

## Art. 8. Apostolic Commitment

§1. *Salesian Cooperators carry out their apostolate, first of all, through their daily tasks. They follow Jesus Christ, the perfect Man, sent by the Father to serve the people of the world. This is why they are committed to putting into practice the Gospel ideal of love for God and for one's neighbor in the ordinary circumstances of life.*<sup>1</sup>

§2. *Animated by the Salesian Spirit, they give special attention to young people, especially to those who are poorest or victims of any kind of marginalization, exploitation, or violence; to those setting out in the world of work; and to those who show signs of a specific Vocation.*

§3. *They foster and defend the value of the family<sup>2</sup> - the foundational nucleus of society and of the Church - and are committed to construct it as "a Domestic Church"<sup>3</sup>. Married Salesian Cooperators live their mission through their marriage as "co-operators with the love of God the Creator"<sup>4</sup> and as "the primary and principal educators of their children,"<sup>5</sup> according to the pedagogy of goodness proper to the Preventive System.*

§4. *They are attentive to the Social Justice Doctrines of the Church and to social communications so as to foster educational journeys to grow in these areas.*

§5. *They support the Church's missionary activity and commit themselves to educate to a global perspective as an opening to dialogue among cultures.*

### CONSIDERATIONS

#### Core themes

1. Everyday Commitments Take Priority
2. Privileged Attention to the Young
3. Fostering and Defending the Value of the Family
4. Attentiveness to the Social Justice Doctrines of the Church and to Social Communications

#### Keys to Understanding

In the first part of this article, *the priority given to the daily commitments* of the Salesian Cooperator is affirmed and founded, as it were, upon Don Bosco's thoughts. Following this, the article proposes the *Christological foundation* of the secular apostolate of the Salesian Cooperator in the light of the Scriptures and of Vatican Council II. Christ the Lord is the Apostle (the One Sent) Who sums up the entire universe and is the *sine qua non* point of reference for every one of His faithful disciples, as each and every Salesian

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<sup>1</sup>Gaudium et Spes. Par. 45.

<sup>2</sup>Christifideles Laici. Par. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Vatican Council II. *Lumen Gentium*. Par. 11. Trans. The Holy See. n.d. Web. 26 Nov. 2013. [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html)

<sup>4</sup>Gaudium et Spes. Par. 50.

<sup>5</sup>Vatican Council II. *Gravissimum Educationis*. Par. 3. Trans. The Holy See n.d. Web 1 May 2014. [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_gravissimum-educationis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html)

Cooperator is called to be. Meanwhile, the other paragraphs remind us of the priorities of the Salesian mission: privileged attention to the young, the value of the family, the putting into practice the Social Justice Doctrines of the Church, and the missionary commitment.

### **A. *Everyday Commitments Take Priority***

*Salesian Cooperators carry out their apostolate, first of all, through their daily tasks.* It is important to restate this priority precisely due to this crucial reason expressed by Don Bosco: "It is necessary that we, too, have secular friends, benefactors, and people who, while practicing the complete Salesian Spirit, live in the heart of their families." (see *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco* Vol. XIII 469 and *Acts of the Special General Chapter XX* no. 153.1) Beyond this declaration, there is his constant thought that the Salesian Cooperators must be "good Christians"; i.e., authentic Catholics. In effect, the characteristics which make the Cooperator's everyday commitments a priority *are, most decidedly, his or her secular condition and mission.*

- ***The Sequela Christi today***

What must a Cooperator do to be a Christian, a lay apostle, as Don Bosco wished him or her to be yesterday and as the Church wants him or her to be today?

He or she must follow Christ today. This means:

- believing in Him, in the ineffable Mystery of the Person of the God-Man, and in His life spent for our salvation and holistic liberation (*faith*);
- making his or her own Christ's vision of the world, of man, of history, and of human events (*conversion*);
- having interior attitudes of total and trusting abandon to God and of full confidence in the loving-kindness of men, as He had (*hope*);
- loving God and one's neighbor like Him (*charity*) and treating people as He treated them;
- behaving in the family, at work, in society, in joy and in suffering, in the face of poverty and sickness, injustice and oppression, and of every form of trial, as He behaved; and
- being docile like Him to the interior voice of the Holy Spirit, Who illumines the conscience and motivates the will.

This must not remain at the theoretical level, at the level of ideas alone, but must be put into practice in the ordinary story of one's daily existence. By putting the focus on these statements of general import, the *Project of Apostolic Life* points to some essential traits of the figure and the life of the Lord Jesus: His mission in the world, His service to man, His activities in the ordinary circumstances of life, and the fact that He is the Perfect Man and a living model for every human person: *whoever follows Christ, the Perfect Man, makes himself more human also.* Certain traits of the life of the Lord are particularly significant to the Salesian Cooperator's secular and Salesian apostolic commitments.

- ***Sent by the Father***

The mission of God's People and of those who take part in that mission derives from Christ and finds in Him the source and reason for being. According to the Synoptics, Christ is presented to man as the One *par excellence* who was *sent* from God (see Luke 4:17–21). All the aspects of Christ's liberating action (proclaiming the Gospel, fulfilling the Law and the Prophets, calling not the just but sinners, seeking that which was lost, and giving back the true meaning to Creation) are all summed up in the *mission* which He received from the Father, the Merciful Creator. The Cooperator *encounters in Jesus Christ the Perfect Apostle of the Father*. This title of Christ in the life plan of Christians – "secular apostles" – such as the Salesian Cooperators must be, cannot but be expressly remembered.

- ***To serve man***

Sent by the Father to bring to perfection the work of the servants of the Old Testament (see Mt. 21:33 ff.), the Beloved Son comes *to serve*. Right from His infancy and youth He affirms that He must be busy about the things of His Father (Luke 2:49). The course of His life is under the sign of a "need" which expresses His filial dependence on the Will of the Father (see Mt. 16:21) but within this need for service which brings Him to the Cross is revealed the *love* which, alone, confers upon Him His dignity and His worth: "But that the world may know that I love the Father: as the Father has commanded Me, so I do." (See John 14:30) Christ serves God by placing Himself *at the service of humanity*, revealing therein the plan His Father has for it: The Father wants all men to be dedicated to each other's service as Jesus of Nazareth, their Lord and Master, had been. This essential feature of Jesus Christ's mission could not be missing from the *Project of Apostolic Life* if it wanted to join the Salesian Cooperators' family and social responsibilities and their Salesian service to the Gospel to their source and matrix: The Mystery of the Lord.

