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## INTRODUCTION

Here we are, a new issue of the Journal of Salesian Studies. It's been a while again. From the beginning of the Journal, we have tried to publish one or two issues a year. From the beginning, the Journal has wanted to be at the service of the readers, of those who want to study the themes related to Don Bosco and Francis de Sales; and the Journal has always wanted to be at the service of those who want to publish on these themes and share their thoughts. All this gives us a certain freedom.

Nevertheless, we want to repeat our previous appeal: “We need your help because the Journal is looking for contributions. We need people who want to publish their articles in our Journal. From history over theology and spirituality to pedagogy and best practices within the field of the “Salesian” tradition of Saint Francis de Sales and Don Bosco.”

In this spring issue, we find five contributions. The first three Fridays have a common theme: “What I want is your happiness” Accompaniment of young people today. They are the written reflections of some Salesians brought to the *Forum Salesianum*. The *Forum Salesianum* is the continuation of the *Colloqui Salesiani*, an experience that began in Europe in 1968 as a meeting of Salesians with an academic background and interested in studying Don Bosco and Salesian life to be able to offer contributions to the solution of practical problems connected with the life of communities. In the summer of 2022, the *Forum Salesianum* was held in Valcocco Turin. Next year, at the end of summer 2024, the *Forum Salesianum* will be held again. Keep an eye on the Forum's website for more info. <https://sites.google.com/site/forumsalesianoitaliano/>

The first contribution is by *Louis Grech*, Salesian of Don Bosco. He writes about the challenges and opportunities of Salesian accompaniment in contemporary Western society. An interesting contribution that makes the link between the heritage of the Salesians and how this heritage continues to have significance and value in society today.

The second contribution is of *Carlo Loots*, Salesian of Don Bosco. In his article he focusses on the person of the accompanier. He himself is the main instrument of accompaniment. Loots indicates what some basic attitudes of the accompanier are, and point out some of the pitfalls that he or she can fall into, as well as some myths that need to be debunked.

The third contribution of this issue is by *Wim Collin*. Like Louis Grech, he writes about accompanying young people from a Salesian

perspective. Collin analyses the accompaniment from a historical and spiritual standpoint. He explores the ways in which Don Bosco, in his correspondence and letters to young people, gave suggestions on how to become a good Christian and a good citizen.

The fourth contribution of this issue is by Sister *Barbara Poredoš*, daughter of Mary Help of Christians. In her original contribution, she explores parallels and differences between the Salesian education system, Don Bosco's preventive system and "positive youth development". This contribution shows how close the different "education systems" are to each other and how they can complement each other perfectly.

The last longer contribution is by *Stefano Maggio* and *John Puntino*. Puntino made a translation of the eighth chapter of *Lo spirito di Don Bosco nel cuore del beato Don Rinaldi, Conferenze e scritti* (The spirit of Don Bosco in the heart of Don Rinaldi, conferences and writings) published in 1990. This chapter, thanks to the dedicated work of Stefano Maggio, explains to us the deep bond with Don Bosco and the spirituality of his third successor.

With the words of the recently deceased Dutch poet and music writer Huub Oosterhuis (known for the hymn "*What is this place*"), we prepare for the next issue: "*Let come what is to come, from You is the future!*" (Kome wat komt, van U is de toekomst!).



Wim Collin SDB  
Editor in Chief



# **SALESIAN ACCOMPANIMENT IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN SOCIETY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

*by Louis Grech*

## **1. Introduction**

Mitch Albom, a successful American sports journalist for the Detroit Free Press, in his inspiring book “Tuesdays with Morrie” narrates his touching experience of meeting a very special person. His name was Morrie Schwartz.

Have you ever really had a teacher? One who saw you as a raw but precious thing, a jewel that, with wisdom, could be polished to a proud shine? If you are lucky enough to find your way to such teachers, you will always find your way back (...). If Professor Morris Schwartz taught me anything at all, it was this: there is no such thing as “too late” in life. He was changing until the day he said goodbye. (...) The last class of my professor’s life took place once a week in his home, by a window in his study. The class met on Tuesdays. No books were required. The subject was the meaning of life. It was taught from experience. The teaching goes on.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie* (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 191-

Morrie Schwartz was Mitch's sociology professor back in his college days and was suffering from Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS). Morrie was older, wiser and understood youth and all the searching that goes with it. Mitch, for some time had lost track of his spiritual mentor and was losing his way. Intuitions diminished and the world seemed a colder place. Luckily, Mitch had a second chance and he rediscovered Morrie once again. In the knowledge that death was imminent for Morrie, Mitch decided to visit Morrie in his study every Tuesday, just like in the old days back in college. Their renewed liaison turned into one concluding lesson on how to live.

On reading Mitch Albom's inspiring spiritual experience, I couldn't stop observing evident similarities with the Don Bosco story and his vast youth project. In the same way Morrie exerted his enduring positive influence on his past pupil Mitch, Don Bosco, two hundred years on from his birth in 1815 continues to influence youth through his Salesian family. His worldwide family continues to offer lessons for youth today on the meaning of life and on how to live.

The aim of the following research is to investigate what Salesian Spiritual Accompaniment entails in the contemporary western context and offer insight into the following questions:

1. What exactly can we learn from the Don Bosco story and what unique contribution can Salesian spiritual accompaniment offer in a contemporary Western culture?
2. Are Children born spiritual?
3. What challenges do Multiculturalism and Secularism pose to spiritual growth?

## 2. Are Children Born Spiritual?

Don Bosco was a firm believer that children can become saints. Various studies today reaffirm Don Bosco's belief in child holiness and that spirituality is indeed an intrinsic human dimension. Thus, such a thesis suggests that every child is born with an openness to the spiritual realm and an ability to grasp spiritual concepts. Elaine Champagne,<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Nye,

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192.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Elaine Champagne, "Being a Child, a Spiritual Child," in *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 8(1), (London: 2003): 43-53.



David Hay,<sup>3</sup> Adrian Gellel<sup>4</sup> and Tobin Hart<sup>5</sup> are among the scholars who express this view. Günter Bräuer claims that the hominoids became human when the essential elements of spirituality fell into place after an evolutionary process that took six million years.<sup>6</sup>

If it is true that children are born with this openness towards this spiritual or divine reality, then spirituality precedes any tool and knowledge developed by humans over the centuries. Spirituality is the dimension that instigated our development into human beings. A careful analysis of the gradual evolution of humanity over the centuries clearly demonstrates that this spiritual development expressed itself through various symbols. These symbols are indeed the primary language of spirituality. Without such symbols, accessing, constructing and experiencing the spiritual dimension would be very difficult. Gellel debates that although spirituality is not a social or cultural construct, yet it needs culture (symbols and metaphors) in order to be accessed and expressed. Hence, offering a valid Salesian spiritual guidance to children today challenges us to make use and promote such symbols that would facilitate spiritual maturity.

If the idea of promoting and making use of symbols was a challenge in Don Bosco's context and age, this has become even more so in our contemporary European secular culture.<sup>7</sup> If we are to accept the notion that

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. David Hay and Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, ed. 2 (London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Adrian Gellel, "Empowering Children through a Symbolic Repertoire," paper still in progress, e-mail message to author, December 2, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> "Children have a secret spiritual life. They have spiritual capacities and experiences - profound moments that shape their lives in enduring ways. These are sometimes stunning, often tender, and reveal a remarkable spiritual world that has been kept largely secret." Tobin Hart, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children* (California: New World Library, 2003), 1.

<sup>6</sup> The elements which indicate a propensity towards spirituality are: 1) awareness 2) connectedness and 3) meaning. Cf. Günter Bräuer, "The Origin of Modern Anatomy: By Speciation or Intraspecific Evolution?" in *Evolutionary Anthropology: Issues, News, and Reviews*, (2008) 17(1), 22- 37.

<sup>7</sup> There is a current philosophical debate on how Western contemporary culture can be best described. Jürgen Habermas in particular is a contemporary philosopher who uses the term "post secular" to describe the social contemporary setting in the West. Habermas argues that European society over the past decades has evolved in three phases: (1) the modern age which was generally characterised by the marginalisation of religion; (2) the postmodern secular phase which saw an increased refusal of religion and the growing phenomenon of individualism; (3) the contemporary post-secular age which according to Habermas is dominated by the concept of fairness. Thus religion must take its place again in society. In the face of the contemporary ethical crisis, Habermas makes the provocative point that

children are born spiritual, it seems that as they grow older they can become spiritually disabled due to the trends of today's society. Gellel asserts that this apparent lack of spiritual growth in many children is due to three main reasons:

- due to hyper modernity we are losing the concept of time and space. As a result we are less able to silence ourselves, to observe and to stand in awe;
- symbols and metaphors are fading away. Hence so are the meaning and the intergenerational wisdom that point to the good life and meaning making. As a result there is a return to primordial chaos;
- individualism is seriously influencing relational consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

Gellel's observations present some valid insights for whoever offers youth spiritual accompaniment in Europe today. These reflections also expose some of the core issues which have led to a contemporary Europe that has lost memory of its rich cultural, historical and religious origins. Offering spiritual companionship in such a context brings forth various challenges. To cultivate and nurture in youth the value of silence, reverence, reflection, symbols and metaphors is no easy task in today's consumerist society.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, offering a significant community experience is also a challenge today, particularly in a society which

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secular Western societies need the moral and spiritual resources of religion to renew the social contract. In this instance, secular and religious actors become equal partners in an open-ended process of production of meaning. For Habermas, the age of post-secularism does not necessitate the refusal of the constant secularizing process and also not a return to the medieval theological predominance. Post-secular society is defined by the continued existence of religious communities in a continually secularizing environment. Joseph Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco CA: Ignatius Press, 2007), 19-48. Jürgen Habermas, "'The political': the Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) 12-16. Jürgen Habermas, "Notes on post-secular society," in *New Perspectives*, 25(4) (2008), 17-29.

<sup>8</sup> Adrian Gellel, e-mail message to author, December 2, 2015. Regarding the issue of relational consciousness, cf. David Hay, "Spirituality versus Individualism: Why we should nurture relational Consciousness," in *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* (2000), Vol 5, no 1, 37-48.

<sup>9</sup> Hart, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*, 47.

encourages individualism.<sup>10</sup> For me, this phenomenon appears paradoxically in the “Gestalt Prayer” by Fritz Perls:

I do my thing and you do your thing. I am not in this world to  
live up to your expectations  
And you are not in this world to live up to mine. You are you,  
and I am I,  
And if by any chance we find each other, it's beautiful. If not,  
it can't be helped.<sup>11</sup>

In my view, these few lines exhibit an underlying mentality which is at the very core of our contemporary culture. Adrian Gellel observes that:

Without claiming that religions are the only means to access, develop and experience spirituality (...) an individualised conception of spirituality impoverishes this human dimension. Since spirituality is a dimension that distinguishes humans from other living beings, it needs to interact with the other constituent dimensions that make us human, including our need for community, our characteristics of learning, of being rational and of developing tools that change us.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> In this case, the use of the term “individualism” infers the social phenomenon as opposed to the individualistic stage. The latter is a natural stage in development of the human person on its way to autonomy. Jane Loevinger identifies it as the seventh stage in a gradual nine stage progression of the ego. Cf. Jane Loevinger, *Paradigms of Personality* (New York: W H Freeman and Co, 1987), 223. Cf. Melvin E Miller and Susanne R. Cook-Greuter, *Creativity, Spirituality and Transcendence: Paths to Integrity and Wisdom in the Mature Self* (Stamford CT: Ablex, 2000), xv-xxxi. Cf. Susanne Cook-Greuter, “Postautonomous Ego Development: A Study of its Nature and Measurement,” in *Dissertation Series* (Tucson: Integral Publishers, 1999). With regards to the social phenomenon of individualism, David Hay identifies three sources: A) the coming of Literacy; B) the Social Contract in European Thought and C) Cartesian Dualism. Cf. David Hay, “Spirituality Versus Individualism: Why we should Nurture Relational Consciousness,” in *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, vol. 5, no 1, (2000), 40-43.

<sup>11</sup> Fritz Perls, *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim* (Gouldsboro ME: Gestalt Journal Press, 1992), 15.

<sup>12</sup> Adrian Gellel, “Empowering Children through a Symbolic Repertoire,” 1.

I find Gellel's observations here very much in line with Don Bosco's holistic vision of spiritual direction which maintained that for spiritual growth to occur, the Oratorian family and formative environment were vital. Within such a delicate period in life, the more the young person is immersed within the Salesian formative environment, the more effective and enriching the spiritual accompaniment will be. This Salesian communitarian dimension could indeed be that unique contribution that Salesian spiritual accompaniment could offer today.

Those who are entrusted with the great responsibility of offering spiritual accompaniment to youth, should have a thorough understanding of contemporary youth culture. Being knowledgeable about the context and background of youth today is a key element which renders Salesian spiritual companionship more practical, dynamic, reasonable, kind, effective and ready to respond to the challenge.

Individualism is not the only challenge facing Salesian spiritual accompaniment today. Among the many challenges that appear in our Western European context, I would identify two contrasting realities which have and continue to evolve on the continent. On the one hand there is the phenomenon of multiculturalism and religious diversity and on the other hand there is the ever growing reality of secularisation.

### 3. A Challenging Responsibility in a Multicultural Europe

The once Christian Europe has over the past fifty years rapidly evolved into a continent characterised by multiculturalism and religious diversity.<sup>13</sup> Even though Christianity still remains the main religion in Western Europe, Islam appears to be the fastest growing religion.<sup>14</sup> This phenomenon has continued to grow, not only as a consequence of the former British and French colonies in particular, but also through the dramatic increase in immigrants who continue to enter through the EU borders in search of a better life.<sup>15</sup> A substantial number of these

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton NJ: University Press, 1994), 3-24.

<sup>14</sup> Special Eurobarometer 393, "Discrimination in the EU in 2012" (Brussels: EU Commission, 2012), accessed on September 19, 2015, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_393\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_393_en.pdf).

Cf. Henkel Reinhard and Hans Knippenberg, *The Changing Religious Landscape of Europe* ed., Knippenberg (Amsterdam: Het Spinnuis, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> During the period January 1-December 21, 2015 around one million migrants and refugees arrived in Europe. This was five times more than in 2014. Cf. International Organisation for Migration, "IOM Counts 3,771 Migrants Fatalities

immigrants are Christians fleeing from persecution and nearly 40% are Muslim.<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Laurence in his book *The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims*, speaks of the rapid growth of Islam in Europe and the challenges faced. He asserts that:

Just over 1% of the world's 1.5 billion Muslims reside in Western Europe, yet this immigrant-origin minority has had a disproportionate impact on religion and politics in its new and former homelands. The Muslim population ballooned in just fifty years from some tens of thousands to 16 or 17 million - approximately one out of every twenty-five Western Europeans - in 2010. During the formative decades of this settlement (1960-1990), Europeans permitted foreign governments and NGOs from the Islamic world to have a free hand in shaping Muslims' religious and political life. But persistent integration difficulties and sporadic terrorism persuaded European governments that their *laissez-faire* approach had far-reaching unintended consequences on host societies' way of life. (...) With projections showing continued demographic growth before levelling off at 25-30 million people (or 7-8%) in 2030, Western European governments have no choice but to look upon their Muslim minorities today as angels imprisoned in a block of marble: a community of new and future citizens whose contours are still being sculpted.<sup>17</sup>

Laurence's assessment of the European situation is quite interesting and in my view clearly highlights the challenges faced not only in Europe but also in many other societies around the world. According to Joe Mannath, "Multiculturalism and multi-religious settings are becoming the norm in most parts of the world."<sup>18</sup> Europe is no exception.

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in Mediterranean in 2015," (December, 2015) accessed on January 6, 2016, [www.ion.int](http://www.ion.int).

<sup>16</sup> Orlando Vito, *Attenzione ai Migranti e Missioni Salesiane nelle Società multiculturali D'Europa* (Roma: LAS, 2012) 32.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Laurence, *The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims, The State's Role in Minority Integration* (London: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Joe Mannath, "L'Accompagnamento Spirituale dei Giovani in Scenari Multireligiosi: Contesti, Possibilità, Limiti, Proposte," in *L'Accompagnamento Spirituale*, ed., Attard and Garcia, 213.

Multiculturalism should indeed be seen as a gift rather than a problem. While challenges remain numerous, multiculturalism has the potential to be a remarkable source of vitality and dynamism. It is something to be celebrated, as we can see in the US. In 2008, the election of Barack Obama (the first African American) as president of a white majority country, in my opinion, shows the willingness of a large number of Americans to get over past prejudices and to accept “the other.” While acknowledging that great steps have been made, still more progress needs to be made when it comes to the real integration of minorities into mainstream society. Multiculturalism is truly a gift when there is true reciprocal respect.

Offering spiritual formation and accompaniment in a multicultural and a religiously diverse Europe needs a new type of mentality and sensitivity. Without a doubt, it requires a different approach from that which functions in a largely mono-cultural or mono-religious environment. This can pose challenges and create tensions, even violence.<sup>19</sup> Like many other Church institutions in Europe, Salesian houses over the past few decades have experienced the influx of youth from other cultures and other faiths. The tenth and current successor of Don Bosco, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime,<sup>20</sup> highlights this new reality. While affirming that the Gospel is indeed good news for all humanity and that no one should be excluded from receiving it, he calls for pastoral prudence so as to creatively respond to this new situation.<sup>21</sup>

This reality cannot be overlooked, and a more creative response is called for. While acknowledging that there are no easy answers, nothing is gained by denying the reality, or by wanting to withdraw into a fantasy world of cultural, religious, linguistic or racial uniformity. The Salesian spiritual director within this context should be knowledgeable of other cultures, religious texts and spiritual writings of other faiths. There is much truth, beauty and wisdom in them. Reading these texts can open the heart and mind to a spiritual world larger than one’s familiar background. Such an appreciation of other religions can enable the spiritual director to perceive youth of other faiths not as a threat but as welcome members

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Steven Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf, “Introduction: Assessing the Backlash against Multiculturalism in Europe,” in *The Multiculturalism Backlash: European Discourses, Policies and Practices* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1-32.

<sup>20</sup> He was elected during the 27<sup>th</sup> Salesian General Chapter in 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Ángel Esposito, *Don Bosco Oggi, Intervista a Don Ángel Fernández Artime, Decimo Successore di Don Bosco* (Roma: LEV, 2015), 201.

within the Oratory with whom dialogue and sharing of common values can be a true process of spiritual growth.

#### 4. A Challenging Endeavour in a Secularised Europe

Concurrently with multiculturalism and religious diversity, Europe continues to face the widespread phenomenon of secularisation. Although there is this growing acceptance of the spiritual dimension, in our contemporary Europe the quest for spiritual direction and its fulfilment still faces various challenges. According to Ivan Platovnjak such challenges were already present during the period following the Second Vatican Council. He asserts that spiritual direction faced an apparent decline during this period.<sup>22</sup> Six years after the conclusion of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI in his Discourse to the IV Congress on Vocations in 1971 acknowledged this apparent crisis and called for a revitalisation in spiritual direction.<sup>23</sup> Pietro Brocardo in an article published in 1974 also speaks of this need for renewal.<sup>24</sup> One could perhaps attribute the motives for this crisis to the significant influence of modernity and the impact of secularisation, the scarcity of prepared spiritual directors at the time, and the lack of adequate cultural, theological and psychological preparation for the ministry particularly during the period leading up to the Vatican Council.

One observes that during this period, traditional approaches to spirituality and spiritual direction were viewed as practices which instilled childishness and reinforced gullibility. In the realm of philosophy, people like Marx perceived religion as a process of self-alienation, a block to liberation. Nietzsche famously proclaimed that God is dead and reduced religion to a service of mediocrity and fear. Freud saw religion as a form

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<sup>22</sup> Ivan Platovnjak, "La Direzione Spirituale Oggi, Lo Sviluppo della Sua Dottrina dal Vaticano II a Vita Consecrata (1962-1996)" in *Tesi Gregoriana Serie Spiritualità* (Roma: Gregoriana, 2001), 14-15. This idea seems to be supported by other authors who also offer reflection about this apparent crisis. Cf. Luigi Borriello, "Crisi e Rinnovamento" in *Rassegna di Teologia* 22 (1981), 306-313. Pietro Brocardo, "La Direzione Spirituale si Rinnova" in *Seminarium* 14 (1974), 157-172; *Il Rinnovamento degli Esercizi Spirituali. Simposio Salesiano Europeo*, 1975. Maurizio Costa, "Crisi della Direzione Spirituale," in *Direzione Spirituale e Discernimento* (Roma: Apostolato della Preghiera, 2009), 5-12. V. Caprioli, "Inchiesta sulla Direzione Spirituale," in *Rivista di Vita Spirituale* (1971), 296-302.

<sup>23</sup> "Occorre quest'istituzione, che va deperendo, e che invece dobbiamo tenere in onore." Paul VI, "Discorso al IV Congresso Mondiale per le Vocazioni (1971)," in *Vocazioni I* (1972), 16.

<sup>24</sup> Brocardo, "La Direzione Spirituale si Rinnova," 157-172.

of neurosis, an illusion, and under the influence of psychoanalytical thought the role of the father became increasingly questionable. Along with the term *Spiritual Direction*, new terminology began to emerge: *Spiritual Companionship*, *Spiritual Accompaniment*, and ancient terms such as *Soul Friend* were rediscovered. One can notice that in contemporary societies, dominated by secularisation, religious practice is unavoidably looked on with doubt.

Robert Schreiter in his study *Pathways to Evangelisation in the First World* refers to Europe in particular as the heartland of secularity. He notes that in Denmark, Sweden and Norway there is a phenomenon which he calls “believing without belonging.”<sup>25</sup> This implied that while people had their own personal beliefs in God, people in general exhibited a very limited sense of belonging or connecting to a Church. On the other hand he observes that in the traditional Catholic countries of Europe, secularity grew quickly and even produced hostility toward the religious institution. This hostility is particularly manifested in a desire for these countries to distinguish themselves from the institution, to be rid of its history and its link to their identities.<sup>26</sup>

Within this very hostile context, religion is often perceived as an obstacle to the autonomy and creativity of the person, and a manipulative misuse of influence.<sup>27</sup> This particular aspect and challenge needs to be constantly kept in mind by whoever engages in the ministry of spiritual accompaniment in the West today. The Western Church in Europe seems to be experiencing dramatic signs of decline and numerous contemporary spiritual authors have referred to this as the “greying and emptying” of the Church.<sup>28</sup> Much more than simply a reduction in church members, this is a shift of authority and the role of institution in the present day. This is evident in the increasing marginalisation of religion and the role of the Church in public life and policy making. Being pushed to the margins, faith

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<sup>25</sup> Robert Schreiter, “Pathways to Evangelisation in the First World,” in *Secularity and the Gospel, Being Missionaries to Our Children*, ed., Ronald Rolheiser (New York: Crossroads, 2006), 107. Cf. Grace Davie, “From Believing Without Belonging to Vicarious Religion. Understanding the Patterns of Religion in Modern Europe,” in *The Role of Religion in Modern Society* ed. Detlef Pollack and Daniel Olson (London: Routledge, 2007), 165-175.

<sup>26</sup> Schreiter, “Pathways to Evangelisation in the First World,” 107.

<sup>27</sup> Vito Orlando, “Ricerca di Senso nella Società Attuale e Spiritualità Salesiana,” in *La Spiritualità Salesiana in un Mondo che Cambia* 20, ed., Cosimo Semeraro (Roma: Sciascia Editore, 2003), 41.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Daniel O’Leary, *New Hearts, New Models: A Spirituality for Priests* (Dublin: Columbia Press, 1997), 22. Cf. Ronald Rolheiser, *Secularity and the Gospel, Being Missionaries to Our Children* (New York: Crossroads, 2006), 22.



is often considered merely a private choice that has no right to suggest anything to anyone else. Although the spiritual life touches the core of one's being yet contemporary man seems to be suffering from the "absence of dialogue, of spiritual communication with others."<sup>29</sup> Secularist culture promotes the idea that the voice of religion should be silenced, or at least demoted to the purely private sphere for "religion or its absence is largely a private matter."<sup>30</sup>

One observes that the once strong moral voice of the church seems to be gone in many parts of society and any attempt to lift that voice often leads to a cultural withdrawing, even a counterattack on the institutional Church.<sup>31</sup> In some cases the Church's response to this attack is one of waiting for a better age or a longing for an imagined golden era to reappear.

Furthermore, within the western context, one observes the rapidly developing phenomenon of the *Cultural Creatives*. This term was introduced by psychologist, Sherry Ruth Anderson and sociologist Paul H. Ray to describe a significant portion of the US and European population. According to Anderson and Ray

*Cultural Creatives* are people who are deeply spiritual without being dogmatically religious, and who enjoy technology and economic prosperity but not at the cost of the environment or community. They understand the world holistically and are deeply committed to non-ideological politics that emphasize practical solutions.<sup>32</sup>

Ray and Anderson claim to have found that 50 million adult Americans (slightly over one quarter of the adult population) can now be identified as belonging to this group. They also estimated that at the beginning of the third millennium there were an additional 80–90 million

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<sup>29</sup> Ignace Lepp, *The Ways of Friendship* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 13.

<sup>30</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Lorenzo Zucca, *A Secular Europe: Law and Religion in the European Constitutional Landscape*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3-22.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Paul H Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson, *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 million People are Changing the World*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), 2.

*Cultural Creatives* in Europe. This phenomenon is a significant reality that deserves attention.<sup>33</sup>

Earlier on in this research, reference was made to the secular phenomenon of individualism and its potential capacity to disable any spiritual development in children. A further observation worth noting is that individualism exerts a strong influence on the contemporary understanding of spirituality. Jack Finnegan offers valuable insight into this matter. He asserts that individualism could lead to dualistic thinking and actions, and he warns against any form of spiritual accompaniment that preserves or reinforces such tendencies. Finnegan asserts that:

In this light consider, for example, the splitting of inner from outer forms of life or of personal life from the socio-political. Consider processes that maintain and reinforce dualistic patterns of inequality, as well as gender, ethnic, and other power-based dualisms, the kind that at their worst make abuse and human trafficking possible.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> According to Anderson and Ray, the *cultural creatives* demonstrate “(1) a love of nature and deep caring about its preservation, and its natural balance; (2) strong awareness of the planet-wide issues like climate change and poverty and a desire to see more action on them; (3) being active themselves; (4) willingness to pay higher taxes or spend more money for goods if that money went to improving the environment; (5) emphasize the importance of developing and maintaining relationships; (6) emphasize the importance of helping others and developing their unique gifts; (7) volunteer with one or more good causes; (8) intense interest in spiritual and psychological development; (9) see spirituality as an important aspect of life, but worry about religious fundamentalism (10) desire equality for women and men in business, life and politics; (11) concern and support of the well-being of all women and children; (11) support spending more money on education, community development programs, and the support of a more ecologically sustainable future; (12) unhappy with the left and right in politics; (13) optimism towards the future; (14) involved in creating a new and better way of life; (15) concerned with big business and the means they use to generate profits, including destroying the environment and exploiting poorer countries.” Ibid., 12.

<sup>34</sup> Finnegan, “L’Accompagnamento Spirituale: Le Sfide del Postmoderno,” 185. “In questa luce si considerino, per esempio, la spaccatura fra forme di vita interne ed esterne o fra la vita personale e quella socio-politica. Si considerino i processi che mantengono e rinforzano i modelli dicotomici della disuguaglianza, così come i concetti di genere, etnia, e altre contrapposizioni legate al potere di coloro che, nella peggiore dell’ipotesi, rendono possibile l’abuso e il traffico di esseri umani.” (my translation).

Offering an authentic Salesian spiritual accompaniment in our contemporary society, undoubtedly entails a constant attentiveness to these dualistic patterns and a vigilance to the distortions and gaps which so often result from such thinking. Finnegan demonstrates exquisitely the dangers of such thinking.

Is it enough to focus on personal growth and wellbeing when so many people are trapped by oppressive systems and poverty? Is it enough to encourage inner peace and ignore a world full of conflict? We live in systemic worlds, in structures and civil and religious institutions. We live in cultures and societies open to the dark and to tragedy. None of us live in splendid isolation immune to what is happening in society and the world around us. What else does it mean when Don Bosco challenges all of us to become honest citizens and good Christians?<sup>35</sup>

In my view, these insights challenge anyone offering Salesian spiritual accompaniment in a secular world to truly understand Don Bosco's vision of Spiritual accompaniment and his concept of holiness. Such an outlook did not consider spiritual growth as a mere and false sense of inner peace and serenity. On the contrary, spiritual maturation was to be concretely expressed through the practical commitment of an honest citizen and a good Christian who positively contributed to society. Undoubtedly, rendering spiritual growth in young people to such an attractive, practical, reachable and tangible commitment within a secularised and consumeristic society is possibly the greatest challenge facing Salesian spiritual accompaniment today.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 85. "E facciamo abbastanza quando incoraggiamo la pace interna e ignoriamo un mondo pieno di conflitti? Viviamo in mondi strutturati, in sistemi civili e istituzioni religiose. Viviamo in culture e società aperte al buio e alla tragedia. Nessuno di noi vive in splendido isolamento, immune a ciò che succede nella società e nel mondo attorno a noi. Che cos'altro può voler dire, dunque, il fatto che Don Bosco ci sfida a diventare buoni cristiani e onesti cittadini?" (my translation).

## 5. Signs of Hope

In sharp contrast with Don Bosco's context, the majority of youth in contemporary Europe enjoy "an abundance of material goods"<sup>36</sup> where problems of food, housing, employment, education and social security seem not to be of primary concern for many. However, the consumer mentality can become for many an insatiable preoccupation that leaves one's spirit starving. Many young people, notwithstanding their social well-being, demonstrate an apathy for life. They appear fearful of the future; afraid of commitment; satisfied, but with no desire.

The right to privacy seems to cut young people off from meaningful communion with others. Especially in moral matters, privacy reaches a point where no guiding norms are acknowledged except those concerning the regulation of social life. Many young people know only a social climate that champions the "buzz" of new experiences, prompting the young to live their sexuality solely as a means of pleasure, to seek refuge in drugs and alcohol, or to have recourse to violence.

Many young people can no longer expect from their family a firm grounding for the affective needs or socio-cultural development, as they suffer the consequences of various forms of family breakdown. As stated earlier, many young people are sceptical of religious institutions that are (in fact or in appearance) inflexible, and which are not responsive to the innovations continually called for by daily life. Hence, many young people distance themselves from these institutions and live their religious experience as something internal and private, without any significant influence on their practical life. They are most comfortable far away from the Church, and take an eclectic approach to religion. For many, there is a weak connection between life and faith, especially in fields of morality, economy and politics. Furthermore in those youth who do believe, Van Kaam perceives a certain inability "to integrate their spiritual life with contemporary culture, art and science."<sup>37</sup>

But this is not the entire picture. At the beginning of the new millennium, the 25<sup>th</sup> Salesian General Chapter affirms that today's youth have a "greater sensitivity to what is sacred, have a clearer openness to the transcendent, and a commitment to a practical solidarity."<sup>38</sup> Many youth

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<sup>36</sup> Egidio Viganò et al., "Educating Young People to the Faith," Documents of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Salesian General Chapter in *ACG*, 333 (Roma: March 4- May 5, 1990), 18.

<sup>37</sup> Adrian Van Kaam, *In Search of Spiritual Identity* (Denville NJ, Dimension Books, 1975), 267.

<sup>38</sup> Pascual Chavez Villanueva et al., "The Salesian Community Today," Documents of the 25<sup>th</sup> Salesian General Chapter in *ACG*, 378 (Roma: February 24-April 22, 2002), n. 22.

demonstrate a critical conscience of civil and religious society, they are committed to spreading the awareness of the real possibilities of change, are sensitive to the economic disparity between north and south, and are committed to the struggle against every form of exploitation, sexism and racism. Given an opportunity, many young people prove that they are generous and have high ideals. With refreshing energy, more and more young people are committing themselves to the centrality of the individual as the beginning, subject and end of social institutions. They want a new way of building relationships inspired by peace and justice. They espouse many values linked with diversity, such as tolerance, ecumenism, respect for what is different, and renewed attention to cultural and spiritual realities beyond purely technical. They are thirsty and searching for God.<sup>39</sup>

Carolyn Gratton observes that this apparent thirst for God is evident in the revival of spiritual direction in the West. She claims: “We cannot go it alone (...) standing at the brink of the third millennium; people are seeking guidance in overwhelming numbers and for reasons beyond counting.”<sup>40</sup> Camil Ungureanu in his analysis of the post-modern European secular society claims that:

In the most secularized continent, Europe, religious and quasi-religious experiences remain important for many of its inhabitants, often in heterodox, transformed and disguised forms (...) In several European societies the interest in (individualized) spiritual-religious experiences has grown beyond established institutions.<sup>41</sup>

Timothy Radcliffe also gives an optimistic assessment of youth in Europe and affirms this growth beyond the established institutions, particularly in the younger generation. He asserts that young Europeans, in this period of post-modernism, are searching. They explore where they are (especially when they feel lost) in terms of their faith journey. He affirms their need to be able to ask questions in a safe context, which otherwise

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<sup>39</sup> For an assessment of youth realities cf. Viganò et al., “Educating Young People to the Faith,” 23<sup>rd</sup> Salesian General Chapter, articles 18, 21, 31, 39, 47, 54, 55 and 58.

<sup>40</sup> Gratton, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance*, ix.

<sup>41</sup> Camil Ungureanu, “Uses and Abuses of Post secularism,” in *Democracy, Law and Religious Pluralism in Europe, Secularism and Post-Secularism*, ed., Ferran Requejo and Camil Ungureanu (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1.

might be considered risky. Radcliffe claims that although Europe is secularised:

There is still a deep hunger for God. People do not only look to Christianity alone but to all religions. The young especially are interested in spirituality rather than doctrine. They are interested in God more than the Church. They are greatly preoccupied by death.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, without the spiritual dimension the view of the human person is limited and incomplete, and so are the responses to the larger questions of life. Various contemporary authors speak of humanity's uprootedness, one's search for meaning and guidance, one's desire for belonging. Among these, one can mention Janet Ruffing who claims:

The complexities of contemporary life, with its peculiar challenges to faith, and the breath of choices Christians face daily lead many to seek individual guidance and support in their ongoing life of intimacy with God and discernment about their responses to this relationship in the daily concerns of life and discipleship.<sup>43</sup>

Charles Taylor debates that although Western modernity has undermined and rendered unmaintainable previous forms of religious life,

new forms have sprung up. (...) The salient feature of Western societies is not so much a decline of religious faith and practice (...) but rather a mutual fragilization of different religious positions, as well as of the outlooks both of belief and unbelief.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Timothy Radcliffe, *The Contribution of Christianity to the Future of Europe*, (May 2, 2005) accessed on March 31, 2014, <http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=11878>.

<sup>43</sup> Janet Ruffing, *Spiritual Direction - Beyond the Beginnings* (London: St Paul's, 2000), 1.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 594-595.

Challenged with the difficulties of this secular culture highlighted earlier on, Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to the island of Malta in 2010 declared that:

Today's culture, like every culture, promotes ideas and values that are sometimes at variance with those lived and preached by our Lord Jesus Christ. Often they are presented with great persuasive power, reinforced by the media and by social pressure from groups hostile to the Christian faith.<sup>45</sup>

On another occasion, in his discourse on religious freedom, Pope Benedict XVI affirms:

Without the acknowledgement of his spiritual being, without openness to the transcendent, the human person withdraws within himself, fails to find answers to the heart's deepest question about life's meaning.<sup>46</sup>

Carolyn Gratton while referring to this profoundly changed society offers insight into the benefits a person could reap from solving such questions. She asserts that:

Questions about meaning, if sincere, are always small openings to transcendence especially when sincerely acknowledged and developed patiently (with the help of a spiritual companion) towards deeper understanding. Moreover, today, many have lost respect for, and indeed lost contact with, their roots, including their faith and religious traditions. As a result some people feel rootless and many are searching for a sense of belonging. The Christian tradition, if entered deeply and faithfully, can provide a story great

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<sup>45</sup> Benedict XVI, "The Noble Vocation of Love and Service: Address to Youths at Valletta Waterfront," in *The Times of Malta* (April 19, 2010) 23.

<sup>46</sup> Benedict XVI, *Religious Freedom – The Path to Peace: Message on the World Day of Peace* (January 1, 2011) accessed on March 31, 2014, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20101208\\_xliv-world-day-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20101208_xliv-world-day-peace_en.html).

enough to provide meaning and address that immense inner longing. In this respect, only a companion who takes into account this post-modern context can be of much help in the process of spiritual accompaniment.<sup>47</sup>

These few lines not only demonstrate the importance of sincerity and patience in the spiritual direction process, but also emphasizes the spiritual director's role in evaluating everything within the present context.

## 6. Conclusion

Don Bosco, in his day, believed that all youth have desires and aspirations that can be honoured only when the young "person's spiritual capacity is taken seriously."<sup>48</sup> Within all human beings there is a deep desire to love, to be loved, and to move towards union with the source of all love. It is this that makes human beings "spiritual" by nature. Hence, to be human is ultimately to be spiritual.<sup>49</sup>

This is why Don Bosco aimed at forming good Christians who would consequently be honest citizens. In the process he accompanied youth in their journey to encounter God and enabled them to find some valuable solutions to those "all-important questions."<sup>50</sup> This aspect of forming young people into good Christians and honest citizens is, according to former Salesian Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chavez, an aspect which the Salesian family needs to relaunch "in a world so profoundly changed from the 1800s."<sup>51</sup>

Pascual Chavez emphasizes this required sensitivity to the new youth situation. He affirms that:

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<sup>47</sup> Gratton, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance*, 27.

