

Jesus, (by Leonardo da Vinci), Don Bosco



Laymen in religious life

In the earliest times most monks were laymen,
with a few priests, in the monasteries.

But as time passed the older orders became
more clerical,
more members were ordained priests,
and the laymen were given to the material care
of the monastery.

At the Council of Trent in the 16th c, with this increase in the numbers of clerical members in monasteries, the office of superior was eventually reserved specifically to priests.

During this time the new orders were mainly priests but included some lay members. The lay members worked alongside the priests but with different tasks to perform. This continued into the 19th century.

So there was a gradual progression over the centuries from being mainly lay religious in the monasteries to being mainly priest religious.

19th century:

In some parts of the world, the mid 19thc was a time of suppression against the older religious Orders and Congregations because they had accumulated too much power and influence over the civil affairs of Society.

The Church was being persecuted
and was facing a crisis.

At this time the Church was in search
of a new identity.

Eventually new congregations were being formed.

Some were trying to re-create the traditional style of monastic life.

Others were attempting to begin a completely new type of religious life more in touch with the times.

Well perhaps that is happening now!

Again the Church is facing a crisis and looking
for a new identity!

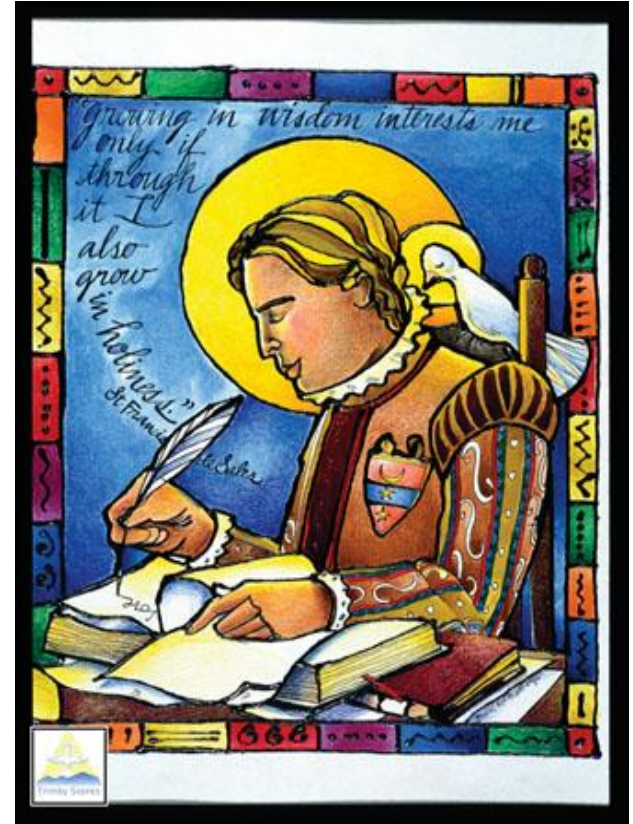
Around this time there was developing a new understanding of the role of the *laity* in the Church.

Holiness was everybody's call, regardless of any clerical or lay status.

St Francis de Sales

Holiness or “Devotion” was for St Francis de Sales everyone’s vocation regardless of clerical or lay status.

Holiness could be gained in every occupation.



Church of Francis de Sales in Annecy



- This was a period of new ideas in the Church and Vincent de Paul and Francis de Sales were great innovators of their day.
- They involved ordinary lay people in new apostolates especially in the care of the poor.

Francis and Vincent



Examples from history

- Francis gave examples of holy people from ordinary life.
- *One of these was St Joseph. He attained holiness doing his everyday job in the carpenters' workshop.*

Don Bosco chose Francis and St Joseph among the first patrons of the Salesian Society.

*Joseph was a simple
layman who was Jesus'
teacher!*

He was the holiest man.

He is our model.



St Francis de Sales
(1567-1622) wrote and
worked on the idea of
the call to holiness of
everyone without
exception. Even the
young!

Don Bosco was greatly
influenced by Francis.



The Salesian Society:

This was the environment in which Don Bosco began forming his ideas of a new Society.

He wanted to have both priests and lay people striving towards holiness by working as equal partners for the salvation of the young.

The Salesian Brother

Don Bosco's idea of the Salesian Brother
formed gradually.

The idea of the Salesian Brother is still
evolving today.

Don Bosco:

“The aim of the congregation is to unite its members, priests, clerical students and laymen, for the purpose of perfecting themselves by imitating our divine Saviour, especially in charity toward the young”

1859 draft of Constitutions

- In the years 1858 to 1862 Don Bosco was working on his draft of the Salesian Constitutions and he speaks of lay people, not of coadjutor brothers.

