

## 1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

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*Feast of the Assumption  
August, 1978*

*Rome*

Dear Confreres,

We are still deeply moved by the unexpected death of Pope Paul VI who has always graced our humble family with special signs of affection and forthright advice. We admire in him a bright testimony of magnanimity in the ministry and holiness of life.

I am writing to you during the days preceeding the feast of Mary's Assumption. It is a bright coincidence. The proximity of the two events helps us paradoxically to unite joy to sadness—the sadness of a deceased friend with the great reality of Mary's Assumption. A prophetic sign of our final victory.

Assumed into heaven, Mary is even closer and real to the Pilgrim Church because she has become Helper who dispenses through the centuries her blessings with motherly concern.

Today we can look upon the fifteen years of Pope Paul's pontificate as a gift of Mary for the entire world. The special protection of Mary has made him teacher and guide in one of the most trying periods of the Church's history.

The feast of Mary's Assumption and her motherly intervention in favor of the People of God help us to think of our founder who was born in the proximity of this solemn Marian feast. The vocation of Don Bosco also seems to be a gift of Mary for the whole christian world.

Recalling one of the last suggestions of Pope Paul to our chapter according to whom "the requirements both in the Church

and in civil society today, appear to correspond more than ever to the particular apostolate of the sons of St. John Bosco";<sup>1</sup> on the other hand, recalling that the intervention of Mary in the first dream of little John Bosco was the determining factor which has shaped that "genius of an apostle" who stands out in the Church, I invite you to reflect with me on the project which is the hallmark of our genial pastoral apostolate— the Preventive System.

For months we have been busy deepening our application of the results of GC 21. Days of study, meetings and days of prayer to better understand the *capitular documents* have been held in the provinces. In many houses the local communities have organized in the ongoing formation themes of the chapter. All this activity is a sign of a genuine religious attitude of the Congregation to the docility to the Spirit of the Lord.

Also the Superior Council has collegiately realized a further deepening of this topic to serve the confreres according to the directives of the chapter.

I shall express a sentiment which this solemnity of Mary evokes: we all complain of the weight of difficulties, of some defects and defections. Yet I am deeply aware in the recesses of my being of an increase of the good which is being done.

The figure of Pope Paul VI in the Church is a strong proof. The Congregation, too, has enthusiastically grown in the awareness of Jesus Christ and His mysteries, of Mary and of the Church. A knowledge and love for Don Bosco is growing apace; religious commitment is more deeply lived and one faces reality with steadfastness.

It seems to me that we see more clearly, that we walk more surely, that a new era of grace is dawning.

<sup>1</sup> GC 21 No. 448.

The abbreviation GC 21 indicates *Chapter Documents, General Chapter of the Salesian Society*, Rome, 1978. Numbers indicate section.

May Mary's Assumption as well as the intercession of Pope Paul serve as sure guides as we energetically walk the long path highlighted by the Council and our last two general chapters.

## 1. In Search of Appropriate Practise

A very delicate problem for these "post-capitular" years is that of finding ways of translating into our lives the final results of the documents of the chapter. The objective of the chapter is precisely the "conversion" of our very selves and manner of acting.

Now the Preventive System of Don Bosco has been, in fact, the proper manner of living and working— "ortho-praxis" as some would say today— after the manner of the first generations of Salesians.

The GC 21 offers us ways to the manner of identifying ourselves amid changes.

We wish, therefore, to rethink our fidelity to the Preventive System. To do this we propose a definite objective that of the conversion of our daily life.

To this end, I invite you to reread once again the first document of the chapter, "Salesians Evangelizers of the Young."

This document assures us that the Salesian practise has *as point of reference* and *as authentic view* the genuine educational and pastoral scope of Don Bosco. This is, indeed, a positive and leading sign of our task of renewal. We must seriously consider it because, it represents not only our own growth but « in a certain sense something new, as regards the work of the SGC.”<sup>2</sup>

The more we acquaint ourselves with the text the more we will discover the key to its teachings and practises as found

<sup>2</sup> GC 21 No. 165.

in Part. III, "The Salesian Educational and Pastoral Plan."

In the introduction we read:

the idea, therefore, that links the various parts of the document and gives them unity is our vocation as evangelizers, which becomes real when it is lived out in our pastoral and educative projects, restudied and put into practise.<sup>3</sup>

Of prime importance is a religious spirit which ought to integrate our life with lasting values of our consecration and mission,<sup>4</sup> which we find in carrying out our Preventive System. In fact, in the mind of Don Bosco and in our living tradition this system "tends to identify itself increasingly more with the 'salesian spirit': pedagogy, apostolate, spirituality."<sup>5</sup>

Our Salesian presence and activity among the young is not only an educational method but also, fundamentally, a religious witnessing:

We publicly confess that the Father's love has called and united us into a community for the evangelization of youth, carrying on *a work of education inspired by the charism of Don Bosco*.<sup>6</sup>

The religious commitment of each community to grow spiritually in its vocation is measured, in fact, by the extent in which the conversion is accepted to live "with the soul of the Preventive System."<sup>7</sup>

It is only with this "soul" that one can realize "that new Salesian presence" which is the flight of the spirit of initiative and missionary zeal of the first generations of our society to which

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* No. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *passim* Nos. 577-592.

<sup>5</sup> GC 21 No. 96.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* No. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* No 17.

the SGC referred: "With the young people of today, the Preventive System means that a new kind of presence is needed."<sup>8</sup>

We are, therefore, speaking of a subject which is demanding; one which goes to the very core of our renewal; one which forms a bond of unity at a time of transition in which pluralism and cultural differences could easily lead us astray:

The Preventive System becomes all the more urgent today when the members of the Congregation scattered throughout the world... wish to preserve through the community effectiveness of their vocation, the vital bond with their Founder and unity of spirit.<sup>9</sup>

This important capitular statement reaffirms Don Albera's statement "This *magna charta* of our Congregation, the Preventive System."<sup>10</sup> This theme reechoes Fr. Rinaldi's saying to young confreres:

The salesian is either a salesian or is nothing; either of Don Bosco or of no one. If we study Don Bosco, if we follow his system, we shall be true sons; otherwise we shall be nothing, working in a vacuum and off the track.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. The Preventive System of Don Bosco

The few quotations and others taken from the GC 21<sup>12</sup> supported by our tradition indicate that our Preventive System

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* No. 155.

<sup>9</sup> GC No. 80.

<sup>10</sup> *Circular Letters of Don Pauli Albera to the Salesians*, Turin, 1965, p. 375.

<sup>11</sup> EUGENE VALENTINO, *Don Rinaldi, Teacher of Pedagogy and Salesian Spirituality*, Turin, Crocetta, 1965, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> GC 21 Nos. 80, 96, 99.

is basic to that “proper character”<sup>13</sup> which distinguishes us among the People of God as salesians of Don Bosco.

## 2.1 *Geniality Expressive of the Founder*

The recent Pope Paul in speaking of the religious in their apostolate of evangelization states: “their apostolate is often earmarked by an originality, a graciousness which call for admiration.”<sup>14</sup>

For salesian “originality” is linked to the carrying out of the Preventive system. This system, in fact, *constitutes the creative originality of Don Bosco*. I would like to cite several passages from a conference given by Fr. A. Caviglia, an outstanding authority of our Father’s educational method. In a conference to teachers held in Rome, 1934, the year of our Father’s canonization, he said:

Don Bosco’s greatness in the life of the Church is his establishing a definite christian pedagogy.... A christian pedagogy lived basically in the christian life for all times has found *in him* its characteristic which is the expression of faith of all and of faith of all and of his holiness.<sup>15</sup>

The underlying theme of his Preventive System can be considered as a kind of “prophetic message” (God speaking through His saints) of our times. In this manner Don Bosco points the way as a “doctor” of the Church, “Father and Teacher” of the art of christian education. The decree of his canonization defines him as “the prototype of the education of modern youth. He has

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Directives of Bishops and Religious in the Church*, Vatican City, 1978, Nos. 14, 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi* No. 69.

