

SALESIAN BROTHERS AND THE LAY MISSION PARTNERS

I. DON BOSCO: MAN OF BALANCE

PRAYER

L: Pope Francis instructs consecrated men and women: “Every charism, to live and to be fruitful, is required to decentralize, because at the center there is only Jesus Christ...

ALL: The charism is not to be conserved like a bottle of distilled water, but must instead be made to bear fruit, with courage, placed at the service of current reality, of cultures, of history, as the great missionaries of our institutes teach us.”

(<http://www.news.va/en/news/francis-receives-the-major-superiors-charisms-are>;
accessed 6 September 2017)

L: “The personal assimilation of Salesian identity takes place in being like Don Bosco rather than in working like him”

(Fr. Pascual Chavez, SDB, Acts of the General Council 416).



ALL: “We are people who are with Don Bosco and the times, and not with the times of Don Bosco.” (Fr. Juan Vecchi, SDB, cited by Peter Varengo, SDB, *Re-imagining Don Bosco*, pp. 34)

L: “Too often we do saints and founders a great deal of

injustice by attributing to them sayings, traditions, or cultural

expressions that suit our comfort zone or our personal agenda, but have little or no historical validity outside their time and place... to lock them into a time warp... in some sort of devotional

imitation that falsify both

their human and spiritual identity...



ALL: Fidelity to Don Bosco is not a bad carbon copy of his style of life nor of his ways of doing things... Fidelity implies commitment to a complex transformation and newness, now brought on with the same vision, courage, and zest.” (Peter Varengo, SDB, *op. cit.*, pp. 34, 35)

L: Fr. Egidio Vigano, seventh successor of Don Bosco, teaches us that each Salesian, to understand his community, must understand both the Salesian brother and the Salesian priest. Vocation is lived in community; the priestly and lay vocations work together so the community can accomplish its mission.

ALL: St. John Bosco, by their good example more than any religious habit, and more specifically, by their professional competence and precision, may our lay brothers in the shops attract more artisans to join the salesian life and expand the professional and vocational school's ministry especially in the foreign missions. In the Oratories, as they teach catechism, may they show that announcing the Good News is not just a program for priests, but of the whole Church. (cf. SDB General Chapters 3 & 4)

L: Pope Francis remarks that we need priests, and vocations are missing. But he warns us: "We have the temptation to take without discernment, the young men who present themselves. This is bad for the Church. Please, study well the path of a vocation; examine well if that man belongs to the Lord: if that man is healthy, if that man is balanced; if that man is capable of giving life, of evangelizing, if that man is capable of forming a family, and of renouncing this to follow Jesus."

(http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/10/03/pope_francis_to_clergy_vocations,_formation,_evangelization/1107820 / accessed 20 January 2018)

ALL: St. John Bosco, remind our priests and those preparing for the clerical state that the "priestly consecration is qualified and enlivened by the spirit and mission that is his by his Salesian profession." Help us grow in the "awareness that the priestly ministry is a specific aspect of his Salesian vocation and is stamped by it – by its concern for youth and education, by its communitarian nature, and by the commitment to be a priest always and everywhere in the variety of activities, works and roles." (Ratio, art. 10.4)

L: St. John Bosco, you helped discover and develop the call of Christ for young people as priests or lay brothers...

ALL: Pray for us.

L: St. John Bosco, you willed that in the Salesian Society priests and lay brothers live the same mission for the benefit of youth...

ALL: Pray for us.

L: St. John Bosco, you placed in the salesian community the lay and the priestly visions as eyes with which we know and love the world of youth...

