

Art. 7. The Witness of the Beatitudes

The lifestyle of a Salesian Cooperator, marked by the spirit of the Beatitudes, commits him or her to the evangelization of culture and of social life.¹ For this reason the Cooperator, being rooted in Christ and aware that all baptized people are called to the perfection of love, lives and gives witness to:

- *a life lived according to the Spirit, as the source of joy, peace, and forgiveness;*
- *freedom, in obedience to God's plan, appreciating the value and autonomy proper to secular realities, committing themselves to direct these, above all, to the service of persons;*
- *Gospel poverty, administering the goods entrusted to them using the criteria of temperance and of sharing, in view of the common good;*
- *a sexuality according to a Gospel vision of chastity, marked by delicacy and a joyful married or celibate life, lived with integrity and based on love;*
- *that mercy which opens one's heart to all material and moral miseries and urges one to work with pastoral charity;*
- *justice to build a more fraternal world that recognizes and promotes the rights of all, especially of the weakest;*
- *a firm will to be a builder of peace in a world agitated by violence and class hatred.*

This way of love for God and for others is a sure path towards sanctity.

CONSIDERATIONS

Core Themes

1. Gospel Values Proposed to All the Disciples of the Lord Jesus
2. Evangelizing with the Spirit of the Beatitudes
3. The Beatitudes of the Salesian Cooperator

Keys to Understanding

Lumen Gentium solemnly declared that all the Faithful in the Church are called to sanctity and to perfect charity, even if by different paths and in different states of life, and that the Gospel Counsels have been proposed to all Christ's disciples – even if their practice takes on a different expression according to each individual's specific vocation. It is in this (and only in this) sense that the present article speaks of the attitudes and of the various Gospel Counsels, inasmuch as they can be lived effectively by all the lay Faithful, once they have taken into account their abilities, distinct vocations, and different circumstances

¹John Paul II. *Christifideles Laici*. Par. 16. Trans. The Holy See. n.d. Web. 26 Nov. 2013. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html

Vatican Council II. *Gaudium et Spes*. Par. 72. Trans. The Holy See. n.d. Web. 26 Nov. 2013. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

of life: celibate, for the love of the Kingdom; betrothed; married; or widowed. In short, it focuses on how the Gospel values expressed in the Beatitudes can be lived concretely by "secular" apostles.

A. *A Personal Style of Life Marked by the Spirit of the Beatitudes*

Gaudium et Spes declares that it is of great importance that the laity “should observe the right order in their earthly activities in faithfulness to Christ and His Gospel. Thus their whole life, both individual and social, will be permeated with the spirit of the beatitudes, notably with a spirit of poverty.” (no. 72a) But is it possible to reach this ideal? Certainly! But not by confiding only in one's own strengths but, rather, by placing one's trust in God's help. “This Charity of God,” affirms the Conciliar Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* “enables the laity really to express the spirit of the Beatitudes in their lives.” (no. 4) The *Project of Apostolic Life* recognizes and adopts these authoritative declarations of Vatican Council II with the affirmation: *the lifestyle of a Salesian Cooperator is marked by the spirit of the Beatitudes.*

B. *Evangelizing Culture and Social Life with the Spirit of the Beatitudes*

The Council takes an extra step forward and invites all the lay Faithful not only to take on the spirit of the Beatitudes as their own by showing themselves docile to the marvelous action of the Holy Spirit but also to radiate it in the environments in which they live, to everyone's benefit. This affirmation is from *Lumen Gentium*, no. 38: “All the laity as a community and each one according to his ability must nourish the world with spiritual fruits. (Gal. 5:22) They must diffuse in the world that spirit which animates the poor, the meek, the peace makers—whom the Lord in the Gospel proclaimed as blessed.” (Mt 5:3-9) This inversion of values can be understood only by making reference to Christ; the Beatitudes are nothing without Him because He alone gives them meaning for He lived them perfectly: “Learn from Me Who am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls.” (Mt 11:29) In effect, the placement of the Beatitudes at the start of Jesus’ inaugural discourse offers, according to Matthew 5:3-12, the “*plan for Christian happiness.*” Inserting the spirit of the Beatitudes into the present-day world cannot happen without *an evangelization* of the culture and of social life. And this carries with it a true renewal of present-day mankind in all strata of society. Paul VI underlined this on a memorable page of his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which merits being transcribed here because the *Project of Apostolic Life* takes inspiration from it when it declares that the Salesian Cooperator’s personal style of life, marked by the spirit of the Beatitudes, *is also a commitment to evangelize culture and social life:*

For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: “Now I am making the whole of creation new.” But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel. The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs... for the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or

to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation. (nos. 18 and 19)

We need to be knowledgeable if we are to be able to incarnate the Gospel in our culture and society.