<sup>48</sup> Gratton, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Christian spirituality is not concerned with just the spiritual aspect of the person but with the integration of the various aspects of the whole person. The human dimension has always been considered as an integral part of spiritual growth. Cf. Ivan Platovnjak, *La Direzione Spirituale Oggi. Lo Sviluppo Della Sua Dottrina dal Vaticano II a Vita Consacrata (1962-1996)* (Roma: Gregoriana, 2001), 404.

<sup>50</sup> "The all-important questions have to do with love, responsibility, spirituality, awareness." Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, 175.

<sup>51</sup> Pascual Chavez Villanueva, "Like Don Bosco the Educator We Offer Young People the Gospel of Joy through a Pedagogy of Kindness, Strenna 2013," in *ACG*, 415 (Roma: 2013), 12.



Everything associated with society and the Church has changed profoundly. Young people are living according to new values and have new criteria for their lives which constitute a culture that really is new; the traditional links in the chain for the transmission of culture and religion (the family, the school and the Church) have become weakened and are often in crisis.<sup>52</sup>

Pascual Chavez emphasises the need of all those involved in the spiritual accompaniment of the young to develop a profound understanding of youth culture and their situation. The claims made here about “weakened traditional links” with the family, school and the church, suggests that Salesian spiritual companions today perhaps need to re-evaluate the traditional school and oratory settings and maybe even recreate new set-ups in which the optimum environments conducive to spiritual growth could occur.

Being in touch with youth culture is pivotal in Salesian spiritual companionship. Without a doubt, a sincere Salesian spiritual direction which is realistically engaged with youth will play a significant and precious role in youth formation today. One cannot interest and influence the young without understanding their pain and without credible efforts to engage with young people.

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<sup>52</sup> Pascual Chavez Villanueva, “Salesian Youth Ministry,” in *ACG*, 407 (Roma: 2010), 12.

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# BEING A GUIDE AND COMPANION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY

*by Carlo Loots*

## 1. Introduction

Every era and culture faces the task of bringing Don Bosco's legacy, his preventive system, up to date. It seems that in the Salesian world today, 'accompanying young people' is the new way of describing the core of the preventive system.<sup>1</sup> However, if accompanying young people is to be congruent with Don Bosco's *Da mihi animas*, an integral and integrative approach to accompaniment is necessary. This means that the young person under guidance should be given attention as completely as possible, in all dimensions: physical, psychological, relational, functional, spiritual. This 'personal accompaniment' is about the whole person and about the

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<sup>1</sup> SCHAUMONT, Colette, LOOTS, C., (Red.), *Opvoeden met Don Bosco als gids en tochtgenoot*, Brussel, Don Bosco Centrale, 2015; ATTARD, F., GARCIA, M.A., *Spiritual accompaniment. An educational and spiritual journey with young people in the way of Don Bosco*, Bolton, Don Bosco Publications, 2018; FERNANDEZ ARTIME, A., 'Lord, give me this water' (John 4:15). Let us cultivate the art of listening and of accompaniment, in *Acts of the General Council of the Salesian Society of St. John Bosco*, 100(2018)426, Roma, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 2018; GRECH, L., *Accompanying Youth in a Quest for Meaning*, Bolton, Don Bosco Publications, 2019.

wholeness of that person, about his personal development and the (re)integration of all aspects of life.<sup>2</sup>

It is good to know that there is a wide range of accompaniment models, from occasional, spontaneous conversations to a series of meetings planned systematically through a formal agreement.

The important thing is that the person being accompanied finds and receives the form of accompaniment that he or she needs most at a particular moment in life and in the given circumstances.

In this article we will focus on the person of the accompanier.<sup>3</sup> He himself is the main instrument of accompaniment. Then, we will outline what the accompanier should (or should not) do or be. We will look at some basic attitudes of the accompanier, will point out some of the pitfalls that he or she can fall into and some myths that need to be debunked. We will do this with particular attention to the ethical dimension of accompanying young people.<sup>4</sup>

By focusing on formal and systematised forms of personal guidance, it is possible to formulate things in all their sharpness.

## **2. What an accompanier does or does not do**

The accompanier has his or her own role to play, taking on their own tasks and responsibilities in accordance with the goal of accompaniment:

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<sup>2</sup> It is not by chance that the term ‘personal accompaniment’ is used in this contribution. Depending on the question, accompaniment may (temporarily) focus more explicitly on one of these aspects of life. But this facet is never isolated from the rest of the person. It comes to the fore, without losing sight of the other aspects. This also suggests that we have questions about certain forms of ‘spiritual guidance’ which isolate faith too much.

<sup>3</sup> Inspiring publications were: STEVENS, J., *Gezien en beluisterd worden heelt de mens. Over persoonlijke begeleiding*, Antwerpen, Garant, 2003; STEVENS, J., HERREBOSCH, E., VANDENHOECK, Anne, *Praktijkbegeleiding van pastores met het oog op kwaliteit van werk en leven*, Antwerpen, Halewijn, 2006; LEIJSEN, Mia, *Gids beroepsethiek. Waarden, rechten en plichten in psychotherapie en hulpverlening*, Leuven, Acco, 2011; ATTARD, F., GARCIA, M.A., *Spiritual accompaniment. An educational and spiritual journey with young people in the way of Don Bosco*, Bolton, Don Bosco Publications, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> The whole forms a framework that gives direction rather than a set of specific rules of conduct. Guides and companions of young people must continue to think for themselves and make their own judgements. This is where ethical action begins.



the development and wellbeing of the person being accompanied. Guidance is meaningful only to the extent that it makes the person being guided more human. In this general objective of accompaniment, several sub-aspects can be distinguished. (1) The persons accompanied become more whole and come to some reconciliation with themselves, their life history, their potential and their limitations. (2) The individual being guided will be able to relate better to their surroundings: people and things, tasks and challenges, prevailing values and norms, traditions and current developments, etc. (3) Their personal life dynamics will be allowed to continue, and will be supported and strengthened. (4) They come to a personal recognition of the secret of their life and of all that exists.<sup>5</sup>

This goal is the touchstone for the work of the person who accompanies. It is what they should do, the way in which it is best done, and they will always be tested against it.

The most essential part of accompaniment is the meeting of two unique, equal human beings. It is precisely in this human contact that the young person experiences the basic attitude of the accompanier: 'You are worthwhile to me' and 'I believe that you too have a meaningful future.' It is about accepting the other as a human being in development.

In fact the accompanier makes a 'relationship offer', one in which the whole person and the necessary expertise is committed.<sup>6</sup> The one accompanying is there for the person being accompanied.

The guiding relationship is a temporary one in principle. Partners and friends have long-standing relationships, but the accompaniment relationship should be for a specified period of time.

The guiding relationship, then, must be characterised as a functional cooperative relationship. The accompaniment relationship is not an end in itself. It is entered into 'in function of' the optimal development and the greatest possible wellbeing of the person being accompanied.<sup>7</sup> It is always

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<sup>5</sup> Personal guidance is essentially different from therapy, even though 'therapeutic' effects are often undeniable. Counselling tends to be developmental; therapy is complaint-oriented.

<sup>6</sup> See: STEVENS, J., HERREBOSCH, E., VANDENHOECK, Anne, *Praktijkbegeleiding van pastores met het oog op kwaliteit van werk en leven*, Antwerpen, Halewijn, 2006, 74-79.

<sup>7</sup> Out of concern for this 'functionality', the guide will also restrain his curiosity. He does not need information about the person being accompanied and his situation that is not relevant to the accompaniment. Under no circumstances will he ask for such information. See: STEVENS, J., HERREBOSCH, E., VANDENHOECK, Anne, *Op. Cit.*, 280-282.

an asymmetrical relationship in which one person asks for guidance and the other tries to respond to that request as responsibly as possible with a view to the development of the person being guided.

Finally, the relationship between the accompanier and the person being guided is one of trust. Entrusting oneself freely to the accompanier presupposes a fundamental trust on the part of the person being accompanied. In turn, the guide must have a deep respect for the story of the person being accompanied. In this way, a climate of safety is created in which the accompanied person gradually comes to see their own reality better and to deal with it in a more satisfactory way.

More than any technique, it is the personal authentic presence of the guide that makes the difference for the young person. If the young person does not experience this as such, they will understandably break off the guidance.

Of course, it is not enough that the accompanier is a ‘good person’, psychologically healthy, with the necessary social skills, an open mind and the necessary sense of reality, with a lot of life experience and wisdom. Accompaniment also requires expertise. Here we distinguish three components, namely: thoroughly tested insights, practised skills and clear ethical standards. These are, of course, completely intertwined.

Anyone who regularly accompanies others must at least be able to explain their views on the subject to anyone who may be interested. In other words, they will have developed their own vision on becoming human, on relationships and communication, on accompaniment. This vision is not only based on their experience, but has been substantiated by a systematic study of relevant literature.

A guide must also possess a number of practical skills. They need to be able to enter into a relationship of cooperation and trust with very different people, to be able to take up this relationship again and again, and to be able to carefully phase it out and end it in time.

Structuring the accompaniment process is also part of the job. And, of course, listening and speaking ‘as an accompanier’.

This means consciously and selectively influencing (i.e. taking into account the goal of the accompaniment and the personality of the person being accompanied) through supportive, affirming, but also confrontational interventions that are offered opportunely and in the appropriate measure. These and other skills can be acquired through

practice, both in the practice of accompaniment itself and in the context of formation and training.

An accompanier will provide the greatest possible clarity and security for the person being accompanied. This is related to all of the above, but also to reliability on an ethical level. Genuine care for the person being accompanied implies personal **integrity**, which is always evident in ethical correctness.<sup>8</sup> The person accompanied must know what they may expect in this respect and be able to trust the accompanier completely.

The accompanied individual tries to express (fragments of) his or her story through conversation with the accompanier. It is precisely this work of articulation that proves to be enlightening and liberating. The one accompanying is present as authentically, respectfully and as open-mindedly as possible, listens, and puts in the 'right word' at the most appropriate moment so that the accompanied individual comes to a further recognition of who they are and what are the light and shadow aspects of their life.<sup>9</sup> The non-verbal dimension must not be lost sight of in all this. After all, all behaviour is communication.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the accompanier must be a good observer, someone with a trained ear and eye, and with a formed intuition.

Accompanying a young person is always a **unique event**.<sup>11</sup> An accompanier creates something new every time. This evokes surprise and

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<sup>8</sup> Many values are associated with the concept of integrity: honesty, fairness, reliability, incorruptibility, love of truth. Integrity also implies an inner component: 'knowing the truth about oneself'. This self-knowledge includes the purification of one's own motives and the willingness to explore one's own deeper motivations and unconscious mechanisms that may permeate the accompaniment work. The boundary between the accompanied person's interests and the self-interests of the accompanier is sometimes blurred. The accompanier's blind spots can be projected onto the accompanied person. Cf. LEIJSEN, Mia, *Gids beroepsethiek. Waarden, rechten en plichten in psychotherapie en hulpverlening*, Leuven, Acco, 2011, 79-104.

<sup>9</sup> See in this context: MONBOURQUETTE, J., *Apprivoiser son ombre. Le côté mal aimé de soi*, Novalis Publishing, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> See in this context: WATZLAWICK, P., BEAVIN J.H., JACKSON, D.D., *Pragmatics of human communications*, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1967.

<sup>11</sup> Every human being we meet - man or woman, child or adult, intellectual or illiterate, immigrant or native, in the position of superiority or inferiority ... - is a unique person. There is the concrete physical appearance of this fellow human being; his or her own life history and their particular living environment with its typical language and customs; their possibilities and limitations of head, heart and hands; their opinions, value scale, beliefs and lack of such; their successes and

often admiration at the same time. Accompaniers realise very well that they are not in full control of the event. It transcends them. Basically, they are a servant. A true guide and accompanier is sensitive to the deep mystery of human existence. The openness and sensitivity to this is therefore an essential element of the competence of a personal accompanier.

Now that it is clear what the accompanier should and can do, it is also clear at the same time what this person should not do in principle.

In any case, the accompanier does not aim to change (the behaviour of) the one being accompanied in a particularly desired direction. On the contrary, their influencing presence and interventions serve the one being accompanied on the path that they themselves wish to follow.

Nor does the accompanier offer the person being accompanied ‘good advice’ whether asked for or not. On the contrary, they allow the person to discover their own way (out).

Nor is the accompanier so naive as to spontaneously add their own story to that of the young person. The important thing is that the person being accompanied has the opportunity to tell their story and to develop.

It can safely be assumed that the person being accompanied is not served by theoretical considerations, however valid they may be in themselves, or by moralising.

The above principles are formulated in absolute terms. Nuance is therefore appropriate. Good advice, for example, may be relevant and welcome at a certain point, if that is what the person being accompanied is really asking for. A short theoretical clarification can sometimes place the experience of the guided person in a meaningful framework. Personal accompaniment is not a straitjacket. There is also a place for playfulness and humour.

In fact, much is possible, as long as the purpose and nature of the accompaniment is maintained. The accompanier may be expected to guard this carefully.

The accompanier obviously makes the greatest effort during the dialogue itself, but also prepares the meeting in his or her own way and lets go of it again. In any case, they make sure that they are fit (e.g. not too

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failures in the family context and professional sphere ... We recognize in them a subject with their own concretely situated freedom and responsibility, with their own life project. See: STEVENS, J., *In gesprek met een ander*, Averbode, Altiora, 1990, 101-102.

tired), that they make themselves mentally free enough in advance, that they are aware of their own value scale ... In this way, they adjust to the specific nature of the accompaniment process. Moreover, if they have previously met the person being accompanied, they now prepare to meet this person as an accompanier.

At the end of the meeting, they take the necessary distance from it. Taking a few notes for oneself can help to give the experience a place. They serve the accompanier's own process of coping, possibly also learning. They are also useful for keeping certain things in mind for the next meeting.

### **3. Ethical diligence as a basic attitude of the accompanier**

Guiding and accompanying young people is something that requires commitment. In addition to theoretical, methodological and practical issues that arise, there are also ethical questions that require reflection, consideration, choice and justification. After all, ethical aspects are explicitly or at least implicitly linked to every (inter)human action. In the context of this article, we will consider four basic ethical attitudes that apply to the accompanier. The first basic attitude concerns the fundamental respect due to the person being accompanied from the accompanier. This thorough respect for the one being accompanied takes concrete form in the recognition of the young person's autonomy and self-determination. Adequate information and clear agreements, as well as the guarantee of privacy are two further basic attitudes that are expressions of the ethical diligence that should characterise the accompanying process.

#### *A foundation of recognition and respect*

The work of accompaniment stands or falls with the recognition of the person being accompanied as a person and with the deep respect that the accompanier has for that person. This means: respect for what the accompanied person is going through and what they have experienced, for the way they live, for what they can and cannot (yet) do, for the story they tell at any given moment, for the mystery of their being that can never be fully expressed. It is always about a fellow human being, fundamentally equal to the accompanier and in many respects similar but at the same time different, unique.

Showing respect means seeing and appreciating someone as a person, regardless of their merits or mistakes, regardless of the difficult

situation they find themselves in. Every ‘human being’ deserves this unconditional respect.<sup>12</sup> No avoidable harm should be done to them. On the contrary, every available opportunity must be given for their personal development. The person being accompanied is seen and listened to as he or she is, here and now. This is precisely what heals a person the most. Judgement, let alone condemnation, is suspended. This *unconditional acceptance* may not, however, be interpreted as approval of everything the person being accompanied does or does not do.

In this context, we should mention *empathy*, in which the accompanier consciously sets aside their own frame of reference in order to observe and feel with the frame of reference of the person being accompanied. They try to understand from within how the one being accompanied experiences themselves in their world and how they attempt to express themselves at this moment. This willingness to put oneself in the other person’s shoes does not mean that the accompanier must be completely absorbed in this. It is important for them to be themselves and stay with their own experience and perception. By being close yet maintaining distance, this attitude offers the person being accompanied opportunities for growth.

Next to and linked to unconditional acceptance and empathy is *authenticity* as a basic attitude. They belong together.<sup>13</sup> Those who are being accompanied do not need a neutral screen or a neutral talking point, but they do need authentic human presence. An accompanier is someone who is in a personal way there for the person being guided, and who realises at all times that this is the way to influence the person being accompanied. On the other hand, it is of the utmost importance that the accompanier has learned to register what the person being accompanied touches and moves in him or her, and also know how to deal with it. What should be shared or not? At what time? In what way? The main criteria to be considered are the personal development of the person being accompanied and the quality of the accompanying relationship. The accompanier is therefore never completely transparent. It is a case of practising selective authenticity,<sup>14</sup> of

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. LEIJSEN, Mia, *Gids beroepsethiek. Waarden, rechten en plichten in psychotherapie en hulpverlening*, Leuven, Acco, 2011, 21-25.

<sup>13</sup> See: LEIJSEN, Mia, *Gids voor gesprekstherapie*, Utrecht, De Tijdstroom, 1995, 34-72.

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Cohn speaks of ‘selective authenticity’ to indicate that you have to: (1) select and (2) make sure that what you say is congruent with what you experience internally. See: COHN, Ruth, *Von der Psychoanalyse zur themenzentrierten Interaktion*, Stuttgart, Ernst Klett Verlag, 1975, 125.

only communicating what is useful in the context of the accompaniment at that moment.

These basic attitudes must have been largely developed by the accompanier. They are the fruit of practice and experience, of reflection and contemplation. They are never definitively acquired, but need to be constantly nurtured and refined with dedication.

Respect is shown, first and foremost, by everyday actions, such as keeping appointments; the use of language appropriate to the one being accompanied; not asking unnecessarily probing questions if there are no clear reasons for doing so; the way in which the importance of the trusting relationship is explained to curious third parties – who may often have good intentions; the care with which notes are kept ...

### *Right to self-determination*

Every human being has inalienable freedoms and responsibilities. They decide for themselves as much as possible in matters that concern them and their situation. They have the right to self-determination.<sup>15</sup> This right to self-determination – properly understood – must be respected at any cost.<sup>16</sup>

Respect for the right to self-determination applies in a special way to personal accompaniment. Accompaniment is first and foremost the business of the person being accompanied. They decide on matters concerning their wellbeing and optimal development. They choose to be accompanied, decide what to bring up during the conversation, and it is they who decide what they will do with it afterwards.

At the same time, by asking for guidance, the individual becomes dependent on someone else, wanting to be influenced by the accompanier in a targeted way. However, the influence that the accompanier inevitably exerts on the individual is of a process rather than a content-related nature.

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<sup>15</sup> Under normal circumstances, you do not take over control of another person's life. If, in crisis situations or periods, individuals are unable to exercise that right, then it is given back to them as soon as it is possible and responsible to do so. See: LEIJSEN, Mia, *Gids beroepsethiek. Waarden, rechten en plichten in psychotherapie en hulpverlening*, Leuven, Acco, 2011, 64-77.

<sup>16</sup> However, in this day and age, where individuals take great freedom of choice in almost all areas of life for granted, this right to self-determination needs to be properly understood. An absolute interpretation ignores the reality that a person lives only in relation to others.

It is not up to the accompanier to say what the person being guided should do during or outside the session.<sup>17</sup> Refraining from doing so requires constant attention since everyone is tempted to do so anyway, based on their own opinions and convictions. This is where restraint is expected from the guide, who is only a temporary companion for the one being accompanied. This person is called to (re)find and follow their personal path. The accompanier is at the service of the one being accompanied in their personal exploration.

Respect for the self-determination of the accompanied person, their autonomy, removes guidance from the sphere of abuse of power and manipulation and leads to their emancipation.

### *Providing information and making agreements*

Out of respect for those being accompanied, their inalienable autonomy and their right to self-determination, those who provide accompaniment have the duty to inform them, in understandable terms, how they see personal accompaniment: its purpose, their methodological approach, the space they are given, the boundaries they do not want to cross, the respective roles of the person being accompanied and of the accompanier, their basic philosophy ...<sup>18</sup>

Informing the accompanied person appropriately is necessary but not sufficient. Another necessary condition for fruitful accompaniment is the establishment of clear agreements. These are usually established in an initial exploratory conversation. The accompanier takes the lead. A counselling contract is concluded more or less explicitly. People then know what to expect from each other and how they will work together towards the goals of accompaniment, especially if the necessary agreements are also made regarding the period of time the accompaniment will run for, the frequency of meetings, their duration, and so on. This agreement is at the

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ruth Cohn's statement: 'Giving less than you need is theft, giving more is murder'. COHN, Ruth, *Living-learning encounters: the theme-centered interactional method*, in BANK, L., GOTTSEGEN, G., GOTTSEGEN, M., (Eds.), *Confrontations*, New York, Macmillan, 1971, 270.

<sup>18</sup> In the context of therapy, there are increasing calls to inform the client explicitly about the therapist's personal value orientation, especially concerning religion and sensitive moral issues such as sexuality. After all, in a positive working alliance the client increasingly adopts the values of the therapist. See: LEIJSEN, Mia, *Gids beroepsethiek. Waarden, rechten en plichten in psychotherapie en hulpverlening*, Leuven, Acco, 2011, 26-27.



same time an ethical commitment: each of the parties undertakes to do their part in the accompaniment to the best of their ability.

Such a ‘contract’ provides clarity, brings structure and offers security. For the person being accompanied, such a framework has the important effect of reducing unnecessary and disabling uncertainty and insecurity. But there is more: formalised agreements also introduce the reality principle into the accompaniment. Real development is only possible when those being accompanied feel that they are accepted together with their wishes and desires, and at the same time are confronted with boundaries and restrictions. Wrestling with inevitable limitations and the frustrations necessarily associated with this, is just as fundamental to growth as is the deep respect for everything going on within.<sup>19</sup> A dedicated guide and accompanier handles this with care and patience. They know that by doing so, they increase the chances of learning, growth and integration for the person being accompanied.

### *Duty of confidentiality*

The accompanier’s duty of confidentiality is also a way of acknowledging and respecting the one being guided, especially his or her privacy.<sup>20</sup> In principle, the accompanier will not tell third parties what the person being accompanied reveals within the confidentiality of the accompaniment. The accompanier is bound to secrecy, an obligation which extends beyond the period of accompaniment and even beyond the death of the one being accompanied.<sup>21</sup> Because of the relationship of trust that underlies the accompanying process, the accompanier is privileged to share the ups and downs of the person being accompanied. To talk freely about information obtained in the accompanying process is a breach of trust and means that the nature of the accompaniment relationship has not been properly appreciated. Secrecy is the cornerstone of a relationship of trust.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See: BIXLER, R.H., *Limits are therapy*, in *Journal of consulting psychology* 13(1949) 1-11.

<sup>20</sup> See: LEIJSEN, Mia, *Gids beroepsethiek. Waarden, rechten en plichten in psychotherapie en hulpverlening*, Leuven, Acco, 2011, 42-64.

<sup>21</sup> See: LEIJSEN, Mia, *Gids beroepsethiek. Waarden, rechten en plichten in psychotherapie en hulpverlening*, Leuven, Acco, 2011, 57-59.

<sup>22</sup> Knowing about confidential matters gives additional power, which could be used to blackmail the one being accompanied. This is why there are laws to protect secrecy and privacy, and why accompaniers can be called to account when they are careless with confidential information.

It may happen that the accompanier is asked or even pressured, either by the one being accompanied or by their surroundings, to disclose something to third parties. This is not to be done lightly, because the duty of confidentiality is sacred. If, exceptionally, something is to be revealed, (what exactly, and how) this will need to be discussed thoroughly with the accompanied person, and agreed upon.

#### **4. Vigilance required**

Accompanying young people is a delicate matter. It requires not only great dedication and expertise from the accompanier, but also the necessary alertness and vigilance.

##### *Pick up stitches*

Since nothing human is alien to an accompanier, such a person can drop stitches at any moment. It is up to them to pick them up again as quickly and as well as possible. For example, it was not made sufficiently clear to the person being accompanied how personal accompaniment is to be understood and what can therefore be expected of it. Or the agreements made at the beginning are not clear and strict enough. Or again, at certain moments, the very nature of the accompanying relationship is overlooked and the inequality of roles is disregarded. Or too much good advice is given, resulting in theorizing or moralizing. The accompanier may have placed themselves too much or too little in the shoes of the person being accompanied, or keeps little or too much distance. Guidance becomes friendship unnoticed ...

##### *Cui bono – to whom is it of benefit?*

It is clear that the accompanier serves the development of the person being accompanied. Of course, there is nothing to stop them enjoying this kind of work and deriving job satisfaction from it. However, there are also some pitfalls that are best avoided.

For example, when the accompanier starts to identify strongly with the person being accompanied and through the experience of the person being accompanied begins to deal with his or her own issues and personal problems.

The accompanier can also 'spare' the person being accompanied, so to speak, by not really going into what is being said or by refraining from confrontation that would be appropriate. It is possible that at that moment something is touched that is sensitive for the accompanier him or herself, that they cannot (yet) face up to or want to face up to, that they are not (yet) reconciled to. Who then is to be spared, if necessary?

The line between the interests of the person being accompanied and the self-interest of the accompanier is sometimes blurred and many of the accompanier's blind spots can be projected onto the one being accompanied. For this reason, accompaniers must be prepared to reflect again and again on how they function: to dare to face openly and honestly what is going on in their inner world, to explore their deeper motivations in order to purify them.

The accompanier's contribution during the accompaniment process should always be characterised by considered selectivity. This involves not simply confiding personal matters to the person being accompanied. And when personal information is shared, it is always with a view to the wellbeing of the one being accompanied (the aim of all accompaniment) and/or the quality of the accompaniment relationship. Selective openness is a concrete form of respect for the person being accompanied.

When the person being accompanied turns to the accompanier with real ethical or philosophical questions, the latter is careful not to formulate an answer on the basis of personal ethical, political or religious convictions. Instead, the accompanier will help the person to make their own choices based on their convictions, and to grow towards independent functioning. In this way, the accompanier respects the freedom and responsibility of the person being accompanied and their right to self-determination.

In any healthy relationship, the people involved seek an optimal dose of closeness and distance that is appropriate for them at this moment and in this context. It is about the closeness needed to understand the other and to empathise with their experiences. This includes distance that gives the other person space. This applies in full to the accompaniment relationship. After all, its primary aim is to serve the person being accompanied in their development. In concrete terms, this means, for example, that an expression of tenderness, in words and/or gestures, may be appropriate in the accompaniment.<sup>23</sup> But this is not done naively or thoughtlessly,

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<sup>23</sup> The prohibition of sexual contact has also inspired some conscientious clinicians to the far-reaching conclusion that all touch in therapy should be avoided. However, there is sufficient scientific evidence that non-sexual touching benefits the client and is ethical. See: LEIJSEN, Mia, *Gids beroepsethiek. Waarden*,

certainly not on the part of the accompanier. What is of the utmost importance is the meaning that the initiator (in this case the person being accompanied or the accompanier) gives to it on the one hand, and the meaning that the other person (presumably, possibly, probably) derives from it on the other. In any case, the accompanying relationship will always be characterised by a well-considered and fundamentally debatable optimum of distance and proximity.

Against the background of the rumours, testimonies and figures that are circulating today about sexual abuse in pastoral relationships, care and accompaniment, the issue of ‘sexuality and personal accompaniment’ deserves extra attention.<sup>24</sup> There are two aspects to this: (1) The experience of sexuality as part of the history of the person being accompanied and (2) the experience of sexuality in accompaniment itself. When the person being accompanied brings up their experience with sexuality, the accompanier deals with it in the same way as with other aspects that can be brought up.<sup>25</sup> In other words, they listen with as little inhibition as possible and support the one being accompanied in their expression, with the intention that this will lead to greater clarity and personal integration.

The other aspect is the experience of sexuality within the accompaniment itself. Of course, sexual feelings, desires and fantasies may be awakened both by the accompanier and the person being accompanied. The one being accompanied is free to express these feelings to their accompanier as feelings of gratitude or annoyance that experienced at a certain point in the accompaniment. And an accompanier who is prepared for the task knows how to handle this in a respectful and purposeful way. This is actually quite normal (I am not saying easy) in counselling. The question of whether or not the accompanier should reveal something of their own experience in this regard is, in principle, just as easy to answer. The most important criterion is and remains that this really serves the person being accompanied.

So far we have been talking about the articulation of sexual experience. It is something else to experience it *de facto*. An accompanier who goes along with the person being accompanied or who encourages it is profoundly mistaken. Here, a boundary – so essential to accompaniment

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*rechten en plichten in psychotherapie en hulpverlening*, Leuven, Acco, 2011, 110-116.

<sup>24</sup> See: STEVENS, J., *Gezien en beluisterd worden heelt de mens. Over persoonlijke begeleiding*, Antwerpen, Garant, 2003, 101-102.

<sup>25</sup> Among other things, the accompanier will need to know themselves well, including their own sexual orientation, view of gender issues, attitude to the opposite sex, their own norms of sexuality, possibly their own frustrations in that area.

– is clearly crossed.<sup>26</sup> Any accompanier worthy of the name should not be led to believe that such behaviour is desirable or necessary for the accompanying process. Sexual experience and accompaniment simply cannot go hand in hand.<sup>27</sup> This is a fixed rule in counselling and psychotherapy.<sup>28</sup> This position has nothing to do with a puritanical attitude. The specific purpose and nature of the guidance relationship and dialogue do not allow for such a boundary to be crossed. The person being accompanied is always the victim.

## 5. Some myths debunked

Some demythologising remarks are appropriate to the accompanier's dedication to 'the cause of the person being accompanied'. This is out of concern for the guide himself, but also with a view to the wellbeing of the person being accompanied. The main question always remains: what really serves the latter? Surely not limitless availability, unlimited expertise or boundless sense of responsibility on the part of the accompanier.<sup>29</sup>

### *Limiting availability*

An accompanier who does not clearly demarcate their availability will not only have scheduling problems overall, but will also run out of

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<sup>26</sup> Sexual abuse in the professional relationship can be placed on a continuum ranging from subtle abuse, in which the one being accompanied has to meet the emotional needs of the accompanier, to a sexual atmosphere of veiled innuendo, seductive behaviour, lingering sexual fantasies, to more overt sexual abuse. In practice, sexual abuse usually involves a gradual shift on that continuum. See: LEIJSEN, Mia, *Gids beroepsethiek. Waarden, rechten en plichten in psychotherapie en hulpverlening*, Leuven, Acco, 2011, 105.

<sup>27</sup> Within a relationship, healthy sexuality presupposes equal partners who mutually consent. A professional relationship is an asymmetrical relationship, in which the client is in a more dependent and vulnerable position. In this context, sexual acts become expressions of abuse of power, of exploitation of blind spots and of incorrect handling of transference. See: LEIJSEN, Mia, *Gids beroepsethiek. Waarden, rechten en plichten in psychotherapie en hulpverlening*, Leuven, Acco, 2011, 105-110.

<sup>28</sup> However, this does not mean that every psychotherapist follows this rule in practice. This is clear from research carried out on the subject. See: VAN DETH, R., *#MeToo onder therapeuten en counsellors*, in *PsychoSociaal Digitaal* (2018)1 31-34.

<sup>29</sup> See: STEVENS, J., *Gezien en beluisterd worden heelt de mens. Over persoonlijke begeleiding*, Antwerpen, Garant, 2003, 103-106.

things to say. Worst of all, he or she may be convinced that they are really helping the person being accompanied. This is a pitiful illusion.

It is extremely important that the person being accompanied also experiences, in the accompaniment process, that there are limits to everything in life. This reality principle provides the one being accompanied with the necessary security and safety, both within and outside the accompaniment.

The accompanier should therefore limit availability, not only out of necessity (given personal limitations) but also on the basis of conscious choices, taking into account the goal of the accompaniment.

It is precisely the limits placed on the frequency and duration of meetings that allows the accompanier to be optimally available. During the agreed time, the accompanier is completely available to the person being accompanied. It is precisely this limited availability that has its own effectiveness.

### *Accepting one's own reality*

Not every accompanier is the ideal guide for every potential individual seeking accompaniment. It is essential that the accompanier has a clear idea of what he or she can and cannot do in the area of accompaniment, of who he or she is and is not as an accompanier. This implies that the accompanier does not have to respond to every request for guidance. When someone thinks they are not the most suitable person for the requested accompaniment or do not have the necessary expertise, they can refer the one seeking accompaniment to someone else. The one seeking accompaniment does not need (despite feeling this way at some point) an ‘Übermensch’, but a fellow human being of integrity (who is also familiar with accompanying).<sup>30</sup>

A good accompanier is not equally skilled in all aspects of accompaniment. Accompaniers are by no means perfect. This means that accompaniment always involves searching, failing and making mistakes. It is up to the person concerned to face up to this honestly, to recognise it, to apologise for it and to limit and repair the negative consequences, as far as possible. Someone seeking accompaniment is not served by someone who

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<sup>30</sup> See: LEIJSEN, Mia, *Gids beroepsethiek. Waarden, rechten en plichten in psychotherapie en hulpverlening*, Leuven, Acco, 2011, 79-118.

is supposed to be perfect. What they need is someone who clearly knows where they stand and can accept that.<sup>31</sup>

Every person who is accompanied inevitably forms an image of their accompanier, an image that evolves in the course of the accompaniment. This image also determines how they behave in relation to the accompanier. And that in turn has repercussions on the latter.

But the accompanier has also formed a self-image. Hopefully this is realistic. If this self-image is too small, it will slow him or her down. If, on the other hand, it is too big, he or she is plagued by the concern not to disappoint (him or herself). In both cases, the accompanier does not function optimally.

### *Delineating responsibility*

The responsibility of the accompanier is not unlimited either. That is not possible (given real limitations) and it is not necessary. It is not allowed because the freedom and responsibility of the person being accompanied and their right to self-determination must be respected. In their involvement with the one being accompanied, the accompanier may indeed be tempted to feel responsible (and behave accordingly) for what the one being

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<sup>31</sup> An experienced accompanier testifies to this self-acceptance: 'I have to know and accept myself, and this is a process that is never finished. I have to be prepared to see not only my talents but also my limitations, my inabilities and my failures, not to be unhappy about it but to be amazed and grateful that I am allowed – as I am – to be a companion. I must be able to admit to myself that I cannot do everything, that I cannot 'help' everyone, that I am not a wizard. I have also experienced that my limitations have their own effect on the person being accompanied. Sharing a bit of powerlessness can sometimes (always taking into account the very nature of accompaniment) even be very fruitful and it certainly breaks the myth of the all-powerful accompanier. More than once I have experienced that it was precisely by sharing my powerlessness that the one being accompanied was able to bring out the most vulnerable part of themselves – which had sometimes been lying like a stone on their heart for many years, without being able to tell anyone – and how this had a truly liberating effect. When, as an accompanier, I dare to be an accessible and vulnerable fellow human being, the other person is given the safety to confide their vulnerability as someone being guided. In doing so, I must always be aware of my own motives and needs, and of course keep the wellbeing of the person being accompanied in mind.' Taken from: STEVENS, J., *Gezien en beluisterd worden heelt de mens. Over persoonlijke begeleiding*, Antwerpen, Garant, 2003, 105.

accompanied does and does not do. However, this makes the person being accompanied more dependent than necessary and is contrary to the principle of personal accompaniment, namely, that the person being accompanied should be in charge of their own life as much as possible. A reserved closeness of the accompanier, including a well-defined responsibility, is what the accompanied person needs, to be able to develop further.

This, of course, does not diminish the responsibility of the accompanier as accompanier. He or she must be there in the accompaniment as that person with their specific role. The accompanier will keep the focus on the goal of the accompaniment itself, will invest in the accompanying relationship, carefully guarding its nature. The accompanier will prepare properly for each meeting, and will maintain and enrich his or her expertise in accompanying. These are all areas of responsibility for the accompanier, who has to be as conscientious as possible. It is not desirable, however, for the person being accompanied or for the accompanier to increase responsibility or develop a sense of responsibility that leads beyond the necessary limits.

## **6. The privilege of being an accompanier**

It is a privilege to serve as a personal accompanier. You are asked to do this by the person interested in accompaniment. You are ‘called’. This fact alone is a special experience. On the one hand, it strokes your vanity, you experience it as confirmation. On the other hand, the question inevitably arises: Who am I that I...?

As an accompanier, you invest a great deal of yourself in personal guidance, but you also get a great deal in return. Because of your personal involvement in the accompanying process, it will inevitably have an impact on you, both on your current experience and (over the years) on your whole life.

You may mean something to others in a special way. This is an important source of life fulfilment. Moreover, it is an opportunity for personal development. Above all, you learn to really listen, to understand the other person's message as well as possible. You also learn to stop judging others too easily, for example, formulating answers to questions, whether asked or not, giving cheap advice and solutions ... The practice of personal accompaniment can make you not only more skilled but also wiser. Among other things, it provides you with a lot of knowledge about people. It brings you back again and again to the question of what is really



of value in a person's life, and in your own life. It sharpens your ethical sensitivity. It confronts you with the mystery of life. And all this reaches deep into your soul and translates into your own lifestyle.



# **MY BELOVED SON...**

## **ACCOMPANIMENT BY DON BOSCO IN THE LETTERS TO SOME YOUNG PEOPLE**

*by Wim Collin*

### **1. Don Bosco's letters**

It is not easy to categorise Don Bosco's correspondence. There is, of course, a considerable number of letters written by himself or his secretaries. Don Bosco did not write every letter himself. He had some Salesians, confreres who were secretaries and who wrote letters on his behalf. He would sign these letters, or one of his secretaries would stamp them with Don Bosco's signature. This was partly because of the number of letters that arrived in Valdocco every day and because, towards the end of his life, Don Bosco no longer had the strength to answer all of them.

It is not easy to divide the correspondence into various categories. They can be divided into categories according to the addressee: letters to important people, civil and ecclesiastical officials, letters sent to Salesians, letters sent to lay people, letters sent to Salesian Cooperators and benefactors, and letters sent to young people. Another classification could be according to subject. For example, letters of an organisational nature, relating to the foundation of the Congregation, letters of a spiritual nature, and letters of a financial nature addressed to benefactors.