<sup>15</sup> ALBERT CAVIGLIA, *Pedagogy of Don Bosco*, Rome, 1935, p. 6.

opened up with a method truly original, the best and most secure road to pedagogical practise.”<sup>16</sup>

In the Preventive System Don Bosco manifests a strong creative ability. His creativity,

is not a creativity of elements. Creating from nothing is the work of God alone. Don Bosco's creativity is a *creative synthesis* which is a sign of a genius. I call it *creative synthesis* because its originality, its beauty, its greatness does not reside so much in its novelty of particulars but in the discovery of that *idea* which bands them into a new and results into a whole.<sup>17</sup>

The catalyst of such a creative synthesis has been called by the chapter “*pastoral charity*”, heart of the salesian spirit.<sup>18</sup> Fr. Caviglia considered it more as a method under the aspect of “*bontà*.” It was a goodness which was visible and intimate. A goodness which elicits a response of love and creates an environment of kindness.

Some of us have heard Fr. Caviglia when he preached spiritual retreats. He stated quite frankly that such kindness ought to be the object of a fourth vow for the salesians— a vow of kindness and the practise of the Preventive System.

I believe that it is especially urgent today in the Congregation to become once again aware of this originality and creativity of Don Bosco.

Perhaps his early disciples spoke so enthusiastically in a language which pre-dated the development of the science of education and the inevitable changes have created a certain remissness, a certain slackening for serious study which could have negative

<sup>16</sup> « novae juventutis educator princeps, nova prorsus...method, quae quidem in paedagogica disciplina vere excellentissimum ac tutissimum signavit iter ». ASS 1935, p. 285.

<sup>17</sup> ALBERTO CAVIGLIA, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Constitutions* No. 40.

results on our identity. Don Bosco instead incarnated in this "system" his own sanctity. He conceived pedagogy "beyond theory and beyond the narrow confines of methodology" to the realm of a wisdom which is based on the charism and special gift of the Holy Spirit. In this manner "the originality" of his system has acquired a future dimension.

F. Caviglia again says:

It is without doubt a paradox: his title to greatness, the invention of the Preventive System. The originality and the end result of the mind and heart of this true genius of goodness is this powerful creative synthesis. He lived it. This idea, this synthesis, originated from the heart and resided in goodness... This system of Don Bosco is the system of kindness or, for better words, *kindness built into a system*. Quite naturally it is kindness springing from the heart of a saint and, hence, a kindness which is more than human. Here the heart of the man gives shape and form to that which the idea of charity dictates, namely, the molding and the saving of souls."<sup>19</sup>

It seems to me that these citations have hit the mark. They clearly describe with accuracy the *most original character of our "proper character"* in the Church; they show us what is the "pastoral charity" which is the perennial source of our identity.<sup>20</sup>

## 2.2 A Date in Tradition

It is clear that when GC 21 speaks of the Preventive System it does not simply refer to the classic pages written by Don Bosco in 1877 and up to the SGC incorporated in the Regulations. Rather it is "an organic whole of convictions, attitudes, actions,

<sup>19</sup> ALBERT CAVIGLIA, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>20</sup> *Constitutions* No. 40; ASGC 26, 127.

presence, means, methods and structures which have progressively established a *certain personal and community manner of existence and action* of Don Bosco, of each individual salesian and member of the salesian family.”<sup>21</sup>

In this respect Don Bosco's brochure is, without doubt, one of the most precious documents. Yet his apostolic and educational method cannot be adequately understood in the few pages of his brochure or other of his many writings. It is enough to glance at the most evident and clear evidence of his system, the growth of Dominic Savio in holiness. During Dominic's life span a great part of Don Bosco's writings were not yet in existence. The Oratory of Valdocco had not yet a full resident program.

We are dealing, therefore, with an apostolic and educational practise which is clarified by the help of Don Bosco's treatise and other writings, but above all by his subsequent manner of acting.

The analysis of such a practise requires a special task of tuning in on the spirit. In fact, since the “system” is the sum total of convictions, attitudes and presence, and was created and lived in a social environment of the last century, we must earnestly endeavor to make some subtle distinction; that is, the living and permanent heirloom of the Preventive System. Its “lasting” values and its message for the future is not to be identified with a cultural view and with an ecclesial mentality of the past.

But if it may have been lamentable to have to reduce the Preventive System to legal observance, it would be more disastrous

<sup>21</sup> Cf. AA.VV., “The Educational System of Don Bosco as Found in Old and New Pedagogy”; “Act of the Salesian European Congress on the Educational System of Don Bosco”, Turin, LDC, 1974, No. 301.

For Don Bosco the expression Preventive System did not refer to a written work but to “that sum of means and educational procedure which suppose and imply an entire organism of convictions, ideas, reasons and faith which comprise his way of dealing with youth”. Peter Braido, *The Preventive System of Don Bosco*, Zurich, PAS-Verlag, 1964, pp 66.

to believe that it no longer bears for us that original vitality so necessary for our renewal.

The GC 21 exhorts us to discover with seriousness and love its "charismatic nucleus" so as to preserve and to carry on our original dynamism. This ought to be done by the entire salesian family, since without the practise of the Preventive System we cannot be faithful to Don Bosco.<sup>22</sup>

### 2.3. *The Basic Element of Our "Charism"*

The SGC had already inserted the subject matter of the Preventive System in the text of the Constitutions defining the system as "precious heritage"<sup>23</sup> linked to that "apostolate of love" which forms "the center of our salesian spirit."<sup>24</sup>

With good reason, therefore, Fr. Louis Ricceri in his important letter, "Decentralization and Unity Today in the Congregation" of October, 1977, in presenting the *original components of our charism* explicitly enumerates the Preventive System as a special "style of apostolic presence."<sup>25</sup>

It is closely linked to other components of salesian charism, especially to the "spirit" of Don Bosco and his "mission" to youth.

In the Preventive System, in fact, one can distinguish two

<sup>22</sup> For a more comprehensive historical-doctrinal in depth study of salesian practise of Don Bosco, three outstanding authors are worthy of note:

— Fr. A. Caviglia in his commentary on the lives of Magone, Besucco and, above all, Dominic Savio, shows a penetrating grasp of Don Bosco's spirit.

— Fr. P. Ricaldone in his book *Don Bosco, The Educator* and as a major superior has brought out quite authoritatively the educational aspect of Don Bosco's charism.

— Fr. P. Braido in his *Preventive System of Don Bosco* is the scholar. He has scientifically approached the subject of the Preventive System. Part I, "The Times, Works and Personality of Don Bosco" merits attention.

<sup>23</sup> *Constitutions* No. 25; Cf. *Regulation* Nos. 3, 4.

<sup>24</sup> ACS 272, October-December, 1973, No. 10.

ACS indicates Acts of Superior Chapter of Salesian Society.  
Superior Chapter of Salesian Society.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* No. 10.

levels or aspects which are different yet closely linked to one another: *the inspiring principle* which creates a spiritual attitude in the individual, "the spiritual thrust", and the *methodological principle* which serves as a guide in the concrete situation of his action, "the educational method."

Between the "pastoral thrust" and the "pedagogical thrust" one can notice a subtle distinction which is worthy of reflection and deepening insight, but it would be an illusion and a danger to add that to forget the close bond which unites them so radically as to make it impossible to separate them. To dissociate Don Bosco's method from his apostolic soul would be to destroy both. In this manner the Preventive System is totally *linked to the salesian "spirit"* by means of its "pastoral thrust" that it constitutes its incarnate character. For a good reason it can be defined as an authentic spirituality of our apostolic action and "therefore our practical way of tending for the fulness of charity and christian life." In fact the educator is completely saturated by sentiments, thoughts and activities which characterize his existence.