C. *The Beatitudes of the Salesian Cooperator Today*

According to the Discourse on the Mount, two principal Beatitudes sum up all the others: poverty, with its pageant of works of justice, humility, meekness, purity, mercy, commitments and labors for peace; and persecution for the love of Christ. "Yes" to the Beatitudes implies "no" to opposite attitudes and behaviors: hatred, self-sufficiency, pride, hardness of heart, intrigue, the will to dominate, violence, the desire for luxury, and sloth.

In translating the Gospel message of the Beatitudes for the Cooperator of today, the *Project of Apostolic Life* keeps all this in mind but makes direct reference to some fundamental dynamics of the human person (the use of liberty, the administration of goods, and the sexual life) and some contemporaneous and variously diffused social situations (efficiency, aggressiveness, divisions, violence, and suffering). Concretely-speaking, it lists the following Beatitudes: a life lived according to the Spirit; the use of one's freedom in obedience to God's plan; the administration of goods in a spirit of Gospel poverty; living one's sexuality according to a Gospel vision of chastity; and primacy given to the Holy Spirit's values: mercy, justice, peace, and the apostolic fecundity of suffering, of non-violence, and of forgiveness.

The order of the first three on the list is adopted from the Salesian *Constitutions*, which respect the sequence proposed by Don Bosco. The underlying motive is the distinct bond which obedience, poverty, and chastity have with the Salesian mission. Taken together, these Beatitudes constitute a project of Gospel and Salesian life which is truly capable of evangelizing profoundly both the family and the social realities in which the Salesian Cooperators live and work.

- ***Freedom, in obedience to God's Plan***

The "secular" aspects of Christian obedience are presented in a special way in this article. Only in a second moment, but certainly not because it is considered secondary, does it speak of "ecclesial" obedience, which is made of attentive and mature docility to our legitimate Shepherds. In what does this "secular obedience" consist? Following the authoritative indications of Vatican Council II, the *Project of Apostolic Life* brings us back to *obedience to God's Plan*. In regards to this, a text of the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no. 7b, is particularly pertinent:

All those things which make up the temporal order, namely, the good things of life and the prosperity of the family, culture, economic matters, the arts and professions, the laws of the political community, international relations, and other matters of this kind, as well as their development and progress, not only aid in the attainment of man's ultimate goal but also possess their own intrinsic value. This value has been established in them by God, whether they are considered in themselves or as parts of the whole temporal order. 'God saw that all He had made was very good' (Gen. 1:31). This natural goodness of theirs takes on a special dignity as a result of their relation to the human person, for whose service they were created. It has pleased God to unite all things, both natural and supernatural, in Christ Jesus 'so that in all things He may have the first place' (Col. 1:18). This destination, however, not only does not deprive the temporal order of its independence, its proper goals, laws, supports, and significance for human welfare but rather perfects the temporal order in its own intrinsic strength and worth and puts it on a level with man's whole vocation upon earth.

Recognizing and obeying this Divine Plan for Creation implies an initial human and Christian attitude, expressly proposed to the Salesian Cooperator in the *Project of Apostolic Life: appreciation for the value of and the autonomy proper to secular realities*. Cultivating such an attitude requires the acquisition of a correct lay mentality; that is, a mentality that bears the following characteristics: 1) concern for the objective value of secular realities, such as physical health and life, family, work, jobs and professions, culture, the sciences, the economy, industry, commerce, politics, relations among peoples, social justice, and peace; 2) dedication to them with constancy even if they are complex realities which demand a serious study of what is real in the present day; 3) a profound sense of professionalism; 4) awareness of the usefulness and the purpose of every job and profession and the demands inherent to each, which are often burdensome; 5) the nurturing of a healthy realism in facing one's existence; 6) seriousness in planning objectives to be reached; 7) the cultivation of collaboration; and 8) appreciation for organization. These qualities are not easily found in one who believes he can prescind from the values that are proper to the "laity."

