

# **Journal of Salesian Studies**

---

---

*Spring 1997*

---

**Volume VIII**

**Number 1**

**Institute of Salesian Studies  
Berkeley, California, USA**

# The Salesians Celebrate 100 Years in the United States

## Bringing Don Bosco into the Mainstream

Lecture by Luc Van Looy, SDB

San Francisco, February 24, 1997

### Introduction

**C**ongratulations on your hundred years of faithful work with and for Don Bosco, with and for young people and with and for so many good people of this great country, to bring the message of the Lord to the young in their own context. I am aware of the fact that I am speaking to a community of people who have the mission of Don Bosco at heart in this part of the country, and who are giving of their best ability, time and effort to the people of California, Texas and New Mexico.

These are times to dream of the future, to thank the Lord for all the good things he has done and to remember many people, events and stories; but we do not remember them only to muse on them, but to find strength in them to take up new plans and develop visions. We learned this from our founder himself; he never gave up looking for new horizons, and his dynamism has given to young people the desire to follow him and to spread the mission all over the world. I've been asking the question, while thinking of your province, where would God want to lead the Salesian Family in the west and in the south of the United States, and I came across this phrase in the document of the 24th General Chapter, surprisingly under the heading of "loving kindness." It reads: "Together with those lay people who take up their inspiration from Don Bosco, we have an explicit duty to seek the best ways and means for transplanting his genius into public life, in the world of culture, of politics, of social life. This can then give life to a new education which opens the way to the new evangelization."<sup>1</sup> It is a

---

<sup>1</sup> Salesians and lay people: communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco; Rome, 1996, n.100, c.

challenging invitation, but it sounds very real, especially if we think of the young people and their environment, of the engagement of lay people in our mission, and if we remember that the essential function of the Salesian is to “give life,” or livelihood, or vitality, or future and hope to so many youngsters who do not see it anymore (or have never had any reason for hoping).

Let’s now set out and examine the genius of Don Bosco, as I select topics for reflection today in this context. I want to dwell on some elements which could carry us into the future.

## **Don Bosco: An Educational Genius**

The effort of Don Bosco has been concentrated around education, and to that end he joined all possible elements together. His ultimate aim was the evangelization of the young, but his characteristic method was educational. The result is a unique movement of education and evangelization in which one does not know which goes first. The reason why he did that was the fact that he put the person of the young in the first place, and one cannot divide the person in different compartments. This leads us now to recognize that the system he developed was not just a methodology or a pedagogical way of approaching difficult youth, it was a spirituality. It’s hard to understand the bottom line of Don Bosco’s pedagogy if one separates culture from faith, education from the dream of leading young people to God. This explains again why there is a substantial union between the three basic elements of his method: reason, religion and kindness. It may be that Don Bosco studied the needs of the day, and responded to the urgencies arising, but this did not separate him from his “pastoral project;” it may be that he was totally taken up by his material needs and his many things to be done, in order to survive and keep his work moving, but this did not in the least carry him away from his God and intimacy with Him. The discovery of Don Bosco has been constantly going on and it took time for people to see through the many activities to find out where his real trust was.

## **Uniting Human Experiences in One Educational Movement**

A beautiful phrase of Cardinal Montini, who later became Pope Paul VI, puts it very nicely while he explained Don Bosco’s secret to the boys of St. Ambrose in Milan: “The secret of Don Bosco was that he was able to lead the boys to God, not so much through the door of the Church, but through the door of the workshop, of the playground. The four keywords, or the four sides of the rectangle he

created are: games, study, work and prayer.”<sup>2</sup> This elevated games and manual work to the level of education, where in his days—and even today—many people considered manual work as a curse. But especially the element of games, of music, of role playing and of all kinds of recreational activities gained ascendancy in his educational concept. This has become a specific characteristic of the Salesian way. Not so long ago a group of religious in charge of vocational promotion gathered in the North of Italy to share their experience of working with young people who are thinking of joining the different congregations. All spoke of prayer sessions and adoration, of personal dialogue in private, and other things of the like. As soon as the Salesian representative got up he asked them questions about the boys and girls they gather and about their natural inclinations and aspirations. He would begin with group dynamics, with celebrations and happy times together and then conclude with a reflection and a prayer led by the young themselves. In the meantime he would have made the young people prepare many things to create an environment, with a snack and a drink. This is Don Bosco!

