The second volume, a bit less bulky, is entirely dedicated to the two sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist: *Instruction on Penance and on the Means Needed to Return to God Through Real Conversion*⁶⁷ and *Instruction on Holy Communion*.⁶⁸ There is an initial exhortation to true conversion and to correcting of one's life;⁶⁹ it is followed by a treatise on the fundamental elements of the Sacrament of Penance, namely, sorrow, confession, and firm purpose of amendment. The concluding part of this section is a detailed introduction to an examination of one's sins, condensed into three sections: the Commandments, the theological virtues together with the virtue of religion, examined in reference to the first commandment, and the seven deadly sins.⁷⁰

The volume's second section is dedicated to Holy Communion and divided into two parts: *On the doctrine, namely, on truths we ought to know about the Sacrament of the Holy Communion*⁷¹ and *On the practice of going to Communion and on what is needed for a good Communion*. This section constitutes a real plan designed for a Christian life, harmoniously modelled on the basic virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity.⁷²

The affinity which exists with not only *The Companion of Youth* but also with the entire framework of Don Bosco's Christian educational system shows how much he owed to all of the above-mentioned authors or at least how much connection there is between praxis and pedagogical reflection and solid tradition, seriously committed to offering youth a solid, specific Christian spirituality.⁷³

9. A teacher constantly 'open to learning'

There is no doubt that Don Bosco, as a founder, had to learn everything involved in the juridical and spiritual structure of the religious institutions that he founded. He also had to learn things about the many publications, narrative, catechetical and apologetic, he was gradually issuing. The same went for his educational experience,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 564-610.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2, 3-27-

⁶⁸ Ibid., 28-371.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 372-491.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 312-371-

⁷¹ C. Gobinet, *Istruzione*, 2, 374-419.

⁷² Ibid., 420-491.

⁷³ In the study by P. Stella, *Valori spirituali nel "Giovane provveduto"*, the first two chapters are dedicated to making the convergences and dependencies more precise: *Letteratura ascetica per la gioventù in Piemonte* (21-45) and *Le fonti del "Giovane provveduto"* (46-79).

especially when he had to express it in writing. We have already mentioned in previous chapters, and earlier in this chapter, the names of educators and pedagogues Don Bosco might have known, to some degree.

A detailed analysis of his more significant pedagogical writings may eventually discover some probable sources Don Bosco may have relied on and drawn from. Don Bosco addressed a letter to Father Rua, at the end of October 1863, one which later became known as the *Confidential Reminders for Rectors*. In this letter we find the classical formula: *make yourself loved before you make yourself feared*, a formula which later was slightly modified. Instead of the word *before*, the words *if you want*, and, *rather than*. Don Bosco may have taken this formula from the monastic Rule of St Augustine or of St Benedict, but most probably from reading books which dealt with Greek and Roman history. The document as a whole may have drawn some kind of inspiration from a booklet written by the Jesuit father Binet, *Quel est le meilleur gouvernement: le rigoureux ou le doux? (What is the best way to rule: strictly or with gentleness?)*. Don Bosco might have had the chance to read this booklet in its Italian edition provided by Jesuit Father Anthony Bresciani (1798-1862), who was director of the boarding school of Mount Carmel and who later on became provincial, near the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*. The text which, had as title *The art of leadership*, was preceded by a note written by the translator, in which he displayed rather conservative ideas aimed at forewarning people against modern permissive and populist tendencies, and possibly or actually affecting family, society and even the world of politics.⁷⁴

There appeared to be numerous suggestions and confirming proofs related to this overall pedagogical viewpoint which surfaced in the basic but significant pages of Don Bosco's *The Preventive System in the Education of Youth*.⁷⁵ Those pages contained many ideas which were the result of Don Bosco's own experience, which in turn reflected reasons familiar to the Catholic pedagogical tradition: above all the

⁷⁴ *Dell'arte di governare. Qual è il governo migliore, il severo, o il dolce?*. Work by Fr Stefano Binet of the Company of Jesus translated into Italian by Fr Antonio Bresciani of the same Company, (Turin: per Giacinto Marietti, 1843), 168 pages. Fr Bresciani's preliminary considerations are found in 5-10.

⁷⁵ These brief pages were published first in a bilingual edition, Italian and French, in a work titled *Inaugurazione del Patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare. Scopo del medesimo esposto dal Sacerdote Giovanni Bosco con appendice sul sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, (Turin, tip. E libr salesiana, 1877), 68 pages, OE XXVIII 380-446; two separate editions followed immediately, the whole work on the *Inaugurazione*: from November of the same year the pages on the Preventive System found a place of honour in the work *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*, (Turin: tip. Salesiana, 1877), OE XXIX 99-109. Cf. Giovanni (s.) Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù. Introduzione e testi critici*, ed. P. Braido, RSS 4 (1985): 171-321.

evangelical method of love, gentleness, reasonableness, understanding, previously championed by Fenelon and Rollin and solidly boosted by Don Bosco's encounter with the Brothers of the Christian Schools and perfectly in tune with the personalities and writings of the 19th century which were accessible to him.⁷⁶

The most immediate and important source was probably a booklet by the Superior General of the Barnabites, Fr Alexander Teppa: *Advice for Catholic educators of youth*, a book we have already referred to.

Don Bosco may have become aware of the two words *preventive* and *repressive* from his contacts with the judiciary, from people involved in prisons, from people involved in juridical and penal matters, and from correctional institutions. We have mentioned earlier, in particular the correctional institution called *La Generala*. A similar idea may have also come from knowing, at least in summary, the more demanding pedagogical work written by Bishop Felix Dupanloup *On Education*, again already mentioned.

10. *The impact of Turin's youth*

The reference to Don Bosco's various pedagogical documents, and also the reference to their similarity to other books, lead us to an in-depth reflection on those who had an immediate impact on the formation of the mentality and style of Don Bosco the educator.

Don Bosco might have had some sort of dependence on other people both in culture and literature. But beyond all this, those who had most impact on Don Bosco's formation were the young and his fellow workers coming, as they did, from the most diverse backgrounds. Don Bosco's formation from his actual experience must be seen as the starting point. Of particular importance was his encounter with the youth of Turin during the years he spent at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*, in the prisons, on the streets and in catechism classes. That was an entirely new experience. Most certainly what prepared Don Bosco for such an experience was not the rural world in which he had lived, and certainly not the Latin school of Chieri and not, at least from a practical point of view, the theological knowledge acquired at the seminary. His real school was the school of personal experience, and that school changed as the times and situations changed. Don Bosco was obliged to constantly restructure his perception of reality as his experience changed. On the other hand, with a realistically open-minded temperament and an ability to read situations, Don Bosco always showed particular sensitivity to those he met and with whom he lived. We should not be surprised if his

⁷⁶ Cf. P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol 2, ch. 14, *Elementi religiosi nel sistema educativo di Don Bosco*, especially 450-459 (*Il sistema preventivo nel contesto culturale di Don Bosco e del suo ambiente*).

rigorous fidelity to ideals and his determination to achieve great plans may have not prevented him from understanding and responding to requests, to the needs, to the characters of those he cared for. He was particularly sensitive to the changing needs of young people, something which varied considerably throughout his long life of educational activity from 1841-1888, even though he lived in different historical, social and cultural conditions. There are many examples to prove this. Above all we see it in Don Bosco's daily and intensively personalised contact with his boys: in the playground, in his office, in the Good Night talks, in the confessional, in his letters, in his various initiatives as a writer, as an organiser and as a director or administrator.

This contact is expressly documented in the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales* which in its very pages and general inspiration could be considered as the reflective expression of an authentic pedagogy, from his first rural Oratorian experience to his experience of working in the city of Turin.

Further proof is found in the various biographies written by Don Bosco, biographies that show us quite clearly how he related to the young men in his care, being with them, talking to them according to their ability to understand. In these biographies we see the way he stressed the significant qualities of his educational method, duty, study, cheerfulness, and the sacraments. *The Power of a Good Education* (1855); *The Life of Dominic Savio* (1859); *A Biographical Sketch of Michael Magone* (1861); *The Little Shepherd from the Alps* (1864). All of these biographies are like so many expressions of educational experience; they are stories which express a systematic pedagogy.

Finally, we should not forget the documents which Don Bosco produced throughout his life and which give voice to his understanding of education in the minute detail of everyday experience: namely his many letters to authorities and benefactors; letters to friends and collaborators; and especially letters to educators and groups of young people. These letters are the expression of the way he shared his continual educative presence.

Many more elements will be mentioned in the following chapters. Don Bosco's dream visions themselves could offer an indication of the growing awareness he had for the needs of young people. More than esoteric nightly fantasies, those dreams help us appreciate a deeper understanding of Don Bosco's Preventive System. The dreams should be considered as the outward expressions of feelings of anxiety, visions which express his concern: the present and eternal happiness of the young, the dangers which threaten their happiness, the initiatives he needed to discover in order to further that happiness. In essence, the dreams reveal the deep meaning of Don Bosco's life and the meaning of his mission as an educator.

Chapter 8

THE WORKS, THE HEART, THE STYLE

We cannot separate the elements of experience summed up in the Preventive System from Don Bosco's personality or from the typical shape of the institutions where he and his co-helpers worked.

It follows naturally then that the fundamental features of the preventive experience to be analysed in the following chapters can be understood only if they are strictly connected with Don Bosco's life, temperament and personality traits. This is what the present chapter aims to recall at least in summary fashion.¹

1. *The works*

In *Memoirs of the Oratory* Don Bosco refers to the initial steps of his activity on behalf of the young as going back to December 8, 1841, and to his chance encounter with a 17 year old young man called Bartholomew Garelli.² In the *Historical Outline* and *Historical Outlines* reference is made to Don Bosco's activity, but without singling out anyone in particular.³ At any rate, even though the initial aim seems to have been almost exclusively to teach catechism, Don Bosco's attention reaches broader horizons as it relates to the primary needs of the young.

In a letter to the Marquis Michael Benso di Cavour, the city's vice governor, and dated March 13, 1846, Don Bosco writes: "The aim of these catechism classes is that of gathering those youngsters on festive days who, left to themselves, never go to any church for catechetical instruction. This is done by using kind words, promises, gifts and similar devices. The teaching is precisely concentrated on: 1) love for work;

¹ Cf. A. Caviglia, *Don Bosco, Profilo Storico*, 2nd edition, (Turin: SEO, 1934), 215 pages; E. Ceria, *San Giovanni Bosco nella vita e nelle opere*, (Turin, SEI, 1938), 442 pages; P. Broccardo, *Uomo e santo. Don Bosco ricordo vivo*, (Rome: LAS, 1990), 235 pages; 1st edition, *Don Bosco profondamente uomo – profondamente santo*, (Rome, LAS 1984), 149 pages.

² MO (1991), 121-122. In the *Cronache dell'oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, N 1, 1860, written by Domenico Ruffino, it speaks of "a young man around 17 or 18", but is precise about neither the year or the name (28).

³ Cf. P. Braido, *Don Bosco per la gioventù povera e abbandonata in due inediti del 1854 e del 1862*, in P. Braido, (ed.), *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, 38-39 and 60-62.

2) frequent reception of the holy sacraments; 3) respect for authority; 4) avoiding bad companions".⁴

A little later, the desire to give shelter to the most needy youngsters led Don Bosco to create a modest home, "the annex, next to the Oratory", which increased the demands and urgent need for help.⁵ For this reason, Don Bosco wrote about the matter to Count Clemente Solaro Della Margherita, the conservative Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia, from 1835 to 1847:

Without even looking at other expenses, the Baker's bill alone for the past three months is more than 1600 francs (approx. 5 million lire or \$2,500), and I do not know yet where I can find a cent. At any rate, they have to eat. And if I do not provide a piece of bread for these youngsters, who are 'at risk' and also 'dangerous' I am seriously exposing them to harm in soul and body. This is not a question of giving a hand-out to a particular individual but of offering a piece of bread to young men who are driven by their hunger to seriously risk the loss of morality and religion.⁶

This is the reason behind all of Don Bosco's undertakings and behind the popular aspect they took on: works for the masses, undertakings which aimed at reaching out and embracing the greatest number of individuals and responding to all their needs.

Chronologically, the first undertaking Don Bosco worked on was the Oratory, the Sunday location for "young people "abandoned" to their own devices: far away from their families or neglected by them; resident or immigrant workers without any fixed point of reference; young people just out of a correctional institution, apprentices looking for work; students who, because of the abrogation law issued by Charles Felix's *Regolamenti* saw the so-called 'congregations' (Religious gatherings)⁷ as falling out of favour. In connection with the Oratory we should also remember the various kinds of undertakings Don Bosco initiated: such as schools accessible to the general public, which gradually took on a consistency of their own within the complex area of Don Bosco's undertakings: schools for music and singing, schools for basic literacy, schools for general culture, evening and Sunday schools, which were only a prelude to the Day schools, hostels etc.

Don Bosco wrote later on in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* of singing and music: "Ever since then I came to realise that without the circulation of the song books,

⁴ Em. I 67.

⁵ Writing to the administrators of the "Opera della Mendacità istruita" in 1850, he writes "There was a home for taking in 20 or 30 individuals and this for extreme cases of need we often found someone in" (letter of Feb. 20, 1850, Em I 96).

⁶ Letter of Jan. 5, 1854, Em I 212.

⁷ Cf. Em I 96-97, 139-141, 172-173, 270-272; MO (1991) 122-123, 128, 132, 142-143, 148-149.

books to relax with, the weekend gatherings would have been like a body without the spirit.⁸ During the winter of 1846-7, our schools gained excellent results: we had an average 300 students every evening. What gave life to our classes, besides science, was the plain-chant and our vocal music which were fostered among us at all times”⁹

When, after 1848, Don Bosco saw that the “dangers to which the youngsters were exposed, as far as morality and religion were concerned, demanded greater efforts to defend them”, he thought it best “to add classes vocal music classes to those for piano and organ, with the instruments themselves, to the day and evening classes: a kind of nascent Philharmonic Society with Don Bosco himself as the *Maestro*, but always with the help of competent people.¹⁰ He responded to similar urgent needs several decades later, in 1871-1872 to be exact, when he organised the first elementary day schools at Valdocco. “These schools were primarily for boys”, as he explained to the mayor of Turin when he appealed to him for financial aid, “who were roaming the streets all day long due to their parents’ neglect or because they were poorly dressed, or were just living in laziness. They were a harm to themselves and a disturbance to the authorities in charge of public security”.¹¹

The Associations and sodalities of various types, set up according to age and according to the different types of youngsters and various objectives, hold a relevant place in Don Bosco’s activity for youth. His natural genius created *La Società dell’allegria* (The Happy Company). Don Bosco’s religious tradition created the Sodality. The need to oppose modern forms of *coming together* inspired Don Bosco to create the *Mutual Aid Society*. He profited from similar tendencies to group together with what he thought would respond to the needs of the times, by encouraging the *Conferences of St Vincent de Paul*, among the young.¹²

But the institution which is the other major work amongst Don Bosco’s best efforts along with the Oratory, is the *home*, which later widened its horizons to becoming a boarding school for youngsters taking on advanced studies and professional formation.¹³ The home would in time become a self-sufficient institution with its own

⁸ MO (1991), 123.

⁹ MO (1991), 176.

¹⁰ MO (1991), 190-191.

¹¹ Cf the letter to the mayor of Turin, Aug. 26, 1872, E II 224-225.

¹² Cf. F. Motto, *Le conferenze “annesse” di S. Vincenzo de’ Paoli negli Oratori di Don Bosco. Ruolo storico di un’esperienza educativa*, in *L’impegno dell’educare*, ed. J. M. Prelezzo, (Rome, LAS, 1991) 467-492).

¹³ The process had begun in Valdocco: during the five year period 1855-1859 a boarding school was set up at Valdocco for high school students, while the classic workshops (shoemaking, tailoring, carpentry, book-binding, mechanics and printing) came into being during the decade 1853-1862.

workshops, schools; and a comprehensive centre providing material aid, religious and moral assistance, instruction, recreation, in short, a true centre for complete formation of the young. In certain areas the home would become the most widely spread work of the Congregation founded by Don Bosco. The relationship between home and Oratory would be reversed in a certain sense: initially, the home was an annex to the Oratory; later the Oratory was to be an institution joined to the home.¹⁴ Don Bosco identified the origins of the home in these words:

While the means to provide the youngsters with religious and literary instruction were easily organised, another much greater need appeared, needing an urgent response. Many youngsters from the city of Turin and from outside the city had the best of intentions of leading a good moral life and a life of work. But when they were asked to begin, they usually said that they had neither bread nor clothes nor place to find shelter, at least for a time... When I came to realise that any work on behalf of these youngsters would be useless if they had not been provided with shelter, then I took pains to quickly rent more and more rooms at high prices.¹⁵

Don Bosco gave a reason for the *colleges or boarding schools* which would be developed during the 1860s, connected with Valdocco:

The burning desire of many youngsters to have regular learning forced me to make some exceptions as far as the acceptance procedures into the home were concerned. We also accepted young men who were not really abandoned or utterly poor but willing to study, provided they showed good moral conduct and an aptitude for studies that would leave no doubt for well-founded hope of an honourable and Christian success in pursuing a scientific career.¹⁶

Then beginning from the 1860s on, various colleges and boarding Institutions were accepted by Don Bosco following regular agreements with municipalities eager to offer secondary studies to young men, from local good families. These institutions

¹⁴ Concerning the phenomenon of "collegialisation" in Don Bosco and amongst the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, cf. P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 1 121-127.

¹⁵ MO (1991), 180 and 182. "The experience", he wrote in 1877, in reference to the "Home for poor youngsters" in Buenos Aires, "has persuaded us that this is the only way to support civil society: take care of poor children...those who would otherwise crowd the prisons, would always be the scourge of society, so they become good Christians, honest citizens, the glory of the place they live in, the pride of the family they come from, earning their bread with sweat and honest work". (letter of Sept. 30 to Dr. Carranza, president of the local Conference of St Vincent de Paul, E III 221.

¹⁶ *Cenni Storici*, in P. Braido, ed., *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, 76-77.

began in the city of Turin and then rapidly spread throughout Italy and beyond, in Europe and overseas, in an unending, rapid and uninterrupted chain of events: Mirabello Monferrato, Lanzo Torinese, Borgo San Martino, Cherasco, Alassio, Varazze, Marassi, Sampierdarena, Turin-Valsalice;¹⁷ then from 1875, Bordighera-Vallecrosia, Nice, Almagro, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Marseille, Magliano Sabina, Albano Laziale, Ariccia, Lucca, San Benigno Canavese, Este, La Spezia, Cremona, Florence, Utrera in Spain, Paris, Rome, etc.

One of the initiatives perhaps less known and yet among Don Bosco's most cherished and one which was to guarantee not only the continuity of his work but also the possibility of extending his Christian and educational efforts, was the promotion and formation of people ready to consecrate their lives to Christian and educational activity in the priesthood and religious life. This was Don Bosco's interest in ecclesiastical and religious vocations.

The occasion was provided by the particular circumstances of the seminary in Turin,¹⁸ but Don Bosco's concern for vocations remained constant and even increased with the expansion of his work and wider perspectives on the needs of the young. To achieve his goal, Don Bosco founded colleges organised along the lines of minor seminaries, and at times he accepted the administration of diocesan seminaries when some bishops entrusted them to him.

For this undertaking, Don Bosco promoted charitable endowments and support; he made sacrifices to obtain hard-won exemptions from military service and from other economic burdens. As a way of supporting this initiative, he founded the Work of Mary Help of Christians for vocations to the ecclesiastical state, mostly for young-adults. This was an offshoot of the generous missionary drive which animated his religious society in 1875.¹⁹

Another wide-open field particularly suited to Don Bosco's gifted approach and understanding was publishing, editorial work and book shops. Don Bosco's written output was prodigious, especially in the catechetical, religious, devotional, apologetic and hagiographical fields. But he soon widened the possibilities of spreading his

¹⁷ Cf. P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*, (Rome: LAS, 1980), 123-157, ch- 6 *Collegi e ospizi in Piemonte e in Liguria (1860-1870)*.

¹⁸ "This was a memorable year [1849]. Piedmont's war against Austria which began the previous year, had shaken up all of Italy. Public schools were shut down as were the seminaries, especially the seminary of Chieri and Turin; they were actually occupied by the military and as a consequence the clerics of our diocese were left without teachers and without a place to gather" (MO 1991, 194).

¹⁹ Cf. *Opera di Mari Ausiliatrice per le vocazioni allo stato ecclesiastico*. *Messis multa, operarii autem pauci; rogate ergo Dominum messis ut mittat operarios in vineam suam...* (Turin, Oratory Press of S. Francis de Sales, 1875), 8 pages; other editions, (Fossan: tip. Saccone, 1875), 8 pages, OE XXVII 1-8.

publications by creating printing presses, book stores and publishing houses of ever growing proportions.²⁰

Don Bosco never overlooked his concern for the schools, as proven by his publication on *The metrical-decimal system* (1849) nor his concern for the entertainment field, as proven by the production of short stories and even by drama: *The House of fortune* (1865). He also began a newspaper, short-lived, entitled *The friend of youth* (1848-1849).

Along with the above, Don Bosco set up the structures required for periodicals and book series. These were successful in the field of popular culture and with Catholic schools. This is shown by: the *Catholic readings* which began in 1853,²¹ the *Library for Italian Youth*, (1869-1885, 204 small volumes), *Selected readings taken from Latin writers and for the use of schools* (from 1866),²² *The Salesian Bulletin* (from 1877), *A short collection of dramatic readings for educational institutions and families* (from 1885).

This literary activity was joined by a rich production of books and booklets of a controversial nature for “the defence the Catholic faith against the proselytising of reformed churches, and against the anticlerical press”. The idea of defending the catholic faith was at the root of other pastoral and educational initiatives such as the foundation of oratories, homes and churches. The main objective was always the salvation of the young and the ordinary folk: “To wrest the souls of poor youngsters from the jaws of heresy”.²³

In addition to the above, Don Bosco was also a generous and courageous builder of churches and chapels, and centres for pastoral ministry among the people. We are dealing with something which finds its humble roots in the tiny chapel made from the Pinardi Shed in 1846, followed, years later, by the Church of St Francis de Sales and, a few years later still, by the Church of Mary Help of Christians. The larger churches, such as the Church of St John the Evangelist in Turin, and the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome, kept Don Bosco busy for more than 10 years of worries and hardships. Everywhere you go you see that church, oratory, school,

²⁰ Cf. P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 1, 229-249, *Don Bosco scrittore ed editore; Don Bosco nella storia economica*, 327-368, *Imprese editoriali 1844-1870*.

²¹ Cf. P. Braido, “L’educazione religiosa popolare e giovanile nelle Letture Cattoliche di Don Bosco”, in «*Salesianum*» 15 (1953): 648-672; L. Giovanni, *Le “Letture Cattoliche” esempio di “stampa cattolica” nel secolo XIX*, (Naples: Liguori, 1984), 280 pages.

²² Cf. G. Proverbio, *La scuola di don Bosco e l’insegnamento del latino (1850-1900)*, in *Don Bosco nella storia popolare*, ed. F. Traniello, (Turin, SEI, 1987), 143-185.

²³ Cf. first appeal for the Church of San Giovanni Evangelista, Oct. 12, 1870, E. II 121-123; letter to the mayor of Turin, June 3, 1871, E II 162-163.

home are Don Bosco's inseparable institutions, in Turin as in Rome, at Vallecrosia as in Nice, Buenos Aires, Marseille, and La Spezia.²⁴

Reference to Don Bosco's activity with sacred buildings brings us back to the constant and often secret work he carried out, from the first to the last day of his priestly life, namely the work of building morally upright and religiously fervent consciences. He did this for the most varied types and people who were looked down on most. A treatise on Don Bosco *the confessor, spiritual director, guide of souls*, would be equal in size to any reconstruction of his activity as an educator. It would cover his relationship with individuals, his preaching to the masses, his specialised talks given during Retreats. At any rate, this activity penetrates and pervades his activity as an educator, shifting it from the human level to moments and reflections of a clearly Christian character.

Don Bosco also carried out enormous and constant activity, for some 30 years, as the founder of the Society of St Francis de Sales, made up of priests and brothers, and of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary help of Christians, with work similar to that of the Salesians, for girls, and The Pious Union of the Salesian Cooperators. These foundations followed several clear stages: their setting up, the juridical stage, canonical recognition, the formation and animation of their members and finally, their consolidation and expansion.

This work was carried out at the same time and in close interaction with the development, direction, administration of all the other educational and pastoral institutions. It was accompanied by a frenetic search for the necessary charitable support, with consequent letters written in all directions and personal relationships with benefactors, private and public, and finally with ecclesiastics and lay people.

By comparison with these main activities Don Bosco's sporadic negotiations between political and ecclesiastical authorities were marginal but not irrelevant. These occurred in order to work out solutions to some difficult juridical and pastoral problems in Italy.²⁵

And finally, we should not forget his daring action carried out from a distance on behalf of migrants and the Missions. From 1875 onwards, missionary activity gave a wider breath of Catholicity to a work with universal potential but still enclosed within

²⁴ It speaks of the first steps towards building the Church of San Secondo, which he had to abandon; note to the Cardinal Vicar regarding the Church of the Sacred Heart, Rome, April 10, 1880, E III 565.

²⁵ Cf. F. Motto, *Don Bosco mediatore tra cavour ed Antonelli nel 1858*, RSS 5 (1986): 3-20; *La mediazione di don Bosco fra Santa Sede e Governo per la concessione degli "Exequatur" ai vescovi d'Italia (1872-1874)*, RSS 6 (1987): 3-79; *L'azione mediatrice di don Bosco nella questione delle sedi vescovili vacanti in Italia dal 1858 alla morte di Pio IX (1878)*, in P. Braido, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa*, 251-328.

national boundaries. Don Bosco lived this missionary experience with exceptional enthusiasm. It gave him, as he was advancing in years, renewed vigour and a feeling of being young again. But in truth, Don Bosco went back to the same refrain: "The only desire we have is to work in pastoral ministry, especially on behalf of poor and neglected youth. Catechism classes, schools, sermons, festive recreational parks, homes, boarding schools and institutions...all these make up our main harvest..."²⁶

2 *Personality and style*

What deeply motivated Don Bosco's activity was charity: the love of God and neighbour, coherently anchored to a Catholic Faith and a priestly vocation almost native to him. There are some personality traits however, which gave Don Bosco's consecration and charitable action some typical signs and elements, to the point where they became part of the Preventive System he adopted.

Highlighting these traits is unavoidable for anyone who wants to understand and retrieve the main aspects of his experience as an educator, since this experience is inseparably bound up with and almost identical to his personality and lifestyle.

2.1 Tradition and modernity

One trait should probably not be considered the most important one, but it struck anyone looking at Don Bosco. This is his modernity.²⁷ This trait is inseparable from his steadfast attachment to the past and its fundamental values: the moral and religious traditions which he assimilated within family and his Christian community and which formed his spiritual nourishment; habits of honesty, work spirit and sacrifice had been Don Bosco's constant companion. Summing up, then, it was his fidelity to the ideals and lifestyle proposed by Christianity, safeguarded and proclaimed within the Catholic Church, by Popes, bishops and priests, and supported by sincere and practising baptised Catholics.

Modernity and Tradition call for two attitudes which, however distinct and distinguishing they are by comparison with priests and Catholics of his own times, blend together most easily in Don Bosco. In fact, Don Bosco's reliance on the spiritual environment he came from, which at times was strongly conservative, was almost

²⁶ Letter to Fr Pietro Ceccarelli, parish priest of S. Nicolas de los Arroyos (Argentina), Dec. 1874, E II 430.

²⁷ Cf. "Don Bosco e le sfide della modernità". Contribution by M. Guasco, P. Scoopola, F. Traniello. (Turin, Centro Studi "Carlo Trabucco", 1988), 46 pages; P Scoppola, "Don Bosco e la modernità", in M. Midali, ed., *Don Bosco nella storia*, 531-540; in the same work we find interesting pages by P. Stella, "Bilancio delle forme di conoscenza e degli studi su don Bosco", 34-36.

always tuned to a realism which led him to accept new situations and demands with a degree of daring: Don Bosco was traditional without being reactionary, mainly modern without joining ranks with any kind of Catholic liberalism.

To talk about Don Bosco being a forerunner or a trailblazer is neither pertinent nor exact. We have already seen, earlier, and will see later that pretty much all of Don Bosco's works and thinking were the on-going heritage of Catholic tradition. What led Don Bosco to this heritage, as we have already remarked, was his mentality, his formation, his acquaintances, his membership of whatever group, and his preferences. It was the environment of his district, family; school at Chieri, seminary, the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*, St Joseph Cafasso, and the spiritual powers which were prevalent in ecclesiastical circles Don Bosco had as reference; it was the Florentine and the Roman aristocrats; the benefactors with whom he had more friendly relationships and from whom he received outstanding help, benefactors like Archbishops, Cardinals and Popes.

The judgement Don Bosco passed on the events of his days was not, fundamentally, different from the one largely shared by the Catholic world. What makes Don Bosco's judgement different, at times, is his realistic way either of bearing with or confronting or correcting the events he faced, sometimes almost recklessly, but always substantially correctly. Don Bosco's stand vis-a-vis some particular events that occurred in 1848 is typical, in this regard. His theoretical judgement of these events was not favourable, for the most part. For instance, he justifies his refusal to have the Oratory participate in the celebrations for the Constitution. "What am I supposed to do? A refusal would have meant that I was a declared enemy of Italy; an acceptance would have meant that I was accepting principles I considered full of fatal consequences".²⁸

This judgement probably did not refer to fundamental theoretical principles (Democratic spirit, the rejection of Absolutism, etc.) but to the practical consequences he thought were deplorable such as the abuse of authority, libertarianism, reckless permissiveness of passions and the press, and a violent break-away from respectable traditions. At any rate, his judgement was not a positive one. But immediately we notice the presence of a will to act which overcomes the polemics. It becomes a resolve to collaborate effectively in bringing about something better in the proposed Constitution and to bring about the best of traditions more urgently required to build a new political and social order founded on religion and moral values.

²⁸ MO (1991), 198. The emphasis is ours. Further on, talking about a 'patriot' priest invited "to give a moral exhortation to the poor youngsters", he comments: "But on that occasion he was really immoral. Liberty, emancipation, independence echoed throughout his talk" (MO 1991, 201).

Here is what Don Bosco is said to have declared to the Marquis Robert d'Azeglio:

Marquis, I have a steady rule in keeping out of anything to do with politics: Never pro or con ...; I do whatever small amount of good I can on behalf of abandoned youth, and strive with all my strength to have them become good Christians, as far as their religion is concerned, and honest citizens, as far as civil society is concerned... Invite me to participate in anything where a priest can practice charity and you will see me ready to sacrifice my life and means; but I want to be now and forever out of politics.²⁹

Really, Don Bosco's politics are of a religious nature directed to providing spiritual benefit, especially for the young and also for their material well-being tied in with that.³⁰ This is the basic criterion used by Don Bosco to pass a judgement on events and ideas and, as a consequence, to act. "My heartfelt recommendation is that prayers be said that our Lord God may have pity on poor Piedmont, which is facing really disastrous times for our holy Catholic religion".³¹ These are the words Don Bosco wrote to the bishop of Ferrara. To Canon Lawrence Gastaldi he wrote in even broader terms. "These are dreadful times for religion. I think that from St Maximus until our own days things have never been so much on the decline as they are today. The famous legal project was passed in the Chamber of the Electors (Deputies); we hope it will not pass the Senate. The King is very sad, but he is surrounded by people who have already been bribed and cannot be trusted. The priests work and, I believe, do not neglect to say or do what needs to be said and done to oppose imminent disorder. The hand of God will grow heavy on us and allow some disaster to take place; we will be certainly comforted by the fact that we have done what we could".³²

The political judgements Don Bosco passed were always functionally Catholic and decidedly negative, because they referred to the abuse of freedom, the protection of apostates and Protestants, the denial of the rights of the Church, the likelihood that evil would spread. "Most of all, youth are at risk; The Lord wants to test us a lot. It is the first time we see Protestant envoys in our city preaching in public squares! Just imagine what scandal will be given, what amount of evil will be done! Books, leaflets, catechism classes, sermons, and promises of employment, alms, and gifts.... these are

²⁹ MO (1991), 199-2008.

³⁰ Substantially, his 'real politik' boils down to educational, social activity on behalf of poor and abandoned youth, morally in danger and socially dangerous. The 'educationalist' policy he illustrates with particular force in his talks in the last decade and makes clear, especially, to a group of past pupils of the Oratory after the journey to Paris, June 24, 1883, BS 7 (1883) n. 8, August, 127-128.

³¹ Letter of Dec. 19, 1853, Em I 209.

³² Letter of Feb. 23, 1855, Em I 248. In reference to the law of suppression of religious orders.

the means used by Protestants. The priests are working tirelessly and steadily, but we have to say it: *youth are at risk!*"³³

"Things religious and sacred ministers" Pope Pius IX wrote, "have been exposed for some two years now to serious trials in our towns, due to the usual donations made by Protestants, and also due to threats and oppression even which the authorities have noted. Added to this is the non-Catholic instruction provided for youth in the primary and secondary schools".³⁴

Don Bosco would not fail to underscore the problems of the year's 1866-1867 as he hoped for civil and religious peace and reassured the Pope of his solidarity and prayers. Writing to his trusted friend Cavaliere Oreglia, Don Bosco says:

Let us hope that God will send peace as soon as possible among the Christian people and that the subjects will join their sovereign and that we may all look to the salvation of our souls with a more tranquil mind".³⁵ "Meanwhile", Don Bosco reassures the Pope, "we will continue to pray in all our houses, morning and evening that your Holiness' precious days may be safe and that God grant you good health and the grace to withstand the serious storms, perhaps not too distant, that Divine Providence will allow the enemies of what is truly good to raise against the spotless Spouse of Jesus Christ. This is the last test, but the expected triumph will soon come our way."³⁶

Don Bosco most likely shared with several Catholics the hope that exceptional events would take place to defend Rome and the Papacy. This would also explain an ironic reference to the reassurance felt by those on the opposite side - the imminent realisation that Italy would occupy and make Rome its Capital: "May you be at peace! Before the realisation of Italian Unity (This will soon happen!) the book shall be finished."³⁷ Don Bosco occasionally employed the weapon of irony with friends who shared the same ideas, to make fun of "Democracy" namely of the "Fanatic Democrats", anti-clericals "a-la-Garibaldi".³⁸

Contrasting prophecies and judgements followed one after the other before and after 1870. Don Bosco forecast, on the precise day the Italian army marched into

³³ Letter to Marquis Giovanni Patrizi, June 20, Em I 209 [written; it was sent on Oct. 24] 1863, Em I 586.

³⁴ Letter to Pius IX, Feb. 13, Em I 552.

³⁵ Letter to Cav. Oreglia, May 21, 1866, Em I 241-242; cf letter to Countess Anna Bentivoglio, Sept. 30, 1866, Em II 302.

³⁶ Letter to Pius IX, June 26, 1867. Em II 398.

³⁷ Letter to Countess Charlotte Callori, Oct. 19, Em II 442.

³⁸ Letter to Count Pio Galleani d'Agliano, Aug. 14, 1855, Em I 264; to Canon Alessandro Vogliotti, July 1860, Em I 419; to Baron Bianco di Barbania, Dec. 1869, E II 65-66; to Countess Alessi di Camburzano, Oct. 28, 1879, E II 126.

Rome: “*Commendatore*, take courage and have hope. Keep these words well in mind: a thunderstorm and tempest, a whirlwind, a hurricane are on the horizon, but they will all last a short while. Then the sun will appear once again with a splendour never seen since St Peter’s day until Pope Pius IX”!³⁹ Three months after the conquest of Rome, Don Bosco wrote to Countess Charlotte Calori: “May God spare us after such a terrible confrontation between Jesus Christ and Satan, and allow us to see the Church and the Holy Father enjoy peace.”⁴⁰

Don Bosco did not lay down his weapons. He not only continued his realistic and constructive politics but, thanks to this kind of politics, could even, as we have mentioned, put his finger on the question of the appointment of bishops and the Temporal Powers. (1871-1874). He makes his thoughts more explicit when he takes “politics of the Gospel” as his norm: “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God”.⁴¹ This norm was always guided by another principle, namely, that “we should do good whenever it is requested and possible.” A Salesian rector was once asked to kindly offer his facilities to the Workers Association of the city. Don Bosco wrote to him: “As far as the workers association and those who champion it are concerned, you can always tell them that we lay aside any party ideas and steadfastly stick to what Jesus Christ said: *Date quae sunt Caesaris, Caesari, quae sunt Dei, Deo*, and that none of them should be afraid of us, of what we might say and do”.⁴²

On another occasion Don Bosco clarified his thinking: “Let this be kept well in mind, that if we want to make headway, we should never speak of politics, neither *pros* nor *cons*. Our life’s program should be that of doing good to poor children. Whatever needs to be added to this principle will be suggested to us by God who will also be our guide whenever required”.⁴³

Some years earlier, during negotiations on the question of the bishops’ temporal power, Don Bosco was talking to a government minister, John Lanza, and at the time he stressed his political views more emphatically: “I am writing with confidence and assure you that while I profess to be a Catholic priest and attached to the Head of the Catholic Religion, I am also very fondly attached to the government. I have dedicated all my limited financial means, all my strength and all of my life to the well-being of its

³⁹ Letter to Comm. Dupraz, Sept. 20, 1870, E II 118-119. The news of the entry of the Italian army into Rome reached the saint on Sept. 21: he made no comment.

⁴⁰ Letter of Jan. 2, 1871, E II 144. To Count Eugene de Maistre who had been a volunteer with the pontifical Zouaves, he wrote on Dec. 28, 1872: “Let’s take courage, we are facing a very sad time. Let’s hope a merciful God will shorten that”. (E II 247).

⁴¹ Mt. 22:21; Mk 12:17; Lk 20:25.

⁴² Letter to the Rector in Nice, Fr Ronchail, April 1877. E III 163.

⁴³ Letter to Carlo Vespignani di Lugo, April 11, 1877. E III 167.

subjects. If you think I can serve you in anything advantageous to the government and religion, you have only to tell me how".⁴⁴

2.2. Realism and timeliness

Don Bosco's work among the young was not inspired by ideologies or theoretical considerations, but by his human, priestly sensitivity, faced with clear-cut facts and concrete situations demanding immediate and realistic interventions and solutions more than plans and projects.

Situations were what pressed Don Bosco to act. For instance, the problem of free time available to young people unprepared to use it appropriately: "Some who cared about proper education of the masses saw..., sadly, that many of those who have dedicated themselves early on to the arts and industries in the city squandered their meagre salaries earned during the week, on games and indulgence especially during weekends and holidays".⁴⁵

Another instance was the condition of the young immigrants who move from the countryside to the city: "We believe that it is publicly known that Father John Bosco, in order to provide moral benefit to abandoned youth, has done his best to have three oratories for boys opened in three main sections of our city. On weekends and holidays Don Bosco gathers these youths in the greatest possible number, since they are at risk in our capital and many of them have come into the city from the provinces".⁴⁶

A third instance was the scourge of the Cholera epidemic which, in 1854, had increased the number of orphans and homeless youngsters and created worries -

⁴⁴ Letter Feb. 11, 1872, E II 195. He would employ identical expressions in a letter on Oct. 12, 1873 to the Minister for Grace and Justice, Onorato Vigliani: "As a priest I love religion, as a citizen I want to do as much as I can for the government... since I am in fact outside of politics and public matters, then if your Excellency wishes to make use of my poor self to do something, there would be no fear of undue publicity" (E II 313). This repeats in briefer form the "profession of political faith" he had spelled out for the Minister for Internal Affairs, Luigi Carlo Farini, on June 12, 1860, and for the Minister for Public Instruction, Terenzio Mamiani, following a search and school inspection (Em I 407-410).

On the development of Don Bosco's political thinking, cf. P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 2, 75-96.

⁴⁵ Circular letter for a lottery, Dec. 20, 1851, Em I 139. The bishop of Biella, Bishop Losanna, had promised a collection for the Oratory. Don Bosco responded, thanking him for the "charity" done for "Turin's youth" and added: "You may be glad to know that the collection provides for many youngsters from your diocese, boys who have to spend a good part of their year in the capital for various reasons of work, and a great number of them come to the Oratory to relax, learn, and sanctify the days dedicated to the Lord" (Letter 4 May 1852, Em I 155).

⁴⁶ Lottery appeal, Feb. 21, 1857, Em I 318.

where to put them, the lack of food, the decreased charitable contributions, the increase of moral dangers.⁴⁷

A further instance was the problem, more general than ever, of youngster both at risk and risky (*pericoloso e pericolante*): they happened to be in the majority. What Don Bosco wrote in a circular letter on March 13, 1854, could easily have been applied to a goodly part of them: "I find myself in a sad situation in telling you that if there has been any time full of danger for youth, well, for sure, this is it! A great number of youth are at an imminent risk of losing their honesty and their religion for a morsel of bread".⁴⁸

Whenever new youth establishments were undertaken, either near or far away, the same reasons were brought up and made publicly known: "At Genoa-Sampierdarena", Don Bosco writes, "a single Parish has about 20,000 people and a small number of priests, nothing in comparison with the needs. The needs are felt by all the citizens but more especially by poor youth who are loitering through the streets and squares of the city, abandoned to the risk of perversion, due to their youthful inexperience".⁴⁹ Similar words are found and even more forcefully, for a rapidly growing city, La Spezia.

La Spezia is certainly one of the cities with the greatest number of abandoned boys. The Arsenal employs most of the inhabitants and they cannot take care of their young. While the city has grown from five thousand to twenty seven thousand people, no provisions could have been made to have badly needed institutions opened for them".⁵⁰ "The religious education of the young has become a need felt by all honest people, but the poor children of the working classes, those who lack the means of sustenance and their parents assistance, deserve particular attention. Without moral instruction, without a skill or employment ability, these youngsters run the most serious risk of becoming a public scourge and therefore ready to crowd our prisons. This need is serious everywhere, but more particularly so in the city of La Spezia. This city with a population which grew from 4000 to 30,000 in a matter of few years, has absolutely no churches, no schools and no homes.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Cf. request to the "Mendacità istruita", Nov. 13, 1854, Em, I 96-97; to the mayor of Turin, Jan. 25, 1855, Em I 243-244; to the superintendent of finance, March 22, 1855 Em I 252; Circular letter 8 May 1855, Em I 253-254; letter to the "Mendacità istruita", Nov. 21, 1855, Em I 270-272.

⁴⁸ Em I 222.

⁴⁹ Circular in summer 1872, E II 220; cf. another circular in autumn 1872, with a similar description, E II 241-242.

⁵⁰ Letter to the Minister for the Navy, Benedetto Brin, Jan. 16, 1877, E III 273.

⁵¹ Circular Oct. 11, 1880, E III 627.

Rome, which had effectively become the capital of Italy, had to deal with serious problems. "This dear city of ours" Don Bosco explained to the Pope "had been abundantly provided for during normal times with educational institutions of all kinds for citizens. Now with the abnormal predicament we are in, with the extraordinary increase in population, with the many youngsters coming from faraway places and all in search of either employment or shelter, it is essential that some steps be taken on behalf of the lower classes. The need to take steps is sadly made evident by the great number of young vagabonds running through the streets and squares of the city and who, most of the time, end up crowding the prisons. These poor boys, more than being wicked, are neglected children and it would certainly be very beneficial to them if an institution were opened for them".⁵²

These references have wider intent, as they include a great variety of works including schools for study of the classics, as he did at the time he was developing the colleges, making a secondary education "accessible for not too well-to-do youngsters, but ones commendable for talent and virtue, and also for poor youngsters gifted with talent and good morals but almost entirely deprived of financial means. The aim is to help them develop the talents Divine Providence has gifted them with".⁵³

2.3 Wisdom and firmness

A typical note of moderation which is really wisdom, also characterises Don Bosco's moving with the times and with the historical situations he lived in. Certainly he did not champion as a principle the idea that "the best is the enemy of the good" but he also knew how to let go of "the best" in order to achieve his goal, however limited and imperfect, rather than end up with nothing. "I perfectly agree with you", Don Bosco wrote to one of his collaborators, in a particular circumstance, "what we look for is the *optime*, the best, but sadly enough we have to content ourselves with what is less good, in the midst of so much evil. Such are the times we live in. Despite this the results we have had are satisfactory".⁵⁴

Several years before, while negotiating with Father Gilardi of the Institute of Charity (Rosminians) in connection with some construction business, Don Bosco wrote: "As you can see, we have to use the simplicity of the dove and the prudence of the

⁵² Petition to Leo XIII, March 1878, E III 317.

⁵³ Letter to the Minister for Public Instruction, Carlo Matteucci, Nov. 11, 1862, Em I 538; and to the supervisor of studies in Turin, Francesco Selmi, October 1863, Em I 610; cf. Em I 542 and 558-559.

⁵⁴ Letter to Fr Giovanni Bonetti, June 6, 1870, E II 96. "The good had to be done the right way", Fr Cafasso had already insisted, to which Don Bosco objected that in the face of many difficulties it was enough to do the good that one could; cf. P. Braidò, *Un "nuovo prete" e la sua formazione culturale secondo Don Bosco*, RSS 8 (1989): 14.

serpent; we have to keep everything cleverly secret so the enemy doesn't come to sow cockle. But, since public things must be backed up by public legality, so that no party may be damaged in front of the law, I am presenting you, most illustrious and revered superior, with the following project".⁵⁵

Wisdom and firmness, Idealism and realism, human calculation and trust in God, patient waiting and onward thrust, diplomacy and frankness: this is what Don Bosco always keeps together and in dynamic balance. "Anyway, you know my good will. Wherever industriousness and goodwill can achieve anything for the glory of God you may count me in, and I will be there with all my strength".⁵⁶ This was one of Don Bosco's principles which finds its completion in another one which, in turn, spells out his practical and constructive 'Crusade', born of trust in God: "God is with us; be not afraid."⁵⁷ But frankness does not exclude a thoughtful attitude based on knowledge of things and people, and also a conciliatory spirit, when needed, whenever there is a question of business matters and spiritual interests. "I desire and recommend that any discrepancy be smoothed out amicably, outside the civil courts, always relying on the judgement of a mutually trusted competent person".⁵⁸ "Tell me about the moral, material condition, about the hopes or fears. Without this knowledge, we cannot but walk surrounded by uncertainties".⁵⁹

In a particular circumstance Don Bosco asked a trustworthy religious in Rome for his opinion whether the approval of the Constitutions had been expressed by bishops too, who had sent a favourable letter of recommendation to Rome. He needed to know this to prepare, ahead of time, a tactical procedure to be used next. And this question was raised only to suggest a guideline, namely, "whether I should go along with their advice, or should act contrary to what they say to be sure I do what they want!"⁶⁰

For this reason, on certain questions Don Bosco wanted the opinions of his collaborators on his own ideas. "Be patient. Take courage. We shall fix everything up. It is an exceptional year: The material to build is available; only the spot needs to be figured out... Things seem to look ok; eight or ten days from now, write to me again and let me know the difficulties you have; but, at the same time, express your opinion on the way to overcome them."⁶¹

⁵⁵ Letter of April 15, 1850, Em I 101.

⁵⁶ Letter to Cav. Marco Gonella, May 20, 1867, Em II 370.

⁵⁷ Letter to Bishop Cagliari, Feb. 10, 1885, E IV 313.

⁵⁸ Letter to Arch. Francesco Vespignani, 9 May 1882, E IV 134.

⁵⁹ Letter to Fr Costamagna, Oct. 1, 1881, E IV 83.

⁶⁰ Letter to Fr Giuseppe Oreglia SI, Aug. 7, 1868, Em II 556.

⁶¹ Letter to Fr Lemoyne, Rector at Lanzo Torinese, Oct. 19, 1874, E II 413.

However Don Bosco also allowed himself to show a certain degree of impatience when it seemed urgent or just, because of delay or because of his anxiety to achieve his goal. "Things are all messed up. I have received your famous note. I am preparing some observations. But you have signed it. If you have anything to say tell me right away. Cardinal Nina was waiting for you to play the role of Punch. (Pulcinella). We will also get out of this mess as best we can".⁶² This is a letter to one of the representatives in Rome. It is not the only one, especially in reference to the very difficult construction of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome: "I would like to have the construction move on; I am making incredible efforts to find money; but if things are going on the way they are right now, when are we going to see the completion of the church?"⁶³

The increase in difficulties also increased pressure on Don Bosco to the point where he concludes ironically. "I have received your letter. We've got to have patience in everything. We will fix up everything. Instead of finding fault with what we are building in Rome, I would like to have certain gentlemen think about giving us money."⁶⁴ "*Alii alia dicant*" (let others say what they want!) about what we're doing in Rome. I'm paying no attention to anything they say, because we are sure about what we are doing"⁶⁵ "I do what I can; but you and Father Savio should do your level best to look for money... Take Courage! Rome is not without money!"⁶⁶ "We should have a pinch of 'Spanish Sun (a brand of snuff) to wake up the person in charge of compiling the briefs (quite long) for our decorations".⁶⁷

2.4 Large-hearted and practical

Don Bosco combines a remarkable breadth of thinking and planning with practicality in carrying this out and finding the means. In this regard we could actually gather an entire anthology of statements revealing Don Bosco's availability, his enterprising and daring spirit. Writing to Bishop Gilardi, Bishop of Mondovì, Don Bosco says: "I have read the program and the project about the Ecclesiastical Library. The undertaking is a difficult one and a gigantic one. If collaborators can be found and the program is made known, as it should be, I am in, at full strength, all the way (*Totis Viribus*)".⁶⁸ Writing to Professor Vallauri and asking publicity in his newspaper *L'Unità*

⁶² Letter to Fr Dalmazzo, his procurator in Rome, June 28, 1882, E IV 147. It refers to the *Concordia*, closing a long dispute with the Diocesan Ordinary.

⁶³ Letter to the Cardinal Vica, July 5, 1882, E IV 149-150; cf. also the letter to Fr Savio in Rome, July 6, 1882, E IV 150; to Fr Dalmazzo, July 29, 1882, E IV 157.

⁶⁴ Letter to Fr Dalmazzo, Aug. 27, 1882, E IV 165.

⁶⁵ Letter to Fr Dalmazzo, Nov. 26, 1882, E IV 215.

⁶⁶ Letter to Fr Dalmazzo, March 19, 1883, E IV 215.

⁶⁷ Letter to Fr Dalmazzo, June 19, 1882, E IV 144. *Sun* was a much prized brand of tobacco.

⁶⁸ Letter March 1869, E II 15.

Cattolica for the church of St John the Evangelist, Don Bosco adds: "The undertaking is a gigantic one but it is absolutely necessary, and therefore I will put my hands to the task".⁶⁹ "This is what the Lord wants from us at this time! Houses, and colleges for students coming from lower circumstances, shelters where we could welcome savages or semi-savages, if we had them...". "You are a musician and I am by profession a poet; so both of us will do our very best to make sure that whatever goes on in the Indies and Australia does not upset what goes on in Argentina".⁷⁰

"I find it extremely difficult to express the feelings that your letter and the subscription of the generous people of Cassine have aroused in me. I have consecrated my entire life to doing good to youth, for I am convinced that the happiness of a nation depends on the sound education of youth. I feel almost as if I am being dragged wherever I can be to do anything, even in a small way, on behalf of youth, the chosen portion of civil society. But I certainly did not deserve to have such noble encouragement".⁷¹

"Whatever turns out to be beneficial to youth at risk or what helps to win souls over to God, that spurs me on to the point of recklessness. Therefore your project of starting something which might be beneficial to poor boys, to boys at risk, keeping boys away from the danger of crowding the prisons, making *honest citizens and good Christians* out of them, this is the goal that we have set before us".⁷²

In this climate and in the manner he used to present his objective, Don Bosco aimed at expanding the proportion and consistency of his works, as they began and in their development. This proved helpful for publicity and for animating his co-helpers and benefactors. "During this month we have already opened five houses and they are already pretty crowded; four more houses will be opened next August, God willing. Isn't it true that we are progressives?"⁷³ "Things are going not only going full steam but they are going like the telegraph. In one year, with God's help and the charity of our benefactors, we have been able to open 20 houses. Presently we have over 70 houses with 30,000 pupils. See how your family has increased!"⁷⁴ "The great undertakings we have at hand, call for many prayers that all may turn out well". This is how he began a letter addressed from France to his closest collaborator (Father

⁶⁹ Letter Dec. 10, 1870, E II 135; cf letter to Countess Ugucioni from Florence, Dec. 1, 1871, E II 189, and March 28, 1872, E II 203; to Fr Rua and Fr Lazzerio April 25, 1876, E III 50; to Fr Cagliari April 27, 1876, E III 52; to Fr Rua April-May 1876, E III 53-55.

⁷⁰ Letter to Fr Cagliari, June and July 1876, E III 68 and 72; cf. also letter Nov. 16, 1876, E III 114.

⁷¹ Letter to Doc. Peverotti di Cassine (Alessandria), Sept. 6, 1876, E III 93.

⁷² Letter to Carlo Vespignani, April 11, 1877, E III 166.

⁷³ Letter to Countess di Camburzano, July 28, 1878, E III 370.

⁷⁴ Letter to Countess Ugucioni, Nov. 18, 1878, E III 417.

Michael Rua).⁷⁵ Don Bosco was projecting similar developments for the young Salesians of South America: "Things here are taking gigantic steps"⁷⁶

These were not only idealised projects. Don Bosco was great with his projects but no less great in the hidden daily work of setting up the means, the tools needed for the realisation of the same projects. Perhaps this was the most recognisable aspect of a life marked by poverty and by a tireless search for help.

The first nightmare has a name: "the Baker". "Miseries keep on re-doubling and I am working out day and night how to pay the Baker. I still have the Baker's March bill to pay and I do not know where to get the money from".⁷⁷ "Should you be able to help me, you would be feeding poor and hungry boys".⁷⁸ "Here we are doing all we can. The mice cannot play near the cat's claws!"⁷⁹ "The price of bread leaves us desperate".⁸⁰

Poverty afflicted every part of his work. "Our houses are penniless".⁸¹ "Misery is the only song you hear sung everywhere, but we have an abundance of youngsters entrusted to our care every day. We are hoping and we are praying"⁸² Don Bosco also finds inspiration in *The Barber of Seville: tutti ne chiedono, tutti ne vogliono. Un poco alla volta, per carità.* (They all ask for it. They all want it. A little bit at a time, for God's sake).⁸³

This search for bread almost became a "testament" in one of his last letters, dated November 7, 1887: "Hunger moves a wolf out of his den, so the proverb says, The same way my needs move me to bother certain benefactors, something I would not do in ordinary circumstances.. Please, help me to the degree which suits you best... I can no longer write. These are the last efforts of my poor hand".⁸⁴

Don Bosco's efforts to muster the help of his collaborators and benefactors were uninterrupted. He did this through personal contacts, with hundreds of individual letters and circular letters. "Keep on being cheerful", he wrote to his best helper,

⁷⁵ Letter to Fr Rua Jan. 11, 1879, E III 436; "Our affairs here are going ahead fabulously, as the world would say, but we say prodigiously" (Letter to Fr Rua from Marseilles, Jan. 17, 1879, E III 442).

⁷⁶ Letter to Fr Taddeo Remotti, Jan. 31, 1881, E IV 9; cf. letter to Fr G. Fagnano, Jan. 31, 1881, E IV 13-14.

⁷⁷ Letter to Canon De Gaudenzi, Dec. 17, 1855, Em I 276; cf. letter Jan. 19, 1854, Em I 215.

⁷⁸ Letter to Baron Feliciano Ricci des Ferres, May 7, 1856, Em I 288.

⁷⁹ Letter to Cavalier Oreglia Dec. 7, 1867, Em II 456.

⁸⁰ Letter to Cavalier Oreglia April 10, 1868, Em II 5226.

⁸¹ Letter to Fr Rua, July 1876 E III 77.

⁸² Letter to Fr Rua, Oct. 13, 1876, E III 104.

⁸³ Letter to Fr Rua, Jan. 1878, E III 285.

⁸⁴ Letter to Mrs. Zavaglia-Manica, Nov. 7, 1887, E IV 384.

“Look for money. Let the *Cavaliere* carry on a successful business and let Buzzetti help him. This is all I can do from here”.⁸⁵ “You, then, *in omnibus labora*. Do your best to collect donations and if we cannot do it in any other way carry out or plan to carry out a useful robbery, or better still, work out some sort of mathematical ‘subtraction’ in some Bankers’ House”.⁸⁶ Don Bosco asked for loans; organised lotteries; invented all sorts of ways of begging; promoted benefit concerts”.⁸⁷ He was gifted with the art of ‘cultivating’ his benefactors efficiently, to the point where it might have appeared to be the end result of cunning, were it not to spring from an intensive love for the ones who were to benefit from it all, and first of all the benefactors themselves. “The only thing that I can still do and I am willingly doing for you” he writes in his last or next to the last letter “and for your loved ones, both living and deceased, is to pray for them every day so that their riches, which are thorns, may be turned into good works, namely, flowers, which the Angels can use to weave crowns for their brows for all eternity. So be it!”⁸⁸

Don Bosco begged, out of love for those in need, but also for those who gave. And from time to time, love takes on the hue of affection, even human affection, sincere gratitude, friendship. This friendship is never without a touch of filial confidence, familiarity, kindness shown by the exchange of symbolic gifts, invitations sent or received, “Distinguished Honours” requested or received, prayers, greetings and personal recollections, even letters to third parties, with friendly and sincere wishes. It is within the context of exquisitely personalised feelings that one can understand how Don Bosco succeeded in establishing relationships with benefactors and ‘mamas’ who were most generous and supportive. These relationships were neither imposed nor artificial, but filial.⁸⁹

2.5 “Completely consecrated” to the young

Don Bosco’s activity was not just the expression of purely temperamental activism. It was a conscious, willed ‘consecration’; a ‘mission’ with a precise objective:

⁸⁵ Letter to Fr Rua, Jan. 24, 1869, E II 7.

⁸⁶ Letter to Fr Dalmazzo, Dec. 9, 1880, E III 639.

⁸⁷ Cf. Appeal for a lottery, Dec., 20, 1851, Em I 139-141; Em I 141, 140, 186, 222, 314, 317-319, 476-478, 478-480; Em II 130-131; E III 94-95, 99-100 etc.

⁸⁸ Letter to Mrs. Broquier, Nov. 27, 1887, E IV 386.

⁸⁹ For example, Countess Charlotte Callori, E II 183 (called ‘mamma’ the first time on Oct. 3, 1871), 191, 192, 225, 227, 230, 252, 259, 290, 306, 318, 487, 513, 523; Countess Girolama Ugucconim E II 84 (called ‘mamma’ for the first time April 13, 1870), 158, 188, 197, 203, 228, 243, 280, 324, 377, 488; E IV 63 (‘Our Good Mamma in JC’); Countess Luigia di Viancino, E II 192; Marchioness Nina Durazzo Pallavicino, E II 201 (‘merciful mother of the poor’); Countess Gabriella Corsi, E II 263, 264; E III 218, 397, 398, 512.

“The full accomplishment of the salvation of the young”. “The young’, as he put it to people “can really count on him as their Capital Resource; he is entirely consecrated to those to be educated, as he would write for all the educators in the pages of his 1877 *The Preventive System in the education of youth*. Precisely for this reason Don Bosco’s dedication to youth has a rhythm which is entirely distinct from the rhythm of his physical life: it even seems to grow with the declining or weakening of his physical life.

Right from the first years of his apostolate, we find Don Bosco sick and forced to spend some months during the summer and autumn at his native village, to restore his already weary body, mainly because of excessive work. And for the same reason, during the summer of 1846, an almost fatal disease strikes Don Bosco.

Acknowledgements of being tired, of having health problems, of suffering physically and morally, are not so rarely scattered throughout his letters and to an increasing degree: “I am so overloaded with work this Lenten season, that I can take no more.” This is what Don Bosco wrote to his friend Canon De Gaudenzi in 1853.⁹⁰ To Countess Callori on July 24, 1845, after a series of sad events, Don Bosco made this confidence: “During these days, just imagine how many expenses, how many troubles, how many responsibilities have fallen on Don Bosco’s shoulders. However you should never think that I am down; I was only tired, and nothing else”.⁹¹

Don Bosco’s condition became more precarious after the serious illness which struck him at the end of December 1871, at Varazze, and he would have more or less serious relapses later on. “As for the Villavernia business”, Don Bosco wrote to a Canon requesting a new foundation, “I cannot even think of it; we have no money nor have we ‘ad hoc’ personnel to staff it; and above all, my poor head has become tired and has no enterprising energy at all”⁹² “I cannot even go to Alassio now”, Don Bosco wrote to Bishop Gastaldi’s niece, “but everything will pass”.⁹³ Practically everything was due to excessive work, to a persistent eye problem, to early physical deterioration as he himself remarked: “I am (extremely) tired, *non plus ultra* (Can’t do anything anymore)”.⁹⁴ “I am at Alassio, in pieces”.⁹⁵

What definitely contributed to his poor condition was his continuous moving around, looking for charitable contributions, and his desk work. “It has been months now since I go to my desk at 2 pm and get away from it at 8:30 pm for supper time”.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Letter March 6, 1853, Em I 193.

⁹¹ Em II 152.

⁹² Letter March 18, 1872, E II 200.

⁹³ Letter July 22, 1873, E II 294..

⁹⁴ Letter to Fr Rua, July 1877, E III 198.

⁹⁵ Letter to Fr Rua, July 1877, E III 201.

⁹⁶ Letter to Fr Bodrato, May 1877, E III 172.

Naturally, this was done after the ordinary work of a long morning; it was often prolonged into late evening hours, by lamp light, when his eye ailment allowed him. "This latest (missionary) expedition has made both my legs and my purse quite tired".⁹⁷ "In spite of so many projects, I was not able yet to have an hour's vacation this whole year... Summing things up I no longer know where to start and where to stop".⁹⁸

To the end of his life, Don Bosco was bothered by his eyes, often recorded in references in his letters. "My consultations with the oculist came up with the following verdict: as far as the right eye is concerned, there is a little hope; the left eye may be kept at the *status quo*, by stopping to read and write".⁹⁹ "My eyes are gone and I can no longer write".¹⁰⁰ "My eyes have somehow improved".¹⁰¹ "PS. It's the first handwritten letter for four months".¹⁰²

Added to his eye troubles was reference to his general health during the last years of his life: "I cut it short because my stomach is very tired".¹⁰³ "My health is not bad but it is not very good either. I'm always very tired".¹⁰⁴ "My health has ups and downs".¹⁰⁵ "I'm here at San Benigno Canavese: very tired".¹⁰⁶ "I am half blind and I can hardly write, therefore bear with my bad handwriting".¹⁰⁷ "I have become very old and half blind".¹⁰⁸ "I have waited to write for several months but my old lazy hand kept forcing me to delay this pleasure. Now I feel that the sun is about to set; and so I thought it best to leave you some written thoughts as the will and testament of one who has always loved you and still loves you".¹⁰⁹ "I am almost blind, almost unable to walk, write, speak".¹¹⁰ "I am here at Lanzo, half blind and half or entirely lame and almost dumb... I cannot use my hand to write".¹¹¹ "I find it hard to write; my days are running fast toward their end".¹¹² Even the very last letters we have repeat the same

⁹⁷ Letter to Fr Fagnano, Nov. 14, 1877, E III 236.

⁹⁸ Letter to Countess Corsi, Oct. 22, 1877, E III 397.

⁹⁹ Letter to Countess Callori, Nov. 14, 1873, E II 318.

¹⁰⁰ Letter to the bishop of Vigevano, Mons. De Gaudenzi, Dec. 1, 1878, E III 420.

¹⁰¹ Letter to Mrs. Saettone, Dec. 20, 1878, E III 423.

¹⁰² Letter to Canon Guiol, March 29, 1879, E III 462.

¹⁰³ Letter to Fr De Agostini, Jan. 4, 1884, E IV 248.

¹⁰⁴ Letter to Countess Bonmartini, Feb. 4, 1884, E IV 253.

¹⁰⁵ Letter to Card. Alimonda, May 3, 1884, E IV 259.

¹⁰⁶ Letter to Fr De Agostini, Sept. 2, 1885, E IV 338.

¹⁰⁷ Letter to Mrs. Maggi Fannio, Sept. 15, 1885, E IV 339.

¹⁰⁸ Letter to Fr Allavena, Sept. 24, 1885, E IV 340.

¹⁰⁹ Letter to Fr Lasagna, Sept. 30, 1885, E IV 340.

¹¹⁰ Letter to a young cleric, Oct. 5, 1885, E IV 343.

¹¹¹ Letter to Baronness Azelia Fassati Ricci, July 24, 1887, E IV 382.

¹¹² Letter to Mrs. Pilati, July 26, 1887, E IV 382.

refrain: "I can no longer write. These are the last efforts of my poor hand".¹¹³ "I can no longer walk or write and if I do it I do it badly".¹¹⁴

2.6 A man with a heart

Don Bosco's heart never stopped loving to the very end. His pedagogy is identified with all his activity; all his action is identified with his personality; and all of Don Bosco's personality is definitively summed up in one word: *heart!*

It is the heart as Don Bosco himself understood it: not only as the organ of love, but as the central part of our being, both at the level of nature and the level of grace. "The heart wants; the heart desires, comprehends, understands, listens to all that is being said; it is inflamed with love, reflects and is moving".¹¹⁵ And a very intense feeling of affection envelops all this. This affection is deeply rooted and always properly in check, but it is also an affection which, following the canons of his own pedagogy, is expressed, shared and therefore visible and perceptible. This feeling of affection moves in all directions but naturally and especially in the direction of youth: this affection takes on, then, the tone of an educative fatherliness. This is one of the first words found in Don Bosco's vocabulary. And when Don Bosco wrote to the Father Borel, his first collaborator, this is what he said: "Before leaving, we did not have much time to talk to each other. But may I ask you to act as a good father of the family, in a house which is yours and mine".¹¹⁶

The community, the many communities of boys, were Don Bosco's family, Don Bosco's house, and Don Bosco's unique and great patriarchal family. This can be perceived intuitively from the thousands of expressions which emerge from his attitudes, words and writings, and particularly from his correspondence, often overflowing with nostalgic barely restrained feelings, affectionate recollections, concerns for others, willingness to be always present.

Writing once again to Fr Borel during the first months of the Oratory, Don Bosco added: "It is OK for Fr Trivero to help at the Oratory. But keep an eye on him, because he deals with the little children too harshly and I know that some of the children have already shown their dislike. Make sure that oil is used to season everything we eat at the Oratory".¹¹⁷

The thought insistently expressed in Don Bosco's letters is that of wanting to hear news about his own boys, their teachers and to reassure them, one by one, that

¹¹³ Letter to Mrs. Zavaglia.Mancina, Nov. 7, 1887, E IV 385.

¹¹⁴ Letter to Mrs. Broquier, Nov. 27, 1887, E IV 386

¹¹⁵ P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol 2, 37-38-

¹¹⁶ Letter, Sept. 30, 1850, Em I 114.

¹¹⁷ Letter to Fr Borel, Aug. 31, 1846, Em I 71.

he keeps them in mind. "Give me plenty of detailed news about my dear children and tell them that at every church I visited I never failed to say some prayers for them. But ask them also to pray for their poor Don Bosco".¹¹⁸ "Even though I cannot be exclusively concerned for the well-being of the Oratory and our youngsters there while here in Rome, my thoughts always fly to where my treasure is, in Jesus Christ namely, to my dear children at the Oratory. Several times during the day I'm paying them a visit".¹¹⁹

After his illness, and while at Varazze, Don Bosco made this announcement: "Next Thursday, God willing, I will be back in Turin. I feel a strong need to get there. I live here in body, but my heart, my thoughts and even my words are always at the Oratory in your midst. This is one of my weaknesses and I cannot overcome it.. While you communicate this news to all our dear children tell them also that I thank them all, from the bottom of my heart, for all the prayers they have said for me; tell them that I thank all those youngsters who have written to me and particularly those who have offered their lives on my behalf. I know their names and I shall never forget them".¹²⁰ "Tell our youngsters that it looks to me as though half a century has gone by since I saw them. I very much long to see them and tell them so many things".¹²¹ "We are at the end of the year: sadly I find myself away from my dear children; you will greet them all on my behalf".¹²² "Extend my most cordial greetings to all our dear youngsters and tell them that I love them very much, that I love them in the Lord, and that I bless them".¹²³ "Tell all our dear youngsters and confreres that I work for them and that my last breath shall be for them. But they should pray for me; they should be good, and avoid sin, so that we may all reach salvation for all eternity. All of it!"¹²⁴

As we can see, Don Bosco's love was shown equally for the young and their teachers who were also 'his children'. We have frequent and affectionate references to his children's teachers also. "Yesterday, (13th) we had had a theatrical performance. The play was the famous *debate between a lawyer and a Protestant Minister*. It was a brilliant performance. Mino sang the *Il figlio delle esule* and it was brilliantly successful but the thought that the very author of the music was far away has deeply moved me; and so, all during the song in the performance I did nothing but think of my dear Sons in South America".¹²⁵ "You left me and you have really racked my heart. I

¹¹⁸ Letter to Fr Rua, Dec. 13, 1865, Em II 189.

