

The art of Salesian encounter, accompaniment and discernment

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The best concrete form of the Salesian approach to education is the educative history of Don Bosco. Some basic principles are described in the short "notes" on the *Preventive System in the education of the young* written in 1877, must be understood within a rich framework of other narrative, educational, motivational and regulatory texts. The texts often explain the educative reality, the good practices in use or describe the exemplary students who are "told" to be an inspiration for a concrete reader. John Bosco narrates the beginnings of his Educative commitment in Turin, in December 1841, as a real encounter with a concrete boy - Bartolomeo Garelli. It was a beginning, consists of dialogue, understanding of the person and a simple proposal for catechism and games during the holidays. But placing the beginning of his educative work in that encounter is more, it is a paradigm of his educative style. The encounter, the dialogue, the support and the accompaniment are the cornerstones around which Salesian education revolves. Pope John Paul II rightly called Don Bosco as educator with "genius of the heart". Geniality and inner passion are condensed in the pastoral charity that stimulates pedagogical intelligence to translate into concrete educative gestures.¹

1. Narrative pedagogy of accompaniment in the discernment of young people

Starting from the narrative analysis of the biographies of the young people by Aldo Giraudò,² I want to develop a brief summary of the Salesian accompaniment in seven steps. In the narration we can grasp not only the ideals of the man to be educated, but also some steps that describe the Salesian way of constructing the educative relationship and to develop in the young the constructive process in dialogue with the educative proposals of the educator and environment of the Salesian house.

1.1. Welcoming

Don Bosco, as a paradigmatic educator, begins to build the educative relationship. Complete and cordial welcoming of the young person takes place through creating communication channel that is informal, contextual and friendly. Welcoming young people is not just a communication of openness and empathetic listening, which can be a technique that is learned with a special training. According to Pope Francis, it is also a "capacity of the heart that makes the closeness possible".³ With great clarity, Pietro Stella describes the concept of "heart" in Don Bosco as "the capacity of intellectual intuition and intense and spontaneous love, as capacity for understanding and love that springs from the most intimate psychological unity of man".⁴ Openness and closeness to the young person one encounters, presupposes an accepted vulnerability of the educator. This readiness to question oneself requires a psychological maturity and a profound personal balance. Without accepting the challenge of profound openness, dialogue remains welcoming only in a formal way and the non-authenticity is grasped intuitively by the young person.

¹ Cfr. E. VIGANÒ, *La nuova educazione*, in «Atti del Consiglio Generale» 72 (1991) 337, pp. 27-30.

² Cfr. A. GIRAUDO, *Maestri e discepoli in azione*, in G. BOSCO, *Vite di giovani. Le biografie di Domenico Savio, Michele Magone e Francesco Besuccho*. Saggio introduttivo e note storiche a cura di Aldo Giraudò, LAS, Roma 2012, pp. 28-30.

³ FRANCESCO, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 171. Il paragrafo seguente è il contesto dell'espressione citata: «Abbiamo bisogno di esercitarci nell'arte di ascoltare, che è più che sentire. La prima cosa, nella comunicazione con l'altro, è la capacità del cuore che rende possibile la prossimità, senza la quale non esiste un vero incontro spirituale».

⁴ P. STELLA, *Don Bosco*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2001, p. 60.

In full confidence a "language of the heart" is created, a typical expression of Don Bosco, which we can see in action at the beginning of dialogues with various young people. With Dominic Savio a sync is created immediately: «Then I called him aside, and started to work [...], we soon entered into full confidence, he with me, I with him».⁵ Michael Magone, who finds himself in the situation of the game led by him as "general of recreation", must be conquered little by little with a patient dialogue that demonstrates in a non-verbal way the statement of Don Bosco said at the beginning: "I am a your friend".⁶ Bartolomeo Garelli, in the paradigmatic tale of 1841, is defended by Don Bosco with the same declaration of friendship that defends him in a situation of vulnerability and opens the dialogue of mutual knowledge:

"What does it matter to you?"

"It matters plenty. He's a friend of mine. Call him back at once. I need to speak with him." [...] He came over trembling and tearful because of the blows he had received. - "Have you attended Mass yet?" I asked him with as much loving kindness as I could.

"No," he answered. "

Well, come to Mass now. Afterwards I'd like to talk to you about something that will please you." He promised to do as I said. I wanted to calm down the poor fellow's spirit and not leave him with that sad impression towards the people in charge of that sacristy. Once I had celebrated my Mass and made due thanksgiving, I took my candidate into a side chapel. Trying to allay any fear he might have of another beating, I started questioning him eerfully:

"My good friend, what's your name?"⁷

However it should be noted that Don Bosco brings into play a dialogue that is balanced. The empathetic openness overcomes the role of impassive, distant, managerial educator who in the period of Don Bosco was closely related to a demanding and austere religion that makes the salvation difficult, and to a philosophically cold, just judge, reachable only from high speculation and moral perfection. Actually, on the other hand, there is rather the risk of a trivializing acceptance according to the postmodern motto of *anything goes* or of a simplistic *I'm ok, you're ok*. An extreme centrality of the young person would lead to an empathy and acceptance to the point of avoidance of the educator. In this case, one could give reason to Nietzsche who through Zarathustra. declared the suffocated and weakened God for his compassion for men.⁸

