

SALESIAN CRITERIA AND PROPOSALS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

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The educational experience of Don Bosco inspires Salesian Higher Education in different ways. The first is in the inspirations of the Salesian charism that accompanied the moment that Salesian Higher Education was born. Beyond history, we are dealing above all with subsequent ways of considering the Salesian educational style from a criteriological, applicative and future point of view. Salesian anthropology is summarized around the following criteria: Christianity and culturally stimulating citizenship; differentiated pedagogy between “basic honesty” and “excellent leadership”; the welcoming environment and, finally, the ideal of the educator as a formator – animator – teacher – companion. On the basis of these criteria we will propose some ideas and potential processes applicable in the field of didactics, accompaniment, planning and positioning within the Salesian Province.

1. Ideal inspirations concerning the birth of Salesian higher education

Every Salesian Institute of Higher Education (IUS) has its own characteristic history and basic traits. Without an attempt to

amalgamate and stereotype the institutions, I will try to summarize not so much the foundational histories, but rather points of reflection and the situational typologies that have stimulated the origin of the IUS. Given the history of foundations and ideas, it seems convincing to draw two scenarios. The first originates from the educational and pastoral needs of the world of youth, the second, instead, responds to the need for the formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco. Consequently, both are inspired by reflections that have different emphases.

1.1. Higher education of young adults becomes part of the Salesian mission

In the West, the final decades of the last century were characterized by the possibility for the young people of the working class to access higher education. The university was no longer seen as a sector for a privileged few, but rather an environment for an ordinary life preparation for a large number of young people. In addition, the definition of “youth” was broadened to include the term “young adult” that describe young people as legally adults who are in processes of maturation and training belonging to the age-groups of 18 to 28 years (Vecchi, 1988).¹ Particularly in the European context, the Salesians of Don Bosco at first developed reflections on the pastoral care of young university students from the 1980s onwards. It was only towards the end of the millennium that a reflection began on the Salesian Institutes of Higher Education in other contexts. A typical Salesian way of proceeding is recognized in this process - first the needs of young people are met, different programs and projects are explored and finally the institutional solutions are clarified.²

¹ The 22nd General Chapter in 1984 had affirmed that “it is important not to stop at adolescence ... but to go further, to the youth, where at this moment interesting cultural and religious phenomenon are noted” (General Chapter 22, no. 71).

² Valdocco Oratory based on a series of “itinerant” activities, the process of expansion of its activities, the progressive logic of the foundation of the Salesian Congregation and the approval of the Constitutions are “founding” experiences of the Salesian way of proceeding (Braido, 2003, vol. 1, p. 299-320).

Juan Edmundo Vecchi, as councilor for youth ministry and later as Rector Major, is one of the central figures in the animation and reflection on Salesian Higher Education. For the first time, and in a systematic way, in 1988, at a meeting organized at the European level, he tackled the theme “Salesians and the pastoral care of university students” (Vecchi, 1988). It was noted that “the emphasis for the moment was almost entirely on the pastoral care of university students. This pastoral action was implemented in about twenty boarding houses/residences for university students, in some chaplaincies and in a few university clubs. No relevance seemed to be given to the world of the university in youth ministry as a whole” (Nanni, 1988, pp. 162-163). The concluding remarks of the meeting in 1988 report some summaries and motivations for Salesian pastoral work in the “university world”:

- the age of “youth” has been broadened;
- university studies have become accessible to young working-class individuals;
- university students are increasingly at risk and in a situation of abandonment;
- the education of university students is required for the principle of continuity;
- the university world is a privileged place for the formation of leaders.

Two sets of problems were reported among the forms of distress, or new poverty, among university students. The first is relational: being left to themselves, individualism, uprooting, the anonymity of university environments, the crisis of a crisis in participatory organizations. A second set revolves around the problematic aspects of the university as such: economic exploitation of culture, strong competitiveness that induces fear of failure, uncertain future employment (Nanni 1988, pp. 40-41). As responses to the situation, the authors of the discussion point to the promotion of a pedagogy of educational environment and a pedagogy of personal accompaniment. Also, in this context, lies the proposal for psychological orientation programs as elaborated by Umberto Fontana in the early 1990s (Fontana & Piccolboni, 1993; Fontana, 1994). Nanni (1988, p. 45) in his proposal overcame the pure reactive mentality with respect to the needs of the young and proactively

proposed pastoral care among university students as a privileged field for vocational ministry.

In Europe, for sociological reasons, the model for the pastoral care of university students seemed to prevail, while in Latin America, Universities or Salesian Institutes of Higher Education were developed. The context, legislation and opportunities have favored the emergence of universities that have responded to the needs of the working classes in the matter of greater professionalization. Regarding IUS, J.E. Vecchi stated that “at the outset attention was directed especially to organizing a service to create the opportunity of a higher education amid the middle and poorer classes and fill the cultural gaps that existed.” (Vecchi, 1997, p. 45). Insofar as he began with an academic proposal structured at the level of the environment, Vecchi pointed rather to the challenge of a Salesian way of training qualified teams professionally and pastorally, that know how to create alternative proposals with respect to the dominant mentality: “Once the first organizing effort required by such initiatives has been accomplished, the moment comes to confront decisively and at community level the cultural and pastoral qualification beginning with the preparation of confreres and lay personnel.” (Vecchi, 1997, p. 45). A similar approach to proposals and attention is seen in the recent development of colleges in South Asia (India) conceived as structures of higher education dedicated to the professionalization of young people from rural and working sectors.

