

Art. 16. Salesian Presence in the World

§1. Salesian Cooperators know they are “in intimate solidarity”¹ with the society in which they live and for which they are called to be light, salt, and leaven. They believe in the interior resources of the person. They share the values of their own culture and they commit themselves to work so that it may be guided by Christian humanism. They promote new realities with a critical Christian sense. They integrate into their life “all that which is good,”² adopting a listening stance, especially as regards the young, in discerning the signs of the times. .

§2. Faced with socio-cultural challenges³ and difficulties, they adopt a critical and constructive attitude. They work with commitment to spread a Christian culture and ethic of welcome and solidarity in society.

CONSIDERATIONS

Core theme

To Be Light and Leaven: Optimism in the Face of the Good and Realistic Courage in the Face of Evil

Keys to Understanding

In this chapter dedicated to the Salesian Spirit are highlighted and specified *how* one works, by what interior *convictions* and *sentiments* one is animated, and what typically Salesian exterior behaviors the Cooperator manifests. The question is: *How does the Salesian Cooperator behave before the world* in which his Salesian vocation calls him or her to live and to work to be its "salt, light, and leaven"? This article explains it from two points of view: 1) when faced with the good, he or she practices optimism; 2) when faced with evil, he or she puts into practice a realistic courage.

Pastoral Salesian charity indicates to the Cooperator an underlying positive attitude: "solidarity." As a Christian, "he feels himself a living part of the Church." As a lay Christian he feels he is a living part of the world, "a citizen" fully inserted in temporal reality and co-responsible in its regard, contributing to its holistic growth by being "salt, light, and leaven." The Conciliar Church testifies to this: “this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds...” and shares in the “joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted”. [In other passages the Council speaks of "human, natural, perennial, positive, moral, and socio-cultural" values of the world which the Christian willingly recognizes and applies himself to develop.]

The Salesian Cooperator believes that God in His Providence has placed in every person natural resources and supernatural Graces upon which a man of action or an educator can always put his trust and find valid reasons to hope. This was the conviction of St. Francis de Sales, “the model of true humanism.” This was also Don Bosco's conviction, as an adversary to the Jansenism of his time: *in every young person, even the most wretched* – he used to say – *there is also always a point accessible to the good, a sensitive chord* that can be made to vibrate. The entire Preventive System consists in "calling upon the interior

¹*Gaudium et Spes*. Par. 1.

²I Thess. 5:21

³*Gaudium et Spes*. Paragraphs 4 and 11.

resources of the person." In the diverse contexts in which the Salesian Cooperator lives and formed by the young or by adults or by one and the other together, he or she tends to give trust, to entrust responsibilities, to help persons grow, and to spread optimism.

In the situations and the events of this world, Salesian optimism brings the Cooperator to see the good rather than the negative side – before which, however, he or she does not close his or her eyes. Indeed, he or she seeks to discover all the good that is done and which is spoken of but little. He or she welcomes and appreciates everything that is truly human and corresponds to some aspect of the vocation and the dignity of man and, in particular, "the values of his own culture." He shares with the young the taste for authentic values. He willingly listens, therefore, to the invitation of St. Paul to the Faithful of Philippi: "brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good fame, if there be any virtue, if any praise of discipline, think on these things... and the God of peace shall be with you!" (Phil. 4:8-9)

The Salesian Cooperator takes on a positive attitude before every form of authentic progress: ownership of things, dignity and liberty of every person and of every people, equal dignity between men and women, a solidarity which is ever stronger on interpersonal, social, national, and international levels. In the face of novelties and newness, he does not assume a prejudicial, negative, or diffident attitude. His propensity is to take them into favorable consideration, "especially if they are pleasing to the young." Don Bosco loved what the young loved, without fear; in his houses they felt at ease and they lived there without mortifying inhibitions. In all these things discernment needs to be exercised, that "critical Christian sense": new things do not always equate to progress; at times they are futile because the "merchants of novelty" manipulate consciences and take advantage of the natural thirst for change; therefore, the Salesian Cooperator follows the norm of St. Paul: "Examine everything and retain that which is good."