- ***In the world***

Christ lived out His mission and accomplished His service to humanity *in a concrete human context*: first, that of His family and of His land of Nazareth, and then the vaster one of His People Israel, even if it assumed a universal salvific dimension. He did not withdraw or estrange Himself from the social and cultural milieu into which He was sent; He did not renege His family, civic, and social responsibilities. He wanted to be like His brothers in all things except sin (see Hebrews 2:17). He lived in contact with humble and simple people; He dealt with the civic and religious authorities of His time; He found Himself caught up in the infrastructures of His People. And it was in this human fabric, with all its lights and shadows, with its miseries and sufferings, with its anguish and hopes, aspirations and frustrations, that He worked out the salvation and the total liberation of humanity. Today there are particular secular situations in which the Salesian Cooperator finds himself living and working, which are rather diverse in many aspects from those of Jesus' time, but also others which are rather similar to them. It is not by fleeing from such ordinary conditions of life, but by remaining in them, that he or she must make his or her own the attitudes and behaviors of the Lord.

- ***Salesian in the world***

Salesian Cooperators *follow Jesus Christ, the Perfect Man... This is why they are committed to putting into practice the Gospel ideal of love for God and for one's neighbor in the ordinary circumstances of life.*

But the Cooperator does not want to accomplish this in a generic way, like any other lay Christian, but, rather, he does so in a specific way, as a Salesian apostle in the world. For this reason, the article opportunely specifies that he does so *animated by the Salesian Spirit*, giving privileged attention to the young everywhere. In effect, the Cooperator puts into action this particular apostolic choice – before all else – in the concrete and ordinary situations in which he or she acts because he or she is a lay person. In his or her family, work, social and recreational activities, he or she pays constant attention to the young, beginning with a special sensitivity as regards the needs of those who surround him or her, showing that he or she is ready to approach them with the relationship style typical of Don Bosco.

- ***Privileged attention to the young***

Don Bosco received from God a heart "as great as the sands of the seashore." He never encountered anyone – man or woman, rich or poor, adult or young person, powerful or forgotten – without trying to do them some good. Yet, his life and every one of his actions show that he felt clearly that he was sent by God directly – and, first of all, to the young.

This priority is what provoked his most persistent appeals to the Cooperators and is what emerges in an indisputable manner in the *Rule* written for them: We who live as Christians in these turbulent times must likewise unite in a spirit of prayer, charity and zeal, using all possible means that our religion makes available to us. We must strive to stamp out, or at least diminish, the evil that puts at risk the moral life of our youth, in whose hands is the destiny of our civil society... The Salesian Congregation, having been definitively approved by the Church, must provide a sure and stable bond uniting the Salesian Cooperators. Its primary purpose is to work for the good of young people, on whom the happy or evil future of society depends... numerous requests for help that are [received] every day from various parts of Italy and of Europe, from China, Australia and the Americas, from the Argentine Republic in particular. These insistent requests are for sacred ministers [and for Salesians] who would undertake the care of young people at risk... It is in order to respond to all these needs that we are looking for cooperators... The principal purpose of the Salesian Cooperators is [the exercise of] charity [towards one's neighbor and, especially,] in behalf of boys at risk. [Something interesting to note: all that is recommended for boys at risk is proposed also for girls in the same situation.] (“Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way...” paragraphs I, II, and IV) [Translator’s note: The text here above is taken mostly from Fr. Lenti’s translation which is found at the end of the *Project of Apostolic Life*, but some of it needed revision to match the original Italian text. It is possible that the Italian text is using a different edition of the *Rule*, as Don Bosco revised it a number of times. The substance is rather much the same, however.]

## ***B. They Foster and Defend the Value of the Family***

Today the family is at the center of the attention and of the pastoral care of the entire Church. The Synod, barely-concluded, has yielded precious guidelines regarding the pastoral accompaniment of families in its final document, in no. 67:

The Synod unanimously restated that the primary school of formation is the family and that the Christian community is engaged in the support and integration of this irreplaceable formative role. Places and times for families to meet need to be determined to encourage the training of parents and the sharing of experiences among families. Parents, as the first teachers and

witnesses of faith for their children, need to be actively involved in their preparation for the Sacraments of Christian Initiation.

Also for the Association of Salesian Cooperators, the family is a privileged place for its apostolic mission. The *Project of Apostolic Life* points out this bond which integrates the mission to the young and to common folk using the expression: “*they foster and defend the value of the family.*” The text gives motivation for such a choice by recognizing the family as the “foundational nucleus of society and of the Church”. In effect, the family is the primary and fundamental, unique and irreplaceable cell of social fabric: the health of society depends in large part on the health of the family. The Christian family is a "Domestic Church" which generates children for the larger ecclesial community and prepares them for carrying out the common mission in different ministries. Having lived the experience of conjugal life and of the problems inherent to educating children, to vocational choice, to professional choice, and to the preparation for matrimony, married Cooperators are capable of offering an invaluable and indispensable service in promoting the good of the family. It is also important to note the profound relationship that exists between the youth and family pastorals.

- ***They are committed to construct it as "a Domestic Church"***

The family which blossoms from Christian matrimony does not simply represent an introduction to the Church or to a part thereof. With good reason, it can be called a "mini Church" or a "Domestic Church". (Synodus Episcoporum no. 87) This is the new significance – and of very great importance and value – which it takes on within the salvific plan initiated by the Lord Jesus. From St. Paul to the great Fathers of the first centuries, the Christian family was seen precisely as a Church on a small-scale in which the constituent contours of the vaster Family of God that is the Church were able to be realized and manifested: The Mystery of faith, of love, of the powerful testimony of the Kingdom of God, and of the living presence of the Risen Lord. "Make your home a Church," St. John Chrysostom very often preached amidst the joyous acclamations of the people.

