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INTRODUCTION

We need your help!

What started as a quite strange and original idea. After a long period of rest, let's call it hibernation, made even a little longer than it was going to be because of the worldwide pandemic of COVID, the *Journal of Salesian Studies* was relaunched. Several reasons motivated the collaboration between the Institute of Salesian Studies of Berkeley, California, and Rome's Centro Studi Don Bosco. Not only because both the Institute and the Centro work in the same field, or because it is necessary to work together. But above all, this Journal wants to be at service of the Salesian congregation, but also because a vast number, almost the majority of confreres, and certainly when we speak of younger Salesians in the first phase of formation, knows as second language English. Relaunching a Journal is not easy, but look, here we are with the second issue of 2021. The truth is we cannot do this alone, and that is why we need your help.

We need your help to spread the word. Spread the word that the Journal is relaunched. Everybody can download it for free from the website. You can print it on your printer, you can read it on your computer or smartphone... and if you want, you can order your hard copy at a very reasonable price (printing + taxes + shipping).

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

We need your help in proofreading. Most of the contributions in the two issues are not from native English speakers, so if you can or know someone who can help do this very precious work, let us know.

We need your help. Did you see some exciting publication that fits our Journal's identity? Let us know. We can help you to make some publicity.



In the second issue of 2021, we have four articles again. In the first article, Anthony Nguyen reflects on how Don Bosco imitated and reflected on the Fatherhood of God for the people of his time, especially the poor and abandoned youth. Therefore in the first part, he is trying to understand how the term “father” is understood in the Old and New testament and some representative theologians. Afterward, he applies this to the image of Don Bosco as a father.

The second article of this issue, Sister Maria Maul, studies the aspect of “vulnerability” in the life of Maria Domenica Mazzarello. In a critical reading of the life of the Main, she indicates some vulnerable elements in her life and how she handled that vulnerability. Her inner strength, her faith in God, made that she could cope with the difficulties encountered in her short life.

With the third article, we dive again into the archives. From John Rozario Lourdusamy, we have already published the first part of his study of the letters of Don Bosco. Letters that weren't primarily intended to be spiritual of nature contain a lot of indications for spiritual life. Father Lourdusamy studied the spiritual profile and teachings in the first seven volumes of Don Bosco's epistolary.

In the last article, Michal Vojtas writes about the Salesian identity of the Salesian Institutes of Higher Education. He is reflecting these Institutes of Higher Education, like Salesian universities, can implement the educational experience of Don Bosco in their context. Therefore he is making in his article some proposals and suggesting some criteria.

In the end, we make some suggestions for books and publications worth reading, followed by some publicity for the international convention on Saint Francis de Sales of the Salesian Pontical University. We will try to publish the special issue on Saint Francis de Sales by June 2022.

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a large, stylized 'W' and 'C' followed by 'SDB'. A long, horizontal line extends from the end of the signature to the right.

Wim Collin SDB
Editor in Chief

GOD AS FATHER AND DON BOSCO AS FATHER

by Anthony Nguyen

Introduction

Don Bosco is a saint who is honored as the “father and teacher” of the youth. However, we may be curious to ask ourselves: In what sense do we understand the term “father” as it is attributed or applied to Don Bosco? Surely, it is not in “biological” sense of the word. But it is not simply in spiritual sense because Don Bosco did not only provide spiritual nourishment (heaven) to the young, but also “work and bread” (something for bodily/biological needs). From this perspective, we may dare to say that the term “father” attributed to Don Bosco should be an integration of “biological” (understood as bodily) and “spiritual” sense of the term. In other words, the term “father” attributed to Don Bosco is understood as “the one who provides bodily and spiritual needs” to the young.

As he lived out his fatherhood among his poor boys, Don Bosco “experiences the fatherhood of God and continually reminds himself of the divine dimension of his work: ‘Apart from me you can

do nothing' (Jn 15:5)."¹ For this reason, God as Father is a most intimate image of God whom he would like to engrave in the hearth of each youngster who was entrusted to his care. It is without any doubt that the image of God as Father arose from Don Bosco's own "lived experience."² He lost his father at the age of 2; then he lost another "father," Father Calosso, when he had just begun to aware of his call to a more "transcendent purpose" in life. He experienced how hard it is for a child to grow up without a father. Thus, these experiences formed in him a heart of a father, which was patterned after that of God, the Almighty Father.

This article aims at presenting, in a concise manner, how Don Bosco had imitated and reflected the Fatherhood of God for the people of his time, especially his poor boys. We will do this by, first of all, trying to understand how the term "father" understood in the Old and New Testament as well as in representative theologians. We then apply what we have found to the image of Don Bosco as father.

1. God as Father

There have been, on the one hand, recently many critiques of theism and the personalist concept of God. Some even speak of the "death" of a personal God, Christian God.³ For example, in the postmodern mind: the human person as *techno sapiens* is envisaged to have enough acumen to take a secure hold of his or her life without being supernaturally aided. On the other hand, there is a new stream of fresh air blowing in the Church, where the "personal dimension of

¹ *Salesian Constitutions*, art. 12.

² Karol Wojtyla defines "lived experience" as "the irreducible or the element that defies reduction of man experience to an epistemological categories." In other words, "lived experience" refers to a person's experience which is *particular as his own*. This kind of experience cannot be easily accessed by others or reduced to a bundle of data, (Karol Wojtyla, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being," in *Person and Community*, trans. Therese Sandok [New York: Peter Lang, 1993], 212).

³ For an in-depth discussion on this topic, see Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 3-46; see also Hans Küng, *Does God Exist?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981); Hans Küng, *The Incarnation of God*, trans. J. R. Stephenson (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), 162-174.

God” has been deeply studied and mystically experienced by many.⁴ God is no longer considered as “Someone” residing in heaven and having nothing to do with man’s day-to-day life. Nor is He the “product” of philosophical and theological speculation. Rather, He is a God who journeys with his people. For this reason, many have been personally touched by a God, who is the Father and who calls them “by name.”⁵

However, no mortal has ever had a direct access to the knowledge of God in Himself. This is also true when it comes to the question of God as Father. One has to have recourse knowing God through creation. And what better way than through the individual human person. This has been attested to by the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In fact, the Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of God as Father in the sense that He is the “Creator,” the “Origin” of all things and the One who cares for His children. We read,

by calling God “Father,” the language of faith indicates two main things: that God is the first origin of everything and transcendent authority; and that he is at the same time goodness and loving care for all his children. God’s parental tenderness can also be expressed by the image of motherhood, which emphasizes God’s immanence, the intimacy between Creator and creature. The language of faith thus draws on the human experience of parents, who are in a way the first representatives of God for man. But this experience also tells us that human parents are fallible and can disfigure the face of fatherhood and motherhood. We ought therefore to recall that God

⁴ See Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993). See also Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985); and Philip Ryken and Michael LeFebvre, *Our Triune God: Living in the Love of the Three-In-One* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2011), 69-114.

⁵ As Joseph Ratzinger has written in his book, *The God of Jesus Christ*, that “God has a name, and God calls us by our name. He is a Person, and he seeks the person. He has a face, and he seeks our face. He has a heart, and he seeks our heart,” (Joseph Ratzinger, *The God of Jesus Christ: Meditations on the Triune God*, trans. Brian McNeil [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008], 24).

transcends the human distinction between the sexes. He is neither man nor woman: he is God. He also transcends human fatherhood and motherhood, although he is their origin and standard: no one is father as God is Father.⁶

Is this understanding, that God is the Origin of all things and Care-giver of His children, the only way to understand God as Father?

1.1. God as Father in the Old Testament

We find in the Old Testament a cluster of three words designating God, namely, *'ēl* (‘lae “), *’ēlōah*, and *’ēlōhîm* (ywy).⁷ When they are used in the Old Testament, they either refer to the true God of Israel or the god(s) of other nations. Besides these words, the Israelites called God by a distinctive name, that is, YHWH.⁸ Even though there are several words designating God as pointed out and these words could connote the idea of plurality in God, there is no doubt that the Jews strictly observed monotheism.⁹ In fact, the prayer, which is the foundation of Judaism is the *Shema*: “Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the one, the only Yahweh” (Deut 6:4).¹⁰

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), no. 239.

⁷ For a more thorough discussion of these names, see *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, 1988 fully revised ed., v.s.”God, names of,” 505. Mark S. Smith holds that this cluster of terms designating God has Canaanite background, (see Mark S Smith, *Early History of God: Yahweh and the Others Deities in Ancient Israel* [New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990], 1-40).

⁸ “YHWH is the only true personal name of God in Israel’s faith; the others are titular or descriptive expressions. References to ‘the name’ or ‘in the name’ of God indicate this name,” (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, 506). For a brief discussion on how it is possible for YHWH to become Trinity, see Bishop Teodoro C. Bacani, Jr., *From Yahweh to the Trinity* (Manila, Philippines: Gift of God Publications), 1-27.

⁹ For a good discussion on the emergence of Jewish Monotheism, see Vel-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 17-18.

¹⁰ According to Joseph Blenkinsopp, the demand presented in Deuteronomy (6:4) is not an affirmation of monotheism, but rather an affirmation of exclusive devotion (love) to YHWH, because for him the Hebrew text of Deut 6:4 (“dx; ywy an “h;l’a] ywy larvy lybq [m;v.”) is better translated as follows: “YHWH is our

This prayer is said at the beginning of the service in the synagogue; it is contained in the phylacteries (Mt 23:5); it is contained in a little cylindrical box called the Mezuzah.¹¹ Thus if the Jews observed strict monotheism, what can we find in the Old Testament concerning the Father in relation to the Son and the Holy Spirit?

The word “father” in the Old Testament is *’āb*. It occurs 1,191 times in the Hebrew and 9 times in the Aramaic form.¹² The primary Greek word corresponding to Hebrew word *’āb* is *patēr*. Another term which has a more intimate tone is *abba*.¹³ *’āb* has many meanings. It can be used for “father” or “grandfather.” *’āb* can be

God, YHWH alone,” (Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Deuteronomy,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy [Eaglewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1994], 99). His view is challenged by some scholars who hold that this text is really an affirmation of the monotheism.”Does the text (Deut 6:4) teach monotheism? Or monolatry for Israel? Or does it teach only a uniqueness in the Lord as over against various Baals and gods of other people? Some of the Israelites believed in the reality of other deities, but this declaration of the nature of the Lord does not admit of the real existence of other gods. The Lord is the only deity (monotheism),” (Kenneth L. Barker & John K. Kohlenberger III, con. ed., *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, “Old Testament” [Grand Rapids, Michigan: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 1994], 247).

¹¹ See William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: the Gospel of Mark*, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975), 295.

¹² See *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Worlds*, 266. E.g., “The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth-Ham being the *father* of Canaan” (Gen 9:18); “When they returned to their *father* Reuel, he said to them, ‘Why are you back so early today?’ (Ex 2:18) “; “And you will keep my Sabbaths; I am Yahweh your God” (Lv 19:3). Emphasis mine.

¹³ E.g., Yahweh said to Abraham “For my part, this is my covenant with you: you will become the *father* of many nations” (Gen 17:4); “Anyone who strikes *father* or mother will be put to death” (Ex 21:15); “Our *father* died in the desert. He was not a member of the party who banded together against Yahweh, Korah’s party; it was for his own sin that he died without sons” (Num 27:3). For a helpful discussion on “*ab*” and “*abba*,” (see Kasper, *God of Jesus Christ*, 142-143). Emphasis mine.

used as a title of respect for a governor, priest and prophet.¹⁴ 'āb is also used to refer to the founder of a tribe or family group.¹⁵

In the Old Testament, God as “Father” appears something more than twenty times.¹⁶ However, we need to be more precise in what sense God is called “Father” in the Old Testament. We find in the Old Testament the expression “God of the fathers” (Ex 3:13) – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.¹⁷ This expression speaks of God as “Father” in the collective or corporate sense rather than individual. Thus, early on God is not (or rarely) “being viewed in a father-son relationship with individuals or as the father of mankind in general.”¹⁸ It is so because the Old Testament belief protects the transcendence of God. God is called “Father” not in the physical or biological sense, but in a metaphorical sense.

Foremost in the Old Testament theology, the term “father” is used in relation to the concept of “election.” He is also called Father

¹⁴ E.g., “Micah said to him, ‘Stay here with me; be my *father* and priest and I shall give you ten silver shekels a year, and clothing and food’” (Judg 17: 10); “Elisha saw it, and shouted, ‘My *father*! My *father*! Chariot of Israel and its chargers!’ Then he lost sight of him, and taking hold of his own clothes he tore them in half” (2 Kgs 2:12); “I shall dress him in your tunic, I shall put your sash round his waist, I shall invest him with your authority; and he will be a *father* to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the House of Judah” (Is 22:21). Emphasis mine.

¹⁵ See *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words*, v.s.”Father,” 266.

¹⁶ See Gerald O’Collins, *The Personal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 14. E.g., “Extol him before all the living; he is our Lord and he is our God; he is our Father, and he is God for ever and ever” (Tob 13:4); “Father of orphans, defender of widows, such is God in his holy dwelling” (Ps 68:5); “Is there not one Father of us all? Did not one God create us?” (Mal 2:10).

¹⁷ According to Durham, “Moses is told first that he is being addressed by ‘the God of his father.’ The word ‘father’ is pointedly singular (see Gen 26:24; 31:5; 43:23; Ex 15:2; 18:4) despite the various (and unjustified) attempts to make it plural. What Moses is told must therefore be understood as a means of connecting the speaking deity with the faith of Moses’ family in Egypt. Then Moses told that this God who addresses him is also the God of the three great patriarchal fathers – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel – a linking of the speaking of deity with the faith of Moses’ people, the sons of Israel,” (Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 31).

¹⁸ “The Old Testament is very restrained in its use of the father-son relation for God,” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, v.s.”God, Names of,” 509).

of Israel as a covenant nation:¹⁹ “You will then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what Yahweh says: Israel is my first born son’” (Ex. 4:22); “Is this the return you make to Yahweh? O people brainless and unwise! Is this not your father, who gave you being, who made you, by whom you subsist?” (Deut 32:6). It is in this concept of “election” that the change from “collective” to “individualistic” sense of the understanding of the term “father” was introduced especially during monarchy period of Israel.

Indeed, during the time of the monarchy,²⁰ the fatherhood of God was transferred from a collective sense to an individualistic sense. The fatherhood of God was directed to David as an individual (see 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; Ps 89:26). However, even in the case of David, the father-child relationship, as we would think, does not apply, since David was presented as a representative for a “royal line” with which the Lord had signed a covenant as He did with Abraham. This fact shows that the Old Testament concept of God as Father is “thin and underdeveloped, perhaps deliberately so, in order to avoid association with pagan ideas of divine fatherhood in the sense of procreation.”²¹

The reference to God as the Father of the Messiah before the time of Jesus remains unclear.²² There are references in the prophetic Psalms (see Ps 2:7; 89:26). However, this was not clear until the time of the New Testament. For this reason, we can affirm that in the Old Testament God as “Father” was not understood as “person” as we understand it today. Yet, even though the term “Father” carries the tone of “personal relationship,” it was simply seen in the Old Testament as a “name” or “designation” of God which the Israelites

¹⁹ See Kasper, *God of Jesus Christ*, 138-139.

²⁰ The time of monarchy began when the Israelites refused to obey the voice of Samuel [the last judge], and asked him for a king who would rule over them; that they also may be like all the nations; and that their king may judge them, and go out before them, and fight their battles. And so Samuel consulted the Lord Who eventually told Samuel to give people a king in the person of Saul, (see 1 Sam 8:10-22).

²¹ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, v.s..”Father,” 510.

²² Bernard Piault argues that although the Old Testament tells us that there is a Father in God, it does not make any reference to God “as the Father of the Promised Messiah,” (Bernard Piault, *What is Trinity* [New York: Hawthorn Books, 1959], 16).

used to address God. On this particular issue, O’Collins has this to point out,

Naming God “Father” expressed His deep involvement in the story of Israel, its kingly leaders, and its righteous ones. The name has nothing to do with physical generation. ... While occurring in a variety of historical, prophetic, and sapiential texts, this divine name cannot be called frequent in the Old Testament, but it will become the favored name in the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of John.”²³

In sum, the Old Testament calls God “Father” primarily as referring to His covenantal relationship with the tribe of Israel: Yahweh would be the Father of a recreated or chosen people according to Mount Sinai *testamentum*. In this sense, God as Father was originally understood as the One who gave birth to Israel by delivering the tribe from slavery and by a covenantal pact in Mt. Sinai. In fact, the belief that God was the Creator of all things only dawned on the consciousness of the Jews post-exilic times.²⁴ There is no doubt that the name Father in the Old Testament connotes the idea of “relation,” but not with another “distinct Person” in the same Godhead, but rather to Israel as people whom He considers as his child (see Hos 11:1).

1.2. God as Father in the New Testament

In lieu of the terms *’ēl*, *’ēlôah*, and *’ēlôhîm* used for calling God in the Old Testament, the New Testament uses the common Greek term θεός (*theos*) as “God.”²⁵ According to some exegetes, the concept of God as defined in the Old Testament is foreign to the

²³ O’Collins, *Tripersonal God*, 23.

²⁴ According to Wenham, the message of creation account is essentially one of redemption. It explains why man needs salvation and what he needs to be saved from. It also describes the original state of the world, and the goal of redemption,” (Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1 “Genesis 1-15,” lii).

²⁵ For an in-depth discussion on “*Theos*” in the New Testament, see Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. I, “God, Christ, Mary and Grace,” 79-148.

Greek since the Greeks believe in many gods and goddesses who were shaped in the image of the human beings.²⁶ This fact helps us to understand the reason why Christians later on depicted the three divine Persons in human form. It is only in later Greek philosophy that the god and goddesses were thought of more as an abstract principle or force.

God addressed as “father” occurs in the New Testament about 250 times. It is found on Jesus’ lips no less than 170 times in the Gospels, e.g., “At that time Jesus exclaims, ‘I bless you Father, Lord of heaven and of earth...’” (Mt 11:25); “Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing’” (Lk 23:34); “In all truth I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven, the true bread,” (Jn 6:32). Unlike in the Old Testament, the New Testament offers texts on the fatherhood of God as one of God’s qualities. In fact, the New Testament seems to present the fatherhood as God’s very nature.²⁷

The term *Abba*²⁸ is used in the New Testament but never in the Old Testament. Using it, Christ intimates to us the God-man (individual) relationship as He is to His Father. According to Barclay, the word *Abba* used of God is a “compact summary of Christian faith.”²⁹ It settles all the relationships that man has in this earthly life.³⁰ The God as *Abba* whom Jesus addressed and taught us

²⁶ Karl Rahner writes in his *Theological Investigations* that, “by ‘θεός’ the Greeks did not mean the unity of a definite personality in the monotheistic sense, but rather the unity of the religious world, clearly felt as *one* in spite of its multiplicity of forms. The Greek conception of God is essentially polytheistic, not indeed in the sense of many isolated gods but as an ordered totality of gods,” (Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. I, “God, Christ, Mary and Grace,” 90); see also Emmanuel Durand, O.P., “A Theology of God the Father,” in Emery and Matthew, *Oxford Handbook of Trinity*, Chapter 27, 371-386.

²⁷ See *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words*, 1998 ed., v.s. “Father,” 268; see also Durand, O.P., “Theology of God Father,” Chapter 27, 371-386.

²⁸ For a concise presentation of “*abba*,” see Kasper, *God of Jesus Christ*, 142-143.

²⁹ Barclay, *Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 1, 200.

³⁰ It settles our relationship to the unseen world; it settles our relationship to the seen world; it settles our relationship to our fellowmen; it settles our relationship to ourselves; and it settles our relationship to God, (see *Ibid.*, 200-203).

to address has the name and the heart of a father. Thus, He is a loving Father, who is not the same as the gods presented in Greek legend.³¹

God as Father is the most favored theme in John's Gospel, e.g., 8:54; 10:32; 11:41; 13:1; 13:3; 18:11.³² The relationship between Father and Son is also strongly depicted.³³ He is not only the Father of Jesus, but He is also "our" God and Father: "Jesus said to her [Mary Magdalene], 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to the brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (Jn 20:17). The distinction between "my Father" and "your Father" (see Jn 20:17) suggests that Jesus affirms a different relationship with the Yahweh of the Old Testament. This is clearly seen in the "knowledge"³⁴ Jesus has of his Father: "Everything has been

³¹ Barclay singles out the most significant Greek legend of the gods is the legend of Prometheus."Prometheus was a god. It was in the days before men possessed fire; and life without fire was a cheerless and a comfortless thing. In pity Prometheus took fire from heaven and gave it as a gift to men. Zeus, the king of the gods, was mightily angry that men should receive this gift. So he took Prometheus and he chained him to a rock in the middle of the Adriatic Sea, where he was tortured with the heat and the thirst of the day, and the cold of the night. Even more, Zeus prepared a vulture to tear out Prometheus' liver, which always grew again, only to be torn out again," (Ibid., 201).

³² God as Father is the most favored in the Gospel of John since Jesus presented in the gospel as the one who comes to make God known: God is "my Father and your Father" (Jn 20:17), (see Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 4, ed., Daniel J. Harrington, [Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998], especially 526). For Ben Witherington III, although the Gospel of John does not fully discuss the Trinitarian doctrine, it has provided Trinitarianologists the needed "most complete set of raw data from which such a doctrine could be constructed because here the interrelationships between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are given the most fulsome treatment of any NT documents," ("The Trinity in the Johannine Literature," in Gilles and Levering, *Oxford Handbook of Trinity*, 69). It is also worthy of note, according to Witherington, that the word "Father" appears 120 times referring to the word "God" and 108 times the term "God" is used for this person. What comes as an earth-shaking pronouncement coming from John the Evangelist is when he addresses the Logos as *theo* in Chapter 1, (see Ibid., 70). If ever the Father is discussed with the Son, Witherington further notes, it is in reference to the Old Testament idea of "Wisdom" (see Ibid., 71).

³³ E.g., "No one has ever seen God; it is the Only Son, who is close to the Father's heart who has made him known" (Jn 1:18); "The Father and I are one" (10:30); "May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me" (17:21).

³⁴ In the New Jerusalem Bible, footnote (g) of Chapter 10, we find this description

entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Mt 11:27). This is decisive statement because it distinguishes the Jesus’ knowledge of God from that of his disciples.

The distinction between Jesus’ knowledge of the Father and disciples’ is made clear by the Gospels of Matthew and John. We hear Matthew declaring: “Everything is entrusted to me by my Father; and no one *knows* the Son except the Father, just as no one *knows* the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Mt 11:27. Emphasis mine). This is somehow echoed in Jn. 8:55: “Although you do not *know* him. But I *know* him, and if I were to say, ‘I do not *know* him,’ I should be a liar, as you yourselves are. But I do *know* him, and I keep his word,” (emphasis mine).³⁵ The key idea that demands full attention here is the word “know” (Gk., *oida* from the infinitive *idenai*, “to know “).³⁶

of “knowledge “: “In biblical language, ‘knowledge’ is not merely the conclusion of an intellectual process, but the fruit of an ‘experience,’ a personal contact; when it matures, it is love.

³⁵ See parallels in Jn 10:15, “Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep “; and 17:25, “Father, Upright One, the world has not known you, but I have known you, and these have known that you have sent me.” Emphasis mine.

³⁶ In his textual analysis of Jn 8:55, Brown notes the use of both Gk words *gignōskein* and *idenai* (*oida*) to mean in English “to know,” (see Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible, The Gospel According to John I-XII* [Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co.], 359). A lengthy discussion on *idenai* vis-à-vis the Gk word *gignōskein* is found, (Ibid., Appendix I:9, 512-515). For his part, Bruce Vawter, CM takes note carefully that “John never says that Jesus *believes* the Father, only that he *knows* him and is known by him. Knowledge comes from faith; faith leads to knowledge as tie lads to life – knowledge is part of life. What John is trying to say is that the believer is introduced into a true knowledge of God to the extent that he can possess it, not that faith is to be equated with knowledge. ... [Here], John is denying the fundamental conviction of Gnosticism, namely, that there is a higher knowledge that can lead to salvation, a knowledge denied the mere believer. Rather, whatever meaningful dimension there is to knowledge, whatever knowledge can do in the matter of salvation, comes only through faith,” (Bruce Vawter, “Johannine Theology,” in Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol 1, The Old Testament and Vol. 2, The New Testament and Topical Articles (Englewood, Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968), 835).

For sure, the manner Jesus knows the Father is not the way a believer (man) knows the Father. On our part when “I know the Father,” the I, the knower, remain, in essence, very distinct from the thing known – “the Father” whose very essence remains inaccessible to man, strictly speaking. In any human knowledge we can readily distinguish the following interspersing factors: the knower, the thing known and the idea ensuing therefrom. The result is an analogical likeness between the knower and the thing known converging manifestly in the ensuing *idea* of the object known. For example, in the assertion, “I know the apple,” the apple as the object of knowledge is very distinct, indeed, from the “I” as the subject or agent of knowledge. And the ensuing factor, generated within the knower, of the apple remains distinct as well because its nature is ideogenic, i.e., it is an *idea* of the object called “apple.”

But when Jesus asserts “I know the Father” the undercurrent statement is this: that Jesus does not have a mere analogical representation of the object known, say, an “idea” of His Father, but rather a more intensive, all-inclusive interiorization of the object known to the extent that the Father and Son know one another at the *most* intimate, *most* intense, and *most* personal level; hence, Jesus’ having the deepest intimacy and profoundest “personalness” with the Father, and living within a relationship of the greatest familiarity with Him. This brand of intimacy and “personalness” has been entrusted to Jesus, as part of His Father’s will, to reveal to his close associates first and then to entire humanity in a manner of “adoption.”³⁷ This makes the Fatherhood of God becomes so personal and intimate.

³⁷ The manner is “by adoption” according to Scriptures but the process is called “deification” or “divinization” proximately from the Gk. word *theosis* and remotely from the Gk. word *apotheosis*. Traditional mainstream theology, both East and West, views Jesus Christ as a pre-existing deity who undertook mortal existence, not as a mortal being who attained divinity: He became one of us to make us “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). We enter into the divine life of the Trinity through the only one mediation: Jesus Christ. In this sense human beings are “God revealed” – living representations of God on earth as they should live in a godly fashion by doing the will of the Triune God as Jesus did, (see Dennis Dexter Sontillano and José Antonio Aureada, OP, “The Nourishing Character of the Eucharist,” *Philippiniana Sacra*, Vol. XLIV, No. 132 (Sept-Dec, 2009): 603-668; esp. 607-619.

This identity in essence urges us to accept in faith that Jesus, because his essence consubstantially equals that of the Father, is in essence equally God. Because of this fact, only Jesus has the key to unlock our understanding of the nature and will of God since He does not have the key but He IS The Key itself: “I am the Way; I am Truth and Life,” (Jn 14:6). Ultimately, therefore, only Jesus can divulge to us what the very essence of God is really and precisely because he is equally God, in John’s very words: “No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known,” (Jn 1:18).³⁸

It is in the poignant awareness of this all-inclusive interiorization of the object known that Jesus, full of conviction, declares in public: “The Father and I are one. ... But if I am doing it, then even if you refuse to believe in me, at least believe in the work I do; then you will know for certain that the Father is in me and I am in the Father,” (Jn 10:30, 38). Elsewhere, “do you not believe that I

³⁸ In the King James Version (KJV): “No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” In the New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSVCE): “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son,[a] who is close to the Father’s heart,[b] who has made him known.” In The New American Bible (NAB), “No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father’s side, has revealed him.” Using the KJV, Barclay sees a three-fold implication of the said passage, namely: 1) Jesus is *unique* (captured by the Gk word *monogenes*, “only begotten”) intimating that Jesus is *specially beloved*; thus, implying that “there is no one like Jesus”; 2) Jesus is *God*, that is, to have seen Him is to have seen the Father as well; and 3) Jesus is *in the bosom of the Father*. Barclay goes on to explain further how the word “bosom” is used in the Bible to speak about the kind of deep intimacy exhibited by the love actively present in the husband-wife or mother-child relationship, or even between close friends; hence, when used between Jesus and His Father the connotation is “complete and uninterrupted intimacy. It is because Jesus is so intimate with God, that he is one with God and can reveal him to men,” (see Barclay, *Gospel of John*, 74-75). Moreover, the unique personality of Jesus is denoted by the use of the expression “Abba” (see, for example, Mt 6:9, 11:25-26, 26:42; Mk 14:26; Lk 23:34, 46; Jn 11:41, 12:27, 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 14-25). Also, the *unigenitus* (“the only Son”) passages in the Johannine corpus substantiate the same (see, for example, Jn 1: 14: “And the Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth,” [emphasis mine]; see also Jn 1:18b; 3:16, 18; and 1 Jn 4:9). If ever John calls Jesus by this extraordinary address, it is to reiterate His exclusivity as Son of God. For a thorough discussion on the use of Gk word *monogenes* or *unigenitus* in Latin, (see Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 13-14).

am in the Father and the Father is in me? What I say to you I do not speak of my own accord: it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his works. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe it on the evidence of these works” (Jn 14:10//7:16; 8:28). Therefore, “in Jesus Christ the distant, unknowable, invisible, unreachable God has come to men; and God can never be a stranger to us again.”³⁹ That is why “they will call him Immanuel, a name which means ‘God-is-with-us’,” (Mt 1:23).