1.2. Challenge

Don Bosco brings together the available and empathetic attitude offering the possibility of developing one's gifts and talents. In the encounter Don Bosco provokes intentionally expectation, desire, curiosity that brings the young out of his narrow horizons. Dominic Savio is tested about his desire and ability to study with the challenge of memorizing a page of Catholic readings. Domenic welcomes the challenge, anticipates the

⁵ G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico, allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in ISTITUTO STORICO SALESIANO, *Fonti Salesiane. 1. Don Bosco e la sua opera*. Raccolta antologica, LAS, Roma 2014, p. 1039.

⁶ G. BOSCO, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1092.

⁷ G. BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, pp. 1235-1236.

⁸ Cfr. l'introduzione al quarto libro di F. NIETZSCHE, *Così parlò Zarathustra: Un libro per tutti e per nessuno*, Adelphi, Milano 1986.

times and responds very well to the glove launched. Don Bosco remains convinced and promises him acceptance in the Oratory.⁹ In the encounter with Magone, Don Bosco sees not only his potential but also perceives his being in a risky situation. Here is the challenging question:

"My dear Magone, do you have the will to abandon this life as a brat and start learning some art or trade, or continue your studies?"

- yes, that I have will, answered with emotion, I do not like this damned life; some of my companions are already in prison; I fear the same for me; but what should I do? My father is dead, my mother is poor, who will help me?

- This evening makes a fervent prayer to our father who is in heaven; pray heartily, hope in him, he will provide for me, for you and for everyone ".¹⁰

The challenge in continuous dialogue is that Don Bosco does not reveal his name to Magone. He sends him back to others and thus provokes his curiosity. The challenging moment is very important for several reasons. The first is the gift of hope - the questions open the horizon of the young person beyond the concrete situation that has exhausted its potential or does not have many outlets for the future. The second element is the knowledge of the young person to understand if the young person is suitable for the educational environment and if so, how to insert him. The third element is an wider vision with the eyes of faith - Don Bosco advises him to pray cordially and to hope by entrusting himself. Finally, the last reason is the context of the free choice that Don Bosco leaves to the young. Dominic, need not learn the page of text, Bartholomew might not come after the Mass and Magone could forget about the identity of the unusual priest who appeared in the middle of the game.

1.3. Confidence - Trust

In the educative relationship, after the approach and the challenge that intrigues and opens horizons, we can arrive at the positive response of the young person. The correspondence to the challenge launched, the good will and commitment of the young come to the formulation of a "promise". The young person relies on the educator and enters into an educative relationship starting from the affective relationship and the sense of gratitude. At this moment it is recognized if the educator has found the accessible point to the good: "In every young person ... you have a accessible point to the good and first duty of the educator is to look for this point, the sensitive string of the heart".¹¹

Received the acceptance letter, our candidate was impatient to come to Turin. He thought of enjoying the delights of the earthly paradise, and becoming master of the money of all this capital. A few days later I see him appear ahead. "Here I am, he said, running towards me, here I am, I am that Michael Magone you met at the railway station in Carmagnola".

- I know everything, my dear; Did you come with good will?

- Yes, yes, I do not lack good will.

- If you have good will, I recommend that you do not put me in confusion all over the house.

"Oh, do not worry, I will not give you any displeasure. In the past I have behaved badly; for the future I do not want it anymore."¹²

⁹ Cfr. *Domenico Savio*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, pp. 1039-1040.

¹⁰ BOSCO, *Michele Magone*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1093.

¹¹ G.B. LEMOYNE, *Memorie Biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 5, p. 367.

¹² BOSCO, *Michele Magone*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1094.

In Don Bosco's stories, the accepted challenge on the part of the young man makes him to discover the feel of tension between the concrete situation and the promise of an ideal. The welcoming of the person by the educator, as the first step in the educative relationship, is a consonant promise with a possible and positive future. The second step of the challenge is prolonged in a distant ideal that resounds in the most intimate and profound parts of the young (the string of the heart). The uncertainty of the future is counter-balanced by the desire to work on oneself. The perception of one's limits is compensated by the trust that the educator places in the young. Braido places here the educational obedience that is gained with the complete welcoming and helps the growth of the young. Domenic Savio "came to the house of the Oratory and went to my room to give himself, as he said, entirely in the hands of his superiors."¹³ Here the anthropology of the educative system is in play. Inspired by Philip Rinaldi, the third successor of Don Bosco, we can state that the Preventive System is based on love and obedience to an order of universal and reasonable values. A repressive system of education, on the other hand, assumes a liberal and individualistic anthropology, thinking of a man who decides with free will to face arbitrary legislation and assumes all the consequences of his choices.