Considering the two differences in emphasis rather than the popular tertiary education linked to a IUS Institute and the pastoral care of young university students through chaplaincies or residences for university students, one can glimpse the particular strengths and challenges of each of them. In the following paragraph I would also like to analyze the approach to higher education which draws inspiration from the development of the formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco.

1.2. The formation of Salesians that inspires and requires higher education

A diverse source of inspiration that links higher education to the Preventive System is found in the traditions, theories and practice revolving around the formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco. I believe that this source is not only at the level of ideas, but also at the level of a mentality that then structures the projects, curriculum and educational models employed, especially if a studentate of philosophy or theology that was aimed at the formation of Salesians, then becomes an Institute of Higher Education. In the following paragraphs I summarize two lines of thought: one, much dated in time, attempts to conceptualize the Preventive System within higher pedagogical studies, the other as offered by J.E. Vecchi in the context of the beginnings of the IUS network.

The Salesians of Don Bosco gradually realized the need to broaden their formation with scientific studies of pedagogy. There are certain early indications in the 1930s within the General Council: “Some state the need to give theologians some general idea of pedagogy in a scientific way” (Prellezo, 2016, p. 215). Later, during Peter Ricaldone’s term of office, a project for a Salesian higher institute of pedagogical studies was maturing, which in 1940, in Turin, took concrete form as the Higher Institute of Pedagogy (ISP – Istituto Superiore di Pedagogia). The aforementioned Rector Major emphasized its importance by saying: “It is a necessity for us to erect this new Faculty; it is a necessity for the Salesian Society, a religious society of educators” (Prellezo, 2016, p. 216). Interestingly, only in 1956 were the motivations for its canonical recognition reported by the promoters of the ISP. The authors speak of the incidence of the youth problem in a world of great economic, social and cultural transformations; the inadequacy of the preparation of educators; the urgency of confronting the contemporary pedagogical world; the intensification of scientific production in the field of education (Prellezo, 2016, pp. 218-219).

The idea of the need for higher studies for the formation of the Salesians, which started out as a concern of some far-sighted scholars and superiors, spread widely during the period of the Second Vatican Council and prompted the thematization of the essential “qualification” of the Salesians. The 19th General Chapter held in

1965 on the new campus of the Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum in Rome, stated vehemently that “every manifestation of our activity now demands qualified persons in the theological, liturgical, philosophical, pedagogical, scientific, technical, scholastic, artistic, recreational, administrative fields, etc.”. Qualification is a “matter of life and death for the Congregation” which for the Chapter implies a re-dimensioning of the structures and the multitude of activities (GC19, pp. 5-10). Despite the insistence, many decisions of that period remained only on paper. Twenty-five years later, Juan Edmundo Vecchi’s honest evaluation of the implementation of General Chapter 19 was: “GC19’s reflection was not satisfactorily translated into practice [...]; neither interpretation nor practice experienced major changes at the grassroots of the Congregation” (Vecchi, 1991, p. 10).

The evolution for the need to qualify Salesians for higher studies culminated in the aforementioned letter of 1997 - “For You I Study”, to which the institution of the IUS refers. IUS Institutes are explicitly placed in the context of the formation of a “new type of Salesian” which corresponds to the demands of the “new evangelization” and the “new education”. The Salesian is part of a new operational model: that of pastoral leaders, first responsible for the Salesian identity of initiatives and works, and then, as an “animating nucleus”, as formator of other educators. It is thus essential to evolve and remain capable of creatively interpreting culture, to animate a broad educational environment, to accompany processes of maturation and growth along with other educators, to orient people, to interact in the social context. This entails keeping various competences formed and updated (Vecchi, 1997, pp. 17-18).

Starting from these ideal references, the IUS Institutes, which were not conceived for the formation of Salesian religious but in service to the younger generations, have a potential to disseminate wide-ranging thought and action, overcoming the temptation to downplay the proposals to the dominant mentality.”Our Universities must define their orientation in line with their Catholic character and harmonize their educative philosophy with Salesian criteria, becoming centers for formation and the elaboration of culture of Christian inspiration.” (Vecchi, 1997, p. 46) From this arises the need and urgency to address, decisively and communally, the cultural and

pastoral qualification, starting with the preparation of confreres and lay people.