¹¹⁹ Letter to Fr Rua, between Jan and Feb. 1870, E II 70-71.

¹²⁰ Letter to Fr Rua, Feb. 9, 1872, E II 193.

¹²¹ Letter to Fr Rua, March 5, 1877, E III 155.

¹²² Letter to Fr Rua, Dec. 27, 1877, E III 254.

¹²³ Letter to Fr Rua, Feb. 25, 1879, E III 447.

¹²⁴ Letter to Fr Francesia, April 12, 1885, E IV 323.

¹²⁵ Letter to Fr Cagliero, Feb. 14, 1876, E III 19.

picked up courage, but I suffered and could not sleep the whole night. Today I feel more relaxed. May God be praised".¹²⁶

Don Bosco's thinking was always accompanied by the particular tone of his educative love, *cheerfulness* and an emphasised cheerfulness for sake of the youngsters who came from poor families, often underfed, and often attracted by the promise of festivities in the dining room, the theatre and the playground. Amongst many, the following example will be proof enough: "Speak like this to your children: Don Bosco loves you always, with all his heart, in the Lord. Don Bosco will remember you in a special way during his Mass on the Feast of St Joseph. Since he cannot be present among you, he promises that there will be a party the first time he has the chance to visit you".¹²⁷

3. *Everything for God*

It is self-evident that Don Bosco's huge amount of activity is deeply rooted in and motivated by Christian and priestly fundamentals, the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity and everything they entail: a constant reference to God, as our final objective, to our neighbour whom we love because and the way God loves him. This kind of talk leads necessarily to what we call interior life and, ultimately, to authentic holiness.¹²⁸

The motto which perhaps best expresses and sums up the core of Don Bosco's deeply inspired personality and activity is the one repeated several times: "*ibi nostra fix sunt corda, ubi vera sunt gaudia*", translatable as: God loved and served, Salvation, Eternal Happiness, Paradise. The *ibi-ubi* (there-where) is considered and lived as 'an end' and at the same time as the source whence Don Bosco's inspirations and energies came.

In the Christian Economy, all these are goods the believer hopes for and obtains through the mediation of Jesus Christ, Our Saviour, and finds extension in the Church

¹²⁶ Letter to Fr Costamagna, Nov. 12, 1883, E IV 240.

¹²⁷ Letter to Fr Bonetti, June 16, 1870, E II 97; cf. again: letter to Fr Ruffino, Rector at Lanzo, March 22, 1865, Em II 117; to Fr Rua from Rome between Jan and Feb. 1870, E II 71-72 ('I will try to help you be happy. The following Sunday on my arrival we will have a big feast on honour of St Francis de Sales'); to Fr Bonetti, Rector at Mirabello Monferrato, 9 Feb. 1870, E II 74; to Fr Francesia, Rector at Cherasco, Feb. 10, 1870, E II 75; to Don Ronchail, Rector at Nizza Marittima, Jan. 12, 1878, E III 270-271; to Don Rua, Jan. 21, and Feb. 25, 1879, E III 440 and 447.

¹²⁸ Cf. profile of E. Ceria, *Don Bosco con Dio*, (Turin: SEI, 1929), 221 pages (extended 2nd edition, Colle Don Bosco (Asti): LDC 1946), 392 pages; P. Broccardo, *Don Bosco 'profeta di santità' per le nuova cultura*, in M. Midali ed., *Spiritualità dell'azione. Contributo per un approfondimento*, (Rome, LAS 1977), 179-206.

which, in turn, announces His Word and is open to his Saving Grace which we call on continuously in prayer.

Fundamentally, Don Bosco remains faithful to the message which announces the ultimate meaning of life, proclaimed also in the *Companion to Youth*: "Serve the Lord with gladness: to make sure to be good citizens here on earth, and to be one day the lucky inhabitants of Heaven".¹²⁹

Don Bosco's life and writings are full of the formula: "The Glory of God and the salvation of Souls" and this formula is the expression of the unique passion which inspired this great activist. His most common and visible attitude ends up being the attitude of one who prays, praises, thanks, expects everything from above and always with the charity which wants to share. "Our silence and our prayers will produce what contributes to the greater Glory of God. However, I am never inactive. Kindness to all. So many things to be done".¹³⁰ "All is going well with things. There are things that go wrong and constant troubles, however, they are all very useful. Silence, Prayer, no noise. Write to me about whatever you know".¹³¹ "Trials teach us how to divide and separate gold from dross. We are constantly tested but God's help never failed us. We hope we will not make ourselves unworthy of his help in the future".¹³² "I know you have a lot to do, but I also know that God has a lot of ways to reward us, and especially when all the work is for the greater Glory of God".¹³³ "That is what God wants and that is enough".¹³⁴

Really, Don Bosco's pedagogy, before being theory or precept and in some way, a system, is a lived experience, an exemplar, a personal transparency. Any complete presentation of his pedagogical vision becomes evident and relevant only if it is constantly referred to this limpid and lively source.

¹²⁹ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto*, 5-8, OE II 185-188.

¹³⁰ Letter to Fr Rua, Jan. 3, 1878, E III 263. The 'greater glory of God' is a motive running through Don Bosco's entire collection of letters, together with the 'salvation of souls': 'manifesto' of a life and uninterrupted conversation.

¹³¹ Letter to Fr Rua, Jan. 1878, E III 267.

¹³² Letter to Fr Francesca, Jan. 13, 1878, E III 272.

¹³³ Letter to Count Charles Cays, March 14, 1878, E III 315.

¹³⁴ Letter to Fr Giuseppe Ronchail, July 20, 1876, E III 75.

Chapter 9

THE OPTION FOR THE YOUNG: SOCIAL AND PSYCHO-PEDAGOGICAL TYPOLOGY

Don Bosco's first contacts in Turin with isolated groups of young people during his years at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* coincided with the beginning of the industrial, demographic and building expansion of the city which would be accentuated in decades following by the inevitable phenomenon of immigrants, the uprooted and the 'abandoned'.¹

According to John Baptist Lemoyne, Don Bosco felt strongly about the early impact of Turin on him and the often very many hidden miseries, the worst of which were made known to the authorities in charge of public order from the point of view of the ones which were most socially dangerous.²

Naturally, the young priest coming from a world largely removed from problems of the urban reality, was deeply affected and wanted to especially understand the religious and moral aspects of the various kinds of needs and distressing situations. He walked along the streets and through the squares, visited prisons and hospitals, entered hovels and climbed into attics, the ultimate refuge especially for young immigrants.³

In the 1870s and 80s the scenario of 'poor and abandoned youth' was seen by Don Bosco to be substantially unchanged, that is, still describable in those terms but there were more of them and the situation was worse. His viewpoint, which began with Turin and some regional experience expanded to national, international and intercontinental horizons, either through direct knowledge or thanks to information

¹ Cf Chap 1, § 3; also P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol 1. pp. 103-109; P. Spriano, *Storia di Torino operaia e socialista da De Amicis a Gramsci*, Turin, Einaudi 1972, pp. 3-17.

² Documented information on the situation is available in U. Levra, 'Il bisogno, il castigo, la pietà, Torino 1814-1848', in *Torino e Don Bosco*, ed. G.Bracco, Vol 1 *Saggi. Turin, Archivio Storico della Città* 1988, pp. 13-97; idem, *L'altro volto di Torino risorgimentale 1814-1848*. Turin, Institute for the history of the Italian renaissance 1988, 204 p.; C. Felloni and R. Audisio, 'I giovani discoli', in *Torino e Don Bosco...*, Vol 1 *Saggi*, pp. 00-119. For the 1860s, P. Spriano *Storia di Torino operaia e socialista*, pp. 3-36

³ Cf. G.B. Lemoyne *Vita del venerabile servo di Dio, Giovanni Bosco...*, Vol 1. Turin. Libreria Editrice Società Internazionale 'Buona Stampa' 1913 [the first edition was 1911], pp. 233-234. There is a more extensive reconstruction in MB II 59-67.

garnered from his helpers, newspapers, civil and Church authorities etc. He embraced this broader perspective as a commitment through his 'dreams', the entire 'planet of young people' seeing them in need of 'salvation' and 'assistance'. Not only individuals' fortunes were at stake but the future of society.

This was the dominant motif of his words, speeches, addresses to families, individual letters, circulars and the many conferences he gave in the past period of his life to benefactors and Cooperators. He exhorted them:

You must help according to your possibilities. You must come to Don Bosco's aid in order to more easily and broadly achieve the noble purpose proposed, to the advantage that is of religion, the well-being of civil society, by nurturing poor youth. You certainly should not overlook the adults; but don't forget that these, with few exceptions, are not so much our concern today. So we go out to the little ones, remove them far from danger, bring them along to catechism, invite them to the sacraments, look after them, or bring them back to virtue. Doing this you will see our ministry become fruitful, you will cooperate in forming good Christians, good families, good populations; and you will construct a barrier, a dyke in the present and the future against impiety and the flood of vice.⁴

Don Bosco's system arose and took shape in conceptual terms precisely through real, factual contact with this unlimited youthful reality. So it is necessary to identify the structures, features, detail the 'face' of the young whom he encountered: both in his immediate concrete involvement and through the images he built up in their regard.⁵

It is not an easy task because if his pedagogy is not doctrinal and systematic, his experience of young people that shaped his pedagogy is even less systematically developed. But it is not impossible, just the same, because here too his consistent and realistic activity is accompanied constantly by clear insights and formulations. In reality what he did and the intentions he expressed — to gain the needed consensus, seek charity, impose some unity on the involvement of his helpers — help us bring together fairly adequately his basic ideas concerning the 'youth situation' from a threefold point of view: sociological, psychological, theological-anthropological.

⁴ A friendly talk given to past pupil priests of the Valdocco Oratory on July 29, 1880, BS 4 (1880) no. 9, Sept. p. 11; he spoke similarly, again to past pupil priests, on July 19, 1883: "take special care of the youth in your towns because they are the hope of society". BS 7 (1883) no. 8, August, p. 129.

⁵ Cf. P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale*, pp. 123-157 (*Collegi e ospizi in Piemonte e in Liguria 1860-1870*), 159-174 (*I giovani degli oratori festivi a torino 1841-1870*), 175-199 (*Giovani e adulti convittori a Valdocco 1847-1870*), 289-294 (*La popolazione giovanile degli altri collegi*).

1. *Elements of the sociology of youth*

What undoubtedly impressed public opinion from the outset was Don Bosco's systematic interest in and intentions regarding 'poor and abandoned' youth, 'the poorest and most neglected' youth, 'poor and derelict youth', 'the most needy and risky children'. Recalling this thirty years later in the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, the story of that early 'little oratory', he loved to go back to the original scope of "gathering up only the boys most at risk, and preferably those who had come out of prison"⁶ far from their families, strangers in Turin", "stonecutters, bricklayers, plasterers, road pavers, plasterers and others who came from distant villages"⁷. At times his preference is expressed broadly by his intention "to be able to decrease the number of rascals and youngsters who end up in prison"⁸.

This course of action does not mark the beginning of something new but rather the continuation of Don Bosco's renewed fervour and growing organisational vigour, according to the needs of the times and experiences past and present.⁹

The problem did not go unnoticed, even in Turin. Initiatives had come into being in the preceding centuries providing help for unfortunate young people whose parents could not or did not care to provide for them. This assistance was given through catechetical instruction and introduction to skilled labour.

Charitable persons, moved "only by Christian charity", by loving kindness, went looking for them; they gathered up as many as possible of them, and with admirable patience instructed them in Christian doctrine, and provided, to the best of their ability, for their greater needs. Some were introduced to some kind of civil culture.

From 1850 on, this was the aim of those people who backed the "Hotel (Albergo) for Virtue" which was established on July 24, 1587, by R. Patente. Workshops were set up to train textile workers, hatters, lathe workers, upholsterers, blacksmiths, carpenters, furniture experts, foundry workers, tailors and shoemakers, and give them increased cultural enrichment.

⁶ MO (1991) 123; "especially those who came out of the prisons" (p. 122). It is significant however that in the *Storia dell'Oratorio di s. Francesco di Sales*, written by Fr Bonetti, which would use the manuscript

⁷ BS 3 (1879) no. 2, Feb. p. 8 = MO (1991) 122; MO (1991) 124 = BS 3 (1879) no. 3, March p. 6.

⁸ MO (1991) 147 = BS 3 (1879) no. 7, July, p. 16.

⁹ Cf. R. Chartier, M.M. Compère, D. Julia, *L'éducation en France du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris, Sedes 1976, pp. 57-58; L. Chevalier *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle*, Paris, Librairie Plon 1958; P. Pierrard, *Enfants et jeunes ouvriers en France (XIXe-XXe siècle)*. Paris, Les éditions Ouvrières 1987, 225 p. However, Turin in the 1840s was certainly not Paris.

Goffredo Casalis goes so far as to consider these 'Hotels for Virtue' as, so to speak, "the dawning of Piedmontese industry."¹⁰ In 1771 an alms-house (it was known as *L'Opera della MendicITÀ Istruita*) was set up with a broader scope in mind. It had been created to teach Sunday school catechism to the poor and to provide them with basic assistance. Later on this activity broadened even further by offering other kinds of assistance: technical training, schools in various districts around the city which the Brothers of the Christian Schools were called to run, during the third decade of the 1800's.¹¹

Naturally we should not forget the various works promoted by the Marchioness Barolo.¹²

From the early 1840s Don Bosco began to espouse the cause of poor and neglected youth and give it all his youthful energy. He appealed to people of various categories and invited them to join him as his close helpers. He did this by means of personal contacts, individual and circular letters, appeals, advertising and in language which shifted between the realistic and the rhetorical.

He spoke of "orphans", "poor and abandoned youth", "youth at risk", "risky youth". Terms like this and others, were repeated, unchanged, for decades in connection with very different types of youngster staying in his institutions: oratories, homes, boarding schools for both academic and working students, agricultural schools. Then finally, Don Bosco's work extended to youth coming from the most heterogeneous layers of society, including youngsters from good families of the lower and middle class classes, and even of the nobility.

In 1857, Don Bosco sent out an invitation to a lottery on behalf of the three boys' oratories in Turin, and explained that the aim of these oratories was to bring boys together at weekends, "gathering as many young people at risk as possible from the city and provincial towns, who had moved to the Capital". However, the "house attached to the Oratory in Valdocco responds to essential needs such as shelter, food and clothing for those youngsters who, no matter whether from the city or from the provincial

¹⁰ G. Casalis, *Dizionario geografico storico-statistico-commerciale degli stati di S.M. Il re di Sardegna, Vol XXI [v. Turin]. Turin, G. Maspero and G. Marzorati 1851, v. Albergo di Virtù*, pp. 690-692; G. Ponzio, *Stato e pauperismo in Italia: L'Albergo di Virtù di Torino (1580-1863)*. Rome, La Cultura 1974, 150 p.

¹¹ G. Casalis, *Dizionario...*, Vol XXIX, v. *Regia Opera della mendicITÀ istruita*, pp. 700-709; G. Chiosso, *La gioventù «povera e abbandonata» a Torino nell'Ottocento. Il caso degli allievi-artigiani della MendicITÀ Istruita (1818-1861)*, in J.M. Prellezio (Ed.), *L'impegno dell'educare...* pp. 375-402.

¹² Cf. R.M. Borsarelli, *La marchesa Giulia di Barolo e le opere assistenziali in Piemonte e nel Risorgimento*, Turin, Chiantore 1933, XI-243 p.

towns ... are so poor and abandoned that they could not, otherwise, be trained for a skilled job or employment.”¹³

Similar invitations issued in the following years (1862, 1865, 1866) took into account not only the home for working boys but also the home for academic students, “Since, some of the boys there come from Turin, but the majority come from other cities and towns either looking for work or to pursue their studies”.¹⁴

In the following decades, Don Bosco would use the same kind of language in reference to the situation in Italy, Europe and Argentina.

The *Patronage St-Pierre* in Nice was opened for “children at risk”.¹⁵ A home for poor children to be trained in arts and crafts was opened in Buenos Aires.¹⁶ The schools for “poor, working-class families’ children” was opened at La Spezia.¹⁷ The Sacred Heart Home in Rome was opened for “children of the lower classes”.¹⁸

Don Bosco repeated this kind of language, often stereotyped, when he talked about the initiatives he wanted the Cooperators to be involved in:

The main goal of the Association is the active exercise of charity toward one’s neighbour and especially toward youth at risk.¹⁹

Over the following decades, in fact, and more so by describing situations and proposing solutions for them, Don Bosco’s interest in “poor and abandoned youth” widened its horizons and became more intense. This gave the original and apparently conventional term, “poor and abandoned youth”, other shades of meaning according to the various circumstances and institutions concerned.

At any rate, Don Bosco always connected the various situations and steps to be taken for them with the beginnings of the festive oratory: “Although my purpose had been that of gathering only children most at risk and preferably those coming out of

¹³ *Catalogo degli oggetti esposti in lotteria a favore dei giovani dei tre oratorii...* Turin, G.B. Paravia & Co.

¹⁴ *Elenco degli oggetti graziosamente donati...* Turin, Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1866 p.3 OE XVII 5; cf *Elenco degli oggetti...* Turin, Speirani 1862, p. 2, OE XIV 198; *Lotteria d’oggetti...* Turin, Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1865. p. 2 OE XVI 248: «i giovanetti accolti in questa casa sono divisi in due categorie, studenti ed artigiani».

¹⁵ Inaugurazione del patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare... Turin, Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1877, p.1. 4, OE XXVIII 382.

¹⁶ Letter to Dr Edoardo Carranza, president of the Conference of St Vincent de Paul in Buenos Aires, Sept. 30, 1877, E III 221.

¹⁷ Circular on the work opening in La Spezia, Oct. 11, 1880, E III 627.

¹⁸ Letter to Leo XIII March 1878, E III 317.

¹⁹ *Associazione di buone opere.* Turin, Oratory of St Francis de Sales Print Shop 18775, p. 6 OE. XXV 486; *Cooperatori salesiani ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume ed alla civile società.* Turin, Salesian Press 1876, p.6, OE XXVIII 260; last edition in San Pier d’Arena, Press and Book shop of St Vincent de Paul 1977, p.30, OE XXVIII 368.

jail, in order to build up a basis for discipline and moral behaviour, I also invited some other well behaved and educated youngsters".²⁰

The *Rules for Day Students* ended up sanctioning an already well-established practice, which made such an undertaking less selective and more open: "We aim primarily at young workers... However, the academic students who might want to join in on weekends or in vacation time are not excluded".²¹ Later on, new situations arose: Protestant proselytising, dangers associated with religious indifference, anticlerical secularism in the school and the press.²²

Logically, the picture one had of "poor and abandoned youth and youth at risk" picked up an entirely new meaning: more than being at the level of economic and legally determined poverty, the danger was seen essentially from a religious and moral perspective which overrode all other differences. As a matter of fact, before any kind of 'redemption' however legitimate, be it cultural or professional, the preservation of the faith and its stability for everyone appeared more urgent.

With regard to the danger of heresy, we do have a clear summary in a short, historical note dated March 12, 1879, and presented to Cardinal Nina, Secretary of State, in the Vatican. Don Bosco first of all recalled his anti-Protestant efforts from 1848 on, in the aftermath of the Constitution and its consequent liberalisation of the laws. This he took up through the press, by spreading good books, teaching catechism classes, preaching, setting up the festive oratories and charitable homes. Then Don Bosco restated the specific objective of the Salesian vocation, which aimed at "liberating the most needy class of people, namely, poor youth, from Protestant snares".

He also pointed out a broad gamut of undertakings such as: the St Aloysius Oratory in Turin; the St Paul Home at La Spezia; the church and grammar schools in Vallecrosia, Ventimiglia; St Leo's Home in Marseilles; the agricultural school at St Cyr and Navarre, Toulon; St Peter's Home in Nice (France); St Vincent's Home at Sampierdarena; the Oratory of the Holy Cross at Lucca; the homes of Montevideo and Buenos Aires.²³

Very similar undertakings, indicative of a Catholic reawakening, were opened in Uruguay and Argentina. These were actually considered to be the more or less remote

²⁰ MO (1991) 123 = BS 3 (1879) no. 3, March, p.6.

²¹ *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli esterni*. Turin Salesian Press 1877, first part, *Scopo di quest'opera*, p.3, OE XIX 33.

²² Don Bosco wrote many times about it to bishop friends and the Pope himself: letter to Pius IX, Nov. 9, 1859, Em I 386-387; April 13, 1860. Em I 400-401; March 10, 1861, Em I 441-442; Dec. 27, 1861. Em I 471-473.

²³ E III 455-456; similar concepts taken up again in a memorial to Leo XIII also March 1879, E III 462-464.

launching platform for a different kind of missionary evangelisation. This strategy is recorded in numerous documents which prefigure a rather ambitious plan which he had already made known to Cardinal Franchi in 1877.

We thought it best to create a new experiment. We are no longer going to send missionaries to work among the savages but go to the outskirts of civilized towns and then found churches, schools and homes with a twofold objective: 1. Help preserve the faith of those who have already received it. 2. Instruct and provide shelter for the indigenous (*Indios*) people living among Catholics either by religious desire or for other needs. The goal was to establish relationships with the parents through their children, so that the savages might become the evangelisers of the savages themselves.²⁴

There is another kind of interest in the young, particularly dear to Don Bosco, and which occupied him throughout his life: interest in young people called to an ecclesiastical or religious state. Naturally, these young people cannot be referred to as 'at risk' or 'abandoned', even though at times they came from families of modest means. "They are good-natured youngsters, who love the practices of piety, and who offer some hope that they are called to the ecclesiastical state".²⁵ The danger to which these youths are exposed does not come from the street or from the fact of being abandoned, but that they might "lose their vocation" through lack of material means and adequate care. This is one of the primary objectives of the Salesian Society: "Since the young who aspire to the ecclesiastical state are exposed to many and serious dangers, this Society will do its very best to make sure that those youngsters who show a special capacity for study and are commendable for their moral behaviour, be fostered in the upkeep of their piety".²⁶

The Cooperators Association's regulations called on them to support "youngsters who have an ecclesiastical vocation" apostolically, spiritually and financially.²⁷

²⁴ Letter of Dec. 31, 1877. E III 257-259. Identical ideas expressed to the new Prefect of Propaganda Fide, Car. Simeoni, in March 1877, E III 320-321; to Leo XIII April 13, 1880, E III 568-567; the *Memoriale intorno alle Missioni salesiane* presents an analytical view of Salesian work overseas, substantially the same as what is in Europe adding certain concrete missionary ideas for the future; to Propaganda Fide in Lyon March 1882, E IV 123-127.

²⁵ Conference to Salesian Cooperators, Turin, Valdocco 23 May 1879, BS 3 (1879) no. 6, June, p.3.

²⁶ *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. Turin, Salesian Press and Book shop 1875, chap I, art 5, p.4. OE XXVII 54

²⁷ *Cooperatori salesiani ossia un modo pratico...* 1876, p. 7, OE XXVIII 261.

The vocation experience has its beginning in 1849 and Don Bosco, despite obvious exaggeration, wrote about it as follows: "We might say that the house attached to the Oratory became a diocesan seminary for some twenty years".²⁸

A similar function is attributed to all the undertakings that followed: homes, boarding schools and agricultural schools, all of which offered cheap tuition. They had exactly the same aim: "to give the greatest number of talented young people the opportunity to receive an education which was a Christian education so that in time they may turn out to be good priests or courageous missionaries or wise fathers of families".²⁹

In 1877, Don Bosco would establish a stable set of rules, the 'Rules for the Houses', for the gradually developing works, along with the parallel 'Rules for the day students'. Every house, as far as possible, was expected to have an oratory attached to it: "The general aim of the houses of the Congregation is to provide help, do good to one's neighbour especially by educating youth, taking care of them during the most dangerous years of their lives, educating them in the sciences and arts and leading them to practise religion and virtue. The Congregation does not refuse to take care of any class of people, but it prefers the middle and poorer classes since these are the ones mostly in need of help and assistance".³⁰

Don Bosco was an ambassador for his own undertakings, and during the last years of his life and particularly during his historic trips to France and Spain, would come up with more engaging and definitive formulations of his system and its objectives, through the many talks and conferences. These would but confirm and further explain things.

In a letter to the Cooperators in January 1880, Don Bosco presented a complete list of the institutions he had set up on behalf of youth at risk: "Recreational parks, oratories, Sunday schools, evening schools, day schools, homes, boarding schools, educational institutions... all open for the public benefit in Italy, France, America".³¹

In April 1882, Don Bosco offered further explanation in Lucca: "Many thousands of youngsters in more than 100 houses receive a Christian education; they are instructed, introduced to learning an art or skill which will help them earn their bread honestly... Charitable contributions are used to prepare these children for civil society, so they may become either good Christian workers or faithful soldiers or exemplary masters

²⁸ MO (1991) 195.

²⁹ Conference to Cooperators at Casale Monferrato Nov. 17, 1881, BS 5 (1881) no. 12, Dec. p. 5.

³⁰ *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. Turin, Salesian Press 1877, part 2, Chap 1, *Scopo delle case della Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales*, p. 59, OE XXIX 155.

³¹ BS 4 (1880) no. 1, Jan, p. 1; information follows on works of various kinds in Italy, France, Argentina, including the Patagonian missions (pp. 1-3).

and teachers or priests and even missionaries who might bring religion and civilization to barbarians".³²

Don Bosco gave a talk at the Cooperators' meeting in Turin, on June 1, 1885: "He seemed very tired and his voice was soft. As he was telling the Cooperators about Salesian undertakings, he emphasised the reasons why they should be supported:

Because they educate youth to pursue virtue, the way leading to the altar; because their main goal is that of instructing youth who today have become the target of wicked people; because in their boarding schools, homes, festive oratories, their families they promote, in the midst of the world they promote, I repeat: love of religion, good morals, prayer, frequent reception of the sacraments".³³

As a consequence, it is not possible to reduce Don Bosco's practical interests to only one category of person, namely "poor and abandoned youth".

Don Bosco's active interests encompass a whole network of young people, a rather broad one which had the restricted and diverse world of delinquents at its lower level, those who needed to be corrected, those who had had to deal with the courts; there was the less defined world of the almost unredeemable, by using only preventive discipline. These youngsters could be harmful to many of the youth he had the intention of caring about the most.

Looking at higher levels, in principle, at least as far as the boarding schools and the homes were concerned, boys from upper-class families (financial or noble status) were excluded. These youngsters would have found themselves ill at ease in relatively 'cheap' institutions as far as buildings, food, cultural activities, general tone of life were concerned.³⁴

Don Bosco's perspective was quite broad when he spoke and wrote, bearing in mind the varied circumstances of young people and people in general. Whether he was writing books to uphold the faith or whether he was doing his best to point out the need for welfare and educational intervention beyond his own area of activity for young people, Don Bosco never excluded the widest possibility of applying the Preventive System, probably including some additional 'repressive' approaches. For

³² BS 6 (1882) no. 5, May p. 81.

³³ BS 9 (1885) no. 7, July, p. 94

³⁴ A more detailed research would be needed for individual institutes to detail the purpose and those they were looking after, their setting, the level and requests of families, the expectations of religious and civil authorities, historical development, quality of those running them and of the education they offered. From the monographs available some excellent research has been done, some less so. Amongst the most important of these concerning works undertaken by Don Bosco: P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*, already cited; F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco à Nice. La vie d'une école professionnelle catholique entre 1875 et 1919*. Paris, Apostolat des Éditions 1980, 397.

instance, he suggested the use of the Preventive System in Turin's prisons to Urban Rattazzi and he suggested to Francesco Crispi that the same system be employed for "boys seriously at risk", amongst whom "vagabonds who end up in the hands of public security agents".³⁵

It is evident, however, that Don Bosco's intentions, expressed through the institutions he had brought to completion and his more pressing concerns, are all focused on the young who find themselves at the lowest level and sidelined by society and mostly at risk. This is what the *Memoirs from 1841 to 1844-45-46 by Father John Bosco to his Salesian Sons* is all about. It is almost a last will and testament:

The world will always welcome us as long as our concern is for under-developed peoples, poor children, members of society most in danger. This is our real wealth which no-one will envy and nobody will take from us.³⁶

This is the direction Don Bosco repeatedly revealed to his Salesians, Cooperators and benefactors, in the talks addressed to them during the last decade of his life, not without explicit reference to the dangerous social situation of young people who are not adequately assisted. It was his last specification which might have aroused the sensitivities of his often well-to-do and concerned listeners, thus attracting greater charitable contributions from them.³⁷

While in Rome, in 1887, Don Bosco urged the Cooperators to help Salesians confront and stem the onrush of ever-increasing impiety and bad morals dragging so many poor and inexperienced youths to eternal ruin, both in the cities and in the towns. He urged them to help the Salesians lower the quantity of rascals who, left to themselves, ran great risk of filling up the prisons.³⁸

On March 30, 1882, Don Bosco told the Genoa Cooperators:

We see these youngsters scurrying from squares to back streets, shore to shore, growing up in the grip of idleness and leisure; we see them learn all sorts of

³⁵ Cf. some texts in P. Braidò, *Don Bosco Eeducatore. Scritti e testimonianze*, Rome LAS 1997, pp 85-87, 291-294.

³⁶ F. Motto, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 pel sac. Gio. Bosco a' suoi figliuoli Salesiani*, RSS 4 (1985) 127.

³⁷ Especially in his final years it is not to be excluded that Don Bosco's talks were added to by the editor of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, Fr John Bonetti.

³⁸ BS 2 (1878) no. 3, March, pp. 12-13. "It is a case of freeing them from the dangers that are imminent, from doing evil, from prison itself" he wrote in 1879, BS 3 (1879) no. 1, Jan., p. 2; The following year again: "Many thousands of young people, left abandoned, without education or religion, would have become the scourge of society, and maybe not a few would curse the Creator in prison... were on the contrary led away from evil"; BS 9 (1885) no. 7, July, p. 95.

obscenities and curses; later on we see them become scoundrels and criminals; and finally, mostly in the prime of life, we see them end up in prison.³⁹

There seemed to him to be an organised plot involved, and therefore works of prevention and defence were needed to counteract it!

On June 1, 1885, talking to the Turin Cooperators, Don Bosco said:

In this day and age, the wicked are trying to scatter the seeds of godlessness and bad morals; they are trying especially to ruin imprudent youths through associations, printed publications, meetings which aim, more or less openly, at keeping youth away from religion, Church and good morals.⁴⁰

To reach the hearts and the wallets of his well-to-do listeners, Don Bosco did not hesitate to project, at times, the likely danger that abandoned youths were like vagabonds, purse-snatchers or even criminals who perhaps one day might show up "begging for money with a knife at your throat" or "with a pistol in their hands".⁴¹

2. Elements of youth psychology

To understand Don Bosco's Preventive System we should also keep in mind the following items, the age bracket of the young people he dealt with and to whom the Preventive System was preferably applied, under his immediate or mediated direction; the age of the boys frequenting the festive oratories in Turin and the complex institution that was Valdocco's Oratory; the age of those attending the boarding schools at Mirabello Monferrato, later transferred to Borgo San Martino, Lanzo Torinese, Alassio and Varazze, Genoa-Sampierdarena, Nice and Marseilles.

2.1 Growing up

As a rule, in the majority of the works Don Bosco founded, the prevailing interest was in teenagers, a more extended age group for festive oratories, schools and boarding schools, including those in the final years of adolescence. Exceptions were made even during Don Bosco's lifetime for students in the boarding schools at Alassio and Valsalice, as well as the pre-university institution set up by Fr Lasagna at Villa Colon (Montevideo).

³⁹ BS 6 (1882) no. 4, April, p. 70. Similar presentation of youth especially those who moved to Rome: BS 8 (1884) no. 1, Jan. p. 2; conference to Roman Cooperators 8 May, BS 8 (1884) no. 6, June, p. 88; in darker tones and described in a conference in Turin on June 1, 1885, youth in Paris "the big capital of France with 2 million inhabitants": BS 9 (1885) no. 7, July, p. 95.

⁴⁰ BS 9 (1885) no. 7, July, p. 95.

⁴¹ Cf. letter to Dr. Carranza, Buenos Aires, 30 Sept 1877, E III 221; conference to Cooperators in Lucca, April 8, 1882, BS 6 (1882) no. 5, May, p. 81; address to the Catholic Association in Barcelona, April 15, 1886, C. Viglietti, *Cronaca dal 15 aprile al 16 maggio 1886*, p. 5

The age range, in reference to young working boys was much wider and less strictly defined.⁴² So summing up, Don Bosco's pedagogy is a youth-oriented pedagogy where the terms 'young', 'youth' are given a rather wide connotation. But in overall numbers and attention, they were mostly teenagers. It is for boys of the 15-16 year-old bracket that Don Bosco wrote 'Lives' or biographical stories of boys, which were one of the basic tools Don Bosco used to pass on his educational experience and pedagogical reflections.⁴³

The following norm, generally put into practice, is found in the 'Rules for Day Students':

We are looking for eight-year-olds, so smaller boys are excluded, along with those who cause a lot of trouble and are unable to understand what we are teaching them.⁴⁴

The *Rules for the Houses* notably restricts the age limit when it established that the pupil "must have completed his grammar school"⁴⁵ as a condition for acceptance. In practice though, most of the boarding schools for students had a grammar school program in place or at least the last two years of grammar school. Ultimately, most of the institutions (oratories, homes, boarding schools) were open to boys whose age went from childhood to early and late adolescence so from approximately 8 to 18 years of age, but probably most were between 12 and 16.

As far as the terminology used by Don Bosco in his talks and in his writings is concerned, there is some inevitable variation. Italian and Latin: *fanciulli, fanciullini, giovani, giovanetti, pueri, adolescentes, adulescentuli, juvenes* (children, little children, adolescents, in general terms) were generally inter-changeable. Only *fanciullo, giovanetto* appear to be distinct, as they designate boys from the age of 8 to 11.

The booklet on *The Work of Mary Help of Christians for Vocations to the Ecclesiastical State Created in the Home of St Vincent de Paul at Sampierdarena*

⁴² At the Oratory at Valdocco, the average age of students was 13-14, working boys, 14-15; cf P. Stella *Don Bosco nella storia economica...*

⁴³ What Albert Caviglia writes, however, is excessive: "Most pedagogues and educational writers turned their attention to children between 6 and 12 years of age. The problem of progress was the primary, elementary schools (as well as kindergarten, the Aporti case); In Italy they were way behind. Now what Our man was concerned about and acted on behalf of, those he called 'youth', 'young lads', are not children but precisely those who worked with, from 12 years on... This was another of Don Bosco's great merits, in having found, literally, the right way to educate teenagers". (A. Caviglia, *La «Storia d'Italia» a masterpiece by Don Bosco. Introductory address, in Opere e scritti editi e inediti di «Don Bosco», vol III La Storia d'Italia. Turin, SEI 1935, pp. XLII-XLIII*); *«Don Bosco anche letterariamente ha risolto il problema della pedagogia dell'adolescente»* (p. XLIV).

⁴⁴ *Regolamento dell'Oatorio...per gli esterni*, part II, Chap II, art. 3, p. 30. OE XXIX 60.

⁴⁵ *Regolamento per le case...*, part II, Chap II, art.9, p. 62. OE XXIX 158.

seems to make a broad distinction between young adults or big boys or bigger boys (*giovani adulti, o grandicelli o più grandicelli*), from 16 to 30 years of age, and children (*fanciulli*), little children (*piccolini*).⁴⁶

2.2 Features of youth psychology

We should not expect from Don Bosco a scientific study of age ranges which would allow us to clearly distinguish various developmental stages. However, at times some of the features pointed out by Don Bosco can be connected with one developmental stage rather than another. It is especially important to remark that Don Bosco's perception of the psychology of the young for whom he worked was strictly connected with his view of pastoral and pedagogical activity as a whole.

In defining the features proper to youth, Don Bosco ended up using descriptive terms but ones which also evaluated things positively or negatively according to how a young person was ready for education or according to the requirements of salvation.

Don Bosco seemed to link the moral and religious aspects of these features with judgement that was more negative than positive, and considered features in need of correction rather than ones that could be employed. Often enough youthfulness was implicitly compared with adulthood. For instance, the incompleteness of youth contrasts with the completeness of adulthood; the fickleness of youth with the poise of adulthood; youthful lack of reflection with adult wisdom; fickle youth with emotionally stable adults.⁴⁷ Naturally, other terms are not omitted which point to positive elements like availability, and positive potential such as sensitivity, impressionability and 'heart'.

More numerous and reflective remarks appear time and again in the pages of the 1877 'Preventive System'. Similar remarks can be found in the writings going back to the 1840s and in particular the *Companion of Youth*, and they are repeated and enriched in the 'Lives' written during the 1850s and 60s.

The pages written in 1877 convey, first of all, what Don Bosco thought was the dominant feature of the youthful age, and the most decisive reason for adopting the Preventive System:

⁴⁶ S. Pier d' Arena, St Vincent de Paul Press and Book shop 1877, p. 4,5,25, OE XXIX 4, 5, 25. Cf. also *Opera di Maria Ausiliatrice per le vocazioni allo stato ecclesiastico*. Fossano, Saccone Press, s.d. [=1875]: "The purpose of this Work is to bring together young men... Each pupil must belong to an upright family, be healthy, robust, of good character, between 16-30 years old"; also in this edition, *fanciulli* and *piccolini* were contrasted with *giovani grandicelli*: pp 2-5, OE XXVII 2-5.

⁴⁷ Cf. J. Scheppens, *Les structures de pensée, notamment théologiques, sous-jacentes à la pratique pédagogique de don Bosco*, in *Éducation et pédagogie chez don Bosco*. Paris, Éditions Fleurus 1989, pp. 148-155. "Jean Bosco définit donc lui aussi les jeunes comme des êtres faibles et inconstants, marqués par la fragilité morale et la versatilité" (p. 150).

The primary reason for this system is the thoughtlessness of the young, who in one moment forget the rules of discipline and the penalties for their infringement. Consequently a child often becomes culpable and deserving of punishment, which he had not even thought about and which he had quite forgotten when heedlessly committing the fault he would certainly have avoided, had a friendly voice warned him.⁴⁸

This feature is strictly connected with a second typical feature: lack of experience, immaturity, and as a consequence, lack of consideration and lack of prudence. For Don Bosco youth, taken in the widest sense, is by definition “dangerously inexperienced” and therefore “unstable” and “careless”.⁴⁹ Therefore, youth can easily be trapped by snares of all kinds and from all sources: from the devil, bad companions, gaudy or alluringly presented things, temptations, freedom, heresy. It is mainly for this reason that youth is “an age exposed to dangers which can be found in every social circumstance”.⁵⁰ ‘Which children should be considered at risk’ is the title of a paragraph written in a memo on the Preventive System and handed to Francesco Crispi in February of 1878.⁵¹

The very root of youth’s thoughtlessness can be found in an innate lack of organisation which affects youth’s psychological existence and precedes any kind of educational intervention. “Youngsters, just because they lack instruction and reflection allow themselves, often blindly, to be dragged by some of their friends or by their lack of reflection into bad behaviour, simply they have been neglected”.⁵²

Connected with this is a characteristic trait “which Don Bosco repeated time and again: Young people are flighty, unable to keep to their commitments, fragile, easily get tired, are just as easily discouraged as they become enthusiastic about something”.⁵³

⁴⁸ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p. 48, OE XXVIII 426.

⁴⁹ Cf. Fatti contemporanei esposti in forma di dialogo. Turin, De-Agostini 1853, p. 3, OE V 53; Lo spazzacammino. Turin Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1866, p. 62, OE XVII 174; Il Galantuomo. Almanacco per il 1873. Turin Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1872, p. 5, OE XXV 5; “remove fickle and careless young people from sin”; G. Bosco, *Severino ossia avventure di un giovane alpigiano*. Turin Oratory of St Francis de Sales Printshop 1868, p. 4, OE XX 4; “Le mie sciagure servono ad altri d’avviso per evitare gli scogli che conducano alla rovina tanta inesperta gioventù”; BS 2 (1878) no 3, March, p. 12, 1q3.

⁵⁰ G. Bosco. *La forza della buona educazione...* p. 55, OE VI 329.

⁵¹ Cf. *Il sistema preventivo* (1878), RSS 4 (1985) 301-302.

⁵² *Il sistema preventivo* (1878), RSS 9 (1985) 300; going to the prisons Don Bosco had noticed that “a great number of children considered their punishment less than the fact they were abandoned and not given consideration” (G. Bosco *L’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales ospizio di beneficenza*. Turin, Salesian Press 1879, p. 3, OE XXI 259.

⁵³ P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol II, p. 190.

In the life of St Dominic Savio, Don Bosco writes: "It is a particular trait of youth to be flighty, namely to easily change one's resolve about what one wants to achieve; and it is not a thing that happens seldom. Today a young man decides to do one thing and the next day he does another one; today he practices virtue to an eminent degree and the next day, he does just the opposite".⁵⁴

Naturally, this turns out to be even more evident when a young man has to face something which demands seriousness and commitment: this is the case with religion, piety, study, work and discipline.

In the Life of Besucco, Don Bosco emphasises how difficult it is for a youngster to "learn how to have a taste for prayer. Their fickle age causes them to see anything which demands serious mental attention as something nauseating and even as an enormous weight".⁵⁵

All that we have mentioned above goes back to a deeper and ambivalent reality with a theological and psychological sense to it. According to Don Bosco virtue, religion, the realm of grace are also sources of happiness. In the *Companion of Youth*, following a widespread ascetic type of literature for the young, both in his own time and earlier, Don Bosco emphasised one extremely problematic aspect of human nature and of the nature of a young person. We cannot tell whether Don Bosco means to refer to a healthy nature or a nature wounded by sin, because at this juncture Don Bosco does not seem to notice such a distinction.⁵⁶ Anyway, according to Don Bosco, the human being and more clearly so the young man seems to be born to rejoice; of his very nature a human being, a young man longs for joy, entertainment, pleasure. This tendency seems to enter into conflict with happiness and its sources. As a matter of fact, so Don Bosco continues, "If I tell one of my children to receive the Sacraments frequently, to pray each day, the answer I get is: I have something else to do, I have work to do, or I have to have fun".⁵⁷

There is another characteristic feature instead, which Don Bosco notes and sees mostly from a positive angle: youngsters need to move about, have life, free rein for their physical, intellectual, emotional and moral energies. There is a fundamental precept connected with this feature. It was inspired by St Philip Neri but employed by

⁵⁴ G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell' Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales*. Turin, G.B. Pravia & Co. 1859, p. 37, OE XI 187.

⁵⁵ G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero Vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d'Argentera*. Turin, Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1864, pp. 113-114, OE XV 355-356.

⁵⁶ P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Vol II p. 188

⁵⁷ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...* p. 33 OE II 213.

Don Bosco in language and educational praxis that makes it a construct of exceptional value: "Let them have ample freedom to jump, to run, to shout as they wish".⁵⁸

There are other innate qualities found in the young and they are entirely positive. Don Bosco sees them and enjoys describing them as they are found in Michael Magone, the typical young lad, not only from a pedagogical point of view but especially from the perspective of a basic psychological structure, prior to any serious moral damage: his liveliness, spontaneity, inborn tendency to like what is good, unconsciously oriented towards true happiness.

Naturally lively yet pious, good and devout, he thought a lot of the smallest practices of piety. He practised them cheerfully, freely and easily, without scruples: on account of his piety, study and congenial nature he was loved and respected by all; on account of his liveliness and good manners he was the idol of recreation time.⁵⁹

Even after the premonition that he was soon to die, Michael Magone's "cheerfulness and joviality were not changed in the least".⁶⁰

There is another feature added to the ones mentioned above: youth has an inner vitality which is expressed by a remarkable impressionability and receptivity, both emotionally and perceptively. Don Bosco deals explicitly with this feature, when he expresses his views on the educative and moral aspects of the theatre.

"We maintain that youngsters hold on to impressions of things vividly presented, in their heart, and neither reason nor contrary facts can convince them to easily forget them".⁶¹

Impressionability may have some negative aspects but it is taken mainly from its positive side, as Don Bosco himself remarks when he talks about the happy crisis faced by Josephine, the chief character in a play called *The Conversion of a Waldesian Lady*. "Youth, so long as it is not the slave to vice, lingers only momentarily on other things, but the precepts of religion and especially eternal principles produce the keenest impression on youth".⁶²

What follows are two overall fundamental dimensions of youth psychology, which embrace the entire personality of the young and have an impact on the entire educational system. They can be noticed especially in boys throughout their teenage years and can be properly directed towards a more mature youth. They are: a very keen sense

⁵⁸ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p. 54 OE XXVIII 432. This outline responds to a true "pedagogy of joy and festivity"; cf chap. 16.

⁵⁹ G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*. Turin, G.B. Paravia & Co. 1861, p. 66 OE XIII 220.

⁶⁰ G. Bosco *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone....* p. 68, OE XIII 222.

⁶¹ *Regolamento per le case...* part I Chap XVI *Del teatrino*, p. 50 OE XXIX 146.

⁶² G. Bosco *Conversione di una valdese. Fatto contemporaneo*. Turin, P. De-Agostini Priess 1854, p. 27, OE V 285.

of justice, intolerance of any kind of injustice and a strong affection, heart. The two features are explicitly highlighted, once again, in the 1877 'Preventive System'. They are both connected with two radical preventive experiences: reason and loving kindness.

Don Bosco gives teachers a reflection on his concern:

Experience teaches that the young do not easily forget the punishments they have received, and for the most part foster bitter feelings, along with the desire to throw off the yoke and even to seek revenge. They may sometimes appear to be quite unaffected but anyone who follows them as they grow up knows that the reminiscences of youth are terrible. They easily forget punishments by their parents but only with great difficulty those inflicted by their teachers, and some have even been known in later years to have had recourse to brutal vengeance for chastisements they had justly deserved during the course of their education.⁶³

All in all, education is a 'thing of the heart', because, as a rule and almost naturally, a boy is 'heart'. 'For this reason, an educator will be always able to win over the heart of the one he protects', and to speak with the language of the heart".⁶⁴

As a matter of fact, "in every youngster, even the most unfortunate one, there is a spot accessible to what is good. It is the task of an educator to look for this spot, the sensitive heart string, and draw profit from it".⁶⁵

Don Bosco reserved some remarks of a psychological and moral nature for the childhood stage, the age prior to eight years old, and for the age of eight to twelve.

In reference the childhood stage, this is what Don Bosco wrote of Dominic Savio: "Even at that happy-go-lucky age, he entirely relied on his mother." And "he also came to know from his parents testimony that he was like this ever since his tender age... when, due to lack of reflection, boys are a bother and a continuous source of grief to their mothers; an age when boys want to see everything, touch everything and, most of the time, mess up everything".⁶⁶

As we have mentioned, 'small boys' were not admitted to the Oratory, because "they cause trouble and are unable to understand what they are being taught".⁶⁷ As for the eight- to twelve-year-old stage, judgements expressed by Don Bosco are not optimistic.

⁶³ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p. 48, 50, OE XXVIII 426, 428

⁶⁴ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p. 48, 50, OE XXVIII 426, 428

⁶⁵ Cited in MB V 367

⁶⁶ G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...* pp 12-13, OE XI 162-163

⁶⁷ *Regolamento dell'Oratorio...per gli esterni*, part II, Chap II, art. 3, p.30, OE XXIX 60.

This is the age, so Don Bosco says, when boys are bored or unwilling to pray and are inclined to the pranks common to that age.⁶⁸ Don Bosco does not even excuse boys of this age from their serious moral responsibilities. We see this in reflections collected by Father Bonetti for his chronicle, dated March 1, 1863: "I find that many boys' confessions can't be treated as indicated in the norms given in theology. Most of the time, no consideration is given to faults committed from the age eight to twelve, and if a confessor does not take steps to find out, and ask about them, they will pass them over and will go on building their life on a faulty basis".⁶⁹

3. *Theology of education*

Don Bosco does not have a systematic and theological anthropology at his disposal. This aspect of Don Bosco's priestly seminary formation seems to lead him back to just a few important, basic acquisitions. What Pietro Stella wrote about a well-defined and widespread dogmatic and moral, though not universally applicable theology can be applied to Don Bosco's culture and his mind-set as educator and pastor. Dogmatic theology saw everything in the light of predestination or a free response to grace, and the account to be given to the Divine Judge, in expectation of either eternal life or eternal death.

Therefore dogmatic theology focused on seeing everything from the perspective of its value for eternity, reward or condemnation.

Moral theology, on the other hand, with its debates on probabilism and probabiliorism, focusing everything on the relationship between divine law and freedom, trained people to see their actions as responsible compliance with divine law.⁷⁰) Some other material, probably of a key nature, was added to this: books on religious formation, writings used to prepare meditations, instructions, homilies for ordinary and extraordinary preaching, other sources of an historical, catechetical and apologetic nature. And finally, Don Bosco's natural disposition and his meaningful conversations with his boys were no doubt decisive in his gaining a comprehensive picture of the natural dispositions of the young as regards salvation and salvation-oriented education.

Don Bosco could attribute his ability to sketch out various classifications of young people to his constant living amongst them. He used many terms and not all of them were necessarily synonymous. In some cases these classifications have a precise

⁶⁸ [G. Bosco]. *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù, scritti da un suo collega*. Turin. Speirani and Ferrero 1844, p. 5 and 11, OE I 5 and 11.

⁶⁹ Cited in MB VII 404. John Baptist Lemoyne says he got it from a *Cronaca* by Fr Bonetti. We did not find it in the surviving *Cronache*.

⁷⁰ P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità*. ... Vol I, p. 61: cf also p. 63.

pedagogical meaning aimed at differentiating the way a boy should be educated.⁷¹ But more often than not, these classifications were nothing but theological and moral evaluations and generally with a preventive or apostolic aim in mind: keeping them away from the wicked, or being friendly with the good and, at times, bringing the dissolute and wavering youngsters back on the right path.⁷²

The most significant text on a theology of youth and education is certainly found in the first lines of Don Bosco's *Introduction* to his 1850s *Piano di Regolamento* (an outline for a set of rules) where he quotes from St John's Gospel 11:52. The text is applied to the youth of his day: Jesus had to die "to gather together in unity the scattered children of God". In this outline we see the main actors in the growing process: God and the means of grace, the family with its deficiencies, society with all its dangers, the educators, the appropriate places, the young themselves with the wealth of resources they are naturally gifted with.

Youth is the most of delicate and precious portion of human society. It is on youth that the hopes of a happy future are based, and youth of itself does not have a wicked disposition. If you remove their parents' neglect, idleness, meeting up with bad companions, which they are subject to especially at weekends, then it turns out to be quite easy to instil in their tender hearts the principles of order, good moral behaviour, respect and religion. And if it does happen at times that they be found corrupt at that age, that happens rather because of thoughtlessness and not because of sheer malice. These youngsters really need a kindly hand, someone who takes care of them, nurtures them and guides them towards virtue and keeps them away from vice. The main difficulty lies in finding a way to gather them together, speak to them and teach them moral behaviour.⁷³

Following a more analytic and largely theological consideration we could place the field-forces on four levels: the young person as an individual, the environment, the religious world, the mediation provided by education.⁷⁴

First of all, Don Bosco speaks of and writes about a general positive readiness of the young to reach moral and educational maturity when nurtured on time, thanks to

⁷¹ Found as we will see in the *Cenni storici intorno all'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, and in the *Articoli generali*, at the head of the *Regolamento delle case*. On this see P. Braido, *Il sistema preventivo in un decalogo per educatori*, RSS 4 (1985) 143-144.

We will speak further on of the pedagogical and differential aspect of classifications.
⁷² Cf. *Cenni* on Comollo (1844), p. 63-64, OE I 63-64; *Il giovane provveduto* (1847), pp. 21-22, OE 201-202; *Vita di Domenico Savio* (1859), pp. 26-27, OE XI 176-177; MO (1991) 59.

⁷³ *Introduzione* to the *Piano di Regolamento...* in P. Braido (Ed.) *Don Bosco nella Chiesa...*, pp. 34-35.

⁷⁴ For a deeper analysis of the anthropological elements of J. Scheppens, *Human nature in the educational outlook of St John Bosco*, RSS 8 (1989) 263-287.

the commitment of educators and thanks to the young person himself. We cannot afford to lose time: "Young people are greatly loved by God", because they still have "time to perform many good deeds". They are at "a simple, humble and innocent age and, in general, have not yet become the unfortunate prey of the infernal enemy".⁷⁵ Besides and also because of this, "the salvation of a small child depends ordinarily on the period of his youth".⁷⁶

Don Bosco wants to express this idea in God's words: "*Adolescens juxta viam suam etiam com senuerit non recedet ab ea*, if we start off with a good life when we are young, we will continue to be good into old age and our death will be a good death and mark the beginning of eternal happiness. On the contrary, if vice gets us in its grip when we are young, it will likely continue to have a hold on us throughout life and until death".⁷⁷

A young person's human potential and natural disposition are helpful, even though they may lean in different directions, more often good, ordinary or even indifferent. Intelligence, the faculty of truth, holds prime of place, then will, the faculty of good, with the freedom to act that follows on from it. Don Bosco gives it a great importance if we think about his insistence on the good resolutions which characterise his pedagogy on the sacrament of Penance.

What distinguishes man from all the other animals in a special manner is the fact that he is gifted with a soul which thinks, reasons, knows what is good and what is evil.⁷⁸

God has given us a soul, namely that invisible reality which we feel in us and which continuously tends to raise itself up to God; this intelligent being thinks, reasons, and will not be able to find happiness here on earth. Therefore, even in the midst of the riches and pleasures of this world, it will always feel restless until it rests in God, for God alone can make it happy.

God gave our soul *freedom*, namely the faculty to choose good or evil assuring it of a reward if it acts well, and threatening it with punishment whenever it chooses to act badly".⁷⁹

⁷⁵ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...* pp 10-11, OE II 190-191.

⁷⁶ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...* pp 12-13, OE II 192-193.

⁷⁷ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...* pp 6-71, OE II 186-187; cf also G. Bosco *La forza della buona educazione...* pp 62-63, OE VI 336-337. It is one of the "almost obligatory topics in ascetic reading for youth" (P. Stella, *Valori spirituali nel Giovane provveduto...* p. 52).

⁷⁸ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...* pp 10, OE X 317-319

⁷⁹ G. Bosco *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo.* Turin, G.B. Paravia & CO. 1858, pp. 23-25, OE X 317-319.

The following elements, very positive as far as religious and moral realities as well as the educational relationship are concerned, should be added to what we have mentioned, namely, sensitivity, affectivity and heart. These make an irreplaceable contribution to the perception of the ugliness of sin and the preciousness of virtue.⁸⁰

Finally, the fragility which the young demonstrate is linked by Don Bosco not only with their age and environment but also with the reality of original sin. Original sin has wounded the faculties of understanding and will; they have become disoriented, obstructed, messed up by the passions which have grown stronger. This is how Don Bosco describes the consequences of original sin, in his book *An Easy Way to Learn Bible History*: “The consequences of original sin happen to be all the miseries of our soul and body”. “The miseries of the soul are: ignorance, concupiscence, being shut out of heaven”; “Ignorance consists in man’s not being able to know his destiny and his duties without the help of Revelation”; “Concupiscence means the tendency to commit sin”. “Finally, the miseries of the body are: poverty, illnesses and death”.⁸¹

It would possibly be useful to re-read a Chronicle detail which records the content of a conversation Don Bosco had on Tuesday, May 11, 1875. The conversation is actually a ‘dissertation’ by Don Bosco on ‘the miseries of man’, all leading back to Original Sin as their origin. It can shed some light on a certain ambivalence evidenced by Don Bosco in his moral evaluation of the young person, on the quality and content of their aspirations to reach happiness and the consequent educational intervention needed: “We have to acknowledge the dissonance between what Don Bosco thinks and says and what Don Bosco does in practice.

It all follows the question of the catechism which says: what effect does original sin produce? It causes us to come into this world not in God’s grace, deserving hell, being inclined to sin, subject to death and many miseries affecting our soul and body. Some think that they will be able to lead a happy life on this earth and try all possible ways to have a good time. But a happy life we will never be able to have on account of the many miseries affecting our soul and body. The more we desire happiness and look for it, the more it will elude us. And what seems most surprising is the fact that all the satisfaction we get is only good enough to increase the miseries produced by Adam’s sin! Well! All these miseries lead us to exclaim from the bottom of our heart: *Quod eternum non est, nihil est*, Whatever is not eternal amounts to nothing. It is better for us to think about eternal realities and then all the things of this earth will appear worthless to us. [Then a large carriage drawn by a mule passes by and gives rise to new thoughts].

⁸⁰ MO (1991) 35.

⁸¹ G. Bosco *Memoria facile per imparare la storia sacra ad uso del popolo cristiano*. Turin, Paravia & Co. 1855, pp. 12-13, OE VI 60-61.

Don Bosco, referring to the mule, exclaimed:

Jumentis insipientibus comparatus est et similis factus est illis (he was compared with stupid animals and became like them) Here you have what man does: he only thinks about the things of this world and commits sins. What does he do when he commits sin? Well! He renounces the use of his reason; because if he did reason it would be impossible for him to offend God since he knows well how great, how good and how just God is. If a man uses his reason, he will try not to offend God. And what is it that distinguishes a man from an animal? Reason: that is why Holy Scripture compares him to a stupid animal. But David prefaces these words with the following: *Homo, cum in honore esset, non intellexit, jumentis insipientibus* (Man, even though held in honour, failed to understand and acted like the stupid animals). In what way is man held in honour? This is the answer given by one Holy Father: A man who is innocent or in God's grace possesses the greatest treasure, the greatest honour ever to be found in this world.⁸²

There is no doubt that Don Bosco shows evidence of a certain kind of literature, particularly by Charles Gobinet, not far from Jansenist tones. But it is hard to spell out in practice what degree of inspiration Don Bosco received from theological sources and how much he allowed himself to be guided by more positive, practical considerations translated into trust and hope.⁸³

At any rate, Don Bosco vigorously states the necessity and possibility of an effective collaboration with God's grace. "Jesus preaches", and announces a happy and eternal life, that is heaven, but his real desire is that this happiness should be reached by dint of effort, by the practice of virtue and avoiding vice".⁸⁴

More closely related to experience are Don Bosco's oft-expressed beliefs about the family setting where the young live. Don Bosco certainly does not fail to refer to the positive influence provided by parents for the growth of the young. Don Bosco often sheds light on the different impact produced by mother and father on the young, and especially in his Lives of his boys. We only have to think about Dominic Savio's exemplary parents as well as Besucco's, about the holy and religious mothers of Peter in *The Power of a Good Education* (1855) and *Valentino* (1866); about the father of *Severino* (1868). Countless are the motherly and fatherly figures we find in the lives of the saints and in the various history texts he wrote: *Bible History*, *Church History*; the *History of Italy* and the *Lives of the Popes*.

⁸² G. Barberis *Cronichetta*, exercise book I, pp 4-6

⁸³ Ct P. Stella *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità...* Vol II pp 232-236; J. Scheppens, *Human nature...* pp 278-281.

⁸⁴ G. Bosco, *il mese di maggio...* p. 30, OE X 324.

But since Don Bosco defends the cause of poor and abandoned youth, youth at risk and risky, he does not fail to underscore the responsibilities of their parents, some of them either inept or incapacitated or perverse.

With regard to the social environment, Don Bosco's judgements are prevalently negative. People responsible for the social environment becoming dangerous are adults who act as the agents of corruption through books, newspapers, immoral shows and bad example of impiety and dishonesty. But bad companions are no less a cause of evil and scandal, especially when it is a question of companions who have reached the lowest stage of consummate malice. When confronted with them, the true allies of the devil, there is no other defence than to reject them and flee from them.

In the world of the invisible Don Bosco constantly marks out the Devil as the fully active tempter. He knows from his faith that the Devil is never idle. Don Bosco has had direct experience of the presence of the Devil both in the harassments which, at certain times, tormented him,⁸⁵ and also and especially during various stages in the lives of his young people.

The talks about his dreams are full of references of this kind, as are his retreat talks and the monthly exercise for a happy death. The Devil and his court appear disguised as various types of monsters and animals: big cats perched on the shoulders of the boys making their confession and preventing them from making a good and sincere confession, *pigs, mad dogs, lions, tigers, elephants* trampling boys under their paws, *snakes* that wrap themselves around and paralyse the boys. The Devil finds servants, helpers, and friends all over: in those who give scandal, in those who are corrupt, in teachers of malice. The 'wiles' which Don Bosco writes about in his *Companion of Youth* are the wiles of the Devil.

The 'snares' laid out by the enemy of the human race to trip up the young, reveal the Devil's creative and unbounded cunning.

But the young person is not at the mercy of evil. He is rather lovingly 'besieged' by the inexhaustible resources of the transcendent world of God and His Grace, offered through the Catholic faith: God, Jesus Christ, the Church, the sacraments, the Virgin Mother, a countless number of Intercessors, the Word of God.

Religion is the foundation, the source and the soul of the young person's life and of his growing process. The appeal to God is absolutely necessary and, naturally, it calls for human cooperation: Prayer, getting away from sin, praying for forgiveness, putting the resolutions made in Confession into practice, the exercise of brotherly

⁸⁵ In the early stages, according to Bonetti's *cronache*, it seems to reach a peak in 1862 (cf *Annali* II 1861-1862, pp 17-22 ff.). In September he would write a short work in the Catholic Readings entitled, *La podestà delle tenebre ossia Osservazioni dommatico-morali sopra gli spiriti maledci*.

charity; in a few but essential words, the service of God, good works, duty. "My dear boys", Don Bosco asked those who were about to hold back, "Do we want to go to heaven in a coach?", the best form of transport in his time.⁸⁶

But the hinge on which the whole divine-human synergy depends as a determining factor is the mediation provided by education. For this reason it naturally follows that the primary virtue needed in a young man is obedience. What contributes most to the "feared shipwreck of the young" is not meeting up with "perverse companions" or parental neglect but their possible "unfaithful disposition towards a good education"⁸⁷ and even before that, the fact that they consider education to be worthless". The presence and the work of educators who are competent and "consecrated" to caring for youth is absolutely necessary for the young person's salvation. Quite literally, "God needs men". This primary initiative essentially calls for a response on the part of the young person, his submission and willing cooperation. This was the first message Don Bosco addressed to youth in the first book entirely written for them:

Since a tender plant, even though planted in good soil in a garden may take the wrong turn and end up badly if it is not cultivated and, so to speak, guided to a certain thickness, likewise you, my dear children, will bend and take a turn towards evil if you do not allow yourselves to be bent by the ones whose task it is to direct you, first of all your parents, then your superiors and elders.⁸⁸

The second great manifesto was directed to educators. The Preventive System, which is a complex experience before it becomes a formula, is entirely for them: to guide them and spur them on to exercising a kind of responsibility which has countless implications: personal and social, temporal and eternal.

This was the message that Don Bosco launched, one more time, as his earthly life fell "into the sear of the yellow leaf": "Work at the good education of youth, especially poor and abandoned youth which are in the majority, and you will be able to easily give glory to God and guarantee benefits for religion, save many souls and cooperate effectively in the reform and well-being of civil society. For reason, religion, history and experience have proven that our religion and civil society will be good or bad, according to the good or bad education imparted to youth".⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Circular to Salesians Jan. 6, 1884, E IV 250.

⁸⁷ G. Bosco, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso...* p. 12 OE II 362.

⁸⁸ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...*, pp 13-16, OE II 193-196.

⁸⁹ Conference to Cooperators in Turin 1883 31 May. BS 7 (1883), no. 7, July, p. 104.

Chapter 10

WAYS SUGGESTED FOR HELPING BOYS WITH SPECIAL PROBLEMS

For Don Bosco, all young people, by dint of being young, are virtually 'at risk'; more so when one considers that they might unknowingly be subject to occult powers. But Don Bosco tends to distinguish them, to classify them.

The first group or category is the largest one; the vast majority which also includes a minority of élite boys because of their moral qualities or because of their calling. He calls these 'the many', meaning "the ones of normal character and nature". Then there is a "third group, the difficult disciples and the unruly". In his *Regulations for the houses*, 1877, he calculates this group to be "one in fifteen" or 6-7%.¹

At the lower end of this scale and immediately connected to it are boys with special difficulties. These are the 'at risk' (*pericolati*) types using the terminology of the day, which he never used: delinquents, boys involved with the police or a legal process, the ones entrusted to correctional institutes.

This fourth category was never included in a steady and systematic way in the educational and institutional framework that Don Bosco visualised for the majority category. But Don Bosco never ignored their existence and never excluded them from his interests as priest and educator. Neither did he exclude them from the reach of his Preventive System. Don Bosco's involvement can be certainly recognised within four fundamental situations:

1. A direct experience, however marginal, with youngsters in prison and correctional institutions (1841-1855).
2. His encounter with 'mischievous' boys within or close to his own institutions.
3. The problematic hypothesis of a reformatory school.
4. The proposal to have his Preventive System universally applied, even though in a differentiated integrated fashion.

1. Don Bosco with young detainees at the *Generala*

Father John Francis Giacomelli, Don Bosco's friend and confessor, gave the

¹ *Regolamento per le case..., Articoli generali*, art. 7 p. 16, OE XXIX 112.

following testimony at the Diocesan process for Don Bosco's Beatification and Canonization, on May 2, 1892:

Don Bosco's charity was not restricted to the boys of his Oratory, but also had a broader reach. As a matter of fact, I accompanied him to the prisons where he taught catechism and heard confessions. I also accompanied him to the 'Hotel for Virtue' where more than 100 boys were boarding.²

Don Bosco began this work at the urging of Fr Cafasso, while he was at the at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* (1841-1844) and he continued it later on, either on his own initiative or in connection with the Oratory work, as pointed out by various converging and interdependent sources.³

Besides all this, what has been said about Don Bosco's ties with the prisons for minors and the *Generala* workhouse can be substantiated with additional information.⁴

John Bonetti in the *History of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales* wrote that "ever since the government had opened the penitentiary and handed its administration over to the Society of St Peter in Chains, Don Bosco received permission to visit those poor youngsters, worthy of every compassion, every once in a while. With permission from the prisons director, Don Bosco gave the boys catechism instructions, preached to them, heard their confessions, and many times mingled with them in recreation in a friendly manner, just as he used to do with his children at the Oratory".⁵

This is the context for the legendary outing to Stupinigi, which Don Bosco had with detainees during the spring of 1855 organised by Don Bosco alone, with the consent of Urban Rattazzi, then minister of the interior. This outing had no guards at all and relied only on mutual trust, the conscientious commitment of the detainees and the spellbinding influence of the educator.⁶

An event such as this, rather more limited, was likely to have happened according to the regulations of the correctional institution. In fact, the institution foresaw the possibility that outings as a reward be granted to youngsters who made the 'honour roll'. From a letter by Canon Fissiaux to the minister of the interior and dated April 22, 1846, we come to know that a small group of worthy detainees around Easter time had been accompanied on an outing to Stupinigi. "The youngsters", writes the Canon

² *Copia Publica Transumpti Processus ordinria Auctoritate constructi in Curia Ecclesiastica Taurinensi*, Vol II, fol, 671v.

³ Cf. G. Colombero, *Vita del servo di Dio D. Giuseppe Cafasso con cenni storici sul Convitto Ecclesiastico*. Turin, Canonica 1895, pp. 2002-202; L. Nicolis di Robilant, *Vita del venerabile Giuseppe Cafasso Confondatore del Convitto Ecclesiastico di Torino*, vol II, pp. 88-89, 94-96; MB II 61-63, 105, 109, 172-184, 273-277, 364-371; VI 531.

⁴ On the *Generala*, see what was said in Chap 5, § 6.

⁵ BS 6 (1882) no. 11, Nov. pp. 180-181

⁶ BS 6 (1882) no. 11, Nov. pp. 180-182; MB V 217-238.

“enjoyed themselves a lot and after the midday meals in a wooded area, all went back home without not even a hint of setback”.⁷

But besides these sporadic forms of assistance, continued regularly or by exception, we have personal testimony from Don Bosco himself in the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, and even before that, recorded as a preface to the already quoted *Historical sketches on the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*. These statements establish an immediate relationship between Don Bosco's activity among the young detainees and the beginnings and development of the work on behalf of the oratories. However, there is still a lingering legitimate suspicion that dates and recollections may have actually overlapped, with the usual addition of some padding.⁸

At any rate, we have to recognise the fact that for a certain period of time the Oratory remained sensitive to the problem of anybody, especially the young, released from prison or from a correctional institution.