Not only does Don Bosco bring together varied elements into his one and only educational system, he has many people join him in this. He worked with people of every class. His letters show, and there are many of them, how he was in touch with highly placed persons, talking to them about his boys and gaining their support and enthusiasm.<sup>3</sup> He moved with great facility in any kind of environment, among merchants of the city of Turin in order to find work for his boys, among politicians in order to defend his position, with devout people of the church in order to instill in them a sense of generosity which might open their purse for his work and especially for the construction to the basilica of Mary Help of Christians; even believers of other religions were on the list of his collaborators.

There is still more: Don Bosco has people with different backgrounds live together. Students with workers, boys from ordinary good families with run-aways, big and small boys. This created a family atmosphere in which all felt at home and caring for each other. The surprise is not that he did try this, but that the boys enjoyed it. He himself was a sign of contradiction for the priests, as it was not right, according to the mentality of the time, for a priest to spend his days with that kind of boy. He brought into his lesson of catechism on Sunday

---

<sup>2</sup> Card. Montini in “Con le mani e il cuore di Don Bosco, discorsi di Papa Montini alla Famiglia Salesiana,” LAS-Roma, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Two volumes have been published with a critical apparatus about his letters, by Fr. Francesco Motto. The last one was presented recently in a famous hall in Rome, with many historians praising this work very highly. The most attention was given to the capacity of Don Bosco to create enthusiasm in people of different background for his work with the poor and abandoned youth of Turin. See Giovanni Bosco, “Epistolario” LAS-Rome, 1996.

afternoon many new elements. The novelty of Don Bosco's oratory was that he extended the hour of Sunday afternoon catechism to the whole afternoon, and soon to the whole day, that he allowed all types of boys (yes only boys in his days) to the class, and that he did lots of other things; not only did he give them a lesson on catechism. The most novel thing however was that he himself stayed all the time with them, played and made them play, worked and made them work, studied and made them study. His exemplary activities were his outings on Sunday chanting and shouting about.

It was indeed one unique movement in which everything could reach a level of education and evangelization, just as a football game becomes educational by the sole fact that the educator plays with the boys; it becomes evangelizing from the moment the evangelizer plays with them.

### **Trust In the Young**

The starting point of his education is total attention to the youngster. An attentive search for the positive points in the boy, to help young people become conscious of their own capacities, to develop their talents. This gives Don Bosco the possibility to search out good leadership and put it to use for others. This trust has its origin in his great awareness of the work God was accomplishing through the mission he had given him. It is His work; they are His boys!

This leads Don Bosco to something further: the right to education for all youth. His concern for people and their development could not permit that these youngsters would run the streets. The discrepancy between people and the difference in treatment due to backgrounds and family connections, resulting in different rights in his days, caused suffering in him. In this line one has to consider also the constant desire to do something for the girls who were not allowed to receive a decent education. Once he "discovered" Mary Dominica Mazzarello was doing something for them in the town of Mornese, he took the opportunity to expand his effort to them in order to provide education also for girls.

Wanting to educate all young people he mobilized all kinds of individuals to be able to do so. We could say, as an example, that the original intention was not to run high schools, but the need for well prepared teachers for his boys made it necessary to set up a formation program for them. This led to the acceptance to run the well known school of Valsalice, which became a source of many vocations and is still one of the more prestigious schools of Turin today. This gave him "volunteer" teachers at Valdocco.