Society of St Francis de Sales

The Congregation was founded on 9 Dec 1859
with 19 members taking their vows.

All were clerics.

But there were laymen working with Don
Bosco all this time.

By 2 Feb 1860, only two months later, the first layman took vows as a Salesian.

His name was *Joseph Rossi*.

Two years after this, on 14 May 1862 twenty-two were admitted into the Society, including two “lay members”.

In 1867 Don Bosco used the term
coadjutor meaning lay helpers or
domestics.

Constitutions...

- *In forming his Constitutions, Don Bosco was influenced in part by the Congregation of the schools of Charity and the Vincentians who had lay members, but they had a subservient role.*
- *Don Bosco wanted his laymen and priests to share the same consecration and apostolate.*
- *Don Bosco was thinking of one Salesian religious vocation that would be open to members who might opt either for the priesthood or for the lay state. This is the originality of which Fr Caviglia speaks.*

- The Salesian Brother, without any *outward sign*, lives by the evangelical counsels, exemplifies in his life the pattern of the Christian person according to the example of Jesus. (Paraphrasing Fr Cavaglia)
- However clear Don Bosco's idea was, it still took many years to conceptualize and express in practice the nature and apostolic task of the lay Salesian. (A. Lenti)

Problems already!

- Even at this early stage in the history of the Society, there was a tendency for some to regard the Brothers as lower class!

On the 31 March 1876 in his Good-Night

Don Bosco said:

***“There is no distinction between members of
the Congregation.***

***Everyone is treated the same, artisans,
young clerics and priests.***

We consider ourselves brothers”

In 1877, in a new hand written edition of the regulations for the House and the Oratory, Don Bosco used the term “coadjutor” for the first time to describe both the domestic helpers and lay-religious members of the Salesian Congregation.

“The coadjutors who belong to the congregation must keep the practices of piety listed in their rule.”

So there is now a clear distinction between the domestic helpers and lay Salesians.

But the term *coadjutor* was still used for both.

Again!

- In 1883, only seven years after the above statement by Don Bosco, somebody said at the third General Chapter held at Valdocco,

“Coadjutors must be kept low...” !

Don Bosco reacted sharply:

“Not at all.

Our Brother Coadjutors are like
everyone else.”

At the same Chapter of 1883 Don Bosco wanted the lay members to continue to be called coadjutors as well as the lay helpers. However the idea of calling the coadjutors “Brother” was discussed for the first time.

Soon after this Chapter the term coadjutor was used only for the lay religious members of the Society.

The role of the Brother:

- Don Bosco had to clarify his ideas further. He said to the Brothers in a conference sometime later after mentioning many fields of work from workshops to classrooms to financial management and others:

“You are not the ones to take the manual chores directly. Your task is to direct. You ought to act as the master supervising the workers, not as a servant...

- *You ought not to be servants but masters; not subjects but superiors.”*

“Now I shall tell you my second point.

Since you are helping in such important work, you must be men of great virtue...”

For Don Bosco his idea of the Brother evolved gradually, but he always spoke of

unity and *equality*,

where all are bound by the common life, common charity and the simple vows.

Early draft of the Constitutions

- All the gathered members lead the common life, bound together only by fraternal charity and by the simple vows, which bind them to form one heart and one soul in order to love and serve God.

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For him his lay Salesians were to work in the workshops and trade schools, in the office and in the city, in the classrooms, on the building site and the farm, and on the missions, in fact in all areas where work was to be found.

*The Salesian Brother could
fill any area of work.*

*But he must be properly
trained.*

*Both professionally and
spiritually.*

The only place the Brother
could not go was that
reserved specifically for the
Priest by his ordination.

Michael Rua 1888 - 1910

- “Our Society is so constituted that it offers abundant possibilities for apostolic ministry not only to its Salesian priestly members, but also to its dear Salesian Brothers...the forming of personnel is vital to the work of our Society...many have high school diplomas, college degrees and teaching credentials...”

Paul Albera 1911 - 1921

- In the older religious orders lay-brothers form a kind of second order...
- Don Bosco did away with such dualism. All Salesians share the same rights and privileges... they are fully Salesian religious, with the one Salesian vocation, and the same apostolate as the priests, except for that which pertains to the ordained ministry.

He was a Salesian presence representing Don Bosco where clerics were not able to go due to the anti-clerical atmosphere of the time.

What about now? Is there any anti-clerical feeling now?

I think even in the Church today there is a new realization of the clericalism within the Church and the harm it has done.

Clericalism puts the Church hierarchy in a position of power over the laity.

