SALESIAN PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITY
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A SALESIAN YOUTH SPIRITUALITY OF
ACCOMPANIMENT:
THE VISION OF JUAN VECCHI AND A NEW MOMENT

Thesis for the Licentiate of John ROCHE

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# CONTENTS

CONTENTS ii

ABBREVIATIONS iv

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 1: THE ROOTS OF A SALESIAN SPIRITUALITY OF ACCOMPANIMENT IN THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SAINT JOHN BOSCO 3

Premise 3

1. Don Bosco’s Spirituality of Accompaniment: Winning and Guiding Young Hearts 5
2. Human and Spiritual Accompaniment of Don Bosco’s Students 26
3. Don Bosco as Spiritual Teacher and Spiritual Director 44
4. Characteristics of Don Bosco’s Spirituality of Accompaniment 52

Conclusion 58

CHAPTER 2: PROPHECY, INNOVATION, AND CHANGE: THE VISION OF NEW HORIZONS ACCORDING TO DON JUAN EDMUNDO VECCHI 61

Premise 61

1. Don Bosco’s eighth successor 62
2. Fundamental Themes of Salesian Spirituality 72
3. The Accompanied Journey of Faith: GC23 Educating Young People to the Faith 110
4. The Perpetual Demand for Updating: Other Themes and Influences 123

Conclusion: A Crucial Turning Point 135

CHAPTER 3: ACCOMPANIMENT AS A GIFT OF GRACE FOR A NEW MOMENT 138
Premise 138

1. A New Cultural Moment and a New Formation 139

2. Tasks and Characteristics of a New Salesian Accompaniment According to Pina Del Core: 168

3. Three Tasks of a New Accompaniment—Other Voices 173

4. New Models for the Act of Accompaniment 182

Conclusion: Holiness, Authentic Experience, and the Return to Don Bosco 192

CONCLUSION 195

BIBLIOGRAPHY 200

INDEX 210
ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations of Church Documents


**NMI** = *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Epistola Apostolica of the Holy Father John Paul II to the faithful, 6 January 2001.


**VC** = *Vita Consecrata*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Bishops and the Clergy, to the Religious Orders and Congregations, to the Societies of Apostolic Life, to the Secular Institutes and to all the Faithful on the Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and the World, 25 March 1996.

Primary Sources


Abbreviations for Scripture Citations, Serials, and Salesian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NAB</td>
<td>New American Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEP</td>
<td>Comunità Educativa Pastorale, in English the Educative Pastoral Community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GC</td>
<td>General Chapter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEPP</td>
<td>Progetto Educativo Pastorale Salesiano, the Salesian Educative Pastor Plan.</td>
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<td>LAS</td>
<td>Libreria Ateneo Salesiana.</td>
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<td>LDC</td>
<td>Elle Di Ci: Libreria di Dottrina Cristiana.</td>
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<td>PGS</td>
<td>Pastorale Giovanile Salesiana</td>
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<td>SDB</td>
<td>Salesians of Don Bosco.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEI</td>
<td>Società Editrice Internazionale.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEPP</td>
<td>Salesian Educative Pastoral Plan</td>
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<td>SGS</td>
<td>Esse Go Esse: Scuola Grafica Salesiana.</td>
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INTRODUCTION

There is a “belief that what is most needed right now to inspire us as missionaries within secularity is a re-inflaming of the romantic imagination within religion.”\(^1\) Ron Rolheiser’s words are apt to describe a problem felt throughout the world of faith, and particularly among ministers, religious, and the faithful living, worshipping and ministering in what is known as the “Western World.” It is the conviction of many similar authors and prophetic voices on the current scene that God is purifying the church of the West and calling for a self-emptying and a living contemplation of the kenotic gift of God in his Son, Jesus. Such voices claim that the world of faith “is lacking fire, romance, aesthetics, as these pertain to our faith and ecclesial lives. What needs to be inflamed today inside of religion is its romantic imagination, and this is not so much the job of the theologian as it is the job of the artist and the saint.”\(^2\)

This work opens with this need and applies it particularly to the important Salesian mission to youth of the world. Something inflamed the youth who met Don Bosco and propelled them into commitments that have shaped one of the largest and growing missions to youth throughout the world into this day. Yet, the fire seems to be weakening quickly in the West. Among the many voices that have raised the alarm was the clear and resounding voice of Don Juan Vecchi, the late and beloved eighth successor to St. John Bosco, the Rector Major of the Salesian Family. He saw that the youth situation had taken on very complex and perilous dimensions in the explosive machinations of globalization. The response to this lack of fire is particularly urgent for reaching the youth in the most dangerous situations of this new reality. More than merely rousing enthusiasm or stoking religious sentiment, the commitment to the young could only be sustained by a gift of the Spirit inflaming the hearts of those called to bring a living and authentic experience of God for a spiritually starving world of the young.

\(^2\) ROLHEISER, Secularity and the Gospel, 20.
This work takes to heart the call of Don Bosco’s ninth successor, Don Pascual Chavez in his convocation of the 26th General Chapter of the Salesians Society of Saint Francis de Sales: “Return to Don Bosco!” His intention to inspire is strong and clear:

Each Salesian represents Don Bosco today; through each one of us Don Bosco returns to be among the young. This requires on the part of each one a greater knowledge of him and of the Constitutions and the taking up of his plan of life, expressed in the motto *da mihi animas, coetera tolle*. This will help us to rediscover our charismatic identity, especially as regards Salesian pedagogy and Salesian spirituality, fan the flames of our apostolic zeal, and encourage us to be present among the young, increase our sense of belonging and make our lives credible. (AGC 394, p.53-54)

The mission of the Salesian Family is to inflame the hearts of the young as Don Bosco did in his day. The task at hand is to illustrate a very specific spirituality lived by Don Bosco that is our heritage and the source of our fire! The first turn in this effort will be, in fact, a return to Don Bosco to examine who and what inspired him. How was he accompanied to sanctity?

The subsequent turn will focus on the special gift of renewal and insight offered to the Salesian Family in recent years in the person of Don Juan Vecchi. His efforts to offer new models of Salesian presence offered from an organic community of religious, lay, and the young will draw lines of connection and inspiration from Don Bosco into our own day.

Finally, this work will bring to these reflections many current voices throughout the church to reveal in greater detail the special call for spiritual accompaniment. Offering models new and old, new mentalities, and pathways for a new evangelization, this work hopes to offer an integrated and reflective return to Don Bosco!
Chapter 1: The Roots of a Salesian Spirituality of Accompaniment in the Lived Experience of Saint John Bosco

Premise

Much has been written on the life and the legacy of Saint John Bosco in the intervening years since his death in 1888. His particular style of education has been and remains the subject of great analyses and speculation. The stories and images of his life, from his childhood through his remarkable response to God’s call as an apostle to the young, are rich and familiar to peoples and cultures throughout the world. The twentieth century introduced Salesian scholars dedicated to the spiritual life of this founder, educator, and saint seeking to uncover a distinctive spirituality for study and imitation. To harness the greatness of this figure has posed a tremendous challenge in all of this time. Students and scholars alike return again and again to the experiences of this man and to Saint John Bosco’s personal record of his own encounters. This is the stuff of spirituality—the lived experience of God. Much more than simple stories, spirituality is participation and mediation. Christian faith, to be grounded in reality, “is not ritual, dogma, religion, or spiritual weirdness. It’s authentic experience made personal through our full participation in what God is doing.”

Participation reverberates throughout the Gospel revelations of Jesus—the fullness of encounter with God. From the outset of his ministry, Jesus invites his newly called disciples to “come and see.” The following of Christ becomes an experience of relationship and accompaniment. Instead, the disciples are not called to become spectators, but to “drink of the cup from which I must drink.” The saints are those whose lives are more than mere models. They are “part of the revelatory address from God calling us to decision.” Hans Urs Von Balthasar insisted upon this important understanding of the

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2 John 1, 39.
3 Matthew 20, 23.
saints and spirituality and is summarized succinctly by Larry S. Chapp of De Sales
University in Pennsylvania:

Were it not for the visible holiness of the saints, it would be all too easy to dismiss Scripture
and Church as ideological deformations of an originating historical event. The holiness of the
saints displays something of the compelling beauty of the form of God’s revelation in Christ,
drawing us closer and provoking from us a dramatic decision. The ‘beauty’ of the saints is the
evident sanity and reasonableness of their trust in God’s revelation. They have a universal
appeal to anyone whose ‘rationality’ has been transformed by sharing in this same attitude of
trust. To that end they provide us with a living hermeneutic for an authentic universal
grounded in an engraced rationality rather than the ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’.7

Pope Pius XI eulogized Don Bosco on the occasion of his beatification describing this deep connection with God:

Union with God was habitual with him, even in the midst of the most absorbing occupations.
Whether at home or abroad, in carriage or train, his discourse breathed the love of God, and
was full of desire to increase His glory. His life was a continual prayer, an uninterrupted union
with God. Faith—was thus one of the virtues most clearly observed in him, a Faith that led
him ever to seek the glory of God in all the marvelous works which he undertook. This high
degree of Faith fostered his burning devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament and to the Mother
of God, who was so closely associated with his apostolate; it accounts for his devotion to the
Guardian Angels and the Saints, for his veneration for the Church and its Supreme Head,
towards whom he ever manifested supreme loyalty and devotion. While at prayer his outward
demeanor was neither exaggerated nor affected, it was perfectly reverent and showed that he
was absorbed in the presence of God.8

A study of Salesian spirituality, then, is a study of Don Bosco’s personal encounter
with God, a “visible holiness.” Something of this encounter was so inviting and so tangible
that it would win many hearts and become a style of spirituality nuanced by the special
charism of accompaniment. An examination of such spirituality becomes a point of
connection with God, a special revelation that is timeless. With the changing of seasons
and cultures within the evolving realities of life, such spirituality waits to be discovered
anew and applied to a given moment, prepared for the challenges such a moment presents.

7 CHAPP, Revelation, 23. This quotation contains references to a work of VON BALTHASAR,
Explorations in Theology, volume 1, The Word Made Flesh, tr. A.V. Littledale and Alexander Dru, San
entitled, “The Science of the Saints.” This homily is also given in its full text in the original Italian in
Eugenio CERIA, Memorie Biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco, Volume XIX La Glorificazione (1888-1938),
Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale, 1939, 131-166.
There is a familiarity in this process because an authentic spirituality will speak to the hungers of any heart in any age.

1. Don Bosco’s Spirituality of Accompaniment: Winning and Guiding Young Hearts

Any reading of the life of Saint John Bosco will lead immediately to the conclusion that there were many key figures in his own life and throughout his life which became for him both friendly companions and spiritual guides. Various moments along his own journey of life are marked by a capturing of his heart and imagination spurring him into an uncertain and often frightening future with courage and faith. These touchstones along the path often became models from which he would draw inspiration and guidance and by which he would, in turn, offer both gifts to the young people considered his missionary focus. In the details of his own encounters, we find substance and precise characteristics of his particular spirituality: spirituality marked by the ability to attract the young, win their hearts, and shape their lives and souls to good purpose and holiness.

To his story and these key figures we now turn.

1.1. Human and Spiritual Accompaniment in the life of Giovanni Bosco

Before Don Bosco won hearts to himself and transformed lives, his own heart had been won-over by many caring and well-placed individuals along his path. Sometimes these were the obvious persons within closest proximity. At other times, these were less intimate figures of his history--mentors at a distance, and even a cultural milieu fertile for his personal growth and development both as a man and as a believer. The Salesian world is deeply indebted to Pietro Stella, Pietro Braido, and Arthur Lenti to name just a few, for placing under the microscope such a milieu in an effort to bring Don Bosco’s universal significance into greater relief. Sometimes, as such scholars maintain, historical and ecclesial events would fall in step with Don Bosco’s journey assisting or provoking in him a personal integration and intuition. At the base of the saint, the educator, the founder, and the man John Bosco are found many persons and events whose accompaniment shaped his holiness and greatness.
1.1.1. Mamma Margherita and Giovanni Bosco’s Experience of God

The role of Don Bosco’s mother, Margherita Occhiena, has been recognized in our times as having the utmost importance in shaping the life of her son and has taken on the universal appeal to the vocation of all parents as the first educators and evangelizers of their children. This has been strongly and unanimously affirmed in the continuing process of her canonization. At the moment of this writing, the world looks to the mother of Don Bosco as Venerable Margherita, soon to be raised to the honors of the altar of sanctity. This affirmation sets in high relief the importance of accompaniment in one’s journey of life. The child, Giovanni Bosco, first encountered God through his holy mother, and this encounter would provide the shape and character of his life-long relationship with God, a relationship sustaining many attacks from within and without.

In Don Bosco’s own biographical memoirs, *The Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*, he begins a reminiscence of his mother with the occasion of his first communion made at the age of eleven years. It was Giovanni’s mother who was his primary catechist and he would go on to pass his exam in catecheses and obtain admission to the sacrament. His recollection is telling as he describes the teaching he received from his mother nuanced by the capturing of his heart:

> Amongst the many things that my mother repeated to me many times was this: ‘My dear son, this is a great day for you. *I am convinced that God has really taken possession of your heart.* Now promise him to be good as long as you live. Go to communion frequently in the future, but beware of sacrilege. Always be frank in confession, be obedient always, go willingly to catechism and sermons. But for the love of God, avoid like the plague those who indulge in bad talk.’ I treasured my mother’s advice and tried to carry it out. I think that from that day on there was some improvement in my life, especially in matters of obedience and submission to others. It was not easy for me to be submissive because I liked to do things my way and follow my own childish whims rather than listen to those who gave me advice or told me what to do.”

Though Mamma Margherita could neither read nor write, she had a profound knowledge of Bible stories and a grasp of a faith that was rooted in the realities of life. For her, God was a part of everyday life, as real as the sun rising and setting, as close as each breath. She had recognized something unique and special in her youngest son; she believed his heart to be possessed by God and sought to nurture that holiness in every way possible.

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That conviction would lead her to tough and difficult decisions for Giovanni’s future as well as lead to confrontation with her step-son Antonio. Determined nonetheless, she was guided by what she believed was Giovanni’s calling. Her first act of spiritual accompaniment was to confirm the stirring Giovanni felt within him and enable him to respond to that stirring despite the obstacles. To this end, she not only goaded him into hard work in the fields of the farm, but also to take up reading and writing. She urged him to do all that was appropriate for his age and encouraged his recreations and his fascinations with acrobatics. These were the first seeds of a thirst for literature and culture and a love for activities beyond the classroom with their power to attract and entertain others.

Perhaps most important to the spiritual formation of Giovanni Bosco was his mother’s advice for and practice of frequent communion and reconciliation. Her daily devotions to the Mother of God and her immersion in prayer deeply influenced the man who would make the pillars of his own spirituality devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the Mother of God. He would carry with him and bestow upon his own students the desire for frequent communion and sincere confession. These were the basic tools for fine-tuning one’s soul and for living in the presence of a loving God.

It must be mentioned that Mamma Margherita worked, lived, and taught within a particular social, political, and religious milieu. This, too, has bearing on the formation of the child, Giovanni Bosco. Much research has been completed with this in mind and is found particularly in the works of Pietro Stella and Pietro Braido. Stella explains that Piedmont had been spared much of the war and turmoil that marked the century of reason, the 18th century. The contemporaries of Mamma Margherita stood solid in the belief that this era had not, in fact, swept away the God of the ages nor the fierce religiosity and faith of the common man. As revolutions swept the regions bordering Piedmont and raged in much of Western Europe, Piedmont would feel their effect in a growing indifference to faith and a mockery of religious rites.\textsuperscript{10} Despite these effects, the period of restoration gave the people of Piedmont an assurance that God was indeed a victorious and patient God.

Margherita shared this confidence unswervingly. “Dominating everything was the idea of a personal God: the most-high Lord but also a Father of infinite goodness. The natural and supernatural orders were tacitly impressed on Giovanni’s mind as he learned of the ties that united the frail human person to God as creature or adopted child.”

For Margherita, even Giovanni Bosco’s vocational dream at the age of nine became the catalyst for her choices as the boy grew. Sometimes those choices were daunting, such as her decision to send Giovanni away in order to pursue studies. Still, no decision was taken independent of the abiding sense of God’s plan for herself, for her family, and for her youngest son.

A detailed treatment of Don Bosco’s understandings of God from childhood through all the pivotal moments of his life has been handled with care and precision in Stella’s work. It will serve the purpose of this study to highlight those details which contributed to the formation of a spirituality of accompaniment. Among such details is the respect for creation Giovanni Bosco learned from life with his mother and family. Stella quotes some examples from the writings of Saint John Bosco in *Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo* published by him in 1858:

Seeing the order and wondrous harmony that reigns throughout the universe, we cannot hesitate for a moment to believe in a God who has created all things, given them movement, and preserves them... In his omnipotence he has given existence to everything and he provides for them out of his goodness. It is he who sustains and sets in motion the enormous weight of the vast whole. It is he who gives form and life to all living things...

But here we encounter a truth that will certainly increase our amazement. All the things we see in the universe have been created for us. The sun that shines during the day, the moon that brightens the darkness of night, the stars that decorate the firmament, the air that enables us to breathe, the water that serves human needs, the fire that warms us, the earth that offers us its fruits: all were made by God for us...

What feelings of gratitude, respect, and love we should have for such a great and good God! What should we give in return for the great kindness of our God?

What had been impressed upon the mind and heart of the young Giovanni Bosco was the centrality of the human relationship to God. God places humanity at the center of creation by “putting all things under [humanity’s] feet.” This relationship permeated all

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that structured Giovanni Bosco’s vision of reality and creation itself. This was a choice of predilection, an intentional invitation for collaboration and accompaniment. This was the model of ministry Saint John Bosco would enshrine in the work of his life. The framework of this relationship is the generous act of creation by a loving God for the sole purpose of rising up a being to share his likeness, to reciprocate his loving outreach, and to share in the very act of creating with him. Far removed is a God of distance and judgment unconcerned and uninvolved with his creation. Instead, this is an image of a God walking in the garden of his creation with the pupil of his eye. However, it is in this garden that the awful and real choice of rejection remains perennially present. This relationship, initiated by God, demands a free response. Accompaniment is an invitation to journey intentionally with the God of creation and invitation. Accompaniment is an act of trust. And this relationship hangs delicately in the will of man.

Saint John Bosco’s own journey would reveal to him the many instances of persons choosing to turn away from this relationship. It would forge in his heart a burning desire to lead others to the awareness of this loving invitation and the dreaded fear of its rejection. Such desire within him would etch in bold letters his life vocation to seek souls above all else.

Perhaps his step-brother Antonio, six years his senior, would become for Giovanni the first and lasting impression of one whose heart may grow cold to such invitation. His response to the protests of Antonio regarding Giovanni’s pursuit of education and the answering of Giovanni’s felt calling, would only deepen the urgency for Giovanni to remove whatever obstacles would stand in the way of responding to his own invitation. This concentrated focus upon the will of his God would forge in young Giovanni the desire for partnering with others in responding to his calling, and with time, in responding to the calls of others.

Reaching the peak of family turmoil, Giovanni’s mother arranged for Giovanni to move away at the young age of twelve, first to her parents’ home in a hamlet near Asti and then to the large farm of the Moglia family, friends of the Occhiena’s. Stella points out that Giovanni would have most certainly dreamed of attending school in Castelnuovo or Chieri.
immediately, but his family was obviously not capable of such expense. In this period of waiting, working the fields, becoming involved in the parish near the Moglia Farm, and reflecting on his future, a contemplative spirit of patience and trust was born. His prayers would be answered in two years: an experienced elderly man was assigned as chaplain at Murialdo, Don Giovanni Calosso. Befriending and admiring the young man, he would intervene in the family situation and offer compromises so that Giovanni could return home.

During these special years, Giovanni had experienced the accompaniment of the Moglia family and that of the kindly chaplain toward achieving his life goals. They recognized and respected the boy’s sense of faith and trust in God. So much did the chaplain recognize his young friend’s faith and intelligence that he partnered with him personally in his education.

1.1.2. Don Calosso as Friend and Spiritual Director

Don Bosco recalled in his Memoirs that Don Giovanni Calosso took a sincere and fatherly interest in him and this interest introduced him to the idea of a spiritual director for the first time:

I put myself completely into Don Calosso's hands. He had become chaplain at Murialdo only a few months before. I bared my soul to him. Every word, thought, and act I revealed to him promptly. This pleased him because it made it possible for him to have an influence on both my spiritual and temporal welfare...

It was then that I came to realize what it was to have a regular spiritual director. a faithful friend of one's soul. I had not had one up till then.15

Saint John Bosco elaborated that before this meeting, he lived his life in a mechanical way “not knowing the reasons,” but after the meeting he “began to savor the spiritual life.” It is an important detail in this recounting that the young Giovanni did not make his savoring a private affair. Instead, he was anxious to share whatever morsels of spiritual wisdom he could with others. Fr. Calosso built on the hungers and enthusiasm for

13 Cf. STELLA, Don Bosco: Life and Work, 22.
14 STELLA, Don Bosco: Life and Work, 17.
15 BOSCO, MO, 36.
16 STELLA, Don Bosco: Life and Work, 18. Stella quotes directly from Don Bosco’s MO.
faith implanted by Mamma Margherita. Even before his contact with Don Calosso, Giovanni had displayed enthusiasm for games, acrobatics, and other attractions to gather his friends and to teach them about God.

Don Bosco's recreational activities naturally played a significant part in his formation. His mother encouraged his involvement in games and outdoor pursuits. His interest in games, in looking for bird's nests and his attempts to be an acrobat all prepared him for his involvement in La società dell'allegría.

Still, now his activities had a focus and a dream attached as never before and these became some of his greatest motivations for gathering people and for perfecting his skills to attract them.

Linked to the spiritual enrichment he received, the young Giovanni was schooled in classic education diving deeply into Latin works. As he excelled in all areas, trials began to appear. The situation at home with his step-brother had not, in fact, improved. Soon, the situation grew intolerable once more. The journey of the good priest went beyond expectation as his intervention now became an invitation for Giovanni to move out once more and this time to stay in the chaplain’s own home. Mamma Margherita was elated and urged Giovanni to take up the offer. In this new environment, freed at last from the strains of his living situation, Giovanni boasted that he could learn more in one day than in a week of visits.

At the age of fifteen, Giovanni lost his mentor to a stroke. In his own words, Don Bosco would write “his death shattered my dreams.” Painfully he recounted Don Calosso’s attempt to preserve his material goods for the boy, only for that to be lost soon after his death as the living relatives of the chaplain came asking for the key to his safe. Not yet an adult, he could only relent. The impact of this shared part of his journey is underlined by Don Bosco’s own admission that each day that dawned brought his “outstanding benefactor” to mind and heart. Don Bosco spoke freely about the affection lavished upon him and the loyalty that engendered in him. He wrote honestly about the depth of the loss he felt at the end of this relationship.

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17 Pietro BRAIDO, Prevenire non reprimere, Rome, LAS, 2000, 140.
18 BOSCO, MO, 42.
19 Cf. BOSCO, MO, 43.
1.1.3. Searching for Models, Clinging to Dreams

The loss of Don Calosso was incalculable. Now Giovanni had to return to the Becchi house and fields. Mamma Margherita watched her youngest immerse himself in profound and inconsolable sorrow and she feared for his health. She made a decision, temporary as it was, that certainly saved his dreams, if not his very life. She sent him to stay awhile with his maternal grandfather. There he regained his strength and his vision. He continued to hunger for models to follow but found the priests in his life sorely lacking in their approachability. Yet, instead of discouraging the youth further, it ignited in him a burning desire to be for others the kind of priest Don Calosso had been for him.

He did return to the family home shortly before Antonio married. During this time, he kept himself out of mental reach by clinging to the model of Don Calosso. He began again to follow his dream even enduring grievously long walks into Castelnuovo for school. As his attentions were turned back to study, Antonio’s attentions were drawn to his future marriage and the division of the inheritance. Margherita joined with her brother Michele to find the means for schooling and board in Castelnuovo. Giovanni lived with a tailor, Giovanni Roberto, while attending class. During this part of his journey, Bosco would experience ridicule from younger classmates and even from an older priest who considered Giovanni’s studies a waste of time.

Stella explains that in this difficult period, Giovanni Bosco retreated to his dreams, seeking out God, “immersing himself in the divine, where his aspirations to the priesthood could be assured and guaranteed.”

The next years at school in Chieri granted young Bosco scholastic and personal success. He advanced rapidly through first level studies bounding ahead to his own level and beyond. He demonstrated to students and instructors an uncanny intelligence and a remarkable ability for recall. Braido refers specifically to these years of formation for their important influence upon the future pedagogy of Don Bosco and indicates that this

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20 Cf. STELLA, Don Bosco: Life and Work, 19. Pietro Stella underlines the trauma of this loss on the young man referring to Don Bosco’s account in the MO: “Things went so far that my mother, fearing for my health, sent me away for a while to my grandfather in Capriglio.”
21 Cf. STELLA, Don Bosco: Life and Work, 22.
22 STELLA, Don Bosco: Life and Work, 23.
molding was helped by “the reality of finding himself deeply immersed into a holistic, formative structure, which is at the same time cultural, ethical and religious.”23 In his studies of this period, Braido highlights two of Giovanni Bosco’s teachers: Banaudi, whose students loved him with the affection of a father so that the good priest never resorted to using punishment; and a young priest, Maloria, whom Giovanni chose as his regular confessor throughout his years of study in theology. The latter welcomed Giovanni warmly. Both men became the models he sought to assist him in attaining his personal goals. Both would influence his own manner of being educator and priest.24 This period would also enkindle in the youth a deep and lasting love for literature.

Into this setting came his dearest peer, Luigi Comollo. Once again, the adolescent Bosco is drawn to the other for companionship, surely, but also for spiritual guidance and modeling. The details of this passage would be etched indelibly upon Giovanni Bosco’s experience and in the future influence his insistence on the need for good companions with a priority of spiritual purpose. The friendship Don Bosco described flourished in the larger context of Giovanni’s efforts to create a special club of good companions. This was his response to peers who seemed lost and unfocused. Giovanni was filled with a desire to become a positive and joyful influence for others creating a “Society of Joy” as his creative response to the new surroundings at Chieri. The intensity of the friendship the two shared and the firmness of their purpose was recognized by Albert Caviglia and recorded within the four biographical volumes of work on Saint John Bosco he left unfinished at the time of his death in 1943. After an in-depth study of Don Bosco’s biography of Comollo Caviglia wrote:

“The spirit by which Don Bosco led to holiness the youngsters whom he educated and then memorialized in his writings is the same spirit that lives in the two young men Comollo and Bosco. The figure, the actions, and the spirit of Comollo are an indispensably ingredient for understanding Don Bosco’s youth and the development of his character. This is even more true for understanding his life before his priestly ordination.”25

We turn our attention to the special and formative relationship with Luigi Comollo, Don Bosco’s closest school-time friend.

23 Pietro BRAIDO, Prevenire non reprimare, Rome, LAS, 2000, 140.
24 Cf. BRAIDO, Prevenire non reprimare, 141.
25 BOSCO, MO, 82. This reference to the work of Don Caviglia is offered in the notes added to the English translation of the Memoirs of the Oratory, with the research of Michael MENDL, and John DRURY.
1.1.4. Friendship and Befriending the Interior Life

It is no small detail that Saint John Bosco would enshrine the friendship he shared with Luigi Comollo in one of his first biographical works. It is a work he would refine and adapt for various audiences especially honing the details to appeal to young readers for emulation. Scholars such as Stella, Caviglia, Braido, and Giraudo, routinely include the Comollo work as the model for future studies of his three students, Dominic Savio, Michele Magone, and Francesco Besucco.

It has been tempting for biographers to paint a picture of a young Giovanni Bosco dramatically turning away from his worldly pursuits in imitation of his inspiring and rigidly pious friend Comollo, but this is an inaccurate portrayal. It is important to contextualize this relationship with another. Giovanni Bosco became the great hero of another peer, a Jewish boy named Jonah. The significance of this relationship is evident in the complete delight Giovanni demonstrated in the presence of this young man’s company. In his Memoirs, Giovanni Bosco recalls spending countless hours singing and playing the piano with his handsome young friend, whose voice was especially gifted. The closeness of this friendship would lead eventually to Jonah’s conversion to Catholicism, despite terrible rejection from his own family.

Giovanni was on the verge of a new insight. His joyful friendship did not deter him from inviting Jonah to a deeper level of faith, to a place where they could share belief and worship, as well as entertainments. This motivation, Saint John Bosco would admit in retrospect, did not become conscious for him until he met Luigi Comollo.

Stella captures this revelation beautifully:

“The origin and cast of John’s friendship with Comollo were very different [from those with Jonah]. In this case it was Giovanni who discovered great spiritual richness in the boy who looked so physically frail. Giovanni instinctively became his protector against the insults and attacks of bullies and other superficial boys. Now athirst for the interior life, Giovanni was really defending the source and wellspring that he was seeking for his own soul’s sake. He was defending the incarnation of the very ideal that seemed to be his own (italics, mine). Giovanni had already been moving toward it on his own, but his encounter with the virtuous

26Cf. BOSCO, MO, 90-97, and STELLA, Don Bosco: Life and Work, 30-32.
Comollo tripped the tension wire in his heart. Seeing in him a hero, Giovanni wanted to be his friend.”

At the same time that this friendship flourished and Giovanni Bosco’s hunger deepened, it is ironic that the reputation of his seminary professors was anything but consoling. Though he respected their position, he longed to talk to them, to share with them, to seek out their guidance and support. And he was not the only one who noticed their distance. In fact, he described his fellow students as fleeing from the sight of any professor as though fleeing from a black cat. Perhaps this is the void Comollo filled. Not finding a safe harbor to rest and to deepen his human and spiritual heart, Giovanni found both a friend and an inspiration in Luigi.

Their exchange was often about heavenly things and Giovanni often felt less worthy or more worldly in Comollo’s presence. In those places of sharing and exploring the deeper meanings of things, they made a pact—which they repeatedly confirmed—that the first among them to die would return to signal personal eternal salvation. Though this detail leads to the familiar recounting of Giovanni Bosco’s supernatural experience after Comollo’s death, what should be underlined here is the shift in focus that marks this part of Giovanni Bosco’s formation. His quest for saving souls has a strong link to this friendship which became a symbol of the pulsing reality of eternity in the midst of the everyday and ordinary events of one’s life.

1.1.5. Accompaniment and Vocational Discernment: Don Cafasso as Mentor and Friend

Wavering on the horizon of his young life, Giovanni Bosco finally began to see his lifelong dream take form and substance. Donning the cassock at the start of his philosophical studies at the seminary, Don Bosco would characterize these years of study

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27 STELLA, Don Bosco: Life and Work, 32.
28 Cf. BRAIDO, Prevenire non reprimare, 143. Braido adds this note to his reference: MO (1991), 91. Many impressions at the moment of his departure, MO (1991), 110. In a book by priest F. Falcone, Per la riforma dei seminari in Italia (Rome: F. Pustet, 1906), Don Bosco’s preventive system is also proposed for “seminaries, especially for Middle and High schools”, although combined substantially for the particular aims of ecclesiastical formation, with the “substance of the S. Charles educational system”. (Ibid., 56-66).
as a shift from the profane to spiritual.\textsuperscript{29} He notes a decided turn to the interior life upon the reading of \textit{The Imitation of Christ} sometime in 1837. Though he remained an avid student and an obedient seminarian, crises would surface in these years. There existed an obvious tension between his fond relationships with the priest instructors and their methods of education. Yet his later reflections leave the impression that the over-riding experience was one of deep affection and that relationships outweighed any other tension, so much so as to provoke in his later years a fond nostalgia for this period.

Giovanni Bosco’s goal to become a priest was indeed coming within his reach, but there is evidence that what remained unclear in those years were his sense of a deeper calling and the application of that priesthood. He was unclear about the path of his future priesthood and considered various forms of religious life, weighing various ministries to consider as a priest. It is to this point in his trip of the faith that Giovanni turned to three people for guide and accompaniment: to Don Joseph Cafasso—his new confessor, a man molded much by his own relationship with the thirty year old Canon that had been the first confessor of Don Bosco, Don Giuseppe Maloria, and two companions whom would remain with him after their ordinations, Giovanni Giacomelli and Guglielmo Garigliano.

He brought to Don Cafasso a dream that perplexed him. He saw himself as a priest darning socks.\textsuperscript{30} The stirrings of deeper questioning caused Giovanni to lean heavily upon his confessor and his friends to focus his attentions and sharpen his resolve. Sometimes this led him to extremes, shunning former pleasures such as playing the violin or returning to acrobatics. He wrapped himself in the ascetic environment of the seminary resolved to eliminate anything that would distract him from the goals he treasured from his vocational dream at the age of nine—a dream he would later explain recurred at difficult moments throughout his life. His friends recall that Giovanni would lose his temper and resolve to imitate the gentleness of Saint Francis de Sales and the humor of Saint Philip Neri as his remedy. He looked to his chosen circle of companions, to the priests, and to his favorite saints as role models for continued vigilance and growth.

\textsuperscript{29} Cf. STELLA, \textit{Don Bosco: Life and Work}, 65.

\textsuperscript{30} Cf. BOSCO, \textit{MO of the Oratory}, in “Comment on John’s Dream 1830, 57-58.
As mentioned before, into this part of his story Luigi Comollo had left his imprint in the heart of Don Bosco and the evidence was most dramatically revealed in his insistence on good companions, which would appear time and time again in Don Bosco’s later work. Accompaniment with his peers was complemented most beautifully in the relationship and trust he would build with his confessor, Giuseppe Cafasso, and the balance between peers and guide would establish a pattern in Don Bosco’s own guidance for others.

As his confessor, Don Cafasso left another lasting and formative impression on Giovanni regarding ministry to prisoners and a fine tuning of his personal spirituality. Braido captures this dynamic:

Fr Joseph Cafasso, besides being a guide in the study of moral theology, also taught Don Bosco spirituality and life. It was Fr Joseph Cafasso who encouraged Don Bosco to follow an educational activity such as priestly ministry among prisoners and Lenten catechism classes with particular concern for the young who had migrated from the countryside into Turin. Don Bosco, in later years, would often go to Fr Cafasso, his benefactor and confessor, both for advice and help.

At the school of Fr Cafasso, Don Bosco strengthened and refined his spirituality: Christian hope; preference given to trusting God rather than to the fear of God; the sense of duty as a coherent Christian lifestyle; the fundamental importance to be given to the practice of the sacraments, an effective pastoral ministry; loyalty towards the Church and the Pope; the apostolic orientation towards abandoned youth; the meditation on the 'last things' and the exercise for a happy death.31

By the accompaniment of the gentle and holy Cafasso, the shape of Giovanni’s ministry became clearer as his discernment was intensified through personal experience. In fact, Don Bosco recalled that in the prisons he saw many young people between the ages of 12 and 18 and became disheartened to discover the high incidence of repeated crime and incarceration. It was his observation at that time that their abandoned state pushed them into crime and the budding plant of a mission grew stronger in his heart. Don Bosco described this moment:

"Who knows?" I thought to myself, "if these youngsters had a friend outside who would take care of them, help them, teach them religion on feast days ... Who knows but they could be steered away from ruin, or at least the number of those who return to prison could be lessened?"

31 BRAIDO, Prevenire non reprimare, 145.
I talked this idea over with Fr Caffasso. With his encouragement and inspiration I began to work out in my mind how to put the idea into practice, leaving to the Lord's grace what the outcome would be. Without God's grace, all human effort is vain.32

After six years of direction from Don Cafasso, and ordained in 1841, Giovanni Bosco took the advice of his mentor to enter the Convitto to hone his pastoral skills as a confessor and priest. This Giovanni did gladly, happy to be with Don Cafasso and enriched by every experience his confessor offered him. The shape of his great mission and its spiritual underpinning is linked directly to this period of Giovanni Bosco’s formation and the accompaniment of Don Giuseppe Cafasso.

1.2. Refining the Call: Hearing the Cry for Accompaniment from the Abandoned Youth of Turin

From Giovanni Bosco’s earliest memories of his own father’s death and the impression this loss left upon his young heart through the search for companions, guidance, and a deepening of the interior life, we see that many circumstances and persons rushed to fill the void left by his father. It became an unspoken theme in his life to fill this void and this translated easily into his quest for a deepening of his relationship with God. His dream at the age of nine—his vocational dream—added complexity and mystery to his search. It ignited within him a life goal, but in the tumbler of his life, the turning, and jostling of many experiences worked slowly and purposefully to smooth and polish that dream. It is tempting to create a list of those persons and details that would bring him to his point of decision to reach out to poor youth and to quantify those contributions as an attempt to systematize Don Bosco’s own personal journey of faith. Some of those details and persons have already been mentioned. Yet, considering that Don Bosco himself would look back only in his last years of life to marvel at a coherent whole, to be moved by the clarity of God’s action throughout his life, it seems advisable to continue on the path of examining his spirituality step by step, to walk with him in the evolution and accomplishment of his dream. This will serve to unfold those moments which give form to a spirituality of accompaniment as God’s special gift, not only to and for Don Bosco, but for the world.

32 BOSCO, MO, 182.
Historically, Don Bosco’s progression as a newly ordained priest preparing for ministry at the Convitto in Turin to Don Bosco the Founder of the Salesians and a vast movement of outreach to abandoned youth cannot be seen in a straight line. It was a winding and precarious path. To examine the many details of this important juncture would encompass a study far beyond the scope of this work. However, to examine some of these details under the microscope of accompaniment and spirituality will assist in offering a glance at this particular characteristic of Don Bosco’s charisma at this crucial moment of his life. Obviously, it will be necessary to contextualize this glance with some historical information, but only as it aids this focus.

1.2.1. The Influences of Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Alphonus Liguori

Let it be underlined that Don Bosco’s experience was positive at the Convitto. It was fortunate that Don Cafasso continued to guide the young priest. Don Bosco praised the Convitto for its wholesale attack against the heresy of Jansenism. This heresy promoted a sense of relationship with God that was distant at best and preached vehemently against the worthiness of man to approach God. So contrary to Don Cafasso’s counsel—and all the spiritual guides before him—Jansenism suggested that “if the world waited four thousand years to receive its Lord, Christians ought to prepare their whole lives by abstaining from Communion.” However extreme this may appear, Stella makes the point that in reality many priests who were labelled as Jansenists in the Piedmont of those times were, in fact, advocates of frequent approach to the sacraments and their ardent desire to see the Eucharist highly respected and valued was often mislabelled. The situation was not black and white. Nevertheless, the influence was strong and the canonization of Don Cafasso, many years later, highlighted this holy man’s desire to free the faithful from such an oppressive God and this influence certainly touched the core of Don Bosco.

33 Cf. STELLA, Don Bosco: Life and Work, 80. This quote comes from a text Stella maintains influenced many Piedmontese pastors, Conversations with Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, a text written by Gabriel Gerberon. Stella explains that acting vicar general for Cardinal Delle Lanze, Gaspare Nizzia, had made a gift of this book to the Piedmontese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joseph Ossorio, in 1762.
What also touched Don Bosco, however, was the austerity prevalent inside of the struggle to find a pure form of Christian living. There existed a great struggle between two schools of thought in that time and region: a benignist disposition led largely by the Jesuits, the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, the Friendship Association, and the Convitto, and a rigorist disposition held firmly by those who feared a new rise of religious apathy such as that leading to the French Revolution, a position espoused by the University of Turin and the Seminary there. The newly ordained priest embraced a God readily available to all in the sacrament of Confession and approachable in the Eucharist, but he also maintained the necessity for one to consciously work toward salvation by a life of interiority, prayer, joyful and willing obedience to the will of God, and the brave suffering that comes with living for others and for God. Such a life adhered fiercely to the Church with affection and obedience to the Holy Father. During his three years of study at the Convitto, this attitude pervaded his role as Confessor. He clearly distanced himself from the rigorist tendency and chose, instead, a view of intimacy with God more in line with the teachings of Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Alphonsus Liguori. This, too, characterized his practice of teaching catechism, as per his duty in training. Along with this duty came the outreach to poor youth in the city, something not distinctly associated with Don Bosco. This would be the occasion for Don Bosco to hone all the more his vision for answering God’s call.

1.2.2. The Choice for “the Abandoned”

The Salesian family of Don Bosco is wont to pinpoint the saint’s critical moment of choice for youth to his encounter with a sixteen year old orphan at the Church of St. Francis of Assisi in Turin on 8 December 1841. This can be considered the historical moment for the start of Don Bosco’s personal connection to his future ministry, but he had been teaching and visiting the youth of Turin prior to this. Such outreach preceded Don Bosco’s arrival in Turin, as well. 

What are important in the exchange with Bartholomew Garelli are the connection Don Bosco makes with this orphaned youth and the resonance this has in his own heart. Here the fatherless Don Bosco meets an orphan. Here a teen too embarrassed to attend school connects deeply with Giovanni, who experienced ridicule as

34 Cf. STELLA, Don Bosco: Life and Work, 36-37.
he entered schooling later than most. Here, Don Bosco met a hunger for individual care, and offered the promise of friendly accommodation he so desperately longed for at every turn in his own life.

Certainly, he launched a program of catechesis and outreach that would grow rapidly. Ironically, his mentor Don Cafasso would interrupt this growing ministry at the end of Don Bosco’s years at the Convitto and force a choice upon the young priest. He would be offered the chance to continue catechism as a tutor at the Convitto at the expense of a growing Oratory, or to become chaplain for a hospital of 400 young girls. The choice pushed Don Bosco to choose going away from the comfortable Convitto to attend to youth in Turin with the Marchioness di Barolo under the guidance of Don Giovanni Borel. At first glance, this appears incongruous with the vision that would be associated with Don Bosco, but in fact, it would serve to confirm his calling more specifically. This was intuited by Don Cafasso who told Don Bosco that God would show him what he should do for youth if he went to Don Borel and continued his work.

The growing mob of youth followed Don Bosco to the little hospital of the Marchioness di Barolo where Don Bosco assisted the head chaplain Don Borel. Here he felt the independence to explore new possibilities for these young people, even as he attended to his duties at the Refugio while the Hospital of St. Philomena was under construction. Tensions would arise on two fronts: the collaboration efforts of other oratories in the city with Don Bosco’s work and the demands felt by the Marchioness for her work for the girls. On the first front, some other efforts to reach out to poor youth became entangled in patriotic politics and protest. This Don Bosco shunned completely. He was ready and willing to collaborate with others’ efforts on behalf of the young but only according to his own judgment in order to avoid such entanglements.

Don Bosco’s growing Oratory moved from the Church of St., Francis of Assisi to the unfinished hospital being built for girls. This served as the place of meeting for Don Bosco’s charges until its completion. By this time, Archbishop Fransoni had become an admirer of Don Bosco’s efforts and even blessed a chapel there for the boys’ use.

In November of 1845, Don Bosco moved the meetings to the house of the priest, Don Giovanni Moretta. He rented three rooms there and over 200 students would meet in the day time while night classes were offered as well. It was during this period that Don Bosco acknowledged that rumors abounded regarding his intentions promulgating the idea
that he was raising a horde for revolution.\textsuperscript{35} Eventually, the noise of the boys created enough disturbance to arouse the ire of the other tenants in Don Moretta’s building and the Oratory was forced to move elsewhere yet again.

1.2.3. Accompanied by a Shepherdess and Sheep

By March 1846, Don Borel joined Don Bosco at a field rented from the Filippi brothers only to be evicted in a few weeks. By now, the vision that may have been clear to Don Bosco was becoming extremely unclear even to Don Bosco’s greatest supporters prompting the notion that the young priest was losing his mind. Nonetheless, Don Bosco clung to a dream he had had at the start of his work among the young people of Turin. In this dream, he again retreated to the spiritual and became convinced of the direction his life was taking. He saw wild animals again and he followed a shepherdess who helped him to lead this strange flock. He saw a new building with porticoes and a huge Church. Along the journey, many of the animals had become sheep. Moreover, when Giovanni became tired, he noticed that many of these sheep transformed into shepherds to help him. Despite the surmounting difficulties and oppositions, he remained steadfast and hopeful, as is evident in his own words:

This dream lasted most of the night. I saw it all in great detail. But at the time I understood little of its meaning since I put little faith in it. But I understood little by little as the dream began to come true. Later, together with another dream, it served as a blueprint for my decisions.\textsuperscript{36}

It may appear that his accompaniment waned in this period, but this was far from the reality. Instead, his accompaniment was found in two very distinctive and telling places when the rest of the world seemed to walk away from him. He found his closest companions in the Virgin Mary, the Help of Christians, and in the young people themselves. Needless to say, both of these refuges he considered as gifts from God. Both appeared in his recurring vocational dream and both appeared in various other manifestations throughout his life.

\textsuperscript{35} Cf. BOSCO, \textit{MO}, 233.
\textsuperscript{36} BOSCO, \textit{MO}, 211.
1.2.4. Identifying the Flock

“Poor and abandoned” had been a term already put to use by a French priest working among youth in Marseilles in the 18th century, Servant of God, Abbé Jean-Joseph Allemand [1772-1836], and in institutions set up by Don Ludovico Pavoni in Brescia. The same term was employed by Don Bosco and by Don Giovanni Cocchi and Don Pietro Ponte, Piedmontese priests also dedicated to forming oratories. This description of their outreach helped to identify the target of their mission. Still, it deserves more clarification here.