He created a "democratic" system of education, having his boys constitute groups and run them among themselves. This allowed him to develop their leadership capabilities. The intuition that the young need to grow within a group in which they feel at home and develop their own capacities and operate as protagonists is a key to the understanding of this methodology. Today we would say it

this way: "The group is the setting where educative and religious proposals become personalized; it is the place for expression and responsibility; it is the place for interpersonal communication and the planning of initiatives. Frequently it is the only structural element that offers the young the occasion for access to human values and education to the faith."<sup>4</sup> The variety of groups allows the boys to choose and express their gifts in their own way.

One more expression of trust we can underline is the foundation of the congregation "with" his boys. Really he did not want to found a congregation, as in his days those were suppressed; rather did he want an educational movement or association, which he would run together with the boys that decided to stay with Don Bosco.

### Communication and Information

An educational activity needs to be located in a context and in a history. Don Bosco was aware of the fact that his boys needed to be introduced into a world of relationships. He introduced a wonderful way of information and reflection at the same time. Before sending them to bed he used to gather them and give them some news about the day, in order to help them feel part of a greater reality. In these brief moments he told them of what happened in the Church and in society. This became a happy institution in the history of the congregation, the "good night." He also referred often to the plans he had and how they should become honest citizens and good Christians. Together with the news he made them reflect on what had happened during the day, and he did not miss any opportunity to spell out the rules of the school if anything unpleasant had happened. The most important thing was to give young people criteria for life and make them feel part of something great that happened.

Also he was from the very beginning present in the field of social communications. He promoted and had to fight for the "Letture Cattoliche," a type of Catholic Readers' Digest. Now we say that the congregation "has understood, from the time of Don Bosco himself, that it could not prescind from the means of communication in its efforts at cultural animation and evangelization, and that the 'pastoral charity,' which is at the root of our mission, is also able to orient the new technologies in the service of mankind and of the Gospel."<sup>5</sup>

His desire to reach everybody made of him a good communicator. He was not satisfied with teaching only young people; he wanted to let their parents and relatives know what he told them and what happened in the environment of their children. Therefore the Salesian Bulletin, allowing him also to reach out to many other people who had been contacted in order to keep his work going. He

---

<sup>4</sup> "Educating young people to the Faith," Capitular documents CG23, n. 274.

<sup>5</sup> Fr. Vecchi in the address at the conclusion of the CG24: in Document of CG24, n. 250.

had the most modern printing press of the city of Turin, and he spent his nighttime writing for his publications. "For him, communicating meant making the entire world a 'Salesian work' on which the preventive system, the problems of the young and his concern for their salvation were at the center of his attention."<sup>6</sup>

### The Foreign Missions

His mission had no frontiers, and reached everywhere. We can verify this in the different cultures and religious contexts in which the Salesian Family is working today. There is no culture which would not be receptive to the preventive system. The simplicity of its message and the closeness to people gives the charisma an easy entry in all contexts. It has good access and easy influence on the culture which every youngster breathes. This shows that the system was part of a vision which certainly was broader than the immediate context in which it all started.

In 1875 the first missionaries left Italy to go to Patagonia, young priests and brothers, never to come back, and with the message to go and "plant" the charisma there. They certainly had breathed the spirit of Valdocco, but did they have the preparation to transmit it in other countries and other languages? Don Bosco followed very carefully what they did and kept sending them clarifications of his system in his frequent letters. This project was not only a way of reaching the whole world, indeed he was dreaming of other continents as well, but also of giving enthusiasm to the reality in Valdocco. Never was there more enthusiasm in the oratory. This movement towards the missions went on without faltering; at the moment Don Bosco died, 20% of the Salesians and of the sisters were in the missions, and up to now there have been more than 126 official missionary expeditions from Turin only.

