

*"The good man seemed to be beside himself with joy at having a church in his house.*

*Thank you, my good friend, for your kindness and good will.*

*I accept these generous offers, provided you can promise me that I can come here next Sunday with my boys". (MO, p.256-7).*

SECOND PART  
SALESIANS AND LAITY  
MEMORIES AND PROPHECY

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## CHAPTER 1

### SALESIANS (SDBs) AND LAITY IN THE WORLD AND IN THE CHURCH

#### **1. Called by the Father to work in his Kingdom**

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*"To me", wrote Don Bosco on his arrival at Valdocco, it seemed truly to be the place of which I had dreamed and seen written: Haec domus mea, inde gloria mea". And he went on to emphasize the solicitude in granting the faculties "to have sung Masses, to make tridiums, novenas and retreats, to admit to confirmation and holy communion, and to certify that all those who regularly attended our programme had fulfilled their Easter duty".<sup>1</sup> From the entire story it is easy to deduce that "to be Church" and make the "experience of Church" is at the heart of Don Bosco's plan of education.*

The opening at Valdocco on Easter Sunday 1846 became the sign of the special linkage between Don Bosco's Oratory and the Resurrection Community.

The salesian mission was to be at the service of the great project of communion which began at the creation and reached its fullness in Christ's Easter victory.

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#### **Created to live and build communion**

Man was created *"in the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1,26) and is called to exist in a relationship which manifests the gift of the Trinitarian communion present in his heart.*

This gift is also a commitment (cf. Gen 1,28). Life is a call to grow in communion with God and with others, to develop one's personal resources and transform the world and nature into a dwelling place worthy of the human family.

This communion is expressed in the first place in the relationship between man and woman (cf. Gen 2,18) who have equal dignity and responsibility. It is a matter of a reciprocal and complementary relationship lived especially in the family, the fundamental subject of society, a community of persons which renders visible and communicates the gift of communion.

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#### **In acceptance of creation and of history**

*"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen 1,31). Created realities have an intrinsic goodness, their own autonomy and consistency.*

Humanity responds to the initiative of God, who calls it and collaborates with it for the transformation of the world through work, science and technology, in the development of society through politics and economics, in the pursuit of justice and solidarity among different peoples. Of this the witness of great men and women is a sign. Such a project manifests the unity of all human beings who come from the same Source and have the same final End. God truly loves the world and involves everyone in working together to build it in unity and peace (cf. GS 92).

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#### **In a process of reconciliation**

In the history of humanity sin destroyed the original unity, shattered interpersonal relationships, changed God's truth into lies and brought death into the world (cf. Gen 3,1-24; Wis 2,24).

Nevertheless the final word is not sin and man's death, but love and the life of God (cf. Gen 3,15). From the initial shipwreck of humanity began the long and still unfinished story of human adventure, which is at the same time both profane and salvific.

Fragments of salvation are particularly evident in the different religions. These manifest the force of humanity in seeking God, a search prompted by grace and having its definitive fullness in the mystery of Christ (cf. LG 16, NA 1.2). God's presence and action can also be seen in persons of good will and upright conscience.

This is an invitation to us to collaborate with them and with believers of different religions in building a world which is more human, just and fraternal.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Memoirs of the Oratory*, p.265

In this sense we can extend the meaning of the term "Laity" to include all those who, although not belonging to the Catholic Church, want to contribute in various ways to an integral education in the spirit of Don Bosco (cf. AGC 350, p.11 and 14).

## **2. Called by Christ to be signs and instruments of communion and participation**

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### **The incarnate Christ, realization of communion**

By the incarnation the Son of God became inserted in the human family, lived as a workman among the people of the time, assuming their culture and religion, and becoming similar to us in all things but sin. In this way he sanctified human bonds, and in the first place those of the family, and gave value and new dignity to all created realities which became means and instruments for communion with God.

Jesus Christ broke down all barriers and gave preference to the poor and lowly as a characteristic of his evangelizing mission.

By his Easter victory he was constituted the firstborn of all creation, and through him God rebuilt the original communion among all things, those of earth and those of heaven (cf.Col 1,17.20).

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### **The Church, sign and instrument of communion and participation**

This new reality is anticipated in the Church, which has the mission to proclaim and construct the Kingdom of God.

Its fundamental vocation is to be united to Christ (cf.Jn 15,5). From this bond stems communion amongst all (cf.Eph 2,14-15), the intensity of which is conveyed by the biblical image of the Body of Christ and the People of God (cf.LG 7 and 9). It is a communion which is born in Baptism and Confirmation, and nourished in the Eucharist (cf.1 Cor 12,13). But it is a fragile communion: personal and communal sins can weaken it to the point of rupture. The sacrament of Reconciliation gives it new life and strength.

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### **The Church, leaven of the Kingdom in human history**

The Church, animated by the Spirit, is able to recognize him and serve him wherever he is manifested, so that all human reality may meet with salvation. Communion and mission are deeply linked to one another, to the extent that communion represents the source and at the same time the fruit of the mission (CL 32).