The problem is that most of the letters, whether categorised by subject or by addressee, deal with different subjects. For example, there are letters to the Salesians in which in one paragraph Don Bosco talks about the organisational nature of, for example, the missions or the organisation of the house or of the work they are involved in. In another paragraph, Don Bosco gives the addressee precise spiritual guidance or some personal pedagogical indications on how a Salesian should behave.

The same can be said of his letters to benefactors in which he writes about how one should be an excellent Salesian Cooperator. Don Bosco explains the state of the various houses and the foundation of the Congregation, and ends by asking for financial support to make it all happen.

Don Bosco wrote many letters to young people, and it would take a doctoral thesis to study them all appropriately. Unfortunately for the scope of this study only a limited selection of letters will be considered. One might think that the letters Don Bosco writes to young people – because Don Bosco wrote quite a few letters to young people – would be an exception here. However, even if the majority of the letters to young people are of a spiritual and pedagogical nature, it is possible to note that some of them have characteristics that have already been discussed in relation to the organisational aspects of the foundation of the Congregation, fundraising and so on. Following are two examples of letters written to young people about young people from Belgium.<sup>1</sup> The first one is from Henri Vonck<sup>2</sup> from Ypres, who writes on behalf of his father. The second is a letter from Jeanne van Cutsem asking for prayers.

#### Example 1:

Ypres, Belgium, November 29, 1887.

Very Reverend Father Bosco

On behalf of my father, A. Vonck-Clément, I am instructed to inform you that he has just paid six hundred francs on your behalf at the Ypres post office, including 500 francs for 250 masses

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<sup>1</sup> W. PROVOOST (cur.), *Correspondance Belge de Don Bosco (1879-1888)*, Roma, LAS, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Henricus-Edouardus-Augustus Vonck, abbreviated: Henri (Ypres, 24 mars 1874 - ?).

*pro defunctis* and 100 francs for your good works. Please send us a receipt.

My father thanks you, very Reverend Father, for the letter you kindly addressed to him dated 25 October, 1887, and he asks you to recommend in your good prayers, the soul of his dear and beloved wife Philomène Clément, our late mother who died last May and was buried on the feast day of Mary Help of Christians.

We all began a novena, and mother hoped that she would recover by the feast day on 24 May. But God had decided otherwise: Mum went to Heaven to celebrate the feast of Mary Help of Christians. Now, most Reverend Father, I urge you also to recommend all your children, our father and all his affairs [,] my two brothers, my little sister and I who have the honour of writing to you and who still asks for your blessing for all of us.

Receive, Most Reverend Father Bosco, the assurance of my deep respect.

Henri Vonck<sup>3</sup>

Example 2:

[Enghien, s.d. (January 1888)]

Most Reverend Father,

Knowing your great goodness, I have come to ask you for a small prayer for the sick. One has been suffering from severe headaches for several years; another, who is in very fragile health, has been suffering from severe angina and the beginning of bronchitis since yesterday.

I have unlimited confidence in St. Anthony of Padua, so we have begun a novena in his honour.

I would be very grateful if you would be so kind as to join us in our prayers!

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<sup>3</sup> W. PROVOOST (cur.), *Correspondence*, 185-186.

Receive, my Most Reverend Father [,] the expression of my most respectful feelings.

Jeanne van Cutsem

Here is my address: Mademoiselle Jeanne van Cutsem [,] Châlet near the train station [,] Enghien Brussels (Hainaut) (Belgium)[.]<sup>4</sup>

Without wishing to detract from the content of these letters, it must be said that there are several letters with similar content. Letters from which very little can be understood. They are some letters to adults, about practical matters, letters in which Don Bosco thanks them for their prayers and financial contributions. The saint writes that he will pray for the boy.

Other letters from young people ask Don Bosco for spiritual advice on various matters. One example is the letter from Edmond Evens<sup>5</sup>, who works in the coal mines in Bellecourt and wants to fulfil his religious vocation.

In the sad situation in which I find myself, allow me to come and commend myself amid your holy and fervent prayers. I am a young man in my twenties. [...] My only desire has always been to dedicate myself to Our Lord in a religious order, but the will of the good God is not sufficiently known to me. Moreover, I have several faults that would prevent me from carrying out my plans.

Here are the main ones: 1. my vocation, 2. my poor health, 3. the destiny that still binds me for two more years, 4. my parents' consent, etc. In the meantime, while waiting for this great happiness, I am constrained to work in the terrible environment of a coal mine'.<sup>6</sup>

Only occasionally do the letters addressed to Don Bosco deal with questions about religious vocations. As stated in the lecture presenting the letters from Belgians to Don Bosco, one can find some prayer requests to

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<sup>4</sup> W. PROVOOST (cur.), *Correspondence*, 273-274.

<sup>5</sup> Edmond Evens was born probably around 1867. At the time he was writing the letter to Don Bosco he was around 20 years old.

<sup>6</sup> W. PROVOOST (cur.), *Correspondance*, 188-189.

find the right spouse in the letters of Madame Dons to Don Bosco.<sup>7</sup> It may be a coincidence, but the twenty-one-year-old Antoinette Segers<sup>8</sup> from Antwerp in Belgium also writes:

I still have a third request to make of you, Reverend Father. For four years, my vocation has been decided; I have given my affection to a pious young man from a good family who has all the qualities to be a Christian husband and who my parents would be happy to call their son; unfortunately, this young man does not return my affection, he knows of my love, but some ungracious friends have ridiculed this love, and he has too much self-love to immediately see beyond their comments.

I have used up all the saints. I no longer trust, my faith is diminishing day by day, I no longer know how to pray [,] the aunt of the young man who wishes this marriage has obliged me to turn to you. You are now the only hope I have left. Pray for me, I beg you, so I can still turn to God to give me Alphonse's affection. I am sure that your prayers will bring me the grace for which I have been waiting in vain for four years. Ask the Blessed Virgin, in whom I have always had great confidence, that she will give me one or two meetings this winter where I can meet this young man and that he can judge my character, and pray to her again so that she can arrange this marriage for 1888.<sup>9</sup>

In the end, Antoinette did not marry her Alphonse, but would be the wife of Joseph Giesen for 22 years, with whom she had five children.

## **2. The stylistic aspects of letters to young people**

For the letters used for this study, we have drawn on the work of the "Istituto Storico Salesiano" and, in particular, the first volume of the "Fonti

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<sup>7</sup> W. COLLIN, *La correspondance belge de Don Bosco (1879-1888). Analysis and contextualization of the letters of Madame Marie Dons, Canoness of the Berlaymont de Bruxelles monastery* [conference November 25, 2019], Roma, Università Pontificia Salesiana.

<sup>8</sup> Antoinette Maria Emilia Segers (Antwerp, 24 July 1866 – 11 March 1922).

<sup>9</sup> W. PROVOOST (cur.), *Correspondance*, 192-194.

Salesiane”. These letters are fascinating and reflect in a beautiful and succinct way the theme under investigation.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.1. Common formal aspects

Looking at the form of these letters from a formal point of view, before going into the details of their content, it is possible to identify some standard components of these letters. These characteristics are therefore independent of the letters’ contents or addressees.

The first characteristic of these letters is that they all begin with a word of gratitude. Don Bosco thanks the writer for what he has written; this gratitude, often expressed in simple terms, meant a great deal to the person who received the letter. For example, to Severino Rostagno: “Your letter brought me much pleasure.”<sup>11</sup>

A second characteristic of the letters is the explicit reference to an earlier one, right at the beginning. Often it is not Don Bosco who takes the initiative for writing, but the young people who first wrote to the director of the Oratory. Don Bosco always refers to this previous letter. In his letters, he would often refer to the young person’s previous letter and to other letters he had already written, opening their hearts. “Looking at your letter from just one point of view, I thank the Lord that during the most difficult years of your life, he helped you to maintain the healthy principles of religion.”<sup>12</sup>

It is worth mentioning that Don Bosco’s secretariat his personal secretaries, kept a huge register of writers who wrote to Don Bosco, indicating when they wrote and what was answered. The letters were also kept in the archives. This whole administration was necessary to maintain good relations, not only when it came to organisational letters or letters relating to the founding of the Congregation but also when it came to pedagogical or spiritual advice that Don Bosco gave.

An exception to these first two characteristics is, of course, the letters that Don Bosco wrote to groups. Among the letters studied, there are

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<sup>10</sup> SALESIAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE, *Salesian Sources 1: Don Bosco and his work. Collected Works*, Rome – Bangalore, LAS – Kristu Jyoti, 2017, 766-791. (= FS) To facilitate the reading in other languages of the letters the reference to the letter will be to the number it has in *Salesian Sources* since it is the same in the various translations.

<sup>11</sup> FS., 186.

<sup>12</sup> FS., 199.



several letters addressed to the students of the “Mirabello” college, for example, or the students of other houses.<sup>13</sup> These letters are special, and above all they give spiritual and educational advice to the students. One could say here that these letters are a written good-night-talk, more than an actual letter. But these letters to the groups also have other characteristics, such as some practical, organisational instructions given to the Salesians in the field.

A third characteristic, a feature that appears in almost all the letters, a very striking and specific component, is the way in which these letters’ core message is presented. Suggestions or concrete guidance on a spiritual or educational level are offered on several points. Don Bosco often wrote a list, 1, 2, 3 or with words underlined or written in italics. In this way, the reader immediately realises what is essential, what the different pieces of advice are and what the order of the steps to be taken is. Usually, these steps are described very briefly: “Meanwhile prayer, work, mortification, frequent confession and communion, will help you conquer the old enemy of your soul.”<sup>14</sup>

The fourth characteristic of these letters is that they are often short letters. Don Bosco only wrote short letters to young people. He also only wrote to adults when there were specific situations. It was often less than one A4 page. Accordingly, the language was simple. Don Bosco did not use complicated words or symbolic meanings. He wrote clearly what he wanted to say. The letter to young Annetta Pelazza, doubting about entering a convent, was six lines or 110 words.<sup>15</sup>

And finally, the fifth and last characteristic is that almost all letters in made reference to God in their closing lines: a prayer to God the Father and often also a prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary or a plea to obtain her intercession. For example: “May God bless you and keep you in his holy grace. Pray for me. I am yours affectionately in the Lord.”<sup>16</sup>

## *2.2. Understanding the formal aspects*

The first tentative conclusion is that counselling through letters is complex, and generally does not happen in one letter but over several of them. There must be several letters, a degree of correspondence, an

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<sup>13</sup> FS., 189; 191; 192; 193; 195; 197; 198; 201; 202; 204; 205.

<sup>14</sup> FS., 203.

<sup>15</sup> FS., 194.

<sup>16</sup> FS., 196.

exchange of letters. However, it should immediately be noted that often Don Bosco often points out in his letters, that it is better to turn to one's own spiritual director rather than to someone at a distance. This, of course, has everything to do with the religious and educational idea that Don Bosco himself had: a spiritual counsellor who was close by and who could be called upon.

A second tentative conclusion is that counselling young people should be about more than an hour-long conference; it is not about endless reflection and introspection or heavy or meaningless dialogues. It is about specific initiatives and concrete steps to be taken. Here too, it is easy to see that all this has to do with Don Bosco's pedagogical system.

A third tentative conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the education of young people does not depend solely on human work. Both in the letters in which Don Bosco gives pedagogical advice and in the letters in which he provides spiritual guidance, it becomes clear that entrusting oneself to God is not only the work of people but also the work of God.

A fourth tentative conclusion, which only applies to part of the correspondence studied, is that it concerns very personal advice. Although Don Bosco sometimes acts like Saint Francis de Sales, who says, "Read the *Philothea*"<sup>17</sup>, Don Bosco said: "Read *The Companion of Youth*"<sup>18</sup> Don Bosco never seems to have had a standard answer that he writes to everyone even though almost the same advice can be found in several letters. Every letter has a personal touch, if only because it is handwritten and addressed to an individual.

### 3. Exemplary letter from Don Bosco to Stefano Rossetti

Looking at the content of the letters, and more specifically what he wrote to the different people, we can also see some similar character traits that are common to all or most of the letters. These traits have everything to do with Don Bosco's pedagogical system. It is not possible, therefore, to make a distinction between what Don Bosco wrote in his theoretical expositions on the Preventive System or other treatises on the educational system, his pedagogical actions, and his letters to young people. In many of these letters, one can find a concise summary of what Don Bosco meant by his educational system.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf *Lettre MCLXXVI*, Œuvres Tome XVII, Lettres: Vol 7, 167; *Lettre MDCLXXXII*, Œuvres Tome XIX, Lettres: Vol 9, 287.

<sup>18</sup> FS., 205.

A striking example is his letter to Stefano Rossetti on 25 July 1860.<sup>19</sup> At that time, Don Bosco was staying in Lanzo Torinese, in the sanctuary of Saint Ignatius. A lot can be learned from this letter. Stefano Rossetti, born in 1843, lived at the Oratory from 22 October 1859 until October 1862. He became a priest and the (vice) rector of the seminary at Asti.<sup>20</sup>

Sant'Ignazio presso Lanzo, 25 July 1860

My beloved son,

The letter you wrote me truly gave me pleasure. You have really shown by this that you have understood how I feel about you. Yes, my good friend, I love you with all my heart, and this love urges me to do whatever I can to help you progress in your studies and in piety and guide you on the way to Heaven. Call to mind the advice I have given you at various times; be cheerful, but let this cheerfulness be truly that of a conscience free from sin. Try to become wealthy - but in terms of virtue, and the greatest wealth is a holy fear of God. Keep away from bad boys and be friends with good ones; place yourself in the hands of your parish priest (arch-priest) and follow his advice, and all will go well.

Greet your parents on my behalf; pray for me, and while God is keeping you some distance from me, I pray that he will always keep you as one of his own until you return to us. Meanwhile, I am yours in fatherly affection.

Fr John Bosco.

As mentioned above, Don Bosco expressed his gratitude for Stefano's earlier letter. He confirmed that the young man had perfectly understood what Don Bosco meant in this letter. And then, very succinctly, Don Bosco describes what he thinks is the purpose of education and what the educator should be like. This is, therefore, not an operational objective but an essential characteristic. "It is because I love you that I will do everything..." Salesian education begins with love for the other. It is love that is the deepest motivation for the educator to be an educator. And it is this love that compels the educator to help the young person grow. Don

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<sup>19</sup> FS., 185.

<sup>20</sup> G. BOSCO, *Epistolario, Volume primo (1835-1863)*, F. MOTTO (cur.), Roma, LAS, 500.

Bosco divides this growth into two parts: the development of studies, that is, human formation in general, and the evolution of faith. This is nothing other than a “translation” of “the upright citizen and good Christian” of which Don Bosco speaks in the *Preventive System* and the *Memoirs of the Oratory*. It is interesting to note that this is immediately linked to something for which Don Bosco is well known, and which is emphasised in this short letter. Being an “upright citizen and good Christian” is directly related to the “da mihi animas”: I will “guide you on the way to heaven”. The ultimate goal is to save the young person’s soul.

In the following sentence, Don Bosco gives advice to help the boy achieve this goal. It is a short list of tips or advice Don Bosco gives the young person. He has already told him this, but he repeats it just to be sure. 1) be cheerful; 2) live according to virtues; 3) avoid bad friends; 4) place yourself into the hands of a spiritual director. Here, too, it is clear that some of these pieces of advice sound familiar to us. They can be found in the biographies of Dominic Savio and Michael Magone.

When we look at the life of Michael Magone, we see that is explained in detail what “being cheerful” means. When Michael Magone spends some time at the Oratory in Valdocco, he is overcome by sadness. This sadness arises because he realises that his cheerfulness is somehow superficial and fleeting, in contrast to the cheerfulness of his new friends. His friends’ cheerfulness is the result of inner and deeply-rooted happiness, real humanity and self-acceptance. Initially Magone’s cheerfulness is the result of “fun”. Don Bosco writes to Stefano that his cheerfulness must be the result of “freedom from sin” or pure humanity. Don Bosco is describing almost the same thing here as he described in detail with Magone.

“Being free from sin” inevitably brings to mind the words attributed by Don Bosco to Dominic Savio on his First Communion day. Words that are not only emblazoned on the wall of the house where Dominic lived in Morialdo but also words inscribed in the Salesian tradition: “death, but not sin”.

“Live according to the virtues” was the following guideline that Don Bosco gave to Stefano. You can be sure that the young people of that time knew the virtues perfectly: faith, hope and love, the divine virtues, and the seven main virtues: chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, kindness, patience, and humility. They learned this in catechism class in every parish, and they knew exactly what they meant. These virtues were the milestones of everyday life. These virtues were to characterise the lives of the young. Examples of this can be found in the biographies that Don Bosco wrote. Just think of the virtue of purity (i.e. chastity), described in detail in the life

of Michael Magone in the chapter on “The seven policemen”. Or in the belief in God (i.e. faith) emphasised in the Life of Dominic Savio.

Having good friends and avoiding bad ones is essential to Don Bosco’s educational experience. Bad friends should be avoided like the plague; bad friends can throw you into the abyss, lead you down the wrong path, and ruin your life forever. Striking examples of this can be found in the lives of Severino and Valentino. Valentino was “forced” to have a bad friend assigned by his father to prevent his son from becoming a priest. Mari, the friend, is the prototype of the wrong friend. For various reasons, including economic ones, Severino befriends the Protestants and thus risks his salvation.<sup>21</sup>

But let us be clear. Don Bosco is not only about avoiding bad friends but also about having good friends. A good friend means salvation. For Don Bosco, there are three categories of friends, but he only talks about two: bad friends and good friends. He never talks about “ordinary” friends. Don Bosco’s concept of friendship is almost identical to the ideal described by Francis de Sales. One makes friends, not for the sake of something, to gain concrete advantage, but for the sake of the other person, because of who he or she is. Friendship improves the other person and me; he or she becomes a better person, and so do I, because of the friendship. Friendship means loving each other, not because of what you do but because of who you are. And the source of this love for the other can only be God himself. In friendship, man recognises and finds a divine presence: it is in the other that man loves the Other. It is the Spirit of God himself who is the author of holy friendship. True friendship leads to God. And that was also the case for Don Bosco. Friends must lift each other up to reach higher goals. A friendship in which one does not grow is not a good friendship.

Don Bosco gives Stefano the fourth guideline: to have a spiritual director. For Don Bosco, having a “regular confessor” was a *conditio sine qua non* for achieving the educational ideal. Placing yourself in the hands of this confessor, pouring out your heart to him so that he can form you by showing you the way, showing you how to advance in life, was more than necessary for Don Bosco. This element is also found in the biographies that Don Bosco wrote: Dominic Savio stands in Don Bosco’s room and asks

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<sup>21</sup> W. COLLIN, *La pedagogia della scelta nelle narrazioni biografiche di don Giovanni Bosco*, in *Atti del Congresso Internazionale*, Roma 20-23 settembre 2018, Roma, LAS, 2019, 271-298; W. COLLIN, *The Role of the “Educational Presence” in the Memoirs of the Oratory and some Biographies written by Don Bosco. The Salesian educator as a guide in the vocational realization*, in «Journal of Salesian Studies» 19 (January-June 2021) 1, 55-81.

him to help him become a saint; Michael Magone goes to Don Bosco and asks him how to be happy. It is clear from this letter that Don Bosco prefers the guidance of the young person to be done “in persona” rather than in writing. It would be the priest who accompanied Stefano, who walked the path with him, not Don Bosco. Don Bosco is convinced that little can go wrong if one acts this way. If you follow the instructions of your spiritual director, you will certainly take the right road and succeed.<sup>22</sup>

It is remarkable and always surprising how simple Don Bosco’s educational ideal is. It is not about great plans or a proposal for life that detaches or separates the young person from his natural environment. On the contrary, it is a proposal for life that leaves the young person in his environment, even if the ideals seem a little alien to us at the moment, from a secularised point of view, which was certainly not the case at that moment.

I would like to come back here at the end of the presentation of these four pieces of advice given by Don Bosco, to emphasise that the advice given by Don Bosco to the young people was very concrete: a list of things that could be followed. The way this boy dealt with this letter, but the way all the young people dealt with the letter they received from Don Bosco, is very striking. The fact that these letters have been preserved to this day means that many young people kept them and probably read and reread them. And even though these letters were collected at the beginning of the process for Don Bosco’s canonisation, that is, well after his death, in the case of this letter, the receiver kept and cherished the letter for more than forty years. And that is not because it was assumed that Don Bosco was a saint or someone famous, with the letter to Stefano in the 1860s, only fifteen years after the beginning of the Oratory. But above all because these letters were very concrete advice for young people, with goals that were very easy to achieve and verify. At the end of the day, when, as was customary, the boy said his evening prayers and reviewed his day, all he had to do was take the summary or the list of goals that Don Bosco had given him and check whether he had achieved them or not. Or, to put it very simply, referring to the letter to Stefano: 1) Have I been cheerful today? Did I commit sin today? 2) Have I lived according to the virtues today? 3) How did I hang out with my friends? 4) What should I discuss with my spiritual director?

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<sup>22</sup> W. COLLIN, *Amicizia. Camminare con maggior sicurezza nella vita. Il concetto dell’amicizia secondo San Francesco di Sales*, in «Note di Pastorale Giovanile» LV (settembre-ottobre 2021) 6, 47-51.

The letter's last paragraph also fits perfectly into this pattern. A greeting to the parents, an entrustment to God, and the hope that God will assist the boy and his family.

#### **4. Pedagogical and spiritual content of accompaniment in the letters to young people**

Don Bosco has a project for young people. That is one of the essential qualities from the letters. The young person must take control of his life and live according to his own project. This can be found in almost every letter. The content of each project is different because it is personal and individual, but it is possible to see some significant and common directions.

When reading Don Bosco's letters, it is important to remember that the author's pedagogical action, the process of education and guidance are never a work of human hands alone. God sets the process in motion: so he writes to Severino, "When I saw you, I seemed to have an inkling of Divine Providence's plans for you."<sup>23</sup> And it is God himself who guides the process and leads it in the right direction: "I ask God to keep you healthy, in his grace, make progress in learning, and that you may be able to be the consolation of your parents and Don Bosco's delight. He loves you so much."<sup>24</sup>

What, then, are the things that Don Bosco recommends to young people?

##### *4.1. Religious recommendations*

Of all the recommendations, the most important one is "frequent confession and communion". This recommendation is reflected in many letters, both in the letters he sends to individuals and the letters he writes to the students.<sup>25</sup> On 1 June 1866, Don Bosco wrote to Giorgio very simply as his third and final point: "3. Fervent and frequent Confession and Communion."<sup>26</sup> He wrote almost the exact same words to Severino Rostagno, "Go to the sacraments of confession and communion."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> FS., 186.

<sup>24</sup> FS., 195.

<sup>25</sup> FS., 186; 190; 191; 193; 195; 196; 197; 198; 199; 203; 204; 205.

<sup>26</sup> FS., 196.

<sup>27</sup> FS., 186.

For Don Bosco, “frequent communion is the great pillar which supports the moral and material world to stop it falling into ruin [...] I believe I am not saying too much if I state that frequent communion is the great pillar that one pole of the world balances on.”<sup>28</sup> To the students of the fourth and fifth grades at Borgo San Martino, where Mirabello’s house moved to, Don Bosco makes it clear why it is so important: “The basis of a happy life for a young man is frequent communion.”<sup>29</sup> Before the holidays’ Don Bosco writes: “While you are at home, at least go to communion on Sundays.”<sup>30</sup> There must be a certain regularity in communion and confession, which must not be broken during the holiday period.<sup>31</sup> Don Bosco is a true pedagogue in these letters, for he commands the young people to always greet their parish priest when they go home.<sup>32</sup> “This is a strict duty of gratitude which will please others and benefit you.”<sup>33</sup> In this way, he simplifies the step for them to go to confession to the parish priest. The parish priests had often urged the boys to go to one of Don Bosco’s schools, and there was also a certain amount of follow-up and control over the boys.

One recommendation that is less often made is actually at the basis of all the recommendations, and the ultimate goal of faith formation is growth and steadfastness in the faith. he writes to Severino Rostagno: “So courage my son, remain firm in faith, and grow each day in the holy fear of God.”<sup>34</sup> This is the virtue in which one must be rich, as he writes to Stefano Rossetti.<sup>35</sup> If these things are done with care, they contribute to the growth of faith. Don Bosco writes to Emanuele Fassati: “Have great regard for your devotions. So make the sign of the cross well, kneel up straight and pray, and be exemplary at church.”<sup>36</sup>

The role of Mary in Don Bosco’s letters to young people is twofold. On the one hand, she is invoked as an advocate, a help and a support in the process of growing up. “May the Holy Virgin preserve you as her own, always.”<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, she is sometimes also part of the proposal: “Be devoted to Mary and you will certainly be holy.”<sup>38</sup> “Pray to the holy

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<sup>28</sup> FS., 191.

<sup>29</sup> FS., 205.

<sup>30</sup> FS., 198.

<sup>31</sup> FS., 197.

<sup>32</sup> FS., 193; 197; 198.

<sup>33</sup> FS., 197.

<sup>34</sup> FS., 186.

<sup>35</sup> FS., 185.

<sup>36</sup> FS., 188. (Also FS., 191)

<sup>37</sup> FS., 191.

<sup>38</sup> FS., 186.



Virgin every day that she may allow anything to happen to you except falling into sin.”<sup>39</sup> In the letter to the pupils at Mirabello, he literally writes as the fourth recommendation a part of the *Memorare*: “3. Devotion and frequent recourse to Mary Most Holy. It has never been known anywhere in the world that someone who has trusting recourse to this heavenly mother is not promptly heard.”<sup>40</sup>

Less frequently mentioned in the letters is the recommendation to meditate daily. Don Bosco reminds his readers of this because meditation belongs to the standard behaviour of the young person. This is specifically about a time of silence and a time for reading.<sup>41</sup>

Some letters deal with the specific subject of priestly or religious vocation.<sup>42</sup> Don Bosco offers some specific tips and recommendations for perseverance. For Don Bosco there are two kinds of vocations: the “secular state” and the “ecclesiastical state”.<sup>43</sup> And in this last category, there are three types of priests: “Secular priest, religious priest, priest in the foreign missions are three fields in which labourers of the Gospel are called to work and promote the glory of God. One must choose what one has most at heart, most adapted to one’s physical and moral strength.”<sup>44</sup>

The words Don Bosco wrote to a young seminarian, Antonio Massara, who was in doubt about his vocation, are remarkable. He did not know whether he wanted to continue in the seminary or enter the Congregation. He also questioned the existence of God. Don Bosco writes:

God is great; God is merciful. We sometimes do not think about him, but he thinks about us and when he sees us running away he places his hands on our shoulders and stops us to bring us back to him. Is that not true? May the Lord be blessed in everything and his decrees adored. [...] I will not be far from advising you to push on ahead as far as priesthood. If you would like a life in

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<sup>39</sup> FS., 190.

<sup>40</sup> FS., 191. The “*Memorare*” by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux goes: “Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.”

<sup>41</sup> FS., 197; 198; 200.

<sup>42</sup> FS., 187; 194; 199; 203; 205.

<sup>43</sup> FS., 205

<sup>44</sup> FS., 205.

common and would like to come with me, I will list you amongst my dear and beloved sons.<sup>45</sup>

#### 4.2. Educational recommendations

One of the most important methods Don Bosco used to make young people understand what education is all about was to propose “models” or examples to follow. This is reflected in the recommendations he gives to the boys. The boys are given an example, literally and figuratively, of what they need to do to become an “upright citizen” and a “good Christian”. Don Bosco had done this from the beginning of his pastoral work, and we do not have to wait for the biography of Dominic Savio and Michael Magone to encounter the first “model”. Earlier, he wrote the biography of Luigi Comollo in his seminary days; later, in *The Companion of Youth* we find the biography of *Luigi Gonzaga*, and it is known that *Stanislaus Kostka* and *Jan Berghmans* were also among the model young people or saints whose lives Don Bosco described. These “proposed models” can be traced in Don Bosco’s letters to young people. For example, he explicitly writes to the boys at Mirabello: “2. Imitating St Aloysius in his good example, especially in avoiding improper talk.”<sup>46</sup> Adding that if they do this, they will be happy.

This, too, is typical of Don Bosco’s pedagogy; he encourages young people to be models for others. “Be models for your relatives and friends in the virtue of obedience, charitably put up with others, make no demands in food, rest, clothing”, he writes to the students at Mirabello before they leave on holiday.<sup>47</sup> The boys at the vocational school in Valdocco were also called upon to be examples for each other: “God willing, I could say that every working boy is a model and good example to the others!”<sup>48</sup> This is how he writes to Giovanni Garino: “I need you to go out and catch souls, but afraid that you might instead be caught by others I suggest that you simply make yourself a model for your companions in doing good.”<sup>49</sup> Young people can learn from other young people, and Don Bosco uses them for his work of salvation among the young. To the boys at the school in Lanzo, he writes: “If you find a virtuous companion in your village try

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<sup>45</sup> FS., 203.

<sup>46</sup> FS., 192. (Also FS., 197.)

<sup>47</sup> FS., 197.

<sup>48</sup> FS., 204.

<sup>49</sup> FS., 187.

to get him to come back to college with you; for those who don't seem so good do not talk to them about coming to college."<sup>50</sup>

It can also be confirmed that what was said about friendship in the letter to Stefano is also repeated in other letters. Of bad friends, he says: "Keep away from bad companions as you would from poisonous snakes."<sup>51</sup> Or: "Avoid [...] companions whom you happen to hear speaking improperly."<sup>52</sup> Another time: "Flee companions who indulge in immoral conversations or give you bad advice."<sup>53</sup> Good friends, on the other hand, you have to look for.<sup>54</sup>

Don Bosco often described how education should take place. The young person needs, and this has been demonstrated several times, a guide, a leader, and someone who shows the way. The young person must have confidence in this person or persons.<sup>55</sup> Don Bosco writes to Annetta Pelazza: "To carry out the idea that for a while is keeping you busy (you have not told me, but I seem to see it in your mind: to become a [religious] sister) put yourself entirely into the hands of your good [holy] superiors."<sup>56</sup> In another letter, Don Bosco writes: "put your heart in my hands."<sup>57</sup> To Stefano he writes: "place yourself in the hands of your parish priest (arch priest) and follow his advice" and the reason for this is very simple "all will go well."<sup>58</sup> He writes to Annetta that obedience is the sure path to Heaven.<sup>59</sup>

#### *4.3. Other recommendations*

As for the standard recommendations, those that have nothing to do with faith, religion or human relationships, there is very little to be found in the letters to young people.

Note the contradiction: laziness – duty. "Avoid idleness, and be very diligent in fulfilling your [...] school duties. Idleness is the father of all

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<sup>50</sup> FS., 198.

<sup>51</sup> FS., 186. (Also FS., 187.)

<sup>52</sup> FS., 190.

<sup>53</sup> FS., 196.

<sup>54</sup> FS., 200.

<sup>55</sup> FS., 190.

<sup>56</sup> FS., 194. (In Italian: "Per mettere in esecuzione il pensiero che da qualche tempo vi occupa..." was translated originally in "To carry out the idea you sometimes are thinking about..." The translation for this article was modified.)

<sup>57</sup> FS., 193.

<sup>58</sup> FS., 185.

<sup>59</sup> FS., 194.

vices.”<sup>60</sup> Another time it would be the first point of attention: “1. Flee from idleness.”<sup>61</sup> Sometimes he says it positively: “Fulfilment of all your duties, especially at school, without complaining about them.”<sup>62</sup> Doing what you have to do means taking responsibility, now and later. Don Bosco writes to the students at Lanzo Torinese in 1875: “You are in college to learn things with which in due time you can earn a living. Whatever be your situation, your vocation, your future state you ought to act in such a way that should you no longer receive support from home, you can still be able to earn an honest crust. Let it never be said that we live off others’ sweat.”<sup>63</sup>

In the same letter, he writes about health as a priority, which may come as a surprise. He did this when he had some minor health issues. “Health, this is a precious gift from heaven, so look after it. Beware of excess, perspiring too much, getting overtired, and moving too quickly from hot to cold. These are the common sources of illness.”<sup>64</sup> In other letters, he wished his addressee and his family good health or that his health would improve.<sup>65</sup> To Luigi Vacaneo he wrote about “temperance in eating.”<sup>66</sup>

## 5. Conclusion: Don Bosco as the guide in his letters

In the last part of this article we will examine what Don Bosco, the author of these letters, reveals about himself, about how he wants to be a guide for young people, often in a clear and direct way. Don Bosco considers himself the “friend of their soul” or simply their “friend”<sup>67</sup>, “father, friend and brother”<sup>68</sup>, and “humble servant”<sup>69</sup>. The youngsters are the apple of his eye.<sup>70</sup>

Don Bosco loves the young person he is writing to and asks him to do the same: “Love me as I love you in the Lord.”<sup>71</sup> He constantly calls

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<sup>60</sup> FS., 191.

<sup>61</sup> FS., 196. (Also FS., 190.)

<sup>62</sup> FS., 188.

<sup>63</sup> FS., 202.

<sup>64</sup> FS., 202.

<sup>65</sup> FS., 186, 190; 192; 195; 197; 203.

<sup>66</sup> FS., 200.

<sup>67</sup> FS., 188; 192; 199; 201; 202; 203; 204; 205.

<sup>68</sup> FS., 193. (“Friend, father and brother” in FS., 198.).

<sup>69</sup> FS., 194.

<sup>70</sup> FS., 195.

<sup>71</sup> FS., 187. (Also FS., 192.)

them his beloved sons.<sup>72</sup> The reason why he does this is described in the letter to the boys at Valdocco:

There is no need to tell you how much affection I have for you. I have given you clear proof of that. Nor do I need you to tell me of your love for me because you have shown that so often. But what are our mutual affections based on? On money? Not mine, because I spend it on you; not yours because (and don't be offended) you have none. So my affection is based on the desire I have to save your souls. You were all redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and you love me because I try to lead you along the path to eternal salvation. So the good of our souls is the basis of our affection.<sup>73</sup>

To Stefano Rossetti, Don Bosco wrote almost identically: "Yes, my good friend, I love you with all my heart, and this love urges me to do whatever I can to help you progress in your studies and in piety and guide you on the way to Heaven."<sup>74</sup> Don Bosco loves his young people because he wants them to become good Christians and help them live a fulfilling life. To the boys at Mirabello, he wrote: "I am coming amongst you as a father, friend and brother; just put your heart in my hands for a while, and we will all be happy."<sup>75</sup> Don Bosco promised to do everything in his power to help the young people, provided that they did their part and cooperated.<sup>76</sup>

There is also a degree of caution in what Don Bosco wrote. There were things he did not want to commit to paper but promised to tell them these things when they met in person. To Severino Rostagno, he writes: "I will not tell you this yet, but if you come another time and see me, I will speak more clearly, and you will know the reasons for certain things said then."<sup>77</sup> Another time to Gregorio Garofoli, he wrote almost the same thing: I would certainly like to speak with you at some length, but the things I would like to tell you cannot be entrusted to a letter."<sup>78</sup> Another time he wrote: "Here I would like to say more things to you which are not for a letter."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> FS., 185; 186; 187; 191; 192; 195; 201; 202; 203.

<sup>73</sup> FS., 201.

<sup>74</sup> FS., 185.

<sup>75</sup> FS., 193.

<sup>76</sup> FS., 187.

<sup>77</sup> FS., 186.

<sup>78</sup> FS., 196.

<sup>79</sup> FS., 195.

It should be clarified that Don Bosco was not a great believer in the use of letters as a means of accompaniment; he preferred to deal with issues in person, in a face-to-face conversation. Don Bosco gives advice to the young people in his letters, especially in letters to individuals, and in some of the letters to groups he gives hints, but it is not real accompaniment. He prefers to talk with the youngsters in private when it comes to actual accompaniment.

There is only one thing left to say: a piece of advice that Don Bosco gave his young people and which is typical of our founding father. When they leave for holidays, he writes to the students: “Make sure you rest, be happy, laugh, sing, go for walks and do whatever you like, so long as you do not commit sin.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> FS., 197.

# **PREVENTIVE SYSTEM VS. POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BOTH APPROACHES**

*by Barbara Poredoš*

## **Introduction**

An array of recent developmental psycho-pedagogical theories that promote youth's potentials indicate the topicality and validity of Don Bosco's Preventive System (PS) as their precursor from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their point of convergence is the promotion of youth's abilities through giving the voice to youth themselves in various forms of expression, maintaining the importance of adult examples at the same time. One of the world-renowned educational models nowadays belonging to the above-mentioned theories is the Positive Youth Development (PYD) philosophy, a theoretical and practical model which bears many similarities with PS and complements it in various aspects. The presentation and comparative analysis of both models will help us evaluate them also from an applicative and future points of view.

## 1. Origins of Positive Youth Development and Preventive System

Both theoretical systems originate from the praxis and are to be found all over the world, yet at a distance of approximately one hundred years.

Don Bosco had no intention of founding a PS institution or writing an essay on his method, considered pedagogy and spirituality at the same time. As Martelli et al. put it: “[The system] suggests an integrated experience that is complete in itself, a well coordinated collection of activities that constitute a dynamic pedagogy.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, John Bosco rather cultivated the idea of special educational settings based on positive relationships where a healthy relational community already implied a certain type of education.<sup>2</sup>

The importance of such developmental relationships in the Salesian spirit was seen in the first communities of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians or FMA sisters in Mornese likewise. Before its theoretical systematisation, the FMA sisters put the prevention into practice through the engagement of the whole educative community for the benefit of girls and female adolescents, especially the most underprivileged. This has given an impetus to subsequent FMA generations to establish educational relationships as the cornerstone of the present “spirit of education”<sup>3</sup> among the FMA.