In his missions he used the same method as in Italy, that is to say his preventive system. He wanted his boys to share in the responsibility of the education, the evangelization and the atmosphere of the community. He did not want his missionaries to put themselves in situations which they might not be able to handle. "He warned them against the taking of too great risks, as he was afraid the 'savages' might kill them even before they were able to start evangelizing."<sup>7</sup> He said to them: "To die a martyr is an honor, because one goes straight to heaven; but in this way, one does not go ahead with the conversion of maybe thousands of souls. Instead, they could be saved if one would be a little more careful."<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Fr. Vecchi, *op. cit.* N. 251.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Salesian Missionary Spirituality III, Mission Department Rome, 1988, pp. 76-77.

<sup>8</sup> *Memorie Biografiche di Don Bosco*, volume XI, p. 280.

The strategy he followed, more visibly in the missions, was that the young should reach out to their parents. Today this is done through parents' meetings and in certain countries through "classes for the parents." Automatically the children educated with the missionaries, would, according to him, bring their parents and relatives to church. "Don Bosco was convinced that the young, formed in a Christian way, would be the most adequate instrument to bring adults to the practice of religion and to give a more human and Christian outlook to society."<sup>9</sup>

The missionary dimension of the Salesian works has given strength to vocations all along the history of the congregation. This can be seen looking at the great number of Salesian missionaries, but also by the effort done from the very beginning to gather young candidates who could give an expression to the charisma in their own environment. In his letters, Don Bosco often referred to the vocations, as he did in this letter to Cagliero: "Among the things to keep in mind, you have to look for a place for a novitiate and a studentate. Do all you can to have some 'Indio' whom you can prepare in the line of an ecclesiastical vocation."<sup>10</sup>

The benefit which comes from the missionary expeditions throughout the history of the congregation, is that people who take part in a Salesian environment learn how to think in a broad way and live with a global vision. For the education of the young it is of great importance that they learn from the experiences of people with different backgrounds, outlooks and cultures.

### **Transplant This Genius into Public Life**

Of course, to transplant the spirit of a genius one needs to participate fully in the same "spirit." Maybe there is no need to be a genius in order to do this, but certainly one needs a lot of docility and sense of collaboration. A Salesian presence does not want to be separate from the environment in which it finds itself. In fact the beginning of an activity does not start with a textbook or a system imported from somewhere else, but from the "point of liberty in which the young find themselves."<sup>11</sup> This remains with us as a challenge all through history. We are coming from a period, during the first part of this century, in which the educational institutions and the religious congregations have been cautious about getting involved in social matters; this was however not part of the original inspiration. Participation in the life of a community has gained again its importance. Most of the Salesian schools are now engaged in cultural activities, the parishes have their own organizations of social assistance, and the youth centers take part in social events in the area. It is important at this point to remind our-

---

<sup>9</sup> Augusto Favale in "Il Progetto Missionario di Don Bosco", LAS, Roma, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Fr. Cagliero on November 14, 1876. Cf. *Epistolario*, III, p. 112.

<sup>11</sup> "Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales", n. 38.



selves of the fact that every Salesian work tries to embody the "oratorian spirit," which is a flexible structure and an entry into the different dimensions of the life of the young. Let's take a look at three areas proposed: cultural, political and social.

## Cultural Life

Education is the bottom line of every activity the Salesian Family wants to organize. As mentioned earlier the secret is that the elements are integrated in the educational system. This begins with an examination of the local culture.

A Salesian presence cannot ignore the cultural reality of the area and therefore wants to engage in uplifting it through activities organized in favor of all categories of people. It is time to come out from an enclosed environment of our schools or youth works in order to assure an environment in which our young people can find the same inspiration as they meet in our structures. There is a great need for systematic, total ministry; this means a way in which forces are combined and operate towards the same goal. To this end the congregations of SDB and FMA have developed what we call the "Educative-Pastoral Community," in which people gather around the same aim, the love for the young, in order to complement the efforts carried out at home as well as in the educational institution and in the Church. This principle starts from the uniqueness of the person of the young, undivided and geared to only one goal in life.