Don Bosco was a poor peasant, and he felt the sting of his father’s early death and the struggle of living in turmoil because of family strife and the lack of resources for his education. This, however, would not be the description attached to his use of “poor and abandoned” especially living in the new crises presenting themselves in the industrial city of Turin. The poor and abandoned youth there had very specific historical, social, and religious situations crying out for response. Don Bosco recognized the difference between the poverty that was a part of his experience and the “new experience” he found in the streets of Turin. Don Bosco made this description:

The oratory was mostly attended by stone-cutters, bricklayers, plasterers, cobblestone setters, squarers and others arrived from distant places…

…from the Savoy, Switzerland, the Aosta Valley, Biella, Novara, and Lombardy.

Arthur Lenti describes the area as full of children “eking out” a living by odd jobs that provided them a “meager livelihood.” Most of these youth also lived without protection and resorted to gangs for defense. These were immigrants and locals alike, permanent residents and seasonal workers all sharing a similar plight. Though factories enslaved children as young as 8 years of age, most of those targeted by Don Bosco and the other oratorian efforts were between the ages of 12 and 20. We recall that Don Bosco had

37 Cf. STELLA, Don Bosco: Life and Work, 106, note 18 and 112, note 33 explains that St. Martin’s Oratory was entrusted to the secretary of the Barolo, Don Ponte.
38 Cf. STELLA, Don Bosco: Life and Work, 106, 110.
40 LENTI, Don Bosco and “Poor and Abandoned Youth,” 8.
been introduced to many young people at the prisons as he assisted Don Cafasso. These boys of Turin fell into this category. They were rarely in prison for serious crime, but as a result of hunger or by association with the gangs.

Lenti describes as many as thousand of these young people flooding the market each day in Turin, looking for some kind of work. There were also many of these youth and many, much younger than this group, who were regularly employed in the factories, but their plight was no better as they were usually badly exploited, frequently sick or injured, and generally neglected. The image of Don Bosco at the marketplace, the train station, or at the local factories is a common part of the Salesian story and this explains why.

The wages received in day jobs and by regular workers made it nearly impossible to live in an apartment. Such conditions negated the possibility of an education, and reduced food staples to an inadequate diet for proper nutrition even among the traditionally poor.

Obviously, these sad situations precipitated crime and delinquency. Crimes ranged from petty theft to serious burglary or prostitution. Gangs gravitated to the Vanchiglia District of Turin near the River Po. Some of these gangs were known for murder and others for breaking and entry and theft. These gangs were well known at the time of Don Bosco’s first oratory efforts. Unfortunately, the civil outreach was minimal and inadequate. Outside of the reforms instituted by King Charles Albert, such as the separation of children from adults in prison, little was done. Even the good intentions of the King were lost in bureaucratic malaise. Don Bosco was among a new generation of priests who tried to respond in realistic and helpful ways seeing that the older generation of priests and the parish structures themselves were at a loss.

His response would be pedagogical and spiritual. Sabino Palumbieri writes of Don Bosco’s “preoccupation” at this moment:

Don Bosco era preoccupatissimo delle incidenze sulla fragilità psicologica dei ragazzi. Egli è stato un educatore che ha realizzato il concetto etimologico di pedagogia. Il pedagogo è colui che conduce per mano il bambino. Don Bosco usava una gradualità di trattamento educativo. Agendo su adolescenti e preadolescenti, vedeva un’incidenza negativa di certe figure sul ragazzo, il quale avrebbe potuto portarlo a generalizzare quella categoria: don Abbondio
pavido, ecco ogni prete pavido; la monaca di Monza costretta in quella forma, ecco ogni religiosa forzata a una vita non gradita.41

Don Bosco heard the collective cry. Here are his own words for this dire situation as he presses to reveal the truer identity of the young as anything but depraved, and weighing the need to act on their behalf:

The young constitute the most fragile yet most valuable component of human society, for we base our hopes for the future on them. They are not themselves depraved. Were it not for parental neglect, idleness, mixing in bad company, something they experience especially on Sundays and holy days, it would be so easy to inculcate in their young hearts moral and religious principles—of order, good behavior, respect, religious practice. For if they are found to have been ruined at that young age, it will have been due more to thoughtlessness than to ingrained malice. These young people have real need of some kind of person who will care for them, work with them, guide them in virtue, keep them away from evil.42

It should not be surprising that the first boys to come to Don Bosco at the start of his oratory were those he met in prison. Lenti points out the discrepancy between the “harmonious” incidents with Bartholomew Garelli and Don Bosco’s own sentence “This was the beginning of the Oratory.” This pronouncement of Don Bosco is vague in its application and Lenti suggests that perhaps Garelli became the symbol of all orphaned, poor, and abandoned youth.43 In fact, it may well be that the sentence refers to his awakening in the prisons while assisting Don Cafasso at the Convitto. In either case, whether he sensed this immediately in prison or later in the collective cry of a darker reality over-shadowing Turin, Don Bosco heard their cry and for him, it was the voice of God.

1.3. A Movement of Accompaniment: the Sheep Become Shepherds

Into the circle of his efforts to respond to the cry of the young, Don Bosco would pull in many resources from every sector of Piedmontese society. From clergy to government officials—even to the King himself, Don Bosco called for accompaniment of resources and concerned action on behalf of these young people. His plan took on more practical dimensions as he envisioned preventive measures of education for both social

42 Cf. S. G. BOSCO quoted in LENTI, Don Bosco and “Poor and Abandoned” Youth, 19.
43 Cf. LENTI, Don Bosco and “Poor and Abandoned” Youth, in the comment, 22.
responsibility and productivity as well as moral and religious depth. These were two sides of the same coin for him. While Don Bosco frequently visited the young people in the poor places where they lived and worked, another need pressed itself upon him immediately and by May of 1847, with his own mother Margherita to assist him; he welcomed his first orphaned and homeless boy. It is interesting to note that Don Bosco quickly found a “companion” for this lad by opening the house to another orphan.

Soon, Don Bosco’s Oratory would be linked to boarding students and housing the homeless. This did not curtail him from continuing to offer assistance to those who did not stay with him. He continued to walk the streets, to meet in the marketplace, to visit the prisons, and to check on the factories. These activities would never wane. Instead, his focus on providing a whole environment for the young in which to grow into healthy citizens and committed Christians took on new force.

He was always a collaborative man. He launched many initiatives, but always with others at his side. From Don Borel at the Filippi fields, to Mamma Margherita at the Pinardi House, to the Cooperators of future days, Don Bosco reached out with the force of an army of concerned individuals. Percolating in his mind, early in the evolution of the first Oratories of St. Francis de Sales and of the Guardian Angels, was the intentional forming of young people to take on his own tasks. This happened at two significant levels. First, it was a decisive part of the work of prevention in the lives of his young people—forming companions to keep each other from harm and to increase in virtue. At another level, though, was a new signpost growing clearer and clearer as it approached: the formation of a Salesian family of vowed members to carry on the outreach he had begun. At both levels, Don Bosco saw the fulfillment of sheep becoming shepherds and felt the guidance of the Shepherdess in the lead.

**2. Human and Spiritual Accompaniment of Don Bosco’s Students**

We cross now from the accompaniment in the life and faith journey of Don Bosco to the accompaniment he offered to his own students. Many of his students would become his first Salesians. A look at these interactions between Don Bosco and by referring to personal testimonies of the young it is hoped to reveal specific characteristics of the Salesian spirituality of accompaniment and its earliest applications. In such details are
found intentional strategies and tactics of Don Bosco for reaching the heart of a young person and offer a passage to find fulfilment and holiness.

2.1. The Biographies of Three Students of the Oratory at Valdocco: Living Hermeneutics

Normative to a study of Don Bosco’s pedagogy and spirituality are the biographies he penned for three of his students to be preserved as models for imitation offered to all of his students present and future. In reality, there are four specific biographies, but the life of Comollo has been mentioned and is distinguished from the student biographies as a memoir of a seminary companion of Don Bosco. There are, of course, other students mentioned in Don Bosco’s writings, but no others are written with such detail and with such clear intent.

Aldo Giraudo, Salesian scholar and professor at the Università Ponificia Salesiana in Rome, has offered a structure for evaluating the encounters of these particular students as recorded by Don Bosco. This structure is helpful for deciphering these biographies for what is common in Don Bosco’s approach with these students and what distinguishes one from the other. Such analysis enables themes and styles to surface in the effort for a spirituality of accompaniment to emerge.

Giraudo offers three levels of narration for organizing the biographies 44. The first levels make use of historical details filtered through the “hagiographical aspects of the virtues concerned.” The next level reveals the “hidden plot” of Don Bosco giving us a window into what is important for Don Bosco; this permits us a view of his ideas of good behaviour and holiness, his manner of relating to the students, and his deepest convictions. The third level or organization 45 demonstrates the identical narrative sequence Don Bosco followed in each biography, namely:

• The early life
• The meeting with Don Bosco
• Life at Valdocco

44 Cf. Aldo GIRAUDO, Narrazione e formazione dei giovani, livelli di lettura e chiavi interpretative di alcuni opera narrative di don Bosco, Dispense ad uso degli studenti, Roma, UPS, 2007,
45 Cf. GIRAUDO, Narrazione e formazione dei giovani,
• Crisis, decision and transition
• The spiritual program
• Sickness and death
• Epilogue

The dusting of these biographies for the fingerprints of a spirituality of accompaniment will not include detailed historical information in the life of the subject (though some contextual information is always necessary) nor attempt a contextual analysis of Valdocco. However, the investigation pointedly focuses on the meeting with Don Bosco and what is revealed about his personal convictions. The process of “winning their hearts” will be touched upon with a more thorough examination of this experience at a later point in this work. With these parts of the narrative sequence isolated, it is hoped to reveal the spiritual program inside of a framework of accompaniment.

Giraudo suggests that there is often opposition between the argumentative discourse and the narrative discourse in a narration, but he supports a union of purpose between these two dimensions. The interaction between the situation and its recounting reveals something important. In other words, the time at which an account of a past encounter is made reveals something in that encounter which serves as a unique form of communication. For Don Bosco “in the perspective of the Oratory the story intends to transmit something, to disclose a pastoral model and an educational method, a spirit and spirituality…” He suggests a link between the story and Don Bosco’s reason for telling it. The communication was never simply the recounting of facts, but, in reality, a hermeneutic intended to evoke “what it reveals” in its listeners. Giraudo borrows an idea from Paul Ricoeur explaining that Don Bosco always included in the narrative a moment of challenge, something that needed resolution, in order to provoke a question that demanded

46 Cf. GIRAUDO, Narrazione e formazione dei giovani, 4. This is my translation of the text: il racconto di sé in prospettiva oratoriana vuol dire, trasmettere qualcosa, svelare un modello pastorale e un metodo educativo, uno spirito e una spiritualità..., un racconto memorialistico che, nel suo stesso impianto narrativo, si rivela profondamente argomentativo, esprimendo la sua argomentazione attraverso lo strumento di una narrazione.

Così vorremmo che attraverso il corso traspia uno stretto legame tra il racconto di Don Bosco e la sua argomentazione, legame troppo spesso sconosciuto agli approcci tradizionali, ma anche a quelli di tipo semiotico.

47 Cf. GIRAUDO, Narrazione e formazione dei giovani, 4.
a personal response inside of his listener/reader.\textsuperscript{48} This provocation has the special quality to survive beyond the moment of the recounting and sets up a dialogue with all listeners/readers in the future, regardless of their own situations.

Don Bosco wanted to save souls. He wanted these stories to provoke a longing for holiness in the hearts of his listeners and make the encounters their own. We turn briefly to the narratives of these biographies to discover what they reveal about a spirituality of accompaniment.

2.1.1. Dominic Meets the Tailor: Accompaniment and Dominic Savio

The most famous, and perhaps the most studied, among the student biographies are Don Bosco’s narration of the life of Dominic Savio. Don Bosco begins with details from Dominic’s home-life. What is important in these details is not the historical chronology so much as the foundations laid for building a life of holiness. Inside of the narration is the exposition of Dominic’s hunger for God and the paths the boy took in pursuit of spiritual nourishment. Giraudo contextualizes the telling of these details within a certain religious and psychological profile of this young man: an anxiety for eternal salvation, anguish over the possibility of damnation, propensity for emotional religiosity, the dramatic perception of sin, and the view of God as both merciful Father and fearful judge. He demonstrated an early love and devotion for the Mother of God, an intense mystical awareness of the Eucharist, a desire, and delight for the vocation of the priesthood, a longing to study, and a heroic level of self-donation. These are the historical and anthropological character traits Giraudo identifies as those considered by Don Bosco for an intentional interpretation of the boy’s life.\textsuperscript{49}

Such longings, sentiments, devotions, and fears would not have been unfamiliar to Don Bosco’s students at any of the points in which the narrative was offered. They point up the character of life and culture for that time and region. Don Bosco insisted here, as in other writings, the necessity of religion for a sound and complete education. It is enough to recall that Don Bosco proposed a style of education at a time of great anti-clerical

\textsuperscript{48} Cf. GIRAUDO, \textit{Narrazione e formazione dei giovani}, 5.
sentiment suspicious of faith and the influences of religion. Giraudo points out that Don Bosco’s response to this situation is evident in the saint’s repeated association of educators with shepherds. In this insistence, Don Bosco highlights the role of one who accompanies; an educator concerned more for the whole child than merely his academic formation. In addition, the power of that illustration is made in describing the interaction that occurs between Don Bosco and Dominic.

Dominic’s hunger for holiness, nurtured by his family, noticed and fostered by his pastor, and finally brought to the attention of Don Bosco, was in need of direction and formation. In the narration, the central theme is depicted in Dominic’s meeting with Don Bosco at the saint’s office. There, Dominic sees Don Bosco’s life motto: Da mihi animas, caetera tolle. Dominic asks for an explanation, is moved, and takes the occasion, eventually, to ask Don Bosco to be his special guide. The boy offers himself as a willing piece of cloth to be tailored in the skillful hands of Don Bosco. Here we find the meeting of two models: the young saint and the ideal educator. This begins a narrative with clear intent to reveal “a book of spirituality and narrative pedagogy.”

Don Bosco’s response to this request sets down a spiritual itinerary for Dominic to follow and outlines a very particular spirituality. He begins by telling Dominic to continually lift his heart and thoughts to God in prayer. In the next moment, Don Bosco cautions Dominic that two tools are necessary for the heart to remain attached to God. The first is mortification and the second is virtue. By mortification, innocence is preserved and by living virtuously, the love of God is known and demonstrated to others. Immediately a link is forged between personal piety and communal responsibility. This will become the template for a spiritual life. All the other tools are means for fostering these gifts of innocence and virtuous living. The presentation of this encounter puts the reader in the meeting and raises the same challenge to maintain innocence and live exemplary lives of virtue. In fact, as Don Bosco concludes the narrative of Dominic, he again addresses the reader and explicitly reveals what is the heart of his motive: to invite the reader to “pass from the plan of the narration to the religious message, from the contemplation of the

50 Cf. GIRAUDO, Domenico Savio raccontato da don Bosco, 46.
“pleasing, virtuous, and innocent’ life of Dominic to personal commitment, from admiration to imitation.”

Stella’s analysis of the same material uncovers what he calls a typical post-tridentine hagiography at the center of the narration. These include: the spirit of prayer, the devotions to the Eucharist and to Mary, the practice of charity toward others, and collective religious attitudes of associations and sodalities. Don Bosco’s contribution to these appears in the homilies he gave on holiness and which move Dominic Savio’s heart. This preaching on the vocation of holiness was followed by one on the zeal for souls and this seems to lead in the narrative to Dominic’s decision to form the Company of Mary Immaculate. Here again, the process moves from personal piety to communal responsibility—indispensable for understanding this particular spirituality.

In every biography, Don Bosco emphasizes the necessity of frequent confession and a consistent confessor. To Dominic, he recommends these as indispensable for holiness. He enshrines the virtues of doing one’s duties to their fullest and with a cheerful disposition. Dominic becomes the prime example of choosing good companions and correcting those who stray from the fold through unhealthy relationships. His devotions for the Eucharist and to Mary are highlighted as extra-ordinary and spill over into the supernatural. The mention of the supernatural, however, is presented by Don Bosco not as the end in itself, but as a further confirmation that a young person could authentically give witness to the highest expressions of faith and the most profound experiences of God.

In the study of Giraudo, he enumerates observable steps in the spiritual sequence proposed by Don Bosco in these narratives. The means to holiness, then, are:

- Piety
- Fulfillment of duties/studies
- Cheerfulness
- Mortification
- Apostolate
- Charitable service

51 Cf. GIRAUDO, Domenico Savio raccontato da don Bosco, 48 (my translation).
52 Cf. STELLA, Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica, vol. II: Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità, Roma, LAS, 1981, 218-225
• Practice of virtues
• Tending toward holiness

These would remain simply ideals if they were not presented as lived realities in the lives of Dominic and the other students. He presents Dominic as a model of attainable and visible holiness. His biography is not an “ideological deformation of the originating historical event” but a participation and mediation of the reality of spiritual life, bringing closer the experience of Christ and provoking in them a dramatic decision.53 Taking the challenge of seeing in the holiness of the saints a living hermeneutic, Dominic Savio is Don Bosco’s prime example of living holiness.

2.1.2. “He has a good heart”: Accompaniment and Michele Magone

The starting point of Michele Magone is obviously a radical departure from the foundations in the life of Dominic Savio. So different, in fact, that Magone’s starting point appears as an intentional device of Don Bosco. We will see in the treatment of Francesco Besucco, that it is both lives taken together which inspires this third boy to become a saint.

Michelle’s plight shared similarities to Don Bosco’s story: the loss of his father, a hardworking mother, and the lack of means to rise above this lived situation and get an education. Don Bosco’s meeting with the boy is nothing like Dominic’s. In Dominic’s case, the eagerness to meet with Don Bosco and the strong desire for holiness propelled him to Don Bosco. In Michele’s case, Don Bosco runs into “the General in charge of the game”54 at the train station and slowly wins the boy’s trust. The starting points are vastly different, but the end points are strikingly similar. Whereas Dominic’s heart seemed to be formed by his parents, his pastor, and an intuited love for God, Michele’s heart seems trapped inside of an impatient and intelligent lad not given to study or to catechism. Every attempt to harness this energy is met with frustration and disappointment. Despite this, Michele’s pastor sees a deep goodness in the boy’s heart. This is the essential condition for

54 Cf. John BOSCO, Biographical sketch of Michael Magone, young pupil at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, (translation by Aldo Giraudo), Torino, Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1866, 3.
holiness. Don Bosco’s intention seems clear in this detail. He accepts the recommendation of the boy for the Oratory because the pastor insists the boy "has a good heart."

Is there a lack of accompaniment in the boy’s life, then? The accompaniment afforded Dominic Savio is certainly evident and comes from every angle. However, like Mamma Margherita, Magone’s mother did the best she could having to go away often to find work. Her intentions were good. Her means were limited. Don Bosco saw the boy’s goodness in his train station and marketplace meetings, but he awaited the same recognition in the pastor. This subtle detail is telling. Don Bosco does not encourage accompaniment. He insists upon it. Without the presence of the interested pastor, one wonders if Don Bosco would have ever made the invitation to Magone to come to the Oratory. What was assured in the life of young Dominic was not as evident for Michele.

As with Dominic, Don Bosco would enlist Magone into a life of spiritual hunger and the desire to become a saint. This met Magone from a different path than that of Dominic. Don Bosco’s first level of appeal was for Magone’s leadership and not explicitly his religiosity or devotion. It seems that immersed in the spiritual environment of his peers, Magone’s leadership was not enough to bring the boy satisfaction. What was missing was not immediately clear to Magone and it seems Don Bosco allowed the question to deepen in the boy’s heart until Magone, himself, came to the realization of his own hunger.

One has to imagine many groups of boys from all manner of varied backgrounds sitting and listening to Don Bosco’s stories finding themselves attracted in one way or other to one or the other model of holiness. How many knew their thirst for holiness like Dominic? How many were innocently unaware until they spent sufficient time in the Oratory with Don Bosco and those caught by his invitation?

Let us highlight Don Bosco’s intuition to find the potential for Magone to become not only a leader but a companion to his peers. How interesting is the intuition! Accompaniment, then, is the capacity to lead, the ability to invite, the inspiration to transform, and the trust to let God’s Spirit do the work. Dominic had this ability. Magone did as well. In the best and most apostolic sense, Don Bosco seemed to be covering all of his bases! He found willing hearts with different faces.

The key to Magone’s story is the basic goodness in the boy. Every means suggested to Dominic became the passion of Magone after he realized that his life was
empty so long as he was incapable of the same sense of prayer and meaning. Soon, confession and a regular confessor became unquestionable for Magone. He, too, gave himself to the Eucharist and the Mother of God. Yet, at first, these devotions and practices held no appeal to him. This is significant because the narration testifies to a heart not only attracted to Don Bosco, but one in which Don Bosco highlighted its goodness and invited the boy to deeper transformation. The raw materials were present. Holiness was possible.

2.1.3. The Gift of Diligence: Accompaniment and Francesco Besucco

Francesco Besucco is Don Bosco’s synthesis and spirituality put on full display. Here was a lad from poor means, loved by a large “harmonious” family, drawn like Savio from his earliest memories to prayer and devotion. Here was a boy whose mother, like Mamma Margherita, wanted holiness for her son above all other gifts. Francesco was a child whose goodness touched the heart of his pastor and whose hunger for knowledge of God and heavenly things was extraordinary.

Francesco had read the lives of both Savio and Magone and connected strongly with their experiences. Here was a member of Don Bosco’s audience tuning into the frequencies intentionally signalled by Don Bosco in these writings.

The link between the three boys seems to be the important support they received from their pastors. This key person of accompaniment saw each one with the greatest of potential and each contacted Don Bosco to help foster this capacity within them.

In this particular biography, Don Bosco explicitly states that Francesco’s heart had become possessed by God.

When the love of God takes possession of a heart, nothing in this world and no suffering distress it; on the other hand every affliction in this life is a source of consolation.  

It was this which gave Don Bosco fertile ground to shape a soul. His avenue of approach respected the gift of Francesco. This was not an accompaniment of coercion, but invitation. Discovering his love of studies and his great diligence, Don Bosco made this the sure roadmap for Besucco’s path to holiness. Don Bosco saw his responsibility to be

55 John Bosco: The young shepherd of the Alps, or the life of the young Francis Besucco of Argentera, (translation by Also Giraudo) Torino, Tipografia dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1878.
an important one in this act of accompaniment. Daniel O’Leary captures well the vocation of accompaniment as he writes:

Maybe, as well as being called to save and convert people into membership of the church, we are first called to the primary task of liberating people into the fullness of their own already graced humanity, into revealing to people the blessedness of their very being, of their capacity for living the abundant life in the here and the now.56

In fact, Don Bosco even admitted some reservations that Besucco’s thirst for holiness was a bit misguided in his excessive attempts for physical suffering and mortification. Don Bosco will go so far as to suggest that this area seemed an obstacle and weakness in Besucco that may have contributed to his untimely death. That being said, there is an interesting detail that surfaces in this admission. Don Bosco felt himself standing at the door of a mystery. He had often felt this way in the presence of Savio, given to ecstasies and premonitions. He had the same feelings as he watched the transformation of Magone into a champion of good and frequent confession. Now the feelings returned as Besucco’s sudden illness and death filled Don Bosco with awe. He suggested:

God saw the great love that this little heart had for Him and to prevent the evil of this world from ruining him, He decided to call him to Himself; he allowed an inordinate love of penance to a certain extent to be responsible for it.57

We see in this Don Bosco’s clarity regarding his own role in the lives of the students. He was to accompany and guide, but God had the last word. The role of the guide is to lead the youth to awareness of God’s goodness already present and at work in the soul. His job is one of invitation, not creation; of encouragement, not coercion. This awareness did not lessen Don Bosco’s passion for saving souls; it simply respected the roles of those concerned and placed all the efforts into the hands of God.

2.2. Common Themes of Accompaniment from Comollo to Besucco

There has been no attempt to include the biography of Luigi Comollo here or the disappointing story of a lost invitation in a student named Valentino. There are, however,

57 BOSCO: *The young shepherd of the Alps*, 1866.
common themes from all of these stories. Don Bosco’s narrative of the life of his seminary companion returns us again to the theme of accompaniment in his own life. It was the depth of his friend which invited the young Giovanni into deeper awareness and the thirst for an interior life. Certainly, these had been implanted in Don Bosco from the start and we have seen influential persons and some of the events that molded his desire for holiness. However, the story of Comollo highlights a detail that runs throughout every narration, even those ending in apparent disappointment. Every narration presents a moment of crisis. The crisis is very different from one protagonist to another, but a decision is provoked in every instance. Again, we call to mind the notion of the saints as true testimonies bringing the Incarnation of Christ closer and demanding a choice, in the views of Von Balthasar.

Often times the crises are not neatly packaged in one event or person but sprout in the garden of particular seasons of life as a cumulative effect or a moment of reckoning. In some cases, though, they are dramatic turning points. For Giovanni Bosco, the meeting with Comollo seems to have been one that forever changed him.

Stella notices that the original text was structured chronologically and did not devote large portions to the development of some virtue. This separates this narrative from those of Savio, Magone, and Besucco. Indeed, what is common to all of them is the dearth of biographical detail and the anecdotal method with the goal of edifying and inspiring the reader. One obvious additional device employed in this early writing is the comparisons offered between Comollo and Saint Aloysius Gonzaga.

In Comollo’s biography arise sayings and maxims that would be found throughout Don Bosco’s works, repeated in his Companion to Youth, and in other publications such as the biographies mentioned in this study. Yet it is curious that a decisively different quality of spirituality asserted itself in Comollo that would not survive in the later works: an excessive personal piety. Comollo wanted to withdraw from life completely. While this translates in Don Bosco’s later writings as a detachment from the world and its priorities, it never becomes an obsessive dualism finding evil in every created thing. Fortunately, for Don Bosco’s spirituality of accompaniment, there is a marked celebration of life and

58 STELLA, Don Bosco: Life and Work, 70.
creation calling for participation rather than withdrawal. Such spirituality involves others rather than judges them. It rejoices in communal participation and mediation rather than self-preoccupation.

It is fortunate for the legacy of Don Bosco that in him we receive a more mature view of God as judge. Certainly, Don Bosco wove images that were frightening and moved many a young heart to steer clear of hell, but for Comollo, the vision of his own condemnation and fear of a wrathful God became excessive. Might we make the link between the moment of hope which followed upon the great fear of Saint Francis de Sales and conclude that Don Bosco clung to this hope and made it his own? The devotion to Saint Francis de Sales, so much a part of Don Bosco and his region, figures richly in Don Bosco’s history of founding the Oratories and establishing a Salesian Family. Familiar to Don Bosco and his contemporaries would be the tale of the young lawyer and student of theology at the Sorbonne in Paris finding himself on the verge of despair. Having lived and breathed a loving and natural relationship with God in his home, the young scholar was repeatedly struck by the harsh soteriology of his Dominican and Franciscan professors. Salvation was reserved for the few. Logically, Francis’ bid for salvation would be challenged to the core. This was the crisis which, through prayer and divine intervention, would fashion the great Doctor of God’s love. Don Bosco’s patron had dedicated himself to combat these heretical and dark views of a loving God and rob the soul of God’s closeness and availability. Don Bosco would join in this battle with passion. Saving souls, not threatening them, not terrifying them into submission, was his lifelong mission and he would speak the language of a Good Shepherd, the language of reasonable, loving kindness and faith.

Perhaps the most important detail to underline in the narration of Comollo is his friendship with Giovanni and Giovanni with him. Here is a complementary model. A spirituality of accompaniment begins with a seed planted in an open heart and proceeds through its stages of growth with various positive aids to that growth, including helpful persons and events. The journey of the budding spirituality necessarily depends on the intentions of others for designed and planned growth and formation, for nurturance by word and example. The greatest danger to the forming life is exposure to dangerous elements and the evil intentions of others. The framework of this spirituality is a shared journey to fruition. It is a spirituality fiercely guarded by those who see the potential of
holiness in another and who actively protects, guides, and nurtures the journey to fullness. The first line of defense is always at the peer level. This was the insight culled from his experience of Comollo. This is the importance of “good companions” becoming the guardians and protectors of the spiritual journey Don Bosco would offer to the young. These companions acknowledge the goodness of God already at work in life and participate in the invitation to act as co-creators with a loving God.

2.2.1. “Winning the Heart”

The one who accompanies and the one who is accompanied share a relationship. We learn from Don Bosco’s personal experience of life and from the details, he shares in the biographies of his students and friend, that the key to this spirituality is the heart. The heart is that place where God chooses to work. Don Bosco’s Preventive System is characterized by the use of reason, religion, and loving kindness. His spiritual pedagogy is marked by educators making themselves loved. However, in looking carefully at the spiritual life in Don Bosco’s experience, Francis Desramaut places the emphasis upon the heart.

If, finally, we had to decide about the priority of reason or love in the search for God, in the mind of Saint John Bosco, we would without a doubt agree that it was love. Familiarity and loving kindness, that is, a spirit of cordiality and affection, were worth more for him, all things considered, than indispensable reason itself. All the spiritual progress of his disciples would be imbued with affective love or, to use his manner of expression, dictated by the “heart.” Loving kindness invested his counselling and teaching. The combination of loving wisdom and farsighted affection produced for him “marvelous results and brought about changes which appeared to be impossible.” No matter how one interprets Saint John Bosco or Saint Francis de Sales, perhaps considering them sentimental, the affective nuances of their spirituality were about equal.59

Winning the heart was only the first task, however. The hearts of Jesus’ disciples burned on the road to Emmaus as he anonymously revealed to them the meaning of his suffering and the meaning of their own experiences of loss and disillusionment. Gently walking beside the frightened followers in the act of fleeing, he calmed them and enlightened them in the Word of God, processing their horrific experiences and their

despair. He produced in them a need for him to stay with them further in the journey. He
accompanied them to an understanding they might never have reached under different
circumstances and now even the dreaded realities of Jesus’ rejection, suffering, and death
became beacons of hope and light. These disciples begged Jesus to remain with them as
nightfall came upon them. He stayed just long enough to offer blessing and break bread.
In the act of sharing, Jesus simultaneously revealed himself and disappeared. Instead of
fleeing further, the fugitives became enlightened pilgrims and returned to the community
of believers with hope and conviction. As they went, they proclaimed, “Were not our
hearts burning with in us?” And that burning ignited into action.

The winning of a heart is only the first step. The call is to conversion and
transformation. To that, we now turn our attention.

2.2.2. Don Paolo Albera Recalls Transformative Experiences among His
Peers

The Emmaus Journey from the Gospel of Luke is the necessary bridge from the
living Don Bosco and the experience of a spirituality of accompaniment after his death.
What was it in the experience of Don Bosco that so powerfully guided the expanding
ministry to the youth of the world he had ignited? Obviously, the Salesian world and the
whole world have encountered Christ authentically in the figure of Don Bosco as saint. His
visible holiness continues to inspire and enlighten both youth and ministers to them to this
very day. What better place to turn than to those closest to Don Bosco. Like the disciples
and the first Christian communities, they can say as John’s community proclaimed,

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we
have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- and the life was
manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with
the Father and was manifested to us-- what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also,
so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and
with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. 60

60 1 John 1, 1—4, in the New American Standard Bible
What do the first witnesses of Don Bosco share with us about their firsthand experience of the saint? To the testimony of Don Paolo Albera, the third successor of Saint John Bosco we now turn.

At the heart of a letter to the Salesians addressed by Don Albera in the *Acts of the Superior Council* on October 18, 1920, is an invitation to all of his Salesians to “throw yourselves into the arms of God.”61 This invitation falls at the center of this letter structurally and it is also the heart of his exhortations—the point of summit and synthesis. Surrounding this invitation is, of course, the focus upon Don Bosco as Founder and Father. Because he had responded to that embrace of God, he did all that he did and all that is the heritage of the Salesian Congregation is both invitation and response to this embrace of God. God’s gift is God’s call. The apostolate is gift and response to that embrace.

The sixteen parts of Don Albera’s circular letter began with personal descriptions of his encounter with Don Bosco as a child, as a young Salesian, and at various points in his Salesian life. His descriptions were rich in their feeling and affection, recalling with joy the embrace each felt in the presence of Don Bosco. Don Albera was intent on situating that embrace and linking it with the experience of Don Bosco’s personal rapport with God. The familiar smile, the fatherly attention, and all the loving attributes of Don Bosco Don Albera recognized as a figure that had withstood the tests of time as an example for all. Don Albera quoted Jesus’ words at the last supper, “I have given you an example so that what I have done, you must also do” (John 13,15).62

To imitate Don Bosco, then, is to imitate Christ and to do that according to a “unique model of our religious life.” It is unique in its imitation of “the mild Francis de Sales,” and its specific mission to reach out with new energies to poor and abandoned youth after the fashion of Don Bosco.63

Don Albera’s motivation, as we have seen, was deeply rooted in his personal experience of Don Bosco. He highlighted such encounters as the experience of transforming hearts. Even apart from Don Bosco in some of his assignments, he described the impossibility of remaining apart from him spiritually because “he was the soul of

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63 Cf. ALBERA, *Lettere circolari*, 329-350
everything and everybody.” And even after many years beyond his death, Don Albera insisted that it was still impossible to be apart from Don Bosco if we “embrace the state of perfection at the basis of the evangelical counsels.”

Early in his letter, Don Albera intimated that to embrace religious life with the fidelity of Don Bosco is to be embraced by God, embraced by Don Bosco, and sent forth to extend God’s loving arms to the young with the same selflessness and tireless energy that he, Paolo Albera the child, the student, the Salesian, and Rector Major had experienced personally.

As Don Albera turned to the Salesian Rule of Life, he linked it profoundly to Don Bosco’s dream at the age of nine years which would become a realized dream in the Salesian Congregation. Much more than a prophetic vision of his accomplishments, the Salesian Congregation stands as a visible response to the call and embrace of God. It is because of this that the mission of the Salesians is seen not merely in its social dimension nor even in simple terms of practical charity. It is seen as the means to one’s personal salvation—one’s personal embrace of God, so to speak. In fact, any activity that is not contemplated as sanctifying does not deserve the name “apostolate.”

Don Albera explained that observation of the Rule by itself is simply a body without a soul. To be true sons of Don Bosco is to seek perfection by giving attention to the internal workings of the Salesian heart, responding to the interior motivations and inspirations of Don Bosco. This interior life pushed Don Bosco to live without rest in working for souls. This path of perfection, this tireless mission for salvation came to Don Bosco, because “he threw everything into the arms of God.” This was Don Bosco’s first action and Don Albera called the Salesian Congregation to make that their own first action. So immersed was Don Bosco in this embrace that Don Albera remembered that Don Bosco often seemed to be in conversation with God at every moment.

The whole itinerary of Salesian religious life and its guiding force emanates from the embrace of God. It is from here that sin is eradicated and put at a distance in the life of the Salesian and, simultaneously, in these efforts to educate the young toward perfection.

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64 Cf. ALBERA, Lettere circolari, 329-350
65 Cf. ALBERA, Lettere circolari, 329-350
66 ALBERA, Lettere circolari, 329-350
67 Cf. ALBERA, Lettere circolari, 329-350
enables us to put that same distance from evil in their own lives. This embrace allows the Salesian to follow the path of perfection, responding to God’s will, and this will not seem difficult. Just as Don Bosco was “abducted by prayer,” so, too, his Salesians are called. In deep prayer, in constant conversation with God, the Salesians develop the ten virtues that are diamonds, in the Salesian crown.

To remain in this embrace is to remain in prayer, especially at mass. In referring to the Blessed Sacrament, Don Albera wrote of the invisible guest, Jesus, whose presence is known and felt. And it is this love which grows day by day and strengthens the Salesian to respond to his vocation.

The Salesian vocation, like the Salesian Rule and the imitation of Don Bosco, is for sanctification. It is never merely for self-sanctification but turns always and concretely toward the young. Don Bosco’s success, as suggested by Don Albera, was not an attribute of his educational approach or the intensity of his work so much as it was his holiness. Don Bosco’s predilection for the young was itself the gift of God and the heritage of the Salesians. To take this gift is to remain in holiness. To improve this gift is to save souls and to bring one’s self to perfection.

The work for youth is, above all, the work of the heart as Don Albera experienced first hand by the transformation of his own heart in the embrace of Don Bosco. Don Albera called this “the secret of the expansive vitality of our Congregation.” The call of the Salesians is the same, to attract by love the hearts of the young so that they may experience the supernatural love of God. That love must be blazing in the heart of the Salesian first of all before it can be offered to the young.

As Don Albera turned his attention to the concretizing of this transformative love, namely in the practice of preventive education, he commissioned the Salesians to attach to this mission “charity” and the “fear of God.” These are enshrined in the words so often spoken and even posted wherever Don Bosco went, “God sees you.” This was the

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68 Cf. ALBERA, Lettere circolari, 329-350
69 Cf. ALBERA, Lettere circolari, 329-350
70 Cf. ALBERA, Lettere circolari, 329-350
71 Cf. ALBERA, Lettere circolari, 329-350
72 ALBERA, Lettere circolari, 329-350
73 Cf. ALBERA, Lettere circolari, 329-350
synthesis of his educative mission. No other means of discipline would ever become necessary if this was understood and believed by the young. They would apply themselves to study, avoid bad companions, love their work, and live orderly lives in that knowledge. This experience of God would be found constantly in prayer, in the frequenting of the sacraments and demonstrated in “expansive joyfulness.” It seemed to be Don Albera’s intention to caution the Salesians from the tendency to be satisfied with the external appearances of education rather than invite the heart and soul to a depth not possible without God. Here, again, is the resounding theme of this letter, to invite the young into that same embrace of God which had so inspired Don Bosco, so deeply transformed Paolo Albera and his companions, and had been the source and sustenance of Don Bosco’s entire spiritual pedagogy.

To view education as an enterprise that is both natural and supernatural seems to be the final point to which Don Albera was headed in this letter. “Without a deep sense of the supernatural life, in vain are our efforts to be capable educators or experts in the art of teaching.”\textsuperscript{74} Appearances, he warned the Salesians, could be deceiving and he urged them to understand that Don Bosco’s whole mission is from God and “eminently supernatural.”\textsuperscript{75} Embracing the whole of that reality and not settling for surface performance will assure the Salesians ease of success in the minutest peculiarities. A characteristic of this whole view of Don Bosco’s system is the display of humility and virtue in Don Bosco and his Salesians. Aware that this mission comes from God leads one to live in the simplicity of virtue and is demonstrated in a life undistracted by passing things but focused on kindness and consideration of others at every moment in life. This was the authenticity that marked Don Bosco and it is the invitation of his successor to the future sons, daughters, and family of Don Bosco.

Don Albera’s letter of 1920 bears a striking similarity to the letter of Pascual Chavez as he convoked the Twenty-sixth General Chapter. Our current Rector Major is also calling on the sons of Don Bosco to return to their Founder and Father and cautions that our distance from this great saint is far greater than preceding generations. There are no personal stories to relate or within which to contextualize Chavez’s own exhortations as

\textsuperscript{74} ALBERA, Lettete circolari, 329-350
\textsuperscript{75} ALBERA, Lettete circolari, 329-350
those experiences related at the start of Don Albera’s letter. Deeply aware of this distance, Chavez reveals that our return to Don Bosco is found in the same return to his undying and untiring love of young people for the purpose of saving their souls.\textsuperscript{76} We might say that Chavez has taken the heart of Don Albera’s appeal and is calling the Salesian world to, once again, throw everything into the arms of God.

3. Don Bosco as Spiritual Teacher and Spiritual Director

Though Don Bosco left no great volume or treatise revealing in systematic detail the framework of his specific spirituality, a definite spirituality rises from any reading of his life, by examining his experiences of God throughout that life, and by observing carefully, not only what he taught his young people and his contemporaries, but \textit{how} he taught them. Joseph Aubry expresses the legacy of such a unique vision and spirituality:

Ha una sua dottrina spirituale, ma non sistematica: è piuttosto avvolta nella sua bononima di scrittore popolare, e i suoi diversi elementi sono dispersi in dozzine di opuscoli senza pretesa né speculativa né letteraria. Le sorgenti più vive e il luogo per eccellenza dalla sua dottrina sono appunto \textit{la sua vita, il suo carisma personale, la sua lunga e ricca esperienza spirituale, polarizzata dalla sua missione di apostolo}. È la forza della sua santità e l'impatto delle sue realizzazioni che hanno fatto di Don Bosco, se non un autore spirituale, senza dubbio un «maestro» spirituale, che ancora attrae, per portarli a Cristo, tanti giovani e adulti, uomini e donne del nostro secolo.\textsuperscript{77}

A survey of Don Bosco’s spirituality which begins with his personal experience must lead to the application of that spirituality. The fond remembrances of Don Albera and the review of Don Bosco’s biographical works return us to the grand theme which permeated Don Bosco’s spirituality of accompaniment: the captured heart. Still, there remains the task of examining Don Bosco in two specific applications of his spirituality. Much has been written about Don Bosco as a spiritual teacher and his own writings regarding the ministry of spiritual direction have been studied in detail. To leave Don


Bosco as the roots of a specific spirituality without a glance at these two areas of study would be incomplete.

3.1. Don Bosco as Spiritual Teacher: Don Bosco’s Theology

*Da mihi animas, caetera tolle.* At the center of Don Bosco’s vision of life, humanity, God, and salvation was his passion to save the souls of the young. Just how that was articulated in the man, Giovanni Bosco, and how that was applied within a given socio-political context has been the subject of much research. To begin an exhaustive study would be impossible in this context, yet the task of understanding Don Bosco’s theology as the foundation of a vital spirituality still at work today must take up a few of the themes of the more complete studies. In this survey, our task will be to look specifically at Don Bosco’s vision of humanity and the role of God and salvation within the human context.

3.1.1. Zeal for Guiding Souls

Joseph Aubry’s look at Don Bosco’s spiritual life leads inevitably to the saint’s chosen patron Francis de Sales. Not only was this great doctor of the Church influential in Don Bosco’s deliberate choice for imitation and the specific influence which steered Don Bosco away from the rigorist theologies and practices of his day, the Patron of Savoy shaped the central theological and apostolic vision of Don Bosco. Aubry explains:

Le scelte spirituali e pastorali più decisive di Don Bosco sono di quest'epoca. Tra le sue risoluzioni di ordinazione leggiamo queste due tipiche: “Patire, fare, umiliarsi in tutto e sempre quando si tratta di salvare anime. La carità e la dolcezza di S. Francesco di Sales mi guidino in ogni cosa.” (MB I 518) In altre parole: zelo incondizionato, nello stile Salesiano. Poco dopo, nella stessa linea, sceglie definitivamente il motto della sua vita, che diverrà quello della sua Famiglia: “*Da mihi animas, caetera tolle:* (Signore) dammi le anime, tieni tutto il resto,” attribuito proprio a S. Francesco di Sales (*MB* II 530).

L'influsso del *Salesio* è stato quindi decisivo (non dimentichiamo che era allora un santo locale, la Savoia facendo parte del regno sardo). Ma non è tanto il teologo e dottore quanto piuttosto il pastore e difensore della verità che Don Bosco ha ammirato e a cui si è ispirato. Si è dichiarato pienamente d'accordo con la dottrina della *Filotea* e ne ha raccomandato spesso la lettura. Ma soprattutto è stato attratto da due espressioni della sua figura di santo: *l'energia apostolica*, lo zelo per le anime, per la fedeltà alla Chiesa cattolica, e la *dolcezza evangelica*
nel modo di esercitare questo zelo: “carità, buone maniere, grande calma, straordinaria mansuetudine.”

Don Bosco’s theology, then, was linked to his attraction to Saint Francis de Sales as a pastor for the common person. The zeal for souls that marks Don Bosco’s theology finds its origin primarily in the zeal found in Saint Francis rendering holiness attainable to all people. This zeal was never perceived by Don Bosco as something outside of his own act of faith. In the saving of souls, one saves himself. The living of a virtuous life was a choice he understood as an obligation in light of the gifts he himself received and he made of his spirituality this dynamic of relational interaction.

Linked to the zeal and apostolic energy of Saint Francis de Sales is a Christian humanism, an understanding of humanity that asserts the goodness of creation with humanity as the peak of God’s creation reserved as God’s own image. The urgency to save souls did not suggest that human nature was depraved and that humanity was destined to condemnation. In fact, Don Bosco’s theological view recognized the great potential that God had instilled in the human person and Don Bosco saw this potential as both spiritual and material. Yet, this human nature needed assistance. It was part of God’s plan from the very beginning to send a Savior. The path to salvation was intended to be a shared journey.

Francis Desramaut has written a beautiful and moving account of Don Bosco’s spiritual formation in his work, Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life. Desramaut underlines the dynamism and the practicality of Don Bosco’s spirituality with the need to guide human nature by means of education, technical training, recreation, and spiritual instruction. He adds:

Don Bosco believed that it was necessary to help people grow in holiness as they are and deal with them as they find themselves. He emphasized the mortification of the spirit rather than the wasting away of the body, and he shied away from using fear and harshness in directing souls and saw God as a father to be loved rather than as a tyrant to be feared.