The positive youth development (PYD) theory originates from the United States of America in the 1960s, when PYD practitioners, researchers, and policy makers wanted to improve life conditions of various youth groups and their families. Their starting point was the belief that young persons possess plasticity because of which “all youth have the potential to change, albeit to varying degrees.”<sup>4</sup> On such a grounding, a

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<sup>1</sup> Alberto Martelli et al., “Activities and Works of Salesian Youth Ministry,” in *Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference*, (Roma: Salesian Youth Ministry Department, 2014), 88.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Giacinto Auccello et al., *Animator v skupini mladih* (Maribor: Slomškova založba, 1997), 30.

<sup>3</sup> Piera Ruffinatto, “La relazione educativa salesiana vissuta dalle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice. Snodi della storia,” *Orientamenti Pedagogici* 68, no. 4 (October-December 2021): p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Richard M. Lerner., Jacqueline V. Lerner, and Erin Phelps, *The Positive Development of Youth. Technical Report. The 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development: Report of the Findings From the First Four Waves of Data Collection: 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006* (Massachusetts: Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development, Tufts University, n.d.), 9.



new connotation has been given to the concept of prevention in psychopedagogical and consequently methodological terms, i.e., from deficit to strength-based models spurred by Karen Pittman's claim in the 1990s that "problem-free is not fully prepared."<sup>5</sup> Nowadays, PYD is known worldwide, embracing developmental processes as well as their outcomes.

Without using the concept of PYD promotion, Don Bosco already considered prevention in youth education as a path towards their empowerment and integral growth. This is the goal both approaches, PS and PYD, have in common: the development and enhancement of youth's positive characteristics as well as their surrounding contexts. In addition, they deal with the question "how to get adolescents' fires lit, how to have them develop the complex of dispositions and skills needed to take charge of their lives."<sup>6</sup> The more young persons, especially adolescents, find their principal purpose in life based on positive values, the more their trajectories become a gift for others.

In the course of their development, PS and PYD have been subjected to scientific rigour and tested in practice as well as in many research studies. They have remained person-centred, with a special focus on adolescence, and attentive to the whole educational sphere. In this way, developmental educational theory and practice have become more interlinked, and the necessary co-existence of prevention and promotion more strengthened.

## **2. Theoretical framework of both models**

In this chapter, theoretical frameworks are presented on the basis of their definitions and components. Then, the reader gets an insight into the three PS pillars, reason, religion and kindness as well as PYD's models of 4 Hs, 40 developmental assets and five Cs.

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<sup>5</sup> Karen Pittman et al., "Youth Development: Issues, Challenges and Directions," in *Youth Development: Issues, Challenges and Directions*, (Pennsylvania: Public/Private Ventures, 2000), 20.

<sup>6</sup> Reed W. Larson, "Toward a Psychology of Positive Youth Development," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (January 2000): 170, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.170>.

## 2.1. Definition

Definitions of both approaches or educational models indicate the interplay of prevention and promotion in the educational practices for youth. Consequently, they aim at active involvement of youth groups in their society in terms of youth leadership as well as social and civic engagement.

PS is founded on the comprehension of prevention which in western cultures traces back to the Renaissance, Enlightenment, modernity, industrial age and Christianity, emphasising high quality of life by avoiding evil deeds. The originality of Don Bosco's Preventive System, however, lies in the combination of the founder's educational approaches towards the poorest youth, especially boys, frequently living on the streets and formation as understood within the Catholic Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly, Mary Mazzarello embodied the preventive pedagogy among girls in a feminine way. The common goal of both educators was to prevent youngsters' lives from spiritual, moral and other disorders, particularly by means of active and constant adult presence among the weakest members of society. Such Salesian assistance gave an impetus to "the constructive, promotional function,"<sup>7</sup> implying a realistic appreciation of youth's needs, talents and limitations on their path to integral personal growth. Therefore, the denomination "preventive" in PS may prove insufficient in psychological and related fields, bearing the whole developmental course towards positive adulthood in mind. Don Bosco, who coined the concept of PS, considered it as a pedagogical method and spirituality that protect and promote growth of developing adults. For that reason, Peter Gonsalves<sup>8</sup> has advocated for the renaming of the system as Don Bosco's expressive education through which youngsters are capable of transcending their own interests and developing their talents for the good of others.

The comprehension of PS in contemporary society is also based on the combination of prevention and etiology for all youth. On the one hand, it avers the idea of accumulating protective factors in their various expressions, where their higher number predicts better behavioural and developmental outcomes. On the other, it seeks the roots of regression in different categories of youth development. Don Bosco's response to both phenomena is promotional in the form of systematic accompaniment of young persons at personal, group and community levels. Healthy relational

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<sup>7</sup> Rik Biesmans, "Assistance: The Essence of Don Bosco's Preventive System," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 16, no. 2 (July-December 2015): 147.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Gonsalves, "Don Bosco's 'Expressive' System. An Alternative Perspective for a Communication Age," *Salesianum* 71 (2009).

systems can be established only on the basis of all mentioned types of educational presence, considering the influence of physical environment likewise.

The mutual interactions of young individuals and their settings are a convergent point between Salesian education and PYD. The PYD theory, which is at the cutting edge of interdisciplinary scientific theory, outlines not only the interactions of the dyad individual ↔ context, but it also specifies them within larger developmental systems. The latter are rooted in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which defines development of an individual as a permanent change in a temporal framework.<sup>9</sup> Bronfenbrenner's conceptualization had a great impact on the developmental psychologist Richard Lerner and his developmental contextualism, which paved the way to the PYD theory.

Hamilton<sup>10</sup> discusses PYD in at least three different ways, yet interrelated: as a developmental process; as a philosophy or approach to youth programming; as instances of youth organizations and programmes striving for PYD. One of the major lacunas or challenges regarding PYD remains the question of enhancing the fusion between individuals and their contexts through intentional change. Without it, youth development cannot be labelled as positive and does not provide the integration of prevention and promotion neither the interaction between intervention and developmental disciplines.

## 2.2. *PS Components*

The conceptual trinity on which the Preventive System is based encompasses reason, religion and kindness. All these components head towards all-round well-being of youth, as is the case also in PYD.

### 2.2.1. Reason

Don Bosco had a firm belief that young persons with their reason are educable to their own benefit and to that of society,<sup>11</sup> moving between

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<sup>9</sup> Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Ecologia dello sviluppo umano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Stephen F. Hamilton, *A Three-Part Definition of Youth Development* (New York: Cornell University College of Human Ecology, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Francesco Motto, "Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco. Le colonne portanti del metodo," *Note Di Pastorale Giovanile* (n.d.), [https://www.notedipastoralegiovanile.it/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=a](https://www.notedipastoralegiovanile.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=a)

rationalism on the one and sentimentality on the other hand. In fact, it implies the use of common sense, leading to realism and learning from everyday experience as a school of life. The component partially resembles the PYD asset Commitment to Learning, although the second remains limited mainly to school settings. This does not mean that Don Bosco, the great educator, did not place great emphasis on school education. On the contrary, he opened workshops for male educands and evening schools. He also penned many school textbooks and founded the publication Salesian Bulletin.

Similarly, Mary Domenica Mazzarello dealt with the education of girls in their convict, inviting female teachers to hold courses in various subjects, from music to languages and home economics. Mazzarello herself learned to write at an advanced age in the frame of her schools and became a seamstress to teach girls the trade. But she always connected pure intellectual education with holistic formation of female youth, which can be perceived in her letter,<sup>12</sup> inviting her sisters to learn not only the languages of this world but firstly how to speak with God as the path to inner happiness.

Furthermore, in both cases, for Mary Mazzarello and John Bosco, reason is also related to responsibility and personal freedom, on the basis of which major and minor decisions are made. The PYD developmental assets link it to the asset of Positive Values, explained in the subsequent paragraphs.<sup>13</sup> They indicate a confluence of youngsters' external and internal sources of development, whereby adults offer explanations and food for thought and youth respond by pondering life issues and integrating them into their (value) system. Intellectual activity is thus linked to moral reasoning, with the scope of reaching post-conventional stage of moral development in adolescents. It also contributes to the formation of adolescent personal faith through concrete initiatives and examples.

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article&id=15175:il-sistema-preventivo-di-don-bosco-3-le-colonne-portanti-del-metodo&catid=351&Itemid=1111.

<sup>12</sup> Maria Domenica Mazzarello, *I Will Never Forget You. Letters of Mary Domenica Mazzarello*, trans. FMA English-language Translation Group (Rome: FMA Institute, 2004), 105.

<sup>13</sup> The common point of PS and PYD here is virtue-based education, related also to positive psychology. It aims at character development, whereby every person is believed to have potential for positive development as there is a point of goodness accessible in every youngster, even the most delinquent, according to John Bosco.

### 2.2.2. Religion

As already mentioned, the Preventive System is a value-based system, which supersedes a mere intention of moral development and is oriented towards religion or rather personal faith. In fact, Don Bosco considers religion more than a set of beliefs, values, rituals and rules related to the Triune Christian God. The centrality of religious experience is composed of personal relations with God the Creator and Father, the Saviour and Son, Giver of Life and Holy Spirit. Being created in the image of God means for Don Bosco following also the divine mission given to every young person. In this way, the core message of youngsters' personal spiritual quest is not to ascribe the meaning of life solely by believers themselves, but to find it in God, who has a special plan for every person he created.<sup>14</sup> Such Christian humanism accompanies young generations through their past, present and future towards the ultimate truths, i.e., communion with God. His image chosen by Don Bosco that serves as a model to emulate first by educators and then by youngsters themselves is the Good Shepherd or Jesus described in Pauline terms as benign and patient, protective and trustful, perseverant and hopeful.<sup>15</sup> In this context and through such attributes of divine love, religion functions as an end and a means to maintain social and moral order as well as to seek the ultimate life goal.

Here, religion is connected with the concept of Character and its values in the PYD model as well as with the asset of Positive Identity-Positive View of Personal Future and Sense of Purpose, explained subsequently. However, in PYD models there is no specific mention of transcendence or a supernatural being like God as a part of personal ontological issues.

If religion or rather spirituality understood as full communion with God is the main goal of youth thriving in PS, there are many other sub-objectives according to Giraudo:<sup>16</sup> to promote processes of the appropriation of spiritual and human values, signposts to life; to personify and advocate for respect, social justice, school and labour, joy for life, music and theatre, friendships, sacrifice for others and God. Thus, the way of transcending individualism is being paved, which still leaves enough

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Aldo Giraudo, "La centralità della 'religione' nel sistema preventivo di don Bosco per l'accompagnamento educativo e spirituale dei giovani," *Salesianum* 79, (2017): 334.

<sup>15</sup> Giovanni Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù. Introduzione e testi critici a cura di Pietro Braidò* (Roma: LAS, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> Giraudo, "La centralità della 'religione' nel sistema preventivo di don Bosco per l'accompagnamento educativo e spirituale dei giovani."

room for individual growth in this regard and acknowledges the role of the caring community of believers within the personal spiritual journey. Indeed, the concept of religion “does not deny a growing person the right to one of the most profound interior needs of the human being: the quest for complete happiness.”<sup>17</sup>

Finally, Don Bosco and Mary Mazzarello propose in religion an educational tool which guarantees the fact still neglected in developmental science and education, i.e., all-round development of youth. Religion indeed represents the so-called “sparks” and means of igniting them with reference to the most intrinsic motivation of human existence - l(L)ove. As Mother Mazzarello puts it: “Love everyone [...] in the Lord [...]”<sup>18</sup> In the spiritual evaluation of the most profound human longing, human’s needs are met, as for instance the desire to be happy and loved; the need for confidence and self-esteem; the need to answer the questions of suffering and death.<sup>19</sup> This becomes possible with the help of sacraments (Penance and Communion), maintaining young hearts pure and radiant with joy. Mazzarello asserts that “cheerfulness [...] is the sign of a heart that really loves the Lord very much.”<sup>20</sup>

Another educational tool in the Salesian pedagogical tradition is offering the concrete example of Mary, Mother of God, and Marian devotions, connected with her figure. Her spiritual-religious daughters, viz., the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, were inspired by this woman, who lived her mission to the full, and proposed her model to their female educands. In parallel, PYD models pay attention to adult role models too and as assets promote Support as well as Empowerment of young persons.

### 2.2.3. Kindness

Loving kindness denotes a type of love and an approach of how to love by showing the affection to every young person. That is to say, in Don Bosco’s opinion youth must feel and know that they are loved. Kindness

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<sup>17</sup> Gonsalves, “Don Bosco’s ‘Expressive’ System. An Alternative Perspective for a Communication Age,” 663.

<sup>18</sup> Mazzarello, *I Will Never Forget You. Letters of Mary Domenica Mazzarello*, 214.

<sup>19</sup> Giraudo, “La centralità della ‘religione’ nel sistema preventivo di don Bosco per l’accompagnamento educativo e spirituale dei giovani.”

<sup>20</sup> Mazzarello, *I Will Never Forget You. Letters of Mary Domenica Mazzarello*, 206.

accompanied by reason and religion is the most efficacious manner to win youth's hearts. Additionally, Motto<sup>21</sup> defines kindness as authentic human love, benevolent, attentive and patient affection, which is also demanding, firm and "uncompromising with evil." This is firstly expected by adult educators, although educational love and its impact should be bidirectional. The more adults are supportive, the more positive outcome can be expected of younger generations. With such kind of awareness, Don Bosco indirectly started developing the concept of the ecological and lifespan perspective in his educational humanism. Due to his *zeitgeist*, the great educator focused more on the impact of adult figures on young people, but was becoming more conscious of mutual influences in individual ↔ context interrelationships as well. With this motivation, he named adults "friends, fathers and brothers"<sup>22</sup> in order to win boys' hearts for good. Notwithstanding that, he also counted on his young collaborators (some still adolescents) whom he called "guardian angels" in establishing supportive and healthy environments for the young. These "angels" had easier access to their peers, which paved the way to subsequent educational interventions and was mirrored in overall positive atmosphere of Salesian institutions.

With regard to the climate, important also in PYD, Don Bosco prioritized an intergenerational family spirit, realized by educators towards parentless children and youth in the first place. The pertinent characteristic could be recapitulated in the PYD asset of Family Support, Positive Family Communication, Other Adult Relationships and even Family Boundaries. Despite being a preventive and not a repressive system, it insists on certain boundaries and rules, however in the absence of chastisement and violence.

The same holds true for the family spirit cultivated in the first FMA communities, where girls formed their identity in the presence of the sisters and female teachers. Their *friends, mothers and sisters* analogously to Don Bosco's concept of adults accompanying youth, tried to ensure girls a feeling of safety through positive bonds, or through Connection, Caring and Compassion in PYD terminology. At the same time, the sisters knew that girls would accept certain educational incentives and guidelines from their young peers. These were the opportunities for them to gain interpersonal competence, e.g., resolving conflicts.

To conclude, a common denominator of all the educational relationships, be it at Don Bosco's Valdocco or in Mornese, was assistance,

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<sup>21</sup> Motto, "Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco. Le colonne portanti del metodo."

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù. Introduzione e testi critici a cura di Pietro Braidò*, 90.

a “constant presence that averts transgressions, and precludes the necessity of punishments”.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the assistance enabled finding latent potentials in youth as the fruit of educational love, which has not changed over time. In fact, the more supportive stimulations the young receive in their contexts, the more they are prepared for self-giving and creating in positive adulthood. Loving kindness is one of the conditions to successfully reach the adult stage in every young person. That is why PS is present in all the continents, in religious and non-religious settings, and can change the trajectories of every young individual, as indicated in Don Bosco’s and Mazzarello’s visions. In the first case, little John understood his educational-pastoral mission by means of beasts that in his dreams at nine years turned into meek lambs or diligent, humble boys under the guidance of the kind Lady. Similarly, Mother Mazzarello witnessed the calling of God’s Mother related to her care of girls playing in front of the future FMA convent. Both saints gradually decoded the visionary messages and successfully passed on their educational as well as spiritual values to next generations.

### *2.3. PYD components*

PYD is a vast theoretical field and in consequence has many models justifying the theoretical ground. However, all are based on the idea of developmental contextualism whereby individuals holistically develop through their intentional regulation, influenced by their settings, and at the same time impact the environment in which they live; the influence is bidirectional. This implies the rejection of a Cartesian dualism in youth development where nature (heredity and genes) and nurture (environmental stimuli like culture and education) are complementary leading to significant qualitative changes.

Different PYD models indicate different thriving indicators of youth development and predict their role in society in adulthood. Some of the most salient models or rather guidelines (because in constant evolution) are: the 4-H model, the developmental assets framework and the five Cs model.

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<sup>23</sup> Biesmans, “Assistance: The Essence of Don Bosco’s Preventive System,” 146.



### 2.3.1. 4-H model

The 4-H model began evolving much earlier than the PYD concept itself; yet, these two are closely interrelated, as proven by the fact that the 4-H is one of the most comprehensive tests of the five Cs model.<sup>24</sup> The 4-H thriving model is spread all over the world and has lately been dealing with the effects of its programmes on PYD.

The 4-H initials indicate the four principal dimensions of personality and competences: head, heart, hand and health.

**Head** stands for the cognitive or intellectual part referring to knowledge, thinking, reasoning, reflexivity, decision-making. The field bears many similarities with reason in PS.

**Heart** denotes affection, kindness, caring and other personal as well as social competencies. It is juxtaposed to head and linked to kindness in PS.

**Hand** is more of practical nature implying skills, competences in the field of vocation, profession, active citizenships and civil society.

**Health** is connected with physical competences in the first place, which leads to certain behavioural patterns and the pursuit of sense. It could be associated with religion in PS.

In order to achieve all-round youth development, it is necessary to take all four Hs into account. Pope Francis affirms it: “In order to educate, one has to be able to combine the language of the head with the language of the heart and the language of the hands”.<sup>25</sup> An educator has to be “multilingual” and has to accompany youth in their wholeness.

### 2.3.2. The framework of 40 developmental assets

Don Bosco foresaw the seeds of good in every young person, which are defined in PYD terminology as internal. They are “dispositions that

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<sup>24</sup> G. John Geldhof et al., “Relational Developmental Systems Theories of Positive Youth Development: Methodological Issues and Implications,” in *Handbook of Developmental Systems Theory and Methodology*, ed. Peter C. M. Molenaar, Richard M. Lerner, Karl M. Newell (New York: Guilford, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants at the Seminar Education: The Global Compact,” Francis, last modified February 7, 2020, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2020/february/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200207\\_education-globalcompact.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2020/february/documents/papa-francesco_20200207_education-globalcompact.html)

develop across time and enhance the probability of engagement in positive actions.”<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, external assets or ecological variables or inputs, supports, opportunities and actual developmental outcomes encourage young people to grow towards positive adulthood. The 40 assets of the framework, which has become one of the most powerful tools for comprehending PYD since 1990, are further categorized as follows.

**External developmental assets** contain: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Constructive Use of Time.

**Internal developmental assets** are composed of: Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies, Positive Identity.

External assets should be provided by adult educators and parents in the first place, which is aligned with Don Bosco’s educational philosophy in all asset fields. Establishing supportive climate and relationships, empowering youth by treating them as great resources, setting boundaries and expectations not only through adult role models, but also through positive peer influence and creating many possibilities for the constructive use of time (in sports, arts, youth programmes and at home) prepare the terrain for the development of internal assets likewise.

As already mentioned, Don Bosco spurred intellectual formation with a clear objective, resembling Commitment to Learning. Furthermore, PYD Positive Values of Caring, Equality and Social Justice, Integrity, Honesty, Responsibility and Restraint (especially in drug and alcohol consumption) are very much correlated to the value system of PS. Also, Don Bosco’s educands were encouraged to grow in their social competencies when faced with various interpersonal situations: Peaceful Conflict Resolution, Resistance Skills, Interpersonal and Cultural Competence as well as Planning and Decision-Making. These all make part of PYD Social Competencies too. Finally, Don Bosco put a great emphasis on identity formation called in PYD the asset of Positive Identity. He was striving for youth’s enhanced Self-Esteem, Sense of Purpose and consequently for a Positive View of Personal Future (PYD components of internal assets), which he imagined only in God. That notwithstanding, PS remains valid for different, even non-religious contexts, as is the case with PYD assets. These are interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, meant for all youth, regardless of their sex, age, culture, education and religion.

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<sup>26</sup> Peter C. Scales, Peter L. Benson, Nancy Leffert, and Dale A. Blyth, “Contribution of Developmental Assets to the Prediction of Thriving Among Adolescents,” *Applied Developmental Science* 4, no. 1 (January 2000): 27-46. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0401\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0401_3).

Although it is better to possess more assets at the same time (girls are usually equipped with a higher number of assets than boys), not all of them are needed to the same degree at once. Despite this fact, it is surely better to have more external and internal opportunities for the young, especially the poorest, than too few. This, however, remains a challenge for educators within the PS and PYD systems due to a frequent gap between adult belief and action in the education of youth. That is to say, their belief in young people is often stronger than their attitudes and deeds towards the young.

### 2.3.3. The five Cs model

The elements of the Cs model are based on the 40 developmental assets and represent an array of thriving indicators: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character and Caring.

**Competence:** Being competent means having various competence typologies, from academic, vocational to personal competences. These are the tools to successfully navigate youth's trajectories in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but were of great importance also in Don Bosco's and Mazzarello's times. Therefore, girls in Mornese were taught not only reading and writing skills, but also music, sports, art, etc.

**Confidence:** The category embraces the concept of self-worth, self-efficacy and protagonism. The more one has competences developed and believes in them, the more their locus of control is consolidated. Yet, this does not suffice; a young person primarily needs to feel unconditional love by others in order to be able to develop other personality areas.

**Connection:** The creation of social networks in youth's settings requires also the creation of safety and belonging, significant elements in PS and PYD. In this way, young persons are stimulated to transcend themselves and their phenomenon of adolescent egocentrism.

**Character:** Many a word has been said about character and moral development in both systems, PS and PYD, and both aim at the internalization of values (moral standards included). At this point, moral and spiritual development are intertwined, especially in connection with the development of spiritual values.

**Caring/Compassion:** At the inception, both terms did not make part of the Cs scheme but are gaining its importance as humane values and “the moral emotions of empathy and sympathy”.<sup>27</sup>

**Contribution:** As the last C was added Contribution by its inventor Richard Lerner. According to his stand, when all other Cs are developed, Contribution as the point of arrival on the path to idealized personhood comes into play. It bears other names as well: participation, and prosocial behaviour, community service and youth voice, youth engagement and positive citizenship.<sup>28</sup>

As a matter of fact, Contribution can emerge prior to the onset of the other Cs, functioning as an input or a result.

One of the main advantages of the five Cs model is its conciseness and clarity since each of the Cs is clear and practical to use. It is applicable worldwide and still under development, especially when studying the impact of individual cultures on PYD.

### 3. Strategies and means of application

Since PS as well as PYD strive for integral growth of youth in order “to become autonomous and responsible persons, and who are able to choose what is good for them,”<sup>29</sup> they avail of similar strategies and means of application. Their principles are commonly applied in four types of settings:

- In carefully designed programmes that have clear objectives on youth education;
- in organizations with well-defined educational plans;
- in socializing systems which promote developmental processes and outcomes;
- in communities<sup>30</sup> intersected with social norms and relational networks.

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<sup>27</sup> Barbara Poredoš, “Positive Youth Development: Between Theory and Practice,” *Orientamenti Pedagogici* (in press).

<sup>28</sup> Edmond P. Bowers, G. John Geldhof, Sara K. Johnson, Jacqueline V. Lerner, and Richard M. Lerner, “Special Issue Introduction: Thriving Across the Adolescent Years: A View of the Issues,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 43, no. 6 (2014): 859–868, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-014-0117-8>.

<sup>29</sup> Biesmans, “Assistance: The Essence of Don Bosco’s Preventive System,” 142.

<sup>30</sup> The concept of community should be understood in a broad sense of the word-

In Don Bosco's terminology, these settings could be presented by virtue of four pillars of education, i.e., home, playground, school, and parish. Each of these contains formal or informal educational strategies or programmes and is linked to larger community systems (e.g., parish related to the universal Church). Their common ground is the oratorian heart (deriving from Don Bosco's Oratory), described in the following way:

The practice of this [Salesian educational] method creates a family atmosphere and determines the initiatives that are necessary for each young person to grow in a warm and welcoming atmosphere (home) marked by happiness (playground), where he or she can develop all their potential, acquiring new skills (school) and embark on an explicit faith journey (parish).<sup>31</sup>

A welcoming atmosphere provides with the necessary conditions for the progress made in personal growth, of which Mary Mazzarello and the community of Mornese were equally convinced. Therefore, the integration of different development areas is also visible in the interplay of educational strategies in the Salesian environment. For Don Bosco and Mazzarello, school offered only a certain (intellectual) input to youngsters; the parish settings had to contribute to youth's spiritual development, whereas the playground to physical and moral formation (games had the rules to follow).

The most typical educational strategies and means of PS are oriented towards youth's holistic growth and their mature adulthood via developmental transitions. The latter include the requirement of heading towards physiological, cognitive, psychosocial, moral and spiritual maturation, which is carried out by Salesian educators with the help of the "goodnight talks,"<sup>32</sup> leading to "success in education."<sup>33</sup> They serve to create supportive climate, to strengthen community relationships and to learn how to read the signs of the times through moral-religious lens. The latter aspect is achieved through the "word in the ear" whispering relevant educational incentives in youngsters' ears to enhance their self-esteem, identity formation as well as positive (Christian) values.

As for PYD, means of youth involvement in their growth processes are similar, following the criteria of educational inculturation. Educators and parents are invited to instil confidence in youth by offering them the

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as a unit within society, not strictly a religious community.

<sup>31</sup> Martelli et al., "Activities and Works of Salesian Youth Ministry," 135.

<sup>32</sup> Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù. Introduzione e testi critici a cura di Pietro Braido*.

<sup>33</sup> Biesmans, "Assistance: The Essence of Don Bosco's Preventive System," 154.

possibility of conversations, encouragement, opportunities to serve and to stand up for themselves and their values. Above all, consistency in words and deeds of adults is required with the scope of being a genuine example for young people.

Educational action of PYD educators can systematically be explained by means of the so-called developmental relationships<sup>34</sup> which are to be found in asset-building communities. They always refer to both sides, youth and adults, and take place in four stages:

1. Attachment: Young and adult persons get emotionally attached, stimulating positive outcomes.
2. Reciprocity: Youngsters and educators participate in joint activities where boundaries are clearly set as guidelines towards independent critical thinkers-sources of their own development.
3. Progressive complexity: With the evolvement of reciprocal relationships, youth's behavioural patterns become more complex as well.
4. The last passage proposes the shift from the balance of power to the balance between adult- and youth-driven actions.

All the stages are to be found in PS alike, especially the last one with the roles of “guardian angels.” Don Bosco and Mary Mazzarello evolved it in a masculine or feminine manner, with regard to anthropology, ontology and methodology. As a matter of fact, women are more inclined to cherish such relationships through caring and compassion, whereas men through the provision of material and spiritual support. However, every educational institution realizes relational processes differently, but each of them is called to accompany young persons in order to:<sup>35</sup> get to know oneself better and to plan one's own life; reinforce personal faith in the search for vocation; contribute to society and reduce all forms of injustice. In such kind of accompaniment, resilience is augmented and protective factors

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<sup>34</sup> Edmond P. Bowers, G. John Geldhof, Sara K. Johnson, Lacey J. Hilliard, Rachel M. Hershberg, Jacqueline V. Lerner, Richard M. Lerner, “Youth–Adult relationships and positive youth development,” in *Promoting Positive Youth Development. Lessons From the 4–H Study*, ed. Edmond P. Bowers, G. John Geldhof, Sara K. Johnson, Lacey J. Hilliard, Rachel M. Hershberg, Jacqueline V. Lerner, and Richard M. Lerner (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 97–120.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Aucello et al., *Animator v skupini mladih*, 144.

(positive values and peer influence, work habits, etc.) implemented. All this occurs in a linear temporal framework, embracing non-linear youth development.

#### **4. Paradigm shift: From prevention to promotion**

In the trajectory of every young person, both prevention and promotion approaches are needed if understood in pure psychological terms. However, Don Bosco's comprehension of prevention already contained the promotional note, which was seen in his methodology with youth. In contrast to traditional services which are according to PYD problem-focused, PS and PYD highlight the importance of positive developmental outcomes. In case of PS, the aim of thriving exceeds the one of PYD since it reaches for eternity in a lasting relationship with God, the deepest source of every thriving person according to Christian belief.

Although the following scheme presenting the passage from traditional to current youth services refers to the PYD philosophy, it has many elements applicable to the PS field too:<sup>36</sup>

1. from problem-focused issues to focus on positive developmental outcomes;
2. from reactive to proactive approaches;
3. from targeted public-youth to all youth categories;
4. from youth as recipients to youth as active participants;
5. from programmes to community involvement and systemic change;
6. from professionals to all community members.

In light of the above passages, youth are not seen as problems but rather as potentials that should respond not only to negative challenges in their trajectories, but first of all to their vision and construction of good living conditions.

In addition, PS and PYD advocate for the inclusion of all types of youth in their educational processes, particularly PS that promotes the poorest young who are least likely to succeed in life.

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<sup>36</sup> Jutta Dotterweich, *Positive Youth Development Resource Manual* (New York: ACT for Youth Center of Excellence, n.d.).

As for the youngsters' role, they are expected to be more than just passive recipients of the services at their disposal. Indeed, they expect to assume active roles in society at large taking the appropriate responsibility.

Neither PS nor PYD began their mission with organized programmes but gradually developed on the basis of everyday educational experience, involving whole communities, regardless of professional education and age. Notwithstanding that, PS has built its foundations on the Salesian religious community as the promoter of Salesian formation. Thus, Don Bosco designated more mature educands in their late adolescence or early adulthood as his close collaborators in youth's formation. Such bottom-up approach has ensured the path towards systemic change, still in evolution in PYD literature. The long-term systemic change may bring more long-term results in the field of education, be it in contents or methods, whereby gender and cultural differences have to be considered as well. Yet, both perspectives tend to see youth as individuals, starting from their own desires and needs. As Villanueva<sup>37</sup> confirms and should hold true for all educators, a Salesian person knows their inspirations, challenges and problems from existential and theoretical points of view. The more so, since youth can be led astray despite many positive incentives they receive from their environment. The complementarity of prevention-promotion should never be self-evident but always revitalized in the mindset of practitioners, researchers and policy makers. To recap in Vecchi's words: "The good educator is the one who is always able to give and create a new opportunity. He is the one who never says: enough!"<sup>38</sup>

## 5. Future perspectives

PS with its three tenets of reason, religion and kindness as well as PYD still (or more and more) prove to be adequate in responding to the needs of today's youth and the whole society in which they live. With its supportive climate (family spirit) and empowerment of young generations in various arenas, both perspectives in question, PS and PYD, are placed between authoritarianism and permissiveness, a parenting style that can be of great help to practitioners and educators. Although historical

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<sup>37</sup> Pascual Cháavez Villanueva, "Le sfide della continuità e dell'adattamento nella pedagogia salesiana," *Orientamenti Pedagogici* 68, no. 4 (October-December 2021): 59-72.

<sup>38</sup> "Il buon educatore è quello capace di dare e creare sempre una nuova opportunità. È quello che mai dice: basta!"; Juan E. Vecchi, *Spiritualità salesiana* (Torino: Elledici, 2001), 114.



circumstances, educational disciplines and youth themselves have changed, core tenets of the educational models have remained the same, in particular ethical and moral values as landmarks of sense in youth's lives.

Furthermore, in view of theoreticians, PS and PYD should treat young persons on the basis of content and methodological interdisciplinarity from related areas, such as psychology, pedagogy, sociology, theology, philosophy, politics, etc. Circumstances in which youth's upbringing take place have lately changed to such a great extent<sup>39</sup> that it is impossible to understand contemporary youth without scientific interdisciplinarity and a profound, sincere attitude towards young persons. These are the sprouts of new humanism and universal solidarity present in youth education closely connected with Salesian realistic optimism and positive psycho-pedagogical tendencies in the last years.

For that reason, kindness as one of the PS tenets remains topical even today. It is an expression of love and respect towards every human being, irrespective of socio-economic background. In this way, social injustice is being reduced and marginalized youth is given the voice they deserve. Therefore, PS refers not only to families and educators, but also to (youth) policy makers and wider social circles.

The same goes for reason applied at school and in out-of-school programmes as common sense. Using intellect for learning by heart (usually within school settings) does not suffice. Youth's brain and mind are characterized by the plasticity that allows for personal agency in different life contexts, which is highlighted by the asset of Constructive Use of Time or Commitment to Learning with Reading for Pleasure, for instance.

The other side of the coin considering reason is spirituality, complementary to the rational part and an indispensable element of PS as well as of PYD. Although still underestimated in PYD literature, relation with a transcendent being or Christian God essentially influences youth's trajectories. Going beyond one's own needs is already a great leap, as defined by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Yet, establishing an intense relationship with a being greater than a human person denotes much greater progress in personal growth. The second one is based on the discovery that humans are made in the image of God, loving heavenly Father who protects and guides people through their life course and with whose help resilience as well as life purpose are significantly boosted.

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<sup>39</sup> Pope Francis speaks of a change of the epoch.

In view of kindness, reason and religion, these are to be found in PYD models likewise, rendering them complementary to PS; however, the asset framework is more detailed and the demarcation line between internal and external assets or inputs clearer. If Support, Empowerment and Social Competencies for example refer more to kindness and social relationships, Boundaries and Expectations as well as Commitment to Learning are bound to reason. Again, Positive Values and Positive Identity are associated with spirituality and personal faith, although less directly than PS.<sup>40</sup>

With regard to the five Cs model, its structure resembles the PS scheme, but is less explicit on religious issues, Character with its moral values being the closest to the pertinent PS category. Other components are aligned with reason, like Competence, whereas Caring/Compassion, Confidence and Connection with kindness.

An overview and a comparative analysis of PS and PYD show that they resemble each other in theory and practice, despite different terminology. Moreover, they prove to still meet the needs of contemporary youth worldwide. Some educational methodology and contents have changed, but the key concepts and values in both types of education have remained, preferring healthy, active youth in society over disadvantaged and passive young receivers.

This poses a challenge to educators and requires from them lifelong formation, for being able and humble enough to “be present with the young wherever [they] meet.”<sup>41</sup> Their presence should always be that of accompaniment and encouragement, as opposed to sheer adult leadership.

Finally, with the basic assumption of PS and PYD, i.e., love for the young, there is no need to literally replicate both educational systems in our educational settings, but to revitalize them anew - for love is creative in its prevention and promotion of youth.

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<sup>40</sup> PYD does not propose any specific religious denomination to follow in a personal spiritual quest. It rather leaves the choice of finding the telos to every individual.

<sup>41</sup> Martelli et al., “Activities and Works of Salesian Youth Ministry,” 139.

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# FATHER PHILIP RINALDI

## TEACHER OF SALESIAN HOLINESS

*by Stefano Maggio*

### **Introductory Note**

Fr. Stefano Maggio knew Blessed Philip Rinaldi, and as Central Ecclesiastical Assistant accompanied the Don Bosco Volunteers, the secular institute founded by Fr. Rinaldi. In the years leading up to Fr. Rinaldi's beatification on April 29, 1990, Fr. Maggio, too, made his contribution to the body of work, both popular and scholarly, on Fr. Rinaldi.

*Lo spirito di Don Bosco nel cuore del beato Don Rinaldi* is an anthology of Fr. Rinaldi's writings and conferences during his time as Prefect General (1901-1922) and Rector Major (1922-1931). It includes selections from conferences to the Daughters of Mary, a leadership group in the Salesian Sisters' Valdocco oratory, lessons on pedagogy to theology students at the Salesian house of studies in Foglizzo, conferences to the Zelatrici di Maria Ausiliatrice, the group that would become Don Bosco Volunteers, conferences and annual strenne (themes given as a type of spiritual New Year's gift) to Salesian Sisters, circular letters to Salesians of Don Bosco and letters to individuals. To this corpus Fr. Maggio adds an original study on Fr. Rinaldi's spirituality as reflected mostly in his personal correspondence.

This study<sup>1</sup> is the fruit of research conducted in an atmosphere of joyful anticipation of the beatification. Fr. Maggio's conversational, at times flowery, style conveys that excitement. For example, he frequently italicizes words and phrases, both his own and Fr. Rinaldi's, to draw attention to the points he is making. These are retained in the hope that, rather than being a distraction, they reflect the author's enthusiasm in studying and interpreting Fr. Rinaldi's work.

What may prove distracting are some occasional expressions that Fr. Rinaldi uses in his letters or that show up in notes that others have made from listening to his conferences. Understandably, Fr. Rinaldi did not take time to edit his letters to individuals as if they were for publication, nor did his listeners take notes other than for their personal purposes. When it became a choice between losing the flavor of the original text in favor of modifying expressions and correcting grammatical imperfections or retaining the original expressions, the choice went with the original expressions as long as the context and intended message could be discerned.

Fr. Maggio admits that deeper and more complete studies of the Don Bosco Salesian spirituality of Blessed Philip Rinaldi are wanting. He offers his final chapter as an initial contribution.

### 1. Presentation

[When I was preparing this book], the Rector Major<sup>2</sup> asked that I add this final chapter on Salesian holiness. It attempts to see what is relatively new in the way Fr. Rinaldi presented Christian holiness, even before Salesian holiness, to those whom he was directing.

This question first came up when I was reading the Servant of God's epistolary, to which for now I am turning and limiting my attention.