Our educational system wants, besides integration in the different levels of society, to make use also of a great variety of expressions. In our "syllabus," working with the young, activities such as theater and music rank very high. Also the active way of stimulating the young through contests and competition is part of the game-plan. It is natural that in competition there are losers and winners, but also this can be incorporated, as in an educational climate the winners have to learn to appreciate the losers and the losers have to learn to congratulate the winners. In a situation of that kind we used to make sure that everyone had flowers or other signs of appreciation ready before the competition and exchange them at the end.

Salesian experience goes before the theory; this becomes eloquent when we see how the planning of any Salesian work starts from the examination of reality. This, nevertheless, is not so much a theoretical study; it is much more of an observation and the sharing of it by the different components of the Educative-Pastoral Community. A Salesian who wants to make a survey of reality in order to find out what has to be done does not so much examine the records in the city hall; he will tend more to start organizing soccer matches in order to listen to the needs of the real young of the area.

There are two areas in which we want to increase our effort:

The first one is the quality of our service. This requires better preparation of the personnel involved, and especially of the Salesians who are carrying the weight of the whole institution, be it a parish, a youth center, a school or whatever. The Salesians are to be the nucleus or the soul of the whole educative community.<sup>12</sup> The qualification of the personnel is not only meant for the Salesians, but for the SDB and laity together. The strength of the Educative-Pastoral Community will lie exactly in its capacity to embark in common formation programs and joint sessions of reflection and planning. The Educative-Pastoral Community is formed through a planning, an educative and pastoral planning, done together from the very start. The examination of the environment of the young, the knowledge of the patrimony of the Salesian charisma, the objectives the community wants to adopt for “these” youngsters and the strategy and its application as well as a constant evaluation are the job of the whole community. Every house is therefore requested to have its proper plan of formation for the whole community, SDB and lay people together. This it does “by promoting in dialogue and shared responsibility with the lay members of the ‘Educative-Pastoral Community’ a program of combined formation; by qualifying the process of development of the Educative-Pastoral Plan as a practical instrument for reciprocal formation; by fostering, through attentive communication, professional, educative, pastoral and Salesian updating.”<sup>13</sup>

A deep cultural awareness will allow us to dialogue with people and participate in cultural events. As educators we feel the need to prepare ourselves to contribute to the formation of public opinion. The capacity of dialogue with the cultural world will allow us to participate in the decisions to be taken with regard to the cultural uplifting of the young and of the poor.

The second area is participation in the field of culture. Recently a study was made about the Educative-Pastoral Plans of the Salesian provinces throughout the world, and the results were published. When examining the relationship between our houses and the environment, the question was asked about how far there is contact with cultural organizations of the area. Surprisingly for being institutions of an educational quality and most of the time being well respected by the people, the result of this survey was rather negative. Only 4.62% of the provinces state they have a good relationship with that type of organization, while 21.54% consider it sufficient and 41.54% insufficient. If we look at the geographical distinction, we have to admit that the North American reality scores

---

<sup>12</sup> The last general chapter, in 1996, gave particular attention to the topic of the central role the SDB community has to play in the Educative-Pastoral Community. Cf. CG24, ns.149-150.

<sup>13</sup> CG24, n. 144.

even lower than average: 20% say adequate, 20% little and 60% show there is a complete lack of contact.<sup>14</sup>

In numerous countries Salesians are involved in cultural coordination programs and educational policies. Now is the time in which we have to come forward and show what we have and are. On various occasions the SDB and FMA together have expressed the need of close connections with the cultural and educational sector of the public administration. In federal governments or regional assemblies policies are made, and in these last years many countries are changing their educational programs and policies. In this the competence and experience of our charisma would be very welcome. In the context of the European Community, for example, we have offered our services for the different courses that are given during summer time for the upgrading of teachers in various fields. We would like to collaborate in the development of educational philosophy and practical skills. It certainly is an important field of action. But, we can no longer be absent from the places where the basis is laid for the education of our youngsters, knowing that our experience, and especially our closeness to the young, would bring an important input.