Referring again to the biographical works, we have seen that Don Bosco invited the young students to make their spirituality practical by simply doing the best they could in

78 AUBRY, La scuola salesiana di Don Bosco, 670.
79 AUBRY, La scuola salesiana di Don Bosco, 679.
80 DESRAMAUT, Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life, 253.
81 DESRAMAUT, Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life, 252.
82 DESRAMAUT, Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life, 252.
all their duties. He urged them to be joyful in their lives to attract others to their path of holiness. We have also seen his reluctance regarding the choices some of his students had made for physical mortification, yet ever attentive to the hunger these boys felt for holiness and for a world beyond this one.

Salesian research author, Sabino Palumbieri captures well this desire for Don Bosco to shape the humanity of the young people. Here we find the practical dimension of his spirituality applied. Behind this theological vision is a God whose predilection has always been for the small and the powerless. Palumbieri writes:

Don Bosco, invece, ha scelto Dio, perché ha riscoperto nel Dio biblico il Dio del povero, della vedova, dell'orfano. Allora attraverso questa lettura della trascendenza biblica ha canalizzato la sua passione per l'uomo in altra direzione..

Anche in don Bosco c'è questa grande passione per migliorare l'umanità, per dare una qualità superiore all'umanità. Ma la superiorità, qui, non è quella dell'aristocrazia, ma quella della responsabilità che arriva a certi traguardi e si realizza in Cristo risorto, che non è il superuomo, ma il vero *iperuomo*. Così, l'umanità può godere della festa, della festa di dimensione pasquale, in cui si annodano tutte le esigenze dell'uomo: l'amore, la comunione, il desiderio della bellezza, l'aspirazione a trasformare in meglio le cose, il sentirsì di casa tra gli uomini, sia pure una casa come la tenda di Israele, sempre in marcia sulla terra.83

Such an image of God, though often misread in his cultural and religious context as predominantly harsh and judgmental, was always presented by Don Bosco in the image of the Good Shepherd. This Shepherd makes the first move to find the lost sheep. This is the Shepherd of his dreams, the Son of the Shepherdess who led Don Bosco to gently transform lives. Let us give Aubry the last word:

Insomma la spiritualità di Don Bosco è *popolare*, *giovanile*, *familiare*; l'impatto di questi tre elementi tipici sulla carità salvatrice ispirata a Cristo buon pastore e buon samaritano permette di delineare il volto originale di Don Bosco tra i santi della carità. Appare come un santo in cui si congiungono per armonizzarsi i valori più altamente divini e più profondamente umani. In lui natura e grazia sembrano riconciliate alla perfezione: “uomo di Dio” in permanente unione con la Fonte dell'amore, arricchito di carismi impressionanti, Don Bosco si trova anche all'agio tra gli uomini e in pieno mondo, è semplice, stavo per dire “prosaico,” abile ed efficiente, sorridente e infinitamente simpatico. Sotto quest'aspetto, è in grado eminente “salesiano”: Francesco di Sales e Giovanni Bosco appaiono l'uno come la versione “nobile,” l'altro come la versione: “popolare” dello stesso umanesimo cristiano.84

84 AUBRY, *La scuola salesiana di Don Bosco*, 677.


3.1.2. Don Bosco as Spiritual Author

Let us turn briefly to a survey of Don Bosco as spiritual author. Francis Desramaut tells us that Don Bosco’s desire to write was motivated by his simple and down-to-earth spirituality. He wrote to be understood by young people and simple peasants and was not interested in doing long research or making scientific analyses. While Don Bosco was author to an incredible volume and variety of works, what emerges in his work is a simple and clear spirituality. Desramaut makes the interesting point that Don Bosco did not distinguish between adults and adolescents in his addressing of spiritual matters in his writings.

Aldo Giraudo cautions the reader and the student of Don Bosco’s spiritual writings from too easily dismissing the works as simple or lacking in depth. In fact, he insists that the level of interiority is often surprising:

Una paziente frequentazione degli scritti di don Bosco, operata a partire dalla consapevolezza che la sua apparente semplicità nasconde una interiorità ricca e complessa, e condotta con metodi nuovi e diversi, ci può riservare parecchie sorprese.

For a more thorough reference to his works and to the authors influencing Don Bosco, there are many studies offered by many of the researchers cited in this work. For our purpose, a look at general groupings of Don Bosco’s work will highlight, at least, the underlying theology of his writings.

Joseph Aubry offers groupings for Don Bosco’s work as an author and Aubry limits these groupings to works demonstrating clear spiritual content and purpose. The first category Aubry refers to is the category of the edifying biographies. These have already been touched upon, but to these can be added Don Bosco’s treatment of the life of his confessor, Don Giuseppe Cafasso. In each of these Don Bosco made a presentation of a reachable and tangible model of holiness. His theology unfolded with a focus upon the action of God in the hearts of these models. God prepared their hearts for lives of service.

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85 DESRAMAUT, Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life, 28-29.
86 DESRAMAUT, Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life, 29.
87 GIRAUDO, Narrazione e formazione dei giovani, 15.
88 AUBRY, La scuola salesiana di Don Bosco, 673-674.
and virtue without removing from them their own free choice. God also led them on a path with companions to nurture the goodness of their hearts.

The second category of publications can be identified as devotional writings. These are the most prolific of Don Bosco’s efforts. These include *Exercises in Devotion to the Mercy of God* (1847), *The Companion to Youth* (1847ff) of which there were 118 editions, *The Key to Heaven for Practicing Catholics* (1856) published for adults, and *The Month of May* (1858). These writings evade attempts to be generalized or labeled according to any one genre of composition. Pietro Stella points out that *The Companion to Youth* is often described as a manual of prayers and devotions, but Don Bosco wanted this work to guide young people “as a method and a way of life.”89 There are strictly devotional publications, but these works share in common the intent for instruction and guidance for living. Over the course of his priestly life, Don Bosco published many devotional books which included sections for instruction, guidelines for devotion, and sometimes information tied to contemporary events. In all of these works Don Bosco had one clear purpose: to reveal the unhappiness of those living outside of the security of Catholic faith and the easy availability of salvation for those who were faithful to their religion.90

The third category of writings suggested by Aubry includes Don Bosco as Founder composing the Constitutions for various institutions. In 1875 Don Bosco penned an introduction to the Salesian Constitutions offering instruction on their ascetic character.91 Consistent with his works addressed to the young, Don Bosco addressed himself personally to his readers in the Constitutions. Even in these documents, he demonstrated a fatherly concern for the salvation of his fellow ministers, his sons and daughters.

The fourth category contains Don Bosco’s autobiographical work, *The Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales: 1815 – 1855* and other personal testimonies. Aubry includes in this category his volumes of personal letters (now fully compiled by Francesco Motto)92, and what is known as Don Bosco’s will, the so-called *Spiritual Testament*,93 the

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89 STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 267.
90 STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 267.
91 AUBRY, *La scuola salessiana di Don Bosco*, 673.
harvest of his final recommendations (MB XVII 257-273). Both Stella and Aubry agree that these works are some of his strongest and his most personal. In these the reader finds a Don Bosco who is very direct, not given to complicated explanations, and one whose obvious preoccupation is the religious education and care of the young. Many of these documents condense his convictions and principles or share his experiences and methods. According to Stella, the spiritual nature prevails:

A feeling of God and souls is ever present. Religious concern surfaces whenever he is dealing with crucial issues of educating youths or the common people or with the needs of the Church in general. We find explicit calls to prayer or to trust in the Lord. In the last fifteen years of his life he was particularly inclined to call down God’s grace on all: ‘May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us…be always with you...’

The last grouping is comprised of all other talks, sermons, good nights, and other communications as recorded by witnesses. A recurring theme can be detected in these and all of Don Bosco’s writings: the urgency of salvation. He was convinced that the steps toward salvation or condemnation began in youth and that the young should dedicate themselves as soon as possible to God. He called for the young to adhere to God’s grace, always available through the Church and primarily through the sacraments. His literature for educators stressed their role in this adherence and underlined their efforts to set the young on the proper path as soon as possible.

### 3.2. Don Bosco and Spiritual Direction

The most explicit reference to spiritual direction as an intentional practice is found in the instructions for directors that Don Bosco left with Don Rua. The intention of Don Bosco was always clear: the director of the community was to be the person to whom the Salesians and the youth must go with openness and trust. To this person, there must be no secrets so that the grace of God might guide the soul. Don Bosco appended the 1875 Directory of members with this norm:

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93 STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 278. This Spiritual Testament was, in fact, a personal letter of instruction to Don Rua to be read to the Directors, drawn up between 1884 and 1886.
95 Cf. STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 278.
96 STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 278.
97 Cf. STELLA, *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, 279
For the smooth running of the Congregation, the preservation of unity of spirit and imitation of the example of other religious institutes, a director or regular confessor is established for those who belong to the Society.\(^98\)

During retreats in 1873, Don Bosco had expressed his desire for this structure of authority and direction:

> The director is the natural confessor of those who belong to the Congregation. God has given him the task of helping them in their vocation. For the boys as well, he is the ordinary confessor, so that he may become aware of vocations and, if possible, instill in them the spirit of the house. Full of freedom of conscience is to be accorded in the choice of a confessor, but all those who manifest signs of a vocation should be directed to him…No one should fear to confess to the director. He is a father, who cannot help but love and sympathize with his sons.\(^99\)

Rome did not agree entirely with this preference of place for the director of religious communities and would regulate a distinction between the roles of the directors and the confessors.\(^100\) The practice of obligatory manifestation of the internal forum would no longer be the norm. Don Bosco could only recommend and encourage this relationship. Despite this apparent conflict, Don Bosco’s intentions remain clear and survived by attachment to directives and future amendments to the Constitutions. The understanding of the terminology of spiritual direction was not as clear. He did not use the “adjective” spiritual when referring to the director as the “natural confessor” of the community and of the boys. Don Bosco did outline nine points to be included in the monthly manifestations with the director, and these can be considered spiritual direction. But the separation of the internal and external forums could only be remedied with Don Bosco’s insistence upon the frequent approach to the sacrament of confession with a regular confessor.

After Don Bosco’s death, Don Rua, his first successor, would have to deal with the clarifications of the roles of the director and the confessor directly and establish a separation once and for all. This was mandated by Rome.\(^101\) Don Rua was obedient, but it was a jarring experience that seemed to the Salesians and to their father, a blow to the traditions of their family. This action would lead to the encouraged separation of the

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\(^98\) Elenco generale della Società di S. Fracesco di Sales, Turin, 1875, 14.

\(^99\) STELLA, Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality, 427-428.

\(^100\) Cf. STELLA, Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality, 422-430.

confessor from the person of the director and the provision for appointing a house confessor. What had not been lost; however, were the complementary roles of the confessor and the director. Don Bosco’s desire to see the director as the father of the community and of the youth would remain in place through all of the debates regarding internal and external forum. Don Bosco would not leave “a detailed methodical directory regarding the internal life of the individual” allowing these adjustments to be made without damaging the privileged position of the director.102

While “spiritual direction” as something seen outside of the strict manifestations made with the director was clearly not Don Bosco’s intention, the emphasis upon a personal and consistent mentoring survived. At the heart of Don Bosco’s spirituality, then, rested the importance of a fatherly relationship with the person seeking to grow in holiness. The role of the Salesian director remains a privileged one in Don Bosco’s family. Translated in future generations, this person, like a father, would oversee the spiritual nurturance of his children by whatever means at his disposal making sure that those in his care would frequent the sacraments of confession and communion and avail themselves of spiritual guidance that is intentional and consistent.

Thus wrote Blessed Philip Rinaldi to his Salesians in 1922:

Ahora bien, esta tradición de la parternidad directorial, el Beato la trasmitió a sus directores casi unida al acto y a las realidades más sublimes de la regeneración spiritual en el ejercicio del poder divino de perdonar los pecado. Porque el Beato ejerció ininterruppidametne durante toda su vida y con especial predilección este poder divino a favor de sus jóvenes. Confesarlos era su preocupación preferida y non la cambiaba con ninguna otra. Los confesaba apenas se levantaba, durante el día, a toda hora, en todas parte, y por al noche continuaba muchas veces hasta la media noche.103

4. Characteristics of Don Bosco’s Spirituality of Accompaniment

With the obvious emphasis placed upon the sacraments of the Eucharist and Confession, there are clear lines of thought which may be extracted from these observations in the life of Saint John Bosco and from the experience of those touched and transformed by him. These lines offer an outline of a specific spirituality which responded well to Don Bosco’s living situation in every dimension pertinent to his experience. This

102 CF. STELLA, Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality, 429-430.
103 BROCARDO, Dirección Espiritual en la historia salesiana, 28.
spirituality has survived the historical presence of Don Bosco and has guided the Salesian movement in its many manifestations up to our present time. From the vantage point of the present moment, let us summarize the characteristics which mark out this particular gift of spirituality from Saint John Bosco.

4.1. Presence

Amadeo Cencini has written a guide for formators of young people seeking training and direction for lives dedicated to religious and presbyteral ministries. His text, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity: Guiding Young People in Religious and Priestly Formation,* offers a three point explanation of accompaniment in the context of formation that serves as a marvelous framework for summarizing Don Bosco’s spirituality of accompaniment. The first essential characteristic Cencini identifies as “real, physical sharing.” He writes, “a daily shared life is the best source of information to know a person.” This was obviously something valued by Don Bosco as he carefully recalled the many persons with whom he lived and worked and studied whose presence seemed to shape the steps of his vocation. More than offering encouragement from afar, these persons lived in the midst of his questions and difficulties. They knew by experience both his desire and the obstacles presented to those desires at various stages. These persons, from his saintly Mother to pastors, teachers, and companions, offered more than simple advice. Most often they offered lived experiences of faith, of discernment, and of courage. Sometimes they even offered Giovanni Bosco shelter for living, books for study, or the means to move forward. In some cases, their contributions were by example and in others, their presence was demonstrably directional, such as the interest Don Giuseppe Cafasso took toward the young seminarian and priest in his care.

This characteristic of presence cannot be overlooked because these gifts of presence had a lasting impact which sustained Don Bosco long after these persons had died. Inside of this gift is an important detail. Had these offerings been nuanced by self-serving interests or merely based on human need in either party, they would have not had

105 CENCINI, *Spiritual and Emotional Maturity,* 41.
the lasting impact they did. Instead, motives far deeper than mere human friendship seemed to operate in Don Bosco’s life. At the same time, he had no fear of using terms such as “lavished affection on me”\textsuperscript{106} and other very human terms of love in speaking and writing of these persons. Surely the affection he had for each of these influences was obvious. Yet he found in each of these gifts of accompaniment more than a simple human consolation. He found a path to serving God and saving his soul. He found in these persons the very presence of God.

This presence is an essential component in a process that is both human and spiritual. Jesus Manuel Garcia observes that the substance of true accompaniment must qualify as spiritual to be authentic. It is a shared journey for the purpose of bringing one to a clear point of arrival.\textsuperscript{107} The one who accompanies become a spiritual “father” (or “mother” by implication) or “master” of this spiritual journey. The point of departure for this process is human and Christian development\textsuperscript{108} and therefore must include not only a spiritual reality but embrace all of the realities of the life of the person to be accompanied. This requires a person who is able to help the one accompanied to discover in themselves their desire for God, very often buried in their own circumstances of life.\textsuperscript{109}

In the biographical works Don Bosco gave us, we see his role as this master, this spiritual father clearly helping the young people in his care to make these discoveries. This intention remains intact, while the experience is very warm and very human. Both Amedeo Cencini and Jesus Manuel Garcia insist that this person in the role of spiritual master or father must have an awareness of the integration of the whole circumstances of the person accompanied and a mature understanding of the whole person psychologically. Cencini’s second component of accompaniment states this clearly:

\begin{quote}
If he [the person who accompanies, the formator] wants to be of help, he ought to combine in himself genuine spiritual wisdom with the knowledge of the human heart and of the laws of psychological development.\textsuperscript{110}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{106} BOSCO, \textit{MO}, 42.  
\textsuperscript{108} Cf. GARCIA, \textit{Accompagnamento Spirituale dei giovani}, 101-103.  
\textsuperscript{109} Cf. GARCIA, \textit{Accompagnamento Spirituale dei giovani}, 104.  
\textsuperscript{110} CENCINI, \textit{Spiritual and Emotional Maturity}, 42.
The third characteristic offered by Cencini is profound in its implications because it underlines the dynamic relationship that necessarily develops in a true act of spiritual accompaniment. The human sharing is, in fact, a sharing in the experiences of God. These must change not only the one accompanied, but the person whose role it is to offer guidance and support. This dynamic is at the heart of Don Bosco’s spirituality! He insisted that the shared journey brings salvation to the young person and is the particular path of salvation for the Salesian guide. Cencini links this understanding to the etymology of the term accompaniment: in Latin, *cum pane* means literally to share bread. Cencini elaborates:

To accompany a young person…implies more than spiritual direction or teaching things or establishing one-way relations; it is sharing and celebrating experiences, always new and full because they will be experiences of God, shared by two people undertaking a journey towards him. To accompany essentially means to share, and in this instance it means to share something as vital as “the bread for the journey,” i.e., faith, the memory of God, of the struggle, of search, and of love…

…Theirs is not just friendship but friendship in the Spirit. It can really be said that the formator [or the one who accompanies] continues his own formation when accompanying the young along the ways of the Spirit.¹¹¹

4.2. Prayer

It is tempting to consider the inclusion of prayer as an element that is too obvious to mention when discussing the act of accompaniment in spirituality or when considering spiritual direction. However, prayer has many styles and Don Bosco’s style was and remains unique. For this reason, the second characteristic of a spirituality of accompaniment necessarily includes a life of prayer and in the example and experiences of Don Bosco that prayer takes on a special form.

Early in his life, we see that prayer was part of living and breathing. It was as near to him as the earth and the sky. Beneath this daily life of prayer permeating all parts of Don Bosco’s life was an image of God as a gentle Shepherd calling him to service and a service that is linked to two important components: the guidance of a Shepherdess—Mary, the Mother of God, and the “goodness” of God. This “goodness” is a loving presence that longs to be united with the young. So strong is this yearning that God has become the very

food of the longing human heart. For Don Bosco, the goodness of God was experienced at its fullness in the gift of the Eucharist. To the Eucharist Don Bosco drew the young people, spending himself to prepare their hearts to receive this gift as often as possible. His insistence upon frequent confession with one consistent spiritual guide was to enable this frequent reception and the continuous molding of these young hearts to the goodness of God and his loving will for each of them.

So pervasive were these components of prayer in his direction of the young, that Don Bosco would enshrine the Blessed Sacrament and the devotion to Mary, the Immaculate Mother of God, as the two pillars of salvation. A spirituality of accompaniment, for Don Bosco, always included these two central devotions. From these two devotions, all other acts of piety, all acts of virtue would flow. Without them, Don Bosco saw no possibility of salvation in a world already plunged into the chaos of many specious political and religious ideologies. These devotions were the ground of truth, the destiny of humanity, the very salvation of souls.

Giorgio Zevini writes of the mediation of God in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ and makes of this mediation the model and task of the prayerful accompaniment. He calls Jesus the “pedagogy of prayer to the Father” and outlines the characteristics of this prayer. These characteristics define beautifully the relationship Don Bosco shared with God and to which he wanted to draw the young. Prayer, for Don Bosco, established an interpersonal and loving relationship with God. This act of relationship is always by God’s initiative as is particularly revealed in Jesus’ revelation of God as “Abba.” The response is, above all, an act of listening for God’s voice. This can happen despite our attentiveness, but Don Bosco’s spirituality encouraged docile and available hearts. In the act of listening, transformation takes place—a transformation touching every part of a person’s reality. Here we may easily find a link to the biographies and their demonstration of these transformative experiences. The life of prayer that brings

114 Cf. ZEVINI, *Educare alla preghiera “in spirito e verità,”* 149.
115 Cf. ZEVINI, *Educare alla preghiera “in spirito e verità,”* 149.
transformation is inevitably linked to the contemplation of love and spills over into the act of caring for others. These are the characteristics of Don Bosco’s prayer and that which he proposed for the young with whom he shared the journey to Christ.

4.3. Other-centered Living

Don Bosco was influenced very much by the Liguorian and Jesuit spiritualities of his time, but there is one important deviation from these paths of holiness that marks Don Bosco as unique. The spirituality offered to the young and to the collaborators of Don Bosco was much less monastic and inward centered than these other traditions. In fact, he departed on one very important detail from the directives of Saint Alphonsus Liguori who emphasized the importance of the eternal over every other created thing. Don Bosco also pointed his youth in the direction of the eternal, without compromise, but never to the disdain of the moment at hand. In fact, his spirituality embraced all of the opportunities of life and was fully intent upon giving the young direction in all parts of their lives. From their spiritual lives they would find the courage and stamina to pursue education for their betterment and the betterment of their societies.

Francis Desramaut develops this important focus of Don Bosco’s spirituality by quoting Don Bosco himself as written in The Companion of Youth and offering commentary:

“The only purpose for which (God) created you was to be loved and served (by you) in this life,” And at the risk of contradicting himself he added: “You are not in this world only to enjoy, become rich, eat, drink and sleep, as the beasts do, but your goal is to love your God and save your soul.” In this way he added some natural goals, that is, to enjoy, become rich, etc., to the supernatural end which was the end that really interested him: to love God and save one’s own soul. The only purpose of his “method of life,” a method of spirituality, as he explained to his boys, was to allow them to: ”become at the same time a source of consolation for their parents, do honor to their country, and be good citizens on this earth in order to be one day happy citizens of heaven.” Thus, this goal did not look only to the hereafter.

He wanted his students to fulfill their legitimate desires and to achieve happiness on two levels: on the level of grace first of all, but also on the natural level…

…For the most part, he did not believe in a dualistic anthropology, which sometimes seems to underlie his books and inspire his attitudes. A view of the Christian life which downplayed

117 Cf. ZEVINI, Educare alla preghiera “in spirito e verità,” 149-150.
118 Cf. DESRAMAUT, Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life, 142.
human values would have appeared suspect to him. He wanted to work for the physical, intellectual and moral development of the people around him. His brand of Christianity not only allowed but demanded a definite human development.119

In similar fashion we see this same pattern in the directives offered to Saint Dominic Savio and to Besucco and Magone. The stuff of holiness was to be found in the stuff of their lives. To be a good student, to be a good companion, to play hard and fairly, to pray with all your heart—these were the paths to holiness. Again and again Don Bosco demonstrated discomfort with the austere practices of mortification chosen by Savio and Besucco and directed these zealous hearts toward a wholesome embrace of their daily tasks.

At the center of this third characteristic is a vision of Church as shared communion. To be members of God’s family meant, for Don Bosco, to be responsible for the care of others in this world and for the inspiration to lead them to Christ for their salvation. Don Bosco’s spirituality lived comfortably in both worlds, walking on both sides of the realities of life—temporal and spiritual. He guided the young to think of themselves as instruments in God’s hands for saving the souls of their own companions and connected their own efforts to holiness inseparably from this duty.

The spirituality of Don Bosco was, for him, the act of participation in the lives of his young people and an act of mediation for their salvation. He inspired his colleagues and young charges with the same itinerary of holiness goading them to participate fully in their lives, fully in the lives of their peers, immersing themselves in the realities of their daily lives, consciously choosing to love God and to intercede and mediate by word and good example wherever there was a danger of falling from that eternal embrace of God.

**Conclusion**

*Mediation* and *participation* are two words which aptly describe the content and intention of Don Bosco’s spirituality. At no point was his spirituality intended for a retreat into the desert with an inclination for personal interiority. While his thirst for the spiritual is evident since his earliest days, his context was always nuanced by the love and direction

119 DESRAMAUT, *Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life*, 141-142.
of significant persons along his spiritual journey. His spirituality had been fashioned as an accompanied journey and his legacy enshrines this dynamic to this day.

Don Bosco’s personal journey fashioned a spirituality offering a specific framework. This relational path is a choice by the chosen. *It is initiated by God and demands response. It is relational.* A response allows a dynamic to spread to all those within the circle of Don Bosco’s embrace and to those sent in mission in the ages since Don Bosco’s lived encounter of God. God continues to invite through those called today, for them, and for the young. The response continues to facilitate reciprocity in the lived experiences and realities of the young.

This spirituality has the breadth to embrace the realities of the present moment and to offer them a model for following Jesus in those realities. Joseph Aubry offers this insight:

Don Bosco è rimasto vivo nella Chiesa di oggi. La sua figura attira. Il suo messaggio spirituale appare abbastanza ricco e flessibile per ispirare a un cristiano il suo progetto di vita, di una vita piena, dagli orizzonti vasti, in cui tutte le sue risorse saranno utilizzate e sviluppate. Abbiamo già notato in Don Bosco l’incontro singolare degli estremi, lo splendido accordo della natura e della grazia. Questa pienezza si ritrova nel tipo di vita cristiana che egli propone: abbraccia la terra e il cielo, gli interessi di questo mondo e quelli del regno di Dio, l’amore a questa vita presente e la sete della vita eterna. Colpisce la sua *completezza*: vi troviamo tutti gli elementi della vita cristiana armoniosamente coordinati e articolati attorno alla realtà fondamentale di Cristo pastore e della sua carità pastorale. Ma per andare a spiegazioni meno generiche, vorrei sottolineare due maggiori esigenze del cristiano di oggi alle quali la spiritualità salesiana di Don Bosco offre elementi di risposta.120

The recent past has witnessed a reawakening of Salesian Youth Pastoral Ministry testifying to the idea that, yes, “Don Bosco remains alive in the Church today.” This reawakening has helped to bring to light a beautiful and proud spirituality for the young of the world, a renewed invitation to meet Jesus Christ in the realities facing the young in our day. The impetus for much of the current vision has come from Don Juan Vecchi, Don Bosco’s eighth successor. His was a singularly special vision visited upon the Salesian world. Though Don Vecchi is no longer among us, like Don Bosco, his legacy remains strong. Through his reflections upon the realities facing youth in our day and his creative response to those challenges, Juan Vecchi brings to life the heart of Don Bosco encouraging a new style of accompaniment with and for the young. Don Vecchi has not

120 AUBRY, *La scuola salessiana di Don Bosco*, 678.
merely translated Don Bosco for our times. He has given us the tools to continue to fashion a spirituality that adapts to the needs of any given moment and place. His vision is up to the task of speaking to a “new moment”121 in the world and in the Church.

In fact, Don Bosco’s spirituality of accompaniment is a path of holiness whose choices are strong and vital in character.122 It includes an adherence to God’s loving plan of salvation, a full immersion in this world while living for the next, the inspiration for total self-donation beyond mere declarations, and an organic family in which to live out this plan in companionship with others, with the saints, and with the Mother of God.123

The second part of this work will focus, then, on the Salesian spirituality of accompaniment in the vision of this successor to Saint John Bosco, Don Juan Edmundo Vecchi Monti. His particular contribution will be explored and finally applied to the realities facing our world today.

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122 Cf. AUBRY, La scuola salessiana di Don Bosco, 678.
123 Cf. AUBRY, La scuola salessiana di Don Bosco, 678.
Chapter 2: Prophecy, Innovation, and Change: the Vision of New Horizons According to Don Juan Edmundo Vecchi

Premise

Perhaps it is too easy to assign greatness or sanctity to a person while they are still alive. Many persons have been cornered by their public reputations and most of these have either shown humble incredulity, as was the case with Princess Diana of Great Britain or they display a disdain for the attention and respond to the praise by returning a challenge to follow their same path. Both Blessed Teresa of Calcutta and St. Pio of Pietrelcina responded with impatience to such gestures of human respect and demanded that their calling be understood as the same calling issued to every person: “be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

A book, Don Juan Edmundo Vecchi Monti, VIII successore di don Bosco: dal Rio Negro al Po, was written by Nando Bacchi, at that time a Salesian president of a media school in Boretto Italy, and published in 1997. This was soon after the election of Don Vecchi as the Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco--Saint John Bosco’s successor. The occasion for the writing and presenting of the book was the awarding of an honorary citizenship by the town of Boretto in that same year as a gesture of appreciation for Don Vecchi’s ancestry: his father was an immigrant from this town.

The book offers a biographical sketch and other personal information, it also offers an educated approach to important themes already well known by the time Don Vecchi was named successor. Much less a book of empty praise, the text offers a review of the thinking of the new successor for that time. It simply calls upon the published record already in circulation. Such was the impact of this Salesian.

Nando Bacchi chose the following words of Don Vecchi to grace the back cover of his text and offers for this study a vision to explore and to share:

124 Matthew 5, 48
La profezia, la novità, il cambio non sono l’annuncio delle utopie temporali non realizzate dalle ideologie alle quali subentrerebbe la presenza ‘cristiana.’ La profezia è legata alla radicalità. È la speranza di revelare un altro orizzonte di senso e di vita in messo a un mondo dominato da interessi materiali, a esprimere in piccoli ambiti di sperimentazione la verità del Vangelo e la forza dell’amore... Questa profezia, novità, radicalità ha un primo spazio di manifestazione: è la comunità cristiana. Essa è sempre tentata di adagiarsi, di uniformarsi al mondo specialmente quanto questo sembra proteggerla e garantirla, quando si dimostra disposto a inserirla come una funzione nel suo ‘sistema.’ Può rimanere chiusa in sé, fare della fede cristiana una ‘religione’ nella quale contano i riti, le istituzioni e le organizzazioni, le iniziative e l’appartenenza sociale più che la presenza vivificante di Dio e la sua alleanza. La vocazione ha sempre un carattere di sveglia, di sfida all’esodo e di invito all’alleanza.126

The radicality and the revelation of another horizon in the sense of life is a gift of the Gospel. Don Vecchi has proposed an awakened vision of the Gospel for transforming systems at many levels. Because of this vision, the word “organic” will rise often in his writings and teachings. It seemed to be his mission to reassemble a wholeness that only the vision of a community might produce. The opposite of compartmentalizing and specializing, Don Vecchi sought to present the entire enterprise of youth ministry as a response of a wide community to the Body of Christ present in and among the youth of the world. Such an enterprise depends on solidarity and complementarities. Such a vision calls upon a renewal and a radicality of purpose that is nothing less than organic.

1. Don Bosco’s eighth successor

In the same fashion as undertaken in the review and examination of the life of Saint John Bosco, this study will investigate some details of the life of Don Vecchi. Within such details lie the seeds of his vision. It is hoped to discover that point of connection with Don Bosco in Don Vecchi’s story and by that means become acquainted with the details of Don Vecchi’s personal transformation. What about Don Bosco captured Don Vecchi’s heart?

1.1. A captured heart in the land of Salesian Missionaries

Juan Vecchi was born in Viedma, Argentina, to Albino Vecchi and Maria Ines Monti on 23 June, 1931. He was the seventh child born to the two Italian immigrants. His

126 BACCHI, Don Edmundo Vecchi Monti, back cover.
family fit well into the dominant groups of immigrants coming to Argentina from Spain, Germany, and Italy. While the Argentine government welcomed the waves of immigrants and the promise of progress was rich, the reality was often less hopeful. The Italian immigrants settled along the Rio Negro and faced many hardships. In fact, many would be required to demonstrate heroic bravery in many situations.127

The reality for any immigrant was harsh. It was necessarily fraught with vast changes of culture and religious practice that had the potential for deconstructing moral values and ways of life once familiar and unquestioned. Bacchi suggests that the impact of the migratory movements of the 19th century is still felt in the “New World” to this very day. There is no doubt that the transitory nature of their existence and the hardships laid upon the migrant families would be something Juan Vecchi would remember throughout his life. Despite the closeness and faith of his own family, he would be witness to much of the desolation that infected his generation and those of other immigrant families.128

Most significant for the inspiration of his Salesian life, Viedma was located in the region of Patagonia, the missionary territory in the dreams of Don Bosco. Don Bosco would live long enough to witness the realization of that missionary expedition. Don Bosco sent ten Salesians to that first South American missionary effort and, as he had dreamed, the Salesians were the most successful of any other group before them. Arriving in 1880 and establishing a college for youth in the region, their work called for rapid and vast expansion almost immediately.

Juan Vecchi frequented the Salesian Oratory from the time he was 11 years of age and again as a high school student. He was particularly taken by the theatrical arts and other activities at the oratory while he excelled as first in his class.129 His association with the Salesians was strengthened by the arrival of his father’s cousin, a Salesian Brother who would become famous for his care of tuberculosis patients in the town of Bahia Blanca until this Salesian’s death in 1951. Brother Zatti was beatified in April 2002 by Pope John

127 Cf. BACCHI, Don Juan Edmundo Vecchi Monti, 16-17.
128 Cf. BACCHI, Don Juan Edmundo Vecchi Monti, 19-20.
Paul II. Young Juan was certainly touched by the example of this giving man in his young life and it can be considered that he may have had direct influence upon Juan’s vocational choice.

At the age of 16, Juan professed his religious vows for the first time. This event preceded his father’s death by only a few months. Soon after, Juan crossed the ocean to Italy to continue his studies in Turin. There he studied philosophy and theology achieving a licentiate in theology a month before his priestly ordination in 1958. In his last years, Don Vecchi would confide in one of his former directors of this period, Salesian scholar, Don Pietro Brocardo, that he was deeply enriched by his exposure to the major superiors and the richness of the Salesian history and spirituality surrounding him during his studies at Turin.¹³⁰

1.2. A Salesian Called to Reveal New Horizons

It is unfortunate that to date there is little biographical work offered for Juan Vecchi. Most of the reflections made regarding his love for youth and for the work of Don Bosco are extracted from his own writings. What little has been written by way of tribute suggests that some of Juan Vecchi’s greatest and most moving work was produced during the last illness that took his life.¹³¹ His focus always seemed to return to marginalized youth and to collaboration with the laity.

In the writings of Don Vecchi one will find repeated references to poor children, those on the margins of society. In two of his circular letters as Rector Major, he focused his attention completely on the plight of such youth. We will return to that emphasis, but by way of introducing his concern, let it be noted that upon his return to Argentina after his ordination, Don Vecchi dedicated himself to the study of education and the formation of youth. He held various positions of administration in those years until he was called to Rome as a delegate for the Special General Chapter, GC20, held in 1971. Bacchi states that this experience would leave an indelible impression upon Don Vecchi and set a course for

¹³⁰ Cf. VAN LOOY, Fr. Juan Edmundo Vecchi, 3.
his future. He acted as a chair for a committee working on the revision of the Salesian Constitutions.\textsuperscript{132} He contributed much to this special gathering and was asked by the Rector Major, Don Luigi Ricceri, to return to Rome shortly to assume a position on the General Councilor as the Regional Councilor for the provinces of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. He held this post from 1972 until 1977. GC21 elected Don Vecchi as Councilor for Youth Pastoral Ministry and launched two successive 6 year terms of service, a period of vast impact and influence upon Salesian Youth Pastoral Ministry.\textsuperscript{133}

During those twelve years of service on the Council, Don Vecchi took seriously the call of Vatican II to read the signs of the times. For him, the signs of the times for a Salesian are found particularly among the poor youth of the world since it is primarily to these that the Salesian Family is sent. This focus upon the marginalized remained with Don Vecchi to the end of his life. Don Luc Van Looy, who served as his Vicar during Don Vecchi’s term as Rector Major, offered this summary in Don Vecchi’s Obituary Letter:

In the first place, Fr Vecchi had, and could pass on to others, a deep concern for poor youngsters. In one of his first circular letters as Rector Major, entitled: "He had compassion on them: new forms of poverty, Salesian mission, effectiveness’, he made a pressing appeal to all the Congregation for a decisive return to the young who are poor: he wrote in that letter: "Poor youngsters have been, and still are, a gift for the Salesians. Returning to them will enable us to recover the central element of our spirituality and our pedagogical practice: the friendly rapport which creates correspondence and the desire for growth. Today we must go beyond the established structures, beyond the normal things we give; we must go out, make a mental and pedagogical exodus towards relationships and shared presence’. In the spiritual anti physical insertion of the Salesians in the world of the poor and outcast he saw the way to live a simpler life and to renew our works.

He launched a new missionary frontier: "The young refugees of the world", with the desire of urging Salesians in war zones to open their doors and pastoral solicitude to the poorest of the poor, the refugees.

Fr Vecchi maintained this concern for poor youngsters to the end of his life. During the final months of his illness he returned to the topic time and again in conversation, suggesting articles for the Salesian Bulletin on the theme of street-children and boy-soldiers - he had seen boys of 12 in Africa with rifle in hand and ready for war, of youngsters sexually abused and exploited, and of immigrants and refugees, all victims of war. With the help of a confrere who

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\textsuperscript{132} Cf. BACCHI, Don Juan Edmundo Vecchi Monti VIII successore di Don Bosco, 23. \\
\textsuperscript{133} Cf. VAN LOOY, Fr. Juan Edmundo Vecchi, 3.
\end{flushright}
typed it for him, he prepared a book on children in difficulty in the present era of globalization.

He was concerned about finding effective solutions to these sad situations of youngsters, and also wanted the Congregation and Salesian Family to make its voice heard with civil institutions, with those responsible for economic policies, so that new and effective innovations could be made in styles of life and action.

In one of the last conversations he had with a journalist from *Vidimus Dominum*, he said that with globalization, the Valdocco of Don Bosco's time where youngsters who were marginalized through the effects of the first growth in industry lived, had now become as wide as the world itself. And among other things, he hoped that the Salesians, together with all religious working in the field of education, would raise their voices loud and clear against the exploitation of the young and promote some large scale initiative to fight its various forms.¹³⁴

Don Vecchi brought a sensitive and perceptive eye to the problems facing youth in the last decades of the twentieth century. As Councilor for Youth Pastoral Ministry, he called for nothing less than a new pastoral mentality. Luc Van Looy remembered this influence asserting that in the history of the Salesian Congregation, Don Vecchi “will be remembered for the new direction he gave to youth pastoral work…to rethink and renew the way of interpreting and giving effect to the Salesian mission.”¹³⁵

He carried this call into his office as Rector Major. He was elected Vicar of the Congregation at GC23 of 1990 and elected six years later as Rector Major. While Rector Major, he wrote about a new form of poverty that takes the form of a multiplicity so vast that it has crept into every corner of the world. He insisted that this was particularly the concern of the Salesian focus:

Tutte le forme di miseria bloccano e possono arrivare a distruggere le riserve educative della persona. A noi colpiscono in forma particolare quelle che compromettono le possibilità di crescita dei giovani, pur riconoscendo che non sono e non si possono trattare come fenomeni isolati e autonomi.

Le povertà giovanili, in cui giornalmente ci imbattiamo, hanno come causa l’indigenza economica, le carenze educative e culturali, la precarietà familiare, lo sfruttamento ignobile da parte di terzi, la discriminazione razziale, l’impiego abusivo come mano d’opera, l’impreparazione al lavoro, le dipendenze varie, la chiusura di orizzonti che soffoca la vita, la

¹³⁴ VAN LOOY, *Don Juan Edmundo Vecchi*, 6-7.
¹³⁵ VAN LOOY, *Don Juan Edmundo Vecchi*, 8.
devianza, la solitudine affettiva. A essa rivolgiamo uno sguardo attento come il campo del nostro impegno indicatoci dal Signore.\textsuperscript{136}

This passionate concern would not be reduced to a social activism but always remained focused upon the “gift of God.” It was Don Vecchi’s conviction that the Salesian vocation was a particular gift of God and God’s particular gift to the Church. His first address as Rector Major made these reflections upon Salesian consecrated life.

In his first circular letter to the Salesians, the new Rector Major examined the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on consecrated life. Don Vecchi reminded his Salesians consecrated by vow that theirs is a gift not only of service but one that opens new horizons in human history—horizons of values and testimonies stimulated by the gift of their consecration.\textsuperscript{137} He urged a focus upon this gift avoiding superficial reflection by recognizing “the mystery at work in us” to “get a deep grasp of the facts which challenge us.”\textsuperscript{138}

To face such facts, Don Vecchi called spirituality the first requirement of consecrated life. Still referring to \textit{Vita Consecrata}, the Rector Major saw spirituality as a “point of convergence” of theological, historical, biblical, and pastoral perspectives. The Salesian consecrated life is given its identity in “singular experiences of life in the Spirit.”\textsuperscript{139} While projects and rules of life enflesh this identity and surface particular charisms, the ground of the calling and mission always remains the effort to “tend toward holiness” by the initiative of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the starting point of the Salesian recognition of and care for youth is the call of the Spirit of God to immerse the Salesians into the “mystery of Christ” to aspire for “the perfection of charity.”\textsuperscript{140} The Salesian charism is a plunging into this mystery by plunging into the realities of young people most in need.

\textsuperscript{138} VECCHI, ACG 357, 10.
\textsuperscript{139} VECCHI, ACG 357, 11.
\textsuperscript{140} VECCHI, ACG 357, 11.
Don Vecchi extracted from *Vita Consecrata* a spiritual itinerary for the Salesian Family by enumerating various dimensions to be cultivated. He identified three dimensions offered in the exhortation: the *contemplative* dimension, which permeates all forms of consecrated life and reminds the consecrated of the presence of God at work; the *apostolic* dimension, which springs from this interior contemplation and connects the consecrated to the mission initiated by the Spirit of God; and the *ascetical* dimension, a form of continual emptying or kenosis which renders the consecrated obedient and available at all points of life.\(^{141}\)

In his review of *Vita Consecrata*, Don Vecchi underlined the pastoral dimension of Salesian Spirituality with an emphasis upon accompaniment:

Service to the dimension of spirituality goes beyond the confines of the Christian community and appears as an accompaniment and support for all who are seeking sense and direction. "All who embrace the consecrated life, men and women alike, become privileged partners in the search for God which has always stirred the human heart and has led to the different forms of asceticism and spirituality."

These “privileged partners” in Salesian spirituality are those who choose to journey with the young in their path to holiness. More than simply a commentary, Don Vecchi set a course and a direction for his years as Rector Major. It would not be God’s plan that the new Rector Major would live out a full term, but his impact would not be diminished, but strengthened by the cross he would soon bear.

**1.3. Interchange Between “Education” and “Holiness”\(^{142}\)**

At the top of the new Rector Major’s agenda was the integration of mission and community. His language was always focused on the task of integration in this and other areas of the Salesian vocation. From this focus would come a new vision of the entire community involved in the task of forming a young person—the educating pastoral community. The vital and integral role of the lay members of the Salesian family had been outlined in GC24, the Chapter on which he worked as Vicar.

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\(^{141}\) Cf. VECCHI, ACG 357, 12.
\(^{142}\) VECCHI, ACG 357, 21, Rome, Direzione Generale Opere don Bosco, 1996.
Don Vecchi referred to *Vita Consecrata* to underline the integration of the vocations of the vowed and lay Salesians:

There is a final indication given in the Exhortation, to which we need to give attention at the present day because it links up with the commitment asked of us by GC24: it is that of the laity, and particularly in the case of "associates and volunteers".

I will not delay on a comparison of indications and motives with those put forward in our capitular document on the same matter. The convergence is too evident to pass unobserved. Our purpose in going through this part of the Exhortation has only been to emphasize that what we are trying to realize is what the Church herself proposes and to show that all these aspects are linked together and mutually reinforce each other. Within them are working those who, according to the same Exhortation, are living and spreading the "spirituality of communion" and become "witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God's design".143

### 1.3.1. The Spirituality of Communion

During General Chapter, GC24, over which Don Vecchi would preside as Rector Major, the focus would be placed upon the importance of the Salesian community and pick up again the theme of “the spirituality of communion.” It would call upon the vowed Salesians in the role of extending the link between the apostolic calling of the vowed Salesians to the baptismal calling of the laity and their united work and witness as animators of a common project. To specialize and sharpen the educational enterprise would become for Don Vecchi the strengthening of evangelization and vocational accompaniment. Human maturity was linked to spiritual maturity and human progress, to spiritual deepening. In hindsight, it seemed that there was no area of Salesian life and mission left out of his examination, from education to formation, from spirituality to administration, from vowed life to the lay vocation. Yet, his efforts consistently reinforced the integration he sought leading to a comprehensive approach to youth pastoral ministry. The spirituality of the young would be shown as the shared spirituality of the Salesian Family. In this vision, apostolate, education, formation, and prayer would unite in one vast movement.

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143 VECCHI, ACG 357, 18.
Don Vecchi, as mentioned above, saw the whole world as Don Bosco’s Oratory at Valdocco; globalization required a global concern and outreach. For this reason alone, new models of pastoral ministry would be called upon and mentalities would be required to shift. These shifts would have to be much more than programmatic. With the world at our doorstep, Don Vecchi felt urgency for reading the moment accurately and shaping an appropriate response. His was not a call to update techniques, but to re-enter the heart of Don Bosco to make a new response.