It is common in Salesian settings that, when we talk or write about holiness, we ordinarily go only as far as illustrating a formula, such as union with God, or some other means, whether it is a fundamental one, such as prayer, or, more generally, one of our characteristic devotions. This implies that our Teachers, beginning with Don Bosco, lack a theologically

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 8 of *Lo spirito di Don Bosco nel cuore del beato Don Rinaldi, Conferenze e scritti*, Stefano Maggio, Turin, SEI, 1990, 287-348, translated by John Puntino. All footnotes are those of the translator unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Fr. Egidio Viganò

sound and organic vision that would form the heart and vital centre from which everything, including these devotions, would flow and radiate.

Certainly, Founders were generally not preoccupied with leaving their disciples with true treatises on their spirituality, but instead guidelines and directions and still more the example of a lived holiness. It was their sons and daughters who then concerned themselves with a reflective study of the writings, teachings and examples from their holy lives, creating theological constructs from which were born the various Schools of Spirituality.

It seems to me that the Salesians have not yet faced this issue. They indeed seem quite embarrassed about defining the theological fundamentals of their own spirituality, even when they are not inclined to deny its very possibility. Nor can our first simple approach here aspire to as much.

Fr. Rinaldi, who was not a theologian, did not envisage the problem in a theoretical way. Nevertheless, from a first reading of his epistolary, elements emerge offering a tentative outline bearing a Christocentric reconstruction. Even though his teaching remains almost exclusively within a Salesian context and bears its stamp, its Christocentric nature makes it suited for religious and lay people alike.

This observation indeed changed the perception, based on an initial reading of the epistolary, that it was largely intended for religious persons (Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians) and therefore, of very limited interest. This reflection helped broaden its applicability. The singling out, in fact, of what would come to be the vital nucleus in the concept of holiness offered by Fr. Rinaldi, allows one to make further applications of it to non-religious, for example, to members of secular institutes, and likewise to everyday lay persons. We are dealing with a pure and simple return to the Gospels, St. Paul and the New Testament in general in anticipation of the same teaching from Vatican II.

This comes as no surprise. After all, are not all the saints inspired by the Gospel? Are not the same devotions of Don Bosco referring to Jesus Christ and his Blessed Mother? Striking about Fr. Rinaldi is that he refers directly to the Person of the Redeemer, from which he knows how to make applications relative to practical life. All is inspired directly from the Gospels and in general from the New Testament, even if explicit quotes are almost entirely lacking both from Scripture and from specific authors.

Yes, there is an author that he certainly knew and promoted, who, we think, could be one of his primary and favourite sources, French author

François Maucourant. His little book, *La vie d'intimité avec le bon Saveur à l'usage des âmes religieuses* (1897), quickly became popular even among persons not in consecrated life. Fr. Rinaldi even had it translated into Italian and published by the Salesians. We see him as early as June 1917 proposing it for meditation to the small group of the first three future “Zelatrici di Maria Ausiliatrice” (QC, p. 12),<sup>3</sup> and in June two years later he recommended it again to the same group, who by then numbered seven.

“You already know this book, but only in general, because books are not well understood the first time one reads them. Choose a point, even only one part of a point, but meditate deeply and well on it” (QC, p. 89).

He was also distributing it among the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians especially among those who needed to draw from it encouragement and confidence in the hard trials of life, as we see in the edifying mortuary letter of Sister Caterina Gaido.

Sister Caterina kept handy the little book, *Vita intima con Gesù*, which the Servant of God had given her. Several chapters were marked by a date; and the encouraging teaching of St. Francis de Sales and other Saints, cited by the author, gave her a way to correct her daily shortcomings. Discouragement, so easy to worm its way into souls who want to follow the way of perfection, was for Sister Caterina the stumbling block against which she needed to be vigilant and fight in order not to be defeated.<sup>4</sup>

Evidence of the wide distribution of this little work, also among the Oratory girls, comes to us from a letter that Fr. Rinaldi wrote to nineteen year old Maria Lanzio, already on her way to becoming a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians. “It makes me happy that you would read Maucourant. You are going to learn many things that will help you throughout your life” (Seville, March 5, 1919).

So, it is clear that Fr. Rinaldi knew and made wide use of this dear little book. The following data shows that it was in circulation both in France and elsewhere. In September 1919, the twelfth edition was printed

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<sup>3</sup> *Quaderno Carpanera: le conferenze spirituali di Don Filippo Rinaldi alle Zelatrici di Maria Ausiliatrice (1917-1928)*, ed. Pietro Schinetti, Rome, Istituto Secolare Volontarie di Don Bosco, 1980, abbreviated in the text as QC.

<sup>4</sup> No bibliographic information is given. Fr. Maggio did not use the block quote style in his work. This translation uses it as an editorial option.



“which increased the total number of copies to 159,000, of which 89,000 were in use among women religious, and 70,000 in use among the laity, not counting the print runs in foreign languages” (Preface).<sup>5</sup>

This is not to say, though, that Fr. Rinaldi actually discovered a spirituality in it, for he shows signs of possessing an emerging one much earlier. Some of his life experiences guide our judgment on this. Let us recall what he confided about his years back in his village after he hastily left the boarding school at Mirabello. “In my day no young man in Lu was going to Communion. I was the only one who did so, and this was at the urgings of my mother” (CA, p. 34).<sup>6</sup>

His resolution of March 20, 1881 is even more explicit about his personal relationship with Jesus. “I want to save my soul. I will bear with adversities, unburdening myself only with Jesus, Mary and Joseph” (CE, p. 24).<sup>7</sup>

In another example during his first experience at the new house at Mathi Canavese, Fr. Rinaldi, as a new director, needed to organize the little community of his “Sons of Mary.” Fr. Ceria says

He was sighing for the moment when he would have the Blessed Sacrament in the House, whose absence had him exclaiming, ‘We seem to be abandoned by all. We are new to the place and inexperienced in office, and we lack even this comfort.’ He finally talked with Don Bosco and everything was put in order (CE, p. 50).

It is rather easy to think, then, that Fr. Rinaldi would have found in Maucourant a rather close affinity with his deep-rooted spirituality. This is the author he particularly wanted for those he was directing in order to pass on his own spirituality because in part Maucourant’s simple style makes him accessible to everyone. Fr. [Pietro] Schinetti draws attention to even greater reasons.

He was one of the ascetical writers that Fr. Rinaldi preferred because of the deep piety that inspired his works [He saw to the translation and distribution of the author’s other small works: on humility (1889), poverty (1890), obedience (1892) and chastity (1900)] and also because his

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<sup>5</sup> Of the Italian edition.

<sup>6</sup> Luigi Castano, *Don Rinaldi. Vivente imagine di Don Bosco*, Turin, LDC, 1980, abbreviated in the text as CA.

<sup>7</sup> Eugenio Ceria, *Vita del Servo di Dio sac. Filippo Rinaldi, terzo Successore di S[an] Giovanni Bosco*, Turin, reprinted 1951, abbreviated in the text as CE.

teaching was drawing largely on St. Francis de Sales through [author Fr. Joseph] Tissot” (QC, p. 63, note 115).

Now we arrive at the opinion of the first Theological Reviewer of the writings of the Servant of God, according to whom the true author and inspirer of Fr. Rinaldi was St. Francis de Sales himself, and more specifically, his work, *Theotimus*, or *Treatise on the Love of God*. Furthermore, in the final analysis, so to speak, the original sources are the Gospel, especially that of St. John with his respective letters, and St. Paul.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Texts

### 2.1. *The laws of Christian sanctity*

Here, rather than following an exhaustive treatment of this introductory theme, we offer an initial reflection on it. Let us turn to a more direct look at Fr. Rinaldi's letters, aware that in them he almost never lingers with organic and complete presentations of holiness, but almost always limits himself to offering and illustrating particular points according to the needs of individual cases and persons. This is what characterizes our work: to reconstruct from the varied and scattered material, a spiritual edifice that certainly had to be present in him as he was proposing and recommending such details not as a scholar but as a master of the spirit.

And yet, among the numerous letters we find a small one which proves the exception to the rule. Dated May 24, 1920 and directed to the young Daughter of Mary Help of Christians Sister Teresa Graziano, assistant to the Mistress of Novices, the letter would later draw immediate attention to itself for its coherent and relatively complete treatment of the concept of holiness and its components, *a real miniature treatise*. Judging its overall merit, it is worth immediately quoting it in full:

Thank you for the news, for the greetings of the Superior and for the prayers. Your plan *to want to become holy* so you can be of service

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<sup>8</sup> Author: Each letter will contain the date, the person addressed, and the page of the Epistolary volume. The italics are ours unless otherwise indicated. Translator: In his letters Fr. Rinaldi frequently abbreviates references to Our Lord and to Mary. Full names and titles replace such abbreviations in an effort to favour content over form. References to Epistolary pages are omitted in this translation. Bracketed entries are the author's.

to others makes me very happy. That is it; no one can give what one does not have. You would need to have much to give something.

From this comes the necessity *to draw near to Our Lord*, who is the source of grace, virtue and holiness. Only he can warm us, sustain us and give us true life.

So *let us draw near* to him: 1) with aspirations and prayers; 2) with meditation; 3) with the Sacraments, above all with Holy Communion.

Courage, Sister Teresa, because the mission of making holy religious and true Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is the noblest one that can be accomplished in this world. It is precisely to give souls to Jesus, who, like Jesus Christ, then give themselves to saving souls. It is a mission for which I would like to live and die. Since I have not been given this treasure, I hope that Sister Graziano may know how to appreciate it and accomplish it with all her might.

Nevertheless, may you not forget that to draw near to Jesus is to participate in all that is his, including the humiliations, the garden, the thorns, the Cross. Hold firmly, my daughter, above all to these things, never abandoning them, never looking to anyone else.

Anyone can see the importance of this snapshot for our purpose here and to understand how, with such an outline well in hand, it was not difficult while reading the other letters to collect little by little the various pieces – enough to fill up a bag – that would come together to form a complete mosaic.

It follows, from the task we have undertaken, that holiness according to Fr. Rinaldi is directed to and focused on the Person of Jesus Christ, who becomes its compelling heart and centre. He made use of expressions that indicate the spiritual relationship to establish with Jesus Christ: *Our Lord Jesus Christ, Our Lord, the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ*. These are the many alternative expressions that recur in his writings, almost always abbreviated the same way, blamed on the haste of penning many letters in one day. They acquire various and not random shades of meaning, such as, to draw near, to follow, to imitate, to love, to become united with. Fr. Rinaldi attributes to this last expression a complete theological-mystic value, very far from a simple intellectual significance that the traditional expression “*union with God*” could suggest. To these expressions we add *to serve*, even if the word itself does not appear, in as much as the Servant of God

presents holiness always under its essential *apostolic* aspect, as indeed it appears also in the cited text, “*to become holy so you can be of service to others.*”

He preferred verbs to nouns, thus highlighting action, as befits the work of personal sanctification (“to want to become holy”); verbs, that, all together, especially if arranged on a musical scale, may suggest a willingness to describe and give rhythm to the various traditional phases of the spiritual life, from the purgative to the illuminative to the unitive. It is clear, as we saw, that Fr. Rinaldi never tried to give a complete theological construct on holiness, nor is it our intention to press the point of these last considerations. We will, in fact, for the purpose of clarity keep this logical order in our reconstruction. For the same reason we will proceed in steps, so that the full concept of holiness envisaged by Fr. Rinaldi will become clear only at the end.

Let us begin, by way of introduction, with some considerations on holiness in general. Fr. Rinaldi, keeping things simple, uses a very clear and precise vocabulary, speaking explicitly of *holiness* while avoiding the more nuanced and less comprehensible terms such as *spirituality*. Regarding *true holiness*, “Do not be satisfied with being *good*, become *holy*”, he wrote to the Provincial, Sister Rosalia Dolza (November 24, 1928). And some months before he wrote to her, “I am happy that you desire to *become holy*. Remember however that it *costs much*. You must *suffer*, but it does not matter” (January 20, 1928).

Since we are dealing then with true holiness in the *Christian* sense, the consequence is that it is not nor can it be merely a *human* work. “... few souls understand this work well, and many believe they have to make it a *drudgery*, that is, they have to huff and puff and sweat, etc.”

Instead, “this work, first of all, *must be left to the Lord to do*, not impeding him with our will, with our self-love; making it too much our own” (to Sister Orsolina Molinari, October 14, 1915).

More complete and straightforward is the first thought in another letter.

Interior work needs our *cooperation*, but let us not forget that what must direct it is the *grace of God*. Let us abandon ourselves with confidence to the work of *grace*, not disturbing it with our worries, with our “me”, with unrelated curiosity. *Let Our Lord work; let us bend*

*ourselves to the slightest breath of the Spirit of God* (to Sister Lina Stracco, after 1919).

Fr. Rinaldi makes an effort to explain to the *Postulants at Giaveno* the ultimate nature of this work of Our Lord by using an image. “*Jesus wants to imprint his image in each one of you. Jesus will paint it within you. Prepare for him the fine and soft canvas. He will create a masterpiece*” (July 12, 1915).

And in his rich conference in the same place, he describes at length the laborious and, in fact, harsh treatment which hemp undergoes before it becomes “the fine and soft canvas.”

After these brief considerations of a general nature, we move on to illustrating the various aspects under which Fr. Rinaldi presents holiness.

## 2.2. *Draw near to Jesus, “source of grace, virtue and holiness”*

We mentioned above the biblical foundation that one notices, almost breathes in, in the language that Fr. Rinaldi uses when he writes on holiness. Now we can easily verify this by beginning with the verb “draw near” (in Greek, *prosérchomai*, Latin, *accedere*, and Italian, *avvicinarsi*) which directly or indirectly always refers to Jesus Christ. It suffices to quote the famous passages from the letter to the Hebrews (4:14-16; 7:22-25; 10:19-22; 11:6).

Now, the text that is most explicit and closest to our context is that most famous one, of a baptismal nature, from the First Letter of St. Peter:

So put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation; for you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. *Come to him (ad quem accedentes, draw near to him)*, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual *sacrifices* acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (2:1-5).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Bible translations will follow Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (RSVCE) unless otherwise noted.

In the letter to Sister Graziano already quoted, when Fr. Rinaldi speaks of “humiliations, the garden, the thorns, the Cross”, one notices precisely the long journey of holiness that he outlines and assigns to the young sister. It is even to the heights of a life transformed “into a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” as St. Peter indicates.

In other letters the Servant of God gets more specific about the various stages of approaching Jesus Christ. It starts with the soul’s need to negate its previous activity.

“*Clear away the obstacles and draw near to the Lord*, and you will see [that] you will easily work, be it also sometimes with effort, but you will work in harmony with the Spirit of Our Lord, and the Lord will bring you up on high” (to Sister Orsolina Molinari, October 14, 1915).

“*Draw near to the Lord* and you will see that strength comes” (to Mrs. E. C., October 4, 1922).

“*Let us draw near to the Lord* and from Him things will go well for us and for others” (to the same, May 18, 1928).

“Studies, school, labours, sufferings and consolations are the many steps *for ascending and drawing yourself to Our Lord* whom we should know, love and serve as much as possible in this world” (to Sister Cecilia Lanzio, September 13, 1929).

“I am happy that I can still congratulate you for your Profession, which *brings you ever closer to the Good God*; I wish you great progress in holiness; act like Martha and Mary” (to Sister Marta Gastaldo, October 27, 1930).

And we can stop here. As you see, already in the verb *to draw near* Fr. Rinaldi condenses a whole plan for holiness, and not only one step or part of it. It will be clearer for the verbs that follow.

First, let us grant ourselves now a concluding remark on the more or less dependence of Fr. Rinaldi on Maucourant. One looks in vain in this author for an adequate confirmation of the rather eye-catching part Fr. Rinaldi gives to the expression *to draw near to Jesus*. Only two small

phrases can be plucked from an attentive reading, but both are introduced in the discussion in different contexts and in a secondary form. The first concerns the fruit of the first sin that left in the spirit of men that “terror of divine things *that impedes them from drawing near with trust to God*” (*Vita intima con Gesù*, p. 49). The second lies inserted in a thought of St. John Chrysostom, according to which “nothing draws us so much to God and makes us so intimate with Him, as this fidelity” in following his will.

Too little, then to draw from it a true and proper dependence.  
*Fr. Rinaldi does it himself*<sup>1</sup>

### 2.3. Follow Jesus: by way of the Cross (see Luke 9:23)

Undoubtedly clear is the biblical character of this verb (*akoloutheo*), which readily identifies with the famous passage on following Christ, appearing almost exactly word for word in the three synoptic Gospels, with its more integral form in Luke 9, 23. “And he said to all, ‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up *his cross daily and follow me*’” (see Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34).

The centrality that *the mystery of the Cross* assumed in the rest of the New Testament in agreement with this pronouncement of Jesus is well noted, particularly with the “theology of the Cross” that St. Paul fully elaborated and proposed to Christians. He synthesizes it with the doctrinal expression, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and *him crucified*” (1Cor 2:2); and with the personal statement, “I have been *crucified with Christ*; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20); and completed with, “But far be it from me to glory except in the *cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14).

Another somewhat necessary text is the first letter of Peter with the Old Testament reference to the famous song of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah (52:13ff). “But if when you do right and *suffer* for it you take it patiently, you have God’s approval. For to this you have been called, because *Christ also suffered* for you, leaving you an example, *that you should follow in his steps*” (2:20-21).

Remarkable, then, is the centrality and the fullness of the mystery of the Cross in the spiritual teaching of Fr. Rinaldi. Against the background of what traditional asceticism commonly terms *Mortification*, he shows a greater adhesion to the evangelical-biblical teaching just described.

We offer, therefore, a sufficiently abundant documentation on these varied, yet substantially similar, expressions so as to discover in them one of the primary ideas of the Servant of God, and therefore of the Salesian charism, of which Fr. Rinaldi is an authoritative bearer and interpreter.

Let us begin with the precious letters to Sister Teresa Graziano. “If at times it costs and causes suffering to follow Our Lord, let us remember, my daughter, that in paradise we will be greatly rewarded. It is well worth suffering some little things here, in order to enjoy God in eternity” (April 7, 1920).

Fr. Rinaldi very often calls to mind this last teaching, in accord with the vital concept of the Paschal Mystery of *Death and Resurrection*.

The same message recurs in another note to Sister Teresa, this one, without date, on the occasion of her father’s death. “*We follow Jesus Christ Our Lord on the road of sorrow*. Courage! Let us also increase in his love.”

Recall the thought already mentioned to the Provincial, Sister Rosalia Dolza about holiness. “Remember however that *it costs much*. *You must suffer*, but it does not matter” (January 20, 1928).

After excusing himself with the missionary, Sister Lina Stracco, for the long delay in responding to a previous letter of hers, he urges

... and since then how many things have happened! External changes to everything, to feasts, persons and things. How was your spirit affected by so many *changes*? I can only imagine it, but you remember that this was an opportunity for you to meditate on the need to have only one point of support in the missions and in life. We must *seek Our Lord Jesus Christ* who does not change, and remains forever our aim, our life and our glory (during 1929).

Generally, the language of the Servant of God avoids harsh tones, favouring rather a gentle manner that proves effective. On the back of a holy card of the Child Jesus he writes to Sister Graziano, “May Sister Teresa Graziano bring to the Holy Child a bouquet of lilies and roses *with their thorns*” (December 18, 1922).

In a note to her from Nizza Monferrato he writes, “One runs the race for the glory of God with Paradise as the goal. Onward without being concerned with the *little thorns*. Let us pray for each other so that we may reach that goal” (May 14, 1924).



Another more effective way to present suffering is *to have something ready to offer the Lord*. And in this his resourcefulness is admirable. Included among the documents are some letters sent to young Sister Rosetta Dadone whose obedience took her from Turin to far-off Sicily. Let us pluck the best flower from the bouquet. “Little by little you will overcome even the effects of the changes; and the memory of all your dear ones, without erasing them from your mind, but rather making even more of an impression, will become *less painful* and a benefit for your soul” (July 17, 1914).

A little more than a month later, on her name day, he remembers her along with the other Rosettas of the Turin Oratory in his greetings.

I do it all the more willingly inasmuch as I know that a rose, beautiful as it is, *has its thorns*, and I think that you also will have your thorns, especially as you find yourself in a new setting where the devil will come to prick you in a thousand ways. Be attentive, my dear daughter, not to be fooled. Take it as a rule that your *imagination intensifies sufferings* and paints a gloomy and scary picture. Laugh at these fantasies, turning them to your advantage in the name of the Lord. *After sadness comes cheerfulness*, which I wish you with all my heart as I pray for you (August 30, 1914).

Shortly afterwards he feels the need to write to her again.

All your fears *and sufferings* perfectly correspond with the condition of your spirit, your education and even your vocation. If you did not have *those sufferings*, you would not be Rosetta, and I would doubt your good outcome. It would be a sign that you do not have heart, that you are not sensitive, that the devil counts your vocation as nothing.

Being sensitive means that everything affects you, and this will help you to feel so many other things that will benefit your soul. *Love for your family makes you feel their absence*. The devil, who sees that you escaped from him, *has to pursue you*. Be at peace, dear daughter, that all will be well.

Your health has declined a bit; your head aches, and so does your stomach. Your letter reminds me of *how much even I suffered in times past*. Keep in good spirits, trusting that just as I got through it all, you will get through it all... *and then you will know how to console others* (September 2, 1914).

He even makes use of a comparison with soldiers going off to war, building up the image of hardships, injuries on the field, of death, “with no comfort after long torments, in the fray, trampled underfoot, or neglected in some corner.” Then he applies it to her.

You see, Rosetta? You, too, are now on the field, *only your battle is with yourself* You are *destroying self-love and yourself* in order to win souls, serve the Lord, obtain the glory of heaven. Courage. *Let nothing disturb you*. Remember that for the glory of the world *others suffer more than we*” (May 18, 1915, during the first days of the Great World War).

Another daughter to whom the Servant of God offered tender care was Maria Lanzio. She was the second of three sisters taken under his fatherly care, especially since their father remarried soon after the death of their young mother.

During the months in which her vocation was taking root, she received a note from Seville from the Servant of God who was on a visit to Spain. “Courage, Maria, watch that you bear well your *crosses and sufferings*, which I think you are encountering right now. *Life is sown with setbacks* and these are occasions for us to prove our virtue” (March 5, 1919).

In January of 1923, Maria is already in the Novitiate, while her older sister, Cecilia, also embracing her vocation, was on her way to the United States as a missionary, and her younger sister, Albertina, remained alone in the family home with her stepmother. Good Father Rinaldi wrote to her from Lanzo.

You did well to write me. It is natural that you are deeply saddened by the separation. Cecilia and Bertina are *dear to your heart*; if you did not feel their absence, your heart would be as cold as ice. On the other hand, *by feeling this way, you have more to offer the Lord*. Be generous therefore.... Take advantage of the solitude, of the *sacrifice*, make yourself more perfect and more good. What you write does not surprise me, in fact, it actually seems very natural to me (January 1923).

With the older sister, Cecilia, who was more mature, the wise director and father did not fear to address her in a more explicit way. “I am happy that now you are *totally the Lord’s*. Now the devil will still do all he can, but I hope that we will always prevail. Let us remember that *the Cross will be our portion*. Let us love it and attach ourselves to it, so that we can save ourselves and many souls” (October 12, 1922).

Regarding her upcoming perpetual profession, Fr. Rinaldi wrote,

Now in that (letter), I wrote briefly about *knowing how to suffer*. *The Cross is the way to heaven: ‘qui vult venire post me tollat crucem suam.’*<sup>10</sup> We are in good company with the Cross. This does not eliminate that the Lord Himself *helps us to carry it* thus making it sweet, gentle, dear, and our consolation and glory... *Even Don Bosco had his crosses*, but let us never forget that *he carried them with a smile on his face* and with full confidence in the Lord (April 13, 1929).

After the death of the Servant of God, Sister Cecilia was asked to write some of her memories for a biography. From the USA she confided in Fr. Ceria.

I have a precious *notebook*, in which, as I was aware of the holiness of my guide, I wrote down as literally as possible each time those expressions of his that impressed me most and that I thought would help me in the future. I am reporting some of those which show the loftiness of that chosen soul of his (CE, p. 495).

We will draw also from the “Little Notebook” and the corresponding page in Ceria. Regarding the Cross, he wrote to her this way: “*Ask for the Cross of Jesus, and ask him also for the strength to carry it*” (CE, p. 497).

Writing to the troubled lady E. C., he wrote, “*Everyone has his cross to bear*. Strive to carry it as Our Lord, who fell under the Cross, *but always got up*” (Catania, August 16, 1916).

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<sup>10</sup> He who wishes to follow me, let him take up his cross; see Matthew 16:24.

At times his tone is strong, especially when he is confronting someone who is resisting God's Will, particularly with regard to vocation. This is the case with Celestina Dominici, secretary of the *Daughters of Mary*, who could not resign herself to the fact that she was not admitted to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. So, the good father, who held her in high esteem and favoured her, wrote to her.

I am reading with pleasure your very dear letter, containing a *beautiful rose with its thorns*. These thorns would serve you well *if the devil would not pierce you with them*. And it is just he who is piercing you with them, because he does not want you to enjoy the peace and quiet [of the mountains] and gain some health. Do not give him the satisfaction of suffering because of him. *You know where God wants you, and this is enough*. You can do endless good in your position [as a certified seamstress with many young women apprentices whom she was forming to live their Christian faith in a vibrant and joyful way]. You will not lack interior peace; *you will have the rest in paradise*. What do you think, that you will live another hundred years on earth? Be at peace, all this will pass quickly. *You will return then to doing God's will*. For now, enjoy the peace of these days. (September 10, 1912, Don Bosco Volunteers Archives).

In contrast with the strong tone toward Celestina, Fr. Rinaldi shows great understanding toward Miss Teresa Musso, another of his spiritual daughters. She too is troubled by the question of vocation, but remains docile in his hands. An excellent licenced obstetrician, she ended up choosing the single vocation and later joining the Don Bosco Volunteers. She was awarded the Gold Medal for Meritorious Service after 40 years of long and sacrificial service, and lived until July 10, 1966.

The following selections come from among those letters found in the epistolary. How he insistently returns to the theme of the Cross!

The Lord wants nothing more than to purify you with this new illness. He desires *patience in suffering* and in awaiting [an FMA vocation], and you have only *to accept* what he is providing. Let us accept everything, therefore, from the hands of the Lord (November 4, 1909).

At all times keep in mind that *you will find the Cross always and everywhere*. We must sanctify ourselves under the Cross *just like the Most Holy Virgin*. It is at the foot of the Cross that she rose to the greatest holiness (February 6, 1914).

Remember that *we all have a cross*. This is yours. I feel sorry for you; I would have wanted to take it away from you, but since I cannot, I will keep you in prayer. Have courage; in time *we will be rewarded* for doing good, and this will not be long in coming (February 27, 1918).

Courage. Keep your spirits up because there is suffering everywhere in this miserable world. Fortunate is the one who knows how to suffer (July 8, 1918).

I see that with every cross that comes the Lord then supports you one way or another. It is really true that the Lord permits trials, and that they are never greater than our strength. Remain devout despite everything, because life passes and the good remains with us and will follow us into eternity. I remember you always (August 6, 1920).

Your life is *sown with many sufferings* and just as it happens to all the souls that must be great. It is true that even little souls suffer... but very differently. Courage. Raise your mind and your heart, and *hope*. With your honesty of life you will have the recompense of the Lord, who takes account of all that escapes the human eye (December 4, 1920).

How much good the Servant of God steadily spread over the years by accompanying one by one his distant daughters through letters so rich in human understanding and supernatural priestly charity!

He gave evidence of this to the oft-remembered Sister Teresa Graziano on the occasion of the death of her father and then on the death of one of her dearest sisters.

How difficult the path of virtue gets at times! *How heavy the Cross some days!* I would like to help you carry it or at least make it lighter for you, *but how difficult it is*. One ends up doing nothing. However, I will pray much to the Lord for your good Sister, your Mother and for Sister Teresa. The Lord, *when he presses with a heavy hand he does not oppress*, rather he provides for our growth and softens

our suffering. Let us abandon ourselves to his infinite goodness (June 8, 1925).

The humble Coadjutor Costantino Stefanoni received a message still richer in fatherly tenderness.

With pain and with prayer, I followed *your long Calvary* back and forth from the house to the hospital, and now I rejoice with you for your faith in our Blessed Don Bosco and for the good state of your health. *Deo gratias!* [He passes away only some years later, on April 18, 1935 in Milan at the age of 50.] Take care to have your faith and charity grow. We will continue to accompany you with prayer.

*Surely suffering purifies us and bring us closer to the Lord*, and through your suffering you realize that you have not suffered in vain. How clear it is that *one ascends to heaven by way of Calvary and the Cross!* May the Lord bless you, so dear to us; be always a worthy son of Blessed Don Bosco” (February 6, 1930).

So, according to the teaching of Fr. Rinaldi, in line with the most orthodox ascetical tradition, *the Cross does not have value in itself*, but accomplishes a double task: *purification and sanctification* of the individual and *apostolic fruitfulness*. The first brings to total detachment *even to immolation*, the second disposes one to *total donation* of oneself to one’s neighbour with the greatest disinterest. Fr. Rinaldi tirelessly encourages both by giving the example.

We begin with the latter. In writing to Fr. Antonio Candela, of the Superior Chapter on Visitation in the USA, he thus pronounces with the authority of Pope Pius XI, “Without a spirit of *mortification* we will never preach Jesus Christ, the Pope told me” (April 17, 1927).

In a positive sense and with fatherly affection, he reminds Fr. G. Antonio Pinaffo, Missionary in Siam-Thailand († August 25, 1971),

This is the miracle of the missionary, *to sacrifice oneself as did Our Lord Jesus Christ*. Your life lets me see that the love of souls and of the Lord develops *with continuous mortification*. If you only knew how well I remember it, and how well I remember you! Tell it to Fr.

Caraglio, that the Lord watches over him *and counts all his sufferings* (February 16, 1930).

And remembering the austere Gospel symbol of the seed, he admonishes the first Daughters of Mary Help of Christians missionaries in India, in the person of Sister Giulia Berra, who was for many years a collaborator of the Servant of God in the Oratory of Valdocco.

I am happy that you have arrived in Assam. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are *like the seed*. In order that it bear the plant and the fruit – and let them remember it well and not forget it – it will have to be *buried, to decompose* and then, little by little, *come to life*. Here is what you need to do, *but do it with cheerfulness, do it with the spirit of joy of Don Bosco, do it without considering the sacrifices*. Forward in Domino. How many baby girls are awaiting redemption through the work of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians! (December 31, 1923).

It is the impetus that makes one think of the *Resurrection of Christ*!

From two other Mission territories came the laments and preoccupations of his sons faced with the fruitlessness and almost uselessness of their labours. The admonition becomes solemn and acquires a tone of prophecy in the person of Fr. Galdino Eleuterio Bardelli, Missionary in China († Hong Kong, November 10, 1982, 99 years old) and recipient of a good packet of letters with which Fr. Rinaldi follows and accompanies the enthusiastic youth.

You are, my dear sons, our first martyrs of *China*. Remember that to be martyrs it is not necessary to shed blood, *suffice it to die for Our Lord Jesus Christ*. You who work zealously for the glory of God want it at the cost of whatever sacrifice, and do not hold back, *you are our martyrs*.

Your sacrifice is perhaps less preached on earth, but is of extraordinary usefulness. You are charting the path for us to keep; *you are preparing future conversions. You are sowing seeds, others will do the reaping*. Courage, dear Fr. Bardelli (August 11, 1929).

And here the good Father remembers Don Bosco's slow martyrdom in life, which blossomed and matured in the triumphant celebrations of his Beatification (June 2, 1929).

No less solemn, demanding and prophetic is the warning he gives in writing to Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti, head of the first missionary outreach in Japan begun in 1925.

You must be satisfied in the first years with *sowing seeds*, with *labouring*, with *suffering*; the harvest will be *late* and possibly *at the same time ruined*. Do not be dismayed. God asks of you *work, sweat and sacrifices*. He is "*Deus qui incrementum dat.*"<sup>11</sup> The most dreadful sacrifice is that of seeing the *futility of our efforts*. To this sacrifice perhaps will be reserved *immense and resounding graces*, which will constitute in turn the harvest of one who did not sow, *but the reward will be all yours* and will be "*merces magna nimis.*"<sup>12</sup>

*You must lay the foundations* of our work in a great mission [= nation?]. Understand the nobility of this enterprise; sense the responsibility of it. Then let the foundations *not be yours* – not Paul's, Cephas' or Apollo's, but all Salesian, all Don Bosco's. Be faithful, therefore, and I would say scrupulous in observing the Rules and Regulations which will be studied, meditated upon, deepened, practiced *mordicus*,<sup>13</sup> with tenacity, constancy and cheerfulness.

*Woe to abuses*, to laxity, to defects. *What you are now and will be is what the Congregation will be in Japan*. The Superiors, in sending you, opened their hearts to the most gratifying hopes. *Be the mainstay of our life....* (August 10, 1931).

In truth, once won over by Don Bosco Fr. Rinaldi, the man and the religious, was never satisfied with small measures, much less so when he composed these pages within four months of his death.

Nor was he so on the home front of the sanctification of souls guided by him. A series of sketches distributed in chronological order from 1915

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<sup>11</sup> "God who gives the increase," 1 Corinthians 3:7.

<sup>12</sup> "An exceedingly great reward," Genesis 15:1.

<sup>13</sup> Tenaciously.



until a few months before his death will show this. The journey is in a straight ascending line.

The directress of the Postulants at Giaveno, Sister Caterina Petrini, handed down to us the summary of a “Conference of Reverend Fr. Rinaldi” from 1915, which is a small masterpiece, completely centred on the hemp plant, to which a reference was made earlier. Although the work is a bit long for us to quote, it merits to be reported, since it aids in better understanding the symbolic method, so dear to St. Francis de Sales, and familiar as well to the Servant of God and fruit of his spirit of observation. It also speaks of his demands when it comes to formation in holiness, which recalls the comparison between the various ways Don Bosco rumpled a handkerchief in his hand and the *abneget semetipsum*<sup>14</sup> of the Divine Teacher.

Who knows how many times you observed a *field of hemp* in good soil, without ever comparing yourself to those plants. You are plants that grow prosperous by means of abundant heat and irrigation.

You watch over that *stiff hemp* in a stream of clear water and you dry it in the sun; then you pick it and you will see it reduced to strands that, combed and finished, produce a *rough and tortured canvas*.

*To remove this roughness*, it gets thrown into water, *beaten repeatedly* and stretched out in the sun. In this way that canvas becomes soft and serviceable for our purpose. *Do you want to paint on it and make it more refined? Repeatedly, wet it, beat it, rinse it and you will have it as you want it.*

We, I was telling you, are something similar; *we are plants that are flourishing* and from whom one wants to draw out that delicate thread, which in order to obtain it *you have to work, and work without respite*, without restraint, *beating* here and *squeezing* there and, in turn, rinsing. *Here*, in the Novitiate *you are in the retting process*, the breeze that purifies you are the Sacraments, the word of the Superior, the Rule in which you are immersed. Not only this, though; *Jesus also wants you to put in your effort.*

And when you leave the Novitiate, you will still be a rough canvas. *Let yourselves be rubbed and beaten*, confident that you will lose your rough and unpolished condition and you will emerge supple

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<sup>14</sup> “Let him deny himself,” Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23.

in the hands of your Superiors. *Bend and allow yourselves to be bent*, if you want to get that flexibility that will make you live well again with others, for whom you must live.

*The sun will make you warm and white*, and this sun is *charity* which comes from on high, which makes you love one another without distinction, without preference, without favouritisms.

*Jesus wants to imprint his image in each one of you*. Jesus will paint it within you. Prepare for him the soft and fine canvas. *He will create a masterpiece* (Giaveno, July 12, 1915).

Will it be said that this is a nice piece of rhetoric, rather capable of discouraging anyone with his excessive severity? It is rather a general and concrete long-term program in tune with Luke's text which has guided us and guides us in this paragraph. *He, Jesus, is the true Exacting One!*

For the rest, a little letter to another group of Postulants in 1922 demonstrates that his severity would not be arbitrary and irrational.

I am happy to know they are all animated by the desire to do well and to complete their religious formation. Tell them *not to be dismayed by their defects*. Let them work at removing them, in order to be transformed, to become perfect; but let them know that in order to correct oneself radically from a defect *there needs to be much time and great patience, and one does not always succeed*. The Lord knows that certain defects humiliate us, and so we must do what may help us to conquer them. I say so, because the Lord always helps us, if we pray with humility (Giaveno, April 24, 1922).

Fr. Rinaldi's method was to propose high goals and to push the most generous ones toward them. We recall the little *Giornale dell'anima* of Celestina Dominici in which, after the usual meeting with the Servant of God, she reports in a note of March 8, 1915, a thought of Bishop Gay which was so dear to him, namely, *the cross here below, joy on high, love everywhere*. She was still tormented by the problem of vocation.

Oh! Lord, if it not be for You, I would not bear so much pain. *Help me to drink the bitter chalice* which you are presenting to me, *help*

*me to drink it to the dregs... In everything, may I always do the holy will of God; in all things; oh, yes, may Your Will be fulfilled – fiat! fiat! fiat!*

And she finishes her note, “How tired I am, my God! *And yet it is for Your Love that I want to suffer*, and to You I offer the *many sufferings* that afflict me. Jesus, help me!”

Then she adds more on the same day.

You cannot fast, you are even prohibited from abstaining from meat, but *you are not prohibited from sacrificing yourself*, from suffering opposition and pains, from doing good, from doing the will of God *immolating yourself* I will seek, my God, to please You. Give me your grace (Stefano Maggio, *Celestina Dominici*, p. 25).<sup>15</sup>

The *immolation*, at which the wise Master is pushing and pulling, begins to take shape. In a short letter to Celestina a year later, we have yet another example. Fr. Rinaldi exhorts her to follow her suffering brother to the mountains in order to escape the stifling heat of Turin.