These two things, professional preparation and presence in policy making structures, have to be planned systematically and coordinated by the province(s), and not left to the initiative of one or other confrere or collaborator. These issues are too important to be left to the good will and personal initiative of any individual person or group.

## Politics

Don Bosco did not so much create an institution; he called the attention of everyone to the needs of the young in the fast evolving situation of an industrializing country. At the same time there was a lot to do about the political relationship between the state of Sardinia and the Papal States. In that environment he was able to navigate freely and surely. It is important that he wanted his Salesians, once he had to found a religious congregation, not to lose full citizenship. This was not the situation in Don Bosco's times, as religious communities had been banned in the states of the North of Italy. He wanted Salesians to be considered as an association of free citizens with an educational goal. The members, and he himself of course, were first and foremost "free citizens." This is why he adopted the phrase "honest citizens." After having said that, he would declare that he was a Catholic and wanted to be considered as such, being a free citizen. In this way he remained "free" from all political intrigues and interpretations. Even though the ministers of his time were anticlerical, and freemasons, he would not get in trouble with them. Moreover it was Minister Urbano

---

<sup>14</sup> "Il progetto educativo-pastorale salesiano, rilettura dei progetti ispettoriali." Roma, 1995, p. 86.

Ratazzi himself who had advised him about how to avoid political harassment and still go ahead with his foundation of a religious congregation even though Ratazzi himself had been instrumental in the suppression of the others.<sup>15</sup> It may be good to recall a few of the important issues in this line: “Don Bosco dealt personally with politicians and men of culture and endeavored to keep up friendly relationships with the cabinet ministers; he participated in the important events of the new political current; he carried out very high and delicate tasks in the grave conflict between State and Church; as a writer of booklets and of the Salesian Bulletin he was especially at the service of the cultural uplifting of the young and old; his focus lies on good morals and on civil society; finally the ‘History of Italy’ he published was meant to give the people and the young a chance to know the history of their country in a time of rising national consciousness. Even though it was such a delicate matter to write on this topic at that particular time, it is a book that avoided engaging in politics as such.”<sup>16</sup>

Before asking ourselves what this means today let’s have another look at the study about the Educative-Pastoral Plans. Only 3.08% of the Salesians in the world seem to give importance to a link with political organizations; 12.31% consider them as of some use and 32.31% say they are of little interest. This means that 47.69%, almost half the congregation, is absent from what is called politics. This could be frightening if we are to be “educators of the backbone of society of tomorrow.” I believe these statistics are too negative, and in case one would try to find out how much of “political education” Salesians do, I think we would reach a much higher quotient. Nevertheless this is an area in which we have to build the future. I feel also that this is directly linked with Salesians’ understanding and participation in the area of culture and politics.

The first thing we learn from this is the connection our communities and our individual Salesians should build with individual political figures. There are many ways to reach out, but the most important one is to create a network of interest and participation. Our past pupils could be a good point of departure for this. For a number of years now we have invited the past pupils—government leaders—of Salesian houses in Italy for dinner with the Rector Major and his council. It always winds up to be a very family-like and fruitful gathering.

We need to be in touch with them for two main reasons: first there is the need to defend the rights of the young. For example in times when government commissions are working on legislation with regards to drug abuse, if we are

---

<sup>15</sup> Father Ricceri wrote an interesting letter to the Salesians about their political responsibility, in the Acts of the Superior Council n. 284. Recently, in the newspaper *Il Tempo* of January 25th an intriguing article has been published by Stefano Maria Paci on the secret letters of Don Bosco, explaining his attitude towards the political power of his days.