1.3.2. A Robust Spirituality for a Global Oratory

In the first circular letter with its reflections upon *Vita Consecrata* and the completion of GC24, Don Vecchi laid out this plan for the Salesians for the coming years. Don Vecchi understood that the universal call for promoting “the spirituality of communion” required for that moment a search for a more “robust spirituality” capable of addressing the needs of that global Oratory. He wrote:

> This is our undertaking for the next six years. We are aware that we have been through a process of change of mentality, that we have rethought the content and method of pastoral work, and have brought up to date the structures of community life and of government. At present we are committed to calling in lay people, sharing responsibility with them and engaging together in formation, but as I pointed out in my closing address: "GC24 arrived at the discussion of spirituality in its search for a source of communion between laity and Salesians. There is a widespread awareness in the Congregation that our linkage with lay people needs a more robust spirituality if we are to face up together to the difficult challenges which the Salesian mission presents at the present day".  

How Don Vecchi delineated this plan for addressing these challenges is worth a review. Just as he read *Vita Consecrata* as a confirmation that the Salesian Congregation was indeed led by the Spirit of God, Don Vecchi spoke of facilitating the task of sharing mission and spirit with the laity with certain frames of reference already available. In the Salesian Constitutions, he reminded the Salesians that the chapter on the Salesian spirit was the starting point and basis for any presentation on their spirituality. He recalled that Don Viganò, his predecessor, had offered “certain traits which form the common

144 VECCHI, ACG 357, 12.
patrimony of all the Salesian Family.” Moreover, he linked to those traits the great work of GC23 for making the young people the common focus of both the lay and the vowed members of the Salesian Family:

GC24 sought to highlight what is best for bringing us to share the mission with the laity: a preferential love for the young and especially the poorest of them in the form of pastoral charity, the quality of educative activity and the family spirit, the commitment for the Church and the world prompted by "da mihi animas", the daily round of duties, relationships and professionalism lived in the presence of God, the educative practice of the continually renewed preventive system.

In this way our spirituality has been formulated for religious, for the young and for the laity: We have available texts for meditation and guidance. "We conclude GC24 with the conviction that to propose the Salesian spirituality to them is the proper and adequate response to a pressing appeal and the offering of a desired gift. In any case, the demand for spirituality prompts us to discover our family treasures, to develop and analyze more deeply those traits which Don Bosco has left us and which are so extraordinarily efficacious."  

The path set out, he insisted, would require an emphasis on lived experience, on community, on communication, and on direction. These, then, are the important touchstones of spirituality: the human lived-experiences of God, their shared celebration in community, the transmission of the encounter to others, and the seeking of ongoing growth and guidance. We have passed this way already with Don Bosco as we examined his lived-experience, his translation of these moments into an outreach within the community to youth in need, his sharing of the call to holiness in their lives, and applying that spirituality in today’s context by making a study of this spirituality for ongoing interpretation and direction.

1.3.3. To Educate Is to Evangelize, to Evangelize Is to Educate

It is interesting to highlight that Don Vecchi’s emphasis always returned to education. Even in this first circular letter with its emphasis on spirituality and sharing that spirituality with the entire Salesian Family, he turned his attention to education as the mission in which that spirituality is lived and applied. Don Vecchi proclaimed that God

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145 VECCHI, ACG 357, 13.
146 VECCHI, AGC 357, 14.
saved the world by educating the human conscience to enable a response. *Vita Consecrata* invokes the field of education as the first line of response to God in the mission of consecrated persons indicating that the Church’s mission is, at its most basic level, a mission of education.

What is specifically Salesian is the blending of two dimensions. Salesian spirituality combines the mission of education to the mission of evangelizing. To educate is to educate to holiness. Educators in this fashion present holiness as the goal of education.¹⁴⁷

2. **Fundamental Themes of Salesian Spirituality**

The distillation of much of Don Vecchi’s ideas regarding Salesian spirituality can be found in a document compiled in 2001 and published as a part of a collection. The text is straightforward in its title and purpose: *Fundamental Themes of Salesian Spirituality*.¹⁴⁸

The task at hand is just as straightforward: to offer a summary of these themes and to surface those ideas and contributions which led Don Vecchi to this work. The text offers fourteen separate themes, but this work will examine those most pertinent to the task of casting in higher relief animation as the Salesian form of spirituality. Such an examination may combine some of the themes or stress some over others. Yet, the intention remains to make the link to Don Bosco’s experience. We concluded the survey of that experience identifying three themes which embraced a deeper significance: the gift of presence, the foundation of prayer, and the formation of community for charitable outreach. With an eye on these themes in Don Bosco, we plunge into some of the themes presented by Don Vecchi. Brought to these themes, as well, will be contributions from his contemporaries for clarifying in greater detail the importance of the themes chosen.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. VECCHI, ACG 357, 20.
2.1. Life in the Spirit

The work of Don Vecchi uncovers a link to the study made by Don Raimondo Frattalone, one of the contemporaries who has written much about Salesian spirituality, spiritual direction, and formation. In referring to Don Bosco and in the effort to distill to its essence the spiritual and educative mission of the Salesians, Don Frattalone makes this synthesis: for a Salesian the mission is a threefold path of spiritual life. It begins as the access offered every day for achieving perfection; this access is permitted the Salesian to move from his personal identity into the identity of the community where the Spirit of God is the source of peace and the understanding of participation as children of God.149 This position within the Spirit of God gives the Salesian a “new light” for seeing the young to whom the Salesian makes approach. This is a place of solitude in which the Salesian receives the gifts of joy and peace which is passed on, by vocation, to the young in his care.150

This place of solitude creates a safe harbor for the young, especially for those most timid. Welcomed by the Salesian, the young person finds a space where love and peace are created, as they were in the experience of Don Bosco. This welcome becomes the invitation to journey along the road to Life by bringing the young immediately to Christ.151 In this way, our meeting with the young becomes a meeting for them with the true God, the God of salvation. The task of the Salesian educator, then, becomes the task of touching the heart of the young and manifesting for them the life of God in their longing hearts.152

Don Vecchi embellished these ideas in his treatment of this theme of life in the Spirit as the starting point and foundation of all spiritual experience and encounter with God. The contribution that Don Vecchi made to this treatment is vital, for he situates this life and action of the Spirit in the gritty, post-modern world of the young, deeply affected

150 Cf. FRATTALLONE, La Vita nello Spirito, 76.
151 Cf. FRATTALLONE, La Vita nello Spirito, 76.
152 Cf. FRATTALLONE, La Vita nello Spirito, 76.
by the coldness of scientific analysis. Don Vecchi recognized that religious and traditional institutions have lost their absolute authority and religious experience has been pushed to the margins of society.\textsuperscript{153} To allow one to see the Spirit of God, a Spirit which breathes and moves within this concrete reality, the minister to the young must be the one who recognizes the long view of God for humanity and becomes inspired to live a witness of charity testifying to the importance and value of human existence.\textsuperscript{154}

An experience of God begins with the Spirit of God. Don Vecchi sees the Spirit as the gift of fine-tuning which enables one to perceive God in the experiences of life. Such a fine-tuning neither negates the real world nor sees it apart from God. Instead, the Spirit allows one to see the relationship of God, humanity, and the world with each other. This fine-tuning, suggested Don Vecchi is important for the Salesian and the educator to discover the Word of God within culture itself and to find a path to salvation in the realities of life in the present moment.\textsuperscript{155}

\section*{2.1.1. The Lines of Action of the Spirit}

Salvation history consistently and persistently revealed that God manifested his name as Relationship. His plan for humanity is based on his identity as \textit{their} God and their identity as \textit{his} people. Therefore, it is within human development, and not simply or preferentially according to technical development, that humanity’s progress and fulfillment are found. Beyond mere logic and reason, this God has manifested again and again the desire for humanity to know and embrace this relationship. Even the intelligence which has gifted humanity and led to scientific knowledge is incapable of embracing this mystery of relationship. Instead, the Spirit makes possible for humanity to know this God by entering into the human heart and making transformation and faith possible.\textsuperscript{156}

Don Vecchi described three lines of action by the Spirit of God which enables that power to move the human heart: the \textit{messianic} or saving line, which pushes people to seek

\textsuperscript{153} Cf. VECCHI, \textit{Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali}, 10.
\textsuperscript{154} Cf. VECCHI, \textit{Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali}, 10.
\textsuperscript{155} Cf. VECCHI, \textit{Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali}, 12.
\textsuperscript{156} Cf. VECCHI, \textit{Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali}, 13.
freedom; the *prophetic* line, which operates in the enlightening and teaching of others to maintain hope in all the circumstances of history; and the *priestly* line of action, in which the Spirit empowers one to live in the world sustained by religious experience, ritual, prayer, and service. All of these actions empower humanity to live an authentic spiritual existence.  

2.1.2. **The Continual Action of the Spirit**

The peak of the experience of the Spirit of God is found in Christ. Jesus invited his companions to live by the Spirit and not by the flesh. Even before the birth of Christ, the Spirit of God moved through the creating Word. All of the events of the Old Testament led to the revelation of the Word at work in the world. Now, made flesh, the Word is revealed by the Spirit of God speaking in Jesus, descends upon Jesus as the sign of his favor with the Father, sustains and guides Jesus beyond temptation into the act of immolation for the salvation of the world. This is the Spirit that raises Jesus from the dead and who descends upon the disciples to carry the Gospel to the whole world.  

Don Vecchi, in this written work, makes a bridge between the early Church encounters of the Spirit of God with the encounters of our times, seeing in them the continual action of the Spirit. This action is found in the teaching of the Church, through Vatican II, and by other means. Always the same action leads to the same conclusion: for the people of God to see themselves as united to the bridegroom of Christ.

2.1.3. **The God or Relationship as the Spirit Moving in the Educator**

It is that the gift of the Spirit which moves in the heart of the educator and Salesian to live according to this God of relationship. God continues to be *their God* and they continue to be *God’s people*. From the dawn of creation, God’s action is one of accompaniment and relationship. The duty of the minister to the young is to live by this Spirit and to welcome the young into the knowledge and experience of their own lives as

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places of revelation and action of the Spirit of God. It is an invitation into mystery and not something that can be justified by scientific evidence. Yet, the mystery is not a poetic reading of reality. The mystery is the action of the Spirit enabling both the educator and the student to see the living and acting presence of God in their lives. Don Vecchi calls this a “new language” in which the Spirit of God speaks to the heart of the believer and by which the believer communicates this reality in life. This, he claims, is the recreation of an entirely new inner structure within a person giving that person the ability to work in the world according to the way of the Beatitudes.159

At this point in the discussion, we come to familiar terms from the life of Don Bosco. This growth in the Spirit leads one to “an adherence to the truth.”160 This adhesion to the truth is an adherence to Christ, who is, himself, the way, the truth, and the life. This is the ongoing call to the believer to conform all things to Christ: to love as he has loved, to live in communion with the Father, to put on the new spiritual person. This is the transformation of the heart that comes from the Spirit in the meeting of believers. This is the transformation of the heart that comes from the Spirit in the meeting between educator and student, between spiritual guide and pilgrim. Don Vecchi saw implicit in this meeting the priority of human development as not only steps in human progress but as steps toward communion with God.161

2.1.4. The Reality of Sin and the Spirit Enabling Transformation

There is, however, another reality that enters into this meeting, just as this same reality often loomed over the meetings with God throughout the history of salvation—the reality of sin. The mystery of the gift of the Spirit that enables humanity to live in a new way is not parallel to or distinct from this corrupted world of sin. This, in fact, was perhaps the greatest motivation for Don Bosco to reach out to the young. He was convinced that

159 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 18-20.
161 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 21.
outside of religion, there was no hope for humanity. Jacques Schepens underlines this conviction of Don Bosco:

For Don Bosco ideal humanity cannot be found either in human existence itself or in its specific dimension, nor even in the task of education or any other purely earthly concerns. Man cannot be fully understood on the basis of his engagement in this world. The one essential dimension is to live one’s life in friendship and peace with God and to practice one’s religion and the Commandments. To Don Bosco’s way of thinking, a human being without God and without religion is a stunted or a crippled being eternally unhappy. His social and educative enterprise seems to have been entirely aimed at this goal i.e. that good people might serve God in a joyful manner, to avoid sin in thought, word, and deed and that they should order, direct, and measure and control their actions towards enhancing the most fundamental dimension of their existence.\(^{162}\)

Guido Gatti puts side by side the reality of sin and the reality of the presence of the Spirit of God and describes the task of discerning from both of these realities. Like St. Paul, this is the arena of flesh and spirit, the letter of the law versus the spirit of the law in the moral development of the person. The goal of the Salesian educator in the face of this reality, and as moved by the Spirit of God in the Salesian’s own life, is to move the young person from a point of view of life and its choices from the third person to the first person. In this journey, the young person is invited to move from fear to intimacy, from the traps and pitfalls of life and sinfulness to the freedom that is offered in the experience of the love of God. Gatti calls this task for the Salesian the task of interpreting the Spirit of God in the lives of the young.\(^{163}\)

So it is that the one who accompanies begins first from his/her own experience of God initiated by God’s Spirit and leads to a shared journey of human and spiritual discernment and growth in the lives of the young person in need of accompaniment. The act of sharing reveals the mystery of the presence of Christ and enables the young person to make choices and perceive a reality beyond the mere physical and concrete situations of life. These choices and this perception, however, are integrated into the ingredients of everyday life making spiritual growth human growth, and vice versa. The realities of sin

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and corruption are ever present and demand a sober awareness of human nature that is always balanced by the concurrent reality and conviction that both the one who accompanies and the one in need of direction are truly children of God.

2.2. Don Bosco as Type and Model of Salesian Spirituality

Don Vecchi’s text moves from the action of the Spirit to the heart of Salesian patrimony by invoking the model of Don Bosco for Salesian spirituality. Because we have spent much of this effort to underline elements in Don Bosco’s lived experience and highlighted the legacy that has come down to us by the witnesses of hearts transformed by a meeting with the Founder, we mention this theme in Don Vecchi’s text as an affirmation of this examination. Still, Don Vecchi offers special insight into some of the details we have already treated at length. They bear mentioning in this text. In fact, Don Vecchi alerted his Salesians to find their “genetic code” in Don Bosco and to participate in personal development of holiness according to that code.164

2.2.1. Don Bosco as “Father” and “Teacher”

Immediately, Don Vecchi took up the title given to Don Bosco as “Father.” As familiar as it is, he wanted to free the term from any sentimental or nostalgic entrapment. Instead, this word signals for the Salesian the one who carries the charism in the same way that Jesus referred to Abba, Father—the One who sent Jesus in mission. The title also evokes a memory of paternal guidance, a privileged place of authority that is ruled by loving kindness, an education of the heart.165

From “Father,” Don Vecchi moved to the title always paired with it, “Teacher.” He explained the importance of the “heart” in this image of Don Bosco:

Acconto a quella di Padre viene collocatao l’accenno al maagistero: “Maestro.” Piuttosto che all’autorità di imporre una dottrina, allude all’arte di indegnare, di farsi capire, di parlare col linguaggio del cuore (emphasis mine), di comunicare con la vita. Accenna al fatto che noi l’abbiamo sequito lasciandoci girare dalla sua esperienza e, attraverso di lui, abbiamo voluto

164 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 24.
165 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 26-27.
seuire Gesù Maestro. Il magistero è un motivo o tema che ricorre sovente nelle sue raccomandazioni e commenti. Nel primo sogno appare la figura della Maestra. Nel testamento dice di Gesù: “Egli sarà il nostro maestro, la nostra guida e il nostro modello...” è collegate al tema della saggezza, che è centrale nella sua pedagogia, nella sua mentalità, e nella sua vita spirituale.

The context for invoking these familiar titles, besides elaborating on their meaning, was for Don Vecchi to keep alive the living connection between Don Bosco and the present generations. He feared the loss of connection with the distance of time. The flood of interpretative images of Don Bosco could, he warned, lessen the centrality of God’s unique gift in the Founder. In the same breath, however, he stood squarely on the conviction that the best transmission of Don Bosco was indeed alive in the “Salesian culture” carefully preserved in Don Bosco’s wide religious family and particularly in the continued traditions of the Salesians of Don Bosco and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

2.2.2. Seeing with a Father’s Eyes

Referring to the “splendid accord of nature and grace” found in Don Bosco, Don Vecchi asserts that, like the great saintly figures before him, Don Bosco deserves to be studied. Found in Don Bosco are amazing balances between austerity and gentleness, intelligence and practicality, holiness and an easy disposition in the world. Don Bosco found signs of God’s intimate friendship in his celebration of friendship and relationship with others on many levels. Many dimensions of the personality of Don Bosco fell under scrutiny at this point in the text. It is here that Don Vecchi also turned to the testimony of Don Albera who exclaimed so enthusiastically his singularly special experience of Don Bosco. In similar fashion, Don Vecchi’s beloved director during his theological studies at the Corcetta, Don Pietro Brocardo resonated with similar affection and praise, especially when considering the deterioration of the idea of a “father” in modern days. As a father according to the model of Don Bosco, one is able to recognize in the children their beauty and importance:

\[\text{166 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 28.} \]
Le ideologie del nostro tempo, che hanno messo pesanti ipoteche sulla figura paterna, sono oggi in difficoltà. Assistiamo infatti ad un reflusso verso il padre, non più figura da rimuovere, ma figura centrale e necessaria all crescita armonica, equilibrata dei figli, sia pure con modalità di presenza e forme nuove, che sembrano chiamare in crisi i suoi classici ruoli.

Un padre più autorevole che autoritario, più vicino al modello che all legge, più amico e fratello che personaggio. Da questo punto di vista don Bosco, per più di un verso, si revela nostro contemporaneo: tanto il suo modo di essere padre è sintonia con le aspirazioni moderne. Lui che raccomandava ai suoi direttitori: “Più che superiori siete padri, fratelli, amici.” Senza dubbio il suo essere padre trova la sua più essenziale ragione di essere in quella paternità nella fede di cui parla spesso S. Paolo (1 Ts 2,7-8.10-11). Una paternità tuttavia alla quale non manca lo splendore umano.167

A contemporary bishop described Don Bosco’s will as void of the word, “impossible.” Don Bosco was not, however, impulsive. This same remembrance records Don Bosco’s care in making decisions. While he was always very practical he made many decisions by making recourse to deep and trusting supernatural principles.168

2.2.3. A Father’s Balance of Love and Discipline

To love and to uphold discipline is a tough balancing act. This is the second characteristic offered by Don Brocardo. He recalls the words of Don Albera and Don Rinaldi as they wrote lovingly of the family Don Bosco created. Don Bosco’s power of attraction resided in his authentic kindness and welcome, but coupled with that was “intransigence” when it came to certain principles:

“Sempre padre,” don Bosco non fu però mai un padre permissivo ed imbelle; non dismissionò mai dale sue responsabilità. Le parti odiose le lasciava ai suoi collaboratori; tutti però apevano che era intransigente e fermo, specialmente in fatto di furto, di bestemmia e di scandalo.169

Despite his ability to be unbending in certain areas, this did not distance the young people from him nor diminish their love for him. They perceived in this father a care that

167 Pietro BROCARDO, Don Bosco: Profondamente uomo profondamente santo, in “Studi di spiritualità: a cura dell’Istituto di Spiritualità della Facoltà di Teologia dell’Università Pontificia Salesiana,” 12, Roma, LAS, 2001, 40. Don Brocardo enshrined three characteristics in the image of Don Bosco as father and teacher. He described his will as both “indomitable” and “flexible.”
168 Cf. BROCARDO, Don Bosco: Profondamente uomo profondamente santo, 38.
169 BROCARDO, Don Bosco: Profondamente uomo profondamente santo, 42.
reached deeply into every part of their lives. To disappoint Don Bosco was, in itself, enough of a punishment for any one of these students.

2.2.4. The Sensitivity of a Father

Don Bosco’s third fatherly characteristic, according to Don Brocardo, was his ability to be both forceful and sensible. He compares Don Bosco’s sensitivity and sensible character to Mamma Margherita and, by way of association, to the Most Holy Mother of God. His strength was, in fact, his sensitive nature. He was sensitive to the needs of the young, to the dangers of their souls, to the strength of their gifts and potentials. Don Brocardo cites the recollections of Don Rua and Don Cagliero remembering how easily tears would come to Don Bosco’s eyes. In the end, suggests Don Brocardo, without this profound sensitivity, there would be no talk of the powerful “loving kindness” of Don Bosco’s preventive system, his unique “amorevolezza.”

2.2.5. The Hidden Quality of Holiness

Moving to other dimensions of Don Bosco’s personality, Don Vecchi, recognized the cultural and religious strength characteristic of his Piedmontese roots. Don Vecchi insisted that beyond these traits, his rich humanity with its sensitivity and down-to-earth practicality had the ability to mix with the problems of his day and was evidence of Don Bosco’s generous response to God’s grace. Unlike the “story of the soul” left by St. Therese d’Lisieux or Blessed John XXXIII, Don Bosco’s story had a hidden quality of holiness. Though hidden, it was profound and manifested itself in a style of action. So profound was Don Bosco’s faith in God that he lived as though the invisible were visible to him (in this, Don Vecchi recalls the reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, 11, 27). Important to this trait, Don Bosco’s response to grace was translated into a movement out to others, always. His encounter in faith brought him to a project of life. Inspired by this, Don Vecchi urged his Salesians:

170 BROCARDO, Don Bosco: Profondamente uomo profondamente santo, 44-45.
171 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 33-34.
Le Constituzioni Salesiane diranno che la nostra consacrazione compredne simultaneamente la vita communitarian, la sequela Christi e la missione giovanile. Ma è questa che dà a tutta la vita il suo tono concreto. Quello che ci distingue e ci plasma. É il luogo dove si esigono e dove si esercitano le virtù del Salesiano, dove egli è obbligato a riprodurre lo splendido accordo tra umanità e senso di Dio.172

2.2.6. The Grace and Mystery of Salesian Identity

In the end, Don Vecchi called the Salesian world to the model of Don Bosco for motives much deeper than academics and study, though one of Don Vecchi’s preoccupations had certainly been to foster ongoing formation and a deepening of Salesian study. In his last circular letter, ACG 375, he concluded a moving discourse on the virtue of Salesian obedience with this call to return to Don Bosco as the foundation for a particular grace and mystery that is Salesianity:

It was not difficult to detect in recent General Chapters an increased effort on the part of the Congregation to better understand its Founder and his place in God’s plan. And this is not for reasons of theological academics, but to clarify the grace and mystery of our identity.

Meditating once again in the light of the Spirit on the whole story of Don Bosco, we find it to be a salvation event in which we too are involved, and that “for this reason his story is our story also”. “The relationship of sons and disciples that Salesians live with regard to Don Bosco” is a true and enduring grace.

We recognize in Don Bosco the guide molded by the Risen Christ to point out to us – educators and young people together – a Gospel way of missionary and youthful sanctification.

For this reason it is a good thing that we should continue to love and sing, in the Salesian world, that old hymn of the beatification “Don Bosco ritorna”, which well expresses our continuing commitment to “bring Don Bosco to life again in ourselves” (M. Rua).173

2.3. The Lord Consecrates the Salesian by the Gift of the Spirit

It has already been stated that the foundation and starting point of consecrated life and, therefore, of Salesian life, is the gift of the Spirit. In Don Vecchi’s treatment of the

172 VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 35-36.
themes, he addressed his Salesian religious family directly. Quoting John Paul II,\textsuperscript{174} he makes transparent God’s intention for this consecration as a response to the action of God’s Spirit “ceaselessly crossing the heart of humanity in the human story.” Don Vecchi recalls this action of the Spirit throughout salvation history and situates the Salesian consecration within that line of action. In fact, by baptism and by religious profession, the Salesian consecration springs forth from the action of the Spirit of God. It is God’s gift to us and to the Church. He continues:

Uno dei tratti che impressiona di più nella vita di Don Bosco è la convinzione di essere stato scelto da Dio per una missione. È il tema del primo sogno, che costituisce poi la trama delle sue “Memorie dell’Oratorio.” Ma la medesima consapevolezza la mostra quando riepilogo la storia delle congregazioni...

(...) Questa consapevolezza è alla base di qualsiasi sviluppo della nostra spiritualità salesiana.\textsuperscript{175}

This conviction of being chosen by God is so essential to the Salesian mission and spirituality that Don Vecchi insisted that neither could possibly progress without a constant return to the source and origin of that choice. The result of that return will create a language and attitude better suited for the present day. This will allow for a profound recounting of what has been handed down to the Salesians as the special gift is reconsidered for its meaning within our situations and cultures of the present day.\textsuperscript{176}

\subsection*{2.3.1. Communal and Personal Consecration}

Salesian consecration is both communal and personal. It requires a personal response to the gift of God. While the consecration and mission is for community, the response is radically free and the choice of the one called. This choice is an option, as it was for Don Bosco, for a plan of life that is pursued with care and attention, returning to the source of the Spirit. With this choice, Don Vecchi offered a warning. Two extremes may creep into this understanding of calling. The first extreme is to reduce love to a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{174} Cf. \textsc{John Paul Ii}, Encyclical Letter “\textit{Dominum et Vivificantem},” n. 59.
\item \textsuperscript{175} \textsc{Vecchi}, \textit{Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali}, 38.
\item \textsuperscript{176} Cf. \textsc{Vecchi}, \textit{Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali}, 36.
\end{itemize}
superficial feeling or simply a movement of an adolescent sensitivity. The second extreme is to allow our hearts to dry up in intellectualism. The consecrated are men and women in a religious sense. They must appear as professionals in the experience of God. Their consecration must serve as a witness for the option of holiness and as the guiding principle of life. As such, it is far more than a feeling or a developed intellectual stance. Such a commitment is always a call to make love real in its fullest and most divine self-offering while, at the same time, it is the informed and studied response to bring the Gospel to life for others. For Salesian consecration, this is especially urgent for those given the specific tasks of authority and animation.\textsuperscript{177}

2.4. Pastoral Charity

In looking at pastoral charity, Don Vecchi made three passes. First, he examined charity as presented in the Gospels. Secondly, he examined charity according to “pastoral specifications.” And finally, he turned his attention to Salesian pastoral charity. A repeat of this process is not necessary. It has been clearly stressed that the response to God’s call is a response made by the action of the Holy Spirit which is exemplified most completely in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and which is always directed outward into service. Thus summarized, we look at the nuances Don Vecchi offers for a specific Salesian pastoral charity.

2.4.1. Charity without Limits or Borders

In brief, Salesian charity is the preventive system. (A more thorough explanation and application of the preventive system will be treated in 1.4.7. in this treatment.) Don Fratallone offers a succinct definition. He reports that Salesian charity is the charity of Don Bosco, which was a charity “without limits or borders.”\textsuperscript{178} This charity has been incarnated across many cultures in the 120 years since Don Bosco’s death and has been characterized by Don Bosco’s own words, “It is enough that you are young for me to love you.”

\textsuperscript{177} Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 48-52.
\textsuperscript{178} FRATTALLONE, La Vita nello Spirito, 82.
This is a charity of a “Father and Teacher.” The Salesian accompanying a young person welcomes him or her with a desire to help them understand their past, present and to enter the future with them to help them find order in the midst of their problems. As a teacher, the Salesian is patient and attentive looking for the right moment to intervene in the young person’s life with aids for understanding. Such patience is perceived as hope, never abandoning the young person or giving up on their situation. Like a pregnant mother, this patience nurtures and slowly brings to birth the full person in their care.179

2.4.2. Charity of Kindness and Gentleness

The mark of this charity is kindness and gentleness demonstrated by an intimate heart that readily adapts to the needs of others, even before a word or gesture is made.180 It enters into the dialogue of growth and maturity to offer encouragement and a climate of attentive listening. Such a charity reflects a profoundly supernatural charity that is, in fact, a movement of the Spirit to enter into a true interpersonal communion with the young. The experience of love arises from the experience of the love of God passed down to the young.

2.4.3. Salesian Charity as Apostolic Charity

Don Vecchi summarized the specific character of Salesian charity stating that it is an apostolic charity. As such, it expresses itself and grows in pastoral ministry. It is an action that needs a soul or it will burn out quickly. With a soul, it can thrive easily with trust and joy in the pastoral work at hand. The tensions that militate against Salesian life—tensions between action and prayer, between community life and mission, between education and ministry, between professionalism and apostolic availability—find unity in

179 Cf. FRATTALLONE, La Vita nello Spirito, 82.
180 Cf. FRATTALLONE, La Vita nello Spirito, 82.
this charity. Every challenge in this pastoral ministry is buoyed and spurred on by the command of Jesus to love as he has loved.181

2.5. The Community as the Locus, Sign, and School of Salesian Spirituality

After thirty years of evolution in thought and practice, the Salesian Youth Pastoral Department in Rome called a gathering of youth pastoral delegates from Salesian provinces all over the world. This took place at the Casa Generalizia in Rome in April 1998. Don Antonio Domenech and the Youth Pastoral Team compiled thirty years of resources and developed thought into a manual to be used throughout the world. Don Vecchi welcomed the delegates and encouraged each to bring back to their province a renewed vision and a plan of ongoing formation. This was the task of review and preparation set down for nearly three weeks in those meetings.

2.5.1. New Proposals

The successor as Councilor General in Youth Pastoral, Don Antonio Domenich, stressed the importance of two central ideas. He insisted that what had evolved had been a new vision of pastoral ministry requiring a completely new mentality. He referred to this mentality as a “new pastoral mentality.” With this new mentality would come a “new style of Salesian presence.” Don Antonio and the Pastoral Team set about the business of walking the Salesian world through the thirty-year span of ideas and movements to arrive at this new place. The content included in their work the formation of pastoral teams, the development of local pastoral plans and provincial pastoral plans. The proposal for a new understanding of the educating community and its makeup would lead to new strategies of planning and implementing with new forms of representation. The Salesian Community was placed at the center of an organic structure for the animation of the pastoral outreach giving it form and content.

181 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 63 (my own translation and interpolation).
2.5.2. An Evolution of Thought and Practice

Many of these ideas were outlined in the guiding texts of the Youth Pastoral Handbook. Don Antonio explained the evolutions taking place in the world of the young and in Salesian understanding of the role of the Salesian community. The Youth Pastoral Guide (PGS) offered a review of its history.

Beginning with the Special General Chapter of 1971 and reviewing five chapters leading to the moment of the publication of the Youth Pastoral Guide, the Youth Pastoral Team highlighted the key components. The SGC 20 was the grounding force clarifying the mission and its focus in view of the Second Vatican Council and placed the Salesian mission within new historical settings. This moved logically to an updating of Don Bosco’s Preventive System for modern times in the deliberations of GC21 (1978). In this Chapter, the Salesian Community was identified as the animator of many apostolic efforts and called for the drawing up of Salesian Educative Pastoral Projects (SEPP). It went onto clarify Salesian identity in changing locations of Salesian ministry.

By 1990, GC 23 would offer responses to the new and rapidly changing situations of young people in their lived contexts. It called upon the SEPP to become a process of educating to the faith. In 1996 GC 24 brought this mission and its planning under the broad horizons of a vast movement which Don Vecchi had referred to as the Salesian Youth Movement, a sharing of spirit and mission involving many persons. This Chapter reiterated the central and critical role of the Salesian Community to serve as the animators of this vast movement. The Pastoral Team added their conclusion:

To the general indications offered by the General Chapters have been added the more detailed reflections made by the Youth Ministry Department, the Pastoral Centers and the Provinces themselves in an effort to provide an adequate pastoral program. These efforts have produced three major results: the elaboration of the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project (SEPP) on the part of the Provinces and local communities; Salesian Youth Spirituality (SYS) spread and deepened among the young as a unifying content of the Salesian Youth Movement (SYM);
and, the processes of human and Christian formation drawn up in various parts of the Congregation as a modern practical synthesis of evangelization of youth.\textsuperscript{182} 

GC23 took up the “new situations” of the young and introduced the Educative Pastoral Plan (SEPP). GC24 placed the formation of this plan into the care of “vast movement of persons” sharing in the youth pastoral mission. This Chapter outlined the crucial role of the Salesian Community as the animating nucleus of the Educative and Pastoral Community (EPC). Don Vecchi had long been the advocate for this understanding of the Salesian role of animation.

\textit{\textbf{2.5.3. The Salesian Community of Today}}

In his convocation of GC25 on 11 June 2000, his intentions were explicitly to look at the Salesian Community in a new way: “We have defined and specified this aspect with the expression: ‘The Salesian community today: its fraternal life, its evangelical witness, its animating presence among the young.’”\textsuperscript{183} Referring to the studies given to this effort, Don Vecchi wrote of “the Salesian community in its new pastoral role.”\textsuperscript{184}

Close to his heart, even at this moment, were the young people caught in the “new plagues” caused by reckless globalization. His cry for renewal, joined to that of the Church’s call in \textit{Vita Consecrata}, was nuanced by a felt longing he perceived among Salesian communities all over the world. He witnessed “a widespread unease” as Salesians sought to find more authentic expression of their vocation in such turbulent times. Within this unease, however, he also saw the desire to be a sign of authentic communion in the world of the young so fractured by the mass communications and creating “social problems with global dimensions.”\textsuperscript{185} This sign, he insisted, is a prophetic sign of hope: “our fraternity can constitute a stimulus and a prophetic sign.” To become this sign, he proposed a focus upon the Salesian community for this General Chapter.


\textsuperscript{183} VECCHI, ACG 372, Rome, Direzione Generale Opere don Bosco, 1999, 5.

\textsuperscript{184} VECCHI, ACG 372, 5.

\textsuperscript{185} VECCHI, ACG 372, 8-9.
The journey of faith, to be proposed to the young and to be made with them, requires the witness of a community in continual renewal and the insertion of such a community in the youthful world and context with a new pastoral quality.

At the same time, the animation of the educative community and of the Salesian Family presupposes a Salesian nucleus which lives a life of brotherhood, works in solidarity and constantly adapts its criteria of involvement.  

2.5.4. The Theme of Interpersonal Relationships in Community

Two themes were stressed by Don Vecchi as he presented his reflections on the Salesian community: relationships and communication. How central these are to accompaniment! As he traced out lines of thought from the Constitutions and various chapters, he suggested that there were necessary conditions to assure healthy relationships. The fraternal life found among the Salesians demand these conditions for the sake of their communal effectiveness as a prophetic sign of the Kingdom of God. Young people are attracted to wholesomeness and holiness together. The conditions he suggested included stability of the soul, the ability to make reflective appraisal of persons and events, and the ability to make lasting relationships and obligations. On the last condition, Don Vecchi dedicated much input and insight. He underlined that within the Salesian community, each member would have varying degrees of friendship with each other and with others outside of the community, but he urged a calm and balanced openness to all. Mature friendships arise from profound interiority and depth.

What can work against the prophetic sign is the blocking that some individuals exert on others in these communities. The obligation in the light of the Word of God is to rebuild such relationships in good faith. Delicately addressing the situations of conflict that inevitably arise in some situations, Don Vecchi pleaded for a generous openness and reconciliation. He called for heroic patience along with truthful and helpful intervention. In this way, love truly does conquer all situations, even the most desperate. This is not an

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186 VECCHI, ACG 372, 11-12.
187 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 72.
188 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 75-76.
option, because the purpose of fraternal life is to be a prophetic sign of the presence of the body of Christ in the world.

2.5.5. The Theme of Communication in Salesian Community

Just as important for this sign is effective communication. This form of communication is not to be confused with the task of social communications or media. This is the ability of daily communication between persons and the ability to communicate one’s self effectively. Don Vecchi offered three conditions to foster such communication. The first is the ability to trace the directions in which communications need to go. This includes both vertical and horizontal communication: exchange between authority and among peers. The second condition insists upon active involvement of all persons in communicating by not allowing any one person to dominate or recede into anonymity. The third condition works toward satisfactory levels of communication by determining what is essential to be shared by all and to understand how to bring others into conversation for important things.189

Obviously, there are many levels of communication and they cannot be considered equal. Don Vecchi indicated that there can be a very negative lack of communication. There can also be the superficial and banal communication that really does not touch at the level most important for human concern. A common communication style involves the work. Communication can function at the level of a job to be discussed or executed. This is functional but insufficient for living with others or for inspiring the young. At the highest level, though, is communication that is heart-to-heart and shares at the level of one’s vocation.190 This is what nourishes relationship and sharing. It is this which inspires emulation and admiration.

189 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 77-78.
190 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 78-80.
2.5.6. The Salesian Community as the School of Holiness

Perhaps we are tempted to think that this detail is unnecessary. However, if the heart of Don Bosco’s pedagogy and spirituality is relationship, it must be authentically found among his family given the task of this animation. These details have much to contribute to the qualities and conditions necessary for an effective and sincere act of spiritual accompaniment. In this theme, Don Vecchi wrestled with the nitty-gritty realities of life in community. He examined the call of the Spirit given to those communities to be signs of fraternity that are prophetic. Yet, beyond this, he insisted that this sharing is to be a school of communion, teaching others how to live together, to share relationships that are healthy and other-centered, and to communicate honestly and effectively.

So important was this theme to the whole spirituality as perceived by Don Vecchi, that he cautioned against a superficial treatment of the theme. He wrote:

The objective of GC25 is not so much what the community and confreres must still do for the young, but what – at the present day – they must be for them as they live with them. Before all else we must keep in mind what we are and how we live, so as to act more effectively from an evangelical point of view for the benefit of those to whom our mission is directed.

It is a question of carrying out an evaluation of our community life with the spirit and method of evangelical discernment, so as to discover ways of Salesian fellowship able to respond to the demands of the following of Christ and of the mission, as these have been presented in the latest ecclesial documents and by General Chapters, and how they appear after the educative and pastoral changes which we have tried in recent years.191

In the convocation for this Chapter on the Salesian Community, Don Vecchi offered the same points of reference already mentioned, namely fraternal life and communication, but he added to these evangelical witnesses, animating presence among the young, and grace of unity.192

The Salesian community is most effective in its Gospel witness when by their communal example they animate the young. The root of this witness is always the Spirit of God. Therefore, as Don Vecchi described it, “the soul of this witness is spirituality, the

191 VECCHI, ACG 372, 13.
192 Cf. VECCHI, ACG 372, 15.
desire to shape one’s life according to the Spirit.” At the heart of the community witness is the reality that the Salesian community is called together by God for the single purpose of living in holiness and offering that holiness to the young. This is in the Salesian Rule, as Don Vecchi highlighted:

The Constitutions declare that holiness is the most precious gift we can offer to the young, the principal contribution of Salesian religious to human education and advancement. Holiness has a temporal value not only through works of charity for the benefit of the poor, but for the vision, meaning and dignity it gives to human coexistence.” In a world beguiled by atheism and the idolatry of pleasure, possession and power, our way of life bears witness, especially to the young, that God exists, and that his love can fill a life completely.

By a life of “assiduous prayer”—rather than mere moments that are prayerful—Don Vecchi assured the Salesians that they would indeed be effective witness of the Gospel. It is in this context of living from an authentic center of spirituality that the Salesian is able to share significant and transforming presence. Here is enumerated the styles of presence most effective as accompaniment. Here is the school of holiness offered by example. The vowed Salesian community is given the unconditional charge to teach by example, to live in faith, to live in dependence upon divine providence, to love freely and in such a way as to offer freedom.

Don Vecchi called the evangelical counsels the privileged place of evangelical witness referring once again to Vita Consecrata:

“The decision to follow the counsels, far from involving an impoverishment of truly human values, leads instead to their transformation. (…) Thus, while those who follow the evangelical counsel seek holiness for themselves, they propose, so to speak, a spiritual ‘therapy’ for humanity, because they reject the idolatry of anything created and in a certain way they make visible the living God.”

This requires an effort on our part to live them not only with consistency and truth, but also in deep dialogue with present-day culture, so that their humanizing value is clearly seen.

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193 VECCHI, ACG 372, 22.
194 cf. C 25
195 cf. C 62
196 VECCHI, ACG 372, 23.
197 VECCHI, ACG 372, 24, quoting VC 87.
The dialogue he spoke of in this context is indispensable for the Salesian school of holiness so that the accompaniment and witness remains effective for the present realities of youth and to “present a successful way of realizing human experience.” Therefore, the animating presence among the young has had to change, suggested Don Vecchi, because of the complexity of the times. One of the traits of the present moment is the fleeting nature of relationships.” This increases in everyone, but especially the young, the desire for communications and relationship.” Recalling GC24, Don Vecchi reminded his Salesians that the young had asked them to be with them more often, to share their lives even at informal moments in order “to help and accompany them in their formation.” They asked for opportunities to participate and assist in the mission of education and evangelization.

2.6. Accompaniment as Various Forms of Presence

Don Bosco’s spirituality of accompaniment demands a transformative presence. Don Vecchi picked up that theme and shed new light on it within a complicated global context. He underlined the evangelical witness of consecrated Salesian life as the school of holiness for those working with and for the young, and as an experience of meaningful dialogue formation offered to the young themselves. At this point of challenge, Don Vecchi specified exactly what this new style of Salesian presence would include.

This accompanying, spiritual, caring presence needs to these characteristics. The Salesians are asked to offer physical presence sharing in the many positive aspects of the world of the young. This presence is called to go beyond administrative or professional duty that is a friendly presence showing concern for the individual. To awaken creativity in the young, an active presence is required accompany the young in their pilgrimage by offering them the opportunity of sharing responsibility. While individual witness is important, Don Vecchi stressed that the community must offer a presence of witness so that the values proclaimed may be lived transparently in the lives of the Salesians. Salesian accompanying presence is called to be a spiritual witness. It is in these styles of presence,

198 VECCHI, ACG 372, 25.
lived, shared, and experienced by the young, that the Salesian accompaniment becomes “proclamation and prophecy.”

2.7. Everyday Salesian Spirituality

The next theme of Salesian spirituality taken up by Don Vecchi was the quality of Salesian holiness for every day. As he developed each theme, he moved closer to the passion of his own life, the education of youth. An expert in this field, he applied Salesian spirituality to the pedagogical dimensions of youth ministry. Yet, before he turned his attention to this dimension of ministry, he seemed to feel the need to drive home the idea that everything proposed thus far had to be grounded in prayer. It seems almost too repetitious, but, like Don Bosco, Don Vecchi returned again and again to three prerequisites for true Salesian spirituality. For it to be lived on a daily basis, the Salesian minister could not progress or be authentic without these. In fact, these three qualities define the Salesian minister: to be a contemplative in action, to work tirelessly, and to live temperately.

2.7.1. The Contemplative in Action

Don Vecchi offered some final thoughts upon the blending of action and prayer before he gave his full attention to the action of education. In the process, he admitted that it is often difficult to see prayer and action together and that this struggle has existed long before his contribution to the discussion. He suggested that the Salesian minister needed two models to follow in this difficult integration: Jesus as the Good Shepherd proclaiming the Reign of God, and Don Bosco.

Tracing the lines of prayer in the midst of Jesus’ public ministry, Don Vecchi extracted four recommendations made by Jesus to his disciples when they would pray. The

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199 VECCHI, ACG 372, 26-27.
200 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 86-106.
201 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 90.
first recommendation was to pray always without ceasing. Don Vecchi revealed this task to be one that makes every moment of life an invocation to the Father.  

The second recommendation of Jesus was to avoid a multiplication of words.

The third recommendation, speak to God in and through your life, recognizes that every word on our lips and every breath is a gift from God.

The fourth recommendation, Jesus insisted that his disciples pray in “Spirit and truth.” Therefore, authenticity and intensity of prayer is shown in a life that is dedicated to serving God and others.

Forcefully, Don Vecchi suggested that perhaps the Salesians knew very little about the life of prayer in their Founder, Don Bosco. He inferred that too much of Salesian focus had been on anecdotal evidence and the tradition of generic stories. He urged a return to classic studies, such as Don Ceria’s Don Bosco con Dio with its reminders that Don Bosco never undertook anything without prayer and that he considered all that was given him a gift from heaven. Don Vecchi urged for a return to the central belief that Don Bosco was in himself the “natural and serene fusion between action and prayer.”

Following Jesus and Don Bosco, the Salesian must become “a pray-er” while “immersed in the world and in the preoccupations of pastoral life.” Their work must be an “untiring work sanctified by prayer and union with God.” For the Salesian, this is expressed as being a contemplative in action, celebrating the liturgy of life.

2.7.2. Salesian Work

Work for Saint John Bosco was never reduced to some occupation of time undertaking a particular task. It was neither limited to manual labor nor study. Work, instead, involved precise study of the mission using every available moment of time and every personal capacity. Don Vecchi called work a constant form of competent action

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202 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 93.
203 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 93.
204 VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 94-95.
205 VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 95.
in much the same way that political, social, and medical fields practice their work. This is an action that requires constant updating in thought and perspective.

The hunger for this kind of work is found only in a pastoral heart. This dedication of the heart must find its direction in charity, proposing in the one who works a pastoral sense of reality. This is, in fact, evaluating work according to the goal of saving souls, reading what is good in a given situation. This is so that those for whom the work is directed may grow in their humanity and come to an awareness of the presence of God.\textsuperscript{207}

Pastoral creativity in this work becomes a practical attitude that goes in search of real concrete problems and ever new situations in the lives of the young. It is developing an eye for their needs, both physically and spiritually. It occupies the time and resources in the best way to help the young develop in all their possibilities, helping them make choices, filling them with dedication.\textsuperscript{208}

In such a manner, the work of accompaniment never ends. It is focused on the needs of the other and tirelessly uses every possible resource to empower the other to become all that God intends them to become. This work is more than punching a time-card for a few hours, but extends into the reality of young lives which do not follow such a neat timetable. Above the goals of social service, this dedication is complete and is rooted in a desire for the young person to discover God.