I am happy that your brother is going to the mountains, and even more, that you may be going also. *You must do this* in order for you to regain your energies and resume your work for the glory of God and the good of your neighbour [the girls of the Oratory and those of her seamstress workshop].

And since she laments not feeling any spiritual fervour, the Good Father urges,

Go then in the name of the Lord. Do not be dismayed about lacking vigour, fervour and other good things. Piety and faith and holiness can be had also with sadness, suffering, agony and repugnance

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<sup>15</sup> Maggio Stefano, *Celestina Dominici. La figlia prediletta di Don Rinaldi, 1875-1964*, n.d., n.p.

for the Cross as Our Saviour had in the Garden. Jesus was never holier than in that hour (July 18, 1916, DBV Archives).

One would search books in vain for such a bold phrase. In it one senses the Servant of God, himself immersed in sadness for the adverse happenings at the Oratory, which one year hence will push him to present the Rector Major, Fr. Paul Albera, with a letter of resignation from the office of director (October 26, 1917).

The proposal of *immolation* does not leave the mind and heart of Celestina herself, for during the following March she entrusts to her diary this little terse but, knowing the person, sincere note: “Jesus! as the lamb on the altar? Oh! yes, *on the altar of sacrifice I will let myself be slaughtered, but I will not complain*. But that I may have strength, courage; that I may know how to suffer *without others knowing about it*” (same, p. 33).

It is the habitual teaching of Fr. Rinaldi, which we encounter again in the famous short letter to Sister Teresa Graziano from which we began.

Nevertheless, may you not forget that to draw near to Jesus is to participate in all that is his, including the humiliations, the Garden, the thorns, the cross. Hold firmly, my daughter, above all to these things, never abandoning them, never looking to anyone else (May 24, 1920).

That is what the spiritual authors call *the virginity of sorrow* (P. Aymard). We will come across it again.

Gradually, this exercise carries the need of detachment from oneself and from created realities together with the donation of all to the Lord in the act of the offering. These we find inseparably united.

In a conference to the *Zelatrici di Maria Ausiliatrice* about detachment, Fr. Rinaldi has this very strong message. “Examine yourselves with diligence, and if you find attachment to something, *shatter it all*, in order to give yourselves generously and perfectly to the Lord, and *to imitate St. Francis de Sales* in total detachment from earthly things” (February 2, 1922, QC p. 176).

Fr. Schinetti fittingly comments,

We immediately note the *extreme force* of this ascetical affirmation of Fr. Rinaldi to the Zelatrici, in full accord with the famous affirmation of *St. Francis de Sales*, “If we were to have only one fibre of affection in our heart that was not for Him and from Him, we would instantly tear it out” (to Mother Jane. Frances de Chantal 1606; *Opere* XIII, 200) (QC, p. 176, note 275).

Writing to Mother Eulalia Bosco, at Nizza Monferrato, Fr. Rinaldi recommended, “Tell those novices that I remember them and commend them to the Lord. May they be generous with the Lord; *may they give him all without reserve*, and resolve to *sacrifice everything*, especially self-love, for his glory and the good of souls” (July 31, 1923).

The plan is complete and well organized.

A letter to Maria Lanzio at the end of her postulancy moves along the same line. “In this last month of postulancy do what you can to prepare yourself to be *all for Our Lord Jesus Christ*. No longer hold back any special thing for yourself, *but strip it all away*” (July 1924).

At the same time he was writing to her sister, *Cecilia*, in the United States, where she was preparing for her first profession.

I thought many times of your desire to make yourself holy, *to immolate yourself for Our Lord, to give him everything*. I was reflecting that you were now completing your promise, the offerings, and I prayed so that you would be generous [she will make vows on August 29]. The time, passing by, must leave us better and rich with treasures, which neither the thief, nor the moth cannot destroy (July 29, 1924).<sup>16</sup>

To the Director of Novices at Portici – Naples, Fr. Felice Mussa, the Successor of Don Bosco was entrusting this message: “May they [the Novices] seek to imitate him [Don Bosco]. Let them remember that they must *follow Our Lord Jesus Christ in the footsteps of our Blessed*. Their holiness must be that of Don Bosco” (December 26, 1929).

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<sup>16</sup> See Matthew 6:20.

He regularly turns his special attention to the three Lanzio sisters with a real fatherly tenderness, and he will confide the reason for it. To Sister Cecilia, as she is preparing for perpetual profession, he writes as a testament,

My Good Daughter, I have a thousand proofs that God wants you *all for himself*, do not refuse him *anything*, *never* resist him; *love* the Lord and *let him do what he wants by you*. Be generous... Always remember me and pray that we do not let ourselves be deceived by the shortcomings of the exterior life (August 20, 1930).

One senses that the Father is navigating in a full mystic ocean and, as an eagle, wants to carry away his beloved daughters with him.

A few months later he returned to writing to her.

The news that the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are beginning a real Mission in *Tampa* and that it is entrusted to Sister Cecilia makes me very happy. Deo gratias! *Our little existence must be consumed for the Lord and for souls...* Courage in difficult moments, but a courage that means faith, hope, charity, and that puts into action all diligence and *the complete sacrifice of one's own person*. Here is a *limitless* program as the zeal for souls ablaze with love of God. Sisters, seek it with patience, making yourselves loved among yourselves, comfort each other, closing your eyes to your defects, which you will do your best to turn into virtues (December 2, 1930).

It seems as though one is hearing here the voice of the Apostle of Love at the end of his life.

He addressed on the same day a two-part message to Sister Maria Lanzio, one for the Postulants for whom she is the Assistant. "Be attentive to the *spirit of interior mortification*, that is of self-love, of taste, of one's will, or better, of that which one does not see exteriorly, without also overlooking *some external thing, but without giving it much importance*" (the *Virginity of sorrow?*). The second message is for her, that she prepare herself for her perpetual profession.

For Sister Maria *it is natural that by now she seeks only the Lord*, the Lord who is in the heavens, and in the Eucharist, and in her heart, seeking him in all three places where he really is: in the glory of the Saints, or in the Body, Soul, Blood and Divinity, or present *as our Head, our life*.

That being said, the VOW to consecrate to him the thoughts, words, works of one's whole life is very useful. It would be true that *nothing would be lost [undertaken?]<sup>17</sup> or made except that it be for Our Lord Jesus Christ*. I would counsel that this VOW be placed *in the hands of Mary Most Holy*, to whom one should recommend oneself often. On our own, we would do just the opposite (March 13, 1931).

It seems that he is dealing with the special *Vow of Greater Perfection*, not so much recommended by the one who had the experience of it. Rather, the Servant of God was able to permit himself to counsel it with a creature whom he knew and was guiding from her childhood. One day, observing her stand out with creativity and a spirit of initiative among a group of girls her own age at the Oratory he muttered, "That one there will make an ideal mistress of novices." And so she was from 1934 for a good 24 years! (Giuliana Accornero, *Storia di Albertina e sorelle*, pp. 59-60).<sup>18</sup>

He was not able to see her in action with his own eyes, but he had the great joy of seeing the triptych of the *Lanzio Sisters* reaching their dream destination. On July 10, 1931 he wrote from Turin to the two closest ones.

*Good Srs. Maria and Albertina Lanzio*, thank you for your letters. I will be even more pleased with one's admission to perpetual vows and the other to vestition.<sup>19</sup> *Deo gratias!* I hope not only to see you again on that occasion, but to take a most active part in it. Meanwhile, let us pray to Mary Help of Christians and Blessed Don Bosco that you prepare yourselves well. *Be you generous in little sacrifices, bearing them for love of the Lord*. I am accompanying you

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<sup>17</sup> The typed transcription of Fr. Rinaldi's letter reads, *perdesse* - lost. Fr. Maggio is suggesting that what Fr. Rinaldi wrote is *prendesse* – undertaken, which would give greater coherence to his thought.

<sup>18</sup> Giuliana Accornero, *Storia di Albertina e sorelle*, Rome, Istituto FMA, 1983.

<sup>19</sup> The ceremony of clothing a person with a religious habit.

and am recommending to your prayers yours in Corde Jesu.<sup>20</sup> Rev. Filippo Rinaldi.

Less than a month later the last message for Sister Cecilia was sent from Turin. It had all the flavour of a *Nunc dimittis*.

I thank the Lord for the good that you were able to do in Tampa during this past scholastic year. It is the first attempt of a missionary style that you are trying out in the United States. It must teach you to do even more and better.... Be attentive, good Daughter! I await more news next year. *Seek souls*.

In these days Sister Maria is here in Turin for her perpetual profession and Albertina for vestition. Both are fervent. They will write the rest. *I feel the need to thank the Lord because he has gathered all three of you there in the house of the Madonna and because father has found his companion* [Francesca].

How good the Lord is! *I would like to tell you so many things, but I cannot*. I do not have the time. Still I will never forget the three sisters who one sad morning [March 4, 1918] remained orphaned at my side. Let us pray that one day we can find ourselves reunited in Paradise. *Up there the fears, the melancholies will be ended and all will be happiness and love*.

In Corde Jesu, Rev. Filippo Rinaldi (August 2, 1931).

It is enough to look at the date. The Servant of God is a few months away from his earthly end (December 5, 1931). He does not know it, but he feels it. In his last letter to the beloved daughter, a faraway missionary, there lingers an aura of veiled sadness and melancholy, but at the same time of holy joy for having finished his earthly mission, not only regarding the three sisters, but also for all his great family of Don Bosco, in the midst of so many conflicts, misunderstandings, sufferings of every kind, physical and moral, which made of him a true *victim of love*, conscious and generous, ready to receive the prize of Paradise, where “the fears, the melancholies will be ended *and all will be happiness and love*”.

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<sup>20</sup> In the Heart of Jesus, a frequent Closing of Fr. Rinaldi's letter.



One senses here the echo of another victim of love of Jesus the Redeemer, *the apostle Paul*, also longing for the prize after a turbulent and troubled life.

As for me, my blood is ready to be poured out as a libation, and the time to set sail has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my race, I have kept the faith. Now there remains only the crown of justice which the Lord, just judge, will award to me on that day and not only to me, but also to all those who *with love* await his appearing (2Tim 4:6-8).<sup>21</sup>

At this point we could naturally raise the question, Why does the Cross occupy so ample and central a place in the spiritual teaching of the Servant of God, Fr. Philip Rinaldi?

a) A first response comes to mind: for a close and conscious consistency with the Gospel and the whole New Testament. We have found very many echoes of it also when explicit citations do not appear, even up to his last letter to Cecilia.

b) Then there is, for the one who knows in depth the life of the third successor of Don Bosco, that which can be called a personal motive. Without wanting to enter into the details, we make use of a text of Bishop Gay, quoted by Maucourant (p. 182), which beautifully portrays the history and life of Fr. Rinaldi.

We should accept *all kinds of crosses*: crosses of the body, crosses of the heart, crosses of the spirit, crosses of the soul; temporal crosses, spiritual crosses, crosses of sufferings, of temptations, of privations, of disappointments, of contempt, crosses that come directly from God, crosses that come from God through creatures; crosses from Superiors, crosses from equals, crosses from inferiors, crosses that arise from our depths and that throw us into confusion and torment.

All these crosses, or mostly all, some more some less, were present in the earthly existence of the Servant of God and afflicting him. So now that the Church has taken the supreme decision of declaring the heroicity of Fr. Rinaldi in the exercise of all the Christian virtues, we can well say

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<sup>21</sup> Fr. Maggio is following the Italian Conference of Bishops' translation which does not correspond completely with RSVCE or any major English translations.

that one of the more heroic virtues was exactly that of patience in accepting and bearing all sorts of crosses always with the serenity, cheerfulness and joviality of his beloved Father, Don Bosco. The cited documentation is none other than a small part of his teaching for others, even if we often see him include himself in the number with a sincere “we”.

Also, he was not just a preacher; his life was consistent even to the point of heroism with what he was teaching. The Biographies demonstrated this even though they lacked the names and enriching details of witnesses, which for obvious reasons of prudence and Christian charity were not included. Above all, the depositions during the canonization process, as referenced in the whole content of the volume of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints titled *Positio super virtutibus* (1985) with the precious *Informatio* (pp. 1-209) from which the conviction about the heroicity of the new Venerable (Decree of January 3, 1987) matured, likewise demonstrate it.

The memorable Fr. Peter Schinetti, student and admirer of Fr. Rinaldi, when responding to and being grateful for the communication of the plan for this work on Fr. Rinaldi, even for this last chapter, expressed himself thus:

Truly, there is still much to discover around this personality, and it gives me pleasure to see interest being expressed in this regard by various sources and also from those in high positions of responsibility.... I am also in full agreement on the details that you indicated regarding [the presence of the Cross in the teachings of Fr. Rinaldi], including, naturally, that which, in unsuspecting times, someone [he] had pointed out as *part of the Salesian charism*: the *victim* aspect (moment), having so much *historical and existential* data that point in this direction (Treviglio, May 31, 1987).

c) This victim component in Fr. Rinaldi seems present and well documented. But the Servant of God himself helps us to consider it also proper to the Salesian spirit and charism, in as much as the reference to Don Bosco is also constant. We are limiting ourselves to only three witnesses. The first has been quoted above in the message to the Novices in Naples. “Let them remember *that they must follow Our Lord Jesus Christ in the footsteps of our Blessed*” (December 26, 1929).

The second is contained in a short letter dated August 2, 1918 to Sister Teresa Graziano and to her Postulants, in which alluding to “the great

and unshakable edifice” of the Salesian Work, he continues, “Don Bosco, hidden, poor, small, *neglected*, was chosen to accomplish the works of God.”

We find, however, a richer and more explicit text within a letter partly related to and directed to the Salesian, Fr. Bardelli, from which it becomes clear that his gaze remains habitually focused on his Father, Teacher and Model.

Fifty years ago, we saw our Blessed Don Bosco suffering, struggling, forgotten, accused, to the point of being suspended from sacramental ministry. Today he is Blessed in heaven, and Turin and Rome and the world bestow on him such honours that are far beyond all expectation (August 11, 1929).

Interesting also is the continuation of this letter, because it also refers to the little Calvary of the missionary, due to misunderstandings and oppositions, attributed by the good Father to the fact that “*unfortunately not everyone knows Our Lord Jesus Christ, nor Don Bosco and his spirit*”, an association itself quite explicit and eloquent.

d) There is one last point, to which the reply has already been given here and there. No accusation can be put forward against Fr. Rinaldi for excessively insisting on the topic of the Cross in his teachings, almost as a form of spiritual masochism. We have already spoken of his desired consistency with the Gospel message and with the entire New Testament. It is also noteworthy that he never omits to follow up his reference to the Cross with a reference to the Resurrection: *Paschal Mystery*, either under the form of the redemptive and apostolic value of suffering, or under that last refuge of remembering Paradise in harmony with the example of his Blessed Father. Bishop Gay’s famous saying so familiar to him (*the cross down here, joy up there, love everywhere*) confirms it.

And we conclude with a testimony of Sister Clotilde Morano from the canonization process, derived from a letter of Fr. Rinaldi to her. In making reference precisely to certain misunderstandings which she was facing in her situation, the Servant of God replied to her, with a not too veiled allusion to his more bitter and piercing sufferings. “One of the greatest sufferings in Community is *when you are not understood by the Superiors. You have no one to fall back on.*”

Now, here is his usual wingbeat. “And that is when you need to *abandon yourself all the more into the hands of the Lord*” (*Positio*, p. 876).

It remains to fathom the vast field of Temperance and Mortification in the private life of the Servant of God. That is not our task. For this, you can resort to the *Informatio* on the heroic virtues, as well as to the Biographies.

#### *2.4. Imitating Jesus: model of humility and meekness (see Mt 11:29)*

Following Jesus means to fashion one's conduct after his, to listen to his teachings and to conform one's life to that of the Saviour. This section then comes as the natural complement to the preceding one, also because it brings to light the interior dispositions with which we must follow Jesus even to Calvary.

Is it not the case that, above all, in two circumstances Jesus exhorts his disciples to imitate him: when he presents himself as the "meek and humble of heart" par excellence (Mt 11:29), and when, after having washed their feet, he encourages them to follow his example (Jn 14:12-16)? Both examples deal with a form of humility enlivened by love, which becomes service.

Over the centuries Christian asceticism made imitating Jesus an object of meditation deepened above all by the Word of God and its practical exercise in everyday life. Conclusive proof of this presents itself in the teachings and examples of the Saints. We seek to gather this proof in Fr. Rinaldi, who abundantly offers us both.

He presents the first big principle to Sister Teresa Graziano for the novices for whom she is the Assistant. "*Let them imitate Jesus in as much as it will be possible for them. May Jesus Christ be always before their eyes, as he was under the eyes of Mary Most Holy*" (December 20, 1923).

To Sister Marta Gastaldo he presents the extreme consequences of such imitation, which must not hold itself back even in the face of the Cross. "*The trial has begun. You must persevere even when difficulties arise. These the Lord permits and at times wills them in order to perfect us, fortify us and make us His imitators in carrying the Cross. Courage. Confide greatly in the Lord*" (March 21, 1921).

To Sister Caterina Gaido he proposes the true and ultimate end of imitating Jesus. "*Let us take courage, so that we can imitate Our Lord Jesus Christ and go on doing good ourselves*" (August 21, 1921).

To the Salesian missionary Fr. Giuseppe Antonio Pinaffo he offers, in short, the sublime example of Don Bosco, so exalted by Pius XI in those days surrounding the Beatification.

“Let each one remember that he will represent Our Lord Jesus Christ the better we imitate Him; and so that we do not make a mistake in the matter of time, place and manner, let us propose to imitate our Blessed. With truth he really speaks to us. *Imitatores mei estote sicut et ego Christi*.<sup>22</sup> Keep going” (December 26, 1929).

The Servant of God is never vague in his teaching, and here is how it unfolds with regard to the imitation of Christ. He clearly puts attention on it, in writing to Sister Carolina Cerrato, by referring to the same teaching of Jesus. “May the Heart of Jesus give you a *meek and humble* love. Pray, also, the same for me” (June 19, 1916).

To Sister Teresa Graziano and to her novices he declares true humility, bearer of happiness and of full abandonment. “...I am writing to you to tell you to be happy this year, each of you, with that happiness that is born *of true humility and of full abandonment to the Divine Heart of Jesus*” (January 15, 1917).

He was able to permit himself with the novice Sister Maria Lanzio to envision a very demanding plan of holiness founded in humility.

Be you attentive to the formation of the spirit; *above all to self-love*. Humiliate it within you. *You must imitate the humility of the Heart of Jesus*. All the rest is vanity and foolishness. Do not lose a day of your novitiate without progressing in the *Spirit of God*; that is, in piety, in charity, in *humility of heart*, in sacrifice, in *renouncing yourself*. *Make Maria disappear, so that only Our Lord, who wants you holy* in mind and in heart, in soul and in body, *remains* (March 24, 1924).

True humility should lead to full confidence in the Lord, as he repeats to Sister Teresa Graziano in a short letter. “I am happy that you are presently beginning your [Retreat]. It should mark a progress in *distrust of*

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<sup>22</sup> “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ,” 1Cor 11:1.

*self in order to confide more in the Lord, to see oneself smaller so as to see the Lord greater*” (August 25, 1929).

Along with humility, Jesus indicated *meekness* as a special object of imitation, which precisely under the dual aspect of calm gentleness and indulgent moderation characterizes Christ (2Cor 10:1) and must also characterize his disciples. Fr. Rinaldi expresses this great truth in his simple, but effective, style in a note to Sister Caterina Gaido. “The more good you become, the better. *It is better to be a violet than a thistle*, even though one is feared and the other trampled” (Liguria, no date).

Humility and goodness create the charm that gladdens the heart of Fr. Rinaldi writing to his nephew Filippo. “Paul was a beautiful soul; *above all humble*: we need to have this virtue be preserved in everyone. *As long as young people will be humble, there will be less evil in the world*. Woe if they were arrogant, and even we, poor elders, woe if arrogance enters us” (October 8, 1931).<sup>23</sup>

We have to be grateful to Sister Caterina Petrini, directress of Giaveno, who, just as she preserved for us a short conference of Fr. Rinaldi to the postulants on hemp, so she preserved these *Thoughts* on humility. This simple but effective synthesis of his teaching is totally inspired by the Gospel.

Jesus wants the *little ones* near Him, and you are the smallest, if your heart is not puffed up with pride or with presumption or with another miserable state, which I cannot believe you have.... For goodness sake, be attentive to *imitating the humility of the Heart of Jesus*. *I prefer you dead than proud*. Make yourselves little before Jesus, and keep yourselves small, which you are doing, poor little daughters! Also, among your companions.... *We are nothing*, my good little daughters, and we must *be little useless creatures, bloated with defects, but always close to Jesus*, to Him who is our strength and our life. Therefore always pray to him, *be happy even if you were bad and at fault*. *Jesus loves you as you are*... (July 12, 1915).

He also speaks a similar message to mature persons – his confreres and priests – to whom he presents humility as the best means for success

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Rinaldi, twin brother of Fr. Peter Rinaldi (1910-1993) of the Eastern United States Province, died as a young seminarian brother on June 25, 1929. Filippo was their father.

in their apostolate. Thus he wrote to Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti in Japan. “Here is what God wants from you. You must make yourselves *children* in learning the language: be such in spirit. *Humility will smooth all your ways*, will enlighten the mind, freeing you from smoke and stench, *will render the practice of charity easy and constant*” (August 10, 1931).

He reminds Sister Linda Lucotti, new Provincial of Sicily, “The Lord has entrusted to you a portion of his flock. Love them as He himself would. Love has resources all its own for obtaining good. *Do not put trust in your talents, but in obedience*. Let us make ourselves religious *of faith*. Move ahead cheerfully in the name of the Lord” (December 21, 1922).

He makes a similar appeal to the missionary in China Fr. Galdino Eleuterio Bardelli. “*Do not look at your gifts and your merits.... There is more to do. Then the one who acts is Our Lord who uses whoever offers himself. Think less about yourself and more about Our Lord Jesus Christ.... Be attentive: do not give way to melancholy [daughter of haughtiness]*” (July 20, 1927).

Likewise, in another situation, he offers a motive of tranquility. “*Continue your interior formation without getting dismayed by your defects. They make the Lord’s goodness stand out more*” (August 9, 1930).

On a different note, he gives a severe lesson to Sister Cecilia Lanzio. “To become discouraged by one’s defects shows *a lack of faith in God*, too much trust in ones’ efforts” (*Little Notebook*, n. 8, CE, p. 496).

And to the one who was complaining about the few fruits of his missionary zeal, Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti, he recalled with both admonition and comfort, “Read and meditate on the positive story of the apostolate of Sts. Peter, John and Paul.... They all died *surrounded by a few beggars*, in imitation of the Master, who nevertheless was and is the life of the world” (August 10, 1931).

He gives another lesson in humility and love of the Church to all directresses through the Superior General Sister Luisa Vaschetti. “To the directresses I would very much recommend: *Let them be more submissive to the directives of parish priests regarding Catholic works. Let them not believe themselves masters, but servants of the Church*. This, without diminishing zeal and charity but by adapting them” (August 17, 1930).

From this long and articulate spiritual effort on humility there matures and exudes the charm of simplicity so loved and recommended by Fr. Rinaldi. He writes about it to Cecilia Lanzio, still a very zealous

eighteen year old oratorian about one of her little compositions for Communion.

Thank you very much for *Communion*. It is a *simple* composition, in the style that I would always want you to preserve. I am sending you poems in different meters, all with a Christian spirit, although not always with that *simplicity* that I just recommended to you. Take from them whatever is beautiful, but keep your way of feeling and expressing. Courage, my little daughter; even poetry can serve the Lord, if it is used well (July 13, 1914).

He made it the object of a special recommendation to Fr. Giuseppe Vespignani for the Salesians. “See that even the superiors preserve *Salesian simplicity*. It seems that they are making noise and standing on their own importance. For heaven’s sake, *let us stand by Don Bosco*” (February 27, 1925).

Commenting on the scene of the Child Jesus in the Temple for the postulants of Giaveno, he embroiders a beautiful image of simplicity and humility united together.

*Jesus was listening in the temple....* We could never teach, unless we ask questions in order to know what we need to do. *Let us look at Mother Mazzarello*. She did not know how to move without first questioning. *She was simple and humble*; and if the Institute developed so well, it is not by the knowledge, intelligence, etc., of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, but rather that they owe it to their Mother, because in her true *simplicity and humility*, *she first inquired with Don Bosco*, then listened, then acted and in this way, she was not mistaken. Do you want to know those who grow in wisdom and grace? Those who question and listen. *Behold the model of Jesus the Adolescent*” (Giaveno, August 4, 1922).

At this point it will be instructive to see if and in what measure Fr. Rinaldi practised the humility he was teaching to others. Let us limit ourselves to only a few cues gathered from the epistolary, taking into account its various degrees. In the first degree humility is modesty which opposes vanity. To the Superior General Sister Caterina Daghero, who with



the others on the General Council were rejoicing at his nomination as Prefect General at the behest of Fr. Rua, he responded in a tone of sincere humility.

I need you to help me *not to do*, so that this runs on account of the Lord and his Holy Mother, who each day are working wonders at the hand of Don Bosco and... of Fr. Rua. What I need is *not to undo*, not prevent, not hamper the course of divine mercies. *Pray that we do not destroy the Works of God* (April 9, 1901).

Humility that opposes pride stands at a deeper level; it is the attitude of the sinful creature, conscious of his miserable state before the omnipotence and holiness of God, in whom he still confides. The humble person in fact recognizes having received from God all that one has (1Corinthians 4:7). A worthless servant (Luke 17:10), nothing by himself (Galatians 6:3), but with God's help, he feels he can do everything. "*I can do all things in him who strengthens me*" (Philippians 4:13).

Here is Fr. Rinaldi responding to Father Antonio Candela who confided in him his trepidation at having to accept his appointment to the General Council. "Still, come peacefully to Turin. *Knowing our miserable state*, we entrust ourselves to Mary Help of Christians, to whom I commend you and from whom you should expect the necessary graces. *Don Bosco then will do the rest...*" (November 28, 1925).

Then, there is the humility of one who also knows how to lower oneself, in imitation of Christ (Philippians 2:3 ff). In a short letter to Father Pietro Tirone, Catechist General, whom he himself appointed to that office, we find this moving profession of sincere humility.

*Dear Fr. Tirone*, in my words there must be arrogance, or rudeness, or something boring that irritates others. *See what is there*, maybe what we do not even imagine, and *appraise me about this and anything else*; so that it does not happen that, while I am recommending charity and unity to everyone, I may not be the one who is at fault with those who are closest to me. *I await this charity from you*, which you will do me as you should, *without fear of irritating my self-love, which needs to be humiliated*. Yours in the Sacred Heart Rev. Philip Rinaldi (no date).

It seems as though we are witnessing a scene from *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*.

It is clear how from this fund of humility there should gush forth full trust in the help of the Lord for every good work. So he wrote to Fr. Carlo Braga, Provincial in China, who was insisting on having new missionary personnel. “We are seriously working for missionary personnel, but you cannot imagine how much it costs us. Only time and *the grace of God* bring them forth, mature them, fill them with his gifts. *We have only to work*” (August 7, 1931).

And we end this review of testimonies on humility with a reference to apostolic charity. It is Fr. Rinaldi who opens up with Sister Lanzio, “*Humility must not prevent charity*” (Quadernetto, CE, p. 497).

Sincere humility lifts up, it does not dishearten.

No less sincere and disarming is his profession – of humility – which he expressed to Mrs. E. C. in one of the frequent moments of misunderstanding.

*Dear Madam*, with great mortification I read your esteemed letter. I am forced to confirm what I have long felt within myself, which is that *I do not have the qualities to accomplish the very delicate mission that You Yourself are expecting of me*. I have to convince myself as well that my head is not equal to my heart. I feel sorry for you that you have always had so much goodness and trust in me. *May the Lord make up for my inadequacy* and grant you what he who is sincere, however he may be judged, did not know how give you, Fr. Philip Rinaldi (May 15, 1920).

Note that from 1913, the Servant of God was always looking to win with patience and humble goodness the trust of that difficult penitent, forever a victim or her unfortunate and touchy temperament. And the effort will last until the death of the good Father, so lamented then after she was deprived of it.

The epistolary has preserved for us as well another pearl of humble simplicity truly...Salesian, which represents the reciprocation of the service received and which the Superior renders to his secret monitor and friend, Fr. Pietro Tirone.

Dear Fr. Tirone, Happy Easter. Tonight, at one o'clock when Fr. Giraudi arrived with all care to be quiet so as not to disturb anyone, there fell from his hand I don't know what. I woke up, and, well, I could not get back to sleep. I take this opportunity to tell you that when I recommend to you to become perfect, it is because I feel the need that our confreres find in the superiors open hearts that may bind them ever more *to Don Bosco and to God*. I do not intend one bit to tell you that you are full of defects! However, now that you are asking me for specifics, I will tell you what was noted. 1<sup>st</sup> during the Superior Chapter they pointed out to me: *He is too German, he is too hard-line*. 2<sup>nd</sup> in the houses of formation they told me, *He is too serious, he does not attract*. 3<sup>rd</sup> the Sisters pointed out to me, *He is too dogmatic, and preaches long*. This is the substance. As you see, it does not deal with love nor rudeness nor affectation. I find you are very proper with me. *What should you do?* Consider Fr. Rua. When he was Prefect General he came across rigid, austere, of few words, and he did not enjoy a great deal of confidence even from the young Salesians. *When he became Vicar and then Rector Major*, without changing character, he acquired so much fatherliness and amiability, such that you know how he was esteemed and loved, *despite the fact that two or three did not reconcile themselves with him as long as he lived*. You do the same. Seek to dress yourself with more fatherliness and preserve the *yes yes, no no* as Fr. Rua and Don Bosco were doing. *Prayer obtains everything; pray*. For the rest you can be convinced that I am happy with you, because I chose you; I who have known you for many years.

Ask Fr. Minguzzi [provincial of Rome from 1929 to 1930] if he believes you [Visitor] should visit or do some necessary thing in his place. Then insisting that he rest, counsel him to withdraw somewhere [such delicacy!]. May the Lord bless you. Always keep in mind yours in Corde Jesu Rev. Philip Rinaldi (April 20, 1930).

For other witnesses to the humility exercised to a heroic degree by the Servant of God in all his years as a superior, it will be enough to resort to the very well documented volume on the *Positio super virtutibus* and on the very long chapter which the *Informatio* dedicates to it, as mentioned above.

One can object that spontaneous humility cannot count as that provoked by others. Yet, we know that all his years as Prefect General (1901-1922) were afflicted with misunderstandings, disagreements,

humiliations. The biographies of Fr. Ceria and Fr. Castano often make subtle mention of them. The biography of Fr. Castano dedicates a half page, sufficient to make us intuit the great trial accepted and always overcome with a great spirit of faith.

No one would have thought that in the exercise of so fruitful a ministry, of which it is impossible to measure the breadth and abundance of fruits, Fr. Rinaldi faced *disappointments and disagreements*. Not everyone was pleased that the Prefect General, who, while inspired by the example of Don Bosco, would dedicate so much time and care to the ministry and was open to such a broad and continuous spiritual charity. In Fr. Rua's times, no difficulties arose. These surfaced *under Fr. Albera*, who also had a very high regard for his first collaborator. Sometimes, however, as Fr. Ceria acutely observed (p. 174), "*Fr. Albera saw certain things about Fr. Rinaldi with other people's eyes.*" That is, there was one who was judging with less benevolence the Servant of God's best efforts in his ministry and was casting doubts in the Rector Major's mind. Right from the beginning of Fr. Albera's rectorate Fr. Rinaldi, who sensed the situation and declared himself willing to renounce all, had decided not to change his course of action. *Only obedience could have taken him away from the apostolate*. However, this never happened. Though he suffered from a certain reserved attitude expressed in words that indirectly affected him, he continued to be a gift for souls. *The price he paid in humiliation and suffering brought about much good*. Fr. Rinaldi knew this and none of it dismayed him (CA, pp. 115-116).

On October 28, 1917, he wrote, "I will be more vigilant so that the confessional and especially women do not divert me from a truly Salesian life according to Don Bosco" – here, then, is where the comments came into play – "For this I need to pray much. Alone I am incapable of keeping on the right path. Mary Help of Christians help me" (CE, p. 145), (CA, pp. 115-116).

One knows, in any case, that misunderstandings and humiliations began before that year, within and outside of the Oratory, at different levels, and on various occasions on the part of the girls, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Salesians.

Fr. Castano continues

Perhaps, then, it makes sense what Fr. Ricaldone, an eyewitness, carefully relates during the canonization process. “Once the late Fr. Albera, not well informed, gave him in Council, *more than a remark, a real reproach*. Fr. Rinaldi, who could have clarified and defended himself, did not say a word. That same day, going out into the city, I allowed myself to recall with him the unpleasant fact. *Fr. Rinaldi remained silent and did not want to speak about it*” (CA, p. 116).

However, we are not without some of his direct, if somewhat veiled, testimony through which his inner suffering – a real agony of spirit – appears. At the bleakest time, which culminates in his resignation as director of the Oratory by means of a letter from Ivrea on October 26, 1917, to the Rector Major, Fr. Albera, he opened up about his suffering with Mrs. E.C., almost groaning as Jesus in the Garden of Olives. “In confidence I will tell you that *I had one of the greatest sorrows that one can have in life during the past days. It has to do with the worst disillusionment that a priest and superior can have*” (Turin, September 13, 1917).

Nor were they the only sufferings, for when writing to Sister Caterina Gaido, he expressed himself in this way.

I returned for the Retreat and I am well. It will help us to forget that which we should be forgetting. *All that is ugly, that is bad, that harms us*, it is our duty to forget it. Don Bosco wanted that we would always have before us what cheers and motivates us toward the good, encourages, does good. Such a great educator was Don Bosco! (August 14, 1919).

And again to Mrs. E.C., “You ought know that for some time I am somewhat disturbed by stories of one kind or another, so that I am experiencing a revulsion for hearing even allusions and the like being spoken” (July 10, 1920).

This was the mettle of the Servant of God’s virtue, who even as Rector Major continued be the object of some ill will, manifested in some cases in the form of mockery even in public, by highly cultured confreres, with hints about his having been a “Son of Mary.” The details were observed and given as a testimony.

Yet in his heart the spirit of the Virgin visiting St. Elizabeth rang out, and at certain moments he was no stranger to the main verses of the *Magnificat*. Fr. Ricaldone himself was able to attest in the canonization process,

We saw him always humble in comportment, in speaking and in acting. As I already said, *he had a very low opinion of himself*, and I do not remember hearing him speak of himself. He considered himself unworthy every time he was promoted to some office. In the last years, when he saw that his strength was fading away, he had in mind to give up the office and *to present his resignation to the Holy See. His humility was always shrouded in goodness and with sweetness*. He was always hospitable, and by his way of acting one understood that he considered himself the Servant of everyone. I add that his humility was properly understood, and did not impede him from taking his place, whether as Director or as Provincial, Prefect General and Rector Major, *with due decorum*. And while he himself practiced humility, and all the other virtues of which I spoke, he did not fail to inculcate them with loving and strong insistence to the Confreres (*Summarium*, nn. 293-294, 1032-1033).

And it is really true that the Lord never fails to extol the humble of heart, just as He, not infrequently did also on earth! As with all our heart we hope, and for this we pray.

## 2.5. *To Love Jesus: observing his commandments (see John 14:15)*

As always, even in this specific field, Fr. Rinaldi does not dwell on theoretical considerations on love, but goes each time to the heart of his subject – holiness – guided always by the Word of God, and especially by the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels and of the disciples in the New Testament.

He begins right away by identifying holiness with the love of Jesus, writing for example to Sister Maria Lanzio with the Novices of whom she is the assistant.

I bless with a fatherly heart the Superior and the Novices of this House. Still, I would like to know if they have begun *to become holy*. *Who loves Our Lord the whole day? Who always renounces her*

tendencies *in order to follow only Our Lord Jesus Christ? Become holy now and truly holy*. Courage good daughters in Our Lord Jesus Christ (January 9, 1927).

And many years earlier he was playing the same theme with greater breadth and a real lyrical dash writing to the novice Sister Teresa Graziano and through her to all the novices of that year. After having spoken of charity in general and of the duty of loving everyone in Jesus, he went on in this manner.

*Love Our Lord, above each and every one*. Really love him, always love him, love him everywhere, love him with your whole heart, with your whole mind, with your whole soul, with all your senses; nay, if you want to love all others well, love *first and – I would say – only Our Lord Jesus Christ*. Learn from his Heart how to love.

Nor does he ever neglect the practical aspect.

If you love Jesus, *you will easily conquer your terrible enemies*, who are self-love, your sensitivity, your imagination, a real madhouse that makes you see so many things that are not true, yet bother you. Courage, my good Daughters, *love Our Lord and watch out not to love yourselves*, your daintiness, your susceptibility. *Loving Jesus, you will always love your neighbour* (June 1917).

To Sister Cecilia Lanzio he illustrates the breadth that love of Jesus needs to take on and the various means for making it a reality.

*In everything we are seeking only God and the salvation of souls*, never vanity and human glory. Be careful, my daughter, be careful. We must not give *a thought, a breath, a beat of the heart* to others outside of Our Lord Jesus Christ. For Him *study, work, teach, suffer, be despised, die*, but with a smile on the lips and joy in the heart, *it is to be solely for Our Lord* (March 17, 1924).

Instead, in a simple note of greetings to the novice Sister Teresa Graziano, he dwells on the motives that make our love for Jesus right and proper. “*Jesus loved Teresa by coming down from Heaven, lowering himself even to you, destroying himself in the Eucharist, dying on the Cross. If Teresa wants to love Jesus as much, may she do what He has done! Courage, my dear; they are works and not thoughts*” (January 27, 1917).