All members of the Church without exception, each in line with his particular vocation, are called upon to take an active and responsible part in this mission. All, by the depth of their faith, the fraternity of communal life, the riches of their charismata and the dynamism of their commitment, proclaim the Kingdom and render it present.

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### **The Church and the secular mission**

The Church is in the world and for the world. It takes up secular values, purifying them and raising them through the newness of the Passover. Truly *"the Church has an authentic secular dimension, inherent to her inner nature and mission, which is deeply rooted in the mystery of the Word Incarnate, and which is realized in different forms through her members"* (CL 15).

In this time of deep transformations in culture and society, believers are called to unite with all men of good will to develop the seeds of the Kingdom which are present everywhere: signs of the Holy Spirit who is working in creation and in history.

## **3. Unity and diversity in the common mission**

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### **Richness of the Spirit's gifts**

The Church receives from the Risen Christ the Spirit of the Father which makes her a participant in the life of the Trinity, unifies her in communion and ministry, and adorns her with various charisms and gifts. The Spirit prompts the Church to open herself to the world and to cultures so as to transform them by the force of the Gospel, and renews her in the different phases of inculturation, finally leading her to perfect communion with her Spouse (cf.LG 4).

Through the action of the Spirit, the ecclesial community is an organic community, characterized by the presence of different and complementary vocations, charisms and ministries (cf.1 Cor 12,4-7).

They are at the service of the growth of the Body of Christ in history and of his mission in the world.

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### **Plurality of ministries**

All in the Church are consecrated and sent out in virtue of Baptism and Confirmation. Nevertheless the ordained ministry and consecrated life presuppose a specific form of consecration in view of a particular mission.

*The lay faithful, through the consecration of Baptism and Confirmation are called to be signs of the Kingdom in the world, dealing with temporal matters and ordering them to God. The secular character is the distinguishing element of their Christian existence (cf.LG 31). They live the common vocation to holiness in work, in the family, in politics and economics, in science and art and in social communication, with a commitment to human advancement and evangelization. The lay Christian is therefore a member of the Church in the heart of the world and a member of the world in the heart of the Church (cf.Puebla 103).*

*The ordained ministers, in addition to the fundamental consecration deriving from Baptism and in virtue of the anointing of the Holy Spirit received in the Sacrament of Order, are marked by a special character which conforms them to Christ the Priest (cf.PO 2). They are stimulated by the charity of the Good Shepherd to give life to the sheep (cf.PO 13) and to build an ecclesial communion animated by the Bishop, who presides over it. The ordained ministry is at the service of the common priesthood of the faithful.*

*Consecrated persons who embrace the evangelical counsels receive a new and particular consecration which, without being sacramental, commits them to making their own the form of life of Jesus which he proposed to the disciples (cf.VC 31). Religious life manifests in a particularly rich way the evangelical benefits and the purpose of the Church, which is the sanctification of the human race (VC 32). Their life of communion becomes a sign for the world and orients it to belief in Christ (cf.VC 46; 51).*

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### **Reciprocal and complementary nature of the man-woman relationship in Christ**

The new rapport with God in Christ provokes an innovation in the deep relationship between man and woman. The innovation is made visible particularly in the vocation to marriage, becoming a sign of the intimate union between Christ and his Church (cf.Eph 5,32).

In the ecclesial setting the mutual relationship between man and women is of vital importance. There seems to be an urgent need for allotting more space to the woman in social and also ecclesial life (cf. John Paul II, *Letter to women*).

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### **Mary, Icon of the Church as Communion**

Let us turn our eyes to Mary.

She has been called to a particular communion with the Trinity who willed that she should be the Mother of the Word to give him to the world. The Church looks to her on its pilgrimage through time. To her Don Bosco turned from the moment of his dream at the age of nine, by her he was educated and became a man totally for God and totally for the young.

## CHAPTER 2

### RADIATION OF THE CHARISM

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*"We heard with our own ears, O God, our fathers have told us the story of the things you did in their days, you yourself, in days long ago" (Ps 43).*

In the plan of salvation which God carries out through the Church, we Salesians contemplate the charism which the Spirit has brought to life and spread through Don Bosco.

Through the mediation of Mary, the Lord called him to take care of "the young who are poor, abandoned and in danger" (C 26); and he did not leave him by himself, but made him the Father of a great family and the guide of a host of youngsters. For this reason his story is our story also.

As we look at Don Bosco our ability for discernment becomes enlightened, and our desire increases to say to lay people what he himself said to the young Michael Rua: "We shall go halves in everything".

#### **1. At the origins**

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##### **Don Bosco's youth and adolescence**

From his boyhood Don Bosco was a great communicator and animator, able to create groups and associations and involve their members, making intelligent appeals to the energies of all of them. At Chieri, where he was esteemed by his companions as the leader of a small circle, he founded the Society of Joy, and during the holidays extended the concept to Morialdo, where he founded another society with the same name.