\textbf{2.7.3. Salesian Temperance}

There is a gage for measuring the authenticity of this work that also serves as an anchor for keeping it from drifting off in other directions of self-interest. Temperance is an ascetical dimension which keeps the minister attentive in the spiritual battle. Temperance is the mark of a mature Christian and in its absence, conversion is impossible. Don Vecchi explained that even the best of intentions in ministry can become compromised over time and diminish the spiritual quality of the ministry. The dangers of a secular culture and society may encumber the heart and hands of a dedicated minister to the young. Don

\textsuperscript{207} Cf. VECCHI, \textit{Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali}, 102-103.
\textsuperscript{208} Cf. VECCHI, \textit{Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali}, 103.
Vecchi more than resonates with St. Paul in comparing the Salesian mission as Paul compared the following of Christ to the discipline and control of an athlete. Temperance keeps our motivations in check and constantly fine tunes our hearts for the true purpose of our calling.\footnote{Cf. VECCHI, \textit{Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali}, 103-105.}

From the communal perspective, Don Vecchi was adamant that fraternal charity and patient acceptance of others were impossible without temperance. From the professional angle, temperance is manifested in the careful use of materials and resources. From a spiritual point of view, it keeps the heart vigilant in purification.\footnote{Cf. VECCHI, \textit{Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali}, 106.}

\section*{2.8. Salesian Spirituality as Pastoral Practice: The Preventive System}

Volumes have been written about the Preventive System, Don Bosco’s pedagogy. Don Vecchi made a sizeable contribution to the studies of this pedagogy. Even to attempt a summary of this work would be an impossible task given the scope of this study. Instead, in the presentation Don Vecchi made in the fundamental themes of Salesian spirituality, he limited himself to a presentation of the pedagogy as a spirituality put into living practice. A treatment of this particular material is, in itself, quite vast, but it is necessary to present in here in the context of this study. One cannot study a Salesian spirituality of accompaniment without the Preventive System of Don Bosco as a spiritual pedagogy because it is recognized by the Church and beyond as an original form of pastoral charity.

\subsection*{2.8.1. A Pedagogical Charity}

For the Salesian, the “legible sign of the love of God” is the Salesian charity offered primarily by the means of an education offered by an educative relationship with the young. This relationship exists to help the young person to open up, to discover the richness of life, to help the young grow.\footnote{Cf. VECCHI, \textit{Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali}, 107.} Don Vecchi made special mention of the difficult realities of young people who are marginalized. He showed sympathy particularly

\footnotesize{\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{209} Cf. VECCHI, \textit{Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali}, 103-105. \\
\textsuperscript{210} Cf. VECCHI, \textit{Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali}, 106. \\
\textsuperscript{211} Cf. VECCHI, \textit{Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali}, 107. 
\end{flushright}
for those who were unable to express their needs in the adult world because of the distance and distrust that exists there. Even the Church blends into their images of an adult world without recognition of their existence—an exclusive world of institution. He stressed the urgency of the Salesian mission in this context to find an open path for dialogue with these outcasts, to bring them some joy and some hope that they may trust enough to open themselves up. Recalling Don Caviglia’s words, Don Vecchi spoke of putting these young at ease, making them smile, implanting in them the seeds of life. This action was also affirmed, noted Don Vecchi, in Pope John Paul’s *Juventum Patris* declaring that Don Bosco’s sanctity is molded as an educative holiness.

*Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco e spirito salesiano* refers to an insight of Don Pietro Stella who, as we have done in this text, turns attention to the lived experiences of such persons as Don Paolo Albera. Regarding this special spiritual pedagogy, the text pulls together these thoughts:

“Si avverte,” afferma P. Stella, “quale profondità spirituale di sentimenti poteva suscitare nei giovani il sentirsi vicini a Don Bosco, uomo di Dio, santo compenetrato dalla divina potenza, nell’Oratorio, in un terreno santo come l’Oreb, impegnato dalla presenza dell’Altissimo. Don Albera con la sua presentazione dei fatti ci porta, ancora per un’altra via, al di là della semplice metodologia educativa. Il suo modo di sentire la sua personale esperienza mistica; ci porta in un clima pentecostale, nella collettiva sperimentazione dello Spirito Santo. Siamo così nel campo dei carismi e della straordinaria invasione del divino, Don Bosco vi assume il ruolo di mediatore, con caratteristiche che manifestano una paternità spirituale di grande efficacia, una singolare capacità generativa di esperienze religiose. Lo spirito di famiglia che Don Bosco instaura è consanguineità spirituale. L’educatore trasmette la vita attinta nell’unione con Dio per messo della vita in grazia nella Chiesa.”

The dynamism of relationship, spirituality, and presence of God, authentic in the experience of the educator and the young is once again highlighted as the unique charism of Don Bosco. This dynamic must reveal the interplay between what is supernatural within

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the natural, an interplay which profoundly adheres to human reality. This is a style of holiness that respects deeply the nature of the young, their spontaneity, their freedom, their choices, “in a word, the person of each youth.”

Following these ideas, this resource develops an understanding of friendship according to Don Bosco. This tangent is worth following as a necessary fork in the road. For a moment, then, we turn to Don Colli’s treatment of Don Bosco and friendship as an expression of this spiritual pedagogy.

2.8.2. A Pedagogy of Spiritual and Human Friendship

By stepping past the preoccupation of the dangers of particular friendships and the well-known warnings of Don Bosco that friendships should be made among those inclined toward goodness while strictly avoiding those not so inclined, Don Bosco himself felt sympathy and affinity for the need to make friends. He, in fact, wanted to make friends himself with the young. We are reminded of the Joyful Society Giovanni Bosco initiated at Chieri. He experienced and wrote about the affection and kindness he experienced in the familiarity he shared with friends such as his seminarian companions, Garigliano, Giacomelli, and Comollo. His singularly special relationship with a Jewish companion, Giona, has already been mentioned to place Don Bosco’s friendships within the framework of a very human need and appreciation of companionship. Also mentioned earlier was the closest relationship, by Don Bosco’s own estimation, that he shared with Luigi Comollo. Don Bosco personally stressed their complementary spirits, and, above all, that this true friendship inspired immediately in Don Bosco a dimension of spiritual friendship. This became the model of a friendship that Don Bosco would return to again and again, because the sharing was very much human, but always directed toward spiritual goodness and perfection. These boys inspired the best in each other. The environment he experienced in relating to Comollo encouraged full confidence and sharing: Giovanni

\[\text{COLLI, Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco, 66.}\]
\[\text{Cf. COLLI, Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco, 70-72.}\]
cared for his friend’s corporal needs as his friend led him spiritually. Don Caviglia offered this conclusion:

Non è adunque soltanto un importante dato biografico, per certi aspetti indispensabile, l’amicizia col santo giovane di Cinzano; ma perché dall’affinità spirituale che generò l’attrazione e l’amicizia ne venne la comunicazione e l’assimilazione delle idée e dei sentimenti, è, dico, un essenziale contributo, quasi un fattore primo, di quella salesianità originaria, alla quale s’informò poin l’apostolo di Don Bosco tra la gioventù.  

2.8.2.1. The Higher Purpose of Friendship

Don Bosco’s efforts to befriend the young, then, was very human, but had a higher purpose. He desired to create for them and in them an environment that was charged spiritually so that they would place a high value on the spiritual in their lives. Don Bosco shares his dialogue between himself and Savio and other young people seeking his guidance. Don Bosco offers that guidance and says, “Ho bisogno che ci mettiamo d’accordo a che fra me e voi regni vera amicizia e confidenza.”

Quoting Don Bosco in the second volume of the Epistolario, Don Colli gives us the saint’s clear intentions:

La mia affezione è fondata sul desiderio ech ho di salvare le vostre anime, che furono tutte redente dal Sangue prezioso di Gesù Cristo, e voi mi amate perchè cerco di conurvi per la strada della salvezza eterba, Dunque – conculde – il bene delle anime vostre è il fondamento della nostra affezione.

For Don Bosco, to be his friend had the central motive of making the young person a friend of God. He used the language of saving one’s soul, but Don Colli interprets that clearly in these terms. This in no way set limits on Don Bosco’s friendship, but made of it a declaration of God’s desire to befriend every young person he encountered. This shared relationship reveals the Incarnational friendship God offered in Jesus.

The best discipline for such friendship is simply to “truly want the best good for the other.”

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219 COLLI, Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco, (citing A. CAVIGLIA, Opere e scritti, V, 10), 73.
220 COLLI, Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco, 76.
221 COLLI, Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco, 76.
222 COLLI, Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco, 77.
2.8.2.2. The Shortness of Life

A recurring detail surfaces in this study, a detail to which we have already given attention: Don Bosco urged the young to see the shortness of life and the importance of making friendship with God early in life. The goodness and mercy they experienced in Don Bosco would be to help the young understand by experience the goodness and mercy always found infinitely in God. To be without these gifts was incomprehensible to Don Bosco.

Toward this loving and merciful God, Don Bosco wanted to accompany the young people by the means of a loving kindness. This became the mark of his pedagogy and its link to the spiritual life. This was, as he referred to it himself, “the ways of the heart.” (Don Colli recommends a careful reading of Don Pietro Braido’s treatment of this defining characteristic in Il sistema preventivo).

Obviously, Don Bosco drew near to the young. Don Colli asks the important question as to the meaning of this closeness for today. He writes:

Vicino anzitutto all loro psicologia, alla loro sensibilità, mentalità, al loro mondo culturale: bisogna, usando le stesse parole di Don Bosco, che, come Cristo il “maestro della familigliarità,” sappia “amare ciò che piace ai giovani.”

2.8.2.3. Friendship and Chastity

Chastity was all important in Don Bosco’s consideration of friendship. Rather than placing this virtue in the negative or oppressive position of limiting friendship or the closeness of relationship, it was situated within the loving realization of the struggles of adolescents in this arena. Don Bosco thrust so much importance upon this virtue as a loving awareness of the fragility of the young in their sense of themselves and in their struggles to comprehend the human demands and complications of love. For this reason, chastity had to be, for him, the highest quality of a Salesian. This enabled the Salesian to love freely and maturely without imposing any condition or need upon the young, even

\[223\] Cf. COLLI, Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco, 78.
\[224\] COLLI, Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco, 84.
\[225\] COLLI, Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco, 87.
unconsciously. Truly, the disastrous psychological consequences of a confused or contrived message on the part of the educator could have life-long implications.

Solo un’affettività e sensibilità perfettamente purificata e mossa dalla carità, espressione d’una paternità spirituale pienamente raggiunta, può far del Salesiano quell’”individuo consacrato al bene dei suoi allievi…pronto ad affrontare ogni disturbo, ogni fatica per conseguire il suo fine.” È tutto ciò “salesianamente,” così senza complessi di anima-vittima, con elegante disinvoltura, con bonarietà e semplicità con spèontaneità e allegria, come se si trattasse di cosa del tutto naturale.226

This friendship, then, is one which is never self-serving. In the mission as educator, the Salesian must integrate into their relationships a “paternity” that involves the young in their totality. This is a paternity which, in the fullness of time, stretches out to last through time. Accompaniment, then, in this model of friendship and relationship, is not temporary or limited to one moment in time. This is because it is not merely a relationship given by nature or imposed by rule. It is a relationship that is freely born of and developed in the midst of reciprocal love as the Salesian “wins the heart” of the young in the midst of this friendship. By osmosis, in this developing relationship, the young person grasps and assimilates into life the values and the deep educative actions that come from this authentic Salesian paternity.227

2.8.3. A Sacramental Pedagogy of Reconciliation

At Don Bosco’s insistence, one sign that the relationship between educator and young person is on the proper track and has as its motivation the salvation of the young, is the educator’s desire to lead the young person into a relationship with a trusted confessor. Don Colli calls this priority the central issue in the methodology of Don Bosco’s spiritual pedagogy. The task of the Salesian educator in this regard is to assist the young person to docile and available to the action of grace.228 Don Bosco was careful to instill in his Salesians and colleagues the priority for this task, not as one of many educative actions, but as the fundamental motive for the educative relationship.

226 COLLI, Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco, 97.
227 Cf. COLLI, Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco, 95-96.
228 Cf. COLLI, Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco, 153.
Don Braido concurs on this point:

Non basta che essi (= confessori) siano degli assolutori. Occorre che diventino nel senso più completo della parola "educatori;" anzi i più veri educatori dei giovani, se la confessione è il "fondamento," la "base," il "sostegno" di una istituzione educativa.229

The confessor is to become the “friend of the soul.” In this special and privileged relationship, the confessor is to lead the young person to frequent reception of the Eucharist. Over time, as we have seen in the life of Don Bosco, the privileged role of the confessor would shift by a decree from the Holy See from the director of the community to someone outside of his jurisdiction in the battle over what is appropriate and distinct in the handling of internal and external affairs of a young person. Yet, what is not lost in this evolution is the central role of the priest as an educator in Don Bosco’s system. A Salesian spiritual pedagogy devoid of the role of a priest, devoid of this friend of the soul is neither Salesian nor spiritual.230

It seems that Don Bosco made a distinction, perhaps foreseeing the possible dilemma for the directors. At one point, he actually insisted that the young need both “a friend of the soul” in an established confessor, as well as a spiritual guide. Don Colli suggests that here Don Bosco’s intention seemed to be a person distinct from authority and free from other forms of “blocks” to their trust, especially in the unstable experience of adolescence. This person can also be the confessor, but if not, the confessor remains integral to this relationship and this guide is not suggested as a replacement or as an equal source of spiritual assistance.231

2.8.4. Attitudes of Pedagogical Charity

Returning to Don Vecchi, there are important attitudes for the Salesian to develop in the work of pedagogical charity.

The first attitude is a predilection for the young. Don Vecchi saw two consequences of this predilection: a dedication of all one’s time for the young and sharing

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229 BRAIDO, Il sistema preventive, 285.
230 Cf. COLLI, Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco, 156.
231 Cf. COLLI, Pedagogia spirituale di don Bosco, 162-163.
in their problems. This is much more daunting than it may seem. Don Vecchi suggested that not a few Salesians have been frightened off by the present problems of young people in the world today. Yet, there is no other place to find connection with them. Don Vecchi insisted:

Il luogo dove la Congregazione si regenera, dove produce nuove espressioni spirituale e genera per sé nuovi membri, ispirati dallo Spirito; dove rinnova l’entusiasmo ed esprime la creatività carismatica è lo spazio giovanile. In esso ha avuto luogo la nostra nascita e continua ad essere il continente della nostra missione e la nostra terra promessa. La nostra spiritualità non troverebbe nuove espressioni se i salesiani si allontanassero da esso.

The Salesian declares three propositions of faith in the young: “We believe that God loves the young.” “We believe that Jesus wants to share his life them for they are the hope of a new future carrying in themselves the seeds of the Kingdom.” “We believe that God expects in the young, by offering them his grace in meeting with them and by putting at their disposal his service, will recognize their dignity by educating them to the fullness of life.”

Another attitude is trust in youth. This requires in the Salesian minister and educator attentiveness and faith for finding in the young that moment to stimulate them to hope and faith.” Every youth carries inside the plan of salvation, that promise of a full and happy life for each one.” Offering a path to the young is, in fact, an act of accompaniment to the end-point of showing the young their own normal resources. This task requires faith and hope and is a participation in the work of God.

The good educator is capable of giving and creating new opportunities for the young without giving in or giving up in their regard. There are three energies within the young to respond to these opportunities: the energy of their reason, of their faith, and of their love. These three are also the sources of the educator’s own growth. The path of

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233 VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 112.
234 VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 110-111.
235 VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 113.
236 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 113.
237 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 114.
the educator merges with the path of the youth. Both travel the same road of discovery and empowerment.

Along this shared journey, another attitude is necessary, according to Don Vecchi. *It is the need for love to be manifested with affection.* This is not merely a reciprocal love shown between people who are in love. It is not a form of sympathy. It is a love corresponding to what is best for the young and for promoting their growth. Recalling the famous letter of Saint John Bosco to the Oratory, written from Rome in 1884, Don Vecchi underlined the danger of giving service as a form of professional production rather than helping them to be saved. The affection given must be experienced as free, without condition or demand for payment in any form. The affection that is returned must also be freely given. This is, as Don Bosco constantly reminded, “things of the heart.”

2.9. The Role of the Educator

Don Vecchi dedicates two themes to the work of salvation and accompaniment: the work of the *educator* and the work of the *evangelizer*. They are worth our attention here.

2.9.1. The Salesians are Educators

An interesting historical point was raised as Don Vecchi introduced this particular theme. He noted that many Salesians had been calling for Don Bosco to be named a “Doctor” of the Church. This was not because of any doctrine or theology he left behind. It was primarily in recognition of the great educative legacy he left. This was never reduced to theory, but a living and practiced educative methodology continuing to effectively minister to youth the world over. He also noted that Pope John Paul II had nodded in recognition of this sentiment in his letter to the Salesians, *Father and Teacher of the Young.*

At this point, Don Vecchi upheld the example of many Salesians whose processes for canonization were advancing. Calling upon these most recent witnesses to Don Bosco’s

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educative system, he links their example to the holiness called for in this system and shows these lives as shining verification of this system. This is, he called it, the identity of the Salesian: educators in human education for Christian formation. In this, there is forged, he insisted, an indissoluble bond between the educator and the evangelizer. Both evangelization and education are two programs, though not equal, which are capable of winning the young; they are communicable and complete programs.

Education, then, is an enterprise leading to an experience of God. Education points to the reality of being a people of God, not simply beings stuck in fate, but objects of God’s intimate love. God educated Israel into a covenant of love and salvation. God strengthened that teaching by en-fleshing his message in the coming of his Son. This is the Word that continues to form and build the People of God today.240

Therefore, education is spirituality. In this are three approaches to education that must be considered. Education is lived experience. It is an art that is difficult because life is difficult. Yet, it is also technical knowledge carrying young people forward. In this way, it is professional. Education is also charismatic, a matter of faith. It necessarily reveals the values of pastoral charity. Education must not be reduced to mere professionalism. It is more than instruction, more than socialization, more than professional preparation. It is presenting to the young person all the possibilities open to them on new horizons which are larger than the expanse of human experience.241

2.9.2. The Salesians as Evangelizers

Don Vecchi insisted that pastoral charity pushes toward evangelization. In this way, pastoral charity is not a static characteristic of spirituality of accompaniment, but an activity that becomes a way to encounter God on the path to salvation. In fact, this is the path of accompaniment. This point always recalls the tensions perceived between contemplation and action and points for comparison to the encounters of Jesus by Martha and Mary—one of service and one of listening.

240 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 128-134.
Responding to this common tension, Don Vecchi called upon a comparison of apostolic roles presented by St. Paul in the New Testament. He cited that the prophet’s task is always to interpret the act of God in the moment. This is a reading of the signs of the times. It is the job of the pastor to gather the community already identified, guard them, care for and animate them so that they may grow as a community. The function of the doctors is to study deeply in order to help the community to understand in ever newer ways the doctrine set against their cultural and lived reality. Finally, the evangelizer is called to bring the Word of God to those who have not heard it in their experience.242

Don Vecchi launched briefly into a collection of images of the evangelizer throughout the New Testament. Following this, he offered a survey of this role in the history of the Church.

For our purpose, we will look directly at some of the attitudes needed for the Salesian evangelizer.

The evangelizer, first of all, needs to be close to the Word of God and to take it up daily. It must be experienced before it is preached.

Secondly, the evangelizer needs to trust and maintain serenity in the face of the present times which touch the living and evangelizing efforts of those called to this task. This permits the evangelizer to enter the commercial, material, non-spiritual world with confidence. Don Vecchi cautioned that this is one of the most essential and most difficult tasks of all. Discouragement and questions of meaning easily surface in this effort.

A third attitude is that of the sower of seeds. The sower is patient and depends on God for the outcome. In the midst of discouragement, it is important to remember that God oversees the process of growth. It is the sower’s task to prepare fertile ground, diligently nourish and guard the seedling and young plant, and trust the work of God.

Finally, Don Vecchi spoke of a collaborative effort to join the voices of others in the task of announcing the Word properly. Working together with priests, catechists,

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242 Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 138-139.
teachers, and all concerned for the evangelization of the young produces a synergy that one voice could never duplicate.\textsuperscript{243}

2.10. Concluding Themes

In all, Don Vecchi offered fourteen various themes of Salesian spirituality. This work has embraced merely eight of these, though much of the same material is found integrated in various parts of this paper. The audience of Don Vecchi’s document, \textit{Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali} was clearly addressed to his Salesian Family and primarily to the Salesians by consecration. In other documents Don Vecchi addressed these and other similar themes to various audiences. In one circular he addressed the Volunteers of Don Bosco and other secular institutes finding their place and mission in the ever-expanding Salesian Family.\textsuperscript{244} He addressed the young on many occasions and published more than one text for them. He wrote to them in \textit{“Andate oltre!” temi di spiritualità giovanile}.\textsuperscript{245} He repeatedly spoke to the vast field of educators within and beyond the Salesian Family. For example, his ideas are visibly traced out in, \textit{“...conversa con noi lungo il cammino” per educare i giovani all fede},\textsuperscript{246} the work of many educators and Salesians. This work was a redaction of Don Egidio Viganò. A cursory glance through the index of this text will reveal many of the same themes as presented in \textit{Spiritualità salesiana}. Don Vecchi offered further reflection and meditations for educators in the text, \textit{Dire Dio ai giovani}.\textsuperscript{247} This text dwells elaborately on the idea of education as the path of evangelization and offers some of the same information and suggestions as already mentioned. However, the work adds to these ideas a process for reflection within given settings and concrete situations.

The last themes mentioned in the \textit{Spiritualità salesiana} text are these:

\textsuperscript{244} Cf. VECCHI, ACG 360, Rome Rome, Direzione Generale Opere don Bosco, (1997) 24 May.
\textsuperscript{246} Egidio VIGANÒ, \textit{“...conversa con noi lungo il cammino” per educare i giovani all fede}, redazione e cura, Leuman , Elledici, 1991, pp.198.
Reconciliation\textsuperscript{248} is the theme which follows the themes of the educators and evangelizers. This was examined earlier, especially with the reflections of Don Colli and Don Braido.

Paternity: the mature expression of pastoral charity\textsuperscript{249}. This, too, has been touched upon in an earlier context.

Good servants of Christ\textsuperscript{250} repeats much of Don Vecchi’s thoughts regarding the role of the consecrated Salesian and the collaboration with the lay Salesian Family.

The evangelical icon of a Salesian Marian spirituality\textsuperscript{251} offers a look at the origins of Don Bosco’s devotion to and guidance by the Shepherdess of his life’s dreams. To speak of Salesian spirituality without recalling the strong sense of trust and fidelity to the Mother of God, through whom Don Bosco believed the entire Salesian enterprise was founded and guided, would be an inexcusable omission. There is no Salesian spirituality without filial attachment to the Mother of God. For our purposes, this stress is offered in the first chapter and Don Bosco’s account of the same.

In referencing these other sources, there remains a vast body of work that is not mentioned. Don Vecchi’s scientific presentations of Salesian pedagogy are the subject of many other studies and too vast to mention in any detail here. Particularly useful in any discussion of an applied spirituality is the text he co-edited with Don José Manuel Prelezzo, Progetto Educativo Pastorale: elementi modulari.\textsuperscript{252} This is a vast and detailed work that, once again, weaves many of the same themes and presents them in the structures of animation for a comprehensive youth ministry. It fosters and guides the formation of a youth pastoral project from an organic Salesian setting, i.e. including consecrated Salesians, collaborators, parents, young people, and an entire community impacting the

\textsuperscript{248} Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 152-166.
\textsuperscript{249} Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 167-183.
\textsuperscript{250} Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 184-197.
\textsuperscript{251} Cf. VECCHI, Spiritualità salesiana: temi fondamentali, 198-234.
lives of young people for a given territory. Much of this same work and its themes surfaces in GC 23 and 24.

3. The Accompanied Journey of Faith: GC23 Educating Young People to the Faith

This work has been pointed in a direction from its beginning: to reflect upon the rich content and direction offered to the Salesian world in the Acts of the General Chapter 23 (GC23). The Salesian spirituality of accompaniment was given a special defining character and renewed meaning in these acts by focusing attention upon the “Journey of Faith” of the young and the “life and apostolic activity” of the Salesians of Don Bosco and the Salesian Family. Don Vecchi was most instrumental in the preparations for this Chapter, in its execution, and in the implementation to follow. He was the Councilor for Salesian Youth Pastoral in the period of preparation leading to GC23—held from March through May in 1990—and was elected Vicar to the Rector Major, Don Egidio Viganò at this Chapter. Don Bacchi recalled:

...di questo stesso ultimo Capitolo è pure nominato Regolatore. Ancora in veste di Consigliere per la Pastorale Giovanile è presente al CG 23 del 1990 e in esso viene nominato Presidente della Commissione incaricata di elaborare il testo riguardante quel fondamentale settore di attività di cui è appunto consigliere.

The compiled documents were divided into three parts. After issuing to the Salesian Community the challenge of educating young people for the moment at hand, with all of the related tasks that would entail, the work was divided according to these three foci: the youth reality, the faith journey, and the practical commitments of the community. The very essence of this work presented a vision of accompaniment for the spiritual journey in its many parts, revealing its character and motives, rooting its purpose, and providing it practical direction.

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254 BACCHI, Don Juan Edmundo Vecchi Monti, 26.
It could be said that much of this chapter reflected the “educative project” of Don Vecchi. His Vicar, Don Luc Van Looy, captured this well:

To ensure the effectiveness of the educative and pastoral mission, Fr Vecchi always had a very clear idea of the need to draw up educative projects that would help "in translating principles and criteria into practice and in reaching through them to the daily life of individuals"! Following his election as the eighth Successor of Don Bosco, one commentator wrote: "After the theologian [Fr Egidio Viganò], the Salesians have chosen a methodologist!" Applying to Fr Vecchi the same description that he himself gave of Don Bosco, it could be said that he had the gift of combining boldness of initiative (farseeing horizons and motivations, creative response to innovations), practical organization and planning, and the wisdom of a teacher able to create an atmosphere, an environment, a style of relationships, a methodology of daily life made up of small items.' It was precisely Fr Vecchi who gave the initial impetus to the educative and pastoral planning now in use throughout the Congregation.255

Because of this impetus, GC23 offers an important key to understanding a Salesian spirituality of accompaniment and its methodology. What follows here are some of the key points of this educative project.

3.1. The Present Phase of History: the New Challenges of GC23

There arose a clamor of many recurring questions from the Salesian provinces of the world begging for answers and direction. Don Viganò presented some of these in the introduction to GC23. These included: How is faith to be understood in contexts in which it has to become both light and salt? How is the life of faith to be related to personal experience? What is meant at the present day by educating to the faith? How can we communicate the faith, and how do we accompany young people in their approach to it?256

In this same introduction, Don Viganò plainly stated that the responses to these important questions had to be “tailored to the young people concerned, who have to be made able to live the demands of faith in the present phase of history.”257 This, he maintained, was the whole objective of the Salesian plan. This plan is, in the history of salvation, “the pedagogy of the Father”—who, by sending his Son, “sums up the educative work of the Father.” This plan is always to look to Jesus as the “pedagogy of love” in his

255 VAN LOOY, Fr. Juan Edmundo Vechhi, 8.
256 Cf. GC 23, n. 9.
257 GC 23, n. 10.
self-giving. It is led and promulgated by the Spirit of God. It is inspired by the lived experience of Don Bosco “in the conviction that faith conquers the world” and leads the young to the fullness of life now and in eternity.258

At the center of these challenges are the questions regarding the young and their faith experience. For them at the present day, just what is God? What effect does faith have in their lives? How do we undertake our mission as educators to the faith in these new times and situations?259 These questions, then, focus on a spirituality to offer the young. The Chapter moved out to meet that challenge.

And so the desire to accompany them in a journey of faith arises quite naturally and spreads in the light of the pedagogy of Salesian youthful holiness.260

3.2. The Youth Reality Challenging the Salesian Community

The logical starting point of examining a challenge is to understand its many contexts. The Salesian communities spread all over the world, could not nuance these challenges from one situation or point of view. What is relevant in one part of the world can speak little to another situation or reality. The first section of GC23 attempted to identify some of those real contexts, step back and name what is common in the youth situation of that given moment, underline the priorities or urgencies of the moment, and address the issue of faith in young lives. This “look” was fashioned as a “pastoral glance at the contexts” to discern a relationship the cultural elements found there and the “plan of salvation” entrusted to the Church.261

To treat each of these contexts in any detail cannot be the scope of this present work, but a listing of those contexts will assist in an understanding of the directions that would be offered by GC 23. The contexts described ranged from the wealthy nations with little need or worry for the basic human problems of hunger and shelter, to multi-cultural settings in which Christianity is in the vast minority, to contexts of dire poverty and

258 Cf. GC 23, n. 11-14.
259 Cf. GC 23, n. 8.
260 GS 23, n. 8.
261 Cf. GC 23, n. 15-17.
suffering. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the unraveling of Communism in the Eastern Block countries of Europe, the coup in the Soviet Republic, and many other dramatic historical events in the two years immediately preceding the chapter opened up entirely new contexts never imagined in the recent past. The mission territory of Africa, given a strong burst of life in the ten-year-old Project Africa initiative, added further contexts both exciting and challenging. Decolonization in Africa, toppling of dictatorships and communism in Russia and its satellite countries, and the crumbling of economies along with their governments presented unimaginable challenges, fears, and hopes.\textsuperscript{262}

Within many of these contexts had been a total lack of Christian culture or influence. In most, education was totally absent or poor, at best. Great fertile ground was discovered for evangelization again and again, while chaos and massive movements gave birth to what GC 23 called “the double mentality” of society—a tension between the traditional and the modern.\textsuperscript{263}

Indigenous groups and ethnic minorities were finding themselves displaced or without the suppression of a common enemy. In many settings, this increased violence and hatred rather than quieted them. GC 23 stood at the doorway to the decade that would witness unheard of genocide and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, in Somalia, Rwanda, the Congo, parts of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and many other locations struggling to adapt to the rapid changes in world history. Many centers of Salesian ministry would witness suffering and violence on an unprecedented scale in such countries as Liberia and Sierra Leone. In such contexts, the journey of faith, the act of accompaniment, would often entail the challenge of the first Christian martyrs. A young volunteer from the United Kingdom, Sean Devereaux, would lose his life trying to accompany youth living under such situations. He would become a symbol of the act of accompaniment that took on the proportions of the “pedagogy of Jesus in his self giving.” The journey of faith could not be understood as a mild adaptation of catecheses, but a call for heroic witness to a living faith.

\textsuperscript{262} Cf. GC 23, n. 15-37.
\textsuperscript{263} Cf. GC 23, n. 37.
The Chapter turned its attention from these contexts to the situations they engendered in youth all over the world. It sought to name some of the most common and demanding of those situations. Stating that many of the traditional models of human personality were giving way to a multiplicity of new models, the Chapter expressed alarm for the overwhelming of young people without a sense of direction. This seemed to produce globally an inability to “make any clear and enduring decisions.” Yet, there were visible longings and audible cries for help to discern. The Chapter identified a desire to build a valid human personality for the present day, no matter the context. This would be characterized by a search for new values. However, this search would run into the great obstacles of “conformism—an uncritical and irresponsible adaptation,” and “pragmatism”—concerned only with what is productive for the moment.

The insight of this Chapter, only at the dawn of the internet age and the infancy of global communities, is incredible. It recognized the desperate felt need for communication among the young with their hope for solving their immediate problems and those of the world they were inheriting rapidly. GC 23 suggested that the relationship between the adult world and younger generations was, at least, in a better place than it had been in previous decades. Yet, even with less tension, there continued to be many pockets of apathy or embarrassment among the young. Therefore, the youth situation of 1990 was one characterized by a longing for the deepening of relationships. GC 23 saw in this great hope and observed trends with various groups of youth gathering to share experiences as well as formation. Into this hopeful trend, however, were the persistent dangers of promiscuity and exploitation.

The Chapter turned an eye toward the relationship of young people to institutions, to educative settings, to the family situations—often marked by the erosion of traditional bonds, and the lack of preparation for becoming responsible adults, thus perpetuating the

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264 GC 23, n. 49.
265 Cf. GC 23, n. 48.
266 Cf. GC 23, n. 49-50.
267 Cf. GC 23, n.51-53.
negative effects of their own lives in future generations. This same precarious new
generation was evaluated as fearful of institutional religion but hungry for the spiritual.\textsuperscript{268}

Wrestling with the life on the streets, the explosion of communications technology,
and all the ramifications of these situations, GC 23 highlighted the need for further
direction to save them from “false needs and mistaken life models.” Within these faulty
models run the gamut of religious hungers, pursuits, and a plethora of confusing ideas. GC
23 expressed special concern for young people “who remain at a distance from the world
of faith” and called this the “most universal fact emerging” at that moment.\textsuperscript{269} Many of
these found faith totally irrelevant in life and culture. Even the question of God had
become totally unimportant to many of these young people. This phenomenon was often
paired with young people who were choosing to live faith as a private affair having no
pertinence or influence upon their public personae. GC 23 declared an urgent priority for
the Salesian community to live a life of faith that was both credible and contagious in
response to such a challenge, but, at the same time, noted the difficulty of such a
challenge. To that community and the ramifications of such a challenge, the Chapter turned
in its second focus, the Journey of Faith.

\textbf{3.3. The Accompanied Journey of Faith}

This present work would like to suggest that this portion of GC 23 could very well
represent among the most beautiful and elegant passages in the entire compendium of
documentation for the Salesian Society of St. Francis de Sales. Eloquently, it opens onto
the invitation of God to the Salesian Family to share in the special gift of “Fatherhood.”
This invitation has come to the Salesian Family from her own teacher, Don Bosco, who
shaped her “to recognize God’s operative presence” in the work of education. It is the
Salesian path for experiencing God’s “life and love.”\textsuperscript{270}

This recognition becomes a Salesian Creed:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Cf. GC 23, n. 56-59.
\item Cf. GC 23, n. 64-82.
\item GC 23, n. 94.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
We believe that God loves the young. This is the conviction which is at the origin of our vocation, and which motivates our life and all our pastoral activity.

We believe that Jesus wants to share "his life" with young people: they are the hope of a new future, and in their expectations they bear the seeds of the Kingdom.

We believe that the Spirit is present in them and that through them he wants to build a more authentic and human Christian community. He is already at work in individuals and groups. He has given them a prophetic task to carry out in the world which is also the world of all of us.

We believe that God is awaiting us in the young to offer us the grace of meeting with him and to dispose us to serve him in them, recognizing their dignity and educating them to the fullness of life.

In this way our work of education becomes the preeminent context in which to meet him.271

Once again we come upon these words of Don Vecchi, which, as we have seen, have been repeated later in his work on the themes of Salesian Spirituality.272 This Salesian Creed is extended to every young person without exclusion, as GC 23 insisted, most especially to those in poverty, brokenness, and sin.273 The task at hand is to discover the “germ of his ‘new life’” in every young person even if that causes doubt or discouragement in the Salesian. The Salesian is steadfast knowing that God has “gone before [the Salesian] in [their] suffering.”274

3.3.1. The First Step: Outreach and Closing the Gap

This first obstacle to overcome in this task is to close the distance experienced between the young and the Salesians, to approach the young and get close to them. Just as Don Bosco’s invitation was made person to person, so must be the outreach of the Salesian. More than simply an educational tool, this outreach was the very proclamation of Christ to the young.275

271 GC 23, n. 95.
272 Cf. section 1.4.7.4. Attitudes of Pedagogical Charity above.
273 GC 23, n. 95-96.
274 GC 23, n. 96.
275 Cf. GC 23, n. 97.
There is such richness in the paragraphs of this section that it is difficult to summarize or quote them for fear of leaving out any part of the message. This outreach is a meeting of the young where they are found and fostering what good is already present in them. This outreach, better than the effort of one person, is enriched by the invitation into a “whole setting that is full of life and presents so many opportunities.” The specific setting the Salesian offers is the “oratorian” setting and this always offers the young an educational structure, a family spirit of friendship, an abiding and joyful sense of God’s interacting presence, and a secure place of welcome. The success of this outreach has already been enshrined many times in the heroic witnesses of many youthful Salesian saints and examples. 276 This outreach, then, is the starting point for a journey toward deeper and richer faith.

### 3.3.2. The Educational Process as Faith Proposal

The educational process is not dismantled in any part of this effort. In fact, the process becomes a proposal for faith. *This is a journey “toward faith” as well as one “of faith.” This task is a starting point and a means to an end.* As a process of education, it takes the young person where they are at and sets them in motion toward a fullness of humanity. This process requires certain aspects:

1. *The journey must be adapted to the condition of those setting out on it* with special attention given to the poorest youth. 2. *The journey goes always ahead toward new goals.* The examples of Don Bosco’s biographies proclaim this reality dramatically. 3. *There is always awareness that each young person has his own rate of progress.* The Salesian must recognize and understand *that the journey must be progressively defined or divided into particular stages.* 277

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276 Cf. GC 23, n. 98-100.
3.3.3. Organic Dimensions of the Person

It is in this section that GC 23 clarifies the educative community, and the educative pastoral community. All men and women, all youth, who are part of this walk of faith, are involved in this community. The Chapter sets about exploring various “dimensions of the journey.” The overall objective, it declares, is to develop a more defined kind of person and believer as the Spirit of God simultaneously shapes a “new creation.” The Salesian becomes attentive to four distinct aspects of Christian maturity. GC 23 refers to these as particular dimensions: human growth toward a life to be lived as a religious experience; the meeting with Jesus to discover the meaning of individual and social meaning; insertion into the community as signs and instruments of salvation; commitment and choice for transformation of the world. The dimensions are organic to the person and not compartmentalized moments or duties. They are not outside lessons, but steps of human maturity made in personal conviction. These dimensions lead to an authentic meeting with Jesus Christ. Because this is an extraordinary and life-challenging and changing encounter, the Salesian educator tries to ready the young person by education to the faith and focuses much on the witness of other Christians who explicitly proclaim Jesus. This proclamation is intended to lead the young to their own discovery of the presence of Christ in their lives.

The transformations are gradual. Persistence, patience, and strong faith are required. Many fall off the path. All move at different levels. Yet the end point for all on the journey is for a commitment to the Kingdom of God. The Salesian task is to help the young find their niche in the building of the Kingdom. While all young people have gifts, they must be educated in generosity and availability. These are rooted in the encounter with Christ as perceived in the Church and in the perception of the mission.

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278 GC 23, n. 112-114.
279 Cf. GC 23, n. 130-137.
280 Cf. GC 23, n. 138/155.
3.3.4. Defining a Salesian Youth Spirituality

At this juncture, GC 23 explicitly defines a Salesian spirituality. First of all, it is “Salesian” – the charismatic current of humanism offered in St. Francis de Sales and interpreted by Don Bosco.281

It is youth spirituality. It begins authentically in the meeting between youth and educator or Salesian. It is fostered in the friendship that develops between them and continues in the process of growing in the life of the Spirit.

The document isolates five spiritualities which contribute to the make up of this Salesian spirituality: 1. Spirituality of Ordinary Life; 2. Spirituality of Joy and Optimism; 3. Spirituality of Friendship with the Lord Jesus, 4. Spirituality of Communion in the Church; 5. Spirituality of Responsible Service. Each of these spiritualities, then, are described in detail and broken down into the roles of responsibility. This is the precise locus linking the sacraments to Salesian spirituality reminding those on the journey that living in the Spirit leads to humble recognition of weaknesses, the celebration of reconciliation, the strengthening by the Eucharistic presence of Christ, and the development of a deepening life of prayer on a daily basis.282 At the end of this particular focus upon defined spiritualities, Mary the Mother of God is reserved a special place.

3.3.5. The Place of Mary in the Journey of Faith

GC 23 states that to follow Don Bosco’s style of holiness necessarily leads to an affectionate link to Mary, the Mother of God and the Help of Christians. She is the one “who infuses hope.” She is the mother to the young waiting to comfort and guide them. Their response is a loving dedication in the “struggle against sin and a view of the world and mankind opposed to the Beatitudes and Jesus’ new commandment of Love.”283

This spirituality increases in the young person the desire to join ranks in the bettering of the world. They desire to become better citizens as they become better

281 Cf. GC 23, n. 158.
282 Cf. GC 23, n. 159-176.
283 Cf. GC 23, n. 177.
Christians. This leads inevitably to many options for service and pushes the young closer to the making of a commitment for life. This component, the growth in vocational awareness, was intertwined in every part of Don Bosco’s journey with the young and impossible to separate from his motives.  

3.3.6. A Faith Mentality and Ethical Discernment

Key issues lead the second section of GC 23 to its conclusion. The last word, then, is dedicated to the formation of consciences—a spirituality geared to the freeing the young person from the dangers of relativism. This stage is, according to the Chapter, an obligatory one. This is the place of personal encounter with God. To meet this place in full preparedness, the Salesian must help to educate the young to a faith mentality and to the capacity for ethical discernment. Linked to this are skills for critically evaluating the cultural models and norms which engulf the young person.

A practical arena for this obligatory stage, for example, continues to resurface in the desperate need to provide formation in media literacy. The young must be given the tools for critical assessment, discernment, and the perspective of faith in dealing with the onslaught of instant communication technology and the overload of information assaulting them each day. Without the creation of a norm, no evangelical reading of reality is possible, catechesis is ineffective, and the sense of sin and mystery are lost. This is an insertion of spirituality into daily experience. It is a conscious living by the Spirit in the moments and decisions of life. The development of this consciousness is best achieved by personal encounter and witness, by the chance for open dialogue, by the invitation to share an accompanied journey toward a Gospel understanding of reality.

It is not surprising that at rock bottom, GC 23 admits that this journey of faith is, in fact, a search for love. Depending on the contexts of experienced love, great repercussions are felt on the overall plan to build the personality. If the contexts are selfish, love becomes a driving force that focuses only on the present moment with little concern for the future or

284 Cf. GC 23, n. 178/181.
the consequences of present choice. The only authentic understanding of love is against the horizon of God. And for many young people, that horizon has disappeared. GC 23 pauses here to underline the need for educating young people to love. The safe and effective ground for this education to take place is in the place of loving acceptance and welcome. The lessons of this kind of love lead to an integral education of the person to appreciate the authentic values of purity. The Salesian’s self donation gives witness to this love so enriching in the life of the Salesian and entices and draws the young to long for such a selfless experience of love.286

3.4. The Dynamics and Structures of Living the Journey of Accompaniment

The last section of GC 23 highlights the “demands” made on the Salesian community for accompanying the young on the Journey of Faith.287

The first demand is for continual renewal. To be a sign of God’s love for the young and the poor, the Chapter demands unity in community, a proclamation of the message, and a commitment to the world. It adds that these require deepening of the values of religious life and constant updating. It demands the best use of time and resources.

3.4.1. The Educative Pastoral Community

In light of these demands, the Chapter set in relief the practical applications rippling out from the Chapter to every province and local community, to every educational and pastoral setting of the Salesian family.288 Among these applications was the insistence upon the conscious identification of the wider educative and pastoral community collaborating with the Salesian, a creation of a planning process which supports the provincial project of outreach to youth with a local application.

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287 Cf. GC 23, n. 219-260.
This demand called for a re-insertion of the Salesian community into the local context and youth scene with “a fresh pastoral approach.” At the center of this local context, the Salesian community is called to become the animators of the educative and pastoral presence as well as the animators of all parts of the Salesian Family.

3.4.2. An Organic Pastoral Plan

The Journey of Faith calls for the development of an “organic pastoral plan” in each community, by drawing together the scattered efforts and initiatives into a convergence upon specific targets. At the center of this convergence is the young person to whom all proposals are directed. Also at the center of this convergence is the educative and pastoral community since a lack of harmony here would destroy the goals for the journey of faith shared with the young.

The Journey of Faith requires the Salesian community to give new focus to vocational guidance. It is to see vocational guidance as the “vertex and ‘crown of all [their] educational and pastoral activity.’” This guidance is called upon at every stage in the journey and respects the various levels of development giving shape to the various forms of intervention.

Finally, GC 23 called upon the Salesian community a new form of communication. Entering the rapidly advancing world so saturated by communications of every kind, the Salesian presence is demanded to educate young people in the faith clearly in the midst of the din. As Don Bosco published widely and frequently to defend the faith of the working class and the young, the Salesian community is called into the same arena as it manifests itself in the social communications of the day.

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289 GC 23, n. 225-231.
290 Cf. GC 23, n. 239-246.
4. The Perpetual Demand for Updating: Other Themes and Influences

The act of accompaniment in Salesian spirituality is not simple. It is not static. It demands the initiation of the Spirit of God in both the educator and the young person. It requires a life of depth and prayer as well as a keen awareness of reality in any given moment. This act is not the act of a spectator, but of one who leads, guides, shares, as learning takes place on both sides of the relationship. Because the setting of this relationship is life itself, both parties must plunge into life in all of its reality, but equipped with the Gospel for a solid discernment and assessment of that reality. It requires many relationships and the support of groups. It requires focused formation and intentional updating. It requires a heart possessed by God and possessed by the burning desire to capture each other’s hearts on the journey. This accompaniment never tires, does not take holidays, is available in many forms of presence, with appropriate attitudes of pastoral charity and driven to educate by evangelizing and to evangelize by educating. To be an authentic experience of participation and mediation, both parties are called to fully participate in complementary realities. Both are called upon to intervene in any situation that threatens the stability of this accompaniment or loses sight of its endpoint in the fullness of life in Christ.