On the other hand the Preventive System is so directly linked to the salesian mission with regard to the "educational method" that it translates it into practice. The SGC reminded us that between salesian "mission", one and identical for all and everywhere, and "pastoral" in action, changeable according to circumstances, that there is an important level which one needs to harmonize.<sup>26</sup> The Preventive System is to be situated between two frames, that of education and apostolate which enlighten and guide the various projects to elaborate and apply in an orderly fashion of the diverse situation of time and space.

To sum up, the "apostolic thrust" and "method of action" of the Preventive System fuse so perfectly to make of the system

<sup>26</sup> ACGS No. 30.

ACGS refers to Acts of Special General Chapter of Salesian Society, Rome, 1972.

a point of reference for the unity and identity of the salesian family in the Church.

## 2.4 *The Sure Way to a True Conversion*

The originality and geniality of our Fonuder are not museum pieces but an appeal to a challenge. They point out the right path to choose for that concrete conversion to which the GC 21 invites us.

Apostolic charity translated into goodness is at the root of our spirit and our mission. The very name salesian originates from goodness in practise considering a saint who had incarnated the "begnignitas et humanitas" of Our Divine Savior. It is, indeed, a name which qualifies our vocation and points out the goal for which we are accountable in the Church. The entire life of Don Bosco is like a commentary on the bearers of this name.

When nine years old John Bosco felt called by the Most High and considered the Madonna as "the inspiring force" and "teacher" of the Preventive System.

With good reason Fr. Rinaldi on the occasion of the centenary of the first dream, 1925, "had ordered that a commemoration be held in every house and he himself held conferences with the salesians and sisters on the subject. Already at that time he aimed to help them see how it had been pointed out to Don Bosco that his educational system was founded on the spirit of goodness and meekness."<sup>27</sup>

For this reason Don Bosco made the formation of his first salesians consist in learning to live and practise the Preventive System. This remained the traditional formation of the first generations of salesians.

Among the last letters of Don Bosco there is an important

<sup>27</sup> EUGENE CERIA, *Life of the Servant of God, Philip Rinaldi*, Turin, S.E.I., 1948, p. 443.

one to Fr. James Costamagna in Argentina. Don Bosco writes:

I feel myself failing and I would like to have with me my sons and daughters of America... I would like to give you a conference on the salesian spirit which should serve as a guide to our actions and our speech. The Preventive System should be for us all... Let words of kindness, patience and charity pervade our classes.... Let every salesian be a friend of all; never to seek revenge. Let him easily pardon. Never recall incidents once forgiven... Kindness of speech, in word, in advising conquers everything and all.”<sup>28</sup>

We know that “this letter contributed to the spiritual and temporal welfare of the province of Argentina. Not only the provincial but other confreres who made copies of the letter sent thanks to the saint. Some who felt they were at fault or found greater difficulties to be charitable and patient took a vow which they renewed every month on the occasion of the practise of ‘Happy Death’.”<sup>29</sup>

The recent Pope Paul with farsighted vision and deep interest in our vocation on May 24, 1973 in his *motu proprio*, “*Magisterium Vitae*”, delivered on the occasion of the elevation of our Pontifical Atheneum to a University stated:

The members of the Salesian Society have respectfully received from their Father and Founder that special charism in the art of education entrusted to them not only as a sacred deposit to be guarded jealously but also as a fruitful seed to be cultivated faithfully.<sup>30</sup>

Hence, be it at the Pontifical Salesian University or at our centers of study we must carry on that activity according to

<sup>28</sup> EUGENE CERIA, *Letters of St. John Bosco*, Vol. 4, Turin, 1959, p. 332.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p. 33, footnote.

<sup>30</sup> ACS 272 October-December, 1973. Nos. 72-77.

which the spirit of the holy Founder which is well known as the “*preventive system*” and which not without a special design of God has drawn its force from the gospel. We are, therefore, dealing with an element which is “substantial.”<sup>31</sup>

Let us listen to the refreshing words of P. Duvallet, a French priest who for twenty years was at the side of Abbe Pierre, the apostle for the education of youth of today:

You have schools, oratories and youth centers but only one treasure — *the educational method of Don Bosco*. In the way in which youth is abused, taken advantage of, mistreated, the Lord has entrusted you with a method of education in which respect for the boy, his nobility and frailty, his dignity as a son of God triumphs. Maintain, renew, enrich this method with modern approaches. Adopt it to the youth of the twentieth century which Don Bosco could not know. But for God’s sake preserve it! Change everything. Lose, if the case may be, your houses but hold on to this treasure thus building in thousands of hearts a way to love and save youth which is the heredity of Don Bosco.<sup>32</sup>

### **3. In the Footsteps of Christ Friend of the Young**

The salesian family was born of the love of Don Bosco for the young. A love of predilection which developed and permeated his natural gifts but which was radically a special gift of God destined for the salvation of the youth of today. This predilection welled up in him from his enthusiastic adherence to Jesus Christ and under the guidance of Mary leading to make present the

<sup>31</sup> GC 21 No. 216.

<sup>32</sup> AA.VV. “Preventive System of Don Bosco in Old and New Pedagogy”; “Acts of European Salesian Conference on Educational System of Don Bosco”. Turin, LDC 1974, p. 314.

mystery of Christ “while blessing children and does good to all,” as the Council says.<sup>33</sup>

The Gospel shows the love of Jesus Christ for the young in various ways: He loves them. “Jesus looked... and loved him. Mk. 10,21. He wishes to be surrounded by them; Mt. 19, 14-15; Mk. 10, 13-16; Lk. 18, 15-17.

“Let the little children”, Lk. 9. 46-48, “He who welcomes.”

He invites them to follow Him. The rich young man, Mt. 19, 16-26; Mk. 10, 17-22.

He heals them. “Go home, your son will live.” Jo. 4, 46-54.

He resurrects. “Young man, I tell you get up.” Lk. 7, 11-15. Daughter of Jairus, Lk. 8, 40-55; Mk. 5. 21-43.

He frees them from the devil. Mk. 17, 14-18; Lk. 9, 37-43.

He casts out the devil from the daughter of Canaanite woman. Mt. 15, 21-28; Mk. 7, 24-30.

He grants pardon to the prodigal son. Lk. 15, 11-32.

He works a miracles. “There is a small boy here.” Jo. 6, 1-15.

We cannot explain Don Bosco’s deep delight for the young without his love for Jesus Christ. In the following of Christ one finds the life-giving source of his vitality. This is the initial gift of the Most High; the “first charism” of Don Bosco. We are not dealing with human inclinations or natural preferences but beyond them. A modern theologian of the religious life states:

Such a level, and no other than what Jacques Maritain has defined as ‘the sphere of the spirit at its source’. It is described as the point of poetical inspiration, the genius of the artist, the mystical experience and above all the indwelling of grace...

We find ourselves beyond the beckoning frontiers, with a grand view. The normal encloses one’s existence as

<sup>33</sup> *Lumen Gentium* N. 46.

if it had more in store. It is almost as if beneath the ashes, ambers had the source of a fire... as if the experience in the soul of Paul on the road to Damascus.<sup>34</sup>

It is the sight of Don Bosco's vocation and, therefore, of his intuition in the art of education and of his spiritual originality of a saint.

### 3.1 "*The Gift of Predilection for the Young*"

Don Albera in his important circular letter of October, 1920, wrote:

"Don Bosco is our model in the education and sanctification of youth."

He perhaps best depicted with greatest care and psychological insight Don Bosco's love as a type for the salesian vocation. He defines it:

The gift of predilection for the young. It is not enough to have a certain natural attraction but it is necessary to have a liking for them. This predilection in the initial stage is a gift of God; it is the same salesian vocation. It is up to our intelligence and our heart to develop and perfect it.<sup>35</sup>

This apostolic predilection for young people appeared in Don Bosco as a kind of "passion". Better, it was his "super-vocation" to which he dedicated himself "avoiding every obstacle and everything, even though good, which would hinder its realization." (Fr. Louis Ricceri) Fr. Peter Stella states:<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> JEAN MARIE ROGER TILLARD, *Carisma e Sequela*, Bologna, Dehoniane Edition, 1978, pp. 57-58.