<sup>16</sup> Fr. Luigi Ricceri, *op. cit.* pp. 25-30.

there, or if we can work at the side with government representatives who are directly involved, we can bring across the preventive method of our educational tradition. It is clear, for those who are in the field, that in the matter of drugs, only prevention can really tackle the problem. Or when governments are reviewing the educational policy and programs, if we are not there, either personally or through friendly politicians, we may lose all the battles.

The second reason why we want to be there is the need to educate our people in their political conscience. The running of the country, especially in a democratic system, needs information and discernment. As educators we need to develop skills and gather information in order to be able to give the right tips to our people in times of elections and referendums. Too often our parish priests lose golden opportunities to guide their people towards a conscientious participation in their political duties by not being informed or trained in the field. Our specific educational skill is "presence;" this we can apply also in the field of political awareness.

When Don Bosco refers to his "politics of the Our Father" he wants to say that he keeps God and His Kingdom at the center. There is nothing in his mind that makes him stand on one or the other side in politics. His harmonious frame of mind allows him that. The politics of the Our Father means to say that he knows what his specific contribution to youth for the building of society should be. "His politics consisted in having as the supreme criterion of his decisions and activities the *Da Mihi Animas* above and beyond any economic, social, cultural and political criterion, yielding his own personal tastes for the sole purpose of being able to stay with youth and announce to them the good news of the kingdom of God."<sup>17</sup> The constitutions of the SDB summarize this attitude very well: "Remaining independent from any ideology and party politics, we reject everything that encourages deprivation, injustice and violence. We cooperate with all who are trying to build a society more worthy of man's dignity."<sup>18</sup>

## Social Development

The work of Don Bosco stands on two feet: education and social development. From the very beginning and with never ceasing strength the task of uplifting the poor and the abandoned has guided initiatives and growth of the congregations of the SDB and FMA and of the Salesian Family. In his educational effort Don Bosco introduced a strong social consciousness. He participated much in social life; this we see not only by way of his reception of boys from socially depressed environments, and by representing them to the same society, but with an increased consciousness, preparation and moral strength. He was in daily con-

---

<sup>17</sup> Fr. Luigi Ricceri in *op. cit.* p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> Constitutions of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales, n. 33.

tact with so many little and big enterprises in which he wanted to place his boys and be sure of their just treatment.

He wanted from the start to have people collaborating with him who were present in society. His desire to initiate a lay movement in the Church shows his reluctance to be labeled as clerical. He made education into a system, in order to be present in society; he brought together many people in one movement, in order to be present in all parts of society.

Salesian work is social work. Society stands for a network of people and groups, of different origin and status. This is the line to follow if we want to actualize the dream of Don Bosco today. The capacity of uniting students and workers, whites and blacks, people of different languages and cultures, poor and rich, this creates society. No one has really the right to stand in the center because of predisposed conditions; all are creatures of God. This is the fundamental mentality which brings Salesians today out onto the streets, or why our preference goes to youngsters who have no one who loves them. That is why the educator in Salesian terms is a "free person" who makes himself loved by the young. The education of Don Bosco has become a social system of advocacy for the young with adults.

There are three areas in which this is done with particular attention: first of all the working world. If Salesians have a name in the world then it is because of our industrial training, job training or vocational training. In many countries the courses given for "out-of-school-youth" have great success, and the image of the Salesian is often linked with the figure of the coadjutor (lay-brother). In the field of the working world a lot of links have to be provided. Often we have limited ourselves to the workshop and the training programs of the vocational center while the young workers in their difficult positions are left alone.<sup>19</sup> In many countries in the process of development the effort to uplift the young in terms of social participation is nevertheless increasingly present. The magazine "Blue Color" in the Philippines, as an example, has a good influence on the whole working apparatus in the country, while in some countries Salesians are very actively present in organizations like YCW and others.