- ***Co-operators with the love of God the Creator***

But what must be done so that this exciting Gospel ideal might become a consoling reality, as is hoped for every Christian nuclear family? In no. 50, *Gaudium et Spes* states:

Parents should regard as their proper mission the task of transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted. They should realize that they are thereby cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love. Thus they will fulfil their task with human and Christian responsibility, and, with docile reverence toward God, will make decisions by common counsel and effort. Let them thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which the future may bring. For this accounting they need to reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they should consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society, and of the Church herself. The parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God. But in their manner of acting, spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the

divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church's teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel. That divine law reveals and protects the integral meaning of conjugal love, and impels it toward a truly human fulfillment.

The same document reminds us in no. 51 that: “All should be persuaded that human life and the task of transmitting it are not realities bound up with this world alone. Hence they cannot be measured or perceived only in terms of it, but always have a bearing on the eternal destiny of men.”

Making these general guidelines of the Magisterium of Vatican Council II and of the Synod of Bishops their own, and opposing the dominant “pro-choice” mentality with an attitude of "generosity" in welcoming and transmitting life, the *Project of Apostolic Life* formulates in the following way this second aspect of the mission and of the married Cooperator’s moral commitment connected to it: “Co-operators with the love of God the Creator” and “the first and chief educators of their children”.

- ***The first and chief educators of their children***

“Undoubtedly, one of the key challenges posed in families today is that of the upbringing of children, made all-the-more challenging and complex by the today’s culture and the great influence of the media.” (Synodus Episcoporum no. 66) Caring for the growth of their children by both word and example is the first and greatest responsibility of parents. In regards to this, a basic concept must be noted and explained: The present situation of many countries is characterized by a notable social and cultural pluralism – at school, at work, in society, and through the *mass media*, there are proposed ideas, models of behavior, and life styles which are not only different from but often in opposition to each other. This juxtaposition has put the traditional role of parents into crisis and has required it to undergo profound change.

In order to be authentic transmitters of human and Christian values, Christian couples must act in such a way that their family become the privileged place where the above-mentioned pluralism of ideas, models, opinions, and judgments are known, acknowledged, discussed, taken on, and then some of which integrated into their own lives after having given them thought, reflection, and critical analysis by means of a sincere and continuous communication between the parents themselves and with their children; in other words, the role of parents today is to form their children in such a way that they can be capable of leading a life of critical evaluation of the different forms of socio-cultural manipulation, which threaten them, and of creating new values in the sense indicated above.

Within this context, the importance of the following must be underlined:

- the *catechesis of toddlers and little children* accomplished according to the indications of the Papal and Episcopal Magisterium and the valid experiences of family catechesis taking place today;
- a proper *education in sexuality*, as requested and encouraged in the precise guidelines of various Conciliar and Pontifical documents; and
- *education to the social dimension of life*.

When speaking of the educational task carried out by Salesian Cooperators, the *Project of Apostolic Life* opportunely reminds us that it is carried out according to the pedagogy of goodness proper to the Preventive System.

[Translator's note: In 2016 the Pontificium Consilium Pro Familia (Pontifical Council for the Family) developed teaching materials called "The Meeting Point: The Adventure of Love" in five languages. These can be found here: <http://www.educazioneaffettiva.org/the-project/?lang=en>]

### ***C. They are attentive to the Social Justice Doctrines of the Church and to Social Communications***

The perspective in which the Social Justice Doctrines of the Church develop is that of a Christian anthropology, with its vision of the dignity of man and of his being in relation with the other members of society. The human person constitutes the hinge around which the entire reflection on social education revolves and is considered in its centrality in respect to society due to its eminent and inalienable dignity. This dignity which belongs to man is founded upon the fact of his having been created in the image and likeness of God. (Gen. 1:26-27) We can say that God-given Biblical Revelation intersects here with those reflections of human reasoning which affirm the value and the dignity of the person.

The human person "is always a value *per se*" and cannot be instrumentalized and treated as a thing, whether in the name of any State, any Institution, or political party, etc. In fact, the person in his individuality is neither a number nor a link in a chain; nor is he a cog in a system's wheel. The human person takes primacy over the State and society. This is an *a priori human right* and, therefore, the foundation of that right itself; hence, it is not the State which, in a paternalistic and "benevolent" way, graciously confers rights upon the person or decides to deny them. Rather, the State has the job of defending, promoting, and supporting the development of the natural rights of all persons, without any discrimination, because whenever discrimination of any kind is verified, it constitutes an injustice that is completely intolerable for the dishonor it inflicts upon the dignity of the person.

### ***D. They support the Church's missionary activity***

Don Bosco cultivated the missionary ideal and participated in the missionary work of the Church of his time. According to his explicit will, the missionary apostolate is an essential element of the nature and the purpose of the entire Salesian Family. In fact, the Salesian Cooperators have given a decisive contribution to Salesian missionary work. Humanization, evangelization, and the founding of the Church – also in the Missions – is directed, according to criteria of preference and urgency, to poor youth and to common folk. Missionary work today takes on increasing importance due to its strict ties with the most serious problems of our times: peace, development, solidarity, and positive exchanges among Nations, Races, and Religions.

### **References**

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### *from Lumen Gentium*

11. It is through the sacraments and the exercise of the virtues that the sacred nature and organic structure of the priestly community is brought into operation. Incorporated in the Church through baptism, the faithful are destined by the baptismal character for the worship of the Christian religion; reborn as sons of God they must confess before men the faith which they have received from God through the Church. They are more perfectly bound to the Church by the sacrament of Confirmation, and the Holy Spirit endows them with special strength so that they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith, both by word and by deed, as true witnesses of Christ. Taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the Divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It. Thus both by reason of the offering and through Holy Communion all take part in this liturgical service, not indeed, all in the same way but each in that way which is proper to himself. Strengthened in Holy Communion by the Body of Christ, they then manifest in a concrete way that unity of the people of God which is suitably signified and wondrously brought about by this most august sacrament.

Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from the mercy of God for the offence committed against Him and are at the same time reconciled with the Church, which they have wounded by their sins, and which by charity, example, and prayer seeks their conversion. By the sacred anointing of the sick and the prayer of her priests the whole Church commends the sick to the suffering and glorified Lord, asking that He may lighten their suffering and save them; she exhorts them, moreover, to contribute to the welfare of the whole people of God by associating themselves freely with the passion and death of Christ. Those of the faithful who are consecrated by Holy Orders are appointed to feed the Church in Christ's name with the word and the grace of God. Finally, Christian spouses, in virtue of the sacrament of Matrimony, whereby they signify and partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and His Church, help each other to attain to holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children. By reason of their state and rank in life they have their own special gift among the people of God. From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries. The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state.