The Salesian Cooperator looks at reality with a "trusting" attitude: his perception of history and, above all, his faith convince him that life always finishes by triumphing over the culture of death. Therefore, he does not fear combatting all that which goes against the dignity of the human and Christian person – especially against whatever demolishes the hope of young people. He operates in a lucid, loyal, practical, and courageous manner. He prefers deeds to words: "He combats evil with courage and constancy," and does not abandon the Earth to those who exploit it. "He is committed to multiplying the good." The more the culture of death spreads, the more the disciple of Don Bosco feels provoked to roll up his shirt sleeves so as to work on public opinion and to seek new solutions to bring about good, above all when the defenselessness of the young is in play. The Association was founded for this reason: "to shake from the languor in which so many Christians lie and to spread the energy of charity." (*Biographical Memoirs* Vol. XVIII 125).

References

Apostolicam Actuositatem, 27, 29.

Ad Gentes 9, 22a.

Caviglia A., *Conferenze sullo spirito salesiano* (Torino PAS 1949, ciclostilato) 14.

Giovanni Paolo II, *Christifideles Laici*.

Giovanni Paolo II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.

Gravissimum Educationis 1, 2, 5.

Gaudium et Spes 4, 11, 11b, 36, 36b, 37, 53, 57, 61.

Lumen Gentium 13b, 16, 17.

Memorie Biografiche V 367; VII 524.

Nostra Aetate 2, 2b, 3a, 4b.

Presbyterum Ordinis 17.

Unitatis Redintegratio 3b, 4hi.

In other passages, Vatican Council II speaks of world “human, natural, perennial, positive, moral, and socio-cultural” values that the Christian willingly recognizes and to which he applies himself to develop in his own life.

from *Gaudium et Spes*

1. The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.

4. To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics. Some of the main features of the modern world can be sketched as follows.

Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world. Triggered by the intelligence and creative energies of man, these changes recoil upon him, upon his decisions and desires, both individual and collective, and upon his manner of thinking and acting with respect to things and to people. Hence we can already speak of a true cultural and social transformation, one which has repercussions on man's religious life as well.

As happens in any crisis of growth, this transformation has brought serious difficulties in its wake. Thus while man extends his power in every direction, he does not always succeed in subjecting it to his own welfare. Striving to probe more profoundly into the deeper recesses of his own mind, he frequently appears more unsure of himself. Gradually and more precisely he lays bare the laws of society, only to be paralyzed by uncertainty about the direction to give it.

Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power, and yet a huge proportion of the worlds citizens are still tormented by hunger and poverty, while countless numbers suffer from total illiteracy. Never before has man had so keen an understanding of freedom, yet at the same time new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance. Although the world of today has a very vivid awareness of its unity and of how one man depends on another in needful solidarity, it is most grievously torn into opposing camps by conflicting forces. For political, social, economic, racial and ideological disputes still continue bitterly, and with them the peril of a war which would reduce everything to ashes. True, there is a growing exchange of ideas, but the very words by which key concepts are expressed take on quite different meanings in diverse ideological systems. Finally, man painstakingly searches for a better world, without a corresponding spiritual advancement.

Influenced by such a variety of complexities, many of our contemporaries are kept from accurately identifying permanent values and adjusting them properly to fresh discoveries. As a result, buffeted between hope and anxiety and pressing one another with questions about the present course of events, they are burdened down

11. The People of God believes that it is led by the Lord's Spirit, Who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labors to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age. For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human.

This council, first of all, wishes to assess in this light those values which are most highly prized today and to relate them to their divine source. Insofar as they stem from endowments conferred by God on man, these values are exceedingly good. Yet they are often wrenched from their rightful function by the taint in man's heart, and hence stand in need of purification.

What does the Church think of man? What needs to be recommended for the upbuilding of contemporary society? What is the ultimate significance of human activity throughout the world? People are waiting for an answer to these questions. From the answers it will be increasingly clear that the People of God and the human race in whose midst it lives render service to each other. Thus the mission of the Church will show its religious, and by that very fact, its supremely human character.

from St. Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians

5:21. But prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

from Discerning the Call 2015

Please see Lesson 16 – Cooperator in the World

from Christifideles Laici

The “world” thus becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation, because the world itself is destined to glorify God the Father in Christ. The Council is able then to indicate the proper and special sense of the divine vocation which is directed to the lay faithful. They are not called to abandon the position that they have in the world. Baptism does not take them from the world at all, as the apostle Paul points out: “So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God”(1Cor 7:24). On the contrary, he entrusts a vocation to them that properly concerns their situation in the world. The lay faithful, in fact, “are called by God so that they, led by the spirit of the Gospel, might contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially in this way of life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they manifest Christ to others”. Thus for the lay faithful, to be present and active in the world is not only an anthropological and sociological reality, but in a specific way, a theological and ecclesiological reality as well. In fact, in their situation in the world God manifests his plan and communicates to them their particular vocation of “seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God”.