<sup>35</sup> *Circular Letter of Fr. Paul Albera*, p. 372.

<sup>36</sup> ACS 284, October-December, 1978, p. 31.

For Don Bosco to love youth did not only mean to arouse affection, but also to feel its attraction, to be subdued, to be aware of the indispensable role of one's life. Don Bosco expresses it in words which surpass the conventional letter-writing style as exemplified in his letters to his boys from St. Ignatius near Lanzo, from Rome and from Florence.<sup>37</sup>

In a memorable page of the early cited circular Fr. Albera wrote:

One must say that Don Bosco had a liking for us in a special way which was characteristically his. One felt his irresistible attraction. I felt myself captive to a powerful force which nourished my thoughts, my words and my activities. I felt myself loved as at no other time, far greater than any other. He surrounded us all and completely as if in an atmosphere of happiness and joy. In him there was a magnetic attraction. He attracted our youthful hearts in such a manner that we could not leave him. Even if we could have, we would never have left him for all the gold in the world for such was our joy in his having such an ascendancy over us which for him was so natural, without any effort on his part. It could not be otherwise because each spoken word or action reflected the holiness of union with God which is perfect charity. He drew us to himself with the fullness of supernatural love which burst forth from his heart. From this singular attraction there sprang up the conquest of our hearts. In him the abundance of natural gifts was raised to a supernatural level.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> PETER STELLA, *Don Bosco in the History of Catholic Religion*, Vol. 2, PAS-Verlag, Zurich, 1969, p. 473.

<sup>38</sup> *Circular Letter of Fr. Paul Albera*, pp. 372-374.

Don Bosco nourished this his charism, the apostolate for the young, with a constant meditation on salvation desired by Our Divine Savior and calling of his priestly vocation: "the young are the delight of the Lord."<sup>39</sup> "Mary Help of Christians blesses those who concern themselves with the young."<sup>40</sup> He backed up this special inspiration of God with realistic reflections based on historical happenings in a society in transition. "Youth is that delicate and precious portion of society on which the hopes of the future are based."<sup>41</sup>

His predilection for youth became the driving force of his life. "The Lord has sent me for the young, hence, I must *not become engrossed in other matters* and preserve my health for their good." And it is the mission of the Congregation. "We must have as our first aim, the good of the young. Those projects which take us away from them are not good."<sup>42</sup>

At the basis of the Preventive System there is, therefore, this preferential choice which requires full commitment to young people prescindng from so many other possibilities: "We already have too many things on hand without going to look for other projects. These projects only direct our attention elsewhere."<sup>43</sup>

Today, too, our Congregation must grow and live in a *true apostolic predilection towards boys and the young*. This is indispensable for a healthy growth.

We cannot make the Preventive System live if this clear choice is not sealed by the charism of our Founder regardless of other ideological interpretations. Even if we rightly speak of our

<sup>39</sup> MB 16, p. 66.

<sup>40</sup> MB 16, p. 238.

<sup>41</sup> MB 2, p. 45.

MB indicates to *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, a work in 19 volumes written from 1898 to 1939 by Frs. Baptist Lemoyne, Angelo Amadei and Eugene Ceria. (Extra-commercial Edition).

<sup>42</sup> MB 14, p. 284.

<sup>43</sup> MB 14, p. 284.

“apostolate of the young in the segment of our society”, this segment only narrows the human sphere of action of our predilection rather than change the object of our priority. Without doubt “predilection” does not mean “exclusion”, but it does demand that the youngsters still maintain the first and most important place.<sup>44</sup>

The GC 21 affirms that:

We recognize in youth itself the other source of our inspiration in spreading the gospel. We salesians are sent to the young, and especially to the poorest of them and we collaborate in the creation of a new society grounding to the full their life in faith.”<sup>45</sup>

We must not be surprised if those communities lose their salesian spirit if for one reason or another they lose their predilection for youngsters.

The first and most urgent need of the Preventive System today is “not to desert the difficult field of our youth commitment.”<sup>46</sup>

Each community program, each individual’s commitment, each new search of salesian presence, it to be aimed towards placing the Congregation at the heart of the problem of young people.

### 3.2 *Shared Charity*

The daily presence of the salesian educator with his youngsters is one fundamental aspect of the Preventive System. Don Bosco had given himself completely to them and did all he could to live in their midst. He could very well assure them, without fear of deception, that his life was for them:

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Constitutions* 2, 14. ASGC 45, 53, 45, 55.

<sup>45</sup> GC No. 12.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* No. 13.

Be aware that I am completely at your disposal morning and evening, day and night — at whatever hour. I have no other aim but to obtain your spiritual, intellectual and physical advantages. I did not desire that you consider me as your superior but as your friend. Have full confidence in me; this is what I desire; what I ask as true friends”.<sup>47</sup> I study for you; I work for you; I live for and I am ready even to die for you.”<sup>48</sup>

The salesian does not only work for the young but among and with them. The Preventive System is for him a practise directed by the heart rather than a scientific manner of procedure. He has need, therefore, to learn the art and the sacrifice to be physically present. He is completely involved as an educator, “a sign of and bearer of the love of God for young people.”<sup>49</sup>

To make the Preventive System live it is necessary to review and renew the salesian practise of presence and of friendliness whether it be in genuine predilection or in youthful development of today.

Here is a subject and assignment we must face with courage and with christian generosity in the gift of self.

The GC 21 has reminded us of “considerable difficulties experienced by some salesians in accepting and understanding the young, in tuning in to their wavelength when discussing their problems.”<sup>50</sup> This situation could lead to missing the mark. Some choose those who are more likeable rather than those whom the Lord sends.

It is disturbing to note in many of our works a diminution in number of this preferential group, and that

<sup>47</sup> MB 7, p. 503.

<sup>48</sup> DOMENIC RUFFINO, *Chronicles of the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales*, Salesian Archives 110, Rome, MS 5, 10.

<sup>49</sup> *Constitutions* 2.

<sup>50</sup> GC 21 No. 21.

we seem to be choosing others who have less claim to our attention.”<sup>51</sup>

For this reason the revitalization of the Preventive System demands that at the head of the list of priorities an actual presence among young people—those in greater need. The pedagogy of Don Bosco is apostolic; born, developed and lived in this segment which constitutes the special place for a genuine salesian experience.

### 3.3 *Knowledge of Each One and of the “Youth Situation”*

Predilection of the young requires a continual deepening of interest, be it for the individual youngster with whom one works or in that cultural phenomenon which today is the “youth situation.”

*Friendliness and dialogue with the individual*, the unsurpassable example of Don Bosco to which we have referred, is a tradition of dialogue and friendliness which we ought to keep and renew.

In our day the outlay in educational services has become so exorbitant as to place greater demands on instruction and culture.

Now this can place a heavy burden on education. We must not forget that our service in education is the task of evangelization and for this reason assure the necessary and even ideal means for such an objective.<sup>52</sup>

Growth in faith has need of a personal touch which can bring to maturity the individual vocation. In “en masse” programs we lose the best opportunity to influence which was so characteristic of Don Bosco’s manner of dealing with the young.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* No. 46.

*Knowledge of the “youth situation”*, a phenomenon of today, is a matter of great urgency for us. It is an element conditioning our dialogue with each youngster and with the entire gamut of the apostolate. There is today this very special “world of the young” which bodes good and evil. The GC 21 describes it with few general references saying that youngsters “go through this experience as living parts of a setting called ‘youth situation’.”<sup>53</sup> For us it is necessary “to lend a willing ear to the voice of the world of the young and to keep it in mind in the educative and pastoral dialog of evangelization.”<sup>54</sup>

This is of the greatest importance because the educational mission of Don Bosco considers quite positively young people as a treasure of society and of the Church. Young people constitute a unique dimension of human existence, a propitious moment, a responsibility for the faith and not simply a passing phase and an age of preparation.

