

**“Da mihi animas
cetera tolle”
Symposium**

July 18-25, 2007

**Don Bosco Hall,
Berkeley**

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Da Mihi Animas in Don Bosco

*Don Bosco's Life and Work for the
"Salvation of Souls"*

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The motto *Da mihi animas; cetera tolle* expresses the primary objective and spirit of Don Bosco's incessant activity and the pastoral and ascetical program that he wished to hand on to his Salesians.³⁰ How this driving ideal powered Don Bosco's life and work—that is, his manifold pastoral choices—is the object of this paper.

Part I: Don Bosco and the Motto, *Da Mihi Animas*

1. Don Bosco's Pastoral Commitments on His Priestly Ordination

In the brief opening sentences of the *Spiritual Testament* (written at intervals between January-February 1884 and the end of 1886, with final additional notes between April 8 and December 24, 1887, 38 days before Don Bosco's death), Don Bosco mentions the preparatory retreat, the ordination itself and his first Mass. This is followed by a "transcription" of a keepsake given at the conclusion of the retreat, and of the nine resolutions made on that occasion.³¹ On the other hand, in his earlier work (*Memoirs of the Oratory*, 1873-1875), he omits mention of the preparatory spiritual retreat, as well as of the

³⁰ *Ceterus -a -um*: n. pl. "*cetera*" is the normal spelling; but one also finds it spelled (in older texts) *coetera* or *caetera*.

³¹ Francesco Motto, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 pel sac. Gio. Bosco a' suoi figliuoli Salesiani* [Testamento spirituale], *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 4 (1985) [73-130] 88-90.

Keepsake and the Resolutions. But after a passing reference to his priestly ordination, he dwells at some length on his first Masses.³²

The Keepsake and the Resolutions seem important enough to merit a comment, because they provide an ascetical and pastoral context for an understanding of the motto.

1.1. *The Keepsake*

The concluding keepsake of the retreat I made in preparation for my first Mass was worded as follows: "A priest does not go to heaven, or to hell, alone. If he will have proven worthy of his calling, he will go to heaven with those [souls] who will have been saved through his good example. If, on the other hand, he will have proven unworthy, through a scandalous life for instance, he will go to perdition with those [souls] who will be damned because of the scandal received from him."³³

The keepsake (that is, the souvenir given by the Retreat Master) deals with priestly responsibility and accountability. It emphasizes the idea that the priest is answerable for souls saved or lost. This is a commonplace to be found in spiritual and ascetical writings on the subject current at the time. For instance, in his *Dignity and Duties of the Priest*, St. Alphonsus expresses this idea in a variety of ways. At one point he writes:

The souls that live like wild beasts and monsters bent for hell, but are afterwards converted and become dear to God, shall be so many gems adorning the crown of the priest who has brought them back to the path of virtue. A priest who is damned does not go to hell alone, and the priest that is saved is certainly not saved alone.³⁴

³² *Memoirs of the Oratory* (English ed.), 166-167.

³³ Motto, *DB's Spiritual Testament*, 21.

³⁴ St. Alphonsus de Liguori, *Dignity and Duties of the Priest or Selva*, translated [...] and edited by Rev. Eugene Grimm (The Complete Works of St. Alphonsus de Liguori, Ascetical Works, vol. XII (Brooklyn: Redemptorist Fathers, 1927), 175; also *ibid.*, 230-232

St. Joseph Cafasso, Don Bosco's beloved master and mentor, in his conferences on the priesthood, expresses similar concepts, for example:

I do not think that it is possible to imagine any sin or disorder more fatal than scandal given by a priest [...]. To find himself on his deathbed, to have to present himself before the tribunal of God to give an account of the souls entrusted to him, of the souls he is responsible for, and of the sins committed by them because of him! [...] What punishment he must expect from God!³⁵

Don Bosco frequently spoke on the priesthood, repeating and emphasizing these traditional concepts. For example, Don Bosco's words on the subject, reported from a conference held in 1868, are recorded in the *Biographical Memoirs*:

The priesthood is the highest dignity to which a person can be raised [...]. If this is so, then how great should the holiness be of one who is a priest or who aspires to the priesthood! Such a person should be just like an angel, that is, a totally spiritual person [...]. And, yes—good example is essential! Let us remember that a priest never goes to hell or to heaven alone, but always well accompanied.³⁶

Again, Lemoyne, citing an archival document in Don Bosco's hand, transcribes titles of sermons delivered during the August retreat of 1867. Among them is the following: "A priest does not go to hell or to heaven alone, but always accompanied by those who may have been lost or saved on his account."³⁷

Such a concept of priestly accountability went hand in hand with current teachings about the holiness required of a

(Part II, Instruction II: "The Good Example that the Priest Should Give").

³⁵ St. Joseph Cafasso, *The Priest, the Man of God: His Dignity and Duties*, Translated by Patrick O'Connell. (Rockford, IL: TAN Books and Publishers, 1971), 166.

³⁶ *IBMIX*, 343-344 (omitted in *EBMIX* [161]).

³⁷ *EBM VIII*, 438.

priest. The demands made of one who embraced the priestly vocation, the dangers that beset priestly life and existence and the strict judgment priests would receive at God's tribunal—these were current “rigoristic” themes in ascetical literature as well as in seminary teaching.

1.2. *The 1841 Priestly Resolutions*

In connection with the spiritual retreat and the keepsake, Don Bosco also took nine resolutions, which he later recorded in the *Spiritual Testament* (mid-1880s) but not in his *Memoirs of the Oratory* (mid-1870s).³⁸

Of these resolutions, made at the beginning of his priestly ministry, a number deal with ascetical and spiritual commonplaces; but the four that head the list evidence a firm commitment to the apostolate. Specifically, by resolutions 1 and 2, Don Bosco renounces even legitimate recreation in order to devote as much time as possible to the ministry:

1° I will not go out for walks, unless a real necessity, such as visiting the sick, demands it.

2° I will make good and careful use of my time.

In the third and fourth resolutions he expresses his complete commitment to the apostolate after the example of St. Francis de Sales:

3° I will not shrink from suffering, from striving, nor even from humiliations, whenever it is a question of saving souls.

4° May the love and gentleness of St. Francis de Sales be my guidelines in all things.

The 1841 resolutions are significant in that they are not determined merely by the change in circumstances or by ascetical self-discipline (as expressed, for example, by the

³⁸ Motto, *Don Bosco's Spiritual Testament*, in *RRS*, 89-90.

binomial, “work and temperance”). Their significance lies in the new spirit (the new spirituality) that pervades them. Assuming that they do reflect an actual historical situation in Don Bosco’s life, then one is forced to conclude that, in spite of struggles and difficulties, Don Bosco had transcended certain undesirable strictures and negative aspects of the *fuga mundi* from his seminary days. The discipline of work and temperance, prayer life, and the safeguarding of chastity, etc. continue to be emphasized; but a fresh spirituality oriented toward the apostolate is now in evidence.³⁹

Don Bosco’s recourse to St. Francis de Sales as model and guide for the apostolate at the beginning of his priestly life is equally significant. This has often been noted.⁴⁰ The Chieri seminarians would certainly have been exposed to the

³⁹ The *Spiritual Testament* as a whole was set down in writing between 1883 and 1887, and the first section of it (containing the Resolutions) some time before 1884. [Motto, *Don Bosco’s Spiritual Testament*, 10-11, especially Footnote 14.] This fact, of itself, would not preclude the possibility that for his resolutions Don Bosco could have used notes dating from 1841, but now lost. Were this to be the case, the text of the resolutions would have been “transcribed,” not merely “recalled.” Lemoyne at this point interprets: “He wrote all the above in 1841.” [EBM I, 385] It is unlikely that Lemoyne knew of a manuscript dating from 1841. It would be contrary to Lemoyne’s custom not to acknowledge the existence of such an important document. It is also worth noting that the original draft of this text in Don Bosco’s *Spiritual Testament* underwent emendations at various points. [ASC 132: Quaderni-Taccuini 6, 3-6 in FDB 748 D7-10; cf. critical apparatus in Motto, *Don Bosco’s Spiritual Testament*, 21-22.] This would tend to show that he was “recalling” rather than “transcribing.” Would his later intervening experiences and concerns have influenced the fashioning of this text? It is a legitimate question.

⁴⁰ Cf. e.g. Arnaldo Pedrini, *St. Francis de Sales, Don Bosco’s Patron. St. Francis de Sales in the Times, Life and Thought of St. John Bosco*, translated by Wallace Cornell; adapted and edited by Francis Klauder (New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications, 1988), 23-25.

biographical facts and the teachings of St. Francis de Sales.⁴¹ It is also worthy of note that the church of St. Philip attached to the seminary contained a chapel dedicated to St. Francis de Sales, with a painting of the saint. A Sodality of St. Francis de Sales, still active in the nineteenth century, met there for devotions.⁴²

No less significant is the fact that St. Francis de Sales, the great pastor-bishop, was the clergy's established model for his pastoral charity and "zeal for the salvation of souls." Together with another famous pastor-bishop, St. Charles Borromeo, he was also principal patron of the Pastoral Institute, which Don Bosco attended after ordination (1841-1844).⁴³

Massimo Marocchi, discussing St. Francis de Sales as a source of Salesian (Bosconian) spirituality, writes:

The [former] monastery of the Visitation founded in Turin in 1638 by Jeanne de Chantal, the massive circulation of the works of St. Francis de Sales published in numerous editions through the eighteenth century, the *Life of St. Francis* authored by the Piedmontese Father Pier Giacinto Gallizia (1662-1737), first published in Venice and reprinted numerous times—these were the vehicles through which the knowledge and spirit of St. Francis spread through the region.⁴⁴

⁴¹ The episode reported by Father Lemoyne on the testimony of Don Bosco's seminary companion and life-long friend, Father John Francis Giacomelli (1820-1901), would tend to corroborate this. [cf. *EBM* I, 302] There were two Boscos in the seminary (James and John). James described himself as "Hard-Wood" (*Bosco d'nespol*). John described himself as "Pliant-Willow" (*Bosco d'Sales*, willow in Piedmontese).

⁴² Giraudo-Biancardi, *Itinerari*, 91.

⁴³ Cf. Aldo Giraudo, *Clero, Seminario e Società* (Roma: LAS, 1993) 398 (Regulations of the *Convitto*, 392-398).

⁴⁴ Massimo Marocchi, "At the Roots of Don Bosco's Spirituality," in *Don Bosco's Place in History*. Acts of the First International Congress of Don Bosco Studies. Rome 1989. Ed. by Patrick Egan and Mario Midali (Roma: LAS, 1993), 172. The former monastery of the Visitation, taken over by Vincentians, served as a retreat house for the archdiocese.

Perhaps, however, the immediate influence came from the spiritual retreats preparatory to ordinations. Not only were they held in the former house and church of the Visitation, with its pictures and memories of St. Francis de Sales, but the Vincentian retreat masters propounded a spirituality derived from the French Oratory of Pierre de Bérulle and from St. Francis de Sales.⁴⁵

1.3. The Motto "Da Mihi Animas, Caetera Tolle" Officially Adopted

1.3.1. The Motto in the Salesian Coat of Arms

In 1880 Don Bosco had undertaken to build the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome. The Roman Church authorities thought it appropriate that the Salesian coat of arms should appear between those of Popes Pius IX and Leo XIII in the church of the Sacred Heart. But the Salesian Society did not have one as yet. So in 1884 the Salesian Society's financial administrator, Father Anthony Sala, who was at the time supervising the building of the church and connected boarding school, engaged an artist friend of the Salesians to prepare a sketch for a Salesian coat of arms.

The original sketch showed a shield on which the field was marshaled in dimidiation. The charges on the field appeared as follows: a large anchor divided the field per pale; at the anchor's right (the viewer's left) stood the bust of St. Francis de Sales, lit by rays from above; at the anchor's left stood a flaming heart; and below the anchor was a grove of trees, with snow-capped mountains visible behind it. Two branches of palm and

⁴⁵ Giraud-Biancardi, *Itinerari*, 126 and 123-124.

Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629), a contemporary of St. Francis de Sales, distinguished himself as cardinal, diplomat, theologian, contemplative, mystic and spiritual writer. He founded the French Oratory and was a leading figure in the French school of spirituality. [cf. *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 2, 362-363.]

laurel, with stems entwined at the bottom, framed the shield as supports. A wreath of roses surmounted by a six-pointed star crested the shield, and below the shield a waving scroll bore the motto, *Sinite parvulos venire ad me*.⁴⁶

When the sketch was submitted to Don Bosco and his Council at their meeting of September 12, 1884, a discussion on the motto ensued. "*Let little children come to me,*" was quickly set aside, and a number of alternatives were suggested, such as "Temperance and Work" (Fr. G. Barberis) and "Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us" (Fr. C. Durando). Don Bosco ended the debate and said: "A motto was already adopted in the very early days of my pastoral work [1841] when, while at the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto Ecclesiastico*), I would visit the prisons: *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle* (Give me souls; take everything else)."

All the councilors agreed and applauded, and the historic motto was adopted.⁴⁷

Don Bosco, and General Councils after him, introduced other modifications and embellishments in the coat of arms, but the motto on the waving scroll, *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*, remained unchanged to this day. It has stood ever since as foundation of the shield, and of the Salesian Society symbolized by it.

By circular letter of December 8, 1885, Don Bosco notified the Salesians of the appointment of Fr. Michael Rua as vicar with right of succession. For this he used stationery that for the first time bore the Salesian coat of arms with its motto.

⁴⁶ Mt 19:14; Mk 10:14; Lk 18:16, Latin Vulgate (Let the little children come to me).

⁴⁷ Cf. *EBM* XVII, 337.

1.3.2. Biblical Source of the Motto, Da Mihi Animas (Give Me the Persons)

The *source* of this sentence is biblical. The Book of Genesis relates that a coalition of four kings mounted a punitive expedition against Sodom and four other cities by the Dead Sea. They took booty and prisoners, including Lot, Abram's (Abraham's) nephew; but Bera, king of Sodom, escaped with some of his people. When Abram heard about the raid, he mustered his men, pursued and beat the invaders, and recovered the booty and the people they had taken, Lot among them. The king of Sodom went to meet Abram, and asked that the prisoners be given back to him: "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself."⁴⁸ Abram gave both the people and the goods back to King Bera.

1.3.3. Spiritual and Accommodated Sense

Obviously in the tradition of Christian spirituality and pastoral practice this biblical text came to be interpreted in a *spiritual sense*, as expressing the priority of the "soul" (spiritual life) for both personal holiness and pastoral ministry. The motto reached Don Bosco in this sense, as also in the *accommodated, ascetical sense* it had acquired in writings to which he had access, such as the *Forma Cleri* (Formation of the Clergy) and the *Regula Cleri* (Rule of the Clergy) of 1752. These two books Don Bosco often used for his daily meditation. The following short prayer is found in the *Regula Cleri*: "O Lord, lover of souls, give me a part of that love, so that I may say with all sincerity and fervor, "*Da mihi animas; coetera tolle tibi.*" (Give me souls; take everything else for yourself.)

⁴⁸ Jerusalem Bible and New RSV translations of Gen 14:25 (Hebrew *nephesh*, means "person"); the Latin Vulgate has, *Da mihi animas (souls); cetera tolle tibi.*

More immediately, the motto was familiar to Fr. Joseph Cafasso, Don Bosco's master and spiritual director at the Pastoral Institute, and to other ascetical writers of his day. Since the early days of the Oratory Don Bosco displayed it as a watchword and reminder for all to see. Biographer Ceria writes:

The motto [*Da mihi animas; caetera tolle*] had been visible *ab antico* [*sic*] written in big letters on the door to Don Bosco's little room. So testified the oldest pupils of the Oratory, among whom were Canon [Giacinto] Ballesio and Card. John Cagliero, who said they had seen it there as young boys. Nothing could have better expressed the supreme goal of the saint in all his actions and sufferings, in his writings and in his talks—a goal that was to constitute the essential program of the society he founded. His major concern had always been the welfare of souls [...].⁴⁹

When Dominic Savio enrolled in the Oratory school in October 1854, he was impressed by the arresting words that confronted him on entering Don Bosco's room. Don Bosco writes:

Having entered the Home of the Oratory, he came to [see me in] my room, and he at once noticed, written in large characters on a placard, the words that St. Francis de Sales was wont to repeat [as a prayer], *Da mihi animas; caetera tolle*. He began to read the words with attention. Wishing that he should understand their meaning, I encouraged him, and helped him to make out their sense: O Lord, give me souls and take everything else. He thought this over and after a while said: "I understand, here you don't traffic in money, but you deal in souls. I hope that my soul, too, will take part in this trade."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *EBM* XVII, 337-338, referring back to ca. 1852. John Cagliero entered the Oratory in 1852.

⁵⁰ Don Bosco, *Life of Young Dominic Savio* (1959), 38, in *Opere Edite* XI, 188.

Part II. Don Bosco's Understanding of *Da Mihi Animas*

2. The Soul in Don Bosco's Understanding

The question may be asked: How did Don Bosco understand "soul" and its relationship to the body in the human person? The answer would affect his understanding of the pastoral priority of *Da mihi animas*?

2.1. Traditional Dualistic Understanding

As a writer of religious pamphlets and as a priest "in care of souls," specifically in service to the disadvantaged, in the nineteenth century, Don Bosco, who was no philosopher and no psychologist, shared the understanding of the soul (and of the soul's relationship to the body) that prevailed in the religious literature of his time, especially in popular devotional literature, and that indeed had come down from the Christian religious tradition.

The Meditation for the second day of Don Bosco's *Month of May* is about "the soul." The first paragraph is worth quoting in full. Here Don Bosco writes, echoing St. Augustine:

God is Creator not only of everything that exists in heaven and on earth but also of us [human beings]. God created our body with its beautiful and admirable qualities. To the body God joined a soul that is surpassingly more precious than the body and everything else in the world. God gave us this soul, that is, this invisible entity that we experience within us, and that unceasingly yearns for elevation toward God. It is an intelligent being that thinks and reasons, but that cannot find happiness in this world—always restless until it rests in God.⁵¹

⁵¹ Don Bosco, *The Month of May Dedicated to Mary Most Holy and Immaculate [...]* (1858), 23-24, in *Opere Edite* X, 317-318.

"Thou hast made us for Thee and our heart is unquiet till it finds its rest in Thee." Cf. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. 1, Ch. 1, in *Saint Augustine, Confessions*, tr. by V.J. Bourke (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 1953), 4.

In two further paragraphs Don Bosco completes his description of the soul. It is immortal because it is a spirit created in the image and likeness of God [# 2]. God gave the soul freedom to choose good or evil, with consequent eternal reward or eternal punishment [#3]. He closes the meditation with an urgent appeal:

O Christian, you have an immortal soul. Think about it: if you save it, all is saved; if you lose it, all is lost. You have just *one* soul, and one single sin can cause its eternal loss!"⁵²

This is dualistic anthropology expressing, with an eschatological orientation, the priority of the soul vis-à-vis the body "in which it dwells." Sin can jeopardize one's salvation, that is, the salvation of one's soul.

The way Don Bosco describes Dominic Savio's death also betrays this dualist conception.

[Dominic] faced his approaching death with the quiet confidence arising from an innocent soul. Even his body, so it seemed, was being spared the anguish and pain it naturally suffers when the soul struggles to break free from its shackles. In a word, Dominic's passing was more like peaceful slumber than death.⁵³

At the close of the departure ceremony held in the Church of Mary Help of Christians on November 11, 1875, each of the departing missionaries received from Don Bosco a leaflet containing twenty keepsakes or souvenirs. The first of these reads: "Seek souls and not money, honors, or dignities," a good paraphrase of *Da mihi animas; caetera tolle*.⁵⁴

⁵² Cf. Don Bosco, *The Month of May* (1858).

⁵³ Don Bosco, *Life of Young Dominic Savio* (1859), 116, in *Opere Edite* XI, 266.

⁵⁴ DB's autograph: ASC 132 (5) in Taccuino, p. 70-77; new ASC classification: B32000 (A2270304); FDBM 747 C2-5; J. Borrego,

Perhaps one may see in the matter a direct influence on Don Bosco from St. Francis de Sales. In his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, this saint speaks of the soul in similar terms:

Consider how uncertain is the day of your death. My soul, one day you will leave this body. [...] Consider the long, languishing goodbye that your soul will give to this base world. [...] Consider how the soul after leaving the body goes its way, either to the right or to the left. Alas, where will your soul go? Which way will it take? It will be none other than the one begun in this world.⁵⁵

Certain it is that St. Francis de Sales was a powerful spiritual influence on Don Bosco and his work. Bishop Jean-Pierre Camus in *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales* attributes to the saint the use of the motto, *Da mihi animas; cetera tolle*.⁵⁶ Though the words do not actually occur in any of the saint's known writings, the reality they express pervaded his whole life and work—a reality that pervaded Don Bosco's life and work as well, and served as ever-present inspiration in his vocational commitment.

The above-quoted texts reflect a dualistic concept of the relationship of the soul to the body. Clearly Don Bosco stood in a dualist tradition.

But there also is a personalist anthropology that, in spite of Don Bosco's inherited dualist persuasion, may put a different visage on Don Bosco's understanding of *Da mihi animas* for the

"Recuerdos de San Juan Bosco a los primeros misioneros," *RSS* 3 (1984) 167-208; Motto, *Epistolario* IV, 547-548; *EBM* XI, 364-365; cf. Salesian Constitutions (1984), p. 265-266; Aubry-Caselli, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 288-290.

⁵⁵ St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, tr. and ed. by J.K. Ryan (Image Bk. New York: Doubleday, 1950) 60-61; cf. *Oeuvres* (Annecy) T. III, Ch. xiii, 43-45.

⁵⁶ Because of the many varying editions of Camus' work his statement attributing to St. Francis de Sales' the *verbatim* use of the motto, *Da mihi animas*, could not be verified.

apostolate. In the paragraphs that follow we will discuss this personalist understanding.

2.2. Personalist Understanding of Soul Vis-à-vis the Body

Gen 2:7 and 14:21, and the Hebrew Bible generally, have a personalist view of the soul-body relationship, for in Hebrew anthropology *nephesh* means “living human being” or “person.” The Greek and Latin Bibles, however, under the influence of Greek anthropology, translated Hebrew *nephesh* by Greek “*psyche*” or Latin “*anima*”—“soul” as opposed to “body.”

Contemporary Christian anthropology maintains a view of the soul-body relationship that expresses a unified conception of the person, diametrically opposed to the dualist anthropology come down in Christian tradition under Greek influence—a personalist view.⁵⁷

The dualistic view of the relationship of the soul to the body described above appears untenable because it implies a denial of the holistic oneness of the human person. Consequently it is incapable of uniting in any significant way the various aspects of Christian salvation. Therefore Christian philosophy and theology have distanced themselves from a dualistic anthropology that gives preference to the soul to the detriment of the body. The human being is not an immortal soul poured into a mortal body, but rather a composite of soul and body, constituting a body-person. Such unity is the basis of a person’s historical dimension as also of a person’s capacity to communicate collaboratively with others. The body thus is reinserted into the process of salvation that is to culminate in the

⁵⁷ In the paragraphs that follow, I am guided by Fr. Francis Desramaut’s excellent reflections in *Les cent mots-clefs de la spiritualité salésienne* (Paris: Éditions Don Bosco, 2000): Introductory Essay (esp. pp. 26-34), and assorted entries (*mots*), such *Âme*, *Apostolat*, *Engagement Social*..., *Zèle*.

resurrection. It is also reinserted into the spiritual life and the apostolate.

Such a unified conception of the person (“personalism”) results in the rejection of certain negative features that traditionally have qualified the Church’s approach to mission. Thus in spite of this tradition of the “priority of the soul” prevalent in his milieu, Don Bosco in the actual situations of the apostolate transcended the negativities of the dualist tradition. His zeal for the apostolate sprang from the great fire of divine charity that impelled him “to seek souls,” that is, “people,” especially “young people.”

2.2.1. Three Attitudes Rejected by Personalism—Withdrawal, Eschatologism and Supernaturalism

First, on principle, both in the spiritual life and the apostolate the attitude *tending to isolate a person* from the person’s history is repudiated. Consequently involvement in society is embraced as an urgent demand of the love of neighbor that Jesus commanded and exemplified. Hence a passive Christian profession, uninvolved in people’s historical destiny, is deemed contrary to the commitment demanded for discipleship. Likewise, the Christian’s spiritual journey (the Christian life), cannot be defined solely in terms of “the spiritual—interiority, prayer and devotion.” It must test its genuineness against the real-life tasks of human beings, and must get involved on the battlegrounds of society and of the Church. Briefly put, one must unite worship and life, interiority and social concern, union with God and communion in Church and society.