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##### **The experiences at Valdocco**

With equal determination, as a young diocesan priest he did something similar with the group of collaborators of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. He fostered participation and the sharing of responsibility by ecclesiastics and laity, men and women. They helped him to teach catechism and other classes, assist in church, lead the youngsters in prayer, prepare them for their first communion and confirmation, keep order in the playground where they played with the boys, and help the more needy to find employment with some honest patron.

Meanwhile Don Bosco took good care of their spiritual life, with personal encounters, conferences, spiritual direction and the administration of the sacraments.

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In the apostolate the primary collaborators were the boys who had lived with him for some time and shared with him service of their neighbour in the most abandoned. Those most closely attached to Don Bosco carried out this service among their peers through the various Sodalities: those of the Immaculate Conception, the Blessed Sacrament, St Aloysius and St Joseph. Everyone followed the example of Don Bosco; he in turn pointed to St Francis de Sales, principal patron of the Oratory, as a model of apostolic dedication and loving kindness. Such examples attracted some of the youngsters even to truly heroic acts of virtue.

On 18 December 1859, he started up with some of them the Society of St Francis de Sales. This was a religious community which from its very first years showed itself open to the values of the world, taking on a secular dimension manifested in a specific manner by the presence of salesian coadjutor brothers. These helped in particular to link the salesian community with civil society, and especially with the world of work.

Don Bosco did not fail either to make good use of the advice of the liberal minister Urban Ratazzi, who was responsible for laws hostile to the Church, but who nonetheless showed him the politically correct way to found a new religious society whose members would preserve all their civil rights.

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In the first draft of the Constitutions Don Bosco foresaw the existence of Salesians who could belong to the Salesian Society while living in the world, without professing the three vows but striving to put into practice that part of the Regulations compatible with their age and condition. But since he was unable to succeed with this plan because of the juridical difficulties of the time, the Saint founded the Pious Union of Cooperators which he considered "of the greatest importance" as "the soul of the Congregation" (cf. SGC 733). His Regulations were approved on 24 June 1876. At the same time, at the suggestion of Carlo Gastini, Don Bosco founded the Past-pupils Association to share in the salesian mission in civil society by the fruitful application of the education they had received.

Even earlier he had set up the Archconfraternity of the Clients of Mary Help of Christians (known now as ADMA), erected on 5 April 1870 by a Brief of Pope Pius IX.

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### **Feminine collaboration**

Despite the attitude of reserve and detachment from the feminine world which Don Bosco shared with the clergy of his time, he developed a style of simple and delicate cordiality to women with whom he came in contact.

Their presence was essential for the life of the Oratory. There was Mamma Margaret, the first cooperator and mother of the Oratory, with whom Don Bosco shared the running of the house. Later there was the mother of Don Rua and of Michael Magone. Other women of Turin society collaborated with him. They gave Don Bosco a hand, helped him financially in domestic activities, and smoothed the way for him to reach government officials.

It became clear in this way that for the realization of a family atmosphere the presence of women was extremely useful.

They were able to provide complementary interventions which enriched the educative relationship and gave a particular tone to salesian loving kindness.

The prospects offered to Don Bosco by the Marchioness of Barolo of working for poor girls subsequently led him to do something for the girls as well. After meeting Don Pestarino and the group of young women of Mornese, led by Mary Domenica Mazzarello, Don Bosco perceived the possibility of realizing for the benefit of girls what he had had at heart for some time. He was happy to recognize the plan of God who by a singular design of grace had instilled the same experience of apostolic charity in St Mary Domenica, involving her in a unique manner in the foundation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (cf. C-FMA 2).

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### **A common patrimony**

Without any doubt there grew up around Don Bosco a vast movement of persons and groups, of men, women and youngsters, of the most diverse conditions of life, who shared with him some elements which became authoritative point of reference: *a spirituality modelled on that of St Francis de Sales; a well-defined mission - the salvation of youth and especially those poor and abandoned; a dynamic project of education and evangelization: the preventive system (of which Don Bosco tried also to write a version adapted to the laity); an environment, in which the original contributions of each one became fused into a common purpose: the Oratory, characterized by a climate and typical style called the family spirit, where each one felt welcome, valued and helped to give and to receive.*

From the beginning, Valdocco was *"a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves"* (C 40).

Don Bosco went ahead, not without tensions, enlarging the frontiers of the mission for poor and abandoned youngsters with the opening of new works both in and outside Italy. Beginning in 1875 he organized missionary expeditions to Latin America, which have continued year by year.

His famous *dreams provide almost a detailed panorama of the vast areas he covered with his mission: lands from Valparaiso to Beijing, by way of Africa.*

## **2. In the salesian tradition**

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### **In continuity**

From Don Bosco right down to the present day, the idea of the laity and the awareness of their role has become, albeit slowly, something ever more vigorous in the Church and the Congregation.

Vatican II, in particular, set out in a new way the role of the laity in the Church and in the world. To his appeal the Salesian Congregation makes every effort to respond with a growing involvement of lay people.

