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From the Convitto to Mission

Bridging Issues

Fr. John Roche, SDB

In the December 2012 issue of *The Don Bosco Study Guide* we examined the influence of Fr. Joseph Cafasso and the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* in the life and mission of Don Bosco as a young priest. The research of Fr. Giuseppe Buccaletto and Fr. Arthur Lenti reveals a long tradition anchored in the shrine of St. Ignatius, where Don Bosco took part in annual retreats for most of his priestly life and from which, Fr. Joseph Cafasso—until his death, continued to guide and influence Don Bosco and many other priests. Fr. Giuseppe provided a schematic outline demonstrating the influence of the founding priests whose vision for the *Convitto* would change the course of formation in Piedmont during that region’s tumultuous political and ecclesiastical climate. Fr. Giuseppe draws the lines between the many saints, their spiritualities and theologies revealing a rich tapestry woven into the heart and mind of Don Bosco at the critical point of his discernment in mission.

Fr. Arthur Lenti makes reference to this very same inspiration for Don Bosco and adds that the recently published sermons and retreats of St. Joseph Cafasso help to justify this connection. Fr. Arthur continues to work on the specifics of that influence while Fr. Arthur recuperates from his bout with infection. We anxiously await the embellishment of this study as we journey further into this year dedicated to the Educational Methodology of Don Bosco. In discussion with Fr. Arthur, he is clear about that part of Don Bosco’s mission and theology that makes a direct correlation



to Fr. Cafasso and the *Convitto*. But there are points of departure distinguish Don Bosco with a special uniqueness in his educational approach.

In the main article in December, Fr. Joe Boenzi contextualized this discernment of Don Bosco within the social setting of Turin. Providing a detailed sketch of the post-Napoleonic occupation we see a Piedmont caught between clinging to Napoleonic reforms and the pull toward turning “the clock backwards.” The landscape became one of re-building and fortifying what was lost both politically and literally drawing young people into factories once reserved for munitions now given to construction. It is this gathering of young people caught in this web of survival to which the young priest Don Bosco turns his attention. Into this mix came not just the young people fleeing from the rural areas, but also political refugees from France and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The labor conditions, he wrote, were “precarious,” adding to the evident poverty experienced by this growing horde. The absence of contracts, the terrible sanitary conditions, and the rise in disease created a world desperate for intervention. While Turin expanded, the lessons from building a railroad gave new

directions for that expansion as Turin became a new political center of a new nation. Fr. Joe makes the link between this history and the “emergence of class consciousness.” At this moment of rallying for organization and to seek better conditions, Don Bosco comes on the scene. It is with his genius for working for this “portion” of humanity that Don Bosco will come to stand head and shoulders above other educators and youth workers of his time. In the midst of political and ecclesiastical tension, his efforts cut through the malaise to assist both society and the Church.

It has long been known that Don Bosco was a professional eclectic when it came to the development of his pedagogies. An examination of those schools of education and significant persons contributing to such schools has been treated carefully in the work of Fr. Pietro Braido, retired scholar and expert in Salesian Pedagogy at the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome. Some of Fr. Braido’s work has been translated into English, but much more remains to be translated. Thanks to the diligent work of Fr. Julian Fox, directing the Salesian News Agency, more and more of this research is becoming available in English.

In this issue of the Don Bosco Study Guide, we will make use of Fr. Julian’s hard work and publish for you the ninth chapter of Fr. Braido’s study, *Prevention, Not Repression: Don Bosco’s Educational System*. In this particular chapter, Fr. Braido launches from Don Bosco’s life in the Convitto and examines Don Bosco’s option for the young which “took shape in conceptual terms precisely through real, factual contact with this unlimited youthful reality.” That reality must consider, as he puts it, the true “face” of the young. And because that reality is not systematic, it comes as no surprise that his experience among the young is hard to confine systematically.

Striving to put some measure of order in an examination of Don Bosco’s evolving pedagogy, Fr. Braido suggests themes in examining various elements of his encounter with youth. Fr. Braido ventures into the sociology and even the youth psychology of the young people attending the first oratories. This effort focuses

mainly upon the teenagers who either resided at these oratories or attended the oratories as day students. There were younger boys, even as young as 8 years of age, but Fr. Braido focuses upon the majority of boys who were between the ages of 12 and 16.

The details Don Bosco left us do not use the modern language of developmental stages, but Fr. Braido insists that the insights of Don Bosco may be tied to very specific stages and demonstrates a keen awareness in Don Bosco—an awareness far ahead of his own time. However, a propensity for evaluating the young as incomplete adults is also in evidence in his descriptions, and this is consistent with his contemporaries in education and the culture of Piedmont. Thus, it may be suggested that the Preventive System was adopted because of a negative assessment of young people. In fact, Don Bosco writes about the “thoughtlessness of the young.” Fr. Braido points out that Don Bosco understood this as evidence of immaturity rather than the result of deliberate choices or moral dissension.

As we turn to this chapter in Fr. Braido’s work, we recall the details of Fr. Joe Boenzi’s intervention in the December issue with his detailed descriptions of the young people toward whom Don Bosco turned his attention. Recall the social and political climate discussed in this study.

The overlapping details serve to remind us that we are called to respond to concrete and practical realities of young people in their social and political settings today. We, too, need to form a perception that reflects their reality so that our mission and our efforts can be shaped by those realities. We have the advantage of many years of study in psychology to help us understand Don Bosco’s own classifications of young people—his “theological and moral evaluations.”



Don Bosco's Educational System

Chapter Nine of the book, *“Prevention Not Repression:
Don Bosco's Educational System”*
by *Fr. Pietro Braido, SDB*
translated by *Fr. Vincent Zuliani, Fr. Julian Fox, SDB*

Author's Forward

Don Bosco's educational system or, more comprehensively, Don Bosco's preventive experience, is a project: it grew, gradually expanded and became more specific in the different and various institutions and undertakings carried out by his many collaborators and disciples. Understandably, its vitality can be guaranteed in time only by being faithful to the law which governs any authentic growth: renewal, in-depth study, adaptation in continuity.

The renewal is entrusted to the persistent ongoing theoretical and practical commitment of individuals and communities. Renewal never ceases. Continuity, instead, can be assured only by a keen engagement with the origins.

The aim of our rapid summary is to provoke an enlivening contact with the primitive roots of Don Bosco's preventive experience as well as its features. Our summary has no intention of offering immediately applicable programs; we simply wish to describe essential original elements which despite their circumstances and limitations can inspire valid and credible projects now and in the future for very different contexts and settings. This is essential if the legitimate aspiration of working “with Don Bosco and with the times” is to happen without a break in continuity.

This third edition is significantly restructured and expanded; more care has been given to historical data, less space to certain flights of fancy, more light shed on things that might be useful for an inevitable revision and revitalisation, something hinted at by an updated bibliography.

12 September 1998

Fr Peter Braido

Translator's Note



left: Fr. Julian Fox, SDB

right: Fr. Vincenzo Zuliani, SDB

Fr. Vincent Zuliani, a member of the United States Province of St Philip the Apostle SUE, and who has now gone to his eternal reward, was the first person brave enough to tackle this translation. He did so with much good will, excellent recall of his native language, a commendable knowledge of English and a rudimentary grasp of ‘porting’ all this into today's technology, viz., text-based programs which might then be easily manipulated for several channels, printing included. Shortly before he died he sent me what he had done on a floppy disk, and a ream of handwritten footnotes, a thousand or more!

I have largely re-translated the work, but it was of immense assistance to have his efforts in a largely recoverable digital format – not all of it was so easily recoverable and it first needed to be returned to a ‘text only’ format. Such are the perils of working with what are by now antiquated proprietary formats. Let that be a lesson for the future! However, knowing the genesis of this translation the reader can understand why there might occasionally be inconsistencies; if I found a section which seemed pretty much accurate, I left it as Vincenzo had first translated it. We can all be eternally grateful to him.

Julian Fox, SDB

2012-10-07

Chapter IX

1. The option for the young: social and psycho-pedagogical typology

Don Bosco's first contacts in Turin with isolated groups of young people during his years at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* coincided with the beginning of the industrial, demographic and building expansion of the city which would be accentuated in decades following by the inevitable phenomenon of immigrants, the uprooted and the 'abandoned'.¹

According to John Baptist Lemoyne, Don Bosco felt strongly about the early impact of Turin on him and the often very many hidden miseries, the worst of which were made known to the authorities in charge of public order from the point of view of the ones which were most socially dangerous.²

Naturally, the young priest coming from a world largely removed from problems of the urban reality, was deeply affected and wanted to especially understand the religious and moral aspects of the various kinds of needs and distressing situations. He walked along the streets and through the squares, visited prisons and hospitals, entered hovels and climbed into attics, the ultimate refuge especially for young immigrants.³

In the 1870s and 80s the scenario of 'poor and abandoned youth' was seen by Don Bosco to be substantially unchanged, that is, still describable in those terms but there were more of them and the situation was worse. His viewpoint, which began with Turin and some regional experience expanded to national, international and intercontinental horizons, either through direct knowledge or thanks to information garnered from his helpers, newspapers, civil and Church authorities etc. He embraced this broader perspective as a commitment through his 'dreams',

the entire 'planet of young people' seeing them in need of 'salvation' and 'assistance'. Not only individuals' fortunes were at stake but the future of society.