A salesian does not intend to help a boy “pass” or “get over” his young years, but rather to live his days in the company of others developing, through his typical plans and his dreams, a personality grounded on evangelical principles to make him a candidate worthy of canonization even at the age of fifteen.

Now the cultural phenomenon of “youth situation” requires special knowledge of his condition:

The harmonious relationship which is so necessary to educate them (young people), liking what they like but without abandoning our adult role of salesian educators, becomes in this way both difficult and complex.<sup>55</sup>

To renew the Preventive System it will be necessary not only to penetrate the heart of each individual but also the actual

<sup>53</sup> GC 21 No. 13; Cf. ASGC No. 46.

<sup>54</sup> GC 21 No. 20.

<sup>55</sup> GC 21 No. 13.

life situation of each youngster: his aspirations, sense of values, his home condition, his models, his tensions, his goals, his life ambitions.

The chapter, therefore, asks us:

As a premise to every educational and pastoral program, salesians need to be more sensitive to the 'youth condition', understood in its expectations which are most in line with the gospel, through an adequate and serious analysis and by means also of direct contact with the young.<sup>56</sup>

### 3.4 *A Careful Evaluation of Human Reason*

The correct understanding of the young is a basic necessity of their education and upbringing. Young people today live in a society which touches their sensibilities by changes because they easily assimilate the values and disvalues of a new culture and present a real pastoral problem to be confronted.

To seriously analyze the conditions of the young it is necessary to have a suitable preparation and competence in the so called human sciences which today are already studied in the first years of formation. These studies ought to hold a prominent place in the updating of the salesian and in his continual readings. These human sciences while an enrichment can also be a danger. In their respective field they need to integrate their findings with global conditions and the ultimate human reality. This result is to be evaluated in the light of philosophical and theological insights and above all in the light of faith.

To renew the Preventive System there is need of an intense and continued collaboration between the human disciplines enlightened by philosophical-pedagogical insights and the discipline

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* No. 30.

of faith based on a pastoral-theological vision. Without this indispensable interchange of reason with human sciences and theology we shall not have the required knowledge of the conditions of the young and sources of their evangelization.

Much evil can result by a one-sided and conceited point of view.

In a special manner realizing that today awareness of the conditions of the young abound in the psychosociological field, it is necessary to underscore the urgency to correlate and link knowledge of the history of salvation, a sense of sin, and the original riches of the patrimony of faith so as not to lose sight of the true perspective.

The word of God, in fact, is not simply a certain convergence of values, or a response of human aspiration but mainly a message, a calling, an interpellation. To "believe" indicates to receive not simply to discover. God is truthfully "other than" the temporal values even though it is beautiful and indispensable to know how to discover the newness of the signs of the times.

In the act of evangelizing it is, without doubt, necessary to know and cultivate the new style of life, of participation but without indentifying its values with those of the Gospel which is the bearer of a special richness, superior and distinct, not to be confused with the cultural level.

The youth of today demand that we take interest and concern in human affairs, study and promote their positive aspects, but also to know their limitations, to critically penetrate their ambivalence and to single out their negative aspects so as not to fall into danger, not imaginary, of man's self-centeredness.

"Man's bend of mind" and "man's self-centeredness" are not the same. The former is demanded by the Preventive System, the latter would be a corruption. As the memorable Pope Paul VI said at the conclusion of Vatican II: The Church has "turned to" but not "turned away from" man.

Our true involvement in "youth situation" ought not to

polarize our human competence, to place obstacles on our other radical involvement as disciples and prophets of the Lord with its theological competence.

#### **4. Pastoral Charity and Pedagogical Wisdom**

Don Bosco's method as history indicates is clearly a "pastoral" activity. We give to this term a meaning which is specific, linked to the apostolic mystery of the Church.

The type of charity which initiated it and inspired it in the heart of Don Bosco is that which grows in the mystery of apostolic succession in which the presbyterate with the collaboration of the episcopate shepherd a special portion of the flock in the light of salvation and the coming of the Kingdom of God. This meaning is not forgotten in an attentive rereading of the Preventive System. He, too, carries out the teachings of Don Bosco without being a priest—and these are, indeed, many—must understand this radical concept which gives the tone to so many aspects and explains the characteristic features of a style all its own.

Don Braido writes:

In my opinion this indicates that Don Bosco has placed the summit of his concern, and hence of his interest for the young, their insertion into society, in the labor field and professional field. This benefit of their educational maturity had one sole aim: their christian redemption in this life and their eternal salvation. He did not deny the intrinsic validity of work to make of the boy an upright man and good citizen and hence of a work accessible not to priests alone.

Don Bosco wished that the ranks of his social and educational apostolates be filled with zealous lay persons ("Coadjutors") in his religious society and outside his

religious society with ("Cooperators"). In a very concrete way he envisioned that the combined effort tend towards a supernatural christian redemption with an eschatological dimension. The need was to have recourse to the means of grace, the sacraments and to the ministers who could dispense them.<sup>57</sup>

Today, therefore, a true realization of the Preventive System directs us to the theme of "Priesthood" of the New Alliance in the light of conciliar doctrine. Vatican II has recalled the key meaning of the royal priesthood of the faithful and in this manner has thrown a light on the function of service and animation of the ministerial priesthood.<sup>58</sup> The bishop with the presbyterate are consecrated to a priestly life for the whole community. The Preventive System is permeated by a priestly spirit.

A vast panorama opens on the horizon to a diligent rereading to which the GC 21 on the explicit invitation of Pope Paul VI has invited us to consider in particular the priestly figure of the Rector. The problem is indeed more extensive and compelling. The results of studying it carefully will be a definite explanation of the true "pastoral" aspect for all those who work in the salesian mission of the Church.

#### 4.1 *Penetration Not Dissipation*

The "pastoral" thrust of the Preventive System serves as a unifying link between evangelization and education.

Don Bosco, in fact, excludes in his pastoral-educational activity any division between education and evangelization.

He wished to describe his practise with a kind of catchy slogan: "Evangelize by educating and educate by evangelizing."

<sup>57</sup> PETER BRAIDO, *The Preventive System of Don Bosco*, p. 88.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium* No. 10.

With this slogan the salesian youth apostolate is characterized by the cultural incarnation in the field of education. Salesian education is to be distinguished by its constant pastoral scope. It is not a play on words but an avoidance of two harmful arrangements; viz., that of pretending simply to reduce pastoral pedagogy to that which extols human findings, as if these findings were already christian in their very structure.

The GC 21 states: "We are well aware that education and evangelization are specifically distinct activities of their class, but nevertheless there is a strict connection between them on the practical plane of existence."<sup>59</sup>

Their mutual autonomy of nature and order do not indicate difference of practise and art.

The distinctive nature with its respective values and relative science does not, therefore, impose a subject matter contrary to "a christian education." In theory it would be a kind of nominalism which is alien to historic realism. Better, it would not take into account either the existing practise, or the existence of two fields of activity, or the existential unity of the person, or the christian meaning of one history.

#### 4.2 To Evangelize "*by educating*"

Let us consider the first part of our formula: "to evangelize by educating".

The pastoral concern of Don Bosco is characterized by the choice of education as the area and field of genuine pastoral activity.

Hence the Preventive System tends towards the existential, bringing into bold relief "evangelization" and "education" which have been underscored in the apostolic exhortation "Evangelii Nuntiandi."<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> GC 21 No. 14.

<sup>60</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Nos. 31-36.