### **The Cooperators**

From the time of Don Bosco to the Special General Chapter there were no outstanding changes in the understanding of the vocation of the Cooperators. The GC19 and especially the GC20 (SGC) brought about a radical change of mentality. They can no longer be seen as simple benefactors or executors. They must be recognized rather as full sharers in the responsibility for the salesian mission and points of reference for lay people in the broad salesian movement. This was the sense in which their new Regulations for Apostolic Life were approved in 1986.

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### **The Past-pupils**

From 1898, with the intervention of Don Rua, the past-pupils of the individual houses have accepted the invitation to form associations on the model of the Valdocco Oratory.

In July 1909 the Statute of the International Federation was drawn up, and received a considerable impulse during Don Rinaldi's period as Rector Major; in Don Ziggliotti's first years it became a World Confederation: a civil association which

gathered together past-pupils without ethnic or religious distinction. Recently have been added the women past-pupils of our environments, recognized in the new Confederal Statute as members with full rights. This statute clearly defines the identity of the past-pupil and opens up new horizons in the field of the salesian mission.

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### **Secular Institutes**

In 1917 some girls of the FMA Oratory in Turin expressed to Don Rinaldi the desire to consecrate themselves to God while remaining in the world; they called themselves the Zealots of Mary Help of Christians. Later they became the Cooperator Oblates of St John Bosco, and today they are the Don Bosco Volunteers (DBV). In 1965 the Turin diocesan authorities recognized them as a Pious Association, and in 1971 as a Secular Institute of diocesan right.

In 1978 they were recognized as a Secular Institute of pontifical right. The kingpins of their vocation are salesianity, secularity and consecration. The Rector Major and his Council have declared them to be members of the Salesian Family in the strict sense.

After the GC23 a similar male group has begun to develop with the title Don Bosco Secular Institute (DBS).

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### **Other lay groups**

Don Bosco also started up the Association of Clients of Mary Help of Christians, involving them in the spirituality and mission of the Congregation by commitments readily realizable by the majority of simple people.

Recently another group has been formed, made up of women only, the Association 'Damas Salesianas'.

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### **Common elements in the Salesian Family**

The groups belonging to the Salesian Family "*participate in a true spiritual kinship and apostolic consanguinity*" (*Common Identity Card, art.10*), characterized by the sharing of the same salesian spirit and some basic elements, usually listed as follows:

- rooted in the mystery of Christ and entrustment to Mary;
- sense of Church;
- union with God and style of prayer;
- pastoral charity for the mission to the young and the poor;
- alertness to the challenges of the new evangelization;
- the grace of unity;
- the ascesis of kindness;
- optimism and the joy of hope;
- work and temperance;
- the spirit of initiative.

(*cf. Common Identity Card, art.18 ff.*)

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### **The Salesian Bulletin**

Don Bosco saw the Salesian Bulletin as an instrument for linkage, animation, formation and involvement of large numbers of lay people who looked kindly on his work. Today the Bulletin is published in numerous editions in the different geographical areas of the world, and represents a very valuable instrument of communication for a fuller sharing of the salesian spirit and a more updated involvement in the educative and evangelizing mission of the Salesian Family and Movement.

## **3. Lines emerging**

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### **Involvement of apostolic forces**

Though conditioned by the ecclesiology of his time, Don Bosco and the Salesians have propagated the charism, trying to involve all sorts of persons in the education of the young.

Thinking back over recent times:

- The GC19 looked at the laity with prudence, accepting some externs as teachers and choosing them from the best of the Cooperators and Past-pupils. The key posts in the educative structure were reserved to Salesians.
- The SGC rethought the salesian project and mission in the light of Vatican II, seeking "*a wide grouping of apostolic forces linked together in the unity of a family*" (*SGC 152*).
- The GC21, drawing inspiration from the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, put before the salesian community the challenge of evangelization. The community was always considered as the animator of the CEP in the realization of the PEPS. In it the Salesians and lay people were both evangelized and evangelizers.
- This openness was confirmed and extended by the GC22, in the definitive text of the Constitutions (C 5.47).

- The relationship between SDBs and Laity matured significantly in the GC23, focusing on the education of young people to the faith. The SDB community became responsible for the animation and formation of the CEP and of the Salesian Family (GC23 235), with the specific task of drawing up the *Lay Project*.

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#### **Lay animators**

The persons who from Don Bosco onwards have shared in the salesian mission, felt the need for a spiritual convergence, in the awareness of having received a gift which they must pass on to others.

A big number of them felt it their duty to give embodiment to the charism with Don Bosco and the times. They shared the objective of education, and laboured generously to prepare young people to take a worthy place in society. For many, the involvement and shared responsibility involved also the objective of evangelization, thus fully realizing the project of the preventive system.

Among these there are some young people who commit themselves in various ways to animation for the benefit of their peers. In this way there has grown in recent years the Salesian Youth Movement and in particular the new experience of the Volunteer Movement.