This was the dominant motif of his words, speeches, addresses to families, individual letters, circulars and the many conferences he gave in the past period of his life to benefactors and Cooperators.



You must help according to your possibilities"; he exhorted them, you must come to Don Bosco's aid in order to more easily and broadly achieve the noble purpose proposed, to the advantage that is of Religion, the well-being of civil society, by nurturing poor youth. You certainly should not overlook the adults; but don't forget that these, with few exceptions, are not so much our concern today. So we go out to the little ones, remove them far from danger, bring them along to Catechism, invite them to the Sacraments, look after them, or bring them back to virtue. Doing this you will see our ministry become fruitful, you will cooperate in forming good Christians, good families, good populations; and you will construct a barrier, a dyke in the present and the future against impiety and the flood of vice.⁴

Don Bosco's system arose and took shape in conceptual terms precisely through real, factual contact with this unlimited youthful reality. So it is necessary to identify the structures, features, detail the 'face' of the young whom he encountered: both in

his immediate concrete involvement and through the images he built up in their regard.⁵

It is not an easy task because if his pedagogy is not doctrinal and systematic, his experience of young people that led to is even less systematically developed. But it is not impossible, just the same, because here too his consistent and realistic activity is accompanied constantly by clear insights and formulations. In reality what he did and the intentions he expressed — to gain the needed consensus, seek charity, impose some unity on the involvement of his helpers — help us bring together fairly adequately his basic ideas concerning the ‘youth situation’ from a threefold point of view: sociological, psychological, theological-anthropological.

2. 1. Elements of the sociology of youth

What undoubtedly impressed public opinion from the outset was Don Bosco’s systematic interest in and intentions regarding ‘poor and abandoned’ youth, ‘the poorest and most neglected’ youth, ‘poor and derelict youth’, ‘the most needy and risky children’. Recalling this thirty years later in the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, the story of that early ‘little oratory’, he loved to go back to the original scope of “gathering up only the boys most at risk, and preferably those who had come out of prison”.⁶ far from their families, strangers in Turin”, “stonecutters, bricklayers, plasterers, road pavers, plasterers and others who came from distant villages”.⁷ At times his preference is expressed broadly by his intention “to be able to decrease the number of rascals and youngsters who end up in prison”.⁸

This course of action does not mark the beginning of something new but rather the continuation of Don Bosco’s renewed fervour and growing organisational vigour, according to the needs of the times and experiences past and present.⁹

The problem did not go unnoticed, even in Turin. Initiatives had come into being in the preceding centuries providing help for unfortunate young people whose parents could not or did not care to provide

for them. This assistance was given through catechetical instruction and introduction to skilled labour.

Charitable persons, moved “only by Christian charity”, by loving kindness went looking for them; they gathered up as many as possible of them, and with admirable patience instructed them in Christian doctrine, and provided, to the best of their ability, for their greater needs. Some were introduced to some kind of civil culture.

From 1850 on, this was the aim of those people who backed the “Hotel for Virtue” which was established on July 24, 1587, by R. Patente. Workshops were set up to train textile workers, hatters, lathe workers, upholsterers, blacksmiths, carpenters, furniture experts, foundry workers, tailors and shoemakers, and give them increased cultural enrichment.

Goffredo Casalis goes so far as to consider these ‘Hotels for Virtue’ as, so to speak, “the dawning of Piedmontese industry.”¹⁰ In 1771 an almshouse (it was known as *L’Opera della MendicITÀ Istruita*) was set up with a broader scope in mind. It had been created to teach Sunday school catechism to the poor and to provide them with basic assistance. Later on this activity broadened even further by offering other kinds of assistance: technical training, schools in various districts around the city which the Brothers of the Christian Schools were called to run, during the third decade of the 1800’s.¹¹

Naturally we should not forget the various works promoted by the Marchioness Barolo.¹²

From the early 1840s Don Bosco began to espouse the cause of poor and neglected youth and give it all his youthful energy. He appealed to people of various categories and invited them to join him as his close helpers. He did this by means of personal contacts, individual and circular letters, appeals, advertising and in language which shifted between the realistic and the rhetorical.

He spoke of “orphans”, “poor and abandoned youth”, “youth at risk”, “risky youth”. Terms like this and oth-

ers, were repeated, unchanged, for decades in connection with very different types of youngster staying in his institutions: oratories, hospices, boarding schools for both academic and working students, agricultural schools. Then finally, Don Bosco's work extended to youth coming from the most heterogeneous layers of society, including youngsters from good families of the lower and middle class classes, and even of the nobility.

In 1857, Don Bosco sent out an invitation to a Lottery on behalf of the three boys' oratories in Turin, and explained that the aim of these oratories was to bring boys together at weekends, "gathering as many young people at risk as possible from the city and provincial towns, who had moved to the Capital'. However, the "house attached to the Oratory in Valdocco responds to essential needs such as shelter, food and clothing for those youngsters who, no matter whether from the city or from the provincial towns ... are so poor and abandoned that they could not, otherwise, be trained for a skilled job or employment."¹³

Similar invitations issued in the following years (1862, 1865, 1866) took into account not only the Hospice for working boys but also the Hospice for academic students, "Since, some of the boys there come from Turin, but the majority come from other cities and towns either looking for work or to pursue their studies".¹⁴

In the following decades, Don Bosco would use the same kind of language in reference to the situation in Italy, Europe and Argentina.

The *Patronage Saint-Pierre* in Nice was opened for "children at risk",¹⁵ A hospice for poor children to be trained in arts and crafts was opened in Buenos Aires.¹⁶ The schools for "poor working class families' children" was opened at La Spezia,¹⁷ The Sacred Heart Hospice in Rome was opened for "children of the lower classes".¹⁸

Don Bosco repeated this kind of language, often stereotyped, when he talked about the initiatives he wanted the Cooperators to be involved in:

*The main goal of the Association is the active exercise of charity toward one's neighbour and especially toward youth at risk.*¹⁹

"Over the following decades, in fact and more so by describing situations and proposing solutions for them, Don Bosco's interest in "poor and abandoned youth" widened its horizons and became more intense. This gave the original and apparently conventional term, "poor and abandoned youth", other shades of meaning according to the various circumstances and institutions concerned.

At any rate, Don Bosco always connected the various situations and steps to be taken for them with the beginnings of the Festive Oratory: "Although my purpose had been that of gathering only children most at risk and preferably those coming out of jail, in order to build up a basis for discipline and moral behaviour, I also invited some other well behaved and educated youngsters".²⁰

The *Rules for day students* ended up sanctioning an already well-established practice, which made such an undertaking less selective and more open: "We aim primarily at young workers... However, the academic students who might want to join in on weekends or in vacation time are not excluded".²¹ Later on, new situations arose: Protestant proselytising, dangers associated with religious indifference, anti-clerical secularism in the school and the Press.²²

Logically, the picture one had of "poor and abandoned youth and youth at risk" picked up an entirely new meaning: more than being at the level of economic and legally-determined poverty, the danger was seen essentially from a religious and moral perspective which over-rode all other differences. As a matter of fact, before any kind of 'redemption' however legitimate, be it cultural or professional, the preservation of the faith and its stability for everyone appeared more urgent.

With regard to the danger of heresy, we do have a clear summary in a short, historical note dated March 12, 1879, and presented to Cardinal Nina,

Secretary of State, in the Vatican. Don Bosco first of all recalled his anti-Protestant efforts from 1848 on, in the aftermath of the Statute and its consequent liberalisation of the Law. This he took up through the press, by spreading good books, teaching catechism classes, preaching, setting up the Festive Oratories and charitable hospices. Then Don Bosco restated the specific objective of the Salesian vocation, which aimed at “liberating the most needy class of people, namely, poor youth, from Protestant snares”.

He also pointed out a broad gamut of undertakings such as: The Oratory of St Aloysius in Turin; the Hospice of St. Paul at La Spezia; the Church and Grammar schools in Vallecrosia, Ventimiglia; the Hospice of St. Leo in Marseilles; the agricultural school at St. Cyr and Navarre, Toulon; the Hospice of St. Peter in Nice (France); the Hospice of St. Vincent’s at Sampierdarena; the Oratory of the Holy Cross at Lucca; the Hospices of Montevideo and Buenos Aires.²³

Very similar undertakings, indicative of a Catholic reawakening, were opened in Uruguay and Argentina. These were actually considered to be the more or less remote launching platform for a different kind of missionary evangelisation. This strategy is recorded in numerous documents which prefigure a rather ambitious plan which he had already made known to Cardinal Franchi in 1877.