At any rate, in the New Testament, the Father is revealed by Jesus as “His Father” and “our Father.” We can sense that the term “Father” primarily refers to the relation between Jesus and the God of Israel. It only secondarily refers to the relation between God and Israel. Even when it is referred to the relation between God and Israel, it does so in reference to Jesus. The reason is: it is only through Jesus that we all receive the grace of adoption and so call God “our” Father (see Gal 4:3-6). This threefold distinction lays down, indeed, the groundwork for the discussion of the personal relations existing in the Old Testament Yahweh (see Lk 10:22; Mt 11:27). This summary intimates to us the Father’s willingness to share his “personness” to us to a certain extent, but actually as an overflow of a kind of the most intimate, the most intense and most personal relation He has with His Son. It is in this sense that we will explore how the “relationship” which Don Bosco has for the young that made him into a father to them.

1.3. God as Father in Theology

Since the scope of this article does not allow us to expose the thought of all theologians on God as Father, we opt to choose only three representatives. They are St. Augustine (for the first millennium), St. Thomas Aquinas (for the second millennium) and John Paul II’s (for the third millennium).

³⁹ Barclay, *Gospel of John*, vol. 1, 75. See also Paul Petersen, “Jesus – the ‘One and Only,’ or ‘Only Begotten’: The Meaning of *Monogenes*” in Paul Petersen and Rob McIver, eds., *Biblical and Theological Studies on the Trinity* (Adelaide, Australia: Avondale Academic press, 2014), 29-34.

1.3.1. St. Augustine

According to St. Augustine, the same substance requires that all works of the Trinity *ad extra* are indivisible, as from one principle.⁴⁰ However, each of the Divine Persons possesses the divine nature in a particular manner and, thus, in the operation of the Godhead *ad extra*, it is proper to attribute to each of the Three a role that is appropriate to the particular divine person, by virtue of the Trinitarian origin of that person.⁴¹ Augustine essays:

Take another saying of the same Apostle (Paul): “For us there is one God, the Father from whom are all things, and we in him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him” (1 Cor 8:6). Who can doubt that by *all things* he means all that is created, like John in *All things were made through him* (Jn 1:3)? So I ask whom does he mean in another place with the words, *since from him and through him and in him are all things, to him be glory forever and ever* (Rom 11:36). If he means Father and Son and Holy Spirit, attributing a phrase apiece to each person – *from him*, from the Father; *through him*, through the Son; *in him*, in the Holy Spirit – then it is clear that Father and Son and Holy Spirit is what the one God is, since he concludes in the singular, *to him be glory forever and ever*.⁴²

Augustine speaks of the Father primarily in relation (reference) to the Son and the Holy Spirit. He is the Father in the sense that from Him the Son was begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeded.⁴³ He is the Principle or Origin in reference to the Son. Augustine explains:

To return to the mutual relationships within the Trinity: if the producer is the origin with reference to what it produces, then *the Father is origin* with reference to the Son, because he produced or begot him. But whether the Father is origin with respect to the Holy

⁴⁰ See *De Trinitate*, I. ii. 8.

⁴¹ See Angelo di Berardino, ed., *Patrology*, vol. 4, 428.

⁴² *De Trinitate*, I. ii. 12.

⁴³ See *Ibid.*, V. i. 6.

Spirit because it is said that *He proceeds from the Father* (Jn 15:26), that is quite a question. If it is so, then he will be origin not only for what he begets or makes, but also for what he gives.⁴⁴

In the economy of salvation, it is the Father who sends the Son and the Holy Spirit. Since He is the Principle, the Father cannot be sent.⁴⁵ Rather He is the One who sent the Son in the “fullness of time” to reveal and bring to completion his loving plan. It is also He and the Son sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to perpetuate his merciful love till the end of time.

1.3.2. St. Thomas Aquinas

The Father is a distinct person because He is the “principle” of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The word “principle” here is understood as “that from which something proceeds.” In this sense the Father is “principle” from whom another person originates. Thomas avoids using the term “cause” even though the Greek Trinitarian theologians use this term interchangeable with “principle” to refer to divinity.⁴⁶

The word “principle” is proper to the “First Divine Person,” since it signifies that by which the Father is distinct from the Son and the Holy Spirit. As Thomas has pointed out, what distinguishes the Father from the Son and the Holy Spirit is “fatherhood.” For this reason, “the name Father, signifying his fatherhood, is the name proper to the person of the Father.”⁴⁷ However, “the fatherhood

⁴⁴ “Coming now to the Father, he is called Father relationship-wise, and he is also called origin relationship-wise, and perhaps other things too. But he is called Father with reference to the Son, origin with reference to all things that are from him,” (Ibid., V. iii. 14).

⁴⁵ See II. iv. 22.

⁴⁶ According to Thomas, “cause” seems to connote a diversity of substances and the dependence of the one on another. If this is applied to the Trinity, the Trinity may lead to “tritheism” or “subordinationism.” However, we can avoid this when we use “principle” since it does not refer to inferiority or priority, but rather only to origin, (see ST, q. 33, a. 1).

⁴⁷ “A name proper to any person signifies that by which the person is distinct from all others. The reason: just as body and soul make up the meaning of man, so also, as noted in the Metaphysics, this particular soul and body make up the meaning of

applies to God first as connoting the relation of the one person to another, before it applies as connoting the relation of God to creatures.”⁴⁸ Concretely, “Father” is primarily the Father in relation to the Son before He is the “Father” in relation to man and other creatures.

Since the Father is the “principle,” He must be “unbegotten.” Thomas contends:

Even among creatures we observe primary and secondary principles, so among the divine persons, while there is no first and second, there is a principle not from a principle, the Father, and a principle from a principle, the Son. Now in the created order a principle comes to be known as primary in two ways: in the one from its being first by reason of its relationship to what follows; in the other, from its being first as not following from another. So too, then, the Father is identified as principle in reference to the persons proceeding from him by fatherhood and common spiration; but as he is principle not from a principle, by his not being from another. That is what constitutes the property of not being born, to which the term “unbegotten” refers.⁴⁹

In sum, we can see clearly that Thomas still follows the traditional understanding of the term “Father” in the sense that He is the One from whom the Son is begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds; it is He to whom everything owes their being. However, Thomas explains it in a more systematic and appealing manner to human reason.

this individual man; through them he differs from all others. Now that which distinguishes the person of the Father from all others is fatherhood. Thus the name ‘Father,’ signifying his fatherhood, is the name proper to the person of the Father [*Unde proprium nomen personae patris est hoc nomen pater, quod significat paternitatem*],” (Ibid., a. 2).

⁴⁸ Ibid., a. 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid., a. 4.

1.3.3. John Paul II

John Paul II has written an encyclical on God the Father called *Dives in Misericordia* (1980). This encyclical comprises eight major sections. It contains one hundred and three paragraphs. It generally exposes the theme of God as the Father who is rich in mercy. John Paul II begins his encyclical on the Father with the affirmation that “It is ‘God who is rich in mercy’ (Eph 2:4) whom Jesus Christ has revealed to us as Father.”⁵⁰ In this affirmation, John Paul II would like to point out to us that mercy is God’s very essence. In this sense, mercy is another concrete face of love. Concretely, then, when love faces the reality of man’s sin, it acquires a new but profounder name, that is mercy. This merciful God is the One whom Jesus Christ has revealed to man as Father.⁵¹

As he has pointed out in *Redemptor Hominis*, John Paul II affirms once again that in and through Jesus, we discover an inseparable link between the knowledge of God, the Father, and the knowledge of man. He writes: “Man cannot be manifested in the full dignity of his nature without reference – not only on the level of concepts but also in an integrally existential way – to God. Man and man’s lofty calling are revealed in Christ through the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love.”⁵² Indeed, Jesus is the full embodied revelation of the Father, “He who sees me sees the Father” (Jn 14:9). In this sense, the face of Jesus radiates the face of his Father who is merciful. On the other hand, man is called to open his heart to Christ, if he wants to enter into a deep relationship with God, the Father of mercies.

According to John Paul II, God is the Father in the sense that He is the “Source of Love and Mercy.” This theme is a combination of the two passages taken from First Letter of St. John, “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8) and Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians, “God, who is rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4). However, for John Paul II, it is through Jesus that “God is love and rich in mercy” is brought to light. He writes:

⁵⁰ *Dives in Misericordia* (DiM), 1.

⁵¹ For an in-depth exposition of the Fatherhood of God, see Antonio López, “God the Father: A Beginning without Beginning,” *Communio* 36, no. 2 (2009): 219-258.

⁵² *DiM*, 1.

Christ, then, reveals God who is Father, who is ‘love,’ as Saint John will express it in his First Letter (1 Jn 4:16); Christ reveals God as ‘rich in mercy,’ as we read in Saint Paul. This truth is not just a subject of a teaching; it is a reality made present to us by Christ. *Making the Father present as love and mercy is, in Christ’s own consciousness*, the fundamental touchstone of his mission as the Messiah; this is confirmed by the words that uttered first in the synagogue at Nazareth and later in the presence of his disciples and of John the Baptist’s messengers.⁵³

“God is love” (1 Jn 4:8), St. John affirms. The love of God turns into mercy when it addresses and embraces man in his suffering and pain, especially the suffering and pain that are the results of sin. Regarding this, John Paul II essays:

Especially through his (Jesus’) lifestyle and through his action, Jesus revealed that love is present in the world in which we live – an effective love – a love that addresses itself to man and embraces everything that makes up his humanity. This love makes itself particularly noticed in contact with suffering, injustice and poverty – in contact with the whole historical “human condition” – which in various ways manifests man’s limitation and frailty, both physical and moral. *It is precisely the mode and sphere in which love manifests itself that in biblical language is called “mercy.”*⁵⁴

When it comes to “mercy,” John Paul II points out, “some theologians affirm that mercy is the greatest of the attributes and perfections of God, and the Bible, Tradition and the whole faith life of the people of God provide particular proofs of this.”⁵⁵ Mercy sometimes becomes an “adjective” (an attribute of) for love. And this is what John Paul II uses in his encyclical to describe God’s essence. Yet, God’s love is not any kind of love, but rather it is the kind of

⁵³ Ibid., 3. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 13.

love that expresses itself concretely in mercy. Furthermore, for Him the merciful love of God by its essence, is a creative love.⁵⁶ Merciful love is creative because it does not focus on itself, but rather it looks for the good of others. In this sense, redemption and creation is one. They are inseparable.⁵⁷ They do not come one after the other, but interpenetrate one another.

Moreover, in the economy of salvation, love is seen as the “only reason” for God to create,⁵⁸ and mercy is seen as the “only way” for man to achieve redemption.⁵⁹ Hence, as creation and redemption are inseparable, so are love and mercy. Why is mercy important in the economy of salvation? John Paul II has pointed out in the Encyclical that mercy, ever since the Old Testament times had been regarded as an attribute of God. It has a long and rich history. In fact, the Old Testament uses different terms and concepts to speak of the mercy of God.⁶⁰

God as “Father of mercies” is experienced in a special manner when man is inflicted with suffering and pain, especially the suffering caused by sin. No other parable can poignantly capture the mercy who is the Father than the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In fact, it is in the context of prodigality that we are called to reflect on God,

⁵⁶ See *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁷ See Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption and Special Divine Action* (Hindmarsh: ATF, 2010).

⁵⁸ See CCC, no. 295; see also Edwards, *How God Acts*, 57-75.

⁵⁹ See Theological-Historical Commission for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, *God the Father of Mercy* (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 1998), 43-57.

⁶⁰ See *Ibid.*, footnote 52. For example, “hānan” means the manifestation of grace, which involves a constant predisposition to be generous, benevolent and merciful; the verb “hāmal” literally means “to spare” but also “to show mercy and compassion,” and consequently forgiveness and remission of guilt; “hūs” expresses pity and compassion, but especially in the affective sense.

To understand the term “mercy,” we have to put it in the context of “covenant” – covenant between God and Israel. Throughout the history of Israel, this covenant was often broken. Whenever Israel became aware of its infidelity, it called on God for mercy. This is made clear during the time of the prophets, who linked mercy with people’s sins. For the prophets, God, who loves his people whom he has chosen for his own sake, pardons their sins and infidelities and betrayal. Whenever people repent, He pardons them: “In the preaching of the prophets mercy signifies a special power of love, which prevails over sin and infidelity of the chosen people,” (*DiM*, 4).

the Father of mercies not in an abstract term, but in a concrete situation wherein each man who as one united with Christ, will be shown mercy. According to John Paul II, “the parable indirectly touches upon every breach of the covenant of love, every loss of grace, every sin.”⁶¹

The situation of the prodigal son personifies the current state of modern man. The prodigal son has received from his father the inheritance (“the image and likeness “), which belongs to him. This inheritance comprises a quantity of material goods, and most importantly, the dignity as a son in his father’s house.⁶² After squandering his inheritance, he comes to realize that he does not simply lose what he has (possession), but also what he is (a son). It is here that we see the inseparability between what man has and what man is. What man has is also as important as what he is. Without what he has, he will be deprived of what he needs to be – what he is.

In his commentary on the Parable of the Prodigal Son, John Paul II touches home-base by stating that mercy is the expression of the relationship between justice and love.”Love is transformed into mercy when it is necessary to go beyond the precise norm of justice – precise and often narrow.”⁶³ Love concerns not what the person has, but the person himself. In other words, love concerns the dignity of the person one loves. This is what the father in the parable did.⁶⁴ John Paul II explains:

⁶¹ *DiM*, 5.

⁶² See *Ibid*.

⁶³ *DiM*, 5.

⁶⁴ From his commentary, we can surmise that for William Barclay this parable has threefold truth: (1) the parable should never have been called the parable of the Prodigal Son, for the son is not the hero. It should be called the parable of the Loving Father, for it tells us rather about a father’s love than a son’s sin; (2) the parable tells us much about the forgiveness of God. The father must have been waiting and watching for the son to come home, for he saw him a long way off. When he came, he forgave him with no recriminations; and (3) it is easier to confess to God than it is to many a man; that God is more merciful in his judgments than many an orthodox man; that the love of God is far broader than the love of man; and that God can forgive when men refuse to forgive. In face of a love like that we cannot be other than lost in wonder, love and praise,” (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, rev. ed. [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975], 205-206).

The love for the son, the love that springs from the very essence of fatherhood, in a way obliges the father to be concerned about his son's dignity. This concern is the measure of his love, the love of which Saint Paul was to write: "Love is patient and kind... love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful... but rejoices in the right... hopes all things, endures all things" and "love never ends" (1 Cor 13:1-8).⁶⁵

In this love, the person does not feel humiliated but rather loved. With this love, God, the Father of mercies, comes to each man in every age to lift him up from the lowly situation since, "He has mercy on those who fear Him in every generation" (Lk 1:50). This is *agape*, existentially as "merciful" love.

In sum, with John Paul II, the understanding of the terms "God as the Father" who is the Origin of all things to whom all things owe their existence shifts to the understanding of God as the Father from whom mercy flows. He is not only the One to whom all things owe their existence, but also the One who is the source of renewal.

2. Don Bosco as Father

It is undeniable that "the Salesian spirit is found incarnate in the Founder, St. John Bosco."⁶⁶ As Salesians and followers of Don Bosco, we are asked to go back to his example, his way of life. He is our model on how to be a "father" and "teacher" for the young of today. The Special General Chapter of the Salesian Congregation speaks of Don Bosco not as an abstract figure, but as a person who is "alive and at work in the midst of his boys, throughout the period

According to Michael Fallon, it is the unconditional love of the father that moves the son to true repentance. The father's love shows the son that it is the father-son relationship that is paramount, not the lost property. Thus, mending the relationship is something that the son cannot do for his scheming; it depends on the father's grace, (see Michael Fallon, *The Gospel According to Saint Luke* [Bangalore, India: Asian Trading Corporation, 2002], 257).

⁶⁵ *DiM*, 6.

⁶⁶ *The Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco*, 236.

of his apostolic life.”⁶⁷ Indeed, Don Bosco is always alive and at work among the young people as a “father.”

2.1. The Fatherhood of Don Bosco

The Salesian Constitutions singles out two qualities of Don Bosco: “The Lord has given us Don Bosco *as father* and teacher.”⁶⁸ This echoes what has stated in article 1 of the same Constitutions: “The Spirit formed within him *the heart of a father* and teacher, capable of total self-giving: ‘I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys’.”⁶⁹ Let us briefly look into Don Bosco as a father.

The image of “father,” applied to Don Bosco, derives from the mysterious divine fatherhood as St. Paul exclaims: “This, then, is what I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every fatherhood, in heaven or on earth, takes its name” (Eph 3:15). The fatherhood of Don Bosco is nothing but an imitation and reflection of God’s Fatherhood. It is Don Bosco who had tasted the goodness and providential care of God’s fatherhood that in his turn he lived this experience among his poor youth. He is true to what St. Paul said: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). He is the perfect “imitator” of God’s Fatherhood as Christ has been.

It is surprising to note that the fatherhood of Don Bosco does not limit to “spiritual” sense, but his fatherhood is something very “simple and *human*.” Here we would like to stress on the term “human” since it will help us to understand how Don Bosco’s fatherhood analogously understood in the “physical or biological” sense. In fact, Don Bosco’s fatherhood is modelled “on the simple and human qualities of a father of a family; both evoke in the Salesian and in the community the idea of kindness, attention, availability and forgiveness.”⁷⁰ The “human aspect” of Don Bosco’s fatherhood is not suppressed by his spiritual fatherhood. We find this

⁶⁷ Special General Chapter, *Don Bosco at the Oratory: Enduring Criterion for the Renewal of Salesian Action*, 192.

⁶⁸ Salesian Constitutions, art. 21. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁹ Salesian Constitutions, art. 1. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁰ *The Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco*, 238.

in the comments on Salesian Constitutions: The qualities of Don Bosco's "human fatherhood" were not suppressed, but permeated by the divine. These qualities express themselves in this manner:

He [Don Bosco] was "deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people," "open to the realities of this earth"; able to inspire esteem, confidence and affection because he was able to love; he was a formative educator, "an idealist and realist who would try anything but at the same time show prudence" (Daniel-Rops); "a giant with massive arms with which he has managed to draw the whole universe to himself" (Card. Nina to Leo XIII); a "dreamer (how many "dreams" he had during his life...) but very much down to earth in what he achieved."⁷¹

Furthermore, the Salesian Constitutions speaks of all Don Bosco's rich gifts of nature and grace placed him at the service of a unique mission in "a closely-knit life project." In him the human and divine aspects were intimately united in the single mission for the salvation of youth.⁷² Yet, Don Bosco is a man with a fixed idea always in mind, which becomes ever broader in detail but remains essentially that of the dream at the age of nine, and will do so until his dying breath: save the young, and especially the poorest of them. This service to youth prompted him to undertake courageous enterprises. He realizes them with "firmness, constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart, in the midst of difficulties and fatigue."⁷³

The fatherhood of Don Bosco is manifested through his firmness and constancy:

Firmness to undertake initiatives that called for a lot of courage, sometimes flying in the face of traditional ideals and ways of doing things; firmness to accept the hard work and toil of his ministry, even to the extent of dying of bodily exhaustion. For a man driven on by

⁷¹ Ibid., 240.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ See Ibid., 240-241.

such holy zeal, he nevertheless had a great and delicate tenderness; it sprang from a heart deeply touch by the wretchedness of the young and the injustices suffered by the lowly; the tenderness of the heart of a father which made him attentive to each one of his children, anxious for their good, sad when he had to be away from them; the tenderness finally of the heart of a child which gave him trust and joy before the infinitely good God, and before the Virgin Mary, the Mother of his family.⁷⁴

With firmness and constancy as described, Don Bosco had loved all his boys and each of them wholeheartedly in the Lord. We find here in Don Bosco's love what we find in God's Fatherhood understood by the Old Testament. Let us single out three prominent features of fatherhood of Don Bosco as imitation of Fatherhood of God presented in the Old Testament.

First, in the Old Testament the concept of God as Father has two sense, collective and individualistic: God as the Father of Israel and God as the Father of individuals like David, Solomon, etc. We find these traits in the person of Don Bosco. He loved the young as collective personality and at the same time as individual. He often said: "That *you are young* is enough to make me love you very much."⁷⁵ In this saying, it is certain that Don Bosco loved the young as a collective personality. In this sense, there is no youngster excluded from Don Bosco's heart. On the other hand, Don Bosco's love for the young was not restricted to collective and abstract sense. Rather his love for the young became so personal, so intimate that he knew each of them by name and he loved each of them in a very unique and unrepeatable manner. This fatherly love of Don Bosco is beautifully expressed in his Letter from Rome in 1884:

Whether I am at home or away I am always thinking of you. I have only one wish, to see you happy both in this world and in the next. It was this idea, this wish of mine, that made me write this letter. Being away from you, not being able to see or hear you, upsets me more than you can imagine. For that reason I would have liked to

⁷⁴ See Ibid., 241.

⁷⁵ Salesian Constitutions, art. 14. Emphasis mine.

write these few lines to you a week ago, but constant work prevented me. And so, although I shall be back very soon, I want to send you this letter in advance, since I cannot yet be with you in person. *These words come from someone who loves you very dearly in Christ Jesus, someone who has duty of speaking to you with the freedom of a father.* You'll let me do that won't you? And you will pay attention to what I am going to say you, and put it into practice.⁷⁶

Second, in the Old Testament, the term “father” is used in relation to the concept of “election.” It is God-Yahweh who has chosen Israel as his first-born son. This is the relationship of choice, of predilection. We find this choice or predilection perfectly reflected in Don Bosco when he was asked by Marchioness Barolo to choose between his poor boys and the position of chaplaincy in her institutes. Don Bosco had chosen his poor boys. It is worthwhile to narrate their conversation here:

Having made up her mind, she went to Don Bosco one day and said: “I am very pleased with the work you are doing for my institutes. I am particularly grateful to you for introducing hymns, plain chant, and organ music during church services, as well as for teaching arithmetic and the metric system in the school, along with so many other practical things.”

“There is no need to thank me, Madame,” Don Bosco replied. “A priest has a moral obligation to work. I was only doing my duty and God will reward me, I am sure, if I deserve it.”...

“But I cannot stand by and see you kill yourself. Whether you realize it or not, trying to do so many different things at the same time is only ruining your health, and it may also hurt my own institutes. Then, there are rumors going about...with regard to your mental faculties. I am, therefore, obliged to advise you...”

“To do what Madame? “

“To give up either your oratory or my hospital. Think it over, and give me your decision at your convenience.”

“I have already thought it over, and I can give you my answer now: you have money and means, and you will have no trouble in finding all the priests you want to direct your institutes. But *poor boys have*

⁷⁶ MB XVIII, 107-114; see also Appendix of Salesian Constitutions 1984, 254. Emphasis mine.

*nothing, and that is why I cannot and must not forsake them. If I were to give them up now, the work of several years would be lost. So from now on I shall gladly do all I can for the Rifugio, but not as a full chaplain. I am giving up this post to devote myself more fully to the care of these boys.”*⁷⁷

Third, as O’Collins has stated, “naming God “Father” expresses His deep involvement in the story of Israel, its kingly leaders, and its righteous ones. Expressed differently, the Fatherhood of God indicates his personal involvement in the life of Israel. This is what Don Bosco had picked up. He completely involved in the life of the young in general and each youngster in particular. He took delight in their interests and anxieties. Regarding this, P. Ruffinato comments:

Don Bosco’s love for these boys manifested itself in practical and timely way. *He took an interest in the whole of their lives recognizing their more urgent needs and with an insight into those most hidden.* To say that his heart was totally dedicated to the boys meant that the whole of his being, intellect, heart and will, his physical strength, everything he was and had was directed towards their good, in fostering their all-around development, and with the desire for their eternal salvation. For Don Bosco, therefore, being a man of the heart meant being totally consecrated to the good of his boys and devoting to them all his strength to his last breath.⁷⁸

By and large, we can affirm that all his life, Don Bosco displayed a father’s heart. He said to his Salesians: “No matter in what remote part of the world, you may never forget that here in Italy you have a father who loves you in the Lord.”⁷⁹ And we recall here also the heart-rending appeal in the Letter from Rome of 1884: “Do you know what this poor old man who has spent his whole life for his dear boys wants from you?...that you should go back to the days

⁷⁷ BM II, 357-359. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁸ P. Ruffinato, *Educhiamo con il Cuore di Don Bosco* in “Note di Pastorale Giovanile,” (no. 6/2007): 9. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁹ BM XI, 362.

of affection and Christian confidence between boys and superiors; the days when we accepted and put up with difficulties for the love of Jesus Christ; the days when hearts were open with a simple candour; days of love and real joy for everyone.”⁸⁰ Don Bosco is indeed a father in imitation of the fatherhood of God!⁸¹

2.2. Don Bosco’s Mission: To Be Sign of God’s Fatherly Love as Jesus Did

This section is the presentation of how the term “father” revealed by Jesus in the New Testament has its bearing on Don Bosco’s mission, to be a father to his poor boys. To be more specific, we would like to explore how Don Bosco had learned and imitated from Jesus the art of revealing the Fatherhood of God to people, especially the young.

To begin with we need to affirm that we are all God’s children. This is not only a fact, but also a reality of faith. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that in Baptism we become sons and daughters of God and so brothers and sisters to one another.⁸² However, it is sad to say the image of God as Father is not much appreciated in today world wherein the image of a father in the family (biological sense) or in religious life (spiritual sense) has been distorted by human weakness and scandal. For this reason, we always need someone to remind and to reflect God’s fatherly love for us in imitation of Jesus Christ. It is without any doubt that the fatherhood has been mostly and completely reflected in the saints, who are “perfect imitators” of the Son. And among them is Don Bosco.

To understand of the fatherhood of Don Bosco, we need to return to Jesus, who reflected perfectly the loving face of God the Father. We do this by examining the task/s which Jesus is sent to

⁸⁰ MB XVIII, 107-114; see also Appendix of Salesian Constitutions 1984, 263.

⁸¹ *Project of Life of Salesians of Don Bosco*, 238.

⁸² “Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: “Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word,” (CCC, no. 1213).

perform. According to Francis J. Moloney, one of the tasks that Jesus claims to have brought to perfection, to have accomplished and thereby glorified God, is to make God known by telling the saving story of God (see 1:18; 20:30-31). However, what sort of God must Jesus made known?⁸³

St. John the Evangelist tells us that the God who Jesus comes to make known is “*A God who loves the world so much*” (3:16-17). He is a Father, who “causes His sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike” (Mt 5:45). The relationship between God, the Father and the Son is very personal, intimate, and dynamic. Regarding this, Moloney comments:

The relationships between God and the Word and between the Father and the Son, and the eventual relationship between Jesus and his own, are dynamic. In other words, the nature of the relationship between God and the Word in the Prologue (1:1-3), spills out into the dynamic nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son in the story. The oneness of God and the Logos in the prologue is further spelled out in the relationship between the Father and the Son in the story.⁸⁴

Moloney points out that toward the end of the Gospel Jesus spells out the reason he has made God known. He asks the Father that believers be swept into the relationship with God that He has had from all time: “Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ... I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (17:24, 26). The love that has existed from all time between God and the Word, between the Father and the Son, has burst into the human story. Jesus has made it known so that others might be

⁸³ See Francis J. Moloney, *Love in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2013), 54-69.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

swept into that same relationship.⁸⁵ This is exactly what Don Bosco had done. For Don Bosco, the heart of his educational and evangelizing mission is the “pastoral charity.” It is the love of the Good Shepherd who is ready to lay down his life for the sheep. In fact, Don Bosco’s whole life was spent to sweep the young people into the loving relationship with God the Father which he had.

