

## Art. 15. Centrality of Apostolic Love

§1. *The heart of the Salesian Spirit is apostolic and pastoral charity. This makes the mercy of the Father, the salvific love of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit present among the young. Don Bosco expressed this with his motto: “Da mihi animas, cetera tolle.” He signified it in the name “Salesians,” by choosing St. Francis de Sales<sup>1</sup>, model of Christian humanism, of apostolic dedication, and of amiability, and promoter of lay spirituality, as his patron.*

§2. *This charity is, for Salesian Cooperators, a gift of God, which unites them to Him and to the young. Further, it takes its inspiration from the maternal solicitude of Mary, who supports and sustains them in their daily witness.*

### CONSIDERATIONS

#### Core themes

1. Apostolic and Pastoral Charity
2. Christian Humanism

#### Keys to Understanding

**A.** What one notices immediately in Don Bosco's words is the welcoming of all that is completely human. Before all else, tending to the honest citizen and good Christian is also highlighting the dignity of the human person. Vatican Council II in its Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, in no. 12, clearly states: “According to the almost unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike, all things on earth should be related to man as their center and crown.”

Educators and apostles have the task of waking up and mobilizing all the potentialities in the young: their faculties of understanding and of reason; their variegated affective patrimony; and their will fortified by freedom. Salesian Cooperators, like Don Bosco, choose Christian humanism and the methodology of the charity of St. Francis de Sales. It is a humanism which is not ignorant of the weaknesses of man but which finds itself on an unshakeable faith in the intrinsic goodness of the person because he or she is beloved by God and is called by Him to Christian perfection, in every state of life. Such humanism is a constituent aspect of the charismatic and spiritual experience of all the Groups founded by Don Bosco and has been made their own, as a precious heritage, by the other Groups which today have been aggregated to the one Family.

For Don Bosco “*Salesian*” Humanism meant valuing everything positive that is rooted in the life of persons, in created reality, and in the events of history. This brought him to: perceive the authentic values present in the world, especially if they were pleasing to the young; insert himself into the cultural flux and of the human development of his time, motivating the good and refusing to bemoan evils; seek cooperation from many in a wise way, convinced that each person has gifts which are to be discovered, recognized, and valued; believe in the power of education which supports the growth of the young person

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<sup>1</sup>*Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way...* Art. V, 8.

Francis de Sales. [\*On the Love of God\*](#). Trans. John K. Ryan. 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963).  
Print.

and encourages him or her to become an honest, upright citizen and good Christian; and entrust himself, always and everywhere, to the Providence of God, Whom he perceived and loved as a Father.

In creative fidelity to Don Bosco, the Salesian Cooperators are committed to offering to today's society his or her service, in receptivity to the innovative guidelines promoted by Vatican Council II and the successive Pontifical Magisterium concerning the relationship of the Church with other Religions and with contemporary society, centered on interreligious dialogue, on the defense of the dignity of the human person and of the family, on the promotion of justice and of peace, on intercultural dialogue – especially in multi-ethnic contexts – and on the safeguarding of all Creation.

The aim of an education given by Don Bosco is two-fold: a good Christian and an honest, upright citizen - a phrase which can also be summed up in the formula of a holistic education or in those very efficacious, renowned, traditional ones of the three “S”s - health, study, and sanctity (in Italian... sanità, studio, e Santità), or "joy, study, and piety," "bread, work, and Paradise", "work, religion, and virtue," "piety, morality, culture, and civility," "happy both on earth and in Heaven”.

1. *Good Christian*: invited to pray; to give good example; to frequent religious practices; to "take part in all those things that can promote the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls"; to speak well of the Church, of Her Priests and Bishops, of the Pope, and of the ecclesiastical positions; to help root out scandals; and to correct fraternally. The spiritual means are those inherited from the Council of Trent and from the spirituality of his time: a well-assimilated catechesis, the Sacraments, practices of piety, and a sense of religious duty - all the way to sanctity. “The first thing suggested to him to become a Saint was to work so as to win souls to God; for there is nothing holier in the world than to cooperate for the good of souls.” (*The Life of Dominic Savio*, chap. 8).

2. *Honest, upright citizen*: One who fulfills the obligations of his personal state of life. It is obvious that the Christian, inasmuch as he is a good citizen, is also called to contribute to the order and the progress of society by leading his own family wisely, participating as much as is possible in works of charity and solidarity, in commitment to catechetical and educational action, and in "uniting himself in the field of action and of work" through joining groups and associations that are at work in the world and are Christian, and by opening himself to the most demanding apostolic and missionary prospects. He or she does so with a sense of duty, of respect for civic order, of work as a necessity for subsistence but also as a factor of his identity, of personal self-development, and of service to society. Obviously, he or she does so within the limits that are imposed by the social condition of the young.