We thought it best to create a new experiment. We are no longer going to send missionaries to work among the savages but go to the outskirts of civilized towns and then found churches, schools and hospices with a twofold objective: 1. Help preserve the faith of those who have already received it. 2. Instruct and provide shelter for the indigenous (Indios) people living among Catholics either by religious desire or for other needs. The goal was to establish relationships with the parents through their children, so that the savages



*might become the evangelisers of the savages themselves.*²⁴

There is another kind of interest in the young, particularly dear to Don Bosco, and which occupied him throughout his life: interest in young people called to an ecclesiastical or religious state. Naturally, these young people cannot be referred to as ‘at risk’ or ‘abandoned’, even though at times they came from families of modest means. “They are good-natured youngsters, who love the practices of piety, and who offer some hope that they are called to the Ecclesiastical state”.²⁵ The danger to which these ones are exposed does not come from the street or from the fact of being abandoned, but that they might “lose their vocation” through lack of material means and adequate care. This is one of the primary objectives of the Salesian Society: “Since the young who aspire to the ecclesiastical state are exposed to many and serious dangers, this Society will do its very best to make sure that those youngsters who show a special capacity for study and are commendable for their moral behavior, be fostered in the upkeep of their piety”.²⁶

The Cooperators Association’s regulations called on them to support “youngsters who have an ecclesiastical vocation” apostolically, spiritually and financially.²⁷

The vocation experience has its beginning in 1849 and Don Bosco, despite obvious exaggeration, wrote about it as follows: “We might say that the house attached to the Oratory became a diocesan seminary for some twenty years”.²⁸

A similar function is attributed to all the undertakings that followed: hospices, boarding schools and agricultural schools, all of which offered cheap tuition. They had exactly the same aim: “to give the greatest number of talented young people the opportunity to receive an education which was a Christian education so that in time they may turn out to be good priests or courageous missionaries or wise fathers of families”.²⁹

In 1877, Don Bosco would establish a stable set of rules, the 'Rules for the Houses', for the gradually developing works, along with the parallel 'Rules for the day students'. Every house, as far as possible, was expected to have an oratory attached to it: "The general aim of the houses of the Congregation is to provide help, do good to one's neighbour especially by educating youth, taking care of them during the most dangerous years of their lives, educating them in the sciences and arts and leading them to practise religion and virtue. The Congregation does not refuse to take care of any class of people, but it prefers the middle and of poorer classes since these are the ones mostly in need of help and assistance".³⁰

Don Bosco was an ambassador for his own undertakings, and during the last years of his life and particularly during his historic trips to France and Spain, would come up with more engaging and definitive formulations of his system and its objectives, through the many talks and conferences. These would but confirm and further explain things.

In a letter to the Cooperators in January 1880, Don Bosco presented a complete list of the institutions he had set up on behalf of youth at risk: "Recreational parks, oratories, Sunday schools, evening schools, day schools, hospices, boarding schools, educational institutions... all open for the public benefit in Italy, France, America".³¹

In April, 1882, Don Bosco offered further explanation in Lucca: "Many thousands of youngsters in more than 100 houses receive a Christian education; they are instructed, introduced to learning an art or skill which will help them earn their bread honestly... Charitable contributions are used to prepare these children for civil society, so they may become either good Christian workers or faithful soldiers or exemplary masters and teachers or priests and even missionaries who might bring religion and civilization to barbarians".³²

Don Bosco gave a talk at the Cooperators' meeting in Turin, on June 1, 1885: "He seemed very tired and his voice was soft. As he was telling the Cooperators

about Salesian undertakings, he emphasised the reasons why they should be supported:

*Because they educate youth to pursue virtue, the way leading to the Sanctuary; because their main goal is that of instructing youth who today have become the target of wicked people; because in their boarding schools, hospices, festive oratories, their families they promote, in the midst of the world they promote, I repeat: love of religion, good morals, prayer, frequent reception of the Sacraments.*³³

As a consequence, it is not possible to reduce Don Bosco's practical interests to only one category of person, namely "poor and abandoned youth".

Don Bosco's active interests encompasses a whole network of young people, a rather broad one which has the restricted and diverse world of delinquents at its lower level, those who needed to be corrected, those who had had to deal with the courts; there was the less-defined world of the almost-unredeemable, by using only preventive discipline. These youngsters could be harmful to many of the youth he had the intention of caring about the most.

Looking at higher levels, in principle, at least as far as the boarding schools and the hospices were concerned, boys from upper-class (financial or noble status) families were excluded. These youngsters would have found themselves ill-at-ease in relatively 'cheap' institutions as far as buildings, food, cultural activities, general tone of life were concerned.³⁴

Don Bosco's perspective was quite broad when he spoke and wrote, bearing in mind the varied circumstances of young people and people in general. Whether he was writing books to uphold the faith or whether he was doing his best to point out the need for welfare and educational intervention beyond his own area of activity for young people, Don Bosco never excluded the widest possibility of applying the preventive system, probably including some additional 'repressive' approaches. For instance, he

suggested the use of the preventive system in Turin's prisons to Urban Rattazzi and he suggested to Francis Crispi that the same system be employed for "boys seriously at risk", amongst whom "vagabonds who end up into the hands of public security agents".³⁵

It is evident, however, that Don Bosco's intentions, expressed through the institutions he had brought to completion and his more pressing concerns, are all focused on the young who find themselves at the lowest level and sidelined by society and mostly at risk. This is what the *Memoirs from 1841 to 1844-45-46 by Father John Bosco to his Salesian sons* is all about. It is almost a last will and testament:

*The world will always welcome us as long as our concern is for under-developed peoples, poor children, members of society most in danger. This is our real wealth which no-one will envy and nobody will take from us.*³⁶

This is the direction Don Bosco repeatedly revealed to his Salesians, Cooperators and benefactors, in the talks addressed to them during the last decade of his life, not without explicit reference to the dangerous social situation of young people who are not adequately assisted. It was his last specification which might have aroused the sensitivities of his often well-to-do and concerned listeners, thus attracting greater charitable contributions from them.³⁷

While in Rome, in 1887, Don Bosco urged the Cooperators to help Salesians confront and stem the onrush of ever-increasing impiety and bad morals dragging so many poor and inexperienced youths to eternal ruin, both in the cities and in the towns. He urged them to help the Salesians lower the quantity of rascals who, left to the themselves, ran great risk of filling up the prisons.³⁸

On March 30, 1882, Don Bosco told the Genoa Cooperators:

We see these youngsters scurrying from squares to back streets, shore to shore,

*growing up in the grip of idleness and leisure; we see them learn all sorts of obscenities and curses; later on we see them become scoundrels and criminals; and finally, mostly in the prime of life, we see them end up in prison.*³⁹

There seemed to him to be an organised plot involved, and therefore works of prevention and defence were needed to counteract it!

On June 1, 1885 talking to the Turin Cooperators, Don Bosco said:

*In this day and age, the wicked are trying to scatter the seeds of godlessness and bad morals; they are trying especially to ruin imprudent youths through associations, printed publications, meetings which aim, more or less openly, at keeping youth away from religion, Church and good morals.*⁴⁰

To reach the hearts and the wallets of his well-to-do listeners, Don Bosco did not hesitate to project, at times, the likely danger that abandoned youths were as vagabonds, purse-snatchers or even criminals who perhaps one day might show up "begging for money with a knife at their throats or a pistol in their hands".⁴¹

2. Elements of youth psychology

To understand Don Bosco's preventive system we should also keep in mind the following items, the age bracket of the young people he dealt with and to whom the preventive system was preferably applied, under his immediate or mediated direction; the age of the boys frequenting the Festive Oratories in Turin and the complex institution that was Valdocco's Oratory; the age of those attending the boarding schools at Mirabello Monferrato, later transferred to Borgo San Martino, Lanzo Torinese, Alassio and Varazze, Genoa-Sampierdarena, Nice and Marseilles.

2.1 Growing up

As a rule, in the majority of the works Don Bosco founded, the prevailing interest was in teenagers, a more extended age group for festive oratories, schools and boarding schools, including those in the final years of adolescence. Exceptions were made even during Don Bosco's lifetime for students in the boarding schools at Alassio and Valsalice, as well as the pre-university institution set up by Fr Lasagna at Villa Colon (Montevideo).

The age range, in reference to young working boys was much wider and less strictly defined.⁴² So summing up, Don Bosco's pedagogy is a youth-oriented pedagogy where the terms 'young', 'youth' are given a rather wide connotation. But in overall numbers and attention, they were mostly teenagers. It is for boys of the 15-16 year-old bracket that Don Bosco wrote 'Lives' or biographical stories of boys, which were one of the basic tools Don Bosco used to pass on his educational experience and pedagogical reflections.⁴³

The following norm, generally put into practice, is found in the 'Rules for day students':

*We are looking for eight-year-olds, so smaller boys are excluded, along with those who cause a lot of trouble and are unable to understand what we are teaching them.*⁴⁴

The *Rules for the houses* notably restricts the age limit when Don Bosco that the pupil "must have completed his grammar school"⁴⁵ as a condition for acceptance. In practice though, most of the boarding schools for students had a grammar school program in place or at least the last two years of grammar school. Ultimately, most of the institutions (oratories, hospices, boarding schools) were open to boys whose age went from childhood to early and late adolescence so from approximately 8 to 18 years of age, but probably most were between 12 and 16.

As far as the terminology used by Don Bosco in his talks and in his writings is concerned, there is

some inevitable variation. Italian and Latin: *fanciulli, fanciullini, giovani, giovanetti, pueri, adolescentes, adulescentuli, juvenes* (children, little children, adolescents, in general terms) were generally interchangeable. Only *fanciullo, giovanetto* appear to be distinct, as they designate boys from the age of 8 to 11.

The booklet on *The work of Mary Help of Christians for vocations to the ecclesiastical state created in the Hospice of St. Vincent De Paul at Sampierdarena* seems to make a broad distinction between young adults or big boys or bigger boys (*giovani adulti, o grandicelli o piu grandicelli*), from 16 to 30 years of age, and children (*fanciulli*), little children (*piccolini*).⁴⁶

2.2 Features of youth psychology

We should not expect from a scientific study of age ranges from Don Bosco, which would allow us to clearly distinguish various developmental stages. However, at times some of the features pointed out by Don Bosco can be connected with one developmental stage rather than another. It is especially important to remark that Don Bosco's perception of the psychology of the young for whom he worked was strictly connected with his view of pastoral and pedagogical activity as a whole.

