

Art. 3. One Vocation: Two Ways to Live It

§1. *Don Bosco conceived the Association of Salesian Cooperators as being open both to the laity and to the secular clergy.*

§2. *Lay Salesian Cooperators carry out their apostolic commitment and live the Salesian Spirit, with lay characteristics and sensitivities, in the ordinary situations of life and of work.*¹

§3. *Secular bishops, priests, and deacons who are Salesian Cooperators live their ministry taking inspiration from the pastoral charity of Don Bosco, whose priestly life is a model of one which gives pride of place to working with commitment in behalf of young people and in places where ordinary folk work and live.*

CONSIDERATIONS

Core Themes

1. The Lay Nature, Proper to the Salesian Cooperators
2. The Ordained Ministry, Proper to Cooperators Who Are Deacons or Diocesan Priests

Keys to Understanding

The configuration of the Association reflects an explicit intention of the Founder, which the first paragraph of the article expresses thus: *Don Bosco conceived the Association of Salesian Cooperators as being open both to the laity and to the secular clergy.* All throughout its history, the Association has constantly numbered among its members both lay Catholics and secular Priests. The number of lay Cooperators was always greater than Priest Cooperators, which number varied according to circumstances. Above all, during Don Rua and Don Rinaldi's Rectorates, there were many Priests who worked among the Cooperators: as Diocesan Directors, Co-Directors, and Decurions [Translator's note: A good and in-depth history of the Association was published recently in Italian, *Il cammino di una profezia* available both in Italian and English for use *intra nos* only and not for publication. All rights are reserved by the publisher.] Many activities within a local or diocesan radius were headed and animated by them. From around the year 1950 and on, their presence in the Association was greatly reduced.

Within the Association, the existence and the Christian and ecclesial action of the two groups (laity and clergy) take on specific characteristics, in a marked way, and impress upon them specific guidelines for their participation in Don Bosco's apostolic project. Being laity or members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy are *two ways of living* the unique Salesian vocation common to all Salesian Cooperators.

Within the Church, all, both ordained and lay, are Cooperators with God and with each other. Built on the foundation of the Apostles and together with Mary, who is the Church's Image and Prefiguration, the entire Church is the great Co-operator with the Father and with Christ in the work of the patient construction of the Kingdom. There is no true and complete cooperation with God outside of Her (the Church): Don Bosco was also convinced of this. In the Church, all Her members, without exception, are

¹Canon Law Society of America. *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition.* (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1983) can. 278. Print.

called to cooperate actively in the Divine task of salvation. Today, therefore, Christ, in the Name of the Father, and Mary and the Church, in the Name of Christ, call to Themselves and send to others every baptized person who is consciously aware of his or her Faith. To lazy, unengaged, sleeping Christians, the Owner of the Vineyard says: “Wake up! Why are you here all day long doing nothing?” – Their dramatic response, relevant still today: “Because no one has hired us!” – “Therefore, *go, you, too*, into My vineyard!” (Mt. 9:37). The Council has reaffirmed this with great clarity, and in a very impressive way, using the term “cooperation”. There ought not be any parasites in the Church: every baptized individual is personally called to collaborate, as a good son or daughter, in the paternal undertaking of God and, precisely for this reason, everyone, whether ordained or lay, receives from the Holy Spirit *different abilities*, different gifts (“charisms”, I Cor. 7:7 and 12:7), and the possibility to give his or her contribution, which may be little and yet is indispensable.

The article highlights three guidelines regarding the specific participation of the Salesian Cooperator in Don Bosco's apostolic project: 1) He or she brings to life today his or her apostolic commitment and lives the Salesian Spirit in the ordinary situations of life and work. These are the theological and sociological conditions of the secular state in which he or she carries on the mission of the Church according to Don Bosco's spirit. 2) The Cooperator accomplishes all of this with characteristic lay sensitivities; that is, as a Christian called to carry out an apostolate to the young and to common folk through the exercise of fidelity to the practices of the Faith, through prophecy, and through Christian witness and animation within the temporal order. 3) As a lay person, he or she spreads such values as these in his or her own environment; i.e., the specific values of Don Bosco's Gospel project carried out with lay characteristics in one's family, in one's marriage, in the areas of life and work, and in one's social reality. *The laity*, are all, *in full title*, co-responsible in the work of God. *Lumen Gentium* says: “Through their Baptism and Confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. ... every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself.” (no. 33b) *Apostolicam Actuositatem* says:

The Christian vocation by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate... The laity derive the *right* and *duty* [emphases my own] to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; by the precept of charity, which is the Lord's greatest commandment, all the faithful are impelled to promote the glory of God through the coming of His kingdom. (nos. 2a and 3b)