Fortified by so many and such powerful means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect.

## from *Christifideles Laici*

### **The Forms of Participation in the Life of the Church**

28. The lay faithful together with the clergy and women and men religious, make up the one People of God and the Body of Christ.

Being "members" of the Church takes nothing away from the fact that each Christian as an individual is "unique and irrepeatable". On the contrary, this belonging guarantees and fosters the profound sense of that uniqueness and irrepeatability, in so far as these very qualities are the source of variety and richness for the whole Church. Therefore, God calls the individual in Jesus Christ, each one personally by name. In this sense, the Lord's words "You go into my vineyard too", directed to the Church as a whole, come specially addressed to each member individually.

Because of each member's unique and irrepeatable character, that is, one's identity and actions as a person, each individual is placed at the service of the growth of the ecclesial community while, at the same time, singularly receiving and sharing in the common richness of all the Church. This is the "Communion of Saints" which we profess in the Creed. The good of all becomes the good of each one and the good of each one becomes the good of all. "In the Holy Church", writes Saint Gregory the Great, "all are nourished by each one and each one is nourished by all".

### ***Individual Forms of Participation***

Above all, each member of the lay faithful should always be fully aware of being a "member of the Church" yet entrusted with a unique task which cannot be done by another and which is to be fulfilled for the good of all. From this perspective the Council's insistence on the absolute necessity of an apostolate exercised by the individual takes on its full meaning: "The apostolate exercised by the individual-which flows abundantly from a truly Christian life (cf. Jn 4: 11) is the origin and condition of the whole lay apostolate, even in its organized expression, and admits no substitute. Regardless of circumstance, all lay persons (including those who have no opportunity or possibility for collaboration in associations) are called to this type of apostolate and obliged to engage in it. Such an apostolate is useful at all times and places, but in certain circumstances it is the only one available and feasible".

In the apostolate exercised by the individual, great riches are waiting to be discovered through an intensification of the missionary effort of each of the lay faithful. Such an individual form of apostolate can contribute greatly to a more extensive spreading of the Gospel, indeed it can reach as many places as there are daily lives of individual members of the lay faithful. Furthermore, the spread of the gospel will be continual, since a person's life and faith will be one. Likewise the spread of the gospel will be particularly incisive, because in sharing fully in the unique conditions of the life, work, difficulties and hopes of their sisters and brothers, the lay faithful will be able to reach the hearts of their neighbors, friends, and colleagues, opening them to a full sense of human existence, that is, to communion with God and with all people.

### **The Family: Where the Duty to Society Begins**

40. The human person has an inherent social dimension which calls a person from the innermost depths of self to *communion* with others and to the *giving* of self to others: "God, who has fatherly concern for

everyone has willed that all people should form one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood". Thus *society* as a fruit and sign of the *social nature* of the individual reveals its whole truth in being a *community of persons*.

Thus the result is an interdependence and reciprocity between the person and society: all that is accomplished in favour of the person is also a service rendered to society, and all that is done in favour of society redounds to the benefit of the person. For this reason the duty of the lay faithful in the apostolate of the temporal order is always to be viewed both from its meaning of service to the person founded on the individual's uniqueness and irrepeatibility as well as on the meaning of service to all people which is inseparable from it.

The first and basic expression of the social dimension of the person, then, is *the married couple and the family*: "But God did not create man a solitary being. From the beginning 'male and female he created them' (*Gen 1:27*). This partnership of man and woman constitutes the first form of communion between persons". Jesus is concerned to restore integral dignity to the married couple and solidity to the family (*Mt 19:3-9*). Saint Paul shows the deep rapport between marriage and the mystery of Christ and the Church (cf. *Eph 5:22-6:4; Col 3:18-21; 1 Pt 3:1-7*).

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 that the family has in the development of society and the Church herself.

The family is the basic cell of society. It is the cradle of life and love, the place in which the individual "is born" and "grows". Therefore a primary concern is reserved for this community, especially, in those times when human egoism, the anti-birth campaign, totalitarian politics, situations of poverty, material, cultural and moral misery, threaten to make these very springs of life dry up. Furthermore, ideologies and various systems, together with forms of uninterest and indifference, dare to take over the role in education proper to the family.

Required in the face of this is a vast, extensive and systematic work, sustained not only by culture but also by economic and legislative means, which will safeguard the role of family in its task of being the *primary place of "humanization"* for the person and society.

It is above all the lay faithful's duty in the apostolate to make the family aware of its identity as the primary social nucleus, and its basic role in society, so that it might itself become always a more *active and responsible place* for proper growth and proper participation in social life. In such a way the family can and must require from all, beginning with public authority, the respect for those rights which in saving the family, will save society itself.

All that is written in the Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* about participation in the development of society and all that the Holy See, at the invitation of the 1980 Synod of Bishops, has formulated with the "Charter of Rights for the Family", represent a complete and coordinated working programme for all those members of the lay faithful who, in various capacities, are interested in the values and the needs of the family. Such a programme needs to be more opportunely and decisively realized as the threats to the stability and fruitfulness of the family become more serious and the attempt to reduce the value of the family and to lessen its social value become more pressing and coordinated.

As experience testifies, whole civilizations and the cohesiveness of peoples depend above all on the human quality of their families. For this reason the duty in the apostolate towards the family acquires an incomparable social value. The Church, for her part, is deeply convinced of it, knowing well that "the path to the future passes through the family".

### *from Gravissimum Educationis*

#### ***3. The Authors of Education***

Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators. This role in education is so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking. Parents are the ones who must create a family atmosphere animated by love and respect for God and man, in which the well-rounded personal and social education of children is fostered. Hence the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs. It is particularly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and office of the sacrament of matrimony, that children should be taught from their early years to have a knowledge of God according to the faith received in Baptism, to worship Him, and to love their neighbor. Here, too, they find their first experience of a wholesome human society and of the Church. Finally, it is through the family that they are gradually led to a companionship with their fellowmen and with the people of God. Let parents, then, recognize the inestimable importance a truly Christian family has for the life and progress of God's own people.