4.1. Don Vecchi, and the Interdisciplinary Nature of Youth Spirituality

The call of Don Vecchi for innovation and his insistence upon changes in mentality and practice were in themselves, prophetic. Yet, he would be the first to give credit to those other voices and resources which gave him much inspiration and direction. In the field of spirituality there are many overlapping disciplines. Because spirituality touches the core of the human experience and because that core is necessarily relational, any assessment of spirituality will inevitably stumble into the studies of psychology, especially those dealing with the process of human maturation. Spirituality will knock at the door of anthropology and open dialogue with sociology. In fact, every avenue of human formation will touch somewhere at a point of connection with spirituality.
Precisely because of this overlapping, many Salesian scholars have investigated these many areas of discipline when dealing with the topic of spirituality linked to Don Bosco. Spiritual direction, for instance, a term unfamiliar in Don Bosco’s time, necessarily examines the accompanied relationship between the spiritual pilgrim and the mentoring spiritual guide. Even without the nomenclature in common use today, Don Bosco gave example and instruction to his own directors which today provide insight for a study of Salesian spiritual direction.

### 4.1.1. Spirituality and Pedagogy

We have already seen that a study of Don Bosco’s spirituality would be incomplete, at best, if a study of the science of his pedagogy is not included or considered simply as a corollary. Don Bosco’s religiosity and sense of history impact both his educative style and the personal and public spirituality he lived.

The world owes a great debt of gratitude to those persons whose lives have been dedicated to the study of these many facets of Don Bosco’s life and mission. Don Vecchi often made such gestures of appreciation and recognition in his own detailed studies as well as in the instruction he left for others. We find, therefore, the influence of Don Frattellone, whose meticulous study of the science of Spiritual Direction placed Don Bosco within a long line of tradition for this art, from scriptures, through the Fathers of the Church, down to the figures contemporary to Don Bosco in the first half of the 19th Century.

### 4.1.2. Salesian Scholarship

The work of Pietro Stella to contextualize Don Bosco within his time and culture has exerted much influence on the scholarship of Salesian studies for much of the latter part of the 20th Century into the present day. Much of this work is evident in the work of Don Vecchi, who often cited Don Stella in his research as well as in his circular letters to the Salesian Family as Rector Major.

Traces of the research of Pietro Braido, Pietro Brocardo, Daniele Calorio, Mario Cogliandro, Carlo Colli, Aldo Giraudo, Arthur Lenti, Antonio Martinelli, Carlo Nanni,
Pietro Stella, Ricardo Tonelli, Morand Wirth, and many others are evident in Don Vecchi’s thinking and writing. So grateful was Don Vecchi for the resurgence in Salesain study and scholarship, that he promoted study vehemently. His practice of updating served more than an inspiration, but became a mandate to the Salesian Family and World in the last years of his life.

4.1.3. Organic Salesian Spirituality

Organic Salesian Spirituality, then, could not be broken down into unconnected parts ready for assembly. Instead, the interlinked and interlocked dimensions of the human person and human experience became the field of study and practice for Don Vecchi. In this organic unity, remains the field in which Salesian youth spirituality is studied and practiced.

To look briefly at a few more of these overlapping areas of study and practice is worth the time and effort. Part of Don Vecchi’s organic vision of Salesian spirituality demands a comprehensive consideration of areas for further study and updating.

4.2. Spiritual Direction

Many authors may be named in referring to the study of spiritual direction as it pertains to Salesian spirituality and Don Bosco. Among these authors, mention must be made of Carlo Colli, Raimondo Frattallone, Pietro Brocardo, and Octavio Balderas. A thorough treatment of their work is impossible and would extend this work inexorably. Only brief reference is possible in this context and we will limit our comparison to Don Carlo Colli. We see obvious influence upon the work of Don Vecchi.

Carlo Colli explores the idea of spiritual direction in the thinking of Don Bosco. By examining Don Bosco from the point of view of spiritual direction, Colli attempts to offer something in his memory that has a permanent value in his charism into our times. This seemed to be the same motive of Don Vecchi, particularly in his writing on the topic of animation and the animating role of the director in the Salesian Community. Following a similar path of analysis to this present work, Don Colli reviewed first what might be considered spiritual direction in Don Bosco’s life and then proceeded to offer an evaluation
of his thought on the matter in his role as a spiritual director. In fact, he underlines the young Giovanni’s thirst for a priest who would, in the way he had expected, guide him and Colli suggests that this very expectation became the type of “pedagogical-pastoral intervention he wanted to assume in his work.”

4.2.1. Spiritual Direction and Paternity as a Special Salesian Character

We have seen that an important theme in Salesian spirituality given focus by Don Vecchi is the theme of Don Bosco’s “paternity.” Perhaps Don Vecchi considered the work of Don Colli in this regard who, nearly 13 years earlier in his own study, developed the idea that Don Bosco built upon his longing for an earthly father and offered this vision of paternity to his “sons,” the first young Salesians. Don Bosco’s intention was clear: his disciples were not only to be his collaborators, but they were to experience the touch and nearness of God in his love for them, and they were to show the same paternity to the young. For Don Bosco, the act of spiritual accompaniment, the role of the spiritual director, was linked to this experience of a dynamic relationship.

For Don Bosco, only Jesus Christ is the true master and spiritual guide of the young. The task of the true spiritual director is to win the heart of the young and open that heart to God. Colli underlines this:

A partire da questa concezione integrale della educazione, che, nell’ottica di don Bosco, non può essere altra che l’educazione Cristiana, si comprende come egli, sacerdoe-educatore, avverta più di altri i limiti invalicabili dell’umano nell’azione educative.

Ad avvertire tali limiti l’ha indotto non solo la sua cultura teologica, ma anche la sua ricca esperienza di guida di anime giovanile. È interessante sottolineare come proprio lui che ha una singolarissima conoscenza del cuore umano, specie dei giovani, e una capacità di conquistarselo ai limiti della manipolazione, dopo aver perentoriamente dichiarato ai suoi che “l’educazione è cosa di cuore,” subito soggiunga che, di tale cuore, “Dio solo ne è il padrone,


294 COLLI, La direzione spirituale nella prassi e nel pensiero di don Bosco, 56.

295 Cf. COLLI, La direzione spirituale nella prassi e nel pensiero di don Bosco, 60.
Finally, both Don Vecchi and Don Colli came to the same conclusion in their treatments of Salesian spiritual direction. The paternity of Don Bosco was not merely an attribute of his role as a priest. It was the special character of his relationship with young people. It went beyond his role as a priest. It became the characteristic mark of the Salesian style of spiritual direction. This was, indeed, the special privilege of the roles of those in authority. Over time, this important role has evolved beyond the director-priest and extends outward to all those in Salesian authority over the young, while never devaluing the singular role of the priestly confessor and guide.

4.3. Process of Human Maturation

The process of human maturing was tackled by Don Vecchi in his references to the journey of the young, among educators and evangelizers, and in the formation of consecrated Salesians. His particular call for attention to this process was urgent in his thinking as the problems of a global community seemed to make the setting for Salesian mission more and more complicated. As he indicated in his concern for animation:

To become and remain capable of animating a broad educative environment, of accompanying with other educators processes of maturing and growth, of guiding individuals, of interacting in the social context, imply that qualifications must be kept always up to date and that time be set aside for rethinking proposals and methods.297

The process of human maturation, Don Vecchi contended, was a life-long obligation requiring vigilance and ongoing formation. He warned that the path could be lost:

For the Salesian – and it applies not only to the young confreres – it is indispensable to have an understanding of the life which leads to a solidly motivated vocational option, and helps to an evermore mature and conscious living, without any complexes or cutting down, his own

296 COLLI, La direzione spirituale nella prassi e nel pensiero di don Bosco, 65-66. Here Don Colli quotes first from the MB I, 43, and then from the Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco, vol. IV from 1881 to 1888, p. 209.

identity and its human significance. Not unreal is the risk of going astray in the face of currents of thought, or of taking refuge in models of behaviour and forms of expression that belong to the past. In such a case our vocation, isolated from life and culture, would not become leaven and challenge but would rather be relegated to the level of a subjective choice.298

The published notes for youth pastoral have often treated the subject of human maturation. In the series *I Quaderni dell’animatore: le dispense di “Note di pastorale giovanile” per la formazione degli animatori di gruppo*, Salesian authors Daneile Calorio, Carlo Nanni, Anna Sansani, and Antonio Martinelli offered insight specifically on the role and identity of the Salesian animator. In a 64 page booklet in this series, they presented a view of the animator from the point of view of human maturation and then from the angle of spiritual animation. Very much consistent with the positions of Don Vecchi, these authors offered a view of animation integrated into the process of human growth. For one to animate others requires a sober understanding of one’s personal identity and role. Functioning fully in life, demonstrating the distinctions between a subjective view of reality and a healthy objectivity, these persons are capable of inviting others to a fullness of self-awareness.

**4.3.1. Maturity Expressed as a Value-centered Lifestyle**

This maturity is marked by a value-centered style of life. This centered lifestyle is optimum for growing spiritually and maturing into the spiritual person God intends. This maturity bespeaks a dynamic relationship by suggesting that the search for maturity is a personal responsibility that is expressed most profoundly within the community experience. Rather than maturity for its own sake, this is a maturity directed outward. This effort is aided by the help of spiritual guides and by sharing life among other animators and persons searching for ways to give life to the community.299

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298 VECCHI, ACS 361, 30.
4.4. Qualified and Professional Religious

By suggesting that Don Vecchi was preoccupied by the training and professionalism of the consecrated Salesians, an emphasis comes to the fore. Don Vecchi was adamant that professionalism and training were indispensable for a consecrated Salesian and linked it inseparably from their duty as members of Don Bosco’s family called by God. However, we must also recall his concern that professionalism should never replace the characteristic loving presence or pastoral presence that marked the Family of Don Bosco. He wrote of a quality with clarity of purpose:

Quality emerges as a necessary requirement in every sector of life, culture and activity. It is spoken of in terms of an ‘excellence’ to be sought, a ‘competence’ to be fostered, an overall ‘quality’ to be attained.

Good will and generous availability are indispensable but insufficient unless they are accompanied by the knowledge and techniques proper to a field of activity, the understanding of cultural phenomena which are a mark of present-day life and, for us, the ability to confront such phenomena with an ever deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ.

The problem is not only for Salesians. It is the common situation of all who want to live, without going astray, through the present cultural transformation, in which to be educators, pastors or simple Christians implies discernment and choice.300

4.5. Issues of Religious Formation

Don Antonio Martinelli worked side by side with Don Vecchi and simultaneously published great work for the updating of Salesian Formation. It is inconceivable not to mention Don Matinelli when referring to the renewal suggested by Don Vecchi.

It is clear that for us, as was affirmed by GC23, spiritual renewal, pastoral tendency, cultural preparation and educative competence cannot be separated one from another, if the Salesian is to be inserted in the youth context with the ability to dialogue and make effective suggestions.301 Together they depict the physiognomy of our holiness and the way we approach it. This means that the urgency of a lawful and obligatory qualification must not be confused with an exaggerated search for efficiency.302 Our hope lies always in the grace which the Father pours abundantly into hearts, in the Cross which is the sign of life and

300 VECCHI, ACS 361, 6.
301 Cf. GC23, 225
302 Cf. FC 38
salvation, and in the Word which enlightens us. But as individuals and as a Congregation, a part of the generous response to our vocation is not to leave the talents we have received lying idle.  

4.5.1. The Religious Dimensions of Existence

An important contribution to this area of thought is certainly linked to the work of Don Antonio Martinelli. His work entitled *Educarsi al quotidiano* offers an examination of spiritual discernment for a person of faith. In this text, Don Martinelli takes on the issues of plurality suggested by Don Vecchi as a bi-product of the new globalization. Such conditions have created for the world, for the believers, and for the Salesians the great peril of a pervasive relativism. With this danger comes the companion of a culture that is highly personalistic casting human existence into a chaotic repetitive cycle of exploitation and selfishness. Within this setting, the formation of a Salesian, and the discernment of the believer, is called upon to give witness to the power of communion in which the true personality can be formed. At the root of the challenges, then, rests a problem of identity. This problem, suggests Don Martinelli, must be addressed by considering the religious dimensions of existence.

Much of this emphasis resonates in the work of Don Vecchi, especially as he responded to *Vita Consecrata* and focused his reflections upon the consecrations of baptism and the further consecration by living the evangelical counsels. This further consecration, he insisted, was to live as a sign of the Gospel, by communal witness, and lead to a vision of the Kingdom freed from the new entrapments of globalization.

4.6. Issues of Lay Formation

GC 24 focused entirely upon the relationship of the consecrated Salesian Family to the Lay Salesian Family. Don Vecchi was explicit in his suggestions for a new style of shared formation. To that we turn, underlining some of his salient thoughts. The quality

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303 VECCHI, AGC 361, 7-8.
of which he wrote concerning choices and discernment for all is urged forward by a new model of shared formation, religious and laity. What he described was both challenging and exciting. Don Vecchi saw the consecrated Salesians as instrumental to this new style of formation. He wrote:

This was felt almost as a constant prodding in our GC24. It was clear from an analysis of the situation of the Congregation, that living the Salesian project of consecrated life at the present day with a serene maturity and facing up adequately to the tasks of our mission, require of every confrere a greater spiritual strength\textsuperscript{306}, a qualitative leap with regard to general preparation, specifically that of a pastor and educator\textsuperscript{307}, and new cultural, professional and pastoral skills\textsuperscript{308}.

Don Vecchi went onto indicate that he personally adopted the priority of formation in his work of the Chapter giving particular attention to its cultural dimension. He saw the participation of the laity within the Salesian spirit and mission as a challenge that could only be met with a new formation. He longed to see the fruit of this formation as demonstrated in joyful living out the roles of educators and pastors with great maturity and openness. He insisted that the motivation for such new formation would not be because of any deficits but because of significance of the religious presence in the mission.

4.7. Casting Out Upon the Open Seas in the Salesian Youth Movement

“Duc in Altum!” Cast out into the deep! This was Don Vecchi’s last rallying cry to the Salesian Family, his last strenna before ending his earthly pilgrimage. How appropriate that he would raise such a cry as he would be leaving the shore of this existence. He was keenly aware of the need for renewed focus upon a vision that embraced many possibilities and newer initiatives. He was keen that Salesian communities would develop vocation awareness in the young and foster a deeper vision across the Salesian Family. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that his dying wish was to re-ignite the Salesian imagination and fire a new and attractive vision of God’s call to serve the

\textsuperscript{306} cf. GC24, 239  
\textsuperscript{307} cf. GC24, 242  
\textsuperscript{308} cf. GC24, 242-243; VC 98
young. It was his hope that this fire of renewal would enkindle a new spirit of joy and creativity in the heart of the Salesian world.

Hearing well the strong voice of John Paul II at the doorway to the third millennium, Don Vecchi made his exhortations his own and added to these specific Salesian characteristics and duties. John Paul II had written his hopes for the activities during the celebration of the Jubilee Year of 2000 and used the image of Christ urging Peter to cast out into deeper waters for a catch of fish after so many unsuccessful attempts. John Paul wrote:

At the beginning of the new millennium, and at the close of the Great Jubilee during which we celebrated the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus and a new stage of the Church's journey begins, our hearts ring out with the words of Jesus when one day, after speaking to the crowds from Simon's boat, He invited the Apostle to "put out into the deep" for a catch: "Duc in altum" (Lk 5:4). Peter and his first companions trusted Christ's words, and cast the nets. "When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish" (Lk 5:6).

Duc in altum! These words ring out for us today, and they invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13:8).309

A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ. The Son of God, who became incarnate two thousand years ago out of love for humanity, is at work even today, we need discerning eyes to see this and, above all, a generous heart to become the instruments of his work".310

4.7.1. An Ensemble of New Realities

Don Vecchi echoed the reflections of John Paul II as he broke down four possible meanings for the metaphor of the “high seas,” and summarized their significance as “an ensemble of new realities and values which we have not yet lived and clarified sufficiently in the light of the redemption, and which we are called upon today to take up as our task and testimony.”311 Yet, Don Vecchi insisted that it is not enough simply to become aware of new realities, new needs, and new settings. In his address to the Salesian Family, he

310 NMI, 58
311 VECCHI, ACG 361, 11
stressed the importance of this moment in history. He referred to it as “a meeting between humanity and grace, between human history and incarnation.”

Don Vecchi summarized the directives of John Paul and gave them the character of the Salesian charism, coloring them as an address to pastors, educators, and ministers to the young, both religious and lay. He spoke of the primacy of grace and reminded the Salesian Family that planning without Christ is, in the end, fruitless. Don Vecchi continued the review by stressing the path of holiness as the only path of true ministry. This path is demonstrated primarily by living the liturgy of life, staying close to the Eucharist daily, proclaiming the centrality of our belief in the risen Lord. For the Salesian Family, this path is one lived in community and in a spirituality of communion, conscious of being members of the Mystical Body of Christ, participating fully in the Mystery and Oneness of the Trinity. This living the liturgy of life holds within it the concern for the poor and the outcast and moves outward in charity to meet them in their most desperate needs, with the special gift of the laity, whose field of social interaction compel the Church to move beyond a comfortable gathering of friends.

4.7.2. The Boat of the Salesian Youth Movement

The image of the open seas led Don Vecchi to take up the metaphor of the Salesian boat. Here he describes those specifically Salesian places of moving out in ministry and casting nets far and wide. He called this, overall, “The Salesian Youth Movement” (SYM). He urged the Salesian Family worldwide to become connected to this movement in every form of ministry, to communicate it throughout the world and open up dialogue between realities and efforts to serve the young. He was so adamant for a new embrace of this reality, that his own words are best suited for emphasis here:

From all that has been said so far, we can conclude that the SYM is not just a desire or a dream; it is a reality! I have seen it in my visits to the different continents where I have come across a full range of expressions of the SYM; at other times I have met with those who have made a conscious and explicit choice of the Salesian brand of spirituality and have formed an “animating nucleus.”

a) This is truly a “youth” Movement, made up for the most part of young people, who however are not averse to or dismissive of the presence and friendship of lay and consecrated adults walking side by side with them. It is a “youth” Movement too because of its style and
modality of animation and involvement. In many places there is a Consulting body of young people that meets regularly and even has a voice in the local Church.

b) It is a uniquely “educative” Movement. In other words, there are different levels of identifying with it or belonging to it, and a varying intensity of participation and involvement. All take part in it – children, boys, young men and even adults – and their education and formation takes place together. For many persons the SYM has become the place where they recharge their batteries, drawing from the sources of spirituality and zeroing in on certain fundamental values that they want to translate into concrete life-choices.

c) It is a “world” Movement. Here at the Forum, the international aspect is clearly in evidence. But the reality is far more widespread than what is represented here. All this means that there is a golden opportunity for “networking”, that is, for working in support of those causes that are concerned with the dignity of the person, the advancement of the young, solidarity with the poor, and the new evangelization. This world dimension can also provide opportunities for “twinning” arrangements between groups and countries, associations and Salesian works; it also makes it possible to identify possible synergies and forms of collaboration with the local Churches and civil institutions”.

We conclude the inclusion of these many other themes. So much more might be explored and considered worth a closer examination and study. The purpose in this work has been to attempt to cull the most important themes and ideas of a remarkable man and successor of Don Bosco. His words, his life, his example, and all that he did call us to make a return to the Word of God as the basis of life and mission. At a time when the work in many parts of the Salesian world seems to outweigh the possibility of responding with energy and resources, this return to the Word brings both comfort and hope in making the bold choice of accompanying the young, and one another, on a true journey of faith. Like the disciples running away to Emmaus, Jesus, the Word of God, can process our present realities and return them to us with courage and the conviction that he, the living God, has never left us alone.

The harvest is great! More than by the quantitative disproportion between the work and the workers, we are struck by the challenges presented by the present situation: the putting forward of a sense of life, education of conscience, accompanying the young on a pilgrimage of faith, building up a broader solidarity, the efficacious embracing of poverty, effective

312 VECCHI, Strenna 2002,
expression of the Gospel, seeing to it that the Word of God is applied to the questions and possibilities of daily life.\textsuperscript{313}

\section*{Conclusion: A Crucial Turning Point}

Don Juan Edmundo Vecchi Monti was a special gift to the Salesian Family and to the Church. In a particular way, this successor of Don Bosco was a special gift to the youth of the world, especially those pushed to the edges of life in a world with increasing problems and complexity. It is little wonder that this man was asked by God to give testimony with his own life. At a point that one might claim to be his peak, he became terribly ill with a brain tumor. His decline was rapid. As he had told his Salesians to be a school of holiness, that is precisely what he became for those who attended him in his illness.

Once while he was taking a stroll Sister Sandra, who was looking after him, asked him: "Fr Vecchi, you were accustomed to being autonomous and independent. You did everything by yourself. You must find it hard now to depend on others". Fr Vecchi looked at her and replied: "God gives his grace. I have put myself in your hands and you have placed me in the hands of God. Do with me as you would do to Christ, and I shall be satisfied".

…Fr Pascual Chávez, a member of the General Council, remarked that his sickness had been like a powerful catalyst accelerating the maturing process and spiritual perfecting of Fr Vecchi, by transforming him into a mystic. On his bed of sickness he felt himself to be priest, altar and victim.

…"We have lived at school of Salesian spirituality", said one of the Sisters who assisted him. And the same was true for the Salesians, and particularly for the students of the UPS who assisted Fr Vecchi during the night. For them it was a lesson of life they will never forget. "We have seen the students weeping", say the infirmary Sisters; "we have seen them on their knees in prayer at the bedside of the Rector Major during the long nights".

During his illness Fr Vecchi gathered around himself a family united in prayer; in his presence everyone lived rich moments of holiness.

Truly did the Rector Major live the long period of his illness as an expression of his service, convinced - as he himself put it - that "a Rector Major who is sick and suffering is not outside his particular ministry, but within it and indeed at its very heart."\textsuperscript{314}

\textsuperscript{313} VECCHI, AGC 361, 5.
\textsuperscript{314} VAN LOOY, Fr. Juan Edmundo Vecchi, 23-24.
Don Vecchi had a vision of reality and a dream of new horizons that inspired the world and set the Salesians on a course to form new ways of responding to the complexities complicating the lives of the young. He aggressively moved into every field concerned with their care, from the science of pedagogy to the depth of spirituality and theology. He gathered groups of religious, members of the vast family of Don Bosco from every style of association. He promoted and gave direction to the growing experience of the Salesian Youth Movement. He was direct in his address to his fellow Salesians and always direct and available in his address to the youth of the world.

As we turn to look at this present moment in our journey of life, Don Vecchi’s words are still very applicable, still very much alive. We are moving into the world he saw from the shore and he urges all concerned with the future of the youth of the world, all those who desire to accompany them to find meaning in life and the love of God beating in their own hearts, to cast the nets far and wide. He is confident that the Lord of Life will provide the catch and the means to haul it ashore to a place of transformation.

The human race is at a crucial turning point in its history, characterized by many signs which are positive and others which are ambiguous. Among these is the tendency to think that it is sufficient unto itself and therefore has no need of God nor of the sacrament of the Church in the development of its life. We are witnessing a dangerous divorce between technical and scientific progress and faith in the living God, who is relegated to private life.

The signs of this tendency are an insistent challenge to us. On the one hand they obscure the religious connection in many sectors of public and social life, and on the other there is a tendency towards vague spiritual experiences which imply a flight from concrete experience.

The Church, for its part, has devoted particular attention to the development of consecrated life, recognizing the various forms in which it has been already expressed and its openness to new manifestations still unthought-of of. It is an indication of the originality of the Spirit who is present in all ages.\textsuperscript{315}

The daily round means incarnation. In your words, gestures and actions, the grace that is within you becomes visible and expresses your consecration. By inculcating it and making it intelligible at the present day, you make ordinary things become significant and small signs eloquent with the expression of sense and humanity.

\textsuperscript{315} VECCHI, ACG 360, Rome, Direzione Generale Opere don Bosco, 1997, n. 7.
There is need perhaps to train oneself to spiritual discernment which can penetrate contemporary perplexities, the widespread fragmentation of the present day, and the precarious element which affects everything. There is also need to look beyond normal horizons, to do a bit of dreaming, to muse on new things and new possibilities.\footnote{VECCHI, ACG 370, Rome, Direzione Generale Opere don Bosco, 1999, n.8.}
Chapter 3: Accompaniment as a Gift of Grace for a New Moment

Premise

It seems a bit presumptuous to consider the memory of Don Vecchi as something so far removed as to distinguish his moment from the present one. That is not the intention of this chapter. Instead, the new mentalities and new ways of being present to young people he advocated have set in motion much of what is being put in place in the Salesian world today. The structures of the wider Educative Pastoral Community (EPC) with their participation and shared formation are, at the moment of this writing, beginning to finally take hold in most parts of the consecrated world of the Salesian family. With that, the personal projects of life of every Salesian educator and the Provincial Pastoral Plans (SEPP) are the rhythm of planning borne of a new and shared “planning mentality” advocated by Don Vecchi and Don Chavez.

There is another wind blowing, however. That wind seems amazingly familiar, though it comes from places far removed from the Salesian context. Men and women, hearing the call of the Spirit to respond to the new evangelization called for by Pope John Paul II, are stumbling across new spiritualities of accompaniment. It would seem that the very same realities drawing the attention of the Salesian world in recent years are overlapping with many other sectors of society and culture. Because of this, the insights gleaned from many other sources serve only to strengthen the call of the Spirit to the Salesian family in all of their particularity.

This chapter sets its hopes on taking the insight of Don Vecchi and the rich heritage of Don Bosco into a moment that has been identified in the Western World as new and challenging. Joining Salesian voices to voices across the spectrum of spirituality and ministry, it is hoped to demonstrate the clarity of the Spirit’s call for this time and for this place.
1. A New Cultural Moment and a New Formation

Salesian scholar and religious, Giuseppina Del Core, has written much about the Salesian spirituality of accompaniment. It is her conviction that such a spirituality “emerges as a grace and a necessity” for the present times as the world and the Church face a “new moment.” Sr. Del Core states clearly that we are living at a time of vocational crisis and which, she suggests, is linked to a wider phenomenon of abandonment. She calls this a time of disjointed formation in which there is an evident lack of discernment and vocational accompaniment. In general, many persons feel distant from spiritual realities and indifferent to spiritual direction. Into this reality, Sr. Del Core suggests that the act of accompaniment “re-emerges as a grace and a necessity in the experience of the Church today.” As she describes this necessity, she offers various components which contribute to a definition of spiritual accompaniment. These components will be considered later in this text. Suffice it to mention that she admits that the terminology in this area of discussion is still evolving and cautions against a facile use of such terms. She emphasizes the need to find a language that is not perceived as threatening to the present culture and one which will not be tempted to water down significance in the process.

What are most intriguing in her work are her identification of this necessity and the emergence of accompaniment as a sign of grace for this particular moment. Here is a translation of her writing on this point:

This is a new cultural moment—a new need for formation! In the secular age, there is a need for a word or a term that invites and addresses this need and takes it out of its trapped connotation (but whatever the term, it is still “spiritual”).

The signs to which she points indicating and highlighting this moment are many: the spiritual transformations taking place among the laity who are asking for direction within special groupings, profound psychological changes taking place with certain

318 DEL CORE, L’Accompagnamento Vocazionale, 76.
urgency, the search for spiritual gurus and the spiritual hunger which that demonstrates, and a universal cry for communion all characterize this moment. Therefore, accompaniment, Sr. Del Core insists, must be educative if it is to provide assistance in making coherent and authentic choices within this tangle of quests for meaning. At this turning point, the roles of the confessors and the religious have shifted from central to marginal positions of influence and ministry. Del Core sees this as a shift in mentalities and realities. She calls this “a new moment within the Church” that is both an opportunity and a crisis.

To find a path out of the labyrinth is to focus on persons in all of their psychological and spiritual needs. Therefore, accompaniment, however it is defined, must be educative and respect the autonomy of the individual. In order to find a symbol adequate to describe the accompaniment needed in this moment, Sr. Pina turns to the Gospel of Luke and the Emmaus Journey. She qualifies accompaniment according to this “experience” of the risen Christ. *Accompaniment is not an idea, but a person who walks beside us and urging us along the same path upon which the accompanier travels.* These are the characteristics of that model: accompaniment is a conversation about the present moment in all of its reality, it is a destination, and it is a sharing of life and ultimate meaning.

Fr. Henri Nouwen echoes this model in his own attempt to walk with others in the secular world. He names the journey as one of being “taken, blessed, broken, and given.”320 He describes each of these steps in the journey carefully: the one baptized is taken—already chosen, already named for, already owned, already claimed as belonging to the Father; the chosen one is blessed as one with special uniqueness, unrepeatable value, worthy of the Father’s love; the chosen is broken and in need of the other and of God; and

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319 DEL CORE, *L’accompagnamento Vocazionale*, 76. Some of the profound psychological changes cited are new thinking for new forms of religiosity and spirituality investing the emotional and deeper parts of life, invasion of exotic ideas from the East, the quest for psychological confirmation of the future by means of astrology, magic, and card-reading, the fascination and the refuge of contemplative isolationism in the face of consumerism and technology, the disciplines a “fusion of spiritualities”, to the return of a spirituality labeled as “traditional.”

the chosen is sent into the world as gift. The entire process of spiritual growth toward an oneness with God and with others is offered in this brief description. Nouwen draws upon an important attribute of being blessed. He emphasizes the unique gift of one’s presence. *Presence* is that special quality that only one can choose to offer or withhold from another. This is the special gift and the call of accompaniment—a call to be actively present, radically attentive, authentically open to “hear” the other with a readiness to respond to the need of the other. For Nouwen, this is the least available gift in our world today, the mark of the secular age, *the* source of our anxiety and violence—the lack of presence.

If accompaniment is the grace of God emerging in this moment and if that is the special gift of presence for a hungering age, it would seem that this is not a passing topic to be easily discussed and thrown aside. It is, in this discussion, the central issue for the moment. It is not simply the central issue for the Salesian, already called to offer a special presence and accompaniment to the young, but it appears as the special call of God to the whole Church. To expand on this notion, let us turn now to other prophetic voices and visions of accompaniment. Let us examine this moment and name it.

### 1.1. Defining a Western Context for a New Moment

More than a few spiritual authors have claimed in recent years that the West is in decline. A shift is taking place. It may take many generations, but one of the consequences of a new globalization is erosion of power in the West. This shift has ramifications in every dimension of the human experience of life from the political to the economic to the profoundly spiritual. As the world becomes smaller, the shift is inevitable. For some, it spells the end of a world-view and the intrusion of unfamiliar and new world-views and cultural values. For others, the shift represents an opportunity for sharing the richness of other views and perspectives. On one side is a defensive stance prepared to fight for survival and on another side hands are reaching out for new synergies and shared possibilities.
1.1.1. A Period of Diminishment

From an ecclesial standpoint, many authors have defined the present moment as a period of diminishment. The Western Church, they suggest, is being purified by God. Here, too, there are definitely separate camps: one defensive, one welcoming. Those whose postures are defensive are neither wrong nor right. They are simply caught in a strange countryside without a map. Those whose dispositions are welcoming are neither more informed nor more correct. They are as much in need of a compass as those preparing their defense. Both sides, in fact, would be wise to join hands on the journey into unfamiliar territory: one offering important links to historical and traditional foundations, the other exploring new possibilities without fear.

This shift has been long in the making and its arrival is not complete. This is a moment of transition. As such, this moment calls out for direction. It agitates and bubbles to the surface many questions of meaning. The possibility of ignoring this reality is gone. Spiritual author and Benedictine Sister, Joan Chittister asserts:

The spirituality of diminishment implies that we will go on without promise of success, with no memorials raised to our efforts, with no institutions to mark our accomplishments, with no respect for age, with no certainty that any one, at any time, will come behind us to complete the work. Given the decline in our numbers, we excuse ourselves from the struggle. Or we become cynical about new efforts, new ideas. Or we deny the present situations entirely and settle down to wait for another age. It is a serious moment in the life of the soul…The idea of starting over to do new work with new energy wearies us to the bone…

But this is a great moment for those whose souls are still alive with God. Diminishment requires more life of us than we have ever known before. It leads us to be ourselves, to give everything we’ve got, to know the power of God at work in us, far beyond our own strength, far beyond our own vision. Diminishment gives us the opportunity, the reason, the mandate to examine our lives, to begin again, to dredge up what is best in us, to spill it recklessly across the canvass of the earth. Diminishment throws us back, whole and entire, small and trusting, aflame and afire, on God. And a life in God is anything but dead. It is glory beyond glory beyond glory.321

In a Salesian context, the Western experience is varied. When the West is applied to the Salesian context, it can refer to the American continents, to the English-speaking

countries, and to combinations of these. On the American continents, the Salesian experience is vastly different from one country and culture to another. In those territories defined as industrialized and progressive with English-speaking as the foundation of education and business, “the West” implies a link to a form of imperialism that connects with Western Europe in a post-World War II world. In other words, “the West” in this application refers to the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Scotland, Australia, and other satellite regions connected by forms of government and economies. It refers also to the Allies of World War II in Western Europe. The Western world, then, is captured in this context as “the secularized world.” Even within this world there are vast differences in every dimension of life experience, but the common ground that is shared in all of these cultures is the long history of development, structures of education, and technological advancement which has, for better or for worse, led to a diminishment of the authority of religious faith within these cultures. Secularism is the new authority.

There is nothing simple about defining a context in the rapidly changing landscape of the world today. Don Vecchi recognized this and referred to many forms of poverty in the experiences of the young. Within his own Western experience from Argentina to Rome, he encountered the problems of globalization. What is important to underline is the fact that the Western world, for all of its contexts and varied cultural expressions, has had positive and negative influence upon the non-western world. For example, Don Vecchi was heart-broken by his encounters with militarized youth in embattled, horribly under-developed countries of western Africa. Though these contexts would not be considered “Western,” the impact of Western arms, Western drugs, and Western colonization has had far-reaching and catastrophic impact upon the youth of these regions.

Therefore, it is difficult to define simply a Western context for a Salesian examination of the present moment. What can be said is that the Western World has, because of globalization, left its mark upon the entire world. In an essay on new evangelization, Robert Schreiter offered this thought on globalization:
Globalization, while providing some overarching understanding of the human being and society, is being found by many people to be grossly inadequate. It’s based upon largely consumerist models. Your value as a human being is determined by what you can make or produce and what you can consume, in the reverse order, actually.\textsuperscript{322}

Asia offers a Salesian context that is, in some ways, radically different. The choice for the vocation of the Salesian religious is growing dramatically. Diverse works are cropping up all over Asia responding to newer and newer challenges. Houses for children of the street, hostels for young people looking for work, and educational enterprises of every shape and size are responding to the hordes of young people forming the major populations of these territories of the early twenty-first century world. Unlike the west, their cultural experience is widely diverse and their spiritual and religious context is anything but homogenous. Even economically, many places once considered among the most impoverished of the world are fast becoming centers of computer science development and engineering. This alone is shifting the economies of these traditionally poorer countries. While the boon can be considered a positive effect, the pace at which the vast numbers of poor are being offered decent living conditions and educational opportunities continues to lag behind incongruously.

1.1.2. Secularization and Globalization

Don Vecchi recognized that the Valdocco Oratory was now world-wide and faced problems far more complex than any one location could ever imagine. It is for this reason that he called for the development of new mentalities and new strategies for living out a new evangelization.

Therefore, we set as our context, in general, the secular world and its impact on the entire world. For the most part, this is rooted in the traditional “Western World.” That world is nuanced primarily by a pluralism borne of immigration. This is an important

detail for defining a context. An overview of this Western World is necessary and calls our attention again to Robert Schreiter:

Secularization may represent what happens under particular social conditions that are not being produced in the same way in different parts of the world. So people are engaging modernity and secularity in very different ways in diverse parts of the world.323

Schreiter calls Europe the heartland of secularity because in Europe and Australia it is found in its strongest form. In Denmark, Sweden, and Norway there is a phenomenon he refers to as “believing without belonging.” It had grown into their custom to be members of their cultural church as a birthright, as part of a “folk church.” These cultures raised generations in school with religion but without any affiliation. He indicates that the place where this is most obvious is when any of these cultures tries to engage in biblical narrative; they become terribly confused.324

Turning his gaze to the Catholic countries of Europe, Schreiter finds a strong secularity which, he claims, grew quickly and even produced hostility toward religious institution. This hostility seems to be rooted in a desire for these countries to distinguish themselves from the institution, to be rid of its history and its link to their identities.

With the unraveling of communism and the fall of related dictatorships throughout Eastern Europe and between East and West Berlin, there are other signs of secularity already present. In Germany, for instance, there are two generations without faith at all. Many burials in Germany are without ritual of any kind and no markers are left to commemorate the dead. Poland is in the same situation. Its seminaries are dropping in number by 50 percent in the last decade. On the other hand, where religion was most brutally suppressed, there is a growing interest. So it is that in the Czech Republic and countries in that area of Europe, there is a renewed interest, but there is little return to what was traditional faith.325

Australia is a special case. Its secularity is very strong, but it lacks in hostility. Unlike Europe with cultural and historical ties to institutional religion, Australia was

323 SCHREITER, Pathways to Evangelization in the First World, 107.
324 Cf. SCHRETIER, Pathways to Evangelization in the First World, 107-108.
325 Cf. SCHRETIER, Pathways to Evangelization in the First World, 108.
founded as a penal colony without attention to any attachment to such institutions. Because of this history, Australia has not been hostile to religion, but is not particularly engaged in its pursuit, either. Secularity has long been its guide for culture and the decision making process in every sector of life.326

The Europeans generally express surprise at the deep religiosity they perceive in the United States and in Canada. There is no established Church in the United States or Canada, but faith is stronger than it appears upon first glance. The memory of an established Church in Europe makes the evangelization effort nearly impossible. This is not a burden in the United States. In Canada, some of that burden has been felt culturally in Quebec, making it the closest link to Europe as far as its brand of developed secularity, but the western parts of Canada are more easily compared to the experience of the United States.327

Even the effects of the Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th Centuries contrast dramatically between those of Europe and the United States. Schreiter makes the point:

A second feature is the Enlightenment. Europe was largely influenced by the French Enlightenment, where there was a tremendous struggle with the Church. Much of the Enlightenment in the United States was formed by the Scottish Enlightenment. Princeton University was staffed with Edinburgh graduates when it began. That’s a much more relaxed understanding of reason, which is not necessarily hostile to religion. Moreover, many people who came to the United States at certain stages were victims of religious persecution. So holding on to faith was a much more important element of who they were.328

The United States has a special brand of secularity which spills over into its many forms of faith. Schreiter suggests bluntly that “everything in the United States gets turned into a market.” The competing denominations offer over nine hundred types of Protestantism. Such competition is virtually absent throughout Europe.

Finally, we must ask what conclusions might be drawn from this glance at the various contexts of secularity and religiosity in the present world known as “the West”? Schreiter suggests that “migration is having an important effect.” He continues:

326 Cf. SCHRETIER, Pathways to Evangelization in the First World, 108.
327 Cf. SCHRETIER, Pathways to Evangelization in the First World, 109.
328 SCHRETIER, Pathways to Evangelization in the First World, 109.
Many of the poor in our countries, apart from first-nation peoples, are migrants. Immigrant religion shows that religion is an important bridge between where people came from and where they are now, at least for the first generation. The second generation is more problematic.  

Though immigration provides a necessary bridge, it remains subjected to many hostilities. Much of these can be identified with a “post-modern” world. This is largely a cultural response to what has failed in the promises of the “modern” world. Progress, as it was perceived 40 years ago, was much more optimistic and, perhaps, naïve. There was inherent in that grasp of progress the expectation that the world could be changed. The intervening events of history have tempered those expectations and, in some cases, even led to a darker view of the future. Schreiter identifies a “disjuncture of different parts of life caused by pluralism” in this point of cultural arrival. He calls this disjuncture by a generalized term, “post-modern” and in so doing indicates that there are different definitions for this term lacking a uniform prevalence throughout the first world. Overall, it is a reaction that causes people to become lost in a variety of choices, unable to find clear criteria for making these choices. In offering an explanation for this, he introduces an interesting insight. What marks those people and events characterized as “post-modern” is the “loss of the big narratives.” Without these narratives, people have tended to throw together disparate elements to give meaning to their lives. This results in multiple identities and to the degree by which this effects an individual indicates the extent of that individual’s involvement in the secular.

Schreiter goes on to suggest three images of the secular. The first image is that religion is receding. He compares this to the erosion of a hillside. This indicates that religion is more and more privatized and slowly disappearing. The second image arrived as late as the 1990’s and suggests that secularity is only a thin veneer covering a teeming religiosity. The last image, the one he suggests needs more attention and exploration, depicts secularity as an island within religiosity. In this he mentions that political science is now turning to religion to explain world order and disorder, abandoning older models

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329 SCHRETIER, Pathways to Evangelization in the First World, 110.
330 Cf. SCHRETIER, Pathways to Evangelization in the First World, 110.
usually presented from the first world. Later in this chapter, we will look again at these three images of the secular as Schreiter shares “strategic pathways” out of secularity for a new evangelization.\(^{331}\)

1.1.3. Maintenance versus Initiative

In the Western Church, there are dramatic signs of a decline. More than a few contemporary spiritual authors have referred to this as the “graying and emptying” of the Church.\(^{332}\) Much more than simply a reduction in church members, this is a shift of authority and the role of institution in the present day. This is evident in the increasing marginalization of religion and the role of church in public life and policy making. Being pushed to the margins, faith is often considered merely a private choice that has no right to suggest anything to any one else. The once strong moral voice of the church seems to be gone in many parts of society and any attempt to lift that voice often leads to a cultural recoiling, even a counter attack on the institutional church. Very often, the response of the church and its ministers is to hunker down in denial or self-righteous indignation. In some cases, the response is one of waiting for a better age or a longing for an imagined golden era to reappear. These responses are wont to lay blame, as well. This is because the conclusions being drawn are too painful: the church has been better at keeping up maintenance than forging new initiatives. Daniel O’Leary draws a powerful metaphor of a pot-bound plant. Many ministers in the church are pot-bound. The plant is beginning to shrivel because its roots have not reached beyond its original confines. These roots have done their job, but to survive, they must burst out of the pot and reach out to fresh soil.

Ron Rolheiser gives an apt description as well:

The problem is not, it seems diocesan life or parish structure. We are doing relatively well here. Simply put, for the most part, we know what to do with someone who walks through our church doors, but we do not know how to get people (not least members of our own families) who are not already going to church to enter those doors. We are better at

\(^{331}\) Cf. SCHREITER, \textit{Pathways to Evangelization in the First World}, 112-115.

maintaining church life than at initiating it, better at being diocesan ministers than at being missionaries.

What is needed today in the Western World, it would seem, is a new missiology for our own highly secularized culture.

Moreover, the very word “missionary” itself no longer functions effectively within our secularized culture. We automatically link the word “missionary” to sending people to minister in places like Kenya, Burundi, Chad, and Bangladesh, but somehow we cannot form the same kind of concept for sending missionaries to London, Washington, Los Angeles, Paris, or Vancouver. For the most part, we lack the very concept for being missionary to the so-called first world.

What is lacking? What is needed?

We need to become missionaries again within our own culture, among our own children. Secularity is now the culture that, it would appear, the church must most address in terms of taking to heart Jesus’ parting challenge: “Go out to all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

This conversation is not far removed by any means from the Salesian context. In fact, quite often this is the very discussion around which provincial councils and chapters meet. Before we can accompany the young, they must come through our doors. Even those young people who are part of a trapped audience by school enrollment do not guarantee their whole or willing attendance for all that is spiritual and rooted to the fundamental values of a Salesian mission.

The secular world is here to stay and the Salesian Family is part of it. This is the new missionary territory within a new evangelization. It requires, as Don Vecchi reiterated repeatedly, a new imagination and a bold faith in order to form an adequate response to its reality. Let us turn to systematic theologian and author, Ron Rolheiser for a breakdown of this new reality called secularity.

1.1.4. **The Many Faces of Secularity**

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the provinces of Canada made a bold choice in the 1980’s. After generations of very established ministries in higher education, they

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called themselves back to their roots and decided to withdraw from these safe and successful institutions, to leave them in the care of trained professionals sensitive to their educational charism, and reach out to the identified poor on the margins of Canadian society. For them, this entailed the choice of moving into the reservations of the indigenous peoples of Canada known as the native peoples or native Canadians. This was a decision to move away from seminaries, high schools, colleges, and other ministries which were and remain very important and well defined and, instead, turn toward the communities plagued by many dramatic forms of poverty from political isolation, institutional racism, and the deadly and pervasive disease of alcohol and substance abuse. Inevitably, these ills of their society have reached far and wide into regions of crime, imprisonment, corruption, exploitation, physical and sexual abuse. This was a bold and sweeping choice at what would appear as a most illogical moment in the Canadian Church, still trembling from the explosive sexual scandals which raged across the country in the 1980’s–which nearly decimated the Irish Christian Brothers from east to west. It is from that context that the Oblates turned their gaze upon another form of cultural poverty touching upon every reality in Canada and beyond: secularity.