At this stage, an important sign is the gratitude of the young person who makes us understand if the educative offer is a gift made to him, or a gift that he deigns to do to the educator. In the story about Francis Besucco, this aspect of gratitude is very strong, even to the point of making him cry. On that occasion Don Bosco affirms: "This young man through healthy culture will make excellent success in his moral education. It is because it is proved by experience that gratitude in children is mostly a foretaste of a happy future; on the contrary, those who easily forget the favors received remain insensitive to announcements, advice, religion, and therefore find education difficult and lead to uncertainty of success".¹⁴

1.4. Environment

At this point the accompaniment enters a new phase. The educative relationship between two people is part of a formative environment of the Salesian house. The interpersonal accompaniment becomes that of a community. From the coherent dialogue we move on to the systemic logic of many interventions and relationships. From the centrality of personalization to a certain standardization of educational itineraries. In the Salesian house the young person experiences proposals, high values, human relationships, activities and educational stimuli. In the rhythms of life and in the regulation, the duties and times of fun are balanced. The proposals of study go hand in hand with the proposals of spirituality.

In the stories that Don Bosco offers us, we glimpse the different types of young people. Some, like Besucco, who in a complex environment find themselves lost in inadequacy, disorientation and inferiority. These need encouragement, support and emotional closeness. A second group is represented by the experience of Magone who «in the early days he had no liking for anything from recreation outside. Singing, shouting, running, jumping, joking were the objects that satisfied his fiery and lively nature». ¹⁵ The third group could, instead, be described in the figure of Dominic Savio:

His standard of living for a while was all ordinary; he admired an *exact observance of the rules of the house*. He applied himself to the study. He waited ardently for all his duties. He listened to the sermons with delight. He

¹³ BOSCO, *Domenico Savio*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1040.

¹⁴ G. BOSCO, *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d'Argentera*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1134.

¹⁵ BOSCO, *Michele Magone*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1095.

had rooted in his heart that the word of God is the guide of man to the way of heaven; so every utmost hearing in a sermon was an invariable memory for him that he no longer forgot.¹⁶

Clearly, in the new situation, the educator does not leave the young person lacking in accompaniment, but it is interesting that Don Bosco brings the experience of assigning to the new ones a companion rather than an educator. Personalized accompaniment is necessary, but at this stage it is crucial to accompany the whole environment, plan times, balance experiences, train educators, give quality and meaning to the activities carried out, in a few words, balance the pedagogy of duties with the pedagogy of joy. In the experience of Magone the balance between duties, defined times and the joy of spontaneous recreation is the context of the story. The accompaniment through the care of the educational environment was so important for Don Bosco, that led him in the 50s and 60s to pass from the oratory to the college as a predominant work. In fact, in the college, the preventive-protective principle that structures the whole environment becomes more concrete.

In addition to following the "visible curriculum" made of times, spaces and activities, it is necessary to take care of the "hidden curriculum" which consists of the values transmitted by relational, behavioral, group dynamics or implicit standards that are not expressed. In this sense, the joy and trust between educators and the young are indicators of the quality of the process of accompaniment through the environment. This is demonstrated by the "educative testament" of Don Bosco - the letter from Rome, in which he wishes "to go back to the happy days of the ancient Oratory. The days of love and Christian confidence between the young people and the superiors".¹⁷

1.5. Crises

After some time spent in an educative environment, the accompanying stories describe a moment of severe crises. Indeed, it can be said that the crisis is the heart of the three biographies. Crises are different realities, linked to character, temperament, past experiences and the degree of maturation of each protagonist. Even if they are different, crises have a common symptom in the stories: decrease in happiness, melancholy or sadness.

In Dominic, the critical moment arrives six months after he entered Valdocco. After the sermon on holiness, a new horizon is opened for him which was before unattainable. The state of mind in which he finds himself is that of the desire and of the need to become a saint designed in absolute terms. The crisis arise when the strong desire for perfection clashes with the imagery of the instruments described in the popular spirituality of the time: extraordinary gestures, artificial penitences and heroic actions. In this crisis, called a "mystical" crisis by Giraud, the task of the educator is the accompaniment in the excellence of the performance of ordinary commitments and activities aimed at the good of his peers. We can add that the task of a contemporary educator, in addition to the accompaniment in the crisis, is also to arouse the desires of excellence and of holiness. Today's ethical horizontalism without ideals create depressive crises worse than those encountered in the path of perfection and holiness.

After a month's stay in the Oratory, Michael Magone is seriously confronted with the quality of the environment and he becomes awareness of his own mediocrity. His commitment lead him rather to a

¹⁶ BOSCO, *Domenico Savio*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1040.

¹⁷ G. BOSCO, *Lettera da Roma alla comunità salesiana dell'Oratorio di Torino-Valdocco*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 451.

