

## Art. 1. The Founder: A Man Sent by God

*To contribute to the salvation of youth, “the most delicate and most precious portion of human society,”<sup>1</sup> the Holy Spirit, through the maternal intervention of Mary, raised up St. John Bosco, who founded the Society of St. Francis de Sales (1859) and, together with Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1872). He extended the apostolic energy of the Salesian charism by officially setting up the “Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators,” the third branch of the Family (1876), united to the Society of St. Francis de Sales (also called the Salesian Society of St. John Bosco or the Salesian Congregation).*

*The Holy Spirit formed the heart of a Father and teacher in St. John Bosco, one capable of total dedication, inspiring him with an educational method permeated by the charity of the Good Shepherd.*

### CONSIDERATIONS

#### Core Themes

1. Don Bosco: A Man of God, Founder, Guided by the Holy Spirit
2. Charismatic Reality of the Association of the Cooperators in the Church

#### Keys to Understanding

**A.** The name of "Founder" was conferred upon Don Bosco by the Church in reference to the three Groups of the apostolic Family created by him. In ecclesial documents, the title of the “Founder of an Ecclesial Institute” has different meanings. Up until Vatican Council II, there were two predominant ones:

- *historical-juridic (or canonical):* one who conceived the idea of a Religious or Apostolic Movement, identified its purposes, and delineated the norms of life and of governance for it (at least the essential ones) was declared a Founder in a *historical-juridic sense*.
- *historical-theological:* one who felt called by God to create an Ecclesial Institute, and who defined its goals, type of life and spirit was recognized as its Founder in a *theological-historical sense*.

In the documents of Vatican II, a third significance emerges:

- *theological-charismatic:* a Founder in this sense is one who was called by God, not simply to create a new institute, but to give life to it and to live *personally* the experience of the Spirit which characterizes said institute.

Don Bosco is the Founder of the Salesian Family in all senses – historical, juridic, theological, and charismatic:

- *in the historical-juridic sense:* he gave origin to the three institutes by indicating their purpose and norms;
- *in the theological sense:* he felt he was “called by God” to give life to a spiritual Family; and
- *in the charismatic sense:* he gave life to and personally lived the Gospel experience of the apostolic Family created by him.

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<sup>6</sup> Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, SDB. *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*. Diego Borgatello, SDB, ed. Vol. II. (New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 1966) 467-468. Print.  
Ibid. Vol. VII. 171.

**B.** In order to recognize Don Bosco as an instrument in God's Hands, the Church relied upon the criteria of its Christian wisdom: the authenticity of his virtues and of his actions. He, himself, in the midst of his developing experience, was certain that he was being guided by Providence. To John Bosco, a young Priest in Torino in 1841, the Holy Spirit gave a special sensitivity for perceiving, through different experiences, the difficulties in which the young found themselves for, having been uprooted from their country life, they flooded this city which was in full social, political, and religious upheaval. He was thus called to consecrate his life to help them become honest, upright citizens and good Christians and to create, to this end, a series of works which met their corporal and spiritual needs.

**C.** The Holy Spirit brought Don Bosco to discover gradually that his mission to the young "had to spread out in space and time for the benefit of different peoples and of numerous generations." But to do this he needed "men capable of working with Don Bosco and appropriate Institutes to assure continuity in dynamic fidelity." From 1844 on, he surrounded himself with Priests and laity, men and women, who formed a type of "Congregation of St. Francis de Sales": these were his first collaborators. Later, at the urging of the Holy Spirit, Don Bosco understood that his complex and important mission would have a greater probability of perduring in a stable way if he were able to count on persons who were entirely dedicated to it. This same Holy Spirit raised up the call to apostolic consecration in the hearts of the first disciples of the Saint. Thus, beginning in 1859, the date of the founding of the Salesian Society, the first manner of the "Congregation of St. Francis de Sales" neither disappeared nor was absorbed, but, as the Founder tells us: "was divided into two categories, or, rather, two families." Those who were free to, and felt they had the vocation, gathered together in common life, living in that edifice (the Oratory/Hospice of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco) which has always been recognized as the Mother House and the center of the "Pious Association", which the Holy Father, the Pontifex Maximus, advised him to call "the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales" and which it is still called today. The others, or "the externs," continued living in the world, in their own families, while continuing to promote the work of the oratories, still keeping the name of the "Union" or the "Congregation of St. Francis de Sales" and of "promoters," or "Cooperators."

These Cooperators, called "extern members", were expressly foreseen in the various drafts of the Salesian *Constitutions* from 1860 to 1874, the year in which they had to be sacrificed (Chapter VII of volume X of the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco* is dedicated entirely to the approval of the *Constitutions* of the Salesian Society and many of the difficulties encountered by Don Bosco to do so.) In 1872, he founded the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, which he wanted aggregated, or closely affiliated, to the Salesian Society so that they might care for the education of girls. Don Bosco, therefore, did not renounce his firm conviction that the greatest number of Christians possible must unite their forces for the good of souls, above all of poor youth. From 1874 to 1876, he wrote various drafts of the *Rule* in which his project was eventually clarified and he found a different juridic configuration: The Salesian Society had to be as life-giving leaven to a vast charitable movement in which men and women would be participants in his mission and in his spirit – each one according to his or her own state of life: thus, the Association of Salesian Cooperators was born – the third institute and bearer of his charism.

**D.** The first chapter of the Cooperators' *Rule* written by Don Bosco states: "It is necessary that Christians unite in doing good." ("Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way..." Par. I) It lists some general points which, without a doubt, still have relevance for us today despite its having been written in the style of the 1800s and, therefore, reflect the cultural climate of his times. The fact that it is important for Christians to work in a united manner is witnessed to by the experience of *the Early Apostolic Church*. The advantages gained from working in this way

of solidarity are indicated by the *Gospel* message. This united front of Catholics is necessary if they are *to face up to* other social, cultural, and political forces.

**E.** The Divine inspiration for founding the Salesian Society and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was simply accepted by many without any fuss while the origin of the Cooperators was ascribed to an initiative that was purely human and suggested to Don Bosco by historical circumstances. But it was Don Bosco himself who said:

It is not Don Bosco, it is the *Hand of God* who makes use of the Cooperators! Listen! You have said that... the work of the Cooperators is loved by many. And I add that it will spread into all nations, into all Christianity... The *Hand of God* upholds it! The Cooperators will be those who will help promote the Catholic spirit. This may seem like a utopia of mine, but still I stand by this conviction.  
(*Biographical Memoirs* Vol. XVIII 125)

For Don Bosco, becoming a Cooperator was a concrete way of being a Catholic and, in the final analysis, a way of living the Gospel in one's historical reality. This article of the *Project of Apostolic Life* harkens back to the approval of the Association, as contained in Pius IX's Papal Brief of 1876. It is a pronouncement of the highest authority of the Church and the guarantor of the authenticity of the Gospel inspiration for the apostolic project carried out by the Cooperators.

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