

Art. 14. Experience of a Committed Faith

§1. *The Salesian Cooperator welcomes the Salesian Spirit as a gift of the Lord to the Church and makes it fruitful according to his or her own lay or ministerial condition. He or she takes part in the charismatic experience of Don Bosco and commits him or herself to promote Salesian humanism so as to create reasons for hope and future prospects for both the person and for society.*¹

§2. *By living Salesian Spirituality, he or she fosters a “practical” experience of ecclesial communion.*

§3. *The Salesian Cooperator entrusts him or herself to the Immaculate Virgin and Help of Christians, for She is the guide of one’s apostolic Vocation: to be a true “co-operator of God”² in making His plan of salvation real. He or she asks Mary, the Help of Christians and Mother of the Good Shepherd, for the help and strength necessary for his or her own salvation and for that of the young. The daily entrustment to Mary characterizes Salesian Spirituality.*

For a sample Lectio Divina prayer to introduce this article, please see the Appendix.

CONSIDERATIONS

Core themes

1. A Committed Faith
2. Mary, God’s First Cooperator
3. Ecclesial Communion

Keys to Understanding

A. The Salesian Cooperator is called to profess the entire Christian Faith: His or her *Credo* is the one of the entire Church. In the richness of the Christian Mysteries, the Holy Spirit Himself guides him or her to put self at the service of the physical and spiritual "well-being" of man, especially of those who are in most need of help and of hope. "The Son of Man did not come to be served but *to serve* and to give his life for the redemption of many." (Mk. 10:45)

Following the example and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth and of the Church, and, in Her, of the Association, the Cooperator puts him or herself at the service (*diakonia*) of humanity so as to proclaim the Gospel to all and to call everyone to fullness of life. It is a service which, according to the Post-Conciliar Magisterium of the Church, encompasses: the *renewal of humanity* through social work and various forms of educational initiatives; personal and community *Christian witness*; the *explicit proclamation* of the Gospel through the teaching of Religion and catechesis; *missionary work* through interreligious dialogue (especially the sharing of life and of prayer) and *collaboration* with those of other Religions so as to combat situations of injustice and to accompany those who are so disposed to enter the Church; the *animation of prayer* in the Christian Community and, in particular, that of the liturgy; many

¹Salesian Family Charter. 15-17.

² I Cor. 3:9.

human and Christian solidarity initiatives; and many forms of *missionary cooperation* and an *evangelizing presence* in areas marked by religious indifference or atheism.

Forming “good Christians and honest, upright citizens” is way Don Bosco most often used to indicate *everything the young need* so as to live their human and Christian existence in fullness: clothing, food, lodging, work, study, and free time; joy and friendship; active faith, the Grace of God, and the way of sanctification; participation, dynamism, and insertion into the social and ecclesial realms. His experience in education suggested a plan and a particular *style of intervention* to him which he condensed into his *Preventive System* and which rests totally on Reason, Religion, and Loving-Kindness.

When we speak of Valdocco, we mean the Oratory and we are making reference to the first years of the fourth decade of the 19th century (1841 to 1846) in which *the Festive Oratory took shape: a school of catechesis, a garden of recreation*, and a center of alphabetization, above all for immigrants, or the abandoned, on non-work days. The oratory takes shape primarily as a place where youth can find unity and express the vitality of a group of boys and girls, teens and young adults, who otherwise would be strangers to each other. As to its structure, at first, it was Don Bosco, together with some of the boys (educators and catechists) who had been better prepared in the associations which animated all the boys in the practice of the Christian virtues through intense religious activity, general culture, recreation, and choices of activities which constituted an initial way for them to participate in things and take on commitments and responsibilities. Then, beginning in 1847, the Oratory also took in the neediest boys from among the abandoned, giving them a place to live – the Hospice St. Francis de Sales. This was a central gathering place for boys who needed to have placement in a job or who wanted to study in the city schools. Later, it became a place for other types of assistance, trade school, cultural formation, and academic education. From 1855 to 1870 one can trace a definite turn in Don Bosco's educational work and assistance: the gradual transformation of the Valdocco Oratory into a *boarding school* both for those on the technical school track (1852–1862) and those on the academic track (1855–1859). This line of activities that would push the work of the Festive Oratory into second place then took shape, even if the Oratory always holds first place in the ideal realm.

From a simple place to gather for catechism and games on days off from school and work – Sundays and feast days – it becomes a place of global formation, with the addition of many buildings. The phenomenon of “turning into high schools” (hostels, academic route high schools, boarding *trade schools*, and later dormers and day students) took place swiftly and would, at least for a century, absorb the greater number (and the best) energies of the Salesian Society and would give a “new look” to the Preventive System. It did not matter if they were schools of the humanities or of trades – they both proposed:

1. Technical courses for the purpose of working at a trade;
2. Basic educational instruction for the purpose of higher studies, including Theology;
3. The broadest education possible (singing, music, theater, games, and outings) – all oriented in a Christian manner; and
4. Unforeseen by the first *Constitutions* approved by the Holy See in 1874, a new and extraordinary openness to *missionary activity* (from 1875 on), which was introduced in Argentina with the Italian immigrants as the first concern.

