

Art. 20. In Communion with Mary and Our Saints

§1. *Salesian Cooperators, like Don Bosco, nurture a filial love for Mary Help of Christians, the Mother of the Church and of humanity.¹ She cooperated in the salvific mission of the Savior and continues to do so also today, as Mother and Helper of the People of God. She is the special guide of the Salesian Family. Don Bosco entrusted the Salesian Cooperators to Her so that they might receive protection and inspiration in their mission.*

§2. *They turn with particular affection to St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church. They have trustful recourse to the intercession of St. John Bosco, “Father and Teacher”² of the young and of all the Salesian Family.*

§3. *Among the models of apostolic life, they venerate, with predilection, St. Francis de Sales, St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello, Alexandrina da Costa, Mamma Margaret, and all the other Saints, Blesseds, and Venerables of the Salesian Family. Knowledge of their lives is a font of inspiration and prayer.*

CONSIDERATIONS

Core themes

1. Filial Love for Mary, Mother of the Church and of Humanity
2. The Saints and Blesseds: Heavenly Intercessors for the Salesian Family

Keys to Understanding

A. In Don Bosco’s life, Mary held a place of special privilege. The Salesian Cooperator nurtures a *filial and strong* devotion to Mary, in imitation of our Founder’s devotion to Mary Immaculate, the Perfect Servant of God and the model for every Christian, and to Mary, the Mother of the Church and the Help of Christians, as his or her special *guide* and the guide of the entire Salesian Family. These are the titles which warrant and demand the Salesian Cooperator’s particular veneration. More than being expressions of devotion only in intense moments, we are dealing with a continuous attitude: “Mary is our home.” Three are the particular attitudes for expressing a love for Mary: *invoking* Her frequently; *celebrating Her Feasts* with fervor (especially December 8 and May 24); and *making Her known and loved*. Every Salesian Cooperator ought to take to heart both the reading and the study of Marian documents which treat of Mary and Her role in the Church and in the Salesian Family.

The Salesian Cooperator keeps alive that communion that unites “Pilgrim and Militant Church” with the “Triumphant Church” in Heaven: The Saints help us build the Kingdom of God. *St. Joseph* is Patron of the Universal Church. Don Bosco made him a principal Patron of the Salesian Family and presented him as a model and a Patron for the artisans, as a model of trust in Providence, as the Protector of the Church, and as the Patron of a Happy Death.

¹*Salesian Family Charter*. 53-55

²John Paul II. *Juvenum Patris*. Trans. Direzione Opere Don Bosco. Par. 1. n.d. Web. 1 May 2014. www.sdb.org/ENG/doc/JuvenumPatris-eng.doc

They invoke our *Founder* as “*Father and Teacher*”. They constantly deepen their knowledge of his life and sanctity. This aspect becomes a fundamental nucleus of their initial and on-going formation.

B. The Models of Apostolic Life:

St. Francis de Sales: Not only do we take our name of “Salesian” from him, but he is also our model of sweetness and pastoral zeal. Salesian Cooperators deepen their knowledge of his pastoral method and love for the Church.

St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello: They take from her life her boldness in the apostolate and her trust in God.

St. Domenico Savio: He is the example of apostolic solicitude and of contemplation.

Blessed Alexandrina Maria da Costa: She is the example of union with Jesus in His suffering and a model of faith in Jesus present in the Eucharist.

Mamma Margaret: She is the witness of God’s presence, of awe at His works of Creation, of gratitude for His gifts, and of obedience to His Will. She also teaches how to educate her children to trust and to the Faith.

The Saints and the Blesseds of the Salesian Family form a patrimony of Salesian Sanctity which becomes a motivating force for spirituality.