This has been misused sometimes.

Clothing

- From the very beginning Don Bosco wanted the Brothers to dress neatly as laymen.
- “Religious in shirt sleeves”

- Curiously in many provinces in the past and even today, there has been a tendency for some Brothers to dress almost as clerics wearing black and white and sometimes even a clerical collar!
- I have heard of Brothers dressing in albs or cassocks!

But Don Bosco wanted us to be religious in
“shirt sleeves”.

So what is happening? Is there still confusion
about who the Brother is?

Didn't Don Bosco make it clear?

- It is not about what we wear or what we are called.
- Who we are and our Faith in Jesus Christ is all that matters.
- *We are not our trousers or our shirt!*

- The Salesian Brother is a man of faith in Jesus Christ. He is a Salesian of Don Bosco.
- We give witness to Jesus through the example of our Faith. We give witness to the existence of God through our relationships with everyone we meet.

- We lead the young and the old
 - to Faith by the example of
 - our life of Faith.

The Salesian Brother today:

The Salesian Brother is a consecrated layman striving for holiness by the practice of the simple vows and working in the apostolate for the young.

This brings the responsibilities and discipline of living the religious life.

Faithfulness to our call is the greatest witness we can give to the world.

- We are men walking in the footsteps of Don Bosco dedicated to the salvation of souls, especially the young and those most in need, especially through education.
- We are called to work in whatever field is required for the work of the Congregation.

Prophet

- The Salesian Brother is a *prophet* speaking the truth with his life and being a sign of contradiction in the world. We challenge the consumerist societies in which we live.

The Salesian Brother is ready to be a visible witness to the existence of God by his life

- The fruits of his labours will be seen in the lives of those he has educated.
- He sows the seed and someone else reaps the harvest.



Crisis!

In Australia, due to the abuse crisis around the world, religious are experiencing a decline in status. No longer are we automatically held in high esteem.

We must earn peoples' trust and esteem.

Some of our confreres are afraid to say they work at "Salesian College".

All religious are facing a hostile world today.

Perhaps this is similar to Don Bosco's time.

Visible, Credible and Fruitful:

- We are called as Salesians to be a sign of the reality of God for the young.
- We are working always for the good of the young. This gives credibility to our life.
- The fruit of our lives is in the lives of the young we have influenced.

Br Thuy at beach camp



Our witness

- The questions young people often ask show me that the witness of my life makes them think.
- They see what I represent and are confronted by it e.g. A boy states that he knows why I do what I do. I ask him to explain. He answers that I do what I do because I believe in God. He came to this belief only by seeing me around the school. Perhaps he will come to Faith through my example. I hope so.

Students in the studio arts class



- Why did you become a Brother? They often ask.
- This is always an opening for some fruitful conversation on the idea of religious life, Jesus and Don Bosco.

- Don Bosco was a model of holiness because his work broke with with the way of thinking and believing of his contemporaries. R.M.
- What aspects of his holiness and work are most interesting to us today?

- Can we interpret Christ's Gospel for our own times, as Don Bosco did?
- Can we be as dangerously imaginative today as Don Bosco was in his time?

- How must we respond to our current situations?
- And not just copy what others are doing.

- How can we imitate Christ in responding to our particular situations today as Brothers?

- Now a little of the history of the Province of Mary Help of Christians of Australia and the Pacific.

Where the first Salesians arrived in
Broome, Australia in 1923,



As it was then, and today.



Further inland.



Site of the first Salesian work in Broome, Australia



The Church bell from the old Church.



Termite mound



One of the local residents!



Boab tree near Broome



Church near Broome



Altar decorated with pearl shells



Brothers gathering near Melbourne



Br Dat making his Profession in Melbourne



Boys in Chapel at Salesian College



Boys in Chapel



Br Thuy painting the house



Br Morrow at OzBosco weekend



Ben from Korea, Chien from Thailand,
Dat from Vietnam / Australia



Two novices and Fr Jim, Fiji



Pacific Regional Seminary, Fiji.



Novices at the inter-novitiate Program in Fiji



Me working on the sculpture of St Joseph for the school



Br Silvio, 86, at Lysterfield, still going strong.



St Joseph installed outside the College.



Mickey Magone, Dominic Savio and friends...



A home without music ...



St Joseph the teacher.



The Aussie Brothers meeting this year.



My references are:

“The Salesian Brother” Rome 1989

“Don Bosco’s Lay Religious” by Enzo Bianco

“Don Bosco” Teresio Bosco

“Introduction to the Devout Life” Francis de Sales

“Don Bosco History and Spirit” Arthur Lenti

Letters of the Rector Major