It is taken for granted today that the formula "honest, upright citizens and good Christians" means the following: A "good Christian" is not just one who goes to Church and is obedient to the Hierarchy but also one who works for a society built on solidarity and with responsibility within the Church community. The "honest, upright citizen" is the person who does not withdraw from society because it is pluralistic and overflows with a plethora of messages but participates with his own internal dynamics and strengths, giving his crucial contribution and active participation for a better quality of life for all men and women.

Don Bosco stood firm in his belief in a Religious State and of the image of society layered with "strata" within which, inevitably, the rich and the poor live together, and in which respect for authority, love for work, gratitude to benefactors, and unconditional intangibility of private property flourish. Rather than elaborating principles, he manifested tendencies: he was conservative more than democratic,

paternalistic more than egalitarian, clerical more than lay, and promoter of associations more than corporations or unions. He aspired to a peaceful moral order which was respectful of everyone and in which the clergy had preeminence; his social model was acquired, traditional, and not something to be created; it was hierarchical, making distinction between the spiritual and the temporal and defending the primacy of the former over the latter; his was not a conflictual personality but the kind that tried to integrate everyone. His purposeful distance from politics does not signify, however, a lack of national spirit; instead, it was very alive in Don Bosco, manifesting itself in his love for peace and for active assistance in moments of need (the cholera epidemics, earthquakes...).

**B.** Salesian humanism takes into consideration daily realities, from work to culture, from the joy of friendship to civic commitment, from the beauty of Nature in which we are immersed to personal and social education, and from professional competence to moral uprightness in one's gestures and choices – all realities which constitute our life – as values that are to be defended and helped to grow. Commitment to promotion of the human person in Salesian history takes into great consideration those little realities which make up the experience of persons.

Salesian humanism works out of the perspective of giving meaning to everyday life. Don Bosco's type of education tends to fill one with hope and to give a future to the history of persons through the use of Reason, Religion, and Loving-Kindness. The apostolic Salesian commitment of all the Groups of the Family is defined as "education", which is the content of one's specific mission and the way of intervening so as to be efficacious. It is also the spiritual choice for those who work in and for the Kingdom. We educate to help each person find his or her rightful place in society and in the Church. One's vocation is the most important point of his or her life. We are placed in this world, not for ourselves but for others and are entrusted with a specific mission to which we are committed as a service to our brothers and sisters. The call is to work always and everywhere and in all things with Gospel charity – something which is greatly needed. Believers, both the young and adults, consecrated and laity, men and women, express in a thousand forms the gift of charity: some do so through educational activities, others in commitment to evangelization to the point of giving of oneself totally and completely.

Pastoral charity is the center and the summation of Salesian Spirituality. If the hallmark of the Franciscans is poverty and that of the Jesuits obedience, charity is the one of the Sons of Don Bosco. Charity, in fact, is the summit of all the charisms: "Aspire to the greater gifts! I will show you the way that is better than all others": Charity. This virtue is not a matter of a personal conquest but it is the humble and total opening up of oneself to God, following Mary's example. It is the impassioned search for the young to give them over to God. Thus love is the hallmark of Don Bosco's spirituality and incarnated Charity becomes the propelling center of Salesian Spirituality: it is the typical note that characterizes a love which knows how to make itself loved and to call forth love. This love is visible, is made manifest, and frees and saves.

In his letter from Rome of 1884, Don Bosco revealed its mystical significance: "How is it possible to reanimate these dear young people? With charity... Jesus Christ made Himself little with the little ones and bore our infirmities. Behold the teacher of the Family Spirit! Jesus Christ did not break the bruised reed or put out the smoldering wick. Behold your model." The mysticism of the *Da mihi animas; cetera tolle* consists in profound communion with God, which forges the heart of the educator, predisposing him or her to total dedication and to generous service. The perspective of Don Bosco's mysticism is found in

this: learning from God how to love and participating in Christ's love by cultivating an apostolic heart which knows how to give of itself without limits for the salvation of the young.

It was precisely pastoral charity which was the spiritual energy impelling Don Bosco to seek out souls and to serve God alone; it was a charity which filled his mind and heart and also his projects with the intent of expanding them and of giving stability to his work. For this reason, he gathered around himself various persons, coordinating and harmonizing their functions and their many gifts, their different states of life and ministries notwithstanding.

## **References**

*Ad Gentes* 4.

Benedetto XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*.

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

Mt 28, 20.

I Cor 3, 9.

Rom 5, 5.