According to Moloney, “God can be known only through his relationships: loving the world so much that He sends his only Son in an act of ‘handing over’ (3:16). If the accomplishment of Jesus’ mission is to make God known, and God’s love for the world generates the sending and handing over of the Son, the task of Jesus is to make love known. How does Jesus make love known? Jesus certainly speaks about love, but as is normal among human beings, he also (and perhaps especially) manifests love in what he does, as well as in what he says.”⁸⁶ This is what Don Bosco had picked up. He manifested his fatherly love for the young through his actions and words. In fact, “he took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young. Truly the only concern of his heart was for souls.”⁸⁷

Indeed, Don Bosco had become a perfect “reminder” and a “reflection” of God’s fatherly love for the people of his time, especially the young. Father Michael T. Winstanley writes:

I believe that Don Bosco was raised up by God to be sign and bearer of God’s love for the young people. As a human being and a committed disciple of Jesus, he sought to reach out to young people, especially the more needy ones, and to enable them to experience the love of God touching their lives. He ‘pitched his tent’ in their midst; he shared their world; he shared their concerns; he shared their lives; he accepted them, was a source of healing, of meaning, of new life. In and through all this he sought to draw them into the circle of God’s love and life. And for him, like Jesus, the key was his presence, his

⁸⁵ Ibid., 56-57.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁸⁷ Don Rua, 24 August 1894, quoted in *Salesian Constitutions*, art. 21.

‘being with,’ his “abiding,” his being there, and the quality and style of that presence.⁸⁸

As we reflect on the Fatherhood of God and that of Don Bosco, let us relax into reality, the reality of our abiding in God and God in us. Let’s reflect also on the quality of our “reflection” of God’s Fatherhood for others. Our presence in the world with the young as educators to the faith, with those with whom or for whom we work, those we seek to serve, be it in parishes, training centers or formation houses, should be a reminder and witness of the Fatherly love of God. May the revelation of Fatherhood by Jesus through love teach us how to do the same!

Conclusion

In general, the Father, theologically speaking, is the Unoriginated. He is the Principle and Source from whom the Son and the Holy Spirit immanently originated and proceed, and economically are sent. This title undoubtedly safeguards this confession of the Father. However, the Father’s love and mercy does not pour on man as an abstract entity, but directly on a concrete man (the younger son – the prodigal son). Said differently, the Father’s love is concrete and personal. Here lies the novelty of this title. Thus, in the field of experience (in the economy of salvation) the Father’s merciful love flows on each concrete man with whom Jesus has united in his incarnation.

Indeed, Jesus is the full embodied revelation of the Father, “He who sees me sees the Father” (Jn 14:9). In this sense, the face of Jesus radiates the face of his Father who is merciful. On the other hand, man is called to open his heart to Christ, if he wants to enter

⁸⁸ Michael T. Winstanley, *Symbols and Spirituality: Reflecting on John’s Gospel* (Makati: Metro Manila: Word & Life Publications, 2013), 202-203.

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into a deep relationship with God, the Father of mercies. For his part, Don Bosco had imitated Jesus. He radiated the face of God, who is loving and merciful to his boys. In so doing, he brought them into a deep relationship with God, the Father of mercies. It is here that we can affirm that Don Bosco is truly a father patterned after the Fatherhood of God.

FRAGILITY IN THE LIFE OF MARY MAZZARELLO

by Maria Maul

Introduction

In the altar of the large church to St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello in Mornese-Mazzarelli, a vertebra of her backbone has been inserted as a symbol of her upright personality and her inner strength.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Fr. Alberto Cavaglià, in his celebratory lecture on 14 May 1932, at the end of the Jubilee Year with which the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) celebrated the 50th anniversary of Mary Mazzarello's death, compared her to the "strong and wise women" of the Book of Proverbs (cf. Prov 31).¹

Eliane Anschau Petri FMA, in her 2018 theological hermeneutics of the testimonies in the beatification and canonization

¹ Cf. Alberto Caviglia, *L'eredità spirituale di suor Maria Mazzarello. Commemorazione cinquantenaria*, in Alois Kothgasser – G. Battista Lemoyne – Alberto Caviglià, *Maria Domenica Mazzarello. Profezia di una vita*, Rome, Institut FMA 1996, 115.

processes, entitled *La santità di Maria Domenica Mazzarello* (= The Sanctity of Mary Domenica Mazzarello), confirms that the cardinal virtue of fortitude was a typical characteristic of Mary Mazzarello, already recognized in the Curia of Acqui's apostolic process in 1932.

Particularly evident was the spirit of Christian strength of Mary Domenica Mazzarello. Card. Parocchi, during the homily in Sacred Heart Church in Rome on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Institute, affirmed that Don Bosco and *Mother* Mazzarello have, one could say, exchanged much. Don Bosco as a man could have become holy, it seems, through fortitude, and *Mother* Mazzarello, as a woman, through gentleness; instead, Don Bosco became holy through gentleness and *Mother* Mazzarello through fortitude.²

The inner strength that she was given by God and that matured under the wise pedagogical influence of her father, gradually grew to the extent that she had to cope with the many difficulties she encountered in her short life, caused by all kinds of experiences of fragility.

This article does not offer a scholarly study of this topic, but is limited to a careful reading of the primary sources of the FMA Institute, especially the letters of Mary Mazzarello and the first three volumes of the *Cronistoria*, supplemented by references to some recent studies. The traces of fragility that can be found in them will be exemplified in what follows.³

² Eliane Anschau Petri, *La santità di Maria Domenica Mazzarello. Ermeneutica teologica delle testimonianze nei processi di beatificazione e canonizzazione* (= IL PRISMA ed. by Pontifical Faculty of Education Sciences Auxilium, Rome 34), Rome, LAS 2018, 192-193.

³ This presentation was prepared for the *Forum Salesian* in Munich (Germany), August 25-28, 2020, and was delivered in Italian under the title *Fragilità nella vita di Maria Mazzarello* on August 26.

1. Experiences of fragility

1.1. Precarious health

1.1.1. Mary Mazzarello's existential health crisis

For those who think of the fragile situations in Mary Mazzarello's life, the typhoid fever that afflicted her at the age of 23 and gave a decisive turn to her young life, immediately comes to mind. Mary Domenica, in fidelity to the 'exercise of charity' required by the Rule of the Pious Association of the Daughters of the Immaculate, had accepted Fr. Domenico Pestarino's request in 1860 to care for her sick relatives during the epidemic, even though she was convinced that she would catch it. In fact, her premonition came true."The evil struck her in one of its fiercest forms and, even if it spared her life, it forever put an end to the strength that had meant she ranked first among her father's workers."⁴ When the illness took hold of Mary Domenica the roles were reversed. She who was skilled at helping others had to lie in bed and be nursed. It was not easy for her to accept this reversal of the situation because she was a confident person and was used to "always being in control of events"⁵. However, it was precisely the long convalescence that oriented Mary Domenica to dedicate herself to the girls of the village and to recognize, step by step, her "pedagogical vocation"⁶. Thus the house in *via Valgelata*, according to Monica Menegusi FMA and Piera Ruffinatto FMA, became a

'symbolic place' because it was located on a path whose name, by chance, recalled the reality of cold, ice, and death. But [...] beyond the recognizable defeat of the illness and death from which she had miraculously escaped, a new life project is found for Mary. [...] In the Christian view, therefore, the 'crisis' is a 'mystical' place where

⁴ Ana María Fernández, *Le lettere di Maria Domenica Mazzarello. Testimoni e mediazione di una missione carismatica* (= ORIZZONTI ed. by Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione "Auxilium" Rome), Rome, LAS 2006, 31.

⁵ Monica Menegusi and Piera Ruffinatto (ed.), *Con te, Main, sui sentieri della vita. Sussidio progetto Mornese*, Rome, FMA Institute – Formation Sector 2007, 52.

⁶ *Ibid* 55; see also Giselda Capetti (ed.), *Cronistoria. The preparation and the foundation 1828-1872*, vol. 1, Rome, Institute FMA 1974, reprinted 1977, 86-99 (hereafter abbreviated *Cronistoria* = Chronicle).

the heart has the opportunity to purify itself and the gaze of the soul to clarify itself in order to see God with new eyes. [...] The trial thus becomes the ‘place’ of discernment where, in intimate contact with the Cross of Jesus, we learn to choose love even when it brings experiences of suffering.⁷

Mary Domenica recovered to some extent, but she was left with fragile health which apparently deteriorated again twenty years later. At the beginning of February 1881, while accompanying the departing missionaries to Marseilles, she again became very ill. Among other things, she was plagued by severe earache. To Sr. Giuseppina Paccotto she confided the reason for these ailments: “I think I contracted them when, as a youth, I mistakenly got up too early and had to wait outside the church door so as not to wake Fr. Pestarino and the parish priest. Sometimes I was all wet from the rain, other times there was a lot of snow, and the dampness of those days is making itself felt now!”⁸ In fact after the missionaries left, she had to stay in Saint Cyr for several weeks due to pleurisy and a high fever. On her way back to Nizza Monferrato, she met Don Bosco in Nice (France), who announced her imminent death with a symbolic narration.⁹

1.1.2. Dangerous diseases among the first Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

Many of the first FMA were also plagued by various illnesses. Sr. Teresa Laurantoni, for example, was confined to bed for a long time because of a stroke;¹⁰ Sr. Maria Belletti and novice Sr.

⁷ *Con te, Main, sui sentieri della vita* 48-49.

⁸ Giselda Capetti (ed.), *Cronistoria. Da Nizza Monferrato nuova espansione con Madre Mazzarello (1879-1881)*, vol. 3, Rome, Institute FMA 1977, 333-334.

⁹ Cf. *ibid* 337-355.

¹⁰ Cf. Giselda Capetti (ed.), *Cronistoria. The Institute in Mornese the first expansion 1872-1879*, vol. 2, Rome, Institute FMA 1976, 166; Maria Esther Posada, Anna Costa, Piera Cavaglià, *Wisdom of life. Letters of Mary Domenica Mazzarello*, revised and expanded new edition, Rome, FMA Institute 2004 (hereafter abbreviated *Letters*), *Letters* 4,5.10 and 5,2.

Domenica Mina contracted tuberculosis,¹¹ Sr. Luigia Giordano typhoid fever;¹² Sr. Ortensia Negrini had to remain immobile for years because of “very severe asthma.”¹³

It is therefore not surprising that Fr. Giacomo Costamagna, immediately after taking over the spiritual direction of the FMA in Mornese, reported at the annual meeting of Salesian directors on 28 January 1876, “Unfortunately, health leaves much to be desired; two of them are at the end of their lives.”¹⁴

The continuous weakness in health of the first FMA represented one of the reasons that led Don Bosco to move the FMA Institute from Mornese to the former Capuchin convent in Nizza Monferrato in 1878. The *Cronistoria* reports, “All the superiors are always concerned about the failing health of many sisters. They attribute the reason for this to the Mornese air which is too thin for those who cannot feed themselves sufficiently and have to work a lot.”¹⁵

Therefore, in their first meeting in August 1878, while they were still in Mornese, the FMA Superiors established the following preventive measure, “Since the preservation of the physical health of the sisters must be one of the most important duties of the Superiors, see to it that there is no permanent draft in the rooms, especially in winter, and with glass windows and padded blankets eliminate a deficiency that could prove fatal for not a few.”¹⁶

Therefore with prudent caution, Don Bosco also had Doctor Silvio Sannazzaro from Nizza Monferrato prepare a statement on the health suitability of the house in view of the relocation of the

¹¹ Cf. *Cronistoria* II 192-193 and *Letters* 6,8.

¹² Cf. *Cronistoria* II 217.

¹³ *Cronistoria* III 168.

¹⁴ *Relazione di don Giacomo Costamagna sulla comunità di Mornese*, document 66, in Piera Cavaglià and Anna Costa (eds.), *Orme di vita, tracce di futuro. Fonti e testimonianze sulla prima comunità delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (1870-1881)* (= ORIZZONTI ed. by Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione “Auxilium” di Roma), Rome, LAS 1996, 168 (hereafter abbreviated *Orme di vita* = Traces of Life).

¹⁵ *Cronistoria* II 305-306.

¹⁶ *Relazione della prima adunanza delle Superiore FMA, Mornese, agosto 1878*, document 93, in *Orme di vita* 239.

educational Institute at Mornese, which was to be better expanded in a more suitable place, in order to be able to present it to the Provincial Inspector of Schools together with the request for the opening of an elementary school for girls. The doctor confirmed that the convent of *Madonna delle Grazie* “is very suitable and appropriate for an educational Institute because of the healthy building, built in a healthy and dry area, ventilated on all sides, with rooms, corridors, and wide airy halls.”¹⁷

However, despite the excellent conditions and the vaccinations given everyone towards the end of 1879, some sisters contracted smallpox.¹⁸

1.2. Damaged teenage orphans

It is noteworthy that it was precisely typhoid fever with the subsequent long convalescence that proved providential for Mary Domenica. She had an experience that was called “*inspiration*” in the beatification and canonization processes. Carlotta Pestarino, for example, expressed it this way in her testimony, “She had the inspiration to gather many girls to educate them for the good.”¹⁹ The inspiration to learn to sew and then to gather the girls to teach them to sew and to love the Lord gave rise to a true apostolate among the girls for whom she had a special affection.²⁰

The boarding students admitted to the School at Mornese were mostly from rural areas, from families with sound human and Christian principles. Nevertheless, there was no lack of ‘difficult cases’ for whom application of the preventive system required “an effort of creativity and addition of love.”²¹

The teenage orphans who challenged the first FMA and tested their educational abilities came to Mornese each with her own

¹⁷ *Dichiarazione del dott. Silvio Sannazzaro sulla salubrità della casa*, document 96, in *Orme di vita* 250.

¹⁸ Cf. *Cronistoria* III 126, 141.

¹⁹ Anschau Petri, *La santità di Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, 156.

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 285-286.

²¹ *Con te, Main, sui sentieri della vita* 107.

individual story. Each was marked by the inner suffering they had experienced at a young age.

Mary Domenica knew the art of earning the trust of everyone, especially the more difficult girls. She surrounded them with courtesies and attentions, despite the visible caginess and rebellion that some displayed. She avoided imposing on them or emotionally blackmailing them to effect change in them. Instead, she knew how to wait until the opportune moment came for the young people to make personal decisions in freedom. Significant examples of this accompaniment of hers are represented by three young people: Corinna Arrigotti, Maria Belletti, and Emma Ferrero.²²

Corinna²³ had lost her mother. She was intelligent, very sensitive, but stubborn, resistant and reluctant to pray. Mary Domenica applied the “golden rule of the preventive system” in her relationship with Corinna, connecting

energy with gentleness, kindness with firmness [...]. So she surrounded Corinna with loving attentiveness to ‘win her heart’, and also by means of her gentle and penetrating word. She awaited the opportune moment and then one evening, after the others had gone to bed, she stopped Corinna in order to overcome her last resistances and to approach her heart. She began to talk gently to her about her deceased mother. Mary Domenica had waited for the evening to touch the heart of this half-orphan, who perhaps at that very moment remembered her mama’s kiss, and that very maternal gesture took down the defenses of the youth, who let herself be touched by the thought of the emptiness that had spread through her life.²⁴

Maria Belletti²⁵ was an orphan. If in Corinna’s heart there was a certain sadness due to the loneliness she had experienced without the presence of her mother, the absence of both parents had awakened in Maria the need to indulge in an easy life with pleasures

²² Cf. Anschau Petri, *La santità di Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, 288-289.

²³ Cf. *Cronistoria* I 260-262, *Cronistoria* II 7-10, 40, 69-72, 78, 87-88.

²⁴ *Con te, Main, sui sentieri della vita* 108-109.

²⁵ Cf. *Cronistoria* II 129-132, 237-238.

and beautiful clothes. In Mornese, a deep transformation took place in her that opened her to God's call. Mary Domenica had known how to establish a personal relationship with Maria Belletti from the first moment, which led the young person on an authentic path of searching for her vocation.²⁶

Emma Ferrero²⁷ who came from a wealthy family, had lost her mother when she was young. Arriving in Mornese at the age of 18 on the eve of the feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1877, she resisted the suggestions of the sisters, without any interest in participating in the life of the community. Faced with the desperate situation of this young woman, the whole community tried to approach her with attitudes typical of the preventive system. But

the gentleness, the goodness, the kindness of the educators seemed annoying to Emma [...]. This is a typical reaction in many adolescents who have experienced neglect and trauma. Their longing to be loved turns into rejection of attention, into attitudes of harshness and self-sufficiency. This is a form of defense against personal relationships, a way of avoiding attachments that might hurt or disappoint anew, or simply of taking revenge on adults for the suffering they have endured. Such an attitude, called *reactive transfer*, arises from the neurotic need for affective compensations as a result of the chronic lack of affection in the family, of basic insecurity, low self-esteem. Thus, it can happen that a pupil transfers to the educator her own affective needs, which are reactive to the figure of the parents who, in whatever way, she has lacked. This type of reaction can be characterized by an insatiable hunger for tangible signs of affection, which can be expressed in feelings of rapture, or on the contrary, of hatred. In the face of such behavior, the control of the relationship on the part of the educator must start from the consideration of the fact that those feelings are not 'authentic' and not directed against her person, but are merely reactions to the inner discomfort of the adolescent, a language of the unconscious, expressions of their psychological and emotional 'poverty'.²⁸

²⁶ Cf. *Con te, Main, sui sentieri della vita* 109-110.

²⁷ Cf. *Cronistoria* II 295-296, 299-300, *Cronistoria* III 128, 156.

²⁸ *Con te, Main, sui sentieri della vita* 111-112.

Mary Mazzarello, with wise and sensitive pedagogical interventions, helped the educators, especially the assistant Sr. Enrichetta Sorbone, to deal with Emma in a suitable way, so that one day she succeeded in “overcoming the mistrust, the fear, the loneliness and finally let herself be loved.”²⁹

1.3. Mental abnormalities

While the positive development of these three young people proved the effectiveness of Don Bosco’s educational method in the feminine ambience of Mornese, Mary Mazzarello and her fellow sisters also experienced abnormal manifestations that could not be cured with educational interventions. The first community at Mornese was very disturbed, for example, and irritated by the strange behavior, the psychological scurrilities of the young visionary Agostina Simbeni, whom some considered a saint. It was only through the direct intervention of Don Bosco that the sisters finally succeeded in ridding themselves of this postulant, who created a real problem among her fellow candidates.³⁰ Mary Mazzarello, in her letter to Fr. Giovanni Cagliero in early 1876, gave a detailed summary of this pathological case, which manifested itself, among other things in ecstasies, revelations of occult things, and demonic obsessions.³¹ “Come soon and we will tell you all the details of this comedy; for now this is enough.”³²

Sr. Teresa Maritano, on the other hand, apparently did suffer from a mental illness. Gertrud Stickler FMA, in her 1987 paper on “Religious Personality and Discernment of Pathological Experience,” emphasized that “some saints prove to be especially endowed with the gift of discernment, almost of psychological ‘diagnosis’, by pointing out the self-centered and sometimes pathological tendencies of one’s own personality and that of others, which constitute a fundamental obstacle to their religious realization or capacity for love and devotion.”³³ She illustrated this thesis with

²⁹ *Ibid* 113.

³⁰ Cf. *Cronistoria* II 188-205.

³¹ Cf. *Letter* 6,5-7.

³² *Ibid* 6,7.

³³ Gertrud Stickler, *Personalità religiosa e discernimento del vissuto patologico*.

the description of Sr. Teresa's illness that Mary Mazzarello herself addressed to the founder Don Bosco in her letter of October 30, 1880:

As you know well, this poor woman was tormented for a long time by confusion of the mind; now, after a blessing [that she] received from Fr. Cerruti, she tells me that she has really remained calm. But instead since then a physical evil showed itself, an illness that keeps her in bed with a low fever, an ever-burning thirst, sore throat, disturbances in the organic functions etc., etc.

But what is more is that she is always asleep, she has an almost constant numbness and is always almost nonsensical, almost as if she had become feeble-minded. The doctor comes every day, he prescribes something for her, but now that he sees she is always at the same point after about twenty days of treatment, he doesn't know what to say. The physical evil is there, I'm convinced of that, but I'm also afraid that this is a consequence of past moral evils, or a change of those same ailments.³⁴

According to Gertrud Stickler, Maria Mazzarello's capacity for psychological discernment "is all the more surprising because in the common spirituality of the time the psychological and moral-ascetic conception of personality was often confused, to the detriment of the person, and inasmuch as the writer could certainly not have been up to date with the first hypotheses and corresponding studies on the relationships between somatic and psychological disorders that were developing in the medical field precisely at that time."³⁵

Mary Mazzarello personally took care of the sick sister: "... after a few days [in March 1879] Mother takes the road to Biella with Sr. Maritano, who was suffering from melancholy and scruples: perhaps – she thinks – a little trip will do good to the health of the

Sapere «prescientifico» e scientifico a confronto, in Maria Esther Posada (ed.), *Attuale perché vera. Contributi su S. Maria Domenica Mazzarello* (= IL PRISMA ed. by Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione «Auxilium» di Roma 6), Rome, LAS 1987, 177.

³⁴ Letter 48,2-3.

³⁵ Stickler, *Personalità religiosa e discernimento del vissuto patologico*, in *Attuale perché vera* 184-185.

dear sister. ... Mother goes to the Sanctuary at Oropa, taking Sr. Maritano with her so that she herself may ask Our Lady to finally cure her of so much unnecessary sadness.”³⁶ The *Cenni biografici of the FMA Institute* report that Sr. Teresa died on 15 January 1884, at the age of 25, at her family home in Cumiana where she had gone in search of a little health.³⁷

1.4. *Inconsistency in relation to vocation*

After the promising beginning of the Institute of the FMA on 5 August 1872, the young community soon experienced the unstable vocations of some sisters who, in fact, did not continue on the path they had chosen. Already at the end of 1875, Mary Mazzarello wrote to Fr. Giovanni Cagliero, “Now comes the sad [news]. A few days after Clothing came the ‘unclothing’. Sr. Angela Bacchialoni was the first. On the 14th of the 12th month she left for Turin with Fr. Rua. On Tuesday, 21st of the month, Sr. Maria Arecco took off the Holy Habit and returned to her own house. Sister Felice is still here but before the year ends she will leave with the sister and then go to the Cottolengo if they will accept her.”³⁸

On 30 March 1876, Sr. Angela Jandet, one of the first eleven FMAs, startled the community by fleeing the house while the sisters were in the chapel.³⁹ She had entered as a teacher at the age of 24 and left even before the dispensation from vows requested of Don Bosco had arrived, after a rather arduous religious life because she could not get used to the ‘rules of the house’.⁴⁰

Despite her sure intuition, Mary Mazzarello was also not sure about Sr. Caterina Lucca, who “had wrung permission from Fr. Cagliero to travel to America with him on 3 February 1881, despite the contrary opinion expressed by Mother.”⁴¹ Therefore, on the day preceding the departure of the missionaries, Mary Mazzarello

³⁶ *Cronistoria* III 24-25.

³⁷ Cf. Stickler, *Personalità religiosa e discernimento del vissuto patologico*, in *Attuale perché vera* 186.

³⁸ *Letter* 4,4 (see also 4,9).

³⁹ Cf. *Letter* 5,3.

⁴⁰ *Cronistoria* II 176.

⁴¹ *Cronistoria* III 320.

reflected for a few hours and “from her words one could see how she was concerned for the soul of a poor person who had strayed from the right path of virtue (Lucca).”⁴² In fact, Sr. Caterina had already left the Institute on 1 June 1881⁴³ – a very painful experience both for Sr. Giuseppina Pacotto, the sister in charge of the third group of missionaries who went to Uruguay,⁴⁴ as well as for Mary Mazzarello herself, “Mother returns again and again to the thought,” commented the chronicler, “that if there were or would be scandals, it was all her fault. If she had been more resolute in opposing that departure, or better, if she had spoken more clearly with Don Bosco ..., perhaps then those consequences could have been avoided. Increasingly, she became better aware, as she had said at other times, of the need to place the Congregation in hands more suitable than hers.”⁴⁵

1.5. *Disturbed relations*

1.5.1. With the Daughters of the Immaculate

Mary Domenica also experienced fragile situations at the relational level from the beginning of her intense spiritual path, which became more and more consistent after she joined the group of Daughters of the Immaculate Conception, newly created in 1855.

When Mary Domenica and Petronilla began their activities on behalf of the girls of the village in 1862 and received the first two semi-orphans in 1863, the “first thorns of the apostolic life” were felt by them on the part of some of the older FMI, who considered “the innovations as exaggerations of independent minds.”⁴⁶ It is not surprising, therefore, that in 1863, when at the end of the three years of leadership by teacher Angela Maccagno, Maín’s name also came up at the moment of election, “the older ones expressed open

⁴² *Relazione della prima adunanza delle Superiore FMA, Mornese, agosto 1878*, document 122, in *Orme di vita* 329.

⁴³ Cf. *Relazione di don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne sulla malattia e morte di madre Maria D. Mazzarello*, document 122, footnote 6, in *Orme di vita* 329.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Cronistoria* III 360-361.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid* 361.

⁴⁶ *Cronistoria* I 135-136.

discontent and almost hostile aversion to the recognition of so much authority for so young a person ...”⁴⁷

The discontent reignited in the spring of 1864 to such an extent that Fr. Pestarino felt compelled to order Main a “painful consequence”, namely to retire to Valponasca for about a month until “it seemed to him that spirits were calmed.”⁴⁸

The disgruntlement came to a head again when, in 1867, at Fr. Pestarino’s invitation, Mary Domenica moved into the house of the Immaculate Conception next to the parish church to live there and form a small community with three companions and three girls under Don Bosco’s guidance.⁴⁹

1.5.2. With the residents of Mornese and Nizza Monferrato

Mary Mazzarello and her sisters had to suffer as well from the temporary offensive reactions of the people of both Mornese and Nizza Monferrato. From 1871 at the latest, a very painful situation developed for Fr. Domenico Pestarino, Mary Domenica, and the first FMAs. Because the diocese of Acqui had vetoed admission of boys and clerics of the village into the school built with the help of the whole population, Don Bosco had destined the new house for the future sisters who would take care of the girls.⁵⁰ The discussions that had arisen after the move of the FMI with Mary Domenica and the girls from the house of the Immaculate Conception to the school during the night of 23-24 May 1872, resulted in a change of attitude of the people of Mornese towards Fr. Pestarino after the foundation of the FMA Institute on 5 August 1872:

“Don Pestarino [...] had to feel the emptiness and loneliness after Don Bosco had left Could they perhaps still think that his compatriots might have false hopes about the fate of the school and a merely provisional stay of the daughters [in it]? The unusual

⁴⁷ *Ibid* 138.

⁴⁸ *Ibid* 142-145.

⁴⁹ Cf. *ibid* 194.

⁵⁰ Cf. *ibid* 248.

coldness with which they received Don Bosco was already an explicit manifestation of their thoughts. ... The presence of the Bishop at the function placed the sisters under a strong protector against the most audacious who would not have gathered, even if the bishop had returned to Acqui. Nevertheless, there always remained the pain of knowing people were irritated, convinced that they had been deceived, and not being able to tell the truth at any price.”⁵¹

In fact on the part of the townspeople, the “different way of feeling and acting”⁵² increased. Mary Mazzarello and the first sisters suffered with Fr. Pestarino who, according to the *Cronistoria*, experienced open threats and felt that he was considered a traitor.⁵³

The hostile and ambiguous attitude of some inhabitants of Mornese towards Don Bosco and the FMA continued to such an extent “that a certain Mr. Pastore, Municipal Councilor, proposed to the Municipality to remove both the Salesian and the Sister from the public schools, to replace them with secular elements over whom he could more freely exercise his authority.”⁵⁴

The notary Antonio Traverso of Mornese, who was a Municipal Councilor at Gavi, therefore suggested to Don Bosco that he move the FMA house from Mornese to nearby Gavi, where the inhabitants would have gladly welcomed the new educational institute.”He assured him that he knew well the attitude of the people who on the one hand would express regret, but on the other were cold and ungrateful towards the institution founded by Don Bosco.”⁵⁵ Fr. Giacomo Costamagna also supported this proposal and he too presented it to his ‘dear papa’ Don Bosco.⁵⁶

As the *Cronistoria* reports, in this situation Salesian Fr. Francesco Bodrato, native of Mornese, was sent expressly to

⁵¹ *Ibid* 290, 312.

⁵² *Cronistoria* II 9.

⁵³ Cf. *ibid* 9-14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid* 209-210.

⁵⁵ *Letter del notaio Antonio Traverso a don Bosco*, document 73, in *Orme di vita* 183.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Lettera di don Giacomo Costamagna a don Bosco*, document 72, in *ebda* 180-181.