In the famous *Little Notebook* of Sister Cecilia Lanzio we find two thoughts, very dear to Fr. Rinaldi, that insist on the same concept expressed in different words. The first, “If we belong to Jesus, he can make of us *what he pleases. Becoming inebriated* with his love, he makes us feel that *he wants us*; leaving us cold and in temptation, *he tries our fidelity*” (CE, p. 496).

This is the language of a mystic!

The second is more simple, but no less effective. “*To love the Lord when the heart is calm and serene* and everything invites us to Him, is no great merit. Instead, it is meritorious to stay equally united to Him *when everything distracts us*, and in ourselves there is irritation and confusion. In these moments *true virtue* stands out” (CE, p. 497).

Lastly, to the novice Sister Teresa Graziano, with a comparison with the Prudent Virgins, he already infers the duty to radiate the love that we bring to Jesus on those who approach us.

Look to ignite in your heart *true charity. The lamp of the Prudent Virgins*: it is the heart on fire with love for the Lord. None from this House should have it extinguished. There let the love of God exist, *and true love of God*, that which does not burn and destroy, but which *illuminates, warms and sweetly moves* however many draw near to us. With this love and heat you will not fear exterior evils [a reference to the disasters of the First World War], and you will progress *in the true spirit of Don Bosco* (January 15, 1917).

Passing then more appropriately to the truly practical aspect that love for Jesus should assume, Fr. Rinaldi could not but adhere to the most sure Christian asceticism, synthesized by *Maucourant* in this way. “The book of holiness is titled: *Do the Will of God*. Our encounter with God takes place *in His will*. There we are united with each other, we understand each



other, we take the first steps in intimacy, since ‘*love is the fulfilling of the law*’<sup>24</sup>” (p. 96).

This is why the Servant of God insists so many times and in the most diverse situations on the Will of God.

Foremost in the *Little Notebook* of Sister Cecilia Lanzio, “*To be holy means to do the will of God*, and this is done by properly fulfilling one’s duty, in every moment of the day” (CE, p. 495). Or, in other words, “*To do one’s duty* with simplicity, with a serene countenance, is the most pleasing homage that we can give to God and the best way of becoming holy” (CE, p. 495). And with the austerity of the language customary in the Saints, “No discipline or fast imposed by ourselves *by our own will* is greater than a day of work done *according to God’s will*” (CE, *ibid.*).

This is why, in defining the spiritual direction that Fr. Rinaldi was giving to his penitents, Sister Maria Lanzio testified, “His was a *simple and plain, gentle, strong and clear direction*.... He demanded *a little at a time* and he wanted above all to get down to the *practical: performance of duty, generosity in daily sacrifices, zeal in doing good*” (G. Accornero, *Albertina*, pp. 50-51).

To Sister Marta Gastaldo, a missionary in the Andes, he wrote, “Go forward calmly, with simplicity and cheerfulness, willing to do *God’s will to the point of sacrifice*” (August 30, 1926).

With Fr. Giovanni Barile, also a missionary and ill († at La Paz July 31, 1961, at 91 years of age), the address became less sober and more pronounced. “How it would make me happy to know that you have recovered. Yet, let us also say, *non mea voluntas sed tua fiat*.<sup>25</sup> The Lord knows better than we. *His will is full of goodness*, more than ours, so, *non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu*.<sup>26</sup> However, pray to our Blessed and to Mary Help of Christians that they would think of us.”

And he concludes with an exclamation so rich in faith and abandonment. “We have such a need of confreres *according to the spirit of the Lord and of the Blessed*.... *Where we may not reach, the Lord will reach*” (January 13, 1930).

With Celestina Dominici the good Shepherd returns with patience to underline the great value of the will of God for our sanctification.

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<sup>24</sup> Romans 13:10.

<sup>25</sup> “*Not my will but yours be done*,” Luke 22:42.

<sup>26</sup> “*Not as I will, but as you will*,” Matthew 26:39.

I am happy that your health is getting better and better, so that you can still do a little good in this world. The desire of a life harvest is pleasing to the Lord, and you have to cultivate it; *but above all doing the will of God is perfection*. In the past you have not been whimsical; be assured that *you have cooperated with his designs*. For the future, be it little or much time, it does not matter; but that which we should do is to *love the Lord, save souls and become holy*.

And he concludes with an echo of Saint Paul. “Courage. Just a little while longer. *Then we will be forever with the Lord in Paradise,*”<sup>27</sup> (DBV Archives).

In this his presentation, Fr. Rinaldi, in the end, does nothing else than follow the teaching of Jesus, so explicit in the Gospel of Saint John, and with a marvelous crescendo.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love” (John 15:10).

“You are my friends, if you do what I command you” (John 15:14).

“He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who love me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (John 14:21).

And Jesus gave us the most complete and total manifestation of Himself with his heroic adherence to the Father’s will and with the commandment of charity. Both the one and the other offered for our imitation. We have spoken of the first. For the second we will only mention what we will develop later.

The first part of the impassioned exhortation to Sister Teresa Graziano and to the other novices to love Jesus Fr. Rinaldi had properly directed to charity. The virtue of Jesus,

...*Charity, love!* How great and admirable a virtue is this very one! Preserve it in your heart. Remind yourselves that it is that *which makes you more pleasing to Jesus*, who came from Heaven just to teach it to us, *and it is his virtue*. Preserve it always, my good daughters, *if*

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<sup>27</sup> See Hebrews 10:37 and 1Thessalonians 4:17; 5:11.

*you want to do good to your neighbour. Always love everyone without distinction, great and small, good and evil, close and far off. But do not love them with words, love them by consuming yourselves as candles lit to illumine and warm your neighbour. Love your Sisters, Superior and little girls and young girls that you have in the house; love them as Jesus loves, and then you will feel what a good thing it is to live in Community.... Above each and every one, love Our Lord...*" (June 1917).

With Sister Cecilia Lanzio, as always, but especially in his last years, the Father of her soul indulges in confidences.

Your letter pleases me, because it gives me *intimate news* that I was happy to know. I was feeling the need to know just how are Cecilia's *soul and heart and health and peace*. I am happy that you are very busy and that you are working for souls. Giving of oneself to doing good *is a necessity, if we truly love the Lord*. I want to believe that you are working, really motivated by the love of God. What is wanting; I take it so much to heart that you love the Lord! *Each day I am more convinced that only this is a good*, in fact the only good, and that the height of the good is *to love the Cross and Jesus hidden in the Eucharist*. Are you loving him, and loving the Cross *even when reciting poems or doing dramas*, be they in the sweet Italian language or in quirky English? I hope so. *Burn the lamp...* Remember me to the Lord, *in the Heart of whom we must always find ourselves* (Rome, January 23, 1928).

So the way remains open to send us on to illustrate the last word in the series with which Fr. Rinaldi puts forward his teaching on holiness: *to serve*, an essential and decisive task for Christian and Salesian holiness.

First, however, to reach this conclusion it will be necessary that the soul reach the summit of the practice of its love of Jesus, that is, to unite oneself, becoming one with Him.

## 2.6. *Uniting oneself to Jesus: Life in Christ and with Christ (see Romans 6:1-11)*

Fr. Pietro Schinetti has cause to affirm, “Truly there is still more to discover about this personality,” and he continues, “One more time Fr. Luigi Castano is correct in saying that the *renewal* (‘recovery’ they are saying...!) of spirituality and of the Salesian spirit *necessarily passes through Fr. Rinaldi!*” (letter of May 31, 1987, from Treviglio).

We found proof and confirmation of it in the preceding pages, and we will find it perhaps yet more forcefully in those that follow. We will deal with knowing the teaching of the Servant of God on “union with God,” so beloved and so inculcated, but to know it *deeply and completely*, avoiding the superficiality that he so much abhorred.

A more organic and complete treatment of this topic is found in a particular way in the *Strenne* to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, especially those in the last years, with the abundant commentary of the Servant of God. We presented them among the documents.<sup>28</sup> Here we want to stay within the pre-set limits of the present chapter, composed *from the epistolary*, with some sporadic exceptions.

We will see, though, that even with the usual method of selections detached and distributed in different contexts, and with the inevitable repetitions, we will find the whole of the substance, and set it out with greater liveliness and freshness. From it all there emerges a “*union with God*” which becomes “*union with Jesus*” totally different from the fruit of an almost prevalently *intellectualistic* operation, but rather a teaching well rooted in the more solid theology of the Mystery of Christ, so deeply illustrated by St. Paul from Gospel data.

Now here is the living and fascinating itinerary which leaps forth from only a small portion of the files. First of all is the solid and indispensable foundation as it was mapped out for the provincial of Milan, Sister Rosalia Dolza, in the wake of the unmistakable teachings of the dear Father, Don Bosco.

Let us seek to fight always the same battle: *death to sin, long live Our Lord Jesus Christ! Make it come alive* in your sisters, in your novices, in your older and younger girls, among your *friendly and enemy* peoples. Be faithful, therefore, to the *spirit of Venerable Don*

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<sup>28</sup> Chapter 5 of the book.

*Bosco*, of St. Francis de Sales, of the Society, which is a spirit of charity which is the same as that of the Heart of Jesus (November 24, 1928).

He repeats the same warning when writing to Sister Giulia Berra, missionary in Assam. “Love the Lord very much; *abhor sin* and let yourself be guided by the one who will put you by his side, here [in Turin] or in China” (May 7, 1922).

It is the Gospel spirit, then, elaborated in its turn by St. Paul in so many forms, as in that classic exposition extensively elaborated in the letter to the Colossians, and alluded to by Fr. Rinaldi when writing again to Sister Rosalia Dolza on the occasion of Easter.

*For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God,*<sup>29</sup> thus far St. Paul, and which the Church repeats to us throughout the Easter Octave. May the spiritual life be always favoured, even by the one who has to bustle about. Let the Sisters accustom themselves *to live with Our Lord Jesus Christ*, in Church and at work.

He does not hide his fears about a certain situation, which he addresses next in the same letter. “The interior life is *somewhat neglected*, yet *Jesus Christ is in us* and we must *live in Him*; *if we do not have Jesus Christ in us we would be dead*.” Then he continues, “Let the thought of Jesus Christ *in us* be a familiar one starting from the novitiate. It is enough to remember the words of Our Lord, ‘He who eats my flesh,’ the Bread of Life, that is Communion, ‘*abides in me, and I in him*.’”<sup>30</sup> An emphasis of Fr. Rinaldi, that he urges thus. “In the private encounters<sup>31</sup> accustom yourself to recall *this idea or truth* to the Sisters. Do it with great prudence, but prepare yourself to repeat *this teaching* to your Sisters.”

In the end there emerges the usual teaching of the Servant of God, in line with Don Bosco, for whom piety, union with God, the interior life must be directed toward the apostolate. So, he concludes his letter, “Be aware then that this thought not distract you from the duties of assistance, studies, etc. For the rest be as cheerful as you can” (April 24, 1930).

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<sup>29</sup> Colossians 3:3.

<sup>30</sup> John 6:56.

<sup>31</sup> Often called *rendiconto* or manifestation in older Salesian literature.

We recall a similar appeal addressed to Sister Marta Gastaldo, making a play on her name in reference to the Gospel and seeking to resolve the famous question of the relationship between the active and contemplative life. “...*act like Martha and Mary*; work to *serve Jesus*, but remember that Jesus must be *your food and your pastime* [a bold and uncommon expression!]; *active with the hands, contemplative in the heart*. *If you live by faith*, the trials as much as the joys will bring you to this” (October 27, 1930).

Now, the Good Father’s main concern is always to inculcate the interior life first. He intends to do this by setting it on the most solid doctrinal basis of the Word of God, which in the following case is that of Jesus in the Gospel (John 15:1ff) through the famous parable of the *Vine and the Branches*. Thus, he wrote to Sister Ottavia Bussolino, in Argentina, to help her resolve an agonizing question.

For you to work [apostolically], *stay united as the branch to the vine*. United with *grace*, united with *prayer*, with the mind, with the heart, with *Holy Communion*. Insist with your Sisters so that *union with God* [here is the traditional formula founded and almost immersed in its genuine theological and biblical context!] may be activated *with all these means*, and then *naturally* they will labor for the good.... *To work for God is the fruit of union with God*. With an infinite *charity and goodness*, exactly with that charity and goodness that is born from the Heart of Jesus, *consume your life by inspiring this union and divine action* (July 3, 1923).

It is one of the most profound, most beautiful and effective synthesis of the Salesian spiritual doctrine, inspired by the *Preventive System* of Don Bosco, founded totally on charity, as he expressed himself in the letter to the novice Sister Orsolina Molinari.

You will see how simple the System of Venerable Don Bosco is, *how beautiful, how divine* it is. When you really love the Lord, you will sense the desire to do *much and do it well*, but first (it is necessary) *to clear away*,<sup>32</sup> then love Our Lord Jesus Christ much, really love him with all your strength. Not so much with a feeling love, *as of the will*.

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<sup>32</sup> Earlier in the letter Fr. Rinaldi tells Sr. Molinari to “clear away the obstacles.”

Courage. Take advantage of the *spiritual childhood* [the novitiate] to grow and become *like Our Lord*" (October 14, 1915).

We know that love is by its nature unitive. In the letter to Sister Cecilia Lanzio on the occasion of her Perpetual Profession, we will come across the Pauline term *incorporation* to indicate the highest union, fruit of grace and of human cooperation. "You can now [with perpetual profession] call *incorporation with Our Lord* perfect, if to the other external<sup>33</sup> you unite union of thought, of heart, of soul *to He Who is the True Life, the Light of men, Mercy, Goodness, Infinite Love*" (August 20, 1930).

The wise spiritual master knows very well in fact, that union with Jesus on this earth is never a final conquest, but needs to be continually renewed at the price of hard sacrifices. In the *Little Notebook* of Sister Cecilia Lanzio we find,

In order to establish our *continuous union with Jesus*, a *continuous mortification* is indispensable. We must seek to mortify our *senses*, keeping in check our eyes, ears, tongue, sense of smell, touch and our whole person, allowing ourselves the least satisfactions possible. The situations and persons with whom we live afford us mortification of the *spirit* (CE, p. 496).

He made the same recommendation to her sister, Sister Maria Lanzio, assistant to the Mistress of Novices. "Accustom those dear daughters to continuous union with Our Lord and to sacrificing all in Him." the underlining is his (March 10, 1930).

He always encourages, therefore, the greatest generosity, as also this little letter to the novice Sister Rita Ceron, on the vigil of her religious profession, bears witness.

I am pleased that you are close to your Profession. It will be one more link that will unite you to Our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom you are consecrating your entire life. Give him your youth with all your heart, so that you will be able to do much good for many souls in Brazil

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<sup>33</sup> "The other external" may refer either to the habit or to the full incorporation into the Institute.

and in the Missions. I will pray to the Lord that you will become holy and do you pray also for he who is yours... (September 24, 1929).

He becomes even more lyrical when writing to the beloved daughter Sister Cecilia Lanzio on the occasion of her Perpetual profession. Even she, though, could not miss the allusion to a sharing in sufferings.

It is proper therefore, that from now on you know how to be always present to Our Lord who is united interiorly with Sister Cecilia; Sister Cecilia then should live united with Our Lord Jesus Christ. Union with God [notice the passage from God to Jesus Christ, so habitual of Fr. Rinaldi!] in work, in recreation, as well as in prayer, as well as before the Eucharist. Union with Jesus Our Lord by day, as well as by night, while awake and while sleeping. Union, always when doing – in sufferings and humiliations – the will of Our Lord, as well as in the exuberance of cheerfulness (August 20, 1930).

Superb this juxtaposition so biblical and Pauline, and so essentially Salesian: suffering and joy!

The exhortation to Sister Teresa Graziano, former directress at Valdocco next to the Servant of God in the Girls Oratory fits very well into this high mystical climate. “*Keep good company with Our Lord Jesus Christ* living and true in your midst as when he was with Mary in Bethlehem and in Nazareth, and is now in heaven” (August 25, 1929).

So let us finish with two short letters to Sister Cecilia Lanzio that summarize very well the two fundamental teachings of the Servant of God. We already quoted the first part of the first letter, which insists on the mystery of the Cross. It concludes thus:

Let us become saints even us (like Don Bosco), seeking to live *the active life* for the salvation of souls, but always *recollected* – as St. Paul wanted – *in Our Lord Jesus*, so much so that in eating, drinking, working, preaching, etc., *his living was Jesus Christ*. May Sister Cecilia find always herself in the heart of Jesus, as yours wants to find himself in Corde Jesu Rev. Philip Rinaldi (April 13, 1929).



In the second, an earlier letter on the occasion of her First Profession, he exhorts her to consume herself like a candle. “Now sacrifice for the Lord begins. *The lit candle begins to consume itself for others with a flame pointing to heaven.* Courage, good dear daughter. I thought many times of this day. How I would like to know that you are *generous, cheerful in fulfilling your mission.* I am hence praying so much for you. Yours in Corde Jesu” (November 14, 1924).

So true, then that the spirituality of Don Bosco, *passing through the heart of Fr. Rinaldi*, becomes more alive, more luminous and more ardent, in the light and warmth of the doctrine transmitted to us by the Gospel and by the entire New Testament. True for all the other sections, but perhaps even more true for the one concerning union with God, a real banner in the hand of he who is considered the surest interpreter of the spirit of Don Bosco for having studied, lived and taught it throughout his entire life.

## 2.7. Serving Jesus: “*Da mihi animas*”

The title is best understood in this way: *Serving Jesus in one's neighbours* as synonymous with *Apostolate*. In Fr. Rinaldi's times that word was not common, with the word *save* more often used in the expressions “salvation of souls” and “good of souls.”

Fr. Rinaldi, then, often adopts the verb *to work*<sup>34</sup> or *to do* in the phrases, “to do good”, “to do good for souls”, as we have been able to observe many times. We also encountered the verb *to work*,<sup>35</sup> “to work for God” and in one case also “to work at serving Jesus.” All the words that translate the term, apostolate, very common today, became current in a special way with Pius XI with regard to Catholic Action.

In the Salesian context it became widely circulated by Fr. Angelo Amadei with his work *Don Bosco e il suo apostolato*,<sup>36</sup> recommended by Fr. Rinaldi to the often-remembered Salesian missionary in China, Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli (February 16, 1930).

With this background, we come to our topic. As already seen, the method adopted for this work, with its rather frequent quotes from the letters, carries many repetitions with it, also because Fr. Rinaldi showed interest in offering to penitents or spiritual children, despite the brevity of

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<sup>34</sup> *Operare*: to operate, work or act.

<sup>35</sup> *Lavorare*: to work, labour, toil.

<sup>36</sup> [*Don Bosco and His Apostolate*], Turin, Società Editrice Internazionale, 1929.

the epistolary style, as complete a thought as possible on the various questions addressed.

This, then, is particularly true for the topic that we want to address in this section on the apostolate, so often called to mind by Fr. Rinaldi a little in all the preceding sections, most especially in the last two on love and union with Jesus. Consequently, we will not have much to add that is really new, and, given the diversity of recipients, there can be no lack of the usual repetitions in what we will say.

We will choose a set from among many selections, preferring the most significant and setting them in the usual logical, albeit rather relative, order.

When writing to the Provincial of Argentina, Fr. Valentino Bonetti, he remembers the entire field of the apostolate, in the formulation so common in Salesian parlance, “*May all be for the glory of God and the good of souls*” (October 27, 1925).

He adds the recommendation, “*Carry on with faith and good humour, correcting imperfections*” (December 14, 1927).

In a note to Sister Teresa Graziano, the horizon of the apostolate widens and is enriched with very interesting theological elements. “*United to Our Lord Jesus Christ, we give honour and glory to the Most Holy Trinity, and we pray that the spirit of piety which is a more intimate and true union with God by means of Our Lord Jesus Christ alive in the Eucharist be better understood by our young people*” (December 18, 1922).

To the very apostolically involved Miss Amalia Bertetti, he makes a general reference to her field of action and underlines the necessary dispositions to perform it. “*Courage. You have before you an immense field for doing good. Confide in Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Help of Christians, and you will always be a good daughter of Don Bosco. Bring his spirit and his action wherever you find yourself*” (October 27, 1920).

More complete is his thought in a short letter to young Maria Lanzio, who by now is maturing and preparing for her Salesian vocation. In it comes a beautiful summary. “*Unite together piety with action. Piety, which keeps you united to God who is charity and infinite love. Action, which always gets united to charity, for it is impossible to love God and not give our whole selves for those creatures whom He created and redeemed with his Most Precious Blood*” (August 3, 1920).

We find another beautiful summary of the Christian and missionary apostolate in the letter to Fr. Antonio Giacone, missionary in Brazil for

over 40 years. “Ensure that you always go there [on apostolic trips] *with the spirit of God*, so that everywhere you pass you can *stir up the grace of God and bring Jesus Christ to life in souls*” (May 4, 1927).

To the beloved son Fr. Bardelli, since his missionary activity was difficult, he recommends faith and patience. “Continue working *with faith*. *God will do the rest*. Everywhere, everyone finds the conversion of people difficult. *It is enough to remember Our Lord*, who achieved little with all his power and goodness. Courage. *Let us get behind Him*” (October 4, 1926).

To Fr. Pietro Piacenza, a missionary in Japan, he reiterates the great truth that the conversion of souls is the work of God, which, however, demands our collaboration. “Finally you have reached your mission. Do it in a way that you can baptize *ten thousand Japanese*. *Your ten thousand converts* in turn will think about others [apostolate of the laity!]. The conversion of souls is *God’s mystery*. Meanwhile it is clear that *you must save yourself by working for others*” (June 25, 1926).

It is the great thought of St. Augustine made his own by Don Bosco with the famous aphorism proposed to young people. “*Salve, salvando salvati!*”<sup>37</sup>

With Fr. Bardelli the teaching of the Good Father becomes more explicit and more challenging.

I see that you are beginning (to) orient yourself to your mission, and above all you realize that the good and the salvation of souls *must come by the grace of God, which is obtained by holiness of life*. It is understood that St. Francis Xavier brought about conversions this way wherever he went. You, too, *without changing yourself*, seek to *become holy*, as this is God’s will, and then by working, sooner or later, *China will become Christian* (January 18, 1923).

In another letter also to Fr. Bardelli the discourse widens and becomes more precise, without lacking an allusion to the difficulties and sufferings of the apostolate.

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<sup>37</sup> Rejoice! In saving others, you save yourself.

It seems to me that your letters reveal an intense desire to *save souls*, and this pleases me very much. It pleases me because you are confiding in the *Heart of Jesus* and are seeking *true piety*. Here rests the secret for saving China: to turn to God and make them see and feel and love Jesus. Everything else is necessary, because we must not neglect anything, *but that is not what converts and saves*. I enjoy it so when you speak to me of *faith*, of *piety*, of *Jesus*, of the *Sacred Heart*. Courage; this is certainly the good way. Do not become disheartened if you meet with *oppositions*, *contradictions*, *mortifications*, etc. *Jesus Christ went down the same road* (October 13, 1928).

With his other beloved daughter, also a missionary, Sister Cecilia Lanzio, Fr. Rinaldi cannot help but envisage certain dangers of the apostolate. “You know, my good Daughter, that I desire nothing more from You than to *see you holy* and to know that *you are sanctifying souls*. So I am happy for dearest you. Allow me, however, to caution you against *temptations or trials*.”

She was about to make her profession, and she will find herself immersed in the typical American apostolate. The Good Father is referring to the real danger that comes from it.

The work on behalf of souls, indispensable for saving them, easily leads to *dissipation* if you do not *love* Our Lord much more than creatures, and if you do not *see* only Jesus Our Lord in the heart of creatures who are entrusted to you. If you see only Our Lord in them, you will bear all without becoming disheartened and without suffering in spirit. So, do your *meditation* well, the *visit* to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and you will live ever united with God. Courage, Sister Cecilia. *Let us become holy at all cost* (January 19, 1924).

To Fr. Carlo Braga, missionary in China, he points out that the apostolate among his Chinese requires patience, faith, sacrifices and enthusiasm.

The Chinese Salesian plant is spreading its branches. *Growing ever so slowly*, in its time it will bear fruit. Let us hope that *impatience* will not spoil it. *Sacrifices* by you and by us certainly have to be made.

Keep the vein of good humour, of cheerfulness, of enthusiasm, of *confidence in God*. Woe if the reins fall or the commander becomes disheartened! The horses, the army do nothing more. Far away be this ugly thought (March 29, 1925).

And with Sister Cecilia Lanzio, the admonition reaches the apex of evangelical need.

Our little existence *must be consumed for the Lord and for souls*. Make use of all the means that are not evil for realizing your purpose: school, entertainments, church, education, the great, the small, Italy (with discretion) and America; but above all of Blessed Don Bosco and Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Courage in difficult moments, *but a courage that means faith, hope, charity*, and that puts into action all diligence *and the complete sacrifice of one's own person*. Here is a *limitless* program, as the zeal for souls *ablaze with love of God* (December 2, 1930).

This citation, made earlier, bears repeating above all in this context as well as chronologically in the life of the Servant of God, the last months of an existence that signal his maturity of experience and holiness.

We conclude this survey on the apostolate with a letter, some months before, to his dear Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli.

Be truly religious, *an interior man, an interior soul*, and the Lord who *will live with you* will satisfy the emptiness, and will also know how to make you feel the joy *born from suffering and humbled love*. Love, Our Lord said to St. Margaret Mary Alaquoque, *reigns in suffering, triumphs in humility, rejoices in union or unity*.

It is one of the rare times when Fr. Rinaldi cites an author. The same citation recurs a second time in the epistolary, and he feels the need to underline the phrase for meditation. He adds a recommendation that acquires great value for us. "If you have a little bit of time, utilize it by reading the Gospel or the Epistles."

Here is the preferred source, as the rest of these pages prove.

And it concludes with the indication already reported at the beginning of this section. “The life of Blessed Don Bosco and of his apostolate [the volume of Fr. Amadei] will do you good... Courage... *Sursum corda!*”<sup>38</sup> (February 16, 1930).

And with this aspiration of liturgical flavour, quite frequently on the pen of the Servant of God to encourage trust and the thought of “things above,” we end the concluding section on the way of Christian holiness, offered to us by Fr. Rinaldi with his characteristic biblical words, so rich in teachings, fruit of his personal experience, nourished by a holiness that today the Church recognizes as heroic.

## 2.8. *The Spirit of Don Bosco: Scattered Evidence*

We want to add yet another unplanned section to this already long enough chapter and for two reasons. First, we have treated sanctity without explicit concern about further qualifying it as Salesian. The references are not lacking in practice; indeed, they are present with considerable frequency in the long quotations from the letters of the Servant of God. Second, one finds an abundance of material that is of some interest on the spirit of Don Bosco (or Salesian spirit). It will prove very useful as a commentary on the title of the entire volume, *The Spirit of Don Bosco in the Writings* [sic] of Father Rinaldi.

Certainly, still more than the previous sections, the warning is all the more necessary that we cannot expect to find in the letters of Fr. Rinaldi an organic and complete illustration of the spirit of Don Bosco in the manner of a studious work. One will be able to find something more in the documentary part of this work, especially in the circular letters, *strenne*, conferences, etc.

We must limit ourselves, then, also here to reporting a series of citations from the letters that, nevertheless, will make abundantly clear the essential lines of the spirit of Don Bosco. He assimilated them at the school of origins, from the most authoritative masters of his early Salesian life, from Fr. Albera, Fr. Barberis, Fr. Rua and Don Bosco himself as we have seen. He added to them from his reflection, lived experience to the point of sanctity, and even by a study to trace them back especially to the genuine

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<sup>38</sup> Lift up your heart.

sources of the traditions, of the Gospel and of the entire New Testament, as we will see.

And it is evidently clear that even in this matter the repetitions will not be few.

It comes as a consequence that “the logical order” imposed on the discussion is solely our work and makes no pretense of scientific rigour. We tried to identify it through the quotes themselves, once collected, through an ascending scale of themes and sub-themes, which seems to us to fall into the great theme, above all because they are almost always explicitly traced back to Don Bosco himself by Fr. Rinaldi. In a few other cases he offers us his very own authoritative witness.

Another observation is that the quotes are perhaps too abundant, even though not all the material was collected, and that from all that was gathered up, not everything was used (almost completely missing, for example, is the correspondence with Mrs. E.C.). From the abundance of quotes, nevertheless, and from the relative repetitions, one will see the variety of expressions used by Fr. Rinaldi and a significant identification with the thought of Don Bosco.

A final word on the content. At first it was thought to separate the two series of quotes from Fr. Rinaldi’s epistolary (Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians) as two distinct subsections. In the end it was believed more fitting to unite them in a single treatment, especially since between the two, no significant discrepancies were found, except some particular emphasis, mostly psychological in nature noticeable in the quotes themselves. In fact, by uniting them, there emerged a substantial identity arising from the common Founder of the two Religious Institutes.

Now let us move to the exposition, indicating the progressive passages on the so-called ascending scale of work.

### *Don Bosco and St. Francis de Sales*

For Fr. Rinaldi, Don Bosco’s reference to the Patron of the Salesian Congregation is historically founded. Some quotations, as well as many others not used, attest to this.

“*Happy Feast of St. Francis de Sales, may his spirit with that of Blessed Don Bosco enliven all those dear confreres*” (to Fr. Pietro Tirone, Visitor in Brazil January 26, 1931).

“We are in the centenary [of the death] of St. Francis de Sales and we have to take advantage of it in order to *know Don Bosco better in the example he offers us*” (to Fr. Adolf Tornquist, a Novice at Portici by Naples, January 2, 1922).

“Be faithful to the spirit of *Venerable Don Bosco, of St. Francis de Sales, of the Society*, which is a spirit of charity, which is that of the Heart of Jesus (to Sister Rosalia Dolza, Provincial of Milan, November 24, 1928).

*Spirit of Don Bosco, Spirit of God...*

A primary source of Don Bosco’s spirit for Fr. Rinaldi is God himself, the Lord, Jesus Christ and his Gospel.

“I wish that you have many new novices, all enlivened by the *spirit of God and of Blessed Don Bosco*. For reading during the days of the Retreat this year you could have *Don Bosco con Dio* by Fr. Ceria read” (to Sister Rosalia Dolza, July 23, 1929).

May they remain strong in their spirit, *in the spirit of the Lord, in the spirit of Blessed Don Bosco*. May they do it also at the cost of the complete sacrifice of all self-love. They will receive in return the *sweetness of the Heart of Jesus*, the fullness of the love of God which surpasses any other joy and consolation (to Sister Teresa Comitini, Provincial of Naples, June 24, 1931).

“Your news made me completely happy; above all because I see that there is a *good spirit* among the confreres. Without the *spirit of God*, China will never be converted to Jesus Christ.... Greet the Confreres for me and in the Retreat, recommend piety, charity, work” (to Fr. Carlo Braga, Missionary in China, July 31, 1924).

“Manage to print the *Gospel*.... This is a work according to Don Bosco. Have the confreres, especially the seminarians, read it, study it and meditate on it. *Let them form themselves on the Gospel, on Our Lord Jesus Christ*” (to Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti, Missionary in Japan, November 1, 1930).



*Therefore you have to know Don Bosco*

For Fr. Rinaldi it is a fundamental and prior requirement.

“I am following your work. Never be dismayed if the results seem slow.... Hearing about the publicity you are making with the leaflets and with the *Life of Don Bosco* pleased me very much” (to Fr. Pietro Piacenza, Missionary in Japan, July 28, 1930).

“*Talk much to them [the novices] about Don Bosco. Try to make them know him better by especially presenting the saint, the man of God, the truly beloved son of Our Lady. Farewell. Greetings and blessings from our Venerable Father*” (to Fr. Domenico Canepa, Master of Novices at Portici, April 4, 1929).

*The best portrait of Don Bosco* is the one that came out after the celebrations [of the Beatification], however, we will not be satisfied until an artist gives us a true picture. From the biographies, the one of *Bishop Salotti* is the best, and I believe *Don Bosco e il suo apostolato* by Fr. Amadei will be read advantageously by the Salesians. Meanwhile, other unabridged volumes are coming out a little at a time (to Fr. Valentino Bonetti, Provincial in Argentina, January 7, 1930).

*Following Don Bosco*

A necessity for everyone, especially the Superiors.

“Do not want to do everything in a hurry. Rest; think, study and *get to feel that we are following Don Bosco. Age quod agis*”<sup>39</sup> (to Fr. Pietro Tirone, Visitor in Brazil, February 7, 1931).

*Imitate Don Bosco, but not superficially*

Without meditation, the confidential talk<sup>40</sup> and true piety, we will never have good workers, true sons of Don Bosco. *It is not enough that they imitate Don Bosco in advertising ut videant opera vestra bona*

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<sup>39</sup> Do what you are doing; concentrate on the task at hand.

<sup>40</sup> *Rendiconto*, sometimes translated as friendly chat or private encounter.

*et glorificent Patrem vestrum*,<sup>41</sup> if they do not imitate him in faith, in hope, in charity, in poverty, in chastity, etc. This has to be above all our preoccupation, our work, *to bring our confreres to God* (to Fr. Giuseppe Vespignani, from the Superior Council, Visitor, March 16, 1924).

We must encourage our confreres toward holiness, as well as to what is Salesian; *but you do not get this with light-mindedness* and without serious meditation *on the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, and without love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Most Holy. If you do not make saints, *I have little hope in your mission* (to Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti, Missionary in Japan, June 26, 1926).

*We need to start with a serious formation*

“... the young confreres are seedlings that you need to straighten, prune, water, fertilize...; but *with love of God* which is spiritual, confidence in the Help of Christians and in Don Bosco” (to *the same*, December 27, 1928).

Support them [the Novices] more and more with a great piety directed toward the Eucharist, even by means of the Sacred Heart, and toward Mary Most Holy. For it to be true, there must come from this piety the *spirit of mortification* of the senses and of the will. Fortunate...are you who have a hand in so noble and divine work of sanctifying the young (to Fr. Domenico Canepa, Master of Novices, March 18, 1928).

I thank those good novices for their remembrance on the day of their vestition; and tell them that I am not worried about their small number, if each one would really want *to honour Don Bosco*. Let them be ready, as they will remember that Don Bosco wanted it so, *to let themselves change their thinking* without resisting and without becoming sad if that costs them a little effort. To say that they must be *docile is too little*; they have to *think and feel as Don Bosco was thinking and feeling*; and if they study his spirit and love his works, Don Bosco will work this *miracle* (to Fr. Felice Mussa, Director of the same Novitiate, December 12, 1930).

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<sup>41</sup> “That they may see your good works and give glory to your Father,” Matthew 5:16.

*To know the true spirit of Don Bosco*

We are working then so that the Sisters stand *in the true spirit of our Blessed*. They have to live *with piety and united activity*. Be careful of a *faulty asceticism*, which results in doing nothing; be more careful of an *activity of words, of movement*, of blending with the world, without a real search for God. *Don Bosco was working for the Lord and with the Lord*, was praying without ceasing to take care of souls. Let us keep the spirit of Don Bosco (to Mother Luisa Vaschetti, FMA Vicar General, January 16, 1923).

Always be the bearer of *observance* of our *traditions*, of affection for the Congregation, for Mary Help of Christians, for Blessed Don Bosco, for Mary Mazzarello. Be vigilant so that *piety* among the Superiors and the Sisters grow *ever deeper*. *Cheerfulness, work*; our activity should be *saturated with piety*, with devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to Mary Most Holy, with *charity to the point of sacrifice*, keeping present *the life and the death of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of Blessed Don Bosco*. Accustom the Provincials and Directresses to speak of piety even in the confidential talks, without entering into the area of sin. Suggest the way of doing meditation, of staying united with God, sometimes even inquiring if they are making resolutions for the day, etc. *The Superiors who do not know how to speak of God*, of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, *produce little fruit*. This also with the girls. One does not correct lightmindedness, worldliness, etc., other than by bringing them to God (to Mother Teresa Pentore, Visitor in Brazil, July 18, 1930).

I feel that my word may not find them [the Sisters] still gathered [on Retreat]. If you can, tell them to practice *putting a great supernatural spirit in all their works*, even the smallest and most material ones; their living would become *a practical and uninterrupted exercise of faith, of charity, of hope*. *That is what Don Bosco is* in all his manifestations; that is the secret of the interior life. Would that our dear Help of Christians and Don Bosco keep you far from every danger, especially that of losing his holy grace and cheerfulness (Fr. Rinaldi underlined the last phrase) (to Mother Teresa Comitini, Provincial of Naples, August 19, 1930).

... which has its true centre in the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus...

“We have the same Rule, the same Superiors, the same Saints, the same Help of Christians, *the same Heart of Jesus alive in that Eucharist*, which Don Bosco wanted as the centre of our life” (to Mother Rosalia Dolza, Provincial of Milan, November 24, 1928).

... source of charity and peace...

“Live happy and may *the charity of Our Lord* always keep us closely united” (to Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli, Missionary in China, April 3, 1923).

“Courage, dear Fr. Bardelli, *omnia facite in charitate Christi Domini Nostri*.<sup>42</sup> May charity reign forever in your heart and may it *shine* in all the confreres and the souls entrusted to you” (same place).

“News of the good harmony that reigns among the [Apostolic] Vicariate [of Shin-Chow, Bishop Canazei] and the [Salesian] Province gives me great pleasure. *Deo gratias!* May it please God that it always be thus. *Peace is the kiss of the Lord*” (to Fr. Carlo Braga, Provincial in China, ... 15, 1931).

... which is nourished by the Eucharist...

May all [the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians] spend 1931 under the gaze of Mary Help of Christians in order to learn from Her *the life of the Spirit which Blessed Don Bosco lived*. I remind the Provincial [he sent a gift of panettone] of the *Bread of Life*. May she not only hunger for this Bread, may she also know how to suggest among her dependants to have recourse to the Eucharist in thought, with the heart, with Communion. *We are not dealing only with frequent Communion*, that are sometimes habitual, but a *desire for the Eucharist* while at work, study, recreation, in bed and everywhere. Where and when this matter is suitable, you must *promote it even more, but engage even the most distracted souls* (to Mother Rosalia Dolza, Provincial in Milan, December 24, 1930).