2. Salesian anthropology as a criterion for Salesian Higher Education

In the first paragraph we deemed important the short study of the stimuli and inspirations that accompanied the origin of the IUS. The valorization of the common ideas that emerged in the historical process, albeit with particular achievements for each institution, allows us to summarize a first draft of the Salesian university model:

- A higher education accessible to the masses, that responds to the need for greater professionalization;
- The standardization of university environments as an opportunity to develop a model that enhances accompaniment and creates a welcoming ambience.
- Higher education is an opportunity to give continuity to the formation of adolescents and accompany them in their young adult years, during which their personality is defined and they can confront life choices;
- Higher education is a privileged place for the formation of leaders and has the potential to spread Christian-inspired cultural models;
- Higher education has an important dimension *ad intra*: the formation of a new type of Salesian called to be a qualified companion, an animator and formator of lay groups that interact with the wider cultural and social context.

In the following paragraphs we expand these stimuli drawing from the permanent insights of the Preventive System and outlining the fundamental traits for a Salesian anthropology. We will consider Vecchi's recommendation that: "there is an urgently felt need to create programs adequate to the situation and inculturate our pedagogical methods, overcoming the simple transposition of contents and methods designed for other areas" (Vecchi, 1997, p. 15).

2.1. A culturally stimulating Christianity and Citizenship

Higher education provides a particular perspective for interpreting the classic binomial of Don Bosco that expresses part of the Salesian educational objectives: “good Christian and upright citizen.” The field of cultural significance can bring a new paradigm of the typical Salesian relationship between Christian faith and citizenship. This is also due to the fact that IUS institutes are primarily operating in the cultural field and serving in the human endeavor of the search of truth. Therefore, if we were to think of higher education institutes as a way of gaining access to the masses of students in order to catechize them or to train them in the function of social change, this would be a form of exploitation with many negative implications.

The idea that Don Bosco had about the relationship between Christianity and citizenship is not radical. He was neither a modern thinker who proposed an education of a “new man” in view of an ideal society,³ nor a restorer of the “old man” of the *ancien régime catholique*. Don Bosco does not conceive Christianity and citizenship as being dichotomous, does not take a narrow ‘protest’ perspective, but educates according to the construction of the Christian individual who practices the authentic values of the traditional believer and the citizen of the current order in a new way. Therefore, he is rather a thinker-actor of an educational synthesis at the level of practical wisdom, striving to achieve both old and new goals.

It would be reductive to envision a Don Bosco as traditional Catholic who was impelled to innovation only by the historical momentum of a society in turmoil. His educational model, on the other hand, led young people to accept both fidelity to the perennial Christian novelty and the ability to integrate into a society that was

³ The education of a “new man” in function of a “new society” is instead characteristic of modern pedagogical currents: the Enlightenment consider a society of equality and rationality (J.J. Rousseau); the pragmatic industrialists, instead, of a society of production and free market (F.W. Taylor); the communists hypothesized a society of equality around a planned economy (A.S. Makarenko) and the nationalistic ideologues a strong centralistic state around the idea of nation (G. Gentile).

in a phase of transition from the old regime to political unification during times of rising industrialization (Braido, 2006. pp. 229-232). Don Bosco, man, priest, educator at the same time, had a vision that values the humanistic aspects of Christianity, promotes all that is positive in creation and society and, at the same time, christianizes civilization showing that only in this way can it develop authentically.

If Christianity remains closed within itself, within the reflections of the past with an archaic language, it becomes culturally insignificant and, in addition, the aspect of the perennial novelty of the Gospel is lost. Therefore, Salesian Higher Education must not see Christianity and citizenship as separate areas to be only reconciled or balanced. This model of reconciliation is found e.g. in the planning model according to dimensions – the dimension of education to the faith is detached from the educational-cultural dimension. The challenges, potentialities and cultural and social tendencies of a society are a stimulating opportunity for Christianity to rethink, implement itself and become meaningful. At the same time, the healthy tradition of “Catholic cultures”, found in different historical eras and in different parts of the world, stimulates the culture of a society to go beyond, rethink, christianize itself, contributing to the wider Catholic-universal *Weltanschauung*.⁴

What Vecchi (1997) said, referring to the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, is timely: “The Gospel way of life is an important source for proposing a new cultural model. A great many founders and foundresses perceiving certain needs of their time, with all the limitations which they themselves recognized, have given these needs an answer which has become an innovative cultural proposal [...] The manner of thinking and acting of those who follow Christ more closely gives rise to a true and proper point of reference for culture” (*Vita Consecrata*, 1996, no. 80). Recently,

⁴ I find the reflections of Romano Guardini stimulating. He proposed a Catholic *Weltanschauung* not as a “type” next to others but as Christ’s gaze on the world: “Essential Catholicism is not a type [...] An attempt has been made to place a type of ‘Catholic man’ next to a Protestant, Buddhist, classic Greek-Latinist, capitalist kind. This juxtaposition, and every other of its kind, is false. The Catholic man is not a type [...] He embraces all the typical possibilities, just as life itself embraces them” (Guardini, 1994, p. 91).

Pope Francis re-proposed the ideas of Pope Paul VI that go along the same lines, affirming that “the Church’s mission of spreading the Gospel not only demands that the Good News be preached ever more widely and to ever greater numbers of men and women, but that the very power of the Gospel should permeate thought patterns, standards of judgment, and norms of behavior. In a word, it is necessary that the whole of human culture be steeped in the Gospel.” (Francis, 2018, no. 2).