"ethical" crisis, characterized by remorse of conscience and moral dilemmas. Michael manages to get out of it after several reassuring dialogues with the educator who suggests the hypothetical solution, but does not make decisions for him. It is a process of conversion, which allows him to access a state of spiritual serenity which he never experienced before and to emerge from it transforming into a new level of interiorized value, chosen with freedom, totality and enthusiasm.¹⁸ In this case the role of the educator is to accompany without replacing the young man's freedom (even for a false compassion) in a difficult moment. The carer supports but does not anesthetize, does not cure the symptoms but patiently guides the search for the root causes of the crisis of the young.

Francis Besucco, for his part, goes into crisis a few days after his arrival in Turin. He feels lost in an environment so different from the original one, he passes from the experience of the shepherd of the mountains to a life in a relatively closed environment of the city. His is an "affective" crisis, defined both by nostalgia for the native environment and by the sense of inferiority towards the companions. Don Bosco accompanies him and supports him affectionately proposing him a simple life project:

Practice only three things and everything will be fine [...]: Cheefulness, Study, Piety. This is the great program, practicing these, you can live happily [...] He took the suggestion too literally; and in the persuasion of being grateful to God everywhere, he showed himself impatient of free time to take advantage of it. What? Not being capable of certain recreational exercises, still he took part, which often bumped or fell here or there [...] Poor boy!...be little more moderate [...] From these words he understood, how the recreation should be moderate, and directed to lift the spirit, otherwise it would be detrimental to the same bodily health.¹⁹

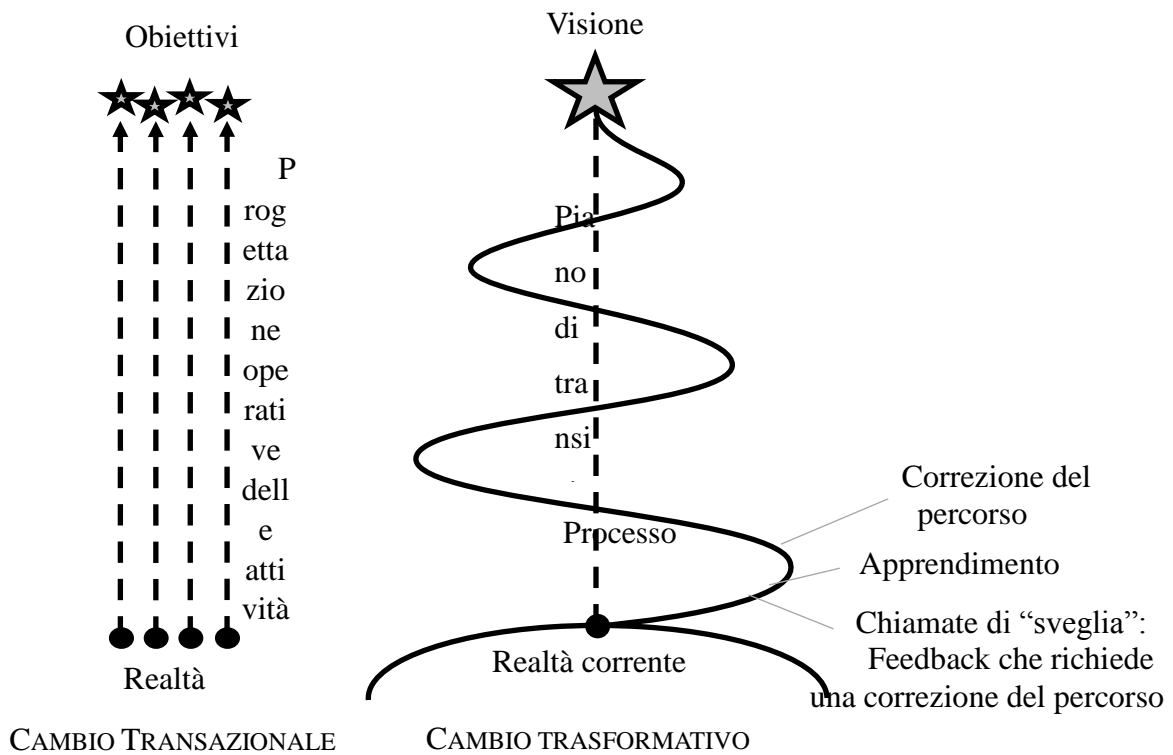
In the case of Besucco the challenge for the educator is the balanced accompaniment that is in the right measure, in the good sense and in the patience that manages to reassure the turbulent and unstable life.

1.6. Decision

The environment and the educator accompany the young man's crisis towards a decision. We can speak of affective, ethical, relational, mystical, etc. but it is interesting to note that the decision that describes Don Bosco has common features. As an element to note, is the fact that the decision does not solve the superficial symptom of a problem, but goes deep and makes an inner transformation. It is precisely a conversion in biblical terms - a *metanoia*, that is change of the way of thinking, of seeing ourselves and reality as a whole. In this phase of accompaniment it takes at least four qualities of the educator: patience to get to the core of the question; capacity for closeness that gives support to the young man's journey in important moments; a lot of inner freedom and finally, inner balance so as not to replace the young but to mature his freedom.