Mornese to tell his compatriots clearly that “this step would be the last straw that would make Don Bosco decide to move his work for the girls elsewhere, even if only to Gavi, Serravalle or Novi, which were more important centers than Mornese ...” This would certainly be a disadvantage for the town, which was so incapable of seeing the benefit of having such an educational institute.⁵⁷ The honest advice of Fr. Bodrato seemed to calm the waters in this dispute, “but it is easy to suppose how much it impacted on Mother’s mind.”⁵⁸

The skepticism towards the sisters continued also in Nizza Monferrato. The first reason for this arose already in the spring of 1879 with the admission of the young Jewish woman Annetta Bedarida, who wanted to convert to the Catholic faith. Because of the intransigence of her family, a very difficult period followed.”In the city everyone talks about the sisters, some for them, others against them, more against than for, of course, because of the old habit of attributing the most ignoble deeds to religious.”⁵⁹ According to the testimony of the *Cronistoria*, at the beginning of the presence of the FMA in the *Madonna della Grazia* Institute, some women were even “beneath the windows shouting like furies, ‘Poor young people, what have you come here to die for? Go back home ... Death to the sisters’!”⁶⁰

1.6. *Painful detachments*

While on the one hand Mary Mazzarello experienced fragile relationships with people who were close to her, on the other hand she had to feel all the more the separation from the 26 young sisters who went to the missions in South America – both she and they knew that these were farewells without reunion. The last gestures were therefore touching, as for example on November 14, 1877 in Sampierdarena: “From the bridge, the emotional group waves. Don Bosco turns with a last long look. Mother Mazzarello can hardly hold

⁵⁷ *Cronistoria* II 210.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Cronistoria* III 48-49.

⁶⁰ *Ibid* 52; Anschau Petri, *La santità di Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, 184-185.

back her tears. Fr. Cagliero wants to say something humorous to raise their spirits, but does not succeed.”⁶¹

At the same time, Mary Mazzarello had to prepare herself for the great detachment from the house belonging to the School in Mornese, which she felt all the more because it held within it the memory of the sisters and young people who were with her at the beginning of the Institute. The notes in the *Cronistoria* clearly allow Mary Mazzarello’s wistful feelings to come through. After having accompanied the beginning of the work in Nizza Monferrato in October/November 1878, on her return to Mornese she wanted the Immaculate Conception novena to be “more solemn than ever: if the first house of the Congregation had to prepare itself to suffer – and who would not feel it [painfully]? – it should at least leave in a harmonious song of love for Mary.”⁶²

After the departure of the second group of missionaries from Genoa on January 2, 1879, “she feels sorrow at seeing the College almost completely depopulated after the work that had cost her innumerable sacrifices. She feels that she must leave the girls, the companions, dear acquaintances, for whom she foresees, with the departure of the sisters, the disappearance of much moral and spiritual help.”⁶³

A month later, on February 4, 1879, Mary Mazzarello personally moved from Mornese to Nizza Monferrato. The *Cronistoria* gives a touching description:

About twenty days earlier, when Don Bosco’s final word on the subject had been communicated, Mother herself had not been able to hold back a few tears from revealing her heartbreak. In Mornese she had learned to love and serve the Lord; the church and the confessional had nourished the incessant work of her spirit; the humble cemetery next to the church held the mortal remains of Fr. Pestarino, Fr. Giuseppe Cagliero, her dear departed sisters, of whom she remembered every gesture and word. In Mornese she had to leave behind three seriously ill sisters, a certain number of ‘little

⁶¹ *Cronistoria* II 290.

⁶² *Ibid* 359-360.

⁶³ *Cronistoria* II 385.

daughters' who were received free of charge, some postulants, lack of funds, and debts to be covered. What suffering!⁶⁴

The chronicler commented on Mary Mazzarello's warm welcome in Nizza Monferrato with terse words: "On her face are the marks of sorrow; but in the flash of her eyes is the smile, and on her lips the ever motherly word."⁶⁵

Mary Mazzarello herself wrote to the sisters in Montevideo on October 20, 1879: "So, my good sisters, if you wish to come to visit me, do not go to Mornese anymore, but here to Nizza [Monferrato]. Poor daughters! We are too far away to do that! It is better that we enter the Heart of Jesus and there we can tell each other everything."⁶⁶

The definitive abandonment of the College in 1880 aggravated her suffering: "The house of Mornese is now completely taken [from us], there is only Fr. Giuseppe there, who sees if it can be sold. Poor house! We cannot think of it without feeling a thorn in our hearts!"⁶⁷

1.7. Frequent deaths

The most painful thorns for her, however, were certainly the losses of many individuals to whom she was warmly attached. In her short earthly existence, Mary Mazzarello experienced the fragility of life through the deaths of at least 35 people dear to her in a span of only seven years. In order to make the emotional burden of this continuous mourning more conscious, the deceased are listed here chronologically up to the death of Mary Mazzarello herself.

On January 29, 1874, the first of the first eleven FMA died, the cook Maria Poggio. Her untimely death began to raise doubts in

⁶⁴ *Cronistoria* III 7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid* 8.

⁶⁶ *Letter* 27,5.

⁶⁷ *Letter* 37,9.

Mary Mazzarello about the deficiency of food, to which Mrs. Blengini had already drawn attention.⁶⁸

Quite suddenly, on May 15, at the age of 57, Fr. Domenico Pestarino, Mary Domenica's cherished spiritual director since childhood, died.⁶⁹

Seven days later, on May 22, the resident pupil Emilia Chiara passed away, and on June 5, Sr. Corinna Arrigotti, the first music teacher. The *Cronistoria* tells in tender detail that Don Bosco himself, together with Fr. Giovanni Cagliero, came for a few days to console his "afflicted daughters"⁷⁰.

On September 4, 27-year-old Fr. Giuseppe Cagliero died. He had succeeded Fr. Pestarino as spiritual director of the FMA.⁷¹ Therefore, the answer that Fr. Giacomo Costamagna gave Don Bosco when the latter asked him to go to Mornese to replace Fr. Giuseppe, is not surprising: "To do what? To die?"⁷² The chronicler added: "Let's hope – they say in Mornese – that he comes to us not to die, but to live."⁷³

When Sr. Rosa Mazzarello died on March 15, 1875, "one wonders again in the house if these deaths are not due to the excessive lack of food."⁷⁴

On February 9, 1876, 'the angel of death' took Sr. Antonia Cassini, a novice who was not yet 17 years old.⁷⁵ Mary Mazzarello expressed her sorrow for the young deceased in her letter to Fr. Giovanni Cagliero on April 5, 1876: "Who would ever have thought it? She seemed a colossus of health [...]. It is really true that death is like a thief and comes when we least expect it! This makes us think seriously."⁷⁶

⁶⁸ Cf. *Cronistoria* II 57.

⁶⁹ Cf. *ibid* 80-86.

⁷⁰ *Ibid* 86-89.

⁷¹ Cf. *database of the Salesian Society, Cagliero Joseph*, ASC B2324501.

⁷² *Cronistoria* II 107.

⁷³ *Ibid* 108.

⁷⁴ *Ibid* II 128.

⁷⁵ Cf. *ibid* 167, *Letters* 4,6.10 and 5,1.

⁷⁶ *Letter* 5,1.

On April 13, Sr. Maria Grosso, the novice mistress, left “the earth for heaven” at the age of 21. Her death had also caused great pain in the village; relatives and friends came from S. Stefano Parodi for her solemn funeral.⁷⁷

On August 16, Sr. Luigia Giordano succumbed to typhoid fever;⁷⁸ on October 4, Sr. Domenica Mina died at the age of 21;⁷⁹ and on November 11, 18-year-old Sr. Maria Belletti.⁸⁰

1877 brought mourning for Sr. Anna Succetti, deceased on March 24.⁸¹ Sr. Paolina Guala passed away on April 9;⁸² and Sr. Caterina Mazzarello died on May 14 in Alassio⁸³.

Therefore, already at their first meeting in August 1878, the FMA Superiors had established precise, detailed norms regarding the intercessions and Masses for the souls of deceased sisters.⁸⁴

At Nizza Monferrato, Mary Mazzarello had to mourn other deceased Sisters: Sr. Lucrezia Becchio, who died on March 11, 1879 in Mornese;⁸⁵ Sr. Maria Gariglio, who passed away on April 1 in La Navarre (France);⁸⁶ 25-year-old Sr. Maria Cappelletti, who gave her life on April 14 at Nizza Monferrato.”It is the first tomb to open in Nizza Monferrato, and people cast glances amid disenchantment and criticism at these weeping sisters behind a humble coffin [...].”⁸⁷

A week later, on April 21, Sr. Margherita Ricci died in Mornese. The chronicler commented: “How much pain and how much concern among the superiors because of such frequent deaths!”⁸⁸ On August 6, Sr. Mary Mazzarello, namesake of Mary

⁷⁷ Cf. *Cronistoria* II 180-182, *Letter* 6,4.

⁷⁸ Cf. *ibid* 217-218.

⁷⁹ Cf. *ibid* 226.

⁸⁰ Cf. *ibid* 237-238, *Letter* 9,9.

⁸¹ Cf. *ibid* 251.

⁸² Cf. *ibid* 252.

⁸³ Cf. *ibid* 256.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Minutes of the first meeting of the FMA Superiors*, Mornese, August 1878, document 93, in *Orme di vita* 242.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Cronistoria* III 18-20, *Letters* 22,2 and 23,7.

⁸⁶ Cf. *ibid* 26, *Letters* 21,5; 22,3,18 and 23,7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid* 32, *Letters* 22,3 and 23,7.

⁸⁸ *Cronistoria* III 42; cf. *Letter* 23,7.

Mazzarello and her disciple from childhood, breathed her last in the arms of Sr. Caterina Daghero at the house in Turin.⁸⁹

The news of the life-threatening health condition of her cherished and beloved father pained Mary Mazzarello greatly. On September 23, she was able to assist him as he lay dying in Mornese.⁹⁰

About a month later, on October 28, Sr. Albina Frascarolo exchanged “this earth for heaven,”⁹¹ and three weeks later, on November 19, Sr. Adelaide Carena.⁹²

Less than two months passed before the next death, that of Sr. Agostina Calcagno⁹³ on January 28, 1880, in Mornese: “Mother has known this daughter of hers since she was a little child. She accompanied her in her pure youth; welcomed her among her daughters in her twenties and now she is no more; how she feels it!”⁹⁴

One month later, on March 1, Sr. Emma Ferrero passed away in Nizza Monferrato after a long, painful illness and a life of suffering.⁹⁵ She was followed on April 21 by Sr. Maria Massola,⁹⁶ on May 21 by Sr. Ortensia Negrini,⁹⁷ on August 12 by the novice Sr. Anna Mora, who on the day of her death made her first vows into the hands of Mary Mazzarello.⁹⁸ On August 14, Sr. Emanuella Bonora had also been granted permission to make her first religious profession shortly before her death at home in the family that same

⁸⁹ Cf. *Cronistoria* III 66, *Letter* 25,10.

⁹⁰ Cf. *Cronistoria* III 95, *Letter* 27,12.

⁹¹ *Cronistoria* III 106-107; cf. *Letter* 27,3.

⁹² Cf. *Cronistoria* III 108-109.

⁹³ Cf. *Letter* 27,3.

⁹⁴ *Cronistoria* III 142.

⁹⁵ Cf. *Cronistoria* III 156. On p. 157 the following details can be read: “After all the effort of more than material assistance for several days at Sr. Emma’s side, and in spite of the pain she harbors in her heart, Mother spent the whole night on an armchair, because in the evening she had let Sr. Paolina Orlandi come to her room and spend the night in her bed – she herself was close to her and kept her company – thinking that it would make an impression on the sick sister to stay in the area where Sr. Emma had died shortly before.”

⁹⁶ Cf. *Cronistoria* III 172.

⁹⁷ Cf. *ibid* 181.

⁹⁸ Cf. *ibid* 222, *Letter* 47,4.

month.⁹⁹ Sr. Rosa Gusmaroli died on September 6¹⁰⁰ and Sr. Maria Cagliero, at barely 22 years of age, two days later, on September 8.¹⁰¹

On September 25, the life of 22-year-old Sr. Virginia Magone ended in Montevideo-Villa Colón – she was the first missionary to die in Uruguay. She had so desired a visit by Mary Mazzarello to South America.¹⁰² “Mother was moved by this one more than any other”¹⁰³ and Don Bosco made sure to publicize her edifying life in the *Bollettino Salesiano*.¹⁰⁴ Two weeks later, on October 7, Sr. Angela Allara died at her family home in Tonco,¹⁰⁵ and on November 21 Mary Mazzarello was personally present at the death of 20-year-old Sr. Innocenza Gamba in Chieri.¹⁰⁶ 1880 ended with mourning for Sr. Carmela Arata, who died in Turin on December 10,¹⁰⁷ while 1881 began with the passing of Sr. Luigina Arecco in Nizza Monferrato¹⁰⁸ on January 24, and that of Sr. Caterina Nasi in Turin on March 3.¹⁰⁹

Already at the end of February 1880, in Nizza Monferrato, Fr. Giovanni Cagliero had presented the first descriptions of the lives of the deceased sisters, something Don Bosco wanted because “the memory of the deceased is an eloquent lesson on the way to living and dying well”. “From the example of the deceased we also have new light on the characteristics of exemplary holiness, on the observation of the Constitutions, on the advantage of being prepared for the great call. [...] Whoever comes after us will say: ‘Like them, we too, and if them, why not us?’”¹¹⁰ The editors of Mary Mazzarello’s letters explain in summary the

⁹⁹ Cf. *Cronistoria* III 231.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Letter* 47,4.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Cronistoria* III 245, *Letter* 47,4.

¹⁰² Cf. *Cronistoria* III 111, *Letter* 40,5 footnote 4.

¹⁰³ *Cronistoria* II 367, *Cronistoria* III 267-269: Virginia had grown up in the sewing school at Mornese and had taken vows at the age of sixteen. In 1879 she traveled to Uruguay with the second missionary expedition in which the FMA participated.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Cronistoria* III 277.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *ibid* 252 and *Letter* 53: Letter from Mary Mazzarello to Fr. John Bonetti, editor of the *Salesian Bulletin*.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Cronistoria* III 274, *Letter* 51,1 and 55,4.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Cronistoria* III 281-282, *Letter* 55,4.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Cronistoria* III 326.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *ibid* 344.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid* 155.

reasons for the numerous deaths among the young FMA, who died at short intervals with an average age of only 25 years.” In the collection of letters we will often notice the recurrent news of the death of young sisters. The harsh air of Mornese, inadequate food, illnesses, the radically adopted self-sacrificial life deprived the Institute prematurely of these religious, but at the same time enriched it with heroic testimonies of virtue, sure guarantee of future apostolic vitality.”¹¹¹

2. From fragility to “religious resilience”

2.1. Devotion to God in one’s own fragilities

2.1.1. Sickness and death

In Mary Mazzarello’s life one can observe the ability to withstand stressful situations and overcome traumatic crises, something that psychology calls resilience. This ability, considered the opposite of vulnerability, can serve personal personality development. The inner resources that lead to psychological resilience can be personal or mediated at the social level.¹¹² In the particularly religious environment of Mornese, Mary Mazzarello was equipped with a firm, deep spirituality that strengthened her resilience. Some examples mark these spiritual attitudes that matured in her precisely in difficult situations.

In her study of Mary Mazzarello’s holiness, Eliane Anschau Petri emphasized that she “lived the painful trial [of typhoid] in faith, in hope, and in love. She participated in the sufferings of Christ on the cross; only He could make her suffering fruitful and give it meaning. According to witnesses, her room became a school of virtue. She was devoted to the will of God; she comforted her relatives; she had a good word for all who came to visit her.”¹¹³

¹¹¹ Letter 5, footnote 2.

¹¹² Cf. *Resilienz (Psychologie)*, [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resilienz_\(Psychologie\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resilienz_(Psychologie)) (21.08.2020).

¹¹³ Anschau Petri, *La santità di Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, 154-155.

After the ‘crisis’ of typhoid fever in 1860, the more difficult moment of convalescence began for Mary Domenica.¹¹⁴ In the spiritual guide for Mornese, Piera Ruffinatto and Monica Menegusi meditate on this drastic experience of her life:

Physically weakened, she gives the impression of being spiritually debilitated as well, in the sense that ‘what used to be has passed away’. She will not be able to return to work in the fields, she is no longer her father’s right hand, and she must resign herself to being considered weak and fragile. This kind of ‘crisis’ can be more terrible than the illness itself, because it destroys all security and plans. In the face of this situation, however, Mary does not lose heart. She is a true believer, able to look away from herself toward God and His plans. Therefore, when she is able to go to church [again] for the first time, she prays thus: ‘Lord, if in Your goodness You would grant me a few more years of life, let me spend them unnoticed and, except by You, forgotten by all.’ This prayer marks the transition from the life before to the new life. Mary, in fact, no longer cares to be considered the ‘*bula*’ of the village, the first in everything [...] She discovered herself to be a fragile, needy, limited creature. She did not sadly retreat into her own weakness, but took a decisive step. She threw herself into the arms of God, saying to Him, “To You I entrust myself!” [...] The typhoid illness robbed her of her strength. It was the opportunity for her to have a profound inner experience of fragility, physical, psychological, spiritual weakness. It was the moment of uncertainty, of insecurity, of searching for the ultimate meaning of her existence. But it was also the moment of conscious acceptance of her creaturely poverty and reconstruction around ‘something’ new that became the unifying center of her life. The God of the trial had uprooted her from the ‘ground’ of her certainties and her ambitions. He revealed Himself to her as the only ground of life and demanded from her trusting surrender.¹¹⁵

Mary Mazzarello’s health remained precarious, as can be seen in a letter Sr. Elisa Roncallo wrote to her mother in July 1880: “The Mother Superior is better, though she could be in better condition,

¹¹⁴ Cf. *ibid* 155-159.

¹¹⁵ *Con te, Main, sui sentieri della vita* 54.

but the Lord wants her to be a great saint, so He always makes her suffer something.”¹¹⁶

Mary Mazzarello grew more and more in the certainty and at the same time conscious acceptance of her imminent death, a death Don Bosco himself had predicted for her, as already mentioned, with an unmistakable parable.¹¹⁷ This can be concluded from what she told Sr. Giuseppina Pacotto in January 1881 when she asked her to go to America with the third missionary departure. In order to console Sr. Giuseppina who, because of her affection for Mary Mazzarello, felt the imminent separation from her very strongly, she assured her with courageous serenity, “I want to accompany you as far as America, but I am devoted to the will of God. As I have already told you, I really must go this year, I feel it! The Lord, so good, has seen it worthy to hear my request by accepting me for the greater good of all.”¹¹⁸

Fr. Giovanni Battista Lemoyne’s account of Mary Mazzarello’s illness and death reveals a mature religious woman, not introverted but dedicated to the good of the sisters and young people until her last breath.”We have before us a woman of 44 years, physically worn down by toil and illness, yet with an alert, courageous spirit and joyful hope for the encounter with God beyond death, as well as wisely concerned for the future of her ever-growing and expanding family, which she looks upon with trepidation and trust.”¹¹⁹

The witnesses to her trial also confirmed that “[Mary Domenica’s] last illness had been a constant lesson of humility, piety, patience, and devotion. She was a true school of virtue. Even with so much suffering, she was serene and cheerful.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Elisa Roncallo to her mother, July 1880, in AGFMA 220 08, quoted in *Relazione di don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne sulla malattia e morte di madre Maria D. Mazzarello*, document 122, footnote 8, in *Orme di vita* 329-330.

¹¹⁷ Cf. *Cronistoria* III 354-355.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid* 316-317.

¹¹⁹ *Relazione di don Giovanni Battista Lemoyne sulla malattia e morte di madre Maria D. Mazzarello*, document 122, in *Orme di vita* 328.

¹²⁰ Anschau Petri, *La santità di Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, 181.

2.1.2. Sadness

As a sensitive woman, Mary Mazzarello certainly always felt sadness on a human level for the losses and partings she so often experienced. However, the sources show that she was the first to try to overcome them. This can be seen, for example, in the section of the *Cronistoria* entitled “From Pain to Spiritual Benefit”, which describes Mary Mazzarello’s attitude in the face of grief over her deceased father.”The vivid pain [...] does not prevent her from making herself and those around her smile; faithful to the Crucified and to the sacred wounds of Jesus, as well as to the pains of the Virgin, she often turns to them for consolation, relief, and courage.”¹²¹

Mary Mazzarello felt the final detachment from the College on April 12, 1880 in a particular way.¹²² “She [Mary Mazzarello] herself goes to close the house that is dearer to her than all, and that she wants to preserve at all costs. But ... ‘this is the way Don Bosco wants it and so be it!’ she repeats to herself and to the sisters.”¹²³ Mary Mazzarello personally went to transport Sr. Ortensia Negrini, who had been confined to bed in Mornese for four years, in the carriage to Nizza Monferrato.¹²⁴ Her inner suffering can be well supposed from the heading ‘The Weeping of the Heart’ of the section of the *Cronistoria* that describes the definitive closing of the house at Mornese. Sr. Emilia Mosca expressed Mary Mazzarello’s feelings as well as her own:

For us sisters, it is a great suffering to have to give up this house where the Institute was born, where we spent the first years in the simplicity, love, and passion of spirit of the ancient Anchorites. How many dear and gentle memories we leave there! But God has decreed it so; the sacrifice is already accomplished, and Mornese is already abandoned.¹²⁵

¹²¹ *Cronistoria* III 96.

¹²² Cf. *ibid* 169.

¹²³ *Ibid* 167.

¹²⁴ Cf. *ibid* 168.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*.

Even sadder for Mary Mazzarello than the renunciation of the original house were certainly the losses of her sisters. Commenting on the death of Sr. Angela Allara on 7 October 1880, a few months before Mary Mazzarello herself died, the chronicler notes:

Mother Mazzarello suffers from this: all these young [sisters] who leave just like that when, formed in the Salesian spirit, they are preparing themselves with enthusiasm for a true apostolate ... it makes you think! Is it the privations? Certainly, they are not lacking; but how many more do the sisters impose on themselves, they who are so eager to suffer! And she blames herself, poor *Mother*; while the real reason lies solely in her longing for holiness. [...] It is such an intense spiritual life that the body cannot always endure it.¹²⁶

Describing Mary Mazzarello's meeting with Don Bosco in Turin at the end of November 1880, the author of the *Cronistoria* commented: "In fact, the deaths of her sisters are so far sure proofs of their sanctity; and this is a great consolation, so that even if the tender *Mother* cannot hide her pain at so many losses, neither can she conceal the sweet feeling of already having a beautiful crown of little saints in heaven."¹²⁷

Mary Mazzarello herself tried to cheer up the sisters in Carmen de Patagones in her letter of 20 December 1880: "My dear daughters, look, death comes now and again. Madame Death [comes] to greet us! Let us pray, let us pray, and let us be prepared."¹²⁸

2.1.3. Feeling of her own inadequacy

One form of fragility that she certainly also felt was her self-assessment of not being able to fully meet the competencies required in relation to her leadership role. Already in her first letter to Don

¹²⁶ *Ibid* 252.

¹²⁷ *Cronistoria* III 277.

¹²⁸ *Letter* 55,4.

Bosco, dated 22 June 1874, exactly one week after her official election as Superior General of the FMA Institute, Mary Mazzarello expressed to him her awareness of her own inadequacy. "Since I am not able to tell you all that my soul feels, I will ask with the greatest possible zeal your great protector [patron St. John the Baptist] to remedy my inability by obtaining for you from the Lord all those graces that you most desire. [...] Will you forgive my incapacity, which does not know how to express itself [...]." ¹²⁹

This self-awareness increased in the following years. Towards the end of the summer of 1880, the retreat had to be concluded with new elections of the General Council, since the first six-year term had expired. Mary Mazzarello, anticipating her death the following year, tried to convince the sisters to elect Sr. Caterina Daghero as Superior General for the following reasons: She herself would feel unable to uphold the religious spirit as in the early years. There were more educated, virtuous, and capable sisters than she for the leadership of the Institute and her death would not now permit them to work as much as was necessary to lead the Congregation. ¹³⁰ She saw in all clarity that "the Congregation now needs real superiors." ¹³¹ Nevertheless, on 29 August Mary Mazzarello was unanimously re-elected as Superior General "with the highest jubilation of all present, except herself, who appears rather wistful, yet reverently devoted to the will of God." ¹³²

Her conviction to leave the direction of the Institute grew stronger and stronger shortly after the third missionary departure of sisters to Uruguay and Argentina:

Besides the good sister Pacotto, in her humility and simplicity, she has also told others that she is unable to continue because of her 'ignorance'; that she gladly gives her life for the Institute and for some sisters who are not following the right path. The Superiors

¹²⁹ *Letter* 3,3 and 6.

¹³⁰ Cf. *Cronistoria* III 234.

¹³¹ *Ibid* 235.

¹³² *Ibid* 238-239.

address words of loving encouragement to her, but she remains with her spiritual clairvoyance: not sad, but strong and sure.¹³³

That Mary Mazzarello would have offered her life was confirmed in the apostolic process of Acqui by Sr. Eulalia Bosco and Fr. Giovanni Cagliero. Sr. Eulalia testified that “the Servant of God would have faced serious difficulties of a moral nature. In the Congregation she would have had sisters who did not act according to the spirit of the Institute and Mary Mazzarello, who would have wanted them to change their minds and not to harm the Congregation, would have offered her own life to God for the common good.”¹³⁴ Fr. Cagliero, who assisted Mary Mazzarello on the eve of her death, confirmed that

she gave me information about quite a few abuses which, according to her special insights and her great experience, compromised the religious spirit of the sisters, postulants, novices, and students of the College; and this because of a certain pronounced complacency in some, because of sensitive and too worldly friendships in others, and because of uncertain vocations so that after her death I was able to correct these serious defects and remove these obstacles for the good of the Institute ...¹³⁵

Finally, Mary Mazzarello, devoted to God’s will, was able to leave life in the serene certainty that she expressed on the last day of her life: “What a good father we have in Don Bosco! He is everything for the Institute, I am nothing! His work belongs to God and to Our Lady, and through his virtue and advice [...] the Institute will always have his support.”¹³⁶

¹³³ *Ibid* 361; cf. Anschau Petri, *La santità di Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, 171-174: The Devotion of Life.

¹³⁴ Anschau Petri, *La santità di Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, 172.

¹³⁵ *Ibid* 173.

¹³⁶ *Cronistoria* III 388.

2.2. Encouraging fellow sisters in their fragilities

Precisely because she herself was the first to draw her inner strength from trust in God, Mary Mazzarello became the strong support of her sisters. Therefore, she never tired of instilling courage in them in the various situations of life, especially in the great challenges they had to face.

To Sr. Giuseppina Pacotto, who had become assistant to the postulants three months before, she wrote in May 1879: “Take courage on my part [...] thankful that I am far away, because if not I would really pull your ears. Don’t you know that melancholy is the cause of many evils?”¹³⁷ In fact, she was convinced: “One more thing I recommend to you. Always be cheerful, never sad, which is the mother of the lukewarm.”¹³⁸

On 9 April 1879, she recommended to Sr. Angela Vallese and to the sisters at the Montevideo-Villa Colón community, “Take courage, my good sisters, Jesus must be your whole strength. With Jesus, burdens become light, fatigue becomes easy, thorns are turned into sweetness.”¹³⁹

Six months later, she encouraged the same sisters with words that show the influence of Teresa of Avila, “The sisters all send you loving greetings and are longing for the time when they will meet you and embrace you in the beauty of Heaven. Courage then, my dearest in Jesus, let us remember that everything passes, so let nothing disturb us, since everything serves to acquire true happiness.”¹⁴⁰

The repeated mention of Paradise, an essential element of the piety of the time, reflects the strong root of their confidence, “Hope of heaven pervades the letters as a testimony to the general awareness that life is a pilgrimage toward its final consummation. It was not only the experience of the untimely death of many sisters that reminded us of this, it was [rather also] a lesson of life and a certainty

¹³⁷ *Letter* 24,2-3; cf. also *Letter* 47,12.

¹³⁸ *Letter* 27,11; cf. also *Letter* 31,1.

¹³⁹ *Letter* 22,21; cf. also *Letter* 37,11 and 64,5.