## **from the *Original Rule of 1876* by St. John Bosco**

### **Article V. Constitution and Governance of the Association**

8. On the feasts of St. Francis de Sales and of Mary Help of Christians, each Group Leader shall call together the members of his own group for the purpose of providing mutual encouragement to strengthen and devotion to these heavenly patrons. Invoking their help is needed for perseverance in the activities undertaken in accordance with the purpose of the Association.

## **from “Pastoral Charity: Core and Synthesis of Salesian Spirituality”**

Previously we have seen how the “type” of spiritual person Don Bosco was: profoundly human and totally open to God; in harmony between these two dimension he lived out a plan of life that he had taken up with determination: at the service of the young. As Don Rua says: “He took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young.” If one examines his plan for the young one sees that it had a “heart,” an element that gave it meaning, originality: “Truly the only concern of his heart was for souls”.

There is therefore a further practical explanation for the unity of his life: through his dedication to young people Don Bosco wanted to give them an experience of God. On his part this was not just generosity or philanthropy but pastoral charity. This is called the “core and synthesis” of the Salesian spirit.

“Core and synthesis” is a telling and demanding affirmation. It is easier to list the various features, even the basic ones of our spirituality, without committing ourselves to any sort of hierarchical relationship, which would choose one as being the principal one. In this case it is necessary to enter into the spirit of Don Bosco or of the Salesian in order to discover the explanation for his way of doing things.

To understand what is involved in pastoral charity we take three steps: we look first at charity, then at the specification “pastoral”, and finally at the ‘Salesian’ characteristics of pastoral charity.

## **2.1. Charity**

One of the sayings of St Francis of Sales is this: “The human being is the perfection of the universe; the spirit is the perfection of the human being; love that of the spirit; and charity that of love”. This is a universal approach that places four modes of existence on an ascending scale: being, human being, love as a form of being superior to any other of its expressions, charity as the highest expression of love. Love represents the high point, the culmination of the maturing process of any individual Christian or not. The educational process sets out to lead a person to being capable of self-donation, to a selfless generous love.

It is psychologists, and not just Jesus Christ who say that a fully developed, fulfilled and happy individual is capable of generosity and can manage to live a love that is not just concupiscence, in other words for the personal satisfaction of being loved. Various forms of neurosis and personality disorders arise from being self-centred and all the usual treatments tend to open people up and to help them to concentrate on others.

Charity is then the main proposal in every spirituality: it is not just the first and the main commandment, and therefore the main programme for the spiritual journey, but also the source of the strength to make progress...

The word “pastoral” indicates a specific form of charity; it immediately calls to mind the figure of Jesus the Good Shepherd. Not only, however, his way of acting: kindness, seeking the lost one, dialogue, forgiveness; but also and above all the substance of his ministry: to reveal God to every man and every woman. It is more than evident how different this form of charity is to other forms whose preferential focus is on particular needs of people: health, food, work.

The element typical of pastoral charity is the proclamation of the Gospel, education to the faith, the formation of the Christian community, bringing the yeast of the Gospel to the situation. This therefore requires being totally available, devoted to the salvation of humanity, as shown by Jesus: of all men and women, of each and even of a single one. Don Bosco, and our Salesian Family following in his footsteps express this charity with the phrase: *Da mihi animas, cetera tolle...*

There is therefore an ascetical process for someone moved by pastoral charity: “Cetera tolle”, “Leave all the rest behind”. One has to give up many things in order to preserve the main objective; many things can be entrusted to others, and many activities can be left to one side so as to have the time and be available to open up the youngsters to God. And this not only in one’s personal life but also in the programmes and the apostolic works themselves.

“Whoever examines the life of Don Bosco, following his thought processes and exploring the results finds a matrix: salvation in the Catholic Church the only repository of the means of salvation. He

feels the challenge of abandoned, poor, aimless young people awaken in him the urgent need for education in order to enable these youngsters to take their proper place in the world and in the Church through methods using gentleness and love. Yet with a tension that has its origin in his desire for the eternal salvation of the young person.”

#### **2.4. Progress so far**

As a summary we can take up again the fundamental ideas of our reflection.

- ✓ Ours is an apostolic spirituality: it is expressed and grows through pastoral work.
- ✓ The apostolate becomes a genuine spiritual experience, and not merely the expending of energy, stress, and wear and tear, and is animated by charity; it is a source of effectiveness, confidence and joy in pastoral work.
- ✓ Charity gives unity to our personal lives; it resolves the tensions that arise between activity and prayer, between community life and apostolic commitment, between education and evangelisation, between a professional approach and the apostolate.

The whole thrust of our spiritual life consists in revitalising pastoral charity, purifying and intensifying it: “*Ama et fac quod vis*”. [“Love and do what you wish.”]