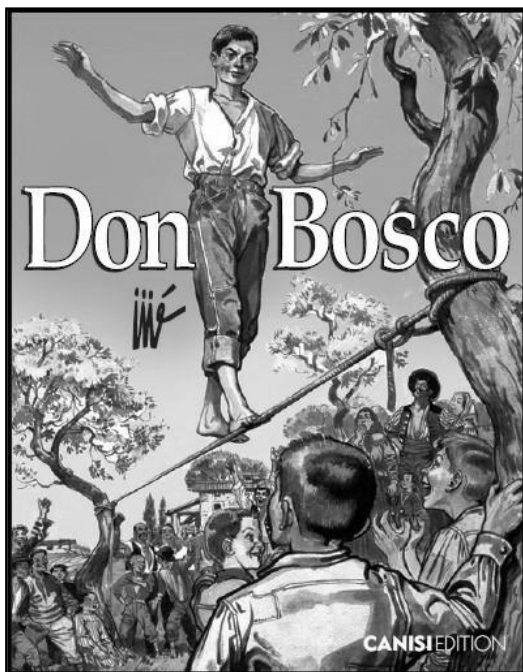
ALL: Pray for us.

1. MAN OF SPLENDID BLEND: On the ‘salesian spirit’ we are told by our Constitutions:

“The Lord has given us Don Bosco as father and teacher. We study and imitate him, admiring in him a **splendid blending of nature and grace**. He was **deeply human...** and he was just as **deeply the man of God...**” (C, 21)

1.1 PROPHEPIC AND PRACTICAL: The French Catholic writer and historian Daniel Rops describes Don Bosco “**an idealist and realist who would try anything but at the same time show prudence.**” (cited in The Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco, p. 239)

1.2 MAN IN THE MIDDLE: In the masterpiece



of St. Teresa of Avila on the interior life and union with God, The Interior Castle, we find seven las moradas, dwelling places or mansions. In the journey of the soul to its center, who is the Divine Majesty, we find that **in the 7th mansions**

there is “harmony between the inner and the outer sides of life...

Polarities (*difference, separation, contradiction*) **and discontinuities** between the human and the divine, between body and soul, between this world and heaven have been resolved in the unity possible...

1.2.1 This ‘**coincidentia oppositorum**’ leaves intact whatever is authentically human and brings to a **higher synthesis contemplation and action, life and ministry, the sacred and the secular...**”

(Ernest E. Larkin, O. Carm., The Published Articles: St. Teresa of Avila and Prayer, pp. 402-403)

1.2.2 The harmony and peace come precisely because **the ground of the meeting – Jesus, the Word of God, the Divine Logos – is beyond the conflict of opposites...** the divine has become human and the human divine, **without either agent losing identity...** (cf. Larkin, op. cit., p. 404)

St. Teresa of Avila “**struggled to harmonize these two contraries – so inimical (*opposed, harmful*) to one another** – such as are the spiritual life and sensory joys, pleasures, and pastimes... The resolution of will occur only by **moving to a deeper level in one’s life where the opposites can come together in a new synthesis.** This is a move into the divine ambience (*condition, character*)... Ultimately **only Jesus Christ heals the ambivalence (*confusion, hesitation*).**” (Larkin, op. cit. pp. 405-406)

1.2.3 It is thus possible to integrate aspects that are apparently opposed, such as **reason and religion; organization and flexibility; efficiency and emotion; theory and practice; prayer, community and apostolate.**

- He is a man immersed in work, yet oriented to persons.
- He is a man of action, yet living with an unwavering sense of the sacred.
- He is a man who is naturally affective, yet with a supernatural love for souls.

Don Bosco is a man of balance. **In media stat virtus. If virtue stands in the middle, then Don Bosco is truly a virtuous man.**

1.3 **DON BOSCO'S EYES:** “Don Bosco’s claim to make ‘**good Christians and honest citizens**’ ran diametrically opposite to the cultural and political cry of the time which demanded strict and absolute separation between Church and state. For Don Bosco, instead, the human person is not a conglomerate of separate elements, but a wholeness of heart and body to be nourished and fostered... **focusing precisely on the wholeness of those who were victims of injustice and exploitation... thus regain personal worth, hope for the future and commitment to change themselves and the world in which they lived... Don Bosco worked unashamedly for the poor...**” (Varengo, op. cit., p. 49, 50)

Fr. Egidio Vigano, 7th successor of Don Bosco, speaks about the Salesian Brother: (cf. Bro. John M. Rasor, SDB, The Salesian Brother’s Spiritual Identity, Journal of Salesian Studies, Spring 2004)



1.3.1 The brother's identity **impacts the community:** it leads the community to **merge Gospel and culture, to renew the earthly city.**

The **lay spiritual vision** is the eyes of the religious community, **eyes with which it knows the world and looks with love on the world.**

1.3.2 A lay mentality... cultivates a close attention and respect for **assessing facts**, a deep sense of **professionalism**, an awareness of the importance and problems of **all facets of work**, a **factual approach to reality**, a serious attitude to **planning**, an instinctive **cooperation**, and a profound appreciation of **organization**.