Secondly, the importance given to the “spiritual” in Christian life and ministry should not degenerate into *eschatological, otherworldly* projections that relegate salvation and the kingdom of God to the hereafter. Present and future must be regarded as intrinsically connected, because the future is the definitive stage of realization of the salvation worked out in the present. Final realities are meant not to abolish but to sustain

the Christian's engagement in history for the achievement of complete salvation.

Thirdly, personalism shuns any supernaturalism, that is, any tendency that would subordinate or eliminate the human element in order to allow full scope to the divine. Obviously, it does not thereby accept "the human" without critical judgment; however, it refuses to conceive of the divine and the human in terms of radical opposition. On the contrary, it believes that God's glory and human happiness are intimately related. Therefore human promotion and helping people to make a success of their lives are signs of authentic discipleship.

(In the threefold rejection outlined above we seem to recognize Don Bosco's own voice, inculcating for himself and for all his followers a spirituality for the apostolate—involvement through practical love of neighbor, through zealous commitment to the present in service to the whole person.)

In a positive mode, personalist anthropology confers on the spiritual life and the apostolate certain characteristics—personalist understandings that are discernable also in Don Bosco's life and work. We may mention the following.

2.2.2. Experience of God in History and Involvement with the World

A person's spiritual experience of the presence of God as Savior takes place in history, that is, within the ever-flowing movement of created reality in time. Since the human being exists in an essential relation with time, a Christian disciple, just like the people of the Bible and of other great religious traditions, is attentive to God's action perceived in historical events. This was a constant theme in Don Bosco's reflection. With such an understanding for him the presence of God appeared as the necessary condition for the success of the historical process. This Presence empowers us to understand the flow of the process and to act within it.

For the Christian disciple the sign of this saving Presence is Christ in his paschal mystery understood as an offer of salvation and of new and eternal life. Standing in this continuing faith tradition, the Christian experiences the living God through meditation on the revealed word, through participation in liturgical worship, through engagement in the work of charity, through working for justice, and through obedience to God's will as expressed in real-life situations. This experience unites the horizontal dimension with the vertical dimension expressed by the Christian mystery.

Such understanding has an important consequence. In former times, Christian perfection might have been made to consist in flight from the world in order to give oneself up to divine contemplation. Today, on the contrary, it is rather through action in the world that one tries to achieve holiness—through being a contemplative in action.

(As will be seen, Don Bosco expressed the special purpose of the Salesian Society in these very terms: "holiness to be achieved through the active life"—that is, a life fully committed to ministry, apostolate and work of charity—in imitation of the pastoral charity of Christ. He believed that by their activity his Salesians were helping to renew society and to bring the world one step closer to its realization in Christ. Thus such engagement becomes a means of holiness.)

Times for recollection, for contemplation, for exodus or for retreat continue to be regarded as important, in fact indispensable. However, it is the whole of one's life with the incessant activities of one's vocation that has to be acceptable to God and thus become a source of spiritual vitality for the apostolate—the whole of one's life, not just certain privileged moments. Without in any way overlooking the encounter with God in situations of prayer and worship, Christians look for contact with God in ordinary life.

(Don Bosco lived in continuous union with God. He sought and found God not in a separated religious life, but in one rooted in the quotidian.)

2.2.3. *Liberation of the oppressed and exploited poor and the establishing of community*

The spirituality of Christian personalism also calls for a commitment to an apostolate that aims at *liberation*, a theme that pervades the whole Christian theology of salvation. Injustices in the social, political, economic and cultural domains always imply a rejection of the Lord's gift of peace, indeed a rejection of the Lord himself. Access to salvation and to communion with God is made possible less through well worked out theological categories as through a life that speaks and works with a sense of urgency for the liberation of the oppressed—a life that sets aside indifference and neutrality and adopts an overt stance in support of the poor and the exploited.

Such option makes two demands on the Christian. The first demand enjoins the *prophetic condemnation* of social injustice, even at the risk of incurring personal loss or hostile reprisals.

The second demand calls for *real solidarity with the poor* so that a total liberation can be effected from within. And since sin has infected also the social institutions, liberation entails not only extirpating evil from human hearts, but also removing or transforming unjust social structures. For this Christians live and work in hope for they believe that liberation and human community can be attained already in this world, even though only in a partial and conditioned manner.

Our world, the western world in particular, appears hardened in its individualism. Hence the Church, following a widespread trend, has sought to promote a model of spiritual life for the apostolate based on *community building or communion*. Vatican II, speaking from a strongly personalist position, stated that "by their innermost nature humans are social beings, and unless they relate themselves to others they can neither live nor

develop their potential.”⁵⁸ The Church sets an example in that it is (or ought to be) a communion, that is, essentially a community of persons bonded in love and solidarity. “It has pleased God to make human beings holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people that acknowledges God in truth and serves God in holiness.”⁵⁹

(Don Bosco consecrated his whole life to this mission of liberation in solidarity with the poor, especially of disadvantaged young people. He valued community not merely as a base or staging area for the mission but as a value in itself. Hence he sought to foster the sense of community, as family spirit, in all educational situations. He believed that the need to live as brothers and sisters united in evangelical communion was strongly felt by all his Salesians and boys. Accordingly he fostered in the Society the formation of communities patterned on the one described in the Acts of the Apostles in which “those who believed were of one heart and soul” [Acts 4:32], communities that live and pray bonded by love and sharing—always with the mission in view.)

The foregoing discussion of Don Bosco’s understanding of the motto, *Da mihi animas*, suggests on the one hand that he stood in the long-established and prevailing dualist tradition, but, on the other, that in the practical unfolding of his vocational commitment he appears totally at the service of the living person and of the person’s concerns and needs, both spiritual and material. Hence, while he uses language and rhetoric of dualist anthropology, the personalist approach emerges unambiguously from the great and open-ended variety of works of charity stemming from this understanding.

⁵⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, # 12.

⁵⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, # 9.

Part III. *Da Mihi Animas* Powering Don Bosco's Vocational Commitment

3. Don Bosco's Vocational Commitment and Its Inspiration

3.1. *Don Bosco's Love and Social Valuation of Young People*

Father Michael Rua, Don Bosco's vicar and successor, wrote:

Don Bosco took no step, spoke no word and undertook no work that did not have the salvation of the young as their object. He left it to others to go after money, comforts and honors. As for himself, he never had anything truly at heart, except the salvation of souls. In word, and above all in deed, did he live by the motto, *Give me souls; take everything else.*⁶⁰

Don Bosco's personal experiences as a youth, as well as his ministerial experiences as a young priest in Turin, provided the basis for what he came to recognize as a divine call to devote his life to the service of disadvantaged young people. Don Bosco spoke of this "inclination," as an inner urge. He told Father Cafasso in 1844: "I feel inclined to work among boys. [...] At this moment I seem to find myself in the midst of a crowd of boys asking me to help them."⁶¹

Later (in 1846) he replied to Marchioness Barolo's ultimatum with the words:

"My life is consecrated to the good of young people. I thank you for the offers you are making me, but I can't turn back from the path that Divine Providence has traced out for me."⁶²

In the preface to the *Companion of Youth* (1847), Don Bosco writes about his love for young people:

⁶⁰ Letter of August 24, 1894, in *Lettere circolari di Don Michele Rua ai Salesiani* (Torino: Tip S.A.I.D. "Buona Stampa", 1910), 109.

⁶¹ *EBM* II, 177.

⁶² Don Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory* (English ed., 1989), 251.

My friends, I love you with all my heart, and your being young is reason enough for me to love you very much. You will certainly find books written by persons much more virtuous and much more learned than myself; but, I assure you, you would be hard put to find anyone who loves you more than I do in Jesus Christ, or who cares more about your true happiness than I do.⁶³

The “inclination” solidified into an option by which the young became the absorbing concern of his ministry, the special inspiration of *all* his apostolic works, and of the various institutions that he initiated or that derived from his spirit—the whole Salesian family.

In this connection, one must note that Don Bosco’s love for young people went hand in hand with a *social valuation* of them—for he was convinced that “*the good or evil moral condition of society depended on whether young people received a good or a bad education.*”⁶⁴ Hence his complete dedication to them was motivated by a desire not just to prevent social harm (as was the case with most of the “charity” in his day), not just to rehabilitate (where needed) but also to *educate*.

By *education* he meant helping the young person to develop and grow both as a human being and a Christian, so that he/she might find his/her proper place in society. His was a “holistic” concept of education that aimed at helping the young person to become “a committed Christian and an honest citizen.” In fact, in the context of the liberal revolution and the progressive secularization of society, he came to the realization that only through the education of the young could a Christian society be preserved or restored. This perception conferred new

⁶³ English version of the *Giovane Provveduto* (1847): *The Companion of Youth* by Saint John Bosco, edited by the Salesian Fathers (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1938), 3; cf. also *EBM* III, 8.

⁶⁴ Giovanni Bosco, *Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales [1858]-1875*. Testi critici a cura di Francesco Motto (Roma: LAS, 1982), 58-60. [F. Motto, *Don Bosco's Constitutions*]

meaning and new urgency on the motto he had adopted and lived by, *Da mihi animas*—now largely understood in a “personalist” mode. Together with the perception that young people were variously at risk the world over, he saw the young, so educated, not only as the “building blocks” of a renewed Christian society in his day, in his city—but also as the vehicle for the renewal of society in any time, in any place throughout the world. Hence, each development of his work, from the original oratory to the school, to the missions, etc. had a “holistic” education of the young in view.

3.2. *Purpose of the Salesian Vocation in Don Bosco's Words*

In the introduction to the *Historical Summary* of 1854, Don Bosco describes the oratory as the Providential means whereby young people at risk may be educated to become committed Christians and honest citizens. He writes:

*Ut filios Dei, qui erant dispersi, congregaret in unum.*⁶⁵ It seems to me that the words of the Holy Gospel, which tell us that our divine Savior come down from heaven to earth to gather together all the children of God scattered all over the world, could be applied literally to the young people of our times. These young people, the most vulnerable yet most valuable portion of human society, on whom we base our hopes for a happy future, are not of their nature depraved. Were it not for carelessness on the part of parents, idleness, mixing in bad company, which happens especially on Sundays, it would be so easy to inculcate in their young hearts the principles of order, of good behavior, of respect and of religion. For, if it so happens that they are ruined at that young age, it is due more to thoughtlessness than to ingrained malice. These young people have a real need of some kind person who will take care of them, work with them, guide them in virtue and keep them away from vice.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ John 11:52: “To gather into one the dispersed children of God” [NRSV].

⁶⁶ Pietro Braidò: *Don Bosco per i giovani: L'Oratorio, una 'Congregazione degli Oratori,' Documenti.* Piccola Biblioteca

In similar terms, Don Bosco clearly wished to transmit his vocational commitment to the Salesian Society. In the Preamble to its earliest constitutions (1858) he wrote:

At all times it has been the special concern of the ministers of the Church to promote, to the best of their power, the spiritual welfare of the young. *The good or evil moral condition of society will depend on whether young people receive a good or a bad education.* Our Divine Savior himself has shown us the truth of this by his deeds. For in fulfilling his divine mission on earth, with a love of predilection he invited children to come close to him: 'Let little children come to me.' [...] At the present time this need is felt with greater urgency than ever before. Parental neglect, the abusive power of the press, and the proselytizing efforts of heretics demand that we unite in fighting for the Lord's cause, under the banner of the faith. Our efforts must aim at safeguarding the faith and the moral life of that category of young people whose eternal salvation is more at risk precisely because of their poverty. *This is the specific purpose of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales.*⁶⁷

3.3. "Give Me Souls" and the Education of the Young—the Home Attached to the Oratory

For Don Bosco every moment of his presence to young people was an educational moment. The work of the oratory, with its various aspects and ramifications, was a work of education. After settling his wandering oratory permanently on Mr. Pinardi's property (1846), Don Bosco established a *Home Attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales (Casa Annessa...)*. This "hospice" was first based in the Pinardi house (1847), and subsequently transferred to new, enlarged premises (1853 and 1856). A growing resident community of poor young people afforded him the opportunity of expanding the application of the educational principles that had guided his

dell'Istituto Storico Salesiano, 9 (Roma: LAS, 1988), pp. 30-34, 34-55.

⁶⁷ F. Motto, *Don Bosco's Constitutions*, 58-60

work with the early oratory. This was the great and successful experiment in education that produced the "Salesian educational method."