It was then that I had first-hand experience that youngsters released from jail were able to live an upright life, forget the past and become good Christians and upright citizens, if they found a kindly hand to take care of them, be with them at weekends and try to find employment for them with some employer or visit them sometime during the week.⁹

On Feb. 20, 1850, Don Bosco wrote a letter to the administrators of the *Mendacità Istruita* alms-house. While referring to the youngsters who attended the Oratory around 1846, Don Bosco wrote, with evident exaggeration, “that there were between 600 to 700 youngsters between the ages of 12 and 20, and most of them had been released from prison or were in danger of going to prison”.¹⁰ In 1854, however,

⁷ Cf. C Felloni, and R. Audisio, ‘I giovani discoli...’, in G. Bracco (Ed.), *Torino e Don Bosco*, Vol I, p. 118.

the first publication, chronologically, that talks about the excursion to Stupigini is the brief work *Opere religiose e sociali in Italia. Memoria* by Count Carlo Conestabile. Translation from French, Padua, Seminary Press 1878. Others depend on this source: L. Mendre (1879), C. d'Espiney (1881), Fr Bonetti, *Bollettino Salesiano* (1882), Du Boys (1883). from the general tone with which Count Conestabile describes the personality and work of *Abate Bosco a Torino* (pp. 4-39) and from repeated approximations one could legitimately conclude that the way the event happened (pp. 23-26) might have been notably padded out almost to the point of being legend. Without legitimising this legend, the testimony of Eugenio Ceria in his Preface to MB XV 7-8 might confirm the event in its real shape.

⁸ The significant discrepancy on this issue between the *Memoirs of the Oratory* and the more controlled *Storia dell'Oratorio* has already been emphasised. The latter was written for the *Bollettino Salesiano* by Fr John Bonetti, who also had the manuscript for the former. We see that he softens the links between the Oratory and concern for ex-prisoners.

⁹ MO (1991) 122-123.

¹⁰ Em I, 96.

and we know this from a manuscript unpublished for a long time, Don Bosco gave a talk which was more normally preventive in nature. It was more urgent and productive to educate “abandoned” young migrants to the city than to re-educate young men released from prison.

During this time, when I was visiting prison detainees, I noticed that the unfortunates who ended up in that place of punishment were mostly poor youngsters who come from far away towns into the city either because they needed to find employment or because they were lured there by some mischievous individual. And these youngsters, especially on weekends, left to themselves, spent the few cents earned during the week on games or gluttonous pursuits. This is where vices come from and the youngsters who were once good soon became enough ‘at risk’ and ‘a risk’ for others. Prisons do not offer these youngsters any way to improve. As a matter of fact in jail they learn new ways to cause harm. Therefore, by the time they are released, these youngsters have become worse. This is why I directed my attention to this class of youngster since they were “abandoned” and “at risk” more than others and during the week, either through promises or actual small gifts I tried my best to win them over and to make them my pupils.¹¹

We also have documented proof that Don Bosco was an effective member of the Royal Society for the protection of youngsters released from the *Generala* prison.¹² This society had been championed very strongly by Petitti di Roreto and by his friend Juvenal Vegezzi-Ruscalla.

Petitti had already written about a ‘Patronage for released detainees’, in an essay ‘*On Proper Administration of the Alms-house (Mendicità)*’.¹³ Petitti had once again taken up the topic with increased conviction in a more specific work *On the current condition of the prisons*. It would have turned out to be useless, as a matter of fact, to debate the corrective education of prison-detainees if no thought had been given to some private, voluntary institution aimed at facilitating their re-entry into society. As an example, Petitti quoted France, where, for some years institutions for prisoners had been created to provide “an education for young detainees”, as well as “Societies aimed at sponsoring detainees released from prison”.¹⁴

In Italy the situation regarding prisons lagged well behind.

¹¹ ‘Cenno storico...’, in P. Braido (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella Chiesa...*, pp. 39-40.

¹² Cf. Chap. 5 § 6.

¹³ C.I. Petitti di Roreto, *Saggio sul buon governo...*, Vol II, pp. 495-503.

¹⁴ C.I. Petitti di Roreto, ‘Della condizione attuale delle carceri’ ..., in *Opere scelte*, Vol I, pp. 382-391.

Petitti had suggested several solutions: societies to sponsor people detained in prison, and released from prison; religious and charitable institutions destined to help the sponsoring societies; shelters for those released from prisons etc.¹⁵

The Royal Society for sponsoring young men released from prison had been authorized by Charles Albert with a royal Brief dated November 21, 1846, and had its statutes approved. Its members were divided into three categories: 'Active members', who assumed the task of being Tutors; 'Paying Members', and 'Paying and active members'. Don Bosco is listed among the first 57 subscribers, among whom were outstanding personalities such as Caesar Alfieri, Caesar Balbo, Robert D'Azeglio, Gustav Camillo di Cavour, Charles Boncompagni.

It took quite some time to collect the necessary funds and a reassuring number of participants. Writing to Vincent Gioberti on August 10, 1847, Petitti mentions 1200 members and a fund of 30,000 lire. This society became operative in 1849.¹⁶ We have a letter dated August 8, 1855, which proves Don Bosco's effective involvement in this society. With this letter the society's vice president entrusted to Don Bosco a young man who had been released from prison, asking him to find employment for him, assist him and help him, and keep a check on him for the three years of his apprenticeship. This kind of help was laid down in the *Instructions for Sponsors of freed youth detainees*.

Don Bosco took on the young man entrusted to him and the obligations indicated, as evidenced by a letter dated August 14, 1855 from his close helper, Father Victor Alasonatti. The Biographer adds that Don Bosco accepted other young men released from prison but with less than satisfactory results, which led him to once again tell the administrators of the Society that his preference was for boys who needed to be sheltered in his home, thus forestalling any "correctional measure".¹⁷

2. Don Bosco's interest in young people with problems

Don Bosco transferred his more systematic interest in youths with problems, actually or virtually at serious risk, into all of his educational institutions starting from the original exemplar, the Oratory. Its main objective was to prevent youngsters from failing and relapsing.

¹⁵ C.I. Petitti di Roreto, 'Della condizione attuale delle carceri'..., in *Opere scelte*, Vol I, pp. 563-566, 582-584.

¹⁶ Cr. R. Audisio, La 'Generala' di Torino..., pp. 205-229, *La Società di patrocinio dei giovani liberati*; on Don Bosco's membership, p. 210; cf also C. Felloni and R. Audisio, 'I giovani discoli', in G. Braccio (Ed.), *Torino e Don Bosco*, Vol I, p. 119.

¹⁷ Cf. MB V 228-231. It would seem there were tighter bonds between the *Società* and John Cocchi and the "Collegio degli Artigianelli", founded in 1849 (cf. R. Audisio, *La 'Generala' di Torino*..., pp. 226-227.

This is what Don Bosco wrote to Michael Cavour, the father of Gustav Camillo Di Cavour, concerned as he actually was about public order in the face of the crowded and unpredictable life of the Oratory, during the critical years approaching 1848:

I have no other aim than that of improving the lot of these poor children. And if City Hall cares to give me some place, I have a well-grounded hope of decreasing the number of rascals and at the same time the number of youngsters going to jail.¹⁸

As we have explained in the previous chapter, this is the dominant objective of Don Bosco's entire activity. This is more clearly declared during the last years of his life when his vision of problem youth in the widest meaning of the term, was no longer limited to the local scene but is seen within a framework of ever-expanding industrial cities, mass immigration and emigration, deep social and cultural changes and the crisis of the relationship between progress and religious faith.

Information on Don Bosco's specific way of dealing with difficult boys enrolled in his institution is scarce. Some information does not have to do specifically with problem boys in a proper and true sense, but only in reference to the specific aims of institutions.

As a matter of fact, the information regards the Oratory at Valdocco, the only oratory personally directed by Don Bosco and which he nurtured with preferential solicitude, particularly the growing group of those aspiring to ecclesiastical life. Rigid judgements on the relative impossibility of correcting some boys and his drastic firmness about expelling some on account of serious insubordination, immorality or moral corruption on account of scandal, theft and contempt for religious practices, should not be generalised but seen in this context.¹⁹

Don Bosco had typical contact with younger adults who were quarrelsome, violent to the point of delinquency around the 1846s and 1850s, as a side activity to his oratorian one. This is a time when Turin witnessed clashes and encounters with the *cocche*, bands or gangs always fighting one another, and their own leaders. Don Bosco, as Father John Baptist Lemoyne records in his *Biographical Memoirs*, succeeded in confronting and appeasing them, "using all the arts of the most refined charity to calm them down, help them and wrest them from those cursed associations".²⁰

¹⁸ 'Cenno storico...', in P. Braido (Ed.). *Don Bosco nella Chiesa...*, pp. 46-47.

¹⁹ This will be noted in Chap. 17.

²⁰ MB III 329; cf. MB III 326-333; in one of his notes, dated Feb. 20, 1863, John Bonetti registers the account by Don Bosco of one of his interventions in a violent rift between two of the 'cocche': it was not the only one and, he adds, to "prevent further offence to God" it was worth facing up to the very real danger. (G. Bonetti, *Annali* III 1862 1863, pp. 63-64).

Dominic Ruffino, a young writer and theology student, provides us with interesting information on characters of this type. He tells us that Don Bosco had accepted some young incredibly wild "artists" (= working boys) into the Oratory, part of one of the *cocca* in town. Amongst other things at times they 'disturbed the peace of the house.' They had come into the Oratory as boarders but "were not the last interested in doing good". One of the assistants took them to heart and got some results. One of them even asked if he could be "shown how to change his life".²¹

We also have reference to a case that happened several years earlier, of a 14 year-old, son of a drunkard and anticlerical father, who happened to end up at the Oratory. This youngster had thrown himself headlong into the various recreational activities of the Oratory but refused to take part in religious functions. He was following the teaching of his father and he did not want to turn into a "mouldy old idiot". Don Bosco succeeded in winning his trust by being tolerant and patient towards him, so much so that "within a few weeks the little rascal had changed his mind and behaviour". The biographer comments, "at the time and for many years to follow how many scenes there were of the kind, and only thanks to Don Bosco who, with his patience and prudent charity, won over very many reluctant, one might say brutal hearts, bringing them back to God's grace and thus making them happy".²² This behaviour particularly reflects the atmosphere at the beginning of the home: it was a small family!

However, the problem of order and discipline would seem more complex and difficult when the Oratory in Valdocco has 800 or more boarders. Those trying to keep to the Preventive System, based on reason, religion and loving kindness, would find it hard to reconcile the three elements..

Even Don Bosco himself would reach a point of taking up a suggestion his closest helpers had proposed of reserving a reflection room for the more difficult kids. This suggestion had arisen as a result of repeated debates on discipline and punishments. We have documented information on the meeting held on August 12, 1866 and on the conferences of March 28 and April 24, 1869.

Fr Michael Rua, who wrote the minutes, reports: "We have spoken to Don Bosco about it and he approved of it. The only thing was that we spoke of dividing the 'reflection room' into two, but Don Bosco decided that there should be only one".²³ We have no records of how the decision was eventually carried out. It is significant, however, that Don Bosco also allows 'repression' as part of his Preventive System

²¹ D. Ruffino, *Cronache dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* No. 1 1860, pp. 10-11.

²² MB II 565-568.

²³ Cf. J.M. Prellezso, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 155; for various references cf. pp. 147-148, 154-155.

thought with milder punishments for ordinary cases and more severe ones when there were really wild kids involved.²⁴

Don Bosco had already written about this issue in the *Historical sketches* where he classified young people at the Oratory in Turin into “wild, scatter-brained and good” boys. Don Bosco said the former kept people “very busy” so very minimal goals were set for this group.²⁵

In Italian, *discolo* has three connotations, the second and third of which are mild compared to the first: someone “who acts without respect for social, ethical norms, rebels against any kind of discipline, is idle and licentious”. The connotation closest to Don Bosco’s thinking is milder; a *discolo* (unruly type) is rather too lively, habitually undisciplined, cannot stand orders and discipline (= a boy). He could also mean by it a boy who was difficult to deal with, “quarrelsome and pugnacious”.²⁶

3. Don Bosco’s negotiations regarding the way correctional institutions should be run

At times Don Bosco showed some interest in running institutions of a re-educational or correctional nature, Here we could drop in an item relating to the summer of 1871 and casually inserted into the tenth volume of the *Biographical Memoirs* by Father Angelo Amadei:

In one of the above-mentioned audiences, whether in Florence or in Rome we do not know, Lanza asked Don Bosco for news about the Oratory at Valdocco and suggested the opening of a house of correction for unruly types (*discoli*) and abandoned youth in one or other religious house.²⁷ John Lanza at the time was the President of the Council of Ministers and he might have been able to help Don Bosco carry out his wish to have an institution for youth in Rome. But this would have only been a way to manifest a rather shallow kind of charity, rather than his willingness to have a project come true. The Government at the time was dealing with weightier, more serious problems, as it was about to settle into Rome”, where religious houses themselves had been ‘plundered’.

The proposal advanced by Duke Scipio Salvati Borghese just a few years earlier, in 1867-68 to be precise, was a more serious and positive one. Don Bosco had been asked to accept the administration of a Roman agricultural school on Via Pigna. It had been founded under the auspices of Pius IX in 1850 and was located close to the

²⁴ We will take this up in Chap. 17.

²⁵ ‘Cenni storici..’, in P. Braido, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa...*, pp. 78-79.

²⁶ S. Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, Vol IV, Turin, UTET 1971, p. 611.

²⁷ MB X 436

Tiber, two miles from Porta Portese. Don Bosco showed that he was clearly in favour.²⁸ He immediately did his best to draft an agreement which would have guaranteed an autonomous administration, especially concerning education. The draft made no reference to anything which might have been incompatible with the educational system in place at the Valdocco Oratory. What was questionable and problematic was the physical condition of the school which, according to Cavaliere Federico Oreglia, was miserable and unhealthy. His brother, a Jesuit, working at the *Civiltà Cattolica*, shared the same opinion. The Jesuit looked at Don Bosco's likely acceptance of the school as a "heroic and meritorious act, certainly not envied by anyone in Rome".²⁹ In reality nothing came out of this. On August 1, 1868, Don Bosco had a personal audience with Pope Pius IX. After the audience, the Pope entrusted the administration of the agricultural school to the Brothers of Mercy from Belgium.³⁰

In 1885-1886 a proposal had been made to Don Bosco asking him to accept the administration of a large correctional school in Madrid: negotiations and reasons for and against accepting this proposal were even more complex. Among those who believed Don Bosco really was the apostle of poor and abandoned youth, even when they were seriously so, were the members of a committee who had received authorization to found a reformatory school in Madrid, dedicated to St Rita (*Escuela de reforma para juvenes y asilo decorreccion paternal*). Don Bosco and his collaborators would end proving this conviction wrong, at least understood in its strict sense.

The perplexities Don Bosco and his closest helpers felt were there from the earliest meetings of the Superior or General Council held on September 22, 1885. At that meeting, all members listened to a report by Father Branda, rector of the home at Sarrià (Barcelona). They had an in-depth debate on the problem and concluded by coming to a consensus but with conditions. As Father Brenda had reported, while the 'Escuela de reforma' was under construction, the people in Madrid had come to know about the Sarrià Home and its workshops which had been built in Catalonia earlier. Father Branda and Minister Lastres had gone to Sarrià to be informed about the educational approach being used there. Father Branda had told him to read the book on Don Bosco written by a Frenchman, Despiney. But Don Bosco interrupted him and said that it would have been better to have got him to read Dubois. The reason for this was that "Du Bois' book makes our system known and he correctly intuited the spirit of our society". The people in Madrid kept on talking about a reformatory school, while Father Branda kept on saying that this was not our aim: "If it is correction we

²⁸ Cf. letters of Nov. 18, 1867, Jan. 3 and 21 and Feb. 11, 1868, Em II 452, 475, 487 and 498.

²⁹ Letter of Fr Giuseppe Oreglia to Don Bosco, Jan. 15, 1868, MB IX 48-49.

³⁰ For some documentation, cf MB VIII 606-607; IX 48-49, 51, 73, 114.

are talking about, that is not our objective". "Then", Fr Branda went on, "the Madrid people came back. They spent the whole day at the home to examine how it was run, the rules and ways of doing things in the home, and concluded by saying that they would have to write to Don Bosco". A month later, at the insistence of the Papal Nuncio, Bishop Mariano Rampolla had been invited to Madrid. At the railway station the bishop was welcomed by Minister Lastres³¹ and by Minister Francesco Silvela (1845-1905) or, more exactly, by his brother, Senator Manuel Silvela, the one who had signed the request letter.³²

The following day, Father Branda was present at the meeting held by the committee members. The meeting was to discuss whether or not to entrust the school to Don Bosco. The objection was raised that committee members' thinking was not consonant with what Father Branda had defined as "our system", but the answer was "as long as the objective is reached, we leave freedom of action. The intention is only that youth be saved". They wrote to Don Bosco, following these guidelines.

A debate followed the report by Father Branda. The position held by Chapter members turned out to be varied, but they all agreed to defend Don Bosco's system. Fr Durando urged that the foundations be stopped. Fr Cerruti, the 'ideologue' of the Chapter, invited everyone to reflect "on the compatibility or not of the project with our system, which had to be made known to the Madrid people who are asking us". Father Rua remarked that the people from Madrid were ready to grant concessions. Father Branda reminded everyone of the fact that both the Nuncio and Minister Silvela were waiting for an answer.³³

Don Bosco first pointed out how much of an unforeseen good had been done, directly or indirectly, by undertakings almost born by chance. Then he invited the chapter members to study 'the possibility of carrying out 'the undertaking' and of 'sending someone to Madrid, of having him stay there to know, to see and come to a decision'. Practically speaking, it was decided to form a Committee, made up of Fr Durando, Fr Cerruti and Fr Branda to examine the Madrid project and the manner of changing it to meet the demands of our system."

Finally Don Bosco said: "We too will agree with all that does not touch the substance (of our system) provided that the means do not turn out to be an obstacle".

³¹ Francisco Lastres y Juiz (1848-1918), disciple of Manuel Silvela, deputy from 1884 to 1896, then senator from 1896 to 1903 senator for life: "His very active and prolonged efforts led to the establishment in Carabanchel (Madrid) of the first reform school for idle youth and the home for paternal correction" (*Encyclopedia Espasa*, t. XXIX 958), in fact St Rita's.

³² Manuel Silvela (1830-1892) was deputy of the Cortes from 1863 to 1883 and senator for life from 1883.

³³ On Oct. 11, 1885, the nuncio would send Don Bosco a letter of recommendation, reported in MB XVII 828.

Then Fr Rua concluded by saying: "we should hold on to our custom of always having two kinds of boys, namely academic students and working boys".³⁴

The following are the minutes of the meeting held two days later on September 24, 1885.

Father Cerruti read out the response to the Madrid Committee in charge of the Reformatory School. The Chapter gives its approval and decrees that the answer be kept in the archives to serve as a norm for similar cases. Don Bosco will sign it. Likewise a letter was sent to the Nuncio in Madrid including a copy of the above-mentioned letter.³⁵

In May 1866, Don Bosco received a renewed written invitation to accept the Madrid project, dated May 5 and signed by Manuel Silvela.³⁶ Attached to the letter was a memo in French, containing the history of the Institute, the text of the decree issued on January 4, 1883, dealing with "correctional institutions", as well as a list of founder-patrons of the Institute. Don Bosco answered Silvela's letter with a letter dated March 17, 1886. It was dictated to Fr Cerruti and signed by Don Bosco himself; the answer was definite and negative.

Apart from the fact that we lack personnel, due to previous commitments, the quality of this Institute as well as its form of discipline do not allow me to accept what we both would like. Despite our desire to do good, we cannot depart from the practice established by our Regulations, a copy of which has been sent to you this past September. It would be possible to establish a school modelled on the Salesian workshops in Barcelona-Sarrià; but we could not at the same time establish a reformatory school based on the model of the St Rita's Institution.

This was not the final word, because Don Bosco, who foresaw that he would be making a trip to Barcelona in April 1886, expressed the hope of meeting up with Silvela and Lastres at that time.³⁷ As a matter of fact, a meeting did take place in April 18, 1886, between Lastres and Fr Rua. Fr Rua made the conditions known to Lastres, which he would have later on shared at the meeting on June 25, 1886, with the members

³⁴ *Verbali del capitolo superiore*, quad. I, fol. 79r-81r. Minutes were taken by Fr G.B. Lemoyne, secretary of the superior chapter.

³⁵ *Verbali del capitolo superiore*, quad. I, fol. 82v.

³⁶ Text in MB XVII 828-829.

³⁷ Letter from Alassio to Sen. Manuel Silvela, March 17, 1886, E IV 353-354.

of the Chapter.³⁸ In the context of this meeting, Don Bosco answered the persistent intervention of the Nuncio from Sarria and showed more readiness to yield.³⁹

Talking with the most respected Mr Lastres, we have found ways to overcome some of the difficulties which could arise alter. So it only remains to draw up an agreement between our Society and the committee championing this undertaking. When I return to Turin, this will be one of my major concerns, namely, to draw up an agreement regarding the project and send it to the illustrious Mr D. Manuel Silvela to have it examined by the above-mentioned committee. For the time being, the really serious difficulty we have is lack of staff. But we hope that with the help of Divine Providence we will also be able to overcome this difficulty.⁴⁰

The Superior Council dealt with the question on June 25, 1886. Don Bosco presided at the meeting. The minutes do not note any of his interventions. Father Rua was the acting president: he had been already appointed as Don Bosco's Vicar and wielded the full powers of the Rector Major. Fr Rua reminded the members of the three categories of youngster foreseen by the Madrid committee: "Boys at risk who had been directly sheltered there; boys who had done jail time, after the court had pronounced a guilty verdict; boys from well-to-do families whose parents had found them incorrigible and had committed them to the institute". Then he read out the letter written by the Nuncio dated April 17, 1886. Their final decision was that the school could be accepted, provided that the principle of autonomy in direction and administration of the school be left to the Salesians. Then the conditions of acceptance already made known to Lastres in Barcelona, and proposed by Fr Rua, were approved:

1. The name and all appearance of a house of correction be removed so that the youngsters not be humiliated.
2. For the time being we should take care only of boys of the first category.
3. For the time being we should not accept boys from the courts.
4. The boys to be accepted should not be older than 14 nor younger than 9 years of age.

³⁸ In his notes from Barcelona Don Bosco's young secretary, Charles Viglietti, on April 20 writes: "The letter from the Archbishop Nuncio in Madrid written to Don Bosco recommending Minister Silvela was read to the bishop and all present. The Minister wanted Don Bosco to put a House in Madrid and a factory is ready to build it. Silvela invited his secretary, a deputy, to convene the group and decide. Don Bosco in fact seems to have decided to accept if Madrid accepts all the Conditions he has put". (C. Viglietti, *Cronaca* April 15, 1886 to May 16, p.11).

³⁹ Letter of April 17, 1886 in MB XVII 829-830.

⁴⁰ Letter from Sarria, Barcelona to the nuncio Archbishop Mariano Rampolla, April 22, 1886, EIV 354-355.

5. Freedom should be given to us to direct boys we judge fit for it to pursue studies.

Fr Durando suggested adding the text of the agreement drawn up for the orphanage in Trent, with some alterations he himself had taken care of. Fr Rua proposed that a fixed amount of money be paid for every youngster, for the director, for the teachers and the service staff. Fr Durando advised not specifying the exact amount of money to be paid, so that the contracting party could determine it. All was approved.⁴¹

Fr Rua took upon himself the task of putting together the various suggestions in a letter to be sent to the President of the Madrid committee. It was an articulate and precise letter which Don Bosco signed on July 8, 1886. The first considerations in the letter were of an educational nature and were such as to discourage the continuation of negotiations.

Fr Rua recognized that the project might have created some difficulties for the committee, starting from the condition in the second part of article No. 2 of the agreement, namely, not to accept anyone who might have received a guilty verdict. He also added:

I shall provide some explanation for this: our wish would be that youngsters who leave this new institution aimed at their civil and Christian education, should not carry the stigma of disgrace. If people were to say that the youngsters came from a correctional school, a reformatory, that would be a stigma that would last throughout their lifetime. Our wish is that any sign which could lead people to believe that the institution was a correctional house, should be removed. To this end, our opinion is that it should be called home or institution but not a reformatory or the like. It is also our wish that for the period of five years, at least, no youngster with a guilty verdict from the courts should be admitted, precisely for the reason of getting the public used to not considering the institution as a correctional house. This also to enjoy greater ease in creating a good group of youngsters to put on the right track who will in turn help put others coming in later on the road to work and virtue.

After these first five years, we hope to be able to gradually accept youngsters who have received a guilty verdict, but even then it would be appropriate to make sure that their admission not be voiced abroad among the public. As far as the financial aspect of the agreement is concerned, the Salesians are awaiting proposals from the committee. Instead, as far as the name for the school is concerned, it is proposed that a name of a saint like St Isidore be chosen.

⁴¹ *Verbali del capitolo superiore*, quad. I, fol. 92v.

The last additional item would aggravate the probably negative impressions of the committee, even though "with great regret" on the part of the Salesians: "Given the shortage of personnel over some years, it will not be possible to immediately acquiesce to your wish, which is also mine. We might have to wait perhaps until 1888 or even 1889 before I have personnel suited for the undertaking".⁴²

The official Salesian position was so clear as to appear almost brutal. Perhaps we should not be surprised that no record has been found to show that the negotiations were continued. However, Don Bosco might have apprised the Nuncio in Madrid of the matter. In fact the Nuncio wrote to Don Bosco as follows:

I would not be able to tell you why no answer was given to the communication which you sent to Minister Silvela, regarding the project submitted to you. I believe I will have the occasion, during these days, to meet with some members of the family of the above-mentioned gentleman. You may be sure that I will never allow the occasion to pass by without confirming my particular good will toward the Salesian Congregation.⁴³

The reformatory school was later accepted by The Third Order Regulars of St Francis of Assisi.

4. A preventive project for boys at risk

A few months after the publication of the booklet on the Preventive System, Don Bosco sent Francesco Crispi, Minister for the Interior, a memo by the same title, with the intention of "presenting the basis on which to set up the Preventive System in an educational setting and home for youngsters at risk and roaming the streets".⁴⁴

According to a letter which goes back to the following year, July 23, and sent to Joseph Zanardelli, the newly appointed Minister for the Interior, it was Crispi who had asked Don Bosco for his thoughts on the Preventive System and on the possibility of providing for the needs of children who were not malicious but merely abandoned and, therefore, at risk in the various cities in Italy and especially in Rome.⁴⁵

There is a radical difference between the booklet issued in 1877 and the one issued in 1878, both as far as their basic aspirations and their contents are concerned. The first booklet is the mature expression of Don Bosco's style of education to be imparted in his institutions. The second booklet has a rather socio-political style. It

⁴² Letter of July 8, reported in MB XVII 604-605.

⁴³ Letter of Archbishop Rampolla to Don Bosco, Jan. 5, 1887, in MB XVII 832.

⁴⁴ Letter to F. Crispi, Feb. 21, 1878, E III 298.

⁴⁵ Letter to G. Zanardelli, July 23, 1878, E III 366; another letter to the secretary general of the Minister, Comm. John Baptist Aluffi, had preceded it on April 25, 1878, E III 335.

especially highlights the massive social changes making the problem of 'abandoned youth more acute and alarming, and a level of social exclusion more serious than the one which existed during the 1850s. Instead of speaking of 'pedagogy', Don Bosco raises the problem of educational and re-educational structures, and the problem of making them work through a harmonious agreement between private initiative and public support.

Don Bosco articulated his thoughts in four points aimed at capturing the attention of the ministers in charge of public order, calling on them not to limit their activity to mere repressive ones. As mentioned, the two ministers were familiar with the opposition between repressive and preventive in a socio-political context.⁴⁶

Don Bosco specified first of all which children were to be considered 'at risk': "Immigrants in search of work in the city, with the risk that they would remain unemployed and engage in small thefts; orphans, abandoned to themselves and loitering with other rascals; boys neglected by their parents or even kicked out of their families; vagabonds who end up into the hands of the police but who are not yet rascals.

Don Bosco then proceeded hypothetically suggesting the measures most suited for youth-work of this kind, measures which were inspired by other works he had already undertaken: "recreational parks to be used on weekends, work-placement programs, assistance provided during the week for those who had found employment, homes for safeguarding youngsters, offering arts, skilled trades and even agricultural schools.

Institutions formally set up for the traditional correction of youngsters do not appear among the suggested measures.

As far as the running of the different institutions was concerned, Don Bosco foresaw the direct action of private individuals, with close cooperation from public support, buildings, equipment and financial aid. Don Bosco concluded with a fourth paragraph destined to offer foreseeable results based on his own experience of 35 years spent championing the cause of the abandoned and at risk youth

When Don Bosco wrote to secular Ministers, he intentionally kept silent on the content of the educational system, especially as far as religion was concerned. The only term connected with the church in the document is the word 'catechism' and this is used only to indicate that it is exclusively a tool to provide moral nourishment suited for poor children of the working classes.⁴⁷

Naturally in Don Bosco's mind the term 'catechism' was associated with all those values, earthly values included, which focused on reason and loving kindness which together with the Catholic religion could have contributed to the gradual human

⁴⁶ Cf. Chap 2, §1.

⁴⁷ *Il sistema preventivo* (1878), RSS 4 (1985) 302.

and Christian redemption of the young at risk: regaining the meaning in life, faith in the power of love, a desire to work, finding happiness, the resolve and ability to inspire attitudes and behaviours in line with the principles of moral dignity and social solidarity. According to the oft-used formula, Don Bosco's aim to change youngsters 'at risk' and 'risky' into 'upright citizens and good Christians'.

Chapter 11

EDUCATING THE “GOOD CHRISTIAN AND UPRIGHT CITIZEN” ACCORDING TO THE “NEEDS OF THE TIMES”

Don Bosco's educational system, just like the whole of his pastoral activity and spirituality, does not demonstrate the radical aspect displayed by other modern prophets of education. Don Bosco does not aim at creating the 'new man' as Rousseau and Makarenko¹ did in different eras and with different perspectives.

But neither does Don Bosco indulge in accepting a pure return to the *old man*, the man of the Christian and civil tradition of the *ancien régime*, with the intention of restoring things to the past. Don Bosco thought out and carried out his own educational work to achieve both old and new objectives: to lead the young to accept and shape themselves both in fidelity to the perennial newness of Christianity and their ability to be part of a society freed from its worst connections to the *ancien régime* and looking forward to new conquests. This is the way Don Bosco was understood by his contemporaries even though they expressed their understanding in different ways. The aim of this chapter is to spell out the essential features of the persons Don Bosco wants to form.

1. Theoretical and practical view of educational goals

The educational goals proposed and followed by Don Bosco, are not the end-result of a general, systematic theory of education, however, they are defined within an experience that was not merely a pragmatic one.

Cultural elements are evidently a part of it: the faith he lived by, from his childhood on and which he expressed in prayer, teaching catechism, taking part in church services; the humanist formation he had received during his youth; his philosophic and theological studies, his moral and pastoral formation, and his historical, apologetic and spiritual reading.

¹ This is the meaning of *Émile* (1762) Rousseau's anthropological revolution, as happily illustrated by A. Ravier, *L'éducation de l'Homme nouveau*, Paris. SPES 1944, and M. Rang, *Rousseaus Lehre vom Menschen*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 1959; of the *inizio assoluto*, "creating the new man", the Soviet collectivist, described by A.S. Marenko, *Poema pedagogico* (1935) and *Bandiere sulle torri* (1938).

Additional elements, and no less influential, are Don Bosco's contacts with the world of poverty and needs, not only at the spiritual level but also on the huge and pressing material level. As life and the Our Father had taught him, the daily bread asked for stood for faith, grace, Christ, the Eucharist, as well as the means of a livelihood and the work to earn it. All these things together.

Don Bosco does not offer us a well-developed and reflective view of the goals of education within a wider humanistic and Christian world view and a life philosophically and theologically structured. But he always has it there in mind and in practice. This was demanded of him by the culture he had acquired, his temperament, his sensitiveness and the impact the young had on him, since they needed everything. A catechetical and religious answer alone was not enough for real questions.

Don Bosco tells us about it through various historical recollections: *The historical outline (Cenno storico)*, *The historical outlines (Cenni storici)*, *the Preface to the Constitutions (of the Salesian Society)*, the various historical notes with which he prefaced material sent to ecclesiastical and civil authorities, *The Memoirs of the Oratory*, the countless individual and circular letters, his talks and conferences aimed at soliciting financial help, charitable contributions and support.

Naturally, since Don Bosco never achieved a compact and organised theoretical overview of his educational system, the various elements which made it up in practice and were employed on a daily basis, sometimes seemed out of kilter as one element might have been valued more than another.

It may also be noticed that religious and supernatural values receive a more preferential treatment than the temporal, earthly values; individual values more than social and political values. But Don Bosco's real situation might justify a deeper re-assembling of all the aspects of his educational system into a holistic, substantial and Christian humanism.²

2. A humanist and Christian view somewhere between the 'old' and the 'new' educational goals

There are countless practical and theoretical expressions which reveal Don Bosco's mind-set on this subject. Even leaving aside characteristic ways of highlighting this, Don Bosco's mind-set is not entirely new when we think that the tradition he followed goes back to the very beginnings of Christianity, and is expressed in classic pedagogical features of the Middle Ages, consolidated during the Humanist and Renaissance periods, and made evident by the flourishing of teaching Congregations

² J. Scheppens writes about this divergence and a certain reconciliation of the differences in the already cited essay, 'Human nature in the educational outlook of St John Bosco', in particular in RSS 8 (1989) 265-277.

(of men and women) in the modern era, which often used the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum* as their model.³

Don Bosco anchored his belief, which became a program, to the oft-repeated phrase "good Christian and upright citizen". Later on, at the time of his missionary initiatives from 1875 onwards, this was translated into others with a wider meaning yet with the same inspiration: civilisation and religion, civilisation and evangelisation, championing "the good of humanity and religion", expanding the kingdom of Jesus Christ by bringing religion and civilisation to people who ignore both.⁴

But the first of these, 'good Christian and upright citizen', is the most widely employed⁵ with some variations: 'good citizens and true Christians', 'good Christians and wise citizens', 'good Christians and upright men.'⁶ As for its content, the formula is a shortened expression of a unique educational manifesto with a traditional flavour, but virtually open to what is new. The formula is first proclaimed in Don Bosco's first important book, which served as a religious guide of life: *The Companion of Youth*.

I am presenting you with a way of life which is short and easy but good enough to allow you to become the consolation of your parents, the honour of your country, good citizens on earth and, one day, the lucky inhabitants of Heaven.⁷

These images more or less explicitly express a moderate mind-set, not a rare one in a Catholic world engaged in the rebuilding of the moral and civil fabric of society after the revolutionary storm.

On the one hand a certain nostalgia for the good old times can hardly be hidden, the times prior to the upheavals provoked by the French Revolution. There is a strong aspiration to return to a society seen as fully Christian and based on the classical religious and moral values: faith, generally followed by the practice of religion, Sacramental life, catechism taught in the family and by the church, the practice of the corporal works of mercy, obedience to the paternal governance of the legitimate, religious and civil authorities, respect for order and hierarchies, being content with

³ This is outlined in its essential aspects in P. Braidò, *Breve storia del «sistema preventivo»*. Rome, LAS 1993, especially pp 15-45. Silvio Antoniano, also found in this volume, is an outstanding witness to the Preventive System in the family.

⁴ Letter to Fr Bodrato, April 15, 1880, E III 576-577, and to a Hungarian benefactor, Nov 1, 1886, EIV 364.

⁵ Cf. P. Braidò, *Buon cristiano e onesto cittadino, Una formula dell' «umanesimo educativo» di don Bosco*, RSS 13 (1994) 7-75.

⁶ Cf. for example the address to those taking part in his Name day celebrations, June 24, 1879, BS 3 (1879) no. 9, July 7, p. 9; a past pupils of the Oratory, June 24, 1880, BS 4 (1880) no. 9, Sept, p. 10; conference to Cooperators in Florence May 15, 1881, BS 5 (1881) no. 7, July, p. 9.

⁷ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...*, p. 7. OE II 187.

one's state in life, industriousness, acceptance of sacrifice, the hope of an eternal reward.

On the other hand, there is likewise a real feeling that the new world is fascinating, pressing, vigorous regarding its conquests, as far as progress and civilisation are concerned. It would be unreasonable and futile to oppose it. Looking at the spirit of his times, Don Bosco thought that today's political setup could be thought of as a steam engine running swiftly down the rails and dragging its freight perhaps, towards a precipice and ruin. Would you like to put yourselves on the railway tracks to stop it?⁸

In practice, Don Bosco shares a widespread tendency not limited to mere protest but effectively working to build a new type of man and Christian, one capable of integrating authentic values of traditional belief and the citizen, who accepts the new order. The blending of the two, however, is imperfect.

Don Bosco and his work are not to be framed within a dichotomous view of the relationship between tradition and modernity; nor do they lend themselves to a dialectic interpretation of the relationship; they should be considered as a virtually synthetic system.⁹

Don Bosco's pre-established goals and the programs he had already set up to achieve them, substantially presume the reclaiming of the time-honoured educational triad, a renewed and updated one: piety and morality, knowledge and civilisation.¹⁰ But this triad should be seen within a real plan which sees the values relating to the *sujet-citoyen* (subject-citizen) and the Christian, tied in with the values relating to reason and religion.

From this perspective, the intrinsic value of the classic realities is clearly stated but at the same time the ultimate goal assigned to culture, civilisation, piety and morality is clearly championed and within a complex view which tends to become a holistic one.

Concretely speaking, Don Bosco thinks and believes as prompted by Christian tradition, namely, that in the order of faith, the recovery of the earthy values should happen as part of the healing and divinising realm of Grace.

⁸ An address to past pupils from the Oratory, June 24, 1883 BS 7 (1883) no. 8, August, p. 128.

⁹ P. Scoppola, 'Don Bosco e la modernità', in M. Midali (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia...*, p. 537.

¹⁰ The triad *moeurs-science-politesse* appears in the *Règlements pour messieurs les Pensionnaires des Pères Jésuites, qui peuvent leur servir de Règle de conduite pour toute leur vie*. Par le R.P. Jean Croiset (Lyon, Frères Bruyset 1749, VI éd.): "La piété, l'Etude, la Civilté" (*Avertissement*, p. 1); «Il y a des devoirs de Religion à remplir, des bienséances à garder, des sciences à acquérir» (p. 2); «on prétend former un jeune homme dans les bonnes moeurs, dans le beaux arts, et dans toutes les bienséances et les devoirs de la vie civile... On veut rendre un jeune homme accompli, mais on en veut faire encore un véritable Chrétien, un parfaitement honnête homme» (p.6)

As a man, priest and educator, Don Bosco wants to give full value to the human element found in the Christian, to champion all that is positive in creation, to give a Christian dimension to civilisation, showing that only this way can civilisation be fully saved.¹¹

Accepting the coexistence of the above-mentioned values is the style which distinguishes Don Bosco's entire educational activity and Don Bosco is always and everywhere the priest; he is also the citizen, a member of society, committed to its material and spiritual progress, with his specific contribution. This is the way Don Bosco saw the members of his religious society juridically and effectively part of civil society. This intention is indicated in the *Historical Outline* of 1874:

Let every member be a religious before the Church, and before civil society a free citizen.¹²

The Cooperators were invited to share the same style of action:

our program shall unalterably be this: leave us to look after poor and abandoned youth and we shall do our best to do to them the greatest amount of good possible. This, we feel, is the way to be able to contribute to good morals and civilisation.¹³

Several times Don Bosco declared that in politics he was neutral. This neutrality meant more precisely that his keen participation in the life of society was foreign to taking party sides, and that he was, thus, proclaiming the deeply radically earthy aspect of his educational work.

Don Bosco was delighted to report what Pope Leo XIII had told them in the audience of May 9, 1884:

¹¹ The question remains concerning the relationship between temporal and spiritual – B. Plonger, *Affirmation et transformations d'une «civilisation chrétienne» à la fin du XVIIIe Siècle*, in *Civilisation chrétienne. Approche historique d'une idéologie, XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris, Beauchesne 1975): «Le christianiser en le civilisant ou bien l'inverse?» (p. 10). In the same book there is an essay by X. de Montclos on Lavigerie, *Le Christianisme et la civilisation* (pp. 309-348). The archbishop of Algiers was in contact with Don Bosco to whom he sent some young Algerians, and whom he met in Paris in 1883. Don Bosco's position on the relationship between Christianity and civilisation offers an analogy with the cardinal's, naturally at a weaker theoretical level sharing the persuasion that they could be reconciled: cf in particular the *Réflexions sur l'idéologie de la civilisation chez Lavigerie*, pp. 337-347.

¹² Cf. P. Braido, 'L'idea della Società salesiana nel «cenno storico»' by Don Bosco 1873/1874 RSS 6 (1987) 264.

¹³ This is the message to Salesian Cooperators that opens the small work in the *Bibliofilo cattolico o Bollettino salesiano mensuale*, in III, no. 5, August 1877, p. 2; repeated in *Bibliofilo cattolico o Bollettino salesiano mensuale*, in III no. 6, Sept 1877, p. 2.

You have the mission to show the world that one can be a good Catholic and at the same time a good and upright citizen; that it is possible to do a lot of good for poor and abandoned youth at all times without colliding with the goings-on of politics, but always remaining good Catholics.¹⁴

This is the way Don Bosco wanted to see his activity converge with that of the governing body in education and politics. Don Bosco wrote about this in a concise manner to a well-known Minister of the Interior, Joseph Zanardelli:

I beg you to graciously accept my constant desire to do my very best to decrease the number of rascals and increase the number of upright citizens.¹⁵

The politician aims at keeping public order, and the educator at championing righteous consciences.

3. Basic polarity and hierarchy of educational goals

Welfare and educational activity on behalf of the young, as developed by Don Bosco and further explained by his words and writings, indicates goals and content before outlining the process. This chapter will now deal with the goals and content of Don Bosco's welfare and educational activity, leaving courses and methods adopted to the following two chapters.

We limit ourselves to drawing data from more explicit situations of educating young people. But to have a more articulate, richer view of things we should be using many other sources: the profiles of authentic Christians scattered through Don Bosco's history books and edifying books; the militant Catholics, men and women he had met and showed appreciation for, his rich correspondence; the saints or especially exemplary people referred to in sermons and instructions delivered on feast days, in 'Good Nights', and on special occasion talks and conversations with close friends.¹⁶

First of all, in reference to what we have remarked about Don Bosco's pedagogical Christian humanism, what stands out immediately is the bipolarity characterising his entire system. On the one hand Don Bosco clearly states the centrality of religious faith and of the transcendent, of what is specifically Christian. On the other hand we can detect a frank evaluation of temporal realities sincerely, intrinsically appreciated and employed, and not only for their usefulness.

¹⁴ Quoted in MB XVII 100. The preceding day, 8 May, the Cardinal Vicar Lucido M. Parocchi had dealt with a similar topic, identifying in "carità esercitata secondo le esigenze del secolo", "la nota essenziale della Società salesiana", BS 8, (1884), no. 6, June p. 90.

¹⁵ Letter July 23, 1878 E III 367.

¹⁶ Some items can be drawn from from two brief essays: P. Braido, *Laicità e laici nel progetto operativo di Don Bosco*, in *I laici nella famiglia salesiana*, Rome Editrice SDB 1986, pp 17-34; idem, *Pedagogia ecclesiale di don Bosco*, in *Con I giovani raccogliamo la profezia del Concilio*, Rome, Editrice SDB 1987, pp. 23-63.

Between the two poles, the temporal and the transcendent, there is more than coexistence on an equal footing. Both are given equal dignity, in proper order, but the temporal is always subordinate to the transcendent.

In reference to this hierarchy we have two singular and complementary statements made by two scholars coming from divergent ideological background: Joseph Lombardi Radice, idealist pedagogue, and Francesco Orestano, Catholic philosopher. The former, despite his secular mind-set, highlighted the absolute centrality of religious inspiration in Don Bosco's experience:

Don Bosco... was a great man. You should try to get to know him. In the context of the Church, Don Bosco corrected 'Jesuitism'. And even though he did not have the stature of St Ignatius, he knew how to create an imposing educational movement, giving the Church the ability to get in touch with the masses again, which it had gradually lost. The secret is: an idea, meaning a 'soul'.¹⁷

Francesco Orestano, too, vigorously stressed the Christian, almost mystical inspiration of Don Bosco's entire activity. An interesting chapter on mystical theology is dedicated to Don Bosco's educational activity.¹⁸ But he singled out Don Bosco's human activity, his positive appreciation of earthy realities particularly the joy of living, and work. He considered these to be the original features of his educational project. Don Bosco sanctified work and joy. Don Bosco is the saint of Christian serenity, Christian practical, happy living. This is Don Bosco's personal synthesis of *nova et vetera* (tradition and modernity). Herein lies his true originality.

Orestano further stresses the following ideas:

Educational and social needs, profoundly understood and seen in the context of the new times, allowed Don Bosco to discover the great law of educating the young to work and with work. He not only appreciated the value of work as an educational tool but also as a content of life...

And this is not all. With his intelligent outpouring of charity, full of human understanding, and convinced of the natural and honest needs of youth and of a sound life, Don Bosco sanctified work together with joy, the joy of living, the joy of working, the joy of praying.¹⁹

¹⁷ G. Lombardo Radice, 'Meglio Don Bosco?' In, «*La Rinascenza Scolastica. Rivista pedagogica, didattica, letteraria, quindicinale*» (Catania), Feb. 16, 1920; republished by the author in *Clericali e massoni di fronte al problema della scuola*. Rome, La Voce Soc. Anonima Editrice 1920, pp. 62-64.

¹⁸ F. Orestano, *Celebrazioni*, Vol I Milano, Bocca 1940. p. 47

¹⁹ F. Orestano, *Celebrazioni*,.. Vol I, pp. 74-76

Don Bosco's humanism is all-embracing, or tends that way: despite inadequate foundations and development on a theoretical level, his humanism is clearly visible in terms of his life. It is significant that it has been possible to draw up various and different profiles of Don Bosco, his ideal style of action listed under various titles. But it is also a fact that it easily blends into a vital synthesis of the divine and human, the heavenly city and the earthly city, eternal salvation, and the joy of living and acting:

- ▲ *Vita intima di Don Giovanni Bosco* (An intimate life of Don Bosco);
- ▲ *Don Bosco con Dio* ((Don Bosco with God);
- ▲ *I doni dello Spirito Santo nell'anima del B. Giov. Bosco* ((The gifts of the Holy Spirit in the soul of Bl. John Bosco);
- ▲ *Un gigante della carità* (A giant of charity);
- ▲ *Don Bosco che ride* (Smiling Don Bosco);
- ▲ *Il Santo dei ragazzi. Don Bosco, amico dei ragazzi* (The boys' saint. Don Bosco the friend of youth)
- ▲ *Il re dei ragazzi* (King of the Kids)
- ▲ *L'apostolo dei giovani* ((The apostle of youth)
- ▲ *Il Santo dei birichini* (The urchins' saint)
- ▲ *Il capo dei birichini* (The urchins' leader);
- ▲ *Il Santo dei fanciulli* (The children's saint);
- ▲ *Il santo dei ragazzi allegri* (The saint of cheerful boys);
- ▲ *Don Bosco conquistatore delle anime* (Don Bosco conqueror of souls);
- ▲ *Un gran pescatore di anime* (A great fisher of souls);
- ▲ *Il Salvatore di anime* (The saviour of souls);
- ▲ *Il Santo del secolo* (The saint of the century);
- ▲ *La più grande meraviglia del secolo XIX* (The greatest wonder of the 19th century);
- ▲ *Un santo per il nostro tempo* (A saint for our times);
- ▲ *Don Bosco, l'uomo per gli altri* (Don Bosco, man for others);
- ▲ *Profondamente uomo, profondamente santo* (Profoundly human, profoundly holy);
- ▲ *Uomo e Santo* (Man and saint).

But Don Bosco himself is the one who brought all these aspects together in his pithy sayings, and those to whom they were addressed would have discerned a clear hierarchy of values in them.

The first of these is a chapter heading in the life of Francis Besucco: *Cheerfulness, Study, Piety*.²⁰

Then comes: *good health, wisdom and holiness* (SSS: *Sanità, Sapienza e Santità* in Italian).²¹ Two more mysterious SSs sometimes joined the three SSSs to make five!. Don Bosco sent the following message to the pupils of the Turin-Valsalice College through their director: "I assure you that I recommend you to God every day in my holy Mass, and that I beg from every one of you the three usual SSSs, which our smart pupils immediately know how to interpret: *Soundness (good health), Savvy (wisdom) and Sanctity (holiness)*."²²

He conveyed the same wishes to the son of Countess Callori, telling her that he had asked for the Pope's special blessing on the three SSS, "for Mr Emanuel namely, that he be *sound, savvy and saintly*".²³ A similar assignment was entrusted to the pupils at Varazze's boarding school, through Fr Francesca: "good health, progress in studies and holy fear of God which is the real value to have".²⁴

In wider contexts work, religion and virtue are presented as the means of salvation for so many young people at risk,²⁵ as part of a broad plan to bring about social renewal based on "Work, instruction, humanity".²⁶ Evidently this program' calls for a regimen of Christian living according to which religion is the foundation of morality and both, religion and morality, guarantee the social order.

4. Meaning of life, 'salvation' to be rediscovered and bolstered

To achieve all that we have mentioned above, it is essential that the potential the young are gifted with be re-awakened and brought into action. This potential can be reduced to three types:

1. The knowing faculties: sense and intellectual knowledge, particularly the reasoning ability which, as we have seen, prevents a young man from behaving like a horse and mule without intelligence: *sicut equus et mulus quibus non est intellectus*.

²⁰ G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, p. 90. OE XV 332; the title of Chap. XVIII is *Allegria* followed by XVIII *Studio e diligenza*, pp. 90-93, 94-99, OE XV 332-335, 336-341.

²¹ Letter to Countess Gabriella Corsi, Aug. 12, 1871, E II 172: «Per la damigella Maria... dimanderò al Signore tre grossi S, cioè che sia sana, sapiente e santa».

²² Letter to Fr Francesco Dalmazzo, March 8, 1875 E 465.

²³ Letter March 8, 1874, E II 362. 23 year old Emmanuel was in the Cavalry.

²⁴ Letter Jan. 10, 1876 E III 6.

²⁵ Cf. the already quoted conference to Salesian Cooperators, Rome, Jan. 29, 1878 in BS 4 (1880) no. 7, July, p. 12.

²⁶ Conference to Salesian Cooperators, S. Benigno Canavese, June 4, 1880 BS 4 (1880) no. 7, July, p. 12.

2. Affections in all their diversity: desires, passions and the heart.
3. The will: as daring freedom seasoned with reason, faith and inflamed by charity.

The human organism is already marvellously composed at the level of creation, but is immeasurably more splendid since it has been elevated to the supernatural order, thanks to the Redemption wrought by Jesus Christ Our Saviour. The awareness of human dignity in the order of nature and grace stands as the foundation of an appropriate vision of the goals of authentic education. Don Bosco writes about this in his very well-known *Month of May* series.

Here Don Bosco emphasises the “wonders of divine grace”²⁷ but does not exclude, rather presupposes and appreciates as something evident, taken for granted, a natural basis which is no less wonderful:

By the expression ‘dignity of man’, I do not only intend to refer to human corporal goods, not even to the precious qualities of the human soul, created after the image and likeness of the Creator himself; I mean to refer only to your dignity, o man, which comes from the fact that you have become a Christian through Baptism, and have been received into the bosom of Holy Mother Church.

Before you were regenerated through the waters of Baptism, you were slave of the devil and an enemy of God and locked out of paradise for ever. But at that the very moment when this august Sacrament opened the door of the true Church, the chains with which the enemy of your soul kept you bound, were broken. The gates of Hell were locked up for you, and Paradise was opened for you. At the same time, you have become an object of a special love of God, and the virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity were infused into you. Once you had become a Christian, you were able to raise your eyes toward Heaven and say: God is the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and He is also my Creator. He is my Father and he loves me, and He bids me call him by this name: Our Father who art in Heaven. Jesus, the Saviour, calls me brother and as a brother I belong to him. I share his merits, passion, death, glory and his dignity.²⁸

The one who edited the dialogue between Don Bosco and Francis Bodrato at Mornese, in October 1864, imagines that Don Bosco, already well-known as an educator, has already spelled out to the town’s teacher the youth anthropology underlying his system of education, based on religion and reason. “Young people are rational beings created to know love and serve God and enjoy him in Paradise”. The educator should be convinced that all or almost all of these dear youngsters have a natural intelligence

²⁷ As we know this is the title of a masterpiece, published in 1863, by the young German theologian Matthias Joseph Scheeben (1835-1888).

²⁸ G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio...*, pp. 60-61, OE X 354-355

by which they can know the good being done to them and a sensitive heart easily open to gratitude".²⁹

In his 1877 work on the Preventive System, Don Bosco would continue: If the educator, with the method of reason and loving kindness "succeeds in getting his pupil to reason" and in winning over his heart, then the pupil will respond with an increased ability to understand and a keener ability to show affection. Thanks to reason, the young will perceive the reasonableness of the law of work, the law of a personal commitment to build things up together, the satisfaction which comes from good results obtained in the classroom and in the workshops. Thanks to his heart, he will effectively have the revitalizing experience of the "family" as found in the community of superiors and classmates, mutual trust and friendship. Finally a joyous awareness will blossom, an awareness that it is worth living and working together, which are the initial steps required for an effective socializing process.

Besides, the awareness that "life is worth living" will be strengthened at higher and more mature levels by the religious Christian experience, thanks to which success at a temporal level will reach out into the wider horizon of eternal salvation. The basic presupposition of all the above, is the Gospel warning "What then will a man gain if he wins the whole world and ruins his life?"³⁰

According to Don Bosco it was precisely this thought which led many young people to leave the world, many rich people to give away their riches to the poor, many missionaries to leave their country and go to a faraway land, many martyrs to give their life for their faith.³¹

The search for salvation is presented to the young as the lesson needed to learn the highest profession of being a Christian, for it is the one which gives meaning and fulfilment to all other professions: the profession of the shoemaker, carpenter, and that of the student. Don Bosco explained this thought in an emotional Good Night talk given on April 30, 1865.

Oh! If I only could share how I feel. Words fail me to express how important this topic is. Oh! If all of you kept this great truth in your mind, if you were to work only to save your soul, then you would have no need of sermons, meditations, the exercise for a happy death, because then you would have all that is needed for your happiness. If your actions were to have this important goal as their aim, how lucky would you be, how happy Don Bosco would be.

²⁹ A. Da Silva Ferreira, *Il dialogo tra don Bosco e il maestro Francesco Bodrato - 1864*, RSS 3 (1984) 385.

³⁰ Mt 16:26.

³¹ G. Bosco, *Il Giubileo e pratiche devote per la visita delle chiese*. Turin, P. De-Agostini 1854, p. 48, OE V 256.

This would turn out to be what I consider the best: the Oratory would be an 'earthly Paradise'. We would have no more theft, bad talk, dangerous readings, back-biting etc. Everyone would do their duty. And this is why: let us all be convinced that the priest, the cleric, the student, the artisan, the poor and the rich, the superior and the pupil; they all have to work toward this goal, otherwise any efforts on their part will prove useless.³²

5. Steps required to be saved

The life of grace in its simplest form, which means freedom from sin, up to its highest form, which is that of perfection and holiness, does not allow a choice by principle and develops in continuity from freedom from damnation and the ascent to the highest of forms of charity: love of God and love of neighbour. What gives fullness and unity to the life of grace is the reality of salvation. Thus F.X. Durrwell, in his wonderful summary of Christian spirituality, could write:

The doctrine of man's sanctification is the same as the doctrine of his eternal salvation - since man cannot find salvation other than through his sanctification in God and it is well known that the doctrine of salvation has a range equal to that of all theology.³³

Don Bosco knows the 'degrees' of spiritual life. In his eulogy on Fr Cafasso, Don Bosco spoke of moral, ascetic and mystic theology³⁴. But he does not show these as confessor or spiritual director. He put them into practice, informally. He writes about them but not in explicit terms, when he refers to the gradual "pedagogy of salvation", mindful of the different of readiness or lack of readiness different types of boys had: rascals, bad boys, scatter-brained boys and good boys. Don Bosco offers a hierarchy of goals and content to poor and abandoned boys. Some offer early steps a true and proper spiritual life.

The first goal is that of helping the young who have gone astray to find the most elementary reasons to live. This meant leading them to desire and enjoy living, adding the intention of having them learn how to earn by work and sweat, the means needed for a decent existence for themselves and their relatives.³⁵

An educational kind of work for these youngsters might have required a preliminary cleansing of their mind and heart: a mind darkened by ignorance and

³² G.B. Lemoyne, Cronaca 1864 ff., Good Night on April 30, 1865. pp. 133-135.

³³ F.X. Durrwell, Dan le Christ Rédempteur. Notes de vie spirituelle. Le Puy Lyon, Éditions X. Mappus 1960, p. 7.

³⁴ G. Bosco, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso*, p. 77 and 89, OE XII 427 and 439.

³⁵ We see this for example in the *Cenni storici...*, regarding the 'discoli': *Cenni storici...*, in P. Braido (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella Chiesa...*, pp. 78-79.

prejudice and a heart ruined by vice and bad moral behaviour. "Enlighten their mind, render their hearts good"; this was the specific objective Don Bosco had in mind when he first started writing his books. He said as much as we have already seen in his preface to his *Bible History* and *Church History*.

As for the many boys who had been entirely deprived of affection or had little of affection in their lives, Don Bosco aimed at creating an atmosphere and a rich network of relationships seasoned with a fatherly, motherly, brotherly and friendly touch namely, relationships capable of restoring their affective life, their emotional life, loaded with intense practical and emotional involvement.

Naturally, the work of recovery and formation reaches a higher and richer plateau when affection, their experience of loving kindness received and regenerated, tend to be integrated and interact with reason and religion. After all, *reason, religion and loving kindness* represent principally the goals and content of Don Bosco's educational system; it is the substance of Don Bosco's system prior to being just means and approach..

Don Bosco places holiness as the goal of the journey of salvation, greatest of all the educational goals and he clearly proclaims it as such. This is not a simple message conveyed to an individual, but a sermon preached to all: "It is God's will that all of us become saints; it is very easy to become one; there is a great reward prepared in Heaven for those who become saints".³⁶

6. Love and fear of God expressed through service

Secondly, young peoples' attention throughout the entire length of the 'salvation journey', is constantly drawn toward the goal which he had heard explained to him from the time of his childhood, when he learned his catechism: to know, love and serve God, Creator and Lord of Heaven and Earth. The love of the Father supposes honouring, revering and serving our Creator and Lord, or to put it in a nutshell, 'fear of God'.

The fear of God is explicitly or implicitly present in all of Don Bosco's moral and spiritual activity. Remotely, it has the ability to dispose a youngster toward love as servile fear, which is useful to achieve conversion from sin through confession and forgiveness. It becomes 'initial fear' when it becomes 'filial fear', which means rejection of sin. This filial fear shares its life with love-charity in time and in eternity and it grows as charity grows; and when it is really lived, then it assumes the aspect of an adoring respect, homage or reverence and honour vis-a-vis the greatness, majesty, sanctity and justice of God, our all-powerful and provident Creator.

³⁶ G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*..., p. 50, OE XI 200.

An educated youngster is rightly and habitually aware of the adorable and amiable presence of God, the all-powerful but at the same time, merciful Father. The believer experiences God's presence under both forms and is aware of the saying: God sees me! The words Don Bosco so often used in his pedagogy, "make yourselves loved rather than feared" are nothing more than a reflection of the "make yourselves loved rather than feared" which characterizes the relationship of a faithful Christian with his God, the "Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, a gentle Father and God of all consolations."³⁷

The Biblical quotation 'The fear of God is the beginning wisdom' became, for a young man grown into adulthood equivalent to the horror of being separated from God, reason to avoid sin, 'nostalgia for grace', 'desire to be effectively purified and request to be reconciled', which comes about through the Sacraments of Penance and of the Eucharist. He recalls the talks heard in the past, which had touched his heart during the time of his early education. "The thought of God's presence should accompany us at all times, in all places and in every action. And who would have the courage of doing anything which might offend God if he thinks that the one that he wants to offend could, at that very moment in which he wanted to utter that word, dry up his tongue and paralyse the hand with which he intends to sin?"³⁸ "Every kind of sin greatly upsets divine justice and causes us to deserve serious punishments, which will turn into greater punishments in the hereafter if they have no actual effects on the sinner in this life. A sincere willingness to correct oneself may soothe divine justice."³⁹ "God is merciful and forgives any kind of sin, provided a man is sincerely sorry and carries out a suitable penance".⁴⁰ These are the two different aspects assumed by God when the wicked Jezebel was punished and the Ninevites were forgiven, because of their conversion.

It is clear that in Don Bosco's language 'fear of God' 'is equivalent to living Christian life to the full. The one who fears God is an observant and exemplary member of the faithful, a good Christian. Fear includes love. Don Bosco gladly accepts what is recommended in the *Porta teco cristiano*, the guide for Christian living for fathers in reference to their duties towards their children: "2. Raise them up with all diligence in the fear of God, since their health depends on it much like God's blessing on your

³⁷ 2 Cor 1:3

³⁸ G. Barberis (G. Gresino), *Cronaca*, quad. 3, evening talk to boys on Aug. 21, 1877, p. 11; cf another version (E. Dompè), quad. 15, pp. 24-25.

³⁹ G. Bosco, *Storia sacra per uso delle scuole...*, Second and improved edition. Turin, Speirani and Tortone 1853, p. 90

⁴⁰ G. Bosco, *Storia sacra per l'uso delle scuole e specialmente delle classi elementari...* Third and longer edition. Turin, Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1863, p. 97.

house and since Divine Providence has entrusted them to you that they might receive a Christian education (Eph.6:4); 3) Impress right away in their tender hearts the holy fear of God, the desire to serve him and a strong love for virtue. (Tob.1:10)".⁴¹

7. Young people in the Catholic Church

"Continue to love the Church in its ministers, continue to live according to our holy Catholic religion, that can make you happy on this earth and eternally happy in heaven".⁴² This is the lesson imparted by Don Bosco to his own close helpers. Don Bosco sees "belonging to the Catholic Church" as a further unmistakable characteristic of the good Christian and upright citizen. This is one of Don Bosco's key foundations for his catechetical and practical theology: "The Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church is the only true Church of Jesus Christ".⁴³

He includes, and puts it strongly, attachment and fidelity to its leader, the Pope: "Be intimately convinced of these great truths: where the successor of St Peter is, there is the true church of Jesus Christ. No one will ever be in the true religion if he is not a Catholic; no one is Catholic without the Pope. Our shepherds, and especially the bishops, unite us with the Pope and the Pope unites us with God".⁴⁴

A correctly educated Catholic young man will be well instructed in Christian doctrine, always courageous in professing the Creed of the church, free from any compromise with heresy and any political radicalism, and will resolutely take sides with the Pope and the pastors. Among advice more often heard were ones already known far and wide since 1853 when Don Bosco wrote *Three particular reminders for young people* at the conclusion of the already cited *Advice for Catholics*.

Avoid as much as possible the company of those who speak about immodest things or try to make fun of our holy religion ["the Pope, bishops and other ministers of our holy religion" Don Bosco would add in 1872]; abhor and reject irreligious books and newspapers which might be offered to you as a gift. Should anyone say that we live in times of freedom therefore one may choose

⁴¹ *Porta teco cristiano...*, pp. 24-25, OE XI 24-25.

⁴² Letter to members of the Our Lady of Mercy Confraternity, Buenos Aires, 30 Sept 1877, E III 225.

⁴³ Title of first edition of his *Avvisi ai cattolici*. Turin, Speirani and Ferrero 1850, 23 p. OE IV 121-143.

⁴⁴ *Avvisi ai cattolici*. Turin, P. De. Agostini 1853, p. 6 OE IV 168. Don Bosco's ecclesiology has obvious limitations, cf. P. Braido, *Pedagogia ecclesiastica di don Bosco*, pp. 24-42; J. M. Laboa, 'L'esperienza e il senso della Chiesa nell'opera di Don Bosco', in M. Midali (Ed), *Don Bosco nella storia...*, pp. 107-133; F. Molinari, Chiesa e mondo nella «Storia ecclesiastica» di don Bosco, in M. Midali etc. pp. 143-155.

to live the way he wants to, rebut this by saying that if we are in times of freedom, let them allow us to live according to the religion as we choose.⁴⁵

8. The Christian, “Man for eternity” but active in the world

The emerging and specific qualification of the Christian as a ‘Man For Eternity’⁴⁶ while at the same time an upright citizen generally means this for Don Bosco: to have the ability to fit into society in an orderly active way, especially ‘by means of work ‘as an ordinary worker, farmer, skilled worker, employee, teacher, soldier, priest, and for those who are wealthy and live off revenue, by using their wealth well. It means that everyone, in various and different ways, is called to the exact performance of duties of his or her state in life which is from the call to lead an upright and exemplary life and be of substantial value to society.

There is a close link between the eternal goal and earthly commitment and the mature young man has learned to hold these together, with his eyes turned towards heaven and his feet solidly planted on earth, doing good deeds along the way. In his *The Power of a Good Education*, Don Bosco has Peter write to his mother as he is about to leave for Crimea, in 1854: “Tell my brothers and sisters that work produces good citizens and religion produces good Christians; but that work and religion lead to heaven”.⁴⁷

As for their application to study or work, the students and artisans at the yearly reading out of the *Rule for the houses* heard a formula which summed up all the recommendations scattered throughout their long period of education. That formula, with three short articles offered the true profile of the working Christian (*homo faber*) explained the main aim of the educational process which Don Bosco had carried out on their behalf:

1. Man, my dear boys, was born to work. Adam was placed in the earthly paradise to cultivate it. The Apostle Paul says: He who does not work does not deserve to eat.
2. By work we mean the performance of the duties proper to one’s state, whether study, art or craft.

⁴⁵ *Avvisi ai cattolici* (1853), pp. 25-27, OE IV 187-189.

⁴⁶ “Remember O man that you are a man for eternity”, in *La chiave del paradiso in mano al cattolico che pratica i doveri del buon cristiano*. Turin, Paravia & Co., 1856, p. 24, OE VIII 24).

⁴⁷ G. Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione...*, p. 89. OE VI 363.

3. By means of work you may be able to make yourselves well deserving for society and religion and do good to your souls, especially if you offer to God all your daily occupations.⁴⁸

9. Society

In many of his talks over the final years of his earthly existence, Don Bosco insisted on the support lay people should render to the mission of the Church, especially regarding the education of the young and even more specifically on their use of wealth. His strong position on alms-giving is typical. He interpreted and proposed alms-giving as a strict and obligatory exercise of social justice *ante litteram*.⁴⁹

Instead among the gamut of educational objectives pursued by Don Bosco we do not find a developed idea of the socially and politically committed human being. The idea is scarcely developed as a specific aim being made explicit more within moral and religious objectives. This is partly due to the social situation in Don Bosco's Italy, when active or passive politics were reserved for those who could take advantage of privileged cultural and economic circumstances. We have to add, though, that Don Bosco made political choice something which involved education. This was the choice he made for himself and his collaborators. For Don Bosco someone who is actively involved in civil and political society is, first of all and continues to be the Christian who does his job honestly and competently. He is someone who contributes to order and progress of society by wisely exercising authority over his family, getting involved inasmuch as is possible in charitable works calling for solidarity, and one who is a model of faith including spiritual and corporal acts of mercy.

Don Bosco's comments to a gathering of past pupils of the Oratory on July 25, 1880, are significant. Referring to someone who had criticized the place where he had received his education and then inviting them all to forgive and pray for ungrateful people of the kind, then he went on to say:

We are Salesians and as such we forget everything, we forgive everyone, we do good to everyone as much as we can, and harm no one. This way we have "the simplicity of the dove and the prudence of the snake", keeping a lookout for traitors and treason.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Regolamento per le case...*, part II, chap. V *Del lavoro*, pp. 68-9, OE XXIX 164-165; we see a precise hierarchy of values revealed in the fact that Chap V follows on from II and IV about *Della pietà* and *Contengo in chiesa*. Work as man's destiny, marked differently before and after original sin, is the antidote to laziness, and already one of the main chapters in *Storia sacra* (1847); cf N Cerrato, *La catechesi di don Bosco nella «Storia sacra»*. Rome, LAS 1979, pp. 308-318.

⁴⁹ Cr. P. Braido, *Laicità e laici nel progetto operativo di don Bosco...*, pp. 23-30.

⁵⁰ BS 4 (1880) no. 9, Sept. p. 10.

10 Life is vocation and mission

The place everyone in society holds, whether civil or ecclesiastical, is never casual or arbitrary. Everyone is called to live according to his own vocation, namely, to hold onto a well-defined place which responds to God's will and guarantees the graces given. Several times Don Bosco declared that vocational choice is the most important aspect of a person's life.⁵¹

The choice, while responding to questions raised by one's neighbour, and particularly by the young, is suited to the aptitudes and inclinations of the person. In turn these aptitudes and inclinations make a person ready to make a commitment which could be "to live as lay person, an ecclesiastic or as a religious".