The family which has the primary duty of imparting education needs help of the whole community. In addition, therefore, to the rights of parents and others to whom the parents entrust a share in the work of education, certain rights and duties belong indeed to civil society, whose role is to direct what is required for the common temporal good. Its function is to promote the education of youth in many ways, namely: to protect the duties and rights of parents and others who share in education and to give them aid; according to the principle of subsidiarity, when the endeavors of parents and other societies are lacking, to carry out the work of education in accordance with the wishes of the parents; and, moreover, as the common good demands, to build schools and institutions.

Finally, in a special way, the duty of educating belongs to the Church, not merely because she must be recognized as a human society capable of educating, but especially because she has the responsibility of announcing the way of salvation to all men, of communicating the life of Christ to those who believe, and, in her unfailing solicitude, of assisting men to be able to come to the fullness of this life. The Church is bound as a mother to give to these children of hers an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ and at the same time do all she can to promote for all peoples the complete perfection of the human person, the good of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human.

### *from Gaudium et Spes*

45. While helping the world and receiving many benefits from it, the Church has a single intention: that God's kingdom may come, and that the salvation of the whole human race may come to pass. For every benefit which the People of God during its earthly pilgrimage can offer to the human family stems from the fact that the Church is "the universal sacrament of salvation", simultaneously manifesting and exercising the mystery of God's love.

For God's Word, by whom all things were made, was Himself made flesh so that as perfect man He might save all men and sum up all things in Himself. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and of civilization, the center of the human race, the joy of every heart and the answer to all its yearnings. He it is Whom the Father raised from the dead, lifted on high and stationed at His right hand, making Him judge of the living and the dead. Enlivened and united in His Spirit, we journey toward the consummation of human history, one which fully accords with the counsel of God's love: "To reestablish all things in Christ, both those in the heavens and those on the earth" (Eph. 11:10).

The Lord Himself speaks: "Behold I come quickly! And my reward is with me, to render to each one according to his works. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Rev. 22:12-13).

50. Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents. The God Himself Who said, "it is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18) and "Who made man from the beginning male and female" (Matt. 19:4), wishing to share with man a certain special participation in His own creative work, blessed male and female, saying: "Increase and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). Hence, while not making the other purposes of matrimony of less account, the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life which results from it, have this aim: that the couple be ready with stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Savior. Who through them will enlarge and enrich His own family day by day.

Parents should regard as their proper mission the task of transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted. They should realize that they are thereby cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love. Thus they will fulfil their task with human and Christian responsibility, and, with docile reverence toward God, will make decisions by common counsel and effort. Let them thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which the future may bring. For this accounting they need to reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they should consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society, and of the Church herself. The parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God. But in their manner of acting, spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church's teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel. That divine law reveals and protects the integral meaning of conjugal love, and impels it toward a truly human fulfillment. Thus, trusting in divine Providence and refining the spirit of sacrifice, married Christians glorify the Creator and strive toward fulfillment in Christ when with a generous human and Christian sense of responsibility they acquit themselves of the duty to procreate. Among the couples who fulfil their God-given task in this way, those merit special mention who with a gallant heart and with wise and common deliberation, undertake to bring up suitably even a relatively large family.

Marriage to be sure is not instituted solely for procreation; rather, its very nature as an unbreakable compact between persons, and the welfare of the children, both demand that the mutual love of the spouses be embodied in a rightly ordered manner, that it grow and ripen. Therefore, marriage persists as a whole manner and communion of life, and maintains its value and indissolubility, even when despite the often intense desire of the couple, offspring are lacking.

## from the *Regulations of the Project of Apostolic Life*

### **Art. 1 Salesian Cooperators in the Church**

§1. Salesian Cooperators integrate themselves in both the parish and the diocese with availability and in an attitude of service in the Salesian style. Called to a ministry by the Church, they carry it out as a means of support and development of the ecclesial pastoral.<sup>6</sup>

They live their Baptismal vocation by taking on Don Bosco's Preventive System as the specific modality in which to express God's love, taking particular care of the young and of families.

§2. The Salesian Cooperators promote heartfelt acceptance of and adherence to the Magisterium of the Church. Their relationships with their parish priests, with other priests, with Religious, and with other laity are marked by esteem, solidarity, and active participation in pastoral plans, especially in those which focus on the young, families, and vocations.

### **Art. 3 The Association in Civic and Ecclesial Realities**

§1. The Association is attentive, with the thrust of the Preventive System, to the cries coming from society for the integral promotion of the human person and of fundamental human rights.

§2. The Association intervenes courageously, according to the teachings of the Magisterium of the Church to promote a sociopolitical culture inspired by the Gospel and to defend human and Christian values. It illumines and urges its members to assume their own commitments in society with responsibility.

Salesian Cooperators make themselves present and bring with them the unique characteristics of the Salesian charism to Associations, Apostolic Movements and groups, educational agencies, and to organizations which have service to youth and to the family as their objective, and which promote justice, peace, and solidarity with peoples on the path of development.

§3. The Association follows social volunteering with particular attention. It adheres to formative proposals and participates in the initiatives of organizations of Christian inspiration.

§4. The Association commits itself to foster intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

## from *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*

### **Loyalty to the Pope**

In Don Bosco's opinion, no one in the whole world was greater and worthier of respect and veneration than the Pope, St. Peter's successor. For him the Vicar of Christ was second only to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament! He waxed enthusiastic in talking to his boys about him: "We must love the popes," he used to say, "regardless of when or where they lived. Their counsels and even their wishes must be a command for us." Often Don Bosco would also remark: "My sons, regard as enemies of our Faith those who belittle the Pope's authority or who try to minimize the obedience and respect due to his teachings and directives." If difficulties beset the Pope, he would exhort his pupils to pray and receive Holy

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<sup>6</sup> John Paul II. *Christifideles Laici*. Par. 28. Trans. The Holy See. N.d. Web. 26 Nov 2013.

Communion. We here quote briefly from the funeral oration of Bishop Emilian Manacorda [of Fossano] which he delivered at Don Bosco's solemn requiem Mass of Trigesima. The bishop commented:

Don Bosco, the founder of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, was the living model of a humble man. Everything about him—thoughts, words, inclinations, undertakings—evoked humility, but this humility would turn into elation at the mere utterance of the words "Roman Pontiff." Then, in a sense, he would catch fire, become alive, and wax enthusiastic. No one who came in contact with him ever heard him say anything that could reflect a less than perfect obedience and childlike docility to the Pope.