The establishment of the Home was a step of major significance in the development of Don Bosco's work. It was conceived as an extension of the oratory and its original inspiration was that it should be a home for oratory boys who were really the poorest of the poor. This fact alone places it, if not on a par with, certainly a close second to, the work of the oratory itself. It is in fact its logical extension, so much so that when first putting this work on a constitutional basis (1858) Don Bosco wrote by way of explanation:

Some [youngsters] are found that are so neglected (*abbandonati*) that, unless they are given shelter, every care would be expended upon them in vain. Therefore, as far as possible houses of shelter shall be opened in which, with the means that divine Providence will provide, lodging, food and clothing shall be supplied to them. While they are instructed in the truths of faith, they shall also be started on some trade or line-of-work, as is presently done in the Home attached [*Casa Annessa*] to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in this city.⁶⁸

But the importance of the Home also lies in the fact that almost from the start it became the laboratory in which the founder broadened his experiment in the education of the young, both working apprentices *and students*, including those also who would eventually carry forward the Salesian work. It was in and through this diversified experiment in "education" that "what was done at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales" became the pattern for Salesian work everywhere. It was thus that the "Oratory experience" became *normative*.

⁶⁸ *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales* (1858), "Purpose of this Society," art. 4, in Motto, *Don Bosco's Constitutions*, 74.

Don Bosco describes the beginning of the Home and its first boarders in various ways.⁶⁹ These early texts by the Founder stress the original inspiration of the Home: it was for the poorest of the poor, orphans in desperate need, barely surviving on the brink. But above we also noted the presence of students among the very first group of boarders at the Home, and their significance for the development of the Salesian work.

3.4. Don Bosco's Option for the Poor and its Character

"Poor and abandoned," "neglected," "orphan," and synonyms occur frequently in Don Bosco's writings in connection with his vocational option. In the official texts of the early constitutions, particularly in the chapter on Purpose of the Society, the various Italian and Latin forms of "poor" occur routinely—Italian: *poveri, più poveri, i più poveri/poverissimi*; Latin: *pauperes, pauperiores, pauperrimi* (English: *poor, poorer, poorest*)

Did Don Bosco intend to *classify* various degrees of poverty and *prioritize* the highest degree to the exclusion of lower degrees? Even a cursory examination of Don Bosco's use of the term in the constitutional text as well as in other writings

⁶⁹ [1] *Historical Outline* of 1854, final paragraph: "Two young men were given shelter. They were poor, orphaned, without a trade, ignorant of their religion. This is how the Home began; it never stopped growing." [2] *Historical Outlines* of 1862: "Neglected young people appeared out of nowhere in swarms. It was then that a policy was established according to which only those youngsters were admitted who were between the ages of eighteen and twelve, orphaned of both parents, and in a state of dire poverty with no one to care for them (*totalmente poveri ed abbandonati*). [3] *MO-En*, 313-314 (ca. 1874): On a rainy evening, Don Bosco and Mamma Margaret took in a 15-year old homeless orphan. Don Bosco adds: "Very soon we had a companion for him." According to Lemoyne, Don Bosco found this second boy, also a homeless orphan, crying with his head against a tree in the nearby boulevard. [*EBM* III, 143-144.]

shows that, while the option for the poor is clear throughout, “poor, poorer, poorest are not used as classifiers. It was not Don Bosco’s intention to classify young people by the criterion of poverty and to choose the poorest of all to the exclusion of others.

Don Bosco’s mind in this respect may be deduced from what he himself did. Within the overarching option for poor young people, Don Bosco considered youngsters individually in their concrete situation of poverty, neglect, exploitation and so forth, and responded to need accordingly. Obviously in any particular situation he would address *preferentially*, or as *priority*, the most crying need. But in the exercise of charity Don Bosco avoided classifying poverty, for that would have jeopardized the Salesian’s ability to respond to need, and to be available to the poor as encountered in concrete situations.

3.5. “Give me souls...” the Poor in the Student Community of the Home

In 1855-56 Don Bosco began to establish a secondary school program at the Home, under the Boncompagni school reform (1848), beginning with the third year of the 5-year *ginnasio*, with 17-year old Salesian seminarian Giovanni Francesca as teacher. By the year 1859-1860 he had succeeded in establishing a complete resident program of secondary studies, with five years of *ginnasio* (high school), under the Casati school system (1859).⁷⁰

⁷⁰ In the wake of the liberal revolution and the constitution in 1848, a school reform took place, the work of Minister of Public Instruction Carlo Boncompagni. It placed all public education under state control (replacing the school legislation of King Charles Felix, 1822) in effect gradually removing it from the Church’s control. However, it allowed the operation of private schools, provided they complied with the requirements of the new statutes. A private school was one that was run by a licensed teacher (usually in his own home) or by an institution. There were several such schools in the city.

From then on, the student community acquired increasing importance for a number of reasons. First of all, in line with the new policy of mass education undertaken by the secular State, Don Bosco saw himself as increasingly committed to education through schools for the poor, with the aim of turning out “committed Christians” as well as “honest citizens.” Secondly, as the number of students steadily increased and surpassed that of working apprentices (steadily in a ratio of about 2 to 1), the school became the more important vehicle for Don Bosco’s educational “experiment.” Thirdly and more importantly, through the school Don Bosco aimed at cultivating vocations to the priesthood, and eventually to the Salesian Society, from among those (poor) boys who gave evidence of good conduct, good will, and intelligence.

Even before the secondary studies program was completely established at the Oratory, Don Bosco began to advertise the Home and Oratory school, stressing their charitable character and purpose. It was for “orphans” who were “destitute and homeless.” The November 7, 1857 issue of the Catholic daily *L’Armonia*, published an advertisement stating Don Bosco’s admission requirements. It *ideally* also constituted a manifesto of his commitment to the poor.

1. The boy must be at least twelve and not over eighteen.
2. He must be an orphan with both parents dead and have no relatives able to care for him.
3. He must be completely destitute and homeless. If a boy fulfills the first two conditions, but has some property of his own, he must bring it with him to help defray expenses; since it would not be right for a person who has property to live off the charity of others.
4. A boy must be in good health, and not be physically deformed or ill with some loathsome or communicable disease.

In 1859, Minister Gabrio Casati, continuing the liberal program of secularization, published a new, far-reaching school reform, which necessitated the reorganization of the program of studies in the Oratory school by this time fully established with five years of secondary studies (*ginnasio*).

5. Priority will be given to totally destitute and homeless boys who already attend the oratories of St. Aloysius, of the Guardian Angel and of St. Francis de Sales, because this Home has been opened especially for them.⁷¹

As Lemoyne has noted, this policy statement seems intended to emphasize “for the public” the priority option for the “poor and abandoned” that had inspired the creation of the Home in the first place. But this statement, while perhaps generally reflecting the situation in the working community, did not reflect the *real* situation in the student community. A number of those boys, though generally poor, were neither orphans nor destitute, and at least some of them paid their room-and-board and tuition fees, at least in part. This may be learned from such Oratory books as Don Bosco’s own House List (*Repertorio domestico*).⁷²

Don Bosco, however, did not make that statement just for publicity purposes, but by it he expressed his real commitment to the needy. Pietro Baricco, in his description of Turin written in 1868, in the two sections devoted to scholastic and to charitable institutions, notes that Don Bosco’s Oratory belonged to the latter category. He writes:

The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, under Father John Bosco’s direction, should be classed as a charitable institution rather than as an academic one. The fees charged for room and board are modest in the extreme, and most of its pupils are maintained free of charge. Perhaps less than one hundred of them pay the full amount of 24 lire per month. Of the 504 students in residence at the institute, 445 are enrolled in the secondary school program (*corso ginnasiale*) [...].

In the program of studies are enrolled young men of good conduct who have completed their elementary course of studies. They are either received free of charge (and these are in the majority) or they pay only a modest fee ranging from 5 to 24 lire per month. On the other hand, all working apprentices are admitted free of charge. They

⁷¹ *EBM V*, 496.

⁷² Cf. Stella, *DBEcSoc*, 202-204; Lemoyne also notes that even before 1851 some of the boarders paid regular fees [*EBM III*, 410].

must be at least 12 years old and orphans with both parents dead, with no one to care for them (*abbandonati*).⁷³

The foregoing pages have described Don Bosco's adoption and understanding of the motto, *Da Mihi Animas*, and his consequent vocational commitment to "poor and abandoned young people" through the Oratory and the Home.

We now turn to a consideration of the priority accorded by him to the active life as a way of holiness for the Salesian apostolate.

Part IV. The Active Life as the Special Religious Purpose of the Salesian Congregation

4. Priority of the Active Life

Describing the purpose of the Salesian Society in a cover letter submitted when presenting the Constitutions for approval by Rome (1864) Don Bosco writes:

The purpose of this Society, in so far as it concerns its members [personally], is to offer them an opportunity to unite in spirit in order to work for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. We find inspiration in the words of St. Augustine: "Of all divine works the most divine is to work for the salvation of souls."⁷⁴

Don Bosco prioritized the active life, that is, a life committed to the work of charity in imitation of the pastoral charity of Christ, as a way of holiness. He offered this spirituality, not only to the Salesians Fathers, Brothers and Sisters, but also to the Cooperators—to the whole Salesian Family—and to the young people in their care.⁷⁵

⁷³ Pietro Baricco, *Torino descritta* II, 708 and 813.

⁷⁴ F. Motto, *Don Bosco's Constitutions*, 229.

⁷⁵ For instance, this is the spiritual doctrine propounded by Don Bosco in the *Life of Young Dominic Savio* (1859): He writes: "The

He never swerved from his conviction that for the Salesian Family and the young people in their care—indeed for all committed Christians—holiness is achieved *through* the work of charity undertaken in imitation of Christ's pastoral charity. This is the meaning he attached to the motto that he made his own and handed on to his followers: *Da mihi animas, cetera tolle!*

4.1. *General and Special Purposes of the Salesian Society as a Religious Congregation*

The debate on the purpose or purposes of religious life has had a long and disputed history, since it has involved a consideration of all the varied forms of religious life that have appeared since early Christian times.⁷⁶

In summary, the *general* purpose of all religious life is seen to consist in striving for personal perfection or holiness, that is, for perfect charity. It bears the following characteristics: (1) it is common to all forms of religious life; (2) it is an essential requirement of religious life as such; (3) it is achieved

first piece of advice that [Dominic] was given for achieving holiness was that he should endeavor to win souls to God; because there is no holier work in this world than that of contributing to the salvation of souls, for whose redemption Jesus Christ shed the very last drop of his precious blood" [Don Bosco, *Life of Young Dominic Savio* (1859), 53, in *Opere Edite* XI, 203].

This is also the spiritual doctrine taught in the charter document, *Salesian Cooperators* (1876). He writes: "This Association might be regarded as a traditional Third Order; but with this difference, that whereas *there* perfection was made to consist in exercises of piety [devotions], *here* the main purpose is the active life and the exercise of charity toward neighbor, especially toward young people at risk" [*Opere Edite* XXVIII, 260].

⁷⁶ For historical survey and discussion see A. Carminati, "Fini della Religione," in *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione* (Roma: Edizioni Paoline, 1977) IV, 40-51.

through a more perfect following of Christ and through a more intimate union with God (whether in individual or in communitarian form); (4) it is expressed in the evangelical way of life (including virginity, poverty and obedience).

The *special* purpose of religious life, on the other hand, consists in some specific activity (relating to ministry, apostolate, or work of charity) undertaken *in addition* to the general common purpose but *possessing formally the nature of a true purpose*. It should be noted that such a purpose is not common to all religious life, since historically there have existed recognized forms of religious life that lacked such a purpose. Nor has it, *in itself*, been regarded as essential for the same reason. However, since historically religious orders and religious congregations were founded and approved by the Church precisely for such a purpose, the special purpose is regarded as essential in their case. This has found confirmation in Vatican II's decree on religious life.

In such communities [devoted to various aspects of the apostolate] the very nature of religious life requires apostolic action and services, since a sacred ministry and a special work of charity have been consigned to them by the Church and must be discharged in her name.⁷⁷

As religious life developed, the special purpose took various forms: priestly ministry, evangelization, pastoral activity, work of charity, etc. It should be emphasized that such activity is undertaken not simply as "an occupation," but as a special way of contributing directly to the Church's mission. (Hence it is that such religious institutes have always sought the Church's approval.)