Another area of attention is the world of street children. A growing number of provinces have launched themselves in this field and invested considerably in it. There are interesting programs for organizing job-development on the streets themselves, getting city governments involved and constructing a way of growth and security for the youngsters without having to leave the streets. In other settings there is an impressive structure and organization which brings the young-

---

<sup>19</sup> In the same study of the Educative-Pastoral Plans, we notice that little attention is paid to social organizations. Only 3.08% consider this important, while 24.62 % give meaning to it and 44.62% ignore it.

sters gradually from the streets into an organized life, where job training is offered and a re-insertion into society is guaranteed.

The third area of attention is the complex world of drugs and addiction. An increasing number of Salesian presences have become specialized in this work. This endeavor has created a network of qualified and full-time educators together with volunteers who are giving of their time and generosity to these young people.<sup>20</sup> The future would desire that Salesians and members of the Salesian family would be specialized in accompanying these young persons or at least be promoters of the prevention of the whole problem. Attention to this growing social problem today has brought about a movement of young people in voluntary service,<sup>21</sup> which reflects its importance in the life of groups and individuals. The call to generosity produces a totally different attitude and an openness to the needs of many.

The combination of education and social awareness brings about a network of attention for the most needy and sets up programs and systems which are able to answer the needs of young people who are helpless and hopeless.

### Conclusion: Two Strategic Points

The key to this operation of transplanting the genius of Don Bosco is the capacity of being there where it all happens and this in such a way as to carry the richness of a charisma to the whole of society. This finds its ultimate motivation in the incarnation of Jesus and his participation in the life of ordinary people. This was however not just a physical presence in order to make people feel good; it was a healing presence, a saving one. It is interesting in the life of Jesus that ordinary people, and even more suffering people, seemed to feel much more at home with him than people in positions of power. But he approached the people in authority with no less vigor than he did with others. His approach was different. The powerful meet in Jesus a challenger, the weak a savior. The teachers of the law a fighter, the sinners a consoler. We can find this same attitude in Don Bosco. Never does Jesus cut links, nor does he choose sides. He remains free, but ready to meet and confront others on the basic issues and criteria. He is

---

<sup>20</sup> The phenomenon of volunteer service is a considerable strength for the future of Salesian presences in the social area. Not only in their own city and country young volunteers give the best of themselves for others; also in mission countries they are rendering a precious service. The congregation has prepared a guideline for the volunteer service in the provinces and a number of books which can help in the reflection and organization. Cf. Publications by the Department of Youth Ministry, Rome, 1996.

<sup>21</sup> The last General Chapter devoted great attention to this movement in the Salesian family, aware of the importance of the preparation of them, of the need for integration in the communities and the follow up after serving. Cf. CG24, 122.



there when the man born blind is calling for healing; he is there when the young son is carried to his graveyard at Naim; he is there when the prostitute needs pardon. This presence goes back to the consciousness of his mission, "What I am telling you are not my words, but those of the Father who sent me."<sup>22</sup>

The second key to the realization of this goal of transplanting the genius of Don Bosco is to consider the mission as a penetrating movement. In order to change society we need to form young people who have the backbone that can withstand the heat and the cold, the wind and the solitude of the desert. The purpose of education is to form the young in such a way that they can enter society freely and responsibly in order to transform it. This needs a cultural sensitivity, social involvement and political sharpness. The education of the Salesians is a "system," but the preventive system is much more than that; it is a spirituality in which education and evangelization go hand in hand in an inseparable way. When we say that it is a movement, we imply it is meant to penetrate the whole of society. If there are young people, the education of the Salesian fits! Where one works with young people, the charisma of Don Bosco is welcome. Wherever the interest of the young is dealt with, we should be there. That is how people of every station in life are strongly invited to participate in this endeavor to educate and save, to follow the young, one by one and as groups, in order to help them face the reality of life and of society. In this way Salesian educators "give life," livelihood and hope to people without it, and open a new horizon to whomever needs it. But, this would not be possible unless all forces would be united towards the same direction, cultural, social and political, in one great movement based on the love for youth.

---

<sup>22</sup> John 14, 24.