In the present age, now that the great narratives that supported the all-encompassing modern *Weltanschauungen* are over, we could positively re-evaluate Don Bosco’s practical reasonableness, which offers us a fundamental attitude of permanent validity. In post-modern culture, strong and deductive thinking has shown its limits, which can be occasions for the development of an integral, practical, wise, ethical and believing rationality. Catholic universities are called to be “a Christian presence in the academic world in the face of the great problems of society and culture” (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 1990, no. 13). In secularized or post-secularized societies, it is not a matter of entering into a sort of radicalizing *Kulturkampf* but of being a Christian alternative that illuminates social and cultural problems by creating innovative ways of life that are more proactive than critical or polarizing.

Departing from Braido’s historical analysis (2006) and the principles outlined by Vecchi (1997) we can characterize the Salesian way of living the intelligence of faith in the following way. The starting point is the willingness to see and value the positive aspects of reality. The goal of thinking in a Salesian way is an integral synthesis, seen more as a tension of opposing complementary principles than an ideology that reconciles everything in a system. This intelligence of faith requires certain skills including: an ability to read both the traditions and the current situation intelligently; the ability to grasp the scope of the phenomena that affect individual and collective life; openness to ever wider horizons of the future marked by Christian hope; creative fidelity that is rooted in tradition and sees innovations in a logic of continuity; the search for answers to the challenges of time and their translation into operational projects; reflection on the educational experience with an attitude of ongoing formation; a rationality that

values both theological thought, the “reasons of faith” and the “cognitive modes of faith” such as discernment, prayer, meditation, contemplation, practical wisdom, the three ecstasies of St. Francis de Sales (reason, emotions, action), etc.

2.2. A differentiated and realistic pedagogy combining “honesty” and “excellent leadership”.

We need to acknowledge the situation in the origins of Salesian Higher Education, which on the one hand sought to cater to the people of the lower classes with an offer of professional training and on the other hand aspired to train leaders for significant social change. Given this polarity, one can observe a diversity of approaches that implies the need for a differentiated pedagogy.

Braido (2003, vol. 2, pp. 680-683) concludes his extensive biography of Don Bosco with one typical characteristic of Salesian work: operational realism. The fascination with excellence and the *avant-garde* did not make Don Bosco forget the magnitude of his problems, the diversity of his points of departure and the insufficiency of his means. A characteristic of the Preventive System is to prefer to implement a realistic “good” to plan some virtual “excellence” at a hypothetical distance. In Don Bosco, we can find a differentiated pedagogy: one for Dominic Savio, and others for the problematic, the runaways, the undisciplined.

The binomial involving citizenship and Christianity is not only culturally stimulating, but also outlines the practical perspective of the goals of education: professional work combined with the practice of the virtues inspired by the Christian vision of the world. At the heart of the Salesian project lies not only a good ordinary Christian and citizen, the honest worker, the morally and civilly responsible common human being. However, the Salesian ideal aims higher and seeks to educate to professional and ethical excellence, in other words, leaders in their professions (“the summit of progress”) and saints actively engaged in the mission of the sanctification of the world (Christian as a “person of eternity”). By connecting the studies and insights of Braido (2006) and Chávez (2007) with the pedagogical models of change, we can find in the Preventive System

five degrees of growth departing from the basic level of honest livelihood and leading ultimately to excellence in holiness:

1. The point of departure is to help young people find the most basic reason to live. It means getting them to experience the desire and joy for living in a serene environment with the educational intention of offering the means for a meaningful development of their profession. Here we are still in a phase of *transmission* where we need to establish a minimum threshold of formative requirements that allows them to acquire the basic skills for an “honest” (upright) profession and human life.

2. The subsequent proposal of a *transactional* nature requires working with cognitive and operational schemes. From the very beginning Don Bosco heralded the paradigm of “enlighten the mind to form a good heart”. Education that aims at the development of intellectual and operational skills must see that concepts interact with emotional experience in order to overcome the blocks of ignorance and cognitive prejudices on the one hand and dysfunctional operational practices on the other.

3. A qualitative leap from transactional to *transformative* education does not lie in the skill of the educator or training activities. The key lies in the family environment typical of Salesian institutions, which creates an atmosphere and a rich network of paternal/maternal, fraternal, friendly relationships capable of instilling trust and expanding further and enabling individuals to be the protagonist of one’s own education. The objective of trust requires sufficient reliability of the educational community in which the hidden project broadly confirms the explicit educational project.

4. Transformative education takes place at a higher and richer level in which affectivity, loving-kindness lived, received and regenerated, tends to integrate and interact with the passion for the search for truth (reason), goodness and spiritual beauty (religion). In the transformative proposal of the Preventive System, the *synergistic triad* reason-religion-loving kindness are an indication of goals, contents, means and methods.