The Jesuit constitutions were the first to adopt a formulation that gave expression to both purposes of religious life.⁷⁸ Later congregations have followed suit, using expressions

⁷⁷ Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 8.

⁷⁸ "It is the purpose of this society not only to strive with God's grace after the salvation and perfection of one's soul, but also at the

such as “twin purposes” or “twin principal purposes,” and other formulations designed to specify various aspects of the two purposes.

Throughout this developing tradition, the purposes are always expressed in *coordination* or simply listed. Don Bosco, on the contrary, in his earliest drafts of the constitutions expressed the purposes in *subordination*, to indicate that for the Salesian the general purpose (Christian perfection or holiness) is achieved through the special purpose (the work of charity).

4.2 Personal Sanctification through the Work of Charity Undertaken after Christ's own Example

One of the most important spiritual insights embodied in Don Bosco's early Constitutions is the relatedness of the exercise of pastoral charity to the religious and spiritual life of the Salesian. This finds expression in the foundational Articles 1 and 2 of the chapter on Purpose.

4.2.1. Articles 1 and 2 of the Chapter On Purpose in the Earliest Drafts of 1858 and 1860

Article 1 in the earliest draft (Rua Ms. of 1858) simply reads:

It is the purpose of this congregation to gather together [into community] its [as] members, priests, seminarians and laymen too, in order that they may strive for perfection *through* the imitation, in so far as it is possible, of the virtues of our divine Savior.

Surprisingly, it may be noted, this first foundational article on the Purpose of the Society makes no explicit mention of pastoral charity towards poor young people, though this would be included in the imitation of Christ's “virtues.” It should,

same time ardently to devote oneself to the salvation and perfection of one's neighbor.” [St. Ignatius, *Summarium Const.*, No. 2, in Carminati, *Dizionario* IV, 45]

however, be borne in mind that the chapter on Purpose was preceded, by two other chapters, the Preamble (quote above) and the Historical Sketch, both eventually removed in Rome. They were intended to provide the key for a correct understanding of this article, of the whole chapter on Purpose, as well as of the whole project set forth in the constitutions.

This would have been enough. But, as though to make it doubly certain, in the next draft of 1860 Don Bosco revised the last phrase of Article 1 to read:

It is the purpose of this congregation to gather together [into community] its [as] members, priests, seminarians and laymen too, in order that they may strive for perfection *through* the imitation, in so far as it is possible, of the virtues of our divine Savior, *especially in charity toward poor young people.*⁷⁹

Article 2 in the earliest draft (the Rua Ms. of 1858) expands the concept of the imitation of Christ already set forth in Article 1, though it does so along traditional lines not free of difficulty. This article, which remained fundamentally unchanged throughout, reads:

Jesus Christ began by doing and teaching. In like manner shall the members begin by perfecting themselves through the practice of both the internal and external virtues and through the acquisition of knowledge; then shall they apply themselves for the good of their neighbor.⁸⁰

The sentence, “Jesus Christ began by doing and teaching,” is a quote from the preface to the Book of Acts [Acts 1:1]. In the Gospel, Luke had spoken about “all that Jesus began to do and to teach,” that is, “all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning” of his ministry; now (in Acts) he is going to continue

⁷⁹ Motto, *Don Bosco's Constitutions*, 72.

⁸⁰ Motto, *Don Bosco's Constitutions*, 72. “External” and “internal” were secondary distinctions based on whether or not a virtue has an external effect or projection.

the story. The phrase “doing and teaching” describes the double activity of Jesus’ ministry (healing and teaching).

The traditional ascetical interpretation of the phrase, however, takes “doing and teaching” to represent two successive stages in the life of Jesus, as in the life of a religious. The “doing stage” for the religious is the period of formation in prayer, study and ascetical striving (paralleling the thirty-years-long hidden life of Jesus). The “teaching stage” is the period of ministry or apostolate that follows (paralleling Jesus’ three-years-long ministry).

There is no doubt that Don Bosco’s wording here was influenced by the ascetical tradition, but he himself throughout the process of approval of the constitutions fought against the very idea of successive stages. He wanted the formation of his Salesians to take place in the context of the apostolate. For example, he consistently rejected the idea of a closed, ascetical novitiate.

Articles 1 and 2 of the chapter on Purpose (in the drafts of 1858 and 1860), based as they are on the strong foundations of the Preamble and of the Historical Sketch, set forth the two basic principles for the Salesian’s spiritual life for the apostolate.

First, Don Bosco sets forth for the Salesian, albeit in nineteenth-century ascetical language, a Christ-centered spirituality. The Salesian, gathered in community for the work of charity, is given a comprehensive means for attaining to “perfection” (holiness): the imitation of Christ in his ministry to the young and the poor.

Secondly, the Salesian’s personal perfection (that is, holiness) is to be attained *through* the exercise of charity. It should be noted that this formulation goes beyond even the idea of “twin essential purposes” developed historically in religious congregations. Vatican II, in the passage from *Perfectae Caritatis* cited above, sanctioned the idea that the special apostolic or charitable purpose of religious congregations is an essential part of religious life, because such activity is entrusted

to them by the Church and is exercised in the Church's name. Such a pronouncement has forced a re-thinking of the ascetical and canonical tradition, which tended to view the special purpose of an institute as additional and secondary. Don Bosco's formulation and the insight it supposes (general purpose to be attained through the special purpose) were so novel in the early 1860s that they must have appeared altogether revolutionary.

But immediately one is taken aback by the drastic re-writing of the article in the constitutional text of 1864.

4.2.2. *Puzzling Re-Writing of Article 1 of the Chapter on Purpose in 1864*

A comparison will reveal the nature and extent of the shift.

Art. 1 (Purpose) Draft of 1860	Art. 1 (Purpose) Draft of 1864
1. It is the purpose of this congregation to gather together [into community] [as] its members priests, seminarians and laymen too, in order that they may strive for perfection through the imitation, in so far as it is possible, of the virtues of our divine Savior, especially in charity toward poor young people.	1. The purpose of this society is the Christian perfection of its members; every kind of work of charity, both spiritual and corporal, on behalf of young people, especially if they are poor; and also the education of young seminarians. It is composed of priests, seminarians and laymen. ⁸¹

Here truly significant changes have taken place. Community (“the gathering”) is no longer in evidence. The tight *subordination* of purposes has been replaced by mere coordination of various juxtaposed elements. The concept of “perfection *through* the work of charity toward the young in imitation of Christ’s pastoral charity” has been replaced by that of an “unspecified” Christian perfection. Christocentric spirituality for the Salesian is no longer to be deduced from the wording of the 1864 article.

Yet Don Bosco never swerved from the abiding conviction that for the Salesian holiness is achieved through the work of charity undertaken in imitation of Christ’s pastoral charity. For example, in the important *Historical Sketch* of 1874, written ten years later for the definitive approval of the constitutions, Don Bosco states unambiguously: “The purpose of this Society is the spiritual advancement of its members through

⁸¹ Motto, *Don Bosco’s Constitutions*, 72.

the exercise of charity toward neighbor, especially toward poor young people.”⁸² This is how Don Bosco understood the “*Da mihi animas.*”

Then how explain the re-writing of Article 1 on Purpose in 1864? Many reasons may be adduced.⁸³ Of these the most telling and decisive was the new directives from the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars issued to clarify this very matter. The promulgation of the *Methodus* in 1863 set in motion a series of actions by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars designed to regulate the approval of the many religious congregations founded in the nineteenth century. Observations given to some religious congregations on the basis of the *Methodus* required that the purpose of the institute should be expressed more humbly, and that separate mention should be made of the member’s personal sanctification.⁸⁴ These directives were later codified in the *Normae* of 1901.⁸⁵ After defining the general and special purpose of religious congregations, the *Normae* directed that a clear and separate statement be made of the two purposes:

⁸² Don Bosco’s *Cenno storico*, in Braido, *DB per i giovani*, 125.

⁸³ For a discussion of the whole subject cf. Francesco Motto, “Constitutiones Societatis S. Francisci Salesii: Fonti letterarie dei capitoli Scopo, Forma, Voto di Obbedienza, Povertà e Castità,” *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 2 (1983) 341-384, esp. 356-360 [Motto, *Fonti*]; also Francis Desramaut, “Lo scopo della società nelle costituzioni salesiane,” in *La Missione dei Salesiani nella Chiesa*; Colloqui 2 (Torino: LDC, 1970), 65-85.

⁸⁴ Motto, *Fonti*, 359.

⁸⁵ *Normae secundum quas Sacra Congregation Episcoporum et Regularium procedere solet in approbandis novis Institutis votorum simplicium*, June 28, 1901 (Norms by which the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars is guided in the process of approval of new institutes with simple vows).

“These two purposes are to be accurately distinguished, and they are to be stated with clarity, in unpretentious terms, and without exaggeration.”⁸⁶

In this context, the 1864 re-writing of Article 1 on Purpose is understandable. It appears that Don Bosco both by following the models and by complying with official directives hoped to make his constitutions more acceptable, as he was submitting them for approval for the first time in 1864.

Part V. Don Bosco's Social Commitment and His Apolitical Stance (Art. 7 of the Chapter on Purpose of the 1864 Constitutions)

In Part Two of this paper (above), we listed the positive acquisitions of a personalist spirituality for the apostolate, among them, striving for liberation, for involvement, for eradication of systemic injustice, for the building up of community, etc. We made the point that Don Bosco, though standing in a dualist tradition with regard to the soul-body relationship, he approached the apostolate with a holistic understanding of the person.

In the pages that followed we presented instances of his insights and forward-looking attitude. In Part Four we discussed the foundational Articles 1 and 2 of the Chapter on Purpose of the early constitutions. At this point we shall briefly discuss Art. 7 of this chapter (draft of 1864).

⁸⁶ *Normae*, No. 44, cf. Carminati in *Dizionario IV* (1977), 49.

The norms given by the Roman congregation also reflect the ongoing debate on the purposes of religious life. Some theologians held that ministerial, apostolic, or charitable activities were not of themselves means of perfection, or simply that the two were separate purposes of religious life, but that one could not be subordinated to the other.

5. Don Bosco's Apolitical Stance

When Don Bosco petitioned for approval of the constitutions in 1864 (and was awarded merely the *Decretum Laudis*), Article 7, recently introduced to provide for total abstention from political activity, was ordered removed under the second Savini-Svegliati observation. He complied, and although the article might still be read in intermediate archival manuscripts, it no longer appeared in the revised draft of 1867 presented in Rome. But he adamantly maintained a policy of political non-involvement.

5.1. Don Bosco's Continued Apolitical Stance

In an address to the First General Chapter (1877) Don Bosco stated that he kept on reinserting the article, which was finally removed only in 1874 before the final approval of the constitutions. Don Bosco's words are worth noting, if only for the reason that they show his determination to maintain a policy of non-involvement.

The Association of Salesian Cooperators has the good will of all because it does not get involved in politics. [As for our Society] the reason why, in my view, we are allowed the freedom to go about our work undisturbed is that our Congregation is in no way involved in politics. I wanted our constitutions to have a special article forbidding all members to get in any way mixed up in politics. Such a provision was included in the manuscript drafts, but when our rules were submitted to the Holy See, and our Congregation received its first approval [*Decretum laudis*, 1864], the article was removed by the specially appointed examining commission. In 1870 [read 1869] the Congregation was up for definitive approval, and the rules were to be submitted again for examination. As if nothing had been said on the subject, I again inserted the article that forbade the members to get involved in political questions. Again they rejected it. Convinced of its importance, I once more inserted it in 1874, when the constitutions had to be examined article by article by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars before definitive approval. Once more it was removed, but this time they attached a written explanation: "This is the third time this article has been struck out. Of itself, it appears to be

generally acceptable, but in this day and age *circumstances may well force one in conscience to enter the political arena, since politics are often inseparable from religion.* In such cases good Catholics cannot be forbidden political activity.” So it was that the article was definitively removed. *We may therefore get involved in politics when it is advantageous and genuinely advisable.* Apart from such cases, however, let us abide by our established rule of not engaging in any political activity.⁸⁷

In his *Memoirs of the Oratory*, written between 1873 and 1875, he speaks of the patriotic celebrations organized to fete the granting of the liberal constitution in the Kingdom of Sardinia (1848). When Marquis Roberto D’Azeglio pressed him to take part in the festivities with his boys, Don Bosco stated his position very clearly:

It is my firm system to keep out of anything political. Never *pro*, never *con*. [...] Invite me to wherever a priest can exercise charity, and you will find me ready to sacrifice life and means. But I want now and always to remain outside politics.⁸⁸

Don Bosco similarly subscribed to the policy of “withdrawal” from political life called for by conservative Catholic newspapers and endorsed by Pope Pius IX’s Decree *Non Expedit*

⁸⁷ ASC 04: Capitoli Generali, GC I, Session 4, September 7, 1.877, Barberis’ Original Minutes, 53-55, *FDBM* 1,843 C12-D2 (also in Transcribed Minutes, *FDBM* 1,849 C5); edited in *IBM* XIII, 265, and in *EBM* XIII, 195.