All these qualities will be **hard to find in one who thinks he can do away with secular values.** Intuition, poetic temperament, goodwill or prayer will not fly a plane.

“Don Bosco demanded of his teachers, too, **professional competence, and scholarly application to study.** Bosco himself was a successful student and an accomplished scholar... ‘If you’ll increase your knowledge,’ he told them, ‘you will be able to do much good, especially to the young people under your care’... **Confidence with subject-matter was to be an attribute of the Salesian teacher.**” (John A. Morrison, *The Educational Philosophy of St. John Bosco*, pp. 22, 23)

Our father and founder used to say: **“Study and piety will make you a true Salesian.”** (Fr. Juan Vecchi, SDB)

- 1.3.3 He sets about making the world the true temple of the Lord and **turning man's manifold activities into a conscious and vital liturgy blending with the Eucharistic Christ.**



Such a vocation enables the layman to **unearth from the “profane” a rich vein of sanctity** – even attaining to spiritual heights traced out by holy Founders who have initiated special Gospel projects.

- 2. MAN ON A TIGHTROPE:** A sculpture of the young Don Bosco **walking a tightrope** stands just outside the original house of the Bosco family in Becchi.

This is a striking image for our imitation of how Don Bosco was able to balance his and our **three-fold mission as evangelizer, educator and communicator as Salesians:**

“The indication was present in the first draft of the Constitutions prepared by Don Bosco for presentation to the Holy See.... The typical areas of the mission entrusted to the Salesians, **education, evangelization and social communication, are to be mutually linked together.**” (Fr. Juan Vecchi, SDB, Communication in the Salesian Mission, Acts of the General Council 370, 2000)

Don Bosco narrates about this experience:

“At Becchi there was a field in which grew several trees. On one of them, a pear tree that is still there was very helpful to me then. I used to sling a rope from it to another tree some distance away... Then standing on the chair, I... repeated as much as I could remember from the explanation of the gospel I had heard in church that morning... After the sermon there was a short prayer, and then the show began... **the preacher transformed into a professional acrobat... I walked the tightrope like an ordinary path and danced on it**, and hung by one foot or one hand, sometimes by two...” (Memoirs of the Oratory, pp. 28-29)

2.1 We call ourselves sons of a Saint (John Bosco) who... succeeded in communicating by body language, by word, and by the very structure he had created. He referred back

to the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales who had the **ability at speaking and writing on the Christian life in a manner that could be understood by small and great**, the educated and the simple, church people and those far from any kind of religion. (Fr. Juan Vecchi, SDB, Acts of the General Council 370, 2000, p. 4)

The **emphasis on the communication** aspect of our being salesian today is an assertion that:

2.1.1 the **Salesian** as an educator and evangelizer of the young people of today has to **acquire “many of the features of the communicator”**;

2.1.2 the **educative-pastoral community** has to become **“a powerhouse of high quality and Christian communication**;

2.1.3 the **Salesian educative-pastoral project** has to ensure that it **contains and develops “the dynamism and qualities of the world of communication”** (Fr. Pascual Chavez, SDB, Acts of the General Council 407, p.59)

2.2The **only useful road ahead is through becoming qualified**. The new literacy, i.e. the ability to read and write in the culture of the media, affects everyone, and in so far as concerns the faith it affects all believers. How much more then should it be of interest to educators and evangelizers. (Vecchi, op. cit., p. 23)

For the **salesian lay brothers**: (Ratio Fundamentalis, 10.2.3.4)

- 2.2.1 **Professional training** is something distinct from the period of specific formation.
- 2.2.2 It is the **responsibility of the Province** to see to it that the Salesian brother engages “in studies aimed at his **professional preparations in view of the apostolic work** he will later carry out.
- 2.2.3 The confrere **qualifies himself in the specific field of his profession and in the skills needed** to fulfill the various tasks and roles that will be entrusted to him, such as, for example, the vast area of the school, technology, social communication, animation techniques, and the different aspects of administration and management.