5. At the summit of the path of integral salvation, Don Bosco clearly proclaimed the supreme educational goal of *excellence* -

holiness. It is not only a message given to a privileged individual but a horizon for all, as recalled by Saint Francis de Sales and also by Pope Francis' recent apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018). In contrast, one overcomes the implicit Gnosticism and Pelagianism by a transformative education in which young people are the protagonists of their formation within the horizon of holiness, entrusting themselves to God. In this sense, holiness is an original work of God's grace and man's response.

2.3. A welcoming and profound environment for a mission in the world

The ultimate aim of educating young adults as excellent leaders for society is already an established conviction: to offer society something of quality through our higher education centers enriching it with mature individuals, competent professional and active citizens (Reference Framework, 2014, p. 214). It would not be right to fall into the "social transformation trap" that considers the commitment to the improvement of society as the only motivational energy for Salesian Higher Education. This is due to the following three reasons: desires of young people, psychological balances within the Preventive System, and requisites of profound transformative planning.

Listening to young people and their expectations often reveals their sense of loneliness, the need for belonging, the lack of vision for the future and the difficulty of planning their life. Symptomatic and important is the message of the young people gathered in March 2018 in the pre-synod on "Youth, faith and vocational discernment". The message became the voice of numerous young people departing precisely from the need to have a strong sense of belonging: "Young people look for a sense of self by seeking communities that are supportive, uplifting, authentic and accessible: communities that empower them". They themselves mention several difficulties, such as social exclusion, experienced by many, as a factor that contributes to the loss of self-esteem and identity. The first paragraph on personality formation ends with the words: "As we grapple with these challenges, we need inclusion, welcome, mercy and tenderness

from the Church – both as an institution and as a community of faith” (Synod of Bishops, 2018, par. 1).

These are symptoms of the fragility of the actual generation, one could say, especially if the evaluation comes from the post-Vatican II generation that fought for the transformation of the world. The observation may be pertinent up to a certain point, but it seems to me that young people express a voice of reality that calls us to rediscover a lost balance. To engage in the world we need a “secure foundation”, a belonging community. In addition, young people who experience their own identity, detaching themselves from their families, need an educational environment that is not standardizing and anonymous, but rather a family environment (Burggraeve & Schepens, 1999; Nanni, 1988). Salesian pedagogy of a welcoming family environment favors the development of healthy personalities who, in the future, may be agents of change. Don Bosco’s loving-kindness, in this sense, is not only a sympathetic being with the young or only an unconditional acceptance of their world. It is a love that is strong (inspired by the immense love of God), personal (addressed to the concrete person), participatory (it frees inner energies), free (it accepts decisions, the autonomy of the other and times of growth), disciplined (by reality and values) and formative (it proposes high reaching goals and horizons).

Salesian Higher Education therefore creates an environment that serves both the goals of creating a welcoming base and the social transformation goal. There is a need to create an organizational culture of the IUS in which Christian values, civil values, the Social Doctrine of the Church are merged into an Institutional Project, with standards and participatory processes in the Academic Community, activities of education in values, empowerment, volunteering, personal discernment and accompaniment (Reference Framework, 2014, pp. 218-222). In fact, in Don Bosco’s Preventive System it is a priority to act primarily in the community. Braido (2006, p. 305) states: “The preventive system is valid both for the education of individuals, with highly personalized relationships, and for the education of the ‘multitudes’. Nevertheless, for the most part, being united in community, is the ‘place’ where the Preventive System has most clearly tried its hand and configured itself, and rendered it largely communitarian”. Here lies the communal balance of Salesian

education that does not create anonymous spaces but neither does it fall into the intimistic temptation of selective relationships that favor a narcissism closed in on itself (Vojtáš, 2017b).

In this way we can relive Don Bosco's ideal: the man we educate with a view to active inclusion in civil society is, first and foremost, the Christian who is competent and upright in the exercise of their profession. Charity and the apostolate are the vocation for all. In the Salesian vision, everyone, according to their respective possibilities and responsibilities, is bound to a charitable and apostolic presence expressed in diverse ways. Some contribute with almsgiving, others engage in catechetical and educational action, others are called to create associations of "activist" Christianity with the logic of "*vis unita fortior*", still others are called to respond, if God calls, to the most daring prospectives of commitment (Braidó, 2006, pp. 245-248).

2.4. The ideal of the educator as formator-animator-teacher of groups

As Vecchi (1997) and also the Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference (2014, p. 214) affirms, the IUS were also founded for the preparation of a new type of educator, religious or lay, who is summarily understood as formator, witness, companion, disciple, community animator, leader and project manager. The many characteristics create a new multi-faceted figure that is the result of the post-conciliar evolution of the Salesian charism and the concrete needs of the educational world.