With regard to the question of how long the article endured in the textual tradition, Motto points out that the archival documentary evidence in our possession does not bear out Don Bosco’s statements. One may therefore question the accuracy of Don Bosco’s recollection. On the other hand, Don Bosco (as reported) directly quotes the written explanation he was given for the removal of the article. In any case, Don Bosco never deviated from this principle. It is well known that he himself shunned not only all party politics but also all political activity.

⁸⁸ *Memoirs of the Oratory (MO-En)*, 356.

of 1868 and of 1874. The decree “forbade” Italian Catholics to vote and otherwise participate in the political process. This policy remained in force throughout the pontificate of Leo XIII, until 1904.

Don Bosco continued to demand that the Salesians’ engagement remain exclusively on the plane of apostolic and charitable activity. The apolitical stance that Don Bosco enjoined on his Salesians he also laid down as a rule for his Salesian Cooperators. As far as their social circumstances allowed, they were to be involved in all kinds of charitable work on behalf of young people, but at the same time they were to avoid any political entanglements. This is borne out by the above-quoted passage from the minutes of General Chapter I, as well as in the Cooperators’ charter documents.⁸⁹ In another comprehensive statement made at General Chapter I, as reported in the minutes, Don Bosco said:

While keeping aloof from politics, we [Salesians and Salesian Cooperators] shall always avoid anything that might compromise us with the constituted authorities, whether civil or ecclesiastical. All we ask is to be allowed to care for poor and neglected young people and to help them in any way we can. This, we believe, is the only way in which we can advance Christian morals and the good of society.⁹⁰

Now, the reason for the removal of the article on politics by Rome is clear (see above), but it could easily have been deduced from general religious principles, from the political situation and from the position of the Holy See vis-à-vis the liberal state. It is the inclusion of such a provision by Don Bosco, and his fierce, unwavering adherence to it, that demand an explanation. After

⁸⁹ “*Cooperatori Salesiani ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume ed alla civile società*” (1876). For the 1875 and 1876 documents, cf. *IBM* XI, 535-545, Appendix 4 and 5 (omitted in *EBM*).

⁹⁰ *ASC 04 Capitoli Generali*, GC I, Session 4, September 7: 1877, Transcribed minutes, 116-118; *FDBM* 1,849 C12-D2; edited in *IBM* XIII, 261-262 and *EBM* XIII, 192.

all, the Salesian mission by its very nature addresses the need of society as well as of individual people.

5.2. Don Bosco's Work of Charity and the Renewal of Society

The question has been raised as to the kind of Christian society Don Bosco envisaged and would want his Salesians to be working for. We do not pretend that Don Bosco's social model was a "modern" one. It was in fact a model that, in spite of its intense moral and religious inspiration, had already been irremediably left behind. Faced with a social and political order that seemed to deny every day more traditional moral and religious values, he envisioned (at least sentimentally) not the coming of a new Christian order but the restoration of the old—the confessional state, a stratified and orderly society in which respect for authority and private property and hard work prevailed, and in which social order and peace were fostered by the Church's moral doctrine and the fear of God.⁹¹

This was just wishful thinking. Don Bosco, perceptive and realistic as he was, knew that the process of liberalization and secularization could no longer be stopped. The separation of Church and State was a fact. Now, these realities called for a re-evaluation of the Church's responsibility, and in particular of the mission of a religious congregation. In spite of his sentimental attachment to the old, he had to be concerned about working for a Christian society in new political and social circumstances.

It may have been painful, but in spite of his unswerving Catholic commitment of the most conservative kind, at the ministerial level Don Bosco was able to respond in open and forward-looking terms. A personal factor was also at work here that had to do with his experience and an increasingly deeper understanding of the problems of the poor, especially poor young people. Living as he did in touch and in solidarity with

⁹¹ P. Braido, *Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco e l'Utopia della società cristiana*. Quaderni di *Salesianum* 6 (Roma: LAS, 1982), 10.

people in concrete situations of suffering, poverty and need, he felt urgently called to meet the need through long-term, as well as immediate, programs. Don Bosco therefore committed his Salesians, after his own example, to the fullest possible engagement in the mission—ministry, apostolate and work of charity. He even presented such commitment as the means whereby the general purpose of religious life itself, personal sanctification, was to be achieved.

His was a complex work of charity that, growing out of the oratory experience, ramified to address increasingly new situations. But even though in the nineteenth century the term “charity” was not yet emptied of its rich Christian theological content, it was “charity” nonetheless. It did not really address directly systemic problems of injustice, oppression, and the like. This in any case is the accusation leveled by social historians (especially those of a Marxist tradition) against all nineteenth-century “charity.” Even so, in practical social terms but in a real sense, such “charity” aimed at renewing society. But could this aim be achieved if Salesians, the Cooperators in particular, were to remain aloof from all political activity? How could the cause of the mission be advanced and its aims achieved, without a political engagement of some kind, at least on selected issues? Then why did Don Bosco enjoin this apolitical stance on his Salesians?

5.3. Possible Reason for the Prohibition of Political Involvement

The Church’s official posture and directives (referred to above), which had to do with political and social policy of the Church vis-à-vis the secular state, may be cited as contributing reasons. Don Bosco would have regarded such directives as normative.

Don Bosco’s known “pragmatism” may also have been part of the reason. In the context of the liberal revolution and of the political, social and religious turmoil attending it, Don Bosco may have thought that restraints were called for in order to forestall reprisals, or simply to ensure the survival of the work.

This was Pope Pius IX's advice, and this is the reason most often given by Don Bosco himself. Abstention from political activity and at the same time the Salesians' commitment to charitable work for the poor are often cited by Don Bosco as the reasons why the Society could escape harassment and win the good will of all.

Beyond such "external" considerations, however, a deeper theological understanding or instinct may have been at work. Don Bosco may have believed that the Christian society of the future was not to be rebuilt through political or social activism and that the Church's, and therefore the Salesian Congregation's mission, was essentially to witness to ultimate (though not "other-worldly") realities. Consequently, Don Bosco may have seen his Salesian priests, brothers and sisters, and (particularly) his Cooperators, as peacemakers helping people transcend political confrontation and class struggle—as a combined force for charity and reconciliation in a society divided by deep rifts and inequalities. Or did he perhaps think of the Salesian Family as a peaceful transforming invasion, much as Tertullian viewed the penetration of early Christianity into the pagan society of his day?

Whatever the reason, questions remain. Was Don Bosco's position tenable, realistic, and above all effective in his day, and would it be tenable, realistic and effective in our own day? Did it not rather curtail the Salesians' ability meaningfully to address the task of evangelization and effectively help the poor? More especially—Would Don Bosco still write the article today, or write it in that manner? Perhaps Don Bosco's reported comment, quoted above, may offer a clue. There, after recording the reason given to him for the removal of the article, that "circumstances may well force one in conscience to enter the political arena, since politics are often inseparable from religion," he himself had to admit: "We may therefore get involved in politics when it is advantageous and genuinely advisable."

5.4. *Don Bosco's Religious-Political Involvement in Church-State Negotiations for the Appointment of Bishops and Exequaturs*⁹²

In 1858 (in the case of exiled Archbishop Luigi Fransoni of Turin) and, later, in the decade 1865 to 1874 occasions arose when political involvement, *for religious reasons*, was indeed “genuinely advisable.” Don Bosco did not hesitate, “for the good of souls,” to answer the Church’s call, and even to volunteer of his own initiative, in a non-official capacity.

5.4.1. *The Problem of Vacant Episcopal Sees*

One very serious and damaging effect of the confrontation between Church and State during and after unification of Italy (1861 and 1870) was the fact that many bishops were removed from their dioceses, and the government opposed the nomination of new bishops to fill the vacancies. The reason for such punishing policy is to be sought in the fact that bishops protested against what they perceived to be the government’s unjust and unwarranted public policies, the government not being disposed to allow dissent or resistance. The takeover of papal territories was not the only reason for the protest. The policies against the Church, in effect since 1848 in Piedmont, and thence extended

⁹² For Don Bosco’s extensive involvement in Church-State negotiations—clearly a political involvement, albeit for a religious purpose—see: A. Lenti, “Politics of the Our Father [...],” *Journal of Salesian Studies* 10:2 (1999) 181-245. This article is to a good extent based on Francesco Motto, “L’azione mediatrice di Don Bosco nella questione delle sedi vescovili vacanti dal 1858 alla morte di Pio IX (1878),” in *Don Bosco nella Chiesa a servizio dell’umanità. Studi e testimonianze*, ed. by Pietro Braido (Roma: LAS, 1987), 251-328. [Motto, *L’Azione*] Earlier articles on the subject by Motto are: “Don Bosco mediatore tra Cavour and Antonelli nel 1858,” *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 5 (1986:1) 3-20. [Motto, *DB Mediatore*] and “La mediazione di Don Bosco fra Santa Sede e Governo per la concessione degli <Exequatur> ai vescovi d’Italia (1872-1874),” *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 6:1 (1987) 3-79. [Motto, *La Mediazione*]

to the whole Kingdom of Italy, were responsible to an even greater extent for the souring of relations and for the protest.

The situation was critical. According to one historian, in the process of annexation and unification (1859-1870) bishops and other clergy in large north Italian cities, such as Milan, Bergamo and Brescia, were investigated, harassed, and some times expelled. In central Italy, over a dozen important cardinals, archbishops, and bishops were imprisoned, expelled, deported, or placed under house arrest. In southern Italy more than 60 bishops met with the same fate.⁹³ According to another historian, after the unification of Italy, 13 bishops were brought to trial, though eventually acquitted, and 5 bishops were taken from their dioceses and imprisoned in Turin. By 1865, 43 bishops had been exiled, and 16 bishops had died and no successor had been appointed. In summary, 24 (of a total of 44) archdioceses, and 84 (of a total of 183) dioceses were deprived of their pastors.⁹⁴ In a number of cases, new bishops nominated by the pope were prevented from taking possession of their diocese. For example, in the consistory of December 21, 1863, the pope had nominated new bishops for Bologna and six other dioceses in that part of the former Papal States. The government, however, had refused recognition on grounds that such nominations constituted an act of sovereignty in territories no longer subject to the pope. Don Bosco was especially concerned with the situation in Piedmont, where eight of eleven dioceses, including Turin, were vacant. In Sardinia Archbishop Giovanni Emanuele Marongiu Nura of Cagliari had been in exile for 14 years.⁹⁵

⁹³ D. Massé, *Il caso di coscienza del Risorgimento italiano*, 342-343, in *Sussidi* I, 86; cf. also *EBM* VI, 503, 303-304, 416.

⁹⁴ *L'Unità Cattolica* of April 4, 1865, in Motto, *L'azione mediatrice*, 264 (data confirmed by the government's instructions given to negotiator Saverio Vegezzi).

⁹⁵ Motto, *L'azione mediatrice*, 264; Desramaut, *DB en son temps*, 518.

5.4.2. *Don Bosco Involvement in Summary*

The principal episodes of Don Bosco's involvements may be listed as follows:

1. Don Bosco and the *Saverio Vegezzi* negotiations for the appointment of bishops (March-June 1865, under Prime Minister Alfonso La Marmora) — Don Bosco was only tangentially involved in these negotiations, which ended in a stalemate.

2. Don Bosco and the *Michelangelo Tonello* negotiations for the appointment of bishops (December 1866 - June 1867, under Prime Minister Bettino Ricasoli) — As far as they went, they were successful in that bishops were appointed to numerous vacant diocesan sees, for which also Don Bosco submitted candidates for nomination (including Canon Lorenzo Gastaldi for the diocese of Saluzzo).

3. Don Bosco and the nominations of bishops in August-September 1871 (under Prime Minister Giovanni Lanza) — These difficult negotiations, favored by *Prime Minister Lanza* but objected to both by leftist liberals of the government and by the conservative Catholic press, ended successfully in the appointment of more bishops. Don Bosco was rather heavily involved and submitted a list of candidates for nomination (including Bishop Lorenzo Gastaldi of Saluzzo for the archdiocese of Turin).