¹⁴⁰ *Letter* 26,7; cf. also *Letter* 39,2 and 55,1.

of faith that grew as Christian life matured.”¹⁴¹ Those who testified at the Acqui process in 1920 also confirmed that Mary Domenica was “very much in love with Paradise.”¹⁴²

Mary Mazzarello had been accustomed since her youth to the idea that paradise could be acquired through the cross. A few months before her death, Mary Mazzarello, who foresaw that Sr. Caterina Lucca would leave the Congregation, told Sr. Giuseppina Pacotto who was to lead the five missionaries in the third mission to Uruguay in early February 1881:

Take courage, Sr. Giuseppina; the moment will come when the cross will become heavy, very heavy for you. But then will be the time to press it to your heart and pledge fidelity to the good God! [...] Remember that the thorns we suffer for love of God will turn into roses! Always tell everything to Our Lady, sufferings and consolations, and you will find an infinitely more loving mother than the one you are now leaving in Italy!¹⁴³

Mary Mazzarello was able to encourage her sisters in an effective and convincing way because she herself gave them the testimony of her own courage, which, as Eliane Anschau Petri points out, became stronger precisely in sorrowful situations:

[...] it is interesting to underline that the virtue of fortitude characterized Mary Domenica in a profound way. She demonstrated it in the small actions of everyday life, but also in delicate and difficult situations of her life and in the history of the Institute: as shown during the illness of typhoid fever; in the face of physical discomforts such as toothache, earache, and deafness, in the last illness when she was afflicted by pleurisy; when the FMA were ridiculed in the town because of their life choice and in the face of the misunderstandings that arose because of the destiny of the College; in the painful experience of the numerous deaths of sisters

¹⁴¹ Fernández, *The Letters of Mary Domenica Mazzarello*, 283.

¹⁴² Anschau Petri, *La santità di Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, 180.

¹⁴³ *Cronistoria* III 361.

and girls at a young age, on the occasion of the death of Fr. Pestarino, which had caused great consternation among the FMA; when anticlericalism broke out over Don Bosco's works and the FMA Institute; in the case of Agostina Simbeni in Mornese and of Annetta Bedarida, the young Jewish woman at Nizza Monferrato. Mother Mazzarello, moreover, was never despondent or discouraged, especially not because of the poverty, which in the early days of the Institute can be called extreme, and the contradictions that were not absent. She never lost her calm, nor her serenity. On the contrary, she conveyed her courage to the others. She always endured her illnesses with devotion and fortitude, and in spite of her weak health she did not neglect the duties of her office. In her was observed an ever present 'balanced and constant humor'. She did not go into raptures over prosperous events and did not become depressed at adverse things.¹⁴⁴

2.3. Serenity in fragile situations

Her habitual fortitude of soul supported Mary Mazzarello above all in the difficult situations that made her and her sisters suffer. The *Cronistoria* testifies, for example in September 1877, that some who harbored old resentments against Don Bosco suggested rather pessimistic reflections and considerations regarding the activity of a Salesian and a Sister in the parish at Mornese. "They are so quick to move or die, these priests and these sisters of Don Bosco! ... And the Municipality loses its authority by ceding teaching to them and allowing it to be given in the College!"¹⁴⁵ Mary Mazzarello's response reveals her trusting calm, "Let us keep silent and pray", said Mother to someone who confided these matters to her. "Our Lady and Don Bosco know everything; we trust them and remain in peace."¹⁴⁶

With faith, courage, and generosity she also faced the inner suffering due to the transfer of the Institute from Mornese to Nizza Monferrato and the deep longing that united her to her family:

¹⁴⁴ Anschau Petri, *La santità di Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, 193-194.

¹⁴⁵ *Cronistoria* II 277.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

She seems to once more feel the sufferings of Fr. Pestarino for that dying College, built more with prayers and tears than with stones and bricks. Moreover, always present to her are her dear, elderly parents ... whom she has to leave at the very moment when they need more consolation and help. But ... the Lord had ordained it so, through Don Bosco, and the sacrifice had to be made with merit and cheerfulness of heart. Therefore, Mother smiled at the thought of Nizza and made sure that the few sick or pretty much so people who remained with her in Mornese smiled too.¹⁴⁷

She also assured Sr. Angela Vallese of this in Montevideo-Villa Colón on 9 April 1879, “Already you will know from the sisters that I am no longer in Mornese, but here in Nizza. We must always make sacrifices, as long as we are in this world. We make them gladly and cheerfully. The Lord will note them all down and give us a beautiful prize for them in His time.”¹⁴⁸ The editors of her letters also stated that “Mother Mazzarello suffered greatly from the transfer of the Motherhouse from Mornese to Nizza. The experience was painful above all because it meant for her a total uprooting from her original home. Mother’s sober words reveal her will to face the new situation with courage and serene dedication.”¹⁴⁹

A month later a very difficult situation arose as a result of the aforementioned admission of the young Jewish woman Annetta Bedarida. In this regard, the chronicler emphasized the confidence of Mary Mazzarello and the first sisters in Our Lady’s help, “Never mind; the storm is only a reason to intensify prayer and overcome every fear with songs of confidence in the great Mother of God and the Institute.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid* 385.

¹⁴⁸ *Letter* 22,4.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, footnote 4.

¹⁵⁰ *Cronistoria* III 49.

3. Through fragility to holiness

3.1. *Maturing of virtue through difficulties*

Due to Mary Domenica's interior attitudes, matured in the midst of so many difficulties, it was possible to confirm 'the excellent degree' to which she lived the divine virtues of faith, hope, and love."The rock-solid foundation of her constant optimism and courage even in the face of difficult and problematic situations was her faith in God, who is love."¹⁵¹ "The more numerous the sufferings, difficulties, and uncertainties were, the more hope shone in her."¹⁵² "She embodied in herself the love that becomes mercy; the capacity to take care of the sufferings and weaknesses of others."¹⁵³

Hand in hand with the cardinal virtues, among which, in addition to the strength already mentioned, were Mary Mazzarello's justice, prudence, and moderation. These were revealed when the processes delved into her characteristic virtue, namely, humility, a virtue she lived in 'simplicity of heart'.¹⁵⁴ Deeply humble, she recognized her limitations and thus, not feeling up to the tasks associated with the office of Superior, she wanted to avoid leadership right from the beginning."But this does not make her depressed [...]. With healthy realism she is aware that all the miseries of this world can also be found in her. Entirely devoted to God and His Providence, she entrusts herself to Him so that He can make use of her poverty to carry out His plan of love."¹⁵⁵

Overcoming the fragilities she experienced, Mary Mazzarello managed to mature also in the virtues connected with her educational mission; in a particularly characteristic way, the virtue of joy. In almost all her letters she asked the sisters if they were joyful, not in the form of a purely human cheerfulness, that is, not only as a consequence of a joyful temperament. Following Don Bosco's example, she herself lived and wanted her sisters to have the joy of a poor and free heart immersed in the love of God, which helps to maintain a balanced cheerfulness, and this in turn helps the ability to

¹⁵¹ Anschau Petri, *La santità di Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, 177.

¹⁵² *Ibid* 178.

¹⁵³ *Ibid* 183.

¹⁵⁴ Anselm Grün, *Semplicità del cuore*, in *Lettere*, p. 34-44.

¹⁵⁵ Anschau Petri, *La santità di Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, 196.

withstand even the fragile situations of life. In fact at the hour of her death, she left the sisters these words that are part of her testament, “Never rejoice too much, never grieve too much whatever may happen to you by way of joyful or sad things, but always rejoice in the Lord.”¹⁵⁶

3.2. Love for Jesus crucified

Mary Mazzarello’s constant joy matured through the painful experiences she had from her youth.”Maria Domenica had a passion for the Cross.”¹⁵⁷ In her life, the Eucharist and the contemplation of the Passion were united in the daily celebration of Mass. In Communion she was able to participate in the mystery of Christ the Savior, in which she was additionally immersed through the constant contemplation of the Passion of the Lord, both in personal meditation and in praying the Stations of the Cross, which helped her to accept the cross in the concreteness of life. The people who lived with her testified that she often meditated on the Passion of Christ and especially cultivated the devotion of the *Via Crucis*. She felt compassion through the sufferings of Jesus and tried to align herself with the suffering Jesus through an ascetic lifestyle. The realization that the Lord revealed His love above all on the cross awakened in her the desire to share His suffering on the cross and to unite herself with Him. She often said that if she met Jesus on the way to Calvary, “she would not let Him carry the cross alone.”¹⁵⁸

The sisters remembered that in her conferences, good nights, and even during her recoveries, she had spoken to them of the Passion of Jesus with the invitation to love Him, lead others to love Him, and suffer everything for love of Him.

Love for Jesus led her to become more and more fully conformed to Him. When she took the cross in her hand, which she had hanging around her neck and pointed her finger at the figure of Jesus, she said, ‘He here, then she turned the cross, and we here.’ In this way

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid* 200.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid* 261.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid* 262.

she made it tangibly clear that it is a matter of living crucified with our Lord. [...] Mary Mazzarello identified herself with Him by imitating His attitude of self-giving, offered herself to God for the salvation of young people.¹⁵⁹

3.3. *Experience of the power of God in one's own weakness*

“In the lives of the saints,” says Eliane Anschau Petri, “this Christian paradox comes true: in human weakness the power of God is revealed,”¹⁶⁰ precisely in the sense of what St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “[...] God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God (1 Cor 1:27-30).”¹⁶¹

Mary Domenica, like all the saints, understood this important dimension of the Christian life, accepting her weaknesses and recognizing in them the power of God's grace that works through weakness.

Weakness or vulnerability can appear in many forms and dimensions. In Mary Domenica's spiritual experience, it manifests itself in her being a woman, even without education; in her physical fragility, especially after contracting typhoid fever; in the poverty of the beginnings of the Institute, in the feeling of inadequacy in relation to her mission as Superior of a religious institute; in the lack of understanding of the villagers, and in the limitations that were connected with her own character and personality.

Some of those who knew Mary Domenica in her role as Superior and had seen the extreme poverty at the beginning in the College at Mornese, could not imagine “that an Institute could move forward in the face of so many signs of fragility and vulnerability: little education, poverty of means and people, hunger, mortality.”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid* 380-381.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid* 381.

¹⁶² *Ibid* 381-382.

God reveals His power by means of human weakness. When He encounters the humility of a human person, He can work great things even in limited creatures, characterized by smallness and vulnerability. [...] Mary Domenica was not ashamed to show herself weak and limited, she did not seek to soften her fragility before the Sisters. On the contrary, she gave herself to them precisely by sharing with them her limitations and encouraging the others not to be discouraged in the face of their own, but to put themselves in the attitude of those who want to overcome them [their limitations] with the grace of God and grow on a realistic path of holiness [...] [in order to be able to say with St. Paul, ‘for when I am weak, then I am strong’ (2 Cor 12,10)].¹⁶³

Mary Mazzarello did not avoid or diminish the magnitude of the weaknesses and difficulties. She invited her sisters to adopt effective attitudes in the face of life’s limitations and trials, that is, to honestly acknowledge them, to accept the realities as they were, and “to flourish in limitation, in weaknesses and difficulties” in order to grow spiritually.”The difficulties can thus become opportunities to have a deeper experience of resurrection.”¹⁶⁴

Conclusion

Fr. Ferdinando Maccono, the main biographer of Mary Mazzarello, wrote a work of 400 pages in 1947 which was published in 1958 under the title “The Spirit and Virtues of St. Mary D. Mazzarello”, wrote in his Preface that, according to a member of the Congregation of Rites, Mary Mazzarello’s cause was optimal because her life was exemplary, simple, and therefore imitable. Fr. Maccono himself confirmed this with the feedback of a parish priest who had given the Catholic Action women the biography of Blessed Mary Mazzarello to read.”They read it with pleasure and said, ‘This Blessed lived like us, she worked like us in the house and in the field.

¹⁶³ *Ibid* 382.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid* 382-383.

And we too, if we want, can do as she did, even if we are not called to found a congregation.”¹⁶⁵

In view of our current worldwide situation we can ask ourselves: Can Mary Mazzarello’s example help us in the concrete situations of our lives? Can Mary Domenica be imitated by us today?¹⁶⁶ And if so, in what way?

Certainly, the social and religious climate has changed radically. The exceptionally intense spiritual atmosphere of Mornese is a thing of the past. Certain spiritual attitudes of that time no longer correspond to the values of today. Nevertheless, we too are experiencing that despite constant scientific progress, threats to all humanity remain, making even our everyday, our highly developed life, fragile and vulnerable. This means that even today, in our own lives and in those of young people, we encounter certain fragilities that Mary Mazzarello and the first sisters at Mornese experienced: unpredictable illnesses, delicate relationships, painful family situations, sudden deaths, challenges of the most diverse kind.

For this very reason, despite the changes in spirituality, piety, and asceticism, Mary Mazzarello can still encourage us in the fragile situations of our personal lives and of the present times. She does so with the strength of heart, based on her personal intimacy with Jesus, with which she faced her fragilities. Surely she would say to us today the same thing she wrote to Sr. Virginia Piccono on 24 May 1880, exactly 140 years ago, “Never be discouraged no matter what disturbance you may encounter.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Ferdinando Maccono, *Lo Spirito e le virtù di Santa Maria D. Mazzarello. Confondatrice e Prima Superiora Generale delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Turin 1958, 3.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Anschau Petri, *La santità di Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, 390-393.

¹⁶⁷ *Letter* 34,2.

THE SPIRITUAL PROFILE OF DON BOSCO EMERGING FROM THE COLLECTION OF HIS LETTERS

(Part 2)

by John Rozario Lourdusamy

[This is the second and last part of the article about *The Spiritual Profile of Don Bosco emerging from the collection of his letters*. The first part was published in the *Journal of Salesian Studies* (Volume XIX – January-June 2021 – Number 1) 29-53.]

6. Don Bosco's art of discernment

Someone with a wise and understanding mind who deeply perceives and distinguishes between good and evil in life's daily circumstances and makes the right choices, truly possesses the heart of discernment. Being pleasing to God, such a person walks before God in faithfulness, righteousness, and in uprightness of heart (cf. 1 Kgs 3:6, 9, 11-12). The wise and the discerning mind seeks first not what is right before human beings, but what is righteous before God. That which is discerned as acceptable before God would naturally be just also before human beings whether it finds acceptance among them or not. Considered in this light, the Don Bosco of the *Epistolario* seems to shine brightly as a man of discernment.

Although Don Bosco does not talk directly about discernment, his words and the choices he makes prove his art of discernment. His decision-making process and his subsequent actions seem to include the following: considering deeply the actual situations of life; searching for the divine Will in everything; making the choices that seem appropriate; confirming through possible revelatory signs; committing himself entirely to the choices made; and finally, counting on God for protection and providence.

Don Bosco's style of dealing with the boys, particularly those who were difficult to handle, makes him a model for educators and pastors of the young.¹ Although such letters are not many in number, they bring out the themes that are dear to Don Bosco. In them, discernment is shown not only in matters concerning himself, but also in circumstances where he has to discern for others. Regarding Clodoveo Edoardo Comollo, we observe Don Bosco's insights on seeing the boy, his initial judgment of him, and his thoughts as to which studies or work would be suitable for him. Perceiving the actual and individual needs of the young is essential to those working for the young.² Pietro Luciano is perhaps a typical example of a boy whose attitudes do not change even after Don Bosco's efforts, as the negative elements in the boy seem to continue even as a cleric in later years. Observable in Don Bosco's dealings are the following: the efforts of the educator, the boy's response, the expectation from the educator, the boy promising to change but not proving it by his actions, the the boy's defects as underlined by Don Bosco (lack of confidence in the educator, not relating with others, wasting time on useless things, not showing proper concern even towards boys who are known for their good example). Then there is the concern shown by the educator despite the negative attitudes of the boy, in the hope that there would be a change, given the opportunities and practical suggestions offered. And finally, hope in God's grace and a prayer that the Lord may bless their efforts.³ Don Bosco calls a spade a spade when he observes the defects of Giovanni, son of Lorenzo

¹ For instance, Cf. E(m) I, 147, 225-226, 431, 276-277, 279, 324, 385, 431; E(m) VI, 512.

² Cf. E(m) I, 147, letter to Rosminian priest Francesco Puecher, on 16 February 1852.

³ Cf. E(m) I, 225-226, letter to Fr Pietro Durbano, on 6 April 1854. Also Cf. E(m) I, 431.

Turchi. The educator saint points out that the conduct of the boy was good earlier but had deteriorated after the vacation. This is the educator trying to prevent things from becoming bad, dealing with the boy just as a father does with his son, dealing with aspects that the educator saint considers to be bad conduct, and finally, when all efforts prove futile, it is Don Bosco who takes the decision.⁴

In another case regarding the nephew of a priest close to Don Bosco, we discover the following characteristics of the discerning educator: constant effort to assist the lad, including for the benefit of his soul. And if all efforts are in vain, then there is little choice but to make the hard decision.⁵ Francesco Rossi, recommended by Baron Feliciano Ricci des Ferres, is another example of the stubborn nature of boys who refuse to make amends despite the continuous goodness of the educator. Despite everything, some failures are bound to be part of the mission to the young. Educators face such challenges. In this case, Don Bosco's kindness was in vain. The unyielding nature of the boy makes Don Bosco feel sad at the inevitable consequences.⁶ Don Bosco's sadness at the unyielding or stubborn nature of such boys reminds us of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem (cf. Lk 19:41-44; Mt 23:37-39). In the case of Peano, who was sent home for not following the rules of the house in spite of repeated warnings by his superiors, Don Bosco also mentions the difficulties created by interference from the boy's relative, stating that educators must be allowed to exercise the roles proper to them; besides, the boy is not in dire need.⁷ Thus, the ways in which Don Bosco deals with these boys who are difficult to handle, besides showing the attitudes of the educator, also reveal particular aspects of discernment.

Seeing everything in the light of God is the principle of his discernment. Reading the signs of the times and acting accordingly is a way of discernment. Being creative according to the times, particularly regarding the mission to the young, making right choices in the day-to-day events of life, helping others to discern in various circumstances in life, and finally insisting on resignation to God's

⁴ Cf. E(m) I, 276-277, 279, letters to layman Lorenzo Turchi, on 17 and 23 December 1855.

⁵ Cf. E(m) I, 324, letter to Canon Pietro Giuseppe De Gaudenzi, on 5 June 1857.

⁶ Cf. E(m) I, 385, letter to Baron Feliciano Ricci des Ferres, on 3 November.

⁷ Cf. E(m) VI, 512, letter to Cav. Carlo Fava, on 4 December 1879.

Will are ways of discernment one can constantly discover in Don Bosco. Having been requested to cooperate with a project to set up a library, he readily agreed to do all he could, because spreading good books was the need of the hour.⁸ Being a man of vision, he also proves himself to be a man of realistic views, but his hope lies in God always. On the difficulties of finding suitable personnel to set up a printing press in the missions, he writes that it is not possible to find personnel for printing. Those who are suitable lack the courage, and those who have the courage lack the capacity. But he adds that he is dealing with it and hopes that God will send them men who are suitable for the work and will place them in his hands.⁹

The urgent need to act when the situation warrants is seen when the good name of a person or the institution is at stake. When an article in the anti-clerical newspaper, the *Gazzetta del Popolo* said that a young man accused of immorality and being investigated by the Judiciary was a past pupil of the Oratory, Don Bosco checked the facts and immediately complained about the false information. He demanded that the news be rectified out of courtesy and love for truth, and without the need to have recourse to matters of law.¹⁰ With regard to the mission to the young, even when things are evidently fine, he seeks advice to improve and stabilize the work. Writing to the parish priest of Marseilles, Don Bosco asks his close collaborator to let him know what he has observed in the Salesian works as being good, mediocre or bad, so that things might be corrected in a prudent and efficient way.¹¹ To diocesan priest Eugenio Bianchi from Rimini who wishes to join the Salesian Congregation, Don Bosco suggests the various phases of discerning the “call within a call”. He invites the priest to attend the retreat at Lanzo so they might chat together, spend some time, and finally decide in such a way that is for the greater glory of God.¹² As for matters of conscience, he does not wish to offer counsel in his letters. In such circumstances he suggests the

⁸ Cf. E(m) V, 58, 61, letters to doctor Giovanni Mazzotti, on 1 and 8 February 1876.

⁹ Cf. E(m) VII, 281, letter to Salesian missionary Fr Luigi Lasagna, on 31 January 1881.

¹⁰ Cf. E(m) V, 428, letter to the editor of *Gazzetta del Popolo*, on 15 August 1877.

¹¹ Cf. E(m) VI, 390, letter to Fr Clément Guiol, on 20 May 1879.

¹² Cf. E(m) VII, 174, letter to diocesan priest Eugenio Bianchi, at the beginning of August 1880.

individual open their heart to their confessor and follow their confessor's advice.¹³ Experience and prudence form part of any process of discernment or spiritual direction.

Don Bosco's excellent ways of discernment in difficult situations personally – particularly with his Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi – reassure us that the saint has mastered the art of discernment. Don Bosco's methods and choice of words are sure to serve as a beacon to those willing to learn from him. His way of reasoning in particular issues, having the love of God and love of neighbour at heart even when surrounded by other problems, and never losing sight of the essentials of charity amidst personal issues, are all wonderful lessons for an enquiring mind.¹⁴ The necessary internal attitudes are also evident in his words. He indicates that he had written a particular letter with the sole desire of telling the recipient what could help both of them and would be useful for the glory of God. However, if some inappropriate word has slipped out, he humbly begs forgiveness.¹⁵ The awareness of being accountable to God for all of one's actions, and having God's glory as the common ground for resolving conflicts, are shown to be the essential aspects for decision-making in Christian life.¹⁶ When all human wisdom has been brought to bear and if one still does not know what to do in spite of discerning with God's help, Don Bosco then introduces resignation to God's Will, for he is convinced that God knows better. The saint leaves everything to God and waits for God to act and inspire further.¹⁷

While Don Bosco emerges as a man of deeper perceptions in life, what sums up his discerning ways in every sphere of life is to know what God requires of him. With this consistent preoccupation

¹³ Cf. E(m) VII, 199, letter to young man Giorgio Borello, on 7 September 1880. Also Cf. E(m) VI, 241, letter to cleric Antonio Massara, on 26 September 1878.

¹⁴ For instance, Cf. E(m) IV, 96-98, 143-144, letters to Archbishop of Turin, Lorenzo Gastaldi, on 14 May 1873 and on 12 August 1873 respectively.

¹⁵ Cf. E(m) IV, 98, letter to Archbishop of Turin, Lorenzo Gastaldi, on 14 May 1873.

¹⁶ Cf. E(m) IV, 144, letter to Archbishop of Turin, Lorenzo Gastaldi, on 12 August 1873.

¹⁷ Cf. E(m) IV, 415, letter to the Bishop of Vigevano, Pietro Giuseppe De Gaudenzi, on 7 February 1875.

he continues to do good, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God (Cf. Mic 6:8).

7. Don Bosco's denial of self in order to desire God

Denying oneself means saying “No” to oneself and “Yes” to God. For Christians, this is an essential aspect of being disciples or followers of Christ: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mk 8:34; Mt 16:24). Denial of self includes other factors in life such as the renunciation of persons, things and the world. Self-renunciation – pushed if necessary even to extremes – for the sake of the Lord is an indispensable condition of discipleship (cf. Lk 14:26-27). Don Bosco's emphasis cannot be different from that of Jesus. We note his insistence in what he wrote as general advice for faithful Christians: “Whoever wants to save himself has to put the thought of eternity in his head, God in his heart, and the world under his feet”.¹⁸ Such insistence by Don Bosco helps us to know his mind, and to correctly interpret his life and words in his letters.

Don Bosco's priority in life – of being God-centred and leading a life oriented towards the Lord of life – naturally leads him to consider everything else as secondary. In the *Epistolario* aspects of his asceticism are often seen in his exhorting others and affirming his thoughts when others speak of or practice such ideals, besides following aspects related to the evangelical counsels in his life.

“Detachment from the world” or “aloofness from the world”, “despising the world”, “withdrawal from the world”, “resignation”, and “attachment to God” are expressions found sporadically in the letters which speak of radical detachment from self, others, and the world as insisted on by Don Bosco.¹⁹ Giving oneself to God and His Will is not just a principle but the fruit of his spiritual practices as

¹⁸ Giovanni BOSCO, *Porta teco cristiano, ovvero avvisi importanti intorno ai doveri del cristiano acciocchè ciascuno possa conseguire la propria salvezza nello stato in cui si trova*, Torino, G.B. Paravia e Comp., 1858, 7.

¹⁹ Cf. E(m) IV, 114, 467. 499; E(m) V, 113. In Italian, “Distacco”, “Disprezzare il mondo”, “Rassegnazione”, “Ritiratezza”, “Attaccarsi unicamente quelle del cielo” are words that specifically relate to asceticism in the *Epistolario*.

well. The radical reform and disciplined austerity of his life become evident in the significance of the clerical habit as total belonging to the Lord. When Count Carlo Cays, at the age of 64, is aspiring and preparing to be a Salesian priest at Valdocco, Don Bosco writes to him: “Well, I believe that you can take the measurements for your cassock, and thus on my arrival we can have *the ceremony through which you totally belong to the Lord*”.²⁰

Giving up everything for the sake of God and keeping in mind the vanity of the world makes Don Bosco happy, and expresses his inner conviction too. When layman Angelo Lago, who owns a pharmacy, decides to sell his possessions and give away everything for charity and consecrate himself to God, Don Bosco is well-pleased. Giving up the material things early in life for the love of God is better than doing it at the end of one’s life, perhaps by force and without having any other choice. Expressing happiness, Don Bosco affirms that his thoughts too are the same:

I agree with you: to dispose [of everything we have] and give all into the hands of the Lord, that is, for the love of the Lord. Many miserable people give at the end of their life but by force, and therefore the gift is worth a just peel; others, prudent according to the Gospel, offer and therefore [have] the one hundredfold assured. We wholeheartedly thank all those who helped you discover the vanity of the world, to break with it in facts and not only in words. This was always my thought: not to possess anything.²¹

Detachment from the things of the world as an attitude required of the followers of Christ is made clear in his letter to the religious superior of a convent. Such asceticism is the way by which religious can sustain themselves. This is what he tells to Mother Maria Veronica di Gesù crocifisso when the convent where she lived with her sisters was going to be closed because of the “subversive laws” against the religious orders. The anxious moment of facing expulsion is in fact a moment of realization. He says that the situation is

²⁰ E(m) V, 373, letter to Count Carlo Cays, on 3 June 1877 (italics mine).

²¹ E(m) IV, 226, letter to a layman, Angelo Lago, aspiring to be a Salesian priest, on 14 February 1874 (italics mine).

difficult since the testing time is approaching and adds that God wants them to keep away from the world and to lift up their hearts to Him with great sacrifices. Encouraging them to go ahead, Don Bosco affirms that faith and prayer can support them in overcoming every difficulty.²² In the circular letter to Salesians insisting on the austerity of life, he makes it clear that the vows help religious to be detached from persons through chastity, from earthly things through poverty, and from oneself through obedience.²³ Contempt for the world, as well as study and moral behaviour, is also recommended for those aspiring to the priesthood.²⁴

As for the laity or those living in the world, detachment takes the form of attachment to God and to things pertaining to heaven. Don Bosco's prayer and wish for the families to whom he writes is that they make proper use of material things in order to gain heaven. Writing on Christmas day to Countess Emma Brancadoro, who finds herself caught up with issues in the family, he assures her of his prayers that God may illumine their minds and grant peace as well as the grace of not getting lost amidst the things of this world but being attached solely to the things of heaven.²⁵ Marquis Giacomo Antinori is told that to do away with sadness in this world caused by human beings, one must be attached to the eternal good. This world is a valley of tears, an exile and a prison. Hence one cannot hope for real happiness here. The stable and the eternal good does not depend on the whimsical nature of humankind, but on virtues and religious principles. Frequent confession and communion are the most effective means to obtain peace of heart.²⁶ The joy of asceticism revealed in offering charity to the poor, which in turn is a significant form of detachment, is instilled in the heart of a thirteen-year-old boy who sends some contribution for the boys at Valdocco: "You will avoid the misfortune of those who at the end of their lives, find themselves with cash-filled boxes, but empty of merit for eternity".²⁷

²² Cf. E(m) VII, 219, letter to the Superior of the Franciscan Sisters of the Lily of Assisi, on 3 November 1880.

²³ Cf. E(m) IV, 114, circular letter to Salesians, on 4 June 1873.

²⁴ Cf. E(m) V, 114, letter to Salesian priest Luigi Guanella, on 16 April 1876.

²⁵ Cf. E(m) IV, 372, letter to Countess Emma Brancadoro, on 25 December 1874.

²⁶ Cf. E(m) IV, 132, letter to Marquis Giacomo Antinori, on 20 July 1873.

²⁷ E(m) IV, 123, letter to young boy Vittorio Cesconi, on 27 June 1873.

