

THE SALESIAN SPIRIT OF THE SALESIAN COOPERATOR

«And what you have learned and received
and heard and seen in me, these things practice.
And the God of peace will be with you» (Phil. 4:9)

“To cooperate” with God the Father

Making God the unifying center of one's life and the source of fraternal communion and inspiration of one's actions presupposes a certain image of God. He is not a distant God, one immersed in His own solitude and imperturbable silence, disinterested in the things of earth; no, He is God-Love (see I Jn. 4:16), Who gives Himself totally to humanity - a “Father Who is always at work”. (Jn. 5:17) He shares in the life of His children, is committed to coming to meet them in their deep longings through deeds of infinite love; He is the God Who is, thus, so involved in our history that He makes Himself vulnerable to man's freedom, accepting the risk of rejection, and always giving Himself as love that forgives. A silent yet effective Worker within history, He joins to Himself active collaborators who, in the concrete situations of life, commit their energies to announce His Love and to accomplish good deeds by drawing their strength to live, to give, and to serve from Him.

For the Salesian Family and its members, "living in God's presence" means cultivating an intense and continuous relationship of love with Him ("union with God"); therefore, they feel filled to the brim with a love like His – one that gives of itself in a benevolent and unselfish way and which is prodigal towards those who are the intended recipients of its mission. It also means knowing how to perceive and welcome signs of His Mysterious Presence in the longings and requests of the men and women of our time.

It is to this God, the Merciful Father, that Don Bosco addressed his heartfelt invocation: "*Da mihi animas; cetera tolle.*" To all his disciples Don Bosco repeats: “The most Divine of all Divine things is to cooperate with God in the salvation of souls and is a sure path to great sanctity.” It is the icon of the Good Shepherd, in particular, that inspires and guides our action, pointing to two precious slants of Salesian apostolic spirituality:

The *first*: An apostle of our Lord Jesus puts persons at the center of his or her attention and loves each one just as he or she is, without prejudice or exceptions, in the manner of the Good Shepherd – even the lost sheep.

The *second*: An apostle does not propose him or herself to others but always and only the Lord Jesus, the Only One who can free us from every form of slavery; the Only One who can lead His sheep to pastures of eternal life. (see Jn. 10:1-15) He is the Only One who never abandons anyone who has gone astray but unites Himself in solidarity with his weakness and, full of faith and hope, seeks him out, retrieves him, and brings him back so he may have life to the full.

Rooting themselves in Christ and conforming themselves to Him is the greatest joy of the Sons and Daughters of Don Bosco. From this comes love for the Word and the desire to live the Mystery of Christ as it is presented in the Liturgy of the Church; being assiduous in their participation in the Sacraments of Communion and Confession, which educate to Christian freedom, to the conversion of hearts, and to a spirit of sharing and of service; and participation in the Mystery of the Pasch of the Lord,

which opens them up to a new understanding of life and of its significance - both personally and in community, in interior and in social realities as well.

In order to explain the full communion with God in His Trinitarian life to which every man and woman is called, Don Bosco did not make recourse to theological formulae which were hard for his young people to understand. He expressed himself in simple terms: those of *Heaven, Paradise, the reward awaiting us, the crown of glory, "the happy land", one hundredfold in the future, a better state, true happiness, eternal happiness, etc.* To wit, therefore, his program for the spiritual life: *joy, study, piety, health, wisdom, and sanctity.*

Love of God and untiring work in this life and Paradise in the next are the heart of Don Bosco's "working" spirituality for his Sons and Daughters but are also extended to men and women, young and old, Cooperators, benefactors and supporters, clergy and laity. It is a form of Christian life imbued with charity which has God as its source and its end. Yes, Don Bosco often asked for money but he also communicated the spirituality of charity in his speaking and in his writing about eternal salvation, about tangible love for one's neighbor, about faith, about hope, and about Paradise. Don Bosco, "the beggar," always ended up being recognized as a "man of God, a spiritual master, a consoling Saint who was in love with Mary, Virgin and Mother, the Immaculate Help of Christians, and of Jesus, Her Son.

Apostolic spirituality is the inspiring and animating core of the life of communion in and for the mission of the Salesian Family. It is a communion, in fact, which does not spring from a human plan; nor does it coincide necessarily with orderly organization – no matter how perfect – nor with ever-refined techniques of aggregation. Rather, it springs from that pastoral charity which was raised up by the Holy Spirit in the heart of Don Bosco and which animated him to the point of sanctity. *Spirituality* means that our Family is guided by the Holy Spirit, He Who rewards with His charisms the various Groups belonging to our one Family. *Apostolic* means it has an interior dynamism which spurs us on to giving and to service, providing salvific efficacy to our work of education and evangelization and unifying our entire existence in this source and center of inspiration. Moved by faith, hope, and charity, Salesian Cooperators participate in God's work. By communicating His Merciful Love to every person, they feel that they are profoundly immersed in the communion and in the apostolate of the Church. This chapter describes the foundational spiritual values of the Salesian Cooperator. Living the Salesian Spirit is participating in the spiritual experience of the Founder:

- his pastoral charity;
- his style of presence in the world;
- his style of action;
- his style of relationship; and
- his prayer life.