¹⁸ Cfr. GIRAUDO, *Maestri e discepoli in azione*, in BOSCO, *Vite di giovani*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁹ BOSCO, *Francesco Besucco*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, pp. 1135-1136.



In today's language we could say that the Salesian educator accompanies the young person in a transformational change and not in a transactional change. In the transactional change a simple problem solving is performed that perceives the difficulty of the young person in one of the dimensions of his personality and subsequently plans, or puts in place, interventions to reach the goal - the solution of the problem and the cancellation of the inconvenience connected to it.

In transformational change, however, the vision of an exciting ideal is used constantly to correct the course of action. A transition plan may very well exist, but this does not eliminate a discernment that is sensitive to the various feedbacks, which come from the reality and "call" to a learning that recognizes the point where he is, puts him in relation with the vision and corrects the course of actions. Therefore, discernment is a constant disposition both in the design phase and in the accompaniment phase. In transformative education, we do not think of solving the problem once and for all. The accompaniment of the young person and the permanent formation of the educators are always useful and necessary.

1.7. Commitment

The solution to the crisis follows, as a last narrative step, the descriptions of the educative itineraries undertaken by the young protagonists under the guidance of the educator. Beyond the different accentuations, one can easily see the unity in structure of the formative program outlined by Don Bosco in these biographies that refers to Christian anthropology put into practice.

There is an emphasis on the *pedagogy of duty*, on the scrupulous use of time and on the diligence in fulfilling the commitments of study and work. Duty is combined with a *pedagogy of joy* that finds its typical expression in moments of leisure and spontaneity. Joy finds its deep root in peace with God and with one's conscience. Here we find the *religious pedagogy* and the regular practice of the sacraments of the Eucharist and of confession in the confidence-accompaniment of the director-confessor. The last component is the

pedagogy of the commitment that makes the young the protagonist, not only of his own growth, but of many forms of service to others, of beautiful friendships and of the ardor for the material and spiritual good of all. Once helped by his companions he himself begins to accompany his own companions. A dynamic that has found its place in the Salesian youth ministry that sees the young animators of young people in a logic of peer education.

An important element is missing to conclude the complete image on the Salesian accompaniment. First we saw the personal accompaniment from the part of the educator; the accompaniment by the exemplary companions and the accompaniment through the care of the environment, the proposals, the programs, the times, the classes and its relational and organizational culture. The last modality is the accompaniment through the "group of commitment" or the so-called sodalities that contribute to the creation of the family environment with their unique character of solidarity, emulation and free participation. Pietro Braido observes as the most meditated description of their identity is the story about the Cheerful society of Chieri.

The Memoirs of the Oratory, written by Don Bosco in the first half of the '70s, show rules of behavior that exactly reflect the lines of Don Bosco's more mature pedagogy:

That these gatherings might have a name, we called ourselves the Society for a Good Time. There was a reason for the name, because everyone was obliged to look for such books, discuss such subjects, or play such games as would contribute to the happiness of the members. Whatever would induce sadness was forbidden, especially things contrary to God's law. Those who swore, used God's name in vain, or indulged in bad talk were turned away from the club at once. So it was that I found myself the leader of a crowd of companions. Two basic rules were adopted: (i) Each member of the Society for a Good Time should avoid language and actions unbecoming a good Christian. (2) Exactness in the performance of scholastic and religious duties.²⁰

2. Don Bosco, is a disciple, therefore accompanies the young

It would be onesided to describe Don Bosco's way of accompanying young people without dwelling on his experience of being accompanied. It seems logical and convincing to affirm that if one believes in accompaniment, one will allow himself to be accompanied or desire to do in the different phases of his life. But before being accompanied "in fact", the basis is to be a disciple with the attitude of the search for the signs of the Spirit in concrete situations and of practice the virtues connected with being a disciple.

In 1886, that is, in the period of the full maturity of his personal experience, to the repeated requests of the Rector of the Seminary of Montpellier who asked him to explain his educational method, Don Bosco exclaimed in the presence of the members of the Superior Council of the Salesian Society: " method you want me to expose: but I do not even know it! I always went ahead how the Lord inspired me and the circumstances demanded ". Words that do not want to mean that Don Bosco would go without knowing where, but that he had not wanted to imprison himself in a rigid and stereotyped system that cut off the freedom and speed of the movements in the face of new initiatives or new needs. The way of Don Bosco's progress seems clear enough and has the characteristics of spiritual discernment, that is, searching God's will in inspirations (more subjective) and in circumstances (more objective). In the following paragraphs I would like to describe some transformative passages of Don Bosco's life particularly that strongly speaks of his discipleship and accompaniment.

²⁰ BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio*, in *Fonti Salesiane*, p. 1193.

2.1. Meeting Don Calosso

The description of Don Bosco's accompaniment by Don John Calosso, which we find in the Memoirs of the Oratory, responds to the accompanying outline described earlier in the biographies of young models.