Ron Rolheiser, a respected spiritual author, lecturer, and member of the Superior Council of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate was instrumental in calling together a symposium which led to a series of symposia on the subject of evangelizing in the first world. Drawing upon respected authorities on this subject from all over North America, these symposia led to an important publication to which we make reference here, *Secularity and the Gospel: Being Missionaries to our Children.* Rolheiser proposes that the first step for moving from fear to action, from discouragement to faith, is to name the reality in which we live and to which the Gospel is more than adequate to respond.

Our faith, moreover, gives us confidence that the Gospels are more than adequate to the task of engaging secularity. Again and again, indeed in virtually every theophany in scripture, the first words that the divine messenger addresses to us are: “Do not be afraid! Be at peace!” Those are important missionary instructions. We must engage in secularity without fear, confident that our truth, our Gospels, and our God are up to the task. Too often there is an unconscious fear that our scriptures, church, and God are not up to the task and that they must
be protected from the secular world. That fear masks a lack of hope. The Gospels still work!\textsuperscript{334}

And so, these symposia named the context as secularity. Ron Rolheiser shares four conclusions about the general nature of secularity in the opening chapter of this text. Let us examine these four points.

The first point these symposia offered is that \textit{secularity is a complex phenomena which needs to be respected in its complexity}. Offering a definition pertinent to the present context, the term refers to the tendency to ignore or deny the principles of supernatural religion. Clear examples of this are found in the government takeover of hospitals and universities founded and once operated by members of religious orders or extensions of the church. This transition constitutes a move from religious to non-religious hands. Yet, this definition needs a link to a historical context. Western Philosophy tends to divide history into the categories of \textit{ancient, medieval, modern, and post-modern}. Secularity is identified, the symposia indicate, with the third category of modernity. Modernity is defined as that period in which human reason became the final authority. Descartes is considered the Father of Modernity, which dismantled the ages of reference to higher and spiritual authorities. The effects of this shift still resonate everywhere in the Western World today.\textsuperscript{335}

Rolheiser cautions that this is not a monolithic reality that threatens faith. In fact, there are many positive transitions and contributions from this shift. Witch burning, once part of the world view and a defense of faith, is long gone. Yet, there is widespread godlessness where God once reigned. In France, the Enlightenment was hostile. In North America, it fostered tolerance and the breaking down of denominational lines of division. Therefore, this complexity is to be respected.

The second consideration is, in fact, a nod to this complexity. \textit{Secularity is mixed morally and religiously}. It is generally morally ambivalent. It is easy to demonize or divinize secularity, but it is neither a “culture of death” nor a “culture of life.” Rolheiser

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{334} ROLHEISER, \textit{Secularity and the Gospel}, 46-47.
\item \textsuperscript{335} Cf. ROLHEISER, \textit{Secularity and the Gospel}, 38-40.
\end{itemize}
suggests that it is a phenomenon full of grace and simultaneously a condition that militates against faith and grace! While secularity insists upon freedom of religion, for example, it is also the attitude enshrined in much of the West that is better translated as freedom for religion.  

The fingerprints of a Judeo-Christian culture are found all over secularity. In fact, secularity is its child, not its enemy. Yet, these symposia have suggested, every culture must be judged by its more noble expressions. Every culture and religion has its dark past, but they also have great moments of insight. In the act of judging this secular culture, though it is not found evil, it is found lacking. Cardinal Ratzinger, presiding at the funeral of Pope John Paul II, referred to the precarious nature of secular culture and its propensity to promote a “dictatorship of relativism.” Therefore, secularity is a morally mixed reality that must be challenged.

The symposia suggest that this is a moment of invitation to approach secularity with a biblical and Catholic attitude by loving the world as God loves it. This mandate is harder than it appears at first. This translates into loving a world with moral inadequacy and even when that world is hostile toward faith and religion. In imitation of God, we are to love despite sin. This is not a love based on right, entitlement, or worthiness. It is based upon the non-discriminatory love of God. As God incarnated that love, we are called to continue that incarnation in this secular world.

Jesus offered the key to this task: to be in the world but not of it. There are dangers on both sides present here. On the one side is over identification with the world and on the other is a disintegration of solidarity with what is good in the world, where God can be encountered. The symposia suggested that this situation demands a “new maturity, a new inner directedness, that is strong enough to immerse itself in the world without losing its moral and spiritual salt because it is rooted solidly enough in something and Someone outside of the world.” Because we are part of the world, children of this world, we are tainted by the same secularity, “inextricably bound up in our culture.” Therefore it is part

336 Cf. ROLHEISER, Secularity and the Gospel, 41-42.
337 ROLHEISER, Secularity and the Gospel, 43-46.
of the task to assume that there does exist, in fact, good will and sincerity in this world and avoid an oversimplified dualism.

In fact, the symposia cautions against fighting God in fighting secularity. Catholic theology promotes the idea that God is the author of all that is good and that the basic nature of creation is good. The world is flawed but NOT corrupt. This is a classic and important distinction that sets the Catholic faith apart.

The last conclusion reached by the symposia is that *secularity is a non-negotiable given in which we live in the hope that the Gospels are up to the task of engaging this reality*\(^{338}\). In the end, this is more of a choice “between faith and cynicism” rather than one between faith and secularity. Rolheiser quotes Jim Wallis, the founder and editor of *Sojourner Magazine* and whom he compares to Dorothy Day:

Prophetic faith does not see the primary battle as the struggle between belief and secularity. It understands that the real battle, the big struggle of our times, is the fundamental choice between cynicism and hope. The prophets always begin in judgment, in a social critique of the status quo, but they end in hope—that these realities can and will be changed. The choice between cynicism and hope is ultimately a spiritual choice, one that has enormous political consequences.\(^{339}\)

After offering these conclusions, Ron Rolheiser offers a summary of the steps for being missionaries to secularity. To these steps we shall return at a later point in this chapter.

### 1.2. Naming the North American Context

Much of what can be said about secularism in the Western World is universal to the various regions aforementioned, but every context will carry its own specificity. The interest of this research, ultimately, is situated within the cultures and experiences of North America. They are no less important for speaking to some of the realities throughout the West, but narrowing the focus facilitates a more accurate application of ideas and suggestions for being missionaries to secularity within that specific context. The Salesian

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\(^{338}\) Cf. ROLHEISER, *Secularity and the Gospel* 45-47.

experience in North America shares similarities with the Western World, but in many ways, this context parts company with even its closest neighbors when considering forms of poverty, opportunities and obstacles for human and spiritual growth, and the search for new mentalities for a new style of Salesian presence in North America. A spirituality of accompaniment will be very specific within this context.

1.2.1. Through the Eyes of Immigrants

Benedictine, Mary Jo Leddy, is a prophetic voice who had been invited to research and speak during the symposia called by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate for addressing the call to evangelize within a first world secularity. She was invited because of her reputation as a spiritual writer and thinker, because of her theology and ecclesiology, and because of her pioneering work for re-imagining religious life in the present context, something to which she has shown amazing insight and dedication in the last two decades. Out of her prophetic journey has come the Oscar Romero House she founded in Toronto, Canada. In that inner-city setting, she and a small community of strong Catholics recognized the very specific plight of immigrants who were refugees pushed to the edges of existence. This project was never set up as a top-down model of ministry but according to a daring model of immersion and service as shared experience with the poor. This ministry has given her a new set of eyes out of which she has reassessed the world, the church, the poor, and all that the Gospels mean in that reality.

In the symposia, she was called upon specifically to offer a perspective that is distinctly “North American” and she does that by speaking alongside and with the refugees in her life and in her community. Yet, the approach she offered was anything but arrogant or pretentious. In fact, she admitted that it is difficult to name a context while living deeply within it. However, she considered it a more treacherous place to ignore the realities, leave them un-named, and simply “go with the flow” of life. She cautioned that too often the church, in North America at least, has been perceived as a group of institutional professionals preaching about fidelity from a sinking ship while the people are
searching for lifeboats. She insisted that this is especially precarious for those living in “the most dominant culture in the world, which for want of better terms [she] will call America, the north, and the west.”

Leddy referred to the starting point from where she lived. She suggested that we can only speak from where we live. Living in and among the refugees in Toronto, she has gained the perspectives of peoples and cultures fleeing from ethnic and tribal warfare in their countries of origin. Their countries, for the most part, are torn apart by war, forcing them to run for their lives. Yet, in many cases, their situations at home were exacerbated at least, if not caused by selfish interests from the West, “craving for things like oil, like diamonds.” For all of their suffering, it is surprising to know that these refugees want to remain silent. They have already tasted the pain of speaking up. Leddy and the small community who gather among these refugees have felt their place to be that of Mary at the foot of the cross. She admitted that the suffering of these people is more than she could ever imagine or truly know and that all she could possibly offer them would be a presence, a listening heart, a caring hope. She insisted that this suffering and displaced people offer a wisdom that is only available upon the cross. Their presence continues to be a cry to the world, “I thirst,” and “why have you abandoned me?” Looking into their faces, it is impossible, she asserted, not to feel the summons and the command to notice them and try to understand their suffering. She suggested that these faces judge our particular culture and force it to recognize two realities: “that we are worse than we know and better than we think.”

Leddy forces the question to the surface, “What is good about the Good News? What does the Gospel say to such suffering?” In offering the presence of her community in Toronto, she speaks about offering them assistance without strings attached. It is a witnessing of the Gospel that comes without condition. It is an accompaniment that asks

341 LEDDY, Naming the Context, 135.
342 Cf. LEDDY, Naming the Context, 137.
343 LEDDY, Naming the Context, 137-138.
for no compensation. And in the honesty of that experience, it reshapes both the “missionary” and the one accompanied by the radically free nature of the Gospel. The good becomes simply a testimony to this available presence. For many of these poor, this experience is the first and only kind of selflessness they have ever known.

Dr. Leonard Sweet, a popular spiritual author who refers to himself as a “futurist,” has an interesting take on the question of what makes Good News good. He has recently published a marvelous little book entitled The Gospel According to Starbucks. As superficial as the title appears, it is actually a profound examination of the present North American culture that offers a sharp and watchful eye for those things that seem to speak to the meaning in people’s lives at the present time. He suggests that evangelism has polluted real evangelization in North America. He states clearly:

Somehow the church lost touch with the meaning of good news. And why wouldn’t Christians lose touch with the heart of the Gospel? I have never met anyone who was energized by cliché and one-liners and subcultural kitsch. But offer people a meaningful, earth-changing mission and then just try to hold them back! The Jesus example of meaning and passion over duty and obligation moves people.\textsuperscript{344}

The shared journey is a shared experience of God. This was also the great narrative that formed the Salesian missionary response. Don Bosco’s journey with the young shaped him and shaped them simultaneously. Their status as the abandoned brought him into authentic encounter with the crucified one and this encounter continually transformed Don Bosco. His gift of loving presence shaped these broken lives with hope and faith. Don Bosco offered his young collaborators a meaningful, life-changing mission. The accompaniment was never a top-down, but a with and for experience of ministry.

MaryJo Leddy’s experience is chosen for this work because of the similarities to Don Bosco’s experience. Not only is her continuing work in Toronto an educative and caring outreach to the most marginalized and the displaced, it is also one she shares with youthful collaborators. Like Don Bosco, whose first Salesians were the young leaders with whom he worked at Valdocco; Leddy’s community is largely made up of college age

young adults volunteering from all over the world. While they assist her and her community in their ministry, they are also the object of the ministry as well. Their participation shapes them. Very much attuned to what Dr. Sweet has suggested regarding meaningful experience, these young adults have touched the living Gospel in their experience, religiously literate or not. Leddy, like Don Bosco, values greatly their contemporary view of the world. In her symposia presentation, she made many interesting and insightful observations about them and through them.

1.2.2. Through the Eyes of the Young

Immediately, Leddy made the observation that these young adults were typical of most young adults in North America today: they are spiritually hungry, but religiously illiterate. The encounters these young people have made with the refugees force them to look for something to sustain them in their difficult work. Leddy suggested that they were looking for a spirituality to guide and strengthen them. Their good will, she asserted, needs to be channeled through forms of discipline and “practices for the long haul.”345 Their schedule of daily prayer and communal practice is intentional for this purpose. It is the educative and formative accompaniment of their lives. In the act of serving, their priorities begin to shift. They see themselves not only sharing in the suffering of the refugees, but as deposits of hope for them and for the world.

Similar insights regarding the young adults of North America today have been offered by others in various fields. To some of these resources we will turn in more detail at a later portion of this work. What seems to have taken place in the hearts of these young adults working among the refugees might be captured in the words of Dr. Sweet. He suggests that anyone can “drink in the life of God and immerse [him/herself] fully in what God is doing on earth. God offers arresting experiences that move [a person] from obligation to passion, spilling over to benefit the lives of those who will see God become visible in [that person’s] life.”346

345 LEDDY, Naming the Context, 139.
MaryJo Leddy and Leonard Sweet have tapped into something too important to miss. It is close to the heart of Don Bosco and Don Vecchi. It is this: young people are transformed by participation, not by sidelining! Entering into ministry offers a young person the chance to co-create and co-operate with God. This is especially significant at the present moment. Dr. Sweet underlines this:

One of the greatest cultural shifts occurring on a global scale is the wikification of all aspects of life, which is fueling the social movement from representation to participation. Wiki is a kind of open-source server software that enables users to create and edit Web pages using any Web browser. It encourages democratization and decentralization and deprofessionalization, as anyone is free to shape the content without any controls other than the community that monitors the contributions…347

Sweet goes so far as to claim that “interactive telecommunications is making everybody a lobbyist and politician. Interactivity is no longer an add-on or plug-in; it is becoming the center-piece of all we do, the fulcrum of the future.” 348

Perhaps interactive ministry is the new name for collaborative ministry or a better way of explaining spiritual accompaniment. We will develop such ideas as we continue.

1.2.3. Through the Eyes of Artists

If accompaniment can be understood as the task to awaken the experience of God already present in the other person’s life, and if this is a task that includes immersion into a given moment and culture, then the one who offers guidance must be attuned to the present moment in every way possible. Dr John Buchanan, Presbyterian Minister, author, and Chicago radio host suggested that the best way to “hear God speaking” in any given moment is to draw near to the arts. It is his conviction that the arts are the most spiritual expression of the human person, regardless of culture or religious affiliation. Through the arts, the deepest questions and longings of the human experience are expressed. This is not to suggest that all communication is an authentic expression. Sin and corruption are present in these media as well. Yet, with a discerning ear and eye, a common voice will

rise and very often, that voice is the voice of God. Dr. Buchanan suggests in his instruction for homiletics that it is the duty of the minister and the preacher to go diligently on a search for the living Word of God as it pulses in the present day and culture. Scripture scholarship, form criticism, and hermeneutical sciences form the other parts of the task, but only together with prayer and this search for the living voice of God can an authentic interpretation of God’s Word be had.

MaryJo Leddy drew near to the artists in her ongoing experience of ministry with and through the refugees in Toronto. She called the artists “insiders who are also outsiders—those who live with an alternative vision to the dominant culture.”349 She included in this category contemplatives and anyone who is a returning missionary—who has lived outside of the North American culture and has returned to it. She declared that the present moment, “this time and place” has a “geography of the spirit” which is offering nourishment for survival in the dominant culture with alternatives to that culture.350

The insight of these persons, especially who operate beyond art for its own sake, is vital to a spiritual assessment and the reading of human hungers at a given moment. These persons are vital for naming a reality, though they are often ridiculed or ignored because of their hard messages. A song or a poem rises to capture a moment. A movement gathers around a banner or theme. The voice of God becomes alive and not easily ignored in a cultural cry. In the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s in the United States, Black Americans found a voice in Dr. Martin Luther King. His “I Have a Dream” speech became a symbol, and the spiritual hymn of the south, “We Shall Overcome” became the theme song of many generations into this very day. Contemplatives and artists together spoke and speak a mighty Word of God for a moment in history.

The special contribution of these artists, contemplatives, and returning missionaries is their ability to call forth a new imagination to respond to a new situation. Dr. Sweet resonates with Sr. MaryJo Leddy on this point. We are immersed in a culture that is saturated by images. This is precisely why many generations are quietly turning away

349 LEDDY, Naming the Context, 141.
350 Cf. LEDDY, Naming the Context, 142.
from institution. They speak a rich and varied language of their generations which is a language of images and symbols that do not correlate to those offered by institution. The result is not a rebellion, but a failure to speak the same language. The subtle suggestion is that the voice of God might often be obscured by those institutions and ministers entrusted with its care, simply because their means of communication have grown stale. Dr. Sweet writes, “Most of the church literature I read tastes over-ripe and stale. Overripe and stale makes God sick!” Sweet bemoans what appears to him as a lack of beauty in presenting the Gospel. There is a lack of authentic human experience, a lack of adequate imagery, and a lack of beauty in what is packaged as the Good News for the present age. He insists, “To qualify for a hearing, the church must convert to beauty and learn the narrative of aesthetics that constitutes the Grand Design. This is not a ‘designer spirituality,’ but a spirituality of Grand Design.” This conversion requires an understanding of what beauty is and what it is not.

What, then, are the images that fit the present reality? What imagination is needed to bring life to the Gospels of life for the present moment? These are vital questions for those engaged in spiritual accompaniment, lest they find themselves operating within a language and within images which fail to communicate effectively, if at all.

1.2.4. Images That Fit the Reality

The starting point is the same: the Image became Flesh. The encounter with Jesus was an intersection between the Word of God and history, the culture and language of a historical moment and the eternal plan of God. This is the starting point of the mission to secularity, the mission of the Gospel, the mission to awaken the incarnate Word inside of the experiences of the lives of the young. The experience of Jesus recalls that Jesus did not make use of abstract ideologies, but images familiar to his time and culture. This is the call of ministry at every moment of history since the encounter of Jesus. Erwin Raphael McManus offers a word of hope:

If God does reveal himself, and this I know to be true, then the message of Christ is a treasure we must not neglect to share with those so desperately in need of the love and life that come only in relationship to the living God. In the end, there is no greater demonstration of what the intersection of the people of God and culture is to look like than the person of Jesus Christ. His conversation with the masses was not simply an abstract intended to gather dust on the shelf of some seminary library. Jesus was a man of his times. He resonated with his culture and spoke in a language that was easily understood. He was a Jew among Jews. Ministry that expresses this same texture is still possible today. It is equally important to be in the world as it is to be not of the world.

It is this tension that God calls us to—an intersection of culture and communication. Incarnational ministry of this magnitude can be done, done well and in a way that both honors and glorifies God. Jesus pulled it off—the Word of God made flesh walked among us. The God of creation became a Jewish carpenter. He was in culture, a part of culture, transforming culture, creating culture. Through the church he continues this journey today.

The danger for many educators and spiritual guides at the present moment boils down to a lack of adequate imagery and imagination. In this lack, there is a failure to make incarnate for the moment the living presence of God. Dr. Sweet suggests that this is a propensity to “trust facts and not parables, ideology and not imagery.” However, the young people of the world today, raised in rich imagery, require a language they can understand. For them, images are more powerful than words. Maybe in this, our present moment is not so very distinct from the moment in which Don Bosco lived. His approach to the Gospels paid due attention to this need among the young. There was no catechism without a game in the field, an outing, or a good meal. The images of their lives became the stories he told and the lessons he taught. Don Bosco made incarnate the living Word of God in images familiar to the young people in that time and culture. Perhaps the most powerful images were those of the Salesians themselves, always present, joyfully assisting, immersing themselves in the studies and struggles, the hopes and the fears of these young people. Even cursory glances at the dreams of Don Bosco, the stories of his good nights, and other examples of his communications with his young people, reveal an amazing array of visual imagery.

Dr. Sweet issues this warning:

It’s correct to consider the image-rich Scriptures as the mind of God made available to us. The Bible “thinks” not in propositions and bullet points, but in images, metaphors, narratives, symbols, and song. Poetry is more the language of biblical faith than prose or philosophy. The church’s failure of imagination is directly attributable to its failure to take up the poet’s tools: image and imagination, metaphor and stories known as parables.\(^{355}\)

Invoking images of a recent film, *The Decline of the American Empire*, MaryJo Leddy makes a statement about the North American Moment’s lack of imagery and imagination. The opening scene of this film depicts a jaded academic describing for a young radio interviewer the present moment as a time of political decline. The character asserts that there is no longer a social vision or a common project in which people invest their energy. The film goes on to pronounce judgment on this age stating, “We have no vision, no models or metaphors to live by. Only the saints and mystics live well at a time like this.”\(^{356}\) Yet, this is exactly the point! Without a spirituality, without assisting the other to discover God within personal experience, life will take on the images of a dominant culture, even if those images are not life-giving. Engagement and participation in the Gospel, however, is a prophetic stance in the midst of this decline and the very stance most desperately needed to provide a pathway out of the death-dealing images of secularity.

The one who accompanies spiritually must boldly stand in the conviction that the Gospels, as we said earlier, are up to the task. The images they offer are translatable to this age and offer true meaning in the chaos. The language of this imagination is found, as Dr. Sweet explains, “living at the intersection of faith and irresistible experience.”\(^{357}\) At this intersection are three “authentic passions.” For the Gospels to live and speak today, they must speak to these passions. These tools of passion forge the imagination of the Gospel view of reality and deserve further attention.

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\(^{356}\) LEDDY, *Naming the Context*, 144. These ideas come from a film directed by Quebec film director Denys Arcand entitled, *The Decline of the American Empire*.

1.2.4.1. The Passion of Provenance

“Provenance is the process of growing a soul that radiates such a beauty that it bears the Maker’s mark and bares the Creator’s signature.”

This beautiful notion explained in the work of Dr. Sweet resounds with the very same notes from the symphony the Salesians would call the masterpiece of Don Bosco’s pedagogy and spirituality. In this mission, Don Bosco was forthright. His was the business of shaping souls for holiness and his motivation was as direct: to lead all by example! So it is that Don Bosco presented living examples to his young people in the lives of Savio, Magone, and Besucco. These young souls did, indeed, radiate the beauty of their Maker and expose the Creator’s hand at work in their lives. That was the sole purpose of Don Bosco’s work in capturing their lives for the present and future generations.

This idea focuses on the goal of making a person better because of faith. It is the ability to say, “‘Yes, Christianity can make you a better person. That better person is Jesus.’ Christianity promises a provenance that can be certifiably Jesus. Authenticity is not about being more relevant but about being more Jesus.”

This process, Don Bosco would call, “becoming a saint.” Today’s parlance may say it differently, but the idea is exactly the same. This is not an agenda of seeking out the God-experiences in life, but the actual invitation by God to become his presence for others. Don Bosco understood that. Savio, Magone, and Besucco responded to that invitation because of what they experienced in their encounters with Don Bosco and their lives gave living testimony of this style of living holiness.

There is a sea change here, a monumental shift in understanding the story of salvation, our shared larger narrative. This is a shift from perceiving revelation as things of God to revelation as Divine Self-revelation. This is a shift from propositional faith to

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interpersonal and relational faith. It is the touchstone of spiritual accompaniment! Dr. Sweet elaborates:

It follows that our expression becomes our confession. A confessional faith is where we end up; it is where an authentic experiential faith that has become expressional takes us. True confessional Christianity is not propositional faith, but expressional faith. To know something, to communicate something, you have to become something. You have to establish provenance. The best things in life must be known firsthand, or not at all. Christians love truth like a person because Truth is a Person.  

1.2.4.2. The Passion of Beauty

It is marvelous to come across authors who speak the language and experience of Don Bosco without knowing it. Such is the case with Dr. Sweet. He identifies the second passion as the desire to “grow a soul that is a beautiful work of art, a soul with such sensitivities that it can pick up signals of transcendence in the most unlikely places…” What an apt description of the recognition Don Bosco nurtured in his young people. We have already examined the models he set up for emulation. These very living and real young people became sources of beauty and connection to God for their peers and their families. Dominic Savio was lost in ecstasy before the Blessed Sacrament, Besucco brought his friends to make visits to the Blessed Sacrament, Magone became distracted by the desire to please God above all things. The examples are abundant and the motive for Don Bosco was clear.

Why are such examples necessary today? Why were they necessary in Don Bosco’s time? In both instances, without these living reminders of the beauty and reality of God, we may end up enduring an existence that has lost contact with that reality. Dr. Sweet asks deep questions of the Christian ministers of today: “Why are we so reluctant to

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360 Cf. Gerald O’COLLINS, *Foundations of Theology*, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970. This same topic is treated and updated in O’COLLINS, *Fundamental Theology*, Eugene, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1981. See especially Chapter III, Divine Self-Revelation, 53-113, and Chapter IX, The Inspired Expressions of Foundational Revelation, 225-241. Fr. O’Collins offers a brief history of the commission appointed by John XXIII to study and update *Dei Verbum* before the start of the Vatican Council II. It is in this review that Fr. O’Collins suggests that a paradigm shift took place from a propositional faith to an interpersonal faith. Dr. Sweet, without reference to this work, uses the same terminology.


grow a soul that takes deep breaths of beauty? Why are we so afraid to experience love that beats on the heart like a bass drum? And perhaps the most perplexing question of all: why are we so afraid to experience Christ or to let the beauty of Jesus be seen in us? Sweet warns that for us, too much of God is “only vaguely remembered and not vividly experienced.”

In an analysis of the generation born before 1982, sociologists and authors William Strauss and Neil Howe suggest that there is a general distrust for anything that is not known by experience. However, in the generation they label as Millennials, those born after 1982, there is a new found trust in parental authority, institutional structure, and in shared experiences of faith. Theirs seems to be a generation anxious to experience all that they can and to help make a positive difference in the world. They are generally less angry and more willing to trust. This trend tends to set in stark contrast the distrust of the Generation X young adults or the faded experiments of the Boomer Generation. Ironically, the generation graduating from high school and entering the college scene in recent years is a generation starving for depth of spirituality and deep and lasting connections with others. Such a generation seems open to the idea of beauty and sanctity. Much like the youth Don Bosco encountered, they seem to be waiting for accompaniment and guidance believing, for the first time in many generations, that they can be examples of something and Someone who is better and offers hope to the world.

This generation, suggests Dr. Sweet, wants lived experiences of beauty rather than experiments in thought. They desire to see themselves in the grand scheme of God’s plan. They are anxious to define beauty in the highest meanings of that term. The embrace this generation seems to be extending to the generations around them has the potential for great healing, and not because that is their intentional political agenda. Instead, having been protected unlike any generation before them and having known myriads of choices and images for which they seek help in discernment, they are opting to see beauty beyond the Hollywood standards and even beyond age and generational differences. Dr. Sweet

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suggests that this generation rejects “useful beauty” and seeks wonder. They are looking beyond the skin-deep variety of beauty for a beauty that is “soul-deep.” They seem to hunger for real spirituality and “a beauty that magnifies the message.” 365

1.2.4.3. The Passion of Rarity

This third passion has already been touched lightly earlier in this chapter when referring to God’s disdain for what is overripe and stale. The passion of rarity is “a unique-one-of-a-kind creation with the provenance and beauty to create stupor in the beholder.” This is all about the ability of the Christian to attract others. How was it that St. Dominic Savio attracted so many of his peers with holiness? How was Magone transformed by that same gift? How could a young Besucco be possessed by the desire to love and serve God even before he could read and write? The authenticity within these youth attracted imitators. Issuing quite an indictment on present day ministries, Dr. Sweet contrasts this contagious quality of holiness to the obsessing over mission statements. “The church has more than enough mission statements and not nearly enough mission relationships and mission movements.”366

Don Vecchi issued a similar warning more than once. He feared an obsession with efficiency to the loss of authentic community. He feared innovation to the loss of depth. The plan of life was a special priority in his writing. Here he advocated a conscious living out commitment by co-creating with God. More than educational prowess or ministerial efficiency, this plan of life is an act of fidelity to the person and the call of Christ. He wrote about his concern that the act of accompaniment would not lead those accompanied to this level of commitment and planning, too lost in details of planning and organizing. In his letter regarding the commitment to ongoing formation, to study for the young, he wrote:

Just as in Houses of Spirituality we frequently find ourselves managing the structures without having available persons and teams capable of spiritual animation, it can also happen that in

our university centers and hostels we may be providing structures and organization but not plans for life and the accompaniment of growth.367

By contrast, the original call, he insisted, was an experience of the Transfiguration of Christ! He called upon the Salesian world never to lose sight of that beauty, that rarity, and that provenance which transfigures the Salesian into the person of Christ:

Some of these recall the personal experience of those who have felt called to this kind of life: the particular brilliance with which Christ has appeared to us and the fascination it has exerted on us, the rich nature of the perspectives it opens up to existence when concentrated in God, the peace which accompanies loving with an undivided heart, the joys of self-giving in mission, the privilege of enjoying an intimacy with Christ and consciously participating in the Trinitarian life. It is all signified in the icon of the Transfiguration of Christ in the presence of the disciples he had chosen to witness his glory.368

1.2.5. The American Moment

At the risk of over-using a cliché, the American Moment, the here and the now of the North American continent, was forever altered by the events of 11 September, 2001. Above all, that event was an awakening to the inescapable reality that the United States was vulnerable. MaryJo Leddy claimed that this message is better translated to mean that “the empire is mortal.” Even before this catastrophic event, many artists and contemplatives had begun to notice a decline in the culture. This has been characterized by a loss of a “common social vision.” Sadly, somewhere between World War II and the present day, the social vision warped into a desire for material things and security. She suggested that this same period witnessed the devolution from a republic into an empire. The myth of progress so enshrined in American culture has not always dominated. There have been, she explained, alternatives with higher motives and callings. The surest sign of hope in this troubled moment has been the vision of youth. The young people of America have looked beyond all the market schemes targeting them and, for the most part, have remained above that influence. As Strauss and Howe have outlined, the Millennials of the

North America have the potential for becoming the next Great Generation, dedicated to ideals and hopes bigger than the culture of the moment.

MaryJo Leddy explained that in her act of accompaniment with many of the young adults assisting in her ministry to the refugees, she found herself taking a lead from them. She has found a voice of conscience and concern in this generation. She is touched by their thirst and hunger for holiness and authenticity. She is challenged by their desire for models, not for words. In many ways, it is their act of accompaniment that has changed her.369

2. Tasks and Characteristics of a New Salesian Accompaniment According to Pina Del Core:370

Pina Del Core has also recognized the vast potential for goodness and the strong thirst for holiness in young people in the Western World. She does not speak from the culture of the United States or North America, but her insights regarding Salesian accompaniment are suited to that setting as well. By identifying a new moment in the culture and in the church, she offers a list of the tasks and characteristics of a Salesian accompaniment. This entire section of this chapter will refer exclusively to Del Core’s lecture notes, Discernimento-Accompagnamento 2005-2006 in Secondo Parte: L’Accompagnamento Vocazionale, 60-107.371

2.1. A Premise

By way of introduction, Del Core offers various perspectives in the discussion of vocational accompaniment offered to the young. Because the Incarnation is the best model of the dynamic relationship between theology and science, she suggests a sound

369 Cf. LEDDY, Naming the Context, 146-150.
371 DEL CORE, L’Accompagnamento Vocazionale, 60-107. Sections 1.2 to 1.3 above and below represent the translation of this author from the published notes of Giuseppina DEL CORE.
understanding between human knowledge and theology and between human psychology and faith. Knowledge of psychology, however, is at the service of spiritual understanding. Accompaniment is a spiritual reality, but it can benefit from the contributions of the human social sciences and rarely works in opposition to them. The act of accompaniment, also, is an art that is best understood in light of personal experience.

2.2. Accompaniment as a Form of Education and Formation

To accompany someone is to form and educate the person. This requires training and authenticity on the part of the person offering accompaniment. Yet, it requires also a sense of timing and an intuition as to the proper moment to invite, to accompany, and to evaluate the action for proper discernment. Del Core cautions that this field makes use of language that is still evolving and overlaps in fields of psychology and counseling. Because there is an obvious hunger manifesting itself in the youth culture today—a hunger for direction and spirituality, there is a need for the Salesian world to respond appropriately by offering an accompaniment that is wholesome, mature, and rooted in the Gospel.

2.3. Towards a Definition of Accompaniment

Del Core offers a succinct definition of the act of accompaniment. It is an experience! It is someone who walks beside, that encourages a person on the same path taken by the other. For the Salesian it is much like the road to Emmaus found in Luke’s Gospel sharing these elements: it begins by asking the other person about their reality, their problems, and their present situation. It is a sharing that points out, ultimately, a goal and a direction. In this way, it is above all a destination.

Accompaniment is a shared journey looking for direction from the Spirit of God. Yet, the identity of the one accompanied and the one offering accompaniment needs to be known before the offer can be made. Professionally it is difficult to define the profile of either the one accompanied or the one who chooses to accompany another person. Mutual terms are exchanged within psychology, counseling, spiritual consultation, accompanying, and facilitating. So, who is the one who does the accompanying? We can say that this person is a “type” of a parent, a friend, or—in psychological counseling and
psychotherapy—it is a doctor, a counselor. In youth ministry and other ministries we might say this person is an animator or leader. But in the end, who accompanies?

It is not easy to establish these terms or confine or limit them separately in their various roles. This leads us to see that to accompany a young person, for instance, in their quest for identity is a complex issue! From a spiritual and Salesian perspective, then, accompaniment is a ministry of convergence between a person and many others with whom that person interacts. (Remember that Don Bosco was not accompanied only by one person, but by many diverse persons at many different levels according to his human, psychological and spiritual needs.)

“The Spirit crosses from one to another” this, offers Sr. Del Core, is the succinct definition given to spiritual accompaniment according to Andrè Louf. It is fundamental to consider the efficacious and real action of the Holy Spirit in the act of accompaniment. God acts in the person across the spectrum of their historical and psychological profile. Louf posited that God works within the person and the relationship of the person and the one who guides must be one of listening together to what God, as creator and liberator, springs forth inside both persons on the journey. In this, Del Core insists that accompaniment cannot be a neutral process. The process, depending upon the psychological health of those on the journey, can open or block an understanding of God’s plan in the person’s life.

So, the task of spiritual accompaniment entails these essential components, considering that both parties are psychologically healthy. Psychologically, this means that we listen. Listening is an art and goes far beyond the mere act of hearing. True listening is an emptying of the self to be filled with the reality of the other. Sacramentally, this means a relationship which transforms the other; a relationship is not optional! And the motive for the relationship is always formational! Accompaniment, then, is a space of listening and discerning! Each of these components Sr. Pina explores in further detail, but that is another focus.

2.4. Towards a Definition of Spiritual Accompaniment

Three dimensions must be taken together in the effort to define an accompaniment as spiritual: theological, psychological, and pedagogical. Sr. Del Core begins by asking questions about the relationship from these three perspectives. What is the experience of relationships? What are the functions of relationship? She suggests that these dimensions are autonomous and overlapping.

- **Theological**: From the perspective that is theological, accompanying must seek out help in this meeting to be clear about this intention.

- **Psychological**: From the perspective that is psychological, it is walking with another and offering proper attention to their maturity. Transformation is a dynamic of this journey. Simultaneously, this is both spiritual and psychological.

- **Pedagogical**: From a perspective that is pedagogical, accompaniment is intentional; a fundamental part of this relationship is to be intentional in the educative dimension. In fact, theological, spiritual, and psychological development follows only after the educational intention is in place.

2.5. Dimensions of Relationship

Perhaps the greatest attention in her study of accompaniment is dedicated to the relationships and their many levels. It is worth mentioning, at least briefly, some of these in outline fashion. To start with, in the act of spiritual accompaniment, Del Core insists there are always three dynamic relationships. There is the obvious relationship between the person in need of accompaniment and the one offering accompaniment. Yet, to be spiritual, to consider these relationships beyond a psychological or emotional plane, and to anchor the intention and motives in that prayerful and spiritual dimension, there is the third
relationship of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the common relationship shared with both persons on the spiritual journey; one does not possess the Spirit more than the other.

There are many levels in these three relationships: there are the sacramental dimensions; there is the level of mediation—a truly a spiritual act of intervention; and the level of ministry—a ministry that is intentional. There are many levels of interaction as well: interpersonal, specific, intentional. These have various channels of communication: these levels transmit values and continuity, but relationship is never reducible simply to communication.

The paths of growth in these relationships evolve, enter courses of change and growth in these phases: the phase of orientation and welcoming—an interior orientation and welcoming of one’s motives; dependence, which begins with trust—this phase is important and delicate because it must lead to a sense of independence. The dependence is meant to shift dependence upon God. But this begins with a profound confidence built between two companions. This leads to counter-dependence followed by autonomy and reciprocity; this means expecting limitations of a relationship as well as an understanding that growth is to be expected in both the accompanied and the one accompanying.

2.5.1. What is Relationship?

The dimensions of interpersonal relationship include reciprocity, interpersonal rapport, and a respect for the diversity of roles and the relationships appropriate to those roles. The relationship is a meaningful one because it offers a companion who helps with questions of meaning at the interior level, far beyond the superficial level. It is a relationship which is free and freeing, creating a space for dialogue throughout the many experiences of life. This is a relationship of mediation; which can be understood as an instrument of growth by mediating the experiences of life for the one growing; this mediation is for leading the other to the Other—to Christ, to the Holy Spirit; this leads to the transformation of the person.

The relationship is an interactive process, an encounter between persons. What is beautiful here is the vision that spans the years and the distance of this relationship; this is not easy work; it requires sensitivity and sensibility, caution, clarity, respect for
differences, recognition of roles, intentionality of spirituality, integration of experiences into a healthy wholeness.

2.5.2. The interpersonal dimensions of relationship:

Parameters are important for understanding and evaluating the process of relationship. The parameters examine continuity of interaction, the variety of that interaction, the quality of interaction, and the frequencies and modalities of the interaction. The parameters are mutuality, other-centeredness, and reciprocity.

These dimensions define the necessary characteristics of a healthy accompaniment and offer points for evaluation.

3. Three Tasks of a New Accompaniment—Other Voices

Earlier reference has already been made to the work of Robert Schreiter of Chicago. His specialty is “missiology” and he is known worldwide as a theoretician and mentor in this field. He has made three succinct points regarding the task of missiology, which he explains is the study of how people might or might not hear the Gospel. These three points, examined more carefully above (see section 1.1.2. Secularization and Globalization), offer three proposed pathways to new evangelization in the first world. Having considered the definitions of accompaniment described by Sr. Del Core, we return to these proposals. Schreiter has suggested that Evangelii Nuntiandi, the Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI (1975) remains the “signature text for evangelization within the Roman Catholic Church.” Building upon this text, John Paul II called for a new evangelization in 1992 which outlined three elements for a true evangelization.

The first element is conversion, turning to God. The Word of God renders the hearer and receiver a new person, changed from the past by the reception of that Word. The second element goes beyond the individual hearer or receiver and impacts all of

373 Cf. ROLHEISER, Secularity and the Gospel, 236.
375 SCHREITER, Pathways to New Evangelization, 103.
society. John Paul II referred to “a civilization of love” and a “culture of life” as concepts for this societal impact. The third element is an element of remembering. It is the Gospel and God’s Spirit which has brought about these conversions in the hearts of individuals and the changes in society. This is an important element in the task of accompaniment. It is a humbling acceptance that accompaniment is an invitation to lead others to God; the one who offers spiritual accompaniment is merely an agent of God’s invitation.\textsuperscript{376}

John Paul II developed these ideas further by suggesting that a new evangelization takes place at three levels. The first level is conversion of the evangelizers themselves. The second level is a call to those who have heard the Gospel but in whom it has not taken root. The third level is evangelizing those who have never heard the Gospel. In the mission to secularity, for the context of North America, albeit the “West,” the first two levels are our preoccupation. Schreiter made the claim that the world was caught by the imagination of John Paul II in his encyclical of 1991 \textit{Redemptoris Missio},\textsuperscript{377} especially paragraph 37. There John Paul recalled St. Paul’s experience as detailed in Acts 19. John Paul suggested that, like Paul, a new evangelization has the task of going where people converge, not waiting for those who come to church. The Gospel must be brought out to the people, not circulated among the converted.\textsuperscript{378} To this task, primarily, Schreiter offered three pathways.

It is interesting to note that some of these pathways, according to Schreiter, are not born of institutions. Many come from movements which have captured the imagination of the young. Such movements have three characteristics: an intense sense of community, a clear path or form to living, and a call for action. These movements with these characteristics Schreiter described as the first pathway to a new evangelization.\textsuperscript{379}

Another pathway to new evangelization is apologetics. Schreiter explained that this is an attempt to interpret the current world and the Christian worldview by means of

\textsuperscript{376} Cf. SCHREITER, \textit{Pathways to New Evangelization}, 104.
\textsuperscript{378} Cf. SCHREITER, \textit{Pathways to New Evangelization}, 104.
\textsuperscript{379} Cf. SCHREITER, \textit{Pathways to New Evangelization}, 113.
apologetics, the aligning of magisterial teachings, fathers of the Church, Scriptures, and the new Catechism. This effort, he claimed, is more in line with a Dutch Reform approach and he notes that a Dominican Study Center has tried to imitate this pathway in the publication of booklets interpreting the world in this fashion.

More in line with a Catholic worldview and approach to new evangelization, Schreiter identifies a third pathway: recasting Church teaching in languages more approachable and intelligible for various audiences. The US Bishops supported this idea stressing that a Catholic view of reality needed to be more sacramental by perceiving God as acting in the world and not over against it. At the center of this reality must be Jesus Christ. And that reality is borne away in narrative, that tool which builds the identity of the community. Here we reconnect with the idea of “the larger narratives” once more.

One of the last points of focus for Don Vecchi, in fact, had been the Salesian Youth Movement. Much of his writing was directed personally to the young encouraging them in their identity, fostering their sense of community, encouraging their instinct to act in the world. By way of apologetics, Don Vecchi called for an educative accompaniment. Relationships needed to be based not merely upon human affectivity or need, as important as these are, but also upon the call of Baptism for each young person to know who they are and come to know what God is calling them to do in the establishing of his Kingdom and in the salvation of their souls. The larger narrative, for the Salesian world, for the youth of Don Bosco, is the story of Valdocco.

An act of Salesian spiritual accompaniment, then, is an invitation into a wider community that has a clear identity, a strong way of life, a clear path of holiness. It intrinsically weaves knowledge and skills for living and for faith. This learning and weaving is a shared and mutual experience which enriches the one accompanied and the one who leads. It is the story of Valdocco, the story of Don Bosco capturing hearts so that those hearts may be caught up in the heart of God. And that story has spread and continues to spread wherever and whenever the invitation is made for an accompanied journey.

From Robert Schreiter we turn now to Gilles Routher of Quebec. Also invited to the symposia on evangelizing a secular first world, this professor of Religious Science at Laval University in Quebec City brought his abilities for synthesizing a vision for
engaging secularity from the particular standpoint of the church in North America. His insights, though not taken in any consciously Salesian context, speak much to the task of accompaniment as it is interpreted in this new moment. This new moment is characterized by the shift of authority from clerical to lay, from institution to movement, from religious to secular. Dr. Routheir has written at the outset of this task:

Rather than consider the future of the church, I prefer to propose another vision of the place and role of the church in society. The church is, first, at the service of the Gospel and the reign of God. This is where we must devote the bulk of our efforts and resources. With this in mind, I will propose three complementary paths.

As we will see, these paths resonate deeply with the rising vision of Salesian youth ministry as it takes on the specifically Salesian task of reaching out to the young for the present day.

3.1. Diffuse the Gospel to the Capillaries

Dr. Routhier has written about the danger of Christian faith being marginalized in society. Like a human body, unless the blood is carried to the extremities by the capillaries, the extremities grow cold and eventually die. Using this metaphor, the Quebecois professor proposes a diffusing of the Gospel as leaven to the whole of society. But how is this to be accomplished in this highly secular, even hostile environment? He turned his attention to all of the baptized, not just to the ordained ministers or the armies of religious. Guided by Vatican II, he identified these “arenas” into which the Gospel must be carried by the baptized: science and culture; family life; economic, social, and political activity; promotion of solidarity among peoples and nations; and safeguarding peace.

What this requires, Dr. Routhere explained, is training. In fact, he uses the term “accompany” and is worth quoting here:

My first priority for building would be to accompany and train Christian men and women in being the capillary network that carries the Gospel through society. After showing their...

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engagement and enthusiasm, Christians will then again take to heart the appeal of John XXIII, who began all of his encyclicals with the statement, ‘With all people of goodwill…’

The author decried what he saw as the disappearance of “significant Christian presence” in society. To remedy this, he suggested developing a model of support for the Christian laity in the North American context. The challenge he issued was for such men and women to begin a dialogue from religious conviction within common practices of society and by that means transform the world. These dialogues, or as many ministry planners say today, “conversations,” would offer opportunities for people to gather and cull their resources and their faith. Routher continued:

We must develop and support opportunities that would make it possible for Christians to gather, giving them means of acting in the name of their faith as agents of transformation and giving them opportunities for prayer, witness, and good works.