The lay faithful’s duty to society primarily begins in marriage and in the family. This duty can only be fulfilled adequately with the conviction of the unique and irreplaceable value the family has in the development of society and the Church herself.

Along the same line the Second Vatican Council states: “This lay spirituality should take its particular character from the circumstances of one’s state in life (married and family life, celibacy, widowhood), from one’s state of health and from one’s professional and social activity. All should not cease to develop earnestly the qualities and talents bestowed on them in accord with these conditions of life and should make use of the gifts which they have received from the Holy Spirit”.

from The Salesian Cooperator by Fr. J. Aubry, SDB

Since the Cooperators do not live “in community”, belong more directly within the structures of the local church, and are more deeply involved in the ways of thinking and acting of the “outside world”, they are generally better equipped than the Religious Salesians to sense and understand the problems of the young and know what possibilities there are of organizing certain kinds of Salesian activity; they are better able to render “appropriate and flexible service that is more rapid and more effective”, that direct and “efficacious Christian presence” among the young; more capable, finally of working within the social structures which condition the lives of the young.

Clearly the Cooperators can be directly responsible for certain works. To quote some remarkable cases:- In 1960 in Guayaquil, Ecuador, the Cooperators set up a whole complex of social work: teaching, vocational guidance, kindergartens, assistance to the sick, etc. The whole organization is their own responsibility. Another example is Hong Kong. There they look after the direction and teaching of a night school with an attendance of 1600 pupils.

from *The Identity of the Salesian Cooperator* (pp. 53, 56-58)

Another characteristic of the specific vocation of the Cooperator is that it is a secular, not clerical or religious, vocation. The Cooperator is a true Salesian, but living in the world, not in a Salesian house or Community. He/she must prepare him/herself for a Salesian life lived fully in the world. In order to understand the profound meaning of a “lay spirituality,” we will ask those who are truly lovers of the living God, the prophets; but also, in a particular way, we will ask the One who more than anyone else was the witness to the living God: Jesus of Nazareth. We will welcome and take the light which they give as the profound motivation behind our education of the young today.

3. The temptation: to skip over history (Statutes, *Project of Apostolic Life* 16)

The prophets wanted to bring man back to his historical reality. One cannot ignore history or evade it by means of sensational miracles. These, in fact, were the temptations placed before Jesus (Mk. 1:12 ff. and Mt. 4:1 ff.) But, is it not perhaps true that God has always manifested Himself in miraculous events? Without a transcendent power, nothing defeats life and history’s momentum. This, at its root, is the temptation to transform rocks into bread.

The value of human experience

Jesus’ refusal of Satan’s proposals has a very great value precisely in reference to man. We propose to enlighten man through the mystery of Christ because in Him is manifested the great love of God for our life: “God, in fact, has so loved the world as to send His only begotten Son.” (Jn. 3:16) From the passage on the temptations, it clearly emerges that nothing in man has greater value than his experience and his life. All of us can know God, can know ourselves and the truth through our living. To feel God close does not require the proof of miracles and wondrous works. From the way in which Jesus accepted being Messiah and announcing the Kingdom, we can draw the conclusion that primacy is always given to human experience. We do not know God through miracles because God is already present in the all the dimensions of our experience, even in those which are contradictory. Jesus wanted to give us a confirmation of this. This is not a fact to be discounted – no. If we think about it, this is its most scandalous aspect.

It was precisely for this reason that Jesus announced His Kingdom side-stepping the people’s expectations of miracles. In doing this, He announced once and for all that God truly loves our life, even the poverties and weaknesses which we experience every day. This is what it means to announce the Kingdom. God is first of all in our life and not in miracles, and our life has value because the very Son of Man has taken it on and made it His own.

Someone will justly object that miracles do exist and that the Gospels speak of them. Yes, it’s true, but let’s be careful not to regard miracles as God’s kind “patching up” of our deficiencies. Miracles do not happen to make man escape a reality which is considered too sad, too poor, and too weak. If it were this way, then we would need to blaspheme God for having allowed our nature to suffer certain and even very heavy limitations. As for the rest, Jesus Himself healed only some infirmities of His time. He wanted every healing to be nothing other than the proclamation of God’s love precisely for those who thought they were victims due to sin. Miracles, then, do not distance us from experience so as to elevate us to a higher state, but they communicate to us that the Kingdom reaches us in our reality and that we are loved,

not punished, by God. Thus began a new age in which every illness and infirmity could be borne without shame before the Lord. Satan was seeking the inverse movement – he wanted sensationalism as proof of God’s presence.