4. Don Bosco's continued mediation to obtain the *Exequatur* for appointed bishops in 1872-1874 (under Prime

The 8 vacant dioceses in Piedmont were: Alba from 1853, Alessandria from 1854, Aosta and Asti from 1859, Fossano from 1852, Vigevano from 1859, Turin from 1862 (Archbishop Fransoni in exile since 1850), Saluzzo from 1864, Cuneo from March 1865. [Motto, *L'azione mediatrice*, 268 and note 27, citing *Civiltà Cattolica* XVI (1864:6) 373.]

Ministers Giovanni Lanza and Marco Minghetti)⁹⁶ — This demand by the state (the *Exequatur* already in the tradition of the House of Savoy) was reinstated after the occupations of Rome (1870) and the Law of Guarantees (1871), as was the “oath of fealty” to the king (which the government, however, was willing to forego). In the times of the liberal revolution, and especially after the occupation of Rome, the Church had rejected these demands by the state as unwarranted acts of a usurping power. The laborious negotiations between Don Bosco (in a private capacity for the Church) and Minister *Paolo Onorato Vigliani* (for the state) ultimately failed to resolve the impasse by compromise because, among other difficulties, of the contending parties’ mutual intransigence,⁹⁷ and of interference from anti-Catholic German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck.

5.4.3. Character of the Negotiations and of Don Bosco’s Involvement

In this context it should be clearly understood that negotiations undertaken between the Holy See and the Italian government were never aimed at a *political* “reconciliation” between the two contending parties. Since the unification of Italy in 1861, and more so since the taking of Rome in 1870, the Holy See’s position was clear and adamantly maintained: Italy was the

⁹⁶ The *Exequatur* (Latin for: “Let the bishop’s nomination and appointment have juridical effect”) was a permit issued by the government enabling the bishop (upon submission of credentials, in particular of the Bull of appointment) to take over diocesan assets and revenues, and run the diocese as a state-approved corporation.

⁹⁷ “Mutual intransigence:”— The government basically would not surrender “the right” of approving the appointed bishop by granting the *Exequatur*, and the Holy See (Secretary of State Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli) absolutely forbade the appointed bishop to make any act of submission to the civil authority. Don Bosco in his mediation labored hard and long to bring the parties together through compromise and wrote a *modus vivendi* that the parties at first seemed to accept, but that was rejected at the end. The negotiations broke down.

aggressor and there could not be any reconciliation except on the basis of "restitution." Under the circumstances, the very idea of a political reconciliation would have appeared preposterous.

The appointment of bishops to vacant sees and obtaining for them the *Exequatur* and the material means necessary to run the diocese were in themselves purely religious issues, *demanding by the good of souls*. This was Don Bosco's understanding and the reason for his involvement, though these "purely religious issues" involved political activity and confrontation in defense of the "party line" of the Church.

An episode of Don Bosco's involvement will show his commitment. In August 1871, Pope Pius IX wrote to King Victor Emanuel II asking him to restart negotiations (that had been lagging) for the appointment of bishops. The king pondered the letter and on August 31, passed it on to Prime Minister Lanza (both in Turin at the time). The Holy See had meanwhile contacted archbishops and bishops to submit lists of candidates. Don Bosco, too, had submitted his list, on which the name of Gastaldi appeared among the first. Since the news of imminent nominations had leaked out, Prime Minister Lanza, back in Florence, immediately called a meeting of the cabinet. But before sending a report to the king, he wished to have a talk with Don Bosco. Don Bosco at the time was engaged with the Salesians' spiritual retreat, which he never missed. Prime Minister Lanza dispatched a telegram to the Prefect of Turin, who summoned Don Bosco to his office and relayed the Prime Minister's message to him. To Father Gioachino Berto, who had gone with him to the Prefect's office, Don Bosco said that the summons came as no surprise, for he had been involved in this matter by the pope's command for quite some time. He added:

I regret to have to leave this very night and be absent for several days while the spiritual retreat is in progress. Besides I feel quite tired. But the good of the Church must come first; it has priority even over the good of our congregation. I shall take the 7 o'clock train this evening,

travel the whole night, and be in Florence early tomorrow for my meeting at the Ministry.⁹⁸

Don Bosco was not well at the time, but such was his commitment to the cause: *Da mihi animas!*

5.5. Community and Mission— Religious Consecration for the Exercise of Charity

Don Bosco's insights pertaining to the purpose and mission of the Salesian Society as a religious congregation (discussed above) find reinforcement in his concept of the Salesian community as expressed in the constitutions' chapter on the *Form of the Society*.

5.5.1. Community as Communion for Mission—Article 1 of the Chapter on Form of the Society

For the purpose of this discussion we select the early 1860 draft of the article as representing Don Bosco's original insight, before presentation of the Constitutions in Rome in 1864. We divide the text into its component elements to facilitate our brief comments.

[i] All the gathered-members lead the common life [ii] bound only by the bond fraternal charity and the simple vows, which unites them to form one heart and one soul, [iii] in order to love and serve God [iv] by the virtues of obedience, of poverty and of holiness of life.⁹⁹

Section [i] sets forth the idea of community already broached in Article 1 of the chapter on Purpose. One should note the unusual term "gathered-members" (*congregati*). The word harks back to the equally unusual phrase in the former article, "It is the purpose of this congregation to gather together [as] its

⁹⁸ Fr, Gioachino Berto's testimony at the process of Don Bosco's beatification, in *ASC* 161: Testi, *FDB* 2,108 C9.

⁹⁹ Motto, *Don Bosco's Constitutions*, 82.

members [...]” This presupposes the fact that, as Don Bosco states in various memorandums, in 1858 the group of oratory workers was divided into two branches: those who “gathered” to live in community, and those who did not. This was the situation even *before* Don Bosco went to Rome in 1858 to seek Pius IX’s advice regarding the congregation.¹⁰⁰

Section [ii] describes the nature of this community. It is a *communion* created by *fraternal charity and the vows*. Both forces act together to form a *bond* that unites the gathered-members *as one heart and one soul*.

The reference here is to the Jerusalem apostolic community as described in the Acts of the Apostles.

Now the whole group of those who believed was of one heart and one soul and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. — All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possession and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.¹⁰¹

These Scriptural texts depict a community living as one heart and one soul, bound by mutual love and common sharing of goods. This description of the Christian community of Acts, even though from a social viewpoint it may be regarded as a short-lived experiment, has traditionally served as a model of religious life, so that the citation from Acts is attested in a number of constitutions. In Don Bosco’s case, it reflects a deeply rooted conviction as well as a theology of religious community. He first refers to these texts in his *History of the*

¹⁰⁰ Braido, *Cenno storico*, in *Don Bosco per i giovani*, 117-118. See also the 1877 document entitled “Salesian Cooperators Ms. in ASC 133: Cooperatori 3(1), 2-3, FDBM 1,886 E8 - 1,887 A2 (edited in IBM XI, 84-86 and EBM XI, 73-75), and Motto, *Don Bosco’s Constitutions*, 70.

¹⁰¹ Acts 4:32 and 2:44-45. [NRSV]

Church (1845),¹⁰² and thereafter some twenty times before 1858, always with reference to religious community.

The stock phrase in *Section [iii]*, “in order to love and serve God,” comes from the penny catechism. There in answer to the question “Who created you?” the phrase defined the purpose of human existence. Here it expressed the double purpose of religious life as well: love and service. Don Bosco seems to assure his Salesians that by being part of a community living in communion and in consecration for the mission the twin purpose of their human existence is also fulfilled.

5.5.2. Virtues of Religious Consecration and Preeminence of Obedience

With *Section [iii]*, the description of the Salesian religious community might be regarded as complete. Don Bosco has already mentioned the vows as a factor in the bond, and that seemed enough in 1858. But in the drafts of 1860 and 1864, with *Section [iv]* he wished to emphasize the role of the *virtues* of obedience, poverty, and chastity. It is as though Don Bosco feared that the term “vows” might be taken in a purely juridical sense. Hence, stress is placed on the “virtues,” to convey the idea of generous commitment and availability. Just as the vows by their binding force, together with fraternal charity, are the means of communion, so the virtues of obedience, poverty and chastity are means of consecration for the achievement of the goals of religious life, the love and service of God.

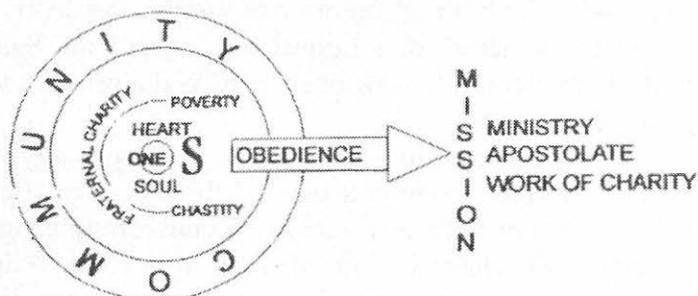
The role assigned to obedience is to be noted. The three vows-virtues of religious consecration are always given in the same order: obedience, poverty and chastity. Don Bosco on many occasions by the spoken and the written word exalted chastity as of supreme importance for the spiritual life of the

¹⁰² *Storia Ecclesiastica per uso delle scuole*, compilata dal Sacerdote Giovanni Bosco (Torino: Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero, 1845), 34, in *Opere Edite* I, 75.

individual, and (in an educational setting in particular) of the utmost necessity for both educators and pupils. However, with reference to the structure of religious life, and of the Salesian community in particular, he saw obedience as the primary virtue in religious consecration.

This is because in his view obedience (especially under the aspect of “virtue” extending beyond the canonical field of the vow) figures not only as a means of consecration together with poverty and chastity, but also as the chief religious structure whereby the consecrated person becomes “available” for the mission. If poverty effects exterior consecration, and chastity interior consecration, obedience makes consecration perfect through availability for the mission of charity. Charity although “*ultimum in executione*” is “*primum in intentione*.” In Don Bosco’s thinking, charity is both the special purpose of religious life and, in its zealous exercise, the means *through* which the *general* purpose (holiness) may be realized. Obedience, which governs the availability of the consecrated person, holds a key position because through it the Superior (“the Community”) directs the consecrated person to mission. And this finally becomes the means of personal holiness.

The following graphic represents the structure of the Salesian religious community-communion, and the special role of obedience for mission (*Give me souls!*).



– Community and Mission –

Salesians live in Community, and through fraternal charity and the vows form a Communion: *one heart and one soul*. Obedience, Poverty and chastity serve as the virtues for religious consecration, to love and serve God. The Superior provides animation and leadership, while through Obedience the Salesian becomes available for the Mission (Ministry, Apostolate, Work of Charity).

[Part VI. *Da Mihi Animas* and the Education of the Young—the School]

6. *Da mihi animas and Education*

The joint eighteenth-century State-Church management of education, briefly interrupted by the Napoleonic period, was revived in the Restoration on the basis of King Charles Felix' reform of 1822. In 1848 the state alone took monopolistic control of education through the Boncompagni Bill, which aimed at removing the Church, not religion, from public education. With the Lanza and the Casati Bills of 1857 and 1859 certain freedoms touching both public schools (at the local level) and private schools were provided for, but were often negated by an overbearing "secularist" administrative bureaucracy. With the consolidation of "secularism," religious instruction and expression were gradually eliminated from the school.

6.1. Don Bosco's Move into Education through the School

In the early 1860s, after the Casati Bill (1859) and the unification of Italy (1861), Don Bosco entered the field of education through the school, which became a major Salesian apostolate. The *need* and the *opportunity* for this engagement stemmed from the situation created by the liberal school laws. Church authorities urged an expansion of the private Catholic school system to counteract the process of secularization. Private schools could be established and operated under the law. Don Bosco was among the first to respond.

It should be borne in mind that the call for a separate Catholic school system was part of the larger posture by the Church of total opposition to, and total disengagement from, the liberal movement. A policy of engagement, or of moderate engagement by the Church (such as that opted for in other countries), would have required considerable concessions certainly, but would probably have brought Catholic forces to bear on the political and social process as a whole with good results.