Resignation to God's plans and acceptance of the joys and sorrows of life is another dimension of asceticism practised and taught by Don Bosco. Leaving everything in the hands of the Lord is the final conclusion after planning and seeking help for his poor boys.²⁸ Don Bosco's total submission to God's ways is seen at the great loss of Fr Francesco Provera who died after a prolonged illness. The saint said that he had been preparing himself for a long time for this bitter loss, but all along it had been painful. While the Salesian Society had lost one of its best members, Don Bosco adds immediately that it surely must have pleased the Lord.²⁹ The sorrow and the acceptance of God's plan is evident ten days later when he writes: "thus it had pleased God, and so let it be".³⁰

Interpreting the Will of God for a pious young woman, Don Bosco assures her that the Lord has not forsaken her, indeed God wants her to be good, virtuous and holy, but with patience and resignation to His Will. The saint also promises her that he would pray for her so that she might continue to despise the world.³¹ An expectant mother, Countess Emma Brancadoro, is assured of his prayers and is exhorted to say particular prayers. Before being told to accept with resignation whatever God grants, there are two additional requirements communicated: "Also on your part two sacrifices are requested: greater detachment from creatures and things of the earth; and as far as possible and as much as your state allows you, give in charity".³²

Detachment from the world, from things and from persons, linked to the intimate following of Christ; deliberately abstaining from the satisfaction of the senses, charitable giving which indicates one's detachment, and accepting the Will of God in everything with resignation – all these, according to Don Bosco, are intimately linked to the teachings of Jesus. While he spontaneously distances himself

²⁸ Cf. E(m) IV, 76, letter to layman Bartolomeo Parodi, on 7 April 1873.

²⁹ Cf. E(m) IV, 277-278, letter to Fr Michael Rua and the Salesian Community at Turin, on 14 April 1874.

³⁰ E(m) IV, 279, letter to Commander Francesco Clodoveo Monti, on 24 April 1874.

³¹ Cf. E(m) IV, 467, letter to a pious young woman Carolina Marietti, on 29 May 1875.

³² E(m) IV, 311-312, letter to Countess Emma Brancadoro, in March 1881.

from whatever is contrary to the following of Christ, the primary reason for doing so is to conform to the person of Christ. The life of renunciation is about desiring the highest good. For Don Bosco, detachment is actually about being attached to God.

8. Don Bosco's virtues shine amid sufferings

The most inspiring letters for readers of the *Epistolario* are probably those written amid problems. In the midst of sufferings, be they physical or moral sufferings, virtues glow. As his perseverance in the practice of virtue becomes evident, Don Bosco's heart, faith, reasoning, discernment and deep spirituality seem to shine forth splendidly.

Fortitude ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of good. Virtues grow not only through education, but also by deliberate acts and by perseverance in struggle. The joy of being with Christ, particularly in moments of suffering, manifests the presence of grace in the Christian.³³

The physical and moral sufferings encountered by Don Bosco, as are evident in the letters, help us to know him and his interiority better. Falling seriously ill soon after settling down at Valdocco in 1846 and recuperating from exhaustion, he is optimistic that his health will continue to improve, but the physical pain remains. However, he is sure that it hurts only for a while then goes away.³⁴ An attitude of acceptance, readiness to suffer inconvenience, and the likelihood that the disturbance will last long are evident in his words. In 1860, suffering for quite some time from illness connected with the lungs, stomach, and spitting of blood followed by some fever, Don Bosco writes on 9 November 1860: "From the feast day of all Saints, the usual spitting of blood manifested itself again, followed by some fever. My family ignores this discomfort of mine".³⁵ In

³³ Cf. CATECHISMUS CATHOLICAE ECCLESIAE, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997, nos. 1811, 1837, 1839. From now on it will be referred as CCC.

³⁴ Cf. E(m) I, 71, letter to priest and collaborator Giovanni Borel, on 31 August 1846.

³⁵ E(m) I, 426, letter to the parish priest of Saluggia, Giovanni Battista Fontana, on 9 November 1860. Also Cf. E(m) I, 442, letter to Canon Edoardo Rosaz, on 15 March 1861.

December 1865, as his eyes do not allow him to write the letter by himself, he apologizes to the Archbishop of Florence, Gioacchino Limberti, for writing through his secretary.³⁶ When his eye-sight returns to its original condition after about three weeks, he tells the Archbishop that thanks be to God his eyes have regained their natural state of health, and so he can freely resume work at his desk.³⁷ In May 1867, he writes that his health is pretty good except for the dizziness he quite often feels.³⁸ In December 1867, physically affected by continuous vomiting for about two weeks, he writes on Christmas day that his health had been somewhat affected by the discomfort he had sustained in Mornese, with persistent vomiting. He is gradually feeling much better, except for a slight hoarseness which he hopes will soon gradually disappear.³⁹ In April 1868, he expresses his inability to visit Duchess Elisa Sardi Melzi d'Eril in Milan, the inability having been caused by toothache.⁴⁰ In June 1869, after about ten days of illness, he writes to thank Duke Tommaso Gallarati Scotti.⁴¹ Telling him that his health in 1869 has been somewhat altered, he gives thanks to God as he now finds himself much better.⁴² Faced with difficulty standing, in August 1871 he informs Michael Rua that he is going to punish his feet for failing in their duty. A few days later he writes from Nizza Monferrato that his feet are once more failing in their duty, and that Doctor Fissore had advised him to stay there for a few more days. On the next day he writes that his feet seem to be better.⁴³ The acceptance of physical discomfort, and his light-hearted nature in dealing with it, are evident in his words.

³⁶ Cf. E(m) II, 193, letter to the Archbishop of Firenze, Gioacchino Limberti, on 27 December 1865.

³⁷ Cf. E(m) II, 198, letter to the Archbishop of Firenze, Gioacchino Limberti, on 18 January 1866.

³⁸ Cf. E(m) II, 366, letter to Cavalier Federico Oreglia of Saint Stephen, on 9 May 1867.

³⁹ Cf. E(m) II, 465, letter to parish priest of Mornese, Domenico Pestarino, on 25 December 1867. Also Cf. E(m) II, 453-454.

⁴⁰ Cf. E(m) II, 523, letter to Duchess Elisa Sardi Melzi d'Eril, on 12 April 1868.

⁴¹ Cf. E(m) III, 100, letter to Duke Tommaso Gallarati Scotti, on 24 June 1869.

⁴² Cf. E(m) III, 147, letter to Cavalier Tommaso Uguccioni Gherardi, on 12 October 1869.

⁴³ Cf. E(m) III, 361, 362, 363, letters to priest Michele Rua, after 21 August and on 24th and 25th August 1871.

Don Bosco believes that it is God who sends sicknesses and it is He who cures. His faith and hope shining bright during another serious illness are revealed in the letters after he regains his health. The second serious illness in life that occurred from December 1871 to February 1872 forces him to remain at Varazze for about two and half months. The seriousness of the illness, as well as his grateful heart, are revealed in his letter to Pope Pius IX, on 8 April 1872: “Holy Father, I am indebted to you for my health. The doctors did not give me any hope of recovery. But after I received your holy blessing I began to improve, and after a few days I had recovered and was able to go about my ordinary works”.⁴⁴ Sickness for Don Bosco is a time of God’s visitation, as he writes about the serious illness that it pleased God to visit him with.⁴⁵ Don Bosco also feels that sickness was the way God held him back from carrying out the plan of opening a house at Marassi, Genoa.⁴⁶ The way Don Bosco discerns, reads, and confirms God’s Will in every action is very evident in this letter. It is God who is at work and who directs every action, both in the life of individuals and in history. Thanking a priest for the prayers offered during his illness and praising God for having restored his health, he requests the priest to pray so that God might help him to serve Him well.⁴⁷

Health is a precious gift of God’s, and it is even more precious if used for serving God. Thanking his benefactor Count Cesare Luigi Balbo and wishing him the precious gift of good health, Don Bosco says that the far more valuable grace is to use good health always for things which contribute to the greater glory of God.⁴⁸ Continuing to experience some difficulties with regard to health in January 1873, he writes that the precarious nature of his health makes him unable to travel alone to Rome, and requests accommodation also for Fr

⁴⁴ E(m) III, 423, letter to Pope Pius IX, on 8 April 1872.

⁴⁵ Cf. E(m) III, 402, letter to Senator Giuseppe Cataldi, on 24 February 1872. Just as sickness is God’s visitation [Cf. E(m) IV, 236; E(m) VII, 364], so the death of someone is also God’s visitation [Cf. E(m) II, 140; E(m) IV, 363; E(m) V, 174].

⁴⁶ Cf. E(m) III, 409, letter to Marchioness Nina Teresa Durazzo Pallavicini, on 21 March 1872.

⁴⁷ Cf. E(m) III, 407, letter to Fr Claudio André of Tortona, on 18 March 1872.

⁴⁸ Cf. E(m) III, 458, letter to benefactor Count Cesare Luigi Balbo, on 12 August 1872.

Berto who will be his guardian angel.⁴⁹ The after-effects of the second serious illness continued to haunt him even one and half years later. Unable to visit a benefactress at Alassio, he states the reason on 22 July 1873: “Last year’s illness does not leave me in peace, neither during the day nor at night. Everything will pass”.⁵⁰ Feeling a little relieved, he senses that the fever he had experienced at night has now shifted to evening, though milder and with less headache, though the fatigue was still being felt in August 1873.⁵¹

“My ophthalmologists had these judgments: there isn’t much hope for the right eye; the left eye can be maintained in *statu quo* by restraining from reading and writing. Therefore, eat and drink, sleep and walk about, etc. etc. Thus, we shall carry on!”,⁵² is the way he writes to “his mother” Carlotta Callori on 14 November 1873. Joseph Aubry notes that despite the eye problems that afflicted Don Bosco for the last fifteen years of his life, he never stopped his work.⁵³ The seriousness of these problems with his eyesight and the lack of time available during “the period of maximum intensity of action”,⁵⁴ seem to be obvious in the postscript to the letter to Archbishop Salvatore Nobili Vitelleschi on 28 April 1874: “Kindly offer sympathy for my poor sight: I took the sheet upside down, and wrote, ignoring or rather without realizing that it was a half sheet”.⁵⁵ Poor eyesight leading to bad handwriting is something he jokes about, asking the letter’s recipient to understand his “bad calligraphy”,⁵⁶ meaning decorative handwriting. Don Bosco’s humorous approach to his handwriting is also seen in his letter to Fr Giuseppe Ronchail in 1878:

⁴⁹ Cf. E(m) IV, 44, letter to the Bishop of Fossano, Emiliano Manacorda, on 25 January 1873.

⁵⁰ E(m) IV, 133, letter to benefactress Lorenzina Mazè de la Roche, on 22 July 1873.

⁵¹ Cf. E(m) IV, 135, 142, letters to Fr Michael Rua, at the beginning of August and on 10 August 1873.

⁵² E(m) IV, 177, letter to “his mother” Countess Carlotta Callori, on 14 November 1873.

⁵³ Cf. Joseph AUBRY (Ed.), *The Spiritual Writings of Saint John Bosco*, 215.

⁵⁴ Braido calls the period 1870-1882 as the intensive period of activities in the life of Don Bosco (Cf. Pietro BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*, vol. II, Roma, LAS, 2009, 9). Also Cf. E(m) VI, 253; E(m) VII, 332.

⁵⁵ E(m) IV, 281, letter to Archbishop Salvatore Nobili Vitelleschi, on 28 April 1874. Cf. also E(m) IV, 332, 371.

⁵⁶ E(m) IV, 500, letter to Marquis Tancredi d’Ormea, on 10 August 1875.

“It will be a bit difficult to read. [...] Make an act of contrition and then you will understand easily”.⁵⁷ Describing himself as “half blind”,⁵⁸ but accepting the situation with a humble heart and realizing the difficulty recipients find in reading his letters, he requests patience, and that they understand his wish to write by himself rather than always seek the help of this secretary.⁵⁹ In July 1877, after accompanying the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and the other pilgrims for about three weeks, he was exhausted, and asked his dear boys to receive holy Communion for his health.⁶⁰ As his physical eyesight went from bad to worse, his eye of faith continued to shine bright when he said that while things were fine in general, his eyesight was getting dangerously worse. However, God was happy with this even though his eyesight did not serve him as it should.⁶¹ As he grows gracefully old, he is ready to suffer heat and cold, rashes or skin eruptions, sweating, and fever.⁶²

Moral suffering allows Don Bosco’s perseverance, positive attitudes, and God-oriented thought process to emerge. He does not give up amid difficulties, but finds ways of overcoming, provided good works can continue. These attitudes are manifested amid difficulties for the Oratory in the early years, in the issues faced by the fledgling Congregation, during the prolonged conflict with his Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, during the closure of the school at Valdocco by state authorities,⁶³ and amid the difficulties faced by religious houses in France in 1880. His determination is that the work for poor boys and of the Congregation which is the work of God should not suffer in any instance. He feels the sufferings of the boys, the clerics, the seminarians, and of the Salesians to be his own, and hence always wants to come to their rescue. He considers himself as

⁵⁷ E(m) VI, 136, letter to Salesian director Giuseppe Ronchail, on 27 March 1878.

⁵⁸ E(m) V, 140, letter to Salesian director Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, on 7 May 1876.

⁵⁹ Cf. E(m) V, 244, 356; E(m) VI, 187; E(m) VII, 139.

⁶⁰ Cf. E(m) V, 403, 411, letters to priest Michele Rua, on 8 July and after 16 July 1877.

⁶¹ Cf. E(m) VI, 289, letter to Countess Carlotta Callori, on 25 November 1878. For further letters regarding Don Bosco’s poor eyesight and his positive attitudes, Cf. E(m) VI, 291, 294, 297, 298, 322, 327, 409, 490.

⁶² For instance, Cf. E(m) VII, 170, 177, 179.

⁶³ Regarding closure of the school at Valdocco, see for instance: E(m) VI, 250, 251, 262-264, 268-269.

a poor man who goes about looking for bread for his poor boys, and he makes others understand the situation of his poor boys. However, the constant thought is that the Master will give in the measure and in the time that He judges most appropriate for His creatures.⁶⁴ Don Bosco is convinced that sufferings inflicted by human beings are also moments for experiencing the hand of the Lord. During the Prussian-French war in June 1871, religious are consoled but are exhorted to adore the mercies of the Lord who sends scourges so that the world will know that God is the Supreme Master.⁶⁵ When the Sisters are saved from the dangers of war, he immediately recognizes the hand of the Lord. Expressing his joy and thanksgiving to the Lord and to Mary, he desires to know the minute details of the supernatural intervention so that he can preserve it as a monument to the glory of Mary.⁶⁶

Failures, discouragements and conflicts are accepted in faith and hope. When hard work is met with obstacles and projects cannot proceed for some reason, Don Bosco is not discouraged.⁶⁷ Occasional day-to-day problems, too, have to be faced: important letters go missing; letters are being opened amid calamitous times for the Church;⁶⁸ even as he struggles to raise money for the poor, the charity sent by the benefactor does not reach him;⁶⁹ a big sum of money meant for a holy cause is stolen by thieves;⁷⁰ and difficulties and heartaches are not wanting even from within the Congregation.⁷¹ Without brooding at length over difficulties, he seeks an answer in faith, and moves on. In the conflict with Archbishop Gastaldi, Don Bosco's faith, hope and charity are resplendent. His all-pervading awareness of God, his humility, patience, readiness to ask forgiveness, upholding the interests of the Church, seeking counsel,

⁶⁴ Cf. E(m) II, 496, 497.

⁶⁵ Cf. E(m) III, 333, letter to the Superior of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Mother Eudisia Babin, on 2 June 1871.

⁶⁶ Cf. E(m) III, 337-338, letter to the Superior of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, Mother Eudisia Babin, on 16 June 1871.

⁶⁷ For instance, Cf. E(m) III, 454-455; E(m) IV, 89.

⁶⁸ Cf. E(m) VI, 103; E(m) VII, 214.

⁶⁹ Cf. E(m) VII, 366, letter to a benefactor whose name is not known, on 31 May 1881.

⁷⁰ Cf. E(m) VII, 112, letter to Baron Aimé Héraud, on 18 April 1880.

⁷¹ For instance, Cf. E(m) VII, 278, letter to Salesian missionary Fr Giuseppe Fagnano, on 31 January 1881.

exhorting the Salesians to keep silent, to pray and observe the rules, and overcoming difficulties with goodness are all evident amid a scene of conflict. Don Bosco perseveres through any difficulty with the secret principle that roses bloom among thorns.⁷²

Physical and moral suffering as evidenced in the letters lead Don Bosco to grow and persevere in the practice of virtue, and offer him further opportunities to keep himself aligned to God and His Will. Even as he suffers personally he chooses to participate willingly in the sufferings of others, thus becoming a good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:25-37). He is sensitive to the sufferings of others and is moved by the misfortunes of others. He chooses to stop beside suffering people rather than pass by on the other side. Those occasions in a way become opportunities to experience the particular power that draws him interiorly close to Christ. In them he discovers or re-discovers his own humanity, dignity, and mission.

9. Don Bosco's joy and sense of humour as signs of holiness

“Happy are the people whose God is the Lord” is the exclamation of the Psalmist (Ps 144:15). The Apostle Paul on the other hand, invites Christians to “rejoice in the Lord always” because “the Lord is near” (Phil 4:4-5). While there are several degrees of happiness, “its most noble expression is joy, or happiness in the strict sense, when man, on the level of his higher faculties, finds his peace and satisfaction in the possession of a known and loved good”.⁷³ Pope Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*, speaking of Christian joy, says that while man experiences joy when he finds himself in harmony with nature, in a special way he finds joy in the encounter, sharing, and communion with other people. Even more does he know the spiritual joy or happiness when his

⁷² Cf. E(m) VII, 123, letter to the Secretary of the State, Cardinal Lorenzo Nina, on 7 May 1880.

⁷³ PAUL VI, Adhortatio Apostolica *Gaudete in Domino*, 9 May 1975, in “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 67 (1975) 291. (We indicate page number, since no paragraph numbers are provided in this document). While “delight” can pertain even to irrational animals, “joy” pertains only to rational beings. The other words for “joy” pertaining to rational beings are: gladness, exultation, and cheerfulness (Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 31, a. 3).

spirit enters into possession of God, known and loved as the supreme and immutable good.⁷⁴ According to Thomas Aquinas, “joy is not a virtue distinct from charity, but an act, or effect, of charity: for which reason it is numbered among the Fruits”.⁷⁵ And “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal 5:22-23).⁷⁶ The spiritual nature of joy derives its merit from being the gift of the Holy Spirit, and Christian joy in every sense is joy in the Holy Spirit.⁷⁷ The extent to which this spirit of joy is present in Don Bosco, and the lively way in which his holiness is manifested through his sense of humour are the objects of our synthesis now, as we try to elicit and complete the spiritual profile of Don Bosco emerging through the letters.

“Despite flux and reflux, what I find as extraordinary is that I am joyful more than I would wish”; “My present occupations are: eating, singing, laughing, running, roaming etc. etc.”; “Tell Peter to prepare good dishes for Fr Pacchiotti, so that on my arrival I might find him in good health and of good humour”.⁷⁸ these are words from a much younger Don Bosco, as he writes in October 1845 at the time of his first serious illness as recorded in the letters. As the result of his incessant activities for his poor boys, he is forced to retreat to his family home at Castelnuovo due to his poor health. Information such as the need to break his journey on the way home, stopping at Chieri – because unable unable to travel further immediately, and not being able to walk even after a week at home, reveal the seriousness of his health already in 1845. However, illness does not stop him from being joyful, and he wishes others the gifts of good health, good humour, and gladness. As if to prove that his joy and a sense of humour spring from God, while telling his boys of the interesting events that occurred during his journey to Lanzo Torinese in 1864,

⁷⁴ Cf. PAUL VI, *Gaudete in Domino*, 291.

⁷⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 28, a. 4.

⁷⁶ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* enumerating the fruits of Charity as “joy, peace, and mercy” (Cf. CCC, n. 1829), states as follows: “The fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity” (CCC, no. 1832).

⁷⁷ Cf. PAUL VI, *Gaudete in Domino*, 292.

⁷⁸ E(m) I, 61, 60, 62, letters to the mentor and collaborator, Fr Giovanni Borel, on 11 and 17 October 1845.

he has a wonderful conclusion to the perennial question as to which came first, the chicken or the egg. Saying that he would give the chicken and the egg to better hands – to a good cook – he concludes that be it the chicken or the egg, one must attribute them to God who had created both of them, including the chicken from which came the egg. Hence even when one goes from father to son, one must terminate the question with the man created by God.⁷⁹

His spontaneous humour is revealed when soliciting help from his priest friend and later Bishop of Vigevano, Pietro Giuseppe De Gaudenzi. The letter is in the form of a skit, and expressions such as how clever the person had been as to pluck the goose without hurting it, and that Don Bosco would be on Pegasus' back and be carried away away at the speed of the wind,⁸⁰ highlight his relaxed mindset. Amidst his playfulness, liveliness, and the liberty with which he writes to those who are close to him, Salesians and particularly the female benefactors whom he considers as mothers, the deep desire is that they always be filled with spiritual gifts. Addressing his "good mother" Countess Girolama Uguccione, he reveals his affection, saying, "if the body could fly with its thoughts, you would have at least one visit a day from this rascal", and playfully writes: "by and large all our schools are filled with students, as many as six thousand six hundred. You are the grandmother of them all, aren't you? What an abundant harvest!"⁸¹

Joyfulness and playfulness are mingled with holiness in Don Bosco. The touch of humour and the sense of faith going hand in hand seems to be a special characteristic of Don Bosco. Informing Giovanni Bonetti about his visit, he tells the recipient: "Get ready with a pot of laments and a bag of money, I will take both". But the thoughts that immediately follow are about the deeper realities of life: "Remember that we have no peace in this world, but continuous war. Some day we shall enjoy true peace, provided we combat

⁷⁹ Cf. E(m) II, 61-62, letter to boys at the Oratory at Valdocco, on 22 July 1864.

⁸⁰ Cf. E(m) I, 142, letter to Fr Pietro Giuseppe De Gaudenzi, on 24 December 1851. Pegasus is a mythical winged horse in Greek literature.

⁸¹ E(m) III, 470-471, letter to Countess Girolama Uguccione, on 9 October 1872.

strongly on the earth. *Sumamus ergo scutum fidei ut adversus insidias diaboli certare possimus*".⁸²

"Your Excellency might say that I have a poetic mind. It is true",⁸³ is how he discusses his plans and ways of carrying out the possible new mission in France. The plans might look imaginative and unrealistic for the recipient or the reader of the letter, but for the writer the assurance is that "God would inspire".

As for his poetic mind, this is also true in the literal sense. We see his skill as a poet on a number of occasions. While his Christmas greetings to Baron Carlo Giacinto Bianco takes on poetic form, his lament at not being able to write is also in poetic style.⁸⁴ Poetic verses of consolation and encouragement are directed to his Salesian sons in Albano, who find themselves overburdened with work and the lack of personnel. The poetic exhortations are as follows: to be at peace and to remain serene, for Don Bosco thinks of them; their worries are his own and he will send immediate help; all of them must be good, always cheerful, true friends and to live remembering that only a good life can make them happy.⁸⁵ The soothing effects on those burdened with work seem to be a balm even to weary readers. As for the lyrical verses to Fr Giuseppe Bologna who is learning other languages in preparation for the missions, Don Bosco playfully asks if the recipient is Spanish or French, German or British. While Ceylon is ready, and Mangalore awaits, the missionary should be ready to bring with him the crowd or followers of Saint Francis Xavier. Don Bosco reminds him that God is the final destination and that heaven is ready.⁸⁶

⁸² E(m) III, 349-350, letter to Salesian Fr Giovanni Bonetti, on 27 July 1871. The biblical quote referred is: "Take up the shield of faith, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph 6:16).

⁸³ E(m) V, 419, letter to the Bishop of Fréjus and Toulon, José Sebastian Terris, on 3 August 1877.

⁸⁴ Cf. E(m) III, 164-165, letter to Baron Carlo Giacinto Bianco of Barbania, on 24 December 1869; E(m) V, 309, letter to cleric Edward Mackiernan, on 22 January 1877.

⁸⁵ Cf. E(m) V, 264, letter in poetic form, to cleric Giovanni Battista Rinaldi, on 27 November 1876.

⁸⁶ Cf. E(m) V, 308-309, letter in poetic form, to Salesian priest Giuseppe Bologna, on 22 January 1877.

Besides showing his skills in poetry, Don Bosco teaches Italian grammar, too, through his letter on 21 November 1876. The actual expertise is not just the poetry or the grammar, but the instilling of confidence in the recipient and the inspiration for knowing the way to God. A humorous letter is the reply to one from young Salesian Fr Angelo Rocca, whose letter had contained quite a few grammatical errors. Don Bosco teaches him grammar, correcting the errors, with a fatherly heart. The recipient, while smiling, is exhorted to know Don Bosco's affectionate heart, but above all, to learn the infinite mercy and goodness of God, and the action plan is to keep the Rule as the standard code, particularly the practices of piety.⁸⁷

Don Bosco's light-hearted nature is put to use to encourage a sick benefactor, also reminding the recipient of an appointment on Trinity Sunday 1891, the writer's Golden Jubilee of Priesthood! Writing in July 1881, Don Bosco makes fun of the hot summer, it looks like ongoing steam baths, but with a little smile, Don Bosco adds that despite the high temperature, there was no news that anyone was cooked already. Then he encourages the benefactor, who wrote to him that he is unwilling to die, to stay alive because for the sake of the charitable works that were incomplete both of them had to collaborate together for quite some time. "You accepted my invitation to attend my fiftieth anniversary Mass to be celebrated on Trinity Sunday of 1891. Do you want to miss an invitation made and accepted by you?"⁸⁸ His spiritual and playful nature emerges in the letter to Countess Carlotta Callori who has been ill. Although normally God grants extraordinary graces even for a single and a brief prayer, Don Bosco does not know the reason why the grace has not been received this time: "[...] And what had been obtained so far, I do not know. Poor Don Bosco! He has lost all his credit with the Lord".⁸⁹ Don Bosco does not mind making fun of himself or even calling himself the leader of his "troublesome" boys.⁹⁰

We can find some eighty occasions in the *Epistolario* where Don Bosco manifests his interior joy expressed as humorous

⁸⁷ Cf. E(m) V, 261, letter to young Salesian priest Angelo Rocca, on 21 November 1876.

⁸⁸ E(m) VII, 395, letter to benefactor Cavalier Carlo Fava, on 4 July 1881.

⁸⁹ E(m) VII, 400, letter to Countess Carlotta Callori, on 24 July 1881.

⁹⁰ Cf. E(m) V, 310, letter to priest Michele Rua, on 22 January 1877.

comment regarding individuals and situations, which also reveal his essential sense of God.⁹¹ The joy referred to in such letters are by nature, deeper than mere happiness. Don Bosco's joy is rooted in God. Since joy comes from God, it is more serene and stable than worldly happiness which might often be merely emotional and momentary. The fruit of Don Bosco's joy is the awareness that God is his strength and protector. One need not think that when Don Bosco is joyful he is free from sorrow. On the contrary, it is in moments of physical illness, moral sufferings and heartfelt sorrow that his humour and Christian hope shine bright. Spiritual individuals never allow themselves to be drowned by the waters of sorrow, for beneath the external signs of sadness, they discover the solid rock that is God who waits with immense love to lift up the heart of His creatures.

From our brief synthesis of the role of joy and humour in Don Bosco's life as emerging from his letters, we might generalize and assert that, though "no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord" (cf. Lk 2:10),⁹² the joy of the Lord fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus, and becomes exceptionally manifest in some. Since they accept Jesus' offer of salvation, they are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness, and with Christ their joy is constantly born anew. In them, God's voice is heard, the quiet joy of His love is felt, and the desire to do good becomes stronger. All these dimensions seem true in Don Bosco. Desiring God's Will, he lives in the Holy Spirit. The experience of God's love and the daily encountering of Christ bring him joy. He finds joy amidst the little things in life. His soul rejoices at seeing the marvels of the Lord (cf. Lk 1:47). Even in moments of great difficulty his joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of the personal certainty that when all is said and done, he feels that he is infinitely loved. As he shares the grief of people enduring great suffering, he lets the joy of faith slowly revive them too,

⁹¹ For some of the letters expressing Don Bosco's joy, besides his lively, light-hearted, and timely humour even amid various problems and fatigue, but all mingled with affection and the ever-present consciousness of God, see: E(m) II, 421, 431, 441, 451; E(m) III, 173, 331, 356, 376; E(m) IV, 141, 147, 158, 187, 210; E(m) V, 55, 155, 234, 310, 440; E(m) VI, 67, 136, 226, 505; E(m) VII, 36, 157, 253, 463; E(m) VIII, 129, 394.