2.3 THE THEATER AND THE LAY BROTHERS: In a conversation with Fr Barberis, we hear Don Bosco saying: “**The happiness wrought by these little theatrical moments made some decide to stay in the Congregation.**” Amongst the reasons for the **current drop in vocations we should not hesitate to add this one too**, amongst many others. As we might also suspect that there is a **direct and mutual relationship between the decline in the number of Brothers (Coadjutors) and the abandonment of ‘Teatrino’** given that they were formidable supporters and key figures in it. (Michele Novelli, SDB, Teatrino: A Critical Elements of Don Bosco's Pedagogy, Elements for the Formation of Salesians in Communication, p. 64)

2.3.1 It is said that **Don Bosco's charism is a dramatic charism.** (cf. Novelli, op. cit., pp. 61-71)



- **Don Bosco's communications style was that of the dramatist.** He did not stop at passing on ideas and content but wanted to be **in tune with feelings, on the same emotional wavelength as youngsters.** So he deliberately gave a theatrical style to his way of communicating and relating.
- Nobody pretends that all the Salesians would have the same capacity as Don Bosco in this: it would be impossible. He was unique. Just the same, **Don Bosco's way of dramatic communication can be nurtured over the years of formation** and one cannot really do without the tools that make this kind of salesian educational communication work: **theatre and music.**

- Martina Crivello points out in an article in the Italian Salesian Bulletin (January 2008): **“The theatrical style of his communication got people involved and was able to channel not so much ideas as feelings and authentic values”**. His youthful apprenticeship in this would later lead him to put a stamp on his Oratory as a **grand dramatic 'game' where theatre and music were its soul.**”

2.3.2 We cannot ignore or just throw out Don Bosco’s conviction: **“Theatre, if comedies are well chosen, is a school of morality, good social life, and even of holiness”** (Fr Barberis’ diary). And then there is the famous **‘good Christians and upright citizens’, also attributed to ‘Teatrino’**. We may be surprised at the **reference to holiness (our first and absolute aim) also achievable through theatre?** How come we have relegated theatre to the attic, as if it were redundant or irrelevant in salesian education?

There is no doubt that youngsters really like music and theatre where they find a **chance to express themselves and play a part in their own education**. This is why Don Bosco wanted music and theatre to be privileged tools of education. **Not using them, or even just minimizing their charismatic value is a basic mistake we make in our mission**. Rediscovering Don Bosco today means also **discovering the decisive impact that music and theatre have always had in the preventive system**.

2.3.3 The qualities of the Salesian teatrino are:

- **DIDACTIC:** It is an educational medium for **developing the youngsters' personalities and for channeling content, values, teachings** that will remain impressed on youngsters' minds.
- **CREATIVE AND INEXPENSIVE BUT PROFESSIONAL:** There needs to be creativity in scenery, costumes, all the basic requirements, using “simple materials”, recycled, re-adapted, re-used. There should be no “business” expenses (hired costumes, commissioned stage sets) but **everything should come from volunteer work...** This **does not prevent the final product from being effective, or something that professionals would not be envious of.** If any investment is made it should be in the area of “services” for **good lighting or adequate sound.**
- **YOUTH-CENTERED:** Between spectators and young actors, the major effort (if not the exclusive one) should be for the advantage of the latter. **Each young person involved, then, is of central interest to the educator coordinating things.** An adult is necessary, not necessarily an expert in the technical side of things, but as the educator. **This daily contact with the youngsters aims at creating an educational relationship which is the only reasons for being there with them.**