In defining the features proper to youth, Don Bosco ended up using descriptive terms but ones which also evaluated things positively or negatively according to how a young person was ready for education or according to the requirements of salvation.

Don Bosco seemed to link the moral and religious aspects of these features with judgement that was more negative than positive, and considered features in need of correction rather than ones that could be employed. Often enough youthfulness was implicitly compared with adulthood. For instance, the incompleteness of youth contrasts with the completeness of adulthood; the fickleness of youth with the poise of adulthood; youthful lack of reflection

with adult wisdom; fickle youth with emotionally

stable adults.⁴⁷ Naturally, other terms are not omitted which point to positive elements like availability, and positive potential such as sensitivity, impressionability and 'heart'.

More numerous and reflective remarks appear time and again in the pages of the 1877 'preventive system'. Similar remarks can be found in the writings going back to the 1840s and in particular the *Companion of Youth*, and they are repeated and enriched in the 'Lives' written during the 1850s and 60s.

The pages written in 1877 convey, first of all, what Don Bosco thought was the dominant feature of the youthful age, and the most decisive reason for adopting the preventive system:

*The primary reason for this system is the thoughtlessness of the young, who in one moment forget the rules of discipline and the penalties for their infringement. Consequently a child often becomes culpable and deserving of punishment, which he had not even thought about and which he had quite forgotten when heedlessly committing the fault he would certainly have avoided, had a friendly voice warned him.*⁴⁸

This feature is strictly connected with a second typical feature: lack of experience, immaturity, and as a consequence, lack of consideration and lack of prudence. For Don Bosco youth, taken in the widest sense, is by definition "dangerously inexperienced" and therefore "unstable" and "careless".⁴⁹ Therefore, youth can easily be trapped by snares of all kinds and from all sources: from the devil, bad companions, gaudy or alluringly presented things, temptations, freedom, heresy. It is mainly for this reason that youth is "an age exposed to dangers which can be found in every social circumstance".⁵⁰ 'Which children should be considered at risk' is the title of a paragraph written in a memo on the preventive system and handed to Francis Crispi in February of

1878.⁵¹

The very root of youth's thoughtlessness can be found in an innate lack of organisation which affects youth's psychological existence and precedes any kind of educational intervention. "Youngsters, just because they lack instruction and reflection allow themselves, often blindly, to be dragged by some of their friends or by their lack of reflection into bad behaviour, simply they have been neglected".⁵²

Connected with this is a characteristic trait which Don Bosco repeated time and again: Young people are flighty, unable to keep to their commitments, fragile, easily get tired, are just as easily discouraged as they become enthusiastic about something".⁵³

In the life of St. Dominic Savio, Don Bosco writes: "It is a particular trait of youth to be flighty, namely to easily change one's resolve about what one wants to achieve; and it is not a thing that happens seldom. Today a young man decides to do one thing and the next day he does another one; today he practices virtue to an eminent degree and the next day, he does just the opposite".⁵⁴

Naturally, this turns out to be even more evident when a young man has to face something which demands seriousness and commitment: this is the case with religion, piety, study, work and discipline.

In the Life of Besucco, Don Bosco emphasises how difficult it is for a youngster to "learn how to have a taste for prayer. Their fickle age causes them to see anything which demands serious mental attention as something nauseating and even as an enormous weight".⁵⁵

All that we have mentioned above goes back to a deeper and ambivalent reality with a theological and psychological sense to it. According to Don Bosco virtue, religion, the realm of grace are also sources of happiness. In the *Companion of Youth*, following a widespread ascetic type of literature for the young, both in his own time and earlier, Don Bosco em-

phasised one extremely problematic aspect of human nature and of the nature of a young person. We cannot tell whether Don Bosco means to refer to a healthy nature or a nature wounded by sin, because at this juncture Don Bosco does not seem to notice such a distinction.⁵⁶ Anyway, according to Don Bosco, the human being and more clearly so the young man seems to be born to rejoice; of his very nature a human being, a young man longs for joy, entertainment, pleasure. This tendency seems to enter into conflict with happiness and its sources. As a matter of fact, so Don Bosco continues, “If I tell one of my children to receive the Sacraments frequently, to pray each day, the answer I get is: I have something else to do, I have work to do, or I have to have fun”.⁵⁷

There is another characteristic feature instead, which Don Bosco notes and sees mostly from a positive angle: youngsters need to move about, have life, free rein for their physical, intellectual, emotional and moral energies. There is a fundamental precept connected with this feature. It was inspired by St. Philip Neri but employed by Don Bosco in language and educational praxis that makes it a construct of exceptional value: “Let them have ample freedom to jump, to run, to shout as they wish”.⁵⁸

There are other innate qualities found in the young and they are entirely positive. Don Bosco sees them and enjoys describing them as they are found in Michael Magone, the typical young lad, not only from a pedagogical point of view but especially from the perspective of a basic psychological structure, prior to any serious moral damage: his liveliness, spontaneity, inborn tendency to like what is good, unconsciously oriented towards true happiness.

*Naturally lively yet pious, good and devout, he thought a lot of the smallest practices of piety. He practised them cheerfully, freely and easily, without scruples: on account of his piety, study and congenial nature he was loved and respected by all; on account of his liveliness and good manners he was the idol of recreation time.*⁵⁹

Even after the premonition that he was soon the going to die, Michael Magone’s “cheerfulness and joviality were not changed in the least”.⁶⁰

There is another feature added to the ones mentioned above: youth has an inner vitality which is expressed by a remarkable impressionability and receptivity, both emotionally and perceptively. Don Bosco deals explicitly with this feature, when he expresses his views on the educative and moral aspects of the theatre.

“We maintain that youngsters hold on to impressions of things vividly presented, in their heart, and neither reason nor contrary facts can convince them to easily forget them”.⁶¹

Impressionability may have some negative aspects but it is taken mainly from its positive side, as Don Bosco himself remarks when he talks about the happy crisis faced by Josephine, the chief character in a play called *The conversion of a Waldesian lady*. “Youth, so long as it is not the slave to vice, lingers only momentarily on other things, but the precepts of religion and especially eternal principles produce the keenest impression on youth”.⁶²

What follows are two overall fundamental dimensions of youth psychology, which embrace the entire personality of the young and have an impact on the entire educational system. They can be noticed especially in boys throughout their teenage years and can be properly directed towards a more mature youth. They are: a very keen sense of justice, intolerance of any kind of injustice and a strong affection, heart. The two features are explicitly highlighted, once again, in the 1877 ‘preventive system’. They are both connected with two radical preventive experiences: reason and loving kindness.

Don Bosco gives teachers a reflection on his concern:

Experience teaches that the young do not easily forget the punishments they have received, and for the most part foster bitter feelings, along with the desire to throw off the yoke and even to seek

*revenge. They may sometimes appear to be quite unaffected but anyone who follows them as they grow up knows that the reminiscences of youth are terrible. They easily forget punishments by their parents but only with great difficulty those inflicted by their teachers, and some have even been known in later years to have had recourse to brutal vengeance for chastisements they had justly deserved during the course of their education.*⁶³

All in all, education is a 'thing of the heart', because, as a rule and almost naturally, a boy is 'heart'. 'For this reason, an educator will be always able to 'win over' the heart of the one he protects', and to speak with the language of the heart."⁶⁴

As a matter of fact, "in every youngster, even the most unfortunate one, there is a spot accessible to what is good. It is the task of an educator to look for this spot, the sensitive heart string, and draw profit from it".⁶⁵

Don Bosco reserved some remarks of a psychological and moral nature for the childhood stage, the age prior to eight years old, and for the age of eight to twelve.

In reference to the childhood stage, this is what Don Bosco wrote of Dominic Savio: "Even at that happy go lucky age, he entirely relied on his mother." And "he also came to know from his parents testimony that he was like this ever since his tender age... when, due to lack of reflection, boys are a bother and a continuous source of grief to their mothers; an age when boys want to see everything, touch everything and, most of the time, mess up everything".⁶⁶

As we have mentioned, 'small boys' were not admitted to the Oratory, because "they cause trouble and are unable to understand what they are being taught".⁶⁷ As for the eight to the age twelve year old stage, judgements expressed by Don Bosco are not optimistic.

This is the age, so Don Bosco says, when boys are bored or unwilling to pray and are inclined to the pranks common to that age.⁶⁸ Don Bosco does not even excuse boys of this age from their serious moral responsibilities. We see this in reflections collected by Father Bonetti for his chronicle, dated March 1, 1863: "I find that many boys' confessions can't be treated as indicated in the norms given in theology. Most of the time, no consideration is given to faults committed from the age eight to twelve, and if a confessor does not take steps to find out, and ask about them, they will pass them over and will go on building their life on a faulty basis".⁶⁹

3. Theology of education

Don Bosco does not have a systematic and theological anthropology at his disposal. This aspect of Don Bosco's priestly seminary formation seems to lead him back to just a few important, basic acquisitions. What Peter Stella wrote about a well-defined and widespread dogmatic and moral, though not universally applicable theology can be applied to Don Bosco's culture and his mindset as educator and pastor. Dogmatic Theology saw everything in the light of predestination or a free response to grace, and the account to be given to the Divine Judge, in expectation of either eternal life or eternal death.