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#### **Lay friends of Don Bosco**

Don Bosco always had many friends, scattered all over the world and in the most varied environments. Their number has not decreased with the passing of time, nor has the bond become weaker between them and our Father and Founder.

They want to keep Don Bosco's spirit alive and ensure the extension of the salesian mission. They offer themselves to help the Salesian Family to know the real situation of youth, and to try to respond to the challenges they present. These friends are enthusiastic and want to collaborate, making available their time and financial possibilities.

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#### **Lay people outside the structures**

Thanks to the determined efforts of so many lay people the salesian mission has passed beyond institutional limits and is spreading beyond salesian structures and works. In this way it comes in contact with other ecclesial realities, with civil society and especially with youngsters in difficult situations, dialoguing with cultures and popular traditions. In consequence the charism is spreading everywhere.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE SPIRIT AND MISSION TO BE LIVED TOGETHER

#### 1. At the roots of our unity

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As we have recalled the beginnings at Valdocco<sup>3</sup> we have met not only Don Bosco's pastoral heart but also his ability to involve others. Thanks to the support of ecclesiastics and lay people, a church, dormitories and playgrounds all became a reality.

This is something that invites us to renew our oratorian heart and prompts us to deeper communion with all those who, in structured or personal ways, want to advance Don Bosco's charism. Together, we humbly place ourselves with watchful attention at the service of humanity, committing ourselves with fresh enthusiasm to give authenticity to our vocation, so that the salesian mission may give ever more fully its contribution to the Church and to the world.

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#### The spirit which has been given to us

For this purpose we are called to share in the Salesian Family with all the lay people, not only in the carrying out of daily work but primarily in the *salesian spirit, to become sharers in the responsibility for the mission in our works and beyond them. This spirit, as presented by the Special General Chapter (SGC 85 ff.) is an ensemble of aspects and values of the human world and Christian mystery which becomes our particular style of thought and feeling, of life and activity, centred on pastoral charity. Don Bosco attracts kindly feeling and stirs up the participation of committed lay persons. He invites us to make with them a spiritual pilgrimage which, based on the salesian spirit shared at different levels, can reach an option of faith and a spirituality which is lived and communicated,*

The communication of such a spirit belongs in the first place to those who are consecrated: "In whatever activity or ministry they are involved, consecrated persons should remember that before all else they must be expert guides in the spiritual life, and in this perspective they should cultivate the most precious gift of the spirit" (VC 55).

We are aware that this is a true and proper school of holiness. One grasps at once the richness of the salesian spirit when, in terms of practical life, it becomes a spirituality. Of the latter we must now look again at some of its principal characteristics.

#### 2. Elements of the spirituality

##### 2.1 Preferential love for the young, especially the poorer ones

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#### Meeting God in the young

Sharing the salesian spirit and mission means in the first place feeling oneself involved in the option for the young.

"We believe that God is awaiting us in the young to offer us the grace of meeting with him and to dispose us to serve him in them, recognizing their dignity and educating them to the fullness of life" (GC23, 95). In this educative service, both Salesians and laity experience the contemplative dimension of their faith, and are able to discover the action of the Spirit in the heart of the young (cf.C 95).

Sharing in the heart of God, the disciple of Don Bosco has a better understanding of the importance and urgency of his own vocation to render present to the young Christ's love for them. Prompted by this love he dedicates himself totally to their integral education (cf.SGC 91).

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. BOSCO G. *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, Eng.edtn. pp.255 ff.*

<sup>4</sup> We can find authoritative interpretations in our main texts: cf. the *Constitutions which are our principal point of reference. Cf. also the FMA Constitutions, the Regulations of Apostolic Life of the Cooperators, the Common Identity Card" of the Salesian Family, and the more recent General Chapters. Cf. also Don Egidio Viganò to the Salesian University (UPS, Rome, 1996, p.162-163).*

Hence, work for the young, and especially for the poorest of them, is the identity card of the salesian vocation, the most involving element of our charism, the starting-point for a process of greater and more profound sharing in the salesian spirit and the preventive system.

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### **Pastoral charity**

To realize this vocation, SDBs and laity open a cordial dialogue with all persons of good will who want to improve the situation of the young, and especially the poor ones, in today's world. Following the example of Don Bosco, they choose for themselves and propagate among others charity as the means and fundamental method of the mission. In this work they give added weight to the important values of salesian spirituality, like generosity, solidarity, simplicity, gratitude, fidelity, joy and optimism even at dark moments, expressing in this way the paschal dimension of Christian life.

