



FROM CHRIST THE EVANGELISER TO THE EVANGELISING CHURCH

CHAPTER



*“...To gather into
one the children
of God who are
scattered abroad”*

(Jn 11:52)



We, the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB), form a community of the baptized. Submissive to the bidding of the Spirit we are resolved to carry out the Founder's apostolic plan in a specific form of religious life: to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor. By carrying out this mission we find our own way to holiness"

[C. 2]



...to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn 11:52). The words of the holy Gospel which tell us that our Divine Saviour came from heaven to earth to gather together all the children of God scattered in different parts of the earth, can be applied literally to the young people of our day. They are the most delicate and precious portion of human society, on which we found our hopes for a happy future ... This was the mission of the Son of God. This alone can be his holy religion ... When I gave myself to this part of the sacred ministry I intended to consecrate my every effort to the greater glory of God and the good of souls. I intended to work to make good citizens on this earth so that one day they might become worthy dwellers in heaven. May God help me to continue thus until the last breath of my life"

[Introduction to the Regulations of the Oratory of St Francis of Sales]

An updated presentation of Salesian Youth Ministry requires reflection not only of a charismatic type but also of a theological nature. Youth Ministry as an activity of the ecclesial community demands of us a deep theological and ecclesiological study. This chapter expounds three basic convictions: Jesus Christ, the evangeliser who proclaimed communion with God and communion between people (fraternal love), is the full revelation of God as a community of love. The Church is the mystery of Communion and mission, animated and sustained by the Spirit of God. The Salesian Congregation shares the Church's evangelising mission, with a specific option for the young.

1

Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, is the complete manifestation of God's love

The precious text of our holy founder (see above), as well as pointing out the holistic nature of Salesian education which aims, through the Preventive System, to form “upright citizens and good Christians”, also clearly shows **the theological profundity of the mission entrusted to him by God**. This continues to be our mission in new contexts very different from that in which Don Bosco lived and worked. We are called “to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor” (C. 2).

The love of God is made fully manifest in Jesus Christ. We read in the first letter of St John: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us” (1 Jn 1:1-3a). In this sense, **Jesus is the prophet par excellence**, unlike the prophets of the Old Testament, through whom in many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers (cf. Heb 1:1). He is the Word of God through whom God communicates in a definitive manner with all the men and women of the world.

The love of God manifest in Jesus Christ is the Good News *par excellence* given to all people, the *euanghèlion*. This love also constitutes the fullness of every man and woman in their situation. Jesus gives this love through communion with God, especially through forgiveness of sins, and through communion with all people, in the “new commandment”: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35).

Jesus communicates **the Love of God which leads to the salvation of all with nobody excluded**, but with a special predilection for those who are

socially or religiously marginalised, for different reasons: the poor, the sick, especially lepers and those afflicted with an evil spirit. Even those who are furthest from God, public sinners (tax collectors and prostitutes: cf. Lk 7:36-50; Lk 15:1-3). Similarly, he shows great kindness and tenderness towards children, of whom he says: "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Mk 10:15).

This manifestation of the Love of God for all men and women is not just a promise that will be fulfilled in the future. Jesus reveals the Love of God through his salvific signs: "he went about doing good" (Acts 10:37-38).

On the other hand, all who experienced the Love of God through the word and action of Jesus Christ, those most in need in their different situations, themselves became evangelisers: the sick, the poor, the despised Samaritan woman, even the man who was possessed by a legion of devils (cf. Mk 5).

Jesus himself described his mission with the **image of the Good Shepherd** (cf. Mt 18:12-14; Lk 15:4-7; Jn 10:1-8), "who wins hearts by gentleness and self-giving" (C. 11).

As a Good Shepherd, Jesus always has a missionary concern. "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose." (Lk 4:43-44). "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (Jn 10:16). The Good Shepherd



Poverty refers directly "to their social and economic situation; abandonment implies the 'theological note' of lack of support through the absence of adequate mediation of God's love; and danger refers back to a determining phase of life, adolescence, the time of decision after which habits and attitudes formed can be changed only with great difficulty"

(FR PASCUAL CHÁVEZ, AGC 384, "LOOKING AT CHRIST THROUGH THE EYES OF DON BOSCO")



"Jesus Christ made himself little with the little ones and bore our weaknesses. He is our master in the matter of the friendly approach"

(LETTER FROM ROME, 1884)

loves all his sheep but has an almost disconcerting predilection for the one that is lost, displaying his tender solicitude by searching for it till he finds it, and his *loving-kindness* by rejoicing as he carried it on his shoulders: "And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing" (Lk 15:5).