The problem is posed and solved in more precise terms in a letter addressed to the students of the two last years of high school at San Martino. "There are two states along which one can walk on the way to heaven: the ecclesiastical state or the lay state. As for the lay state", Don Bosco declared expeditiously, "everyone has to choose the studies, employment, profession which allows him to fulfil his duties as a good Christian and meet with the approval of his parents". With regard to the ecclesiastical state, Don Bosco provides more detailed directions. First of all, he indicates what kinds of detachment the ecclesiastical state entails:

Renouncing the comforts and the glory of the world and earthly joys, in order to give oneself to God's service... In making this choice the only counsellor who can be decisive is the confessor. He is to be heeded without paying attention to superiors or inferiors, relatives or friends... Whoever enters into the ecclesiastical state with the sole intention of giving himself to God service and walking the path to salvation, has the moral certitude of doing a great deal of good to his soul and the souls of his neighbour.

Within this basic choice there are three possible different options: to be a priest in the world, to be a priest in religious life, to be a priest for the foreign missions.

Everyone may choose what his heart desires and what is more suited to his physical and moral strength, but he should get the advice of a person who is pious, learned and prudent.

However all these choices must come from only one point and lead back to it, the centre, namely, God.⁵²

We need to say that while Don Bosco often spoke with young people who were facing the choice of the ecclesiastical or religious state, he did not give over

⁵¹ Cf. for example an evening talk on July 7, 1876, G. Barberis, *Cronichetta*, quad. 2, p. 2.

⁵² Letter June 17, 1879, E III 476.

much importance to someone who chose the secular state instead. "Once a young man knows he is not called to the ecclesiastical or religious state, then it does not matter whether he chooses to be a blacksmith or a carpenter, a shoemaker or a tailor, an employee or a businessman".⁵³

In particular, he showed that he favoured a religious vocation for young men who he thought might encounter dangers if they remained in the world.⁵⁴ As years went on, Don Bosco would begin to talk about lay religious vocations to working boys as well. "Religious vocations are not only for young gentlemen, academic students that is".⁵⁵

11. Common vocation: charity and apostolate

The vocation which after all, is common to everyone, whether ecclesiastic or lay, is but one: the vocation to practice charity, the vocation to love. Everyone, according to his or her possibilities and responsibilities, is bound to be there in charity and as an apostolate, expressed in various ways: giving alms, by being engaged in teaching catechism or in education, joining forces with others who are actively engaged.⁵⁶

This is achieved and produces better results for the glory of God – *vis unita fortior* -when people join groups and associations of militant Christians and thus open themselves - if God so calls them - to the most daring apostolic and missionary possibilities.⁵⁷

What Don Bosco, with daring intuition, suggested to a young man who would later on be proclaimed a saint, is good for everybody:

The very first thing suggested to him in order to become saint was that of doing his best to win over souls for God. Therefore there is no holier thing in the world than that of cooperating for the good of souls for whose salvation Jesus Christ shared the very last drop of his precious blood.⁵⁸

12. A life style seasoned with hope and joy

Finally, a young man moulded by the Preventive System is made capable of practising in the future the traditional virtues of charity and temperance, obedience,

⁵³ G. Barberis, *Cronaca*, quad. 19, p.2.

⁵⁴ Cf. for example his talk on the evening of 10 May 1875, G. Barberis, *Cronichetta*, quad. 1, pp 2-3.

⁵⁵ G. Barberis (E. Dompè), *Cronaca*, quad. 15, evening talk on April 21, 1877, p. 7. The talk was completely given to to different dangers faced by someone who chooses a lay ecclesiastical vocation and he who opts for religious life.

⁵⁶ Conference to Cooperators at Borgo S. Martino, July 1, 1880, BS 4 (1880) no. 8, August, p. 9.

⁵⁷ Cf. P. Braido, *Laicità e laici...*, pp. 30-31.

⁵⁸ G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, p. 53 OE XI 203.

honesty and modesty, and finding reasons to rejoice even here below in steadfast hope of gaining eternal happiness. The following remark found in the *Companion of Youth* is reserved for young people still at school and on the threshold of adulthood:

Besides, we see that those who live in God's grace are always cheerful and, even when they are in the midst of affliction, they show a contented heart. On the contrary, those who abandon themselves to pleasures, live in a state of anger and try as much as they can to find peace in their amusements are always more and more unhappy: *Non est Pax impiis (There is no peace for the wicked)*.⁵⁹

So the exhortation given to youngsters: "to occupy the time of their youth well: *Quae seminaverit homo, haec et metet* (a man will reap what he has sown.) was an obvious and habitual one. Just as it is for farmers who sow and cultivate a field. "The same thing will happen to you, my dear boys, if you sow now; in due time you will have the satisfaction of reaping a good harvest...And whoever does not sow during his youth, will harvest nothing in his old age."⁶⁰

Beatus homo cum portaverit jugum ab adolescentia sua (Blessed the man who from his youth has borne a yoke...). "Be on guard while you are young and keep the commandments, and you will be happy in this life and in the life to come."⁶¹ The saints, while seriously thinking about eternal punishments, lived with the greatest gladness in their hearts since they firmly trust in God that they would avoid them and one day go to possess the infinite good the Lord keeps for those who serve him.⁶² A legitimate fear, which avoids presumption but has the filial trepidation of being possibly separated from God and not persevering to the end, finds relief in the sure hope that God is faithful and never reneges on his promises. This is the source of the joy felt by one who, rather than trusting his own merits, puts his trust in the benevolence of the Father whom he honours and serves with real love.

⁵⁹ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...*, p. 28, OE II 208

⁶⁰ G. Barberis, *Cronichetta*, quad. 2, evening talk July 7, 1875, pp. 39-40

⁶¹ MB XI 253, evening talk to boys on July 28, 1875.

⁶² G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...*, p. 29, OE II 209.

Chapter 12

EDUCATIONAL DISCIPLINES:

(1) PERFORMING ONE'S DUTIES; GOD'S GRACE

Young peoples' lives evolve and are open to being formed, for Don Bosco. A young life is a growing process necessarily involving an adult educator, surrounding factors, and what the educator does. As we have seen, in the network of forces involved in the growing process of the young person, education stands out as the dominant and irreplaceable one. All other resources are effective thanks to the mediation of education. Growing up takes place thanks to educators, in interaction with them, and in obedience to them.

Naturally as Don Bosco's undertakings expanded, they achieved their objectives in different ways and with different approaches depending on the situation of the young people concerned:

1. The type of youngster: orphan, abandoned, civilised, seminarian....
2. Psychological and moral levels: good character, ordinary character, difficult, bad.
3. Kind of institution: festive oratory, evening and Sunday school, religious and recreational association, boarding school for academic students, home for working boys.

There was also the question of communication: press, theatre, music and singing, games, outings/excursions.

Naturally, there was a basic platform made up of goals, values, contents and methods common to all institutions which resulted in a fundamentally unified Preventive System though one which could respond flexibly to real circumstances. But to achieve all this the approaches used needed to be different if they were to be appropriate and effective.

Which means that while it is easy enough to work out the aims, it becomes much more difficult to draw up a picture of the variety of approaches by which these aims were to be achieved, given the multitude of different circumstances of young people and the range of institutions offered to deal with them. In the end we can only describe the more significant broad outlines. The next two chapters will take these up. Both will indicate the educational approaches adopted within an overall Christian view of education. In the first chapter, however, we will highlight the religious aspect, while

the following chapter will look more closely at human cooperation, while not overlooking the omnipresent divine factor.

1. From obedience of a pedagogical kind to adult social conformity

The royal road, the only one according to Don Bosco, to adult maturity is obedience – listening and then following. During the period of education this is the means and method for arriving at a complete adult social conformity.

Obedience to the educator is the main tool for becoming truly human and Christian, just as the learning of a trade or craft demands dependence on the ‘master’. To learn the profession of being human and Christian, everything comes back to the *unum necessarium* (the one thing necessary): obedience to God, the Pope, the holy ministers of the Church, or in other words, whatever your state in life, be obedient to whom you must be obedient: father, mother, employer, superior.

It is for this reason that obedience is the virtue which “encompasses all other virtues. It is the virtue which gives rise to and permits other virtues to grow and also safeguards them in such a way that they may never be lost.”¹

“The foundation of all virtues in a young man lies in obedience to superiors. Obedience generates and safeguards all the other virtues. And, if this virtue is necessary for everyone, even more so it is necessary for youth. Therefore if you want to acquire this virtue, begin by obeying your superiors, submitting yourselves to them without any kind of opposition just as you would submit to God.”²

By means of obedience, a young man either as in individual or in community becomes a disciple and by inwardly conforming to what is ordered, expressed in rules and prescriptions, he becomes disciplined at every level and in every sector of his inner and outward existence. So education becomes a work of obedience and discipline in the broader sense: fulfilling one’s duty is really fulfilling all duties towards God, others, and self. Duty and doing things dutifully are deeply connected: everything we need to do for our salvation goes back to the duty of our state in life - study, work - which turns out to be like a measuring rod to test and verify the authentic fulfilment of all other duties.

‘Discipline’, for Don Bosco, has a holistic meaning. In a circular to Salesians in 1873, Don Bosco stated: ‘By ‘discipline’ I mean a way of living which conforms to

¹ G. Bonetti, *Memoria di alcuni fatti tratti dalle prediche o dalla storia*, end of 1858, pp. 10-11,13,15.

² *Regolamento per le case...*, part II, Chapter VIII *Contengo verso i Superiori*, p. 75 OE XXIX 171.

the rules and traditional customs of an institution. Therefore to reach the good results connected with discipline it is essential that all the rules be kept by everyone.” “Observance of these rules must be evidenced by members of the Congregation and by the young entrusted to our care by divine Providence... And so, discipline will have no results at all if the rules of the Society and of the school are not kept. Believe me, my dear friends, it is on the observance of the rules that the moral and other benefits for the pupils, or their ruin, depend... The rules are really nothing but a synthesis of all the values human and Christian, to be pursued”. And to conclude Don Bosco wrote: “The Lord said, one day, to his disciples: ‘Do this and you shall live’ (Lk.10: 28). I am saying the same thing to you”.

Don Bosco assured his Salesians and their pupils that by practising these things: “You will have the Lord’s blessings, you will enjoy inner peace, discipline will triumph in our houses, and we will see our pupils grow in virtue and walk along the road to eternal salvation”.³

It is an essential ingredient of the Preventive System to “make the rules of an institution known” and then help the young to keep them, with the help of the educators who mention them then guide, advise and correct with loving kindness.⁴ To grow, it remains for the pupils to cooperate obediently and with conviction.

There is no doubt that at times Don Bosco presents obedience as sacrificing intellect and will and as having an intrinsic moral and religious value. Tertullian fell into heresy because he did not have humility and did not submit to his legitimate superiors and especially to the Vicar of Jesus Christ.⁵

“By obedience we offer to God as a sacrifice what we hold most precious, namely, our freedom. Consequently this is the sacrifice we can offer God and to Him, this is the most dear offering”.⁶ But above all, obedience has a functional value since it is educationally productive. After all, even for Don Bosco, education was equated with discipline, understood in its widest sense.

It is, however, hard to determine the degree of freedom and autonomy granted and favoured by this type of pedagogy of obedience. Perhaps the overall comparison with the effective experience of the Preventive System in all its aspects might provide a flexible interpretation of what has been said thus far. We might see this in the chapters to follow.

³ Circ. Letter Nov. 15, 1873, E II 319-321

⁴ Cf. *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p. 46, OE XXVIII 424.

⁵ G. Bosco, *Vita de' sommi pontefici S. Aniceto, S. Sotero...* Turin, G. B. Paravia & CO., 1858, p. 46, OE X 250. “If Savonarola had submitted to his Superiors those evils would not have befallen him”, his opinion in *Storia d'Italia*, in reference to his being tortured and condemned to death.

⁶ G. Bonetti, *Memoria di alcuni fatti...*, p. 15.

2. Pedagogy based on 'duty'.

Pedagogy based on duties like the duty to study, work, follow a profession, a mission, is as fundamental since it is an initiation into what is sacred; indeed it is considered *res sacra* in itself, the expression of God 's will and a way to achieve holiness.

The duties we are talking about constitute the entire gamut of human and Christian moral dimensions. Fr Albert Caviglia remarks: "Whoever gains a close knowledge of our saintly educator will know that these ideas lay at the basis of all his educational effort, both in community living and in spirituality as well. Don Bosco did not give credence to showy piety, meaning piety which was not backed up by a diligent and conscientious observance of one's duties".⁷ "Two fundamental principles stand out: the scrupulous use of time and diligence in the performance of one's duties, according to Don Bosco are at the head of all spiritual effort"⁸

This is how the formation of a good Christian and honest citizen is brought about. Don Bosco achieves it subtly through reminders and by vigilance, by means of exhortations and example, and by means of a variety of things, ideal and useful, that provide motivation.

Don Bosco dedicates a chapter from Michael Magone's Life to the "exact performance of his duties". Magone is presented as the ideal prototype of a boy who might seem scatter-brained, a bit too lively at first sight, entirely caught up in what he is doing, capable of turning the whole house upside-down, but who becomes amenable to discipline by working at it: "In time, he knew how to check himself and exercise self-control to the point that he was always the first one to respond whenever duty called."⁹

In his Life of Francis Besucco, Don Bosco again highlights "his exactness in the performance of his duties", the "exact use of time", his readiness to get out of bed in the morning, his "outstanding punctuality in going to church", his "diligence in his studies, attention in the classroom, and obedience to the superiors".¹⁰

Herewith what Don Bosco wrote in the *Rules for the Houses*:

⁷ A. Caviglia, *Savio Domenico e Don Bosco, Studio*, pp. 99-100. Caviglia gives a whole chapter to *La vita di dovere* (pp. 97-110).

⁸ Cf. A. Caviglia, *il «Magone Michele» una classica esperienza educativa...* p. 152; cf pp. 151-154, *Il dovere* (in the same book we find the life of Luigi Comollo with a preliminary note); A. Caviglia, *La vita di Besucco Francesco...*, pp. 171-174.

⁹ G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, p. 13,15,35, OE XIII 167, 169, 189; see the whole chapter *Puntualità ne' suoi doveri*, pp. 33-39, OE XIII 187-193.

¹⁰ G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, p. 95, 96, 114, 120 OE XV 337, 338, 356, 362. On the topic of *Studio e diligenza* cf chap. XVIII, pp. 94-99, OE XV 336-341.

Remember that you are in the springtime of life at your age. Whoever does not get accustomed to work in his youth will probably end up being lazy into old age; he will, perhaps, be a dishonour to his country and relatives, and will do irreparable harm to his soul.¹¹

“Avoidance of idleness” which is the “father of all vices”, is the foundation of a sincere spirituality. Therefore, there should be utmost diligence in the performance of one's duties, both scholastic and religious. Idleness is the father of all vices. Don Bosco had noticed something which made him sad in the pupils of Mirabello, among other things, “A group (of pupils) who avoid any work as though it were a huge boulder hanging over their heads.”¹²

Attending to one's commitments to study and work is essential practical training for a serious and happy life and is acquired through the habit of discipline and moral and civil uprightness. Following this line of thought, Don Bosco gave a series of eight short Good Night talks to the boys on moral discipline and study method.¹³ The means range from fear of God to good eating habits. Faith and reason, morality and hygiene, devotion and common sense are all nicely blended together to attain happiness and what is good.

The pedagogy of duty and work is substantially part of the entire life of an educational institution, with its continuous succession of various occupations and moments of recreation, tight rhythm of activities in the classroom, workshops and study halls, with eagerness to achieve one's best, emulating others, all the while accompanied by the example and energy of the educators.

This is the characteristic of Salesian religious and Don Bosco is proud of it!

Do we not hear it repeated every day to the four winds: work, instruction, humanity? Lo and behold... In many cities the Salesians are opening workshops of all kinds, agricultural schools in the countryside to train young people to work in the fields; they found boarding schools for boys and girls, day schools as well as evening and Sunday schools, oratories with recreation on Sundays to refine young men's minds and enrich them with useful knowledge; for hundreds and thousands of orphans and abandoned children they open up homes, orphanages and welfare institutes, bringing the light of the Gospel and civilisation

¹¹ *Regolamento per le case...*, part II, Chap V *Del lavoro*, art. 6 p. 69, OE XXIX 165.

¹² Letter to the students at the minor seminary of St Charles, Mirabello, Dec. 30, 1863, Em 1629.

¹³ G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff, p. 22, 23, 25, 26, 31, 37, 38, 53; cf. Also G. Berto, *Raccolta di detti, fatti e sogni di d. Bosco*, Good Night Sept. 11, 1867, pp. 60-61.

to the very barbarians of Patagonia, doing their best so that humanity may not only be just a word but a reality.¹⁴

3. Prime of place for religious education

Cultivating the religious dimension, instilling the fear of God in the young, educating them to live habitually in the state of grace: all this constitutes the objective of the complex of Christian practices of piety which find its inspiration in tradition and the personal experience which characterises the life of every "house".

It is absolutely self-evident that for Don Bosco religion that is put into practice is the main goal of an authentic education. This is what Don Bosco tells a group of past pupils who had achieved such a goal, thanks to the education received at the Oratory. Don Bosco goes back to this and insists upon it:

Wherever you may be, always show yourselves to be good Christians and upright men. Love, respect, put into practice our holy religion, the religion with which I educated you and with which I kept you away from the dangers and corruption of the world; the religion which brings us comfort in the sufferings of our life, gives us strength when we face the clutches of death and opens for us the gates of boundless happiness.¹⁵

This 'boundless happiness' and 'eternal salvation', as a matter of fact, are constantly placed before the eyes of the young as an on-going stimulus to reflection and commitment. With eyes fixed on that goal, the young person is invited in several ways, through words, readings, stories and 'dreams', to subordinate every other activity to this one and consider "the salvation of one's soul", as the dominant idea of spiritual life.¹⁶

This is the central point of Don Bosco's entire educational approach. "Salvation is the fruit of redemption wrought by Jesus Christ and stands for 'freedom from sin' and life of grace; it stands for adoptive son-ship, friendship with God, in a word, it stands for holiness.

Three warnings found in Don Bosco's *Guide for Christian living (Porta teo cristiano)*, insist on this idea:

¹⁴ Conference to Cooperators at S. Benigno Canavese, June 4, 1880, BS 4 (1880) no. 7, July p. 12.

¹⁵ Address June 24, 1880 BS 4 (1880) no. 9, Sept., p. 10.

¹⁶ Cf. P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol II, chap IV *Storia e Salvezza*, pp. 59-100; idem, *Don Bosco e le trasformazioni sociali e religiose del suo tempo*, in *La famiglia salesiana riflette sulla vocazione nella Chiesa di oggi*. Turin-Leumann, Elle Di CI 1973, pp. 159-162, *Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*.

19. God wants us all to be safe; rather it is his will that all of us become saints.
20. Whoever wants to be saved should have the idea of eternity in his mind, God in his heart and the world under his feet.
21. Everyone is obliged to perform the duties proper to the state in which he finds himself.¹⁷

In the salvation event, beyond simplified terms like “theocentrism” or “christocentrism”, terms foreign to Don Bosco’s way of thinking and language, what stands out and takes on absolute relevance is the action of God who, as we have seen, shows predilection for the young;¹⁸ it is the action of Jesus Christ our Saviour, true God and true Man, our Divine Saviour.¹⁹

Meanwhile, the young person learns, on occasions such as feast days, novenas, special months, particular events and devotions, that the Mother of our Redeemer is active in his life as a Christian, through her intercession and mediation. The young person is invited to appeal to her daily by repeating the invocation three times: “Dear Mother Mary, help me to save my soul”.²⁰

Finally, it is not irrelevant to indicate from a particularly pedagogical point of view that young people can more easily accept and interiorise the presence of divine or sacred persons thanks to the effective intermediary work of their educators. Coadjutor brothers, clerics, and above all priests and particularly the confessors can see that God, our Saviour Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary are accepted, trusted and loved, the more they know how to represent them in life by being real “fathers, brothers and friends”. It is enough for them to invest themselves with the qualities suggested by the Preventive System: the charity St Paul praises, charity founded on unshakable hope, made tangible by active “consecration” in a climate of human reasonableness and loving kindness.²¹

4. Teaching fear as a prelude to love

Education substantially has the aim of transfusing a vital synthesis of love and fear into the religious world of the young person. This synthesis is the correct relationship

¹⁷ *Porta teco cristiano...*, p. 7, OE XI 7.

¹⁸ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...*, pp. 10-11, OE II 190-191.

¹⁹ G. Bosco, *Il cattolico istruito nella sua religione. Trattenimenti di un padre fi famiglia co' suoi figliuoli secondo i bisogni del tempo*. Turin, P. De-Agostini 1853, first series, section X, p. 43, OE IV 237; section XI, p. 47, OE IV 241; section XII, pp 50-53, OE IV 244-247.

²⁰ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...*, p. 54, OE II 234; *La chiave del paradiso in mano al cattolico...*, p. 43, OE VIII 43.

²¹ The virtues of the good educator Don Bosco takes back to the three basic qualities: reason, religion, loving kindness, subject of chap 14.

of the believer with his God, Creator and Lord, and at the same time, Father and Saviour. This is meant to occur through a delicate balance where “love more than fear” becomes the hinge of spirituality and pedagogy.

This is a belief and a method founded on centuries-old piety, Scripture, liturgy, and popular religiosity.

Grant, O Lord, that we may feel, at the same time, love for and fear of your Holy Name, so that those whom you have established on the solid foundation of love may never be deprived of your guidance.

This is the prayer which young members of the faithful heard read out in Latin at Sunday Mass during the octave of the Feast of Corpus Christi, the second Sunday after Pentecost, and which a high school student knew how to translate.

The young person is ordinarily aware of his fragility as a ‘pilgrim’, exposed to dangers, temptations, sin, and also aware of his dependence, as a creature, on the good God who is Provident and justly rewarding and so fears separation from Him. Therefore the idea is constantly impressed upon him that he should keep God’s Commandments, his counsels and, above everything else, the “new commandment, the Gospel rule of charity”. The young man is urged to entrust himself to God’s grace and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in hope and through prayer for his perseverance to the end.

This perspective is present throughout the educational process and focuses on the following exhortation: “Remember, O young man, that we are created to love and serve God Our Creator and that all the knowledge and riches of this world would be of no avail to us without the fear of God. All our temporal and eternal goods depend on this holy fear of God”.²² “Whoever has no fear of God should quit studying, because he would be toiling in vain. “The Fear of God”, so say the Holy Scriptures, “is the beginning of wisdom”.²³

The “seven considerations for each day of the week” tend to insist on blending the two motives of love and fear.²⁴ Through the frequent recitation of acts of Faith, Hope and Charity and the act of Contrition...that was precisely what was constantly taught.

²² *Regolamento per le case...*, part II, Chap III *Della Pietà*, art 1, p. 63 OE XXIX 159.

²³ *Regolamento per le case...*, part II, Chap VI *Contegno nella scuola e nello studio*, art 21 and 22, p. 73 OE XXIX 169. There are strong expressions found here like “a proud student is stupid, ignorant”; “the proud person is hateful in God’s eyes and reviled amongst men” (Ibid, Chap VI, art 22; Chap IX, art. 6, p. 73 and 78, OE XXIX 169 and 174).

²⁴ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...*, pp. 31-50, OE II 211-230.

5. Practices of piety in religious education

After having nurtured the fear of God as a supreme treasure, Don Bosco added: "Keeping the fear of God alive helps us in prayer, the holy Sacraments and the Word of God".²⁵ *The Rules for Day Students* gives the rector the mission of "doing his very best to instil in the hearts of the young the love of God, respect for sacred things, frequent reception of the Sacraments and a filial devotion to Mary Most Holy, for all that constitutes true piety."²⁶

From the viewpoint of the number of "practices", there is a considerable difference in the case of boarders, where the academic students have more than the working boys, and the case of day students.²⁷ For the latter, the following prescription holds: "They shall be absolutely obliged to come to Mass on Sunday and on Holy Days of obligation. If possible, they should also attend on weekdays".²⁸

For those who attended the Oratory, there was a customary series of practices of piety offered on Sundays: Mass, homily, catechism classes and an afternoon service.²⁹

Personal participation in religious life and the maturing of one's commitment to moral behaviour presuppose an enlightened and conscious faith which is not possible without a systematic program of Instruction and Reflection. To achieve this, Don Bosco relies on the effectiveness of several means: catechesis on history and doctrine, religious culture as part of schooling, preaching - generally of an instructive but also entertaining kind, always simple and down to earth, meditations and spiritual reading.³⁰

The pedagogy of faith leaves ample room for explicit forms of public witness, including together in large groups: solemn religious celebrations, organised participation of particular groups in liturgical services, such as for altar boys, choir members, sodalities, pilgrimages to churches and shrines.

Reminiscing on the turbulent days of 1848, Don Bosco wrote in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*:

²⁵ *Regolamento per le case...*, part II, Chap III, art. 2, p. 63, OE XXIX 159.

²⁶ *Regolamento dell'Oratorio...*, per gli esterni, part I, Chap I, art. 7, p. 6, OE XXIX, 36.

²⁷ Cf. *Regolamento dell'Oratorio...*, per gli esterni, part II, Chap X, *Pratiche particolari di Cristiana pietà*, pp. 43-44, OE XXIX 73-74; *Regolamento per le case...*, Chap III *Della Pietà* and Chap IV *Contengo in chiesa*, pp. 63-68, OE XXIX 159-164.

²⁸ Deliberations of the Conference of St Francis de Sales 1875, MB X 1115.

²⁹ As for Practices of piety at Valdocco, also adopted in other similar institutions, for boarders and day students, cf P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità...*, vol II, pp. 303-309.

³⁰ Chapter 18 will speak more specifically of the school of Christian doctrine.

To encourage our young men ever more to disdain human respect, that year, for the first time, we marched in procession, to make those visits [to churches on Holy Thursday] singing the *Stabat Mater* and *Miserere*.³¹

6. Sacramental pedagogy in general and specifically the Eucharist

In boarding establishments we notice a literal application of the pedagogical principle relating to the sacraments. And even though this principle was indicated as a general orientation in what he wrote about the Preventive System, it involves the entire system.³²

Naturally this principle, in due proportion, is applicable to all Don Bosco's institutions. It is a well-known fact that the term 'sacraments' in Don Bosco's educational language, stands for the sacrament of Penance and the sacrament of Holy Eucharist which are "the wings needed to fly to Heaven".³³

Frequent Confession and Communion, daily Mass are the pillars which must support the edifice of education, from which we propose to banish the use of threats and the cane. Never force the boys to frequent the sacraments but encourage them to do so, give them every opportunity. On occasions of retreats, triduums, novenas, sermons and catechism classes, let the beauty, grandeur and holiness of the Catholic religion be dwelt on, for in the sacraments it offers to all of us a very easy and useful means to attain our salvation and peace of heart. In this way children take readily to these practices of piety and will adopt them willingly with joy and benefit.³⁴

But for a quicker journey to the beneficial use of the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist, the appeal Don Bosco made to educators and those to be educated in his Life of Dominic Savio is quite significant

Give me a young man who frequently approaches these sacraments and you will see him grow during his youth, reach adulthood and, if God so wills, advanced old age, with conduct which stands out as an example for all those who know him. Let the youngsters come to understand this principle, so that they may put it into practice; let all those who are involved in the education of these same youngsters understand this principle, in order to be able to teach it.³⁵

³¹ MO(1991) 193.

³² Cf. A. Caviglia, *Savio Domenico e Don Bosco, Studio*, pp. 343-363, *Don Bosco e la Pedagogia dei Sacramenti*.

³³ G. Bonetti, *Annali II* (1861-1862), p. 13.

³⁴ *Il sistema salesiano* (1877), p. 54, 56, OE XXVIII 432, 434. Between square brackets we find a text inserted into the *Regolamento per le case* (p. 8, OE XXIX 104).

³⁵ G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, p. 68, OE XI 218.

Basic to education in the sacraments are the indications provided by catechetical instruction and traditional preaching: on the necessary conditions for a valid, worthy and fruitful reception of the above mentioned sacraments; on the main actions and parts connected with them; on the serious danger of committing a sacrilege when the right dispositions are not there; and on the frequent reception of the sacraments (which he insists on to a growing degree).

As we have already remarked, Don Bosco would never fail to denounce the wiles of the Devil who, in the striking stories he told and the 'dreams' he related, appears under a number of forms, some alluring and some monstrous.

To all of the above we need to add Don Bosco's many strennas (= suggested action programs) given at the beginning of every year, his exhortations, the instructions given on the occasion of the 'exercise for a happy death' and Retreats.

What is more positively carried out and clearly evidenced by the practice of the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist, is the synthesis of the human and divine, the action and 'work' of grace and the impulse given to personal collaboration between the priest-educator and the young person to be educated. This synthesis is what characterises not only the sacramental experience but also prayer, 'devotions', among which devotion to the Virgin Mother holds a privileged place.

The sacraments and prayer are not only a means of grace but also tools for human growth, since they provide a solid foundation for moral virtues and promote inner and exterior joy.

They may say what they like about various systems of education, but I do not find any other secure basis for mine except frequent reception of the Sacraments of Confession and Communion. And I believe I am not overstating things when I say that when these are missing, then morality is 'banished'.³⁶

A Eucharistic pedagogy, then - Mass, Communion, Visits (to the Bl. Sacrament) - is exceptionally well developed by Don Bosco. Its first presentation appears in the Life of Louis Comollo, but it was proposed for the first time to seminarians (1844) and to youth in general later on (1854).³⁷

As was customary during Don Bosco's times, First Communion was stressed because of its particular moulding effectiveness, and described as "the most important act of one's life", "the most momentous and serious of one's life".³⁸

³⁶ G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, p. 100 OE XV 342.

³⁷ Cf. [G. Bosco], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo...*, p. 24, 32-34, OE I 24, 32-34.

³⁸ G. Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione...*, pp. 20-21, 30, 38, OE VI 294-295, 304, 312.

The *Companion of Youth* dedicates several pages to the 'manner of assisting at holy Mass', to 'preparation for holy Communion, to 'Visits to the Blessed Sacrament'³⁹

Don Bosco loved to recall that for Dominic Savio, "It was a real delight to be able to spend some hours before the Blessed Sacrament".⁴⁰ The Eucharistic theme is more widely developed in the spiritual and pedagogical profile found in the Life of Francis Besucco, a more instructional 'Life', particularly in three chapters on 'Holy Communion', 'The Veneration of the Blessed Sacrament', and 'Viaticum'.⁴¹

Once again there is Don Bosco's solid conviction that next to the Sacrament of Penance, "the second support for youth is Holy Communion... Lucky those youngsters who receive this Sacrament frequently and with proper dispositions at an early age".⁴² Added to this theme are recurring questions of early and frequent Communion.⁴³

But the repeated exhortations to receive communion - preceded by confession - makes us think of a Don Bosco who at times had to be more modest in educational objectives. The frequent reception of the sacraments on feast days is proposed as a strenna on December 13, 1858, to the "workers", the working boys, "who cannot receive the holy sacraments so often on weekdays".⁴⁴ For this reason there are many stennas on this topic. The strenna given on December 31, 1860, for the following year, says: "A sincere confession and frequent communion".⁴⁵

The strenna (more of a parable in this case) given on December 31, 1863, presented the two columns with these striking terms written on them: *Regina mundi*, Queen of the world and *Panis vitae*, Bread of life.⁴⁶

As he was giving out the strenna for 1868 on December 31, 1867, Don Bosco ended one of his usual dream-stories he was telling, with these words: "Let this be the strenna: "frequent communion is the most efficacious means to have a good death... Honour Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin: with these two safeguards, everything will be obtained; without them nothing is obtained".⁴⁷

³⁹ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...*, pp. 84-92, 98-103, 103-105, OE II 254-272, 278-283, 283-285.

⁴⁰ G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, p. 71, OE XI 221.

⁴¹ Cf. G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, respectively, pp 105-109, 109-113, 157-158, OE 347-351, 351-355, 399-400.

⁴² G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, p. 105, OE XV 347

⁴³ Cf. G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, pp. 105-106, OE XV 347-348; *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), pp. 9-10, OE XXVIII 105-106.

⁴⁴ G. Bonetti, *Memoria di alcuni fatti...*, p. 35.

⁴⁵ D. Ruffino, *Cronache dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, No. 2 1861, p.2: G. Bonetti, *Memoria di alcuni fatti...*, pp. 68-69.

⁴⁶ D. Ruffino, *Le doti frandi e luminose...*, pp. 10-12.

⁴⁷ G. Berto, *Fatti particolari I*, pp. 8-10.

7. Sin and the sacrament of reconciliation

The administration of the Sacrament of Penance with its various benefits, seems more evidently pedagogical: it is an event that gives grace, an occasion for spiritual direction, and moral therapy for the corruption produced by sin.

Besides the concept it is the massive reality of sin, both original and actual sin, that stands out in Don Bosco's mentality and spirituality, as well as in the sleepless nights he spent fighting against the one who is the personification of sin, the Devil. There is plenty of evidence of this in his writings, words and actions. Don Bosco multiplied his warnings, teachings and exhortations to arouse horror for sin, to point out "the ugliness of sin", "the greatest enemy of the young"⁴⁸ in contrast to grace, and "the beauty of virtue".

"Oh, how unfortunate are those who fall into sin, but how more unfortunate are those who live in sin". "Oh sin! Oh Sin! What a terrible scourge you are to those who allow you to enter into their hearts". These are the words Don Bosco has the young Michael Magone say after his general confession.⁴⁹

It is absolutely essential "to break the horns of the devil, who would like to become the Lord and master of some individuals".⁵⁰ For Don Bosco sin is a source of anxiety which he communicates by recounting his threatening dreams when faced with the most frequent forms of evil affecting the young: impurity, blasphemy, theft, bad talk, scandal, intemperance and sloth regarding religious duties. The youngsters' enemy number one, as already stated, is impurity, "the ugliest of sins"⁵¹ "wallowing in the mud of degradation", feeding on "poisonous meat"⁵² *Animalis homo non percepit quae Dei sunt*, A man who acts like an animal does not perceive what pertains to God.⁵³ Exposing a white handkerchief, symbol of the Queen of virtues to hail and snow⁵⁴ is like offering Our Lady a piece of pork, a cat, a dish of toads, instead of flowers".⁵⁵

In the 'Dream' on Hell, Don Bosco singles out the main snares which capture the young, who are dragged along by a monster-like devil. The snares are: "the snare

⁴⁸ Letter to artisans at the Oratory, Jan. 20, 1874 E II 339.

⁴⁹ G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, p. 22, OE XIII 176.

⁵⁰ Letter to young people at Mirabello, beginning July 1864 Em II 58.

⁵¹ G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca*, 1864ff, Good Night Dec. 14, 1864, pp. 47-49.

⁵² G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca*, 1864ff, Good Night Dec. 2, 1864, pp. 33-34.

⁵³ F. Provera, *Cronaca*, Good Night Aug. 22, 1862, dream of the snake (the *Ave Maria*), p. 5; other version D. Ruffino, *Cronaca* 1861 1862, 1863, pp. 118-121.

⁵⁴ D. Ruffino, *Cronaca*, 1861 1862 1863.

⁵⁵ G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff, dream at end of May 1865, pp. 137-139. Lemoyne's diary is full of evening talks on the topic: Jan. 16, 1865, pp. 72-74; Feb. 6, 1865, pp. 85-86; Feb. 13, 1865, pp. 92-94.

of pride”, “the snare of disobedience”, “the snare of envy”, “the snare of the sixth commandment”, “the snare of theft”. There were many more snares but the ones which capture most of the young were *dishonesty*, *disobedience* and *pride*, which connects the first two. Added to these was *human respect*.⁵⁶

Along with catechesis and preaching, often anxious and anxiety-producing, he constantly wove in reassuring words about *God's mercy and forgiveness*.

The sacrament of Reconciliation is an efficacious means to bring grace and joy, being the sacrament of peace with God and with oneself. God's mercy becomes operative with the “hammer of confession”.⁵⁷

By comparison with the sacrament of the Eucharist, the entire penitential process is, by far, more prevalent and given more attention in educational terms, in the Life (*Cenno biografico*) of Michael Magone. The reason is that the human element plays a more consistent part than it does in the automatic *ex opere operato* of Communion and the Mass.⁵⁸

In fact, notwithstanding the *ex opere operato*, the administration of the Sacrament of Penance is invested with a strong pedagogical role, both for the minister and the penitent.⁵⁹ The confessor, who should always be the same one makes a definite impact on the young person through what he does, as long as the three dispositions required for a good confession are fulfilled, namely, integrity and sincerity in confessing one's sins, an appropriate sense of sorrow for sins committed and a firm purpose of amendment. The last condition is the one Don Bosco insisted on more particularly. “As long as you do not have a steady confessor in whom to place all your trust, you will never have a real friend for your soul”. Don Bosco wrote this in his Life of Michael Magone for young people to take note of.⁶⁰

At the same time, Don Bosco addresses those whose job it is to hear the confessions of young people, offering pedagogical and reflective insights to help them more easily receive and respond to the trust of the young. Terms which are characteristic of Don Bosco's system are repeated time and time again: “Welcome them with loving kindness; help the young to express whatever they have on their consciences; correct

⁵⁶ G. Berto, *Cronaca* 1868-2, pp. 21-23.

⁵⁷ G. Berto, *Cronaca* 1868-2, p. 3. Others record a similar expression: “The hammer means confession and includes holy communion” (F. Provera, *Cronaca*, pp. 5-6).

⁵⁸ G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, pp. 20-24, OE XIII 174-178.

⁵⁹ Cf. R. Schièle, ‘L'Église formatrice des consciences par le sacrement de pénitence’, in «*Salesianum*» 14 (1952) 578-589.

⁶⁰ G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, p. 26 OE XIII 180: *Una parola alla gioventù*. pp. 23-27, OE XIII 179-181.

them gently, win over their trust; use plenty of prudence and reserve in whatever has to do with chastity".⁶¹

Likewise in the *Life of Francis Besucco*, Don Bosco first exhorts the young to choose a confessor who will be their steady spiritual guide. Then, he addresses those who have the task of educating the young, offering three recommendations:

Zealously impress upon them the need for frequent confession; Insist with them on the great usefulness of choosing a steady confessor; Remind them often of the great secrecy of confession, to reassure them and encourage them to approach the Sacrament of penance with boundless trust and serenity of spirit.⁶²

These recommendations are habitually tied together in Don Bosco's sermons, conferences, goodnight talks, writings, personal counselling, which in turn ask a firm, personal commitment on the part of the young.

We find a dramatic focus of this kind in one 'Dream' which Don Bosco recorded in a letter to boys at Lanzo on February 11, 1871. The dream tells of a monster who plays his part with the assurance of help from trustworthy 'friends', namely: those who make promises and do not keep them, those who confess the same sins every time, and those who indulge in bad talk: "every word is a seed which brings forth marvellous fruits". But the monster is also forced to reveal who "his greatest enemies" are: those who often go to communion, those who are devotees of Mary and especially those who keep the resolutions they made in confession.⁶³

8. A Marian and devotional pedagogy

Along with the Sacramental experience of Penance and Eucharist is Don Bosco's insistence on practical things like habitual attitudes and behaviour seasoned by Christian piety; readiness to pray and sensitivity to devotion.⁶⁴

To attain this, religious festivities, brightened up with joyful forms of singing and music, make a singular contribution.⁶⁵

The pedagogy of 'piety' is experienced more through a series of practices rather than being spelt out in words; daily, monthly, yearly liturgical as well as civil

⁶¹ G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, pp. 27-29, OE XIII 181-183

⁶² G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, pp. 100-105, OE XV 342-347, La confessione.

⁶³ E II 149-159.

⁶⁴ Cf. P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità...*, vol II, pp. 275-357, *Preghiera Sacramenti e Osservanze religiose*.

⁶⁵ We will speak more widely on this in Chap 16.

rhythms. Within this practical, religious pedagogy of Don Bosco, one can recognise the persistent intertwining of Confession, Mass, Communion, spiritual reading, prayer, and the divine office.⁶⁶ We see these things expressed in the 'Lives' of his young pupils, as well as in other stories of a biographical kind: The Lives of Dominic Savio,⁶⁷ Michael Magone⁶⁸ and Francis Besucco⁶⁹ make it evident since their lives reflect the experience of the community in which they live.

Don Bosco's practical, religious pedagogy is relived by Peter, the chief character in his *The Power of a Good Education*,⁷⁰ in the parish and at Don Bosco's Oratory; and by Valentino, in the story by the same name, who boards at a school which has a Salesian style. Valentino prayed intensely at home, during his childhood, thanks to the guidance of his mother; at school, where he easily picked up the old habit of following the practices of piety. Valentino's subsequent crises are linked with the neglect of such practices.⁷¹

Among devotions, the devotion to the Blessed Mother holds a position *par excellence*.⁷² "Devotion to the Blessed Virgin is the support of every faithful Christian, and is particularly the support of Youth".⁷³

Michael Magone feels that the devotion to Our Lady is almost like a vocation, from the day he receives the gift of a holy picture of the Blessed Virgin with the following words written on it: *Venite filii, audite me, timorem Domini docebo vos* (Come children, listen to me and I will teach you the fear of the Lord) and he begins to honour her under the title of "Heavenly Mother, divine teacher, compassionate shepherdess".⁷⁴

⁶⁶ Cf. *Una preziosa parola ai figli ed alle figlie*. Turin Oratory of st. Francis de Sales Press 1862, p. 5 (Ricordo II), 7-8 (Ricordo III), 13-15 (Ricordo VIII), OE XIII 441, 443-444, 449-451.

⁶⁷ Cf. G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, pp. 62-67, OE XI 212-217.

⁶⁸ G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, Chap VI Sua esemplare sollecitudine per le pratiche di piet , pp. 29-33, OE XIII 183-187.

⁶⁹ G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, pp. 113-119, OE XV 355-361.

⁷⁰ G. Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione...*, Chap VIII Singolarit  di sua divozione, pp. 62-69, OE VI 336-343.

⁷¹ Cf. G. Bosco, *Valentino o la vocazione impedita. Episodio contemporaneo*. Tuin. Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1866, pp. 5-6, 22 (Chap I *La madre di famiglia*), OE XVII 183-184, 200; pp. 19-25 (Chap. IV *Nuovo collegio. Ritorna alla piet *), OE XVII 197-203; and then, in more or less serious crisis pp. 10-13, 14-16, 38-39, OE XVII 188-191, 192-194, 216-217

⁷² Cf. P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella sotria della religiosit ...*, Vol II, pp. 147-175, *Maria Santissima*; A. Caviglia, *Domenico Savio e Don Bosco. Studio*, pp. 310-322, *Devozione e dedizione a Maria SS.*

⁷³ G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, p. 39 OE XIII 193

⁷⁴ G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, Chap VIII *Sua divozione verso la B. Vergine Maria*, pp. 39-40, OE XIII 193-194.

According to Don Bosco even Francis Besucco “nourishes a special affection for Mary Most Holy. During the novena for her Birthday he demonstrated particular fervour towards her and then spelled out his filial expressions towards her”.⁷⁵

Don Bosco gave his boys a prayer he had written for them at the Marian shrine at Oropa:

“Mary, bless our entire house; keep even the shadow of sin far away from the hearts of our youngsters. May you be the guide of all our students; may you be the seat of True Wisdom for them. Let them be yours, always yours; consider them always as your children and always keep them among your devotees.”⁷⁶

Mary, sometimes by extraordinary means, calls back the more obstinate amongst the boys, to do penance, and keeps God's punishments away from them.⁷⁷ The Novenas, especially the Novena to the Immaculate Conception, are days of grace and times when ‘verdicts’ are being passed and there is a ‘cleansing’ going on in the house: “Our Lady is the one who chooses the youngsters suited for the Oratory or the youngsters who should leave or be expelled from the Oratory”⁷⁸

Discussion of Mary becomes more intense when Don Bosco begins the building of the Church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin (1863-1868).

The privileged devotional practices are the daily recitation of the Rosary and the devotions during the Month of May.

9. Initiation to a ‘*sensus ecclesiae*’ and fidelity to the Pope

The *Sensus Ecclesiae* (sense of the church), and fidelity to the Pope hold an important place in Don Bosco's pedagogy. He considers them to be essential to a full and complete Christian faith.

They are given different emphasis

- the first focuses on the salvific reality of the Church
- the second focuses on the structural reality of the Church

Oral and written catechesis, apologetics and pedagogy... all converge on the need to impress upon the young the belief that only the Catholic Church possesses the means of grace and salvation: Revelation, in its integrity and truth; the Sacraments,

⁷⁵ G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, pp. 115-117, OE XV 357-359.

⁷⁶ Letter to the “Dear students” of the Oratory, Aug. 6, 1863, Em I 594.

⁷⁷ G. Bonetti, *Annuali* II (1861-1862), evening talk to the boys of the Oratory on Sunday Jan. 12, 1862, after a ball of fire had appeared in two of the rooms, pp. 6-9.

⁷⁸ Cf. D. Ruffino, *Cronaca dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* No. 1 1860, Nov. 27, 1860, p.27; idem, *Cronaca* 1861 1862 1863, words in June 1862, p. 95; G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff, Dec. 2, 1864, pp. 32-35, and Dec. 4, 1864, pp. 36-37; Jan. 11, 1865, after talking about Our Lady's apparition at La Salette e “signs” in Chioggia, Vicovaro, Spoleto, pp. 69-70.

administered in the fullness of validity and grace; orderly communal living in charity, guaranteed by the harmonious coexistence of the two dimensions, the hierarchical and the fraternal.

No salvation outside the church is not up for argument. Don Bosco's *Church History, Advice to Catholics, The educated Catholic*, along with his various apologetic works all converge on that belief. It comes from a catechesis which was presented orally long before it was written down.

The holiness of the Church prevails over other of its features, including the unity of the Church, although this latter is a fundamental structural feature.

But no less insisted upon from the viewpoint of catechesis, is the structural compactness of the Church, guaranteed from the top down: The Vicar of Jesus Christ and Successor of St Peter, The Pope. Don Bosco's educational effort in this regard is especially evident during the first two decades of his involvement in working for the young.

There are some constants in Don Bosco's activity as a leader which are manifested through his writings and his talks:

The defence of the historical, dogmatic centrality of the Papacy in the History of the Church;⁷⁹ his Sunday catechetical instructions centred on the History of the Popes; his solicitude in celebrating events related to the Holy Father in a festive way; the Pope's interest in life at the Oratory, especially during the period when Pius IX was exiled at Gaeta (gratitude shown for the gift of 35 Lire, festivities for the rosary-beads sent and blessed by the Pope and mailed from Portici on April 2, 1850);⁸⁰ later on, the separation of the Feast of St Peter from that of St Aloysius Gonzaga;⁸¹ celebrations for the 25th Anniversary of the Pontificate of Pius IX etc.

Don Bosco's enthusiasm for the Pope was contagious and educational: when he returned from his trips to Rome, and on any other occasion, for example in 1882, as recorded in the Chronicle written by Fr John Bonetti.

During the first days of May, Don Bosco reminded the boys about the fact that Pius IX even though pressed by business dealing with the entire church, had

⁷⁹ Cf. Preface to *Storia ecclesiastica*, p. 9, OE I 167. In the book the centrality and above all the saints and saintly Popes. In the lives of the Popes, the historical primacy is also highlighted as well as the primacy of jurisdiction and teaching.

⁸⁰ Cf. *Breve ragguaglio della festa fattasi nel distribuire il regalo di Pio IX ai giovani degli oratorii di Torino*. Turin. Botta 1850, 27 p. OE IV 93-119.

⁸¹ Speaking with his closest helpers on June 16, 1876, Don Bosco shows that he is "absolutely against" the celebration of the feast of St Aloysius Gonzaga on the day of St Peter, and expresses the wish that for the first Pope there needs to be "a feast of of his own". (G Barberis, *Cronichetta*, quad. 8, pp. 29-30).

shown interest in the Oratory at Turin. And he took the occasion to urge the boys "to love him, not so much as Pius IX, but as the Pope established by Jesus Christ, to rule over the church". The he concluded: "I would like to have Pius IX count on all the youngsters of the Oratory as his defenders whatever part of the world they might find themselves in".

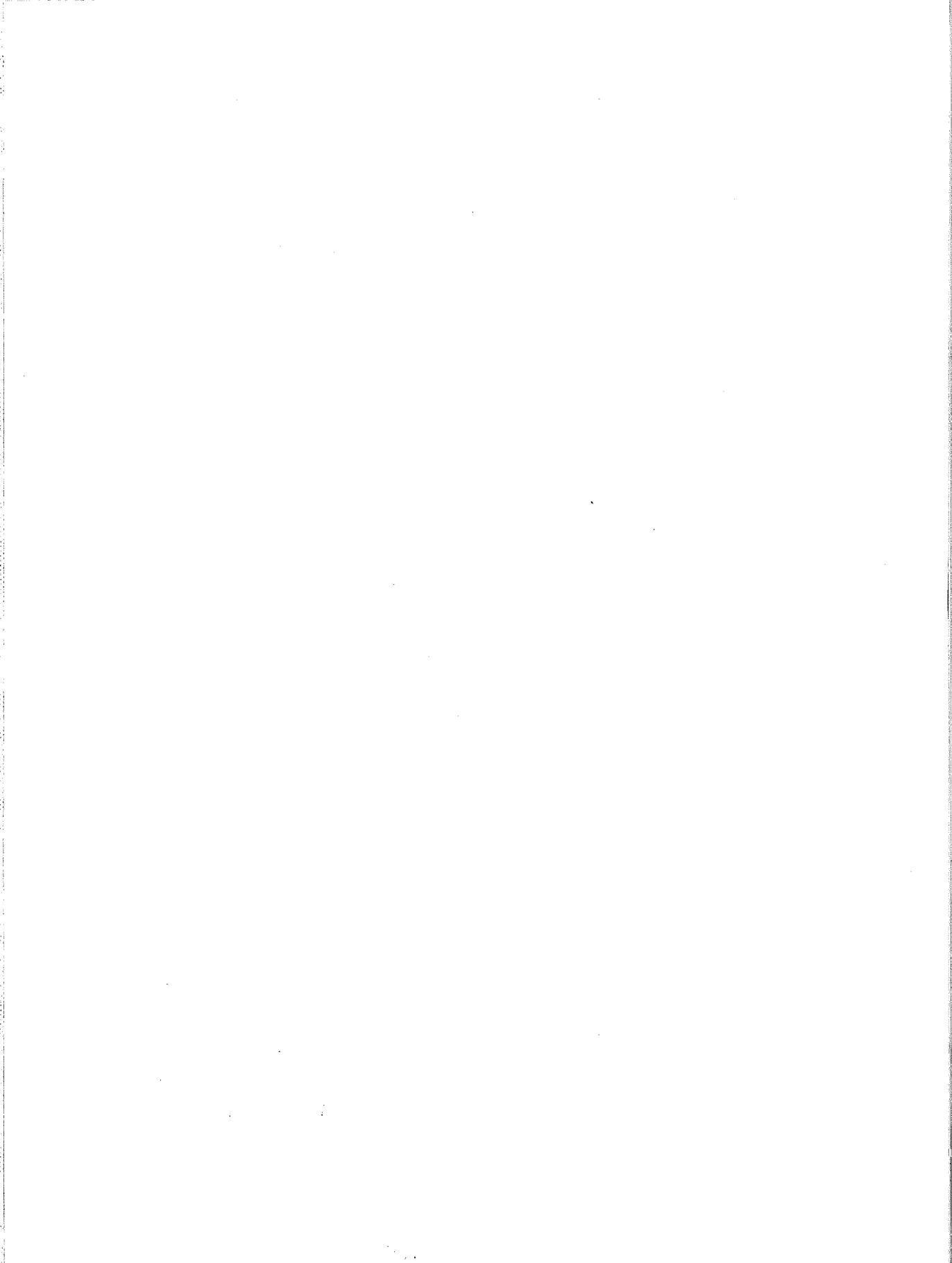
And a few days later, Don Bosco stated: "Catholicism is losing out day after day. It is about time that we draw closer to Pius IX and fight with him, if necessary, to the point of dying for him".⁸²

Don Bosco's pedagogy of fidelity to the Pope was summed in an exhortation addressed to his boys on March 7, 1867:

My dear children, never forget as long as you live that the Pope loves you and so, may no word which might sound like an insult to him ever come out of your mouth.⁸³

⁸² G. Bonetti, *Annali II* (1861-1862), pp. 78-79.

⁸³ G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff, p. 189.



Chapter 13

EDUCATIONAL DISCIPLINES: (2) VIRTUE AND COMMITMENT

Christian education involves collaboration: human and divine. Don Bosco was neither Pelagian nor Quietist. He is prepared to act instead of just handing things over to the supernatural. "A lot of hard work is achieved with hope", Don Bosco taught in the concluding talk at a retreat, "The hope of a reward supports patience", he insisted and then concluded: "Have courage then! May hope support us when our patience risks failing us".¹

1. Practising charity, mortification and politeness

We have already dealt with the virtue of obedience which shapes all other virtues at least from a pedagogical point of view.

As we have also seen, piety and hard work are fundamental virtues for him. There are also other virtues which Don Bosco nurtured and looked upon as absolutely essential for the young and the adult "good Christian and upright citizen".

He offers a concise list in his chapter on the *Imitation of Christ* in *Portrait of a True Christian* and *The Key to Heaven* (*Ritratto del vero cristiano* and *Chiave del paradiso*, respectively). The Christian is invited to follow behavioural patterns of the kind we find in his model, Jesus Christ. "He should pray, since Jesus Christ prayed"; "he should be available just as Jesus Christ was available for the poor, the ignorant, children"; "he should treat his neighbour just as Jesus Christ treated his followers", and like Jesus Christ "he should be humble, obedient, sober, self-controlled, attentive to the needs of others". "He should be with his friends much like Jesus Christ was with St John and St Lazarus, namely he should love them in the Lord and for the love of God"; "he should endure privation and poverty as Jesus Christ endured them, with resignation", and "just like Jesus Christ he should bear with insults and abuse"; "he should be ready to endure the pains of the spirit", just like Jesus Christ who was betrayed, denied and abandoned; finally, "he should be ready to patiently accept all kinds of persecutions, sickness and even death, entrusting his soul into the hands of his Heavenly Father".²

¹ G. Barberis, *Cronaca*, quad. 20, retreat at Lanzo, Sept. 18, 1875, pp. 7-8.

² *La chiave del paradiso*..., pp. 20-23, OE VIII 20-23.

Naturally, in the broad list of Christian virtues proposed to young people and adults, the theological virtues could not be left out. These virtues, however, do not change the strongly moral inspiration of the entire structure, based on duty and the practical exercise of acquired virtues.

Pointing out the courage of the young martyr Pancras, Don Bosco invited young people to look with wonder at the “living faith, firm hope, and ardent charity” preceded by a virtuous childhood. It was during childhood that Pancras was the delight of his parents and a model for his companions, obedient to his parents, performing his duties exactly dedicated to his studies”.³ A “living Faith” and “ardent Charity” were the features Don Bosco had already attributed to Louis Comollo (1844).⁴

In his *The devotee of the Guardian Angel*, Don Bosco proposed the following prayer:

I beseech you, O Lord, grant strength to my spirit with a living faith, firm hope and ardent charity, so that disposing of what belongs to the world, I may think only about loving and serving my God.⁵

Two years later, the same prayer was proposed again, in the *Companion of Youth*.⁶

Speaking of the early ministry of St Peter, The Vicar of Jesus Christ, Don Bosco attributes a living faith, deep humility, prompt obedience, and fervent and generous charity to this apostle.⁷

According to Don Bosco, the exceptional feature which distinguishes the spiritual life of Dominic Savio lies in the practice of the three theological virtues:

We might even call the liveliness of his faith, the firmness of his hope, his ardent charity and his perseverance in doing good up to his last breath, extraordinary.⁸

Charity has a place *par excellence*, as evidenced by the clear progress towards holiness along which Dominic Savio is guided: taking upon himself his neighbours' problems, big or small, knowing how to live happily together with his classmates, growing in conviviality and friendship. The first commandment for living in Don Bosco's home for young people, no matter what kind of institutional appearance there might be was:

³ *Vita di S. Pancrazio martire...*, Turin, G.B. Paravia & Co, 1856, p. 35 and 11, OE VIII 229 and 205.

⁴ [G. Bosco], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo...*, p. 34, OE I 34.

⁵ *Il divoto dell' Angelo Custode*. Turin, Paravia & Co., 1845, p. 71 OE I 157.

⁶ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...*, p. 124, OE II 304.

⁷ G. Bosco, *Vita di S. Pietro...*, p. 65, OE VIII 357; cf also G. Bosco, *Il mese di maggio...*, p. 152, OEX 446.

⁸ G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, p. 93, OE XI 243.

Honour and love your companions as your brothers; love one another, as the Lord says, but beware of scandal.⁹

We can see in all this the elements of active and happy life in common where the benevolence and courtesy of the superiors encounters their pupils' trust. Community life as a whole prevails over individual relationships. Don Bosco's fundamental aim is to form a family, live together.¹⁰

Charity is nourished and strengthened by good deeds, either imposed or freely chosen. In Don Bosco's Oratory and schools, the more mature youngsters helped the small ones and the newly arrived, so that they head in the right direction. Don Bosco uses a kind of prefect system in the study hall and dining room.¹¹

In 1854 some thirty boys offered their services to help people struck down by the cholera epidemic. This down-to-earth-kind of charity, consisting of brotherly relationships, mutual respect, cordiality, friendship, politeness, good manners, is strongly and often stressed by Don Bosco for the boys to follow.¹²

Lived experience becomes an intentional pedagogy as narrated in the classical 'Lives' of Dominic Savio¹³ and Michael Magone.¹⁴ Michael Magone shares his game-playing with the timid ones, those not so well endowed physically; he comforts the home-sick kids; offers menial services to those who have difficulties; he assists the sick; he calms down others thirsting for revenge".¹⁵

The Rules for the Houses has the following to say:

Every young person accepted into our houses should consider his companions as brothers, and the superiors as those who take on the role of their parents.¹⁶

The community of students and teachers is a continuous education in action to learn how to practise charity. Don Bosco urges everyone, young or old, just as was

⁹ *Regolamento per le case...*, part II, Chap IX *Contengo verso i compagni*, art. 1-2, p. 77, OE XXIX 173.

¹⁰ Chapter 15 is dedicated to this topic.

¹¹ *Regolamento per le case...*, part

¹² *Storia dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, BS 6 (1882) no. 2, Feb. pp. 30-34

¹³ G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, Chap XII *Episodi e belle maniere di conversare coi compagni*, and XXI *Sua sollecitudine per gli ammalati*, pp. 57-62, 102-104, OE XI 207-212, 252-254.

¹⁴ In the seventh chapter of Magone's Life it speaks of "friendly relationships" with his companions and "features of courtesy and charity" (G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, p. 34 and 38, OE XIII 188 and 192).

¹⁵ G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, pp. 47-53, OE XIII 201-207, Chap X *Bei tratti di carità verso del prossimo*.

¹⁶ *Regolamento per le case...*, part II, Chap II *Dell'accettazione*, art. 5, p. 61, OE XXIX 157; Chap IX *Contegno verso I compagni*, pp. 77-78, OE XXIX 173-174.

the case for Dominic Savio, to make all games, classes, assignments and just living together a training ground for self-education in charity and apostolic friendship.¹⁷

Good example and apostolic zeal are the highest expressions of charity, but *The Power of a Good Education* had already dedicated several pages to these things. Peter, the main character, first of all defends himself from less trustworthy companions; then, in the workplace, during games, in the military barracks, he succeeds in gaining esteem and a ready listening ear.¹⁸

The boys' 'Lives' Don Bosco wrote between 1859 and 1864 indicate an explicitly lived and reflex pedagogy of apostolic charity. It would appear to be an essential part of what salvation is all about.¹⁹

Don Bosco also insistently proposed mortification to the young. An explicit pedagogy involving mortification can be found in the well-known biographical notes on young people.²⁰ Generally, Don Bosco does not advise anyone to practise extraordinary mortification, just the kind that comes from daily life. He urges them to accept these lovingly: "Diligence in studies, attention in the classroom, obedience to superiors, putting up with the discomforts of life such as heat, cold, draughts, hunger, thirst etc." and endure suffering for the love of God and, of course, to fight against temptation, be vigilant, and "custody of the external senses, especially the eyes".²¹ Mortification is insisted upon especially in reference to the virtue of chastity, which we will deal with later on in this book.

Within this overall and relatively simple scheme of things Don Bosco also acknowledges an aspect typical of the Catholic tradition of education: good upbringing, good manners, politeness were considered essential for a solid moral education from Erasmus to Jean Baptist de la Salle. This kind of civilised behaviour boils down to cleanliness, orderliness, and banning all kinds of coarse behaviour which is an obstacle

¹⁷ G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, Chap XI *Suo zelo per la salute delle anime*, pp. 53-56, OE XI 203-206.

¹⁸ *La forza della buona educazione*, pp. 18-20, 35, 47-48, 55-62, 75-80, OE VI 292-294, 309, 321-322, 329-336, 349-354.

¹⁹ On the theological and pedagogical importance Don Bosco gave the apostolate as a vehicle and expression of human maturity see A. Caviglia, *Domenico Savio e Don Bosco. Studio*, book III, Chap II *Vocazione di Santo: L'apostolato*, pp. 129-142, and Chap III *L'apostolato in azione*, pp. 143-156.

²⁰ Cf. Chaps XV, XIII, XXIII respectively of *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*, Chap XV *Sue penitente*, pp. 72-75, OE XI 222-225; and *Pastorello delle Alpi*, Chaps XIII and XXIII with their titles, *Mortificazioni – Penitente – Custodia dei sensi – Profitto nella scuola e Sue penitente*, pp. 68-74 and 119-124, OE XV 310-316 and 361-366.

²¹ G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, pp. 120-121, OE XV 362-363.

to purity itself. "You should take cleanliness very much to heart. External cleanliness and orderliness stand for cleanliness and purity of one's soul".²²

2. The Queen of virtues: chastity and its pedagogy

Chastity is the Queen of virtues; the virtue which safeguards all the other virtues. It is the virtue Don Bosco nurtures, desires, defends and protects the most. He insists on it with evident anxiety and a strongly protective attitude. Without chastity the mind and the heart do not heed exhortations regarding goodness and grace and hence, productive growth.

What Don Bosco practised and recommended others to do included clean surroundings, moral uprightness of people in those surroundings, good example from the teachers and other educators. He dedicated a whole series of advice and exhortations relating to the morality of the assistants, teachers, workshop heads which become particularly significant when we find them in other pedagogical writings, for example the *Confidential Memo for Rectors* and the *Preventive System 1877*. The circular to Salesians on February 5, 1874, might be seen as a program of action. It is entitled *On the manner of promoting and preserving morality among the boys graciously entrusted to us by divine Providence*. The 'manner' was first of all spelled out as the example to be given by the educators: *sal et lux*, salt and light. Educators had to demonstrate resplendent and real chastity in word and action.²³

We find similar advice for Salesian religious educators in *The Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales*, in the introduction, where Don Bosco deals with the vow of chastity.²⁴

As for educating youth to chastity, Don Bosco foresees two steps generally: a preliminary or healing step and a constructive one. The first is seen as almost essential since Don Bosco considers innocence preserved to be a rare ideal among children and teenagers. Dominic Savio is an exceptional example of this, when he rejects the invitation of his less delicate companions to join them in immodest bathing.²⁵ If we take a strict interpretation of grave matter and the responsibility of someone who has reached the age of reason, it would be Don Bosco's opinion that most young people are premature 'penitents'. In his first eulogy at Cafasso's death, Don Bosco stated:

²² *Regolamento per le case...*, part II, Chap XI, art. 1, p. 80, OE XXIX 176; cf. Chaps X and XI, *Della modestia e Della pulizia*, pp. 78-81, OE XXIX 174-177.

²³ E II 347-348.

²⁴ Cf. C. SDB 108-111; P. Braido, *Tratti di vita religiosa salesiana nello scritto "Ai soci salesiani" di Don Bosco del 1875*, RSS 13 (1994) 375, 412-414, 439-443; idem, *Tratti.... del 1877/1885* RSS 14 (1995) 108, 135-137.

²⁵ G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, p. 23-26, OE XI 173-176.

It happens that many youngsters become the unfortunate prey of vice at an early age, and thus lose the inestimable treasure of their innocence before they ever knew its value, and become slaves of Satan without even having been able to taste the delights of being the children of God. This is due either to unfortunately meeting up with bad companions or because of their parents, neglect, and often, because of their natural bent which is resentful of a good education.²⁶

Francis Besucco shared this confidence with his spiritual director:

I am very upset, because the Lord says in the Gospel that we cannot go to heaven except by being innocent or by doing penance. I cannot go to heaven with my innocence anymore because I've lost it. Therefore I have to go to heaven by doing penance.²⁷

Just like many of his contemporaries in similar Catholic environments, Don Bosco saw and evaluated reality and its problems from an essentially moral perspective. He started off from the presupposition that a boy at the age of reason knows and wills freely, that he is strengthened by grace and therefore, that he is capable of confronting his sexuality with full awareness and free consent. Biological, physiological and psychological conditioning, conscious or unconscious, as well as pathological ones, are not taken into consideration here.

Once the first step, the healing stage, is resolved then the second and constructive step occurs at the intersection of morality, ascetics and recourse to grace. What is considered of capital and also conditioning importance is flight from the occasions of sin, idleness, bad talk and companions, familiarity with girls and girls' familiarity with boys, or in other words "custody of the senses", temperance and mortification.²⁸

In Michael Magone's 'Life', Don Bosco presents a broad list of preventive and therapeutic means of an ascetic and religious nature: the seven guardians of chastity.²⁹

This concise pedagogical treatise on a defensive preservation of chastity, often reduced to simple and difficult continence, is enriched by indications on how to get rid

²⁶ G. Bosco, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso...*, p. 12, OE XII 362.

²⁷ G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, p. 120, OE XV 362.

²⁸ Cf. *Le sei domeniche e la novena di San Luigi Gonzaga*, Turin, Speirani and Ferrero 1846, pp. 18-19, 20; *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo...*, pp. 6-7, 21-22, 34-35, OE I 6-7, 21-22, 34-35; G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...*, pp. 20-26, OE II 200-206. The last are offered as a strena or topic for other talks to students during the year for two Rectors at the schools, Fr Bonetti and Fr Lemoyne, in letters of Dec. 30-31, 1868, Em II 617-618.

²⁹ G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, Chap. IX *Sua sollecitudine e sue pratiche per conservare la virtù della purità*, pp. 43-47, OE XIII 197-201.

of bad thoughts, a renewed appeal to follow the ideals of a youthful and generous life trusting in the power of grace, and "modesty".³⁰

Naturally, primary importance as far as the education and re-education of the young is concerned, is given to supernatural means, namely to the sacraments of penance and communion, devotion to the Blessed Virgin and prayer. In the *Chronicles* of the 1860s and more so in those of Father Barberis between 1875-1879, we find recorded several and various descriptions, Good Nights, talks dedicated to the topic of chastity such as its importance, its models, the dangers it is exposed to including holiday time, scandal, ways to preserve it. Prevention also seems to admit of one or two 'repressive' possibilities, such as threat of expulsion. Apparently, there is not much room accorded to a specific enlightening process and education to human love.

3. Pedagogy of vocational choice

According to Don Bosco, the choice of a state of life should not be left to the free will of an individual. Fundamentally, we are dealing here with a vocation and this comes from God. Vocation, therefore, is first of all a discovery and a response. A vocation, then, needs to be formed within the inevitable triangle: God, the educator who could be an individual or a community, and the young person himself who needs to be helped to see the 'signs' of God's plans for him.

While we have time, let us beg the Lord to teach us the path we need to take.³¹

We have a series of Good Nights given by Don Bosco in December 1864 (December 5, 10 and 12) to the boys at the Oratory. They deal with ways of discovering one's vocation reduced to three main ones: the test of good deeds, the corroborating testimony of others, the positive opinion of the Confessor.³²

The story of *Valentino or an obstructed vocation* is a dramatic presentation of a vocation, an ecclesiastical vocation. Three distinct chapters are dedicated to describing the three crucial moments of this vocation: its genesis in a favourable educational setting, difficulties encountered, its "demolition and dissolution" with the consequent moral ruin of the protagonist.³³ In chapter 5 of the same story there is

³⁰ Cf. *Regolamento per le case...*, part II, Chap X *Della modestia*, pp. 78-80, OE XXIX, 174-176.