⁹² PAUL VI, *Gaudete in Domino*, 297.

because his own firm trust remains constant even amid the greatest of distress.⁹³ It is for this reason that Pope Paul VI, while describing the joy in the hearts of the saints, places Don Bosco – as well as Saint Francis de Sales – among the saints who have taught the way to holiness and joy.⁹⁴

Conclusion

Through our efforts at providing a summary of the essential aspects of the person of Don Bosco emerging from the huge collection of his letters, we have pointed out the dominant characteristics we can perceive in them. In stating that three relationships, namely, the relationship with God, with neighbour, and with oneself constitute the spiritual profile of an individual, we have tried to show how true they are for Don Bosco. While an all-pervading God consciousness and sense of the soul mark Don Bosco's relationship with the divine, we believe that his God-oriented nature gives meaning to all of his life and activities. Such a foundation is affirmed also in his relationship with others through love and gratitude, particularly with his boys and Salesian sons who are truly his delight and consolation. As for the relationship with self, we have listed the dominant and unique characteristics that help us to better understand the person of Don Bosco through his written words.

The purpose of Don Bosco's letters is not interior self-revelation but the immediate day-to-day accounts of events, descriptions of gratitude, of guidance, and of the joys and sorrows of life. However, the unintentional self-revelation in these communications of a deeply spiritual person who is characterised by spiritual shyness or an extremely reserved spiritual nature, makes the emerging spiritual profile both notable and unique. The interiority of the saint intermingled with everyday affairs and strewn throughout the vast collection of his letters is a rich harvest that helps us gain pertinent insights into Don Bosco's spiritual profile.

⁹³ Cf. FRANCIS, *Adhortatio Apostolica Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 nov. 2013, in *AAS* 105 (2013) 1019-1137, nn. 1-4, 6.

⁹⁴ Cf. PAUL VI, *Gaudete in Domino*, 306-307.

What is the outstanding image of Don Bosco emerging from this collection of his letters? At the immediately visible level, shining ever brightly is the external image of a zealous priest who feels called by God for the salvation of the young. Don Bosco is firm and committed in fulfilling such a universal mission while reading the signs of the times in all the circumstances of life concerning the political, social, economic, cultural and ecclesial contexts in continuous evolution. At a deeper level, we discover the image of a person who passionately and continuously gives himself to God and His ways. Life in God, total availability to divine commands, continuous discernment of the Will of God, and being attentive even to the whispers of God characterize this profound image of Don Bosco. He is perceived to be in a “God-synchronous orbit”, as he is constantly and habitually directed towards God, and longs to be in harmony with Him. This is revealed to be the touchstone of understanding and interpreting the spiritual person of Don Bosco in his letters.

In conclusion, we can say that by reading the letters in chronological order, a reader has the sense of moving at pace with the current and the letters’ main protagonist. Even when one is not the addressee but a reader from another time, the letters make one feel that one is among the members of the fortunate audience to whom they are addressed. Now, what can the fortunate addressees see, feel, and learn? The Lord who has created humankind wants us to experience His love, providence, presence, and joy -- both now and in eternity -- made possible through His saving grace. God is the Father and the Master of everyone and of everything that exists. But when evil forces threaten to become the masters of the world, Don Bosco is sure that the prayers, the love of good people, and devotional practices work marvels. The Merciful God always comes to the assistance of His people, while Mary fights off evil forces. Whether the time is opportune or inopportune, one should worship Jesus in the most holy Sacrament, and continue to do works of charity. It is this theological outlook that Don Bosco communicates continuously. In everything that Don Bosco does and in whatever he communicates, one perceives the constant spiritual undercurrent lying beneath all human considerations and material preoccupations. If we miss this God-oriented perspective, we miss the real spiritual person of Don Bosco. But when one tries wholeheartedly to discover

the unifying force lying beneath his outward actions, one is sure not only to admire the beauty and the warmth of that force, but will also be led to experience that force and feel fortunate to be blissfully swept up in that spiritual undercurrent.

SALESIAN CRITERIA AND PROPOSALS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

by Michal Vojtáš

The educational experience of Don Bosco inspires Salesian Higher Education in different ways. The first is in the inspirations of the Salesian charism that accompanied the moment that Salesian Higher Education was born. Beyond history, we are dealing above all with subsequent ways of considering the Salesian educational style from a criteriological, applicative and future point of view. Salesian anthropology is summarized around the following criteria: Christianity and culturally stimulating citizenship; differentiated pedagogy between “basic honesty” and “excellent leadership”; the welcoming environment and, finally, the ideal of the educator as a formator – animator – teacher – companion. On the basis of these criteria we will propose some ideas and potential processes applicable in the field of didactics, accompaniment, planning and positioning within the Salesian Province.

1. Ideal inspirations concerning the birth of Salesian higher education

Every Salesian Institute of Higher Education (IUS) has its own characteristic history and basic traits. Without an attempt to

amalgamate and stereotype the institutions, I will try to summarize not so much the foundational histories, but rather points of reflection and the situational typologies that have stimulated the origin of the IUS. Given the history of foundations and ideas, it seems convincing to draw two scenarios. The first originates from the educational and pastoral needs of the world of youth, the second, instead, responds to the need for the formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco. Consequently, both are inspired by reflections that have different emphases.

1.1. Higher education of young adults becomes part of the Salesian mission

In the West, the final decades of the last century were characterized by the possibility for the young people of the working class to access higher education. The university was no longer seen as a sector for a privileged few, but rather an environment for an ordinary life preparation for a large number of young people. In addition, the definition of “youth” was broadened to include the term “young adult” that describe young people as legally adults who are in processes of maturation and training belonging to the age-groups of 18 to 28 years (Vecchi, 1988).¹ Particularly in the European context, the Salesians of Don Bosco at first developed reflections on the pastoral care of young university students from the 1980s onwards. It was only towards the end of the millennium that a reflection began on the Salesian Institutes of Higher Education in other contexts. A typical Salesian way of proceeding is recognized in this process - first the needs of young people are met, different programs and projects are explored and finally the institutional solutions are clarified.²

¹ The 22nd General Chapter in 1984 had affirmed that “it is important not to stop at adolescence ... but to go further, to the youth, where at this moment interesting cultural and religious phenomenon are noted” (General Chapter 22, no. 71).

² Valdocco Oratory based on a series of “itinerant” activities, the process of expansion of its activities, the progressive logic of the foundation of the Salesian Congregation and the approval of the Constitutions are “founding” experiences of the Salesian way of proceeding (Braido, 2003, vol. 1, p. 299-320).

Juan Edmundo Vecchi, as councilor for youth ministry and later as Rector Major, is one of the central figures in the animation and reflection on Salesian Higher Education. For the first time, and in a systematic way, in 1988, at a meeting organized at the European level, he tackled the theme “Salesians and the pastoral care of university students” (Vecchi, 1988). It was noted that “the emphasis for the moment was almost entirely on the pastoral care of university students. This pastoral action was implemented in about twenty boarding houses/residences for university students, in some chaplaincies and in a few university clubs. No relevance seemed to be given to the world of the university in youth ministry as a whole” (Nanni, 1988, pp. 162-163). The concluding remarks of the meeting in 1988 report some summaries and motivations for Salesian pastoral work in the “university world”:

- the age of “youth” has been broadened;
- university studies have become accessible to young working-class individuals;
- university students are increasingly at risk and in a situation of abandonment;
- the education of university students is required for the principle of continuity;
- the university world is a privileged place for the formation of leaders.

Two sets of problems were reported among the forms of distress, or new poverty, among university students. The first is relational: being left to themselves, individualism, uprooting, the anonymity of university environments, the crisis of a crisis in participatory organizations. A second set revolves around the problematic aspects of the university as such: economic exploitation of culture, strong competitiveness that induces fear of failure, uncertain future employment (Nanni 1988, pp. 40-41). As responses to the situation, the authors of the discussion point to the promotion of a pedagogy of educational environment and a pedagogy of personal accompaniment. Also, in this context, lies the proposal for psychological orientation programs as elaborated by Umberto Fontana in the early 1990s (Fontana & Piccolboni, 1993; Fontana, 1994). Nanni (1988, p. 45) in his proposal overcame the pure reactive mentality with respect to the needs of the young and proactively

proposed pastoral care among university students as a privileged field for vocational ministry.

In Europe, for sociological reasons, the model for the pastoral care of university students seemed to prevail, while in Latin America, Universities or Salesian Institutes of Higher Education were developed. The context, legislation and opportunities have favored the emergence of universities that have responded to the needs of the working classes in the matter of greater professionalization. Regarding IUS, J.E. Vecchi stated that “at the outset attention was directed especially to organizing a service to create the opportunity of a higher education amid the middle and poorer classes and fill the cultural gaps that existed.” (Vecchi, 1997, p. 45). Insofar as he began with an academic proposal structured at the level of the environment, Vecchi pointed rather to the challenge of a Salesian way of training qualified teams professionally and pastorally, that know how to create alternative proposals with respect to the dominant mentality: “Once the first organizing effort required by such initiatives has been accomplished, the moment comes to confront decisively and at community level the cultural and pastoral qualification beginning with the preparation of confreres and lay personnel.” (Vecchi, 1997, p. 45). A similar approach to proposals and attention is seen in the recent development of colleges in South Asia (India) conceived as structures of higher education dedicated to the professionalization of young people from rural and working sectors.

Considering the two differences in emphasis rather than the popular tertiary education linked to a IUS Institute and the pastoral care of young university students through chaplaincies or residences for university students, one can glimpse the particular strengths and challenges of each of them. In the following paragraph I would also like to analyze the approach to higher education which draws inspiration from the development of the formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco.

1.2. The formation of Salesians that inspires and requires higher education

A diverse source of inspiration that links higher education to the Preventive System is found in the traditions, theories and practice revolving around the formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco. I believe that this source is not only at the level of ideas, but also at the level of a mentality that then structures the projects, curriculum and educational models employed, especially if a studentate of philosophy or theology that was aimed at the formation of Salesians, then becomes an Institute of Higher Education. In the following paragraphs I summarize two lines of thought: one, much dated in time, attempts to conceptualize the Preventive System within higher pedagogical studies, the other as offered by J.E. Vecchi in the context of the beginnings of the IUS network.

The Salesians of Don Bosco gradually realized the need to broaden their formation with scientific studies of pedagogy. There are certain early indications in the 1930s within the General Council: “Some state the need to give theologians some general idea of pedagogy in a scientific way” (Prellezo, 2016, p. 215). Later, during Peter Ricaldone’s term of office, a project for a Salesian higher institute of pedagogical studies was maturing, which in 1940, in Turin, took concrete form as the Higher Institute of Pedagogy (ISP – Istituto Superiore di Pedagogia). The aforementioned Rector Major emphasized its importance by saying: “It is a necessity for us to erect this new Faculty; it is a necessity for the Salesian Society, a religious society of educators” (Prellezo, 2016, p. 216). Interestingly, only in 1956 were the motivations for its canonical recognition reported by the promoters of the ISP. The authors speak of the incidence of the youth problem in a world of great economic, social and cultural transformations; the inadequacy of the preparation of educators; the urgency of confronting the contemporary pedagogical world; the intensification of scientific production in the field of education (Prellezo, 2016, pp. 218-219).

The idea of the need for higher studies for the formation of the Salesians, which started out as a concern of some far-sighted scholars and superiors, spread widely during the period of the Second Vatican Council and prompted the thematization of the essential “qualification” of the Salesians. The 19th General Chapter held in

1965 on the new campus of the Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum in Rome, stated vehemently that “every manifestation of our activity now demands qualified persons in the theological, liturgical, philosophical, pedagogical, scientific, technical, scholastic, artistic, recreational, administrative fields, etc.”. Qualification is a “matter of life and death for the Congregation” which for the Chapter implies a re-dimensioning of the structures and the multitude of activities (GC19, pp. 5-10). Despite the insistence, many decisions of that period remained only on paper. Twenty-five years later, Juan Edmundo Vecchi’s honest evaluation of the implementation of General Chapter 19 was: “GC19’s reflection was not satisfactorily translated into practice [...]; neither interpretation nor practice experienced major changes at the grassroots of the Congregation” (Vecchi, 1991, p. 10).

The evolution for the need to qualify Salesians for higher studies culminated in the aforementioned letter of 1997 - “For You I Study”, to which the institution of the IUS refers. IUS Institutes are explicitly placed in the context of the formation of a “new type of Salesian” which corresponds to the demands of the “new evangelization” and the “new education”. The Salesian is part of a new operational model: that of pastoral leaders, first responsible for the Salesian identity of initiatives and works, and then, as an “animating nucleus”, as formator of other educators. It is thus essential to evolve and remain capable of creatively interpreting culture, to animate a broad educational environment, to accompany processes of maturation and growth along with other educators, to orient people, to interact in the social context. This entails keeping various competences formed and updated (Vecchi, 1997, pp. 17-18).

Starting from these ideal references, the IUS Institutes, which were not conceived for the formation of Salesian religious but in service to the younger generations, have a potential to disseminate wide-ranging thought and action, overcoming the temptation to downplay the proposals to the dominant mentality.”Our Universities must define their orientation in line with their Catholic character and harmonize their educative philosophy with Salesian criteria, becoming centers for formation and the elaboration of culture of Christian inspiration.” (Vecchi, 1997, p. 46) From this arises the need and urgency to address, decisively and communally, the cultural and

pastoral qualification, starting with the preparation of confreres and lay people.

2. Salesian anthropology as a criterion for Salesian Higher Education

In the first paragraph we deemed important the short study of the stimuli and inspirations that accompanied the origin of the IUS. The valorization of the common ideas that emerged in the historical process, albeit with particular achievements for each institution, allows us to summarize a first draft of the Salesian university model:

- A higher education accessible to the masses, that responds to the need for greater professionalization;
- The standardization of university environments as an opportunity to develop a model that enhances accompaniment and creates a welcoming ambience.
- Higher education is an opportunity to give continuity to the formation of adolescents and accompany them in their young adult years, during which their personality is defined and they can confront life choices;
- Higher education is a privileged place for the formation of leaders and has the potential to spread Christian-inspired cultural models;
- Higher education has an important dimension *ad intra*: the formation of a new type of Salesian called to be a qualified companion, an animator and formator of lay groups that interact with the wider cultural and social context.

In the following paragraphs we expand these stimuli drawing from the permanent insights of the Preventive System and outlining the fundamental traits for a Salesian anthropology. We will consider Vecchi's recommendation that: "there is an urgently felt need to create programs adequate to the situation and inculturate our pedagogical methods, overcoming the simple transposition of contents and methods designed for other areas" (Vecchi, 1997, p. 15).

2.1. A culturally stimulating Christianity and Citizenship

Higher education provides a particular perspective for interpreting the classic binomial of Don Bosco that expresses part of the Salesian educational objectives: “good Christian and upright citizen.” The field of cultural significance can bring a new paradigm of the typical Salesian relationship between Christian faith and citizenship. This is also due to the fact that IUS institutes are primarily operating in the cultural field and serving in the human endeavor of the search of truth. Therefore, if we were to think of higher education institutes as a way of gaining access to the masses of students in order to catechize them or to train them in the function of social change, this would be a form of exploitation with many negative implications.

The idea that Don Bosco had about the relationship between Christianity and citizenship is not radical. He was neither a modern thinker who proposed an education of a “new man” in view of an ideal society,³ nor a restorer of the “old man” of the *ancien régime catholique*. Don Bosco does not conceive Christianity and citizenship as being dichotomous, does not take a narrow ‘protest’ perspective, but educates according to the construction of the Christian individual who practices the authentic values of the traditional believer and the citizen of the current order in a new way. Therefore, he is rather a thinker-actor of an educational synthesis at the level of practical wisdom, striving to achieve both old and new goals.

It would be reductive to envision a Don Bosco as traditional Catholic who was impelled to innovation only by the historical momentum of a society in turmoil. His educational model, on the other hand, led young people to accept both fidelity to the perennial Christian novelty and the ability to integrate into a society that was

³ The education of a “new man” in function of a “new society” is instead characteristic of modern pedagogical currents: the Enlightenment consider a society of equality and rationality (J.J. Rousseau); the pragmatic industrialists, instead, of a society of production and free market (F.W. Taylor); the communists hypothesized a society of equality around a planned economy (A.S. Makarenko) and the nationalistic ideologues a strong centralistic state around the idea of nation (G. Gentile).

in a phase of transition from the old regime to political unification during times of rising industrialization (Braido, 2006. pp. 229-232). Don Bosco, man, priest, educator at the same time, had a vision that values the humanistic aspects of Christianity, promotes all that is positive in creation and society and, at the same time, christianizes civilization showing that only in this way can it develop authentically.

If Christianity remains closed within itself, within the reflections of the past with an archaic language, it becomes culturally insignificant and, in addition, the aspect of the perennial novelty of the Gospel is lost. Therefore, Salesian Higher Education must not see Christianity and citizenship as separate areas to be only reconciled or balanced. This model of reconciliation is found e.g. in the planning model according to dimensions – the dimension of education to the faith is detached from the educational-cultural dimension. The challenges, potentialities and cultural and social tendencies of a society are a stimulating opportunity for Christianity to rethink, implement itself and become meaningful. At the same time, the healthy tradition of “Catholic cultures”, found in different historical eras and in different parts of the world, stimulates the culture of a society to go beyond, rethink, christianize itself, contributing to the wider Catholic-universal *Weltanschauung*.⁴

What Vecchi (1997) said, referring to the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, is timely: “The Gospel way of life is an important source for proposing a new cultural model. A great many founders and foundresses perceiving certain needs of their time, with all the limitations which they themselves recognized, have given these needs an answer which has become an innovative cultural proposal [...] The manner of thinking and acting of those who follow Christ more closely gives rise to a true and proper point of reference for culture” (*Vita Consecrata*, 1996, no. 80). Recently,

⁴ I find the reflections of Romano Guardini stimulating. He proposed a Catholic *Weltanschauung* not as a “type” next to others but as Christ’s gaze on the world: “Essential Catholicism is not a type [...] An attempt has been made to place a type of ‘Catholic man’ next to a Protestant, Buddhist, classic Greek-Latinist, capitalist kind. This juxtaposition, and every other of its kind, is false. The Catholic man is not a type [...] He embraces all the typical possibilities, just as life itself embraces them” (Guardini, 1994, p. 91).

Pope Francis re-proposed the ideas of Pope Paul VI that go along the same lines, affirming that “the Church’s mission of spreading the Gospel not only demands that the Good News be preached ever more widely and to ever greater numbers of men and women, but that the very power of the Gospel should permeate thought patterns, standards of judgment, and norms of behavior. In a word, it is necessary that the whole of human culture be steeped in the Gospel.” (Francis, 2018, no. 2).

In the present age, now that the great narratives that supported the all-encompassing modern *Weltanschauungen* are over, we could positively re-evaluate Don Bosco’s practical reasonableness, which offers us a fundamental attitude of permanent validity. In post-modern culture, strong and deductive thinking has shown its limits, which can be occasions for the development of an integral, practical, wise, ethical and believing rationality. Catholic universities are called to be “a Christian presence in the academic world in the face of the great problems of society and culture” (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 1990, no. 13). In secularized or post-secularized societies, it is not a matter of entering into a sort of radicalizing *Kulturkampf* but of being a Christian alternative that illuminates social and cultural problems by creating innovative ways of life that are more proactive than critical or polarizing.

Departing from Braido’s historical analysis (2006) and the principles outlined by Vecchi (1997) we can characterize the Salesian way of living the intelligence of faith in the following way. The starting point is the willingness to see and value the positive aspects of reality. The goal of thinking in a Salesian way is an integral synthesis, seen more as a tension of opposing complementary principles than an ideology that reconciles everything in a system. This intelligence of faith requires certain skills including: an ability to read both the traditions and the current situation intelligently; the ability to grasp the scope of the phenomena that affect individual and collective life; openness to ever wider horizons of the future marked by Christian hope; creative fidelity that is rooted in tradition and sees innovations in a logic of continuity; the search for answers to the challenges of time and their translation into operational projects; reflection on the educational experience with an attitude of ongoing formation; a rationality that

values both theological thought, the “reasons of faith” and the “cognitive modes of faith” such as discernment, prayer, meditation, contemplation, practical wisdom, the three ecstasies of St. Francis de Sales (reason, emotions, action), etc.

2.2. A differentiated and realistic pedagogy combining “honesty” and “excellent leadership”.

We need to acknowledge the situation in the origins of Salesian Higher Education, which on the one hand sought to cater to the people of the lower classes with an offer of professional training and on the other hand aspired to train leaders for significant social change. Given this polarity, one can observe a diversity of approaches that implies the need for a differentiated pedagogy.

Braido (2003, vol. 2, pp. 680-683) concludes his extensive biography of Don Bosco with one typical characteristic of Salesian work: operational realism. The fascination with excellence and the *avant-garde* did not make Don Bosco forget the magnitude of his problems, the diversity of his points of departure and the insufficiency of his means. A characteristic of the Preventive System is to prefer to implement a realistic “good” to plan some virtual “excellence” at a hypothetical distance. In Don Bosco, we can find a differentiated pedagogy: one for Dominic Savio, and others for the problematic, the runaways, the undisciplined.

The binomial involving citizenship and Christianity is not only culturally stimulating, but also outlines the practical perspective of the goals of education: professional work combined with the practice of the virtues inspired by the Christian vision of the world. At the heart of the Salesian project lies not only a good ordinary Christian and citizen, the honest worker, the morally and civilly responsible common human being. However, the Salesian ideal aims higher and seeks to educate to professional and ethical excellence, in other words, leaders in their professions (“the summit of progress”) and saints actively engaged in the mission of the sanctification of the world (Christian as a “person of eternity”). By connecting the studies and insights of Braido (2006) and Chávez (2007) with the pedagogical models of change, we can find in the Preventive System

five degrees of growth departing from the basic level of honest livelihood and leading ultimately to excellence in holiness:

1. The point of departure is to help young people find the most basic reason to live. It means getting them to experience the desire and joy for living in a serene environment with the educational intention of offering the means for a meaningful development of their profession. Here we are still in a phase of *transmission* where we need to establish a minimum threshold of formative requirements that allows them to acquire the basic skills for an “honest” (upright) profession and human life.

2. The subsequent proposal of a *transactional* nature requires working with cognitive and operational schemes. From the very beginning Don Bosco heralded the paradigm of “enlighten the mind to form a good heart”. Education that aims at the development of intellectual and operational skills must see that concepts interact with emotional experience in order to overcome the blocks of ignorance and cognitive prejudices on the one hand and dysfunctional operational practices on the other.

3. A qualitative leap from transactional to *transformative* education does not lie in the skill of the educator or training activities. The key lies in the family environment typical of Salesian institutions, which creates an atmosphere and a rich network of paternal/maternal, fraternal, friendly relationships capable of instilling trust and expanding further and enabling individuals to be the protagonist of one’s own education. The objective of trust requires sufficient reliability of the educational community in which the hidden project broadly confirms the explicit educational project.

4. Transformative education takes place at a higher and richer level in which affectivity, loving-kindness lived, received and regenerated, tends to integrate and interact with the passion for the search for truth (reason), goodness and spiritual beauty (religion). In the transformative proposal of the Preventive System, the *synergistic triad* reason-religion-loving kindness are an indication of goals, contents, means and methods.

5. At the summit of the path of integral salvation, Don Bosco clearly proclaimed the supreme educational goal of *excellence* -

holiness. It is not only a message given to a privileged individual but a horizon for all, as recalled by Saint Francis de Sales and also by Pope Francis' recent apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018). In contrast, one overcomes the implicit Gnosticism and Pelagianism by a transformative education in which young people are the protagonists of their formation within the horizon of holiness, entrusting themselves to God. In this sense, holiness is an original work of God's grace and man's response.

2.3. A welcoming and profound environment for a mission in the world

The ultimate aim of educating young adults as excellent leaders for society is already an established conviction: to offer society something of quality through our higher education centers enriching it with mature individuals, competent professional and active citizens (Reference Framework, 2014, p. 214). It would not be right to fall into the "social transformation trap" that considers the commitment to the improvement of society as the only motivational energy for Salesian Higher Education. This is due to the following three reasons: desires of young people, psychological balances within the Preventive System, and requisites of profound transformative planning.

Listening to young people and their expectations often reveals their sense of loneliness, the need for belonging, the lack of vision for the future and the difficulty of planning their life. Symptomatic and important is the message of the young people gathered in March 2018 in the pre-synod on "Youth, faith and vocational discernment". The message became the voice of numerous young people departing precisely from the need to have a strong sense of belonging: "Young people look for a sense of self by seeking communities that are supportive, uplifting, authentic and accessible: communities that empower them". They themselves mention several difficulties, such as social exclusion, experienced by many, as a factor that contributes to the loss of self-esteem and identity. The first paragraph on personality formation ends with the words: "As we grapple with these challenges, we need inclusion, welcome, mercy and tenderness

from the Church – both as an institution and as a community of faith” (Synod of Bishops, 2018, par. 1).

These are symptoms of the fragility of the actual generation, one could say, especially if the evaluation comes from the post-Vatican II generation that fought for the transformation of the world. The observation may be pertinent up to a certain point, but it seems to me that young people express a voice of reality that calls us to rediscover a lost balance. To engage in the world we need a “secure foundation”, a belonging community. In addition, young people who experience their own identity, detaching themselves from their families, need an educational environment that is not standardizing and anonymous, but rather a family environment (Burggraeve & Schepens, 1999; Nanni, 1988). Salesian pedagogy of a welcoming family environment favors the development of healthy personalities who, in the future, may be agents of change. Don Bosco’s loving-kindness, in this sense, is not only a sympathetic being with the young or only an unconditional acceptance of their world. It is a love that is strong (inspired by the immense love of God), personal (addressed to the concrete person), participatory (it frees inner energies), free (it accepts decisions, the autonomy of the other and times of growth), disciplined (by reality and values) and formative (it proposes high reaching goals and horizons).

Salesian Higher Education therefore creates an environment that serves both the goals of creating a welcoming base and the social transformation goal. There is a need to create an organizational culture of the IUS in which Christian values, civil values, the Social Doctrine of the Church are merged into an Institutional Project, with standards and participatory processes in the Academic Community, activities of education in values, empowerment, volunteering, personal discernment and accompaniment (Reference Framework, 2014, pp. 218-222). In fact, in Don Bosco’s Preventive System it is a priority to act primarily in the community. Braidó (2006, p. 305) states: “The preventive system is valid both for the education of individuals, with highly personalized relationships, and for the education of the ‘multitudes’. Nevertheless, for the most part, being united in community, is the ‘place’ where the Preventive System has most clearly tried its hand and configured itself, and rendered it largely communitarian”. Here lies the communal balance of Salesian

education that does not create anonymous spaces but neither does it fall into the intimistic temptation of selective relationships that favor a narcissism closed in on itself (Vojtáš, 2017b).

In this way we can relive Don Bosco's ideal: the man we educate with a view to active inclusion in civil society is, first and foremost, the Christian who is competent and upright in the exercise of their profession. Charity and the apostolate are the vocation for all. In the Salesian vision, everyone, according to their respective possibilities and responsibilities, is bound to a charitable and apostolic presence expressed in diverse ways. Some contribute with almsgiving, others engage in catechetical and educational action, others are called to create associations of "activist" Christianity with the logic of "*vis unita fortior*", still others are called to respond, if God calls, to the most daring perspectives of commitment (Braidó, 2006, pp. 245-248).

2.4. The ideal of the educator as formator-animator-teacher of groups

As Vecchi (1997) and also the Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference (2014, p. 214) affirms, the IUS were also founded for the preparation of a new type of educator, religious or lay, who is summarily understood as formator, witness, companion, disciple, community animator, leader and project manager. The many characteristics create a new multi-faceted figure that is the result of the post-conciliar evolution of the Salesian charism and the concrete needs of the educational world.