Our SGC had spoken of “complete christian development” and of “christian education leading for freedom.” Don Bosco in his days “was fond of summarizing the program of life proposed to boys in simple but meaningful formulas. He speaks of ‘good christian and respectable citizens’; he sets his sights on ‘health, wisdom and holiness.’”<sup>61</sup>

His pastoral concern is not reduced to a simple catechetical or liturgical instruction but embraces the concrete pedagogical-cultural situation of the boy.

His pastoral concern is directed to the inner core of the process of humanization without doubt with a critical eye to its short-comings but also with an optimistic global view of human maturity. He was convinced that the gospel seed must be planted in this field to lead the young people to give themselves wholeheartedly in their own time.

In this manner his pastoral concern leaned toward the up-building of a new society so much so that Don Bosco could present his “System” as a genuine element of promoting a common good to any politician who was not keen on matters of faith.

We are dealing with that evangelical charity which is exemplified in the giving of a glass of water and a piece of bread, in visiting the sick and the imprisoned, in freeing and helping the wayward and abandoned boy.

With good reason Don Bosco is known in the Church and in the world as a “Saint Educator” since he directed his holiness in educating. On the other hand if the Gospel is a value for salvation in the process of a boy’s growth and if a boy lives in a period of educational process, his evangelization has to be assisted by an educational process by which his faith is to be integrated as a unifying element of his own personality.

The formula “evangelize by educating” carries with it some precise options on the part of the salesian.

<sup>61</sup> GC 21 No. 81.

One must note that the Preventive System as a "praxis" places these options on the existential plane and so we refer them to the person who evangelizes and educates, to his convictions, to his intimate motives, to his competence, to his method and ways among the young people. I shall list the more important options of this first formula:

● *The thrust which sets the educational process into action.*

The reason why the salesian (as an individual or as a community) plunges himself into the educational field has its origin outside the realm of culture. It originates from his pastoral charity, or better, from a motive of service to the Gospel. The fundamental option of his whole life is the following of Christ wholeheartedly. This basic choice permeates the very being of the salesian so that all his activity, whatever it be, acquires evangelical intention.

"The Preventive System", Don Bosco often said, "is charity. The holy fear of God infused into the heart."<sup>62</sup>

The interior thrust (personal or communitarian) must be guided and directed to the point of holiness. To neglect this would reduce the formula "evangelize by educating" to a snare that would make of evangelization a purely human gimmick.

With good reason Don Bosco chose the motto: "Give me souls" to point the way and to stimulate the salesian on his mission.

● *Positive concern for values and cultural institutions.* The intention to evangelize brings the salesian (as a person or as a community) to appreciate and to assume the educational task of human values, thus deepening and developing the specific nature which is endowed with its own finality even if it knows that a certain autonomy which responds in the order of analysis and of

<sup>62</sup> MB 6, p. 381; Cf. *Circular Letters of Fr. Paul Albera*, pp. 374-375.

their study does not bring independence of faith in the practical order in the art of education.<sup>63</sup>

There is, in fact, a very important distinction which has to be maintained between the natural reality to be considered analytically in its formal autonomy and the same reality considered globally and harmoniously in so far as it refers to a man living in history and recapitulating in Christ.

At any rate, the fact that values, cultural institutions and human sciences have their own specific goals, the Preventive System should be open to the initiatives and cultural institutions with a special view for the needs of youth thus helping to bring about their harmonious growth.

Don Bosco was most attentive to human values. We have only to think what he did in the area of schools, works, leisure time, printing, cultural updating, music, organizations etc.. Only a person with a free and very human spirit—without any touch of Pelegianism—could leave to his disciples such words: “Give youngsters plenty of time to shout, jump and run. Gymnastics, music, declamations, theater and walks are very effective means.”<sup>64</sup>

In this manner, cultural and educational know-how of the salesian will be a gauge to measure the sincerity and efficacy of his intention to evangelize. On the other hand, his intention will be the light which will illumine him on the way in the art of education.

● *To securely bind the Gospel to culture.* In the carrying out of the Preventive System, the Gospel is presented in a manner closely linked to concrete situations. The Gospel is not isolated from life but harmoniously set is the growth process of the youngster's personality and development. It is not to consist in legal observances and obligations, but is a gift and a power which

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, No. 7.

<sup>64</sup> MB 13, pp. 920-921.

permeates one's whole person which runs over into history and the entire creation of the Mystery of Christ.

Don Bosco was always concerned to have boys see the inner human development of the person and of society, "the beauty of Religion." He sought always to prevent and heal the dramatic cleavage of the Gospel and culture. He often repeated: "Only religion can begin and bring to completion the true task of education."<sup>65</sup>

A true sense of gradual growth. The Constitutions of the Salesian Congregation state:

We accept youth as we find them and imitate the patience of God himself whatever the state of their present freedom or faith... We seek to enlighten and stimulate them while recognizing the subtle process by which faith grows. In education we should aim at involving young people more and more in their own development.<sup>66</sup>

It is an educational process that bears in mind all the human dynamism and creates in the youngsters the necessary requirements for a free response.

For this reason the first part of the formula "evangelize by educating" bears a special need to reactivate the Preventive System: each one must be true evangelical "animators" as persons and communities<sup>67</sup>; to consider a specific cultural area with its values; its institutions and sciences as the environment and destiny of our pastoral mission.

#### 4.3 *Educate "by evangelizing"*

Let us briefly look into the second part of the formula.

If it is a fact that the evangelical choice of the Preventive

<sup>65</sup> MB 3, p. 605; Cf. MB 7, p. 768; MB 10, p. 204.

<sup>66</sup> *Constitutions* No. 25.

<sup>67</sup> *Constitutions* No. 25.

System is the cultural choice of education, it is likewise true that its educational task is firmly finalized by the pastoral aspect of evangelization. Our educational outlook is "pastoral." This not only in the sense that on the part of the educator it grows and is nourished by the daily apostolic charity, but also in the sense that the whole educative process with its contents and methodology is directed to the christian goal of salvation and filled with its light and its grace.

This does not mean that salesian pedagogy is simply concerned with establishing a set program to impart lessons on religion or some form of culture; rather, it must bear a global task to impart absolute values of God and to interpret the life and history of the richness of the Mystery of Christ.

This pedagogy is well aware of the future resurrection and fully realizes the vivifying presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church and the world. It is objectively concerned and focuses on the nerve-center of man's history. The Preventive System intends to propose an education which is realistically aimed at the heart and center of the man of history, as a practical art to learn to grow in fulness.

This manner of "educating by evangelizing" also carries with it the *concrete options* of worth in the educative process. Such options refer here to the reality of the "person" of the educator, to the real goal and history of his growth, to the contents, to the means required and to the methodology most useful in his growth. The most incisive options to the second part of the formula are:

● *A clear awareness of the last end.* Don Bosco's pedagogy presents with insistence the true religious end of life; the ultimate end is the focal point of his education. It is clear, concise in its presentation. "The only aim of the Oratory is the salvation of souls."<sup>68</sup> "This is not only the principal aim but the only motive

<sup>68</sup> MB 9, p. 295.

for my coming here.”<sup>69</sup> We know quite well the deep conviction of Don Bosco that without “religion” (in its full sense of the word) true human progress is not attained.

Now, in the practical order of art, the Preventive System is an “art”, the end entails the same function of principles in the speculative order. The forgetting of the end of education—one of the erroneous and incomplete views of today—is cause of deviation, of incompetence and one-sidedness. This is one of the great dangers of our time. Our society which, in fact, has made such technical progress is accused by thoughtful men, even unbelievers, as being decadent because it stresses more the means than the end, and so, dangerously deviates with regard to human growth of the person and society.

Don Bosco wished to formulate and have present the clear objective of the supreme end of one’s existence. He wished to introduce its true light and its force in the educational method.