³¹ G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff, Good Night of Dec. 5, 1864, p. 38-39; cf. D. Ruffino, *Cronache dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, No. 1 1860, p. 11, 28; *Cronache...* No. 2 1861, pp. 22-23

³² G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff, Good Night of Dec. 5, 1864, pp. 38-39; others testify to him speaking to the boys on the evening of Dec. 10, 1864, pp. 40-41 (the lay assistants could be the bad advisers, p. 43); on Dec. 12, pp. 44-46 he speaks of the confessor; comes back to this again on March 5, 1865, p. 114.

³³ Cf. G. Bosco, *Valentino...*, Chap V *La vocazione* (pp. 25-29, OE XVII 203-207), VI *Le difficoltà* (pp. 29-34, OE XVII 207-212), VII *Una guida fatale* (pp. 35-40, OE XVII 213-218).

ample talk of the signs of a vocation, which Don Bosco had explained on several occasions to boys and their teachers: moral uprightness, knowledge and an ecclesiastical spirit.³⁴ The usual warning about the renunciation that ecclesiastical vocation demands is always present, along with the firm will to “champion the glory of God, win souls for him and, most importantly, save one’s own soul”.³⁵

The talks on vocation assumed wider dimensions with the rapid development of the Congregation and the arrival of the missionary project of the 1870s and 1880s. The Good Night on December 7, 1875, is one example of this: Don Bosco first gave to the boys an account of the departure of the first missionaries from Genoa and then went on:

Naturally, many of you sense a great desire now to leave and become missionaries. Well, I can only tell you that if all of you were to be included in the group of missionaries, there would be places available for everyone and I would know exactly what assignment to give you. The reason for this is that the needs are great and the requests for missionaries are so many that the bishops who make these requests are imploring us to help; and they also tell us that several missions, which have only just begun, had to be abandoned for lack of missionaries. But for the time being, start by preparing yourselves for the missions by praying, being really good, being missionaries to one another, giving good example to one another and also by studying hard, carrying out your duties of study and school-work. Then you will see that with God’s help you will be able to reach your goal and be loved by the Lord and by all people.³⁶

The countless talks to the boys, the addresses delivered to novices and post-novices, the conferences for Salesians and particularly for rectors, especially on the occasion of the feast of St Francis de Sales, and the interventions made at the General Chapters.... all were aimed at educating the young to choose their vocation.

At meetings of Salesians holding positions of responsibility, Don Bosco became an educator among educators in this matter too. In order to cultivate vocations and make them attractive, Don Bosco repeatedly recommended the practice of charity among the educators, and loving kindness towards the young, in a word, fidelity to the practice of the Preventive System.³⁷

³⁴ G. Bosco, *Valentino*...., pp. 26-29, OE XVII 204-207.

³⁵ G. Bosco, *Valentino*...., p. 29, OE XVII 207.

³⁶ G. Barberis, *Cronichetta*, quad. 3Bis, p. 36.

³⁷ Cf. for example G. Barberis, *Cronaca*, quad. 19 instructions for retreat at Lanzo 13 and 14 Sept 1875, pp. 1-14, G. Barberis, *Cronaca*, quad. 14, conference at the Oratory, Feb. 4, 1876, pp. 42-45; March 19, 1876, pp. 63-66; G. Barberis, *Verbale del Capitolo Superiore*, quad II, at Alassio, Feb 7, 1879, pp. 73-76.

Both the academic students and the working boys were repeatedly invited by Don Bosco to look at the signs indicative of a vocation from God and were presented with the perspective of a broad personal self-realisation, in the old and in a new world.³⁸

4. The pedagogy of the 'last things'

Death, Judgment, Hell, Paradise carry particular weight in educating the young to real commitment. This is the privileged way to bring about a serious education to fear and love of God, a way full of energy and initiative. A 'virtuous fear', may start off as being afraid, a servile kind of fear, but it evolves intentionally and rapidly into an initial filial fear which is the beginning of wisdom and the way that leads to grace and love.

Pedagogy of the 'last things' comes naturally to Don Bosco. He personally experienced it through his awareness of the superhuman responsibility a priest has for the salvation of others, which is the condition for his own salvation. Don Bosco's preaching on the 'last things', therefore, could be nothing but a moving and persuasive witness, before being simple words or an advice or warning. The 'last things' are a source of concern, seasoned with love and Christian fear, for Don Bosco. There is a touching proof of this, amongst many others, in something he wrote towards the end of his life and found in the *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6*:

"I know, my beloved children, that you love me. May this love, this affection, not come down just to weeping after my death. Instead, pray for the eternal repose of my soul. I recommend that prayers be said, charitable deeds be performed, mortifications undertaken, holy communions received in reparation for the faults I may have committed in doing good and preventing evil. May your prayers be directed to Heaven with this special intention, that I may find mercy and forgiveness from the very first moment I appear before the tremendous majesty of my Creator."³⁹

Don Bosco's language about the last things, intense as it may appear, does not lessen the value of temporal life and circumstances. On the contrary they are the price of a happy life here and now and in eternity. There is no doubt, however, that Don Bosco intends to draw the thoughtful attention of his boys towards eternity which is immeasurably more important than anything else: an eternity with God, filled with

³⁸ Cf. for example G. Barberis, *Cronichetta*, quad. 5, evening sermons March 15, 1876, p. 19; quad. 6Bis to the working boys, March 31, 1876, pp. 14-17; G. Barberis, *Cronaca*, quad. 3, May 13, 1877, pp. 1-4.

³⁹ F. Motto, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6..*, RSS 4 (1985) 126.

happiness, paradise; or an eternity of damnation and unhappiness, hell. Death and judgment are the door to both: the moment on which our eternity depends, an eternity full of joy or an eternity full of suffering.

It is from such preparation for and meditation on death that the monthly practice of the Exercise for a Happy Death comes.⁴⁰ Ideally it is repeated countless times, with announcements about forthcoming fatal illnesses, foreseen and sudden deaths, exhortations and predictions. In this regard Don Bosco follows the centuries' old pastoral practice of care for souls, perhaps stressing a little more the 'ministry of fear' side of this but blending catechetical recollections, echoes of his mother's warnings, the sermons heard in his parish or preached during parish missions, the meditations from the seminary, advice received from his confessors and spiritual directors. He did all this in accord with the most widely accepted canons of traditional religiosity.⁴¹

For several years, when he was offering the stenna for the new year, Don Bosco repeated the same wish given on December 31, 1861:

Let us all stay ready so that when death unexpectedly appears we may be found prepared to leave for eternity, in peace.⁴²

He ties the end of the year to the end of our earthly life (the 'last things') neatly together.

Don Bosco begged educators to be very frank when preaching or giving spiritual guidance to the boys, with regard to the 'last things'. Even in this, Don Bosco was an uncontested master also. We see it in his writings and reminders, Good Nights at the end of the year, the various stennas, the little notes handed out to individuals, the sayings written on the walls of the Oratory porticoes.

In certain contexts, for example in the 'Lives' of young people, the idea of paradise finds privileged treatment. In other contexts Don Bosco re-awakens the thought that death is weighing on us with all the seriousness and responsibility it implies⁴³ and the thought that there may be no more time available for repentance for one's sins, and, therefore, the possibility of going to hell.

⁴⁰ The classic prayer for such practice are introduced already in the first edition 1847, in the *Giovane provveduto* (pp. 138-143, OE II 318-323). In particular the *Pregghiera per la buona morte* might have been disconcerting. Quoted by J. Delumeau, *La Peur en Occident (XIVe-XVIIIe siècles)*. Une cité assiégée. Paris, Fayard 1978, pp. 25-27: he heard it being said in Nice at the Salesian school where he had entered as a teenager.

⁴¹ Cf. J. Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur: la culpabilisation en Occident (XIIIe-XVIIIe siècles)*. Paris, Fayard 1983, 741 p. This as for the earlier note has also come out in Italian.

⁴² G. Bonetti, *Annali II* (1861-1862), pp. 3-4.

⁴³ Death at a young age was not so rare at a time of high infant and youth mortality. Those at the Oratory had already experienced this in their families or birthplace, and several times a year at the Oratory.

In one of the traditional Novenas to Our Lady, Don Bosco was able to say with simplicity:

The Novenas in honour of our Heavenly Mother are days packed with favours and the grace of good health. Woe to those who do not take advantage of them. I hope, rather I'm sure, that nineteen out of twenty will take advantage of these Novenas and that our good Mother will welcome them into paradise. Others who do not want to take advantage of these Novenas should remember that the eternal flames of hell await them if they do not show readiness for conversion.⁴⁴

Ah my dear children, whoever has not yet taken advantage of it should not waste it. *Dum Tempus Habemus*, as long as we have time... we all have to make a long journey... *Ibit in domum aeternitatis suae*, He will go to the eternity which is due to him.⁴⁵

The pedagogy of the 'last things' is also found in many of the 'dreams' which recall the drama of salvation and one's personal responsibility for it. Particularly significant are the accounts made by the boys to Fr Cafasso, Silvio Pellico and Count Cays; the stairway to heaven; the slopes of the seven hills; the way of perdition. There are various images of the difficult journey toward salvation which happens to be the earthly pilgrimage of every human being *per sanguinem, aquam et ignem*, through blood, water and fire. In one way or another, the boys are called to fix up their consciences, not without a visible showing of anxiety and a general recourse to confession.⁴⁶

"We ploughed a treacherous sea" are the words of a hymn introduced into the final edition of the *Companion of Youth* and explained in another very symbolic 'dream' narrated by Don Bosco to the boys on January 1, 1866. In that 'dream', life is depicted as a dangerous trip by raft on storm-tossed floodwaters covering a huge land surface. The sixth and seventh commandments are more at risk than the others. Don Bosco urges his boys to be docile and obedient.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff, Good Night Dec. 2, 1864, pp. 34-35.

⁴⁵ G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff, Good Night Dec. 5, 1864, p. 40.

⁴⁶ Cf. D. Ruffino, *Cronache dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, No 2 1861, Good Night Dec. 31, 1860, pp. 2-6; G. Bonetti, *Memoria di alcuni fatti...*, pp. 65-69; D. Ruffino, *Cronache dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, No. 2 1861, Good Night of 12 and 15 Jan 1861, pp. 6-8, 13; D. Ruffino, *Cronache dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, 1861, 1862, 1863, Good Night April 7, 1861, pp. 2-22; G. Bonetti, *Annali I*, pp. 17-34; G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff Good Night Oct. 22, 1864, pp. 4-8.

⁴⁷ A brief fragment in G. B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff, p. 157; developed in *Documenti* and MB VIII 275-282.

The dream about hell, described on May 3, 1868, and handed down to us by Fr Joachim Berto, concerns a shipwreck from which there is no salvation. There are youngsters who rush headlong into that place of eternal punishment and remain there, petrified. They are heard to cry out: "We made a stupid error". They are not yet damned, but they would be were they to die at that very moment. Don Bosco sees the following words written somewhere: "sixth commandment". Even those who are attached to earthly goods, are disobedient, proud or victims of human respect all risk hell.⁴⁸

Beyond the dreams, Don Bosco makes any number of predications of death. The chronicles of the first years, the 1860s, handed down to us by Frs Ruffino, Bonetti and Lemoyne, make a point of it. Fr John Baptist Lemoyne is the most accurate of them, since he took up a painstaking process of verification to ascertain whether or not the predictions came true.

Sometimes Don Bosco, who is more than attentive to the psychology of the young, seemed concerned about what was spiritually useful for their souls, according to the well-defined principle: "When something turns out to be good for souls, then it certainly comes from God and cannot come from the Devil". Then he also added: "I have a unique bit of news to tell you, namely, that the Devil has been defeated in this house and if we continue this way he will be forced to declare bankruptcy".⁴⁹

On several occasions Don Bosco would justify his procedure calling it a duty which he performs for the salvation of the young.⁵⁰ "Healthy fear", seriousness, responsibility characterise the pedagogy of the 'last things' that Don Bosco insistently practised amongst the young. In principle, this type of pedagogy did not create feelings of anxiety, even though predictions of death did indeed provoke them. Don Bosco knew that and at times he justified himself, as he did for example in a Good Night given on March 16, 1865. And, mind you, this is not the only talk of this kind:

When I show up here and announce that another boy is going to die, for goodness sake let me know if some of the boys are too scared by these announcements and write to their parents asking to be taken out of the Oratory because 'Don Bosco is always predicting the death of someone.' But please, tell me this: had I not made this announcement would Ferraris had prepared himself so well to appear before God's tribunal? ...To those who are so afraid of death, I say: "dear children, perform your duties, do not engage in bad talk, approach the

⁴⁸ G. Berto, *Cronaca* 1868-2, pp. 9-20.

⁴⁹ D. Ruffino *Cronache...*, No 2 1861, Good Night of Feb. 17, 1861, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁰ Cf. G. Bonetti, *Annali II* (1861-1862), evening talk of April 25, 1862, pp. 68-69; D. Ruffino, *Cronaca* 1861 1862 1863 1864 Good Night of 11 Jan and Feb. 4, 1864, pp. 14-15; G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff, Good Night of Dec. 18, 1864, p. 53.

sacraments frequently, do not give way to gluttony, and death will not scare you.⁵¹

5. Education to hope and joy

This kind of education, certainly problematic in some ways, contributed to maintaining an approach to life lived under the motto: "God sees me!". This God is a father and a judge, great in his love, and a demanding, encouraging guardian of merit as well as someone who punishes any fault, anywhere. This is popular kind of theology, condensed into advice for holiday times and offered in the already quoted Good Night on August 21, 1877, both to academic students and working boys at the Oratory. This "healthy fear" was, finally, part of love expressed by abandoning oneself to God who is a merciful Father.

We should not think that the Lord is all cruelty and inflexible justice, Don Bosco assures them, no, he is rather all mercy, goodness and love. And just as the one who offends God should be afraid of him, so one ought to remain happy and content who can say of himself: I have nothing on my conscience that bothers me. To the latter I can say: go and sleep peacefully; let your recreation be cheerful and live happily. If someone who lives in harmony with God leads a happy life, someone who cannot say that he has a good conscience should be afraid, lest God take his time away from him.⁵²

Along with responsible commitment, radical feelings of hope and joy were also likely to surface.

Following the simple and traditional faith Don Bosco adheres to, life and death are events with which we have to come to grips, just as we have to come to grips with good and evil, reward and punishment, heaven and hell, all sources, respectively, of a legitimate hope and a healthy fear. Within this perspective, good people will always expect to hear words of hope, eternal happiness and a justified, even though precarious earthly joy, naturally all connected with how one carried out one's daily duties. If we want to have a good harvest, we first of all have to sow "good and useful things".⁵³

The young person is introduced to acknowledging the constant presence, not only of death, but also of the alluring perspective of paradise which is implored through

⁵¹ G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff, Good Night of March 16, 1865, p. 118.

⁵² G. Barberis (G. Gresino), *Cronaca*, quad. 3, Good Night of Aug. 21, 1877, p. 12; cf also G Barberis (E. Dompé), *Cronaca* quad. 15, p. 27.

⁵³ G. Barberis, *Cronichetta*, quad. 2 Good Night Wednesday, July 7, 1875, pp. 39-43; similarly in D. Ruffino *Le doti grandi e luminose...*, Jan 1864, pp. 14-15.

the motherly mediation of Mary, Virgin and Mother.⁵⁴ The hope that God will grant us paradise is based on secure guarantees provided by reason and faith: having been baptised, and living as a Catholic, being able to profit from the sacrament of Forgiveness, having the opportunity to draw sustenance from the Eucharist, being able to practice Christian mortification and Christian charity; and especially by the fact of knowing that Jesus Christ shed his blood for our salvation and our happiness.⁵⁵

From 1863, *The Companion of Youth* added the last line from the presentation of the first edition, "Live happily and may the Lord be with you", with the conclusion "Live happily and may the fear of God be a treasure for you throughout your life time".⁵⁶ The 1875 edition had another enriching addition: "May heaven grant you many long years of a happy life and may the holy fear of God be always the wonderful treasure showering you with heavenly favours in time and in eternity".⁵⁷ "Ah, for the love of Jesus and Mary", it said toward the end of 1847, "with good deeds, prepare yourself to hear the favourable sentence of God and remember that the more fearful the sentence uttered against a sinner, the more consoling likewise the indication that Jesus addressed to one who lived as a Christian should: 'Come?', he will say, 'come and take possession of the glory that I have prepared for you';⁵⁸ "the more fearful the thought and consideration of hell, the more consoling will be the thought of paradise, which is offered to you. Oh, how desirable and lovable is the place where all kinds of goods will be enjoyed".⁵⁹

6. Signs of a differentiated and contextual pedagogy

It is quite clear that Don Bosco, since the first two decades marking the beginnings of his cultural and spiritual evolution, was convinced that if the young man had to embark on any sort of journey for his human and Christian growth, he needed to perceive his personal identity and potential for recovery and development.

The adult who accompanies him should support him with a similar intuition, Don Bosco believed. As we have already seen, this interaction between the young

⁵⁴ G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff evening talk during novena for Immaculate, Dec. 2, 1864, pp. 34-35.

⁵⁵ G. Reano, past pupil of the Oratory, letter to Fr G. Bonetti Feb. 2, 1885, pp. 40-42; revokes a Good Night by D. Bosco during a novena to Mary in response to the question, Why does God want to give us heaven?

⁵⁶ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...*, Turin, Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1863, p. 6

⁵⁷ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...*, Turin, Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1875, p. 7, OE XXVI 7

⁵⁸ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...*, p. 43, OE II 223.

⁵⁹ G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...*, pp. 48-49, OE II 228-229.

person and the educator constitutes the essence of Don Bosco's Preventive System. No other meaning can be given to Don Bosco's classification of the young into "rascals, scatter-brained and good", or the differentiated ways he proposed for dealing with them.

Differentiated approaches were first seen in the *Historical Outlines* then in the general articles of the *Rules for the Houses*, 1877. The first is a paradigmatic and generally overlooked document. "The scatter-brained", Don Bosco explains, "the ones who habitually just hang around and do little work, can be led to a successful outcome by teaching them a trade, through assistance, by instruction and by keeping them busy". They will not all turn out to be perfect Christians but they will certainly be good citizens, honest workers, morally and civilly responsible human beings and, perhaps, people who could pass as good Sunday Christians. For the rascals instead, the results might be longer-term. "The fact that they don't get worse" is an appreciable, though minimal, goal. "Many succeed in becoming wiser and therefore earning their daily bread in an honest way". This is certainly a remarkable result in terms of a young man's growing into adulthood and regaining consistent temporal values. It could stand as a potential preparation for following the Gospel since it provides some understanding of life and, perhaps, faith in God.

At any rate, there is a well-established 'pedagogy of hope'. The seed has been sown and will bear fruit. Room should be left for time and grace to work on: "The same individuals who seemed so insensitive when they were being looked after find room, in time for the good principles they learned and later on this will produce results".⁶⁰

Diagnosis, prognosis and therapy result from real and ever wider-ranging experiences. These experiences range from a rural mountain background, (Francis Besucco and Severino) to urban and metropolitan scenarios with their prisons, public squares, places of corruption; from chimney-sweeps and village farmhands to urchins and rascals; from humble and honest country kids, lost in the city, knowing neither the place nor the language, to the street kids, orphans, and also students and young workers needing an appropriate cultural formation and a profession.

This is the basis of a 'pedagogy of the possible', which differs in objectives, rhythms, provisions and results and is the origin of a practical, varied, non-rigid nor systematic youth spirituality.

In the narrative writings of the 1850s, we notice the different ways the characters began their journey of recovery: Louis, in the sixth and seventh dialogues found in *Current Events presented in dialogue form (Fatti contemporanei esposti in forma di dialogo 1853)*, the anonymous protagonist of *The unhappy life of a new apostate (La vita infelice di un novello apostata 1853)*, the young man who had to be lured

⁶⁰ *Cenni storici...*, in P. Braido (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella Chiesa...* pp. 78-79.

“either with promises or with little gifts”, in the *Historical Outline (Cenno storico* 1854), the soldiers who are approached by Peter in the barracks, in *The Power of a Good Education (La Forza della buona educazione* 1855), the young gang leader of assassins recovered by St John The Evangelist, as recorded in the lives of the *Supreme Pontiffs St Linus, St Cletus and St Clement (Vita de' sommi Pontefici S. Lino, S. Cleto, S. Clemente* 1857).

7. Unresolved adolescent problems

Even a painstaking analysis of what Don Bosco as an educator said and did may leave the impression that several problems relating to the life of the young, have only been touched on. Don Bosco's social, political education is substantially aimed at the religious and moral level. Similar guidelines are followed solving the problems that would eventually be listed under the leading of sex education, education to love, as preparation for engagement⁶¹ and marriage and intervention in cases of adolescents facing crises of faith, doubt, intolerance and alienation. Among Don Bosco's books there are some which present difficult situations produced by encounters with Protestants (for example “Severino” or “adventures of a young man from the Alps” 1868 or with a corrupt individual (Valentino... 1866) but they do not offer convincing solutions.

We note two situational crises in the area of faith and morals, and the suggestions given by Don Bosco or actually drawn from some letters of spiritual direction by Don Bosco himself. A diary note left by Fr Dominic Ruffino, dating back to June 1862,⁶² provides the first indication. Don Bosco calls the attention of his young helpers to possible youth crises in the area of religious practice. He does not offer solutions but thinks that recalling a past warning from a teacher might produce some good in the future.

We should be providing the youngsters with protective means for the future when they will be 17 or 18 years of age: “look here, a very dangerous age is approaching. The devil is preparing snares to make you fall. First, he will tell you that frequent communion is for small kids and not for big ones like you and so you should go to communion rarely. Then the devil will keep you away from sermons and cause you to be bored with God's word. When we meet them

⁶¹ Regarding sexual problems during puberty Pietro Stella observes: “We could tentatively say that Don Bosco and his times, incomprehensibly, did not know or tackle problems tied to masturbation by young people”. (P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol II p. 262). Instructive though elusive are observations in the following pages: *Problemi particolari dell'educazione tra pubertà e matrimonio* (pp. 262-274).

⁶² Lemoyne accredits this to a diary entry by John Bonetti which we cannot trace. Ruffino's text is shorter than the longer one in MB VII 192.

already grown up, we should say: "Do you remember what we told you? "Ah, it is true", they will say. This recollection will do them good.⁶³

No less disappointing is the solution Don Bosco offers for a teenager's crisis of faith. The one who relates it is trustworthy - Blessed Michael Rua.

He records the event in his all-too brief diary. When requested by a working boy if he could join the academic students, Don Bosco had consented. The boy must have been intelligent and, on his own, was in search of something. Probably there was no one at the time that he could confide in.

After a few months of study, the young man was suddenly attacked by temptations, started to doubt God's existence, paradise and hell etc. He did not feel satisfied keeping this way of thinking to himself and so began to make his doubts known to his classmates. This certainly could not but be dangerous for those who listened to him. Don Bosco came to know about it and then, soon enough, found a remedy to dissipate the doubts. The young man's benefactor called on Don Bosco to arrange the young man's transfer from the working boys to the academic section. Don Bosco suggested, in the presence of the young man, that for the time being it might be better not to come to any definite decision since it looked like the young man's head might not handle the studies and that he was as yet uncertain. That is when the young man realised the wrong steps that he had taken. He acknowledged the harm he had caused by yielding to the doubts in his mind and much more the harm that he had caused by repeating these doubts to his classmates. He straightened himself up and from that time on led a fervent life.⁶⁴

What strikes us in reference to this real teenager is not so much the talk about protecting the community from a troublesome element but that no constructive intervention is alluded to. This might have been a 'lacuna' affecting a mind-set but also the whole setting. This would seem to be confirmed by some letters of an educational nature mostly addressed to young men of a higher social and cultural class. In these letters we find the indications ordinarily given to the Oratory boys without any age distinction. And even in these letters, what stands out is the protective side: flight from, caution, submission to...much more than a concern to understand, explain or build up in a positive way.

When requested to express his judgment of certain books, Don Bosco answered:

The books are not on the 'Index'. There are, however, certain things that are dangerous for a young person's morality, so, while you may read them, you

⁶³ D. Ruffino, *Memorie* 1862 1863, p. 79.

⁶⁴ M. Rua, *Cronache*, p. 6.

should also be careful, and if you find that they cause harm to your heart, stop reading them or at least skip the passages which may be relatively dangerous for you.⁶⁵

Later on, Don Bosco would propose the following solution to the same young man.

Keep an eye on bad companions and avoid them; look for good companions and imitate them. God's grace is the greatest of treasures: the fear of God is the first among all riches.⁶⁶

To another young upper-class lad Don Bosco gave three fundamental reminders, the three F's: Flight from idleness; Flight from companions who indulge in bad talk or give bad advice: Frequent Confession and fervent, fruitful Communion.⁶⁷

On another occasion, Don Bosco congratulated a Baroness for having chosen the right boarding school, Mondragone.

In that school teachers, assistants and directors look after what is really good, the good of the soul.⁶⁸

Two years later, Xavier, the same young man, would be a cause for concern. Don Bosco tried his best to get a hold over him by sending him a book, and suggesting to his mother that she intervene directly and in person:

If you were to suggest he write to me and ask my advice, I would do my best to straighten out some of his ideas. When I was in Rome he showed great esteem and deference towards me: who knows if a new voice might cause him to think again?⁶⁹

We also have record of advice given to "a most illustrious lady" in reference to her marriage:

I will not fail to pray that God may enlighten you so you may choose the person who might be able to better help you save your soul. For your part, however, take into account the morals and religion of the individual. Don't look at appearances, look at reality.⁷⁰

Don Bosco's judgment on the potential dangers in education in the family is a severe one. He expressed this in a letter to a lawyer from Toulon, France, a Mr Colle:

⁶⁵ Letter to 19-year-old nobleman Ottavio Bosco di Ruffino, Aug. 11, 1859, Em I 381-382.

⁶⁶ Letter to the same person, Jan. 9, 1861, Em I 433-434.

⁶⁷ Letter to Gregorio dei Baroni Garofali, a 14-year-old in the Jesuit college at Mongré (Southern France) June 1, 1866, Em II 252.

⁶⁸ Letter to Baroness Cavalletti in Cappelletti, Oct. 22, 1866, Em II 305.

⁶⁹ Letter to the same individual May 25, 1868, Em II 536.

⁷⁰ Letter to Miss Barbara Rostagno June 27, 1874, E II 391.

In a few words I will spell out the core issue at hand: the parents were too affectionate towards their only child. Too many caresses and too much affectionate attention. However, he was always a well-behaved boy. Had he lived longer, he would have run into great dangers which might have dragged him towards evil after his parents' death. This is why God snatched him away from danger and took him with him in heaven. From heaven he will protect his parents and those who have prayed or will pray for him.⁷¹

⁷¹ Letter to lawyer Luigi Fleury Colle, May 22, 1881, E IV 55; his son was called Louis Antoine, 22 Sept 1864-3 April 1881. The parents were benefactors.



Chapter 14

“THIS SYSTEM IS ENTIRELY BASED ON REASON, RELIGION AND LOVING KINDNESS”

We have looked at the broad features of Don Bosco's Preventive System and educational approach. What we are trying to do in the chapters to follow is take an in-depth look at particular significant topics in the system itself. First of all we intend to explain the main features which underlie the approach of the system itself and confer a specific style on it. In the following chapter, we intend to single out the setting and community climate which characterise the 'places' where the preventive assistance and education are carried out.

After that two chapters will be dedicated to elements which evidence two typical and all-embracing aspects of the system: on the one hand feast days, joy and 'free-time'; on the other, the seriousness of the rule of life which the Preventive System shares in some respects with the repressive system.

However, these chapters should not be looked upon as isolated. Each sheds light on and broadens the content of the others which, in turn, prevent them from being seen just from their own perspective.

This is true, first of all, in reference to the pedagogical relevance of the 'educative community', which is seen as a 'family' in concrete terms. The affectionate, reasonable and religious 'pressure' which the educators apply is extended by the community, which is seen as young people, friends, brothers living together firstly amongst themselves rather than with 'superiors'. Although Don Bosco says that the rector is everything, and similarly for the educators, in reality that 'everything' is represented by them in so far as they are 'for' and 'with' the young, who claim to a certain extent the clear right to be key players along with their superiors.

The climate of festivity and joy eliminate any scheme which might lead to the community or individuals being oppressive. At the same time, however, the climate of cheerfulness is not intended to give the impression that the community is always 'feasting', namely, that it is a family without seriously engaging objectives. We have also provided a chapter which deals with 'demanding love', with all that this might imply in terms of bonding and suffering.

In this chapter we explain the methodological side of what Don Bosco considers the foundational pillars of his system:

This system is entirely based on reason, religion and loving kindness.¹

When analysed more carefully, the three terms, no doubt, first of all define the content of the preventive message. Taken in their holistic perspective, the three indicate the key dimensions of a fully Christian way of being human: temporal values, a religious sense, the world of affections at a sensible, spiritual and supernatural level. This is what we have explained succinctly in the previous three chapters. But in Don Bosco's explicit pedagogical language it is primarily the methodological significance of these three fundamental words that is made evident. These three words prefigure a systematic whole articulated through initiatives, interventions and means solely directed to fostering the development of the young.

The young, in turn, are always to be involved in the work of their own maturing process as human beings and Christians. This should come about through persuasion, the method of the heart. The motivating and dynamic character of these three words is further bolstered by the foundation, the anchor on which Don Bosco depends, namely, on charity.

"The practice of this system is based entirely on the words of St Paul: *charitas benigna est, patiens est; omnia suffert, omnia sperat, omnia sustinet, Love is patient and kind,...* love bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things. With charity, reason and religion are the tools the educator should constantly use, teach, and himself put into practice if he wants to be obeyed and achieve his goal".²

In other words the statements made by Don Bosco mean to show educators what their qualities and virtues should be. But they are all practically reduced to one: an educative charity, methodologically expressed in the threefold form of reason, faith and loving kindness.

1. The educator, individual and community, is the key player in the educational process

The entire preventive method is entrusted to the educator. In the description of the "two systems used throughout history in the education of youth", one can detect the different weight given to the educator as part of the three main forces involved in the field of education: the law, rules – superior, rector, assistant, and the dependants, the pupils. Paradoxically it seems that in the repressive system the executive responsibility is almost entirely in the hands of the pupil. The superior, the educator, besides having the task of vigilance, wields the power of judgement or punishment.

¹ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877). p.46, XXVIII 424

² *Il sistema preventivo* (1877). p. 52, OE XXVIII 430

In the Preventive System instead, the absolute key player is the educator who holds all power: the executive, the judiciary and punitive. The pupil, instead, is called to an essentially cooperative execution, a subordinate, shared role.

Don Bosco speaks and writes about the Preventive System to adult educators. The two letters dated from Rome and edited by Father John Baptist Lemoyne under the inspiration of his superior, are remarkable precisely because substantially the preventive burdens and obligations should have been the content of only one letter, the one addressed to the Salesians at Valdocco. The 'system' is entirely based on them; it works or does not work depending on whether or not they bear its weight and guarantee its fruitfulness.

It is for this reason that the Salesians at Valdocco are called to be totally consecrated to their pupils as father, brother and friend, sharing their life much like the adult members in a family. They are fathers, mothers, brothers and more so friends, with an additional emotional element which transcends the family itself and leads to relationships of a superior quality which can reach the pupils' consciences. They achieve their highest level in the person of the rector who is also a father and confessor.

Practically, the system is based on the reason, religion and loving kindness of the educator – individual and community – and through him, on all the pedagogical elements which he uses or of which he acts as mediator. The pupils will never be mature – in the use of the values of reason, religion and loving kindness – unless the educator himself values the method based on reason, religion and loving kindness.

The educator/teacher is called upon to present himself as an active, living model of values, of everything that is that reason, religion and loving kindness offer as valid and which the educator can make lovable, attractive, motivating, a driving force for the pupil.

The educator is to be an energetic model of morality, according to Don Bosco, in relation to all the likely educational objectives.

We can, however, establish, as an invariable principle, that the morality of the pupils depends on the morality of the one who teaches them, assists them and guides them. 'One cannot give whatever one does not have' so the proverb goes. An empty sack cannot produce wheat, nor can a flask full dregs provide good wine. And so, before we present ourselves as teachers to others, it is essential for us to possess what we want to teach others.³

It is natural then, that Don Bosco should speak of the 'repressive system' as an easy and less difficult system.

³ Circular already cited, of Feb. 5, 1874, OE E II 347.

Instead the Preventive System according to Don Bosco, "for the pupils it is easier, more satisfactory and advantageous. To the teacher it certainly does present some difficulties, which however can be diminished if he applies himself to the task with zeal. An educator is one who is consecrated to the welfare of his pupils"⁴

In conclusion, the educators are expected to be well endowed with human, religious and emotional values; they are expected to be the very models, the witnesses and the communicators of these values, through their life, with their words and deeds. This means they need boundless energy, but it also means a benevolent and enveloping 'siege' which pupils can hardly resist.

2. This threefold foundation has a relational unity

Reason, Religion and Loving kindness are not simply juxtaposed; they are interrelated; rather, they co-penetrate one another. This occurs not only at the level of objectives and content but also means and methods.

At the first level, they are an original synthesis of all the elements needed for the complete development of a boy: the physical, intellectual, moral and social elements and the religious-emotional elements as well. At the methodological level, they set in motion a systematic whole, actions suited to involving the young person in all of his most significant potential: mind, heart, will, faith. All this potential is interrelated.

The serious nature of moral and religious commitment implying duty, piety, living in the state of grace, keeping far from sin, is proposed and championed on the basis of relationships and processes which are reasonable and kind.

On the other hand, the gentleness linked with loving kindness does not mean weakness and sentimentalism, a clumsy sort of sensitivity, but emotional co-involvement, constantly enlightened and purified by reason and faith.

In turn, the balance, moderation, reasonableness of rules and interpersonal relationships are constantly motivated and integrated through religious piety and the empathic participation of the educator who is actively present.

Furthermore if, on a methodological level, we should want to determine which of the three elements is the most important, there is no doubt that loving kindness holds prime of place. Naturally, by loving kindness we mean all the connotations of meekness, gentleness, charity, patience and affection. Loving kindness is the supreme principle, the soul of the preventive 'method', just as religion is indisputably the first principle and soul of the system, taken as a complex of goals, content, means and methods.

⁴ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), pp. 46, 60 OE XXVIII 424, 438.

There is a consensus among scholars on the centrality of educative love. This educative love stands for intelligent charity, loving dedication;⁵ it is the sway of a father who "holds the heart of his children in his hands"; it stands for "com-penetration of souls".⁶

Mario Casotti, a Catholic pedagogue⁷, defined it as "the method of love". German Salesian Nikolaus Endres singled out love as the foundational factor of the method and saw it as a fundamental relationship between the educator and the person to be educated, a creative, exemplary force and an effective guide to the world of values.⁸

Loving Kindness is a "proven love"⁹ and therefore an affective and effective love, because it is proven by deeds, perceivable and actually perceived.

In the letter to the Salesian at Valdocco, dated May 10, 1884, Father John Baptist Lemoyne correctly interpreted Don Bosco's thinking when he wrote:

Love is the foundation (of the Preventive System). But, this is not enough. Something is missing and that something which is decisive in education: "Not only should the boys be loved but they should know that they are loved". And this is not enough. This knowledge will finally be persuasive if they feel loved in the things they like, by "sharing in their inclinations"; then they will be ready to share, with love, what the educator proposes, such as discipline, study, in a word, all their duties.¹⁰

3. Loving kindness: a term with many connotations

In the Italian lexicon, familiar to Don Bosco, the term *amorevolezza* is not identified with *amore* (love) nor equated with *carità* (charity), a theological virtue belonging to the world of Christian Revelation. The term stands for a cluster of small virtues which have to do with relationships, attitudes or behaviour among people who

⁵ V.G. Galati, *San Giovanni Boco. Il sistema preventivo*. Milano-Varese, Educational Institute Cisalpino 1943, p. 152.

⁶ A. Aufray, *La pedagogia di S. Giovanni Bosco*. Turin, SEI 1942, pp 83-84.

⁷ G. Bosco, *Il metodo preventivo. Con testimonianze e altri scritti educativi inediti*. Introduction and notes by Mario Casotti, Brescia, La Scuola 1958, pp. 49-59.

⁸ N. Endres, *Don Bosco Erzieher und Psychologe*. München, Don Bosco-Verlag 1961, pp. 72-79.

⁹ P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol II, pp. 461-462, 471-472.

¹⁰ P. Braidò, 'Due lettere datate da Roma...', in P. Braidò (Ed.), *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 364-365, 368-369, 381-382. The texts which emerge from the final redaction (pp. 381-382), far from that Roman May, are identical to those already presented in the two draft manuscripts which he drew up towards the end of April, beginning of May 1884.

demonstrate feelings of love, graciousness and warm availability between one another through words, gestures, or by offering help, gifts. It stands for affection, benevolence, kindness and solicitude: as shown by fathers and mothers, including spiritual 'fathers' and 'mothers', towards their children and by men and women who care for one another, like spouses, engaged couples, lovers and friends; or by protectors toward those who are to be protected; or by benefactors towards the recipients of their kindness.

In religious terminology, *amorevolezza* stands for the visible, merciful and welcoming human-divine love of Jesus Christ.

In practice, Don Bosco invests the term with more meanings than the current lexicon would indicate. Either explicitly or synonymously, he offers it within a formal Christian and pedagogical framework and as part of his own mind-set and style which draws its inspiration from an educational, charitable (in the sense of welfare, or wanting to provide social assistance) love which in turn is affective and effective at the same time.

The educator "in word and even more in deed, will show that his care is exclusively directed to the spiritual and temporal benefit of his pupils". "Assistance requires few words and many deeds".¹¹

For Don Bosco, *amorevolezza* indicates "a complex code of symbols, signs and attitudes". It is the "features by which one manifests liking, affection, understanding and compassion, and willingness to share someone else's life".¹²

He sums up its wealth of meaning when he was able to give a mature interpretation to the lesson he had learned in the dream at age nine: "Not with blows but with kindness and charity you will have to win over these friends of yours".¹³

All the changes or variations made by Don Bosco to what he had written on the Preventive System are intertwined with the idea of *amorevolezza*, loving kindness. These changes or variations dealt with the rectors, assistants who like "loving fathers should speak and act as guides on every occasion, give advice to and lovingly correct [the young]".

The Preventive System makes a friend of the pupil; it makes the pupil affectionate to the point that the educator will be able to speak the language of the heart both during and after the time a pupil is educated. And "once he has won over the heart of the one he protects, will be able to wield great power over him".

¹¹ *Regolamento per le case...*, General articles, art. 2 and 3, p. 15, OE XXIX III.

¹² P. Stella, *Don Bosco e le trasformazioni sociali e religiose del suo tempo*, in *La famiglia salesiana riflette sulla vocazione nella Chiesa di oggi*. Turin-Leumann Elle Di Ci 1973, p. 162

¹³ MO(1991)35.

For this reason, "every night, after the usual prayers and before the pupils go to bed, the rector or his substitute should publicly address the boys with some affectionate words". The results will match the premises, namely, "The pupil will always be his teacher's friend and he remember with pleasure the direction he received, and will still consider his teachers and the other superiors as fathers and brothers".¹⁴

We find the term *amorevolezza* used by Don Bosco in the most significant situations: an encounter,¹⁵ at the time of forgiveness¹⁶ in Confession¹⁷ in an educational relationship,¹⁸ in the "system",¹⁹ in teaching,²⁰ in pastoral ministry²¹ and in a community or where people are together 'as a family'.²²

Finally, there are connected terms which denote visible affective and effective value: "declared love",²³ heart, benevolence,²⁴ affection,²⁵ gentleness and patience.²⁶

¹⁴ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877). p.46, 50, 56, 60, OE XXVIII 424, 428, 434, 438. OE

¹⁵ Writing about the lad who was being chased out of the sacristy at St Francis of Assisi church, Don Bosco says: "He was trembling and crying from the beating he had been given. Have you heard Mass? I asked him with all the loving kindness I could muster".

¹⁶ *Esercizio di divozione alla misericordia di Dio*. Turin, Eredi Botta 1846/1847, p. 75, OE II 145.

¹⁷ G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, p. 27, OE XIII 181.

¹⁸ G. Barberis, *Cronaca*, quad. 14 bis, conference to Rectors, Feb. 4, 1876, p. 45.

¹⁹ Letter to Prince Gabrielli, June 1879, E III 482. Recalling his stay in Marseilles with the Brothers of the Christian Schools in March 1877, Don Bosco told Fr Barberis what he told the Brothers who asked him how he acted to attract "the sympathy and benevolence of everyone": "I explained something of our Preventive System to them, loving kindness etc., while mostly in colleges (boarding schools) we only find the repressive system, serious, grumpy superiors". (G. Barberis, *Cronichetta*, quad. 11, p. 69).

²⁰ Letter to Fr Giuseppe Bertello, 9 April 1875, E II 471.

²¹ Cf. for example his address to past pupil priests, BS 4 (1880) no. 9, Sept. p. 11.

²² Letter to the Bishop of Biella, March 4, 1852, Em I 156; G. Bosco, *La forza della buona educazione...*, p. 74, OE VI 348; letter to pupils at Lanzo, Jan. 3, 1876.

²³ For example, in a letter to teachers and boys, E III 6, 53, 128 (1876), 447 (1879); IV 138 (1882).

²⁴ E III 379 and 425 (1878), 525 (1879), 550 and 641 (1880).

²⁵ Cf. for example E II 328-329, 329-330, 331, 339, 343, 359, 361-362, 377, 378, 379 (1874); E III 5, 9, 42, 64 (1876); 380 (1878); IV 9, 35, 40, 55, 59 (1881), 248-249 (1883), 238 (1884).

²⁶ F.X. Eggersdorfer, *Jugenderziehung* (München, Kösel 1962), interprets it as "affective benevolence" (pp. 239-241); On *amorevolezza*, cf. R. Zavalloni, *Educarsi alla responsabilità* Milan, Edizioni Paoline 1986, pp. 95-105, *Significato di una pedagogia dell'amorevolezza*; X. Thévenot, *Don Bosco éducateur et le «système préventif»*, in *Éducation et pédagogie chez Don Bosco*. Colloque interuniversitaire, Lyon, 4-7 April 1988. Paris, Éditions Fleurus 1989, pp. 95-133. *La place de L'amorevolezza et de l'amour*, pp. 116-124; idem, *L'affectivité en l'éducation*, *ibid.*, pp. 233-254.

4. The basis of *amorevolezza*: religion and charity, reason and friendship

The little virtues included in *amorevolezza* - having the young know that they are loved, sincerely sharing their interests - take on a moral and pedagogical dignity and consistency, thanks to the bigger virtues on which they depend and which inform them. With virtues like these, the limits of a simple dual relationship are overcome and the system is guaranteed the stable features of social relations, universality at an already formally pedagogical level.

Among the 'big' virtues, the theological virtue of charity stands out, along with the virtues of justice, and otherness, which are the roots of any formal friendship and of an authentic "pietas".

The Preventive System supposes, firstly, that the educator be a balanced and integrated person, and therefore sociable, sensitive to the needs of others, to the problems of group living at all levels, local and global. In other words a very much 'relational' person, especially where young people are concerned, and above all with the 'poor and abandoned'. He will be a person of great inner and external self-control, temperate and prudent. Such a person loves practical contact with the needs of youth and knows how to wisely foster solidarity amongst others who can help, sustain, or who are benefactors.

Amorevolezza in its various connotations supposes and demands the contribution of reason, which in turn entails intelligence, willingness to understand, tact and reasonableness. It is practically translated into adapting oneself both to the pressing needs of the young, the needs of the place they come from (also the nation they come from) and the needs of the Church as well, since it is within these worlds that the young learn daily how to be an effective part of them.

Amorevolezza grants to the educator the ability to reawaken in the young their 'reasonable consent'. "Allow yourself to be always guided by reason, not by emotions", Don Bosco suggested to one of the assistants.²⁷

Thanks to the 'system of love', the pupil never grows angry for the correction he has received or for the punishment he is threatened with or actually given, because there is always a friendly and preventive warning which goes with it, which makes him reason things out and, more often than not, the correction or punishment succeeds in winning over the pupil's heart. The pupil, treated in this manner, comes to realise that he needs to be punished and almost wants to be. Had a friendly voice warned him of his error, the pupil might not have fallen. In conclusion, "in the Preventive System

²⁷ MB X, 1023

...the pupil becomes a friend, and the assistant a benefactor who advises him, has his good at heart, and wishes to spare him vexation, punishment, and perhaps dishonour".²⁸

Educators are able to 'generate' rational human beings, so they will never use their hands (*maneschi*, was Don Bosco's play on words, here, meaning 'from the tribe of Manasseh , but in his dialect, *manasse* also meant 'threats') or develop an overly sentimental attachment to the boys. They will spell out especially, and very clearly what they want from the boys, avoiding complicated setups, and appealing only to what is essential and helpful for the boys' personal and social development.²⁹

Finally, in a Christian context, the entire system of *amorevolezza/loving kindness* has charity as its foundation. Charity is spurred on by faith, which is itself a gift and a grace. This is something evident to Don Bosco's awareness as a believer and as a priest, and he acknowledges it very clearly in a letter addressed to the working boys in Valdocco on January 10, 1874.

The working boys are the apple of my eye... and so I think I am responding to my heart's desire by taking delight in writing to you. There is no need for me to tell you that I have much affection for you. I have given you clear proof of this. There is no need for you to tell me that you love me, because you have constantly shown it to me. But what is the foundation of our mutual affection? Is it my purse? Certainly not my money, since I have spent every penny for you. Certainly not yours because you haven't got any money. Please, I mean no offence by that! Therefore, my affection for you has as its foundation my desire to help you save your souls, which were all redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. And you love me, because I try to lead you along the path to eternal salvation. And so, the good of souls is the foundation of our mutual affection.³⁰

Another letter addressed to the superiors and pupils at Lanzo more clearly highlights the intimate link that exists between the human and the theological, between the fruit and the plant.

During my stay at Lanzo you have enchanted me with your loving kindness and goodness; you enchanted my mind with your piety. The only thing left for me was my heart, and you have stolen all my heart's affection. Now, the two hundred friendly and very dear hands which signed the letter, have taken full

²⁸ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877). p. 48 and 50, OE XXVIII 426 and 428.

²⁹ *Metodo dell'amore*, the Preventive System could be equally described as a method of reason and persuasion; cf. Minimus, 'Metodo della ragione', in «*Salesianum*» 9 (1947) 273-277; M Pellerey, *Il metodo della ragione*, in «*Orientamenti Pedagogici*» 35 (1988) 383-396.

³⁰ Letter from Rome to working boys at the Oratory in Valdocco, Jan. 20, 1874. E II 339

possession of this heart of mine, and there is nothing else left but a lively desire to love you in the Lord, do good to you, and save all your souls.³¹

Practically then loving kindness in all its shapes and sizes and thanks to the fullness and maturity of the human ability to love and to the rational lucidity of friendship, is supported and nourished by the infused virtue of charity for the attainment of the last end which is the salvation of souls.

Loving kindness is continuously creative; it is inexhaustible in terms of 'beneficence, doing good - a practical translation of 'benevolence', wanting the good of others. An actual, practical fraternal charity on behalf of the weak and the small united with God's life, it spurs us on to love, to want and actually do what God loves and to fully share "the life of Christ in me"³²

God is love beyond all measure and we love our 'brothers' in the measure suggested by reason and human and divine wisdom.

5. The educational abundance of loving kindness

The different expressions connected with *amorevolezza* (henceforth 'loving kindness') are but signs of the super-abundance of its connotations.

"Loving kindness assumes different aspects in relation to the variety of situations of poverty and abandonment. These situations find a response in the abundant human and divine qualities found in the educator, who is called to act as a "father, brother, friend" and also benefactor, a teacher, and supporter. This is how it was with Don Bosco and this is how the Preventive System works.

One of the results of an interior charity and certainly contributing to loving kindness is a sense of *misericordia*, mercy and compassion. Behind this lies the pain and sorrow one feels seeing the harm and misfortune which young people have to endure as we meet up with them in prison or see them running wild, and heading for trouble, in the city streets. This painful feeling becomes compassion and pity; when controlled by moral reason, mercy is a natural virtue, and when inspired by the reason that God himself has for being merciful, then mercy becomes a theological virtue, springing from charity.

Mercy stands for compassion and first of all compassion for the dangers to which poor and abandoned boys are exposed, for the danger of being without God, of being far from him, of being far from salvation, but also for the temporal evils that beset them: ignorance, loneliness, idleness, corruption.

Mercy sees one's neighbour from the perspective of needs which appeal for help. And a merciful person cooperates with God and represents the embodiment of

³¹ Letter of Jan. 3, 1876, E III 5.

³² Jn. 13, 14-15 and Gal. 2:20.

God's goodness. The loving kindness which is made up of heart, words and deeds becomes, through a human and divine impulse "Beneficence, the implementation of mercy. Mercy makes itself evident in acts of "Beneficence", acts which were called acts of loving kindness in the older Italian lexicon.³³

Mercy is connected with love expressed in few words and many deeds, with works of spiritual and corporal mercy which Don Bosco had come to know from his catechism and from the family and the religious world in which he lived as a child. The social and educational assistance provided by the Preventive System becomes a huge organisation directed towards collecting and redistributing alms, bread, school, apprenticeships.

Loving kindness is also a more interior and respected work of spiritual mercy. Among the acts of spiritual mercy, according to the Gospel,³⁴ fraternal correction was always considered the most important of all.

Fraternal correction, as we will see in chapter 17, is one of the most characteristic expressions of preventive education. Its task is to help young people emerge from the imperfections peculiar to their age and the prejudices they might have, and offer them new and better ideas to lead them to more upright and productive behaviour in life, here and now and for eternity.

Material and spiritual alms-giving, education, re-education....these all respond to a keen sensitivity to the most varied kinds of poverty and miseries of body and spirit, with real concern for doing something about them, through loving kindness; providing food, clothing, shelter and education; readiness to warn, advise, correct, comfort and guide.

Loving kindness also has other facets by means of which the educational relationship becomes a profoundly moral one: they are piety and affability or approachability. Piety covers an almost unlimited range, beginning with our parents and country to the point of reaching out to anyone with whom we have blood or just social ties. It includes the respect children have for parents and relatives. It is because of piety, considered not only in terms of its ultimate objective, namely, God, that natural or adopted children honour their parents and pupils honour their teachers and other educators. The latter, in turn, come to the aid of the former, children and pupils, their needs and requests for the immediate present and the future, and thus they become loving fathers, brothers and friends of those whom they benefit.

³³ The term is frequently employed by Sister Celeste, the older sister of Galileo Galilei, when she is thanking her father for his 'amorevolezza', the gifts he gave to the monastery, and the 'amorevolezza' he exercises towards his daughter. (Cf. M.C. Galilei, *Lettere al padre*, ed. Giuliana Morandini. Turin, Edizione La Rosa 1983).

³⁴ Mt. 18:15-17.

Affability, approachability comes from a reservoir of humaneness, sociability, natural goodness, as well as the theological virtue of charity. It enriches justice with a remarkable note of amiability, courtesy and finesse. This is the more simple kind of friendship which has some affinity with that great friendship represented by charity and which establishes orderliness, spontaneity and graciousness among those who enjoy being together. Perhaps better than all the other facets, it reflects the face of loving kindness of which Don Bosco wrote and spoke: see that you build up a sympathetic harmony through word and deed, in the mutual expectations of daily common life. According to Don Bosco, affability in word and deed puts a final touch on 'demonstrated love'.

He repeatedly insists on appealing to the heart, to love made evident by deeds and which in turn is the proof of an effective education.

Recommend to all of our people to direct all their efforts to two cardinal points: to make oneself loved, not feared³⁵ if you want to be loved, make yourself lovable.³⁶

To succeed with the young, do your best to be well-mannered with them: make yourselves loved, not feared.³⁷

Loving kindness touches chords, creates vibes which engage the entire personality of those addressed, namely, young people and adults who will become sensitive to an entire gamut of interests, both material and spiritual. To "win over the heart" of the young does not only mean touching their emotional world; nor is their response only one of affection. It is also one of gratitude, esteem, respect, desire to correspond, commitment and cooperation.

The final consideration is connected with the meaning that Don Bosco gave to the term 'heart', in a properly religious and theological context, and the interpretation given to typical expressions like "speak the language of the heart" and therefore "win over the heart of the pupils", namely, reawaken a young person's potential, his will, mind, and his eagerness to work.³⁸

6. Loving kindness becomes Salesian spirit

During the last years of his life, in reference to mutual relationships between Salesian religious and other educators, with the boys and with everyone, Don Bosco

³⁵ Letter to Bishop John Cagliero, Feb. 10, 1885, E IV 313.

³⁶ MB X 1022.

³⁷ MB XIV 513.

³⁸ Cf. P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol II, pp. 37-41.

understood and formulated the term loving kindness in a way that related to the thinking of the 'doctor of charity', St Francis de Sales. Loving kindness ends up being closely tied to the spirit of charity and gentleness of St Francis de Sales, a true spirit of gentleness and charity.³⁹

In 1880, Don Bosco summed up the spirit of the Congregation in this term, the spirit of its entire being and activity, especially the spirit of educational and preventive activity as it emerged from the second General Chapter:

Our patience, charity and meekness should be reflected in our words and deeds in such a way as to have the words of Jesus Christ fulfilled in us: You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world".⁴⁰

The two terms *sal* (salt) and *lux* (light) come together to create the word 'Salesian': "do not forget that we are Salesians: *sal* and *lux*. The salt of gentleness, patience and charity, the light reflected in all our outward activities: *ut omnes videant opera nostra bona et glorificent patrem nostrum qui in coelis est*, that all may see our good deeds and glorify our Father who is in Heaven".⁴¹

"Charity, patience, gentleness, never humiliating reprimands, never punishments, always do good to whomsoever we can and harm to no one".⁴²

"Gentleness in the way we speak and act, in the way we warn.. conquers everything and everyone".⁴³

"Insist on the charity and gentleness of St Francis de Sales whom we ought to imitate".⁴⁴

When Mother Catherine Daghero was elected Superior General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians on August 12, 1882, Don Bosco gave her as a gift a box of *amaretti* (macaroons, though here the word refers to the literal translation: small bitter things) with a note wishing her the best:

Here you have some candy that you may distribute to your Daughters. Keep for yourself the gentleness you need to practise always and with everyone; but always be ready to receive the *amaretti*, or bitter mouthfuls which God might choose to send you.⁴⁵

³⁹ G. Barberis, *Verbali*, quad. 1, Capitolo generale II, Sept. 4, 1880, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁰ Circular to Salesians Nov. 29, 1880, E II 638.

⁴¹ Letter to Fr Costamagna, Jan. 31, 1881, E IV 7.

⁴² Letter to Bishop Cagliero, Aug. 6, 1885, E IV 328.

⁴³ Letter to Fr Costamagna, Aug. 10, 1885, E IV 332.

⁴⁴ Letter to Fr Lasagna, Sept. 30, 1885, E IV 340.

⁴⁵ E IV 76.

Loving kindness in its most pregnant sense ended up by being identified with Salesian spirit, with explicit reference to St Francis de Sales, his theology of love, refined by the intentions, activity, dreams and proposals of Don Bosco, in a word, by his the life-style and action.

7. From social support (assistance) concerned with basic needs to educational support

Even though welfare or social support (assistance) is not the specific subject of the present study, within the concrete experience of Don Bosco's Preventive System, in addition to his use of the term 'assistance' in an educational context, the term also finds its place [in its Italian meaning of 'welfare or social action'] in the aid offered to "poor and abandoned" boys.

The first pressing concern that Don Bosco had as his interest in the young began to take shape, and what remained a concern for him to the end of his days, was that of providing for the material needs of his boys first of all.

The 'salvation' of the young at all levels, religious, moral and cultural, was always preceded and accompanied by a commitment to ensuring the means for subsistence, housing, meals, clothing, equipment for schools and work-shops. This is true especially of Don Bosco's poorest institutions: homes, orphanages, and the oratories in the slum areas of the city.

The two dimensions, one social humanitarian and the other educative and re-educative, both moral and religious, are constantly and practically considered to be inter-related. According to Don Bosco's Catholic mind-set, though, real or potential delinquency was associated with a lack of religious foundations. Religious indifference, poor Christian practice were considered as both cause and symptom of a certain moral corruption and as an inevitable risk for society.

The contribution of material help and the education ended up being necessarily integrated. Don Bosco made this integration evident in private letters, circular letters, appeals, sermons aimed at collecting funds and especially through his works.

The Preventive System is both a welfare system, a social system and a system for a moral and religious education.⁴⁶

Assistance plays a key methodological role in educational activity, so much so, that in the Preventive System being an 'educator' and an 'assistant' are one and the same thing. Therefore it is evident that the type of assistance practised and proposed

⁴⁶ Cf. P. Braido, «*Poveri e abbandonati, pericolanti e pericolosi*»: *pedagogia, assistenza, socialità nell'«esperienza preventiva» di don Bosco*, in «*Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche*» 3 (1996) 183-236.

by Don Bosco should not be understood only within the perspective of what he wrote in 1877 and the document which refers to a highly structured setting much like the colleges/boarding schools and homes, which were expected to see to the entire life of the young for a long period of time.

The experiences Don Bosco had, his writings and talks, lead us to understand 'assistance' in a broad and flexible way. This is true, for example, for assistance in schools for day boys, oratories, youth ministry activities, even other activities related to printing, publishing and book stores.

On the level of behaviour such a fundamental inspiration leads to some immediate consequences which completely involves the one who practises the Preventive System, wherever it may be employed. Some texts give us some idea of this, even though it would be more significant to refer to the lived experience that Don Bosco wanted. The contents of his 'definition of the Preventive System' in the 1877 text are fundamental for us to know: rectors and assistants are always to be among their pupils, talking to them, guiding them, advising and correcting them.⁴⁷

Assistance is not policing nor is it about hand-outs, but is a friendly presence, a presence which promotes and gives life to the entire activity of the individual we want to help. Assistance is usually carried out in very different ways in an oratory, a boarding institution, the classroom, a group, at work.

Let the superior [= educator] be all to all, always ready to listen to any doubts or any complaints of the young; he should be all eyes in supervising their behaviour like a father; he should be all heart in looking after the spiritual and temporal good of those who have been entrusted to him by Divine Providence.⁴⁸

Certainly, according to the idea and the practice of Don Bosco's Preventive System, assistance entails 'surveillance' just as the notion of 'prevention' includes the prior notion of defence, prevention, protection and relative isolation whenever possible. Prevention as surveillance is a particularly sensitive area in boarding schools or boarding institutions where the centuries-old practice of periodically reading out the rules is followed. This reading of the rules aims at informing and warning boys who are more vivacious than bad.

Fr Michael Rua, writing to the rector of a Minor Seminary in 1863 says:

Bring all the teachers, assistants and dormitory heads together on some occasion and tell everyone that they should do their best to prevent bad talk, keep all books, writings, pictures (*hic scientia est*) or whatever else might endanger

⁴⁷ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877). p. 46, OE XXVIII 424.

⁴⁸ *Due lettere datate da Roma...*, in P. Braido (Ed.), *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 386.

purity, the Queen of virtues, far from them. Let them give advice and be charitable with everyone⁴⁹

It is impossible not to think about the influence rigorous theological thinking had on Don Bosco or ideas similar to Jansenism, regarding the consequences of original sin, and related beliefs vis-a-vis the psychological and moral fragility of the young. Young people inclined to evil, vulnerable, threatened by bad companions, exposed to scandals, the young 'at risk', could not be saved except with the constant, protective and caring assistance of the teachers.⁵⁰

This is an idea, however, which Don Bosco had quite clearly in mind and which he insisted upon, namely, that assistance should be directed towards promoting and animating. The teacher/educator is always present and takes part fully in the life of his pupils; he listens to them, joins them, stirs up interest, welcomes initiatives and inspires activity. As we have seen earlier on, this is demanded by the Preventive System, right from the time he defined it and made it authentically educative.⁵¹

"Putting the pupils in a situation where it is impossible for them to commit sin" should not be taken to mean "the material impossibility of committing sin."⁵² In this sense the continuous, visible or psychological presence of Don Bosco among the young and the young with Don Bosco, is not rhetorically but really the best and most typical representation of the pedagogical concept of 'preventive assistance'.⁵³

Once more, and especially in this sensitive area, the system is entrusted to the educator. Balance, tact, the human touch, fatherly and brotherly affection, vivaciousness, knowing how to put oneself at their level as a friend, and many other elements, are essential for a correct and valid implementation of the Preventive System.

⁴⁹ F. Motto, *I «Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori»...* p. 153

⁵⁰ One example of a severe interpretation of the assistance offered in the short essay by Minimus, *Metodo della vigilanza*, in *Salesianum* 9 (1947) 122-128. There are many warnings, public and private on danger especially in the boarding setting of "already rotten boys", on "disorders": cf. P. Braido, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, Zurich, PAS-Verlag 1964, pp. 208-210.

⁵¹ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877). p. 46. OE XXVIII 424.

⁵² A. Aufray, *La pedagogia di S. Giovanni Bosco*, p. 44.

⁵³ A happy synthesis of "preventive" and "assisting" understood as "being amongst the young" is offered by H. Henz, *Lehnbuch der systematischen Pädagogik*, pp. 230-232. A good analysis of assistance as a promoting and animating presence can be found in G. Dho, *L'assistenza come 'presenza' e rapporto personale*, in *Il sistema educativo di don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova*. Leumann-Turin, LDC 1974, pp. 104-125; and by F. Wöss, *Salesianische Assistenz: der Erzieher als Animator*. Köln, Kölner Kreis 1976, 31 p.

Chapter 15

THE EDUCATIVE 'FAMILY'

The Preventive System, understood broadly, is open to all kinds of educational, re-educational circumstances. Don Bosco did not apply his system only in the classic institutions: oratory, home, boarding house, boarding school, association, group. He did so in individual encounters as well; it was there, too, in his publishing undertakings. It was Don Bosco's behavioural style in the widest range of social relationships, with people of all ages and circumstance. It is not only in the *Confidential Memo to Rectors* that we can find rules Don Bosco gave on relationships with outsiders. They can be found also in the *Memo for missionaries* who had to face various life situations.

The Preventive System is valid not only for one-on-one education, for stronger personalised relationships, but also for mass education.¹

However, wherever many people were gathered in community, that was the 'place' where the Preventive System took shape, and the result was that the Preventive System is, to a large measure, the system for community. This is what this chapter is about.

1. The family paradigm

Don Bosco's Preventive System took shape prevalently within communities of young people, communities with a wider dimension such as: oratories, homes, boarding institutions, boarding schools, schools for day students. So it is primarily a program related to the pedagogy of the environment.²

Notwithstanding all of the above, in Don Bosco's mind and praxis the Preventive System anticipates with the same clarity that every educational institution should take the family as its model, adapted according to circumstance. "Don Bosco's Oratory", writes one scholar, "was meant to be a home, a 'family', and not simply a boarding school."³ "The 'Lives' written by Don Bosco", the same scholar continues, "continue

¹ Fr Mario Barbera (Turin, SEI 1942) dedicates the first chapter in his San Giovanni Bosco educatore, to Don Bosco "educator of the masses": this inspired the essay *Don Bosco educatore delle moltitudini*, in «Civiltà Cattolica» 139 (1988) II 230-244.

² Cf. H. Bouquier, *Don Bosco Édicateur*, Paris, Téqui 1950, chap 9. *L'éducation problème de milieu*, pp. 1-2; A. Caviglia, *Domenico Savio e Don Bosco*. Studio, p. 286.

³ A. Caviglia, *Il «Magone Michele»...*, p. 141.

the effect, in the minds of the young readers for whom they were written, of the good example which gradually shapes what is called the environment, the climate, the atmosphere surrounding the boys Don Bosco had gathered around himself in his early days, in a 'home' which was meant to be a 'family'".⁴

This family atmosphere was demanded by the very essence of the system inasmuch as it is preventive and founded on reason, religion and loving kindness. There can never be 'loving kindness' -which polarises reason and religion methodically - unless a calm and exemplary 'environment' is created, namely, a family climate.

This automatically means that even its structure should have some similarity to the family. Only this kind of family-like structure could have enabled the blossoming of trust between pupils and superiors, not really seen as superiors but as fathers and brothers, the blossoming of an affectionate sharing of life with the boys as brothers and friends, and finally the blossoming of solidarity among all of them.⁵

Psychological motives led Don Bosco to choose this kind of family structure for his system, his own family experience, his religious convictions, which had him think about believers as the great family of the children of God; sociological data relating to the scenario of an urban environment where a lot of youngsters lived far from their families, and were strangers in a world they did not understand because of its lifestyle and language, and were practically without a 'family'.

The codification of Don Bosco's praxis as found in his words and writings conforms to the family paradigm. He wanted to apply to every community of young people what he was first of all demanding of his large community of young people at the Oratory in Valdocco, which he himself directed and gave life to. The Oratory's structure and life became the norm to be followed by all of his houses.

The first thing to be dealt with was the relationship of the young with their superiors, their educators:

Obey those who have been appointed to be your superiors to guide you and direct you, and be obedient to them: because they will have to render an account of your souls to God himself; open up your hearts to them and look on them as though they were your fathers, who ardently want your happiness.⁶

⁴ A. Caviglia, *La vita di Besuccio Francesco...*, pp. 157-158.

⁵ "Don Bosco", writes Franz Xavier Eggersdorfer, "can be taken as a paradigm of the shaping power of the environment. A good family was the dominating factor in his educational approach in his communities" (*Jugenderziehung*, p. 83)

⁶ *Regolamenti per le case...*, part II, Chap. VIII, art. 2And 7, pp. 75-76, OE XXIX 171-172.

Then there were also relationships between the boys themselves: "Honour and love your companions like brothers"; "love one another, as the Lord tells us, but watch out for scandal".⁷

In a Good Night given on June 1884, Don Bosco exhorted the boys as follows:

There is only one thing I feel I must recommend to you and it is this: be sure to love one another and not despise anyone. Do not despise anyone but rather welcome everyone into your company, willingly allow any of your companions to join in your games, dismiss all kinds of antipathy toward your companions, antipathy which you cannot somehow explain. Welcome everyone, be kind to all, with the exception of those who indulge in bad talk.⁸

On another occasion, Don Bosco presented his boys with a concise program: "Thank God, speak of God, work for God. Think well of your neighbour, speak well of your neighbour and do well to your neighbour. Never think badly about your neighbour, never speak badly about your neighbour, and never cause any harm to your neighbour."⁹

2. Family style

Don Bosco seemed to have sketched out his theory on the importance of the family atmosphere in a Good Night in January 1864. On that occasion he used the image of a beehive, urging his boys to imitate the bees in two things: 1. They obey their queen; 2. They have a sense of solidarity. This is the way by which the small world of education was to become a preparation for the future great world of society, from the perspective of solidarity.

My desire is for you to learn how to produce honey like the bees do. Do you know how the bees produce honey? Mainly with two things:

1. They do not produce it on their own but under the direction of a queen whom they obey in any circumstance; and then they live together and help one another.
2. The second thing is that they go around and pick up pollen from the flowers here and there. But, notice: the bees do not pick all the pollen they find in one flower, but go to this flower, then another flower, and they take from the flowers only what helps them produce honey.

Getting to the application of the image, Don Bosco made these remarks:

⁷ *Regolamenti per le case...*, Part II, Chap IX, art. 1 and 2, p. 77 OE XXIX 173.

⁸ D. Ruffino, *Libro di esperienza* 1864, pp. 17-18

⁹ D. Ruffino, *Libro di esperienza* 1864, p. 73.

The honey stands for the good produced by everyone working together, with their piety, study and cheerfulness. The entire result is guaranteed by 'obeying their queen', namely, by obeying the rules and superiors.

The fact that many live together increases cheerfulness; it serves as an encouragement to bear with the hardships of study; it serves as a stimulus by noting others' progress; there is a mutual sharing of acquired knowledge, ideas and that is the way learning from one another takes place. The fact of living together with lots of others who do well, becomes an inspiration for us to do well, without even being aware of it.¹⁰

The same image was published by a correspondent in a Parisian newspaper, *Pèlerin*, following an interview with Don Bosco in May 1883. The small home started in 1847 had become, for quite some time, a great complex of buildings with 800 boarders.

We have seen the Preventive System in action. In Turin, the students form a huge boarding institution: they do not know anything about moving by rows since they move from one place to another, family-style. Groups of youngsters surround their teachers without too much noise, irritation, or conflicts. We looked with admiration at the faces of those boys and we could not restrain ourselves from crying out: Here is the finger of God.¹¹

The picture is slightly forced as the description provided by Don Bosco's first biographer. At any rate, it could be more faithfully tied back to the initial phases of the home at Valdocco.¹² The biographer himself had already mentioned the introduction of moderate and gradual regularisation.

In those days the boys enjoyed much freedom because they lived like in a family. But, as soon as a need arose or a disorder crept up, Don Bosco gradually restricted the amount of freedom with some appropriate rule and so, one by one, over time, disciplinary norms were established and now form the *Rules for the Salesian houses*.¹³

In a large family-like boarding institution, obviously real tensions may arise and gradually grow, between the fundamental climates of spontaneous, fatherly, brotherly

¹⁰ MB VII 602. Lemoyne says it is an address recorded in a diary along with others, but without giving a date.