## **2.2 Spirituality of relationship: the family spirit**

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### **Don Bosco, man of relationships**

The first gift Don Bosco gives to his disciples is that of a serene and welcoming human relationship. His self-control allowed him to give himself to others with extraordinary efficacy, and to give gradually to relationships a pastoral and sacramental content. The quality of educative encounters was always foremost in his mind. "Let all you speak with become your friends", he used to say, and "to be a friend of Don Bosco meant everything at Valdocco: spiritual commitment, interior happiness, collaboration in education, family joy. He was convinced that the salesian spirit "must animate and guide all we do and say". He is forthright about this in his letters to Don Cagliero and Don Costamagna in August 1885: "The preventive system must be our distinguishing characteristic. (...) Charity, patience, kindness (...) This holds for the Salesians among themselves, with the pupils and others, externs or boarders". "Study how you can make yourself loved", he murmured to Don Rua, leaving him what seemed a final message and indicating to him the secret of the art of the Good Shepherd. At the end of his life therefore, he handed on as a deep conviction and precious legacy, the intuition he had received in his dream at the age of 9 years, And in his predilection for the 'relational virtues' as the bearings for educative dialogue and practical collaboration, Don Bosco proved an excellent disciple of St Francis de Sales.

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### **A need of today's men and women**

Today people bewail a widespread absence of relationships, and loneliness gives rise to more fear than death itself, especially among the young and the aged. The human sciences describe man as a being of relationships. He is immersed in them from the time he leaves his mother's womb. A positive relationship builds him up and makes him happy; a negative one can depress and even destroy him. In any case rapport is at the heart of every educative approach, of every effort at collaboration, from family harmony to the efficacy of a pastoral and educative community. *"We must be brothers to men at the same time that we want to be their pastors, fathers and teachers. The right atmosphere for dialogue is friendship, or rather service" (Paul VI, Ecclesiam suam).*

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### **The salesian response: loving kindness**

What we hear from the laity and from young people convinces us of the great desire there is for rapport; and that in the Congregation there are numerous experiences which provide grounds for hope that we can grow in this direction, giving full expression - together with lay people and primarily in their regard - to the rich values of salesian loving kindness and the family spirit which stems from it.

It can run the risk of being downgraded to the level of a purely technical instrument, latching on to another person, young or adult, and manipulating his personality. For this reason it must be so filled with charity that it becomes transformed into an expression of authentic relational spirituality. Its fruit and sign is the serene chastity, so dear to Don Bosco, which governs affective balance and oblation fidelity. Strengthened and purified in this way, educative rapport is expressed in the personal encounter, builds a formative and stimulating environment, encourages group processes, and accompanies vocational maturing.

## **2.3 Commitment in the Church for the world**

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### **The force of "da mihi animas" and the New Evangelization**

*"Da mihi animas" just about fills the whole life of those who take their inspiration from Don Bosco, indicating rapport with God, relations with one's neighbour, and intervention in history with a personal contribution. It concerns contemplation not less than action, the will to do good, and the determination to find the necessary means.*

As Salesians, we express the significance of our existence by the ardour of our pastoral charity.

At the present day one perceives a cultural crisis of notable proportions, the challenge of the *New Evangelization*. *The heart of the response to it is the inculturation of the Gospel: this indeed has become a pressing obligation for the Church. Salesians and laity alike are called to become ever more aware of the setting in which they have to work: culture and education.*

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### **The challenge of contemporary culture**

Today we are witnessing an increased social, civil and political sensitivity. It obliges all who follow Don Bosco to give the same attention that he did to movements and cultural changes. In this way the *politics of the Pater noster become the projection of a society renewed through work carried out conscientiously and with competence, cultural elevation and joyful faith, so as to make all men equally children of the same Father.*

In this task the renewed consciousness of the laity evokes the responsibility of all men of good will. Some things are urgently required: the family as the 'sanctuary of life', respect for the dignity of the person and his rights, the spreading of a culture of solidarity and peace, human advancement leading to more just living conditions, and the defence of ecological balance. The direct insertion of lay people into public life must be reasserted and sustained; it must be lived with a spirit of service, to give growth to justice and fraternity, directing attention to the poorest and most abandoned. (cf. CL 42)

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### **Together towards a new apostolic commitment**

The discernment of cultures as a human reality to be evangelized demands a new kind of collaboration among all responsible for the work of evangelization. Salesians and lay Christians are called upon to give effect to the force received in baptism: faith; to entrust themselves to him with an attitude of unwavering certainty: hope; and to give as a sign that they belong to him the availability towards all, which is charity.

We are committed to seeing to it that the faith proclaimed, lived and celebrated to the full, becomes culture: authentic cultural values, assessed and assumed in the light of faith, are necessary for the incarnation of the same culture of the evangelical message. To fulfil this task the CEP becomes "an experience of communion and a place of grace, where the teaching programme contributes to uniting into a harmonious whole the human and the divine, the Gospel and culture, faith and life" (VC 96).

In this new panorama, inspired by the Word of God and the social doctrine of the Church, one can continue with the evangelical innovation which gives central place to the salvation of the person, to service, and to orientation towards the Kingdom. For the Salesians it is an invitation to deepen the radical nature of their 'sequela Christi', and for the laity to progress in the synthesis between acceptance of the Gospel and practical activity.

The programme of life condensed in the beatitudes which present the values of the Kingdom and of the 'Our Father' can be proposed also to those who belong to other religions.