The post-conciliar organizational decentralization, the absence of restructuring of works, the logic and exigencies of planning undertaken in the Educative and Pastoral Communities, the shared responsibility of the laity, a requested and often unsuccessful change of mentality and also the lack of Salesian personnel are what have brought the demands summarized under the title of "new evangelization" to maturity (Vojtáš, 2017a, ch. 1). Summarizing Vecchi's indications, we discover a series of skills required by the Salesian educator of the new millennium, who:

- is capable of an open, intelligent and pro-active confrontation with new phenomena, understanding cultural trends, attempting to proclaim the faith “in the heart of life”, interpreting new languages and codes of meaning;
- possesses an identity as a believer, a spiritual robustness and the capacity for convinced dialogue with others in a climate of freedom. This requires that the faith and the reasons for our hope be understood and lived with validity and transparency;
- is a pastoral guide, animator of other educators - “driving nucleus” and formator of adults who share responsibility for educational work, beyond mere friendship;
- has a clear Salesian identity in so far as he is primarily responsible for the Salesian identity of initiatives and projects. He has a greater theoretical and practical knowledge of youth problems and education and knows how to authoritatively propose educational goals and itineraries.

I believe that Salesian Higher Education has a two-fold relationship with the ideal of the new educator. The IUS needs such educators and at the same time should prepare them. The duality of this relationship does not create two independent lines of planning but is an opportunity both for synergy within pedagogical or formative institutes and for the creation of a specific Salesian formative method. Here I only offer some universally valid principles inspired by the model of formation starting with Salesian identity (Schaumont & Loots, 2015).

Identity is not a static datum, but rather a dynamic one: it presents itself as a process that is not formed from one day to the next. It is constituted within a vital network that is continuously modified by internal and external factors. Dynamism, however, does not imply generality - a clear identity is important in the manner in which one addresses the outside world as well as the educators of one's particular IUS institute. The clear vision of the institutional project strengthens the link with the work, offers a meaning for educational activities, increases satisfaction and provides a joyous experience. Departing from the model cited, I propose some

principles: history, criteria, language, management, practice and environment.⁵

The relationship of an institution with its tradition can vary: sometimes there is a strong bond, almost one of dependence, while at other times one finds oneself in a purely formal relationship with the inspirations of the beginnings. A work that detaches itself from its roots loses its original identity. For a Salesian institution intending to remain 'Salesian', the effort to cultivate a dynamic relationship with the traditional and current contents of the Salesian educative and pastoral model that offers a set of criteria is indispensable. Tradition in general is not only Salesian but also local, the history of the institute varies, depending on whether it was formerly a college, a high school, a formation house for Salesians, etc. Often, local traditions are stronger interpretative keys than the set of theoretical criteria themselves.

The criteria of the Salesian educative and pastoral model are not univocal words which are immediately understood and applied. They need a language that reveals and forms their understanding and interconnection. The term 'language' here is broader than the choice of vocabulary. Images, symbols, gestures, applications and stories of best practice are forms of language. Those who enter an institution perceive multiple eloquent and interpretive messages about their identity, even without a word being spoken.

Every organization that wants to be based on a specific identity must be able to clearly formulate its mission and objectives by following the strategies and considering the criteria of Salesian education. This formulation serves as guidance for management, decision-making processes and the training of collaborators. The Salesian identity of a IUS institute results above all from the way in which the project is implemented. For example, it is easy to include

⁵ Each formative model is implemented by concrete individuals. In this sense, on July 6, 2016, at the General Assembly of the IUS, the Rector Major, Ángel Fernández Artime, asked for more presences of the Salesians in the IUS saying: "Few Salesians are not a wealth. If we want to collaborate with the laity, they themselves want our presence [...] The charism also has its visibility with the realistic presence of persons. Universities are a preferred field; therefore, it is not enough to come part-time to the university".

in the management program or objectives of the institute the fact that young people are at the center. But if this does not occur in daily activity and there are no standards, structures and resources for accompaniment (young people at the center of educational attention) or student participatory organizations (young people at the center of educational activity), the project is contradicted by reality and becomes a mere formality. In such contexts, the organizational culture is a set of rules, values, written and unwritten rules of conduct, organizational chart, calendar, organizational, motivational and communicative systems. The more harmonious and cooperative the organizational culture of a IUS institute, the more will it be convincing, incisive and formative in its Salesian identity.

3. Ideas and Applied Processes

The Salesian charism is essentially educational and since its origins has developed into a cyclical movement of experience and reflection. The experiential part, or, if we prefer, its applications, is for us not only a phase that comes “after” in a deductive fashion, but is foundational and characteristic. In this sense, Salesian anthropology is not only “applied” but is understood, specified and characterized by the various application styles. In the following paragraphs I would like to propose some ideas, theories and/or best practices that concretize the most reflective inspirations of the preceding paragraph.

3.1. *The model of Salesian rationality as a didactic criterion*

In the context of fragmented knowledge and scientific disciplines, there is a great risk of separating educational contexts and educational dimensions. In the post-conciliar context, the human sciences have been relatively perceived as autonomous from theology (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 36; *Gravissimus Educationis*, no. 10 and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 7.) and have brought different approaches to the methodological field. Following this logic, even Salesian education and pastoral care did not have “a” methodology and had to introduce the logic of education by dimensions (YM Department, 1979). The declarations on the need to integrate

dimensions are often only a pious wish or rather a symptom of the separation of dimensions into non-communicating areas and activities. Even within the reflection on education, “pedagogy” is set aside and “educational sciences” are preferred as a multi-disciplinary concept that often only has inter-disciplinarity as an ideal reference.

Let us therefore take seriously the idea of trans-disciplinarity proposed by Pope Francis in the Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* and recommended from Paul VI onwards, precisely to overcome the “there is a lack of wisdom and reflection, a lack of thinking capable of formulating a guiding synthesis” (*Veritatis Gaudium*, no. 4c). Following the Pope’s line of reasoning, and also the typical Salesian way of proceeding, we are not proposing a new epistemological theory but teaching methods that embody and concretize Salesian anthropology in processes of learning and personal formation. The strategy is therefore not to propose new courses (such as the courses of “Catholic doctrine” in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, part 2, art. 4 §5 and *CIC* 811 § 2) but a Salesian way of educating by means that integrates the different didactic paradigms. Here I would like to exemplify some possibilities:

Co-operative learning is a teaching methodology that balances the aspect of content education with the needs of soft skills training needed for interaction in the group. Besides being an innovative way of education, it has the advantage of implementing a Salesian rationality that is relational, discursive and narrative (Pellerey, 2015). Moreover, it has already been tested as a paradigm of a Salesian educational style in the IUS through the course “*Curso de Aprendizagem Cooperativa e Tecnologia Educacional na Universidade - Em Estilo Salesiano*” (Botelho & Vicari, 2009).

Other Salesian educational aspects (Christianity-citizenship) can instead be supported by service learning. The practical synthesis of Christian and religious values as experienced in service or volunteer projects becomes a driving force for learning. These values and activities are neither occasional nor self-focused. Starting from actual problematic situations and ensuring that students are an active part of the learning process, the clear separation between “volunteer work” and “school” is overcome by embodying and reflecting Salesian anthropology. Furthermore, there is potential to link service

learning with inter-culturality and other contemporary challenges (O'Grady, 2012).

Character (or virtue or value) education as a key Catholic approach, has the potential to educate to citizenship and “it is possible now to take up at least some of Don Bosco’s educational insights, included in the ideal of the upright citizen, and present them from a more recent perspective, taking into account today’s state of knowledge about the character of man and modern societies” (Grządziel, 2015, p. 118. See also the articles in *Misión Joven*, 2018). The typical approaches of virtue education denote some typically Salesian traits: a pedagogy of the community environment that embodies a tradition; experiential learning that integrates the moral dimension (moral character) and the performative dimension (performance character); a narrative pedagogy that has the potential to include the new digital natives and the new “digital continent” (Grządziel, 2015).

3.2. Multi-level isomorphic accompaniment

A proposal of differentiated pedagogy, if it does not want to remain only at the level of theoretical principles, necessarily implies personal accompaniment. Even the different innovative teaching methods are not technical methodologies that work “automatically”; they give cues, stimulate, open horizons but an internalization in people’s lives occurs in the context of the educational relationship that needs to have time and space dedicated to the young person. The principle of attention to the individual person is a fundamental characteristic of the Preventive System and the Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference also says this about IUS: “Complete human development offered by way of formation requires that each individual receive pastoral attention and accompaniment [...] This implies developing a model of formation and ministry that: ensures the orientation and accompaniment of the individual in integrating the different dimensions of human, Christian, professional and social development; explicitly proclaims Jesus Christ and his Gospel, while accompanying those who freely wish to follow a path of Christian growth and maturity, through programmes of education in faith” (YM Department, 2014, pp. 221-222).

Diverse are the problems of the recent and richly themed accompaniment. The differentiation of styles and methods of accompaniment has not helped the desired integration of the dimensions of growth, but has created a multiplicity of references and a variety of concrete advice (accompaniment, confession, therapy, coaching, mentoring, counseling, etc.). And the production of many texts on accompaniment has multiplied the “requirements” for mentors, resulting in fewer (honest) people thinking themselves suitable to be mentors. A third complication comes from an idealized concept of freedom, in which (false) respect for the person implies the impossibility of any accompaniment at the organizational structural level. This is the direction taken by Gesing (2004) who compares the abandonment of the classic friendly chat with the director in the Salesian world with the increasingly strong practice of supervision in the workplace.

Given this, I think it is necessary to propose a model of accompaniment in the IUS that has three complimentary and logical understandings: isomorphic, diversified and generative. It is necessary that accompaniment becomes a “form” of the organizational culture of the IUS that structures the organization of processes and educational environments at different levels. The institution defines some basic criteria (ethical, pedagogical, Salesian) for every type of accompaniment. This is the sense in which we can speak of an isomorphic organizational style - there are different concretizations but there is a form of accompaniment recognizable in all.

The diversification of accompaniment realistically provides for different types of accompaniment. There is a need for supervision across different levels of the organization and this involves the accompaniment of educators in terms of Salesian leadership/discipleship (Rodríguez, 2018). Other types of accompaniment will be carried out by professional teams with a specific preparation aimed primarily at students: center for psychological listening, pastoral counseling center, university pastoral team for confessions and spiritual accompaniment, etc.

The third, generative logic, instead, in line with the Salesian tradition of the “guardian angel” (Braido, 2006, pp. 310-311), implies that each person is potentially a companion/mentor,

follower/leader, disciple/teacher. Here one could include the more informal and contextual ways of accompaniment such as mentoring, tutoring, peer coaching, etc. One consequence of isomorphic accompaniment is the need to set standards and prepare formative courses for mentors at different levels.

3.3. The innovative concept of the IUS as “a whole”.

The curricular and extracurricular proposals, methodologies, activities and even different levels of accompaniment are not sufficient for a good functioning of a IUS institute. These elements contribute to the offer which is formative but without an institutional project they can be fragmented, isolated and/or opposed proposals. Since the 1970s, the Congregation has proposed (more in theory than in action) the educative and pastoral planning as a way of finding harmony and intentionality in the various educational proposals. If the statement that “The Institutional Project is a true constitutional charter that guides the life of the whole institute” (Frame of Reference, 2014, p. 218) is to be true, the modality and processes of planning should be more “integral” and less “fragmented”. Integrality is understood more as a systemic logic of convergent interconnections (Nanni, 2006; Vojtáš, 2017a; Rodríguez, 2018) than an integralism that begins with an idea and then applies it deductively and hierarchically. Obviously, this is not a new ideology - it is rather the harmonization of autonomies and a positive re-evaluation of the relationship between hierarchies and collegial forms of leadership (Kühl, 2002).

If education is understood in its entirety, and not only as a technical method, it becomes fundamental not only to understand the situation and respond by defining the desired “product” (product paradigm) but also the processes that guide the path that brings the work to completion (process paradigm). Last but not least, it is fundamental to go above and beyond indifference to concrete individuals, to observe the educators, their inner worlds, their past, their motivation, spirituality and vocation (paradigm of identity). I am convinced that this step is not the result of the desire to “spiritualize” higher education by force, but rather a consequence of the evolution of models of leadership (Rodríguez, 2018, pp. 53-83),

of the limits of design by dimensions in the Salesian context and, last but not least, of the opportunity to set up planning methodologies that are truly formative and virtuous and not only techniques for achieving the desired products (Vojtáš, 2017a, pp. 110-125).

The planning modalities of a “whole” exceed the management for industrial-modern objectives with some steps that are more suitable to the world of VUCA - volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. Respecting the specific nature and history of each institute, I think that it is appropriate to valorize not only linear thinking but also systemic-integral thinking (cf. authors such as Deming or Senge); transformative and not just transactional change (Tichy, Devanna, Mezirow, Scharmer); participatory and community leadership (Schein, de Geuss, Wenger); excellence instead of effectiveness (de Pree, Bennis, Covey, Gardner); the multiplicity of “intelligences” (Polanyi, Agor, Mintzberg, Argyris, Gardner) and spirituality in planning (Giacalone, Jurkiewicz, Benefiel).

The Institutional Project in this way balances the need for clarity of identity by talking about the Salesian vision and mission that creates an organizational culture (Schein, 2017) and works in a differentiated pastoral university or “concentric circles”. In this way the Salesian tradition of “ingenious modernity” announced by Philip Rinaldi, Don Bosco’s third successor, is maintained. He affirmed that ingenious modernity “rigidly preserves the substantial spirit in its educational method” and for this reason it prevents us “at the same time from becoming fossilized in things that are accessory and subject to change over time” (Rinaldi, 1927, p. 573). An institutional planning of this kind maintains in a creative tension the constancy of the spirit, that is, the balance between fidelity to the founding principles and the creativity of pastoral, organizational and didactic applications. An Institutional project is thus a flexible mediation that clearly defines the “Salesianity” of the institute by accepting the “rules of the game” of a concrete cultural, social and legal context.

3.4. To conclude: the strategic position of the IUS in the Salesian Province

The fact of linking the proposal of Salesian Higher Education with the formation of Salesians is not only, I think, one of the inspirations of the origins but rather has also a potential for the future and for the Salesian identity of a Salesian Academic Center. The relationship between the Salesian Province and a IUS institute can be varied, from the positions of an outsider, through simple respect and acceptance, to finally a mutually enriching synergistic collaboration. In the final analysis, the IUS could become a center of gravity for the “Salesian” academics who are there and if they do not find a Salesian placement, they will find other ways to realize their competence. While at the same time, it could become a radiant center of pedagogical, sociological, communicative, editorial innovation, etc. Areas of possible synergy could include:

- initial and ongoing formation of Salesians;
- pedagogical and Salesian formation of lay people who work or volunteer in the Province;
- collaboration with the Youth Pastoral Team of the Province;
- research projects on youth, communication, new social trends, etc.;
- editorial or media communication projects at the province level;
- radiating and positioning in educational and social networks of the outside world (State, NGOs, Associations, etc.).

A choice of this kind would involve investment in a faculty/institute/center of pedagogy or sciences of formation with the presence of Salesians (or representatives of the Province) and a coordinated planning with the Province sectors of Youth Ministry, Formation and/or Social Communication. The desirable advantage would be an enriching relationship between academic reflection, the liveliness of the world of youth, the needs of the context and the concreteness of the Provincials’ educational-pastoral proposals.

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INTERESTING PUBLICATIONS

by Wim Collin

PATHWAYS TO FRATERNITY, EDUCATING THE YOUNG IN THE LIGHT OF “FRATELLI TUTTI”

Pathways to
FRATERNITY
Educating the young in the Light of ‘Fratelli Tutti’



Edited by
Jesu Pudumai Doss
Sahayadas Fernando
Maria Charles Antonysamy

1. Introduction

As the title suggests, the book is an attempt to outline diverse paths to fraternity for educators and mentors in contemporary India. Paths to brotherhood spanning the various fields of interest of Indian youth today: personal, social, cultural, political, and spiritual. The book aims to be a concrete and effective tool for educators in the upbringing of young people. The basis or background against which these suggestions are made, it says on the book’s cover, is always the Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis from October 2020: “Fratelli tutti”.

1.1. The authors

The book *Pathways to Fraternity* is edited by three principal authors, the Salesians of Don Bosco Pudumai Doss, Jesu, Sahayadas Fernando, and Maria Charles Antonysamy.

In *Pathways to Fraternity*, we find nineteen contributions on which collaborated twenty-two different authors; some of the contributions have, for various reasons, two authors. Except for one or two authors, most are or Salesian (sixteen) or Jesuit (four).

1.2. The Book

Pathways to Fraternity is published by *All India Don Bosco Education Society* (AIDBES) in New Delhi, India. AIDBES is the publishing house of the South Asian Regional Office of the Salesians

of Don Bosco in New Delhi. This office coordinates all the Salesian South Asian Religious Provinces concerning several services to the various dimensions of the Salesian Youth Ministry. The book is written in English and published in 2021; the book's price is ₹350 (€25 \$30) and can be ordered at: dbyasouthasia@gmail.com.

The book contains 341 pages and includes 19 different contributions by various authors. The contributions are preceded by a presentation and an introduction; both are numbered separately. The contributions are all about the same length, about 15 pages, the smallest contribution has only ten pages, the largest contribution is more than 25. Most articles are richly provided with footnotes, but none are concluded with a bibliography.

Pathways to Fraternity is dedicated to “All persons of good will, who through their lives and teaching, have inspired young people to transcend all barriers and to create a fraternal society.” It is stated explicitly that the editors and the publisher in no way can be held responsible for the views and the content expressed by the authors in their papers.

2. The content

The 19 different contributions are divided into four thematical parts or categories.”The first group of 8 articles delves into *some general challenges*, such as in the philosophical, moral, religious, social, legal economic and ecological spheres, of educating the Indian youth towards fraternity. The second group of 5 articles presents various *educational methodologies and processes* to enable fraternity, with a special focus on the pedagogical, intercultural, psychological and catechetical approaches. The third part includes the 2 articles that discuss *special categories of people*, such as migrants and women. In the last part, one may include the 4 best practices that one gathers from lived experiences of the NGO's, especially in their work with youth at risk and refugees.”¹ Although the book focuses on India and the Indian context its youth is living,

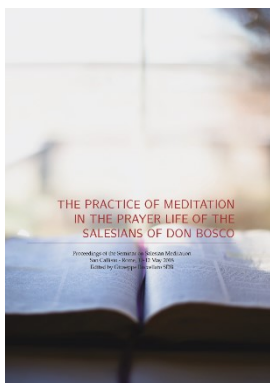
¹ Pudumai Doss, Jesu, Sahayadas Fernando, and Maria Charles Antonysamy, eds. *Pathways to Fraternity. Educating the Young the Light of “Fratelli Tutti”* New Delhi: All India Don Bosco Education Society (AIDBES), 2021, x-xi.

several contributions also have meaning outside this context, particularly those of the first two parts of the book.

3. Technical

Pudumai Doss, Jesu, Sahayadas Fernando, and Maria Charles Antonysam, eds. *Pathways to Fraternity. Educating the Young the Light of “Fratelli Tutti”* New Delhi: All India Don Bosco Education Society (AIDBES), 2021. ISBN 978-81-954146-0-4

THE PRACTICE OF MEDITATION IN THE PRAYER OF THE SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO, PROCEEDINGS OF THE SEMINAR ON SALESIAN MEDITATION



1. Introduction

The Practice of Meditation in the Prayer of the Salesians of Don Bosco [from now: *The Practice of Meditation*] is the result of a seminar organized by the Formation Sector in Rome, 10-12 May 2018, and now three years later, a digital book was published with the content of the seminar. The seminar aimed to clarify the place of meditation in the tradition and life of the Salesians of Don Bosco. The book offers some practical guidelines in this area of meditation, focusing on the indications given by Saint Francis de Sales.

1.1. The authors

The book *The Practice of Meditation* is edited by don Giuseppe Buccellato, Salesian of Don Bosco. He is an expert in the field of Salesian spirituality and the history of Don Bosco.

In *The Practice of Meditation*, we can find four main contributors apart from the introduction of don Ivo Coelho, Salesian

of Don Bosco, and general councilor for the formation of the Salesian congregation. Don Giuseppe Buccellato himself, Don Eunan McDonnell, don Giuseppe Roggia and don Xabier Blanco.

1.2. The book

The Practice of Meditation is an online publication by the Formation Department of the Salesian congregation. The Formation Department is in charge of promoting the integral and ongoing formation of the members of the Salesian congregation. Special attention goes to the process of the initial formation of Salesians worldwide.

At the same time, the book *Pointers and Suggestions for Daily Meditation in the Society of St. Francis de Sales*, written by Giuseppe Buccellato, was published in English. The original version in Italian is from 2020.

The book counts 59 pages with four main contributions, two larger contributions from Buccellato and McDonnell from around 15 pages each, two smaller contributions from Roggia and Blanco from about five pages each. The central part is concluded by a text of the book's editor. After the conclusion, we can find the practical information concerning the seminar with several letters of recommendation and invitation and the appendix with the program.

2. The content

The first contribution, the one from father Buccellato, concentrates on the essential elements of meditation in Don Bosco's practice and teaching. He starts with underlining the fundamental need for meditation for religious life and then touches some very practical matters about meditation in the tradition of Don Bosco. He explores themes like: When does one have to meditate?; Why do it with other brothers?; How long it has to last?; Is it necessary to have a specific method to meditate?.

Eunan McDonnell goes a step back in time with his contribution and analyses and synthesizes the Salesian way of meditation. He concentrates his contribution on what Saint Francis de Sales, the

source of inspiration for Don Bosco, wrote about meditation in his principal works, especially in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, *capolavoro* of Francis de Sales.

Giuseppe Roggia, as Euenan McDonnell, is an expert on Saint Francis de Sales, speaks of meditation as *lectio Divina*. He starts his contribution by explaining what *Lectio Divina* is, analyzing the steps of *meditation*, *contemplation*, and *collation*. He is indicating the importance of this so-called “journey” in the various stages of the early formation of young confreres as well as in the ongoing formation.

The last contribution is from Xabier Blanco, he is binding together the theme of Salesian meditation with the contemporary search for silence. His insights balance the silence of the meditation and the importance of the community, underlining the importance of communicating and sharing the meditation experience. He refers in his contribution to the Spanish priest and novelist Pablo d’Ors.

3. Technical

Everybody can download the book by clicking this link: https://www.sdb.org/en/Departments/Formation/Documents/The_Practice_of_Meditation_in_the_Prayer_of_the_Salesians_of . The book is, as stated earlier, also available in other languages. Apart from printing on your own printer, there is no link to a print-on-demand website. Printing a hard copy of the book would be interesting for those who would like to read, make notes in the book, or take it to the chapel to read there.

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES



SAINT FRANCIS 1622
#FRANCESCODISALESS2022 DE SALES 2022

POSTERITY
PEDAGOGY
SPIRITUALITY



NOVEMBER 18-20 2022



The Salesian Pontifical University and the Salesian Congregation announce the International Convention dedicated to “**Saint Francis de Sales: Posterity - Spirituality - Pedagogy**”, the bishop of Geneva who has significantly changed theology, in particular Christian spirituality, and proclaimed “Doctor of the Church” by Pope Pius IX.

Four hundred years after his death in Lyon on December 28th 1622, the Convention intends to contribute to the study of his life, his works, his influence, his thought, and his spirituality.

The Convention is organized by the Faculty of Theology and takes place from November 18th to 20th 2022 at the UPS and is divided into two parts:

- the inspiration: Francis was not only founder of the order of the Visitandines, but already from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century, founders of orders, congregations, institutes that were inspired by his spirituality and his work. It will probably be the first time in history that so many “Salesian” institutes come together to share their common source of inspiration.
- various interventions: of a pedagogical, historical, ecclesiological, and spiritual nature that deepen and broaden the knowledge of Saint Francis de Sales.

Speakers: on the relationship between Francesco di Sales and Jeanne de Chantal, Wendy Wright (USA); on the call to holiness, Eugenio Alburquerque (Spain); on the spiritual accompaniment of women, Judith de Raat (Netherlands); on communication, Vincenzo Marinelli (Italy); on pedagogy, Michal Vojtáš (Italy); on the relationship between contemplation and action, Giuseppe Roggia (Italy); on his influence on Xavier Thévenot, Thierry Le Goaziou (France); on relations with Protestants, Emile Amoungou Amoungou (Italy); on his ecclesiology, Aimable Musoni (Italy).

Date: Friday – Sunday November 18-20 2022

Place: Università Pontificia Salesiana - Roma - Italia

Languages: Italian, English, Spanish, French

Information: francescodisales2022@unisal.it



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CALL FOR PAPERS SPECIAL ISSUE 2022



Next year, the year dedicated to Saint Francis de Sales, as we celebrate the 400th anniversary of his death, the *Journal of Salesian Studies* will publish a special issue. All the articles in the first issue of 2022 will be dedicated to Saint Francis de Sales. In that way, we want to contribute to the study of this great saint's spirituality, history, and theology.

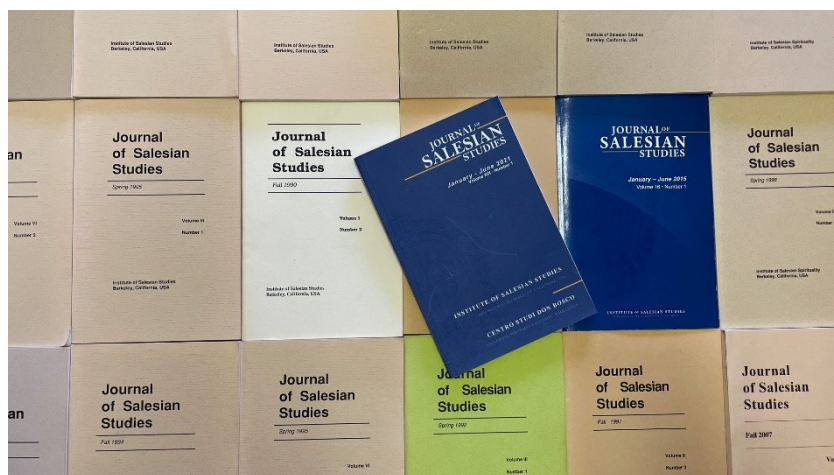
The *Journal* wants to encourage everyone to contribute to this issue. A lot has been written already about the bishop of Genève. However, there is still a lot to study: themes about his spirituality, his way of accompanying people, best practices of implementing Salesian spirituality today, images of nature in his preaching, the influence of contemporary saints, rereading of the sources used by Saint Francis, challenges for Salesian spirituality today, encouraging people to meditate according to Saint Francis,...

The articles must be written in English. And have a minimum length of 5.000 words and a maximum length of 25.000 words. An important component is an abstract. This 100-500 word summary is used to help the reader quickly ascertain the paper's purpose. The abstract is not intended to substitute the article and does not necessarily mention the conclusions. Instead, it is meant to whet the

reader's appetite and draw their interest by noting some of the key points of study and perhaps the methodology.

Authors are asked to use the template for formatting purposes and follow the guidelines outlined on the website of the Journal.

The submission deadline is April 30, 2022. For submission and presentation, for proposals and questions, contact: collin@unisal.it



CALL FOR INTERESTING PUBLICATIONS

Books and publications of particular interest to the Salesian spirituality, pedagogy, history, as outlined in the “Call for Papers”, ought to be submitted to the following address:

Journal of Salesian Studies

Wim Collin
Piazza dell'Ateneo Salesiano 1
00139 Roma
Italy

CALL FOR PAPERS

This Journal is an academic publication covering topics primarily related to the Salesian tradition of Saint John Bosco, including its connection to the wider Salesian tradition relating to Saint Francis de Sales. In order to progress the Salesian mission and properly understand and discern the call of Salesian discipleship, many articles take on a historical perspective and delve into the origins of the Salesian charism, spirit, educational style, and its historical application through time. These historically-based articles are designed to encourage the reader's critical reflection and draw connections to its current application. However, many articles make more of an immediate practical application.

The Journal of Salesian Studies, therefore, welcomes proposals and contributions that bring to the fore any of the following subjects:

- Education and evangelization of youth
- Don Bosco's charism and method
- Timely and pertinent topics relating to Salesian work
Historical research in topics relating to the growth and development of the Salesian Society
- Francis de Sales' charism, spirit, and historical influences, as well as related persons and topics such as Jane de Chantal and the Visitation Order
- Profiles of personalities who have made a notable contribution in Salesian history, such as Mother Mary Mazzarello or founders of other congregations who have Saint Francis the Sales as a source of inspiration
- Book reviews of publications that are either explicitly Salesian, or publications which may be of interest to those involved in the education and evangelization of youth)

Submission Details:

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There are two possibilities to print this issue of the Journal of Salesian Studies. The first one does not need any explanation, just print it on your own printer or in a copy center.

But we also thought about the possibility to print your own hard copy, or the copy for the library through a print on demand website, so you can have a hard copy with a colored cover to add to the collection of the Journal. The procedure is very simple.

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8. You will receive your issue in a couple of days.

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