The most profound meaning of the Incarnation of the Son, sent by the Father "through the work of the Holy Spirit" which **finds its full realisation in the Paschal Mystery**, the death and resurrection of Jesus, is precisely this: to reveal the divine love to us "to the end" (Jn 13, 1ff.) in order to gather together in unity all the men and women of the world. "For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility ... for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:14.18).

2

Jesus reveals to us the Mystery of God, a Community of Love

Jesus not only reveals the love of God for us, but the true face of God, who is in himself a **Communion of Love**. The Father gives himself to the Son by generating him, and together they breathe the Holy Spirit. This is the heart of the Christian faith.

This communion of love is not only manifested to all people by the Son, but is really shared with them through the action of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It constitutes the basic duty of every Christian: to build in our world the Kingdom of God which is a Kingdom "of justice, love and peace". I pray "that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21).



3

The Church, called to continue Jesus' mission

This is the *raison d'être* and the fundamental mission of the Church: to continue the mission of Jesus Christ, with the light and the power of the Holy Spirit, to make visible the God who is Love, and to build communion with Him and among all men and women. Nobody is excluded but "the least" are privileged, in different situations in space and time in history. This continuity is described in the New Testament, in the writings of John, with a phrase that is quoted twice: "No one has ever seen God" (Jn 1:18; 1 Jn 4:12). The first time it refers to the mission of Jesus: "the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known", but the second time it transfers this mission to the community of believers in Christ: "if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."

The Church is, in its deepest essence, "**a mystery of communion and mission**" (*Christifideles Laici* 32): the continuation of the Mission of Jesus Christ, by proclaiming the Love of God for the building of the communion and community of the sons and daughters of God. The experience of the Church is the experience of communion with God and with men and women.

It is a community sustained by the Spirit, where *faith*

is lived in community (koinonia)

is reflected and becomes consistent witness (martyria) is celebrated (liturgy) is transmitted in service and pastoral action (diakonia)

is translated into attitudes of life (spirituality)

Its community dimension is seen and realised at different levels. It has its proper goal in the eschatological fulfilment of Communion of love with God, and of people among themselves, which is the fullness of the Kingdom of God. Here on earth, the privileged instrument of this love and the place where it is made real is the Church community, a communion of love which is being built every day. It is, at the same time, an instrument of indispensable ministerial service for the realisation of the Kingdom

through its work of evangelisation and catechesis, the celebration of the Sacraments, the experience of fraternal life in community, ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, and its work for human development which leads to the overcoming of all discrimination and marginalisation.

Therefore, **the Church is essentially missionary**. Its primary duty is to bring the good news of Christ to every people and culture. This mission of the Church sets the tone and the very identity of the Christian community. The task received from Christ to evangelise all peoples is not just “something to be done”. It is part of the very nature of the Church and expresses the Church’s identity. This is beautifully stated in one of its liturgical texts:

To make of all the nations one single people, which has as its end your kingdom, as a condition the freedom of your children, as its law the precept of love (ROMAN MISSAL, COMMON PREFACE VII).



4

The Salesian Mission

The Salesian charism is a participation in the universal mission of the Church, and an experience of the Spirit, a gift of God given to the Church and to humanity through Don Bosco. It has its own distinctive characteristics:

- *the people to whom we are sent: to ‘unite’ young people;*
- *predilection for “the poorest, those abandoned and in danger”: those who are far from God, marginalised from the*

human community, most in need of an experience of the love of God;

- *a style of its own which favours loving-kindness (educative love that makes young people grow and creates a relationship) and a sense of community (family spirit) to overcome loneliness and exploitation;*
- *our privileged means which is education and the experience of the Educative and Pastoral Community, “a living experience of Church and a revelation of God’s love for us” (C. 47).*

5

Mary, Mother and Teacher

“All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus.” (Acts 1:14). The motherly presence of Mary in the first community, at the centre of the ‘brothers and sisters’ of Jesus, has continued down through the centuries. She is “the motherly face of the Love of God.” She leads us to Jesus, so that all men and women of the world may **become sons and daughters in the Son**. As at the wedding at Cana, her concern and motherly predilection is for all those “who have no wine” (Jn 2:3). And in particular for the many young people who cannot find meaning in their lives because they do not feel loved by God. They are marginalised because of their socio-economic condition, their lack of employment, their family situation, or their need for affection. By making us their companions of the journey, “the Virgin Mary is present in this process as a mother. We make her known and loved as the one who believed, who helps and who infuses hope” (C. 34).