Alberto Marvelli is a splendid example of a young professional, of a layman involved in the apostolate and in the construction of a better world, even as a politician. He died at 28 years of age. He was born in Ferrara on March 21, 1918, but it was Rimini that became the center of his work and his life. Right from his adolescent years, he had a strong desire for sanctity, which he conceived not only as a need of his soul but also as an indispensable means with which to cooperate in the salvation of his neighbor. To the moral formation he received in his family was added that of the Salesian Oratory in Rimini and that of Catholic Action, among whose ranks and organization he had his first experiences with an apostolate. His was an apostolate suffused with the Salesian charism through personal contacts, discussions, lessons, and conferences. He animated a great number of charitable and social assistance initiatives. He was a member of the Conference of St. Vincent de Paul and had a special predilection for the poor and abandoned. He even began the “Mass of the Poor” for the needy, followed on Sundays by a peaceful lunch which he himself served. The animating force behind this great dynamism was the Love of God, nourished by assiduous prayer and daily Communion. In his “Diary”, which was printed posthumously, certain stages of his constant and progressive maturation in his interior life can be verified – to the point of arriving at the heights of the mystics. Among other things, he writes: “Jesus is inviting me to climb, to ascend. I have an intense desire to become a Saint by the life which the Lord has in mind for me.” He was beatified by Pope St. John Paul II on September 5, 2004, at Loreto, Italy.

Attilio Giordani is, before all else, a model of family life. He was present both as a husband and a father at all times and was a man rich in great faith and serenity, living a self-willed austerity and Gospel poverty for the benefit of those most in need. His marriage with Noemi, in May of 1944, was, to him, not only a “word given” but, above all, a Sacrament of Christ which he strove to express in its sanctity and indissolubility in daily life and in the education of their children. The family remained united because

Attilio and Noemi supported each other with prayer and the practice of charity. He is a model of lay Salesian sanctity lived in joy. Having become a Salesian Cooperator, he lived his Faith in the midst of his lay reality, taking his inspiration from Don Bosco's project of apostolic life. He built his personality as a man and as a Christian on joy. His sense of humor was the direct expression of a conscience ruled by faith in Christ. Moreover, he gave witness with courage and joyful goodness to his Christian Faith even in difficult environments or situations (as during his period of military service and in the war or at his job) *by living in the world without being of the world*, swimming against the current. He concluded his earthly life by sharing with his family the choice to do mission work, leaving the enthusiasm of a life given for others as his "Last Will and Testament": "Our faith must be life" and "The measure of our belief is manifested in our being." Venerable Attilio Giordani is a limpid incarnation of Salesian Spirituality as a layman. This aspect always raised up special admiration in the Consecrated Salesians who recognized the providential presence of one such model and they themselves did not fail to have recourse to him for counsel on how to be an apostle among the young.

The Groups of the Salesian Family have numerous lay people involved in their mission. We are aware that there can be no complete and total involvement if there is not also the sharing of the same spirit. Living Salesian Spirituality as lay people who are co-responsible in the work of the education pastoral is, therefore, a fundamental task. The attractive figure of Attilio Giordani is, in this sense, a font of inspiration for formulating a lay Salesian Spirituality.

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from *Iuvenum Patris* by Pope St. John Paul II

Dear Son [Don Egidio Viganò, Rector Major in 1988]

Health and the Apostolic Benediction.

1. The well beloved Salesian Society is preparing to commemorate by appropriate initiatives the first centenary of the death of St John Bosco, the father and teacher of youth, and I am glad to avail myself of the opportunity offered by this circumstance to reflect once again on the problem of the young and meditate on the responsibilities of the Church in preparing them for tomorrow.

The Church has in fact an intense love for young people: always, but especially in this period so close to the year 2000, she feels invited by her Lord to look upon them with a special love and hope, and to consider their education as one of her primary pastoral responsibilities.

The Second Vatican Council declared with clear vision that "ours is a new age of history"; and it recognized that efforts are being made everywhere to ensure an ever increasing development of education. In a period of cultural change the Church notes with concern in the field of education the need to come to grips with the profound cleavage between the Gospel and culture, which undervalues the saving message of Christ and considers it of only marginal importance.