The post-conciliar organizational decentralization, the absence of restructuring of works, the logic and exigencies of planning undertaken in the Educative and Pastoral Communities, the shared responsibility of the laity, a requested and often unsuccessful change of mentality and also the lack of Salesian personnel are what have brought the demands summarized under the title of "new evangelization" to maturity (Vojtáš, 2017a, ch. 1). Summarizing Vecchi's indications, we discover a series of skills required by the Salesian educator of the new millennium, who:

- is capable of an open, intelligent and pro-active confrontation with new phenomena, understanding cultural trends, attempting to proclaim the faith “in the heart of life”, interpreting new languages and codes of meaning;
- possesses an identity as a believer, a spiritual robustness and the capacity for convinced dialogue with others in a climate of freedom. This requires that the faith and the reasons for our hope be understood and lived with validity and transparency;
- is a pastoral guide, animator of other educators - “driving nucleus” and formator of adults who share responsibility for educational work, beyond mere friendship;
- has a clear Salesian identity in so far as he is primarily responsible for the Salesian identity of initiatives and projects. He has a greater theoretical and practical knowledge of youth problems and education and knows how to authoritatively propose educational goals and itineraries.

I believe that Salesian Higher Education has a two-fold relationship with the ideal of the new educator. The IUS needs such educators and at the same time should prepare them. The duality of this relationship does not create two independent lines of planning but is an opportunity both for synergy within pedagogical or formative institutes and for the creation of a specific Salesian formative method. Here I only offer some universally valid principles inspired by the model of formation starting with Salesian identity (Schaumont & Loots, 2015).

Identity is not a static datum, but rather a dynamic one: it presents itself as a process that is not formed from one day to the next. It is constituted within a vital network that is continuously modified by internal and external factors. Dynamism, however, does not imply generality - a clear identity is important in the manner in which one addresses the outside world as well as the educators of one’s particular IUS institute. The clear vision of the institutional project strengthens the link with the work, offers a meaning for educational activities, increases satisfaction and provides a joyous experience. Departing from the model cited, I propose some

principles: history, criteria, language, management, practice and environment.⁵

The relationship of an institution with its tradition can vary: sometimes there is a strong bond, almost one of dependence, while at other times one finds oneself in a purely formal relationship with the inspirations of the beginnings. A work that detaches itself from its roots loses its original identity. For a Salesian institution intending to remain 'Salesian', the effort to cultivate a dynamic relationship with the traditional and current contents of the Salesian educative and pastoral model that offers a set of criteria is indispensable. Tradition in general is not only Salesian but also local, the history of the institute varies, depending on whether it was formerly a college, a high school, a formation house for Salesians, etc. Often, local traditions are stronger interpretative keys than the set of theoretical criteria themselves.

The criteria of the Salesian educative and pastoral model are not univocal words which are immediately understood and applied. They need a language that reveals and forms their understanding and interconnection. The term 'language' here is broader than the choice of vocabulary. Images, symbols, gestures, applications and stories of best practice are forms of language. Those who enter an institution perceive multiple eloquent and interpretive messages about their identity, even without a word being spoken.

Every organization that wants to be based on a specific identity must be able to clearly formulate its mission and objectives by following the strategies and considering the criteria of Salesian education. This formulation serves as guidance for management, decision-making processes and the training of collaborators. The Salesian identity of a IUS institute results above all from the way in which the project is implemented. For example, it is easy to include

⁵ Each formative model is implemented by concrete individuals. In this sense, on July 6, 2016, at the General Assembly of the IUS, the Rector Major, Ángel Fernández Artime, asked for more presences of the Salesians in the IUS saying: "Few Salesians are not a wealth. If we want to collaborate with the laity, they themselves want our presence [...] The charism also has its visibility with the realistic presence of persons. Universities are a preferred field; therefore, it is not enough to come part-time to the university".

in the management program or objectives of the institute the fact that young people are at the center. But if this does not occur in daily activity and there are no standards, structures and resources for accompaniment (young people at the center of educational attention) or student participatory organizations (young people at the center of educational activity), the project is contradicted by reality and becomes a mere formality. In such contexts, the organizational culture is a set of rules, values, written and unwritten rules of conduct, organizational chart, calendar, organizational, motivational and communicative systems. The more harmonious and cooperative the organizational culture of a IUS institute, the more will it be convincing, incisive and formative in its Salesian identity.

3. Ideas and Applied Processes

The Salesian charism is essentially educational and since its origins has developed into a cyclical movement of experience and reflection. The experiential part, or, if we prefer, its applications, is for us not only a phase that comes “after” in a deductive fashion, but is foundational and characteristic. In this sense, Salesian anthropology is not only “applied” but is understood, specified and characterized by the various application styles. In the following paragraphs I would like to propose some ideas, theories and/or best practices that concretize the most reflective inspirations of the preceding paragraph.

3.1. The model of Salesian rationality as a didactic criterion

In the context of fragmented knowledge and scientific disciplines, there is a great risk of separating educational contexts and educational dimensions. In the post-conciliar context, the human sciences have been relatively perceived as autonomous from theology (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 36; *Gravissimus Educationis*, no. 10 and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 7.) and have brought different approaches to the methodological field. Following this logic, even Salesian education and pastoral care did not have “a” methodology and had to introduce the logic of education by dimensions (YM Department, 1979). The declarations on the need to integrate

dimensions are often only a pious wish or rather a symptom of the separation of dimensions into non-communicating areas and activities. Even within the reflection on education, “pedagogy” is set aside and “educational sciences” are preferred as a multi-disciplinary concept that often only has inter-disciplinarity as an ideal reference.