Therefore Dogmatic Theology focused on seeing everything from the perspective of its value for eternity, reward or condemnation.

Moral theology, on the other hand, with its debates on Probabilism and Probabiliorism, focusing everything on the relationship between divine law and freedom, trained people to see their actions as responsible compliance with divine law.⁷⁰) Some other material, probably of a key nature was added to this: books on religious formation, writings used to prepare meditations, instructions, homilies for ordinary and extraordinary preaching, other sources of an historical, catechetical and apologetic nature. And finally, Don Bosco's natural disposition and his meaningful conversations with his boys were no doubt decisive in his gaining a comprehensive pic-

ture of the natural dispositions of the young as regards salvation and salvation-oriented education.

Don Bosco could attribute his ability to sketch out various classifications of young people to his constant living amongst them. He used many terms and not all of them were necessarily synonymous. In some cases these classifications have a precise pedagogical meaning aimed at differentiating the way a boy should be educated.⁷¹ But more often than not, these classifications were nothing but theological and moral evaluations and generally with a preventive or apostolic aim in mind: keeping them away from the wicked, or being friendly with the good and, at times, bringing the dissolute and wavering youngsters back on the right path.⁷²

The most significant text on a theology of youth and education is certainly found in the first lines of Don Bosco's *Introduction* to his 1850s *Piano di Regolamento* (an outline for a set of rules) where he quotes from St. John's Gospel 11:52. The text is applied to the youth of his day: Jesus had to die "to gather together in unity the scattered children of God". In this outline we see the main actors in the growing process: God and the means of grace, the family with its deficiencies, society with all its dangers, the educators, the appropriate places, the young themselves with the wealth of resources they are naturally gifted with.

Youth is the most of delicate and precious portion of human society. It is on youth that the hopes of a happy future are based, and youth of itself does not have a wicked disposition. If you remove their parents' neglect, idleness, meeting up with bad companions, which they they are subject to especially at weekends, then it turns out to be quite easy to instil in their tender hearts the principles of order, good moral behaviour, respect and religion. And if it does happen at times that they be found corrupt at that age, that happens rather because of thoughtlessness and not because of

*sheer malice. These youngsters really need a kindly hand, someone who takes care of them, nurtures them and guides them towards virtue and keeps them away from vice. The main difficulty lies in finding a way to gather them together, speak to them and teach them moral behaviour.*⁷³

Following a more analytic and largely theological consideration we could place the field-forces on four levels: the young person as an individual, the environment, the religious world, the mediation provided by education.⁷⁴

First of all, Don Bosco speaks of and writes about a general positive readiness of the young to reach moral and educational maturity when nurtured on time, thanks to the commitment of educators and thanks to the young person himself. We cannot afford to lose time: "Young people are greatly loved by God", because they still have "time to perform many good deeds". They are at "a simple, humble and innocent age and, in general, have not yet become the unfortunate prey of the infernal enemy".⁷⁵ Besides and also because of this, "the salvation of a small child depends ordinarily on the period of his youth".⁷⁶

Don Bosco wants to express this idea in God's words:

*Adolescens juxta viam suam etiam com senuerit non recedet ab ea", if we start off with a good life when we are young, we will continue to be good into old age and our death will be a good death and mark the beginning of eternal happiness. On the contrary, if vice gets us in its grip when we are young it will likely continue to have a hold on us throughout life and until death.*⁷⁷

A young person's human potential and natural disposition are helpful, despite even though they may lean in different directions, more often good, ordinary or even indifferent. Intelligence, the faculty of truth, holds prime of place, then will, the faculty of

good, with the freedom to act that follows on from it. Don Bosco gives it a great importance if we think about his insistence on the good resolutions which characterise his pedagogy on the Sacrament of Penance.

*What distinguishes man from all the other animals in a special manner is the fact that he is gifted with a soul which thinks, reasons, knows what is good and what is evil.*⁷⁸

God has given us a soul, namely that invisible reality which we feel in us and which continuously tends to raise itself up to God; this intelligent being thinks, reasons, and will not be able to find happiness here on earth. Therefore, even in the midst of the riches and pleasures of this world, it will always feel restless until it rests in God, for God alone can make it happy.

*God gave our soul freedom, namely the faculty to choose good or evil assuring it of a reward if it acts well, and threatening it with punishment whenever it chooses to act badly.*⁷⁹

The following elements, very positive as far as religious and moral realities as well as the educational relationship are concerned, should be added to what we have mentioned, namely, sensitivity, affectivity and heart. These make an irreplaceable contribution to the perception of the ugliness of sin and the preciousness of virtue.⁸⁰

Finally, the fragility which the young demonstrate is linked by Don Bosco not only with their age and environment but also with the reality of original sin. Original sin has wounded the faculties of understanding and will; they have become disoriented, obstructed, messed up by the passions which have grown stronger. This is how Don Bosco describes the consequences of original sin, in his book *An easy way to learn Bible History*: “The consequences of

original sin happen to be all the miseries of our soul and body”. “The miseries of the soul are: ignorance, concupiscence, being shut out of heaven”; “Ignorance consists in man’s not being able to know his destiny and his duties without the help of Revelation”; “Concupiscence means the tendency to commit sin”. “Finally, the miseries of the body are: poverty, illnesses and death”.⁸¹

It would possibly be useful to re-read a Chronicle detail which records the content of a conversation Don Bosco had on Tuesday May 11 1875. The conversation is actually a ‘dissertation’ by Don Bosco on ‘the miseries of man’, all leading back to Original Sin as their origin. It can shed some light on a certain ambivalence evidenced by Don Bosco in his moral evaluation of the young person, on the quality and content of their aspirations to reach happiness and the consequent educational intervention needed: “We have to acknowledge the dissonance between what Don Bosco thinks and says and what Don Bosco does in practice.

It all follows the Question of the catechism which says: what effect does Original Sin produce? It causes us to come into this world not in God’s grace, deserving hell, being inclined to sin, subject to death and many miseries affecting our soul and body. Some think that they will be able to lead a happy life on this earth and try all possible ways to have a good time. But a happy life we will never be able to have on account of the many miseries affecting our soul and body. The more we desire happiness and look for it, the more it will elude us. And what seems most surprising is the fact that all the satisfaction we get is only good enough to increase the miseries produced by Adam’s sin! Well! All these miseries lead us to exclaim from the bottom of our heart: Quod eternum non est, nihil est, Whatever is not eternal amounts to nothing. It is better for us to think about eternal realities and then

all the things of this earth will appear worthless to us.

[Then a large carriage drawn by a mule passes by and gives rise to new thoughts]. Don Bosco, referring to the mule, exclaimed:

Jumentis insipientibus comparatus est et similis factus est illis (he was compared with stupid animals and became like them) Here you have what man does: he only thinks about the things of this world and commits sins. What does he do when he commits sin? Well! He renounces the use of his reason; because if he did reason it would be impossible for him to offend God since he knows well how great, how good and how just God is. If a man uses his reason, he will try not to offend God. And what is it that distinguishes a man from an animal? Reason: that is why Holy Scripture compares him to a stupid animal. But David prefaces these words with the following: Homo, cum in honore esset, non intellexit, jumentis insipientibus (Man, even though held in honour, failed to understand and acted like the stupid animals). In what way is man held in honour? This is the answer given by one Holy Father: A man who is innocent or in God's grace possesses the greatest treasure, the greatest honour ever to be found in this world.⁸²

There is no doubt that Don Bosco shows evidence of a certain kind of literature, particularly by Charles Gobinet, not far from Jansenist tones. But it is hard to spell out in practice what degree of inspiration Don Bosco received from theological sources and how much he allowed himself to be guided by more positive, practical considerations translated into trust and hope.⁸³

At any rate, Don Bosco vigorously states the necessity and possibility of an effective collaboration with God's grace. "Jesus preaches", and announces a hap-

py and eternal life, that is heaven, but his real desire is that this happiness should be reached by dint of effort, by the practice of virtue and avoiding vice".⁸⁴

More closely related to experience are Don Bosco's oft-expressed beliefs about the family setting where the young live. Don Bosco certainly does not fail to refer to the positive influence provided by parents for the growth of the young. Don Bosco often sheds light on the different impact produced by mother and father on the young, and especially in his *Lives of his boys*. We only have to think about Dominic Savio's exemplary parents as well as Besucco's, about the holy and religious mothers of Peter in *The power of a good education* (1855) and *Valentino* (1866); about the father of *Severinus* (1868). Countless are the motherly and fatherly figures we find in the lives of the Saints and in the various history texts he wrote: *Bible History*, *Church History*; the *History of Italy* and the *Lives of the Popes*.

But since Don Bosco defends the cause of poor and abandoned youth, youth at risk and risky, he does not fail to underscore the responsibilities of their parents, some of them either inept or incapacitated or perverse.

With regard to the social environment, Don Bosco's judgements are prevalently negative. People responsible for the social environment becoming dangerous are adults who act as the agents of corruption through books, newspapers, immoral shows and bad example of impiety and dishonesty. But bad companions are no less a cause of evil and scandal, especially when it is a question of companions who have reached the lowest stage of consummate malice. When confronted with them, the true allies of the devil, there is no other defence than to reject them and flee from them.