Certainly, to achieve this [creating collaborators in the apostolate among the converted] *you need Communion*. Study the way of giving *daily Communion also to those who do not have a daily Priest*. I am telling you this in confidence. Discuss it with Bishop

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<sup>42</sup> Do everything in the love of Christ Our Lord. See 1 Corinthians 16:14.

[Versiglia, Vicar Apostolic]. *Be careful*; obtain the necessary faculty, but it will be a great means. *The Eucharist within reach of the more fervent faithful*, the so-called catechists, or better Cooperators. *When a young woman makes a vow of chastity and has Holy Communion within reach*, she can do immense good. The same applies for certain young persons, for certain mothers and men.... Pray and then courage, make a plan of action, *in union with Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament*. I, too, will pray for this (to Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli, January 20, 1924).

### *Marian component*

If you want it to be even more meritorious [transferring houses], forget about human things, throw yourself with full trust in the Lord, and think about making yourself only a *true Daughter of Mary*. May her goodness with the just and with sinners render you ever more like the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, whom *She was the first to imitate* (to Sister Pierina Sutto, January 17, 1928).

“Encourage the Aspirants, the Novices, the Confreres with confidence in the *Ecce Mater tua*<sup>43</sup> and incline them to preach the praises of this Good Mother. *By means of Mary we had Our Lord Jesus Christ and by means of Her we will bring him to souls*” (to Fr. Valentino Bonetti, Provincial in Argentina, April 20, 1928).

“May Mary Help of Christians smile on you, keep her spirit in you, help you to do good” (to Sister Caterina Gaido, June 18, 1925).

Never lose courage. Always confide in *Mary the Most Holy Help of Christians*, who will continue to support and console your whole family. May you remember that *Our Lady can do everything*, and that she is our most tender Mother. May you have recourse to her in all necessities and invoke her with faith and perseverance (to Mrs. Giustina Giacometti, September 2, 1927).

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<sup>43</sup> “Behold your mother,” John 19:27. This was Fr. Rinaldi’s 1928 *strenna* for young people and past pupils.

“I bid you to grow more and more in love of the *Sacred Heart, of the Help of Christians and of Blessed Don Bosco*. They must be our consolers in life and in death” (to Fr. Giovanni Barile, Missionary in South America, June 24, 1931).

### *Spirit of piety and of work*

Accustom your Sisters to *pray always* when working, studying, assisting, teaching, playing, joking, day and night. Pray and make them pray always. There is no other good than *prayer and work while praying*, that is, keeping the mind, the heart turned to God. Courage, Mother Dolza, let us *use time well*. If you could see how painful it is, *when you are old*, to know you lost time, effort, while there is so much to do for the Lord and for souls (to Sister Rosalia Dolza, September 12, 1929).

The news from Sicily comes most welcome. I knew that there is much good on that island, and your confirmation gave me great pleasure. We endeavour to keep those Sisters *in the spirit of piety and of work*. Do not neglect anything in obtaining this, so that it makes them *true Daughters of Venerable Don Bosco* (to Mother Teresa Pentore, Visitor in Sicily, Macerata April 15, 1925).

### *Spirit of charity and of faith*

“I see among other things that you understand the difficulty of your mission. What pleases me most is your *spirit of charity and faith*” (to Fr. Pietro Piacenza, Missionary in Japan, October 31, 1926).

### *Spirit of true “Salesian” charity*

I would like, however that you be vigilant because with piety there would be *true charity*, which knows how to sympathize and help the sister, which leaves that rigidity that is not ever *according to Our Lord Jesus Christ and Don Bosco*. Let us distinguish well between *observance* to be praised, and *rigidity* to be rebuked. You will see it by that *gaiety and simplicity, which is St. Francis de Sales’s own* (to Mother Teresa Pentore, Visitor in America, May 25, 1926).

You will find this seminarian [about whom a letter addressed to him was lost after he had an initial reply by the same Visitor] and take

an interest in him. *Don Bosco will inspire you. I hope that you can do much good during your visit. Have a big heart, and gain everyone's heart* (to Fr. Pietro Tirone, Visitor to the Roman Province, April 11, 1930).

### *Spirit of charity and of justice*

It is true, you will find difficulties, as always if you want to do good, because you have to overcome evil; but do not fear. What you must do above all is to make yourself loving by using *great charity and justice* with everyone, without respect to persons, time or circumstance. *Be always good, above all by practicing true justice and equality.* For the rest do not fear. Mary Most Holy will take care of it. *She is master of the house more than you.* May the Lord bless you, keep you *always cheerful*, make you a true dear daughter of Don Bosco (to Sister Teresa Comitini, Provincial in Rome, December 28, 1923).

### *Salesian fatherliness*

“Surely, *fatherliness* is the great means for improving hearts and rendering religious life that much sweeter *even on earth*. We would recommend it especially this year. In fact, we are praying to our Blessed Father that he obtain it for us” (to Fr. Armando De Rosa, April 12, 1929).

I am recommending to you *plenty of fatherliness* above all in the little evening talk<sup>44</sup> and in the confidential talk. May [the theology seminarians] *never feel anything bitter, irritating or satirical*. Be only *good*. Let the others do the other parts, but *in a Salesian way* (to Fr. Ludovico Costa, Director of International Theological House of Studies in Turin, Crocetta, October 15, 1926).

### *Salesian Chastity*

Keep them [the Novices] working hard and taking good care of the *beautiful virtue*, not speaking of it, but of mortification of the senses and of

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<sup>44</sup> Known in Salesian circles as the Good Night talk.

devotion to Mary Most Holy” (to Fr. Felice Mussa, Director of the Novitiate, March 18, 1928).

“...cherish *modesty* above all, which opens the door to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and prepares souls for true charity, for really Christian action” (to Sister Rosalia Dolza, November 24, 1928).

“Today it is snowing. May blessings without end fall on you and on your Province, and above all may sisters and young girls entrusted to your care be as *white as snowflakes*” (to the same, January 1, 1929).

“Jesus, in presenting the Virgin to us, presents her to us with a lighted lamp. The lily does not flower unless it is exposed to the burning rays of the sun. There is no virginity if there is no charity” (Little Notebook of Sister Cecilia Lanzio, CE, p. 497).

May *this good Mother* [Mary Help of Christians] bless all of them [Daughters of Mary Help of Christians], wherever they may find themselves, and may she adorn them with *those virtues* which Blessed Don Bosco saw in them when he founded them, that is, with the *purity of the Angels* so that they would be worthy of the youth which he saw entrusted to them, and *of the charity* that Our Lord Jesus Christ came to bring for the salvation of souls (to Mother Luisa Vaschetti, 3<sup>rd</sup> Superior General, May 23, 1930).

“May Mary Help of Christians bless the Postulant *Stefania Martinotti* and make her *white* as a lily and *ardent* with charity and religious action, as *Venerable Don Bosco* wanted the *Daughters of the Help of Christians*” (July 25, 1926).

### *Salesian cheerfulness*

Fr. Rinaldi’s references to Christian joy, understood in a Salesian way as cheerfulness, are innumerable. We shall quote only some of the most characteristic of his style.

“May cheerfulness and *trust in the Lord* accompany you during this new scholastic year” (to Sister Rosalia Dolza, September 12, 1929).

“For the rest, *remain as cheerful as you can*; may the Lord bless you” (to the same, April 20, 1930).



“Take a few walks and they will do you good, and *keep cheerful*” (to Miss Celestina Dominici, September 10, 1912, DBV Archives).

“Let us be *happy, cheerful and good*” (to Mrs. E.C., July 29, 1913).

“Here is what you need to do, but do it *with cheerfulness, do it with Don Bosco’s spirit of joviality*, do it without looking at the sacrifices. Forward in Domino” (to Sister Giulia Berra, Missionary in Assam, December 31, 1923).

“Live cheerfully” (to the same, April 9, 1924).

“The proof of good will is the cheerfulness that you must *always keep*, whatever oppositions may come” (to Sister Carolina Cerrato, November 28, 1916).

“Let us pray much. Let us press ourselves and others on toward a *cheerful and active holiness*” (to Mother Luisa Vascetti, January 16, 1930).

“Go forward calmly *with simplicity and cheerfulness*, willing to do the will of God to the point of sacrifice” (to Sister Marta Gastaldo, August 30, 1926).

### *Discouragement: causes and remedies*

Well, then, if you want to prevent discouragement, it is necessary that *you clothe everything* – that which is within you and that which others do and say – *with a great supernatural spirit*, all aiming at the light of faith, of hope and of charity, that is, *according to God’s estimation*, not according to the estimations you had up to now. You will get that by cultivating the interior life, whose nourishment is Jesus in the Eucharist (to the FMA Novices at Pessione, August 19, 1930).

“On difficult days *look to Paradise*. Up there you will receive the recompense for all that you have suffered on this earth” (to Sister Giulia Berra, December 31, 1923).

*Let nothing disturb you* St. Teresa said and Blessed Don Bosco repeats to us, in particular to the Directors. *Let nothing disturb you*; in

its time you will be happy.... *Non turbetur cor vestrum*.<sup>45</sup> We respect you and we love you; if you have need, come here to talk with us. I am praying for you; *the devil must not win the game* (to Fr. Josip Tkalec, August 1, 1931).

*“Let nothing disturb you above all in spirit. With serenity and trust in God let us save the Young”* (to Sister Linda Lucotti, new Provincial in Sicily, October 8, 1922).

### *Apostolic component*

*“Blessed Don Bosco and Mary Help of Christians will bless you, if you seek the glory of God”* (to Fr. Carlo Braga, Provincial in China, August 7, 1931).

Courage, dear Fr. Barile; what I ask you is that by your word and your example you may do good for the Confreres of Peru. *How I would need to be understood by everyone*. Let us pray that *the spirit of the Blessed be our spirit*; let us pray that *the love of souls and of the Lord triumph* above self-love (to Fr. Giovanni Barile, July 30, 1929).

I see that you are beginning (to) orient yourself to your mission, and above all you realize that the good and the salvation of souls *must come from the grace of God* which is obtained by *holiness of life*. It is understood that St. Francis Xavier brought about conversions this way wherever he went (to Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli, January 18, 1923).

*“Keep watch so that God may reign in your hearts. If you are not holy, you will be doing something useless.”*<sup>46</sup> *Beans do not produce rice, nor nuts figs; so the missionary will not bring Jesus Christ, if he is not totally the Lord’s”* (to Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti, August 26, 1926).

I share in the pain of your oratorian disaster.... *Let nothing disturb you*. I console myself by remembering the history of the first

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<sup>45</sup> “Let not your hearts be troubled,” John 14:1

<sup>46</sup> Fr. Rinaldi uses the idiomatic expression, “*farete un buco nell’acqua*” – you will be making a hole in the water.

Christians in Rome. *The triumph of the Cross will come also for you; for the time being you are experiencing only its humiliations and vicissitudes. Be persevering in prayer and in fractione panis.*<sup>47</sup> Now you are uniting *two great means*, devotion to the Sacred Heart and that of the Help of Christians, and you, too, will see miracles. *Start again* with renewed energy and above all with faith and charity (to Fr. Pietro Piacenza, Missionary in Japan, October 12, 1928).

### *Missionary component*

I am very happy to know that you will hold the *little assembly for the Missions* in your boarding school on the 28<sup>th</sup>, vigil of the feast of St. Francis de Sales.<sup>48</sup> I rejoice that those students will know how to understand the *high civil and Christian significance* that encompasses the missionary concept, and I rejoice that they would take an immediate interest in these *truly big questions* of religion and homeland. Only men of heart and faith know how to penetrate them and offer their energies to resolve them (to Fr. Giuseppe Mossetto, Director at Cuorgné, January 22, 1926).

It seems to me that V.S.<sup>49</sup> *has not yet understood well* the scope of our missionary feasts and our expeditions. Look, we propose to create enthusiasm for *the salvation of unbelievers*. Yet we are convinced that *the missionary idea* among the boys: 1<sup>st</sup> cultivates the heart; 2<sup>nd</sup> increases faith; 3<sup>rd</sup> awakens vocations. These *three goods* are for the *benefit of the Christian education of the young* and for an increase of Salesian vocations. For the rest it is good to consider that a Catholic country such as Argentina *should not ignore the Hindus and the Chinese* from the East. Pardon my insistence on this, that the interest I have in increasing the personnel for Argentina, for its houses and the progress of their studies, does not lessen in the least. *Sow these ideas* in the boarding schools and among the Confreres that they must then be obedient to the Superiors.... In February I will go to France and Spain. In this last country we want to start a *Missionary House* (to Fr. Giuseppe Vespignani, Visitor in Latin America, December 9, 1925).

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<sup>47</sup> "In the breaking of the bread," Luke 24:35.

<sup>48</sup> January 28. Before the Vatican II reform of the liturgy, the feast of St. Francis de Sales fell on January 29.

<sup>49</sup> The initials of a person's name.

Increasingly encourage the houses of formation.... Then I wish that you seriously consider founding soon a *Mission House* also in Argentina. *The evangelical spirit is not complete without a zeal for converting pagans* and for accomplishing the *Ite docete omnes gentes*,<sup>50</sup> not just the Argentinians. Instill *this idea of being true Salesians* (to the same, November 27, 1925).

*Apostolic method: the Salesian...*

“Our method is *Salesian*. Let us do as Don Bosco did at Turin” (to Fr. Carlo Braga, Missionary in China, July 31, 1924).

“I am happy that you brought the *Salesian method*. His Holiness Pius XI advised me to use it also in the Missions” (to Fr. John B. Gasbarri, missionary in Peru, April 20, 1923).

The Holy Father *counts a great deal on our ways, that is, of the Salesians*. Approach the boys, interact with them, instruct them *through our methods* that he knows so well. He spoke to me of singing, music, professional schools, outings, even about the past pupils, as *the means of which we have the patent*. So I wish that you make known these ideas of the Holy Father [even those on the necessity that the Missionary know and appreciate the culture of the peoples to evangelize, to be spoken of shortly] to your companions and turn your attention to putting it into practice. The Holy Father has great trust in *Venerable Don Bosco's methods*. He would want even the popular press, print shop and paper mills there (to Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli, April 3, 1923).

*... his principal characteristics:*

Approach persons

“It is Don Bosco’s tactic, that of *approaching people* in imitation of Our Lord” (to Fr. Pietro Piacenza, in Japan, July 28, 1930).

“How are your relationships with the Chinese going? *Are you trying to approach* the Chinese in whatever way, as far as you can? *You need to go to them* and draw them to you. Here stands *Don Bosco's school*,

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<sup>50</sup> Go teach all peoples. See Matthew 28:19.

practiced also by all the zealous missionaries everywhere” (to Fr. Carlo Braga, in China, March 29, 1925).

Do not alienate anyone

“Do not alienate yourself *from anyone* while you work with the poor, even look for the poorest” (to Fr. Pietro Piacenza, in Japan, July 28, 1930).

Attract the young people

“Above all attract young people; *talium est enim regnum coelorum*.<sup>51</sup> And this is our portion” (to Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli, January 18, 1923).

“Remember that Don Bosco *founded his hopes on young people*. Pius XI does not think very differently about it. I spoke with the Pope about your school according to the norms and he was very happy about it. This is his plan that *we penetrate into the public schools*” (to Fr. Carlo Braga, May 8, 1924).

It gave me great pleasure that you are working with the mountaineer friends [of the Lanzo valley, during vacation] to do good for the *young people*. *Young people*, as Don Bosco said, *need to play, to be cheerful*, etc., and if we do not bring them toward good activity, they go toward bad activity. *Poor young people encounter wolves who make them wild*. They become rough in their tastes, dealings, words, while they scurry about, shout, amuse themselves. You accomplish the work of refining by *bringing them toward pure ideals, healthy cheerfulness, true life*.... Work with the new companions encourage them to do good (to Miss Cecilia Lanzio, July 25, 1921).

“The work done for girls generates multiple fruits” (*Little Notebook* of the same person, CE, p. 497).

“After all, young people must be *our favoured part*. Don Bosco saw the salvation of China in the young people” (to Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli, October 13, 1928).

Prefer *poor and working* young people

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<sup>51</sup> “For to such belongs the kingdom of heaven,” Matthew 19:14.

*It seems to me that it is not the case to become preoccupied with the inheritance of that lady of Viscone. Rather I believe it better to let her have an understanding with others. You can cite as a reason, which it is also true, that we lack the personnel to open that new house. For the rest, take courage. See if you can restore life to that house. Rather, it would be better to attend to the young or to the working classes in as much as you have the means to do so. For that make known your popular ideas, so that the gentlemen may come to your aid (to Fr. Deodato Giacometti, Trent, June 26, 1919).*

Evangelize with faith and charity

“Courage; *gather as many boys as you can*, make them good, devoted to Mary Help of Christians and to the Most Blessed Sacrament, *though they are still pagans*; the rest will come” (to Fr. Galdino E. Bardelli, July 20, 1927).

As you see, you have only to comfort yourself by thinking that you are imitating the Saints living in the Christians’ desert of China. Onward, dear son, onward in Domino *Sow the good seed; bring the good news to everyone*. The Apostles were in no better condition than you; *have their charity* and press on (to the same, February 11, 1925).

I am sharing in your progress and in thanking the Lord for it. Also, the Holy Father in days past demonstrated his trust in the Salesian work in Japan.... Continue, with faith, your work *among your youthful pagans*. Use all the attractions, dealings, and modern methods, as Don Bosco did, sanctifying all that is indifferent but that young people like. Use everything as a ladder to reach their heart and bring them to Our Lord Jesus Christ (to Fr. Pietro Piacenza, May 15, 1930).

Become one of them and of their culture

*Make use of the Daughters of Mary* for spreading good; *if only you could become Chinese with almond eyes and the old-fashioned ponytail*, how much more good you could do! Now, go ahead in Domino. Remember that Don Bosco saw that his sons were triumphing under the banner of Mary Help of Christians (to Fr. Bardelli, January 29, 1927).

I was with the Holy Father, who, you could say, spoke to me only of the Missions. *He follows you almost as I follow you*; he reads

the Salesian Bulletin and takes an interest in everything and blesses you. He dwells above all on *two ideas*. *First*, he believes that *it is necessary to study much about the lands where missionaries go*. He would like the Missionary to know the language, habits, history, geography, ethnography, etc., of the land. He has great trust in these means for entering into families, in society and among learned persons. He would like to see you *in the school and everywhere*. *In the second place*, he counts a great deal *on our ways*, that is, of the Salesians (to the same, April 3, 1923).

Rouse up collaborators:

“Go among the boys. This has to be foundational to our mission. *By means of the boys you must win the men*. Don Bosco dreamed of this and this has to be our mission” (to Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti, June 26, 1926).

“Your method of *using others to do good*, and even the same physician, is precisely Don Bosco’s, that, as soon as he learned something as a boy or seminarian, it drove him to teach it to others” (to Fr. Pietro Piacenza, March 21, 1928).

The proposal to *have pious and converted souls help you* is the Salesian system. Don Bosco used boys to help with the boys and used lay people in all his works. *This then is the Christian spirit. Charity is diffusive*. It is impossible to be warm and remain cold. Make use of all, boys and girls, the young and old. Don Bosco wanted us in paradise with a crown of souls saved by our zeal. At another time tell me how many men and women Cooperators you have created (to Fr. Galdino Bardelli, January 20, 1924).

“Your letter affirms me in the dream that I have for China; besides, Don Bosco assured us of it. Christians, *when they have the true Christian spirit, cultivated in a Salesian way*, will give you the necessary offerings for running the works” (to the same, July 20, 1927).

Principle work: *The Oratory*

I am very happy that you are thinking of the Oratory; but also here, that it be a Salesian Oratory in the spirit of Don Bosco. This work

gives results in every land, even among the pagans, when it is carried out with the authentic imprint of our Venerable Father (to Fr. Giovanni B. Gasbarri, Chachapoyas, Peru, April 18, 1928).

I am rejoicing in the good news that you give me and I hope that with the Apostolate of the Oratory the good will multiply. *Don Bosco assures us that this is the salvation of society....* Keep well, dear Fr. Bardelli; *implant in China our principal work*, that of the Oratory *doing as Don Bosco did* (to the same, April 28, 1931).

The last among the substantial collection of Fr. Rinaldi's letters to this zealous missionary who spent around sixty years in China and died in Hong Kong on November 10, 1982, at 99 years of age, is still aimed at the *Oratory*. The Good Father penned it a few days before his passing, a witness to his ardent missionary zeal. It merits being quoted in its entirety.

Turin, November 18, 1931,

Dear Fr. Bardelli,

The Oratory will be also an advancement of the Mission when it is done with perseverance and the spirit of Don Bosco.

I say with perseverance because the results of converting the whole of China will not be achieved easily, but it will be with a work of greater penetration than all the others.

As to the spirit, then, I recommend myself to Our Lord. The spirit comes from above and only the one who knows how to live the life of Jesus Christ as Don Bosco did bears that life with him and communicates it to others.

Accordingly, I will pray much for you and for your collaborators. Courage. I will also remember you to yours.

In Corde Jesu

Rev. Philip Rinaldi



## 2.9. Conclusion

Preserved is a splendid synthesis of the spirit of Don Bosco which Fr. Rinaldi sent to the Mistress of the Novices of Arignano, when Maria Lanzio was preparing to enter as a postulant.

I greatly appreciate your greetings, because they come united with promises to make yourselves *worthy daughters of our Venerable Don Bosco*. This is everything, good Daughters. Make yourselves like Him pious, like Him *devoted* to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Help of Christians, like Him *zealous for the good* and the salvation of souls. But remember that to be properly *pious, devout, zealous like Don Bosco requires that you be like Him, humble of heart* and like Him, *imitating Saint Francis de Sales* in courteous and refined ways and like Saint Francis de Sales *always in the presence of God* (January 28, 1922).

When writing to Fr. Pietro Tirone, Visitor to Brazil, he showed him the way to build a good Salesian. “Be encouraging everywhere, bring good humor, piety, Don Bosco” (July 25, 1931).

Instead, he outlined for Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti a kind of *silhouette* of the model Salesian. “...as good Salesians to be *cordial and simple; never familiarity, rather endless goodness*” (October 29, 1928).

Those who knew and visited him attest that the three last brushstrokes reproduce for us a Fr. Rinaldi who journeyed through his long life observing, studying, remembering and imitating his Father and Teacher Don Bosco.

Suffice it to say that this last chapter was the most difficult of them all, precisely because it is more rich, varied and complex than the previous ones. It was born only as a simple sketch for a conference to the Don Bosco Volunteers, and initial encouragement came from the current Ecclesiastical Assistants, including the Central Assistant, to rework it, enrich it, for a volume in the Institute’s series *Documenti e Testi*.

I had a similar invitation at a later time from three instructors at Università Pontificia Salesiana for a wider research. The late *Fr. Dominico Bertetto*, also, returned the material to me, accompanied by this sparse note, from which moreover the idea for the title to this little volume was suggested.

May 11, 1987

“Dear Fr. Stefano,

It seems to me that it would be very useful for everyone if you would draw up a version directed to all in a way that was easily accessible for developing the topic, *holiness according to Fr. Rinaldi*. Do it right away. D. B.”

As I reread the Epistolary from the beginning with this new lead in mind and meanwhile becoming ever more attentive to details, the bulk of notecards increased as well as the references to various interesting subthemes of the general topic of holiness. The idea of the work developed more clearly and increased in substance.

In a brief presentation of the entire work on the writings of Fr. Rinaldi to the Rector Major, mention was made of this special chapter on holiness in the Epistolary of the Servant of God. And from him came the exhortation, almost a command, to bring it to fruition with a presentation, even only an outline of the gathered material, without excessive preoccupation with a scientific quality, thus leaving to the experts the task of resuming the discussion and eventually perfecting it and giving it a definitive form in our days.

So, the writing of the draft began in the last days of June, and was completed a little after the middle of July. Then, as it developed, surprises, veritable discoveries increased. Not only did the series of six words intensify with quotations from Fr. Rinaldi's letters, but the same original intuition became clearer and clearer and received new confirmations. The *Christocentrism* of Fr. Rinaldi became palpably evident, and was indeed carried to its ultimate applications, while the *biblical theological* foundation of his entire spiritual doctrine proved always more extensive, more solid and richer than expected. Especially the Gospel and the letters of St. Paul, that he knew almost from memory, even if he did not explicitly quote them except on rare occasions, were breathing there from top to bottom. It would have been easy, given the time, to integrate the various notecards on Fr. Rinaldi with the respective New Testament biblical references. From one final reading of the entire chapter all impressions were transformed into ever greater certainties.

Therefore, the principal and foundational thesis from which we began can be considered completely confirmed. In addition we have the

awareness that Fr. Rinaldi's teaching refers constantly to Don Bosco and to his genuine spirituality, reinforced moreover by the richness of the biblical foundations which he brings to it, fruit of his constant meditation on the sacred text, according to the explicit testimony of Fr. Zerbino. So, we have affirmed the legitimacy of this ninth and last chapter and, in it, this final paragraph on *The Spirit of Don Bosco*, which is presented not as an almost forced external addition but as a necessity that spontaneously wells up from within the entire little work.

Finally, given the character of this work, to be considered only as a first attempt – imperfect, not matured, nor refined – the tempting task of carrying it to a greater maturation is left to the experts; with the desire and the hope that a more extensive reworking of the entire documentation (extending also to the other writings of the Servant of God) may soon be achieved, with the deepening and enriching that they would bring with it.

It seems however we may deduce that Fr. Rinaldi's merits for his biblical reworking of the spiritual teaching of his Father and Teacher could be said to have been acquired. We may then affirm that also in this delicate area he was able to achieve the task so well discharged by others: *to preserve, with innovations and enrichments, the sacred deposit received as a precious inheritance, in order to adjust it to the times and transmit it to new generations of Don Bosco's Family.*

Therefore, also in this case he would remain *a precursor of new times!*



## BOOK REVIEW

**FR. RINALDI**

**GOOD FATHER AND HUMBLE SERVANT OF ALL**

*by John Puntino*



The translation of Fr. Pierluigi Cameroni's work on Blessed Philip Rinaldi makes a significant contribution to the scarce body of literature available to English readers.

Fr. Cameroni writes from his privileged position as Postulator General of the Salesians of Don Bosco, where he was able to access the documents and testimonies used in preparing Fr. Rinaldi's cause of canonization. Moreover, his enthusiasm and love for Fr. Rinaldi shines through, even as he carefully and respectfully uses his sources.

Fr. Cameroni divides the book into four chapters and a conclusion. The first, on Fr. Rinaldi's life, gives the necessary details of his life and historical context. However, it concentrates on his spiritual development, giving ample examples of his resolutions during the various phases of his initial formation and first years of responsibility as a

Salesian priest. It then shifts focus to his responsibilities as Prefect General and Rector Major. Fr. Cameroni continues to highlight Fr. Rinaldi's spiritual life as he describes the administrative challenges of the Prefect General's office and his apostolic and educational activities on behalf of the SDB and FMA. For Fr. Rinaldi's extensive activity with the laity and Salesian Sisters, the author inserts an extract from Fr. Egidio Viganò's 1990 letter, "Fr. Philip Rinaldi authentic witness and interpreter of the 'Salesian Spirit'" (AGC 332, pp. 24-34; pp. 39-46 in the text).

Surprisingly, Fr. Cameroni gives less attention to Fr. Rinaldi's time as Rector Major than to other periods of his life. Not surprising is the way he brings out Fr. Rinaldi's spiritual strength and moral authority as he gave his attention to the religious and professional education of the Salesians, the spiritual heritage of Don Bosco, the missions and Don Bosco's beatification.

The second and most substantial chapter addresses Fr. Rinaldi's heroic life of virtue.

It begins by noting that while Fr. Rinaldi was alive no one thought of him as a saint. After his death, though, his fame of holiness grew and reports of graces

received prompted a closer look at his life. Fr. Cameroni quotes from the testimonies of Fr. Peter Ricaldone, who was Fr. Rinaldi's Prefect General, other Salesian priests, a diocesan priest, a Salesian sister and Bishop Evasio Colli, Fr. Rinaldi's compatriot and friend. All point to how Fr. Rinaldi lived and presented an accessible holiness, devoid of extraordinary events, yet rich in the practice of all the virtues.

The author then gives an orderly presentation of the virtues studied in detail during the cause of canonization. He begins with the theological virtues of faith, hope, love of God and love of neighbor, and continues with the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. He concludes the chapter with a look at Fr. Rinaldi's practice of the virtues central to consecrated life, that is, chastity, poverty, obedience and humility.

Within each of these categories, Fr. Cameroni presents specific aspects of Fr. Rinaldi's holiness, for example, "A man entirely of God," Pillar of the Eucharist," Pillar of Mary," "They spoke of Fr. Rinaldi as they would of a father."

He uses over 120 quotes from the testimonies of 29 witnesses to illustrate manifestations of Fr. Rinaldi's holiness. In so doing, there is some repetition of references to events and situations in his life, because they relate to more than one virtue. They are viewed from different angles according to the virtue being presented.

The material that Fr. Cameroni collected reveals Fr. Rinaldi's expressions of everyday holiness, that is, how he responded virtuously to the realities confronting him. For example, in his prayers to Mary, pp. 66-67, he writes, "My most Holy Mother, the interests of the Pious Society are entrusted to my prudence and activity. You know how very clumsy I am, and how I would not know what to do. So, You do it." "Dearest Mother, I am placing under your direction the matter of our properties because I really do not know what to do." In the section on love of neighbor, pp. 80-87, Fr. Rinaldi advises his niece, Sr. Maria Rinaldi, FMA on how to be a Salesian superior. "Your first task is to safeguard the family spirit in the community.... Your role as superior is to radiate calm, serenity, joy.... Look at yourself often and see if your face spreads sunlight around you" (p. 82).

Fr. Cameroni's skillful organization of the heroic virtues of Fr. Rinaldi give the overall effect of an attractive, well-integrated, realistic son of Don Bosco who sought only to be faithful to God through his external obligations and in his personal, well-hidden ascetical life. The rich variety of testimonies further highlight the effect that Fr. Rinaldi had on a wide range of individuals, works and groups of the Salesian Family.

Chapters three and four are much smaller than the first two. Chapter three presents, first, a brief biography of Mother Maria Lazzari, spiritual directee of Fr. Rinaldi and foundress of Missionary Sisters of the Passion of Jesus. Through her prayers and actions invoking the intercession of Fr. Rinaldi, one of her young members, Sr. Carla De Noni was miraculously cured of an otherwise fatal wound suffered during a World War II air raid. The second part of the chapter is the extensive testimony of Mother Lazzari in which she relates her experiences of his virtuous life, his style of spiritual direction and two events that she considered miraculous. The second is her account of Sr. Carla's cure, which is the miracle accepted for Fr. Rinaldi's beatification.

In the fourth chapter, Fr. Cameroni turns his attention to Fr. Rinaldi as founder of what is today the Secular Institute of Don Bosco Volunteers. He traces in Fr. Rinaldi's life the ways in which he grew to understand feminine psychology, the economic and social challenges that young women face and the desire of some to live an apostolic and consecrated life but who were unable to enter a religious institute. He then relates the immediate steps taken in the founding of the secular institute. In so doing, he includes the two longest passages in the book of material originating from Fr. Rinaldi, his first conference to the original members, May 20, 1917 and his conference of June 25, 2022 to the members, his first after his election as Rector Major. The first gives us an up-close view of his clarity, organizational abilities and depth of Salesian spirituality. The second shows how he directed the young women to practice that spirituality in their mission to the secular activities of everyday life.

In a masterly conclusion, Fr. Cameroni reviews highlights of Fr. Rinaldi's spiritual profile without slavishly repeating or simply summarizing the content of his book. Rather, he synthesizes the key elements of his holiness, such as his humility, practical judgment, goodness, frankness, fatherliness and prayerfulness, adding illustrations, with the help of more testimonies. He identifies Fr. Rinaldi's outstanding characteristics, such as his serene and imperturbable character, tireless zeal and bold initiatives. He presents Fr. Rinaldi as a guide and model of fidelity to Don Bosco. He expresses the wish that Fr. Rinaldi's canonization will stimulate the Salesian Family in its mission and lead to an increase in vocations.

There follow three short addenda, the chronology of Fr. Rinaldi's life, the sequence of events leading to the beatification and a prayer for his canonization.

The book presents itself well. A sturdily bound, 8 1/4" x 5 3/8" paperback with 12 photos and sketches gracing the cover and text. In future editions it may prove easier to read the text if there were more than 3/8" left and right borders on each page.

A particular challenge in the translation of such a work as this is to remain faithful to the precise meaning of sworn testimonies while expressing those thoughts in fluent American English. Readers will judge the clarity of those passages.

*Fr. Rinaldi, Good Father and Humble Servant of All* adds a substantial study of the blessed's holiness to the small body of materials in English. Currently, that literature ranges from full-length to pamphlet size popular biographies and a study of Fr. Rinaldi's circular letters to the SDB, *The Salesian Legacy of Father Philip Rinaldi*, by Martin Dai Loc Nguyen. A word of gratitude to Fr. Pierluigi Cameroni for his original contribution, Don Rinaldi, Padre buono e umile servo di tutti and to Agnes B. Paulino and her editors who produced the current English edition.

Technical

FR. RINALDI, GOOD FATHER AND HUMBLE SERVANT OF ALL

Pierluigi Cameroni

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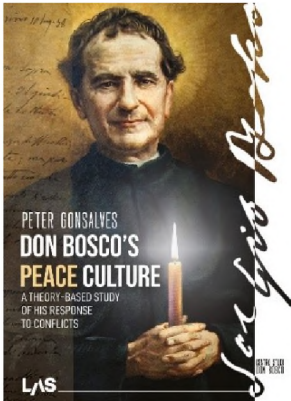




## **DON BOSCO'S PEACE CULTURE**

### **A THEORY-BASED STUDY OF HIS RESPONSE TO CONFLICTS**

*by Guglielmo Malizia*



Until last February 23, peace in Italy and in Europe could seem taken for granted because for 70 years war had only been encountered in books and other media. Russia's invasion of Ukraine suddenly dispelled the illusion that a war would never again break out in Europe. It is an unjustifiable aggression against a free people that risks turning the clock back to a situation of massacres, destruction and forced exodus. What is most worrying is that there are no signs of an imminent peace. Yet, just a few years ago, on December 19, 2016, the United Nations Assembly approved a solemn Declaration on The Right to Peace which in article 1 reads: "Everyone has the right to enjoy peace such that all human rights are promoted

and protected and development is fully realized."

In this context, the author's volume is particularly welcome because it speaks to us of a culture of peace with a scientific approach, and connects it with the thought and action of a saint, St. John Bosco, who still deeply influences thinking, attitudes and behaviors of many young people in more than 130 countries in the world.

There is also another merit of the work that deserves to be immediately highlighted. The publication fills a void in the scientific literature relating to Don Bosco. In fact, until now there was no serious study that would illustrate the peace characteristics of his thought, of his action and, in particular, of his educational system. The publication in question breaks new ground for further studies on the Piedmontese Saint in a justifiable way.

The chosen approach is scientific and acceptable. The starting point is based on the studies of Johan Galtung which occupy a fundamental place in the literature on peace. With this legitimacy, the volume constructs a firm theoretical framework to analyze Don Bosco's thought and action. The outcome is that the Saint emerges incontrovertibly as an "artisan of peace".

After this positive evaluation of the volume, it is appropriate to present it in more detail. The book is divided into three parts. The first is dedicated to describing Don Bosco's attitudes and behaviors in contexts of conflict. It begins with the presentation of his attempts at being non-violent in the years of his youth. His actions become more relevant over time, starting from his first effective initiatives on behalf of poor and abandoned youth and extending into his peace responses to political and ecclesial conflicts.

The second part is a study of Don Bosco in the light of the framework of Galtung's school. With the theory explained in the first chapter, three chapters that deal with the theoretical analysis of Don Bosco's thought and action follow. The author's re-

examination of the preventive system of the Piedmontese saint will certainly pique the readers' interest.

The third part is dedicated to the general presentation of the culture of peace of St. John Bosco. Some aspects that are particularly significant are his nonviolence, his search for truth, his awareness of the social question; his service to others especially poor and abandoned youngsters; his discovery of the potential of the mass media; the importance given to citizenship on a par with ecclesial membership and love for the Church. The list reaches its climax with his attention to the voice of conscience and his profound faith which interiorly nourished his culture of peace.

The volume is addressed to members of the Salesian family, those who know the life of Don Bosco; to parents, teachers, youth leaders and all other collaborators and benefactors of Salesian works. The author also has readers from different religious traditions in mind. Whoever the readers may be, one is certain to be enriched by this publication, especially all those who care about world peace and about peace education of the young.

Technical

#### DON BOSCO'S PEACE CULTURE

Peter Gonsalves

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Books and publications of particular interest to the Salesian spirituality, pedagogy, history, as outlined in the “Call for Papers”, ought to be submitted to the following address:

Journal of Salesian Studies  
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This Journal is an academic publication covering topics primarily related to the Salesian tradition of Saint John Bosco, including its connection to the wider Salesian tradition relating to Saint Francis de Sales. In order to progress the Salesian mission and properly understand and discern the call of Salesian discipleship, many articles take on a historical perspective and delve into the origins of the Salesian charism, spirit, educational style, and its historical application through time. These historically-based articles are designed to encourage the reader's critical reflection and draw connections to its current application. However, many articles make more of an immediate practical application.

The Journal of Salesian Studies, therefore, welcomes proposals and contributions that bring to the fore any of the following subjects:

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