The first meeting takes place in the street. Don Calosso among others walking down the street notices him as a "child of small stature, with his head uncovered, hair bristling and ringed," who walked in great silence. He greets him by welcoming him and making a joke of his mother's appreciation.

Then he challenged him on the sermon by saying: "What have you been able to understand!" After the exhaustive answer, Calosso opens the possibility to study and promises the help for overcoming family problems.

Don Bosco entrusts himself to the guidance of Don Calosso, who makes him "taste what spiritual life is", in the midst of the study, the duties and the joy "of the usual festive gatherings in the meadow".

In the following pages the theme of the living environment is taken up - the family. The quiet period of winter in which the peasants' jobs did not require a great commitment have passed and his brother Antony was beginning to get excited about the fact that John was still young.

The following crisis occurs as a conflict between the two brothers. John's dream of studying clashes with the attitudes and demands of rural life.

The decision that resolves the crisis is typical for the combination of loving-obedience that is fundamental to the Preventive System. John relies entirely on his guide who accompanies and begins to share life with the chaplain, going home only to sleep. He states that «Don Calosso He had become an idol for me. He loved more than his father, prayed for him, served him in all things. "

His commitment makes quality leaps, works and studies with enthusiasm and total responsibility. "I made so much progress in one day with the chaplain, that I would not have done at home in a week." It is symbolic that after Don Calosso's death, Don Bosco continued the discourse of accompaniment. He describes immediately in the next paragraph his meeting with "a new benefactor" and his future guide, Don Joseph Cafasso ".²¹

2.2. The vocational choice

Don Bosco lived within an attitude, which intensifies the importance of vocational choice until it was decisively determined for salvation or eternal damnation that led to inevitable anxiety. The first strategies to "handle" the vocational dilemma were two: the path of obedience and the path of rationality. In obedience to his confessor Joseph Maria Maloria, who was considered the most learned ecclesiastical of Chieri, John would have expected more concrete indications regarding the choice of vocation. The young Bosco was very happy with his guide and will continue to confess to him also in the seminary, but his advice on this matter

²¹ Cfr. *Idem*, pp. 1182-1186.

was not enough: "In this situation, he answered me saying, everyone must follow his own inclination and not the advice of others".²² Various hypotheses can be made about the choice of Maloria not to express himself directly, but the fact remains that John could not choose simply obeying another's directive. The second alternative was to make a rational choice. The elements that came into play were: the right time for choice (the last year of high school), the decision not to rely on dreams, the consideration of the high dignity of the priestly ideal, the awareness of one's own weaknesses and of the dangers of the world and finally the question of economy. The rational result of the decision-making process was to become a Franciscan.²³

The rational choice could not be carried out due to a strong perception of an inner restlessness among the Franciscans where the young Bosco would not have found so much inner peace that he looked for. From here on, the typically 'Boschian' way of discerning and being accompanied is developed. John Bosco retrospectively tells it in the Memoirs of the Oratory in a context of discernment in prayer that can be described phenomenologically as the creation of a vision of the future permeated by trust in God's Providence. John makes a novena according to this intention and receives the sacraments with great fervor. John Bosco entrusted to the advice of the uncle priest of Luigi Comollo, In fact, the advice of the uncle of Comollo goes in this direction, suggesting John to enter the seminary where he will be able to know better what God wants from him. In these situations the discipleship of John Bosco made a transformative leap, perceiving himself as a disciple in the permanent search for the voice of the Spirit in concrete situations. The center of his discipleship is the attitude of the search and not the "materiality" of the accompaniment that would seem to become more occasional and less profound.

2.3. The choice of proactive prevention

Finding himself in Turin, the young priest John Bosco does not immediately decide his field of work, but relies on the formation and accompaniment in the Ecclesiastical College by St. Joseph Cafasso. Working in the re-education works of the Marchioness Barolo and attending the prisons of Turin, Don Bosco came to know the pressing problems of the young people of the time. It is in this context that Don Bosco makes a discernment that leads him to another leap in quality - the choice of the proactive preventive strategy that is at the heart of the Preventive System. Don Bosco writes about his visits to the prison: "It was on those occasions that I noticed how many were brought back to that site because they were abandoned to themselves. Who knows, he said to me, if these young men had a friend outside, who took care of them, helped them and instructed them in religion on holidays, who knows they can not keep away from ruin or at least reduce the number of those, who return to prison?"²⁴

Don Bosco's preventive attention is thus the result of an accompanying discernment that goes deep and addresses the causes of the problems that afflict young people. The depth of discernment is not opposed, but helped by the immersing into the concrete world of young people. It is not only a response to the immediate pressing problems that would risk being welfare, but it is a preventive formation that anticipates the falling of those who are "at risk". Don Bosco responds concretely to the challenges of the youth with the preventive proposal of the festive oratory: the friendship in an anonymous city in demographic growth and in the phase

²² Cfr. *Idem*, p. 1210.