Recognizing and obeying this Divine plan for Creation means, in today's situation, *not allowing oneself to be brainwashed by the multiple and contemporaneous forms of secularism, laicism, and atheistic materialism*. These absolutize Nature and secular realities, unhinging them from God or, according to the atheistic hypothesis, "freeing them from His domination"; thus demonstrating a grave inability to comprehend the meaning of Creation and the union that exists between God and the realities created by Him and entrusted to the responsibility of man. Regarding these ideas, a second passage of the Conciliar Decree (no. 7c) is important and must be cited:

In the course of history, the use of temporal things has been marred by serious vices. Affected by original sin, men have frequently fallen into many errors concerning the true God, the nature of man, and the principles of the moral law. This has led to the corruption of morals and human institutions and not rarely to contempt for the human person himself. In our own time, moreover, those who have trusted excessively in the progress of the natural sciences and the technical arts have fallen into an idolatry of temporal things and have become their slaves rather than their masters.

In the face of these and analogous distorted situations of sinful human intervention, a specific task for the lay Christian is obvious. This is also expressly proposed to the Cooperator by the *Project of Apostolic Life: always to direct [secular realities] to the service of persons*. This is a second aspect of the secularity proper to the Salesian Cooperators' specific vocation for it is meant for the Christian animation of the temporal order.

- *Gospel and secular poverty*

Before all else, the type of poverty proposed to the Salesian Cooperator is Gospel poverty; in other words, it is the one practiced by the Lord Jesus and proclaimed a "Beatitude" by Him. Before being an economic or social reality, it is a spiritual and religious attitude. The "poor", in the Biblical sense, are the meek who are aware of their personal limitations and who trust in God. Jesus of Nazareth is presented as the Messiah of the poor and He Himself is poor because He is "meek and humble of heart" (Mt. 11:29) and the "peaceful" King. (Mt. 21:5) He, Who also appreciates things and uses them with simplicity, demands of His disciples this spiritual attitude, before all else: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Mt. 5:3); i.e., He demands of them: an attitude of radical freedom where temporal goods are concerned (regarding whatever they may either possess or lack); the recognition and admission of their own indigence and weakness; and the knowledge that they need God's help. In this way, they become capable of desiring and of receiving the true riches which come from above. The accent placed on this spiritual aspect of poverty by the Gospel must not make us forget the religious value of material poverty, in the measure in which it is a sign and a means of interior freedom. Bethlehem (Mt. 27:35), Nazareth (Mt. 13:55), public life (Mt. 8:20), and the Cross (Mt. 27:35) are all different forms of poverty embraced, lived, suffered, and endured by the Lord. Christ puts all His disciples on their guard against the danger of riches (Mt. 6:19 ff.) and proposes material poverty to them. Such was, in fact, the condition of the life of the Apostles and of St. Paul who lived off his own work (I Cor. 11–12) and the ideal which the first Christian Community set their sights on to imitate – in which "no one called his own that which belonged to him." (Acts 4:32)

If material poverty – provided it be received with a generous spirit – is already here on earth the cause of an authentic spiritual joy and of hope for an ineffable eternal recompense, it remains, nonetheless an inhuman condition and the Gospel notes the demands of Social Justice: the rich have obligations toward the poor; what is more, service to the poor is a manifestation of love for Christ (because in them we come to Christ's aid). (Mt. 25:3) Gospel poverty opens up horizons concerning the significance of the good things created by God for the benefit of all men; it motivates us, therefore, to seek alternative structures regarding the prevailing materialistic situations of today's world. In the end, the principle and the objective of Gospel poverty are participation in the Mystery of the "liberality of our Lord Jesus Christ":

“being rich He became poor, for your sakes; that through His poverty you might be rich.” (II Corinthians 8:9) With the Biblical significance of poverty of spirit clarified, it is necessary to add immediately that the kind of poverty indicated for the Salesian Cooperator is a secular poverty and, therefore, a poverty which conforms to their condition as persons who live in a determinate human context with responsibilities to their family and society. As such, it is distinguished completely, for example, from the kind proper to Religious. Moreover, it does not only regard their material goods but also the spiritual, cultural, and moral ones, which are more precious than simple riches. And what is more, it does not only concern the use of the goods but also of their acquisition and their destination. This is all understood in the phrase: “*administering the goods entrusted to them using the criteria of temperance and of sharing, in view of the common good.*”

The text also points out the demands of this Gospel and secular poverty and how they relate to concrete, present-day situations. They are, in substance: the awareness that they are not owners but mere administrators of their own goods and are responsible under the law of work with its demands, difficulties, and privations; the testimony of simplicity, of temperance, and of moderation which flee from luxury and ostentation, which are true injustices to the enormous masses of indigent and needy people; the spirit of solidarity which pushes beyond the egotistical accumulation of things and holding onto unused goods; and the generous sharing of the same *in view of the common good*.