¹¹ Quoted from MB XVI 168-9.

¹² A more realistic view of the Oratory, a large community of more than 800 with two sections, students and working boys, is offered by J.M. Prellezio in «Ricerche Storiche Salesiane» (1989-1992), in the already quoted *Valdocco nell'Ottocento tra reale e ideale*; cf also P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale*, especially Chaps. VIII-XII (pp. 175-288).

¹³ MB IV 339.

and filial relationships and the inevitable demands of order and discipline. This is reflected in a sermonette Don Bosco delivered at the beginning of the scholastic year 1863-1864:

I do not want you to consider me so much as your superior but rather as your friend. And therefore, do not be afraid of me, have no fear of me, but rather trust me, for this is what I wish from you and this is what I beg of you, this is what I would expect from true friends... let us all form but one heart! I am here, ready to help you in any circumstance. Be of good will, be sincere with me as I am with you.¹⁴

It is clear that the family style takes on different accents as required by the disciplinary needs which different educational contexts presented. Practically speaking, most of the indications mentioned by Don Bosco had to do with Valdocco, or the Oratory for outsiders during the early years, and the home in later years, and often and particularly with the academic student section.

One of the main results achieved through a family-like regime was to surmount, and not just theoretically, the contrast between authority and consensus, two essential features of education. Obedience in the house is adherence to an objective order which involves the so-called "superiors" and the so-called "inferiors" without drawing distinctions between them, and guarantees a harmonious and industrious living together. In practice, the two different 'orders' create no problems when everyone feels bound to follow the common rule of life.

Once the tension between authority and obedience is overcome by adhering to a common rule, then we have created a suitable condition for changing the family atmosphere into an effective and habitual 'familiarity'! This is the specific task of the educators as they relate to their pupils but also expected of the life-style of the pupils as they relate to one another when they live together.

There is a message for the educators in particular, in Don Bosco's letter dated May 10, 1884. As we have mentioned, Fr John Baptist Lemoyne wrote it but Don Bosco himself inspired it, when reminiscing nostalgically, as he was wont to do on how things worked at the home in Valdocco during the first 15 years of its existence.

"Our beloved Father cannot hold any conversation without reminiscing on the heroic times at the Oratory", writes Lemoyne from Sampierdarena on April 8, 1884, to a Salesian from Turin.¹⁵ He rightly refers to the familiarity which was a way of breaking down the barrier of mistrust which had been unconsciously erected between

¹⁴ MB VII 503. The text is taken up again, according to Fr Lemoyne, in a diary entry by John Bonetti. We have not found it.

¹⁵ Cf. 'Due lettere datate da Roma...', in P. Braido (Ed.), *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 351.

the young and their educators, who were considered as superiors and no longer fathers, brothers and friends, and therefore more feared and less loved. This familiarity is especially to be in evidence when the spontaneity of communal living is at its best: recreation time.

...Familiarity with the boys especially at recreation time. Without familiarity love is not shown and if love is not shown, then there cannot be trust. Whoever wants to be loved, must show that he loves. Jesus Christ became little with the little and bore all our infirmities. Here you have the master of familiarity.¹⁶

Nothing else is left but to revitalise the old system of total availability of the educators and this is the real meaning of familiarity in its widest connotation: total availability to the requests of the young.¹⁷ The young for their part will not fail to respond with warm trust. This is precisely what the letter Fr Michael Rua read out at Valdocco, said. It was addressed to them: "If you want to have unity of heart and soul, you've got to break down the fatal barrier of mistrust and let in a heartfelt trust".¹⁸

The climate of authentic familiarity will enhance fraternal friendship among the boys. In fact, even though Don Bosco showed mistrust of 'particular friendships', which he considered ambiguous and murky, and he often denounced these in his educational efforts, he celebrated friendship. Friendship may be a spontaneous and powerful means for cultural and religious growth.

In the first book he published, the *Life of Luigi Comollo*, Don Bosco sketched out a brief but true treatise on friendship.¹⁹ The Lives of Dominic Savio and Michael Magone²⁰ openly and profoundly describe features of friendship but from a more formal pedagogical point of view.

The *Life of Dominic Savio* had two chapters dedicated to it:²¹ chapter 17 deals with his special friendships and his relationship with young Camillo Gavio; chapter 18 deals with Dominic Savio's relationship with young John Massaglia.²² These

¹⁶ *Due lettere datate da Roma...*, n P. Braidò (Ed.), *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 383-384

¹⁷ *Due lettere datate da Roma...*, in P. Braidò (Ed.), *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 385-386.

¹⁸ *Due lettere datate da Roma...*, in P. Braidò (Ed.), *Don Bosco educatore...*, pp. 374.

¹⁹ Cf. [G. Bosco], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico* [called 'giovane' in the second edition, 1854] *Luigi Comollo...*, pp. 13-72, OE I 13-72.

²⁰ In the *Cenno biografico* on Magone he speaks of 'companions' but there is a closer spiritual relationship, a more personal one, with some which is closer to 'amicizia', friendship. cf. G. Bosco *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, pp. 43-53, OE XIII 197-207.

²¹ On friendship in Don Bosco's writings, from the collection of letters to the various 'Lives', J. Canals Pujol, Salesian, has carried out extensive research. Part of this is published in an essay *La amistad en las diversas redacciones de la vida de Comollo escrita por San Juan Bosco*, RSS 5 (1968) 221-262.

²² G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, pp. 83-88, 88-93, OE XI 233-238, 238-243.

friendships are clearly based on orientation towards God, spiritual improvement and holiness. From his first encounter with Camillo Gavio, Dominic Savio had a precise idea of the kind of holiness Don Bosco preached: "You should know that here, holiness consists in cheerfulness".²³ Evidently, this cheerfulness is joy linked with the state of grace, virtue, the exact 'performance of one's duties'.

Dominic Savio began a more intimate spiritual friendship with John Massaglia because they both came from districts close to each other and shared the same spiritual aspirations and ideas about vocation. "They both came to the Oratory at the same time; they were from neighbouring towns; they both had the same intention of embracing the ecclesiastical state and had a real desire to become saints".

After the retreats held at Easter time their friendship became more intense, as Don Bosco explained it:

After the retreat, Dominic Savio told to his companion: "I want us to be true friends; true friends for what concerns our souls. Therefore from now on I would like us to monitor each other in whatever may contribute to our spiritual welfare." From that moment on, Savio and Massaglia became true friends and their friendship lasted, because it was founded on virtue. Both vied with each other by giving each other good example and sharing mutual advice which might help them avoid evil and do good.²⁴

Later on, Don Bosco commented: "If I'd want to write about the good and virtuous traits of John Massaglia, I'd have to repeat whatever I have said about Savio, whose faithful follower he was for as long as he lived".²⁵

3. Family structure: the rector and his co-helpers

From the viewpoint of method, family style becomes a structure, namely, a well-established set of relationships amongst the people concerned: the relationship of the rector with his co-helpers and pupils; the relationship of pupils with their superiors, who are expected to be fathers, brothers and friends from the point of view of education.

3.1 *The Rector*

Historically, Don Bosco's educative family cannot be equated with an assemblage of people and not even with a 'boys town' community, independently of

²³ G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, p. 86, OE XI 236.

²⁴ G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, pp. 88-89, OE XI 238-240.

²⁵ G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, p. 91, OE XI 241.

its eventual evolution and reinterpretation. The educative family paradigm is created by a style of living together which, as far as the relationship between authority and affection is concerned, takes inspiration from the analogous relationship found in an ideal natural family, that is, between parents and their children, brothers and sisters.²⁶ For this reason the rector is recognised by everyone as the head of the family, a true *Paterfamilias* (head of family) who wields undisputed authority over all the activities of his collaborators and pupils.

The rector, as a father, makes sure that his children are provided with material bread, physical care, intellectual nourishment and with moral and religious support.²⁷ He is not a 'father-master' nor even just a superior, governor, but a real father-mother, firm and loving with full responsibility at all levels: physical, intellectual, scientific, moral and religious. The classic document on the rector is the *Ricordi confidenziali* or *Confidential Memo for Rectors*, written in 1863 but gradually, later on, expanded, re-touched. They were employed throughout the rest of Don Bosco's lifetime. We know that their origin goes back to 1863, at the end of October. It was a personal letter sent to Fr Michael Rua, newly appointed rector of the first *collegio* or boarding school outside of Turin, Mirabello, Monferrato. As new schools of the kind were built Don Bosco, in 1870, thought it best to give the text a much broader application. He would continue to re-touch the original text over the following years, up until 1886. From 1870, the *Ricordi* were given to every rector. They had been collected together in a booklet entitled *Confidential Memo for Rectors*. They have continued through to our own time as a significant expression of Don Bosco's spirit.

The rector is the mind, heart, and centre of the activities of the entire house. The house is, at the same time, a religious house, an educational institution, and the communities of educators and pupils are present to one other. The paragraphs which make up the document address a rector who is a 'consecrated person', the superior of a community of consecrated people who, in turn, are educators and live together with the young to be educated. The rector is, furthermore, the one responsible for, and the representative of the community vis-a-vis secular and ecclesiastical authorities;

²⁶ For sociological types of the family, which would embrace most of Don Bosco's large educational communities, especially the boarding schools, cf. P. Melograni (ed.), *La famiglia italiana dall'Ottocento ad oggi*. Bari, Laterza 1985, XVIII-712 p; differentiates between farming, working, middle class families; M. Barbagli, *Sotto lo stesso tetto. Mutamenti della famiglia in Italia dal XV al XX secolo*, Bologna, Il Mulino 1984, 557 p; M. Barbagli and D.I. Kertzer (Eds), *Storia della famiglia salesiana 1750-1950*. Bologna, Il Mulino 1992, 367 p.

²⁷ The terms "figli", "figliuoli" can sometimes seem to be simply an Italian translation of the Piedmentese term "fieuj", that in certain contexts simply means "ragazzi". In Don Bosco's familiar language applied to each Rector there is a more specific connotation of a paternal spiritual and educational relationship with the boys.

he is the representative of an institution which operates in two areas, the civil and the religious.

The titles in the document give us an exact idea of the plurality of functions assigned to the rector: how the rector should deal with himself, the teachers, the assistants and dormitory heads, with the Coadjutors and the service people, with the young pupils, the day students, the members of the Society, when giving orders.²⁸

There is a host of varied tasks assigned to the rector but they are all linked with the classic principle: strive to make yourself loved rather than feared. The adverb 'rather' was preceded by some variants, such as "before..." and "if you want".²⁹

There is a recurrent insistence on certain recommendations: "Be concerned", "speak", "get together", take account of, check, prevent, to hear the opinion of. Particularly addressed is the presence that the rector must have among his young pupils.

In practice and theory, and later codified in the *Rules for Day Students*, the rector stands for the core of Don Bosco's pedagogy of community. It is true that theoretically and practically it is the educative environment in its entirety which should first of all be cared for. But it is also self-evident that the environment is created by the entire 'family' of educators and young people.

However, the one called to give to this collective work shape, a unified and systematic orientation and be the soul and spirit of the educative community, the one capable of translating the pedagogy of the environment into a personal pedagogy, a 'one-on-one pedagogy', is the rector. The rector is called to be entirely dedicated to educative rather than administrative activity, even though everything comes back to him. It is the rector's task to take care of everything that concerns the spiritual, material and scholastic running of the house.³⁰

"The rector is the main superior and responsible for everything that happens at the Oratory". He should out-do other superiors in piety, charity and patience; he should always show himself to be friend, companion, and brother to all. For this reason he should always encourage everyone to do his duty but prayerfully, not by giving severe commands. He should be like a father among his children.³¹

It is quite evident that here we have the fatherly and familiar idea peculiar to traditional Christian pedagogy, bolstered by other affective and organisational elements and inspired, once again, by the threefold reason, religion, and loving kindness.

²⁸ Cf. F. Motto, *I «Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori»...*, p. 1\51.

²⁹ F. Motto, *I «Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori»...*, p. 151.

³⁰ *Regolamenti per le case...*, part I, Chap I, art. 3, p. 19, OE XXIX 115.

³¹ *Regolamento dell'Oratorio...per gli esterni*, part I, Chap. I, art. 1,2,7, p. 5-6. OE XXIX 35-36.

The lovingly kind fatherliness of the rector extended throughout the day and reaching out broadly has expressions of its own, as they relate both to individuals and the community. Expressions relating to the individuals refer to Confession, spiritual direction, and the so called *parolina all'orecchio* or 'word in the ear'.

What the *Ricordi* have to say about the rector as the appointed ordinary confessor of the religious and educative community is important. This was the practice Don Bosco had begun, way before it became 'a norm', from the very beginning of his work. Don Bosco, who was concerned about providing material bread for the young, could not think of a Christian education which was not an 'education of souls'. What he wanted and wrote about was quite clear: "In our houses, the rector is the ordinary confessor, therefore you should make sure that you show that you gladly hear anyone's confession, but you should grant them ample freedom to make their confession to whomsoever they might choose. Let everyone clearly know that you never take part in voting on their moral conduct and be careful enough to avoid even the shadow of suspicion that you rely on what you recall being told in confession".³²

In his practice regarding the sacrament of Penance, Don Bosco usually also assumed the role of spiritual director. Even here, Don Bosco recommended the choice of only one and the same confessor, inseparably acting as the priest who absolves and who also gives advice.³³

"Following the example of Cafasso, his teacher, and the better spiritual tradition of his times, Don Bosco heard confessions of people and also directed them spiritually".³⁴ But his way of giving spiritual direction was quite open to formal and informal types and was very flexible.³⁵ "His entire pedagogical spirituality and all of his pedagogy" writes Fr Valentini rather forcefully, "was a spiritual pedagogy".³⁶

Personal direction was more intensive at certain crucial periods during the year: at the first contact a young lad had when coming into boarding life at school, at retreats, when choosing a vocation, and whenever there were particular moral or spiritual issues. Even the 'word in the ear' was simple but impressive, and a form of direction. Don Bosco invited the rector, as the father of the young pupils, to take advantage of it.

Writing to Fr Michael Rua, newly appointed rector, Don Bosco says: "Do what you can to spend the entire recreation time with the boys, and try to whisper some

³² F. Motto, *I «Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori»...*, p. 156.

³³ Cf. A. Caviglia, *Savio Domenico e Don Bosco. Studio*, pp. 82-87, *La direzione di don Bosco*.

³⁴ P. Brocardo, *Direzione spirituale e rendiconto*. Rome, LAS 1966, p. 150.

³⁵ Cf. C. Colli, *La direzione spirituale nella prassi e nel pensiero di don Bosco: «memoria» e «profezia»*, in M. Cogliandro (ed.), *La direzione spirituale nella famiglia salesiana*. Rome, Editrice SDB 1983, pp. 53-77.

³⁶ E. Valentini, *La direzione spirituale dei giovani nel pensiero di don Bosco*, in *Salesianum* 14 (1952) 354.

affectionate word into their ear, the way you know best, and you will gradually come to realise the need for it. This is the great secret which makes you master of a young person's heart".³⁷ When the letter to Fr Rua became the *Confidential Memo for Rectors*, Don Bosco included an additional series of these 'whispered words' directed to the good of the souls and their salvation.³⁸

But there is also a rector's daily 'collective encounter' or 'encounters' with the community of superiors, assistants, outside co-workers, young academic students and /or working boys, and domestics. It was Don Bosco's wish that normally the rector or, at times, one of his collaborators, should give a Good Night to the whole community gathered for night prayers, before retiring to their quarters.

He shall publicly offer some affectionate words to the community; he should make some announcements or give some advice on things to be done or to be avoided. He should try to draw some lessons from events that occurred in the place or outside during the day.

This is the already classic Good Night which aims at creating and intensifying a general climate of sincere willingness to communicate with one another. Don Bosco recommended it be short though he often did not keep it that way himself. But he never wanted to turn it into a verbose and dry sermon. "The talk should never last more than two or three minutes". Given these conditions the Good Night might really become "the key to morality, the key to the good running of the house, and the key to success in education".³⁹

3.2 *The community of teachers, educators*

The rector is not the only educator nor does he run everything himself, alone. "If the essence of being a rector" is not that of doing everything himself personally, but of coordinating and working with others, it is clear that the rector's activity should involve the collaboration of everyone who holds responsibility in the house. Here we have verification of the convergence of two equally true statements: "All in all, from this you will come to realise that the essence of being rector consists in being able to

³⁷ F. Motto, *I «Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori»...*, p. 149

³⁸ F. Motto, *I «Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori»...*, pp. 155-156. Regarding the noisy, happy unorganised recreation at the first oratory, Don Bosco writes in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*: "to one I might whisper a recommendation to be more obedient, to be more prompt in attending to his duty; to another I would suggest regular attendance at catechism, or at confession, and so on". MO (1991) 160.

³⁹ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p. 56, 58, OE XXVIII 434, 436; cf E. Ceria, *Annali della Società Salesiana*, vol II, Turin, SEI 1946, pp. 856.869, *Di una cosa tutta salesiana: la buona notte*.

share tasks which need to be carried out and then making sure that they are carried out".⁴⁰

"Anyone holding office or providing assistance to the young people entrusted to us by Divine Providence is responsible for giving warnings and advice to any boy in the house, any time there is a reason to do so, especially when it is a question of preventing any offence against God".

Even the doorkeeper is called on the stage as he plays the role of a first rank actor to guarantee the 'preventive character' of the system.⁴¹ "The choice of a good doorkeeper is a treasure for an educational institution".⁴²

The terms "superior" or those who hold any kind of responsibility, and "educator" are practically synonymous since in different ways they are fathers, brothers and friends. The terms are more especially applied to those who hold some office in boarding schools, such as the prefect or vice-rector, the financial administrator, the catechist or spiritual director, the prefect of studies, the professional councillor [which means the one in charge of the trade school activities, workshops etc.].

But in all this common activity the teachers, the shop-heads and assistants are involved as well in proportion to their age and the activities they are called to carry out. The *Rules for the Houses* dedicate a chapter to every assignment and activity.⁴³ Instead the tasks indicated in the *Rules of the Oratory* 'for outsiders' turn out, in practice, to be nominal ones only, remnants of resources used by Don Bosco and gradually improved upon for their spirit.⁴⁴

Everyone works according to his competence and assignment within a network of relationships which contribute to create a compact educating community. We see this, as far as Valdocco is concerned, recorded in the minutes of the meetings of assistants, teachers, and superiors of the house chapter or even of the superior chapter. In the discussions and decisions made there, 'we' generally substitutes 'I', following the principle:

We do not want to be feared; we want to be loved and we want you to put all your trust in us.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Letter to Fr Giuseppe Ronchail, March 23, 1877, E III 158.

⁴¹ *Regolamenti per le case...., Articoli generali*, art. 1, p. 15, OE XXIX 111; part I, Chap XV, pp. 47-49, OE XXIX 143-145 *Del portinaio*.

⁴² *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p. 56, OE XXVIII 434.

⁴³ *Regolamenti per le case...., part I, Regolamento particolare*, Chaps. I-XVIII, pp. 19-57, OE XXIX 115-153.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Regolamento dell'Oratorio...per gli esterni*, part I, pp. 4-27, OE XXIX 34-57.

⁴⁵ Quoted in MB VI 320.

The solidarity of the educating community is particularly visible in boarding setups, in the boarding schools and homes. But it is similarly evident in the various types of institutions where the young are gathered. Without distinction, everyone is asked to influence the young as fully as they can and provide an educative assistance which is not simple surveillance but something which enlightens, encourages, and promotes growth.

4. The mobile world of the young

In this context of family, fatherliness, at times paternalistic, what takes on an extraordinary importance is the annual 'feast of gratitude'. This feast is a partially steered one, but an occasion to generally mobilise all the lively energies of the young people involved in various activities: sacred and secular songs, music, literary compositions, poems, theatrical performances, academic entertainment, recitations, decorations set up in the various places and performances.

The feast of gratitude began during the first years of the home⁴⁶ at Valdocco and it ordinarily coincided with Don Bosco's Name day, June 24. It was solemnly celebrated and with ever-growing involvement by people, up to Don Bosco's death. He was the one being honoured. This feast was then 'copied' in style in all the Salesian educational institutions and became a solid pedagogical tradition.

4.1 Relationship between respect and gradual autonomy

The Feast of Gratitude, according to Don Bosco, aimed at enkindling in young people a sense of respect and love for their superiors, deepening the sense of family, as well as naturally aiming at promoting due sentiments of gratitude and kindness. This too is education.⁴⁷

It is quite natural that as part of a pedagogy of 'making oneself loved rather than feared', just as in any well-functioning family, a privileged place is given to the process of learning how to show honour, respect and reverence towards teachers, much as would be the case towards parents (Honour your father and your mother), relatives and benefactors.

During Christmastime, Don Bosco often urged the boys to write to their parents and express gratitude to them; ask them to forgive past faults and promise respect and obedience for the future. In a Good Night given to the boys on December 31, 1868, Don Bosco said: "I recommend that you pray and offer up some communions for your parents, brothers and sisters or benefactors who provide bread and make

⁴⁶ Cf. MB II 491; III 534-536.

⁴⁷ Cf. MB IX 886.

sacrifices for you, and I recommend that you be grateful to them". He then added that gratitude be shown to the teachers and to everyone who contributed to their cultural and moral growth.⁴⁸

There is a chapter in the *Rules for the Houses* entitled "Behaviour towards superiors". It is quite full of suggestions as to what attitudes precede and accompany love, and are demanded by love and are complementary to love. The chapter speaks about obedience, submission, gratitude, waiting for advice and warnings, reverence, deference, respect and sincerity.⁴⁹ And these are all expressions of the 'fear' which has nothing at all to do with 'dread' or with 'being distant', but is due recognition of the outstanding humanity and moral maturity of the superiors from whom much is received. To not have them would turn out to be disastrous.

However, all the above does not mean education which teaches perpetual submission to the educator, even when the pupil has grown in autonomy and competence after leaving school and may still want some advice or correction.⁵⁰ At any rate, the pupils have a lot of room left them to live their kind of life, their demands, energies, and original contributions both positive and negative. The educators still feel challenged by tacit or expressed protests of the young or their dissatisfaction, and the barriers they put up. At the frequent and regular meetings the educators and teachers at Valdocco take full stock of all of the above, and do not fail to identify difficult situations in order to find out their causes and provide solutions to them.⁵¹

4.2 *Giving some structure to a community of young people: sodalities*

Don Bosco did not want the community of young people to be a generic type of family, or something which relies only on vertical relationships. It has many faces even though from one single original inspiration, the prototype community of the house at Valdocco, in all its parts: the two boarding schools for academic students and working boys, the day school, the festive (weekend) oratory, the quasi-seminary and novitiate for young Salesians in formation.

The concrete realisation of the community differs according to the institutions we are dealing with: some institutions are more open, like the oratory, the day school, the youth centres; some institutions are more rigid in terms of communal living, like

⁴⁸ G. Berto, *Cronaca* from June to December 1868, pp. 33-34

⁴⁹ *Regolamenti per le case...*, part I, Chap IX *Contegno verso i superiori*, pp. 75-77, OE XXIX 171-173.

⁵⁰ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p. 50, OE XXVIII 428.

⁵¹ For the many questions posed at staff meetings and the superior chapter itself and especially the survey in June 1884 amongst members of the house chapter, cf. J.M. Prellezzo, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 272-307.

the boarding schools for academic students and working boys, the boarding arrangements for seminarians. Besides, each of these institutions is further divided into different kinds: classes for small boys and big boys, classes for those in the different workshops; choir members studying sacred and secular music, theatre groups, the members of the band and later on, gymnastics and sports clubs; and, everywhere religious sodalities and the altar boys group.

Sometimes Don Bosco's institutions opened up to mutual aid societies, youth conferences of St Vincent de Paul and workers associations and, eventually additional sub-groups with various interests, religious and moral, cultural and recreational.

Particular importance was given to sodalities in the family-home set-up. These bore the unmistakable features of solidarity and involvement. Their origins seem to have been the so-called 'Society for a Good Time' (*Società dell'allegria*) promoted by Don Bosco when he was still a young man at Chieri, in 1832. Don Bosco refers to it in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, written mostly between 1873 and 1875. The *Memoirs* tell us about the behavioural norms which reflect precisely the guidelines in Don Bosco's mature moral pedagogy.

Everyone was obliged to look for such books, discuss such subjects, or play such games as would contribute to the happiness of the members. Whatever would induce sadness was forbidden, especially things contrary to God's law. Those who swore, used God's name in vain or indulged in bad talk were turned away from the club at once. So it was that I found myself the leader of a crowd of companions. Two basic rules were adopted: (1) Each member of the Society for a Good Time should avoid language and actions unbecoming a good Christian. (2) Exactness in the performance of scholastic and religious duties.⁵²

As far as the program of activities of the club are concerned and the way they should be carried out in practice, Don Bosco seems to have projected into it the content and spirit of the rules for the sodalities, already proven successful at Valdocco over the many years of their existence.

During the week, the Society for a Good Time used to meet at the home of one of the members to talk about religious matters. Anyone was welcome to come to these gatherings. Garigliano and Braja were among the most conscientious. We exchanged good advice, and if there were any personal corrections we felt we should hand out to each other, whether these were our own personal observations or criticisms we had heard others make, we did that. Without realising it we were putting into practice that excellent adage, "Blessed is he who has an advisor"; and the saying of Pythagoras: "If you have no friend to

⁵² MO(1991)61.

tell you your faults, pay an enemy to do it". Besides these friendly activities we went to hear some sermons and often went to Confession and Holy Communion.⁵³

It makes no difference whether Don Bosco's sodalities are completely or only partially original, whether inspired by 'the congregations' of young students which also existed in Chieri, or whether they come from the Society for a Good Time. These sodalities were an essential ingredient of Don Bosco's educational structure which developed as experience grew. The sodalities represented a valid tool for translating into practice the collaboration between pupils and educators without which it would be an illusion to speak of a family education.⁵⁴

The sodalities were an important tool for establishing a vital link between the demands of the educative love of the superiors and the active consent of the young.⁵⁵

The sodalities apparently came about by chance, but became an intimate part of the system. They actually respond to deeply-rooted needs, psychological needs of the young and in particular the need for spontaneous activity and social life in a group. For this reason Don Bosco wanted the sodalities to be surrounded by the greatest prestige which was to be accorded both by the educators and the pupils. He wanted them introduced in all of his institutions.

What Don Bosco wrote about the sodalities in his *Ricordi*, then, has binding force:

Let the altar boys, the Sodalities of St Aloysius, Blessed Sacrament, the Immaculate Conception be recommended and promoted. Show benevolence and satisfaction towards boys enrolled in them. But you shall only be their promoter, not their director. You should consider the sodalities as work carried out by the boys. Their management is entrusted to the catechist.⁵⁶

In a circular to Salesians on November 15, 1873, Don Bosco reminded them that the spirit and moral tone of our houses⁵⁷ depended on the sodalities. In a letter written on January 2, 1876, he defined the sodalities as the "key to piety, the safeguard of morality, and the support of ecclesiastical and religious vocations".⁵⁸

The organisational ingredients of the sodalities are simple enough. The first ingredient is freedom and willingness to participate.

⁵³ MO (1991) 62-63.

⁵⁴ They came into existence in the following order: St Aloysius 1847, Immaculate Conception 1856, then Blessed Sacrament and altar boys 1857, St Joseph 1859

⁵⁵ Cf. P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale* (1815-1870), pp. 259-269.

⁵⁶ F. Motto, *I «Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori»...* p. 156

⁵⁷ E II 320.

⁵⁸ E III 8.

As a strenna for this year I will give you something to do... What you need to do is this: consider well the sodalities that we have in the house, like the Sodality of St Aloysius, Blessed Sacrament, the Altar boys, St Joseph, Mary Help of Christians and the Immaculate Conception.

I recommend, especially to the teachers and directors of the sodalities, that they should urge, rather not urge but encourage the young who might want to join them. There is no need for exhortation.⁵⁹

And, besides, Don Bosco speaks of self-government on the part of the young, even though with some supervision, incorrectly called 'direction' by the catechist⁶⁰ as we find in the *Ricordi*.⁶¹

The St Vincent de Paul Conferences too, in Don Bosco's thinking, had particular educational value regarding the exercising of charity. These conferences were first introduced by Don Bosco among the young people at Valdocco and later on in the other oratories in Turin.⁶² Don Bosco became a promoter of 'annexed' Conferences like the St Vincent DePaul Conference for Youth annexed to the Paris Conferences, and also the Roman oratories⁶³, to the point where Marquis Patrizi referred to Don Bosco as "our most dear founder".⁶⁴ Don Bosco also cooperated in founding a similar association among a group of youths from Bergamo.⁶⁵

What prompted Don Bosco to found the mutual aid society among the older working boys enrolled in the St Aloysius Sodality was his concrete sense of religious and moral prevention and his desire to promote Christian solidarity.⁶⁶

The rules of the mutual aid society were printed in 1850. The young workers could have found there, besides the material advantages, practical Christian guidance

⁵⁹ G. Barberis, *Cronichetta*, quad. 3Bis, Good Night of Dec. 31, 1875, p. 43.

⁶⁰ Cf. art. 4 of the rules for the St Aloysius Sodality, in the Regolamento dell'Oratorio...per gli esterni, part II, Chap. XI, p. 45, OE XXIX 75; the St Joseph Sodality, MB VI 194; the Blessed Sacrament Sodality and Altar Boys, MB V 760 and 788; cf also MB III 220; MB VI 196-197-

⁶¹ F. Motto, *I Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori...* p. 156

⁶² Cf. F. Motto, *Le conferenze 'annesse' di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli negli oratori di don Bosco. Ruolo storico di un'esperienza educativa*, in J.M. PELLEZZO (Ed), *L'impegno dell'educare...*, pp. 467-492.

⁶³ Cf. *Viaggio a Roma 1858*, diary manuscript of Don Bosco and cleric Rua, p. 38 and 70.

⁶⁴ Cf. letter of Don Bosco to Marquis Patrizi 22 May 1858, Em 349, and the response of July 1, MB V 927-928

⁶⁵ D. Ruffino, *Cronaca*, 1861, pp. 10-11

⁶⁶ *Società di mutuo soccorso di alcuni individui della compagnia di san Luigi eretta nell'Oratorio di san Francesco di Sales*. Turin, Speirani and Ferrero 1850, 8 p; OE IV 83-90. "To prevent young extern boys from the Oratory from joining up with dangerous societies, Don Bosco had in mind to set up one amongst them with the scope of carrying out corporal works of mercy and to the spiritual advantage of the members as well". (*Storia dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, BS 5 (1881) no. 8, Aug., p. 8.

on how to conduct themselves in society. Its objective, in fact, was that to “offer assistance to friends who got sick or found themselves in dire need because they were unemployed against their will”.⁶⁷ During the last years of his life Don Bosco refused the invitation to revive the mutual aid society and encouraged his past pupils to join some of the already existing workers’ societies.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Art. 1 of the *Regolamento*, in *Società di mutuo soccorso...*, p. 4, OE IV 86.

⁶⁸ Cf. address to past pupils on July 23, 1882, BS 6 (1882) no. 9, Sept. p. 150.

Chapter 16

THE PEDAGOGY OF JOY AND FESTIVITY

It was a happy intuition of the sharp-minded philosopher, Francesco Orestano, when he said: "If St Francis sanctified nature and poverty, St John Bosco sanctified work and joy... I would not be surprised if Don Bosco were to be proclaimed Patron saint of games and of modern sports".¹

In a summation of the most recent scholarly research work done on Don Bosco and his 'modernity', Pietro Stella remarks that some studies have highlighted the intuitions, rather than the wording of the *Preventive System* (1877) which governs the role of free time and games in Don Bosco's educational experience.

This holds true both in reference to the spontaneous gathering of boys at the Oratory and the rather uninhibited gatherings of boys in a Salesian boarding school where the playground games were an important moment in the life of the young, besides being a healthy release valve (though not without some constricting and even repressive elements)²

1. Joy

Joy, and cheerfulness are constitutive elements of the Preventive System and they cannot be separated from study, work, piety and religion. "If you want to be good", Don Bosco suggested to young Francis Besucco "just put these three things into practice and all will be well: cheerfulness, study, piety. This is a great program, and if you put it into practice you will live happily and do much good to your soul".³

A year earlier, in 1862, Fr John Bonetti, then a student of theology, jotted down the following remarks in one of his diaries:

Don Bosco usually tells the Oratory boys that he wants only three things from them: cheerfulness, work and piety. He often repeats a saying of St Philip

¹ F. Orestano, *Celebrazioni*, vol I, pp. 76-77; cf. G. Söll, *Don Bosco-Botschafter der Freude*, Köln, Kölner Kreis 1977.

² P. Stella, *Bilancio delle forme di conoscenza e degli studi su don Bosco*, in M. Midali (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia...*, p. 35.

³ G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi...*, pp. 90-91, OE XV 332-333.

Neri: at the proper time run, jump, have as much fun as you want but, for goodness sake, don't commit sin.⁴

Joy is an essential feature of a family-like setting and an expression of loving kindness. It is the logical outcome of a system based on reason and an inner and spontaneous religious sense, which has as its ultimate source peace with God and the life of grace.

The fatherly and brotherly contact of the educator with his pupils would have neither value nor effect on the spirit of the young without the effectiveness of a joyful, cheerful existence. It is thanks to these that the boys are open to what is good.⁵

Before being a methodological approach and a way of getting a boy to accept what is serious in education, joy was a way of life for Don Bosco. He draws this from an instinctive psychological appreciation of the young person and from family spirit.

At a time when education in the family context was generally austere, Don Bosco understood more than anyone else that a boy is a boy and wants to be treated as a boy; he knows that his deepest need is for joy, freedom, play, the 'Society for a Good Time'. Since he is a believer and priest, Don Bosco is convinced that Christianity is the most reliable and lasting source of happiness because it is the announcement of glad tidings, the Gospel: from the religion of love, salvation, grace, nothing else can spring up but joy and optimism. Therefore there is a singular affinity, almost a mutual appeal between the young and Christian life. The boy who feels he is in a state of grace naturally feels the impact of joy; he is sure of possessing a good which is entirely in his power, and his delightful state of mind is translated into cheerfulness.⁶

But in practice joy takes on a religious meaning in Don Bosco's educational experience and correlated reflection on it. The boys themselves are aware of this as it appears from the encounter between Dominic Savio and Camillo Gaudio when, as we have remarked, cheerfulness is equated with holiness.⁷ This seems crystal clear in this and other 'Lives' written by Don Bosco or in the real life in his 'house'. Fr Caviglia tells us that

Don Bosco knew the role played by joy in the formation process and the way to holiness, and always wanted joy and good humour to prevail amongst his

⁴ G. Bonetti, *Annali II* (1861-1862), 2 May 1862, p. 77.

⁵ Cf. A. Caviglia, *Introduzione alla lettura de La vita di Savio Doemnico*, pp. XLI-XLII. The theme of joy as a factor in education for Don Bosco is especially developed also by F.X. Eggersdorfer, *Jugenderziehung...*, pp. 263-264.

⁶ A. Caviglia, *Il «Magone Michele»...*, p. 149

⁷ G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...*, p. 86, OE XI 236.

boys. Serve the Lord with gladness: this invitation could easily have been called the 11th commandment in Don Bosco's home.⁸

This balanced mixture of sacred and profane, grace and nature in the youthful, transparently human cheerfulness, of someone happy in his state of grace is revealed in all expressions of daily life, the performance of duties as much as in recreation. This balance, however, reaches particular intensity in the many festivities, religious and secular which were celebrated. The conclusion to *carnevale* (Mardi Gras) the last three days, really, stand out in this regard. Added to the exercise for happy death, adoration (of the Bl. Sacrament) and prayers, and almost intertwined with them, are the special treat at the dining room table, the games, the lottery, the theatrical performances, music and finally a bonfire.

No book written by Don Bosco offers better testimony to this balanced mix of devotions and games as *The Memoirs of the Oratory*. The term 'oratory' etymologically speaking means 'a place of prayer' but it stands also for a 'recreation park'. Don Bosco makes that explicit when he writes: "Emotionally attached to this mixture of devotions, games and outings, everyone was becoming attached to me, to the point that they were not only very obedient to my orders, but they were eagerly waiting for me to get them to do some task".⁹

Secondly, Don Bosco considers joy as a fundamental life-need, as the law of youth which, by definition is an age where they are outgoing and happy. This is why Don Bosco is enthusiastic about it, as shown in a beautiful page of the Life of Michael Magone. He writes with real pleasure of his fiery and lively temperament, the way he would look back at the games at the end of recreation, and how he seemed to shoot out like a cannon ball when he rushed out of the classroom or study hall into the playground.¹⁰

Don Bosco saw in Michael Magone the archetype of a great many youngsters. This understanding of youth psychology led him to accept the military stirrings of 1848 and be tuned in to the demands of the times, as long as there was no offence to religion and good morals. He did not hesitate to allow the boys to play at military manoeuvres at the Oratory and even gave them sticks for 'rifles' (without a barrel).¹¹

Those who knew Don Bosco were familiar with the exploits of *Bersagliere* (a crack corps of soldiers) Joseph Brosio (1829-1883) who reminisced about them in a belated memoir.¹²

⁸ A. Caviglia, *Il «Magone Michele»...*, p. 149

⁹ MO (1991) 146.

¹⁰ G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele...*, p. 15, OE XIII 169.

¹¹ MB III 20

¹² G. Brosio, 1880 or thereabouts, pp. 3-5, cf MB III 438-440; *Storia dell'Oratorio...*, BS 5 (1881) no. 3, March, p. 15.

Recreation time was filled with games, tricks, riddles, very pleasant conversations mingled with serious ones – all educationally valuable. The *Memoirs of the Oratory* have an abundance of words describing movement and cheerfulness: much noise, shouts, songs, applauding, blurt out with loud cheers, raising an uproar, singing, “tired from laughing, having fun and singing and, I would say, also from shouting”.¹³ recreation with *bocce* balls, stilts, rifles, wooden swords, the first gymnastics equipment, most of the boys spent their recreation time jumping around, running, having a good time, playing various games... “all the tricks of jumping, running, bowling, playing with ropes and sticks, under my supervision”.¹⁴

Cheerfulness displayed in all kinds of recreation and especially in the outside games, becomes a diagnostic and pedagogical means of the first order for teachers; for the boys an area where they can show their goodness.

As Fr Caviglia remarks: “After the Sacrament of confession, in Don Bosco’s system, no other more vital and active centre can be indicated than joy. The spontaneity and joyful, familiar style of life of the young person is not only one of the key ways of getting to know souls, but it also turns out to be a way of, an opportunity to approach young people without fear and prejudice, and whisper an appropriate word in confidence”. Here again we have the vital principle of pedagogy or, better still, the vital principle of a true and proper education carried out one-on-one even though it is happening within a group setting.¹⁵

Fr Caviglia digresses about life in the playground in a study on the Life of Michael Magone.

If we remember that Don Bosco, when it was possible, used to let go of everything to be in the playground with his children, we will have understood the importance this has in his eyes, as an educator and father of the souls of his children.¹⁶

“I used this unorganised kind of recreation to instil in my pupils’ minds ideas about religion and the frequent reception of the Sacraments”, Don Bosco says, speaking about the early Oratory.¹⁷ The last of the ‘seven secrets of the oratory’ which Don Bosco revealed in June 1875 and which were recorded by Fr Julius Barberis, is: “cheerfulness, singing, music, lots of freedom in amusements”.¹⁸

¹³ MO (1991) 145

¹⁴ MO (1991) 159.

¹⁵ A. Caviglia, *Savio Domenico e Don Bosco, Studio*. p. 134.

¹⁶ A. Caviglia, *Il «Magone Michele»...*, p. 172

¹⁷ MO (1991) 160.

¹⁸ G. Barberis, *Cronichetta*, quad. 2, p.3. The 5th and 6th are respectively “the superiors give much confidence and are always amongst the boys”, and, “giving them a couple of confidential words after prayer” (Ibid).

So, cheerfulness for Don Bosco is recreation, amusements but it is also an authentic and irreplaceable pedagogical reality. Justifiably, as we have seen earlier on, 'familiarity' with the young, especially at recreation time is one of the key points he stresses in his letter to teachers in May 1884.¹⁹

2. Feast days

Feast days have a pedagogical value too. Joy is most visible and intense on these occasions.²⁰ They happen to be many and varied. We should first mention ordinary Sundays and liturgical solemnities. Among the latter the following stand out: the Christmas novena and Christmas Day; the Epiphany; Holy Week; Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Corpus Christi. Easter was prepared for and followed by a great number of confessions and communions by boys and girls in the weekend (festive) oratories.²¹

Don Bosco gave special educational import to some Marian celebrations, for individuals and the 'cleaning up' process in the community: Mary's birthday in September; the Immaculate Conception in December (this feast was the most important celebration of all because it reminded everyone about the beginning of the oratory work); Mary Help of Christians on May 24 and the feast of the Assumption.

May 24 was not only the feast of the oratory but soon became a popular and pilgrim feast with additional extraordinary manifestations, both sacred and profane, involving the organisation of various activities for which both Salesians and the young people worked together.²²

Some festivities in honour of special saints were celebrated with greater intensity: St Francis de Sales, St Joseph, St Aloysius Gonzaga, St John The Baptist (This feast also marked the date of the annual meeting for pupils and past pupils around Don Bosco), the feast of St Peter which was also the feast of the Pope, All Saints Day, St Cecilia patroness of musicians, and finally the patron saint of each educational institution. The June 24 feast was quite special: it began on the vigil and became the

¹⁹ *Due lettere datate da Roma...*, in P. Braido (Ed.), *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 365, 370, 384. F.X. Eggersdorfer, *Jugenderziehung...*, sees in joy and play, generously present in Don Bosco's institutions, a key factor of vitality and educational activism (pp. 283-287).

²⁰ Cf. F. Desramaut, *la festa salesiana ai tempi di don Bosco*, in *La festa nell'esperienza giovanile del mondo salesiano*, ed. C. Semerano, Leumann (Turin), LDC 1988, pp. 79-99. in particular *Il valore pedagogico delle feste salesiane* (pp. 97-99); R. Alberdi, *La festa nell'esperienza salesiana della Spagna (1881-1901)*, *Ibid*, pp. 100-129

²¹ Cf. J.M. Prellezio, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 83, 109-111, 189.

²² Cf. J.M. Prellezio, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 79, 93, 101-102, 114-118, 155-156, 177-178, 199-200, 202-206. However, in the first general chapter in 1877, "they spoke of the danger for morality of mixing 'omnia generis' at the festivities for Mary Help of Christians and in other boarding schools on special occasions" (G. Barberis, *Verbali*, quad. I 143-144).

model for all the Feast Days of Gratitude celebrated at different times in the Salesian houses and oratories. The Salesian Bulletin from 1879 on gives us plenty of information about this feast at Valdocco followed by reminiscences on the meetings Don Bosco had with the past pupils of the oratory, priest and lay, in July.²³

Many of the feast days were characterised by an extraordinary display of music, singing and splendid religious services. Triduums and novenas also preceded them. Some months were livened up and given educational value by encouraging the youngsters to take part as fully as they could: the Marian month of May; March in honour of St Joseph, very close to the almost corporate interests of the working boys, October's Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.

Fr Ceria writes that

Don Bosco was constantly concerned with offering young minds and imagination a varied pasture to graze on which might turn them away from thinking about less good things.

So he steered theatrical performances towards the same aim as feast days in and out of church. He made sure that the feasts would be celebrated with pomp and cheerfulness but also at such intervals that as soon as the excitement caused by one feast day was fading away, the expectation of another feast day was aroused²⁴

A blending of reflection times and festivities was also found in the monthly 'exercise for a happy death', at the yearly retreat, in the triduum at the beginning of the school year: outings and festivities were always added to them, for instance: vintage, chestnut harvests, award celebrations. The springtime yearly outing²⁵ was given particular attention and was well-prepared ahead of time. We have already mentioned the *carnevale* with rituals both sacred and profane attached to them. The welcoming ceremonies reserved for religious and civil authorities were quite frequent. There were also other initiatives which prevented routine and boredom from setting into school life.

Every festivity had a twofold aspect: the religious and the profane. Don Bosco always wanted the explicit educational nature of these events to be brought out. He

²³ BS 3 (1879) no. 7, July, pp. 8-9; 4 (1880) no. 9, Sept, pp. 9-12; 5 (1881) no. 8, August, pp. 15-16; 6 (1882) no. 7, July, pp. 122-123.

²⁴ MB XII 136.

²⁵ He analyses this in the "conferences" to teachers, to see the results, inconveniences, see how to improve them. Cf. J.M. Prellezzo, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 83-84, 91-93.

started doing this at the general gatherings held on Sundays at the oratory. As far as possible these gatherings had novelty, joy, edification as their feature.²⁶

Teachers were invited to remind their students about the upcoming festivities.²⁷

Solemn festivities reflected the religious rhythm of Sundays, strongly enhanced by music, singing, and possibly by the appearance of a bishop, with better food at the dining table and with the harmonious sounds of the band playing in the playground. In late afternoon, the feast days were always concluded with a theatrical performance. The climax of the feast day was Eucharistic communion, possibly a general communion during the early morning Mass.

Don Bosco wrote to Fr Michael Rua in February 1870. At the end of the letter he addressed the boys at the Oratory directly:

The evening of the 25th I shall be with you and I will be all yours. But, please, don't try to have any festivity on my behalf. The greatest feast that you can offer to me is to see you all in good health and well behaved. I will try my best to make you cheerful. The Sunday following my arrival, I hope we will celebrate the great feast day in honour of St Francis de Sales. Make that feast day the best feast I could ever want to have. I would like you all, on that day, to receive Holy Communion. When you celebrate feast days like this all the rest means nothing.²⁸

3. Theatre

The first theatrical performance took place on June 29, 1847, when the Oratory at Valdocco was at its beginnings. It was in honour of Archbishop Louis Fransoni who was visiting the oratory. The group of boys had been prepared for "Recitals", dialogues and a sketch. When the Archbishop arrived, Don Bosco read out some words prepared for the occasion. After Mass and the Confirmation ceremony, the following performances took place: first of all several poetic and prose compositions were read out. They were followed by a dialogue-type comedy written by one of Don Bosco's collaborators, Fr Carpano, and entitled: *A Corporal in Napoleon's army*.²⁹

Two years later Charles Tomatis, a very clever and versatile artist who lived at the Oratory from 1849-1861 one Saturday evening, when Don Bosco was busy hearing

²⁶ In fact up until 1842, according to MO (1991) 123-125; then 125, feast of the bricklayers in honour of St Anne; years later, 144-146, walk to Superga; 158-160: "leaving church, free time began" (p. 159); 178-180, Feast of St Aloysius; 195-196, Feast of Pius XI exiled at Gaeta.

²⁷ "When there was a Novena or Solemnity, give some words of encouragement, but brief, and if you can, with an example" (*Regolamento per le case...*, part I, Chap VI *Dei maestri di scuola*, art. 13, p. 35, OE XXIX 131.

²⁸ E II 71-72.

²⁹ MO (1991) 179 and *Storia dell'Oratorio...*, BS 4 (1880) no. 2, Feb. p. 2; no. 3, March, p. 7.

confessions, took the initiative of entertaining the young boarders with mimes, puppet shows, farces and comedies.³⁰

For 1847-1852 another type of theatrical activity is recorded. It consisted of dialogues and performances with didactic intent: on Bible History, the metrical decimal system, etc. Generally these performances were connected with the activities of the evening and Sunday schools and, occasionally, outstanding personalities were present like Ferrante Aporti and Charles Boncompagni.³¹

In the 1850s a true theatrical tradition had its beginnings at the home in Valdocco. This tradition would be enriched during the 1860s with a variety of theatrical fare: comedies and popular farces in dialect and Italian; Latin comedies performed before an audience which included illustrious personalities from the city of Turin; historical and sacred dramas; various kinds of musical performances: operetta, melodrama, anthologies of musical numbers taken from theatre and musical romances.³² In April 1861 the Oratory saw the first performance of the Latin comedy *Minerval* written by Fr Palumbo, a Jesuit. On June 2, 1864, there was a performance of the *Phasmationices* (*Larvarum victor* = victory over ghosts), a comedy which had already been performed on May 12. It had been written by Bishop C.M. Rosini and adapted by Fr Palumbo.³³ In June 1865 it was again performed at Mirabello Monferrato.³⁴

Latin theatrical performances and academic entertainments made up a remarkable portion of the extracurricular activities of a school.³⁵ Theatre, then, in its various expressions, was gradually inserted with full rights into Don Bosco's educational system and considered to be an element which was integrating, helped build up an atmosphere of cheerfulness and was given a didactic purpose. The immediate objective Don Bosco had for theatre performances was, naturally, a recreational one. However, they also had a higher goal, a cultural and an educational goal.³⁶

Don Bosco addressed the rectors regarding this with a lively address during the conferences of St Francis de Sales in June 1871.

³⁰ MB III 592-593.

³¹ MB III 231, 535, 623-652; IV 279, 410-412; Em I 157; *Storia dell'Oratorio...*, BS 4 (1880) no. 12, Dec. pp. 5-6.

³² Following on from John De Vecchi, a musician from the city, Salesians like Fr John Cagliero, Fr James Costamagna and Joseph Dogliano would be responsible for well known musical compositions.

³³ See the invitation in Latin, 27 May 1864, Em II 50-51.

³⁴ Cf. letter of don Bosco to Marquis D. Fassati, June 4, 1865, Em II 140.

³⁵ Cf. G. Proverbio, *La scuola di don Bosco e l'insegnamento del latino* (1850-1900), in F. Traniello (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della letteratura popolare*. Turin, SEI 1987, pp. 169-173.

³⁶ Cf. S. Stagnoli, *Don Bosco e il teatro educativo salesiano*. Milan, *Eco degli Oratori* 1968, 154. p.

I see that things are no more the way they should be with us; they are not like in the early days. We no longer have *teatrino* (little theatre) but real theatre. At any rate, my intention is that the theatre performances should have this basic objective: to entertain and instruct. Let there be no scenes which might harden the hearts of the boys or make a bad impression on them. Let there be comedies, but of the simple type, with a moral message added to them. Let there be singing, for singing, besides entertaining, is also part of instruction and therefore a much needed tool these days.³⁷

Don Bosco did his best, on several occasions, to provide rules which would admit no exception, to achieve these specific and compatible objectives of theatre performances. These rules were discussed and clarified at the General Chapter. 'Entertaining' and 'cheering up' had to go with 'instructing' and 'educating'.³⁸ The introduction to the rules for theatre performances found in the *Rules for the Houses* sum up the many values of theatre:

Theatre performances, staged according to the rules of Christian morality, can be greatly advantageous to youth when their objective is nothing but to cheer up, educate and instruct the young as much as possible within a moral perspective. To be able to achieve this the following need to be established: 1. subject matter should be suited to the young; 2. things which might create bad habits in the young should be excluded.³⁹

One of Don Bosco's most trusted collaborators, Fr Julius Barberis, had previously outlined his general thoughts based on the educational value of theatre performances. These thoughts were based on lived experience.

1. Theatre performances if well-chosen are a school of holiness... 2. They provide excellent intellectual instruction or the kind that teaches the practical prudence needed in life; 3. They develop the mind of the one who is performing;

³⁷ MB X 1057. We also have the manuscript of Don Bosco's address; his words on 'teatrino' are recorded briefly and incompletely, Fdb mcr 1.870 A9-B8. "One thing then that must be taken into consideration and fixed up are also the texts and recitals they have. I have always tolerated them and still do, but it is my idea that 'teatrino' is done only for the boys and not those that come from outside. In every house of education etc. "

³⁸ *Regole del Teatrino* printed and sent to houses in a four page booklet in 1871. Reported in MB VI 106-108 and X 1059-1061. In 1877 they became part (with variations) of the *Regolamento per le case* and the *Deliberazioni del Capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel settembre 1877*, OE XXIX 146-151 and 432-437.

³⁹ *Regolamento per le case*, Chap XVI Del teatrino, p. 50, OE XXIX 146; identical, other than for the absence of "done according to the rules of Christian morality", is the preface to the published Regulations a year after, in the *Deliberazioni del Capitolo generale.... tenuto in Lanzo Torinese...*, p. 56, OE XXIX 432.

4. They help us get to see human existence and society from within; 5. They are great entertainment for the boys who think about them several days before and several days after; 6. Last year (and this may have happened a thousand times before and after) a seminarian told me that he decided to join our Congregation when he was attracted by the cheerfulness he gained from theatre performances; 7. They get rid of bad thoughts and talk – everything focuses on the performances; 8. They draw lots of youngsters to our schools because even during vacation time, the oratory boys tell their classmates and friends and many others about the cheerfulness at the oratory and about the theatrical performances they saw.⁴⁰

In January 1885, with special encouragement from Don Bosco himself, the print shop at San Benigno Canavese issued the first of a collection series of dramatic readings to be used by educational institutions and families. Initially this publication came out every two months and, from 1886 on, every month. The cover of the first one, written by Fr John Baptist Lemoyne, had this well-defined program:

It has been noticed that especially comedies, if not strictly morally correct, leave such awful impressions on young minds that they still remain in old age. We have thought it best to gather and publish a series of dramatic readings to overcome this; besides being entertaining and attractive, they can be educational and morally correct. Some priests, experts in drama, asked and guided by Don Bosco, are setting in place the following program: the dramatic readings will aim at entertaining, instructing and educating the masses and especially Italian youth, with a series of booklets containing dramas, comedies, farces, tragedies and also simple dialogues and entertaining poems.⁴¹

4. Music and singing

The role played by vocal and instrumental music in Don Bosco's educational system is also strictly connected with the idea that education happens through cheerfulness, a calm atmosphere and by refining aesthetic taste and feelings. Music finds plenty of room in all of Don Bosco's institutions, from the festive oratory to the boarding school for academic students, to technical and professional schools. In the latter, the band received particular attention. Besides everything else, music gives a lively festive tone to any solemnity, sacred or secular: at religious functions, processions,

⁴⁰ G. Barberis, *Cronichetta*, quad. 4, Feb. 17, 1876. pp. 68-69.

⁴¹ G.B. Lemoyne, *Le pistrine e l'ultima ora del paganesimo*. San Benigno Canavese, 1885, program of "Collana di Letture drammatiche"; cf BS 10 (1886) no. 1, Jan, pp. 9-10; announced in BS 9 (1885) no. 1, Jan, p. 15 and on the cover; presentation of *Le pistrine* in BS 9 (1885) no. 3, March, p. 48.

during outings and excursions, receptions and departures, award ceremonies, academic entertainment and theatre performances.

In 1859, Don Bosco had a biblical quotation inscribed on the door of the classroom for vocal music, adjusting its original meaning: *Ne impedias musicam!* (Don't obstruct music).⁴² Don Bosco's views on music can be neatly summed up in his "An oratory without music is like a body without a soul",⁴³ a line he employed on many occasions.⁴⁴ It was the theoretical expression of a conviction which had been a practised reality from the very beginning of his educational activity.

Reminiscing about his very early collaborators when he began gathering young people (1842), Don Bosco wrote in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*:

These helped me maintain order and they read and sang hymns. From the very beginning I realised that without songbooks and suitable reading matter, these festive gatherings would have been like a body without a soul.⁴⁵

Reminiscing in the same 'Memoirs' about the establishment of the first night schools, during the winter of 1846-1847, Don Bosco wrote:

The classes were animated by plain chant and vocal music which we always cultivated.⁴⁶

There is a mixture of reasons for Don Bosco's interest in the educational role of music. During the first years music was primarily considered as a preventive means:

An extraordinary number of people joined music classes. Vocal and instrumental music was taught to draw the young away from the religious and moral dangers to which they were exposed.

We thought best to add piano and organ classes and also instrumental music to the night and day classes.⁴⁷

Later on a new religious motive was added especially in reference to sacred music and Gregorian chant, plain chant:

It was Don Bosco's desire and aim that the young, when they returned to their native towns, would be able to help the pastor by singing at sacred functions.⁴⁸

⁴² Sir. 32; 5; cf. MB V 540.

⁴³ MB XV 57.

⁴⁴ This was heard at Marseilles in 1881, speaking with a French priest who had founded an *Oeuvre de Jeunesse*, run rather more austere than his own oratory. Lemoyne mentions it in MB V 347.

⁴⁵ MO (1991) 123.

⁴⁶ MO (1991) 176.

⁴⁷ MO (1991) 182 and 190

⁴⁸ MB III 150-152; cf MO (1991) 50, 176, 182, 202.

An added reason was to fight against idleness. "You have to keep the boys constantly busy"⁴⁹

Finally, we also ought to keep in mind the particular 'pedagogical' value given to music.

In the first volume of the Salesian Annals, Fr Ceria dedicates an entire chapter to summarising what Salesian music is all about: "The main reason (for music) can be found in the healthy effects which music has on the hearts and imagination of the young, according to Don Bosco, as it aims primarily at refining, uplifting the young and making them better".⁵⁰

5. Outings and walks

In the pages on the Preventive System and in Don Bosco's activity as an educator, besides the weekly walks and the yearly school outings for working boys and academic students, the 'autumn walks' or outings were evidently stressed.

It was a way to put into practice the principle of "love what the young love" so that they will love what the educator loves. These outings also contributed to building up an atmosphere of Christian joy which constitutes an integral and essential part of the formation of the young. They had a fundamental educational value then.

At the weekend oratory at Valdocco, these excursions or outings flourished ever since its beginnings, together with pilgrimages. They were absolutely necessary during the time-span between 1844-1846, when the oratory had no fixed abode or did not have at its disposal places of its own for worship. The *Memoirs of the Oratory* recall outings to Sassi, Madonna di Campagna, Stupinigi, our Lady of Consolation, Monte dei Capuccini.⁵¹

The autumn walks were classic. We have an account of a varied series of these outings which go back to 1847 and continued until 1864.⁵² Even when the outings were over, the choir members and award winners would enjoy a short stay at Becchi in autumn.

The outings between 1859 and 1864 saw a particular development: they lasted almost two weeks. They were well organised and an ever-growing number of boys

⁴⁹ MB V 347

⁵⁰ E. Ceria, *Annali della Società salesiana dalle origini alla morte di S. Giovanni Bosco (1841-1888)*. Turin. SEI 1941, p. 691; cf. Chap LXIV *La music salesiana*, pp. 691-701.

⁵¹ MO (1991) 140, 141, 144-146.

⁵² There is some respectable literature on this. The best is by L. Deambrogio, *Le passeggiate autunnali di don Bosco per I colli monferrini*. Castelnuovo Don Bosco, Istituto Bernardi Semeria 1975, 539 p. The last parts of the *Storia dell'Oratorio* published in the Salesian Bulletin are dedicated to the walks, BS ii (1887) no. 3, March pp 30-33; no. 4, April, pp. 47-48; no. 5, May, pp. 57-58; no. 9, Sept. pp. 116-119; no. 10, Oct. pp. 129-132.

took part in them. They would enter the town with the band right up front; the parish priest or personalities of the place would offer them an improvised shelter and daily food, and along with the people would welcome them. There were visits to outstanding personalities, morning and evening religious services, recreational activities, exhibitions by the band, theatrical performances on an improvised stage in the town square. They included songs and skits in Piedmontese dialect, short comedies, *gianduja*, the classical Piedmontese marionette could never be left out.

The outing to Genoa during the October fortnight of 1864, is an historic one. On the way back to Turin, between Lerma and Mornese, Don Bosco was able to draw two outstanding personalities into the Congregation: Francis Bodrato and Fr John Baptist Lemoyne.

The excursions or outings aimed at achieving a truly educational objective as they guaranteed first of all that the young would be looked after during vacation time and their feelings would be enriched:

Have the young experience first-hand that to serve God can really be part of having a good time.⁵³

The youngsters, after the completion of their school year, got considerable physical benefit too, as they enjoyed a long, generous recreation.

These excursions or outings were effectively the prelude that led to the wording of the *Preventive System*: "Let them have ample freedom to jump, run, shout as they wish", to which was also added: "The walks are very effective means of obtaining discipline; they are useful for the upkeep of morality and good health".⁵⁴

⁵³ MB II 384-391.

⁵⁴ *Il sistema preventivo* (1887), p. 54, OE XXVIII 432.



Chapter 17

DEMANDING LOVE: “A WORD ON PUNISHMENTS”

The practice of correction and punishments is much better articulated in the educative experience of Don Bosco than it is in the statements of its principle. The few indications found in the last paragraph of the *Preventive System* (1877), “A word on punishments”, do not appear to be good enough to act as a theoretical foundation. It needs to be found within a more substantial perspective.

Don Bosco’s practice of correction and punishments is based on one of the principles which could well be considered a key one for his spirituality and pedagogy:

Try your best to make yourself loved rather (‘before’ or ‘if you want to be’) than feared.

The two terms, love and fear, are no less fundamental than the threefold ‘reason, religion, loving kindness’. They all have their roots in faith and theology, and blossom and produce results in pedagogy and ministry.

The two terms seemed even more realistic and essential in a kind of prevention directed to youth at risk and youth who were a risk, and at times expressed with deeds but certainly more often through word and outlook.

1. The basis for a practice of correction and punishment

First of all, it is clear that in its wording the first term (love) does not exclude the second (fear): “make yourself loved rather than feared” substantially means “make yourself loved and make yourself feared”, with priority given to love. Often it is love that wants fear’ to the point that fear increases as love does. A theological certainty becomes a pedagogical principle.

The wording achieves and includes the latter, which is a container and philosophical, theological and experiential basis for reason, religion and loving kindness. We have seen that Don Bosco’s care for the young and his neighbour, without exception finds its roots in his faith and his theological, moral and pastoral formation as a priest, oriented towards the eternal salvation of the young.

This untarnished Catholic faith sees in love and fear of God the essence of any authentic holiness. Don Bosco’s theology of history confirms this belief, widely evidenced by his writings on both sacred and secular history. God governs the world and human

events through attractive reward and the healthy threat of future punishment, in time and eternity. This is the idea that pervades the entire *History of Italy* and in this connection, Don Bosco's idea and wording borrowed from Greek and Latin history is made explicit in the phrase: "It is better to be loved than to be feared".

The transferral of Don Bosco's theological and historical conceptions to action on behalf of youth was inevitable. The pedagogical qualification of 'father, brother, friend', ended up being reinforced thanks to the indissoluble bond between them, between affection and loving kindness and elements directed towards respect, esteem, honour and reverence.

We have already recalled the many versions of the wording from the *Historical Outline of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales* (1862) to the letter addressed to Fr Michael Rua in 1863 and the *Confidential Memo for Rectors* derived from them. The wording is also brought back to life in the *Preventive System* and in the general articles of the *Rules for the Houses*.

The relationship between love and fear suppose the co-existence of integrating points of view. The terms 'before' and, 'if one wishes', and 'more or less', follow one another and respectively express the order of time, causality and importance.

No one could better interpret Don Bosco's thinking than Fr Michael Rua and the Salesians at Valdocco, who had come together for one of their regular meetings to study the disciplinary and educational situation at the Oratory. Among the recommendations at that meeting, was precisely the one related to educating the young to both love and fear in their relationships with their superiors.

Make yourself loved and, at the same time, feared by the young. This is an easy thing. When the young see that an assistant is fully concerned with their well-being they cannot but love him. When they see that the assistant does not let anything happen, meaning anything which may not be right, and warns them about all their faults, they cannot but have a certain kind of fear of him, namely that reverential fear that they ought to have towards their superiors. The assistant has to be very careful about one thing, and that is that he should not lower himself to the level of the young people in the way he talks or in his actions, especially during games: he should take part in everything but at the same time should maintain an air of gravity and make them see by his own behaviour that he is their superior.¹

2. Fear which comes from love

It is clear that in all its versions, fear is not opposed to love but rather comes

¹ J.M. Prellezio, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, pp. 263-264.

from it. Fear, in a pupil, becomes 'filial fear' which develops into deference, submission, honour, obedience and respect for an authentic 'superiority'.

In certain cases of guilty infractions, fear may be associated with feelings of embarrassment, restraint, shame, blushing, shyness, and a sense of unworthiness and apprehension at the thought of losing the esteem, trust and support of the one who loves and helps: fear of being separated from the one who loves us is the essential core of authentic fear.

It cannot be excluded that in certain situations, making known duties as well as sanctions for not performing them may produce a 'servile fear', which is not entirely useless for someone who needs to be brought back to reason. Starting from this kind of fear, education properly so-called may be set in motion as a process. This sort of fear may presuppose a certain intimidation, fear of punishment, fear of the one who might inflict them, but it doesn't consist in them. This is how we should read the recommendations made by Don Bosco on various occasions, starting from the *Confidential Memo...*

Let charity and patience constantly accompany you when you give orders, when you correct. And make sure that everyone comes to know from your deeds and words that you are after the good of their souls.

But at the same time,

It should be the concern of everyone to find out those pupils who might be dangerous: once they have been discovered, insist that they be made known to you.

You shall never accept pupils expelled from other schools or pupils whose moral behaviour you know for sure to be bad.

If it should happen that, in spite of due caution, a pupil of this kind is accepted, assign him a companion of sure morality to assist him and never lose sight of him. Should he be found guilty of indecent actions let him be warned only once and if he falls back into the same actions, let him be sent home immediately.

Should you discover some serious offence, summon the guilty person or the suspected person into your office and in the most charitable way make sure to have him declare his guilt and the wrong he has caused by doing what he did. Then correct him and invite him to fix up all those things that pertain to his conscience.

When you give orders, always be charitable, meek. Threats, anger and worse, violence, should always be kept far away from your words and deeds.²

²F. Motto, *I «Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori»...*, p. 151, 154, 155, 156-157, 159.

Don Bosco expressed his thinking on this matter with utmost clarity, speaking to the boys at the Oratory in a Good Night on October 26, 1875. This reflects the content of so many other talks given by Don Bosco.

You have increased in number again. We have begun everything just as usual. They say that someone who has been warned on time is worth a hundred others. So, now that we are in time still I should warn you of a few things. First of all, keep well in mind that we are starting right now and we will continue throughout the year giving you marks for your studies, your behaviour in the classroom, the dormitories, the dining room and similar places. Anyone who does not behave well will receive a poor mark and will hear his name mentioned in public, in front of all the others, to his great shame. Anyone who does not hear his name mentioned in public can see that as a sign that everything is going well for him. Those who get poor marks should know that they will be tolerated for a while, but then, no longer. I am sorry, but this is what we are forced to do every year with someone. We are forced to show him the door and tell him: "You are no longer for the Oratory".

With some others we will bear a little longer and let them go on for a while to see if they decide to change their ways, but then you know what the proverb says "The water pail goes to the well so often that in the end it breaks", meaning that one thing added to another eventually becomes something big. We will let someone go on until the end of the year, but at that time all of his pranks will seem bundled up together and we will give him a poor mark, then during holiday time we will be forced to send a note home saying that he can stay home and enjoy a longer holiday since there is no more room available for him at the Oratory. This is exactly what we had to do this year. And if you notice that several people are missing, it happened because of this. Now you are all well advised in advance and I hope that no one will ever see this happening to him.³

3. The role of the superior, rules as the concrete embodiment of duty, initiation into responsibility

Reason is fundamental. The Preventive System supposes that the educator is protective and always present. But there is something which makes the Preventive System look like the repressive one: the clear indication of the objectives to be achieved and the way to achieve them. Concretely, this is referred to as the Rules, prescriptions broken down into precepts, written and oral, which encompass the daily life of the pupils. They represent the code of duties towards God, one's neighbour, one's self.

³MB XI 459-460.

The pupil is bound to follow this code. Surveillance might be entirely reduced to 'assistance', help, support, but this does not remove the fact that it should begin by presenting the code of duties.

Both the preventive and the repressive systems consist in making the rules known to the individuals and then making sure that they are kept – this is surveillance.⁴ In both situations the code may be identical.

Even though discipline and the related practice of correction and punishment differ according to the different contexts, it is quite clear that Don Bosco is a disciplinary educator who loves communities which are orderly and functioning correctly. There is severity at Valdocco because it is an overcrowded home, it is considered as the 'mother-house' and example to be imitated by all the other Salesian houses. Don Bosco, right from the beginning, worked tirelessly at expanding the various rules to cover a wider range of matters given the diversity of the educational institutions, or the groups and their respective activities. Even for the more open institutions, Don Bosco, early on began writing Rules both for the teachers and pupils. This booklet of rules was printed and edited only in 1877, at the same time as the *Rules for the Houses*, and for boarding schools and homes.⁵

We have already referred to Don Bosco's numerous interventions to guarantee order and discipline especially in boarding schools and about his curt warnings to recidivists and more dangerous youngsters but also to those who, through their own fault did not draw any cultural, religious and moral benefit from life in school. This is the case referred to in a Good Night given on March 20, 1865, which was intended as a comment on the grades received at the semester exams.⁶

But the following night, faced with many unfulfilled duties, Don Bosco forewarned the pupils that for the future, there would be severe inflexibility in punishing public disorders and lack of respect toward the assistants. The assistants were formally forbidden to punish and were ordered rather to report on any happening. However, Don Bosco was inflexible with anyone who upset discipline, especially if they were academic students, the privileged ones.