²³ Cfr. *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Idem*, p. 1234.

of early industrialization, religious education for children without parishes, healthy fun for those who spend most of their time working, night schools for the illiterate, etc.

2.4. Further evolutions of the discipleship of Don Bosco

In the steps described, we saw Don Bosco moving from a style of "totalizing" accompaniment of Don Calosso to a mature style of discipleship. Summing up we see that as a teenager, in his 14-15 years, he lets himself be guided with the same style that he proposes to his boys in edifying biographies. But in the concrete choice of his vocation he finds himself in the necessity of entering into a more mature logic, of a constant discernment. Both blind obedience and pure rational choice are discarded. The choice falls on the path recommended in the seminary that allows him to concretize further his mission. Finally, at a third level, we see the continuation of discernment under the guidance of Cafasso, which broadens the horizons not only to discern in personal life but also in the concrete processes of educative-pastoral work.

In the 60s we can see the decline of the festive oratory at Valdocco, the failed experience with the college of Giaveno, the problematic construction of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, the long process of approval of the Constitutions, attempts to expand in Piedmont with the different colleges entrusted to very young directors. In the '70s the missions began in Latin America, the controversies with the Archbishop Gastaldi for which it was neither simple nor immediate to rationally predict the future of the Congregation and the work that began in very modest conditions. The working creativity of Don Bosco is a fruit of continuous discernment that makes him detach from a single mode of work (for example that of the festive oratory) and gives him an inner freedom that he can rely more and more on Providence. His working genius and heroic discipleship are found to be strengthened and to be synergised.

Another aspect of Don Bosco's discipleship can be observed in the stories of his dreams, in which he is always accompanied by a character: Don Cafasso, Don Alasonatti, Count Cays, Silvio Pellico, Marquise Barolo, etc. Even Domenic Savio, for several times, led Don Bosco in the opening of new horizons. In this way the path is accomplished - the excellent disciple has become master of his master. It is interesting how the historian Pietro Stella combines in his assessment realism and dreams as complementary in the action of our Saint:

We realize that it is not easy to establish Don Bosco's attitude of dreams, which he feels or presents as prophetic, and reality. One has the impression that he acts in the conviction of having a mandate from above, a goal to be achieved, something to be achieved even if he does not perceive - through dreams - the whole entity. Don Bosco warns that the unfolding of events makes the Congregation configure not how he would have liked it, or how he believed it should become [...] His ideas are modified, the specified conditioning of the events always followed carefully, not to accept them passively, but to adapt to them, with continuous creative activity, the new construction [...]. It is not pragmatism, because it dominates the fixed purpose and a series of religious and moral principles: it is skill and the search for opportunity: it is radical optimism in the persuasion that the evolution of things always offers an acceptable basis on which to implant their germs, in the confidence that they, even if conditioned by "very sad times", will always find ways to overcome the storms and to fructify ».²⁵

²⁵ P. STELLA, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, vol. 1: *Vita*, LAS, Roma 1979, pp. 161-162.

3. Conclusion: Educate and plan today with a style of accompaniment

The phenomenological-narrative analysis of the experiences of the founder of the Salesian Family allowed us to access his style of accompaniment in seven steps. This style finds correspondence with the theory and practice of transformative change and works on three levels of interpersonal, group and environmental accompaniment. The intervention of the educator is rooted in the experience of having been accompanied and the credibility of his gestures is founded in the profound identity of the accompanying educator because he is a disciple. I think that the seven steps and the Salesian style are valid even now but some variables of a context have to be considered. I briefly outline some current tools that can enlighten the practice of the educative accompaniment of young people towards the choices of life.

3.1. The plan of life as a practical tool of accompaniment

Given the postmodern context without a strong and shared references, it is not enough to appeal to "values", "virtues" or "duties of life" as before, in a society in which the majority of the population was educated by values and a shared Christian ideal. The educator must work explaining together with the young the vision, the values and accompanying the implementation of personalized strategies. A useful tool is the "plan of life" written and co-created with the educator who is above all in the role of facilitator. The plan is not just a linear statement of values, objectives, activities and indicators, but is found in the dynamics of transformative discernment that implies, as in Don Bosco's narratives, challenges, crises, decisions and quality leaps. The Frame of Reference for Salesian Youth Ministry says: "In this logic, as Christians, we read the plan of life under the sign of the vocation, call of God that arouses, supports and strengthens the freedom of the young person, making it capable of responding with freedom and joy to one's own identity and mission [...] It is in this space that the proposal of faith and the response of the plan of life are also placed".²⁶

The plan of life can be built by analyzing with the young their goals, asking why is that goal, in order to discover rationally and emotionally whether the goal is an end or just a means to reach another goal. The purpose of the chain of questions is to arrive at the ultimate intrinsic desire that can build the basis of vision-vocation and is an end in itself. Another path that can be made together with young people, is visualizing the future, imagining the different anniversaries of life, retirement or funeral, in a sort of purposeful "exercise of good death". Then the contents of the imagination are verbalized describing the story, the people of reference, the desired wishes for the various roles of current life. From here you can start a work on goals and strategies in the life of the young.²⁷

3.2. The isomorphic organizational style of accompaniment

If the accompaniment is a work task for the educator, it can lead to good results. I think that the process will hardly come to the effects present in the biographies of the young models, because the strength of the testimony and the knowledge of the educator that must be "ahead" in self-knowledge, of their motivations to work constructively with the dynamics of transference and counter-transference. It is necessary that

²⁶ DICASTERO PER LA PASTORALE GIOVANILE SALESIANA, *La pastorale giovanile salesiana. Quadro di riferimento fondamentale*, SDB, Roma 2014, p. 53.