- ***The Gospel vision of chastity***

Christ the Lord gives His intimacy to those who give themselves to Him in the simplicity of faith and of love – “to the pure of heart” – and proclaims them “blessed” for “they will see God.” (Mt. 5:8) According to Biblical faith, which believes that all Creation is good – and, specifically, the entire reality of sexuality; i.e., the fundamental condition of being a man or woman – chastity is an interior and moral reality and is fully realizable when one's very existence is marked by the living presence of the Lord. It must be remembered, so as to avoid misunderstandings, that every Christian situation bears its own kind of inherent chastity. There is a chastity which is proper to fiancés, one proper to spouses, and another proper to those who are celibate. The *Project of Apostolic Life* proposes it as an achievable ideal for every Salesian Cooperator, keeping in mind one's specific state in life. This does not preclude that those who feel called by God to do so can reach all the way to the renunciation of creating one's own family in view of a particular self-giving to the service of God and of neighbor.

This is not to be equated with naïve innocence, or ignorance of the biological and psychological reality bound up with one's being male or female, or with just a “tranquil possession” of it. Rather, it suggests the idea of a *continual conquest* by means of an illuminated educative path. It does not present the commitment to reach it as an oppressive burden which renders one anxious, untrusting, or worse, bitter and dissatisfied, on account of possible fragility and weakness; but, rather, it is a liberating spiritual force which leads one to self-control and which is expressed in behaviors marked by naturalness and delicacy. Nor is it seen simply as a bearer of serenity (even though it is, without a doubt) but as a source of true joy: it is the “Beatitude” of which the Gospel speaks. It is valued, above all, as being *centered on love*, which finds different expressions in the celibate lifestyle, in the state of being engaged, in matrimony, and in widowhood, and is open to multiple forms of authentic human and Christian friendship.

- *Mercy, justice, and peace*

In completing this discourse on the Gospel Beatitudes in relationship to the actual contexts in which the Salesian Cooperators live and work, the article now takes into consideration three socio-cultural situations produced by a widespread materialism and the cause of not a few social evils: "efficiency" (not to be confused with an efficient way of working, which is a value), aggressiveness, and divisions. These stand counter to the three attitudes inspired by the primacy given to the values of the Spirit and defined by the Gospels as "Beatitudes": mercy, justice, and peace, as motivated by a correct comprehension of the Cross of Christ, which is the supreme manifestation of love.

References

Apostolicam Actuositatem, 4b, 7c.

Giovanni Paolo II, *Veritatis Splendor* (6 agosto 1993).

Giovanni Paolo II, *Evangelium Vitae* (25 marzo 1995).

Giovanni Paolo II, *Fides et Ratio* (14 settembre 1998).

Gaudium et Spes, 28ss.

Lumen Gentium 8ss, 40-41.

from *Christifideles Laici*

Called to Holiness

16. We come to a full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider *the prime and fundamental vocation* that the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit: the vocation to holiness, that is, the perfection of charity. Holiness is the greatest testimony of the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ.

The Second Vatican Council has significantly spoken on the universal call to holiness. It is possible to say that this call to holiness is precisely the basic charge entrusted to all the sons and daughters of the Church by a Council which intended to bring a renewal of Christian life based on the gospel. This charge is not a simple moral exhortation, but an *undeniable requirement arising from the mystery of the Church: she is the choice vine*, whose branches live and grow with the same holy and life-giving energies that come from Christ; she is the Mystical Body, whose members share in the same life of holiness of the Head who is Christ; she is the Beloved Spouse of the Lord Jesus, who delivered himself up for her sanctification (cf. *Eph 5:25 ff.*). The Spirit that sanctified the human nature of Jesus in Mary's virginal womb (cf. *Lk 1:35*) is the same Spirit that is abiding and working in the Church to communicate to her the holiness of the Son of God made man.