I want the students to be good, otherwise let them either go back home or transfer to the working boys section. I would also like to say that if the students are sent back home they are not being thrown on the street, for most of them have a family or relatives who could take care of them.⁷

⁴*Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p. 44 and 46, OE XXVIII 422 and 424.

⁵Cf. *Regolamento dell'Oratorio...per gli esterni*, 63 p. OE XXIX 31-92; *Regolamento per le case...*, 100 p. OE XXIX 97-196.

⁶G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff, Good Night, March 20, 1865, pp. 119-120

⁷G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff, Good Night, March 21, 1865, pp. 121-122.

We have seen a similar decision made by Don Bosco in the Good Night given on July 9, 1875. It was a question of silence and keeping in line. But Don Bosco ended by saying that he relied on the sensitivity of the boys' consciences. He had also pointed out that keeping certain rules might become a means for spiritual refinement, advancement in virtue and increased love for the Virgin Mother and her Divine Son.⁸

4. Corrections

Besides being the normal pedagogy of encouragement and accompaniment, which is the essence of assistance, the Preventive System often becomes a 'corrective' pedagogy.⁹

This is natural if we think that the Preventive System has to deal with growing boys, all their characteristic features of flightiness, light-mindedness, rashness, yielding to the negative impact of ideas and behaviours, all features attributed to them by Don Bosco.¹⁰

Correction is expressed through a wide gamut of interventions of graded seriousness: advice, warnings, reminders, admonitions, fore-warnings, reprimands and threats. These are not punitive actions but ones aimed at removing fickleness and forestalling their going astray, which may lead to irreversible waywardness, and at getting the young used to proper and correct behavioural patterns in their way of thinking, speaking and acting. This is how a loving and strong father and mother would behave in their family towards their children, as they are always aware of their responsibility. Don Bosco did not know anything about permissiveness.

'Corrective' terminology is quite often found in the *Preventive System*. Educators are thought of as 'giving advice' and as 'correcting in a loving manner'. References are made to 'corrections given', 'threatened punishments', 'friendly advice', a benefactor who gives a warning', 'Good Nights' wherein some advice or warning is given about things to be done or things to be avoided.¹¹

Correction in its more general and common form is of the essence of the Preventive System. As a matter of fact, if boys were not to make mistakes, with few exceptions they would not be boys anymore and they would have no need of education.

While being assisted, therefore, the boys should be granted an opportunity to freely express their thoughts. But we should be careful to rectify and also

⁸ G. Barberis, *Cronichetta*, quad. 2. pp. 45-46.

⁹ Cf. H. Franta – A. R. Colsanti, *L'arte dell'incoraggiamento*. Rome, *La Nuova Italia Scientifica* 1991, pp. 25-29

¹⁰ See Chap 9, §2.

¹¹ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p. 46, 48, 50, 56 and 58, OE XXVIII 424, 426, 428, 434 and 436.

correct those expressions, words and actions which may not be suited to a Christian education.¹²

Correction therefore is necessarily present at all the steps of the educational activity: the word whispered in a boy's ear, private and public warnings, the Good Nights, the small written notes, reminders during the study period or in the classroom, recreation time or walks, in church, in the dormitories and everywhere.

The ways of correcting are the ways of loving kindness, reason, discretion; the ways of patience, charity and grace.¹³

"Corrections and punishments should never be given publicly but always privately and in the absence of companions...to bring the pupil to see his fault with the aid of reasons and religion".¹⁴

"Never give any correction out of impulse but wait until your emotions have subsided. Above all, make sure that the pupil leaves us satisfied and in a friendly manner."¹⁵

The circular letter *On punishments to be inflicted in the Salesian houses* was not written by Don Bosco but by a Salesian, one of his earliest followers. This letter however, is inspired by Don Bosco's way of thinking and it does bring up the following two points as far as the use of correction is concerned: "See to it that you choose the most opportune time to correct and remove any suspicion which might make someone believe that we are acting out of emotions".¹⁶

For several years already rectors of Salesian houses knew the rules about correcting boys. The rules had been gradually drawn up in the regular meetings they held:

"Respect the pupils' reputations"; "never reprimand them unless you are sure about their faults"; "Do not act on impulse, but examine things cold-bloodedly". "They should recognise us as their 'Superiors' ... if we were to humiliate them with words, mainly because we are 'the superiors', we would make a laughing stock of ourselves".¹⁷

5. On punishments

Punishments, instead, seem to be forced into the theoretical framework; part of

¹² *Regolamento per le case...*, p. *Articoli generali*, art. 3, p. 15, OE XXIX 111.

¹³ *Regolamento dell'Oratorio...per gli esterni*, part I, Chap X *Dei pacifatori*, art. 2 and 5 p. 20 and 21, OE XXIX 50 and 51.

¹⁴ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), *Una parola sui castighi*, art. 2, p. 64, OE XXVIII 442.

¹⁵ Letter to a young teacher, Jan. 28, 1875, E II 448.

¹⁶ Cf. J.M. Prellezio, *Dei castighi da infligersi...*, pp. 294-300.

¹⁷ Rules given by Don Bosco before 1870, in the appendix to MB XIV 847-849.

a kind of publicity almost, relating to the pedagogy of reason, religion and loving kindness. Don Bosco dedicated the final pages of his *Preventive System* to 'A word on punishments'. But punishments were already dealt with in the previous pages where it was pointed out that the Preventive System

...excludes all violent punishments and tries to do without even the slightest chastisement.

Being forewarned, the pupil does not lose courage on account of the faults he has committed... nor does he resent the correction he receives or the punishment threatened or inflicted, because it is always accompanied by a friendly preventive warning which appeals to his reason and generally enlists his accord, so that he sees the necessity of the chastisement and almost desires it.

The repressive system instead, arouses bitter recollections for punishments received, even though they were deserved, because the manner in which they were given was hateful.¹⁸

Don Bosco is more moderate especially when he had to write for the public than when he deals with 'practical' education particularly at the Oratory in Valdocco. No wonder then, that he holds on to a very succinctly expressed thesis: "Never have recourse to punishments if possible".¹⁹

In a Good Night given during the summer of 1884, in a fragment from the Chronicle already quoted, Don Bosco asked for 'much trust', rather than, 'fear' and then added:

"I abhor punishments as much as a father in his own family... But..."²⁰

Punishing was not part of Don Bosco's habitual ordinary way of behaving.²¹ In a letter he wrote the Salesians dated May 10, 1884, we see the echoes of a sad question:

Why the replacement little by little of watchful and loving prevention by a system which consists in framing laws? Such laws either have to be sustained through punishment and so create hatred and cause unhappiness, or if they are not enforced cause the superiors to be despised and bring about serious disorders.²²

¹⁸ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p.

¹⁹ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p.

²⁰ D. Ruffino, *Libro di esperienza* 1864, p. 67. Fr Lemoyne reports a text which is longer which he says he got from Fr Bonetti's diary (MB VII 503); a brief section is quoted in Chap. 15.

²¹ 'Due lettere datate da Roma...', in P. Braido (Ed.), *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 385.

²² 'Due lettere datate da Roma...', in P. Braido (Ed.), *Don Bosco educatore...*, p. 385.

When punishment is inevitable, it should not be inflicted until all other means have been exhausted and there is some hope for the party punished to get some benefit out of it.²³

It is Don Bosco's steadfast and repeatedly mentioned position never to inflict violent and physical punishments.

Striking the boys in any way, obliging anyone to be on their knees and in a painful position, pulling their ears and other similar punishments must be absolutely avoided. They are forbidden by civil law, greatly irritate the young and degrade the educator.²⁴

"Neither the whip nor blows and other violent punishments, nor any punishment harmful to one's health; normally no assignments for detention, no reflection rooms which, at times, were given due consideration".²⁵

Don Bosco first of all leans towards natural and psychological punishments inspired by reasonableness and goodness. Depriving a boy of a kindly sign is a punishment which gives courage and never humiliates.

With the young, punishment is whatever is meant as a punishment. It has been noticed that in the case of some boys a reproachful look is more effective than a slap in the face would be. Praise of work well done and blame in the case of carelessness are already a reward or punishment.²⁶

Finally, so that reasonableness and moderation be used in commonly inflicted punishments,²⁷ Don Bosco did not want young teachers and assistants to inflict them on the boys. We have already seen this mentioned in the Good Night given on March 21, 1865:

To make you feel good, I absolutely forbid the assistants from inflicting punishments, so that no one will ever complain.²⁸

In the area of punishments, the one who holds the main responsibility is the rector, even though the execution is entrusted to the vice rector, the prefect, because

²³ J.M. PELLEZZO, *Dei castighi da infligersi....*, pp. 290-294.

²⁴ The article is added to the text of the *Preventive System* published in the *Rules for the Houses*, p. 12 OE XXIX 108.

²⁵ Also the letter *Dei castighi da infligersi....*, PELLEZZO, pp. 304-306.

²⁶ *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), Una parola sui castighi, aart. 1 and 2, p. 64, OE XXVIII 442.

²⁷ In the circular *Dei castighi....*, mirrors the practice followed at the Oratory in Valdocco and in other houses; some simple examples: J. M. PELLEZZO, *Dei castighi....*, p. 304.

²⁸ G.B. LEMOYNE, *Cronaca* 1864ff,

reason should not destroy fatherliness and the particular position held by the rector as the ordinary confessor of the Salesian House.²⁹

6. Dismissal and expulsion

The frequent expulsion of boys should be seen within the context of Don Bosco's thinking and his times. Ideas of equal opportunity and the right to study did not yet exist. Only those who had finance could enhance their social and cultural status.

It was considered a privilege to study for a degree or learn a professional skill in a well-organised institution. It appeared evident that whoever did not know how to appreciate either study or skills would be obliged to go back to his local area. It was not a question of going back to a place of perdition. It was only a question of going back to one's family and picking up again the 'Pondus diei et aestus', the weight of the day's work and heat', which he had left and which would have realistically re-educated him after his failed experience at school.

This attitude, some people thought, ran the risk of someone having a vocation forced on him. But this is the answer given by Don Bosco:

The choice of a state of life here in our own house is entirely free and no one is ever admitted to the clerical habit if he doesn't possess all that is required of him. Anyone who has these requirements has a true sign that he has a vocation. Anyhow, for anyone not called to this state of life, given the terrible times in which we live, I think it would be better if he got back to working his own land.³⁰

Don Bosco's nephew, Louis, fell into this category, even though he was undecided about what choice to make.

Don Bosco thought the same way about another youngster whose parents were farmers. "This has to be kept in mind", Don Bosco added, "because if he were a young man from well-to-do circumstances, it would not be proper to have him sent back to work the land. But in regard to a young man who has been taken from that type of work and sent to study to find out if the Lord was calling him to the ecclesiastical state, if he is not so called, we would do him no wrong and it would be better for him to be sent back to work his own land".

Therefore, a dismissal or an expulsion might not only seem reasonable but also inevitable, particularly at Valdocco and especially for the academic students section made up mostly of young men who aspired to an ecclesiastical vocation. Whoever did

²⁹ See MB X, 1094-1095, norms from Don Bosco collected by Lemoyne; other norms from the 'conferences' for prefects; MB 1121; cf. also Prellezzo, *Dei Castighi...*, p. 308.

³⁰ Ruffino, *Cronaca* 1861 1862 1863, pp. 93-95.

not show the signs of a vocation was either sent to another school or was sent home. Besides, academic students and working boys would also have remembered that the house which welcomed them and educated them relied on the generosity of benefactors.³¹

Leaving aside the fact of not seeing the signs of a vocation as reason for dismissal, an expulsion or dismissal was compulsory when all the other resources of the system had been exhausted. The Preventive System was never declared to be an absolutely infallible system. The ones who were expelled were mostly those who were guilty of the three evils which had to be avoided at all cost, and pointed out in the *Rules for the Houses*. More so the case of recidivists. The three evils to be absolutely avoided were: 1. Blasphemy and calling on God's holy name in vain 2. Dishonesty, taken to mean any scandal related to the sixth commandment 3. Theft. Additional evils were 'formal and systematic disobedience' and 'rebellion'.

In a long Good Night given on February 13, 1865, Don Bosco first denounced thefts, lack of discipline, and immoral acts, then openly communicated the decision he had arrived at:

I have therefore made a decision and this is to get rid of those responsible for these scandals. Don Bosco is the most easy-going man on earth; you may destroy and break anything, you may scamper around and he will always know how to show compassion for you. But do not start ruining souls, because then Don Bosco becomes inexorable.³²

This is that type of environment Father Julius Barberis referred to in one of his diary entries as he keenly took notice of a certain situation at Valdocco.

There is a rule in our houses, and that is to absolutely not tolerate young men amongst us who are rat-bags or who in any way may cause scandal for their companions. One bad conversation, even the smallest immoral act would be enough to have the guilty person expelled from our house. But no one may be expelled without informing Don Bosco about it.³³

The intransigence of the chronicler was certainly connected with the students who aspired to the ecclesiastical state, and the pre-novices.

However this intransigence for most of the boys was clearly contradicted by Don Bosco in his *Confidential Memo for Rectors* which is a text of great normative value for them.

³¹ *Regolamento per le case...*, p. part II, Chap XVI, p. 89, OE XXIX 185.

³² G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff pp. 93-94. He gives a lengthy justification for the invitation to the boys listening to "Denounce those responsible for disorder and sin" (Ibid pp. 96-97).

³³ G. Barberis, *Cronichetta*, quad. 3., p. 19.

Whenever you come to discover some serious fault, summon the guilty party or suspected party into your office and, in the most charitable manner make sure to have him acknowledge his fault and the harm that he has done in committing it; then correct him and invite him to fix up whatever pertains to his conscience. By following this procedure and by continuing kindly assistance to the pupil we have obtained marvellous results and some behavioural changes which seemed impossible.³⁴

The rules are similar for the weekend Oratory, which still had a flexible structure.³⁵

“Even young rat-bags may be accepted, provided no scandal is given and they show willingness to keep on improving their conduct”.³⁶

Nevertheless, in the considerable amount of documentation we have on Don Bosco's life, there is countless information about cases where forgiveness was granted to individuals who were negligent in discipline or even scandalous, but ready to sincerely acknowledge their error.

7. Rewards

Don Bosco's doctrine and practice always included the traditional pedagogy of reward, however simple and familiar. He did this through an awards celebration. Don Bosco grew up in schools inspired by the Jesuits and so he could not but have included the psychological and moral factor of 'emulation' in his system.

The most longed-for award for any young man had to be the one connected with the fact that a good deed had been done and the inner satisfaction it produced, especially when there was also the warm and affectionate recognition of the educator added to it. For many years Don Bosco established the handing out of the awards for good conduct on an annual basis. This award was given to the best boys, selected by a free and democratic nomination process. The award ceremony ordinarily took place before the feast of St Francis de Sales, on June 29.

Don Bosco explained the award selection procedure to the boys at a Good Night given on January 19, 1865.

There is a tradition in our house and I say this for the newcomers. On the feast of St Francis, awards are given out and the boys themselves are the ones who

³⁴ F. Motto, *I «Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori»...*, pp. 156-157.

³⁵ *Regolamento dell'Oratorio....per gli esterni*, part II, Chap II *Condizioni d'accettazione*, art. 6 p. 30, OE XXIX 60.

³⁶ *Regolamento dell'Oratorio....per gli esterni*, part II, Chap II, art. 7, p. 30, OE XXIX 60.

give these awards to the best of their companions. The academic students give the awards to the best academic students and the working boys to the best working boys. This is the way it is done. Every young man draws up a list of ten names of the young men he considers the most diligent, the most studious, the most devout among those he knows, no matter what dormitory or class they belong to; he signs the list and hands it over to his teacher. The teacher hands it over to me and I go through all of the lists and the one who has received the majority of votes gets the award on the feast of St Francis de Sales. Even the seminarians may draw up a list of ten youngsters. The superiors will draw up their own lists. Even I would do mine, but mine only counts for one vote.³⁷

The solemn award ceremony for achievement in the school and studies took place towards the end of the scholastic year, during the middle of August or in the first days of September. The ceremony took on a particular solemnity. There were songs, recitals, performances of choice instrumental music, talks suited for the occasion, and the presence of important persons.³⁸

Award ceremonies for working boys are recorded for the Oratory in Valdocco on May 30, 1872, July 2, 1876, and August 15, 1878.³⁹

Also other awards, special awards but much simpler ones, were handed out on a weekly or monthly basis. Much appreciated was the privilege of sitting at the dinner table with Don Bosco and the superiors on Sundays, for those who, in every class, had distinguished themselves by their conduct.⁴⁰

It was a constant concern of Don Bosco's that award and praise should not be exclusively given for the natural or innate talents of the pupils, without considering their goodwill and diligence.⁴¹

³⁷ G.B. Lemoyne, *Cronaca* 1864ff, p. 78-79.

³⁸ Cf. MB III 357-358, 428; V 279-280; X 187, 373, 1230. In the 'conference' on Sept. 1, 1872, we see: "The decision was made to hold the award ceremony in the courtyard of the younger students, with gas equipment, music etc". (Prellezco, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 171); there is a note in the minutes of the meeting on Aug. 6, 1881 (*ibid.*, p. 274) and July 31, 1882.

³⁹ J. M. Prellezco, *Valdocco nell'Ottocento...*, p. 45, 70. "The decision was made to hold the award ceremony for working boys on the day of Corpus Christi in their courtyard, after vespers, with vocal and instrumental music". (*ibid.*, p. 168).

⁴⁰ Cf. MB III 440-441; VI 437; XI 111. For 1876 in his diary, Fr Lazzero notes: "Generally during the month of St Joseph, those who stood out in every class dined with Don Bosco. On the feast itself the working boys would begin. This however was 'ad libitum superioris'". (J. M. Prellezco, *Valdocco...*, p. 109)

⁴¹ *Regolamento per le case...*, part II, Chap VI, art. 22. p. 73, OE XXIX 169.

Don Bosco, as we have already seen in the *Rules for the Houses*, addresses the boys frankly: "A proud student is a stupid ignoramus", and he insistently recommends that teachers avoid giving in to awarding innate talents or things that they simply like seeing in a boy.

Never praise any young man in a special manner. Praises ruin the best natural gifts. One boy may sing well, another may perform on the stage with self-assurance...and he is immediately praised, courted and considered special... Be sure not to praise them for their natural looks. The better students of the school become proud if they are overly praised, while certain less-talented individuals may get discouraged and since they cannot achieve like the others they hate the teacher, saying that he really does not care much for them. These ones are in need of some recognition.⁴²

⁴² MB XIV 847.

Chapter 18

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Don Bosco spoke and wrote about his projects on behalf of youth and his pedagogical approach to the most diverse range of people: collaborators, cooperators, benefactors; popes, cardinals, bishops and priests; authorities, politicians, financiers, civil servants, managers of state and local corporations... He also looked at various possibilities for applying the Preventive System in education: in prisons, with Urban Rattazzi, Minister for Justice in 1854; in recovery institutions, with the Italian Minister for the Interior in 1878; in the classroom, with Francis Bodrato, school teacher in 1864; in private educational institutions and families via the Salesian Bulletin.

However what he gave us, the writings he left us, the experience he handed down to us, refers more explicitly to the very many institutions that he himself founded, ran or led.

We can divide them into two main categories:

1. Institutions of an open nature such as recreation parks, daily and weekend oratories, youth centres, Sunday and Night schools, other schools of various levels and degrees, popular and youth press, missionary residences.
2. Comprehensive (in the sense of offering overall care) institutions such as homes, hostels for young workers or students, technical schools for the technical and professional training of youth, boarding schools for students and ecclesiastical seminaries.

All these categories of institutions with the exception of the missions which began in January 1880, are all listed and officially codified in the Salesian Constitutions, officially approved in April 1874, and translated into Italian in 1875.¹

1. The aim of the Salesian society is the Christian perfection of its members, the performance of any work of spiritual and corporal charity towards the young, especially the poor and also the education of the young clergy...

¹ Cf. *Regulae seu Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii juxta Approbatioanis decretum die 3 aprilis 1874*. Augustae Taurinorum, ex officina Asceterii Salesiani An. MDCCCLXXIV, pp. 6-7, OE XXV 416-417.

3. The first exercise of charity will be that of gathering together poor and abandoned boys to instruct them in the holy Catholic religion, particularly on feast days.
4. Since young people are often so totally abandoned that any care exercised on their behalf would prove useless if they were not given shelter, as far as possible houses will be opened in which lodging, food and clothing will be provided for them with the means which Divine Providence provides; and while they are instructed in the truths of the Catholic faith, they will also be introduced to learning some art or craft.
5. Since the dangers our youth encounter are many and serious, whenever they aspire to enter the ecclesiastical state this Society of ours will do its very best to foster the piety of the ones who show special aptitude for study and are commendable for their good morals. When it is a question of accepting youngsters for studies, let the poorest boys be accepted by preference, precisely because they would not be able to pursue their studies elsewhere....
6. Support for the Catholic religion is a need felt mostly among Christian people, particularly in small towns. Therefore Salesian members will do their best to zealously conduct retreats, strengthen and direct towards piety those who, moved by the desire to change their lives, might want to go and listen to them.
7. Likewise, they will do their best to spread good books among the people using all the means which Christian charity inspires. Finally, through word and writing they will try to stem the increase in godlessness and heresy which in so many ways makes inroads among uneducated and ignorant people.²

The reference to the Salesian institutions is essential to understand the evolution and the articulated make-up of the Preventive System, at least in its three binding elements:

- 1) The Preventive System is gradually implemented through structures which Don Bosco does not create *ex novo*; they are typical of the Restoration, with many of them having roots way back in the period of the Counter-reformation and the *ancien régime*. However each of Don Bosco's institutions is given a new

² *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales secondo il decreto di approvazione del 3 aprile 1874*. Turin, Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1875, pp. 3-5, OE XXVII 53-55.

look of its own by the Preventive System which further delineates its fundamental features.

- 2) The 'system', as it becomes incarnate in the various institutions is in turn conditioned by them, taking on different features which help it to better articulate itself. For instance, the system as we find it in an oratory and a boarding institution or boarding school is not identical.
- 3) The various Salesian institutions are generally geared to young people of varying social, cultural, religious and moral levels, and aim at responding to different pressing needs or needs which have different social, scholastic, professional, catechetical and formation emphases. These emphases in turn, have an impact on educational methods and content. We cannot, therefore, ignore the many aspects that such a pedagogy may assume.

A partial institutional and pedagogical typology is also part of Don Bosco's thinking as evidenced by one of his most important addresses during the 1880s. In that address he drew up, at least in sketchy form, an overall picture of his social initiatives on behalf of the young.

There are festive oratories with parks or places for respectable recreation. Young people are drawn to these places if properly approached and entertained with properly supervised games and activities; at the proper time and place the youths are instructed in Christian doctrine in these oratories; they are directed to and assisted in the practice of their religious duties. There are Night schools for poor young workers who are busy the whole day in their workplace and cannot acquire the necessary instruction otherwise. There are some day schools also which offer free tuition. There are Sunday catechism classes and even daily catechism classes, held either in churches or in private homes.

There are also the so-called sponsorship arrangements where we find employment for young people with upright employers and see that they run no risk at all as far as their religion and their morals are concerned. But these at times are not enough... these youngsters need a home, a roof; a shelter is needed for the ones who are derelict, hence the necessity of having homes for the most needy youngsters. Therein these youngsters are provided with everything they need for life; some are placed in workshops and trained to pick up a skill so that one day they can earn an honest piece of bread. Some others, gifted by God with a particular talent, are directed toward studies and often some of them embrace a civil career and by being employed in this or that office help their families and society. Some other youths instead enter an

ecclesiastical career and become apostles of religion and civilisation, not only among us but also among barbarian nations.³

We may justifiably think of a single Preventive System, but this system is implemented through a variety of approaches or preventive methods.⁴

1. The oratory

The first institution, chronologically speaking and also in terms of importance, is the festive (weekend, feast days) and daily oratory.

The oratory is the most popular, flexible and personalised expression of the religious, social and educational activity carried out by Don Bosco. The Preventive System was born, at least in its original elements, out of the oratory. And the system as implemented at the oratory contains the features which distinguish it from the one implemented in boarding schools and similar institutions. However the Preventive System does retain its essential, common dimensions in any setting.⁵

The oratory is the off-shoot of the immediate pressing needs naturally connected with additional elements such as catechesis, religious practices, free time, cultural activities.⁶

Later on, there would be additional rules drawn from experience and from statutes for similar undertakings in Lombardy and Piedmont and then applied to the oratory. But the stamp Don Bosco gave it is strongly evident. The oratory was fashioned after an initial and clever intuition which does not exclude an eclectic synthesis of

³ Conference to Cooperators in Genoa, March 30, 1882, BS 6 (1882) no. 4, April, p. 71.

⁴ At least four different methodological versions can be identified already in the social and educational experiences in the first twenty or so years in Turin: cf. P. Braido, *Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco alle origini...*, RSS 14 (1995) 310-312.

⁵ Don Bosco has left us fundamental writings of an historical and ideological nature on the oratory; there is also literature of notable variety. From Don Bosco we have in particular: *Cenno storico dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* (1854) and *Cenni storici intorno all'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* (1862); in part *La forza della buona educazione* (1855), *Severino ossia avventure di un giovane alpigiano* (1868), *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli esterni*. Worthy of attention are certain studies: P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol I pp. 103-109; idem, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 71-90, 101-108, 159-174; G. Chiosso, *L'Oratorio di don Bosco e il rinnovamento educativo nel Piemonte carloalbertino*, in P. Braido (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella Chiesa...*, pp. 83-116; idem, *Don Bosco e l'oratorio (1841-1855)*, in M. Midali (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia...*, pp. 297-313.

⁶ "This Congregation in 1841 was nothing but a Catechism class, a weekend recreation park which in 1846 [1847] added a Home for poor working boys, making a private institute a numerous family" (Report to the Holy See, March 1879, E III 462)

other many additional elements. It was only partially defined by the first article of the Regulations: "(The Oratory) is intended to entertain the young on weekends with pleasant and respectable recreation, after having attended the sacred services in church".⁷

The oratories begun by Father Cocchi and Don Bosco were developed precisely at the intersection of two pressing needs: pastoral (the conversion of the people brought about within the people themselves by the presence of a priest) and popular educational (helping young people left to their own devices, abandoned, without anyone to guide them and therefore potentially at risk and risky and helping them in themselves and for society).⁸

The pastoral, catechetical and recreational aspects of the oratory are integrated by the concern to provide young people with a general, moral and cultural formation. And this was to be achieved by means of associations, Sunday schools, day and evening schools, musical activities, theatre, gymnastics and sports and also by means of outings.⁹

There are two other important intuitions which may be considered as already acquired by Don Bosco by the time the oratory was finally established at Valdocco. The first has to do with the flexible structure he wanted to give the oratory: it is not to be parochial (which was the way Fr Cocchi still envisaged his oratory) and not even inter-parochial but something in between, namely something suited to Church, urban society and working class youth. The second was related to the dynamic intertwining of religious formation and human development, catechism and education.¹⁰

What stands out, first of all, is the religious element.

(The Oratory is) a house for Sunday gatherings where everyone would have the opportunity to satisfy his religious duties, receive instruction at the proper time and be given direction, advice to lead a Christian and upright life.¹¹

⁷ *Regolamento dell'Oratorio...per gli esterni*, part I, [Introduzione] *Scopo di quest'opera*, p. 3, OE XXIX 33.

⁸ G. Chiosso, *Don Bosco e l'oratorio...*, in M. Midali (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia...*, p. 301

⁹ Cf. especially MO (1991) 158-161

¹⁰ G. Chiosso, *Don Bosco e l'oratorio...*, in M. Midali (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia...*, p. 302

¹¹ Circular, Dec. 20, 1851, Em I 39

The (Oratory) Regulations contain this warning: when a young man enters this oratory he should be convinced that this is a religious place where we wish to turn young men into good Christians and upright citizens.¹²

The Regulation concerning the rector summarises the eminently Christian goal of oratorian education. First of all he is “the principal superior and responsible for all that happens at the Oratory”. “He should use every possible means to instil in the hearts of the young the love of God, respect for sacred things, frequent reception of the sacraments, filial devotion to Mary Most Holy and all that constitutes true piety”.¹³ Hence the Oratory is a school where one may find religious instruction and practices besides inspiration to live a Christian life.

One of the few conditions required for acceptance into the oratory was that “the young person be occupied in some art or craft, because idleness and not doing anything, are the source of all vice and make religious instruction useless no matter whether it be in the form of Sunday sermons, morning or afternoon sermons, or catechesis in classes or all together”.¹⁴

As for ‘religious practices’, according to the accounts given of the oratory at its beginnings there is much insistence on giving the young the opportunity to approach the sacraments of Confession and Communion.¹⁵ When the first chapel at the oratory was blessed on December 8, 1844, Don Bosco wanted the chapel to be a sure place where the young could fulfil their duties in church.¹⁶ Even during the critical times of the ‘wandering oratory’, Don Bosco’s first concern was to find a way for the young to fulfil their religious duties: catechism, hymn singing, Mass and Vespers and religious instruction.¹⁷

The oratory, besides all of the above, was an open structure, extremely flexible as to time and the kind of young people who attended it. The oratory had no timetable; it was not a school bound to fixed periods. All workers and students had their days off and free time which might be easily wasted in idleness and dissipation, especially at weekends.

The oratory was called upon to fill the gaps when the young were not working and needed to be kept busy. It was called upon to fill the life of the young with new possibilities, joy, human and heavenly values, formation and recreation, instruction and edifying practices. There was a steadfast concern not to allow anything which might interrupt the continuity of oratorian educational activity, so much so that oratorian

¹² *Regolamento dell’Oratorio...per gli esterni*, part II, Chap II, art. 6, p. 30, OE XXIX 60.

¹³ *Regolamento dell’Oratorio...per gli esterni*, part I, Chap I. art. 1 and 7, p. 5 and 6, OE XXIX 35 and 36.

¹⁴ *Regolamento dell’Oratorio...per gli esterni*, part II, Chap II, art. 5, p. 30, OE XXIX 60

¹⁵ Cf. for example MO (1991) 123-124, *L’Oratorio nel 1842*.

¹⁶ MO (1991) 133.

¹⁷ MO (1991) 134-146.

activity went on, in one way or another, the whole week long. This was Don Bosco's praxis and theory:

The entire Sunday was dedicated to taking care of my youngsters. During the week I used to call on them at their work, in their workshops, in their factories... This proved to be of great comfort to the youngsters since they were seeing a friend who was concerned about them. This also pleased employers who willingly kept youngsters on who were assisted during the entire week and even more on weekends when they were more exposed to dangers.

Every Saturday I used to visit the prisons with my pockets full of either tobacco or fruit, sometimes small loaves of bread and always with the objective of taking care of the youngsters who had had the misfortune to end up in prison, with a view to helping them, making them my friends and once they were so moved of inviting them to the Oratory as soon as they had the chance to get out of that place of punishment.¹⁸

Furthermore, the oratory was for everyone, namely for anyone who wanted to use his free time and wanted to use it constructively. If there was a preference it was for those most in need both materially and spiritually.

However, those who are poor, the most abandoned ones and the most ignorant, these are preferably accepted and taken care of because they have the greatest need to be helped so that they may keep on the way to eternal salvation.¹⁹

In fact, the oratory's first objective was that of holding on to the young most abandoned and at risk, as Don Bosco says in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*.²⁰ The deliberations of the last two General Chapters presided by Don Bosco, contain the following decisions:

To achieve the main goal of the Salesian Society more effectively, which is that of gathering together poor and abandoned youths particularly at weekends, it would be most beneficial to have a recreation park, an oratory in cities and towns where there is a Salesian House, in order to take care of outside youngsters who need religious instruction and are exposed to the risk of perversion.²¹

¹⁸ MO(1991) 125

¹⁹ *Regolamento dell'Oratorio...per gli esterni*, part II, Cap II, art. 2, p. 29, OE XXIX 59.

²⁰ MO(1991) 133.

²¹ *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto capitolo generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuti in Valsalice nel settembre 1883-86*. S. Benigno Canavese, Salesian Press 1887. p. 22, OE XXXVI 274. They are similar expressions to the ones found in the circular of Dec. 20, 1851: "those youth who through parental neglect or bad companions, or lack of means are exposed to constant danger of corruption", "lazy and ill-advised youth" (Em 1139)..

Differently from homes and boarding schools the oratory on principle excluded any systematic procedure of accepting, classifying, admitting or dismissing youngsters, except in very rare cases which called for expulsion. The oratory stands out as the most dynamic and unpredictable of the youth gatherings planned and implemented by Don Bosco.

The binding elements of the oratory were essentially the interest, attention, adequacy which it was in a position to express regarding religious awareness, moral commitment, culture, free participation, and the solidarity of friendship and shared responsibility, a climate of freedom, love and joy.

More than any other institution, the oratory aimed at being a centre of youthful vitality and liveliness, the full expression of the principle of cheerfulness, as Don Bosco describes it with candid simplicity in the circular letter of December 20, 1851:

Various little games were introduced which would help develop the physical strength of the boys and provide respectable recreation for their spirit. This is how we tried to make their time with us both useful and delightful.²²

If games and joy, according to Don Bosco, make up the essential atmosphere and setting for all his educational institutions, they must be like this in even more generous measure for the weekend oratory. The reason is that the oratory is a 'free' educational institution where compulsion and imposition of rules are substituted by the captivating aura of a festive environment, and charity.

The above-mentioned deliberations of the General Chapters insisted on the following:

Especially recommended are the various kinds of games and amusements suited to the age of the youngsters and to customs of their own towns, for this is one of the most effective means to attract youths to the oratory. Quite useful to promote the frequent attendance at festive oratories are the distribution of prizes at given times, for instance such prizes as books, devotional objects, clothing.. The same can be said for raffles, outings, performance of easy to understand and morally sound plays, music classes, little parties etc.²³

Games and festivity were the privileged moments for creating familiarity, gregariousness, friendship and facilitating the sharing of human and religious values.²⁴

But besides piety and joy, the irreplaceable bond for the oratory more than any other is the bond of charity. Charity is first of all undoubtedly love supported by strong

²² Em I 139

²³ *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto capitolo generale...*, art. 7 and 8, p. 24 OE XXXVI 276.

²⁴ G. Chiosso, *Don Bosco e l'oratorio...*, in M. Midali (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia...*, p. 301

moral, religious and social motivations. However charity had also to be translated into human, tangible loving kindness. This is the way charity makes itself evident and becomes a human way of attracting and winning over the young.

The smooth running of the festive oratory depends, after all and above all on a true spirit of sacrifice, a great amount of patience, charity and benevolence towards all. This is the way the boys will be able to have and keep an ever dear memory of the Oratory and will attend it also when they are grown-up.²⁵

“The rector”, so the Regulations say “should... constantly show himself a friend, companion and brother to all”.²⁶

Besides, “Every catechist should be cheerful and show the importance of what he teaches. When he corrects or warns he should always use encouraging words and never humiliating ones. He should praise those who deserve to be praised and be slow to blame anyone”.²⁷

And finally, everyone is reminded of the following:

Mutual charity and patience in bearing with the defects of others, the championing of the good name of the Oratory and those employed there, and encouragement to everyone to be kind and to trust the rector. These are the things which are warmly recommended to all. Without them we will never be able to keep order, promote the glory of God and the well-being of souls.²⁸

Finally the oratory was the first place Don Bosco experienced real solidarity from many of his collaborators: ecclesiastics, lay people, young and adult, aristocrats, professional people, middle-class people.²⁹ Don Bosco writes with gratitude of his collaborators, first of all in his *Historical Outline 1854*³⁰ and the *Historical Outlines*³¹ 1862, and finally with greater insistence and intentionality still, in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* when he hinted that he had the idea of forming the Cooperators Association.³²

²⁵ *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto capitolo generale...*, p. 24, OE XXXVI 276.

²⁶ *Regolamento dell'Oratorio...per gli esterni*, part I, part I, Chap 1, art. 2, p. 5, OE XXIX 35.

²⁷ *Regolamento dell'Oratorio...per gli esterni*, part I, Chap VIII *Dei catechisti*, art. 16-17, p. 18, OE XXIX 48.

²⁸ *Regolamento dell'Oratorio...per gli esterni*, part I, Cahp 1, art. 4, pp. 28-29, OE XXIX 58-59.

²⁹ “Equally important was the recourse (as Fr Cocchi already did in Vanchiglia) to collaboration from young people already well formed and able to be significant pedagogical models for boys accustomed to very different settings, as well as of course helping with catechism and free time”. (G. Chiosso, *Don Bosco e l'oratorio...*, in M. Midali, *Don Bosco nella storia...*, p. 302).

³⁰ *Cenno storico...*, in P. Braido (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella Chiesa...*, p. 36, 41, 52.

³¹ *Cenni storici...*, in P. Braido (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella Chiesa...*, p. 65, 66, 69, 81.

³² MO(1991) 123, 124, 125, 128, 158, 188-189.

2. Home and boarding school (*collegio*)

When it is a case of the more comprehensive institutions such as boarding schools and homes, the real measure of Don Bosco's creativity should not be sought in their structures as such.³³ In fact boarding institutions, whether they be a home for abandoned youths or a boarding school for academic students or young apprentices, artisans or a minor seminary, strongly limit the application of some of the most original and dynamic elements of Don Bosco's system of education.

These elements, instead, appear to be more obviously seen in the oratory and in any other open institution: spontaneous access, attendance, fewer disciplinary measures and regimentation, absence of financial matters to be dealt with, contact with the family and the outside world, evaluation of what was learned in daily lived experience, the non-existent problem of 'holidays'.³⁴

On the other hand the boarding institution seems to allow for a more rigorous application of some protective and disciplinary aspects of the Preventive System. Don Bosco in fact developed the more mature aspects of the Preventive System in reference to the home and the boarding school.

Vice versa the type of boarding schools he set up are softened by the features and style proper to the Preventive System. He injected something new into already well-established structures and traditions. Given the craze for turning to boarding schools at the time, Don Bosco's *collegio* gave a new historical twist to them, but also a new Preventive System came about along with a new type of (boarding) school.³⁵

The human, cultural, social qualities of the boys who frequented them necessarily affected the shape of Don Bosco's boarding school-boarding house. In many instances they brought a certain simplicity and poverty. It is this that made their living together less formal, more elementary and therefore more ready to grasp the features of a 'pedagogy of the poor', or 'poor pedagogy'. These traits are the sincerity of friendships,

³³ Don Bosco wrote important texts on young people educated as boarders: the Lives of Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, Francis Besucco, who mirror a kind of boarding setup that is really a seminary for ecclesiastical vocations. The Oratory as a home for students and working boys – see the *Cenno storico* and *Cenni storici* (P. Braido Ed., *Don Bosco nella Chiesa...*, pp. 53-59 and 74-81). The boarding school plays an important role in *Valentino o la vocazione impedita* (1886) (OE XVII 179-242). The boarding house experience is found in the *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù 1877*. As a codification of long experience with this institution, see the *Regolamento per le case...*, 1877, OE XXIX 111-194.

³⁴ On the boarding school and 'collegialisation' see P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol I, pp. 121-127; idem, *Don Bosco nella storia economica...*, pp. 123-157; (*Collegi e ospizi in Piemonte e in Liguria 1860-1870*), 175-199 (*Giovani e adulti convittori a Valdocco 1847-1870*), 289-294 (*La popolazione giovanile degli altri collegi*).

³⁵ Apparently paradoxical,(but only apparently), read O. del Donno, *Don Bosco, il demolitore dei collegi, l'antipedagoga di convinzione, l'educatore di vocazione*. Bologna, N.U. Gallo 1965, 389 p.

trust placed in the teachers, the experience of community life like at home in the family, seasoned by loving kindness, evangelical openness to the gifts of grace, appreciation for study and profession, fascination for games and activities, theatre and the like, which were generally not accessible to the family environment the youngsters had come from.

For the vast majority of youngsters, life at boarding school was not something taken for granted, a necessity created by family circumstances or by social status but good fortune, an unexpected gift, an unforeseen and stupendous opportunity for social and cultural growth, the starting point of a new course towards the future.

Most of the best requirements of the system found in the boarding school the best locus for their implementation, above all the fundamental requirement of prevention in its twofold aspect: protective-preparatory and positive-constructive. It is precisely the concern for prevention which gives origin to the boarding school-boarding house:

Among the young who attend the city oratory are some who are in such a situation that all the spiritual means provided for them would be useless were their temporal needs not responded to.³⁶

When I came to realise that for many boys, any work undertaken on their behalf would turn out to be useless if I were not to give them shelter, I took great pains to rent more and more rooms in a hurry, even though the cost was extremely high.³⁷

Later on for reasons of pedagogical prevention Don Bosco adopted the rigid approach of the boarding school both for the working boys and the academic students, introducing workshops and classes to the Oratory premises.

Since we had no workshops, our pupils used to go to work and do their schooling in Turin, with great detriment to morality due to the fact that the companions they met along the way, the language they heard and what they saw made what we were doing for them and what we said to them at the Oratory useless.³⁸

What was happening to the working boys, lamentably was happening also to the academic students. For this reason, for the classes they had been divided

³⁶ *Piano di regolamento per la casa annessa all'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales in Valdocco. Scopo di questa*, a manuscript from 1852 kept in the Salesian Central Archives in Rome. Don Bosco wrote about the question in the *Cenni storici*: "Amongst the young people who frequent these oratories there are some who are so poor and abandoned that any concern for them was almost useless unless there was a place to live, food, clothing. We provided this with the home attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales". (*Cenni storici...*, in P. Braido (Ed), *Don Bosco nella Chiesa...*, pp. 74-75.).

³⁷ MO (1991) 182

³⁸ MO (1991) 187

into, the more advanced in studies had to be sent to Professor Joseph Bonzanino; Rhetoric students to Professor Matthew Picco. These were excellent schools, but going to and coming from school was full of dangers. In 1856, the school and the workshops were definitively established at the Oratory.³⁹

Clearly, a pedagogy of preservation and ‘immunisation’ seems to be the ideal for a moral educational structure without breaking its continuity. Don Bosco prefers to build educational structure on virgin territory rather than on land which needs preliminary restoration and clearing. He does not reject the second hypothesis but he does not do anything to put it into practice.

This persuasion returned frequently especially during Don Bosco’s final years, in talks given to Cooperators and benefactors. When he was in Marseilles, he spoke with particular concern about the country girls going to the city to earn their living and becoming exposed to so many dangers of perversion. On the one hand the lack of education and religious instruction and on the other the presence of scandal, corruption, malice.. cause huge disasters among them. Now they are sheltered in the house at St Cyr where they “till the land and receive intellectual, religious and moral instruction”.⁴⁰

In the short novel-like *Life of Valentino*, Don Bosco intentionally demonstrates the educational effectiveness of a Catholic boarding school where the fact of being set apart, having perfect organisation and assistance all with the function of preserving and protecting the young, obtain quick and convincing educational results.

Set apart from his mates, removed from bad reading, the frequent mixing with his classmates, the class competitions, music, recitals, some theatrical performances in a small theatre. all these things had him soon forget the wild sort of life he had been living for almost a year. And the recollection of his mother’s advice, “Avoid idleness and bad companions” would often come back to him. And so it was with ease that he picked up the old habit of keeping the practices of piety again.⁴¹

Several patterns can be seen from the above: a clear-cut separation from the outside world,⁴² strict admissions process,⁴³ good control processes, and awareness of the rules.⁴⁴

³⁹ MO(1991) 187-188.

⁴⁰ Conference in Marseilles, March 29, 1883, BS 7 (1883) no. 5, May, p. 79

⁴¹ G. Bosco, *Valentino...*, pp. 21-22, OE XVII 199-200; cf. The whole of Chap VII *Nuovo Collegio, Ritorna alla piet *, pp. 19.25, OE XVII 197-03

⁴² Cf. *Regolamento del parlatorio* 1860, MB VI 597-598.

⁴³ Cf. F. Motto, *I «Ricordi confidenziali ai direttori»* p. 155

⁴⁴ A typical case – the gradual limitations given the presence inside the Oratory of faithful who came for the feast of MHC.

The concept of prevention is translated into one of the first boarding school traditions which was later proven wrong by events namely, the rather marked mistrust for schools for day-students and boarding institutions. When Don Bosco was still alive, at a meeting of the Superior Chapter in February 1877 the boarding school at Valsalice came up for debate and as a consequence, the proposal to transform the school into a semi-boarding school where the transportation arrangements would take care of picking up and bringing back the students to and from home.⁴⁵ Don Bosco did not accept the proposal.

The main positive aim of boarding school formation was more effective if there was less compromise in daily contact with the outside world. The history of Don Bosco's boarding schools reveals this twofold phenomenon: "annexed to the Oratory", the main work, a home, room-and-board institution is added which would soon enough become a boarding school for academic students, those who are aspiring to an ecclesiastical career or not, and for working boys. It was structured according to what was demanded by self-sufficient and autonomous formation. Given the increasing number of boarding schools it is the oratory that ends up by being considered as the 'school annex'.

From a pedagogical viewpoint there is no difference between the boarding schools and the homes destined to shelter boys who are orphans and without assistance, either because their parents do not wish to or cannot take care of them, boys without any skill, without instruction and exposed to the danger of a miserable future.

The homes are destined to offer their boarders a complete formation in an equally welcoming setting: instruction, professional skills, discipline for life, moral and religious education.⁴⁶ The *Rules for the Houses* request that two conditions of pedagogical significance be followed for the acceptance of the above-mentioned boarders: they should be known by the educator, as far as possible and they should be ready to consider the home as their family.

We will preferably accept those who attend our festive oratories in our charitable institutions, because it is extremely important for us to know something about the character of the boys before they are definitively accepted in our houses. Every boy accepted in our houses should think of his companions as brothers, and his superiors as the ones who take on the role of their parents.⁴⁷

The educational autonomy which Don Bosco wanted rather than the administrative autonomy, leads him to exclude interference and intrusion from homes

⁴⁵ G. Barberis, Minutes of chapter sittings, quad. 1, fol 32v.

⁴⁶ *Regolamento per le case...*, part II, Chap 1, pp. 59-60, OE XXIX 155-156.

⁴⁷ *Regolamento per le case...*, part II Chap II, art. 5, p. 61, OE XXIX, 157.

and boarding schools which limit the preventive effectiveness of his system. This is the intent of the earlier cited letter in reference to the peculiar nature of the Preventive System and addressed to the president of the Roman *San Michele a Ripa* Home, apparently about to be entrusted to Don Bosco:

Meanwhile it would be best that I explain my views in reference to the essential part of your letter: "the direction of the young and their immediate dependence and surveillance shall be entrusted to us".

Don Bosco's explanation consisted in the exact definition of the respective areas of competence, namely the administrative and the educational areas.⁴⁸

Family spirit is another essential element characterising the kind of boarding school Don Bosco wanted. However, the problem of order, punishments and even expulsions is more keenly felt here than in any other structure. It is the idea of family that shapes all the organisational and disciplinary aspects. The boarding school is 'a home', as we have seen underscored by Caviglia in reference to the educative community.⁴⁹ The very continuity and stability of communal living highlights the positive aspects of formation activities which might find less cooperation in other institutions, things like group activities, stability of friendships, graduated spiritual direction, the cultural and emotional value of festivities, entertainment, theatrical and musical performances, the creation of traditions and a particular lifestyle.

Even Don Bosco's theory and practice regarding holidays, which is somewhat strict, can guarantee the presence of intensely participative communal forms of living, much like the memorable autumn walks we mentioned earlier.

In this regard, Michael Magone's stands out as an exemplar.

During all the time he was with us, only once did he go home on holidays. After that, even at my urging, he never wanted to go home, even though his mother and relatives, whom he loved with great affection, expected him home. He was quite often asked the reason for his attitude but he always shrugged off the question with a laugh. Finally, one day, he explained the mystery to one of his close friends: "I went home only once to spend some days of vacation, but in the future, unless forced to, I will never go back home again".⁵⁰

We need to bear in mind once again that certain restrictions, imposed or advised, deal primarily with some institutions like the academic students' section of the oratory

⁴⁸ Letter to Prince Gabrielli, June 1879, E III 481-482; cf. Also letter to Can. Guiol, Marseilles, Sept. 1879, E III 520.

⁴⁹ A. Caviglia, *Domenico Savio e Don Bosco. Studio*, p. 68.

⁵⁰ G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul gioanetto Magone Michele...*, p. 57, OE XIII 211.

at Valdocco, which was considered a minor seminary for ecclesiastical vocations. The following will explained this more thoroughly.

3. The minor seminary

In 1860 the anticlerical Turin newspaper *La Gazzetta del Popolo* created some polemic about Don Bosco referring to him as a modern-day 'Father Lobriquet..., the director of the nest full of bigots at Valdocco'. It was a clear reference to the oratory as a boarding school primarily directed to caring for ecclesiastical vocations.⁵¹

Don Bosco's minor seminary was not substantially different from other ordinary boarding schools. However, it is certain that the specific orientation it had strongly conditioned the lifestyle of the boarders. On the one hand the minor seminary lifestyle highlights its protective elements. On the other hand it highlights other essential traits, such as the religious atmosphere, sacramental life, family-like setting pursuing a wide range of ideals.

Naturally the stress is placed on all the procedures which aim at guaranteeing a social, moral, almost ascetic environment with additional measures to guarantee the 'immunisation' of the boarders. During the summer of 1884, there was a debate about the disciplinary and vocational crisis at the Oratory. The meeting of the Superior Chapter on June 5, 1884, was dedicated to the topic of morality and fostering vocations at Valdocco. Don Bosco seemed quite rigid: The first and fundamental principle is that of "safeguarding the young". The protection of the young had to begin at the moment of acceptance and continue on right up to their expulsion. "Broken bones should be placed by the door." "There must be severity in expelling the bad boys". "During the formation period discipline and surveillance are needed so that no corner of the house may be a hideaway. There must also be an appropriate catechesis on Sunday and morality should be constantly protected". Don Bosco concluded the meeting by focusing once again on three most immediate means, needed to reach the set goals of morality and vocations:

1. A specific set of rules on accepting boys;
2. The house must be 'purged';

⁵¹ A very useful though indirect source to understand Don Bosco's thinking regarding formation and vocation is by Fr Almerico Guerra, *Le vocazioni allo stato ecclesiastico quanto alla necessità e al modo di aiutarle. Osservazioni pratiche antecedute da alcune avvertenze sulla scarsezza del Clero*. Rome, Civiltà Cattolica Press 1869., pp. IX-334. The author often quotes Don Bosco with admiration. His colleagues called him "true sower of virtue" who "formed very good clerics and excellent priests" (p. 76). Don Bosco, thanking the author for the homage rendered his work. Writes, "The book is written according to my spirit and I would really like it to be used by educators of the young" (Letter June 6, 1869, E II 31).

3. Sharing, distribution, regularisation of offices, the boys and the playgrounds etc.⁵²

This meeting as well as the one held on July 7, 1884 added a few more restrictive measures to the ones already taken and intensified vigilance, decreased the number of contacts of the young with settings considered destructive or dangerous like parishes, oratories, institutions for religious women, state hospitals, and at times even the reduction of the study program to the functional one followed by the apostolic schools in France. This reduction called, for example, for the exclusion of Greek and mathematics in the final high school grades to make it impossible for them to take the high school comprehensive exams.⁵³

But at the same time and with the same insistence, Don Bosco urged the use of so many other very constructive tools proposed by the Preventive System itself: the presence of authoritative and competent teachers, Salesian Confessors specifically assigned to this task and capable of offering discrete and prudent direction regarding vocation,⁵⁴ unity of direction, frequent family-style meetings between the rector or the catechist and the pupils both in public and private,⁵⁵ creating an intense climate of confidence and cordiality, harmony among the educators, loving kindness towards the young: these are all the things Don Bosco considered to have a key importance.

I see the need to deal with one another with much charity and gentleness, and that we should deal in the same way with all the members. Seeing the charity and gentleness that we have towards one another will move the boys to be very much committed to our kind of life...Therefore, I say it and I repeat it: gentleness and charity among ourselves and with them are the most powerful means to educate them correctly and to foster vocations.⁵⁶

Patience, gentleness, a Christian relationship of the teachers with their pupils will win over many vocations among them.⁵⁷

To all that has been mentioned above, there should be added also a courageous pedagogy of the ideals, as we have seen, when we wrote about the primacy of

⁵² G.B. Lemoyne, *Verbali delle riunioni capitolari*, quad. 1 13r-14r.

⁵³ G.B. Lemoyne, *Verbali delle riunioni capitolari*, quad. 1, fol. 13V, 18r-v, 19r.

⁵⁴ G.B. Lemoyne, *Verbali delle riunioni capitolari*, quad. 1, folo. 13v.

⁵⁵ G.B. Lemoyne, *Verbali delle riunioni capitolari*, quad. 1, folo. 17R-v and 18r.

⁵⁶ G. Barberis, *Verbali del secondo capitolo generale (1880)*, *FdB 1857 C10-12.*, quad. 1, folo. 13v.

⁵⁷ F. Motto, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6...*, p. 106. He wrote to Fr Tomatis in Argentina: "Through your exemplary way of life. Charity in speaking, commanding, putting up with others' defects, you will win many for the Congregation" (letter of Aug. 14, 1884, E IV 337).

apostolic charity among the virtues of a Christian young man and of the educative journey taken towards choosing a vocation.

In conclusion, the Preventive System should lead a young man to a mature vocational choice, and among these choices also the choice of the ecclesiastical and religious state.

Don Bosco does not fail to point this out: "Financial and personal sacrifices may need to be made, but if the Preventive System is put into practice we will have an abundance of vocations".⁵⁸

Speaking in general terms during the meeting of the Superior Chapter on September 12, 1884, Don Bosco said:

I recommend something else. Study should be done and effort made to introduce the Preventive System in our houses and practise it. The rector should hold talks on this very important point. Countless are the advantages for the salvation of souls and the glory of God.⁵⁹

4. The school

Don Bosco's theory and praxis on the school do not offer original features other than the originality which comes from the application of the principles of preventive pedagogy.

Perhaps something can be found in things relating to technical or professional training of the working boys and, in some remarks also about religious education. All of his schools demonstrate two fundamental aspects: their ethical religious objective and their social and professional usefulness.

School and culture are considered essentially as means for acquiring moral fibre in a Christian sense, and for the necessary preparation for life: "In order to be able, at the proper time, to earn the bread needed to live."

4.1 Humanities

The *Latin* school - generally the five years of high school as indicated by the Casati Law(1859) - presents no remarkable innovations in structure or teaching methods.⁶⁰ The only remarkable item is the insistence on the usual principle: Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This meant that honouring and loving God are the

⁵⁸ F. Motto, *Memorie*.... p. 106.

⁵⁹ G.B. Lemoyne, *Verbali delle riunioni capitolari*, quad. 1, fol. 33v.

⁶⁰ Cf. G. Proverbio, *La scuola di Don Bosco e l'insegnamento del latino*, in *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare*, ed. F. Traniello. Tuirn, SEI 1987, pp. 143-185; B. Bellerate, *Don Bosco e la scuola umanistica*, in M. Midali (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia*..., pp. 315-329.

beginning, means and end of scholastic formation and the humility of the learner is the indispensable inner disposition for it.

Don Bosco frequently commented on a biblical reference in his Good Nights and included it in the *Rules for the Houses*.

Let him who has no fear of God quit studying, because he works in vain. Knowledge will never enter the wicked soul, neither will it live in a body enslaved to sin.... The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God.⁶¹

The teacher "will do his best to draw moral lessons from sacred and secular classical texts when the subject matter gives occasion to do so, but only with a few words and without much fuss. Once a week, they should have a lesson on Latin texts taken from a Christian author".⁶²

In this light, given the debate over the question of whether to include Latin and Greek classical authors in the classroom Don Bosco could not, in practice, follow the stricter thesis championed in France by Father Gaume against Dupanloup, on account of the iron-clad demands of state-imposed programs, but at the same time he deplored the consequences of a scholastic education which had become pagan because of this.⁶³

As he confidentially told a lawyer from Nice (France), he favoured the introduction of (Christian) Latin authors into his schools. The director-general of Salesian schools at the time, who championed Gaume's viewpoint, made reference to the point:

This education, based entirely on pagan classical authors, saturated with exclusively pagan maxims and sayings dished out in a pagan manner, will absolutely never form true Christians, especially in our days when the school is everything. It saddens me. I have fought all of my life, followed Don Bosco vigorously against this type of perverse education which ruins the minds and the hearts of the young during the best years of their life. It has always been my ideal goal to reform the school and to put it on a truly Christian basis. It is with this in mind that I undertook the printing and editing, revision and correction of secular classic Latin authors mostly used in our schools. I have begun publishing classic Christian Latin authors. I consider these authors, the holiness of their doctrine and their examples rendered more beautiful by their elegant and at the same time robust style, would provide what was missing in the secular authors, which are mostly the product of reason alone. My hope has

⁶¹ *Regolamento per le case...*, p.

⁶² *Regolamento per le case...*, p.

⁶³ On arguments that broke out in France on the thesis of Jean-Joseph Gaume, cf. D. Moulinet, *Les classiques païens dans les collèges catholiques? Le combat de Monseigneur Gaume (1802-1879)*. Paris, Éditions du Cerf 1995, 485 p.

been that they can nullify the destructive effects of pagan materialism and give due honour to what Christianity has also produced in the field of literature.⁶⁴

We should also remark that, from a teaching point of view Don Bosco gives preference to traditional approaches because of their family-oriented traits. Some of Don Bosco's recommendations on how teachers should conduct themselves are well known: esteem for the textbook, faithfully explained; the students should be questioned on it; they should keep in mind the intellectual average of the students in the classroom; they should make use of literary academic entertainment and theatrical performance of a humanistic nature; they should use dialogue in their teaching.

More binding force was given by Don Bosco to some regulatory matters:

4. The most backward students should be the main concern of the teachers; they should be encouraged and never humiliated.
5. The teachers should quiz everyone, without distinction and frequently. Let them show great esteem and affection towards all of their pupils especially towards those who are intellectually slow. Let the teachers avoid the bad habit of some who entirely give up on those students who are negligent and slow to learn.⁶⁵

4.2 *The working boys and their formation*

The technical and professional school for working boys deserves some mention. This type of school is less relevant from a pedagogical and didactic point of view than it is from a social and welfare perspective, since it expanded in an extraordinary way the world over.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ F. Cerrutti, *Le idee di D. Bosco sull'educazione e sull'insegnamento e la mission attuale della scuola. Lettere due*. S. Benigno Canavese Salesian Press and Bookshop 1886, pp. 4-5.

⁶⁵ *Regolamento per le case...*, part I, Chap VI, pp. 33-34, OE XXIX 129-130. The idea was also familiar to Ferrante Aporti. The teacher should reach out to everyone, the sick, the mediocre, the more capable. "A teacher's attitude should not be measured by having helped the learned ones but by helping those of any ability; the expert farmer is not the one who gets results from fertile ground but who can make sterile ground more fertile" (*Elementi di pedagogia...*, in F. Aporti *Scritti pedagogici*, vol II, pp. 87-88.

⁶⁶ Cf. P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale...*, pp. 243-258 (I laboratori di arti e mestieri); L. Pazzaglia, *Apprendistato e istruzione degli artigiani a Valdocco* (1886-1846), in F. Traniello (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare...*, pp. 13-80; D. Veneruso, *Il metodo educativo di san Giovanni Bosco alla prova. Dai laboratori agli istituti professionali*, in P. Braidò (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella Chiesa...*, pp. 133-142; J.M. Prellezso, *Don Bosco e le scuole professionali* (1870-1887), in M. Midali (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia...*, pp. 331-353.

This line of work began when Don Bosco opened up his humble home. This home provided food, shelter and social assistance to a limited group of boys who were employed by artisans in the city. They often had a guaranteed regular contract, and were surrounded by educational concern and care. We find the gradual organisation of the workshops taking place in the Oratory during the period 1853-1862.

The workshops were opened for moral, religious, educational and economic reasons: tailors and shoemakers in 1853; bookbinders in 1854; carpenters in 1856; printers in 1861; blacksmiths in 1862. In July 1878, two agricultural schools were opened up for boys and girls at La Navarre and at St-Cyr, France.

The technical professional schools, besides having the above-mentioned religious and moral objectives, also took on important social, technical and professional aspects of sufficient value to create a formula for craft which admits a relative amount of culture but is especially practically oriented.

“After all”, Don Bosco declared openly in 1881, “I do not want my children to be walking encyclopedias; I do not want my carpenters and blacksmiths and shoemakers to be lawyers; I do not want my printers, bookbinders and booksellers to act as though they were philosophers and theologians... For me it is enough that they are competent in what belongs to their trade. And when an artisan possesses the knowledge which is useful and appropriate for his skilled work then I say that this kind of individual is learned enough to render service to society and religion and has the right to be respected as much as can be”.⁶⁷

The last official stage in the evolution of the technical schools which Don Bosco witnessed is indicated by a well-drawn-up document already developed at the Third General Chapter of 1883 and later on finalised and approved at the Fourth General Chapter of 1886.

The two General Chapters had included among the topics to be studied: “directions to be given to the working sector of the Salesian houses and the means needed to develop vocations among the young artisans”.

It is in these Chapters that we find the orientations and norms used as the basis for the developments to be followed later on within Salesian professional schools. Until then the professional schools were at a rather embryonic stage.⁶⁸

In the document approved in 1886, there is a preliminary reminder about the threefold goal which led the Salesians to take care of young artisans, working boys:

⁶⁷ BS 5 (1881), no. 8, August, p. 16

⁶⁸ Cf. L. Pazzaglia, *Apprendistato e istruzione...*, in Traniello (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare...*, p. 63; J.M. Prellezio, *Don Bosco e le scuole professionali...*, in M. Midali (Ed.), *Don Bosco nella storia...*, p. 349.

To have them learn a trade, so they can honestly earn the bread they need to live on; to have them instructed in religion; to provide them with the knowledge required by and suited to, their state. From this threefold goal we can draw the threefold orientation to be followed in setting up programs and methods to be used in professional schools .

Naturally, the first orientation is the religious and moral one; the second is an intellectual orientation which includes the necessary wealth of literary, artistic and scientific knowledge, as well as knowledge of drafting and of French; the third orientation is the professional one which aims at training the artisan in everything pertinent to his trade, not only theoretically but also practically. For this reason the artisans shall be trained to a level of competence in their trade which includes step-by-step procedures carried out quickly.

This was a demanding requisite which foresaw that the duration of the practical training period would generally last five years.⁶⁹

4.3 *Religious education*

As for religious education, it is self-evident that well-formed religious culture is the stronghold of holistic education for Don Bosco. But other elements characterise his activity in this field.

We have a document, which goes back to Don Bosco's final years, which sheds light on the exceptional importance he gave to religious instruction: it is the basis of any reform both in society and education. This document is a hand-written note left for Fr Dalmazzo, the Procurator General in Rome. The note contained ideas, proposals which he intended to have presented to the Pope and which, probably, were given to Pope Leo XIII in the audience he had on April 5, 1880.

Urgent matters for which only the Vicar of Jesus Christ can provide appropriate solutions:

1. Children: Catechism should be taught to children at least every feast day. There are few towns and very few cities where such catechism classes are generally being held - and even fewer for poor and abandoned boys. Very little attentive concern is expressed in inviting the boys to make their confession.

⁶⁹ *Deliberazioni del terzo e quarto capitolo generale...*, pp. 18-22, OE XXXVI 270-274 (Dei giovani artigiani...). Deeper research on the genesis of this document can be found in a critical edition by J.M. Prellezso, *La «parte operaia» nelle case salesiane. Documenti e testimonianze sulla formazione professionale* (1883-1886), RSS 16 (1997) 353-391.

2. Clergy: Greater care in instructing the faithful according to the norms established by the 'Catechism for Pastors' published by order of the Sacrosanct Council of Trent. It is hard to find a parish with such instructions, if we exclude the towns of Northern Italy. Greater eagerness and greater charity in hearing the confessions of the faithful. Most of the priests never carry out the ministry of hearing confessions, since they only hear confession during Easter time and then no more.
3. Ecclesiastical vocations...
4. Religious Orders: religious orders are undergoing a terrible crisis. Two things should be promoted: all dispersed religious should be gathered, insisting that they live a common life and open up the activities of their respective Orders. The religious who live a contemplative life should extend their zeal to teaching catechism to the children, religious instruction to the adults and hearing their confession....⁷⁰

The number of educational recommendations on this topic is considerable even though there are no particularly innovative elements. What prevails is the will to use what is easy and what is substantial both in catechesis and preaching which, after all, is particularly directed towards catechesis.

Sermons should be simple: we define what we want to deal with, we divide it into parts and explain each of them... We should not lose ourselves in dissertations or in examples. We should not pile up many texts or many stories, which are only there to prove a point. But we should explain the text or the few texts well and have them stand out. Instead of so many stories, take one suitable story and tell it entirely, in all its more appropriate detail. The limited mental ability of the child will not be able to appreciate and understand all that proofs you might offer but he will hold on to the story and keep it in his memory. His powerful memory will recall it even when many years have gone by.⁷¹

"An easy and popular style"⁷² is what Don Bosco requested of catechism textbooks. Generally he preferred that texts be written in dialogue form and have intuitive visual aids.

The historical structure Don Bosco gave to the teaching of Christian doctrine is remarkably interesting. This structure appears with greater evidence during the first fifteen years (1844-1858) of Don Bosco's involvement with youth and during his

⁷⁰ E III 561-562; see also MB XIV 467

⁷¹ G. Barberis, *Verballi del primo capitolo generale* (1877), quad. III, XXVI session, pp. 55-56.

⁷² MO (1991) 167; cf. Preface to *Storia sacra* (1847), p. 5 and 7, OE III 5 and 7.

intense activity as a writer on biblical and ecclesiastical history and also as a writer of works of religious and apologetic nature.⁷³

Story is certainly taken in several contexts as a didactic aid to draw the attention, awaken the interest of the listener and as a way to relate to dogmatic truths and moral precepts to real experiences. But Bible History and Church History have had an impact on the contents of catechesis and all its objectives. Histories of the Bible and the Church help present human history as the history of salvation wrought by God through the mediation of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah (Old Testament), the one who has come to work and still works on earth (New Testament) and who lives on in the Catholic Church which, in turn, guarantees the indissoluble bonding of all the faithful with their closest Shepherds, the priests, and with the bishops, the Roman Pontiff, Jesus Christ and God.

Naturally, during the 1850s Don Bosco gives a markedly apologetic tone to such a theological vision, dealing as he was with Protestantism, Jewish religion and the keener attention given to the 'history of salvation'.⁷⁴ From the 1860s on, it does not seem that these enthusiastic beginnings developed into a consistent and significant catechetical tradition of the same intensity, even though it was further clarified and looked at. Whatever elements of originality may have been developing along with Don Bosco's praxis should be attributed more to the general inspirations of the system than to innovative directions.

5. Forming the educators

Don Bosco did not create an institution to form his teachers and educators: clerics, priests, Coadjutors of the Salesian society, Sisters of the Institute of The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians; men and women of the laity ready to collaborate in the education sector as Cooperators.

For priests: Don Bosco expected them to follow the normal seminary and religious curriculum: high school, novitiate, college with philosophy and four years of theology.

For Coadjutors: a course of professional formation, the novitiate and a period of religious and technical updating were expected to be followed.

For Cooperators: periodical meetings for spiritual and apostolic animation were expected to be followed as well.

⁷³ Cf. P. Braido, *L'inedito «Breve catechismo pei fanciulli ad uso della diocesi di Torino» di don Bosco*, pp. 7-8.

⁷⁴ Cf. the monograph by N. Cerrato, *La catechesi di Don Bosco nella sua «Storia sacra»*, Rome, LAS 1979. He points out significant changes that occurred between the first edition in 1847 and the second and third in 1853 and 1863.

It was not only practical reasons like preparing personnel for his rapidly expanding and wide-reaching work which saw Don Bosco reluctant to have his collaborators go through a period of formation. His socially-directed educational system demanded the continuous and active presence of the educators among the boys and the sharing of their lives and interests.⁷⁵

Ascetic, cultural and professional formation could never have had an adequate development apart from the educative community. The formation of priests and brothers who wanted to consecrate their entire life assisting full-time in educating the young would not have occurred unless within the educative community or with a close connection with it. Experience, made more meaningful by the daily contact with the young and with co-workers, guided by the rector who is the 'educator of the educators', had to stand as a qualifying factor in the educational maturing of Don Bosco's Salesians.

Naturally, this maturing process had to be supported by a process of cultural, philosophical, theological and basically professional formation.⁷⁶

The Constitutions of the Salesian Society published and presented to Rome for definitive approval in 1874, have a chapter, chapter 14, which deals with the Director of Novices and their formation.