## **2.4 Spirituality of daily life and of work**

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### **Daily life the place for meeting God**

Don Bosco proposed to his first collaborators, as he did also to the boys of the Oratory, a manner of living the Gospel in depth, without detaching themselves from life: *living in the presence of God.*

Daily life constituted for Don Bosco the natural setting for the perfecting of all men, the place of response to the human and Christian vocation, and for us Salesians also the religious vocation.

Intuition of the value of daily life leads us to exploit with the laity the whole of creation as a gift of God: life, nature, material things produced by man, interpersonal relationships.

In solidarity with the world and its history (C 7), we share with the laity the joys and difficulties stemming from the social context in which we are inserted, seeking together to find in it the signs of God's will.

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### **The gift of work and the professions**

Don Bosco taught his boys to use their time in tasks useful for personal or communal life in a healthy, educative and creative form. He himself was an example of a life totally dedicated to work, and he wanted his Salesians to be characterized by the spirit of enterprise and hard work.

Looking back on this experience, we see in Valdocco a true school of work: it developed a pedagogy of duty which educated to this practical form of living the spirituality.

Work, when perceived as an integral part of God's plan for all men, leads us to defend the dignity of all work and of man as its subject. This awareness exploits the combined and individual endeavours of Salesians and laity for the education of the young.

From us, in line with the characteristics of our specific vocation, is demanded a professional approach, i.e. the greatest possible perfection in our own work. This implies the generous acceptance of the toil involved, the constant commitment

and ongoing formation that goes with it. Discipline and sense of duty become for us our path of ascesis, the concrete measure of our spiritual maturity.

## 2.5 The preventive system: constant listening to God and to man

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### A pedagogical approach continually renewed

We are convinced that the principal contribution to the changing of the world for the coming of the Kingdom is commitment to education. "There is no doubt", as Pope John Paul II affirmed, "that the first and fundamental cultural fact is the spiritually mature man, i.e. man fully educated, man able to educate himself and others".<sup>5</sup> The main original contribution we can offer to the cause of education is the preventive system. Its permanent vitality is shown in the ability to respond to the most diverse challenges. In the multiple situations in which it operates, it needs continual reunderstanding. The urgent need for this was indicated by Fr Egidio Viganò when he spoke of a new preventive system.

The essential element of such newness is the *sharing between SDBs, lay adults and young people in an educative and pastoral praxis always in dialogue with the discoveries of science and with the various contexts in which we are working.*

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### Central elements of the preventive system

To guarantee fidelity and success we need to reconsider the original intuitions of Don Bosco. He was convinced that "*this system is based entirely on reason, religion and loving kindness*" (MB 13 919). *We are called upon to look in a new way at the three fundamental elements he indicated.*

#### a) Reason

To Don Bosco's way of thinking reason is synonymous with fairness and persuasion, seen in opposition to repression and imposition. It helps to evaluate everything with a critical sense and to discern the authentic value of earthly realities, respecting their autonomy and secular dignity. It enables the great endeavours of mankind to be discovered and shared, in the continual and laborious process of personalization and socialization. More by deeds than by words Don Bosco has shown us that at the root of his system of education there is a solid humanism and a genuine appreciation of the reality of created things. This makes of the preventive system an *open system, rich in human hope and able to come to grips with the different cultural situations. For this reason it implies a particular attention to contexts, a previous assessment of the youth situation and an effective arrangement of educative interventions through the elaboration of the PEPS. This enables a balanced educative process to be set up, avoiding the double risks of 'minimalism' (fear of suggesting anything new) or of going to the other extreme of rushing ahead too fast and imposing weights that cannot be borne.*

#### b) Religion

*Religion, understood as faith which has been accepted and given correspondence, represents the meeting point between the Mystery of God and the mystery of man, linked with the frailty of his history and culture, but also quickened by God's sure call. The awareness of such a reality invites us to imitate God's patience, meeting young people and laity "at their present stage of freedom" (C 38).*

*If on the one hand we must recognize that missionary territory now includes every part of the world, on the other we must be ready to find ways of education to the faith which are gradual and specifically aimed.*

In Christian contexts it is still possible to realize the preventive system with a certain completeness and help the lay faithful, adult and young, to discover the countenance of Jesus. Listening to the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments and especially the Eucharist and Penance, commitment to charity and witness, the happiness of living beneath the gaze of a loving Father, are still possible educative objectives to be proposed without undue hesitation and within a serenely ecumenical approach. (cf.GC23, 68-71).

In secularized contexts, where culture seems mute and incapable of speaking of the Father of Jesus Christ, it will be necessary to educate the invocations of transcendence and the great demands arising from the sense of life and death, pain and love, without concealing the beam of light which comes to us from our faith (cf.GC23, 76.77.83).

In the contexts of the great monotheistic and traditional religions, the first educative dialogue will be with the lay people who are nearest, to recognize with them the grace present in such religions, encourage their desire for prayer, and exploit the fragments of the Gospel and of educative wisdom present in the culture, life and experience of the young people (cf.GC23, 72-74, 86).