B. Through re-reading Don Bosco's ideas and experiences in the light of a renewed Conciliar ecclesiology and of the Pontifical Magisterium as regards evangelization, the Salesian Cooperators express their apostolic action under different formulae: *pastoral/educational service*, carried out according to the Preventive System; “*educating by evangelizing and evangelizing by educating*”; *holistic education in the style of the Preventive System*; educating and evangelizing according to the *pedagogy of goodness*; and other analogous formulae. Essentially, the Salesian Cooperators carry out their Gospel service in their daily life through their proclamation of it and their witness to it.

It is again Don Bosco who points out some elements of the journey (Rome, 1878): to help the Salesians "face and put a halt to irreligion and bad manners which are ever increasing, which, both in the city and in the country, drag to eternal ruin such poor and inexperienced young people... to diminish the number of unruly youth; who, left to their own devices, run a great risk of helping to populate the jails." (Genoa, 3/30/1882): "We see them roaming from piazzas to piazzas, from shore to shore, growing up on laziness and games and gambling, and learning obscenities and blasphemies; and later, we see them becoming rogues and criminals; and finally, and most often right in the flower of their youth, we see them land in prison." (Lucca, April 1882): "Many thousands of young men, in well over 100 Houses, receive a Christian education, receive instruction, and are set on the path of the technical arts or a trade which will allow them to earn their daily bread honestly (...). Your offerings go to raise up these young men for civil society to be Christian workmen, faithful soldiers, exemplary teachers, Priests, and even missionaries who will bring Religion and civilization to barbarous peoples." (Torino, June 1, 1885): Salesian Work must be sustained “because it educates the young to virtue and to the path of the Sanctuary [sic] for its principal aim is to instruct the youth so that they promote in the midst of the world, in schools, in hospices, in festive oratories, in families – so that they promote, I say – love for Religion, for good manners, for prayer, and for frequenting the sacraments – these youth who, today, have become the target of evil men.” "In these times, evil men seek to spread impiety and bad manners, to the ruin, especially, of unwary youth through societies, the press, and gatherings with the more-or-less blatant purpose of drawing them away from Religion, from the Church, and from healthy morals."

C. The article makes particular reference to no. 4 of the Vatican Council II document *Ad Gentes*:

To accomplish this, Christ sent from the Father His Holy Spirit, who was to carry on inwardly His saving work and prompt the Church to spread out. Doubtless, the Holy Spirit was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified. Yet on the day of Pentecost, He came down upon the disciples to remain with them forever (cf. John 14:16). The Church was publicly displayed to the multitude, the Gospel began to spread among the nations by means of preaching, [...] For it was from Pentecost that the "Acts of the Apostles" took again, just as Christ was - conceived when the Holy Spirit came upon the Virgin Mary, and just as Christ was impelled to the work of His ministry by the same Holy Spirit descending upon Him while He prayed.

The Salesian Cooperator, in the measure in which he knows himself to be a living and active part of the Church, feels the need to live in intimacy with the Holy Spirit and to invoke Him with insistence, knowing that He is present in a mysterious but real way in his mind and spirit and as the One Who sustains him in his apostolic Salesian commitment.

D. Through Jesus' work and the sending of the Holy Spirit, God raised up the Church so that, through the combined action of all its members – the Faithful and Her Shepherds – She might be the visible Cooperator with His plan throughout the centuries. Vatican Council II made this vision of faith its own right from the first lines of *Lumen Gentium*, when it defined the Church as the "Universal Sacrament of Salvation," in other words, as the "sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humankind." By placing him or herself within this vision, the Salesian Cooperator sees in the Church the "Body (visible and organic) of Christ," animated by His spirit of love. We are speaking of one of the most realistic ways in which Paul described the Church. "We know we are a living part" of Her because, by the power of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation and our specific Salesian vocation, one becomes an active and co-responsible subject. He or she sees in Her "the center of communion of all its forces working for salvation." According to what Vatican Council II has declared, the Church, the:

messianic people, although it does not actually include all men, and at times may look like a small flock, is nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race. Established by Christ as a communion of life, charity and truth, it is also used by Him as an instrument for the redemption of all, and is sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

E. The contemporary Church's reflection on the Mystery of Christ and on Her own Nature has brought Her to find, at the roots of the first and, as the crown of the second, the very figure of Woman: the Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church. God has placed in His Family – the Church – as in every domestic hearth, the figure of Woman, who, in a spirit of service watches over Her and protects Her. In His salvific work, Christ had as "a Cooperator" His own Mother, Mary of Nazareth, predestined to this by the wisdom of the Father and enabled by the presence of His Spirit. The Salesian Cooperator sees and venerates in Mary, as "Perfect Servant" of the Father in imitation of her Son, She who "has cooperated in an absolutely unique way in the work of the Savior, as the *Mother of Jesus*"; and with Him, as Co-Redemptrix, in glory with her Son, "does not cease to cooperate as *Mother and Help of the Christian people*."