In Don Bosco's opinion, the honor paid to the popes could never be overdone. On one occasion, he remarked to the cleric [Michael] Rua that he would be very happy if the feasts of sainted popes—then semi-double—were raised to the rank of double, and he wanted the feast of St. Peter to be solemnized every year at the Oratory

### *from The Identity of the Salesian Cooperator*

“To the Salesian Cooperators is proposed the same harvest as that of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, with whom they are meant to be associated.” (Don Bosco, *Regulations of the Salesian Cooperators*, 1876, ch. IV)

“All the members of the Salesian Family, facing the concrete needs of poor and abandoned youth, receive a special grace of illumination and of determination from the Holy Spirit” (CGS, doc. I, no. 163).

1. **“The same Harvest, the same Goal, the same Means”:** the same Mission (*Project of Apostolic Life*, 8)

The Salesian Family is a union of apostolic forces which tend to the same goal, as is expressed in a very explicit way in the *Regulations of the Cooperators* formulated by Don Bosco himself: “To the Salesian Cooperators is proposed the same harvest as that of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, with whom they are meant to be associated.” (Don Bosco, *Regulations of the Salesian Cooperators*, 1876, ch. IV) In the Salesian Bulletin of January 1878, Don Bosco further said of the Cooperators: “We must unite among ourselves and with the Congregation... Let us unite in looking *to the same goal* and in using the *same means* to accomplish it.” (cited in *Acts*, no. 153)

An example in this regard is the comparison of two keys texts. According to Don Bosco, the first defines the Salesian Congregation and the second the “active Third Order” of the Cooperators. This is how it is expressed in Article 1 of the *Constitutions* as presented and then definitively approved in 1874: “The Salesian Congregation seeks this as its goal: that its members, while tending towards Christian perfection, carry out every sort of work of charity, whether spiritual or corporal, towards adolescents, above all, the poorest, and that they be occupied also with the education of young clerics” (*Memorie Biografiche* vol. X, p. 956). And in Chapter III of the *Regulations of the Salesian Cooperators* of 1876, where the purpose of the Cooperators is defined, we read: “This Association is considered by the Holy Father as a ‘Third Order’ in which ‘Christian perfection’ is sought, not first and foremost in the exercise of piety, but by pursuing as its ‘principal goal’ the active life in the exercise of charity towards one’s neighbor, especially the young who are at-risk.”

In a more biblical and ecclesial language, we would say that, from within and at the service of the “global mission of the Church,” the Salesian Religious and Cooperators have a “specific mission.” The word “mission” is very rich in meaning; it implies, first of all, the idea that apostolic work is not a task which someone assigns to himself, according to his own autonomy and his own tastes: he receives it from God, who “sends” him to work in *His* vineyard (cf. Mt. 20:4). Therefore, it includes the following elements:

1. Someone who *sends*: God, or the Spirit of God. The Source of every charism.
2. Someone who *is sent*: the “missionary,” always a servant, an instrument.
3. The one to whom the servant is sent: the people served in the mission
4. Finally, a *service* is fulfilled in the Name of God, by the missionary, in favor of the ones to whom we are sent.

There’s a dialectic bond between the two realities of “vocation” and of “mission”: God “calls” to Himself His disciple in order to purify and instruct him. Then He “sends” him to others in His Name, as we read so often in the Bible, especially in the case of the Apostles: “He *called* to Himself the ones He wanted. They went to Him and He chose the Twelve so that they would stay with Him and that He might *send them* to preach.” (Mk. 3:13+14). The Cooperator, in faith, feels called and sent by the Lord to continue Don Bosco’s work, according to his concrete situation and possibilities, in communion with all his Salesian brothers, coordinating themselves with the other missionary forces of the Church.

## 2. **The three priorities of the Salesian mission** (*Project of Apostolic Life*, 8)

All of Don Bosco’s life and all of his actions indicate that he *clearly* felt that he was *sent directly by God to three categories of people*: the young, common folk, and pagans.

### ***Mission to the young***

To speak of educating youth means confronting a very vast field and urgent task. It was *precisely the urgency and the breadth of this task that provoked Don Bosco’s insistent appeals to the Cooperators*: “We must unite in these difficult times... to remove, or at least mitigate, those evils which put at risk the good manners of the young, in whose hands are the future of civil society.” (*Regulations*, 1876, Ch. I) The Salesian Congregation... the bond for the Cooperators... has as its primary end to work for the good of youth, upon whom the good or the sad future of society is founded... It is for the sake of coming to their aid in such great necessity that the Cooperators are sought.” (ibid., Ch. III) “The principal aim of the Cooperators: the exercise of charity towards their neighbor and especially towards youth at-risk.” (ibid., Ch. III)

If Don Bosco considered his times *difficult*, how would he react *today* and what appeals would he make to his Cooperators! Above all, how would Don Bosco respond to this question: “Is education still possible?” This is not a rhetorical question. Every day the news recounts new unsettling events which reveal ever more disquieting aspects of the world of the young. We speak of an educative emergency.

Above all today, the *educational emergency* must be perceived and lived as a problem of *the adults*, before being considered one of the young.

In the second place, this educational emergency can be adequately faced only *by cooperating*, in a *network* – each one from his own particular angle and with his own specific resources. *Family, school, Church* – to list only those institutions which are traditionally assigned the task of education – all have something to give to the new generations.

The third basic idea is that the educational emergency represents a *challenge to our innovative creativity*. It cannot be faced, therefore, by having recourse to formulae and plans which were, perhaps, valid up until yesterday, but have been superseded for the most part. We need to know how to take up these problems in the light of a profoundly changed situation, even in respect to a recent past. We need an *educational workshop*. This means that *no one can pretend to supply* that ONE perspective which will permit us to understand what is happening to our young people, and, much less, the *winning strategies or recipe for immediate efficacy*. The meaning of “*workshop/laboratory*” consists exactly in a *monitoring* and in a *continual reflection* on the topic. The task of education today requires a great effort to identify that which is truly essential so as to distinguish it from that which it is not.