Often we find ourselves working with youngsters and lay people, with men and women of good will, who do not manifest any specific religious attachment. In such cases the preventive system aims at finding and welcoming the spark of truth

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<sup>5</sup> Address of John Paul II to UNESCO 1980.

deposited in every human heart, in fostering the "dialogue of life" - especially "in the concern for human life" and "in promoting the dignity of women" - "which prepares the way for more profound exchanges" (cf.VC 102).

### **c) Loving kindness**

This is expressed as unconditioned acceptance, constructive and positive rapport, sharing of joys and sorrows, and the ability to manifest educative love by signs. In addition to inviting each educator to be cordially and faithfully present among the young, it commits the community to the creation of an authentic family spirit.

It also expresses the pastoral charity which promotes a new educative culture by "offering a specific contribution to the work of other educators" (VC 96).

Together with those lay people who take their inspiration from Don Bosco, we have an explicit duty to seek the best ways and means for transplanting his geniality into public life, in the world of culture, of politics, of social life. This can then give life to the new education which opens the way to the new evangelization.

It will be necessary to give special thought to strategies for installing the preventive system in families, helping them to shed light on modern problems and aspirations, and to create an environment of joy, dialogue and solidarity, transforming them in this way to authentic "domestic churches".

### **3. A pedagogy for living together in Don Bosco's mission and spirit**

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#### **Formation together**

The realization of communion and sharing of the spirit and mission of Don Bosco implies for us, SDBs and laity, that while respecting the laws of the Church (cf. CIC 241,1), we renew our formation processes.

A change of mentality is needed: *grow together, form ourselves together.*

Don Bosco recommended to the lay Cooperators: "Let us be united among ourselves and with the whole Congregation. Let us be united by having the same end in view and using the same means to attain it. Let us unite as a single family through the bonds of fraternal charity" (Sal.Bulletin, January 1878).

We believe that from this new method will depend in large measure the results we hope to achieve.

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#### **Pedagogy of the oratorian heart and of the mission**

The first step that we SDBs and laity have to take is that of getting to know and appreciate each other, as regards both what we have in common and how we differ. The point of convergence is the oratorian heart and the style of the Good Shepherd. This is the deep source of unity for all who are called to work with Don Bosco. The salesian spirit, lived with sensitivity and various accentuations, should nevertheless be made known to all in its essential elements. But theoretical reflection is not enough. With Don Bosco we believe that working together offers us the most opportune methods for formation together. In sharing the mission, every individual, every CEP and every salesian group gains a concrete experience of the preventive system, and acquires the ability to learn from life (cf. C 119).

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#### **Let us share a process of formation**

The commitment to shared formation must become a process open to all, adapted to the rate of progress of each individual and respectful of the riches of every vocation. Particular processes, drawn up together, must also be set up progressively from time to time. These will provide more detailed experiences, content and objectives, in line with particular situations (cf.GC23, 109-110).

We think it important to cultivate in such processes the following *attitudes*:

- an attentive awareness of our manner of behaviour in relationships and communications;
- patience in listening, and willingness to give way to the other;
- the deliberate giving of trust and confidence;
- willingness to enter into the logic of exchange of gifts;
- readiness to make the first move in welcoming others with kindness;
- assumption of the daily discipline which gives value to being together;
- promptness for reconciliation.

As we carry out this process together we develop at the same time certain methods which help us to grow in spirituality and in salesian praxis:

- the Word of God placed at the centre of our own existence (cf.GC23, 146);
- the experience of daily life as the concrete space for meeting with God (cf.GC23, 162);
- the knowledge and practice of the preventive system in all its components;

- the assimilation of salesian values through experience of its various phases: living, reflecting, communicating and celebrating (cf.FSDB, c.IV, n.130 ff.; The Salesian Brother, n.188 ff.)

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### **Shared holiness**

22 April 1996 saw the closure at Turin, to the great joy of all present, of the first stage in the process of the recognition of the sanctity of Mamma Margaret. This fact makes us think of the holiness that was lived at Valdocco with a particular profile. Some of those who shared the life of the first salesian community have already had their witness to holiness recognized by the Church.

This is evidence that at Valdocco there was a particular kind of atmosphere: holiness was built up together; it was shared and mutually communicated, in such a way that the holiness of some cannot be explained without the holiness of others.

The goal of a formation realized in common with Don Bosco, which the Church and today's young people expect from us Salesians and lay people, is the gift of our holiness - not only our personal holiness but that too of the CEP and of the Salesian Family: a shared holiness (cf.C 25).

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### **Memories**

With joy we have recalled our rich tradition from the origins to the present day - a gift of the Spirit for our mission

We have done so:

- to celebrate the wonders the Lord has done;
- to preserve them in mind and heart as Mary did;
- to repeat "da mihi animas" as time passes by;
- as we share with the laity an oratorian heart;
- to extend the charism beyond every frontier;
- to sustain everywhere the hope of the young;
- to return to Valdocco and set out from there once again.