F. Reflection on these Mysteries illuminates the vocation of the Salesian Cooperator and helps him or her understand self in his or her most profound aspects. In the Cooperator's life and daily apostolate, he or she shares St. Paul's joy and awe at having been called to be "a Cooperator with God, in his field, in the building of his edifice.": "To me, the least among all the holy ones, has been granted this grace to proclaim the unfathomable riches of Christ." Don Bosco, too, beginning in 1878, printed on the frontispiece of the *Salesian Bulletin* the phrase attributed to St. Dionysus the Areopagite: "Of those things that are most divine, the most divine of all is that of *cooperating with God* in saving souls."

References

Ad Gentes 4.

Giovanni Paolo II, *Christifideles Laici*.

I Cor 3, 9.

Lumen Gentium 1, 9bc, 48; 4, 61.

Mt 28, 20.

Rom 5, 5.

from the Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family

Art. 6. In communion with the Church

The Spirit of God distributes different charisms to the faithful «for the common good.» (I Cor. 12:7), inserting them harmoniously into the life of the Church in view of its mission of the salvation of humanity.

He is at the origin of a marvellous variety of Groups of consecrated men and women who, while they are contributing effectively to the mission of the Church, enrich her with different gifts, manifesting in this God's manifold wisdom and making visible the characteristic marks of the Church herself, one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

The Salesian Family consists of Christian men and women, consecrated men and women who with the individuality of their own charism and spirit, place themselves at the service of the mission of the Church, especially in the vast world of youth, in working class areas, for the poor and for peoples not yet evangelised (apostolicity).

Living at the heart of the Church and carrying out the Salesian mission, it reflects the different gifts, unites together particular vocations within a single spiritual and apostolic Family, expresses communion between the various different ministries, all directed towards the service of the people of God (catholicity).

Being present in the local Churches, it fosters communion among its members and with the Successor of Peter, in this way re-living the devotion to the Pope handed down by Don Bosco (unity); it participates in their apostolic activity, offering its own particular contribution, especially in the area of the mission to the young and to the working classes; it promotes understanding and collaboration with other groups and institutions for an all-round education of the individual; it takes care of the vocational guidance of the young, educating them to the faith and setting them on the way to an apostolic commitment in the Church and for the world. In order to carry out their educational mission the various Group make good use of the support of the Past Pupils including those belonging to other religions or with different views of the world (catholicity).

The Family of Don Bosco, developing its characteristic spirituality of charismatic origin, enriches the whole Body of the Church with a model of Christian life all its own (holiness). Bearing witness to this are the numerous ranks of the spiritual sons and daughters of Don Bosco already declared saints or proceeding along the path of beatification and canonisation.

Art. 7. For a new Christian humanism

The apostolic Family of Don Bosco is called Salesian because it is linked to Saint Francis of Sales, who Don Bosco chose as his inspiration and patron as with his work and writings he proposed that Christian humanism and that expression of charity which corresponded so well to his intimate aspirations.

It is a humanism that does not ignore man's weakness, but is based on an unshakable confidence in the intrinsic goodness of the individual who is loved by God, and by Him called to Christian perfection, in every state of life.

This humanism is a constitutive element of the charismatic and spiritual experience of the Groups founded by Don Bosco, and as a precious inheritance has been made their own by the other Groups which today are aggregated to the single Family.

The whole Salesian Family, therefore, enters into this large movement, offering to the Church an original contribution in the field of education and in apostolic work.

“Salesian” humanism for Don Bosco meant giving due weight to all that is positive in the life of individuals, in creation, in the events of history. This led him to accept the genuine values present in the world, especially if pleasing to the young; to place himself in the flow of culture and of human development in his own times, encouraging the good and refusing to lament about the evil; wisely seeking the cooperation of many people, convinced that each one has gifts that need to be discovered, recognised and put to good use; believing in the power of education which provides support for the young person's development, and encouraging him to become an upright citizen and a good Christian; and always and everywhere entrusting himself to the providence of God, perceived and loved as a Father.

With the founding of the Groups which make up his Family, and with other apostolic initiatives, such as missionary expansion, Don Bosco intended to make his own contribution to the achievement of the project of a « Christian society » to be restored in the midst of the secularisation proper to the XIXth century, or to be established in contexts not yet evangelised.

In creative fidelity to Don Bosco, the Groups of the Salesian Family are committed to offering to today's society their own services, following the new guidelines promoted by the Vatican Council II and subsequent official pontifical teaching regarding the relationship between the Church and other religions and with contemporary society, centred on inter-religious dialogue, on the defence of the dignity of the human person and of the family, on the promotion of justice and peace, on intercultural dialogue especially in multiethnic contexts, and on the safeguarding of creation.

from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

3:9. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.