And they specify: “It remains for each one of them to cooperate in the external spread and the dynamic growth of the Kingdom of Christ in the world.” (*Lumen Gentium* no. 35d) “They are fellow workers for the truth... they cooperate in presenting the word of God especially by means of catechetical instruction.” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* nos. 6a and 10) And, with magnificent words: “they should be aware of the fact that they are cooperating with God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* no. 16a) “co-workers [of Christ] in the various forms and modes of the one apostolate of the Church.” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* no. 33) Obviously, they also work with the Bishops, Diocesan and Religious Priests, among themselves, in their parishes, in the diocese, and elsewhere. (see *Lumen Gentium*

no. 27c) The *catechists* in the Missions are called “reliable coworkers of the priestly order.” (*Ad Gentes* no. 17b) *Christian spouses and parents* receive the sublime titles of “Cooperators with the love of God” (*Gaudium et Spes* no. 50b), “Cooperators in grace and witnesses of faith for each other, their children” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* no. 11b), “witnesses and Cooperators in the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church.” (*Lumen Gentium* no. 41e)

In delineating the figure of the Salesian Cooperator who is an Ordained Deacon or Priest, a member of the ecclesiastical Hierarchy, the article highlights three essential guidelines which refer directly to the specific way in which he participates, in his unique condition in the world, in the realization of Don Bosco's apostolic project. The fact that he lives out his personal ministry taking inspiration from Don Bosco, an eminent model of priestly life, is characteristic of the Salesian way he exercises his priestly or diaconal ministry. He gives privilege of place to the young and to the environments of common folk in his pastoral choices. This marks his ministry's field of action, keeping it in harmony with the Salesian mission to the young and to common folk. In this way, he enriches the Church in which he works because the apostolic project of Don Bosco is a concrete expression of the mission of the Church.

The Ordained Ministers - Bishops, Priests, and Deacons - are obviously eminent “Cooperators with God”. The Council applies this title explicitly to missionaries because they cooperate “in the mystery of salvation.” (*Ad Gentes* nos. 15b and 25b) Priests, especially parish priests, are often defined as “prudent Cooperators with the Episcopal order.” (*Lumen Gentium* nos. 28b and 41c)

All the above manifests the mystical greatness, the ecclesial value, and the doctrinal and spiritual quality of the name "Cooperator". What does it mean to be a Salesian Cooperator? It is, for the Christian, a way of expressing and living out one's cooperation with God's Plan, which is profoundly part and parcel of the Christian vocation itself.

References

Apostolicam Actuositatem, 8.

Codex Iuris Canonici cann. 276 §2, 278.

Ceria E., *I Cooperatori Salesiani; un po' di storia*, (SEI Torino 1952) 91.

Annali della Società Salesiana (SEI Torino 1941) I, 232.

Lumen Gentium, 34-3G.

Giovanni Paolo II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, (16 ottobre 1979).

Giovanni Paolo II, *Christifideles Laici*, (30 dicembre 1988).

From the *Code of Canon Law*

Canon 278

§1. Secular clerics have the right to associate with others to pursue purposes in keeping with the clerical state.

§2. Secular clerics are to hold in esteem especially those associations which, having statutes recognized by competent authority, foster their holiness in the exercise of the ministry through a suitable and properly approved rule of life and through fraternal assistance and which promote the unity of clerics among themselves and with their own bishop.

§3. Clerics are to refrain from establishing or participating in associations whose purpose or activity cannot be reconciled with the obligations proper to the clerical state or can prevent the diligent fulfillment of the function entrusted to them by competent ecclesiastical authority.

from *The Identity of the Salesian Cooperator*

1. The “Salesian” Vocation (*Project of Apostolic Life Statutes, 3*)

The vocation of man is to become ever more man; the Christian vocation is to become ever more true children of God, another Christ, i.e., to attain the fullness of Christian life. But since the Church is “in intimate solidarity” with the human race and its history (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1), God’s Spirit does not cease raising up in it people and movements to respond to new needs. We all know that the 19th century was an epoch of decisive transformation: the first wave of industrialization invaded Europe accompanied by social and political upheavals, in particular in the phenomenon called urbanization.

It was at that time that the Holy Spirit raised up Don Bosco and made him a “giant of charity”: his vocation would be to dedicate his life to poor, abandoned, and at-risk youth to save them from material and spiritual misery and assure their integral development; it would also be to invent an appropriate educational method and to create a vast movement of apostolic forces, capable of guaranteeing the continuity and spread of his work and his original spirit – the spirit with which he wants his work to be animated.