It is ever more urgent that today all Christians take up again the way of gospel renewal, welcoming in a spirit of generosity the invitation expressed by the apostle Peter "to be holy in all conduct" (*1 Pt 1:15*). The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, twenty years after the Council, opportunely insisted on this urgency:

"Since the Church in Christ is a mystery, she ought to be considered the sign and instrument of holiness... Men and women saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult circumstances in the Church's history. Today we have the greatest need of saints whom we must assiduously beg God to raise up.

Everyone in the Church, precisely because they are members, receive and thereby share in the common vocation to holiness. In the fullness of this title and on equal par with all other members of the Church, the lay faithful are called to holiness: "All the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity". "All of Christ's followers are invited and bound to pursue holiness and the perfect fulfillment of their own state of life".

The call to holiness is *rooted in Baptism* and proposed anew in the other Sacraments, principally in the *Eucharist*. Since Christians are reclothed in Christ Jesus and refreshed by his Spirit, they are "holy". They therefore have the ability to manifest this holiness and the responsibility to bear witness to it in all that they do. The apostle Paul never tires of admonishing all Christians to live "as is fitting among saints" (*Eph 5:3*).

Life according to the Spirit, whose fruit is holiness (cf. *Rom 6:22; Gal 5:22*), stirs up every baptized person and requires each to *follow and imitate Jesus Christ*, in embracing the Beatitudes, in listening and meditating on the Word of God, in conscious and active participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, in personal prayer, in family or in community, in the hunger and thirst for justice, in the practice of the commandment of love in all circumstances of life and service to the brethren, especially the least, the poor and the suffering.

from Gaudium et Spes

72. Christians who take an active part in present-day socio-economic development and fight for justice and charity should be convinced that they can make a great contribution to the prosperity of mankind and to the peace of the world. In these activities let them, either as individuals or as members of groups, give a shining example. Having acquired the absolutely necessary skill and experience, they should observe the right order in their earthly activities in faithfulness to Christ and His Gospel. Thus their whole life, both individual and social, will be permeated with the spirit of the beatitudes, notably with a spirit of poverty.

Whoever in obedience to Christ seeks first the Kingdom of God, takes therefrom a stronger and purer love for helping all his brethren and for perfecting the work of justice under the inspiration of charity.

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

The Following of Christ in a Salesian Way According to His Beatitudes

.... Being an apostle of Christ does not mean he is dispensed from being a disciple of Christ: quite the contrary. The Salesian Cooperator desires to bring the Gospel to others: he himself must be the first to

know and live this same Gospel. In fact he will carry the Gospel to others far more effectively by the way he lives than by the way he speaks.

The Beatitudes

It is the Salesian's duty to be among those on the mountain-side listening to Jesus preaching his Beatitudes. Both the spirit and the mission of our family are in deep accord with them and impel us to practice the evangelical virtues they present:

- Poverty in spirit and heart: to help us be detached from ourselves and our smugness and attached to the young and poor.
- Meekness and simplicity in our speech, in our way of treating others, in the patience our Salesian method requires of us.
- Ill-treatment serenely accepted in the face of difficulties; and sympathy for others who are afflicted in any way; especially the young. - Hunger and thirst for justice, i.e., for God's glory and for the just happiness of our neighbour, especially those who are deprived of justice and happiness.
- Mercy: With our hearts ever open to material and moral misery, and ready to pour thereon the healing oil of our understanding and brotherly help.
- Purity in thought, word and deed, avoiding all that could scandalize; but especially bringing to our homes a way of life that is above reproach, welcoming and serene.
- Peace that we energetically strive for in a world agitated by violence and class hatred.
- Determination to stand four-square by those who are persecuted in their efforts to achieve the Kingdom of God, of Justice, of Brotherhood, that Kingdom where God's children are not exploited.

All these virtues make us avoid what is contrary to the Gospel or in any way anti-Salesian: smugness, pride, harshness, and intrigue. They encourage us to be "meek and lowly in heart" like Jesus (Mt. XI, 29) and "merciful even as our Father is merciful" (cf. Lk. VI, 36), and to imitate Christ according to the inspiration given us by our patron, St. Francis of Sales who was so steeped in the Gospels.