- **COMMUNAL AND CELEBRATORY:** For Don Bosco theatre was **not for those who were afraid of work, of for the privileged ones, or people who were full of themselves, or just to create a gang.** The communal side (entire oratory, parish, school) leads the actor not to do things for him or herself, but for the whole setting. Beginning with the theme of the performance (chosen in accordance with the educational plan), the day of performance (community feast day), involving where possible other groups, **theatre becomes an opportunity for bringing the whole community together.**
- **GLOBAL, OPEN-TO-ALL:** The leader should not “choose” who to educate or who not; the theatre experience is **open to everyone who chooses it. The leader entrusts tasks to whoever can do them best, acting or technical support.**



The script, then, is chosen on the basis of who can take part, how many there are, and not vice versa. Roles can be added to or reduced, characters changed, adapted to the character of the young players. These determine how the practice sessions go: the script then becomes a script which adapts to the group putting on the performance. One of the most worthwhile experiences is something put on by using all components of the Educative Pastoral Community: it becomes a privileged medium for building up harmony amongst groups.

3. MAN OF DISCERNMENT:

L: St. Francis de Sales teaches: “A good vocation is simply a firm and constant will to serve God in the way and places the Almighty God has called you. This is the best mark one could have to know when a vocation is true.” (Spiritual Conferences of St. Francis de Sales, #17)

ALL: We all have the means to make a difference in the world, for good. But where do we show up? Where and with whom do we want to make an impact? Why there? Why them?

L: St. John Bosco tells us: “When your parents or other people in authority try to dissuade you from the path to which God invites you, remember this is the time to practice the great counsel of the gospel message that we should obey God rather than human beings” (Acts 5:29). (cited by Pietro Stella, SDB, Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality, p. 401)

ALL: In our search for our place in the world, what voices must we listen to? What voices must we ignore? What is the criterion that compels us to take one road and not the other when we stand at the crossroads?

L: St. Francis de Sales further teaches: “Strive day by day to become more pure in heart... estimating everything, and weighing everything in the balance of the sanctuary, which really is no other than the will of God... It is not the special property of roses to be white. Pink or red ones are sweeter and more beautiful; but it is the special property of the lily. So, in like manner, let us be what we are, and let us, as we live, do the best we can to honor Him whose workmanship we are.” (Treatise on the Love of God, Book 8, Chapter 14)

ALL: Loving Father, you have formed in Don Bosco a heart as great as the shores of the sea and made him founder of a vast spiritual family. Send more vocations to the various members of the Salesian Family. May these many apostolic forces, with distinct vocations but living in the same spirit and in communion with each other, continue our founder’s work at the present day.

L: The Strenna for the Salesian Family for 2018 complements the journey of the whole Church on ‘Youth, Faith and Discernment of Vocations’: “Let us cultivate the art of listening and accompaniment.”

ALL: “Discernment enables us to moderate our judgment, to keep a proper balance, to make a patient comparison... between the multiple possibilities of choice which are a guarantee of freedom and moral responsibility.” (Fr. Juan Vecchi, SDB, Called to be Shapherds, p. 81)



L: Let the boys be instructed on vocations in general. Don Bosco repeated a number of times: “**Avoid telling a lad that he should or should not become a priest. What’s important is that boys think about vocation**

and choose the one that is right for them.” (Fr. Julius

Barberis, SDB, Transcribed Minutes, General Chapter II, 4 September 1880)

ALL: St. John Bosco, help us walk with the young, with families, with the fathers and the mothers... with whom the different groups of the Salesian Family are engaged in their mission, providing opportunities for accompaniment of all young people, excluding no one, because the Spirit is at work in each one. (cf. Fr. Angel Arttime Fernandez, SDB, Strenna 2018)

L: St. John Bosco, attentive listener of vocation stories...

ALL: Pray for us.

L: St. John Bosco, wise discerner of God’s will...

ALL: Pray for us.

L: St. John Bosco, able guide of mission seekers...

ALL: Pray for us.

Questions I have after the talk...

Realizations I have after the talk...

Challenges I have after the talk...