Therefore, he founded a group of immediate collaborators, Religious apostles, and a group of more agile collaborators: Diocesan Priests and lay apostles inserted into all locales. He gave this immense and united apostolic Family St. Francis de Sales as patron and inspiration. All its members are Salesians, therefore, committed to the same fundamental task, following the same spirit - some as vowed Religious (FMA and SDB) and others not: the Cooperators.

2. The vocation of the “Salesian Cooperator” (*Project of Apostolic Life Statutes, 3*)

The Cooperator vocation is none other than the Salesian vocation lived in the world, without any particular form of consecration. Don Bosco never stopped saying it. We will give two official definitions which meet and complete each other along essential lines:

1. “Cooperators are the Faithful who, with particular diligence, tend towards Christian perfection in the state of life proper to them and place themselves at the service of the Church: above all in the apostolate to the young; with the Salesian educational spirit and method; in union with the whole Salesian Family; and in their own personal responsibilities.”

2. And the one given by the Salesian Special General Chapter, in its Declaration to the Cooperators (no. 730): “The Cooperator, as first envisioned by Don Bosco, is a true Salesian in the world; i.e., a Christian, lay or Priest, who, without religious vows, responds to his personal vocation to sanctity, committing himself to a mission among the young and the common people, according the spirit of Don Bosco, in the service of the local Church, and in communion with the Salesian Congregation” (and, it is understood, with all the other groups of the Salesian Family).

4. Elements common to both ways of being Salesian (*Project of Apostolic Life Statutes, 3*)

Salesian Religious and Salesian Cooperators

There’s no doubt that one of the most precious aspects of such a vocation is founded on the fact that it is lived in the heart of an immense family whose complexity and world-wide diffusion multiply its richness and dynamism.

The common elements for all its members are numerous:

The same Founder, Don Bosco, today represented by the same Superior, the Rector Major,

- and the same participation in its providential charism:
- the search for Gospel holiness (according to each one’s own state of life),
- through one mission (chiefly educational),
- each according to the same spirit,
- and according to a special kind of fraternity and collaboration.

It is on the basis of this one, same fundamental Salesian vocation that concrete vocations to the Salesian Religious and the Salesian Cooperators spring up: “The Salesian vocation is “salesian” first before being “religious”... the Salesian charism goes beyond the confines of our Congregation.” (*Acts of the Salesian General Council, no. 739*)

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

Cooperators are those members of the Church who commit themselves in a special manner to Christian perfection in their particular state of life, placing themselves at the service of the Church:

- In the apostolate of youth in particular with the Salesian spirit and educative method.

- In union with the entire Salesian family
- Capable of shouldering their own apostolic responsibilities.

The Cooperator as originally envisaged by Don Bosco is a true Salesian in the world, i.e., a Christian, be he layman, lay religious or priest, who, even if he has no religious vows:

- follows a vocation to holiness,
- by offering himself to work for the young and ordinary working people,
- in the spirit of Don Bosco,
- in the service of the local Church,
- and in the communion with the Salesian Congregation.

For the Salesians who are religious Cooperators and the Salesians who are lay Cooperators there is no doubt that the finest aspect of such a vocation lies in the fact of living in the bosom of an immense family.

The elements common to all the members of the family are:

- the same founder, Don Bosco, represented today by his successor, the Rector Major;
- the same sharing in Don Bosco's God-given charism;
- the search for holiness (according to one's own state in life)
- by means of a mission;
- the search and the mission both being according to a special spirit
- and according to a specific form of brotherliness and collaboration.

Qualities needed to become a Cooperator:

- that the Holy Spirit is calling us to find our position in the Church and carry out our vocation in its common mission;
- taking the Gospel seriously and living our lives as authentic Christians;
- being sensitive to the problems of the young and the poor;
- knowing Don Bosco and correspond with his spirit, work, and methods in developing our own supernatural gifts;
- having a sense of brotherliness in co-responsibility and collaboration as disciples in action.

“It is necessary to see clearly that being a Salesian Cooperator is to answer a true call: it is to accept an authentic Salesian vocation, to follow a true apostolic vocation.”

from *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 3

The apostolate is lived in faith, hope and charity poured out by the Holy Spirit into the hearts of all the members of the Church. And the precept of charity, which is the Lord’s greatest commandment, urges all Christians to work for the glory of God through the coming of his kingdom and for the communication of eternal life to all men, that they may know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (John 17:3).

On all Christians, accordingly, rests the noble obligation of working to bring all men throughout the whole world to hear and accept the divine message of salvation.

from the Letter of St. James 2:14-18

Faith without Works Is Dead

What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

But some one will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.

See also excerpts following Article 35 of the *Compendium*