Let us therefore take seriously the idea of trans-disciplinarity proposed by Pope Francis in the Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* and recommended from Paul VI onwards, precisely to overcome the “there is a lack of wisdom and reflection, a lack of thinking capable of formulating a guiding synthesis” (*Veritatis Gaudium*, no. 4c). Following the Pope’s line of reasoning, and also the typical Salesian way of proceeding, we are not proposing a new epistemological theory but teaching methods that embody and concretize Salesian anthropology in processes of learning and personal formation. The strategy is therefore not to propose new courses (such as the courses of “Catholic doctrine” in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, part 2, art. 4 §5 and *CIC* 811 § 2) but a Salesian way of educating by means that integrates the different didactic paradigms. Here I would like to exemplify some possibilities:

Co-operative learning is a teaching methodology that balances the aspect of content education with the needs of soft skills training needed for interaction in the group. Besides being an innovative way of education, it has the advantage of implementing a Salesian rationality that is relational, discursive and narrative (Pellerey, 2015). Moreover, it has already been tested as a paradigm of a Salesian educational style in the IUS through the course “*Curso de Aprendizagem Cooperativa e Tecnologia Educacional na Universidade - Em Estilo Salesiano*” (Botelho & Vicari, 2009).

Other Salesian educational aspects (Christianity-citizenship) can instead be supported by service learning. The practical synthesis of Christian and religious values as experienced in service or volunteer projects becomes a driving force for learning. These values and activities are neither occasional nor self-focused. Starting from actual problematic situations and ensuring that students are an active part of the learning process, the clear separation between “volunteer work” and “school” is overcome by embodying and reflecting Salesian anthropology. Furthermore, there is potential to link service

learning with inter-culturality and other contemporary challenges (O’Grady, 2012).

Character (or virtue or value) education as a key Catholic approach, has the potential to educate to citizenship and “it is possible now to take up at least some of Don Bosco’s educational insights, included in the ideal of the upright citizen, and present them from a more recent perspective, taking into account today’s state of knowledge about the character of man and modern societies” (Grządziel, 2015, p. 118. See also the articles in *Misión Joven*, 2018). The typical approaches of virtue education denote some typically Salesian traits: a pedagogy of the community environment that embodies a tradition; experiential learning that integrates the moral dimension (moral character) and the performative dimension (performance character); a narrative pedagogy that has the potential to include the new digital natives and the new “digital continent” (Grządziel, 2015).

3.2. Multi-level isomorphic accompaniment

A proposal of differentiated pedagogy, if it does not want to remain only at the level of theoretical principles, necessarily implies personal accompaniment. Even the different innovative teaching methods are not technical methodologies that work “automatically”; they give cues, stimulate, open horizons but an internalization in people’s lives occurs in the context of the educational relationship that needs to have time and space dedicated to the young person. The principle of attention to the individual person is a fundamental characteristic of the Preventive System and the Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference also says this about IUS: “Complete human development offered by way of formation requires that each individual receive pastoral attention and accompaniment [...] This implies developing a model of formation and ministry that: ensures the orientation and accompaniment of the individual in integrating the different dimensions of human, Christian, professional and social development; explicitly proclaims Jesus Christ and his Gospel, while accompanying those who freely wish to follow a path of Christian growth and maturity, through programmes of education in faith” (YM Department, 2014, pp. 221-222).

Diverse are the problems of the recent and richly themed accompaniment. The differentiation of styles and methods of accompaniment has not helped the desired integration of the dimensions of growth, but has created a multiplicity of references and a variety of concrete advice (accompaniment, confession, therapy, coaching, mentoring, counseling, etc.). And the production of many texts on accompaniment has multiplied the “requirements” for mentors, resulting in fewer (honest) people thinking themselves suitable to be mentors. A third complication comes from an idealized concept of freedom, in which (false) respect for the person implies the impossibility of any accompaniment at the organizational structural level. This is the direction taken by Gesing (2004) who compares the abandonment of the classic friendly chat with the director in the Salesian world with the increasingly strong practice of supervision in the workplace.

Given this, I think it is necessary to propose a model of accompaniment in the IUS that has three complimentary and logical understandings: isomorphic, diversified and generative. It is necessary that accompaniment becomes a “form” of the organizational culture of the IUS that structures the organization of processes and educational environments at different levels. The institution defines some basic criteria (ethical, pedagogical, Salesian) for every type of accompaniment. This is the sense in which we can speak of an isomorphic organizational style - there are different concretizations but there is a form of accompaniment recognizable in all.

The diversification of accompaniment realistically provides for different types of accompaniment. There is a need for supervision across different levels of the organization and this involves the accompaniment of educators in terms of Salesian leadership/discipleship (Rodríguez, 2018). Other types of accompaniment will be carried out by professional teams with a specific preparation aimed primarily at students: center for psychological listening, pastoral counseling center, university pastoral team for confessions and spiritual accompaniment, etc.