In the world of the invisible Don Bosco constantly marks out the Devil as the fully active tempter. He knows from his faith that the Devil is never idle. Don Bosco has had direct experience of the presence of the Devil both in the harassments which, at certain times, tormented hi⁸⁵m, and also and especially dur-

ing various stages in the lives of his young people.

The talks about his dreams are full of references of this kind, as are his retreat talks and the Monthly Exercise for a happy death. The Devil and his Court appear disguised as various types of monsters and animals: big cats perched on the shoulders of the boys making their confession and preventing them from making a good and sincere confession, *pigs, mad dogs, lions, tigers, elephants* trampling boys under their paws, *snakes* that wrap themselves around and paralyse the boys. The Devil finds servants, helpers, and friends all over: in those who give scandal, in those who are corrupt, in teachers of malice. The 'wiles' which Don Bosco writes about in his Companion of Youth are the wiles of the Devil.

The 'snares' laid out by the enemy of the human race to trip up the young, reveal the Devil's creative and unbounded cunning.

But the young person is not at the mercy of evil. He is rather lovingly 'besieged' by the inexhaustible resources of the transcendent world of God and His Grace, offered through the Catholic faith: God, Jesus Christ, The Church, The Sacraments, The Virgin Mother, a countless number of Intercessors, the Word of God.

Religion is the foundation, the source and the soul of the young person's life and of his growing process. The appeal to God is absolutely necessary and, naturally, it calls for human cooperation: Prayer, getting away from sin, praying for forgiveness, putting the resolutions made in Confession into practice, the exercise of brotherly charity; in a few but essential words, the service of God, good works, duty. "My dear boys", Don Bosco asked those who were about to hold back, "Do we want to go to heaven in a coach?", the best form of transport in his time.⁸⁶

But the hinge on which the whole divine-human synergy depends as a determining factor is the mediation provided by education. For this reason it naturally follows that the primary virtue needed in a young man is obedience. What contributes most to the "feared shipwreck of the young" is not meeting

up with "perverse companions" or parental neglect but their possible "unfaithful disposition towards a good education"⁸⁷ and even before that, the fact that they consider education to be worthless". The presence and the work of educators who are competent and "consecrated" to caring for youth is absolutely necessary for the young person's salvation. Quite literally, "God needs men". This primary initiative essentially calls for a response on the part of the young person, his submission and willing cooperation. This was the first message Don Bosco addressed to youth in the first book entirely written for them:

Since a tender plant, even though planted in good soil in a garden may take the wrong turn and end up badly if it is not cultivated and, so to speak, guided to a certain thickness, likewise you, my dear children, will bend and take a turn towards evil if you do not allow yourselves to be bent by the ones whose task it is to direct you, first of all your parents, then your superiors and elders.⁸⁸

The second great manifesto was directed to educators. The Preventive System, which is a complex experience before it becomes a formula, is entirely for them: to guide them and spur them on to exercising a kind of responsibility which has countless implications: personal and social, temporal and eternal.

This was the message that Don Bosco launched, one more time, as his earthly life fell "into the sear of the yellow leaf": "Work at the good education of youth, especially poor and abandoned youth which are in the majority, and you will be able to easily give glory to God and guarantee benefits for religion, save many souls and cooperate effectively in the reform and well-being of civil society. For reason, religion, history and experience have proven that our religion and civil society will be good or bad, according to the good or bad education imparted to youth".⁸⁹

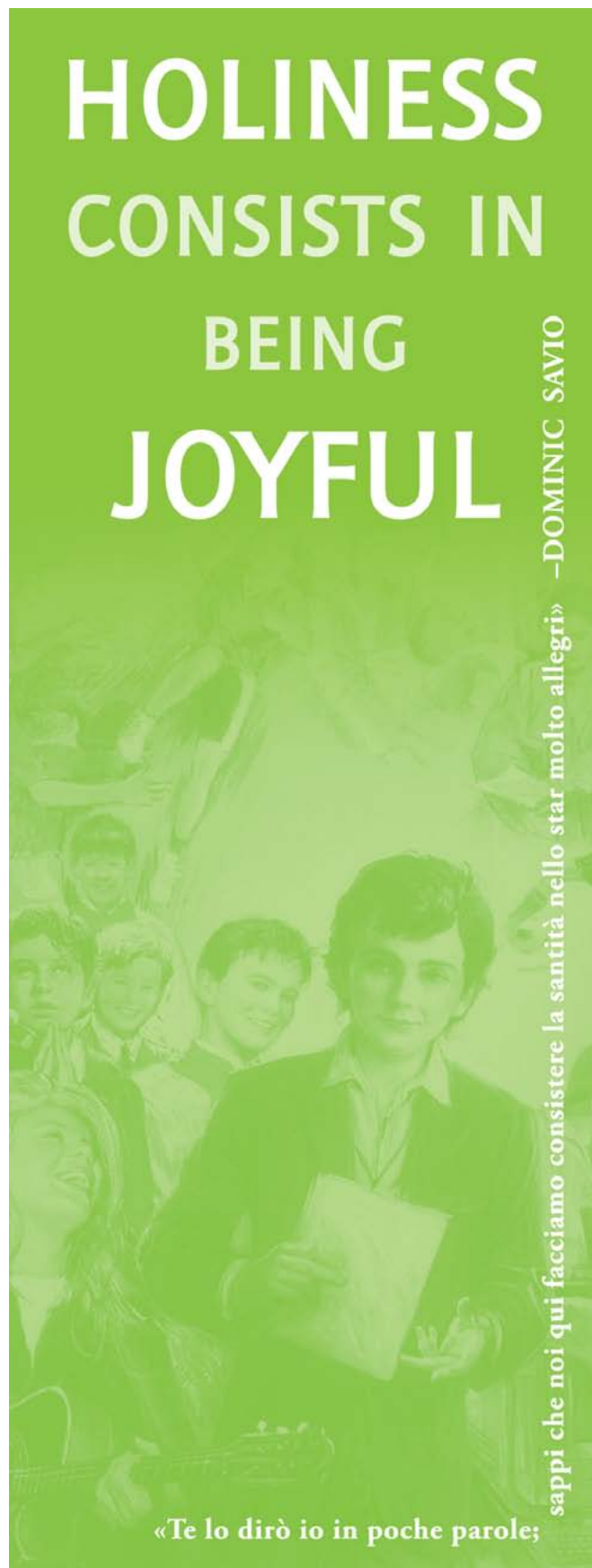
End Notes

- 1 Cf Chap 1, § 3; also P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol 1. pp. 103-109; P. Spriano, *Storia di Torino operaia e socialista da De Amicis a Gramsci*, Turin, Einaudi 1972, pp. 3-17.
- 2 Documented information on the situation is available in U. Levra, 'Il bisogno, il castigo, la pietà, Torino 1814-1848', in *Torino e Don Bosco*, ed. G.Bracco, Vol 1 Saggi. Turin, Archivio Storica della Città 1988, pp. 13-97; Idem, *L'altro volto di Torino risorgimentale 1814-1848*. Turin, Institute for the history of the Italian renaissance 1988, 204 p.; C. Felloni and R. Audisio, 'I giovani discoli', in *Torino e Don Bosco...*, Vol 1 Saggi, pp. 00-119. For the 1860s, P. Spriano *Storia di Torino operaia e socialista*, pp. 3-36
- 3 Cf. G.B. Lemoyne *Vita del venerabile servo di Dio, Giovanni Bosco...*, Vol 1. Turin. Libreria Editrice Società Internazionale 'Buona Stampa' 1913 [the first edition was 1911], pp. 233-234. There is a more extensive reconstruction in MB II 59-67.
- 4 A friendly talk given to past pupil priests of the Valdocco Oratory on 29 July 1880, BS 4 (1880) no, 9 Sept. p. 11; he spoke similarly, again to past pupil priests, on 19 July 1883: "take special care of the youth in your towns because they are the hope of society". BS 7 (1883) no. 8, August, p. 129.
- 5 Cf P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale*, pp. 123-157 (Collegi e ospizi in Piemonte e in Liguria 1860-1870). 159-174 (I giovani degli oratori festivi a torino 1841-1870), 175-199 (Giovani e adulti convittori a Valdocco 1847-1870), 289-294 (La popolazione giovanile degli altri collegi).
- 6 MO (1991) 123; "especially those who came out of the prisons" (p. 122). It is significant however that in the *Storia dell'Oratorio di s. Francesco di Sales*, written by Fr Bonetti, which would use the manuscript
- 7 BS 3 (1879) no. 2 Feb. p. 8 = MO (1991) 122; MO (1991) 124 = BS 3 (1879) no. 3 March p. 6.
- 8 MO (1991) 147 = BS 3 (1879) no.7 July, p. 16.
- 9 Cf R. Chartier, M.M. Compère, D. Julia, *L'éducation en France du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris, Sedes 1976, pp. 57-58; L. Chevalier *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle*, Paris, Librairie Plon 1958; P. Pierrard, *Enfants et jeunes ouvriers en France (XIXe-XXe siècle)*. Paris, Les éditions Ouvrières 1987, 225 p. However, Turin in the 1840s was certainly not Paris.
- 10 G. Casalis, *Dizionario geografico storico-statistico-commerciale degli stati di S.M. Il re di Sardegna*, Vol XXI [v. Turin]. Turin, G. Maspero and G. Marzorati 1851, v. Albergo di Virtù, pp. 690-692; G. Ponzo, *Stato e pauperismo in Italia: L'Albergo di Virtù di Torino (1580-1863)*. Rome, La Cultura 1974, 150 p.
- 11 G. Casalis, *Dizionario...*, Vol XXIX, v. Regia Opera della mendicizia istruita, pp. 700-709; G. Chiosso, *La gioventù «povera e abbandonata» a Torino nell'Ottocento. Il caso degli allievi-artigiani della Mendicizia Istruita (1818-1861)*, in J.M. PELLEZZO (Ed.), *L'impegno dell'educare...* pp. 375-402.
- 12 Cf. R.M. Borsarelli, *La marchesa Giulia di Barolo e le opere assistenziali in Piemonte e nel Risorgimento*, Turin, Chiantore 1933, XI-243 p.
- 13 *Catalogo degli oggetti esposti in lotteria a favore dei giovani dei tre oratorii...* Turin, G.B. Paravia & Co.
- 14 *Elenco degli oggetti graziosamente donati...* Turin, Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1866 p.3 OE XVII 5; cf *Elenco degli oggetti...* Turin, Speirani 1862, p. 2, OE XIV 198; *Lotteria d'oggetti...* Turin, Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1865. p. 2 OE XVI 248: «i giovanetti accolti in questa casa sono divisi in due categorie, studenti ed artigiani».
- 15 *Inaugurazione del patronato di S. Pietro in Nizza a Mare...* Turin, Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1877, p.i. 4, OE XXVIII 382.
- 16 Letter to Dr Edoardo Carranza, president of the Conference of St Vincent De Paul in Buenos Aires, 30 Sept. 1877, E III 221.
- 17 Circular on the work opening in La Spezia, 11 Oct. 1880, E III 627.
- 18 Letter to Leo XIII March 1878, E III 317.
- 19 *Associazione di buone opere*. Turin, Oratory of St Francis de Sales Print Shop 18775, p. 6 OE. XXV 486; *Cooperatori salesiani ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume ed alla civile società*. Turin, Salesian Press 1876, p.6, OE XXVIII 260; last edition in San Pier d' Arena, Press and Book shop of St Vincent de Paul 1977, p.30, OE XXVIII 368.
- 20 MO (1991) 123 = BS 3 (1879) no. 3, March, p.6.
- 21 *Regolamento dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales per gli esterni*. Turin Salesian Press 1877, first part, *Scopo di quest'opera*, p.3, OE XIX 33.
- 22 Don Bosco wrote many times about it to bishop friends and the Pope himself: letter to Pius IX, 9 Nov. 1859, Em I 386-