The point of departure and the climate of every educational intervention can be none other than that of *listening* and *dialogue*, not only as the young are concerned, but also among all those who have the role of “educator.” Too often, indeed, we provide pat answers when what they are really asking us for are *paths on the journey*.

The Salesian Cooperator must be able to recount a beautiful story in order to begin an *uninterrupted dialogue between the generations*. It is true, the times of protest, with their excesses, are just a memory of long ago. But at times, one gets the impression that in place of the “frontal attack” between the generations, a yet more radical kind of *incapacity to communicate* and to understand each other has entered in to take its place - to the point of even making conflict impossible. We have passed from an “anti-father” generation (1968) to a *generation without fathers*: we now have *orphan* children. From generational conflict we have passed to a generally-diffused generational egoism. Many studies of the condition of youth highlight the insignificance of adults for a majority of the young. Adults are neither models for them to imitate nor to reject. They are neither an occasion for encounter nor for confrontation: they are only, simply, *insignificant*. This insignificance of the adult to the young is a product, in great part, of this generational egoism; i.e., of the incapacity of the adult to see the young as their future.

This makes it such that the adults, considering the young only as “*contemporaries*,” limit themselves to protecting them, to offering them the conditions which create a *sufficiently easy life*, but without any true action tending to render these very same young people active subjects and active players in social, economic, and political life. But the “*warm nest*” does not form robust personalities. Many of the youth of this age, in this complex world, are found to be *fragile*, disoriented, and *incapable of facing difficulties* and those trials which, as we well know, life spares no one. They are part of that generation in history which, for the first time, has grown up so protected, so helped and supported, that they have not developed the necessary “antibodies” to survive when faced with menacing things in life. Perhaps we adults, understanding, and with reason, that the modern world is more menacing than in our day, have sought to construct around our children *the most protective nets possible*, smoothing out bumps, difficulties, and obstacles of every kind. Their fragility is also the fruit of our *fears*. In this context, fathers – even many who believe in conscience that they are correctly fulfilling their duty – limit themselves normally to being the “*provider*” of their family. Dialogue with him is minimal.

***Psychological Consequences of the family crisis (Project of Apostolic Life, 8 §3)***

Family atmosphere determines much for the young. The experiences, the voids, the wounds, and the limits profoundly mark the life of the children. As a rule, a healthy knowledge of “being of worth” is formed from the experience of being valued by others. This is the first task of the parents: to demonstrate to the child, through their love and dedication, that he has worth. Appreciation on the part of the *mother* is more or less expressed in affection: it lets a child feel that he is understood and encouraged, spurred on to try again once pardoned. Appreciation on the part of the *father* communicates greater security (he is the symbol of the external, unknown world) and pushes the child to risk and to what is new. Only he who feels valued and secure in himself, i.e., with the dignity and the capacity to be free, can be fraternal and in solidarity; he accepts that others have worth, too, because he is loved by his parents.

***From the educational emergency to a new Christian presence in education: the school (Project of Apostolic Life, 8 §5)***

School ought to be the place in which education happens through the *handing on* of a cultural patrimony, elaborated by tradition, through study and the formation of a critical conscience. In our society, however, the *very idea of education has been placed in crisis* for it presupposes a shared set of values – something which no longer exists. Freedom of the individual to determine his own path, in full autonomy, and to rework his own identity, is exalted. This difficulty is accentuated by a certain prevailing ideology of *professionalization*.

According to this ideology, the education which the school imparts would only make sense in how *useful* it is to the processes of the economy and productivity: the efficacy of the school. The efficacy of a school, pushed to excess, says: It is useless and off the mark to spend time educating an interiority that is capable of asking questions about the meaning of life. The first responsibility of education seems to have become that of giving *instructions on “how to do things.”* Consequently, the teacher is no longer a “master” capable of helping his students understand all the many facets of reality, but is only a “coach,” a “trainer.” The problem becomes even more serious when the teachers don’t know why they ought to teach and the students don’t know why they ought to study, especially those subjects which are not considered immediately “useful.”

Fortunately, there are still many teachers in the schools who give their service as an authentic *vocation* and who constitute a human, relational-educational asset for the school and for society, precisely because they know how to remain firm in that which truly counts: the good of the children and of their growth as persons. For the Salesian Cooperators who work in the world of the school, there is opening up a demanding field and an educational challenge to be faced with the very courage that Don Bosco had (pp. 17-21).

***The need for ethics in order to grow together (Project of Apostolic Life, 8)***

How shall we orient ourselves in social and political action in this epoch of profound tensions in which we are living? In an epoch which is characterized by the processes of globalization and of economic crisis? How shall we point to choices which are free from party conditioning and geared towards the common good, in a context which is marked by litigiousness and corruption of such a high degree, and by the generalizing of instrumental readings applied to all the behaviors and the choices of a person in the public eye? These seem to me to be the questions that every person, and in particular, the Salesian

Cooperator as a disciple of Christ, must put to himself given the needs which calls to each of us and given the longings especially of those who are the weakest and the most threatened by the present economic-political insecurity.

No instrumental answer, coated with kind reassurances, can be given to these questions. We need to answer in a serious, motivated, and responsible manner. To do so, we need to identify a high standard to which to refer. It must be an inspiring standard which is both credible and applicable at the same time, so that we can have recourse to it with interior conviction and operative determination, ready to pay in person for the choices made.

This standard might bring us back to the one elaborated by St. Augustine in a historical time which was no less dramatic and complex than ours – the epoch of the decline of the Roman Empire. To those who were blaming the Christians for that disturbing degradation, the Bishop of Hippo did not fear to point out the true reasons for the crisis. The profound cause of the crisis of the greatness of Rome, was, for St. Augustine, moral in character: it was the wide-spread tendency – sustained by those at the top, but become the common mentality – to prefer *vanitas* to *veritas*. The two concepts are the expression of opposing logic: vanity is connected with the primacy of *appearance*, to the triumph of the *mask* which covers exclusively egoistic interests and proposals of short range behind proclamations of high-sounding intentions. *Vanitas* indulges in accustoming itself in the face of evil, gives in to compromises that bring temporary tranquility, makes one value a façade of respectability, capable of hiding one's true purposes. Truth, instead, is what weighs choices against permanent ethical values and, therefore, on the inalienable dignity of the human person when considering his temporal and eternal destiny. To a world “*which is in dissolution and is sinking*” he sees God's work opposed to it, which gathers to Himself a family to make of it His eternal and glorious city “not for the praise of vanity, but thanks to the judgment of truth” (*De Civitate Dei*, II, 18, 3). His intuition is surprisingly fitting for today: faced with a “civilization of the mask,” which chases after the myths of an exasperated consumerism and rampant hedonism, he defines an alternative vision, one built on the truth of things and on the primacy of those values of which no one is exempt. What is this truth? What are these values? Let us compare *vanitas and veritas* in four great areas of questions which require the responsibility of every man and woman who has society at heart, no matter what might be the role that he or she plays.