The third, generative logic, instead, in line with the Salesian tradition of the “guardian angel” (Braido, 2006, pp. 310-311), implies that each person is potentially a companion/mentor,

follower/leader, disciple/teacher. Here one could include the more informal and contextual ways of accompaniment such as mentoring, tutoring, peer coaching, etc. One consequence of isomorphic accompaniment is the need to set standards and prepare formative courses for mentors at different levels.

3.3. The innovative concept of the IUS as “a whole”.

The curricular and extracurricular proposals, methodologies, activities and even different levels of accompaniment are not sufficient for a good functioning of a IUS institute. These elements contribute to the offer which is formative but without an institutional project they can be fragmented, isolated and/or opposed proposals. Since the 1970s, the Congregation has proposed (more in theory than in action) the educative and pastoral planning as a way of finding harmony and intentionality in the various educational proposals. If the statement that “The Institutional Project is a true constitutional charter that guides the life of the whole institute” (Frame of Reference, 2014, p. 218) is to be true, the modality and processes of planning should be more “integral” and less “fragmented”. Integrality is understood more as a systemic logic of convergent interconnections (Nanni, 2006; Vojtáš, 2017a; Rodríguez, 2018) than an integralism that begins with an idea and then applies it deductively and hierarchically. Obviously, this is not a new ideology - it is rather the harmonization of autonomies and a positive re-evaluation of the relationship between hierarchies and collegial forms of leadership (Kühl, 2002).

If education is understood in its entirety, and not only as a technical method, it becomes fundamental not only to understand the situation and respond by defining the desired “product” (product paradigm) but also the processes that guide the path that brings the work to completion (process paradigm). Last but not least, it is fundamental to go above and beyond indifference to concrete individuals, to observe the educators, their inner worlds, their past, their motivation, spirituality and vocation (paradigm of identity). I am convinced that this step is not the result of the desire to “spiritualize” higher education by force, but rather a consequence of the evolution of models of leadership (Rodríguez, 2018, pp. 53-83),

of the limits of design by dimensions in the Salesian context and, last but not least, of the opportunity to set up planning methodologies that are truly formative and virtuous and not only techniques for achieving the desired products (Vojtáš, 2017a, pp. 110-125).

The planning modalities of a “whole” exceed the management for industrial-modern objectives with some steps that are more suitable to the world of VUCA - volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. Respecting the specific nature and history of each institute, I think that it is appropriate to valorize not only linear thinking but also systemic-integral thinking (cf. authors such as Deming or Senge); transformative and not just transactional change (Tichy, Devanna, Mezirow, Scharmer); participatory and community leadership (Schein, de Geuss, Wenger); excellence instead of effectiveness (de Pree, Bennis, Covey, Gardner); the multiplicity of “intelligences” (Polanyi, Agor, Mintzberg, Argyris, Gardner) and spirituality in planning (Giacalone, Jurkiewicz, Benefiel).

The Institutional Project in this way balances the need for clarity of identity by talking about the Salesian vision and mission that creates an organizational culture (Schein, 2017) and works in a differentiated pastoral university or “concentric circles”. In this way the Salesian tradition of “ingenious modernity” announced by Philip Rinaldi, Don Bosco’s third successor, is maintained. He affirmed that ingenious modernity “rigidly preserves the substantial spirit in its educational method” and for this reason it prevents us “at the same time from becoming fossilized in things that are accessory and subject to change over time” (Rinaldi, 1927, p. 573). An institutional planning of this kind maintains in a creative tension the constancy of the spirit, that is, the balance between fidelity to the founding principles and the creativity of pastoral, organizational and didactic applications. An Institutional project is thus a flexible mediation that clearly defines the “Salesianity” of the institute by accepting the “rules of the game” of a concrete cultural, social and legal context.

3.4. To conclude: the strategic position of the IUS in the Salesian Province

The fact of linking the proposal of Salesian Higher Education with the formation of Salesians is not only, I think, one of the inspirations of the origins but rather has also a potential for the future and for the Salesian identity of a Salesian Academic Center. The relationship between the Salesian Province and a IUS institute can be varied, from the positions of an outsider, through simple respect and acceptance, to finally a mutually enriching synergistic collaboration. In the final analysis, the IUS could become a center of gravity for the “Salesian” academics who are there and if they do not find a Salesian placement, they will find other ways to realize their competence. While at the same time, it could become a radiant center of pedagogical, sociological, communicative, editorial innovation, etc. Areas of possible synergy could include:

- initial and ongoing formation of Salesians;
- pedagogical and Salesian formation of lay people who work or volunteer in the Province;
- collaboration with the Youth Pastoral Team of the Province;
- research projects on youth, communication, new social trends, etc.;
- editorial or media communication projects at the province level;
- radiating and positioning in educational and social networks of the outside world (State, NGOs, Associations, etc.).

A choice of this kind would involve investment in a faculty/institute/center of pedagogy or sciences of formation with the presence of Salesians (or representatives of the Province) and a coordinated planning with the Province sectors of Youth Ministry, Formation and/or Social Communication. The desirable advantage would be an enriching relationship between academic reflection, the liveliness of the world of youth, the needs of the context and the concreteness of the Provincials’ educational-pastoral proposals.

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