● *An educational process directed positively toward Christ.* If the salesian practise is born and is nourished by pastoral charity and tends explicitly and loyally towards salvation of redemption, it will find all its motives and inspirations in Christ and in His Gospel.

At this point christian values and principles have great importance and effect in the Salesian System.

It is worthy of note that this christian objective of the educational formula is a requirement of a “valid premise” or rather of the objectivity of human history, even if such a “premise” is not known or recognized by all, and not simply the result of a religious cultural structure which could by now be an anachronism.

In the educational process as conceived so realistically in the Preventive System the “ecclesial” dimension is approximately considered. It does not develop only the individual religious

<sup>69</sup> MB 7, p. 504.

experience but *the concrete and communitarian experience of the Church* with all the elements which constitute the community of constitute love, of faith and of cult for the service of human salvation.

A prominent place is given to the life of the sacraments and liturgy with a special stress on the *pedagogy of "Penance" and "Eucharist"* in "*Marian Climate*." These; indeed, after Vatican II and in view of the cultural changes need a further deepening and urgent renewal.

A demanding task in this field is that of "catechesis" which explains the gospel and introduces one into the life of the Church. In all of this it brings a strong "*sense of vocational direction*" to each conscience and the aim of an active and personal participation in the Mystery of Christ.

Here, too, "sanctity" is the expression of the "System." If the motive of pastoral charity made Don Bosco the "Educator Saint", by analogy the right direction to Christ of the salesian educational method made Dominic Savio the "*Educated Saint*."

In the Church and in the world the Preventive System is the genuine pedagogy of sanctity—one the part of the educator who completely lives it; on the part of the pupil who absorbs the Gospel teachings. Sanctity is the true and inevitable goal of our history.

It is worthy of note that Don Bosco and Dominic Savio are not saints who have worked in the field of education but they are saints simply because they have carried out this educational "System." Their sanctity might be considered a lesson which has been given by the Holy Spirit. The environment of Valdocco at the time of Domenic Savio lead us:

not only to the treshold, but to the full view of mystical experience. It brings us to a pentecostal climate, to a collective experience of the Holy Spirit. The family spirit which Don Bosco generated is that of *spiritual consanguinity*. The educator transmits life filled with

union of God through life of grace in the Church.<sup>70</sup>

The original and bold concept of “youthful sanctity” is intrinsic in the art of education for Don Bosco. His great insight was not only not to disappoint the deep-seated aspirations of the young—need of life, of expansion, of joy, of liberty, of the future—but to have brought gradually and realistically the same youngsters to taste that only the “life of grace”, that is, friendship of Christ, which is perennial joy. Their authentic ideals became realized and actualized: “We make sanctity consist in being always cheerful.”<sup>71</sup>

The Preventive System invites us, therefore, to rethink and to renew for today the same concept of “sanctity”, its presence in the history of man, its indispensability of the process of humanization. It invites us to consider Don Bosco as the “Teacher of youthful sanctity.”<sup>72</sup>

On the question of this genuine christian concept it is noteworthy to hear the chapter:

A similar plan in its contents, in its goals, in its style, may also be proposed and offered to those who do not share our vision of the world and who do not share our faith... Applied with flexibility, gradualness and a sincere respect for the human and religious values of the cultures and religions of our charges, it can yield abundant fruits on the educational level, it can create friendship and promote affection from pupils and past pupils, it unleashes great energies of good, and in more than a few cases lays the foundation for an open path of conversion to the christian faith.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> PETER STELLA, *Don Bosco in History*, Vol. 2., p. 472.

<sup>71</sup> MB 5, p. 356.

<sup>72</sup> PETER STELLA, *Spiritual Values of 'Companion of Youth' of St. John Bosco*, Rome, 1960, p. 128.

<sup>73</sup> GC 21 No. 91.

● *Critical thinking and a sense of duty in the light of the Gospel.* At a time of pluralism, as in our days, it is necessary to teach the youngsters to think critically so as to pick out authentic values and also to unmask certain cultural influences which *via* the media impose and overwhelm the young.

The light of faith is, indeed, the only sure guide that can objectively lead the mind through the snare of false ideologies.

The *Evangelii Nuntiandi* states:

To educate by evangelizing (means) that the power of the Gospel reaches and nearly upsets the judgments, set values, points of interest, set ideas, inspirational sources and human models which are in control with the Word of God and with the plan of salvation.<sup>74</sup>

The true value of education and of authentic culture is: to free the young ones, to make them conscious of their true rights and duties, and aware of the right events of their day; to make them capable of self-determination and cooperation.

Educating in this manner results in a culture which is open and enriches itself not only by the production of new ideas and new life but, above all, by giving society a contribution of individuals who are courageous bearers of critical thinking and good conduct.

“Have the courage of your faith and of your convictions. Do not fear. God is with the Church all days even to the end of time. It is up to the wicked to fear the good and not the good to fear the wicked,” said Don Bosco.<sup>75</sup>

In the pedagogy of Don Bosco *right conduct* holds a prominent place. He always insisted on gentle persuasion, on “a sense of duty”, on “discipline” in life and on the “spirit of sacrifice.”

<sup>74</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi* No. 19.

<sup>75</sup> MB 6, p. 482.

The meaning of liberty and one's rights can be consonant to the Gospel only if it is accompanied by a clarity and insistence in the practise either of the spirit of sacrifice of one's duties. At the epicenter of christianity is Christ crucified!

A great politician of our day, Aldo Moro, who has given witness with his life to the values of a democracy, has stated that "a country will not save itself; the season of rights and liberty will be passing, if (in that country) a new sense of duty is not born."

To educate "by evangelizing" implies, therefore, a concrete option with new obligations for a revision from the very foundations of our educational work.

— *The Word of God, by its nature, reveals and interpellates.*  
In conclusion, an indispensable option to assure the educational process is to respect the specific nature of the Gospel and of faith.

The Word of God is not, naturally speaking, a human development or an answer to a problem. It is instead an initiative of God, a gift, an interpellation, a calling, a request. The Gospel before answering, questions.

The educator must be aware and loyal to this Word of God. His main concern in adjusting to the conditions of the young, is not to ignore or oppose the pastoral mission of "prophet" of the Gospel.

Harmony and mutual understanding of the two aspects demand reflection, renewal and loyalty.

Hence, as the pedagogy of the Preventive System rests on the fundamental option of pastoral concern, the salesian must constantly present the teachings of the faith unblemished. With personal gifts and abilities he must guide his charges according to the examples and teachings of Christ who intercedes and calls as the Lord of history.

## 5. The Salesian Style

Permit me some concluding observations. The renewal of the Preventive System according to a living tradition is linked to some conditions of community sharing which appear quite simple yet carry potential educational advantages.

In its entirety these constitute "the salesian style" which gives tone and form to our work. We now choose the main features to underline some concrete points which need to be valued and renewed.

### 5.1 *Typical characteristics*

Among the chief characteristic qualities of the Preventive System are the following:

- **ASSISTANCE.** It needs to be interpreted in the light of the present conditions of the young and according to educational needs. Being present among the young, taking active part in their activities and apostolic programs, counseling them in their problems, all this is the essence of assistance. We might perhaps have to overcome the habit of considering its disciplinary aspect in favor of the example of the "oratory."

To favor such a view we might have to analyze the delicate concept of "prevention".

Don Bosco had a clear insight into the methods aimed to repress and remedy damages of a negative experience and strained himself with directed love to cultivate the seeds of the good to prevent the experiences of the disfigured. He chose the second way; namely, his "System" which he wished to be called "Preventive." It is entirely directed to the proper growth with the grace of God, of youth's potentials so that with human possibility, they can be kept from every sin which impinge on their human frailty.

To attain this he lived entirely among the youngsters so that by his presence he could be a witness to a life of grace and he was concerned to create an environment of respect for it. Here is a point upon which it is necessary for us to meditate upon, if we wish to relive genuine salesian style.