The following mandate was included in it:

The aim of our Congregation is that of instructing the young and especially the poorest among them surrounded by the dangers of the world, with knowledge and religion, and to guide them along the way to salvation. Therefore all the novices after their second trial period should be engaged in the demanding exercise of studying, teaching in night and day schools, teaching catechism to the children and offering assistance in more difficult cases.⁷⁷

Don Bosco was motivated to seek a special dispensation: "for the right to have a trial period to find out whether the aspirants have the ability to assist and instruct youth".⁷⁸ But the battle was lost; the norm was not approved.

⁷⁵ M. Guasco, *Don Bosco nella storia religiosa del suo tempo*, in *Don Bosco e le sfide della modernità*, pp. 32-33. He speaks of Don Bosco "a man of sharing", and "incarnation" who created a certain "kind of priest".

⁷⁶ Cf. P. Braido, *Un nuovo prete e la sua formazione culturale secondo don Bosco. Intuizioni, aporie, virtualità*, RSS 8 (1989) 7-55.

⁷⁷ *Regulae Societatis S. Francisci Salesii, Romae*, Typis S.C. De Propaganda Fide 1874, caput XIV, art. 8, p. 35, OE XXV 287, published again the following March, OE XXV 329.

⁷⁸ *Consultazione per una Congregazione particolare*, in March 1874, p. 12, OE XXV 398.

Practically speaking, Don Bosco already carried out a practical training in education and kept on carrying it out, both as part of and beyond the novitiate, as a necessary complement to the spiritual and cultural formation of the Salesians.⁷⁹

This was an intuition in tune with Don Bosco's sensitivity, his vast visionary capacity, which included realism enveloped by the passion to achieve grandiose projects which youth needed. For these visions and these tasks, these dreams, the simple traditional formation process, however necessary, was not enough and not even a simple traditional pedagogy was enough for such visionary scenarios.

The educator, whose heart was as wide as the sand on the seashore, had to be much more than a simple priest, religious, instructor and educator, and much more than a pedagogue or social activist.

The new priest or religious or educator had to develop in contact with a living experience, a reality full of pressing needs such as misery and abandonment, with a great sense of humanity and a steadfast faith inflamed by charity, all of which was to be achieved along with an overflowing passion and sensitivity.

What contribution could have been provided by 'a pedagogical Institute' or by 'a course or curriculum on formation of educators' when their presence was needed right away and so badly? However, on an historical and concrete level the processes of ecclesiastical formation of educators using the Preventive System - a philosophical and theological formation - could not have stopped at just emergency structures, the rudimentary structures Don Bosco was constrained by all kinds of troubling needs to put into place.

In 1901 the Ninth General Chapter of the Salesian Society was finally able to tackle the problem of the general organisation needed for ecclesiastical studies for Salesians. That organisational plan included a period of practical training which was meant to be the experiential moment in the formation of the Salesian educator, in tune with Don Bosco's intuition as priest-educator formed according to the demands of the Preventive System and of his added cultural, professional and practical formation.

⁷⁹ Cf. P. Braido, *L'idea della Società Salesiana nel «Cenno storico» di don Bosco del 1873/74*, RSS 6 (1987) 261-301.



Chapter 19

TOWARDS TOMORROW

At the end of this summary presentation we can ask ourselves to what extent historical reality can be the basis for formulating a valid preventive project now and in the future. It is clear that the Preventive System was thought out and implemented by Don Bosco in the 1800s and therefore is inevitably dated, and not only chronologically! It would not be presumptuous to say once more, that with the Preventive System of the 1800s a period of the history of Christian education came to an end.

The vital continuity of this system, we concluded, was entrusted to the regenerating task of new reflection and future research.¹

1. **Modernity's educational revolution**

It is already difficult, no doubt, to reconstruct yesterday's Preventive System with today's mentality: that is the advantage and disadvantage of any historical work. But more difficult still is to understand past events in terms of their eventual implementation in the present or projection into the future.

Regarding Don Bosco's world, the world of his educational institutions and therefore the world of the system he practised or proposed for various and wide-ranging ways of implementation, we have to acknowledge that such disconcerting events have intervened that understanding the old terminology and its general interpretation has been made difficult.

We have already mentioned some of the more outstanding changes: the gradual expansion of the Industrial Revolution; the triumph of science and technology (up to the appearance of scientism and positivism); the birth of the so-called human sciences (sociology, psychology etc.); a new evaluation of the body and sex; the transition from monarchic absolutism to a liberal parliamentary system and democracy; the commanding prominence of the 'social question' in socialism, Marxism, 'the social doctrine of the Church'; growing disputes between revealed religions, with touches of anti-clericalism and atheism; the appearance of Freudian and in-depth psychology; the 'discovery of the child'; 'new education' and activism; religious evolution within the Church from

¹ Cf. P. Braido, Presentation, second volume of *Esperienze di pedagogia cristiana nella storia*, ed. P. Braido, Rome. LAS 1981, p.8.

modernism to Vatican Council II (Christian practice, theology, liturgy, Scripture, ecumenism, the role of the laity and of the young) and, at the same time, wars and political and social revolutions of global dimensions; more recently, widespread relativism in the fields of thought, ethical thinking and moral practices.²

We should pay particular attention to a modern 'Copernican revolution' with secular roots but with effects relevant to the world of education, achieved well before the experience of 'preventive' educators who were born within the traditional Catholic world and active during the 19th and 20th centuries. This is particularly significant because it highlights with exceptional vigour the two hinges of the Preventive System as it proposes, once again, but in new terms, the classic opposition between authority and freedom:

1. Attention given the child, its exuberant energies and therefore central role in education;
2. The consequent reconsidering of the preventive, protective and promotional function of the adult educator.

Among pedagogical theoreticians we could consider as forerunners of the new approach to education, J. Amos Komenski (1592-1670), and John Locke (1632-1704), and as the recognised 'founding father', Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), who has had extraordinary influence.

According to Jan Amos Komenski man, created and redeemed by Jesus Christ, is a child in the likeness of God, called upon to fulfil the task of "mediator" between the Creator and his creatures. Education is certainly "discipline", but this discipline presupposes the rich and natural possibilities of cooperation, provided by the pupil. In his growth through education, the pupil sets in motion all the lively potential he is endowed with: "senses, reason and faith". Engaging "mind, hands and tongue" the pupil grows to maturity through the three capacities of "knowing, acting, speaking".

The process, then, is characterised by "naturalness and spontaneity", with the growing participative and active causality of the pupil: "one learns by doing"; "one builds oneself by building". For his part the educator, more than reflecting a violent and decadent society, is the prophet of a new civil and religious world.

Formation, explains Komenski,

...should take place with the utmost delicacy and gentleness, almost spontaneously, just like a living body grows in height step-by-step without the

² P. Briado, *La prassi di don Bosco e il sistema preventivo. L'orizzonte storico*, in *Il sistema preventivo verso il terzo millennio*, Atti della XVIII Settimana di Spiritualità della Famiglia Salesiana, Rome, Salesianum Jan. 26-29, 1995. Rome. SDB 1995, p. 12.

need of stretching or spreading out its limbs; likewise, if you feed the body with prudence, nurture and exercise it, it will almost unconsciously acquire height and robustness; likewise I say that, in the soul, the food, the nourishment, the exercises, are all converted to wisdom, virtue and piety.

Everyone should be educated in such a way as to attain a real rather than fictitious culture, a solid, not superficial one so that the human being as a rational soul may be guided by his own reason and not by the reason of others; everyone should get accustomed not only to read and understand the opinion of others from books, and also memorise and recite them, but to delve, by himself, into the roots of things and draw authentic knowledge and usefulness from them. The same solidity is needed for morality and piety.³

The pupil's active role was also highlighted in the empirical world of John Locke, in his *Thoughts on Education* (1693). The crisis of the true absolute, the appearance of tolerance, and the birth of individualism are all linked. The starting point for an educator's activity needs to be an attentive knowledge of the aptitudes and inclinations peculiar to each individual. The starting point for this activity is childhood, in order to impede further deviations in less positive inclinations and consolidate properly oriented inclinations and passions:

The great principle and foundation of all virtues and values consist in this: that one is able to deny oneself, one's desires, go against one's inclinations and follow only what reason indicates as something better, even though one's natural appetites are bent toward a different direction.⁴

The method, then, should be "proportionate to a person's capacity and responsive to his natural talents and constitution. This is actually what should be looked at in education rightly conceived". "For, in many cases, all that we can do or should long to do is to draw what is best from what nature has provided, to prevent vices and defects to which a given character is more inclined and direct it to achieve the benefits of which it is capable. Every natural talent should be helped to progress as much as possible, while it would be a wasted effort to try to graft into it a different one".⁵

When it is a question of finding a tutor for his son, a father should first of all try to find someone who is a good teacher. "Look for someone who knows how to discreetly train him in good manners", Locke writes, "entrust him to his hands, so that as much

³ J. A. Comenio, *La grande didattica*, in *Opere*, ed. M. Fattori, Turin, UTET 1974, pp. 192-193.

⁴ J. Locke, *Some thoughts concerning education*, edited... by J. W. and J. S. Yolton. Oxford, Clarendon Press 1989, §33, p. 13.

⁵ J. Locke, *Some thoughts concerning education*, §66, p. 122.

as possible he may guarantee his innocence, protect and nourish his sensitivity to what is good, gently correct and root out his bad inclinations and firmly establish in him good habits".⁶

It is in this light that we should view Locke's critique of punishments which humiliate, and awards, which are materially delightful, and his theory of "natural punishments". "I do not consider useful for a child corrections where physical pain is somehow a substitute for the shame and sorrow for having done something wrong". Locke instead considers esteem, or lack of it, approval or disapproval for what has been done as more effective.⁷ "The shame of having failed and deserving punishment is the only true support for virtue. At times a warning, an indication, a reprimand, a show of surprise and amazement would be sufficient".⁸

But the most radical turn in education was determined by the appearance of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile ou de l'éducation* in 1762. Rousseau is the one who has inspired the great far-reaching dimensions of education and pedagogy of the last two centuries.⁹ From the countless debates and the quite diverse interpretations of Rousseau's contributions, we can select some leading motifs which have made history.

1. The turning point is the statement which opens Rousseau's masterpiece: "Everything coming from the hands of the Author of things, is good; and everything degenerates in the hands of man".¹⁰ This is the manifesto of what would come to be understood as natural education, active education focused on man. "We take as our starting point the incontrovertible maxim that the first motions of nature are always right: originally there is no perversity at all coming from the human heart; there is no vice at all of which we cannot say how or in what way it has entered (into the human heart). The only passion natural to man is love of self or self-love taken in its broad sense. Self-love in itself or in reference to us is good and useful".¹¹ "Oh Man! Your freedom, your power are as extensive as the

⁶ J. Locke, *Some thoughts concerning education*, §147 p. 208.

⁷ J. Locke, *Some thoughts concerning education*, §48, pp. 112-113; cf. §§ 43-63, pp. 110-120.

⁸ J. Locke, *Some thoughts concerning education*, §66, p. 78-79, 85, p. 138, 141, 145.

⁹ Citations from G. G. Rousseau, *Emilio*, Complete translation, introduction and notes in Italian by G. Roggerone, Brescia, La Scuola 1965.

¹⁰ G. Rousseau, *Emilio*, lib. I, p. 7.

¹¹ G. Rousseau, *Emilio*, lib. II, p. 89. "The fundamental principal of every morality about which I have reasoned in all my writings", he tells Christophe de Beaumont in an open letter, "and that I have developed in this latest one with all the clarity I can muster, is that man is naturally good, loves justice and order; that there is no original perversity in the human heart and that the first motions of his nature are right... I have shown that all the vices we impute to the human heart are not in fact natural" (J. J. Rousseau, *Lettre a C. de Beaumont archevêche de Paris*, in *Oeuvres complètes*. Paris, Gallimard 1969, pp. 936-936).

limits of your natural powers and no further; all the rest is only slavery, illusion, and prestige".¹² "There are two kinds of dependence: dependence on things, which is proper to nature; and dependence on man, which is proper to society. "Dependence on things, since it does not have moral traits at all, does not damage freedom and it does not generate vice. Dependence on man, since it is disorderly, generates every vice and it is mainly because of it, that the master and slave indulged in mutual depravedness".¹³

2. What follows naturally is a recognition of the intrinsic, absolute value of "childhood" which should not be appreciated in terms of adulthood to be achieved but rather as a paradigm of what the adult state should be, if carried out along the development of the original qualities according to nature. "Humanity has its place in the order of things; childhood has its own place in the order of human life. We should consider the man in man, and the child in the child. Although, all that we can do for his well-being is to assign to every child his own place, to establish it firmly, and to direct human passions according to man's constitution."¹⁴
3. Education cannot be but natural; education is the development of the potential which the Author of creation has placed within man, not yet soiled by society and by education, which is its deputy. Look at nature and follow the path it marks out for you. This is nature's rule.¹⁵
4. The educator is not called to direct those faculties which have a finality and resources of their own but to preserve them, protect them so that they may not be blocked or swayed by negative interferences but rather find positive support from the great 'masters', namely from the natural world of the countryside, away from the city, and from those who live and work there: this is 'nature's education' and 'the education of things'.¹⁶ "Religiosity itself is professed and lived by being in contact with nature, interpreted by reason, and in spontaneous harmony with the Creator"¹⁷

¹² G. Rousseau, *Emilio*, lib. II, p. 75

¹³ G. Rousseau, *Emilio*, lib. II, pp. 77-78.

¹⁴ G. Rousseau, *Emilio*, lib. II, pp. 69-70.

¹⁵ G. Rousseau, *Emilio*, lib. I, p. 23.

¹⁶ G. Rousseau, *Emilio*, lib. I, pp. 9-10.

¹⁷ G. Rousseau, *Emilio*, lib. Cf. G.G. Rousseau, *Emilio*, pp. 346-418, *Professione del vicario savoiardo*. The second part will come under particular fierce debate (pp. 389-418), when after exposing his natural theistic religion the vicar answers the listener's request: "speak to me of revelation, the scriptures, obscure dogmas that I have been getting wrong since my childhood without being either to understand them nor believe in them and not knowing how to either accept or reject them". (p. 389).

The action of the educator for the first period of a child's life is defined as "negative education", and, after the child's 'second birth' (14/15 years of age) "indirect positive education": "We are born twice, so to speak: the first time, we are born to exist, the second time we are born to live; the first birth is for the species, the second for the sex."¹⁸ "Zealous teachers, may you be simple, discrete, reserved: never be in a hurry to act, except to prevent others from acting"¹⁹ "Young instructors, I am preaching to you on a different art, that of teaching without precepts, and that of doing everything without doing anything at all. This art, I agree, does not belong to your age... You will never be able to create wise men if you do not first of all make little rascals out of them".²⁰

5. Even though Rousseau's attention, in this book, is focused on the 'Tutor', the *Gouverneur*, he 'holds forcefully' that, if inspired by the principles expressed, first-childhood educators are the parents, first of all the mother, soon enough actively helped by the father.

To the mother, Rousseau directs the rest of this appeal:

Tender and far-sighted mother, you who have been able to get off the main thoroughfare and protect the nascent tiny tree from the clash of human opinions! Cultivate and sprinkle that little plant before it dies; its fruits, one day, will be your delight; build a fence around your child's soul in good time: another may mark out the perimeter, but only you should build the barrier, preventing him from being overcome by 'human opinions', by the existing artificial and conforming society so that he may see with his own eyes and hear with his own heart".²¹

Émile was taken by Catholics and Reformers as the expression of rationalistic naturalism that led a fundamental attack against the specific nature of Christianity founded on the divine adoption of man, the reality of original sin, the reality of Revelation and Grace.²² Rousseau's thinking had Calvinistic roots and *Émile* is first of all a protest against the pessimistic view of man after original sin, as viewed by Protestants and Jansenists. This is highlighted by Rousseau himself in an answer to the newspaper

¹⁸ G. Rousseau, *Emilio*, lib. IV, p. 265.

¹⁹ G. Rousseau, *Emilio*, lib. II, p. 94.

²⁰ G. Rousseau, *Emilio*, lib. II, p. 130.

²¹ G. Rousseau, *Emilio*, lib. I, I, p. 8. Rousseau has a lengthy note to justify the primacy of education by the mother

²² Jacques Maritain, in his *Trois réformateurs. Luther, Descartes, Rousseau* (Paris, Plon-Nourrit 1925) speaks of *Jean-Jacques ou le saint de la nature* (pp. 131-237).

Mandement on November 8, 1762, when the archbishop, who was decidedly anti-Jansenism, condemned the book.²³

Leaving aside the theological conflict and the well-founded suspicion of 'naturalism', Catholics, without the Reformers, could have taken advantage of the occasion to revise their view of man after original sin, and they could have corrected obvious deviations created by Protestants and Jansenists. A correct rediscovery of what was left in a human being from original creation would have helped reclaim the human potential on which to rely to construct a Christian education respectful of what was human and natural in the child. Revelation and grace certainly did not imply that the *Gouverneur* was to have an authoritarian and oppressive role at all levels: political, ecclesiastical discipline, education.

Rousseau became the forerunner of the 'Copernican revolution' in pedagogy and in didactics which would end up as 'new education', carried out in 'new schools'. 'New education' has a critical stance vis-a-vis education and traditional schools. They are accused of focusing on the objectives, the programs, on the educator and therefore on an adult-oriented education far from the complete life of the student to be educated.

'New education' aims at giving the old relationship a new place, setting the pupil at its centre, as the protagonist of his own development, in terms of his own needs and interests, which happen to be a hunger for life rather than for culture. In Europe there is discussion of the 'active school', (Adophe Ferrière)²⁴, of 'functional education', 'school made to measure', (Edward Claparède).²⁵ In the United States there is talk of 'progressive education' (John Dewey).²⁶ In Italy there is discussion of 'activism'. The last qualification marked the beginning, among Catholics, of attempts to revise, to acclimate one's positions within the perimeters of a Christian vision of the world, of education and catechesis.²⁷

²³ Cf. J.J. Rousseau, *Lettre...*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, t. IV, pp. 932-933.

²⁴ Cf. A. Ferrière. *La scuola attiva*. Florence, Bemporad 1930 XXIV-313 p.; *L'école active. Textes fondateurs*, par D. Hameline, A. Jornord, M. Belkaïd. Paris, PUF 1995, 128 p.

²⁵ É Claparède, *L'éducation fonctionnelle*, Neuchâtel, Delachaux et Niestlé 1931, 266 p.; idem, *L'école sure mesure*. Neuchâtel, Delachaux et Niestlé 1953, 140 p.

²⁶ J. Dewey, *Interest and Effort in Education*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co. 1913, IX-101 p; *Democracy and Education*. New York, MacMillan CO. 1916, XII-434 p.; *My Pedagogic Creed*, New York, E.L. Kellogg 1897, 36 p.; C. W. Washburne, *Che chos'è l'educazione progressiva?* Florence. La Nuova Italia 1953 (original edition, New York, The John Day Co. 1942).

²⁷ É Devaud, *Pour une école active selon l'ordre chrétien*. Paris, Desclée de Brouwer 1934, 368 p. - interpretations and additions; M. Casotti, *Scuola attiva*. Brescia, la Scuola 1941, 318 p.; A. Agazzi, *Oltre la scuola attiva. Storia, essenza, significato dell'attivismo*. Brescia, La Scuola 1955, 244 p.; G. Nosengo, *L'attivismo nell'insegnamento religioso della scuola media*. Milan, IPL 1938, 281 p.; idem, *Sette lezioni di attivismo catechistico*. Milan, IPL 1940, 184 p.; S. Riva, *Esperienze e indirizzi di pedagogia attiva religiosa*. Florence, LEF 1940, 184

The reason for the existence of the 'new schools' and 'activism' vary according to the different orientations, authors and experiences. At times some references are made to features which could be compared to the classic "Preventive System". The preferred setting is that which is set apart from everything and protected, like the countryside. There is repeated use of terms such as experience, research, manual work, ability to work with one's hands, and the pupil's autonomy. Adolphe Ferrière expresses, in thirty specifications, the peculiar features of a 'new school', offering ten indicators for three types of formation: general, intellectual, moral.

The 'new school' is a 'laboratory' of 'practical pedagogy'; a boarding institution located in the countryside, it divides the pupils into groups and puts them in separate houses; it prefers co-education, promotes work; priority is given to workshops for manual work such as the carpenter shop, agricultural training, both with regulated and free; it leaves room for natural gymnastics; it organizes outings and camps.

For its part, intellectual education opens up broad horizons for the spirit, with 'general culture' and 'spontaneous specialisations'. These specialisations are based on facts, experiences, personal activity and are in response to spontaneous interests proper to the various stages of a child's age. 'Individual research work' is favoured along with group discussion. The teaching is only done in the morning, following this rule: two or three subjects per day, and a just few per month.

Moral education is carried out from within; gradual practice of a child's critical sense and freedom in the context of a community which follows the 'school republic' or 'school-city' system. The 'school-city' is run by a general assembly involving the director, teachers, pupils and staff. The community may also follow a kind of 'constitutional monarchy' which calls for the election of heads, definite responsibility and other helpful social assignments. This type of school envisages positive rewards, punishments or negative sanctions and 'emulation'. The 'new school' must have a beautiful environment. Group music and choral singing are fostered. There are also daily exercises to educate one's 'moral conscience', and to educate one's 'practical reason'. Most of the 'new schools' adopt a non-confessional or inter-confessional position as far as religion is concerned, with tolerance for the diversity of ideals, even though there are efforts made to ensure the spiritual growth of the human being.²⁸

contd. 27

p.; idem, *La pedagogia religiosa del novecento in Italia. Uomini, idee, opere*. Roma, Brescia, Antoniannum/La Scuola 1972, 379 p.; for a discussion on the broad spectrum of pedagogues and Catholic philosophers cf. *L'attivismo pedagogico*. Atti del II Convegno di Scholé, Brescia, Sept. 9-11, 1955. Brescia, La Scuola 1956, 358 p.

²⁸ A. Ferrière, Préface to A. Faria de Vasconcellos, *Une école nouvelle en Belgique*, Neuchâtel, Delachaux et Niestlé 1915, pp. 7-20. At the end of the preface he offers a grading for various famous 'schools': 30/30 to 17½/30: Odenwald (Germany), Bierges (Belgium), Bedales

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) takes her cue from the scientific psychology and experiences of J. M. Itard (1775-1838) and E. Seguin (1812-1880) rather than from 'new education', but she integrates them decidedly with her direct experience of psychology and ends up with *La casa dei bambini* or children's home (1907). Within this 'home' and from it Montessori finds the rich and vital potential of childhood - this is her 'discovery of the child' - and of the circumstances for their development, uniting science and spirituality.²⁹

The primary measure taken by Montessori consists in preventive action directed towards protecting the child from the impact of negative environments of inept families or the widespread forms of 'coercive and repressive education'. "In dealing with the psychic side of the child we should be concerned not so much with education but with the child. Practically the child disappears as a personality underneath education: and this happens not only in schools but anywhere where the word 'education' is found, so at home with parents, relatives and any adult who might have to take care of or have responsibility for children. Even for conscience, education has taken the place of the child". This so-called education which, in reality, is lowered to the condition of being domination of the child by the adult and manipulation of the child, is debatable no matter what methods are being used to implement it.

"When I speak of education", Montessori clarifies, "I am referring to any kind of dealings with the child. I do not intend to distinguish between loving kindness and harshness in dealing with the child". Instead, according to Montessori, "it is a question of placing the child right in the centre, just the way he is, pure and simple. There is no doubt that we have been unknowingly overpowering the human shoot which blossoms as a pure entity and is charged with energy. We should not be the "masters of a child's soul, but only and simply its helpers in the exercise of its activities and in the expansion of its personality". "When room is left for the child to expand, then it shows surprising activity, and a truly amazing capacity to improve its actions".³⁰

The creation of a world suited to the child is then inevitable. "When the adult does not take the place of the child, but it is the child himself who acts, immediately

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and abbotsholme (England), Lietz (Germany), des Roches (France). This last-mentioned, while offering a complete education also provides room for Christian formation: cf. The monograph of L. Macario, *Les Roches. Una comunità educativa*, Zürich, PAS-Verlag 1969, 329 p.

²⁹ This is certainly the reason why Montessori wanted to change the title of *Il metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica applicata all'educazione infantile nelle Case dei bambini* (1909) to be altered to *La scoperta del bambino* (Milan 1950, VIII-379 p); cf. *Maria Montessori e la liberazione del fanciullo*, ed. Elena Faber. Rome, Cremonese 1974, 128 p.

³⁰ M. Montessori, *Manuale di pedagogia scientifica*, Naples, Morano 1935 (III ed.), pp. 15-20.

the need arises to provide the child with a suitable environment".³¹ "In this environment the child must be free to act, namely, it must have reasons to act but in a way suited to it; it must have contact with an adult who knows the laws which govern its life and who will not stand as an obstacle for it, either by protecting it or by guiding it or by forcing it to act independently of its needs".³²

This is the foundation on which Montessori builds her method, which is preventive when compared with traditional systems or methods either repressive or preventive. This is one of the most original and most universal versions of 'new education'.³³ The period of childhood may be the crucial time for a regeneration of humanity oriented towards living together and in peace. "The child is the father of humanity and civilisation".³⁴ The basic attitude of an adult should be one of "interest and love".³⁵

A more recent pedagogical direction is represented by the so-called non-directive education, the pedagogical version, foreseen by Carl Ranson Rogers himself,³⁶ of non-directive psychotherapy or client-centred psychotherapy, as proposed and practised by Rogers himself.

This is a more linear and coherent form of education distinct from those mixed up with various versions of institutional pedagogy. As with therapy, so with the educational process it is up to the individual to build his own personality. Both therapist and educator facilitate the growing process while acting as catalysts for sound and constructive energies which spring from within the patient and pupil towards self-realisation.³⁷

³¹ M. Montessori, *Manuale di pedagogia scientifica*, p. 20.

³² M. Montessori, *Educazione e pace*, Milan, Garzanti 1964, pp. 118-119.

³³ Cf. amongst the best summary studies in the Acts of the 11th International Montessori Congress, Rome, 26-28 Sept 1957, *Maria Montessori e il pensiero pedagogico contemporaneo*, Rome. Ed. «Vita dell'Infanzia», s. d., 366 p.; G. Calò, *Maria Montessori (1870-1952)*, in J. Chateau (Ed.), *Les grandes pédagogues*. Paris PUF 1956, pp. 310-336; R. Finazzi Sartor, *Maria Montessori*. Brescia, la Scuola 1961, 191 p.; A. Leonarduzzi, *Maria Montessori, Il pensiero e l'opera*. Brescia Paideia 1967, 243 p.; T. Loscho, *Maria Montessori. Il progetto-scuola nella visione ecologica dell'uomo e del bambino, costruttori di un mondo migliore*. Bologna, Capelli 1991, 202 p.

³⁴ M. Montessori, *La mente assorbente, third conference at the 8th Congress in San Remo 1949 on La formazione dell'uomo nella ricostruzione mondiale. Rome, Ente Opera Montessori, s.d., p. 340; Cr. R Regni, Il bambino padre dell'uomo. Infanzia e società in Maria Montessori. Rome, Armando 1977, 287 p.; A. Scococchera, Maria Montessori una storia per il nostro tempo. Rome, Edizioni Opera Nazionale Montessori 1997, 196 p.*

³⁵ M. Montessori, *L'unità del mondo attraverso il bambino*, 4th conference at the 8th Congress, San Remo 1949: *La formazione dell'uomo...*, p. 431.

³⁶ C.R. Rogers, *Freedom to learn*. Columbus Ohio, C.E. Merrill 1969, X-358.

³⁷ In a developing process that from *Client-centered Therapy. Its current practice, implications and theory*, Boston Houghton Mifflin, 1951, XIII-560 p.; and *On becoming a person. A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. Boston. Houghton Mifflin 1961, XI-420 p.; he ends up at *A Way of Being*. Boston Houghton Mifflin 1980.

Both patient and pupil will be helped to have a positive perception and acceptance of themselves and of others: this will be the starting point of any effective cultural, ethical and social growth. The successful result is tied up with the quality of relationship which the therapist and the educator have been able to establish and with the attitudes that follow it: the genuineness, sincerity, consistency of the relationship with the individual and with the group, alien from any professional masks; positive consideration, esteem, trust shown in reference to the potential and aptitudes of the individuals; empathic understanding, by means of which the other feels that he is understood from his own point of view.

This is a non-authoritarian and non-troublesome way of becoming accustomed to freedom, one's capacity for self-determination, sense of responsibility and spirit of initiative.³⁸ This is a psychotherapeutic and educational activity which entails latent yet inevitable and consistent changes, Rogers says, in all areas where authority and freedom meet: therapy, education, administration, politics; and institutions of all kinds.³⁹

It is impossible to supply a panoramic overview of institutional pedagogy because this pedagogy is a galaxy of positions and people differentiated over time rather than a theory universally shared by those who profess it. We limit ourselves to singling out some of the attitudes and innovative motivations emerging from it.

There are various directions: activism, the class-community and class-laboratory of C. Freinet (1896-1966); the non-directive psychology and psychotherapy of C. Rogers (1902-1987); group dynamics, with K. Lewis's field and vital space theories (1890-1947). In its more specific forms, institutional pedagogy was the offshoot of a protest against oppressive and manipulative social and political structures which heavily condition the cultural and educative growth processes.⁴⁰

Institutional education has as its objective the transformation of institutional formation: school, classrooms, university laboratories, culture and work groups from

³⁸ Cf. R. Zavalloni, *Educazione e personalità*. Milan, Vita e Pensiero 1955; idem, *La terapia non-direttiva nell'educazione*. Rome, Armando 1971, 223 p. (in particular, pp. 129-215); idem, *La psicoogica clinica nell'educazione*, Roma/Brescia, Antonianum/La Scuola 1972, 482 p; M-L. Poeydomenge, *L'éducation selon Rogers. Les enjeux de la non directivité*. Paris, Dunod 1984, XIII-194 p.

³⁹ Cf. C. R. Rogers, *Un manifesto personaliste. Fondements d'une politique de la personne*. Paris, Dunod-Bordas 1979, XIII-241 p. (original, *On personal power*. New York, Delacorte Press 1977).

⁴⁰ Cf. *Les pédagogues institutionnelles* par J. Ardoino et R. Lourau. Paris, PUF 1994, 128 p.; G. Snyders, *Où vont les pédagogues non-directives? Autorité du maître et liberté des élèves*. Paris, PUF 1973, 324 p.; R. Hess, *La pédagogie institutionnelle aujourd'hui*. Paris, J.-P. Delarge 1975, 142 p.; G. Avanzini, *Immobilisme et novation dans l'éducation scolaire*. Toulouse, Privat 1975, pp. 143-154, Chap III *Pédagogie institutionnelle et révolution*; L.-P. Jouvenet, *Horizon politique des pédagogies non directives*. Toulouse, Privat 1982, 291 p.

'instituted' to 'instituting'. This naturally implies a radical change in the way those taught and those who teach are simultaneously present to one other in an active way. In any kind of authoritarian and bureaucratic government the teacher-educator represents ordinances, programs, goals, methods which are all imposed from on high, and operates within the institution much like a father in his family. Fathers and teachers have a well-defined idea about what they intend to propose as a goal and their task is simply that of finding ways to 'boss' youngsters around without attention to their aspirations, inclinations, desires and needs.

Institutional Pedagogy instead champions the right of individuals and groups to self-manage their own human and cultural growth through freely choosing objectives, programs and methods: this is the right to self-management.⁴¹

Pedagogical self-management is an educational system where the teacher gives up his claim to transmit messages and, from that moment on, defines his educational intervention beginning with the 'medium' of formation, letting pupils decide on the methods and programs to be used in learning. This is what is called negative education today.⁴²

Given the various orientations pedagogical self-management assumes the forms such as group dynamics, non-directive method, group-psychotherapy and co-operative work.⁴³ The teacher or educator is directly involved in the group, but only as one of its members, at its disposal, at its beck and call as a facilitator, expert, consultant, adviser.⁴⁴ This way institutional education promotes a different, autonomous access to knowledge, culture, way of thinking, and at the same time an experience of freedom and conflict and also strong emotional bonds. Institutional education also leads to a deep transformation of the personality of the young person and disposes him to achieve the

⁴¹ Cf. M. Lobrot, *La pédagogie institutionnelle. L'école vers l'autogestion*. Paris, Gauthier-Villars 1972: I Part, *Pédagogie et bureaucratie*, pp. 11-123; II part, *Pédagogie et autogestion*, pp. 127-277.

⁴² Cf. G. Lapassade, *L'autogestion pédagogique*. Paris, Gauthier-Villars 1971, pp. 5-6. Lapassade interprets it, however, in a radical 'libertarian' sense leaving it up to groups of teachers to give life to anti-institutions, so-called 'internal institutions' (cf. G. Lapassade, *Groupes, Organisations, Institutions*. Paris, Gauthier-Villars 1967, pp. 57-64.

⁴³ G. Ferry, *La pratique du travail en groupe. Une expérience de formation d'enseignements*. Paris, Dunod 1970, XI-227 p; M. Lobrot, *L'animation non directive des groupes*. Paris Payot 1974, 252 p.

⁴⁴ With time someone has sensibly reshaped the earlier radical non-directive approach: cf. D. Hameline, M.-J. Dardelin, *Liberté d'apprendre. Justification d'un enseignement non directif*. Paris, Éditions Ouvrières 1967, 341 p. e idem, *La liberté d'apprendre. Situation II. Rétrospective sur un enseignement non-directif*. ibid. 1977, 349 p.

most remote goal namely self-management of a social, political, democratic, and dynamic kind.⁴⁵

There is also the more general denunciation of the danger of repression constituted by the invasion of the pedagogical into all the forms of social life.⁴⁶ The very notion of 'education' is debatable when it is understood as a way of promoting the growth of the one to be educated, urged to achieve predetermined goals: religious, ideological and political; or when it is understood as necessarily authoritarian and intrinsically repressive. Everything that deals with the pedagogical world is radically questioned and especially so when it turns out to be a question of functional method.⁴⁷

Seen this way, preventions would become repression.

2. Restoration, reinvention, rebuilding

Among the various formulas coined to respond to age-old and pressing needs and proposals, the 'new Preventive System', with the catch-cry "With Don Bosco and with the times", has made inroads. This new formula is the outcome and almost a necessary development of two more universal formulas: 'new evangelisation' and 'new education'.

In the Apostolic exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, December 30, 1988, among the novelties included within evangelisation we also find new players like the laity and, among the laity, the young: they are beneficiaries but also "*leading characters in evangelization and participants in the renewal of society*"⁴⁸

The new historical, civil and ecclesiastical climate would no less urgently lead to, following in the footsteps of Don Bosco, a new education, a creative and a faithful one aiming at generating the 'new man'.⁴⁹ Even this new form of education explicitly

⁴⁵ Cf. R. Barbier, *Une expérience de pédagogie institutionnelle à l'Institut Universitaire de Technologie de Saint-Denis*, in «Orientations», t. 14, no. 50, avril 1974, 218-219; M. Lobrot, *La pédagogie institutionnelle*, p. 5 and 203; cf. M. Lobrot, *L'animation non-directive des groupes....*; various proposals offered by A. Vasquez-F. Oury, *L'educazione nel gruppo-classe. La pedagogia istituzionale*. Bologna. Edizioni Dehoniane 1975, 351 p.

⁴⁶ Cf. J. Beillerot, *La société pédagogique. Action pédagogique et contrôle social*. Paris, PUF 1982, 223 p.

⁴⁷ A. Hocquard, *Édequer à quoi? Ce qu'en disent philophes, anthropologues et pédagogues*. Paris PUF 1996, 263 p.: on personalistic and humanistic positions responses prevail which are inspired by Sartre's existentialism, in the form of scepticism, problematicism, nihilism, and a vague eudemonism or economically or professionally useful functions.

⁴⁸ Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, Dec. 30, 1988, no. 46; E. Viganò, *La Nuova Evangelizzazione*, Atti del Consiglio generale della Società salesiana, no. 331, Oct-Dec 1989, pp. 3-32, in particular 4 pp. 21-22.

⁴⁹ E. Viganò, *Nuova educazione*, ACG n. 337, a. 72, July-Sept 1991, pp. 3-43.

expects the active involvement of the young who are the beneficiaries of the fatherly and motherly care provided by the educators, acting as natural fathers/mothers or their substitute. They both work together: "The young person is an active individual in educational praxis and must feel truly involved as a leading player in the work of art to be created".⁵⁰ What follows, almost necessarily, is the idea of a 'new Preventive System' equivalent, according to the person who coined the formula, "to launching Don Bosco's charism towards the third millennium".⁵¹

Actually, the roots of the 'new Preventive System' are solid, and it is from them that we can see the birth of a really 'new Preventive System' with updated forms of great value for the future. It contains principles endowed with endless potential. It also contains particular suggestions pregnant with possibilities for development; there are buds ready to blossom and expand.

1. What stands out, at the outset, is the personality of a great educator who musters within himself all the anxieties of so many others who have dedicated themselves to the salvation of the young in the same century in their clearly preventive intention, mentality, means and methods. What links them is their passion for the salvation (in its broadest sense) of the young, which Don Bosco expressed in singular breadth of perspectives and projects.⁵² Everyone is included in these perspectives, but particular predilection is shown towards the young and, among the young, towards those more at risk: from East to West, from North to South, from Valparaiso, Chile, to Peking, China, from Europe to Africa and Australia.

Don Bosco brings a steadfast, eminently Catholic conviction, that "Faith without works is dead", that charity and good deeds are the only sure way to witness the truth of God's love. The educator's work is a continuous process of invention, or better, the ability to grasp, with practical intuitions, the right moment, the suitable place for acting. The Preventive System formulated by Don Bosco in his 1877 treatise, but lived and practised before that, is one of these unexpected but surprising and timely educational works, emerging during the time of his religious maturity. The Preventive System is the masterpiece of a craftsman, an artist, architect and builder: Don Bosco. And like any true artist, he shows the difference between what is imagined and planned and what is actually implemented and expressed.

⁵⁰ E. Viganò, *Nuova educazione*, pp. 13-14, 18-19, 30.

⁵¹ E. Viganò, *Nuova educazione*, comment on the *Strenna* 1995, *Called to freedom* (Gal 5:13), let us rediscover the Preventive System by educating young people to values. Rome, FMA 1995, pp. 9-12; idem, *Un nuovo sistema preventivo*, BS 119 (1995) no. 4, April, p. 2 (a simple summary of the commentary)

⁵² See what was proposed in Chap. 8.

2. For this reason, 'what is expressed', even with its limitations, is something extra-rich, something which those who practise it can read and re-interpret in the present and in the future; they are able to appreciate it and bend it to suit new demands for action. It is enough not to move too far from the great ideas which inform it, some of which are rooted in the faith, and others in the daily theatre of life: "The greater glory of God and the salvation of souls"; "A keen faith, steadfast hope and ardent charity"; "A good Christian and upright citizen"; "cheerfulness, study and piety"; the three SSSs; the five SSSSSs; "evangelisation and civilisation".

Nor must we overlook the great methodological orientations: "Make yourself loved before making yourself feared" or "if you want to make yourself feared", "rather than making yourself feared"; "Reason, religion and loving kindness"; "fathers, brothers, friends"; "familiarity, especially during recreation time"; "to win over the heart"; "an educator is a person consecrated to the good of his pupils"; "ample freedom to jump around, to run and shout as much as they wish".

3. But if we want Don Bosco's experiences, ideas and system not to end up being merely a jealously guarded heritage but form the actual beginning of a real educational innovation for the new youth and for new and deeply changed times, then they have to be studied in-depth; they have to be thought out again, integrated, updated theoretically and practically.

Don Bosco's Preventive System came into being and was formulated within a limited world, centred mostly on the experience of the oratory at Valdocco, Turin, even though it was proposed for a variety of situations far and wide. Today this system is called upon to meet the challenge of the world of the young which even from a quantitative point of view presents problems that cannot in any way be compared with those of the 19th century. Among the more outstanding problems the following four could be singled out:

1. The unlimited extension of 'youth' when compared with 'youth' of the 19th century, even simply in demographic terms;
2. The extended age range of youth from the brief childhood of the past, 1-6/7 years of age, to something which might include the first 25/30 years of life;
3. The countless variety of circumstances the young find themselves in. Following the criteria used in Don Bosco's times, not only economic, social and cultural, but also moral and religious, most young people today might be considered 'at risk', 'abandoned', 'poor';
4. The extraordinary cultural pluralism, often involving conflict, which young people experience today.

4. For these and other reasons the original educational hypothesis seems to have been superseded. It created an institutional, separate, apolitical system. The Preventive System must be written all over again and implemented in many versions to reach the entire gamut of people involved, more or less explicitly, and systematically associated with the growing up process, beginning with the leading players: parents, teachers, other educators, pupils and those being educated in any shape or form. Naturally, we must be aware of the existence of divergent and conflicting forces which are to be tackled cooperatively from a pedagogical point of view.⁵³

In tackling them the following need to be involved: politicians, economists, scholastic organizers, mass media, cultural and sporting associations, leisure clubs, churches, ideologies, administrators at all levels. No institutional education sector can be considered self-sufficient from now on. And even the theoretical revision of the Preventive System cannot be carried out except within a broad area of cultural, social and political discussion.

5. At a formal educational level the following needs stand out: frank realisation that there are lacunae and retrograde elements within the traditional Preventive System; an effort is required to create and rebuild the system almost from its very foundations. There are some parts of the Preventive System, which Don Bosco was unable to explore profoundly and fully implement due to personal and cultural limitations as well as historical circumstances.

What stand out first of all are social and political areas, and formal education, without neglecting consideration of strong moral content already generously present in the system.⁵⁴

Here there is an obvious need to engage in a specific theoretical and technical in-depth study of the "Good Christian and upright citizen".⁵⁵ No less needed is a radical reconsideration of affectivity, sexuality and human love in reference to different

⁵³ Cf. P. Braido, *Pedagogia dell'identità, della differenza, della solidarietà*, in «Orientamenti Pedagogici» 37 (1990) 923-930. We cannot overlook research, reflection and writings on 'complex society' and the 'educating society': cf. For example, As. Pe. I., *Per un'educazione nuova di fronte alla società complessa*. Acts of the 18th National Congress, Catania, Nov. 3-7, 1987, Catania C.U.E.C.M. 1989, 229 p.; G. Angelini et al, *Educare nella società complessa. Problemi Esperienze Prospettive*. Brescia, La Scuola 1991, 225 p.; N. Galli, *Educazione familiare e società complessa*, Milan, Vita e Pensiero 1991, 482 p. (with a complete bibliography, pp. 455-472); cf. S. Colonna, *Senso di una pedagogia della «società educante»*. Lecce, Milella 1978, 246 p.; idem, *Società educante e umanizzazione sociale*, Ibid 1979, 252 p.

⁵⁴ Cf. for example, F. Desramaut, *L'azione sociale dei cattolici del secolo XIX e quella di don Bosco*, in *L'impegno della famiglia salesiana per la giustizia*. Leumann-Torino, Elle Di Ci 1976, pp. 21-77; in particular pp 46-75, *L'azione e il pensiero cristiano di don Bosco*.

⁵⁵ Cf. P. Braido, *Una formula dell'umanesimo educativo di don Bosco: «Buon cristiano e onesto cittadino»*, RSS 13 (1994) 75.

vocational choices. This radical reconsideration is urgently required of a system which makes affectivity, loving kindness and kindred realities one of its foundations.⁵⁶ In fact, even though it has the ambition of being an open system and a system for the young, the Preventive System has proven to be, perhaps not so rarely, a suspicious, rather cautious one, at times indifferent, fearful, prudent and inclined to control and to silence.

A third item to add is a more positive appreciation and explicit use of the inner energies of the young and an increased recourse to personal and group autonomy within the framework of educative cooperation and even as part of teaching and catechetical activities.

Finally, we need to get beyond a 'traditional' culture, a pragmatic view of what we understand by 'profession', 'student', 'artisan' or young worker to be. The revision of the Preventive System also demands overcoming a prevalently authoritarian culture, closed to free reading, personal research, confrontation and debate.⁵⁷ Turin, with its advanced industrial culture and associated social issues, and the birthplace of the Preventive System, has recognised some strong limitations of Salesian culture: strictly traditionalist and conservative!⁵⁸ Of the three great words used to express the Preventive System, it appears that 'reason' in particular needs to reclaim the fullness of its meaning and its theoretical and practical functions: understanding, explaining, judging and deciding. This way reason can be the guardian of affectivity and religiosity, an enlightened practical guide for acting, key in turn to moral existence, and the place for timely, creative intuitions.⁵⁹

6. The Preventive System came about and grew over millennia, in a religious, biblical and Christian atmosphere. It now needs a new and vigorous anthropological and theological foundation, which might restore and strengthen the fragile practical and moralistic foundation of the 19th century. The theological vision presupposes

⁵⁶ Cf. P. Braido, *La prassi di don Bosco e il sistema preventivo*, in *Il sistema preventivo verso il terzo millennio*. Rome, Editrice SDB, 1995, pp. 145-148. X. Thévenot insists on this in his studies cited in the bibliography. Elements of reconsideration and proposals connected with a new problem in respect to Don Bosco's experience can be found in the collaborative work ed. by C. Semeraro, *Coeducazione e presenza salesiana. Problemi e prospettive*. Leumann-Torino, Elle Di Ci 1993, in particular pp. 81-151, *Coeducazione tra storia e vita salesiana*.

⁵⁷ For some fragmentary consideration cf. F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco e l'indifferenza religiosa*, in C. Semeraro (Ed.), *I giovani fra indifferenza e nuova religiosità*. Leumann (Turin), Elle Di Ci 1995, pp. 143-160.

⁵⁸ Cf. G. Pollano (Ed.), *Cristiani e cultura a Torino*. Acts of the Congress in Turin, 3-5 April 1987. Milan. F. Angeli 1988, pp. 41-44.

⁵⁹ Cf. M. Pellerey, *La via della ragione...*, pp. 385-396.

previous reflection of a rational character on the human being, on what it means to be a young man or a young woman.

The opening gambit of Rousseau's *Émile* is not *per se* heretical. Christopher de Beaumont was able to grasp the opportunity not so much to condemn but to clarify Catholic teaching on the effects of original sin within Adam's race. A human being is God's creature; in his essential and original structure, a human being is a value, something good. This essential structure was not destroyed nor corrupted in its 'naturalness'.

Original sin stands for the condition of being deprived of the state of justice and therefore of being slaves of Satan (this does not mean that Satan has taken possession of man), of being exposed to suffering, death, lack of the original harmony between the senses and spiritual faculties. But these faculties still hold on to their intrinsic value and dynamism.⁶⁰

The disharmony expressed by the easy straying of passions no longer subject by grace to the law of the spirit, through concupiscence leads to an actual weakening of reason and will as they strive to achieve their proper object, namely, what is true and good, but it does not lead to their intrinsic corruption.

Passions such as self-love, the tendency to love and defend oneself, sensitivity, and affectivity which is food or sex-oriented, are not *per se* negative; they have simply lost their original subordination to the law of reason and grace. And therefore, thanks to the nature proper to all human faculties and thanks to the grace of redemption, all the possibilities of rebuilding God's original plan in every human being, in justice and holiness, remain alive, re-fashioned by evangelical newness.⁶¹

7. Likewise, we can say the same thing about the second part of Rousseau's claim. Youth sociology and the psychology of growing up, which Don Bosco loved to tie to his rather bare formulas⁶² have, at their disposal all the tools which were unthinkable for Don Bosco, the tools needed to describe and interpret the causes,

⁶⁰ "Love of self" is different in Rousseau's conception of it: it is the natural goodness of the individual. Education has the task of allowing it to develop correctly since, as a result of a sick society, it should develop away from any contact with it. This is Rousseau's strong point anthropologically speaking: through education ideas of wellbeing, goodness, freedom, happiness are sublimated and become moral ideas. But that means being closed within *Émile*'s selfishness, deprived of true disinterest, social ability, sense of common humanity. The 'new schools' did not follow Rousseau in this, opening themselves instead decidedly to social ability. (cf. A. Ravier *L'éducation de l'homme nouveau. Essai Historique et Critique sur le Livre de l'Émile de J. J. Rousseau*, t. II. Paris, Éditions SPES 1941, pp. 505-509.

⁶¹ Elsewhere we have noted the moral emphasis of Don Bosco's pedagogical spirituality, with explicit lack of basic dogmatic aspects: cf. P. Braido, *La prassi di don Bosco...*, also cited there a note by P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol II, pp. 116-117.

⁶² Cf. Chap 9, §1 and 2.

effects and measures of what has become “degenerate in the hands of man”, compared to their original status. Both at the local and regional level and beyond, it is possible to carry on the needed research with more precise, systematic and properly articulated information on the real situation of the young. Only this way can old and new language overcome its status as mere terminology, as it reflects notions which are real and call for action: poverty, abandonment, risk, deprivation, social distress, violence; needs, aspirations, opportunities, values; family or school education either in crisis or lacking or even deviant; ‘dangerous’ society which produces children ‘at risk’; ‘distant’ ‘closed’ ecclesiastical institutions. Education and pedagogy call for an on-going creative imagination, instead of tired repetition of formulas.

8. A serious theological vision also correctly guides us in understanding the real circumstances of the main players in the growing-up process, their potential, the energies they have and their need to be respected and assisted in their development. This assistance must be provided through differentiated resources and approaches for childhood, boyhood, adolescence and adulthood. The fact that we rely on these resources does not mean that we are following Naturalism as viewed, conceived and implemented in different theoretical contexts by Komenski, Locke, Rousseau and Montessori, or the ‘new schools’ by ‘activism’, and ‘institutional pedagogy’.

We do not have to be child or youth ‘worshippers’ to understand the real historical discoveries made. These discoveries can be confirmed and enriched by old and updated anthropological and theological beliefs. On the one hand there is an innate tendency to happiness in every human being, *eudaimonia*. The great Greek moralists have written pages of high even though elitist calibre on this and the great Christian theologians of the first centuries and of the Middle Ages welcomed it in their writings.

This is the starting point of every authentic moral and educational journey at a human level, which calls for mobilising every human energy, psychic, physical and spiritual, capable of reaching the constantly moving goal-posts: the realisation of a complete, individual and social existence.

Added to all this is the abundant in-pouring of the gifts of grace infused in a human being at Baptism: the sharing of divine life, the theological and moral virtues which protect it and help it grow towards the attainment of happiness in the beatific encounter with God.

Human and divine pedagogy meet to bring about human happiness, which is sublimated in the Gospel Beatitudes. The young will be able to proclaim these Beatitudes because of the aspirations and impulses of their age, but they will be seriously and responsibly proclaiming them only if they are in a situation of doing it on their own, thanks to the twofold and unified pedagogy of God and man.

9. From this perspective it becomes a duty to appeal to all the experiences and kinds of knowledge which may provide us, even through nature and reason, with

information on the real situation and disposition of the various stages of the young. For a correct education we have an abundance of research work at our disposal and scientifically precise information, both on the fundamental importance of childhood and the psychological and cultural complexity of adolescence. As far as childhood is concerned, no authentic theology of sin leads us to deny what experience and science have discovered and have already made public on the original virtue of the child. The intuitions of the great educators, from Froebel to Aporti, to Montessori, agree on the data provided by the sciences on the child: the child possesses a huge potential of marvellously creative energy which, if not tampered with at its roots, has a decisive impact, beginning from the earliest years, on his future.

Modern psychology and in particular depth-psychology, in their investigations into the adult psyche, have traced the causes of the character flaws, psychic turmoil and imbalance found in the adults to their childhood experiences.⁶³ But it would be wrong to attribute these negative traits which may have come from so many contexts in the family and society to childhood: shortcomings, inter-conjugal and domestic conflict, neglect, hurts, violence, and what might have come from physical and psychic pathologies in the conscious or unconscious. Childhood, recognised as such from its very foundation and in its environment, must unquestionably be the primary and privileged reference point for a responsible preventive education.

10. Anyone who professionally deals with the successive stages of youth development, should first of all beware of any mythologising the age of adolescence, ignoring its previous historical period or stage.

The literature which inspired Don Bosco to write *The Companion of Youth* might lead someone to understand adolescence in Rousseau's terms at least partially and unconsciously, as an immaculate 'second birth', a 'new beginning', without any inherited debts or strings attached. During this stage, positive potential intertwines with the shortcomings and deficiencies due to the education or bad education, or lack of education preceding it. Childhood and adolescent psychopathology aims precisely at separating the apparent anomalies due to the growing process itself from pathologies with far distant roots already set in motion and in need of psychotherapeutic and educational interventions.⁶⁴ The prevention offered initially (Primary Prevention) might also at times turn into prevention which is good for the years to follow (Secondary prevention). Following this line of development, we could hold to the conviction that

⁶³ M. Montessori, *L'intelligenza assorbante* and *L'umiltà del mondo attraverso il bambino*: interventions at the VIII International Montessori Congress, San Remo, Aug. 22-29, 1949, pp. 369-383 and 528-537.

⁶⁴ V.L. Castellazzi, *Psicopatologia dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza: Le nervosi*. Rome, LAS 1988, 156 p.; *Le psicoso*. ibid. 1991, 159 p.; *La depressione*, ibid, 1993, 174 p.

Don Bosco's initial preventive experience, essentially of the primary type, might be extended to all the circumstances of human growth, even to the most complex ones up to the second and third levels.

At any rate, right from the beginning, the Preventive System was exercised at both pedagogical and positive levels and also at the level of social assistance, by different interventions, to the point that they seem much more appropriate now than they were then.⁶⁵

12. (NB, 11 was skipped in the original Italian text!)

The fact of having the same final goal, a multiplicity of objectives and different paths to follow means first of all a diversified and qualitative articulation of the final goal. This final goal can be legitimately expressed and summed up in the classic term 'Salvation'. It could also be equated with holiness, if this is not identified with canonised holiness or the like but taken in its original sense: "To live in Christ, to be in a habitual state of grace," have a permanent awareness of one's Christian dignity as a child of God, even though at times a 'prodigal' child of God.

As far as the various levels of belonging to the Kingdom of God on earth are concerned, Don Bosco, as we have already remarked, wrote of them in his *Historical Outlines* (1862), jotting down the balance sheet of twenty years of work among the boys. What he wrote is significant and open to broader development.⁶⁶ It deals with concrete initial hints to some sort of differentiated pedagogy. We can speak about it and even begin the different requirements presented to the young in different educational institutional settings: the oratory, the boarding school, the home and the Minor Seminary.

13. There is another difference to be considered with regard to education and it is related to two fundamental pedagogical directions:

- 1) The individualised or rather personalised aspect of the educational journey, in reference to the pupil's freedom, taken as an individual or as a group, demand for autonomy in choosing the objectives and the means and methods to attain them;
- 2) Legitimate educational pluralism which takes into consideration the increased number of circumstances within which young people grow up today.

This is something which was almost ignored by Don Bosco and his collaborators, since they worked in a fundamentally homogeneous world, or one considered as such, and thought that the same system might be (too) easily transferred to more

⁶⁵ As indicated in the bibliography, the perceptive contributions of Giancarlo Milanese and others are significant in this order of thinking. They have seen how to understand and re-propose – theoretically and practically – the Preventive System as something multidisciplinary, historical, sociological, psychological, pedagogical.

⁶⁶ Cf. Chap 11, §4 and 5 and Chap 13, §6.

heterogeneous worlds resulting from gender, ethnicity and political, social and cultural circumstances.

14. As a result the person and activity of the one to be educated has changed. This has been vindicated by the most recent and advanced findings of those who champion activism and institutional pedagogy, and by the relevant and continuing phenomena of protest and self-management. The fact that some inspirations are ideological does not eliminate the legitimate question-mark they raise. It needs to be evaluated and responded to by approaches more suited to all these many differences. Research into the cultural, scientific and technical foundations of the various different interventions can help.⁶⁷

With this reservation it is legitimate to hold that the Preventive System may profitably be linked to various forms of activism, self-government and self-management and versions of these proportionate to the maturity already reached. This is especially so during adolescence and young-adulthood. Any preconceived pessimism, which might tend to see educational activity as a nagging kind of assistance aimed at protecting the weak or the young person at risk or some poor unfortunate minor should be disposed of. Psychology of development, depth-psychology, social psychology, the psychology of the family and of institutions, might provide helpful indications for inventing solutions of various kinds, highly differentiated and inspired by the gradualness of the process and a sense of what is possible.

At the time when youth protests were getting under way, Achilles Ardigo asked himself this question: "Could we hypothesise a youth culture as a vital component of a renewing force, maybe even a revolutionary one regarding the civilisation of well-being in one part of the world? It would seem to fit the present state of things in a society of huge organisations or those in an advanced stage of transformation. The discourse becomes rather difficult and high-flown' at this point".⁶⁸

15. The more we stress the dignity, virtue and active role of the child and young person, the greater is the educator's need to play the role of innovator. This 'Copernican revolution' in education and pedagogy should be considered as a definite conquest. Don Bosco might have had some practical intuitions concerning this but there is no doubt that in his preventive initiative the educators are the uncontested owners of the entire system: its goals, content, methods and means.⁶⁹ After more than a century of theory and practice, youth-adult relationships have undergone deep change,

⁶⁷ Cf. P. Braido, *Appunti per una interpretazione pluridimensionale della «constestazione giovanile»*, in «Orientamenti Pedagogici» 15 (1968) 1284-1304.

⁶⁸ A. Ardigo, *La condizione giovanile nella società industriale*, in *Questioni di sociologia* vol II, Brescia, La Scuola 1966, p. 609.

⁶⁹ Highlighted in Chap. 14 §1; cf also P. Braido, *La prassi di don Bosco...*, pp. 135-136.

if for no other reason at least for the fact that in today's society the attainment of adult status has been delayed for several years. This holds true in reference to profession, financial independence, emancipation from parents, and the possibility of forming a family.

But for this reason alone the natural and legitimate process of maturing should not be held in check or blocked⁷⁰ as might happen when prevention and assistance are ambiguously understood. All this means a radical new way of interpreting and experimenting with the roles of 'father, brother and friend'. The educator who is sure of himself and reassuring, aware of his role and responsible is not authoritarian but only authoritative and capable of combining deep respect and unconditional trust with his boundless affective involvement. Only this way can there be an authentic dialogue and a constructive confrontation with the young person, who is respected in his rights, his active role, including his right to dissent and protest.

Not only are sodalities expected to be, as Don Bosco wanted, something for the young people themselves to run, but everything pertinent to them should first of all and more universally be their business too: their life, desires, ideals, restlessness, their proposals, reasons and collaboration. As a consequence the educative community, experienced as a family, undergoes a radical change of meaning and style. It is inevitable that the kinds of relationships which in Don Bosco's era might have been rather paternalistic or too much like a family, should be replaced by free and liberating relationships which are authentically personalised and personalising.⁷¹

16. Along with these main players in the system, once conceptual and concrete changes have been made, the entire methodology of the Preventive System is involved, and it should start from the basic concepts of love and fear, reason, religion and loving kindness.

Any pastoral ministry and pedagogy based on 'servile' fear which generates real, mental and affective dread of the 'master' cannot but be up for question. Dread should be substituted by mutual respect, just as the commandment 'honour your father and your mother' is not just a one-way street. Only someone who has shown himself to be respectable and trustworthy can desire respect. And then, the three words which were proper to a vaguely and obscurely romantic world (when God, country and family were 'considered supreme') should be reinterpreted in the light of totally new concepts and thinking. We also have a different view of the Christian Faith than Don Bosco had: liturgical renewal, new bases for moral theology and spirituality, a

⁷⁰ G. Lutte, *Lo sviluppo della personalità. Prospettive pedagogiche*. Presentation of the work of D. P. Ausubel, Zürich PAS-Verlag 1963, pp. 21-22.

⁷¹ P. G. Grasso, *Gioventù: gruppo marginale in crisi di identità*, in «Orientamenti pedagogici» 12 (1966) 759.

return to the sources of the Christian message as proclaimed in the Scriptures and gently channelled into dogmatic reflection.⁷²

Loving kindness needs to be re-conceived in terms of its foundations, content, the way it is demonstrated, in view of an essential and desirably different relationship between adults and young people, and on the basis of the self-awareness of young people today which makes them less disposed to be won over in their affections and less exposed to its latent dangers.

Reason, particularly should recover its full meaning. The clarification of the concept of reason and its re-evaluation is essential to an educative prevention inasmuch as the young people and adults are constantly being exposed to contrasting tensions such as the sudden appearance of technological rationality, the demands made on education to control the world of desires, evasion through the world of instant emotions, the pressing need to fantasise power, the advent of weak thinking, and the same time the demand for critical thinking amidst the wilds of multiculturalism.⁷³

Solutions may be found, given renewed methods, in the blending of instruction and education, in the recovery of all the roles that reason should play within the ambit of human potential.⁷⁴

17. In the general process of recovering what is 'preventive', one thing must now be given its proper value since it is on this that the system finds its basis in its more natural and primitive form: the family.⁷⁵ Family stands out among other things as the system which is most open to the possibilities, problems and related solutions of the young. It is open to the unexpected, to risks and to quick decisions, new and timely ones so long as they remain consistent with fundamental general principles: legal, moral, religious.

The family may become the paradigm of 'renewal in continuity' for the Preventive System, in preference to the formalised model of a closed system such as the boarding institution or school. The oratory, associations and groups are forms very close to it. We need to invent a concrete and articulate preventive family-like pedagogy and re-apply the key concepts of the system (carefully, in view of changed circumstances) especially loving kindness, oscillating between affective creativity, a reassuring sense of belonging and concern for possessiveness and violence.

⁷² See, for example, the reflections and proposals of Giuseppe Groppo at the end of a study on *Sacramental Life, Catechesis, Spiritual Formation as Essential Elements of the Preventive System in Il sistema educativo di Don Bosco tra pedagogia antica e nuova*, pp. 52-74, especially, pp. 67-74.

⁷³ Cf. M. Pellerey, *La via della ragione, Rileggendo le parole e le azioni di don Bosco*, in «Orientamenti pedagogici» 35 (1988) 383-384.

⁷⁴ Cf. again M. Pellerey, *La via della ragione*...., pp. 395-396.

⁷⁵ In 1869 Don Bosco wrote to a benefactor in Milan: "I believe you did well to bring the boy back to be educated at home: better a father's eye than the eye of a hundred assistants. This can be said of parents who have the means to educate them at home, as you have". Letter to Giuseppe Brambilla, 8 May 1869 Em III, lett no. 1312).

If the family can rightly be considered the actual cradle of the Preventive System it also calls for an on-going regeneration, education and preventive re-education. Radical changes are needed today [on behalf of the family] and they have to be of a welfare, political and social character, but it is impossible for preventive educators not to also include educational and re-educational interventions, therapeutic interventions even, on behalf of anyone aspiring to marriage and the mission of transmitting life. These interventions should take place before, during and after creating a conjugal and family community.

18. Finally, it becomes inevitably essential for preventive educators to have renewed readiness to learn. This is the primordial condition for proclaiming (though not yet defining) a 'new Preventive System'. Besides all the earlier mentioned circumstances, there also must be a recourse to the human sciences and in particular to the education sciences. These have made immeasurable progress since Don Bosco's times. We cannot do without them at all epistemological levels, at time when all pedagogical thinking, whatever leaning it may have, is at a painstaking stage of critical reflection.

Even given the multiplicity of preventive interventions, the Preventive System understood as pedagogy and pastoral ministry is subject to all the tensions which characterise the epistemological basis of science or of the sciences of educational and pastoral activity.⁷⁶

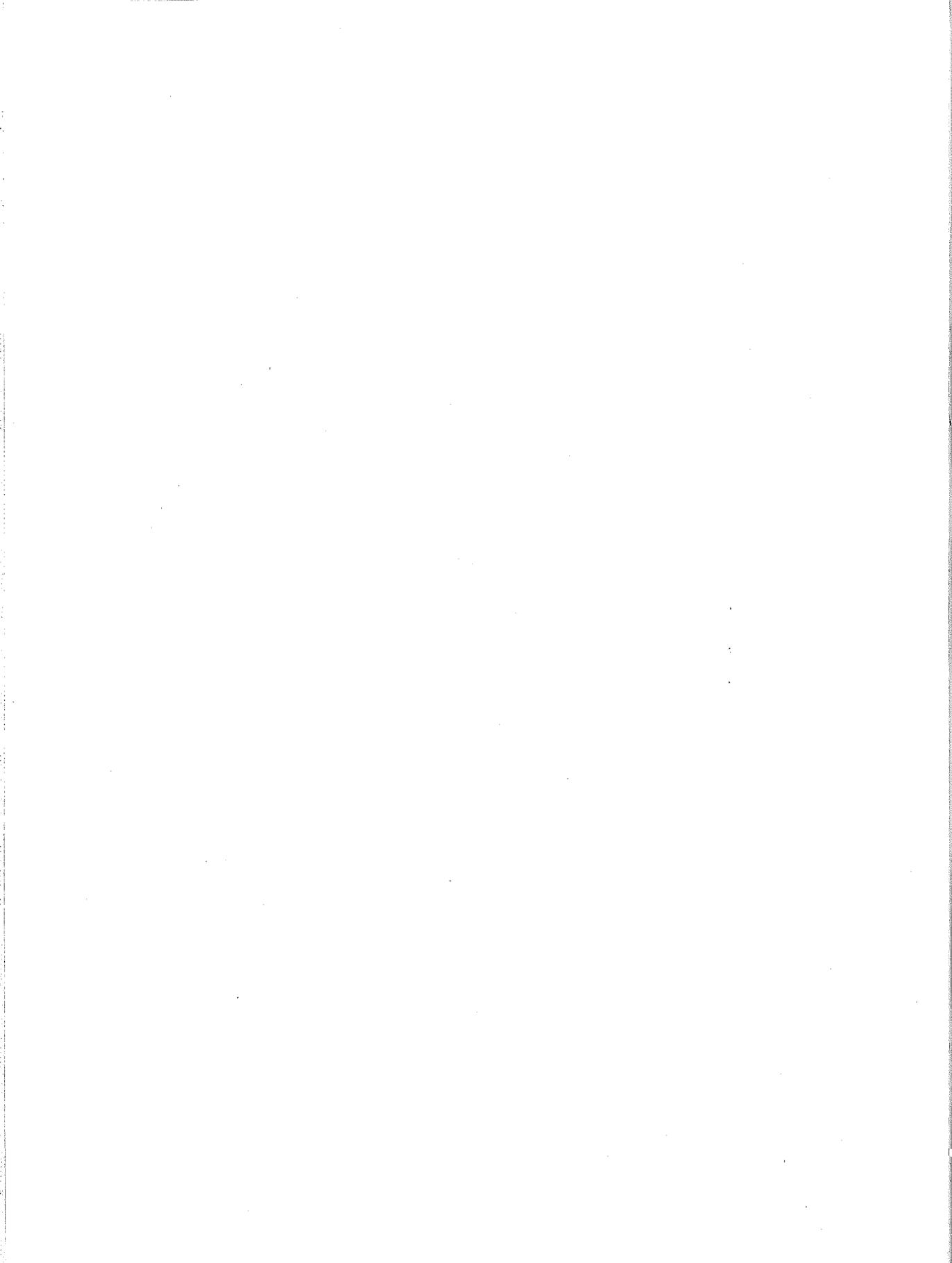
And the reality of youth with its vast gamut of situations and problems is still more pressing than the theory.⁷⁷

Don Bosco's fundamentally dogmatic system was not only drawn from general anthropological and theological principles. His experience as an educator, and the formulation it received reveal a pedagogy which is, to some extent experimental, but an experimental pedagogy which was practised, evaluated, improved upon tirelessly in the pedagogical laboratory which we know as the Oratory in Valdocco and the institutions which branched out from the Mother House.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Cf. C. Nanni, *Pedagogia in discussione*, in «Orientamenti pedagogici» 36 (1989) 890-914; C. Volpi, *Paideia '80. L'educabilità nell'era del post-moderno*. Naples, Tecnodid 1988, 162 p.; F. Cambi, R. Fornaca, G. Cives, *Complessità, pedagogia critica, educazione democratica*. Florence, La Nuova Italia 1991, III-23e4 p.; A. Granese, *Il labirinto e la porta stretta. Saggio di pedagogia critica*. Florence, La Nuova Italia 1993, VIII-399 p.; G. Acone, *Declino dell'educazione e tramonto d'epoca*. Brescia, La Scuola 1994, 268 p.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Ripartire dalla strada* (Turin, SEI 1997), cited in the bibliography, the pertinent insistences of Domenico Ricca: *I salesiani nel pianeta minori* (pp. 28-29); *I salesiani nel pianeta tossicodipendenza* (pp. 137-157).

⁷⁸ Cf. P. Braido, *Pedagogia perseverante tra sfide e scommesse*, in «Orientamenti Pedagogici» 38 (1991) 906-911.



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