This opposition exacerbated the anticlerical sentiment and created a situation of conflict that was aggravated by the government's policies after the unification of Italy (1861) and the occupation of Rome (1870). Although the laws allowed ample freedom to private Catholic schools, often the hostility of government functionaries kept such schools under pressure and in a state of inferiority. Don Bosco and the Oratory school were subjected to harassment on several occasions.¹⁰³

It is difficult to say just what Don Bosco's perception of the situation was in reality. But, while evidently committed to the Church's position, he steered a course that was both ideological and pragmatic. With courageous a-political engagement and a deeply religious inspiration, he took the fullest possible advantage of the law and succeeded in building

¹⁰³ See for example *EBM* VII, 186-193, 262-270.

an impressive school system based on an unambiguous rejection of secularism and on an authentic valuation of religion.

It seems that Don Bosco's course of action was dictated by his perception of what the "salvation of souls" required. He was convinced that the secularist movement stemming from the liberal revolution ran contrary to the cultural tradition and to the very soul of the people, especially of the young people for whom he lived and worked. He believed that to eliminate religion and the Church's guidance from education meant eliminating a powerful formative force from the soul of young people (and from society at large). Apart from causing "spiritual harm," such removal would weaken the very foundation of their cultural identity, and would therefore stymie personality, character and citizenship. For Don Bosco turning out honest citizens and committed Christians was the indivisible aim of education.

6.2. Constitutional Basis and Expansion of the Salesian School Apostolate

The Salesian (boarding) school (*collegio*) represented a new and major commitment by Don Bosco to education in the context of liberal school reforms. In the 1860s (and throughout Don Bosco's lifetime) there took place a tremendous expansion of the Salesian work outside Turin—first in Piedmont and Liguria (Kingdom of Sardinia), and a little later in the rest of Italy, in France, Spain, England, and some nations of South America. Now, it is remarkable that the expansion, at least for Italy, took the form principally of the (boarding) school with a liberal arts curriculum chiefly at lower secondary level (*ginnasio*). The school at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was the first to be established (1855-1859) and could serve as a model.

It is also remarkable that some of these schools (and ideally *all* of Don Bosco's schools) functioned as "junior seminaries." In this regard one should bear in mind that in the early constitutions the school as such does not have a separate article. It is listed not as a separate apostolate of the Society, but

only in connection with promoting priestly vocations. While the constitutions were still in the development stage, and successive apostolates were being given separate recognition, the school apostolate as such did not receive separate treatment in the constitutional text.¹⁰⁴

And yet it is certain that Don Bosco's option to enter the field of the school, and to develop the school apostolate to the extent that he did, was motivated by a larger concern than just "vocations," and found larger scope of application than just the junior seminary. Don Bosco's decision had been to enter the field of education through the school *expressly* as demanded by his commitment to *Da mihi animas*.

Oratory work and other forms of Salesian engagement usually went hand in hand with the work of the school, but within a few short years this "new" apostolate became quantitatively the chief work of the Society.

6.3. The Salesian School and Don Bosco's Option for Poor Young People

6.3.1. Schools Generally for Middle-Class Young People

The question is asked whether Don Bosco's commitment to education through schools replaced his original option for the poor, since schools at secondary level were largely attended by middle-class youngsters. Clearly Don Bosco never abandoned in principle and in practice his option for the "poor and abandoned," but also felt duty-bound to respond to real needs spawned in new political and social contexts. The school apostolate was undertaken in addition to, not as a replacement of, the original option. It should rather be regarded as *the original option extended*. The new generations of young people were the new "poor and abandoned."

¹⁰⁴ Motto, *Don Bosco's Constitutions*, 76-77.

In the sixties and into the seventies, not many of the children of the peasant and working classes advanced beyond primary levels of education, if at all. Hence, schools at secondary level would prevalently enroll middle-class youngsters.

(Obviously, higher secondary education (*liceo*) was for young people from richer families. This was true also in the case of the couple of *licei* that Don Bosco accepted.)

For these reasons, as far as the school was concerned, Don Bosco could no longer claim in his appeals that his work was for the “poor and abandoned” or for “destitute orphans,” nor could he rely totally on private and public charity. Most of the students paid at least a part of their tuition, room and board. Generally the schools, once established, apparently operated in the black. But the term could now be taken to mean the “morally and spiritually poor and abandoned,” a category that had grown out of the lay school laws and that was growing apace with the progressive secularization of society at large, not only in Italy but also the world over.

Clearly Don Bosco was never troubled by the dilemma: *either* oratories for poor and abandoned youth *or* [boarding] schools for middle-class young people at risk. He saw the need and the opportunity and did not hesitate.

6.3.2. Don Bosco's Abiding Commitment to the Poor Young People

Don Bosco, while responding to the Church's call and taking advantage of new opportunities, never abandoned his commitment to the poor both in principle and in practice, as compatible with reality. All Salesian apostolates are to the young and the poor, and this is part and parcel of the Salesian charism. Thus, in all Salesian schools room and board and tuition were in many instances reduced or condoned to accommodate young people from poorer families, especially if these youngsters looked like possible candidates for the “ecclesiastical state.” This principle was first embodied in the

“junior seminary article” of the constitutions of 1860, referred to above, and the idea often found expression in Don Bosco’s appeals to benefactors.

Furthermore, as is known, in 1872 Don Bosco accepted the school at Valsalice (Turin) only after much soul-searching, and the Archbishop’s insistent requests. His qualms arose precisely because it was a school for the nobility. In a letter to Archbishop Gastaldi Don Bosco stated:

What discourages my associates [from accepting the Valsalice school] is this: 1. *Our purpose is to work for the middle class and not for the nobility.* 2. If persons of such outstanding ability as are the present administrators cannot make a go of it, how can we, the poor puny little pygmies that we are, ever hope to succeed?¹⁰⁵

By mid-1870s, the schools of the Society numbered close to one dozen and were apparently successful in more ways than one. It seems that on the whole they operated in the black, and even made some money. But the Society’s finances overall were depleted. In this connection, someone came up with a suggestion, as Biographer Fr. Ceria reports:

Another suggestion to strengthen the financial base was to open more boarding schools and thus generate revenues for the Society. Don Bosco’s reply was categorical: “We must mainly devote ourselves to poor youngsters. We do need boarding schools, but our festive oratories, hospices, and homes for destitute boys are a source of many vocations and the means of extraordinary good. The best thing we can do is to open houses like this Oratory of Turin, the hospice of Sanpierdarena and the hostel of Nice [France], where students and working boys, poor or on the verge of poverty, can live [...]. If we set

¹⁰⁵ Don Bosco to Archbishop Gastaldi, March 22, 1872, Motto, *Epistolario* III, p. 411; *IBM* X, 344-345 (omitted in EBM). By “middle class,” Don Bosco may have meant poor, as contrasted to the nobility. But it is nonetheless true that in the 1860s and 1870s secondary schools (Salesian schools being no exception) were largely for middle-class youngsters.

up our houses in this modest way for destitute boys, we will be welcomed by the good and the bad alike.¹⁰⁶

6.4. Role of education and the school in Don Bosco's Missionary Strategy¹⁰⁷

"There are no Salesian missions in the South [of Argentina and Chile], but rather colleges, agricultural schools and churches."¹⁰⁸ The statement was meant as a criticism of Don Bosco's missionary strategy, but it actually points to the originality of his approach, based as it was on the relationship *School and Mission, Education and Evangelization*.

Speaking of the originality of Don Bosco's work, Cardinal S. Baggio pointed out "that its most significant feature is the class of people he chose to minister to, the twin categories of the young and the poor [...]. This choice is as clear as day in Salesian missionary territories."¹⁰⁹

Don Bosco never deviated from his original option. The fifth of the twenty keepsakes given to the departing missionaries in 1875 reads: "Take special care of the sick, the children, the aged and the poor, and you will gain the blessing of God and the good will of people."¹¹⁰ Ten years later, in his *Spiritual Testament* he wrote with regard to Salesian missionary strategy:

As long as we shall concentrate on converting pagans and saving the poorest of the poor among young people, the world will always

¹⁰⁶ *EBM* XII, 268.

¹⁰⁷ For this last paragraph I avail myself of a section of Jesús Borrego, "The Originality of Don Bosco's Patagonian Missionary Enterprise," in *Don Bosco's Place in History*, edited by P. Egan and M. Midali (Roma: LAS, 1993) 467-484 (473-476, edited and adapted).

¹⁰⁸ Borrego, in *Don Bosco's Place in History*, 475.

¹⁰⁹ S. Baggio, cited by Borrego, in *Don Bosco's Place in History*, 476.

¹¹⁰ *EBM* XI, 364 (Twenty keepsakes to the first departing missionaries).

welcome us. [...] When founding a foreign mission [...] all efforts should be made to establish schools and to encourage vocations. [...] In God's good time our missions will reach China—Peking, to be exact. Then let us keep in mind that we go there to care for poor and abandoned young people.¹¹¹

Evangelization leading to the “implanting of the Church” is the specific aim of all missionary activity, Don Bosco's too! In fact, “genuine evangelization” was a dominant theme in his farewell addresses to departing missionaries and in his letters to them. His Salesians (priests, brothers and nuns) were sent to “announce the word of God,” to “spread the faith” “to carry, [...] proclaim [and] spread the light of the Gospel amongst the inhabitants of the Pampas and Patagonia.”¹¹² In this regard, Fr. A. Caviglia makes the following point:

The fundamental principle of Salesian missionary activity and its method is [...] the conversion of unbelievers by ministering to the educational needs of young people. [...] In every Salesian mission, alongside the [specific] priestly task, there must always be the ministry of the school. [...] All Salesian foundations, no matter what their field of action, are “school”—this is the specific Salesian method of Christian penetration.¹¹³

With Don Bosco the school was not just a *useful means* of evangelization; with him education was “an organic constituent of missionary activity.” Hence he wrote in his *Spiritual Testament* (cited above), “When founding a foreign mission [...] all efforts should be made to establish schools and to encourage vocations”—that is, to educate young people and to develop “native” clergy.

¹¹¹ *EBM* XVII, 250 (*Spiritual Testament*); see also Aubry-Caselli, *Spiritual Writings* (“*Spiritual Testament*,” excerpts), 363-364.

¹¹² Cf. for example Don Bosco's discourse to the first missionary expedition in *EMB* XI 358-363.

¹¹³ A. Caviglia, *La concezione missionaria* cited by Borrego in *Don Bosco's Place in History*, 475.

In practical terms, Don Bosco believed that the best and surest means of civilizing and Christianizing Patagonia, for example, lay in turning its young people, as those of Turin or Nice or Buenos Aires, into “honest citizens and committed Christians.”

This binomial became his missionary formula, as it had been that of his service on behalf of the poor and abandoned. He voices it repeatedly in equivalent terms throughout the 1880s: “Evangelization and civilization;” “the good of society and of religion;” “religion and true civilization.” He obviously meant “Christian civilization,” because he was convinced that “there is no true civilization outside Catholicism, the one true religion that sanctifies, unites and civilizes nations.”

He therefore adhered to the position, commonly held at the time, that society was civilized in so far as it was Christian (Catholic) and, in the case of Patagonia, it was civilized in so far as it was evangelized.¹¹⁴ Don Bosco assures a cooperator that the Salesian missionaries “would gladly lay down their lives when it is a matter of saving souls and spreading Christ’s kingdom by bringing religion and civilization among those peoples that still have no knowledge of either.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Don Bosco to Fr. Bodrato, April 15, 1880 in Ceria, *Epistolario* III, 576-577 (“civilization and religion,” “civilization and evangelization”); Don Bosco’s address to the Turin cooperators, January 20, 1881 in *Bollettino Salesiano*, 5 (February, 1881) 3; P. Braido, *Il progetto operativo* 24-26 (all also cited by Borrego, in *Don Bosco’s Place in History*, 475-476.

¹¹⁵ Don Bosco to an unnamed cooperator, November 1, 1886, Ceria *Epistolario* IV, 363-364.

In conclusion we note one of Don Bosco's fundamental insights:

“In an era when missions [...] were often outposts of European colonialism, he saw that the church would never put down permanent roots in mission lands unless it encouraged the creation of a stable indigenous clergy.”

We note another fundamental insight: As a result of his long experience as a Christian educator Don Bosco was convinced that, even in the missions, young people who had received “a liberal and Christian education” would be “the most suitable instruments for attracting adults to the faith, thus giving Patagonia a new Christian and civilized aspect,” and ensuring that “Patagonians should be evangelized by Patagonians.”¹¹⁶

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¹¹⁶ Borrego, in *Don Bosco's Place in History*, 477 (citing P. Scoppola, *IBM and Ceria, Epistolario*).