In my address to the members of UNESCO I had occasion to state: "There is no doubt that the first and fundamental cultural fact is the *spiritually mature* man, that is, a fully educated man, a man capable of educating himself and educating others" and I noted a certain tendency to "a unilateral shift to instruction" with consequent manipulations which can provoke "a real alienation of education". I recalled therefore that "*the primary and essential task of culture* in general and also of all cultures is *education*". This consists in fact in enabling man to be more man, to 'be' more rather than just to 'have' more and consequently, through everything he 'has', everything he possesses' to 'be' man more fully".

In the numerous meetings I have had with young people in the various continents, in the messages I have given them, and in particular in the Letter which in 1985 I addressed "To the youth of the world", I expressed my intimate conviction that the Church is at their side and indeed must be so.

I want to recall those same considerations on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the "dies natalis" of a great son of the Church, the holy priest John Bosco, whom my predecessor Pius XI did not hesitate to call "educator princeps".

This auspicious event provides me with the welcome opportunity to offer some remarks not only to you, to your confreres and to all the members of the Salesian Family, but also to the young people who are the beneficiaries of your educational work, together with Christian educators and parents, who are called to carry out so noble a human and ecclesial ministry.

I am also pleased that this commemoration of the Saint is taking place during the Marian Year, which directs our thoughts to "Her who believed": in her generous assent in faith we discover the fruitful source of her educative work, first as Mother of Jesus and then as Mother of the Church and Help of all Christians.

from *Guidelines and Indications for the Formation of Salesian Cooperators*

A plan of life

In traveling along this path of configuration to Christ, one is called to develop his or her personal plan of life enlightened by the faith experience of other men and women; of persons who, in a manner all their own, have already happily succeeded in their sequela Christi: the Saints. The Saints offer us all concrete, lived examples and, therefore, they point out to us secure paths of faith and of Christian commitment. In a particular way, the Salesian Cooperators refer to and are inspired by the faith experience and apostolic commitment lived and witnessed to by St. John Bosco. Thus, they take on those same Gospel values as their own personal plan of life with the same inspirations that Don Bosco realized in his.

This specific vocation represents the particular face and the original identity with which the Salesian Cooperators live their human and Christian experience.

Don Bosco did not write a true and veritable treatise of the spiritual life or of his pedagogical system. The Preventive System and the spirituality of our Founder were assimilated through a life shared and a tradition handed down from his first disciples – above all by the example of their witness. Today, however, that first generation of his sons no longer exists. Therefore, in order to be formed as true Salesians, it is necessary, first of all, to make a serious and orderly study of Don Bosco's life, of his writings, of the fonts of his spirituality, of the history of the foundation of the Salesian Family and of the life of its Saints.

As Don Chavez stated, however, “Being familiar with the various aspects of Don Bosco’s life and works and even of his educational method is not sufficient. Behind all this, as the source of the fruitfulness of his activity and relevance, is something that can escape even us, his sons and daughters: his deep inner life, what we could call his ‘familiarity’ with God.”³

In seeking to discover this “deepest secret and the real reason for his being so surprisingly relevant today,”⁴ the Salesian Cooperators are called, at the same time, to realize concretely their task of being Salesians. They discover again each day that gift of “feeling called and sent on a concrete mission: to contribute to the salvation of youth, committing themselves to Don Bosco’s very mission to the young and to ordinary folk.”⁵

1.3.1. TO KNOW

General Principles

When calling upon each member of the various Religious Institutes, Congregations, and Societies of Apostolic Life to rediscover and value their origins, the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes together with the Sacred Congregation for Bishops, in its *Mutuae Relationes* (“Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church”), reaffirm the necessity of an intensive study of the *charism* of the Founders: “The very charism of the Founders”⁶ appears as an

³ Chávez, Pascual, SDB. “Let Us Draw upon the Spiritual Experience of Don Bosco in Order to Walk in Holiness According to Our Specific Vocation”. Trans. *Acts of the General Chapter*. 417 (2014) 4. Print.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Project of Apostolic Life: Statutes and Regulations*. Statutes, Article 2 §2b. 24.