● *Creating an Educational Environment.* Our manner of dealing with the young is not based solely on one to one basis. We believe that the surroundings can be a vehicle for values. The necessity of an environment was for Don Bosco one of the first pastoral accomplishments. It definitely became a focal point so that we cannot conceive salesian educational action without considering the quality of surroundings.

● *Formation of the Educative Community.* In educational communities it is necessary to know how to involve all those responsible and to inspire them with the ideals of Don Bosco. The ever increasing number of lay persons offers us an opportunity to hand on the wealth we possess. At the same time there is a risk of losing our identity if we do not seriously handle our assigned roles of "animators". The educative community is, in the first place, the community of the young inspired by the educators. When speaking of a community for youngsters this means to have created with them and in their midst a means of communication and friendship; to have placed in their view common objectives. It means to have let them share and participate in the educative process and not only be recipients of our apostolic and professional expertise.

● *Youth Groups and Movements.* The community experience opens up a world of possibilities and values. We must not be surprised that our Father with his keen intuition and wisdom reached such definite and fundamental conclusions. The GC 21 has demonstrated a sensibility on this point confronted by a twofold phenomena: the collapse of traditional groupings (associazionismo)

and the lack of a substitute agent sufficiently forceful to assume the characteristics of salesian spirituality. Evidently we are not dealing here with founding a movement which would be a sign of force in a particular circumstance. Rather to offer to the young an intense experience of the community of faith and commitment in favor of others with sufficient doctrinal support and organized to assure growth continuity.

## 5.2 *Urgency of Inventiveness*

The salesian style is not once and for all; it is rather a task of sound creativity, above all at a time of cultural transition.

It is exactly with this in view that we have chosen this subject matter, subtle and demanding, for this letter.

One of the aims of the GC 21, which I consider quite urgent, is the following:

Every province (or group of provinces) will draw up an educational plan suited to local conditions as a basis for programming and evaluating its various works in line with the basic options made by the Congregation: oratories, youth centers, day and boarding schools, residences for students and artisans, parishes, missions.<sup>76</sup>

To devise a program of such responsibility it is indispensable to think "salesianly." Educational sciences are not enough, not faith alone, and not even one's experience which has become more or less uncritical with the passing of years and has now been called to be renewed by the Council and two General Chapters.

The fact that the GC 21 speaks of an environment so different—from the oratory to schools, from parishes to the missions—ought to indicate that it is a completely different criterion or a spirit which we must know how to reactivate rather than have

<sup>76</sup> GC 21 No. 105.

a body of rules for this or that structure even if the following of a spirit becomes incarnated in precise directives and obligations.

The carrying out of the project demands that we face a “united front” subject to various applications.

To rewrite in synthesis the ideas and practises of the Preventive System in such a way that none of its spirit is lost or obscured is a task which requires tuning in on the charism of the Founder and a careful reading of the signs of the times. One of the practical results of the session has been that this synthesis may involve not only some who are competent or the qualified or those naturally interested in such a subject but every confrere and community.<sup>77</sup> We will need to refresh what we already know and to admire what is new. We will need to recover what we have abandoned; discover dimensions emerging from our reflections and arrive at a deeper and richer synthesis which will direct us in our commitment of evangelization and our search of unity in our life of religious apostles.

All levels of responsibility are called upon to take part in this movement. The GC 21 states:

The provincial, the provincial conferences and the regional Councillor, will promote meetings, study days or weeks, discussions, exchanges of educational and pastoral experiences, which will eventually be open also to teachers and educators who do not belong to the salesian family, for the purpose of spreading the knowledge of Don Bosco's preventive system, encouraging research into it, and furthering its updated implementations, taking carefully into account the conditions of youth and working-class people in the local environment as well as the valid contributions of modern anthropological and pedagogical sciences.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> GC 21 No. 571.

<sup>78</sup> GC 21 No. 105.

To this end it will be of help to take advantage of expertise assistance for the Department of the Youth Apostolate which during the coming years will direct its service to the educational and pastoral phase of the salesian apostolate.

### 5.3 *Practical Aspects of Commitment*

Therefore, the carrying out of a project involving a community means to call together individuals for study and reflection, to focus attention on the social and ecclesial phase of our work, to search with creativity ways and solutions of situations. It means to unite the community with a unified criterion to which all members can aspire and by which each can recognize one another. It means to assure integrity and to free ourselves from sectionalism and improvisation.

The project will be the result of our study on the Preventive System and of our efforts in the application of the actual situation.

A similar task of rediscovering ought to reinforce the now operative programs in *three areas*:

- **THE FORMATION OF OUR PERSONNEL.** Our personnel ought to value, assimilate and deepen the pedagogical and pastoral aims of Don Bosco's Project. It ought to reflect on the cultural mentality attuned to pedagogical, pastoral and spiritual subject matters. A genuine renewal of the Preventive System will result if the above aims are practised in formative communities of the young confreres, courses of ongoing formation and in the updating of every house of the province.

- **THE SALESIAN "ANIMATOR" OF LAY HELPERS.** Experiences of these past years show that a clear and definite presentation of principles guiding our salesian pedagogy does much to impress itself on the minds of our helpers, since they are well aware of the special richness of the spirit of Don Bosco. They realize that they are closely involved in the work of education and they have a sense of belonging.

● THE STUDYING AND EXPANDING OF SALESIAN PEDAGOGY. The study and spreading of salesian pedagogy on the part of our professional educators and researchers in our Centers of Study is a must.

In his own days Don Bosco recommended that writings which made known our spirit and which presented our unique type of apostolic action be made known.

*Dear Confreres*, we have dealt with a topic which is indeed at the center of our salesian identity on levels nearest to our daily practical life. To dedicate ourselves to its reactivation is a question of life. Already Don Bosco in September 1884 spoke before the Superior "Chapter": "Every effort and every plan must be used to introduce and put into practise the preventive system in our houses... The advantages which accrue from its practise are incalculable for souls and glory of God."<sup>79</sup>

These are difficult days for our young people. The hierarchy, especially in the last synod of bishops, was well aware of the problem. It asked that further research and greater efforts be made in behalf of the youth of today. We have been given by the Lord, through the initiative of Mary, a special charism to bring to the Church in this field. The recent Pope Paul IV has reminded us with insistent concern.

Be of good heart. Let us apply ourselves wholeheartedly to use the gift we have received. "We are not dealing with a new pedagogical theory, but to know and understand a model of the of education," Fr. B. Fascie would say.

We must be "artists" capable of recreating the scenes of friendship and holiness which were seen at the Oratory of Valdocco especially at the time of Don Bosco and Domenic Savio.

This, in essence, is the problem of salesian sanctity. If we do not grow in the practise of the Preventive System, we shall not be faithful to our vocation. Our Family is likewise involved.

<sup>79</sup> MB 17, p. 197.

If we do not revitalize the Preventive Sytem, we shall fall into a kind of anonymity which will never justify our existence among the various ecclesial groups.

Let us ask Mary Help of Christians two great favors for the Congregation and our entire Family. One, the ability to maintain a *harmonious and creative tautness between two poles* of the Preventive System; namely, the one the “pastoral” thrust of our activity; the other a well selected “pedagogy” and “educational” competence.

Second, *a goodness of heart* which can season our style of life and of dealings with boys and the young with that goodness which Don Bosco would say: “It is not enough to ‘love’, but to ‘be loved’ by the boys.”<sup>80</sup>

May the saintly pastor, Pope Paul VI, follow us from heaven with his loving friendship that we be indeed genial apostles and wise disciples.

I wish each of you every good and I assure you my prayers.

Let us together seek to let this treasure of Don Bosco bear abundant results. Our boys and youngsters have a right. All the People of God will benefit therefrom.

Affectionately yours,

Fr. EGIDIO VIGANÒ  
*Rector Major*

<sup>80</sup> MB 17, pp. 111-112.