It would be beneficial to draw out all the parallel points made in GC24 and GC25, both encouraging ongoing formation of the laity within and with the Salesian Family. The entire GC24 was aimed at collaboration between Salesian religious (SDB’s) and Salesian laity. The primary structure set up to facilitate this was named as the Educative Pastoral Community (EPC) and the collaborative work of creating a common plan for ministering to the young, known as the Salesian Educative Pastoral Plan (SEPP). This chapter, under the strong direction of Don Vecchi, spelled out the need for new initiatives in strengthening this collaboration with a shared formation:

Encouragement of a new style of communication and shared responsibility:

381 ROUThIER, From a Project of Adaptation to Refounding, 163.
382 CMD, The Center for Ministry Development in the United States is an organization that works in conjunction with the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry to provide educational and evangelical resources for Catholic youth ministry programs and youth ministers. In much of their groundbreaking work over the last 35 years, they have developed systematic structures for building youth ministry projects, most especially in various parish models. In their manuals for beginning parish youth ministry, Celebrate Youth, and in those for strengthening it, YouthWorks, the Center uses the term “conversations” to describe multi-leveled efforts for gathering various segments of the parish for an educative dialogue that might assist participation and collaboration from those segments of the parish for the ownership and development of a plan of youth formation and ministry.
383 ROUThIER, From a Project of Adaptation to Refounding, 163-164.
To be together at certain important moments, to give more time to informal meetings and to sharing, enlivens the family spirit, fosters reciprocity and intensifies collaboration.

A new style of communication is needed if one is to be efficacious in facing complex challenges like inculturation, the new contexts and the youth condition.

Openness to dialogue, to what is new, to the rich qualities and talents of our collaborators will increase the ability to give new responses.

This new style enables the lay person to take on real responsibilities with respect to the mission. Commitment is a determining factor in some cases, especially among the young, for vocational discernment and the choice of a life of consecration.

Thanks to these stimuli, the Salesian becomes aware of the primacy of God in life, of the prophecy of the Kingdom, witnessing to communion, a worker of salvation in the midst of the young, and a guide in spiritual life…

Development of a process of formation in common:

Mission, inculturation, dialogue, communication, all demand a new style of formation for facing present circumstances, for responding to the young and for sharing responsibility with lay people in the mission.

The laity asks in the first place for the elaboration of a plan of formation for their spiritual and charismatic preparation. Secondly they note that formation to communion and sharing should be realized by both parties together.

At the same time we have to face up to the changed youth condition; together we have to address the vast plurireligious and pluricultural contexts; together we must live the fruitfulness of the EPC and the efficacy of the SEPP; together we have to find new initiatives like the volunteer movement or other significant experiences.

The conviction is also increasing that the field of daily commitment is the place for authentic growth: the web of relationships created by a lively and efficient EPC becomes a setting for intense ongoing formation, touching on human, pedagogical and Salesian aspects. These relationships are a vehicle for messages, they prepare us to use new languages, they foster a more attentive listening to what the world and youth culture are saying, especially when the EPC promotes youthful protagonism.384

3.2. Into the Social Network

An alarming effect of globalization and secularization has been the privatization of religion. Such an effect relegates religious conviction to the realm of political opinion, not

384 GC 24, 54-56.
allowing those convictions to interact with situations and decisions of life at the public level. Dr. Routhier urged that this was the task of the “capillary network” to bring life beyond the doorways of the churches to move into society itself. In fact, he wrote that this called upon Christians to move into the most blatantly secular parts of their societies bringing the Gospel without shame or apology. He called this an institutional presence and promoted the movement of believers into the fabric of all that operates in society. This goes beyond an effort to evangelize individuals and demands a Gospel presence within social networks.385

In Don Vecchi’s time of leadership, from his post on the General Council as head of the Youth Pastoral Department, to his time as Vicar General, and in his last years as Rector Major, the idea had grown progressively stronger that the Salesian Family is called beyond the confines of its various works as defined by one apostolate or location and, instead, move into the public sector to impact the territory. The nurturing of the concept of the EPC and its SEPP had this in view. To develop merely a local plan of action, to focus only upon the local youth while ignoring the youth of an entire region and all those invested in their care, even beyond the Salesian Doorway, is to reject the new pastoral mentality and the new style of Salesian presence to which the Spirit of God has led the Salesian Family. Here is just one of many directives of GC 24 in this regard:

The Province not only gathers local communities into one which is broader but, as the subject of the mission in a much wider territory, can take on initiatives and activities to be carried out by lay people, properly formed and followed up. It is up to the Province to discern, applying the criterion of quality and to the extent that this makes it possible, how to distribute Salesian resources in line with the importance attaching to each initiative and its involvement in the work.386

Even the language found within the Salesian Youth Ministry Manual of 1998 contains this idea of a particular region or territory and the role of the Salesian presence to work with the elements of that particular area. A Salesian parish is not defined, it explains, but the presence of the SDB’s within a given parish, but primarily by the region or territory

385 Cf. ROUTHIER, From a Project of Adaptation to Refounding, 164-165.
386 GC 24, 238.
it represents. The Salesian presence has purpose within that territory to help animate and direct its priorities for the care of the young. In fulfilling that task, the parish can be identified as “Salesian.”

3.3. New Styles of Flexible and Immediate Church

Don Bosco proposed models of pastoral communities and collaborative efforts for his young people that pushed far beyond the boundaries common to his time and culture. Much of that vast vision would eventually be tempered by the cautions of the Holy See, by distrusting contemporaries who perceived Don Bosco as a political or social threat, and even, at one point, by his own local ordinary, Bishop Gastaldi. For example, the idea of lay men and woman forming communities to dedicate themselves to the care of the young people had, as yet, no container in the vision of the Church of that period. This idea would evolve into the family of Salesian Cooperators. Even the founding of a religious order was a matter of necessity more than a long developed and premeditated course of action.

Dr. Routhier has made proposals for new styles of faith communities and ministerial presences that allow both those communities and presences a much more immediate impact than might exist simply by institutional structure. Here are some of his ideas.

Dr. Routhier’s model retains a measure of institution by network, but it is flexible by local proximity and availability. Routhier referred to these as “district houses.” This is the model of presence that goes out to where people gather the alternative to building structures within an established faith or parish community. Routhier insists:

The church must be obvious and easily locatable in the weave of neighborhoods and cities; it must have a place on the street and be easily visible…

Parishes cannot do everything, and I image that soon some parishes will not be able to fulfill the range of requirements, not for lack of resources, finances, or priests, but for lack of the faithful. There should still be a tangible presence of the church, supported by Christians in a particular location in each neighborhood or area of a city. This is what I call a “district

387 ROUTHIER, From a Project of Adaptation to Refounding, 165.
house”; multifunctional in nature, it is often a house of charity and culture, and serves as a gathering place.388

Such places, he maintains, would not merely offer structure, but also a space for first contact and the earliest proclamation of the Gospel. These spaces might offer safe harbor for those alienated from institution or distanced from tradition. By nature, these houses would be multifunctional offering many styles of learning and formation, houses that practice charity and outreach, places where sharing is practiced and learned, houses where networks are made to better the lives of the poor and broken.

As places of culture, such houses would offer other forms of education through the arts, sacred and secular. Workshops and debates, conferences and bookshops could offer other forms of lively engagement and encourage intellectual and spiritual formation. At some level, such outlets could become known for their focus on spiritual accompaniment. Those wishing to move deeper into their spiritual life would find mentors and guides, trained and ready to lead. This would offer deeper immersion and reflection upon the Word of God by all manner of possible methods and would, hopefully, lead to the discernment of one’s personal calling by God.

What Dr. Routhier might claim to be innovative and bold, is in fact, the very model Don Bosco offered his young people. It is the model Don Vecchi recast for a world in the grip of a chaotic and depersonalizing globalization. A simple reading of the last three General Chapters, GC23, GC24, and GC25, leads to the same ideas and similar innovation. Yet often the danger of familiarity and repetition encroaches upon the prophetic power of innovation and change. Perhaps these joined voices from so many diverse points of departure and experience may become, for the Salesian world, an affirmation that the Spirit of God is pushing and pulling, creating out of chaos, renewing out of the ashes of the familiar.

388 ROUTHIER, From a Project of Adaptation to Refounding, 165.
4. New Models for the Act of Accompaniment

One of the gifts of any exile is the longing for a homecoming. Inside of that longing might be found newer expressions of some very familiar ideas. These ideas may spark new life where apathy or fear may have come to inhabit the heart. There is a small, but powerful text that, for this work, has offered great insight while provoking a keen recognition of some old familiar friends in its presentation. Perhaps this is because this small text dwells upon the call of the priest for a secular world. It is a loving outreach to many presbyters who have found themselves in that new territory without the roadmap, who have awakened to a new world with a growing sense of isolation and uselessness. This text is called, *New Hearts, New Models* and is written by Irish theologian and teacher, Daniel J. O’Leary. This is a recent text that offers hope and insight to priests, especially diocesan sacramental priests, who look upon this moment in the history of the church as one that threatens them to the very core. This is a time of ministerial exile!

What Fr. O’Leary offers are some “new models” of priesthood for these changing times. Yet, what he offers fits very well into the heart of Don Bosco. These models, then, do not apply simply or exclusively to ministerial priests. Their application easily translates into a Salesian spirituality for any Salesian educator because at their core, they are models of an educative and pastoral project, a plan of life, a spiritual accompaniment. These models, then, are offered here as new containers of old ideas, new models of a tried-and-true Salesian spirituality.

4.1. Capturing Hearts

Along the journey of this entire work, from the beginning of its research to these concluding insights, the subject of the heart has never left its place at center stage! We began with the heart of Don Bosco as he fell in love with God, sought father figures to guide him, gave his heart to companions to find friendship and holiness, and as he took on the loving tasking of winning hearts to himself to be captured by the heart of God. We looked at those elements that became his pedagogy and spirituality, one that he would call a method of the heart. We recounted the ripple effect of this love reaching down through
many generations, still intriguing and inspiring Salesian leadership and charism to our present day. We journeyed into the heart of Don Vecchi, so taken by the power of Don Bosco’s outreach and so compelled to bring that embrace in ever-newer ways to young people on the margins of the world. It is little wonder, then, that this first model offered by Fr. Daniel J. O’Leary rings out clear tones of a Salesian spirituality.\(^{389}\)

O’Leary suggests that it is not merely the job of the minister to capture hearts, the minister is called to be “a farmer of hearts.” Cultivating what is in the soil of the human heart to allow it to grow on its own, to sink its own roots, and find its own nourishment: what an apt description of Don Bosco! The weariness so many experience in this secular world, he suggests, comes from a “blindness to the secret divinity of our hearts.”\(^{390}\)

Beautifully, he explains:

The counter-attraction is not between the church and the world; it is between authentic and inauthentic ways of being human. Jesus, the church, the sacraments, the priest, are all there, not to draw people out of a neutral or even threatening world into a safer, sacred institution, but to enable people, and all creation, to become aware of their inherent holiness and divine destiny.\(^{391}\)

4.2. Ministry of Beauty

Let us recall that Dr. Leonard Sweet wrote of the “Passion of Beauty” as mentioned above (see section 1.1.4.2 The Passion of Beauty). There he suggested the important task of growing a soul into its own beauty. Daniel O’Leary, on the other hand, holds up a model of ministry he calls the “prophet of beauty.”\(^{392}\) Similar to the first model, this minister is given the task of revealing the other person’s inner beauty—to discover the image of God the other bears uniquely. What a succinct and powerful summary of spiritual accompaniment! O’Leary suggests that much of Western tradition has been turned toward the exultation of goodness and truth to the exclusion of beauty. Because the minister believes the Word of God is the most beautiful expression of God’s presence,

\(^{391}\) O’LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 41-42.
\(^{392}\) O’LEARY, *New Hearts, New Models*, 44-50..
leading another into that Word empowers the other to know “their own creativity, their
dignity, and their glory.”

Writing to inspire priests, O’Leary’s reflections inspire an adaptation that is
completely Salesian and outside of a strict clerical reference. He explains that the work of
design of a minister for Christ today is a privileged place for bringing to birth the Savior in
a pilgrim’s heart, but not just for the masses in general, but for each and every soul who
comes across the path of the minister. He continues:

…to make those he serves more aware and proud of their uniqueness as co-creators with God
of the loveliness and holiness of human affection, reconciliation, and trust. They are lovely
because they are God’s human ways of becoming incarnate in our world of time and space.
And we know this to be true, because it happened first in Jesus.393

The ability to be this prophet of beauty is rooted in the minister’s complete
awareness of God’s view of him/herself. The minister knows about the sin in life, about
failures, about brokenness. Such ministers realize that their own beauty has been carved
out of the messiness of their own lives. With such awareness, they are empowered to
invite others into the same awareness. This is a ministry of transparency that journeys
alongside, not from above. This is a ministry that is vibrantly aware of the sacramental
nature of life! It comes from a humble place that acknowledges calmly and quietly that it
is in the little everyday moments and personal encounters that God is met and known.394

4.3. Transcending and Transforming Fear

Fear, claimed O’Leary, has been used as an instrument of control throughout the
history of man and even in the story of the church. However, we believe that Jesus came
to dismantle that fear holding so many lives hostage. Constantly Jesus is telling his
listeners to not be afraid. “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God, have
faith also in me.”395 Jesus came to set free hearts imprisoned by fear and to remove the
power fear holds over so many lives.

393 O’LEARY, New Hearts, New Models, 46.
395 John 14, 1, NAB translation.
One who accompanies, then, is a “healer of fear.” By listening to the other, by teaching by word and example, by contemplative prayer, the minister builds a reserve that is capable of holding the broken and messy pieces of another’s life. Like the stranger who would turn out to be Jesus, himself, walking alongside the frightened disciples fleeing on the road to Emmaus, the minister is called to walk alongside the mystery and pain of another and help that person to understand the meaning of that moment. Echoing a familiar theme of the great spiritual author, Henri Nouwen, O’Leary is confident that this privileged place of healing comes from having been wounded. We are, in fact, wounded healers. This shared journey from fear to faith returns the confidence and trust to their proper place.

In a Salesian context, Don Vecchi not only preached or taught this particular virtue. He lived it. He lived it especially in his sickness and dying. He became a healer of fear by looking squarely into the face of his own mortal fears and coming out on the other side of trust and hope. How blessed we are to have his words and the richness of his faith:

Illness caught me unexpectedly in the midst of the Ministry assigned to me by Providence. I had planned many things for my time in office, but this took me by surprise. God’s grace and your prayers have helped me to face this vocational turning point at which the Lord called me to serve him in a new way.

“How do you respond to life?” Life comes to me et us. It is a matter of understanding that it is an absolutely free gift, the fruit of an inconceivable love. It is not just something temporary, but eternal in both duration and quality; it finds its meaning in Jesus Christ, with whom we share our human experience; it implies commitment, and at the same time joy and risk. In this perspective the dominant feeling is that of trust in the faithfulness of God hymned in the psalms: You, O Lord, are my life, my strength, my hope, my light. “If I should walk in the valley of darkness, no evil would I fear. You are there with your crook and your staff; with these you give me comfort” (Ps 22, 4). The good man is defined especially as a “thankful man”, while the unbeliever is fundamentally ungrateful.

The Salesian educator has the task of leading the young to that question, “How do you respond to life?” After recent campus shootings and violence, the Coordinators of Youth Ministry in many places of North America shared resources among themselves and

396 O’LEARY, New Hearts, New Models, 50-51.
398 VECCHI, ACG 377, 3.
their collaborators for dealing with this tragedy as it struck out at the young people of America. The response of these ministers was immediate, and many offered safe places for the young to gather for many days as they processed their fears. In good Salesian tradition, these ministers were present, ready with resources, opening a safe door of welcome in the midst of fear. 399 This is the ministry of Salesian presence at its finest.

The ministry of presence at its best releases what is best, as O’Leary concludes:

All experienced priests, spiritual directors, prayer-guides, teachers, and parents instinctively know, they do not heal people; they do not give to their visitors, children, pupils something they already lack; they do not pour out from their own fullness something to fill the empty spaces of those around them: rather, do they draw out from hearts and souls of those they are privileged to serve, the innate wisdom and beauty and healing already waiting to be released.400

4.4. Ministers of Mystery

A captivating idea from Salesian youth ministry involves the process of discovering the plan of God in the mystery of life. GC23 quoted the Salesian Constitutions in this regard:

Vocational guidance constitutes the vertex and “crown of all our educational and pastoral activity.”401 But it is not the terminus of the faith-journey; it is an element always present, and one that must characterize every stage and every area of intervention.402

This ever present element can also be understood as holding in respect the mystery of the other person in the faith that God truly has a specific plan and purpose for his/her life.

The vocation of the one who accompanies, as O’Leary suggested in this model, is to enable the other to see mystery and infinity in every small thing. This vision requires discipline and calls the pilgrim to be educated and purified. In this purifying, the pilgrim is

399 Cf. Lane PALMER, Virginia Tech: A Pastoral Response to an Unspeakable Tragedy, in “Youth Ministry.com, providing many links to resources for Youth Ministry, including this one at www.dare2share.org, Group Magazine, April 2007. One Salesian Past Pupil serves as the CYM of his home parish youth ministry in Lakewood, California. This college junior opened the doors to the youth center every evening after school for the next week with other adults and counselors at hand to help the teens process their fear (Andrew Coffey, SJB ’04, andy1c@sbcglobal.net.)
400 O’LEARY, New Hearts, New Models, 56.
401 Constitution 37
402 GC 23, 247
invited to see in every in moment from “the agony and ecstasy; the boredom and excitement; the failures and successes of their lives” as Jesus perceives them.

The present moment is a difficult one for the perception and survival of mystery. It requires a compass, of sorts. The one who accompanies is to offer this compass in a confused time. Leading others to see the mystery and the plan of God in the midst of the secular confusion is not an easy task and demands discipline of the guide. This calls to memory the ascetical priorities of Don Bosco. His chastity practiced to liberate love from its selfish conditions, his poverty to make ready all of his resources for the service of the poor and the young, and his obedience to the plan of God as filtered painfully and incrementally into the details of his life, all served to keep Don Bosco rooted in mystery and to point out to the young the supernatural quality within every moment. By the indwelling of God’s Spirit in the heart of the Salesian minister, they make available this unfolding plan of God. St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians echoes this:

Out of this infinite glory, may he give you the power of his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, you will, with all the saints, have strength to grasp the breadth and length, the height and the depth until, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God.403

Fr. O’Leary ended his reflection on this model of the minister to Mystery with this caution. In a world so given to production and measuring things in terms of pragmatism, the work of revealing mystery is quiet and unnoticed. It does not concern itself with results, unlike the world. The caretaker must be careful in order to stay clear of the obsession to find measurable results in the business of soul-tending. Even an accidental leaning in this direction can throw both the minister and the one to be guided onto a treacherous path away from God’s plan.404 Instead, the one who guides is to become the friend of the soul. Linked to this is the conviction that on our own, we cannot progress easily toward wholeness.

403 Ephesians 3, 16-19.
Don Bosco’s insistence upon a consistent confessor reflects this model very closely. Fr. O’Leary also highlights the special call of priesthood to walk in the role of confessor along this journey. As a soul friend, this person becomes the one to gently prod the other to move beyond the lies and manipulations one often tells one’s self to avoid the truth.

4.5. Weavers of Wholeness, Integration, and Organic Unity

The soul friend described above also has another important duty to connect the pilgrim to the wider community. This is not an easy task. Fr. O’Leary claims that this task demands that a person helps another to accept the illusions and brokenness of their own heart before they can begin to tolerate, accept, and forgive the illusions and brokenness in those hearts of the community around them. This is an inner process that has effect upon the outward signs of living in community. The obstacles to this inner process are many. Very often wholeness is postponed as a person remains resistant to and reluctant to explore their own spiritual integrity. It is a frightening journey to look at one’s own brokenness and lack of integration. For most people, so many layers have covered over the effort to be accepted that this is no longer a conscious device in the person performing the masquerade. This is the reason for a soul friend: to lead one back to personal integrity, toward wholeness that fosters community.

Ironically, the absence of this highly individual pursuit of inner wholeness renders community impossible! Very often, this inward glance can degenerate into a selfish individualism. Hence, there is always a need on this spiritual journey for a bold spiritual friend. Buried inside of that individualism, suggested O’Leary, is a seed of growth wanting to reach out its roots far and wide. It is just too afraid and too buried by the illusions it has upheld for so long. Thus, the spiritual friend can lead this person into a self-acceptance and a challenge for inner growth that, in the end, will make the effort for community healthy.405

The one who accompanies must have a great knowledge of the human heart. However, this knowledge comes at a great price. Quite often, a person does not feel at home in their own community, and this applies to both the spiritual guide and the one seeking guidance. There is a word of caution here. It can happen that the one who serves as minister and guide might subtly replace their need for true community and a sense of acceptance in the felt-need offered by the one seeking guidance. This masks a very subtle selfishness and must be avoided. The one who offers accompaniment must be on a similar journey toward wholeness. The community that welcomes, that is mature, that tries despite its weaknesses to welcome, is the best place for one to offer accompaniment. Where one feels at home, one can offer guidance to others. The place of community can offer this guide a place that is safe, that allows self-acceptance and understanding of the guide’s own woundedness. From this safe place, the act of accompaniment avoids becoming an act of compensation.406

When the guide is at home, the guide has the fullest capacity to be a weaver or wholeness. With the help of the community that accepts this guide, wholeness is offered not merely to an individual, but to the whole of society. This notion of Fr. O’Leary so closely resembles the idea of Don Vecchi that it is worth highlighting. Don Vecchi urged the community of the Salesians to be mature and loving. As true disciples of Christ, their choice for wholeness is not intended for self-service, but to become a school of holiness for others.

4.6. Catching the Love of God

“The love of God is caught, not taught! Only fire begets fire. Enthusiasm is contagious.”407 With these powerful words, O’Leary makes the case for the silent witness of the extraordinary in the ordinary. The people of God, he maintains, are not looking for super human beings they cannot emulate, but flawed human beings who demonstrate an

407 O’LEARY, New Hearts, New Models, 79.
extraordinary trust in God.⁴⁰⁸ So it is that the minister is called to look into the silent places of their own hearts to enable them to resonate with the hearts of others. To inspire, one has to experience inspiration. To motivate, one has to be motivated. O’Leary encourages the one who offers accompaniment to trust their experience remembering that there is something sacred in the human experience. Jesus became flesh and elevated every human experience as a door to the sacred. At the heart of this reflection upon Jesus is a theology of the Incarnation remembering that God chose to become a defenseless and dependent child. Therefore, “something of God’s true nature could only be captured in the defenselessness of childhood.”⁴⁰⁹

This reflection, however, goes far beyond a romantic glance at the helplessness of children and opens a window onto God’s anawim, the little and forgotten people of the world. The minister of the young is called to become the voice of these forgotten. They are the silent ones whom society shuns. The anawim remind us that God cannot be understood completely. If he has created these outcasts, there must be something of God’s image and significance to be found in them.

What an amazing link to the Salesian Credo! Salesian spirituality is above all focused on a primary group among the anawim: the poor and abandoned young of the world. The voiceless young people will be heard in as much as the Salesian offers them a place in the journey and at their table. O’Leary raised the voice of an American prophet, Franciscan priest and activist, Richard Rohr. He offered Rohr’s words on this call to journey with the anawim, and not leave their situation merely to theological discourse:

The church has mostly tried to resolve all theological dilemmas with analysis and academic thinking. It just does not work. It produces a faith that is not real, that has no passion in it, no reality, no power to compel—just endless theological distinctions and books and articles, while the world goes by and asks ‘Who cares?’ This would not have happened if we’d kept Jesus’ counsel to stay close to the poor. The poor kept us close to the Gospels, to the important questions and issues, to the Christ-child within and without.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁸ Cf. O’LEARY, New Hearts, New Models, 79.
⁴⁰⁹ O’LEARY, New Hearts, New Models, 82-83.
Finally, as a voice of the silent, the one who accompanies must observe two important aspects of that role: first, to recognize the poverty within the caregiver when reaching out to the poor; secondly, to recognize the two-way nature of the gift of grace, offered to the one ministering and the one receiving the ministry. These are safeguards which remind the one offering accompaniment that their place is to be kept beside the anawim, for in God’s eyes, all are little and all are broken. *Moving away from this reality into a safer and more rewarding ministry can lose touch with the very call God has given.*

4.7. Sacraments of Compassion

The last model offered in the vision of O’Leary is one that looks to the compassionate heart of Christ. It is here that the evangelizers of the young rediscover that their positions are intrinsically part of the painful reality of humanity. From this position, the evangelizer becomes “the embodiment of divine mercy, the prophet of God’s unconditional love.” This embodiment guarantees a destruction of suffering by the act of suffering, in the manner of Jesus’ self-sacrifice. As O’Leary has stated, “this is no soft option.” It requires a complete outpouring of the person who offers compassion. “We are called to be with people, to rejoice with them, to walk with them, to stay with them, to suffer with them, to be the embodiment of God’s compassion for them.” Because we believe that God suffers with us in his compassion, we as ministers to the young are called to nothing less. This is a “God in communion” with us.

It is apropos that this reflection is the last offered by Fr. O’Leary. When making a comparison to Don Bosco or Don Vecchi, this is most suitable. Why? Because the Salesian mission of accompaniment, in the end, is the call to a special union with God. Experiencing this union with God, as Don Bosco did nearly at every moment in his life, one has to be moved by the little and the forgotten, the lost and the young, the voiceless

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and the homeless. It is no small wonder, nor a coincidence, then, that Don Vecchi’s concern for the most vulnerable and exploited youth of the world, those on the streets and those consigned into military action, was the one thing that seemed to never leave his thoughts and the one direction to which he pointed the Salesian family. As Don Vecchi suffered his final illness, he became the compassion of Jesus, suffering for these young and compelling others to extend their hands and hearts in complete service to these little voiceless ones in God’s Kingdom.

**Conclusion: Holiness, Authentic Experience, and the Return to Don Bosco**

This present moment, this new moment for the church and for the world, both as a challenge and as an opportunity, is met by the Gospels and the Spirit of God. Both are up to the task of forging meaning and direction in this age called secular in the Western World. The act of mediation offered by Don Bosco and renewed with long-reaching vision by Don Vecchi in the very recent past, serve as a compass for those looking for meaning and those offering guidance toward such meaning by the spiritual act of accompaniment. Mediation is specifically Salesian when it conveys through authentic, everyday experiences of life, the authentic presence of God. This mediation and this meeting are transformative for those on the journey, because the journey is propelled from start to finish by the Spirit of God.

The trademark of this mediation is its invitation to participation. The model of ministry is one of reciprocity and co-involvement. It involves the participation of the whole person in all of his and her physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual make-up.

The Spirit of God is blowing across the height and breadth of the vast human landscape in these days, raising the same awareness and sounding the same call to invitation from many points of direction. The richness of the vision is overwhelming at this time and for this moment. As many are folding up the deck chairs and preparing for a massive descent as the ship sinks out of sight, others across many generations are preparing for Pentecost!
Don Vecchi’s successor, Don Pascual Chavez, invited the Salesian Family to await a Pentecost! His call to “return to Don Bosco” has set in motion another General Chapter. As the world prepares for the gift of the Spirit in the next moment, the Salesian Family may remain confident that the Salesian path to holiness remains an effective, authentic experience of God. It offers a unique spirituality of accompaniment that meets at a moment of recognition in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread and sends the Salesian educator and evangelizer with hearts ablaze into the vast and hungry world of the young!

From the Emmaus Journey to our own day, we are a hungering people, too often fleeing the pressing realities and looking for any avenue of escape. Escape is a big business dominating the global culture in so many ensnaring and deadly ways in these times. Yet, as the disciples fled from their community in fear, expecting death to follow them, their lives took a radical turn by the act of accompaniment. This accompaniment was not a diversion or a counterfeit for truth and meaning. It was the person of Jesus, Himself. Jesus set their hearts on fire with the truth, not with lies, quick fixes, material gain, or promises of any kind. The truth he revealed was so powerful, his presence so tangible, that these disciples plunged back into danger and returned to the community ready to accompany and inflame those still lost in doubt and denial.

An act of spiritual accompaniment, then, is an accompaniment with the person of God who is, by definition and by experience Accompaniment himself. Don Bosco Haus in Vienna, Austria is a living example of the kind of community Don Bosco envisioned and one that follows carefully the inspirations and models of a new style of presence suggested by Don Vecchi. Salesian Sister and educator Johanna Götsch describes this effort in terms of inviting and welcoming the young in a climate of true friendship that involves making them collaborators in the mission. This involvement pays careful attention to all of the dimensions of their lives from the social, to the educative and prayerful while empowering their own call of baptism within authentic experiences of animation. This involvement, ultimately leads them to an internal and external colloquy with Jesus. All the while, the
Salesian lay, religious, and young person, accompanies, prays and loves, in an act of self-emptying service that transforms lives.415

To offer such service is to give witness to the heart of God and to make that heart accessible to those in our care. This is an act of faith, an act of profession, and an act of instruction. Let this work conclude with the lilting, inspiring words of the late German theologian and Catholic priest, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, words which capture, somehow, the act of accompaniment and the very nature of God:

Such an undivided Heart is just as much God’s love become human as it is man’s love become divine. It is the perfect demonstration of the triune life of God and the perfect living out before God of a single minded conviction. Distance and proximity coincide. The servant is a friend because he is a servant, and the friend is a servant because he is a friend. And nothing is confused or abolished, nor is any boundary violated by the vertigo of such infinities…

For it is not ecstasy that redeems, but rather obedience. And it is not freedom that enlarges, but rather our bonds. And so it was that God’s Word came into the world bound by the compulsion to love. As the Father’s Servant and as the true Atlas, he took the world upon his shoulders. Through his own deeds he joined together two hostile wills, and, by binding them, he undid the inextricable knot. He cared to exact everything from his Heart. Indeed, by over exacting he wrenched his Heart up to wholly impossible tasks. It was through such overburdening that the Heart recognized its divine Lord, recognized happiness and love, and opened itself up to obedience.416


CONCLUSION

The Salesian spirituality of accompaniment is a unique spirituality having roots in an originating historical event: the life and vocation of Saint John Bosco. That event, at its most basic level, consists of Saint John Bosco’s encounter with God making visible a specific holiness, a living hermeneutic which has become for the world a gift to be studied and emulated. The effort of this work has been to put at the center of this study this particular holiness, to study it within its historical roots and to extract from that study specific characteristics and qualities of a spirituality capable of relevance and application beyond those historical foundations.

This was the task of Chapter One. It began by making a survey of Don Bosco’s personal experiences of accompaniment which offered the framework for his own act of accompanying the young as his vocation and mission became clearer. From his experience and from his application, we may stand with the gift of hindsight to reveal not only the specific characteristics of this holiness, but the practical dimensions in which that holiness would be applied by Don Bosco in two very specific roles: as a spiritual teacher and as a spiritual director. These roles are highlighted in the study in the effort to systematize Don Bosco’s approach to a lived spirituality. It is through the lens of these two roles that a convergence between education and evangelization surfaces.

This convergence is the setting in which accompaniment takes place. It is here that we find the integration of Don Bosco’s pedagogy and spirituality. This convergence was identified as concurrent acts of mediation and participation in the lives of the young. For Don Bosco, these acts always included three elements from his own experience which became the criteria of his spirituality: the gift of a physical presence to accompany the young on their journeys of life and faith; a grounding in prayer which orients that presence to the gift of God’s abiding presence; and a mission that was always directed outward to the young in need of guidance and loving concern.

Chapter One offered this survey of Don Bosco’s experiences to underline these applications of mediation and participation as the distinguishing heart of Don Bosco’s
spirituality of accompaniment. It had always been the intention to see those acts under the light of Don Bosco’s own description as being works of the heart.

Chapter Two introduced the figure of Don Bosco’s eighth successor, Don Juan Vecchi. The purpose for this focus upon the work and insights of Don Vecchi had always had its intention to reveal this man’s special understanding of the Salesian spirituality of accompaniment and to illustrate in detail how urgent such an understanding is for the continuing mission of youth ministry according to Don Bosco’s style of spirituality. To review Don Vecchi’s understanding of Don Bosco’s spirituality for a contemporary application was, at the very least, a complicated and daunting undertaking within the scope of this work. Don Vecchi’s vast contributions to the fields of Salesian pedagogy and spirituality are hardly containable in any one work.

The choice of direction for this chapter was not so much chronological as it was thematic. In an effort to ground this study, Chapter Two began with a brief reference to the life of Don Vecchi as a context for what would be revealed as his special contribution to the study and application of the Salesian spirituality of accompaniment. Moving away from the historical survey and shifting quickly into that contribution, the chapter was guided by Don Vecchi’s own writings regarding the themes of Salesian Spirituality. This particular work, though concise, is very dense and was limited by the scope of this paper to examine those elements which were considered to be specifically linked to meditation and participation, to the dimensions of accompaniment.

After offering this limited examination of seven out of fourteen themes, the paper turned its attention to GC23 as, perhaps, the best illustration of a contemporary application of the Salesian spirituality of accompaniment. In fact, GC23’s entire focus was given to the Journey of Faith shared with the young and reveals the work of Don Vecchi and his contemporaries for a new understanding of this spirituality applied in mission.

The work of this chapter was, indeed, complicated and detailed and turned to many Salesian scholars for clarifying the themes of this spirituality as isolated by Don Vecchi. It was particularly interesting, for example, to discover the influence of Salesian scholar Don Brocardo not only for a better understanding of such themes, but for his personal influence in the life of Don Vecchi. The reference to so many of these scholars to underline Don
Vecchi’s clarity of understanding was meant to reveal implicitly the influences of accompaniment in Don Vecchi’s own life and study. His vision, as strong as it was, had a context and a company of contemporary scholars out of which he made his own discoveries and offered his special contribution.

The chapter was wont to be lost in these themes and the survey of GC 23, risking the central focus for which these paths were originally taken. Yet, the paths were chosen with the hope of coming close to the same points of conclusion as were made in Chapter One: the roles of educator and evangelizer as those offered for a particular style of mediation and participation. The logical direction this chapter wanted to follow, then, was to examine GC23, for an application of those roles in a world that had become so complicated—a world Don Vecchi recognized in need of a transformation that only an authentic spiritual accompaniment might offer.

Yet another turn was taken in this complicated chapter hoping to extend Don Vecchi’s contribution into the present moment. By presenting Don Vecchi’s address to the Salesians for their formation as educators and evangelizers, with Don Vecchi’s insistence upon constant and efficacious study, this chapter intended to present those themes necessary for formation today. Don Vecchi’s moment for teaching and guiding was interrupted suddenly with his illness, but even in that he offered a vision for the new century. It was a vision characteristically linked to Don Bosco’s spirituality of accompaniment but one which opened onto new horizons Don Vecchi would only begin to see before his death.

What was gained in this study was the abundant evidence that Don Vecchi’s life and work offers a complex richness of study and reflection for applying a specific Salesian spirituality of accompaniment to the challenges arising in his day and in our own day. Yet, the burden of Chapter Two was put in the effort to highlight as much of Don Vecchi’s work and thought as possible and by that lead to a clear hypothesis: the suggestion that his vision, more than any other at the present moment, made accessible the spirituality of Don Bosco. That accessibility has with it many important responsibilities of ongoing formation and a deepening of spiritual grounding in order to meet the challenges of Salesian ministry in the new century. The themes of Salesian spirituality, the outline of action in GC23, and
the other related themes brought out to demonstrate the clear vision of Don Vecchi were limited by space and focus and could not afford an in-depth study these areas suggested to be necessary. Without deeper study, much of this material runs the risk of loosely connecting scattered details in danger and pulling the study itself off course and away from the center of Don Bosco’s foundational experiences.

Chapter Three had as its focus to take up some of the new horizons Don Vecchi’s vision proposed and to make of these a synthesis with Don Bosco’s spirituality as an appropriate response to the challenges facing the new century.

The task of the final chapter, then, was to uncover in the present moment the Salesian spirituality of accompaniment as a special grace and a special initiative of the Holy Spirit for service to the young. The first task of this chapter was to define the new moment as clearly as possible, calling on disparate voices addressing the needs pressing upon this moment. There was within this task another clear motive in the effort to draw together other voices: to demonstrate that this engraced moment reveals the Spirit of God on the move. A spirituality of accompaniment is a call beyond the Salesian milieu to the whole world of believers and in the midst of this revelation, Don Bosco’s spirituality appears as a special gift offered for this moment. This was the vision Don Vecchi offered in the last moments of his life and, as the chapter tried to insist, called forth a response for further study and application.

This last chapter moved from the defining of the present moment to the characteristics of a Salesian accompaniment for that new moment as outlined very practically by Sr. Giuseppina Del Core. She offered an updated definition of a spiritual accompaniment and examined the relationships at the heart of this accompaniment.

As the Spirit is blowing across these new horizons and updated definitions, other voices were offered as part of this continuing vision of evangelizing by educating. These voices were included as further evidence that Don Vecchi had captured and presented a vision so profound as to confront with confidence to the challenges of today.

Inspired by the evidence of the Spirit moving through these challenges, the last voice to be shared offered seven models for a contemporary act of accompaniment. These models, like the innovation and prophecy of Don Vecchi, were offered as part of the effort
to capture as much as possible those important roles of spiritual teacher and spiritual director so desperately needed even now.

The resources for this work were vast and rich, perhaps too vast and too meticulous to be taken within the scope of such a study. This work was limited by an inability to tie together sufficiently the plethora of resources at hand. It wanted to be more than it could. It wanted to offer the synthesis that Don Bosco’s lived experience and applied spirituality were given new life and clarity in the work of Don Vecchi, and that that new vision was up to the task of offering to the world what the Spirit is calling for in this present moment, an act of profound spiritual accompaniment of the young with a very specific style of mediation and participation. The Spirit can bring order out of chaos, but this work has fallen short in that regard.

At the very least, there is promise in this struggle. The richness of the treasure offered in Don Bosco’s originating historical experience and the new focus given this by the vision and ministry of Don Vecchi, are a field waiting to be plumbed for practical application in many contexts and in the face of a very real hunger for God among the young people in our world today. It is important, then, to suggest that deeper study be made and offered to an eager world of youth ministry. Let that study probe further the various components of Don Vecchi’s vision of Salesian youth spirituality in an effort to offer ever-new forms of spiritual accompaniment that God may be known, loved, and made accessible to the young.
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INDEX

CONTENTS ii

ABBREVIATIONS iv

ABBREVIATIONS iv

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 1: THE ROOTS OF A SALESIAN SPIRITUALITY OF ACCOMPANIMENT IN THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SAINT JOHN BOSCO 3

Premise 3

1. Don Bosco’s Spirituality of Accompaniment: Winning and Guiding Young Hearts 5
   1.1. Human and Spiritual Accompaniment in the life of Giovanni Bosco 5
       1.1.1. Mamma Margherita and Giovanni Bosco’s Experience of God 6
       1.1.2. Don Calosso as Friend and Spiritual Director 10
       1.1.3. Searching for Models, Clinging to Dreams 12
       1.1.4. Friendship and Befriending the Interior Life 14
       1.1.5. Accompaniment and Vocational Discernment: Don Cafasso as Mentor and Friend 15
   1.2. Refining the Call: Hearing the Cry for Accompaniment from the Abandoned Youth of Turin 18
       1.2.1. The Influences of Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Alphonus Liguori 19
       1.2.2. The Choice for “the Abandoned” 20
       1.2.3. Accompanied by a Shepherdess and Sheep 22
       1.2.4. Identifying the Flock 23
   1.3. A Movement of Accompaniment: the Sheep Become Shepherds 25

2. Human and Spiritual Accompaniment of Don Bosco’s Students 26
   2.1. The Biographies of Three Students of the Oratory at Valdocco: Living Hermeneutics 27
       2.1.1. Dominic Meets the Tailor: Accompaniment and Dominic Savio 29
       2.1.2. “He has a good heart”: Accompaniment and Michele Magone 32
       2.1.3. The Gift of Diligence: Accompaniment and Francesco Besucco 34

210
2.2. Common Themes of Accompaniment from Comollo to Besucco 35
   2.2.1. “Winning the Heart” 38
   2.2.2. Don Paolo Albera Recalls Transformative Experiences among His Peers 39

3. **Don Bosco as Spiritual Teacher and Spiritual Director** 44
   3.1. Don Bosco as Spiritual Teacher: Don Bosco’s Theology 45
       3.1.1. Zeal for Guiding Souls 45
       3.1.2. Don Bosco as Spiritual Author 48
   3.2. Don Bosco and Spiritual Direction 50

4. Characteristics of Don Bosco’s Spirituality of Accompaniment 52
   4.1. Presence 53
   4.2. Prayer 55
   4.3. Other-centered Living 57

**Conclusion** 58

**CHAPTER 2: PROPHECY, INNOVATION, AND CHANGE: THE VISION OF NEW HORIZONS ACCORDING TO DON JUAN EDMUNDO VECCHI** 61

**Premise** 61

1. **Don Bosco’s eighth successor** 62
   1.1. A captured heart in the land of Salesian Missionaries 62
   1.2. A Salesian Called to Reveal New Horizons 64
   1.3. Interchange Between “Education” and “Holiness” 68
       1.3.1. The Spirituality of Communion 69
       1.3.2. A Robust Spirituality for a Global Oratory 70
       1.3.3. To Educate it to Evangelize, to Evangelize is to Educate 71

2. **Fundamental Themes of Salesian Spirituality** 72
   2.1. Life in the Spirit 73
       2.1.1. The Lines of Action of the Spirit 74
       2.1.2. The Continual Action of the Spirit 75
       2.1.3. The God or Relationship as the Spirit Moving in the Educator 75
       2.1.4. The Reality of Sin and the Spirit Enabling Transformation 76
   2.2. Don Bosco as Type and Model of Salesian Spirituality 78
       2.2.1. Don Bosco as “Father” and “Teacher” 78
3. The Accompanied Journey of Faith: GC23 Educating Young People to the Faith 110
   3.1. The Present Phase of History: the New Challenges of GC23 111
   3.2. The Youth Reality Challenging the Salesian Community 112
   3.3. The Accompanied Journey of Faith 115
       3.3.1. The First Step: Outreach and Closing the Gap 116
       3.3.2. The Educational Process as Faith Proposal 117
       3.3.3. Organic Dimensions of the Person 118
       3.3.4. Defining a Salesian Youth Spirituality 119
       3.3.5. The Place of Mary in the Journey of Faith 119
       3.3.6. A Faith Mentality and Ethical Discernment 120
   3.4. The Dynamics and Structures of Living the Journey of Accompaniment 121
       3.4.1. The Educative Pastoral Community 121
       3.4.2. An Organic Pastoral Plan 122

4. The Perpetual Demand for Updating: Other Themes and Influences 123
   4.1. Don Vecchi, and the Interdisciplinarity Nature of Youth Spirituality 123
       4.1.1. Spirituality and Pedagogy 124
       4.1.2. Salesian Scholarship 124
       4.1.3. Organic Salesian Spirituality 125
   4.2. Spiritual Direction 125
       4.2.1. Spiritual Direction and Paternity as a Special Salesian Character 126
   4.3. Process of Human Maturation 127
       4.3.1. Maturity Expressed as a Value-centered Lifestyle 128
   4.4. Qualified and Professional Religious 129
   4.5. Issues of Religious Formation 129
       4.5.1. The Religious Dimensions of Existence 130
   4.6. Issues of Lay Formation 130
   4.7. Casting Out Upon the Open Seas in the Salesian Youth Movement 131
       4.7.1. An Ensemble of New Realities 132
       4.7.2. The Boat of the Salesian Youth Movement 133

Conclusion: A Crucial Turning Point 135
CHAPTER 3: ACCOMPANIMENT AS A GIFT OF GRACE FOR A NEW MOMENT

Premise

1. A New Cultural Moment and a New Formation
   1.1. Defining a Western Context for a New Moment
       1.1.1. A Period of Diminishment
       1.1.2. Secularization and Globalization
       1.1.3. Maintenance versus Initiative
       1.1.4. The Many Faces of Secularity
   1.2. Naming the North American Context
       1.2.1. Through the Eyes of Immigrants
       1.2.2. Through the Eyes of the Young
       1.2.3. Through the Eyes of Artists
       1.2.4. Images That Fit the Reality
           1.2.4.1. The Passion of Provenance
           1.2.4.2. The Passion of Beauty
           1.2.4.3. The Passion of Rarity
       1.2.5. The American Moment

2. Tasks and Characteristics of a New Salesian Accompaniment According to Pina Del Core:
   2.1. A Premise
   2.2. Accompaniment as a Form of Education and Formation
   2.3. Towards a Definition of Accompaniment
   2.4. Towards a Definition of Spiritual Accompaniment
   2.5. Dimensions of Relationship
       2.5.1. What is Relationship?
       2.5.2. The interpersonal dimensions of relationship:

3. Three Tasks of a New Accompaniment—Other Voices
   3.1. Diffuse the Gospel to the Capillaries
   3.2. Into the Social Network
   3.3. New Styles of Flexible and Immediate Church

4. New Models for the Act of Accompaniment
   4.1. Capturing Hearts
   4.2. Ministry of Beauty