⁶ See Paul VI. *Evangelica testificatio*. Par. 11. Trans. The Holy See. n.d. Web. 3 Dec. 2015. http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19710629_evangelica-testificatio.html

“*experience of the Spirit*, transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth... This *distinctive character* also involves a particular style of sanctification and of apostolate, which creates its particular tradition, with the result that one can readily perceive its objective elements.”⁷

In his letter, “Preparation for the Bicentennial of the Birth of Don Bosco,” of January 31, 2011, Don Pascual Chavez, then Rector Major, stated:

It is necessary... to draw on the sources and on the studies about Don Bosco, in order to deepen our knowledge first of all about him as a person. The study of Don Bosco is an essential condition in order to be able to communicate his charism and propose his current relevance. Without knowledge there cannot be love, imitation or intercession; then only love can lead to greater knowledge. It is a question therefore of a knowledge which starts from love and leads to love: an affective knowledge.⁸

He added further along: “We must have a knowledge of Don Bosco’s spirituality and live it.”⁹

More recently, in his first commentary on the *Strenna* – that of the bicentenary year of the birth of Don Bosco – the Rector Major, Don Ángel Fernández Artime continued to exhort the entire Salesian Family to “com[e] to know, and rediscover in all its fullness, the spirit of Don Bosco which today as always needs to have all its charismatic power and relevance.”¹⁰

For the purpose of ensuring this knowledge about Don Bosco among the Salesian Cooperators, the *Project of Apostolic Life* exhorts: “To accompany the Aspirant’s process of discernment, the Association promotes formative paths which are both structured and flexible, whether communal or personal. These include the study and the analysis of some formative themes...”¹¹ Analogously, in regards to ongoing formation, it says: “Conscious of the importance of on-going formation, the Salesian Cooperators... dedicate time to reflection and study to deepen Sacred Scripture, the Doctrines of the Church, their knowledge of Don Bosco, and Salesian documents.”¹²

As has already been underlined, in Salesian tradition, this knowledge needs to be made *concrete*, put into action, beyond being theoretical; it is naturally directed toward action and reinforces the Salesian Cooperator in his understanding of the vocation he has received.

⁷ The Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes and the Sacred Congregation For Bishops. *Mutuae relationes*. Par. 11. Trans. The Holy See. n.d. Web. 28 Nov. 2015. <http://www.vatican.va/>

⁸ Pascual Chávez, SDB. “Preparation for the Bicentennial of the Birth of Don Bosco.” Par. 1. Trans. Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco. 31 January 2011. Web 28 Nov. 2015. <http://www.infoans.org/2.asp?sez=2&sotsez=13&doc=6062&Lingua=2>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Angel Fernández Artime, SDB. “Like Don Bosco, with the Young, for the Young.” Par. 3. Trans. n.d. Web 28 Nov. 2015. <http://www.sdb.org/en/rector-major/1058-strenna-rm-projects/1747-strenna-2015-commentary>

¹¹ *Project of Apostolic Life: Statutes and Regulations*. Regulations, Article. 15 §2. 79-80.

¹² Ibid. Article 16 §1. 80-81.

If each one of us can come to feel *in our very being*, in the depth of our being that same fire, that passion for education that Don Bosco had, meeting each young person at a deeply personal level, believing in each individual, convinced that in each one there is always a seed of goodness and of the Kingdom in order to help them to give the very best of themselves and to draw them to a close encounter with the Lord Jesus, then we shall certainly embody in our lives the best of the Salesian charism.”¹³

Indicated Actions

It is important to:

- come to know, gradually and in an *affective* way the story, the pedagogy, and the spirituality of the Founder, matured also by means of a living contact with the numerous printed works of Don Bosco;
- know the distinctive traits of Salesian identity, in particular, God as Provident Father and Mary as the Help of Christians and Mother;
- read and meditate on the *Project of Apostolic Life* and its official commentary;
- assimilate the life and the spiritual experience of the Saints, Blesseds, and Venerables of the Salesian Family – especially those of some exemplary Cooperators and of those who were venerated in a particular way at Valdocco and Mornese

from the Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family

Art. 36. The spirit of Salesian prayer

Salesian prayer is *apostolic prayer*; it is a movement which starts from action in order to reach God, and it is a movement which, from God, leads back to action with Him, since mind and heart are filled with His love.