- 387; 13 April 1860. Em I 400-401; 10 March 1861, Em I 441-442; 27 Dec. 1861. Em I 471-473.
- 23 E III 455-456; similar concepts taken up again in a memorial to Leo XIII also March 1879, E III 462-464.
- 24 Letter of 31 Dec. 1877. E III 257-259. Identical ideas expressed to the new Prefect of Propaganda Fide, Car. Simeoni, in March 1877, E III 320-321; to Leo XIII 13 April 1880, E III 568-567; the *Memoriale intorno alle Missioni salesiane* presents an analytical view of Salesian work overseas, substantially the same as what is in Europe adding certain concrete missionary ideas for the future; to Propaganda Fide in Lyon March 1882, E IV 123-127.
- 25 Conference to Salesian Cooperators, Turin, Valdocco 23 May 1879, BS 3 (1879) no. 6 June, p.3.
- 26 *Regole o Costituzioni della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. Turin, Salesian Press and Book shop 1875, chap 1, art 5, p.4. OE XXVII 54
- 27 *Cooperatori salesiani ossia un modo pratico...* 1876, p. 7, OE XXVIII 261.
- 28 MO (1991) 195.
- 29 Conference to Cooperators at Casale Monferrato 17 Nov. 1881, BS 5 (1881) no. 12, Dec. p. 5.
- 30 *Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales*. Turin, Salesian Press 1877, part 2, Chap 1, Scopo delle case della Congregazione di S. Francesco di Sales, p. 59, OE XXIX 155.
- 31 BS 4 (1880) no 1 Jan, p. 1; information follows on works of various kinds in Italy, France, Argentina, including the Patagonian missions (pp. 1-3).
- 32 BS 6 (1882) no. 5, May p. 81.
- 33 BS 9 (1885) no. 7, July, p. 94
- 34 A more detailed research would be needed for individual institutes to detail the purpose and those they were looking after, their setting, the level and requests of families, the expectations of religious and civil authorities, historical development, quality of those running them and of the education they offered. From the monographs available some excellent research has been done, some less so. Amongst the most important of these concerning works undertaken by Don Bosco: P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale (1815-1870)*, already cited; F. Desramaut, *Don Bosco à Nice. La vie d'une école professionnelle catholique entre 1875 et 1919*. Paris, Apostolat des Éditions 1980, 397.
- 35 Cf some texts in P. Braido, *Don Bosco Eeducatore. Scritti e testimonianze*, Rome LAS 1997, pp 85-87, 291-294.
- 36 F. Motto, *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 pel sac. Gio. Bosco a' suoi figliuoli Salesiani*, RSS 4 (1985) 127.
- 37 Especially in his final years it is not to be excluded that Don Bosco's talks were added to by the editor of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, Fr John Bonetti.
- 38 BS 2 (1878) no. 3 March, pp. 12-13. "It is a case of freeing them from the dangers that are imminent, from doing evil, from prison itself" he wrote in 1879, BS 3 (1879) no. 1 Jan., p. 2; The following year again: "Many thousands of young people, left abandoned, without education or religion, would have become the scourge of society, and maybe not a few would curse the Creator in prison... were on the contrary led away from evil"; BS 9 (1885) no. 7 July, p. 95.
- 39 BS 6 (1882) no. 4, April. p. 70. Similar presentation of youth especially those who moved to Rome: BS 8 (1884) no. 1, Jan. p. 2; conference to Roman Cooperators 8 May, BS 8 (1884) no. 6, June, p. 88; in darker tones and described in a conference in Turin on 1 June 1885, youth in Paris "the big capital of France with 2 million inhabitants": BS 9 (1885) no. 7 July, p. 95.
- 40 BS 9 (1885) no. 7 July, p. 95.
- 41 Cf letter to Dr. Carranza, Buenos Aires, 30 Sept 1877, E III 221; conference to Cooperators in Lucca, 8 April 1882, BS 6 (1882) no. 5, May, p. 81; address to the Catholic Association in Barcelona, 15 April 1886, C. Viglietti, *Cronaca dal 15 aprile al 16 maggio 1886*, p. 5
- 42 At the Oratory at Valdocco, the average age of students was 13-14, working boys, 14-15; cf P. Stella *Don Bosco nella storia economica...*
- 43 What Albert Caviglia writes, however, is excessive: "Most pedagogues and educational writers turned their attention to children between 6 and 12 years of age. The problem of progress was the primary, elementary schools (as well as kindergarten, the Aporti case); In Italy they were way behind. Now what Our man was concerned about and acted on behalf of, those he called 'youth', 'young lads', are not children but precisely those who worked with, from 12 years on... This was another of Don Bosco's great merits, in having found, literally, the right way to educate teenagers". (A. Caviglia, *La «Storia d'Italia» a masterpiece by Don Bosco. Introductory address*, in *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di «Don Bosco»*, vol III *La Storia d'Italia*. Turin, SEI 1935, pp. XLII-XLIII); «Don Bosco anche letterariamente ha risolto il problema della pedagogia dell'adolescente» (p. XLIV).
- 44 *Regolamento dell'Oatorio...per gli esterni*, part II, Chap II, art. 3, p. 30. OE XXIX 60.
- 45 *Regolamento per le case...*, part II, Chap II, art.9, p. 62. OE XXIX 158.
- 46 S. Pier d'Arena, *St Vincent de Paul Press and Book shop 1877*, p. 4,5,25, OE XXIX 4, 5, 25. Cf also *Opera di Maria*