²⁷ Cfr. M. VOJTÁŠ, *Reviving Don Bosco's Oratory: Salesian Youth Ministry, Leadership and Innovative Project Management*, STS Publications, Jerusalem 2017, 324 pp. 228-232. Versione italiana: ID., *Progettare e discernere. Progettazione educativo-pastorale salesiana tra storia, teorie e proposte innovative*, LAS, Roma 2015, pp. 263-266.

accompaniment becomes a "form" that structures the processes and educative environments at different levels. This is why one can speak of an isomorphic organizational style.

In this direction, with a specific focus, the study of a Salesian Reinhard Gesing from Germany, expert in the field of Salesian formation, is moving. In one of his writings he compares the function of the interview with the director in Salesian tradition and the dialogue of supervising the employee with his superior in a concrete multinational company.²⁸ Through the comparison of the two ways of dialogue, the author reaches the possibility of learning for the two organizations: the Salesians could enhance the interview more (and return to practice), thanks to recent management studies applied in the company sphere; the role of the director could be broadened by including some functions of the coach in giving and receiving feedback; the important methodology of the interview could be highlighted; and, lastly, the practice of dialogue could also be extended to lay collaborators in Salesian works as a tool for ongoing coordination and formation. Salesian style clearly goes far beyond corporate supervision but as a matter of fact sometimes there is not even that. For a false respect for the autonomy of educators and for the historical legacies of generations that have already passed by, we do not practice the Salesian colloquy that has a potential for educational and organizational coordination.

3.3. The transformative plan of educational structures

If Salesian accompaniment is the truly isomorphic principle within an educational structure, it should affect not only communication and interpersonal processes of supervision, empowerment, facilitation, etc. but also at the level of "organizational culture" and the identity of the institution. Said with more concrete concepts, the accompaniment must also enter as a basic logic for strategic planning. From previous studies it can be concluded that the model of the man who is at the base of Salesian educative-pastoral planning is the rational-voluntaristic man linked to planning by objectives. Within this transactional logic, the first step is to analyze reality, plan objectives, follow activities and finally, verify. By itself, if the one who plans has enough consensus to get the plan approved, there is no need for the collaboration of others and if so only as information carriers and / or executors.

In a transformative logic, on the other hand, planning can be conceived above all as a formative tool of the educative-pastoral community and only secondary as a managerial tool. During the planning process we should accompany the processes of confrontation on more profound aspects of educational action: the inner identity of the educator, the virtues and attitudes, the paradigms, the expectations, the fears, the hopes and the deeper vocational aspects.

To ensure the right importance for transformation, the planning moments could consist of five steps. It starts from the predominantly rational description of the situation and from the verification of previous planning cycles that present a variety of stimuli and symptoms. In the second moment the community descends into the most emotional part; it elaborates a meta-analysis of the paradigms connected with the habitual ways of thinking and feeling, connected with experiences and with personal or group history, to share and question paralyzing paradigms and / or opposing ideologies. In the third moment the community discerns the

²⁸ Cfr. R. GESING, *Das Mitbrudergespräch in einer Ordensgemeinschaft und das Mitarbeitergespräch im Unternehmen. Ein vergleichende Darstellung unter besonderer Bezugnahme auf das Mitbrudergespräch bei den SDB und das Mitarbeitergespräch bei RWE*, Manoscritto della serie "Benediktbeurer Schriftenreihe zur Lebensgestaltung im Geiste Don Boscos", Benediktbeuern 2004.

presence of the Spirit who speaks in concrete reality to accept a call that is given and which has the potential to change the basic educative-pastoral perspective. The call is narratively explained in a vision in the fourth moment of the plan: it is also opportune to have the vision tested in small prototypes to have already the first feedback from the practice. In this way the typical way of "planning" of Don Bosco is recovered, who by narrating proposes to the young people and educators the educative stories of the model boys or of paradigmatic situations. Only then do we arrive at the fifth moment of the operational planning, which completes the vision in reality, establishes objectives and strategies in the effort to align all the systems in the direction of vision with the instrument of regulation, typical of Don Bosco.²⁹

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²⁹ Cfr. VOJTÁŠ, *Reviving Don Bosco's Oratory*, pp. 258-283 oppure ID., *Progettare e discernere*, pp. 283-314.