Don Bosco did not devote long hours to prayer nor did he use any particular methods or forms (for him the “practices of the good Christian” were enough), because in him action and prayer were all one. The extraordinary work in which he was engaged from morning until night did not disturb his prayer, rather it gave rise to it and guided it; and the prayer cultivated in the depth of his heart nourished in him renewed energies of charity to dedicate himself with everything he had for the benefit of his poor boys.

The name itself *oratory* given to his first institution is meant to convey that everything in that place was prayer or could become prayer; and that whatever good was done in that house was the fruit of prayer: that of Don Bosco, his collaborators and his boys.

Prayer spreads out and therefore is typical of those who live Don Bosco’s spirituality and carry out his mission. Not however, to the neglect of those moments of explicit prayer, nourished by listening to the Word of God and a loving response, which transform life into prayer, prayer into life.

Art. 37. Mary Help of Christians, Teacher of apostolic spirituality

Devotion to Mary (together with that to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and to the Pope) has been one of the three devotions which marked the spiritual and apostolic life of Don Bosco. The whole Salesian Family

¹³ “Like Don Bosco, with the Young, for the Young.” Par. 3 §1.

is and feels itself to be a *Marian Family*, which came into being through the motherly care of the Immaculate Help of Christians. All the Groups in fact express this conviction in their own Constitutions.

For the Salesians, Mary Help of Christians is the model and guide in their educative and apostolic activity mother and teacher in their formative experience, particularly invoked in their prayer.

For the Daughters Mary Help of Christians, Mary the Virgin Mother, the humble handmaid, Mother of the Saviour is Mother and Teacher of every Salesian vocation and the «real Superior of the Institute». She is the model of faith, of hope, of charity, and union with God, of motherly care and tenderness, of consecrated life, of prayer, of openness, of listening, docility, and collaboration, of apostolic charity.

The Salesian Cooperators « in the Immaculate Virgin and Help of Christians discover the deepest elements of their vocation: being true “cooperators of God” in the realisation of his salvific plan ».

For those belonging to the Association of Mary Help of Christians, entrustment to Mary means «living a daily spirituality with evangelical attitudes, especially with thanksgiving to God for the wonders he continually works, and with fidelity to him even in times of difficulty and grace, following Mary’s example».

According to the Sisters of Charity of Jesus, Mary helps them to live animated by the Holy Spirit, to put Jesus Christ at the centre of their lives, to nourish a sincere love and great confidence in Her in their relationships with people, to imitate the example of the Woman of faith who seeks the will of God in ordinary daily life, of the loving Mother concerned about others, of the Disciple of the Son who listens to the Word, of the Consoler of the afflicted, of the Help of Christians and of the Mother of humanity.

The Damas Salesianas in their *Ideario* put it this way: «Mary is the first committed lay woman who in the giving of herself faithfully accepts the plan of God, brings to life his word, as woman, spouse and mother, teacher and witness, the first to be evangelised and to evangelise. She is the inspiration and the model to be followed by the Dama Salesiana, and all this leads us to declare her to be the First Dama Salesiana, the norm, the guide, the inspiration, mother, sister and faithful companion in our mission».

Daily entrustment to Mary therefore is a characteristic of our spirituality. Entrustment has an upwards action: it is a giving of oneself in order to respond generously to a mission to be accomplished; but there is also a downwards motion: accepting with trust and gratitude the help of Her who guided Don Bosco and continues to guide the spiritual Family which has its origin in him.

from A Prophecy’s Journey

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 devotion to these heavenly patrons. Invoking their help is needed for perseverance in the activities undertaken in accordance with the purpose of the Association. (Don Bosco’s *Rule* of 1876)

from Discerning the Call 2015

Please see *Lesson 4 – Mary, Our Help*