*First, in the area of politics and institutions:* the dehumanization of civil life we often encounter is also the fruit of a way of governing that has separated authority from effective authoritative behaviors, and democratic representation from the true representation of the needs and interests of its citizens. The ideal of the so-called *good governance* is inseparable from a strong ethical tension which respects the participation of all in decision-making and is directed to serving the people and not using individuals or societal groups for the purposes of production of the concensus.

On the *cultural and spiritual resources level*, *vanitas* triumphs there where the search for the ephemeral is privileged, uprooting the realization of the common good from collective memory, of which art masterpieces, marvels of ingenuity, and the spiritual and religious traditions are precious traces. A community stripped of its memory is, at the same time, deprived of its identity and risks being exposed to being used in a perverse manner. The triumph of *veritas* consists here in respect for and promotion of the collective cultural, artistic, and religious patrimony as the basis for the recognition of the true needs and priorities to which to tend. Priority attention to education, to school, and university, is a consequence of being inspired by truth in this area.

The area of the *economy* is no less subject to the contrast *between vanitas and veritas*: if one takes inspiration for all economic choices from the former, then they are geared only to making profit and to private interests; if from the latter, there will be an integrated economy, attentive not only to the maximizing of utility, but also to everyone's sharing in the goods, to the involvement of the weakest, to the advancement of the young, of women, of the aged, and of minorities. An economy of communion, which seeks to put all resources in common, with a respect for nature, for the collective participation in what is useful, for the reinvestment which has social goals as its end, and for the responsibility towards future generations, can be a significant model of the necessary turning point in this field. The principal of gratuitousness, of which the Holy Father Emeritus, Pope Benedict, speaks in *Caritas in veritate*, is an irrevocable factor of the development of all people. The future city cannot be programmed and run according to exclusively utilitarian logic: it will either be the fruit of an integrated economy, which unites to public and private interest, compatible with it, the role of a civil economy capable of valuing all the pieces in play and of promoting collective growth, or it will risk increasing the processes of fragmentation which produce the dehumanization of the city. Here the centrality of the human person, as a term of reference and of measure in its every expression, appears as the truly decisive criterion, in which *vanitas* and *veritas* are distinguished one from the other.

In short, the field of *ethics* is, in general, the most profound one for the application of the dialectic proposed by St. Augustine. To an individualistic and utilitarian moral, focused exclusively on the interests of the single and the few, often hidden behind masks of respectability or propaganda, we need to counterpropose an ethic of truth, open to the foundational values of common humanity and on the transcendent dignity of the human person. This ethic is characterized by the primacy of one's responsibility towards others, towards oneself, and towards the environment, through the consequent urgency of solidarity and of participation, which give first place to the rights of the weakest, individuals, groups, peoples, or entire countries. It is further characterized by openness to spiritual values (which go together with cultural and artistic goods) to freedom of religion and conscience, to the respect for and advancement of research experiences, and of the worship and to giving witness of God.

***In the light of the Social Doctrine of the Church: some principal fundamentals*** (Project of Apostolic Life, 8 §4)

The horizons in which the Social Doctrine of the Church develops are constituted by Christian anthropology, with its vision of the dignity of man and of his being in relation to the other members which compose society.

### ***The human person***

The human person constitutes the cardinal point around which all reflection on social teaching turns. It is considered in its centrality in respect to society, on account of its eminent and inalienable dignity. This dignity of man is founded on the fact of having been created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1:26+27). We can say, at this point, that the facts of biblical revelation cross into the reflections of human reason, which comes to confirm the value and the dignity of the person.

The human person "is always a value in and of itself" and can never be used or treated as a thing, not in the name of any State or any Institution, or party, etc. In fact, "the person, in his individuality is not a number, is not a link in a chain, nor is he a cog on a wheel." The human person has priority over the

State and society. This is the “subsistent human right” and, therefore, also the foundation of the right. Moreover, it is not the State which, in a paternalistic and benevolent manner pours out his rights on the person, or decides to deny them; rather, it has the task to defend, promote, and foster the development of the natural rights of all persons, without any discrimination - for whenever such discrimination should be verified, it would constitute “a completely intolerable injustice for the dishonor borne upon the dignity of the person.”

### ***The principle of subsidiarity***

This constitutes another weighty element of the Social Doctrine of the Church. The term derives from the Latin *subsidium afferre* (to bring help). Pronounced by Pius XI, in *Quadragesimo anno*, the principle is illustrated in these terms: “Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them.” This principle is connected with the dignity and the autonomy of the human person and with the organic conception of the State. Even though this was pronounced in the historical context marked by the totalitarianism of the 1900s, it still retains, nonetheless, a universal pillar for all time.

The lack of respect for this principle is typical of totalitarian States, which absorb and destroy every private initiative (everything is from the State and within the State, nothing outside of itself), as is also typical of the so-called “Welfare State”, which “intervening directly” and always in every area and every situation, in fact “takes away social responsibility” and, moreover, “provokes the loss of human energies and the exaggerated increase of public apparatus, dominated by bureaucratic logic.” This principle is further denied by the flip side of the preceding - by the liberal-bourgeois ideologies, which do not admit any intervention of the State, which ought to remain neutral as regards social life, following the famous principals of “laissez-faire.” According to this ideology, it is considered just that the socio-economic life of the stronger and more powerful be strengthened, as if by a sort of natural selection (reproducing in the social sphere the Darwinian theory of natural selection of the species): it doesn’t matter if the weakest and the least gifted are left by the wayside, abandoned to their fate. By means of this “natural” mechanism, the greater good of the Country, as a whole, is produced. As a consequence, the stronger will crush the weak; the richer will always be richer and the poorer will always be poorer (pp. 28-31).