- Ausiliatrice per le vocazioni allo stato ecclesiastico. Fossano, Saccone Press, s.d. [=1875]: “The purpose of this Work is to bring together young men... Each pupil must belong to an upright family, be healthy, robust, of good character, between 16-30 years old”; also in this edition, fanciulli and piccolini were contrasted with giovani grandicelli: pp 2-5, OE XXVII 2-5.
- 47 Cf. J. Scheppens, *Les structures de pensée, notamment théologiques, sous-jacentes à la pratique pédagogique de don Bosco*, in *Éducation et pédagogie chez don Bosco*. Paris, Éditions Fleurus 1989, pp. 148-155. “Jean Bosco définit donc lui aussi les jeunes comme des êtres faibles et inconstants, marqués par la fragilité morale et la versatilité” (p. 150).
- 48 Il sistema preventivo (1877), p. 48, OE XXVIII 426.
- 49 Cf. *Fatti contemporanei esposti in forma di dialogo*. Turin, De-Agostini 1853, p. 3, OE V 53; *Lo spazzacammino*. Turin Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1866, p. 62, OE XVII 174; *Il Galantuomo*. Almanacco per il 1873. Turin Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1872, p. 5, OE XXV 5; “remove fickle and careless young people from sin”; G. Bosco, *Severino ossia avventure di un giovane alpigiano*. Turin Oratory of St Francis de Sales Printshop 1868, p. 4, OE XX 4; “Le mie sciagure servano ad altri d’avviso per evitare gli scogli che conducano alla rovina tanta inesperta gioventù”; BS 2 (1878) no 3. March, p. 12, 1q3.
- 50 G. Bosco. *La forza della buona educazione...* p. 55, OE VI 329.
- 51 Cf *Il sistema preventivo* (1878), RSS 4 (1985) 301-302.
- 52 *Il sistema preventivo* (1878), RSS 9 (1985) 300; going to the prisons Don Bosco had noticed that “a great number of children considered their punishment less than the fact they were abandoned and not given consideration” (G. Bosco *L’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales ospizio di beneficenza*. Turin, Salesian Press 1879. p. 3, OE XXI 259.
- 53 P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, Vol II, p. 190.
- 54 G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales*. Turin, G.B. Pravia & Co. 1859, p. 37, OE XI 187.
- 55 G. Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero Vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d’Argentera*. Turin, Oratory of St Francis de Sales Press 1864, pp. 113-114, OE XV 355-356.
- 56 P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Vol II p. 188
- 57 G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...* p. 33 OE II 213.
- 58 *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p. 54 OE XXVIII 432. This outline responds to a true “pedagogy of joy and festivity”; cf chap. 16.
- 59 G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*. Turin, G.B. Paravia & Co. 1861, p. 66 OE XIII 220.
- 60 G. Bosco *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone...* p. 68, OE XIII 222.
- 61 *Regolamento per le case...* part I Chap XVI *Del teatrino*, p. 50 OE XXIX 146.
- 62 G. Bosco *Conversione di una valdese*. Fatto contemporaneo. Turin, P. De-Agostini Priess 1854, p. 27, OE V 285.
- 63 *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p. 48, 50, OE XXVIII 426, 428
- 64 *Il sistema preventivo* (1877), p. 48, 50, OE XXVIII 426, 428
- 65 Cited in MB V 367
- 66 G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico...* pp 12-13, OE XI 162-163
- 67 *Regolamento dell’Oratorio...per gli esterni*, part II, Chap II, art. 3, p.30, OE XXIX 60.
- 68 [G. Bosco]. *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo morto nel seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù, scritti da un suo collega*. Turin. Speirani and Ferrero 1844, p. 5 and 11, OE I 5 and 11.
- 69 Cited in MB VII 404. John Baptist Lemoyne says he got it from a Cronaca by Fr Bonetti. We did not find it in the surviving Cronache.
- 70 P. Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità...* Vol I, p. 61: cf also p. 63.
- 71 Found as we will see in the *Cenni storici intorno all’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, and in the *Articoli generali*, at the head of the *Regolamento delle case*. On this see P. Braidò, *Il sistema preventivo in un decalogo per educatori*, RSS 4 (1985) 143-144.
- We will speak further on of the pedagogical and differential aspect of classifications.
- 72 Cf *Cenni on Comollo* (1844), p. 63-64, OE I 63-64; *Il giovane provveduto* (1847), pp. 21-22, OE 201-202; *Vita di Domenico Savio* (1859), pp. 26-27, OE XI 176-177; MO (1991) 59.
- 73 *Introduzione to the Piano di Regolamento...* in P. Braidò (Ed.) *Don Bosco nella Chiesa...*, pp. 34-35.
- 74 For a deeper analysis of the anthropological elements cf J. Scheppens, *Human nature in the educational outlook of St John Bosco*, RSS 8 (1989) 263-287.
- 75 G. Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto...* pp 10-11, OE II 190-191.

- 76 G. Bosco, Il giovane provveduto... pp 12-13, OE II 192-193.
- 77 G. Bosco, Il giovane provveduto... pp 6-71, OE II 186-187; cf also G. Bosco La forza della buona educazione... pp 62-63, OE VI 336-337. It is one of the “almost obligatory topics in ascetic reading for youth” (P. Stella, Valori spirituali nel Giovane provveduto... p. 52)..
- 78 G. Bosco, Il giovane provveduto... pp 10, OE X 317-319
- 79 G. Bosco Il mese di maggio consacrato a Maria SS. Immacolata ad uso del popolo. Turin, G.B. Paravia & CO. 1858, pp. 23-25, OE X 317-319.
- 80 MO (1991) 35.
- 81 G. Bosco Memoria facile per imparare la storia sacra ad uso del popolo cristiano. Turin, Paravia & Co. 1855, pp. 12-13, OE VI 60-61.
- 82 G. Barberis Cronichetta, exercise book I, pp 4-6
- 83 Ct P. Stella Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità... Vol II pp 232-236; J. Scheppens, Human nature... pp 278-281.
- 84 G. Bosco, il mese di maggio.... p. 30, OE X 324.
- 85 In the early stages, according to Bonetti's cronache, it seems to reach a peak in 1862 (cf Annali II 1861-1862, pp 17-22 ff.). In September he would write a short work in the Catholic Readings entitled, La podestà delle tenebre ossia Osservazioni dommatico-morali sopra gli spiriti maledci.
- 86 Circular to Salesians 6 Jan. 1884., E IV 250.
- 87 G. Bosco, Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Caffasso... p. 12 OE II 362.
- 88 G. Bosco, Il giovane provveduto...., pp 13-16, OE II 193-196.
- 89 Conference to Cooperators in Turin 1883 31 May. BS 7 (1883), no. 7, July, p. 104.



A Milestone Year!

Fr. Arthur Lenti Celebrates 90 Years!



Institute of Salesian Studies

Post your greetings, prayers, blessings, kind wishes, and gratitude for the life and work of Fr. Arthur Lenti, who celebrates his 90th birthday on the feast of St. John Bosco, January 31st!

<http://salesianstudies.org/celebrating-a-milestone/>

Joseph Mathew Paradayil likes this.



Joseph Mathew Paradayil Happy Birthday in advance Fr. Arthur, prayers for your good health.

15 minutes ago



It would be enough to celebrate Fr. Arthur's achievement as the author of his historical critical study of St. John Bosco arising from his 30 plus years of teaching Don Bosco Founder and Don Bosco Builder at the Institute of Salesian Studies (ISS). During all of this time, and even today, Fr. Arthur researches, translates, and compiles information on a daily basis, often retiring late and rising early.

In November, Fr. Arthur was setback with a serious leg infection which came as a complete surprise to himself and all of us at the ISS. Because of this, he was unable to attend the conference in Turin scheduled that month to examine spiritual direction as Don Bosco understood and practiced in his work with young

people. Even from his hospital bed, Fr. Arthur sent his working draft of his own research and sent a video greeting to those gathered.

It seems his strength and vigor are slowly returning and he will offer a course during the intersessions exploring Don Bosco and the Supernatural. This January 31st, on the Feast of Don Bosco, Fr. Arthur will reach a milestone as he celebrates 90 years! The ISS is proud to have its founder with us still, and invites all the Salesian audience around the world to send your prayers and best wishes to Fr. Arthur for this occasion. Be sure to visit the Institute of Salesian Studies' facebook page, or SalesianStudies.org to send your greetings!

Suggestions for Use of this Guide

With the Young

- Perhaps this month's study may serve as an impetus to take the pulse of the young people in whatever setting you might be. Invite the young to an assembly drawing from a cross-section that is representative of the young people in your area. Offer them a special celebration of Don Bosco. Share with them his educational methodology and underline for them the process which led Don Bosco to reach out to young people. Explain to them that Don Bosco responded to concrete needs in the lives of his young people. These needs arose from the political and social climate of his time and the impact those times had on their lives.
- Take the time to ask them to share the realities they see in their lives and the lives of their peers. Ask them to articulate the specific areas of need for themselves and for their peers. Challenge them to speak openly about their experience of their families, the youth culture, the pressures of being adolescents in various contexts, and ask them about their experience of the Church. What is prayer for them? What is missing in their faith lives? Challenge them to help to communicate those needs, questions and realities in their experience of life.
- Compile this information. Perhaps ask them to prepare a report with you which can be shared and compared to other groupings of young people.

Cooperators

- Let the Cooperators use the January feast of Don Bosco as a rallying point for the study of Don Bosco's Educational Methodology. Invite Salesians and Collaborators to provide input for a day of study before or after the feast.

Community Days

- Looking at the plan suggested for work with the young, the Salesian community can take those reflections and the input from young people and use them to re-examine their own community plan and to re-launch the pastoral plan. Take the findings of these young people to the meeting of the Council of the Educating Pastoral Community. Ask them to help the Salesians respond to those needs and ask that representative body to add whatever other input they may want to add as representatives of the area, the parents, the alumni, and staff.

Colleagues

- The month of Don Bosco is a wonderful opportunity to strengthen the Salesian Identity and Character of any faculty or staff. As members of a Salesian Mission, call upon the resources and the Salesian personnel of the province to strengthen that identity and charism through study, prayer, and outreach. By study, seek the guidance of a Salesian Facilitator to examine the Preventive System for a practical evaluation of its application at the Mission entrusted to your community. Call an evening of prayer to pray for the youth of the world, to pray about the pressing needs of young people in so many contexts—the local context, and the contexts of children all over the globe. As a form of outreach, plan an event which invites young people to participate in these moments of study and or prayer.