The value of “every day” (Statutes, *Project of Apostolic Life* 16)

Jesus came to tell us that man does not need miracles or extraordinary things to become the best he can be, but that man must trust in God’s presence day after day. If this is true, then we need to avow this even when we find ourselves in front of grave contradictions, even when we discover that we “are hungry.”

Situations do exist in which we have to ask ourselves objectively if God is present and if what we see and experience can possibly fit in a plan of love. How many times we ask ourselves if the Kingdom can be present in certain events or situations. Who is not scandalized in front of injustice and oppression; who does not suffer when faced with the victims of famine or the abuse of minors; who does not question himself if there is any sense at all in war and violence? But whoever avows that he cannot believe that God is Father as long as these situations exist among us, probably has not known Jesus Christ.

“Not on bread alone does Man live”: Jesus wanted to tell us that even if all the problems which afflict history should be resolved, it would not be on account of this that God’s face would appear more transparent to us. With Jesus of Nazareth, we know (although still obscurely!) that God is already present in our reality, in our life as it is, with its problems and with its poverties. Nothing can make us think that God is “absent” from the world because it is too unworthy to welcome Him. The more we think about it, the more we discover the “scandal” of the Kingdom: it was just this discovery of the scandal that gave the first communities the strength to announce it to the entire world, even if none of the problems had been resolved.

from the Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family

Art. 9. For new forms of solidarity

The current phenomenon of globalisation has increased interdependence between individuals and peoples in the economic, cultural, political and religious spheres; the opportunities are clear to be seen, but so too the danger of it turning into those forms of domination which cause new kinds of poverty and increase marginalisation; but there is another way of thinking about globalisation and it is that of solidarity inspired and guided by gospel values.

«This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.» [*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38]

The Groups of the Salesian Family are engaged in exercising this solidarity through a variety of educative and apostolic activities:

1. Education, which is the highest form of solidarity, if understood and exercised according to the criteria suggested by Salesian assistance. Nowadays we could describe it as «the ethics of being close », in other words: personalised intervention, relationships of friendship and trust, listening to the deepest aspirations of young people and of the poor, identifying those responses which are possible and effective, faithful accompaniment.
2. Civilian, social and missionary voluntary service, nowadays widespread among young people and adults, which can be for some a genuine vocation, in so far as it demands readiness to give one's time and energy; it puts them in contact with people's practical problems, commits them to supporting development initiatives, invites them to exercise a sense of co-responsibility, encourages them to learn to give and to be of service.
3. Social and political commitment, carried out especially by Groups of lay members, according to the criteria expressed by the magisterium of the Church. We read in *Gaudium et spes*: «The Church regards as worthy of praise and consideration the work of those who, as a service to others, dedicate themselves to the welfare of the state and undertake the burdens of this task »;[GS 75] and in *Christifideles Laici*: « the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in "public life", that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good.».[ChL 42b]

Art. 10. Exchange of gifts

All heirs to the Salesian charism and spirit, the Groups establish among themselves a very close relationship so that each Group expresses the identity of the Salesian Family, but not without reference to the others.

In fact, entering into a Group, in virtue of a specific vocation, means entering the whole Family; it is as though each one feels entrusted to the others in a mutual relationship.

It is then that the different members enable the Family to live the completeness of gifts and values, because in the various Groups can be seen emphasised the particular spiritual features which are the common patrimony and which for this reason cannot be missing in any Salesian heart. The communion of the Family places these at the disposal of everyone.

All this is for the benefit of the mission, since it makes it possible to undertake in a more adequate and effective manner the human development and Christian education of the young, of poor people, of the sick and of peoples not yet evangelised.

The relatively short history of the Salesian Family demonstrates that without real communion there is the danger of a progressive impoverishment of the project of Don Bosco even to the extent of being unfaithful to it. The recognition that without the others the members of a particular Group cannot be themselves, ought to be an awareness cultivated by all, inspiring appropriate expressions and practical attitudes.

See also the Handbook references following Article 6 of this Compendium